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THE BERLIN WALL: A MATERIAL AND PSYCHIC HISTORY

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract	p. 1
Introduction	p. 3
The Wall in Fragments	p. 4
Veil- and Tear-Images on and of the Wall	p. 12
The Wall as Overbearing Veil of Images and its Kitsch Aesthetics	p. 16
The Wall as Facilitator of Veil- as well as Tear-Images	p. 21
The Wall as Membrane and its Creaturely Aesthetics	p. 23
The Wall as Veil and Creature in History	p. 33
The Wall as Spatial Barrier and Distributor of the Sensible	p. 36
Methodology	p. 39
Chapter Summaries	p. 41
Chapter 1: Function, History and Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall	
Introduction	p. 48
Function	p. 51
History of Walls	p. 67
History of Walls in Berlin and the Berlin Wall	p. 81
History and Aesthetics of the Different Generations of the Wall	p. 85
Chapter 2: The Wall as Screen	
Introduction	p. 100
Distorted and Partial Views	p. 104
Western Screen of Images	p. 119
Screen Versus Thing Power	p. 144
Chapter 3: The Wall as Membrane	
Introduction	p. 157
The Dynamics of Visuality and Visibility	p. 177
Mauer and Wand	p. 187
Gewand and (Mass) Ornament	p. 196
Magic Wand, Colour and Dadaist White Line	p. 200
Undulating Lines, Walls and Baroque Illusions	p. 209
Chapter 4: The Wall as Annihilator of the Historical and Amplifier of Utopian Desire	
Introduction	p. 221
The Wall as Historical Panorama and its Undoing	p. 233
The Wall as Aesthetic Filter: Socialist Realism, the Avant-Garde and Historical Disruption	p. 243
The Wall and Walls of Great Promise	p. 266
Conclusion	
The Wall as Fragmented History and Historical Fragment	p. 282

Works Cited

p. 300

Appendix

List of Abbreviations

p. 318

Images

p. 319

Abstract

This thesis concentrates on the material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall (1961-1989) and is based on the analysis of images. A visual history of the Berlin Wall acknowledges the fact that the Wall as material object before and after its demolition has been predominantly sensed and made sense of in form of images; whether photographic, filmic, digital or in form visual metaphors such as the Iron Curtain or the Anti-Fascist Protection Wall. While a haptic engagement with the Wall was possible on its Western side, where artistic interventions took place in the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of Western press photographers, West Berliners and people visiting West Berlin looked at and across the Berlin Wall and introjected it in form of an image. A strict ban on images of the Berlin Wall on its Eastern side by the GDR government, which also heavily restricted access to the border zone in East Berlin, resulted in the production and accumulation of images taken from the Western side of the Wall. I argue that the fetishization of the Western perspective onto the Wall and the fetishization of the Western Wall has continued after the demolition of the Wall and German reunification in 1990.

While the production of the one-sided Western visual regime, defined as Berlin imaginary (Manghani 2008), and the wholesale identification with the Western point of view, is historically traced in this thesis, it is counteracted by a conceptual framework based on dialectical images. Walter Benjamin's (1940) concept of history expressed in the dialectical image, which re-surfaces in the present and reveals the truth of a historical constellation in a flash, is re-fracted through Georges Didi-Huberman's (2008) differentiation between veil- and tear-images. Both, veil- and tear-images as fetish and fact, are regarded as historically significant and the concept is applied to the analysis of images of and on the Western side of the Berlin Wall. I argue that the distribution of veil- and tear-images of and on the Berlin Wall had a geopolitical impact and needs to be acknowledged in the present.

The Berlin Wall as material barrier and military fortification, obstructing and dividing up space, is analyzed as fetishized and aestheticized screen, screening off the other side, as membrane, filtering socio-economic and affective flows and as protective shield invested with utopian desire for the building of socialism in the GDR. I argue that due to the complex functions of the Berlin Wall and the aestheticization of its Western side by means of graffiti and Wall art an almost schizophrenic tension emerged between the Western aestheticized frontline Wall and the Eastern military hinterland Wall and its border zone. I use Gilles Deleuze's (1981) analysis of Francis Bacon's paintings to differentiate the violence of the sensational and the violence of sensation as well as his (1993) reading of Leibniz' concept of the monad as fold exemplified in the Baroque house to show the workings of the Berlin Wall as paradoxical, aestheticized material structure in space. Pleasing as well life-threatening, the Berlin Wall triggered effects as well as affects, traced by the production of illusionistic images such as trompe l'oeils and their illusion-destroying other-anamorphic images (Lacan 1973) as well as the illusion of images in motion (Warburg 1923) on and of the Berlin Wall. As a result, the Berlin Wall emerges as surface for aesthetic interventions, as interface between East and West as well as biopolitical agent, displaying creaturely characteristics (Santner 2006), encircling a bounded existence.

