

# *The Future of Temple Mount: Imagined Possibilities in Contemporary Palestinian and Israeli Art*

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**Ella Elbaz**  
*Stanford University*

**ABSTRACT:** This essay analyzes two contemporary video artworks—one by the Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour and one by the Israeli artist Yael Bartana—in an attempt to better comprehend contemporary visions of the future in the arts of this region. I focus on the chronotope of Temple Mount, or al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, as a study case that assembles many of the most essential themes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the future of the land is contemplated through the ways in which this indivisible holy site can be shared by the two nations. Through a reading of the two artworks and their commonalities—both suggest dispossession, relocation, and commodification as alternatives to the current conflicted situation—I ask whether these works exit their own cultural and political zeitgeist and therefore open up new possibilities or whether they are, rather, exemplary of our times, in which we find a growing tendency to depict the future as hopeless.

**T**EMPLE MOUNT, or al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, has long been the heart and crossroads of both Israeli and Palestinian concrete and imaginary geographies. The same place where today stand the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque and where the First and Second Jewish Temples (destroyed in the sixth century BCE and first century CE, respectively) once stood has long fired the imagination, elicited multiple representations, and been the focus of much violence and friction. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in contemporary visions of the future of the region,

this spatial knot of religious and political power has featured prominently. The two artworks I will focus on in this essay, Larissa Sansour's *Nation Estate* (2012) and Yael Bartana's *Inferno* (2013), posit alternatives to the contemporary configuration of Temple Mount by entertaining the possibility of *unlikely and improbable* solutions to the question of how to share a place that is intrinsically indivisible. To understand how unexpected these imaginary prophecies are, one has to take into account how incendiary and thus how stable and unshaken the status quo of Temple Mount has been since the beginning of the conflict in the early twentieth century. Since the 1920s international, Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian authorities time and again have affirmed that al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf will not change under any circumstances, and any attempt to do so has led to widespread and violent objections, such as the Second Intifada of 2000 and the riots around enforcing new security measures in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, to imagine the Dome of the Rock or the Jewish Temple anywhere other than on Temple Mount is simply preposterous—and it is precisely this notion of the ludicrous and implausible that I will explore here. I will present not only the proposition that these two artworks go beyond the scope of contemporary possibilities and thus expand and intervene in their political and cultural atmosphere, but also the opposing option that these artworks sit comfortably in their zeitgeist, in which the future is constructed as dystopian. The central question of this essay is what do these artworks *do* when they prophesize dark future scenarios? Can they disrupt the cultural and political tissue of their time and open up novel possibilities for their viewers—and thus change the range of what is considered plausible? Or do they merely reflect the inability to imagine the future as significantly different from the present? In other words, what are the limits of imagination and can these two video artworks break free of the constraining shortsightedness of our days, in which no solution to the conflict seems to be in sight?<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that access to al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf is central in any future resolution of the conflict, yet Larissa Sansour, a Palestinian artist based in London, devises another solution, one that rids the sacred space of this quandary. In her futuristic *Nation Estate* Palestine has become a skyscraper in which each Palestinian city occupies a different floor, easily accessed by an

