

Chapter 4
“I Cross Her Borders at Midnight”
Audre Lorde, Diaspora Poetics, and the Berlin Wall



Figure 4.1: Screenshot of Audre Lorde in Berlin from *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years*, 2012 (Dagmar Schultz/Third World Newsreel)

“I cross her borders at midnight/ the guards confused by a dream.”
—Audre Lorde, “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls”

*“I went to Berlin with strong reservations and found of course much there ... Most of all I found a certain amount
of room to be.”*
—Audre Lorde, unpublished journal entry

*“A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place
created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”*
—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

I. “First Impressions”

Audre Lorde faced several pressing uncertainties in the weeks surrounding her fiftieth birthday in the early months of 1984. Lorde had just returned from her parents’ Caribbean

homeland of Grenada, shortly after U.S. troops invaded the island following the ousting and execution of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. She went there to survey the aftermath of the occupation and drafted her troubled response in the essay, “Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report.” Lorde’s observations were given late inclusion into her first book of collected prose essays, *Sister Outsider*. In the first weeks of the year, she drafted the Grenada essay while she reviewed the manuscript’s final edits on typeset pages. Lorde was already an accomplished, National Book Award-nominated poet, and had recently authored a reflective opus, the autobiographical “biomythography” *Zami*. But her rationale for publishing her first collection of essays was in part to increase legibility to wider audiences and to ensure more of her work would survive beyond her lifetime. Two weeks before her February 18th birthday, Lorde began weighing options as her doctor discovered a tumor in her liver following an acute gallbladder attack and recommended a biopsy.¹ Already a breast cancer survivor, Lorde elected to put off immediate treatment. Lorde was wary of Western medicine’s invasive approaches to treating liver cancer, and thus she avoided getting a firm diagnosis. Amidst these profound exigencies, Lorde kept working and followed through on a commitment she had made the year prior – to serve as a guest professor for the summer semester at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University in West Berlin. “I’ve made up my mind not to have a liver biopsy,” Lorde wrote in her journal. “I’m asymptomatic now except for a vicious gallbladder. And I can placate her. There are too many things I’m determined to do that I haven’t done yet.” She included on a short list of unfinished aims to “see what Europe’s all about.”²

Lorde’s earlier life circumstances and writerly output had previously inspired transnational forms of identification. Lorde was born in 1934 to parents who had immigrated from Grenada and had settled in New York City. She published poetry from her teen years

onward, and eventually worked as a professor to supplement her writing output. In her early twenties, she visited Mexico, and in her later years international travel continuously was a mode and theme of her work. Trips in the 1970s and early 1980s to Ghana, Barbados, U.S.S.R., and Grenada had greatly impacted her life and work, as did her activism on behalf of women writers of color and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa through the group she co-founded, SiSA (Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa).

Lorde's first trip to Berlin in 1984 occurred in the midst of swirling turmoil but initiated a significant period of transformation and fueled the expansion of her diasporic consciousness developed specifically in Germany. Lorde was prolific in Berlin, despite her fragile state of health, fears of mortality, and recognized distance from home. Lorde expanded her diasporic consciousness with teaching and writing poetry as her most powerful navigational tools. Lorde arrived in Berlin in April, and settled in an apartment near the *Schwarzen Grund*, a wooded area outside of the city center near the Free University and within walking distance of *Krumme Lanke*, a lake surrounded by willow trees. At the Free University, Lorde taught three seminars: "Contemporary Black Women's Literature," "Contemporary Black Women's Poetry," and "The Poet as Outsider."³ During her three-month stay, Lorde faced chronic health problems due to her ailing liver, including an inability to consume solid foods. Dagmar Schultz – the Free University instructor and women's press editor who had invited Lorde to Berlin – found a homeopathic doctor who began treating Lorde's cancer with injections of iscadore, a remedy derived from mistletoe. This form of therapy helped bring her calm and soothed her illness.⁴ Lorde faced a terminal outlook and daily challenges to her health, but continued to surpass personal and professional aims for her visit. When she arrived back in the United States in July 1984, Lorde's health stayed stable for several months and she began publishing numerous poems, essays, and

journal entries drafted during, related to, and inspired by her time in Berlin. The fact that she returned to Berlin annually from 1986 through her final trip a month before her death in 1992 affirms her connection to the city – as does her recollection of experiences and inclusion of divided Berlin themes in all of her subsequent published projects.⁵

The imprint of Lorde’s first Berlin journey would become most publicly legible to readers of *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986) – a collection of poems that includes “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls,” “This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps: Plotzensee Memorial, West Berlin, 1984,” and “Diaspora” – as well as in *A Burst of Light* (1988), a book of essays and edited journal entries dating back to the months surrounding her trip to Europe. These public modes of literary production evince Lorde’s self-revealing, interdisciplinary poetic methodology. But they also hint toward a cache of Lorde’s unpublished drafts of poems and journal entries left outside of her reader’s seemingly open access to the circumstances of her life.

For example, the unpublished, free verse poem “First Impressions” – which she began as a journal entry on May 2, 1984 and then later typed out and revised in three iterations days later on May 15 – exemplifies how Berlin’s historically traumatized urban spaces served as poetic points of reflection for Lorde. In the poem, Lorde captures observations of everyday life in Berlin through a series of pairings in which she critically purposes the concepts of home and health. She opens with the lines, “The toilet paper is stiff as a 20 Mark note/ The stall doors are long and solid/ but the latch always works/ in reverse.”⁶ Here Lorde conjures Berlin as a space of queer intimacy and invitation. Comparable to the contemporaneous Berlin-based work of American photographer Nan Goldin, including her portraits of women in bathrooms, Lorde also balances this sensual impulse with themes of separation, strained refuge, and alienation.⁷ Her use of enjambment, pushing “works” and “in reverse” to distinct lines, conveys a sense of tenuous

safety. Lorde uses a simile to reform the idea of West Germany's economic currency (a marker of Germany's internal division) and a "latch" to counter an enclosure behind which she herself resorts. Lorde goes on,

Houses are intimidatingly clean
but laundries are few and expensive
the mail comes early
and meals quite late
in Berlin
a health-food store is called
A Reform House

Through her poetic imagery and form, Lorde conjures Berlin as a bewildering homespace, within which she experiences estrangement and comfort. Lorde uses the word *in* repeatedly to emphasize location and enclosure, and to bridge and blur distinct thoughts between the lines. The phrases "in reverse" and "in Berlin" appear after line breaks, which also stand out formally in spatial isolation, thus emblemizing and allowing for her curiosity and suspicions about the city to coexist. The refrain functions as what Amitai F. Avi-Ram refers in relation to Lorde's work as an "*apo koinou*," a word or phrasing that through enjambment shares meaning between two lines.⁸ As she bridges her lines, Lorde conjures Berlin as a whole city, neither limited to just East nor West, and mirrors her own travels across both sides of the Berlin Wall. As the short poem ends, she writes, "the women are small-boned and wiry also/but surprising/each one I approach/ becomes some other place/ to hide in Berlin." Lorde repeats the phrase "in Berlin" but removes the line break to reaffirm Berlin as a place she experiences both separation and refuge.⁹

While writing this poem, Lorde experimented with the placement of "in Berlin" in her drafts. For example, the phrase does not appear as the ending line of her untitled journal version of this poem. Lorde added the phrase three weeks later to the final line when she first typed up

the work. This first typed draft includes “in Berlin” on its own line at end the poem, only to be crossed out in a handwritten edit. The next draft and the final unmarked version retain the phrase, though she removes the line break and joins the final two lines as “to hide in Berlin.” Whether the handwritten edits on the typed-out drafts are Lorde’s or another reader’s, the poet’s questioning of how to deal with being “in Berlin” stands out. Lorde mined the physical and cultural makeup of the divided city as a surface of reflection, and turned to poetry as an outlet to consider such observations. The fact that this poem remained unpublished, while much of her other writing about Berlin was prominently revised and published, reemphasizes the productive tension between Lorde’s site-specific productivity and “hiding” in the divided city.¹⁰

Lorde explored the cultural and topographical contours of historic Berlin – including life on both sides of the Berlin Wall – through meetings with groups of women writers. In addition to teaching at the Free University, Lorde read poetry at West Berlin’s Amerika Haus, workshopped with an East German writers’ group, demonstrated against the U.S. deployment of Pershing Missiles in an Easter Sunday march, and conducted discussions with West German feminists about anti-Semitism, homophobia, lesbian identity, and racism.¹¹ Lorde encountered urban memorials, including those related to the Holocaust, paying heed to the silences they addressed or reproduced about Nazi Fascism. In the company of Schultz and Lorde’s companion, Gloria Joseph, Lorde also found places to thrive: flower markets, dinner parties, and lesbian nightclubs such as Die Zwei and Pour Elle. She wrote in her journal, “Dancing the night down in Berlin is a more than acceptable way to release the joy.”¹² By making Berlin a space of habitual return for poetic work, homeopathic treatment, and self-reflection, those close to Lorde contend the city added years to her life and certainly new layers of meaning to her work.¹³

Lorde's time in Germany immediately spawned a series of poetic possibilities, both for the German women she encountered and for herself. Through and growing out beyond her teaching, Lorde became a key figure in the emergent Afro-German movement. Michelle Wright notes, "Afro-German activists most often point to Audre Lorde ... as one of their most inspiring leaders and organizers."¹⁴ Tina Campt also writes, "The thoroughly diasporic, cross-cultural exchange between [the movement] and Lorde contributed substantially to their articulation of their identity as Afro Germans."¹⁵ At the outset of her trip, Lorde posed a question to herself in her journal, "Who are they, the German women of the Diaspora? Where do our paths intersect as women of Color ... what can we both learn from our connected differences that will be useful to us both, Afro-German and Afro-American?"¹⁶ Lorde is credited in part for coining the term "Afro-German," and her encouragement led to the production of the movement's foundational literary text, *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out) (1987), an anthology of autobiographical and poetic writings for which Lorde wrote the preface, that included fragments drawn directly from this previous journal entry. As Lorde worked alongside these women (among them, writers May Ayim and Katharina Oguntoye), Lorde posited Afro-German women as connected to a larger constellation of African diasporic and women of color communities.¹⁷

While scholars such as Wright and Campt are correct to argue Lorde's foundational impact on the Afro-German movement, what also emerges is the reciprocal, critical effect Berlin had on Lorde's vision of herself. This is especially evident given her fragile health and shifting form of homeopathic treatment, but also through her wrestling with her identity as an American in her work – and the geopolitical complexities of being a traveling black lesbian writer from the United States who forged transnational solidarities during the Cold War through poetry. In the

same journal entry from before her trip, she notes, “We are hyphenated people of the Diaspora ... we are an increasingly united front from which the world has not yet heard.”¹⁸ Her mixed grammars of “we” and “they,” along with the presumptive “I” of the journal form, epitomize Lorde’s approach to both poetic and diasporic consciousness – exploring possibilities for connection across lines of identified difference especially through poetic writing. Like her productive conceptualization of creative uses of difference, transnational division became a key aesthetic and theme for Lorde, especially as she considered her sense of being alternately at home and on edge in Berlin.

Lorde’s creative methodology for writing poetry sheds light on her own previously stated theoretical formulation that poetry is an imaginative form of historical record and intervention. Lorde’s primary identification as a poet did not preclude her from pursuing multiple genres of political and critical writing, nor from engaging in nonpoetic forms to deal with the political potential of poetry.¹⁹ Consider Lorde’s critical intervention in “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (1977) that poetry is the “skeleton architecture” that forges “a bridge across our fears of what has never been before,” in which she conveys a connection between poetics and political reality, and expresses her conceptualization of this in the form of an essay, merging prose and poetic lines to make her points.²⁰

Emblematic of Lorde’s relationship to her poetry, and to Berlin, was her ambivalent treatment of the Berlin Wall. Lorde engages the Berlin Wall in numerous pieces of writing to ponder its geopolitical relevance and its symbolic weight. Lorde presents the Berlin Wall as both a spatial and temporal divide, and a poetic manifestation of division. From 1984 onward, the Berlin Wall would enter Lorde’s poetic language as a complex symbol of history and memory through which she addressed Cold War-era issues of division and difference, solidarity and

survival. Lorde glimpsed the borders of Berlin – in terms of the multiple city’s political borders and the ones she confronted internally. Lorde’s rendering of the Berlin Wall in her poetry demands attention both because her poems about Berlin capture the multiple forms of division on both sides of the divided city, as well as on both sides of 1989’s historical threshold. How she accounted for the Berlin Wall in language depended on the relative connections and sense of historical timing she wished to forge through her interdisciplinary modes of recollection. Like Freed’s and Davis’s deliberately oblique reflections on the Berlin Wall, Lorde employed similar tactics to underscore her poetic explorations of division.

In this chapter, I consider the Cold War context for Lorde’s poetic self exploration in Berlin through the symbol of the Berlin Wall. I weigh Lorde’s poetic methodology through her engagement with the division of Germany in *Our Dead Behind Us* and her subsequent texts, *A Burst of Light* and *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Difference*. In each case I animate her publicly-circulating work with readings of revised poems and journal entries from her archives. First, I consider broader connections to discourses on history and memory that inform the Cold War contexts of Lorde’s poetry. This includes American policies of Cold War rollback envisioned or enacted through Germany, that were also paced by American cultural representations of the Berlin Wall and/or expanded networks of transnational solidarity for Afro-diasporic communities. Second, I read Lorde’s poems from *Our Dead Behind Us* and other writing from *A Burst of Light* for connections between Lorde’s Berlin-based self-reflection and her broader political project of working across lines of difference and division. Third, I follow the production and reception of these works, and consider the trajectories for Lorde’s additional poems about the Berlin Wall written after the dismantling of the border in 1989, including “East Berlin,” “Peace on Earth: Christmas, 1989,” and “Restoration: A Memorial–9/18/91,” which were included in her

posthumously-published book, *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Difference*. I contend a divided Berlin offered Lorde a significant site to explore a poetic architecture of diaspora, within which the Berlin Wall marks one prominent landmark to connect reflections of the multiple divisions she encountered in West and East Germany (and eventually, the reunified nation). Just as Lorde famously wrote, “Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives,” a divided Berlin offered Lorde a poetic architecture of diaspora and space of creativity to practice working across lines of division.²¹ Such a vision of “skeleton architecture” employs poetry (as well as diasporic consciousness) to reimagine actual boundaries and borders of Cold War geopolitics.

II. Between Cold War History and Memory

During the weeks leading up to the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in the spring of April 1985, President Ronald Reagan announced a plan to commemorate the occasion with a visit to Bitburg, West Germany. The Rhineland town, near the Luxembourg border, was decimated by allied bombing in 1944. The town was transformed into a NATO airbase during the Cold War, eventually under the supervision of the American Air Force. Reagan’s mission would include a visit to the Bitburg air base and a ceremony at the Bitburg Military Cemetery with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. There, Reagan was to lay a wreath to honor German soldiers buried there. At first, Reagan’s plans did not include ceremonies in any other allied countries or other prominent sites from the war. Upon the announcement of the trip, the fact that the Bitburg cemetery included burial plots for 49 S.S.-Wachen Nazi officers was made clear to the American public. Immediately, members of Congress and prominent Jewish

Americans criticized the selection of Bitburg for this commemoration, given that no former concentration camps or sites of Jewish trauma were included in his itinerary.

To address critics, Reagan defended himself in a press conference clarifying his decision as a matter of forging further reconciliation with West Germany, one of the U.S.'s "staunchest allies," who had supported NATO efforts in the early 1980s to station major components of its Pershing missile system throughout the nation despite their own domestic "Euro Missile" protests. Reagan also mentioned the S.S. soldiers in particular, whose combat history became fodder for his defense. Reagan claimed, "Those young men are victims of Nazism ... drafted into service to carry out the hateful wishes of the Nazis. They were victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps."²² Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate author, who happened to be visiting the White House the following day at a ceremony in which he was bestowed with a congressional medal, addressed the President directly: "May I, Mr. President, if it's at all possible at all, implore you to do something else, to find a way – to find another way, another site. That place, Mr. President, is not your place. Your place is with the victims of the S.S."²³ Following the public outcry and Wiesel's appeal, the White House amended the President's agenda – adding the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp to Reagan's official itinerary – though the President kept his commitment to Kohl to appear at Bitburg. The decision did not fully appease critics, and instead further incensed those who saw Reagan's visit as a form of closure and forgiveness, an offering of shared identification with both victims and perpetrators of World War II.²⁴

On May 5, President Reagan laid two wreaths, 220 miles apart: one at the base of an obelisk at Bergen-Belsen and another above the tombs of buried German soldiers at Bitburg. Reagan issued remarks at the Bitburg air base later in the day, to put his two gestures of

commemoration in perspective. After making brief remarks to address “veterans and families of American servicemen who still carry the scars and feel the painful losses of that war” and “survivors of the Holocaust,” Reagan defended his overall mission to honor U.S.-West German post-World War II relations. To accentuate his point, his speech sampled a famous declaration of identification initially forged to characterize this transatlantic diplomatic relationship:

Twenty-two years ago President John F. Kennedy went to the Berlin Wall and proclaimed that he, too, was a Berliner. Well, today freedom-loving people around the world must say: I am a Berliner. I am a Jew in a world still threatened by anti-Semitism. I am an Afghan, and I am a prisoner of the Gulag. I am a refugee in a crowded boat foundering off the coast of Vietnam. I am a Laotian, a Cambodian, a Cuban, and a Miskito Indian in Nicaragua. I, too, am a potential victim of totalitarianism.²⁵

Reagan’s rhetorical approach was to conjure identification through equivalence, and to do so, he claimed, like Kennedy, status as a Berliner. But even further, he extended his mission of historical commemoration and Cold War strategic alliances through a series of identificatory “I am” statements conjuring Kennedy’s 1963 *Ich bin ein Berliner* speech. By mentioning the Holocaust and Berlin Wall in the same statement, and joining them with other geopolitical identities, he attempted to personalize and stand in for a litany of “victims” from Cold War hotspots – without identifying his own administration’s participatory or aggressive role in these global conflicts. Further, he did so without separating the particular forms of suffering and culpability that play out in each local historical context. Beyond reconciliation, West Germany was to be affirmed publicly as a crucial military partner in the Cold War, and as a site of valid armament. To be at once a Berliner, a Jew, a Vietnamese Refugee, and a prisoner of a Soviet Gulag is an appeal to identification without difference and a justification for increased military action in Germany. Leveraging location – in both one’s presence and rhetoric – in matters of memorial recognition

and political maneuvering affirms the notion that identification and place operate jointly in persuasive ways.

In addition to Wiesel's earlier remarks, American cultural figures responded loudly to Reagan's visit to Bitburg. The trip inspired at least two rock and roll rebuttals – the Ramones' "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" (Figure 4.2) and Frank Zappa's "Reagan Goes to Bitburg" . In an interview with *Spin*, Joey Ramone (otherwise generally a supporter of Reagan) said, "We had watched Reagan going to visit the SS cemetery on TV and were disgusted. ... We're all good Americans, but Reagan's thing was like forgive and forget. How can you forget six million people being gassed and roasted."²⁶ In another cultural response, African American expatriate cartoonist Ollie Harrington, who had lived in East Berlin since 1961, drew two editorial cartoons on the subject for the Communist newspaper *Daily World*. In the first, a grinning Reagan walks towards a grave stone with a wreath labeled "from Ron" (Figure 4.3). Under the ground, one uniformed skeleton with S.S. paraphernalia awakens toward attention. In the second, another skeleton, again in combat gear, stands up from his grave and reads an official-looking decree that reads "Full Pardon" and signed by Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl



Figure 4.2: Ramones, "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg," 1985 (Beggars Banquet Records)



Figures 4.3–4: Ollie Harrington, Editorial Cartoons, *Daily World*, 1985 (Walter O. Evans Collection of African-American Art)

(Figure 4.4).²⁷ The cultural reverberations across the Atlantic unveiled the problematics of historical memory and prevailing fears of ethnic violence in Germany underlying the intended act of commemoration.

If the President's stated goal was commemorating and furthering reconciliation in West Germany, such an action occurred in the wake of two simultaneous historical currents occurring in the United States: the reacceleration of the Cold War and the boom of memorial culture. U.S. foreign policy, under the direction of President Reagan, had also segued from Cold War detente following the end of the Vietnam War to the policy of "rollback" of direct military intervention or covert operations in nonaligned or socialist-led countries, propelled by Reagan's rhetoric deeming the Soviet Union an "evil empire." In 1983, Reagan announced the speculative "Star Wars" missile defense system, and partnered with NATO to station 572 Cruise and Pershing II mid-range missiles across Europe, including 108 in West Germany. During this period, the U.S. also carried out military aggression or intervention through the support of counter-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Namibia, and Grenada. This diverse and far-reaching litany of foreign lands point to the ways the view of an re-exacerbated bipolar Cold War with the Soviet Union during the Reagan years underwrote a large expansion of U.S. empire and redeployment of cultural fears of a communist threat.

In the case of Berlin, the heightened rhetoric and military maneuvering of this reanimated and further globalized Cold War shook but failed to undermine the strange coexistence maintained between the two Germanys. Even remaining as foes, they practiced diplomatic relations across their borders through a system of economic credits and payments, permitted emigrations, trading of land borders, and a lessening of sharp rhetoric about the Berlin Wall. During this period the wall was made to more remarkably visible to the citizens of

each side, as the wall received its third architectural reconstruction in the mid–1960s through the 1970s (known as *Grenzmauer 75*). And yet, divisions within the respective Germanys would truly test the ideological resolve of the structures of power – in the East, the call for expanded access to exit visas gained public momentum, and Soviet reform policies of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* brought about possibilities for reform across the Eastern bloc as well as tensions over political change. In the West, the Euromissile Crisis of 1983 sparked anti-nuclear protests and demonstrations in West Germany and across Europe. Further, attention to the strained assimilation of racial and ethnic minorities pitted Germans of color (in particular, Turkish and Afro-Germans) against the ideologies of the *Volk*.²⁸

Political struggles of the Cold War were publicly routed through debates about “sites of memory” and legacies of World War II freedom and repression. Pierre Nora’s landmark essay, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” (published in 1984 in French; translated into English in 1989) identifies “sites of memory” at odds with “real memory.” In some cases such sites are where “hopelessly forgetful modern societies ... organize the past” – and yet for Nora “sites of memory” also beckon the potential for a cultural memory that approaches “critical history.”²⁹ Spikes in contested expressions of cultural memory was also fueled, in part, because of the increased economic and social rootlessness of this time period, amidst swirling questions of identity – national and otherwise. Marita Sturken writes, “Cultural memory is a means through which definitions of the nation and ‘Americanness’ are simultaneously established, questioned, and reconfigured.” Sturken writes of official memorial projects as measures to bring “cohesion” and “closure,” as opposed to cultural memory which seeks to democratize modes of historical representation and reflection.³⁰ Given Reagan’s rhetoric at Bitburg, especially his “I am a Berliner” echoed remarks, his overlapping memorializing and Cold War strategic alliance missions

become clear. He lays bare a U.S. agenda that sought to rescript national borders along the imperatives of rollback foreign policy, in this instance by routing public awareness through Germany and the cultural imaginary of the Berlin Wall.

Reagan was not alone in testing the expressive boundaries of Cold War rhetoric and policy. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, American artists and writers had explored the Cold War “borderlands” of Berlin since 1961 to make sense of U.S. Cold War policy as well as to test limits of American identity.³¹ For example, Joyce Carol Oates’s collection of short stories, *Last Days* (1984), was inspired in part by her 1980 trip to Berlin. Oates writes about Cold War division along the Iron Curtain – in stories about Germany, Poland, North Africa, among other locales. Two of her stories, “Ich bin ein Berliner” and “Our Wall,” take place on alternate sides of the divided city. In Oates’s journals from the period of her own trip, she reports she was “haunted” by the Berlin Wall. She writes in the following year, as she was drafting her stories, “I swing back and forth between too much awareness of certain insoluble problems (I mean on a larger scale – society, the world, Reagan, our new mood of meanness and suspicion in America) and what must be too little.”³² In the first story, she personalizes “the danger of being an American in Europe” through a somber, defeated spin on a spy tale. The protagonist is the younger brother of a Fulbright scholar who claims the body of his sibling. The deceased brother’s obsession with the Berlin Wall led to his fatal shooting at the border. Though the younger brother claims to reject identification – “for the record, I am not a Berliner” – he returns to the city and is tempted to reenact his brother’s suicidal journey, to approach the border wall again from the West.³³

In the second story, “Our Wall,” Oates refashions the historical story of Peter Fechter in 1962, murdered by border guards trying to cross the border from the East, again as an imagined



Figure 4.5: Tseng Kwong Chi, Keith Haring paints the Berlin Wall, October 1986 (Keith Haring Foundation/Muna Tseng Dance Projects Inc.)

younger brother and employs a grammatical sense of shared identification with the wall. The personal and political crises Oates writes about in her journal are reflected in her own alternating close descriptions and dream-like approaches to the Berlin Wall in the final pages of the work. She writes, as her character approaches the forbidden, militarized border from its East side, “Someday it is whispered, we *will* overcome The Wall.” But within several lines she ends her story, and pursues a detached narrative point of view. Oates concludes with a declarative statement: “Come closer, have no fear, long before you were born The Wall was, and forever The Wall will endure.”³⁴

If Oates was drawn closer to the Berlin Wall only to ultimately distance herself through fiction, visual artist Keith Haring’s October 1986 mural painted directly on the western side of the wall near Checkpoint Charlie on Zimmerstrasse paralleled her method through an embodied

gesture of expression (Figure 4.5). At the invitation of the *Haus am Checkpoint Charlie*, Haring's site-specific intervention occurred at a highpoint for prominent American artists, including Jonathan Borofsky and David Wojnarowicz, expressing themselves with painted imagery directly on the Berlin Wall.³⁵ In one day, Haring painted a 300-foot long mural covering an entire city block comprised of an interlinked chain of human figures depicted in the traditional German flag colors of black, red, and yellow. Haring told the press, "It's a humanistic gesture, more than anything else ... a political and subversive act – an attempt to psychologically destroy the wall by painting it."³⁶ Despite his monumental aim, Haring's gesture toward making a spectacle of aspirational German solidarity drew criticism for an overemphasis on universality. Haring employed a complex semiotic system of X's and O's on the bodies of the figures to conjure diversity and difference. But whereas many of his other contemporary public projects drew on site-specific political provocation, the mural lacked a direct, multilevel acknowledgment of German history beyond abstraction. Haring, however, drew attention to his own transnational project of grassroots public action in coverage surrounding the event. For example, in the televised press conference, he wore a self-designed "Free South Africa" t-shirt connecting the association of his public mural in Berlin with his global anti-apartheid artwork. But within days, Haring's Berlin mural was painted over, and audiences lost a chance to draw connections through the Berlin Wall to scars of memory and contemporary global conflicts.³⁷

Perhaps the most poignant rebuttal to the problem of American-German memory in the era of Cold War reacceleration can be found in Lorde's poems from *Our Dead Behind Us*. Inspired in the year before Bitburg (1984), but revised and published the year following (1986), the book of poems tasks itself – and the genre of poetry – as an ambivalent yet critical form of historical reflection. Germany is a key site of engagement, as noted, and many of Lorde's poems in this

volume were authored or edited while she was in Berlin. While Reagan's trip to Germany sought to consolidate U.S. global power, Lorde's poetic explorations of diaspora in Berlin sought to interrogate U.S. empire and hegemonic notions of national authority and identity through locating sites of diasporic consciousness. In *Our Dead Behind Us*, Reagan is not explicitly mentioned in the poems, though Lorde reflects on her own strained identification with Reagan in press interviews surrounding the project. For example, Lorde told German journalists, "I cannot say I am black and so Ronald Reagan has nothing to do with me. ... The personal and political are entwined; they are not the same, but they support each other."³⁸ Nonetheless, many of the book's poetic scenes occur or refer to a litany of American Cold War hotspots: Germany, South Africa and Grenada, or within the U.S. at sites of racial, gender, sexual and economic violence.

