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Settler Sublime: Reparation and Return in Yael Bartana's Polish Trilogy

In a trilogy of internationally acclaimed art videos featured at the Venice Biennale's Polish Pavilion in 2011, the Israeli artist Yael Bartana illustrates a utopian political movement based on an eclectic pairing of visual and historical texts, including European settler colonialism, diaspora nationalism, political Zionism and Socialist Realism. The movement as described by its leader Sławomir Sierakowski calls for three million Jews to return to Poland, and for an end to all forms of ethnic violence. Within this framework, Bartana manages to raise important questions for the politics of cohabitation within a divided Europe. However, by making a conscious departure from the ongoing dynamics of intergenerational violence and reparation that are rooted in the genocidal crimes of the 20th century, Bartana's completed work offers a way out from the specific narrative closures that appear to serve as its inspiration. In effect, Bartana manages to transform what would otherwise be a jumble of political, historical and academic discourses into a strongly aspirational and post-national vision in which Europe is finally able to overcome the traumas of its past. Though I provide a critical and detailed analysis of each video to provide a context for this vision, the purpose of my article is to situate Bartana's work in relation to theoretical debates surrounding contemporary European politics, focusing specifically on issues of citizenship, nationalism and migration. I use this theoretical framework as a way to highlight the affective content of Bartana's story as it unfolds on the screen, and to assess Bartana's attempt at linking expressions of utopian affect to the historical imagination. Broadly speaking, then, the article draws a line between the methods and approaches of European area studies, artistic practice and the popular domain of affect theory. I conclude the article by suggesting that Bartana's trilogy is successful because it manages to raise profound methodological questions while simultaneously offering a provocative engagement with contemporary politics.

1 Introduction

And Europe Will Be Stunned (2011) is a video project by the acclaimed Israeli artist and long-term resident of Berlin, Yael Bartana, in collaboration with several others, including a prominent leftist and Polish public intellectual, Sławomir Sierakowski. The completed work is framed by the fictitious birth of a political movement, the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), and by the eventual realization of its demand to return Europe's diasporic Jews for Polish resettlement. I argue that implicit in Bartana's representation of this return is an invitation for viewers to re-imagine the 'idea' of Europe, and therefore to challenge the actually existing European community. In part, this invitation is materialized by strategically shifting Poland from its peripheral status in the European Union (EU) to the center of attention, and by making Polish

Jews into the reluctant agents of necessary social change. In other words, by reconstructing Jewish Poland as a land that welcomes all diasporic and migrant peoples, Bartana positions the figure of the Jew as a "generic symbol of displacement" (Lehrer / Waligórska 2013: 23), and, in turn, as the anchor for a lingering desire among Europeans to establish a foundation of conviviality and cooperation with the foreigners in their midst. From this perspective, Bartana's project is simultaneously an engagement with collective memory, a work of art, and a political demand.

The interdisciplinary complexity of Bartana's project has been explored by the Canadian-based ethnographer of Jewish Poland, Erica Lehrer, who in a co-authored essay with Magdalena Waligórska identifies Bartana's work as part of a growing trend towards "memorial interventions," which represents a departure from the received practices of "historiographic revision, heritage preservation work, and monument building" (2013: 2). As Lehrer and Waligórska explain, the interventionist model of collective memory is one that privileges nontraditional venues that emphasize the dialogical, of artworks that are increasingly digitally mediated and hyperbolically visual, of memory objects that are exhibited and temporary as opposed to permanent, and of strategies that appeal directly to the needs, desires, inclinations and expressions of audience members. Bartana's work is symptomatic of the interventionist turn in a way that corresponds to another trend within socially engaged intermedial art, in which artists make specific efforts to respond to the saturation of media culture by affirming aesthetic creation as a political tool (Chapple / Kattenbelt 2006; Thompson 2012).

The present article explores how Bartana's video installation is aligned to both of these trends, paying close attention to the work's participatory and theatrical elements in relation to the artist's own desire to break down the distinctions between art and life, truth and fiction. To substantiate my claims in this regard, I take the article in two separate directions: first, I examine the historical archive that Bartana draws from by making explicit references to the narrative elements of the videos and their progression. I then devise a theory of citizenship and migration that illustrates the ideological and political spirit of Bartana's project, emphasizing the artist's willingness to enter contemporary political debates, and thus their effort to go beyond conceiving of the aesthetic as mere illustration. Finally, I consider Bartana's specific treatment of affect, which I suggest

she uses both as a mechanism for communicating historical material, and as a vehicle for imposing real-world demands upon the intended viewers of her work. In this, Bartana is successful in exposing the methodological issues that arise from her unique entanglement with the European historical imagination.