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<sup>1</sup> Temple Mount has long been one of the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hillel Cohen writes about the official claims regarding the unchanging status of Temple Mount in the 1920s in *Tarpat: Shnat ha-efes basikhsukh ha-yehudi aravi* [Tarpat: Year zero in the Jewish-Arab conflict] (1929; Jerusalem: Keter, 2013). Gilad Sher quotes Israeli prime ministers, delegates, and negotiators stating that Temple Mount is the key issue according to which peace negotiations succeed or fail in *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2001), 197–209. Throughout the Israeli media in 2000 we can find Ariel Sharon's ascension to Temple Mount named as the trigger for the Second Intifada; more recently in 2017 the attempt to install metal detectors at the entrance of Ḥaram al-Sharīf has led to a new cycle of violence; to a lesser extent so did the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem, which was followed by reassurances given by the US ambassador that the United States supports the status quo of Temple Mount. More generally, Ron E. Hassner claims that *any* sacred place is by definition a source of violence between different religious groups and is inherently indivisible, in *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 21, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have declared that peace negotiations are at a dead end: see, e.g., Jamil Hilal, *Where Now for Palestine? The Demise of the Two-State Solution* (London: Zed, 2007); Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis: The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence* (London: Pluto Press, 1995); Cherine Hussein, "Countering an Illusion of Our Epoch: The Re-emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine/Israel" (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2011). In Israeli literature Elana Gomel and Vered Karti Shemtov claim a similar notion of "no way out" in "Limbotopia: The 'New Present' and the Literary Imagination," *Comparative Literature* 70, no. 1 (2018): 60–71.

elevator after reaching an international airport via the “Amman Express.”<sup>3</sup> Sansour’s ironic gaze is revealed precisely through the difficulty of sharing the holy place: the elevator opens briefly on one of the floors, where Sansour sees the Dome of the Rock relocated to the skyscraper, open to the visits of the tenants of the new state/building (fig. 1). However, by the end of the video, when she looks through her apartment window she sees none other than the actual Dome of the Rock, beyond the separation wall that encircles the building, on Temple Mount (fig. 2). It thus becomes clear that the utopia of having a free state is in fact nothing more than another displacement, that the holy space is but a replica, and that the tower is a new type of enclosure and segregation, albeit elegantly packaged. The theme of the empty façade is continuous with the commodification of national and cultural symbols as it appears in her video art; when Sansour arrives at her apartment, the plates display patterns of *kūfiyyah*, traditional Palestinian food comes in microwavable packages, and an olive tree—the symbol of Palestinian *ṣumūd* (steadfastness)—is planted



FIGURE 1 Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate*, 2012, 3:35.



FIGURE 2 Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate*, 2012, 6:46.

<sup>3</sup> *Nation Estate* is part of Sansour’s *Sci-Fi Trilogy* (along with the video arts *Space Exodus* and *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*). However, for the sake of focus on Temple Mount and comparison with Bartana’s work, I limit my discussion to *Nation Estate*, while in other contexts it should be read as part of a greater whole.

in the middle of her apartment, uprooted from its natural habitat. Sansour's future Palestine is a grim vision of a merchandized, reductive, and rootless stateless state. Equally, the Dome of the Rock—which has become a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle<sup>4</sup>—is reachable only as a modified, watered-down duplicate, devoid of its essential connection to its locality.

To what extent can this future vision of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf—as metonymic for the possible prospects of the conflict as a whole—be considered far-fetched or even impossible? The issue of accessing sacred spaces touches upon one of the more urgent life experiences of most Palestinians living in and outside Palestine—which is the freedom of mobility.<sup>5</sup> Sansour's wild suggestion of dislocating the Dome of the Rock, currently difficult to visualize as ever happening, can also be read as reacting to actual possibilities of the political situation today. The question of how to practically and aesthetically facilitate mobility goes back to plans of the Israeli security forces to normalize and modernize checkpoints and turn them into customer-based, sleek, and pleasant spaces, like the one we see in the video.<sup>6</sup> These security plans assume that the problem of mobility is one of comfort rather than national: as if an elegant elevator to a replicated al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf will satisfy and dismiss all national aspirations for self-governing and claims to the land.<sup>7</sup> By depoliticizing the national aspects that are involved in the wish for sovereignty, including over contested Jerusalem, Sansour shows what territorial quests can look like once reduced to the level of convenience. At the same time, relocating the Dome of the Rock to a skyscraper also strips it of its religious sanctity that is based in the ground it stands on. The lack of both the political and the religious elements, along with the fact that Sansour's creative solution of doubling the inseparable space could obviously never be considered in peace negotiations, qualifies this future scenario as “ludicrous.” Nonetheless, by imagining the freedom to travel to and from everywhere in Palestine, including its most conflicted areas, it becomes visual, imaginable, perceptible—and thus perhaps possible, even as an implausible option. Her alternative future reflects on the current impossibility of imagining a viable way to share rather than divide, segregate, or replicate the land at the same time as it suggests that what today seems impossible to our contemporaries—a unified, accessible, and modern Palestine—is possible to entertain as a thought, a dream, and a vision.