Because of the entanglement between matter, the sensing of matter and making sense of it at a specific historical moment and over time, the aim of this thesis has been to develop a multi-perspectival framework, which considers present hegemonic and absent perspectives, present and absent times (the present, the past and the future), the Wall's materiality as well as the imprints it has left on the psyche due to its always already divided, Janus-faced structure. In this way the history of the Berlin Wall as *sight* and *site* is theorized, running counter to conventional accounts, which strictly differentiate between the two. This thesis

argues that at the overdetermined border (Balibar 2002) between East and West Berlin during the Cold War sight and site conditioned each other and thus have to be thought as political-aesthetic arrangement in space (Rancière 2000).

Introduction

When as a child I went hiking with my father in Southern Austria, which shared a border with then Yugoslavia, we would stop before the top of the mountain, where my father's family came from, because it was on Yugoslav territory. Even though it was perfectly fine to cross the border and even though we had Slovene family on the other side of the mountain, we never crossed it and I never asked why. Long after the end of the Cold War, in my late forties, I began to explore the region of Southern Austria and Northern Slovenia. Both countries were part of the EU by then, and I asked myself why I had never challenged my father; the descent was certainly steeper but so much more beautiful on the other side.

The geopolitical borders had redrawn the map of Europe after the Second World War and divided Europe to a large part into a communist and capitalist bloc. I had thoroughly internalised this Cold War map growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. Even though Austria had declared its geopolitical neutrality after the departure of the Allied occupying forces in 1955 and Tito's Yugoslavia had defied Stalinism and opted for a third way in 1948, Hitler's war of annihilation and a different geopolitical agenda had estranged the two neighbouring countries, which were not part of either the capitalist or communist bloc.

The Cold War would, unbeknownst to me at the time, soon come to an end in 1989. I remember watching the news of the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, on television in joyous disbelief but crossing the paternal border mountain and descending on the other side would take another 25 years.

In 'What is a Border?' (2002), Étienne Balibar contends the historical complexity of the notion of border (84). Borders are overdetermined and always signify more or less than mere state boundaries, depending on for example greater geopolitical alliances. They are also polysemic, in the sense that individuals belonging to different social groups experience the crossing of the same border in radically different ways. Crossing a border may be

experienced as mere formality by a citizen of the Global North or as unbreachable obstacle by a citizen of the Global South. Above all, borders are heterogeneous, they fulfil several functions at the same time, they demarcate territory, they channel and differentiate between flows of people and goods as well as granting specific rights to some while denying them to others. Far from functioning only as visible, external reality, borders form identities (of the nation state) and are at the same time internalised as inner borders (78-84). Balibar mentions, as an aside, the psychoanalyst André Green who “once wrote that it is difficult enough to live *on* a border, but that is nothing compared with *being* a border oneself. He meant this in the sense of the splitting of multiple identities ...” (83).

Personal insight in the persistence of inner and outer borders, even if long obsolete or never a hard border in the first place has been the driving force of my project, which traces the material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall: a material and psychic history, which bases its enquiry on a visual history. A material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall has been freighted with an abundance of iconic images of the Wall and the graffiti and Wall art on its Western side—photographic, filmic, digital, discursive, and metaphorical in nature—predominantly produced by Western media at the time. As a consequence, we are left with today’s scarcity of often highly fetishized material remnants of the Berlin Wall understood as pieces and segments of the Berlin Wall as well as documentary material in form of photographs and films of the Wall.

The Wall in Fragments

In order to trace the material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall it is necessary to start with its material remnants after the fall and the demolition of the Wall in 1989 rather than its construction in 1961. The fact that the Wall, with very few exceptions, does not exist in situ anymore, has shaped my approach. The tension between an abundance of iconic images of the Berlin Wall, predominantly taken from West Berlin, and the scarcity of material

remnants, fetishized if they were part of the Wall's graffitied Western side, exemplifies the fact that behind a screen of images material scarcity comes to the fore. On a superficial level, the material fragments stand in contrast to a large number of photographic and filmic images, which, with regard to perspective and content, must also be read as fragmentary. Most of them were taken from the Western side of the Berlin Wall, representing a Western point of view. Despite its always already binary material structure, which consisted in its later stages of a frontline and hinterland wall, facing West as well as East, one-sided Western views and material remnants of the Western Wall continue to determine historical approaches and, on the psychic level, the structure of desire. While analyzing these fragmentary and fetishized structures, this project aims to do away, on the conceptual level, with one-sided Western directed positions by arguing that the Wall as screen of images and material barrier at the same time also functioned as membrane, filtering goods, human traffic, even affects.