2 Bartana's Historical Archive

I will now provide an illustration of the historical narratives that underline each video installment of the trilogy. In the first of the series entitled *Mary Koszmary* ('Nightmares', 2007), Bartana introduces the mythical prehistory of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), and outlines the motives that led to demanding that prewar Jews return to their European (i.e. Polish) homeland. Voicing this demand is the Polish leftist intellectual and founder of *Krytyka Polityczna*, Sławomir Sierakowski, a figurehead who positions himself throughout the trilogy as the movement's presumptive leader. In this eleven-minute sequence, Sierakowski delivers an impassioned speech about the current state of Polish and European politics to a small group of listeners. Writing in collaboration with Kinga Dunin, who is another prominent voice on the Polish left, Sierakowski reasons that if Poles truly want to realize the potential of welcoming and integrating diverse populations and build a multicultural society, they must first invite Jews to return from Israel and therefore acknowledge their complicity in perpetuating the genocidal crimes of the past.

Alongside this demand, whose initiation would require a complete overhaul of Europe's migration policy to recognize acts of reparation that are imbued here with extra-legal significance, Bartana choses to augment Sierakowski's speech by including a series of canted low-angle shots of the leader that may be derived from Nazi propaganda, specifically from Leni Riefenstahl's repertoire of films. By highlighting the implied tinge of haunting and foreboding in Sierakowski's promise of a utopian new beginning, Bartana further positions the propagandistic display of the political leader himself within a setting that is completely dominated by Polish *lieux des mémoire*, including a visual tour de force that draws a line from the country's post-Holocaust memory to the atrocities of the Communist era and beyond. The most significant of these memorial objects is the Decennial Stadium in which Sierakowski delivers his speech (fig. 1). Though it

has since been demolished, the Stadium was a site made infamous by the Communist Party for its massive demonstrations, and it was also the site of a self-immolation by an individual protesting the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. By situating Sierakowksi's plea for new beginnings within this Stadium, then, *Mary Koszmary* proves to be very effective at juxtaposing the ruins of Poland's past together with the intrinsic promise that is embodied by figures of its political present.

Fig. 1: Yael Bartana, *Mary Koszmary* ('Nightmares', 2007), video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw

Holocaust memory forms a cornerstone of the video's historical narrative. While the Holocaust continues to be a mainstay for Poles seeking to understand their relationship to the past and to the Other, Bartana appears to hold the view that Holocaust memory as an institution has exhausted its potential. Obliquely signified by the appearance of pillow feathers to evoke the chaotic memory of "arrests, deportations and pogroms" of the Nazi period, *Mary Koszmary* embodies the fantasy of postwar recuperation through Sierakowski's repeated reference to the haunting allegory of Rifke's ghost, a figure that has long been an ornament of Polish national suffering and a symbol of the specific familial ties between Poles and Jews (Mytkowska 2013: 131). By describing this figure's persistent refusal to rest until the Jewish return is completed, Sierakowski, while skillfully encapsulating the Polish desire to transcend their complicity in the genocide,

insists that making reparations for past atrocities must be accomplished by actions that go beyond reinforcing the exceptionalism of the Holocaust.

Focusing less upon Holocaust memory as upon settler colonial themes, Bartana's second video installation stages a provocative reversal of the Zionist right of return. In *Mur I Wieza* ('Wall and Tower', 2009), the newly formed JRMiP begins the task of resettling Warsaw's Ghetto Heroes Square amidst a booming sonic rendition of the Polish national anthem. The video depicts settlers building a fort that eventually takes the shape of a kibbutz, which was a familiar structure on the Palestinian landscape during the early 1900s and continues to be a crucial point of reference in Israeli society. Particularly with the recent privatization of the kibbutz system in Israel, Bartana's visual reference to the glorified Israeli past links up with ongoing protests against the Kibbutz Yakum Association, whose actions in recent years reflect the denigration of Israel's poor and the primacy of the security regime. In 2009, for instance, protesters squatted on the association's property and built a so-called 'Tower of Justice' in the image of the historic kibbutz tower structure (fig. 2), drawing attention to the way in which the entire kibbutz system has been betrayed by profit motives (Arad 2012).

Fig. 2: Yael Bartana, *Mur i wieża* ('Wall and Tower', 2009), video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Bartana's choice to represent this politically charged image aligns to her support of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), which is an organization that

aims to return illegal settlements to Palestinians, and which does so under the premise of "building as a point of resistance" (Bartana / Eilat / Esche 2011) While this theme is explored even more fully in Bartana's earlier work, notably in *Summer Camp* (2007), it echoes here in *Wall and Tower* for slightly different purposes, namely to expose the utopian basis of any appeal to the Right of Return. Here, too, Bartana plays both sides as the kibbutz structure depicted in the video eventually takes the shape of a heavily guarded camp. While the identity of the antagonist beyond the gates remains unclear, the theoretical significance of the camp as a "biopolitical paradigm" resonates with contemporary global realities, and the duplicity of the kibbutz structure with Bartana's desire of exposing the nightmare of utopian inclination (Agamben 1998: 134). Toward the end of the video, Sierakowski briefly appears to endorse the resettlement initiative by presiding over the lifting of a flag composed of a Polish *Order of the White Eagle* with a Jewish Star of David in the foreground (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Yael Bartana, *Mur i wieża* ('Wall and Tower', 2009), video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Bartana's investment in the Zionist narrative is anything but superficial. In fact, the aesthetic from *Wall and Tower* is entirely borrowed from early propaganda films by the German filmmaker Helmar Lerski, specifically from his major film, *Avodah*

('Work', 1935). With a musical score written by the composer Paul Dessau, *Avodah* features a deliberate conjunction between socialist and Zionist narratives. Preceding Socialist Realism, Lerski's work is very much influenced by the early propaganda films of Sergei Eisenstein, the kino-pravda movement, and by the modernism of agricultural settlement initiatives that were definitive for the generation of the late 19th and early 20th century. Given these influences, *Avodah* is not a conventional Zionist film, as is Judah Leman's *L'Chayim Hadashim* ('Land of Promise', 1935), which is a straightforward documentary composed from a narrative of commercial prosperity in the reputed promised land. By contrast, *Avodah* is dominated by montage images of labour and collective decision-making, agricultural and urban development, and modern machinery.

