

AFTER COLLECTIVE MEMORY: POSTNATIONAL EUROPE AND SOCIALLY
ENGAGED ART

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on works of public art that enjoy proven success in challenging the national bias of European heritage practice. By developing methods at the intersection between collective memory, critical historiography, and theory, I situate heritage debates in relation to forms of discrimination that emerged as symptoms of the financial crisis (2008-present). I then describe how public art interventions help to unsettle the grand narratives of cosmopolitan idealism that work to neutralize anti-racist strategies in the public sphere. The progression of my thesis eventually poses a challenge to the cosmopolitan reach of the Jewish diasporic tradition in particular. To that end, I explore the archival strategies of Holocaust memory practitioners, including their express aim of including diverse (i.e. non-Jewish) histories of violent exclusion into the historical record; the social and political conditions for the emergence of counter-monuments in West Germany during the 1970s, and the subsequent efforts that were made to turn this memorial aesthetic into a global standard for the memory culture industry; the haunting resurgence of cosmopolitan aspirations in Yael Bartana's video installation, *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2011); and a meditation on Bartana's attempt at revisiting the racial dynamics of intergenerational violence in the aftermath of genocide.

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PREFACE

More than anything else, my thesis represents an engagement with public art imaginaries that succeed in challenging the national lens of European heritage brokers. These imaginaries work to displace the institutions and effects of national memory with specific demands for social change, and furthermore to situate themselves in relation to forms of discrimination that have only recently emerged as symptoms of the European financial crisis.¹ The methods of collective or cultural memory help me to understand these symptoms genealogically in connection with European racism, and also to challenge the grand narratives of cosmopolitan idealism that work to neutralize the relevance of anti-racist strategies in the public sphere. By troubling the cosmopolitan reach of European Jewish memory² in particular, I note the challenges that attend to acknowledging the lives and experiences of racialized Europeans into cultural memory.

In the broadest terms, my dissertation is informed by a psychoanalytic bias, as through each of its chapters I revisit specific postwar traumas through creative artworks that aspire to interrupt them, using the world of imagined objects as a mechanism of displacement and working-through. While psychoanalytic perspectives inform my writing practice throughout the thesis, I suggest that this particular aspect of my work does not become fully evident until the concluding chapters, specifically in my account of Yael Bartana's video installation from 2011, *And Europe Will Be Stunned*.

By way of introduction, I would like to explain my choice of beginning with the

¹ The timing of the crisis, and, indeed, questions about whether the crisis continues into the present, has been the subject of competing ideas and perspectives. For the sake of the present work, the time period under consideration falls between 2008-2011.

² This encompassing term is explored and challenged throughout the dissertation.

European financial crisis as opposed to other significant events worthy of cultural debate, contestation or analysis. For instance, I would like to point out that there is an emerging scholarship that directly asks whether Europeans *should* imagine (or re-imagine) themselves as a collective unit given the present circumstances that the European Union has faced since 2008. This scholarship is more important than ever, I argue, because the way such questions are answered in practice tend to become important deciding factors on the matter of who gets to belong to Europe and who doesn't. Deciding upon specific imaginaries through official channels tends to recompose the core values that help everyday Europeans make assessments about the sustainability of their collective focus—and often, I think, this assessment tends to unfold in debates over how to exercise decisions that are just as opposed to unjust.

In my thesis I refer only to a fraction of this work, in part because of its tendency for rhetorical engagement. One example of this tendency is Franco Berardi's *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, in which he describes the conditions in Europe using the rhetorics of 'semio-capital,'³ which depict global financial flows as an insidious process of linguistic exchange. Though I believe that Berardi's insights are valuable for what they are in general, I argue that his summations in this particular work conceal an equally insidious attachment to the motifs of good old-fashioned revolution, dominated as they are by bombastic evocations of the 'multitude' as a form of life that is capable of overcoming the financialization of culture.

My own conversations on these subjects are limited to particularities, for instance, to Jürgen Habermas's insistence that the European Union's egregious response to the

³ Berardi, Franco "Bifo," *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Semiotext(e), 2012), 31.

crisis was to relinquish the democratic potential of its imagined collective,⁴ or Simon Springer's suggestion that neoliberalism and violence represent mutually reinforcing techniques of the state.

These more specific claims allow me to explore a diversity of examples, including the *Banlieue* riots of 2005 and '07, in which racialized groups in France voiced their frustration over a generational conflict that is rooted in significant neglect and underrepresentation for native minorities. Other examples provide evidence of narrowing views among majority whites, like the legitimization of neo-fascist groups by the Greek national and European parliaments. In Chapter One, the economic situation in Greece (at least before 2015) is especially useful for exploring the impact of lost imaginaries in tandem with the resurgence of politically motivated violence in the present. Such violence is illustrated with further reference to the social impact of new immigration patterns that go well beyond the historic relationships marked out as symptoms of post-coloniality. Because these new immigration patterns are most detectable in the geographical and ideological peripheries of the Union, they have arguably revealed themselves to be causal factors in what theorists like Étienne Balibar refer to as 'self-racialization.'⁵ Beyond just the Greek example, this concept refers to the internalization of inequalities by majoritarian groups who increasingly resolve their indentured status by turning to fascist alternatives.

In responding to this diagnosis, my thesis explores postnational alternatives for democratic participation. In the spirit of finding plausible alternatives, I mention the Habermasian solution to create a form of *European* citizenship, but in the end I choose

⁴ Habermas has used this argument repeatedly in connection with recent events from 2015.

⁵ Balibar, Étienne, *Politics and the Other Scene*, Trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (Verso, 2012), 44.

nomadic alternatives that are more capable of reflecting the fluidity and complexity of Europe's physical and spatial coordinates, and therefore of interrogating the endurance of its idea. This conversation includes Sandro Mezzadra's work on the border as concept, which is primarily composed of a description of maps that get erased and re-drawn with greater frequency, to considerations about the forces of jurisdictional violence or governmentality that promotes this confusion, the limits of international law, and the corresponding ascendancy of pacification as a key responsibility of the national state.

These points are all briefly explored in connection with the 'rights of circulation,'⁶ which includes the ability (or lack thereof) to freely move across national borders and to be treated with recognition by the states that occupy those lands—rights, in other words, that are guaranteed in some small measure by EU treaties. The legal dimension of these activities is further complemented in Chapter One by a critical introduction to a specific and well-known genealogy of the discourse on biopolitics that is intended to reveal the racial bias of its founding categories. This genealogy moves laterally from Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben to consider work by Achille Mbembe, Alexander Weheliye, Jill Jarvis, and others.

The transition point of my introductory chapter departs from this conversation to ask what all of this talk has to do with collective memory and 'memorial intervention,'⁷ which I summarize here in three quick remarks. First, I suggest that my analysis of racial warfare is in a sense prefigured by Agamben's shorthand reference for a very large

⁶ Balibar, Étienne, 'Towards a Diasporic Citizen? From Internationalism to Cosmopolitics,' Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-mei Shih, Eds., *The Creolization of Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 208.

⁷ Lehrer, Erica, and Magdalena Waligórska, 'Cur(at)ting History: New Genre Art Interventions and the Polish-Jewish Past,' *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 20:10 (2013): 1.

container of European traditions—the so-called ‘European man.’⁸ I describe this concept in my own terms with brief mentions of the myth of Europa, the rise of the Church during the Medieval Period, the establishment of Christendom, and the French Revolution—all efforts at marking time in the development of ‘European’ tradition. Second, alongside these efforts, I argue that many of today’s present circumstances within Europe are not only prefigured in its past, but that they have also become part of our increasing inability to remember the past as such, evoking Andreas Huyssen’s famous diagnosis of today’s ‘culture of amnesia.’⁹ Third and finally, I argue that amidst the turmoil experienced by Europe’s minority subjects, the popular turn to collective memory highlights increasing demands for recognizing those subjects in ways that European laws simply cannot comprehend. Taken as a whole, I communicate these points in relation to artist Jonas Dahlberg’s ‘Open Wound,’ which is a memorial design scheduled for installation in Norway to commemorate Anders Breivik’s racially motivated massacres in 2011.

By cutting a peninsula nearby Utøya, the site of Breivik’s second massacre, Dahlberg intends to leave behind a gaping absence in the wake of disaster that I claim is unequivocally taken from postwar Germany’s counter-monumental aesthetic, and which I describe in Chapter Four as a global standard for memorial design. On this premise, however, the ‘Open Wound’ opens up further aporias for consideration. These include the tenuous links between memorial culture and socially engaged art; the particular circumstances that made site-specific remembrance culturally valuable and transferable; the ability of these structures to trouble the line between victims and perpetrators; and the impact such edifices have for audience participation, as well as the specific force of this

⁸ Agamben, Giorgio, and Peppe Savà, ‘God didn’t die, he was transformed into money,’ *Libcom.org*, 10 February 2014.

⁹ Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1994), 1.

participation for advancing the postnational agenda.

In fact, the interventionist motif of this proposed memorial site offers me a working definition of socially engaged art as I explore in Chapter Two. To set up this lengthy discussion, I refer in Chapter One both to Nato Thompson and Nicholas Bourriard's descriptions of performative works that enact social (or civic) change as part of its articulation, noting how specific readings of socially engaged art tend to privilege the performative dimension beyond (or against) considerations of artistic form. To use just one example, we could say that Dhalberg's design is valuable most of all for the way it demands participation from its visitors, as any visit to the intended site will require individuals to become undone by the magnitude of the cut in which they stand, and perhaps also to begin asking questions about how Nordic culture, or European tradition as a whole, could manifest such crimes on the scale that it did.

In Chapter Two I move on from these definitions to explore the theoretical impulses that are composed by emergent relations between cultural memory and socially engaged art as entwined material practices. In this chapter I focus in particular on how a popular obsession with 'the past' can be substantially linked to a contemporary art practice that is obsessed with 'the new.' I analyze perspectives within memory studies to better understand this unique conjuncture, moving laterally from Susannah Radstone's description of 'memory culture' as distinguished by actions that 'exceeds the personal,'¹⁰ to Alon Confino's concern about the yoking of memory practices together with state functions and national allegiances; to Kerwin Lee Klein's suspicion of reducing memory studies to a series of metahistorical claims, or to the individual traumas and the therapeutic demands that individuals make; to Jan Assmann's formulation of a 'cultural'

¹⁰ Radstone, Susannah, 'Memory Studies: For and Against,' *Memory Studies*, 1:0 (2008): 31.

memory that goes beyond the ‘communicative’ approaches led by Maurice Halbwachs or Pierre Nora; and finally, to Andreas Huyssen’s insistence that new memory and museum practices should be harmonized with efforts to commodify them.

Especially crucial here is Huyssen’s Benjaminian claims regarding the scope of contemporary museum practices, noting changes both to its spatial and visual coordinates, extending to its methods of curation and the sorts of expectations it places upon visitors; to redirecting the audience gaze back to the present as opposed to the past; and to linking museum practices, particularly its built environments, to those of contemporary art—all of this anticipates a discussion about the *theory* of art and politics. In this, I first describe and then take issue with Dmitry Vilensky’s claim that redefining the terms of art using specific formal imperatives corresponds to changes in the political realm. Vilensky argues that engaging the system of global capitalism through a ‘subversive affirmation’¹¹ of its properties is the primary (and perhaps exclusive) means by which formal innovations are made. On this basis, I argue that Vilensky’s perspective is influenced by the historical avant-gardes and by various attempts on their behalf to forge connections between aesthetic experience and art’s political potential.

I counter Vilensky’s claims with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Ranciere, presenting both as theorists who have each described the historical avant-garde as much more involved in rethinking aesthetic relationships to the past than most would care to admit. Ranciere, as we know, is much more Foucauldian of the two, suggesting that the methods of politicized art should account for the epistemic conditions in which the art is produced, together with the ability or potential to interrupt them. A third dissenting voice

¹¹ Vilensky, Dmitry, ‘On the possibility of the avant-garde composition in contemporary art,’ *Zanny Begg*, 2009, Web.

is Peter Bürger's, who historicizes the presumed radicalism of the avant-garde by drawing connections between these historical movements and what he refers to as the self-criticism of art in bourgeois society.¹²

Chapter Two also represents an effort on my part to revisit these debates through Frankfurt School critical theory, and through specific debates between Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. For instance, the issues that I raise under the heading of 'aesthetic materiality' become retrospectively important in subsequent chapters. These include discussions on dreams in relation to awakening, consciousness in relation to language, utopia in relation fetishism, and on questions of time, temporality, experience, and the concept, and on negativity, catastrophe, rationality and domination. Subsequent to this I include a discussion about the postmodern and its antipathy for Frankfurt School alternatives despite its fetishism of the avant-garde, noting subsequent attempts at recharging the lifelines between 'the new' and 'the commodity.' I resolve many of these questions by exploring the so-called 'afterness' of the new with reference to prescient critiques by Boris Groys on the matter of conceiving futures through a retrograde belief in extra-cultural possibility. Indeed, Groys notes the tendency for such aspirations to give themselves over to claims of universality, for failing to consider the dialectical relationship between the spheres of profaned and valorized culture, or the revision that such relationships impose upon conceptions of authorship and authenticity. As I explain at the close of Chapter Two, all of these points contribute to what Gerhard Richter calls 'the logic of afterness,'¹³ which denotes a modicum of sensitivity towards the mediation of cultural forms, and therefore towards 'a living on and after that remains attached to

¹² Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹³ Richter, Gerhard, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 4.

what came before.’¹⁴

Now, at this juncture of my Preface I would like to shift gears by bridging this discussion on politicized art with topics from Chapter Four, specifically ‘the remainders of memory’ that I describe in connection with postnational Berlin. My focus in this chapter above all is on the German counter-monuments, which are memorial structures that exemplify absence, forewarning and participation, responding as they did to the West German *vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the 1970s, inaugurating a period of civil disobedience by memory activists hoping to challenge the lack of public conversation about Germany’s historical debt to its perpetrator past during WWII.

By evoking memory through a topographical lens, I describe conditions from the immediate postwar era to the present, occasionally referencing specific works and films to reveal a gradual shift in the perception and thinking about how perpetrator crimes should be remembered in general. I note a shift from the practices of de-rubbling Berlin in 1945 to the militant archaeological program that was initiated thirty years later. Evoking work by James E. Young, Karen Till and several others, I explore the former *Gestapo Gelände*’s period of memorial activism up to and including the first exhibition of *The Topography of Terror*. This particular exhibit is important because of its inclusion of the Berlin Wall as an object that allowed the torture chambers below to be preserved in the first place, but which subsequently became a curatorial object intended to show how competing histories and traumas may be represented geographically.

The next section of Chapter Four proposes a difference between counter-monuments and the memorialization of destruction that is present in works by Hans Haacke, Anselm Kiefer, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and by others, like Huyssen, who

¹⁴ Ibid.

describe the obsession of these artists with concealed references to a heroic, figurative and sublime image of destruction from the Romantic era. Against this group I pair artists like Jochen and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Horst Hoheisel and Rachel Whiteread in addition to Ullman, suggesting that these artists move beyond the aesthetics of destruction to engage in acts of (surreptitious) preservation; that through the motifs of depth, absence, minimalism, and desire, they seek political alternatives that reflect unique and therefore provocative perceptions of history. Beyond the disenchantment that destruction makes, I suggest that these particular artists express their debt to the past by issuing demands for responsibility.

In the final pages of Chapter Four I make an effort to situate Ullman's obsession with the absence that the pit represents in connection with the American land art movement, pointing to earlier works in which Ullman makes specific political statements about the social conditions of Palestinians within Israel where he lives. Taken as a whole, this earlier work demonstrates how negative-form sculpture can be directly tied to concepts of the domicile or the dwelling and the search for enduring modes of cohabitation, and to pick apart the relationship between public and private to reveal the fragility of surfaces and the logistics of encounter, intimacy, discovery, and remembrance. To demonstrate the topographical limits of the artwork as an extension of these particular concerns, I return to the canonical works of American land art with works by Mary Miss, Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on relationships between landscape and city architecture, beginning again with a diagnosis of Berlin's acquired status as a prime location for global capital and memory tourism. The very questionability of art as a catalyst for social engagement returns again

with my remarks about Peter Eisenman's *Holocaust Memorial* in conclusion.

Eisenman's structure is especially important to my argument because it brings up the significance of archaeology for the materialization of postnational or cosmopolitan memory culture. Whereas James E. Young maintains that Eisenman's site is an ostentatious display of austere modernist architecture that is both monumental and funereal, Adrian Parr insists that it represents a malleable surface for the transformation of genocidal crimes into what she describes as virtual content for the imagination—something intensive and life affirming. These conversations subtly evoke Eisenman's *Cities of Artificial Excavation*, in which the architect first engages in a critical rethinking of site-specific engagement to explore the layered and textured history of cities, and the linguistic or deconstructive relationships that he could then observe between the *trace* and the *ground*.¹⁵ All of these factors invite an air of buoyancy to his design of the Berlin memorial. In fact, this specific claim is mobilized by Parr to convincingly assert that 'memorial culture is utopian memory thinking,'¹⁶ that the very practice of memorialization compels us to recognize the libidinal economy that remains concealed by the perpetuity of the trauma, and to express the desire for a world that moves beneath this perpetuation.

Alongside these questions, the third and final argument of my dissertation focuses on the construction of Jewish spaces and 'post-Jewish culture.'¹⁷ My motivation to study this subject arose from a desire to understand the genealogy of European Holocaust

¹⁵ Bedard, Jean-François (Ed.), *Cities of Artificial Excavation: The Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (Rizzoli, 1994).

¹⁶ Parr, Adrian, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁷ Lehrer, Erica, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Indiana University Press, 2013) 148.

narratives as they have been constructed through popular formats like television, and correspondingly, to understand the influence with which Holocaust institutions operate on the global public stage, (for example, the connections such institutions have with the inauguration of an international human rights regime). My interest in this subject also extends to recent projections by scholars to include Holocaust narratives as a crucial device for pursuing anti-racist activism. However, what is particularly notable for me at this juncture is the extent to which those who are most vulnerable to European racism have altogether removed themselves from participating in Holocaust memory culture.

Alongside this phenomenon, I argue that the hyper-visibility of the absent Jew and the significance of this figure for conversations about racial tolerance cannot excuse the fact that many groups are present demographically but are nevertheless absented from received notions as to what (or who) *constitutes* Europe. Certainly we must remember Fatima El-Tayeb's claims that an ideology of deracialization perpetuates under the sign of multicultural ethics, and, indeed, that this very ethics in practice facilitates a sort of colourblind racism that is infinitely more difficult to isolate, identify, challenge, or refuse.¹⁸

I introduce these questions and problems in Chapter Three, in which I describe the emergence of Holocaust memory in the shadow of present conditions, looking at specific changes that such memory has undergone in the last seventy years since the end of the war. These include its eventual popularization through television and film, together with initiatives (diverse though they may be) to archive its history through literature and video testimonies, including broader philosophical questions of human being that engage the

¹⁸ El-Tayeb, Fatima, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

dynamic relationships between testimony and speech.

Subsequent to these conversations I discuss competing perspectives on the use of archival images in representations of video testimony narratives, in which I explore whether images depicting the crimes themselves should be prevented to secure the status of the event as ‘unimaginable,’¹⁹ and whether this particular status obscures our ability to desacralize the experience of atrocity. This dimension of the archives debate is especially crucial in my dissertation because conceiving of the Holocaust as unimaginable was first proposed amid the German *historikerstreit*, in which progressive historians aimed to counter the revisionism of right-wing revisionists to downplay the significance of the genocide for German history. In Chapter Three I describe how the peculiar status of the event that resulted from these debates subsequently contributed to making Holocaust memory into a phenomenon of ‘global’ concern. And, so, between these ‘national’ and ‘global’ dimensions I propose to offer a ‘postnational’ alternative.

As part of this alternative, I introduce Michael Rothberg’s claims in *Multidirectional Memory* as a corrective to other prominent voices in these debates, notably David Levy and Natan Sznaider’s in *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. Rothberg’s vision is unique because it insists that Holocaust memory should be combined with a new examination of post-coloniality. Noting that memories are distinct from their events, Rothberg reads Holocaust narratives as continuous with social justice initiatives from the 1960s and 1970s, and argues that Holocaust memory should be read in ways that ‘rethink collective memory in multicultural and transnational contexts.’²⁰

¹⁹ Didi-Huberman, Georges, *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Trans. Shane B. Lillis (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²⁰ Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Globalization* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 21.

While his argument is based on specific claims of mediality that I engage in the chapter, at this moment I would like to highlight his desire to locate the history of European-Jewish difference alongside that of today's 'postcolonial migrants.'²¹ While the sentiment here may be productive for situating Holocaust memory in relation to contemporary concerns, I argue that Rothberg's own language prevents us from conceiving of racialized minorities as European natives.

My investigation of these shared experiences in Chapter Three anticipates sustained analyses in Chapters Five and Six of Yael Bartana's video trilogy, *And Europe Will Be Stunned*. Above all, despite its global audience, I argue that the impact of this series can best be determined from the perspective of European area studies, particularly in work that deals with the contradictions of cosmopolitan norms within the European community, and indeed the struggle to rethink the European idea in accordance with them. Practically speaking, Bartana's work presents me with an opportunity to combine Erica Lehrer and Magdalena Waligórska's ideas about memorial intervention together with theories of judicial activism and efforts to protect the rights of Europe's most vulnerable minoritarian subjects. The judicial activism theme is explored through my discussions of work by Étienne Balibar, Seyla Benhabib, Bonnie Honig and Jacques Derrida, in which I situate Bartana's strategy of parody and duplication to reveal how her aesthetic works coincide with these particular strategies.

For instance, in *Nightmares*, the first instalment of the trilogy, the narrative is premised on imagining the potential for cohabitation between Jews and Poles in the post-Communist present. A fictional movement called the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP) is born, which is represented by a prominent leftist (or more precisely

²¹ Ibid., 23.

liberal) intellectual, Sławomir Sierakowski, who invites all the prewar Jews to exercise a right and return back to Poland. Through this return, the narrative encourages all the European countries to participate by addressing the status they have given to their minority populations and correcting it. One strategy that I use to understand this cluster of themes is by focusing on Bartana's symptomatic representation of the Jew, which invites further conversation regarding the explosion of popular interest in Polish-Jewish culture, the push for reparative Jewish immigration by specific European countries, and the psychoanalytic labour that the Jewish body performs as a figure of absence, and therefore, in turn, as a universal conductor of political action.

I refer to additional art projects in which efforts are made to explode the philo-Semitic tendencies that reproduce similar images of the Jew. However, Bartana's efforts are notable because she exceptionalizes the Jew to its most hyperbolic limits, and in the process she makes the Jew's exceptional status as an integral component of the unfolding nightmare of cohabitation that is revealed in subsequent installations of the work. *Wall and Tower* puts this nightmare into action by representing the settlement of Jews in a Warsaw park, using the aesthetics of kibbutz nationalism as an act of sovereign foundation to reveal a fundamental ambivalence in the very desire for settlement. I then explore Bartana's skillful use of the kibbutz in relation to themes of earlier works, describing the significance of these works for Israeli audiences, for whom the kibbutz structure with its communistic ideals has since undergone privatization. I also describe how this image circulates among housing activists within Israel vis-à-vis Palestine.

Further to these conversations, I examine narratives of visitation with respect to the Jewish national or Zionist themes that are part and parcel of this aesthetic. I refer to Pier

Paolo Pasolini's excursions to the Middle East in his *Location Hunting in Palestine* from 1964, which is characterized not only by his profound misrecognition of the Palestinian Other, but also by the catastrophic prediction that he unfolds through his personal disenchantment with the State of Israel. I then extend this analysis with mention of Ayreen Anastas's compulsion to retrace Pasolini's journey some 41 years later, noting similarities and differences between the two. By focusing on the motifs of hopelessness that both Pasolini and Anastas express, I situate Bartana's repetition of settler colonial narratives in relation to an expression of hope that is capable of acknowledging its own ambivalence. Whereas Anastas, for example, engages in repetition to compare two different factual stories—Pasolini's and her own—Bartana, as I mentioned earlier, creates a fictional narrative that parodies itself through repetition.

At this point I will refer to my extended discussion of Bartana's investment in Zionist propaganda and settler colonial film, including her use of the German director Helmar Lerski's *Avodah*, and all the discussions of Jewish masculinity and Socialist Realism that I explore in Chapter Six. Putting these themes aside, I will mention that Bartana is steadfast in her commitment to establish a visual record of co-dependency between images of European nationalism and the Zionist ideological perspectives that dominate in the Middle East. I describe this relation with further reference to several prominent critics, all of whom describe how the formation of Israel by Zionism drew more or less extensively from the European heritage of imperialism and colonialism.

Indeed, Bartana herself acknowledges the impossibility of being extricated from crimes that are made repeatedly in her name but against her wishes. Her memorial intervention is therefore in a sense to reverse the harm that these narratives have

facilitated. I bring this interventionist spirit to the surface in my concluding discussion of Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, which forms a counterpoint to John Drabinski's *Levinas and the Postcolonial*. In my estimation, both of these theorists return to 20th century European Jewish thought precisely to illustrate that Zionism emerged from a diversity of attitudes and perspectives, and that ethical solutions are possible only on the basis of revisiting this diversity. This theoretical perspective is then put into dialogue with pre-existing efforts to create bi-national alternatives in the Middle East to complement the post-national alternatives being explored to the North. In fact, both Butler and Drabinski come to this conclusion in their individual efforts at disentangling the Levinasian tradition from the unapologetic Zionism voiced by the philosopher himself. It is with this attempted displacement in mind that I would also situate Bartana's videos.

In conclusion, I'd like to say a word about an element of the Bartana story that is under-represented in art criticism that focuses on her work, namely Bartana's own personal investment in staging a mission to Poland. Amidst Bartana's ambivalence about her homeland Israel, the artist's journeys to Poland, too, are informed by the pedagogical images of her childhood, repeating in the artist's mind as it were through figures of haunting to which she is unable or unwilling to identify as her own. Beyond this identification, I argue that Bartana's ultimate desire is to situate a postnational alternative within Poland as illustrated in the third installment, in which supporters take to the streets of Warsaw in a show of mourning for their departed leader. Importantly, the source of hope in this video is partly derived from a Jewish history that originates in the 18th century struggles for Jewish autonomy in Poland, namely the ideology of diaspora

nationalism in addition to efforts in recent years, after Communism, to rethink Jewish culture amid a polarized political spectrum.

Above all, we are visited here in the third installation by an image of post-Jewish culture, and as Bartana puts it, that of ‘a broader Polish community that will trigger our imaginations.’²² Against the tide of German exceptionalism on the global stage, and paired with the intrinsic hopefulness of a *diasporic* Jewish figure, what we as viewers are treated to in this trilogy of videos is the air of innocence and naïvety that tends to accompany acts of sovereign foundation, complete with the subtle premonition to which all sacred promises speak as they turn inward, as solidarity eventually sours, and as gestures of ethical responsibility materialize in disaster.

²² Bartana, Yael, ‘Conversations with Contemporary Artists at the Guggenheim,’ *YouTube*, 12 March 2012.

CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING MEMORY AT THE CROSSROADS OF EUROPEAN DEBT

Every description of the economy is primarily a cultural act.

Boris Groys



Figure 1: Natalia Judzińska, 'Ghetto was here,' trade center in Mirów, Warsaw, 2015.

INTRODUCTION

The financial debt crisis in Europe appears to be over. Markets have stabilized, and austerity measures, in some cases, have been reversed.¹ But questions remain. The European Union (EU) experienced a sharp economic downturn in 2008 following the disclosure that overwhelming national debts were being carried by a handful of member

¹ These changes occurred before Syriza won the elections in May 2014. See: Weisbrot, Mark, 'Greece: signs of growth come as austerity eases,' *BBC News*, 22 January 2014.

states, particularly Greece. This revelation further contributed to a global recession, with roots in the United States housing market, and to what has routinely been compared to the Great Depression. In Europe, public debate surrounding the crisis focused more or less exclusively on the interaction between financial markets and preexisting lending policies that are specific to the European Union. However, in light of repeated attempts at determining how such policies connected with their original purpose of balancing the need for national autonomy in fiscal matters with monetary interdependence, I would argue that analysts and commentators at this time were equally struggling to discern whether the eventuality of the crisis truly reflected the cultural imaginary that the policies were meant to signify. For example, this insight might make it clearer as to why public debate surrounding the crisis eventually shifted from technical debates concerning the EU power structure over to questions about the ‘Merkelization’² of its federalist spirit.

For Jürgen Habermas, the dominance of executive governance within the European Union signifies a top-down approach in which confidence has been given to leaders that happen to represent member states with the highest wealth differential.³ Such leaders, to Habermas’s mind, thus predictably mischaracterized the crisis as one that primarily affected the region’s most important symbol of competitiveness in trade—that of the Eurozone and its common currency, the Euro. On this basis, Habermas insists that expressions of such anxiety conceal a greater concern about the impact of defining Europe in relation to its global financial capability in the first place. Indeed if we follow Habermas in this argument, we might conclude, as he does, that the crisis became the endurance test for an idea of Europe which is supposed to reflect a postnational collective

² Hockenos, Paul, ‘The Merkelization of Europe,’ *Foreign Policy*, 9 December 2011.

³ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Polity Press, 2012), 52.

in accordance with the autonomous will of its members.

The idealized image of a harmonious European community has shifted in the wake of austerity measures taken by Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain. As I will indicate in the following pages, these developments appear to validate Simon Springer's argument that structural adjustments reveal a 'relational connection'⁴ between neoliberalization and violence. Implicit in the demand for structural adjustment is the belief that applying the insights of classical liberalism to contemporary society will simply replicate the Enlightenment ideal of peaceful coexistence among rationally minded actors or subjects. What do get replicated, in fact, are traumatic historical relationships that are premised upon historical exclusions along ethnic or racial divides within national states and between states in the European community. With this replication in mind, we might also begin to think about ways that the ideology of neoliberalism and its concealment of violence are symptomatic of what Andreas Huyssen refers to as 'a culture that is terminally ill with amnesia.'⁵

The element of violence in such forgetting applies both to the policing initiatives that are necessary to keep order in the streets when a given state enforces austerity measures, and to the relationships that are fostered (or destroyed) between diverse populations through such enforcement. In Greece, for example, the antipathy for those who are presumed to be local migrants has been triggered in part by the racialization of Greek nationals in connection with the rest of the white majority throughout Europe. Chrysi Avgi, which is otherwise known as Golden Dawn, represents a fascist acceleration that has paralleled the austerity program of this southern country. Having roots in the

⁴ Springer, Simon, 'The Violence of Neoliberalism' (Forthcoming in the *Handbook on Neoliberalism*, 2015), 9.

⁵ Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1994), 1.

1980s as a social and political movement with ties to the police, the Golden Dawn has recently ascended through municipal ranks to the national parliament. In 2014, it secured further representation in the European Parliament, providing it with legitimacy and resources despite its connection a year earlier to the killing of Pavlos Fyssas, a rap artist who espoused ideas that were unsympathetic to neo-fascism.⁶ Given these circumstances, we should perhaps begin to analyze the ascendancy of the Golden Dawn together with broader tendencies of exclusion that are at the core of the European imaginary.

Aamir R. Mufti has drawn some connections between the populist anger over immigration in Greece and subtle changes to the movement of people throughout Europe.⁷ Mufti refers to the treatment of immigrants under European immigration policy, in which the freedom of movement guaranteed for the citizens of European member states has been matched by gradually tightening restrictions on the movement of those who are deemed not to belong. In particular, Mufti focuses on Pakistani migration through Greece to imply that Greece takes on an unequal distribution of the European responsibility for migrant populations in ways that effectively racialize both communities. He claims that immigrants to Europe ‘are being largely confined to the continent’s internal “peripheries,”’⁸ resulting in a cascading effect whereby incoming populations become the subject of discrimination by those who have already been marginalized by the larger European community. This new pattern of migration differs from those of the 1950s and 1960s, where former subjects of the colonial regimes sought refuge and prosperity in the northern European metropolises. In this sense, the case of Greece ‘reflects a truly EU phenomenon,’ as ‘these immigrants are trying to enter Europe

⁶ ““Neo-Nazi” held over Greek musician Pavlos Fyssas death,’ *BBC News*, 18 September 2013.

⁷ Mufti, Aamir, ‘Stathis Gourgouris interviews Aamir Mufti,’ *Greek Left Review*, 14 July 2014, Web.

⁸ *Ibid.*

as such, not necessarily Greece, which does not have any significant historical relations with their countries of origin.’⁹

In effect, Mufti describes a novel set of circumstances at Europe’s peripheral border. As the threat of being withdrawn from the Union became a greater possibility in the wake of financial disaster, ‘the gangs of Golden Dawn make a strenuous case for the Greek people not being reduced themselves to a “black” or “brown” population.’¹⁰ Exceptionally violent though it has been, the sort of racialized discrimination that has unfolded in Greece reveals broader trends in a region where encounters with migrant populations tend to invite abject displays of self-loathing.

The anti-immigrant focus of nationalist parties on the far right is not a new phenomenon. The examples of fascistic behaviour by groups who may be affiliated to such parties are too numerous to mention here. However, beyond Mufti’s observation that new patterns of immigration have taken place as a consequence of internal discrimination within the European Union, there is another, and perhaps more familiar problem of misconceiving racialized groups as European migrants in the first place. In fact, demonstrations of resistance by settler communities have become just as commonplace as the far right ideology that opposes them. The racialized ghettos in the suburbs of Europe’s largest cities have been prime locations for such protest. One of the most notable examples occurred years before the onset of the financial crisis, with unfolding riots in the Paris *banlieues* during the Fall and Winter of 2005. The riots in question amounted to a belated response to the logic of suburban segregation by raced communities, having been represented a generation earlier in a film called *La Haine*

⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.

(1995).¹¹ The difference in this particular uprising, however, was that much of the frustration that fuelled it was due to feelings of malcontent with the neoliberalization of French society.

Ignited by a tragic altercation between a pair of black francophone teenagers and the police on suspicion of robbery, the burning of cars and the eventual ruination of the *banlieues* had been carried out by a racialized minority who experience both chronic unemployment and a profound lack of political representation. Ostracized in the popular media as being migrants of Arabic or North African origin, these second- and third-generation settler communities have become locked in an exchange between belonging and exclusion. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson have suggested, these communities are an ‘object of difference and hence a target of integration’¹²—where ‘integration’ is defined metaphorically to conceal their ‘disappearing.’ The aesthetic of the riot never creates a sense of recovery from the kinds of subjection that are experienced by its participants. Nicholas Sarkozy, who was elevated from Interior Minister to President despite making inflammatory remarks about the riots, represented the triumph of the right in the French political establishment. For Alain Badiou, though the *banlieues* riots reflect a global phenomenon of discontent, we cannot say that they were in any way successful. The riots, as Badiou says, ‘remain a bitter and negative experience, an experience of abandon: the young people of the *banlieue* were left to themselves, with no opening to anyone else. This cannot be political.’¹³

¹¹ Canet, Raphaël, Laurent Pech and Maura Stewart, ‘France’s Burning Issue: Understanding the Urban Riots of November 2005,’ Forthcoming in B. Bowden and M. David, Eds., *Riot: Resistance and Rebellion in Britain and France* (Palgrave, 2015), 1-17.

¹² Mezzadra, Sandro and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method: Or, The Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013), 145.

¹³ Badiou, Alain, “‘We Need a Popular Discipline’: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative,” *Critical Inquiry*, 34: 4 (Summer 2008): 658.

RIGHTS OF CIRCULATION

Operations that depoliticize subjects through the racialization of Europe have been countered by repeated attempts at evoking a politics of memory. For someone like Habermas, the systematic discrimination of raced communities described above can be settled by attacking the concentrations of power that were deemed necessary to cope with the recessionary times. With an aim of further democratizing the European Union, Habermas argues that it should become more responsive to the kinds of social inequality that are acutely felt during periods of crisis. However, this particular assertion is made on the grounds of a personal belief in the originary capacities of ‘Europe-wide solidarity,’¹⁴ which assumes that a European *demos* does in fact exist to validate these proposed structural changes. Should the Habermasian optimism be read in a critical light, for example, it might be discovered that the events of the debt crisis exposed the potential for conflict between EU members, and therefore revealed certain limitations of identifying with ‘Europe.’ The re-introduction of the potential for conflict is significant because the Union was designed in the first place to avoid such conflict in the aftermath of WWII. Were this latency to become the mark of uncertain times, the hopes of getting beyond it may involve recognizing the exposure of long-established power differentials that nevertheless present themselves as being circumstantial.

In other words, the debate surrounding neoliberalization should be shifted to a level in which participants can begin to question the very basis of ‘European’ collective memory. This need for questioning is all the more urgent as identitarian managers meet demands of such obduracy that they have been forced to redraw the geographical and

¹⁴ Habermas, 2012, 53.

metaphorical lines that distinguish Europe and Europeans from a growing number of outsiders. In seeking to determine the logic of who gets excluded from the categories that define the European, it might become necessary to replace the Habermasian affirmation of intrinsic Europeanness, with its blind faith in the messianic return of ‘popular sovereignty,’¹⁵ for Étienne Balibar’s assertion of the possibility for a ‘nomadic’ citizen.’¹⁶ For Balibar unlike Habermas, the very prospect of nomadism permits us ‘to ask how the age-old figure of the citizen could be reconfigured in the age of global migrations... and... how it could become an institutional reality.’¹⁷

In other words, by challenging the operation that seeks to validate supposedly ‘diasporic’ speaking positions in connection with a liberal cosmopolitan orthodoxy, Balibar suggests that a formal structure of belonging be designed for a new kind of subject, one that is ‘at least partially independent from territory.’¹⁸ Balibar’s hope appears to be towards contravening given assumptions about the status of territory within the geopolitics of contemporary Europe, to suggest that we should rather consider the institutional effects of the European Union in terms of its ability to support the ‘right of circulation’¹⁹—a right that might prospectively extend from the circulation of commodities and information to include people as well. This particular innovation does not rely upon rearguard actions that seek to reinforce edifying notions about the material or ideational foundations of the European community, with its apparent triumph over the specter of national identity and exclusion. Balibar, in a sense, appears to suggest instead

¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶ Balibar, Étienne, ‘Towards a Diasporic Citizen? From Internationalism to Cosmopolitics,’ Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-mei Shih, Eds., *The Creolization of Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 207-226.

¹⁷ Ibid., 207.

¹⁸ Ibid., 222.

¹⁹ Ibid., 208.

that times of crisis are precious moments of opportunity—an opportunity not to return to the Enlightenment idea of postnational unity as to disrupt and disassemble the imaginary itself.

Likewise for someone like Giorgio Agamben, for whom the financial debt crisis bore witness to a ‘radical transformation’²⁰ of the cherished categories that for generations defined European collective memory, reflecting an epistemic shift, for example, in the very definitions of the ‘nation-state, sovereignty, democratic participation, political parties, [and] international law.’²¹ However, unlike Balibar, Agamben maintains a degree of pessimism about the tangible benefits that such transformations afford. Beyond its transformative potential, the financial debt crisis exemplified what for Agamben signifies ‘the normal condition’²² of global market capitalism, with its remarkable ability to recuperate from periodic lacunae during the natural course of its accumulation. Far from being exceptional, Agamben reiterates that such crises mark out pivotal moments of incredible weakness that ultimately demonstrate the resiliency of the system at large. Beyond projections of a nomadic citizen, Agamben explains that ‘crisis’ and ‘economy’ signify ‘words of command that facilitate the imposition and acceptance of measures and restrictions that the people would not otherwise accept.’²³ Because of this command, the financial debt crisis is simply unable to indicate transformation for change as Balibar suggests, as it does to reinforce the image of the European community with its functional contradictions.

It might be time to consider how these reputed transformations operate beneath the

²⁰ Agamben, Giorgio, and Peppe Savà, ‘God didn’t die, he was transformed into money,’ *Libcom.org*, 10 February 2014.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

surface of language to affect the very epistemé that for so long has defined Europe by its plain existence as a geopolitical reality. For instance, doubts have been raised about the persistence of this false idea that Europe can be defined as a legitimately separate and distinct geographical entity.²⁴ Whether we point at the invention of the European continent during the heyday of Christendom as a land bordered by the Islamic world, or earlier, at the myth of Europa's travels to the 'land of the sunset'²⁵ following her marriage to Zeus, the inclination to rely upon a geopolitical anchor becomes formed as a challenge time and again. For this reason, some historians have insisted that we understand Europe exclusively 'a cultural concept'²⁶ that is able to account for its various instabilities and periodic alterations in times of conflict. For instance, the public debates that emerged together with the heroic but ill-fated Euromaidan public square, a political force that for a time occupied Kiev with mass demonstrations calling for European integration, and the subsequent military response from powerful forces in the East, are just one example of the categorical instability to which these historians refer.

Agamben may indeed be right that a fundamental transformation of political concepts has taken place, and that we need to rethink and even challenge the list of associations that connect Europe to familiar notions of invention, democracy, or revolution. Perhaps it is not simply the case that the geographical borders have shifted. Rather, because 'Europeanness declines gradually in the peripheries,'²⁷ revealing sites of radical uncertainty for the 'expansion and retreat'²⁸ of European cultural expression, the

²⁴ Jordan-Bychkov, Terry G., and Bella Bychkova Jordan, *The European Culture Area: A Systematic Geography* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

exemplary status that we accord to Europeanness should also be reconsidered. The mounting desperation that goes into policing the European Union's external borders only provides further evidence of the need for a clear transformation to the methodological assumptions of its political categories.

In yet another gesture towards the opportunity for such transformations, I note that Mezzadra and Neilson follow in Balibar's footsteps by attempting to significantly revise the concept of the border so that it can begin accounting for some of the differences that I describe above. They write that 'borders, far from serving simply to block or obstruct global flows, have become essential devices for their articulation.'²⁹ By drawing attention to their signifying power in particular, Mezzadra and Neilson invite us to consider that borders in the present day are no longer composed entirely of lines on a map that simply demarcate territory-bound sovereignties. Rather, such borders have become 'complex social institutions'³⁰ that serve to confound longstanding relationships between the state and the circulation of capital, and therefore also between the law, migration and demands for social justice.

Using issues surrounding migration as a rhetorical point of reference, Mezzadra claims that a new governmentality has emerged between Europe and its extant managerial actors, who, he argues, enjoy greater flexibility than national state actors do to interpret their specific legal responsibilities. Non-state actors have for this reason become crucial to the maintenance of border controls in postnational Europe, and, in many cases, these actors are the first point of contact for those seeking asylum.³¹ These changes alone might allow us to appreciate that while 'borders today still perform a "world-configuring

²⁹ Mezzadra and Neilson, 3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 181.

function,” they are also ‘often subject to shifting and unpredictable patterns of mobility and overlapping, appearing and disappearing as well as sometimes crystallizing in the form of threatening walls that break up and reorder political spaces that were once formally unified.’³² Using this configuration, Mezzadra and Neilson move to supplement the received definition of borders as territorial or even physical entities with forms that are temporal, cognitive or ephemeral. Beyond the (territorial) theme of security, therefore, I argue that Mezzadra and Neilson’s definition should perhaps be understood as mounting a provocation, calling for a reconsideration of the border as an epistemic or medial category. This application goes against the obsession with global flows and its celebrated elimination of borders after 1989, or indeed with their resurgence after 2001. As a ‘borderscape,’³³ Mezzadra and Neilson are able to account for ‘the simultaneous expansion and contraction of political spaces,’³⁴ but without at the same time participating in a normative program for their abolition.

Notably, Mezzadra and Neilson are invested in using their methodological approach to explore the shifting epistemic criteria of the border in connection with the politics of European migration. They argue that a new governmentality has emerged with the rise of non-state managerial actors who have come to spearhead the migration process because they do not have the same kinds of legal responsibility that bind EU member states to behave ethically in these particular matters.³⁵ More importantly, however, I find Mezzadra and Neilson’s analysis to be useful for the present study because it invites us to

³² Ibid., 6

³³ For a more elaborate description of this term, see: Rajaram, Prem Kumar, and Carl Grundy-Warr, Eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory’s Edge* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

³⁴ Mezzadra and Neilson, 12.

³⁵ Ibid., 182.

imagine the stakes of ‘postnational’ articulations of state power in connection with a European community that in many ways have become immune to the jubilant discourse surrounding globalization and its presumed destruction of the border.

In fact, beyond conversations about a distinctive European ‘culture area,’³⁶ the theory of European community that Mezzadra and Neilson develop is one that approximates Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande’s definition of a ‘cosmopolitan empire,’³⁷ which is technically speaking a formation of empire that is situated in the aftermath of the imperial state. Through this category we can perhaps begin to acknowledge the peculiar status of the European Union as neither a confederated nor federal state, but as a set of institutions that with restricted legislative authority occupy considerable influence around the world. By returning to notions of empire in ways that are different from the rapidly canonical appropriation of the term by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,³⁸ which is itself based in part on the established methods of World Systems theory, Beck and Grande follow Mezzadra and Neilson’s insistence of recognizing the epistemic variability that the concept of the border materializes.

Above all, the post-imperial empire is defined as ‘one that *annuls* fixed borders and makes them variable,’³⁹ a figure of empire that interweaves, transforms, shifts and pluralizes the distinction between inside and outside. Such variability is not a convenience so much as a necessity for sovereign power. In Europe, in any case, the result has not been a Habermasian emancipatory vision, in which the EU would be situated as a model managerial state that is productively interrupted by expressions of

³⁶ Jordan and Jordan, 3.

³⁷ Beck, Ulrich, and Edgar Grande, *Cosmopolitan Europe* (Polity Press, 2014), 64.

³⁸ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁹ Ulrich and Grande, 64.

popular sovereignty. Rather, the post-imperial state that Beck and Grande describe is premised on a ‘repressive cosmopolitanism,’⁴⁰ in which manifestations of violence between members of the EU are encouraged by every act that would disavow it. Indeed, with every piece of legislation, the individual members ‘become executors of their own internal pacification,’⁴¹ and the strategies that are employed to achieve such pacification coincide with previous assertions about role that neoliberal states have in terms of perpetuating jurisdictional violence.

Achille Mbembé’s ‘Necropolitics’⁴² offers a further explanation for the perpetuation of violence by neoliberalism, which I will later argue provides strong indications about the future direction of European memory culture. Now, Mbembé’s own articulation of necropower is premised on the categorical rejection of a normative political framework, in which subjects act collectively in accordance with the rational calculus of the public sphere to secure their autonomy by facilitating ‘communication and recognition’⁴³ in diverse environments. Associating this normative framework with G.W.F. Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*,⁴⁴ in which human communities are secured by confronting the forces of death in a so-called restricted economy, Mbembé argues that contemporary politics is more akin to the insights of Georges Bataille.⁴⁵ For Bataille, death is ‘an expenditure without reserve,’⁴⁶ such that human life and the communities that support it can be nothing more than incidental to this expenditure. From Mbembé’s perspective, this engagement of political subjects involves much more than simply ‘the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁴¹ Ibid., 66

⁴² Mbembé, J. A., and Libby Meintjes, ‘Necropolitics,’ *Public Culture* 15:1 (Winter 2003): 11-40.

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ Hegel, G. W. F., *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁴⁵ Bataille, Georges, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (Zone Books, 1991).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

forward dialectical movement of reason.’⁴⁷ Rather, the conditions faced by these subjects make them vulnerable to a ‘spiral transgression’⁴⁸ that by definition cannot ensure their survival.

From this description, the political is a space that caters only to the siren call of death, such that sovereign subjects in particular must define their right over life precisely by utilizing the magnificent powers of destruction that are available to them as sovereigns. In lieu of a political theory that would support this assertion, Mbembé strongly doubts the commonplace assertion that the Nazi extermination camps are paradigmatic of this engagement, or indeed that ‘the camp’ as such should be conceived, with Agamben, as ‘the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West.’⁴⁹

By separating necropower from the rapidly canonized ideogram of the camp, which I discuss later, Mbembé instead draw a parallel to the image of the guillotine that came to epitomize the French Revolution in the aftermath of the Terror. That is to say, for Mbembé, the public guillotine reveals a new cultural sensibility at this juncture ‘in which killing the enemy of the state is an extension of play.’⁵⁰ By illustrating further concrete links between such playfulness and the treatment of colonial subjects, Mbembé insists that while ‘the links between modernity and terror spring from multiple sources,’⁵¹ like the concentration camps, a more prominent source is the democratic bias of the national state and its undisputed relation to colonial power.

Mbembe envisages the European colony as being akin to a ‘terror formation,’⁵² a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 181.

⁵⁰ Mbembé and Meintjes, 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Ibid., 24.

political community that is shaped less by the kind of normative guarantees described above as by a relation of systemic inequality. The concept of necropower may then be applied to this formation as a historically mindful alternative to the state of exception that is projected by the image of the camp. Through necropolitical analysis, in other words, descriptions of colonial conquest can be developed in relation to a centrifugal power, a force of considerable magnitude that through its exteriority would be capable of policing the divisions between national states and their mutual wars of position. Given these circumstances, we can perhaps begin to imagine a form of life that is appropriate for a postnational region that demonstrates its ability to follow the logic of corresponding forces, that of a centripetal power in which the violence from previous eras is returned to that region once again. To speak of ‘infrastructural warfare’⁵³ as Mbembé does is therefore highly pertinent to acknowledging these new conditions and relations of power.

MEMORY AND METHODOLOGY

As a spatial category, the infrastructural component here is defined by relations of inequality that are produced by the conditions of racialized minorities facing segregation and discrimination in France, or as demonstrated above in the examples of Greece, by that of prospective immigrants along the peripheries of the European Union. It may be possible, in any case, to verify Agamben’s observation that the financial debt crisis in particular was ‘a crisis of our relation to the past’—the past of ‘European man.’⁵⁴ In fact, I argue beyond Agamben’s prescriptions to reiterate that ‘European man’ was not created

⁵³ Mbembé and Meintjes, 29.

⁵⁴ Agamben and Savà, ‘God didn’t die, he was transformed into money.’

in isolation from those figures of alterity that are too easy to eliminate from the collective memory of this particular subject. For instance, Alexander G. Weheliye in his article ‘After Man’ suggests that European race relations should be considered with a concept of blackness that defines ‘an integral structuring assemblage of the modern human.’⁵⁵ On the basis of this assertion, Weheliye dismisses Agamben’s equivocations to suggest that ‘the biopolitical function of race is racism; it is the establishment and maintenance of caesuras, not their abolition.’⁵⁶ If we then consider that dealing with concepts derived from contemporary Europe is always and repeatedly a question of imprinting these caesuras upon European memory culture, it should equally be acknowledged that racialized subjects who live and belong to this region have particular epistemic and generational rights with respect to it.



Figure 2: Jonas Dahlberg, *Open Wound*, design for Utøya, Norway.

