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SPACED AND PLACED: HETERO-'TOPIC' INTERPRETATIONS OF
THE WARSAW GHETTO

INTRODUCTION

"Ghetto," a colloquized term that presently designates an impoverished, neglected, or undesirable residential area, originally was used to distinguish similarly undesirable parts of town—Jewish parts of town. Early etymology suggests that the term ghetto describes "the quarter in a city... to which the Jews were restricted,"¹ as well as "a quarter in a city, especially a thickly populated slum area, inhabited by a minority group or groups, usually as a result of economic or social pressures; an area, etc., occupied by an isolated group; an isolated or segregated group, community, or area."² These two definitions bring to light key features of the origination of the ghetto: it was minoritized and spatially "other."

In this essay, I argue for a redefinition of spatial significance within the ghettos and the respective emergence of the Warsaw Ghetto. The essay will examine the significance of the Warsaw ghetto as a place of oppression *and* liberation; religious stifling *and* hegemonic freedom. The city inhabitants (the non-Jews), the SS soldiers, the captured and emplaced Jewish people living inside, and tourists to the site imagine(d), interpret(ed), and localize(d) the ghetto in a variety of ways, lending to the multifaceted construction of spatial understanding that can be examined using haunted space, surveilled space, and memorialized (re)constructions of space. Thus, I argue that the Warsaw ghetto represents a haunted space, an inverted panopticon, that through social activity and time becomes both utopia *and* heterotopia.³

DEFINING 'TOPIAS'

This study operates within certain 'topic' frameworks, geographic regions, and with expected limitations. Although I am working out of a Lefebvrian dialogical framework for these three '-topias,' I have chosen three definitions

¹ "Ghetto, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 17, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.du.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/78056>.

² "Ghetto, N."

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life 2nd (Second) Edition Text Only*, n.d., 108. "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not. Haunted places are the only places people can live in—and this inverts the schema of the *panopticon*."

to work with to limit the scope of the project. Lefebvre does not define these ‘-topias’ but puts them into conversation with one another:

... On the basis of ‘topias’ (isotopias, heterotopias, or utopias, or in other words analogous places, contrasting places, and the places of what has no place, or no longer has a place—the absolute, the divine, or the possible. More importantly, such places can also be viewed in terms of the highly significant distinction between *dominated* spaces and *appropriated* spaces.⁴

Using urban scholar Orlando Santos’ definition of isotopia, Michel Foucault’s and James Faubion’s definitions of heterotopia, and a working definition of outopia, I define ‘-topic’ spaces in relationship to Lefebvre’s dialogical connections set forth in *The Production of Space*.⁵

Orlando Santos defines isotopias as:

Spaces homologous to the logic of capital, having analogous functions and structures from the perspective of capital reproduction that are therefore spaces of capital, commodified – that is, having exchange value. In this sense, the spaces produced by the public authority, in the logic of creating conditions for capital reproduction or in the logic of political domination, could also be conceived as isotopic spaces. Thus, it can be said that spaces of participation created and used as domination mechanisms are equally isotopic spaces.⁶

Santos further elaborates to say that “the neoliberal city can be viewed as processes of creating isotopias, of commodifying urban common spaces and subordinating them to the logic of capital.” Isotopias are analogous places, according to Lefebvre, that are made spaces by different people. Santos’ definition focuses on commodification of spaces produced and reproduced for certain purposes. My argument situates the Warsaw Ghetto as an isotopia – a capitalist, analogous structure – that, once endowed with a sense of place or placeless-ness (heterotopia and outopia, respectively), it becomes embedded with meaning (or without meaning). The simultaneity of Lefebvrian ‘-topic’ interpretations runs as the constant current throughout. With isotopias as the forerunner, the definitions of heterotopias I have chosen to work with explore and examine two types of heterotopic interpretation.

As the founding father of heterotopology, Michel Foucault, describes and defines heterotopias as:

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1 edition (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 163.