Scholars commenting on *Our Dead Behind Us* importantly remark on Lorde's poetic uses of geopolitical borders and boundaries. Gloria Hull writes, "edges, lines, borders, margins, boundaries, and the like appear as significant figures in her work...Yet it is not simply lines which attract Lorde. She almost equally is fascinated by what happens as they cross and recross, touch, and intersect with one another." Hull goes on to note that the poems are "enacting a series of displacements. The geographical shifts are paralleled by shifting in a "time-tension" Sagri Dhairyam elaborates that *Our Dead Behind* "is a testament to 'the burden of history,' the overtly political freight that the poems carry."As Dhairyam goes on to note, "The poems in [*Our Dead Behind Us*] resolutely stitch threads of various extraliterary discourses in the poetic."³⁷ As such, working across lines of geopolitical and formalistic difference mark Lorde's approach.³⁹

The book's title, based on a line of her opening poem "Sisters in Arms," is an invocation of memory and forges a grammar of shared belonging. She attempts not to distance herself from the "dead" to whom she refers, but create space for memorialization and collectivization. The

location of this poem is South Africa, and the imperative is diasporic connection – however some of its images refer to her status as an American acting out and struggling with her own global reach. In 1984, Lorde helped start the organization Sisterhood in Support of Sisters of South Africa (SISA), and her poem marks the beauty and strains of such diasporic action. In this poem, Lorde writes, “I could not plant the other limpet mine/against a wall at the railroad station/ nor carry either of your souls back from the river/ in a calabash upon my head/ so I bought you a ticket to Durban/ on my American Express/ and we lay together/ in the first light of a new season.” Here, the wall is an image that conjures violent potential and memorial longing. As the poem goes on, Lorde uses white space and typographical marking to convey the limitations, and to rely on form to double up on her meaning, something she does throughout *Our Dead Behind Us*: “Now clearing roughage from my autumn garden/ cow sorrel overgrown rocket gone to seed/ I reach for the taste of today/ the *New York Times* finally mentions your country/ a half-page story/ of the first white south african killed in the ‘unrest’...” Lorde’s grammatical use of “your” conveys separation and a bridging of difference. The spatial pause between “sorrel” and “overgrown” is cleared, like the “roughage” in the line before. This use of white space occurs throughout the collection as a form of poetic division. The space is suggestive of the previous lack of attention of conflict mentioned in *the New York Times*, though this mention is posited not in content but in spatial terms. Likewise, the scare quotes around “unrest” enact another form of clearing, this of meaning of the word, to hint at what has not been covered in the newspaper, a stand-in for official forms of global knowledge.⁴⁰

Further, the “us” in *Our Dead Behind Us* conjures multiple potential meanings. The title announces a call for collectivization, but marks division and difference as the ground for solidarity. The “us” could also stand in for “U.S.,” and refer to Lorde’s own wrestling with her

identity as American at a moment of Cold War reacceleration. In this sense, Lorde's poetic approach bridges the geopolitics of the Cold War and memorial culture – just as Reagan did at Bitburg – but in ways that also allow for diasporic consciousness to be forged across lines of difference, with poetry enacting open-ended reflection instead of closure. As Lorde writes in another poem in *Our Dead Behind Us*, “Home,” with a purposeful spatial pause and call to alternate forms of inscription, “We arrived at my mother's island/ to find your mother's name in the stone/we did not need to go to the graveyard/ for affirmation.”⁴¹

III. Berlin Borders and Inscriptions

Upon her arrival to Berlin in April 1984, Lorde wrote in her journal, “I have been here a week and already a whole new life has begun which I wish to keep in balance.”⁴² Lorde was taken in and taken aback by Berlin, a city that led her to new paths of recovery, haunted her, and also became a site of immense productivity. Berlin offered an archive of poetic imagery and ideas. Lorde drew from her relationship to the physical environment of the city in all of her writing about her experiences in Germany and forthcoming projects. There, she was aware of how her multiple intersecting identities (black, lesbian, poet, American, among other distinctions) marked her as an outsider but also gave her opportunities to work across difference on both sides of the city's internal divide. She encountered active silences about racism and anti-Semitism maintained in the long shadow of Nazism encoded in the city's public spaces, and at once reimagined them as sites to speak out and to experiment with seeking connection.

In one edited journal entry printed from *A Burst of Light*, listed June 7, 1984, Lorde refers to the Berlin Wall, in light of Berlin's legacy of war and her own struggle for survival:

I am listening to what fear teaches. I will never be gone. I am a scar, a report from the frontlines, a talisman, a resurrection. A rough place on the chin of complacency. ... So what if I am afraid? Of stepping out into the morning? Of dying? Of unleashing the damned gall where hatred swims like a tadpole waiting to swell into the arms of war? And what does that war teach when the bruised leavings jump *an insurmountable wall* where the glorious Berlin chestnuts and orange poppies hide detection wires that spray bullets which kill? [Emphasis added.]

In versions of this journal entry contained in her archive – including the entry in her unpublished journal and page proofs from the book – “the wall” was plural, listed as “insurmountable walls.”⁴³ Her revision is suggestive of the actual border system’s intricate and myriad modes of defense, as well as Lorde’s understanding of her experience living in Berlin through the multiple lines of division – including her own lines of private poetic thought and publicly circulating poetic work. Lorde indicates revision as a regular facet of her creative process, but also the ways the Berlin Wall functioned as a key site and symbol of her poetic practice.⁴⁴ She treats the Berlin Wall as a formidable structure, though she reframes the notion of the divided city through its multiple lines of division – historical, racial, sexual, poetic and personal – and therefore as a space of potential connection.

After her trip, Lorde prepared poetry for publication that would ultimately materialize into *Our Dead Behind Us*. Lorde writes about this period in journal entries included in *A Burst of Light* (and in other pieces in her archive including unpublished journal entries and drafts of poems), and presents this time from late 1984–1986 as one of revision and continued reflection about Berlin. She collected several poems for a preliminary collection, initially titled, “POEMS from OUT TO THE HARD ROAD (unpublished manuscript.)”⁴⁵ Lorde published some of her poems to be later included in *Our Dead Behind Us* in journals and magazines such as *Black Scholar*, *Ikon*, and *Parnassus*. She submitted the full book length manuscript, with 43 poems, to her

publisher Norton, no later than December 1985 and in January 1986 she received page proofs. The book was published in late 1986.

Given the centrality of Berlin to the project, Lorde's poem "Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls" is an integral poem through which she highlights the divisions of Cold War Germany in its full complexity. Some of those divisions include her wrestling with her own fate and identity. According to her archive, Lorde began drafting this poem in her journal on May 8 and 9, 1984, while teaching in Berlin. The typed drafts of the poem that survive are dated February 11, March 31, and April 1 of the following year.⁴⁶ At each stage, Lorde tends to her draft around choices of language and line spacing. The poem resembles an encoded diasporic map, emphasized by her intermingled use of recognizable symbols and sites from both sides of Berlin, as well as coyly presented private images and memories that transcend the divided city's limits.

Scholars have suggested Lorde represents the plight of Afro-German women in her poem. Melba Boyd, a scholar and poet who attended Lorde's Berlin reading at the Amerika Haus, contends the poem "embodies [Lorde's] identification with the plight of Afro-Germans and women of color in Berlin, as 'woman' is coded as the city, with forbidden borders and American influences."⁴⁷ The "American influences" must also be read to include Lorde's own experiences in Berlin. To be sure, Lorde's poetic rendering of Berlin as a "strange woman" frames the poem around notions of identity and estrangement for her observations of the city, but importantly also about herself. The title of the poem is a way to signal the Afro-German community's strained relationship with the city, but also deploys the term "colored" to convey a potential connection with U.S. racial discourse; in this way and others throughout the poem, Lorde opens herself up as an additional, if not central, subject of the poem.⁴⁸

Lorde locates her poem in the timespace of a dream but also in the geopolitical reality of divided Berlin, which opens her to imagine ways to transgress the boundary and ponder new possibilities in the city.⁴⁹ The poem opens,

Perhaps a strange woman
walks down from the corner
into my bedroom
wasps nest behind her ears
she is eating a half-ripe banana
with brown flecks in the shape of a lizard
kittiwakes in her hair
perhaps
she is speaking my tongue
in a different tempo
the rhythm of gray whales praying
dark as a granite bowl
perhaps
she is a stone.⁵⁰

Berlin is introduced through a matrix of diasporic sites. The symbols in the first stanza – the kittiwake bird, the lizard, gray whales – conjure the tropics by the sea, and thus connect readers to Lorde’s other non-U.S. homespaces, in Grenada and St. Croix. The possessive “my” stages an interaction that resembles translation and invasiveness.

Midnight as a poetic time of liminality is crucial to this poem. Nighttime offers a charged temporal space, as it allows for uncertainty and ambivalence.⁵¹ It also signals queer intimacy, in the dream and out in the streets. The internal border of Berlin functions here along several lines as a divider – it marks the spatial divide between the poem’s two stanzas, the introduction of the narrative “I,” and the divider between one day ending and the next beginning.⁵² By the second stanza, the speaker traverses the woman’s/city’s internal border at the Berlin Wall, and the narrative perspective changes to the first person:

I cross her borders at midnight
the guards confused by a dream
Mother Christopher's warm bread
an end to war perhaps
she is selling a season's ticket to the Berlin Opera

Without naming “The Berlin Wall” in this poem, Lorde finds several ways to locate and then transgress the poem’s alluded boundary. The wall is accounted for in the poem not through direct nomenclature or its concrete architecture but instead through the language of “borders,” “guards,” and temporal trickery. In geopolitical time, midnight is significant, as it is a clear reference to the actual East German policy in which all sanctioned daily visitors from West Berlin to East Berlin must report and return back before midnight. The poem’s travel after midnight suggests border control ultimately fails to keep the city’s division intact. Crossing the borders after midnight in the dream gestures to other routinized outcomes. For example, Lorde writes in the following lines, “she is selling a season’s ticket to the Berlin Opera.” The Berlin Opera, which was located in East Berlin, stands in to imagine the East as a site of habitual (“season”) and elusive return.⁵³ Ultimately, she attempts to undermine the normalcy and logic of division.

Accentuating the poem’s liminality is Lorde’s use of the word “perhaps” throughout the work. Given Lorde’s free verse style, her poetic structure comes not from meter or rhyme per se, but from the rhythm created through line breaks, stanzas, and spacing. The poem begins with the word “perhaps,” which then reappears six times, either by itself after a line break, or with extra white space separating it from other words on the line. The word acts as an unsteady refrain, and snakes through the poem, mimicking the actual zigzagged path of the wall and offering an ordering structure to the poem. In doing so, she undermines polemic division and singular political meaning, all the while making sure the actions she explores in the poetic dream are both purposeful and conditional. Contrasting the surreal realm of dream crossings, her attention to

extremes of tactility and texture is also important, as expressed through her litany of images suggesting “a tender forgiveness of contrasts” including the play between the “hard” of “a granite bowl,” “a stone,” “metal,” and the soft, “half-ripe banana,” “Mother Christopher’s warm bread,” “silken thighs,” and the “american flag.” These contrasts ground the dream and poem in the city’s material conditions – including military occupation and fortified borders – even as they summon ethereality. In the final lines, Lorde writes,

perhaps
A nightingale waits in the alley
next to the yellow phone booth
under my pillow
a banana skin is wilting.

Lorde’s nighttime border crossing is imagined through undermining the systems of border control at the Berlin Wall and a dreamed excursion that culminates in a moment of potential flight. By previously spatializing and grounding her poem with mentions of a street “corner” and “the hair-bouncing step/of a jaunty flower-bandit” (a reference to Dagmar Schultz), a nightingale pauses for her in the alley, and symbolizes escape and restraint. The nightingale, an important poetic symbol ranging from antiquity to the romantic period, embodies and negotiates a number of divisions explored within poetry including: expression and silence, masculinity and femininity, and the threshold between life and death.⁵⁴ For instance, John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” looks to the bird, like a poem, as a way to transgress these boundaries.⁵⁵ Lorde places her nightingale in Berlin’s Cold War urban context and an alley, as a way to further suggest liminality between being grounded and being light. Once again, the city’s hard edges – of history, of the Berlin Wall – make stone and concrete important material referents to Lorde’s poetry in and of Berlin, as does the potential for soothing, softness, comfort, and flight from that very urban topography.



Figure 4.6: Dean Ayres, Urn at the Plötzensee Memorial, 1997 (Flickr)

Part of Lorde’s complex and haunted relationship with Berlin was also connected to the public memory of the Holocaust. The city is where Lorde suggested she was “listening to what fear teaches” and remained as a “scar” in a place “where hatred swims like a tadpole waiting to swell into the arms of war.” Like the poetic navigation of “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls,” Lorde extended her own exploration of the divided city in another poem, “This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps: Plötzensee [sic] Memorial, West Berlin, 1984.” Located on a lake in the city’s

northwestern outer reaches of West Berlin, Plötzensee was a former Nazi prison and execution house. In 1952 it was dedicated as a memorial to those persecuted by the Third Reich.⁵⁶ During Lorde’s 1984 trip, the Plötzensee Memorial was West Berlin’s most prominent Holocaust memorial. As Lorde’s title suggests, the site marks memory of the Holocaust by incorporating earth from each German concentration camp into a large inscribed urn (Figure 4.6). Lorde presumably visited the site, as she retained copies of the memorial’s pamphlet in her records.⁵⁷ Lorde began drafting her reflections as a journal entry while considering her own comforts and reservations at the close of her time in Berlin. On July 29, 1984, she wrote, “But you have to forget Plotzensee’s [sic] bland lack of assuming responsibility, the obscure circumlocutions that protect Germany’s children from their history and humanity. An urn of earth from concentration

camps. Not ashes of Jews.”⁵⁸ For Lorde, her identification with Jewish victims of Nazi tyranny was also connected to her concerns about contemporary racism in Germany. She added,

Nothing can come to the point of feeling what they are saying, so they can never move on. So a Germany committed to this kind of thinking only is a Germany of the past, committed to repeating the same mistakes who will it be this time? The turks? or the newly emergent Afri-German [sic] people?⁵⁹

Inspired by this journal entry, Lorde typed out drafts on February 2 and February 19, 1985, and continued to edit the poem toward publication.⁶⁰ In doing so, Lorde connected her reflection on the history and memory of the Holocaust in Berlin to her Afro-diasporic consciousness.

In the poem, Lorde marks this memorial as a site of contradiction, rather than resolution. Lorde’s poem conjures the filmic work of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* by placing her vision of the site of memory around the “overgrowth” of nature and amnesiac cultures over sites of Holocaust trauma.⁶¹ She also uses geographic space to signify on historical time. Lorde’s earliest drafts carry the titles “Plotensee [sic] Memorial to the Resistance: Berlin 1984” and “Plotensee [sic] Memorial_Berlin 1984.”⁶² By the final draft in her archive, she makes two key changes: the primary title is a translation of the actual plaque inscription at the memorial (“*Die Urne Enthalt Erde aus deutschen Konzentrationslagern*”) which had also been cited in the body of an early draft of the poem, and the geopolitical descriptive “West” is added to Berlin in the title. In the latter case, she reminds of the specific location of the site, as well as how Germany’s post-1945 division also created spaces of historic estrangement and sublimated traumas of the recent past. Through all iterations, her use of the year reminds readers of the influence of her first trip, but also resembles an inscriptive timestamp often found on historical or memorial markers.

The poem opens with a tension staged between remembrance and erasure. Lorde utilizes the memorial’s actual inscription verbiage in her poem to convey the gaps between what is claimed and what is rendered silent in this historical display.

Dark gray
the stone wall hangs
self-conscious wreaths
the heavy breath of gaudy Berlin roses
“The Vice Chancellor Remembers
The Heroic Generals of the Resistance”
and before a well-trimmed hedge
unpolished granite
tall as my daughter and twice around
Neatness
wiping memories payment
from the air.⁶³

Her reference to a “stone wall” and “self-conscious wreaths” conjure the Berlin Wall, and pace Reagan’s Bitburg controversy within the context of the problematics of Holocaust memory. “The heavy breath of gaudy Berlin roses” further suggest the empty expressive gestures of beauty in the face of a misremembered history. Again, Lorde uses extra horizontal spatial gaps (“neatness/ wiping memories payment/ from the air”) to convey rhythmic structure, as well as to suggest gaps and silences in the imposed rhythms of historical time and memorial reparation. Society rushes to move on, rather than healing or necessarily talking about its losses.

Lorde goes on to describe a picnic in the park and lake area that encompasses the memorial. The scene becomes eerie, and features several juxtaposed images of birth and destruction. For example, Lorde describes sitting to eat, “beneath my rump/ in a hollow root of the dead elm/ a rabbit kindles,” conveying at once a litter of baby rabbits and of burning and fire. Subsequently, as Lorde ends the picnic, the haunting does not cease. The appearance of a “writhing waterbug,” a roach flicked but split open in her food, symbolizes through interruption the degradation and loss of life, as well as the potential for survival as deterred.

The picnic is over
reluctantly
I stand pick up my blanket
and flip into the bowl of still-warm corn
a writhing waterbug
cracked open her pale eggs oozing
quiet
from the smash.

Lorde's line breaks and extra spatial pauses convey an unsteady rhythm to this moment. The caesuras in this stanza – between “I stand pick up my blanket” and “cracked open her pale eggs oozing” – are pauses that double as physical descriptions of stepping away and breaking open. The pairing of “quiet” and “the smash” again suggest the gap between silence and expression at this site.

In the poem's final stanza, Lorde marks and pushes the limits of memorial practice, both at the site and in her own poetry. Here, she distinguishes between “earth” and “ash” of human remains, and reminds her reader of the impossibility for commemoration to fully stand in for the loss of human life. She highlights how this site's appeal to nature as a form of rebirth doubles as a funereal absence, and hinders critical dialogue about violence and history.

Earth
not the unremarkable ash
of fussy thin-boned infants
and adolescent Jewish girls
liming the Ravensbruck potatoes
careful and monsterless
this urn makes nothing
easy to say.

Themes of speech and silence coexist in these lines. Her gendering of the murdered Jews is carried out again in her reference to Ravensbrück, which was a predominately female concentration camp outside of Berlin. In relation to her work with German feminists, this serves as a call to identification to critically addressing their pasts. Her final lines, “careful and

monsterless/ this urn makes nothing/easy to say” respond to both the urn at Plötzensee and perhaps her own urn poem as limited in ability to find the utterances appropriate to encounter such a violent history. Further, like her reference to a nightingale in “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls,” the final lines conjure another classical symbol of poetry, the urn, and Keats’s canonical “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Keats’s poem also mediates the gaps between speech and silence, but owes its culminating lines to a lesson “spoken” by an Urn and conveyed in quotation marks: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”⁶⁴ Lorde’s ending signifies on and challenges Keats’s ode, and reminds her readers of the aesthetic limits of memorial gestures, be they poetic, and/or material. The past can be localized into poems, aesthetic objects, and memorials, but true loss extends beyond speech acts made evident in sites of historical reflection. Overall, Lorde revisits the thematic extremes of soft and hard materiality in Berlin – the tensions between the inscription of the plaque and the physical traces it references, the offering of tangible earth that was sealed in the urn. Against these two material extremes, Lorde’s conveys her own and a larger shared sense of Berlin as a simultaneous refuge and site of potential danger.

Lorde’s poem “Diaspora” departs from and extends outward visions of these previous poems that are clearly sited in Berlin. Lorde mined Berlin’s emergent diasporic identities and memorial displays, and in doing so created a body of work that mapped the divided city into a larger, transnational vision of struggle. But the site-specific Berlin of her poems also informed the abstracted Berlin imaginary from which she continually would draw. The concept of diaspora is for Lorde tied to notions of danger, flight, but also connection across lines of division and difference. As noted, when Lorde considered the “insurmountable” Berlin walls in her journal,

she also wrote, “I am listening to what fear teaches.”⁶⁵ Fear, survival and Berlin became interconnected in her works. Several other poems in *Our Dead Behind Us* have these themes or foci, some of which cloak allusions to Berlin in poetic imagery or were altered in the revision process. For example, the poem, “For Jose and Regina” was titled in earlier drafts, “Growing Up in Berlin.”⁶⁶ The poem “Diaspora,” however, bears the traces of her experiences of the divided city as they would ongoingly become woven into her broader conception of diaspora poetry. Lorde appears to have begun writing the poem “Diaspora” in the United States, in the wake of her appearance as the sole openly lesbian or gay speaker at the 20th anniversary commemoration of the March on Washington in August 1983. The experience was galvanizing for Lorde, despite her feelings of strain, fighting homophobic “precautions” by organizers in preparation of the event. Her initial title for the poem was “Either We March in Washington or we Blow it Up.”⁶⁷ Lorde’s drafts of this poem appear in her journal on January 30, 1984, before leaving for Berlin. Here, she writes a clear vision for her forthcoming poem: “I want to write this out -- a poem that will have traced the difference in fears -- the thing that is feared then the fear of fear and then the recklessness of the fears ‘passing.’”⁶⁸ The critical study and transformation of fear was an integral theme of Lorde’s work and travels to Europe. Typed drafts of this poem appear in May and in July of 1984. Here, as the poem eventually titled “Diaspora” emerges, we understand the connections Lorde draws between fear and difference, American identity and exile, while conjuring and revising the poem in Berlin.

Lorde worked on “Diaspora” while in Berlin, and as such she imagined her experiences as extending to her other travels in and beyond the borderlands of U.S. empire, that included Germany. Diaspora is recognized not merely as a dispersal that transcends modern boundaries

but as a form of militarized or politicized division that once recognized can be mined for creative and political projects.⁶⁹ She begins the poem with the lines,

Afraid is a country with no exit visas
a wire of ants walking the horizon
embroiders our passports at birth
Johannesburg Alabama⁷⁰

Here she problematizes national belonging. By referencing exit visas, she nods to a key concern of East German activists working to achieve internal reform. Within the first phrases, she immediately recalls the division of Germany from an East German perspective to convey an imbalance. The Berlin Wall is both implied and extrapolated from here – the hybrid country Lorde describes is delineated by the official documentation of the passport and the controlled lines of national borders, but also by its horizons, its outward stretches. The adjoining of “Johannesburg Alabama” without extra spatial pausing or punctuation places the cities together in the shared space of the poetic line, and thus joins them as mutually constitutive sites within Lorde’s diasporic mapping. Lorde spends the poem naming and creating a roll call of other places, some actual and some imagined, to offer a vision of struggle thorough her poem, including the Shatila Refugee Camp in Lebanon and the “Braceras Grande.” The latter is a wordplay on the Rio Grande, but also the word “*bracero*,” or male manual laborer. Lorde offers the “bracera” as a female worker to present a womanist workforce in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border.⁷¹ The rituals of return and flight here are accented by Lorde’s imagery and form, especially in one instance in the poem within which she uses an extra spatial pause: “Washington bound again.” Notions of fear and leaving are enacted at the center of the American capital as well as along the margins of its militarized borders in Mexico, Germany, and elsewhere.

The dreamspace of midnight in this poem, as in “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls,” is again a location of furtive movement. But rather than the return to slumber or potential for

intimacy, in “Diaspora” she pushes toward a state of chaotic and exigent movement at its close. Her linkage of escape and movement across national borders again cites the German border contexts directly (“a dark girl ... escapes into my nightmare ... wakes on the well of a borrowed Volkswagen”) but incorporates other modes and imaginaries of escape. Lorde blurs distinct geographies toward a mapping of the shared conditions. The poem closes as its unnamed protagonist wakes up out of sleep and “gulps carbon monoxide in a false-bottomed truck” as she finds herself transgressing borders and fording rivers, “grenades held dry in a calabash/ leaving.” The image of a grenade hidden in a hollowed out gourd-like fruit implies an impending sense of doom as well as a strategic form of resistance – and the chance of nourished liberation through flight. The last line as a single word, “leaving,” enjambed and left hanging, pushes for even further ambiguity. Leaving becomes applicable to Lorde as poet, her concept of diaspora, and for the collectivized vision of the woman furtively crossing national borders. Diaspora is conjured through modes of border crossing and possibility. She weighs flight and return as the two forms of response that also underscore the aims of the traveling cultural worker – that is to connect spaces through stories and dreams, and to face fears of the unknown by working across lines of difference and division.

Lorde’s poems in *Our Dead Behind Us* bear the traces of her Berlin trip through historic citation and themes of flight and return along the border. They also convey an aesthetic of division through spatial pausing and enjambment, and selectively stage unlikely juxtapositions to suggest bridging spaces of difference. Midnight, whether as a poetic timespace, or a moment for intimacy or furtive movement, becomes the time in which Lorde asks her readers to explore and consider possibilities for rethinking the worlds around them. Lorde’s practices and methodologies for writing poetry enabled her to explore along those pathways toward further critical thought.

Lorde's time-space of actual travel and teaching in Berlin in 1984 allowed her to collect a rich living archive of experiences, identities, and sites that evoked multiple pathways of Cold War historical consciousness and geopolitical possibility.

IV. Dreams of Europe

Between the writing and publication phases of *Our Dead Behind Us* in 1986, U.S. Cold War policy and the question of militaristic reach across national borders were significant matters of political debate. Reagan worked with newly-appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev on missile treaties (including the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty), while simultaneously spiking rhetoric and policy around fears of a continued communist threat. Congress passed new iterations of the Boland Amendment to ban funding of Nicaraguan contras even as the C.I.A. continued to funnel money to the contras through illegal arms sales, as uncovered in the Iran Contra scandal. Earlier in 1986, once again, Germany was a site of global American conflict. A West Berlin Disco in the neighborhood of Schöneberg that was popular with American GIs was bombed at the behest of Libyan government. The violent act killed two servicemen and one Turkish woman, and the United States responded by bombing Libya.⁷² In the following year, in June 1987, Reagan would return to Germany, this time to West Berlin as a speaker for the city's 750th anniversary celebration. On this trip, he spoke in the British-occupied sector, within steps of the Brandenburg Gate. There, Reagan uttered some of the most memorable words of his presidency: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Reagan spoke on a stage within close proximity to the Berlin Wall, but a blue staged podium with American and West German flags marked the immediate backdrop, with the Gate visible directly above. During Reagan's visit, thousands of West Germans also went to the

streets to protest his appearance, which occurred days after a series of homegrown May Day Riots in Kreuzberg.⁷³ In addition to foreseeing the ultimate thaw of the Cold War, the Reagan visit marked a “theatrical turn,” as Ted Widmer suggests, in which “Reagan’s inner actor proved shrewder than most who would have counseled realpolitik.”⁷⁴ The ability to understand global Cold War borders coincided with new moments of conflict integral to U.S. Cold War policy. Cultural productions of the period continued to imagine ways to delve into discourses concerning the shifting geopolitical dynamics and maps of the world.⁷⁵

For Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us* showcased for readers her approach to the ideas of diaspora and difference brought out through her travels to Europe. Reviewers remarked on her geographic fluency, though varied in their views of the interrelatedness of her sites of poetry and the political approaches of her work. An anonymous reviewer for *Booklist* writes, “She has been courageous in speaking her mind, in standing up as a witness. ... The content is laudable; at least, if you agree with her.”⁷⁶ In a more praise-filled review, *TLS*’s Alice Phillips notes,

Lord [sic] travels instead to Grenada (at least in imagination), Berlin, Florida, Tashkent, reporting on old atrocities and new outbreaks of oppression, and returns to her racially unsettled neighborhoods in Staten Island, across the water from Manhattan, to write poems about them. ... Lord [sic] is a mature poet in full command of her full craft; many of the poems here are classically austere, and even the more obviously message-ridden are tautly constructed.⁷⁷

In this sense, Lorde’s notions of geography and history, and content and form, work together. Similarly, Barbara Christian writes for the *San Francisco Chronicle* that as Lorde “moves through Germany, Grenada, Florida, New York, Lorde is irrevocably affected by events in South Africa, Chile, El Salvador, Russia – by women she meets as ‘Sisters in Arms.’” Christian sees Lorde as outlining an approach to geography and history that is about reflection and transformation, and shapes her review with inflections of Lorde’s written discourse. She adds, “To change their pattern of life, those who ‘left our dead behind us’ must have rituals of healing, a ‘lust for

working tomorrow' This ritual, this lust, this poetry is not a luxury. It is a necessity, Lorde says, if we are to survive."⁷⁸ Therefore, poetry, like diaspora is posited around its powers of connection, and modes of healing that enable a mutually-constitutive and communal form of survival.

The publication of *Our Dead Behind Us* was supported by the release or public reading of several other related works by Lorde. Though many of her poems dealt with similar issues of Cold War geopolitics and diaspora, her prose and published journals indicated a multifarious commitment to poetics of diaspora by interweaving forms. Rather than seeing them as wholly distinct, I again emphasize the poetic and travel methodologies that underwrote all of the work were inspired by her time in Berlin. For example, her essay "Apartheid U.S.A." was written and published as a pamphlet in 1985, but reprinted for *A Burst of Light* in 1988. Lorde opens with the similar approach that she must read and intervene into traumatized urban spaces through extraliteral inscription:

New York City, 1985. The high sign that rules this summer is increasing fragmentation. I am filled with a sense of urgency and dread: dread at the apparently random waves of assaults against people and institutions closet to me; urgency to unearth the connections between assaults. Those connections lurk beneath the newspaper reports. ... You won't find that information in the *New York Times* or the *San Francisco Chronicle* or *GQ*.⁷⁹

In the essay, she goes on to draw many connections: between South Africa's system of apartheid and "the Nazi Germany's genocidal plan for European Jews"; violence perpetuated against black people across the United States and around the world; and the effects of the global market on people of color as affected by Cold War-era policies. She ultimately calls for unity amongst people of the African diaspora in Europe, Asia, and the Americas: "The connections between Africans and African-Americans, African-Europeans, African-Asians, is real...We need to join our differences and articulate our particular strengths in the service of our mutual survivals."⁸⁰

Lorde's prose created a space to work out, through travel, ideas – be they personal, political, or historical – that she ultimately draws into complementary focus in her poems.