⁵⁵ Weheliye, Alexander G., ‘After Man,’ *American Literary History* 20:1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 324.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 328. Jill Jarvis takes this position even further by redirecting criticism toward Agamben for failing to recognize the traumatic memory of racialization in which his founding categories are implicated. See: Jarvis, Jill, ‘Remnants of Muslims: Reading Agamben's Silence.’ *New Literary History*, 45:4 (Autumn 2014): 707-728.

Given Weheliye's framework and other critics of Agambne's theoretical insight for understanding race and memory, it is perhaps no surprise to learn that European memorial culture is dominated by representations of absence, severing and, indeed, caesuras. Materializing this relation is Jonas Dahlberg's winning bid to design a series of memorial sites following Anders Breivik's racially motivated mass killing in Norway in 2011. Following the distribution of his online manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, Breivik successfully carried out a bombing of the government quarter in downtown Oslo, killing eight, followed by a massacre of sixty-nine on the nearby island of Utøya, which at the time was hosting a popular annual summer camp by the Worker's Youth League. Commissioned by Public Art Norway, Dahlberg's memorial is particularly interesting for the way it impresses upon the urgency of making everyday Europeans ethically responsive to the changing epistemic, demographic and geopolitical striations I described above.

Breivik himself participated in a very different kind of narrative production by using the genre of the manifesto to communicate an egregiously selective reading of European history, in which he criticized the promotion of multiculturalism and the settlement of Muslims in Norway in particular as signs of intrinsic weakness. Given that the attacks themselves have been the worst calamity to affect Norway since WWII, Dahlberg's ambitious design is undoubtedly warranted. Interestingly, however, it should also be noted that Dahlberg's design establishes specific relationships to artistic conventions that are long associated with the collective memory of perpetrators. To be more specific, as I argue in Chapter Four, Dahlberg appears to participate in a tradition of counter-monumental design that was invented by the Germans to acknowledge their

wartime crimes against the European Jews. If we then consider Dahlberg's influence by this aesthetic, it may be fair to suggest that his work gestures at provoking Nordic citizens to acknowledge the responsibilities, or culpabilities, that attend to such remembering.

Another way of making this point is to suggest that a prominent feature of the memorial is its attempt at unhinging the rhetoric surrounding Breivik's reputed insanity, which in any case became the main subject of interrogation during his trial,⁵⁷ and therefore to connect his acts of violence with a set of larger cultural and political circumstances. By physically severing the Sørbråten peninsula overlooking Utøya and inscribing a 'symbolic wound'⁵⁸ within public space, Dahlberg's initiative thus addresses Breivik's culpability in relation to that of all Europeans, to acknowledge not only the sublime violence of the perpetrator, but also the everyday violence that is committed against raced communities in the name of Europe. On this basis, my dissertation examines the issues described above in connection with the memory cultures of minority Europeans, and explores the broader history of memory culture in ways that give further credence to their peculiar forms and preoccupations.

Central to my investigation is an assertion about the force of impact that aesthetics can make upon social and political issues of discrimination, violence and geopolitical conflict. Above all, by using aesthetics as a site of collective memory, I gain access not only to a series of unique perspectives on these issues, but also to understanding the public's specific demands for meaningful change.

In an effort at a broader illustration of my work, I suggest that Dahlberg's 'Open Wound' memorial brings to light two foundational aspects of my dissertation. The first is

⁵⁷ Friedrichsen, Gisela, 'How Sick Is Norway's Mass Murderer?' *Speigel Online*, 24 April 2012.

⁵⁸ 'Wounded landscape: how Norway is remembering its 2011 Utøya massacre,' *The Guardian*, 6 March 2014.

evoked in the way that Dahlberg's piece interacts with a memory culture that is increasingly focused upon activist themes. The most clear definition of this turn within memory studies is offered by Erica Lehrer and Magdalena Waligórska's concept of 'memorial intervention,'⁵⁹ which I describe in a subsequent chapter is premised on abandoning received forms of memorialization that are focused on traditional practices, like national rituals, for dynamic engagements or performances that take a share in addressing social problems, or in directly transforming social relationships. While the abstract narratives that are contained in Dahlberg's 'Open Wound' certainly permit such engagement to happen, my dissertation historicizes this trend in a broader effort at understanding its limitations. Previous attempts have certainly been made to historicize activist memory. For example, these include Wulf Kansteiner's allusions to the German 'memory dissidents'⁶⁰ from the 1970s who demanded that perpetrator crimes from the war be publicly acknowledged, or Susannah Radstone's mention of the more recent divide between 'memory research' and 'memory culture,' in which she suggests that the latter has become predisposed to making social demands in ways that 'exceeds the personal.'⁶¹

More specifically, in the present work I describe the historical conditions for a particular conjuncture between the material practices of memory and those of socially engaged art. The art historian Nato Thompson illustrates these conditions particularly well by describing the province of socially engaged art as a set of aesthetic practices that

⁵⁹ Lehrer, Erica, and Magdalena Waligórska, 'Cur(at)ting History: New Genre Art Interventions and the Polish-Jewish Past,' *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 20:10 (2013): 1.

⁶⁰ Kansteiner, Wulf, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Ohio University Press, 2006), 6.

⁶¹ Radstone, Susannah, 'Memory Studies: For and Against,' *Memory Studies*, 1:0 (2008): 31. This mention of the personal refers primarily to methods derived from psychology.

force tangible relationships with civic action.⁶² In other words, Thompson insists that artistic production of this sort tends to be aimed less at ‘representing’ the world as do traditional forms of art, or even at transforming it through a process of abstraction, as by using the work to perform acts of social change, and indeed by making this performance an intrinsic part of its articulation. Similar to Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘relational aesthetics’,⁶³ Thompson writes that socially engaged art must retain a flexibility that ‘reflects an interest in producing effects and affects in the world rather than focusing on the form itself.’⁶⁴ In doing so, he continues, a socially engaged artistic practice can result in ‘new forms of living that force a reconsideration and perhaps a new language altogether.’⁶⁵

On this basis, Dahlberg’s counter-monumental vision is just one step towards a socially engaged artistic practice as I describe it above. In subsequent chapters of my dissertation, I examine specific ways that new media applications like video installation have come into contact with memory culture in ways that highlight the impact art can make in provoking social change. However, my first task is to examine how social engagement was first articulated in theory, and for that I return to debates over aesthetic materiality by members of the Frankfurt School, and peripherally by the historical avant-gardes that were key to their influential vision. In Chapter Two, I focus on the impact of the avant-gardes in terms of their demand for ‘the new,’ and I make further gestures towards how this demand became included in the ‘memory boom’⁶⁶ of the 1990s. I suggest that memory practitioners were strongly persuaded at this time to contend with

⁶² Thompson, Nato, ‘Living as Form,’ Nato Thompson, Ed., *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (The MIT Press, 2012), 33.

⁶³ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Press Du Reel, 1998).

⁶⁴ Thompson, 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Huyssen, 1994, 5.

the lingering aporias of the avant-garde's esteemed legacy despite the total saturation of capital into every facet of human experience—a reality they could not have predicted. With the recent explosion of popular interest in memory-related themes, I argue that memory culture in general has been redirected by demands to address the contemporary moment. On this basis, I argue that the urgency behind Thompson's assertions regarding social engagement is more or less symptomatic of these demands.

To put it another way, while Thompson rightly insists that social engagement within art should be achieved by a 'shift towards the performative not only in art but in knowledge,'⁶⁷ another question might be posed in terms of how this shift is re-valued as a commodity. Maria Lind takes up this point by observing that 'artists involved with social practice face the challenge of changing working conditions in a deregulated, post-Fordist job market, affected by an economy radically restructured by financial speculation and abstract values.'⁶⁸ For Teddy Cruz, on the other hand, these pressures have led many artists to redirect their practices away from entrepreneurialism into 'a project of *radical proximity* to the institutions [of capital], transforming them in order to produce new aesthetic categories that can problematize the relationship of the social.'⁶⁹ I argue that memory discourses play an important role in these efforts because they invite artistic producers to consider the broader genealogies of the institutions to which their practice is directed—or directed against.

A final problem that is raised by the emergence of oppositional demands within memory culture is their implication for the cultural critic and the academic researcher.

⁶⁷ Thompson, 24.

⁶⁸ Lind, Maria, 'Returning on Bikes: Notes on Social Practice,' *Living as Form*, 49.

⁶⁹ Cruz, Teddy, 'Democratizing Urbanization and the Search for New Civic Imagination,' *Living As Form*, 60.

Often, for example, the critic has been tasked with providing a ‘symptomatic reading’ of the social transformations embodied in a given work. In a famous passage on the role of the critic, the literary theorist Terry Eagleton exclaims that the work of art is always implicated in the ideological content from which it is made. He writes, for instance, perhaps enigmatically, that works of (literary) art do not ‘take history as its object’ as ‘have history as its object.’⁷⁰ Among other things, this distinction means that the cultural critic must determine the ideological lineages and histories in which the work participates, and therefore ‘to expose constraints imposed on the work by various styles that it employs.’⁷¹ However, the critic’s role is even more important when it comes to analyzing socially engaged art that operates within the ambit of memory culture. That is, by redirecting the common point of reference away from social events or political activities, the critic of memory culture is urged to make tangible consequences with respect to them. As I demonstrate in my analysis of Yael Bartana’s video installations in Chapters Five and Six, the art of social engagement and its capacity for fictionalization is a testing ground for developing critical methods and approaches to the affective and performative response that such work demands from its audiences.

The second foundational contribution of my dissertation is that it redirects attention back to the structural and historical inability of postwar European Jewish memory to access broader social engagements with the politics of race. Once again, Dahlberg’s memorial design brings this incompatibility to light, as he chooses to represent the atrocity of a racially motivated crime using a highly specific artistic strategy that originates in postwar Germany. Dahlberg thus inadvertently forges ahead with a

⁷⁰ Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (Verso, 1976), 72.

⁷¹ Johnson, Pauline, *Marxist Aesthetics: The Foundations Within Everyday Life for an Emancipated Consciousness* (Routledge, 2011), 234.

connection that I describe in Chapters Three and Four, in which memory practitioners devise specific strategies to extend the insights of Holocaust memory to diverse cases of genocidal violence in the contemporary period. In this, Dahlberg confounds Mbembé and Meintjes's choice to excise Holocaust memory from their otherwise powerful explanation of necropolitics.⁷² However, with notable exceptions, I would argue that it is utterly commonplace to resist postwar European Jewish memory conceived as supporting material for insights into the dynamics of race.

To use one incidental example by way of introduction, I note that at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies meeting at Paris in 2012, a panel on European multiculturalism was convened featuring Étienne Balibar, Fatima El-Tayeb, Paul Gilroy, and the organizer of the panel, David Palumbo-Liu. The most revealing exchange happened when Balibar pointed out to El-Tayeb that her description of European race relations had completely disregarded the history of anti-Semitism, including the genocidal campaign by the Germans during WWII. Deflecting Balibar's criticism, El-Tayeb responded with reference to her work, suggesting that because the institutions of Holocaust memory have 'deracialized'⁷³ the Nazi crimes, they have also neutralized efforts at challenging widespread ideological conformity with a brand of multiculturalism that is grounded in the repression of difference.⁷⁴

I address these claims particularly in Chapters Five and Six. On the one hand, I argue that El-Tayeb's claims are useful because they point out that the institutions of Holocaust memory are undoubtedly put to work by a status quo mandate that seeks to

⁷² Mbembé and Meintjes, 12.

⁷³ El-Tayeb, Fatima, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 61, where El-Tayeb refers to this repression as 'colorblindness.'

prevent a working-through of the traumas that exist for racialized minorities; or that they seek effectively to *erase* those memories by participating in tactics that reinforce social order. To that end, I revisit El-Tayeb's contribution to these debates with particular mention of her insistence upon the diminished returns of the 'migrant' and 'diaspora' as positions of agency. By situating these claims in relation to artistic contributions by Yael Bartana—which by and large represents an interrogation of European Jewish memory in the age of globalization—I am better able to investigate El-Tayeb's symptomatic omission of this particular cultural insight. As such, my theoretical and aesthetic engagement with Bartana's work towards the end of my dissertation is prefigured by Dahlberg's appropriation of a Holocaust memorial aesthetic in his response to a racially motivated crime in the present.

Above all, my investigation of this problematic connects with a broader concern for developing a theory of postnational Europe that is more responsive to the need for unique and inclusive cultural imaginaries that affirm Europe's minority populations as recognized political subjects. For Beck and Grande, by posing questions about *where* Europe ends or to *what* it belongs, we have already fallen victim to the comforting embrace of '*state form*,'⁷⁵ which unquestionably challenges the capacity to affirm the existence of inclusive postnational communities. Continuous with Beck and Grande's struggle for adequate definition, I develop a theory of Europe that questions the validity of the national state in the first instance. I argue that cultural and theoretical work in which the national state is featured produces a recursive speculation over the potential that globalization offers, one that is invariably premised on outmoded ideas about the latter's ability to eliminate borders, and therefore to welcome cosmopolitan values that

⁷⁵ Beck and Grande, 71.

are simply unable to claim a justifiable anchor.

By theorizing matters of race and aesthetics in relation to the demand for transformative postnational figures of community, I move for a ‘creolization’⁷⁶ of European area study. Through Édouard Glissant,⁷⁷ I follow Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei-Shih’s effort to develop a working definition of creolization on the basis of constructing a genealogy of European philosophy, or Theory, that is to be precisely account for the latter’s impact on the discipline of Ethnic Studies. One of their findings is that Theory ‘only managed to provide a screen for a thoroughgoing narcissism on the part of the Eurocentric self.’⁷⁸ For instance, Lionnet and Shih demonstrate how Theory’s obsession with alterity offered those working in Ethnic Studies a superficial universalism that only obscured ‘efforts to address specific problems in the larger field.’⁷⁹ Those larger problems hinged on the desirability (or lack thereof) to rely upon class-based narratives that became structurally incompatible with ‘new and multifarious forms of citizenship and more variable forms of culture.’⁸⁰ Quoting Stephen Palmie, both Lionnet and Shih use the trope of creolization as a way to emphasize the specificity of foundational terms, as for Palmie, ‘all stories of theoretical concepts...begin as regional concepts.’⁸¹ This, too, pertains to the universal scope of European conceptual thought.

In Chapter Six, I evoke a politics of creolization that takes exception to the practice of mainstreaming European Jewish identity, which includes idealizing persecution that historically has been paradigmatic for the construction of supposedly ‘cosmopolitan’

⁷⁶ Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-mei Shih, *The Creolization of Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011).

⁷⁷ Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ Lionnet and Shih, 8.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., 23.

values and institutions. For Lionnet and Shih, ‘one form of melancholia is never the same as another, as each arises from distinct social, economic, political and cultural situations.’⁸² Despite the misapprehensions described here, I argue that the figure of Jewish belonging is crucial for understanding this process, because it is precisely Jewish life that has become an object of transference for Europe’s aporetic relationship to a host of cultural, ethnic and racial differences. On this basis, I provide a symptomatic reading of Bartana’s stylistic influences, which includes a wide range of European settler colonial narratives, diaspora nationalism, political Zionism, and Socialist Realism. By working through these complex associations, an altogether different model of cosmopolitan discourse can be proposed: that is, a relational conviviality in which political subjects need not resurrect their identitarian defenses when conflicts return.

⁸² Ibid., 113.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

It is vain to imagine that foundations are built on nothing, that one will create a new art.

Alain Badiou

INTRODUCTION

Memory cultures are historically separated from the broader tradition of social justice and demands for political change. More frequently, these cultures are intimately connected to the institutions of power, and more specifically to the maintenance of national rituals, commemorative practices, the musealization of sanctioned collective pasts, and ultimately to the extensive symbolic functions of the national state. Alon Confino writes that ‘by sanctifying the political while underplaying the social, and by sacrificing the cultural to the political, we transform memory into a “natural” corollary of political development and interests.’¹ Against this disposition towards power, I would like to draw attention to another effort that has been made in recent years. This effort is one that aligns the culture of memory to a critical aesthetic paradigm, and, in a sense, treats aesthetics as a *vehicle* for social change instead of dismissing such concerns as mere decoration for the established ideas and conditions that Confino describes. Above

¹ Confino, Alon, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,’ *The American Historical Review* 102:5 (December, 1997): 1394.

all, this action resituates memory practices—including the ‘culture industry’² that has developed around them—vis-à-vis political transformations that are structurally opposed to diagnostic formula or symptomatic reading. With these circumstances in mind, it becomes all the more urgent to emphasize the epistemic turn that I mentioned in Chapter One, namely that of shifting memory practices away from their ritual functions and towards an altogether different framework in which the production of memory culture is aligned with critique and intervention.

Debates surrounding the political significance of critical memory practices have further implications for the reception of memory within the academy. In the last ten years in particular, a transdisciplinary field of ‘memory research’³ has emerged from the social sciences in response to the growing realization of specific methodological limitations between the fields of history, sociology and psychology.⁴ However, the early onset of memory research can be traced back to the 1960s with the growing influence of *histoire des mentalités*, a popular methodological paradigm that originated among French historians in the prewar era, in which analysis was focused on the dynamics of everyday cultural life as opposed to the history of politics and war.⁵ The founding concept of ‘mentalities’ refers to the attitudes and assumptions held by individual subjects during a given period of time. The mentalities approach thus privileges the quantitative and psychological bias of the *Annales* tradition, which, by emphasizing the unconscious

² See: Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002).

³ Radstone, Susannah, ‘Memory Studies: For and Against,’ *Memory Studies*, 1:0 (2008): 31.

⁴ See: Olick, Jeffrey K., Vered Vinitzky, and Daniel Levy, Eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵ See: Burke, Peter, ‘Strengths and Weaknesses in the History of Mentalities,’ *Varieties of Cultural History* (Polity Press, 1997), 162–82.

attachments formed by individuals, purports to capture ‘the impersonal content’⁶ of thought itself. This tradition of historiography is important for the gestation of memory studies because the latter began in opposition to precisely these quantitative solutions, looking instead to the desiring production of individuals and how they serve to influence the formation of collectivities. This distinction is often cited as the principal reason why memory research became categorized together with ‘antihistorical’⁷ perspectives. Coincidentally, these perspectives later formed the bedrock for critiques of positivism that subsequently dominated the field of historiography for generations to come.

As I briefly mentioned in Chapter One, the cultural theorist Susannah Radstone has voiced concerns over the widening gap between ‘memory research’ and ‘memory culture,’⁸ which she claims creates an entirely new set of problems especially for those who work within the academy alone. Noting the systematic and often aggressive campaigns to canonize the field of Memory Studies, Radstone argues that the transdisciplinary nature of memory research has led to an emphatic and infectious discourse of ‘traumaculture,’⁹ which in turn has become a signpost of disciplinary laziness. Radstone warns that ‘without careful disciplinary embedding and testing,’ the methods and concepts developed as memory research ‘may appear to explain more than they actually can.’¹⁰

⁶ Chartier, Roger. ‘Intellectual or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories,’ LaCapra, Dominick and Steven L. Kaplan, Eds., *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Cornell University Press, 1982), 22.

⁷ Klein, Kerwin Lee, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,’ *Representations*, 69:1 (Winter, 2000): 130.

⁸ Radstone, 2008, 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

With the ubiquity of memory-related subjects across diverse academic fields, the concept of memory itself has been made into a ‘metahistorical category,’¹¹ which is a category that links to ongoing discussions of language, representation or experience, occupying a discursive mode that is clearly far more philosophical than the social justice motivations of practitioners who work outside the academy. The narrative pattern of this now-established genre of academic discourse defines collective memory as forever attached to an experience of displacement, and therefore to a production of meaning ‘that [is] displaced by the rise of the modern self and the secularization and privatization of memory.’¹² By making this particular claim, the historian Kerwin Lee Klein emphatically rejects reducing historical experience to the nostalgic longing for an authentic past, arguing that rhetorical engagements with the past confuse archaic and contemporary realities and apply the concepts of memory anachronistically. Because these readings are symptomatic of the felt impossibility for substantial relationships among individuals in the felt absence of a collective, Klein observes that this particular conjuncture is too often repurposed for therapeutic ends.

A more considered attempt at reclaiming memory for objective cultural history is offered by historian and Egyptologist Jan Assmann, for whom history is determined to be no longer concerned ‘with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered.’¹³ The domain of practice that the latter opens up is eventually described as ‘mnemo-history,’ which is an analytic that, according to Assmann, ‘surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of inter-textuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of

¹¹ Klein, 128.

¹² Ibid., 132

¹³ Assmann, Jan, *Moses the Egyptian* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 9.

reading the past.’¹⁴ This historically inflected analytic develops into a theory that is similar to Klein’s, which argues that memory is not a psychological constant but rather something that operates differently according to historical periods. Richard Terdiman, too, has explored the implications of this difference by precisely describing memory ‘as itself *differentiated in time*.’¹⁵ However, Assmann’s approach is unique compared to the others because of the way he departs from a long-established assumption regarding the significance of lived experiences (and group interactions) as primary analytical resources.

To put it another way, the approach that favours such lived experiences most clearly resembles the work of Maurice Halbwachs,¹⁶ who proposed a type of ‘communicative memory’¹⁷ in which the immediate spaces of interaction among families and nations are regarded as the only way of accessing the truth of collective identity and experience. Assmann departs from this approach by taking up the work of art historian Aby Warburg to examine the so-called ‘objectifications’ of culture, including image-dependent constellations of ‘festivals, rites, epics [and] poems.’¹⁸ By analyzing these cultural forms, a researcher can determine the persistence of types across vast distances of space and time, just like Warburg did with the repetition of types from the Ancient period during the Renaissance.¹⁹ Though the resulting forms and images tacitly rely upon lived experiences and make human experience into nothing more than historical objects, for Assmann these forms become repurposed as analytical tools that ultimately create a fully integrated approach to the larger field.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Terdiman, Richard, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁶ Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Assmann, Jan and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,’ *New German Critique*, 65 (Spring–Summer, 1995): 129.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See: Woodfield, Richard, Ed., *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg’s Projects* (G & B Artists International, 2001).

Pierre Nora offers further insight into Assmann's distinction between collective and cultural memory. However, unlike Assmann, Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire*²⁰ proposes a method of historiography that is equally responsive to the alleged disorientation of modern times. That is, by acknowledging the discursive and rhetorical shift from the concept of the 'nation' to 'society,' Nora claims that our links to national traditions have paradoxically been severed by the new and emerging capacities for representing the past as such.²¹ For instance, with the saturation of historical writing, the collective (national) experience that was celebrated by Maurice Halbwachs and others is hereby rendered elusive and intractable. Chronicled history decomposes the unifying practices that Nora considers to be authentically French. As he writes, 'memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, like a snake sheds its skin.'²²

On the basis of this assessment, the alternative memory practice that Nora devises is explicit in terms of addressing the vanishing present as a condition to which historical writing must now contend. Though the integrity of national cohesion has been shattered, the contents of memory survive as site-specific fragments or *lieux des mémoire*.

Andreas Huyssen offers a final contribution to the prevalence of cultural memory in the aftermath of collective identity. While he adopts Nora's basic diagnosis, Huyssen also replaces the latter's lingering melancholia with his own desire to return the social

²⁰ *Les Lieux de Mémoire* was an extremely ambitious project headed by Nora that was eventually translated into three English volumes. For example, see: Nora, Pierre, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past Volume 1—Conflicts and Divisions*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Columbia University Press, 1996).

²¹ This follows a famous distinction within early sociology between 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft.' See: Tönnies, Ferdinand, *Community and Society*, trans. Charles Price Loomis (Dover Publications, 2011).

²² Nora, Pierre, 'Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*,' *Representations*, 26:1 (Spring 1989): 13.

world to its rightful place of (moral) authority. To that end, Huyssen periodizes a break in the historical consciousness of the nineteenth century. He describes the historical imaginary of this historically specific idea of ‘Europe’ in contradistinction to our own, using the metaphors of hope, optimism, and the sense of resolution that persisted despite the rumblings of nationalism and religious conflicts that were present in every country of the region. In contrast to this approach, Huyssen positions contemporary society as maligned by the saturation of ‘cultural amnesia,’²³ in which a collective demand to remember serves to reproduce social conditions that led to such forgetting in the first place. Huyssen points to the onset of synchronous mass media as the ultimate cause for this particular global phenomenon. He writes, ‘within modernity itself, a crisis situation has emerged that undermines the very tenets on which the ideology of modernization was built, with its strong subject, linear and continuous time, and its superiority over the pre-modern.’²⁴

At the same time, however, Huyssen departs from Nora’s basic proposition by forcefully describing the transformative potential of the imagination in this process. He argues for a presentist reading of history, that, beyond ‘some naïve epistemology,’ regards the production of memory as never entirely concerned with ‘the past itself.’²⁵ He writes that with the impossibility to remember ‘what was there before,’ the true function of the cultural producer is to create ‘imagined alternatives to what there is.’²⁶ By departing from an earlier investment in the potential offered by concepts of the future, as in nineteenth-century Europe, Huyssen situates memory practices as being responsible for

²³ Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1994), 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ Huyssen, Andreas, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

the articulation of cultural belonging in the present. He focuses in particular on institutions such as museums, and suggests that their immense popularity in recent years is a symptom of amnesia as described above. Though media forms are the principal agents of amnesia, they also offer cultural producers different possibilities for engaging and harnessing the imagination, and therefore also for shaping and reflecting the contemporary social world.

THE PAST OF THE NEW

Now, memory cultures may have been redirected towards the present, but to what extent have they become implicated in efforts to participate in ‘the new’? In other words, what are the precise relationships between the emerging global memory culture that Huyssen describes, and the broader spectrum of contemporary art practice from which it draws inspiration? To answer some of these questions, I briefly examine statements by the curator and political activist Dmitry Vilensky, who argues that aesthetic newness appropriates art for political action precisely by collapsing the distinction between art and life, just like the historical avant-gardes proposed over a century ago.²⁷ With references to Dada, Surrealism, Futurism and the Russian movements, Vilensky observes that contemporary artists bring individual works into dialogue with specific formal imperatives, thus combining the ‘poetic force’²⁸ of art and politics. With Jean-Luc

²⁷ On the other hand, Boris Groys wishes to make a distinction between Russian avant-gardes and Western varieties on account of the very different political circumstances of the Russian Revolution. See: Groys, Boris, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Verso, 2011).

²⁸ Vilensky, Dmitry, ‘On the possibility of the avant-garde composition in contemporary art,’ *Zanny Begg*, 2009, Web.

Godard, Vilensky writes that the most basic desire shared by artists today ‘is not to make political art but to make art politically,’²⁹ and, in other words, to forge connections ‘between art, new technologies, and the global movement against neo-liberal capitalism.’³⁰ By ventriloquizing the avant-gardes, as it were, Vilensky encourages artists to engage critically with the system of global capital through a ‘subversive affirmation’³¹ of its basic properties.

I observe that Vilensky’s references to the historical avant-gardes raise a host of issues, not only for contemporary art practice but also for the politics of memory. To begin, I note that Vilensky refers to these movements in a way that situates art and politics as corresponding spheres of praxis. To substantiate this observation and describe its implications, I refer to Vilensky’s views on the contemporary avant-garde as a unified movement that ‘finds consistent realization in direct interaction with activist groups, progressive institutions, different publications and online resources, challenging again the established order of what art is.’³² This correspondence is important to note because, for Vilensky, it ‘locates the political potential of art within the autonomy of the aesthetic experience.’³³

Now, on the basis of this claim, I argue that Vilensky’s approach proves to be questionable because it ultimately obscures art’s social function. By relying upon a celebratory discourse in which the status quo is routinely denounced, as it is here, I argue that artistic praxis will always appear to be fully transcendent over the weight of its historical pressures. As such, though Vilensky’s description impressively condenses the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

dominant rhetoric within contemporary art, it does not address the implications of reanimating the avant-gardes without acknowledging the specific historicity of the affiliated movements.

Following this assessment of Vilenky's contribution, I assess whether the avant-gardes should be construed as movements that truly called for the extrication of art from the obligations of history. To answer this question, I note that Jürgen Habermas offers an interpretation of the avant-garde's continuing influence under the rubric of 'aesthetic modernity,'³⁴ which according to Habermas refers to a discipline of thought that is located somewhere between Charles Baudelaire and André Breton. Against conceiving the avant-gardes as triumphantly ahistorical, Habermas suggests that the political climate in which these movements emerged was profoundly unstable. He further suggests that the avant-gardes responded to this instability in effect by disclosing their 'longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present.'³⁵ Beyond a maniacal futurism, in which artistic creation assumes the role of 'blowing up the continuum of history,'³⁶ to quote Walter Benjamin, the regime of aesthetic modernity 'disposes [only] of those pasts which have been made available by the objectifying scholarship of historicism.'³⁷ In other words, Habermas positions the avant-gardes against forms of scholarship that were simply unable to address significant changes that appeared on the horizon. From this perspective, it would appear that the avant-gardes should rather be defined as attempts at reanimating history beyond destroying it.

³⁴ Habermas, Jürgen, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project,' Hal Foster, Ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (The New Press, 1998), 3-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3

³⁶ Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, 261.

³⁷ Habermas, 1998, 4.

Jacques Rancière offers a theory that parallels Habermas's interpretation. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he soundly rejects efforts like Vilensky's that insist upon a direct correspondence between politics and art. Rancière suggests that a simplistic relation between the two not only 'masks the specificity of the arts,' but it also reduces artistic praxis to becoming 'the basis for a simple historical account, a transition.'³⁸ Rancière is therefore suspicious of any 'politicized' art that substantially borrows from the avant-gardes, whether it does so by identifying art with life, declaring a break from the past, or simply by fetishizing technological innovation. Rancière claims that the reinstatement of these practices as methodological precepts becomes fused to a subjectification of history that is based on a teleology defined by revolution. The aesthetic movements that are built on these premises are therefore vulnerable to participating in a 'disenchanted discourse that acts as the "critical" stand-in for the existing order.'³⁹ Indeed, Rancière argues that the proponents of aesthetic modernity have themselves been yoked to a rather simple procedure, in which aesthetic practices merely aspire to become a 'potentiality inherent in the innovative sensible modes of experience that anticipate a community to come.'⁴⁰

Beyond examining the corresponding implications or statements of particular works, Rancière defines aesthetic practice through an analytic of the sensible, or through a framework in which all the various possibilities within art can be revealed. This 'partition,' as some translations describe it, is composed of a 'delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible.'⁴¹ This partition does not follow a linear path of artistic revolution, as too many commentators and critics have announced in the past.

³⁸ Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006) 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Rather, it allows cultural critics to describe *a priori* forms that are otherwise marked by the ‘co-presence of heterogenous temporalities.’⁴² This approach is useful because it demonstrates how politics and aesthetics interact precisely by interrupting the conditions of the sensible. He writes:

Art is not political owing to the messages and feelings that it conveys on the state of social and political issues. Nor is it political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it takes with respect to those functions. It is political insofar as it frames not only works or monuments, but also a specific space-time sensorium, as this sensorium defines ways of being together or being apart, of being inside or outside.⁴³

With Vilensky, it becomes apparent that the specific revolutionary activity of the contemporary avant-garde involves a comparatively simple process of cycling from one sphere of activity to the other—from aesthetics to politics and back again. For Rancière, on the other hand, these transitions involve a ‘tension between two opposite politics: [between] art suppressing itself in order to become life, and art doing politics on the condition of doing no politics at all.’⁴⁴ The so-called ‘aesthetic regime of art’⁴⁵ thus signifies this tension by describing the specific language game that aesthetic modernity exploits. Above all, this game is one in which ‘the future of art, its separation from the

⁴² Ibid., 26.

⁴³ Rancière, Jacques, ‘The Politic of Aesthetics,’ lecture at the Frankfurter Sommerakademie, 2004.

⁴⁴ Rancière, 2006, 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

present of non-art, incessantly restates the past.⁴⁶ Similar to Habermas in this regard, Rancière points to a figure of praxis that ‘devotes itself to the invention of new forms of life on the basis of an idea of what art *was*, an idea of what art *would have been*.’⁴⁷ Indeed, this formulation accords with the structure of memory.

Peter Bürger offers a final challenge to the pairing of the avant-garde with attempts to excoriate historical consciousness from aesthetic production. Indeed, Bürger, too, refuses to describe the avant-garde as the triumphant disintegration of bourgeois art, but instead sees it as a broad artistic and cultural movement that made parallel truth claims concerning the notion of autonomy on which such art was founded. No longer associated with destruction pure and simple, the avant-garde as Bürger describes encompasses an aesthetic practice that is structured by unrelenting self-criticism, a core practice that involves rejecting the longstanding hermeneutic traditions privileging of content over form, style over technique, and the primacy of the artist’s vision. Bürger writes, ‘the historical conditions for the possibility of self-criticism must be derived from the disappearance of that tension that is constitutive for art in bourgeois society—between art as an institution (autonomy status) and the contents of individual works.’⁴⁸

Bürger goes on to describe how this tension developed in the twilight of 18th century absolutism, in which art practice and appreciation was very much tied to the culture of the ruling class. As demonstrated by the flourishing institution of *l’art pour l’art* after the French Revolution, Bürger argues that the concept of autonomy never sought to challenge the separateness of class that defined its precursors. Rather,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁸ Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 30.

autonomous art characterized ‘the detachment of art from the praxis of life, and the obscuring of the historical conditions of this process as in the cult of genius.’⁴⁹ Bürger recalls the philosophical legitimation of such autonomy, particularly the Kantian paradigm of aesthetic judgment as disinterested pleasure.⁵⁰

The basic premise for this detachment of art from life is carried over yet again by Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*,⁵¹ which ‘attempts to show that it is on the very basis of its autonomy, its not being tied to immediate ends, that art can fulfill a task that cannot be fulfilled any other way.’⁵² Above all, the point of this diversion is to show that the very foundation of bourgeois art is directly tied to the avant-garde’s resistance to institutional confinements. In other words, on Bürger’s account, the avant-garde cannot be explained without referring back to the aesthetic practices of the bourgeoisie.

AESTHETIC MATERIALITY

Notwithstanding the specific historical circumstances in which it came about, the spirit of the avant-gardes has become a dominant force in contemporary art criticism and theory. It has also become crucial for the genealogies of memory culture. Walter Benjamin’s work is particularly revealing of this legacy. Quoting Andreas Huyssen, ‘it is in Benjamin’s work of the 1930s that the hidden dialectic between avant-garde art and the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰ Bürger explains that Immanuel Kant conceived of aesthetics as both different from and opposed to a rationally and conceptually rich interpretative framework. As such, the pure intuitive or sensory exposure that it entails must be distinguished from the category of interest, and therefore as antithetical to desire. See: Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Hackett Publishing, 1987).

⁵¹ See: Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Dover, 2004).

⁵² Ibid., 44.

utopian hope for an emancipatory mass culture can be grasped alive for the last time.⁵³ The avant-gardes are situated here as crucial to the history of emancipatory politics, and therefore also to Benjamin's esteemed position within Memory Studies. If the range of academic research devoted to Benjamin's work is any measure of the enduring potential for a speculative memory culture, the dialectic to which Huysen refers appears to be flourishing. *The Arcades Project*, for instance, is the most widely celebrated genealogy of Benjamin's citational practice of engagement with historical material as fragments of memory. This work is especially important for the present study because it highlights the enduring appeal of the avant-gardes for political thought and action.

One of the most lasting impressions of this work is Benjamin's rhetorical engagement with the dream. 'Every epoch dreams of the one to follow,'⁵⁴ a quote that Benjamin takes from Jules Michelet to imply that speculation is part and parcel of social change. Benjamin thus emphasizes the significance of engaging in a process of retelling that constitutes the 'graduated turn'⁵⁵ towards a politics of memory. In other words, he writes, the content of the past 'presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth.'⁵⁶ Therefore, beyond the realm of historical description, in which the past is reducible to a reservoir of facts and details, we as thinkers of the political should comport our actions towards what Benjamin (and Ernst Bloch before him) defined as the 'not-yet conscious knowledge of what has been.'⁵⁷

⁵³ Huysen, Andreas, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 14.

⁵⁴ Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann, Ed., *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap Press, 2002), 13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Importantly, the exchange between dreams and awakening that Benjamin describes should not be conceived as celebrating the ascendancy of dreams, as Sigmund Freud's 'wish-fulfillment'⁵⁸ might indicate. Rather, Benjamin privileged dreams as a key source of the imagination because he wanted to prevent the sort of epochal gaze that would amount to the regressive continuation of time before the present moment into the future. In the shadows of progressive time, Benjamin often spoke of Europe's emerging capitalism from this perspective as a 'reactivation of mythic forces,'⁵⁹ as convoking a regressive pattern in which the violent reinforcement of capitalism's ideological coherence is triggered with every return.

In fact, Benjamin maintained that this particular cycle of ideological capitulation was best illustrated by the phantasmatic display of commodity fetishism, which is exemplified for Benjamin by nineteenth-century Paris. By obsessively traversing the somnolent desires of the city, Benjamin's text signals a turning point in the discourse on the dream.⁶⁰ At some point during his archival investigation, it becomes imperative for Benjamin to construct a political vision in which dreams are the exclusive precursor of sudden awakening. Evoking a Proustian framework of involuntary memory, Benjamin observes that 'remembering and awakening are most intimately related.'⁶¹ Benjamin here introduces a notion of the dialectical image as a way of illustrating this relation, which he variously defined as a constellation that brings together elemental fragments of consumer culture together with the repressed material of its primordial past. Unlike the dream of

⁵⁸ See: Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford Paperbacks, 2008).

⁵⁹ Benjamin and Tiedemann, 391.

⁶⁰ The turning point thus breaches Freud's analysis of the dreamer as an individual who desires only to stay in the dream for the purposes of wish fulfillment.

⁶¹ Benjamin and Tiedemann, 389.

wish-fulfillment, for example, the dialectical image creates an unsustainable tension between the present and the past. He writes:

The old prehistoric dread already envelops the world of our parents because we ourselves are no longer bound to this world by tradition. The perceptual worlds break up more rapidly; what they contain of the mythic comes more quickly and more brutally to the fore; and a wholly different perceptual world must be speedily set up to oppose it. This is how the accelerated tempo of technology appears in light of the primal history of the present.⁶²

In another celebrated text on mechanical reproduction in art, Benjamin extends these insights directly to matters of aesthetic materiality, in which the dialectical image appears from the gaps where presumed-to-be authentic or ritual forms of communication become mechanized by the onset of photography, film and sound.⁶³ Through acts of substitution and displacement, Benjamin writes that new technologies operate in ways that rescind their content as ‘aura.’⁶⁴ In other words, it is through such acts that ‘the total function in art is reversed,’⁶⁵ he claims, precisely at ‘the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production.’⁶⁶ The impasse that results from this confrontation of ‘old’ content and ‘new’ media effectively shatters ritual and contemplative forms, and thereby forcefully introduces an absolute past—that of ‘primal history’—together with the felt necessity for a collective decision to be voiced. On this basis, the social function of art must now acquire new strategies of articulation.

⁶² Ibid., 462.

⁶³ Benjamin, Walter, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ *Illuminations*, 217-253.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 224.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Not surprisingly, many critiques have been made of Benjamin's theory of art, including by Bürger⁶⁷ and Rancière.⁶⁸ However, the most formidable critique of Benjamin's theoretical framework to date was made by his colleague and mentor Theodor Adorno. In personal letters between the two, Adorno takes an obsessively materialist approach to the metaphor of the dream, honing in on Benjamin's separation of historical becoming into discreet categories of 'consciousness' and the 'epoch.' Adorno claims that Benjamin establishes a troubling continuity between these categories despite his apparent insistence upon their rupture in the 'now-time.'⁶⁹ For Adorno, such evocations are causally determined. He claims, for instance, that Benjamin adopts a thoroughly 'undialectical'⁷⁰ category of authorship by defining consciousness as a force of agency that exists prior to all material relations. The mythological structure of agency that dominates Benjamin's work thus forces him to overvalue the programmatic or functional aspects of historical becoming. On this basis, Adorno's corrective is to externalize the dream by means of dialectical interpretation, such that 'the immanence of consciousness itself [can be] understood as a constellation of [material] reality.'⁷¹

Matthew Charles has expanded on Adorno's critique of Benjamin and its ongoing significance for contemporary literature and theory. For instance, Charles claims that Benjamin adequately responds to Adorno's suspicions concerning the prevalence of messianic phenomenology throughout his schema. He shows that Adorno's materialism positions the construction of 'not-yet conscious knowledge' as a veiled attempt at

⁶⁷ Bürger, 29-30.

⁶⁸ Rancière, 2006, 31.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' 261.

⁷⁰ Adorno, Theodor, and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Harvard University Press, 1999), 110.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

perpetuating future-directed impulses that rest on a foundation of intentions. In other words, Charles shows that for Adorno, Benjamin's construction betrays a principle of *directedness* within consciousness that merely reintroduces a Cartesian distribution of sensory and cognitive structures belonging to the subject. The principle of directedness means that subjects are defined exclusively by their ability to strive 'toward objects.'⁷² Adorno thus claims that the cumulative force of these gestures produces little more than what Bloch referred to as 'the intelligence of hope,'⁷³ which thereby imposes an over-curated and *formal* desire onto the political stage.

Yet Charles nevertheless maintains that Benjamin and Adorno arrive at similar conclusions despite these equivocations. He claims that the structure of Benjaminian truth 'is concerned not with the coherence of the object established in consciousness, but with the immanent self-representation of the object itself.'⁷⁴ As such, Charles claims that the counter-phenomenological revision of 'not-yet conscious knowledge' is one that inscribes *catastrophe* into the very structure of awakening, and thereby displaces the cognitive operations of a subject present to itself. Using this parallax to its full potential, Charles thus revises Michelet's original phrase to read: 'every epoch dreams of itself annihilated by *catastrophes*.'⁷⁵ From Charles' perspective, Benjamin's utopian thought should be released from the demand to support modes of intentionality, because what it rather presages is a clearing of the void that is 'glimpsed as a *result* of catastrophe.'⁷⁶ On this

⁷² Charles, Matthew, 'The Future is History: Dreams of Catastrophe in Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin,' conference paper, Institute of Advanced Studies, Durham University, 25-27 March 2011.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

basis, the image of the dream must be reconfigured according to its very impossibility to become the content of a conscious projection.

The immediate result of this interpretation is that we no longer need to equivocate about whether dream-images are empirically verifiable, nor do we need to endow ‘the catastrophic’ as such with a transcendent quality. Quoting Benjamin, the dialectical image is rather encountered ‘in language.’⁷⁷ This particular disclosure is notable because it appears to resonate with Charles’ attempt at resuscitating Benjamin’s thought from its supposedly melancholic attachments. In other words, if we accept that Benjamin reconfigured the dialectical image according to the structural demands of a ‘historical index,’⁷⁸ the implication is that catastrophic becoming must be configured in relation to the indexical or hieroglyphic properties of an image. From this perspective, acts of memory should be defined in relation to the condensations and displacements of the indexical sign, and desire, in turn, by the ability to measure an oncoming disaster.⁷⁹

Adorno himself establishes a thoroughly historical basis of interpretation that is designed to prevent a phenomenological subject from becoming dominant. According to Martin Hielscher, Adorno insists that artistic truth exists only when the creative process as such ‘gives itself up to time.’⁸⁰ This observation is corroborated by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*, in which he claims that ‘the historical situation of artistic phenomena [is] the index of their truth.’⁸¹ Given the constitutive relation that is established here between history and artistic creation, it becomes clear that interpreting such phenomena

⁷⁷ Benjamin and Tiedemann, 462.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ In fact—advancing Charles’ claim—this more accurate construction of the dialectical image is one that is supported by Adorno’s praise of Benjamin’s earlier distinction between allegory and symbol. See: Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (Verso, 2009).

⁸⁰ Hielscher, Martin, ‘Adorno and Aesthetic Theory,’ *European Graduate School Video Lectures*, 2009.

⁸¹ Adorno, Theodor, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 339.

must develop ‘a countermovement to the subject,’⁸² which is accomplished precisely by working against forms of agency that will later serve to represent historical becoming. Whereas the great aesthetic paradigms initiated by Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel were structured by universals through the incorporation (or prohibition) of subjective taste, interest, or desire, for Adorno, ‘this [practice] was in accordance with a stage in which philosophy and other forms of spirit, such as art, had not yet been torn apart.’⁸³

This last point is especially revealing for the way in which Adorno’s interpretive schemes bear the mark of his tragic inheritances. The universalizing operations contained in the German discourse on modernity, for instance, had by his own time become equated exclusively with death. Famously, Adorno maintained that the universal ‘After Auschwitz’⁸⁴ had acquired a singular force of impact so intense, such that any subsequent impulse towards creating art would have to succumb to a preemptive encryption. Referencing the poetry of Paul Celan, Hielscher’s assessment of Adorno’s theoretical horizon at this juncture is that ‘art has become difficult.’⁸⁵ Adorno himself corroborates this view in *Negative Dialectics*, where he writes, ‘if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case, it must also be a thinking against itself.’⁸⁶

In light of these developments, reviving avant-garde movements from the past was widely considered by members of the Frankfurt School to be one last hope in efforts to counter the stifling cultural forms that arose in the aftermath of genocidal violence from WWII. Adorno together with Max Horkheimer provides a full description of how

⁸² Ibid., 346.

⁸³ Ibid., 334.

⁸⁴ Adorno, Theodor, *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber (The MIT Press, 1983), 34.

⁸⁵ Hielscher, 2009.

⁸⁶ Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Continuum, 2007), 365.

the politics of totalitarianism in the immediate postwar era had sutured its practices to an emerging ‘culture industry.’ In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the authors insist that forms of contemporary mass culture were by and large identical with totalitarian forms of social control, and furthermore, that a disenchanting core of standardized behaviour had been established within a totality conditioned by the ultimate value of entertainment. Adorno and Horkheimer observe that technical rationality was in essence a ‘rationality of domination’⁸⁷ that altogether subsumed the potential for aesthetic critique. The authors task the spirit of the avant-garde as such with creating strategies of interpretation in which to destabilize this rational core. They write that ‘like its adversary, avant-garde art, the culture industry defines its own language positively, by means of prohibitions applied to its syntax and vocabulary.’⁸⁸ Indeed, resisting this identity will be anything but straightforward.

Returning to *Aesthetic Theory*, I note that Adorno gestures to such resistance in his passing observation that ‘new art is as abstract as social relations have in truth become.’⁸⁹ That is, abstraction serves as an illustration of art’s encrypted social function, and perhaps also its irretrievable connection to death. The realm of artistic abstraction isn’t equipped to prepare observing subjects for a harmonious aesthetic experience. Rather, such art moves in the opposite direction by withdrawing into itself, creating a measure of distance from the world of human activity with which it collides and with which it draws its potency and inspiration. Importantly, the purported distance that art establishes from society does not involve degrees of autonomy from the social world, as in art for the bourgeoisie; rather, distance here becomes the medium for the incorporation

⁸⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, 95.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁹ Adorno, 1997, 30.

of art with life. In the absence of any reference to mythical origins or primal histories that structure Benjamin's work, it is clear that the avant-gardist spirit in Adorno's text appears within the ambivalent frame of artistic creation that stands opposed to its own productions. This art, above all, is one that survives paradoxically by challenging its right to exist at all.

Adorno's aesthetic theory is unique because it challenges interpretive strategies to become reflexive in ways that prevent the amnesia or misrecognition whereby art is separated from the fecundity of brokenness and suffering. In other words, if 'admixed with art's own concept is the ferment of its own abolition,'⁹⁰ the methods of establishing truth will themselves declare the incompleteness of the process in the face of it. To put it another way, it would appear that the relation between creation and criticism for Adorno is one of dependency. Because philosophy is composed of a truth that art cannot say, he writes, 'the truth content of an artwork requires philosophy.'⁹¹ This inability to say is revealed through a specific relation of dependency.

Indeed, Hielscher also raises this point with his oblique suggestion that there are competing, or, at the very least conflicting movements within the Adornian matrix of interpretation, particularly when it comes to his handling of the relations between art, nature and the concept.⁹² While Hielscher describes that the natural is mimetically charged by the work, the work itself engages in mimesis through a falsification of its (natural) object. Beyond the subjectification whereby intuition and pleasure combine in aesthetic experience, the conceptual world for Adorno is therefore exposed to art in precisely the same way that art immerses in its content—that is, through negation. If, as

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁹¹ Ibid., 341.

⁹² Hielscher, 2009.

Adorno writes, ‘there is no artwork that does not participate in the untruth external to it,’⁹³ it is because of this that the avant-garde must be revived.

POSTMODERN AVANT-GARDE

The postmodern era from the 1960s offers a further opportunity to recall the intrinsic sense of promise that was held by the avant-gardes despite the ongoing complexities of mass culture. Unlike Adorno’s negative dialectics, however, the postmodernist faith in the new gained exponentially during this period in ways that anchored the commodity-form instead of devising strategies to oppose the dominant economic system. Given these circumstances, it may be no surprise to learn that thinkers of the postmodern by and large were openly skeptical of Adorno’s critical theory. For instance, Bürger voiced skepticism of Adorno’s method, arguing that because it situates a realm of political activity beyond the measure of historical becoming, it is essentially forced to define the new in art as both redemptive and untouchable.

To illustrate his argument, Bürger points to Adorno’s description of so-called antitraditional art, in which the new is situated as the basis for a revolutionary aesthetic paradigm, and is therefore opposed to the commodified world. However, whereas Adorno might argue that such a paradigm shares in processes that are relational and historical, Bürger maintains that Adorno’s attachment to the status of revolution effectively gives to novelty the distinction of ‘universal validity.’⁹⁴ Bürger thus cautions that any

⁹³ Adorno, 1997, 347.

⁹⁴ Bürger, 20.

appropriation of Adorno's hermeneutic should account for his 'failure to precisely historicize the new'⁹⁵—a failure that is utterly contradictory to his main objective.

Andreas Huyssen makes a stronger claim regarding the usefulness of Frankfurt School critical theory, suggesting that Adorno's work in particular is unable to account for contemporary society and culture. For Huyssen, 'the new in art' cannot be substantially different from 'what dominates in commodity society.'⁹⁶ Because no specific distinctions exist between the two, Huyssen concludes that Adorno's tireless resolve to separate artistic creation from the sphere of the commodity reveals a stubborn affinity for the exclusive conventions of modernism—which Huyssen identifies in an earlier work as the main adversary of the avant-garde.⁹⁷ On this basis, it becomes clear that the very desire to separate artistic creativity from the commodity-form is simply no longer possible in contemporary society. On the other hand, as Frederic Jameson observes, it may be less important to consider how aesthetic production and the commodity have become integrated, as to what extent this integration has provoked 'a transformation in the very sphere of culture.'⁹⁸

Huyssen follows Jameson's description of postmodernism as a 'cultural dominant'⁹⁹ that is marked by a sharp turn away from the modernist tropes that were institutionalized by the middle of the last century—which was, incidentally, the time that Adorno was writing. Considering the rise of postnational societies together with the rapid predominance of neoliberal economies, and that of a right-leaning ideology throughout

⁹⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁶ Huyssen, 1994, 7.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 18-21.