Central to Lerski's aesthetic and also to Bartana's second video is the image of a strong and industrious (male) Jewish settler. Although Bartana herself plays with this genre considerably, her evocation of muscular Judaism focuses the attention of the audience on a 19th-century image of Zionist ideology, a strongman figure who is in fact derived from a European genealogy of imperial power, specifically from Hellenism (Presner 2007). I argue that Bartana's depiction of this figure is consistent with the historically accurate appropriation and not with the many anachronistic versions that appear in popular culture. These include Quentin Tarantino's 'bear Jew' from *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), which carries the implicit suggestion that muscular Judaism originated in ghetto-bound resistance movements. Wartime 'bear Jews' also appear in Gerald Green's television miniseries *Holocaust* from the 1980s, and, in a more playful guise, as a symptomatic figure of repressed homosexuality and militarism in photographic work by Adi Nes. For Bartana, the trope of muscular Judaism is consistent both with Zionism's socialist beginnings and the broader claim that Israel is a descendent of the West's history of colonial rule. From this perspective, the individual 'bear Jew' becomes an important figure with which to explore the potential of a co-constitutive relationship between Europe and Israel.

Fig. 4: Yael Bartana, *Zamach* ('Assassination, 2011), video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Zamach ('Assassination', 2011) details the aftermath of Sierakowski's untimely (and untold) murder, and features images of the famous Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science, and the Ghetto Memorial. Following a commemoration scene in which Sierakowski's body is held for public viewing, we are invited to witness the beginning second phase of the movement which is visualized by a critical mass in the streets of Warsaw (fig. 4). Prior to the demonstration, Bartana records a series of eulogies both from fictional characters and real people. Sierakowski's bereaved wife and the ghost of Rifke are featured alongside the Polish art critic Anda Rottenberg, the novelist Alona Frankel, and the Israeli television personality Yaron London. I argue that the blatantly contradictory viewpoints as expressed by these figures imparts to the audience a message about the importance of polyvocality within political movements, and it demonstrates this particular movement's inherent capacity for mobilization amid public disagreement and the contestation of ideas.

However, another unique dimension of this video that deserves to be mentioned is Bartana's choice to use this third video installation as a means of indulging her interest in diaspora nationalism movements from Poland's Jewish past. According to historian Michael Steinlauf, diaspora nationalism originated in the activities of the Bund in the

late 19th century, a political party whose message was strongly distinguished from Zionism by their call for a "Judaeo-Polonia" in which Jews would be free to govern themselves as equal citizens before the national state (Steinlauf 1996: 12). The documented influence of the Bund speaks to the unremitting confidence of the Jewish minority at this time. But it is also instructive because of the Bund's demand that national states begin to recognize the cultural and political autonomy of *all* minorities. In fact, the Bund's insistence was for the official recognition of minorities who lacked "the anchor of place," and indeed to make Poland a home in which diverse traditions and values could be recognized and protected (Rabinovich 2012: xvii). From this perspective, the history of the Bund as referenced in *Assassination* provides us with a fundamental opposition to the form of the national state, and therefore with the means to radically rethink the very terms of cohabitation.

The post-national sentiment that ran through the diaspora nationalism movement in Poland is especially significant for Bartana in terms of forging links to some of the more recent and provocative investigations into European Jewish thought. From Edward Said's *Freud and the non-European* (2003) to Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2013), Gianni Vattimo and Michael Marder's *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics* (2013), and John Drabinski's *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (2013), this burgeoning literature tends to focus at least in part on emphasizing that Zionism emerged from a diversity of attitudes and perspectives, and that only by revisiting this diversity can we begin to formulate ethical solutions to our current social problems, whether in Europe or the Middle East. By supplementing a weighty depiction of early Zionist narratives in the first two video installations with a Polish variant of Jewish thought in which the diaspora challenges the biblical Right of Return, Bartana allows her viewers to begin to dialogue with existing efforts at creating bi-national alternatives between Israel and Palestine.