In May 1987, on one of her return trips to Berlin, Lorde addressed the Dream of Europe Conference organized in West Berlin, an event that was also significant to the early Afro-German movement. Again, for Lorde, poetry and diaspora are analogous concepts, and the timespace of the dream becomes a point of departure:

Poetry, like all art, has a function: to bring us closer to who we wish to be: to help us vision a future which has not yet been: and to help us survive the lack of that future. ... For most of my life I did not dream of Europe at all except as nightmare. ... I was fifty years old before I came to Europe. When I did, I found people there that now compose my dream of Europe. They are Afro-European and other Black Europeans, these hyphenated people who, in concert with other people of the African Diaspora are increasing forces for international change.⁸¹

Again, playing with the notion of insider/outsider identificatory and estranged dynamics, she maintained distance despite the connections she forged for herself in Berlin: “I am an outsider, dreaming of Europe.”⁸²

A Burst of Light, Lorde's second volume of collected essays, as noted, also includes a body of published work drawn from her journal entries. Just as she had done with her previous *Cancer Journals* (1979) from the time she had lived through a bout of breast cancer, she includes journal entries with embedded poetic and prose fragments to trace her processes of work, travel, and healing from cancer. The later entries span from 1984–1987. She reveals over time that though her living in Berlin afforded her relief and a new form of homeopathic treatment which inspired returns to Europe, she was in fact suffering from liver metastases. Like her earlier *Cancer Journals*, Lorde details conversations and thought experiments during her illness that more broadly pertain to her own creative process.

Lorde's published journal includes eight entries located in Berlin, drawn from a series that remain in her archives. Alongside these Berlin entries are others from New York, St. Croix, Switzerland. Berlin again registers here within a global itinerary and imaginary, clearly mapping Germany into Lorde's work. She refers here to plans to return to the city for more mistletoe therapy and work with Afro-German women.⁸³ In these entries, the words "Berlin Wall" do not appear even as she includes observations about the border. And yet, complex elements of German history and division play out in the entries through a mode that recalls and complements her poetry. The geopolitical trajectory of this collection and her work during this period – which melds poetics of diaspora with that of healing and political advocacy – is emblemized in her final entry, listed as the epilogue and dated as August 1987. She closes with a vision of division and diaspora in the global era, that is both personal and collectively-minded:

I try to weave my life-prolonging treatments into a living context – to resist giving myself over like a sacrificial offering to the furious single-minded concentration upon cure that leaves no room to examine what living and fighting on a physical front can mean. What living with cancer can teach me. I go to Germany this fall for further mistletoe treatment. I look forward to working again with the Afro-German Women's group. ... My most deeply held convictions and beliefs can be equally expressed in how I deal with chemotherapy as well as how I scrutinize a poem. It's all about trying to know who I am wherever I am.⁸⁴

Lorde advanced a poetics of diaspora through a creative discursive mapping of Berlin as a significant and personal point of departure and return. Whether for reasons of health, critical reflection, poetic inspiration, or geopolitical advocacy, her commitment to a divided Berlin and wrestling with the complexities of the Berlin Wall, helped Lorde further a concrete awareness based on location and the dreams of working across lines of difference and division.

V. “Berlin Again”

Between 1987 and her death in 1992, Lorde composed more poems that addressed themes of travel and return. They were prepared by Lorde as a manuscript during the years she fought her cancer, but published posthumously in the collection, *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* (1993). Lorde had returned to Berlin in 1986 and then each year through the month prior to her death in 1992. Lorde’s habitual relationship with Berlin coincided with the rise in awareness of the Afro-German movement of which she was in part responsible. Her “Berlin years,” as friend and filmmaker Dagmar Schultz would term them, also extended across the years of sweeping change in Germany, in particular the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and Germany’s reunification in 1990. *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* offers a poetic bridge across this epochal divide. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Lorde’s introduction to Berlin occurred in the years of its division. As the demise of the wall was neither inevitable nor anticipated, Lorde’s pre-1989 Berlin poems look for ways to undermine or connect across the lines of division. She would primarily consider the existence of the Berlin Wall amidst other divisions. Alternately, her post-1989 poems and writing showcase Lorde’s sense of wariness about how the *Wende* would affect life in Berlin, especially for Afro-Germans and people of color, specifically employing the name “Berlin Wall” to make her critical insights legible.

Lorde wrote in an unpublished journal entry, on the day after the border’s initial breaching on November 10, 1989:

The world does change. The Berlin Wall is suddenly down -- East Germans flooding Potsdamer Strasse with the Western 100 DM and Woolsworth near the Publishing House admitting 5 at a time! Well. One thing Berliners know how to do is enjoy a spectacle, all right. I hope it keeps on being fun. Spoke to Dagmar yesterday from Blanche and Clare’s -- she’s not too optimistic about the effect of this upon the foreign workers in West Germany. Neither am I.⁸⁵

Lorde spelled out more of her apprehension, in an entry dated, January 5, 1990:

I feel very uneasy about all this eastern european freedom business -- i don't like it yet how can one be against the girl creeping through the holes in the Berlin Wall down a street in Kreuzberg? But what does it bode for my sisters in Germany? For the Afro-German movement? And what about USA now the balance is going?⁸⁶

In each case, Lorde calls out the Berlin Wall by name, as opposed to through poetic nomenclature or political allusions, to recognize the concrete border's symbolism and public feelings of historical estrangement in this period. The Berlin Wall is imagined as a gateway



Figure 4.7: Audre Lorde at the Berlin Wall in 1990 (Dagmar Schultz/Third World Newsreel)

bring about returns to xenophobic violence in Germany, and as a site of precarious American Cold War geopolitics. In these journals, Lorde highlights the Berlin Wall to present broader uncertainties and fears wrought in periods of seeming public revelry and progress. This notion can be explored in a visual artifact, a rare photograph of Lorde taken by the Berlin Wall, snapped in this time of reunification in 1990 (Figure 4.7). Shot by Schultz, Lorde makes eye contact with the photographer's lens, even as she maintains an oblique stance, with her torso and legs askew to the camera. Lorde wears an untucked salmon collared shirt with blue jeans, and carries her own camera, shown dangling from her hands. Behind her is a remnant of the Berlin Wall that appears untouched by graffiti

artists or *Mauerpeckers* (wall peckers) but altered through the posted political signs dating this to the first elections of a reunified Germany. Through this image and Lorde's multidisciplinary writing in this period, we are reminded that even after its "fall," the Wall remained a site of projection and declaration as it was transformed into a monumental ruin in Berlin.

Here, Lorde poses in front of ads for several political parties attempting to continue to reform the new government through socialism, including the Bündnis 90 and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).⁸⁷ But Lorde's skepticism of this period was more centered on the waves of racially-motivated violence erupting on Berlin and German streets. As Christoph Ribbat notes of the two decades following reunification, "respected German newspapers counted 93 fatalities due to right-wing extremist violence since 1990," measuring more than two-thirds of the official list of victims murdered while attempting to cross the Berlin Wall during the Cold War.⁸⁸ In addition to the fatalities, assaults and acts of intimidation also characterize this period. Lorde would respond in numerous pieces of writing to the series of racist attacks on people of color in Germany that coincided with the dismantling of the wall and reunification. In 1990, along with partner Gloria Joseph, Lorde wrote an open letter to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, published in German media outlets to call attention to the early occurrences of these attacks. In this letter, the women outlined their concerns about street violence they learned about on their return trips in the form of open epistolary communication with the German leader. They write,

Why has the dismantling of the Berlin Wall meant that we now feel less and less safe as Black Women visitors to ride the U-Bahn in Berlin. ... Why must we become more and more afraid to walk the once safe streets around Alexanderplatz in East Berlin after dusk? ... What do [the recent racist attacks] say about Germany to the two of us as African-Americans ... Next month, next year, as we teach and lecture in New Zealand, in England, in Japan, in South Africa, and the question is asked, how was your last trip to Germany, what is Berlin like, now? What will we be able to say?⁸⁹

In this letter, they present the violence in Berlin as a concern of diasporic space, and go beyond statistics and headlines to also account for pervasive fears and multiple perspectives. The piece simultaneously aims to defend Afro-German women and deploys the grammatical “we” to identify with and remark on the dangers Lorde and Joseph face as black women spending time in Germany. Lorde remains suspect of change with neither discussion nor difference. She again turned to the imagery of the Berlin Wall and the divided city for reflection and advocacy.

This sort of intervention into the *Wende* period marks the poems in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*. Though her Berlin poems in *Our Dead Behind Us* also dealt with the division of the wall, these later poems reflect the historical challenges of reunification after 1989. Several poems in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* explicitly deal with the Berlin Wall and the dynamics of Berlin’s transformed border.⁹⁰ Despite the altered imperatives of the work, in each case Lorde’s rendering of Berlin deals with its multiple intersections of division – and the city as a source of public and private reflection.

For example, the poem “East Berlin” opens with the declarative statement, “It feels dangerous now/to be Black in Berlin.”⁹¹ The subject of this poem is disembodied and without a human subject. Yet her use of “it” makes her statement declarative and factual. Lorde’s sense of the new geography of reunification is based on well-known urban landmarks but eschewed, as her narrator zig zags back and forth between the former West and East, and through time, channeling a cosmopolitanism that incubates violent conditions:

sad suicides that never got reported
Neukölln Kreuzberg the neon Zoo
a new siege along Unter den Linden
with Paris accents New York hustle
many tattered visions intersecting.

Already my blood shrieks
through the East Berlin streets
misplaced hatreds
volcanic tallies rung upon cement
Afro-German woman stomped to death
by skinheads in Alexanderplatz

Her poetic mapping of “East Berlin” is as a geopolitical anachronism, as the notion of an “East Berlin” is defunct in the reunified Germany. Lorde’s use of spatial pausing here separates districts in the former West Berlin that she brings up in this poem (Neukölln, Kreuzberg, Zoologischer Garten) to suggest dislocation amidst the post-Wall borderlines, and is furthered by the sequential references to the East Berlin’s Unter den Linden and Alexanderplatz. The concrete materiality of the Berlin Wall is transferred to the sidewalk in a scene of violence in reunified Berlin.

Though already partially dismantled, the Berlin Wall enters as a symbol of the continued dangers for people of color in Germany, and of trying to move beyond the past without reconciliation and proper attention for mourning. Lorde writes in the final paragraph,

Hand-held the candles wink
in Berlin’s scant November light
hitting the Wall at 30 miles an hour
vision first
is still hitting a wall
and on the other side
the rank chasm
where dreams of laurels lie.

Here she uses the word “wall” twice – once as capitalized referring to the Berlin Wall as a proper noun, once in a lower case as a poetic symbol of a threshold separating temporalities and deeper truths. “The Berlin Wall” and “the wall” are joined as stark poetic sites. Again, Lorde views

Germany through rituals of commemoration and the timespace of a dream. She is wary of celebrations of triumph in light of the violence and uncertainty of this time. Lorde comments on the nation's transformation through modes of cross border travel, which includes allusions to going back in time, to reaffirm the sort of deep divisions that remain traceable in the city.

In another poem, "Peace on Earth: Christmas 1989," Lorde conjures the first holiday season of a reunified Germany through the Berlin Wall. She considers the rapid shifts in history that occurred following November 1989, to imagine two simultaneous drives – to account for the continuities of conflict and to lay bare an aspiration for peace, healing, and regrowth. Lorde writes, "A six-pointed star/in the eyes of a Polish child/ lighting her first shabbas candle fading/ into a painted cross on the Berlin Wall."⁹² The Star of David and shabbas lights convey a ghostly Jewish presence along the former border, but also the need to slow the rhythms of historical time doubled as a call to heed lessons of the past. Lorde uses spatial pausing in this instance again to slow the flow of the ideas, and to double as a imagistic and physical reenactment of the act of "fading." The word "fading" functions as an enjambed "Apo Koinou" to share meaning across two lines. The appearance of the Berlin Wall in the subsequent line reminds that the Wall is a canvas for expression and a site of post-1989 projection.

Further in, Lorde juxtaposes and alternates between symbols of war and peace to convey the liminal timespace of reunified Berlin. For example, there are references to World War II-era European suffering and images of American patriotism, including excerpted lines from the Star-Spangled Banner and a transposition of text sent on emergency relief materials ("THIS IS A GIFT FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA"), as well as a list of post-World War II and Cold War hotspots in Central America, South America, and Israel/Palestine with spatial pauses ("Panama Nablus Gaza/ tear gas clouding the Natal sun"). Her

poem moves between these places and historical references, and creates an invocation for peace and coexistence amidst conflict.

Finally, Lorde glimpses Berlin in one more of her poems, titled, “Restoration: A Memorial – 9/18/91.” Lorde’s name for the poem and opening lines appear to reference a journal-style of self-reporting. She locates herself as a scribe in Berlin, but as a means to offset, with a spaced break, an image of both healing and pain: “Berlin again after chemotherapy/
I reach behind me once more/ for days to come.”⁹³ As soon as she introduces Berlin as her site, she quickly moves her poetic reflection toward other diasporic locales, including conjured memories of her home in St. Croix devastated by Hurricane Hugo two years before, in 1989. The storm by nature exists outside of a realm of national borders, but Lorde imagines her grief and healing through an identification as an estranged national outsider – “Would I exchange this safety of exile/for the muddy hand-drawn water” and “In this alien and temporary haven/ my poisoned fingers/ slowly return to normal.” Berlin is posited here as a site of healing but also as a point of departure for memory. The Berlin Wall is absent, but the potential for transformation out of chaos and destruction is borne through direct engagement and dreaming, departing from Berlin. Lorde writes, presumably to her partner Joseph, “I read your letter dreaming/the perspective of a bluefish/or a fugitive parrot.” The parrot is not a bird imagined for their flight per se, as was the Berlin nightingale, but their abilities to carry speech acts forward. She ends the poem with a last sentence, with a hopeful imperative, echoing the theme of return in the poem’s first line, and in both cases, for the sake of survival and redemption in history: “Learning to laugh again.”

In October 1992, Lorde traveled to Berlin and gave a public reading once more in Schultz's apartment. But soon after, Lorde went back to St. Croix where her health further deteriorated. Afro-German writer Ika Hügel-Marshall, Schultz's partner and a dear friend of Lorde, recalls on Lorde's final days: "A phone call from America: Gloria asks us to come to St. Croix as soon as possible. Audre is dying. She is growing weaker by the day. We book a flight and two days later, Dagmar, our friend May Ayim, and I are there."⁹⁴ When her friends from Germany arrived, Lorde laid in bed, too weak to speak or move. Hügel-Marshall recalls a poignant memory from their final visit with Lorde. She writes, "Audre can no longer speak. ... Her eyes are wide open, and I watch tears and a hint of fear flow across her face. How much she wanted to live on, and yet how dignified she is in dying. ... She is not alone." Soon after, Lorde passed away, reportedly close to midnight, on November 17, 1992.

For months and years after her death, friends, loved ones, and those inspired by her teachings held memorials – at the Cathedral Church of the St. Divine in New York, near her and Joseph's home in St. Croix, and at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of the Cultures of the World) in Berlin, among other locales. Lorde's biographer De Veaux captures the immediate forms of memorial Lorde had envisioned: "Lorde had spent a lifetime defying socially imposed boundaries and she wanted her ashes scattered in several places."⁹⁵ Lorde's final resting places include: Buck Island in St. Croix; a site in Hawaii from which she had seen an eclipse; her former yard in Staten Island; Washington Square Park in her hometown New York City; and by *Krumme Lanke*, the lake she so loved in the former West Berlin.

Lorde's impact lives on in Berlin through public and intimate expressions of archival memory. In February 2012, Schultz premiered the film *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984-1992* at the Berlin

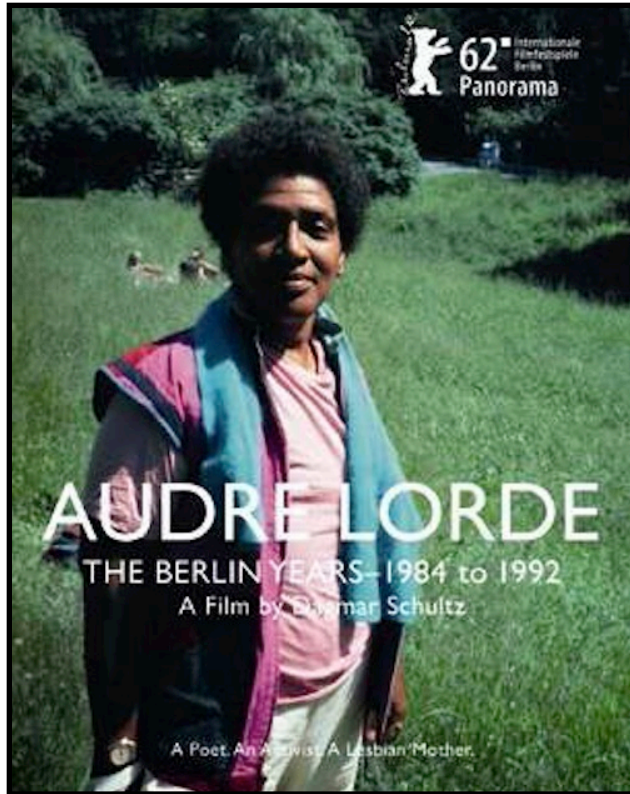


Figure 4.8: Film Poster for *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years* (Dagmar Schultz/Third World Newsreel)

International Film Festival, and held a U.S. premiere at the Brecht Forum in New York City weeks later in March. The film features clips from Schultz’s rich, extensive personal archives covering Lorde’s many trips to Berlin. In packaging these traces of memory, Schultz presents rare, beautiful, and historically significant moments of cultural exchange shared between circles of new friends, including poetry readings, dance parties, and classroom visits. Schultz notes in a statement about the formation of the film,

Fortunately, during much of the decade this film covers, I photographed, audio- and video-recorded Audre with her consent, but without any plan whatsoever about what to do with this trove of material. In the ten plus years it has taken me to bring this film to fruition, it was clear to me that I definitely wanted to make this material available to as many people as possible.⁹⁶

To complement the distribution, Schultz digitized much of the footage and prepared the previously personal materials to be donated to the Free University in Berlin, joining Spelman College in Atlanta as the other major destination for Lorde scholars.

The documentary footage places Lorde’s Berlin years into the historical context of the emergence of the Afro-German movement, and reminds her international audiences of the importance of Berlin in Lorde’s life and work. The film also offers a window into Lorde’s relationship with Berlin, in terms of her poetry and her health. In an interview, Gloria Joseph states, “Berlin added years onto Audre’s life.” One of the film’s promotional posters features

Lorde in a faint smile standing amidst the greenery at a site that resembles *Krumme Lanke* (Figure 4.8), a space that marks the interanimated relationship Lorde shared with the city. Here, and elsewhere in Berlin's open spaces and hiding places, she sought connection by recognizing differences and working across lines of division, soothed and spurred on by dreams of the city.

¹ Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) 337.

² Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca, N.Y: Firebrand Books, 1988), 54.

³ Lorde had been invited to West Berlin by Dagmar Schultz, an instructor at the Free University and editor of the Sub Rosa Orlanda Women's Press that had first translated Lorde's work into German. Schultz was inspired by Lorde when she heard Lorde give talks at a pair of international Women's conferences – in Copenhagen at the UN Women's World Conference in 1980 and in the Berkshires in 1981. In their correspondences surrounding the invitation, Schultz outlined her admiration of Lorde's work and the exciting potential she saw for Lorde's guest professorship. Among other reasons for teaching in Berlin, Schultz noted there was a group of young women writers, some of whom were of African descent and would benefit from Lorde's tutelage: "One positive aspect is that you would certainly attract women from the German black community." Dagmar Schultz Invitation, Audre Lorde Papers (ALP), Spelman College Archives, Box 5, 1.1.117.; Course Register 1983, John-F-Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, Free University Berlin Archives, 634-637.

⁴ By June 7, 1984, she wrote in her journal of the treatment, "I feel less weak," and when she returned home later in the summer, she added, on August 1, "Saints be praised! The new CAT scan is unchanged. The tumor has not grown, which means either the Iscador is working or the tumor is not malignant! I feel relieved, vindicated, and hopeful." Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 59, 65.

⁵ Lorde's published work on Germany includes poems in *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986) and *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* (1992); the essay "Apartheid U.S.A." and journal entries from *A Burst of Light* (1988); and the preface to foundational Afro-German text *Farbe Bekennen* (1987, and second edition 1992). Also relevant to this body of work can be found in archival or collected works, such as her speech at the Dream of Europe Conference in Germany (1987), and interviews published in Audre Lorde, and Joan W. Hall, *Conversations with Audre Lorde* (2004). There also remains a significant portion of her work translated and published into German, pioneered by Schultz and the Rosa Orlanda Women's Press.

Exploring the extent to which her first trip informed her late career output remains on the agenda of Lorde scholars to this day. Other contemporary projects that continue to measure her impact on Afro-German and Afro-European cultural exchange, include Dagmar Schultz's 2012 documentary *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992*, and a scholarly forthcoming volume edited by Stella Bolaki and Sabine Broeck titled, *Audre Lorde's International Legacy: Essays on Encounters, Creativity and Activism*.

⁶ All citations to drafts of this poem refer to "First Impressions," in ALP. Box 31.2.4.314.

⁷ Lorde's poem evokes the Berlin photography of American artist Nan Goldin, whose *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* included an image of a woman friend in East Berlin's Pergamon Museum bathroom. Goldin premiered a slideshow version of *Ballad* in West Berlin in 1984. Bathrooms were important spaces for Goldin's intimate photographs, especially those taken in Berlin. She went on to take a self-portrait in a Berlin bathroom in 1991. See Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture: 1986); and "The Berlin Ballad of Nan Goldin," *The Economist*, 6 January 2011 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/01/contemporary_photography>.

⁸ Amitai F. Avi-Ram, "Apo Koinou in Audre Lorde and the Moderns: Defining the Differences." *Callaloo*. (1986): 193–208.

⁹ "First Impressions."

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For more on Lorde's reading at **Amerika Haus**, see DVD Extras on Schultz (dir.), *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992* (New York: TWN (Third World Newsreel, 2012); and Melba Joyce Boyd, "Politics, Jazz and the Politics of Aesthetics" in Maria Diedrich, and Jürgen Heinrichs (eds.), *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011) 359-361; For more on Lorde's work with **East German women's writers' groups**, see Unpublished Journal Entry [May 17, 1984], ALP, Box 47, No. 17; Photographs, ALP, Box 66A; and Private Interview with Dagmar Schultz, December 10, 2010; For more on **Easter March**, see Photographs, ALP, Box 66A; For more on **workshops in West Germany and Europe**, see Lorde, *Burst of Light*; De Veaux, *Warrior Poet*, 340-344; and Schultz, *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992*.

¹² Unpublished Journal Entry [June 16, 1984], ALP, Box 47, No. 17.

¹³ For more on black women writers and "rituals of return," see Tayana L. Hardin, "Rituals of Return in African American Women's Twentieth Century Literature and Performance." Dissertation. University of Michigan, 2012.

¹⁴ Michele Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 196.

¹⁵ Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004) 177.

¹⁶ Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 56–57. Some of these women, as Lorde would learn, had African heritage that dated back to Germany's colonial period in the 19th century. Others were born to German mothers and African American GI fathers who had been stationed in Germany following World War II. In each case, these individuals were without identitarian nomenclature or solidarity, other than pejorative terms imposed on them such as *Mischlingskinder* (meaning mixed, brown babies) or "war babies." For more on history of African American GIs and their German offspring, see Maria Höhn, *GIs and Frauleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Lorde was a key figure in women of color feminism, and her work forged connections with other diasporic work domestically and abroad. For more on Lorde's previous work as a key figure in women of color feminism, see Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1981); and Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Lorde, *Burst of Light*, 58.

¹⁹ By attending to Lorde's poetic mixed-genre approach one must also consider Linda Garber's charge in her chapter on Lorde in *Identity Poetics* that, "Critics of all stripes exhibit a strange resistance to Lorde as a poet, however, preferring to discuss (and presumably read) her prose work. Similar arguments have been raised by Lexi Rudnitsky and Megan Obourn. My treatment of Lorde's work attempts to redress the lack of close reading of form in Lorde's poetry, but also attempts to consider multiple and extra-literary forms of her work, as well as the historical context and grounding of her poems. The materials in her archive suggest the overlapping and back-and-forth nature of her own production process. See Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 105; Lexi Rudnitsky, "The 'power' and 'sequelae' of Audre Lorde's Syntactical Strategies," *Callaloo*. 26.2 (2003): 473–485; Megan Obourn, "Audre Lorde: Trauma Theory and Liberal Multiculturalism," *Melus*. 30.3 (2005): 219-245.

²⁰ Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).

²¹ Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).

²² As quoted in Geoffrey Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 94.

²³ As quoted in *Ibid*, 243.

²⁴ Geoffrey Hartman notes, "Unfortunately, Mr. Reagan compounded his error by explanatory statements that made no distinction between the fallen German soldiers and the murdered Jews; indeed, he suggested that both were 'victims' of a Nazi oppression whose responsibility he limited by laying it upon the madness of 'one man.'" *Ibid*, 65.

²⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Joint German-American Military Ceremony at Bitburg Air Base in the Federal Republic of Germany" <<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/50585b.htm>>.

²⁶ Legs McNeil and John Holmstrom, "We're a Happy Family," in *SPIN* (Aug 1986) 78.

²⁷ Oliver W. Harrington and M. T. Inge, *Dark Laughter: Satiric Art of Oliver W. Harrington* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993). For more on Harrington, see Harrington, *Why I Left America* (Detroit: W.O. Evans, 1991) 54–55.

²⁸ Carmen Fayvonville writes, “20th-century global migration has fostered the creation and maintenance of transnational diasporas in all western societies, including Germany. As a result...western nations can no longer maintain their formerly territorialized, spatially-bounded, and culturally homogenous status.” In that sense both the global and internal divisions experienced in part through the two Germanys were a part of the larger emergence of globalization being actualized in the 1980s, that brought about increased cross-border economic and social relations, as well tensions of identity and economic self-determination within national borders. See Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961–1989* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) 378, 395; Carmen Faymonville, “Black Germans and Transnational Identification” in *Callaloo* (Spring, 2003, vol. 26, no. 2) p. 364–382.

²⁹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire” in *Representations*. (1989): 7–24.

In the United States, two signature moments of the emergent memorial culture included debates about the legacy of the Holocaust and Vietnam, as played out in the opening of Maya Lin’s Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. in 1982 and the release of Claude Lanzmann’s Holocaust film *Shoah* in 1985. The impending AIDS epidemic would mark another moment the nation was confronting its own problematics of memory and politics of death. In each case, the question of how to properly memorialize was complicated by the ongoing and unresolved nature of these conflicts.

³⁰ Identity was a powerful and polemic organizing principle of this period of globalization, because, as Lauren Berlant suggests,

The crisis of the national future...comes at a time when America feels unsure about its value in a number of domains: in world military politics, in global economies, in ecological practice, and in the claim that the nation has a commitment to sustaining justice, democracy, and the American Dream when there seems to be less money and reliable work to go around.

Such scholars suggest the ways the memory debates are interrelated – whether about the Holocaust or the Vietnam War – to continuing policies and attitudes about U.S. military policy and culture. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1997)13; Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) 18. For more on AIDS memory, see Ann Cvetkovich, “Aids Activism and the Oral History Archive,” in *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, no. 2.1 (Summer 2003).

³¹ I utilize Gloria Anzaldúa’s formulation of the borderlands throughout my dissertation. As Anzaldúa contends, “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the spaces between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” In addition, there are productive and conceptual links between Anzaldúa and Lorde. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) i.

³² Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates: 1973-1982* (New York: Ecco, 2007) 409.

³³ Oates, “Ich bin ein Berliner” in *Last Days: Stories* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984) 99–100.

³⁴ Oates, “Our Wall” in *Last Days*, 241.

³⁵ Cleve Gray, “Wall Painters,” in *Art in America*, October 1985, 39-43. For more on Borofsky’s “running man” paintings on the Berlin Wall and public art/sculptures in Germany, see Mark Rosenthal and Richard Marshall, Jonathan Borofsky. (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1984). For more on Wojnarowicz’s cow’s head paintings on the Berlin Wall, images of the Berlin Zoo, and the adapted performance of his written monologues, *Sounds in the Distance*, in Berlin in 1984 (starring Allen Frame, John Edward Heys, and others, and accompanied by Nan Goldin), see David Wojnarowicz Papers, Fales Library, New York University; and John Edward Heys Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division at the New York Public Library.