⁹⁸ Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1992), 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4-6.

the West, Jameson illustrates how the postmodern turn refers above all to a diversification of artistic or cultural strategies that seek to challenge the rarefied status of social cohesion, including the diminishment of oppositional solidarities within an increasingly global public culture. Through a deployment of unique strategies, Jameson's work thus aims to challenge modernism's rigorous dichotomy between 'mass' culture and 'high' art. Through this challenge, Jameson is forced to consider the avant-garde and Adorno both with suspicion.¹⁰⁰

Huyssen's early attempt at historicizing modernism clearly illustrates the difficulty of extending Adorno's thought. In it, Huyssen returns to the 1960s to indicate the resurgence of the avant-garde among artists and cultural producers, suggesting that the urgency for adopting the spirit of these movements was precisely to counter the domesticated high modernism that was prevalent in cultural industries at the time. He writes:

The postmodernism of the 1960s was characterized by a temporal imagination which displayed a powerful sense of the future and of new frontiers, of rupture and discontinuity, of crisis and generational conflict, an imagination reminiscent of earlier continental avant-garde movements such as Dada and surrealism rather than of high modernism.¹⁰¹

He writes that the enthusiasm of the 1960s, at least in the United States, promoted a 'culture of confrontation'¹⁰² that served to galvanize popular forces and new

¹⁰⁰ Such suspicion could refer to many theorists of the postmodern such as Perry Anderson, Kenneth Frampton, Linda Hutcheon, or Jean-François Lyotard.

¹⁰¹ Huyssen, 1987, 191.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 190.

technologies, developing a kind of ecstatic declaration of art's transformative potential. This enthusiasm was short-lived, however, and it ultimately failed by the early 1970s, by which time the 'neo-avant-garde'¹⁰³ had adopted the worst aspects of what Jameson describes as *pastiche*. In other words, the neo-avant-garde was engaged with 'working from the ruins of the modernist edifice, raiding it for ideas, plundering its vocabulary and supplementing it with randomly chosen images and motifs.'¹⁰⁴ The waning spirit of creative destruction was eventually supplemented by a reasonable measure of confusion about the ways that postmodernism could be said to interact or distinguish its practices from modernism as such. The misfortunes described by Huyssen thus accord with Bürger's characterization of the 1970s as a decade in which the avant-garde became an institution for itself.¹⁰⁵

In a more recent work, Huyssen positions the gradual disappearance of the historical avant-gardes as a turning point for the explosion of interest in cultural memory. He writes, 'the waning of avant-gardism in the 1970s also contributed to the blurring of boundaries between museum and exhibition projects.'¹⁰⁶ In other words, the museum at this juncture 'is no longer the guardian of treasures and artifacts from the past discreetly exhibited; it has moved into the world of spectacle.'¹⁰⁷ A new obsession with the past thus emerged that was symptomatic of the changes that postmodernism struggled and failed to understand. For Huyssen, this obsession proved to be nothing less than 'a sign of

¹⁰³ Bürger, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Jameson, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Bürger, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Huyssen, 1994, 20.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

the crisis of that structure of temporality that marked the age of modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other.’¹⁰⁸

In fact, the onset of cultural amnesia that Huyssen describes is a response to this affect of disconnection from the past, such that ‘every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence.’¹⁰⁹ However, Huyssen’s theory of memory culture also moves beyond the typical compensatory logic, which is geared to preserving the past in the form of archives and traditional forms of musealization. Beyond this, Huyssen insists that the obsession with memory allows alternative cultural imaginaries to flourish on their own terms. Indeed, evidence for the latter can be found in attempts to completely reimagine the organization of museums and related institutions, not to mention the very means by which we choose to represent our remembered pasts as individuals, largely by utilizing new technologies of communication. Beyond the avant-gardist desire for new foundations, it would seem that for Huyssen the very demand for new curatorial and museal practices ‘expands the very shrinking space of the (real) present in a culture of amnesia.’¹¹⁰

Huyssen’s vision of the ‘memory boom’ instrumentalizes the discourse of postmodernism to illustrate the continuing value and significance of the new. His approach is directly at odds with Adorno’s, whose tendency of transcending the new is often considered to be symptomatic of his abiding attachment to high modernism. In responding to this specific attachment, Huyssen provides a reflexive theory of the new. He writes that ‘the new...is producing changes in the structures of perception and feeling...the new tends to include its own vanishing, the foreknowledge of its

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

obsolescence.¹¹¹ Should any innovative production in the sensible modes of experience be retained, Huyssen would undoubtedly insist that it contend with the inescapable horizon of possibility that the commodified world determines. In other words, ‘the key word is diversification,’ which is to say that ‘consumer capitalism today no longer simply homogenizes territories and populations.’¹¹² We are free, in other words, to develop the conditions for expression of the past in accordance with the constraints of the imagination.

AFTER THE NEW

It might be worthwhile to ask whether there is anything to look forward to in the twilight of the new. To answer this question I turn to Boris Groys’ *On The New*,¹¹³ which has recently been published in English some twenty-two years after the German original. Though it may seem contradictory to release a translated work on ideas of the new so long after it was initially produced, Groys’ *On The New* has been subject to precisely this belated history of publication. Perhaps like memory itself, this work has demonstrated its endurance by the very means that Groys himself has encouraged: by crossing the threshold into ‘valorized’ culture. A German philosopher and critic of Russian descent, Groys’s many writings have enjoyed a renaissance of sorts in the English-speaking academy. This latest edition responds to the circumstances of artistic production in the heyday of the postmodern critique, serving as a complement of sorts to my previous discussion. I argue that *On The New* contains a dedicated effort by Groys at

¹¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Groys, Boris, *On The New*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2014).

reconstructing the architectonics of invention. It foregrounds the complexity of producing cultural work in ways that not only find success in *acquiring* value, but also in *absorbing* that value as valorized objects in the cultural archive. A description of this exchange between production and value is especially useful given today's mediatization of everything, which is a condition that was largely rejected by modernists in Groys's generation, for whom creativity had become an all but impossible criterion of art.

Notable, however, is the way in which Groys refuses all symptomatic readings that dominated the field of critical inquiry at the time of his original publication. For instance, Groys emphatically refuses to *diagnose* the conditions of postmodernity, preferring instead to challenge the primacy of alterity and the aesthetics of disenchantment that stood as its most basic precepts. Groys is therefore successful here in cementing his variance with the epistemic claims of the postmodern era in general. In other words, by provoking his readers to reconsider the capacities of innovation, they are better able perhaps to acknowledge how the course of innovation determines value, and further to assess the resistance or transformation of such value under the pressure of the new.

Groys's book is divided into three unequally distributed sections. The first section outlines a history of the new, and begins with a series of chapter headings that are meant to reveal the author's bias against false attributions of the latter—whether by association to alterity, utopia, difference, or freedom. In seeking to determine what the new *is not*, Groys manages effectively to destabilize a familiar allegory of discovery that has long been used to solidify beliefs surrounding modernity and its origins. Integral to this allegory is the assumption that prior to the onset of modernity, the new was completely

undesirable, ‘condemned,’¹¹⁴ as it were, because of its presumed fraternity with the devil of time, and its allegiance to forces that aim to obfuscate and contort the established traditions that both define human communities and preserve them from destruction—though, it should be noted that Groys speaks only of traditions from Europe.

Nevertheless, while the shift to modernity as Groys describes appears to result in a violent elimination of these established traditions, his own version of events paradoxically reveals how they were in fact retained and repositioned in the guise of a future anterior. In other words, with the onset of modernity, Groys claims that newness itself was revalued as being ‘anterior to all historical time,’¹¹⁵ just like the past was regarded in antiquity. The value placed on futurity and its association with the new thus returned, unsurprisingly, to the primitive, and from this vantage point, the new could then be established through its connection with ‘extra-cultural reality.’¹¹⁶ This extra-cultural reality is nothing less than a sublime alterity, an otherness the likes of which could not be imagined except under particular and unyielding circumstances. Personified by figures of the historical avant-garde, this identification of the new with a hidden reality became the unattainable marker of cultural production. However, by the time Groys set upon writing the book in question, this value had all but depleted its capacity to arouse a sense of collective optimism. Unlike thinkers who subscribed to the postmodern critique, Groys is adamant that this diminished value not be associated with any discernible epistemic change. If there was any change to speak of, it was in affect-laden responses to the impossibility for the new to be revealed as such.

Groys’s argument is distinctive precisely for the way it challenges the tendency

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

among contemporary cultural producers to regard innovation with a sense of disenchantment, rejecting in turn that such innovation should be guaranteed by cajoling the real from its place of hiding. More specifically, by disabling the notion whereby all innovative works are measured by degrees of authenticity, Groys manages to remove himself from the overwhelming sense of disenchantment that serves to reinforce our inability to imagine the present as an age that harbours the potential to catalyze the new. Accordingly, Groys exclaims that ‘the new is not just the other, it is the valuable other.’¹¹⁷ In fact, Groys maintains that a different sense of value can be devised, beyond the measure of authenticity, and therefore in contravention to the view that specific cultural works are somehow inadequate to that measure.

Groys discusses specific engagements of producing works that are capable of retaining value, all of which tend to resolve in corroborating his preferred method of understanding this retention. It is a process, he writes, in which ‘valorized’ culture is transformed by its structured relationship to the realm of the ‘profane.’ For Groys, in other words, the profane realm offers up a ‘reservoir’¹¹⁸ of materials—a mix of objects and ideas that have been rendered dangerous, transitory, banal, or simply other. By combining this material together with established items in the cultural archive, there is an immutable but productive tension in the object, and this for Groys is what ultimately *constitutes* innovation. As established culture is profaned, the profane object in turn becomes transformed into something of value. Indeed, Groys’s description of this exchange is utterly distinct from the way objects were valued by the historical avant-garde. According to those interpretations, the profane object takes the role of a mediator

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 64.

between the unconscious of the artist's creative act and the sphere of *universal* value. The valorization at issue in Groys's text, on the other hand, enjoys an exclusive relationship to the cultural archive, and not, therefore, to some extra-cultural reality. The exchange in question thus operates in a way similar to fashion. For, in its capacity as inauthentic, the valorized profane of fashion refuses claims to universal value, and yet it still demonstrates the ability to locate tensions in a specific object.

The most extreme tension will appear as an impossible distinction between the two realms in a single object or 'work,' which is subsequently rendered valuable. To communicate this tension, Groys's argument relies heavily on a broad transition within Western contemporary art towards the aesthetics of 'ready-mades,' providing a useful illustration because, as Groys insists, ready-mades demonstrate utter clarity in their representation of 'both value levels.'¹¹⁹ To that end, examples of ready-mades are amply provided in the book and discussed at length. Reproductions of *Mona Lisa*, for instance, are reputed to signify neither a total overcoming of values (as professed by the historical avant-garde) or their complete devalorization (as lamented by the postmodern critique). Rather, the relationship between the 'original' *Mona Lisa* and its 'trashy'¹²⁰ reproductions result in making a unique work of art that is subsequently deemed worthy of cultural preservation. Efforts at revaluation here are similar to that performed by Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*, a painting that refuses to express the secret perceptions of the artist by drawing attention to the value hierarchy between mass culture and high art.¹²¹ Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, on the other hand, brings this tendency to its fullest expression, providing an especially useful example for Groys in terms of foregrounding

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹²¹ More in-depth conversation of Malevich found in Groys, 2011, 14-33.

the way choices are made when objects of art become ‘strategically necessary.’¹²² In other words, the juxtaposition contained by Duchamp’s urinal, which is turned upside down and emblazoned with an erroneous signature, is one that directly contravenes efforts to equate the chosen work with an expression of Duchamp’s personal artistic freedom. *Fountain* therefore juxtaposes the two realms with considerable attention to detail. Above all, however, this particular juxtaposition does not signal the ‘end of art,’¹²³ but rather potently demonstrates what Groys refers to as *negative adaptation*—a process of interpretation that does not convey art’s truth so much as its suspension by the profane.

Readers of Groys in English may be grateful for his effort to salvage the constituents of innovation in a time of saturated global capital, and yet for the same reasons, his overall position on the state of contemporary art might appear to be limited or simply dated. For Groys, ‘innovation is carried out mainly in the cultural-economic form of exchange.’¹²⁴ In the third part of the book entitled *Innovative Exchange*, Groys once again tries to bypass postmodernism’s obsession with imagining the profane realm through a figure of *scarcity*. The logic of the obsession according to Groys is grounded in the presumption of cultural activity that works to simulate the profane in order to accelerate the process of exchange, with the imminent threat of erasing the profane entirely and replacing it with a cultural archive that is driven to tyranny. Groys unsurprisingly rejects this ‘ecological counter-argument’¹²⁵ on account of its belief in a universal profane that is rendered scarce and therefore inaccessible by the cultural conditions of global capitalism. Groys is rather dedicated to situating the profane

¹²² Groys, 2014, 102.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

historically as the placeholder of innovation, thus encouraging solutions to the contradictory means by which art's value is determined in the present. For instance, if we accept that the profane has truly evaporated with the massification of culture, it stands to reason that we should also dispense with the archaic notions of authorship that are endemic to transforming such material into something valuable. In fact, this particular insight may be Groys's most important contribution in the book: that of pointing to the reinforcement of conventional views upon authorship, and to the hallucination of scarcity on which those views are perpetuated and reinforced. In other words, Groys deftly indicates an ongoing crisis in which artists are driven to paranoia over ensuring their cultural worth on the basis of the originality and authenticity of their contributions. He writes, 'no one now wants to entrust his [*sic*] originality to the future or to let others trespass on the cultural domain.'¹²⁶ Given these circumstances, Groys encourages a productive understanding of the relationship between contemporary art and market capitalism by rejecting any residual attachments to authorship as a category of innovation. He writes, 'it is precisely work with existing texts and images which makes it possible expressly to demonstrate the intra-cultural originality of one's own work.'¹²⁷

THE LOGIC OF AFTERNESS

Memory continues to be an obsession among cultural producers, as well as for others who are driven to feed their desire for inspiration increasingly by looking back. However, a conflicting demand for the new sits alongside this desire. For instance, the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 44.

‘afterness’ that consumes contemporaneity has indeed become a significant new theme in cultural theory. In that spirit I want to end this chapter with a brief exploration of Gerhard Richter’s analysis of afterness as a concept that bridges novelty and memory. For instance, Richter’s description of afterness as ‘a constitutive form of modernity’¹²⁸ brings together many of the perspectives explored in the present chapter. Importantly, the cultural logic on which Richter’s arguments depend is posed as a challenge to the postmodernist (or avant-gardist) trope of an epistemic break from the past—a notion that is still very present as a spectral remainder for Huyssen, and an object of critique for Groys.

For Richter, the phenomenon of afterness emerges from ‘a living on and after that remains attached to what came before,’¹²⁹ and, in this sense, it stands opposed to the early postmodern desire of returning to the new as both a force of creativity and destruction.

Richter writes:

[The logic of afterness is] one in which the belatedness of thought, the indebtedness of art, and various forms of language, memory, and the image conspire to yield a cultural paradigm in which there can be no realm of experience that would remain untouched by its movements of following or uninflected by the mediatedness...of its own radical finitude.¹³⁰

Through this statement it becomes clear that Richter’s observations are an attempt to deepen his understanding of the obsession with memory as a kind of symptomatic

¹²⁸ Richter, Gerhard, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 36.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

response to the afterness of cultural forms. Despite Huyssen's insistence that such forms are premised on a radical break in the space-time continuum, I argue that strong parallels exist between these thinkers in terms of how they position the resulting frameworks of memory culture. For instance, though Richter suggests that afterness can be useful in terms of positioning trends within cultural practices in relation to what came before, it is only because he recognizes that the content of these trends amount to 'a past that was never present to itself.'¹³¹ In a similar gesture, Huyssen writes that 'the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory,' such that memory itself is 'given in the very structures of representation.'¹³² On this basis, I would argue that a further extension could be made to Groys's attempt at describing 'adaptation' in terms of utilizing the realm of the profane for a cultural memory of the present.

The significant correlation of these writers is useful to mention because it allows for consideration of the ways that memory becomes inscribed into the present, while simultaneously avoiding the pressure of having to contend with the heroic pronouncements as to whether such memory indicates a 'break' or 'acceleration' of modern forces, and other such equivocations. Richter's work helps to both acknowledge and set aside Rancière's critique of the postmodern as 'a desperate attempt to establish a "distinctive feature of art" by linking it to a simple teleology of historical evolution and rupture.'¹³³ Richter himself argues that the dominance of 'post-isms'¹³⁴ within contemporary theory operates like temporal ruses that cannot fully provide correct interpretations as to the *spatial* dimensions of memory. His assessment of Freudian

¹³¹ Ibid., 14.

¹³² Huyssen, 1994, 3.

¹³³ Rancière, 2006, 28.

¹³⁴ Richter, 8.

Nachträglichkeit is particularly revealing in this regard. For Freud, the concept describes belatedness in terms of its psychological significance—as the afterwardsness of repetition, trauma and working-through—whereas Richter maintains that the concept has diminished value because of its exclusive focus on time. To provide his own interpretation, Richter performs an etymological conversion of belatedness, which as he claims reveals a spatial residue that connotes nearness, distance, and proximity.¹³⁵ The Freudian concept therefore ‘cannot do justice to the full scope of the afterness phenomenon.’¹³⁶

In conclusion, I suggest that Richter singles out time or temporality as the true culprit of amnesia in a way that is similar to Assmann’s Warburgian technique of mnemo-history, which I described in the beginning of this chapter. However, the ongoing attempts at spatializing the present using memory as the vehicle are pyrrhic at best. In subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I aim to explore the question of newness, memory and spatiality from a diversity of approaches, and from an equally diverse set of European histories. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the underlying theme of this work is to investigate how European memory has been articulated on the basis of its past, but more importantly, to investigate how this past is featured in its present articulation, vision, or self-identity. Through these investigations, it may become clear that utopian demands are just as present and alive as the surety of their defeat.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 9.

CHAPTER THREE

ARCHIVE, CAMERA, WITNESS: THE MULTIDIRECTIONAL TURN IN POSTWAR EUROPEAN JEWISH MEMORY

The blood has dried, the tongues are silent. The blocks are visited only by a camera.

Alain Resnais

INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust has cast a long shadow over European collective memory. It is composed mainly of institutions that were built to serve an edifying function for generations after the war, and indeed to immortalize the event with a steady distribution of images, rituals and memorials. Part of this immortalization has been achieved with the recorded testimonials of those who lived and survived to tell their story. In fact, the collective memory of the Holocaust in general continues to be a source of abiding fascination for popular audiences. The year 2015, for instance, marks seventy years since the Red Army liberated the death camps in Poland and Germany, and the numbers of tourists to those sites continues to rise each year beyond any predicted measure.¹ At the same time, a profound epistemic transformation is underway as recorded testimonies

¹ Spencer, Clare, 'The rise of genocide memorials,' *BBC News*, 11 June 2012.

detailing experiences of this atrocity become defined less by conditions for their *production* as by speculations about what happens when its ‘last witness’² expires.

In my attempt to map these changes vis-à-vis the stunning impact of Holocaust memory upon the discursive imagining of postnational Europe, the present chapter takes three approaches. First, it offers a genealogy of testimonial narrative and reception to provide a rationale for the continued popular demand of Holocaust memory culture. I describe below that the specific pedagogical authority that this collective memory has acquired stems from the role it played in developing a ‘cosmopolitan’ subjectivity. In other words, because ‘the Holocaust has become a new primal scene’ for Western subjectivity, as Annette Wieviorka argues, ‘we are therefore in the presence of a second myth of origins.’³

Giorgio Agamben makes a similar argument when he suggests that Holocaust memory ‘is always already repeating itself’⁴ like a kind of involuntary act of self-infliction, one that for Agamben at least manages to articulate something that is less intrinsically Western, as it is for Wieviorka, as something fundamentally *human*. Recuperation of the event is never possible from either perspective. Yet if we presume that catastrophic and destructive potential lies at the core of a ‘European’ subject, as I suggest it might, we can extrapolate from Holocaust testimonial history to consider its future learning potential despite the growing absence of survivors. Beyond a living

² Phelan, James, Jakob Lothe and Susan Rubin Suleiman, ‘Introduction,’ *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future* (Ohio State University Press, 2012), 3.

³ Wieviorka, Annette, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Cornell University Press, 2006), 139.

⁴ Agamben, Giorgio, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 2002), 101.

memory of this event, I claim that we must interrogate the status it has been given from the visual archive it leaves behind.

In the second part of this chapter I offer some answers to this question. I look at the production of the Holocaust visual archive from the period of its ‘advent’ to that of its ‘Americanization,’⁵ and provide a cultural history of sorts for the engagement of this narrative in popular film and television. Parallel to these efforts, I examine Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1984), particularly his effort at developing exclusive relationships between testimony and art beyond any sort of graphic representation depicting the atrocity. Now, these competing strategies may fall somewhere between using archival images for ethnographic, popular and even sensational purposes, versus other purposes that are conventionally iconoclastic, truthful or symbolic. To consider the fuller consequences of this distinction, I explore Lanzmann’s iconoclastic refusal to use any visual archive in his work, which is something that is raised by Georges Didi-Huberman and his insistence that we must return to violent images of the event if we are to follow through with critiquing representations of its sublimity.

In this, I show that Didi-Huberman wishes to prevent an obfuscation of the circumstances that allowed such catastrophes to happen at all. By slightly extending Didi-Huberman’s strategy, I look at cases where second-generation survivors have used the visual archive to communicate stories, and in this I provide an explanation for how the archive can be used precisely to mediate the unresolved experiences of violence that the event recalls, particularly among family members. In these cases, notably Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, I argue that the archival document becomes one of several ways of

⁵ Wieviorka, 117. The term ‘Americanization of the Holocaust’ was initially developed here: Barenbaum, Michael, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

devising therapeutic responses to the involuntary transmission of memory between generations, and to do so in ways that illustrate the magnitude of the crime without breaching the demand for ethicality.

Third, this chapter challenges the tendency of depoliticizing the Holocaust during the course of universalizing its memory. To that end, I suggest that the canon of Holocaust memory is more often than not interpreted within a liberal and pluralistic framework of multicultural ethics. In this formation, the European public sphere can be imagined as being grounded in a system of justice that is designed for the protection of victims who are paradigmatically represented in stories about the Holocaust. The catastrophic event unfolds a scene of state-sanctioned prohibition for the genocidal crimes that may happen in the future.

In my effort to disassemble this cluster of narratives, I present two competing theories that both challenge the prevalence of the liberal discourse, first by examining the work of Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider.⁶ Among other points, I describe how Levy and Sznaider challenge the so-called Holocaust theory of modernity, derived in part from the Frankfurt School, in which the memory culture around this event becomes clearly abstracted from the historical specificity of the crimes. I describe how Levy and Sznaider reassert the precise distinction separating perpetrators and victims, and how in doing so they devise a ‘cosmopolitan’ memory that accounts for the Europeanness of the event in conjunction with its global transportability.

As a counterpoint to Levy and Sznaider’s prescriptions, I draw from Michael Rothberg’s suggestion that Holocaust memory can be understood as more precisely

⁶ Levy, Daniel and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Temple University Press, 2005).

‘multidirectional,’⁷ which by definition goes beyond its ‘global’ or even ‘postmodern’⁸ iterations. Though Rothberg criticizes the Holocaust theory of modernity along with Levy and Sznajder, in other words, his work is distinguished by making further ontological or generative connections between Holocaust memory in relation to catastrophic events with which it might otherwise compete for global recognition. I argue that Rothberg reads Holocaust memory in a forward motion that is continuous with the movements for social justice that emerged in the 1960s along with it. By engaging in a theoretical project that rejects the very hypothesis of universalism, indeed to better understand how these apparently disparate movements are coterminous with each other, I suggest that Rothberg is successful in positioning Holocaust memory both outside and beyond the Eurocentrism of its celebrated institutions.

TESTIMONY AND SPEECH

However before moving on, I propose to briefly review some of the different terms that people have used to define Holocaust memory culture. Often, for example, the terms ‘Holocaust,’ ‘Auschwitz’ and ‘Shoah’ are used with specific aims in mind, and an ongoing debate has taken place over which term is the most appropriate. Some have argued, as Giorgio Agamben did, that in spite of the admission by a famous author of testimonial literature, Elie Wiesel, that the term ‘Holocaust’ is preferable for describing

⁷ Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Globalization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁸ Santner, Eric, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Cornell University Press, 1993), especially 1-31.

the experience of the genocide,⁹ the cultural etymology of that term evokes a problematic association of sacrifice which carries specific references to the alter of a pyre.¹⁰ Moreover, because of this association to a devotional metaphor—‘to adore in silence’¹¹—Agamben finds that this term is unable to deliver a precise measure for those who witnessed the violence of total destruction, for example, versus those like Wiesel who survived.

Other cultural historians offer a competing theory. Dominick LaCapra, for instance, prefers to use ‘Holocaust’ because unlike Agamben’s chosen alternative, ‘Auschwitz,’ it is able to address concerns as to the genocide’s historiographical diversity of place.¹² Moreover, LaCapra claims that ‘Holocaust’ is the preferred term among survivors because it participates in a refusal to repeat the terminology of the perpetrators.¹³ Following Alvin Rosenfeld, LaCapra maintains that historians must be careful to avoid a ‘pornographic’¹⁴ representation of genocidal violence in their work, and that a skillful use of terminology is part and parcel of this responsibility.

Of course, alongside these debates there is another term, ‘Shoah,’ which derives from a Jewish word referring to the onset of catastrophe or destruction. Though it has been used by prominent memory practitioners like Claude Lanzmann, the term is perhaps the most limiting of the three because it tends to focus exclusively on the Jewish

⁹ Wiesel reputedly defined the term in connection with the genocide of European Jews but later regretted the decision. See Mahler, Jonathan, ‘Eli Wiesel’s Great Regret,’ *The Daily Beast*, 19 April 2009.

¹⁰ Agamben, 2002, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹² LaCapra, Dominick, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 11-12.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Rosenfeld’s reference is discussed further in Cory, Mark, ‘Public Memory and its Discontents,’ Bloom, Harold, and Robb Erskine, Eds., *Literature of the Holocaust* (Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 198.

experience of the atrocity. Another side of this debate, however, critiques the term for its proven inability to counter the sensational universalization of catastrophic memory.¹⁵

Annette Wieviorka addresses this confusion of terminology from another angle altogether, arguing that the push towards a ‘universal’ Holocaust memory should be analyzed in connection with debates over testimony literature and its unique status in the field. In a sense, for Wieviorka the name we give to the genocide matters less as the attention we pay to the modes by which its experiences are communicated. To that end, Wieviorka moves laterally from the ‘advent’ of testimony literature to that of its ‘Americanization’ as a way of assessing its critical entry into the domain of popular culture. This concern for the transmission of memory requires that we engage testimony as a literary medium.

As literature, however, the historiographical authority of the witness requires further elaboration, because literariness, as such, stands opposed to the kinds of documentary materials that were used to guarantee the culpability of the perpetrators, for example, during the Nuremburg trials. For Wieviorka, historians must bear in mind that with literature they ‘are not dealing with archival documents.’¹⁶ That is, ‘when they engage with writers, they must keep in mind that writers are unlike the historian, that they are in quest not of a factual, positive reality but rather of a literary “truth.”’¹⁷ Testimony literature challenges the means by which verifiable truths secure the historical record. A further consequence, however, is that we must treat literary elements according to their own criteria of evaluation.

¹⁵ As per references to ‘Shoah-business.’ See: Comay, Rebecca, ‘The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism,’ Andrew Benjamin, Ed., *Walter Benjamin and History*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 91.

¹⁶ Wieviorka, 41.

¹⁷ Ibid.

To that end, Wieviorka claims that the significance of particular languages, including ontological questions regarding their translatability, are the sorts of problems or questions that only literary criticism can decide. Wieviorka illustrates this methodological competition in terms of Wiesel's Yiddish testimony, questioning the ability of its French translation to properly communicate his very personal experience of hopeless abandon. In a very clear departure from historiographical methods, Wieviorka explains that acts of translation raise the specter of the original's literariness, as without Yiddish, 'the literature of Destruction would be without a soul.'¹⁸ However, beyond matters of authorship or translation, there is another sense in Wieviorka's definition of testimony that draws a deeper wedge between the very subjectivity of the witness in relation to the act itself. By testifying, in other words, a conflict emerges within the self over the seeming paradox of having survived catastrophic circumstances, in which testimony comes to signify a kind of 'protest against death.'¹⁹ If it is successful, however, the perspicuous act of testimony leads to a conflict within the self, but also, perhaps, to the means for a cure.

For Wieviorka, this element of resolution leads us to ask to where one testifies from, 'and what does one testify to?'²⁰ In other words, Wieviorka wants to know what are the stakes involved in characterizing oneself a survivor, a witness to destruction? Agamben's analysis of the witness brings a unique perspective to this line of questioning. True, this analysis is similar to Wieviorka's in the sense that it treats testimony as a form of literature. However, unlike Wieviorka, Agamben refuses to make a categorical distinction between history and memory—between the archival document and testimony

¹⁸ Ibid., 45.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

literature—as he chooses instead to focus on describing how both are derivative from a common root or ‘point of indistinction.’

To that end, Agamben re-establishes the legal basis of testimony as derived from *testis*, which is the Latin root to signify the act of bearing witness in a court proceeding.²¹ Agamben’s etymological investigation thus seeks to promote confusion between the ethical and legal definitions of testimony. In other words, if testimony is a form of language that is mediated by a subject who witnesses, Agamben will add that language itself is a form of law. The slippage into law is important to describe because it brings about specific outcomes for the subjectivity of the witness, as the act of testifying becomes implicated in a spectrum of questions about the relation between absolution in the form of justice, and punishment before the law. The motive behind disrupting the objective determinations of justice and guilt, Agamben writes, is to reveal the untold complexities at stake when it comes to factoring all the implications that an experience of catastrophe involves. To put it another way, by rejecting the categorical distinctions between innocence and guilt, Agamben insists that we reject Terrence Des Pres’s characterization of the Auschwitz survivor as abiding to the ‘ethics of heroism,’²² to rather consider the ambivalent feelings a survivor might have in relation to those who died.

As Agamben suggests, ‘the deportee sees such a widening of the abyss between subjective innocence and objective guilt, between what he [sic] did do and what he could feel responsible for.’²³ Because the very questionability as to who the survivor is responsible cannot properly be described within these categories or by their distinctions,

²¹ Agamben, 2002, 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 94.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97.

Agamben proposes that ‘shame’ is a rather more accurate description of their symptomology. To understand this discourse on shame a bit further, we can say that with Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, Agamben describes Auschwitz as an ‘event without witnesses,’²⁴ with the rationale that those who experienced the destruction first hand obviously could not have survived it. In turn, as Laub and Felman explain, the survivors occupy a proximate relation of distance from those who truly witnessed the crime. Testimony occupies an ever-widening gap between survivors and witnesses. Through shame, therefore, ‘the subject...has no other content than its own desubjectification; it becomes witness to its own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject.’²⁵ The act of testifying to one’s personal experience of survival happens when ‘the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking.’²⁶

FROM THE CATASTROPHIC TO THE UNIVERSAL

Through shame, Agamben tries to collapse the distinction between victims and perpetrators by asserting their co-implication in an all-too-human struggle for articulation. The irony, of course, is that Holocaust witness testimony did not truly become a recognized cultural practice until the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, when witnesses were called to provide evidence in support of Eichmann’s prosecution as the unequivocal victims of his actions. As Wieviorka writes, the Eichmann trial was the first moment in which witnesses entered the public space to become ‘an embodiment of

²⁴ Ibid., 35. For original citation see Felman, Shoshana, ‘In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah,’ *Yale French Studies*, 97:1 (2000): 110.

²⁵ Agamben, 2002, 106.

²⁶ Ibid., 120.

memory.²⁷ Whereas, on the other hand, ‘the man in the glass cage was eclipsed by the victims,’²⁸ it was also precisely through him that the cultural identity of the Jewish victim emerged.²⁹



Figure 3: Eichmann Trial, Jerusalem.

Now, this series of gestures and identifications was met with skepticism from different quarters, notably from Hannah Arendt who had herself aroused controversy for criticizing the political dimensions of the trial in a series of journalistic essays.³⁰ Further skepticism regarding the historiographical accuracy of testimonials was brought to the table by prominent Holocaust historians.³¹ Despite these criticisms, the so-called ‘advent of the witness’³² became a powerful figurehead of Holocaust memory at this particular juncture. The Eichmann trial itself became a precedent of sorts for the development of a criminal court in which to adjudicate crimes against humanity, making the testimony of

²⁷ Ibid., 88.

²⁸ Wieviorka, 84.

²⁹ I explain in Chapter Six that this figure was also supported by a previously established mythology surrounding the Jewish Right of Return.

³⁰ Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics, 2010).

³¹ This skepticism is represented in works by Lucy S Dawidowicz, Saul Friedländer and Raul Hilberg.

³² Wieviorka, 56.

Holocaust survivors an important feature of efforts to combat genocidal violence for generations to come. Subsequent recognition of the genocide from the international community led to the promotion of sweeping changes to the way memorialization is practiced, particularly in the United States.³³

Now, a long-discussed consequence of the trial stems from the fact that it was widely televised, a medium that obviously drew a lot of attention to the events of the Holocaust in a way that was previously unimaginable.³⁴ In fact, this level of public exposure not only brought certain renown to the stories of Holocaust survivors, but it also extended these stories in a tidal wave of new productions for both television and fiction film. To some extent, this broadening of the narrative's scope had a precedent in *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), an extremely well received filmic version of the Anne Frank survivor story directed by George Stevens. Since that time but especially in the aftermath of Eichmann's trial, the Holocaust survivor became a mainstay for larger audiences, as mounting public interest culminated in the 1990s with blockbuster hits like Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*, 1997). For Slavoj Žižek, the subterranean drift towards the comedic, particularly with Benigni's film, participates in a depoliticizing gesture that secures ideological conformity to the idea that the Holocaust was an *absolute* evil. Through a particularly totalizing conception of evil, Žižek writes:

The objectifying historical knowledge breaks down and has to
acknowledge its worthlessness in front of a single witness, and,

³³ Ibid., 106. President Carter, for instance, spearheaded a campaign in 1993 that led to the inauguration of the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum.

³⁴ Recently, BBC Two released a film called *The Eichmann Show*, which follows the story of Milton Fruchtmann and Leo Hurwitz, who in the 1960s were involved in producing the Eichmann trial for a global television audience.

simultaneously, the point at which witnesses themselves [have] to concede that words fail them, that what they can share is ultimately only their silence.³⁵

The figure of the catastrophic witness has been taken up in more recent personal portrait films in which the wartime context provides the backdrop for an overriding (if overbearing) drama between individuals. These include such films as Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosenstrasse* (2003), and Stephen Daldry's *The Reader* (2008).

One of the most notable precedents for these filmic engagements was the television series by Gerald Green entitled *Holocaust* (1978). This fictional series is based on a slowly eroding friendship between a German Jewish and Aryan family as they part ways during the war. With melodramatic flourishes, the series illustrates the escalating persecution of the Jewish family, while the Aryan family indulges in using the conflict to bolster its status with the political establishment. The dissonance between these divided experiences only solidifies a general feeling that the Nazi war machine thrived on administering ludicrous injustices upon its many victims. However, beyond its narrative elements, the television show is most remembered for the international fame it received during the time it aired, and subsequently it became the model for all future dramatic engagements with the Holocaust story.

Wieviorka herself refers to the series in her description of 'the changing image of the survivor'³⁶ throughout the 1980s. Holocaust memory was elevated in these years to an entirely different register, which in turn led to the sort of institutional changes I

³⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, 'Laugh Yourself to Death: the new wave of Holocaust comedies!' (Lund Universitet, 1999).

³⁶ Wieviorka, 107.

mentioned above. Further to Wieviorka's definition of the 'Americanization'³⁷ of Holocaust memory culture, however, there are other changes that result from the new prevalence of popular film and television, in which witness testimony became re-articulated to conform to the grand narratives that encourage audiences to identify with the position of the victim.³⁸ As it happens, the gap between testimony literature and the kinds of sensationalism represented in the *Holocaust* series was adequately taken up by Elie Wiesel in a 1978 review for *The New York Times*.³⁹ In it Wiesel argues that the series ultimately failed in its attempt to bridge the divide between fiction and documentary. Among other things, Wiesel complains of the show's spectacularization of the atrocity, its wanton indulgence in factual errors, and its willingness to engage in all manner of stereotypes particularly of Jewish people.

Wiesel then argues that the show blithely appropriates the archetypes of Jewish heroism and martyrdom that emerged with the publicization of survivor testimonies during the Eichmann trial. Crucially, however, though these specific critiques provide insights into the relation between witness testimony and popular visual media formats, they are presented here precisely to demonstrate the ways in which the crime should, according to Wiesel, be conceived as unimaginable. He writes: 'The Holocaust? The ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted... Only those who were there know what it was.'⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 117.

³⁸ Some writers have pointed out that popular interventions like the American television series marked a turning point in the genocidal memory for Western Europeans, particularly in Germany, as it contributed to a larger movement towards the history of everyday life or *Alltagsgeschichte*. For example, see: Kansteiner, Wulf, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Ohio University Press, 2006).

³⁹ Wiesel, Elie, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction,' *The New York Times*, 16 April 1978.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Beyond Wiesel's personal belief in the unimaginable, the narrative and genre conventions of popular film and television had an enormous impact on the Apollonian world of the audio-visual testimony projects. The most notable among these projects include the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies; the Yad Vashem Archive; and Steven Spielberg's initiative, the USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education. Granted, many debates can be had about the best practices to use in the procurement of witness testimony, and each of these organizations certainly follow their own protocols and rules of engagement. In Spielberg's initiative, for example, the testimonial method follows the suspiciously congruent path of a successful mourning, which is loosely based on narrative structures that ultimately frame the survivor by the motifs of salvation, recuperation and individualism—tropes that can be rather easily extended to a dramatic film.

Wieviorka points out that compared to Fortunoff, for instance, the Spielberg testimonies operate according to a substantially modified technique, which includes the use of close-ups for dramatic effect, the affirmation of postwar success as a model for survivor identity, and an 'ideology of intimacy'⁴¹ encouraged by the interviewer. All of these elements contribute to an atmosphere that Wieviorka calls an 'absolute experience.'⁴² This experience, in fact, was extended further to a 1998 Shoah Foundation docu-drama by James Moll entitled *The Last Days*. This film recounts the stories of five Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust, but it also supplements their testimonials with heavily curated archival material, together with pilgrimages to the towns and villages from which they were deported. Each story concludes with a narrative about their

⁴¹ Wieviorka, 143.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

personal success and prosperity in postwar America. Though it may be imprecise to claim that video testimony projects in the last thirty years have all been forced to establish some kind of relationship to popular American film, *The Last Days* very clearly demonstrates the risks that may be involved in blurring these categories.

ARCHIVING TESTIMONY

For Holocaust memory practitioners, on other hand, the prospect of the last witness signals the very real possibility that the genocidal crimes of the Nazis will no longer be part of living memory. New questions have since been posed about the status of the video testimonies as compared to images of the crime itself, or from the practice of using those images to aid in the construction of a spectacular narrative. In many ways, arriving at clear answers to such questions returns us to the earliest days of Holocaust visual culture. For example, Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et Brouillard*, 1955) not only offers a counterpoint to the Spielberg effect, but it also furthers a larger debate regarding the appropriate use of archival material. Famous as the critical introduction to the genocide for Parisian filmgoers, *Night and Fog* is similar to *The Last Days* as both make no hesitation about using images depicting the camps in the period during which they were in operation. In Resnais's case, these include the Nazi-produced films that document their own brutality on the camps, as well as those made by the Allies during liberation. Of course, Resnais's use of these images differs markedly from the heavily curated environment of the Spielberg productions of more recent times, and determined entirely by the grand narratives of victimhood and heroism as I mention above.

In contrast to these narratives, Resnais himself ‘never pretended to “teach everything” about the camps,’⁴³ and his chosen images likewise have no specific purchase on the moral, pedagogical or ideological functions of the cinema. Rather, his presentation of graphically violent images facilitates a singular demand for enunciation. This demand is secured by Resnais’s critical engagement with *montage*, by manipulating the time or duration of sequences precisely to invite competing interpretations with every subsequent frame. Montage challenges the popular narratives because it creates a platform for audiences to bear witness to the crimes, and therefore to bear a certain responsibility. This labour of revelation can be further conceived by paraphrasing Jean-Luc Godard. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, Godard said that in the process of ‘*making visible*,’ the images as they appear on the screen must be rendered ‘*dialectical*.’⁴⁴

Godard’s criteria can be further extended to a pairing of *Night and Fog* and Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1984). I argue that both films are similar in that they remain entirely consumed by the task of coaxing enunciation from its hiddenness on the screen. Both filmmakers likewise engage in a similar approach to artistic creation, particularly when it comes to inserting frames of the Polish countryside together with a creeping sense of unease for reasons that are never quite explicitly stated. In *Night and Fog*, these scenes become invitations for Resnais to reveal the sublime traumatic event that lies veiled beneath this appearance of normality, in a juxtaposition that is perhaps most strongly featured in the opening frame of the film.

⁴³ Didi-Huberman, Georges, *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.



Figure 4: Claude Lanzmann, still from *Shoah* (1984).

For Lanzmann, on the other hand, the fields surrounding the camps also provide a space for queer contemplation in the aftermath of a catastrophe that has left few tangible or material traces despite an abundance of distilled affect. On this basis, I suggest that Lanzmann's depiction of these fields is set apart by his outright refusal to connect with any particular images of the atrocity. While Resnais shows the sublime force of the mass killing in its frightening detail, Lanzmann himself refuses applying these images altogether. He maintains, after all, that *Shoah* is distinctive because it mobilizes vocalization exclusively, and in this sense, he argues, it is 'not a historical film.'⁴⁵

For Felman, *Shoah* is unique because it demonstrates a singular attachment to dialogue and proves that despite overwhelming evidence of the crime, the Shoah remains 'an utterly proofless event.'⁴⁶ The cinematic air of Lanzmann's work is driven by stories that can be told only by those who witnessed (or rather survived) the events, if not also by

⁴⁵ Felman, 112.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110.

the perpetrators and the bystanders. Defenders of Lanzmann's position will argue that any reproduction of an image or thing shares in preventing the sort of discursive engagement that is capable of yielding the truth despite whether it remains concealed.⁴⁷ Lanzmann, however, is obliged to translate this refusal into a figure of truth that 'does not kill the possibility of art.'⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva brings this point to fruition in her commentary on the so-called 'Lanzmann-Felman duo,'⁴⁹ suggesting that *Shoah* evinces a 'cinema of the invisible,'⁵⁰ in which iconoclastic refusal provides the very means by which the image may enter into speech.

Kristeva writes, 'the truth of the trauma always destroys all possibility of narration, and of all imaginary speech, even the most enigmatic poetry.'⁵¹ Yet Lanzmann is unconvinced that the inherently destructive potential of this truth need support the assertion that the Holocaust is 'unimaginable.' With his dogged insistence that interviewees speak of their experiences in the most excruciating detail—to fill the absences of the spaces that are filmed as well as those that lie hidden in the words themselves—we discover 'the liberation of the testimony through its desacralization.'⁵²

Now, this faith in desacralization is exactly what Didi-Huberman attacks in his forceful criticism of Lanzmann's refusal to use archival and documentary images of the crimes. Didi-Huberman reminds us that according to Lanzmann's own declarations, 'archival images are images without imagination,'⁵³ that is, without the disruptive or

⁴⁷ Huberman, 90-97.

⁴⁸ Felman, 105.

⁴⁹ Kristeva, Julia, 'For Shoshana Felman: Truth and Art,' Emily Sun, Eval Peretz, Ulrich Baer, Eds., *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader* (Fordham University Press, 2007), 315.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 318.

⁵² Felman, 118.

⁵³ Huberman, 93.

disassembling power with which Lanzmann might describe his own creative engagement. We know that Lanzmann rejects such images on the basis that they operate on evidentiary terms, and therefore that they corroborate the sense that exactitude needs to be emphatically distinguished from truth. Whereas truthfulness is open to expression, the regime of exactitude belongs to the historical record. In fact, Didi-Huberman's most strongly worded contestation is aimed at Lanzmann's ardent defenders like Gérard Wajcman, who has claimed, among other things, that strictly speaking 'there are no images of the Shoah.'⁵⁴ To illustrate the sublimity of the Shoah's violence would mean elevating its crimes to the ill-reputed authority that it might otherwise enjoy in the popular domain.

For Didi-Huberman, the logic of the sublime is rather premised on a false assumption that archival and documentary images are capable of providing 'the whole truth,'⁵⁵ or that complete forms of interpretation are even possible. As a counterpoint to various arguments in favour of Lanzmann's iconoclasm, Didi-Huberman draws attention to a photograph depicting the open-pit crematorium in 1944 after the arrival of the Hungarian Jews, among three other images that were taken by survivors. For Didi-Huberman, these images are useful as reminders that images of extreme violence serve to 'address the unimaginable, and refute it.'⁵⁶ In other words, they are useful because they validate the reality of the crimes precisely by forcing that reality upon the imagination itself. Beyond denouncements of his 'idolatry' or 'fetishism,'⁵⁷ I would argue that Didi-Huberman situates the epistemic force of the image on the same level as enunciation

⁵⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 94.

itself. He explains, ‘the “unimaginable” of Auschwitz forces us, not to eliminate, but to *rethink the image*.’⁵⁸ Beyond the space of testimony film and the specific controversies discussed above concerning the status of the image, it would appear that subsequent generations of Holocaust memory have often tended to implicate the relationship between images and testimony in broader issues of transmission. For writers like Marianne Hirsch and Eva Hoffman, the dynamics of Holocaust memory, particularly among the second generation of survivor families, tended to be dominated by questions of mediation unlike ever before.

Hirsch, of course, is well known for having developed the concept of ‘generational postmemory,’ which strictly refers to ‘remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe.’⁵⁹ One of the main features of such remembrance is what Hoffman calls ‘the paradoxes of indirect knowledge,’⁶⁰ including the relation between the survivor and the family member who is the subject of their testimonial. The central question of ethicality is not limited to simply discussing how stories are passed down from one generation to another. Rather, questions of mediation concern the interplay involved in negotiating with traumatic experiences through affective modes of contact with the other—whether through bodies, figures of speech, coping strategies, or through a more complete repetition of the traumatic experience itself.⁶¹ In this we can find Hirsch’s insistence that beyond providing historical accounts of transmission, we should rather move towards defining ‘a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge

⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁹ Hirsch, Marianne, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 104.

⁶⁰ Hoffman, Eva, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (PublicAffairs, 2005), 25.

⁶¹ Many of these strategies are indebted to the work of psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott. For example, see: Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* (Routledge Classics, 2005).

and experience.’⁶² Indeed, Hirsch’s reference to a *structure* of transmission does not require the acquisition of historical knowledge in the banal sense as it enjoins us to engage with a psychodynamic process where ethical responses must be defined in relation to survivors and their ‘chaos of emotion.’⁶³

Art Spiegelman’s two-volume graphic novel *Maus* (1991) is a fitting example of how second-generation postmemory foregrounds mediation as central to the way stories can be told. Communicated by non-human actors, *Maus* graphically represents the artist’s personal mission to extract a complete testimony from his ornery father, who is a survivor of Auschwitz. Spiegelman’s hope is that through this process, he might be able to find a way of coming to terms with a childhood memory of his mother’s suicide. The graphic novel format allows text and image to converge in ways that encourage the reader to adopt a split narrative format, one that moves freely between the archival document, on the one hand, and the personal narrative that links to the relationship between father and son, on the other. Spiegelman engages in a historically accurate reconstruction based on familiar images of the war, and then situates the latter in connection to the father’s memory. As such, the testimonial is placed in a dialogue with historical events, and in one case in particular, Spiegelman reproduces the very same image of the open-pit crematorium that Didi-Huberman uses to justify his rebuttal against Lanzmann’s supporters. Art becomes life, and life, in turn, becomes archive.

As a work of testimony literature, I suggest that Spiegelman’s *Maus* displaces problems of mediation onto a fraught personal relationship between father and son that forms the crux of his story. As Hoffman explains, the transmission of Holocaust memory

⁶² Hirsch, 106.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 111.

from a surviving parent to their child is a deeply affective one, as family ties tend to emphasize the corporeal and embodied nature of memory. True, survivors are ‘often difficult people, and are found to be so by others.’⁶⁴ In Spiegelman’s case, his childlike self becomes a determination of his own success as an adult. The figure of the child is set in relation to the relentless self-punishment of his father, which is managed by the child through a lifelong depression that only attends to preexisting guilt formations surrounding his mother’s suicide.

These affects are highlighted when the character is portrayed sitting at the writing desk and pondering his own relationship to the memory that he has tasked himself with representing in a graphic novel. Indeed, there is a familial component of this tragedy that only substantiates Hoffman’s description of the psychological impact of being a child to Holocaust survivors. Of her own experience, she writes, ‘the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war.’⁶⁵ In this sense, the profaned origin of survivors into the second generation becomes part of that generation’s temporal experience, as the quotidian time of the everyday is supplemented by the frenetic time of the catastrophic.

In effect, the critical work on generational postmemory helps us to arrive full circle at the previous summation, in which the archival document is defined as a contested site of enunciation that nevertheless falls under the province of testimony. For Hirsch, an analysis of family photography can be useful for understanding how survivor memories are transmitted through affective channels. That is, by occupying both the

⁶⁴ Hoffman, 54.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3

‘inscriptive’ and ‘incorporative’⁶⁶ dimensions of the archive, the photographic medium can swiftly bring up associations of specific memories detailing persecutions that happened during the Holocaust, and this process, Hirsch maintains, serves ‘to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation.’⁶⁷

She writes that photographs ‘enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic “take.”’⁶⁸ Analyzing such documents can be successful, then, in terms of disassembling the suspicion that by reinforcing their universal application, the documentary images can participate in unifying the rituals that serve to remember the atrocity to which they are connected. In fact, debates surrounding the archive of testimony tend to be invested in preventing interpretations of the Holocaust as an event composed of unimaginable violence, as the latter will always require devotional practices to its continued obfuscation.