⁵ There are only two brief mentions of “isotopias” in *The Production of Space*: the first on page 163, and the second on page 366.

⁶ Santos, Orlando, “[Urban Common Space, Heterotopia and the Right to the City: Reflections on the Ideas of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey](#),” *Urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana* 6, no. 2 (August 2014): 146–57, <https://doi.org/10.7213/urbe.06.002.SE02>.

Real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable.⁷

Likewise, in James D. Faubion's, "Heterotopia: An Ecology," he elaborates:

Heterotopias are 'realized utopias'... they are 'real emplacements' that simultaneously represent, contest and reverse— and are so 'utterly different from'— all the other real emplacements in their environment. They are liable to recoding and heterogeneity. They engage temporalities distinct from those engaged in the places that surround them. Last... they are spaces apart- open but isolated of controlled access and egress. They are places of extremes, either each creating a space of illusion that denotes all that is in place around it as even more illusory or creating a space 'as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged' as its counterparts are 'disorganized, badly arranged and muddled.'⁸

Faubion's definition echoes the sentiment of ghettos as emplaced heterotopias. Faubion engages discussions of temporality, illusion, and reality to create a useful counterpart to Foucault. I demonstrate, using these guiding theoretical frameworks, that the Warsaw Ghetto functions as places of hegemonic irruption for the emplaced Jewish people; emplacements and encampments inside of pre-set city walls; and as places betwixt and between realized notions of liberation and oppression.

Finally, the outopia, or the *utopia*, is a nowhere space that gives life to the Westernized, positivist spin "utopia." Outopia is derived from the Greek "outopoic:" spaces that exist as non-places. Lefebvre's use of utopia, or "spaces occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary—by 'idealities' such as nature, absolute knowledge, or absolute power," play on and with the use of outopic to describe the Warsaw Ghetto as a non-place for the S.S. soldiers.

The ghetto functioned as both an idealized utopia where the Jews could be shut off and shut *in* from the idealized city of Warsaw, as well as an *outopia* for the S.S. soldiers—a nowhere place with disposable people. The Ghetto imprisoned the "other" to leave room for "the same." Simultaneously, the Ghetto was outopic—no place. It was an enclosed encampment of people who meant very little, contributed very little, and had little social and economic function in and for the City of Warsaw.⁹

⁷ Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, eds., *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, 1 edition (Routledge, 2015).

⁸ James Faubion, *Heterotopia: An Ecology*, 31-32.

⁹ This is meant to convey the thoughts and feelings of the non-Jews who were part of the SS regime. The sentiments of meaning and contribution are not the feelings and thoughts of the author, but the assumed positionality of the enemies of the Jewish people.

These three 'topic' interpretations, isotopic, heterotopic, and outopic, work independently and dependently of one another. They move from one to the other, they work simultaneously, and they function as separate entities based on the party observing the place. The inhabitants of the ghetto make the place layered, multi-cultural, and engaged with temporalities and geographies. The Ghetto is "a place of extremes, either... creating a space of illusion that denotes all that is in place around it as even more illusory or creating a space 'as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged' as its counterparts are 'disorganized, badly arranged and muddled."

The S.S. soldiers, the Nazi regime, and the political party in power saw the ghetto as placeless. It was a holding zone for worthless, non-Germanic people. The outopic function of the Warsaw Ghetto created an illusion of non-existent people who were not seen or heard, could not come in or out, but were confined to the placeless locale of the city structure.¹⁰

UTOPIC ADVERTISEMENT

In Nazi propaganda, the Warsaw Ghetto appears as a utopia. Much of what is now known about the Warsaw Ghetto is relayed through survivors or limited still photos. The recent findings of a Nazi Propaganda film revealed a new, utopic perspective.¹¹ The utopic perception of the Warsaw Ghetto is now (and was then) revealed through a simultaneity of place and surveillance.