³⁶ “Keith Haring Paints Mural on Berlin Wall,” in *New York Times*, 24 October 1986.

³⁷ For more on Haring, see John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991). Another important cultural work that dealt with the materiality of the Berlin Wall and the ruins of post-World War II Germany was Wim Wenders’ film, *Wings of Desire*. Released in West Germany in 1987, the film was predominately in German, however featured American actor Peter Falk, who spoke most of his lines in English. See Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire* (Santa Monica, CA: Distributed by MGM Home Entertainment, 2003).

³⁸ Ilona Pache and Regina-Maria Dackweiler, “An Interview with Audre Lorde” (1987) in Lorde and Joan W. Hall, *Conversations with Audre Lorde* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) 166.

³⁹ Gloria Hull, “Living on the Line: Audre Lorde and *Our Dead Behind Us*” in *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*, Cheryl A. Wall (ed). (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989) 153; Sagri Dhairyam, “‘Artifacts for Survival’: Remapping the Contours of Poetry with Audre Lorde.” *Feminist Studies*. 18.2 (1992): 249.

⁴⁰ Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, 3–5.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 49.

⁴² Unpublished journal entry [April 27, 1984], ALP, Box 46, Number 17.

⁴³ Unpublished journal entry [June 6, 1984], *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 80

⁴⁵ ALP.

⁴⁶ All citations to drafts of this poem refer to “Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls,” in ALP, Box 31.2.4.324.

⁴⁷ Melba Boyd, “Poetry, Jazz, and the Politics of Aesthetics,” 262.

⁴⁸ Lorde’s use of “colored” may also resonate with other such deployments in the post-civil rights era. See Ntozake Shange’s 1975 choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*.

⁴⁹ For more on the dreamspaces of Lorde's poems, see Hull, "Living on the Line."

⁵⁰ All citations to this poem refer to "Berlin is Hard on Colored Girls," Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, 22–23.

⁵¹ Berlin's queer character, especially during the Cold War, has been primarily studied through a gay male and critical masculinities focus. Important Western figures in this history include Christopher Isherwood and David Bowie. Lorde, as well as photographer Nan Goldin, also represent intersections and significant narratives of queer life in Berlin through lesbian and feminist perspectives. Chuck Stewart, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of LGBT Issues Worldwide* (ABC-CLIO, 2009) 193.

⁵² Across her poetry, Lorde draws her poetic imagery from actual experiences and imaginative gestures. She uses the perspective of "I" for herself and to embody witnesses for others. This demands readers' close and open consideration to meaning and subjectivity.

⁵³ "MUSIC VIEW; East Berlin Opera Nervously Awaits The Next Act," *New York Times*, June 24, 1990; Emily Pugh, *The Berlin Wall and the Urban Space and Experience of East and West Berlin, 1961-1989* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 2008) (Dissertation – 3311209) 62.

⁵⁴ Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class and Histories* (Sheffield: Sheffield Acad. Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ John Keats, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

⁵⁶ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 151–152, 162.

⁵⁷ ALP, Box 43.

⁵⁸ Unpublished journal entry [July 29, 1984], ALP, Box 46, Number 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ All citations to drafts of this poem refer to "This Urn Contains Earth From German Concentration Camps," in ALP, Box 31.2.4.322.

⁶¹ Claude Lanzmann, on *Shoah* "Making a history was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to construct something more powerful than that. And, in fact, I think that the film, using only images of the present, evokes the past with far more force than any historical document." Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust: the Complete Text of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

⁶² Lorde does not use an umlaut in her published spelling of Plötzensee. In her earlier drafts, she also misspells the name as "Plotenzee" or "Plotensee," as she worked from a German-English transliteration.

⁶³ All citations to this poem refer to "This Urn Contains Earth From German Concentration Camps: Plotensee Memorial, West Berlin, 1984," Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, 24-25.

⁶⁴ Keats, “Ode to a Grecian Urn.” I thank fellow members of the critical poetry seminar at the Texas Institute for Literary and Textual Studies for pointing out this connection.

⁶⁵ Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 80.

⁶⁶ ALP, Box 31.2.4.318.

⁶⁷ Also titled, “Either We March in Washington or we Blow it Up” as seen in ALP, Box 31.2.4.306. All citations to drafts of this poem refer to this ALP listing.

⁶⁸ Unpublished journal entry [January 30, 1984], ALP, Box 46, Number 35.

⁶⁹ In recent years, scholars have formulated definitions to Diaspora that also seek to employ similar creative approaches that draw on Afro-German or Afro-European formations. Michele Wright presents urban diasporic counter-discourse as “a twentieth-century intellectual tradition of African diasporic counter-discourses of Black subjectivity that is defined not by a common history or common cultural trope but a particularly theoretical *methodology*.” Tina Campt notes intercultural address as a mode of diasporic communication. Alexander Weheliye purposes the formulation of diasporic citizenship, in which groups attempt to create a local, even if imaginary, as nation, and other political/cultural affiliations.” Further, Brent Edwards uses diaspora as “*décalage*” as a formulation that “compels us to focus on the ways in which movements always intersect, leading to exchange, assimilation, expropriation, coalition or dissension.” Wright, *Becoming Black*, 3; Campt, *Other Germans*, 171; Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 147. See also Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁷⁰All citations to this poem refer to Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, 32.

⁷¹ Another reading of the poetic geography of the Braceras Grande can be seen in Mary K. DeShazer, *A Poetics of Resistance: Women Writing in El Salvador, South Africa, and the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 24.

⁷² For more on the Berlin bombing, and the U.S. counter attack on Libya see Nathalie Malinarich, “Flashback: The Berlin Bombing” on *BBC News.com* <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1653848.stm>>.

⁷³ Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961-1989*, 396; Serge Schmemmann, “24,000 Demonstrate in Berlin against Reagan’s Visit” in *New York Times*, 12 June 1987.

⁷⁴ Ted Widmer, “Reagan at the Wall,” in *The New York Times*, 12 June 2012, A25.

⁷⁵ Numerous other contemporary American cultural productions draw and reflect on Berlin's division. Some of these texts include Dr. Seuss's *The Butter Battle Book* (1984), Herbert Jay Stern's *Judgment in Berlin* (1984), William Buckley Jr.'s *The Story of Henri Tod* (1984); popular music such as Elton John's "Nikita" (1986); television episodes of *MacGyver* (1986), *Alvin and the Chipmunks's* "The Wall" (1988), and the *Golden Girls* (1988); comic book installment of *Spiderman vs Wolverine #1* (1987); and film versions of *Judgment in Berlin* (1988). American audiences were also influenced by several works by German cultural figures that closely considered the symbol and site of the Berlin Wall, including Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer* (The Wall Jumper) (1983) and Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin (Angels of Desire)* (1987), the latter featuring American actor Peter Falk.

⁷⁶ Review, *Booklist*, 1 October 1986.

⁷⁷ Alice H.G. Phillips, "Calling for the right kind of power," in *TLS*, 15–21 April 1988.

⁷⁸ Barbara Smith, "Naming the Rage and the Courage, in *San Francisco Chronicle - Review*, 20 July 1986, 6.

⁷⁹ Lorde, "Apartheid U.S.A." in *A Burst of Light*, 27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁸¹ "The Dream of Europe – Remarks," ALP, Box 17, 2.1.061

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 131.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 131-134.

⁸⁵ Unpublished journal entry [November 10, 1989], ALP, Box 46, Number 35.

⁸⁶ Unpublished journal entry [January 5, 1990], ALP, Box 46, Number 35.

⁸⁷ For the latter group, PDS, a poster that reads, "*Für die Schwachen eine starke Opposition*" ("For the weak a strong opposition") attempts to leverage fears of swift change among East Germans by claiming strident opposition to the governing parties of the West even as they refer to their potential constituents as weak and in need of protection. See Peter Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left: The PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005) 116.

⁸⁸ Christoph Ribbat, "Party Without 'Party People': Richard Avedon at the Brandenburg Gate" in Richard Avedon, Michael J. Holm and Helle Crenzien (eds.), *Richard Avedon Photographs, 1946–2004* (Humblebæk, Denmark: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2007) 174.

⁸⁹ ALP, Kohl letter.

⁹⁰ As Lorde described to German publishers as she sat in Schultz's Berlin apartment in 1991, the project she realized had a lot to do with "the shifting of perspectives" rather than fundamental or foundational change: "That is the kind of thing I'm talking about. It is not that you alter inside what you know to be so, it is that you see the shifting of differences. And that is why the magical and the marvelous arithmetics, the ways in which of what is, because arithmetics deals with basically what is." Private Video, Dagmar Schultz, 1991. Transcribed by author.

⁹¹ All citations to this poem refer to Lorde, "East Berlin" in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987–1992* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993) 50.

⁹² All citations to this poem refer to Lorde, "Peace on Earth: Christmas, 1989" in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, 39.

⁹³ All citations to this poem refer to Lorde, "Peace on Earth: Christmas, 1989" in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, 40–41.

⁹⁴ Ika Hügel-Marshall, *Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black in Germany* (New York, N.Y: Continuum, 2001) 105.

⁹⁵ De Veaux, 366.

⁹⁶ Press Kit, *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years*, available at <<http://www.audrelorde-theberlinyears.com/images/presskit/pressRelease.pdf>>.

Chapter 5 Midnight Radio

Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Passing Strange, and Remixing The Berlin Wall



“On August 13th, 1961, a wall was erected down the middle of the city of Berlin. The world was divided by a Cold War and the Berlin Wall was the most hated symbol of that divide – reviled, graffitied, spit upon. We thought the wall would stand forever, and now that it's gone, we don't know who we are anymore.”

–Yitzhak, Hedwig and the Angry Inch



“Love raged like an ocean in a state of withdrawal/ A fishbowl of emotion and the Berlin Wall.”

–Stew, Passing Strange

“Popular music has always been my refuge because it is the refuge of strangers; because in the world of popular music, we are all strangers among sounds made by others.”

–Josh Kun, Audiotopia

Figures 5.1–2: Screenshots from “Tear Me Down” in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 2001 and “Come Down Now” in *Passing Strange*, 2010 (IFC Films)

I. Crossing Over

Like the construction of the city’s first border fortifications back in the early hours of August 13, 1961, the demise of a formidable Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 similarly caught citizens of East and West Berlin in disbelief. The infamous wall’s fate, at both its onset and

undoing, drew the attention of the American media and quickly conjured multiple forms of urban division and freedom across the world. And even though the possibility of social change had reached a boiling point over years and months preceding each watershed moment at the start and end of the wall's proper periodization, the most impactful and shattering actions of a divided Berlin occurred through the course of two particular nights of its existence.

Just as August 13, 1961, marked the first day of an unsteady and unpredictable period of Cold War division, from November 9, 1989, onward, the Berlin Wall's ruined afterlife spilled out into the unknown. There was and is no telos to the Berlin Wall, just a longing to make meaning out of its dismantling and the significance of its downfall. The boundary's historical framing, like the physical border's ability to keep people, ideas, and cultural stories in or out of West or East Berlin (depending on your perspective), proved to be leaky too.

In the spring and summer of 1989, the ruling regimes of the Eastern bloc loosened expressive restrictions and select border controls due to public pressures from within, both at the party level and from the ground up. Each increment of change was spurred by a series of economic and social reforms, in the wake of Soviet policies of *Glasnost* (openness) and *Perestroika* (restructuring).¹ On May 2, Hungary began disassembling border fencing, opening up a crossing point into Austria. Protests across Poland and the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania occurred with far less severe backlash from local authorities and the Soviet Union. In East Germany, citizens in Leipzig demonstrated against the policies of one-party rule. Earlier in that same year, East German party leader Erich Honecker promised a more advanced Berlin Wall that could stand for "fifty or hundred years, if the reasons for its existence have not been removed."² However by July 1989, over 25,000 East Germans had escaped through the opened Hungarian border. Even as the option to obliquely defect through Hungary materialized, the

idea of change was afoot for the large number of East Germans who intended to stay in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) but who felt emboldened to reshape the government in part due to the changing and increasingly public nature of dissidence. The large, growing gatherings of protestors sought to bring reform to the existing system, including greater access to travel without danger of reprimand or retribution. Frederick Taylor wrote,

On Monday 2 October, 10,000 citizens of Leipzig appeared on the streets. They chanted slogans about freedom, but above all they declared: 'We will stay here'. This message was, in its way, even more worrying for Honecker than that conveyed by West Germany-bound hoards of refugees. The regime had gotten used to arresting its dissidents and dumping them in the West. Now they were determined to stay in the East, and there were too many to deport them all.³

The weekly Monday protest movement in Leipzig swelled quickly with surging waves of participation. By October 30, approximately 300,000 citizens marched in Leipzig. That same night, 20,000 East Berliners also took to their streets. These public displays remained overwhelmingly peaceful, and yet a sense of necessary and imminent change was called for in emphatic ways that the ruling party could not ignore. The ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the GDR began planning reforms to quell the outrage but had to act fast due to the expanding public spectacle of the uprisings.⁴

On November 9, 1989, at six o'clock in the evening, a media spokesperson for the SED's Politburo, Günter Schabowski, read a report to television reporters of the regime's reform plans. Eventually, this was to include lifting travel restrictions and issuing more visas for permanent exit. When asked after his extended remarks when this would all take effect, he consulted his papers at the press conference and responded, "immediate, without delay." Schabowski failed to notice instructions that the announcement of such specifics was to be withheld until the following day, to fully prepare and manage the changes in policy.

The news of such a drastic and “immediate” amendment to state policy did not break at once, but within several hours the consequences of this unplanned divulgence began to take shape. Taylor adds,

The first reports from DPA [Deutsche Presse-Agentur] and Reuters, which came over the wires at a couple of minutes after seven p.m., simply said that any GDR citizen would be entitled, from now on, to leave the country via appropriate border crossing points. Low-key stuff. Then, at five past seven, Associated Press pulled ahead of the pack and spelled its interpretation out in a simple but sensational sentence: ‘According to information provided by SED Politburo member Günter Schabowski, the GDR is opening its borders.’

For the next several hours, as the Politburo and border guards scrambled unprepared, crowds began to gather at city crossing points. At approximately 11:30 pm, East Berliners pushed down a security fence at the *Bornholmer Strasse* crossing and then a flood began that was not stopped. The news quickly traveled across seas to U.S. audiences, who continued to demonstrate great interest in the fate of a divided Berlin. For example, that day newscaster Peter Jennings issued a special report for ABC News from his desk in New York City. In the first hours after the news broke, Jennings shared initial details and then observed on-air, “What will happen now is hard to tell.”⁵ The following evening Tom Brokaw of NBC News, who was present at the Schabowski press conference, broadcast the evening news live from the west side of the Brandenburg Gate. Brokaw opened the program with a nod to the atmosphere: “The sound that you hear, and what you’re seeing tonight, not hammers and sickles, but hammers and chisels, as young people take down this wall, bit by bit. ... Tonight citizens from both Germanys are singing and dancing on the wall itself.” Brokaw’s on-scene reporting included more references to the sounds and sights of the breached border, in which the politics and culture of the city mirrored one another. “Tonight, in this city, famous for its carefree nightlife,” Brokaw added, “in this city where the song says, ‘Life is a cabaret,’ tonight in Berlin it’s freedom night.”⁶ Brokaw also noted that some celebrants were

either too inebriated or had been escorted away by existing border control to partake in the collective gathering. His words bespoke the obvious – the societal hangover to come.

On the night many shorthand as “the fall of the Berlin Wall,” the concrete structure remained mostly in place. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall gained a broad association with freedom – of public expression, grassroots political action, and free-market capitalism. From those evenings and onward, the wall became in and of itself a stage for public revelry and reflection, but still had an unclear future. If Berlin’s wall had been for decades a place of critical engagement with systems of power on both sides of its divide, “freedom night” is more an emphatic rupture than a true end. We should be wary of those who see or seek closure out of the happenings of that November night. Freedom is a means and a methodology, not an endpoint or a destination. Defining the concept, or attempting to locate it without regard to its connections to repression, often proves to be hazardous to its very condition.

Svetlana Boym writes of freedom to “shed some light on the dilemmas of freedom that are sometimes more difficult to confront than the discreet charms of power.” She adds, “Defining freedom is like capturing a snake: the snake sheds its skin, and we are left with the relic of her trickery as a souvenir of our aspiration.”⁷ As Brokaw noted, *Mauerpeckers* began chiseling away chunks that fateful night, and East German border guards began clearing passages and new openings, thus participating in a fragile new era of division that would end with their own jobs becoming obsolete, like the status of East Germany. But those seeking to hold onto chunks of the Berlin Wall, for historical value or for the emergent market in selling these “souvenirs,” would be grasping too. Even with pieces pecked away, much of the structure and its myriad components would stay for months, as the country moved toward the potential for reunification without resolution. The experience of sudden transformation is relevant beyond Germany, and not just

for the pieces of the wall that went up for sale to tourists in Berlin street markets and global tourist hotspots. *How does a nation deal with its deep militarized and violent legacies of division? How to balance quick, unsteady rhythms of change against deep structures of belonging and/or alienation?* For the night of and weeks following November 9, 1989, the border was transformed into a stage for fantasies of political and cultural experimentation. Freedom was its buzzword, but surely remained elusive among the newest German ruins.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, American cultural producers and consumers had regularly turned to the Berlin Wall as a site where U.S. freedom and repression, history and identity, on which such concepts could be imagined and reflected. In the weeks following the initial breach of the Berlin Wall by East Berliners on the evening of November 9, 1989, and in addition to regular news reports filed from Berlin, Americans turned to popular culture to make meaning of this improvised historic moment. For example, on November 18, *Saturday Night Live* comedian Mike Myers reprised his Sprockets skit, playing disaffected avant-garde West German TV host Dieter. In this installment, Dieter is finally able to interview East German filmmaker Gregor Voss (played by guest star Woody Harrelson) days after the former “countercultural” and “suppressed visionary” is able to travel to the West for the first time. But on this segment, the spoils of capitalism have overcome Voss. He stumbles into the interview wearing a beer-can-holding helmet and proclaims, “Ich bin ein West Berliner.” He has abandoned his harsh minimalist aesthetic in favor of the parodied spoils of capitalist culture – scarfing a hamburger and Mountain Dew, and boasting of his rented Buick LeBaron.⁸ Even here jubilation provokes blurriness and a loss of identity. The linkages between Berlin’s defunct wall and Western consumer culture were not relegated to Sprockets, and became a platform for celebratory

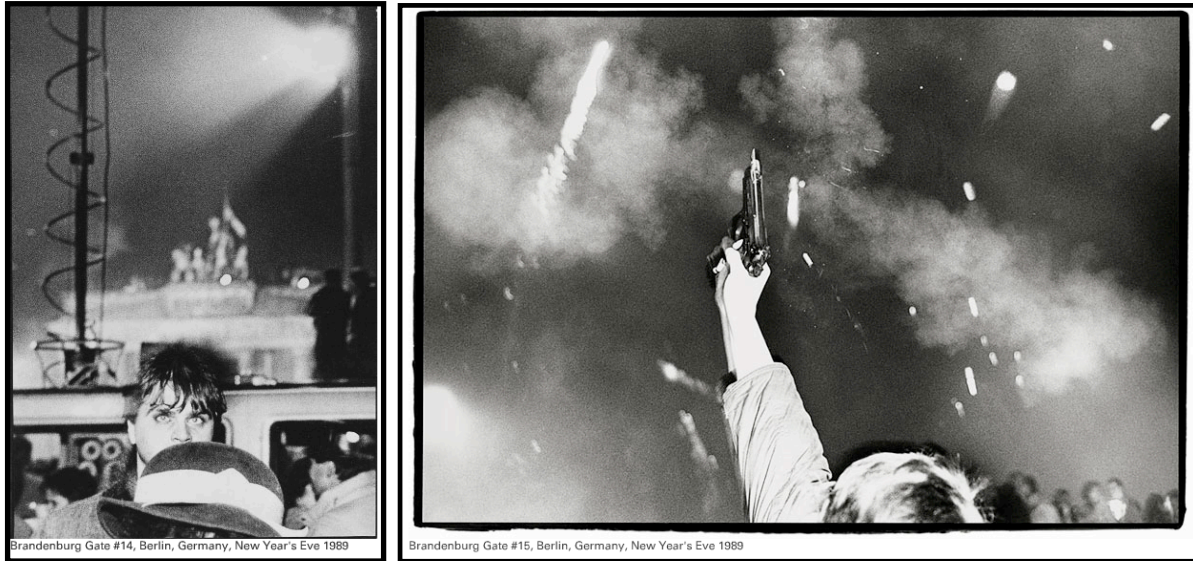
consumerism. AT&T and Pepsi aired commercials during the Christmas season, with documentary-style footage from Berlin and sentimental soundtracks. Complementing the visuals, each commercial featured respective backing songs of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" and Handel's *Messiah*, reinforcing the



Figure 5.3: Screenshot from David Hasselhoff, "Looking for Freedom," 1989/1990 (YouTube/ZDF)

message of the wall's dismantling as an event to be marked and celebrated – honoring the opening for movement of people and goods across the border.⁹

The celebratory early days of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall reached a highpoint on New Year's Eve 1989/1990. As the first New Year's in three decades in which Germans from both sides of the nation's divide could join to mark the occasion. That evening, a pair of American cultural figures descended on the Brandenburg Gate, one to perform, the other to document the gathering. David Hasselhoff, American actor and singer, was an official guest on the night's program. An announcer on German television introduced him, and he sang his hit, "Looking for Freedom."¹⁰ The song was not written about the breach of the Berlin Wall, but fit well into the public narratives surrounding freedom at the time. Marc Seaberg previously released "Looking for Freedom" in Germany in 1978, but when covered by Hasselhoff in the summer of 1989, the track had become a hit in West Germany and Austria, and was associated with change sweeping across the Eastern bloc. Wearing a custom-made light up leather jacket



Figures 5.4–5: Richard Avedon, “Brandenburg Gate” #14 and #15, 1989/1990 (Richard Avedon Foundation)

and a piano scarf (Figure 5.3), Hasselhoff’s live concert has become a central, if not the quintessential schmaltzy pop cultural story shorthanding the *Wende* period of the Berlin Wall into a culminating story about freedom. The song signifies a culmination in the search for freedom, as presented in the form of a self-evident cultural spectacle.

Another American on the scene, photographer Richard Avedon, stayed out through the night, walking the path of the former Berlin Wall on and around *Pariser Platz*. Avedon was a well-established arts and fashion photographer, known mainly for his iconic composed portraits. But for his reportage project, titled, “Brandenburg Gate,” he adjusted his approach. Avedon shot street scenes without uniform backdrops, a sharp focus, or controlled lighting (Figures 5.4–5). Critic Christoph Ribbat referred to this contrast in Avedon’s aesthetic as purposely “feverish and crude.” Ribbat contextualizes this set of images against the scenes in which they were captured: “In Avedon’s Berlin photo-essay ... German reunification plays out as a post-communist blues.”¹¹ Avedon, an American Jew still haunted by the specter of trauma in Berlin rather than taken just with the story of historical change, was struck by the unresolved nature of “the

German question” going into this first organized public celebration of German unity. The disorientation, soft focus, and menacing clouds of smoke captured in the nighttime sky made evident through Avedon’s images reference a Germany not at the end of its development but in the midst of a swirling historical identity crisis. Violence is barely contained in these scenes, as Ribbat points out, and Avedon’s images foresee a period of racial and gender violence surrounding the reunification period. As Audre Lorde’s poem “East Berlin” would mark two years later, Avedon’s portraits show the photographer wrestling with the tempestive nature of historical change in a place still bearing multiple epochs’ worth of war scars and losses. The Hasselhoff and Avedon cultural productions connected to December 31, 1989–January 1, 1990 play out major themes in American culture contending with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall: Within steps of the former Wall and one another, American cultural figures demonstrate the tension between celebration and cautious reflection in a moment of shifting historical attitudes and longings.

Given the history of American culture’s critical engagement with the Berlin Wall, such cultural performances and productions did not cease with the end of the Cold War period, and came to stand in for broader visions of fracture and reunification that were demonstrated through Berlin. For example, Michael Jackson’s poem, “Berlin 1989,” published in his 1992 book *Dancing the Dream: Poems & Reflections*, illustrates the flurry of transnational and historical identifications that emerged out of the *Wende* period. As he waxes symbolic in the book’s preface, dancing is imagined as an act of connection, in which “the creator and creation merge into one wholeness of joy.” Like some of his other poems in the book about the environment and AIDS, his effort to capture Berlin history in poetic form seeks triumph out of chaos or pain. Jackson himself had toured through West Berlin on his 1988 *Bad* tour, playing to thousands in front of the

Reichstag, and developed an affinity for the city. (He even considered relocating there in 2006.¹²) Jackson opens his poem in a moment of conflict: “They hated the Wall, but what could they do? It was too strong to break through.” Soon after, Jackson personifies the Berlin Wall as a determinant character. He writes, “The Wall laughed grimly. ‘I’m teaching you a good lesson ... if you want to build for eternity, don’t bother with stones. Hatred, fear, and distrust are so much stronger.” The wall is undermined here, however, when people remember the “beloved faces that yearned to be seen” on the other side. Even as the pronouns of “they” and “you” in the poem have no clear referents, Jackson describes a process of the wall coming down, broken by “a million hearts [that] had found each other. The Wall had fallen before it came down.” The poem denotes and then abstracts the historical moment, doubled by the photograph of Jackson appearing alongside – the pop star wearing a black leather jacket with a golden armband placed as if to suggest signification on Nazi swastika uniformed adornment and medallions from European automobile makers with crowns and crests. Jackson’s connection to Berlin spanned across the divide of 1989 with a powerful yet puzzling display of popular identifications with global politics, conjuring at once a people’s history without actual people, and suggestive of his own forthcoming deployment of *Ostalgie* and Eastern bloc identifications on his *HIStory* project (in which he placed statues of himself in former communist public spaces, including Berlin’s Alexanderplatz).¹³ Jackson was one of many American cultural producers who looked to Berlin as a site of cultural return and reflection on global politics in the years and decades following 1989.¹⁴ We may depart from these stories of 1989/1990 to understand artists, writers and intellectuals who participate in the evolving and continued practice of embarking to Berlin and representing their encounters with the emergent geopolitics and memory of the Berlin Wall.¹⁵

Either through their reflexive framing or in some cases just the existence of their work focused on Berlin, many of these producers challenge shorthanded and misguided formulations about freedom and history in the face of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. To contest the idea of the “end of history,” such figures may return to their own experiences in or of a walled Berlin, to offer different perspectives on the historical import of the moments of change. They do so as a form of reflection that approaches a remix. Such works bring together existing historical footage, sounds, images, and dominant tropes; joins them with stories of personal experiences, mixes them elements of a previous body of their own work and inspired citations of others; proposes imaginative “affective mapping” or aspirational geographies to summon new collectivities; and challenges proprietary claims of culture and history.¹⁶ In sum, they remind us of the improvisational and creative nature of historical change and ideation. The tools of historical remixing can surely be employed to reify dominant narratives, but they also open up spaces of cultural exchange and critical consciousness around the production of history.¹⁷

To explore this concept, I turn to a pair of rock musicals adapted into films that are products of complex American-Berlin histories themselves: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) and *Passing Strange* (2010). Each work is in part located in Cold War Berlin and made by figures who had spent significant time there while the Berlin Wall was up (John Cameron Mitchell and Stew, respectively), and yet the musicals were staged after the end of a divided Germany. The very transhistorical and transnational histories of these musical works suggest a larger critical cultural tradition of pushing forward not only the Berlin imaginary but also doing so to expand possibilities for critical forms of American cultural performance. These cultural productions present history of the Berlin Wall through aesthetic framings, and utilize archetypal struggles of the traveling American in Cold War Berlin to broaden collectivities of empowerment and

expression. The creators Mitchell and Stew (and respective songwriting partners Stephen Trask and Heidi Rodewald) locate the American borderlands of Berlin in an estranged space and time – the afterlife of the Berlin Wall – and repurpose its geopolitical history to model strategies for modes of listening and creating cultural works that favor tools of collective imagination and adaptation over limitation. They do so by approaching, conveying, and ultimately undermining creative formalistic boundaries as well as geopolitical ones to embrace *oneness* – a stasis built in the face and constitutive of chaos, uncertainty, historical burden, and upheaval. In other words, these works present the Berlin Wall’s strange historicity as a way to promote a creative methodology that values both the connective acts of listening and performing, and the modes of becoming that interanimate identity and adaptation. Songwriting, like the complex memory of the Berlin Wall, becomes a model and a metaphor for a means with no true end other than promoting dynamic reflection and evolution.