The same difficulty in imagining sustainable solutions looms large in the contemporary Israeli imagination of the same topos. Bartana's dialogue with the chronotope of Temple Mount

<sup>4</sup> Hillel Cohen writes about how al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf is one of the last symbols that can effectively mobilize the Palestinians of '48. See “‘Aliyata ve-nefilata shel Yerushalayim ke-birat falastin” [The rise and fall of Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine], in *Forty Years in Jerusalem*, ed. Ora Ahimeir and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2008); “The Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa in Zionist and Palestinian National Consciousness,” *Israel Studies Review* 32, no. 1 (2017): 1–19.

<sup>5</sup> Surveys of the issue of mobility can be found in Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Elia Zureik, eds., *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine: Population, Territory and Power* (London: Routledge, 2011); Ghada Ageel, ed., *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Shira Havkin quotes advocates of the privatization of checkpoints saying that their goal is “[t]o reduce the friction that currently exists in the checkpoints and improve the quality of service without decreasing the level of security. These crossings will be considered as official border crossings and will resemble the terminals found in every country in the world.” She also quotes Commandant Oren Julian explaining that “the population who use the crossing points have to be given a service. These places must be welcoming, places that provide service, not dark places.” Shira Havkin, “Outsourcing the Checkpoints: When Military Occupation Encounters Neoliberalism,” in *Israelis and Palestinians in the Shadows of the Wall: Spaces of Separation and Occupation*, ed. Cédric Parizot and Stéphanie Latte Abdallah (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015): 26, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Havkin (ibid.) also claims that the privatization of checkpoints depoliticizes these spaces.

involves the building of the Third Temple—that is, the reinstatement of the Jewish religious center of ritualistic worship almost two thousand years after the destruction of the Second Temple. The only catch is that her Temple is relocated from Jerusalem to São Paulo in Brazil.<sup>8</sup> *Inferno* begins by showing many festive people of color dressed in white and adorned with flowers and fruit, symbols of Shavuot and the fertility of the land, all marching toward the new Temple, while above in the sky three helicopters import the main tools of the Temple straight from Jerusalem and in the background we hear the celebratory *tki'a* and *shvarim* (the sounds made by different types of horns) of Rosh Hashanah (fig. 3). Unfortunately, when the inauguration ceremony starts, led by the famous Brazilian drag queen Carlos Marcio José da Silva, aka Marcia Pantera, the Temple goes up in flames, is cracked as if by an earthquake, and eventually collapses (fig. 4). Hence, imagining the realization of *the* utopian dream (both religious and Zionist)<sup>9</sup> is once again coupled with *the* dystopia—the prospect of *hurban* (destruction), expulsion, and exile. In the final scene of the video we witness the establishment of a new version of the Western Wall along with how the commemoration of the loss of the Temple is perverted by capitalism and tourism.<sup>10</sup>



FIGURE 3 Yael Bartana, *Inferno*, 2013, 00:38.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike the case of the Dome of the Rock or of Palestine as a whole, the idea that the national home and center of the Jewish people should be elsewhere than in Erez Israel has a long tradition that Bartana taps into: from actual political plans such as the Uganda scheme and Birobidzhan's Jewish Autonomous Oblast to literary representations of such scenarios, for example, Eshkol Nevo's Jewish settlement in Argentina in *Neuland*, Nava Semel's in New York State in *E-Srael*, Gideon Avital-Eppstein's in the Peloponnese in *Pele Po Ness*, Michael Chabon's in Alaska in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*; in Yair Hasdiel's *Tel Aviv* most of the world's Jewry is in Poland, and Yoav Avni imagines what the Uganda scheme would have looked like in *Herzl amar* [Herzl says]. Within such a context Bartana's twist can be read as part of a known practice of entertaining the idea of dislocating the Zionist dream to other geographical places.

