

WALLS WITHOUT CINEMA

STATE SECURITY AND SUBJECTIVE EMBODIMENT
IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY US FILMMAKING



LARRIE DUDENHOEFFER

B L O O M S B U R Y

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Larrie Dudenhoeffer

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*To my grandparents,
all of them immigrants, all of them dreamers*

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1

Conceptual Borders: An Introduction to *Walls Without Cinema*

We, in this country, in this generation, are—by destiny rather than by choice—the watchmen on the walls of world freedom.

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, UNDELIVERED SPEECH, DALLAS, TX,
NOVEMBER 23, 1963

We go into wars to defend [other countries'] borders. We don't defend our own borders. And we're going to start defending our country; we're going to start defending our borders.

PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP, NRA CONVENTION SPEECH,
DALLAS, TX, MARCH 4, 2018

“Build the wall!” At several rallies for Donald J. Trump throughout 2016–18, in such far-flung areas as East Otay Mesa in San Diego, California; the State Fairgrounds Expo Hall in Tampa, Florida; Olatengy Orange High School in Lewis Center, Ohio; and the Federal Building in Greenville, South Carolina, several supporters were to chant that slogan over and over in an effort to convince the forty-fifth president to fulfill a campaign oath to construct a security wall along wide stretches of the almost 2,000-mile region of deserts, uplands, river valleys, and municipalities that separate the United States from Mexico.¹ At the outset of the campaign season, Trump spoke openly about exploiting the Secure Fence Act of 2006—which, according to then-president George W. Bush, was meant to curb terrorist attacks and stimulate “immigration reform”²—in order to install a wall made of concrete, steel, and rebar that will rise anywhere from 30

to 55 feet in the air. “I would build a great wall,” the famous real estate developer was to declare in a 2015 presidential announcement speech,³ “and nobody builds them better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively.” Despite serious objections that the effort to construct such a wall is xenophobic and only appealing to white supremacists, that it might cause flooding and other environmental damage, and that it might embolden agents to question, detain, and accost Hispanics, Muslims, and noncitizens without moral constraint, Trump set forth shortly after taking office Executive Order 13767, which calls for funding for five thousand additional border patrol officers and a “secure, contiguous, and impassable physical barrier” to discourage illegal immigration, stem the trade of drug cartels, and facilitate the repatriation of aliens to their countries of origin.⁴ On October 12, 2018, Senator Kevin McCarthy, echoing the favorite slogan of Trump’s supporters, spoke in favor of the “Build the Wall, Enforce the Law Act,” a measure that asks the Department of Homeland Security for \$23,400,000,000 to oversee construction of the wall, outfit it with the newest surveillance technologies, cover its infrastructure and daily operations costs, and finally squelch sanctuary city resistance to it.⁵

The inflaming of fears over “unfair” trade agreements causing factory outsourcing and massive unemployment, “illegals” taking the work that remains away from citizens, terrorists entering the country, and traffickers impudently funneling opioids and sex slaves into it speaks to Naomi Klein’s analysis of the workings of “disaster capitalism.” She argues that the invention or exploitation of a crisis, such as those surrounding issues of nation-state security, creates certain market opportunities so that, for example, state officials, in concert with their corporate cronies and sponsors, strip us of civil rights at the same time as they finance watchlist informatics; video surveillance systems; iris, retina, voice, DNA, face, fingerprint, and other “biometric” scanners; web tracking devices; data mining software; spy drones; and security walls, fences, checkpoints, roundups, and detention centers.⁶ However, in concentrating on the economics of these sorts of measures, Klein, along with more mainline media scholars, neglects an important component in moving citizen-voters to support their construction, staffing, and maintenance, or at least to register them on their cultural radar: *the near ubiquity of these border walls* in much twenty-first-century US cinema.