In German, the word *Einheit* carries several meanings including unity and reunification. *Einheit* also translates to “oneness.” As a broad religious and philosophical concept, oneness suggests the ways in which an individual exists in relation to others – whether that be another person, a group or the universe at large. Important to conceptions of oneness is the interconnected idea of the self and the other, which is related to conditions of both identification and estrangement, and proximity and distance. The condition of *Einheit*, like the phrase encapsulated within the seal of the United States, *E pluribus unum*, registers the multiplicity of identities within the self and the nation – as either a motto or aspirational principle of each country, a call to reconcile convergent histories and possible futures. Cultural productions create important spaces for the potential to explore and aspire to oneness, especially across boundaries of difference and division.

One way to demonstrate the practice of oneness is through the mechanisms of a different but related cultural production, Eugenides' novel, *Middlesex*. Protagonist Cal recalls his entire family's history as a story about American belonging and estrangement, structured from recollections paced throughout the book that occur when he is a diplomat stationed in post-Wall Berlin. Cal, born as an intersexed female Calliope to a Greek immigrant family, examines the mores of post-World War II American culture through an examination of his own travails. This is traced through his family's movements from a war-torn Greece in World War I, to Detroit's racial strife and urban reorganization in the 1960s and 1970s, to the moment of Cal's transition being fully realized in San Francisco and then Berlin. History and memory serve as dual engines in this work: Eugenides (the author) finished the novel as a fellow at the American Academy in Berlin; Cal (the protagonist) narrates the plot lines of the narrative from Berlin. And while the majority of the book's diegetic action occurs elsewhere, the intermittent moments staged in Berlin serve a purpose to the larger text. As Cal says, "This once divided city reminds me of myself. My struggle for unification, for *Einheit*. Coming from a city still cut in half by racial hatred, I feel hopeful here in Berlin."¹⁸ Like *Middlesex*, one shared goal of productions *Hedwig* and *Passing Strange* is the search for an American oneness. That quest moves through post-Wall Berlin, delves into legacies of racialized and queer identities, and puts forth cultural representation (in these cases, song writing and listening) as an act of co-creation. From this deployment of images, sounds and ideas of Berlin, the search for oneness is neither achieved nor abandoned, but highlighted in and of itself as a way for one (as self or social body) to coexist.

In this chapter, I focus on the time period that straddles the last days of the Berlin Wall and the immediate time afterward, as explored in the rock musicals *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Passing Strange*. I trace the performers/writers John Cameron Mitchell and Stew through their

experiences in West Berlin in the mid-1980s and examine how they integrate them into genre-defying, autobiographically-based performances after the period of the wall in the early 2000s. Both *Hedwig* and *Passing Strange* emerged from a litany of stages of development: they were experimental songs then off-kilter stage shows then widely performed theatrical cult classics before they each were adapted for cinema. Rather than editing out their originary experimental impulses, they help compose some of the enduring film versions' strongest elements. They do so by advancing listening and songwriting strategies as modes of collaborative and critical cultural exchange – exemplified through the song and concept of “midnight radio” in *Hedwig*, and the refrain “listening is waiting” in *Passing Strange*. In each case, the productions model and urge cultural connections over closure or singularity, both musically and historically. In other words, each production turns to a critical exploration of identity by slowing or altering the rhythms of progressive time, and remixing historical narratives around the Berlin Wall. Even as identity is forged through disorienting or painful self-discovery, the musicals put forth stories of oneness hewn from fragmentary, fractured, and historical traumatic loss or experience. The concept of identity is of value and also becomes an exercise in bridging personal perspectives and those of a larger social body. The musicals mark sonic interventions into the socio-political-existential-grammatical quest to balance the *me* and the *we* – for the musician, the American, the Berliner – and suggest the power in strange collectivities, those groups that come together against the cultural and/or creative barriers that have been instated against them. The very fact these works have inspired new productions, new recordings, and cinematic releases from their cobbled originals cement their legacies as powerful reminders of democratic creativity. The historical dismantling and the creative reappearance of the Berlin Wall are staged in these works to slow down, reinterpret, and remix history.

Scholars of rock musicals remind us that the platform is traditionally nonconformist – its practitioners bridge the practices of popular music and theatrical musicals, and must contend with the problems of audience identity and legibility. Elizabeth Wollman opens her book, *The Theater Will Rock*, with an acknowledged disagreement over the formal rules and historical underpinnings of the rock musical. She writes, “Most historians tend to cite what they see as the shortcomings of the rock musical. Traditionalists, especially, take particular issue with its reliance on amplification and electric instrumentation, and its resultant loud volumes.”¹⁹ This alteration of customary stage musicals plays on the genre’s underpinnings and also seeks to rescript them. Just as with popular music, Raymond Knapp contends the American musical is a cultural format that treads the ground between personal and “collective identity formation.” Knapp argues in *The American Musical and the Performance of National Identity*:

American musicals – through their characters, stories, and songs; through the memorable performance of those characters, stories, and songs by charismatic stars; and through the varied ways and degrees which wider populations merge with those characters, live out their stories, and sing or move to their songs – have given people, in a visceral way, a sense of what it *feels* like to embody whatever alternatives that musicals might offer to their own life circumstances and choices.²⁰

Knapp deals with the production of stage musicals, within which he reads rock musicals, all the while portending to moments of filmic and other off-stage adaptations he deems as “traces” and of which he is generally suspect. He writes, “Whereas in staged musicals an audience may pretend through the convention of ‘suspending disbelief’ ... film makes this convention harder to adhere to. Film musicals, even more readily than stage musicals, generate a kind of expressive double image.”²¹ Knapp contends this as a form of confused gesturing, and an elimination or editing out of particular theatrical effects. I depart from Knapp’s formulation in that I read filmic versions of the aforementioned rock musicals precisely through the ways they may bear the marks

of previous productions and have inspired multiple forms of spin-off, including those that lead the musicals back to the theater. Their filmic versions are not end points but portals for an expanding audience base and summoning of attention to the very devices of production and ideas of embodiment the shows originally sought out. Further, the fact that the shows emerged out of experimental song performances and travels, undoes the necessity to approach them through any one precise formal approach other than marking the importance of the stage production to their evolutions. Even as each work has been referred to as genre-defying, the need to revisit and delineate the genre categories evinces a disciplinary impulse toward coherence that I contend each work seeks to critically interrogate.

Music functions as a form of intersectional identity constructed and tested in each work. Through content and formal construction, these musicals offer reflections on the ways songs, like aspects of one's identity or different groups, cohere and emerge, fall away and rejoin – especially in regard to one's racial, gender, sexual, class and national identity. Both works do so through stories about songwriting and play with the idea of autobiography. Each work's writer and narrator hovers over and informs the story but is neither omniscient nor untrustable. Relevant details of their lives from America or Berlin are made prominent in the works, only to be skewed and altered in the narrative. Each production utilizes dual ensembles that keep actors and rock bands on stage at once. And despite being so driven by their creators, these works have inspired new productions, new recordings, and cinematic releases from others outside the production to as powerful reminders of the power of democratic co-creativity. *Hedwig* and *Passing Strange* remind us of the imaginative limits of cultural productions and suggest expansive aims of art – to author open-ended possibilities amidst social actualities. The search for oneness is its simultaneous embrace of the self and the collective through culture, affixed with the social glue of the strange.

II. Listening to History, Estranging Production

The deconstruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 mark for many the historical end of the Cold War. The notion these events mark an “end of history” is drawn from Francis Fukuyama’s essay of the same name. “End of History” was published during the summer of 1989 in *National Interest*, though its readership greatly expanded after the events of November in Berlin. Fukuyama had forecasted the foreseeable outcome of the Cold War as an eventual triumph of liberal capitalism bringing with it the end of ideological conflict. As scholars have pointed out in the years since Fukuyama’s proclamation, the formulation has been held up as a rallying cry for the Cold War triumphalism of the West – rather than a call for precaution in the two Germanys and a wary unfolding of the deep-seated conflict’s fallout. Such scholars have wrestled with Fukuyama’s formulations in the wake of its widespread appeal as an explanation of the collapse of Soviet communism, and use cultural sources to levy their critiques of the thesis. In such critical revisitings, they note how phrases such as “end of history” or “fall of the wall” collapse complexity and historical process into *fete accompli* events, without actors or afterwords. In *Image Critique and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, Sunil Manghani writes,

[The] fall of the Wall has seemingly given rise only to a dramatic (though, nonetheless, ubiquitous) sense of ‘end’, finale and political closure. ... Like a bookend, the ‘fall of the Wall’ becomes a hidden proper for all that comes to stand after it. ‘The fall of the Berlin Wall’, ‘the collapse of communism’, the cutting of the Iron Curtain’ are each ways of poetically spiriting away the past, each a turn of phrase which blots complexity of what led to the events and dilemmas that were to come afterwards; of there being actually two ‘really existing’ sides.²²

Manghani suggests the “Berlin imaginary,” a “‘collective subconscious’ that out of a whole range of historical artefacts [sic], images, and events, develops for itself a regulatory fiction of ideological divisions.” For images of the fall, the imaginary was over-determined by the “victor’s”

outlook and the language and images at the “end” of the Wall require further unpacking.²³ Similarly, Joshua Clover writes in *1989* of further critical engagement with Fukuyama, in the context of popular culture that sought to make meaning from the happenings of that year. Clover summarizes his intervention around the way the phrasing “end of history” continues to obscure a more complex and continued negotiation of historical process:

That history didn't end by now is not worth remarking. There is nonetheless a specter of actuality in Fukuyama's analysis, and it wants reckoning as something more than a straw man. *We have trouble imagining*. The participle is everything. For if we understand Fukuyama to have been making the more modest if still tragic claim that 1989 witnessed the end of *historical thought*, that the public imagination of the West has abandoned a conception of ongoing historical process, of alternative arrangements of daily life – then his suggestion is considerably less laughable.²⁴

Clover goes on to elucidate the ways popular culture (especially the pop song and the music video) formalistically may view 1989 with “the outcomes of a historical dynamic that has a great and particular use for the congealed and singular image-event into which all meanings are bound to collapse.” He demonstrates the historical use value of Berlin here, as scenes of the border are used in music videos or other edited cultural works. Berlin Wall-related works become case studies, as Clover accounts for “the double-faced drive of editing,” the sublimation of the creative process into a “whole” piece that flattens critical potential in popular music driven into market segments despite their dynamic underpinnings. He is wary of the ways the culture surrounding the dismantling of the Berlin Wall fuels “the disappearance of the edit, the cut.” Clover adds, “And this too bears an ideological payload, one that arrives even before the expressively political messages. It is the spectacularization of coherence itself.”²⁵ In both works, Manghani and Clover seek to re-engage the ubiquity of Fukuyama's argument, to revalue historical process over inevitability, and seek cultural sources to lead toward strange narratives that do not overemphasize the closing off of the Cold War.²⁶ Rather than settle for an end of history, these

scholars aim to look at the transnational and transhistorical Cold War's afterlife, implications, and hangovers drawn close to and through the Berlin Wall.

In the year following the dismantling of the wall, popular music became a front for dealing with the legacy of the events of 1989. Early songs by They Might Be Giants ("Road Movie to Berlin"), dc Talk ("Walls"), and Run DMC ("What It's All About") all attempted to make sense across contexts of how the wall continued to signify on division within months after it ceased to be a functional border. Berlin's layered history created a context for reflection and continued to be a cultural meeting place. Through such works and others like them, we may explore the chaos endemic to the project of unity.

Perhaps the quintessential American Berlin song of reunification is "One" by U2, recorded in part at an old Nazi ballroom converted into the famous recording base Hansa Studios, previously used by David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Brian Eno. The song's meanings run in multiple directions, all signifying on the days of German reunification. U2 arrived in Berlin on the last night the GDR existed, before formal reunification on October 3, 1990, to record their album, *Achtung Baby*. Band member Adam Clayton recalls, "The collapse of the Berlin Wall seemed to result in a general state of malaise within Germany. It was depressing and intense and dark and gloomy."²⁷ Though of Irish descent, their previous albums *Joshua Tree* and *Rattle and Hum* had opened up and placed them into circuits of American traditions of musical performance. The fact that the album's signature song, "One" references the band's own troubles in comparison to the healing of the city of Berlin speaks to the track's powers of strained but purposeful identification. The chorus of "One", "We're one, but we're not the same – we get to carry each other," epitomizes oneness in spite of and fueled by differences, and the burdens of

bridging them.²⁸ Interpersonal obligation is not a matter of choice but interdependency and part of the responsibility of co-existence.

The song's production and circulation builds on the concept of obligation and connectivity. In the larger production of the song, U2 adapted the work of queer American artist David Wojnarowicz for their single cover art and the concept of one of three music versions of "One," adapting his "Untitled (Buffalo)" image into their multiformat mediation on the song (Figure 5.6). Other music videos for the song include footage in Berlin (Figure 5.7), in which the band alternately shows up in gender-bending apparel and makeup. The band reportedly donated royalties from sales of the single to AIDS research, a recognition of the way the song's meaning accrued additional meaning and purpose. It was also a response to Wojnarowicz's poetics of



Figures 5.6–7: Cover of U2, "One," 1992; and Screenshot from "One" music video (Island)

historical witnessing in his Buffalo image. Lead singer Bono told journalist Alan Light in 1993,

Whatever you do now, you are in the post-AIDS age. It's there, and you've got to walk through it or around it. And if a record deals with any kind of erotic subject matter, the specter of AIDS is even all the more close. ... Wojnarowicz dealt with the subject seriously, he took it on. I can't believe people can just walk around it, you know?²⁹

As U2 expanded the reach of their own song through its release as a single, the song's history of performance as a new cover standard finds American artists seeking opportunities to confront other moments of trauma and tragedy.³⁰ The song has been covered by dozens of American musicians, especially at times of personal challenge and/or national turmoil. Johnny Cash's 2000

cover features an ailing country singer wrestling with mortality. In the wake of the devastation wrought by underprepared emergency services after Hurricane Katrina, U2 joined Mary Blige in a cover of “One,” for a nationally-televised fundraising telethon. Daphne Brooks points out,

Blige ... would stage the most cogent political coup of the airwaves during a telethon performance of U2’s 1990s elegy-anthem “One,” turning what could have been an awkward duet with frontman-activist Bono into a metanarrative, a staged musical dialogue of sorts that brought to light the emotional dimensions of black female disenfranchisement and white patriarchal and legislative power, arrogance, and humility.³¹

Blige would again cover the song in the 2006 Grammys and include a recorded version for her album. Two years later, Adam Lambert, a finalist in *American Idol* was given personal permission from Bono to sing “One.” Given the rumors about his queer sexuality, and soon thereafter public acknowledgment of being gay, Lambert’s cover became a coded power ballad doubling as an acknowledgment of his sexual identity. “One,” like other Berlin songs, deals with the task of the bold and brilliant interventions of these American Berliners and the cover versions extend the initial sites of inspiration and actors of change. Whether the chaos is social, political, or simply sonic, unity becomes a productive and challenging goal.³²

Whether as songs tethered to a site-specific imaginary or an imagined space music provides, Josh Kun’s concept of audiotopia is again instructive. Kun writes of the audiotopia as “the space within and produced by a musical element that offers the listener and/or the musician new maps for reimagining the present social world.” In his formulation, Kun writes of popular American music in a transnational frame as “one of our most valuable tools for understanding the impact of nationalism and citizenship on the formation of our individual identities ... and one of our most valuable sites for witnessing the performance of racial and ethnic difference.”³³ The construction of an audiotopia is contingent on a listening strategy that conjures real and imagined spaces of American music, “the spaces that music itself contains, the spaces that music

fills up, the spaces that music helps us to imagine as listeners occupying our own real and imaginary spaces.”³⁴ Like with “One,” and in moving to consider *Hedwig* and *Passing Strange*, each work models a critical strategy for listening that is forged in conjunction with one for songwriting. Respectively, each demonstrates songwriters as listeners, and vice versa, who seek oneness and who must strive for oneness without erasing conflict or difference. They value estrangement in an historical and geographic sense of the process.

Strangeness, Kun writes, is “identity’s uncomfortable, but required double,” and because “musical listening is a form of confrontation, of encounter ... identity is made self-aware and is, therefore, menaced through its own interrogation.”³⁵ Such a listening strategy in the case of works like *Hedwig* and *Passing Strange* must be a part of a larger practice of critical reception that bridges the sonic, visual, and performative elements. In Mitchell and Stew’s works, listening and songwriting are dual tropes of each work and thus embody the dialectics of their engaged methodologies. Each work imagines and attempts to become an audiotopia to deal with the chaotic nature of American Cold War history and identity. Spaces of transformation are elusive, but may be approached within the structure of the song. Even as the works were adapted from the experimental stage to the Broadway/Off-Broadway production to filmic productions with expanded audiences, they may bare the marks of their earlier stages of production as fruitful portals for reflection, the stuff that conjures and maps out critical thought and democratic creativity. They powerfully use music to seek out and suggest working beyond the productive limits of musicality, history and identity.

III. “Tear Me Down”

Hedwig and the Angry Inch emerged as a production out of a series of encounters, concerts, and assembled performances to conjure the complex circumstances of the Berlin Wall, preceding and following 1989. Written by John Cameron Mitchell and songwriting partner Steven Trask, the story of Hedwig is a recollection of the divides and historical hangovers of the Cold War. *Hedwig* is also a performative case study in the power of song listening and writing as means to offer oneness and love in the face of painful traumas.

Mitchell’s connection to Berlin dates back to his late childhood. Mitchell’s father, Maj. General John Mitchell, served as the U.S. Army’s commanding general of the American military in Berlin from 1984-1988. In addition to his duties, his role brought him onstage with President Ronald Reagan during the 1987 speech at the Brandenburg Gate.³⁶ The younger Mitchell would visit his parents in Berlin on summer breaks during college. Mitchell was a musician and an actor, and spent time in Homopunk clubs in Kreuzberg. Even as Mitchell drew aesthetic influence from his time in Berlin, the story of Hedwig had additional transnational roots. While living with his family as a teenager in Junction City, Kansas, he met a German army ex-wife, who worked as an occasional sex worker near the base.

In 1994, when Mitchell started developing the story for a musical, he combined these experiences and figures, including himself, and first performed the character of Hedwig in a New York drag punk night at the Squeeze Box. Hedwig is a transgender East German émigré, displaced from socialist East Berlin to Junction City, Kansas and then downtown New York City. At the Squeeze Box, fragments of the story and songs would emerge, and were drawn out from covers of songs such as Cher’s “Half Breed,” David Bowie’s “Boys Keep Swinging,” Fleetwood Mac’s “Oh Well,” and Mott the Hoople’s “All the Young Dudes,” in addition to song-story

monologues about Hedwig's life and backed by Trask and his band.³⁷ The show was first presented as a grouping of musical numbers in the Westbeth Theater Center in the West Village on February 27, 1997. By the following year, they moved across the street to the Jane Street Theater and premiered as an off-Broadway production on February 14, 1998. After additional traveling productions with a slightly varied cast, and workshopping at the Sundance Institute, Mitchell and his creative team developed *Hedwig* into a motion picture. Mitchell played Hedwig in workshop iterations of the play, the original productions (1997–1998) and in the film version in 2001.

The *Hedwig* film opens with a sound check and a delay. The sounds of an electric guitar being tuned and then segueing into “America the Beautiful” is accompanied by visuals of a plain black screen for several beats. After this deferral, Hedwig bursts onto the screen in mid-gait, alternately walking through and primping back stage. This interlude is a gesture to the assembled, raw produced nature of Hedwig's previous live shows, both within and amongst the productions. If the place of a punk cover of “America the Beautiful” suggests oppositional engagement with the national symbolic, the first full song of the musical, “Tear Me Down” approaches the transnational symbolic of America's Berlin as a way to frame the show. Hedwig opens the song with an invocation – “Don't you know, I'm the New Berlin Wall,” she sings, “Try and tear me down!” Dressed in a cape that resembles the Berlin Wall on one side, Hedwig and the band play in a small Kansas City chain restaurant, Bligewaters, with images of the Titanic pictured behind their makeshift stage, which gestures to global and local structures of errant history in the work.

Hedwig's opening performance offers several monumental and off-kilter performance propositions including that a transgender performer can embody the Berlin Wall. Hedwig adopts



Figure 5.8: Screenshot from “Tear Me Down” in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, 2001 (New Line Cinema)

a language evocative of President Reagan’s “Tear Down This Wall” rhetoric, but repositions it into an oppositional queer punk anthem and form of historical storytelling exceeding citation or delimitation. The divides Hedwig evokes are not merely geopolitical, but harken to the divides of identity, location, and history. Hedwig’s cape is marked on one side as a graffitied Berlin Wall (Figure 5.8), with markings that include a swastika, a circle-A anarchy symbol, a peace sign, and an inscription that reads, “Yankee Go Home ... And Take Me With You.”³⁸ The other side of the cape resembles patriotic themed drapery used for stagings on Memorial Day or 4th of July. Hedwig also wears a tattered blue jean denim cat suit underneath to emphasize the aesthetic appropriation of symbols of Cold War Americana. Hedwig symbolizes these intersections and divides, but the musical also opens with a call to collectivity and perspective as demonstrated through Hedwig’s life and songwriting process. Expressions of national, sexual, and gender identities are just a few of the identitarian paradoxes of the work. Hedwig offers her story as case

study for history's errant and tragic courses, but also the way music may be approached to work across divides.

Yitzhak, Hedwig's band mate and transgender spouse, also originally from the Eastern Bloc, delivers an overview as a spoken bridge in the song, setting up the Berlin Wall as one of the musical's key conceptual anchors:

On August 13th, 1961, a wall was erected down the middle of the city of Berlin. The world was divided by a Cold War and the Berlin Wall was the most hated symbol of that divide – reviled, graffitied, spit upon. We thought the wall would stand forever, and now that it's gone, we don't know who we are anymore. Ladies and gentlemen, Hedwig is like that wall. Standing before you in the divide between east and west, slavery and freedom, man and woman, top and bottom. And you can try to tear her down.³⁹

Together these performance of identity and history set the stage for Hedwig's tale to have a more universal appeal, even as she marks her own outsider status through the metaphor and site of the Berlin Wall – to think about division and wholeness in relation to one's national, sexual, racial, existential identities, not around sameness but coexistence. Hedwig personifies and performs the Berlin Wall, as she sets out to deal with her own history through songwriting and listening.

From this introductory song, the deeper storyline emerges. Hedwig as performer and narrator explains her history. She was born as the boy "Hansel" to an East German mother and a sexually abusive American GI father the same year as the Berlin Wall emerged in 1961. He grew up in a cramped East Berlin flat. Through narration, we learn her mother moved from West Berlin to the East *after* the city was divided. Hansel's sense of dislocation as a child is paced by his spaces of refuge, especially those found through television and music obtained through illegal signals received from West Berlin. He tunes into "American Forces" networks to watch cartoons, and listens to music either on a handheld radio while dancing on his bed or with his head stuck in his mother's cooled down oven which he decorates with post-ups of David Bowie.

He presumably learns to sing in these cramped spaces by extending beyond them through acts of listening and repetition. Hedwig, in recalling her childhood, talks about the “American masters” such as Toni Tenille, Debby Boone, Anne Murray, and “crypto-homo rockers” Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, and Bowie.⁴⁰ Even if artists like Murray and Bowie are not from America, Hedwig cites them as part of a particular set of cultural works tied to Western modes of creativity that Hansel associates with the other side of the Berlin border.

Confinement is a key theme of the work, as we see Hansel and then Hedwig deal with spatial inhibition and refuge. Hansel aches to travel, but makes it only as far as a set of war ruins near the Berlin Wall on its eastern side. Here, he sunbathes in the nude and meets Luther Robinson, a wayward African American GI, who brings gummy bears and delectable candy from the West to tempt Hansel. Luther’s initial misidentification of Hansel as a woman and then seeming acceptance of his status as a man is accented by their meeting place along the Berlin border.⁴¹ The “bittersweet” offering of candy, the ruinous environment of their meeting, the nature of their respective outsider statuses all point to an unlikely meeting, racialized and sexualized as queer. (Here they are staged to mark, literally, as Heather Love suggests of queer narratives “the ruined state of the social world.”⁴²) In the transition from “Hansel” to “Hedwig,” liminal geography adds to a sense of history’s fissures.

Robinson’s plan is to marry Hansel and bring him to the United States, but to do so Hansel has to have a sex-change operation. Given the tightness of border control, Hansel would adopt his mother’s identity and forge her passport to exit. Before exiting, however, the surgery is botched on several levels – the gender reassignment is incomplete and Hedwig is left with “an angry inch.” Further compounding the cruelty of their exit on November 9, 1988, we come to find out a year to the day after they arrive in America, Luther leaves Hedwig for another man on

the same day the Berlin Wall is first breached. If they had waited one year, there would have been no need for the surgery to leave the country. Amidst this cruel sense of timing, Hedwig's transgender identity becomes her means of personal expression and stage persona, as by this point in the musical her music is inseparable from her history of trauma. Hedwig never quite leaves the stage, and the search



Figures 5.9–10: Screenshots from “Wig in a Box” in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (New Line Cinema)

for healing and aspiring wholeness occurs throughout the musical.

In the scene in which Luther leaves Hedwig, we see the themes of confinement and refuge play out in the space of a song and in the historical moment. Luther steps away from their trailer home with his new boyfriend carrying his bags. Inside, Hedwig watches television footage of the Berlin Wall being dismantled (Figures 5.9–10). The scene introduces the song “Wig in a Box,” and takes place in the trailer in which Hedwig appears marooned, on the Junction City, Kansas army base, now left on her own. An anonymous television news commentator proclaims over jubilant televised scenes from Berlin that Hedwig watches, “The Germans are a patient people. And good things come to those who wait.”⁴³ Hedwig is distraught, but then segues into song, and transforms into the persona of a performer, to find semblance of a new self. Putting on



Figure 5.11: Screenshot from “Wig in a Box” in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (New Line Cinema)

the wig is aligned with the act of putting on a song on tape or record player. Patience is not the problem here, but is imagined as both a space and time, an attention to the record’s grooves, to spot portals to becoming and expression within the song.

Hedwig also uses the song to recollect. She sings, “I look back on where I’m from/look at the woman I’ve become/ and the strangest things / seem suddenly routine.” The word “strange” is used not to distance Hedwig’s sense of self, but as an affirmative and expansive notion of her identity. As such, the act of putting on the wig, or the song, or both, especially through the midnight hours, is not merely an escapist gesture, but a way of turning to expressivity in moments of dislocation and isolation. The scene reaches its climactic moment when Hedwig’s band joins her in the trailer and the playing of the song causes the exterior wall of the trailer to fall (Figure 5.11). The camera is situated outside to reveal the group of assembled performers. As such, the creator appropriates the motif of the Berlin Wall falling, and breaks down a barrier between performers and their audience. After this trailer wall has tumbled, the song’s final verses end with the call to collectivity (“everybody!”) and a bouncing dot encourages singing along as a

production effect. A story that begins in historical malaise and isolation becomes a rallying call for connection and tearing down boundaries through song.

Such a transformative vision of boundaries plays out through the musical, where borders mark sites of trauma that may or may not be reformed, and that function as sites of knowledge and/or alienation. Hedwig's tutelage of Tommy Gnosis, a young rocker from Junction City who falls in love in with Hedwig but then steals her song en route to super pop stardom, is another story about borders in the musical: between self and other, songwriter and song-performer, knowledge and truth, and separation of lovers. During the second part of the musical, the Berlin Wall is replaced as the key structure of the story. However the concepts of borders and separation allow for an abstraction beyond the wall toward the musical's prescriptions for healing from divisions.

This especially comes to focus in the musical's final number, "Midnight Radio." The narrative of the musical has just reached its denouement, and like an encore of a pop concert, "Midnight Radio" does the work of breaking from and reframing the entire set. In the song, Hedwig ponders oneness and the idea of "strange rock." Music has created a space for her to imagine being whole in a world of divisions.⁴⁴ Being strange means again finding yourself a path, and locating collectivities and sites of connection without erasing the fraught nature of identification. After the previous song, and disruptive split-second flashbacks to earlier scenes including one by the Berlin Wall, Hedwig strips off her dress, and takes off her wig (Figure 5.12). Standing denuded, and without any clear statement on Hedwig's gender other than being undone (or is it Cameron-Mitchell, the auteur emerging fully?) she rejoins her band and an assembled audience. The band's clothing and the stage setting appear for the first time as all white, conjuring rebirth or a clean slate. But the song offers a reprise of Hedwig's difficulties.

Rather than reifying confinement, the song and the visuals detail the possibilities for refuge and escape.