As a consequence, this project wants to stress the central paradox at the heart of the Wall as clear-cut geopolitical ordering device. In my argument, the Wall has always already been overdetermined, polysemic and heterogeneous: first because of its inherent binary material structure facing inside and outside; second because of the geopolitical division of postwar Berlin into two opposing halves belonging either to the capitalist or communist block with its ensuing exclusionary identities; and third because the now severed city parts paradoxically shared the Wall as a means of division together with unrelenting attempts of overcoming this division, serving different ends on different sides.

When on November 9, 1989, East Berliners flocked to the checkpoints between East and West Berlin along the Berlin Wall, because Günter Schabowski, secretary of the Central Committee for information and member of the SED Politburo, had erroneously announced on camera new travel regulations for GDR citizens with immediate effect, the GDR state had

been fighting for political and economic survival for a while.¹ Due to Schabowski's hasty announcement that all GDR passport holders were allowed to leave the GDR permanently and could pass through the checkpoints at the border, including Berlin, East Berliners were eager to test their new freedom of movement. What is commonly known as the 'fall of the Berlin Wall' has become part of German collective memory, since the 'fall' heralded the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Eastern communist bloc in Europe and the reunification of Germany on October 3, 1990.

From a Western vantage point the 'fall' of the Wall enabled East Germans quite literally to enjoy the, in Western liberal-democratic terms, freedom of movement and with it freedom of expression and freedom of consumer choice. From an Eastern vantage point freedom of movement meant dissidence, striving for transformation and societal change. Cultural critic and philosopher Boris Buden reads the ever-present image of the 'fall' of the Berlin Wall, the end of communism, the subsequent period of transition commonly called *Wende*² as a *Zynische Wende*, a cynical turn. The Western observers of the peaceful revolution in 1989 ironically distanced themselves from the transformational event they witnessed. Disillusioned by the mal functioning of Western democracies but emotionally hardened, cynical Western observers were fascinated by the allegedly blind belief of GDR citizens in the transformational power of Western democracies or of a socialism in democratic form in the late 1980s. After the 'fall' of the Wall and the dissolution of the Eastern communist bloc, it was *not the fact* that the Wall's gates were opened due to the

¹ See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010). In September 1989, Hungary had opened its borders to Austria, causing the numbers of East German refugees seeking to leave the GDR and live in the FRG to surge. At the same time GDR civil rights and protest movements calling for structural change and democratic rights became more vocal. In October 1989, Erich Honecker, leader of the GDR since 1971, was forced to step down and followed by Egon Krenz, who promised GDR citizens a turn in policies (*Wende*), which was met with general scepticism by the population towards party politics. At the same time the GDR was facing financial ruin and was heavily dependent on loans from the FRG (239-252).

² For a discussion in detail of the concept of *Wende* see: www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/677932/da844372419109a378e7060523ec4477/WD-1-024-19-pdf-data.pdf. Accessed 27 August 2020.

pressure of the East German people and their popular protests was foregrounded in collective memory *but the viewing position* of the Western onlooker that was privileged. Unlike in previous revolutions, Buden argues by drawing on Kant's insights into the French revolution of 1789, who attributed great importance to the identification of the bystander as observer with the revolutionary action, that the Western onlooker was affected but not enthused by the revolutionary energy of the Eastern protests and felt vindicated in his viewing position within a democratic, capitalist space. While a blind eye was turned on Eastern 'action' contributing to the historical event on November 9, 1989, the Western 'reaction' to the event has been universalized in the form of photographic and filmic material, in the postwall, postcommunist era (Buden 17-19).