<sup>9</sup> The Third Temple appears in both secular Zionist utopias (such as Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* and Boris Schatz's *Yerushalayim ha-bnuya* [The rebuilt Jerusalem]) and in the religious utopian plans of about a dozen Orthodox Jewish organizations that strive to change the status quo of Temple Mount. See Yitzhak Reiter, *Status quo be-tahalikhey shinuy: Ma'avakey shlita be-har ha-bayit* [Status quo under processes of change: Power struggles in Temple Mount] (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Gil Hochberg suggests that the excessive nature of Bartana's allusions to multiple religious and political traditions calls into question the sincerity of Bartana's critique of the (dis)utopian Zionist dream. In my reading the switch from the best-case scenario to the worst is not necessarily part of a political critique of



FIGURE 4 Yael Bartana, *Inferno*, 2013, 8:05.

Bartana, an Israeli artist based in Berlin, shows the proximity of the reification of redemption only to justify minutes later the title of the piece by showing the Temple being utterly destroyed. The reality in which the Temple returns to be the center of religious life is provokingly coupled with its downfall—after all, since the last two Temples ended up in ashes, a third is bound to be doomed. As Bartana says in an interview, “Once I heard about the Brazilian temple, I said spontaneously that one has to destroy it. . . . It was clear to me that this attempt to create a utopian reality carries its own destruction within itself. A look at history suffices to see where utopian movements lead to.”<sup>11</sup> The utopia turns into a nightmare, as if the very idea that such a reality will come to be is unthinkable, or at least that one cannot maintain the idea for long without associating it with its disastrous corollary. As such *Inferno* rubs shoulders with the limits of imagination: she shows how what is politically out of the question becomes imaginable, only to then bring her viewers to an apocalyptic dead end and to divulge that possibility as impossible in the long run. Yet we have to bear in mind that *Inferno* is still an alternative future. As such, the video offers a radically different perspective from the one of the present or the past. It is not a mere reduction of history to a circular course but a suggestion that the future can be profoundly disparate from what we imagine to be optional nowadays. As Amir Eshel poignantly writes in *Futurity*, it “is not about a future that is bound to materialize, but rather about the disquietingly tangible sense of what the present holds as a dreadful possibility.”<sup>12</sup> More specifically, the world of *Inferno* is an impossible world, a possibility the present does not hold, and yet this video presents it as possible. Moreover, it is a world that *has already happened*: the Temple of Solomon of

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Zionist future visions but, rather, reflects on the (im)possibility of imagining any future that is not marred by reduction, destruction, or empty simulacra. Gil Hochberg, “The Hailing Power of the Ritual,” in *Yael Bartana* (Zurich: J. R. P. Ringier and Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, 2017), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Igal Avidan, “An ‘Inferno’ Erupts at the Berlin Film Festival,” *Times of Israel*, February 18, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 239.

the Evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, on which the Temple in the video is based, has actually been built and was inaugurated in 2014. As such, *Inferno* is a possible afterlife that lies in between the plausible and the implausible, as well as between past, present, and future.