The Warsaw Ghetto served a utopic function for the Nazi party. Surrounded by barbed wire with 10-foot-high brick walls, the Nazi army emplaced 400,000 Jewish prisoners (at a time) into the small fraction of the Polish capital.¹² The Ghetto was originally "founded" between 1939 and 1940 on 1.3 square miles of land. Despite the cold aesthetic of the Ghetto walls, in 1942 a crew of German soldiers were sent in to film Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto.¹³ The goal of the project was:

¹⁰ This project will work diligently to remain respectful and courteous to the stories, narratives, and lived experiences of the people inhabiting these places. I do not wish to undermine or over-simplify the experiences of those who suffered before, during, or after the forced emplacement and relocation to the ghettos. This project is operating as an observational analysis of the infrastructure, regulations, and human make-up of the place of "the ghetto" – not offering a solution, answer, or overall theory about the lived experiences of the people living inside (or outside). Additionally, do not read the analyses and observations of the Warsaw Ghetto as a generalization of all ghettos. None were equal, and certainly none were fair. The Warsaw Ghetto was heavily documented, photographed, and recorded, thus it provides an easy vantage point from which to write.

¹¹ "[Utopia, n. : Oxford English Dictionary](https://www.oed.com/entry/220784?redirectedFrom=utopia)," accessed May 21, 2018, [#eid. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Utopia as: An imagined or hypothetical place, system, or state of existence in which everything is perfect, esp. in respect of social structure, laws, and politics](http://www.oed.com/entry/220784?redirectedFrom=utopia)

¹² Many Jewish prisoners barely survived on the roughly 200 calories per day rationed resulting in disease or death as they awaited their next move to Hitler's camp chambers.

¹³ "[A Film Unfinished : The Warsaw Ghetto As Seen Through Nazi Eyes | HuffPost](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-z-chesnoff/ema-film-unfinishedem-the_b_682030.html)," accessed May 17, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-z-chesnoff/ema-film-unfinishedem-the_b_682030.html.

to record for posterity examples of the religious practices and “sub-human culture” of the soon to be eliminated *judische Rasse*, everything from a circumcision ceremony to a burial service; from the extreme poverty of the many to the supposed lack of concern of those few Jews who still had some assets.

The film was staged insofar as the soldiers corralled the prisoners of the Warsaw Ghetto forcing them to act. The film was simultaneously real—showing poverty, abuse, and starvation—and not real—fine dining, polite banter, and friendly guards and watchers. However, the realness of the film came only from the outtakes, while the staged scenes remained as captivating plotlines.¹⁴

A scene often examined reveals “a starving child dying on the streets of the Ghetto while other Jews walk by or [Jews]…din[ing] on meals at well stocked restaurants that never existed.”¹⁵ However surprising or unsurprising, The Nazi propaganda film was never finished. The film remained in a carefully hidden box for over fifty years until Yael Hersonski, an Israeli documentary maker, wrote and directed *A Film Unfinished*. This 90-minute documentary revels the atrocities in the Warsaw Ghetto filmed by the Nazis (and their contracted crew). Hersonski included the original propaganda footage, but kept the out-takes “that provide tangible evidence that scenes of Jews living the high life were staged”—constructing a utopia.¹⁶



Figure 1: Yael Hersonski, *A Film Unfinished*, scene still (2010, Oscilloscope Pictures, Sundance Film Festival)

The original intent of the Nazi propaganda film was to produce a utopia, one that was layered over the isotopia in the minds of the viewers. *The Ghetto* was intended to portray a paradise or, more aptly put, a Jewish utopia. The propaganda genre for the Nazi Regime served well over the course of their reign. They utilized fear and brute force to coerce the Jewish citizens into roles or staged scenes to show the world that the dangerous Jews were held behind closed walls but with care.

¹⁴ *The Ghetto* will be used to talk about the Nazi produced film, *Das Ghetto*. *A Film Unfinished* will be used to talk about [Yael Hersonski's Sundance Film](#) that includes parts of the original film, outtakes from *The Ghetto*, as well as over-laid interviews with survivors, archivists, and historians.

