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Facing the Wall:

Screening through Alienation and Separation

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

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Abstract

Despite relying on a fantasy of unity, globalization maintains a conflict-ridden system of exclusion. The politics of division physically emerge as barriers, partitions, and concrete walls, barricading national groups away from their imagined Others. While borders and cultural identities appear increasingly permeable, political walls by contrast reappear around the world. Such barriers produce restrictive political spaces and delimited perspectives; however, they also demarcate the psychological conditions and historical imaginaries of those they keep apart. Drawing on the example of the former Berlin Wall, Israel's Separation Wall and the imminent Wall at the US-Mexican border, this project examines the psychological and traumatic settings of political division as materialized in political walls. Foregrounding the traumatic voids and fantasmatic structures these barriers impose, the project looks at the function of political walls in securing narratives of political separation and investigates them as potential screens. I argue that, while political walls work as ideological screens, erasing the Other, they can also be read as media screens that project the politics on which they rest and thereby enable encounters across the two 'sides'.

As a media screen, a political Wall either serves as a backdrop for constructed political realities or as a surface onto which political commentary can be projected and subsequently engaged with. The silent imposition of the Wall is often envisioned through fictional films, documentaries and photography, while graffiti, murals or installations foreground the Wall's rewriteable materiality. Political walls conceptualized as and through such forms of art and media make possible the reworking of the politics and histories of walls by disrupting the prevalence of their perception and making visible the exclusionary realities they sustain. Investigating both cinematic and artistic encounters with each Wall in Berlin, Palestine and Mexico, the project examines the Wall as a projective screen which implies an indivisible relationship between two sides. Political walls are read as symptoms of our time, working to separate people but also attesting to the silent barriers we erect from within. They function as symbols of cultural othering and continue to mediate the intimate and often traumatic conflicts at the physical and psychological faultlines of human communities. I suggest that by bringing to the surface the conflicts of human division, political walls allow us to rethink, rewrite and reclaim the meaning of these structures, enabling a re-vision of their politics.

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Chapter 1

Re-Introducing Political Walls

Political Walls are a symptom of globalization. The more we imagine ourselves as part of an increasingly open, free and transnational community, the more we are confronted with the occupying, partitioning, barricading and walling off of cities, territories and nations. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, such barriers have continuously resurfaced, from Palestine to Mexico, reminding us that political division is a recurring motif in the writing and rewriting of global maps and identities. Most famously, the Israeli West Bank barrier exemplifies “separation as a philosophy”¹ meant to protect a community from an impending threat while creating a boundary to support collective identification. Complemented by the increasing fortification of its counterpart in Mexico, the barrier envisions the emergence of the modern walled state, where collectives are stabilized and protected against the backdrop of an imaginary Other, which is equally feared and disdained. In this way the new walls resonate with the memory of the demolished Berlin Wall as they reintroduce means of exclusion and control into contemporary political landscapes. Political walls demarcate a highly politicized space at the same time as they produce (and foreclose) confined modes of community. The walled space is stabilized by cultural narratives and psychological undercurrents that reproduce the political boundary on an imaginary level and thereby assist in the construction of a (walled) identity. What is interesting about the visual statement of a concrete Wall made of solid, impenetrable surfaces is how these façades, as symptoms of cultural alienation, make visible the psychological foundation of the political space. Political walls materialize segregation and exclusion played out equally in the collective imaginaries that produce political division and physical divides. These walls carry with them (and on them) historical narratives and re-enact the power divisions they are meant to support. Drawing on the examples of the Berlin Wall, the West Bank separation barrier and the US-Mexican border, this project investigates the Wall as a

¹ David Makovsky, "How to Build a Fence," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no.2 (2004), 52. In this article Makovsky argues that the Wall provides security and encourages peace, ignoring the fact that such a Wall is the literal site (and enforcement) of conflict division.

physical *and* metaphorical form, reappearing in different historical contexts and exercising its effectiveness politically and psychologically.

Examining the Wall through the particular settings in Berlin, Israel and Mexico exposes its function as a mirror for a larger structure of segregation. The politics of division are concretized in bricks and mortar, but essentially these walls also work as metaphors for barriers of the mind. The walls from Palestine to Mexico maintain an existing separation while covering over the aggressive social and political attitudes they reinforce. The new walls are thus built on old concepts, effectively generating and securing a narrative of ‘us and them,’ while performing an insistent denial of the underlying relationship between the two sides. On the one hand, each Wall reacts to particular circumstances, pitching itself as filter, shield, and screen in response. On the other hand, the various walls reference one another and reveal a common trace. In this way the particularities each Wall reveals lend meaning to the other(s), while reworking the intricacies of walling as a global force. The Wall in Berlin stands out, not simply because it is often quoted as the blueprint for the new walls, but also because it is now absent from the political landscape it has so profoundly inscribed. As the Wall of the past, the Berlin Wall can tell us about the invisible impressions and enduring psychological traces that support the physical monument. The West Bank separation barrier is the Wall of the present, offering a contemporary study of modern forms of walling and attempting to distinguish itself from the imprisoning means of the Wall in Berlin. However, despite being located in a different political and cultural context, it too reveals a reliance on psychological effectiveness. The West Bank separation barrier aggressively promotes a national fantasy, while blending out the competing realities of Israel’s formation. Thereby, the West Bank separation barrier offers insight into the fantasmatic undercurrents of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and articulates the Wall’s imaginary function. Finally, the Wall of the future, the US-Mexican border, is the “third space” of the analysis, exemplifying the way in which political walls project and materialize existing imaginaries. In this way the three walls reveal as they conceal the dynamics of their political and psychological effectiveness.

Dividing land and people, the walls in Berlin, Israel and Mexico maintain a psychological division, particularly concerned with the repression (and oppression) of an intolerable Other – both in the sense of an ideological and psychological

construction, banishing real people (on the other side) and carefully cementing a fantasized alterity (reflecting back onto the self). Once constructed, however, these physical and metaphorical barriers do not simply promote the effacement of the Other, but themselves become invisible in the social and political landscapes they inhabit. It is thus the function of invisibility, both as their effect and means, that makes political walls effective agents of separation and alienation. To engage with these walls is to bring them into the public field of vision, interrupting their invisibility and intervening in the rigid constitution of the walled state. Such a state utilizes division and effacement as the means by which the Other is excluded, physically and psychologically. Ideological coherence and identity are secured by ignoring, even repressing, the intolerable identity and vulnerability of the Other. Correspondingly, violence is legitimized precisely on the grounds that the Other does not have a face and hence remains Other. A Wall in its effacing function is thus a means of making-invisible. It works to prevent us from seeing beyond the limit it poses and rigidly defines the collective self as separate from the Other. To face such a Wall is to be confronted with the outer contours of an obstinate and irresponsive identity as well as a structure of congealed and unseen violence. The Wall stands as a fabrication of invisibility in order to estrange, alienate and finally efface one (side) from an/other. Thereby the Wall itself becomes invisible in the political landscape it sustains. Simultaneously, the Wall persistently affirms itself by securing and mediating the identities upon which it rests. It reflects these identities in the form of narratives about the collective; like a mirror, it throws back the image for affirmation. A Wall may thus be considered a spectacle of invisibility that seeks to instil blindness to the other side as well as reflect the collective it encompasses.

More radically, a Wall may be read as a medium of text and image that provides the means for its own critique. Political walls can be investigated in terms of screened media and themselves as media screens, precisely because they are a form of spectacular inscription on the psychological and political landscapes they inhabit. Thereby they generate (and degenerate) particular forms of meaning. The Wall itself works as an image from which to draw meaning and is often used as a stage or backdrop for political performance. In this way the Wall produces a variety of meanings as well as inviting creative engagement, often mediated through the interpretive lens of film and art. Furthermore, the surface itself can be read as a

medium in its own right, attracting artistic commentary and other expressive responses, such as graffiti, murals, photo-projections or installations. The Wall does not simply hide the various ideas and attitudes it has come to materialize, but is also capable of conveying and even challenging the implications of its own appearance. Thus, it is capable of critically interrupting itself. Such an interruption is precisely an interruption of the spectacle of invisibility necessary to the Wall's effectiveness. By drawing attention to the way in which the Wall does not simply exemplify separation and alienation but can be read as a medium of the collective imaginary it secures, counter-hegemonic actions can address and challenge the politics of invisibility and demarcation. As a medium the Wall thus provokes reflexivity and perhaps a way to see through the Wall's imposition. The Wall may thus have effects that are in opposition to its hegemonic functions, provoking responsiveness and engagement. This means that the Wall does not simply stand as an obstacle, but also enables encounters which allow visibility and invisibility to be negotiated. Hence, we have to look at the Wall less from the point of view of politicized concrete than of mediation and meaning. To ask such a question means to ask what the Wall can tell us about itself, how it addresses us and how it demands that we respond.

A View on Global Boundaries

In our globalized world the act of responding, which enables or forecloses our relationships with others, is closely related to forms of responsibility. The effective and affective consequences of political acts travel globally between people and states, despite these channels being marked by inherent inequalities and oppressive power relations. Simply put, we have to respond to one an/Other precisely because in a globalized world the Other is necessarily a part of the collective formation. Contrary to this dynamic, a political Wall always seeks to hide one side from the other. However, it also brings the encounter between the two sides involuntarily into being and essentially into view. The Wall thus unwittingly resonates with Judith Butler's remark that the relationship with the Other cannot be disavowed, "regardless of what the other does, regardless of what I might will."² The global reinforcement of political division thus only highlights Badiou's observation that "in

² Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 91.

human terms -the ‘unified’ world of globalization is a sham.”³ In this light, a rhetoric of global unity is a cynical form of exclusion in and of itself. As Badiou further reminds us, “the overwhelming majority of the population have at best restricted access to this world. They are locked out, often literally so.”⁴ The unifying force of global capitalism hence shows itself to depend on divisions of basic human existence while preventing a critical self-understanding in response to these shortcomings. Instead, the global order of capitalism peddles a fantasy of unity that it carefully posts onto its own divisive walls. Thus, globalization is in itself a spectacle of invisibility reinforced by its own expulsions and barriers. To remain unresponsive to this narrative of division is to reinforce it, and to reiterate the philosophy of separation and irresponsibility – in short to build new walls.

Despite the rhetoric of a unified world, we increasingly face the violence of separation: our world espouses itself as being walled. Badiou suggests that there is in fact such a thing as “the world’s wall,”⁵ which serves as a reference point for ever newer modes of division and effacement. These shifts can be understood as the manifestation of a persistent circle of violence, which is upheld by a self-defeating attitude of desperate compartmentalization *and* a desire for unity. As a result the Wall presents itself as an effect of historical and often traumatic forces and functions as a physical and psychological impediment for those who must endure it. It is essential to realize that walls always impose on and cut through the human narratives on both sides. Whether they are meant to close out refugees, drug-smugglers, migrants, communists, tax evaders, terrorists or simply the poor, the intrusive, the discontented and the labelled, is of secondary interest. The walls of the world exclude the Other as they create the Other by exclusion. The rhetoric of security is always self-defeating, as being secure comes at the cost of being secured. Put simply, walls do not offer safekeeping; they build prisons. They work to imprison people, minds and (collective) selves into two sides which seek to secure alienation through division. Thus, walls do not simply serve as a concrete imposition; rather, they bear and expand the symbolic weight they have come to materialize.

³ Alain Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” *New Left Review* 49, (January-February 2008), 38.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The Politics of Walls

Rhetorical and architectural barriers are often discussed as demarcations of the global imaginary, but none are so clear as the walls that seem to literally resurface as lines of division on the face of the world. Running through sites and minds alike, they announce the motif of exclusionary effacement through different periods of time and contexts. This need for exclusion points to an internal incoherence - a falling apart of one's own identity construction projected onto the Other - as exemplified by but not limited to the case of Berlin. Indeed, the concept of walling resonates beyond the 1989 demise of the Berlin Wall. The modes of division have merely shifted, paving new directions for a politics of walls as the means for contemporary imaginaries. Thinkers like Alain Badiou and Étienne Balibar have extensively analysed these developments in the wake of the Berlin Wall's demise.⁶ Badiou has suggested that the 'end of history,' as the end of grand narratives, has neatly survived its own epitaph, with the myth of global unity subverted by increased fortification. Recently, Wendy Brown revived this discussion, investigating the resurgence of walls as a reaction to the waning sovereignty of nation-states.⁷ Her analysis exposes the emergent walls in Israel-Palestine and at the US-Mexican border as having similarities with the crumbled Berlin Wall, in fact both seek to fix an equally vulnerable ideological narrative. Taking the idea of immovable ideologies in a different direction, primarily concerned with political change and new forms of community, Jacques Rancière has further utilized the notion of the border in order to test ideas of political disruption.⁸ Rancière's thinking about aesthetics and politics allows us to situate the discussion of walls and boundaries within the field of media and its transgressive potentialities. Collectively, these lines of thought attest to an imaginary substantiation of the global politics of walls.

⁶ Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis"

Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? – Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso 2002).

Étienne Balibar, "Europe as Borderland," *Society and Space* 27, (2009) 190-215.

⁷ Wendy Brown, *Walled States: Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

⁸ Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics," in *Communities of Sense*, ed. Beth Hinderliter et. al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 49.

The politics of walls rest on a paradox of the global imaginary. The resurgence of the boundary as reflected in the building of the political Wall appears as a contradiction to the unifying force of globalization, yet such boundaries have also been identified as the supporting columns of the globalized world. In this context Badiou problematizes the notion of unification in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In “The Communist Hypothesis” Badiou dismisses “the single world of freedom and democracy,”⁹ instead lamenting the reconstruction of walls “all over the world.”¹⁰ To Badiou these new barriers exemplify conflictual and escalating divisions “between the pleasures of wealth and the desires of the poor”¹¹ and thereby mock the pretence of the global imagination. Adding to this observation, Balibar explains that, although contemporary processes of globalization have weakened the force of borders, such boundaries also attain new meaning(s).¹² Balibar explains that globalization facilitates the permeability of boundaries firstly in terms of economics and communication. However, the resulting formation “needs borders more than ever to segregate, at least in tendency, wealth and poverty in distinct territorial zones.”¹³ Because of this, Balibar explains, “less than ever is the contemporary world a ‘world without borders.’”¹⁴ The emergence of systematic forms of exclusion renders the border essential to “the constitution of social condition on a global scale,”¹⁵ a phenomenon Balibar more precisely describes as a process of “global apartheid.”¹⁶ In this sense the local significance of the border may be diminished, but globally, more than ever, it serves the partitioning of political and cultural structures into ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The Wall thus marks a local projection of global distributions of authority and surveillance. However, Balibar also points out that the clash between notions of apartheid and the imagined “‘democratic’ and ‘social’ forms of the modern national state”¹⁷ evoke too stark a contrast. Balibar is hopeful that this may lead to the emergence of transnational over purely national forms of

⁹ Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” 38.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 93.

¹³ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*, 113.

¹⁴ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 92.

¹⁵ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*, 113.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

belonging,¹⁸ thereby drawing attention to the imaginary inconsistencies that confront the walled state in a globalized world.

Applying the inherent potentialities of these imaginary inconsistencies to challenge the fortification of the nation-state, Wendy Brown suggests that we examine the nation-state in terms of its vulnerabilities. Brown posits that the waning sovereignty of the nation-state in the face of the global imagination leads to a forceful reappearance of walls. In *Walled States: Waning Sovereignty*, Brown explains that these new walls, analogous to the vanished Berlin Wall, respond to a felt decomposition of the nation, seeking to protect the imagined community on which it rests. For Brown the new walls function as spectacles of state power and materialize the ideology of the community, thereby assisting the collective's imaginary coherence while essentially mediating its unity. Brown reads this as revealing the vulnerability of the nation-state, or, as she puts it, "rather than resurgent expression of nation-state sovereignty, the new walls are icons of its erosion."¹⁹ Conversely, Junita Sundberg points out that Brown's focus on the revelation of the state's instability overlooks the fact that the new walls attest to the "increasing power of states."²⁰ Sundberg claims that walls instead denote the erosion of the law, leading to the 'walling up' of not just people but of democracy.²¹ Although Sundberg's point is an important nod to the escalating surveillance exercised by the walled state, her analysis does not necessarily contradict Brown's argument. Instead, it should be pointed out that Brown's discussion moves beyond the political setting of walls, as she raises questions about the "mental organization of space"²² and the imaginary constitution of national identities in walled states. Hence, Brown draws attention to ways in which walls "fictively restore a national imaginary,"²³ resonating with Balibar's claim that the modern nation-state "rests upon a rule of exclusion, of visible and invisible "borders," materialized in laws and practices."²⁴ Despite laying the focus on different aspects, these authors share an interest in the way in which

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Brown, *Walled States*, 24.

²⁰ Junita Sundberg, "Delimiting Democracy: Witnessing along the US-Mexico Borderlands," in *Political Geography* 33 (2013), 53.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Brown, *Walled States*, 73.

²³ Ibid., 114.

²⁴ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*, 23.

walls constitute the collective within their boundaries, and how they assemble imaginary and political forms of togetherness.

The act of being together, or togetherness, has to be considered on the grounds of a community's political and fictitious territorialisation. Balibar explains that borders "define a territory to delimit it and to register the identity of that territory or confer one upon it."²⁵ However, Rancière reminds us that such political acts are always both fictional and aesthetic, constituting "a specific historical organization of social roles and communality."²⁶ Politics thus "has a theatrical aspect,"²⁷ as Hinderliter points out, staging a form of 'consensus' "through which the political division into assigned roles and defined parts manifests itself."²⁸ This echoes the identity politics of nation-states and resonates with the staging of political division; however, Rancière's notion of consensus asserts that the "given of any collective situation are objectified in such a way that they can no longer lend themselves to a dispute."²⁹ Such a given (of national togetherness) can appear in the political realm as a manifestation of a "dominant fiction"³⁰ that is concretized in the aesthetic of the Wall. Hence, the setting established by the Wall limits the forms and fictions of 'togetherness' that can be played out. Conversely, Rancière is interested in the way in which this also allows for moments of 'dissensus.' Border disruption or invocations of border-displacement advocate for more differentiated engagement with the constitution of the thinkable, sayable and possible – an idea Rancière famously coins the disruption of "the distribution of the sensible."³¹ According to this logic, 'reality' itself is exposed as being foremost "a framing or a fiction of reality,"³² and hence the meaning of the political Wall must be substantiated, but can also be undone, by the Wall's ideological mediation. Fictions and aesthetics can mobilize the Wall's mediating capacity for new forms of identification, supporting or undermining the sphere of the political, allowing us to reimagine its walls.

²⁵ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 76.

²⁶ Beth Hinderliter, introduction to *Communities of Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁹ Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics," 48.

³⁰ Kaja Silverman, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," in *Cinema & Psychoanalysis*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Routledge, 1990), 115.

³¹ For an in depth discussion see Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics," in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 12-19.

³² Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics," 49.

Casting a doubt on the coordinates of the political creates a sense of togetherness on the basis of shared practices of interpreting and collective forms of meaning production, instead of relying on the ideological mapping of fixed identities and walls. Togetherness is then closely associated with the shared construction and deconstruction of fictions that maintain the heterogeneity of a given community. Drawing on Rancière, Beth Hinderliter advocates “communities of sense” referring to a “nonessential manner of being together in a community whose coherence is no more than a fiction or a potentiality.”³³ For her fictions do not simply create community; rather, communities themselves must be based on a certain assembly of fictitious meaning, which according to Rancière, “binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility.”³⁴ In this context Rancière calls for a community of ‘emancipated spectators’ who recognize “that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection.”³⁵ An ‘emancipated’ community does not ground itself in the dominant fiction (such as that reflected in the Wall) as the means of its very existence, but understands this as a basis on which togetherness is “constantly renegotiated through disagreement.”³⁶ As Rancière puts it, a community of sense demands “the identification of modes of fictional construction with means of deciphering the signs inscribed in the general aspect of a place...a wall...a face.”³⁷ This may subvert a Wall’s pervasive meaning-structures and challenge the suspect sketch of otherness. It may in turn be capable of undermining the traumatic nationalism upon which these categories rest. Togetherness is thus enacted by assigning meaning to social reality. It is based on the notion of interpreting, translating³⁸ and creating fictions that blur separate registers of psychological and physical life. This, to Rancière, relies on an understanding of community as a form of resistance to the political aesthetics of the given and its rigid walls. Instead, togetherness is inherently bound to the reconfiguration of the meaning of relationality and the reinterpretation of the visible. The idea resonates with the public reception of artistic display, performance and film, as well as the

³³ Hinderliter, *Communities of Sense*, 2.

³⁴ Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics,” 32.

³⁵ Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, “Art of the Possible: Interview with Jacques Rancière,” *Art Forum* (March 2007), 264.

³⁶ Hinderliter, *Communities of Sense*, 2.

³⁷ Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics,” 35.

³⁸ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Art Forum* (March 2007), 280.

way in which these expressions participate in and through forms of (political) community.

Shifting the View: On Psychological Boundaries

While the Wall mediates communities, it is also a means (or medium) by which politics come to be materialized. Such forms of mediation are directly linked to the registers of the mind and demand that we shift the perspective from the political formation to the fantasmatic coherences they produce. Essentially, the politics of walls and globalization are highly reliant on the creation and maintenance of collective imaginaries, despite contradicting these fantasies in practice. Such inconsistencies suggest that the psychological formation underwriting the Wall conceals its tangible inadequacies. Indeed, the politics of walls are supported by a psychological foundation that allows for the creation and maintenance of consistent ideological imaginaries in relation to the Wall. Brown suggests that we pay attention to the psychic defences gratified by physical walls, and the way in which political walls perform a desire “to resolve the vulnerability and helplessness produced by myriad global forces.”³⁹ Attempts at challenging and confronting political walls thus need to consider the conceptual and psychological constitution of the barrier and the communities it produces. In other words, in order to discuss its politics, the psychology of the Wall needs to be brought to the forefront of the investigation. This means that we have to extend the critical discussion of political walls by (also) engaging them in a psychoanalytical discourse. This may help to “grasp what the new Walls *psychically* address or assuage, even when they cannot deliver on their material promise”⁴⁰ [my emphasis] and also to shed light on a traumatic legacy of their formation and effectiveness. By turning the view to subjectivity within the psychoanalytical framework, we can understand the ways in which the politics and communities envisioned by Balibar or Rancière are psychologically maintained and diversified. This draws attention to the ways in which the collective psychological effects of the Wall are progressively realized through the experiences it generates and the intersubjective relations it expresses. Ultimately, like any relation between

³⁹ Brown, *Walled States*, 132.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

self and Other, the political relation is first and foremost intimate, ambivalent and potentially traumatic.

In order to work through the compulsive (re)composition of political walls around the world, it is essential to realize that material walls are also screens, in the technological and psychological senses. Such screens make visible the otherwise hidden psychological undercurrents of the political situation. The screen foregrounds the Wall's psychical reinforcement, its affective trajectories and traumatic implications. Serving in their most abstract form, to project the workings of the mind, screens thereby enable a form of working through, or what I will call 'screening through'. Foregrounding the image instead of the word, the concept of the screen acknowledges the psyche "as visual model,"⁴¹ as Silverman asserts, in which trauma finds expression through images and scenes produced in fantasy. This suggests that in order for political trauma to be articulated, a projection surface or media screen is needed onto which the fantasies of individuals and collectives can be projected and subsequently engaged with. If the Wall itself can provide such a screen – as numerous films and aesthetic projects attest – then the political and psychological undercurrents of its formation can be made visible in this way. Such unconscious dynamics are often revealed via the subject and are addressed by artists and filmmakers while rarely being acknowledged within the political settings that produce them. In order to understand the political formation of walls, it is thus necessary to foreground the interrelation between trauma and fantasy and examine how this is expressed through film and art in the different contexts of Berlin, Israel and Mexico. It is precisely through an investigation of the psychological mediations facilitated by walls that their traumatic assemblies are brought to the surface, enabling us to publicly engage such assemblies on the screen of the Wall.

The process of meaning production that links the Wall to the media screen lies in its ability to invoke and remediate the psychical screen.⁴² This screen must be read in

⁴¹ Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 84.

⁴² The notion of *remediation* is primarily used to establish the Wall's function as a medium of the psychological formation that underlies the political space. Following Bolter and Grusin's definition of remediation as "the representation of one medium in another" this suggests that the Wall repeats or refashions a psychological mediation preceding the construction's physical appearance and thereby makes it visible. However, remediation here also points to the negotiation of conflictual divides as well as implying acts of reconciliation and the possibility of remedy in the context of working through the individual and collective trauma associated with the Wall.

its double function as both a barrier and a receptive surface, drawing attention to the way in which the Wall itself is manifested as an impeding obstacle and also a projective medium. Essentially, while the Wall's physical representation may work to hide an underlying psychological design, this construction has no choice but to also reveal its unconscious undercurrents. In its physical being, the Wall reveals an identity established on the basis of repression, and thereby produces forms of collectivity which are ultimately traumatic. Simultaneously, the Wall communicates the inconsistent imaginaries it seeks to stabilize, precisely because it is a symptom of divisive politics and thereby provides a screen for the material it mediates. However, although this ambivalence is undeniably exhibited in the Wall's very structure, it is arguably the barrier's overwhelming visibility which also works to hide these meanings. The psychological projections inherent to the Wall must thus be brought to the forefront of perception, by recognising the barrier's function as a screen and by examining the ways in which the Wall remediates psychological conflicts and unconscious separations.

The Politics of Trauma

The Wall can be investigated as a formation of trauma, demonstrating how political narratives inform personal experience. Indeed, as a construct the Wall does not simply evoke but is central to the very logic of trauma. Barriers are formed to protect the psyche, and isolated segments of feelings, like isolated people, become alienated, split off and ultimately imprisoned.⁴³ Invariably, these segments act "like a foreign body"⁴⁴ or something Other within the most intimate territory of the self, despite and because of these protective measures. The idea corresponds to the political terminology of the military operation and thereby, from the outset, the political is evoked at the core of intimate conflict. Freud writes that traumatic stimuli "bombard" the individual "with such force that they break through the protective

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000), 45.

⁴³ Jacob D. Lindy, "Legacy of Trauma and Loss," in *Beyond Invisible Walls, the Psychological Legacy of Soviet*

Trauma, ed. by Jacob D. Lindy and Robert Jay Lifton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 13.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 6.

barrier”⁴⁵ of the psyche, which in turn “mobilize[s] all available defence mechanisms.”⁴⁶ Essentially trauma evokes a prison of memory - defining the present and screening the meaning of the past. Trauma functions like a Wall, separating off while lending meaning to a psychological reality the subject wishes to ignore. The psychological scene resonates with the political setting of walls. Hence, the Wall evokes and reflects an intimate otherness at the heart of conflict rendered visible. On the level of the social, the grand political narratives that feed off collective forms of understanding, inform the personal trajectories of those who are caught up by them. They intimate certain forms of subjectivity and often assist the psychological formation of division and conflict – in short, they become traumatic. Such narratives are represented by and manifested in the concrete of the Wall, as much as in the political, cultural and psychological landscapes in which the Wall is anchored. The way we mediate these narratives and make them visible thus influences (and is influenced by) the way we think, feel and experience these structures.

To engage with the Wall as a means of traumatic politics acknowledges the personal trajectories it produces, but it also suggests that the Wall’s psychological constitution exceeds the specificity of (historical) time and space. The Wall understood as a traumatic trace implies a continuous struggle over meaning that works beyond the historical sedimentations of narrative. Drawing on Freud, Cathy Caruth reminds us that trauma is capable not only of transmitting “historical and personal truths”⁴⁷ but also collapses the time and space in which this occurs. Trauma surpasses its own historical context precisely because it exceeds immediate experience. This dynamic is reflected in the example of the Berlin Wall, which is still palpable as a psychological landscape that repeats itself (at least in part) in the examples of Israel and Mexico. This repetition in turn lends new meaning and interest to the absent Berlin Wall. Thus, the symptoms of trauma make themselves known and felt belatedly, as the repressed effectively returns “from the future.”⁴⁸ Trauma in a historical context then needs to be understood as inherently referential,

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷ Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience,” introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 8.

⁴⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 55.

as “it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and another time.”⁴⁹ Such “refusal of historical boundaries”⁵⁰ is ironically implicated in the three Walls under discussion and suggests they may share a common traumatic trace. What this proposes is not so much that their situations and narratives can be equated, but that they lend meaning to each other through the traumatic ruptures they evoke. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, “every historical rupture (...) restructures the narrations of the past, makes it readable in another new way.”⁵¹ The Wall of the past, the Wall of the future and the Wall of the present may then work as channels for radically reimagining the Other in the self, and as prisms for retelling a shared narrative of walling.

The Politics of Fantasy

Fantasy may shed further light on the dynamics of trauma by helping to situate individual experience within the frame of the collective. Jacqueline Rose, Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl have stressed that “fantasy should be at the heart of our political vocabulary,”⁵² implying that collectives are characterized by, and rely on, fantasy structures at the core of their experience (and the ways in which they organize the experience of the individual). Similarly, Freud investigates fantasy as the way in which the individual understands what it cannot grasp in order to cope with reality.⁵³ In both cases fantasy becomes a way of ascribing and inscribing meaning and may therefore be helpful to the investigation of individual and collective trauma. To uncover the relation between fantasy and trauma is then to look at collective trauma as more than a metaphorical extension of the individual and to engage with layers of meaning in political experience. This suggests a shift away from the traumatic event to a careful unveiling of the “dominant fictions”⁵⁴ that enclose our historical experiences. In this regard, political contexts are always

⁴⁹ Caruth, “Trauma and Experience,” 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 56.

⁵² Corinne Squire, Amal Treacher and Susannah Radstone, *Public Emotions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.

⁵³ Paul Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” in *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, Issue 14 (Autumn 1998), 93.

⁵⁴ Silverman, “Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity,” 115.

already characterized by a fantasy structure that is equal parts trauma and culture, continuously implying each other.

The politics of walls may seek to divide us but simultaneously they demand that we acknowledge the fantasmatic elements that constitute, sustain and connect our personal and political relationships. Where the Other is hidden behind a Wall, recognition is prevented precisely in order to fantasize the self as separate from the Other. The exclusion of the Other has to be persistent in order to maintain this self-understanding. In this way the Wall attaches all kinds of fantasmatic identities to the other side, whether in the form of fascist legacies in Berlin, a terrorist people in Palestine or criminal migrants from Mexico. However, the reliance of the self on the Other is equally hidden and hence this process of alienation has to be continuously reorganized in order to be sustained. Since the Other cannot be encountered, this negotiation between the self and the Other has to be carried out via means of fantasy. Hence, while the Wall marks the dividing line of the visible, it also fosters a fantasy about what lies beyond. This fantasy sustains the desire to exclude the Other while paradoxically engaging both sides in a fantasmatic relationship. Simply put, to exclude the Other is to fantasize the Other into being, precisely because the edifice of exclusion is based on the fantasy that the Other is indeed other. However, it is precisely the fantasy of otherness which leads to the defensive act of erecting a Wall. The Wall can hence be regarded as a constitutive element in the fantasmatic relationship between self and Other, sustained in a vicious circle of self-organization and affirmation. The Wall has provoked this relationship; it stands in for this relationship; and it sustains the relationship. The Wall is at once past, present and future, cementing the narrative of 'us' vs. 'them'. Hence, the Wall's effacement does not necessarily work in the form of an erasure, but substitutes a fantasmatic relationship with the Other that was paradoxically always already there. Crucially, this intimates that the relationship is never extinguished as such by the Wall, but is merely blocked or repressed, and lastly (re)constituted.

Invisibility is then not entirely pessimistic, but rather introduces a fantasmatic crack in the Wall. Fantasy is not merely a disguise; rather, it lays bare the ways in which the self seeks coherence but does not escape its own otherness. Fantasy works as an

envelope for the missing piece, or “my foreignness to myself,”⁵⁵ and thereby provides a channel for the return of the repressed. Freud reminds us that we are most ourselves where we are most other and that it is therefore impossible to understand the self without encountering its own “foreignness.”⁵⁶ The inevitable fantasy about the Other as manifested by a Wall is then a way of investigating the walled-off self by engaging invisibility as a way of seeing. The Wall’s own logic is to crystallize and throw back a mirror image because the fantasy about the Other is ultimately linked to a fantasy about the self and its limits. Hence, although the Wall vehemently subjugates the political and psychological landscapes it intrudes on and occupies, it may provide the means of engaging with its own invisibility, when the trajectories of fantasies and narratives enveloped by the Wall are projected onto the surface of the Wall. If the Wall is encountered as the screen of its own traumatic imposition, it can work to make transparent its own grand narrative of division.

The Psychology of Screens

The notion of ‘screening through’ emerges as the visual equivalent to Freud’s idea of ‘working through.’ Crucially, the notion of a projection surface is already inherent to the traumatic structure. It is conceptualized by Freud in the form of a psychological screen that binds (and separates) the unconscious and the conscious, and assists in the production “of the preliminary stages of an image.”⁵⁷ Freud, hence, conceptualizes the psyche like an inner cinema through which we engage with the pictorial abstractions of the unconscious. However, Freud quotes Hildebrandt, maintaining that “the most intimate relationship”⁵⁸ that links the different registers of the psyche, and thus plays out on the inner screen, also “goes hand in hand with seclusion and separation.”⁵⁹ From the outset, Freud’s screen can thus be regarded as both a barrier and a medium, which resonates not only with the mechanism of the cinema, but also evokes the image of the Wall. Indeed, for Freud, the notions of

⁵⁵ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 84.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Drawing on psychoanalysis Butler explains that “I first comes into being as a ‘me’ through being acted upon by an Other”. (Ibid., 89) The interpellation by the Other is thus fundamental to the formation of the self, explaining why we are ‘other’ at our most intimate and supporting the idea that the relationship to the Other is inseparable from an understanding of the self.

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 684-685.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

medium and barrier (cinema and Wall) coincide at the intersection between unconscious and conscious.⁶⁰ More radically, the Freudian screen may provide insight into the ways in which the inner Wall finds expression (and repression) in the physical world, illustrating the relation between a psychological enclosure and a political one. Hence, the concept of the inner screen raises questions about how the psychological is informed by, and articulated through, collective forms of projection in the material landscape of the political. Conversely, this also demands an engagement with the way in which these projections allow us to (re)negotiate the traumatic structure of the political via the screens they inhabit. In other words, understanding the workings of the inner screen of the psyche may provide insight into the dynamics that determine political walls and their (re)mediation as aesthetic screens.

The notion of a psychical screen is central to the language of psychoanalysis and suggests that we engage with our inner thoughts and ultimately our/selves foremost via modes of visual projection. Drawing on Freud's work in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Silverman maintains that there is a "psychic primacy of vision"⁶¹ and that "the activity of looking occupies an extraordinarily privileged position"⁶² in the dream work. Indeed, Freud explains that "dreams think essentially in images"⁶³ and that the dream work is in part about "turning abstract thoughts into pictures."⁶⁴ Furthermore, he conceptualizes the psyche as resembling "a photographic apparatus,"⁶⁵ in which different registers of psychical life are put in relation to each other "like lenses,"⁶⁶ through which "excitation passes"⁶⁷ so that "an image comes into being."⁶⁸ This idea suggests that a scene is recognized or organized inside the psyche before it is projected onto the external world. Expanding this metaphor, Laplanche and Pontalis imagine the process of psychological projection as being "comparable to the cinematographic one."⁶⁹ The authors explain that what the

⁶⁰ Freud discusses a "screen" which stands between the unconscious and consciousness. See, Freud, *The Interpretation of Dream*, 690.

⁶¹ Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators*, 78.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶³ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 113.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 684.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 685.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 354.

subject projects onto the outer world, is in fact “an image of something that exists in him in an unconscious way.”⁷⁰ In this sense, the image becomes central to a screening of the repressed. However, this concept of projection is simultaneously closely related to “a mode of refusal to recognise,”⁷¹ which again evokes the image of a psychical Wall. Hence, the inner screen works in terms of both psychical projection, which leads to imaginary appearances (or screenings), and psychical protection, which serves to shield, conceal and divide different registers of psychical life from one another.

The inner screen must be regarded as a critical agency that negotiates the duality of projection and protection, a notion which Freud more precisely conceptualizes as the preconscious. According to Freud, the preconscious shields the unconscious. In fact “it stands like a screen between the latter and consciousness.”⁷² However, this screen also enables pictorial unconscious material “to access consciousness”⁷³ and hence, it can be imagined as an intermediary through which the abstract ideas of ‘unthought’ material pass into consciousness. Silverman notes that the dream work does not “produce images only out of considerations of representability”⁷⁴; rather, it is precisely through the means of the visual that the unconscious can be thought and thus brought into appearance. In this way the preconscious marks a transitional space and works like “a filter” or “a stage,”⁷⁵ which is perhaps also comparable to the transitory realm of a border checkpoint at the edges of a territorial Wall. It is here that “unconscious desires are transferred and halted,”⁷⁶ as the psychic agencies weigh up the appearance of ideas and memories, that surface visually from the unconscious, and are either bound by language on the threshold of consciousness or barred from passing. Crucially, Freud explains that in this function the preconscious remains “in closer relation to consciousness”⁷⁷ than the unconscious, and thereby firstly exercises a guarding function on behalf of the psyche’s “authorities.”⁷⁸ Hence, the intermediary dynamics of the screen are not foregrounded; rather, the screen

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 690.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Silverman, *World Spectators*, 80.

⁷⁵ Herman Westerink, *A Dark Trace: Sigmund Freud on the Sense of Guilt* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 42.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 690.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 120.

secures a kind of censorship and protection which *also* opens the possibility of its role as mediator of what was previously hidden. In this regard the psychic screen is similar to the Wall: it first and foremost marks a barrier, whose capacity to mediate emerges only secondarily. In turn, this suggests that political walls can perform functions of critical mediation when we also invest them as screens.

Conceivable as both a technological device and a psychological concept, the screen links the Wall to media. The screen is a barrier, akin to the notion of a shield, a mirror or a filter, but is also a medium, in the form of a receptive surface or a projection screen. Since the logic of the screen functions both within and beyond the psyche, psychological considerations acknowledge the ways in which the Wall is internalized and plays a crucial role in the political situating of the personal. On the other hand, this process is (re)mediated through, for example, cinematic forms that imagine the individual within social formations. Both film screens and concrete surfaces thus organize the affective and ideological economies in which individual trajectories play out. Hence, these displays must be considered in their intimate relations to the unconscious imperatives of the collective that is, in relation to the concept of an inner screen. This allows us to think about Walls and films as forms of collective projections that reveal and conceal social processes of meaning production. They organize the fantasmatic investments that sustain the structures of the political but they also exteriorise the psychological processes that inform these structures and thus open them up to contestation. Read as devices, these screens work to enlarge and display the psychological designs of the political. Such mediation takes place on and through the site of the Wall and is then (re)interpreted through its (re)appearance in the cinema. Hence, as visual devices, both Wall and cinema encourage collective forms of looking and thereby function as public screens that (re)mediate the screens of the psyche.

Media Screens

Both the Wall and the cinema can be read as material (and political) manifestations of psychical processes in the service of grand narratives; however, it is precisely the notion of the screen which also lends them to mediation and perhaps contestation. Most poignantly, the Wall functions as a surface construction in and of itself. The

Wall is a textual and intertextual phenomenon, a reference point which both is and supports an image. On the most basic level the Wall echoes the screen as a projection surface, because the Wall is a surface resulting from a variety of projections of the self and the Other. Hence, the Wall is a screen that supports both a physical and a psychical structure fundamental to the collective imaginary. Of course, such a logic also alludes to the collective scenes provided on the cinema screen, which is why the physical and psychological imperatives of the Wall are prone to reimagination (and finally remediation) through the medium of film. Both Wall and film function as projections, and hence, they work via modes of screening that engage the collective imaginaries in which they are embedded. In this regard the notion of the screen allows for an examination of the Wall in relation to the cinema. However, taking this relationship seriously suggests that the very idea of the screen needs to be examined from two sides. The screen must be read as both a barrier and a receptive surface, capable of impeding and mediating the trajectories of political imaginaries.

A Wall can be read as an obstruction *and* a medium; in both cases, it works as a screen. To investigate a walled life hence asks us to shift our view to the particularity of mediated experience and to examine walls as screened media and media screens. A walled life manifests itself in various works of media that seek to crystallize the personal narratives of those affected by grand divisions, retelling their stories and seeking to affect us in return. Media texts serve as reference points for a ‘walled’ life and also open up questions that complicate the very notion of separation, most notably on the surface of the Wall itself. Thus, to articulate the operation of political walls in the public field of vision we must acknowledge the significance of the mediated experience for the constitution of the walled public sphere. Walls as screened media and media screens may thereby work “as public mode[s] of identification and self-development,”⁷⁹ and envision the entanglements of the personal and the political, as well as address the fantasies inherent to institutional power. Fictional films and documentaries, as well as the various art works on and in front of the surface of the Wall, deal with the barrier, its symbolic weight, and issues related to its physical imposition and context. These works can tell us about the ways in which the Wall is imagined, as they shed light on those

⁷⁹ Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, (Winter 1998), 283.

stories unheard and ignored in the process of constructing and enforcing the edifice of grand narratives.

The Wall may enable an uncovering of its own repressed narratives, when it is examined as a symptom of politics, and a receptive screen for its own psychological undercurrents. The idea of the receptive screen is attached to a reading of the barrier as not simply concealing, but more obviously revealing the mechanisms of its own creation. In regard to the inner screen of Freud's analysis, this means that the function of the preconscious as a separating screen can be turned inside-out and read as intermediary. If the Wall itself is a projection of psychological imperatives, and thereby a symptom of politics, it thus may work in a similar way. Indeed, the formation of the symptom is all about bypassing barriers because, according to Freud, the symptom is produced precisely in the moment the repressed material breaks through the protection of the psyche.⁸⁰ If the Wall is read as such a symptom, it must also be an agent of its own criticism, because it has no choice but to reveal the repressions it seeks to cement. Such a return of the repressed is envisioned in the images of GDR photographer Gundula Schulze Eldowy or Detlef Matthes, who capture the unseen corners of the walled life. Furthermore, the symptom is re-enacted via performances, as demonstrated by Rona Yefman's *Pippi Longstocking in Abu dis*, Allan Kaprow's *Sweet Wall* in Berlin or the *Border Art Workshop/ Taller de Arte Fronterizo* in Mexico. These performance artworks engage the political space in order to articulate and renegotiate the Wall's meaning within their particular contexts. The Wall emerges as a screen for the hidden meanings of its very formation, which may be investigated and revealed by art. The symptom that is the Wall may hence present itself as "absolutely rigid,"⁸¹ as Rose explains, but at the same time the structures that fortify it so tightly are "constantly, internally, falling apart."⁸² The Wall, encapsulating such an ambivalent dynamic of self-understanding, demands to be scrutinized as a screen that is capable of mediating the (collective) unconscious, precisely because as a symptom it facilitates the coinciding of the return of the repressed and the physical sign.

⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 18.

⁸¹ Jacqueline Rose "Untitled Entry," *Camera Obscura* 20- 21 (1989), 275.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Fictional films may serve as reflections of imaginaries that are visualized as collective fantasy. For example, Germany's *The Lives of Others* (2006) investigates the impositions and walls that are created in the personal lives of the protagonists through their involvement with the GDR's secret police. The film complicates dichotomies of good and evil, and works to keep open questions of responsibility and guilt. Similarly, the Palestinian film *Paradise Now* (2005) complicates the notion of the 'terrorist,' and raises questions about the cycles of violence. Both films renegotiate political 'sides' via the complicated microcosms of their protagonists to indicate the way in which political settings are implicated in psychological ones. Utilizing the lens of the personal to negotiate the collective fantasies that propel a walled narrative, the Palestinian film *Lemon Tree* (2008) reconstructs the political landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by reflecting on the psychological attachment to the physical land. Unfolding a personal dispute over a lemon grove between Israeli and Palestinian neighbours, the film projects the complex political situation onto the microcosm of human relationships and the walls they are facing. The fictional investment of politics thereby enables discussions of the psychological intricacies cemented within walls. Furthermore, films can privilege the visual over narrative as a means of reflecting on the unconscious undercurrents of such politics. Making this a strategy, director Elia Suleiman's films transgress the unconscious walls as much as they reflect them, providing dream-like metaphors of consciousness about and within the Palestinian situation. In this way the Wall is the elephant in the room even where it is not explicitly shown, specifying its own imposition through the experiences it generates and the personal and political settings it creates. Hence, media that screen the Wall facilitate a return of the repressed from the 'other side' by envisioning the psychological barriers that are projected onto political landscapes.

The psychological projection manifested in the Wall is magnified by the means of the cinema, precisely because film is prone to augment the processes of the psyche. Film conflates the private theatres of individual fantasy with the public consumption of grand narratives. In this regard film (re)produces Freud's dream work on the level of the shared and the collective, while maintaining an insistent (and often noted) association with the intimate visuality of the unconscious. As Walter Benjamin has famously put it, "the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does

psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.”⁸³ Similarly, Susan Sontag conceptualizes the camera as both “a fantasy machine”⁸⁴ and “the ideal arm of consciousness.”⁸⁵ In this regard, the film screen (similar to the preconscious) enables the merging of different psychical registers, as envisioned by Chantal Akerman’s film *From the Other Side* (2002) or Cynthia Beatts’ *The Invisible Frame* (2009). Both films are concerned with the psychological inscription of space in the Mexican and Berlin context, respectively, and work to transgress the stark separation of these formations by uncovering the repressed undercurrents. Just as Freud says of the dream work, films allow us to turn “abstract thoughts into pictures”⁸⁶ and they project the Wall foremost as a medium of its own meaning, by engaging it as an experience that can be publicly documented and thereby renegotiated.

Documentaries communicate and ‘rehumanize’ a life of segregation by drawing on the physical and psychological realities of the people affected. Predominantly, these films investigate the Wall’s tangible impacts and depict extraordinary attempts of ordinary people to deal with and counter a ‘walled’ life. Particularly in Palestine the filming of documentaries has therefore become a form of activism, with the camera functioning as a witness to the everyday violence experienced in the occupied territories. This is reflected in films such as *Budrus* (2009) and *Five Broken Cameras* (2011), both of which document the struggles of Palestinian communities in relation to the Wall cutting through their land. However, these films also blur the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by showing Israelis and Palestinians side by side, and by differentiating amongst diverse political attitudes. Foregrounding the psychological realities of such attitudes, *Rabbit à la Berlin* (2009) further complicates the mediation of history in the German context. Depicting the rabbits that lived on the Berlin Wall’s death strip as a microcosm of East German life under a totalitarian regime, the film blurs fiction and documentary in order to make sense of the psychological implications of the political realities in the GDR. Hence, similarly to their fictional counterparts, documentaries envisage the particular as a means to complicate grand narratives and collective consciousness. They also particularize the walls which they reference and depict the ways in which political

⁸³ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 237.

⁸⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁶ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 457.

walls manifest individual lives, physically and metaphorically, internally and externally, visibly and invisibly.

Where the Wall is a host for meaning, it is also a media screen for its traumatic undercurrents. This screen is in the first instance blank, invisible, empty. However, it is precisely this bareness which provokes the inscription of fantasy. Indeed it appears that all walls have in common that they invite expressivity of all sorts. The Wall is continuously used as a multimedia screen, both disguising and criticizing the Wall's very presence in spectacular or small acts of mediation, ranging from the scribbling of one's name, as is typical for a culture of 'tagging,' to elaborate painting or art installations. This is reflected in the various artworks that covered the Berlin Wall, and which inspired the preservation of wall-art at the famous *Eastside Gallery*. This 'screening' in Berlin is mirrored in the various murals on the West Bank separation barrier, rendering the Wall a critical message board as well as a canvas for beautification. Artists use the wall-screen to express their ideas in relation to the Wall by projecting film and photography or by painting over the Wall's empty spaces. Wall-art thus ambivalently unites transparency and obfuscation and demands that we think the two together. For instance, the works of German artist Peter Unsicker on the Berlin Wall in the 1980s, or the more recent French project *Face2Face* in Palestine utilize the Wall as a screen that instigates debate about the relationship between the two sides. Such art installations directly encounter the Wall and play with its flickering presence between visibility and invisibility, as more overtly staged by the trompe l'oeil effect of Banksy's work at the West Bank separation barrier. Hence, art transgresses the physical imposition of the Wall by bringing its narratives into view and by providing the means to engage with them creatively, intellectually and emotionally. Such forms of mediation are always ambivalent because they run the risk of blanking out the Wall and replacing it by a fantasy scene, as reflected in the intentional political 'landscaping' of the murals on Israel's Gilo Wall. However, the problematic beautification of an ostensibly controversial object may also be seen as a means of confronting the Wall's inherent ambivalences and exposing them in various ways, investigating the broader social and cultural implication of interacting with the Wall itself.

The Wall calls to the individual precisely because it articulates subject formation in relation to an (external) space. The Wall carves out an internal (psychological) space

that needs to be reimagined, or brought to the surface, through those experiences which are not represented by the grand narrative that cements the Wall, or by the collective imaginary it seeks to polish. In fact, the Wall as subjective experience attests precisely to the inconsistency of this imaginary. Such a negotiation of the internalized political space is most evident in Tilda Swinton's philosophical bike ride along the absent Berlin Wall in *The Invisible Frame* (2009), exploring the psychological setting by experiencing the physical one. Thereby experience may renegotiate narrative and offer different readings of the Wall's signification. Thus, the repressed meaning of the Wall can be engaged with through an exploration of the internal mechanisms it provokes, or more precisely, in the way it must find an opportunity to mediate its trauma through the personal trajectories it encounters. Collapsing the personal, the political and ultimately the psychological, the Czech drama *Kawasaki's Rose* (2009) explores the family as the residue of the devastating and enduring violence of the walled state. In this regard, media texts render the screen capable of expressing the experience of the individual; and film, in particular, is 'looked' at as remediating the mechanisms and interrelations of different psychical registers. This resonates with the way in which the screen imitates the associational links and workings of memory itself, providing a locus for an encounter that is otherwise absent from the surface, as most obviously exemplified in the physically demolished Wall in Berlin and the not yet fully materialized Wall in Mexico. Both examples provoke artistic reactions that imagine the Wall in order to engage with it. This is reflected in Berlin's construction of a domino wall for the 20th anniversary of the Wall's demise or the city's insistent attempts to remember the monument virtually. Mirroring this attempt, artists have long anticipated the Wall in Mexico, for example via means of a barrier made of coffins. In these instances, the screen communicates beyond representational confines and hence it is precisely through the notion of the screen that the hidden meanings of the Wall are visually articulated.

Where the function of the Wall as a screen is brought to the forefront, its imposition as a barrier can be subverted. Where the screen is not confined to representation but offers a visual articulation of the workings of such limits, it traverses the notion of the barrier and instead becomes "the locus of mediation."⁸⁷ Lacan's

⁸⁷ Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 149.

conceptualization of the screen as an “intraversable”⁸⁸ ideological filter, by which the subject is always inevitably ‘photographed’ and projected, opens the possibility of subversion, as Silverman explains. Silverman explores a possible inversion of the screen’s meaning where the subject is not fully caught up in the imaginary but actively maps him or herself in it.⁸⁹ Drawing on Lacan, she asserts that the subject can contest the screen as an ideological barrier and point of fixation when it “isolates the function of the screen and plays with it.”⁹⁰ Evoking a sense of self-reflexivity, Hirsch further explains that when subjects identify how the screen determines “the ways in which they see and are seen,”⁹¹ the screen is no longer simply a barrier but becomes the space for a possible “intervention...in the imaginary relationship”⁹² the screen otherwise fixates. In a similar way, Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña decentres the dominant culture, creating a hybrid space for the negotiation of (his) identity by playing with the masks of the stereotype. However, on a collective level this opens up the chance for the redefinition of the collective self, precisely at the point where the imaginary is exposed as a masque or filter which predetermines perceptions and understandings of the self. The cultural imaginary can then be contested via artistic transposition, at times redoubling or collapsing the screen altogether. At this point the screen is foregrounded as a concept telling us about the Wall and merging the different screens by which it is mediated. Such a dynamic occurs when Simone Britton’s *Wall* (2004) is projected onto the surface of Israel’s Wall or Akerman’s film *From the Other Side* is turned into an installation piece in the Mexican desert. In all these works the screen highlights the Wall as the protagonist in the political scene, at the same time as the Wall foregrounds the screen as the central means of setting political fantasy, as well as political critique, into motion.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 103.

⁹² Ibid.

Remediation(s)

The following pages engage these and other examples in order to shed light on the workings of political walls, their cultural legacies, and psychological formations. By foregrounding the creative engagement the Wall provokes, the works under discussion ultimately interrupt the Wall's political effectivity as a means of segregation, paving the way to examine the various ways of 'crossing' it. Chapter Two addresses trauma theory in order to suggest a process of 'screening through', as working through, the traumatic interpellations of political walls. Examining these ideas in relation to the Berlin Wall, Chapter Three discusses artistic engagement with the Wall before and after its demise, in order to negotiate questions of trauma and the return of the repressed in relation to the absence of the Berlin Wall. Chapter Four examines the ways in which the Berlin Wall is reimagined on the film screen in order to discuss how the psychological intersects with the political but also to show that the Wall is an intimate Wall of the mind, cutting across the intimate spheres of nations and individuals. Shifting the view to the Wall of the present, Chapter Five engages with the screening of the West Bank separation barrier, investigating how political and psychological landscapes are reproduced via cinema. The cinematic landscape exploring a walled-off Palestine addresses the fantasmatic exclusion of the Other and negotiates the relationship to Israel. This provides insight into the psychological undercurrents of the political conflict and challenges the rigid national imaginaries that produce an inert space. Chapter Six examines these ideas in relation to the artwork inspired by the West Bank separation barrier and discusses the forms of 'togetherness' envisioned by these acts. The concluding chapter then takes the discussion to the space of the US-Mexican border in order to consider the foundations of the Wall in relation to a 'third space.' These final examples foreground forms of boundary crossings in order to explore the (unconscious) trajectories that link the three walls. The transference of meaning among the walled states of Berlin, Israel and Mexico suggest a transgression of the associated political, metaphorical and psychological barriers each Wall projects.

The remediation of the Wall provides an effective interruption. The numerous art projects that engage the Wall as a screen renegotiate its implications and expose the internalized spaces it provokes. Recontextualizing these processes on a different

screen, films draw further attention to the Wall's hidden meanings by foregrounding its psychological trajectories, returning the Wall's meaning from the physical to the psychical realm. Both film and Wall, art and concrete surfaces, are public media that lay bare national imaginaries and provoke a more nuanced sense of collective self-understanding. Ultimately, both media forms (re)mediate a traumatic absence, or repressed history and politics, at the core of the walled identity that undermines the coherent fictions the Wall is meant to impose. This provides various perspectives on the Wall's projective status and opens the possibility for political contestation, where the Wall as/on screen can provide a counternarrative to the Wall as obstruction. Since the Wall is a visual articulation of the traumatic politics that have led to its formation, it is possible to read the Wall as a medium capable of reworking the psychological undercurrents of the walled state. As a medium the Wall foregrounds the experiences and relations which are otherwise made invisible in this space. Hence, when the Wall rearticulates the absent link between self and Other, here and there, then and now, it challenges the very narrative of traumatic division it otherwise appears to secure.

Chapter 2

On Politics and Fantasies: The Scenes of Trauma

Trauma has played a significant role in the making of history, precisely because “history makes itself felt through the crisis it creates and the changes it ‘inspires.’”¹ Trauma draws attention to the hidden meanings of politics by foregrounding the legacies on which they are built; it also points to a visualization, and hence articulation, of these traces. In particular the relation between fantasy and trauma provides insight into the psychological scenes that support and reproduce the political realm. Such scenes highlight the interrelations between subjects and the collective, projecting their intricate entanglements onto the public screen. As the psychological becomes a way of understanding the social realm and the collective identities it articulates, trauma theory gains importance for a discussion of political investments and historical divides. Such debates cross disciplinary borders, positing an important way to understand the past as a means to make sense of the present and suggesting the relevance of the subject’s psychological processes for a debate about collective, cultural and even political imaginaries. Trauma theory thus has, as Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz point out, “undoubtedly expanded our understanding of the unspeakable and unrepresentable registers of individual and collective suffering”² and broadened the means of understanding history. As Cathy Caruth asserts, such an engagement refuses “to be silent in the face of the unsayable.”³ Rather, trauma theory provides modes of interpreting, and perhaps understanding, historical sites of conflict by unveiling symptoms of psychological enclosure, thereby connecting the psychological and political aspects of individual and collective life. Just as trauma is often associated with a specific event that disrupts subjective experience, masking a crisis and preventing the individual from thinking, feeling and experiencing something intolerable, collectives, too, are constituted by the affective economies of crisis around which they organize themselves and which allow them to perceive themselves as coherent.

¹ Silverman, “Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity,” 117.

² Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, “Mapping Memory,” introduction to *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 9.

³ Harold Bloom quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, 10.

The constitution of collective identities is traumatic to the extent that, collectives utilize traumatic events to confirm an “emotional legitimacy”⁴ of their identities and rely on the exclusion of *others*. This traumatic, internal constitution of collective identities is often ignored or even denied. Hence, events of ‘traumatic gravity’ often define and maintain a social realm, while being perceived as happening *to* a community. However, trauma must be examined in relation to the collective formations it befalls and also creates. Where historical suffering is central to the maintenance of a collective identity, it produces and sustains an Other precisely because traumatic events are often related to particular attempts at exclusion, expulsion or even elimination. Thus, the discussion of trauma must be taken into account when mapping the collective in order to examine the way in which classifications of what constitutes a collective trauma produce distinctly politicized events and categories of othering. By suggesting a specific “relation between past and present that the traumatic narrative implies,”⁵ trauma is politicized in the way it determines what a collective understands to be traumatic (and what it may repress as well). Traumatic events are shared vicariously and often pose a threat to the protective formation of collective identities. However, such a threat may also assist in the forming of identity. The way we think about such traumata not only determines how a collective remembers such events. It also defines the ways in which such acts of memory shape the present and imagine the future – in short how a collective organizes itself in response to a trauma.

