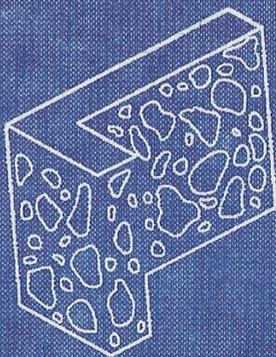
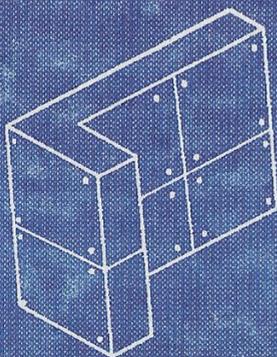
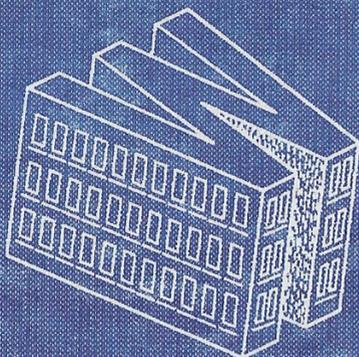
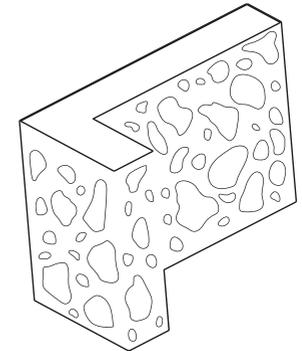
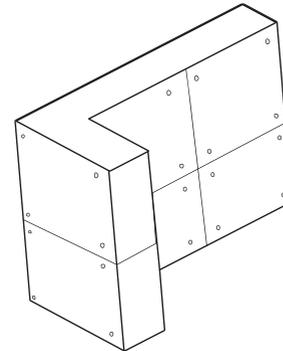
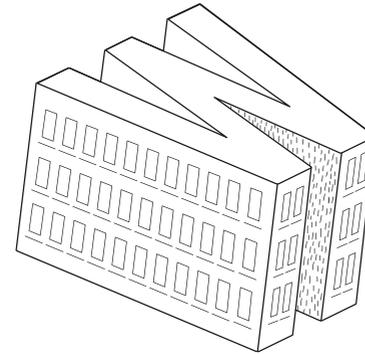


OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



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EDITORIAL

This publication analyzes the wall as an object from different angles: thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and twenty-five years after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The wall has been regarded in and through the relations between objects and walls, from the perspectives of both Berlin and Latin America.

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

During the last preparations for this publication, the coronavirus pandemic dramatically made its appearance. It happened globally, spreading in just a few months throughout the world. One of the many direct effects was the shutting down of borders by national governments. Another was governments asking or forcing people to stay home, with higher levels of violence depending on the location.

We started the project that led to this publication by thinking about the connection between Mexico and Germany through the figure of the wall, both past and present. The culminating event of the project in fact took place directly on the 30th anniversary of the fall of the German wall. Today, amid the pandemic, a wall can be felt at the door to one's home. In addition to the immobility we face, concerns about a looming financial crisis add weight to the ongoing situation, which has already incurred an enormous loss of life.

Arriving under the guise of technological aid, new forms of control through digital devices emerge alongside reinforced border security measures. If, on the one hand, (automated) processes of contact tracing and other control measures might be necessary to avoid further connotation, on the other hand, those processes must be kept in check: too often such control processes, whether introduced by nation states or corporations, reproduce sexist, racist and xenophobic structures, all at the expense of privacy.

Although our project started two years ago, it has originated a diverse and pertinent collection of lenses with which to observe the current situation, both by learning from historical events and looking to the times ahead of us.

WALL

Even before the pandemic, it was a well-known fact that objects retain a larger freedom of movement than the majority of the global population. Objects, not subjects, have the greatest agency to travel throughout the international economy. This does not mean, however, that subjects have no place; they indeed have a fixed one: subjects, who must stay in place, maintain the extractive, productive and logistical flows that the economy requires in order to come full circle. It is because of the control and exploitation of subjects that the objects around us dance.

But the question arises, what can we learn from the objects? Under neoliberal capitalism, can they be understood as anything other than objects of consumption? What can they teach us about subjects, what can they reveal about the infrastructures of their animation? How can the objects explain the increasingly complex relations between producers and consumers, workers and managers, politicians and citizens? And what about the role of the media?

This book accumulates a series of positions regarding the Berlin Wall and its legacy as a media avatar, or as a symbol of the ending of a divided era and the ushering in of a new era of unification and global expansion.

In their own way, the positions expose myths surrounding the Berlin Wall, and treat it as an agent of history—an object—with a certain power to transform, either in its presence or its absence. They explore the ways this object, and the *wall* more generally, has been bestowed with subjective (or ideological) meaning, and to which ends.

The project that led to this publication was initiated by Tlaxcala3 in Mexico City, directed by Clara Bolívar and Ali Coteró, and The Institute for Endotic Research in Berlin, directed by Benjamin Busch and Lorenzo Sandoval. We were driven by an inquiry into the historical and contemporary manifestation of *walls*. Considering Berlin as a historical example, and the Mexico-US border as a contemporary example, as well as the diffuse shift from the concrete to the abstract production of walls, the project was interested in finding cracks and fissures for radical intervention.

It was envisioned in three stages, as a continuation of Bolívar and Coteró's 2018 project with Biquini Wax EPS, the *1st International Encounter of Objects Without People*, which was inspired by the work of Melquiades Herrera, a pioneer of performance art in Mexico and critic of consumerism.¹ The first stage of *Objects Before and After the Wall*, the project that precipitates here, was a transdisciplinary study circle at the space of Tlaxcala 3. The second stage, which took place simultaneously, was a series of *Berlin encounters* with screenings and commissioned texts with a critical approach to the Berlin Wall and the history of subsequent capitalist expansion. The third stage was a gathering at The Institute for Endotic Research based on subsequent *curatorial research*, on November 9, 2019—the 30th anniversary day of the fall of the wall—attended by Tlaxcala 3, titled the *2nd International Encounter of Objects and Walls*.

Therefore, this book is composed of interlaced contributions sourced from two parallel processes. One

1. Anna Goetz, "Plastic Fantastic: The Radical Humour of Mexican artist Melquiades Herrera," *Frieze*, June 26, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/plastic-fantastic-radical-humour-mexican-artist-melquiades-herrera>.

source consists of commissioned texts, artworks and reflections related to the series of encounters hosted at The Institute for Endotic Research. The other source consists of submissions to the *2nd International Encounter* from around Latin America, organized in Tlaxcala³ in Mexico.

In writer and curator **Karen Fiss**'s commissioned text on **Sung Tieu**'s exhibition "Subnational Enterprise," the author unpacks the history of Vietnamese migration to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the west and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the east. Furthermore, she addresses the conflicts and contradictions that arose during the reunification process, which underlie Tieu's work. Fiss connects this history to contemporary movements in surveillance and border security, as well as the expansion of consumer society since the end of the Cold War, to expose still existing (and in many ways exacerbated) control infrastructures.

Rodolfo Andaur's "Transitar entre los símbolos del muro" analyzes the epistemic, political, global crisis inscribed in the fall of the Berlin Wall. Following Andaur's reflection, this fall showed the symptoms of the expansion of neoliberalism to global politics. Andaur focuses in more detail on the connections between the fall of the wall in Berlin with Mexican and Chilean contingent politics of that period, and how art is the necessary symbolic production, where words cannot arrive to contribute to a densification of intellectual debate.

Formed and informed by the relations of consumerism as opposed to those of (nominal) collectivity, the dissolution of the GDR and subsequent expansion of

the FRG into its territory caused a fundamental shift in the everyday relations of citizens of the defunct GDR. Architect, writer and translator **Manuela Koelke** offers an introspective and simultaneously outward-looking reflection in her commissioned text "Clearances," which from her own experience of the reunification process in the East, recounting formative childhood experiences and providing a critical retelling of the story at the level of everyday life.

In 1989, the Wall was destroyed, but its dividing effects did not disappear: on the contrary, they increased in more silent and sophisticated ways. They transformed into what **Alberto Pacheco Benites** calls *three regimes of walls*. To find out how they work, he establishes a *new nomenclature* that differentiates between *portable walls*, *factual walls* and *transparented walls*.

Portable walls are the ones configured by the dynamics of technological objects, pocket walls from the informational regime. *Transparented walls* are tangible, built, constituted, but they are invisible because we have normalized them as they surround us in the sphere of everyday life. Walls that privatize public space: fences, bounded borders, house walls and neighborhood gates make us constantly feel others (neighbors, foreigners, differentness, aliens) are always a threat.

Transparent walls are manifestations of *factual walls*: these are "walls of unconcerned unfairness, of unachieved social mobility, discrimination, racism, walls of the always-promised development that is precisely never achieved, walls against the hope for dignified life." Those who cross the Sonoran Desert

and Chihuahuan Desert walls, the Rio Bravo wall, the Arauca river wall, the Mediterranean Sea wall seek to cross *factual walls*.

Hito Steyerl's reprinted essay, "The Empty Center," originally published in 2003, reveals the historical and activist considerations that underpin her 1998 film of the same name. Steyerl examines the empty space left over after reunification as the projection ground for global capital, which exposes not only the erasure of history, but also the emergent increase in conflicts between xenophobic Germans and people with migrant backgrounds who have lived in Germany for generations, or who are arriving for the first time due to newly opened borders in the post-Cold War expansion of the EU.

Lorenzo Sandoval contributes with a text on the relationships between the COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming reinforcement of borders globally, as well as a nationalistic and xenophobic drift. In his text, he expands the notion of the wall as a figure for the border in order to place it at the domestic threshold.

Francisco González Castro's "Vagar por el muro" [Walk Through the Wall], explores the wall as a concept, so he can then place us with him in 2016 in the Arizona desert, where he performed with Lucy Quezada "Layers of Disappearing: 1,002 of 7,000" as homage to the 7,000 migrants who died trying to reach the other side of the wall.

For the *2nd International Encounter of Objects and Walls* on November 9th, **Daniela Medina Poch** proposed a free public workshop titled "Global Warming, Reggaeton and Emotional Micropolitics."

Amid social uprisings at different latitudes, namely in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, Daniela Medina Poch invited us to imagine how everyday objects might canalize the anger and hope we currently experience in the world.

Prompted by **Harun Farocki's** film "The Leading Role" (1994), which was entered into dialog with Koelke's reflections on the reunification process by screening the film on the occasion of her presentation, she also wrote a response to Farocki. Koelke considers Farocki's particular methodology and approach to the film, which deals with the fall of the wall as presented in the media, eschewing narratives at the level of everyday life or politics, and instead honing in on the different approaches to narrative construction in the media between West and East.

In "Love Letters to the Wall," **Marisol García Walls** approaches the wall from an emphatic point of view, by drawing a conceptual text-based piece from a procedure of conceptual literature. She gives voice to people who had feelings for the Berlin Wall and committed emotionally by marrying the wall. From news telling their stories, she erases and leaves words, and through them the Berlin Wall's echo emerges in the present as an image of some kind of freedom or happiness as possibility. Effects—af-fects—affections coming back from the Wall from the images we saw on TV and stories we heard about it when we were young.

Eli Cortiñas's contribution, "Walls Have Feelings," creates an opening for interpreting the vestiges of power as embodied by walls and monuments, their destruction following collapse or their breakdown in

the face of resistance, as well as the new regimes of digital control and enforced self-care, a requirement for performing one's role in the global economy of likes.

“Foráneas: piedra blanda, tierra inmóvil” [Foreigners: Soft Stone, Still Land] considers the body as the place where power is embodied, but also where resistance can emerge. **Lorena Tabares** and **Diana Buitrón** sustained a weight on their head as long as they could manage, as a gesture for all those foreigners who were expelled from their territory, standing vulnerable and affected on a forced journey into the unknown.

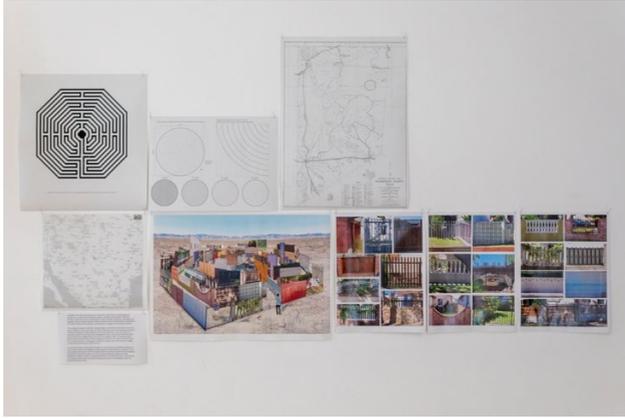
In “Visiting the Berlin Fence Memorial” **Benjamin Busch** discusses his artwork from 2015 that draws a connection between the Berlin Wall and the EU border fence surrounding the Spanish exclaves of Melilla and Ceuta located on the African continent. His thesis is that the Berlin Wall, which symbolized the border of the constellation that would become the contemporary EU, did not fall exactly, but was pushed to the extremes edges of the bloc, and inverted, in concert with the political-economic developments of the post-Cold War period.

As an assemblage, the contributions to this book analyze the wall as an object from different angles: thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and twenty-five years after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994). The wall has been regarded as an ideological space in and through the relations between objects and walls. The notion of the liminal, the crack, the border and other possible unfoldings have been explored.

Together, we have carried out a reflection on objects—the wall as an object, the objects that pass or do not pass through walls—after the fall of East Germany (and the rest of Eastern Europe), the breakup of the USSR and the subsequent neoliberal reforms which took place in Europe and Latin America. These are embodied myriad forms in this book, which we offer as a document of our collaboration and a gesture toward future retellings of the story of *walls*.



Photographs from the 2nd International Encounter of Objects and Walls at The Institute for Endotic Research. Photos: dokugram/ Benjamin Busch



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



WALL

CRITICAL APPROACHES FROM LATIN AMERICA

Clara Bolívar & Alí Cotero

The Office of Artistic Accompaniments Tlaxcala3,¹ Mexico City, is a self-managed instance which proposes curatorial dialogs from contemporary art issues with different communities, from the perspective of cultural management. From April to September 2019, in Tlaxcala3 and The Institute for Endotic Research, we carried out the theoretical and curatorial research *Objects Before and After the Wall*, which considered a study circle happening in Mexico City, and sessions of lectures of commissioned texts in Berlin.

This investigation, supported by Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo for curatorial research, gathers and traces constellations of artistic practices and research processes which critically approach contemporary walls after the Berlin Wall's fall on November 9th, 1989: walls as geopolitical borders,

1. More at <https://gcas-la.com/tlaxcala3>

walls of classism and racism, walls of neoliberalism, ideological walls, as well as the effects of Donald Trump's administration's aim to straighten the border wall of Mexico-US.

The study circle gave us the opportunity to expand the possibilities to learn from contemporary walls from Mexico City. From April to August 2019, researchers and artists shared in Tlaxcala3 diverse approaches to the wall. With the artist and researcher Felipe Zuñiga, we started from questioning colonialism and geography, with the idea of *geopoetics* from Latin America with works like the ones by Ecuadorian artist Fabiano Kueva and his Alexander von Humboldt Archive² and the work at Lake Texcoco in Mexico by Colombian artistic researcher Adriana Salazar.³

We approached neoliberalism itself as a wall, with the work of artist Daniel Aguilar Ruvalcaba and ideology walls with Joaquín Segura's perspective and work. The US-Mexico wall was brought to the discussion by the Tijuana based researcher Juan Antonio del Monte, who developed the idea of a *precarization* vortex in the wall.⁴ Finally, with Chicago based artist Jose Benavides, we concluded with walls of racism in both Mexican and US societies.⁵

After the first stage of activities both in Berlin and Mexico City, we made an open invitation to artists and creators to send contributions to the *2nd International*

2. More at <http://fabianokueva.net/archivo/archivo-alexander-von-humboldt>

3. More at <http://www.allthingslivingallthingsdead.com>

4. More at https://ces.colmex.mx/pdfs/tesis/tesis_delmonte_madrigal.pdf

5. More at <https://joseluisbenavides.com/post/190706138715/muros-visibles-e-invisibles-del-racismo>

Encounter of Objects and Walls. The invitation for the Encounter was published in the online magazine from Centro de Estudios de Cosas Lindas e Inútiles, in Santiago de Chile.⁶ We were in contact with them and started close collaborations regarding objects and material culture, thanks to their talented editor in Mexico City, Marisol García Walls.

Contributions to the 2nd International Encounter of objects and walls were received by email at tlaxcalatres@gmail.com returning to the three main strategies of mail art, explained by César Espinoza:

I. It is a long-distance dialogue between people who will probably never get to know each other or exchange words in a loud voice. This [...] allows knowing other circumstances and other problems. It seeks for understanding, and solidarity.

II. Correlatively, it is a political, ideological dialogue, by the very nature of the system. A communication system is more interested in the existential problems and current circumstances than eminently formal and stylistic concerns. Although it allows escapist outbursts, it always means a practice outside the academic or market codes [...]. This characteristic was of special importance to face dictatorial regimes, such as those lived in Latin America, or closed systems such as 'real socialism.'

III. It originates a process of artistic decentralization, when from each village or province you can send creative messages and be known or transmitted to a multitude of places, as opposed to the 'centers' governing art implanted since the second postwar period, where a plot of galleries, museums,

6. More at <https://ceclirevista.com/2019/10/04/invitacion-2do-encuentro-internacional-de-objetos-y-muros-de-tlaxcala-3>

critics and art dealers' closed apparatus controls a marketing and 'prestige' that rules over universal art. [...] This is now enhanced in the times of the Internet and email.⁷

Possibilities for participation in the Encounter were:

1. Objects Showcase
2. Audiovisual material
3. Critical texts, diagrams and drawings
4. Visual poetry / concrete poetry
5. Instructions for assembling and disassembling walls

We received collaborations from Austin, Bogotá, Cali, Chicago, Ciudad de México, Ciudad Juárez, Estado de México, Guadalajara, Lima, Quito, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Sonora / Arizona and Tijuana. We made collaboration with the GCAS – Latin American collective to transmit it online.

So, from Tlaxcala3, *Objects Before and After the Wall* builds an assemblage of artists and researchers born in the eighties and nighties, who *approach – walk – wonder about it, resist to – walls* within their Latin American contexts.

We called it *International Encounter*, since we conceive the idea of *Encounter* as an occasion to get together in self-managed art spaces and other instances in different latitudes, to share and discuss about works and experiences regarding particular and shared walls.⁸ The *Encounter* is a warm place to stay and embrace our shared sensibility in an instance of confidence.

7. César Espinoza, "Arte-correo y poesía visual en México: una práctica (todavía) corrosiva," *Heterogenesis*, <http://www.heterogenesis.com/H-45/EspinozaCas.htm>.

8. More from the First International Encounter of objects without people: <https://terremoto.mx/relatoria-del-primer-encuentro-internacional-de-objetos-sin-personas>

The Encounter occurred on November 9th at:
 Casa Centrox16, Ciudad Juárez⁹
 Casa Vidrio, Guadalajara¹⁰
 Khora, Quito¹¹
 Maleza Proyectos, Bogotá¹²
 The Institute for Endotic Research, Berlin¹³
 Tlaxcala3, Mexico City¹⁴
 Supplement projects, Miami.¹⁵ November 24th

To visit thirty years later the ruins of the Berlin Wall from a critical Latin American perspective evidences that, in our contexts, built and invisible walls are getting thicker and heavier, and so their effects. The collaborations included here use words which name – trace – face – question – pierce – penetrate – perforate walls and bring us together to resist through critical thinking, poetry and imagination.

Clara Bolívar and Alí Cotero
 Tlaxcala3
 Mexico City, May 2020

9. More at <https://cargocollective.com/alejandraaragon/Los-muros-no-son-para-siempre>

10. More at <https://casavidriogdl.wixsite.com/casavidrio/2do-encuentro-internacional-de-objeto>

11. More at <https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/cultura/horadar-pensar-muros-fronterizos-otra-manera-romperlos>

12. More at <https://www.malezaproyectos.com/copia-de-2>

13. More at <http://theinstituteforendoticresearch.org/wp/projects-current/objects-before-and-after-the-wall>

14. More at <https://gcas-la.com/2do-encuentro-internacional-de-objetos-y-muros>

15. More at <http://supplementprojects.com>



Presentation of the showcase *Objects and walls during the Chilean dictatorship (1973–1989)* [Objetos y muros en la dictadura chilena], May 22, 2019. Archivo Tlaxcala3. Photo: Kristina Reyes. More at <https://ceclirevista.com/2019/06/26/objetos-y-muros-en-la-dictadura-chilena-1973-1989-en-tlaxcala-3>

SUNG TIEU'S SUBNATIONAL ENTERPRISE

Karen Fiss



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

1. Inventory Poem II (2015)

The Smell Of Power

-

Obama

El Paso

Secret Service

Back In Action

No Limit

Ecstasy

Sensation Ecstasy Now

Power

Gold

Luxury

Deadly Magical

Prophecy

Belong To

Everyone

Everyman

1999

Cuba

Brazil

Ground Force

Fire

No Fear

Iron Men

Cold Dreams

...

WALL

The beginning words in Sung Tieu's concrete poem were culled from the inventory of the many products that fill Binh & Hoa Import/Export, a shop in the large Dong Xuan shopping center in the Berlin neighborhood of Lichtenberg. The goods for sale in this wholesale hub range from power adapters, flashlights and kitchen gadgets, to cell phone cases, Rubik's cubes and national flags. Binh & Hoa is just one of the many stores, restaurants and salons filling the six hangar complex, which is run primarily by Vietnamese immigrants from Northern Viet Nam. Among the most popular items for sale at Binh & Hoa are GDR-themed door plaques: raunchy, humorous, and exhibiting a distinct nostalgia for a bygone era. Also popular with customers are the many kinds of imitation perfumes, knock-off designer brands whose names have been altered sufficiently to pass legal muster.

Tieu programmed her inventory poems into two LED signs which she included in a 2015 installation at the project space Kinderhook & Caracas. The LEDs hung over plexiglass boxes overlaid with photographs shot at the Dong Xuan Center: young women entering the shopping center, a young man waving at the photographer/artist, and details of plugs, wires and coloured lights for sale. At first sight, these stacked translucent cubes read as an ethereal response to the typically heavy and aggressive industrial vocabulary of minimalist sculpture. Two of the boxes are positioned as if they have been opened, a gesture which pulls them back toward the vocabulary of shipping and commerce— packages left on the cement floor of a warehouse. Large square metal pegboards, installed a foot or so away from the gallery wall and illuminated from behind, also evoke the scale and geometry of minimalist precedents. Tieu's intervention though once

again brings these objects back to a functional use, with a small selection of goods from the import/export store hung at random intervals on the pegboards: an alarm clock, a tempered glass cell phone protector, and one of the "Ersatz" vintage plaques from which Tieu word-scavenged for her inventory poems. The plaque advertises a Pils, the beer bottle set against an idyllic rendering of Sachsenburg Castle in the former GDR. The LED signs are not hung directly on the gallery walls either, but positioned at angles so they remain objects in space, shifting between the corporate elegance of a minimalist artwork, or perhaps a Jenny Holzer, and the language of cheap advertising found in convenience stores or fast food restaurants.