Im Bild vom Fall der Berliner Mauer, das für den Untergang des Kommunismus steht, ist schon die ganze Wahrheit des Postkommunismus enthalten: Man sieht euphorische Massen, die über die Mauer und durch deren geöffnete Türen herauslaufen wie Getreide aus einem aufgeplatzten Sack, doch man sieht nicht, was die Massen sehen. Der Blick der Menschen, die soeben die Mauer und den Kommunismus gestürzt haben, ist im ikonischen Dokument ihrer revolutionären Tat nicht enthalten. Was es hingegen zeigt, ist der Blick der anderen, derjenigen, die an diesem Ereignis nicht aktiv beteiligt waren. So ist unser Bild vom Untergang des Kommunismus gespalten in ein blindes Geschehen und dessen symbolische Repräsentation, die außerhalb dieses Geschehens vorgenommen wurde. (Buden 17)

The image of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which stands for the demise of communism, already comprises the whole truth of postcommunism: One sees euphoric masses, who run across the Wall and through its opened gates like grain

from a burst bag, however one does not see, what the masses see. The look of the people, who have just brought down the Wall and communism, is not included in the iconic document of their revolutionary deed. What it shows, on the other hand, is the look of the others, those who were not actively engaged. In this way our image of the demise of communism is split in a blind event and its symbolic representation, which took shape outside this event. (Buden 17; my trans.)

The split image of blind action and its representation, what Buden calls, *im Blick der anderen*, through another's eyes and from another's point of view (Buden 17), will haunt any serious discussion of the Berlin Wall, its 28-year existence and its fall (1961-1989).

We must not forget that the Wall did not 'fall' on November 9, 1989, but its gates were opened due to miscommunication and popular pressure.³ The actual demolition of the Berlin Wall would soon follow suit. Already on November 10, 1989, according to Anna Kaminsky in 'Die Erinnerung an die Berliner Mauer seit 1990' (2009), Politbüro discussions about the fate of the Wall as Volkseigentum, property of the East German people, began. Bavaria had offered to purchase parts of the military fortification rampart in exchange for much needed foreign currency (29-30). As a means to boost the GDR economy, which seemed beyond repair, and because of the growing international demand for Wall segments as Cold War mementos and trophies, the GDR government decided to demolish the Wall and sell off sought-after segments of the graffitied Western Wall to the international public. Thus, the demolition of the Berlin Wall began in January 1990, a large part of which was turned to rubble and re-used as construction material for highways and other purposes. Hundreds of colourful segments of the Western Wall, on which artists such as Thierry Noir or Kiddy Citny

³ See Major. Günter Schawboski had partly been absent from the meeting, where the new travel regulations were discussed and had been handed a written note by Egon Krenz before holding the press conference on November 9, 1989, where, due to the general atmosphere of confusion, he improvised (Major 252). See also Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer* (2009). After Schabowski's televised announcement not only East Berliners but also the international media gathered at Bornholmer Straße border crossing in East Berlin, pressuring the East German border guards, who were taken by surprise, to open the gates (134-139).

had left their trace, were sold and became part of more than 140 Cold War memorials worldwide (30-32). Kaminsky drily remarks that the material structure, which, as a highly effective border fortification system with frontline, hinterland wall, control strip, watchtowers, barbed wire and metal fences, had divided East from West Berlin for 28 years, disappeared swiftly within a year.

Apart from only a few stretches of the inner-city wall, now part of the official Berlin Wall memory trail, with well-preserved segments of the Berlin Wall such as at Bernauer Straße (Berlin Wall Memorial), Niederkirchner Straße (close to the Checkpoint Charlie memorial site) or the East Side Gallery near Oberbaumbrücke, the Wall as material structure does not exist in situ anymore.⁴

In 1990, after the demise of the GDR and German reunification on October 3 of the same year, the majority of Berliners saw no necessity to preserve the much-hated object of division even if parts of the GDR civil rights representatives and the cultural avant-garde continued to mourn the loss of the socialist state, which was to be transformed but not abandoned⁵. According to Kaminsky, Berliners in general longed to return to normality (30). In the following ten years individual initiatives calling for a common memorial for the victims of the Berlin Wall and decisions taken by the Berlin Senate to create an official Berlin Wall memorial site paved the way for preserving the last existing remnants of the inner-city wall. Eventually, on August 13, 2011, the 50th anniversary of the construction of the Berlin Wall, the newly arranged Berlin Wall memorial site at Bernauer Straße was able to

⁴ See www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/de. Accessed 19 February 2022.

See also Axel Klausmeier and Leo Schmidt, *Wall Remnants: Wall Traces* (2004). Art historians and conservationists Axel Klausmeier and Leo Schmidt meticulously trace, describe and list the last remnants of the fortification system in situ.