What constitutes a traumatic event within public discourse is often restricted to a moment in time. The 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, the Breivik massacre in Norway, for instance, all testify to the way in which the traumatic event itself is often constructed through, and perhaps synonymous with, the media event. Such historical processes of editing often serve the work of identity formation, which is most obviously expressed in the increased narrativization of the nation in times of crisis – or more specifically, a careful establishment of the nation’s resilience through memory and other forms of cultural interpretation of the traumatic event. However, Hodgkin and Radstone point out that memory’s “relation to historical

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 4.

⁵ Katharine Hodgkins and Susannah Radstone, introduction to *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkins and Susannah Radstone (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9.

events is complex and mediated, involving fantasy and wish rather than simply recording what happens.”⁶ Furthermore, Maureen Turim explains that “trauma is not necessarily a single event, but a series of events that affects the imaginary and the symbolic.”⁷ To speak of the traumatic event as such is thus not useful unless we also examine the cultural and political fantasies against which it takes place and which imply and sustain its continuous impact. Nonetheless, Radstone laments that “trauma theory has difficulty in acknowledging the place of fantasy”⁸ and thereby neglects an important aspect of the way in which we subjectively ascribe meaning to collective historic events, political narratives and traumatic experience. Engagement with traumatic memory thus needs to acknowledge an “imaginary dimension to history”⁹ and collectivity, in order to explore the cultural underpinning of traumatic experience, beyond the singularity of an event or the narrative of linear pasts and histories. This may shed light on the formative imaginaries a collective chooses to (and chooses *not* to) understand about itself.

Trauma may then not simply be a wound, as Greek etymology suggests, but may also allude to the German word for dream: *Traum*. The notion of *Traum* or dream in Freudian terms implies a return, in the form of fantasy: the return of the repressed as an imagined scene. Freud draws attention to the connection between dream and trauma in “Fixation to Trauma – The Unconscious,” stating that “patients regularly repeat the traumatic situation in their dreams.”¹⁰ The engagement with dreams may thus help to shed light on the various layers of meanings and experience that make up and work through political narratives and contexts as well as the various traumata they evoke and address. This not only acknowledges the narrative of politics as constitutive of traumatic experience but also suggest that trauma evokes a different kind of ‘language,’ often through visual expression, articulating political contexts through a personal lens. Trauma is consequently not simply an event or mode of suffering but also a mode of understanding that allows us to engage with something silent and unrepresented at the core of political discourse. This is crucial for an understanding of the interplay between political context and traumatic experience, or

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Maureen Turim, “The Trauma of Histories: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks,” *Screen* 42 vol.2 (Summer 2001), 206.

⁸ Hodgkins and Radstone, *Contested Pasts*, 6.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Fixation to Trauma – The Unconscious,” in Freud *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 274.

to borrow the words of Annette Kuhn, “the operation of the meaning-production process has, as it were, to be unearthed, for it is precisely the work of ideology to conceal its own operations.”¹¹ In this context trauma theory may productively address such concealments by engaging an ‘absence’ at the core of the political or a sense of avoidance constitutive of the cultural imaginary upon which the political formation rests.

Absence

A political Wall stands in for a failure of politics, a rhetoric of security or a philosophy of separation, but it also inscribes a sense of ‘absence’ into the political space. Indeed, a Wall is an ideological formation through which historical absence is simultaneously enacted and concealed. It carries and expands the symbolic weight it has come to materialize. Its means are inscribed in and rest on grand narratives that serve its political appropriation. These narratives are “a particular effective system of discursive meaning production,”¹² as Hayden White reminds us, and hence the Wall (like the narrative that supports it) organizes the way in which a collective establishes a fictitious yet meaningful relation to the physical and psychological formations in which it is embedded. Where the Other is hidden behind a Wall and banned to an empty space, absence thus becomes the locus of the Other and grand narratives seek to legitimize themselves as placeholders of the missed encounter. Where the ‘other side’ is obscured and (a)voided, grand narratives substitute for the void they evoke by filling this space with a fantasy about the Other and by sealing fantasmatic elements in an envelope of ideological discourse. Such discourses, in essence, are aimed at preserving the consistency of the narrative by hiding precisely this – that the grand narrative exists as a narrative of (a)voidance and absence.

The Wall is a symptom in the sense of a “stage setting of fantasies.”¹³ Hence, its meaning “cannot be included in the circuit of discourse, of social bond network but

¹¹ Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 74.

¹² Hayden White, preface to *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), x.

¹³ Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986), 14.

at the same time it is a positive condition of it.”¹⁴ It supports ideological structures aimed at cementing the status quo as separation from the Other, through a fantasy about the Other – one that hides, obscures and ultimately denies a relation to the other side. This is not to say that such a discourse is delusional per se but rather, to quote Žižek, “in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’.”¹⁵ In this case the ‘reality’ of the Wall supports the coherence of the self through exclusion of an Other – an Other that needs to be (a)voided in order to be fantasized as other. Returning this to the political, Renata Salecl explains, “The structure of power is inherently fantasmatic.”¹⁶ Hence, an announcement of power by means of a Wall - a cut between the self and the Other and simultaneously the staging of an absence is necessarily also a fantasmatic inscription of the relationship between self and Other. The structure of political fantasy rests on the advent of leaving something unsaid (about the self and the Other) to secure a space in which ideological meaning is generated. Crucially, this void in and of political discourse may (re)appear in individual fantasy and re-imagine the relationship to the Other through subjective experience. It is then crucial to access the narratives (and fantasies) on which political walls are built, because what is hidden behind such narratives and Walls is crucial to an understanding of the self.

The absence of the Other returns as the wound of the self; as such, absence possesses a traumatic force that needs to be encountered in order to be worked through. In fact the formation of the Wall and the boundary it entails perpetuates a destructive division which is similar to the psychic segmentation inflicted by trauma. In both cases this partition rests on a traumatic repression of the Other. The function of the Wall alludes to the dynamics of trauma, excluding the unwanted from conscious reality, and provoking an injury on the level of unconscious formation. Such a wound makes itself felt in the constitution of subjects and collectives, demanding that we engage with the hidden materials that shape our lived experiences. In this way a Wall, just like trauma, flickers between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Hence, the Wall as a void, a present absence, evokes a wound cutting through the physical *and* psychological landscapes of

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶ Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

collectives and individuals. Such a wound is not simply a result of alienation and separation as perpetrated by political walls. This wound also suggests itself as the origin of the formation of the Wall. Read in this way the Wall evolves as a protective mechanism that seeks to conceal something repressed at the core of political discourse which is in effect a wound in the relationship of self and Other – or, more precisely it marks a traumatic absence of this relation. Hence, the dialectical, traumatic meaning of the Wall for the self and the Other is subdued by a symptomatic avoidance. The traumatic element that physical and psychological walls are built of intimates a problematic relationship with the Other. It comes to manifest this relationship and also reinforces it. The traumatic element of the Wall is thus never encountered as such; it *is* a void of self and Other and thus remains absent. The Wall in its physical and psychological formation therefore effectively prevents what Jacqueline Rose and Edward Said endorse with the Gramscian maxim that “The consciousness of what one really is ... is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical processes to date which have deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory.”¹⁷ The problem proposed by the Wall is the collapse of a shared history and hence a shared narrative, isolating the self and splitting off the Other, resisting commonality and common experience and thereby rejecting the Other from one’s own conscious – making the Other absent, individually and collectively. To challenge this dynamic is to uncover the dialectic of individual and collective experience, bringing to the forefront the intimate ways in which the self is constituted by Others.

Affect

Freud explains that trauma is an individual experience in which the subject’s ego is overwhelmed by a stimulus and cannot adequately discharge the accompanying affect.¹⁸ In an attempt to protect the self, an “antithetical representation,” a representation that is kept out of consciousness, is established. Paradoxically this representation further prevents catharsis in an effort to protect the ego. This results

¹⁷ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1980), 73.

Jacqueline Rose, “Nation as Trauma, Zionism as Question,” interview by Rosemary Bechler, *Open Democracy*, 18 August 2005, http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-debate_97/zionism_2766.jsp (accessed July 9, 2011)

¹⁸ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 91-92.

in “a conflictual division within the psyche,”¹⁹ or a wound, which according to Meares “disrupts experience of the self and leaves a void instead.”²⁰ Crucially, it is this division within the psyche that Freud relates to a notion of the conscious and the unconscious,²¹ leading him to a conceptualization of psychoanalysis as a process of “transformation or translation into something conscious.”²² In this context the means of repression are exercised through an “intensification of a boundary idea,”²³ or a “displacement of attention,”²⁴ which Freud conceptualizes as both a form of “boundary” and “a gap in the psyche.”²⁵ The boundary and the gap, the Wall of and void in psychic life, prevent an increased tension, the Freudian *Erregungszuwachs*,²⁶ from being discharged, which leads to a form of dissociation. Meares further explains that in this division and dissociation of the self “the experience of the disruption of self-experience is stored in a form that cannot be processed as one’s own past forms, feelings, perceptions, bodily sensations and so on.”²⁷ The psyche attempts to exteriorise or project the inner conflict through a series of defence mechanisms; however, the self is continuously disrupted as “unnameable thoughts and unfeeling feelings penetrate the consciousness,”²⁸ insisting on “the indestructible nature of the unconscious.”²⁹ This leads Freud to postulate his credo, ‘Wo es war, soll ich werden’³⁰ (Where id was, I shall be), asserting that the function of the psychoanalytical process is to engage with the division of the psyche in order to encounter “an unbearable truth”³¹ about the self. Trauma (and psychoanalysis) hence echoes the dialectics of encounter as intimating both a point of meeting and a confrontation of different registers of psychical life.

¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰ Russell Meares, *Intimacy and Alienation: Memory, Trauma and Personal Being* (London: Routledge, 2000), X.

²¹ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 92.

²² Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious,” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 573.

²³ Sigmund Freud, “Draft K,” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 96.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The German word *Erregungszuwachs* literally translates to an increase in tension. However, this has also been referred to as energetic tension or affect in the English translation. For example, Paul Verhaeghe, *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive* (New York: Other Press, 2001), 52.

²⁷ Meares *Intimacy and Alienation*, x.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 733.

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, “XXXI Dissection of the Personality,” in *Complete Introductory Lectures*, ed. James Strachey (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 544.

³¹ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 3.

Circulating freely between the different registers, affect becomes a major force in the understanding of individual and collective trauma. This notion not only relies on the way in which individual and collective experiences implicate each other through the affective overlap that mark their exchanges, but also draws on the dissemination of the traumatic factor through the affective channels of collectivities, which do not rely on common signification. Applying the logic of individual trauma to a notion of collective and cultural trauma, therefore, demands the examination of the affective nature of trauma. Indeed, Freud identifies “affect as the operative cause of trauma”³² and talks about “permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates.”³³ He thereby conceptualizes a notion of affective dislocation at the centre of the trauma logic. Arguably, then, it is the *affect* of trauma that fails to bind a signifier and changes the tension of repression into compulsive repetition. Such repetition attempts “to bind the traumata to signifiers”³⁴ in order to attain ensuing (affective) catharsis, but simultaneously this “discharge from the system Unconscious passes into somatic innervations that leads to development of affect.”³⁵ Affect thus ‘circulates’ through the trauma concept working along both ‘sides’ of the psychic division, but also provides a means of exchange between individuals.

The traumatic factor according to Freud is found in the notion of *Erregungszuwachs*, an increase in excitation, which Verhaeghe associates with affect.³⁶ This association resides in a notion of the autonomy of energy and lack of signification implied by both. Brian Massumi asserts that affect operates as “narratively delocalized”³⁷ and indeterminate. Similarly, Freud’s *Erregungszuwachs* “cannot be verbalized nor discharged”³⁸ but penetrates both conscious and unconscious, echoing the operation of affect according to what Massumi calls “two-sidedness.”³⁹ (Traumatic) affect hence resists the shift between divides from the outset, revealing “a problematic correspondence across each of the divides.”⁴⁰ This not only offers “a complex view

³² Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy, introduction to *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 14.

³³ Freud, “Fixation to Trauma,” 275.

³⁴ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 101.

³⁵ Freud, “The Unconscious,” 582.

³⁶ Verhaeghe, *Beyond Gender*, 52.

³⁷ Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31, (1995), 85.

³⁸ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 91.

³⁹ Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 96.

⁴⁰ Michael Hardt, foreword to “What affects are good for” in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough, Jean O’Malley Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xi.

of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship,”⁴¹ but also perpetuates the notion that affects are capable of transgressing boundaries of psychic life and individual bodies. Affect is, as Misha Kavka states, “transportable, transmittable, and mobile”⁴² and thereby “affect can affect a mind *or* a room.”⁴³ [my emphasis] Hence, affect is better described as an idiosyncratic yet shared human experience, even if it is not consciously ‘signified’ as such, which is capable of providing a shared “affective register of belonging.”⁴⁴ In a traumatic scenario such registers remain dissociated from representation and thereby materialize an “unfeeling feeling,”⁴⁵ perceived as being “outside the range of usual human experience”⁴⁶ or an experience that cannot be narratively localized.⁴⁷ Trauma thus constitutes what may be understood as an active non-experience that communicates affectively, while resisting the organized significations of narrative conglomerates. This modifies Said’s and Rose’s proposition that “historical processes” deposit “an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory,”⁴⁸ in so far as the ‘traces of history’ are also traces of trauma. Such traces then mark an unreadable yet feelable register of traumatic affective experience. That which is unspoken in history and politics makes itself felt as a void or a tension - a traumatic absence that may affect individuals in various ways. This opens up the possibility of engaging with collective trauma as an expressive form of collective non-narrative made up of countless particular psychological tones. The expression of collective trauma circumvents unspeakability and positions the self in relation to a social world where trauma is a matter of collectivity, precisely because individual and collective experiences imply and sustain each other.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy: Reality Matters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 31.

⁴³ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁴ Lauren Berlant, “Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest : Ambient Citizenship“ *Social Science Research Counsel* <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/berlant-affect-noise-silence-protest-ambient-citizenship/> (accessed: May 1, 2011).

⁴⁵ Meares, *Intimacy and Alienation*, X.

⁴⁶ American Psychiatrist’s Association’s definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, 3.

⁴⁷ Massumi describes affect as being narratively delocalized, see: Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 85.

⁴⁸ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 73.
Rose, “Nation as Trauma, Zionism as Question”

Form

Where trauma cannot be expressed by the collective, individual experience may help to negotiate affective forms of engagement. All experience is first and foremost individual and particular, but it is at the same time constitutive of, embedded in and interpreted through the social. Social reality therefore does not mark a detached mode of objectification, merely framing the individual, but presents itself as an intersubjective construction of reality in which individual modes of (affective) experience find context and feedback. Individuals make sense of their experience through social interaction, searching for modes of (collective) interpretation and ways of speaking to each other. Echoing this, Lacan posits that “society and culture...may well be reduced to language,”⁴⁹ particularly because the social also establishes the individual by binding it to the signifier. In the case of trauma, one might argue, the language of the collective fails to bind the (traumatic) affect to the signifier, and hence new forms of ‘expression’ have to be negotiated. Of course, this idea of articulating is complicated by the fact that trauma is concerned with something “unspeakable”; however, the expression of trauma nevertheless takes place through its affective dissemination and idiosyncratic implications. The negotiation of trauma in turn has to foreground affective expressions that articulate individual experience within social realities. Affect here operates in feedback loops, whereby the affect is repeated and reactivated, yet never accomplished or “completed.”⁵⁰ Hence, a social exchange of affect and affective feedback might well remain outside of narrative and language, and thereby prove more effective in the negotiation of trauma. Drawing its force from being unsignified and “delocalized,”⁵¹ affect may help to articulate the traumatic aspects of collective settings beyond the common narratives.

Individuals may articulate a collective trauma’s unspeakability through the channels of their felt experiences. In this context Robert Jay Lifton quotes Heike Bernhardt’s expression “the traumatisation of everyday life,”⁵² to discuss the transmission of

⁴⁹ Jacques Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” in *Cultural Theory: An Anthropology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 432.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 85.

⁵² Robert Jay Lifton, “History as Trauma,” in *Beyond Invisible Walls – The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma*, ed. Jacob D. Lindy and Robert Jay Lifton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 214.

affective knowledge among individuals which Nora Csiszer and Eva Katona explain as a product of “larger historical forces.”⁵³ Although such forces are effectively silent, they ‘speak’ to the social through the affects they generate. Lacan explains that “we get used to reality. The truth we repress.”⁵⁴ This indicates the importance of the unconscious and affective dimensions of social arrangements. If society is language upon which we have agreed through the construction of social reality, the unconscious posits a language concerned with a different kind of truth that cannot be expressed by those means alone but nevertheless *affects* the social formation of narratives. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud posits that such “unconscious ideations”⁵⁵ are spoken through dreams as well as found in “folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes.”⁵⁶ Crucially, these unconscious ideations relate to social formations because “all the material making up the content of a dream is in some way derived from experience.”⁵⁷ Unconscious ideations, thus make use of social material and are encoded, although not necessarily recognized, in collective social constructions of reality. Conversely, social formations rely on dominant fictions, as Silverman reminds us, whose basic logic tends towards a form of “closure” and “fixation of meaning,”⁵⁸ and thus tends to avoid the ruptures of trauma. Hence, to borrow the words of Gabriele Schwab, “in order to make trauma accessible, a form needs to be found that translates into language or symbolic expression an experience that is only unconsciously registered and left as a mere trace on the affective and corporeal levels.”⁵⁹ Such a form may be found in the expression of dreams. Similarly to the way in which the Freudian dream circumvents psychic censorship by means of distortion and condensation, the dominant fiction may be disrupted by the ‘dream work’ provided by cultural idioms, as expressed through various forms of media and art. In this way the traumatic, unconscious ideations appear in the form of condensed and distorted material in the social.

⁵³ Nora Csiszer and Eva Katona, “Hungary: Replacing a Missing Stone,” in *Beyond Invisible Walls – The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma*, ed. Jacob D. Lindy and Robert Jay Lifton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41.

⁵⁴ Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” 442.

⁵⁵ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 467-468.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 468.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁸ Laclau quoted in Silverman, “Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity,” 115.

⁵⁹ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press 2010), 8.

The dream work circumvents modes of ‘unspeakability’ by expressing unconscious ideations through affective imagery. Freud conceptualizes this emergence of dreams as the form of *Verdichtung*, which may also be a key to the expression of collective trauma. *Verdichtung* is translated as condensation, but it also implies a literal ‘thickening’ and, as Lacan reminds us in *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious*, the expression condenses in itself the German word *Dichtung*.⁶⁰ *Dichtung*, which means the literary production of both poetry and fiction, here comes with the attached prefix ‘ver’, implying both a distortion of poetry, or mis-fictionalization, as well as an enlargement, or over-fictionalization. *Verdichtung* hence points to both the inexpressibility and possibility of collective trauma. It thereby mirrors the way in which individual experiences encapsulated in social formations are also often distorted, thickened, mis-fictionalized and simultaneously over-fictionalized. Trauma may follow a similar logic which, to quote Freud, may “link a series of dream thoughts together in a logical chain,”⁶¹ except that the logic is a traumatic logic, and hence, is a matter of affect. Crucially, Freud’s writings on dreams further suggest that “the affect and the ideational content do not constitute [an] indissoluble organic unity”⁶²; rather, “the ideational material has undergone displacement and substitution, whereas the affects have remained.”⁶³ If we regard collective trauma as a matter of affect, then a discussion of this phenomenon has to draw on a psychoanalytical framework, precisely because psychoanalysis recognizes the affect as being appropriate and “can put them upon the right path... by seeking out the idea which belongs to it.”⁶⁴ Hence, we have to think about the ways in which we can engage these “justified”⁶⁵ affects in order to examine what can be learned from them. The focus of such analysis has to turn to the collective ‘*Verdichtung*’ of trauma.

⁶⁰ Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” 439.

⁶¹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 583.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 597.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 596.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 597.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Fantasy

The different appearances of collective trauma are particularized in the way in which the trauma encapsulates an element of ‘*Verdichtung*’, or more precisely, in the way in which it is played out in fantasmatic expression. In a letter to Fliess in 1897 Freud explains that “there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between the truth and the fiction that is cathected with affect.”⁶⁶ Freud consequently prioritises psychical reality over material reality and treats the fictitious accounts of his patient as a reporting of fantasy rather than a lie. To Freud, such fantasies have a “defensive function”⁶⁷ and simultaneously promote “a psychological elaboration”⁶⁸ of trauma, as Paul Verhaeghe asserts. Fantasies thus become the “primary concern of psychoanalysis”⁶⁹ because they communicate between the conscious and the unconscious. Freud affirms that dreams *are* fantasies, but crucially he further suggests that fantasy is a ‘twofold’ phenomenon in this context. On the one hand, there is a fantasy which functions at the heart of the dream, and marks the setting for the dream wish, an original fantasy. On the other hand, a secondary fantasy ‘envelopes’ the dream thought, thereby making the wish acceptable to consciousness. These two fantasies “communicate,”⁷⁰ articulating together the social (from which the manifest material of the dream draws its settings and actors) and the unconscious (the latent content of this scene).⁷¹ This implies that fantasy engages in an interplay between social reality and psychic reality. As Sue Thornham puts it, “fantasies address social reality...as well as ‘original fantasies’ in their reworking of the ‘kaleidoscopic material’ of the subject’s social existence.”⁷² This leads Thornham to treat “fantasy as a scene”⁷³ played out in “the ‘private theatre’”⁷⁴ of the “inner world of imagination,”⁷⁵ as described by Laplanche, whose elaborations necessarily draw on the mise-en-scene of collective reality.

⁶⁶ Freud reports this in a letter to Fliess on September 21, 1897. See “Letters to Fliess,” in Peter Gay ed. *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 112.

⁶⁷ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁹ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷¹ For example, Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 597.

⁷² Sue Thornham, *Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory* (London: Arnold, 1997), 96.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Suggesting an intricate relationship between private fantasies and collective fictions, the ‘private theatre’ provides insight into the larger arrangements of a collective’s grand narratives. Crucially, the subject’s fantasies contain “traces of history,” as Said and Rose emphasize, or as Freud puts it, “they fit themselves in to the subject’s shifting impressions of life, change with every change...and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a ‘date mark’.”⁷⁶ In regard to collective trauma, fantasy then plays a particular role in the way it addresses social reality and history through the individual but also in the way in which the individual is addressed through social fantasies in return. Verhaeghe explains that fantasies largely determine “the way in which someone enters, even constructs his intersubjective world.”⁷⁷ Hence, the fantasmatic and ideological frameworks in which the fantasies of the social play out communicate with individual fantasy scenes. Both collective and individual traumata are shaped by social fantasies alike. In the words of Elisabeth Cowie, “fantasy then [is] a privileged terrain on which social reality and the unconscious are engaged in a figuring which intertwines them both.”⁷⁸ Through the means of fantasy, trauma is not only a terrain for the conjunction of the social and the individual but it also becomes a mode for interpretation of psychic and social reality by which we examine the formation of the present through the lens of the past.

Memory

The interpretation of psychic and social reality through fantasy and trauma draws on the function of memory as a way to (re)stage a historic event. In this context memories not only provide the “material”⁷⁹ of fantasy but also play a key role in the formation and elaboration of trauma. Freud explains that “dreams draw on memories inaccessible in waking life.”⁸⁰ Such memories reside in the unconscious and to Freud “there is no doubt that they can produce all their effects while in an

⁷⁶ Sigmund Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” in Peter Gay ed. *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 439.

⁷⁷ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 99.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 96.

⁷⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 69.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

unconscious condition.”⁸¹ Nonetheless, one has to distinguish between two kinds of memories: memories that have been repressed and hence forgotten on the one hand, and memories “which have always been unconscious, and thus which could never have been forgotten in the first place.”⁸² Here fantasy and memory engage in a peculiar interplay. Memory draws on fantasy, as reflected in the ‘false’ accounts of Freud’s patients, but unconscious fantasies find a slippage into consciousness through the recollection of memory.

Freud exemplifies the intricate passage from unconscious fantasy to conscious recollection in his account of *Screen Memories*. He argues that we project repressed memories and fantasies back into our childhood and experience them as scenes that depict seemingly trivial instances.⁸³ According to Freud, these ostensibly insignificant scenes contain images associated with what affects us most,⁸⁴ precisely because they offer “a point of contact”⁸⁵ for the unconscious fantasy and the conscious memory. They “meet,” as Freud expresses it, “half way.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, the scenes created necessarily draw on the material provided by cultural signifiers, and thereby “highlight the fact that memory is never straightforwardly or reducibly subjective.”⁸⁷ This has several implications for the examination of trauma. Firstly, trauma can be, and often is, experienced through the “fictitious,” which is why collective fictions are just as effective (and affective) as what we understand to be the facts. As Freud puts it,

if hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new fact that emerges is precisely that they create such scenes in *fantasy*, and this psychical reality requires to be taken into account alongside practical reality⁸⁸

⁸¹ Ibid., 689.

⁸² Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 98.

⁸³ Sigmund Freud, “Screen memories (1899),” in *Sigmund Freud Collected Papers Volume 5* ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 62-63.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memory (1899),” in Peter Gay ed. *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 124.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Susannah Radstone, “Cinema and Memory,” in *Memory: History, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 341.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Laplanche “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 8.

Secondly, it is doubtful whether memories surface in their own right without containing a fantasy element and vice versa. Hence, collective remembering has to include and acknowledge such elements of fantasy. The material of memory (whether fictitious or not) can provide a temporary hook for a fantasy scene, in which trauma and affect can be played out.

In this way fantasy acknowledges the non-linearity of (traumatic) histories and allows for the “construction of a history of layers, which is the main generator of new meanings and connections.”⁸⁹ Rather than claiming objective access to a past, we are reminded that over time histories overlap ambiguously and by deferral. Such affective assessments of the past simultaneously exclude temporality. As Cowie puts it:

[Fantasy] hovers between three times: the present provides a context, the material elements of the fantasy; the past provides the wish; deriving from the earliest experiences; the dreamer then imagines a new situation in the future, which represents a fulfilment of the wish.⁹⁰

All of these elements are played out simultaneously in fantasy, which is why Freud asserts, “in [dreams] there is a complete lack of time.”⁹¹ This implies that trauma articulates itself through *Verdichtung*, as placed in fantasy scenes. The lack of temporality suggested by these scenes mirror the disruption and dissociation of memory occurring in trauma. This acknowledges the traumatized subject as “being frozen in time,”⁹² while translating this immobility into the moving imagery of the fantasy scene.

The timelessness of traumatic memory suggests that a cultural memory seeking to engage with collective trauma cannot rely on a notion of history as ‘facts.’ Rather, cultural forms of recollection have to acknowledge the affective and fantasmatic nature of memory itself. It is doubtful whether affect can be discharged in a purely ‘factual’ account of what a collective understands their trauma to be, without providing space to engage with fantasized nuances of the collective *Verdichtung*.

⁸⁹ Roger Kennedy, “Memory and the Unconscious,” in *Memory: History, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 181.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 96.

⁹¹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 164.

⁹² Michael G Kenny, “A Place in Memory: The Interface between Individual and Collective History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 3 (July, 1999), 429.

This intimates that history is always also a ‘felt’ past and cultural remembering must simultaneously be a negotiation of particular feelings. As Howard and Frances Morphy put it:

History is important...not as a record of events but as a means of understanding how the relationship between the past and present has been continuously reconstructed and how the myths about the past fit the conditions of the present.⁹³

Such relations necessarily evolve between individuals as well as between the individual and the social. They are negotiated within cultural spaces and create what has been prominently referred to as “landscapes of memory.”⁹⁴ These landscapes work as images as well as imaginaries and they serve the work of identity construction across space and time.⁹⁵ Imagining ideas of national unity in particular, these landscapes allow for identifications that bind dispersed collectives and allow them to enact a sense of identity. It may hence be helpful to think of these landscapes as ‘stages’ or ‘theatres’⁹⁶ acknowledging the fantastical and fictional elements of (collective) memory. Such spaces allow for a (re)visiting of a (traumatic) past and encourage a fantastical and affective encounter whose purpose is to interpret and (re)experience the particularity of collective trauma and history.

Politics

A landscape of memory is always already embedded in a cultural conglomerate of grand narratives. This poses a problem in so far as any space for fantasy and memory is predetermined (and potentially limited) by (political) fantasies that work to sustain ideology and that may already occupy these spaces. Such cultural and political narratives are concerned with fantasy without acknowledging this necessarily and thereby seek to mask their ideological investments. In order to understand the ways in which collective trauma is enveloped in ideological narrative

⁹³ Howard Morphy and Frances Morphy, “The ‘Myths’ of Ngalakan History: Ideology and Images of the Past in Northern Australia” *Man*, New Series 19, no. 3 (September, 1984), 462.

⁹⁴ See among others Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), Jill Bennett *World Memory*, 8.

⁹⁵ Hodgkin and Radstone, *Contested Pasts*, 12.

⁹⁶ Kenny, “A Place in Memory,” 434.

arrangements, the relationship between politics and fantasy needs to be addressed, rather than (a)voided. Essentially, politics and ideology in particular need to be understood “not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel,”⁹⁷ as Žižek puts it. Political trauma hence draws on a traumatic element that is already present in the fantasy structure of the political. It emerges out of something unspoken and silent at the core of the grand narrative. It is thus organized around a kind of traumatic absence that cannot be directly addressed.

Renata Salecl argues that what is made absent from political discourse - the element that is impossible to represent - is indeed ‘the nation’ itself, since “fantasy functions as a scenario that conceals”⁹⁸ the impossibility to actualize this concept. A country is then “always already a kind of fiction.”⁹⁹ It is not a place, but rather “a narration about this land.” The fantasy of the ‘homeland’ conceals the fact that the nation as a political community is first and foremost imagined “as both inherently limited and sovereign,”¹⁰⁰ rather than denoting an empirical existence, as Benedict Anderson has famously argued. Such a structure of fantasy, “the scenario” that allows society to perceive itself as consistent, propels a sense of nationalism, which, according to Gellner, “invents nations where they do not exist.”¹⁰¹ Instead of being brought to awareness, the ‘nation,’ as “the traumatic element,”¹⁰² needs to imagine itself, which according to Anderson works via channels of media and, following Salecl, is enabled by a fantasy of ‘othering.’ Salecl further argues that in its basic layout this fantasy “serves as a support for ethnic hatred”¹⁰³ because identification with ‘the nation’ (or the national self) “is based on a fantasy of the enemy”¹⁰⁴ (the Other). One could argue that in the framework of ‘collective staging’ the national fantasy works as a means of unity and sovereignty. This can be read analogously as the ‘original fantasy’, or Freud’s unconscious fantasy, working through the individual in the sense that all subsequent images of and about the Other are then specific ‘secondary fantasies’ that ‘envelop’ the wish for unity and sovereignty. Thereby the subsequent

⁹⁷ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 45.

⁹⁸ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 20.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

fantasy scenes will, in some way, articulate the national wish and thus serve the fantasmatic investment in the nation's (imagined) sovereignty. Essentially, the two fantasies 'communicate' through the means of public discourse. They draw on each other, build on each other and simultaneously conceal each other in *Verdichtung*, in order to mask the impossibility of their own unifying aspiration and avoid addressing the traumatic absence of the nation and the inconsistent imaginary that haunts it.

The inconsistent imaginary fractured by the absence of the nation is counteracted by the fantasy of a collective national identity. This fantasy is inscribed in the physical and psychological landscape of the homeland, but finds its most overt expression in the establishment of an all enclosing (and unifying) barrier. In the psychological sense, this alludes to Silverman's assertion that, "like the psyche described by Freud, the social formation develops a 'protective shield' by means of which it guards itself" in the form of a "dominant fiction" which in turn "articulates the desire of the *socius*."¹⁰⁵ The homeland thus evokes the national fantasy as "the stage setting of desire,"¹⁰⁶ or more precisely an ideological desire for sovereignty and unity that drives the political towards a sense of self-sufficiency and "totality."¹⁰⁷ In the physical sense the nation may then overcome the inconsistency of this imaginary through the building of an actual, visible, concrete Wall that is capable of producing "a spatially demarcated us,"¹⁰⁸ as Brown reminds us. In her discussion of the waning sovereignty of the nation state, Brown explains that the Wall reassures national identity and national politics "when these can no longer be fashioned from conceit of national political or economic autonomy, demographic homogeneity, or shared history, culture, and values."¹⁰⁹ Effectively, "walls often function theatrically"¹¹⁰ as a form of "spectacularized power"¹¹¹ and stability, producing what Brown calls an "affect of walling" meant to offset the anxiety produced by waning sovereignties.¹¹² On a political scale this affect may in turn determine a sense of togetherness,

¹⁰⁵ Silverman, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," 116.

¹⁰⁶ Laplanche, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 14.

¹⁰⁷ Laclau quoted in Silverman, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," 115.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Walled States*, 117.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

resonating with Berlant's elaboration about the affective investments in politics.¹¹³ However, it may also determine the way in which the ideological meaning of political discourse is deciphered by its participants. Hence, the Wall as a form of meaning production determines the way in which the subject identifies with the homeland.¹¹⁴ It produces a fantasy about the nation, intimating a particular relationship to the Other, at the core of which we find a fantasy. This fantasy provides a sense of unity in regard to "everything from...physical security and economic well-being to...[a] psychic sense of 'I' and 'we,'"¹¹⁵ but does so crucially through the evocation of the hostile Other. Thus, the imaginary solidified by the Wall is ironically not limited to its enclosure. Instead, "all kinds of suppositions, associations, fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar and strange space outside one's place,"¹¹⁶ as Edward Said asserts. The barrier in the physical and psychological landscape of the nation hence presents itself as a conglomerate of (political) fantasy and (political) narrative, seeking to mask the absence of a national cohesiveness. Because the original fantasy and its traumatic element coincide in the symbolic fiction of the nation, the fantasy formation must "always return" through traumatic repetition. It is an attempt to bind the fiction of 'the nation' to a signifier, resulting in a compulsive reiteration of a barrier between the self and the Other – or a Wall which concretizes political fantasies and narratives.

Where political discourse perpetuates and simultaneously masks ideological inconsistencies by organizing a fantasy structure around the notion of a hostile Other, the relationship between self and Other is inscribed with a barrier. Such a fantasy barrier provides a locus for ensuing fantasies about the enemy. Individual experience is then collectively organized around a fantasy of aggressive Other and defensive self. Here the fantasy-frame provides a mode of interpretation in which a mass affect is generated and hooked to a predetermined ideational content. "The autonomy of affect"¹¹⁷ is lost in this process, as dissemination is inhibited and censored by the barrier between self and Other. Such an accumulation of separation and alienation prevents relationality to the Other but also accumulates tension that

¹¹³ Berlant, "Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest"

¹¹⁴ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 30.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Walled States*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Edward Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 168.

¹¹⁷ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 83-109.

cannot be discharged.¹¹⁸ This scenario of togetherness (of the nation) via “affective registers of belonging”¹¹⁹ is contained and essentially draws on a mode of ‘affective separation’ (from the Other). The stories and images provided by the political discourse censor the meaning of affect by interpreting feelings exclusively within the realm of explanations suggested by the symbolic fiction of politics. The ego of the subject is overwhelmed by a national ‘ego’ and hence it is the national ‘ego’ that regulates and eventually lends meaning to the affects of the social. Anna Freud explains that the ego selects its defence mechanisms in a manner that prevents the liberation of “unwelcome” affect,¹²⁰ and thus it exercises a kind of censorship that inhibits the affective economy. Such a defence through censorship separates the affect from its representation and instead “attaches” the affect to “other ideas” that are more acceptable to the ego, as Freud explains.¹²¹ In the case of national egos such ‘false connections’¹²² prevent the discharge of affect of the walled experience and thus perpetuate compulsive repetition of the dominant narratives as the sole uncensored source of ideational content. Hence, identification of the self must reside within the borders of the symbolic fictions provided by ideology and political discourse. The subject is determined by excluding *particular* experience and fantasy. This suggests that the self is potentially oppressed where the Other needs to be repressed, precisely because the experience of a particular individual is subsumed to the need of national (fantasized) consistency.

Symptom

Verhaeghe proposes that an engagement with trauma demands the acknowledgement of (at least) two kinds of traumata: a structural trauma and an external trauma in the form of a variety of particular experiences and non-experiences.¹²³ Drawing on Freud, Verhaeghe explains that the structural trauma marks an “internal, inescapable conflict” that concerns “the essence of human nature or culture”¹²⁴ and which is

¹¹⁸ As described by Verhaeghe in relation to *Erregungszuwachs*

¹¹⁹ Berlant, “Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest”

¹²⁰ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Karnac Books, 1993), 32.

¹²¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Neuro-Psychosis of Defence,” in *The Standard Edition of the complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume III* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 52.

¹²² Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 100.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

structurally traumatic because “it can never be adequately represented.”¹²⁵ This may well be read analogously to Salecl’s outline of the ‘nation’ whose traumatic ‘absence’ marks the essence of political discourse. “We cannot specify what it means nor can we erase it,” she writes, because it “is an element in us that is ‘more than ourselves.’”¹²⁶ The external trauma, which Verhaeghe calls “particular,” concerns a conflict imposed from the ‘outside’. It is not part of the structure of discourse as such but happens ‘to’ an individual or a collective. Crucially, the structural trauma of being and the external trauma of disaster (or what trauma theory has repeatedly posited as the ‘traumatic event’) intertwine and support each other.¹²⁷ Hence, every external trauma gravitates towards an existential ‘absence’ of being. Political trauma is evoked by and simultaneously reiterates the trauma of political discourse. Hence, collective traumata need to be examined in the way they relate the particular to a structural trauma of the ‘nation’. The fantasmatic barrier inscribed on the relationship between the self and the Other thereby functions as a symptom of the structural trauma, but also provides the *mise-en-scene* of particular traumatic experience.

In order to make sense of the traumatic imposition of political walls it is essential to identify them as symptoms of the ‘nation’. A Wall literally conceals an absence (of the relation between the self and the Other) that returns as a wound precisely because its meaning relates to “an element in us that is ‘more than ourselves’.”¹²⁸ Dealing with the trauma of the Wall is a matter of engaging with ‘scenes’ that address this element, in order to expose the Wall as a symptom. Such an exposure seeks to shift the grand narratives that feed into its formation and expand them through the particular. A symptom not only conceals a traumatic element; it also makes it visible. It appears as the consequence of a repression, as can be traced in the forced ‘absence’ of the Other in defence of the self. The symptom works to express such acts of repression. In this regard political walls, first and foremost bring forth the encounter between self and Other - albeit interpreting this as a matter of *confrontation*. Hence, the aim of moving and removing grand narratives, the aim of challenging them, is to set the stage for a *meeting*, which includes the Other and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

¹²⁷ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 97.

¹²⁸ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

thereby provides collectives with a greater variety in engaging with trauma and working through its related affects. As Freud puts it, “tracing a hysterical symptom back to a traumatic scene assists our understanding only if the scene...recognizably possesses the necessary traumatic force.”¹²⁹ The Wall needs to be examined as a wound or sign in order to understand the particular collective traumata it evokes through memory and fantasy, and which feed back into its repeated return. As Freud states,

no hysterical symptom can arise from a real experience alone, but in every case the memory of earlier experiences awakened in association with it plays a part in causing the symptom...this proposition holds good without exception.¹³⁰

An explanation of and encounter with the Wall, hence, cannot rely on a rhetoric of security, political power, or differentiations between self and Other. It has to associate these ideas with a problem at the core of the concept of the nation and take a variety of narratives into account. “Symptoms are overdetermined,”¹³¹ meaning they are supported from several directions at once, which is why a discussion of political walls must, as Rose points out in regard to Israel, take into account that “it is perfectly possible to have both concrete reasons for something and other, less tangible reasons as well.”¹³² Nonetheless, these “less tangible reasons,” are excluded from the discourse of grand narratives, despite informing and producing the particular experiences of individuals. Such ignorance manifests itself in a fantasmatic barrier *and* in the symptom of the Wall. Working through is then essentially a matter of ‘leading back to a scene’ in which historical forces are related to the particular and perhaps ‘less tangible’ experiences. In this regard, memory must ‘return’ as a scene which allows for affective togetherness and dissemination beyond the filter of ideological coherence. It needs to encapsulate both structural and particular traumata and acknowledge them as relational. Such scenes offer the individual and the collective a locus to re-experience something which has been excluded from experience – the experience of the self *in relation* to the Other.

¹²⁹ Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria (1896),” in Peter Gay ed. *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 98.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³² Rose, “Nation as Trauma, Zionism as Question”

Projection

Scenes of collective trauma that relate the particular to the structural and the self to the Other offer possibilities of catharsis, precisely because the particular experience ‘envelopes’ something about the structural problem – that is, the nation. This exchange works via modes of projection, a process by which a “psychological element is displaced and relocated in an external position.”¹³³ It is consequently through expressions of individual experience that the traumatic absence of the ‘nation’ can find articulation. The particularity of individual fantasy exceeds the narrative and ideational content of political discourse, and thereby the fantasy circumvents ‘censorship.’ When political trauma enters and disturbs the subjective psyche, the traumatic element of politics is internalized and demands a line of defence on the subject’s part. It does not make use of the narrative of the nation but addresses this trauma in a ‘form’ that belongs to the subject, thereby creating a personal narrative through fantasy. Indeed, this appears as a particular defence mechanism of the individual and offers a glimpse into the underlying traumatic structure precisely because it does not seek to represent the nation’s trauma directly but instead *projects* it in a fantasy scene. As Verhaeghe explains, the interconnection between the structural and the particular trauma opens up the chance to “at least partly exteriorise”¹³⁴ the original conflict, and thereby to partly project what is “more than ourselves.”¹³⁵ Simply put, we cannot flee from our internal conflicts, which is why we seek to project them. If our internal conflict is ‘political in structure’, then repressed elements of political discourse may be addressed through personal fantasies. This is important for a working through of political trauma because it enables the collective to re-experience something which is lost within grand narratives.

Such projection may follow the logic of Freud’s *Screen Memory* and thereby offer a point of contact between collective trauma and individual experience. Essentially, an individual recollection of experience, a memory as it were, may serve “as representation of one or more important phantasies.”¹³⁶ The significance of engaging

¹³³ Laplace and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 349.

¹³⁴ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 97.

¹³⁵ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

¹³⁶ Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memory (1899),” 123.

with these scenes lies in the fact that a recollection or expression of the screen memory enables an original, or in Verhaeghe's sense, a structural, fantasy to surface. Such a layered fantasy "represents in the memory impressions and thoughts of a later date whose content is connected with its own by symbolic or similar links,"¹³⁷ as Freud asserts. Hence, projecting particular and structural trauma into one 'scene' establishes a link between the individual and the collective, illuminating something about the collective through individual experience. Highlighting such links then profoundly challenges the idea that subjective experience and expression is inconsequential in the context of grand narratives. In fact, these seemingly 'trivial' instances of individual experience are capable of articulating the "essence of human culture,"¹³⁸ an essence which may be repressed by political discourse. Further, it is through a 'scene' that we are capable of experience. "A thought," Freud writes about the fantasy of a dream, "is represented as a scene, or as it seems to us, is experienced."¹³⁹ Since trauma is "the collapse of present experience,"¹⁴⁰ such a scene may replace the collective absence of experience through the projected experience of the individual. Hence, it may be that it is in the trivial detail of the everyday, the scenes of ordinary life, that the "past, present and future are strung together as it were"¹⁴¹ and we find "a point of contact"¹⁴² with what affects us most.

Projection is not simply a means to carry the trauma outward but also a profound component of the fantasy scenario itself. The fantasy scene offers what Freud coins '*der andere Schauplatz*',¹⁴³ often translated as 'another scene',¹⁴⁴ in which the identificatory roles suggested by political discourse are subverted as 'fixed' subject positions become obsolete. In social reality the traumatic element of political discourse is repressed and the act is concealed by a fantasy structure that positions the subject in a hostile relation to the Other. In psychic reality the political narrative is replaced by a personal narrative, which provides the subject with multiple points of possible identification and hence challenges the 'concreteness' of ideology and its related 'dominant fictions'. As Laplanche puts it, "fantasy is...a favoured spot for

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Verhaeghe, "Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan," 96.

¹³⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 682.

¹⁴⁰ Kristen Brown Golden and Bettina G. Bergo, *The Trauma Controversy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁴¹ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," 439.

¹⁴² Freud, "Screen Memory (1899)," 124.

¹⁴³ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig: Elibron, 2002) 33.

¹⁴⁴ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 112.

the most primitive defence reactions, such as turning against oneself, or into an opposite, projection, negation [etc].”¹⁴⁵ Hence, if we accept that the screen memory has “a profound structural relationship with the original fantasy,”¹⁴⁶ then the fantasy of the individual opens up the possibility to re-negotiate the subject positions of self and Other contained and perpetuated in the original fantasy about the nation.

The ideological script of self and Other is dislodged through the intervention of individual fantasy. Projection may severely undermine the notion of separation and alienation inscribed in the relationship between self and Other. Drawing on Freud’s essay in “A Child is Being Beaten” Laplanche explains that “the original fantasy is characterized in absence of subjectivization”¹⁴⁷ because “the child is one among many other characters in the fantasy ‘a child being beaten’.”¹⁴⁸ Where the subject intertwines the structural trauma of the nation and the particular trauma imposed by the Wall by means of a fantasy scene, the “mixed nature”¹⁴⁹ of this scene opens up new identification points. The otherwise carefully cemented barrier between self and Other in the fantasy structure of the nation becomes obsolete in this “other scene” because the subject “appears caught up himself in the sequence of images,”¹⁵⁰ in the fantasy about the nation, “without pursuing an object or a sign.”¹⁵¹ As Thornham points out, such a “relation of the social to the psychic material seems to suggest the subversive potential of fantasy’s slippage between subject positions”¹⁵² because the positions of the self and Other can be re-narrated through this fantasy.

In this mixed version, the subject’s desire is potentially inconsistent with the country’s desire. ‘The nation’ is not exclusively set in stone by the subject’s fantasy but nevertheless contributes to the *mise-en-scene*. Because of this the story of the nation is re-narrated through the personal lens of fantasy, including the subject’s experience, memory and other personal trajectories in this narrative. *Der andere Schauplatz* (another scene) – the setting of dreams in Freud’s writings – here allows for the subject to experience an element of ‘the nation’ by taking up various roles of social behaviour, thereby indicating the possibility of various political positions.

¹⁴⁵ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 27.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 95.

¹⁵⁰ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 22.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵² Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 97.

Analogous to Freud's description of the original fantasy in "A Child is Being Beaten," the violence is re-negotiated along the continuum between who is exercising violence and punishment and who endures or deserves it. In "A Child is Being Beaten" the subject is present in what is perceptibly a violent scene through which the subject 'experiences' various points of view. According to Freud, these positions are most commonly reflected in a shift between the following impressions: "my father is beating the child whom I hate,"¹⁵³ "I am being beaten by my father,"¹⁵⁴ "I am loved by my father,"¹⁵⁵ and "my father loves only me and not the other child for he is beating it."¹⁵⁶ This syntactical interchangeability reveals, as Thornham asserts, that "while subject positions are variable, the terms of social difference are fixed."¹⁵⁷ In this context Thornham is primarily interested in the social difference of gender; however, such differentiations may also resonate with the fixed subject positions ascribed to race, ethnicity or religion. With this in mind, it is essential to point out that Freud's scene conceptualizes difference in relation to the social behaviour each of the position enacts. Thereby, fantasy reorganizes the occupation of *roles* of social behaviour and perhaps opens up the possibility of subverting the fixed segregations of social categories and stereotypes, instead enabling empathetic affective positions.

The enactment of social behaviour in "A Child Being Beaten" simultaneously suggests different political positions and roles. However, the scene also displays power relations and hierarchies that resonate with the continuum of institutional violence reiterated by the nation-state. Concretely, the fantasy perpetuates and marks the position of the witness, the victim, the persecutor, the enemy and the narcissist. Essentially, these positions echo the fantasy structure of 'the nation' in so far as a political discourse of alienation and separation draws on this original scene of violence, albeit in a reductive and clothed form. The Other in such a political fantasy is always the persecutor and the enemy, while the self is clearly positioned as the victim and the narcissist or nationalist (as devotee of the (collective) self in the form of the ideal ego or state). The witness is avoided in the nation fantasy or merely

¹⁵³ Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten," in *Collected Papers Volume II* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950) 179.

¹⁵⁴ Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten," 179.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵⁷ Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 96.

implied in the self-referential assumption that these categories are ‘correct’ because they are obvious, thus visible (to us). However, particular fantasies enable a complication of this setting, because they allow us to re-tell the story from various angles and provide different material for the expression of traumatic ideations. In this scenario the roles are still fixed, but the subject is not; once the identificatory positions are changeable, all kinds of differences become imaginable and thus imageable. The self in fantasy may then be victim, persecutor, witness, narcissist, devotee or enemy and shift between these positions indefinitely. Simultaneously the Other is equally identified and implicated in various positions of this constellation. This complicates the dominant narrative of political discourse profoundly as the fantasy of ‘ideal self’ and ‘hostile Other’ is exposed as having no claim on fixed subject positions as points of reference.

Perhaps the most effective revelation in this regard is the identification of the self as possible perpetrator. As Laplanche explains, “projection is defined as a mode of refusal to recognize”¹⁵⁸ something in the self but simultaneously allows the subject “to recognise in others precisely what he refuses to acknowledge in himself.”¹⁵⁹ The (fantasmatic) barriers between the self and the Other are hence blurred through modes of projection; however, what becomes obsolete is not the distinction between a self and an Other, but the fixation of positions through dichotomies of good and evil. Essentially this is not concerned with a different representation of the ‘nation,’ because there is no representation of the desired object in the fantasy. The ‘nation’, as it were, remains inherently unrepresentable. Instead, such psychic elaborations demonstrate that this traumatic absence can be (re)organized *in relation* to the Other. If trauma is a matter of two scenes, in which “the first gains meaning through the second,”¹⁶⁰ then the psychic elaboration of the ‘scene of violence’ can challenge the reductive and traumatic discourse of politics, precisely because it presents an alternative setting for ‘the nation’, *einen anderen Schauplatz* - another scene, played out on the historical stage that binds collectives to one another.

¹⁵⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 354.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 9.

Treatment

The ‘other scene’ of trauma foregrounds the importance of the visual for an engagement with political and psychological walls. The visual affectively addresses trauma beyond the limits of the verbal and brings its fantasmatic dimension into appearance. This is important for an idea of treatment, or working through, precisely because Freud (unlike Lacan) maintains that “a complete remembering and verbalisation must be possible.”¹⁶¹ However, he soon finds that his patients never get hold of the last *word*, but instead penetrate into ever earlier traumata and new associations. As Paul Verhaeghe asserts, “hence, Freud gets the idea that treatment amounts to the verbalisation of something that is obviously not verbal,”¹⁶² which later leads him to raise the importance of fantasies. He recognizes that trauma has a visual and fantasmatic quality that is played out in the mind, as evident in the way it evokes ‘scenes’ of memory. Crucially, Freud further establishes that “recollection without affect almost invariably produces no results,”¹⁶³ because traumatic affect is not discharged unless the patient can “put words to the affect.”¹⁶⁴ Hence, a signifier needs to be found in order to represent something that exceeds representation, through means of a visual affective, or affecting scene.

A (political) scene as an envelope for the affective dimension of trauma must be imagined, actualized and made accessible through public display. Instead of containing affect within the enclosure of political narrative, such a scene may offer a possibility of projecting the nonverbal intensities of trauma, thereby introducing them to collective discursive practices, lastly enabling the negotiation of verbal signifiers. The scene thereby communicates visually at the threshold between the unconscious and consciousness. Similarly, the Freudian dream visualizes an unconscious wish and its attached affects by way of “a pictographic script”¹⁶⁵ which is then communicated to consciousness in the form of a scene - a process at the end of which “the affects have remained unaltered.”¹⁶⁶ The dream appears on “a screen between the [unconscious] and the consciousness,” protecting one element through

¹⁶¹ Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 92.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶³ Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 10.

¹⁶⁵ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 381.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 596.

revealing and mediating another without substituting the underlying affects. Thus, the visual problematic of trauma lies in the fact that it is unrepresentable as a concrete matter, but due to its affective nature it can be made available to experience by attaching the affects to the protective screens of distorted and condensed imagery. Similarly, film and the visual arts may provide a public encounter with traumatic affects. Working through the walls of the unconscious and the political may thus amount to a notion of *screening through* such affective scenes on public display.

Chapter 3

Mediating Absence: Artists and the Berlin Wall

Although the Berlin Wall is remembered as the iconic concretisation of Cold War binaries, its most outstanding characteristic has been that of ‘absence.’ In part this is due to the way a barrier typically works as a means of erasing the other (side) while reinforcing an enclosed one-sided perspective. However, such mediations of absence appear to gain particular momentum in the instance of Berlin, where the notion of ‘absence’ is carefully inscribed in the city’s architectural and imaginary structure, as can still be felt today, more than twenty years after the Wall’s physical demise.¹ It seems that in Berlin the Wall has not disappeared; rather, it was in the first instance, and continues to be, absent. Whether the concrete slabs were covered by graffiti in the West or presented a “clean screen”² in the East, post-1961 life turned away from the Wall³ and thereby silently accepted (and perhaps supported) its lethal implications. City maps of East Berlin depicted the other side as empty space. The West became a virtual ‘nothing’ beyond the Wall, just as the East disappeared from the weather charts on western television.⁴ The world, it seemed, ended at the concrete divide that cut through the middle of Berlin.

The famous city Wall separating the East and West of Berlin at a length of 45.9 kilometres became a signifying image of 20th-century division; however, this image also worked to disguise the architectural complexity of the Wall, effectively evoking a consistency of absence. While the colourful partition in the West became world famous, the part of the Wall effectively working to imprison people, the East, was largely kept hidden from view. This notion of imprisonment (rather than anti-fascist protection) became particularly obvious after the Four Power Agreement about Berlin. From 1972 the inhabitants of West Berlin could access the Eastern part of the city by acquiring a short term visa, whereas such crossings were nearly

¹ For an in depth discussion of the city’s voids see Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1997), 57-81.

² Joachim Schloer, “It has to go away, but at the same time it has to be kept: The Berlin Wall and the Making of an Urban Icon,” *Urban History* 33, (2006), 98.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” 64.

impossible for the inhabitants on the Eastern side.⁵ Yet, the concept of the Berlin Wall has become largely associated with the graffiti imagery on the Western side. Thus, it is precisely the Wall's operative side that remains absent from a global (Western) imagination about the Wall. Essentially, the Berlin Wall also reached much further than the 155 kilometres surrounding West Berlin. It separated the country along a 1,393 kilometre inner border system, designed to keep the actual Wall invisible and thus pervasive enough to seamlessly integrate itself into the everyday of (East) Germany. Large parts of the GDR border were not 'walled,' in the sense of a concrete imposition, but were often disguised by lakes and forests, which were kept under strict surveillance. Most notably the Berlin Wall was made up of two walls - the 3.6 metre-high concrete slab facing the Western side of the city and the so-called interior Wall facing the East. The two walls were separated by the no man's land of the 'death strip' which kept *the* Berlin Wall on the Western side out of view from the East, at the same time as it was meant to keep the various escape attempts from the East out of western perception. In this way the Eastern side of the Wall was not simply markedly absent from the public field of vision, but also encouraged to remain absent from thought. It thereby characteristically evoked what Olaf Briese has called an "aesthetic of absence."⁶ This 'absence' of the Eastern Wall essentially marks the Berlin Wall's main characteristic and stubbornly outlives its demise.

Today this notion of absence is important to recall precisely because the Berlin Wall has physically vanished but persists as a global imaginary that seeks to be mediated in various ways. The physical demolition of the Wall began immediately during the night of 9 November 1989 with politically motivated acts of destruction.⁷ Soon after, people all over the city began to hack the Wall to pieces. The so-called wall-peckers sold these pieces, sent them off to international friends or kept them as personal

⁵ The Four Power Agreement, taking effect in June 1972 allowed "unimpeded" travelling from West to East. However, travelling from the East to the West was still nearly impossible and only permitted in the case of a family emergency.

See for example, Klaus Schütz, "Berlin in the Age of Détente," *The World Today* 31, no 1 (January, 1975), 29-35.

Jochen Frowein, "Legal Problems of the German Ostpolitik," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 23, no.1 (January, 1974), 105-126.

⁶ Olaf Briese, "The Different Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall," in *The German Wall: Fallout in Europe*, ed. Marc Silberman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 49.

⁷ Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, "Mauermalerei und Mauerspechte," *DRA* <http://1989.dra.de/themendossiers/politik/mauer/mauermalerei-und-mauerspechte.html> (accessed: 10 March, 2013).

memorabilia. The GDR famously also started to sell off large pieces of the (painted) Wall through the state-owned import-export company Limex, reassuring critics that the profits would be donated to health services and public restorations.⁸ While a few segments of the Berlin Wall have been preserved in other parts of the world (mostly in the USA), most of the Berlin Wall has been destroyed. Berlin still exhibits pieces at Potsdamer Platz and the 1.4 kilometre-long Berlin Wall memorial along Bernauer Strasse, displaying various Wall segments and a ‘preserved’ section of the deathstrip, including a watchtower and barbed wire. However, Briese maintains that “the goal was and is not preservation, (which is impossible anyway because the original is gone) but rather contemporary reconstruction.”⁹ Rather than maintaining the actual Wall, these objects of memory help to testify to and simultaneously cover over an aesthetic of absence as inherent to the Wall. Exceptional in this regard is the Eastside Gallery (which will be discussed in more detail) because it marks the interior Wall of the East, although it imagines it in terms of the graffiti iconography of the West. Altogether the memorials testify to an effort to imagine the Wall and to mediate it despite its absence. In this way the Wall persists as an invisible structure on the face of Berlin and continues to evoke an ‘aesthetic of absence.’