3 Citizenship
Given the description above, there is little doubt that Bartana's multi-format project is built upon the artist's desire to communicate a universal message of conviviality

through a decidedly post-national vision of contemporary Europe. In many ways, in fact, this message requires viewers to suspend their disbelief in the face of irreversible differences within Europe's diverse political culture, ethnicity, heritage, and practices of nationhood. Bartana herself has conceded that her project expresses the diminished potential for post-national belonging through an allegory for "the impossibility of living together" (Bartana / Eilat / Esche 2011), revealing the obscenity of political subjects who resurrect their identitarian defenses when conflicts emerge. As such, given the cycle of identitarianism that underlines Bartana's playful engagement with the universal, it is perhaps instructive to consider that Bartana produced these works during the height of the European financial debt crisis, releasing the first installment in 2007, with an exhibit of the completed trilogy in 2011 at the Venice Biennale, in which it was featured at the Polish Pavilion. On the basis of this timeframe alone, it is plausible to assume that Bartana's choice of putting forward a demand for Europe to openly welcome migrant communities was influenced, at the very least, by the mounting evidence that Europe's political mainstream was moving in the opposite direction.

In effect, by declaring "the impossibility of living together," Bartana makes a tangible but subterranean shift away from acknowledging the harmonious images of postnational community that have defined European politics for a generation. Cannibalized by the austerity regime, these harmonious images have been reputed to conceal a "relational connection" between the conditions of austerity and the perpetuation of violence, and thereby of signaling a repetition of ossified relationships that are rooted in a host of ethnic, racial and geographical exclusions (Springer 2015: 9). Indeed, theorists such as Simon Springer have responded to this relational connection out of a wish to expose the structural incapacity of acknowledging that such exclusions persist despite the willingness to engage in obverse narratives of tolerance, cohabitation or belonging. Given Springer's claim, one might follow Andreas Huyssen in supposing that present-day realities as described here reveal "a culture that is terminally ill with amnesia," or a culture that forgets its past in ways that make it difficult to imagine a future (Huyssen 1994: 1). For theorists like Giorgio Agamben, on the other hand, the fallout from the financial crisis is instructive for understanding the cultural practice of neoliberalization in general, as it tells us that a "*radical* transformation" has occurred in the cherished

categories that have long defined European collective memory and identity, whether it be the "nation-state, sovereignty, democratic participation, political parties, [or] international law" (2014). As Agamben explains, the ontological shifts in these foundational categories only accelerate the tendency to use abstractions like "the economy" in order to "facilitate the imposition and acceptance of measures and restrictions that the people would not otherwise accept" (2014).

Bartana's interventionist aesthetic addresses these conditions by presenting viewers with a revolutionary program for changing the terms of European citizenship, offering a sweeping alternative for uniting communities beyond specific historical claims to territory and identity. Above all, Bartana's bold vision for a post-national future in Europe is at variance with the conventional ways of legitimizing inclusive models of post-national citizenship, including the rational calculus of communicative action that was developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989 / 1962). More recently, Habermas (2012) has further developed his theory of communicative action by devising a constitutional solution for the European financial crisis, in which he proposes a concept of European citizenship that decidedly moves beyond ethnic differences by reaffirming the value of cultural plurality, equality and political participation.[1] More specifically, Habermas situates the right of pluralities as a direct challenge to the elitism of political leaders, and speculates as to how the "subjective rights of the citizens" of Europe can finally become the primary means by which economic and social policy is shaped within the EU's existing jurisdiction (2012: 32). By transnationalizing notions of popular sovereignty, in other words, Habermas believes that a "political commonwealth beyond the nation-state" should come equipped with all the appropriate democratic mechanisms with which to put an end to the "executive federalism" that has otherwise prevailed (*Ibid*.: 29).

While Bartana and Habermas are both deeply invested in helping to realize the potential for a "Europe-wide solidarity" in troubled times, I argue that only Bartana's project has the imaginative potential to draw a line beyond the established categories of political community, for instance, by providing a vision of Europe that appears to be strongly at

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[1] He has been followed by Guérot (2016).

odds with the assumption that a European *demos* is needed to legitimize change (Habermas 2012: 53). Whereas Habermas might agree with Aleida Assmann's suggestion that *ethnos* and *demos* are situated hierarchically and therefore subject to alteration (Assmann 2006), I argue that Bartana's project is rooted in challenging the ontological primacy of both categories altogether. Leaving behind notions of intrinsic Europeanness or popular sovereignty, then, Bartana's project rather proposes a constitutional alternative that mirrors Étienne Balibar's assertion of the possibility for a *nomadic* form of European citizenship (Balibar 2011: 207–226). Developed from a call for civic consciousness that aims to accommodate subjects who are unmoored from specific territories and categories of ownership, Balibar insists on the possibility of altogether changing the figure of the citizen-subject to reflect the existing patterns of global migration.