Instead of hailing customers with news of a price cut or a daily special, the LED programmed with Tieu's poem "The Smell of Power" jumble political keywords such as "Secret Service," "Obama," and "Ground Force," which are the names of some of the fake eau de toilette brands. One might say that by combining these signifiers the LEDs attempt to market, rather pathetically, the seductive elixir of power. Does power smell? It actually stinks. Listing these charged political words recalls the minimalist language of news headlines. The incorporation of words



such as Obama, El Paso and Ground Force recalls a particularly insane news story at the time Tieu created this work in 2015, when Texas Governor Greg Abbott claimed that President Obama was preparing a military takeover of Texas. The governor deployed the Texas State Guard to monitor US military training exercises, thus legitimizing right-wing conspiracy theories and



fake news that the president planned to wipe out ISIS terrorists supposedly hiding in the outskirts of El Paso and then declare martial law in the Lone Star State.

The framing and twisting of “facts” to suit particular ideological agendas is a longstanding preoccupation of Sung Tieu, who frequently incorporates rewritten news stories into her installations. These articles, all published under the generic moniker, *Newspaper*, reveal how the presentation of facts is not objective, but shaped by deeply held beliefs and “authorized by power.” In her article titled “Ghosts of the

American Psyche, 2017” Tieu explains: “With the loss of faith in the media, recent logics of capital have made us all producers and receivers of capitalizable content. The weaponization of media, produced and consumed by everyone individually through social media outlets, blur the lines between information, judgment, advertisement and propaganda within the private and the public

terrain...”¹ Through her visual and textual practice, Tieu interrogates the structures of power by which people and products circulate, or are prevented from circulating, in service of an increasingly accelerated global capitalism. Under these conditions, more traditional forms of surveillance—the fixed and solid structures of walls and prisons—are further strengthened by systems of control that are fluid, a liquidity that can penetrate in-between spaces and adapt to new ones. Tieu’s work evokes these new conditions conceptually and sensorially, while also making the point that such disciplinary modes are increasingly being replaced by our own complicity, the policing of our own actions. While hard force and banoptic² resources are concentrated on guarding entrances and borders, for those already privileged on the “inside,” traditional enforcement is less necessary as behaviour become increasingly tamed through consumption, temptation and seduction. The combination of securitarian networks and the manipulation of desire is, as Tieu’s poem suggests, “Deadly Magical.”

2. Recruitment Agreements Between Nations

For the second part of *Subnational Enterprise*, Tieu re-programmed LED signs at the Dong Xuan market itself. Inside the CECO LED shop in Hall 8 the artist customized around a dozen LEDs on display in their store with facts about the recruitment of foreign labor in Europe and the US. The scrolling information called out the dates and countries engaged in the displacement of

1. Sung Tieu, “Ghosts of the American Psyche: Let the Serpent In,” *NEWSPAPER*, October 27, 2017.

2. The banopticon, a term coined by the French sociologist Didier Bigo (as a deliberate revision of Bentham/Foucault’s concept of the panopticon) refers to the apparatuses by which nations institute profiling mechanisms, securitization, and other technologies of surveillance to police borders and migration.

temporary workers. Encountering these LED messages in the context of the shop was disorienting to say the least—their history lessons bore no relation to the other signs hanging in the store which advertised “Buffet,” “Eis Cream,” and “Open Hours.” Among the historical dates announced on the LEDs were the 1913 California Alien Land Law, the 1942 Farm Labor Agreement between Mexico and the US, the 1973 West German ban on the recruitment of foreign “guest” workers, and the 1980 agreement on the “Importation of Contract Labor” between the German Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.³ Tieu notes that her interest in this installation grew out of her “desire to talk about displacement as an essential state-building instrument.”⁴ Indeed nearly 600 bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) were signed internationally between 1945 and 2015, which speaks to the considerable dependence on immigrant labor for nations competing in a global economy.⁵

Most relevant to the location of the installation at the Dong Xuan center, as well as to the artist’s biography,

3. The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam had similar agreements with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. East Germany also had recruitment agreements with North Korea, Angola, Mozambique, Cuba and countries of the Eastern Bloc. The Alien Land Law in California targeted primarily Japanese immigrants, prohibiting anyone who was “ineligible for citizenship” from owning agricultural land or signing long-term leases. The Farm Labor Agreement, also known as the Bracero program, continued with various extensions until 1964, bringing five million migrant laborers from Mexico to the US. The 1973 ban implemented by the Federal Republic of Germany, came after numerous bilateral recruitment programs signed by the West German government between 1955 and 1968 to bring guest workers from Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and Yugoslavia. Similar programs were initiated in other northern European countries including the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

4. Maurin Dietrich, “In the Night, I hear ‘em Talk: Sung Tieu. *Mousse* magazine (67, 2019):159.

5. Only after the Cold War “ended” did another significant wave of BLAs begin, this time engaging workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Poland and Romania to destinations such as the UAE, Qatar and New Zealand. See Adam S. Chilton, Eric A. Posner, “Why Countries Sign Bilateral Labor Agreements,” *Coase-Sandor Working Paper Series in Law and Economics*, no 807 (University of Chicago 2017): 17.



is the recruitment agreement (Anwerbeabkommen) that brought 70,000 Vietnamese workers to the GDR (The first wave of contract workers arrived between 1980 and 1984. Sung Tieu's father came during the second and larger wave of recruitment between 1987 and 1989). Nearly all of the contract workers who came to former East Germany under the agreement originated from the northern regions of Viet Nam. The connection to their northern roots is evident in the naming of the Dong Xuan Center after the well-known Hanoi market, *Chợ Đồng Xuân*. The actual wording of the recruitment agreement highlighted the importance of "deepening the brotherly cooperation" ("die Vertiefung der brüderlichen Zusammenarbeit") between the political allies, downplayed GDR's labor shortage, and instead framed it as program organized for the benefit of Vietnamese workers to gain valuable training in German industry.

This was hardly the case in practice: the GDR provided little training or language instruction for the Vietnamese workers, and made every effort to insure that they did not integrate into East German society. The contract workers were required to come alone without family members and could stay no longer than four or five years. Nearly every aspect of their lives were controlled and monitored by the state-owned enterprises that employed them. They were required to live in housing designated for Vietnamese migrants, and were subject to heavy surveillance by both Vietnamese government agents and the Stasi. In addition, they had to forfeit 12% of their wages to the Vietnamese government for the "development and protection of the homeland."⁶

6. Gertrud Hüwelmeier, "From Contract Workers to Entrepreneurs: Gender and Work Among Transnational Vietnamese in East and Reunited Germany, in *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia: Transnational Perspectives since 1800*. Joanne Miyang Cho and Douglas T. McGetchin, eds. (Palgrave, 2017), 276.

Their contracts banned liaisons and marriage with Germans, and pregnancy led to immediate expulsion and return to Viet Nam.

In contrast, the approximately 38,000 Vietnamese who came to live in the former West after 1978, the so-called "boat people," were taken in as refugees under the Geneva Convention by the FRG in response to pressure from media coverage and UNHCR. Whereas the GDR agreement was unequivocally temporary and isolating, the West German government made efforts towards "integration." The Vietnamese arrivals, nearly all from the Southern part of Viet Nam, were given permanent residence status, and efforts towards family reunification were supported. When possible, West Germany tried to select refugees who had a moderate level of education. They received mandatory language and integration courses, and unlike other asylum seekers, Vietnamese quota refugees were allowed to work after six months in the country. Students received further financial support towards education or professional training.⁷

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the differing circumstances of the Vietnamese in the east and west became drastically apparent. While the lives of those in the west remained mostly unchanged, those in the east had their work contracts cancelled and their housing shut down. The Vietnamese population in the former east Berlin nearly doubled as contract workers from other former Eastern Bloc countries came to Germany illegally following the break up of the Soviet

7. Frank Bösch and Phi Hong Su, "Invisible, successful, and divided: Vietnamese In Germany since the late 1970s," United Nations University WIDER Working Papers, "The politics of group-based inequalities—measurement, implications, and possibilities for change" (2018/15): 5.

Union. At first, the FRG attempted to incentivize the return to Viet Nam by offering 3000 DM to anyone willing to leave voluntarily. About half the Vietnamese population departed at this time, but soon the newly unified German government started the process of mass deportations of rejected asylum seekers. Viet Nam refused to allow the Viet Kieu back into the country, so Germany offered the government a \$140 million “aid package” to encourage timely repatriation. With the sharp rise in German nationalist fervor and xenophobic violence, living conditions became even more difficult. The Vietnamese endured racist attacks in 1991 and 1992, and several apartments were burned by mobs in places such as Hoyerswerder and Rostock (attacks Tieu alludes to in one of her “Newspaper” pieces, an op-ed titled “Inside the Blocks, 2019” which she wrote from the perspective of a 7-year old child, the age she would have been at the time of the article’s presumed publication).⁸

With their legal status in limbo and without regular employment, the East German Vietnamese needed to find other ways to support themselves financially. They began to self-organize, launching small businesses with low start-up costs such as flower and fruit stands. They also created makeshift markets in abandoned buildings, often hanging their wares on the same kind of metal pegboards Tieu used in her installation at Kinderhooks & Caracas. Most of the goods sold in this manner were “gray market,” unauthorized but legally distributed resale products. Other items, such as

8. Sung Tieu, “Inside the Blocks, October 16, 1995,” *Newspaper*, 2017. Tieu wrote this fake op-ed as a critique of the article by Alan Cowell, “No Job, No Country,” which was originally published on October 13, 1995 in the *New York Times*. Tieu signed her fake op-ed under the pseudonym Ching, the invented name of a Vietnamese character Sung Tieu played previously on the German television sit-com *Türkisch für Anfänger*.

cigarettes smuggled in from Poland, were sold off the black market, which became increasingly controlled by a mafia. In these myriad ways, the former contract workers had to find whatever cracks existed in the new political landscape—unused spaces and informal economic opportunities—and transform them into mechanisms of survival.

While the wall between east and west Berlin came down thirty years ago, economic and social divisions still divide the Vietnamese communities today. There are roughly 165,000 people with a Vietnamese migrant background living in Germany now (around 100,000 are first-generation migrants, of whom around 80,000 are Vietnamese nationals, and about 60,000 are second or third generation with no firsthand experience of migration).⁹ Most of the people whose roots were originally from the north and settled in former East Germany remain in the neighborhoods where contract workers were originally confined, including the area around the Dong Xuan Center. Those who came from the southern Viet Nam and settled in the FRG have had much better rates of upwardly social and geographic mobility. The Vietnamese remain the most highly segregated minority group in Germany. They also remain segregated from each other, due to their vastly different migratory experiences and differing political allegiances. It is said that the Vietnamese living in west Berlin rarely shop at the Vietnamese markets in Lichtenberg because they say they are controlled by “Communists”¹⁰ (rather paradoxical for such a free-trade enterprise).

9. Ann-Julia Schaland and Antonie Schmitz. *The Vietnam Diaspora in Germany*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2015, p. 13.

10. Suzanne Vieth-Entus and Sidney Gennies, “Stille Community: Wie Vietnamesen in Berlin leben,” *Tagesspiegel*, May 11, 2016.

3. “Roses from Damascus”

For the third part of *Subnational Enterprise*, Tieu produced a sound piece that she preloaded onto re-designed and newly branded counterfeit MP3 players, which were sold as “Subnational MP3s” on the shelves of Binh & Hoa along with their other merchandise. The soundtrack is a montage of segments sourced from films, advertisements, music, and ambient field recordings made by the artist at KaDeWe, Berlin’s famous luxury department store. It opens with a few measures of a Lady Gaga pop song, which gives way to the strings of a *Đàn bầu*. This traditional Vietnamese instrument provides brief musical interludes between the various conversations of salespeople and customers. Occasionally we hear Vietnamese spoken, but most of the exchanges take place in English, the lingua franca of global capitalism, at the counters of KaDeWe’s upscale boutiques. Listening to the MP3 through headphones as one wanders around the Dong Xuan market clearly sets up a comparison between its wholesale, off-brand commodities and the expensive designer items sold at the KaDeWe. As in many of her other artworks, Tieu deliberately disorients us, in this case disconnecting what we see from what we hear, encouraging in a subtle gesture of *détournement*, a reconsideration of preconceived notions and expectations.

In one sound segment, a character from *Sex in the City* expresses shock at the “insane price” Carrie (the show’s main protagonist) paid for a recent fashion purchase. An advertisement for Amazon follows, equating online shopping with self care: “Who needs the self help aisle when you can self help yourself to Amazon.com and get exactly what you need, overnight express and shame free!” The ease of overnight and international

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shipping, offered as well by a KaDeWe salesperson to a shopper in another section of the soundtrack, underscores how fluidly goods and services are able to travel in the interests of global capital, while barriers only increase for people attempting to cross borders in order to immigrate or seek refuge. The recorded interaction between Tieu and a salesman at the KaDeWe



perfume counter points to the same disparity between the mobility of people and objects. The salesman attempts to convince Tieu to purchase the more exclusive Christian Dior fragrance, *J'adore absolut*, rather than the more mundane one, *J'adore*. He explains that the expensive version contains unique ingredients: “roses from Damascus, Arabic jasmine, tuber roses from India... It’s very, very special.” Roses are imported from Damascus, their “exotic” quality considered an intrinsic component of Dior’s exclusive appeal and high price tag. War refugees from the same city, on the

other hand, continue to be unwelcome.

The inquiry into why some commodities are valued over others expands into more complex investigations concerning how dominant culture determines “authenticity” and value. Fake perfumes threaten the brand value of designer labels, which expensive

advertising and public relations carefully fabricate. Tieu’s work, through subtle juxtapositions and manipulated tropes, undermines other constructed notions of authenticity, in particular the paradoxes inherent in contemporary German and diasporic identities. What constitutes “authentic” German Kultur and how is Deutschland branded? Who is labeled an ex-pat, and who an immigrant? Der Ausländer, the Other, as a classic Derridean supplement, simultaneously completes and destroys the naturalized dichotomies which authoritative cultural hierarchies rely on. As such, the mythology of German ethnicity, hollow at its core, remains completely dependent on its xenophobic construction of the stranger. Whether spending hundreds of dollars on a flask of scented water or shoring up an essentialized identity, these psychic investments are entirely rooted in irrational thinking.

Tieu further dissected the complexities of diasporic identity during a reading/performance in 2017 in New York City’s 47 Canal Gallery. In her piece, *Inferiority Complex*, she interrogates her audience as well as herself about the “complex” in which she finds the diasporic artist caught.¹¹ She asks: is this structure “an architectural configuration, a psychological syndrome, or a political apparatus?” Tieu’s deconstruction of this “complex” resonates in several respects with Foucault’s notion of the *dispositif* as an apparatus that is relational and ever shifting in its ability to seep and envelope. The *dispositif*, according to Foucault, is a “heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical,

11. Sung Tieu, *Inferiority Complex I*, performed at 47 Canal Gallery, New York City. 2017.

moral and philanthropic propositions.”¹² In other words, it can be both form and formless, invisible and visible, “the said as much as the unsaid.” A structure and not a structure. A wall and the ideological remnants of a wall.

As an artist born in Viet Nam, raised during the early years after German reunification in one of the designated Vietnamese migrant housing blocks, and now living in London, Tieu asks rhetorically: “What did this discontinuation of one’s own cultural heritage do to us in order to adapt to a new one, a foreign one, as a foreigner?” “How does Germany’s past relate to me? Am I assimilating too much to another social culture, while forgetting my own?” “And when have we adapted enough, or neutralized ourselves enough to be integrated? Is this struggle even productive?” “And finally, “Is it a search for meaning and authenticity? Am I destined to occupy the position between the cracks?” Part of Tieu’s artistic strategy in navigating the “diasporic complex” is to continuously shape shift and up-end authenticity (through parafiction, or sometimes simply by employing a pseudonym or working in collectives). By challenging institutionalized categorization, Tieu underscores that all subjectivities are inevitably hybrid constructions in formation, particularly under the conditions of globalization as cultures are continuously de- and reterritorialized. Most importantly, it is precisely by occupying the “cracks,” transforming in-between spaces into potentially subversive spaces, rather than abandoning them to the increasingly invasive and fluid methods of control, that Tieu actively resists “the subjugation of her imagination”—and hopefully ours as well.

12. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair*, edited by Frédéric Gros, Paris: Gallimard, 2018.

All images are photographs of “Subnational Enterprise” © Sung Tieu, 2015.



TRANSITAR ENTRE LOS SÍMBOLOS DEL MURO

Rodolfo Andaur

Después de las erradas declaraciones de Schabowski,¹ el día 9 de noviembre de 1989, apareció una ferviente expectación mundial en los medios de comunicación así como también alrededor de las fronteras de las que por aquel entonces dividían a las dos alemanias. Esa misma noche la presión popular consiguió transitar, de manera pacífica, de un lado del muro hacia el otro. Estos hechos acontecidos en Berlín, no solo marcan una sentencia histórica en Europa, sino que también repercuten en las ideologías, las relaciones políticas y multilaterales a nivel global.

Efectivamente la caída del muro de Berlín delimitó un nuevo escenario geopolítico para el viejo continente que ante la manoseada Guerra Fría propició la apertura de estos nuevos límites al 'merchandising' impuesto

1. Günther Schabowski portavoz de la República Democrática Alemana (RDA) leyó ante la prensa internacional una parte del proyecto de Ley que permitía a todos los ciudadanos de la RDA viajar fuera desde la misma sin un justificante. Pero ante la pregunta de un periodista sobre cuándo entraba en vigencia la mencionada ley, Schabowski contestó: inmediatamente; esta exclamación provocó que miles de alemanes de uno y otro lado del muro se apostaran en las fronteras de Berlín, provocando el comienzo de la destrucción del muro.

fuertemente por los Estados Unidos después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Pero además las imágenes de una ciudad como Berlín –derribando un muro que los dividió por varias décadas–, evidenciaron que la denominada 'reunificación alemana' solo había sido estructurada para masificar un sistema político que orquestaba la neoliberalización de la población. Por cierto, estas gestiones fueron desempeñadas con éxito en las naciones que dejaron atrás el comunismo y, al mismo tiempo, reforzadas con ímpetu hacia otras latitudes a petición del insistente pavor de la CIA. Aquí nos encontramos con los casos de Chile y México.

En Chile a pocas semanas de la puesta en marcha del desmantelamiento del muro de Berlín, se llevaron a cabo después de 19 años, las primeras elecciones presidenciales y parlamentarias.² Estos comicios re-establecieron el espíritu republicano, un acontecimiento que de ninguna manera opacó el fin de la sanguinaria dictadura de Pinochet. En realidad estos eventos, amparados en un cuestionado sistema democrático, circunscribieron otra de las tantas fases que exhibirá más adelante un sistema político y económico que ha sido administrado, hasta el día de hoy, por una constitución³ que fue promovida por la dictadura cívico-militar, la misma que mantuvo en el poder al general Augusto Pinochet por un poco más de 16 largos y oscuros años.

2. El 14 de diciembre de 1989 se llevaron a cabo en Chile las elecciones presidenciales y parlamentarias que impusieron como vencedor al demócrata cristiano Patricio Aylwin conocido internacionalmente como uno de los más férreos opositores al proyecto socialista de Allende.

3. En septiembre de 1980, con menos de un mes de convocatoria y con las libertades cívicas coartadas, tuvo lugar el denominado Plebiscito Nacional donde los chilenos mayores de 18 años estaban obligados a pronunciarse con un Sí para aprobar la nueva constitución, o un No para rechazarla. Finalmente la preferencia Sí obtuvo más del 60 % de los votos. A raíz de este hecho diversos pensadores y políticos han catalogado de ilegítima La Constitución de 1980, tanto en su origen como para el ejercicio de la gestión democrática.

No obstante, uno de los peores momentos para Chile, bajo la lupa internacional, y que puso en tela de juicio a la renombrada 'recuperación de la democracia', ocurrió cuando Alemania y la parafernalia libertaria estadounidense cuestionaron el actuar de la cancillería chilena por la presentación de una solicitud de asilo firmada por Erich Honecker ante la embajada de Chile en Moscú.⁴ Nadie dudó que este trámite significaba un ticket para que Honecker esquivara a la justicia. Bajo este contexto, el extinto jerarca tuvo algo a su favor ya que eligió a un país que todavía figura como un territorio diseñado, específicamente, para promover la impunidad en materia de derechos humanos.

La tensión política por este suceso se incrementó escandalosamente dentro de la contingencia de Chile. Algunos de los dirigentes políticos que en ese entonces pertenecían al oficialismo y que años atrás habían arrancado hacia la República Democrática Alemana (RDA) –después del golpe de Estado que derrocó al Presidente Allende–, exigieron al gobierno, presidido por el demócrata cristiano Patricio Aylwin (marzo 1990 – marzo 1994), autorizar el hospicio para el otrora Jefe de Estado de la RDA y su esposa. Tras extensas presiones, incluso algunas enviadas desde el extranjero, el asilo fue concedido. Ironías de la historia que terminaron por reunir en una misma ciudad a uno de los militares mimados de la CIA: Pinochet; y al oscuro e intransigente leninista apellidado Honecker.

4. La polémica estadía de los Honecker se extendió desde el 11 de diciembre de 1991 hasta el 29 de junio 1992.



Francisca García
Gutiérrez, *Die lila Hexe/
La bruja púrpura*, 2019.
Still video.

Cambiando de latitud. México, durante los descuentos de los años ochenta, estaba siendo gobernado por Carlos Salinas de Gortari (diciembre 1988 – noviembre 1994) quién a través de sus conocidas truculencias políticas gestionó, como estadista, una serie de planes para privatizar algunas de las más emblemáticas empresas públicas de ese país. Todo ese juego con olor a corrupción fue la debacle del Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), la misma colectividad que pavimentó el camino hacia la firma del cuestionado Tratado de Libre Comercio con América del Norte (TLCAN).⁵

5. El Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN), en inglés conocido como NAFTA, es una zona de libre comercio entre Canadá, Estados Unidos y México. Estos tres países lo firmaron el 17 de diciembre de 1992 y entró en vigencia a partir del 1 de enero de 1994, cuando se cumplió con el procedimiento de ratificación por parte del poder legislativo de cada uno de los países que lo suscribió.