The aesthetic of absence was crucial to the Wall’s operation as a political imposition but it also adhered to an invisible structure of meaning that maintained (and perhaps evoked) the Wall while securing its psychological effectivity. In this context people from Berlin often speak about a ‘mental’ Wall which has outlived the demise of the actual Wall, leaving an invisible structure that persists. The interplay between absence and presence as well as visibility and invisibility thus sustains the Wall as a physical and psychological obstacle. This interplay, it seems, was well understood by the East German authorities, who strictly prohibited the Wall’s depiction and thereby any form of mediation on and of the Wall. The law was meant to prevent potential escapees from gaining a detailed understanding of the border system, but inadvertently it also worked to reinforce the Wall’s psychological effectiveness. Lars Kristensen refers to an internalization of Berlin’s Cold War space as “self-evident

⁸ Serge Schmemmann, “Upheaval in the East: Berlin, Abject and Crumbling, Berlin Wall Surrenders,” *The New York Times*, 28 January 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/28/world/upheaval-in-the-east-berlin-abject-and-crumbling-berlin-wall-surrenders.html> (accessed: 7 March 2013).

⁹ Briese, “The Different aesthetics of the Berlin Wall,” 55.

and definite,”¹⁰ suggesting a sense of pervasiveness that led people to believe that the Wall would always be there. In this way the GDR literally created a political order of (in)visibility that was not only reflected in the institutionalized ‘absence’ of the Wall but also in a thorough control of the GDR’s cultural production, later leading to the assumption that subversive engagement with the Wall could only be conducted in the West.¹¹ However, it has become clear that the Wall’s logic, and the politics it stood for, could be, and were, artistically challenged in both the East and the West, either by outright opposition to the prohibition to depict the Wall or through a more subtle engagement with its dynamic of absence and invisibility.

Shifting the view from the visible Wall to the invisible structure that sustains it, Joseph Beuys challenged the Berlin Wall by interrupting its (aesthetic) perception as early as 1964, when he demanded that the Berlin Wall be raised by 5 cm. Beuys formulated this idea as part of a memorandum to the Ministry of the Interior that he handed out at the New Art Festival in Aachen in order to draw attention to the artist’s ability (and Beuys famously considered everyone to be an artist) to challenge political impositions as concretised in the monument of the Wall.¹² By making it the subject of a bizarre demand, Beuys ridiculed the Wall’s physical (visible) imposition and thereby drew attention to its absurdity. Furthermore, he managed to articulate the Wall’s dynamic of invisibility by conceiving of the Wall as a matter of pure aesthetics, and thus as something that designates the visible as an effect of thought.¹³ The visible becomes a mechanism of the thinkable, and thus reveals that both segments, thought and materiality, work in tandem to support the same (political) structure. When asked to justify his demand, Beuys explained that “the wall is an image and should be seen as an image”¹⁴ and thereby he approached it in terms of proportionality rather than politics (of course, he was well aware of the interaction between politics and aesthetic when making this distinction). Beuys continued his declaration by estimating an ideal height for the monument, which he calculated on the basis of the Wall’s length, thus stripping the Wall of its grand political narrative

¹⁰ Lars Kristensen, introduction to *Post-Communist Film: Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture: Moving Images of Postcommunism*, ed. by Lars Kristensen (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

¹¹ Claudia Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall: Demarcating Culture in the Cold War Germanys* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 12.

¹² Bettina Funke, “Displaced Struggles: On Rancière and the Art World,” *Artforum* (March 2007), 341.

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), 4.

¹⁴ Quoted in Funke, “Displaced Struggles,” 341.

and exposing its function as figurative rather than concrete.¹⁵ In this way Beuys's absurd demand intimates the possibility of overcoming the Wall, precisely because it shifts the view to a metaphorical Wall (of narrative, ideology and ultimately thought) that works to sustain the concrete Wall, which is exposed as an expression of these symbolic parameters.¹⁶ Beuys explains that viewing the monument from this angle "immediately diffuses the wall."¹⁷ Simultaneously, by interrogating the Wall's function as an image, he firmly foregrounds its appearance in the public field of vision, thereby countering the structure of invisibility as well. By refusing to regard the Wall as a normal part of the public field of vision (or lack thereof), Beuys estranges and defamiliarizes a common perception of it. He thereby alienates the monument, instead of allowing himself to be alienated by the Wall. In a way this echoes the Brechtian alienation effect, in so far as Beuys meant to prevent those who live with the Wall from becoming so immersed in its structure and appearance that they could no longer notice it or reflect on its imposition.

The immersion in the Wall, and in particular the aesthetic of absence, constitute an emotional imposition precisely because the Wall's invisible structure is easily internalized by those who live with it. The internal Wall thereby echoes the mechanisms of trauma because it partitions the psyche, barricading away the repressed and preventing it from recurring consciously. Similarly, the Wall draws on the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, and the means of visibility and invisibility, in order to exercise its psychological effectiveness. The efficiency of absence in this context conceptualizes the Wall as that which can never be adequately represented but persists as an internal conflict. However, as psychoanalysis maintains, psychical labour as elaborated in the process of working through may assist in dealing with the trauma by projecting it or mediating it, in an attempt to come to terms with the traumatic imposition. In this way the expression of trauma can become a means of understanding experience¹⁸ - an experience which, in the case of the Berlin Wall, is largely sustained by absence. The ability to mediate absence and what is made absent thus functions as a resistance to the political order

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Beuys explains this in the instructions to his work: Joseph Beuys, "Beuys empfiehlt Erhöhung der Berliner Mauer um 5 cm (bessere Proportion!)," *Aktenvermerk für das Innenministerium*, 20 July 1964 <http://www.josephbeuys.de/texthand.htm> (accessed 18 March 2013).

¹⁷ Quoted in Funke, "Displaced Struggles," 341.

¹⁸ Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy, introduction to *World Memory*, 3.

of (in)visibility and the traumatic forms of alienation this provokes. Thus, the act of mediating the Wall constitutes a form of subverting the political imperatives and dealing with the psychological imposition in so far as such acts address the Wall's effectiveness by reinstating it in the public field of vision. Mediation counters absence by renouncing an institutionalized forgetting of the Wall and thereby encouraging a (re)making of absent history.

Critical Images and Historical Imaginations

Since the GDR government sought to prevent any form of mediation of the Wall, artistic encounters were largely absent from the surface; however, they nevertheless thrived below it. Engaging with the aesthetic of absence worked to overcome invisibility by reinstating the self in relation to a highly politicized space that sought to hide its own effectiveness. In the East such acts were predominantly addressed through the medium of photography, due to its capacity to individuate and authenticate the hidden realities of the everyday. Detlef Matthes' amateur photographs of the Berlin Wall provide an example of challenging the 'absent' Berlin Wall as orchestrated by the East German authorities by refusing to simply internalize its presence. Blatantly opposing the prohibition of depiction at the age of 18, Matthes created a rare documentation of the emptiness and absence that constitute a walled space in the form of black and white shots of blank concrete and a vast no-man's land.¹⁹ The photos capture the sense of isolation experienced by the photographer, which is utilized as the defining means of a very personal encounter with the Wall, perhaps making an attempt at understanding the space, while unavoidably interrogating it politically. Matthes notoriously photographed the Wall from hide-outs, as a form of (risky) personal negotiation with his imprisonment. Chasing a view of the West, he experienced every photograph (altogether 180)²⁰ as a form of triumph, reclaiming the space that essentially erased him from the Other's sight. The photos allowed Matthes to investigate a forbidden view, but they now also work as documents of a largely absent view of the Wall from an Eastern

¹⁹ RBB/ Stilbruch, "Blickpunkt Ost: Detlef Matthes fotografiert die Mauer," *YouTube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3pmNNySW-I> (accessed: 17 March 2013).

²⁰ Stefan Locke, "Mauerfotos: Interview mit Detlef Matthes," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 May 2011, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/mauerfotos-das-musste-immer-ganz-schnell-gehen-1624904.html> (accessed: 7 March 2013).

perspective.²¹ Matthes' grainy photographs are devoid of people or any signs of social life, adding to the impression that the Wall was indeed 'absent' from East German everyday life on the one hand and created a form of permanent absence (of sociability) on the other. Overall, the photos depict the obscene normality of imprisonment and the peculiar absence of engagement with the Wall. A "parking lot at the end of the world,"²² cut-off streets and train lines as well as complex border systems reinforce a sense of endless enclosure and limitation.



Figure 1 Courtesy of Detlev Matthes
Ruppiner Straße Ecke Rheinsberger Straße, Mitte, Ostberlin, 1986



Figure 2 Courtesy of Detlev Matthes
Leipziger Straße 49, Mitte, East Berlin, 1986

These photos are personal investigations of an imposed environment and perhaps attempts at understanding this space while enabling meaning retrospectively. Matthes lost the photos in 1987 when the Stasi coincidentally discovered the collection, after Matthes was arrested at the notorious Pflingstkrawalle.²³ Matthes was accused of espionage and imprisoned for six weeks, until it was established that the photos were politically 'harmless.' Ironically, this is precisely what gave these photos political leverage and further preserved them from the void of forgetting. Years after the Wall's demise, Matthes found the long forgotten photos in his Stasi

²¹ Ibid.

²² RBB/ Stilbruch, "Blickpunkt Ost"

²³ In June 1987, during the so called 'Pflingst-holidays' David Bowie, Genesis and the Eurhythmics were singing at 'the concert for Berlin' right next to the Wall in the Western part of the city. In the Eastern part young people had gathered to catch a few sounds of the concert. Things escalated when people prompted towards the Brandenburg Gate, confronting police and NVA. During the three-day confrontation 158 people were detained (and subsequently 'filed' by the Stasi).

See Olaf Leitner "Rock Music in the GDR. An Epitaph." In *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 17-40.

Jochen Winters "Der Ruf 'die Mauer muss weg' wird der SED noch lange in den Ohren klingen" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 10, 1987.

WWS „Schallmauer“ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 10, 1987.

file and subsequently made them accessible to the public in exhibitions.²⁴ Today Matthes's photos serve to document a history of isolation as experienced by an 18 year-old at the time, and thereby testify to the intersection between the private and the political, now reframed by the present, enabling the photographs to gain political and historical significance with hindsight.

Whereas Matthes's photos testified to a private (secret) encounter with the Wall, the works of professional GDR photographers such as Gundula Schulze Eldowy were also (officially) able to make appear what was hidden and thus excluded from the official 'inventory' of political discourse. Some of the most successful artistic subversions of authorised GDR culture were accomplished by reinterpreting an official practice while still following it. Photography had the simple advantage that it was not considered a form of art in the GDR,²⁵ a stigma which even after reunification haunted Eastern photography, now accused of submitting to the official social realism credo, and therefore incapable of genuine artistic creation.²⁶ Such arguments ignore the crossovers between confirming and subverting the official political principle of social realism because "such realism retained its critical edge in documenting a social experience"²⁷ that often did not correspond to the state's official image. Despite the official claim of depicting the reality of the working class, social realism was underscored by an insistent glorification of successful socialist progress. Where 'reality', particularly that of the working class, departed from such formulas, the socialist setting was revealed to be made up of competing realities, potentially challenging the official discourse of unified contentment. Photography in this regard could show an un-orchestrated (and by extension unauthorized) life in the East, while capturing and thus reinstating the individual faces in the otherwise faceless collectivity of the GDR. Photography thereby challenged the absence of the (private) subject; or, as Susan Sontag put it, "just to show something, anything, in the photographic view is to show that it is hidden."²⁸

²⁴ For example, "Berliner Mauer: Fotos Verboten," organized by *BStU*, 11 August 2013. – 31 December 2013, https://www.bstu.bund.de/SharedDocs/Ausstellungen/Region-Frankfurt/ffo_fotos_verboten.html (accessed: 18 May 2014).

²⁵ Matthew Shaul and Nicola Freeman, *Do Not Refreeze: Photography behind the Berlin Wall* (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2007), 17.

Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 193.

²⁶ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 11-12.

²⁷ Betts, *Within Walls*, 222.

²⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 121.

Such crossovers were often reflected in photographs of private life in the GDR, which were at once highly welcomed, as they suggested a certain (socialist) way of life, and could also gain a subversive potential, if utilized to reinstate the individual beyond the socialist script.

From the 1960s various GDR photographers began photographing families in their living rooms in order to document 'real existing socialism' within the domestic walls of GDR citizens.²⁹ These photos most prominently showed the family arranged for a portrait in the living room, frequently positioned around the coffee table, presenting the "tidy worker domicile."³⁰ In the mid-1980s Gundula Schulze Eldowy drew on this tradition of the domestic in her photo series *Nude*, but utilized the space in a way that exposed the socialist living room photos as highly scripted by individuating the subject beyond this script. The subjects of her photos are particularized, belonging to a community located in Berlin-Mitte, of which the photographer was an intimate member.³¹ The people in the photos are naked, or "stripped of clothes as markers of status and nation."³² Many of the faces reappear through her different series and thereby reinstate the intimacy and familiarity between subject and photographer. This trust enables Schulze Eldowy to show her subjects in private, unguarded and without inhibition, echoing Sontag, who writes that "to take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability."³³ The private space in Schulze Eldowy's series is often unarranged and uncertain, foregrounding the naked, 'uncovered' individual. A lot of the photos transmit a sense of isolation and perishability, in contrast to the collectivity and euphoria of official state photography. Furthermore, the images expose two different spheres of privacy in the GDR, an officially scripted (and perhaps frozen) way of being a family, as well as a hidden 'naked' privacy of individuals which suggests an aura of despair and transience.

The notion of transience challenged the GDR's official future orientation by foregrounding a sense of decay. Despite our tendency to associate communism with the past, following a progressive logic, Boris Groys points out that communist-ruled

²⁹ Betts, *Within Walls*, 194.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

³¹ Shaul and Freeman, *Do Not Refreeze*, 16.

³² Betts, *Within Walls*, 216.

³³ Sontag, *On Photography*, 15.

societies have always followed the “banner of some universal future,”³⁴ aggressively asserting “the credo of progress.”³⁵ In this sense communism was “utterly modern,”³⁶ a modernity which was above all “a way of politically organizing time,”³⁷ away from a compromised and frozen past towards a “future within the present.”³⁸ Subverting the particular temporality of communism, GDR photography could thus undermine the system’s ideological directions and statutes. Schulze Eldowy’s series *Berlin in a Dog’s Night* in particular focuses on the margin of a society that officially did not have a margin, in the physical as well as in the social sense. Rather than testifying to the anticipated future of socialist progress, the series documents people who are anchored in a repressed past. The photos document a struggling, declining society and an infrastructure about to collapse. The subjects are firmly integrated into the decaying city space, which does not so much reflect the anticipated modernity of the GDR system, but instead references the past of a war-torn Berlin. Schulze Eldowy’s photos uncover absence by drawing attention to the image of the “lost city”³⁹ in what was then (still) a wounded Berlin. The photos capture a lifestyle shaped by a troubled past, which has subsequently vanished from post-unification Berlin, but also anticipated the fall of the Wall.

Highlighting the destructive impact of a past largely repressed from the East’s official credo, Schulze Eldowy’s images anticipate the future in the sense that they foreshadow the demise of the Wall. The people of the East were officially ‘frozen’ in a modern arrangement of surveillance and futurity. Conversely, Schulze Eldowy portrayed people whose lives appeared subsumed by the past and thereby disrupted the “ideological fiction of the future present.”⁴⁰ Her photos hence reference the past but also anticipate a future of the regime’s demise. As the photographer puts it in an interview in 2009: “It’s not like all of a sudden, with the 9th of November, and because of Mr Schabowski, the borders were opened. You can see it in my pictures,

³⁴ Boris Groys, “Back from the Future,” *Third Text* 17, issue 4, (2003), 327.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tyrus Miller, introduction to *Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context*, ed. Tyrus Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “Berlin hatte damals etwas von einer untergegangenen Stadt”

Humanistischer Pressedienst, “Interview mit Gundula Schulze Eldowy, Teil 1,” *YouTube*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqYDoQEjI8A> (accessed: 17 March, 2013).

⁴⁰ Miller, introduction to *Given World and Time*, 3.

where the agony is already visible.”⁴¹ In this sense Schulze Eldoway engages with a structure that is otherwise kept invisible, individuating the economic and societal decline of a future-oriented GDR, firmly anchored in a troubled past. Schulze Eldoway showed that which was officially not existent in the GDR: a sense of misery, poverty and social isolation. The photographer, herself living for more than 13 years in the midst of the community she depicted, conveys a feeling of forgotten times and stories, of living in the shadow of both society and the Wall. This is reflected in the stark lighting contrasts that foreground the darkness of the space and simultaneously create a haunting emptiness. In the audio track that accompanies the exhibition of these photographs on her website, Schulze Eldoway explains that she wanted to save these faces from being forgotten. To her these images utilize stories - stories of ordinary people that need to be protected from disappearance and that belong to the city of Berlin.⁴² At the same time, the photographer attempted to portray a particular moment in time and a milieu that had been forgotten even while it still existed. In this way the people depicted give a face to the history inscribed in the spatial memory of Berlin and (like all portraits) they allow for a moment of history looking back at us.

Schulze Eldoway captures moments that authenticate an absent East Berlin normality in which, as she puts it, “the splitting of Berlin is the splitting of its inhabitants.”⁴³ These snapshots of everyday life were hidden not only from the future-oriented view of the GDR authorities, but also from Western culture. The captured moments were thus characterized by absence both in terms of the past they referenced and the present they created. Drawing on Benjamin and Arendt, Britta Duelke explains that “the transmissibility of the past relates to its capacity to be cited in the present.”⁴⁴ Hence, photographs such as Schulze Eldoway’s can only depict the past if they are granted this authority. In this context Schulze Eldoway was capable of exhibiting her

⁴¹ “Es ist ja nicht so, dass mit dem 9. November plötzlich mit Herrn Schabowski die Grenze aufging. Sieht man meine Bilder an, da ist ja die Agonie schon zu sehen.”

Humanistischer Pressedienst, “Interview mit Gundula Schulze Eldoway, Teil 3,” *YouTube* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7_2s4eHkoQ (accessed 17 March 2013).

⁴² “Im Herbstlaub des Vergessens,” *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* <http://www.berlin-ineinerhundenacht.de/hundenacht.html> (accessed: 17 March 2013).

⁴³ “Die Zerissenheit Berlins, ist die Zerissenheit seiner Bewohner“ “Im Herbstlaub des Vergessens,” *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* <http://www.berlin-ineinerhundenacht.de/hundenacht.html> (accessed: 17 March 2013).

⁴⁴ Britta Duelke, “Quoting from the Past or Dealing with Temporality,” in *Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context*, ed. Tyrus Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 105.

photography in the GDR but it took twenty years after reunification before they provoked a second wave of appreciation. The 2007 British exhibition *Do Not Refreeze: Photography behind the Iron Curtain* exemplifies the way in which these works are retrospectively incorporated into a corpus that rewrites East German history as the testimony of a wholesome European history. Featuring Schulze Eldowy and other GDR photographers, the exhibition advertised the photos as “an extraordinary contribution to European photography”⁴⁵ which, up until this point, had “been frozen out by the Cold War.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the German exhibition *Look Back Forward*⁴⁷ provided another ‘deferred’ setting for the hidden faces of and behind the Wall to appear in a unified Germany. Ironically, the photos are thus utilized to reformulate a notion of ‘undivided’ European history, but they also prove capable of subverting (and perhaps rewriting) GDR history, by illuminating the faces of unscripted East German private life that were otherwise hidden by and filtered through the ideological screen of the Wall.

While critical images from the East were largely intent on an interrogation of the Wall’s invisible (ideological) structure, the critical response in the West could take a more physical form. Following an invitation by the famous gallerist and curator René Block to West Berlin, Allan Kaprow reconstructed the Wall using bread and jam instead of mortar near the ‘actual’ Berlin Wall in 1970. Kaprow’s performance piece *Sweet Wall* (physically) illustrated an image of the falling Wall twenty years prior to its demise and thereby mirrored the psychological demise anticipated by Schulze Eldowy. However, the difference in power relations between the system and the artist affords a kind of affective reversal according to which the melancholy of the East can be translated into cynical humour in the West. Just like Matthes and Schulze Eldowy, Kaprow criticized the Wall’s bizarre normality; however, he explored the construction as an absurd social transaction rather than a fortress or a societal demarcation. The use of bread and jam was a joke about “sweetening the embittered barricade,”⁴⁸ but also merged the politics of the Wall with the ‘everyday activity’ of making one’s bread. The Wall was thereby attributed to a collective

⁴⁵ The description is used to advertise the exhibition

“Do not Refreeze,” *Cornerhouse*, <http://www.cornerhouse.org/art/art-exhibitions/do-not-refreeze> (accessed: 18 March 2013).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Eckhart Gillen, Annette Tietz, Paula Böttcher, “Blick Zurück Nach Vorne,” *Galerie Pankow* 2009.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

process of labour, as central to “both state socialism and capitalist models,”⁴⁹ while simultaneously reinstating the artificiality of the Wall’s constitution of a highly restrictive space. This modified the image of the divided city, drawing attention to an absorption of the individual into a routine of constructing walls, suggesting an East-West complicity in the act.



Figure 3 Allan Kaprow 'Sweet Wall'

Courtesy of Hannah Higgins

Sweet Wall explores the political monumentalization of the actual Wall as a process that constructs and normalizes an absurd banality and everyday pervasiveness. Assisted by a small group of people, Kaprow spent an afternoon creating six layers of the bread-jam-concrete arrangement and documenting the process with the help of film and photography, before finally pushing the Wall over and collecting all the materials.⁵⁰ Kaprow was well aware of the political implications ‘the fall’ would have in such close proximity to the ‘actual’ Wall and the event has subsequently been read as one of the “more spectacle oriented sites of the Happenings,”⁵¹ an art form Kaprow had developed most prominently during the 1960s.⁵² However, despite the image of the falling Wall, and the political anticipation of such a spectacle, Jeff Kelley points out that the sweet Wall’s “toppling was anticlimactic, at best.”⁵³ The

⁴⁹ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 185.

⁵⁰ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 184.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵² Allan Kaprow’s Happenings combined various forms of media and disguised them as ordinary things such as noise, body movement, etc. This collage was meant to break down the boundaries between the different art forms

See Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 163.

image of the collapsing Wall was “yawning and slow,”⁵⁴ and thereby lacked the affective layering of spectacle. Kaprow’s *Sweet Wall* might thus testify to the artist’s increasing interest in “intimate forms of physical, social and psychological exchanges”⁵⁵ towards the end of the 1960s. With these “activities”⁵⁶ or “events,”⁵⁷ he highlighted “the banal everyday activity”⁵⁸ and “individual self-reflection and self-absorption.”⁵⁹ The absurdity of the construction thereby draws attention to the individual’s unwilling participation in this normality. The event of the bread-jam fall works as a conclusion, but the artwork itself marks a process that cannot be reduced to the fall.

Allan Kaprow’s *Sweet Wall* can be read as a form of “enactment”⁶⁰ against the backdrop of the iron curtain, demonstrating the Cold War space as nonsensical, while establishing very literal, if not obvious, political statements about the Berlin Wall within this space. The scene created here works in and through the setting of Berlin’s Cold War *mise-en-scène*. Indeed, West Berlin had become a favoured ‘stage’ for performance by artists and politicians alike. The Wall was “in constant use as a backdrop of photographs”⁶¹ and served in the creation of ideological statements particularly by high ranked politicians⁶² and “made global sympathies and positions within the Cold War visible.”⁶³ Against the backdrop of this screen, Kaprow’s piece self-consciously explored the Cold War space of West Berlin as an “empty lot”⁶⁴ and militarized zone whose major sustenance, the Wall, figured the anticipation of its dismantling, alluding to the cyclical nature of history. Drawing attention to this at once definite and fragile space, the parody of its major substantiation, the Wall, was built of edible resources to enclose nothing and no one. This worked as a criticism of the waste of important resources to sustain the Wall,⁶⁵ but it also demonstrated a possible expiry date of the imposition.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 185.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Kelley, *Childsplay*, 1.

⁶¹ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 162.

⁶² For example, Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Nikita Krushchev (and later Ronald Reagan).

⁶³ Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall*, 162.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁶⁵ Kelley, *Childsplay*, 163.

In addition to the more obvious political connotations, *Sweet Wall* also reveals a subtext linking the work to a broader historical context, reinstating absent meaning as constitutive of the Wall's traumatic force. Such "historic echoes"⁶⁶ are informed by spatial memory and the artist who involuntarily brings his or her own history to the piece. Of course, memories are pivotal in a space like Berlin, which itself works as a palimpsest of countless histories, ranging from the political to the very personal. These historical resonances recontextualize the work, addressing some of the traumatic and repressive forces that sustain the Wall. For example, Kelley points out that Kaprow later discovered that he had placed his work close to the spot on which Rosa Luxemburg had been murdered. Furthermore, as Kelley also notes, the image of Kaprow, an ethnic Ukrainian Jew, constructing and destroying a Wall in the middle of Berlin evokes the difficult memory of ghetto walls under National Socialism, walls "against which Jews had been shot, or those against which they still wailed"⁶⁷ in Jerusalem. This intimates the Berlin Wall as a testimony to a German inability to engage with the horrors of World War II, reinstating the political and psychological dimensions of trauma. As if to shield the traumatic experience behind the screen of the pre-conscious, as Freud explains the dynamic of repression, each side of the two Germanys tended to displace the responsibility for the country's national socialist past by "frequently pass[ing it] over the border to the 'other' Germany"⁶⁸ on the other side of the Wall. Whereas the West framed the GDR as a continuation of the totalitarian Nazi regime (a discourse which is still common today), the GDR blatantly legitimized itself on an 'antifascist foundation myth,' which went as far as officially terming the Wall "the antifascist protection rampart."⁶⁹ Kaprow's falling Wall can thus be read as a demand to engage with what is repressed and hidden on the other side, leading to a contemplation of earlier historical walls and national enclosures. The falling Wall as the anticipation of the 1989 events and the echo of an unspeakable past denotes the clash of different historical situations in its materialization. It also suggests that these collective conflicts are projected, or screened through the traumatic symptom the Wall provides.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bill Niven, *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1.

⁶⁹ Evelyn Preuss, "The Wall You Will Never Know," *Perspecta* 36, (2005) 19.

The Wall as Screen

Testifying to an understanding of the Wall's invisibility and function as a screen of Germany's political unconscious, Peter Unsicker investigated the conflicted space of the Wall through art installations. Engaging with a visual articulation of the Wall's traumatic imposition in the last three years of its existence, his work preconfigures the notion of the invisible or "mental wall,"⁷⁰ as he put it. On November 9, 1986 (an uncanny historic echo) Unsicker, a sculptor from Heidelberg, opened his *Wallstreet Gallery* at Zimmerstrasse in West-Berlin, which he still operates today. In 1986 the gallery's back door directly faced the Wall with a space of merely 6 meters between the window and the Wall. Although the artist's primary medium is wood and at this point he was "absolutely not interested in wall art,"⁷¹ as promoted by Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet, he encountered the invisible structure of the Wall within a matter of days, feeling "totally confronted with the wall."⁷² The daily question "Do I stand before or behind the wall?"⁷³ became what he describes as a "very personal consternation,"⁷⁴ finally prompting him to accept the Wall as a task. He developed a need to work with it and on it, or arguably, *through* it by reinscribing the Wall into the visual. Unsicker's investment of this politically and affectively charged space resulted in a need to disrupt the Wall's unbearable stagnation.

A week after arriving at Zimmerstrasse, Unsicker started his project in which he utilized the Wall as a medium and extension of his gallery. *The Work on Ruination* (Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen), as he called it, evoked both an act of ruining and a sense of being ruined by the imposition of the Wall. Ruination in Unsicker's understanding is the result of ignorance and idleness, both of which have resulted in the stagnation materialized by the Wall, which he sought to overcome. In this way

⁷⁰ Unsicker speaks about "die Mauer im Kopf" (the Wall in the head) or mental wall Patrice Massenet, "Homo Ludens: Der Mensch lernt durch Spiel – Interview mit Peter Unsicker 1987," *YouTube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMV-fcOG6ZU> (accessed: 17 September 2012).

⁷¹ "Mauerkunst hat mich wirklich Null interessiert."

Ralf Gründer, "Das Wundpflaster: Interview mit Peter Unsicker 2009," *Youtube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBGjNoVfN5o> (accessed: 13 September 2012).

⁷² Serge Schmemmann, "Berlin Journal: In Search of a Work of Art to Overcome the Wall," *The New York Times*, 13 November 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/13/world/berlin-journal-in-search-of-a-work-of-art-to-overcome-the-wall.html> (accessed: 21 September 2012).

⁷³ Peter Unsicker, *Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen: Eine Dokumentation Angewandter Kunst* (Berlin: Luftfilterverlag, 2001), 25.

⁷⁴ "eine ganz persönliche Betroffenheit" stated in Massenet, "Homo Ludens."

Unsicker understood the space as a personal challenge to counter the aggressive invisibility of the Wall, acknowledging the need to bring the Wall into people's consciousness, because, as he put it, "as long as I can see the wall in front of me I know it is not running through my mind."⁷⁵ The *Work on Ruination* thus investigated the psychological structure of the Wall prior to its physical disappearance and engaged with its visual capacity as a surface and a (multimedia) screen by posting a series of images and installations on the Wall. Engaging the Wall as a (Lacanian) screen, Unsicker's art recognizes the way in which we are constituted by an "'imaginary' mapping"⁷⁶ that determines how we perceive ourselves and others. The Wall's fantasmatic (identity-) screen functions "like a mask,"⁷⁷ but also allows for a playing with the projections of the ideological screen which is, literally, brought to the surface by Unsicker's installation. Playing with the images repressed and/or imposed by the ideological screen of the political order, Unsicker's images "assume a critical importance, opening up (...) an arena for political contestation,"⁷⁸ as Lacan would have it, by literally playing with the 'face' of the Wall and creating a counter-image to the monument. Unsicker's work thereby drew out the Berlin Wall's absurdity by attending to the mechanism of its invisibility and traumatic imposition.

Unsicker's art can be read as working with and through the traumatic experience of Germany's division, understanding the Wall's operation as a repressive shield that prevents and expresses a (shared) World War II past. In this context Unsicker understood the Wall as a plaster adhering to a wound cutting through Germany. While the Wall was meant to stop the GDR from "bleeding out"⁷⁹ (or losing its people), in this very attempt it echoed the logic of trauma and the psychic forming of barriers and split-off entities. Engaging with these layered connotations allowed Unsicker to reinstate the Wall's presence and to negotiate its meaning. His first installation was thus called the *Wound Plaster* and initiated the confrontation of and with the Wall as a form of engaging with trauma. Unsicker attached a giant plaster made of paper mâché and textile onto the Wall. The plaster stretched up the 3.6 m

⁷⁵ So lange ich die Mauer vor mir sehe, weiss ich, ich hab die Mauer nicht im Kopf.

Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 148.

⁷⁷ Lacan quoted in Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 150.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "Bauchbinde...welche die DDR vor dem 'ausbluten' beschützen sollte"
Unsicker, *Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen*, 8.

height of the Wall and was signified by a red cross and a crack through which (painted) blood was still escaping. It reinstated the Wall as a wound cutting through Germany's political, historical and psychological landscapes. At the centre of the red cross, Unsicker displayed a mask, the plaster mould of an 8 year-old boy, presenting the face of Germany as that of a wounded or diseased child. The face individuated the suffering induced by division, but it also indicated (and foreshadowed) the possibility of ONE German face. It is not clear which side the face belonged to as it was attached to the Western side but could also be read as pressing through the Wall from the East. The Wall literally became the wound and hence, the trauma cutting through Germany. In this context Unsicker understands art as a form of working through, or as he put it "a healing process in regard to the psychological hardening in this wall-wounded city."⁸⁰ The Wall, to Unsicker, thus testified to the "materialization of a diseased state of being"⁸¹ and thereby can be read as an image of trauma.

The evocation of an image of trauma and hence a sense of not simply working on but also through ruination (what is rotten inside) is based on two themes that run through Unsicker's work. Firstly, the images he creates work through modes of literalization and, secondly, literal figures of speech are turned into images. Unsicker's work thereby follows the logic of confronting different (im)materialities with each other. In this case, one image (the Wall as the image of trauma) is countered by another (the image created by art) to produce a scene that turns the Wall's unconscious undercurrents into literalized images (rather than words), and thereby visualizes the trauma underpinning the Wall. The significance of literality for trauma has been widely discussed in the field of psychoanalysis. Freud applies this notion in his engagement with the 'surfacing' of the unconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which later leads Cathy Caruth to assert that trauma is in fact constituted by the insistent return of the literal.⁸² Literality and visuality relate precisely because the unconscious communicates through images that translate into words and words that are articulated by the image. Hence, Unsicker's work can be

⁸⁰ "ein heilsames Vorgehen bezogen auf geistige Verteinerung in dieser durch die Mauer-Wunde beschädigten Stadtlandschaft"

Quoted in Michael Nungesser, "Im Schatten des Monstrums," *Berliner Zeitung*, August 9, 2001.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 5.

read as both literal yet visual statements that return as a response to the traumatic imposition of the Wall.

The visualization of trauma echoes the will to literally attach “associative chains”⁸³ of meaning to the trauma imposed by the Wall. The installations may hence be read as a form of working through by means of the visual rather than a talking cure, producing a ‘screening through’ while drawing attention to the structure of trauma encoded in the Wall. Rancière similarly explains that “speech institutes a certain visibility,”⁸⁴ an idea literally put to work in Unsicker’s project. To Unsicker the installations provide a sense of immediate coherence, “stimmig”⁸⁵ as he calls it, alluding to a sense of sanity and balance that intimates a notion of catharsis. The images he creates rearticulate something that otherwise remains ‘unsaid’ about the Wall and reaffirm the meaning of the Wall as traumatic rather than invisibly pervasive. For example, Unsicker’s installation *The Ice Cold War*, covered a segment of the Wall in ice and thereby literally froze the Wall to express the ‘cooling down of relationships’ between the two sides and perhaps the ‘frozen’ perspective of the politics of walls. *Wood Against Concrete* positions Unsicker’s wood-work in opposition to the Wall by leaning a large number of decomposing wood blocks against the concrete of the Wall to create a contrast between the ‘organic’ wood and the ‘dead’ Wall.⁸⁶ This reinstates the Wall’s rigidity but also suggests a working through of ‘dead’ materiality in order to decompose the imposition. Unsicker’s work thus ‘puts something back into the picture’ that is otherwise not articulated on the surface. His images can be read as addressing the Wall’s invisible structure and, similar to the process of working through traumatic experience, they seek to bring these ‘hidden’ meanings to the surface.

However, Unsicker’s work does not offer simple resolutions, but rather utilizes the notion of “work” as on-going engagement. Working on ruination intimates a form of emotional and creative labour that has to be exercised continuously as a way of confronting the Wall in order to work through it, perhaps literally so. Unsicker’s work thereby reiterates a connection between trauma and visibility, whereby the Wall, in its presence, can be understood as a traumatic monument. In this context,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 18.

⁸⁵ Unsicker, *Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen*, 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 21.

Unsicker also turned the Wall into the *MuSehum fuer Unbewaeltigtes* - a wordplay which in English translates as ‘MuSEEUm for that which has not been worked through.’ Unsicker’s work thus does not aim to provide answers but opens the possibility of thinking through the Wall’s imposition and absurdity. The images he creates are a form of thinking in images or image-thinking. This echoes Walter Benjamin’s neologism, the thought-image. To Benjamin the thought-image is a form of writing that reinstates the image as a central part of thought. It is a constellation “in which the dialectic of thought and image is unfolded and becomes visible.”⁸⁷ This can be understood as a form of writing that re-enacts the constitution of meaning in the image rather than offering only a thought product. Everything becomes literally “transformed into writing.”⁸⁸ Benjamin’s most famous example would be the angel of history,⁸⁹ a visual description of a perpetual looking back on a catastrophic past. Thought-images cannot be translated into conceptual language⁹⁰ or as Adorno explains it, thought-images are “picture puzzles (...) of something that cannot be said in words.”⁹¹ This alludes to the notion of trauma theory in the sense that the thought-image indeed marks “the verbalization of something that is obviously not verbal.”⁹² Unsicker can be said to draw on a similar method by engaging the thought-image in reverse, turning a textual snapshot, akin to Benjamin’s written thought-image into a visual statement which firstly invites reflexivity and then radiates meaning in several directions, provoking a working through of the image.

Unsicker’s *Crack in the Mirror* installation utilizes the notion of literal reflexivity by turning the Wall into a mirror that throws the gaze back at itself and thereby ironically ‘cracks’ the Lacanian mirror. Unsicker plastered the Wall with a large number of uneven mirror pieces in order to reflect on the tension in the space and to address the “‘imaginary’ mapping”⁹³ it enforced. The kaleidoscopic mirror assemblage reflected the image as indefinitely shattered, splitting individuals and landscapes, indicating that the reality thrown back at the passerby is broken or

⁸⁷ Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

⁹⁰ Weigel, *Body and Image Space*, 58.

⁹¹ Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 323.

⁹² Verhaeghe, “Trauma and Hysteria within Freud and Lacan,” 92.

⁹³ Lacan characterizes the screen and the mirror stage as an imaginary mapping. See Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 148.

breaking. This promoted a strong sense of self-reflexivity, and a very literal transformation from optical reflection to intellectual reflection, from image to thought and back again. Unsicker's literal attachment of the mirror pieces thereby meant to reflect social and human processes back into the space which sought to hide them. He explained that "the present tension at the Wall is dispersed by the social power of art - transformed into light and reflection,"⁹⁴ in the sense that the Wall actually disappeared on the one hand and was made obvious on the other. The mirror mosaic prevented 'thinking beyond the space' and demanded a potentially conflictual encounter with the self in relation to the Wall. This disruptive reflexivity, the falling apart of an established sense of self provided an opportunity for a new way of 'putting the pieces together.' It enabled a new perspective in which the spectator's reflection was literally inscribed onto the surface of the Wall and thereby entwined with the other side through a notion of doubling (another me on the other side; another Germany). Furthermore, the Installation generated Western media attention, which was also broadcast to the artist community on the Eastern side. Thus, the ideological screen of the Wall was taken up by the ideological screen of TV and thereby circumvented the barrier, defeating the imposition temporarily. Later, Unsicker recalled this small victory as generating a large number of drinks offered to him upon visiting an East Berlin bar, as he often did to mingle with artists in the East.⁹⁵ In this way the installation challenged the Wall as 'normal' but also suggested a possible reconfiguration of the space of division into a space of encounter.

Peter Unsicker negotiated the politically charged space he found himself in by utilizing his art as a means of 'playing' with the Wall as a screen. This not only exploited the Wall as a projective surface but also manifested the way in which it functioned as an ideological screen. Drawing on a Lacanian framework Silverman explains that "the ideological status of the screen"⁹⁶ reveals itself in the "culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only

⁹⁴ "Die von Anbeginn an vorhandene Spannung an diesem Platz wurde durch die soziale Kraft der Kunst aufgelöst – in Licht und Reflex transformiert."

Unsicker, *Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen*, 29.

⁹⁵ Peter Unsicker, "Privatkampf mit der DDR," *Spiegel Online*, 19 February 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/mauerkunst-privatkampf-mit-der-ddr-a-949740.html> (accessed: 17 October 2012).

⁹⁶ Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 150.

constituted, but differentiated”⁹⁷ By focusing on the role of the Wall as a screen, Unsicker is thus able to challenge such images (or their absence). *The Work on Ruination* challenges the (Lacanian) screen by “isolate[ing] the function of the screen and play[ing] with it.”⁹⁸ Exemplifying this, Unsicker’s *Wailing Wall* used the Wall to reinscribe the individualized face onto the grand narrative of division cemented by the Wall. Fixing several plaster moulds of faces to the Wall (and doubling their presence whenever they were taken down by the East German border guards), Unsicker sought to reframe the faces of “those who have been ruined,”⁹⁹ leaving open on which side of the Wall the ruination occurred. The pale faces ranged from childlike moulds to scary masks with a ‘deathbed’ expression. The uncanny effect was enhanced by Unsicker’s use of a white bed sheet stretched across the Wall through which the faces seemingly approached the onlooker. Moreover, he displayed four round mirrors, situated at different eye-levels, to allow viewers to integrate their own faces into the installation, thus positioning them among those who have been ruined (by the Wall). Again, these faces, like the face of the wound plaster, can be read as pressing through the Wall from the Eastern side but are firmly attached to the Western side. This not only foreshadowed the many faces that would be ‘pressing through’ in 1989 but it also addressed the erasure of the face as enacted by the Wall’s physical imposition and ideological screening.

Unsicker exposes both the inner Wall and the historical Wall as elements of projection and virtuality. The artist enables a form of projection as a psychical defence, or a need to externalise an inner conflict. Despite the subjectivization of perspective however, the visitor can enter the artistic space only from a Western point of view. The Wall as an ideological screen, and ultimately as a perspective, thus continues to haunt the installations and adheres to the ideological screen as an internal mechanism. Unsicker’s Wall Street Gallery thus brings to life a conflictual historical imaginary and simultaneously allows for an encounter with an otherwise invisible inhibition foregrounding the psychological and virtual space the Wall creates. Echoing this, Evelyn Preuss points out that the Berlin Wall has always been virtual to an extent, because it was meant to create a particular field of vision, a ‘virtual reality’ excluding the other side. She writes,

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁹ Unsicker, *Die Arbeit am Verdorbenen*, 13.

the wall as concrete as it may have been, was a device of the virtual age, allowing politico-economic systems to create and maintain virtual worlds, which divest the political subject of her mobility and her agency, even the mobility and the agency of her own look.¹⁰⁰

Unsicker's installations thus do not simply simulate a historical imaginary but also stimulate the need to deal with the Wall's absence, by recognizing the function of the look to engage with a physical and psychological structure. The virtual Wall in Unsicker's backyard exemplifies that the Berlin Wall makes for an extraordinary projection surface, both in the form of an ideological screen and as a canvas. The Wall is an object of projection whether in the political and psychological realm or as testified by the various graffiti works on its Western side.

Projections on the Wall

The Berlin Wall is anchored in the (western) imaginary and works as an image of history that mediates the narratives upon which it has been built. This image also challenges these narratives through murals and graffiti, reflecting on (the imaginary of) the Wall. On one side the Berlin Wall reflected back an idealized projection of Western democracy and freedom of expression; on the other, it supported the blank restrictiveness of the authoritarian image of the East. In the western part of the city, the Wall thus became a signifier of freedom and democracy long before the fall, most famously through the utilization of the Wall as a graffiti medium meant "to transform it, to make it ridiculous, to help destroy it,"¹⁰¹ as Thierry Noir, one of the most notorious Berlin Wall artists, recalls. The Western canvas attracted international artists such as Keith Haring, Christophe Bouchet (Thierry Noir's partner in crime) and Lev Nussberg. Their countless murals shaped the global image of the Berlin Wall as a canvas for challenging the Wall's visual imposition on the city. The West reclaimed the Wall as a colourful image despite the 'grey' East's official ownership of the monument. In this way, the Wall evoked a statement of Western resistance, capable of reflecting back to the West the image of its own idealized 'free' self. This suggests that artistic engagement can reflect (on) the political; however, it needs to be acknowledged that such creativity is always bound

¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Preuss, "The Wall You Will Never Know," 30.

¹⁰¹ Thierry Noir, "The Story of the Berlin Wall from a Painter's Point of View," *Thierry Noir* <http://www.galerie-noir.de/index.html> (accessed: 14 May 2013).

to questions of who has the means to interrupt, critique and engage with a given situation and who is excluded from this possibility. In the Eastern part, where the Wall was a taboo, engaging with the surface in this way was nearly impossible and (for the present) remained invisible. When paintings on the Eastern side were finally realized in the aftermath of the Wall's demise, they suggested not only a defiance of the restrictive authorities,¹⁰² but also worked to preserve the Wall by foregrounding it as a piece of art, and as a medium.



Figure 4 'Brotherkiss' Eastside Gallery Berlin, 2014

Photo: Tony Stümer

The 1.3 kilometre Eastside Gallery strip, which was painted by over 120 artists (including Thierry Noir) in 1990, eventually realized the drive for preservation, while also subverting the Wall's blank invisibility from the Eastern side. Nevertheless, Olaf Briese laments the painting over of the blank Wall of the East as "a total loss for the city,"¹⁰³ precisely because "this bleak interior wall...documented the bleakness of its designers almost perfectly."¹⁰⁴ Briese reads the art as merely

¹⁰² Even after the Wall had lost its function as an enclosure and therefore no longer served a particular point, it was not immediately decided what to do with the monument or what its legal status would be. In this context the painting on the Wall was technically declared illegal, while there were not really any means to enforce this rule.

Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, "Mauermalerei und Mauerspechte,"

¹⁰³ Olaf Briese, "The Different Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall," 55.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

”confronting the horror vacui and fear of the construction’s naked practicality.”¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, the gallery claims to have created an “expression of a unique point in time.”¹⁰⁶ This point in time testifies to the affect of the Wall’s demise by “giving the wall a new face in a new time.”¹⁰⁷ Images such as the famous *Brotherkiss* between Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honeker by Dimitrij Vrubel or Birgit Kinder’s *Test the Rest* Trabant driving through the Wall have become iconic and attest to the euphoria about the Wall’s demise in early 1990, thereby ironically preserving it for affective reflection. The Eastside Gallery thus can be read as a temporal snapshot which does not constitute memory per se, but rather *enables* memory, providing a relation to the past by suggesting an affective anchor for ‘the Wall.’



Figure 5 ‘Birgit Kinder’ Eastside Gallery Berlin, 2014

Photo: Tony Stümer

The Wall as an object is emotionally charged because it provides a pathway for investigating both history and personal trajectories at once, and thereby evokes a sense of shared, if sentimental authenticity “that enables identification and solidarity among strangers.”¹⁰⁸ The Eastside Gallery welcomes this sense of sentimentality since it allows for retrospective investments and modes of relationality. It redefines

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “History of the Eastside Gallery,” *Eastside Gallery*, <http://www.eastsidegallery.com/historyesg.htm> (accessed: 27 February 2013).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Sina Najafi, David Serlin and Lauren Berlant, “The Broken Circuit: An Interview with Lauren Berlant,” *Cabinet*, issue 31, (Fall 2008) http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/31/najafi_serlin.php (accessed 4 May 2014).

the Wall as an emblem of a frozen past, ironically evoking an emotional attachment to the once hated object and suggesting that historic objects, such as the Eastside Gallery, are in fact ‘placeholders’ that allow for multiple ambivalent relations and attachments. Such investments were brought to the surface when the city tried to remove parts of the gallery on 1 March 2013 in order to rebuild a bridge that had been destroyed during World War II and to construct a luxury apartment complex.¹⁰⁹ The plan generated a mass protest of about 6000 activists and citizens who formed a ‘human wall’ to protect the actual Wall, demanding that “the Wall must stand.”¹¹⁰ The images of the people protecting the Wall from demise turn the historic meaning of the monument on its head and testify to the way in which meaning changes retrospectively and affectively. Although the dismantling of the Wall was temporarily stopped, the events sparked an intense debate about the historic meaning of the gallery. The protesters accused the city of erasing its history and selling it off. The supporters of the project accused the protesters of hypocrisy, arguing for the legitimacy of the process in strictly legal terms. Of course, such arguments fail to acknowledge the affective investment that propelled the protesters, an investment that works as “a mode of relationality in which people take emotions to express something authentic about themselves that they think the world should welcome and respect.”¹¹¹ The protesters felt excluded from the legal process and therefore did not accept its legitimacy. The process revealed a larger problem about the privatization of public space and about the legitimacy of public monuments as constitutive not only of a singular moment of history, but of various individual histories. In this sense the protesters did not protect the Wall as such, but the affective relation to the

¹⁰⁹ For example: Markus Horeld and Juliane Leopold, “Berlins legitimer Mauer-Protest oder Scheinheiligkeit?,” *Zeit Online*, 4 March 2013, <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2013-03/east-side-gallery-protest/komplettansicht> (accessed: 6 March 2013).

Sebastian Heiser, „Mauer in Geiselhaft,“ *TAZ*, 3 March 2013, <http://www.taz.de/!112114/> (accessed: 6 March 2013).

¹¹⁰ Deutsche Presse Agentur, “Tausende demonstrieren gegen Teilabriss der East Side Gallery,“ *Zeit Online*, 4 March 2013, <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2013-03/demo-east-side-gallery> (accessed: 6 March 2013).

¹¹¹ Earl McCabe, “Depressive Realism: An Interview with Lauren Berlant,“ *Hypocrite Reader*, issue 5 (June 2011) hypocritereader.com/5/depressive-realism (accessed: 13 March 2013).

past it enables,¹¹² thus expressing their ownership of a personal but (shared) history.

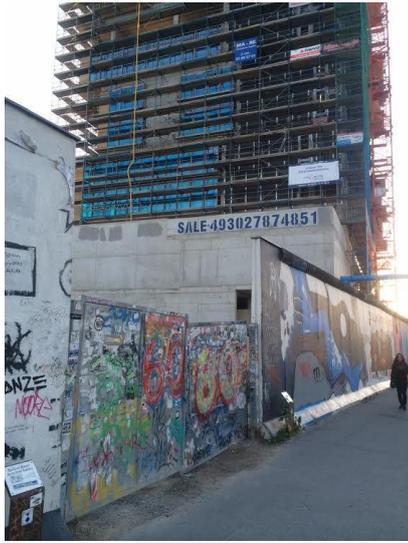


Figure 6 Apartment Complex vs. Eastside Gallery Berlin, 2014 .

Photo: Tony Stümer

The planned demise of the Eastside gallery reveals a mechanism of historical repression that adheres to the Wall's traumatic imposition on the one hand, but also affirms the Wall at the centre of a struggle between competing histories on the other. The argument that the Wall needs to be displaced in order to rebuild the Brommy Bridge, which was destroyed by the Nazis in order to stop the Soviets from moving forward, testifies to the World War II trauma encoded in the Wall. Reversing time in this way alludes to a need to repress the Nazi past at the cost of encountering Germany's most recent history of division, effectively rendering the two traumatic histories absent from the spatial arrangement of Berlin's present. Erasing the Eastside Gallery is the culmination of the traumatic aesthetic of absence that always secured the Wall's effectiveness. The paintings, on the other hand, retrospectively give shape to this invisibility and materialize the limitations of the space, which is why their removal provokes emotional responses. People demonstrating with slogans such as "the wall must stay" uncannily reverse the 1989 image of people demanding "the wall must fall."¹¹³ In a similar way one German newspaper's

¹¹²David Hasselhoff, who had been singing at the Wall in November 1989 and became an iconic figure affectively associated with these celebrations, joined the protesters for a concert. Arguably, it is not the music that drew a large audience to this concert, but precisely the affective relationship to the past explained by Berlant and here expressed in a sense of ironic, yet genuine sentimentality for the aging pop star.

¹¹³ "Die Mauer bleibt stehen," reversal of the infamous 1989 slogan "Die Mauer muss weg" (the Wall must go)

headline stated “No one has the intention to destroy a wall,”¹¹⁴ echoing Walter Ulbricht’s announcement in July 1961 that “no one has the intention to build a wall.”¹¹⁵ The protest traumatically collapses time and expresses the crystallization of the histories attached to the Wall as various personal encounters and stories across different spaces and generations. Simultaneously, there seems to be an insistent demand to repress the Wall and to return it to an absence. Despite the protests temporarily stopping construction, the company responsible managed to take down further sections of the Wall by the end of March 2013. A first demolition took place, hidden in darkness, at 5 o’clock in the morning and was ‘protected’ by a 250-strong police force.¹¹⁶ The scene not only mimicked the mechanism of repression in which the psychological forces work to maintain the exclusion of a forbidden thought from consciousness, but also ironically re-invoked the scene of the Wall’s creation in 1961, thus projecting the traumatic image once more and transferring it to the present.

The struggle over the Eastside Gallery suggests that despite the demise of the Wall and the political system that created it, communism left visible and invisible structures across the physical and psychological landscapes of the post-communist world¹¹⁷ that still reflect a legacy of division. Interestingly, ‘wall-art’ increased *after* the fall of the Wall and/or around the 20th anniversary of its demise in 2009. On the one hand, this may be explained by the renewed interest in the Wall in the context of the anniversary and the countless attempts to ‘unearth’ various materials, stories and ‘testimonies’ in order to signify and mediate the date’s historical importance. On the other hand, the notion of (re)surfacing also suggests a need to continuously reimagine a lost structure and thereby echoes the compulsive repetition associated with trauma. The reactivated engagement with the Wall may then further be read as

For example, Martin Hendrichs, “Retten Eastside Gallery,” *Youtube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIyN6p3HRBo&NR=1&feature=endscreen> (accessed: 17 March 2013).

¹¹⁴ “Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer abzureißen”

For example, “Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer Abzureißen: Eastside Gallery wird weiter demoliert,” *Soldiner Kiez Kurier* <http://soldinerkiezkurier.wordpress.com/10376-2/> (accessed: 17 August 2013).

¹¹⁵ “Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer zu errichten.”

For example quoted in Henning Wrage, “Politics, Culture, and Media Before and After the Berlin Wall,” in *The German Wall: Fallout in Europe*, ed. by Marc Silberman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 61.

¹¹⁶ “Bauarbeiter reißen Lücke in Eastside Gallery,” *Zeit Online*, 27 March 2014, <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2013-03/abrisse-east-side-gallery> (accessed: 26 April, 2013).

¹¹⁷ Lars Kristensen, introduction to *Postcommunist Film*, 8.

an attempt to provide a retrospective view on the now seemingly absurd experience of a walled city. As Kristensen explains, the absent Wall conjures a loss of a definite shape of history, as “there is nothing onto which the present can reflect.”¹¹⁸ Echoing Fukuyama’s famous exclamation about the ‘end of history,’ the loss of the Wall in the post-communist world denotes “the point where time and space collide,”¹¹⁹ suggesting that the spatial organization of the absent Wall is in need of frameworks of understanding - frameworks that are both spatial and temporal in the way they provide meaning. Mediating the structure and frameworks associated with the Wall and a walled experience thus evokes Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*, in which an absence in the present is undergirded by a particular dynamic of the past, folding back on itself and making “possible a different understanding of what was remembered.”¹²⁰ Such notions of reconstructing history via screen memories and Freud’s uncanny temporalities echo the need to make sense of the past in the context of the present and vice versa.

Twenty Years Later: Re-Mediating the Wall

The commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the 1989 demise in 2009 readily drew on an image which had already been circulated and reaffirmed within the national (and global) imaginary. Turning back time became the logic of the televised spectacle, symbolically re-staging the fall of the Wall in a manner carefully designed to reaffirm the course of history since 1989, and thereby the course of democracy. The various reconstructions of memories such as Chancellor Angela Merkel re-enacting her crossing of the bridge at Bornholmer Strasse in 1989,¹²¹ or the masses of people gathered around the Brandenburg Gate, plus various exhibitions, panel discussions, newspaper articles, and film festivals all worked towards the climatic falling of a two-kilometre *Domino Wall* in the centre of Berlin. In this way the established meaning of the 1989 images were playfully reasserted and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974) 356.

¹²¹ Nikolas Kulich and Judy Dempsey, “Leaders in Berlin Retrace the Walk West,” *The New York Times*, 9 November 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/world/europe/10germany.html?_r=0 (accessed: 2 February 2013).

retrospectively affirmed. In order to create a celebratory space, the ‘Freedom Fest’¹²² mixed entertainment and politics, elsewhere carefully avoided by German politicians. The ‘show’ was hosted by the popular German entertainer Thomas Gottschalk, who welcomed high-ranking political guests, such as Hilary Clinton, Nicholas Sarkozy, Dimitri Medvedev, Gordon Brown and Angela Merkel, as well as Mikhail Gorbachev and Lech Walesa,¹²³ while leading mass chants spelling the word F R E E D O M.¹²⁴ The image of the fall was carefully scripted in order to ‘remember’ the ‘domino-effect’ of the ‘falling’ communist countries opening their borders to the West. Following a 100,000-voice countdown, Lech Walesa initiated the falling dominoes, just as he had symbolically done twenty years earlier when he helped to open Poland’s borders. During the 30-minute spectacle 1000 dominoes, individually painted by more than 15,000 children and adolescents, were toppled in a row accompanied by a screaming audience along the route. Screens along the way enhanced the televisual experience the falling dominoes were meant to design, and of course the event ended in a huge fireworks show above the Brandenburg gate, referencing the New Year’s eve celebration of 1989/1990, now often confused with images of the night of the fall of the Wall. As Lech Walesa summarized it in an interview a few days prior to the event, “The fall of the Berlin Wall makes for nice pictures.”¹²⁵ Thus, the falling Wall of the commemoration was first and foremost meant to create a (pleasant) image of (and for) Western democracies, suggesting that the image of the falling Wall works for Berlin both in the sense of aesthetics and also in the sense of a self-projection to the public, evoking the affirmation of the course of history rather than questioning it.

The event suggested a certain way of remembering and attempted to prescribe the experience of the participants, creating a celebratory space for the status quo. The Wall served as a backdrop for a political stage (as it always had), mediating a carefully orchestrated and conclusive history lesson about the “single world of

¹²² Fest der Freiheit

¹²³ The Polish president Lech Walesa was the leader of Solidarnosc in Poland in the 1980s. The independent trade union was majorly involved in opening the border of Poland, which enabled thousands of Germans to flee the GDR, eventually leading to the demise of the Berlin Wall.

¹²⁴ ZDF “The Domino Fall of the Berlin Wall,” *YouTube*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG97uKKdwyY> (accessed: 18 October 2012).