By privileging nomadic ways of living and being in political community, Balibar challenges the Habermasian demand for consensus among rational actors, arguing that such unanimity is impossible, and, in many ways, undesirable. However, Balibar ultimately rejects the consensus-based model because it inadvertently identifies subjects in relation to a corresponding set of territorial claims. Moving against the grain of territorial disputes, Balibar reconsiders the institutional effects of a prospective European citizenship in terms of whether postnational institutions have the capacity to extend the "rights of circulation" from the sphere of commodities to that of people (2012: 208). Behind this approach is Balibar's assertion that all identity claims are "fundamentally ambiguous" (*ibid*.: 57). As he has written in the past, such claims merely tend to produce "community *effects*" within a disciplinary regime, and, in many instances, those effects tend toward violence (Balibar 2003: 20). By extension, Bartana's fictionalization of post-national citizenship may include these critiques in addition to offering solutions. However, while it may be crucial to highlight differences between the approach taken by Habermas and Balibar, the very notion of constitutionality that is common to both should be analyzed as well. For instance, according the acclaimed postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak, it is imperative that we be skeptical of engaging in the "constitutional rhetoric" that has led to such a poor handling of issues surrounding cultural pluralism, particularly as constitutional models tend to elevate domestic (or state) policies in ways

that make it prevent us from addressing the patterns of exclusion that anchor such policies in the first place (Spivak 2005: 4). In Spivak's case, this difficulty is particularly evident in the "dubious" advancement of "gender equality" as pursued by global feminism, which to her has become blind-sighted by constitutional guarantees that are plainly incapable of detecting the spectral remainder of national chauvinism that is part and parcel of such demands (*ibid*.: 4). On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge here that Balibar in particular has indicated his awareness of the limitations posed by constitutional rhetoric, suggesting, for instance, that identity groups who persist in advancing their national aspirations within post-national frameworks that diminish their authority has posed a significant danger for Europe (Balibar 2012). And yet despite such observations, Balibar, unlike Spivak, maintains the necessity of reinventing the constitutional framework instead of dispensing with it altogether.

Balibar's insistence on finding new constitutional guarantees for nomadic citizens is further put to the test by Fatima El-Tayeb, who echoes the concerns of Balibar and Spivak in suggesting that the cultural conditions of racialized minorities in contemporary Europe are directly symptomatic of the "post-national dismantling of the welfare state in the name of Europeanness" (El-Tayeb 2011: 21). However, while El-Tayeb stops short of articulating a constitutional solution to matters of racial prejudice, her broader argument draws more parallels with Balibar's than it does with Spivak's because she observes that the "migrant" and "diaspora" have today become diminished subjects of agency and are beyond restitution. Focusing on "native European populations of color," particularly those second- and third generation minorities of so-called "migrant" or "diaspora populations," El-Tayeb makes the case that the physical mobility of this generational group has been terminally limited by their affiliation to "home countries" for which they otherwise have no specific relation of belonging (*ibid*.: 21). For El-Tayeb, the common characterization of these groups is derived from a European "internalist narrative" that unequivocally denies the potential to imagine forms of collective solidarity that extolls the virtues of the minoritarian (*ibid*.: 21).

By reimagining the place of racialized minorities in Europe through a provocative demand for "postethnic" solidarities, El-Tayeb's aim is not only to de-escalate the moral panics that continue to surround immigrants and immigration, but also to challenge the

institutionalized practices of erasure that have made it impossible to address racialization at all (*ibid*.: 144). In the spirit of this aim, El-Tayeb takes issue with the tropes of diaspora literature that systematically describe the nostalgia for place and the mapping of genealogy as its essential criteria (cf. Quayson 2013). In fact, El-Tayeb emphatically rejects the idea that "home" should be regarded with longing or esteem when it comes to describing and defending the presence of minoritarian communities. Beyond these criteria, she claims that political transformations can and should result from asserting the primacy of "border-crossing" practices that unapologetically take place within the European "step-fatherland," thereby allowing diverse minoritarian subjects to acknowledge their combined experience of dispersal and rootedness by different means (2011: 121).

The motivation for El-Tayeb's forceful rejection of the "migrant" or "diaspora" as guiding metanarratives derives from her interest in collective artistic projects that aim to develop oppositional narratives in which minoritarian subjects symbolically reject the identifying markers of their supposed "home country" (*ibid*.: 68). Drawing from the work of José Esteban Muñoz, El-Tayeb describes how such "disidentification" serves to replace less effective categories and methods of hybridity that were popularized a generation earlier by figures such as Homi K. Bhabha (2004). She argues that the former term – hybridity – is more responsive to the kinds of structural conditions that lead entire populations to suffer from a chronic absence of symbolic recognition (Muñoz 1999). The cultural politics and aesthetics of disidentification instead favor expressions of longing that deliberately contravene the national paradigm on which diaspora or migrant literature is based, and therefore slowly replace this paradigm by emphasizing concrete experiences of dislocation or "translocality" (El-Tayeb 2011: 7). Evoking themes borrowed from Édouard Glissant's theory of "Relation," I argue that El-Tayeb adheres to a nomadic sense of belonging that, as Glissant writes, "links not to the creation of a world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contact among cultures" (Glissant 1997: 144). From this perspective, I suggest that El-Tayeb's theoretical and methodological approaches run parallel to Balibar and Bartana's demand for a new European constitutional paradigm that is built on nomadic forms of belonging as opposed to those that are built on territory, identity and nation.