Alejandro Gómez-Arias,
Stone garden, 2019.
 Still video

Estas ominosas maniobras administrativas de Salinas de Gortari fueron evidenciadas cuando a pocos meses de abandonar la presidencia, aparecieron una serie de investigaciones periodísticas que confirmaron que bajo su período de gobierno hubo un incremento sostenido de la violencia armada en diversos puntos de México. Es más, esa violencia contó con el beneplácito de los mismos dirigentes del PRI. Esta hecatombe social y política, más los delirios de modernidad impulsados por el priismo, fueron uno de los subterfugios para que apareciera, después de siglos de marginación indígena, el movimiento Zapatista el cual ha estado intentando perfilar la contingencia política de México desde el sureño estado de Chiapas. Esta revolución, dentro de la propia nación mexicana, transformó las insignias de cientos de grupos indígenas que en la actualidad continúan trabajando para reivindicar, entre otros cosas, los territorios ancestrales y los derechos humanos.

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No hay dudas que el TLCAN ha sido un embuste bajo el cual operan algunas autoridades políticas y civiles en América Latina. El tratado fue, en si mismo, una excusa para que el presidente Bill Clinton ordenara la puesta en marcha de la “Operación Guardián”,⁶ un proyecto que incluía la construcción de un muro en la zona fronteriza de Tijuana-San Diego con el objetivo de resguardar la seguridad de los Estados Unidos ante la inmigración ilegal.

Cuando leemos y re-leemos estos antecedentes y el criterio de realidad que aplicamos desde la coyuntura actual, ratificamos que algunas huellas que rodearon al muro de Berlín han sido trasladadas física e intangiblemente hacia otros lugares del globo. Es el caso de Chile y México, donde nos encontramos con ciertos símbolos que tensionan otros muros y que aparecen en las metáforas de incalculables crónicas, nuevas pautas ideológicas y, por ejemplo, gestiones gubernamentales que hoy son emprendidas con vehemencia en contra de la sociedad civil.

Ahora, justo en el instante en que se conmemoran los 30 años de la caída del muro de Berlín, Chile atraviesa por una de sus crisis políticas más complejas de las últimas décadas. Una crisis que marca al ejercicio neoliberal, del cual este país ha sido uno de sus principales promotores. Pues bien, esta revolución social también da cuenta de la caída de algunas creencias ideológicas, del libre mercado y de las astucias de la

6. La “Operación Guardián” o conocida en inglés como “Operation Gatekeeper” es una medida de Estado bajo el gobierno de Bill Clinton (1993-2001) que tuvo como objetivo principal resguardar la integridad en una de las fronteras más congestionadas del mundo. Sin embargo, la integridad civil de cientos de miles de mexicanos ha sido martirizada producto de la violencia con la que han actuado agentes de los servicios migratorios de los Estados Unidos con el transcurso de los años.

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globalización, una situación que ha traslucido, ante la mayoría de lxs latinoamericanxs, la crisis de identidad de nuestra democracia utópica.

Para analizar esta situación, desde otra óptica, confirmamos que este desequilibrio aparece porque la administración política de un Estado no ha asimilado ni mucho menos (re)conocido, en colectivo, su entorno político. Más bien, hemos construido una sociedad que preferentemente muñequa al sujeto político con el fin de desplazarlo y que unos pocos siempre estén confirmando los vaivenes políticos y económicos del Estado. Además hablar de sujeto, de la historia, la dominación, la dependencia externa, las clases sociales oprimidas, del papel de las masas populares, de categorías tales como totalidad, exterioridad, liberación, esperanza, es caer nuevamente en un momento que no toma en serio el “desencanto político” en el que la cultura actual se encuentra radicada.⁷

No existe duda alguna que el rechazo a la político se conjuga con el desinterés por generar conocimiento desde nuestros mismos territorios, un antecedente que no solo afecta a la gobernanza chilena sino que a todo el resto del continente. De la mano de esta reflexión, recuerdo lo escrito por la boliviana Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: “...la crisis que viven nuestras sociedades es una crisis de valores y una crisis epistémica; un sistemático bloqueo y confusión en los procesos del conocimiento.”⁸

7. Dussel, Enrique. *Filosofías del sur: descolonización y transmodernidad* (Ciudad de México: ediciones Akal, 2017) p. 36.

8. Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible: ensayos desde un presente en crisis* (Buenos Aires: editorial Tinta Limón, 2018) p. 93.



La cultura visual y la producción artística proponen, desde tiempos inmemoriales, reconocer los valores de la sociedad a través del arte. Por lo que es imperativo admitir que las cuestiones que circundan al arte nos dejan sendas introspecciones sobre nuestra sociedad actual. La mayoría de estos análisis acarrearán múltiples juicios sobre el pasado y la contemporaneidad frente a las cicatrices de ese arte que está hecho de imágenes, sonidos y olores. No obstante, existen cosas visibles que no conforman una imagen, hay imágenes que son solo palabras. Pero el régimen más común de la imagen es aquel que pone en escena una relación de lo decible con lo visible, una relación que juega al mismo tiempo con su analogía y con su diferencia.⁹

Ingrid Hernández y Pieter Wisse, *Grand Trump Border*, 2016. Collage fotográfico, 170 x 131 cm.

9. Rancière, Jacques. *El destino de las imágenes* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2011) p. 28.



Olivia Vivanco, de la serie *De paso*, 2014. Fotografía, 90 x 67,5 cm.

A partir de estos cuestionamientos, entendemos que el lenguaje hablado ha cubierto necesidades elementales, pero la comunicación simbólica y creativa se ha posicionado más allá de lo evidente. Es por esto que cuando traducimos los mensajes que construyen los artistas los interceptamos bajo una plataforma que analiza sus acciones e investigaciones. A esto le agregamos el componente curatorial que se transforma en una hoja en blanco que edita, mezcla y expande diversas problemáticas que han estado adjuntando los artífices a sus mismas ideas a través de otros tantos e innumerales sucesos definidos, para este caso, como históricos-atemporales.

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Al construir un espacio sensato para dimensionar, desde la escritura, los contrasentidos que aborda la exposición y divulgación de propuestas artísticas que están entrecruzadas con lo ocurrido en Berlín, desprendemos algunos emblemas para descomponer la confusa y violenta historia que en estos últimos años rodea a más de un muro.

Si observamos detenidamente esta exposición —que reúne artistas visuales de Alemania, México y Chile— imaginamos que sus propuestas abren un panorama crítico y que evidencian, desde las instancias que están presentes en la cultura de masas, los conflictos y desesperanzas que han desencadenado las narrativas políticas a nivel global. Por lo demás, el simple hecho de reunir diferentes puntos de vista en un espacio expositivo, no pasa solo por masificar una orientación política, sino que más bien por implantar el frenesí de una práctica intelectual cada vez más necesaria.

Por todas estas razones, al elucubrar una parte de la atmósfera histórica de Berlín y la mítica que envuelve la contigencia de América Latina, será imperativo densificar más de un diálogo que nos traslade hacia imágenes icónicas y disímiles que poseen algunos territorios donde, por momentos, sus imaginarios permanecen aferrados a un muro.

Transitar entre los símbolos del muro

Curaduría: Rodolfo Andaur
 Patrocinio: Goethe Institut y Fundación Heinrich Böll
 Lugar: Parque Cultural de Valparaíso
 Fecha: Sábado 12 diciembre 2019 al 12 de enero 2020

Artistas invitados:

Rotraut Pape, Yana Yo, Hito Steyerl y Hartmut Jahn (Alemania)
 Juan Castillo, Francisca García y Enrique Ramírez (Chile)
 Olivia Vivanco, Ingrid Hernández & Pieter Wisse y Alejandro Gomez-Arias (México)

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CLEARANCES

Manuela Koelke

Living in East Berlin, my family home got television from the West with our old school analog antenna. My brother and I watched Batman, The A-Team, Knight Rider and MacGyver nearly every day after school before our parents came home, even though we weren't allowed to watch it. Soon we were also watching the news from East and West with my parent's precaution in mind: "Don't believe what they say." Each country was trying to present their own version of the truth, rendering the other as manipulative, insincere and false, and only interested in pushing their own agenda. One was a profitable democracy, the other the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat. Ideology was a term I learned about early on by singing songs about peace and antifascism at our 7:15 am morning assembly once a week.

I was raised in the spirit of enlightenment to think for myself, be critical of what goes on around me and to make up my own mind—only then I would become a mature and responsible human being able to handle life on my own. So, I decided from a young age not to believe what the media said. I didn't believe in (or trust)

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the news. I refrained as much as I could from judging anything by its immediate appearance. I was curious and open to anything I encountered and yet remained at a critical distance, trying to protect myself. Singing and dancing games with kids I didn't know at the local group of young pioneers—nah. Guess I wasn't a good Jungpionier, even though I liked peace, my parents, helping others, learning, discipline, sports, singing and dancing—just not when it was superimposed. I had my pride.

Likewise, on November 9, 1989. I remember our family watching the news in our living room that night. After the 40th anniversary of the GDR in the summer of 1989, which was celebrated with a big parade, waving hands and tanks rolling down the former Karl-Marx-Allee, Soviet Union president Gorbachev's visit to Berlin had led to the resignation of Erich Honecker on October 18, 1989. Honecker, who until then had been General Secretary of the Central Committee (Generalsekretär/Erster Sekretär des Zentralkomitees) for nearly 18 years, officially resigned due to health reasons, but he was actually forced to step down by the Central Committee, one of the ripple effects of Gorbachev's proclaimed "glasnost" (meaning "openness") and the Perestroika's restructuring the Soviet Union. Egon Krenz, a highly favored successor to Honecker, was installed as an interim. Under his leadership, people were initially skeptical if things were finally going to change, but at least he was better than Honecker. Soon, the Central Committee began to address and discuss various pressing issues, such as economic problems, the merit system, and freedom to travel. What eventually led to the fall of the wall was the intention of the Central Committee to allow freedom to travel yet implemented slowly

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and in several steps, in an official process that was supposed to grant permission to travel or visas “without delay”. However, when presenting this decision to allow freedom to travel on the 7pm evening news “Aktuelle Kamera” of November 9, 1989, Günther Schabowski, then newly elected speaker of the Central Committee (a position that didn’t exist before) and previously active as a journalist, was asked from what date this decision was effective. Ironically, Schabowski, who couldn’t find any specified date in the press release (even though it was intended to be effective from November 10, namely the next day), referred to the phrase “without delay” and simply declared: “effective immediately.” (—So much for central planning.)

When we heard the news, we couldn’t believe it. We didn’t believe it. It must have been a mistake, a misunderstanding. —A little later that evening: images of people lining up at the border crossings to West Berlin. Apparently not even the guards had heard the news. Not knowing what to do, they opened the border. Soon after, people were sitting and standing on the wall, celebrating. —Was is true? Was it all just propaganda by the West? Hard times to make up one’s mind if one doesn’t have all the facts.

The day after, on a Friday, half of my fellow classmates didn’t show up in school. Half of my class was missing, including our teacher. I remember sitting there in the bright neon lit classroom on a gloomy November morning with some of the other kids, waiting for someone to come by and tell us what’s going on. It began to dawn on me that they were just gone. Just like in the television show “The Leftovers” (2014-2017), when suddenly two percent of the earth’s population vanish, most of my friends were

gone from one day to next, including their families. The entire neighborhood felt empty. I was bereft of what had constituted my life up to that day: the people around me. What appeared like freedom to others was a confusing and unexpected loss to me. The blank unknown of the West had intruded into my life and spread its absence and emptiness like a virus. Only a few came back to school again the next day, a Saturday, which used to run only for a few hours in the morning. Most of them, however, I never saw again. Only recently did I learn from friends who lived further away in Brandenburg that they experienced the same sort of disappearances, only with a day of delay since there they didn’t get television from the West and only heard of the news the next day.

Entfremdung, alienation, wasn’t a familiar term to me at that time. It was strange to be in a place that had undergone such a complete change overnight and yet looked the same, smelled the same, though less populated. Usually one feels estranged when confronted with something unfamiliar, something foreign. One might think of it as a state of being threatened by some external force. It isn’t necessarily what comes to mind when trying to find the terms to describe something being taken away or subtracted from the everyday. One would rather think of it as grief and mourning, but it is also a form of alienation.

Nevertheless, this change, although sudden in its effect, was the result of a gradual decline of the GDR and the Eastern bloc in economic terms. Already toward the end of the 1970’s, studies were undertaken to find out how the economic situation could be improved. Subtle inquiries into a trade union model between Socialist states turned out to be futile because national interests, even among the Eastern bloc, were prioritized over common economic interests. This

also showed in everyday life. Five or six years before the fall of the wall, the neighbors stopped gathering for Subotniks, as the days of “voluntary-compulsive” unpaid work on the weekends—usually one Saturday each month—were called. They were dedicated to cleaning up the neighborhood of garbage, fixing public amenities, collecting recyclable material, and other community services, but now, no one saw the point in doing it anymore.

West Berlin was always just a blank area on the Berlin map—a wiped-out empty spot “400ha Weißraum” foregrounding the wall I wasn’t allowed to scribble on. It was a forbidden area. I could paint my fantasies there and draw up my own game.

My family didn’t go to visit West Berlin immediately after November 9, because my parents were afraid that they wouldn’t be allowed to come back to East Berlin. The visa-situation was unclear at that time. The rules could have changed any minute again. We waited until February or so when the situation had stabilized. It was a grey, cold day. We took the S-Bahn and then the U-Bahn to Wittenbergplatz or Zoo. We received our 100,- D-Mark “Welcome Gift” (Begrüßungsgeschenk) and my parents got me some orange flavored tic-tac and apple flavored Hubba Bubba bubble gum from the kiosk, something I only knew from classmates who’d previously received packages from their relatives in the West and traded it for any kind of help with homework.

West Berlin didn’t look like paradise to me. It looked hopeless and melancholic. People on the street didn’t exactly seem happier than us. They looked depressed, but I didn’t even know that word at the time. It didn’t inspire anything in me. I felt lost somehow. All that advertised potential of what to discover, or more

precisely, what to spend one’s money on, —I didn’t really know what to do with it until some years later. It had no value for me. The idea that “experience” can be bought seemed foreign to me. One of my biggest adventures took place on the landfill just a couple of hundred meters from my block. My friend Conny and I were trying to fly kites on a mildly grey autumn day and by chance we found a little lizard in the trashy wilderness. I took it home and put it on the top of our laundry in the bathroom. Excited as I was, I wanted to show it to my brother, but it escaped immediately. I couldn’t stop thinking about where it went. Did it die hiding underneath our bathtub or did it find its way out through the ducts down our 18-story high-rise? Unlike others at that time, I hadn’t felt limited in my freedom. I wasn’t lacking anything in particular. Maybe I was just too young.

In February 1990, Helmut Kohl, in order to ensure his reelection as the Chancellor of West Germany, announced on TV the willingness of West Germany to prepare for a German-German currency union, which was implemented on July 1st, 1990. It took only two or three days until the local Konsum was filled up with goods from the West. Until then, there were mostly regional goods. Next to our school was a garden where they used to teach us how to grow fruits, vegetables and all kind of plants for everyday use. In the summer we had a stand and sold our radishes, carrots and apples in front of the Konsum, which earned us a little pocket money. Before, I only knew of mandarins from the can. Bananas or peaches, available only once or twice a year, if that, felt like Christmas. Any flavored yogurt or quark was self-made with canned cherries or other fruit added to it.

While writing this piece, I found out that in English, “mandarins” is also a term for “high-ranking officials” or scholar-bureaucrats of imperial China. In her 1954 book *The Mandarins of Paris*, Simone de Beauvoir wrote about the mandarins as an elite that emerged from educational qualification as opposed to the monetary wealth or inherited privileges of the bourgeoisie and discussed their role and responsibility in society. I only read her work a couple of years later. But in any case, back then, I made it my hobby to peel mandarins.

Now, the D-Mark coins were heavier and sturdier than the (GDR-)Mark. The new bills were bigger and worth 16 times more than the old ones. There was yoghurt with all kinds of different flavors, ready to be eaten right away. No additional preparation necessary—how efficient! But I was most occupied with the fresh oranges. I remember slowly peeling the skin of the oranges and its pieces and picking off every single piece of pulp before letting the juice pop on my tongue. It was my way of resisting the sudden overflow of stimuli by all kind of new things, exotic fruits, colorful ice cream, glittery stickers, new technologies, skateboards and the like. Just slow down. Take all the time you need to see and make up your mind.

Soon after that, we had new teachers from the West. English instead of Russian became my first foreign language and *Dirty Dancing*’s “Time of my Life” was played all over the place. There were Hypercolor T-Shirts that changed its color depending on the temperature. *New Kids On The Block* (NKOTB) caused another mass hysteria. I stuck to Depeche Mode who required a little more sophisticated kind of engagement. After all, the band was formed the year I was born. Their music was distributed on the black market

and, thanks to my older brother, I knew their songs by heart before I even understood what their English lyrics meant. They lived in such an excessive way that touched something beyond the superficial satisfaction to be gained from owning or experiencing new things. It was mystical. Dave Gahan thought he was Jesus. But who was Jesus anyhow? I couldn’t care less due to my atheist upbringing. I didn’t think all that pathos was really necessary, but I was fascinated by the untamed expressions of desire, suffering and calls for compassion, gospels unbound from any insignificant materiality. Only because of them did I eventually look up stories in the Bible. Still, I tried to ignore the religious or dogmatic dimension of their songs and instead picked out what seemed to offer some kind of spiritual or ethical guidance in a crumbling and uncertain world, something that everyone could potentially relate to. Therefore, it doesn’t come at a surprise that Depeche Mode had its biggest audience in the former Eastern bloc.

* * *

Growing up, gender equality was a given to me. Both of my parents worked from morning to evening. As almost every woman in East Germany, my mom stayed at home only for a year before I joined the *Kinderkrippe* (pre-kindergarten) at age two. The institutional discipline with which the groups of kids were organized is something that stayed with me until today. It was a form of daily automation that almost felt relaxing and reassuring. I pretty much knew what would happen, and I was ok with it, because I learned a lot of things. The only thing that annoyed me, was being dragged to the kindergarten at 7am by my father, who walked so fast that I couldn’t keep up with him and had to run

alongside his long legs, and then being the last to be taken home at 7pm by my mom, who had to work late. Even though my mom still took care of most things in the household after she came home from work, there was a general sense of sharing that work. My brother and I, for example, were responsible for taking out the trash.

Girls in the GDR defended themselves in school when the boys were running around squeaking like little pigs and trying to get between the girl's legs with their 30cm long plastic rulers. We simply kicked their asses. I felt a bit guilty because at that age boys are said to lag two years behind girls in cognitive capacity, even though they catch up later. We could've cut them some slack, but they deserved it. Still, that didn't keep us from riding our bikes around the neighborhood and playing in the shrubs together until it got dark. Most kids just had a key around their neck and were free to roam around the area until evening. We found lots of creative ways to answer 'nature's call' without having to go home early, so even the tiniest discovery could turn into an adventure. After all, MacGyver taught us how to survive based on chewing gum alone.

Looking at it in retrospect, I was brought up and educated very much in line with socialist feminism, or Marxist feminism, according to which capitalism and patriarchy are the main causes for the oppression of women and therefore must be abolished. Of course, gender equality came in handy to generate the labor force that was lacking since the end of World War II. Everyone was needed to fulfill the production schedule. It meant contributing to society in a meaningful way.

Interestingly enough, in the German Wikipedia entry on "Feminism," only feminist movements in West Berlin are mentioned. East Germany (and perhaps the

Eastern Block in general) was not mentioned once as an example where gender equality, by means of abolishing capitalism, was already implemented and where patriarchy, though the battle was slightly less successful but getting there, was actively fought against. Socialist feminism is listed only as a subsection of feminism as such, going straight from the influential representatives from 100 years ago, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, to a rather recent figure such as Shulamith Firestone, not mentioning anything in between, not even Sylvia Federici.

The reason I bring this up is the late realization that my experience of having grown up in a society that was much more advanced in terms of gender equality, education, healthcare and social security than Western capitalist states, in terms of the tangible availability of those ideals for a majority of the population, regardless wealth or social standing, is increasingly rare and unique. While today, the fight for achieving equality on all levels seems hopeless in the face of the supposed non-existence of any alternative to capitalism, for me it helps to remember my childhood to bear witness to what kind of change can be achieved within just a couple of decades, if people would just stand in for implementing and defending equality as the basis for any solidarity, and work together toward the same goal.

Of course, any attempt to implement equality of any form in an undemocratic state is paradoxical and a vain endeavor from the outset. And it goes without saying that I have no intention of whitewashing over the limitations on freedom in the GDR. It is something I didn't get to experience due to my age—I was after all only 8 years old when the wall fell. In fact, I might have faced some difficulties for saying what I think and not shying away from confrontation. Looking

back, I realize this feature causes problem, no matter the political system, something I'm not certainly sorry about. Because our family stayed in East Berlin for the following years and I spent most of my time with kids who also grew up in the East, any difficulties I could have possibly encountered with the new system emerged with a delay of about 10 years after the fall of the wall. When I started to study at the University of Arts in West Berlin in 2000, I realized that the culture of working together, of discussing and finding solutions to problems that everyone was affected by and concerned with wasn't at all the culture of West Germany. Ironically, only recently I have been called a romantic revolutionary with overly high standards that challenges others too much and makes people uncomfortable. But growing up in a system that had already accomplished so many things on a large scale and at a relatively high standard (for those times) gave me a different basis for seeing and acting in the world today. On the one hand, it feels like a great gift to have been born in that time and place in 1981, a privilege in terms of having personally experienced an alternative to capitalism. However, its lack of democracy, its unbearable surveillance and other failures will certainly not be forgotten. As a kid, I was only slightly aware of these issues through my parents' critical comments. They also told me not to talk to strangers on the phone and vented about their day in the bathtub, where running water made it difficult for anyone to tune in. Antifascism, though at the core of East German ideology, was never truly defended in the practice. Any critique of totalitarianism didn't transfer from Hitler to Stalin. We gathered old clothes for the orphans in Nicaragua, but no one could tell me much about the Vietnamese guest-workers in the neighborhood. And there weren't any Vietnamese kids in my school, in

fact, everyone was German and white. Also left out were any conversations about religion or other races. The first time I encountered a man of color was on a train ride with my grandma to Dresden where my brother and I often spend the summer vacation. I made a drawing for him, probably containing at least a sun, a tree, some flowers, some stick figures and a white dove. That's all I remember.

What stayed with me, however, especially from my visits to Dresden was my grandma's experience of the night of the 13th/14th February in 1945. Both worked in the bank in the 1930's and 40's and refused the Hitler salute. She spoke of the bombing, the roaring sound of the airplanes, the fires, how they were hiding in bunkers, the heaps of burnt corpses whose smell covered the entire city for the following weeks. My grandfather never talked about it at all and died in 1990. Witnessing their kindness and generosity, I always had the idea that Dresden's experience of extreme suffering must have left a deeply humbling impression on everyone living there. It didn't occur to me that resentment might have still been lingering for some. Yet, this type of suffering and the solidarity that it created seems to last for only a couple of generations and simply wears off after more than half a century.