Like the childhood Hansel who listened to American radio from East Berlin to seek escape, the midnight radio becomes a conduit, a channel, a praxis to live in the world through song: “A dream/ Or a song/ That hits you so hard/ Filling you up/ And suddenly gone/ From you heart



Figure 5.12–13: Screenshots from “Midnight Radio” in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (New Line Cinema)

to your brain/ Know that you're whole.” The concept of “midnight radio” as explored in the song of the same name presents listening as a cosmic transmission affirming wholeness and doubles as a connection point for artists who have interpolated and soothed the listener through song. “Midnight Radio” pushes on with a roll call to female performers who helped Hedwig deal with the challenges of her identities, including as a performer and listener: “Here’s to Patti, and Tina, and Yoko, Aretha, and Nico ... and Me.” By stating “me” at the end she integrates herself into this pantheon of artists. But rather than indulging as a fantasy of individual exceptional achievement, she adds the subsequent lines, “And all the strange rock and rollers/ You know you're doing all right.” The audience in the transformed Bligewaters is no longer defiant nor

disinterested by the band, nor is audience participation parodied with a hokey sing-along. Instead, the line between stage and venue blur, and heads and hands of audience members purposefully jut into the camera's frame (Figure 5.13). The listeners are neither in the way nor separate from the act of performance, but powerfully join the scene. The musical ends soon after with a staged merging of the two halves of Hedwig back into one. Hedwig also performs this connection and reunion with her band and the audience. The midnight radio confers agency through a shared but elusive practice of oneness, of unity through and with difference. Like the earlier midnight radio transmissions and song tracks in *Hedwig* – reaching across the Berlin Wall for an East German kid seeking a way out, or playing out in an East German emigre's trailer on November 9, 1989 – the finished version of the midnight radio accommodates static and paces change with connection.

IV. “Listening is Waiting”

From strange rock-and-rollers to *Passing Strange*: just as with *Hedwig's* midnight radio, the musical *Passing Strange* offers the refrain “listening is waiting” as a sort of frequency to approach songs in and out of context, in and out of Berlin. *Passing Strange* marks an approach to listening and songwriting as a means to slow down, to not always view movement as progress, and to rethink the past to live a future of mutual healing – to, as one of its lyrics suggest, take a listener's “complex out of context.”⁴⁵

Passing Strange is a musical, written, composed, and performed by Stew, Rodewald, and their band, the Negro Problem. Spike Lee adapted the Tony-award winning Broadway show *Passing Strange* from 2008 for cinematic release in 2010. The production emerged from sonic “fragments” – pieces of actual songs, echoes of signature genre sounds, and stories of travel. The

musical is fueled by ideas of displacement, both sonic and geographic. Like Mitchell, Stew lived in Berlin while the wall was up, and also drew inspiration from Kreuzberg. Stew and *Passing Strange* share a Berlin inspired trajectory. In the musical West Berlin becomes a site of democratic upheaval and experimentation, galvanized by the May Day Riots of 1987 that served as a prelude to the rowdiness that met President Reagan a month later on a visit to West Berlin. The 1980s counterculture of West Berlin, in nightlife and also radical action, serves as a site of artistic ingenuity and reflection of life back in America. Stew recalled his unlikely circumstances for traveling there with a group of friends:

We went to Berlin and the wall was still up and we're still just – there is something to having a wall around a place, that's kind of comforting actually, you know what I mean? It's oddly comforting, it seems like it's going to be scary when you first go in, you see the East German guard and he's really, really kind of the scariest guy you've ever met because, you've never seen a person that pale, you know, and he's just looking at you in a way where like the entire Cold War is just like resting in his eyes. And he looks at you, and he really does look at you in a way that when people say like a withering look, you do kind of shrink a bit when you first get that first look from that East German guard you know, he just looks like, you later on realize the look means something a little bit different, it's more complex.⁴⁶

The musical plays with this autobiographical aspect of Stew's life. There is much to mine in what draws both songwriter Stew and the fictional protagonist, plainly named Youth, to Berlin, and what knowledge can be learned in the American borderlands of West Berlin in a production about life while the Berlin Wall was up, but staged nearly twenty years after its dismantling. Over the following years, Stew in real life took up part-time residence in Berlin. Several of Stew's and the Negro Problem's songs emerged out of his time and bear the imprint of his European life, including, "Comikbuchland," "Naked Dutch Painter," and "Les Arteest Cafe."

The earliest incarnations of *Passing Strange* came out of adapted Negro Problem songs, and were written and performed with Stew's writing partner Heidi Rodewald at Joe's Pub in New York City in 2002. Bill Bragin, who oversaw the performance space at Joe's Pub, recommended

Stew and Rodewald to the Public Theater for consideration. In the course of writing and performing songs from the album *Naked Dutch Painter* and the 2004 concert “Stew’s Travelogue (of Demonically Energized Souls)” a workshopable version of the musical emerged. This version would go to the Sundance Institute’s Theater Lab and open at the Berkeley Repertoire Theater in October 2006. In May 2007, they made their debut in New York at the Public Theater. On February 28, 2008, *Passing Strange* opened for its Broadway premiere at the Belasco Theater. The last two live performances were filmed and edited by Lee for cinematic release in 2010, but was made most accessible to audiences of PBS’s Great Performances series that same year.⁴⁷

The production utilizes a dual ensemble, as was the case with Hedwig’s theater run, with actors and the band both present onstage. The interplay and juxtaposition of the two groups highlights two of the musical’s guiding questions: In what ways is music real? How is the search for a sense of racial authenticity analogous to a search for transcendent music, in which balancing roots and routes must be taken into account? The protagonist Youth lives a quest to find *the real*, taking him out from his mother’s care in an African American middle class enclave of South Central L.A., set in the 1980s. Stew serves as the omniscient narrator and lead singer guide. Viewers are taken with Youth, and Stew follows, as he leaves for Europe, first to the edenic Amsterdam, and then to its dystopian “black hole” counterpart, a then-walled Berlin. The desire to write the perfect song propels Youth’s travel and pushes him to confront the limits and possibilities of his identities – American, black, male, songwriter, son.⁴⁸

In the musical’s second act, nearly every scene is imagined as taking place in West Berlin. Here, the stage is transformed by a series of buttressing horizontal yellow lights against a plain backdrop representing the Berlin Wall (Figure 5.14). It is a sparse but confining backdrop, though is imagined as enclosing Youth’s latest experience with the real. Though the Berlin Wall does not

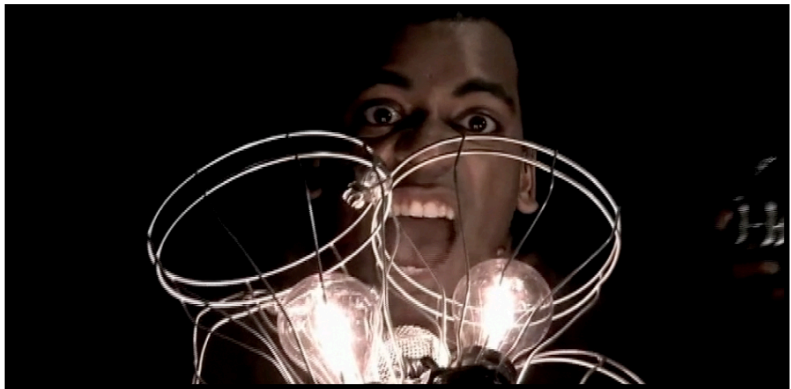


Figure 5.14: Screenshots from “Berlin: Black Hole with Taxis” in *Passing Strange*, 2010 (IFC Films)

emerge until the musical’s second act, we are made aware of the ways fears of confinement from its beginning structure the plot. Youth is terrified that he will remain trapped in L.A. forever. The refrain “listening is waiting,” is first sung by Rodewald here and echoed by the ensemble, ushers in his first experience at church. At that moment, the refrain appears didactic and cautionary. As the musical goes on, is brought up to slow Youth’s desire for progress without reflection or critical reception. For after stints in church, with the youth choir, or in his punk garage band the Scaryotypes, the only solution he comes up with is exile. “Fuck this fishbowl. If we’re gonna deal with the real, we gotta tour Europe.”

Youth then leaves for Amsterdam, validated that he is following in the exiled footsteps of Josephine Baker and James Baldwin. He at first feels liberated. But even as Amsterdam becomes a site of philosophical awakening, it offers a brief respite from American racisms. He finds redress from regimes of distrust. When a waitress who he briefly becomes involved with romantically offers him her “keys” – a play on privacy and musical scales – he relates it to his ex-

patriate status: “No more saying ‘uncle’ to Uncle Sam/ I’m telling L.A. just where I am/ Color me Amsterdam.” But soon after, he is compelled to leave this “paradise” because he is unable to write songs there. Questions of racial authenticity haunt him, as he is asked if he is a jazz musician. The daily euphorias did not offer him creative grit, and his blackness travels once more with baggage from a U.S. racial past.



Figures 5.15–16: Screenshots from “Identity” in *Passing Strange*, 2010 (IFC Films)

In *Passing Strange*, when Youth arrives in Germany, Berlin is introduced with a wall of sound – sustained electric guitar feedback, rumbling percussion – and will soon lapse into sparse, breakneck postmodern cabaret. During the song, “Berlin: A Black Hole With Taxis,” Youth is shouted at with a series of speculative statements by an East German border guard, including “PASS!” demanding to know his identity and to see his passport (Figure 5.15). Racial passing and passports both connote travel, but here they also suggest an attempt to recreate one’s self through displacement. But that act of recreation is not powered by a simple freedom; it frames the limits of such a fantasy.

In Berlin, Youth links with leftist radical artist/activist collective Nowhaus. It’s in Berlin that Youth both disavows his old identity and adopts a “new” one. Here he tells leftist German

comrades, who question his authenticity and thus right to be with them, that he is a “hustler” from the ghettos of South Central. After being accepted, he boasts, “I am no mere *popsongmaker*. My work is about ... transcendence. My work is about ... the limits of blackness.” The disavowal of title “popsongmaker” is balanced by the possibility of Youth to transcend his status as a middle class, music playing African American. He confronts such a limit while evoking the Berlin Wall.

In a performance of his postmodern cabaret, titled, “Identity” (Figure 16). Youth gruffly sings lines, “America is flowing/ Slowly exiting my veins/ I am giddy, cold and glowing/ And this song will break my chains,” spiraling toward the refrain, “Hit the wall, free at last!/ Hit the wall, free at last!”⁴⁹ Here he is disavowing identity, by pairing an allusion to the Berlin Wall with a line of great civil rights importance, “free at last,” made famous as the close to Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech during the 1963 March on Washington. In hitting the wall, the enclave of Berlin seems a protected and liberatory space for his search for the real. His invocation of King’s famous words comes across as a form of racial identification that doubles as an attempted distancing and dismissal from the confines of an American past.

“Hitting the wall” was both a turn of phrase and a stand-in for a deleted scene in the play. Stew recalls in a public interview,

Something that got cut from the play was this thing that me and the director always liked ... where the protagonist would be like taking a walk, he had this litany of things ... where he’s walking with his girlfriend in the morning, bump into the wall. Have a nice breakfast with someone and talk about a cool song you’re gonna write and then bump into the wall, you know? Have a wonderful spring walk and bump into the wall, like you could not forget. What we do, I think as Americans, what we do pretty well, is forget. Berlin doesn’t let you forget, and they still don’t let you forget. The wall never lets you forget that it was more to it than just your sort of late capitalist sort of paradise. The wall constantly reminded you of what, about 80 million things, that people are suffering, that there is politics, that politics is real, that people are actually living in situations, not just this far away concept of like you know it’s Africa and I really don’t know what that

means because it's far enough away where all I have to do is put a dollar in an envelope and then everything is gonna be fine, and I'm gonna feel better. The wall doesn't make you feel better, you kind of have to just deal with it, it's there and it becomes, it sits on you, you kind of wear it. You know you kind of have to wear it, and wearing The wall is I think what makes, what made me feel more alive and more conscious because it didn't allow me to forget.⁵⁰

Even without the staging of this exact scene, the instruction is key – as we do see in the musical, despite Youth's dislocated setting in West Berlin's countercultural scene, he can not fully break free of his own racial burdens. He is fetishized and singled out in Berlin within the shadow of the Berlin Wall by his radical brethren at his shows for being “the black one,” an enlightened “ghetto warrior” and musical genius.

Youth indulges in this admiration of his caricature, only to be called into question by his lover, German Nowhaus member Desi (Figure 5.17). Preceding the song “Come Down Now,” which also borrows from vocabulary from the historical dismantling of the Berlin Wall, she claims that Youth, who once shared that his grandmother had to pass as white to get employed, was now “passing for ghetto.” The song features a duet between Desi and Rodewald – the refrain, “listening is waiting” reappears as an invitation to slow down, to not always view movement as progress, to rethink history without needing an end or a destination, even as it plays with and against the imperative of “now.”

In the song, Desi, joined by Stew and Rodewald with layered vocals, implore Youth to realize that running toward the real is tantamount to running away from authentic connection. Desi sings, “So come down now, remove your mask / See all you gotta do is ask me/ I'll give you all ze love life allows.” Youth's mask, his own conception of the Real built up here in relation to the Berlin Wall, was preventing his access to “real” forms of love and acknowledgment. To be seen and to be seen through – the obstruction of the wall emphasizes those boundaries put up by Youth, and also the song's ability to see through them.



Figure 5.17: Screenshot from “Come Down Now” in *Passing Strange*, 2010 (IFC Films)

In the following song building up to the finale of the musical, “Work The Wound,” Stew compares the writing of songs as both wearing a mask and the building “a twelve foot wall,” working in unison, to protect the entertainer (spoken in the first person “I”) from vulnerability and critical disdain of his “art” and “life,” which have become one in the same. Working the wound, as an act of musicality and exercised memory, stages Stew’s own problems with the limits of such expression. In this work, we are unsure that the wall constituted through performance ever truly comes down. But it does seem that he is able to find another way to repurpose it for critical musical inquiry. The message rings true not just for musicians, but also for anyone who has sought refuge in a song. Stew sings in a subsequent song, “Passing Phase,” “Song is a balm/ But Song cannot heal/ You believed in it too long/ Now I need something more .../ I need something more than real.”

The musical ends with an adapted version of an original Stew (the band) song, “Love Like That,” in a moment when the dual ensemble segues into a final sonic statement blurring

autobiographical and expressive ideas of realism. “I remember when I owned everything,” is a call to bask in the safety of youth, while marking the impossibility of such a stance. He goes on,

The universe is a toy in the mind of a boy/ and your life is a movie too, starring
you/ and your family’s the cast and crew/ that’s a little secret between God and
you/ but ain’t it strange how it all makes perfect sense/ once your life becomes
evidence/ of the need to feel/ love is more than real.

Stew suggests that frames and stories we construct to accept ourselves must be broken down to coexist. He alludes to the way we internalize cultural productions as they are employed by listeners, sometimes to empower and other times to excuse notions of self. The imagined movie he speaks of, that we star in from birth, is a metaphor for a sense of the world without other fellow actors, without shared fates, and without simple beginnings and endings in which meaning is clear. Love is unwieldy, strange, personal, but the search for it is a collective one. Resounding the call to recognize limits and then continue onward, *Passing Strange* presents oneness in the shadow of its remixed and re-envisioned Berlin Wall: through spaces for critical thought and creative co-experimentation; musical works that push our critical thinking and collective aspirations; and identities as songs that incorporate and push social boundaries. So other walls can come down. And in their place – bridges, notes, mixes, lyrics to rewind and re-engage history. If tuning into *Hedwig’s* “Midnight radio” is an act of practicing creativity and collectivity in the face of strained freedoms and strange signals, *Passing Strange’s* call to “come down now” is to live from within and beyond the song.

V. Cultural Refrains

If we consider both *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Passing Strange* as works that return to the Berlin Wall to trouble the coherence of Cold War histories, and as models of cultural production that demonstrate creative strategies for performance and reception, their respective lore also have

much to do with their uncertain and ongoing trajectories. *Hedwig* has been brought back to the stage over a dozen times since the cinematic release of the film, in several countries around the world. Further, in 2003, artists ranging from Stephen Colbert to Yoko Ono to Yo La Tengo covered songs from *Hedwig* for a benefit album (*Wig in a Box: Songs from and Inspired by Hedwig and the Angry Inch*) with proceeds going toward the Heinrich-Martin Institute, which included New York City's first high school for LGBT students. Mitchell and Trask also contributed some unreleased tracks from the musical for this disc. Students from the high school were included in the subsequent documentary, *Follow Your Voice: With the Music of Hedwig*. Rumors of a Broadway run of *Hedwig* have subsisted for years. For its future audiences: on September 2012, Mitchell and Trask debuted songs from a sequel production to *Hedwig* at Provincetown's Afterglow performance festival.

Passing Strange's afterlife has taken the production to similar unexpected pathways through acts of reception and co-creation. The first production of the show without Stew and Rodewald premiered in 2010 at the Studio Theater in Washington D.C. But since, the songwriting pair has returned to Studio Theater to cover their own songs from *Passing Strange*, and are now preparing a song-cycle about Washington D.C. for the theater. The musical was carried forward in public conversation after its initial post-production runs, when Angela Davis and Toni Morrison held their aforementioned public conversation at New York's Public Library. In response to a question about the cultural productions and visual literacies, Morrison offered both her frustrations with Hollywood and a compelling model of creative expressivity:

It's as though they're fearful of powerful and different creativity, how to do something wild and different, or they follow a certain pattern ... think about *Passing Strange*. Wasn't that something? I have never seen anything on Broadway that literate and that musically inventive and staged that way, that was really a leap for me. I thought it was fantastic, so it is possible.⁵¹

Creativity here is imagined as a form of estrangement, a reckoning with historical trends and patterns, an unsettling to push forward. But it also as is framed as a return, a call to cultural engagement and empowerment through collectivity, and means to celebrate progress through composed reflection.

Because *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Passing Strange* exist across multiple contexts, formats, and productions, they offer no simple sense of ownership. They belong to particular authors and places, but also to the people who continue to make meaning of them in acts of listening and performing. In drawing from and imagining a city rife with traumatic wounds and transformed vistas, these works are part of a growing body *and* method of culture that continues to spring forward from the Cold War ruins of the Berlin Wall.

¹ For more on Soviet policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, see Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Putin* (London: Penguin, 2003) 448–466; and Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 62–71.

² Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: 13 August 1961-9 November 1989* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 400.

³ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁴ For more on Leipzig Movement, see Taylor; and Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁵ ABC News, 9 November 1989 < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnCPdLLUgvo>>.

For a critical reading of the reporting on the breaching of the border, see Sunil Manghani, *Image Critique & the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2008). In a consideration of how images function as both objects and vehicles of critical inquiry, Manghani takes on photography produced during the “fall of the Berlin Wall.” Rather than assuming photographs and filmic footage captured on November 9, 1989 as marking a moment of “instant history,” or as having coalesced in part under the terminology commonly used by Germans as *die Wende* (“the turning point”), he groups them instead as “images of the fall of the Berlin Wall.” The former notions, he argues, “skip over a set of complex relations, contradictions, and long-term processes,” while the latter formulation accounts for the ways in which this moment has been framed primarily through “images” of its “fall.”

⁶ NBC News, 10 November 1989 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK1MwhEDjHg>.

⁷ Boym, *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010) 2.

⁸ NBC, *Saturday Night Live*, “Sprockets,” 18 November 1989.

Another comedic interlude, but from a previous generation: during a “News of the Future” skit on another variety show, *Laugh-In*, shown in 1969, the comedic newscaster predicted the end of the Berlin Wall: “Berlin, twenty years from now, 1989. There was dancing in the streets today, as East Germany finally tore down the Berlin Wall. The joy was short-lived, however, as the wall was quickly replaced with a moat full of alligators.” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLIWbDu30PI>>.

⁹ The soundtrack for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall would also include Leonard Bernstein's "Ode to Freedom," a take on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony performed in Berlin on Christmas Day 1989, altogether introducing grand and monumental sounds to visions of the scene. Humphrey Burton, June Anderson, Sarah Walker, Klaus König, Jan-Hendrik Rootering, Leonard Bernstein, Friedrich Schiller, and Beethoven Ludwig, *Ode to Freedom: Beethoven: Symphony No. 9* (Stuttgart, Germany: EuroArts, 2009).

For more on consumerism and the complexities of freedom in former East Germany, see Sheena Iyengar, *The Art of Choosing* (New York: Twelve Books, 2010)

¹⁰ "Did David Hasselhoff really help end the Cold War?" on BBC.co.uk, 6 February 2004 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3465301.stm>>.

¹¹ Christoph Ribbat, "Party without Party People: Richard Avedon at the Brandenburg Gate" in Richard Avedon, Michael J. Holm, and Helle Crenzien, *Richard Avedon Photographs, 1946-2004* (Humblebæk, Denmark: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2007).

¹² Berlin was also the city where Jackson infamously held his infant over the balcony of the famous Hotel Adlon overlooking Pariser Platz in 2003, an incident heavily photographed by the public and paparazzi. William Boston, "The Stasi File on Michael Jackson," in *Time*, 5 August 2009; and Ian Halperin, *Unmasked: The Final Years of Michael Jackson* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2009) 283.

¹³ For more on Jackson statues in former communist public spaces, see Mariusz Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representation of Powers and Needs* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008) 94.

¹⁴ A major global cultural event that is part of this history but beyond the scope of this dissertation is Pink Floyd's June 1990 performance of *The Wall* on Potsdamer Platz. See Roger Waters, Mick Worwood, Ken O'Neill, and Tony Hollingsworth, *The Wall: Berlin 90* (United Kingdom: Universal Music, 2008.)

¹⁵ American cultural works exist from the days following the border's destruction through the present day, nearly twenty five years later. This includes those who created and circulated work during the Cold War and were previously discussed in this dissertation: Leonard Freed, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Ollie Harrington and Nan Goldin, among others, whose Berlin Wall *oeuvres* span the historical divide of 1989 and ruminate on the post-wall identity of the "New Berlin." This also refers to a range of figures who spent substantive time in Berlin – perhaps before but definitely after the *Wende* period – and whose work drew from the cultural imaginary of a divided Berlin, such as novelists Janet Fitch (*White Oleander*), Jeffrey Eugenides (*Middlesex*), Paul Beatty (*Slumberland*), Aleksandar Hemon (*Lazarus Project*), Chloe Aridjis (*A Book of Clouds*), and Ida Hattemer-Higgins (*The History of History*); musicians Michael Jackson (*HIStory*), Leonard Cohen (*The Future*), Lou Reed (*Berlin*, "Brandenburg Gate"), Prince ("Wall of Berlin"), Ani DiFranco ("Subdivision"), Michael Stipe of R.E.M. ("ÜBerlin"), Jake Shears of Scissor Sisters (*Nightwork*) and David Bowie ("Where Are We Now"); filmmakers Tilda Swinton and Cynthia Beatt (*The Invisible Frame*); photographers Mitch Epstein (*Berlin*), Frank Day (East Berlin), and Carmen Winant (Berlin Portraits); visual artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude ("Wrapped Reichstag"), and Jenny Holzer (Reichstag entrance project); and performance artist Kinga Arraya (*Ten Steps*), among an extensive and growing list of others. There are a range of institutions that foster these continued connections, including the American Academy, DAAD and Goethe-Institut, as well as individuals who funded their own trips. In the forthcoming manuscript version of this project, I will directly engage more of these productions and attempt to open an online archive of these collected materials from my research.

¹⁶ For more on affective mapping, see Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ I discuss more about the notion of historical remixing in my epilogue.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (New York : Farrar, Straus, Giroux)106.

¹⁹ Elizabeth L. Wollman, Galt MacDermot, and Stephen Trask, *The Theater Will Rock: A History of the Rock Musical: From Hair to Hedwig* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 5.

²⁰ Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Manghani, 135.

²³ Ibid, 124.

²⁴ Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 1–2

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶ They do so, as Magdalena Zaborowska, Sibelan Forrester, and Elena Gapova, also suggest, to bring greater critical focus to the shared outcomes, by both East and West, of this caesura. They write, “In the post–1989 era...East and West must recognize each other in the former opponent's image; they must think of shared legacies of racism and discrimination but also of constructed "whiteness" and its legacy in a world where nothing happens in isolation and without far-reaching historic, cultural, and social consequences.” Magdalena Zaborowska, Sibelan Forrester, and Elena Gapova (eds.), *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post–Communist Cultures Through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004) 7.

²⁷ Neil McCormick, *U2 by U2* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) 271. U2 would also demonstrate their Berlin influences in their Zoo TV Tour, using East German Trabant cars as light fixtures for their stage show. See George Weiss, *Zoo Tv: Live from Sydney* (London, England: Island, 2006).

²⁸ U2, “One,” *Achtung Baby* (Island, 1991).

²⁹ Alan Light, “Behind the Fly,” in *Rolling Stone*, 4 March 1993.

³⁰ For more on popular music covers and collective, flexible anthems, see Alan Light, *The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah"* (New York: Atria Books, 2012).

³¹ Daphne Brooks, “‘All That You Can't Leave Behind’: Black Female Soul Singing and the Politics of Surrogation in the Age of Catastrophe” in *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. 8.1 (2008): 180–204.

³² Brooks adds, “A song that has retained its place in contemporary rock culture for its multiple and intersecting meanings, ‘One’ has been interpreted by critics as a narrative of a conversation between a father and his queer, HIV positive son. Others have described it as the documentation of an emotionally abusive relationship coming undone. The band itself has recounted it as the pivotal song that was inspired by an effort to find aesthetic resolution and peace while they recorded their identity-transforming 1991 album *Achtung Baby*.” Ibid, 189.

³³ Joshua Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 11, 23; See Gayatri Gopinath’s extension of “queer audiotopia” in Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

³⁴ Ibid, 21.

³⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

³⁶ See *Whether You Like It or Not* on Hedwig DVD; John Moore, “Hedwig’ creator’s parents are tearing down a wall” in *Denver Post*, 25 June 2005 <http://www.denverpost.com/theater/ci_15360293>.

³⁷ Richard Burnett, “Three Dollar Bill: Get some Hed!” on *Ourcommunity.ca*, 25 June 2011 <<http://hour.ca/2011/02/10/get-some-hed/>>.

³⁸ See Billy Wilder, *One Two Three* (Los Angeles, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1961) for a comical deployment of the phrase, “Yankee Go Home.”

³⁹ References to *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* refers to cinematic version – Emily Hubley, Christine Vachon, Katie Roumel, Pamela R. Koffler, John C. Mitchell, Andrea Martin, Michael Pitt, Alberta Watson, Stephen Trask, Rob Campbell, Theodore Liscinski, Michael Aronov, Miriam Shor, and Stephen Trask, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (New York, NY: New Line Productions, 2001). Additional references refer to theatrical songbook, Stephen Trask and John C. Mitchell, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Woodstock, N.Y: Overlook Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ In the theatrical version, reference to “Colored girls sing” is included as a line in the scene in which Hedwig lists influences.

⁴¹ The trope of the sexual deviance of black GIs in Berlin is troubling, and comes up in other Berlin-based works, including Lou Reed’s “The Kids” from his *Berlin* album: “They’re taking her children away/ Because of the things that they heard she had done/ The black Air Force sergeant was not the first one.” For another reading of this scene, see Kathryn B. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴² Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007) 27.

⁴³ *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

⁴⁴ See also Wendy Hsu’s notion of wholeness in oneself in Thomas Peele, *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴⁵ All references to lyrics refer to Stew, Heidi Rodewald, and Annie Dorsen, *Passing Strange: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2009).

⁴⁶ “Post Minstrel Syndrome: Public Interview with Stew,” Interview with Paul Farber, University of Michigan, 17 November 2010.

⁴⁷ Spike Lee, Steve Klein, Stew, Annie Dorsen, de'Adre Aziza, Eisa Davis, Colman Domingo, Chad Goodridge, Rebecca N. Jones, Daniel Breaker, Heidi Rodewald, and Matthew Libatique. *Passing Strange* (New York, NY: IFC Films, 2010).

For more on the evolution of *Passing Strange*, see *Passing Strange: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Broadway Musical*.

⁴⁸ Paul Beatty’s *Slumberland*, a novel also set in post-*Wende* Berlin interestingly takes on the idea of the perfect beat and racial blackness. The shared principles of *Passing Strange* and *Slumberland* was the topic of my 2010 Experience Music Project talk, “Selections from History’s Jukebox: Rebuilding and Remixing the Berlin Wall.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Post–Minstrel Syndrome” Interview.

⁵¹ “Angela Davis and Toni Morrison: Literacy, Libraries, Liberation,” New York Public Library, 27 October 2010. <<http://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2010/10/27/angela-davis-toni-morrison>>.

Chapter 6 Piecing History



Figure 6.1: Berlin Wall at Battery Park, Lower Manhattan, 2012 (author)

“History is layered. But the layers are not stacked neatly. The disrupting force of the present puts pressure on the past, scattering pieces of it forward into unanticipated locations. No one owns these pieces.”

—Susan Buck-Morss, *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*

“Historical events might be unique, and given pattern by an end...yet there are perpetuities which defy both the uniqueness and the end.”

—Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*

I. “Concrete History”

The Berlin Wall’s transformation from geopolitical barricade to cultural commodity and architectural ruin occurred within days of the opening of the East German border in November 1989. These days of change are recounted in Aleksandar Hemon’s 2008 novel, *Lazarus Project*.