Timothy Corrigan, writing about the similar cultural, economic, and technological shake-ups wrought in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, argues that our contemporary viewing experiences involve a crisis of “legibility and interpretation.”⁷ The “movie rituals and formulas” in the classical era tendentially serve to “supplement, reflect, and support relatively stable social identities and ideologies,” according to Corrigan.⁸ However, after Hollywood’s experimentation with the techniques of the “new waves and counter-cinemas” of the 1960s and 1970s, its conglomeratization in the

1980s and the resulting fragmentation of its audiences, and its acquiescence to the time-shifting, “zapping” (channel-changing), and cross-promotional regimes of VCRs, cable television, and music videos, the cinema underwent a series of sweeping changes in terms of its formal qualities, experiential meanings, and narrative codes.⁹ The cinema, after Vietnam and the countercultural revolution, times that saw the steady destabilization of our collective “identities and ideologies,” was to suffer the decay of its structural coherence, unambiguous spectator alignments, and archiving of sociohistorical memories, offering its audience only “a minimal amount of textual engagement” in favor of slick, surface-level visual designs and manic action set pieces.¹⁰ Corrigan, though, also argues that the market ambitions and international reach of Hollywood companies, as well as other national cinemas, make their output inevitably cosmopolitan in flavor so that “a cinema without walls” appears (contextually speaking, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall) that might undo cultural chauvinism, collapse older forms of textual and interpretive sensemaking, and make space for new ones to emerge.¹¹

The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, in which al-Qaeda terrorists flew airliners into the sides of the Twin Towers, demolishing them, set in motion a series of changes in cross-border relations, US state security measures, and their recoding and representation in the media, chiefly cinema. George W. Bush spoke in 2006 to the nation about expanding the National Guard from twelve thousand to eighteen thousand agents, arguing that the “border should be open to trade and lawful immigration, and shut to illegal immigrants, as well as criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists.”¹² President Barack Obama, after requesting \$500 million to reinforce the nation’s defenses and revamp its immigration system, in 2010 similarly sent south 1,200 more forces to secure it.¹³ Donald Trump, though, in a series of tweets on October 18, 2018, went against Bush’s vow never to “militarize the southern border,”¹⁴ threatening to immediately cut financial assistance to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala and to deploy US troops to Mexico to aggressively thwart any attempts at illegal immigration:

In addition to stopping all payments to these countries, which seem to have almost no control over their population, I must, in the strongest of terms, ask Mexico to stop this onslaught—and if unable to do so I will call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR SOUTHERN BORDER!¹⁵

The catastrophic effects of the 9/11 attacks on the ethicopolitical decision-making of the United States, as well as its treatment of those from different races, creeds, classes, and cultures, show up on cinema screens, sometimes explicitly, sometimes metaphorically, in several different twenty-first-century (sub)genres, including war films, zombie films, monster films, fantasy films,

superhero films, romance films, science fiction films, action thrillers, and dark comedies.

However, unlike the mainstream films that came out after the Vietnam War that Corrigan discusses, these more recent films call attention to a different sort of crisis that afflicts the post-9/11 era: that of *an excess of the legible*, or what we might rather term the *spatio-legible*, taking the form of an all-too-clear demarcation, articulation, surveilling, and management of certain diegetic spaces at once meant to fence some characters inside of their confines and exclude others. However, these films do more than dehumanize their antagonists; use fear tactics to tacitly argue for the construction of security walls or surveillance nets; or uncritically repeat the ideologemes that serve the racist, fascist, and xenophobic agendas of recent US administrations (and their international counterparts). Many of these films, through their complex narrative, representational, and compositional rhetorics, frustrate the development of any sort of *sensus communis* that might universally and imprudently support, owing to their fear of terrorism, crime, or economic disadvantage, Bush's, Obama's, or Trump's solutions to the issues facing immigrants, refugees, and members of certain outgroups. These films, in other words, move us to rethink and counter the implementation of these apartheidist measures, most explicitly the construction of those aesthetic and architectural monstrosities, the real-life security walls outside of the cinema—the “walls without it.” As Michael J. Shapiro might argue, the films under discussion in the following chapters, rather than simplistically capitalizing on racist or reactionary attitudes to national, cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious “others,” actually serve to introduce their viewers to the operations of “dissonance and disjuncture that break down walls.”¹⁶