And so, far from being nostalgic about East Germany, most of all I see it as an opportunity to learn from. In 1989, many people in the East were hoping for change to finally happen in those few months before the fall of the wall, but I doubt that anyone was looking forward to the long term effects of privatization, devaluation and dissolution by the Treuhand of what most East Germans had been building in only a couple of decades and working for most of their lives.

Three years after the reunification we moved away

from the concrete jungle of Marzahn to the rather quiet suburb of Köpenick. I remember the last time I looked up at our high-rise. When the wind was strong and the clouds slid by really fast, as tall as it was, it looked like it could fall over any time, in slow motion, except it didn't. It always made me dizzy, but I immensely enjoyed this analog special effect. A couple of years later in 2001, during my architecture studies, I came back to document our high-rise, a Plattenbau, Type WHH-GT 18/21. Only two years later it was torn down because it wasn't profitable enough. How tiny the footprint seemed in relation to everything that happened there.

* * *

Given the recent intensification of politics in media and everyday life, it seems all the more relevant to speak about events like the fall of the wall and its ongoing effects upon today's world. Just five years ago it seemed impossible to escape the imposed narrative of Germany's unification as a liberating event. While five years ago in 2014, we witnessed white balloons being freed into Berlin's sky along the foundations of the former wall, in remembrance of the East German liberation, today, with the rise of the AfD and other far right movements since 2013, we can notice in the media a somewhat patronizing attempt to acknowledge the East German soul and all its sorrows.

Even though quite a number of right-wing groups remained active in the GDR since the end of World War II, it wasn't a phenomenon immediately present in my environment in Marzahn. However, within just four or five years after the reunification, quite a number of my fellow classmates in Köpenick were struggling due their parent's loss of employment, numerous divorces

following economic precarity, physical and psychological abuse, and a generally lethargic hopelessness concerning their future. While some turned to the Left reading existentialists and turning vegetarian, many of them became skinheads or hooligans with shaved heads and bomber jackets turning every discussion concerning the current political situation in class into a challenge to combat their instinctive search for a scapegoat. For them it was all cheap foreign labor's fault flooding Germany and taking away everybody's jobs. I cannot say in how far they were influenced by remaining right-wing groups in the GDR or if this type of reaction emerged solely in the moment. I'm not in touch with any of them today, but I wouldn't be surprised if they turned out to be the next generation of AfD voters, only that today there's no more classroom where they can be confronted about it.

THREE REGIMES OF WALLS

Alberto Pacheco Benites

“You have to work on the wall, because without a set of impossibilities, you won’t have the line of flight, the exit that is creation”

—Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*

“But how can a wall that is not continuous be a defence? Indeed, a wall like that is not only unfit to be a defence—the structure itself is in constant danger. Those sections of the wall standing in desert places can of course be destroyed over and over again by the nomads”

—Franz Kafka, *At the Building of the Great Wall of China*

We are surrounded by walls that we don’t notice. We are pierced by invisible walls. We have walls within us. Today’s walls are multiple and present, open and constant. Sometimes we sense them being “built”, but for the most part their power overtakes us. Because of their closeness and transparency they simply become “normal”. They are present in every space. They capture all that is around and inside them. Not

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only the political discourse of neo-conservatism and exacerbated exclusions, but the different corners of quotidian life, too. They capture the institutional pragmatics, the urban orders and logics; they capture the dynamics and overflows of the unequal, and they capture, more recently, the logics and subjectivities of subjects and their information. All, while simultaneously introducing themselves in the different levels of the production of life.

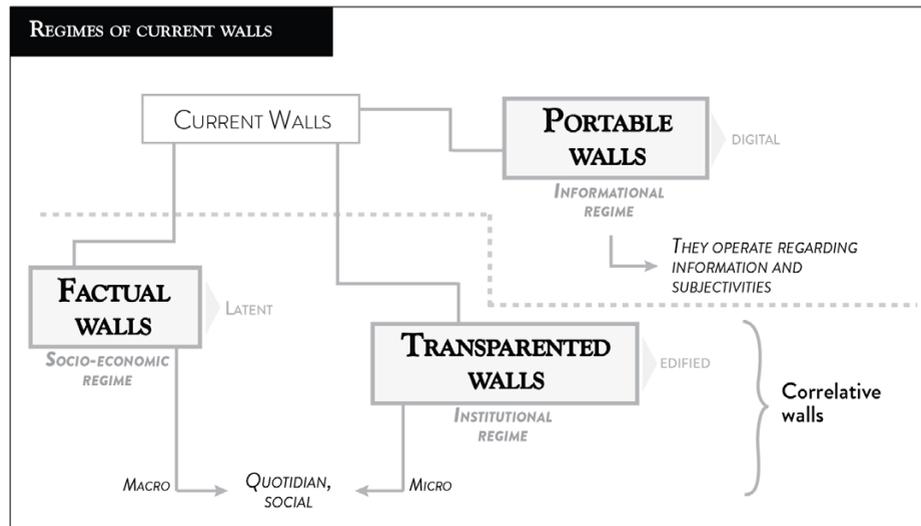
This is a cartography, an approximation to our current walls, a postulation for the existence of three types of walls present in the quotidian, that comply at the same time with the diverse regimes that support them.

First, the “*portable walls*”, the ones that correspond with the dynamics that configure the technological objects and the subjectivities of the subjects. These are the walls of the *informational regime*. In second place, the “*transparented walls*”, those that physically occupy our surroundings and correspond with the *institutional regime*. Conceived to spatially divide subjects while (re)marking symbolic differences that underlain as a political justification of their existence. These are the walls so inserted into the quotidian that they seem to have become “imperceptible”, normalized to the point of “transparency”. At last, the “*factual walls*”, they refer to the unresolved overflows and tensions in the plane of the *socio-economic regime*. These walls refer to the constant state of segregation and growing inequality within the framework of the current ideological-economic system.

The proposed approach at these regimes makes reference to the ways in which existence constantly “walls” itself. While the first type of walls is

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emphasized, the following two are presented as correlatives, as two adjacent faces of a logic embedded in the social. Thus, it is a question of making a balance, of making a cartography of the *territoire* constituted by the assumption that the great wall of this era collapsed on November 1989 in Berlin. The ironic sense of history suggest that it was precisely the implications of that fall (with the configuration of the current version of Capitalism and its cultural model as hegemonic) that would end up triggering the “building” of our various current walls. Walls that correspond with the regimes mentioned previously, that operate at different levels of social orders. While the *informational regime* affects the practices (and subjectivities) of the subjects; the *institutional regime* refers to the logics that shape the most immediate quotidian dimensions; while the *socio-economic regime* responds to the order of the neoliberal system and its cultural order as a whole.



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Portable walls

There are walls that enclose the subject without physically separating them, walls that circumscribe subjectivities. These walls are miniscule, minimal and portable, they are not erected, and they do not evince themselves as insurmountable. Pocket walls, if you so wish. *Wall-objects*, through which more and more portions of our lives voluntarily circulate. Walls in which we insert ourselves and that also cross us. *Portable walls*, part of all dynamics and exchanges.

They block us, they isolate us, like the prison wall of a recognizable political regime would, only they do it without confinement. Ultimately, these walls also belong to a regime. One that, unlike the more institutional or more political tenor regimes, operates in a tenuous way but with more resounding effects and with a lesser chance of opposition.

The portable walls are walls of the current *informational regime*, which is the one outlined by the communicational dynamics of digital technology. A regime that is based on speed and the saturation of information as a maxim. A regime that is characterized by an amount of information that saturates the subject until it is inoperative, by leaving it ecstatic through the informational overflow. When given this amount of information the subject can only circulate it, adding to that ecstasy of overflow. Let's say, given so much information, the subject has no choice but to circulate it—to flow—such information as an answer. As the only possible action.¹

1. For a deeper study on what this informational regime implies, cf. Pacheco Benites (2018).

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On the one hand, there is too much for subjects to operate with it. On the other—and because of the above—users only have their empty circulation as a resource, adding to the informative maelstrom of society. The innumerable gadgets that sustain this flow function as walls that enclose us and circumscribe under those logics of this regime, which also become the logics of reasoning and subjectivization of the subjects themselves.

In this sense, they are *wall-mirrors*—to continue with the analogy of Jean Baudrillard (cf. 1990)—which fascinates us not with our image (as was the case with Narcissus' mirror), but with the dynamic reflection of our mental processes, open/exposed before our eyes. How we jump/cut/paste, how we share, link, flow. In the end, subjects end up in that sort of closed circuit in which they are connected with themselves. Closed circuit of the ecstatic fascination of their mental processes flowing and connecting with the maelstrom with which everything circulates on screens.

However, this *wall-mirror* is usually put in the place, instead, of the opening that allows connection—always seen as positive. “Open window” rather than a wall, it would be said. But it overlaps precisely that “window” role that culminates in the overflowing and metastatic exercise of a saturation of the subjects. Through the always open window of digital stream ports, too much content, too much information is sneaked in. The subject ends up disconnected through hyper-connection. As Baudrillard himself points out, it is really the best way to censor someone (to wallow him by openness): to open and provide all the possible ways to access everything. It is even more effective than suppressing access to some things.

So our portable walls “openly enclose” the subjects. Whether as a *wall-mirror* that places the subject in the closed circuit of fascination for its mental processes of flow and connection;² or as the *wall-window*, which implies the hypertelic information overflow to which corresponds the saturation in which an inoperative subject is added. A subject that simply can't deal with so much information if it is not inserted into the dynamics of flow.

However, the operation of these digital and portable walls, also has an impact in the dynamics between the subjects and between the subjects and their experience of the world. Thus, the disconnection through hyper-connection generated by its forms of employment and logic tend to isolate the user in the fascination of their operations on the screen. In that sense, the image of the isolation of the subjects is already common today despite being in company.³ As the French anthropologist Marc Augé points out in a recent interview, now we carry the non-place all the time (cf. Geli, 2019). Finally, these portable walls enclose us in the non-place, if such a thing exists. They enclose us—with tragic irony—in the network (which was characterized by the opening that led to the connection of its nodules); they enclose us in the cloud (whose evanescent figure would tend to place it on the side of what isn't fixed). That is what our *wall-screens* achieve: to lock ourselves in these “open” non-places, by reason of submitting to their

2. It is worth considering the amount of time that the subjects “invest” in “surfing” or drifting through the network (or the cloud), with not more aim than the exercise of flowing, than that of being ecstatic with that unlimited capacity for communication. It speaks of the same ability to frantically navigate from one content to another, sliding (literally) through the flows that privilege even the design of interfaces.

3. Even people sharing a table or a bed, are in the confinement of their own shared solitudes, each at the mercy of the enclosure of that ubiquitous wall of the screen.

logics and the impossibility of disconnection. They lock us up by necessarily enrolling in the *informational regime* and its logic. The closure of the exacerbated and tyrannical connection walls us from the other subjects, in a digital isolation of which much has been said and of which the daily effects and symptoms are only increasing. But the operation of these walls does not stop there. It also implies isolation from the experience itself, which subjects experience thanks to the filter of their screens.⁴ This builds another dimension of the same wall. One that is installed between the subjects and their experience in the world. *Virtual wall*, while translating all the experience in the virtual and informational version of it. An experience with “the potential” to be converted into information, and, more importantly, to circulate and insert itself into the ecstatic dynamics of circulation and excessive flows. In a way, you don’t live if the experience doesn’t happen “through” the screen.

These *ubiquitous walls*, *portable walls*, manage to take confinement to unsuspected levels, never predicted or projected before by the most recalcitrant confinement regimes. It is precisely these *open walls* that characterize the contemporary control societies that Deleuze had already announced and which he characterized with the presence of “information technology and computers” (cf. 2006). As the philosopher indicated, instead of confinement, opening and modulation are strengthened. The *ubiquitous wall*, then, modulates the dynamics, promotes flows to their excretion or limits them. All these operations,

4. That people enjoy a live concert, through the recordings they make of it in real time, or that the quotidian or travel experiences are conceived precisely in order to be converted into images intended for exacerbated circulation of networks point to the same observation.

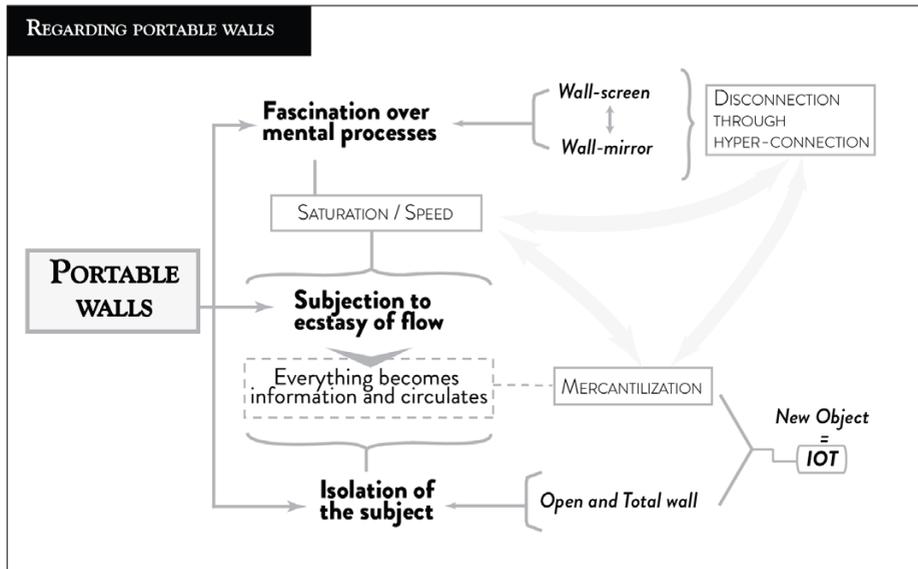
in addition, are traversed by another functionality: converting every corner of life into marketable merchantable material. Finally, in the current context, in addition to the dynamics of speed and saturation, the possibility of transforming all circulating information into market and profitable material is also palpable. In the current informational regime, everything must be transformed into information. All that information must also constitute marketable material. Today, more than ever before, data constitutes a basic market material, a kind of commodity around which commercial operations are articulated. Hence why this matter is subject to so many tensions and is so in vogue the discussion about the use of data by companies and to whom the users’ data is sold to (or not). Today, habits, personal data, the logic of consumption, preferences, routines, etc., are all part of a set of merchantable information.

Our objects of connection, our *ubiquitous* and *portable walls* also leave us locked at the mercy of the market. We are subjects that are subject to the commercialization of all the data we produce and consume, which we circulate through our media. In this regard, one might think that disconnection or rejection of the use of these supports (these digital *wall-objects*) could be an option, a valid (or even possible) exit to the issue. But the truth is that we have arrived to the imminent appearance of a type of object that will make such an option considerably difficult.

The next stage of the mass digital object is the one corresponding to the Internet of Things (IoT) paradigm, which ultimately means that a large number of our quotidian objects will be able to connect to the internet through their own IP address. This will allow them to collect, store and above all, collate and operate with

the information that users constantly produce through its use. Thus, all the cracks and anodyne corners of our physical experience in the world are also “locked” by the logic of the *informational regime*; they are also subject to the mercy of a possible total commercialization of it.

It will no longer only be the most “communicational” aspects of our lives becoming information (that is, everything we produce through social networks, apps, media made for social dynamics, etc.), but all the experiences (including the more physical dimensions of them) subject to the same logic and dynamics of the informational regime. When this ends up happening, the new stage of the digital wall-object will have ended up enclosing the logic of exacerbated and excessive circulation. The wall, then, crossing every corner of the quotidian, inserted into the “micro” dimension of our connected existences. The open wall, the *total*



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wall of the ports and connections, will be settled when all our objects collect the most diverse activities and convert them into circulating information that is also marketable. And we will be locked, walled in the margins of digital control.

Transparented walls and Factual walls

There is a mutual duality corresponding to these walls. Both inhabit the social and are deeply correlated. Let us start with *transparented walls*. These are the walls that are in the world, built, tangibly. Built or constituted. *Official walls*, we could say, that have become “transparent” to the point that they have become part of the quotidian landscape of that which is normal (or, simply put, the landscape). This transparency comes from the fact that we have become accustomed to what they represent, as well as their almost unquestionable presence in certain spaces. They are the walls that divide (order, some could say) the territories of the social, while they rise above the ground.

The *transparented walls* are those that inhabit the corners of the external and closest quotidian, those that draw (and blur) out the public spaces in cities (specially in Latin America) and those that enclose (but do not bring closer) the national territories, subject to the pragmatic frontiers of their ruling States.

It is “normal” for us to see fenced, bounded borders (fences, control, barbed wire, walls in the full sense of the word, etc.) as much as it is “normal” for us to walk on the street while looking to at the walls of every corner (house walls, electric fences, neighborhood gates and fences, facades, etc.). The presence of the nearest quotidian wall has transparented and with it,

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so has its essence. The meaning and the symbolic strength of the wall, because we have become accustomed to it being there, becomes normalized and part of the menu of social dynamics. Thus, in regards to the former (the usual walls in our cities), we should begin with observing what is happening in our continent. Latin America is characterized for being the scene of a phenomenon that usually awakens amazement. It is the curling of misery with overwhelming opulence. The face-to-face (but never “neighboring”) of very contrasting realities that our cities witness. In Brazil, next to a favela, a luxury neighborhood; in Argentina, Villa 31, as one of the oldest *villas* in the city, next to the most sought-after neighborhoods (cf. Veras Mota, 2019); in Peru, on the two slopes of the same hill, on one side is the wealthiest neighborhood of the capital, and on the other there is no drinking water (cf. Pighi, 2015). In the middle: a wall. An intimidating and cold edifice. Imputable. A wall that reminds us that there is a “we” and that seems to forget that there is also an “other”. In the end, if we cannot see them, and they cannot cross, they practically don’t exist. These are the walls of a general privatization of public space. Walls that expose the appropriation of the streets that goes beyond any dimension of the construction of citizenship. On the contrary, today, who has the resources privatizes public spaces.

These *private walls*, then, convert the spaces of exchange—of (re)knowing⁵ between subjects—in a closed jurisdiction, on the basis of a supposed search for security and the constant ghost of *the other as a threat*. If at the beginning cities were walled to

5. TN: It is impossible to translate the sense of this expression. In the original, the intention is to play with the sense of the words *reconocer* (to recognize) and *conocer* (to know) using the construction *(re)conocer*.

protect its citizens from the unknown (emphasizing the shared sense of belonging among its inhabitants), now the walls that dress our cities (*intra-urban walls*) are there to protect us—it is said—precisely from the other inhabitants of our same space, of our same plot of the city. “Hell is other people” said a character from the Sartrean theater. Today, more than ever, seems to be the case. Hell is the street, and the undesirable is the “neighbor”.

The wall inserts itself, then, in the heart of our closest spaces, in the streets where we once shared games, in which the most basic neighborhood (and citizen) relationships were configured. Today, walls are so introduced that become quotidian. Frontiers of status at the micro level, that make it clear that public space ceased to be such a thing.

It can be said that these *transparented walls* are on good account *institutionalized walls*, either by the praxis of the subjects or by a more formal apparatus, as commune, a municipality or some type of government device. Precisely that: device in the terms outlined by Foucault. A discourse that validates the logics of a formal institutional power (citizen insecurity, translated into figures or statistics,⁶ demography, distribution of spaces, migration rates, etc.), followed by an institutional practice that translates the discourse into logics (application policies determine organization or governance of some kind), to finally translate it into more “micro” operations, on the subjectivities of the subjects: build the belonging to the closed space of privatized areas, while at the same time building

6. Statistical knowledge will be considered by Foucault as the “knowledge of the State” par excellence, and will be essential to configure the logic of government that articulates and justifies the actions of the State in society (Foucault, 2006, p. 320).

the subjectivity of the excluded by the wall (foreigner, different, alien). And, finally, the wall works—like any limit—like a swinging door. The wall not only determines something on the raised side, but it configures both, the entire spectrum of the divisive: *wall-sway*.

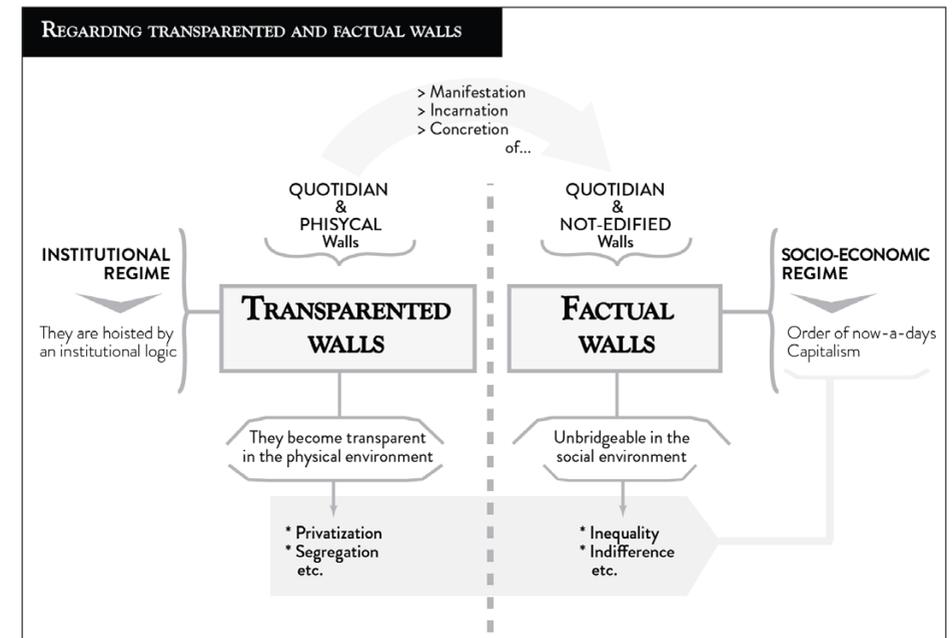
We are talking, then, about the *transparented walls* of those who are expressly installed in the physical world and close to the subjects. Walls that are raised to leave something clearly indicated and without tacit edging, to express their division, implying the place of the one who excludes and the excluded. It is the wall that borders certain neighborhoods, *wall-grating fence* that close the entrance to the streets, *wall-gate* of an residential area that limits free transit, walls that eat away the public space as the space for free development of citizenship. If the walls reveal something, it is that our society inhabits in the mandate of suspicion and fear. The wall is the monument to the paranoia of society and the indicator of its latent constant overflow, *wall-fear*. It is the monument to the paranoia of those who can afford the wall to reproach not only the difference that this marking makes, but the possibility of expressing such a difference.

And, within the framework of an order in which this precaution/fear has been installed as the normal, these walls have become transparented because they accustom us to their daily presence and they have been institutionalized, being part of the *institutional regime*. They are, then, walls that correspond to national borders, too: walls that filter, electrified fences, frontier fences or delusions of concrete, unbeatable, such as the one proposed by the Trump administration in the United States. *Transparented walls*, in their quotidian presence, suppress the grey zones to explicitly state the divisions, so as to not leave room for doubts or claims.