Looking at the two videos side by side, we see that once again the solution to the indivisibility of Mount Moriah is displacement; disconnecting the highly spatial and territorial Israeli-Palestinian conflict from its very region, it can suddenly be resolved. By dislocating the Temple/Dome of the Rock with all its promises to another chronotope, the “problem” of Jewish or Muslim access to Temple Mount becomes solely a technical problem, not a national or a religious one. In both artworks, the sanctity of the site that is so intimately related to the actual place becomes a mere symbol; but in both, this symbol nonetheless maintains its sacred—or, rather, its touristic—aura regardless of the severing of its link to the very essence that endowed sanctity on it, that is, the location. What seems to be implausible today—namely, the reinstatement of the Temple or confining Palestine to a tower—appears as an option once it is done elsewhere, outside the geographical scope of the conflict. Not unlike *Nation Estate*, in *Inferno*, too, the mechanized version of the future is “better”—the fragmented culture of worshipping the relic or the replica maintains the veneer of wish fulfillment. In other words, the two videos design a future that is frightful in its synthetic and artificial grace, yet they grapple with deep contemporary political and religious necessities that currently remain unaddressed.

Therefore, the two artworks—as gloomy and disheartening as they might be—*act* rather than represent. The political reality that infiltrates their artistic license is not the one that serves as their background. Rather, they leave the sphere of their context and try to conceptualize a different reality—the one that is profoundly unknown and unexperienced—that of the future. But defining these works as acts lies not only in their preference for depicting fictional future scenarios but also in their attempt to shape the ways in which their viewers consider their options from the viewpoint of the future. Switching the Archimedean point from the past to the future allows these works to be prophetic in the performative sense of the word: their images are of what is yet to come, and they speak in order to change, challenge, assert, promise, forewarn; in other words, they use speech acts—or image acts<sup>13</sup>—but in an imitative manner. They are not “serious” speech/image acts, and there is no binding contract that has been agreed between the speaker and the listener. But through imitation of the speech act these works pretend to create an assertion that we *are bound* to consider as sincere<sup>14</sup>—it is the power of “what if” and “what could

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<sup>13</sup> While the term I use, “image act,” was coined by C. J. Reynolds after John Searle’s term “speech act” that elaborated on J. L. Austin’s understanding of performative language, I do not use it in the same way that Reynolds had in mind. Reynolds’s definition of the image act is exclusive to the manipulation of journalistic images, whereas I refer with this term to the image whose primary communicative function is not to represent but to act by instigating change, establishing a pact, or asserting a certain state, etc., when understood and given the right conditions. See Carson J. Reynolds, “Image Act Theory,” in *Seventh International Conference of Computer Ethics: Philosophical Enquiry* (Enschede: Centre for Telematics and Information Technology, 2007), 12–14. I am not the first to point out that art of the conflict tends to interrupt and challenge its political sphere (see, e.g., the introduction to Gil Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015]), but I hope through the concept of the image act to offer a more elaborated understanding of *how* and *when* art becomes performative in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

<sup>14</sup> John Searle differentiates between “serious” (in the sense of sincere, not deceitful) and “nonserious” speech acts (such as in literature) not by how they appear written or spoken but by their pretense, in the sense of “make-believe.” Nonserious speech acts cannot be performative because they do not have all the necessary conditions to act, but they can pretend to have them. John R. Searle, “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse,” *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1975): 319–32.

be.” In this strict sense they are acts of an Arendtian kind: that is, by her definition in *The Human Condition*, doing the unexpected, rupturing the temporal and spatial trajectory that seems plausible today by inserting other alternatives and creating a space among men to contemplate their condition.<sup>15</sup> This essentially political space is what these two works form through their suggestive power: the future perspective is used to exit the here and now and think of Temple Mount not only as the tangled conflicted place it is today but also as resolved and fulfilled, beyond one’s wildest dreams—whether or not this is in practical, likely, or desirable ways. The two artworks create alternatives: for the location of the holy sites, for the primacy of the original over the simulacrum, for the nationalist utopias and collective cultural narratives. In short, they intervene in the sum of contemporary options and insert new possibilities. Unlike what Adorno and Horkheimer scornfully predicted, this is the type of “nationalist art”—in the sense that it centers on the struggle of the collective as opposed to that of the individual—that can and does challenge the viewer along with the capitalist frame of power.<sup>16</sup> Sansour and Bartana perform an act of defiance by harnessing national symbols, if not goals and agendas, and thus they use means that are not unlike those of propaganda. It is precisely the medium that Adorno and Horkheimer criticized—the cinema made into an ideology—which allows these two works to become political interventions in addition to being art; both videos are highly cinematic in their camera usage and their storytelling, and it is difficult to imagine the unraveling of Temple Mount’s dystopian future in the format of a painting since it requires the dimension of time that videos allow. Thus, the two art videos are visual and narrative acts that use the force of art to formulate alternatives to dead-end conditions as well as provide room to discuss the efficiency of imagination.