THE MULTIDIRECTIONAL TURN

The status of the event as ‘unimaginable’ has two principal effects: first, it obscures the national debate in which the thesis on the unimaginable was proposed, and second, it bolsters efforts, which are distinct from the latter, to position Holocaust memory as a phenomenon of ‘global’ concern. These mounting effects resulted in part from the belated course of Holocaust awareness throughout postwar Germany. Eric Santner refers precisely to this belatedness in a conversation about the dynamics of

⁶⁶ Hirsch, 117.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 115.

identification among the offspring of Germany's perpetrators, arguing that crimes committed by the latter were not addressed until the subsequent generation made an initiative to do so. He writes, '[when] the perpetrator generation dies out, more properly juridical issues of guilt and complicity yield to more inchoate questions of historical memory and of the mediation and transmittal of cultural traditions and identities.'⁶⁹

Santner's hypothesis is dependent upon a reading of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* from 1967, which examines the denial of guilt for Nazi crimes among those who were counted as its participants. Citing painful 'narcissistic injury,'⁷⁰ the perpetrator past thus represents a silent inheritance that can only be addressed by indirect means. To illustrate the magnitude of this injury, Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania Anno Zero*, 1948), one of the more popular rubble films of this era, features a young protagonist who poisons his terminally ill father before eventually committing suicide on the premise of feeling overwhelming guilt for his homicidal action.

Against the background of such contorted figures of denial, Santner explores the dynamics of perpetrator memory in Germany's second postwar generation, which includes those who did not directly experience the war, and who were therefore prone to identify more with the Jewish victims than with their parents and older family members. For writers like Dominick LaCapra, such modes of identification are problematic because they fail to distinguish between victims and perpetrators, which in turn maligns concrete answers about who in fact should be held responsible.⁷¹ However for Santner, this

⁶⁹ Santner, xii.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁷¹ LaCapra, 2001, 86-114.

identification is rather part and parcel of acknowledging the difficulties that such inheritances pose.

For example, the tendency of identifying with the victim participates in broader ‘postmodern’ trends towards what Santner describes as the ‘discourse of bereavement,’⁷² in which ‘to be a speaking subject is to have already assumed one’s fundamental vocation as a survivor of the painful losses—the structural catastrophes—that accompany one’s entrance into the symbolic order.’⁷³ Santner describes this introjection of bereavement as a kind of felt anxiety, in which losses are resolved only by engaging in solidarity initiatives where broader collectives become a unique part of the story. Quoting the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, Santner writes that anxiety ‘can be recuperated only in the presence of an empathic witness,’⁷⁴ and indeed that ‘mourning without solidarity is the beginning of madness.’⁷⁵ What is therefore key in this particular memory formation is a therapeutic practice of guided regression.

Now, Santner proposes an ethic of witnessing that stands in opposition to attempts by the right at using the tragic circumstances of the war to legitimate the reconstruction of an affirmative postwar German identity. Such efforts were made back in the 1980s during the so-called Historian’s Debate or *Historikerstreit*, in which a small group of neonationalist historians from West Germany voiced their criticism of earlier maneuvers to suppress any such articulation of German identity. Above all, this group sought to reclaim a sense of national pride by establishing a historical record that was favourable to these goals. Their strongest claim, in fact, was that the rise of the death camps and indeed

⁷² Santner, 9.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 26.

Nazism altogether was borne from a defensive strategy against the threat that was posed by Soviet military power.

In response to this revisionism, historians on the left such as Jürgen Habermas sought to challenge these views on the basis that they encourage sympathy for the perpetrator burden, and therefore diminish the magnitude of its criminality.⁷⁶ Habermas here follows in the *Sonderweg* tradition by characterizing the Nazi crimes as a malignant symptom of Germany's unique path to modernity. In this, he boldly challenges such right-wing historical revisionism by calling for a detailed acknowledgment of Holocaust memory. His rationale is that such rendering can provide historians with the means to elaborate upon the dynamics of a 'postconventional identity'⁷⁷—which is an identity that for Habermas is coherent with universal norms.

Many different responses to this quarrel were featured in popular daily newspapers and in televised public debate. However, for historians like Wulf Kansteiner, the Historian's Debate in the end did not amount to a particularly important national conversation, because it ultimately failed to create lasting outcomes beyond those within the highly specialized academic field of historiography. Yet Kansteiner also maintains that the Debate is notable for its symptomatic engagement with identity as such. He therefore pursues this claim by further historicizing the turn to revisionism in 1986, and finds that significant attempts were made at least since the 1960s to 'engage public memory'⁷⁸ of the crimes that were committed by the Nazi regime during its tenure. As I indicate fully in Chapter four, a catalyst for such engagement was sought by 'memory

⁷⁶ Habermas, Jürgen. 'Eine Art Schadenabwicklung: Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung,' *Die Zeit*, 18 July 1986.

⁷⁷ Holub, Robert C., *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (Routledge, 1991), 120.

⁷⁸ Kansteiner, 7.

dissidents⁷⁹ of this time, including representatives of the student movement, to delaminate the past from this silence and therefore demand that West Germany align any remaining questions about the genocide together with a contemporary moral imperative—the so-called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁸⁰

As Kansteiner explains, determining the true cause of the Final Solution became a fixation for the dissidents. However, the ongoing search for answers has only led to a series of abstractions about the events under consideration. For instance, the political cause that motivated such demands had been quickly reduced to technicalities about whether Hitler's personal motivations did or did not have a greater share in the decision to eliminate the European Jews. For Santner, debates of this sort are less important to consider because their very articulation merely indicates a rearguard extension of the 'inability or refusal to mourn.'⁸¹

Another perspective might point out that the Holocaust was universalized in the first place during equivocations over West Germany's postnational aspirations. With Habermas's demand, for instance, these equivocations went beyond that of determining Nazi crimes in accordance with international norms of social justice, to argue that 'inchoate questions of historical memory,'⁸² just as Santner described, can be negotiated as well by the international community. Adamant about the singularity of the event, Habermas argues that postwar Germans ought to take a leadership role when it comes to preventing the tactics of exclusion that are germane to any formation of national identity. For, if such formative practices would only adhere to universal norms, the institution of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁰ In Chapter Four, I explain how memory activists in the 1970s and 1980s fostered new strategies of memorialization throughout West Germany at the site of the *Gestapo-Gelände*.

⁸¹ Santner, 52.

⁸² Ibid., xii.

Holocaust memory would then be free to characterize the event in question as an ‘emblem’⁸³ for genocidal violence, and therefore as a measure of its future prohibition.

Many competing perspectives find fault in this approach. For example, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder point out that a universal Holocaust memory ‘encapsulates the idea of catastrophe’⁸⁴ in ways that ultimately lose intrinsic meaning. Unlike Santner’s claims, this particular argument corroborates LaCapra’s warning that a decontextualized memory culture surrounding the Holocaust will only result in further erasing the line between victim and perpetrator. For Levy and Sznajder, the very act of erasure returns back to Adorno and Horkheimer’s attempt to frame the Holocaust as a sublime culmination of modern society.⁸⁵ In fact, Levy and Sznajder extend this criticism to include Hannah Arendt’s construction of a universal perpetrator,⁸⁶ and to Zigmunt Bauman’s construction of a universal victim along similar lines.⁸⁷

Levy and Sznajder’s solution to this problem involves moving away from fruitless debates about the cultural impact of universals and particulars, to focus instead upon questions or problems that exclusively attend to matters of transmission. They take aim at Maurice Halbwach’s distinction between social and historical memory precisely in this spirit of redirecting the conversation towards mediality. As I explained in Chapter Two, Halbwach’s rationale for making this distinction was to illuminate the domain of the

⁸³ Levy and Sznajder, 192.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁸⁵ See: Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, [1944] 2007).

⁸⁶ See: Arendt, Hannah, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).

⁸⁷ See: Bauman, Zygmunt, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

social as a naturalized extension of living memory, and furthermore to guarantee that the family will be conceived as the sole prototype of the nation.⁸⁸

This distinction also has the benefit of challenging the assumption that diverse forms of memory have significant epistemic claims upon the nation as such. The regime of historical memory, in other words, did not hold any favour because of the perception that such memory is beholden to the ephemeral mode of its transmission. By situating present-day Holocaust memory with this category, however, Levy and Sznadier contest the dominant attitude as it is represented in the influential work of Anthony Smith or Pierre Nora.⁸⁹ Whereas Smith, for example, maintains that ‘there is no global identity,’⁹⁰ Levy and Sznadier insist that ‘national memories are now mixed with collective memories culled from other, collective expressions of solidarity such as ethnicity, gender, and religion.’⁹¹ This adjustment thus acknowledges the avenues and opportunities that new media represent in terms of imagining forms of collectivization in which the Holocaust remains a point of reference. On this basis, Levy and Sznadier insist that all memory culture be premised upon ‘contextualized universalism.’⁹²

Michael Rothberg voices a final perspective on these matters in his highly influential work on the intersections between European Jewish memory and that of postcoloniality. Indeed, by rejecting the cultural value of universalism altogether, Rothberg is able to acknowledge the peculiar status that Holocaust memory has acquired

⁸⁸ See: Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁸⁹ See: Phillips, Kendall R., and G. Mitchell Reyes, Eds., ‘Surveying Global Memoryscapes: The Shifting Terrain of Public Memory,’ *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (University of Alabama Press, 2011), 17.

⁹⁰ Levy and Sznadier, 31. Also see Smith, Anthony, ‘Towards a Global Culture?’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 7: 1 (June 1990): 171-191.

⁹¹ Levy and Sznadier, 35.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 44.

in recent years, including its specific capability of enabling diverse traumatic experiences to enter public conversation. On the other hand, Rothberg equally asserts that such approaches have led to a situation of ‘comparative victimization,’⁹³ which is precipitated by a wholly competitive phase established by a ‘hierarchy of suffering’ between those who ascribe to Holocaust memory, and those who ascribe to similar crimes from the intervening years.

Rothberg suggests that perhaps it is time to think beyond the national and global frameworks that have been so thoroughly explored, to completely reconceptualize what Holocaust memory means for contemporary global audiences. To that end, Rothberg insists that ‘remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites.’⁹⁴ In practical terms, this claim would imply that the practices of Holocaust remembrance should be disentangled from the actual events of the crime, to be read as continuous with the solidarity initiatives that arose during the period of its advent. These initiatives may include the rise of new social movements in continental Europe for the mobilization of gay, feminist and environmentalist communities, the demand for civil rights among African Americans, or the number of anti-colonial struggles that grew exponentially during this period. By focusing on comparisons that aim to disrupt the reinforcement of ‘universal’ suffering, Rothberg argues that we should ‘rethink the conceptualization of collective memory in multicultural and transnational contexts.’⁹⁵

Rothberg substantiates his argument first of all by making a claim that resonates with Levy and Sznajder’s perspective, arguing that there are two varieties of collective memory in the present day—that of ‘common’ and ‘shared’ memory. With the onset of

⁹³ Rothberg, 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 21.

global media, Rothberg continues, the common memories—those that are woven together with traumatic events by those who experienced them—begin to enter the sphere of ‘shared’ memory when they are transmitted beyond such individuals. Shared memories, in other words, are ‘formed within mediascapes,’⁹⁶ but in ways that situate the latter as its condition of possibility. By using this distinction as the basis for his claim, Rothberg permits himself to make a second argument that is rooted in Sigmund Freud’s concept of screen memories.⁹⁷

As Freud explains, screen memories represent stand-ins that allow the subject to access their traumatic experiences through describing a scene or a dynamic that may have no actual relation to the event(s) being considered. Though they do not have any claim to verifiable content, the benefit of these projected memories is found in their unique capacity for ‘affective charge,’⁹⁸ a charge that allows us to reconsider how particular memories move through time and become both ‘retrospective’ and ‘anticipatory.’⁹⁹ As decision points, such affective landscapes of memory cannot be fully understood until they are determined by the memory-work itself. In other words, ‘one cannot know in advance how the articulation of memory will function.’¹⁰⁰ Therefore, by occupying a range of variables from the personal to the political, and by moving interchangeably from the past to the present and beyond, Rothberg convincingly asserts that memory ‘is structurally multidirectional.’¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁷ Freud, Sigmund, ‘Screen Memories,’ *The Penguin Freud Reader*, Ed., Adam Philips (Penguin Classics, 2006), 541-561.

⁹⁸ Rothberg, 16.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 35.

Rothberg's main arguments are important to rehearse because they are repeatedly evoked in a literature that aims to reveal how the European genocide against the Jews must continue to be a precedent for voicing criticism about the technologies of race. Moreover, I suggest that Rothberg's gesture towards a multidirectional interaction between otherwise competing traditions of memory, and therefore his disdain for the universal are both particularly resonate with my own perspectives. While it is far from obvious to claim with Rothberg that 'the history of Jewish difference in Europe foreshadows postcolonial migrants in contemporary Europe,'¹⁰² I suggest that the very undecidability contained in this assertion becomes a pivot for another conversation to proceed. For example, the current transition into the next chapter is toward a sustained focus upon site-specific works within the tradition of German counter-monuments, which I argue are directly implicated in a search for polyvalent and multidirectional alternatives within the fabric of memory.

¹⁰² Ibid., 23.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE REMAINDERS OF MEMORY: BERLIN'S POSTNATIONAL AESTHETIC

The scar, the wound, the place marking death exceeds our sense of order.

One impulse is to repair, to repudiate, to erase in an attempt to aid forgetting.

Karen Wilson Baptist

We stand upon graves.

The Active Museum

INTRODUCTION

Berlin's memorial culture reached its zenith after 1990 and the 'turning' (*die Wende*), but little attention has been given to the particular circumstances of this conjuncture. Twenty-five years since the fall of the wall is perhaps long enough to begin thinking about the cultural and political impact of this event's most visually circumspect achievement: the counter-monument.

One of Berlin's more subtle counter-monuments is Micha Ullman's *Bibliothek*, which was included in the walking tour for the memory obsessed back in 1995. This work can be found beneath the Berlin Bebelplatz, in Mitte next to the law buildings at Humboldt University and the State Opera House. The object, though inconspicuous, represents an effort to acknowledge the Nazi book burnings that occurred on that site on

10 May 1933. Its ‘negative-form’¹ display is composed from a hollowed interior extending six feet into the ground amid the cobblestones. An empty set of bookcases sits behind hermetically sealed glass, with a ghostly bluish light around its frame.



Figure 5: Micha Ullman, *Bibliothek*. Berlin, Germany.

A plaque sits next to the underground library with a description of the book burning event that it represents, followed by an even more intriguing epigraph situated below. The latter passage is taken from a line of Heinrich Heine’s tragic play, *Almansor* (1822), which illustrates an ongoing battle between Moors and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula during the medieval period.² In a particularly dramatic scene, Heine describes the destruction of holy books just prior to the Grenada War with a strange sense of foreboding. He writes: ‘Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too’ (*Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen.*). With

¹ Young, James E., *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1994), 43.

² Heine, Heinrich, *Almansor: Eine Tragödie* (CreateSpace Publishing, 2013/1822).

its inclusion on the site of the Nazi book burning, this epigraph acquires further significance in relation to the memory of WWII, the Holocaust, and post-Wende Germany. Heine's quote is therefore used here precisely as a way of capturing the depth of messianic apprehension that Ullman's sculpture attempts to visualize, with its situated absence of books in the library.

By juxtaposing Heine's quote against the background of Ullman's exquisite presentation of a literary and philosophical canon under erasure, the *Bibliothek* memorial is intended to interrupt the blithe of visitors into remembering the otherwise unspeakable crimes of an attempted genocide against the Jews, and other minorities in the late years of the war. However, *Bibliothek* is important in another sense. By extrapolating from its measured task of simply remembering those crimes, the structure exposes the contradictory forces at play within the specific history of postwall Germany. Holocaust memory remains here a crucial element of the narrative, as the motivation to build counter-monuments in the first place was because traditional memorial structures could only recuperate the German state from its recent and violent past. Indeed, Berlin's new memorial district has undergone its own recuperation. It includes sites like Ullman's sculpture along with larger ones like Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. In fact, as I describe below, one of the more prominent criticisms that was raised during the building of that particular memorial was that the resulting 'memory district' would eventually reduce cultural memory practice to that of 'international cultural exchange, avant-garde art, and the establishment of cultural institutions, international architecture, and global corporate culture.'³

³ Till, Karen, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 149.

For Karen Till as for Lutz Koepnick, ‘the new Berlin Republic architecture has assumed a highly significant role in recalling the past and marking the nation’s place after the end of the Cold War.’⁴ The ostensibly ‘cosmopolitan’ aspirations of these architectural projects have filtered into the established traditions of Holocaust memorials and their attempted expansion. Can the counter-monument be remembered beyond the insistence of this memory, despite the sanitized images of Europe’s postnational future that such memory perpetuates?

THE TOTAL MONUMENT

With *Bibliothek* as the main point of reference for my investigation, I now turn to a description of the event and the circumstances that led it to its memorialization decades later. More revered than the magnificent burning of the library at Alexandria by Julius Caesar, or Louvain during the Great War, the Nazi-perpetrated burning of books has acquired a reputation that is unparalleled in the history of biblioclasm. The Berlin event is unique because of the way it transposes the logic of destruction onto the revelation of a specific modernity. In other words, the memory of this event adequately demonstrates how the logic of destruction is in many ways paradigmatic for modern statecraft as the Third Reich conceived it. Ullman’s memorial, however, appears to further suggest that the book burning essentially presaged a materialization of statecraft and its logic as destruction ‘to come.’ In fact, the desire to burn supposedly un-German books at this critical juncture may include a provision for the onset of *total* destruction.

⁴ Koepnick, Lutz, ‘Forget Berlin’, *The German Quarterly*, 74:4 (2001): 344.

Ullman's memorial opens a line of questioning about how to fathom a memory of this magnitude. Should we, the vicarious and belated witnesses of total destruction, strive to acknowledge the inherent speculation on which this act of remembering is based? If by challenging our interpretation of the event as a microcosm of book burning history, can we situate it as one that speaks a greater truth? The messianic quotation of Heine's—whose work, incidentally, was targeted by the perpetrators—is combined with Ullman's sculpture as a prophetic warning of genocidal violence. Yet that outcome could not have been predicted on the night of the burning. Matthew Fishburn has described initial reactions to the event as 'hypnotic...' creating a 'sensation'⁵ that was meticulously curated for the international community. The spectacle of destroying books in the heart of the nation's capital was certainly effective in terms of silencing international critics in the face of actions from a state apparatus whose murderous potential was slowly becoming apparent. For domestic audiences, on the other hand, the burning of books was a demand for vigilance. It was designed to mobilize popular support for National Socialism, and to illustrate policies that would come to reflect this projected image in the body politic.

Undoubtedly, the Germans had other motives for burning books at this time. Fishburn suggests, for instance, that the event was staged to deflect attention from a controversy over the arson fire at the Berlin Reichstag earlier that year in February.⁶ The popular media at the time had more or less determined that fascists were the perpetrators of that arson. The fascists argued, however, that it was the design of Communists, and therefore just another example of how a Communist government would wreak havoc. By strategically redirecting the public's attention toward a second arson—one that is

⁵ Fishburn, Michael, *Burning Books* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

ideologically consistent with the Nazi brand—the fear-inducing message of a Communist threat could be further justified. Another motive for the event was the scheduled closure of the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Research), led by its founding director, the psychoanalyst Magnus Hirschfeld. For obvious reasons, including its acknowledgement of gender diversity and its supposed promotion of homophile culture, the Institute became an immediate target of the social restructuring.⁷ Its closure, however, resulted in a spontaneous ransacking of its library of more than 20,000 books, all of which ended up in the square together with works from the university’s collection. A book burning was organized shortly afterwards by a local students association, who acted in accordance with their founding precepts but were clearly under the influence of the national state.⁸

Though it may be tempting to read this event into a causal narrative in which book burnings presage the Final Solution as the inclusion of Heine’s quotation might suggest, it may rather be the case that the burning of books illustrates just one discrete occasion for the ‘symbolic’⁹ celebration of fascist ideology. In this regard, the event was certainly useful for the Nazis because it imposed a fictitious ‘blank slate’¹⁰ onto allowable forms of cultural expression. It became a way of starting over, and therefore a means of building new paths for the realization of a social imaginary that could be constantly measured or assessed by a persistent ideal. It enjoined the population to work for an Aryan *lebenswelt* from the ashes of the accursed civilization. In this sense, the purifying of Germany’s

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ The correspondence between the student’s mandate and Nazi state policy was symbolized in turn with the presence of Joseph Goebbels at the pyre.

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

intellectual life by means of fire and brimstone could have been the next logical step in the expression of this life.



Figure 6: Hans Haacke's *Germania*. 44th Venice Bienalle, German pavilion.

I now want to situate Ullman's desire to expose the entanglements of this particular destruction of the books. I begin with a point of contrast that situates Ullman's implicit critique of the monumental aesthetic in relation to the emphatic architectural vision of the Nazi urban planner Albrecht Speer. This contrast is useful because of the magnitude of Speer's investment in the monumental. His 'blood and soil campaign'¹¹ to redesign Berlin through the fabled image of Germania takes us to the architectural limit of that particular aesthetic paradigm. That is, Speer's model of Germania participates in a sublime illustration of his unwavering commitment to an indestructible form of

¹¹ Baptist, Karen Wilson, 'Shades of Grey: The Role of the Sublime in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,' *Landscape Review* 14:2 (2012): 80.

destruction—a monumentalism of the built environment that, in the end, survives ruination.

The aftermath of Speer's indestructible image of urban ruin is perhaps best visualized by Hans Haacke's *Germania* [Figure 5], which features a hall of dilapidated marble bricks with the proper name draped above. Haacke's exhibit sought to uproot the object cause of fascist desire from the dead spirit of this imagined city, in part by inviting visitors to assume the role of archeologist. By doing so, Haacke manifests destruction in such a way that guarantees the survival of Germania in our imaginations, which is now depicted by an empty vessel of monumentality. However, because this very outcome was the one that had been intended by Speer from the very beginning, it may be worthwhile to ask whether Haacke's work actually goes beyond repeating the spirit of Speer's particular vision. Ullman's work, by contrast, is notable because it escapes any such attempt at inscribing the monumental aesthetic into the image of ruin, preferring instead to represent the ruin in its absence from the scene of the memorial.

A second counter-example of Ullman's approach is that of Anselm Kiefer's *Sternenfall/Shevirath Ha Kelim* [Figure 6], which first appeared in Monumenta 2007 but is also part of a longer series by the artist featuring bookish themes in some truly magnificent works.¹² *Sternenfall* is unique, however, because it goes beyond prior iterations of the bookish theme by making direct inferences to the symbolic destruction of Jewish-German communities or 'people of the book.'¹³

¹² A particularly striking though much earlier version of this theme is *Zweistromland* ('Land of Two Rivers/The High Priestess'), 1986-89.

¹³ Young, James E., *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (Yale University Press, 2002), 7.



Figure 7: Anselm Kiefer, *Sternenfall/Shevirath Ha Kelim*, 2007.

Though dramatic and beautiful, Kiefer's aesthetic is defined above all by the way it situates the logic of destruction explicitly in the memory of its victims, evoking the 1938 November Pogrom or *Kristallnacht* with his conspicuous use of broken glass. Indeed, I challenge this evocation by arguing that despite the significance of acknowledging the violence of the Pogrom, as Ullman does with the book burning, Kiefer has few choices here but to construct a *retrospective* history of its destruction. Or, to put it another way, I suggest that Kiefer's demand for retrospection produces narrative structures that are ultimately designed to consolidate the 'culture of amnesia'¹⁴ that Andreas Huyssen famously described in connection with Germany's built environment: a desire to look back and reflect upon the past in a way that obscures our better understanding of it. Beyond the demand for retrospection, the *Bibliothek* memorial issues a warning that effectively resists such amnesia in the first place.

¹⁴ See: Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1994).

On this basis, and similar to the pairing of Ullman with Haacke regarding assumptions of their shared attitudes about the endurance of monumentalism, the works of Ullman and Kiefer have little in common apart from their bookish displays. Ullman's *Bibliothek* stands alone from these examples because it participates in aesthetic strategies that are famously described by James E. Young as designed 'not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by its passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation.'¹⁵ By participating in these strategies, as I describe below, *Bibliothek* thus permits us to reject the foundational practices that art's memorial function¹⁶ demands.

In the following pages, I extrapolate from *Bibliothek* to consider the counter-monument in some of its broader iterations. I analyze its emergence within postwar Germany to question both what is at stake in its continued popularization and how it interacts with the political, cultural and economic fluctuations of the present day. I then move on to explore some of the theoretical consequences of the counter-monument in my conclusion.

TOPOGRAPHY AND REVELATION

As the end of WWII marked the beginning of a new geopolitical world order, the practice of memorialization was more or less insignificant throughout postwar Europe for

¹⁵ Young, 2002, 7-8.

¹⁶ This notion represents a spin on the term 'museum function' that is discussed by Peter McIsaac. See: McIsaac, Peter, *Museums of the Mind: German Modernity and the Dynamics of Collecting* (Penn State University Press, 2007) 3-29.

at least a decade or more.¹⁷ Memorial sites did, however, crop up in the first days of the liberation, most of which were arranged by surviving members of the death camps using objects they found onsite. But these structures were never made to last.¹⁸ Unique because of their intended temporariness, these sites of survival eventually gave way to a growing sense of anxiety over the new obstacles of an uncertain future around the world. This was particularly the case in postwar Germany.

Janet Ward describes this period of German history as dominated by attempts to revolutionize the national infrastructure in compliance with an internationally enforced policy of denazification. Envisioned as ‘fiercely modernizing,’¹⁹ the directives coming from Berlin at this time suggested that ‘de-rubbling took precedence over preservation.’²⁰ Less focused on remembering the past, the postwar national agenda was aimed almost exclusively at responding to the demands of urban planners, real estate agents, profiteers, and foreign stakeholders.²¹ The sense of urgency to refashion Berlin’s urban and built environment in accordance with these demands projected the image of a ‘city under construction’²²—a place where collective amnesia regarding the past’s atrocities was essential for daily survival.

The significance that Berlin took on in this new and industrious German state only magnified in 1961, as attempts to discourage emigration by Eastern authorities resulted in the construction of an anti-fascist protective rampart or Berlin Wall. This enclosure of the

¹⁷ See: Ladd, Brian, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Sites of survival were eventually used as mapping devices in the search for the precise location of war crimes.

¹⁹ Ward, Janet, ‘Sacralized Spaces and the Urban Remembrance of War.’ in Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber, Eds. *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 152.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jordan, Jennifer, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 23.

²² Till, 39.

East marked an important transition for the national capital. Once considered to be a ‘blank slate’²³ for developers, Berlin from this point forward was conceived in world-historical terms as the urban locale for a ‘divided memory’²⁴ between opposing global superpowers. Memorial cultures emerged in the intervening years that were by and large responsive to this geopolitical situation. As the two Berlins increasingly mirrored fluctuating ideological hostilities on the international scene, their national and cultural memory practices became impacted by the antipodes of an internal conflict.

Not surprisingly, the GDR’s memorial aesthetic was dominated by the tropes of Socialist Realism, incanted by heroic narratives and figurative motifs in which the ritual of hyperbolic instruction ultimately triumphed over preservation and dialogue.²⁵ With the socialist state’s calculated refusal to acknowledge particular victims of the war—going so far as to position such refusal as a defining feature of Communist universalism—its memorial culture came to be reflected in a spectacular and exuberant anti-fascism.²⁶

Though it has been mentioned previously in this chapter, the West German historians were deeply invested in recognizing victims through a larger *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a coming to terms with the past through sanctioned practices of interrogating the legacy of National Socialism.²⁷ Driven, it would seem, by popular demands for reparation and social justice, the Western variant of cultural memory engaged historical events with considerably more nuance and depth of perspective. Civil rights and leftist groups working in the FRG in the 1960s felt increasingly emboldened by

²³ Jordan, 28.

²⁴ See: Herf, Jeffrey. *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Jordan, 33.

²⁶ Though several important initiatives were launched in later years by authorities within the GDR, including the renovation of Neue Synagogue in the late 1980s, there was never any sustained institutional recognition of the fascist calamity experienced by its racialized victims.

²⁷ Jordan, 43.

the desire for a critical engagement of the nation's past. In fact, they did so in the interest of provoking larger changes in their society with minimal interference from the state.²⁸

Subtle though it may have been, the cultural memory of Berlin at this time became a conductor for the traumatic division of its urban life into East and West. To take apart this subtlety, I turn to examine Berlin's first counter-monumental project at the site of the former *Gestapo Gelände*, which eventually came to be known by the *Topography of Terror* exhibit that sits there today. I suggest that this particular site illustrates how the division of Berlin was a determining factor in the emerging memorial culture of this period. A careful examination of its emergence indeed challenges the assumption that a divided Berlin reflected two separate or discrete memorial cultures.



Figure 8: *Topography of Terror*, Berlin, Germany.

Located amid the ruins of the Gestapo Headquarters, the *Topography of Terror* exhibit predictably describes the onset of Nazi atrocity and its eventual downfall in a

²⁸ Till, 20.

linear fashion. The narrative wall in question is situated alongside the building's remaining subterranean torture chambers, moving westward on Niederkirchnerstraße from the Martin-Gropius-Bau, a celebrated hall from the nineteenth century, to Wilhelmstraße. Lodged between ruins and historical landmarks, the memorial function of this site at first appears to be reduced to a transparent interpretation of the events that hastened the destruction of Germany, and eventually, of fascism. But this function includes a further element, a remnant of the Berlin Wall, which acts like a frame for the exhibit from high above, displaying a subtle if persistent juxtaposition of another distinct period in the city's postwar history.

Ensnared in the fabled epicenter of Nazi power, the Gestapo Headquarters was known in its time as a gateway for the routine torture of political prisoners. Though many of the neighbouring structures had been destroyed in the war, the basement cells of the Gestapo building were rediscovered because of their fortuitous location underneath the Wall. It would thus appear that the very existence of the Wall resulted here in a spontaneous act of preservation. In a space once deemed 'geographically lost,'²⁹ I demonstrate how the former *Gestapo Gelände* now plays a crucial role in terms of providing us with knowledge of the divided city.

In 1978, a social movement formed around a citizen's demand to excavate the ruins of the Gestapo Headquarters on Western land. Though state-initiated plans were underway to refurbish the Martin-Gropius-Bau, other voices challenged any such development of the area. In fact it was around this time in 1981 that prominent members of the community joined these voices of discontent. Notably, the urban planner Dieter

²⁹ Young, 1994, 81.

Hoffman-Axthelm declared the terrain an ‘*Ungelände*’ or ‘antisite.’³⁰ His insistence was that the ruins should be left untouched as a future warning of the unspeakable crimes that occurred there. In 1982 a Senate Competition was announced with the aim of soliciting entries for a new memorial site near the Martin-Gropius-Bau. The competition was eventually abandoned following a disagreement over the winning design. However, this outcome emboldened a citizen’s group from the radical left to stage ‘illegal diggings’³¹ of the site as a way of guaranteeing its continued preservation. In what came to be known as the Active Museum, the group encouraged citizens of West Berlin to excavate, enjoining members to ‘dig where you stand.’³² The broader intention here was to transform the dig into a ‘permanently open site of investigation,’ and in doing so to return the land its former status as an ‘open wound.’³³ It would thus appear that by vigorously undoing the past, the act of digging on this particular site was considered by the diggers themselves to be a means of prying open the closed narratives that have long been associated with memorialization.

Now, the Active Museum’s anti-establishment actions only strengthened the demand by West Germany’s new social movements for ‘localized education’³⁴—a pedagogy that consciously set aside the national interest in favour of exploring issues and problems of a more immediate, if local concern. As Till explains, the social movements of this period insisted that postwar Germans begin to ‘work through the past self-critically at historic sites where particular events transpired.’³⁵ The pantomime of

³⁰ Till, 72.

³¹ Ibid., 96.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 89.

³⁵ Ibid., 90.

archeological practice through digging should therefore be considered exemplary of this cultural value. As such, given the complexity of its historical conditions, the *Topography of Terror* today represents a condensation of two distinct memorial types. On the one hand, it features a ‘site of admonishment’ (*Mahnmal*)³⁶ in which particular emotional responses are solicited in the face of certain evil. On the other hand, it represents a ‘historic site of the perpetrators’ (*Gedenkstätte*),³⁷ in which site-specific archives are consulted to provide factual knowledge for the purposes of education. The ‘ambiguous synthesis’³⁸ of these types allowed the exhibit to skillfully capture both emotional and intellectual content in relation to a particular site. This in turn gave individuals a chance to interrogate the traumatic memory of the place in relation to a collective silence in the years prior to its excavation.

A permanent exhibit opened in 2005 after years of disagreement and setbacks. In 1987, a temporary exhibit was prepared in advance of Berlin’s 750th anniversary with critical acclaim. As the political situation unfolded, however, the final design of the site was altered by efforts to protect a neighbouring remnant of the Berlin Wall, ostensibly in an effort to avoid ‘the precariousness of ignoring something.’³⁹ Historians like Georgina Webb-Dickin have suggested that this act of preservation happened simply because of the proximity of the wall itself. However, even if we accept that retaining the wall at this particular juncture was a ‘coincidence,’⁴⁰ I argue that it is nevertheless impertinent to

³⁶ Ibid., 88.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 103. This quotation is from Stephen Daniels.

³⁹ Webb-Dickin Georgina, ‘Topographies of Terror: Reading Remnants and Traces on the Gestapo Gelände.’ *HARTS & Minds: The Journal of Humanities and Arts*. 1:2 (2013): 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

adopt Webb-Dickin's further claim that preservation for its own sake 'is somewhat inadequate as a form of commemoration.'⁴¹

I argue that Berlin's memorial engineers demonstrated a cautiousness here that forever changed the collective memory of the former *Gestapo Gelände*. Juxtaposed with an iconic image of the divided city, the wall has unsettled the otherwise simplistic chronological narrative of the exhibit space. Its towering presence in effect forces visitors to rethink Berlin's communist past as both distinct from the period of fascism and yet strangely familiar. Risking the obliviousness of visitors regarding the difference of these histories only proves how crucial it is to investigate them in the present.

Above all, the included portion of the Berlin Wall raises another question in terms of how the exhibit acknowledges the experience of living in the divided city. Pairing images of the border is a reminder that circumstances today are directly anticipated by their pasts—and that such circumstances in turn become part of a greater sense of anticipation regarding the future. In that sense, at least, the curators of this site have abided to the mandate that was first suggested by the activists: to dig the soils for remainders of the past by exposing the uncertainty to come.

Histories of German counter-monuments tend to begin around 1980, from the period of their growing influence throughout the post-*Wende* era into the present day.⁴² Negative-form sculpture is often a point of reference in these conversations. Though a category of artmaking, it is often situated as an aesthetic practice that can be described as having the kind of memorial function I refer to above. However, competing perspectives have been voiced in discussions of the counter-monument's genealogy. Andreas

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See: Young, 1994; Young, 2002; Jordan, 2006.

Huyssen, for instance, has challenged the apparent uniqueness of this genealogy by situating the obsession of contemporary culture with ‘the negative’ directly alongside the history of the monument, implying that counter-monuments merely extend the former’s negative desire.

To substantiate his claim, Huyssen draws up a brief history of monumental art, and returns in particular to the apocalyptic varieties that were popular late in the nineteenth century. This particular genre of the monument suggests that all relationships with the past must ultimately lead to self-destruction. If the conventions of this genre include any criterion of redemption, therefore, it is one that can be resolved only by appeals to a revolution in the form of art, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁴³

Huyssen brings our attention to the continuation of nineteenth-century German aesthetics through motifs of negativity in the twentieth. My claim, however, is that Huyssen relies on the very same reciprocal exchange between destruction and creation to make his own point. In a way similar to Haacke’s *Germania* and Kiefer’s *Sternenfall*, Huyssen is himself obsessed by monumental ruination, and indeed his observations are useful in terms of providing a context for the actions of the Nazi state. His observations are less useful, however, when it comes to representing the desire of contemporary Germans to acknowledge the destructive potential of ideas from their past in a new aesthetic paradigm. Huyssen’s work is therefore unable to account for Ullman’s experiment with negative-form sculpture in *Bibliothek*, in which ruination itself is held in abeyance and destruction paused.

One of Huyssen’s main points of reference for this argument is Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s veiling of the German parliament building in 1995—*Wrapped*

⁴³ Huyssen, 1996, 186.

Reichstag. This stunning project brought international attention to a fraught symbol of German national culture, and it may have also contributed to hopes of celebrating a half-decade of reunification. Huyssen himself describes the veiling as ‘uncannily beautiful...its spatial monumentality both dissolved and accentuated by a lightness of being that was in stark contrast with the visual memory of the heavy-set, now veiled architecture.’⁴⁴ However, communicated as it was through repetition, as it were, I argue that Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *Wrapped Reichstag* is perhaps less useful for appreciating the kind of unsettling provocation that we might associate with a counter-monument.

To put it another way, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s veiling of the Reichstag represents a playful engagement with monumental aesthetics pure and simple. Through the veiling’s conspicuous presentation of ‘transitoriness,’ the work communicates this aesthetic together with an obdurate challenge to notions of permanence.⁴⁵ But this challenge is intrinsic to the aesthetics of the monument. The enveloping fabric is an awe-inspiring visualization that highlights ‘the temporality and historicity of built space, the tenuous relationship between remembering and forgetting.’⁴⁶ Yet by visualizing permanence as destruction, the wrapping also serves to restage the familiar features of German national identity by means of heroic, figurative, and sublime ruination.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 187.

⁴⁶ Ibid.



Figure 9: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1995. Berlin, Germany.

The ghostly demarcations of this work are indeed seductive. However, what the veiling ultimately spectralizes are the redemptive narratives of the nation's past, developed on the basis of a history in which the German national identity is inscribed into conditions that are superficially illustrated as unstable, uprooted, and cosmopolitan. As Huyssen confirms, the emphasis here is on transitory themes developed from conventions of the nineteenth century, in which total destruction was often paired and mitigated by regeneration. From this perspective, the ruin aesthetic that Christo and Jeanne-Claude approximate might be more accurately characterized as 'a monumentalism of destruction.'⁴⁷

Huyssen proceeds to further historicize images of destruction from the nineteenth-century by turning to the philosophical works of Wilhelm Wagner. These works are especially notable because of Wagner's spirited rejection of monuments. Now, Wagner's

⁴⁷ Ibid., 189.

aesthetic derives in large part from a search for the origins of modern times in a universe of myth. Yet the journey he makes toward this origin is one that predictably ends in a grand destruction of appearances. Indeed it is through acts of *total* destruction that Wagner faithfully reconstructs the groundwork for an image of ‘ruin before time itself.’⁴⁸ In this sense, the only solution to Wagner’s attempt at resolving modernity’s tensions is by means of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Huyssen’s historical argument repeats itself in the present. In fact similar motifs of destruction and creation have been compulsively represented in recent popular culture and media. One recent example is Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011). The plot of the movie is centered on news of a fatal meteor approaching the planet Earth. Lovers grow distant on the night of their ceremonial union as time slows and grinds to a halt. The Wagnerian score from *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) provides musical accompaniment for this narrative, which is eventually eclipsed by the onset of a total disaster. Compelling though this representation of disaster might be, I argue that the continuation of these motifs in the realm of popular culture is more or less distinct from trends within German memorial art in the contemporary period. Though the counter-monument relies upon narratives of destruction, I also insist that it abides to a sense of hesitation before the realization of disaster as such.

DESTRUCTION AND THE COUNTER-MONUMENT

I argue that an accurate genealogy of counter-monumental art requires a different conception of negative-form sculpture. For instance, I would point out that the negative in

⁴⁸ Ibid., 197.

sculpture has been used repeatedly in efforts to restage, to parallax and otherwise alter assumptions concerning the struggle between destruction and creation that I mentioned earlier. For example, the counter-monument for James E. Young is a structure that ‘redeems itself in its eventual self-destruction,’⁴⁹ showing little apparent difference from Huyssen’s analysis of the Wagnerian legacy, or, indeed, from the latter’s extension into popular culture. My argument, however, is that Young in particular places specific limits on this redemption. In my own estimation, the graphic representation of spatial emptiness—the formal presentation of the void—serves to challenge the redemption that can be accrued from the transitory.

On this basis, the counter-monument enjoins us to decide between the terms of redemption through destruction or through hesitation. For instance, Young suggests that postwar Germans of the second generation in particular shared an unequivocal ‘distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis,’⁵⁰ and therefore also ‘a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers.’⁵¹ If there were any sense of redemption in all this for Germany’s status as a wartime perpetrator, it would have to take place through the medium of a very specific distrust for signs of fascism. Indeed, self-destructive art made death much less monumental.

The distrust of fascism is nowhere more evident than in Esther Shalev-Gerz and Jochen Gerz’s *Monument Against Fascism* (1986-1993), which is located in Harburg-Hamburg and is considered to be the most prominent German counter-monument besides the *Topography of Terror*. Unveiled in 1986 in an unremarkable working-class residential district, this *gegenstandsmal* initially featured a phallic 12-metre structure of brutalist

⁴⁹ Young, 1994, 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Ibid.

design, coupled with a plaque inviting visitors to leave impressions upon its surface.⁵² Though the artist's suggestion was that visitors participate in marking up the structure, with the understanding that such activity would provide a forum for Nazi sympathizers, the Gerz's greater intention was to expose the hypocrisy of the convention whereby names are inscribed on the surface of monuments in a show of patriotism. This provocation, however, was only the most visible of them all.

Over a period of several years, the *Monument Against Fascism* began to disappear. It was lowered into the ground over several intervals, sinking completely below the surface in 1993. Today resembling a gravesite, the structure in its absence embodies a powerful refusal to comply with the expectations of collective mourning. Against the appropriation of faint longings for an imagined past as nourishment for projections of the future, the site merely offers a rote and utterly plain interlude with death. And yet while burying fascism is undoubtedly symbolic, I argue that remembering fascism in this manner requires a further shift in perspective in terms of how memory can become a mechanism for social change—a mechanism, I will argue, for imaginaries of the postnational.

A precedent for this site was made by Jochen Gerz's groundbreaking critique of the memorial museum at the former Dachau concentration camp.⁵³ In his exhibit *EXIT/Dachau* (1971), Gerz reveals that the museum participates in a curatorial imperative in which the museum itself represents the prison perhaps all too well. Young writes, 'Gerz was the first artist to critique the Holocaust memorial museum as a formal,

⁵² Young, 2002, 28.

⁵³ For a comprehensive interpretation of global memorial museums, see Williams, Paul, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2008).

if ironic extension of the authoritarian regime it would commemorate.⁵⁴ As for Gerz himself, the very concept of the memorial museum challenges a ‘sublime repression of the past,’⁵⁵ in which redemption from the past itself is the only solution.

Gerz’s work on the Dachau site is important to my study in a further sense because it clearly illustrates an elliptical narrative that later became canonical. As Young reiterates throughout his work, the counter-monument visualizes an epistemological crisis that makes it impossible to sustain narratives that are driven by causal connections—in which recollection, for example, precedes expiation or redemption.⁵⁶ *EXIT/Dachau* rather shows how counter-monuments have been made to ‘ethically represent the memory-act, [the] difficult attempt to know vicariously.’⁵⁷ Indeed, the very tribute to vicarious knowing alters the memorial site and its potential as one that ‘ceases to be testimony.’⁵⁸

Gerz’s early work also brings our attention to the question or questionability of site-specificity in a time when Berlin is overwrought with the palimpsests of urban ruins.⁵⁹ Young’s claim, however, is that site-specificity resulted from challenging the inherent modernism that conceives monuments and memorials as fundamentally different. According to Young, modernism insists upon a distinction between the psychic and emotional labour of remembrance and that of the ‘material objects, sculptures, and installations used to memorialize a person or thing.’⁶⁰ Counter-monuments, on the other

⁵⁴ Young, 1994, 124.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁶ See Young, 1994, 2, 10, 94; Young, 2002, 46.

⁵⁷ Young 1994, 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1. This quotation is from Alice Yeager Kaplan.

⁵⁹ See: Huyssen, Andreas, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Young, 2002, 4.

hand, derive from a ‘tension between site and memorial,’⁶¹ which then serves to alter the composition of space with the inclusion of affective voids at the sites of atrocity.



Figure 10: Horst Hoehsel, *Ashcroft Fountain*, Kassel, Germany.

This tension is further reflected in Horst Hoehsel’s *Ashcroft-Brunnendenkmal*, located in Kassel, Germany and unveiled in 1995. Hoehsel’s concept for the space adds another dimension to the counter-monument because it highlights the way that void space can be used strategically to interrupt the visitor’s experience. This particular use of void space has also been represented in Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin.⁶² Hoehsel’s project, however, has a more specific purpose. It was commissioned by the city in an effort to acknowledge a Jewish member of the business community, Mr. Sigmund Ashcroft, who in the 1890s became the exclusive donor for a centrally located fountain.⁶³ Built in 1908, the fountain was later destroyed by the Nazis during a reign of terror, in a period of destruction that was followed by the deportation of Kassel Jews into

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

⁶² See: Libeskind, Daniel, ‘Trauma,’ in Hornstein, Shelley, and Florence Jacobowitz, Eds., *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2002) 43-59.

⁶³ Young, 1994, 40-43. The fountain was designed by artist Karl Roth.

Polish and German concentration camps. It wasn't until the 1960s that the site's connection with the Ashcroft family became widely known, though even by that time and until Hoheisel's initiative, Young explains, the site was covered in soil and simply called 'Ashcroft's grave.'⁶⁴

Hoheisel's *Ashcroft-Brunnendenkmal* sinks the original design into the ground only to rebuild the structure 'as a hollow concrete form.'⁶⁵ The fountain lies flat along the surface while its depth is accentuated by the sound of water falling to the bottom of the structure. Through this presentation, the design appears to insist that visitors should vicariously witness the Ashcroft memory despite its represented absence. By an act of meticulous preservation, Hoheisel thus successfully visualizes empty space in a way that serves to challenge heroic interpretations, whether those of Ashcroft, the fountain, or the Nazi attempt to erase the presence of Jews from the city. Indeed, we as visitors are forced to remember but silently, and we are therefore confronted, as it were, by the absence of a body, a life, and its commemoration. The narrative subtleties that are present at this site might be criticized for over-intellectualizing the visitor experience, lacking as they do the kind of explanatory power that belongs to linear history. But these ambivalences are not only directed by the conventions of self-destructive art. They become crucial in a further sense through the negotiation between memorial space and the changing attitude among Germans toward their perpetrator past. Indeed as I have demonstrated, the counter-monument engages a specific mode of destruction that is utterly different from that explored by Huyssen and others. If the counter-monument destroys itself, it is never by means of the certainty associated with totalization.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 45.

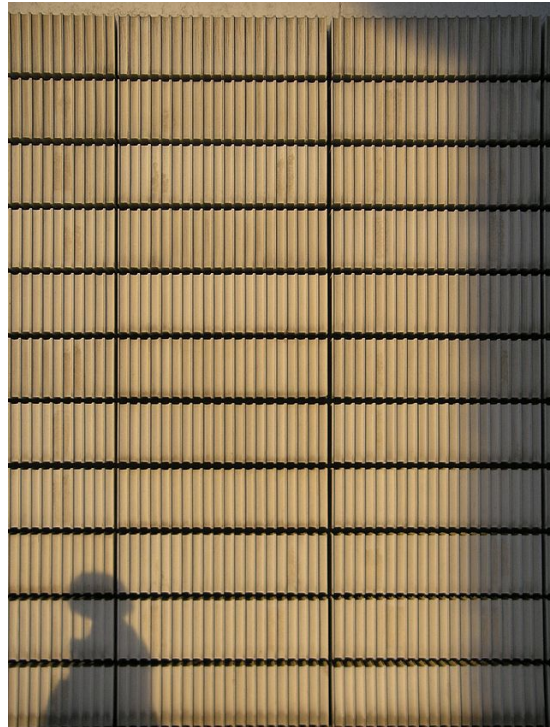


Figure 11: Rachel Whiteread, *Holocaust Memorial*, Vienna.

The escape from totalization has come to define the German counter-monument together with its established and yet ambivalent relationship to minimalism. As such, the effort to visualize this escape is not limited to structures that are found in Germany alone. Rachel Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* is a case in point. Unveiled in 2000 after years of controversy over the use of space in Vienna's Judenplatz, Whiteread has designed a memorial that may at first seem rather austere in comparison with its surroundings. This design carefully appropriates the specific conjuncture between Holocaust memory and the aesthetics of minimalism through a deceptive engagement with the negative. As Rebecca Comay suggests, for instance, Whiteread's contribution is stunningly uniform and therefore minimal, composed from 'evenly mounted rows of tightly stacked modules,

each containing the casts of twenty neatly aligned books, every book positioned with its spine turned inward, each nearly identical in height and thickness.⁶⁶

Now, if we follow Comay's argument, the very minimalism of the display is what foregrounds the imprint of absence as a central, but hidden, component of the work. It represents a bookcase in which the books themselves are turned inward, inviting associations about their status as inaccessible and unreadable. In this, the structure reveals a larger aim of Whiteread's to reconstruct 'an archive impenetrable in its own self-display.'⁶⁷ Indeed, the particular archive represented here embodies a forceful allegory of the impact Jews have made on Austrian history, and the continuing impact of the attempted destruction of Jews on the European collective imaginary. This specific function is even more explicitly reinforced by the presence of ruins from a medieval synagogue, which are situated beneath the structure.⁶⁸

The matter at hand then turns to the specific cosmology of absence that is referenced here by Whiteread's design. To be sure the structure enacts or performs a very deliberate escape from totalization, away from the dominant tropes of monumental art and its self-evidentiary modes of display. But it also propels us into a space where the absence itself must remain concealed. In other words, the revelation of absence in its absence is entirely conspicuous here. It might be useful, then, to attempt a further line of questioning about Whiteread's attempt to render the space of memory vulnerable, escaping totalization as she does by the gesture of an absence that remains concealed.