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But let us move on to its correlative walls: *Factual walls*. Unlike the previous walls, which have become invisible because of their everlasting presence, these last factual walls have an opposite drift: they are perceptible precisely because they are not seen. They are the walls that are not new in the social world and that on good account trigger the innumerable tensions and overflows that the current *socio-economic regime* supposes. These are other walls with which we live daily and sometimes manifest themselves in built up walls (which have to become transparented) or slide along our portable *wall-objects*.

The *factual walls* are those that belong to the merciless order of societies in the current capitalism, which serve as the basis of all overflows and dis-encounters, and that build/shape indifference as a norm for



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subsistence. They are the walls that present divisions more insurmountable than physically built walls, which can cross territories and spaces, but do not need them to show its divisiveness. We are talking about the walls of unconcerned unfairness, of unachieved social mobility, discrimination, racism, wall of the always-promised development that is precisely never achieved, walls against the hope for dignified life.

The *transparented walls* of quotidian life are nothing more than stages of manifestation of these *factual walls*, they sustain them, support them. The wall that the migrant crosses is not really that “official” border wall (as we know, in many occasions they don’t even cross that one). On the contrary, the wall crossed is the *wall-welfare*, the *wall-hope* that the departure implies: the new beginning, the promise of better living conditions. In the end, the migrants leave from the *wall-underdeveloped*, in which they are locked, contained and casted away to their own luck at survival. There is an unofficial wall, which is harder, much harder, to cross through than the official wall of border control (now almost transparent).

In the end, the frontier wired fence (like the wall of the exclusive neighborhood) is “normal” by consequence of habit, it makes itself invisible to most. But the *factual wall*, which is revealed in that wired fence, can hardly be overlooked. In the current order, in the socio-economic regime that circumscribes everything, that *factual wall* is heavier, stronger and more impassable than any mass of concrete, barbed wire or granite. Neither the minefields that “protect” borders as *explosive walls* are as incendiary as inequality or the difference of access to the minimum conditions for a dignified life or as the access to education necessary to cross those walls.

Unlike the walls of the regime mentioned above, these cannot become transparent. These are walls that manifest themselves regardless of land or conditions. They can be installed along deserts, rivers, seas. The Sonoran desert wall or the Rio Bravo wall, the Arauca river wall, the Mediterranean Sea wall, claiming their share of lives each year. They are nothing but terrains dressed as factual walls. If the landscape became symbolic territory, it is because it was crossed by a factual wall. They are lands that embody this regime of walls. Finally, these are the walls through which Modernity invents its own outcasts (cf. Bauman, 2005 and Wacquant, 2011). These are the walls that want to leave out the ghosts and protect the fantasies that a social class builds regarding the other, that are revealed in those other transparented *wall-social status*, expressed in the closing of an “exclusive” neighborhood.

The *factual walls*, on the other hand, are the ones which subjects find themselves against when they try to leave the indifferent survival in which the current economic system inscribes us. The neoliberal order, for which everyone is his own resource and in which the State ends up being a sort of regent of the dynamics of transnational corporations and of the subjects thrown to their own luck in the heart of their cities, legitimizes that survival. At the crossing of the desert, hope seeks to cross that *wall-egoism/wall-abandonment* imposed by the logics of today’s Capitalism. Similarly, on the Mediterranean Sea wall, one sails in search of some better way to survive, the minimum of that which is called humanity.

The *factual wall* is the one that forbids the enjoyment of the same levels of humanity. The *factual walls* (the ones we can’t see but do feel) are precisely those that

operate at that level of social split. Trump's delirium with his summons to the *wall-monster* that will inhabit in the desert will be nothing more than the physical manifestation of the factual wall that already inhabits in the Sonoran and the Chihuahuan desert from long ago. We could remember Mongin when says that "the great void of the desert is a motley skin [...] the desert is a country without a name, a land that leads to nowhere" (1993, p. 27-28). That delusional wall will make evident and literal that factual wall that underlies that territory for decades.

The *factual walls* of our inequalities constitute that great *global wall* that is bridged day by day with the shameful postcards of the Syrian boy who drowned in the coasts of Turkey (cf. Jofré, 2018) or of the bodies of the 23 month old girl and her father, drowned on the banks of Rio Grande (cf. Ahmed and Semple, 2019), or from the shaken faces of Venezuelan migrants in the north of Peru, when—unexpectedly—they were imposed the *wall-visa* of diplomatic tenor, or, maybe the faces of sub-Saharan migrants, who jump the fence in Gibraltar and who shout in unison "Victory!" when they manage to cross the wired fence (cf. Méndez Urich, 2018). Wired fence that, in the end, is the lesser powerful manifestation of the *factual wall* of the need that drowns those who risk of crossing it. These are the *wall-tensions*, which, when made real can end up transparented to the quotidian, but which, as tensions (as potency), spit on our faces with greater force. Finally, a built wall is power, while the factual wall is potency.

The micro and quotidian reflection of this social walls, ultimately, is also felt in the dynamics of our cities, where the wall of our survival leaves us denied of the perception of survival (and pain) of the other.

Wall, to not notice the endless spillage of anguish, of neediness, to not notice the plea of all who are dispossessed and precarious in the same mud as we are, but with much less luck than us. The correlative of the global *factual wall* is that of the *wall-egoism*, *wall-denial* that we build for ourselves—it is worth saying—to make our own life bearable, because without these self-imposed walls, our anguish would be unsustainable.

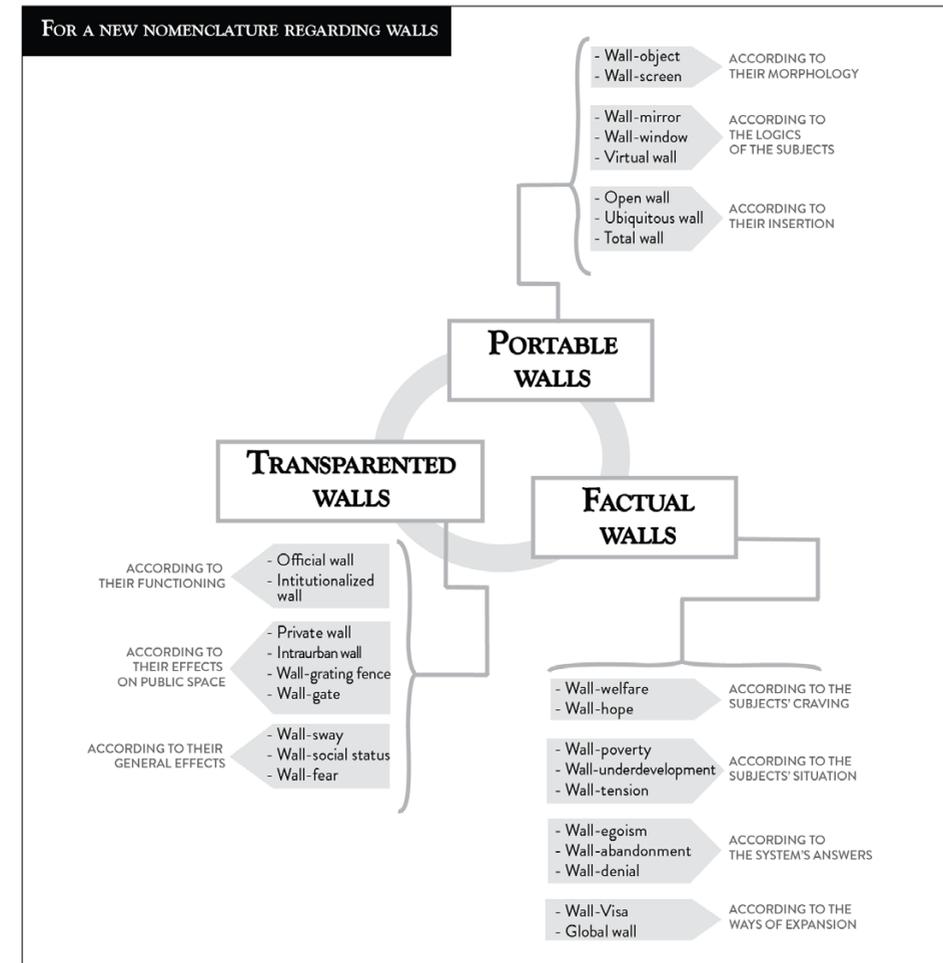
Ironically, it turns out that the arithmetic of this economic and ideological order has been concretized precisely because of the fall of that other great wall, whose dismantling entailed the uncontrolled hegemony of the current economic system. With the event of the fall in Berlin of that ignominious wall that kept the city divided throughout much of the twentieth century, the historical-ideological tension that had sustained the dialectic of the twentieth century, in terms of Baudrillard, was also over. But the truth is that with the fall of the Berlin wall, nothing was further than a conclusion of history or the modern project, in the same line of the naive optimism of some (Fukuyama and his progeny, who insist that we are in the best version of the world to have ever existed). Nor do we attend the project of a Modernity pending to be realized or of tension that point to a concretion (in the logic of Habermas). We are, however, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on the rough tracks of a world where the neoliberal economic order and its ideological-cultural apparatus of informational and technological tenor were responsible for erecting other wall regimes. After the fall of that wall, back in 1990, the system did not respond with the general dissolution of walls, but with the institution of another variety of walls, sometimes more merciless, that operate at other levels on the subjects.

Today, our task, as it was then (and always is) is to dismantle the wall (the walls). Dismantle not with a devised program (which ultimately also functions as a wall, “alternative wall”), but looking for cracks in all existing walls. The task is to trace the cracks in all wall regimes, not as an “alternative power”, but as *potency*. To hollow walls, to crack walls, drill walls. Denounce/announce the building of walls and logics of “becoming-wall”. In light of present events, this task is already immeasurable.

Translated by Alejandro Engelhardt

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THE EMPTY CENTER

Hito Steyerl

“It is not so much crossing boundaries as frontiers as it is the partial disappearance, dissolution or repositioning of the boundaries themselves. It is the shifting of the boundaries as you try to cross them... Now you begin to see that we are also talking about the fragmentation of boundaries; the partial breakdown, renegotiation, repositioning of boundaries, about the appearance of new boundaries which cut across the old ones.”

—Stuart Hall

Potsdamer Platz is a square in the center of Berlin, Germany. Before World War II, it used to be the center of the city, the center of its power. Then it became a deadly minefield, enclosed between the borders of the Cold War. In 1989, the Berlin Wall comes down. The area between the walls, the empty margins of the border, is open. Now, the center returns.

After German reunification, Potsdamer Platz is rebuilt by transnational companies. In the process, people are shoved out to the outskirts of the city. They are

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marginalized by the re-centering of Germany’s political and economic power. *The Empty Center* (Hito Steyerl, 1998) closely follows the processes of urban restructuring that have taken place in the core of Berlin over the last eight years. In 1990, squatters proclaim a socialist republic on the death strip. Eight years later, the new headquarters of Mercedes Benz arise in the same location.

The film makes use of slow superimpositions to uncover the architectonic and political changes of the last eight years. It focuses on Potsdamer Platz to discover traces of global power shifts and the simultaneous

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dismantling and reconstruction of borders. At the same time, it traces back the history of ostracism and exclusion, especially against immigrants and minorities, which always have served to define the notion of a powerful national center. Its form evokes an archaeology of amnesia where every single item refers to absence and erasure. What is uncovered is a repeated process of obliteration.

Postcolonial histories

The history of minorities in Germany before World War II often provokes bewilderment. Neither the labor migration nor the refugee movements after World War I have left traces in the collective historical awareness. Migration movements in the wake of German colonialism and the traces of anti-colonial activities in the Weimar Republic are even more unknown. Only the existence of Jewish minorities is acknowledged to a certain degree. This form of historiography is not overly surprising. Walter Benjamin wrote that history is always a construction of the powerful.

The neglect of minorities in this kind of historiography derives partially from its formal characteristics in that such historiographies form a grid of knowledge which structurally excludes minorities. Minorities are not primarily defined by their small number, but by their incompatibility with preexisting categories of identity. This is due to the construction of minority, which involves a maze of conflicting demands. Minority is constructed in between its own conceptions and those of the majority. Since these two conceptions are not congruent, the process always produces loose ends. Yet it is not this residue which is constitutive of the situation of minority but rather the often arbitrary



and intense swaying of the categories within which the ever-changing construction and classification of minority takes place. In this border zone, the norms of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion are being negotiated, as well as the allocation of humans to all areas of political existence or to the zone of “bare life,”¹ which is completely disenfranchised and stripped of rights. The border space is where the rules are made through exception, and this exception is often identified as minority.

1. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.



In the film *The Empty Center*, the border space is determined as the empty zone between the walls of the former death strip, the area of the Berlin Wall in the center of Berlin. In the empty expanse between the borders, where empires confronted each other, the competing power claims of nation and capital have consolidated into architectural forms. But in the same space, lost traces of colonial and minority presence can be retrieved as well. This search is not informed by feelings of nostalgia but by a desire to understand how the process of erasure is inscribed into the very foundations of the constructions of power. This space of the border is the dark side of the euphoric

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poststructuralist concepts of hybridity, carnival and fluid nomadism.

Two types of spaces are intersecting and superimposing here: the political one, which allows for social participation, and the one connected to a state of exception, in which different kinds of minorities are threatened, flexibilized and disenfranchised. These two types of spaces penetrate each other to such a degree that practically in every political space, the state of exception is co-present. This is particularly relevant to minorities, who are often equated with the state of exception.

Zone of indeterminacy

The video *The Empty Center* analyses the former border zone between the walls in its relation to the state of exception. In this area the symbols of the new political and economic powers arise over a period of 10 years: government buildings and company headquarters. The new powers are consolidated during a period of transition within this undetermined zone between the former borders. In this place, history is written, and history is erased. The video probes different construction sites to unsettle the myth of “tabula rasa,” of an empty spot without historical depth, which informs all new building activities.

In the 90s, on the former premises of the Palais Mendelssohn, former residence of the composer Felix Mendelssohn, a Jamaican woman is selling pieces of the Berlin wall and GDR transit visas in a souvenir tent. Her own residence permit is only temporary. The souvenir tent was removed, and a large new building has been erected.

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Reconstruction plans for the area of the former chancellery of the Reich were highly controversial. In the 30s, the building was reconstructed by the Nazi government as their headquarters. This structure included the famous Fuehrerbunker, where Hitler and Goebbels committed suicide in 1945. But the building had been in use before the Nazi period.

In Bismarck's times the so-called Congo Conference was held here. A genocidal private colony by the name of Congo State owned by the Belgian King Leopold as private property was legitimated. At that time, arbitrary borders were drawn across a five-meter-high map of Africa. They became commonly known as "Berlin Borders." After German reunification, the adjacent subway station, which integrates parts of the former chancellery's marble decoration, is renamed from "Thaelmannplatz" into "Mohrenstrasse" (Thaelmann was a former communist leader, whereas "Moor Street" refers to black musicians in the Prussian King's Army).

May Ayim comments on this act as an erasure of antifascist memory in favor of sentimental colonial reminiscences, as an act which is symptomatic for the rising racist resentments articulated in many acts of violence against foreigners and people of color in the Berlin of the 90s. While a part of the area has been reconstructed during the GDR period as a residential area, another part is now supposed to be used for the premises of the federal states' mission buildings. The debate becomes heated over the third part of the area, where a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is planned. In 2000, neo-Nazis are repeatedly marching on the site in order to protest against the building of the memorial.

The newly built Sony headquarters on Potsdamer Platz include the old Hotel Esplanade. In 1940, the "Indische Legion" (Indian Legion) is celebrating the Indian day of independence there. It forms a part of the Waffen-SS, is led by the nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose and was largely recruited among British POWs from the Indian subcontinent. The German government had supported anti-English opposition among Indians since World War I and financed part of Indian political diasporic activities in Germany. These contacts laid the groundwork for Bose's later activities.

The history of the Indian Legion is one among many stories of non-German troops which actively supported fascist rule and aggression. Besides the Indian Legion there was an Arab Legion, a Bosnian and Albanian Legion and other troops from most occupied countries. The multicultural history of the Waffen-SS refers to a history of partly nationalist, partly anti-colonial movements who tried to realize their anti-communist, anti-Western and often racist and anti-Semitic goals in joining forces with German Nazis and Japanese militarists. But Berlin was also the scene of early anti-colonial communist internationalism. Zhou Enlai, later head of state of liberated China, and M. N. Roy, secretary of Comintern, both spent time in Berlin working in diasporic and internationalist communist circles.

Most interesting is the connection of the sceneries of Weimar Republic commercial exoticism with the deportation camps of the early 20s, erected on the legal base of the state of emergency. The area of the new building of A&T company was taken by a building called "Haus Vaterland" (Fatherland House). It housed

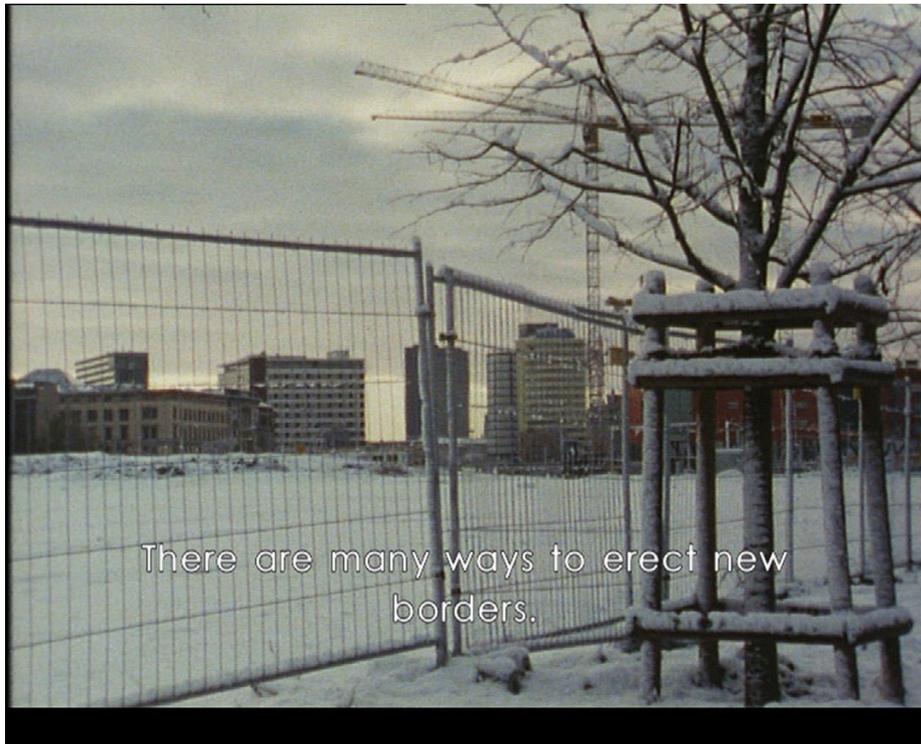
a Japanese tea room, a Turkish coffee shop, a Spanish bodega, a Russian vodka pub, a Wild West bar, a French bistro, a palm tree hall and the so-called Rhine terraces. The architect and critic Siegfried Kracauer has analyzed the building as a symptom of a depoliticized employment culture obsessed with efficiency and hygiene. He meticulously notes the praises of the various attractions in the advertisement brochure of Haus Vaterland: “Bavarian landscape: Zugspitze with Eibsee—alpenglow—entry and dance of the Bavarian *Schuhplatter* lads [...] Prairie landscapes near the Great Lakes—Arizona—ranch—dancing—cowboy songs and dances—Negro and cowboy jazz band.”² Rationalized escapism is central to the architectonic constitution of the building itself: embodied in the convolution of facades and stage scenery, whose geography is taken “from popular songs.” The former Askari soldier Bayume Mohammed Hussein is working here as a waiter. He lost his German citizenship in 1933. He died at the concentration camp Sachsenhausen, where he was deported in 1943 because of “racial disgrace.”

The earliest “concentration camps” in Germany were opened shortly after World War I. They were called “concentration camps for foreigners” and served as internment camps for refugees who could not be deported to their countries of origin. Their inmates were mostly Eastern European Jews, but also Latin Americans, Asians and suspected Communists of all nations. Although the camps were called “concentration camps,” they did not implement anything even remotely resembling the later extermination policies

2. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998), 92.



of the concentration camps of the National Socialist period. The main connection between both types of concentration camps is a legal one. Both were legally based on laws relating to the state of emergency. This state of emergency was proclaimed several times during the Weimar Republic and became permanent during the Nazi period. The state of emergency means a suspension of rules and the chaotic creation of new, arbitrary rules—the rule of force—at the expense of those minorities defined as exceptions.



Time lags

The formal structure of the video is a recreation of the structure of the former border zone between the walls. Long superimpositions show the transformation and reconstruction of single buildings within a period of five years. Just as the legal framework and the structures of transition materialize in the area between the former walls, transition formally becomes visible between two images which show the same place at different times and document its architectural transition. There is always one part of the picture which remains the same while everything else changes.

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The reflection on repetition and difference became the formal backbone of the film. In a wider sense, these transitions refer to the question of repetition and difference within history. Does the past repeat itself? Do parts of it return while the rest changes? Does it return with a difference? Or does it return as something else? How can we relate the different patterns of exclusion and nation-building in German history? Is it possible to relate the colonial policies of the Bismarck area to the present treatment of foreigners and minorities in Germany? Wouldn't this type of relation between different types of exclusion infer a relativist stance towards the genocide during the Nazi period? On which basis can we position these different historical periods in relation to one another?

In this sense, the video essay is a document of a period of transition—also on the level of visual production modes. It documents the technological transition from celluloid to digital processing technologies. All images were either shot in HI-8 video or 16-mm film—but the postproduction was entirely performed on nonlinear editing systems, which enabled me to visualize the process of excavation and of the visualization of different layers of the terrain. By incorporating not only different strata of history of the place but layers of different technologies as well, the video turns into an experimental project of a political archeology.

Translated by John Southard

This text was first published in Ursula Biemann, ed., *Stuff it: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Zurich: Voldemeer, 2003), 45–53, accessed at https://monoskop.org/File:Biemann_Ursula_ed_Stuff_It_The_Video_Essay_in_the_Digital_Age_2003.pdf. It has been lightly edited for typos, citations and style. It is reprinted with permission from the author.

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THE WALL IS A VIRUS

Lorenzo Sandoval

I am writing this in the moment when the COVID-19 crisis is hitting hard in Germany. In Peru, Morocco, Denmark, Spain, Italy and many other places, the almost total lockdown of society has already taken place. A few days ago, France declared war against the virus. Most of the borders are closed to people considered migrants: if you are not from the country, you cannot go (back) in. Last year, the art spaces Tlaxcala³ in Mexico and TIER in Berlin started a collaborative project titled *Objects Before and After the Wall*¹ with the intuition of putting forward the wall as a negative symbol connecting past and present conflicts; the wall is a device that defines which degree of being-human any person is. The much needed contingency plans spreading around and alongside the virus show us a lesson we will need to remind ourselves of in the future—that the very same countries that have been closing their frontiers to refugees are now talking about saving lives.