Something There Is That Doesn't Love a Wall

To appreciate the extent to which twenty-first-century Hollywood films depart from the diegetic constructions, ideological commitments, and compositional strategies of the cinema of the Cold War era, all we must do is compare a few of them to their mid-century counterparts. Many of the films from the 1950s and 1960s—the time of rising counterinsurgent US intervention in Southeast Asia, the announcement of President John F. Kennedy's New Frontier myth, and the completion of the Berlin Wall—mostly take to task separation fences; security auxiliaries, such as roadblocks, checkpoints, and sentry nests; and the isolationist mentalities that result from them. Richard Slotkin describes the US foreign affairs doctrine at the time as calling for military action against communist nations on the “frontiers” of the Third World, “a stage for the expansion of American

influence” and a testing site for the advancement of democratic values and neoliberal economic development.¹⁷ He further describes John Wayne, arguably the most recognizable star of the era, as a “folk hero” to scores of Americans, who saw the actor as a spokesman for these distinct American virtues; a supporter of initial US counterguerrilla efforts; and, although a staunch Republican, a fellow traveler of Kennedy’s anti-communist New Frontier thesis.¹⁸ Thus, such films as John Huston’s *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (1958) advocate nonobservance of strict state demarcations and *even breaching international barriers* in favor of robust intercontinental trade, cultural exchange, and sociopolitical cooperation.¹⁹

The film, set in 1856 in a Japan suffering from the ravages of earthquakes, typhoons, and cholera outbreaks, opens with the approach of US consul general Townsend Harris’s (John Wayne) ships to the coastlines of the nation. The representatives of the Shimoda Prefecture run down to the shore, forbidding the ships from docking, even as Harris ignores their warnings, saluting them and reminding them of their earlier trade agreement with the United States. The Japanese at first refuse to recognize Harris’s diplomatic status, although they offer the consul general’s cohort quarters in a shack, apologizing for its shabbiness while explaining the troubles they face with natural disasters. Harris, in a formulation that speaks to US anti-barrier attitudes at a time when Soviet authorities were restricting east-west European travel and emigration, tells the Japanese, “No one stays as he was, nor any country. This will do. Home, sweet home.” However, over the course of the film, Harris must fight for official recognition, and even decent treatment in the marketplace, in order to win their trust and negotiate with the Shogunate for the opening of Japan. He does so with the assistance of Okichi (Eiko Ando), who, as romantic interest and cultural attaché, announces in voice-over, “This is my story too.”

The film therefore enacts the violation and dissolution of state identity- and territory-markers in three significant and overlapping ways. Of course, in terms of *diegetic construction*, despite censure, social shunning, and the continual threat of arrest, Harris defies isolationist thinking and crosses over into Japanese waters, a movement that we might characterize as sadly one-way and thus imperialist, if it were not for the other two ways through which the film counters the impulse to create or refortify nation-state “walls.” The film, in its *narrative content*, also depicts the crossing of certain cultural divides: apart from the interracial romance that informs its overarching storyline, one scene features a Japanese man embarrassing macho icon John Wayne in a martial arts demonstration, a turn of events unthinkable in the work of Howard Hawks or Henry Hathaway, some of the star’s other famous directors. Finally, the film’s *textual form* resembles the spirit of international cooperation that its main characters advocate. Although its image track in the main focuses us on Harris’s diplomatic mission, the film reserves the voice-over narration for Okichi, who mediates

and controls the telling of these events, so distant in time—in doing so, she figures the “now” of US–Japanese comity. *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, then, in tune with its release context and anticipating the crisis in Berlin in the following months, ultimately valorizes *exploring frontiers over shoring up borders*.²⁰

Contrast the ideological tenor and diegetic construction of Huston’s film to Martin Scorsese’s *Silence* (2016), a film also set in Japan, in this case close to the time of the Catholic resistance to the Tokogawa Shogunate in the 1630s. The film depicts the efforts of two Jesuits, Sebastião Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Francisco Garupe (Adam Driver), as they attempt to minister in secret to the converts of the villages of Tomogi and Gotō, whom the samurai of the magistrates, suspicious of the foreign missionaries and set on restoring the traditional cultural identity of Japan, routinely torture, terrorize, and repress. The Jesuits throughout the film struggle with their consciences, as they realize that satisfying the Shogunate’s demands that they openly renounce their faith might abate some of the suffering they witness and endure themselves. Ultimately, Garupe dies and Rodrigues apostatizes, stepping on a *fumi-e* (an effigy of Jesus), inspecting trade ships for religious artifacts, and meeting with the inquisitor a final time to discuss the fate of Christianity in Japan. *Silence* thus surprisingly follows much of the same narrative arc as *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, each film culminating with an audience in front of a Japanese official concerning the opening of the nation to international and intercultural commerce. However, Scorsese’s film, reflecting the emphasis on security walling in the world-systems of the twenty-first century, shifts its focus to the closing of Japan off from other territories and regimes, as well as the effects of such a decision on the social unicity, cultural normativity, and internal dynamics of the nation-state.