⁶⁶ Comay, Rebecca, 'Memory Block: Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust Memorial in Vienna,' Hornstein, Shelley, and Florence Jacobowitz, Eds., *Image and Remembrance*, 252.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

For Comay, Whiteread illustrates ‘the eerie presence of a medium which in its very obduracy and opacity evoked the persistence of a loss as intangible as it was insistent.’⁶⁹ The palimpsestic square in which the memorial is housed thus performs an intricate doubling or repetition, in which the Whiteread structure itself becomes accountable for the site-specific memory of the ruins for which it provides a home. As Comay writes, the deliberate librariness of Whiteread’s memorial serves to inscribe ‘the essential relapse of culture from a site of openness and emancipation to one of simultaneous exclusion and confinement.’⁷⁰ By inviting us to traverse history, as it were, the structure presents us with an absence that must be circumscribed, and later confronted, by its opposite. The presencing of absence and its impossibility for Comay is therefore ‘the essential obstacle which needs to be posited in order to be overcome.’⁷¹

Returning to Germany and specifically Ullman’s memorial in the Bebelplatz, we find similar attempts of using the void strategically as an essential obstacle to remembering. Ullman’s introduction to the German memorial scene began with his proposal for a ‘nonsculptural solution’⁷² at the site of the book burning, in a competition that was very much attentive to the locational turn within German cultural memory. Around the time of its unveiling, Ullman described the work as a memorial site composed of ‘a subterranean, hermetically sealed room in the middle of Bebelplatz.’⁷³ As with Whiteread it represents a library, but in this case the ‘walls are covered in shelves of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 254.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 258.

⁷¹ Ibid., 261.

⁷² Jordan, 103.

⁷³ Ibid., f23.

white-plastered concrete.’⁷⁴ Indeed, ‘twenty thousand books would fit here,’⁷⁵ had Ullman not emptied the shelves leaving only a pit for burning.

But even the act of burning the books—or, more specifically, the act of representing this act—is contained here by Ullman’s hesitation in the face of a premonition of genocidal violence. In this sense, Ullman’s metaphor of the fire clearly invites visitors to recall, remember, and interrogate the corpus of *die Deutsche Kultur* as it was measured by the Nazi fantasy of racial purity. But on another level it brings our attention to the onset of total destruction that later occurred in its name, and in doing so it makes a prescription regarding the future. I argue it is through this juxtaposition that the linear time of the monument gives way to forewarning, while absence itself remains concealed.

The vertigo of Ullman’s pit insists upon a response from its visitors in a way that serves to acknowledge the unfolded atrocity, and through it, the impossibility of recuperation. A visit to *Bibliothek* is thus deemed successful if the experience has confronted our readiness and capability to examine the insistence of ideas deemed unpopular, not to mention their untimely fate in the roaring fire. In this sense, the absence of books leaves an invisible remainder. They are, in effect, strangely emptied of matter, beyond ash, imprint, or record. For Ullman what is of utmost concern is less the mere fact of the emptiness as its magnitude. He explains, ‘Einstein formulated that energy is matter times the square of the speed of light, or the opposite—matter (books) in connection with

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

light (fire) is transformed into energy...Only the spirit of the books and the people remains; they meet each other in the heavens.’⁷⁶

Ullman’s mention of light and energy counters his visualization of a deepening and ‘more palpable’⁷⁷ emptiness with a sense of buoyancy. The emptiness that Ullman struggles to describe is contained in a hermeneutic operation that ‘begins with the void that exists in every pit and will not disappear.’⁷⁸ The void, in other words, is a presencing of containment that stages articulations of a desire to go beyond recuperation. For Ullman, therefore, emptiness is ‘a state, a situation formed by the sides of the pit: The deeper it is, the more sky there will be and the greater the void.’⁷⁹ But what can be the potential for this ever-deepening void if not that of reimagining the book, the archive and the title of its letter?

Perhaps more than any other, the *Bibliothek* memorial confronts its visitors with what Comay describes as ‘a frozen possibility,’ in the sense that ‘it exposes the very promise of transcendence as idealism.’⁸⁰ With the image of absence reflected upon the surface of a memorial that is ‘at once ceiling, floor, and window,’⁸¹ we are once again confronted by a demand for the impossible, for something new. According to Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* (1998), the materiality of the remainder thus poses ‘a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow...’⁸² In my conclusion of this chapter I examine how

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ ‘Creating the Underground Library,’ *Arts and Culture Resources for Yom Ha’shoah*, Web.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Comay, 261.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36.

counter-monuments have a tendency to pair an insistent presencing of the void together with such demands.

SCULPTURES OF DEPTH AND DEATH

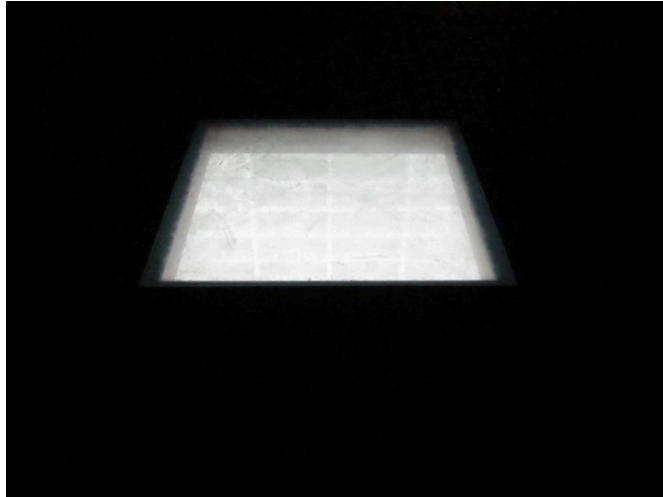


Figure 12: Micha Ullman, *Bibliothek* at night, Berlin, Germany.

The genealogy of this pairing might return us to Ullman's own investment in earthwork sculpture or 'land art' from the 1970s and 1980s, a movement to which he belongs. The particular aesthetic of this sculpture was initially focused on getting beyond conventional art forms. It garnered appeal for Ullman as someone who left agricultural school early on for a degree program at the Bezalel Academy in 1960. His subsequent teaching career took him throughout Israel but also to Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and eventually to Berlin. Indeed, Ullman's connection to Germany resulted in opportunities to participate in memorial projects, first in 1995 with *Bibliothek*, and later in works commissioned at the site of Berlin's former synagogue along Lindenstraße (*Nobody*,

1997), and near the Werra River (*Flood*, 1999). As a distinguished earthwork sculptor, Ullman has produced over 120 works throughout his 40-year career. Many of these appeared in a retrospective exhibit, 'Sands of Time: The Work of Micha Ullman,' at the Israel Museum Jerusalem, which was held in conjunction with being awarded the Israel Prize for Sculpture in 2009.

Pits have been an enduring feature of Ullman's work. In fact, he was drawn to them back in his earliest attempts at visualizing the politicization of land in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, thus using the pit strategically as a means of communicating 'themes of place and home, absence and emptiness.'⁸³ These themes reflect how an experience of loss, which is derived from the impossibility of cohabitation, is further reflected in the desire for balance and equanimity. In other words, negative-form sculpture is directly tied here to notions of the domicile or the dwelling and the search for enduring modes of cohabitation, if not also the relationship between human communities and the earth. To facilitate these relationships, Ullman turned to using hamra soils as his distinctive medium, which are native to the community near Tel Aviv in which he lives. By navigating the space between the private experience of space and those of ritual, community and memory culture, Ullman thus prioritizes the imperative to forge intimate connections with land that is shared, and with communicating longstanding objections to the treatment of Palestinians by the Israelis. In both instances, Ullman says, 'I am a frustrated farmer.'⁸⁴

Ullman's first major work is useful to briefly mention here because of the way it synthesizes the elements mentioned above. Unveiled in 1972 at the border of the shared

⁸³ 'Sands of Time: The Work of Micha Ullman,' *Israel Museum Jerusalem*, Web, 2011.

⁸⁴ Lando, Michal, 'Art that hints at the big questions,' *The Forward*, Web, 2009. This quotation is by Micha Ullman.

northern Palestinian and Israeli village of Meser/Metzer, this work is composed of ‘twin pits’⁸⁵ dug by Ullman in the respective communities, followed by a ritualistic sharing of their soil. This performance was an expression of Ullman’s opposition to Israel’s land grabs in the 1960s during the Six-Day-War. Ullman, however, was also fascinated by the cooperative relationship that was maintained by these communities, not to mention their unprecedented ability to strengthen ties both during and after the conflict. ‘In an attempt to unite in some way the warring places [elsewhere], Ullman dug a pit in each place and filled it with soil from the other. On the surface, almost nothing was visible.’⁸⁶ For, as if through an imperceptible sleight of hand, Ullman made an important and timely point about the potential to forge common ground between distinct communities. In this he sought to ‘touch meaningful energies in a site—not just forms, also in this case sociological/political tensions.’⁸⁷

This political expression becomes part and parcel of the formal conventions of the work, as per the famous definition of earthwork sculpture proposed by the art critic Rosalind Krauss as ‘historically bounded.’⁸⁸ In this, Krauss sought to emphasize the refusal of these forms to capitulate to historicisms that tend to erase the specificity of the works themselves. As such a refusal, earthwork sculpture according to Krauss becomes a viable way to mobilize challenges against the dehistoricizing force of the monument, together with their reputed autonomy, verticality and stability. Krauss, in other words, proposed that public art has recently acquired a new commemorative function, displaying

⁸⁵ ‘Micha Ullman,’ *Museum on the Seam: Socio-Political Contemporary Art Museum*, Web, 2009.

⁸⁶ Lando.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Krauss, 38.

a 'loss of place'⁸⁹ that is thoroughly immersed in the negative conditions of its own creation. Noting the reductive way that institutions tended to regard the earthwork phenomenon, that of being situated between the terms of 'architecture' and 'landscape,' Krauss proposes an alternate course in which the genealogy of the earthwork unfolds a system of much greater complexity.

For Eleanor Heartney, the resulting practice of 'site construction'⁹⁰ that Krauss initially proposed was indeed paradigmatic for the era of 'post minimalism, process art, anti-form and land art.'⁹¹ From this perspective, the (re)turn to the earthwork represents a shift that Dennis Oppenheim once described as having emerged from 'a very formal concern with sculpture,'⁹² and more specifically, from a critique of the monumental style that previously dominated the field. On the other hand, while these concerns are often located in the New York art scene of the period between 1960-1970,⁹³ it is rarely mentioned that their popularization also happened to coincide with the West German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and the resulting shift within aesthetics towards the counter-monument aesthetic. Indeed, the impact of land art on memorial culture is not very often investigated.⁹⁴ As such, I propose to briefly examine some early examples of earthworks, using *Bibliothek* in particular as a comparison.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁹¹ Heartney, Eleanor, 'Beyond Boundaries,' Mary Miss and Daniel Abramson, Eds., *Mary Miss* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 9.

⁹² Smithson, Robert, *The Collected Writings*, Ed. Jack Flam. (University of California Press, 1996), 177. This quotation is from Michael Heizer.

⁹³ This scene include artists such as Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Walter De Maria, Robert Irwin, Sol LeWitt, and Bruce Nauman.

⁹⁴ Although such investigations can be found. See: Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory* (Vintage, 1996).

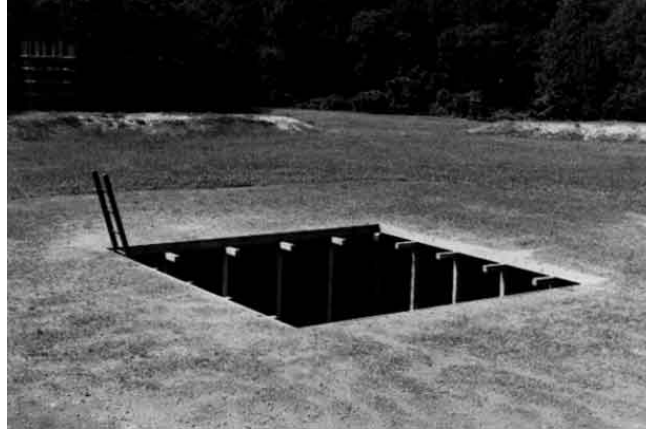


Figure 13: Mary Miss, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, 1977-78, Roslyn, New York.

For instance, Ullman's specific dedication to exploring the relation between public and private spheres in conjunction with the visual motifs of absence and emptiness can be illuminated by returning to one of the most groundbreaking works in the genre of earthworks sculpture. *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (1977-78) by Mary Miss greatly influenced Krauss and a generation of artists who are affiliated with this particular movement. Built at the Nassau County Museum in Roslyn, New York, Miss describes the work as an experience of unfolding discovery. She writes:

Passing through the opening between the earth mounds, a large square hole in the ground with a protruding ladder becomes visible. Upon descending the ladder, a large courtyard is revealed. A wall set back from the opening surrounds the court with a door in each side. Behind that wall is a passage that circles the courtyard. In the innermost wall of the passage, slotlike windows look into a dark void of

undetermined size, undermining the viewer's presumption that the ground they have just walked across was solid.⁹⁵

As this description shows, Miss's work illustrates the impossibility of catering to conventions of interpretation that guarantee the autonomy of the work, as well as that of using aesthetic strategies that I would suggest are similar to Ullman's despite differences between the two. For both, the earth pit acts like a kind of lever, facilitating 'breathing space, human scale, [and] first hand experience.'⁹⁶ The *Perimeters* site, on the other hand, invites visitors into a scene of encounter first with the latter, and ultimately to become a participant in the environment of the pit. The subject's descent into the earthwork is a key element of this investigation because it serves to acknowledge Miss's foremost desire 'to make intimate spaces within the public domain.'⁹⁷ This desire does not coincide with Ullman's. That is, though *Bibliothek* emphasizes the desire for intimacy as in *Perimeters*, this desire is communicated almost exclusively by means of erasure and prohibition. Access to the pit in *Bibliothek* is not allowed, sealed as it is from the top and at every corner. Even the interior of the space is obscured by the light of day. For, *Bibliothek* enacts a theatre of prevention that is crucial in this frame, and, indeed, the primary reason for such prevention, I would argue, is because of the specific memorial function that the site enacts.

Robert Smithson's written work is useful to briefly mention here because it vividly attests to these subtle differences. For, beyond approaching questions of the public sphere directly, as Miss and Ullman do in their individual ways, Smithson himself sought to articulate a fluid relationship between the earth and private experience. For

⁹⁵ Miss, Mary, 'Outdoor Projects,' Mary Miss and Daniel Abramson, Eds., *Mary Miss*, 95.

⁹⁶ Heartney, 'Beyond Boundaries,' 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Smithson, this particular relationship is derived from attempts to visualize the mute and inanimate world behind appearances, and therefore to establish individual relationships with natural space. It has often been noted that Smithson's descriptions of privacy were achieved through a process of disentangling sites (or nonsites) from the striations of myth, geology and the technologies of recording. Exquisitely manifested in some of Smithson's greatest works including *Spiral Jetty* (1970), we find here a specific relation to destruction that is not present in Miss's work, but which is clearly taken up in Ullman's. This relation is one in which the act of 'construction takes on the look of destruction.'⁹⁸ In fact, the dynamic relation between the two shows that expressions of intimacy can be situated here as a desired outcome, but only through established connections with its opposite term.

Erosion, resurfacing and destruction mark the syllogistic interplay between the natural and social life in Smithson's work as in Michael Heizer's *Two-Stage Liner Buried in Earth and Snow* (1967).⁹⁹ This particular work is composed of an earth pit of roughly equal size as *Bibliothek*. It represents the first in a series of land art productions that Heizer collectively entitled *North, East, South, West*, in which Euclidean shapes marked by depressions in the ground are situated as cardinal points. *North* and *South* were first installed in California's Sierra Nevada before the entire set was moved to a permanent collection in the state of New York. Together they materialize 'elemental vocabularies of form and gesture'¹⁰⁰ that are geometrically layered or distributed across a stretch of land. In the singular piece *Two-Stage Liner*, however, I suggest that construction and

⁹⁸ Smithson, 101.

⁹⁹ Boettger, Suzaan, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (University of California Press, 2004), 108.

¹⁰⁰ Goven, Michael, 'Michael Heizer: Long – term view,' *Dia Art Foundation*, Web, 1995-2014.

destruction are eminently visible in ways that are congruent with Ullman's design. Both Heizer and Ullman thus skillfully demonstrate an engagement with the groundless ground in a way that takes us beyond the infinite cycle of the death drive. In the conflict between death and life, as it were, these artists visualize a resistance to erasure itself.

Heizer's inspiration came from a longstanding desire to focus upon the earth's fragility through an explicit performance of the way its surface tends to be routinely disrupted, tampered and hollowed out, particularly in urban environments. This fragility is significant because, according to Heizer, 'the city gives the illusion that earth does not exist.'¹⁰¹ By returning the city to its elemental origins, manifesting such return visually by an illustration of the earth's depth, Heizer seeks to present his viewers with 'an alternative to the absolute city system.'¹⁰² Heizer more precisely aims to interrupt the smooth space that urban-centric narratives demand. In this he brings to light an important aspect of counter-monumental design that is taken up particularly strongly in Ullman's *Bibliothek*. By a similar process of interruption, in other words, Heizer draws our attention to the site of conflict between the urban environment and the memory that is subsumed beneath the surface. In doing so he draws further attention the disruptive potential of returning the visible remainders of memory *back* to the surface.

Counter-monuments have been instrumental for attempts at broadening the Holocaust memorial agenda into the broader field of public memory. As Young writes, traditional memorial spaces tend to 'ignore the essentially public dimension of their

¹⁰¹ Smithson, 102. This quotation is from Michael Heizer. Incidentally, plans were underway in 1998 to build an underground parking lot just below the Bebelplatz (Jordan, 98). Ullman reportedly protested by suggesting that such plans would impact negatively upon the site's authenticity. Support from Berliners convinced the developers of the lot to include site preservation in their mandate.

¹⁰² Ibid.

performance, remaining either aestheticist or piously historical.’¹⁰³ In fact, Young appears to raise this point again in an earlier conversation about the modes of temporality that are best exemplified by the memorial function of counter-monuments in general, which results, he writes, in ‘a commemoration of its essence as dislocated sign.’¹⁰⁴ Through the staging of particular aesthetic motifs from diverse resources, but particularly from the conjuncture between architecture and landscape, the counter-monument designs thus return to earthly themes through a reflection on demands that aim to harness future action.

PUBLIC ART, AFFECT, AND RECUPERATION

I want to conclude by asking about the impact these forms have made in terms of harnessing the negative for imaginaries of a postnational German public culture. I then question whether the resulting imaginary holds any potential for getting beyond the global imperatives that led Berlin to construct a memorial district in the first place. These issues are particularly crucial to explore in an effort to acclimatize with the sense of urgency behind making the practices of memory a distinctive feature of Berlin’s long acquired status as a ‘global city.’¹⁰⁵ Koepnick, for instance, has suggested that ‘Berlin city planners today explore images of locality and historicity in order to increase the city’s competitive advantages.’¹⁰⁶ Certainly, global capital and its circulation play an

¹⁰³ Young, 2002, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁵ See: Sassen, Saskia, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, (Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁶ Koepnick, 347.

important part in maintaining a memory district for this particular city. However, the ways in which it has altered the memory experience is an altogether different story.

Among others, Thomas Elsaesser suggests that Berlin's memorial landscape should be described above all in both an affective and implicative manner that accounts for the emerging influence of global capital but which does not circumscribe the bigger picture of how memory becomes factored into present-day concerns and processes. For Elsaesser, Berlin is 'a city of multiple temporalities and of diverse modalities: virtual and actual, divided and united, built and destroyed, repaired and rebuilt, living in a perpetual *mise en scene* of its own history, a history it both needs and fears, both invests and disowns.'¹⁰⁷

In other words, Elsaesser describes the memorial culture in Berlin as propelled less by the demands of global capital and equally by a sense of ambivalence regarding its past. This ambivalence has mobilized the desire to use memorial objects as a way of reflecting upon and constructing a future image of public space that, in turn, acknowledges the pressures of capital in the ways I have mentioned above. Establishing discursive relationships between the two has certainly been a preoccupation. As Young writes, the German counter-monuments unequivocally assert that 'the social function of art *is* its aesthetic performance.'¹⁰⁸ Andrew Benjamin follows this claim by writing that, as a subset of architecture, contemporary memorialization has become implicated in 'the complex and cosmopolitan nature of the public.'¹⁰⁹ Benjamin writes that 'neither the public let alone public architecture can be defined in ways that conflate or identify the

¹⁰⁷ Elsaesser, Thomas, 'Sonnen-Insulaner: On a Berlin Island of Memory,' in Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner and Andrew Webber (eds.). *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37.

¹⁰⁸ Young, 2002, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, Andrew, *Writing Art and Architecture* (Re-press, 2010), 13.

public with an essentialist sense of national identity.¹¹⁰ In contradistinction to this aim, the public galvanizes elemental forces that create ‘a strong sense of disorder,’¹¹¹ but particularly where identitarian concerns define the terms of the debate. In fact, I would argue that this disorder also provides some answers in terms of desiring to remember.

The counter-monument itself is intrinsically public owing to its confrontational stance towards its own facticity as an object. Beyond the prophylactic effect of remembering, the counter-monument takes us ‘into’ memory by means of forcing. As objects, memorials confuse the boundaries between inside and outside in a way that constantly throws into question the very existence of the public itself. Pits, indeed, are the residual element of this confusion. In other words, when memorials engage with the outside by means of the pit, they draw less from metaphors of ascendancy and verticality as from those of sinking. Benjamin’s work is a prime example in this regard because it aims to show that sinking, like forcing, takes shape as it were by ‘working from the outside in,’¹¹² and thus by questioning the stabilizations and reinforcements of their equilibrium.

By understanding the public as a dynamic and complex force in contemporary culture, we might also consider the potential held by memorial art in terms of further developing a theory of private experience. Recalling Smithson’s earlier comments in relation to those by Elsaesser, I want to suggest that the memorial function in art hardly appeals to the construction of a public sphere, but that it is rather composed above all from private and individual concerns. Elsaesser’s claim is a direct challenge to the melancholic reimaginings of Pierre Nora’s otherwise groundbreaking work on *les lieux*

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹ Elsaesser, 37.

¹¹² Benjamin, 13.

des mémoire, in which the functioning of societal relations is what prevents access to collective forms of remembering in the first place.¹¹³

Elsaesser proposes a more productive alternative whereby memory and its excrescent forms come together to produce *île de mémoire*—‘memory islands.’¹¹⁴ This concept is useful because it draws the melancholic and individual realm toward ‘a certain extraterritoriality...[toward] an element of the private and personal rather than common or communal.’¹¹⁵ By doing so, the private realm as Elsaesser describes turns to rituals of remembrance in which the individual is brought to a place of speculation, a place that by definition goes beyond the obdurate themes of grief and loss.

Elsaesser’s strategic use of the *île* is especially pertinent to my discussion because it focuses on the spatial dimension of site-specific remembrance, defining ‘space’ in its broadest terms as encompassing the natural, cultural, and spiritual realms. Each of these realms goes ‘in’ and ‘beyond’ the determinations of physical space or extension. In other words, a holistic combination draws from memorial topographies that ‘remind us of the permanence of geographical formations, as they absorb both the *longue durée* of history and the short memory of human generations, gathering energy and entropy around built spaces, even when in ruins or apparently built.’¹¹⁶

This description of Elsaesser’s accords with Young’s insistence that counter-monuments by and large ‘suggest themselves as indigenous, even geological outcroppings in a national landscape.’¹¹⁷ He writes, ‘such idealized memory grows as

¹¹³ Nora, Pierre, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’ *Representations* 26, 1984, 7-25.

¹¹⁴ Elsaesser, 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁷ Young, 2002, 2.

natural to the eye as the landscape in which it stands.’¹¹⁸ Even counter-memory, therefore, is susceptible to forgetting.

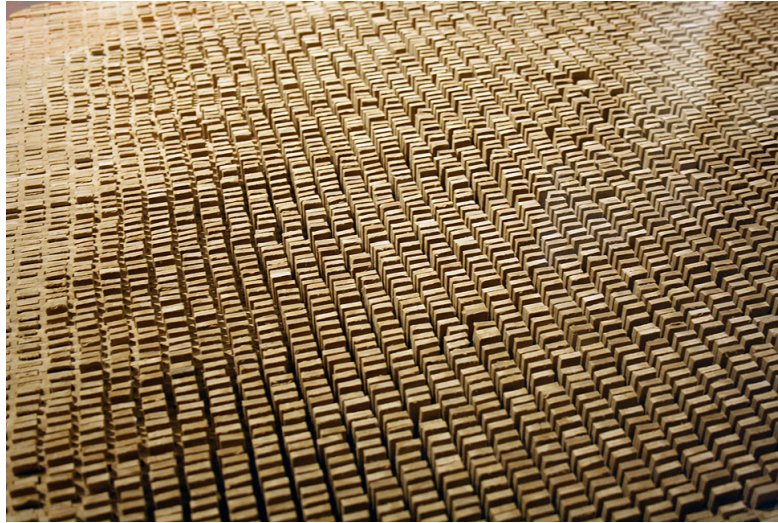


Figure 14: Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra, *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (original design), Berlin, Germany.

Finally, Peter Eisenman’s *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* has been widely regarded as one such geological outcropping, boasting an architectural design composed from 2,711 columns that are grouped in austere formation across unstable ground. For some of Eisenman’s abiding critics, including Young, the memorial represents a divergence from the aesthetic norm in postwall Berlin. In other words, recalling Huyssen’s capitulation of total destruction, the site embodies the regressive assertion of a monumentalism that has successfully internalized the postnational aspirations of cosmopolitan Europe. Distinguished by its breathtaking expansion across a city block in the center of town, the Eisenman site appears to reject the insistence of

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

counter-monumental design, to represent material absence in conjunction with site specificity.

As Young explains, the location of Eisenman's *Holocaust Memorial*¹¹⁹ was the subject of a decade-long contestation that was eventually resolved by a decision to locate the work on the most available public land.¹²⁰ For Koepnick, the pragmatism of this decision further validates the vulnerability of Berlin as to the facilitation of 'highly choreographed environments enhancing local prestige and gratifying desires for historical continuity, livability and territorialization.'¹²¹ Present-day Berlin represents a sacralization of ground that in some cases lacks the historical significance or affective meaning that counter-monuments strive to create. Sacralization, then, results in a particular kind of memorial expression that drives at the heart of what should be involved when it comes to remembering traumatic pasts in the heat of the contemporary moment.

For Young, the design of Eisenman's site is plainly ostentatious, derived from a modernist architecture in which recuperation and amnesia are clearly enforced. Young's observation of this enforcement stems from the collaboration between Eisenman and the artist Richard Serra to design the site, which ended abruptly when Serra took issue with directives to scale down and modify his artistic vision.¹²² The conflict between them reveals a polarity between art and architecture as competing traditions in memorial art, and it therefore provides significant clues about a larger problematic within Berlin's memorial culture, in which the counter-monument has become acclimatized. Young writes:

¹¹⁹ This name is used interchangeably.

¹²⁰ Young, 2002, 208.

¹²¹ Koepnick, 347.

¹²² Young, 2002, 209. The image above represents Serra's original design.

Where contemporary art invites viewers and critics to contemplate its own materiality, or its relationship to other works before and after itself, the aim of memorials is not to call attention to their own presence so much as to past events *because* they are no longer present.¹²³

In other words, Young's demand for greater attention to the subtlety of time in relation to the visualization of absence is missing in the *Holocaust Memorial* because of Eisenmann's exclusively architectural vision, but particularly because of his obsession with the *ground*. For Adrian Parr, on the other hand, this debt to architectural form represents an innovation of memorial space. Above all, because Parr claims that architecture is subject to a field of intensities, the *Holocaust Memorial* according to her analysis will be less implicated in the history of conflict that preceded its construction. To that end, Parr's recent effort to disentangle the uncertain terrain of time, landscape, and the architecture of grief in Berlin, is premised on the notion that memorial culture should include efforts to disrupt its long held association with traumatic events and experience. The memory of such events should not be prevented, she claims, but should be approached in ways that are sensitive to the production of narratives that foreclose or conceal the libidinal economy that contains them. By acknowledging the source of energy or movement that drives traumatic memory in the first instance, Parr insists that memorial aesthetics should provide an opportunity in which to reconnect the practices of memory with those of social change.

Parr's more specific claim is that Berlin's memorial landscape expresses the force

¹²³ Ibid., 12.

of ‘an intensive topography.’¹²⁴ In other words, because Eisenman’s *Holocaust Memorial* represents a *groundless* architecture for Parr, she defines cultural memory in the same gesture as a movement of internal differentiation that lies beneath the territorial and excrescent forms of memorial space. She thus situates the design initiatives for these spaces within a presentist ontology whereby the traumatic memory is understood as providing virtual content for the imagination. In this sense, Parr distinguishes her claims from Kenneth Foote’s typology of landscape, as that which oscillates between functions of ‘sanctification’ and ‘rectification,’ or that of Bernard Tschumi’s description of architectural design as providing a condition for the articulation of spaces and events.¹²⁵

Though Parr’s characterization of topography goes beyond the limits of objective physical space, it is used in this frame to disrupt assumptions regarding the significance of ‘shadowed ground’¹²⁶ in regard to memorial expression. Intensities precede the objective space, Parr writes, because they express imaginative potential, in other words, ‘a becoming-milieu in unpredictable depth.’¹²⁷ Materialized in Eisenman’s askew grid, the distribution of columns unfolds a *spatium*, in which the potential for something new becomes imperceptibly certain during the course of engaging with the site, usually by walking down the pathways of the grid. In this sense, Parr maintains that Eisenman has accounted for a measure of unpredictability that effaces its own criteria of measurement.

Parr’s insights are provocative because they appear to go against the grain of conventional interpretations regarding the meaning and significance of these memorials. The Eisenman site, for instance, is one that is often described closer to Young’s

¹²⁴ Parr, Adrian, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 158.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

interpretation as being continuous with funereal themes as an imprint of the sublime. As Karen Wilson Baptist writes, ‘the sublime traditionally contrasts the beautiful; it is associated with the unrepresentable, a masculine monumental scale, which is beyond human comprehension.’¹²⁸ For Baptist, the *Holocaust Memorial* affords an experience that is ‘deliberately disorienting,’ as ‘the banality of form and lack of material reflectivity bury the visitor in shades of grey. One could lose all sense of self within the disordered blocks,’ Baptist writes. ‘I imagine it feels like death.’¹²⁹

Parr’s attempt to connect a philosophy of intensities derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze is thus a highly provocative gesture that is aimed precisely at challenging interpretations of the memorial with death, which the counter-monument has all too readily inherited. Through engagement with established conversations regarding Berlin’s memory problems, however, Parr asserts that ‘memorial culture is utopian memory thinking.’¹³⁰ Memorialization, in other words, according to Parr, ‘compels us to think the break utopia announces,’¹³¹ and it thereby restores to sites of memory the potential to issue a specific ‘demand.’¹³² Parr’s aim is therefore to re-establish the association of memorial culture with efforts to facilitate productive social change with that of life itself. An important aspect of this project is Parr’s own demand for us to recognize the libidinal economy of the traumatic event, while further recognizing the specificity of their desire for a world that moves beyond or beneath its perpetuation.

Parr’s forceful entry into the debates of memorial culture encourages us to reassess the counter-monument some twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

¹²⁸ Baptist, 77-8

¹²⁹ Baptist, 78.

¹³⁰ Parr, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Parr helps us to ask whether these sites continue to express or frame intensities that lie hidden beneath the built environment as depths of unpredictable measure, or whether they have exchanged their engagement with the political for a strategy of obfuscation or spectacle. On the basis of Parr's claims, I argue that we need to investigate the means by which something new can be devised from the very situated histories that counter-monuments reacted against. These include the discourse of fascism and the rise of Communism, the postwar renewal project, and the ongoing attempt at revisioning, or reimagining, Berlin's urban palimpsest.

It may indeed be time to consider the rearticulation of Germany's memorial culture amid changing political circumstances. The premise for my investigation has been that post-*Wende* Germany has come to pass in an era of profound uncertainty. The legacy of those jubilant celebrations of Western dominance in 1989 appears to have been defined retrospectively by a punishing fiscal emergency at home, and conflict abroad. I therefore challenge the notion that memorials are no longer significant for articulations of the political in light of new geopolitical pressures. In fact, the changing circumstances around the world have created unrelenting demands on all forms of cultural expression, particularly memorialization, both in terms of the accountability and continued legitimacy of such expression. How, then, does the memorial culture in Germany interact with the social, economic, political and affective conditions of austerity (or post-austerity) in the present? Does the counter-monument still represent and indeed resist the past with the same force of intention?

Karen Till has addressed some of these questions by reflecting upon the situation in which *die Wende* first arose in Germany, suggesting that there are in fact two separate

meanings of the term. The first, she writes, refers concretely to the election of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under Helmut Kohl in the 1980s, and the subsequent West German initiative for European integration that in many ways came to define his long tenure as Chancellor.¹³³ The second, she continues, has a more speculative meaning that refers to the exquisitely crafted image of democratic action that has become retrospectively associated with German reunification, and which arguably persists in debates around the future of the European Union in the present day. This distinction is pertinent for my own argument because the meaning of the latter appears to be directly inspired by the unique position that Germany found itself in 1990, once again symbolizing an important shift in the geopolitical world system.

Indeed, the engineers of West German cultural memory were not immune to alterations and new demands. They were, by and large, enjoined to produce traditions of memory that were founded upon ideas of democratic action similar to their own, but in a way that further corresponded to images of a unified Germany triumphant over Communism. The dominant perception is that German memory culture has yielded to polyvocal demands that were long established in the former West. I argue, on the other hand, that German memory culture became something entirely different after 1990. Though it did represent a continuation of debates originating in the West concerning matters of ‘belonging and citizenship,’¹³⁴ the triumphant attitude that is often associated with the West German perspective underwent its own changes, which in turn have been reflected in the aesthetics of the memorials.

I argue that cultural memory in the surviving city did not mirror the Western

¹³³ Till, 20. See also Young 1994, 186.

¹³⁴ Till, 20.

variant as perfectly as it may at first appear. Most notable in this regard are the concerted efforts that were made to preserve the Communist past in the formerly Eastern districts of Berlin and throughout East Germany. Structures depicting heroic antifascist imagery were ‘abandoned, but not removed,’¹³⁵ thus marking a strange coincidence between German political history and the grammar of authenticity that by this time had become a defining feature of memorialization the world over. Jordan reminds us, however, that ‘authenticity does not guarantee memorialization,’¹³⁶ as the development of these sites must always negotiate with issues of ‘land use, landownership, the resonance of the site’s meaning with a broader (often international) public,’¹³⁷ and other factors. On the other hand, despite these ongoing setbacks and negotiations, a resistance to leveling the past has gained considerable footholds, even in fields like architecture and urban planning that were so resistant to these changes in the past.¹³⁸

Given the history of these developments and with an eye towards future memorialization, it might be useful to revisit a foundational question that James E. Young posed in 2002: ‘Under what aegis, whose rules, does a nation remember its own barbarity?’¹³⁹ Above all, I suggest that we should consider this question with sensitivity to the way that demands from the global economy have absorbed memory cultures. Understanding the way memorials can be positioned in response to such demands invariably puts the ongoing transformation of the West German narratives into further perspective. Whether through images of destruction or ruin, these particular narratives were determined from the outset by the logic of excavation, and by a cultural value in

¹³⁵ Jordan, 54.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁸ Ward, 48. This foothold is described at length in relation to the Architects Debate in 1993.

¹³⁹ Young, 2002, 7.

which the past exposed and overturned is preferable to the alternative in all cases. It may be significant to ask whether the strategic use of empty space and narrative eclipses in the counter-monument have been appropriated for another history, in which the model German citizen upholds the idealization of the postnational state as unquestionably democratic, pluralist, and prosperous (or capitalist). We may indeed have to question if the radical engagements with memory culture from the past have been compromised by the abiding relationship between counter-monuments and a German state that is once again regionally hegemonic.

Given their uneven reverberations in time and space, their reversals and overdetermined representations of failure, the counter-monuments of the future will have to be designed according to the given circumstances that once led to their urgent creation. Yet the designers of these future memorials may also have to articulate the content of their work differently given unforeseen conditions of possibility and erasure. Certainly, counter-monuments are unique in the way they mobilize collective affects together with a sense of mystery and foreboding. They were instrumental in the 1980s precisely because of the nascent if naïve desire they represented for rediscovery and exposure. Confronting the past in this way became an essential component of imagining a future beyond any measure. Counter-monuments thus drew attention to the perpetrator crimes of the Nazis at a time when exploring that history in Germany was unprecedented. That time has passed.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON BEING STUNNED: THE APORIAS OF COSMOPOLITAN UNIVERSALISM IN Yael BARTANA'S *MARY KOSZMARY (NIGHTMARES)*

Open it up. Make it more universal.

Yael Bartana

INTRODUCTION

Memory culture since the heyday of the German counter-monument has been showing signs of entering a more intensive 'cosmopolitan' phase. Above all, this phase, if we are to call it that, has acquired a newly speculative articulation in recent years, described by Erica Lehrer and Magdalena Waligórska as the consequence of a broad departure from the traditional memory practices of 'historiographic revision, heritage preservation work, and monument building.'² These theorists claim that European memory in particular has undergone significant alterations, becoming comparatively theatrical and interventionist, with stronger demands for public action and accountability in the political sphere. By operating under the rubric of 'memorial intervention,'³ these practices work in concert with a cultural imaginary that ostensibly challenges the predominance of national identities and the practices of exclusion that reinforce them. But this too is just one part of the story.

² Lehrer, Erica, and Magdalena Waligórska, 'Cur(at)ing History: New Genre Art Interventions and the Polish-Jewish Past,' *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 20:10 (2013): 2.

³ Ibid.

The motifs of performance and participation have entered the culture of memory through expressive and creative forms that illustrate a desire for even greater integration of the European community in the widest sense of the term, a desire that is reflected in Seyla Benhabib's concept of 'democratic iteration.'⁴ As Benhabib describes, such iteration amounts to a novel form of cosmopolitan action that is premised on returning to a universal and ostensibly democratic system of values, a return that challenges the perpetuation of epistemic claims that rely upon the nation-exclusion binary described above.

Focusing on the status of minorities in postnational European states—which may include immigrants, settlers, refugees, or the stateless—Benhabib's proposal for *another* cosmopolitanism aids in the development of *normative* frameworks. These frameworks come complete with guarantees for institutionally sanctioned responses to the injustices that result from the geopolitical conditions of the present day. As such, Lehrer and Waligórska's mention of a new cultural memory can be at least provisionally tied to Benhabib's proposal for judicial activism, especially in regard to the acknowledgement of demands for recognition by racialized minorities. The current chapter is an attempt to disentangle some of the issues that this conjuncture raises.

Before I move to substantiate this conjuncture in my examination of work by Yael Bartana, an internationally acclaimed video artist, I want to briefly describe what is implicit in this return to the cosmopolitan outlook. For instance, should this return be put in the service of a 'minor' cosmopolitanism, one that speaks from 'below' without the guarantees afforded by the traditional (colonial) or contemporary (capital) reinforcements? Without any doubt, the desire of returning in the first place is a symptom

⁴ Benhabib, Seyla, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

of the need to make sense of the relatively new but stunningly complex articulations of global interconnectedness, not to mention the ethical possibility that is contained by such articulations. The risk, however, is that by voicing such a desire for cosmopolitan action, these approaches will fall victim to the equally strong demand for flexibility and efficiency that are intrinsic to late capitalism. In fact, this quiescence may be contrary to the ideal of democratic iteration as Benhabib's use of the term might suggest.

Under less than ideal conditions, I argue that the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism should be explored once again but with a degree of caution, particularly if we consider that cosmopolitan attitudes in recent years have forged an intimate relationship between memorialization and capitalization. In fact, that is what I explored toward the end of my previous chapter. Beyond these observations, I note that for Rosi Braidotti and her collaborators in *After Cosmopolitanism*, the renewed interest in facilitating alternative genealogies of the cosmopolitan has resulted in 'an "exploded" concept,'⁵ one that boasts diverse, and, at times, contradictory criteria for its application. Though many competing perspectives and conceptual innovations have resulted from this explosion, we might agree that most of them are situated, or so Braidotti claims, 'between the universalistic, rationalist Neo-Kantian transcendental cosmopolitan models, on the one hand, and the multi-faceted, affective cosmopolitics of embodied subjectivities grounded in diversity and radical relationality, on the other.'⁶

My interest here is not to rehearse the genealogical debates that Braidotti has succinctly described in her book, but rather to examine how a transformative artistic practice has emerged between them to produce a focused, interventionist and theatrical

⁵ Braidotti, Rosi, Patrick Hanafin and Bolette B. Blaagaard, Eds., *After Cosmopolitanism* (Routledge, 2013) 3.

⁶ Ibid.

memory culture. In an effort to accomplish this task, a cornerstone of my discussion in this chapter is Bartana's celebrated video work, the *Polish Trilogy*, or what is otherwise known by the title *And Europe Will Be Stunned*.⁷ I will now turn to a brief description of that work.



Figure 15: Yael Bartana, *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, 2011.

An Israeli artist who resides in Berlin, Bartana premiered her renowned video project in its entirety at the Venice Biennale in 2011, following an invitation to represent Poland by its national Ministry of Culture. Illustrating the utopian life cycle of a fictitious political movement, the work is structured around a call for the return of prewar Jewish populations to the Polish lands on which so many met their fates during the Shoah. Under the auspices of the JRMiP—the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland—together with a cameo by the leftist intellectual Sławomir Sierakowski, its celebrated leader, Bartana

⁷ To be 'stunned' in Bartana's sense is to be 'amazed.' But according to psychoanalysis, amazement is something that is more akin to the immobilization that attends to traumatic experience.

creates a remarkably subtle presentation of what she envisions for Europe's cosmopolitan future. She illustrates a 'coming community,'⁸ to be sure, but one that is defined above all by the terms of a reparative immigration policy, a policy that is facilitated by an integrated and secure multicultural status quo.

I want to outline some of the main tendencies that emerge from this work's foundational idea. For one, I argue that Bartana visualizes the hopefulness of her cosmopolitan vision by engaging in a highly partisan effort to implement a Polish variant, one that arguably goes beyond the country's belated and haphazardly constructed multicultural culture. Bartana thus draws from all the force of the universal that the cosmopolitan affords to secure this visualization. By examining her work I seek to provide a comprehensive analysis about the appeal of European integration among political elites and democratic communities alike. Having said that, my analysis of the trilogy's first installment, *Mary Koszmary* (Nightmares, 2007), shows that Bartana herself reveals a sense of ambivalence that must be present in any such revision of cosmopolitanism. In the first instance, I argue that Bartana's work is intended to disrupt the longstanding assumption, explored in Chapters Three and Four, that Holocaust memory is central to such an idea. Indeed, the prospect of a Holocaustal 'last witness'⁹ in particular invites a sense of closure and imagination with uncertain potential of what the event will mean for generations who do not have a living memory of the event to depend upon. Poland is therefore central to any such reimagining of the European collective, and

⁸ See: Agamben, Giorgio, *The Coming Community*, Trans. Michael Hardt (University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁹ Lothe, Jakob, James Phelan and Susan Rubin Suleiman, Eds., *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future* (Ohio State University Press, 2012), 1.

in more recent years it has become irretrievably associated with the unconventional turn in memory culture that Lehrer and Waligórska describe.¹⁰

Bartana makes two oblique references to this turn: on the one hand by her steadfast reluctance to address matters of the Holocaust directly, and on the other by an effort to make the European Jew an enduring protagonist of her fiction. Bartana's entire project is thus premised on a rather incongruent pairing in which the returning Jew is deemed crucial for reconciling the past and articulating a new cosmopolitan vision of Europe beyond the confines of national exclusion. The risk in making such a bold statement, of course, is that Bartana's representational strategy once again turns the Jew into 'a generic symbol of displacement,'¹¹ which is problematic especially if we consider the broader discourse on Europe's racialized minorities. In fact, I argue below that the racialized minorities of contemporary Europe not only outnumber the Jews in Europe significantly, but they also do not enjoy the same level of prestige the Jews have acquired in recent decades.¹² The 'multidirectional memory' that I examined in Chapter Three should thus be modified here precisely to account for situations in which the memory of the Holocaust is structurally and historically foreign to the actual experience of racialized minorities in the present, however resonant that particular history may be. On this basis, what needs to be questioned here is what could possibly materialize by an act of shifting the rhetoric of universalism, away from Holocaust memory, and towards a more specifically demarcated anti-racist political activism. Does Bartana's work facilitate or hinder this shift?

¹⁰ Other artists explored by Lehrer and Waligórska include Rafał Betlejewski and Zuzanna Sikorska.

¹¹ Lehrer and Waligórska, 23.

¹² See: El-Tayeb, Fatima, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

A related suggestion I make in this chapter is that *Nightmares* visualizes an image of Poland that literally embodies cultural values that are associated with the ‘idea’ of Europe. The potential to realize such values has indeed been reiterated by the most vociferous and outspoken defenders of the European Union (EU). Poland’s well-documented enthusiasm for membership in the Union has been instructive for understanding the endurance of the latter despite the ongoing effects of the financial crisis.¹³ Situated at the territorial limits of the Union, Poland’s enthusiastic membership and its economic success is a notable contrast to the widening armed conflict further east in divided Ukraine. Sierakowski once argued that ‘instead of a bulwark separating east from west, Poland could become a bridge.’¹⁴ In fact, Poland’s ability to articulate a future image of Europe was perhaps strengthened by the first wave of the Ukrainian crisis. One of Bartana’s points, however, is not simply that Poland has acquired new responsibilities with its association to the European Union, but that its demonstrated ability to advance the cosmopolitan ideals of the Union is premised on a speculative value which is derived from its geopolitical location.

For instance, should we accept that Poland represents the imagined ‘border’¹⁵ of Europe as described by Étienne Balibar or by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson, we might consider a corresponding shift in our imaginary of this country as being paradoxically central for the European idea. According to Balibar, it is the very sites along the periphery that signify the spatial equivalent for a wider application of the

¹³ Sikorski, Radoslaw, ‘For Poland, European integration is not a crisis. It’s an inspiration,’ *The Guardian*, 2 June 2011.

¹⁴ Sierakowski, Sławomir, ‘Poland should reinvent itself as the bridge between east and west,’ *The Guardian*, 4 April 2011.

¹⁵ See Balibar, Étienne, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Translational Citizenship*. Trans. James Swenson (Princeton University Press, 2003). See also Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press 2013).

cosmopolitan idea, in which ‘a people is constituted through the creation of civic consciousness.’¹⁶ In this sense, Poland’s peripheral status in the east is crucial to advancing the cosmopolitan aspirations that Europe represents more generally.

Third, Bartana’s fecund engagement with parody and fictionalization is crucial for accessing the cosmopolitan in a way that recognizes the ambivalence of the concept within the European imaginary.¹⁷ The images that Bartana evokes in her videos inspire feats of displacement and foreclosure that serve to reflect the utopian and messianic content of the idea. Using a dreamworld composed of saturated images that rigorously comply with these narratives, Bartana reconstructs the elements of political engagement in a way that is both ‘deeply anachronistic’¹⁸ and utterly contemporary. And yet it is through this apparent reconstruction that Bartana implies the inevitable failure of the project, as dreams become nightmares.

Later I will demonstrate how the moment of failure that precedes such nightmarish conclusions is held in abeyance throughout Bartana’s trilogy, but in a way that vividly implies the nightmare in every frame. The opening scene of *Nightmares* is no exception, in which Sierakowski introduces the hegemonic appeal of the JRMiP with a resounding speech. In the pages that follow, my question for this subtle depiction of the nightmare and its messianic apprehension is whether or not Bartana’s visualization of political commitment signals the inevitable downfall of utopian aspirations, including that which is often associated with the European Union itself, or its opposite. In other words, I question whether Bartana’s work can be used to relocate Europe’s true potential for

¹⁶ Balibar, 2003, 2.

¹⁷ See Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1990). See also Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Groys, Boris. ‘Answering a Call,’ *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, 135.

conviviality in the radical conjuncture of a ‘minor’ solidarity, a solidarity that is conspicuously represented here by Poland and its insistence on the return of its Jews?

Though many issues can be raised here, my conclusion of this chapter focuses on the specific criteria for an enduringly cosmopolitan mission, pursuing a number of alternatives within the spectrum that Braidotti provides. In other words, between the post-Kantian and relational models of cosmopolitan action, I engage alternatives that seek to historicize the idea of Europeanness in order to make it further accountable to its founding ideas. If there is no such thing as a European *demos*, for instance, which is something the detractors of the European Union have repeatedly claimed, I argue that the prospect of expanding the Union, particularly in the East, yields immediate conflict with long established geopolitical enclosures that are mired in irreversible differences of political culture, ethnicity, and nation.¹⁹ Therefore Bartana’s response to these cleavages is timely.

PRIMARY JEWISHNESS

The release of Bartana’s trilogy has coincided with an explosion of popular interest in Polish-Jewish culture. In towns and villages throughout Poland, it is reported that Jewishness has been adopted ‘as a selling point, almost a badge of cool.’²⁰ The ‘badge of cool’ phenomenon mirrors another as described by Eric Santner in *Stranded*

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that resistance fighters in the Euromaiden never appeared to be bothered by the fact that the EU was founded by elites to achieve specific economic aims, or indeed that the EU’s association with the constitutional revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is plainly incorrect (Habermas, 2012, 30). The lure of cosmopolitanism erases these contradictions with a steadfast desire to neutralize long-established cultural differences.

²⁰ Vasager, Jeevan, and Julian Borger, ‘A Jewish Renaissance in Poland.’ *The Guardian*, 7 April 2011.

Objects, in which the Star of David at one point began circulating among postwall Germany's alternative youth.²¹ Bartana's dream for a reconciliation of Polish Jews is an interesting counterpoint here because it moves beyond the cool factor, as it were, to make a prescient remark about the status of multiculturalism in European society. However, we need to consider how this dream of Bartana's invites further associations concerning the obscure relationship of solidarity between Europe and its Jewish minority, or whatever it is that Europeans have projected onto their own imaginary of this group.



Figure 16: Yael Bartana, still from *Nightmares*, Video, 2007.

In actual fact, there have been campaigns within European countries to encourage immigration of (primarily Israeli) Jews. In Spain, the most prominent example, an amendment of the immigration law in 2014 allowed for the naturalization of descendants from the Sephardic minority who fled during the Inquisition.²² In Germany, on the other hand, the emigration of young progressives from Israel—most recently, former Israelis

²¹ Santner, Eric L., *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Cornell University Press, 1993), ix-xi.

²² Kassam, Ashifa, 'If Spain welcomes back its Jews, will its Muslims be next?' *The Guardian*, 24 February 2014.

who belong to LGBTQ communities fed up with the pinkwashing campaigns—is well established.²³ Given these circumstances, Bartana’s call for the return of Jews in *Nightmares* has an element of cultural authority. It therefore stands to reason that the controversy that has surrounded the work in the past did not originate in the call of the return itself, but perhaps in the histories that Bartana chose to frame the call. By drawing from a montage of highly symbolic imagery and from the conventions of propaganda film, Bartana has created a remarkable if stunning visualization that draws from European settler colonial narratives, diaspora nationalism, political Zionism, and Socialist Realism. Above all, however, this work demands a high degree of emotional labour, particularly from the Poles.