On the other hand, while it may appear that El-Tayeb and Bartana's positions diverge in regard to the privileged role that Bartana gives to the Jew as a harbinger of social and political change, I argue that their positions are, in fact, complementary. Granted, for El-Tayeb, the widespread institution of Holocaust memory led to the subsequent overvaluation of Jews in the European public imagination, and this overvaluation has only contributed to reinforcing Islamophobia as a paradigm or standard for racist attitudes among white Europeans. While resurgent anti-Semitism was also prevalent during the financial crisis and its aftermath, El-Tayeb's main critique still applies, that the "Judeo-Christian affinity and alliance against the lethal threat of radical Islam is naturalized and implied to be traditionally present" (2011: xxviii). El-Tayeb's position on Islamophobia thus implies that because Holocaust memory has saturated the European fantasy of welcoming the other as compensation for the relative absence of a Jewish population, a kind of exceptionalism of Jewish absence has come to buttress the systematic erasure of minoritarian communities who are present in significant numbers. While Holocaust memory practitioners such as Erica Lehrer take issue with perpetuating the assumption that European Jews are indeed absent from the social and political life of contemporary Europe (Lehrer 2013), Bartana, like El-Tayeb, uses this assumption to her advantage as the rhetorical starting point of her work. Bartana refashions the Jew as a figure of cosmopolitan nomadism and situates him hyperbolically as the leader of a broader movement calling not simply for the return of pre-war Jews to their European homelands, but also for the settlement of migrants who have been ostracized in the meantime. Rather than simply rehearsing the historical linkages between European nationalism and Zionist settler colonialism, Bartana presents the Jew as a symbolic image of Europe's existential need to restore its racial and ethnic diversity, for instance, as she does in *Mary Koszmary* and in subsequent videos. From this perspective, beyond simply endorsing the play between presence and absence that El-Tayeb regards with antipathy, Bartana aligns her project to "multidirectional" approaches within Holocaust memory that are based on creating solidarities between European Jews and those in other communities who have fallen victim to acts of genocide (Rothberg 2009).

Above all, Bartana's work aims to expose the geopolitical and cultural heritage that exists between Europe and the Middle East, and therefore to acknowledge that a "dead

end" has been reached in Europe as evidenced by the resurgence of its fortress mental-ity, and in Israel by its ongoing crimes against the Palestinians (Azoulay / Ophir 2013: 149). As Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir suggest, both the Pole and the Jew can meet on the premise of exiting this dead end. In other words, by "exiting the cleansing re-gime, the privatized and corporatized world," there remains a unique opportunity in which to revive a collective project that directly challenges the apparent invincibility of territory and identity – a project that can be accomplished only by returning to those places from which people have been expelled (*ibid*.: 149). From this perspective, Bar-tana's work appears to be constructed from a variant of universalism that is rooted in the desire to construct imaginaries and ways of being that offer radical solutions to the problem or question of cohabitating with others. By doing so, Bartana's narrative arc repeats the imperatives of the national and cosmopolitan state precisely to demonstrate the extent to which those imperatives have been exhausted.

4 Politics of Aesthetics

The preceding section highlights the ways in which Bartana's video project encourages her audience to reassess conventional strategies for integrating minoritarian communi-ties. As a way to further appreciate how she apprises her audience of the ever-multi-plying dangers of adopting the status quo, I will now explore Bartana's exquisitely sub-tle method of aesthetic presentation. In other words, if a significant cause of the pro-ject's effectiveness lies in making allusions of forewarning to a "benign and seductive" image of the universal, I will show that Bartana facilitates the expression of these allu-sions only by repeating and spectacularizing that image (Gilroy 2006: 59). Consistent with Jacques Rancière's description of artistic creativity as a discrete immersion of "heterogenous temporalities," I argue that the content of Bartana's project appears to aesthetically duplicate a sovereign act of foundation in the name of a national (Polish) state. However, Bartana duplicates this narrative only to propose a (European) post-national alternative that coincidentally renders the national form implausible (Rancière 2006: 26). In fact, by unfolding images and stories that touch the actual world, Bartana's repetition of political metanarratives becomes an effective means of parody.

From a Rancièrian position, then, Bartana's aesthetic choices appear to be consumed by "incessantly restat[ing] the past" with the aim of defamiliarizing conventional tropes of national belonging (*ibid*.: 24). In doing so, Bartana ultimately invites her viewers "to imagine the sensible otherwise," in other words, to promote subtle shifts in artistic perspective as an alternative to making seismic demands for revolutionary social change (Tanke 2011: 75). As fiction and reality become universes of meaning that increasingly parallel each other, Bartana's own position as an artist comes to occupy what Bonnie Honig has described as a "double gesture" of cosmopolitan intent (2008: 107). In other words, by offering a vision of unconditional hospitality towards the other in the face of "a finite set of resources and calculable claims," Bartana explicitly invites her audience to joyfully pick apart the deep-seated imaginaries that sustain the institutions of the state, and therefore to slowly and stealthily dismantle the social order (Honig 2008: 105). Beyond conventional cosmopolitan forms of hospitality, Bartana's interventions are aligned to Étienne Balibar's notion of the *cosmopolitical*, a political ethic that "draws a line between competing universals" as a means to challenge expectations of normative action (Balibar 2010).