Silence opens in a very different manner than *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, with Japanese ministers and their samurai standing in the mists and carrying their standards up a mountainside near a series of volcanic springs. There the Japanese torture five Catholic missionaries with scalding water; one of them, the Jesuit Cristóvão Ferreira (Liam Neeson), informs us in voice-over that they constantly “live in fear,” since “all [their] progress has ended in new persecution, new repression, new suffering.” As the missionaries scream and Ferreira despairs, the camera captures the mountaintops in the distance that form a stratigraphic carapace—a natural set of walls—surrounding the coastlines of the nation. Once Rodrigues and Garupe arrive in Japan, they come ashore at night, disappearing into a cave under the mountains, in clear contradistinction to Townsend Harris’s much cheerier disembarkation in Huston’s film. These opening scenes in *Silence* offer clear parallels to the situation facing immigrants and refugees as they attempt to enter other countries in the new millennium, fully understanding that there they must maintain a furtive existence, counting on the assistance of sympathizers or fellow members of the same ethnicity, religion, or

sociolinguistic cast to elude those authorities that wish to entrap, ostracize, or inflict some form of sanction on them. Philip Horne, in fact, aptly describes the film as a movement from the “epic sweep” of its “seething volcanoes” and “threatening waves” to a much tighter, almost claustrophobic focus on the confinement of its main characters to a series of “huts, bamboo cages, compounds, prison cells, [and] palanquins.”²¹ True to this description, *Silence* ends with Rodrigues’s funeral, a train of Buddhists setting fire to the casket with torches reminiscent of the ones the villagers of Tomogi use to dispel the darkness of the cave for the Jesuits earlier in the film. The camera then digitally zooms in on the inside of the casket, revealing a crude wooden crucifix in the folds of the corpse’s palms.

The implosive qualities of the film mark the radical departure of twenty-first-century US cinema from the internationalism and cultural rapprochement of *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, again in three ways. *Silence*, in terms of its *diegetic construction*, dramatizes the closing of the “walls” surrounding the nation in on the main characters, specifically Rodrigues, so much so that the final shot of the film consists of the snug interior of the man’s casket as the torchbearers cremate it. As for its *narrative content*, the film, unlike its counterparts from the Cold War era, suggests the reversion of US cinema in the new millennium to isolationist feeling and ethno-national chauvinism, as the most of the Japanese remain Buddhists and the missionaries, although tacitly, in silence, remain Christian, the only open cross-cultural exchange occurring through the shipping trade. Finally, regarding its *textual form*, the film insists that its narrative and its image-flow do not move in the direction of a mutual “story,” with Ferreira in voice-over calling the oppression of the converts and the confinement of the Jesuits to the island’s natural and carceral borders a series of “hells.” The Shogunate speaks to these men in Japanese, the film conventionally subtitling their words so as to suggest the inexorable nonidentity of the one to the other, each of their cultural rituals unable to truly touch the other’s “inner being.” *Silence*, coming out at a moment that saw the engineering of security walls to separate Hungary from Serbia, China from North Korea, Egypt from Gaza, and the United States from Mexico, contemplates *the shoring up of borders and their isolating influence on the individual along with the nation-state*.

Other films from the mid-twentieth century advocate for more than the opening of nation-states; some take to task the concrete walls, anti-vehicle trenches, anti-tank obstacles, observation towers, and meshwork fences that separate them, restricting civilian movement, international travel, and ideological commerce. The most conspicuous of these structures, the Berlin Wall, the climax of a decade’s worth of Soviet demarcation efforts meant to stem emigration and defection from East Germany and other satellite states, made appearances in some of the spy films of the “New Frontier” era. J. Hoberman, comparing President John Kennedy to secret agent James Bond, describes the August 13, 1961, construction scene as an effort of the

Soviets and East Germans to seal “the border between East and West Berlin” with a “double-tiered wall,” turning the area into an exclave, with alien and unfriendly territory surrounding it on either side.²² Although certain films of the era in the James Bond vein, such as *Funeral in Berlin* (Guy Hamilton, 1966) and *Casino Royale* (Ken Hughes, John Huston, Joseph McGrath, Robert Parrish, and Val Guest, 1967), feature the Wall, the most thoughtful cinematic representation of it comes from an adaptation of a John le Carré novel, the quite unglamorous *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965).