In *Nightmares*, Bartana draws from the interventionist motifs of the new memory culture referenced by Lehrer and Waligórska in an effort to bring further attention to the ‘Jewish absence in Poland.’²⁴ By dramatically revealing the Jew to be both present and absent in the European unconscious, Bartana forces together two distinct populations who are otherwise separated by generations of silence, and in doing so, she is able to acknowledge their potential as a future collective. From a statement written by Sierakowski together with Kinga Dunin, the JRMiP is spontaneously invented here amid the ruins of Warsaw’s Decennial Stadium, which is an abandoned tomb of forgotten tragedy for the Jews.²⁵ Sierakowski delivers a powerful speech that evokes the torment of losing Poland’s Jewish families to the wartime atrocity in particular. Yet in doing so he accords the Jews with an unprecedented responsibility, claiming that only by returning

²³ De Quetteville, Harry, ‘Israel’s anxiety as Jews prefer Germany.’ *The Telegraph*, 14 May 2008.

²⁴ Lehrer and Waligórska, 22.

²⁵ The Decennial Stadium (*Stadion Dziesięciolecia*) was used by the Nazi regime to round up Jews during the war. Later, in 1968, it became the site of Ryszard Siwiec’s self-immolation protest of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Therefore the site is historically significant for two reasons.

will Poland be able ‘to chase away the demons.’²⁶ Evoking the haunting allegorical figure of Rivka, disguised as an ornament of national suffering, Sierakowski insists that the Jewish return will finally allow her to rest.²⁷ He thus exclaims: ‘Return to Poland, to your country!’²⁸

In *Mur i Weiza* (*Wall and Tower*, 2009), the second installment of the *Polish Trilogy*, Bartana depicts the growing ranks of the JRMiP amid the soundtrack of a remarkably patriotic anthem. In this video, the group’s committed members have returned to the historic Jewish district of Muranów in Warsaw with the intention of building a kibbutz in the style proposed by early Zionist propaganda film. The third installment, *Zamach* (*Assassination*, 2011), features a public funeral service to commemorate Sierakowski following a successful attempt at his life, and includes eulogies from well-known Polish and Israeli intellectuals. A fourth, little known epilogue was then produced in 2012, in the form of a recording of the First Congress of the JRMiP which took place in Berlin. Featuring a mock town hall, the Congress invited participants, artists and academics to debate propositions for a constitution of the movement. In Chapter Six, I return to some of these propositions in an effort to grapple with the complexity of Bartana’s entanglements with ‘the Holocaust, Zionism, and anti-Semitism.’²⁹ For now I turn to Bartana’s singularization of the Jew as a catalyst for political transformation.

In fact, the primacy of the European Jew conceived as the conductor of a new universalism is undoubtedly a major theme in Bartana’s work. One important precedent for situating Jews in this light is the internationalization of Holocaust memory. As I

²⁶ Bartana, Yael, *Mary Koszmary*, Video, 2007.

²⁷ The Polish mythology around Rivka derives in part from the Biblical matriarch Rebekah, which is translated into the Hebrew רִבְקָה, which roughly means ‘to join.’

²⁸ Bartana, Yael, *Mary Koszmary*, Video, 2007.

²⁹ Lehrer and Waligórska, 22.

mentioned in Chapter Three, this shift resulted from debates over how to position the Holocaust within a postwar German historiography. Around 1986, leftist German historians in particular sought to define the violent memory against Jewish populations as epistemologically singular, thereby defending the representation of those events from a revisionism that would prefer to erase the magnitude of this violence. The exceptional status attributed to this moment of history has since become a sublime measure that selectively determines whether states have complied with universal codes for the protection of human rights. Indeed, as I further suggested in that chapter, and here quoting Benhabib, the persecution of Adolf Eichmann for crimes against the Jewish people was especially important because it marked ‘the beginning of the evolution of cosmopolitan norms.’³⁰

On the other hand, the apparent sublimity of the Nazi-led genocide does not give us a complete story about why European Jews are so intensely fetishized in the present day. In fact, the latter has come to obscure and overshadow the supreme authority that Holocaust memory enjoys. To illustrate my point, I will now examine one of the more recent and especially dramatic interpretations of Jewish tokenism that was on display in a 2013 exhibit at the Jewish Museum Berlin, called ‘The Whole Truth: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about the Jews.’ With an air of playfulness, the curator Michael Friedlander sought to dispel some of the myths that have come to surround the German-Jewish minority in particular, using references to the quotidian as part of a strategy to normalize the Jewish body, and therefore to emphasize the ordinariness of its religious and cultural practices.

³⁰ Benhabib, 2006, 20.

Now, despite its ordinariness, the exhibit garnered international attention for one particular aspect of its display. In a sensational exploitation of interpersonal dialogue, the exhibit prominently featured a ‘Jew in a box,’ in which volunteers from Berlin’s Jewish community were invited to sit behind a sheet of glass and field questions from passersby. For one commentator, the message here is that ‘you can’t be incognito as a Jew in Germany.’³¹ Identifying as Jewish frequently becomes the subject of conversation, and indeed the very facticity of a Jewish person in the midst of German society will guarantee prejudicial, but often favourable, treatment. Another reading of the exhibit is that it connects the ordinary Jew with the postwar history and memory of the Holocaust, situating the Jew in the very position of Eichmann during his trial, complete with the associated themes of interrogation and sequestering.³² With this particular image in mind, we might also consider whether the ‘Jew in a box’ represents the true evolution of cosmopolitan norms, especially considering the instrumental role that Benhabib, for instance, gives to the persecution of Eichmann.

Above all, ‘The Whole Truth’ seeks to avoid making the Jewish subject into a banal figure for cultural consumption. By interrogating the circumstances that lead this particular group to be fetishized, however, the challenge will be in isolating value systems that reinforce discrimination. Using a confrontational style, Friedlander makes the received caricatures of Jewish bodies both uncertain and worthy of suspicion. That is, by relinquishing the burden of representing world history, the Berliner Jew, at least, acquires a choice in terms of whether or not to refuse the mythic stature of their people. As a memorial intervention, therefore, the exhibit allows visitors to discover truths in

³¹ McGrane, Sally, ‘Ask a Jewish Person,’ *The New Yorker*, 5 April 2013.

³² Weinthal, Benjamin, ‘The Jew in a Box,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 4 April 2013.

which the reputed singularity of Jewish experience is brought to bear on its multiplicity and imperfections.³³

To put it another way, the rhetorical strategy that Bartana's work engages is diametrically opposed to Friedlander's but for similar ends. Granted, her visual strategy helps to emphasize the overdetermination of Jewish exposure, focusing in particular on its fetishism within Poland's tourism industry. On the other hand, Bartana appears to have much less interest than Friedlander in representing the Jew as ordinary. In fact, the cosmologies of interpersonal dialogue are entirely replaced here by careful and exquisite re-presentations of the Jew as world-historical.

In a turn that is perhaps more surreptitious than Friedlander's, Bartana's work expresses her desire for an inclusive, multicultural and cosmopolitan Europeaness that is far from ordinary. It may therefore be time to ask what Bartana's hyperbolic depiction of the Jew as *extraordinary* does to further the established conversations surrounding the future of postnational Europe. Indeed, this question is especially relevant if we acknowledge Jacqueline Rose's depiction of the *Polish Trilogy* as an attempt to visualize Europe's Jews as a 'return of the repressed.'³⁴ In other words, how can the dream for a new social order properly escape its nightmarish awakening?

RACIALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Bartana released her completed trilogy in 2011 at the tail end of a financial crisis that bore witness to an accelerated period of racialized discrimination throughout Europe.

³³ This attitude is very different from that of marginal groups like the *antideutsch*, who attempt to appropriate German anti-nationalism with a staunchly pro-American and pro-Israeli position.

³⁴ Rose, Jacqueline, 'History is a Nightmare,' *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, 140-145.

As I address in Chapter One, the spike in racially motivated crimes has been further provoked by alterations in patterns of migration. The prevalence of discrimination also corresponds with increasing demands from far-right movements to be normalized into political culture. In fact, given these circumstances, Bartana's work represents an important if controversial addition to a highly charged political climate. More important for the reception of this work, however, is the singular focus upon the Jew, as European Jews have been more or less extricated from the sort of discrimination that is perpetuated almost without question upon other minority groups. Though Jews remain highly visible in public conversations about racial tolerance, they are practically absent demographically, especially compared to minorities who are correspondingly present and erased from the larger European imaginary. Given these circumstances, we need to ask whether Bartana's work can respond adequately to such intense differences between competing experiences of marginalization.

In *European Others*, Fatima El-Tayeb offers some reasons for this radical disjunction without mentioning it explicitly. In any case, the logic of her argument suggests that the figure of the Jew is distinguished by the peculiar status it acquired during the postwar era, in which '1945' became the fictional anchor for an epistemic revival of the Enlightenment project. El-Tayeb explains that specific ideological and geopolitical strategies were the key motivation for this revival, as indeed 'the challenge and moral obligation that the postwar West thus faced was to recover and modify the Enlightenment project in a way that would reestablish it as the basis of an international

regime of universal human rights.³⁵ What El-Tayeb does not say, however, is that amid this capitulation, the Jew became the principal agent.

Although El-Tayeb does not mention it, a reference can be made here to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a symbol of the shift described above. During the course of securing human equality in Europe, the implementation of the UN mandate made it necessary to domesticate interstate relations by developing social institutions that were committed to *deracialization*. The more immediate purpose of this initiative, however, was to deescalate tensions among the former combatants of the war. The relationship between this official mandate and the realities it created on the ground are worth a second look. As El-Tayeb explains, the cultural legacies of these elite decisions resulted above all in a profoundly surreptitious variant of racism. The institutional protections led to a situation in which acknowledging discrimination was effectively disallowed, and in which systemic forms of racism were perpetuated in turn under the auspices of multiculturalism and tolerance. For El-Tayeb this created a unique situation, for as she writes, ‘the dialectic of memory and amnesia, in the shape of an easily activated archive of racial images whose presence is steadfastly denied, is fundamentally European.’³⁶

The *Polish Trilogy* lightly treads upon the erasure of traumatic relationships that sit between a utopian universalism and that of El-Tayeb’s repeated mention of the ‘native European population of color.’³⁷ Locked, as it were, between hyper-visibility and a resounding absence of recognition, the native minorities of Europe have adjusted

³⁵ El-Tayeb, 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxv.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29. See also Camp, Tina Marie, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (University of Michigan Press, 2005).

themselves to the perpetuation of an ‘internalist narrative,’³⁸ in which the potential to imagine forms of collective European identity with a focus on the minoritarian is all but denied. Given the tragedy of this misrecognition, it might be pertinent to ask who Bartana believes to be the ‘people’ of Europe that Sierakowski addresses. In other words, what needs to be questioned here is whether Bartana’s faith in the promise of a new and more inclusive Europe has any appeal for those whose belonging is contested if not rejected altogether. For El-Tayeb, such questions are often paired with material demands, as ‘lack of recognition within the nation...makes any effective claim to supranational rights difficult if not impossible.’³⁹ In fact, the ‘post-national dismantling of the welfare state in the name of Europeanness,’⁴⁰ as I also mention in Chapter One, does not tend to create solutions when it comes to making claims for the rights of citizenship. Europeanization thus reduces the ability of the state to provide support for those who seek to have their rights acknowledged in the public or legal domain.

The discourse of European universalism appears in this frame only to intensify the exclusion of subjects who are not only considered ethnically or culturally different, but of subjects who have acquired the permanent mark of such difference.

To illustrate the extent of the discrimination in this case, it might be useful to briefly examine the EU criteria of ‘free movement.’ This particular constitutional guarantee was introduced by member states in conjunction with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. The provision of free movement is now a cornerstone of the EU’s democratic initiative, aimed at loosening internal constraints within the borders of the common market, while strengthening (or rather policing) its borders on the outside. El-Tayeb

³⁸ El-Tayeb 21. This term is adapted from the work of Stuart Hall.

³⁹ El-Tayeb, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

makes the point that ‘free movement’ does not apply so easily to racialized minorities of the third, fourth, or fifth generations, the so-called ‘migrants’ whose mobility is already limited by their affiliation to the supposed ‘home countries’ for which many have no specific relation of belonging.

There are numerous examples of how established minoritarian subjects are treated in this manner. In the case of European Muslims, the demographic profiling of settlement areas has been ongoing for generations. The resulting Islamophobia is now widely regarded as a paradigm for racialized discrimination in contemporary Europe. In fact, many of the conversations that have emerged around this issue would suggest that Islamophobia has not only replaced anti-Semitism, but that it operates in a way that is more or less identical to it. Indeed, this claim has resonances with Hannah Arendt’s famous characterization of anti-Semitism as the basis for imperialism abroad.⁴¹

David Theo Goldberg gives readers a sense as to why Islamophobia has taken such a commanding role in recent years. He writes, ‘Islam is taken in the dominant European imaginary to represent a collection of lacks: of freedom; of a disposition of scientific inquiry; of civility and manners; of love of life; of human worth; of equal respect for women and gay people.’⁴² Commonly associated with pre-modern civilization, the general public may assume that followers of Islam are *a priori* hostile to the European value system, and thus to the desire for cosmopolitan society. The common assumption indeed is that such attitudes are at the root of political extremism. The debate in France over the wearing of religious symbols in public schools is just one example of

⁴¹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).

⁴² Goldberg, David Theo, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 165.

how European states tend to perpetuate this distinction.⁴³ But more examples could be drawn in light of the growing intolerance of cultural and religious groups whose facticity is beyond what is presumed to be the norm.

El-Tayeb historicizes Goldberg's claim further by arguing that 'the supposed contemporary Judeo-Christian affinity and alliance against the lethal threat of radical Islam is naturalized and implied to be traditionally present.'⁴⁴ I argue that further investigation into such ideological conflict between Jews and Muslims is important for situating Bartana's project. Paraphrasing Michael Rothberg,⁴⁵ I propose to move against the insistence of an exact correlation between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which is basis of Goldberg and El-Tayeb's respective arguments. I rather suggest that a plausible counter-argument would show that Jews have been defined for centuries as a population 'internal'⁴⁶ to Europe. In other words, the Jews were often conceived as an obligation for the state to manage, as in nineteenth-century France, for example, where Jews acquired rights from the state but only in their capacity as a segregated religious minority.⁴⁷

Muslims, on the other hand, have been situated rhetorically as 'external' to Europe at least since the days of Christendom, despite the intangibility of this claim. Beyond responsibility, the solution for dealing with Muslim populations has always been to exclude. Under these circumstances, it might be difficult for the racialized victims of Islamophobia to establish solidarity with the Jewish victims of anti-Semitism, and

⁴³ See Chapter One for a description of this debate.

⁴⁴ El-Tayeb, xxviii.

⁴⁵ See: Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁷ Rabinovitch, Simon, *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States* (Brandeis, 2012), xxxii. '[I]n France and the United States, two countries with republican self-perceptions, one generally sees an emphasis on the religious significance of the Jews as a people in the diaspora.'

therefore with the cosmopolitan vision of the JRMiP. Under the rubric of Islamophobia, it would be even less plausible to assume that racialized groups in Europe today would share any affinity with the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, or indeed with the way that its memory has been archived by forms of state.

I now want to examine the El-Tayeb commitment to the establishment of what she describes as ‘postethnic’⁴⁸ solidarities among diverse groups within contemporary continental Europe. These aims are advanced first by efforts to deescalate the moral panics surrounding immigration, emphasizing how such policies reinforce discrimination against European minoritarian subjects. The postethnic imaginary thus challenges ‘the European dogma of colorblindness by deconstructing processes of racialization *and* the ways in which these processes are made invisible.’⁴⁹ Along similar lines as the ‘creolization’ of postcolonial literatures that I mentioned in Chapter One,⁵⁰ El-Tayeb insists that we identify the figure of the migrant as problematic, and indeed that we start to challenge the widespread dependency of critical thought on the very notion of diaspora that maintains this category of subject.

Above all, El-Tayeb’s demand is for a diversification of diaspora literature, and to acknowledge how redistributions of the national state have neutralized the diasporic and its once laudable potential for social transformation. More specifically, the claim that El-Tayeb makes here is that Europeanization cements a particular notion of the diaspora that ‘perfectly matches the internalist narrative.’⁵¹ This notion, or, more specifically, this cultural practice, does not work in the interests of minoritarian subjects, because ‘it locks

⁴⁸ El-Tayeb, 144.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵⁰ See: Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-mei Shih, Eds., *The Creolization of Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011).

⁵¹ El-Tayeb, 51.

the migrant out of the nation and into the past.⁵² It therefore situates the ‘migrant’ in relation to a history that has by and large been erased. Given these observations, it may be time to get away from the nostalgia of place and genealogy that Ato Quayson, for instance, described as the essential criteria of a diasporic literature.⁵³

Challenging the layers of nostalgic longing for distant homelands, El-Tayeb calls for ‘border-crossing’⁵⁴ engagements in which links are nourished between diverse minoritarian subjects, precisely to acknowledge the peculiar dispersal and rootedness of racialized communities in the European demography. El-Tayeb writes that postethnic solidarities result from collective actions that are delivered primarily by means of art, composed of minoritarian demands to shift the circumstances of their ‘disidentification.’⁵⁵ Drawing from the work of José Esteban Muñoz, such disidentification articulates a position that is more than ‘hybrid’ in the traditional sense of the term, as proposed by writers like Homi Bhabha back in the 1990s.⁵⁶ Muñoz’s term contrasts with notions of hybridity because of its responsiveness to situations in which entire populations attempt to survive in the chronic absence of symbolic recognition.

In other words, Muñoz challenges the strategic essentialisms of the past to argue that disidentification signifies an agency that oscillates between the ‘fixed’ and ‘constituted definitions’⁵⁷ of a speaking subject. As Muñoz more clearly explains in the following sentences, this agency is conceived in ways that forge together ‘a point of contact between essential understandings of self...and socially constructed narratives of

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ Quayson, Ato, ‘Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary,’ in Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, Eds., *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 139-161.

⁵⁴ El-Tayeb, xxii.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68

⁵⁶ Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁷ Muñoz, José Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6.

self.’⁵⁸ To that end, the deployment of a ‘disidentification’ is something that accounts for the compulsory limitations that minoritarian subjects face in terms of securing legitimacy for their very existence in the public domain. Above all, minoritarian subjects are constituted here in the struggle *against* disidentification. Yet these very struggles are the ones that ultimately prove to be challenging in terms of fostering wider nets of solidarity.

The longing for distant homelands may not be useful or even meaningful given the present circumstances facing those who are both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ Europe simultaneously. El-Tayeb proposes an alternative thinking of diaspora that is aimed precisely at going ‘beyond the national paradigm.’⁵⁹ For this particular conjuncture, El-Tayeb isolates the lack of crossover between ‘black diaspora discourse and debates about the potential usefulness of the diaspora model in the European context.’⁶⁰ By shifting the emphasis away from the projections of a distant homeland towards the concrete experience of dislocation, El-Tayeb maintains that productive linkages should be made between diverse groups continually, and indeed that we should pursue these connections despite the inequality that may result from the disparities between them from the outset.

Delivered through expressive forms—such as poetry, music and television, among others—El-Tayeb describes the archive of practices that marginalized groups create in terms of their greater potential for articulations of ‘translocality,’⁶¹ in which the national state is once again challenged as a viable alternative. El-Tayeb writes that such articulations of the translocal are useful because they point ‘to commonalities that were not based on ethnic or national identifications or ascriptions, but rather on the common

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ El-Tayeb 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

effects of racialized economic exclusion.⁶² In this sense, alternatives are constructed here on the very basis of Europeanness for which these communities have no access or guarantee to enjoy.

Another way to describe these particular circumstances is to suggest that El-Tayeb introduces a point of impasse between the translocal solidarity network that she develops in her work, and the transnational repression machine that such conceptual work opposes. Paradoxically, El-Tayeb introduces a breaking point with substantial references to Édouard Glissant's theory of 'Relation.'⁶³ El-Tayeb's specific desire in using this text is indeed to return the concept of diaspora back to its rightful place at the forefront of conversations regarding minoritarian subjectivity, but in a way that more specifically acknowledges the circumstances I mentioned above.

'Relation,' in other words, means to mark or signify the process by which a diaspora network situates itself beyond national aspiration. That is, beyond the 'root identity'⁶⁴ that Glissant describes in another section of the work—a term that is practically allegorical for member states of the European Union—minoritarian identity represents 'a form of violence that challenges the generalizing universal.'⁶⁵ For Glissant, this violence is relational. In other words, 'relation identity' is composed of an ongoing process through which collectives are formed. It adheres to a nomadic criterion of belonging that is 'linked not to the creation of a world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contact among cultures.'⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 144.

Glissant's description of the 'contradictory experience of contact' has forceful resonances with the palpable tension that appears in Bartana's work, and specifically in Sierakowski's call for the return of the Jewish diaspora, on the premise of building wider solidarities. Does this contradiction bring with it the possibility for recovering the past in a way that opens up the national culture to a substantial diversification? As Sierakowski insists, the minoritarian collective should return but with the stipulation that by recuperating and exonerating the complicities of the past, it further grant the potential for an entirely novel articulation of the social in due course. The desire for such articulations may be particularly strong in the conjunctures that are highlighted by the community of Jews with historical links to Poland. As Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir write on this point:

A dead end has been reached in both Poland and Israel, and this is where the Pole and the Jew may meet: exiting the dead end—exiting the cleansing regime—exiting the privatized, corporatized world; reviving a collective project and returning—to Poland, to Palestine, to anywhere from which people have been expelled.⁶⁷

THE INSISTENCE OF NATIONAL BELONGING

Jacqueline Rose writes that 'the call for return strikes...at the heart of Polish-Jewish history,'⁶⁸ which may lead to speculation as to how the process of reviewing such a history can become a factor in terms of exiting its dead end. Bartana's work responds to

⁶⁷ Azoulay, Ariella and Adi Ophir, 'This is Not a Call to the Dead,' *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, 149.

⁶⁸ Rose, 2012, 141.

this speculation first by recuperating a period in which the Ashkenazi began to settle in the Eastern parts of Europe. By piecing together connections between this forgotten past and the contemporary moment, the evidence of cooperation makes it increasingly clear that Jews and Poles were crucial in the slow process of constructing a national imaginary. Bartana's attempt to build a narrative that is premised on intergenerational mutuality is motivated further by her desire to situate Poland as a distant homeland, in other words, to become a place in which to strive for an impossible return. She says, 'this is a story of the Ashkenazi,' but, 'it is also a personal story, and a problematic one.'⁶⁹

The story of Jews in Poland is the result of a long and fraught relationship that was stalled from the very beginning by the politics of Empire. During the 1500s, in the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ashkenazi found a home in the east after mass expulsions from Prussian lands. In the east they enjoyed relative cultural and religious diversity. As Michael Steinlauf explains, minority populations were free to live communally here, and to enjoy politically active lives with the potential for establishing relationships with others who inhabited the region.⁷⁰ However, this period of virtually unchallenged diversity and conviviality was short. As the Commonwealth became divided and parceled out amid conflicts between the neighbouring empires, the struggle for national liberation was born, and, as Steinlauf argues, the emerging formation of the Polish national state ushered in an entirely different set of circumstances for its minority populations.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bartana, Yael, correspondence, 2012.

⁷⁰ Steinlauf, Michael, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Steinlauf focuses his discussion of this growing militancy on the 1862 Polish Uprising.

With the acculturation of a unified Poland in full swing, the Jews in particular started to acquire a vernacular of nationalistic ideology. This was especially the case during the interwar period and the days of the Second Polish Republic. The Jewish minority began to formulate demands for greater autonomy during this period, complete with guarantees for a modern Jewish culture that was increasingly informed by Enlightenment values.⁷² In Chapter Six, I briefly describe the political ideologies from this period and their interlocking lineages, including Zionism, Diaspora Nationalism, and Jewish socialism as represented by the Bund. Here, it is important only to mention that the call for Jewish autonomy in Poland—a ‘Judaeo-Polonia,’⁷³ as it were—indicates the confidence that was enjoyed by this particular minority at the time. As Steinlauf argues, the confidence of the Jewish minority was regarded with suspicion by the Poles, who themselves were beginning to show signs of internal conflict.

During the interwar period, this internal conflict altered the course of debates over the implementation of the Minorities Treaty, a protective guarantee for what was at the time a diverse population. In the standoff between ‘pluralists’ and ‘exclusivists,’⁷⁴ the minority debates resulted in a polarization of the political spectrum, and in the end, it encouraged vehement displays of anti-Semitism along with other expressions of moral outrage. Arguably, this polarization is alive today in a sublimated form, as Poland represents an overwhelmingly Catholic and conservative nation that is now more homogenous than ever. Indeed, Sierakowski, Dunin and the other Polish collaborators in Bartana’s project seek to challenge the institutions of this conservative orthodoxy,

⁷² Ibid., 9. Steinlauf mentions that Hasidism was especially active in this period as a ‘populist, optimistic, combative’ movement (9).

⁷³ Ibid., 12

⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

providing systematic critiques of its claim to being a natural authority in the first instance.⁷⁵ In fact, the generations of conflict resulting from precarious efforts to engender a cosmopolitan society might lead us to question the viability of Sierakowski's dream. The ideal that Sierakowski illustrates is a modification of commonly held assumptions from the earlier debates as I describe them above, but in this newer version, it is the Jewish diaspora and not the Poles that have the agency to create meaningful social change.

In fact, it is unfathomable to consider the Jews, or some projection of this group, as representing the promise of a future in which Poland's diversity is speculatively restored. These are hypothetical and yet urgent questions for the European idea. They extend beyond Poland to encompass a global dimension, to materialize what I briefly describe in Chapter Seven as a resurgence of Paul Gilroy's 'planetary consciousness.'⁷⁶ However, I here want to investigate the opposite end of the spectrum, namely the journey to Poland that Bartana took during the course of researching her project. Of these visits, Bartana has said that first impressions of her reputed homeland were of city centers in which the Jewish 'void' was immediately present on every street corner.⁷⁷ Indeed, Bartana represents voids in her work, implicitly referencing Stalinism as she does, for instance, with the *lieu de mémoire* of the Decennial Stadium in the first installment of her work.

⁷⁵ Sierakowski, for instance, is the leader of a prominent left movement called *Krytyka Polityczna*.

⁷⁶ Gilroy, Paul, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Columbia University Press, 2006), 72.

⁷⁷ Bartana, Yael, 'Louisiana Talks: Yael Bartana,' *YouTube*, 2012.

For Mytkowska, ‘the jarring juxtaposition of a Stalin-era setting with the young standard-bearer of the Polish left is one more unsettling obstacle to negotiate’⁷⁸ in this work. On the other hand, it is the personal motivation for this visit that offers an even greater obstacle. Sites of destruction from Bartana’s perspective represent the gentrified remainders of an exploited tragedy—a memory that has outlived its use. Therefore beyond the urban landscape of destruction and its voids, Bartana’s travel itinerary appears instead to be heavily supplemented by individual and familial concerns. I argue that paralleling these concerns is the artist’s eternal hopefulness for Poland’s future, a hope that goes beyond the cultural memory of destruction pure and simple. To understand Bartana’s infusion of hope during the course of her travels, I would suggest that we might compare Bartana’s return to Poland with the contrasting example of Claude Lanzmann’s pilgrimage to the sites of destruction in *Shoah*.

What is at stake in this comparison is the nature and function of the pilgrimage. For instance, Shoshana Felman has brought to light the fact that Lanzmann’s pilgrimages involved a duty-bound struggle for truth that was intended to commemorate the victims of unimaginable terror. In some ways like Bartana, Lanzmann returned to Poland because it remains the desecrated homeland of the European Jews. But Lanzmann’s visits were inspired by another motivation, that is, by the desire to return ‘back to the primal scene of annihilation, [in what is] at once a spatial and a temporal return, a movement back in space and time, which, in attempting to revisit and repossess the past it also, simultaneously, [moves] forward toward the future.’⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Mytkowska, Joanna, ‘The Return of the Stranger,’ in Bartana, Yael, *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy* (Artangel, 2012), 130.

⁷⁹ Felman, Shoshana, ‘In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,’ *Yale French Studies* 79, 1991: 125.

On the basis of Felman's description here, I thus interpret Lanzmann's hope as one of collectively achieving the final stage of the mourning process, in other words, to break the trauma into digestible units, and to salvage the past in the name of reparation as a kind of abstract universal. On the other hand, Bartana's journey can be read as an attempt at making peace with the tortured ghosts of this atrocity, including those in the following years of Stalinist rule. However, because Bartana is intent upon distancing her work from claims of repossession, the *Polish Trilogy* is very different from the approach that Lanzmann takes throughout his film. By engaging the motif of return through an aesthetic of defamiliarization, Bartana's pilgrimage is rather marked by a search for points of conjuncture, in a future that is unpredictable and strange, but one that has nevertheless set aside the atrocities of the past without erasing them.

This approach is productive because it recognizes the impossibility of fully achieving the desired aims of reparation. Dreams, in other words, are followed by nightmares, and the necessity of living with the latter is an experience that Bartana seeks to articulate. Facilitating the coexistence of the nightmare is not identical to perpetrating its violence. The enthusiastic agents of Poland's 2004 membership in the European Union reflects the latter, breaking as it does from the limitations of the past by aggressively transposing its conditions onto the image of a coming community with Western aspirations.⁸⁰

Even the worst periods of tumult during the financial crisis resulted in unwavering commitment from Poland to the European idea.⁸¹ Bartana's project therefore represents a

⁸⁰ One of the most performative examples of this aspiration can be found in the YouTube videos produced by *Invest In Poland*, touting Poland's viability for foreign investment against the background of a highly enthusiastic choreography.

⁸¹ Sikorsku, Radoslaw, 'For Poland, European integration is not a crisis. It's an inspiration,' *The Guardian*,

significant deviation from the status quo, having positioned itself against the rising tide of the new obsession with matters of finance. Bartana together with Sierakowski creates associated meanings that acknowledge the nightmares of the crisis, and they do so precisely by opening up the crisis to situations that cannot be predicted or measured by the same criteria of evaluation. Sierakowski's call in the empty stadium 'represents a willingness to be weakened—to risk all that will follow.'⁸² And yet through this impossible calculation, the call is situated against a thoroughly domesticated cosmopolitanism, complete with the ongoing debates it provokes between voices across the political spectrum. As Lehrer and Waligórska pointedly suggest, the Polish state would unequivocally reject 'an influx of Moroccan or Ethiopian or Russian Jewish emigres.'⁸³ In this sense, Bartana's work is both timely and provocative.

In fact, to deepen our appreciation of this provocative act of aesthetic confrontation, it may be pertinent to ask, once again, from where does the capricious drive for exclusion originate? El-Tayeb, for one, argues that the nation itself supplies the means of exclusion, as exclusion itself is the most elemental function of national belonging in every case. Nothing in this proposition is controversial. Bartana's project, on the other hand, turns on representing a function of the *state* as the primary vehicle for defeating the very exclusions that nationalism perpetuates.

2 July 2011.

⁸² Azoulay and Ophir, 150.

⁸³ Lehrer and Waligórska, 14.



Figure 17: Yael Bartana, still from *Assassination*, Video, 2011.

Bartana’s visualization of solidarity at the end of her trilogy therefore reveals a technically ambivalent process. For, Bartana does not actively counter the terms on which Poland enthusiastically adopted its EU membership. Instead she draws from that enthusiasm to more precisely locate the motive for a ‘a new configuration characterized by the crisis of the national-social state.’⁸⁴ In other words, Bartana finds that belonging itself must be questioned during the course of interrogating changes to the structure of European national identity. Her assumption appears to be that as new legitimacies are acquired under the sign of globalization, the loosening borders of the state fuel a mandate for a wider breadth of inclusion that originates from actions that are deemed to be ‘cosmopolitan.’

Cosmopolitan actions tend to be packaged in terms that are conspicuously speculative. Bartana thus represents the Polish ‘idea’ speculatively as the bedrock for incitements of a timeless patriotism. In other words, the timelessness of this idea

⁸⁴ Balibar, Étienne, *Politics and the Other Scene*, Trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (Verso, 2012), 70.

corroborates Étienne Balibar's claim that 'states cannot become *nation-states* if they do not appropriate the sacred.'⁸⁵ Sacrality is therefore crucial for understanding Bartana's illustration of this phenomenon. In *Nightmares*, the reinvention of sacrality becomes a key element of the insistence that Poland diversify the received ideas of national belonging. Using parody to communicate these sacred elements, I argue that Bartana critically retraces the steps that lead exclusion to become a necessary action of nation-states. As such, the true aim of her work is to disrupt the cycle in which the drive for exclusion is secured by effects that are produced from the sacred. The result is a thoroughly cosmopolitan aim that is subsequently declared in vivid detail by Sierakowski in the stadium. He says:

With one religion, we cannot listen
With one colour, we cannot see
With one culture, we cannot feel
Without you, we can't even remember.
Join us, and Europe will be stunned!

Whether through disruption or conviviality, these efforts appear to reflect Balibar's critical engagement of the identification process, suggesting that Bartana, too, wishes to get beyond the commonplace view that globalization and the loosening of national borders will miraculously facilitate a progressive alteration of its criteria. Though sacrality holds the very potential that is commonly associated with identity or national character, Balibar insists that '*all identity is fundamentally ambiguous*.'⁸⁶ Whether as *ethnos* or *demos*, a shift in perspective is required in which the movement of

⁸⁵ Balibar, 2003, 20.

⁸⁶ Balibar, 2012, 57.

the subject is displaced by a more encompassing ideological reinforcement. By challenging the impulse to reply on the mystery of a sacred bond, Balibar sets to work on interpreting national identities in terms of the way they engender ‘community effects’⁸⁷ as opposed to inalienable truths.

Balibar’s critique is even more important if we consider the alternatives to his proposition. For instance, identification understood as a process is strongly at odds with the work of Aleida Assmann, which maintains that *ethnos* and *demos* are situated hierarchically.⁸⁸ For Assmann, the order of these essential markers of national identity can be used to determine the viability of particular nation-states over that of others, suggesting that a democratic people, for instance, tend to be more inclusive, and therefore to be more amenable to changes associated with cosmopolitan values. Balibar rejects Assmann’s hierarchy because it fails to acknowledge that nations are themselves fictions, and that all fictive identities operate in the interstices ‘between *ethnos and demos*,’⁸⁹ and therefore beyond any notion of a hierarchy between them.

Above all, the fictive identity of the national state operates in close conjunction with the practice of bordering. For Balibar, the concept of the border provides the state with ‘an institutional means of preserving the rule of exclusion or insisting upon its necessity.’⁹⁰ Developed back in the days of William of Orange, Balibar claims, the border has come to represent a territorial claim of authorial power that is instrumental for policing the movement of demographic minorities. The recent effort to make national borders amenable to the demands of globalization has proven to be even more powerful

⁸⁷ Balibar, 2003, 20.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25. For more see Assmann, Aleida, ‘Europe: A Community of Memory,’ *Twentieth Annual Lecture of the GHI*, November 16, 2006.

⁸⁹ Balibar, 2003, 8.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

as an indicator of this authority, not less, as the state must continually assert its power in ways that are very different than before. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson suggest that borders should no longer be understood simply as the capacity to ‘block or obstruct global passages of people, money, or objects,’ but rather as ‘central devices for their articulation.’⁹¹

Developing an analytic of globalization on the basis of border crossings is crucial for bringing attention to the ongoing reappraisal of European colonial history by the national state. As Balibar writes, globalization represents a ‘concrete form of colonization’⁹² that affirms the integrity of the state and its borders. On the other hand, it destabilizes the state’s ability to ‘integrate’⁹³ the class struggle. Compromised is that dynamic stability of the triumvirate between nation, state and class that structured the geopolitical epistemé of the democratic revolutionary era. As forms of poverty emerge that the state cannot properly manage, the onset of economic globalization requires that national borders get policed in strict adherence to the prohibitive criteria for *European* belonging. Given the circularity of these conditions on the ground, we might begin to formulate a counterpoint to the false affirmation of democratic potential that has been inscribed into the act of loosening national borders in the first place.

For that I turn to Bonnie Honig’s suggestion that the claim to minority rights in the supranational domain is utterly fruitless in most if not in all cases. With strong resonances to El-Tayeb’s position, Honig writes, ‘the new porousness of territorial borders among EU countries has been accompanied in recent years by the erection of

⁹¹ Mezzadra and Neilson, ix.

⁹² Balibar, Étienne, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Secularism: Working Hypotheses,’ *Backdoor Broadcasting Company: Academic Podcasts*, 2010.

⁹³ Ibid.

new, not at all porous borders inside the EU.⁹⁴ These terms result in an utterly paradoxical situation, in which ‘the hosts are not only welcoming: they are hostile.’⁹⁵

Expanding on the claim that globalization results in new forms of impoverishment and danger, Gayatri Spivak draws our attention to the way ‘dubious gender equality’⁹⁶ reinforces and perpetuates European integration and its ‘constitutional rhetoric.’⁹⁷

Repeating and revising Balibar’s observation about the displacement of class struggle, Spivak contends that ‘if we want to learn the lesson of what we call gender, we will say that the spectralization of labor in capitalism is held within the semiotic spectralization of gender that is as old as the human or, in some way, the animal.’⁹⁸ Race, class, and gender exclusions coalesce here in a way that only further exposes a modality of social organization or policing that tends to get rephrased and thus strengthened by the liberal humanist discourse of the multicultural.

Balibar makes another crucial observation in terms of the status we should rightfully give to the affirmation of multiculturalism. He writes that globalization gradually links with the state in such a way that national identity groups have become both less powerful and more dangerous. In this he acknowledges that globalization ‘makes it possible for nations to acquire their autonomy, as cultural entities, from the state.’⁹⁹ Such entities reach out to create solidarities in which their autonomy is reflected, thus resulting in patterns of grievance that attach racist positions to an oppositional politics situated on the far right. Above all, the slow march to the right only proves

⁹⁴ Honig, Bonnie, ‘Another Cosmopolitanism? Law and Politics in the New Europe,’ in Benhabib, Seyla, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 107.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Spivak, Gayatri, ‘What is Gender? Where is Europe? Walking with Balibar’ (*European University Institute*, 2005), 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁹ Balibar, 2012, 63.

Balibar's claim that 'racism clearly corresponds to a displacement of the identity system of nationalism,'¹⁰⁰ as fascism has increasingly become a favoured solution for this displacement.

THE PERILS (AND PARODIES) OF MULTICULTURALISM

Indeed, Bartana's *Nightmares* is particularly interesting from this perspective as a cultural symptom or litmus test of contemporary European politics. For instance, from the outside, contemporary Europe might appear to be increasingly dominated by insidious efforts to discredit the non-European in its midst: to establish difference, rebuild the borders, to rescind policies that welcome immigration, and indeed to destroy itself in the process. In some cases, this affirmation is clearly voiced by extreme nationalists who operate semi-autonomously of the national state, as in Greece with the Golden Dawn and its fraternity with the police. In this light, Bartana's video project apprises us of these ever-multiplying dangers with exquisite subtlety. The *Polish Trilogy* represents the dream behind the existing nightmare, and with this aim in mind, the work provides viewers with a measure in which to gauge the actually existing reality. It makes allusions of forewarning that can provide us with viable practices in which to redirect the collision course of political multiculturalism. But there is a further dimension to this problem that we need to consider.

For the majority in Europe, particularly among leaders who claim to hold centrist and moderate views such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the ideal of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 71.

multicultural society has ‘utterly failed,’¹⁰¹ having resulted in national policies of cultural assimilation that have proven to be ineffective. This ineffectiveness has been especially the case for racialized minorities, who, because of their visibility tend to represent this failure, especially for the white majority. Now, moderate though Merkel claims to be, I want to argue that her position on multiculturalism supplies further evidence of Europe’s ‘self-racialization,’¹⁰² in which sanctioned European laws that currently police minoritarian bodies tend to perpetuate the kinds of poverty, racism and sexism I mentioned earlier. Against multicultural policies that are designed to be ineffective, Balibar, for one, prescribes a solution that takes us back to the relational economies of difference proposed by Glissant. Balibar writes:

The basis of “multicultural” (multinational, multireligious, etc.) society lies: not simply in the pluralism of the state, but in the oscillation for each individual between two equally impossible extremes of absolutely simple identity and the infinite dispersal of identities across multiple social relationships; it lies in the difficulty of treating oneself as different from oneself, in a potential relation of several forms of “us.”¹⁰³

For Balibar, against the militant status quo that Merkel upheld with a bold assertion of prejudicial assimilation, this impassioned call of Balibar’s acknowledges difference in a way that is reminiscent of Spivak’s prescription for a metonymic relation

¹⁰¹ Weaver, Matthew, ‘Angela Merkel: German multicultural society has “utterly failed,”’ *The Guardian*, 17 October 2010.

¹⁰² Balibar, 2012, 44.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 68.

of the self. In other words, both writers call for a relation-identity that configures agency through ‘communities’ of difference. Spivak writes:

Agency presumes collectivity, which is where a group acts by synecdoche: the part that seems to agree is taken to stand for the whole. I put aside the surplus of my subjectivity and metonymize myself, count myself as the part by which I am connected to the particular predicament so that I can claim collectivity, and engage in action validated by that very collective.¹⁰⁴

Announcing the predicament that such collective action finds itself in is one step towards dismissing the European project as one that perpetuates ‘benign and seductive’¹⁰⁵ universalism. For Spivak, the banality that this quote from Gilroy reveals only proves that the European idea has come to represent no more than a vector for the perpetuation of misrecognition, and thus a mere ‘public concept’¹⁰⁶ for those whose belonging is already secured. A European *demos* operates within the sepulcher of the postnational, defined above all by a legal framework that is premised on national conventions and rules of behaviour. Sublime evocations of ‘Europe’ represent a conceptual stage, whereby ‘domestic policy [has become] an allegory of the global,’¹⁰⁷ ruled as it is by patterns of exclusion that are surreptitiously redrafted from the seat of imperial power. The kind of agency that results from practicing acts of individual metonymy is therefore highly preferable to this recapitulation.

¹⁰⁴ Spivak, 2005, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Gilroy, 59.

¹⁰⁶ Spivak, 2005, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

The European project has devolved into actions and outcomes that are increasingly strategic and spatial, composed of ‘frontiers and differences’¹⁰⁸ that nullify the potential for the very speculation that distinguished this project from the outset. Spivak and Balibar’s engagements with the ‘idea’ of Europe therefore run parallel to the geopolitical actions of the European Union, offering a universe of speculation that does not so much seek to restore the idea of Europe in its originality, as to offer alternatives. This frame of speculation is where I would situate Bartana’s work. Acknowledging, to quote Gilroy again, that multicultural universalism was ‘abandoned at birth,’¹⁰⁹ I argue that Bartana’s gesture of visualizing alternatives is premised on the very same epistemic uncertainty on which Balibar and Spivak base their speaking positions.

I want to take a moment to describe more precisely how the JRMiP purports to operate in conjunction with this uncertainty by means of the undecidable. I argue that Bartana’s visualization of the political reflects what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘co-presence of heterogenous temporalities,’¹¹⁰ as I mentioned in Chapter Two, which is a term that straddles the fictional reserves of a given concept by incongruently announcing its utter plausibility. My contention is that by forcing together these heterogenous conditions, Bartana creates images and stories that touch the actual world and yet are premised entirely on its repetition or parody. Bartana’s enactments of parody, however, are quite different from the way the latter has been theorized by Frederic Jameson, who famously made a distinction between parody and pastiche in advance of reaffirming his commitment to a specific brand of utopian modernism. Jameson writes:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gilroy, 1

¹¹⁰ Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (Bloomsbury, 2013), 26.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter.¹¹¹

It is well known that Jameson historicizes the postmodern through examples of its pastiche-like qualities. His greater purpose, therefore, is to reassert the transgressions of parody by harkening to the past through melancholic gestures in which political revolution becomes a necessary action. From this perspective, Bartana's engagement with aesthetics differs markedly from Jameson's. Though she 'incessantly restates the past'¹¹² in a similar manner, she refuses to make the subsequent political gesture that Jameson's work on parody demands. In fact, Bartana returns, repeats and revises the aesthetics of totalitarianism in ways that challenge the received wisdom that 'ironization is rejuvenation,'¹¹³ to quote Boris Groys. By allowing 'us to imagine the sensible otherwise,'¹¹⁴ Bartana nullifies the demand for seismic breaks in the universe of politics, favouring a subtle turn of perspective in the universe of art.

By engaging parody on her own terms, I claim that Bartana's work participates in Bonnie Honig's politics of the 'double gesture,'¹¹⁵ which I later argue mounts a resistance to the institutions that ostensibly guarantee global justice. Visualized in the most generic depiction of a political movement whose very articulation is threatened by self-erasure, the JRMiP reveals limitations in the official discourse of European integration precisely

¹¹¹ Jameson, 17.

¹¹² Rancière, 24.

¹¹³ Groys, 139.

¹¹⁴ Tanke, Joseph J., 'What is the Aesthetic Regime?' *Parrhesia* 12, 2011, 75.

¹¹⁵ Honig, 107.

by paralleling its movements. However, Bartana's engagement with parody through the motifs of exile and recuperation goes further, insisting that we acknowledge fiction and reality itself as universes of meaning that parallel each another.

To illustrate this parallel meaning, I note that Sierakowski once declared in an interview that indeed 'there is more reality in the movies'¹¹⁶ that Bartana has produced. In other words, the *Polish Trilogy* according to Sierakowski forcefully illustrates that 'in reality there is one option, whereas in imagination you can choose.'¹¹⁷ In broadly psychoanalytic terms, Bartana introduces the reality principle as if it were structured by the fantastical presentation of an ideal political community, thus graphically depicting nightmares that would otherwise remain hidden from those who persist in the dream of social change. The palpable potential for disaster is clearly articulated in this work, which I suggest offers a vision of hospitality, of welcoming the other, that is technically speaking without condition. For, Honig unconditional *hospitality* is the practice of giving without limit to the other. The unconditional is therefore marked by 'an infinite openness that both enables and jeopardizes one's capacity to host another,' whereas 'conditional hospitality...postulates a finite set of resources and calculable claims.'¹¹⁸ Honig's definition is inspired from Jacques Derrida's *Of Hospitality*,¹¹⁹ in which he insisted that for any progressive politics to be effective, it must situate itself in the play between the conditional and the unconditional as such.

¹¹⁶ Bartana, Yael, and Sławomir Sierakowski, 'Yael Bartana: Conversations with Contemporary Artists at the Guggenheim,' *YouTube: Guggenheim Museum*, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Honig, 105.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, Jacques, and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford University Press, 2000), trans. Rachel Bowlby.

For Derrida, the reference to ‘play’ composes an ethics of welcoming the other beyond any condition of the other’s foreignness—a welcoming that is strictly speaking impossible. He writes, ‘it is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, as if it were only possible to transgress it.’¹²⁰ Bartana acknowledges the urgency of transgressing this law in *Nightmares*, as it represents the ethical demand as emerging from a structure of law, in which the inevitable nightmare of belonging must present itself in a spectral motif that only becomes apparent in further installments of the trilogy.

For Honig, the play between these two distinct orders of meaning is anchored by Hannah Arendt’s famous demand for the *right to have rights*, which forms a cornerstone of her argument in ‘Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man.’ The reason this work anchors the distinction is because it features an unconditional demand, namely that which is formulated on the basis of ‘a right to belong to some kind of organized community.’¹²¹ In other words, the *right to have rights* affirms a given collective desire to protect those who find themselves displaced, denationalized, and without any standing position from which to make such demands in the first place. Arendt, indeed, was responding to a very specific set of circumstances immediately after the war, in which mass displacements under the Nazi regime were still being negotiated. As a general proposition, however, Arendt’s insistence on this particular right had an impact on the process of devising international, or in fact cosmopolitan practices in which to prevent such things from happening again.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹²¹ Arendt, 1973, 297.

Critics including Seyla Benhabib have made the argument that specific conditions can be inscribed into supposedly unconditional demands like those described above. Benhabib, for instance, draws our attention to the fact that declaring a right to have rights is ‘built upon [a] prior claim of membership,’ such that ‘one’s status as a rights-bearing person is contingent upon the recognition of [that] membership.’¹²² Furthermore, the institutional recognition that was gained for this right, namely the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, only demonstrates how the unconditional demand falls short in terms of its legal effectiveness. Most importantly, Benhabib shows that the Declaration includes a provision for the right to emigrate but not to settle in foreign lands, which is a claim that plainly assumes one’s ‘right to a nationality.’¹²³ Against this supposed institutionalization of a conditional guarantee, Benhabib concludes that the Declaration ‘upholds the sovereignty of individual states,’¹²⁴ which means that enforcing one’s ability to express their rights will, in the end, be subject to the very same conventions that its legal protection was designed to overcome. Benhabib writes:

The irony of current political developments is that while state sovereignty in economic, military, and technological domains has been greatly eroded, it is nonetheless vigorously asserted, and national borders, while more porous, are still there to keep out aliens and intruders. The old political structures may have waned but the new political forms of globalization are not yet in sight.¹²⁵

¹²² Benhabib, Seyla, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

To put it another way, a persistent aporia exists between the act of issuing unconditional demands, on the one hand, and the sort of ‘normative incongruities’¹²⁶ that Benhabib describes, on the other. Any attempt to enforce such demands on the basis of cosmopolitan norms will therefore risk putting their implementation into jeopardy. For Benhabib, one solution appears to be in making slow incremental progress towards an ideal of rights protection guarantees. For Honig, on the other hand, Benhabib’s optimism is vulnerable to limitations because it relies too heavily upon what she calls ‘evolutionary time.’¹²⁷ For Honig, Benhabib’s particular engagement with linearity betrays a formalist bias in which institutions demonstrate their potential for self-improvement. By conferring on institutions the ability to fail better, as it were, Benhabib appears to contend that the unconditional must eventually coincide with its materialization in the form of law. How, then, could a position like Honig’s, and by extension, Bartana’s, be better sustained given their obdurate fidelity to ‘the unconditional’ *before* the law?

At stake here are two very different perspectives on the matter of ‘the unconditional.’ To illustrate the difference further, let’s consider Benhabib’s and Honig’s interpretations of Arendt’s controversial position on the Eichmann trial from 1961, described in Chapter Three as being crucial for the human rights regime that eventually resulted in the adjudication of ‘crimes against humanity.’ Benhabib and Honig describe Arendt’s suspicions regarding the viability of an International criminal court and its ability to facilitate such adjudication, which strikes both writers as odd given Arendt’s insistence on the need to protect the unconditional demands mentioned above. For Benhabib, this suspicion has since been resolved by the evolution of the human rights

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Honig, 112.

regime, particularly with respect to devising cosmopolitan norms of justice. Such evolution proves that the duty of hospitality is not merely ethical but normative, and thus implicated in a slowly evolving legal environment that will eventually make it necessary to establish a federated system that is built upon cosmopolitan norms as opposed to international ones. Benhabib's claims are ultimately rather Kantian, derived specifically from 'On Perpetual Peace,'¹²⁸ in which increments of progress based on rational precepts in concert with international law is the order of the day.