¹⁵ “A Film Unfinished: The Warsaw Ghetto As Seen Through Nazi Eyes.”

¹⁶ Bob Fisher, “‘A Film Unfinished,’ A History Unveiled,” International Documentary Association, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://www.documentary.org/magazine/a-film-unfinished-history-unveiled>.

A Film Unfinished demonstrates the perceived ways the Warsaw Ghetto functioned in different spaces—particularly on film. Utopia poses an interesting dichotomy between the film's perceived work and the Nazis' perception of the Warsaw Ghetto. The Ghetto, outtopically defined due to its confinement of a people group with little to no worth to the Nazis, was a “no place.” However, the film suggests otherwise. The Ghetto was (perceived as such) a paradise—a specific kind of utopic place. The Nazis did not believe this, but they took great care to promote a message of life in the ghetto vis-à-vis propaganda film and photography. The perception of utopia versus the conceptualized ideology of outtopic argues for the simultaneity of spatial, ‘-topic’ definitions and argues for hauntings and surveillance even after the ghetto collapsed.

Hersonski's *A Film Unfinished* raises questions about space and surveillance. The utopic endeavor of the Nazi regime gave the film a voice to speak to the experiences of those living inside of the Warsaw Ghetto. Their experiences, their livelihoods, their families, and their realities became a “thing” to be watched, rather than an experience to be had. The original film, sans Hersonski's editing, revealed a haunted utopia—a space to be studied and watched only by those living outside of the Ghetto walls.

The inverted structure of the panoptic surveillance differs to an *unseen absence*, rather than an unseen presence.¹⁷ The film and its later constructive edits for the Sundance Film Festival, begs the question of seen and unseen, presence and absence, and surveillance and power. The utopic, heterotopic, and outtopic spatialities of the Warsaw Ghetto were created because of the unseen absence. The towering walls of the small imprisonment skewed the perception of the demarcation of space. The memory of the Warsaw Ghetto for the soldiers, the prisoners, the non-Jewish city inhabitants, the tourists, and the Sundance Film watchers evoked haunted memory and haunted spaces, of an unseen absence that could watch and was watched while the Ghetto was lived in and on, but rarely melded with spaces of another.

OUTOPIC AND HETEROtopic:

UNSEEN ABSENCES INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

The spatiality of Warsaw ghetto was not dependent on perception but rather on experience. The filmed (and then film-edited) reality of the Warsaw ghetto held a specific spatial location, definition, and resonance, but it also ran concurrently with Nazi interpretations of outopia. The memorialization of the Warsaw Ghetto on film, as one form of media, concurrently existed as utopic and outtopic prior to its release to the public in 2010 as *A Film Unfinished*.

Temporally speaking, the Warsaw Ghetto and the modes of surveillance shifted across time and in the same time; the heterotopia of the Jewish inhabitants were watched by the soldiers, tourists, and Sundance film attendees. They were subjected to gazes from the outside but also gazes in the

¹⁷ Sacasas, “‘Haunted Places Are the Only Ones People Can Live In.’”

distant future. The roughly one-square mile of space that contained the ghetto was and is forever haunted by the memories of the people who lived inside and the watchful eyes of those living with them and those who lived after. The haunting, inverted panoptic function of the Warsaw Ghetto creates spaces of unseen absences fostered by collective memory, "as a place that [is] outside all places, even though they [it is] actually localizable."¹⁸

NAZI OUTOPIA



Figure 2: Harrie Teunissen, "Warsaw Ghetto," Digital image, Topography of Terror.