The film opens with a shot overlooking the Wall, with the camera scanning the ashen, mortar-and-steel Checkpoint Charlie site and focusing on a sign that reads, “You Are Leaving the American Sector.” The first sequence of the film depicts its main character, Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) member Alec Leamas (Richard Burton), watching the death of another operative attempting to move through the checkpoint on a bicycle. Midway through the death strip, the Germans activate the sirens and floodlights, shooting down the agent, who unsuccessfully tries to weave from side to side in order to dodge the fire of their machine guns. More than a stark treatment of the ugliness of East-West relations, this sequence depicts one of the worst consequences of state security walling and other similar devices: their delimitation of our freedom of movement, of the easy flow of our arms, torsos, and feet as they force us to curtail our motions or cramp them in such a way as to make them seem unwieldy, irregular, spasmodic, or, in this case, serpentine. Of course, the movement of these characters onscreen, the charm and stylishness of their actions, distinguishes the cinema from the older visual arts.²³ However, in this sequence, the movements of the spy that the Germans assassinate appear clumsy, erratic, and unheroic; if anything, the alarms, signals, and machinegun nests off-screen function much more smoothly, meaning that these instruments of war, oppression, and mutual suspicion seem to function more “naturally” than the men and women in the film do. The Berlin Wall, in other words, represents *an affront to the moving image*, or rather to *the fundamentally human movement* that makes it of interest to us.²⁴

The rest of the film focuses on Leamas’s attempts to enter East Berlin so as to frame Hans-Dieter Mundt (Peter van Eyck), the officer responsible for the cyclist’s death, for counterespionage and treason. The film emphasizes the circuitous routes that Leamas must negotiate in order to do so, impersonating an alcoholic ex-convict; developing romantic ties with an idealistic communist sympathizer, Nan Perry (Claire Bloom); meeting the recruiters of the Link, a chain of spies seeking out informants and defectors; and finally traveling to the GDR to convince the interrogator Fiedler (Oskar Werner) that Mundt serves the UK as a secret intelligence asset. En route to Germany, Leamas drives through a series of checkpoints, iron gates, and troop stations that make the entire countryside seem an expansion of the

death strip, with miniature Wall-like ramparts and soldiers with combat rifles cropping up throughout it. At one of the East German compounds, Mundt manages to escape character assassination and conviction, convincing a tribunal to arrest Fiedler as the real traitor, Leamas as a confusion agent, and Nan Perry as their accomplice and dupe. However, in another twist—narratively matching the circuitous movements it took to reach the German manor—Mundt, who serves as a mole for the UK, frees the couple from their cells during the night, furnishes them with a car, and instructs them to race to Berlin to flee the country. The couple complies, reaching the city and moving again in roundabout ways through its dark alleys, warehouse interiors, and desolate sidewalks near the outer strip of the Wall, which they must scale while avoiding the searchlight that scans its surface, much in the way the camera slides over it in the opening scenes of the film (Figure 1.1).

The two scramble toward the Wall, clamber over it, and freeze as the searchlight spots them. Then a sniper in an over-the-shoulder composition shoots down Nan, and Leamas, after a moment of indecision, descends to the East German side to implicitly assist the woman or even retrieve the corpse. The sniper shoots once more and Leamas crumples over and dies. The circular ray that draws attention to the couple in this final sequence resembles nothing so much as the cone of xenon arc light that commonly came from the movie projectors of the era. This final touch underlines the ways that nation-state walling infringes on our capacities to move about unselfconsciously, to interact with those whom we wish, and to catch sight of distant objects or scenes of interest to us without something obstructing our view of them. By extension, then, these sorts of security walls also infringe



FIGURE 1.1 *The Berlin Wall in The Spy Who Came in from the Cold.*

on cinematic expression, in that it relies on near-constant movement, the dynamic interrelation of the characters on-screen, and the illusion of depth in its wide or establishing shots. The searchlight, though, stops shining as the main characters die and the film ends. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* thus aligns the cinema with them, its opto-mechanical functions clearly in the service of free movement and very much able to critique the tools of alienation, fear, murder, and repression—whether sirens, sniper rifles, or searchlights—as inimical to the moving image’s operational values. As Leamas’s decision to assist Nan rather than reenter West Berlin shows us, such structures as the Wall reduce each nonconformist individual who rejects the thinking that occasions Cold War containment to the status of *an exclave of one*.