However, what if we consider these two works as *failed* performative acts and as ineffective mobilization attempts? So far I have explored the ways in which Sansour and Bartana expand current possibilities—but what are the ways in which their visions stem from *within* the current bank of options, and furthermore, how do they narrow down options by pointing at the avenues that should be avoided? When looking at other forms of future imaginations—those that are outside the scope of cultural production, that is, actual political forces—there are equally “unexpected” options that are beyond the realm of the likely. This might imply that these videos reflect their contemporary context much more than intervene by being visionary and groundbreaking. If our contemporary mode of temporality is exactly that of the unexpected or the uncertain, and negotiating with the unknown is the mark of the here and now, then these works do not trespass the borders of our current imagination. Perhaps it is *not* preposterous to think that Palestine will be limited to an edifice when Israeli administrators, asked where Palestinians are supposed to live, while being constrained by continuous land expropriation by the state, answer: upward.<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned proposal to privatize checkpoints also makes the aesthetics of *Nation Estate* seem

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 177–78, 190–92.

<sup>16</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–136. Of course, Adorno and Horkheimer analyzed Western culture and did not take into account the complexities of other traditions—colonial or anticolonial—that participate in mass culture.

<sup>17</sup> As documented in the memoir *Palestinian Walks* (London: Profile Books, 2010) of the lawyer and writer Raja Shehadeh in a conversation with the head of the planning council for the West Bank: “When I asked the head of planning how the village was expected to provide plots for the future expansion of its inhabitants, he would answer with a straight face that they could build up. The image of our beautiful villages in the undulating hills crammed with skyscrapers horrified me” (99).

plausible and predictable. Equally, since 1967 several right-wing religious organizations, whose aim is to change public opinion toward favoring the possibility of building the Third Temple, have actively started to bring this about.<sup>18</sup> In such a political atmosphere, it could be that the artworks are less acts that disturb the current reservoir of prospects and are more predictable and originate from their very own cultural fabric. They *react* to current possibilities rather than broaden them and in fact might even reduce them by steering viewers away from contemporary political undercurrents with their premonitions. Both real and imaginative life become channels through which the implausible turns into the conceivable, and both fall short in finding viable solutions that do not include the horrific, unreasonable, or unjust. The dystopian element indicates the limits of our imagination to perceive a future that does not contain a catastrophe. This is not the same as saying that these forms of thinking—whether political or artistic—are “stuck” in an ever-broadening present that has no end.<sup>19</sup> These contemporary representations of the future, I claim, are limited, shortsighted, and therefore quite the opposite of everlasting—they can only imagine the end. Sansour and Bartana point at their own difficulty in imagining a future reality that is not as unexpected as the present. The amalgamation of imagination and reality is due to this limitation: when reality itself becomes absurd, its representation also becomes absurd and vice versa.