The Warsaw Ghetto was walled — built with the forced labor of Jewish men who forced to live inside the confined space. The third Reich sealed the ghetto in November of 1940, becoming the "largest ghetto in both area and population in an area of about 1.3 square miles, or 2.4 percent of the city's total area."¹⁹ The gates were externally guarded by German/S.S. soldiers and Polish police.²⁰ The walls contained what was once the Jewish quarter and quickly became the Jewish Ghetto. Shortly after the initial sealing of the ghetto, the gates were reduced from the initial twenty-two to nine — this limited communication into and outside of the walls. The act of sealing, guarding, and retaining the Jewish people amplifies the Nazi Regime's desire to clarify the Ghetto as a "no place." The Nazi's vision of the Warsaw Ghetto as an outopic no-place was driven by external perceptions and inverted panoptic surveillance, and thus navigated the Nazi attempt to create an emplaced "no place" within the already structured city of Warsaw.

¹⁸ Dehaene and Cauter, *Heterotopia and the City*.

¹⁹ "Warsaw Ghetto Sealed," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 5, 2018, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1939-1941/warsaw-ghetto-sealed>.

²⁰ There were specified Jewish police or watchers that remained inside of the Ghetto walls to keep peace. However, these watchmen were afforded little to no more rights than the lay-Jews who lived inside.



Figure 3: "Polish Citizens Walk by Wall," Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Brick by brick the city dwellers of Warsaw watched as their once Jewish neighbors (now city centered prisoners) built the wall that would enclose their quarters. Once inside, the Jewish occupants were scarcely let out with little to no communication transmitted in or out. They were placed inside of a city center only to be forgotten and deemed as having "no-place." Civilians walked by the walls each day (Fig. 3) unable to see in and the Jews unable to look out. There was a mutual loss of surveillance. The panoptic structure of imprisonment, surveillance by a visually accessible presence, faltered. In its place was an invisible, unknowable absence of watchfulness both for the Jews and for the city members.

The inverted structure of Jeremy Bentham's, (and later Foucault's development of), the panopticon denotes space marked by watchfulness or a lack of it. The utopia of the Warsaw Ghetto for the soldiers was no place, occupied by an unseen absence. Typical panoptic structures would designate a centrally placed watchman relegated to observe by inmates on the perimeter. The inmates would not know if they were being watched nor by whom they were being watched. Due to this unseen presence, the inmates would tend towards a self-regulation of behavior. The inmates were subject to scrutiny — collectively, individually, and by the watchman or observer.²¹

The Warsaw Ghetto's inversion of this structure claimed no single watchman, but watchmen. No known presence, but an absence of watchers. The walls of the ghetto imagined the space as no place, and the no place marked a place to be watched but not entered; watched but not observed; watched but not known. The atrocities that occurred within the confines of the ghetto, the starvation, poverty, death, and decay, were silenced to the outside by the walls that contained the vermin Jews. The ghetto was no-place — unseen and absent — just as those whose watchful eyes remained outside were also unseen and absent.

The absent and unseen watchful gaze of the soldiers, the citizens, and the Third Reich regime gifted the ghetto with an unforgettable haunting — an unforgettable memory. There is no place, De Certeau said, that is not haunted by spirits that are hidden there in silence.²² The Nazi soldiers' persistence of an outopic interpretation of the ghetto creates a haunted place where

²¹ Barton, Ben F., Barton, Marthalee S. "[Modes of Power in Technical and Professional Visuals](#)". *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. 7 (1), 1993, 138-162.

²² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* 2nd (Second) Edition Text Only.

memories persist and an unseen absence lingers. The panoptic inversion was not only a present reality of the soldiers, but a future recognition for tourists and movie goers. The place of the Warsaw ghetto will forever be haunted and haunt those who come to visit (or watch) the imprisoned spirits of the Nazi outopia.

JEWISH HETEROPIA

The Warsaw Ghetto functioned in many ways spatially for the differing groups that would bear witness to the site during imprisonment and after the destruction of the ghetto.