David Leitch’s spy action film *Atomic Blonde* (2017) serves as a new millennial counterpart to *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in several ways. Set in 1989, right on the cusp of the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Atomic Blonde* follows secret agent Lorraine Broughton (Charlize Theron), who, much as with Leamas in the earlier film, seeks revenge for the murder of another MI6 operative, James Gascoigne (Sam Hargrave), who was attempting to smuggle out of East Berlin “the List,” a microfilm document that contains the names, identities, and affiliations of everyone working for an intelligence service throughout the Cold War arena. The List thus functions as an informational analogue to the Link, the order of communist agents that Leamus must infiltrate in Martin Ritt’s 1965 film, in which the villain Mundt turns out to serve as double agent for the British. *Atomic Blonde* offers an additional twist on this scenario: the MI6 undercover agent David Percival (James McAvoy), Lorraine Broughton’s contact in Berlin, at first appears the traitor whom the British codename “Satchel,” as we see this man make self-serving deals with the KGB and then assassinate a Stasi defector thought to memorize the contents of the entire List. However, the antihero Broughton actually serves as the double agent in this film, as she murders Percival, retrieves the List, impersonates a Russian, and massacres the KGB agents, the epilogue revealing that, as Satchel, she was working for the CIA, spreading misinformation to manipulate Soviet opinion. She even frames Percival as the rouge Satchel, using audiovisual evidence taken from Delphine Lasalle (Sofia Boutella), a French agent and Broughton’s romantic interest who thus functions as a counterpart to Nan Perry—not only do the two of them fill similar forensic roles, they also die in the course of their respective story arcs. Leamus, in a fit of despair, chooses to die alone with Nan Perry on “neither” side of the Cold War dispute, whereas Broughton eventually retires the Satchel deception²⁵ after Percival strangles Lasalle to death, flying off with a senior official from the CIA after at once repudiating MI6 and the KGB in the film’s epilogue sequence. However, *Atomic Blonde* also differs in significant ways from *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*,

as it speaks to twenty-first-century feelings of ambivalence toward nation-state walling.

The film opens with footage of President Ronald Reagan's 1987 "Tear Down this Wall" speech, and from there it segues into an action sequence involving Gascoigne attempting to escape East Berlin in foot. A KGB agent drives into Gascoigne and then shoots the man down in the streets in an act reminiscent of the death of the cyclist that opens *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. The agent steals Gascoigne's wristwatch, which contains a copy of the List on microfilm. This opening sequence, more than slyly alluding to an older spy film, establishes the aesthetic of *acceleration* central to understanding the diegetic construction of a film set during the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the restructuring of US international relations.²⁶ The film contains a number of similarly dizzying set pieces; for instance, after immediately arriving in West Berlin, Broughton fights off two assassins in a speeding car. Then she fights off Stasi and KGB agents in Gascoigne's apartment, in a movie theater, on a stairwell in East Berlin, and in an opulent suite in Paris, all after receiving a final "message" from a vision of the former MI6 operative in a dream: "You need to run." The disorienting composition of these sequences, along with the extreme fast-motion insert shots of Berlin's streets, autobahn, nightlife, and freedom marches, speaks to accelerating changes in the film's diegetic-ideological coordinates with the immanent tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the decommunization of the East, changes that we can intuit, if not directly sense, from these sorts of images.

Lisa Purse argues that viewers of action cinema "can be imaginatively oriented towards particular diegetic trajectories without having to continuously *see* them," since these velocities express cultural concerns over the "negation of space" that accompanies moments of intense social, economic, and technological change.²⁷ This accent on fastness finds its complement in the film's directional axes of movement: unlike with the circuitous crossings in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the agents in *Atomic Blonde* enter East and West Berlin in a mostly *straightforward* manner. Broughton, wearing a crimson wig, merely consults a checkpoint officer and walks right into the Alexanderplatz; moreover, while teenagers from the GDR drink, dance to rap music, and trade for illegal merchandise, Percival evades the Stasi forces raiding the scene and crawls into a duct under the Berlin Wall to easily cross into West Berlin. These twin forces, accelerating motion and forward momentum, explode in the film's climax in the dismantlement of the Berlin Wall, during which Germans chip away at its ramparts, scale them without retaliation from soldiers, and set off fireworks while chanting "Down with the Wall" in unison. Broughton, in these moments, shoots Percival in the streets near the Wall (much as Leamas dies near it) and afterward takes advantage of the opening of the East to entrap and murder the KGB agents seeking the List (Figure 1.2).