¹²⁵ Charles Hawley, “Interview with Lech Walesa,” *Spiegel Online International*, 6 Nov 2009,
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/spiegel-online-interview-with-lech-walesa-it-s-good-that-gorbachev-was-a-weak-politician-a-659752.html> (accessed: 23 March 2013).

freedom and democracy”¹²⁶ celebrated in 1989. In this sense “world leaders became history teachers,”¹²⁷ spreading the values of democratic societies and toasting to (German) national unity. Although the falling Wall referred to a historic event, it also worked to affirm the present and the current coordinates as the valid future orientation. Drawing on his own experience of the event, Ben Gook characterises the commemoration as a form of “intensified remembering with others (...) anchored in place.”¹²⁸ This ‘anchor’ works to signify German unity as the epitome of free people and free markets. However, Gook also found the commemoration to be “unfulfilling”¹²⁹ and characterised by “an affective gap”¹³⁰ between the emotions created by the set-up of the celebration and the actual experience which it sought to articulate. Whereas for Gook this led to a disappearance of the subject “behind the appearance of involvement,”¹³¹ it also adhered to the logic of spectacular (televisual) production, reviving the Wall as an ideological screen upon which the desires of and about the West can be projected. In this regard the commemoration is the perfect example of Debord’s claim that “the fall of the Berlin Wall, repeated over and over again, immediately attained the incontestability of all the other signs of democracy,”¹³² leaving little room for personal investment or political contestation.

This is particularly evident in the spectacular falling of the dominoes and the accompanying exultory speeches, verifying that the falling Berlin Wall is not simply the hallmark of freedom but also a stand-in for the ‘nation’ itself. The symbolism of the event is meant to represent Germany as such and to “restore a sense of unity and purpose”¹³³ by staging a “closed harmonious totality,”¹³⁴ which marks, as Salecl reminds us, “a fundamental impossibility”¹³⁵ otherwise. This is problematic, precisely because it reinstates the fall of the Wall as a clean slide of history and encloses the Wall’s meaning without exploring the ‘historic echoes’ reverberated in this fall. The uncanny coincidence of November 9, marking both the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the atrocities of the ‘crystal night’ pogrom in 1938, was

¹²⁶ Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” 38.

¹²⁷ Ben Gook, “Being There Is Everything,” *Memory Studies* 4, no. 13 (2011), 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 10.

¹³³ Gook, “Being There Is Everything,” 19.

¹³⁴ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

mentioned by Merkel but not incorporated into the event. Similarly, when the band U2 blocked their free concert from the view of those who had failed to get ‘tickets,’ the situation produced an abundance of historical ironies, referencing the ‘Concert for Berlin’ in 1987¹³⁶ and of course the very Wall whose demise was celebrated. Read in this way the image of ‘walling’ at the 20th anniversary commemoration and the accompanying events involuntarily evoke a haunting presence of the Wall precisely because the event necessarily references other times and spaces that problematize ‘the end of history’ instead of reinstating it. These referential scenes meant to mark an ending, instead reveal uncomfortable continuities or what Gook identifies as the “continuing of endings.”¹³⁷

To the extent that the 2009 commemoration was both a repetition and a continuation, it echoed Freud’s work on repression. According to Freud, “repetition replaces remembering”¹³⁸ and “gives way to acting out”¹³⁹ absences, which may well illuminate the condition of continuous enactment of the Wall. In this way we are reminded that the past inhabits the present and vice versa. This is reflected in the way in which the Berlin commemoration self-reflexively pointed out ‘other walls’ in the world. Although this was primarily an effort to internationalize the event,¹⁴⁰ it also created a web of political experiences across time and space, pointing towards the invisible (global) structures mentioned by Kristensen. About one fifth of the dominoes were shipped off to parts of the world in which visible and invisible walls persist. These dominoes predominantly went to Cyprus, Turkey, Palestine, Israel and Korea, to be painted by children who continue to live a ‘walled’ life. The two most famous dominoes were those returned from South Africa, where they had been painted by Nelson Mandela, his children and grandchildren, drawing further attention to the structural invisibility of divisions and walls. Silverman reminds us

¹³⁶ The same concert which led to the infamous Pflingstkravalle (which led to Detlef Matthes arrest) and which sparked first voicing of the slogan ‘the Wall must go’ from the Eastern side.

Kate Conolly, “New Berlin Wall built for U2 gig to mark fall of old one,” *The Guardian*, 5 November 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/05/new-berlin-wall-u2-gig> (accessed: 5 February 2013).

¹³⁷ Casey quoted in Gook, “Being There Is Everything,” 20.

¹³⁸ Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XII*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 151.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ ECB, “Dominoes for Peace: Mandela Family to Participate in Symbolic Toppling of the Wall,” *Spiegel Online International*, 26 August 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/dominoes-for-peace-mandela-family-to-participate-in-symbolic-toppling-of-berlin-wall-a-645012.html> (accessed: 14 October 2012).

that indeed “the look is most powerful when it turns from the visible to the invisible”¹⁴¹; or, as Nelson Mandela’s grandson, Kweku Mandela, put it, “for years, Germany had a visible wall, while South Africa had an invisible one. That is what links our two countries.”¹⁴² One may well argue that Germany is also dealing with an invisible structure of on-going division, just as South Africa’s invisible Wall always produced very visible effects of alienation. This points to the way in which political walls, as means of exclusion, always work invisibly through their visible presence, evoking a mental separation as much as a corporeal one. The iconic Berlin Wall thus both represents and covers over an invisible Wall that persists. It thereby lifts off from a specific historical context and becomes used as a symbol to address various political forms of alienation.

Mediating Presence

Exploring the link between the Berlin Wall and other political contexts, and thereby foregrounding an imaginary and visual presence of the Wall, Angela Melitopoulos suggests the possibility of historical transference on the setting of the former death strip. The artist utilizes the Wall’s previous space at what is now called Skulpturenpark_Berlin in the centre of the city. The setting is the brainchild of the artist collective KUNSTrePUBLIK e.V. and hosts art projects that resonate with its five-hectare space.¹⁴³ Skulpturenpark_Berlin artistically explores the absence of the Wall through the means of historical echoes in a politically charged space, but it also investigates the way in which such histories resonate across different contexts. Angela Melitopoulos explored this dynamic as part of Skulpturenpark’s 2009 ‘Wonderland’ exhibition. Her installation *The Blast of the possible: A Transnational Space Montage* engaged with the legacy of political separation by projecting images of the Green Line dividing Cyprus’s capital Nicosia onto the former death strip in Berlin. The setting allowed her to uncover the relationship between history and place, investigating the way in which histories are transferable from and to other walled contexts. Nicosia, which after the fall of the Berlin Wall remained Europe’s

¹⁴¹ Kaja Silvermann, *World Spectators*, 5.

¹⁴² ECB, “Dominoes for Peace”

¹⁴³ Karen E. Till, “Interim Use at a former death Stripe? Art, Politics, and Urbanism at Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum,” in *The German Wall: Fallout in Europe*, ed. Marc Silberman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 106.

last divided capital, was visually (and perhaps affectively) transferred onto the setting of the former Berlin Wall in order to draw attention to an enduring legacy of division. This juxtaposition adheres to Rancière's demand that "political art must be some sort of collage"¹⁴⁴ in order to evoke a disruptive idea or enable a sense of shared meaning across time and space. Echoing this, Melitopulos projected photographs of neighbourhoods in Nicosia and Varosha onto large billboards that were assembled on the space between Moritzbruecke and Spittelmarkt. The images were gathered from the United Nations Archives and aimed to explore the fragmentation of collective memory¹⁴⁵ and the collapse of temporalities in the context of enduring mechanisms of political separation and alienation.

In her installation Melitopulos depicts the notion of the Wall as an 'on-going story' or "unfinished screenplay,"¹⁴⁶ connecting dispersed walled contexts but also evoking a shared sense of traumatic absence or affective no man's land. The images depict deserted neighbourhoods, empty houses and empty rooms. This uncanny absence resonates with the Berlin space of the death strip and even mimics the triste colour palette of the Berlin environment. Commonalities in architecture are reflected in images of Nicosian buildings, which resemble the architectural design of their Berlin counterparts in the background of the billboards. The spaces seemingly overlap and overflow. Thus, Melitopulos's project puts together the visible structure of Nicosia and the invisible structure of Berlin to explore a legacy of division. The aesthetic of the absent Wall thereby becomes "a means to construct the possibility of shared meaning,"¹⁴⁷ by bringing together diverse forms of experience, in this case the different 'Wall-experiences' of Berlin and Cyprus. The juxtaposition alerts the viewer to the specificity of these different contexts but it also rearticulates the notion of the Wall as a means of exclusion and alienation constitutive of a variety of political realities. In this context the artist explains that her project alludes to the work of memory, or more precisely the "segmentation of collective memory,"¹⁴⁸ and thereby associates the Wall with a phenomenon of the past that persists as an issue

¹⁴⁴ Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetic," 41.

¹⁴⁵ "Angela Melitopoulos – Möglichkeitsraum I (The Blast of the Possible)," *KunstrePublik* <http://www.kunstrepublik.de/en/curatorial/skulpturenpark-berlin-zentrum/wunderland/angela-melitopoulos-moeglichkeitsraum-i/> (accessed: 17 May 2013).

¹⁴⁶ "Angela Melitopoulos," *Skulpturenpark* http://www.skulpturenpark.org/exhibit/wunderland/angela_melitopoulos_E.html (accessed: 17 May 2013).

¹⁴⁷ Beth Hinderliter, introduction to *Communities of Sense*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ *KunstrePublik*, "Angela Melitopoulos"

of the present. The billboards echo Freud's ideas on screen memory. The scenes depicted layer repressed material of forgotten political landscapes, as the absent Berlin Wall resurfaces in the images of Cyprus and Cyprus becomes a mirror of Berlin. The projection of the Wall thus reiterates that "trauma comes from without and within,"¹⁴⁹ as Laplanche explains, and that this ultimately provokes a (traumatic) collapse of temporality such as is found in the screen memory. The Wall is not a phenomenon of either the past, the present or the future, but instead traumatically defies the notion of linearity, reappearing throughout these contexts as if it had "merely shifted,"¹⁵⁰ as Badiou would say.

The shift of perspective enables the 'surfacing' of the trauma of political walls in another place and time, but also makes the imposition accessible on the level of personal experience. This is reflected in the way in which visitors in Berlin were invited to participate in the 'stories' of the other context, which were literally inscribed into the landscape of Berlin's death strip. Melitopoulos scratched phone numbers into the ground, which, upon being called would have people in other walled contexts tell their story to the people in Berlin, hence creating participation through the history of dispersed contexts.¹⁵¹ These stories align the freedom associated with the demise of the Berlin Wall and the enduring political division associated with images of Cyprus, with the global problems of separation. In this context the notion of borders and walls is also lifted to a metaphorical level in order to address political and social entrapment, particularly that associated with problems of immigration. We hear about two Palestinian men trapped at Dubai airport, or the chants of freedom from the infamous Pagani Detention Center,¹⁵² which was originally designed for 300 immigrants and gained dubious fame when cramming 1200 immigrants in horrific conditions. A man tells about the humiliation and racism he faces in Germany and a woman recounts the hardships she is willing to endure in her quest for a better life.¹⁵³ These personal accounts of migrant experiences testify to a persistently walled world, in which the 'Other' is permanently confronted (and harassed) by transnational, institutional and personal boundaries. Melitopoulos' installation thus projects narratives of psychological and

¹⁴⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 10.

¹⁵⁰ Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," 38.

¹⁵¹ To listen to the audiotracks see *Skulpturenpark*, "Angela Melitopoulos"

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Skulpturenpark*, "Angela Melitopoulos,"

political separation ‘back’ onto the former death strip of the Berlin Wall and thereby draws attention to the ‘hidden’ realities of political division across time and space.



Figure 7 Angela Melitopoulos ‘The Blast of the Possible’ Berlin, 2009.

Courtesy of Philip Horst

The Blast of the Possible discloses a hidden structure behind the everyday reality of the Berlin landscape in which an invisible or structural Wall persists as the means of political aesthetics. The critical potential of this installation thereby lies precisely in the way it contests the globalization of the Wall’s demise. It thus aesthetically reconfigures a current (global) politics by combining “different spheres of experiences”¹⁵⁴ into a critical montage. Similarly, Rancière points out that political art must provoke “a clash of heterogeneous elements”¹⁵⁵ that incite “a break in our perception, to disclose hidden connections.”¹⁵⁶ In this way the installation addresses an enduring structure of political division, instead of perceiving it as having disappeared in 1989 Berlin. Melitopoulos’s installation is thus capable of reminding us that a structure of division is still at work in Europe and the world. This unlocks the Wall as a phenomenon of the past and posits it as a contemporary issue, compulsively repeating the means of exclusion. Hence, the project addresses the construction of social realities through the exclusionary logic of political walls and simultaneously invites the participation of the spectator in order to demonstrate that (political) structures can be reworked via artistic intervention. The aesthetics of this space is at once political and artistic, and the spectator is at once a member of the

¹⁵⁴ Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetic,” 41.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

audience and an active participant in this environment. Returning to Rancière, artists, just like politicians, build the stage, as he puts it, where the story of our realities are framed and call for “spectators who are active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it.”¹⁵⁷ This is what he calls an emancipated community. Melitopoulos makes use of the physical and metaphorical dimensions of political walls to convey such forms of participatory critical intervention. The Wall is thereby put (back) into view and renegotiated as a traumatic imposition that continues to reappear in the different spatial and temporal registers of local and global politics.

Continuous Endings

Read as a temporal image, the falling Berlin Wall generates a sense of endurance or endless forms of reconstruction and falling, marking the end of history as an event that “will forever happen.”¹⁵⁸ The fall of the Berlin Wall thus exceeds a specific moment in time, which is reflected in the numerous medial reproductions of the episode since 1989, and also in the way in which the event was anticipated. Even on the night of November 9, 1989 the actual fall was metaphorically preceded by its media image, in the sense that Western media proclaimed the opening of the Wall before it was actually opened and thus enabled the opening to a great extent.¹⁵⁹ Hence, before the Berlin Wall actually fell, ‘the fall’ was already an image (and imaginary), staged before and beyond the actual chronology of the event. Such stagings had both anticipated the demise and have been re-enacted after the fact. In this sense, the falling Berlin Wall provides ‘a scene’ that reappears in different times creating a sense of timeless meaning, or an act never quite fulfilled. Read in this way, the fall of the Berlin Wall appears as an image of the city, which is closely related to the idea of working through or “a way of coming to terms with absence.”¹⁶⁰ The staging of the fall of the Wall thus affords a paradoxical reading.

¹⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum* (March 2007), 280.

¹⁵⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 168

¹⁵⁹ The Berlin Wall was opened on 9 November 1989 as a result of a press conference, in which the spokesman for the East German Politbüro, Günther Schabowsky to the surprise of the journalists (and also himself) read out a statement that promised the opening of the border. When asked by a journalist when the new regulation would take effect, Schabowsky (mistakenly) replied “immediately,” propelling the events of the night.

¹⁶⁰ Gook, “Being There Is Everything,” 20.

On the one hand, the image of the fall is firmly integrated into a network of the 'incontestable' significations of the spectacle, as Debord points out. On the other hand, this image also opens the possibility of connecting to experiences across time and space, potentially reconfiguring meaning through resonances with political and historical contexts that are not necessarily foregrounded in the script, but nevertheless firmly attach themselves to the scene created. In this way trauma folds back onto itself; it collapses temporalities and recaptures the past while projecting the scenes of an 'absence' that stirs us.

Chapter 4

Working through Absence: The Berlin Wall on Screen

The Berlin Wall persists as a psychological condition in the present precisely because it implicates a traumatic memory that cannot be fully erased. Evoking a protective (yet equally traumatic) form of forgetting, the intolerable experience is “walled in, silenced, and removed from consciousness and the public sphere,”¹ while exerting pressure on the present. This interplay between a physical and psychological sense of ‘walling in’ perpetuates a ‘memory prison’ or ‘walled past’ that echoes the mechanisms of repression. As Radstone and Schwarz explain, “what most characterizes the times in which we live is social amnesia, in which we, as modern subjects, are cut off from the pasts that have created us.”² The repressed histories of a walled past are thus at the core of engaging the Wall as a means of affective (traumatic) presence. In this context the past remains inaccessible; however, trauma has a way of resurfacing, ensuring its compulsive repetition and (perhaps) also demanding to be worked through. Schwab points out that trauma is made accessible by finding “a form...that translates into language or symbolic expression an experience that is only unconsciously registered.”³ Hence, trauma can only be located (and subsequently worked through) at the point of meeting between “unthought knowledge”⁴ and shared signification, enabling a projection of history’s unassimilated affects.

Whereas Freud psychologically locates this possibility of *Wahrnehmung*, or availability to consciousness, on the screen of the preconscious, a similar mechanism also plays out via collective engagement with the screen in the cinema. The projection is possible because, on the one hand, “film and photography have inserted themselves like protective barriers between us and the real”⁵ and hence afford a sense of (psychological) security. On the other hand, these media are prone to re-envision and screen our “unconscious optics”⁶ and thus enable scrutiny of the hidden depths of the psyche. Therefore, film facilitates Freud’s *dream work* - or the

¹ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 84.

² Radstone and Schwarz, “Mapping Memory,” 1.

³ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Christina Braun quoted in Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 24.

⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 237.

condensation, displacement and finally representation of unconscious material – and makes it available to public engagement, by translating it into the shared images and stories we see on screen. In this way the cinema screen mirrors the nation and envisions its formative fantasies; however, it also simultaneously reiterates them. Films are utilized to retell the story of the nation, as they reimagine its past and narrativize its aspirations. Thereby, films simultaneously draw on and recreate the fantasmatic investments that enable the nation (or its captivating illusion) in the first place; or, as Anthony Smith points out, they “disseminate and perpetuate the idea of the nation itself, its history, its development and destiny.”⁷ Hence, film offers a powerful point of identification for a national imaginary and rearticulates the nation’s core fantasies. However, similar to the workings of such fantasy, film is capable of visualizing affective knowledge and thus also provides “a powerful ground for transference,”⁸ as a form of actualization of the unconscious⁹, assisting in the act of continuously imagining and reworking a national memory and walled-off past. In this sense the film screen enables the negotiation of repressed (national) histories. It provides a form of working through or what I have called ‘screening through’, the walled-in memories that stir us collectively, by mediating their traumatic impact and by creating fictions that help us explore the experiences of the past in the present context.

Film self-reflexively interrogates memory, addressing the way in which media documentation may uncover and maintain private and public memories on the one hand and manipulate and even eradicate them on the other. In particular, film adheres to “the often noted viscosity of memory”¹⁰ but also allows for the articulation of affective disintegration, precisely because the film screen produces a link between spectators and collective imaginaries via the circulation of feeling. Exploring memory and its ideological designs visually, film provides the opportunity to investigate and foreground the Wall’s (invisible) psychological architecture as encoded in its spatial arrangement. At the same time, the screen also brings to the surface the contours of “an invisible wall [that] stands for more

⁷ Anthony Smith, “Images of the Nation: Cinema, Art and National Identity,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 57.

⁸ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 23.

⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis describe transference as “the actualisation of unconscious wishes” Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 455.

¹⁰ Radstone, “Cinema and Memory,” 327.

complex reflections about our ability (or inability) to imagine something that once was but no longer exists.”¹¹ Both Cynthia Beatts’s *The Invisible Frame* (2009) and Bartek Konopka’s *Rabbit à la Berlin* (2009) explore the physical and psychological space left behind by the Berlin Wall as a means of investigating a specific perspective on and about the East, tangible in the visible and invisible remainders of this monument. In this way they debate historical perception and invite reflection on identity and the mediation of repressed histories in a (post)walled world. *The Invisible Frame* poses questions about the ambiguous relationship between past and present, following Tilda Swinton on a philosophical bike ride along the absent Wall in an impossible attempt to access the ‘other side’ of history. The haunting invisibility of the monument comments on the obstacles of understanding the past from the point of view of the present and evokes a sense of retrospective separation and introspective alienation. Similarly, Konopka’s allegorical reimagining of the past through his documentary about the rabbits that inhabited the former death strip, defamiliarizes the Wall’s meaning and simultaneously projects its totalitarian effectiveness, reminding the viewer of the ambivalence of historical mediation. In this way both films complicate the accessibility of the past, particularly the East’s past, and thereby re-envision processes of historical othering, and perhaps “wilful forgetting,”¹² as Huyssen puts it, through reflections on the Berlin Wall.

The crisis of accessing a collective past is countered by remediating experience creatively. In this way the past is continuously (re)imagined, foregrounding its affective links to the present. Hence, although history remains “both absent and unrepresentable,”¹³ as Kaja Silverman reminds us, the memories negotiated in and through film bring to the surface the fantasmatic and affective investments that shaped and continue to shape a walled life. However, “there is no way of thinking about memory outside its histories and politics”¹⁴; hence, investigating the ‘felt’ dimensions of the past (often through the lens of private memory) unveils the intermingling of national fantasies and individual experience. In this sense film can provide the link between the political and the personal, the publicly displayed and

¹¹ Katharina Gerstenberger and Jana Evans Braziel, “After the Berlin Wall: Realigned Worlds, Invisible Lines, and Incalculable Remnants,” in *After the Berlin Wall: Germany and Beyond*, ed. Katharina Gerstenberger and Jana Evans Braziel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6.

¹² Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” 60.

¹³ Silverman, “Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity,” 117.

¹⁴ Radstone and Schwarz, “Mapping Memory,” 4.

the intimately guarded. This is important precisely because the Wall functions as a mediation of rigid identity politics and inconsistent collective imaginaries, while molding the subjective trajectories of individual lives. Films such as *The Lives of Others* (Donnersmark, 2006) and *Kawasaki's Rose* (Hřebejk, 2009) explore the intimate effects of silent walls cutting through the lives of people in a walled existence, while exposing the larger political narratives and national fantasies that constitute these walls. Florian von Donnersmark's *The Lives of Others* unearths the psychological walls sustaining an oppressive system of intimate surveillance. Following an adherent Stasi officer who becomes increasingly absorbed in the lives of the artistic couple he monitors, the film interrogates a national fantasy of the good man and thereby reveals further fantasies of reconciliation with (or perhaps despite) an atrocious past. Jan Hřebejk's *Kawasaki's Rose* explores similar parameters (albeit to different ends) and suggests that the notion of the walled life is sustained in the present, exploring how we may deal with its enduring repercussions in public and private. In this way both films destabilize a simplistic distinction between victim and perpetrator and simultaneously provoke discussion about the politicization of memory. Memory-making plays out in the logic of the present and engages with history as a form of experience, by which established binaries of understanding are subverted, providing insight into the intimate complexities evoked by political settings.

Rabbit à la Berlin

Bartek Konopka's 'natural documentary' *Rabbit à la Berlin* (2009)¹⁵ explores the space in between the no-man's land of the two Berlin Walls (erected to the East and the West). The film draws on the expanding rabbit population that actually lived in the walled-off pasture and retells the history of the GDR from the rabbits' point of view. In this version of history the Wall was erected to protect the rabbits, providing plenty of food and equal access to underground caves. Exploring the different phases of the regime's increasing fortification of the social experiment, Konopka creates an allegory for the troubled comfort of totalitarian imprisonment and civil apathy, investigating the rabbit's microcosm as an analogy to East German life.

¹⁵ *Rabbit à la Berlin*, directed by Bartoż Konopka (Germany, Poland: Deckert Distribution, 2009), DVD.

Approaching history like an exercise in zoology, Konopka's "fairy-tale allegory docu-genre"¹⁶ posits the Wall as a physical *and* psychological space. The film reimagines the past through defamiliarizing the Wall's meaning, while simultaneously projecting its totalitarian effectiveness, thereby reminding the viewer of the ambivalence of historical mediation. In this way the film complicates the accessibility of the past and reconsiders processes of historical othering and forgetting in relation to the Berlin Wall. Thus, the satirical tone that accompanies the film's allegorical form and ironic distance addresses history through defamiliarization and reveals a crisis of accessing the irretrievable past. The experience of the East is estranged through the rabbit perspective, putting pressure on historical truths and challenging dominant forms of storytelling. Human truths are reframed as bizarre, mirroring the way in which the East has been made strange (to) itself. The Wall can thus be read as a memory landscape. However, it also alludes to W. J. T. Mitchell's idea of landscape "as a cultural practice, evoking a visual field which does not merely signify the structures of political power but also functions as an agent of its ideology."¹⁷ This in turn suggests that the Wall's politics are encoded in its spatial design.

The landscape of the death strip exemplifies the inherent spatiality of politics and rearticulates the politics of the walled state from the forgotten no-man's land at its margin. The Wall as both limit and condition of Eastern life condenses the meaning of politics in the GDR and provides insight into the mechanisms of oppression. Carl Schmitt points out that political and social orders become visible through "the initial measure and division of pastureland"¹⁸ in an act of order and orientation that produces an "enclosure" or "spatially concrete unity"¹⁹ through which the law of its politics, or *nomos*, is established. This is precisely what happens to the rabbits in the beginning of the film when soldiers set up the cosy nature reserve that frees the rabbits from the pains of natural struggle. However, this also coincides with the act of establishing the walled state as totalitarian entity, reiterating that the mechanisms

¹⁶ Thomas White, "Meet the Filmmaker: Bartek Konopka – Rabbit à la Berlin," *International Documentary Association*, August 2009, <http://www.documentary.org/content/meet-filmmakers-bartek-konopka-rabbit-a-la-berlin> (accessed: 17 September 2013).

¹⁷ W.J.T Mitchell, "Imperial Landscapes," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

¹⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of utopia and dystopia play out concurrently. Nomos, “quite literally a wall”²⁰ according to Hannah Arendt, spatially evokes “a kind of no man’s land between the public and private”²¹ that enables a political community in which the Wall secures political life on one side and shelters the biological life of the family on the other. Following this logic, it becomes possible to read the political through the enclosure. By situating the biological life of the rabbits on the pasture inbetween the GDR’s wall(s), Konopka allegorises the political order of the GDR as a totalitarian entity precisely because the space in which the rabbit life takes place collapses the notion of home and homeland. This becomes visible in the spatial negotiation of the death strip as a nature reserve but also alludes to an Eastern life in which the sanctuary of the home was permanently subject to arbitrary state surveillance and intrusion. As Arendt explains further, “to have no private place of one’s own ... meant to be no longer human,”²² and one may add, in the logic of Konopka, perhaps to be a rabbit.

The Wall creates a political order alongside psychological imperatives, and thereby creates a particular identity reflecting both on East and West. The ‘rabbit identity’ is documented as a ‘species,’ cynically alluding to Zinovyev’s *Homo Sovieticus*,²³ provoking critical commentary and historical othering alike, and evoking community as a psychological consequence of living a walled or ignorant life. As Konopka puts it, the film is about “the rabbit’s people of the world (...) those people who want to have a simple life and want to have at least some area of fresh grass.”²⁴ The rabbit-identity is thus associated with the notion of fear and ignorance, evoking a timeless middle-class mentality that privileges private comfort over civil courage. The German terms *Angsthase* (literally “scared rabbit” in reference to a coward) and *Versuchskaninchen* (literally a “test rabbit” and the equivalent to the English “guinea pig”) both comment on the psychology of the GDR’s “niche society”²⁵ as evasive and passive. The notion of *Angsthase* is evoked in the first minutes of the film, introducing the species as ‘naturally fearful’ and ‘hiding in caves’ when feeling threatened. The notion of *Versuchskaninchen* further alludes to the idea of the GDR

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 63-64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

²² *Ibid.* 64.

²³ Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus* (New York, The Atlantic Monthly, 1985).

²⁴ Visions Du Reel, “Interview Bartek Konopka,” *YouTube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJA61bBRgIQ> (accessed 5 September 2013).

²⁵ Günter Gaus, cited in Betts, *Within Walls*, 10. Gaus coined the term ‘niche society’ in relation to the GDR, during his time as the first permanent representative from the West in the GDR.

as a social experiment which treated its citizens as dispensable. Whereas such ideas comment on East German civil debility, they may also satirise the common view of East Germans as a simple species that tends to portray “the East as a quainter more natural Germany,”²⁶ as Hodgkin explains, a portrayal through which the FRG could in turn affirm its superior credentials, as suggested by Paul Cooke.²⁷ The Eastern identity thus remains ambivalent, as expressed through the ironic distance provided by the figure of the rabbit. Konopka, who was born in Poland in the early 1970s, explains, “I feel myself as a rabbit and I know that many people around me psychologically feel themselves as rabbits.”²⁸ His film then explores a gap in the post-communist experience, an in-between space shifting between East and West, past and future, nostalgia and shame. With the loss of the Wall as a referent for identity, the past is projected as a means to make sense of the present, locking identity into discussions that characterise the East as either a callous dictatorship or a caring homeland.

The Eastern experience is characterized by a complex position of being simultaneously a victim and a pillar of the regime. Engaging this dichotomy from the perspective of the death strip thus utilises spatial and psychological inbetweenness. This is reflected in the archival footage of people happily waving their flags during a parade juxtaposed with images of increased fortification and surveillance, leading to an even more peaceful existence for the rabbits. *Rabbit à la Berlin* alludes to media depictions of the GDR as “a noble experiment gone wrong,”²⁹ but turns this notion on its head by depicting a sudden shift from paradise to terror state that allegorizes the unwarranted aggression of the regime against its own citizens through images of lethal crop-spraying in an attempt to control the expanding rabbit population. The traumatic implication of such routinized cruelty is addressed through the defamiliarizing tactic of using animal imagery as a stand-in for humans, as has been done in works such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* or John Marsden’s *The Rabbits*. This is most hauntingly demonstrated in a former guard’s assurance that no one shot the rabbits, a statement which is ironically placed

²⁶Nick Hodgkin, *Screening the East: Heimat, Memory and Nostalgia in German Film since 1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 67.

²⁷Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (New York: Berg, 2005), 12.

²⁸Visions Du Reel, “Interview Bartek Konopka”

²⁹Mary O’Brien, *Post-wall German Cinema and National History: Utopianism and Dissent* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2012), 4.

alongside contrasting gun shots and images of dead or injured humans being carried from the death strip. The juxtaposition satirises the infamous commentary of a Western journalist about escapees from the East being shot like rabbits, while it lays the ground for the numerous scenes in which the rabbits are massacred as a way to visually articulate the traumatic enforcement of the shoot-to-kill policy on the death strip. The walled-off pasture becomes a microcosm onto which the ambiguities of the Eastern experience are projected to enable a nightmarish awakening, evoking an East German paralysis that outlives the Wall's physical demise. After the Wall has fallen we see an elderly couple awkwardly standing in a gap of the Wall looking disoriented, as if they did not dare to cross the line. The pair signifies the fact that the Eastern self remains confined by the death strip of a walled past.

The rabbit perspective on history renders the past absurd and bizarre through the eyes of the rabbit on the one hand and through our own looking at the rabbits as the centre of historical events on the other. The two perspectives oscillate in the film, reimagining the facticity of the archival footage and diverting it from established meanings. Such a "naïve" history allows for an examination of history outside itself, in the form of "the strange behaviour of humans"³⁰ easily reframed from the rabbit's point of view as being all about them. By focusing on the banality of historical detail in order to access larger truths, Konopka opens up questions of representation and the ambivalence of historical mediation. Similar to the numerous (filmic) rewritings of GDR history, the past in *Rabbit à la Berlin* is easily twisted with the help of media images and archival footage. This comments on the representation of the twentieth century through the media and functions as a reminder that all history is essentially mediated and that meaning is negotiable, depending on one's perspective. *Rabbit à la Berlin* highlights this in the depiction of the numerous high-ranking visitors on both sides of the Wall who use the obstruction as a projection screen for their own politics, reframed as a supposed attempt to impress the rabbits. While such a reframing never seems to stray far from its underlying histories, it establishes the allegorized image on screen "both as a site of vanguard political analysis and as a space of aesthetic alterity."³¹ In this sense Konopka's depiction of the GDR is not

³⁰ Bartożs Konopka, *Rabbit à la Berlin*.

³¹ Katie Trumpener, "La Guerre est fini: New Waves, Historical Contingency, and the GDR 'Rabbit Film'," in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. M. Geyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 115.

simply a study of political immobility and intransigence; it simultaneously encapsulates the notion of resistance through a slight twist of the focal lens.

It is precisely the image of the rabbit that signifies a history of resistance. Whereas the film positions the rabbits as naively engaging with a wall that falls as inexplicably and suddenly as it had appeared, the interviews with Thierry Noir, Peter Unsicker and Manfred Butzmann reinstate the rabbit as a symbol of political struggle. All three artists have focused their work on a criticism of the Wall, using it as a screen for political commentary and utilising the rabbit as a symbol of freedom, precisely because it was the only creature capable of occupying the pastureland. Thierry Noir created a rabbit homage through graffiti on the surface of the western side of the Wall, as did Butzmann from the East when the border was opened, while Unsicker designed an Easter postcard depicting a giant rabbit breaking through the obstruction. In the context of art, the rabbit of course evokes provocateur Joseph Beuys, who famously also felt himself to be a rabbit,³² but to whom the rabbit represented an element of movement and action (rather than passivity and fear) and thus could be used as a sign of transformation. Most notably, however, the very notion of a ‘rabbit film’ evokes a reference to East German filmic resistance. Similar to Konopka’s work, Kurt Mätzig’s 1965 reformative drama *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (The Rabbit is me) addressed the problem of political disengagement as a way of supporting the structures of totalitarianism. The film (constructively) criticized the law-making of the GDR system as having fatal social implications and was subsequently singled out by the state and withheld from release, paving the way for a wave of film bans in the same year.³³ These films persisted as underground legends and are still collectively known as the *Kaninchenfilme* or *Rabbit Films*,³⁴ now touring the Goethe Institutes of the world.³⁵ Barton Byg explains that, because of their belated circulation after the fall of the Wall, these films now ironically attest to the regime’s failing, instead of contributing to reform as had been anticipated by

³² Ingeborg Ruthe, “Der Hase bin Ich,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 21 January 2006, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/beuys-hat-begeistert-und-genervt--um-die-welt-zu-bessern--was-bleibt-20-jahre-nach-seinem-tod--der-hase-bin-ich,10810590,10355472.html> (accessed: 15 August, 2013).

³³ Trumpener, “La Guerre est fini,” 116.

³⁴ The forbidden “rabbit films” include Gerhard Klein *Berlin um die Ecke* (Berlin around the Corner), Juergen Boettcher’s *Born in ’45*, Herman Zschoche’s *Karla*, Frank Vogel *Denk bloß nicht ich heule* (Just don’t think I’ll cry) and Frank Beyer *Spur der Steine* (The Traces of Stones)

³⁵ Trumpener, “La Guerre est fini,” 116.

their creators.³⁶ The meaning of the rabbit is thus layered and carries multiple truths beneath the surface, similarly to the workings of political allegory itself, reminding us that historical truths are transcribed and projected, evoking different readings in different contexts. *Rabbit à la Berlin* attempts to negotiate and perhaps transgress the historical encryption of space, whereby the concretisation of history and its spatial organisation, as exemplified in the Berlin Wall, gives way to contemporary perspectives on enduring political alienation.

The Invisible Frame

Investigating the interplay between outward and inward perspective within historical space, Cynthia Beatts's *The Invisible Frame* (2009)³⁷ resonates with her earlier attempt to mediate the Wall through a bike ride in *Cycling the Frame* (1988). Both films show Tilda Swinton cycling along the Wall's 160km route through Berlin and Brandenburg as she contemplates her experience of the space through inner monologues. Although the two films are meant to stand independently, according to the director both journeys communicate different "underlying layers of consciousness"³⁸ across the historical space and thereby articulate the Wall as a physical, metaphorical and also psychological demarcation across time. In this sense both films provide "psychogeographic, philosophical mediations,"³⁹ as Anke Westphal points out, and invite an exploration of expressed and repressed history. Utilising the 'outsider' as the catalyst of inward and outward perspective, the two films negotiate identity in a landscape that is maintained by the ambivalent appearance and disappearance of Cold War history, yet enable an engagement with the Wall beyond its physical imposition. The first film, *Cycling the Frame* (1988),⁴⁰ was produced by non-Germans for a TV series called *Looking from the Outside* and presents the physical imposition of the Wall as a sense of frustrating finality.

³⁶ Barton Byg, "Is there still an East German Cinema," in *Cinemas in Transition in Central Eastern Europe after 1989*, ed. C. Portuges & P. Hames (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 79.

³⁷ *The Invisible Frame*, directed by Cynthia Beatts (Germany, 2009; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Icarus Film, 2009), DVD.

³⁸ Beatts cited in Katja Petrowskaja, "Interview with Cynthia Beatts" *Invisible-Frame* 2009, <http://www.invisible-frame.com/en/the-film/interview/> (accessed: 6 September 2013).

³⁹ Anke Westphal "An Approach to the Wall," *Berliner Zeitung*, 7 November 2009, <http://www.invisible-frame.com/en/the-film/reviews/2009> (accessed: 17 August 2013).

⁴⁰ *Cycling the Frame*, directed by Cynthia Beatts (Berlin, Germany, 1988; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Icarus Film, 2009), DVD.

However, this also cements perspective and positions the outsider in relation to a Wall as an artificial margin, and thus perhaps in relation to a philosophical endpoint as a limit to thinking. Kristensen explains that this immovable viewpoint allows Swinton's character to achieve increasing assurance in response to the concrete obstruction.⁴¹ In this way Swinton is directed by the Wall and her perspective towards the physical and psychological imposition is unequivocal: she hates the Wall and she wants to shoot a hole in it. Twenty-one years later, the Wall, if not completely gone, is absent and in this way disrupts the indisputability of the experience. The introspection enabled by the Wall in 1988 is now replaced by the search for new frames.⁴² Swinton's 2009 journey reveals an impossible desire to understand the other side of this space by returning to the excluded perspective in search of what has emerged from it - only to reveal that the East's perspective is still walled off.

With the object of the Wall gone, the engagement with the past in *The Invisible Frame* is experienced as increasingly contentious, leading to a nostalgic search for definite frames of encounter. As Swinton sets out on her journey, she passes the various memorials across Berlin that seek to preserve a sense of what the now absent Wall was like. It seems that Swinton does not gain any insight from these cues, as her inner monologue is silenced. Rather than accessing the past, the monuments echo Mila Ganeva's criticism of the city's continuous effort to "bring the past back to surface, of course in a neat, clean, attractive form,"⁴³ since this sense of 'clean' history denies the significance of absence as a form of horror vacui accompanying the fallen Wall. Swinton expresses a wish to complete her experience of the historical space in a way that is no longer limited by the physical obstruction of the Wall. "I want to know what the wall was like from the other side," she states as she leaves the tourist attractions behind to follow the invisible frame. However, her impossible journey to the other side of history is disrupted by a sense of permanent disorientation. She gets lost repeatedly, encountering haphazard pathways and graffiti-covered roadmaps. The encounter with the Wall is complicated by the loss of

⁴¹ Kristensen, introduction to *Postcommunist Film*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³ Mila Ganeva, "No Histories just Stories: Revisiting Traditions in Berlin Films of the 1990s," in *Berlin: The Symphony Continues: Orchestrating Architectural, Social and Artistic Change in Germany's New Capital*, C.A. Costabile-Heming and R.J. Halverson eds. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 266. pp. 2161-278. Ganeva (2004: 266)

its physicality, leading Swinton to seek it through other objects such as fences and hedges, always searching for direction and a way back. Kristensen remarks that with the “wall as something that gave shape to history”⁴⁴ gone, her perspective is no longer anchored, as “there is no ‘outerland’ where the self can be reflected and space internalised.”⁴⁵ However, this also reinstates the Wall as a potential mirror and projection screen for the historical identities reflected in spatial arrangements. If, as Étienne Balibar outlines, the notions of partition and walling are a means to “maintain oneself as unified,”⁴⁶ then the disappearance of the barrier creates the loss of unity in the physical and psychological sense, ironically leading to a nostalgic projection of all kinds of borders, fences and partitions, such as can be seen in the numerous *Kleingärten* or garden allotments that can be found all over Berlin and Brandenburg. In this way *The Invisible Frame* also articulates nostalgia for a lost object of history, for a sense of direction and the possibility of ‘definite’ knowledge. Although such definite knowledge is of course illusory, this notion of a “self-evident and definite”⁴⁷ framework is not simply sentimental but also functions as a reminder of the Wall’s own pervasiveness, which led people to believe that it would just always be there.

By way of her own ideological dislocation, Swinton is able to investigate the mechanisms of the Wall’s psychological functioning as a mental barrier. This is sustained precisely by systematically evoking the erasure still tangible in the historical space that was once governed by a dynamic of visible and invisible limitation. In this regard it is important to recall that a wall does not simply work to erase the other side, but ultimately invites the viewer to forget the sight of the wall itself. This is reflected in the blank screens that famously marked the Eastern side of the partition, but it is also observed by Swinton in 1988 when she explains that “West Berliners seem to be so studiously ignoring the Wall.” Whereas Swinton initially contrasted this phenomenon with the “enormous attention given to the Wall by the men in the towers from the East,” twenty-one years later the whole space seems to be submerged in a sense of wilful amnesia and historical forgetting. In her study of *Post-wall German Cinema and National History* Mary Elisabeth O’Brien

⁴⁴ Kristensen, introduction to *Postcommunist Film*, 3.

⁴⁵ Skoller cited by Kristensen, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Balibar, “Europe as Borderland,” 193.

⁴⁷ Kristensen, introduction to *Postcommunist Film*, 3

remarks that such wilful amnesia is symptomatic of the filmic engagement with events of German reunification, or *die Wende*, and that this phenomenon attests to an effort “towards unanimity by erasing all evidence of conflict.”⁴⁸ However, in “digging under the surface of reunification,”⁴⁹ Beatts articulates this persistent erasure by focusing Swinton’s attention on the Wall’s absence, thereby questioning and challenging the prerequisite to ignore it and opening up the possibility of deconstructing the Wall’s logic. As Swinton puts it, “[w]hen this Wall, this ex-Wall, this manifestation of a ghost-Wall was here it felt so much more invisible than it is now. It has my attention in a way it never did before.” Thus, it is only through the Wall’s absence that she comes to understand the Wall’s brutal pervasiveness - a brutality she identifies as “translated into some kind of stoic acceptance” and now wilfully forgotten in the landscape of the present. This notion of amnesia aligns the Wall’s pervasiveness with the loss of memory evoked by a traumatic injury. It communicates a need to forget “what has become useless, or too difficult to accommodate,”⁵⁰ and further suggests that a traumatic walled past still exerts pressure on the present.

Since the Wall’s invisible structure is internalized by those who live with it and/ or outlive it, the Wall becomes a means of a traumatic encounter that evokes post-communism’s radical inbetweenness, manifesting itself within the shifting trajectories between us and them, here and there, now and then. Such twofoldness echoes the notion of a traumatic disruption precisely because trauma occurs “on the threshold between remembering and forgetting, seeing and not seeing, transparency and occlusion, experience and its absence,”⁵¹ as Huyssen puts it. Similarly, the Wall draws on these dialectics to exercise its psychological (traumatic) effectiveness. However, the fact of absence recalls the Wall as that which can never be adequately represented but persists as an internal conflict. For Swinton the wish to bring the two sides together through some kind of knowledge of “what the Wall was like from the East” remains unfulfilled and yet her impossible desire acknowledges this traumatic wound and its uncanny resonance with the present. We see her zigzagging the line of cobblestones that mark the Wall’s former route, “as if sewing the two sides

⁴⁸ O’Brien, *Post-wall German Cinema and National History*, 23.

⁴⁹ cited in Petrowskaja, “Interview with Cynthia Beatts”

⁵⁰ O’Brien, *Post-wall German Cinema and National History*, 26.

⁵¹ Huyssen, “Trauma and Memory,” 16.

together.”⁵² This expresses the desire to heal the troubled past and the haunted present through “instinctive ghostwork,”⁵³ as Beatts describes the journey in an interview. However, it is the articulation of this traumatic impossibility that summons the meaning of Swinton’s excursion. Quoting Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, Swinton frames her last kilometres as an acknowledgement of loss when she addresses the historical other, stating,

I bear equally with you the black permanent separation.
Why are you crying?
Rather give me your hand, promise to come again in a dream.
You and I are a mountain of grief.

It is this impossibility of closure and yet continuous entanglement of past and present that suggests the historical space can never be adequately read; rather, it must be permanently rewritten.

Of course the rewriting of historical space is always twofold in the sense that it is as revelatory as it is evasive. In the case of German reunification it was made clear instantly that there was no intention to preserve GDR history. As the then Minister of the interior, CDU politician Wolfgang Schäuble, put it in 1990,

my dear citizens, what is taking place here is the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, and not the other way around (...) We are not seeing here the unification of two equal states. We are not starting again from the beginning, from the position of equal rights.⁵⁴

The historical space of the East was literally rewritten in the light of the West, most evidently reflected in the obsessive renaming of streets after unification. Swinton encounters examples of this as the signposts of a rewritten history. She passes streets called *Einheit*, *Freiheit* or *Kuckucksruf* (Unity, Freedom or the Cuckoo call⁵⁵). The houses are restored and polished, making room for new generations that have no active memory of the Wall. The long shots of graceful house facades are underlined with sounds of children that remain absent from the image, as if the future was

⁵² (Beatts cited in Petrowskaja, “Interview with Cynthia Beatts”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ cited in Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, 3.

⁵⁵ Earlier in the film the Cuckoo is associated with the notion of greed, thus indicating the means of capitalism’s all-consuming emergence

haunting a present that cannot deal with its own past. “Acres of shame and rewritten history” prevent Swinton from gaining a perspective of the East, often leading her to lose her orientation or to question whether she is in the East or the West. On the other hand, the past erupts unexpectedly in ruins that attest to the East’s decaying presence. Swinton utilises these moments to put herself into the shoes of the Other, taking the perspective of a border guard from a watch tower and reciting a to-do-list while cycling around the remainder of a monument in the shape of a soviet star. Yet none of this provides retrospective meaning; despite and because of everything being open, the historical space is instead layered with new experiences across time.

Although Swinton never accesses the past, her journey attests to the nonlinearity of historical time. In this regard Richard Terdiman points out that “human temporality,...is always underlain and rewritten by other times”⁵⁶ and thus we cannot assume the past’s persistence (and thereby liberate ourselves from it). Instead we have to engage it through a continuous “confirmation, as the form the past takes now.”⁵⁷ Swinton expresses this notion when she muses “now you see it, now you don’t. It’s like a trick of the light and then you come around a corner and something is completely unchanged.” As the Wall flickers between past and present, it becomes impossible to write it into a map (or to find it solely according to its former route), precisely because it is also a temporal phenomenon attesting to the circularity of historical occurrences. Swinton often fails to locate the Wall on the map she is using, finally leading her to the conclusion that “maps are very fake things. They tell you that time has stopped but it hasn’t. It’s going on, remaking itself all the time.” This is reflected in Swinton’s literal circling, singing a repetition of “round and round and round and round,” and in her constant encounter with and musing about “new walls.” In this way the historical space of the Wall is shown to circulate and to itself be associated with cycles of history and nature.

The image of nature is utilized in order to evoke the circularity of history, but it also provides a sense of metaphoric estrangement, allowing for commentary on the politics of space. Beatts continuously evokes nature in order to ironize the politics associated with the Wall. The poppy fields that have taken over the space of the

⁵⁶ Richard Terdiman, “Taking Time: Temporal Representation and Cultural Politics,” in *Given Time and World: Temporalities in Context*, ed. T. Miller (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 132.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Wall, for example, evoke former chancellor Helmut Kohl's often quoted (and much criticized) promise of blossoming landscapes in the East,⁵⁸ while also attesting to a naturalisation of the Wall's absence. This is interesting because the earlier *Cycling the Frame* utilises the image of nature in order to contrast with the Wall and to reinstate the monument's monstrous and artificial disruption of ordinary life. When Swinton states that she "want[s] to shoot a hole into the Wall," the aggressiveness of the statement is contrasted with the fact that the hole is meant to save a little bee. This opposition reinstates the Wall's impediment to the ways of nature, and defies it by privileging the bee over the concrete obstruction. In *The Invisible Frame* then, the space has been taken back by nature and thus the Wall itself, in its 'absent' presence, has been rendered natural. Despite Swinton's best efforts to become part of this naturalized landscape by disappearing in a bush or lying in a field waving her hands with the rhythm of the wind blowing through the grass, she thus does not ultimately emerge in the historical landscape. Despite nature's best efforts, the Wall still cuts through space, as signified in the image of a dead snake lying on the concrete. This reiterates a historical space in which the past is still active yet overtly ignored and thereby imprisons the present. Swinton thus concludes that real freedom is not achieved through getting over the past but through a fearless engagement with it - fearless precisely because such engagement does not accept the silent and persistent walls of the heart and the mind.

The Lives of Others

The silent walls intimately cutting through the personal lives of ordinary people as a consequence of political impositions also demand to be assessed as part of historical negotiation. In fact, regarding history as part of the intimate sphere allows for a reimagining of the past via the means of fantasy, as addressed by the fictional accounts of drama. Exemplifying this, *The Lives of Others* (2006),⁵⁹ directed by Florian Henkel von Donnersmark, tells the story of the adherent Stasi agent Gerd Wiesler who takes the lead in a surveillance operation targeting the playwright Georg Dreyman and his girlfriend, actress Christa-Maria Sieland. While monitoring

⁵⁸ Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, 3.

⁵⁹ *The Lives of Others*, directed by Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck (Germany: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

the couple's every move in their East Berlin apartment, Wiesler is increasingly moved by the intimate negotiation of their private desires and political confines. Sieland and Dreyman unwittingly introduce Wiesler to the pleasures of art and music, but they also testify to the oppression, humiliation, and destruction perpetuated by the state, despite their political and cultural capital. When black-listed director Jerska commits suicide, Dreyman begins working on a regime-critical text. Wiesler conceals the playwright's subversive endeavours, and thus protects him from violent persecution by the state. Accordingly, the film was widely received as advocating a "classical model of redemption and humanization through art,"⁶⁰ which, culminating in Dreyman's piano rendition of 'The Sonata for a Good Man' as the footing for his own and Wiesler's transformation, also led to the film's controversial critical reception.

On the one hand, the film's tragic treatment of Eastern surveillance has been hailed as an authentic view of life in the GDR and a much needed corrective to the late 1990s phenomenon of Ostalgie.⁶¹ On the other hand, the film has been accused of aestheticizing historical inaccuracies and endorsing a humanization of the perpetrator, and by extension a humanization of the state apparatus as such.⁶² Anna Funder in particular took issue with the film's "odd relation to historical truth"⁶³ and argued that it was merely "a fantasy narrative."⁶⁴ However, taking such concerns seriously, the film draws attention to the fantasmatic investments sustaining (national) history and thus it suggests, as Timothy Garton Ash points out, that "these objections are in an important sense beside the point."⁶⁵ It is precisely the "fantasy narrative" that accounts for "the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence"⁶⁶ inherent to all remembering of the past, which according to Berlant underpins the

⁶⁰ Cheryl Dueck, "The Humanization of the Stasi in "Das Leben der Anderen," *German Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (October, 2008), 599.

⁶¹ Susan Stone, "DDR Living: Museum Offers 'Ostalgie' Look at East Germany," *Spiegel Online International*, 20 July 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/ddr-living-museum-offers-ostalgie-look-at-east-germany-a-427579.html> (accessed: 15 October 2013).

⁶² See Dueck, "The Humanization of the Stasi in "Das Leben der Anderen," Anna Funder, "Tyranny of Terror," *The Guardian*, 5 May 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/may/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview12> (accessed: 15 October 2013)

⁶³ Funder, "Tyranny of Terror"

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, "The Stasi in our Minds," *The New York Review of Books*, 31 May 2007, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/may/31/the-stasi-on-our-minds/> (accessed: 17 October 2013)

⁶⁶ Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," 286.

very notion of intimacy. The fantasmatic structure on which the film rests thus provides insight into the affective truths of intimate negotiation that shades historical experience but also shapes the politics in which it is embedded. In fact, *The Lives of Others* suggests that intimacy itself works to perpetuate the terror of the state, securing the psychological walls that help to sustain it. Yet intimacy also offers a mode of subversion precisely because it is linked to the transgressive capacity of fantasy and thus is capable of circumventing these inner walls. Ultimately, then, intimacy works as a mode of identification on the level of the personal as well as on the level of the political and thereby lays the foundation for a transformation that is firstly grounded in the personal relations all politics entail.

Set in the Orwellian year of 1984, the film exemplifies a politics of intimacy through which the totalitarian state systematically collapses individual desire in order to bureaucratize (and thus control) the intimate as such. This produces the faceless perpetrator dedicated to a system of oppression, much in the way Hannah Arendt has famously outlined ‘the banality of evil,’ and produces a psychological culture in which the state attains the role of the intimate Other. Rouvillois points out that the state’s “drive to monitor intimacy”⁶⁷ reiterates “that the citizen’s body belongs to the collective.”⁶⁸ The body is thus subjected to the intimate control of the state precisely because totalitarianism clashes with “the rebellious and perturbing potentialities of desire itself.”⁶⁹ Wiesler’s internalization of this dynamic is reflected in his strict self-control and the reduction of his physical needs to a bare minimum, defining his existence through an absolute “renunciation of desire in service of the state.”⁷⁰ His apartment is sparsely furnished and his meals are functional at best. His contact with humans is reduced to his students and superiors, with the exception of occasional mechanical sex with a prostitute working on schedule for the “MfS guys.” Wiesler never ceases to be the Stasi agent; rather, his identity is completely subsumed to this role. Thus, his most intimate relationship is with the state and it is for this reason that he instantly finds Dreyman to be suspiciously “arrogant” (and perhaps unwittingly attractive) in his ability to combine private intimacy and public standing. This leads Wiesler to suggest monitoring Dreyman, volunteering himself for the

⁶⁷ Frédéric Rouvillois, “Utopia and Totalitarianism,” in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, edited by Roland Schaer et. al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 319.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ O’Brien, *Post-wall German Cinema and National History*, 137.

task. Wiesler's internal surveillance of his own desire is thereby projected onto Dreyman as the other of a desired self. His need to investigate the playwright's political commitment is driven by the wish to subject him as well to the bureaucratized intimacy of the state and thus to prove that the structure of self-renunciation is necessary to maintain the righteousness of the state. In this way, Wiesler personifies the terrifying structure of the state designed to distrust and control its citizens at all times, supporters and opponents alike. It also attests to what Foucault has famously termed governmentality, epitomized in the totalitarian state's attempt to regulate its citizens from the inside by establishing an omniscient self-control, which is then projected outward.⁷¹

The state's intimate control is best reflected in the notion of an all-encompassing surveillance mechanism that turns the state into a giant panopticon. The GDR's bond with its citizens did not necessarily rest on the notion of political affect as "feeling politically together,"⁷² but was experienced on the grounds of permanently imagining oneself to be enclosed and observed (a fear which was of course always realized through the means of the Wall and the scrutiny of the State Security system). In fact, Preuss argues that because the movement of GDR citizens was restricted at all times, life in the East played out as if on a stage, and turned the "immobilized citizens into an audience."⁷³ Resonating with this notion, the film sets up a hierarchy of looking, similar to the spatial arrangement of the theatre, in which each of the main characters takes part. Wiesler first encounters Dreyman during one of his plays, to which the Stasi agent is taken by his senior commander Grubitz, an unapologetic careerist, who is seeking an opportunity to introduce himself to Minister Hempf. Establishing the scene for the choreography of power that will determine the intimate surveillance of the couple, the two Stasi men are positioned in the upper box, allowing them to monitor the theatre as a whole. Christa Maria performs on stage while Minister Hempf is in the centre of the frame, in close proximity to the stage in the stalls. Dreyman, closely watched by Wiesler through a pair of binoculars, sits in the VIP loge. This literally sets the stage for 'Operation Lazlo,' based on Wiesler's suspicion and Hempf's desire for Christa Maria, reflected

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 87-104.

⁷² Berlant, "Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest"

⁷³ Preuss, "The Wall You Will Never Know," 25.

in the particular dynamics of looks exchanged between the participants in the scene. Indeed, throughout the film everyone engages in a dynamic of looking, hiding and performing, suggesting, as Mazierska points out, that “Wiesler is by no means an exception among the citizens of the GDR.”⁷⁴ In fact, Sieland and Dreyman observe each other, Grubitz watches Hempf, Hempf orders his driver to follow Sieland, and even Wiesler is watched by Dreyman’s neighbour. Intimacy plays out via the means of the look, whether it is the intrusive look of the Stasi or the tender looks exchanged between lovers. However, it is the look that bypasses the state that serves to undermine it.

Surveillance functions as a form of intimate terror, as exemplified in Wiesler’s secret intrusion into the private sphere of Dreyman’s home, but it also renders the Stasi agent a participant in the couple’s intimacy, which implicitly destabilizes the state’s predominance. Indeed, Dreyman and Sieland’s home appears as an island of interpersonal warmth and creative possibility in the otherwise grey and meagre landscape of the East. Unlike Wiesler’s own apartment, their home is warmly lit and furnished with a wealth of books, art, and even a grand piano. This exemplifies how “the private sphere functioned for many citizens as an outpost of individuality, potential dissent, and alternative identity formation,”⁷⁵ as Betts asserts, in which the intrusion of the state was anticipated but also tacitly ignored. The privacy of the home thus epitomizes the German word *heimlich*, referring to both homely and secretive, in the double sense of private secrecy and a secret presence, imagined or real. The private sphere is thus cynically “connected to a profound sense of shared intimacy,”⁷⁶ a dynamic in which Dreyman, Sieland and Wiesler engage. Indeed, Wiesler is positioned at the heart of this intimate exchange. He knows about the little lies and profound secrets the couple hide from one another as well as about their shared intimate moments. However, he also functions as the Other to this discourse of intimacy in the psychoanalytical sense. Miller asserts that “the most intimate is at the same time the most hidden”⁷⁷ because it marks “a point of

⁷⁴ Ewa Mazierska, *European Cinema and Intertextuality: History, Memory and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 216.