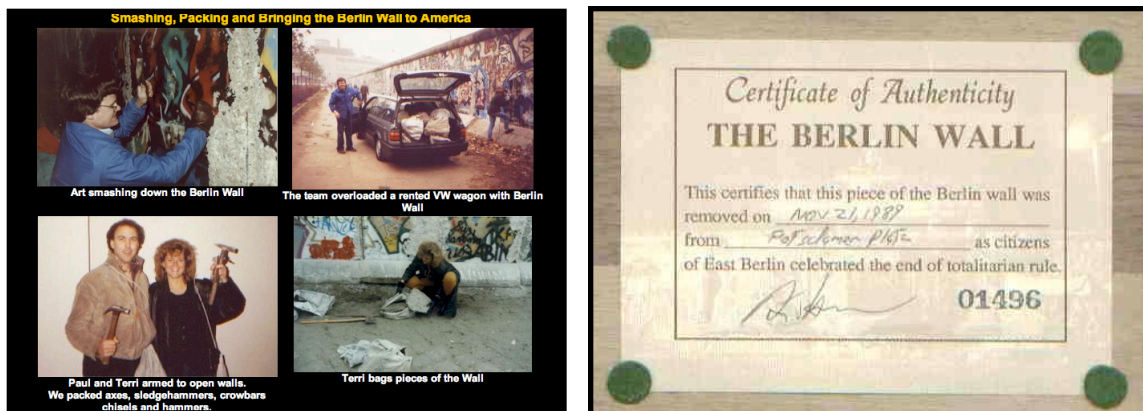
Like the actual writer Hemon, the book's protagonist, Vladimir Brik, is a transplant to America who left his native Sarajevo on the verge of the city's 1992 siege. Now, over a decade later, he faces the prospect of going back to Europe, where he will meet up with an old friend who had stayed through most of the war. He recalls their previous encounter, an exchange about America and Berlin, from before he sought exile. "We stood on the street," says Brik, "I listened to him telling me ... how in Berlin he used to sell pieces of the Wall to American tourists chasing the shadows of true experience." Brik goes on to explain that in the wake of reunification and the collapse of East Germany, his friend capitalized on this emergent market of Wall seekers. But rather than pecking pieces off the former border Wall, he sold fake chunks, simple spray painted blocks of concrete. To verify his fabricated relics to customers, he would provide authenticity certificates, authenticated only by his own signature. Brik ends this anecdote with a lesson learned when his friend's ruse is exposed:

He almost got into trouble ... bargaining with a couple from Indiana who carried empty rucksacks to fill them with concrete history. He got out of trouble by telling the cops that he was selling *replicas*, which was all right, somehow, with the cops and the Americans. His last words to me were of advice about the U.S. of A. Over there anything is true.¹

Lazarus Project highlights a variety of dubious truth claims leveraged after the end of the Cold War, especially those that link claims of a Western Cold War triumphalism to actual or alleged material remnants from the former Eastern Bloc.² The author Hemon places the outbreak of genocidal violence in the former Yugoslavia against the so-called "End of History" of 1989 to connect the deeper and ongoing currents of geopolitical history. In the "U.S. of A." not *anything* is true, but Hemon's scene begs several questions of his readers about American public culture and its relationship to the Berlin Wall following 1989 – what historical memory and/or contingencies do we encounter with scattered pieces of the Berlin Wall in American public venues? What is at

stake when we prize such historic remnants on one hand but tolerate adjacent replicas on the other?

Hemon's formulation of "concrete history," or the related phrase "pieces of history" is a common, shorthand way to refer to displays of the dispersed ruins of the Berlin Wall. The couple from Indiana in Hemon's novel could be said to resemble a group of actual Americans who run the wall-for-sale website Berlin-Wall.net, an online store that documents the group's own 1989 trip to Germany to retrieve concrete elements of the former border. They claim, "Now YOU Can Own a Piece of True History – The Berlin Wall."³ Along with offering pieces for sale, the group puts forth photographic evidence from their trip, and supplies their own authentication certificates (Figures 6.2–3). Curious Americans were not alone in their *Mauerpecking*, or their



Figures 6.2–3: Screenshots from Berlin Wall Photo Gallery (berlin-wall.net)

desire to turn pieces of the former border into historical relics that can be held and owned. The marketing to Americans in these examples present the crumbled, displaced Berlin Wall as a historical remnant for sale and also promotes the experience of history, whether as a self-referential artifact or in a replica substitute form. The phrase "pieces of history" was not created to talk about the Berlin Wall, but has come to stand in as a self-explanatory evidential claim of



Figure 6.4: “Pieces of History across the USA,” 4 November 2009 (USAToday.com)

what we see or can touch, rather than naming a longing for what we seek when we encounter pieces of the former Wall, out of the context of post-*Wende* Berlin.

The idea that pieces of the Berlin Wall can be displayed and thus considered simply historical, without exploring deeper contexts or imagining potential futurities for the relics, is a point of departure of this concluding chapter. Since 1989, the phrase “pieces of history” has been used regularly in popular parlance and signage to frame displays of large segments of the Berlin Wall in sites around the U.S. of prominent national or local significance. Currently, there are more than forty pieces of the former Wall on public display across America. The Berlin Wall has now become a regular feature of the public memorial and monumental landscape of the United States. Consider a map, published on the 20th anniversary of *Mauerfall* by *USA TODAY*, titled “Pieces of History Across the U.S.A.” for a sense of the broad national dispersal across the nation (Figure 6.4). Venues for these displaced ruins include government buildings, museums, presidential libraries, universities, corporate headquarters, archives, and a variety of other public cultural spaces.⁴ Such pieces have been installed from the early 1990s and new installations occur through this day.

The desire to install more Wall memorials continues to be strong. For example, one nonprofit group, the Outdoor Arts Foundation in Tampa, Florida has stated the goal of having “a minimum of one monument in each of the 48 contiguous States by the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Wall” by 2014. Their website states their rationale for the project around making public Cold War memory more visible – but alongside this goal they also present dubious historical information on their website and have posted a broken URL link to their page proving authentication.⁵ Whether or not we deem these pieces trustworthy stewards of memory, the “outdoor” of their campaign conjures an image of public space and a trend that exceeds beyond this Tampa group’s undertaking. The longing to place pieces of the Berlin Wall in American cities in “public” is an evolving trend that begs further exploration – both for what this tells us about Cold War memory, for what Americans consider “public” about “public spaces,” and what role these pieces play in the realms of public art, history, and consumerism. These displays build on the deep identification with the Berlin Wall maintained by Americans throughout the Cold War, and how the nation carries forward such an attachment. The fact that many of the pieces are placed in public with varying levels of access and amidst larger strategies for public education, entertainment, or both, remains evident in this ongoing treatment of the Berlin Wall in American culture.⁶

When we encounter displays of the Berlin Wall, especially in American urban public spaces, we confront the interplay between the recalling, the conflating, and the remixing of historical memory potentially employed for the purpose of cultural placemaking. That interplay includes both capital projects and grassroots interventions, and, at times, the interanimation of the two forces. As such, the Berlin Wall pieces mark sites of contest for defining and controlling public space. Michael Warner considers the category “public” as a reference to series of

formations of “totality”: as a “social totality” of a nation, city, or political body; a “concrete audience ... bounded by the event or by the shared physical space”; or a relationality brought through the reception and circulation of texts.⁷ The common dialectic model of public and private as differentiated by proprietary versus civic ownership is eschewed when working with systems of meaning and belonging. George Yúdice and Sharon Zukin, among other scholars, have also understood cultural placemaking around both the proprietary and communal values, in which “cultural economy as a political economy ... forms an intersection of profit and social justice agendas.”⁸ Their contexts from both the Cold War period and the contemporary politics of the local site in which they were placed evince important ideas and processes that shed light on how we approach and define public urban space – and how cities are places where we both measure progress and attempt to preserve or make sense of the past.

In this chapter, I explore the phenomenon of putting pieces of the former Berlin Wall on display in American public spaces. I contend that now, over twenty years after the wall was first dismantled, the desire to be present with the wall has not subsided. Such displays point out the unresolved matters of post-Cold War politics and historical memory, and suggest the stakes for local projects of placemaking. Framed as pieces of history, these displays shape the contours of discourse understanding our past and current moment through a longing to be historical. There is no way these pieces can transparently demonstrate historical value or fully verify their authentic elements, but the impulse for its installers to do so is telling and worth unpacking. Like in any debate about authenticity, such a claim is fragile in this scenario, as the connection or commitment to historical fact or deeper contexts of any Wall site depends greatly on the expedient aims of its operators and desires of its consumers. Such a longing reminds us that the story of the Berlin Wall, whether in Germany or America, is far from coherent, and such a

practice attests to the complicated entanglements of the Cold War rather than offering simple narratives of resolution or triumph. In this chapter, I catalogue many of the post-1989 uses of the physical Berlin Wall in American culture. I first consider the Berlin Wall around theoretical discussions of post-Cold War “sites of memory.” Second, I consider readings of several urban Berlin Wall sites, and the virtual reach of physical memory. Finally, I end with critical and reflexive displays, those that seek to remix the end of history.

II. Cold War Sites of Memory

In current day Berlin, one can glimpse traces of the city’s former division, intermittently scattered around the city. Sites of significance and intrigue include the official memorial and documentation center on Bernauerstrasse. There, a small fully-conceptualized border zone is rebuilt for observation from a tower across the street, with other adjacent creative installations of toppled Wall segments and steel rods lining the entire block. On Niederkirchnerstrasse, pecked remains from the wall stand above the Topography of Terrors, the underground outdoor museum and archeological site of a former Gestapo prison, and run the entire length of the city block. Several stand alone large segments remain positioned through the tourist centers of the city, such as Potsdamer Platz or Checkpoint Charlie, some of which contain so-called “authentic” graffiti of both the pre-and post-1989 periods, and others with newly painted murals offering a range of interpretations. Throughout the city, in the absence of the wall’s concrete architecture, a cobblestoned trail also marks its former, snake-like formation through the city (Figure 6.5). The *Mauerweg* bike trail allows cross-city navigation along this path and around the previous 155km border circle, even though the trail occasionally interrupts into a building or vacant field. Other traces exist in the “new death strip,” the former border strip that is neither a no man’s land nor a



Figures 6.5–6: Berlin Wall traces, 2012
(author)

blank slate but instead a site of urban redevelopment and intervention.⁹ This space includes Prenzlauer Berg's *Mauerpark*, where a piece of graffitied hinter wall sits above the weekly Flea Market and Karaoke party, but under the threat of large scale commercial rezoning. Similarly, in nearby sites of gentrification in mixed-use residential and retail gift-shops, you can buy pieces of the Berlin Wall (Figure 6.6), packaged again with their own claims of history and certificates of proof.¹⁰

These examples offer a vantage to consider the range of preservation and display techniques for the Berlin Wall outside of Berlin. Of all these instances, whether in Berlin or the U.S., I do not necessarily wish to vet which pieces of the wall are real or not, but to think of what particular claims are being made about their own specific contexts. I do find it meaningful that the material remnants of a divided

Berlin have been *displaced* from Germany and *replaced* as monumental national artifacts in the United States. But even in Berlin, the decision to preserve, move, or alter the ruins is suggestive of the process of power and emergent layers of historical memory. With both Berlin and America in mind, Andreas Huyssen writes,

We have come to read cities and buildings as palimpsests of space, monuments as transformable and transitory, and sculpture as subject to the vicissitudes of time. Of course the majority of buildings are not palimpsests at all...the strong marks of the present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses, and heterotopias.¹¹

Huyssen's formulation relates to building projects that may also conjure the dispersed, palimpsestic nature of the Berlin Wall itself. Pieces of the wall bear the transnational marks of history, but are not simply or transparently historical. I contend that when remnants are presented merely as "pieces of history" their significance may be produced through tautologies of authentication, but nonetheless emerge to instruct us about contemporary debates of memory and public space. The wall is equated with history – in relationship to its "fall," itself a passive grammatical construction without a human actor – but now it is replaced in highly prominent political and cultural sites around or outside of Berlin, thus complicating the status of the "ruin" and harkening to the problematics of historical closure.

What do the displays of the wall segments tell us about the desire to reduce history to pieces? What does it mean to want to be close to these fragments in places far away from their original context, especially in public spaces of Americana or democratic debate? The issue is not that the United States is an improper site for relics of the Berlin Wall or Cold War memory. In fact, imaginative gestures that map the U.S. Cold War borderlands in America may open up critical possibilities for geopolitical engagement. But I am wary of self-apparent, self-generated authentication of memorial remnants, refashioned into newfangled historical landmarks, without reflexive contextualization or elucidations of America's complex transnational Cold War geography. Instead, each public display of the Berlin Wall becomes a portal to history as a complicated site of memory, reflecting political and cultural challenges in each particular context of commemoration. To understand their historical or expressive value, I look to unpack the circumstances of each site's display and creative approaches to keeping the remnants as dynamic sites of discourse. Tracing the footprint of the former Berlin Wall pieces becomes a compelling

case study for Cold War memory and public space in the United States, especially given the wall's erratic and auratic afterlife in America.

Scholars working in the post-1989 period consider the ways history and memory function through physical traces, whether in-situ or displaced. They build on Pierre Nora's "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," in which he famously remarks that, "There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory." Nora's wrote his essay in French in 1984, and it was translated into English in 1989, thus both preceding and coinciding with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. The essay has served as a critical base to studies of history and memory over the last two decades, written against what Nora deems as the modern "acceleration of history" at the deficit of "real memory." Though Nora distinguishes between "real memory" (which "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects") and "history" (merely relative, a form of "reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete"), he concedes that the will to remember may suffice in purposing sites of memory against total sublimation into the project of static history. He argues, "Reflecting upon *lieux de mémoire* transforms historical criticism into critical history—and not only in its methods; it allows a secondary, purely transferential existence, even a kind of reawakening."¹²

Though Nora's treatise may seem like an accusation against historians in the project of distancing memory, the essay has prompted many in the field of History and adjacent disciplines to consider historical projects around sites of memory. As Liliane Weissberg notes,

Perhaps no other recent work has been as influential for our present-day understanding of collective or cultural memory. Interestingly, however, it also links back to an *ars memoria* in which buildings, objects, and places have turned into theaters that help us both to recall and to construct our own historical identity in the process.¹³

Jay Cook, Lawrence Glickman and Michael O'Malley also point to Nora's sites of memory as one of the key formulations connecting U.S. and European modes of cultural history and critical thought.¹⁴ Rather than completely adopting or rejecting Nora's argument, other scholars recognize Nora's essay as itself a sort of landmark in the project of writing history.¹⁵ Building on Nora, we may seek a history of the longing for "pieces of history," to reaffirm how history and memory are entangled, and consider the ongoing meaning made from Berlin Wall displays enacted through the structure's afterlife.

I follow scholars of Cold War cultural memory to think of the messiness of historical periodization and modes of display referring to the diffuse global Cold War conflict – against a desire to promote, profit from, or pilfer historical sites of memory for political expediency without reflexivity or a will for democratic collective action. The Berlin Wall is a key site and symbol for such critique. W.J.T. Mitchell, for example, writes,

The fate of the Berlin Wall is a perfect illustration of this process of disfiguration as a transformation of a public monument into a host of private fetishes. While the Wall stood it served as a work of public art, both in its official status and its unofficial function as a blank slate for the expression of public resistance. As it torn to pieces, its fragments are carried away to serve as trophies in private collections. As German reunification proceeds, these fragments may come to signify a nostalgia for the monument that expressed and enforced its division.¹⁶

Such a formulation opens up historical understandings to bridge the past to the present in dynamic ways, to challenge static invocations that treat history as either a teleological narrative or inevitable feedback loop – rather than as unstable, unresolved, and strange. Jon Wiener's recent *How We Forgot the Cold War* updates Mitchell's postulate by visiting American Cold War sites of memory, including exhibited pieces of the Berlin Wall. He remarks on the buildup of cultural capital surrounding these remnants in "displays [that] present a stunningly wide range of interpretations: one treats its graffiti as art; another treats the whole thing as a joke."¹⁷ Wiener

powerfully frames the study of the Cold War around ideological battles over “official Cold War memory” – including the coexistence of discourses of American victory despite the absence of a prominent victory monument. But his study begs the question, are these pieces of the wall scattered victory monuments or are they functioning in another manner? Perhaps the fragmentation of the Berlin Wall pieces signal toward the shadowy agency of the Cold War itself and its memory, magnified through its memorial recall, and emblemize the nebulous syntax of subjectless, popular phrases such as “fall of the wall” or “end of history.” I contend the wall pieces are ambivalent monuments to the Cold War, pulled in multiple directions, including the desire to stage public discourses about victory with a refusal to interrogate long-term ramifications and global contexts of the conflict.

III. Historical Currents of America’s Berlin

Before pieces of the Berlin Wall were scattered across the world, there was already a deep history and tradition of representing the wall in American culture. As covered in the rest of this dissertation, the American public’s fascination with the city’s Walled border was connected to the city’s defense and to the spectacle of the wall itself. During the Cold War, Berlin was a significant geopolitical site and symbol of American culture. This connection was fostered by a Berlin-fueled imaginary of both freedom and repression informed by World War II and the Berlin Airlift, and magnified by the construction of the Berlin Wall. The divided city of Berlin was a major focal point of Cold War political confrontation, military occupation, and cultural connection. Cultural productions provided many Americans images of the border and fueled a desire to *see* it, to be witnesses to the wall. From 1961–1989, Americans were offered a range of other sources for bringing them closer to the wall either through on-site reporting or fictional treatment in

American cultural productions. Enriching this history, members of the Civil Rights and various social movements would also repeatedly invoke the Berlin boundary as a metaphor for racial barriers across America, drawing comparisons to emphasize the wall's uncanny presence in the architecture and social networks of U.S. segregation.

In the coming decades, hundreds of American cultural productions included references to the Berlin Wall. The archive of wall works includes Academy Award and Tony Award winning productions, bestselling novels, television and print commercials, influential art works, Top 40 music, prime-time television episodes, and now well-trafficked tourist sites; it also includes work in avant garde, experimental, esoteric, activist and remixed forms. In this broad range appropriations of the wall's cultural history, which continues over two decades after the dismantling of the wall, Americans attempt to make sense of German history (especially the long shadow of Fascism), but also shed light on matters of social and spatial division in America, especially around race, gender, class, and sexuality. The reflective potential of all such work, whether fictive or fact-based, or a bit of both, had been in its ability to link Berlin's boundaries of freedom and repression with those of America. From 1961 onward, there emerged a widespread cultural practice in which the Berlin Wall is imagined as a symbol of division and displacement in the U.S., a tangible border that was incorporated to tell stories about the seams in society, and a mirror in which Americans saw their own freedoms and repressions reflected.

In the post-1989 epoch, the marketplace for Wall materials opened up nearly simultaneously with the border itself. Marc James Leger points out two distinct periods of export – the first before formal German reunification in 1990 in which the East German-sanctioned company Limex auctioned off pieces of the wall in Madrid and Monte Carlo in 1990, in which pieces including graffiti by notable artists were valued with higher prices; and the latter after



Figure 6.7: Screenshot from eBay auction for “A Piece of the Berlin Wall-Authentic-Own a Piece of History,” 2012 (eBay)

reunification in which the German state offered pieces as gifts and offerings, and private sellers hawked them outside of the country.¹⁸ There were a number of ways Americans could purchase pieces of the wall outside of Germany – department stores with small pieces in holiday gift packages, a 1993 auction in Fort Lee, New Jersey for pieces, and mail order catalogs. Now, from the comfort of your own home, you can visit eBay to purchase pieces, verified again by self-generated authenticity certificates (Figure 6.7). The marketplace of the wall also includes over a dozen consumer products and clothing items that depict the wall in material objects – from Nike Pegasus Berlin sneakers to Peace Tea’s Berlin-themed edition cans (Figures 6.8–9), as well as the products sold through commercial advertisements representing the wall. The full footprint of these varied small Wall fragments is nearly impossible to fully trace – and some have joked that we could rebuild several walls if we gather all sold pieces back together. Scholars and members of the press have mapped the global reach of many larger pieces. German scholar Leo Schmidt has offered text and web-based forms of mapping of these pieces and the particular contexts through which they move.¹⁹ Large pieces are often displayed in public spaces, which make them easier to



Figures 6.8–9: Advertisements for Nike Pegasus Berlin and Peace Tea (Nike/Peace Tea)

find, and internet wiki listings offer glimpses as well – though several pieces have been moved or are obscurely placed *in-situ* (This does not even count the scores of Americans with home displays of the wall pieces.) They become portals to history but also become their own complicated sites of memory.

In the nation’s capital, Washington DC., there at least 6 pieces of the Berlin Wall situated within walking distance of the monumental core of the nation. In each case, there are several if not dueling aims of each display. Steps from the chambers of the U.S. Congress, pieces of the wall are positioned at the sacred heart of American government, in the Capitol Rotunda. In June 2009, former President Ronald Reagan was remembered with the installation of a 7-foot tall, 500-pound bronze statue. In addition to this memorial cast in Bronze, sculptor Chas Fagan ringed the cornice of Reagan’s statue with concrete fragments of the former Berlin Wall. When dedicated, house speaker John Boehner held up different pieces of the Berlin Wall as well (Figures 6.10–11). The sculptor had previously used pieces of the wall in at least one other monument to the late Reagan, an aircraft carrier being dedicated in his name. There are pieces of the wall in other structures devoted to Reagan's memory, including the trade building named



Figures 6.10–11: Screenshots from Reagan Statue Dedication (CNN Video)

after him in Washington, D.C., his Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, his alma mater Eureka College, and a replica piece in his hometown of Dixon, Illinois, with fabricated graffiti. These monumental structures conjure Reagan’s Cold Warrior revivalist policies and his “Tear Down this Wall” speech in 1987. In the case of the capitol, there is no historical plaque or explanation, just a self-evident gesture of historicity. The piece in the nearby Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center’s lobby, located next to the metal detectors, does have a plaque citing the speech and lists the sponsor for the segment, German automaker Daimler-Benz.

To be sure Reagan is a central figure embedded in the memory but not the only galvanizing force of remembrance of the wall. Consider the other pieces of the wall in Washington, D.C. or close by – the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies displays a piece in a garden off their Massachusetts Avenue pedestrian entrance. The Smithsonian Institution owns several small brick-size pieces that have been used in displays and archives in their various institutions. Less than a quarter mile away, the for-profit museum, the Newseum, obtained nearly a dozen former segments, along with a guard tower, and other Cold War artifacts, in an atrium display with a sign that invites viewers to touch “a piece of history.”

These artifacts comprise the opening exhibit to their museum. Another for-profit institution, the International Spy Museum, a few blocks to the north, includes a small palm-sized piece of the wall, but it is set against a large backdrop of a fabricated wall painted with ersatz graffiti.²⁰ The interplay between authentication and fabrication should be considered for all wall displays – not just as a means to test their veracity but to consider what additional materials and stories are being told through their display. The scrawled Graffiti is considered the natural patina of the pieces, without consideration for what it signifies, when it was applied, or whose messaging appears. Like an authentication certificate stamped with solely one's own stamp, many viewers are not encouraged to ask what a piece of history is, but to accept its apparent and emphatic status. In many of these examples from just D.C., we see a suggestive broader trend: sponsors of Berlin Wall displays blur memorial, historical instruction, and infotainment aims. The potential for reflection lies in the ability to link the past of the Berlin Wall with its present, and to consider all of the historical layers, including that of its current monumental display.

New York City has several pieces of the wall in scattered sites, including three accessible to a nonpaying public: one is across the street from the United Nations; another is at Lower Manhattan's Battery Park, situated around 100 yards from Ground Zero (Figure 6.1). The placement, at the edge of Liberty Street before Kowsky Plaza, places the Berlin Wall piece near a series of 9/11 memorials – including one for NYPD and another dedicated to a police K-9 who lost its life during the aftermath of the attacks. The city of Berlin donated this piece to New York in 2004, presumably as an act of identification with New York's traumas from 9/11. The piece features artwork by famous painter Thierry Noir, who actually painted this particular segment in 1998 as an act of protest against the city moving or destroying remaining pieces of the wall. As an historical object in a memorial landscape that also is placed to be appreciated as public art

and a feature of a redeveloped Battery Park waterfront, the mixed uses of the Berlin Wall and its charged placement affirms the idea that memory, art, and commercial development intersect in projects of placemaking.



Figure 6.12: “Street Art on Berlin Wall in New York City 3,” New York City (Global Graphica.com)

A different piece is placed in a privately owned public park at 52nd Street and Madison Avenue (Figure

6.12) in New York City. This latter parcel of space is used by office-workers or tourists for lunch or coffee breaks, and is generally kept open to the public. Jerold S. Kayden noted of this privately-owned public space (POPS) in the early 90s, “Five large reinforced concrete slabs taken from the demolished Berlin Wall, literally pieces of history, have been planted upright near the western edge of the space ... and[fall] squarely within a venerable public art tradition of jolting viewers out of their routine ways of thinking.” After the public clashes at Zucotti Park, a different privately owned public park in New York that served as epicenter for the Occupy movement in 2011 and 2012, the city’s municipal art society with Kayden’s leadership began working on a project and a beta website for a more transparent listing of the histories and rules of each of the city’s over 500 parcels of privately owned public spaces. The website gives glimpses into the spatial dynamics of this Berlin Wall-enhanced POPS, also covered in Kayden’s study, and hints toward why knowledge of these spaces requires further critical oversight:

Does this art work well at this public space, however? As installed, the concrete slabs essentially take it over. The Berlin Wall now, ironically, separates the urban

plaza from its most salient, valuable amenity, a four-paneled water wall and reflecting pool lining the western edge. The naturalistic ambience of nine loosely arrayed trees and cobblestone paving, reminiscent of nearby, tranquil Paley Park, seems at odds with the in-your-face history lesson.²¹

Kayden reminds that pieces of the wall have been used for public art and placemaking purposes since the end of the Cold War, and relate to other adopted, myriad forms of public art to do the same. By displaying pieces of the wall in this way at this site, however, not only does its architect demarcate the space as a spectacle, but also as one where access to history should be just an arm's length away. Kayden's notion of the estrangement that goes along with "in-your-face history" reminds not only that displayed pieces of the Berlin Wall offer lessons that are far from transparent, and occur in the wake of debates about who gets to use public space and how cities envision appropriate levels of dissent in their streets.²²

Officials employing financially-beneficial cultural tourism practices legitimize particular



Figure 6.13: Berlin Wall Fragment, Seattle Center, 2010 (author)

practices of historical memory and physical traces for the expedient purpose of placemaking across many city spaces. In doing so, they sample local and global forms of knowledge and experience. Pieces of the wall have been activated to create allure and identity for such spaces that mark the intersections between commerce, entertainment, and education, playing with the notion of the architectural ruin achieves its status as a landmark despite geopolitical displacement. At the Seattle Center (Figure 6.13), located beneath the Space Needle, a piece of the Berlin Wall is placed in the

food court, tucked between a fudge shop and a teriyaki stand. Chicago's public transit Western Avenue stop has a piece curated by the former McCormick Freedom Museum. (In the downtown of Chicago, the Tribune building's exterior features famous stones from history, including a small fragment of the wall protruding from the building's facade). Segments at museums or cultural venues such as New York City's Ripley's Believe it Or Not, Raleigh's Marbles Kids Museum, Orlando's Hard Rock Cafe, or Las Vegas's Main Street Casino, available to paying or potential consumer publics, problematize the dual aims of many of these sites. The "responsibilities of representation" for loosely public spaces that claim historical and monetizing touristic aims remain unclear.²³ History is not reducible to pieces, but its marketing, whether as souvenirs or a curated experience, nonetheless remains an alluring product.

When the context for placemaking signifies on local geography, the space for critical history may be layered or brought in critical relation to the Berlin Wall. Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad Freedom Center dedicated a piece of the former border in a street-level plaza. Not only does the museum mark a history that has been largely left out of national monumental culture, it is also placed at a site of deeper division. In an announcement about the dedication of the Berlin Wall, Mayor Mark Mallory stated, "The Freedom Center sits on the banks of the Ohio River, another barrier to freedom that eventually fell. ... It is natural that this institution that celebrates freedom should serve as the home for another symbol of the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice."²⁴ Though not "natural" per se, the connection to Berlin draws from a deep racial discourse comparing U.S. sites of racial subjugation and segregation to the Berlin Wall. The Freedom Center serves as a portal to an understudied aspect of American history in which the physical traces of the Berlin Wall are used to hint at the elusiveness of racial memory in the United States, and thus freedom and repression can be jointly imagined. The

museum, in addition to serving a public educational function, remains part of a waterfront redevelopment effort here, and as such, projects of historical memory and cultural tourism again intersect, as they do in cities across the United States.