Early propaganda films perpetuated perceptions of utopic paradise—of a city behind walls that reflected the city *beside* the walls. Poverty and wealth, religion and crime, all things a “normal” city experienced appeared to happen behind the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazi soldiers consigned the ghetto to the status of outopic where it became localizable but un-placed. People saw but could not see inside, and the Jews inside could not see out. Instead, they inhabited the place with haunted memories and haunted experiences of neglect. Despite these external experiences, the Jewish lives inside of the ghetto coexisted heterotopically due to their experiences and forgotten-ness that the soldiers afforded them. Although the soldiers revered the Warsaw Ghetto as an empty place, the Jews inside were alive and vibrant, erupting into the city before the ghetto was abandoned, burned, and remained rubble.²³



Figure 4: “Warsaw synagogue destroyed by the Nazis,” HaChayim HaYehudim Jewish Photo Library, Jewish Virtual Library.

²³ Jews leaving the Warsaw Ghetto was not voluntary. Many and most of the Jews who survived detainment in the Warsaw Ghetto were later sent to death at Treblinka or to other concentration camps.

Foucault's heterotopia, elaborated by later theorists, revolves around thematics of emergence, irruption, and interruption. Figure 4 shows a menorah standing in front of rubble left-over from a Nazi-decimated synagogue in Warsaw.²⁴ The menorah, an erupting reminder of the Jewish people, binds this place to culture, tradition—Jewishness. Likewise, the Jewish people remain memorably tied to the place of their Jewish quarters and to the place of their imprisonment.

The Nazi's outopic perception of the ghetto countered the Jewish experience of a real emplacement that simultaneously "represent[ed], contest[ed], and reverse[d]... all the other real emplacements in their environment."²⁵ The Warsaw Ghetto engaged cultures, people, and religious experiences that were deemed invalid for public space. Their heterotopic place was a place apart—"open but isolated of controlled access and egress."²⁶ It was a place of extremes that was perfectly Jewish and imperfectly imprisoned, meticulous, and badly arranged. The heterotopic experience of the Warsaw Ghetto was betwixt and between the utopic and the outopic pretenses that the Nazis attempted to imagine and distort.

To the imprisoned and emplaced Jewish people, the ghetto was not outopic and simultaneously un-utopic. It was a place, but not a paradise. It contrasted the daily lives of those living outside of the walls as an eruption of "otherness" into the otherwise planned city-scape that was a Jew-free Warsaw. Despite the Nazi's attempt to mask their presence by walls and confinement, their very real presence emanated through the city. To the political powers in charge, they were "no place" but there were not forgotten. The very structure of the ghetto, the walls and limited entry-ways, contained the Jews but also left the place of the Jews *the place of the Jews*. The area that once was the Warsaw Ghetto will forever be remembered as the site of the Warsaw Ghetto. To the loved ones who come to pay homage to their lost or forgotten relatives, survivors of the horrific imprisonment, or tourists who come to remember what was, the Warsaw Ghetto remains an irruption of Judaism, of difference, of emplacement, in an environment that was hegemonically rigid.

The Warsaw Ghetto remains a haunted heterotopia for all who encounter it. Haunted places are the only places that people can live in because they have socially active memories, stories, and narratives that create social cohesion to the past, present, and future. The Warsaw Ghetto represents a haunted space, an inverted panoptic space, that through past, present, and future social activity becomes and remains a heterotopia. The mere admittance and acceptance of the place where Warsaw once stood, engages temporalities and experiences that suggest that it was *a place* that contrasted the no-places, the paradise places, and the non-socially activated places that were written onto the Ghetto's structure, but not the experiences of the people inside. The walls did not define the internal experiences of those who refused to accept that they were living in no-place. The walls were built around the Jewish quarter that stood in Warsaw for years prior to their erection, but the walls did not erase the liveliness and the experiences of the Jewish people erupting and

²⁴ The destruction of the synagogue is unknown, whether it was before, during, or after the imprisonment of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.

²⁵ James Faubion, *Heterotopia: An Ecology*, 31-32.