1. See online at <http://theinstituteforendotice.research.org/wp/projects-current/objects-before-and-after-the-wall>.

Luckily, most countries are not following the example of the current UK Prime Minister, who years ago praised the town mayor in the 1975 movie *Jaws*. In the film, the mayor insisted on keeping the beaches open for profit-making, regardless of people losing their lives.² The Prime Minister, very much aligned with this fictional mayor, said that people needed to simply keep swimming. Against the opinion of most citizens, the Prime Minister proposed that very same strategy against the Coronavirus in an attempt at obtaining herd immunity: if we allow as many people as possible to get the disease, they would eventually develop the antibodies and firewalls against the virus. Needless to say, epidemiologists strongly advised against the strategy, and this brainless plan was dropped.



CO.CARE/CO.CUIDADO (Conscious, Communal, Cooperative), 2020. Artist Chaveli Sifre produced a hand sanitizer to distribute in Berlin.

Addressing this pandemic requires close collaboration between citizens and governments. Mutual aid is fundamental, especially in giving psychological support. Many examples are already on view elsewhere: in Italy, neighbours give concerts on balconies; in Spain, general ovations for public health officials and workers take place everyday; distribution networks for those in need are being created in many cities; truck drivers reinforce their mutual support. Collaboration is the only way of overcoming this situation. As of March 18th, media reports indicated that there are

2. SÁENZ DE URIARTE, IÑIGO: "Boris Johnson, el alcalde de 'Tiburón' y la arriesgada estrategia contra el coronavirus en Reino Unido". See https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/Coronavirus-Boris-Johnson_0_1006149762.html.

two successful models to address the pandemic—both aided by technology. The first one, implemented by China, puts forward strict control measures over population. The second, in South Korea, is based on close collaboration between citizens and government. In either case, border restrictions strongly apply.

The current situation is also a massive social experiment of global control, with great consequences on biopolitics. There are radical changes that are taking place due to the crisis. As with any war or conflict—such as the September 11 attacks or different terrorist attacks (although not so much with far right-wing terrorism)—the paradigms in terms of social organization are going to change dramatically.



In Marchalena, eighty people are producing masks at home to support the community.

Among others, there are four interwoven elements that will need to be closely looked at once the virus is contained. The credibility of left-wing parties already in government—or the progressive ones in their struggle for recognition—is going to be highly affected by how they deal with these four topics.

Therefore, social and cultural organizations must work towards rethinking these issues and continue to come up with new ways of producing communities.

The first issue is racism and xenophobia. In recent years, we have witnessed how the governments of the West lost their sense of humanity. They will now probably feel emboldened in their anti-migrant discourse, as we can already see in many examples:

one of the first comments by the President of the United States reinforced the idea that a wall at the Mexican border is even more necessary now; fascist parties in Europe insist on the closure of borders for non-Europeans; recently, we have seen the tremendous violence against war refugees on the Greek border with Turkey; in Lesbos, people are basically left to rely on luck to survive.

This type of reaction exacerbates the never-ending refugee crisis and it wrongly rests on the idea of Europe or the U.S. as a fortress. The war against the virus, as declared by the President of France, cannot be a war against migrants as well. Finding strategies to maintain the diversity of communities would be key for reconstructing the social sphere after the pandemic ends, and a way to continue saving lives. There are no different levels of human beings. If the COVID-19 crisis is about making a collective consciousness out of this, then it must be applied beyond borders. Instead of containing people, the focus must be on containing the disease, while borders remain open and aid remains available by any means necessary.

Secondly, the fear of new pandemics will justify new control strategies over populations.³ If after the September 11 attacks many people agreed to a reduction of privacy in exchange for security, the technological protocols of both successful models of containment—as implemented in China and South Korea—will be applied globally and at different levels. Let's not forget that precisely at the same time the September 11 attacks took place, much of the global

3. KLEIN, NAOMI: *The Shock Doctrine*, Allen Lane/Penguin Books, New York, 2007. See: <https://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/61852-focus-naomi-klein-coronavirus-is-the-perfect-disaster-for-disaster-capitalism>.

digital infrastructure was developing intensively and the internet began to model into its current formation. It may have been that corporations had already sought, prior to the attacks, the kind of access to our data that was later justified by the fear of terrorism. Decades earlier, it would not have been possible to imagine that we would all allow tech companies to collect our personal information, geo-location, and even our desires as seen through data.

Very much connected to the entanglement of state control and algorithmic technology, exploitation of resources continues to devastate lands and communities in the Global South, worsening the long trail of colonial enterprise. The activities of tech corporations have left a severe footprint in different territories across the globe, but mainly in countries of the Global South: the need for resources in terms of energy, water and rare minerals to fulfill their production has brought entire communities under conditions of mass impoverishment and violence, as one can see in Congo or in Chile. These conditions have been brought on by very aggressive control measurements, in order to pursue the development of the fabrication of digital devices. The “cloud” is actually quite terrestrial and material—it is brought about by radically worsening the lives of the Global South. Technologies of control and material exploitation of lands and workers come hand in hand. They also feed climate change, the consequences of which were recently seen, for example, in sad devastations in Mozambique and Puerto Rico.

The impact that corporations have on our lives is undoubtedly strong. We have recently witnessed, for example, how elections were affected by social

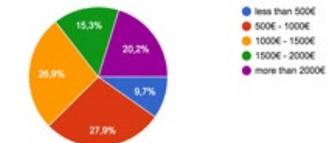


bbk Poll on the Situation of Visual Artists in Berlin: The Financial Impact of COVID-19

398 respuestas

How much income will you as an individual lose in the next four weeks due to COVID-19? If you have more than one job, please indicate the total income you expect to lose in the next four weeks:

391 respuestas



bbk Berlin currently organizes 2,370 visual artists from all disciplines and artistic genres. It offers its members a wide range of services such as: professional legal protection, free legal advice, tax advice, social advice, tenancy advice, insurance advice, comprehensive information on the profession as an artist. Image: bbk Berlin's poll campaign.

media campaigns based on fake news. However, the influence goes even further in neoliberal modulations of micropolitics: beyond disciplinary systems of control, corporations have understood that the battlefield is also molecular, that they go beyond already-controlled state policies.⁴ Once the current pandemic is over, control of individuals by either the state or technological corporations will be reinforced. The combination of technologies with authoritative governments will be a disaster for democratic and autonomous thinking. The struggle to keep a right to privacy, along with free speech and freedom of movement, will be a great one.

A third issue to consider is the concept of social distancing. Under this notion, how can anyone imagine any public demonstration? Consider the recent case of the feminist strike 8M in March. Many friends were concerned with the virus after participating in the gathering. As we know with Glissant, Lorde, Preciado

4. SZTULWARK, DIEGO: *La ofensiva sensible. Neoliberalismo, populismo y el reverso de lo político*, Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2019.

or Bifo, politics are not possible without a certain (or even great) degree of eroticism: the capacity of being together, feeling the bodies of others and producing a common consciousness. The challenge then is how to produce such political consciousness without being together: a feeling of touch or closeness while being far away. For many, it will take time and effort to lose their newfound fear of being close to others. We need to imagine new ways of being together beyond the restrictions of the virtual. Our political, social and cultural life depends on it.

Lastly, the pandemic will affect workers' rights. In recent years, there has been a political struggle to address the precariousness left by the last economic crisis in Western societies, in addition to the long lasting Western exploitation of the rest of the world economies. The general impoverishment of working conditions of workers' lives of the last decade was made under the guise of economic recovery. What we're seeing instead is how wealth has been flowing to the top (and from South to North) tirelessly, leaving the working class everywhere under increasingly worsening circumstances. The financial class has been sucking the blood of workers globally. For instance, a general model of working as freelancers instead of working under contracts is widespread. This means that things like health insurance are the responsibility of the individual, instead of the employers. Out of necessity, everybody has become a brand of oneself, and therefore common struggles are more difficult to organize. Unions have to be reclaimed, rethought, and redrawn. Is it the time of organizing a new Internationale?



Fermin Jiménez Landa,
Las Puertas / The Doors.
<https://vimeo.com/172089729>

Paraphrasing William Burroughs, walls are a virus: always create as many insoluble conflicts as possible and always aggravate existing conflicts—this is done by dumping on the same planet life forms with incompatible conditions of existence. There is of course nothing “wrong” about any given life form since “wrong” only has reference to conflicts with other life forms. The struggle against the wall is still and will be even more of a pressing one. As cultural workers, we operate within the imaginary of a society: providing images, platforms and strategies for tearing down any wall is a task also for us. COVID-19 will be probably one of the epic moments of our generation. The shape of the myth around it is still to be made.

“The Wall is a Virus” was written on 18th March 2020.

Thanks to Zöe Claire Miller, Eli Cortiñas, John Holten, Joaquín Jesús Sánchez, Sandra Noline Nielsen, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Chaveli Sifre and Fermín Jiménez Landa.

Originally published by Editorial Concreta, and republished by Independent Curators International. See <https://curatorsintl.org/research/the-wall-is-a-virus>.

VAGAR POR EL MURO

Francisco González Castro

Tú. Camino al lado de un muro; soy parte de uno y muchos muros. Tú. ¿Camino al lado de un muro?; ¿soy parte de uno y muchos muros?

* * *

Inevitablemente pregunto, ¿soy algo más que un ladrillo en el muro? Me interrogo, a los 14 o 16 años, cuando vi “The Wall”, de Pink Floyd. Acaso, ¿todos los muros son construidos con ladrillos? Piedras. Tengo vagos recuerdos de la caída del Muro de Berlín (tenía 5 años); más presente en mi retina están los ladrillos y el temor a ser uno — ¿no es ese temor el que hace que ya lo sea?

¿Cuántos ladrillos me constituyen, me hacen devenir muro? ¿Cuántos ladrillos han sido puestos en mí durante los días pasados? ¿Cuántos ladrillos instalaron la idea de que soy alguien? Me han fabricado al construir un muro que me delimita, me han concebido para ser parte de uno y muchos muros.

Otto Gross, en los primeros años del siglo XX dijo: “[...] cada uno debe liberarse del principio de autoridad

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

y del servilismo, inoculados en la infancia; no consentir a la voluntad de poder que hay en nosotros —no querer dominar a otro.”¹ El muro es el límite impuesto, el límite interiorizado; una autoridad que me dice (me digo) lo que debo hacer: el muro del Deber. Gross lo deja claro.²

Hay una diferencia entre el muro y la frontera, pero los muros nos mienten: quieren que pensemos que son lo mismo. La autoridad instala el muro, separando arbitrariamente al paisaje y al colectivo (o no arbitrariamente, sino de acuerdo a sus intereses); mata, odia lo múltiple y lo nómada; ordena a los sujetos lo que se debe y no se debe hacer, odia a los sujetos múltiples.

La frontera esta viva, es el límite transitable: el río, el desierto, la cordillera. Mi piel es mi frontera y puedes habitarla y recorrerla.

* * *

En su clase acerca de la biología del comportamiento humano, Robert Sapolsky plantea el problema de pensar por medio de categorías: primero, uno no ve claramente las diferencias entre elementos al estar estos bajo la misma categoría; segundo, uno sobreestima cuan diferentes son dos elementos al ponerse un límite entre ellos y, tercero, cuando se pone atención al límite se pierde el total.³

Las categorías —constituidas como fronteras— si

1. Otto Gross, *El origen comunista en la simbólica del paraíso* (Valparaíso: Ediciones del Caxicondor, 2014), 21.

2. Para profundizar en las propuestas desarrolladas por Otto Gross, se sugiere revisar: Otto Gross, *Selected Works 1901-1920*, edición y traducción de Lois L. Madison (Mindpiece, 2012).

3. Stanford University [Stanford]. (2011, 1 febrero). 1. Introduction to Human Behavioral Biology [Archivo de video]. Recuperado de <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNnIGh9g6fA>.

WALL

bien, aportan a nuestro pensamiento de distintas maneras, cuando luchan por mantener su identidad e instalan muros para protegerse, petrifican nuestra capacidad crítica y modifican nuestro actuar, limitando la práctica a lo ya establecido. Las categorías son los muros a través de los cuales vemos y entendemos a otros; ya sea un sujeto, un colectivo, un objeto o una materia, es otro. De la frontera se pasa al límite. Si aquello constituye parte de nuestra cognición e influye en como nos relacionamos con el espacio-tiempo propio, la moral y la categoría del ser se instala en nosotros desde un afuera para normarnos y darnos la ilusión de ser alguien. Rusty Cohle lo ilustra de manera elocuente en *True Detective*:⁴

Pienso que la consciencia humana es un trágico tropiezo en la evolución. Nos volvimos demasiado conscientes de nosotros mismos. La naturaleza creo un aspecto de la naturaleza separado de si misma... somos criaturas que no deberíamos existir por leyes naturales [...]. Somos cosas, obrando bajo la ilusión de tener un Yo... experiencias y sentimientos, programados con la completa seguridad de que cada uno de nosotros es alguien, cuando de hecho, todos somos nadie.⁵

Y claro, Cohle es un nietzscheano, y conoce lo dicho sobre la moral y el ser: “[...] no hay ningún ‘ser’ detrás del hacer, del actuar, del devenir; ‘el agente’ ha sido

4. *True Detective* es una serie que fue transmitida en los años 2014, 2015 y 2019 por la cadena televisiva HBO, cuya primera temporada estuvo protagonizada por Matthew McConaughey y Woody Harrelson. La serie fue dirigida por Cary Fukunaga y escrita por Nic Pizzolatto. La trama se centró en cómo dos detectives—Rustin Cohle (McConaughey) y Martin Hart (Harrelson)—investigan el asesinato ritual de Dora Lange. Ello los conduce a desenmascarar una organización detrás del hecho—con autoridades religiosas y políticas—que lleva décadas asesinando, torturando y violando a jóvenes y niños.

5. “The Long Bright Dark,” *True Detective*, dirigido por Cary Fukunaga (Nueva York: HBO, 2014). Transcripción y traducción del autor.

ficticiamente añadido al hacer, el hacer es todo.”⁶ Los muros de la moral nos impiden alcanzar nuestros deseos y bloquean la visión de ese horizonte liberador, hecho de rojo y de trueno. Los muros del ser nos inmovilizan y delimitan, nos obligan a la coherencia y a la verdad, e impiden que nos perdamos en otros, que caigamos en la locura, el suicidio y la libertad: pura voluntad de creación. La moral y el ser nos aprisionan, y a través del *deber ser*, nos condenan.

* * *

La frontera entre mi cuerpo y el desierto sangra. Mi piel esta herida, rota. El roce constante con el suelo, con la arena y con las piedras deja su huella, imprimiendo su fuerza y materia.⁷

Más de 7.000 migrantes han dejado sus cuerpos en este territorio; cuerpos asesinados que desaparecen capa por capa. Forzados a caminar por el desierto—dada la militarización que circunda al muro—, “La Bestia” los trae sobre su lomo y entrañas, los ayuda a escapar en su búsqueda por vivir.

El muro mata empujando al abismo. Te obliga a deambular, a andar por días, semanas, meses. El desierto, que te mira desde su horizonte, te azota con el sol, las espinas y las quebradas. Tu fuerza se diluye en su inmensidad, la boca se seca y la sangre hierve. Deliras en la posibilidad de crear, robada y negada para ti; pero en tu última acción, cuando ya no queda nada y decides dormir, te entregas al desierto como

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogía de la moral. Un escrito polémico* (Madrid: Alianza editorial, 2013), 67.

7. En este apartado se hace referencia a la acción *Capas de desaparición: 1.002 de 7.000*, realizada el año 2016 en conjunto con Lucy Quezada y con el apoyo de Robert Neustadt. Para mayor información se puede revisar el siguiente link: <http://franciscogonzalezcastro.com/2016-Capas-de-Desaparicion-1002-de-7000-Layers-of-Disappearing-1002-1>.

una nueva materia. Tu cuerpo desaparece, se seca, es comido y destrozado, es hecho pedazos; ahora devienes desierto, eres la vida que habita allí.

Más de 7.000 restos de más de 7.000 cuerpos de migrantes han sido encontrados en el desierto. De-seamos tocarlos, tantear el suelo que ocuparon y en el que desaparecieron; devenir sus capas de desaparición. Un homenaje que permita a nuestros cuerpos, en algún grado de intensidad, corporeizar lo que ellos experimentaron. Para vivirlo, nos acostamos y levantamos en el desierto, una vez por cada uno de ellos. Ansiamos hacerlo 7.000 veces, pero nuestras fuerzas no alcanzan a abarcar tal desastre: después de tres horas y llegando al límite de nuestra energía, lo hacemos 1.002 veces.

Mi piel tiene una capa de arena, sudor y sangre. No sé dónde termina mi cuerpo, pero ya no es en mi piel: me reconozco en la tierra y quiero descansar en ella. Anhelo afirmar el momento en el que me encuentro, el *devenir-cuerpo* constante que me constituye. Pero soy incapaz, estoy perdido en el desierto: soy cada grano de arena, cada cuerpo de migrante y cada coyote que despedaza esos cuerpos.

Caigo una vez más, apenas controlo mis movimientos, no resisto mi peso. El suelo es suave, cómodo, quiero dormir. Me paro, lento, dudando de mí, temiendo que no lo logre. Mis músculos se acalambran y tiemblo, pero consigo pararme. Quiero dormir, no sé si estoy allí: probablemente no, pero sigo, a la tierra nuevamente.

La repetición moldea el suelo, el que se abre y me recibe. Los movimientos quedan impresos, los dedos marcados y el sudor riega la tierra; capa a capa las huellas se deshacen para grabarse nuevamente. Veo el borde del precipicio, siento su brisa y me detengo.

El camino a través del desierto —la única “entrada” que deja el muro— es solitario. El caminar solo o en grupo es siempre un andar propio, único; aunque continuamente recorrido por muchos. La ruta es seca y el terreno agreste, con piedras y rocas que hieren los pies. La sombra está colmada de espinas y de arbustos que no entregan cobijo. Allí, el migrante camina vestido de negro, camuflándose en los rincones y recovecos, escapando de las brasas del día, avanzando por medio de la noche. Carga galones de agua y un poco de comida, construye zapatos especiales para no dejar huellas e improvisa su refugio. Huye y se esconde de otros, en cada momento escapa de sus perseguidores. Es buscado sin tregua. Es detenido. Es torturado. Es asesinado. Es desaparecido. Es encarcelado. Es deportado.

Aquel es el camino al que obliga el muro, con su voluntad de muerte y de ruina. Han inventado su lugar y se alimenta de quienes chocan contra sus extremidades. Todo su sentido se construye a partir del hecho de cortar un flujo, de dividir una frontera y detener su tránsito, normándolo.

* * *

El muro que presencié es el de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos. Es un muro, en un lugar concreto (atraviesa muchos paisajes), fabricado con diversos materiales y con formas que cambian a lo largo de su extensión. Fue construido para un fin, con dinero proveniente de flujos específicos, con las manos de obreros particulares. Tiene una fecha de inicio y tendrá una de término; un espacio-tiempo propio. Alto, ancho, largo: desde el mar a través del desierto y luego al mar. Toda su especificidad está teñida de sangre.

La constitución de un muro se encuentra en sus particularidades. La categoría de muro nos hace olvidar las diferencias, lo concreto, las relaciones que convergen en cada muro; las máquinas que los hacen funcionar. Pienso en esta categoría, y deseo reducirla para entenderla: ¿una barrera?, quizás sí. ¿Un corte? hay cortes que no son muros. ¿Una división?, se puede dividir sin muros. ¿Una construcción?, hay construcciones que no son muros y hay muros que no han sido construidos. ¿Un límite?, hay límites que no son muros. ¿Cuánto puede ser leído como muro sin serlo, y cuantos muros son pasados por alto? Acaso la potencia del muro —como categoría— es la de poder comprender cierto tipo de barreras, que dividen y limitan, y que son construidas para cortar flujos. Pero desde allí hay que particularizar, penetrar en lo anecdótico de cada muro, en su estructura y materia, para destruirlo. Por otro lado, me pregunto, ¿hay muros que valdría la pena preservar?

La Gran Muralla China, el muro de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, el Muro de Berlín; frente a estos y otros muros, ¿cuáles son los muros olvidados?, ¿cuáles son los muros invisibles? Los muros de las poblaciones del país en que nací separan a ricos de pobres, los muros del país en que crecí protegen a los pobladores de las balas, los muros del país en que viví dividen por clase y clausuran los mundos sociales. ¿Quién ve esos muros?, ¿quiénes los destruirán?

Mi escritura es ahora un lamento, y mi pluma desea ser un puñal. Los nombres de los muros requieren ser señalados y sus caminos demarcados. Unos y otros se instalan sobre nosotros, acorralándonos y asfixiándonos. Pienso en un porvenir en el cual deseo vivir, pero el

camino está cubierto por la bruma. Y quizás ese es el problema: a ese porvenir no se “debe” llegar, sino que deviene creación desde el deseo, en el deseo. No es un mañana, es un hoy que ya se ha postergado por demasiado tiempo. Los muros nos limitan, al tiempo que nos marcan un norte y un enemigo; son faros que nos guían hacia una ceguera. Ver a través de su estructura implica traspasarlos y superarlos, aun desde el lugar propio, inmóviles. Lo que puede devenir diferente de los muros y su muerte es la vida, en su autocreación y efervescencia, en su exuberancia y embriaguez, en su deseo de si misma—por si misma. Vida más allá del muro, vida sin muros.

* * *

Tú. Camino al lado de un muro; soy parte de uno y muchos muros. Tú. ¿Camino al lado de un muro?; ¿soy parte de uno y muchos muros?

Francisco González Castro
Octubre, 2019
Austin, TX

GLOBAL WARMING, REGGAETON AND EMOTIONAL MICROPOLITICS

Daniela Medina Poch

How can we use the frame of art to expand and diversify the action of protesting?¹

Both performance and protest go beyond representation. Both seek to manifest a statement through the presence of the body within a context that becomes transversal to the action and dialogue one to one with the present realities.

The workshop seeks to encourage citizen participation in micro-politics by acting creatively to react upon the disagreements or pursue ideals which deal with our context. Everyday objects, songs and subjects will be brought up as ingredients of our collective performance session.

1. This contribution consists of material related to the free public workshop "Global Warming, Reggaeton and Emotional Micropolitics," which occurred at The Institute for Endotic Research on November 9, 2019.

Photos: Lorena Tabares.

"[...] Lately we have witnessed the explosion of a series of distinct revolts, different in nature, in forms, and in goals: the Ecuadorian insurrection, the riots of young people in Hong Kong, the massive wave of protest against Spanish centralism in Catalonia, the armed resistance of Kurdish people against the genocidal fascism of Erdoğan and the Turkish state.

Now the upheaval of Chilean workers and students that started as a protest against a rise in transportation prices is turning into a practical massive critique of financial violence and calls the students and workers of the world to take to the streets with the youngsters who every Friday march against climate change.