Further complicating this use of actual pieces of the Berlin Wall, is the way in which there has been a recent surge in performed reenactments of the “fall of the wall” across the country. With the support of the German Information



Figures 6.14–15: Germany at GMU, “Freedom Without Walls” at George Mason University, 9 November 2009(Freedom Without Walls); and Screenshot from *Call of Duty: Black Ops* -Berlin Wall Map Pack, 2010 (Treyarch)

Center, thirty universities received funds to hold programming and art contests on the November 9, 2009 anniversary (Figure 6.14). This trend continues in schools and cities nationally, annually, especially on the anniversaries of the wall’s initial construction (August 13) and the date of its breaching (November 9). In such reenactments, fabricated materials are often used to “reconstruct” the Berlin Wall. Organizers often invite passersby to place sanctioned graffiti-style markings or simulate border interactions, and then invite them to help tear down the pieces of the wall by hand or with a hammer-like tool. The restorative impulse to rebuild the Berlin Wall as an historical display goes along with the embodied and performed fantasy of destroying it

oncemore. Afterward, the fabricated materials may be thought of as having auratic historical qualities and become souvenirs to retain in careful regard after the performance of the fall.²⁵

The virtual realm becomes another site of simulated interaction with material components of the wall in the context of American culture. Through video games, we see play and embodiment being used to experience history by proxy but centered on the materiality of the Berlin Wall. In the early 1990s, this included several arcade games focused on tearing down the border. More recently, in 2007, gamemakers Sierra offered a deluxe version of their game *World Conflict*, with a subject matter pertaining to an imagined Cold War that did not “end on November 9, 1989,” through a packaging that boasted “the chance to grab a piece of history - an authentic piece of the Berlin Wall, a monument that once divided the Cold War superpowers right through the heart of Europe.”²⁶ The co-existence of virtual and archeological memory produce a strange tautology – the game focuses on the reactivation of the Cold War, while its packaging relies on a fetish of pieces of the wall, a relic of its past. In another video game, Activision’s wildly popular *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, gamemakers released a bonus “map pack” in 2011 that included a level dedicated to the Berlin Wall (Figure 6.15). As a first-person shooter game that places its players in highly aestheticized and historically based settings, the Berlin Wall map invites historical intrigue and trounces the actual conditions of the peaceful revolution in irresponsible disarray. Carefully-rendered scenes of Checkpoint Charlie can be blown to bits by players. In a video advertisement for the game, its company created a mock music video of *Wende*-anthem “Winds of Change” by German band The Scorpions, transforming it into a violent splaying of the idea of peaceful cooperation at the wall. The video mocks the idea of sociality and solidarity. As Penny Von Eschen has pointed out, history’s details are seriously considered in one sense in this scene and yet its designers take immense liberties with the urban

layout and armageddon-level violence.²⁷ In these simultaneously historicized and fictionalized visions of the past, there remains no legitimate vision of the future beyond violent reproach. And the return to Berlin is marked by dangerous forms of erasure and aggressive nostalgia.

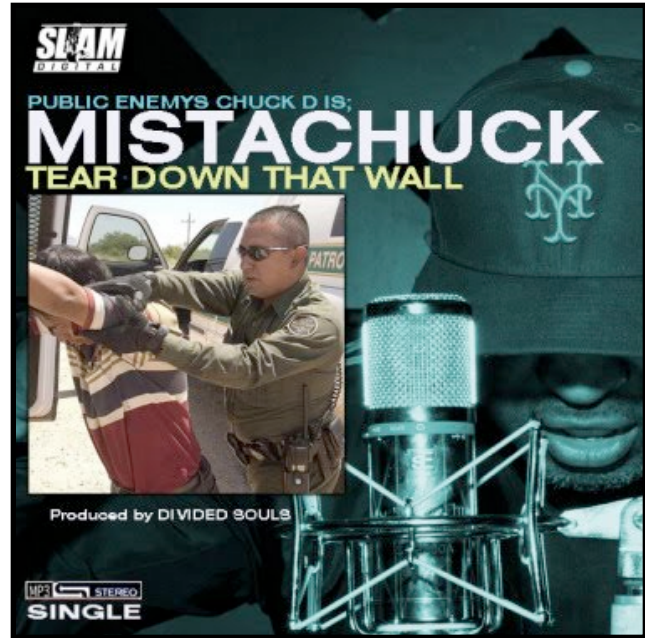
Whether actual, performed, or virtual, there remains a danger to reduce the wall to a site of freedom fantasy or unnecessary violence connected to its status as Cold War booty of the “triumph” of capitalism. Any desire to fill the space of the former border with fantasies fueling conflict and violence misremember the peaceful revolution by citizens of the Eastern Bloc that brought about the dismantling of the wall. Now, over twenty years after the Wall was first dismantled, the desire to be present with the wall strongly continues. We may think of these displays or performative gestures not as encounters with history directly but as ways to ponder public expression, imagination, and possibility through the longing for historical engagement. Figuring out how to make pieces of history dynamic and open-ended remains a difficult task when pieces of history are to be told and sold.

IV. Wall Projects

Whether as a material relic or referent set of ideas, the Berlin Wall remains a compelling product. Beyond its economic value for sale or profit, the wall also exists as fodder for historical remixes and critical projects. Artists and writers who employ fragments or perspectives on history may fashion new works that both capitalize and critically engage on the wall’s ruined afterlife. Through such works we are reminded of the power of the remix. Such expressions create venues to consider both historical process and new sites of conflict. Lawrence Lessig writes of the remix as “a critical expression of creative freedom.”²⁸ Conceptually or with actual/imagined use of remnants, the historical remix allows its practitioners to employ what Salamishah Tillet refers to

as a “critical patriotism” – a way to engage democracy’s sites of freedom and repression that “neither encourages idolatry to the nation’s past nor blind loyalty to the state” but through “dissidence and dissent ... [allows an artist or writer to] become the model citizen, one who does not dismantle but re-engages the meta-discourse of American democracy.”²⁹ Displacement and disjuncture does not approach a “true” history of the Berlin Wall but seeks to engage its broad historical appeal for critically patriotic projects.

For example, in 2010, when Arizona lawmakers passed SB2010, enabling law enforcement officials with broad powers to stop anyone suspected of being a nonlegal resident and demand their papers, rapper



Figures 6.16–17: Cover for Chuck D, “Tear Down This Wall,” 2010, and “By The Time I Get to Arizona,” 2011 (Slamjamz/The Art of Chuck D)

Chuck D released a sonic protest and a visual art piece that engaged this pernicious piece of legislation. As a member of stalwart hip hop group Public Enemy, Chuck D had previously released a protest song a generation earlier, 1991’s “By the Time I Get to Arizona,” in objection to the state’s noncompliance with honoring the federal Martin Luther King commemorative holiday. His 2010 follow up, “Tear Down That Wall” sampled a few historical sounds: his own



Figures 6.18–19: David Kohl, “Mr Gorbachev tear down this Wall \$T” (AP Photo); Screenshot from online meme (<http://neosoalomon.blogspot.com>)

“Arizona” track, and Ronald Reagan's 1987 Brandenburg Gate speech (Figure 6.16). The remix effort included a rearrangement of Reagan's own words into a collaged sonic challenge of the law: Reagan was remixed to declare, drawing

from and scrambling his own word-bank, “But in the West today, we see a free world that has achieved a level of failure, unprecedented in all human history.”³⁰ Months later, Chuck D accompanied this sonic work with a visual art rendering, what he deemed a “visual mashup” (Figure 6.17), borrowing language and conventions from remix culture. He contends, “To execute much of the work, a variety of American masterpieces were sampled, reconfigured and intertwined with contemporary images from Guantanamo, Mexico, and Arizona in a stealth

manner.”³¹ Among the images, a ruined segment of the Berlin Wall, with revealed inner-support steel bars, stands next to a fence meant to symbolize the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the greater regime of border control. Like the skin color litmus test enacted in the scene of the painting, the Berlin Wall functions to measure U.S. policy against history's lessons learned from the regime of the wall. Chuck D's work predated the Occupy Wall Street's signification on the same speech, using “Tear Down This Wall” again to decry exercises of power, in their case economic powers

symbolized at Wall Street. Through numerous public signs and online memes (Figures 6.18–19), the archive of the Berlin Wall was repurposed for grassroots action to decry economic division. Whether placed as public memorial or as a story circulating in public imagination, American Berlin Wall “pieces of history” continue to forge the grounds and sources for critical discourse about public space and democracy.

Other artists draw our attention to the fetishized trade in Berlin Wall fragments with projects that reflexively deal with the hyper-historicity of such pieces. Stephanie Syjuco, who is of Filipino descent and is based in San Francisco, titled her 2008 exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and on-going project, “The Berlin Wall.” Syjuco displayed found concrete “proxy” Berlin Wall chunks on raised clear stands. The result was meant to appear as though they were floating. Underneath, she included engraved brass plaques to note the exact location and year she found the material and titled each piece. She found her pieces in “backyards, urban street corners, suburbs, and wilderness areas” in the U.S. and all over the world, but named each “Berlin Wall.” Through disjuncture and tempting cognitive dissonance, Syjuco’s claims her “fictional collection ... attempts to manifest the hopes and promises that the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall temporarily ushered in.”³² Viewers must consider the uncanny concrete materiality and place of placeless galleried esteem she bestows on her fabricated historical remains, which meditate on the process of projection of significance that characterize displaced Wall ruins.

Another visual artist, Farrah Karapetian plays with the notion of the historical *tchotchke* in a series of works titled “Souvenir.” Here, she mines and seeks to expand the archives of the Berlin Wall. Karapetian traced actual remnants of the wall on acetate and plexiglass to make chromogenic prints of the pieces. She imbued her prints with colors that matched hues found on

the graffitied concrete pieces, and hand-cuts the prints to provoke a feeling of dimensionality to her prints. Whether these prints function as indexical etchings of an historical surface or simply fabricated objects, Karapetian puts forth an ambivalent form of monumentality to recall the evolving and subjunctive legacy of the Berlin Wall.

To close, I want to consider a prominent and complex site of memory involving pieces of the Berlin Wall in which historical preservation and ongoing reflection are co-functionary



Figure 6.20: Berlin Wall Project, Los Angeles, 2012 (author)

principles: the Los-Angeles based Wende Museum's multifaceted Wall Project (Figure 6.20). Through multiple artistic and historic projects (including the archival home for Karapetian's Wall souvenirs), the Wende Museum explores Cold War memory through the German term *Wende*, referring to the historical period of reunification and meaning the turn of history, rather than end or triumph. As such, the museum emphasizes contingency over mere recall. The Wall Project offers the critical potential of leveraging the perceived history of the wall and thus invites their publics to do the same – by presenting imaginative displays and discourses about historical memory.

Such an approach allows for experience of Berlin Wall pieces in ways that are not fixed, but invites multiple forms of historical reflection and recontextualization. The *Wende* was founded by Justinian Jampol, who while working on his dissertation about iconography of the German Democratic Republic found that his archive was elusive – disappearing and being discarded in the years following the reunification of Germany. The belief that the material culture of the GDR was somehow not worth saving, and was merely historical refuse is telling. Jampol contends, “This post-*Wende* process has had consequences for historical material ... [some of which] has been destroyed or has simply disappeared.”³³ In the museum’s historical overview on its website, its curators go a step further:

During the early 1990s, these materials that document an entire cultural history of what life was like in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, were rapidly disappearing. Historical landmarks were being torn down, statues vandalized, consumer products discarded, film and photographs left to deteriorate and archives actively destroyed.³⁴

Rather than being undercut by their geopolitical distance to the Eastern Bloc, they are using their U.S. location to calibrate critical approaches and build out collections of objects that were in danger of being destroyed if the institution was in Europe. But their holdings and programming remind Americans and international audiences of the global nature of Cold War conflict and memory, in which Los Angeles remains one important site among many others for reflection. Jampol adds, “One of the most rewarding parts about this job is thinking about new ways to engage our audiences by bringing the collections out into the open. This is achieved through projects in the urban landscape.”³⁵

The Museum and archive opened in 2004 and is currently located in a gymnasium-sized warehouse in Culver City, outside of the city center, with plans to relocate to a permanent space in a nearby former National Guard Armory. They have a piece of Thierry Noir-painted Berlin

Wall segment outside of their office and a cache of broken up Wall chunks in plastic containers normally shelved in their warehouse. They regularly bring their collections out in public all over the Los Angeles area and present them in new arrangements. In one major undertaking, the Wende Museum worked with city officials to curate and create a public display of pieces of the Berlin Wall along Wilshire Boulevard. Along one of L.A.'s busiest thoroughfares, the main component of the Wall Project is located between Ogden and Spaulding Avenues, across from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in a privately controlled public grassy patch. Through a curated repainting of the wall pieces on both sides, and much creative programming, they have created a rare public space in Los Angeles that invites numerous audiences and perspectives – as noted, to not treat the pieces of the wall as static monuments or memorials but as sites of reflection and action. Urban theorists such as Mike Davis have noted the ways in which architecture of public space in L.A. leaves little room for public, face-to-face gathering in a culture centered on the automobile. But the multipronged Wall project has created a rare hub of pedestrian collectivity and democratic expression. Here, mourners of Reagan and Kennedy leave flowers on their respective birthdays, but also Chicano-American and Chinese-American groups hold protests for progressive immigration reform. Jampol regularly finds hand-written notes, many written in Chinese, slotted into the gaps between the segments, like those left at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The site surrounding the exhibit has also become a hub for the local food truck movement, where one can actually get a *Currywurst*, but also can choose from dozens of other culinary options, and enjoy a rare picnic with strangers in the middle of L.A. In a polarized political culture and often segmented city environment, these pieces of the former Berlin Wall have become the backdrop for new connections and critical expressions in urban space.



Figure 6.21: “Collected Fragments” Exhibition, 2010 (Wende Museum)

The Wende Museum and archive pushes those who encounter their pieces to think about the historicity of their objects but also demands authentication be itself unpacked – a bold call relevant to other sites and projects of American history and culture. On the 20th anniversary of *Mauerfall*, they installed the Wall Project. At the same time they created another temporary art installation that positioned self-reflexive replica pieces of the wall cutting across Wilshire Boulevard with art by the likes of prominent artists Shepard Fairey. They pivoted off from the historic Berlin Wall as a reference point to think about other walls – namely the one along the U.S.-Mexico border and in Israel/Palestine – and contemporary cultures of surveillance in the West. They also used an adjacent gallery on Wilshire for a show titled, “Collected Fragments,” to draw focus to their larger collection of discarded Eastern Bloc materials, as well as on how they received, preserve, and display such objects (Figure 6.21). For this show, they defied the usual

upright choreography of Wall pieces. They instead took the container in which they hold the pieces in their warehouse and made a circled pattern on the floor. Here they conjure the makeshift market display in Berlin of the *Wende* years that grounded the wall to purchasable chunks. Made to look both sacralized and cast aside, such a display is but one example of this interconnected attempt to find critical potential from history.

Since the installation, the pieces of the Berlin Wall on Wilshire, like those from around the U.S. have taken on their own emergent and open-ended histories. The American displays of the Berlin Wall pieces bring together historical ideas with gathered artifacts and new productions or projections in a way to fuel imaginative visions of geopolitics. The marketplace for the Berlin Wall fragments and stories continues to morph, and the reflective potential of this history remains to be determined. The Berlin Wall exists in concrete and once-more becomes a cultural meeting place, a bridge, a mirror, a metaphor, a place to envision division in American cities, to critically reflect and long to overcome.

“Let them come to Berlin.”

Echoes of a border culture.

¹ Aleksandar Hemon, *Lazarus Project* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008) 21–22.

² For more on Cold War triumphalism, see Jon Wiener, *How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America*. Berkeley (University of California Press, 2012); and Penny Von Eschen “*God, I Miss the Cold War*” (Forthcoming).

³ “Berlin Wall for Sale – Buy Pieces of the Berlin Wall,” <<http://www.berlin-wall.net>>

⁴ For a well-documented and partial map, see “Memorial Landscape Berlin Wall,” <berlin-wall-map.com>. The litany of Berlin Wall sites of memory mentioned does not even account for the many more instances of smaller, palm sized fragments reserved for private ownership and display

⁵ “Berlin Wall Art Collection,” Outdoor Arts Foundation <<http://www.outdoorartsfoundation.org/berlinwallhome.html>> 31 March 2013.

⁶ A point of comparison has emerged in the years since the September 11, 2001 attacks. Pieces of the former Twin Towers’ steel frames have been installed in public spaces in similar fashion.

⁷ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002) 65–66.

⁸ See Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁹ Oliver Miller, Daniel Schwaag, Ian Warner, Arno Brandlhuber, and Silvan Linden. *Slab: The New Death Strip* (Nürnberg: AdBK, 2011).

¹⁰ For more on authentication see Sarah Everts, “Authenticating Pieces of the Wall” on *Artful Science* <<http://cenblog.org/artful-science/2012/08/13/authenticating-pieces-of-the-berlin-wall/>>; and “Chipping away at Berlin Wall souvenir myths” on *The Local* <<http://www.thelocal.de/society/20091019-22677.html>>.

Digital projects have also reimagined the wall in Berlin. This includes “Virtuelle Mauer/ ReConstructing the Wall” <<http://www.virtuelle-mauer-berlin.de/>>; and the Berlin-wall-map portal.

¹¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003) 7.

¹² Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” in *Representations* (Spring, 1989), 7–24.

¹³ Liliane Weissberg, “Introduction” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, Dan Ben-Amos and Weissberg (Eds.) (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999) 16–18.

¹⁴ Jay Cook, Lawrence Glickman, Michael O’Malley (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Scholars of history and memory have drawn on and further extended Nora's germinal formulation. Despite being quoted widely and prompting more attention to the built and preserved sites of memory, several scholars have critically engaged Nora on the issue of parsing memory and history. Kirk Savage contends, "Unlike Pierre Nora, I do not believe in any absolute distinction between history and memory. Still, the terms are not the same. I take the production of history to be one practice among many that constitute collective memory." Diana Taylor addresses Nora's formulation in *The Archive and the Repertoire* in an attempt to rejoin archival and embodied memory. "A 'trace,' 'mediation,' and 'distance,' he argues, has separated the act from the meaning, moving us from the realm of true memory to that of history. This paradigm polarizes history and memory as opposite poles of a binary." Similarly, Marita Sturken writes, "History has often been seen as standing in opposition to memory...However, Nora's concept of memory is highly nostalgic. I would posit cultural memory and history as *entangled* rather than oppositional." Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997) 215n; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 2; and Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 5.

¹⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 384.

¹⁷ Wiener, 22.

¹⁸ Marc J. Leger, *A Fragment of the Berlin Wall in the Centre De Commerce Mondial De Montréal: Notes Toward a Theory of the Public Artefact at the "End of History"* (Thesis M.A.-Dept. of Art History, Concordia University, 1997).

¹⁹ See Berlin-Wall-Map project; and Axel Klausmeier and Leo Schmidt, *Wall Remnants - Wall Traces: The Comprehensive Guide to the Berlin Wall* (Berlin: Westkreuz-Verlag, 2004).

²⁰ The relative walkability between these pieces in relation to the National Mall – despite the barriers of entrance behind security gates and paywalls – was the subject of an interactive installation piece I designed along with artist James Huckenpahler for the "Parks and Passages: Investigating Modern Ruins in Washington D.C. and Berlin" exhibition at the Goethe Institute in Washington D.C. (September–November 2012). We created a "Wall on the Mall" map, led a walking tour with representatives from the City of Berlin and the Goethe Institute, and handed out small paper versions of the large map for viewers to take with them from the exhibition to be able to attempt walking the route.

²¹ Jerold S. Kayden, The New York City Department of City Planning, and The Municipal Art Society of New York, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* (New York: Wiley, 2000) – and <<http://apops.mas.org/pops/525/>>.

²² The Occupy movement is one continued example of how urban space can be reanimated through demarcation, embodiment, and calls for collectivity.

²³ Paul M. Farber, "Review: National Museum of Crime & Punishment" in *Museums and Social Issues* (6.1, 2011) 91–98.

- ²⁴ Paul Bernish, “Freedom Center Site for Berlin Wall,” <<http://freedomcenter.org/freedom-forum/index.php/2009/09/freedom-center-site-berlin-wall-monument/>>.
- ²⁵ For more on reenactment see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- ²⁶ Tom Bramwell, “Free Lump of Berlin Wall with World in Conflict,” on *Eurogamer.net* <<http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/free-lump-of-berlin-wall-with-world-in-conflict>>. See also Michelle Martin, “Berlin Wall shooting video game angers victims’ relatives,” on Reuters <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/30/us-germany-wall-game-idUSTRE68T1PS20100930>>.
- ²⁷ Von Eschen, “Gaming the Cold War: *The Call of Duty* Video Franchise and the Crisis of Historical Knowledge” (Paper), Presented at American Studies Association Conference, 2011.
- ²⁸ Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008). The concept of the historical remix is important to my project, and I intend to expand this in forthcoming scholarship. To do so, I would like to work in ideas of postmodern/hip hop creativity, and take into account Salamishah Tillet’s notion of “democratic aesthetic” and Amy Carroll’s concept of “remex.”
- ²⁹ Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) 11.
- ³⁰ Chuck D, “Tear Down This Wall” (Slamjamz, 2010.)
- ³¹ Mister Pizzo, “Chuck D’s ‘By The Time I Get To Arizona’ Art Unveiled on *Hiphopsite.com* <<http://www.hiphopsite.com/2011/03/04/chuck-ds-by-the-time-i-got-to-arizona-art-unveiled/>>.
- ³² Stephanie Syjuco, “The Berlin Wall” <http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_theberlinwall.html>.
- ³³ Justinian Jampol, “GDR on the Pacific: (Re)presenting East Germany in Los Angeles” in *German Monitor* [74 (2011)] 251–265.
- ³⁴ Wende Museum <<http://www.wendemuseum.org/>>/
- ³⁵ Steven Heller, “Cold War Relics: The Wende Museum Saves Communist Design” on *Atlantic.com* <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/cold-war-relics-the-wende-museum-saves-communist-design/243464/>> (11 August 2011).

Coda A Wall and a Bridge



Figure 7.1: The Civil Rights Freedom Wall, Selma, 2012 (author)

“There was something stirring across the country because of what happened in Selma, Alabama, because some folks are willing to march across a bridge. . . . Don’t tell me I’m not coming home to Selma, Alabama. I’m here because somebody marched.”
—Barack Obama

In Selma, Alabama, on the first in Sunday in March, crowds gather annually for a new commemorative tradition known as the Bridge Crossing Jubilee. Officially organized since 1993, the event paces the same paths of the voting rights protests of 1965. They do so to mark the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, to set out from the Brown Chapel and walk across the Edmund

Pettus Bridge, to keep vital an ongoing public engagement with practices of democracy and civil rights. On March 5, 2012, my day in Selma began on the street outside of the Brown Chapel, on the thoroughway now known as Martin Luther King Street (formerly Sylvan Street) and the scene of the 1965 Selma Berlin Wall barricade and protest. There, I walked on a sidewalk with fellow members of the Faith and Politics Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage toward the historic church to attend a commemorative service. The pilgrimage had brought us from Washington, D.C. to Birmingham and Montgomery before arriving in Selma. Whereas 47 years prior, state troopers had blocked access to the roadways, that morning we had a motorcade police escort to guide our group, comprised of representatives from Congress, members of clergy, journalists, professors, students, and civil rights movement veterans, down Highway 80 en route to the Brown Chapel for Sunday service.

When we arrived, the two front towers of the church, two of the tallest structures in the area stood out as we walked down King Street. Near the entrance, the title of the week's sermon, "Never Quit, Never Give Up" was listed on the announcement board outside the chapel. Amidst the signage outside the church, two historical markers in particular conveyed this chapel as a site of memory connected to broader stories of struggle – a two-column memorial with a bust of Martin Luther King and the inscription I HAD A DREAM, and a reflective rectangular stone monument with its title cast in golden capital letters across the top: THE CIVIL RIGHTS FREEDOM WALL (Figure 7.1). There were no signs or references to Selma's Berlin Wall, just this Freedom Wall. Though the signage did not refer to the 1965 protest conjuring the Selma-Berlin Wall, its placement was uncanny nonetheless. With this memorial wall, the remembrance of previous boundaries of freedom was kept alive on this street through this and other related acts of commemoration. A wall installed on which to reflect, not divide.

Inside the chapel, a litany of civil rights dignitaries and current-day activists shared the pulpit and offered stories that sought to connect past and present-day struggles – speakers including Rep. John Lewis, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. Al Sharpton, and featured speaker, then-E.P.A. Director Lisa Jackson. Martin Luther King III, the slain civil rights leader’s son, joined this impressive group, as did his father’s former aide, Dorothy Cotton, while over a dozen members of the Kennedy family sat in the pews, led by Ethel Kennedy, widow of Robert Kennedy. The service on this anniversary of Bloody Sunday – with the King and Kennedy families co-existing and sharing words in the sanctuary, at a church once considered a shelter for an unlikely conglomerate of protestors needing protection from state troopers and vigilantes – was held in a chapel now guarded by National Park Service rangers and as a registered national landmark.

When the service was finished, we walked outside to join a crowd quickly growing in numbers. Because the crowd was too large to be accommodated in the chapel, many speakers from the pulpit also offered their remarks from the church’s front steps. The focus of their speeches had as much to do with history as with present concerns about civil rights – the recent trend of restrictive Voter ID laws made at the state level that sought to police voting with onerous registration processes, and immigration reform that sought to further criminalize undocumented workers and students. They also spoke out against mass incarceration and the repressive character of a political culture at odds with its own ideals of freedom. Selma was not only a site of memorial reflection, but also of contemporary debate about democracy and the latest rehashing of old battles. Among the groups listening and demonstrating were a large number of Latino citizens who carried signs protesting Alabama’s HB-56 voting and immigration legislation. A man with an orange safety vest and a hat that read SECURITY shouted call and response chants in Spanish and English as the crowd of dignitaries and twenty-first century civil rights

marchers began walking toward the bridge. Rather than protesting against the gathering, such groups sought to use the event as a platform, to build on the momentum provided through historic reflection and amplify their messages. As our group walked out to the street, we joined the gathered public. On the street, along with thousands of other people, we marched slowly, shoulder to shoulder, toward the Pettus Bridge, to complete the day's most important ritual of crossing over. In front, Congressman Lewis, the man who was beaten unconscious on this roadway back in 1965, led the group back across the bridge, a rite he has maintained every year except one since the original Bloody Sunday. Members of the SNCC Freedom Singers, the same group who had sung backup on the record "We've Got a Rope That's a Berlin Wall" had mixed into the crowd and began to sing standards from the movement as we talked toward the river.

Blocks from the church, the swelled crowd turned the corner on Broad Street and the bridge entered our collective sights. The vista was astonishing – the sea of people making their way to the river crossing with the steel bridge's towering arches now in sight. We walked up the ramp and up to the highpoint of the bridge, taking time to turn around and take in this view: to look back to the Selma banks of the Alabama River, and then to face the side of the bridge closer to Montgomery, where the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute now sits, near the edge of Highway 80 on the spot where protestors were once tear-gassed and beaten as they had hopes of marching to the State Capitol to be able to register to vote. This bridge, named in honor of Edmund Pettus, a former Confederate General and then later a U.S. Senator, was the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the long Civil Rights movement, and has now become one of America's most sacred sites of commemorative reflection. No longer a barrier but a conduit many times over. Anything is possible. The movement of history, like democracy, can not be scripted without space for creativity, revision, and transformation.

Special Collections

Angela Y. Davis Legal Defense Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library (New York, NY)

Christopher Temple Emmet Papers, Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University (Palo Alto, CA)

The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, German Historical Institute/Vassar College/Heidelberg Center for American Studies (Digital Archive)

Free University Archives (Berlin, Germany)

Leonard Freed Papers (Garrison, NY)

Keith Haring Foundation (New York, NY)

John Edward Heys Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division at the New York Public Library (New York, NY)

Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Library at Yale University (New Haven, CT)

James and Esther Cooper Jackson Papers Tamiment Library at New York University (New York, NY)

Allan Kaprow Papers, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, CA)

Labadie Collection, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI)

Audre Lorde Papers, Spelman College Archives (Atlanta, GA)

Mauer Documentation Center Archives (Berlin, Germany)

Paul and Eslanda Robeson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Library at Howard University (Washington, D.C.)

Lisbet Tellefsen Collection (Oakland, CA)

Wende Museum Archives (Los Angeles, CA)

David Wojnarowicz Papers, Fales Library at New York University (New York, NY)

Interviews

Bettina Aptheker (October 21, 2011)

Leo Branton (January 11, 2012)

Allen Frame (March 23, 2011)

Brigitte Freed (June 15, 2009 and August 1–2, 2009)

Richard Grossman (October 5, 2010)

Dagmar Schultz (December 6, 2010 and August 5, 2011)

Stew and Heidi Rodewald (November 17, 2010)

Bill Van Parys (November 7, 2009)

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