

Rage

In 1993, I traveled to Berlin for the first time. I arrived at night at a little East Berlin hotel. The snow was deep, the streets dark and dreary. We were opening an exhibition at the Galerie Parterre, a group of German and Israeli artists. We stayed in the city for several days, and all I remember is a strong sense of alienation and bone-chilling cold.

A memory: My father couldn't watch German-speaking films. He would become irritated. His entire family perished in the Holocaust. In 1952, he went to study architecture in Vienna, and subsequently returned to Israel. One day he was approached by Arabs from the village of Meisar who asked him to design a mosque for them, and my father – a Jew who immigrated to Israel from Poland and who studied architecture in Vienna – designed a mosque (stylistically influenced by the Bauhaus) in the village of Meisar. Every morning, in the kibbutz dining room, he would eat herring. He never touched hummus.

I am talking about a culture, or about a black hole – a Platonic cave populated only by shadows, spectral cultural images. What is anxiety? When is

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¹ Peter Handke, *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams: A Life Story*, 1974, tr. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974).

anxiety built into the core of your psyche, like an invisible backbone passed down from my grandfather through my already-dead father, who will no longer be angry with me for going to Germany?

Likening the work of art to a vase made of clay, Lacan maintains that all art is a mode of organization around a void. Is it the same void felt by Büchner's Woyzeck, who stamps his foot on the ground, saying: "It is hollow there... can you hear it? It is all hollow down there" – or is it the "horror vacui of consciousness?"¹

In *Notes on the Days of Awe 2*, a work executed underneath the Beitar Jerusalem soccer stadium, I constructed a large wall made out of used tires. These tires are piled up during the night in the streets of Jaffa, by the car repair shops and garages, just like those being set on fire, in the course of the current Intifada, by protesting Palestinian children in the West Bank. The tire grid covered the walls like a bunker, like immense "death walls," like the three-dimensional power of a fence, or the pattern of an Arab keffiyeh – the very same keffiyeh covering the veiled man's face at the Balata refugee camp,

for example; *balata*, the Arab word for the terrazzo tiles laid by Arab workers in Jewish neighborhoods through the country.

I'm writing long sentences, which embark on a cross-cultural journey. This is the "transfer": the lame translation, the confusion, the inevitable discord that characterizes the "Israeli experience." Somehow I try to touch upon it, time and again, to generate a painterly formulation of something that never really comes together in the "actual world," which will never materialize into the etymological Hebrew trinity: *shalem-shalom-hashlama* (whole-peace-reconciliation).

Now I am going back to Berlin. There is a painting I created recently that I would like to bring along with me. It is a painting of fire (inspired by a small drawing in the sketchbook Jackson Pollock brought his psychoanalyst) on a black wooden board; above it, hovering in midair, are the Hebrew initials of the words "With God's Help."

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