Capitalism is a corpse, and we are trapped in it: in this trap everything is rotting: invention, progress, friendship, and love. They told us that there is no alternative to capitalism: in this case we must prepare for war, for environmental apocalypse, and for the extinction of the human race, which gets more probable every day.

But the truth is that the alternative does exist: it is based on getting free from an obsession with economic growth, on the redistribution of the resources, on the reduction of labor time, and on the expansion of time dedicated to the free activity of teaching, research, therapy.

In every city of the world we must express solidarity with the insurgents in Chile, Ecuador, and Hong Kong, but most of all we must prepare to take to the streets, to stop work, to stop urban circulation, and to build structures for the ecological and social reconversion that is badly needed by every person in the world.

Maybe the time has come, the time that we have long been waiting for: the moment for dealing the final blow to this mode of production that is producing death, to attack it in all places in every way. [...]"²

2. Franco "Bifo" Berardi & Vitrina Distópica Santiago, "Put An End to Nazi-Liberalism Now," e-flux conversations, October 19, 2019, <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/bifo-vitrina-distopica-santiago-put-an-end-to-nazi-liberalism-now/9470>.

Dear you,
 The world needs your fire.
 The world needs your sensitivity.
 Please take an object you like.
 Observe it and connect it to your reality.
 How can this object canalize your position,
 your anger or your hope towards the world?
 Make a script of an action in which you react
 to your context through the object.
 There are no limits, be creative.

WHAT DO I DEFEND?

BEGINNING:

DEVELOPMENT:

END:

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



WALL



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

Tschicki tschiki SOFTNESS

(DJ movement)

Writing on a paper to the toilet in the sky
 A lifetime supply
 Never buy again until the day you die
 (Caressing your cheek with the back side of your hand - alternating the sides of your hand, always with the back)

Papi give me grapes
 Mami, give me wine
 Keep the seeds and plant them in your mind
 So they can intertwine
 Slowly slowly learning in plants time
 (Rotating head, shoulders, ass and again head,
 (as many rotations as possible (while saying slowly slowly)))
 Learn from plants but don't move like one
 Move your ass and it will move your mind
 Don't worry plants won't charge a dime
 Learn from them without wasting time
 Slowly slowing learning in plants time

Come on and gather all around
 Come with us and break the wall
 Because you are here to fight
 And Never to Fall
 I grew up with fear, being threatened everyday

(improvised movement)

a song by
 Chad, Anita, Luigi21+, El General, Ladycomotú,
 Talista, Aurora, F, BigBen, danielaasecas, La Bolívar

WALL

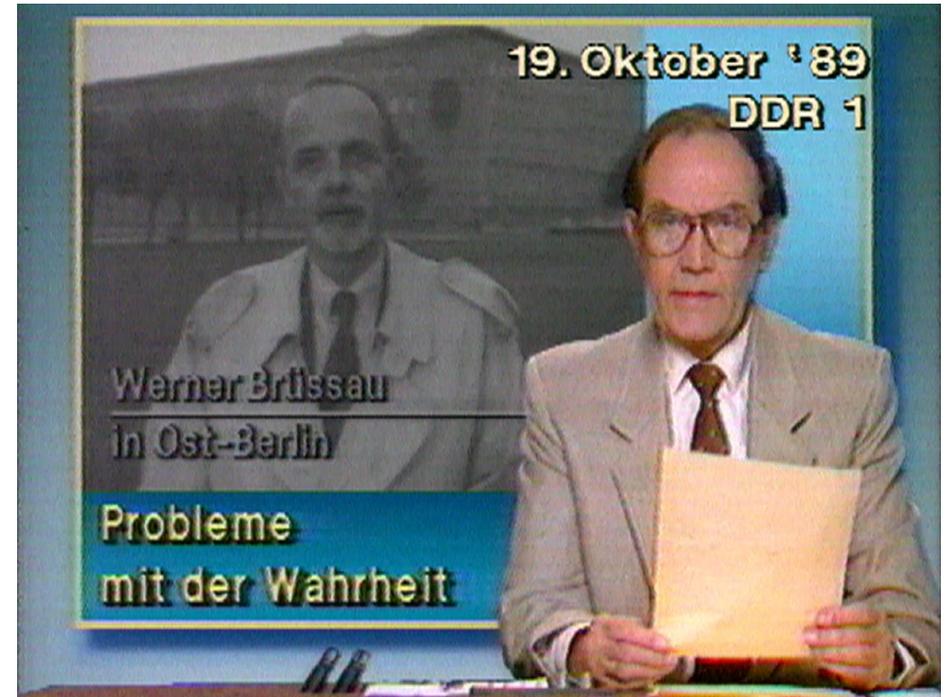
HARUN FAROCKI'S THE LEADING ROLE

Manuela Koelke

Harun Farocki's 1994 documentary *The Leading Role* (35 min.) commissioned by the ZDF, one of the state funded TV channels in West Germany, creates a montage of excerpts of the news from both East and West German television reporting about the events before and after the fall of the wall in 1989. This material at that time was only accessible to the few living in Berlin who were able to receive both East and West German television with their analog antennas.

At first glance, the selected material aims at making apparent how both states were working toward holding up certain narratives: media in the East mostly reports about economic achievements of the working class and of socialism in general. Reports focused primarily on meetings in factories and other workplaces. Economic progress is still today comparatively less relevant in Western media. Whereas in the West, public opinion is reflected by means of interviews and polls on the streets, in the East public opinion is expressed by workers at their workplaces. With the change of leadership in the GDR and its political

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



opening in fall 1989 and the growths and spread of Monday demonstrations in the streets of Leipzig, any problems or critique of the workers were only slowly acknowledged and publicly discussed by state officials at workplaces.

The material is carefully selected and surprisingly leaves out any images covering main events leading to the breakdown of the GDR, for example the stepping down of Erich Honecker, any statements by West German officials, and the fall of the wall itself on November 9, 1989. Just as Farocki slowly unrolls the film material, repeats news snippets and comments on them while zooming out of the frame in an almost meta-documentary style. The viewer

WALL

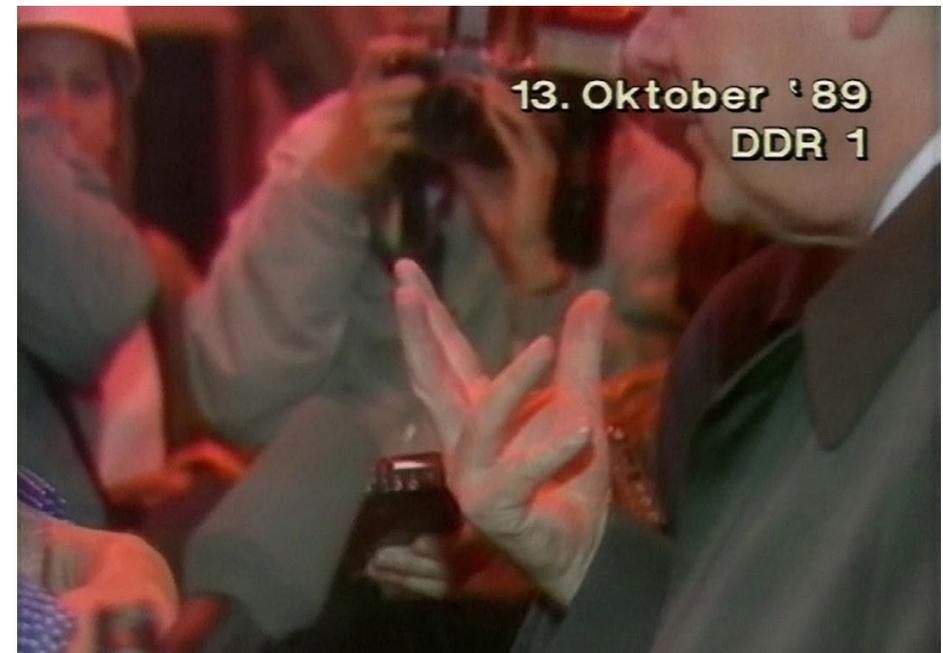
also starts to notice underlying worldviews by becoming aware of details and connections in what is not being highlighted or not shown. Farocki lets the images speak for themselves and yet explains them in a somewhat self-reflective and educational manner as if he is looking at them for the first time. It is a method that is characteristic of Farocki's rich film essayistic work: He is very much aware of the fact that simple depiction is not enough and is even misleading if you want to develop an idea and a concept of something. He thus employs a double movement: He reflects on the problems of illustration and at the same time tries to illustrate systems, processes and methods.

Already the title *The Leading Role* points to the notion of a more or less autonomous role of the media to simultaneously report, reflect and form the public opinion. On the one hand, the media in both East and West Germany is being instrumentalized and compelled to promote a certain agenda set by the respective governing power in each state, on the other hand, the increasing emancipation from these set agendas and the media's redefinition according to or conforming to the journalistic practice of West German media becomes visible throughout the events of the German reunification. Not least to mention the historical moment in which Günther Schabowski announced "accidentally" the immediately effective freedom to travel and thereby the opening of the wall. Yet, even though this moment is not included in Farocki's documentary visually, the contingency in the images and their ambiguity are sensitively highlighted in a way that does not simply appeal to a bipolar literacy of every micro detail but shows how the images actually shift beyond either narrative.

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One of the scenes in particular shows how the camera in East German television, usually used to capture the statements of state officials, now does not know who to capture in the frame because it is unclear, who is speaking next. Another scene zooms in on a gesture that can mean many things—money, power, performance, clarity.

Farocki doesn't directly reveal his position on the content of the selected material. However, it speaks through the arrangement of the scenes. In the beginning, scenes of the parade for the 750th anniversary of the City of Berlin in 1987 remind the viewer of the degree to which the GDR used the media for their propaganda. Yet, parts of this scene repeat again after a scene in which a state-conform worker comments in response to the Monday demonstrations in



WALL



November 1989 and insists on the necessity of discussing any public matter at the workplace as opposed to in the streets. This arrangement reveals the irony of the attempt to restrain any public discussion merely to the workplace, because without demonstrating and fighting on the streets, as the victorious four fighters staged in front of the Brandenburger Tor are supposed to represent, no socialist revolution would have come into power in the first place. The revolution did not only take place in the factories, but most of all on the streets and everywhere else. In that sense, it becomes clear to which degree the GDR has been undemocratic, is thus responsible for the frustration that has built up over the years which led to its own breakdown.

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



Harun Farocki himself writes about his film: “They are images of the media covering the current moment, and in such reports even the unpredictable emerges every day. [...] Today, after five years, we can gather from the documents how deeply the collective consciousness was shaken and with what inner calm this shaking was concealed. Thus, here we have the expression of the one who chooses suicide the very next day.”¹

1. Harun Farocki, “Die führende Rolle,” *Borderland Berlin*, 1994, <http://www.virtual-archiv.org/borderland/filmprogramm/die-fuehrende-rolle>.

All images are stills from “The Leading Role” © Harun Farocki GbR, 1994.

WALL

LOVE LETTERS TO THE WALL

Marisol García Walls

On June 17, 1979, a Swedish woman, Eija-Riitta Eklöf married the love of her life: the Berlin Wall. Since then, she has actively worked to inform the rest of the world about what she calls “objectosexuality”. She has pioneered in making networks among lovers of the non-human, lovers of walls similar to her own husband, but also domestic appliances, bridges and various historical monuments. Although there has been a wide media coverage that documents the stories of these people, it soon became apparent to me that most of this coverage was written from an ironic distance: texts that seemed “journalistic” at first but that were plagued with irony and disdain for the subjects, as if they truly belonged in a cabinet of curiosities.

In this conceptual text-based piece, I draw from a procedure of conceptual literature—the erasure of the original texts, chosen from the large number of articles that emerged from a Google search associated with the words “to marry the Berlin Wall”. From this array of texts I chose five. Erasure of most of the text

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

helped me see past the irony and scorn to delve into the stories of those who have married the Berlin Wall: Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer, actor David Hasselhof and Erika Eiffel, who also had a relationship with the famous French landmark. Using erasure as a creative force, I attempt to re-read the texts in the tradition of love letters, altering their meaning and placing them again in the affective dimension attributed to their lovers by the wall.

List of original sources

- #1. Richard Alleyne, “Woman ‘married’ to Berlin Wall for 29 years,” The Telegraph, May 27, 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/2035996/Woman-married-to-Berlin-Wall-for-29-years.html>.
- #2. Derek Scally, “Hasselhoff marries Berlin Wall,” The Irish Times, April 1, 2013, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/hasselhoff-marries-berlin-wall-1.1345340>.
- #3. “Woman Leaves Berlin Wall For Garden Fence,” December 13, 2008, <https://geekologie.com/2008/12/woman-leaves-berlin-wall-for-g.php>.
- #4. “Object of affection: Meet the people ‘married’ to weird things,” March 24, 2018, <https://www.rt.com/news/422203-people-married-inanimate-objects>.
- #5. “Wunderkammer,” Paramnesia Berlin, April 30, 2008, <https://paramnesiaberlin.wordpress.com/tag/berlin-wall>.

WALL

#1

Concrete structure

Whose fetish
the structure

roots in childhood
on television

collecting pictures

her trip

a full, loving

relationship with the wall.

I find long, slim

things with horizontal lines very sexy.

the rest of mankind

horrified

depicting his former

glory.

#2

He secretly

married the Berlin Wall on a recent visit to the German capital.

twice divorced tied the knot with the wall's most famous
stretch.

I've been looking for freedom, but I've finally found
happiness in Berlin.

We stand strong

on the evening

a small group

to retain

a rare condition called

love

#3

Woman leaves Berlin Wall for

local garden fence

diagnosed claimed

tied

The Great Wall of China's attractive, but he's too thick - my husband is sexier.

While she remains a virgin with humans, she insists

since the destruction of the wall

she hasn't been

lover

and has shifted her affections to a near

garden fence

#4

One woman's inanimate object is another one's true love.

people who fall

People who fall in love with objects

Objects can range
can vary

from innocent to intimate.

not necessarily an object

unconventional

similar

#5

certain reservations

developing unease

belief

in the existence of a soul

within the objects

WALLS HAVE FEELINGS

Eli Cortiñas

What's the role of those silent objects?¹

What do they know that we don't?

What do the walls witness in the rooms of power?

How do walls feel about the decisions being made within the comfort they provide?

What's the role of those silent objects?

What do they know about the hands using them?

How do walls feel about the decisions being made within the comfort they provide?

1. This contribution is an assemblage of dialog excerpts and stills from the video artwork "Walls Have Feelings" © Eli Cortiñas, 2019.

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



WALL



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

Totalitarian systems work hard to achieve a consistent look.

An entanglement of signs, that builds a recognizable iconography.

Buildings—interiors—walls—uniforms—paintings—sculptures—graphics.

A kind of fascist brand identity.

Dictatorships are built on labor.

What are nationalisms nowadays built on?

The ethnic cleansing of history has become a standard procedure.

(Building) Walls have become a standard procedure.

Silencing the past has become a standard procedure.

There is an immediate connection between productiveness, labor, immigration laws and labor conditions.

Walls are not there just to stop you from crossing borders,

but to create poorer working conditions, illegality and extenuate the worker's body.

WALL

I would like to know more about happiness!

Happiness, you know what happiness is?

Happiness is the smell of a new car.

It's freedom from fear.

It's a billboard on the side of the road,

that screams,

that whatever you are doing it's ok.

You are ok.

Now what?

The colonized world is a world cut in two.

The dividing line, the border is indicated by barracks
and police delegations.

It follows the lines of urbanism of the contemporary world:
peripheral enclaves, refugee camps, gated communities,
the factory, the bureaucracy, the prison, the army.

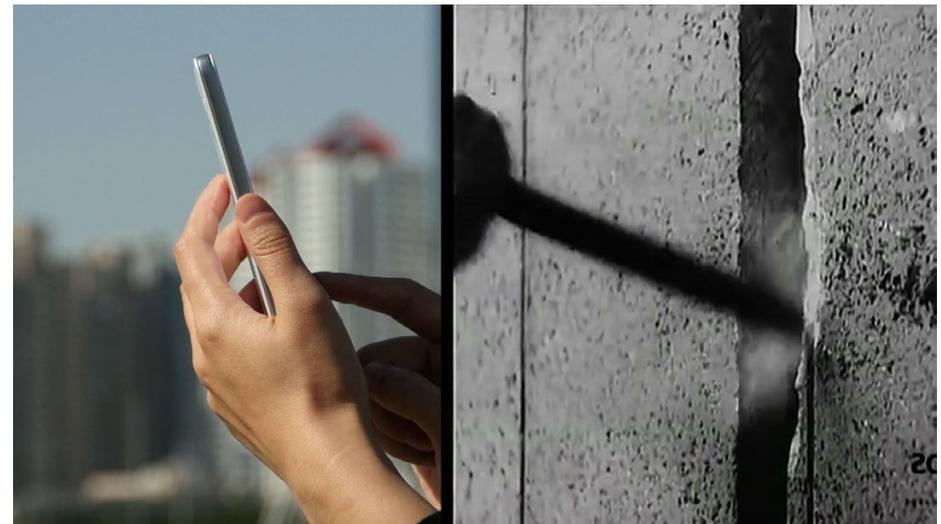
There is no continuity between the earth and the sky.

Pilots converted into computers,

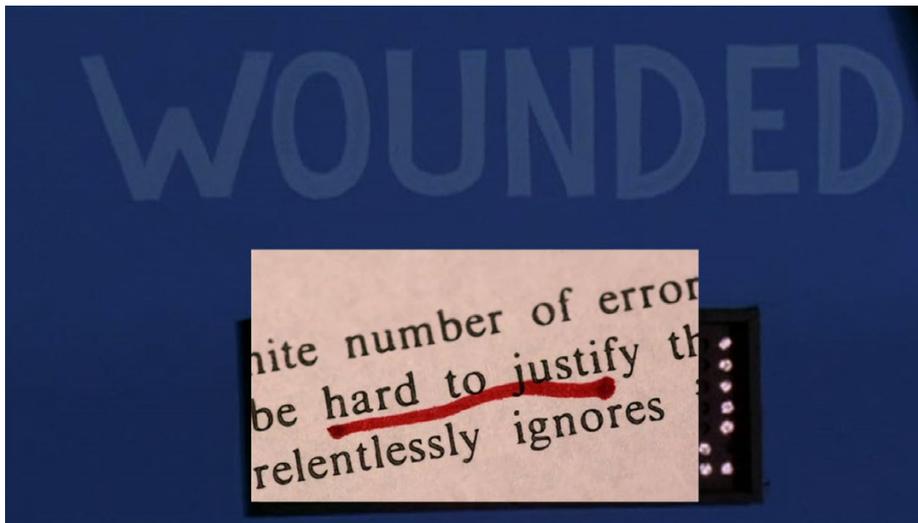
the state turned into a war machine.

Documents as monuments.

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



WALL



OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE

You are beginning to feel your eyelids getting heavy

as you slip deeper and deeper into a state of complete relaxation

All your cares and concerns are disappearing

Deeper and deeper

Way down

Your concern about your job melts away

Way way down

Now I want you to relax your legs

Now when I go backwards from three

You will be in a state of complete relaxation

Your worries cares and inhibitions will be gone

And you will remain in that state

Until I snap my fingers

Three

Deeper and deeper

Way, way down

Two

Deeper and deeper

Way down

WALL

FORÁNEAS: PIEDRA BLANDA, TIERRA INMÓVIL

Lorena Tabares & Diana Buitrón

“De todas maneras, cada vez que se levanta un muro, habrá ‘insurrectos’ para ‘saltarlo’, es decir, para atravesar las fronteras. Aunque sólo fuera imaginando. Como si inventar imágenes contribuyera—unas veces modestamente, otras con fuerza—a reinventar nuestras esperanzas políticas.”¹

A partir de la invitación de Tlaxcala 3 para el encuentro a realizarse en noviembre, trabajamos un proyecto entre videos y texto, en donde tuvimos como punto de partida una imagen detonante y la propia experiencia de un territorio atravesado por situaciones complejas en cuanto a la coexistencia y el bienestar de nosotros sus habitantes.

En una sociedad marcada por procesos históricos coloniales, sus cimientos, tanto de orden político como económico, se interponen de manera directa en nuestras necesidades básicas, llevándonos a un estado de preocupación e insatisfacción constante en la vida diaria.

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, Sublevaciones, <http://untref.edu.ar/muntref/sublevaciones>.



Imagen 01: En Fotografía impresa en Venezuela (1945–2019). Autor del libro: Sagrario Berti, 2019.

A lo largo de estos procesos históricos y hasta la actualidad, las jerarquizaciones violentas —pigmentocracia, esclavocracia—, los estados no igualitarios, la deslegitimación de la misma existencia, se replican y atraviesan de maneras distintas las realidades o acontecimientos que se manifiestan como cruciales para quienes lo viven, considerándose al cuerpo, en su conformación genética y morfológica como una de las fronteras más determinantes para el acceso y la participación social dentro de estos esquemas hegemónicos heredados.

El cuerpo, visto desde un lado de su materialidad y conformación, es un contenedor de dolor, de heridas autoinfligidas, en la actualidad, como cicatrices de una supervivencia constante; la tensión entre las circunstancias y sus propias reacciones obligan al sujeto a tener una consciencia del cuerpo, entendiendo su totalidad más allá de su propia existencia. Ese cuerpo biológico con características condenadas es el lugar donde se condensan los ejercicios del poder y donde la resistencia emerge.

En diferentes momentos, las diferentes partes del cuerpo han tomado la responsabilidad de representar a ese todo; por ejemplo, el puño al aire, la boca abierta o los pies en marcha. Es ese momento justo, donde la acción llevada a cabo por el fragmento se convierte en un gesto. El ejercicio del caminar, como esa forma de controvertir los límites de manera individual como colectiva, es ese gesto que recubre las resistencias latinoamericanas: nacimos siendo nómadas; la abolición de la esclavitud implicó dar a luz los parias de la tierra (imagen 01); los desplazamientos forzados en Colombia tienen errantes permanentes, y la dictadura en Venezuela, hoy han creado una colectividad más

sin tierra, sin enumerar tanto otros ejemplos hacia atrás en la historia.

Entre la fragmentación del cuerpo y el gesto, los pies proporcionan movilidad, a su vez las piernas y el tronco como continuidad indisoluble permiten al sujeto su desplazamiento; sin embargo, cuando es violentado, el cuerpo se convierte en la evidencia del gesto que aún sin verlo y sin que sea palpable; se resiste a desaparecer, una ausencia presente.

Caminar es una acción elocuente que acentúa los lugares que resisten a las limitaciones del territorio: se trata de construir un patrón, un fraccionamiento, para transitar entre un punto inicial y un otro punto lo cual implica controlar el equilibrio, contar el tiempo que se demora entre ir y volver, recorrer largas distancias, y después finalmente sentir el movimiento involuntario, el espasmo y el vaso. Aunque el cuerpo conoce y a su vez desconoce el tiempo que resiste ante cualquier situación: la resistencia nunca tendrá límites.