Fig. 5: Yael Bartana, *Zamach* ('Assassination', 2011), video still, courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Alongside these formal interventions in the arena of cosmopolitics, ethics and norms, Bartana's project is consumed by navigating a diverse field of historical narratives. Though "deeply anachronistic," to quote Boris Groys, I argue that Bartana's work is comprised of projecting complex historical images that inspire feats of displacement, opportunity and foreclosure (Groys 2013: 135). By visualizing a dreamworld in which saturated images of the present comply with utopian narratives of the past, as depicted above (fig. 5), Bartana appears to be able to graphically depict the nightmare that remains hidden within such worlds. I argue that a crucial part of Bartana's aim is therefore to make viewers complicit in the participatory dimensions of "being stunned," as to be stunned in this manner is not just to be amazed or dazzled by the beautiful display of images familiar to a Polish or Israeli audience, but is rather to be rendered vulnerable by a traumatic experience that is simultaneously constitutive, reassuring and painful. On this basis, there is a strong psychoanalytic dimension to Bartana's project that invites viewers to consider the potential of restoring Europe's diversity as a direct response to the struggles that define its past.

Finally, the embodied and affective dimensions of this work give Bartana a prime opportunity to express her own personal history as an intrinsic part of the video's narrative. Amidst a deep sense of ambivalence about her homeland Israel – a land that repeatedly makes decisions in her name but against her wishes – Bartana's Polish journeys are correspondingly informed by the haunting repetition of pedagogical images from her childhood, thereby touching upon Bartana's complex relationship to the linkages between family and nationhood. Bartana thus repeats the saturated metanarratives described above as a way of partly revisiting narrative histories that Bartana herself is unwilling or unable to identify as her own. From this vantage point, Bartana is thus able to reconnect to her Polish heritage through an expression of estrangement from the very idea of home. In fact, if we regard this project as a kind of personal testimony, it might be plausible to suggest with Giorgio Agamben (and Shoshana Felman) that, "the one who speaks here [i.e. Bartana] bears the impossibility of speaking," in other words, that testimony will always be an incomplete act of reparation (Agamben 2002: 120).

5 Affect

Descriptions of the affective realm within social, political and personal life are particularly useful when it comes to mapping some of the broader implications of Bartana's project. Affect theory is distinguished by its ability to open the symbolic or representational domain of political and historical memory to the somatic or 'feeling' domain of artistic expression. Often, the dichotomy between these domains will situate affect as somehow 'beyond' the field of representation, or even opposed to it. To explore the parallel between the way in which affect theory troubles this potential opposition and Bartana's juxtaposition of historical narratives, I revisit the groundbreaking work, *Touching Feeling* (2003), in which the philosopher and cultural historian Eve Sedgwick theorizes affect as a variable that operates by antagonizing the centrality of performative utterances, particularly in deconstructionist readings of modern linguistics.

To be more specific, Sedgwick identifies the performative utterance as being a "directly productive aspect of language," an aspect of the linguistic structure, in other words, that is endowed with a special ability to *transform* the world as opposed to merely *describing* it (*ibid*.: 5). Sedgwick addresses this commonplace insight before moving on to challenge the authority that such an interpretation gives to the linguistic signifier, exploring how performative utterances rather serve to reveal the "texture" and "feeling" that is endemic to linguistic operations (*ibid*.: 13–22). By identifying ambiguity in the criteria of the performative, Sedgwick effectively frees herself from speaking to the demand that linguistics be limited by the study of referential content, arguing instead that linguistics too used to examine the broader spatial dimensions of feeling that define speaking subjects and their lived experience. Using the motifs of texture as the basis of her analysis, then, Sedgwick engages "the increasingly divergent physical scales…that characterize the relation between touch and vision…" (*ibid*.: 15).

Sedgwick's specific provocations help us to examine the circuit of trauma and repetition in Bartana's video project, particularly given Sedgwick's preference to replace the symbolic and referential structure of the drive with dynamic relational models. In other words, by emphasizing the intimacy and "texture" of the emotions, Sedgwick makes a crucial point about the so-called "freedom of the affects" – a freedom, in other words, that "gives [affect] a structural potential" that is diametrically opposed to the Saussurian

claims of the "arbitrariness of the signifier" (*ibid*.: 19). Contrary to the signifier and its presumed arbitrariness, Sedgwick's allusion to a structure of affect that boasts of an analytic resiliency, I would argue, has the potential to productively illustrate the specific demands that Bartana's work involves. In many ways, a Lacanian framework, or one that is equally indebted to the signifier, would not be as adept at balancing out Bartana's unique concoction of historical objects, or, indeed, her nuanced displacement of narrative genres.

Since the publication of Sedgwick's book, the field of affect theory has garnered significant new interest among scholars in the humanities and social sciences, becoming a crucial interdisciplinary method of cultural analysis. In many ways, however, the deployment of affect theory, particularly the second-hand interpretations of primary texts, has resulted in a highly rhetorical engagement with cultural objects that otherwise should be marked by historical and spatial specificity. In fact, this tendency towards obscuring the specificity of cultural objects in analysis was predicted by Gayatri Spivak around the same time that Sedgwick was writing. In *Death of a Discipline* (2005), Spivak engages in a diatribe against the conceit of "metropolitan Cultural Studies" at the expense of more culturally and historically specific political and ethical engagements with language (*ibid*.: 10). Emerging from the "radical fringes" of America's English departments, Spivak goes on to suggest that this virulent brand of scholarship is distinguished by making "presentist" and "personalist" knowledge claims, and ultimately by relying upon a set of monolingual, classist and myopic foundations (*ibid*.: 8).