FIGURE 1.2 *The Berlin Wall in Atomic Blonde.*

These two forces, as they mutually inform these final sequences, also nicely characterize the film's twenty-first-century release context, in that the acceleration of socioeconomic change in it dovetails with further escalations of violence. It is no accident that the straightforwardness of the movement of the characters in *Atomic Blonde* seems to contradict its narrative structure; unlike its 1965 forerunner, it "retells" its main narrative threads over the course of a series of debriefings with MI6 and CIA chiefs. This film, even as it reenacts the transgression and collapse of the twentieth century's most notorious security structure, at the same time *fantasizes its recursion*. The fall of the Berlin Wall in *Atomic Blonde* might then represent another instance of the "false intel" that its main character, the real Satchel, appears so expert at—in other words, while on the surface dramatizing and acknowledging the internal pressures that make state security apparatuses so unstable and unpopular, the film also unmistakably couches them *in an air of nostalgia*.²⁸ Thus, if anything, the film expresses the conflicting temptations to erect walls, as well as demolish them, and in any case to contemplate their return and their effects at times of swift cultural, ideological, and socioeconomic transformation. Without these walls, the world-system devolves into a set of shifting allegiances and *conclaves*, such as the conspiratorial CIA and the now-capitalist remnants of the KGB.

These sets of films, as symptomatic of the cultural attitudes toward nation-state security in two different centuries, clearly differ from each other in significant respects. The films from the Cold War era, for example, disparage natural barriers and separation walls as anathema to free movement, trade, cultural dialogue, and romantic attachment, as an invention only dear to militarists, isolationists, and apparatchiks.²⁹ Typically these films treat these sorts of security measures as a challenge for their main characters to defy or outmaneuver, as with *The Barbarian*

and the Geisha or Alfred Hitchcock's spy thriller *Torn Curtain* (1966).³⁰ Some of these films rue the construction of security walls as a cause for ideological despondency and an affront to freedom of association, self-determination, and open and transparent communication, as in the case of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. However, the films from the 2010s coming out after the 9/11 attacks and the Secure Fencing Act, and at about the same time as President Donald Trump's January 2017 Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements Order, reflect changes in US attitudes toward the issue of nation-state walling.³¹ These films do not accede to the US development of separation walls so much as they express a certain cultural ambivalence about them, criticizing their violent effects while also representing them as *established facts*, as concretizations of twenty-first-century realpolitik over contentious issues of immigration reform, national security, and cultural identity. These films often suggest the crushing, coarsening, or deindividualizing effects of natural or man-made barriers on those inside of them, or the ways that these security measures create an atmosphere of social mistrust that tends to other characters *who do not appear to belong* to the nation-state.³² Although these films depict security walls and other such mechanisms as failures of the sociopolitical imagination, they nonetheless inure viewers to the act of seeing them and therefore to conceivably seeing them outside the movie theater or television room—to seeing walls without cinema. It is indisputable that much twenty-first-century mainstream Hollywood cinema works to normalize the very sight of these walls in US artistic, cultural, and critical discourse, their frequent reappearance from film to film making their real-life construction seem inevitable, almost a foregone conclusion. However, the ambivalence of these films to their subject matter, diegetic construction, and sociohistorical context also makes them extremely valuable tools for us to use in thinking through the dangers these walls represent to refugees, immigrants, citizens, military servicepersons, US government officials, and other nation-state actors, as well as to the environment, farmlands, wildlife, and the world's commercial traffics, shipping routes, capital flows, and overall economic well-being. These walls do not wait to show up on cinema screens until after the 2006 approval of the Secure Fence Act, though. Right after 9/11, a number of Hollywood releases and coproductions from 2003 to 2005 set about introducing their audiences to state security techniques, including the use of separation walling to *exclude certain bodies from certain spaces*. These films anticipate those that came to theaters after the installation of over 600 miles of wire and steel fencing on US–Mexican territories, during the course of its extension under President Barack Obama, and throughout Trump's efforts to finish the wall that the Bush administration, a GOP majority Congress, and the US Department of Homeland Security set about constructing.