For Honig, Arendt's suspicion over the viability of an International criminal court is not an embryonic precursor to the realization of a global cosmopolitan community. It is instead a realization of the uneven dynamics that result from the ideal of cosmopolitan norms in action. In fact, these dynamics manifested from the outset in the strategic impulse that informed Arendt's position on the Eichmann trial. Though Arendt 'affirmed the justice of the trial,' she at the same time voiced her concern over its 'politicality,'¹²⁹ specifically in the way the Israeli officials at the time had curated the trial to maximize its potential of inciting ethnic nationalism. For Honig, the ability to hold these two otherwise conflicting positions at the same time is a reflection of Arendt's fidelity to the double gesture. It demonstrates the play between two distinct orders of meaning from which an unconditional demand for hospitality can, perhaps, be made.

¹²⁸ See: Kant, Immanuel, *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. trans. Ted Humphrey (Hackett, 1983).

¹²⁹ Honig, 103.

THE DOUBLE GESTURE OF EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

Extending the discussion of the preceding section further, I argue that ‘right to have rights’ opens up a host of questions and conversation around the postwar desire for the peaceful cohabitation of the European powers. Building institutions in which to adjudicate ‘crimes against humanity’ is one end of the spectrum. The other end deals with matters of citizenship and questions of national belonging, and tends to become associated quite differently with a sense of urgency for the development of mechanisms that will account for the diversity of peoples. This urgency is particularly strong when it comes to the contested debate around the prospect of a *European* form of citizenship.

In turning to this category of citizenship, I initiate a line of questioning that asks whether Honig’s double gesture can be useful for imagining the field of relations that Bartana’s work demands. In other words, we need to ask whether relations of recognition between and among minoritarian subjects can be extended to a further recognition of their ties to the so-called European ‘stepfatherland.’¹³⁰ For Benhabib, we discover that ‘the most pressing question concerning democratic citizenship is access to citizenship rights.’¹³¹ But in the absence of securing these rights, Benhabib insists that ‘new forms of political agency’¹³² have emerged in their place, agencies that transform with every new development of the EU since the Treaty of Maastricht. These forms of agency are double edged because they are often accompanied by increasingly precise definitions of national belonging and exclusion. They are nevertheless beneficial, Benhabib claims, for

¹³⁰ El-Tayeb, 121.

¹³¹ Benhabib, 2006, 13.

¹³² Ibid., 17.

diversifying access to spaces that have traditionally been aligned to the national state and its recognized members.

Benhabib, for one, points to the uneven distribution of political rights and social privileges across various groups and categories of people, the most notable of whom become associated with the so-called ‘third countries’ that was discussed in a previous section of this work. Benhabib’s summation of this tendency is that ‘nationality and democratic voice are still coupled in problematic ways,’¹³³ particularly if we consider ongoing resistance to the idea of *European* citizenship. In lieu of this alternative, Benhabib returns once again to the notion of citizenship in its ‘disaggregated’¹³⁴ form, as a possible solution to this problematic coupling, with the rationale that some minoritarian subjects will never enjoy full political rights in the European countries to which they otherwise belong.

In fact, with the increasing visibility of such disaggregation, Benhabib argues that communities once united by citizenship should now take the responsibility of actively separating the terms between ‘nationhood and democratic peoplehood.’¹³⁵ On the one hand, this separation can prove to be a risk, as it might aggravate the longstanding variance between the pejorative rhetoric surrounding minority groups as the cause of social problems, and the official rhetoric of the European Union’s tolerance of minorities, built upon its success at promoting peace among its member states. On the other hand, while these discursive cleavages certainly exist, Benhabib for one extols the virtues of the new citizenship model for introducing ‘complex ways of mediating the will- and opinion-

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 8.

formation of democratic majorities and cosmopolitan norms.’¹³⁶ Jürgen Habermas extends this claim even further in a critique of the European Union’s ‘executive federalism,’¹³⁷ which I briefly mentioned in Chapter One as something that precipitated the European financial crisis. Echoing Benhabib’s call for ‘democratic iteration,’ Habermas makes a persistent case for the ‘transnationalization of popular sovereignty’¹³⁸ within the Union, arguing that the very democratic promise held by the latter is at stake.

Indeed for Habermas, the reinvention of a European authority grounded in ‘democratic principles’¹³⁹ would both rationalize and civilize the European political community. It would challenge the elitism of its decision-making bodies by introducing a speculative model of belonging, in which the ‘subjective rights of the citizens’¹⁴⁰ of Europe could finally become the primary agent of economic and social policy within the EU’s existing jurisdiction. But who counts as a European citizen as Habermas describes? For, Habermas appears to situate the concept of the citizen between two incompatible extremes, between traditional notions of belonging—including those who participate in their national political community as recognized individual subjects—and the ‘peoples of Europe,’¹⁴¹ which Habermas describes as a broader and perhaps amorphous collective agency. Emphasizing the ‘sharing of sovereignty’¹⁴² that would occur between these overlapping categories, Habermas makes a double gesture that leads him to assert the viability of a citizenship model for all Europeans, including the racialized minorities that I refer to above.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹³⁷ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Polity, 2013), 52.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 32.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴² Ibid., 54.

On the one hand, this double-sided concept gives Habermas a further opportunity to restage his belief in the existence of a European *demos*, adding further credence to his desired prioritization of reasserting the will of democratic majorities into the structure of the European Union. On the other hand, this claim gives Habermas the opportunity to present a highly optimistic forecast of the Union's coming community, in which the embryonic form of a 'political commonwealth beyond the nation-state'¹⁴³ is projected as a virtual 'world society.'¹⁴⁴

Indeed, by distinguishing "European people" and "citizen of the Union," Habermas writes, 'we touch on the central question of the correct constitutional concept for this new kind of federal policy.'¹⁴⁵ The double agency that sustains the Habermasian speculation is further presented here as the gateway for a perpetual peace on the global scale. But what is the viability of such an agency given the present circumstances, particularly the unevenness in the process of determining citizenship in the era of postnational governance? What role does the reality principle take in this orgiastic forecast of the benefits that can be reaped from the informal recognition of belonging?

Returning to Balibar's position that the expansion of popular sovereignty in the transnational domain is most likely to result in a deepening of the structural inequality for Europe's marginalized populations, the decision seems to be whether the incremental progress announced by Benhabib and echoed by Habermas has reached a point of 'exacerbation.'¹⁴⁶ Balibar, indeed, raises some doubts about the viability of the neo-

¹⁴³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁶ Balibar, 2003, 56.

Kantian frameworks explored above.¹⁴⁷ His alternative to Habermas's solution in particular is guided by his skepticism of transnational institutions to be effective, leading him beyond the question of whether it is possible for Europe to construct a fictive identity, to ask whether it is desirable or even necessary.¹⁴⁸

Writing in the late 1990s in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, with the flaring up of ethnic incompatibilities that would eventually come to define the post-Communist era,¹⁴⁹ the so-called European community became the subject of Balibar's extended reflections on Europe's racial conflict, which for Balibar and others is absolutely fundamental to understanding the region's broader history. Though still in its relative infancy at the time, Balibar's claim is that the idea of 'Europe' proved its utter 'powerlessness'¹⁵⁰ in the face of Balkan disintegration. Balibar thus contends that the belated intervention of the European powers clearly demonstrates the limitations of the supranational governing body in matters of conflict. Though the belatedness was due in part to its peculiar arrangement of consensual action between member states, the claim appears to be that Europe's inaction from the very beginning of the crisis is significant for understanding the nature of the union more generally.

The European officials were flummoxed by the undecidability of Europe's claim to authority with respect to its territorial sphere of influence, a problem that for Balibar has continued into subsequent conflicts. Did the former Yugoslavia constitute a part of Europe, or was it rather situated on the outside of its borders? Was Europe justified in

¹⁴⁷ Another prominent example of this tradition can be found in Held, David, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁸ Balibar, 2003, 9.

¹⁴⁹ See Denitch, Bogdan, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁰ Balibar, 2003: 3.

deciding upon military intervention, and if so, under what legal circumstances could it do so effectively? These are just some of the questions that led to the long awaited response of the Europeans, and ultimately to the regressive ‘internal colonization’¹⁵¹ of Kosovo that continues to this day.

Balibar’s observation of this intervention runs parallel to Bartana’s given his summation of the ineffectiveness of the normative structure outlined by Benhabib and Habermas. This structure, he claims, does not address the equivocations that precipitated the disaster in Kosovo. Rather, it busies itself with the sanctioned discourses of tolerance, in which ethnic differences are reframed as cultural pluralities, and it does not therefore give us access to alternatives that will address the fundamental problem of nationalism itself. This activity of reframing does not mitigate such conflicts, nor does it resolve the structural exclusions that lead to them. Balibar thus counters this tendency with a deliberately oppositional discourse, manifesting in actions that he describes as ‘cosmopolitical.’¹⁵²

In making a theoretical move that appears to foreground yet another attempt at approximating demands for the unconditional, Balibar claims that ‘cosmopolitics’ differs from the sphere of normative actions because it ‘draws a line between competing universals.’¹⁵³ It makes an explicit step beyond imposing encompassing standards, in which particulars are subsumed through a relation of synecdoche to the universal. In other words, cosmopolitics produces conflict *between* universals. On this basis, Balibar reveals his desire to disrupt the unquestionably secularized universe that cosmopolitan ideas produce. His main point of contention is that the very presumption of secularism

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Balibar, 2010.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

has been strategically employed to provide support for concepts of multiculturalism that perpetuate inequalities instead of resolving them. The latter is deployed to undermine religious differences by reducing them to the status of a ‘culture.’ Indeed, this problem has been especially egregious for the Muslim minority who must face a European public that is unable to clearly separate religious and cultural markers of identity.

Balibar’s response to this problem is contained by his suggestion that the very notion of ‘culture’ has Eurocentric origins. Reducing contemporary religious observation that is not Christian to a cultural novelty is often encouraged by structures of dominance. Balibar’s distinction is useful, then, because it draws our attention to the fact that within Europe there is a growing conflict between cosmopolitan and religious universalism. ‘Cosmopolitical’ action proves its worth by preventing easy resolutions between the two. In other words, by decompleting universals in relation to each other, this action retrieves a sense of promise by returning to a politics of the double gesture.

In conclusion, I suggest Bartana herself participates in a politics of the double gesture precisely through her the aesthetic engagements in *Nightmares*, and therefore within the pantomime of messianic foreclosure surrounding the Jewish right of return to Poland, with a further attempt at critically retracing these steps by indulging the motifs of parody, of a defamiliarization that bequeaths the nightmare within the dream. A politics of the double gesture is also featured in commentary by Lehrer and Waligórska, who point out that though Bartana’s artistic mode of presentation is ‘bracing’ and ‘invigorating,’¹⁵⁴ its effectiveness is derived above all from its successful attempt at cultural ‘ventriloquism,’¹⁵⁵ precisely because of its ability to represent what can no longer

¹⁵⁴ Lehrer and Waligórska, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 10.

speak on its own behalf. This compromised ability to speak has justifiable cause, as does Bartana for her ironic repetition of this speech in its unadulterated form. Through ventriloquism, Bartana takes her audiences to a place beyond even the unfathomable locale on which Sierakowski stands in the Decennial Stadium, as a figure of hope against the landscape of remembered atrocity. Apropos of Balibar, this locale opens up a cosmic space in which the racialized differences that were equally ventriloquized can finally transition into a realm of human co-existence that is heretofore unimagined.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SETTLER SUBLIME IN Yael BARTANA'S *MUR I WIEZA* (WALL AND TOWER) AND *ZAMACH* (ASSASSINATION)

We reach back to the past—to the imagined world of migration, political and geographical displacement, to the disintegration of reality as we knew it—in order to shape a new future.

JRMiP Manifesto

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter looked at Yael Bartana's fictional account of a revolutionary demand for cosmopolitan society in *Mary Koszmary* (Nightmares, 2007), the first installment of *The Polish Trilogy* that otherwise carries the title, *And Europe Will Be Stunned*. By using this fabricated reconstruction of grassroots activism as my starting point, I took Chapter Five as an opportunity to focus on the difficulty of translating demands for revolutionary action into the kind of normative frameworks that political institutions are obliged to follow. By adapting the language of Bartana's story, I described this epistemic conflict in terms of the nightmare that lies concealed behind the utopian idea of revolution. The nightmare manifests here in a displacement of the Jewish Right of Return onto Poland as the former site of an attempted genocide of the Jewish people. The drama of *Nightmares* is therefore carried by a sublime act of foundation and

by the re-emergence of a new sovereign subject. In tracing these movements, my previous chapter showed that Bartana not only participates in a well-established critique of sovereignty, but that she uses premonition as a narrative tool with which to illustrate its inherent capacity for monstrous outcomes.



Figure 18: Yael Bartana, still from *Wall and Tower*, Video, 2009.

Bartana's first installment of the trilogy makes it very clear that in order for a new postnational polity to become real, the European community must be permitted once again to formalize the will of organized collectives in their territories. Bartana's mirroring of this process is different only because it includes 'the other,' or rather, 'the Jews,' as the particular agent of this sovereign gesture. Without question, we must acknowledge the risk posed by acts of sovereignty to capitulate mechanisms of exclusion and violence that we attribute to the national state. Bartana's parody of these acts, on the other hand, inscribes a democratic and inclusive social policy into the very mechanism that perpetuate Europe's historic resistance to immigration, religious minorities, and the like. The work is successful, therefore, because it not only broadens the scope of

Europeanness, but it also interrogates our received notions of this particular identity in the present.

In Chapter Six, I continue my examination of ‘Europe’ as the ‘traveling concept’¹ of Bartana’s fictional story, exploring in detail the second installment, *Mur i Wieza* (Wall and Tower, 2009), and the third, *Zamach* (Assassination, 2011). In *Wall and Tower*, I describe Bartana’s illustration of the Jewish migration into Poland as prophesied by Sierakowski in the first installment, which results here in the creation of a kibbutz camp in the Muranów district of Warsaw. Scenes of construction and building reflect the tradition of early Zionist propaganda film, although the image of Jewish community in Bartana’s version is explicitly bi-national, worldly, and inclusive. Bartana, in other words, visualizes a community in the making that stands in immediate contrast with the ‘incremental genocide’² of apartheid Israel.

In *Zamach*, Bartana concludes her analysis with a focus on the public commemoration of Sierakowski after his untimely death, ending the trilogy as she does with a mass demonstration of support for his populist mission in the streets of Warsaw. Bartana’s representation of the movement’s growing hegemony traverses the ironies of the (European) national idea, following the translation of this idea into a Jewish (national) prescription, that, though once marked by diversity, has since become singularly Zionist and therefore national. To that end, my aim in the present chapter is to reassert Bartana’s effort at disassembling the influence of received ideas regarding ‘Europe’ as a prime identity category, and therefore to disentangle her complex layering of historical content

¹ See: Bal, Mieke, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (University of Toronto Press, 2002).

² Unlike a generation earlier, terms like ‘genocide’ and ‘apartheid’ made in reference to the Israeli Occupation have become commonplace. See Razazan, Malihe, ‘Incremental Genocide: An Interview with Ilan Pappé,’ *Jadaliyya*, 10 July 2014.

throughout the work as a whole. Foremost in my analysis is emphasizing Bartana's repeated exposure of Europe's ongoing memorial debt to the Jews, and indeed to critically establish the simultaneous ideological fraternity between Europe and the State of Israel.³ Throughout the chapter, I note that while Bartana demands a complete rethinking of this relationship, her personal investment in the Zionist narrative might be mistakenly construed as support for Israel. My claim, on the other hand, is that Bartana's aesthetic and political engagement is not only experimental, it is equally anti-statist.⁴

KIBBUTZ NATIONALISM

I want to begin with a discussion of Bartana's portrayal of settlement in *Wall and Tower*, which as I mentioned above represents a sovereign act of foundation in all its celebratory detail. This particular representation is notable because such acts are often veiled or excluded from images that are commonly associated with national (or national-like) communities. By reversing or enabling this exclusion, Bartana depicts a settlement kibbutz on Polish land that is intended to become a communal home for the returning Jews. Only later does it become a compound that requires protection by watchtower units and barbed wire. In fact, it is through this transmogrification—if not equally through a retrospective vision of the sublime—that Bartana exposes the violence in which all communities originate. Sublimity, that which exceeds representation and is borne from an

³ This fraternity has resulted in a significant military partnership between Israel and leading European countries.

⁴ For reasons unlike the first, these later installments have been more contentious for viewing audiences, the result perhaps of Bartana's choice to engage a tradition of Zionist political thought that is highly contested. As an anti-Zionist Jew in self-imposed exile from Israel, Bartana's engagement with this material is often misunderstood.

experience of the traumatic, is the basis for the artist's discursive position on the matter of such representation, which I suggest echoes the debate in Chapter Three between Georges Didi-Huberman and Claude Lanzmann. The debate in that chapter concerns the moral value of depicting actual images of genocidal violence. Here, I argue that Bartana would side with Georges Didi-Huberman, who as I mentioned in Chapter Three insists that we must depict the unimaginable of the sublime in every case, particularly if our hope is to get beyond the fetishistic substitution of its memory.

Bartana participates in this gesture by depicting an image of sovereign foundation—a violence that is positioned laterally to the genocidal violence mentioned above. To accomplish this task, Bartana returns to the design for settler camps that became familiar structures on the Palestinian landscape in the early 1900s. Their simple aesthetic is paired in this installment with a narrative that insists upon the utter simplicity of the settlement idea. This simplicity is illustrated by curated expressions of accomplishment from the workers, and by the loud and boisterous nationalistic anthem that runs throughout the video sequence. The ecstatic vision of belonging that is conveyed by these narrative elements then crescendos with a visit from Sierakowski, who is on hand to deliver the movement's celebrated flag: a Star of David in the background of the *Order Orła Białego* (Order of the White Eagle).

Following an exchange of the flag with a receiving settler, the viewer is prompted to observe the commencement of the nightmare in the dream.



Figure 19: Yael Bartana, still from *Wall and Tower*, Video, 2009.

Bartana's *Wall and Tower* participates in a cluster of associated themes that are explored by the artist in the intervening years of the trilogy's production. In 2007, Bartana released *Summer Camp*, a 12-minute video that defamiliarizes the Zionist dream of territorial redemption from historical conditions of exile. The aesthetic objects in *Summer Camp* are thus 'ideologically inverted'⁵ in a similar way as in the trilogy, but here Bartana is much more explicit in referencing her political commitment to the Palestinians who are subject to the Occupation. To be more specific, *Summer Camp* puts Bartana in direct solidarity with the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), a grassroots organization that describes itself as 'dedicated to ending the prolonged Israeli Occupation over the Palestinians,'⁶ and who has since demonstrated this commitment with attempts at re-territorializing Palestine.

Bartana's commitment to the settlement theme originates from an anti-oppression politics that aims to disqualify claims over Palestinian land by taking specific actions. It

⁵ Patenburg, Volker, 'Loudspeaker and Flag: Yael Bartana, from Documentation to Conjuraction,' *Afterall Online Journal*, 30, Summer, 2012.

⁶ 'Our Mission and Vision,' *The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)*, Web.

is a politics, in other words, that goes beyond simply discounting the legitimacy of those specific claims under international law. Using the slogan of ‘building as a point of resistance,’⁷ Bartana’s message in *Summer Camp* bears a strong resemblance to the mandate of the ICAHD. As she says, corroborating Leher and Waligórska’s claim as I described in previous chapters, it is ‘not about memory and creating a museum out of something, but about establishing a relationship to contemporary Israeli politics.’⁸ On this basis, the relationships that Bartana establishes are those formed in opposition to the apartheid state.

Another notable element of *Summer Camp* is its emphasis on the parallels between domestic issues and the security regime that manages the Occupied Territories. The video by and large focuses on the privatization of the kibbutz system, provoking a social commentary around the destruction of welfare programs that secure basic necessities for impoverished Israelis. With the conditions of apartheid persistently in the background of this work, Bartana juxtaposes an image of the nineteenth-century Zionist dream with the ongoing class warfare that exists in contemporary Israel. She compares the latter with historical kibbutz communities, which were rooted in notions of equality and freedom for the Jewish people. In other words, with the privatization of the kibbutz system, a class conflict has emerged in the Jewish community, which only further compounds the injustice between Jews and Arab-Israeli citizens, and undocumented Palestinians.

Mounting actions have drawn attention to the inequalities that persist in a state that is now multiply divided despite relentless efforts to enclose itself from division. One

⁷ ‘Galit Eilat and Charles Esche talk to Yael Bartana,’ *Impossible Objects*, 2011, Web.

⁸ Ibid.

example of such division occurred in 2012, when activists built a 1930s-era compound with a design similar to those featured in Bartana's videos. This time, however, the compound was built on property of the Kibbutz Yakum organization, which plays a crucial role in the National Kibbutz Movement. Called 'the tower of justice'⁹ in the popular media, the protest ended not ten days after protesters occupied the structure. By harkening to the golden age of kibbutz collectivism just as Bartana does, the action was successful for bringing attention to the issue of public housing. But it also carried implicit references to the structural relationships between domestic policy and the security regime of Israel.

This theme is represented both in *Summer Camp* and *Wall and Tower*. But there is an important difference between the two representations, a difference that results at least in part from Bartana's shifting association of the Israeli kibbutz conceived as sanctuary. Granted, the idealized version of the kibbutz can be found again in the opening frames of *Wall and Tower*, as the triumphant settlers work to put together a communal environment within Warsaw that reflects their political aims. From that point forward, however, the image of the kibbutz starts to change, reflecting a subtle passage from the sanctuary of the camp into a site of future militarization. For some critics like Joanna Mytkowska, the royal road of sovereign decisionism that Bartana portrays risks socio-historical confusion. For example, as the members of the JRMiP work to transform the camp into a defensive military station, the identity of the antagonist beyond its gates remains unclear. Are these Jews responding to the Arabs, 'or maybe the Poles?'¹⁰ Indeed, with this line of questioning, Mytkowska insists that determining the specific players in Bartana's fantasy

⁹ Arad, Roy, 'Israel's social protesters erect "Tower of Justice" on coastal highway,' *Haaretz*, 17 July 2012.

¹⁰ Mytkowska, Joanna, 'The Return of the Stranger,' *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, 133.

will equally determine the effectiveness of her projections for ‘cosmopolitan’ Europe. However, I would ask whether it is not more effective to argue that such defensive posturing is a necessity for any act of community. In other words, if the passage into the nightmare is more or less guaranteed, we could perhaps determine the value of this work instead on the specific juridico-political function of the camp, and therefore in turn on Bartana’s choice of representing this structure within Poland.

I argue that the juridico-political function to which Bartana refers owes a debt to Giorgio Agamben. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Agamben wrote that ‘it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm.’¹¹ Extending this claim beyond the Nazi concentration camp, I suggest that Agamben’s basic claim applies just as well to the structure of the kibbutz and its eventual privatization. As such, between the existence of modern collective subjects in conjunction with the institutions of law and the mechanisms of subjection, the kibbutz in *Wall and Tower* comes to occupy a sovereign agency in accordance with the rigorous criteria for a ‘state of exception.’¹² The kibbutz thus embodies powers of exception that become legible only on the basis of its sovereign decision-making capability. Therefore by using this genealogy as opposed to Mytkowska’s socio-historical criteria, it may be possible to situate the onset of kibbutz statehood together with that of constitutional democracies that Agamben claims were established on the basis of the exceptional powers of a *national* state.¹³

Through this particular transition, Agamben describes how the ancient desire for a politics of ‘the good life’ eventually shifted towards an altogether exclusive concern for

¹¹ Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 181.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See: Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

the bare fact of living—and dying. Beyond re-centering practices that were once dismissed within the political realm, as Michel Foucault maintains with his own description of biopolitics as a technology of discipline and modern subjectivity,¹⁴ Agamben's own preoccupation with exceptional power suggests that living beings survive in such conditions but only under the constant threat of the sovereign will. Agamben therefore suggests that sovereigns are tasked with the production and reproduction of bare life as their chief biopolitical function, in other words, to create a 'life that may be killed without impunity.'¹⁵ The production of this life brings with it a concept of bodies that has been stripped of qualities, reduced to all but its mere facticity as a living thing, which invites further reflection on the technologies that determine how particular bodies enter the realm of disposability. As a whole, this dynamic is composed of relations of power that reinforce violent encounters between the state and the collective subject that it produces, manages, and eventually destroys.

Now, I mentioned in Chapter One that efforts have been made over the years to contest, appropriate and to otherwise expand upon Agamben's theory of the camp and the state of exception on which it is based. These commentaries validate his work as a particularly strong critique of biopolitics in late modernity. With this earlier conversation in mind, I want to briefly mention one such attempt that is especially fecund for understanding Bartana's approach to kibbutz nationalism. I argue that Jasbir Puar's rendition of biopolitics¹⁶ allows us to appreciate the full extent of Bartana's attempt to rediscover the camp as a heuristic tool for her alternative political vision.

¹⁴ See: Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1978).

¹⁵ Agamben, 1998, 39.

¹⁶ Puar, Jasbir K., 'Prognosis time: Towards a geopolitics of affect, debility and capacity,' *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 19:2 (July 2009): 161-172.

Paur's specific interest appears to be in extending Agamben's theory to Kaushik Sunder Rajan's observations in *Biocapital*.¹⁷ According to Puar, Rajan's analysis demonstrates the continuity between Agamben's discourse on the exception and the biological imprint that is left by the 'neoliberal circuits of political economy.'¹⁸ Although we may assume that exceptionality is intrinsic to this economy, Puar writes that the exception is especially notable because it has been proven to generate 'incipient forms of materiality' that have resulted in 'changing the grammar of "life itself."' ¹⁹ In other words, Puar claims that biocapital forces the hand of collectives into accepting the conditions of 'living in prognosis,'²⁰ in which death becomes a function of living. It might be useful to consider ways that such 'prognosis' interacts with the duplicitous projections of 'the good life' throughout the image of kibbutz nationalism that preoccupies Bartana. To be more specific, I argue that we might have occasion to ask how the structure of political engagement orients subjects toward a modality of hope that acknowledges the changing landscape of 'living (and dying) in relation to statistical risk, chance, and probability.'²¹

Ultimately, for Puar, a political life is imagined in which the exacting circumstances of late capitalism can in fact be redirected in accordance with subversive aims. To accomplish this subversion, Puar returns to the earlier models of political action, inspired as they are by the drama between sovereigns and bare life, to settle upon the category of 'hope' as one that embodies this skillful action. I argue that Bartana, too, looks forward to a course of action that acknowledges the zero sum game that late

¹⁷ See: Rajan, Kaushik Sunder, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Puar, 164.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 163.

²¹ Puar, 165.

capitalism presents for organizing collectives. For Bartana, such action equally builds from a point of no return, in which basic categories as 'life' face utterly duplicitous and circular modes of engagement.

HUNTING FOR LOCATIONS

In an effort to locate a figure of hope that will be capable of performing subversive actions, Bartana reverses the pattern of migration by situating Poland (as opposed to Palestine) as a new destination to realize such possibility. By way of comparison, I argue that the artist's investment in location goes above and beyond the kind of mythic attachment of place that is demonstrated by Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1964 expedition to Palestine. Indeed for a long time, Pasolini dreamt of filming the Holy Land as a backdrop for his religiously inspired work *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (The Gospel According to Matthew, 1964). A rare glimpse of Pasolini's tour of the region prior to making that film was released under the title *Sopralluoghi in Palestina* (Location Hunting in Palestine, 1964).

The visit itself did nothing to meet his expectations, as Pasolini was repeatedly confronted during his travels by a sense of disappointment at the obdurate loss of religious aura and spiritual revelation that he, perhaps naïvely, expected to find. The ecstatic rural expanse of Pasolini's imagination is eventually countered in the film by images of a desolate and creeping urbanity. The Jewish state in turn is attributed with a sort of malignancy, as it appears for Pasolini to be following an irreversible path of profanation and destruction that is typical of the modern world. A personal memory

composed of incurable longing for a past that never was becomes inscribed into the film's landscape like a presentiment of future catastrophe. Indeed, like Pierre Nora's obsession with *les lieux des mémoire*, we find that Pasolini's hunt for locations is driven by a mania for authenticity, which is delivered in turn by means of a confessional 'self-portraiture'²² that defeats any greater purpose during the course of its articulation. Nevertheless, it is through this refracted portraiture that the director moves tentatively forward with a commentary regarding the forced segregation within Israel.



Figure 20: Pier Paolo Pasolini, still from *Seeking Locations in Palestine*, (1964).

Given the hunter's eye for absolution, a commentary of this sort will never make it beyond the horizon of disappointment that indeed comes to shape this entire film. As one commentator put it, 'where Pasolini's musings lack any overt colonial critique, the camera highlights it.'²³ On the other hand, Pasolini himself appears only too happy to indulge his fetishism of 'third world' conditions that for him escape the circulation of

²² Gordon, Robert S. C., *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 92.

²³ Gharavi, Maryam Monalisa, 'Pasolini Filming Palestine,' *South/South*, 15 April 2010, Web.

capital. His hope, then, is one that projects an image of the world beyond this circulation and the relentless conformity of culture that it demands. Having said that, however, Pasolini's attitude toward the Palestinians is even less flattering than his characterization of the Jews. The Palestinians are hereby conceived as a people that suffer from a lack of perspective and recognition, which for Pasolini can only be found in the kibbutz camps that surround the major cities.

Artists and filmmakers have explored Pasolini's work to develop a more considered assessment of apartheid conditions in the Occupied Territories. One of the most representative is the 2005 production *Pasolini Pa* Palestine* by Ayreen Anastas. Herself a Palestinian artist, Anastas documents changes in the landscape by following the travel itinerary that Pasolini took some four decades ago. Situated, as it were, between written and visual content, the narrative voice is translated into a 'route map'²⁴ of the modern forces that Pasolini abhors. By creating a 'cartographic cinema'²⁵ of Pasolini's psychological relationship to these forces, Anastas thus establishes a dialogue with Pasolini by re-tracing his route as a mnemonic repetition of the original film. Through a palimpsestic lens, Anastas invites her viewers to experience the settler imperative in its (lost) potential. Indeed for this, *Pasolini Pa* Palestine* is a useful counterpoint to *Wall and Tower*.

²⁴ Jahoda, Susan, and Jesal Kapadia (Eds.), 'Setting in Motion,' *Rethinking Marxism*, 18:4 (October 2006): 478.

²⁵ See: Conloy, Tom, *Cartographic Cinema* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007).



Figure 21: Ayreen Anastas, stills from *Pasolini pa*Palestine*, Video, 2005.

On the other hand, if neither Pasolini nor Anastas can create a sense of hope from their representations, from what resources can we draw in order to extricate complacency from the tragic circumstances of this unremitting loss?

To better understand the onset of these circumstances and the inability to establish a position of hopefulness in the face of near-total destruction, I briefly refer to a conversation about the relationship between hope and despair by Lisa Duggan and José

Esteban Muñoz.²⁶ In the exchange, both thinkers appear to suggest that hope must originate from a sense of lasting despair if it is to be truly productive. In other words, hope is rendered ambivalent in ways that challenge its association with the inherent potential of the imaginary. If hope is therefore affirmed in this manner, as Duggan and Muñoz both argue that it should, the sort of political action that can be manifested in its name should be protected from relapsing into *complacent* action. Duggan puts this sentiment another way by suggesting that hope is ‘a wish for repair of the past,’ acknowledging that ‘since the past cannot be repaired, hope is a wish for that which never was and cannot be.’²⁷ The question, in other words, becomes that of what we should make of this hope if not to simply restage an affirmation by utopian design. For instance, can we even justify an investigation into the structure of hope at all, especially if we take Duggan’s claim that it is impossible to generate such aspirations for people who occupy positions neither of ‘happiness or optimism?’²⁸

At this point Muñoz steps in to remind their readers that desiring a new world should be expected in all cases ‘despite an emotional/world situation that attempts to render such desiring impossible.’²⁹ In other words, utopianism for Muñoz amounts to ‘the education of desire,’ and indeed ‘bad sentiments’³⁰ are crucial to this process. In Bartana’s trilogy, the nightmares that accompany the desire for settlement follow a very similar pattern. In other words, if we retain the paradoxical wish to ‘repair our relation to the social and political world that we have also wished to mutilate, explode, destroy,’³¹

²⁶ Duggan, Lisa, and José Esteban Muñoz, ‘Hope and Hopelessness: A Dialogue,’ *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 19:2 (July 2009): 275-283.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

Duggan argues, we must also be able to determine ways that will help us navigate the force of the negative as a necessary factor in our political decision-making.

By extrapolating from Duggan and Muñoz's claims, I argue that Bartana's approach to constructing hopeful environments differs significantly from the approach taken by Anastas. Whereas Anastas engages in motifs of repetition in order to compare two different factual stories, Bartana aims to create a fictional narrative that engages repetition through parody. Importantly, I note that while some theorists of Israeli memory have indicated shifting trends in terms of the prevalence of using comedy—particularly the shift in recent years from 'constitutive' to 'homeopathic' forms, as Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi describes³²—I argue that Bartana engages parody in ways that invite us only to return to the settler colonial imperative. In fact, as I describe below, her dedication to representing this imperative anachronistically, as parody, is one that resonates not with the comedic trends but with Muñoz's demand above for an expression of hope as the education of desire.

Bartana's impulse for parody thus returns not to the utter seriousness of Zionist settler propaganda film, particularly Helmar Lerski's *Avodah* (1935), which she later included in her exhibits next to the screenings of *Wall and Tower*.³³ Commissioned by a German banker and the Jewish National Fund, with a musical score by a German composer Paul Dessau, *Avodah* dramatizes an innocent if naïve desire for political

³² Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi suggests that a trend has emerged in the relationship between comedic literature and Holocaust memory. She writes: 'Some thirty to forty years after the liberation of the death camps and some twenty years after the conquest of the West Bank and Gaza, the function of comedy [is] no longer constitutive in the wake of tragedy ("laughter after..."), but hortatory—or "homeopathic"—in the face of a new unfolding tragedy' (298). See Ezrahi, Sidra DeKoven, 'From Auschwitz to the Temple Mount: Binding and Unbinding the Israeli Narrative,' in Phelan, James, Jakob Lothe and Susan Rubin Suleiman (Eds.), *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future* (Ohio State University Press, 2012), 291-314.

³³ This was certainly the case in Bartana's exhibit at the van Abbe museum in Eindhoven, but not in her exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

community among the Jews just prior to the war. Designed to convince members of the European diaspora to exercise their right of return, the film received critical attention for its laudatory and yet idiosyncratic portrayal of a socialist utopia.³⁴ However, the socialist theme of this work is what makes it so important for Bartana, representing as it does a unique image of the body in conjunction with political power as exercised by a collective sovereign subject.



Figure 22: Helmar Lerski, still from *Avodah*, 1935.

In ‘Helmar Lerski in Israel,’³⁵ Jan-Christopher Horak describes the film as opening with a partial image of a man descending into a vast and barren field. As the description goes, the man’s face is concealed until the end of the sequence, in which a dramatic close-up of the figure slowly moves from the bottom of the man’s feet to the top of his head. Symbolizing the heroism of the returning Jew, this towering figure grins

³⁴ Mytkowska, 132.

³⁵ Horak, Jan-Christopher, ‘Helmar Lerski in Israel,’ Talmon, Miri, and Yaron Peleg, Eds., *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 16-30.

widely in a show of optimism, ostensibly for the agricultural potential displayed by the land.

Horak writes that throughout his career Lerski felt it was a paramount responsibility of his to graphically represent the human soul 'as reflected in the living reality of the face,'³⁶ and particularly in scenes of labour or collective decision-making. Drawing from themes of agriculture and technology as narrative itineraries, *Avodah* thus moves swiftly from an authentic documentation of kibbutz life, including images of fields, ploughs and harvest celebrations, to the bustling excitement of Tel Aviv and images of mixing asphalt, the paving of roads, and a cartography depicting the urban expansion of the Jewish state. The narrative that results from these itineraries is utterly simplistic. It begins with a crisis of water, and documents the efforts of the kibbutz dwellers to devise techniques for the construction of an irrigation system. The scenes of bustling urbanity at the close of the film express the high utopianism that is characteristic of this genre. But the narrative as a whole is historically significant in a further sense. In fact, Lerski himself drew from diverse resources during the course of its production despite his commission to produce a Zionist propaganda film. Among other influences, Lerski was especially taken with the Soviet propaganda films that have become paradigmatic of this era.

Propaganda films in the Soviet tradition are distinguished from settler films by their effort at incorporating socialist themes directly into the visual grammar of the production. According to Lerski's interpretation, these themes included scenes of workerism and collective solidarity amid circumstances of adversity and triumph. In an important sense, therefore, *Avodah*'s exploration of socialist themes is opposed to famous

³⁶ Ibid., 17.

Zionist productions like Judah Leman's *L'Chayim Hadashim* (Land of Promise, 1935), which uses a much simpler documentary style in which to force connections between the barren land of Palestine, and the redemption or fulfillment of its promise. Indeed for Horak, *Land of Promise* is 'a straightforward documentary with narration, emphasizing Jewish Palestine's economic boom and opportunities for capitalist investment while downplaying more socialist aspects of the kibbutz movement.'³⁷

What can we make of this discrepancy except to argue that *Avodah* is a Zionist propaganda film on the fringes of the genre, opting for an 'expressive style [that] creates an almost mythical image of the Jew in Palestine, toiling and triumphing amid the sweeping desert landscape.'³⁸ Lerski produced hours of footage depicting scenes that adhered more vigorously to the Zionist project, and indeed his resistance to including these scenes amounts to a failure of compliance with the genre. In this sense, *Avodah* does not produce a Zionist imperative so much as it does a Soviet aesthetic that for Volker Patenburg involves 'fusing faces and tools into dynamic machines of labour.'³⁹ By emphasizing the utopian dimensions of settlement in particular, Lerski's career developed in a growing conflict with the Israeli film production community that paid for much of his work. Horak describes an especially noteworthy conflict that arose with the mishandling of Lerski's final film, *Adamah* (Tomorrow is a Wonderful Day, 1947), which documents the acculturation of Jewish orphans from the Holocaust into Israeli culture. Unbeknownst to Lerski, a set of images depicting celebrations of Israeli statehood was included just prior to the film's release at a festival.⁴⁰ Furious by this turn

³⁷ Horak, 20.

³⁸ 'Avoda,' *The National Center for Jewish Film*, Web.

³⁹ Patenburg, 'Loudspeaker and Flag.'

⁴⁰ Horak, 24.

of events, the filmmaker ended his relationship with the Zionist producers, and he never produced any films thereafter.

Extrapolating from Lerski's troubled relationship to Zionism, I consider the influence of his film for Bartana's *Wall and Tower* beyond a simple comparison of their shared cinematic gestures, camera angles and narrative devices. Rather, my argument is that Bartana draws from a socialist and utopian image of the body from a bygone era, precisely in order to juxtapose the perpetuation of biocapital that I mention earlier. By returning to the most untenable resources of hopefulness, Bartana's aim appears to be that of loosening the grip of destitution that biocapital reinforces.

BODY POLITICS: NATION AND REGENERATION

Todd Samuel Presner offers a succinct interpretation of the body politics of Zionism amid growing scholarly interest in the topic.⁴¹ His work is especially noteworthy in comparison with Bartana's because of his emphasis on the European roots of the Zionist movement. Presner's most significant claim is that hegemonic Zionism does not simply *mimic* European modernity, but that it represents a crucial missing link in the history of its development. By finding points of contact between Zionist ideology and the auspicious unfolding of Europe's colonial and imperial histories, Presner challenges the dominant perception that Zionism is the expression of a religiously justified Right of Return.

⁴¹ Presner, Todd Samuel, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (Routledge, 2007).

One of the merits of Presner's approach is that he locates the origins of Zionism in a set of ideas that long predate post-Holocaust Europe. As Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi has observed, Israeli imperialism in the Middle East has been repeatedly excused by arguments that aim to combine a mythology of biblical exile together with a story of post-Holocaust redemption. She writes that throughout a sixty-year history since the 1948 partition, 'archetypal memory based in scriptural narratives began to prevail over historical thinking, and mythical claims began to supplant political ones.'⁴² For Ezrahi, though a 'phoenix'⁴³ narrative rose to prominence during these years, it has only been strengthened with each new acquisition of Palestinian land. I therefore argue that Presner insists upon a contiguous relationship between Zionism and European modernity as a way of preventing such justifications of colonialism by scripture.

Presner differs strongly from the argument put forward in *The Question of Zion* by Jacqueline Rose, for whom the logic of Jewish messianism ends in the establishment of a state perceived as the guarantor of redemption from conditions of exile.⁴⁴ By historicizing Jewish settler colonialism against the grain of the specious promise of returning to Palestine, Presner claims it was 'the revaluation of the myth of the "eternal" Jew [that] became the very means by which the "wandering" Jew was transformed into an agent of the Universal.'⁴⁵ The new agency that Jews acquired in this process was therefore less Jewish in the religious sense, as it was centered in a (European) genealogy of imperial power.

⁴² Ezrahi, 'From Auschwitz to the Temple Mount,' 294.

⁴³ Ibid., 293.

⁴⁴ Rose, Jacqueline, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-58.

⁴⁵ Presner, 173.

Using this genealogy as a sort of template, we can say that while universality is a defining feature of *Wall and Tower*, the larger aim of this video appears to be in translating the spirit of the Jewish people into something much more practical, strategic and indeed non-religious. Quoting Max Nordau, it may be the case that the radical utopianism of the Zionist ideology ‘awakens Judaism to new life,’⁴⁶ and yet this ‘new life’ is one that appears to be consumed by matters of secular political thought and action. Beyond a religious basis of Jewish identity, therefore, Presner makes reference here to four intersecting discursive regimes: the ‘aesthetic, therapeutic, eugenic, [and] colonial.’⁴⁷

On the basis of these regimes, Presner’s conclusion is that Zionism shares in a theory of regeneration that is familiar to that which appears within modern European political philosophy. Beyond reinforcing a defensive mechanism against anti-Semitic attitudes in Europe, therefore, Zionism is shown to have developed ‘in the fight against degeneracy, [and, therefore, in] the formation of the Jewish body and body politic, the historical eugenics of Jewish hygiene and race-science, and, finally, the articulation and justification of Jewish colonialism and militarism.’⁴⁸

Presner makes the case for a historically sensitive interpretation of the way Jews have contributed to the archive of European modernity, in which the object cause of desire to resettle squarely rests in a Foucauldian regime of biopower. As I emphasize above, this regime is separate from a messianic (or quasi-messianic) claim to religious homecoming as the basis for resettlement. In fact, the discourse of Zionism worked only to repossess a relation of power in which bodies could service the demands of a national

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

state. Indeed, this precise description of embodiment is visualized with exquisite detail in both Lerski's *Avodah* and Bartana's *Wall and Tower*.



Figure 23: 'Bear Jew', featured in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, 2009.

I want to briefly note that Presner's work is heavily informed by a theory of 'muscular' Judaism, which refers to an image of the body that at one time responded to the growing national aspirations among European Jews beginning in the nineteenth-century. This particular body assumes a form that is derived from the Hellenic ideal of masculinity, composed from a homoerotic athleticism that serves to complement the ancient model of social organization and learning. However, at the turn of the last century, the Hellenic figure was reintroduced in conjunction with an entirely different set of socio-historical issues and geopolitical realities. Presner attributes the authorship of this revival to a generation of thinkers and activists who attended the Second Zionist Congress in 1898. Importantly, this attribution challenges the claim that muscular Judaism had first emerged within Holocaust narrative. In popular culture, such ghetto-bound Zionism has been represented in characters like Rudi Weiss, the resistance fighter

in the 1979 TV-series *Holocaust*, and more recently, in the ‘Bear Jew’ of Quentin Tarantino’s film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009). The Jewish body that is associated with national aspirations borne from the wartime experience is one that tends to evoke the Biblical story of exile, not the Greek one of triumph that Presner describes. The Holocaustal lineage is therefore inconsistent with the vision of muscular Judaism that I discuss here.

Before the postwar era, the muscular Jew as Presner describes it was a defensive response to its anti-Semitic counterpart, which was depicted in European newspapers by an impoverished and cerebral figure that was fabled to harbour ruthless self-interest and cowardly desires.⁴⁹ The muscular Jew, by contrast, is an eminently worldly figure that takes the shape of a healthy, strong and utterly male embodiment of specific political values.

Through this embodiment, the muscular Jew thus exemplifies the confidence and industriousness that is often associated with European modernity. Above all, Presner’s research into the muscular Jew reveals an image of national life that is relevant for contextualizing events in the Middle East, particularly in the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. The muscular Jew thus represents a ‘deeply conflicted ideal’⁵⁰ that has brought European nationalism (via colonialism) to the Middle East, and thus compromised the right of an entire people to self-determination. Assuming the muscular Jew has a European lineage as Presner claims, we must now look more closely at the generative relationship between ‘Europe’ and the ‘State of Israel.’

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

THE PARADOX OF BELONGING

Bartana's commentary on the particular relationship shared between Europe and Israel is an instructive one, having claimed as she does that 'Israel is a kind of laboratory of the former West.'⁵¹ Edward Said, too, makes a similar observation in *The Question of Palestine*, arguing that 'Europe' and 'Israel' are 'epistemologically, hence historically and politically, coterminous,'⁵² especially in regard to their mutual advancement of imperialism and colonialism. By positioning this relationship as a kind of implicated memory, I turn now to examine the extent to which such implication has become a factor in Bartana's representation of kibbutz communism in *Wall and Tower*.

Presner's historical and archival examination of the muscular Jew is once again a starting point here, because in arguing for a rigorously historical interpretation of the Jewish Right of Return, as I mention above, his work also demonstrates that prior to the onset of hegemonic Zionism, 'Jews are given little agency in histories of modernity.'⁵³ For instance in G. W. F. Hegel's analysis of World History, Presner explains that the Jews are associated with pre-modern 'Oriental' history, and therefore with premature cultural traditions and practices. The resulting figure of the wandering Jew, for instance, is an expression of 'anything but "world-historical" people.'⁵⁴ Indeed from this perspective, the ideas of Zionism would be a welcome path to modernity for the European Jews given the conditions they were up against.

⁵¹ 'Galit Eilat and Charles Esche talk to Yael Bartana.'

⁵² Said, Edward W., *The Question of Palestine* (Vintage, 1992/1978), 83.

⁵³ Presner, 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

At this point I would like to introduce Walter Mignolo's observations as a complement to Presner's suggestion that the mythology surrounding the expulsion of Jews was eventually revised to fit the practices of imperialism and *vice versa*. Mignolo writes that 'the Zionist project was at the same time a movement of liberation mounted on the model of the modern European nation-state, which was already entrenched in European imperialism around the world.'⁵⁵ This entrenchment of imperialism was certainly the case in Palestine during the era of the British Mandate, he explains, which had a propensity for supporting Zionists from the outset.

Following Mignolo's claim, I argue that Zionism had an ideological function that was also emphatically colonial in its articulation. Presner corroborates Mignolo's observation by writing that Zionist ideology gave itself the task of 'extending—by way of the imaginary—the idea of Europe to the shores of Palestine.'⁵⁶ As such, using Presner and Mignolo's combined perspectives, a valid argument can be made here for an 'equivalence' between Europe and the State of Israel's advancement of imperialism and colonialism to achieve their geopolitical aims. These aims result in ideological commitments for Israel that Mignolo claims are distinctly European, including those of 'progress, modernity, salvation, and manifest destiny.'⁵⁷

Moreover, these observations make it eminently clear that even to the European Jews, Palestine was 'a new territory...both different from and still fundamentally connected to Europe by virtue of the same sea, and coterminous [sic] with many of [the]

⁵⁵ Mignolo, Walter D., 'Decolonizing the Nation-State,' in Marder, Michael and Gianni Vattimo, Eds., *Deconstructing Zionism*, 57.

⁵⁶ Presner, 186.

⁵⁷ Mignolo, 66. To use just one example of a practice that includes all four commitments, I note that Presner's abiding obsession is with demonstrating how seafaring became crucial for substantiating the projections of a modern Jewish state in accordance with the European idea. Indeed, Presner's interest in this area is corroborated by scenes from *The Land of Palestine*, in which Jewish immigrants are shown entering Palestine's cities by way of the sea.

same imperial ideals.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the specific circumstances that led to the creation of Israel are very different from those of any other European national state. For Mignolo, the historical context for the emergence of Israel proves that it is ‘not an imperial state like any other,’ as ‘the discourses legitimizing its foundation, made possible by the dispossession of the land, *replicated* previous imperial discourses.’⁵⁹ The question that must be asked is therefore in regard to the status of this replication.

For Mignolo, the historical record should be the ultimate authority in every case. In fact, this fidelity to historical description returns Mignolo to Hungary at the turn of the last century, suggesting as he does that Theodor Herzl’s cultural heritage may have influenced the theories that were later used in founding the Jewish state. Above all, Mignolo writes, the trial of living in a ‘decaying empire’⁶⁰ must have given Herzl the distinct impression of the urgency to recover Europe’s cultural and political achievements from the past, and by doing so, to reassert the primacy of these specific achievements on the world stage. As Bartana echoes in the second installment of her trilogy, Herzl is characterized in Mignolo’s work as being immersed in a quest for the preservation of a specific idea of Europe, in which Jews are the political agents.

Now, Presner counters Mignolo’s suggestions as to Herzl’s motivation. He argues that the discourse of hegemonic Zionism that emerged from Herzl and his contemporaries was highly influenced by the body politics of the German *Volkskultur*. Presner thus claims that German and Jewish traditions share highly similar experiences of national identification, citing the fact that each ‘came into existence without the support of a

⁵⁸ Presner, 186. Here the author makes an implicit reference to Said.