⁷⁵ Betts, *Within Walls*, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁷ Jacques Alain Miller, “Extimité,” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 76.

opacity”⁷⁸ or otherness which Lacan calls *extimacy*. As Miller further explains, “extimacy says that the intimate is Other - like a foreign body, a parasite”⁷⁹ - or a Stasi agent in the attic. Wiesler is thus the extimate to Dreyman and Sieland’s intimacy, positioned as “the Other who, more intimate than (...) intimacy, stirs [them].”⁸⁰ In this way, Wiesler is never simply an observer but always a participant in the intimacy of the couple and their affective circuits, casting his own position increasingly into doubt. When Jerska commits suicide, Wiesler cries secretly (*heimlich*) in the attic, attesting to his emotional investment in the scene playing out. Thus, the implied mutuality of intimacy stirs Wiesler, too, and he is confronted with himself as part of the encounter between the Other in the self and the self in the Other. This addresses him as an individual rather than an agent of the state, and leads him to the realisation that the Other, in the negative sense, is the state and not Dreyman.

In the course of the intimate encounter between the couple and the Stasi agent, Wiesler increasingly identifies with Dreyman, paving the way for his transformation. However, it is also necessary to point out that from the outset, Wiesler and Dreyman are not as antagonistic as they may seem. Both share a deep commitment to the GDR, which is based on an obdurate sense of idealism, albeit to different ends. Dreyman is a personal friend of the General Secretary and Head of State’s wife Margot Honeker and is described by Grubitz as “pretty much the only non-subversive author.” Indeed, Grubitz further points out that to Dreyman, “the GDR is the most beautiful country in the world.” Dreyman often tries to balance a peculiar middle ground between the “perturbing potentials”⁸¹ inherent in art and his political idealism and commitment to the GDR. His rebellious friend Hauser points this out when he tells him, “you’re such an idealist that you are almost a bigwig,” urging him to understand that “if you don’t take a stand, you are not human.” Similarly, Wiesler’s devotion to the state also relies on the utopian ideals inherent to communism but rarely accomplished in its lived experience. He sits with the lower ranks in the ministry’s cafeteria, asserting to Grubitz that “socialism has to start somewhere.” He also reminds him of the oath they swore when Grubitz explains the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁸¹ Rouvillois, “Utopia and Totalitarianism,” 319.

benefits of Dreyman's persecution for both their careers. Wiesler identifies with Dreyman on the grounds of this shared idealism and simultaneously disidentifies with the careerist exploitation of power by those representing the state. Laplanche and Pontalis explain that identification works via modes of recognition,⁸² which in the case of Wiesler is channelled via the intimacy that develops as part of his surveillance of Dreyman and Sieland. Crucially, such identification in the psychoanalytical sense marks "the operation itself by which the subject is constituted."⁸³ In this way Wiesler is intimately confronted with the question of the self and realizes that his political idealism is incompatible with the state's abuse of power. Rather, his desire for a utopian ideal is mirrored in Dreyman's reformist hopes, leading Wiesler to be "transformed, wholly or partially after the model the other [Dreyman] provides."⁸⁴ As Laplanche and Pontalis further explain, identification "expresses a resemblance and is derived from a common element which remains in the unconscious"⁸⁵ and which they identify as "a phantasy."⁸⁶ Thus the common element that links Wiesler to Dreyman (and us, the spectators, to both of them) is precisely the intimate fantasy of the good man persisting in a terrible world.

The fantasy of the 'good man' resonates throughout the film, binding the characters in their actions but also determining the historical approach of the film. Whereas Wiesler understands himself to be the good man fighting the enemies of the state, Dreyman's own fantasmatic investment in the image of the good man is reflected in his non-conflictual manners and self-confirming narcissism. By intimately linking the characters through modes of identification, the film here most overtly participates in this shared fantasy. However, rather than dismissing this as a somewhat idealized "fantasy narrative that could not have taken place,"⁸⁷ such investment may also provide insight into the larger cultural fantasies that support a national memory. Indeed, Dreyman is modelled on a cultural icon – Bertolt Brecht – who like Dreyman was capable of writing communist texts that were "still

⁸² Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 205.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Funder, "Tyranny of Terror"

interesting enough to be read in the West”⁸⁸ and whose work insistently considered the question of how to be good in a bad world, as most poignantly explored in Brecht’s drama *The Good Person of Szechwan*. This link between Dreyman and Brecht finds its most explicit expression when Wiesler reads the Brecht book he stole from Dreyman while imagining the playwright reading the words. In this way Dreyman is presented as the good man Wiesler aspires to be, which the latter realizes (in a Brechtian Lehrstück (or learning play)) in the (educational) drama that plays out in the couple’s apartment. This literally stages Laplanche and Pontalis’s explanation that fantasy is linked to a “private theatre,”⁸⁹ in which “our most intimate possessions”⁹⁰ play out as scenes. Fantasy provides “the stage setting of desire,”⁹¹ eventually allowing for both Dreyman and Wiesler’s desire to literally transgress the law. Crucially, both men overcome their inner prohibition the moment they find this fantasy confirmed by Sieland. She adores Dreyman and finally chooses him over the powerful Hempf, who threatens to destroy her (and eventually initiates her persecution). She also tells Wiesler that he is “a good man” the moment he introduces himself as her “audience.”

Ironically, the fantasy of the good man ultimately provides the link between Dreyman and Wiesler, engaging them in their shared complicity in Sieland’s death. However, their righteousness is never questioned by the film, precisely because the women in the film are depicted as weak rather than good and thus they support but do not sustain the film’s fantasy. As GDR poet Wolf Biermann elaborates, “we are all addicted to evidence of people’s ability to change for the good,”⁹² alluding to cinema’s ability to initiate the examinations of “social issues through the lens of fantasy”⁹³ in the process of imagining the collective self. The fantasy of the good man thus resonates with aspirations of reconciliation, which haunt a nation still in the process of reuniting on the ruins of an atrocious past. In this sense Dreyman and Wiesler serve as collective fantasies of the good man, despite their implication in Sieland’s destruction, distilling “the question of individual morality, a value easily integrated into Western capitalism and ultimately antithetical to Lenin and Brecht’s

⁸⁸ Grubitz about Dreyman

⁸⁹ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 6.

⁹⁰ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 438.

⁹¹ Laplanche, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” 14.

⁹² Wolf Bierman, “The Ghosts are Leaving the Shadows,” *Signandsight.com*, 29 March 2006, <http://www.signandsight.com/features/682.html> (accessed: 17 October 2013).

⁹³ O’Brien, *Post-wall German Cinema and National History*, 297.

intentions.”⁹⁴ Donnersmark thus creates “a metaphorical hyperrealism”⁹⁵ rather than a historical document, or as the director himself argues, the reality of the film is “verdichtet.”⁹⁶

Verdichtung, which implies both condensation (dicht = thick) and dramatization (Dichtung = poetry), enables Wiesler’s transformation but also characterizes the intimate treatment of history itself. In the Freudian dream *Verdichtung* appears both in the sense of a thickening and a mis- and over-fictionalization, and is thus linked to the notion of fantasy. This evokes the playwright in the private theatre of desire, which, like Wiesler’s identification with Dreyman, expresses itself through Wiesler’s transformation into ‘the good dramatist.’ Wiesler interferes in Dreyman’s and Sieland’s relationship, causing Dreyman to find out about Hempf and convincing Sieland to liberate herself from Hempf’s exploitation. Thus, Wiesler orchestrates the couple intimately, while fabricating the scripts for their everyday lives. Crucially, these scripts contrast with his intimate experience of the lives of others, despite their factual correctness. This makes apparent that the Stasi language “obfuscates and confines experience, rather than defining and communicating it,”⁹⁷ as Paul Cooke asserts, attesting to Wiesler’s inability to experience a life of his own.

Affected by the language of Brecht (through the voice of Dreyman), Wiesler becomes the playwright. He transforms life into fiction by concealing the ‘revolution’ that develops within the walls of the apartment. While he overhears the creation of Dreyman’s text, he experiences the state’s terror expressed through literary language, or *Dichtung*, which translates into his own insertion of affective truths into the fabricated files. When Dreyman reads his file after the fall of the Wall, it is revealed that Wiesler actually created an imaginary play for the 40th anniversary of the GDR on Dreyman’s behalf. Incredulously, Dreyman reads (now through the voice of Wiesler) the first act, in which “Lenin is in permanent danger,” but “despite increasing pressure from the outside he holds on to his revolutionary plans.” This opening betrays the actual events but also, in a way, rightly communicates his own (and Wiesler’s) increasingly precarious situation. Thus, despite *Verdichtung*’s thickening and distorting of reality, “the affects have

⁹⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁹⁵ Die Zeit quoted in Dueck, “The Humanization of the Stasi in ‘Das Leben der Anderen’,” 601.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Garton Ash, “The Stasi in our Minds”

⁹⁷ Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, 81.

remained”⁹⁸ appropriate in the Freudian sense. Thus, Wiesler rewrites history, but intimately retains its affective truths much in the way *Donnersmark* insists on the film’s emotional (rather than historical) accuracy. Perhaps the film’s historical infringement is thus not simply linked to Wiesler’s fantastical transformation into Dreyman but suggests the possibility that this could also work in reverse; or, to borrow Jacqueline Rose words, “fiction’s greatest offense becomes its ability to turn us all into perpetrators, each and everyone of us.”⁹⁹ Acknowledging the fictional quality of all history intimates that the way we access history describes but also destabilizes our (political) position(s) in the present.

Kawasaki’s Rose

The Czech film *Kawasaki’s Rose* (2009)¹⁰⁰ destabilizes simplistic distinctions between perpetrator and victim. Utilizing the ambiguity of memory as a vehicle, the film investigates the East’s totalitarian past as the basis of a walled life in the present. Director Jan Hřebejk examines the guilt of the collaborator and the sacrifice of the dissident as “two sides of the same coin,”¹⁰¹ suggesting that the layers of personal and political history elude one-dimensional narratives of heroes and villains. Instead, the film asserts that remembering itself carries a politics that reworks individual and national identities across different times and spaces. Set 20 years after the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Kawasaki’s Rose* interrogates the past through the family drama that erupts when former dissident and highly acclaimed psychiatrist Pavel Josek is revealed to have collaborated with the secret police in the early 1970s. Pavel assisted in the expatriation of his rival Borek in order to win back his then ex-girlfriend and now wife Jana. Set to receive the Memory of the Nation Award for “his moral credit in spite of unfavourable political circumstances,” Pavel is confronted with a compromising file unearthed by a documentary film team that unravels the family secret and situates the personal conflicts as being firmly anchored within national history. Underpinning the notion of forgiveness, the film reconstructs this history through the eyes of both its

⁹⁸ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 596.

⁹⁹ Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2007), 146.

¹⁰⁰ *Kawasaki’s Rose*, directed by Jan Hřebejk (Prague, Czech Republic: Madman, 2009), DVD Film Festival Screener.

¹⁰¹ Mazierska, *European Cinema and Intertextuality*, 241.

immediate participants and succeeding generations. The characters' personal lives are indefinitely shaped by a walled-off past that demands to be confronted. Resonating with Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'deferred action,' a process "in which early memories and experiences are revised and rearranged at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences,"¹⁰² the film negotiates the meaning of national and personal acts of remembering. According to Roger Kennedy, it is precisely this "rearrangement of memories"¹⁰³ that constructs history. Thus acts of remembering are less helpful for discovering truths about the past, "than to understand the impact of the past in the present."¹⁰⁴ Thinking historically is not simply about forgetting certain narratives and foregrounding others; rather, it marks an attempt to access walled-off memories, affecting what constitutes a present self.

Such memories can act as an imprisonment built on unbearable histories of unspoken traumatic experience, thereby enabling their continuous impact. Freud associates the very notion of repression with a "dark trace,"¹⁰⁵ referring to Oedipus' "ancient guilt"¹⁰⁶ and thus links these prisons of memory to a sense of felt culpability in the past. Yet he also explains that what is retained "acts like a foreign body,"¹⁰⁷ fully capable of asserting its impact on the present "long after its entry."¹⁰⁸ This is reflected in Pavel's own guilt, which is walled off behind an appearance of being what his deceitful son-in-law Ludek repugnantly calls "a paragon of virtue." Pavel seems to carry this façade as a burden, forbidding emotional collapse. However, as Pavel never allows himself to work through his own guilt, 'the foreign body' impacts negatively on the lives of his descendants, which is literally evoked through his daughter Lucie's tumor, the removal of which opens the film. It is also reflected in his granddaughter Bara's unsettled position in the family. Without knowing it, Bara seems to enact Borek's sense of displacement and she compensates for her lack of understanding the silent legacies that affectively work through her family with eating – preferably shop-lifted chocolate bars. This habit of stealing sends her to a literal prison and thus evokes her family's dark trace. Schwab

¹⁰² Kennedy, "Memory and the Unconscious," 185.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰⁵ For an in depth discussion see Westwink, *Figures of the Unconscious*.

¹⁰⁶ See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 363.

Westwink, *Figures of the Unconscious*.

¹⁰⁷ Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

explains that internalized guilt leads the children (and grandchildren) of perpetrators to be “always on the run.”¹⁰⁹ Exemplifying this, Bara runs from the shop owners who catch her stealing, poignantly leading her to her grandfather’s study - after a detour to the police station. The repressed material comes to the surface when Bara suggests keeping the incident a secret and Pavel unwittingly articulates his own imprisonment. He explains that “everyone who cheats or who steals isolates himself,” maintaining that guilty secrets are destructive precisely because the “inner prison is much worse”¹¹⁰ than confessing one’s misdeeds. Although this leads Bara to own up to Ludek, Pavel actually reinforces the structure of self-imprisonment by not addressing his own implication in this moral truth, despite Bara asking about the tension between him and Ludek. Dan Bar-On explains such a dynamic via the notion of a “double wall,”¹¹¹ which describes the erection of walls between the past and the present by victims and perpetrators alike, leading their descendants to build their own walls, etc.¹¹² Together these walls work to maintain a “conspiracy of silence,”¹¹³ for any attempt to break through is instantly met by “the wall of the other.”¹¹⁴ In this way the prison of memory is inflicted on succeeding generations, on account of the silence of the previous one.

The past resurfaces in the present through the silent legacies of past atrocities most commonly enveloped in the family secret and delivered, from one generation to the next, by the affective circuits that maintain these enigmas. As Schwab explains, “children read their parents’ unconscious more generally in the embodied language of affects.”¹¹⁵ They intimately negotiate their parent’s conflicts and secrets and thus attain an expertise at “listening to the unspoken,”¹¹⁶ reflected in the shifting moods and affective tensions surrounding them. This enables the development of what Marianne Hirsch has coined a ‘postmemory’ to describe “the experience of those ... whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation.”¹¹⁷ The idea is most poignantly articulated through Pavel’s betrayal and Lucie’s subsequent loss of (her biological father) Borek prior to her own birth; it

¹⁰⁹ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 95.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Quoted in Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 96.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

finds a locus in the parents' guilt, unwittingly echoed in Jana's explanation that the hardest thing was "to decide on behalf of the child" when confronted with the secret police. The destructive force of the state erupts within the family frame, which is illustrated by the chilling account of former secret policeman Kafka, who reveals the family secret over shots of private images that depict the idyll of Pavel, Jana and Lucie. These photographs exemplify the hidden location of postmemory as identified by Hirsch, and attest to a family chronicle demanding belated reinterpretation - by Lucie foremost. At the same time, it is up to her to develop the narrative that connects one historical moment with the other, providing an opportunity to integrate the unassimilated affects that constitute her family and lastly her self. As Hirsch further explains, "perhaps it is only in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who ... receive its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions, and symptoms of the previous generation."¹¹⁸ Lucie thus develops her own narrative by untangling the threads of the past as she confronts her father and mother, and travels to Sweden to meet Borek. She enables the transitory movement of affective histories across time and space and thus achieves affective catharsis, most poignantly exemplified by the communal reciting of Czech swear words at Borek's Swedish dinner party. This release of tension is later repeated in Prague, when Borek humorously bombards Pavel with a seemingly endless list of swear words, taken from a book he has been given by Lucie. In this way Lucie becomes the knot of a complex past, assembling the various strings of affective histories located in different moments in time and dispersed cultural spaces.

The spatial distribution of traumatic histories resonates with the psychological arrangement of memory as organized through modes of attachment and exclusion. Exploring memory in the context of social and spatial specificities thereby enables a sense of cultural transference and relational remembering. Pavel's guilt is an exemplary dilemma of the Eastern experience and its particularity functions as a means of investigating Czech history. However, this specificity is complicated by Borek's expatriation, demonstrating the way in which history may stretch across different cultural contexts. Thus, although memory "unfolds within a spatial

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 25.

framework,”¹¹⁹ as Maurice Halbwachs points out, it is essentially also about traversing these spaces. Borek’s expatriation to Sweden has literally made him the foreign body Freud associates with repressed memory, unfolding Pavel’s dark trace of a purposefully forgotten story all the way to Sweden. Thus, when Borek travels to the Czech Republic and attends Pavel’s medal ceremony in Prague, he personifies the return of the repressed. However, as the complex image of the rose Borek’s painter friend Kawasaki dedicates to Lucie signifies, transference, in the sense of displacing unassimilated affects from one idea to another,¹²⁰ is ultimately not linear. The film instead suggests a composite relationship of various histories made apparent through layers of violent pasts across different cultural contexts. There is a sense of historical belonging located in the traumatic memories carried across these contexts, an idea which is most apparent in Borek’s friendship with the equally displaced Kawasaki. The Japanese artist, who lost his family in the Tokyo Sarin gas attack in 1995 and subsequently stopped painting, is “adopted” by Borek, who lost everything in 1972. The two men seem inseparable, connected by a mutual understanding of each other’s fate and intimately linked by a sense of interpersonal transference. When Lucie unlocks the past for Borek, Kawasaki thus also feels a sense of the knot unravelling. This transference release is reflected in his painting of the rose for Lucie, and resonates with the voice of Pavel reading a poem on remorse and suffering that overlays the scene. Such spatial and generational compositions of memory sites exemplify Schwab’s argument that “histories of violence can be put in a dialogical relationship with one another, thus creating a transference dynamic for those who participate in, witness, or inherit those histories transgenerationally.”¹²¹ This suggests that we are all implicated in each other’s experiences, enabling collective forms of remembering that do not foreclose cultural, historical and national particularities, but rather draw on them to underpin self-formation in the context of shared histories of violence.

Particular memories are crucial in the formation of national identity because they propose that histories of individuals are exemplary for what the collective understands itself to be. Moments of collective identification such as Pavel’s Memory of the Nation Award thus (de)stabilize certain political positions as against

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, 457.

¹²¹ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 29

others, but also unwittingly foreground the way in which the nation engages with the affective details of its past. Pavel's ceremony exemplifies history's continuous narrativization and marks an attempt to cleanse inconsistent fantasies about the past. However, this official narrative is complicated by the protagonist's moral ambiguity, and thereby the film ultimately privileges human dilemmas over historical valour. In this regard the fantasy of 'the good man' plays out differently in *Kawasaki's Rose* than it does in *The Lives of Others*. Whereas Wiesler and Dreyman perpetuate a strong sense of moral integrity in an otherwise cruel world, Pavel asserts a moral vulnerability to historical and political force, suggesting a different kind of reconciliation. As Pavel points out in his acceptance speech, "some things cannot be atoned for," and thus he does not attempt to undo the past but rather advocates remembering it as formative. "If memory is lost we cease to exist," he explains, accepting the award as a "punishment" instead of some kind of "perfection" as Borek cynically describes it earlier. Hence, the film suggests a movement from collective guilt to collective responsibility, as advocated by Schwab,¹²² which is reinforced by Pavel's apology – a commitment to moral complexity that *The Lives of Others* lacks. Crucially Pavel's plea for forgiveness is directed at Lucie (and not Borek), and thus it addresses the generation that carries these legacies, rather than those participating in their creation, precisely because the past cannot be reconstructed in a more favourable way. The fallen hero on the pedestal thereby voices the nation's most affective dilemma, suggesting that heroes and villains go hand in hand, without attempting to resolve this contradiction. This undermines the historical dichotomies upon which national identities rest and suggests that the official collecting, archiving and publicising of past atrocities has to account for human complexities. Pavel's inauspicious weakness is thus not forgiven, but becomes part of his integrity as an attempted healing of the national wound. In this way the scene further resonates with the stinging case of Czech writer Milan Kundera, who was accused in 2008 of denouncing military deserter Miroslav Dvořáček. Allegedly Kundera's collaboration in 1948 sent Dvořáček to a labour camp, where he served for 14 years before emigrating to Sweden. Kundera has rejected these claims and was widely supported by other prominent writers; however, the incident underpins the affective charge of the nation's memory as

¹²² Ibid., 34.

ambiguous, contradictory and ultimately lost. Kundera writes that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”¹²³ Thus, Pavel provides a counter-narrative, demonstrating the personal ambivalences of those who make up the nation and thereby reinterpreting the official discourse that seeks to celebrate him as the exemplary citizen.

Kawasaki's Rose investigates the location of memory as firmly situated within the domestic realm of the family, similarly to the way in which *The Lives of Others* negotiates history as belonging to the intimate sphere. Both films thereby function as a reminder that complex politics are ultimately small in the sense that they tangibly play out through the everyday trajectories of ordinary people. This idea is particularly relevant for a memory of the communist past precisely because communism has always maintained a complex interplay between the personal and political. With the state venturing deep into the private sphere of individuals, people were forced to negotiate a public identity in accordance with official political scripts. On the other side, this also led to the importance of creating a private idyll, promising a kind of intimate self-preservation. Ironically Pavel and Jana continue this performance long after the end of the Iron Curtain, this time maintaining their image as distinguished dissidents. Thus, the communist era and its aftermath exemplify Hirsch's point about the family structurally being “a last vestige of protection”¹²⁴ against the threats of the political but also becoming “particularly vulnerable to these violent ruptures, and so a measure of their devastation.”¹²⁵ Christa Maria's death, Wiesler and Dreyman's helplessness, as well as the men's implication in this tragedy exemplify the point. Both *Kawasaki's Rose* and *The Lives of Others* examine such historical implications through the lens of personal repercussions or, to borrow from Mazierska, “politics enter [the] characters' lives through their bedrooms and kitchens.”¹²⁶ Individual memory is embedded in politics and histories and thereby constitutes these trajectories as contestable and indefinite. Such conflicts are particularly apparent during the interviews with Kafka, who does not show any remorse but instead intellectualizes his own cruelty and thereby repudiates the harm done by his work as an interrogator. This is juxtaposed with the

¹²³ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 3.

¹²⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 13.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Mazierska, *European Cinema and Intertextuality*, 239.

personal accounts of Borek and Jana, reminding the viewer (if not Kafka) that politics dramatically impact on individual citizens. Conversely, the state uses the personal dramas between individuals to fulfil its own agenda and thereby makes apparent that the system cannot work without its human participants. Such conflation is most apparent in Hempf's delusional assertion that being a state's man means that "everyone" is his "employee"; thus, private betrayal constitutes state betrayal, legitimizing his obliteration of Sieland's career as an actress. It is also reflected in Pavel and Jana's betrayal of Borek, eventually forcing the latter into political exile through the involvement of the state. In this sense the family becomes "subject to conflicting historical and ideological scripts,"¹²⁷ as Hirsch asserts, at the same time it enables them. Private settings thus provide access to the production of meaning which politics and history enforce. As Radstone explains, "history (...) offers the means by which we can grasp the memory of memory."¹²⁸ Hence, it is important to raise questions about how the politics of the personal are remembered and mediated within a public discourse.

Film is a vehicle of continuous remembering. It is capable of engaging an irretrievable past, offering perspectives, decentred from the fixed positions grand narratives and relegating history to a perpetual reimagination. The films discussed demonstrate not just the outward spatialization of politics as a form of meaning production, but also address the internalisation of the political to similar and crucially enduring ends. This is notably depicted in the reconstruction of the family secret by the documentary team following Pavel, who set out to celebrate the polished image of the virtuous dissident. When his betrayal is discovered, however, the documentary moves from supporting a public memory with the help of the exemplary individual to investigating the private memories challenging a one-dimensional account. The interviews with Borek, Kafka, Jana and Bara confront different points of views, but the medium also enables the juxtaposition of these assessments, and thus creates an equally fabricated, yet multifaceted narrative. Similarly, Wiesler rewrites the lives of others in the private theatre of the home, allowing the viewer to intimately reconsider the public staging of historical fantasies through the Brechtian *Lehrstück* *Donnersmarck* creates. This is important precisely

¹²⁷ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 13.

¹²⁸ Radstone and Schwarz, "Mapping Memory," 6.

because the notion of working through is less concerned with adequate reconstructions of the past than with the creation of a narrative that helps to make sense of the past's impact on the present. In other words, the films envision the unassimilated affects of the past as part of a more or less consistent imaginary. In this sense the Stasi file as well as the documentary about Pavel (and by extension Hřebejk and Donnersmarck's films) function as agents of particular ways of remembering and disseminate these memories to a broad audience.

Reiterating memory as something active and creative, these films also serve to remind us that such collective (re)constructions always come at the cost of obliterating others, and thus may serve the sedimentation of national narratives before all else. Konopka's rabbit perspective satirizes this idea, suggesting that media truths are subjective, constructed, and instrumental, and thus comment on the politicization of memory via its public mediation. However, when Tilda Swinton leaves the public display of history behind in order to explore the Wall's meaning through an internal dialogue, she reminds us that the past is only ever assessed through an experience of the present – an experience cinema helps to provide. We may remain “cut off from the pasts that have created us,”¹²⁹ but the cinematic screen creates the locus for “the temporal imaginings of past, present and future.”¹³⁰ Swinton's journey is thus an interrogation of the Wall as that which has been and now remains absent, the experience of which is tellingly “dedicated to the people of Palestine.” Indeed, all four films represent an examination of the past through the lens of the present and thus ultimately attest to the way in which “cinema memories travel through time and from one historical moment to the next.”¹³¹ Thus, the Wall ‘screens through’ the personal and political identities which traumatically resurface in the present and challenge a structure of violence all too easily remediated in current cultural contexts.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹³¹ Radstone, “Cinema and Memory,” 341.

Chapter 5

Projecting Dreams: The Cinema of Israel-Palestine

Following Yitzhak Rabin's announcement in 1994 that "we have to decide on separation as a philosophy,"¹ Israel began to construct the iconic Wall of the present: the West Bank separation barrier. Similar to the Berlin Wall, the construction works to exclude the other side physically and mentally by serving as a visual symptom of divisive politics. The barrier instantiates a need for security from an atrocious Other, which in its most immediate manifestation evokes the Palestinians but arguably relies on the traumatic memory of Jewish persecution during the Holocaust. In this way the Israeli Wall and the Berlin Wall share the same historical legacy but are also linked in the present, not simply by means of a visual similarity but due to their aesthetic connotations. Like the Berlin Wall the Israeli Wall can be read as an "overriding presence of absence,"² or more precisely as constructing an "aesthetic absence"³ out of the cultural and political presence of Palestine. The Israeli Wall thereby epitomizes the screen, both in the sense of a shield erasing the Other and as a projection surface on which the collective imaginary of Israel comes into being. As Ella Shohat puts it, "while, as we know, all nations are invented...some nations are invented more than others, especially since in the case of Israel, the state can be said to have invented the nation."⁴ Hence, the collective identity of Israel is dependent on the notion of screening out, which has ensured a continuous expansion of Israel's mental and physical barriers in an effort to secure the Israeli collective by excluding the Palestinians. In this way the Israeli Wall organizes political and psychological space, redefining a landscape which works as the central enigma in the imaginary of both collectives. The two communities are thereby locked in a conflictual relation, negotiating opposing claims to the space and competing meanings of and fantasies about the place. As a result, the West Bank separation barrier stands as a 'Security Fence' but functions as a prison, subjugating both Israeli and Palestinian subjectivities.

¹ Makovsky, "How to Build a Fence," 52.

² Hamid Dabashi, introduction to *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (London: Verso, 2006), 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 252.

Israel's Wall has appeared as the physical manifestation of a politics of division, undergirding a national identity that seeks to blind itself to the existence of the Other. Unlike the Berlin Wall, the West Bank separation barrier is not a border, but is more overtly an instalment of power, or an architectural symptom of divisive politics, that simultaneously prevents and reveals the encounter between the two conflicting sides and locks them in the visible manifestation of a violent structure. Such a structure is always a work in progress because "violence renews itself in the apparent inexhaustibility of its object,"⁵ as Judith Butler explains. Israel's Wall works accordingly, continuously and progressively reinventing its route, despite the International Court of Justice declaring in July 2004 that the "wall is a political measure, unjustified on grounds of security, and a defacto land grab."⁶ Israel has since then repeatedly expanded its attempts, and the anticipated route of the barrier under construction will be 709 kilometres long, with 85 % of it appearing within in the West Bank, thereby increasingly annexing Palestinian land and livelihood.⁷ Most of the barrier takes the form of barbed-wire fences and trenches, but in some places the barrier evolves into a 6 to 8 metre-high concrete Wall that, according to the IDF, will make up about 30 kilometres in total once construction is finished.⁸ When completed, the 'security fence' will imprison approximately 210,000 Palestinians between the barrier and the green line,⁹ cutting them off from their lands, families, olive groves, workplaces, hospitals, etc. Israel's politics of division thus exemplifies the way in which a rhetoric of othering and dehumanization is directly translated into the public field of vision by inscribing political landscapes onto human space.

The collapse of political and personal space, however, also works as a means of encounter, precisely because the physical entity of the Wall gives shape to an everyday politics of alienation and separation and thereby concretises the relationship between the two sides in the form of a telling symbol. The ambivalence of the Wall is reflected in the way it reveals the encounter between the two sides and

⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 33.

⁶ Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), xvii.

⁷ "The Separation Barrier," *B'Tselem*, 1 January 2011, http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier (accessed: 12 January 2012).

B'Tselem is the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

⁸ Israel Ministry of Defence, "Operational Concept," *Israel's Security Fence*, 31 January 2007, <http://www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/ENG/operational.htm> (accessed: 17 January 2012).

⁹ The Green Line is a demarcation line which delimits the territories administered by Israel since the 1967 Six Day War.

simultaneously prevents it. The Wall as a shield strengthens the grand narratives of division and threat by verifying a need for self-protection in the public field of vision and by defining the parameters of security for one's own identity - an identity that seemingly needs to be walled off in order to be experienced as coherent. On the other hand, the Wall does not simply fortify the narratives of its creation but also lays them bare by bringing the relationship between Israel and Palestine to the forefront. Read as a medium, the West Bank Wall stands in for the relationship between the two sides and can thus provide insight into the conflict and potentially uncover the identities it conceals. The West Bank Wall is thus not simply a means of division but marks a point of both meeting and confrontation, because it crucially appears as the physical and psychological manifestation of a (political) relationship between Israel and Palestine. This is important to acknowledge because the problem posed by the Wall is in the first instance the collapse of a shared history and hence of a shared narrative of two sides. However, the underlying relationship between the two sides is encoded in the political, psychological and physical elements of the landscapes, and thereby reinforces but also potentially challenges the politics of walls.

Constructing Political Landscapes

The landscape of Palestine is a site of conflict shaped by Israel's hostile organization of space. Israel's politics are secured through geopolitical strategies and appropriated through a complex interplay between visibility and invisibility that works to maintain the formation of a coherent and sheltered political identity and national imaginary. This logic of Israel's politics is manifested in an intricate system of ideological and spatial forms of separation and effacement that work to divide Israelis from Palestinians. Such division is most visibly evident in the symbol of the Wall. The walled landscape of Palestine represents the cementation of Israel's rigid identity and it visually imposes this identity on the everyday lives of the people who inhabit the space (on both sides of the Wall). At the same time, the Wall indicates "a process by which social and subjective identities are formed,"¹⁰ and it impacts on both Israelis and Palestinians that live within its site and sight. Following Rancière,

¹⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, introduction to *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

such a political appropriation of the field of vision creates “a common landscape of the given and the possible”¹¹ in which “social and political forces that constantly try to keep things, activities and people in their proper places”¹² operate to secure and naturalize the status quo of political power. The landscape of Palestine, through which the Wall cuts, is hence the site of Israel’s political power and occupation.

The interplay between landscape and politics relies on the role of the land as central to a national imaginary. The imagined homeland at the core of national narratives and political identities is first and foremost an image of a landscape which has the capacity “to naturalize and render transparent”¹³ the ideological ideas from which such imaginaries take their effectiveness. The very foundation of Israel relies on such a claim to the land and is echoed in the motivation of ‘making the desert bloom’. In the *Question of Zion* Jacqueline Rose explains that Israel’s national imaginary works through a “language of redemption of the land via settlement.”¹⁴ This reinstates a wish to enter “history though territory”¹⁵ and to reclaim the ‘promised land.’ Thinking through the Zionist project thus has to begin with the notion of an attachment to the land - a land which is assumed to be empty and hence available as a protective haven for the homeless Jews. This is the idea exemplified in the Zionist slogan, “A land without people for a people without land,”¹⁶ reinforced by the horror of anti-Semitism that spread across Europe, peaking in the Holocaust committed by Nazi Germany in World War Two. These fantasies at the heart of Israeli ideology must then, as Edward Said points out, rely on “the refusal to admit, and the consequent denial of, the existence of Palestinian Arabs,”¹⁷ in order to avoid the conflict of securing one people at the expense of another, thereby repeating the violence Israel sought to escape. This is reflected in a spatial politics of avoidance and introduces vision as a claim to the land in the sense that the parameters of the visible define the (political) reality of the inhabitants. Landscape establishes a scopic regime that provides modes of belonging and exclusion. In this way the spatial

¹¹ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 259.

¹² Ibid.

Rancière famously refers to this phenomenon as the ‘the police’.

¹³ Larry Abramson, “What does Landscape want? A Walk in W.J.T. Mitchell’ Holy Landscape,” in *The Pictorial Turn*, ed. Neal Curtis (London: Routledge, 2010), 182.

¹⁴ Ravitsky quoted in Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 35.

¹⁵ Annie Pfingst, “The Presence of Palestinian Absence in Narrating the Zionist Nation into being,” *Cultural Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (March 2008), 115.

¹⁶ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 9.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

organization of Israel works to undermine the Palestinians' very existence by making them invisible and negating the Palestinians' own "indissoluble bond with the land."¹⁸ The conflict between Israel and Palestine is hence carried out in and through the construction of landscape and narrative in the field of vision. It marks a battle over what and who is seen as part of the legitimate field of the visible, and who is negated through effacement.

Israel's spatial politics perpetuate a fantasy of separation and carefully orchestrate the architecture of the homeland accordingly. Such an organization of space exploits the landscape in order to secure a coherent identity. Rose points out that in the logic of Zionism the landscape needs to be 'redeemed' as part of a divine plan,¹⁹ which is practically accomplished through the accoutrements of settlements, walls and towers. Ideologically, the land also "needs to be filled by the dreams...of its beholders."²⁰ The Zionist dream, in its perpetual deferral as a promise, a wish to be fulfilled, continuously occupies the site of Palestine and manifests itself in concrete spatial designs of a work in progress. This exemplifies Salecl's claim that a country is always "a kind of fiction" but also reminds us that such fictions gloss over the 'absence of the nation' through the concealment of fantasy.²¹ Both Palestine and Israel share this notion of absence, but it is Israel's power to create and manifest its dream in the spatial organization of the land and the fantasmatic realm of identity politics that seems to afford its unresponsiveness to Palestinian suffering. The visual distribution of power largely denies Palestine its own national dream while the fantasy scenario evoked by Israel imagines landscape as an ideological screen that protects Israel and hides Palestine. The landscape thus stages both "a defensible and homogeneous Israeli political space"²² and national identity. In this sense to create the homeland is to dream the nation, and "Israel has [largely] succeeded in shutting its own and the world's eyes"²³ to the social, cultural and political relations embedded in this dreamscape.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rose refers the language of redemption quoting Ravitsky Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 35.

²⁰ Abramson, "What does Landscape want?," 178.

²¹ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

²² Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 178.

²³ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 172 – 173.

The invisibility of Palestinians is evoked on an imaginary level *and* carefully enforced in the physical construction of space. The dream serves as the scheme for constructing reality. This is not to say that Israel rests upon delusions; rather, it “foregrounds its own fantasmatic dimension”²⁴ while engaging architecture as a form of constructed reality, instead of confronting the fact of Palestinian existence as indissoluble from Israeli identity. As Rose points out, “Zionism (...) is a violation of reality that knows its own delusion and runs with it.”²⁵ Despite the rhetorics of an empty land, Israel is of course aware of the conflict of occupation, but it settles the land on the basis of the dream (and the wish to which the dream pertains) rather than encountering the actualities of suffering. Israel’s first president Chaim Weizman explained as early as 1909 that “We have to create our title out of our wish to go to Palestine.”²⁶ Analogously, Freud explains that the “motive force of the dream”²⁷ is the wish which is “represented as a scene.”²⁸ Such a scene can be read as the Palestinian landscape, but in this case it also marks a concrete instalment of power. Israel’s architecture is a strategic tool to exercise power over the Palestinians, locking them into engineered prisons, shaped by roads, water pipes and barriers that isolate and divide them from each other.²⁹ Simultaneously, the constructed realities of Israel’s landscape design maintain that these atrocities remain invisible, hence affording a ‘psychological blindness’ that secures the notion of redemption as well as the ‘continuation of the dream’.³⁰ Eyal Weizman explains that the process of “building the land of Israel”³¹ essentially entails a complex system of “comfortable, traffic free roads, completely devoid of Arabs,”³² which creates the ‘land without people’ so as then to claim it. Furthermore, Weizman points out that the separation

²⁴ Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 16.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 714.

²⁸ Ibid., 682.

²⁹ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 12.

³⁰ Bar-On gives the example of a banner of the Zionist Council, which said: “We shall continue to dream the dream.”

Modechai Bar-On, “Conflicting Narratives or Narratives of a Conflict: Can the Zionist and Palestinian Narratives of the 1948 War Be Bridged?,” in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History’s Double Helix*, ed. Robert L. Rothberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 163.

³¹ Sharon Rotbart, “Wall and Tower (Homa Umigdal): The Mold of Israeli Architecture,” in *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israel’s Architecture*, ed. Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman (New York: Verso, 2003), 40.

³² Amira Hass, “You can drive along and never see an Arab,” *Ha’aretz*, 22 January 2003, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/you-can-drive-along-and-never-see-an-arab-1.21522> (accessed: 17 January 2012).

of Israel from Palestine and the spatial negation of Arab livelihood are also vertically enforced through a three-dimensional matrix of roads, tunnels and bridges.³³ The invisibility of the Palestinians is built into the spatial organization of an Israel without Palestine and at the same time this design is disguised as it naturalizes the given landscape. The Wall cutting through this land, as a monumental and overt imposition is hence capable of rendering visible the fantasy of separation concretised in the architectural making of the landscape.

Constructing a Cinematic Landscape

Israel has self-reflexively produced the nation through landscape and utilized the cinema and other narrative forms to stage the national imaginary as a site for identity formation. Shohat points out that the movement of Zionism, as a process of shaping collective national imaginaries and memories, emerged concurrently with cinema and has always been well aware of cinema's ability to produce the Zionist dream on the national screen.³⁴ In fact, she argues, "Zionism invented, as it were, the Israeli nation partly through its literary and cinematic narrative."³⁵ As early as in the works of the Lumière brothers,³⁶ cinema has envisioned the empty land at the heart of the Zionist endeavour and inscribed the place on the mental map of the collective imaginary. Following Anat Zanger, this idea is enhanced rather than necessarily limited by the inability of cinema to "write the Israeli place as anything other than a fantasy,"³⁷ precisely because fantasy, as has been shown, provides the motive force for the establishment of the nation. In this context cinema becomes a means of reading the Israeli space and the borders it establishes as "reflect[ing] mental maps of belonging, setting boundaries between 'us' and 'them'."³⁸ Mediating the walled space, cinema not only enforces but also reveals the intimate structures of violence that forge and prevent relationships. In this context Shohat concludes that film does

³³ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 11-12.

³⁴ Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 250.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Auguste and Louis Lumière, "Palestine 1896," *YouTube*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vaIK8wlA10> (accessed: 19 January 2013).

Louis Lumière, "Leaving Jerusalem by Railway 1897," *YouTube*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ctp11Vef9Yo> (accessed: 19 January 2013).

³⁷ Anat Y. Zanger, *Place, Memory and Myth in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (Edgware: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012), xviii.

³⁸ Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 289.

not simply “register[-] perceptions and perspectives on reality,”³⁹ revealing the ideological dynamics and intimate ambivalences of conflict, but that it is also a “means to actively shape that reality.”⁴⁰ This in turn suggests cinema’s central role in creating, sustaining as well as challenging Israel’s wall(s).

Challenging the confined space of Palestinian erasure becomes a matter of reinstating a Palestinian face into the public field of vision. Palestinian cinema is thus not reducible to a national aspiration (although this often happens, particularly from within the Palestinian community⁴¹) but is first and foremost a means of renegotiating a deeply problematic relation to the visual. Edward Said asserts that “Arabs were always being represented, never able to speak for themselves.”⁴² In his keynote speech for the 2003 Palestinian film festival *Dreams of a Nation* in New York, Said considers the subversive potential of Palestinian cinema to be twofold. He explains that “on the one hand, Palestinians stand against invisibility...and on the other hand they stand against...a visual identity associated with violence and terrorism.”⁴³ Both of these problems constitute a form of effacement, described by Butler as either “producing a symbolic identification with the face as inhuman,”⁴⁴ or “foreclosing our apprehension...so that there never was a human, there never was a life and no murder has, therefore, ever taken place.”⁴⁵ The face of Palestinian cinema as a challenge to the walls of Israeli domination has to revisualize the Palestinian face as human and free it from the mask of the stereotype in order to be reintroduced as part of the (political) landscape. On the other hand, this is difficult to accomplish where the production of the cinematic landscape remains intimately bound to the political one.

The cinema of Israel-Palestine has to consider the indissoluble bond with the Other, even where it does not address the intimate link explicitly. The Palestinian and Israeli imaginaries are locked into the landscape from which they draw their form,

³⁹ Ibid., 251.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Elia Suleiman’s complaint about the burden of national cinema, as having “to tell the story of Palestine.”

Elia Suleiman, “A Cinema of Nowhere,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2000), 98.

⁴² Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 25

⁴³ Edward Said, “Preface: Keynote Speech for the *Dreams of a Nation*,” in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (London: Verso, 2006), 3.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, 147.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

“constitute[ing] an intellectual space of conflictual and independent utopias and dystopias.”⁴⁶ Exemplifying this, Hamid Dabashi argues that the structural (traumatic) core of both cinematic traditions is Israel’s establishment in 1948, called al-Nabka (the catastrophe) by Palestinians and the War of Independence by Israelis.⁴⁷ The events of 1948 are traumatic for Palestinians, in the sense of an exodus, but arguably this act of violent repression of an Other (per definition) also manifests itself traumatically within Israel’s collective imaginary. Dabashi suggests that this central trauma is precisely “the defining moment of Palestinian Cinema”⁴⁸ and structures the stories around remembrance of a lost homeland, just as Zionism envisions the homeland epically unfolding on the collective screen. Although these competing narratives are radically different, they are also intimately linked, creating a cinematic landscape that reveals rather than conceals the foundational relationship at work. This is not simply reflected on screen but also resonates in artistic collaborations between Israelis and Palestinians (*Lemon Tree*, *Five Broken Cameras*); political collaborations on screen (*Budrus*); film funding, as in the case of Suleiman’s *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, which was funded by the Israeli Fund for Quality Film; and more complicated reflections on the artist’s identity (e.g. Elia Suleiman as Palestinian citizen of Israel or Simone Britton, who identifies as Arab-Israeli). To borrow Shohat’s words, “The point here is that the boundary between Israel and Palestine, which on one level would seem to constitute an irreconcilable wall-like division, is often subverted and interrogated by very complex filmic and cultural negotiations.”⁴⁹ The films discussed in the following sections thus examine the interplay of mental and physical walls as they mediate the double-sided relationship, however controversial and violent, as being foundational for the cinematic landscape of Israel-Palestine.

⁴⁶ Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 273.

⁴⁷ Dabashi, introduction to *Dreams of a Nation*, 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 273.

Walling the Land: *Lemon Tree*

Israeli director Eran Riklis's and Palestinian writer Suha Arraf's *Lemon Tree* (2008) "is set on both sides of the Green Line Border between Israel and the West Bank"⁵⁰ and tells the story of the Palestinian widow Selma Zidane, whose lemon grove is declared a "security threat"⁵¹ when the Israeli defence minister Israel Navon and his wife Mira move in next door. Selma hires lawyer Ziad to prevent the lemon grove from being uprooted, while Israel and Mira increasingly struggle to negotiate their demand for security both politically and privately. When the lemon trees are fenced off, the relationship between the neighbours rapidly deteriorates, eventually leading Selma to take the case to the Israeli Supreme Court. Mira, however, comes to identify with Selma, and thereby is confronted with her own and her husband's hypocrisy. While they publicly maintain the importance of building relationships among Israelis and Palestinians, Israel and Mira are incapable of doing so with their own neighbour. The couple becomes estranged over the dispute, as their own relationship is increasingly walled off. By taking the political issues of separation and alienation to the micro level of the personal, the film critiques the Wall as a physical but also psychological barrier that separates and alienates people. *Lemon Tree* depicts the Wall's destructive impact on a crucial bond between the people and the land, which plays an essential role in both the Israeli and the Palestinian imaginary. It further points out the ways in which this relationship is subjected to escalating Israeli surveillance and the arbitrary enforcement of a discriminating law. Overall, this demonstrates the replacement of human relationships with (self) destructive estrangement.

Lemon Tree situates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the competing claims to the land, critiquing Israel's ignorant policies and walls. The landscape of the lemon grove thereby mediates a larger politics of walling and reflects on the progressive division between Israel and Palestine. The film opens with a slow tracking shot into the lemon grove, establishing Selma's relationship to the land by focusing on the labour and care she invests in the plants that in turn provide for her. Selma's grove is contrasted with a long shot of the West Bank Wall, along which Mira and Israel's

⁵⁰ *Lemon Tree*, directed by Eran Riklis (Palestine/ Israel, 2008; Collingwood: Madman, 2009), DVD.

⁵¹ Ibid.

possessions are being transported, foreshadowing the gradual erection of the physical and mental barrier, which will separate the neighbours but also cause the death of the land. This reverses the myth of redemption, as it shows the Israeli couple detached from the lemons, which otherwise “serve as a charged metaphor for the Jewish people’s relationship with their land.”⁵² The inconsistency of the Israeli imaginary is thereby exposed and, as the film suggests, immediately erased from consciousness by means of repression/walling. As soon as the couple arrives at their new home, the secret service enters the grove and sets up a watch tower, ignoring Selma’s presence and never discussing the problem with her. According to Edward Said, this attitude is characteristic of Israel’s dealing with the Palestinians as “an inconvenient nuisance”⁵³ rather than “a population with an indissoluble bond with the land.”⁵⁴ Indeed, Selma and her worker Abu are “refused a decent place in actuality - even when they sit on the land.”⁵⁵ In turn, Selma can only defend her grove by proving her bond with the land. However, the newly erected fence prevents her from taking care of the trees, giving the authorities a reason to deny this bond.

The film suggests that the violent structure perpetuated by the Wall entails the non-recognition and erasure of the individual substantiated by an arbitrary and discriminatory law. Selma epitomizes the “absent Arab” who is caught up in a surreal confinement based on obscure regulations, in which “those in control (the authorities) and those being controlled...are trapped in the same topographical field following orders from above.”⁵⁶ This supports Sundberg’s claim that borders not only wall up people but also the law.⁵⁷ Starting with the letter Selma receives about the military’s decision to uproot the grove being written in Hebrew rather than Arabic, Selma finds herself caught up in the horrors of a bureaucratic system which does not recognize her and in which she is left without support. The political and institutional structures obliterate the individual or make use of him or her to reinstate their own institutionalized power, as when substantiated by a ‘state of emergency’ that allows for the continuous suspension of the law. For example, when Ziad assures the Supreme Court that the uprooting “does not comply with the regional

⁵² Zanger, *Place, Memory and Myth in Contemporary Israeli Cinema*, 138.

⁵³ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 8

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁶ Zanger, *Place, Memory and Myth in Contemporary Israeli Cinema*, 46.

⁵⁷ Sundberg, “Delimiting Democracy,” 53.

commander,...is wrong under international law...and is violating humanitarian values,” going so far as to quote the Geneva Convention, he is interrupted by the military lawyer, who adds, “unless so required by imperative military necessity.” This non-recognition of and by the law mirrors Selma’s journey to the Israeli Civil Administration in the West Bank, where she is told after hours of waiting that her problem is not important - a strategy seemingly aimed at the political surrender of the Palestinians. Accordingly, the Palestinian village men show little compassion or will to help her. When Selma decides to challenge the order, she relies on self-motivation and is only assisted by the outsider Ziad. This suggests that human relationships, like the soil of the plants, deteriorate through the lack of care that develops in the shadow of walls.

The political destructiveness of the Wall is made visible through the intersecting personal conflicts it creates. For example, the fictitious defence minister Israel Navon, who literally stands in for the country Israel by virtue of his political standing and name, continuously reiterates the importance of good relations with the Palestinians as well as defending the progression of the Wall. However, the conflict in his backyard exposes (both the country and the man) Israel’s inability to confront the mental barriers. This contradiction runs through Israel’s public commentaries, reducing peace talks to political accessories rather than opportunities to formulate actual goals, critiquing the country’s regressive politics. When Israel declares, “my father used to say, we will sleep quietly only when the Palestinians have hope. At any case the trees must be uprooted,” he points to the fatal inconsistencies of such politics, as well as suggesting that the country Israel has been led astray. Instead of ‘redeeming’ the land, Israel’s relationship with land and people is constructed self-consciously and functions as an artificial component of his public image. Israel’s failure to connect with his Palestinian neighbour is mirrored by his inability to bond with the land. He mindlessly ‘borrows’ lemons from the grove for his party and does not understand Selma’s outrage over the intrusion. Later, he launches a public campaign for the protection of Palestinian olive trees while insisting on the destruction of the lemon grove. These contradictions originate in Israel’s inability to acknowledge the link between his mental barriers and the physical Wall he is constructing, which in turn exposes the country’s paradoxical policies. The ‘homeland’ is destroyed rather than protected because Israel excludes human

relationships from his concept of security. At the same time Israel's relationship to his more open-minded wife is deteriorating, eventually leading her to leave him. Just like the country, the defence minister avoids acknowledging the connection between the escalating conflicts and the politics of walls. As Israel denies the relationship between land, people and Wall, he fails to create a home for himself. By extension this serves as political analogy for the country Israel's increasingly conflictual relation to the land.

The logic of violence and loss is perpetuated by ignorance; however, it can be interrupted (if not overcome) through modes of engagement and recognition. The connection that unfolds between Mira and Selma arguably fails to establish a dialogue between the two sides, but it nevertheless produces acknowledgement and empathy across fences. Mira increasingly identifies with Selma's struggle, as she participates in her neighbour's vulnerability through the violent scenes Mira observes. These moments of 'witnessing' challenge the invisibility afforded by the Wall and rupture Mira's ignorance, enabling the recognition of commonalities. Both women are isolated and feel neglected. Selma's husband is dead and Mira's is absent. They are both estranged from their children and attempt to carve out their home (Selma lives off the land and Mira is an interior designer) within the confines of aggressive male jingoism. Of course, Mira finds herself in a superior political position (the secret service protects her; the grove needs to be uprooted for her safety); however, her identification with Selma can be read as an inability to maintain Israel's 'psychological blindness'. Mira is unable to turn her eyes from the grove and Selma's confrontation with the military and feels increasingly urged to meet her neighbour. However, Talmon and Peleg argue that Mira, who represents the Israeli Left, does not communicate with the Palestinian side but only reflects on herself.⁵⁸ Exemplifying this, the authors quote a scene in which Mira approaches Selma's house but instead of talking to her neighbour, Mira encounters her own reflection in the window, which causes her hesitation and leads to the secret service's intervention.⁵⁹ Talmon and Peleg explain that Mira's failure to establish a dialogue stems from the barriers she "erects around herself."⁶⁰ However, this

⁵⁸ Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg, *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 284.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 284.

moment of self-reflexivity also leads Mira to contemplate her own and by extension her country's impediment on Palestinian livelihood.

Self-reflexivity, the film suggests, provokes an engagement with the Wall as an impediment to a peaceful future and considers alternative modes of response. Indeed, Mira develops a sense of responsibility for Selma's situation and realizes that the walls meant to protect her also work as a prison, from which she can only free herself by acknowledging her neighbour. When Mira is prevented from knocking on Selma's door by the secret service and she protests, it is made clear to her that the agents do not take orders from her but her husband. The incident causes Mira's depression, leading her to consider the larger parameters of her country's and family's history and future. Talking to Gera about children, she confesses mourning a child she never had and thus indirectly reflects the state's inability to build a future. As Mira puts it in regard to her family, "my mother always used to say, Israel needs to sort out the problems with his father before he can become one himself." This of course reflects on (the country) Israel's ongoing struggles with the trauma of the Holocaust, raising the difficult question of response and responsibility. Here the film implicitly encourages a negotiation of the past, perhaps asking whether the correct response to a memory of persecution and genocide is militant protectionism and dispossession of another people, or compassion for the Other and a recognition of (mutual) vulnerability. These questions remain crucial for Israel's and Palestine's future, whose tentative status is reflected in the absence of both Mira's and Selma's children. Mira and Israel's adopted daughter Sigi, like Selma's son Nasser, lives in Washington, signifying that the future generation has lost the connection with the land, leading them to search for a home in the West. Hence, when Mira finally appears in Court, it is foremost to acknowledge the relationship between the two sides, a relationship made possible by acknowledging the Other as the precondition of peaceful coexistence.

Lemon Tree foregrounds the claim that the competing memories and attachments to the homeland can only be reconciled through human interaction. Mira's act of acknowledging Selma's struggle by appearing in court recognizes that the Other's relationship with the land is the precondition of human and political relationships. Thus, the land connects the people to the place but also to each other. As Abu puts it to the court, "Trees are like people. They have feelings, they need to be talked to,

need tender loving care.” The uprooting of the trees is thus synonymous with the dispossession of people and the neglect of human relationships. Of course, this also foregrounds the fact that the Wall does not simply divide the land but also instantiates division between, and perhaps within, people. Unable to adhere to this logic as the basis for protection of her country, Mira appears in the Supreme Court, where Selma explains, “My trees are real. My life is real. You are already building a Wall around us isn’t that enough?” Selma perhaps simultaneously speaks for Mira, who subsequently leaves the husband who has been walling her in. With the Separation Wall now running through his garden, signifying the breakdown of human relationships, Israel has fortified and defeated himself. In the last scene of the film, he stares at the Wall while the camera pans to the other side, showing Selma equally defeated among her pruned trees. She is also looking at the Wall and thereby directly at Israel. The final image intimates that Israel’s fear of terror is ultimately destructive for both sides, as the face-to-face encounter is made impossible in this dying walled land.

Facing the Terrorist: *Paradise Now*

The Wall also needs to be understood in the context of the discourse on terror that legitimates its construction in the name of security. Within this discourse the Palestinian is subsumed to the image of the suicide bomber, an image which works to dehumanize the face as evil and to support (rather than prevent) the continuation of violence, as Judith Butler and Edward Said have both outlined. In *Paradise Now* (2005),⁶¹ director Hany Abu-Assad challenges the image of the terrorist by controversially giving “a human face to the suicide bombers.”⁶² The film thus critically examines the notion of terror as intimately linked to power and victimization, but it also experiments with the possibility of alternative resistance. *Paradise Now* envisions the last hours before the two childhood friends Said and Khaled are due to carry out a suicide attack in Tel Aviv, including their last

⁶¹ *Paradise Now*, directed by Hany Abu-Assad (Palestine, 2005; United States: Augustus Film, 2008), DVD.

The film won the Golden Globe for best foreign movie and was also nominated for an Oscar, marking the first official recognition of Palestine by the Academy.

⁶² Warner Independent Pictures, “Q and A with Hany Abu-Assad,” *Paradise Now Press Kit* (2005), 7.

moments with family and friends, the shooting of the martyr video and their reflections on their motivations and doubts. When the two eventually cross into Israel, they are discovered by soldiers and separated in the subsequent chaos. Although Said crosses back into Israel, he finds himself incapable of carrying out the act. Meanwhile, Khaled is trying to find Said in Nablus, as his absence becomes increasingly suspicious. A cat and mouse chase begins in which the two friends try to find each other, in the midst of which Suha the daughter of a martyr, with whom Said shares a growing affection, tries to prevent the act. However, when Said and Khaled finally find each other and their group, Said makes a strong claim to the leader, explaining why he wants to carry out the attack regardless, whereas Khaled finally decides to refrain from carrying it out. ‘The film ends with Said pulling the trigger in a public bus in Tel Aviv.

Paradise Now reclaims the image of the terrorist but simultaneously attempts to open up a “meaningful discussion about the real issues at hand.”⁶³ The film works to disrupt an Israeli imagined position of moral superiority and consequently has been criticised for being a one-sided, “vile, terrorist glorifying movie”⁶⁴ that attempts “to trivialize mass murder.”⁶⁵ However, the film does not condone the murder of people or legitimize the perpetration of violence; rather, it unmistakably criticizes these atrocities. Examining the point of view of the oppressed however, Abu-Assad seeks to explore the cycle of violence leading to such radical acts. The film disrupts the image of irrational terror as the mechanism that secures the victimization of the oppressor. This is important precisely because understanding a position does not equate to its legitimization, but rather opens the possibility of investigating the problem in more depth. Abu-Assad criticizes the way in which terror begets violence and also shows how it is contested from within the Palestinian community. Most importantly, the film complicates a conception of a face of terror, as epitomized in the bearded Muslim, and reiterates that terror acts are committed by human beings, whose motivations are based in complex political and personal trajectories. As Butler puts it, “certain faces must be admitted into public view.”⁶⁶ In admitting the face of the terrorist, *Paradise Now* shifts a foreclosed narrative of

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ James Bowman, “Humanized without Honor,” *The American Spectator* (April 2006), 58.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xvii.

irrational evil towards a more complex investigation of violent intimacy at the heart of the terror act, implicating both ‘sides’. However, as Butler further points out, it is in the very act of showing the human face (and thus engaging with what is particular about the face in the literal and metaphorical sense) that representation must fail.⁶⁷ In this way *Paradise Now* is not a universal legitimization of suicide bombings, but explores the possible conditions that lead to such acts.