El cuerpo demarca un territorio mientras el sujeto va construyendo sus trayectos; esas líneas aleatorias que se visibilizan a medida que se imprimen las huellas de quienes las recorren. Huellas que para muchos terminan siendo señales de alerta, guías, mensajes, y/o protestas. El territorio es un campo de fuerzas cambiantes con nuevas demarcaciones. Aquello que los mapas, atlas, han descrito en su momento —las convenciones— aparecen como señales vetustas de territorios hoy muy distintos, territorios que hasta los más avanzados programas de mapeo ocultan u omiten, suponiendo que las demarcaciones esquemáticas son una unicidad denominada por un único nombre.

¿Qué pasa entonces cuando un cuerpo se desplaza a otro territorio? ¿es obligado a vivir de una manera diferente, se desdibuja, queda expuesto, vulnerable, afectado? es ahí, donde la figura del ser humano foráneo nace; aparece un ser que va de un lugar a otro, abre su frontera, su cuerpo se condiciona a las posibilidades externas, muy diferente al nómada aunque posea una estrategia de vida parecida, ya que por formar parte del afuera resulta tener una existencia espasmódica, desencajada. Los seres foráneos, mujeres como hombres que caminan entre parajes contrastantes, distintos al lugar que dejaron hace tiempo, miran con nostalgia su alrededor, una que invade hasta las pocas cosas que pueden traer consigo. Caminan con el anhelo, la sed de ver recompensados sus pasos por un beneficio, muchas veces sin encontrarlo; pues, la cantidad de toques del talón excede a aquello recibido, se quiebra. La energía y vitalidad del cuerpo allí depositada es transición sin ganancia.

Los retratos de las tres mujeres en la fotografía (imagen 01) son la potencia de su fuerza reflejada en los gestos congelados de resistencia ante el peso. En la imagen pervive la frontalidad de la mirada ante el reposo, la mano en el pecho y en el corazón, y la expresión reflexiva de la señora que toca su quijada. A pesar de la desigualdad del intercambio entre valor y acción, la resistencia y el gesto persisten.

Como una metáfora de aquella resistencia dos mujeres con un peso en la cabeza (imagen 02) y una lucha que da a la gran economía como ganadora aparecen en una nueva imagen; en un video, estas dos personas realizan un mismo acto, sostener en su cabeza un peso mientras el agua cae sobre sus cuerpos. En

otro video, una lucha entre soplos sin rostros, hace de un textil sintético dorado —aluminio pintado de dorado que recubre una marca de monedas de chocolate que venden en Colombia— una forma frágil e inestable donde sobresale la cara más visible de esa economía basada en los recursos, la consecuencia de entender bajo el envoltorio monetizado cada una de las instancias de nuestra vida.

El regreso de la mirada a la imagen de aquellas tres mujeres y al lapsus de tiempo que las cobija nos presenta un segundo de su trayecto, entre el inicio y el final de un corrido desconocido, donde caminar es el vehículo del pensamiento y el gesto: sus cabezas llevan una gran recompensa con la que anhelan alimentar la existencia. Las tres retratadas con su aliento entrecortado, ante la gran economía, llevan encima al recurso convirtiendo su valor en una fuerza que se transfiere cuerpo a cuerpo; con una ilimitada resistencia ellas consumen y combaten las batallas que parecieran no tener final.

Décimas

Lluvia fría debe ser
pero con el alma en boca
es otra vida que invoca
aunque cerca de caer
por el largo recorrer
hacia allá está el devenir
no hay lío si se debe ir
con el pecho encadenado
y el trasegar almenado
ella perseguir el huir

El panorama se nubla
sobre llamas y destrozos
visite los tiempos rotos
luego, sentí como huela
Pues, tan infeliz nos vela;
Así, con tan grandes ganas
y mis solas alpagatas
Guarde unos cuantos frijoles
para sembrar por los montes
entre largas caminatas

cuerpo duro ya no pesa
aunque blando sea el mío
la costumbre no es hastío
porque de los siglos se versa
la esperanza no descansa
cuerpecito ya sereno
lleva la carga con recelo
Con sus cicatrices la abraza
Sin abandonarla, la alza
y suya la lleva en su seno

La piedra recibe fuerza
la tierra, tira, suspira.
Ahogándose respira,
alienando mi cabeza.
Al asumir, endereza
desmembrada yo me siento.
Sin siquiera su aliento
sin haber visto la cara;
como si sólo bastara
el vivir en detrimento

No pretendo componerme
aún sabiendo que puedo.
Pues con el dolor me quedo
ir buscando desprenderme.
Doblegada sin moverme
un baneo, huelo, trago;
agua tierra con letargo.
Buscar el aliento lento
inclinandome me siento;
no consigo pero cargo

Ella piedra, yo soy tierra
agua riega sin aviso.
Con solo su preaviso
enredada, desentierra.
y si se llega se aterra
en el cuerpo la consciencia
de la tierra su carencia;
los valores de las almas
gritando furor aclaman;
con dolencia su clemencia

Este techo va conmigo
por los nómadas caminos,
Me acompañan atavíos
como olvidos y rezago,
El fantasma que es amigo
viento soplo de mi hermano
en el cañal y el matojo
ese susurro que me advierte
es sonido que me abate
de la errante y del foráneo

Viví de ojos apretados
pero un día de un agosto
soñé con un cielo abierto
y ahí al fin, pude olvidarlos
soñe, me atreví a vencerlos
olvidando mis pupilas
bebiendo el rocío fiel
sendas de pasadas lunas
que escurre sobre mi piel
dibuja tiernas arrugas

Una, dos y mil bocanas,
porque la vorágine es
de corrientes muy salvajes
y alud de tórridas aguas,
ríos vueltos avalanchas
en paisajes húmedos rotos
hasta los últimos soplos
con mares en sus pulmones
falta de aire e inhalaciones
son sus más libres respiros

pieles tiesas abrasivas
entre muros y barreras.
persiguiendo las hileras
del camino que cautivas.
vuelca voces agresivas
sus gritos, ensordecida;
queriendo para su vida
no ser presa ni su temer;
y sin nada más que hacer
te reduces entumida

Es la mujer y su revés
adentro y el afuera.
escuchar alguien quisiera
tocar sus brazos y sus pies.
estirarse en sus carnes
enterrarse su lamento;
florece triste aliento
caminos que la esperan;
si luz del sur se entera
enciendan campo abierto

El silencio como soga
y sentarse de cuclilla.
A pulso con esterilla
En su cuello se desfoga.
aun sabiendo que dialoga
sin tragar su cuerpo hielo
enfurece su pellejo
con tremenda valentía;
relatar historia propia
caminar sin pies ni cielo

Es el cántico sereno
de los bellos rumbos míos
lleno de elocuentes puntos
de faz y origen alterno
bien aparte del adorno
cuando se trata empalmar
toma al pausado cantar
y al gran silencio verbal
como una norma esencial
para el querido palmar

Horizontes que en mis ojos
sus colores los delatan
colorados bultos arman
los picos con grises páramos
pintan a lo lejos pálidos
unas sendas humaredas
dibujan oscuras huellas
y cultivos de aielés
y de blancuzcos jazmines
tejen sus canosas rutas

Entre tanta y poca calma
este cuerpo no descansa
tiritando nadie amansa
ni con fatiga se aploma
poco las ansias mitiga
tiembla todo el pie derecho
pero no deja el acecho
busca saltarse la barda
y doblarse no incomoda
ya que incierto es el futuro

Con su falda carcomida
sus manchas y su abrigo.
entra sol enardecido
impulsando su tonada.
que su canto grite cruda
porque cruda con el alma;
iluminas tu mirada
tragas ríos y montañas;
el valor de tus hazañas
por la sangre de su máma.

la sangre sus alimentos
caminando sur y norte.
mirando pelo responde
en sus pies sus fundamentos.
huye, vuela, con los vientos
invisible muerte lenta
sin mirar, estar de vuelta;
en sus brazos te calientas
expirar, estas resuelta
no menciones, existencia.

Estar envuelta con hierba
sin estar mirando nada.
el desaire que probaba
con el puño resonaba
el olor de tierra brava;
traía la cabecera
su fulgor de jornalera;
acuestas en propio lomo
entendió triste despojo;
el corazón desprendiera.

Palma con palma ella cose
talegas de finos bordes
vestidos de varias flores
alisa, carga y reviste
siembra, vacila y resiste
tejidos con hilos duros
hechos sin tantos apuros
los bemoles ella venda
a los frutos une y arropa
sin olvidar sus agujeros

Es tu nombre 'jornalera'
alegría de mis campos.
son tus callos en tus manos
esperanza de mi tierra.
no camines ve ligera
porque llevas oro puro
aunque traes deterioro;
doy mi mano jornalera
que soy yo por vez primera
tus pies, cabeza, y yugo



Imagen 02

VISITING THE BERLIN FENCE MEMORIAL

Benjamin Busch

The Berlin Wall is present, even in its absence. The Berlin Wall Memorial, a popular destination for visitors that inhabits the wall's former death strip, presents an incomplete historical narrative. In the context of the Memorial, the Berlin Wall is historicized as a symbol of dead totalitarianism, finally overcome by liberal democratic struggle. It has become a site for the free touristic consumption of a divided past, now unified under the free market. The *Berlin Fence Memorial*, a conceptual artwork I made in the form of a publicly distributed flyer in June 2015, updates the obsolete Berlin Wall to the latest border security hardware of the EU, to which Germany belongs, by conceptually projecting the fence of Melilla into the former death strip in Berlin. By adopting the format of the Berlin Wall Memorial's official flyer, my work opens an alternative space for individual contemplation of contemporary border security practices without the need for strong institutional affiliation. The original flyer's design was sufficient. Only the text and images had to be swapped. The format of the flyer allows for a tactile dissemination of information in public space.

OBJECTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE



Melilla border fence with Morocco in the background. Photo: José Palazón Osma

On the front side of the bilingual flyer, images of the Berlin Wall are shown mixed with images of the border fence in Melilla. The main text is reprinted here: Melilla is a Spanish exclave on the northern coast of Africa, bordered only by Morocco. A state-of-the-art anti-immigration fence surrounds the city, marking the outermost reach of the European Union. "This fence is not just the fence of Melilla. It is the fence of the whole of Europe. This here is also the fence of Berlin," stated Juan José Imbroda, mayor-president of Melilla.¹ A political border is no longer to be found at the site of the former Berlin Wall, which was dismantled and then reconstructed as a memorial. Berlin's remote border, that is the EU border, is mainly disregarded. To make

1. Juan José Imbroda, mayor-president of Melilla, Spain, quoted in "Die Berliner Menschenfalle," *die tageszeitung*, March 5, 2014, <https://taz.de/Europas-blutige-Aussengrenze/!5047592>.

WALL



Migrants attempt to cross the Melilla border fence in 2014. Photo: Santi Palacios

it evident, the open-air Berlin Fence Memorial recreates the latest established border security technology of the EU inside the death strip at Bernauer Strasse. It becomes a place of reflection, historical presentation, collective commemoration and individual mourning for those affected by contemporary border protection practices in Europe and around the world.

The six-meter tall Melilla border fence, or la valla de Melilla, is a state-sponsored protective solution against illegal intruders. It utilizes a range of so-called passive safety elements, such as lethal-grade razor wire, rotating panels, tear gas dispensers and wire traps. The fence is additionally equipped with spotlights, noise and motion sensors and video cameras for rapid police response. However, despite its shocking appearance and grave effectiveness, migrants increasingly risk their lives by attempting to climb the

fence and to enter Melilla. With nothing to lose but life itself, their approach is concrete. The terror of the fence's passive safety elements is a rite of passage to EU soil, where migrants from all walks of life are eligible to apply for asylum in Europe.

In an era of Nobel Prize-winning peace in Europe, it is possible to imagine the "advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights" not just within Europe, but also at the site of its border. Visitors to Bernauer Strasse may be shocked, appalled or offended by the gruesome presence of the Berlin Fence and wish for it to be torn down. Such a reaction is natural, and it is shared by many. Yet, as long as the EU border fence stands, the Berlin Fence will stand as a reminder of its existence.²

In the view of Spanish and EU law, individuals put their own lives at risk by attempting to scale the deadly Ceuta and Melilla border fences, whereby they illegally enter the EU. If, in this act of transgression, a migrant loses his or her life, that death is legally registered as a suicide. In theory, the EU deters illegal immigration through intimidation by employing so-called passive safety elements. In practice, however, the migrants, many of whom are estranged refugees, are not deterred. They are determined to enter the EU, where they are eligible to apply for asylum. They do not end their pursuit in Morocco. In search of a better life, the migrants become subject to the violence of a non-living infrastructure. Can objects murder?

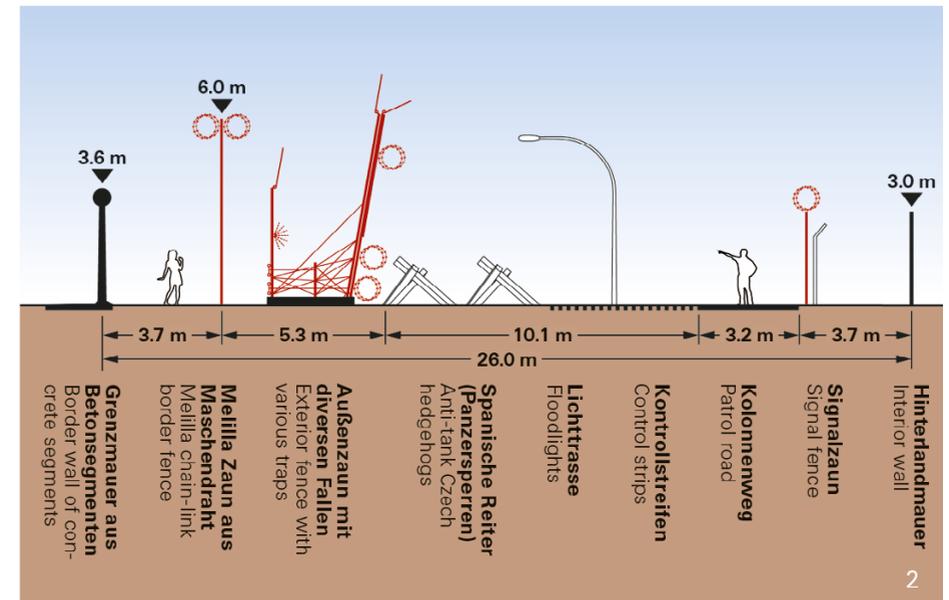
Considering the greater flow of human migration to the EU, Ceuta and Melilla are bottlenecks where migrants

2. Berlin Fence Memorial Flyer, see <http://studiobusch.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/berliner-zaun-flyer.pdf>.

and refugees from diverse origins converge. Despite the gruesome fence and active police brutality toward migrants and nearby self-organized camps, the flow of migration has not stopped. Between Ceuta and Melilla, migrants wait for the opportunity to enter Europe. They suffer injury from and succumb to the EU border infrastructures despite self-organized crossing attempts and ongoing activism. Migrants' self-made tools and strategies for climbing the fence are thought out and effective, but they are not always successful, sometimes ending in death from blood loss. Lives are also claimed in the Mediterranean Sea. On February 6th, 2014, for example, a group of approximately 400 migrants attempted to swim from the coast of Morocco to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. The Spanish Guardia Civil fired rubber bullets into the group and used tear gas and rubber batons. At least 15 people were killed and more were seriously injured.³ At other times, migrants have drowned without intervention.

Around the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was propped up in the media as an international spectacle, artists and activist groups evoked a parallel between the Berlin Wall and contemporary EU border infrastructures—not only its fences, but also Frontex, the EU border agency tasked with policing the Mediterranean Sea. With their project *Erster Europäischer Mauerfall*, Zentrum für Politische Schönheit produced a spectacle organized around a coach tour to the EU border, where ticket-holders were encouraged to bring bolt cutters. Zentrum's attempt to tear down the border fence in Bulgaria gained media attention and a political

3. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26201013>, <https://www.ecre.org/death-at-europes-doorstep-one-year-on-and-still-no-justice-for-the-migrants-who-died-off-ceuta> and <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/case/europes-treacherous-borders-seeking-justice-for-ceuta-victims>.



response, but it also failed, and was indeed destined to fail from the start: police stopped the action before a single fence wire was cut. This raises the question: are direct action and civil disobedience effective? The answer seems to be: we can't do anything, but we must do something. The *Berlin Fence Memorial* is in conversation with the work of Zentrum für Politische Schönheit. There is a common critique that it is hypocritical to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall with knowledge of the EU border fence, which violates human rights. Rather than going to the EU border, my approach was to materialize the fence in Berlin—to bring it home—through a conceptual provocation. It is a gesture that underlines the alienating scale and materiality of the Melilla fence by placing it within a referable local context.

The *Berlin Fence Memorial*, as a concept, can also be seen as an architectural proposal. One way to

Cross-section of the Berlin Fence Memorial, with elements of the Berlin Wall in black and proposed constructions copied from the Melilla fence in red.



Rendering of the Berlin Fence Memorial, with the proposed construction of the Melilla fence replica at the site of the current Berlin Wall Memorial.

intervene as an architect in the historical narrative of the Berlin Wall would be to physically realize the fictional project, to materialize the “Berlin Fence” in Berlin public space as a permanent structure. Would it be insane to think it possible? And anyway the “Berlin Fence” already exists—just in Ceuta and Melilla, not Berlin. Finding a way to build the fence in Berlin would be a serious political and economic challenge. Who wants it? Who would pay for it? The pursuit of governmental approval and funding would undoubtedly expose the violence of participation. Yet even as a purely theoretical project, the flyer opens up an alternative conceptual space: With an update to the Memorial, there is now room for a multitude of migration histories. The historical term ‘refugee,’ which also applied to East Germans fleeing to West Germany,

receives a contemporary meaning that reflects not only the diversity of asylum-seekers in Germany and the EU today, but also the general social composition of the country and the bloc in times of free trade and easier movement, at least for those with the right passports.

Already, architects, designers and engineers participate in the construction of the EU border. And not only the EU border, but also the US-Mexico border and borders around the world becoming durable barriers to human movement. Architects are needed both on the technical level, to design border infrastructures, but also on the organizational level, to apply for permits from the necessary authorities, and to justify certain features or material aspects of the infrastructures particularly with regard to budget. This raises the question of design ethics. In practice, architects are in the business of providing a professional service (at least this definition applies to the majority of architects). To whom a service is provided, for what purpose a service is employed—these factors are consequential. Under capitalism, architects are effectively service providers to those who control capital. If architects have the luxury to refuse a contract, e.g. (not) to build a border fence, then they are comparatively privileged. There are billions of euros to be made building security infrastructures for the EU alone.⁴ It is not an easy decision to refuse a contract when the existence of an

4. The Málaga-based company European Security Fencing (ESF) is the only producer of the type of concertina wire (razer barbed wire) used in EU border fences in Hungary, Melilla and elsewhere; EU border building is a multi-billion euro industry. See “La frontera de concertinas húngara, negocio para una empresa de Málaga,” *El País*, September 16, 2015, https://elpais.com/politica/2015/09/14/actualidad/1442225805_160390.html and “Das Milliardengeschäft mit den Grenzzäunen,” *Die Welt*, October 16, 2015, <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2015-10/fluechtlinge-zaun-europaeische-union-stacheldraht-ungarn/komplettansicht>.

office, with employees and running costs, is at stake. Ethics seem to be secondary to survival in a highly competitive and generally undervalued profession. There are consistent discussions about design ethics among architectural professionals, also within unions and certain architectural organizations, but there is no unified approach in a field that is dependent on a system built on exploitation (e.g. underpaid construction workers), debt, corruption and speculation. Consistency is not typically a feature of architectural discussions I've encountered—unless you count the often present feeling of dissatisfaction.

In recent years, more media attention has been paid to especially high-profile architects working in countries with questionable working conditions. This has at times generated outrage, and has fed into what might be a political re-awakening of the architectural profession, to some degree. Still, the disparate assemblage of politically conscious architects is a small subset. The average architect is more likely concerned with their own working conditions, which often include great amounts of overtime and, compared to other professions with similar years of training and professional liability, worse salaries. There are organizations that seek to improve the material conditions of architectural practice. Their struggle is part of the same struggle for justice for the construction workers, and it is probably one of the first steps toward any general ethical revolution in the field of architecture.

There is a rift between theory and practice in the architectural discipline. Architectural theory, which is especially valued in art contexts, is often approached as something that can exist independently from architectural practice—it doesn't have to get its hands dirty



A designer at work.
Screenshot of European
Security Fencing promotional
video on YouTube,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAzqmu94N00>.

with the (ethical) compromises inherently faced when theory gets applied. But the divide between theory and practice, when you think about it, isn't really that deep: there's one dominant theory, at least, that gets applied directly in practice every day: the theory of co-operation with capital. It's applied to varying degrees, and with varying amounts of reservation. Ultimately practice, chained to capital—with very few exceptions—achieves what theory cannot: built, usable architecture. The ethical conundrum architects face is generated by a desire for another world to exist, whose aesthetic production architects can facilitate, which is however negated by the material conditions of society, which only allow for utopias to emerge if they are profitable. The Melilla fence is one example, but it is inverted: for the few, it expresses utopia; for the many, it outlines a bleak dystopia. For architecture to break free from the profit motive, scalable tools for critical practice must be developed and employed in great numbers, articulated as part of a global struggle.

This text has been adapted from an interview by Alejandro Strus in Kathrin Wildner, Gerda Heck et al., eds., *Raumzine #1* (Berlin: Fachbereich Raumstrategien der Kunsthochschule Berlin Weissensee, 2015): 58-61.

IMPRINT

This book was published by The Institute for Endotic Research (Berlin) as part of a collaboration with Tlaxcala3 (Mexico City), which took place over the course of the year 2019, the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Edited by Benjamin Busch and Lorenzo Sandoval.

Cover and Graphic Design by Donají Marcial Cruz.
Design Layout by Benjamin Busch.

The editors would like to thank all the contributors to the book, the Tlaxcala3 team (Clara Bolívar, Alí Coteró and Lorena Tabares), and all the participants of the *2nd International Encounter of Objects and Walls*.

The cover is printed with the Risograph printer of ON/OFF. Pages are printed with the laser printer of F101 Architekten. Bound with the wire binding machine of the Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology. Typefaces used are Staatliches and Arial.

The production of this book is supported by the Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo fund for theoretical and curatorial research, with further support from the Berlin Senate Department of Culture and the Berlin Art Prize.

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ISBN: 978-3-9819512-7-1

The Institute for Endotic Research Press
Donaustrasse 84
12043 Berlin
Germany
2020

A project by:



TLAXCALA 3

Supported by:

✧ FUNDACIÓN JUMEX
ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

Senatsverwaltung
für Kultur und Europa | **be**  Berlin

Berlin Art Prize