Looking at the long-standing tradition of representing Temple Mount in both Israeli and Palestinian art, it becomes clear in what ways these two videos are the outcome of their times, on the one hand, and stand out, on the other. The many representations of these sacred locations are not homogeneous. In Palestinian art there are ample examples of the Dome of the Rock as a symbol of nationalism and resistance (one famous example is *Jamal al Muhamel* by Sliman Mansour), as an abstract concept of spirituality such as in the works of Kamal Boulatta and Samia Halaby, and as a concrete place that faces current political tensions, for instance, in the more recent works of Aya Younis (*The Rock*) and Jawad al-Mahli (*Jerusalem*). However Sansour allows her viewers a wholly novel perspective; her preoccupation is not with the place in its current situation or only as an emblem of nationalist or religious identity; she transgresses these known uses of the image of al-Ḥaram al-Sharif and offers a future vision in which the Dome of the Rock can be displaced, packaged, and delivered as a ready-made product. Similarly, Bartana empties the Temple of its roots and origins in terms of its religiosity but not in terms of its artistic history. The art video visually alludes to many previous representations of the Temple and its destruction—from the Arch of Titus to Nicola Poussin’s and Francesco Hayez’s paintings (figs. 5 and 6).<sup>20</sup> Visually, Bartana does not follow the usual Israeli artistic tradition of representing Temple Mount with the Dome of the Rock (from Ze’ev Raban’s posters and tourist postcards

<sup>18</sup> As mentioned before, there are about a dozen such organizations; the most famous of them are the Temple Mount and Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) Faithful Movement (established in 1967) and the Temple Institute (established in 1987). Right-wing religious organizations are also mentioned in the afterword of Yael Bartana’s book version of *Inferno*, written by the curators of the Nova Jerusalem project, Benjamin Seroussi and Eyal Danon (New York: Petzel, 2015), 50.

<sup>19</sup> Gomel and Shemtov (“Limbotopia”) link the tendency they identify in Israeli literature of the last few decades with Gumbrecht’s concept of the broadening present, that is, a notion of no way out of a permanently expanding present, without a clear future ahead. See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). This characterization of our times has also been expressed by François Hartog in *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), with respect to European culture.

<sup>20</sup> Francesco Hayez’s *Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem* was actually printed on the temporary construction walls of the Temple of Solomon in São Paulo.



**FIGURE 5**  
Yael Bartana, *Inferno*, 2013.



**FIGURE 6**  
Arch of Titus,  
first century CE, Rome.

to contemporary representations by David Adika [*Temple Mount*] and Niv Ben David [*Marilyn Monroe*]), but rather, she uses the models of the First and Second Temples that the Evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God used. While contemporary political changes lead to the growing public support for groups that endorse and fight for access to Jewish practices on Temple Mount, Bartana offers a critique of this increased tendency to reimagine the Temple as possible and active. She similarly allows her viewers to rethink the possibilities, consequences, and significance of building the Third Temple far from its previous location.

Juxtaposing these two artworks by Sansour and Bartana does not necessarily insinuate that there is a codependent exchange or influence between them but, rather, points to a shift in contemporary visions of the future: Temple Mount as a study case in Palestinian and Israeli art does not spring forth out of nowhere; it grows out of a rich and elaborated tradition but at the same time, thanks to its centrality in all aspects of the conflict, it is a test ground for changing perceptions of space and time. As we can see by analyzing these two examples, both the temporality and the spatiality of the region are shifting toward the unlikely and implausible, and so they reflect precisely the spirit of their time and place: the notion that extreme measures, if not outright impossible solutions, have to be considered when thinking of the future. Both *Nation Estate* and *Inferno* remain effective acts because of their success in making their viewers more alert and cautious and their ability to provoke thinking about alternatives to the contemporary

situation. At the same time I'm putting a question mark on the ability of these artworks to go beyond the political imagination that surrounds them when their responsiveness to their context is considered. They are part of what allows us to diagnose the contemporary exploration of the future as deeply bound to its current situation. Hence, we find the conviction in *Nation Estate* and *Inferno* that the present cannot stay stagnant but that any future change offers little beyond what contemporary powers, ideas, and possibilities afford. The contemporary vision of the future is precisely that—a vision determined by our time and place, seen through the vantage point of a future that can never be realized. A