The reproduction of Said’s face in *Paradise Now* negotiates the ambivalent image of the terrorist as part of a process of meaning production. Massad points out that ‘terror’ is an act that collapses into an identity or image controlled by the enemy; thus, both Israeli and Palestinian acts of violence have been labelled as terror.⁶⁸ Controlling the image of the terrorist assists in approving one form of violence as legitimate and denouncing the other as simply evil. This has been well understood by the Israeli forces (and the West in general), leading to an almost exclusive alignment of the image of terror with the Arab face, particularly post 9/11. *Paradise Now* complicates the image of the terrorist, utilizing Said’s face as the site of negotiation. Just before Said is recruited by Jamal, he visits a rundown photography studio in Nablus. The picture taken bears witness to Said’s devastation, displacement and apathy. Staring into the camera, his look is empty; his eyes are encircled by dark shadows and framed by an untidy face and haircut. The photo mirrors the stereotypical terrorist image; however, it also secures the ambivalence of Said’s face in relation to this category. Later we learn that the photographer specializes in both martyrs and collaborators, heroes and traitors, tragedy and elegy, thus foreshadowing Said’s own wavering position between these categories. The ambivalence is enhanced when the stereotypical face of the terrorist, which Said perfectly conveys while working as a mechanic, is juxtaposed with the clean shaven handsome appearance Said takes on to carry out the attack, which seems to transform him into a completely different person. When Said encounters his ‘new’ face in a mirror reflection, assuring himself that “you cannot alter fate, there is no other way,” he ultimately disrupts the image of the bearded terrorist. The moment is juxtaposed with Suha contemplating the photograph of the broken young man, taken only hours before. The contrast evoked complicates the function of the face as a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁸ Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Question of Palestine: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

proof of identity, instead making it subject to an equivocal process of meaning production.

The mediation of the face in *Paradise Now* introduces ways of looking at the suicide bomber but also negotiates the Palestinians' wavering between live and death. The act of violence (on both sides) is thereby closely related to the production of a media image and the elaboration of a face of terror. Throughout the film the considerable effort of undertaking the suicide act is subsumed to the reproduction of Said's and Khaled's faces. Their faces are consistently remediated through photography, the creation of posters, the martyr video(s) and the use of mirrors, producing different ways in which they can be seen. On the one hand this maintains the ambivalence of the terrorist category in its discursive construction of power relations. Or in the words of Massad, the face of terror "becomes nothing less than a projected fantasy, with each party holding up a mirror to the other so that whatever one party says reflects back on it."⁶⁹ For example, just after a Palestinian man points out that Said looks like a settler, Said makes the decision to carry out the attack while staring into a mirror. On the other hand the mediation of the face utilizes the status of the image as a foreshadowing of one's own death in order to negotiate its protagonists' wavering positions between (political) death and life. As Barthes points out, "each photograph always contains this imperious sign of ... future death,"⁷⁰ and thus these remediations of the face imply the status of the Palestinians' social death under occupation. Under such conditions the act of suicide bombing is not simply a form of killing oneself but becomes "a sign of life."⁷¹ It instigates, as Nouri Gana further points out, a "cloning of the body from its passive living dead status under occupation to an active ... living-dead motor force against the occupation."⁷² This sentiment is precisely what underlies Khaled's response to Said's doubts about the attack, when he states, "you said there was no other way; under the occupation we are already dead." In this sense, the act of suicide bombing is also a symbolic act,

⁶⁹ Massad, *The Persistence of the Question of Palestine*, 8.

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 97.

⁷¹ Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (London: Merlin, 2003), 129.

⁷² Nouri Gana, "Reel Violence: Paradise Now and the Collapse of the Spectacle" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no.1 (2008), 35.

whose meaning is negotiated via the image in an attempt to (re)gain control over life and death (on both sides).

Abu-Assad articulates a rationale of violence that undercuts the image of the terrorist as evil, while indicating a Western culpability in the creation of violent extremists. This is particularly obvious in the use of the martyr video, of which there are two instances in the film. The first is made by the group in preparation for the act and pokes fun at the iconography of the khuffyr-covered, machine gun holding terrorist, giving a dramatic speech. When Khaled records his message, the camera repeatedly fails to function, which leads him to deliver his speech less and less energetically. When the team starts to eat during the recording, Khaled is reminded of his mother, which prompts him to address her, advising her where to buy the cheapest water filters. This integrates the 'terrorist' in the everyday realm of family activity, making the image of the fanatic seem absurd. Said's video message is performed with his trademark apathy, leaving little room to understand his personal motives for the act and thus denying such videos the potential to reveal a particular rationale. Of course, this self-reflexively also casts doubt on the film's ability to do so, framing and particularizing the director's subsequent attempt to explore precisely such motives when Said gives his speech to the group leader. Addressing the camera frontally and explaining why he wants to carry out the attack, he presents the viewer with the actual martyr video of the film. Said explains what the occupation means to him, having grown up in Nablus and having experienced his father's execution for being a collaborator. The personal account reclaims the voice of the terrorist, providing a set of motivations, albeit not necessarily legitimizations, while maintaining the ambivalence inherent to such (re)mediations.

Said's speech interrupts the discourse of terror rather than terror itself by disavowing its underlying dynamics of power and providing a discomfiting rationale. This disrupts the myth of the fanatic and reveals, to borrow Massad's words, that "what the discourse on terror seeks is the erasure of power relations as the central problematic of violence."⁷³ Hence, as long as the suicide bomber remains an irrational extremist, the other side does not need to engage with its own complicity in the act. In the case of Israel/Palestine this dynamic is central to the maintenance

⁷³ Massad, *The Persistence of the Question of Palestine*, 8.

of existing power relations and ongoing global support for Israel. As Edward Said puts it, “Zionism’s sense of the world as a supporter and audience has played a considerable role”⁷⁴ in the shaping of the conflict, but also in the distortion of the reciprocity of violence. The idea that the victim also constitutes the perpetrator is sustained by the image of the ‘faceless’ terrorist; however, by addressing the audience Said exposes this structure of violence, explaining to the spectator that

if you are all alone faced with this oppression, you have to find a way to stop the injustice. They must understand that if there is no security for us, there will be none for them either. It’s not about power - their power doesn’t help them...even worse, they’ve convinced the world and themselves that they are the victims. How can that be? How can the occupier be the victim? If they take on the role of oppressor and victim, then I have no other choice than to also be a victim and a murderer as well.

This reversal of power relations and zero sum logic also exposes the imaginary of the suicide bomber who, through using the body as the last resort of absolute violence, seeks a utopian equality in death, as Khaled explains earlier to Suha. This idea is heavily contested by Suha, who insists that equality cannot be achieved by means of killing, which sustains the conflict and its injustice. This intimates that the more walls Israel builds, the less it can engage with the issues that cause a need for security, leaving it vulnerable to future attacks. As Rose explains, “suicide bombing is in itself an act of passionate identification,” and hence evokes a sense of deadly intimacy. This suggests that instead of building walls, counterterrorism needs to build relations to the enemy. To borrow Noam Chomsky words, “unless the powerful are capable of learning to respect the dignity of the victims, impassable barriers will remain, and the world will be doomed to violence, cruelty and bitter suffering.”⁷⁵ The Wall is thus exposed as providing a false sense of security while preventing peaceful solutions – a notion highlighted by the fact that Said crosses the fence no less than five times throughout the movie. While the psychological stereotypes supporting such fences are less porous than their physical counterparts, they must be challenged by countering the exclusionary politics that maintain structures of violence and their accompanying images.

⁷⁴ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 20.

⁷⁵ Noam Chomsky, “Violence and Dignity: Reflections on the Middle East,” *Edward W Said Lecture*, 18 March 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ0VzkahoGE> (accessed: 15 May 2013).

Mapping the Personal: The Cinema of Elia Suleiman

The films of Elia Suleiman engage, expose and destabilize the violent structures of the status quo and, despite the director's claim that he has "absolutely no imagination [about what to] do with the Wall,"⁷⁶ his films pay witness to the traumatic and claustrophobic ferocities of a walled state. Regarding cinema as a possible form of resistance, Elia Suleiman engages with the mundane and absurd in order to visualize the space of Israel-Palestine, articulating the intersection of the private and the political as a form of comical choreography. Suleiman's work speaks of displacement by laying bare the ways in which the structures of the political encroach on the spaces of the private, and even on the unconscious of what he calls "estimated Palestine."⁷⁷ In this way, Suleiman's cinema expresses the 'psychological occupation'⁷⁸ that troubles the walled and traumatized unconscious, but also disavows it by exploring non-linear means of representation, which convey the absurdity of oppression as a form of exaggerated reality. Suleiman privileges the visual over the verbal and thereby brings the trauma of Palestinian dispossession and imprisonment to the surface of the everyday. His trademark deconstruction of narrative works to disrupt ideas of finality and truth, particularly in their alignment with forms of nationalism, in favour of multiple trajectories of identification. The image in his cinema is thus decentred and destabilized, communicating the absence of Palestine through means of multiplicity, humour and fantasy.

Suleiman engages fragments of the everyday in order to negotiate the psychological implications of an occupied and walled Palestine. His acclaimed Israel-Palestine trilogy which consists of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), *Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain* (2002)⁷⁹ and *The Time that Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee* (2009),⁸⁰ utilizes multi-directionality to reflect on a particular political climate in its intersection with the private spaces of the director's family

⁷⁶ Simone Britton and Elia Suleiman, "Wall-Mur," *The European Graduate School*, 7 May 2005, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/elia-suleiman/videos/wall-mur/> (accessed 15 May 2013).

⁷⁷ *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, directed by Elia Suleiman (1996; Jerusalem, Israel: Kino International 2005), DVD.

⁷⁸ Elia Suleiman, "The Occupation (and Life) through an Absurdist Lens," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2003), 70.

⁷⁹ *Divine Intervention*, directed by Elia Suleiman (Palestine/Israel, 2002; New York: Artificial Eye, 2003), DVD.

⁸⁰ *The Time That Remains*, directed by Elia Suleiman (Palestine/Israel, 2009; United States: IFC Films, 2012), DVD.

and immediate environment. The films work to screen through a traumatic absence of Palestine. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* combines a personal with a political diary in order to express the structural interventions that lead to stagnation and helplessness, transcribing an unbearable sense of passivity and waiting as characteristic of the ambivalence of Israeli-Palestinian existence. Because it received Israeli funding and lacks nationalistic overtones, the film was boycotted by the Arab world, leading critics to accuse Suleiman of “treason, Zionism and cooperation with the enemy.”⁸¹ The next film in the trilogy, *Divine Intervention*, allows the tension built up in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* to erupt in more explicit depictions of violence, with “all hell breaking loose,”⁸² as Suleiman describes it himself. The film most notably engages fantasies of (female) empowerment and liberation, providing a sense of catharsis. *Divine Intervention* was received enthusiastically around the world, but its submission to the Oscars was rejected on the grounds that “Palestine is not a country,”⁸³ only to later receive the Judges’ Choice Award in the 2002 Cannes Festival. Finally, *The Time that Remains* unveils the traumatic core of Palestine’s confined (non)existence. Using his father’s diaries, Suleiman gives an account of the conflict’s development, or as the director suggests, its regression, starting with the crucial envisioning of the 1948 foundation of the state of Israel - the unrepresentable traumatic moment of al Nabka. The film thereby visualizes the return of the repressed, depicting the loss of the homeland through the lens of family history. Hence, the trilogy can be read as a form of ‘working through’ the political trauma of Palestine by engaging personal trajectories. Exploring the mundane and domestic, Suleiman uncovers the violent structures of political and psychological occupation, projecting the walled existence of Palestine.

Suleiman’s films work as a form of resistance through witnessing. In all of his movies Suleiman appears as the silent expressionless character E.S. who connects the sequences through his vigilant presence. E.S is an observer, through whom the viewpoint of the film unfolds, although he often cannot see properly or is ignored by

⁸¹ Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Memory and Trauma* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 41.

⁸² Hamid Dabashi, “In Praise of Frivolity: On the Cinema of Elia Suleiman,” in *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (London: Verso, 2006), 136.

⁸³ Sabah Haider, “Palestine already exists on Film,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2010, <http://mondediplo.com/2010/03/16palestinecinema> (accessed: 13 May 2013).

other characters. E.S. is the ‘absent’ witness, as Getz and Khleifi point out,⁸⁴ whose powers are subsumed to the structures he interrogates with his look, but whose silent and relentless testimony nevertheless works to destabilize these structures.⁸⁵ As Suleiman put it in an interview, “silence is very political...[it] can destabilize a certain microcosm of power.”⁸⁶ Silence expresses a reluctance to communicate within the structure of the status quo and thereby circumvents existing unequal power relations, even if this means that E.S. is reduced to a ghost-like existence. Furthermore, silence challenges the arbitrariness of power by reinserting the Palestinian witness into an environment which subjugates Palestine’s presence. This idea is enhanced insofar as E.S. does not invite the viewer’s identification precisely because he remains mute and expressionless; rather, he puts the spectator in a position of witnessing E.S. witnessing. E.S., thereby enables a contemplation of our own (distanced) positioning in the image and political frame. He reiterates his own absence and brings it to the forefront of perception, as famously staged in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* when we witness E.S. witnessing a police raid in his own home, during the course of which the policemen seemingly remain oblivious to his presence.⁸⁷ Reporting on the incident, the police list all the items in the house carefully, before ending the call with the statement, “at last a guy in a pyjama, over,” thereby cynically testifying to their ignorance of a Palestinian presence, objectifying E.S. existence and rendering him utterly irrelevant. However, through his look E.S. lays bare the structures of the political imaginary in which he does not exist, utilizing cinema as a form of resistance and applying Edward Said’s claim that “vision and recognition in this Palestinian way dialectically answer Zionist blindness.”⁸⁸ E.S.’s point of view thus unfolds the reality of the film as experienced by the director; that is, it unfolds the Israeli imaginary imposed on Palestinians as absurd and performative.

Drawing on the obscenity of performance, the controversial intervention made by Suleiman’s cinema is the application of humour to the harsh reality of occupation and conflict. The director disrupts genre expectations but is also capable of re-

⁸⁴ Getz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 175-176.

⁸⁵ Dabashi, “In Praise of Frivolity,” 158.

⁸⁶ Suleiman, “The Occupation (and Life) through an Absurdist Lens,” 68.

⁸⁷ Haim Bresheeth, “A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman’s ‘Chronicle of a

Disappearance” *The Journal of Cinema and Media* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2002), 81.

⁸⁸ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 180.

articulating the unspoken dynamics of power. The joke is embedded in and draws on a political choreography, uncovering the underlying structure of violence, making it visible in a scene, and thus accessible as a critical moment. On the one hand, this works by utilizing enjoyment as a form of resistance and catharsis, whereby laughing at the things one is not supposed to laugh at disrupts the rigidity of the existing power structure. Rancière reminds us that “shifting the generic frame can constitute a political act,”⁸⁹ precisely because “the world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words and images.”⁹⁰ By interrogating the situation with humour, Suleiman thus contests the existing division between those who have reason for laughter and those who are excluded from it by virtue of their dehumanization. Humour and laughter thereby constitute a humanizing, yet defiant act in the face of injustice. As Suleiman puts it, “There is something not subversive per se but resistant about humour.”⁹¹ However, humour also maintains the tragedy of the situation. It carries the unspoken registers of suffering and exclusion with it, precisely because its function is to overcome these categories while simultaneously exposing them. Dabashi explains that Suleiman creates “the precise critical moment when the depth of tragedy mutates into the height of comedy”⁹² and then “remembers the dark dread at the heart,”⁹³ echoing the Freudian idea that the joke always borders on the socially unspeakable.⁹⁴ For example, in *Divine Intervention*, after spending the night observing a sadistic soldier at the checkpoint, E.S. begins a staring contest with the settler in the car next to him. His attempt is assisted by sunglasses and a song working to build tension, as E.S. captures the settler by means of his look. Contrasted with this demonstration of antiquated male competitiveness, the music turns into a female voice singing the lyrics “I put a spell on you, because you’re mine” at the moment the settler returns the look and accepts the challenge; E.S.’s attempt to display overt masculinity is thus undercut, and the confrontation is re-read as simultaneously aggressive and flirtatious. As the lights turn green, the two keep staring (instead of racing), attesting to the impotence of the challenge and the

⁸⁹ Kristin Ross, “Introduction on Jacques Rancière,” *Art Forum* (March 2007), 254-255.

⁹⁰ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 263.

⁹¹ Elia Suleiman, “Interview with Elia Suleiman,” *Divine Intervention DVD* (France/Palestine: Artificial Eye, 2002).

⁹² Dabashi, “In Praise of Frivolity,” 135.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Jacqueline Rose, *Proust Among the Nations: From Dreyfus to the Middle East* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.), 180.

inability to move forward, ridiculing the immovable dynamics of chauvinistic nationalism. The situation is drawn out to absurd length without providing any cathartic result. In this way Suleiman reveals a sense of entrapment, but further attests to the impossibility for the Palestinian to challenge the Israeli face-to-face as he fails to either match or change the connection between male heterosexuality and aggressive nationalism epitomized in the unmovable settler. The joke thus, reveals the obscenity inherent to the existing structure of power and its associated walls by addressing it through an absurd scene.

Suleiman is interested in the ways in which the absurdity of the occupation shapes the ordinariness of everyday life. His films utilize the intimacy of the personal as the locus for identity negotiation. The private space marks the focus of Suleiman's cinema and is explored as a means of apprehending the political rather than simply escaping it. Starting from the cynical 'premise' that "Palestine does not exist,"⁹⁵ as famously exclaimed by Edward Said and reiterated by Suleiman in various contexts,⁹⁶ the director turns to the intimate realm in order to negotiate a Palestinian absence. Since neither the homeland nor the waning concept of Palestinian identity 'exist', even while they are defined by this absence, 'Palestine' has to be explored by means of the domestic and the personal. Suleiman's private spaces (which are often the director's own) are "divided, disjointed, apprehended only bit by bit,"⁹⁷ offering contradictory scenes of (a)politicized existence. For example, E.S.'s parents, Fuad and Nazira, are often shown in their routinized activities, such as checking the mail or eating breakfast. On various occasions they are seen resting and sleeping or staring out of the window, disengaged and (e)motionless, "waiting like the rest of Palestine,"⁹⁸ as Haim Bresheeth puts it. The whole of Nazareth (Suleiman's hometown) seems to be trapped in violent boredom and aggressive passivity. The camera frame remains completely static in these scenes and often provides the spectator with a disadvantaged point of view.⁹⁹ The image works like a prison that hinders movement and agency, framing or walling the daily routines of the protagonists. Thus, Suleiman's everyday life expresses the dynamics of a walled

⁹⁵ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 5.

⁹⁶ E.g. Suleiman, "The Cinema of Nowhere," 96.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹⁸ Bresheeth, "A Symphony of Absence," 74.

⁹⁹ Linda Mokdad, "The Reluctance to Narrate: Elia Suleiman's Chronicle of a Disappearance and Divine Intervention," in *Storytelling in World Cinema Volume One: Forms*, ed. Lina Khatib (London: Wallflower press, 2012), 199.

existence, reaching into the domestic, confining and partitioning the private space, suggesting that the political emerges into the private in the form of a choreographed pervasiveness, invisible yet prevalent.

The political infiltrates the private and provokes an internalization of the power structures because the psychological occupation “has seeped into the mind and body”¹⁰⁰ as Remaileh explains. Indeed, the political can blend in so well that politics appear irrelevant or even remain unrecognized. For example, when E.S.’s father feeds his bird in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, the radio brings the political back into the private space; however, the commentators discuss the war in Bosnia rather than the events in Israel-Palestine. Hence, political violence subtly leaks into the private but, just like trauma, is articulated only in relation to another time or space. This renders the political inescapable but also suggests that a retreat into the private can provide a commentary on the political prevalence of confinement, exploring its effectiveness. In *The Time That Remains* such a retreat recounts the immediate reaction of Nazareth’s inhabitants to Israel’s declaration of independence in 1948. As one of Fuad’s friends puts it, “My family needs me; the country is lost.” As has been discussed, such a separation between the private and the political is at best delusional, leading to a domestic repression of the social oppression.

Political deterioration and misdirected violence erupt as the symptoms of social and domestic repression. For example, *The Time that Remains* chronicles a continuous “regression of the status quo”¹⁰¹ in correspondence with the movement from active to inert resistance. Since the political frame cannot be changed and the dominant powers remain unmovable, the inhabitants of Palestine eventually “unleash their frustration against each other.”¹⁰² Violence seems to erupt as an absurd and irrelevant act of self-defeat or a non-sequitur, whose meaning is transferred onto another context. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* we repeatedly see cars stopping in front of a café. Each of the drivers subsequently attempts to beat his passenger, but is prevented from doing so by the men in the café. Similarly, in *Divine Intervention* we see a group of neighbours involved in an extended beating, shooting and finally burning of what turns out to be a snake. Such scenes pay witness to a collectively

¹⁰⁰ Refqua Abu-Remaileh, “Palestinian Anti-Narratives in the Films of Elia Suleiman,” *Arab Media and Society* issue 5 (Spring 2008), 2.

¹⁰¹ Haider, “A Different Kind of Occupation”

¹⁰² Suleiman, “Interview with Elia Suleiman”

built-up, inert tension that is epitomized in the image of the pressure cooker of *Divine Intervention's* final shot. In *The Time That Remains* Suleiman eventually shifts his lens and lays bare the structures of political confinement Palestinians are subjected to. We see a Palestinian man taking out the garbage while talking on the phone. The man remains seemingly oblivious to the long gun barrel of a tank directly next to him, which follows his every move. The invisible violence of the occupation is brought to the forefront and at the same time it is obliterated or envisioned as belonging to the unconscious and thus has to be projected as a fantasy scene.

Political confinement emerges as 'another scene' in the setting of private routines, recovering the invisible oppression from the depth of the unconscious. Suleiman's cinematic unconscious articulates itself by evoking a political choreography that has been described as a stylistic "Tourette syndrome,"¹⁰³ because it creates the scene by which "the subconscious begins to speak its anxiety out loud with no control."¹⁰⁴ For instance Suleiman negotiates the notion that the two sides are inseparably interlocked in the conflict, to the point where the Palestinian psyche lives under occupation of a trauma or "a foreign body" as Freud would say. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* Suleiman exemplarily creates a scene which he entitles "The hidden conscious of estimated Palestine," designed spatially as a basement at the centre of which there is a chair in the colours of the Palestinian flag. We see the female lead Adan taking a seat. While watching a group of Arab men performing a traditional *dapke* dance on an old TV screen, she sings a traditional Jewish song about gazing towards Zion, which works perfectly in sync with the Arab dance. The scene has been read as "a powerful statement on shared culture between Arabs and Israelis"¹⁰⁵; however, it also lends itself to Freud's idea that we are indeed most other at the point of our greatest intimacy, or as Rose puts it, "we are peopled by others"¹⁰⁶ in a way that Butler describes as "not only persecuted but besieged, occupied."¹⁰⁷ Thus, in this scene the obscenity of the Wall is manifested because, as Bresheeth points out, "the two nations are ... mortally locked in a struggle around boundaries, in

¹⁰³ Dabashi, "In Praise of Frivolity," 142.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 131.

¹⁰⁶ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 89.

which the subtext is a struggle about identity,”¹⁰⁸ constituting the formation of the subject. Hence, where the political is inescapable in the private sphere, it leads to psychological confinement. This is further acknowledged in *The Time That Remains* when E.S. pole-vaults the separation barrier in an attempt to escape the political absurdity of Ramallah, only to land in the obscene reality of his life in Israel. Neither the private, nor the political or even the imaginary realm provides an exit from the walled reality.

Affective relief however, is possible on the level of fantasy. While the fantasy scenes in Suleiman’s cinema highlights the absurdity of the occupation and its repressed realities, they also provide a sense of absurd catharsis. As Freud explains in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, in order to deal with trauma, its image needs to be obscured. Echoing Freud’s notion of the dream, Suleiman utilizes fantasy scenes in which a strong sense of wish fulfilment drives the dream-thought or cinematic image. In this sense the jump over the Wall not only expresses the impossibility of a utopian escape, but also the wish to overcome the Wall that confines everyday life. Moreover, the fantasy scenario enables a move from passivity and impotence to action and empowerment, which is experienced affectively. As Suleiman explains, “there is an activity, even if it’s in the fantasy,”¹⁰⁹ and thereby the fantasy scenario pushes the viewer beyond the inert space. In this way Suleiman utilizes fantasy as the cathartic moment of communal liberation from the tension and claustrophobia sustained by the political and psychological walls of the occupation. This occurs in *Divine Intervention*, for example, in which we see E.S. causing a tank to explode by simply throwing an apricot pit at it, or we witness his girlfriend appearing as a Palestinian ninja eliminating a special unit of the Israeli military. In another surreal sequence we see the woman crossing a checkpoint at gunpoint, staging an empowering catwalk in which she seems to literally make the watchtower fall apart by virtue of her confidence. To Suleiman these forms of fantastical empowerment provide a critical reversal of the absurdity of reality but they also work as a means of hope. Fantasy, used as the tool of oppression, can also become the tool of liberation. As Suleiman states in a conversation with documentary filmmaker Simone Britton, “reality is only reality and it can be false,”¹¹⁰ implying that the same may hold for

¹⁰⁸ Bresheeth, “A Symphony of Absence,” 72.

¹⁰⁹ Suleiman, “The Occupation (and Life) through an Absurdist Lens,” 65.

¹¹⁰ Britton and Suleiman, “Wall-Mur”

fiction and fantasy. This challenges the effectiveness of Zionist fantasy and provides a cinematic experience of confidence for the Palestinians. The real and the fantastical are interrelated, evoking reality's own fictitiousness while encouraging an affective 'redistribution of the sensible'.

Stranger than Fiction: Documentaries on the Wall

The fictitiousness of the everyday is sustained by a sense of traumatic realism, which is often recorded through documentary. Documentaries engaging the realities of Israel-Palestine tend to work as forms of testimonial to the unrepresentable – the structural violence and silent suffering that subtends the everyday. These films often explore a point of view, but they constitute an always unfinished document that seeks to reveal and organize the repetitive nature of violence. Thereby documentaries enable a form of resistance and mobilization, and are often considered a vital part of political activism, paying witness to injustices and conflicts erupting in the walled space but also protecting activists in court and thereby assisting their struggles. Most notably, documentaries such as *Budrus* (2009),¹¹¹ *Five Broken Cameras* (2011)¹¹² and *Wall* (2004)¹¹³ investigate Palestinian existence and resistance, by focusing on the ordinary people who deal with the occupation. This intersection between the personal and the political opens up a possibility of understanding the psychological implications of the Wall and testify to the violence of a walled politics. *Budrus* (2009), *Five Broken Cameras* (2011) and *Wall* (2004) all utilize the documentary as a form of activism, negotiating the construction of the West Bank separation barrier by depicting the traumatic effects on the people and the devastating implications for the land through which it cuts.

All three films attest to the absurdity of the Wall and work against its silent acceptance or unseen pervasiveness, producing knowledge about its effects and mobilizing solidarity among its victims and critics. *Budrus* chronicles the successful non-violent protest of a village in danger of losing its land and olive trees to the

¹¹¹ *Budrus*, directed by Julia Bacha (Israel/ Palestine, 2009; Washington D.C.: Arab Film Distribution, 2011), DVD.

¹¹² *Five Broken Cameras*, directed by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi (Palestine/Israel, 2011; New York: Kino Lorber, 2012), DVD.

¹¹³ *Wall*, directed by Simone Britton (France/ Israel, 2004; New York: Artificial Eye, 2004), DVD.

Wall. The film focuses on political negotiation via peaceful means, attempting to recount both the villagers' as well as the soldiers' 'side'. Acknowledging the unusual relationships between Israeli and Palestinian activists on the one hand and between Fatah and Hamas leaders on the other, the film promotes reconciliation. Furthermore, it places a special emphasis on the role of women in non-violent protest in an attempt to challenge dominant stereotypes and imagery of violence as circulated by the media. Although dealing with an almost identical issue in the village of Bil'in, the Oscar-nominated *Five Broken Cameras* insists on the point of view recorded by farmer Emad Burnat (although the material is narrativized by Israeli filmmaker Guy Davidi). Unlike *Budrus*, this film places a particular emphasis on the violence evoked by the repetitive frustrations, humiliations and invasions that mark the on-going struggle of the village against the Wall. Finally, Simone Britton's *Wall* explores the way in which the construction obscures relationships between people and thereby ultimately works against a productive future for both sides. Britton's film is an attempt to screen the Wall in its full height so it can be seen in all its terror, thus marking a fierce reinstatement of its visibility. Evoking this idea literally, Britton screened her film on the concrete of the barrier in 2004. The screening re-constructed the Wall's narrative on the very surface cementing it, and, in the course, exposed the Wall's symptomatic obscuring of the relationships intimately linked at the core of the conflict it claims to solve. Indeed, all three films have been screened to their relevant communities, in order to boost morale and encourage debate. This foregrounds that the Wall as a subject of documentary does not simply record the obstruction's particular impact, but also reorganizes the personal stories of people on either side. As a narrative device the Wall can thus become a tool in the struggle against the walled state.

All three documentaries focus on the barrier's construction impeding on everyday life and make visible the politics of the Wall's changing route. In this context Eyal Weizman points out that the West Bank separation barrier works like a "seismograph of political and legal battles"¹¹⁴ and thus provides a visible indication or "micro structure of the conflicts that saturate its environment,"¹¹⁵ as depicted in the personal accounts of people who voice their stories in these films. Furthermore,

¹¹⁴ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

the mediation of the Wall demonstrates the clash between the political, the legal and the private realm. This clash governs the dynamic of the struggles that determine the Wall's route and is reflected in the way in which activists challenge the Wall politically through protests and legally with the help of lawyers. However, both forms of resistance originate in the Wall's intrusion of the private sphere, as reflected in nightly home raids by the military in *Five Broken Cameras*, the loss of land in *Budrus* and the breakdown of personal relationships in *Wall*. The films thereby reinstate the relation between Wall and totalitarianism, familiar from the example in Berlin. Epitomizing Arendt's equation of "walls with law and order,"¹¹⁶ the examples demonstrate how such order is misread or abused. The films depict how the politics of separation and occupation "erupt into Palestinian living rooms, bursting in through the walls"¹¹⁷ at any given moment. This evokes the circular dynamic of social protest and military intrusion, particularly that taking place in Emad's village Bil'in and the neighbouring Budrus.

Julia Bacha's *Budrus* chronicles the idea of breaking through walls and shifting them physically and mentally by focusing on peaceful protest. While depicting a collective attempt to shift the Wall's route, the film strives to break down the established stereotypes and categories of 'us' vs. 'them'. Thereby *Budrus* implicitly criticizes the media's focus on violence as a means of feeding back into the circular logic of the conflict. Such a focus is exemplified when Aljazeera withdraws its media attention from a pending protest, after the villagers decide to postpone confrontation with the soldiers in order to protect their children. Foregrounding non-violence and balanced peace reporting, however, the film becomes an advocate of peaceful journalism¹¹⁸ as conceptualized by Galtung and a tool in the challenges to the existing media economy. This is reflected in the film's simultaneous engagement of the Palestinian leader Ayed Morrar, his daughter Iltezam, Israeli activist Kobi Snitz, Yasemine Levy, a squad commander of the Israeli Border Police and Doron Spielman, the spokesman of the Israeli Army. Negotiating these different perspectives, the film shifts the walls of the conflict from difference in nationality to

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 210.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁸ Peace-journalism is a collection of principles aimed at progressing a journalism that promotes peace rather than war and conflict, by shifting the focus, depth and central questions of reporting. It was originally conceptualized by peace-researcher Johan Galtung. For more details see Johan Galtung and Charles Webel, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

difference in perception of the Wall/law, vacillating between legitimate necessity and unjust obstruction. This opens up the possibility of peaceful coexistence while re-narrating the core of the conflict, as reflected in the image of the soldiers facing the protesters who comprise both Palestinians and Israelis. The shot divides the line of protesters and the military with a small stone Wall, and thereby suggests that the separation evoked by the barrier is not simply between Israelis and Palestinians but more overtly between a military force and the ordinary people. As Iltezam explains, “not all of them are soldiers. They don’t really hate us,” thus breaking with the preconception of ‘us’ and ‘them’. *Budrus* exemplifies successful non-violent protest, with the village securing 95% of its land and trees in the end, despite the Israeli Army denying that the rerouting of the Wall can be attributed to the protest. The film thus uncovers alternative means of resistance and advocates the dismantling of mental walls to open up new strategies that can resist the physical Wall.

Challenging mental barriers both within a Western and Arabic imaginary, *Budrus* foregrounds the success of non-violent protest as largely enabled by the females of the village. The film thus breaks with the stereotype of the silent oppressed Arab woman and explores the positive roles women can play within popular resistance. When Ayed’s 16 year-old daughter Iltezam realizes that only men are attending the demonstrations, she organizes Budrus’s women to join in. Whereas the conflict is predominantly mediated as a violent dispute between (male) stone throwers and soldiers, the women in Budrus reclaim their progressive roles in the struggle for peace. The film critically reinserts them into the picture. For example, gathering before a protest, the women are filmed almost secretly from below and through the frame of a broken TV screen, whereby their absence from the media is at once addressed and challenged. The presence of Budrus’ women works as a hindrance to the escalation of violence, although they do not ultimately prevent it from happening. As Iltezam puts it, “I saw the men trying to push the soldiers and none of them could do that. But I think the girls could do it.” Her statement is juxtaposed with images of women pushing back an army jeep and confronting the soldiers. At one point Iltezam, ignored by the soldiers, finds herself face to face with a bulldozer and decides to block it from tearing down an olive tree by jumping in front of the giant machine. The act forces the bulldozer out. However, the scene uncannily echoes the story of American activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed by an Israeli

bulldozer under similar conditions in 2003. Hence, the scenes evolving in *Budrus* also serve a greater narrative of resistance, meant to inspire peaceful activism and referencing other non-violent struggles such as the protests in Bil'in, which is the setting for the Oscar nominated film *Five Broken Cameras*.

Although *Five Broken Cameras* deals with similar issues as *Budrus*, it utilizes a succinct point of view through the eyes of farmer Emad Burnat and his five cameras chronicling the protest. Thereby the film puts a greater emphasis on the personal trauma evoked by the Wall. Documentary in this instance becomes a form of activism as the act of filming marks a way for Emad to participate in the demonstrations. The footage was originally captured for news agencies or to be used as evidence in court. Increasingly however, Emad's filming becomes a way of dealing with the endless circle of violence, particularly when the Israeli army fences off approximately 500 acres of the village's land in order to 'protect' a nearby settlement. The resulting film, in which Burnat collaborated with Israeli filmmaker Davidi, depicts the village's struggle over their land and their engagement with creative forms of protest in the face of an overpowering might. As the main such form, the camera becomes a shield to Emad that helps him distance himself from the traumatic events surrounding him and provides him with a sense of mastery. "When I film I feel like the camera protects me," he states, alluding to the workings of trauma and the distance victims experience when the damaging event unfolds in "a cinematic way."¹¹⁹ This is particularly obvious when Emad's house becomes the object of a Kafkaesque night-raid during which he is told by a soldier that his home has been declared "a military zone," and he is thus violating the order by being on the premises. Emad helplessly confronts the surreal moment with insistent recording, as if to ensure a sense of control. Thus, filming in *Five Broken Cameras* is not only aligned with activism but also marks a succinct way of dealing with the trauma of violence; or as Emad puts it, "I film to heal." Unlike *Budrus*, *Five Broken Cameras* thus focuses on the traumatic violence the village is exposed to and the anger that results, emphasizing the difficulty of using non-violent techniques in what is essentially a violent struggle.

¹¹⁹ Meares, *Intimacy and Alienation*, 2.

The structural violence enabled by the Wall is depicted as intimate terror, precisely because it occurs at the intersection between the personal and the political, between the inhabitants of Bil'in and the ideologies maintained by the Wall. Underlining this, Davidi structures the narrative according to the development of Emad's youngest son, Gibreel, whose birth not only marks the reason why Emad gets a camera, but also coincides with the beginning of the contentious construction. Davidi explains that the interconnection between Gibreel's life and the protest allows for a depiction of the repetitive nature of violence under the occupation, in which a sense of progression is only achieved by moving "from the intimate scenes to the external events."¹²⁰ Otherwise, Davidi provocatively maintains, the occupation's "violence is boring,"¹²¹ precisely because it is maintained by endless repetition and a subtle breaking of motivation and will. Hence, Gibreel's on-screen development and birthday parties correspond to an increasing tension between soldiers and villagers, while also reinstating the Wall's uncomfortable pervasiveness in the everyday reality of the little boy. When Emad documents Gibreel's first words, we hear him saying "jidar!" (Wall) and "jesh" (army). Gibreel stands in for a future generation, whose images of the other side are reduced to an experience of the army that confiscates 'his' land against the backdrop of a giant Wall. He furiously explains this at the age of four while we watch him marching at a protest. The suggestion that such tactics breed future anger and potential violence is escalated when Gibreel's (and Emad's) grown-up friend Phil is killed by a grenade and the little boy subsequently asks his father why he does not in turn kill the soldiers. Davidi here points to a (potential) future of violence created by the Wall, despite the fact that after five years the village achieves a minor rerouting of the construction. That this does not necessarily erase the experience of the children is uncomfortably echoed in one of the last scenes, when Gibreel confidently walks up to the concrete Wall and signs it with his name.

Simone Britton's film *Wall* depicts the daily obscenities of the Wall, further investigating the psychological effects that result from a loss of relationality and a submission to fear. Britton's film attempts to show how repression turns into oppression, which is ultimately also traumatic for the perpetrator. The film intimates

¹²⁰ Toby Miller, "Five Broken Cameras: Interview with Guy Davidi," *Take One*, 4 November 2012, <http://www.takeonecuff.com/2012/5-broken-cameras-guy-davidi-interview> (accessed: 5 March 2013).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

the negative psychological effects for the Israeli side and explores the consequences of ‘walling in’ one’s identity. In a conversation with Elia Suleiman, she asserts that “when trauma is very strong, you feel comfortable in it,”¹²² a dynamic she seeks to challenge by making sure the Wall is seen, and exploring its destruction of a fundamental relationship to the other side. Similarly to *Five Broken Cameras*, *Wall* starts off by exposing these effects on the younger generation, this time on the Israeli side. The opening of the film is a long tracking shot along colourful images on the Israeli side of the Wall, while a conversation between the filmmaker and two children evolves. The children (like Gibreel) are unable to recall a moment before the Wall was there. When asked about the Wall’s meaning, one of the children explains that “they shoot Arabs from here,” a claim interrupted by the other child’s assertion, “No, they shot us, so we hide behind the Wall.” The children then admit that they were initially afraid of the team, thinking they were Arabs and their cameras weapons, thus attesting to the fear that governs life behind a Wall. The conversations, along with the images of the painted concrete, establish the full weight of the Wall in the physical and psychological sense. However, Britton, who identifies as both Jewish and Arab, subverts the ‘child-like’ simplicity of divisions into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ when she asks the children to tell her how to identify an Arab. The children fail to explain how one distinguishes an Arab from a Jew, thus highlighting the sense that the two ‘sides’ are inherently connected despite the Wall. The scene reinstates the irrelevance of the stereotype and echoes the intimate violence of *Paradise Now*. However, with reference to her own bicultural identity, Britton concludes that the Wall visualizes “a fear of integrating the region; of becoming part of it psychologically.” *Wall* suggests that the barrier’s obscuring of a relationship with the Other eventually also cuts through the self and cements a fear that arises from one’s own capacity to hurt or to be hurt.

Wall documents the act of building up concrete as a means of reinforcing an established narrative of unequal power, which is simultaneously undercut by the personal experiences that evolve along the Wall. The physical construction is carefully envisioned through a tracking shot of the landscape, during which concrete blocks systematically obscure the camera’s view. In a way, the scene imagines the view of Selma as she unknowingly stares at Israel at the end of *Lemon Tree* and

¹²² Britton and Suleiman, “Wall-Mur”

resonates with the struggles in Budrus and Bil'in. Exploring these microcosms further, Britton's camera collects the diverse impressions and thoughts of the people living in the Wall's immediate proximity. The interviews range from expressions of fear to calls for peaceful co-existence, and challenge the unitary and decidedly unproblematic narrative simultaneously 'constructed' by Amos Yaron, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Defence. As he unfolds the political narrative of security and defence from terrorists, the stories Britton collects render the construction increasingly absurd in its effect of separating and alienating people from each other. This absurdity is revealed as inherent to the power relations that sustain the Wall as a narrative and thereby also attest to the reality of Suleiman's ludicrous choreographies. For example, we see Palestinians building the Wall and erecting the air-conditioned towers that are ruining their lives. The images are in slow motion, mirroring the absurd stagnation while also showing attempts to reach the other side. We see Palestinians crossing through cracks in the Wall and an Israeli trying to meet up with his Palestinian neighbouring village. In this way the narrative undercuts separation, creating a powerful image of resistance to a walled identity at the seam between these opposite views.

Reflections

The cinema of Israel-Palestine negotiates competing national imaginaries and self-reflexively explores the traumatic relationship at the core of its dreamscape. While primarily concerned with a projection of the homeland, cinema reveals that the conflict is fought through visual means and heavily relies on the creation of powerful narratives and fantasies. Similarly, the Wall as a screen (and on screen) plays a significant role in the negotiation of the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy, maintaining the parameters of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence as well as reality and fiction. The organization of Israel-Palestine's visual domain, as well as the challenging of the dominant fiction it produces, is thus primarily concerned with laying bare how a politics of avoidance evokes the breakdown of human relationships, the effacement of the Other and the occupation of the intimate. Engaging these trajectories, the films under discussion show that the problem of territorial and political security is "not simply a case of Palestinians crossing the

border but of borders crossing them,”¹²³ in both the physical and psychological sense. Moreover, the films suggest that the repression necessary to erase the Other not only walls in Palestine but simultaneously imprisons Israel in a painful past. This engages the unconscious undercurrents of the conflict, revealing the deadly intimacy working at its core and negotiating the unequal power relations that sustain the violent relationship.

By projecting these dynamics onto the screen, political films encourage Edward Said’s point that the two sides, despite being locked in “fierce conflict,”¹²⁴ are “fundamentally reconcilable if both peoples make the attempt to see each other within a common historical perspective.”¹²⁵ Despite their different emphasis, the films under discussion reinstate, negotiate and ultimately challenge the physical and psychological Wall. This privileges encounter over stagnation, or, as Said put it, “better fully acknowledge[s] conflict than hidden and unstated fears, rigidly theologized fantasies about the Other.”¹²⁶ By bringing such fears and fantasies to the forefront of investigation, cinema seeks to bring the Wall into full view and enables ‘a crack’ in the barriers that sustain the political status quo.

¹²³ Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 288.

¹²⁴ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 232.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 6

The Art of Encounter: Artists at the West Bank Barrier

The Wall in Palestine appears not only as a concrete obstruction that divides and hides people; it also works as a symptom of divisive politics capable of rendering visible the ideological forces that have come to create it. The importance of the ideological function is brought to the surface precisely at the point of the Wall's practical "inefficacy."¹ Despite the Wall's official function as a security barrier meant to prevent attacks from Palestinians, Brown points out that the Wall "blocks clear surveillance and the access needed for subduing armed challenges."² Furthermore, the Wall "has not stopped Palestinian violence or hostility, only altered Palestinian tactics and technology,"³ and has "exacerbated frustration and rage at Israeli domination,"⁴ as Brown explains. Rather than exercising a pragmatic (physical) protection, the Israeli Wall more pressingly must be considered as a psychological shield, working as a symptom of the traumatic divisions it seeks to efface. As Freud points out, "a symptom arises where the repressed and the repressing thought can come together in the fulfilment of a wish,"⁵ echoing the function of the Wall to maintain Israel's political security by repressing Palestine and by extension what is done to Palestinians by the state of Israel. Because the barrier is considered a defence against terrorist attacks from the Israeli point of view, however, it thereby disguises such acts of repression.⁶ Crucially, the symptom is capable of 'telling' us about the act of repression, since it acts as a form of expression of the experiences upon which it rests.

The Wall in Palestine thus intimates processes of cultural separation at the same time as it can be read as a medium that screens the political narratives that cement such processes. The Wall is at once a symbolic image of separation and a medium of its mechanisms and politics. Indeed, Weizman explains that the Separation Wall

¹ Brown, *Walled States*, 110.

² *Ibid.*, 100.

³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Letter 105 to Wilhelm Fliess, February 19, 1899 in Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 277.

⁶ Freud maintains that the symptom is a surrogate for the repressed idea that despite its disguise evokes a similarity with this idea. The Wall can be read as a disguised repression of the Palestinians, a Wall of denial, similar to the psychical walls that maintain the repression of ideas in the unconscious.

works effectively “as a powerful image within a media economy of the conflict”⁷ which has brought to Palestine “an international audience.”⁸ He asserts that this image resonates “within a Western historical imagination still engaged with unresolved memories of its colonial and Cold War legacies”⁹; hence it is capable of utilizing global narratives that situate the conflict, through its mediation, within a broader context of political apartheid. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the Wall is not necessarily a stable monument, but rather shifts according to the political and legal battles surrounding it.¹⁰ The Wall as a medium generates a variety of meanings. It acts like a mirror by which the (political) identities foregrounding its creation are thrown back to the viewer, but it is also used as a surface of expression, a media screen that allows us to rethink, rewrite and reclaim the meaning of its architectural distribution of political, cultural and psychological space.

The Wall manifests political division but at the same time it provides a material medium for resistance through art. It can thus be argued that, since politics has a spatial and aesthetic dimension, art utilized in this space can gain a political dimension. Politics creates a landscape of the possible, as Rancière reminds us, and works to construct the psychological, cultural and spatial realities of those who inhabit these landscapes and are affected by them. In this context Rancière asks, “What landscape can one describe as the meeting place between artistic practices and political practices?”¹¹ It appears that the encounter between the Wall as a symptom of politics and as a screen for art presents itself as a literal manifestation of this ‘meeting place’. Such an encounter must also be understood as a confrontation and emerges where a political practice is used to create an artistic one – or, more precisely, where a political Wall becomes a screen for the art that seeks to resist it. In this instance art may render the politics of the Wall’s creation transparent and thereby rearticulate the political landscape with the help of the artistic one. Of course, this poses questions about whether art is used to subvert and/or support the political and material structures with which it engages. In either case artistic practices can offer a point of entry that may help to expose and hence transform the political realities inscribed by power. This suggests that where art makes use of the

⁷ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See previous chapter about *Budrus*: Eyal Weizman claims the Wall is a political seismograph.

¹¹ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 259.

structures and materials of political power, it potentially subverts and occupies the political landscapes in a way that allows us to reimagine them. Art may insert “another scene” (in the Freudian sense) into our political realities and thereby pose a counterweight to the political status quo.

It is precisely through means of the imaginary, the fictitious and the artistic that the boundaries of the political can be renegotiated. In this context, Rancière maintains that politics and art are not antithetical, in the sense that the former appeals to the rational and thus the real, whereas the latter belongs to the realm of the sensible, and thus is a matter of fiction and feeling. Instead, Rancière points out that both politics and art enable a particular regime of the visible and thereby constitute aesthetic forms that reconfigure the order of the possible and sensible.¹² If reality is fictitious in this sense, “the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought.”¹³ Hence, politics is a way of framing a given reality or an attempt to fictionalize the real in a certain way. Furthermore, such politicised aesthetics classify perceptions of the categories demarcating fictions from realities, as they determine what counts as real and what is regarded as fictitious, much in the way a Wall distinguishes the reality of a collective from its fictitious Other. In this regard a political act constitutes “a partition of the sensible,”¹⁴ which means “a reconfiguration of the visible of the common.”¹⁵ Similarly, art also “partitions space” and establishes forms of aesthetics that support or subvert a given order of the visible. Hence, both politics and art can get caught up in the order of the sensible, potentially promoting consensus. Conversely, both art and politics can also make use of their critical potential by creating “dissensual stages,”¹⁶ and by “inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional.”¹⁷ For Rancière, art is politicized when it transgresses limits and redefines borders of consensual agreements, leading him to the conclusion that “it is no coincidence that some of the most interesting artworks today engage with matters of territories and borders.”¹⁸ In this regard, the artworks displayed on political walls (re)negotiate the distribution of the sensible evoked by

¹² Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics,” 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

the partition. Simply put, they work to reorganize the field of representation produced by the Wall.

If art can be engaged as a political practice, it changes the grounds for perception of a visible regime in the political and thereby challenges notions of ‘unrepresentability.’ Political art, as understood by Rancière, recontextualizes the given and thereby creates a stage on which issues and people appear differently to the roles that have been assigned to them.¹⁹ The points of identification within the social are multiplied. This can provoke a redistribution of the possibilities of “space and time, of forms of visibility of the common, forms of connection between things, images, and meaning,”²⁰ and thus produce new forms of interpreting the communal given. Evoking a “clash of heterogeneous elements”²¹ that work “to provoke a break in our perception, to disclose some secret connection of things hidden behind everyday reality,”²² art may thus provide the grounds for renegotiating an economy of absence and invisibility as prevalent in the workings of walls. Political art can undo established relationships “between signs and images, images and times, or signs and space that frame the existing sense of reality.”²³ In this sense, political art is not only about the creation of new meaning; it is also inherently about challenging the very idea of unrepresentability. In order to be political, art needs to manifest itself as “the revolt against exclusion from forms of representation”²⁴ and thus it may prove vital in the task of working through walls. Art may help to establish new relationships between different registers of the sensible, providing new forms of aesthetics, and thereby enabling *other* forms of identification that may assist in challenging the politics of walls and working through traumatic experience.

Pippi Longstocking in Abu Dis

Rona Yefman’s 2006-2008 project *Pippi Longstocking - The strongest girl in Abu Dis* confronts the realities imposed by historical and political narratives with the means of fiction. The fictitious encounter of Pippi and the Wall circumvents grand

¹⁹ Hinderliter, *Communities of Sense*, 7.

²⁰ Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Aesthetics of Politics,” 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²² *Ibid.*, 41.

²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁴ Bettina Funke, “Displaced Struggles,” 284.

political narratives of separation and ultimately subverts them affectively, if not concretely. Yefman uses Astrid Lindgren's rebellious children's character to visualize the extraordinary attempt of a now grown-up Pippi (played by Danish actress Tania Schlander) to move the concrete of the Separation Wall with her bare hands, an endeavor captured on film. Pippi's attempt marks an anti-authoritarian act that, despite it being 'unsuccessful' in the sense that the Wall is of course not moved, accomplishes a reconfiguration of the possible because it "disrupt[s] the logic of the production of the everyday"²⁵ in Rancière's sense. To "change the coordinates of the given"²⁶ Pippi pits the fragility of her body against the massivity of the Wall. It is precisely because she is known as 'the strongest girl in the world' and acts as an icon of radicalism and defying conventions that her attempt to move the Wall and her failure to do so point out the political monstrosity of the Wall. As Rancière puts it, "art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional."²⁷ Mirroring this thought, Yefman reinstates the physical boundaries and historical precedents to transformation and progress by inserting freedom-loving Pippi into a frame of ultimate restriction. The installation uses the utopian absurdity of childhood liberty and fantasmatic empowerment to challenge the normative imposition of the Wall thereby ultimately highlighting the absurdity of the Wall itself.



Figure 8 Rona Yefman 'Pippi Longstocking in Abu Dis'
Courtesy of Rona Yefman

²⁵ Carnevale and Kelsey, "Art of the Possible," 267.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rancière "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetic," 49.

Literally attempting to rearrange a landscape of the possible, real-life Pippi may not move the actual Wall but she interrupts the boundary between reality and fiction. In this regard Rancière further explains that “the real as such simply does not exist”²⁸; rather, there are only frames by which such distinctions are accomplished. The critical momentum of Yefman’s installation thus lies in Pippi’s ability to undo the frames of reality and fiction and thereby invest new trajectories of the seeable, thinkable and sayable. This is best reflected in the way in which Pippi aka Schlander is repeatedly told by bypassers that her attempt is impossible, that she cannot move the Wall. At the same time Pippi never seems to doubt her own ability to move the Wall and simply tries a little harder. Yefman juxtaposes these constraints with Pippi’s indissoluble will to move the concrete, a physical and affective persistence that generates a call for response and eventually leads Palestinian bypassers to join her. The images address “a spectator whose interpretive and emotional capacity is not only acknowledged but called upon,”²⁹ or to quote Rancière once more, “the work is constructed in such a way that it is up to the spectator to interpret it and to react to it affectively.”³⁰ Thus Yefman’s piece produces a social affect of empowerment and reinstates individual strength and determination in place of political grand narratives, affectively animating communal engagement via the screen. It is precisely this point where the affective underpinnings of fantasy and fiction potentially shift the factual circumstances of social restriction. The grand narrative of separation is thereby subverted by the artistic encounter.

Pippi’s attempt ascribes meaning to the individual, but further establishes the way in which fictions address and confront social reality. To return to Rancière’s point about both art and politics reconfiguring what is thinkable at a given moment, the installation exposes the Wall as a limit to possibility in the form of an obstruction to both thought and vision. At the same time, Yefman’s Pippi does not for a moment doubt her own capacity to reorganize this arrangement. What is thinkable to her contradicts the structure of the status quo. This injunction marks the point where the fantasies of the political and the imaginations of the personal renegotiate the landscape of the possible. In this sense, the Wall is no less fictitious than Pippi’s attempt, but because Schlander is affectively assisted (and verified) by her

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Carnevale and Kelsey, "Art of the Possible," 263.

³⁰ Ibid.

spontaneous Palestinian helpers, Yefman is able to reinforce her sentiment that it is the Wall that “is artificial.”³¹ This marks a disruption of the sensible, in the sense Rancière imagines it, but most importantly it allows for the dissemination of affective collective resistance. In this context fiction is not only disruptive but also empowering, calling upon spectators to acknowledge their own capacities to act within a given situation. Hence, the spectator is encouraged to recognize his/her ability to respond to the landscape of the status quo, which in turn translates to a form of respons-ability (or responsibility as the ability to respond). Analogously, Rancière explains that “an emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators,”³² reinforcing the spectator’s active complicity in the fictitious gesture staged by Yefman’s Pippi, who eventually ends her attempt by facing the camera and addressing the viewer directly with the words, “Let’s go home, we’ve got work to do.”³³ Expanding on this in 2008, Yefman created a limited edition documentation of the event that offered collectors a video of Pippi’s attempt along with a do-it-yourself kit. Including a stencil and a can of fluorescent spray paint decorated with a sticker of the film, the edition allowed collectors to spray the message “I love my life” on a surface of their choice.³⁴ Yefman thus draws on the ‘archive of resistance’ already established on and about the Wall, including graffiti, exhibitions and installations, but she extends the archive to support an overall sense of empowerment. The edition is meant to “recognize personal power and to effect daily changes in any environment.”³⁵ The project thus explores modes of liberation by translating the media affect generated through the images of Pippi into an imminent possibility of action.

Graffiti: Painting the Wall

The visual vocabulary of graffiti is traditionally linked to the invasion of spaces and the formation of subcultural exchanges. In this way graffiti has always been linked to modes of politicized disruption in the sense that it functions as a response to the

³¹ “Rona Yefman “ *Vimeo* <http://vimeo.com/16739009> (accessed: 12 August 2013).

³² Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum* (March 2007), 280.

³³ “Rona Yefman”

³⁴ “I love my Life“ *Art and Culture Edition* <http://editions-stage.bluebox-placeholder.com/products/i-love-my-life> (accessed: 12 August 2013).

³⁵ “I love my Life“

social needs of those that seek to affirm their presence in a visual field that tends to ignore them. The “illegal urban paintings”³⁶ of early graffiti were most prominently linked to the demarcation of territory, particularly with their first appearances in the mid to late 1960s in Philadelphia and in 1970s’ New York.³⁷ Appearing predominantly in subways and clubs or hard-to-reach public spaces, graffiti art has worked as a mode of subverting the visual order. This order, if examined in terms of Rancière’s thought on politics as aesthetics, always works as a form of exclusion by denying certain representations as opposed to others. Thus, a political act is any attempt to reclaim representation within the established discursive and visual orders. In this sense graffiti can be read as “a mode of protest”³⁸ or a form of empowerment because it marks an “unlawful disruption of the urban environment,”³⁹ writing identities back into a city’s visual landscape through the accumulation of signatures and images that are linked to particular groups and individuals. Because of this visual occupation, graffiti has been juridically treated as a form of vandalism and even social crime,⁴⁰ while also attracting attention as an expression of alternative or counter-culture. At the same time, graffiti artists have always laid an emphasis on their engagement with a subculture by creating a form of “internal dialogue with each other”⁴¹ that is more concerned with its own styles and ethics than it is interested in communicating with the general public.⁴² However, these boundaries between subculture and public have become increasingly merged since the 1970s and 1980s, highlighting graffiti’s subversive potential on the border between illegality and high art.⁴³ This reinforces the idea that the politicization of graffiti is not solely reducible to content and form, but more importantly emerges out of its context of exhibition. Graffiti is then unsurprisingly the prevalent medium of choice in oppressed spaces, as it allows for a disruptive response to heavily constrained environments through the visual negotiation of the “distribution of the visible, the sayable and the possible.”⁴⁴ It inscribes the oppressed back into the space that has

³⁶ Anna Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 7.