To counter the parasitic form of cultural analysis as described above, Spivak's proposal is to revitalize comparative methods by making a bridge to Area Studies, which is an academic discipline that is specifically mandated to acquire knowledge of diverse languages, although for reasons that are directly tied to geopolitical interests. By countering the metropolitan variant of Cultural Studies with what she describes as "a care for language and idiom," Spivak insists that scholars should once again be permitted to enter a realm of linguistic engagement whereby thinking is an extension of feeling without relinquishing the cultural specificity that language involves (*ibid*.: 5). By broadening the category of translation to include a realm of personal experience,

Spivak describes the potential to create a new brand of comparativism in which the act of translating from "language to language" is methodically supplemented by moving "from body to ethical semiosis" (*ibid.*: 13).

I argue that Spivak's commitment to reframing questions about language is very similar to Sedgwick's own proposal, as cultural analysis in both writers must account for the specificity of the Other by practicing a kind of unconditional hospitality. Indeed, if affect theory does anything close to what Spivak defines as Cultural Studies, her fore-warning might well propel us to reconsider how affect can and should be meshed with the historical objects through which it lives and breathes. In fact, it may well be the case that both Spivak's and Sedgwick's perspectives can be useful in abiding to the affective specificity of Bartana's work. In fact, given the global reception of *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, the specific choices that curators have made to demonstrate their attunement to the artist's admittedly unique frame of reference has been subject to a wide range of variation.

For example, the completed presentation of the trilogy at Venice was endorsed by the Polish Ministry of Culture, and therefore as part of a larger strategy of using the work in promotional material for the national government's progressive mandate. The work was also a provocation for the Biennale, as it was the first major exhibition by an artist who has no specific ties to the represented country, namely Poland. As the completed work was exported to different countries and contexts, the sense-making narratives that curators used to introduce it to various contexts changed accordingly. For example, when the trilogy made its way to the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Canada, the exhibit appeared to be rather plainly described as making an appeal for global multiculturalism, which therefore elided the progressive intent behind the Polish national government's sponsorship. In fact, the entire referential content of the work was practically ignored in the Toronto exhibit, which only resulted in transforming the affective overtones of the work into a kind of floating signifier.

Toronto's exhibit was far from unique, as a host of curators attempted to apprehend this complex and at times jarring presentation in ways that were comprehensible to the irrevocably Western ideas of globalism and multiculturalism. Although there were sev-

eral exceptions to this shortsighted perspective, one notable exception was at Eindho-ven's van Abbemuseum in 2012, in which one of Bartana's main collaborators, Galit Eilat, designed an exhibit for the work that was very clearly intent upon revealing Bar-tana's personal investment in the material, an aim that Eilat accomplished in part by itemizing the historical objects that served as Bartana's inspiration. As part of her cu-ratorial strategy, Eilat displayed archival documents that Bartana used to reconstruct the overall aesthetic of the videos, and also provided a retrospective of Bartana's earlier work to demonstrate continuity. In contrast to the exhibit from Toronto and from the main exhibit at the Biennale, audiences at the van Abbemuseum were therefore treated to a highly informative presentation of the work that did not at the same time compro-mise its affective, political, ethical or personal content.

6 Conclusion

Bartana's *And Europe Will Be Stunned* presents viewers with a transformative recon-struction of debates concerning Israel's responsibility to stem the ongoing perpetuation of violence against Palestinians, and Europe in accepting its responsibility for securing the rights of minoritarians. Playing at the interstices between fiction and reality, Bar-tana's completed project quickly inspired a gathering of intellectuals, artists and inter-ested parties to continue discussions about politics and ethics in the guise of a Congress meeting of the JRMiP. In 2012, the Congress met in Berlin to formulate a constitution for the fictional movement. Despite the parodic elements of this meeting, which in-cluded calls to split Israel geographically from the continental landmass and to abolish national languages throughout the European Union, the discussions did at times be-come serious. These moments included passionate pleas to open EU borders to illegal migrants, and to redirect the funds from Holocaust museums to the victims of European colonialism.

Outrageous though these claims may have been in 2012, extrapolating Bartana's project into a meeting of the Congress signals the work's uncanny ability to emphasize the radical possibilities of the political imagination and collective decision-making. For these reasons, *And Europe Will Be Stunned* offers a timeless alternative for thinking through contemporary politics without at the same time ignoring the historical weight

of traumatic histories and their influence as a critical framework. By occupying the space not only between fiction and reality but also between the past and the future, the political and the personal, Bartana's project will undoubtedly become a canonical artistic rendering of the significance we accord to minoritarian cohabitation at this unique juncture of our geopolitical present. For that reason, I argue that Bartana's project continues to provide crucial lessons in the arena of political ethics and in matters of cross-cultural reparation.

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