²⁶ Ibid.

emerging from the center of a city that refused to validate them. The walls did not enclose no-place but a the betwixt and between place. The walls created the heterotopia and the walls created the haunting, the unseeable absence that will never leave.

FUTURITY: THE UNSEEN ABSENCE OF TOURISTS AND WATCHERS

Yael Hersonski's *A Film Unfinished*, now close to eight years old, is available for public streaming and viewing through internet mogul, Amazon. The public can now access the inside of the ghetto through a streaming device of their choice. The audience—alone or in a group—is invited alongside the people of the Warsaw Ghetto to mourn and validate the rawness of their experiences. The documentary features interviews with survivors from the ghetto, a reenactment of a testimony from Willy Wist, one of the camera operators who filmed scenes from *The Ghetto*, and subtitles that create narratives and give voices to the scenes.



Figure 5: Czarek Sokolowski, "A fragment of the former Warsaw Ghetto wall"

Across the world, in different spaces and places and in different times, the film can be watched, but not without raising questions of the watcher and the watched. The Warsaw Ghetto can now be watched, viewed, from sofas, chairs, and airplanes. The film has spatial and placed limitless that the once-inhabited place Warsaw Ghetto did not have. Questions raised revolve around motifs of haunting. Can the haunted places, the inverted panoptic places, be boundless—spatially and temporally? What does "limitless" streaming (watching or viewing) do to or for the lives of the survivors, victims, or families of the imprisoned? What does the film say about the unseen absence?



Figure 6: Czarek Sokolowski, "A fragment of the former Warsaw Ghetto wall"

The film suggests several things, but specifically two that I would like to point out in comparison with the site itself: the film memorializes haunted places as *forever* placed and haunted, and it reiterates and mirrors the inverted panoptic model of utopia and heterotopia but with *futurity*. The film go-ers become the unseen absent watchers. They are absent temporally and are unseen from others, watching from screens at home or elsewhere. They are peering into the lives of the Warsaw Ghetto prisoners in a way that is not, surprisingly, invasive because of the raw reality of the film.²⁷ The lived experiences of the Ghetto prisoners are revealed in truthful way that reflects their internal perceptions, the Nazi's propaganda agenda, and the placelessness that was attempted. The film shows the atrocities of the roughly one mile square area that will never be forgotten so long as it is memorialized and watched because it will forever be haunted.

Although the film presents the history of the Warsaw ghetto, the real lives and real experiences, the wall itself (in parts) still stands as a memorial to those that once lived inside (fig. 5 & 6). Outside of a section of preserved wall stands a bench. Tourists can come and sit in front of the wall that held in and held out people from the same city. The gaze runs two ways: the tourists sit in the haunted places and are watched by others, while the spirits of the haunted places remain unseen and absent. The wall is no longer imprisoning people, but stands as a fragile moment in time to recognize the atrocities. The question, who is watching whom, remains. There is no panoptic structure at work once the Warsaw Ghetto is destroyed, nor was there one while it still stood. The places that haunt invert the structures that dictate self-regulation, behavioral conformity, and "being watched." Instead, places that haunt have no present watcher, remain absent and unseen, and self-regulate only insofar as their lived experiences allow. The haunting of these places reaches farther than present moments. They haunt pervasively; they remain places to watch and be watched.

²⁷ Although not the subject here, this could also be compared to a voyeuristic god-figure, or other omnipotent, omniscient being. For further information, see Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Sigmund Freud, [*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*](#), trans. James Strachey (Mansfield Centre, Conn.: Martino Fine Books, 2011).

The bench that stands outside of the wall invites people to sit. It facilitates conversation in a once and forever haunted place. Houses have been built around the remaining wall structure inviting people to live on haunted grounds. Inhabited places cannot exist un-haunted; "This unseen, absent reality laid over our perception of present places 'invites the schema of the panopticon...' Rather than being seen by an unseen presence, we see an unseen absence."²⁸

²⁸ Sacasas, "'Haunted Places Are the Only Ones People Can Live In.'"