³⁷ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁰ Penelope J. Crow et al., “The Mural of Graffiti Deterrence,” *Environment and Behaviour* 38, no. 3 (May 2006), 423.

⁴¹ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ For a detailed discussion see Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 58-62.

⁴⁴ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 259.

made them invisible, constituting a form of community and turning the environment to a debate about who or what is excluded from it. Hence, graffiti marks an inscription in which aesthetic and political practices coincide and rearticulate the public field of vision. In this regard, graffiti shares its mode of appearance with that of political walls, although it works to disrupt an order as opposed to sustaining it. However, this also makes political walls irresistible to graffiti. The medial capacity of the Wall, its function as a mirror and a screen, appeals to the possibilities of expression provided by graffiti. The spatial logic of the Wall as the epitome of order and visual rigidity presents the natural antidote to the subversive and disruptive nature of graffiti – and vice versa.

Graffiti as a surface expression demonstrates the Wall's functioning as a screen by inscribing a narrative of resistance directly on the Wall's concrete. In this way the politics which the Wall seeks to naturalize are revealed, and in a sense debated, where those who are excluded from the public realm utilize graffiti to assert their existence and resistance. In the Palestinian context such acts of writing gain particular significance as they mark an act of voicing and civil disobedience. This reinstates Palestinian presence and re-inscribes it onto the material landscape, asserting that graffiti is capable of disrupting the existing power relations which deny Palestinians such agency. Julie Peteet points out that graffiti invites response,⁴⁵ which gains a particularly subversive significance in a political landscape that largely ignores the Palestinians and remains impassive to their suffering. In this context graffiti may be read as demanding response in the field of vision from a public that remains stubbornly blind. Said explains that "Zionism always undertakes to speak for Palestine and the Palestinians,"⁴⁶ but this has meant that "a Palestinian cannot be heard from (or represent himself) directly on the world stage."⁴⁷ The use of graffiti becomes extremely important in this context as it marks a form of voicing at the same time as it visualizes this voice. In this sense the Wall provides a significant medium for Palestinian resistance as a visual form of communicating a Palestinian voice. Of course, such writings are fragile, fragmentary and often erased as they appear. However, the very appearance of such graffiti undermines Israeli

⁴⁵ Julie Peteet, "The Writing on the Walls: the Graffiti of the Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996), 139-159.

⁴⁶ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 39.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

surveillance and problematizes Palestinian “civil extinction”⁴⁸ through the form of an aesthetic expression. This screen creates the public image of a silenced voice on the Wall as a screen of occupation. Since this screen is embedded in a global media economy of conflict, graffiti as the visualization of an otherwise unheard Palestinian voice is capable of articulating the plight of the Palestinians to a global audience. Hence, the graffiti on the Separation Wall allows for the appearance of a Palestinian voice as a ‘symptom’ of Israeli politics. It produces an image that (through other forms of media) readily resonates with global notions of imprisonment and resistance and thereby draws attention to a people that is otherwise largely invisible.



Figure 9
West Bank Separation Wall Bethlehem, 2013
Photo: Jenny Stümer



Figure 10
West Bank Separation Wall II Bethlehem, 2013
Photo: Jenny Stümer

The graffiti on the Separation Wall not only addresses and challenges a Wall that denies Palestinian existence; it also plays a vital role in the visibility of Palestinians to each other by mirroring a Palestinian presence to itself. One of the main consequences of the Wall is the fragmentation of the Palestinian population and the separation of villages and communities. The division within Palestine makes it difficult for Palestinians to collectively organize in the face of occupation and further displaces them from the land. By extension, this undermines Palestinian national aspirations and the creation of collective and shared narratives, crucial for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 103.

the attempt to “mobilize people around a common goal.”⁴⁹ As Said explains, “perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right...to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality.”⁵⁰ Such collectivity is essential in the reinstatement of identity as an act of resistance. Graffiti is capable of creating identity-based community by initiating a form of ‘everyday’ dialogue as an accumulation of communication about and among Palestinians. Thus, a re-inscription into the field of the visual does not necessarily have to be highly politicized in order to be effective. In fact, the most “banal” of graffiti (if examined in terms of resistance) - the writing of one’s name - becomes an effective statement of identity. It demands the recognition of the individual as part of the collective, inserting the particular into the social configuration that makes up the writing on the Wall. In this sense the Wall can function as a mirror that makes a people visible to itself, reflecting their image back into the public space from which they are excluded and thereby assisting in the formation of (collective) identities through the Lacanian mirror. Such a mirror challenges the ‘land without people’, supporting Rose’s point that “[t]here is no land to speak of outside of the social relations embedded within it.”⁵¹ The ‘graffiti mirror’ thereby reinscribes the Palestinians as part of these relations and provokes consideration of their situation from within and outside of their communities.

The Separation Wall as a mirror and a screen functions to mediate Palestinian experience and thereby interrupts its own narrative of division. Furthermore, the graffiti on the Separation Wall invites global commentaries and responses, and thereby creates a collective dialogue on a global stage in which the plight of the Palestinians is debated and condemned. Graffiti thus turns the Wall into a medium that critiques its own existence and provides a crucial communication tool in support of the Wall’s opposition. Israel’s separation barrier is effectively turned into a message board for the world, capable of critically responding to Israel’s politics, while creating an archive of resistance. Although many of these messages are “devoid of any seemingly direct connection to the occupation or barrier,”⁵² it is the

⁴⁹ Edward Said, “Invention Memory and Place,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c2002), 250.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 172.

⁵² Robert R Souders, “Whose Place Is This Anyway: The Israeli Separation Barrier, International Activists and Graffiti,” *Anthropology News*, (March 2011), 16.

act of writing on the Wall which deeply resonates with a project of Palestinian resistance. Robert Sauders points out that during the first popular uprising of the Palestinians, the Intifada from 1987 to 1993, Palestinians made use of graffiti in order to circumvent media censorship by the Israeli authorities.⁵³ Graffiti became a means of political speech and enabled the dissemination of information, thus assisting the organization of resistance and the mobilization of communities.⁵⁴ During this time graffiti was regarded as “a low-level politically motivated offense akin to throwing stones or Molotov cocktails,”⁵⁵ as Sauders points out, and “a running political commentary on the progression of the uprising,”⁵⁶ as Peteet explains. It is in light of these (rare) moments of Palestinian voicing that the current opposition to Israel’s politics in the form of graffiti can be read as globalized and not necessarily banalized. On the other hand, this raises the risk that the Palestinian voice might (once again) be overpowered by a range of international voices that seek to reappropriate the Wall as their own medium without necessarily providing concrete help or input for the situation. In this sense graffiti always posits questions of ownership as it projects various identities into public space.



Figure 11 West Bank Separation Wall III Bethlehem, 2013

Photo: Jenny Stümer

The Separation Wall is endured by Palestinians, but largely painted and beheld by an international audience. This complicates any simple notion of ownership and

⁵³ Sauders, “Whose Place Is This Anyway,” 16.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion see Peteet, “The Writing on the Walls,” 139-159.

⁵⁵ Sauders, “Whose Place Is This Anyway,” 16.

⁵⁶ Peteet, “The Writing on the Walls,” 143.

reframes the claim that the Wall can be used as a medium. The extent to which the various artistic encounters with the Wall effectively respond to the Palestinian situation before the eyes of a global audience cannot be decided unambivalently. On the one hand, it can be pointed out that the paintings and graffiti on the surface of the Separation Wall turn this political imposition into a tourist attraction that makes it “too easy for tourists to feel as though they’re politically engaged.”⁵⁷ In this way the Separation Wall appears to be reclaimed as Badiou’s ‘world’s Wall,’ functioning as a depot for all kinds of statements from a global audience that range from the ordinary and banal, to broader commentaries on the state of the world. Such discourses transgress the particularity of the situation by drawing attention to more general contexts of human interaction that serve as prisms for collective ponderings of the everyday. At its worst, such a transgression of Palestinian particularity risks “making a community of Palestinians beholden to a Westerner’s interest in a Westerner’s mural on a Wall that’s destroying their lives.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, to dismiss the inscriptions on the Wall as tourist memorabilia is to ignore the global response and affective engagements invited by the Wall and thereby to banalize the way in which these graffiti may work as political commentary. A global response is important in so far as it counters the Wall’s invisible pervasiveness. Otherwise a political Wall is easily normalized, along with the policies which the Wall espouses in the first place. Thus, the Palestinians may well not “need its presence underscored for them”⁵⁹; however, in the struggle for visibility it is important that the presence of the Wall is taken to a global stage in order to debate its horrific impacts as well as its ongoing expansion despite its illegal status under international law. Such a debate may be embedded in more general discussions of human relationships, but instead of foreclosing absorption of the Palestinian cause within such debates, a general context may also help to situate the conflict and assist Palestinians to benefit from the international attention and apprehension this generates.

The ambivalent presence of the Wall as a medium can provide a communication tool for Palestinians to articulate their situation to and through a global audience, rather

⁵⁷ Emily Hanssen Arent, “Searching for Banksy on the West Bank Wall” *Matador Network*, 14 May 2012, <http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/searching-for-banksy-on-the-west-bank-Wall/> (accessed: 6 December 2012).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hillel Halkin quoted in Ronen Eidelmann, „The Separation Wall in Palestine: Artists love to hate it“ in *Cultural Activism: Practices Dilemmas and Possibilities*, ed. Begüm Özden Firat and Aylin Kuryel (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 107.

than being overpowered by it. The Wall can be utilized as a medium to pitch the Palestinian cause into the context of a global debate, as exemplified in the project *Send a Message*, which was launched in Palestine in 2004. The project was the result of a Dutch advertising workshop held by the PDCF (Palo Dutch Concept Factory) with young Palestinians of the Peace and Freedom Youth Forum (PFF) in Ramallah. The aim of the workshop was to “create effective, out-of-the-box communication concepts ...inexpensive to execute”⁶⁰ and helpful in the process of fundraising for the Palestinian cause, and in particular to help support the PFF open Youth Center in Bir Zeit,⁶¹ which aims to provide young Palestinians with a sense of autonomy. *Send a Message* allowed people from around the world to log on to the project’s webpage and send a message to the activists. For a fee of 30 Euro these messages were inscribed on the Wall and then exhibited via photographs.⁶² The project hence makes effective use of the Wall as a tool of mediation in the local and global context. It utilizes the Wall as “the Palestinians’ frame of reference”⁶³ but simultaneously hopes to “create media attention about the Wall.”⁶⁴ Overall, the project reached 550,000 people worldwide and accumulated 1498 messages on the Wall.⁶⁵ The international dialogue thus carried out on the Wall supported the Palestinians on the ground and demonstrated their ability to communicate with and through an international audience. The graffiti explicitly used the Wall as a message board for the world, accumulating a collective voicing of the everyday, ranging from political commentary to humorous statements to cooking recipes and marriage proposals. Although these statements differ in their articulation of protest and resistance, collectively they managed to gather international news interest as well as express solidarity. As the activists put it, “the Wall won’t fall due to the messages written on the Wall, but they will remind Palestinians trapped inside that they have not been forgotten.”⁶⁶ In this sense a recipe or wedding proposal may be read as a

⁶⁰ Arjan El Fassed, “Palestine: Sending a Message with Social Media,” *Global Voices*, 16 September 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/09/16/palestine-sending-a-message-with-social-media/> (accessed: 15 November 2012).

⁶¹ *Send a message*, <http://www.sendamessage.nl/> (accessed: 13 November 2012).

⁶² Linda Haddad in Ram, “Sending a Message to the World” *Al Jazeera*, 23 May 2008, <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/60yearsofdivision/2008/05/20086150587752776.html> (accessed: 14 November 2012).

⁶³ Ram, “Sending a Message to the World”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Send a message*.

⁶⁶ Justus Van Oel, founder of [Sendamessage.nl](http://www.sendamessage.nl) quoted in Arjan El Fassed “The Writing on the Wall spells ‘Freedom,’” *The Electronic Intifada*, 20 April 2009

rehumanizing of walled space. Such comments “reterritorialize the space as a global forum.”⁶⁷ They reinstate the everyday of human activity and render it abnormal in a landscape where humans are hidden and imprisoned. This contrast is signalled by every message on the Wall and in turn creates an image of the Wall that can be readily broadcast to the rest of the world.

The murals of British graffiti artist Banksy operate within a context of the Wall as a global image and local imprisonment but self-reflexively engage the ambivalences that consequently work through the aesthetic politics of the Wall. Due to the artist’s popularity, Banksy’s iconic works on the Wall in Bethlehem in 2005 further increased the visibility of the Westbank separation barrier and its function as what the artist labelled “the world’s largest open air prison.”⁶⁸ However, Banksy’s art has also generated large-scale ‘Banksy Tourism’, drawing increasing numbers of Western spectators to Bethlehem. In this context the work is situated in the ambivalent borderland between affirming and interrupting politics through aesthetics. The Banksy images evoke and transcend the imprisonment imposed by the Wall and conjure ambivalent sentiments of utopian escape from a heavily constrained political space. We see a girl flying over the Wall holding on to a handful of balloons, while a little boy paints himself a ladder; on various occasions the Wall opens up a window onto a beautiful beach or an impressive mountain scape.⁶⁹ These images comment on the Wall as physical impediment by providing a contrast or a backdrop against which to examine the imposition. The exaggeration of this contrast plays with the Wall’s flickering status between visibility and invisibility. On the one hand, it can be argued that Banksy’s work marks a “reclaiming [of] public space as a space of public imagination”⁷⁰ and thereby invites the spectator to circumvent the “barriers to thought and awareness”⁷¹ that define this space. On the other hand, his work turns the Wall into a beautiful and photogenic tourist destination and hence runs the risk of inviting a forgetting of the impediments endured by the inhabitants of the space. Rather than resolving this ambivalence,

<http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-Wall-spells-freedom/8192> (accessed: 17 November 2012).

⁶⁷ Sauders, “Whose Place Is This Anyway,” 16.

⁶⁸ Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London: Random House Group, 2006), 136.

⁶⁹ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 139, 143-144.

⁷⁰ Nigel Parry, “Well-known UK Graffiti Artist Banksy Hacks the Wall,” *Electronic Intifada*, 2 September 2012, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/well-known-uk-graffiti-artist-banksy-hacks-Wall/5733> (accessed: 17 November 2012).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Banksy incorporates it ironically into the images, literally depicting holiday destinations as the unattainable point of escape. This cynical commentary is echoed in the artist’s framing of the work, which not only points a finger at the “open air prison”⁷² but further explains that the Wall marks “the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti artists.”⁷³ Banksy engages with the ambivalences of the Wall and his work on it as part of the commentary he is making, complicating the notion of visibility and invisibility. The monstrosity of the Wall is turned into a holiday destination and thereby forgotten in its very visibility, which is paradoxically the way its presence as a political imprisonment can also be understood. The dynamic reinstates the point that walls are first and foremost ostensibly invisible and effectively work through a ‘blending’ into the landscape they have confirmed. Banksy’s work therefore does not simply question the Wall, but also draws attention to the landscape it works in and through.



Figure 12 Banksy 'Girl escaping with Balloon' Bethlehem, 2005

Courtesy of Pest Control Office



Figure 13 Banksy Bethlehem Checkpoint, 2005

Courtesy of Pest Control Office

The graffiti on the Westbank Separation Wall ultimately exposes the Wall as two-sided: as a visible and invisible, local and global, fleeting and permanent medium of political division. Banksy’s work exemplifies this dynamic. The trompe l’oeil effect that depicts an actual opening in the Wall is central to the majority of his images in Bethlehem. The Wall is rendered invisible through the paintings at the same time as

⁷² Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 136.

⁷³ Ibid.

they “draw a 20 foot high arrow pointing at the ugliness,”⁷⁴ and thereby make the Wall visible. Addressing a local and global audience, the images operate within the tension of Palestinian specificity at the same as they reclaim the issue as an international responsibility. Some of the images reference the Berlin Wall, on which similar methods of trompe l’oeil were applied (such as Birgit Kinder’s *Trabant breaking through the Wall*), and thereby associate the image of the Separation Wall with the familiar imaginaries of its Berlin counterpart. In this way the heavily restricted space of the Westbank is juxtaposed with a global memory of the Berlin Wall’s demise, provoking the imagination of future freedom and anticipating it in the Palestinian context. These images thus regenerate art’s (and by extension graffiti’s) ability to create an archive of resistance that is central to transformative political narratives. The ephemeral nature of graffiti, of course poses a problem to the establishment of such narratives, but also mimics memory’s instability and characteristic rewriting as a counterweight to history and official narrative. Works such as those of Banksy can provide anchor points in this dialogue, as they afford a sense of iconic permanence (not least through their various publications and reprints) at the same time as they invite ongoing commentary. This is reflected in the numerous graffiti responses both in favour and critical of Banksy’s work that overwrite or copy his pieces, adding to them or dismissing them altogether.⁷⁵ In this sense the painting on the Wall is caught up in inevitable ambivalences that open debates about public modes of seeing on the one hand and complicate art’s function in the aesthetication of politics on the other. In his reflections on the murals Banksy quotes a conversation with a Palestinian man which exemplifies this dilemma. The old man commented, “You paint the Wall, you make it look beautiful,” to which Banksy replied, “thanks,” prompting the old man to respond, “We don’t want it to be beautiful. Go home.”⁷⁶ In this sense graffiti serve as a resistant mediation of a ‘walled’ life, which is contradictory in itself as it is always caught between the two sides of concealment and exposure, security and vulnerability. The intervention of art in such a space remains ambivalent and hence demands self-reflexivity on the

⁷⁴ Parry “Well-known UK Graffiti Artist Banksy Hacks the Wall”

⁷⁵ Adrian Margaret Brune, “Banksy in the West Bank,” *Huffingtonpost*, 7 November 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/adrian-margaret-brune/banksy-in-the-west-bank_b_895037.html (accessed: 15 November 2012).

⁷⁶ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 142.

part of both artist and viewer. Inviting both blindness and seeing, the image becomes a medium rather than simply a message.

Gilo: Looking through the Wall

Wall art does not simply run a risk of beautifying a monstrosity or erasing the Palestinians from a narrative of resistance. It may also actively assist the Wall's effectiveness by supporting its invisibility in order to shift attention away from such ambivalences and to a de facto support of the invisible structure of political appropriation. In this sense art may assist the narrative of alienation, and thus the narrative of the Wall, by blanking out the Wall and making it less criminal and less absurd. The former Wall in Gilo,⁷⁷ an Israeli settlement in the south-western part of East Jerusalem, is an example of painting the Wall into invisibility in order to cement the status quo and conceal the ostracism of the Wall's imposition. This is accomplished through the projection of a fantasy landscape that works to exclude and hide the Other but also to hide the Wall itself. The concrete slabs exhibit large murals that replace the landscape lost to the physical imposition of the Wall with the psychical 'reality' of an empty and peaceful land. The 'land without people for a people without land' is envisioned in the images of the Gilo Wall, which paints Palestine out of the landscape and imagines an Israeli space devoid of Arab people. The pastoral view suggests a picturesque land marked by impressive pine trees (at times validated by actual tree crowns seen over the Wall), romantic ruins of forgotten times and distant idyllic villages of unspecified Europeanness.

⁷⁷ The Wall in Gilo was built in 2000 during the second Intifada and eventually removed in 2010 because it was thought that "the security situation in the area is stable." While Gilo residents expressed sadness to part with the painted slabs, the Jerusalem municipality deemed them no longer necessary. Although this can be read in support of the IDF's argument that the Wall is a security measurement only (and not, as has been proposed, an architectural extension of power and a mode of destruction targeting Palestinian communities) it needs to be pointed out that since the Wall's inception the Israeli authorities have been careful to not define the Wall as a border and thereby an acknowledgement of territorial limitation. It is therefore politically necessary, as Weizman points out, to keep the Wall "dynamic" and "constantly shifting." This creates an "irresolvable geography" on the one hand and secures the territorial 'openness' of Israel on the other. See Nir Hasson, "IDF Engineers Begin Removal of Gilo Barrier Built during Second Intifada," *Haaretz* 16 August 2010 <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/idf-engineers-begin-removal-of-gilo-barrier-built-during-second-intifada-1.308237> (accessed: November 17, 2012). Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 6-8.



Figure 14 Gilo # 1, 2001

Courtesy of Miki Kratsman and Chelouche Gallery Tel Aviv

In this way the Gilo Wall exemplifies an architectural unresponsiveness to the landscape's actualities and in particular to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The Wall stages Zionism as the negation of Palestine and thereby inscribes a psychological barrier in the form of an invisible physical Wall. However, this invisible Wall is not simply a barrier but also a medium, even if it is not explicitly utilized as such. The Wall 'speaks' to the side it is viewed from and also implicitly says something about the other side which it seeks to displace. Unlike the graffiti found on the Palestinian side, the Gilo Wall largely speaks to and about an Israel that communicates what Baruch Kimmerling has termed the 'politicide' of Palestine⁷⁸ - the denial of Palestinian existence, which is physically enacted through the murals on the Wall and their inscription of Palestinian absence. In this way the Palestinian village of Beit Jalla (situated behind Gilo's Wall) is effectively blanked out and replaced with an idealized imaginary of the homeland. The Wall is literally turned into an ideological screen, which does not simply efface the other side, but particularly stages Zionism and its "immensely traumatic ...effectiveness."⁷⁹ Such a staging needs to blank out the Wall in a way that suggests a vast landscape ahead

⁷⁸ Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians* (New York: Verso, 2006).

⁷⁹ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 197.

precisely because Israel is careful not to suggest that the Separation Wall marks a border. As Rose remarks, since “Israel seeks to be the state of all Jewish people...it supersedes the means of territory.”⁸⁰ By rendering the Wall invisible, this illusion of territorial freedom is maintained. Rose further suggests that this perspective marks “a historically embedded failure of vision,”⁸¹ a notion which is literally reflected in the Gilo paintings. However, it has been pointed out that Zionism is perfectly adaptable to the staging of the fantasy and the creation of a dreamscape. “It knows itself as a child of the psyche, a dream, a figment of the brain,”⁸² Rose explains, leading her to the conclusion that “like the unconscious Zionism had to be staged.”⁸³ In this sense the fantasy landscape on the Gilo Wall literally enacts and cements a notion of the national self in relation to a utopian idea of complete mastery over the land and peaceful self-protection.

The Gilo Wall exemplifies the way in which Israel’s architecture reappropriates the very narrative that finds its physical manifestation in the siting of the Wall. Gilo cements the status quo by repressing Palestine and replacing it with a narrative that can only be perceived as coherent if Palestine is repressed. This narrative is a self-absorbed and narcissistic mediation of the national self as self-contained, similar to the self-absorbed discourse mediated by the bare Wall in the first place. Simultaneously, this mechanism stimulates the psychological blindness that allows the state of Israel to maintain an idealized version of the Israeli land as the literal and metaphorical means of national self-protection. This is echoed in the Gilo Wall’s initiation as a reaction to the second Intifada after conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis escalated in the area. In the course of these conflicts Gilo was attacked by Palestinian sniper bullets and large parts of Beit Jala were destroyed.⁸⁴ The Wall, although controversial for its admission of vulnerability, was erected to protect the inhabitants of Gilo.⁸⁵ Crucially, the construction of the Gilo Wall (like the rest of the Westbank separation barrier) was conducted without the involvement of any architects and thereby resonates with a more general criticism about the ‘exclusion’ of architects from the ‘Security Fence’ project. The complaint relies on an aesthetic

⁸⁰ Ibid., 198.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 67.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Richard Flemming “Paint your Troubles Away” *Cabinet Magazine* Issue 9, Winter 2002/2003, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/9/fleming.php> (accessed: 17 November 2012).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

argument rather than an ethical one. In this context architect Gideon Harlap lamented in his 2004 campaigning speech at Israel's Architect's Association that the Westbank Separation Wall could have been beautiful or impressive (rather than disturbing and offensive) had the Israeli authorities involved architects in its design.⁸⁶ Harlap advocated an "attractive structure"⁸⁷ and expressed a wish to turn the Wall into an international attraction (apropos of Banksy) comparable to the Great Wall of China rather than a locus for international criticism.⁸⁸ Similarly, Weizman quotes Israeli architect Ayala Ronel envisioning "transparent plastic partitions"⁸⁹ where Israel had to part with particular beautiful landscapes and to further propose "camouflaging the partitions as landscape elements."⁹⁰ In Gilo, such a mindset eventually materialized when the then head of the culture department of Jerusalem's municipality, Shlomo Brosh, decided to hire Israeli and Russian artists to "paint the Wall with the missing view, in an effort to alleviate some of the ugliness of the concrete slabs."⁹¹ He justified this with the following reason: "We did not want to part with the view, but they forced us to. So we copied the view."⁹² The result of this is a fantasy landscape beyond the Wall. The murals on the Gilo Wall expose as they hide the reflection of an idealized national identity that "continue[s] to dream the dream."⁹³

Gilo creates a blind spot in the landscape but at the same time it mediates and renders visible a national dream about Israel. The Wall here functions as a symptom of politics, mediating a fantasy element that expresses a national wish to 'paint over' Palestine. The Palestinian side is obscured and avoided, and the void this leaves in perception is filled in with a fantasy about the Other - in this case based on 'a land without people'. This in turn secures the narrative of the Israeli national self and serves the "'internal cohesion and solidity' of Zionism."⁹⁴ Salecl's argument that the void of political discourse is in fact 'the nation' and that fantasy functions as a

⁸⁶ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 161.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Harlap's speech at the 2004 annual convention of Israel's Architect Association in Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 161.

⁸⁹ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 169.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹¹ Brosh quoted in Flemming "Paint your Troubles Away"

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Banner of the Zionist Council, quoted in Bar-On, "Conflicting Narratives or Narratives of a Conflict," 163.

⁹⁴ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 197.

scenario that conceals the impossibility of representing this nation, points to the traumatic structure of nationalism. The fictionalized character of a country (such as Israel) exposes the nation as not a place but rather “a narration.”⁹⁵ The fantasy of the ‘homeland’ provides a structure for the national fantasy; it is “the scenario”⁹⁶ that allows society to perceive itself as consistent, a *Schauplatz*, as Freud would say, that needs to be filled with dreams about the nation. The nation is then always a fantasy projection, though this is rarely so clearly manifest as in the murals on the Gilo Wall. Essentially, the Wall supports the coherence of the national self through exclusion of an Other - an Other that needs to be (a)voided in order to be fantasized as Other. This fantasy secures the structures by which the nation is imagined and narrativized. The fantasized landscape hence does not simply conceal the Wall as such, but inevitably also reveals the larger fantasy upon which it rests as a symptom of politics.

The Wall as a medium here also functions as a mirror by throwing the gaze back on itself, reflecting a fantasy of Israel without Palestine. Thus, the mechanism of denial lies at the heart of Israel’s identity. The Wall exposes this dynamic but at the same time renders it traumatic, since the nation arrives with a need to repress the persecution of the Other. In the first instance this parallels Israel’s discourse of the Jewish state and its core narrative of victimhood (resulting from a traumatic history of Jewish persecution), on the basis of which it secures its effectiveness and coherence through blanking out another persecution, the violence it exercises against Palestine. Rose points out that “although it is one of the most powerful military nations in the world today, Israel still chooses to present itself as eternally on the defensive, as though weakness were a weapon, and vulnerability its greatest strength.”⁹⁷ Of course such an idea remains unresponsive to the vulnerability of the Palestinians to ongoing occupation and violence. However, if we take seriously that Zionism acts upon a shared fiction and does so effectively by establishing ‘a narration about the land’ as the means of national aspirations, then the notion of vulnerability also intimates that we are dealing with a configuration of trauma. To be sure, Rose addresses her reader in *The Last Resistance* with the disclaimer, “You are

⁹⁵ Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom*, 15.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Rose, *The Question of Zion*, Xiii.

analysing a trauma.”⁹⁸ In this context the dream of the nation, and the dream of Israel in particular, does not simply work effectively but it also works affectively. As Rose further asserts, it is this “affective dimension, as it exerts its pressure historically, that has been blocked from view.”⁹⁹ In this sense the Wall of Gilo serves to block the affect of Israel’s trauma as it represses the Palestinian trauma from recognition. Hence, while the inscription on the Wall evokes and symbolizes Palestinian trauma, it further mediates Israel’s traumatic encounter with its own history and actions by exposing the Wall as the very mechanism of trauma, as having to repress something intolerable from perception, namely the persecution of the (Palestinian) Other.

The role played by vulnerability and trauma in Israeli identity formation may provide an opportunity to invite the return of the Other into this two-sided conflict. The politics of division, and thus the denial of an underlying relationship between Israel and Palestine is as artificial as the Gilo murals on the Wall. Israel and Palestine are most obviously intertwined in their shared attachment to the land, their dream of national selfhood and their sense of vulnerability. They share the intimacy of conflicts, which binds them as ‘each other’s Other’; as Said puts it, “the actuality is that Palestinians and Israeli Jews are now fully implicated in each other’s lives and political destinies.”¹⁰⁰ A shared perspective, and perhaps a shared narrative, is then played out in the various layers of what Zionism means to the Israelis and what it has meant to the Palestinians in return. The image perpetuated by the Gilo Wall disguises this perspective and literally turns it into a blind spot, signifying the “historically embedded failure of vision”¹⁰¹ mentioned by Rose. The images on the Gilo Wall thus reconfirm the very narrative upon which the Wall rests, cementing the status quo by repressing Palestine and replacing it with a narrative that can be perceived as coherent only if Palestine is repressed. This then marks a self-contained and ultimately self-absorbed mediation of national selfhood, but manifests it as a normative mode of public seeing. Said explains that progress in the conflict can be achieved only “if both peoples make the attempt to see each other within a common

⁹⁸ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 197.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 49.

¹⁰¹ Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 198.

historical perspective”¹⁰² and he grounds this in the inevitable relation between “the people of Palestine – Arabs and Jews – whose past and future ties them inexorably together,”¹⁰³ and whose “encounter has yet to occur on any important scale. But it will occur...and will be to their mutual benefit.”¹⁰⁴ This mutual seeing demands forms of mediation that acknowledge and enable the relation between the self and the Other. In this sense the narrative of division must be opened to the Other on both sides in order to expose the self as vulnerable and to encourage a mutual facing.

Artists without Walls

The *Artists without Walls* project staged at Abu dis in 2004 can be read as a reaction to the Gilo Wall and as an attempt to disrupt the philosophy of alienation and separation, the blindness and avoidance Gilo mediates. *Artists without Walls* is a collaborative project between Israelis and Palestinians and utilizes the Wall as a medium capable of evoking transparency. Echoing the approach of the Gilo Wall murals, the artists effectively render the Wall invisible. The Wall is literally made transparent and thereby expunged. However, unlike the Gilo murals, the *Artists without Walls* project frames this transparency in the form of an opening in the Wall that enables a view to the other side. This opening is achieved by projecting a live transmission from each sector onto the opposite side of the Wall and thereby making each side visible to the Other, an event which prompted “two hours of cheering and waving.”¹⁰⁵ The installation thus acknowledges the Wall’s presence and uses it as a projection surface to reinstate the other side. On this basis the project comments on the physical and psychological blindness evoked by the Wall and seeks to overcome these dynamics in an act of mutual seeing. *Artists without Walls* reflects on the ideas mediated by the Gilo Wall and decisively rests its endeavour on the presumption that “the Wall is merely an expression, in a concrete form, of what is already there, a high degree of segregation and wish for separation, a mentality, a feeling which is

¹⁰² Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 232.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 238

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Terry Boulatta “The Spirit of Activism” in *Against the Wall: Israel’s Barrier to Peace*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: New Press, 2005), 257.

widely present in the public”¹⁰⁶ By denouncing such a “mentality” as resting upon a wish, the artists imply that in actuality a narrative may also be shared. This echoes the notion that Palestine and Israel are already implicated in an indivisible relationship that exposes the Wall’s psychological barrier as a (effective) fantasy of division from the Other. For the artists to work against the Wall, then, means “working against this, changing the mentality.”¹⁰⁷ Such a change is related to the reclamation of public space as a medium of public bonding and exchange in order to provoke a change in the ‘landscape of the possible’. In this sense the installation achieves a temporary overcoming of the Wall as the symptom of the political landscape, which allows *Artists without Walls* to interrupt a normative mode of public vision.



Figure 15 Artists without Walls

Osa Archivum



Figure 16 Artists without Walls II

Osa Archivum

Artists without Walls reintroduces the dynamics of engagement into an otherwise restricted and rigid political space. The artistic event does not simply interrupt the status quo by reintroducing ‘the other side’ to vision, but it also performs this visuality by means of human interaction. The event creates an image of bonding and empowerment that at the same time marks an act in which looking and acting are strongly related to these parameters. Involving artists and communities from both sides of conflict, there is a sense of action in the creation of the event that challenges the status quo of cemented political immobility. Such forms of stasis are encoded in the ‘lifeless’ imagery of the Gilo murals that depict landscapes devoid of humans and thereby foreclose the possibility of human interaction. The *Artist without Walls* event, on the other hand, sets in motion what can be described as community effort,

¹⁰⁶ Artists without Walls “Separation Mentality,” *Osaarchivum*, 1 April 2004, http://osaarchivum.org/galeria/the_divide/chapter12.html (accessed: 17 November 2012).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

accompanied by meetings and discussions. It thus resonates beyond the moment of transparency projected onto the Wall and thereby also reintroduces the human space concealed beneath a projected landscape. What is effectively initiated is a process capable of spreading into a variety of events, each challenging the stasis of the given division. Terry Boulatta, a Palestinian teacher and member of the group, recounts her impressions of the event as follows:

Our Israeli artist friends brought two projectors. The Palestinian community around the Wall brought us electric cables and chairs. People gathered to watch what was happening. When it was totally dark, the projectors screened people standing on one side of the Wall to the people standing on the other side of the Wall. My neighbours came down to salute their family members who came to the other side. After two hours of cheering and waving the projectors were turned off. The Israeli and Palestinian artists came around to our neighbourhood for tea and dancing. We felt very victorious.¹⁰⁸

In this way, performance is capable of creating community through participation in the artistic event. This further enables particularization, through channels of personal experience, of a political space that otherwise denies such possibilities (of facing, waving, dancing, etc). Thus, the *Artists without Walls* project not only works through a sense of overcoming but more importantly brings to life an image from which (Palestinian) life has been excluded. Animated by the mutual facing and waving, the landscape is reorganized. This echoes what Rancière calls emancipation, “the blurring of the opposition of those who look and those who act, between those who are individuals and those who are members of a collective body.”¹⁰⁹ A political fantasy that rests upon avoidance is interrupted in the moment the Other is brought back into view and a mutual facing is made possible. The Wall, resting on a narrative of alienation between the two sides, is turned into a medium of its own interruption the moment it transgresses this narrative and mediates the Other’s presence. One could argue that in this example, too, a wish is enacted by temporarily overcoming the obstacle of the Wall and creating a bond with the other side. Once again, however, the aesthetic pleasure generated raises the danger of implying a degree of approval for the Wall’s existence, as the artists acknowledge.¹¹⁰ In contrast to the Gilo Wall, however, this is not done through a mirror-logic but literally by

¹⁰⁸ Boulatta “The Spirit of Activism,” 257.

¹⁰⁹ Rancière “The Emancipated Spectator,” 279.

¹¹⁰ Artists without Walls “Artists without Walls” *Osaarchivum*, 2004, http://osaarchivum.org/galeria/the_divide/chapter19.html (accessed: 20 November 2012).

turning the Wall into the transparent screen of a window. What makes this project different is the way in which it touches on and interrupts the mechanism of the political discourse evoking the Wall. In this sense *Artists without Walls* collapses distance and invites communication.



Figure 17 Artists without Walls III

Osa Archivum

A collapse of distance and the interaction between the two sides can create a shared affect. Since affect precedes narrative, the sharing of affect can serve as an important bonding force that has political implications. In this context Freud reminds us that affect is related to the repressed rather than serving to disguise fantasy.¹¹¹ This is echoed in the affective responses evoked by the *Artist without Walls* project: the spontaneous waving and expressions of excitement erupting upon the two sides seeing each other and the communal bonding this provides. Contrary to alienation and division, affect becomes the catalyst of encounter and potentially provides what Lauren Berlant calls an “affective register of belonging,”¹¹² in this case, belonging to a community is made up of both Israelis and Palestinians who have a common interest in challenging the Wall as the “icon for the occupation.”¹¹³ Although this ambition is restricted by the powerful political reality of division, such an endeavour is nevertheless politically relevant precisely because public spheres are always, as Berlant asserts, “affect worlds” to which people are bound by feeling and in which

¹¹¹ In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud explains that psychoanalysis “recognizes the affect as being...justified” in the disguised fantasy of the dream. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 597.

¹¹² Lauren Berlant “Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest: Ambient Citizenships”

¹¹³ Boulatta “The Spirit of Activism,” 257.

they negotiate a “common interestedness.”¹¹⁴ This “affective projection”¹¹⁵ alludes to the artist’s statement about the need to change a feeling and a mentality. The project thus allows them to develop a common interest of countering the separation evoked and symbolized by the Wall.

The affective channel provided by the *Artists without Walls* projection binds communities and at the same time reinstates the particularity of the body as a political site. Berlant insists on the importance of feeling encounters in the political realm. “A public’s binding to the political is best achieved,” she writes, “neither by policy nor ideology but the affect of feeling political together.”¹¹⁶ In this scenario affect gains a double function. Firstly, affect alludes to the fantasmatic dimension of the politics that creates the Wall, as it underpins the underlying relation to the Other (side). This is important, as Rose points out, precisely because “reason will not settle it. You cannot argue with a dream.”¹¹⁷ A shared affect, however, may redirect the meaning of projection, a notion which *Artists without Walls* literally achieves. Furthermore, affect takes the political back into the realm of the physical because affect implicates the individuated body and also “marks a body’s belonging to a world of encounters.”¹¹⁸ The body is individuated by the particular affective experience encountered, which is reflected and screened in the mutual response to each other’s facial expressions of excitement and pleasure as well as in the bodily reactions of dancing and waving. Bodies and faces sharing affect hence stage a political act because, as Butler writes, “[w]e are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies.”¹¹⁹ The body as the site of conflict exposes what violence may be exercised upon and what may exercise violence in turn. It individuates this notion through the particularity evoked by the face. In short, those affected by the politics reinstate their presence and relationality by virtue of their body and mutual facing, thus providing the means for shared human experience.

¹¹⁴ Berlant “Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Rose, *The Question of Zion*, 68.

¹¹⁸ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

¹¹⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20.

Face2Face

A face-to-face encounter brings the Other into one's own field of vision by recognizing the Other as one's own, regardless of the violence that may underlie this encounter. Facing the Other intimates that the Other's face mirrors one's own face. At the same time such an encounter always negotiates particularity and vulnerability as the means of mutual facing. For Lévinas the face-to-face encounter provides the means for an ethical demand, by which the self (willing or not) is put into relation with the Other, calling the self into question.¹²⁰ However, whereas the face in Lévinas' account is pure expression, the human face is inherently connected to a body which according to Butler always has a public, and thereby perhaps involuntarily a political, dimension.¹²¹ In this sense the face anchors the body Butler talks about and has the capacity to constitute us politically - by identifying and recognizing the Other as self. Such acts of recognition rely on channels of mediation. Hence, it is not surprising that Barthes identifies the creation of the body in the feeling of posing in front of a camera - in the act of being photographed. Barthes suggests that the camera creates the body,¹²² a body which is according to Butler "political[-] in part by virtue of social vulnerability."¹²³ Sharing vulnerability here points to the capacity of mediation to reconfigure the realm of the possible by mutually exposing the Other and the self through channels of vision and feeling. Recognizing such an intervention then becomes a political act, as it demands a response to the vulnerability of the Other - a vulnerability in which the onlooker is always implied. In this sense portrait photography, especially when framed by political conflict, mediates an attempt to create a face-to-face encounter aware of its own violent intimacy, and potentially resurrects the body in the landscape of effacement via means of a depiction of the face.

The 2007 French project *Face2Face* by artists JR and Marco draws on this capacity of the photograph by screening the face of the Other as a site of a shared narrative. The project thereby seeks to question grand narratives of division as it reinstates a relationship with the enemy. *Face2Face* returns to the notion of facing as a literal

¹²⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000), 81.

¹²¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 26-27.

¹²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 11.

¹²³ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20.

counter to effacement by providing engagement with the particularity of everyday life. The project collects portrait photography of everyday people, shot with a 28 millimetre camera (and thereby allowing for maximal closeness of the subject), who make ‘funny faces.’ The close-ups are then enlarged and presented in pairs of shots, each projecting an Israeli and a Palestinian who share the same occupation side by side.¹²⁴ The images were shown in what the artists themselves called the “biggest illegal expo ever”¹²⁵ on both sides of the Wall and in several Israeli and Palestinian cities. JR and Marco explain the idea of the project as follows: “With our project, we wanted to show the face of ‘the other’...to reveal the complexity of the situation to show a resemblance in those expressions.”¹²⁶ This notion of a face-to-face reinstates the presence of the Other and demands engagement with this presence. This is an engagement through facing, through mirroring and screening the self in the Other. As Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*, “The photograph is the advent of myself as other,”¹²⁷ which works to him through channels of looking but which also indicates a recognition of the Other as indivisible from the self.



Figure 18 JR and Marco Face2Face’Bethlehem, 2007

Courtesy of JR / jr-art.net

¹²⁴ JR and Marco, *Face2Face* (Paris: Édition Alternative, 2007), 16-17.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12.

The face becomes the site of an encounter with the grand narratives that run through the individual life paths and stories told by each face, affecting its lines and forming its expressions. This encounter is made available through the photograph that allows us to linger and to examine it without concrete knowledge of the picture's reality. In this instance the face suggests a form of resemblance and caricature at once. Lévinas reminds us that the notion of resemblance implied by the image does not sustain an actual relationship with reality or direct encounter with it but creates a "shadow" of the relationship at work. One could argue that this sense of the image being "more real than reality"¹²⁸ comments on the perhaps utopian sense of commonality suggested by the images. The faces do not specify a situation of violence and they do not attempt to directly communicate a sense of suffering, conflict or power. Instead, they manifest silliness and humour as the ultimate means of human connectivity. In this instance art "does not belong to the order of revelation"¹²⁹ in the sense that it discloses the conflict. However, this 'caricature' of resemblance subtly invites us to rethink the face as a site of narrative. *Face2Face* makes use of the comical face to probe the narrative of and about the Other and in particular to question the separation between the Other and the self. The images show the face as a site capable of reinstating difference, but this (human) difference is questioned in the way the faces resemble each other. These instances expose a social role via caricature and affirm, as Sontag explains, that "the camera cannot help but reveal faces as social masks."¹³⁰ Exaggerating this idea, the images play with modes of expressivity as forms of caricature and exemplify the face as a site where being and being a picture coincide.¹³¹ Thus, we are reminded that the "person bears on his [or her] face...always [his or her] own caricature"¹³² or a social and political mask. The photograph in this sense does not reveal the face as such, but represents the mask it bears as an image, a notion which in the case of the *Face2Face* project becomes the *modus operandi*. The photographs evoke resemblance through the common use of caricature. This reveals the social mask by foregrounding its caricature, an idea which echoes Barthes claim that "the photograph cannot signify except by assuming

¹²⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, "Reality and its Shadows," in *Collected Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*, 59.

¹³¹ Lévinas articulates this idea in more detail in Lévinas, "Reality and its Shadows," 6.

¹³² *Ibid.*

a mask.”¹³³ To Barthes then it is only through the lens of these masks that a face is made “into the product of a society and history.”¹³⁴ Consequently “the mask is the meaning,”¹³⁵ a meaning which in the *Face2Face* installation expresses a relationship through the shared narrative of everyday occupations and activities. Simultaneously, the images attach these resemblances to social roles and occupations but not to nationality, effectively producing commonality on the level of the broadly social. JR explains that in most instances people were actually unable to distinguish the Palestinian from the Israeli.¹³⁶ In this sense the faces are indeed ‘more real than reality,’ reinstating a relationship that is repressed in the realm of the given. The face in its pure expressivity rehumanizes the political by exposing the Other and the self as related.



Figure 19 JR and Marco Face2Face II

Courtesy of JR /jr-art.net

¹³³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 34.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ JR, “My Wish: Use Art to turn the world inside out,” *TED*, March 2011, https://www.ted.com/talks/jr_s_ted_prize_wish_use_art_to_turn_the_world_inside_out (accessed: 18 March 2012).

The relationship between the self and the Other, the face-to-face of two sides, is first and foremost an instance of intimacy negotiated along the lines of a particular encounter. Such intimate encounters are potentially both violent and peaceful, too alienated and too close, but they negotiate a relationship at work despite the imposition of borders or walls. Indeed, intimacy itself foregrounds all kinds of conflicts, divides and ambivalences. It is grounded in the exchange of affects and feelings that have to be negotiated as they shift perspectives and relationships. Berlant asserts that “in its expression through language, intimacy relies heavily on the shifting register of unspoken ambivalence.”¹³⁷ Such exchanges are conflict-laden, even violent and traumatic, at the same time as they insist that intimacy is in itself a dynamic which we constantly ‘negotiate’ in relation to the Other. The photograph can provide the means of such a relationship but it works as both a tool of power, implying a potential aggression, as Sontag points out, and a means of reaching out by making things closer, “like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end.”¹³⁸ *Face2Face* engages with this intimacy of the photograph while it establishes intimacy as a means of the photograph, its particular artistic method, precisely in the instance of Barthes’s ‘posing’ to create a body, according to Butler. The 28 millimetres lens only allows for a few centimetres of space between the subjects and the artist, who is involuntarily “listening to their breath.”¹³⁹ This implies a point of closeness and intimacy demanding trust, a negation of separation (reflected in the images) in order to make room for a new way of looking (at each Other). As the artists assert, “this intimacy does not distort the faces but offers an original perspective.”¹⁴⁰ *Face2Face* brings the Other closer - so much so that it becomes hard to distinguish the Other from the self.

Projecting this perspective into the realm of the political (literally postering the Wall), *Face2Face* accomplishes the dissemination of intimacy face-to-face within the public eye and thereby renegotiates the public field of vision. Berlant explains that “the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness.”¹⁴¹ The ideal of the democratic public sphere thus rests on “the advent of intimacy as a

¹³⁷ Berlant “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 286.

¹³⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 167.

¹³⁹ JR and Marco, *Face2Face*.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Lauren Berlant “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 281.

public mode of identification and self development.”¹⁴² The intimacy of and in the *Face2Face* portraits projected on the Wall exemplifies this closeness between politics and the intimate particularities of the everyday. The project reinstates the faces that sustain and endure the politics of division, but it also turns the Wall into a public screen of self-reflexivity and self-development. Portrait photography is itself strongly associated with privacy and particularity, but the intimacy it generates is, in the context of Berlant’s understanding of intimacy, indivisibly connected to a “narrative[-] about something shared.”¹⁴³ The perspective provided by JR and Marco thus demands the consideration of such a narrative at the same time as the project reminds us that this relationship is already at work. The project projects ‘commonalities’ back into a political space that signifies division. Berlant suggests that “spaces are produced relationally,”¹⁴⁴ as borne out by the juxtaposition of multiple realities that recreates the walled space through the intimacy generated by the images and the similarities they reveal through common facial expressions. The political space in which the Wall erupts as a symptom is then reconsidered through channels of feeling and thereby creates a space of and for engagement. Communicating personal narratives through the faces that address the cameras within their given political context provides a vehicle to retell the narrative of the Wall from the point of view of the human beings it works to hide on each side.

The face reintroduces affectivity as necessarily constitutive of (and constituted by) the realm of the political and the narratives that strengthen it. What is of interest about the faces in the photograph makes itself felt if we allow for an understanding of intimacy as a part of politics (rather than its opposite). The image of the face can express and affectively so, an experience of humanity in a political space rather than simply an image of it. Barthes writes that “whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not what we see”¹⁴⁵; rather, “the photograph touches me if I withdraw from its usual bla bla to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, we are asked to make an affective investment in response to the image. Such a notion of responsiveness must be created in resonance

¹⁴² Ibid., 283.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 285.

¹⁴⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

with a relevant political consciousness, but it is ultimately accomplished only when the photograph thinks beyond itself to “feel, intuit - what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.”¹⁴⁷ In this sense the *Face2Face* project is most subversive at the moment we do not consider the faces as representations of Palestinians and Israelis - or even of an Israeli-Palestinian commonality but when we understand them to communicate the incommunicability of human experience to our own specific position as viewers. In this regard it is important to point out that the images ultimately do not face each other (they are projected side by side); they face the public eye. The intimacy of the face-to-face is thus taking place between the photographer and the subject, though it is mediated by the onlooker, who is situated in a broader public field of vision. To look at these photographs is then to be asked to respond from one’s own position because the onlooker is addressed and individuated by these faces. Again, such a response may be understood as a form of responsibility. Being responsible is then to be open - even vulnerable to the face and its affective circuits that link the self and the Other and project them side by side. When the face becomes a pure expression, rather than a signification, it may in fact encourage an affective encounter to interpret and (re)experience the particularity of collective trauma and history.

Facing Trauma

Wall art thus works as an archive that channels the affective modes of the political situation and the resistance it creates. The circulation of affect and fiction renders such archives of resistance inventories of trauma. Affect at the core of the traumatic repression travels freely between divides and disseminates itself across the artistic encounters exhibited on the Wall. These artistic endeavours mark traces that generate the unreadable, yet feelable registers of traumatic histories and politics, and they encourage fantasmatic and affective encounters to help viewers (re)experience the traumatic impositions. To borrow Jill Bennett’s words, “rather than reducing itself to a form of representation, such imagery serves to register subjective

¹⁴⁷ Sontag, *On Photography*, 23.

processes that exceed our capacity to ‘represent’ them.”¹⁴⁸ In the case of Palestine these works endeavour to re-negotiate presence via means of visibility and invisibility, a presence largely effaced from the landscapes of the political. By using the Wall as a medium of image and text, this effacement of the Other is brought to the forefront and can be discussed and hence challenged. In this sense the landscape of the visible is reconstructed and sometimes momentarily overcome. Correspondingly, the work of art must operate within the structures it seeks to challenge and thereby always runs a risk of being absorbed and re-appropriated. It is precisely this ambivalence that allows art to not only challenge the logic of the political via means of fiction, but to lay bare the very structural entanglements of politics with fantasy. Ultimately, the dialogue between politics and art is not a means of fantasy vs. reality but calls upon the spectator to work through the different registers of possible social realities and dreams. Art may indeed, as Rancière maintains, “blur the interplay between fact and fiction to establish a new relationship.”¹⁴⁹ In the case of Israel, however, this must counter the effacement of the Palestinians and reinscribe them into the visual. In this way the intimate encounter between politics and art may not simply create a reimagining of the relationship between the two (sides), but also bring about a reimagining of a face-to-face relationship between enemies.

The reinstatement of the face in particular addresses us affectively and politically because it articulates a common vulnerability at stake in human interaction. The face demands a response in these terms and thereby calls on political responsibility - not simply by provoking a form of sentimentality or immediate empathy but by implying a relationship that is grounded in the experience of shared vulnerability. A reinstatement of the Other’s face may hence offer the most basic form of responsibility between self and Other because the face in Lévinas’s understanding marks an absolute vulnerability that poses an ethical demand, while it crucially puts the self into question. Furthermore, as Butler puts it in *The Precariousness of Life*, “to respond to the face,...means to be awake to what is most precarious in another

¹⁴⁸ Jill Bennet, “The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory: Theorising Trauma through the Visual Arts” in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin (New York: Routledge, 2003), 28.

¹⁴⁹ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 263.

life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself,”¹⁵⁰ hence to acknowledge a shared human vulnerability. The face then challenges the Wall’s enforcement of alienation and separation by implying a sense of shared vulnerability, evoking shared trauma. On the other hand, such trauma is already mediated by the presence of the Wall. As Said puts it, “the notion of separation has also closed these unequal communities of suffering to each other.”¹⁵¹ It is precisely a shared responsibility in the sense of mutual response to suffering and trauma that counters this, enabling an acceptance of the Other - as one’s Other. Correspondingly, Freud explains in his analysis of mass psychology that we lose ourselves in the collective, or as Rose puts it, “[w]e love the other most, or need most be loved by the other, when - from that other and from ourselves - we have most to fear.”¹⁵² In this sense a shared human vulnerability is always at the heart of political violence and effacement. To reinstate this vulnerability is then an attempt to interrupt violence and effacement by pointing out what is at stake in human conflicts. Crucially, this interruption takes place by reinstating the Other’s face as that which is most vulnerable or potentially most violent - and which Lévinas associates with the most basic mode of responsibility. The question remains how to integrate or interpret this responsibility to share vulnerability in terms of the grand political narratives, and in this case how to re-tell a story that carries the weight of 3000 years of historical suffering.

Optimistically speaking, sharing vulnerability can mark a starting point from which to re-tell, re-experience and even reinterpret the current story by giving the enemy a face. Of course, in the logic of affect this can be elaborated in several directions without providing any straightforward conclusions. Thus the idea is to open up the grand narratives instead of further concretising them. In his book *What does a Jew want?* Israeli filmmaker Udi Aloni explores such ways of redirecting narrative and meaning. He writes about the notion of the face in the grand narrative of Israel and offers a mode of reinterpretation. Aloni explains that the encounter between the self and the Other is grounded in the question of to be or not to be (in relation to the self) and to kill or to be killed (in relation to the Other). For him the ethical change in the encounter with the Other has to be to change the fear of being killed into a fear of

¹⁵⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 134.

¹⁵¹ Said “Invention Memory and Place,” 251.

¹⁵² Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 68.

killing.¹⁵³ Hence, it is the fear of being a killer that needs to be faced, demanding that Israel face the narrative of having wronged the Other - Palestine. Aloni illustrates this with reference to the grand narrative of 'the figure of Israel' in his "midrash-panim (midrash about the face) in relation to Jacob and Esau."¹⁵⁴ In the biblical story Jacob wrongs his brother Esau and lives in fear of being killed by Esau. However, after Jacob encounters an angel, is renamed Israel and gains significantly greater spiritual and physical power than Esau, he fears killing his brother much more than being killed by him. It is in the response of Israel and Esau to seeing each other face to face that the interpretation of the story takes two different directions, with the Hebrew word *nashak* referring to both a bite and a kiss exchanged between the brothers/enemies.¹⁵⁵ These two interpretations of the Biblical story lead Aloni to state two possible responses to the Other's face - the Palestinian face. Firstly, Aloni speaks of the bite, which by extension evokes the wound and thereby foreshadows a sense of trauma. He states:

the guilt of seeing this other – seeing him face to face, seeing how he reminds us that he has nothing and we have everything – ...this guilt makes us again take the houses of people-, who lost their houses once already, - take again the land of people who lost their land once already.¹⁵⁶

This idea raises the question of protecting Israel at the cost of a traumatic repetition of violence. In this context the notion of trauma suggests a traumatic encounter for both sides. Even though experience of such suffering is particular to and differentiated by each perspective in the conflict this proposes the notion of a shared trauma and of violence as intimate. Aloni's second option is then to respond to a love for Israel by including the Other. As he puts it, "I am trying to understand that in my community my love of Israel can only come out of my love of Palestine,"¹⁵⁷ echoing the two-sidedness of violence and vulnerability as well as Freud's claim about the interrelationality between fear and love. In a walled state, defining the self in relation to the Other, countering a notion of alienation and reinterpreting the grand narrative of division hence demands responding to both the trauma and

¹⁵³ Udi Aloni, *What Does A Jew Want?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 56.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

vulnerability of the two sides - Israel and Palestine – so that the Other introduces into the self what is most foreign to the self and the Other is confronted and met in a face-to-face encounter.

Chapter 7

The Third Space: The US Mexican Border

The examples of the Berlin Wall and the West Bank Separation barrier illustrate the ways in which political walls secure binaries of meaning within ideological constructions. At the same time, both cases exemplify the ways in which political walls can be used to stage attempts at subverting the very structures they impose. This creative facilitation of the Wall as a medium enables forms of traversing an otherwise fixed entity in the actual and the imaginary sense, and thereby seeks to reconfigure the structures of meaning on which this construction rests. Facing the Wall and engaging it creatively is thus about the invocation of affective responses and political responsibility, as mediated by the artistic and cinematic screenings on and of the Wall. Such screenings perform a need for transgression and signify a collective will to overcome the rigidity of the Wall's physical and psychological imposition. In one way or another, the examples discussed therefore ask us to cross the boundaries of political binaries in order to explore new forms of togetherness. In this context, the US-Mexican Wall is a useful concluding case study because it references its precedents in Berlin (the Wall of the past) and Palestine (the Wall of the present) while representing the Wall of the future. It thus has the potential to conjoin temporalities as well as the political and psychological undercurrents of all three walls. Drawing on the performance art of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the cinematic work of Chantal Akerman, this closing discussion foregrounds the liminal artist and the liminal filmmaker in relation to the US-Mexican border in order to explore their subversion of fixity and division, as well as their resistance to conventional representations that exclude the Other. Gómez-Peña utilizes performance to negotiate his own otherness, while Akerman is interested in unconscious trajectories of othering and the traumatic interfaces they reveal among different political and historical settings. Both Akerman and Gómez-Peña facilitate a collapse of walled binaries in order to question the global processes of othering invested in the migrant. The US-Mexican border thus provides a useful platform for exploring forms of 'otherness' that may emerge in all kinds of walled contexts and spaces.