⁵⁹ Mignolo, 58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

unified nation state.⁶¹ In fact, the reputed specificity of German colonial history—derived from the *Sonderweg* thesis—should be expanded, in Presner’s view, to include ‘the specificity of Jewish colonial discourse’ as one that ‘drew on the German model.’⁶²

A further consideration of the equivalence between ‘Europe’ and the ‘State of Israel’ might also examine the latter’s status as a nation-state in the tradition of postcoloniality. Writers like Mignolo contest this comparison, however, by suggesting that Israel ‘did not emerge from a struggle for independence,’ but ‘enjoyed the support of the imperial forces others were trying to overthrow.’⁶³ Nathan Weinstock, too, argues that the Jewish colonialization of Palestine was strategically useful for European imperial expansion, although he notes in the same breath that the path to Israeli nationhood ‘does not follow the usual logic of European colonization.’⁶⁴ He explains this discrepancy by suggesting that while the expansion into British Palestine was a ‘civilizing mission,’⁶⁵ it was intended for the colonizers themselves and not for a subjugated population.

In reviewing the basic premise of Weinstock’s argument, we find that Zionism by its own admission did not rely upon the ‘exploitation of the indigenous population’⁶⁶ as did previous adventures of European colonial power. Presner accepts this argument in principle, but with the caveat that subsequent exploitation by the Jewish colonists should also be acknowledged. To that end, Presner makes an important distinction. He argues, on the one hand, that the Zionist rhetoric of a ‘land without people for a people without

⁶¹ Presner, 157.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mignolo, 62.

⁶⁴ Presner, 159.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 159.

land'⁶⁷ developed only as a retrospective justification of Zionist colonial policy. On the other, Presner separates the 'peaceful acquisition' of land at the outset of the Zionist project from the violent politics of 'replacement'⁶⁸ that followed. With respect to the Europeanness of the Zionist project, Presner must therefore historicize the difference between 'muscular' state building and 'militarized' colonial domination.⁶⁹

Mignolo diagnoses the equivocation above as a symptom of the paradox that lies at the heart of Israel's Zionist ideology—a paradox, in other words, of belonging itself. Mignolo confirms, for instance, that 'the formation of the Zionist project in nineteenth-century Europe responded to a predicament similar to that of...indigenous people.'⁷⁰ He further observes, however, that while the European Jews had been liberated from subjection by imperialism after the Second World War, following Arendt's definition of imperialism,⁷¹ the result of that liberation was a mass immigration to Palestine that 'implied the dispossession of communities that [had] not conquered that land by dispossession.'⁷²

Mignolo thus formalizes the geopolitical contradiction that I previously mentioned in connection with Presner's work. Mignolo, however, also mirrors a trend that has emerged with particular force in the growing critique of Israel's military policies. This trend turns on the question of whether it is more accurate to characterize the State of Israel as a specific translocal variant of the national state, or, instead, as a concentrated if 'sublime' replication of the European imaginary.

⁶⁷ The genealogy of this phrase is discussed by Dowty, Alan, *The Jewish State, A Century Later* (University of California Press, 2001), 267.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁰ Mignolo, 69.

⁷¹ Arendt, Hannah, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001).

⁷² Mignolo, 69.

Bartana approaches the paradoxical circumstances that led to the creation of the Jewish state by challenging equally paradoxical feelings that stem from her own sense of belonging. On this point, Bartana acknowledges the impossibility of extricating herself from the crimes that are repeatedly made in her name but against her wishes. For Galit Eilat, a curator based in the Netherlands and one of Bartana's chief interlocutors, it is clear that 'we are, in general, against the nation-state. So why do we take the responsibility and the blame for it?'⁷³ For Bartana, blame is the basis of responsibility itself. Though the latter changes as opposition to the colonial practices of the state develops, for Bartana 'the trauma [of Zionism] is not just individual, it's collective. If something bad happens, then it is seen as collective punishment.'⁷⁴

A significant part of Bartana's taking responsibility is finding ways that Zionism can be modified to better reflect her political convictions. Bartana returns to the history of Zionism in order to precisely determine that the Jewish national project was replete with a diversity of viewpoints and competing perspectives, and that it need not have resulted in the extremist version that it is today. Against Presner's insistence that we should come to appreciate how the historical circumstances that led to Zionism also played a role in creating 'alternative modernities,'⁷⁵ Bartana rather wishes to challenge the hegemonic model with the creation of alternative Zionisms.

Beyond altering one's sense of belonging and responsibility, there are good reasons to think that creating such alternatives, too, will be impossible. For Michael Marder, this impossibility is reinforced as it were by synecdoche. He writes, 'despite its presumed anchoring in the eternal, [Zionism] is a highly mobile locale: it spreads

⁷³ 'Galit Eilat and Charles Esche talk to Yael Bartana.'

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Presner, 16.

centrifugally, displacing and imposing itself onto other places and subjects outside it, and, at the same time, draws people and events into itself, as through a vortex.’⁷⁶ This particular variant of the ideology has made the national state into an imperative for the Jewish diaspora, such that ‘the legal, institutional, religious, and cultural shape of the polity is determined by that part which hypostatizes itself in the vacant place of the whole.’⁷⁷

On the basis of this reading, I argue that Bartana’s work does not contradict these findings but rather reinserts a sense of open-endedness to the promise it once held. In other words, by visualizing the Zionist state in the unrepresentable moment of its sublime foundation, the rhetoric of return is consonant here with a progressive mandate in which to diversify political options among the Jews, and indeed to begin at the core of its governing institutions. In regard to the impact this commitment has had on Bartana’s artistic strategy, she says, it is both ‘true’ and ‘*not* true’ that ‘I [Bartana] am repeating or even mirroring the mechanism.’⁷⁸ In other words, it is through repetition, and thus through a ‘political variation on the theme of metaphysics’⁷⁹ that Bartana’s vision of the Zionist state maintains itself in a logical tension with the synecdoche that Marder describes.

By retracing the same gesture of ‘concealing through naming,’⁸⁰ the communal imagery in *Wall and Tower* is intended to demonstrate the limited powers of the state to include a diversity of viewpoints. Bartana’s *Unheimliche* vision of the Jewish state thus

⁷⁶ Marder, Michael ‘The Zionist Synecdoche,’ in Marder, Michael and Gianni Vattimo, Eds., *Deconstructing Zionism*, 155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷⁸ ‘Galit Eilat and Charles Esche talk to Yael Bartana.’

⁷⁹ Marder, Michael, and Gianni Vattimo, Eds., ‘Introduction—“If Not Now, When?”’ *Deconstructing Zionism*, xiii.

⁸⁰ Marder, 159.

communicates the urgency of bringing Israeli citizens to the point of acknowledging the injustice that is perpetuated by its governing structure. As Jacqueline Rose writes in her commentary on this work, Bartana does not appear to be resistant to exposing these injustices by any means. In fact, ‘it is the unresolved clash of these histories, rather than some neat, false analogy between them, that makes the second film so troubling.’⁸¹

Bartana’s depiction of Zionism has provoked strongly held attitudes and beliefs regarding the State of Israel. But Bartana’s own position on these matters is often misunderstood. Having left her Israeli home in an act of self-imposed exile, Bartana has spoken about ‘the necessity of finding a position outside one’s home in order to reflect upon it.’⁸² In the same interview Bartana mentions the emotional impact of a family member’s decision to openly refuse military duty in the Occupied Territories, which is something that happened just prior to her own decision to leave the country. It was by supporting this family member during their prison sentence that Bartana felt ‘trapped in between.’⁸³ She says, ‘you’re home, [and] you cannot be free of it, but you’re constantly criticizing it, aware that you don’t want to represent what it stands for.’⁸⁴ Bartana has chosen to voice this ambivalence about home by juxtaposing the prewar socialist ideal of Zionism against that of its militant (or militarized) version. She says, ‘Zionism started with these high hopes: the kibbutz, socialism in Israel, new land and a new architecture and society—an experiment for which I still have a huge amount of respect.’⁸⁵

⁸¹ Rose, Jacqueline, ‘History is a Nightmare,’ *And Europe Will be Stunned*, 144.

⁸² ‘Galit Eilat and Charles Esche talk to Yael Bartana.’

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Boris Groys writes that Bartana's trilogy is an effort 'to liberate the Zionist project from the ethnic separatism that has...destroyed its former utopian appeal.'⁸⁶ Yet Bartana does not find easy paths to this 'utopian appeal' despite its 'universalist roots.'⁸⁷ In fact, by conceiving the universal as 'the impossibility of living together,'⁸⁸ Bartana demands that her viewers begin to imagine the inherent discomfort of cohabitation. It is only through this experience of discomfort that the potential for ethics can be acknowledged.

Because Zionism has acquired a problematic reputation 'even within Israel,'⁸⁹ Bartana's hope is to create a decentered and polyvocal approach to the right of return on which it is based. Not surprisingly, Bartana rejects the 'conflation of Zionism and Judaism'⁹⁰ that those on the right insist upon during moments of conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Yet Bartana also takes these terms to their limit, evoking the prewar association of Zionism with antifascist resistance, and indeed with the kind of democratic socialism that is represented in her work. The artist's wish is therefore to revisit such themes as to better understand the circumstances for their abandonment. Gianna Vattimo, for one, has searched for the shift that led to such abandonment in the first place. He writes:

We started with a "Zionist" mythology—the right of Israel to have its own state, legitimized by the horror of the Shoah and by the apparent lack of democracy in the entire Middle East—and we have over time abandoned it precisely when we discovered the

⁸⁶ Groys, Boris, 'Answering a Call,' *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy*, 139.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁸ 'Yael Bartana...and Europe will be stunned,' *Impossible Objects*, 2011, Web.

⁸⁹ Groys, 139.

⁹⁰ Marder and Vattimo, xv.

Nakba; that is, when we opened our eyes, or when they were opened, to the colonialist and nationalist (even racist) sin that remains like an original sin upon the foundation of the State of Israel.⁹¹

DIASPORA NATIONALISM

Zamach (Assassination), the third installment of Bartana's trilogy, is utterly different from the previous installments explored above because it demonstrates a growing willingness on Bartana's part to forcefully challenge the persistence of the 'homeland' theme within newer expressions of community. These particular expressions occupy a force of impact on previous discussions in ways that are productive for some of the key political concepts that I have explored in this dissertation. Filmed during the aftermath of Sierakowski's life, this final video symbolizes Europe's adoption of an ethical framework that is premised on a vision of cohabitation that goes well beyond the colourblind compulsions that I mention in Chapter Five. The death of the movement's leader yields an outpouring of grief that finally makes it possible to begin dismantling the settler imperative. Indeed, it is through this dismantling that the European Jews become agents of change in contemporary Polish society. I argue below that Bartana's preferred

⁹¹ Vattimo, Gianna, 'How to Become an Anti-Zionist,' Marder, Michael and Gianni Vattimo, Eds., *Deconstructing Zionism*, 16. Incidentally, the Italian philosopher has developed a reputation for his outspoken views regarding Zionism. Reportedly, he made a series of controversial statements during the bombing of Gaza in 2014. See Momigliano, Anna, 'Italian philosopher apologizes for saying he wanted to "shoot those bastard Zionists,"' *Haaretz*, 30 July 2014.

figure for such dismantling is rooted in the East European Jewish traditions of diaspora nationalism.

More broadly, I argue that Bartana returns to the tropes of popular sovereignty in order to illustrate how communities can participate in the abatement of grief. Acts of sovereignty are represented here in connection with a popular street uprising in the midst of a state funeral for the departed leader. Refusing to adopt the exceptional powers of the state or its military function, the constitutive moment of sovereignty is revealed by the sublime endurance of Sierakowski's political vision. In fact, the diversification of the JRMiP's mandate in *Assassination* is used by Bartana precisely to reassert the actual desire for 'a broader Polish community that will trigger our imaginations.'⁹² As we have seen, it is by triggering the imagination that the grief of prior displacement can be transformed into 'an attribute and function of assembling.'⁹³



Figure 24: Yael Bartana, still from *Assassination*, Video, 2011.

⁹² Bartana, Yael, 'Conversations with Contemporary Artists at the Guggenheim,' *YouTube*, 12 March 2012.

⁹³ Puar, 168.

To be more specific, I suggest that Bartana assembles a picture of conviviality through precise moments of disagreement, reparation and mobilization. Disagreement is particularly strong in the eulogies that accompany the funeral procession, featuring cameo appearances by the Polish art critic Anda Rottenberg, the novelist Alona Frankel, and the Israeli television personality Yaron London. Each speaker was encouraged to comment on the movement in ways that would reveal their personal commitment to its founding ideas. Taken as a whole, these voices emphasize the inherently polyvocal nature of the JRMiP movement in the broadest terms, making disagreement a motivating force of political action.

In this, Bartana rejects the application of any simple procedure that would demonstrate conviviality by the existence of collective valency.⁹⁴ This valency refers to ways of connecting at an elemental level that somehow requires a unified voice that only the imprint of a sovereign decision can allow. On the other hand, Bartana's fidelity to disagreement is tested in this scene, particularly with Yaron London's contribution, in which he argues that a Jewish state of any description will rightfully compromise the value of Jewish experience in the diaspora. Bartana, for her part, chose to keep this statement with its rather statist implication in the final cut, thereby demonstrating the spirit of productive disagreement and what it can do. However, the implication of London's commentary also forces Bartana to make a stronger statement than before about the direction she would like to take the movement.

The openness to disagreement on Bartana's part may be effective as a way of countering the siren call to assume the position of a sovereign exception, but it also faces limitations. In other words, the function of disagreement in the dialectic of *Assassination*

⁹⁴ This reference is to the group psychology of Wilfrid Bion.

is like that of an abstract universal. It is disruptive and provocative, but it is ultimately unsustainable even by its own account. It opens possibilities for action but it does not indicate how such communities of disagreement can move forward. In fact, the negative moment of this abstraction tends to be expressed by returning to the past in a search for reparation.

In *Assassination*, this particular search is redirected by the appearance of fictional characters on the eulogy stage, particularly Rifke, who is briefly described in Sierakowski's inaugural speech from *Nightmares* as the ghost who haunts Polish society during successive postwar generations marked by cultural amnesia. With a name that is often attributed to acts of joining and intercultural dialogue, Rifke's appearance is intended to signal a turning point in the overall narrative, a moment of healing from the death pangs of an increasingly forgotten and yet strangely regenerative history. Rifke's ability to move reparation along, however, is determined only in the aftermath of her testimony, which not only recounts the crimes of the past, but also provides subtle motivation to move beyond them. She says:

I am Rifke, who was murdered and buried
anew, who was disinherited, who was moved,
breathless, from the mass graves at Auschwitz,
Babi-Yar, Treblinka, Majdanek, Sobibor, to
the shrine of memory, to the mausoleum of
architecture of the sublime in Jerusalem.
I can be found everywhere. I am the ghost of
return, the return returning to herself.

Sunken in the crypt of grief that cannot be
expressed in words, my dead tongue hides
something that was buried alive.

I am here to reveal the destruction of the
understood through the tongue.

I am here to weave the torture of identity
from the threads of forgetfulness.

I am condemned to exist in the frozen crystal,
saved from healing, removed from the
present.⁹⁵

Immobilized by the haunting of her own return, Rifke's statement is quickly paired with a sense of malcontent among the growing number of supporters assembled around the stage. In this phantasmagoria of a spontaneous action, Bartana depicts scenes that emphasize the crowd's sheer propensity for revolutionary resolve.⁹⁶ Using the aesthetic motifs of public assembly, Bartana connects the sovereign action depicted in her previous installments together with the explosive potential of the multitude as it descends into the streets of Warsaw's former ghetto.

In a gesture of fidelity to this scene, Bartana and her organizing team met in Berlin in the spring of 2012 to hold the First Congress of the JRMiP, a fictional meeting to discuss constitutional issues of the movement. Attended by artists and academics, the

⁹⁵ 'Speech by Rifke,' In Bartana, Yael, *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy* (Artangel, 2012), 122.

⁹⁶ In a provocative counterpoint to Poland's homogenous population, Bartana further curated multiethnic and multiracial extras that are conspicuously featured in the crowd.

Congress offered a space for invited participants to volunteer motions and develop a constitution that would serve to institutionalize the movement as a legitimate political actor. Erica Lehrer, a participant of the Congress, has explained that the deliberations included calls to ‘open the borders of the EU’ for illegal migrants, ‘to the technically impossible, such as funding a geotectonic engineering project that would split Israel off from the continental landmass.’⁹⁷ Other deliberations included a motion to redirect the funds from Holocaust museums in Auschwitz to the victims of European colonialism, and another to abolish national languages in the Eurozone.



Figure 25: Yael Bartana, still from *Assassination*, video, 2011.

From the banal and the obscure to the explosive and outrageous, these motions were designed in the spirit of the movement as it has been depicted in the video installations. However, the Congress was also an attempt to promote dialogue around

⁹⁷ Lehrer, Erica, and Magdalena Waligórska, ‘Cur(at)ting History: New Genre Art Interventions and the Polish-Jewish Past,’ *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 20: 10, 2013 (1-35), 9.

issues that are often too difficult to address without posturing or controversy.⁹⁸ In regard to the tropes of Zionism and their presence in this work, the Congress only accentuates a tendency within *Assassination* in particular to go beyond the statist and colonial vision of Zionism that currently dominates the governing structure of contemporary Israel. In other words, I claim that Bartana's final gesture in *Assassination* is to recoup 'national' sentiments that were prevalent among the Jewish diaspora in Europe, and which served as premises for an ideological conflict with hegemonic versions of Zionism.

That is, unlike in previous installments of the trilogy, *Assassination* draws substantially from the East European Jewish tradition of 'diaspora nationalism.' As part of European Jewish history, diaspora nationalism refers to a loosely constructed set of ideas reflecting an alternative vision of Jewish social thought, with an emphasis on the practicality and fecundity of the diaspora. It originated as a cultural movement in Eastern Europe and flourished in the first half of the twentieth century as opposition mounted to a diversification of political Zionism. As I explain below, Bartana's overall visual strategy in this particular installment is a symptom of this opposition, resuscitating as she does a long established debate over whether or not it is advantageous to declare autonomous ('national') rights within constituted (nation-) states.

Bartana transposes this particular debate onto her illustration of a mature political organization. The final installment bears witness to the inclusion of further demands beyond its original mandate, the most notable of which is the call to extend European settlement rights to all minorities. In fact, I argue that the movement would need to be transformed in the process of formulating these demands. It would need to expand

⁹⁸ Beit Zatoun, a Toronto cultural center, addressed this phenomenon recently by holding a workshop entitled 'Talking about Israel & Palestine without exploding.'

demographically, but it would also need to hone its ability to translate the collective experience of grief into a force of ever-broadening social change. The most effective way of communicating this change is found in the eulogy speech by JRMiP youth, Marek Maj and Salome Gersch:

Optimism is dying out.

The promised paradise has been privatized.

The Kibbutz apples and watermelons are no longer as ripe.

We direct our appeal not only to Jews.

We accept into our ranks all those for whom there is no place in their homelands—the expelled and the persecuted. There will be no discrimination in our movement.

We shall not ask about your life stories, we shall not check your residence cards, nor question your refugee status. We shall be strong in our weakness.⁹⁹

This layered and complex text may in the first instance be situated in relation to the emergence of diaspora nationalism within the Jewish autonomy movements of Eastern Europe. To that end, I examine work by Roni Gechtman and Simon Rabinovitch,

⁹⁹ ‘Speech by Marek Maj and Salome Gersch,’ *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy* (Artangel, 2012), 125.

as historians who both appear to suggest that diaspora nationalism was already widespread by the time the Jewish Labor Bund was established in Russia and Poland in 1897.¹⁰⁰ Though it formalized the Jewish diaspora into a recognizable political movement, the Bund garnered the most visibility for their demand that national states begin to recognize the cultural autonomy of European minorities in general.

By combining a socialist or working-class politics with a variant of secular Yiddish-speaking Judaism, the Bund was able to present a strong multinational alternative to the Zionist settler imperative. The Bund's insistence was for the recognition of minorities by national and imperial authorities despite lacking the 'anchor of place.'¹⁰¹ As such, while defending the interests of the Jewish diaspora, the Bund also responded 'to specific circumstances of modernizing Europe.'¹⁰² Gechtman in particular makes the point that collaboration between minority groups was decentered and infrequent prior to the Bund's attempt at unifying them. Indeed, the Bund achieved such unification by establishing ties with social democratic unions throughout the East, together with minority groups facing similar conditions and desires for political representation.

In its capacity as a socialist and radical movement whose aim was to resist the 'territorial partition of multinational states,'¹⁰³ the Bund was only incidentally a Jewish organization. On this basis, by further unpacking the valence between this movement of Eastern Jews and the socialist political actors in this region, I note that the wider Jewish diaspora according to Gechtman drew heavily upon Yiddish as 'the main medium

¹⁰⁰ My reference here is to the establishment of the General Jewish Labour Bund in Russia and Poland.

¹⁰¹ Rabinovitch, Simon, Ed., *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States* (Brandeis, 2012), xvii.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Gechtman, Roni, 'National-Cultural Autonomy for Eastern European Jews? The Austro-Marxists and the Jewish Labor Bund,' *JBDI/DIYB*, Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 4 (2005), 24.

through which [their] national culture was “manifested.”¹⁰⁴ The implication, however, is that while the Bund and its Yiddish foundation served to unite the Jewish diaspora in a national project that also challenged the territorial state, the use of Yiddish language was in some ways exclusive to the communities who spoke it.

Rabinovitch, in any case, focuses on the precise distinctions that Yiddish makes in regard to matters of settlement and the broader appeal of such movements. In his comparison of the Hebrew and Yiddish words for exile—*galut* and *golus*, respectively—Rabinovitch argues that the prevalence of the latter within diaspora communities reveals competing traditions under the umbrella of Jewish thought. In the Yiddish version, a specific reference is made to the ‘physical conditions of Jews in Europe,’¹⁰⁵ whereas the Hebrew version makes an explicit reference to settlement. While both versions indicate a path ‘from ancient conditions of exile to modern conditions of national solidarity,’¹⁰⁶ the Yiddish version differs by affirming the experience of exile as a condition without end.

There are further implications to consider in examining the use of Yiddish in this particular movement. Gechtman, for instance, points out that Yiddish divided workers in ways that prevented the full realization of the Bund’s socialist potential. He explains that when the Bund appropriated Yiddish for political aims, the language was transformed into a written medium, thus intellectualizing its thought and making Jews vulnerable to assimilation.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, however, the growth of the national diaspora movement in some instances prevented the working class from participating in its further development, as most workers were illiterate and used Yiddish only in everyday speech. While the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁵ Rabinovitch, xix.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Gechtman, 46.

advancement of Yiddish brought loose alliances closer together, therefore, it also in some ways brought them farther apart along class lines.

A third and final implication to consider here is the impact of Yiddish on efforts within diaspora nationalism to combine both religious and secular themes of Jewish experience. This combination led prominent Bundists, like Simon Dubnov, for instance, to devise concepts of ‘spiritual nationalism’¹⁰⁸ to describe the movement. The practical implications of this discursive invention have been mixed. On the one hand, it appears to limit the access of non-Jewish minority groups into the discursive realm of concepts such as exile and redemption. On the other hand, the invention of diasporic political life in Europe contributed to mitigating the historical predicament that led to ongoing Ashkenazi migration towards the East from the West.

This predicament was especially present in countries like France and Germany, where Jews were by and large considered to be a religious minority on the periphery of the mainstream. As Jews were often segregated in these countries from the urban community, if not otherwise assimilated, diaspora nationalism sought to reverse this process by combining religious identity with political agency.

Indeed, the religious flavour of these diaspora movements challenges a dominant perception that Zionism is premised on achieving redemption from exile through the logical fulfillment of criteria that was passed down from Judaism. Rabinovitch, for example, separates Zionism from the religious themes that are associated above with diaspora movements. He argues that Zionism should rather be interpreted as an exclusively secular political ideology simply on the basis of its premise as to the

¹⁰⁸ Rabinovitch, xxv.

‘negation of exile,’¹⁰⁹ a premise that in turn negates an experience that is conditional for Jewish religiosity. Rabinovitch, however, goes further by suggesting that neither ideological position measures up to the religious criteria, as ‘both negating the exile and affirming the diaspora are equally problematic to a religious tradition that continually yearned for the end of exile through redemption but affirmed the immediacy of exile and the distant future of redemption.’¹¹⁰

To put it another way, I argue that we need to be careful when it comes to assessing Bartana’s own attempt at retrieving the political history of the European Jewish diaspora in relation to Zionism. As Rabinovitch makes clear, historical and strategic precedents have been set for conflating the two political ideologies. He explains that Zionism was often evoked strategically ‘to make claims for Jewish autonomy,’ whereas the Bund was systematically misrepresented within Zionist historiography to emphasize its ‘national [i.e. territorial] character.’¹¹¹ Indeed, these attempts at misappropriation are crucial to acknowledge if the integrity of the record is to be preserved.¹¹²

Now, Bartana’s equivocations about the specific terms of these ideological positions are different from the strategic alignments that Rabinovitch describes. I argue that Bartana’s intervention is rather premised on making Zionism and the diaspora movements much more available for productive experimentation. It is through experimentation, for example, that Bartana’s work eviscerates the utopian element of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., xix. This particular phrase is attributed to Ahad Ha’am’s 1909 article of the same name.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., xxii.

¹¹¹ Ibid., xxxi.

¹¹² Boris Groys (2012) suggests that a productive comparison should be made to the Soviet-era *kolkhoz* movement as ‘a form of Zionism that need not be connected to Zion’ (139). As Groys explains, the movement resulted from a 1920s initiative by the USSR in which Jews were encouraged ‘to build a home for themselves on its territories’ (133). Centered in Birobidzhan, an Eastern outpost, the *kolkhozes* were designed to compete with the Israeli kibbutz initiative, and indeed to serve as a conductor for the ideas of Communist internationalism that many believed to be lacking in Israel.

Jewish faith, with an experience that originates ‘in a discourse of sin and punishment and in the promise of redemption.’¹¹³ Above all, the narrative format of these videos reveals efforts by the artist at a sort of playfulness within the very terms of Jewishness, and thus to create a political agency that is different from the content of its creation.

PARTING WAYS

In my final examination of Bartana’s trilogy, I briefly examine Judith Butler’s efforts at distinguishing Judaism from the ethical and political content of Jewish philosophy in *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. Butler’s work has proven to be influential in terms of challenging the Israeli position that all critiques of its policies are anti-Semitic. However, while this problematic gesture is certainly highlighted in Bartana’s trilogy as well, I argue that Butler and Bartana have a lot more to contribute on this matter than that of simply challenging the prevalence of a phrase.

Butler revisits the lively debates of European Jewish philosophers prior to WWII to illustrate that Zionism emerged from a diversity of attitudes and perspectives.¹¹⁴ Because of this diversity, Butler challenges the charge of anti-Semitism that is made by pro-Israeli forces against mounting pressure from their numerous critics.¹¹⁵ However, Butler also reasserts the uniquely ethical contribution that originates in the diasporic experience of the European Jews, proposing that the lessons of this experience offer

¹¹³ Ibid., xxvi.

¹¹⁴ Some of these writers include Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Emmanuel Levinas, Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem.

¹¹⁵ Alain Badiou is another contemporary philosopher who has taken up the theme of anti-Semitism, although from a very different perspective. See Badiou, Alain, Eric Hazan and Ivan Seagre, Eds., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism* (Verso, 2013).

postnational alternatives to the situation between Palestinians and Israelis. Though Butler is more or less focused on the situation in the Middle East, her arguments draw from philosophical resources that are powerfully reimagined in Bartana's work.

Above all, Butler insists that a binational solution is the most viable in terms of resolving the Palestinian crisis. By asking whether 'binationalism [can] be the deconstruction of nationalism,'¹¹⁶ Butler takes on a counter-messianic but equally speculative language that is rather similar to the kind used by the JRMiP. Against the charge from the left that a single binational state would result in a mass quiescence of Israel's genocidal policies, the single state proposed here establishes an ethics of cohabitation for the inclusion of minorities as political subjects.

Butler (like Bartana) returns to the political writing of the Jewish diaspora to support her vision of an alternative state in which cohabitation is the founding doctrine. She focuses on the experience of dispersion in particular, following Franz Rosenzweig's description in *The Star of Redemption* of a Judaism that is composed of 'waiting and wandering.'¹¹⁷ Butler contemporizes this description with her claim that 'to "be" a Jew is to be departing from oneself, cast out into a world of the non-Jew, bound to make one's way ethically and politically precisely there in a world of irreversible heterogeneity.'¹¹⁸ I argue that such 'irreversible heterogeneity' demands that Jews be prepared to affirm a resolutely collective experience, in which being-in-the-world is marked by uncertainty, in which redemption and return are not inscribed into daily practices or secured by

¹¹⁶ Butler, 110.

¹¹⁷ Rosenzweig, Franz, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 348.

¹¹⁸ Butler, 15.

settlement narratives, and in which the basis for encountering the other is one's own vulnerability.

Butler takes this uncertainty as the groundless condition for the establishment of collective solidarity beyond the state and its security regime. The mere fact of dispersion is the basis for Butler's nonidentitarian approach to political action, which is aimed at transcending the divisions and exclusions of settler colonialism practiced within Israel. Butler draws from the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to suggest that 'the other does not just constitute me—it *interrupts* me.'¹¹⁹ On the basis of this assertion, her ethical project is composed of negotiating with this interruption as the basis of selfhood. In other words, by questioning the interruption of the other by the self, we are forced to respond in accordance with a prohibition against killing the other. In this, Butler claims, we might begin to appreciate how Jewish diasporic experience paves the way for an ethical relation between disparate others.

One of the cornerstones of Butler's philosophy is whether the ethical relation as she describes it should 'remain Jewish.'¹²⁰ Through my own investigation of its transferability through Bartana's work, I suggest that Butler appears to draw another parallel here to conversations that were happening within the Bund, in which a universal statement of postnational solidarity ultimately resulted in bringing together minority populations across the region. Not surprisingly, the question of Jewishness according to Butler is one that is engaged in an ongoing struggle with the religious basis of Jewish identity. She therefore insists upon a dedicated investigation into how we can 'assimilate

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3.

religious meanings into established secular frames,¹²¹ particularly when it comes to expanding on the geopolitical relevance of the ethical.

On the other hand, by challenging the inclusion of religious perspectives as I have indicated, I argue that Butler appears to depart from conversations that I would associate with diaspora nationalism. Taking a second look, however, it appears that Butler's actual claim is that the destruction of Palestine by the State of Israel has been helped along by the *privatization* of religious experience. In other words, Butler's anti-religious perspective aims to reject all efforts by Israel to parallel the experience of dispossession perpetrated by the Nazis with similar narratives from the Bible, arguing that such parallels only justify the continued destruction of the Palestinians. On this basis alone, Butler argues that the question of Jewishness must be separated from the religious basis of Judaism proper. In other words, 'if the logic is religious, we have to oppose the use of religion.'¹²²

Butler's opposition to political and religious combinations opens up further questions in her text concerning translation. On the one hand, there is a sense in Butler's work that 'translation strips any claim of...religious content.'¹²³ Or, to put it another way, for Butler translation neutralizes the pathos of religious discourse by intellectualizing the affective or mythical elements of the religious. Butler, however, also wants to counter the assumption that 'translation is an effort to find a common language that transcends particular discourses.'¹²⁴ Beyond or beneath transcendence, as it were, Butler thus truly

¹²¹ Ibid., 8.

¹²² Ibid., 15.

¹²³ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 8.

wishes to describe translation in terms of seeking connections with the other at the epistemic limits of Jewish experience.

With respect to the Hebrew word *galut*, for example, Butler translates its meaning as it were ‘an opening to the unfamiliar,’¹²⁵ and therefore as something that goes beyond the promise of redemption. By taking us to a ‘fallen realm,’ the subject in exile as Butler describes can finally be eclipsed by the fecund potential for ‘chiasm and cohabitation.’¹²⁶

In support of her claim, Butler refers to Edward Said’s prescient reconstruction, in *Freud and the Non-European*, in support of her claim of a ‘diasporic origin for Judaism.’¹²⁷ Said developed this idea in relation to Sigmund Freud’s uneasy relation to the matter of his own Jewishness. Stemming from his ambivalence to this identity category, the psychoanalyst wrote a highly idiosyncratic theory of Moses as the Egyptian patriarch of Jewish faith.¹²⁸ Of this attempt, Said writes, ‘what seems to be missing is Freud’s implicit refusal, in the end, to erect an insurmountable barrier between non-European primitives and European civilization.’¹²⁹

For Butler, this particular reading is useful when it comes to challenging the Zionist separation of Jews and Arabs, a separation that in her view has perpetuated settler colonialist practices and led to the ongoing destruction of the Palestinians. Incidentally, the separation has also facilitated a host of discriminatory policies inside of Israel, which has led in some cases to the racialization of non-European Jewish migrants.¹³⁰ Against this trend, Butler speculates what could happen ‘if two “traditions” of displacement were

¹²⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁸ Freud, Sigmund, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katharine Jones (Vintage, 1955).

¹²⁹ Said, Edward W., *Freud and the Non-European* (Verso, 2004), 19.

¹³⁰ One of the most shocking examples of this racialization in recent memory is the charge that Israel participated in sterilizing Ethiopian Jewish women prior to their immigration. See Neshet, Talia, ‘Israel admits Ethiopian women were given birth control shots,’ *Haaretz*, 27 January, 2013.

to converge to produce a postnational polity based on the common rights of the refugee and the right to be protected against illegitimate forms of legal and military violence?’¹³¹

In other words, if ‘Jews and Arabs are not finally separable categories,’¹³² as Said observes, the question that must be asked is what this particular status can teach us about the exclusionary practices of the so-called Jewish state, and how a course of action might be devised to resist the inherent discrimination of this particular entity? For Bartana, this question is put another way: how can postnational alternatives be proposed in ways that acknowledge the contiguity of identity categories?

As I have shown, Butler’s work in *Parting Ways* is aimed at returning diasporic experience to a privileged space of subjectivity and political agency. Her investigations appear to be consonant with attempts at disassembling the powers of exception that are historically aligned to the national state. Indeed, by meditating on the experience of *dispersion*, I have shown that Butler delves into contested sites of encounter with alterity. By doing so she once again positions the universal as the only viable mechanism of social change. In other words, ‘there is no universal that is not finally negotiated at (or *as*) the conjuncture of discourses.’¹³³ The universal is thus restored by an ethical encounter that is irrevocably relational, and therefore the universal as such is premised on the ‘irresolution of identity’¹³⁴ that lies somewhere in the volatile region of the other.

Above all, I argue that the JRMiP is premised on this irresolution. Indeed given this apparent similitude, I will end Chapter Six with a brief comparison of Butler’s and Bartana’s approaches to questions of the ethical relation. To accomplish this final aim, I

¹³¹ Butler, 16.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

return to Butler's investment in conversations among European Jews in the aftermath of the war, marking as they did a turning point in conversations about the right of return that lies at the core of Zionism. As Butler demonstrates, apropos of the diversity of viewpoints that have been expressed in her work, it is true that some thinkers in this group established pro-Zionist attitudes, whereas others sought to reaffirm the political and cultural value of the diaspora. On the face of it, nothing in this observation is controversial.

However, there are several examples that suggest the division was not so simple to make with particular authors in mind. For example, though Butler refers to Hannah Arendt's progressive affirmation of the diaspora, noting her emphatic suspicion of statist alternatives, she also points to the fact that Arendt routinely expressed Eurocentric and even racist attitudes. As a 'secular Jew'¹³⁵ of German extraction, Arendt conceived of the Ashkenazi variant as superior to all the rest, particularly over the Arabs. For Butler, however, a more pressing conflagration is found in comments by Emmanuel Levinas. That is, beyond the latter's insistence that only Zionism could provide 'the end of an alienation,'¹³⁶ Levinas maintained that the Palestinians, the Jewish neighbours, represented for him an 'Asiatic' population composed of subjects who have 'no face.'¹³⁷ The implication appears to be that Levinas inadvertently promoted the unethical treatment of Palestinians.

For Butler, the ethical value of Levinas' work can be salvaged from these inflammatory comments. In a precise gesture of confinement, Butler proposes to 'read

¹³⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 48.

Levinas against himself,¹³⁸ and therefore to situate the ethical against the grain of the violent spirit that lies behind his statement. The practice of reading against the grain is absolutely necessary, Butler insists, because ‘cohabitation is not a choice, but a condition of our political life.’¹³⁹ These comments are undoubtedly evocative, not only for Levinasian ethics as it is commonly received, but also for Bartana’s visualization of political life. On the other hand, I maintain that it is crucial to ask whether Bartana’s gesture of repetition extends Butler’s method of reading, or whether it hides an important difference between the two.

John Drabinski offers a unique approach to this question in *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other*.¹⁴⁰ Against Butler’s wish to excise Levinas’ offending statement regarding the Palestinian other, Drabinski maintains that his conspicuous omission of the latter from ethical treatment only more fully demonstrates the scope of his work. In fact, the tension that the prejudicial statement generates is an intrinsic part of this framework, as Drabinski argues. The exclusive sentiment not only situates ethics within the canon of European thought, but it more profoundly locates ‘Europe’ as its chief progenitor. To put it another way, Drabinski interprets the prejudicial comment as a symptom of the epistemic limits in Levinas’ work *as a European philosopher*. He writes, ‘to decolonize Levinas begins at his home, there, in Europe, re-entangling identity in the elsewhere.’¹⁴¹

Drabinski’s observation is useful for helping us to understand Bartana’s attempt at challenging the European-Israeli imaginary through tactics of parody and repetition. That

¹³⁸ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁰ Drabinski, John E., *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

is because for Drabinski, the incidental commentary Levinas engaged in raises ‘the question of how the entanglement of Europe with its others stakes out an *ontological* claim,’ particularly if we consider that ‘the very being of Europe is already tied up with global conquest.’¹⁴² Drabinski writes, ‘The New World is Europe itself, an identity worked out not just in the constitutive tension of the Bible and the Greeks, but also and at the same time in the slave ship, on the plantation, and so in all of the violence of empire.’¹⁴³ The constitutive interruption between Europe and its others therefore motivates Drabinski to call for greater ‘transcultural contact’¹⁴⁴ between Europe and its others.

This call, too, appears to be consonant with Bartana’s aims. For Butler, on the other hand, the solution is comparatively simple. Butler’s suggestion takes us back to the Middle East, back to a time where it is possible to surgically excise the Zionist perspective from ideas (of ethics) that originated in Europe. To that end, Butler exclaims that actually existing Zionism has led to a situation where ‘one cannot be a Zionist and struggle for a just end to colonial subjugation.’¹⁴⁵ Though she may in fact be correct, I argue that her attempt to extract any trace of Zionism, including from Levinas’s strongly held beliefs, makes it strictly speaking impossible to completely map her perspective onto Bartana’s.

Butler’s subsequent remarks are particularly revealing of this impossibility. She writes that ‘even the experiments in socialism that characterized the kibbutz movement were an integral part of the settler colonial project, which means that in Israel socialism

¹⁴² Ibid., 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁵ Butler, 19.

was understood to be compatible with colonial subjugation and expansion.’¹⁴⁶ While Butler’s comments may be true, they also create a barrier that simply does not exist from Bartana’s perspective. In fact, given this difference, I argue that Butler must choose between negotiating with a demand for ethics that is always-already in trouble, or with extracting the ethical from an origin that troubles the line with its subtle aspiration for exceptional power.

Bartana’s trilogy, on the other hand, is strictly speaking undecidable. That is to say, because the artist has become a mirror for the exaggerated images of utopian ideas, the work that is produced in this frame will always be marked by subtle visualizations of its nightmares. The precision with which Bartana illustrates the co-implication between Europe and Israel as the other’s ‘laboratory,’ for instance, is able to withdraw from the logical invocations of violence and separation that occur between them in all but name. ‘Concealing through naming,’¹⁴⁷ as it were, Bartana’s videos offer a truthful critique of this western ideology through its ambivalent and often contradictory expressions, taking parody and repetition to the limit of their entertainment value. This limit brings the ethical to the fore.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Marder, 159.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CRISIS REVISITED IN PLANETARY EUROPE

Europe always glances towards the distance, being always ahead of itself with the other.

Rodolphe Gasché

It becomes impossible even to imagine what it is like to be somebody else.

Paul Gilroy

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, NASA has been aware of the existence of icy water along the surface of Europa, one of several moons that orbit the planet Jupiter in the solar system. In 2011, NASA made a further announcement following a related discovery that this cold, white planet may also harbour the unlikely potential for life within its vast oceans. Since that discovery, NASA has allocated funds for a mission to the planet, the so-called Europa Clipper, which accompanies another mission initiated by the European Space Agency (ESA), called the Jupiter Icy Moon Explorer (JUICE).

According NASA's release statements for the Clipper, their mission will be dedicated to conducting preliminary reconnaissance, to capturing images beneath the surface of the ice and monitoring the planet's general atmospheric and climatic conditions. The spacecraft will make forty-five flybys over the planet and transmit

thousands of images back to Earth. Indeed, the enthusiasm of NASA's scientists can hardly be contained by recent headlines that have brought this story to the public's attention. Reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's subtle observations regarding the 'reactivation of mythic forces,'¹ one article reads: 'Mars will test our capabilities, but Europa is the prize.'²

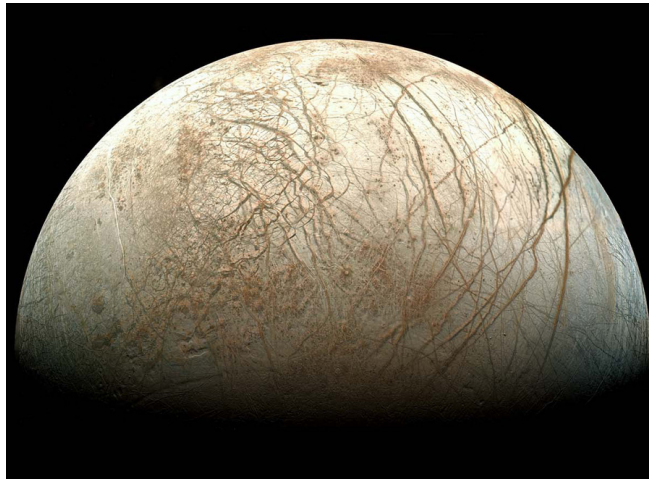


Figure 26: Europa.

The recent news of planned missions invites further reflections on the ethics of cosmopolitanism as this topic has been raised throughout my dissertation. I would suggest, for instance, that a number of cultural theorists have attempted to develop alternatives to the discourse of cosmopolitanism for precisely the reasons that the Europa story conceals. For instance, in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy takes a critical view of the discursive repetition that has occurred since the institutionalization of a post-9/11 culture of security, a period of history that has witnessed the resurgence of the

¹ Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann, Ed., *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap Press, 2002), 391.

² Fletcher, Leigh, 'Mars Will Test Our Capabilities, but Europa is the Prize,' *i09*, 7 February 2015.

national state, the waning authority of the United Nations, and a Second Gulf War that in more recent years has perpetuated an even greater conflict in the Middle East.³

In describing events from recent memory, Gilroy remains focused on the question of how these powers have managed to galvanize the rhetoric of universalism to support their perpetuation of global conflict. He makes references to the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's stated rationale for entering the Second Gulf War as grounded in the defense of freedom, democracy and respecting or tolerating cultural differences around the world. In relation to a discourse that is represented here by Blair, Gilroy refers to the 'benign and seductive language of humanitarianism,'⁴ evoking strategies of using such language to conceal a highly duplicitous geo-strategic mandate. But Gilroy also wants to situate pronouncements like Blair's in relation to a broader European history, and to that end, he makes connections between these pronouncements and the 'armored'⁵ cosmopolitanism of colonial and imperial rule, with specific mention of Leopold in the Congo, whose own practice of colonization was defined above all as an exercise in philanthropy. The conclusion Gilroy draws is that the very aspiration for translocalism and the forging of broader solidarities is already lost during the very course of its articulation.

Gilroy concretizes this observation with his emphatic rejection of the Biblical discourse to 'love thy neighbor,' which he describes as 'an impossible request for tolerance with intimacy.'⁶ Gilroy evokes Freud's skepticism of this particular intimacy, where it is mentioned in *Civilization and Its Discontents* for the purposes of constructing

³ Gilroy, Paul, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Columbia University Press, 2006), 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

a sort of transhistorical pathology of cultural communities.⁷ Writing in the aftermath of the Great War, Freud struggled to understand how hatreds have developed so intensely between groups who live in such close proximity to each other. Returning to the most basic precepts of human togetherness, Freud argues that ‘civilized man exchanges happiness for security,’⁸ and, as a result of this exchange, develops neurosis. Racism, then, is an opportunity to discharge the aggressivity that accumulates in one’s adherence to this demand for security. Gilroy thus proposes to historicize universalism as precisely an attempt to act morally and justly in the face of otherness, as Freud contends, rather than as formulating a response to the violence that attempts to do away with otherness. Gilroy further describes how universalism has been unevenly distributed among humankind, as he makes particular reference to the period of European colonization and imperial rule. Above all, Gilroy suggests that universalism has merely become a thin compensation for the absence of new ways to appreciate proximity and cohabitation with the other.

Gilroy asks whether a politics of cosmopolitanism from below is even possible under these circumstances. For an answer to this question, he looks to anti-nationalist perspectives, referring to Freud’s reaction to the Great War, as I mentioned above, and also to the antipathy for nationalism among the refugees of WWII, specifically the Jews. Gilroy introduces the concept of planetarity, which among other things promotes ‘a sense of estrangement from the cultural habits one is born into.’⁹ Following an earlier history from the days of Galileo, when the earth was symbolically displaced from its central

⁷ Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

⁸ Ibid. 73

⁹ Gilroy, 70.

position in the cultural imaginary of Christendom, the planetary ethos that Gilroy encourages is one that significantly minimizes national, state and territorial sovereignties, precisely by positioning those practices in relation to the orbital view. The cosmopolitanism of the planetary sort is one that is borne not from a sense of autonomy and camaraderie, but rather from a mutual experience of finitude and suffering. Other writers of the postcolonial like Gayatri Spivak have offered their own theory of the planetary. Spivak writes, for instance, that ‘postcolonialism [remains] caught in mere nationalism over against colonialism. Today it is planetarity that we are called to imagine—to displace the historical alibi.’¹⁰

Gilroy approximates the ‘hopeful despair’¹¹ that such radical finitude creates as a kind of prescription for the scene of global geopolitics. It would in any case bring us to a rather different perspective on the potential for life at Europa, inviting us perhaps to enjoy the symbolic resonance of this planet’s name and the mission dedicated to its transformation. Like the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, the Europa Clipper is discursively embedded in a mission to return. For someone like Gilroy or Lauren Berlant, such a mission is imbued with a measure of hopeful despair that the NASA-approved release statements and articles would not be able to comprehend. Like Gilroy, Berlant wishes to move beyond the utopian narratives that have come to define the geopolitical terrors of the past, and therefore to move explicitly into the space of immersive cultural articulations that engage the present on its own terms. With this aim in mind, Berlant follows Gilroy’s prescription for ‘hope’ through what she variously refers to as ‘optimism.’

¹⁰ Spivak, Gayatri, *Death of a Discipline* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 98.

¹¹ Gilroy, 75.

In defining the terms of optimism, Berlant's discussion provides a useful conclusion to broader themes in this dissertation, at least in terms of the specific conjunctures she describes between aesthetics and social engagement. Focusing on the present as I have indicated in so many writers mentioned in previous chapters, Berlant writes that 'the present is perceived, first, affectively.'¹² By making this assessment she strongly departs from the familiar axis between inheritance, responsibility and articulations of the future. Optimism, in other words, is not optimism for the receding horizon of an uncharted future. It rather describes how subjects form specific attachments in the world. To solidify this methodological difference, Berlant moves strictly beyond the cultural politics of the encounter, which, for example, utterly saturates popular narratives around the expeditions to Planet Europa. Beyond the encounter, Berlant focuses on the psychic dynamics of 'the scene,' which represents a discursive shift in her work that further corresponds with a departure from analyzing cultural objects, and to focus instead on their circulation.

In the scene, optimism follows an always-circuitous path involving elements that provoke ambivalence and even suffering. For instance, Berlant examines capitalist social relations and how they organize or disorganize the collective in space and time. One concept she uses to describe these movements is that of 'slow death,' which refers to 'the attrition of subjects by the situation in which capital determines value.'¹³ In other words, beyond the axis of utopian futures, including its mutilated and degraded forms, Berlant describes how the capitalist relations of exchange value become sutured to the

¹² Berlant, Lauren, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

reproduction of life, and therefore to a collective experience of dispossession. In this ‘cruel optimism,’ she writes:

The subject or community turns its treasured attachments into safety-deposit objects that make it possible to bear sovereignty through its distribution, the energy of feeling relational, general, reciprocal, and accumulative. In circulation one becomes happy in an ordinary, often lovely, way, because the weight of being in the world is being distributed into space, time, noise, and other beings. When one’s sovereignty is delivered back into one’s hands, though, its formerly distributed weight becomes apparent, and the subject becomes stilled in a perverse mimesis of its enormity...Our activity is revealed as a vehicle for attaining a kind of passivity, as evidence of the desire to find forms in relation to which we can sustain a coasting sentience.¹⁴

The preceding passage guarantees Berlant’s a kind of freedom from focusing on the traumatic core with which cultural theory appears to be obsessed. Rather, for Berlant, the dynamics of optimism enter into circulation with fantasy, suffering and the ordinary. To put it another way, ‘crisis ordinariness’¹⁵ challenges the sovereignty of limit concepts within cultural theory, and in cultural history as well, as in dominant perceptions of the European financial crisis. It allows us to consider instead how ‘memory and the past emerge in mediated zones of visceral presence distributed across scenes of epistemological and bodily activity.’¹⁶ And in this, memory allows us to think and to

¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹⁶ Ibid., 52.

rethink our received forms of collectivity beyond their supposed limitations and boundaries.

In conclusion, it may be worthwhile to consider how crisis ordinariness affects the politics of cohabitation among Europeans in particular. How, in other words, can the history and memory of generational violence, exclusion, genocide, appropriation, and death, be reactivated in fecund or productive ways? For Gilroy and Berlant, at least, the politics of exclusion within postnational articulations of Europe can be altered and redirected subliminally by establishing relations of distance from the longstanding discursive investment in notions of commonality, community and responsibility. In the spirit of what Berlant describes in relation to the post-phenomenological tradition as *being-with*, the preceding dissertation has drawn from aesthetics and collective memory to analyze specific genealogies of race, suggesting, among other things, that new patterns of continental race relations and migrations have emerged since the EU financial crisis unfolded in 2008. By arguing for the ‘creolization’ of European area studies in the wake of this crisis, I have challenged the cosmopolitan grand narratives that dominate and perpetuate forms of raced inequality. By using aesthetics, and particularly the art of social engagement, I have shown that different frameworks are needed to recognize minority subjects beyond the rigid orthodoxies of the migrant, diaspora or the refugee.

Above all, this work has formulated an elaborate demand on its readers to adopt an ethical philosophy as the very basis of politics.

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