As one of the largest and most controversial border regions in the world, the US-Mexican border provokes reflections on contemporary forms of militarization, cultural othering and spectacular enactments of national imaginaries. However, it also provides a reflexive and hybrid space from which to engage the notion of crossing as a way of shedding light on the Wall as a traumatic trace. The idea of ‘crossing’ and ultimately confronting ‘the other side’ opens up the possibility of examining the Wall from a third position, beyond the rigid binary of the politics of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The US-Mexican Wall in particular allows for a discussion of the Wall’s conceptual ‘other side.’ It encounters the Other as a multiplicity located in the reflexive space of the actual and conceptual ‘in-between.’ This is possible because the US-Mexican border epitomizes the notion of crossing in the physical and psychological sense. Practically, the border registers approximately 250 million legal crossings per year, which is supplemented by an (estimated) one million illegal crossers risking their lives in the midst of the lethal desert, many of them dying on the way.¹ As Roger Bartra puts it, this border is “a *wall* we can only cross if we have the necessary documents”² [my emphasis]. However, the ambivalence between possibility and restriction, the change of one’s current life at the risk of death, is not limited to the physical but also plays out through the crosser’s subjectivity. Indeed, the border is a transitional space, in which one (cultural, social or fantasmatic) identity is exchanged for another through the process of crossing, rendering this Wall “the magic curtain”³ in the Mexican and American imaginary. Simultaneously, the border prominently (and ironically) functions as a restrictive death zone, by which the impermeability of the American way of life is solidified. This ambiguity creates psychological inconsistencies, which are met by the border’s ever increasing process of “walling up,”⁴ exemplifying the exclusionary mapping of globalization.

Exploring the US-Mexican border in the context of crossing denotes this border as a third space, in both the literal and the conceptual sense, from which we can explore the Wall’s ‘otherness.’ The idea of crossing is closely related to the notion of liminality, and its implication in ambivalence. This resonates with the screenings

¹ Marion Schmid, *Chantal Akerman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 114.

² Roger Bartra, introduction to *Warrior for Gringostroika*, by Guillermo Gómez-Peña (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1993), 11.

³ Thomas Torrans, *The Magic Curtain: The Mexican-American Border in Fiction, Film, and Song* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002).

⁴ Junita Sundberg, “Delimiting Democracy: Witnessing along the US-Mexico Borderlands,” in *Political Geography* 33 (2013), 53.

discussed in relation to Palestine and Berlin, many examples of which attempt to challenge established ideological binaries by (re)introducing the means of ‘inbetweenness.’ By extension the example of the US-Mexican borderland elevates this idea and provides a new space, or third space, from which to articulate the correspondences between these ‘walls’ without reducing them to ‘sameness.’ To Homi K. Bhabha such a third space is culturally located in hybridity and marks the territory where differences encounter each other.⁵ Hence, the third space can be thought as a borderland of possibility and transformation, where identities are fluid and perspectives multiply continuously. In a sense the third space is the conceptual other side to the Wall, most obviously because it is a space which enables rather than restricts variance and contention. The third space creates “other positions,”⁶ and “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”⁷ It reminds us, to borrow from Judith Butler, “that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value.”⁸ Instead, the third space proposes forms of recognition that initiate the “intervention of otherness,”⁹ or ways of negotiating the fact that we are always self and Other.

Evoking the Wall’s inherent otherness, the US-Mexican Border allows for an exploration of the Wall’s traumatic traces, bringing together recurrences while highlighting specific trajectories. Thus, the US-Mexican border functions as ‘the other scene’ to the previous examples. As Bhabha explains, the third space “bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings and discourses.”¹⁰ Collating the Wall’s traumatic traces, the third space allows for the negotiation of the Wall’s trauma in layers - layers that stretch across different contexts and times and ultimately collapse these distinctions. Balibar illustrates a similar idea in his conceptualization of ‘the other scene of politics.’ To him this scene is “also the scene of the other, where the visible-incomprehensible victims and enemies are

⁵ Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Babha,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Butler, *Precarious Life*, XII.

⁹ Rutherford, “The Third Space,” 211.

¹⁰ Ibid.

located at the level of fantasy.”¹¹ This echoes the contexts of Berlin and Palestine and the identificatory parameters they (attempt to) fix. Both Palestine and Berlin produce and hide otherness fantasmatically, and thus it is no surprise that we might find ‘the other scene’, a return of the repressed, in the context of Mexico. In this sense the Wall as such is an unconscious trace, reappearing in the past, present and future context of walling, and reiterating Freud’s assumption that “unconscious psychic processes are in themselves timeless.”¹² The traumatic legacy of the Wall is thus reworked and repeated from Berlin via Palestine to Mexico. The Wall thereby opens up the possibility of intercultural transference despite itself, along with the actualisation of its unconscious determinants through the means of projection.

Projecting the Global

The process of projection has been central to the discussions of Berlin and Palestine, as these walls illustrate projection used as a means of psychological defence. In both cases the projection serves to externalize a conflict between self and Other, which is materialized in the concrete Wall. Consequently, the Wall provides a projection screen for the psychological undercurrents of this conflict, at the same time as the projective elements of the Wall can be explored through the cinematic screening of the Wall’s trauma. Such dynamics of projection are fully materialized in the US-Mexican example, precisely because this Wall draws attention to processes of global fortification reflected in internal divisions. In the words of Balibar, the US-Mexican border functions as a “territorial projection[-] of the political world order (or disorder).”¹³ Resembling the Berlin Wall and the West Bank Separation barrier, the US-Mexican border works as a fantasmatically produced shelter¹⁴ that rests on a “national imago of goodness, one that wholly externalizes the nation’s ills and disavows its unlovely effects on others, its aggressions, needs, and dependencies”¹⁵ while strengthening the cultural hatred it projects. In this sense, the border works as

¹¹ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, XIII

¹² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 67.

¹³ Balibar, “Europe as Borderland,” 193.

¹⁴ Brown, *Walled States*, 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 122.

a “laboratory of globalization,”¹⁶ and visualizes the exclusionary processes of walling and surveillance. If, as Michel Foucault maintains, “invisibility is a guarantee of order,”¹⁷ the bringing to surface or making visible of power structures is precisely the first step to subverting and disaggregating the existing “political world order,” according to Balibar. Wherever the dynamics of global identity mapping are projected, forms of intellectual and artistic crossings may be enabled to renegotiate the meaning of the border as a Wall.

To date, the US-Mexican Wall has for the most part rested on an imaginary projection, which only in recent years has begun to materialize. Despite working primarily through a form of virtual fencing, complete with infra-red cameras and “24/7 drone flights,”¹⁸ as well as a vast, lethal desert strip, the US-Mexican border nonetheless needs a physical Wall as theatrical projection for the purpose of psychological consolidation. As Brown puts it, “sensors and screening devices are not up for the task.”¹⁹ Instead “walls – solid, visible, walls - are demanded when the constitutive political horizon for the ‘we’ and the ‘I’ is receding.”²⁰ Thus, it is precisely through the imaginary that the border can – and must – be concretized as a Wall that projects American security while enabling a militarized surveillance complex. Such imaginaries have been supported by films such as *Traffic* (2000), which reinstates the threat of the borderless world and the corruption of the American family through drug trafficking, advocating a binary of good and evil in the American imagination which plays out as equivalent to the coordinates of North and South. On the other hand, projections of the Wall have also been used as artistic challenges to these national fantasies. For example, in 2003 artist activists in Tijuana evoked the Wall as an arrangement of colourful coffins, each displaying a particular year and the numbers of deaths recorded in the borderlands.²¹ Placing the coffins on

¹⁶ Néster García Canclini quoted in Andrea Noble, *National Mexican Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 149.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books 1979), 200.

¹⁸ Todd Miller, “Creating a Military Industrial Immigration Complex,” *Aljazeera*, August 3 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/2013714154732351793.html> (accessed: 1 May 2014).

¹⁹ Brown, *Walled States*, 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Leslie Berestein, “An Openness to Border Fence: Divider boundless as Visual Forum for Political Expression,” *The Border Wall in the News*, 30 November 2009, <http://borderwallinthenews.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/openness-to-border-fence-divider.html> (accessed: 14 April 2014).

the Mexican side, the installation effectively projected the Mexican reality of the border's deadly and restrictive landscape. This characterized the border as a Wall that poses a threat to the lives and security of those that try to escape its shadow, rather than condemning the people it keeps out. Ultimately, the US-Mexican Wall, both in terms of the physical and psychological rigidity it projects, vacillates between competing structures of meaning, often taking its cues from the walls in Berlin and Palestine.

Referencing its precedents in other political and historic contexts the US-Mexican border aims to legitimize itself as a Wall and as an arm of the surveillance state that performs rigid state control. In this function, the US-Mexican borderlands are linked to Israel, both ideologically and practically. Both Israel and the US tend to refer to each other for support. Recently the US went as far as contracting Elbit, Israel's "biggest defence contractor,"²² to finish the construction of its Wall. As one of the US consulting agents, Mark Amtower, put it, without a trace of irony, "in extraordinary circumstances, one really wants to employ the best."²³ This not only illustrates the notion of projection and transference of the fantasy of security across different contexts, but also reveals a global exchange of walling expertise aimed at suggesting a certain sense of 'normality' and even 'quality'. The West Bank Separation barrier and the US-Mexican border are thus linked by the fictions of security they seek to sustain by supporting each other and sharing the technology and knowledge of walling. However, while the Israeli Wall is used as a validation that also offers practical links and assistance in the US border fortification, it is the historic undercurrent of totalitarian imprisonment exemplified in the Berlin Wall that haunts this discourse of legitimization.

Both the US and Israel are at pains to distinguish themselves from the legacy of the Iron Curtain; however, the implications inevitably surface as these states project the Berlin Wall into their current walled contexts. As John McCain proudly asserts, the US-Mexican border is the "most militarized border since the fall of the Berlin Wall,"²⁴ thereby utilizing the German precedent as a literal referent. More generally,

²² Haaretz and Reuters, "West Bank Separation Barrier Technology coming to U.S.-Mexico Border," *Haaretz*, 5 March 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.578035> (accessed: 1 May 2014).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

it is the unbounded control of the state emerging from a project of walling that projects a memory of Berlin. Such a projection works psychologically as a form of denial, whereby that element “which the subject [or nation] refuses to recognise or rejects”²⁵ in the self is subsequently “expelled from the self and located in another person or thing.”²⁶ In this way the totalitarian elements of the Berlin Wall traumatically resurface as the US-Mexican border becomes “ground zero for the rise, growth, and spread of the domestic surveillance state.”²⁷ Indeed, the US-Mexican border extensively relies on a suspension of law, which echoes the example of Berlin and mimics Israeli strategies to justify the Wall “as a response to a ‘state of emergency,’ bidding to protect a vulnerable nation under siege.”²⁸ This produces a “constitution-free zone,”²⁹ which according to Sundberg, exemplifies “boundary making as a technique of power used to reconfigure the state and its relationship to citizens within the space of the nation.”³⁰ The ‘walled state’ emerging in the US-Mexican border region thus mirrors the totalitarian power structures of the GDR. In this sense Brown rightly asserts that, no matter what the ideological particularities, “walls built around political entities cannot block out without shutting in, cannot secure without making securitization a way of life, cannot define an external ‘they’ without producing a reactionary ‘we’.”³¹ Thus, the US-Mexican border, the West Bank separation barrier and the Berlin Wall stage power in much the same way. Enclosing the subjectivities and freedoms of the people they seek to keep out on the one hand and claiming to protect on the other, they project and maintain fixed identities and secure the separation from the Other as a way of life.

Performing the Border: Guillermo Gómez-Peña

A border provokes a wish to cross it, and to resist the limitations of walled space. Challenging the enclosed perspectives offered and projected by the Wall, Mexican-born Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña utilizes the medium of performance in order to explore the notion of crossing and multiplicity as markers of a ‘border

²⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 349.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Miller, “Creating a Military Industrial Immigration Complex”

²⁸ Brown, *Walled States*, 36.

²⁹ Sundberg, “Delimiting Democracy,” 55.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Brown, *Walled States*, 42.

subjectivity'. Investigating difference and diversity in relation to the border, both as a physical site and a psychological setting, the artist builds up 'the other scene' to exclusionary patterns of power and binary politics by situating identity within the 'third space'. Engaging in a process of social communication and "cultural translation,"³² Gómez-Peña suggests, in resonance with Bhabha, "that all forms of culture are in some way related to each other, because culture is a signifying or symbolic activity."³³ This artistic intervention constitutes a political act in the sense Rancière imagines it, precisely because Gómez-Peña's performances create a possibility of political negotiation, or a shift of perspective in a landscape of binaries, by insisting on an inherent cultural hybridity. The artist celebrates identity as a form of multiplicity and understands his performance "as a strategy to become visible"³⁴ made available to those who embody unwanted diversity and cultural otherness. His performances, to borrow the words of Patricia Zavella, "become a reflexive space which fosters agency by allowing for critiques of politics from outside and from within Mexican communities."³⁵ Border art thereby becomes "a conceptual territory,"³⁶ in which the border's restrictive meanings and associated identity politics are renegotiated and the border space itself is reclaimed "as a worthwhile place of creation."³⁷ Hence, the Wall as a means of separation is subverted by the notion of the border as an image or a stage, working "as the site of specular performance"³⁸ that seeks to make visible the unconscious assumptions about culture and identity it otherwise so strictly maintains. Exploring the concept of otherness along these parameters, Gómez-Peña's investigation of the US-Mexican border opens up questions about the encounter of cultures. Through his performance he seeks to challenge the dominant fictions associated with national identities by reinventing the relationship with a cultural Other and constructing alternative fictions of the everyday. Ultimately, this reinstates the artist as activist and facilitator of community, transgressing the boundaries of power.

³² Rutherford, "The Third Space," 209.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Conversations Across the Border: A Performance Artist Converses with Theorists, Curators, Activists and Fellow Artists*, ed. Laura Levin (London: Seagull Books, 2011), 322.

³⁵ Patricia Zavella, *I'm neither Here nor There: Mexican Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), 192.

³⁶ Coco Fusco, "The Border Art Workshop/ Taller de Arte Fronterizo: Interview with Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Emily Hicks," *Third Text* 3, no. 7 (1989), 53.

³⁷ Ibid., 57.

³⁸ Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 166.

In his performative engagement with the Wall, Gómez-Peña explores the crossing of borders, both in terms of the collective and the individual as well as the physical and the psychological, and thereby draws attention to multiperspectival encounters. This reveals the border's interplay between a site-specific politics that mostly re-enacts (post)colonial violence and its more universalized psychological form of alienation. Drawing on Jeff Kelly, Claire Fox explains that an artistic practice which is concerned with site-specificity, investigates how "a place is not merely a medium of art but also its contents."³⁹ Conversely, the exploration of the psychological undercurrents of such a place is more concerned with the way in which the place itself is internalized. This interplay is reflected in Gómez-Peña's two most border-focused works: the establishment of the *Border Art Workshop/ Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAW)* in 1984 and his performance character *Border Brujo*, which he performed between 1988 and 1989, and which enjoyed a significant afterlife in the form of a video installation and a performance script.⁴⁰ The BAW/TAW foremost investigated the border area as a site that revealed heavily coded cultural, historical and political layers of structuring subjectivity, whereas *Border Brujo* was increasingly interested with the investigation of a 'border personality' as a widely applicable experience. With these artworks Gómez-Peña thus traced a movement from the specificity of the border's site to the internalized conditions of the border as a psychological restriction. In so doing he insisted, as Claire Fox observes, that "the border was something people carried within themselves, in addition to being an external factor structuring perception."⁴¹ Both projects, *BAW/TAW* and *Border Brujo*, thus invite an exploration of the borderlands as liminal third space, in which the specific and collective traces of dominant fictions, identities and walls can be found and experienced, at the same time as they are subject to a hybrid renegotiation of multiple cultural and political – but also psychological – encounters.

The *BAW/TAW* was a bilingual artist collective which predominantly challenged the politics of the US-Mexican border between 1984 and 1990 by claiming it as "a

³⁹ Claire F. Fox, "The Portable Border: Site Specificity, Art and the U.S. – Mexico Frontier," *Social Text*, no. 41 (Winter, 1994), 63.

⁴⁰ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (St Paul Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1993), 75-96. "Extracto: Guillermo Gomez - Peña / Museo de Arte Moderno 2011," *Vimeo* <http://www.frequency.com/video/border-brujo-19/34601261> (accessed: 15 May 2014).

⁴¹ Fox, "The Portable Border," 63.

laboratory for social and aesthetic experimentation.”⁴² The group proposed “the artist as a social thinker and binational diplomat,”⁴³ staging cross-cultural performance encounters in the US-Mexican border region. For example, in 1986 the group performed a ‘roundtable’ on the border between Chicanos, Mexicans and North Americans, literally placing participants around a table which was bisected by the US-Mexican border. Turning the tables in the practical and metaphorical sense, the group then staged illegal crossings of the border as well as illegal exchanges of food and affection.⁴⁴ The performance resulted in what the artists have described as “fiesta,”⁴⁵ enabling forms of community. This proposed a sense of border culture marked by the inherent crossing of its participants and suggested a “community of difference...fragmented, ever changing, and temporary”⁴⁶ as opposed to the enduring binary division enforced by the border as Wall. The insistent site specificity thereby became “a guiding principle of the group,”⁴⁷ showing the US-Mexican border “not merely as a delimiting factor or dividing line but a social and cultural world unto itself.”⁴⁸ This setting allowed the artists to stage a kind of reverse cultural invasion, according to which the relationships between Anglo-American, Mexican and Chicano cultural identities could be renegotiated.

Projecting such collective negotiations back onto the psychological screen of the individual, Gómez-Peña’s performance character *Border Brujo* foregrounds idiosyncratic experiences and perceptions of the border, while articulating a political and cultural criticism through the multiple voices of the character. *Border Brujo*, whom the artist has described as “a psychological border crosser”⁴⁹ and “a guide for border crossers,”⁵⁰ combines multiple identities that re-enact and also traverse the broader cultural assemblages. The character of *Border Brujo* consists of fifteen different personae, each speaking a different “border language”⁵¹ or dialect, who

⁴² Gómez-Peña, *Conversations Across the Border*, 324.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 57.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Philosophical Tantrum,” *Youtube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74ajLA7MFDw> (accessed: 1 May 2014)

⁴⁷ Fox, “The Portable Border,” 63.

⁴⁸ Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, “Shifting Borders, Free Trade, and Frontier Narrative US, Canada and Mexico,” *American Literary History* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), 90.

⁴⁹ Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 59.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 75.

reflect on the various relationships between South and North.⁵² *Border Brujo* continuously re-enacts colonial attitudes and stereotypes of the exotic and somewhat backward Other, before offsetting these images with articulate cultural criticism. “I’m ready to fight, I’m ready to rape, don’t like me too much, ‘cause I’m a drug smuggling welfare recipient to be,”⁵³ one of *Border Brujo*’s personae proclaims, before he blatantly rejects this stereotype, lamenting that “if it wasn’t for the fact that I read too much Foucault and Baudrillard...I could fulfil your expectations much better.”⁵⁴ The various personae speak with different voices – ranging from “authoritative” to “drunk,” “vulnerable,” “agitated” and “epiphanic”⁵⁵ – and enact different accents as well as varying levels of intelligibility, affirmation and antagonism. Speaking from a candle-lit postmodern altar consisting of a mix of cultural icons, such as the Lady of Guadalupe, the Star Wars robot R2D2, a football and a plastic figure of an American Indian, *Border Brujo*, himself covered in ‘ironicized’ pop culture buttons, a giant banana necklace and a Corona hat, works the image of the Mexican through different aspects of culture, art, film and literature. The character thereby questions the notion of a fixed identity, continuously re-enacting multiple perspectives across continuums of cultural identification.

Engaging with the borderlands in terms of transculturalism and hybridity disrupts the purification and fixation of identity. This challenges ideological processes of borderization, both in regard to psychological fragmentation as well as global and national forms of exclusion. However, as Andrea Noble points out, “borders...exist precisely because they can be crossed”⁵⁶ and identities are “never as stable as the sheer materiality of the border-as-frame would suggest.”⁵⁷ Thus, the performance of hybridity draws attention to the border’s vulnerability or imaginary inconsistency and thereby challenges the border’s own performance of stability, unveiling its underlying structures. The connection between crossing and the concept of the transcultural is thereby prominently expressed in the various hybrid genres Gómez-

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 76-83.

⁵⁶ Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 149.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Peña applies. In a combination of Mexican popular culture and fluxus,⁵⁸ Gómez-Peña's performance art draws attention to cultural contrasts and shifting identities that make up the third space, challenging the rigid territorialisation evoked by walls meant to segregate "a new mankind, the fourth world, the migrant kind."⁵⁹ *Border Brujo* is not willing to maintain such distinctions, or as he puts it to his audience, "I am not your tourist guide across the undetermined otherness."⁶⁰ Instead, Gómez-Peña pleads for "a pluralistic sense of self"⁶¹ and for the application of "multiple repertoires of identity"⁶² as reflected in his multilingual performances, mix of cultural costumes and insistent hybridization of Mexican and Anglo American cultural icons, ranging from a Tequila bottle to a Batman sticker. To Gómez-Peña these images and acts of multiplicity subvert what he identifies as the "the borderization of the world,"⁶³ staging a cultural clash and thereby exercising, as he says, "the freedom that my two countries have denied me."⁶⁴ The artist maintains that "hope is always located on the other side of the border or the mirror,"⁶⁵ demanding that we acknowledge the multiplicity of identities and contexts as being on the 'other side' to the Wall. In other words, the encounter between two cultures or two sides does not have to materialize in the building of a Wall but can emerge as the performance of a "border experience."⁶⁶ Similar to the fantasy scenario evoked by Freud, such an experience works through the negotiation and expression of different identificatory roles and positions, and suggests that, like *Border Brujo*, we perform these multiple roles in multiple contexts and communities. Hence, instead of building a Wall we need to find ways of rethinking our conflicts in terms of cultural and political hybridity and exploring the multiple identificatory positions they suggest.

By exploring multiplicity as a means to map identities, Gómez-Peña challenges the ideological fictions that support division by walls, and repositions the binary meanings they construct. The artist seeks to deconstruct the grand narratives and mythologies that stigmatize and exclude the cultural Other, by renegotiating the

⁵⁸ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶¹ Fusco, "The Border Art Workshop," 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁵ Gómez-Peña, "Philosophical Tantrum"

⁶⁶ Fusco, "The Border Art Workshop," 59.

meaning of the border, and challenging the parameters that define identity. This is possible precisely because “borders frame national and cultural identities”⁶⁷ in specific ways that are reiterated through dominant fictions, and Gómez-Peña disrupts these patterns of power via “creative appropriation, expropriation, and subversion of dominant cultural forms.”⁶⁸ His aim is to position the Other and the self in a continuous project of crossing, precisely because the ‘arrival’ on either side suggested by the dominant fiction “is just an illusion.”⁶⁹ Gómez-Peña’s artistic intervention is the positioning of the Other (including himself) “in a fictional centre, pushing the dominant culture to the margin.”⁷⁰ In this way, the parameters of the given are rearranged, “turning and forcing the dominant culture to become the other.”⁷¹ For example, the *BAW/TAW* released a press statement on El Día de la Raza/Columbus Day, claiming that “the continent had been turned upside down,”⁷² leading Columbus to arrive in Tijuana. The fictional event was then itself replayed by the ‘roundtable’ situated across the border. Exploring a similar approach of decentring the facts fictitiously, Gómez-Peña called for a Gringostroika movement, advocating “the complete economic and cultural reform of U.S. capitalism.”⁷³ Such a strategy of fictionally rearranging meanings not only aims to make “a parodic, dramatic and humorous theatre out of the dominant fantasy,”⁷⁴ but also exposes the global and local power structures that purport to be centres of dominance. In this way political contingencies are fictitiously recontextualized and explore the underlying structures of meaning, much in the way *Rabbit à la Berlin* allegorises the death strip and films such as *Kawasaki’s Rose* and *The Lives of Others* blur the boundary between victim and perpetrator. In each case the dominant fiction is challenged through a multiperspectival engagement of the spectator, through which the dominant narrative itself becomes strange or just one possibility among many alternatives.

The construction of alternative fictions does not only aim to destabilize the dominant fiction, remapping the boundaries of the given through strategies of (counter)

⁶⁷ Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 164.

⁶⁸ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ John Kraniauska, “Border Dialogue: Talking to Guillermo Gómez-Peña,” *Traversia* 3, no. 1 (1994), 159.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 57.

⁷³ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 12.

⁷⁴ Kraniauska, “Border Dialogue,” 170.

fictionalization. It also serves as a form of resistance, by which the Other negotiates his or her position as an outsider from within the field of meaning constructed by the dominant collective. The migrant thereby epitomizes the Other on the inside, much in the way Gómez-Peña evokes *Border Brujo* as “he becomes self and other within himself.”⁷⁵ The character demonstrates the interrelation of self and Other; however, this relation can play out along different fictitious trajectories. For example, the collective may not strictly seek to eradicate the Other; rather, the (fictive) Other is needed “to reproduce an illegality that in turn justifies the repressive measures”⁷⁶ of the state. Gómez-Peña persistently re-enacts this illegality of the migrant and recontextualizes it in order to open such processes to critical reflection. For example, the illegal exchange of food and affection across the border table highlights this strategy of illegalization and renders it absurd, while also staging such boundaries as the means for successful crossings. Negotiating different cultural, political and psychological subject positions, Gómez-Peña acknowledges the production of alternative fictions as a “significant way for immigrant cultures to deal with the new reality”⁷⁷ that allows for a remapping of the new setting, often through “reterritorialization, rejection of the new reality and the construction of a fictitious past.”⁷⁸ To Gómez-Peña these parameters are essential to the Chicano movement; however, the elaboration of alternative fictions is useful to migrants and ‘Others’ in varying contexts of segregation who find themselves in unfamiliar and often hostile surroundings. Whether navigating an absent Wall in Berlin or witnessing *Pippi Longstocking in Abu Dis*, the reconstruction of reality via means of alternative fictions is a powerful means for addressing the element of otherness within a particular collective self and rearranging the coordinates of this collective’s self-understanding. In this way the figure of the migrant as well as the conceptual Other are reinstated as crucial to the imagination and re-imagination of an unbounded collective.

Gómez-Peña aims to challenge national identity, reimagining its psychological undercurrents and thus broadening the forms of community it enables. *Border Brujo* in particular exemplifies Gómez-Peña’s claim that crossing the border evokes a

⁷⁵ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 76.

⁷⁶ Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*, 62.

⁷⁷ Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

“multiplicity of selves.”⁷⁹ However, the many facets of *Border Brujo* also make a point of the psychological process of bringing out these selves, “many of which are unconscious.”⁸⁰ *Border Brujo* “articulates fear, desire, trauma, anger, and misplacement,”⁸¹ switching between the fifteen personae that make up his character. Continuously oscillating between the extreme emotions of a ‘borderline personality,’ he explores the self as much as the Other and hence becomes an “alternative chronicler of life in a community.”⁸² The spontaneous eruptions of these seemingly repressed characters thereby function as a cathartic release, capable of circumventing the Wall that protects the collective (Anglo-American) unconscious, re-enacting this process on a cultural level. These moments of eruption are often enacted as ‘drunk talk’, through which *Border Brujo* uncovers uncomfortable truths from the post-colonial unconscious. “You think we have nothing in common?”⁸³ he asks before revealing, “well, well you are a victim of your government and so am I...of yours.”⁸⁴ Confronting his Anglo-American audience, a drunk *Border Brujo* explains, “I am here ‘cause your government went down there, to my country without a formal invitation and took all our resources, so I came to look for them, just to look for them, nothing else. If you see a refugee tonight treat him well; he’s just seeking his stolen resources.”⁸⁵ The enactment resonates with Elia Suleiman’s stylistic ‘tourette syndrome’ reproducing the psychological occupation of the (collective) Palestinian mind. The hybrid identity becomes a melting point for the different spheres of psychical and cultural life and thereby questions the otherwise strict differentiation of these registers, exposing the unconscious underpinnings the boundaries otherwise seek to hide. The idea of exposing and thus disrupting such demarcations reverberates through the photographs of Gundula Schulze Eldowy and Detlef Matthes in their collapse of political and private spheres to reinstate the invisible or unseen aspect of the everyday Wall experience. Similarly, the works of Peter Unsicker on the Berlin Wall and Banksy’s graffiti art on the West Bank Separation barrier bring forward the hidden meanings of a walled life, but recontextualize the very image of the boundary much in the same way that Gómez-

⁷⁹ Kraniauska, “Border Dialogue,” 161.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 75.

⁸² Ibid., 76.

⁸³ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Peña reconfigures the meaning of the border. With the Wall working “as synecdoche of the nation it divides”⁸⁶ such efforts of refiguration ultimately challenge the collective imaginary of the nation with the aim of critically addressing its power centres. Such an attempt also marks a “search for a new conceptual nation,”⁸⁷ as Gómez-Peña explains. This nation, to Gómez-Peña, always has to be located on the conceptual other side to the boundary in order to be “capable of containing...complex identities.”⁸⁸ Hence, the wall-artist always implicitly addresses the post-national through the reimagining of community as multiple, diverse and both self and other.

Reinventing the relationship with the Other is crucial to a critical mediation of the Wall, as it explores otherness from without as well as from within. This encounter with otherness is a recurring theme of the wall-screenings and marks an attempt to debunk cultural and political stereotypes. The starting point of this encounter is the recognition of “otherness within,”⁸⁹ which relies on the idea that “one has to understand otherness to understand oneself.”⁹⁰ Conversely, Judith Butler reminds us that mutual recognition also relies on the initiation of otherness precisely because, “when we recognize another, or when we ask for recognition, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are,”⁹¹ but rather to “instigate transformation, to petition the future always in relation to each other.”⁹² In other words, recognition demands the evocation of hybrid identities that are both self and other. However, as Gómez-Peña explains, “the problem is that the North continues to project stereotypes onto the South, as the centre does onto its perceived margins.”⁹³ This is reflected in the various Mexican stereotypes that circulate through a border discourse, ranging from the criminal to the romantic mariachi. However, it also resonates in other walled contexts with the ideological maintenance of otherness, reflected in the terrorist in Palestine or the war criminals who are always on the other side of the Wall in Berlin. In this construction of the stereotype, the hybrid finds its counter-force, precisely because the stereotype depends “on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the

⁸⁶ Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 151.

⁸⁷ Gómez-Peña, *Conversations Across the Border*, 16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 66.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 44.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Gómez-Peña, *Conversations Across the Border*, 23.

ideological construction of otherness,”⁹⁴ and thus is created and maintained by the walls and boundaries of the political. Collapsing such boundaries is then closely connected to a drastic engagement with and recontextualizing of stereotypes they produce. For example, Gómez-Peña enacts and radicalizes the stereotype, most overtly in the appearance of the romantic mariachi or the drunk antagonistic migrant. Similarly, Abu-Assad’s *Paradise Now* seeks to debunk the stereotype of the terrorist, enlarging the image to point out its fractures for the audience. As Gómez-Peña puts it, when you confront the audience with the stereotype, “you shatter the mirror in front of their faces and you make them aware of the political implications of the construction of this stereotype.”⁹⁵ In this way, the screening of otherness marks a political praxis aimed at destabilizing the rigid divisions of political power.

Political wall art engages in a complex process of working through political division in order to reinstate the otherness within, ultimately reimagining practical forms of political community. As Gómez-Peña explains, border art evokes “a process of healing, articulating, subverting, reinventing, this relationship with the cultural other.”⁹⁶ Since this process, in the broadest sense, stages an encounter at the margins of the political, it also implies that the artist is an enabler of community, facilitating the cultural groundwork necessary to imagine new forms of political togetherness. Whether in the context of Mexico, Berlin or Palestine, the artist seeks to reintroduce diversity, noise and affective resonance into an otherwise culturally impoverished and politically inert space at the margins of power. Gómez-Peña reminds us that in such a context “the artist, besides being an image maker, has to become a provider of infrastructure, a community organizer, and has to become a popular politician in order to speak.”⁹⁷ For example, *BAW/TAW* published a regular magazine (*The Broken Line*), created radio shows⁹⁸ and produced many of their performances in the context of cross-cultural encounters, such as the roundtable, and thereby facilitated artistic debates that are also politicized. As Gómez-Peña puts it, “when you don’t have access to power, poetry replaces science and performance art becomes

⁹⁴ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen* 24, no 4 (1983), 18.

⁹⁵ Kraniauska, “Border Dialogue,” 161.

⁹⁶ Fusco, “The Border Art Workshop,” 54.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

politics.”⁹⁹ A similar logic applies to the Israeli-Palestinian project *Artists without Walls*, who by rendering the Wall transparent, not only evoked an affectively shared experience between the two sides, but also enabled community with the participants dancing and talking together long after the projectors had been turned off.¹⁰⁰ This mirrors the ‘siesta’ that spontaneously evolved from the *BAW/TAW*’s roundtable performance, but also resonates with the crowds of people engaging with the Wall in Peter Unsicker’s ‘backyard.’ Hence, the examples speak to an affective and political reviving of an inert space meant to divide people and communities. Contrary to such patterns of political alienation, artists prove helpful in culturally nourishing political margins through affective scenes that reinstate diversity, encouraging us to acknowledge that “no one belongs to only one community.”¹⁰¹ In this way artists evoke the Wall’s other side, by providing a stage, in the sense of Rancière, on which the multiple roles of the social can rearrange the given reality of division.

Screening the Border: Chantal Akerman’s *From the Other Side*

Similarly to the art of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Chantal Akerman’s films display a profound interest in the liminal encounters between self and Other, continuously exploring their underlying relationships. However, Akerman’s films utilize this relationship foremost in order to investigate the layers of trauma underlying everyday politics. Her documentaries in particular investigate political and historical settings, but are ultimately interested in bringing the repressed to the surface as part of the social criticism they evoke. Echoing Tilda Swinton’s philosophical enquiry of Berlin’s absent Wall in *The Invisible Frame*, Akerman’s documentary *From the Other Side* (De L’Autre Côté, 2002)¹⁰² is attentive to the abstract meanings of space and the psychological demarcations to which space is linked. The film investigates the Mexican border as a Wall that carries fatal symbolic and practical implications for the Mexican people, imposing a political and psychological segregation from the United States. Unveiling the multiple sides to this problem on both sides of the border through interviews, Akerman encounters the political implications of space

⁹⁹ Gómez-Peña, “Philosophical Tantrum”

¹⁰⁰ Boulatta “The Spirit of Activism,” 257.

¹⁰¹ Gómez-Peña, “Philosophical Tantrum”

¹⁰² *From the Other Side*, directed by Chantal Akerman (USA/Mexico, 2002; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Icarus Films, 2012), DVD.

foremost via insistent interrogations of the personal. Her approach resonates with that of Elia Suleiman and his devotion to the political unconscious of the bounded space. Reworking the documentary *From the Other Side* into an art installation, Akerman also “creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters”¹⁰³ and thereby projects the scene in a “transitive relationship...between activated spectatorship and active engagement in the wider social and political arena.”¹⁰⁴ Akerman’s work on both the film and the installation thus implies a ‘transitive relationship’ and perhaps a moment of transference across political and historical settings. Her work investigates the psychical dynamics revealed by the Wall as both medium and barrier, insistenty exploring the Wall on – and as – screen.

The screen allows Akerman to explore the trajectories of trauma through her complex documentation of the return of the repressed and her insistent collapse of conceptual binaries. She thus perpetuates a cinema of blurred boundaries - between the self and Other, the personal and the political, the factual and the fictitious, and the director and her subjects. This bringing together of registers that are normally kept separate allows her to think the operations of the Wall across different cultural and historical spaces, to reveal a common trace of suffering or a map of traumatic encounters that links the various contexts. For Akerman, then, traumatic walls erupt in and through a variety of settings, but always implicitly lead her back to the Holocaust as the ultimate traumatic experience and the post-memorial burden she inherited from her parents.¹⁰⁵ Trauma is manifested and revealed via its link to “a post-Holocaust imaginary”¹⁰⁶ and Akerman insistenty reproduces this ‘post-memory’ through the investigation of alternative fictions and realities. Ultimately, this engagement offers insight into the traumatic recurrences of political walls and intimates how they might unconsciously be linked. Indeed, Akerman conjures a cinema of the past in the present, of endurance and passage; ultimately, she evokes a cinema of the unconscious, “obsessed with borders and liminal spaces,”¹⁰⁷ across different contexts and times. Similar to the work of the psychoanalyst, her films are characterized by patience and waiting in order to allow meaning to surface and to

¹⁰³ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate, 2005), 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 2.

explore the invisible dynamics between the concrete and the abstract, the apparent and its other side.

Akerman's documentary *From the Other Side* explores the US-Mexican border and the forms of subjectivity reflected on each side. In this way, the film "records a personal and socio-political topography of the human condition"¹⁰⁸ in the shadow of the Wall. Projecting the physical and psychological effectivity of the Wall in order to transgress it, the film begins on the Mexican side, where Akerman interviews the inhabitants of the Mexican borderlands about stories of crossing. The interviews are interspersed by long shots of the Wall to reveal that family tragedies are embedded in poor economic conditions and fatal attempts to cross into a better life. When Akerman's camera finally crosses to the other side, the sight of the Wall disappears as she explores the political and mental barriers that characterise the US side as a profound sense of xenophobic anxiety and inability to deal with the postcolonial narrative that connects the two countries. However, the borderlands also work as a backdrop for the depiction of social, economic and psychological links between the two sides, foregrounding the plight of an impoverished South dependent on a largely ignorant North. Indeed, the film captures what Kraniauskas calls "the contradiction produced...between a law that separates and an economic dynamic which joins, and that makes of the border zone it creates a place of extreme violence and exploitation."¹⁰⁹ *From the Other Side* thus makes clear that "border crossings are themselves acts of desperate people"¹¹⁰ and that the Wall is in fact an unforgiving "architecture of violence,"¹¹¹ to borrow Noam Chomsky's words, shaping the relationship between the two interconnected sides.

The Wall becomes the protagonist of Akerman's film and the central problematic of the situation. Reflecting on this, the film itself is divided into South and North by an infamous ten-minute tracking shot of the Wall midway through the film. However, the first half of the film makes it clear that the Wall is foremost a Mexican reality, restricting life to an inert and unproductive space. Very few people enter the static

¹⁰⁸ Klaus Ottman, "From the Other Side (De l'Autre Côté)," in *Chantal Akerman: Moving through Time and Space*, ed. Terrie Sultan (Houston: Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, 2008), 32.

¹⁰⁹ John Kraniauskas, "Border Issues," *Traversia* 3, no. 1 (1994), 7.

¹¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, interview by Graham Cairns, "Hidden Power and Built Form: The Politics Behind the Architecture," *Architecture_MPS* 3, no. 3 (October 2013)

<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20131001.htm> (accessed: 1 May 2014).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

frame, which represents the Mexican condition. We see people only from afar, passively waiting, like the Palestinians in Suleiman's film, or trying to work the dead land without tools. These people (many of them children) are caught up in an unproductive and futureless space, limited by an enormous fence and the inequalities it has materialized. Akerman captures this agony in the accounts of a 14 year-old who wishes to cross over in search of a better life. She reiterates the bleakness of his future in Mexico with a long tracking shot along the Wall, whose felt endlessness is finally offset by a 180° turn that leads the viewer back into Mexico, where the tracking shot of the Wall is now mirrored by an outward-looking tracking shot of its reflection: an empty, lifeless and silent Mexican neighbourhood. As the traumatic consequences of the political situation emerge, the personal voices become more and more silent and the static shots of the Wall are increased. Finally, the Wall itself takes centre stage in the film as the camera (re)approaches it in a second tracking shot, as if to take it on once more. This shot foregrounds the Wall as the defining object of the Mexican space, absorbing all attempts to create meaning. Such shots are not unfamiliar, as Akerman's second tracking shot resonates with the final scene in *Lemon Tree* when Selma in the midst of her dead trees and Israel, within the emotional wasteland of his failed relationship, silently stare at the separation barrier in their backyard, not knowing they are facing each other and unable to cross.

Akerman's filmic crossing into the US creates a profound sense of disorientation, and thereby mirrors the unstable imaginary on which the Wall rests, dislodging it from its particular location. The shot leads the viewer to the other side of the unconscious, away from the repressed scene of post-colonial exploitation to the encompassing reality of a stable US economy and culture. Here the Wall works foremost as a psychological barrier, which is reflected in the xenophobic accounts of interviewees and poses an implicit limit to those who criticise the lethal handling of the situation or try to improve it. This reveals the Wall as a constitutive force of trauma, precisely because the film is concerned with the Other that the barrier produces fantasmatically and the fictitious nationalism this production entails. We hear a border patrol agent, reciting a eulogy, refer to "the front lines of this daily war," and a couple of farmers explaining their right to use gun power against potential threats to their property. The same couple also expresses a profound fear of the "diseases" Mexicans could bring, underpinned by an anxiety that "there won't be

enough vaccine for everybody.” Such fantasies of invasion not only produce an abundance of ironies in a postcolonial context, but also reveal that “the wall transcends the specific context of the film and becomes an allegory of all barriers that have divided and continue to divide humanity.”¹¹² The xenophobic and aggressively defensive fantasies about the (Mexican) Other resonate with the aggressively self-protective rhetoric that also characterizes the spaces of Berlin and Israel. Thus, the film exemplifies the fact that walls “inadvertently produce a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic and militarized.”¹¹³ In this sense, the Wall screens the social injustices it perpetuates, both in the sense of concealing these processes and in the manner it inadvertently makes them visible.

From the Other Side focuses on the Wall as a means of exclusion, sustaining the fictive identity of the US while denying the two sides’ mutual interdependence. Because the film acknowledges that the separation is one-sided for Mexico, it thus also carefully deconstructs the ideological position of the US as self-contained. In the first few minutes of the film we are confronted with the story of Delfina’s son, who, after years of trying to help his Mexican community to progress and sustain itself, realizes that the means to achieve the aim of relative economic and social stability are only located on the other side, north of the border. In a painful account Delfina recalls her son’s idealism, which eventually sent him on a journey he did not survive. This shows that walls invite those they exclude to project a wish for a better life beyond the limits of the barrier. However, the film deconstructs the myth of the magic curtain, which suggests that the US-Mexican border “is transformation itself, the embodiment of change,”¹¹⁴ promising “the beginning of one sort of life”¹¹⁵ and “the ending of another.”¹¹⁶ Instead, the border is literally evoked as the Wall Bartra describes, working as “a filter that is supposed to purify the passing flux.”¹¹⁷ The Mexican, as the cultural Other, is thereby manifested as the ‘impure,’ which implicitly legitimizes the ignorance towards suffering and cruelty displayed by the other side. As a sheriff in Arizona explains, the border policies are ineffective,

¹¹² Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 116.

¹¹³ Brown, *Walled States*, 40.

¹¹⁴ Torrans, *Magic Curtain*, 24.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, 11.

provoking a “large increase in deaths of migrants,” but he refers to these deaths as “calculated consequence.” Hence, the image of the physical Wall we encounter on the Mexican side is meant to signify the mental barrier maintained by the US. The long shots along the border display, to borrow Philip Rosen’s words, “the difficulty of borders, the physicality of borders, the facticity of borders by doing so for the film frame.”¹¹⁸ The meaning of the Wall emerges gradually, patiently illustrating the move “from the concrete to the abstract and ... back to the concrete,”¹¹⁹ as Akerman describes her film style in an interview. This opens up spaces for critical reflection, whose meaning is often undisclosed but always hints at the Wall’s potential as a ‘third space’.

From the Other Side collapses opposites and challenges the xenophobic construction of the impure by pitching hybridity against the exclusionary forms of binaries, thus reinstating the Other as human. Applying a range of film formats, collapsing fact and fiction and experimenting with a hybrid soundscape, Akerman utilizes hybridity to express the “themes of exclusion and alterity”¹²⁰ and, like Gómez-Peña, to counter ideological contagion. Akerman thereby uses the transgression of boundaries as a means to take a stance against xenophobia and bigotry. This is particularly evident in the film’s choice of music and the recurrence of a somewhat out-of-place Monteverdi piece. The melancholic tune appears in the first scene of the film, in which the 21 year-old Francisco talks about his brother’s failed attempt to cross and the many people he saw dying on the way. It reappears when the camera follows a border agent ‘hunting’ down migrants at night and also echoes in the last minutes of the film, when Akerman recites a fictitious story about a missing woman. The music is estranged from the image and subverts established means of representation as well as the normal relation between image and sound. A similar strategy is applied to the non-diegetic soundtrack accompanying the xenophobic couple in Arizona, although Akerman here chooses a distinctly uplifting and thus highly ironic piano piece. In both cases, the sound disrupts the illusion of reality and affords a critical distance meant to stir the viewer into questioning established truth claims and binaries of knowledge and experience. However, whereas the images of

¹¹⁸ Philip Rosen, “Border Times and Geopolitical Frames: The Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture 2006,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (Fall 2006), 16.

¹¹⁹ Miriam Rosen, “In Her Own Time: Interview with Chantal Akerman,” *Artforum* (April 2004), <http://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200404&id=6572> (accessed: 1 May 2014).

¹²⁰ Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 118.

Francisco, the 'hunting' border patrol agent and the open highway appear disjointed at first glance, one could also read the music as stitching them together to create a theme of persecution and loss. Again, the Wall finds expression in a third space, this time in the soundscape. The other side to the Wall is expressed through multiplicity and the merging of boundaries, providing the 'opposite' of a walled perspective and reinvoking particularity in the dominant political arrangement.

Akerman utilizes personal trajectories in order to destabilize political certainties, reinstating the intimacy of the personal in order to challenge a politically bounded space and to circumvent separation. In particular, Akerman makes use of the interview to reveal the personal aspects and facets that lend meaning to the Wall through the experiences it creates. This marks an attempt to uncover the personal trauma within political objectives, but also provokes a breaking down of the barrier between the filmmaker and her subject. For instance, the interview with Delfina starts with a tracing of her family's history and origins back to Spain, slowly revealing the economic conditions of the post-colonial setting that lead to her son's fatal departure to the North. Delfina's account thereby not only politically contextualizes migratory flows but also affords her the time to emotionally transgress the protective barriers built around her personal suffering. Akerman uses her interview technique to reach out to the other side, a tactic literally accomplished by her persistent addressing of the subject, in heavily accented Spanish and English, while remaining off-screen. Akerman's voice thereby circumvents the barrier between the filmmaker and her subjects, sometimes allowing her subjects to question her in return. In a way Akerman mirrors the relation of the subject with the Wall and vice versa. Hence, many of the subjects are filmed with the same enduring, patient camera as the images of the Wall. The camera waits for meaning to emerge, and provides the space for the details of a protagonist's life to evolve. This circumvents the Wall as a barrier that makes invisible the suffering it induces. In this way the film stages multiple ways of transgressing boundaries both in content and form, all in the service of experiencing the face of the Other, or the faces of the other side.

The patience on the part of the filmmaker also reveals the affective nuances that exceed verbal communication, as mirrored by the face. The camera stays fixed on Delfina's agonized face long after she has finished her story. Her expression of

despair is then mirrored by a long shot of her husband's face, who eventually continues the story, to which there is no closure, before the camera returns once again to Delfina's face. This sense of silent agony and impossibility of finding meaning is epitomized in the image of the barber who faces the camera in complete silence, never uttering a single word. It seems that the suffering experienced by the protagonists cannot be expressed by mere words, but is revealed in their silent, despairing faces. Because of this the film can be, as Klaus Ottman remarks, "almost unbearable for the show of human suffering expressed by the parents or grandparents of migrants who have perished in the desert."¹²¹ Furthermore, the subjects are exclusively filmed head-on by the camera and thus they always find themselves in a face-to-face relation with the filmmaker and the audience.¹²² The audience becomes a witness to the encounter, and is also drawn into the situation. Face to face with the Other (on screen), according to Lévinas, "involves a calling into question of oneself"¹²³ and simultaneously (re)introduces the Other into the underlying relationship. Therefore, the face-to-face relation "calls the self into a relationship of responsibility,"¹²⁴ in which we cross over to the other side and are able to see the imprisonment enacted by the Wall. Such images reinvolve JR's *Face2Face* project on the West Bank separation barrier or Gundula Schulze Eldowy's photographs of people in East Berlin, dislodging the personal trajectories of their suffering and transferring them into one another's 'scenes.' This is possible precisely because the film invites us to transgress the boundary as it pitches the dynamics of the intimate against static politics. However, it also teaches us that transgression of these boundaries demands an unfathomable understanding of the trauma of bounded space.

From the Other Side interrogates the walled landscape cinematically and evokes the bounded space as its physical and psychological undercurrent. Mexican life thus unfolds within the notoriously static, and at times imprisoning, frame of Akerman's camera. Depictions on the US side are subdued to a similar stillness, perhaps to indicate that progress in the immigration debate has come to an unproductive standstill. This reflects the inertia of the walled space and is heightened in the

¹²¹ Ottman, "From the Other Side," 33.

¹²² Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 115.

¹²³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 81.

¹²⁴ Jeffrey W. Murray, *Face-to-Face on Dialogue: Emmanuel Lévinas and (the) Communication (of) Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003), 4.

filming of the actual Wall. As we see shots of the Wall cutting through a picturesque landscape, the camera's movement is reduced to a minimum, foregrounding "the rigor of the frame"¹²⁵ and the durability of the Wall. The technique recalls the static framing of Elia Suleiman, which works to give expression to the psychological imprisonment of his characters and the political impotence of the walled space they inhabit. This idea is heightened by Akerman, in particular through the images that show the Mexican side at night, foregrounding the Wall, lit up by dozens of lights and supported by helicopters and border patrols, effectively creating the imagery of a prison. During daytime Akerman invokes imprisonment through the uncomfortably long shots that "reinstat[e-] the materiality of space as a parameter of filmmaking, in part by foregrounding the time it takes to traverse the space."¹²⁶ Depicting the Wall as a prison-Wall Akerman articulates issues of surveillance and imprisonment as being directly related to the camera, whether it is in the service of a documentary or to track down illegal crossings. This self-reflexive ability of Akerman's camera to re-create imprisonment is mirrored towards the film's ending. Following the shadows of illegal crossers through the eyes of an infra-red surveillance camera, the film asserts a cinematic connection to issues of surveillance, not only because film and surveillance "inhabit the same technological field,"¹²⁷ but also because they give expression to the inner boundaries of psychological imprisonment. The film hence draws attention to the unspoken, the bounded and the impenetrable as reflected and maintained by the Wall.

The bounded space of the physical and psychological setting resonates with the boundaries of language and thereby reinstates the silent visuality of trauma. As Terri Ginsberg observes, the Wall can only be shown on the Mexican side (of the film),¹²⁸ where it is always present, intraversable and cutting through the everyday lives of the people Akerman encounters. It is "positioned as looming...in any case mortally impenetrable"¹²⁹ and always framing Mexican life. However, when the film crosses over to the US side, the Wall disappears from the screen. From there on the Wall "is veritably absent – from the *mise-en-scène*, as well as, the film insinuates, from U.S.

¹²⁵ Rosen, "Border Times and Geopolitical Frames," 15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁷ Kaira Marie Cabanas, "What The Map Cuts Up, The Story Cuts Across: Chantal Akerman's *De L'autre Cote*," *Parachute* (1 October 2005), 26.

¹²⁸ Terri Ginsberg, "Bordering on Disaster – Toward an Epistemology of Divided Cinematic Space," *Spectator* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 33.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

consciousness.”¹³⁰ In this way North and South replay the division between conscious and unconscious settings of the psyche, much in the way Freud had imagined it. Following this analogy the Wall, once again, is reinstated as the (preconscious) barrier and screen of the political setting. It marks the point where uncomfortable and painful thoughts and feelings are either blocked from consciousness or made available for a process of working through. The film illuminates this traumatic meaning of the Wall as a psychic barrier meant to regulate and obscure the repressed and its return to the screen. It thereby reminds us that the Wall marks the boundary of the visible, the speakable and hence the verifiable, both in the psychological sense and its physical function. The silent tracking shots of the Wall accentuate the “formalism of visual language at the expense of the spoken word,”¹³¹ precisely because when we arrive at the Wall we ultimately “arrive at the boundary of language, of the unrepresentable or inexpressible.”¹³² In this way, Akerman’s silent filmic movement along the Wall, which culminates in the crossing to the other side, literally and figuratively exemplifies the work of the camera as working through the walls of trauma. However, it also demonstrates that when we reach the Wall we also arrive at the symptom and thereby get a glimpse of the trauma that constitutes it.

To Akerman the screen works as the central device for investigating the Wall’s traumatic composition. Ultimately, she works through, or ‘screens through’, the Wall as a barrier, exposing it as a psychic screen on several levels. Firstly, the barrier is evoked via the film screen, which in Akerman’s work also enacts a boundary. However, as she moves between the spaces, the screen is “not so much a surface of reproduction as the site of a construction,”¹³³ and thus the Wall/screen analogy becomes the means of critiquing the divide. The screen also evokes, as Rancière maintains, “a process of transformation”¹³⁴ by exposing its function as a barrier. As a medium it transgresses specific contexts and is able to tell us about the Wall’s traumatic formation, whether in Berlin, Israel or Mexico. From the claustrophobic gaze of the surveillance camera lining up unspecified migrants, whose extended walking through the lethal borderlands restages a memory of the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ottman, “From the Other Side,” 35.

¹³² Ibid., 36.

¹³³ Carnevale and Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” 267.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

'death march' in Europe, to the images of open highways accompanied by Akerman's narration about loss and memory, the closing images of *From the Other Side* resound with Jewish trauma. As daylight begins to light up the scene, the image slowly dissolves to expose the surface of the screen, which, as becomes apparent, is located in the Mexican desert. This obscures distinctions between here and there, collapsing distance and traversing spatial and historical contexts. The screen functions as a medium capable of working through the collective (global) anxieties materialized in the Wall, reinstating the screen as a psychic device. In the darkness of the Mexican desert the screen works as the preconscious of a border mentality. However, in the light of the day it reinvokes the barrier, dissolving the transparent image. Marion Schmid reads this move as staging "the dissolution of the American Dream,"¹³⁵ and as such it may well also comment on the Wall as the national screen. Freed from its spatial particularity, the screen of traumatic history reinvokes the Walls of the past, the present and the future, whether they are set in Berlin, Israel or Mexico. Linked in projective repetition and subdued to the flickering presence of the Other, they collectively echo the film's final words: "it must have been a mirage." In this way Akerman suggests an unconscious link between different cultural and historical contexts, transferred onto the third space because it would otherwise be unrepresentable.

Materializing the historical unconscious, the Wall is revealed as a traumatic trace. It thereby links the different walls to a repression of the ultimate atrocity committed against the Other – and thus, to a post-Holocaust imaginary. Wherever it appears, the Wall marks a local projection of a global repetition of xenophobia and violence, separating the self from the Other and simultaneously denying this. Akerman exposes this with the fictitious story that overlays the final scenes of the film. Reciting the story of David, who is in search of his mother, the last words are in themselves recollections and constructions of the Other. The story is told from the point of view of a landlord who speaks of an anonymous "her" whose identity we never learn; thus, we are refused the encounter with the Other, and cannot transgress the intimate walls between self and Other. Akerman's words (now in French) insist on a disturbing non-specificity of the Other and subtly incorporate familiar prejudices, commenting on the woman's tidiness, her supposed mystical powers and

¹³⁵ Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 120.

her determined distance from others. The account intimates a divestment of responsibility on part of the fictitious speaker and simultaneously blames the victim. What happened to her remains unknown, and is subject to unreasonable speculations as well as uncomfortable repression of her possible death (which is at the same time strongly implied). Once again this echoes the persecution of the Jews and the insistent denial of bystanders. The dynamic hence reinvoles the trauma of the Holocaust, but also links the different contexts of Mexico, Israel and Berlin in their inability to deal with its legacy. This reveals that the collective trauma envisioned by the Wall, like perhaps all collective trauma, is linked to the atrocities of the Holocaust as the most devastating and fierce reinstatement of the nation. Akerman further points to this when she explains in an interview that her interest in the US-Mexican border had been sparked by an article in which an American was quoted comparing migrants to 'dirt.'¹³⁶ As she read the words "we don't want that dirt,"¹³⁷ Akerman was instantly reminded "of other times in history when the word 'dirt' was used,"¹³⁸ most evidently in the hateful expression of "dirty Jews."¹³⁹ Thus, Akerman's exploration of the US-Mexican Wall is a study of human repression of "the Other who is impure"¹⁴⁰ as linked to the crimes of the Holocaust, but also marks an ability to respond, or take responsibility, on account of this history.

Similarly, the trauma of the Holocaust resonates with the examples in Berlin and Israel, linking them at the deepest, most intimate level of the unconscious. The Berlin Wall works as a symptom of denial, and of the German inability, and perhaps refusal, to deal with the guilt and shame of the atrocities committed during World War II. Serving to repress the legacies of the past on both sides, the Wall literally builds a barrier against the past in an attempt to remodel the (collective) self without having to address earlier atrocities. Inevitably linked to this denial, the Israeli Wall also works as an expression of the trauma associated with the Holocaust. It projects the fantasy of the nation in order to secure its people from the recurrence of a genocide and to cope with the past by eliminating vulnerability. However, this projection is a means of walling in the traumatized collective, and thereby, in a

¹³⁶ Scott Macdonald, "Chantal Akerman," in *A Critical Cinema 4: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 267.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 268.

sense, can also be read as a prison of memory, while tragically repeating exclusion and violence in the name of self-preservation. It is then not surprising that the past refuses to disappear, demanding collective responsibility and an ability to respond. Facing the Wall as a screen and working through the trauma it repeats thus begins to answer Schwab's call for an "intercultural transference between different violent histories,"¹⁴¹ which she conceptualizes out of Germany's haunting legacies. It also resonates with Rose's agreement with Edward Said's appeal that we must "enter into each other's historical and ongoing pain"¹⁴² in the context of Israel-Palestine. Thus, in order to transform the screen of the Wall from a barrier into a self-reflexive medium, we need to acknowledge the conditions of one another's traumatic constitution. We need to face the Wall's personal and political legacies in order to reimagine collective forms of togetherness that acknowledge the fantasmatic scenes underlying our fields of reality. And we need to work through (or 'screen through') forms of exclusion, rejecting the totalitarian frame of surveillance, in order to transgress binaries and overcome Walls by reintroducing the Other into a relationship with the self.

¹⁴¹ Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 29.

¹⁴² Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 10.

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