⁵ See Sarah James, *Paper Revolutions* (2022). While Christa Wolf, together with other reform communists and intellectuals pleaded for the continued existence of the GDR in 1989, a year later well-known GDR mail artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt started, with her last mail art project in the GDR, a petition upholding the socialist dream of an egalitarian society and comparing “the mere adoption of the Federal German order ... tantamount to rape” (Wolf-Rehfeldt in James 316).

let its visitors explore a, partly preserved, partly reconstructed⁶ segment of the Berlin Wall including a frontline, a hinterland wall, a control strip and a watchtower. Additionally, a memorial landscape had emerged from marking the ground on which houses stood at Bernauer Straße on then GDR territory, and the excavation of some of their basement structures. They had to give way to the evolving military zone between East and West Berlin in the 1960s. Together they document the construction and expansion of an inner-city military fortification system and the human tragedies that resulted from it (32-35). Kaminsky, referring to Lore Ditzen's article 'Die ausrasierte Stadtwunde' on August 13, 2001, in the German newspaper *taz*, states that a common criticism about the preservation of various Berlin Wall segments had for a long time been that "eben nicht nur eine einfache Mauer, sondern eine breit 'ausrasierte Stadtwunde' die Stadt geteilt habe." 'clearly not only a simple wall, but a thoroughly 'razed urban wound' had divided the city.' (my trans.; 32)

What is left of the Berlin Wall are fragments, all too often fragments of the hinterland wall or odd pieces of the border zone, which attract attention if they are well preserved, in a central location and display Wall Art such as at the East Side Gallery⁷. An inner-city GDR watchtower is worthy of interest if it is of heightened historical significance; as in the case of the Günter Liftin memorial at Kieler Straße, which is one of the sites where East Germans attempted to escape and failed, with fatal consequences⁸. Very few stretches of the Western

⁶ Even though the Wall segments at Bernauer Straße have been under conservation since 1990, parts of it were demolished in the Wende (the time between the 'fall' of the Wall in 1989 and reunification in 1990) and the post-Wende euphoria and had to be reconstructed for the memorial site (Saunders 207-214). See also Axel Klausmeier, 'Die Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer an der Bernauer Straße' (2011) for detailed information on the development of the memorial site at Bernauer Straße.

⁷ Shortly after the 'fall of the Wall' on November 9, 1989, artists tried to paint the Eastern side of the Wall, which had been inaccessible before. East German border guards. However, attempts were thwarted until the East German government during the Wende period agreed to offer a stretch of hinterland wall close to Oberbaumbrücke and the river Spree. International artists were invited to come to Berlin and leave their marks in form of murals containing joyful messages about the end of the Cold War. On September 28, 1990, the East Side Gallery was opened and hailed as one of the longest open-air galleries in the world. See also www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/de/east-side-gallery/historischer-ort/laengste-open-air-galerie#der-mauerfall-1989brund-die-entstehung-der-east-side-gallery. Accessed 19 February 2022.

⁸ After sealing off East from West Berlin and securing the inner-city border on August 13, 1961, Günter Liftin was the first victim to be shot by members of the East German police when jumping into the water at Humboldt Harbour and trying to swim to West Berlin on August 24, 1961. The memorial was initiated by Günter Liftin's

frontline wall, which, in the late 1970s and 1980s, had been tattooed by graffiti and Wall art in the American sector between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie, are left. The Berlin Wall memorial at Bernauer Straße and the preserved Wall segment at Niederkirchnerstraße close to Checkpoint Charlie are the most well-known examples. None of the aforementioned remaining Western Wall fragments display graffiti or Wall art, either because they were historically located in an area where very few artistic interventions took place, such as at Bernauer Straße, or because Wall peckers, in the Wende period, the time of political uncertainty in the GDR between the ‘fall’ of the Wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990, had removed large pieces of graffitied or painted concrete as personal mementos or for commercial gain, which was the case at Niederkirchnerstraße. Thus, the Wall segments at Niederkirchnerstraße, which form part of the Topography of Terror Memorial commemorating the Gestapo headquarters and notorious Nazi prison nearby, display their rugged and ripped Wende surface rather than the smooth whitewashed or graffitied counterpart of before the ‘fall’⁹.

Historians and conservators have not tired to point out that the remaining fragments of the Western Wall in situ or purchasable in form of colourful, original Wall-piece-souvenirs at Mauermuseum at Checkpoint Charlie, attract considerably more attention than pieces of hinterland fences, patrol roads and floodlights, which were part of the border zone and could provide the often lamented missing details of the border fortification system¹⁰.

Smaller and larger pieces of colourful Berlin Wall segments have become part of a popular discourse on aesthetic interventions at the border. The application of graffiti and wall

brother Jürgen and is dedicated to all victims, who were killed or injured at the border between East and West Berlin, East and West Germany.

See www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/de/gedenkstaette-guenter-litfin. Accessed 19 February 2022.

⁹ See www.topographie.de/en/the-hoistoric-site/history-after-1945. Accessed 19 February 2022.

¹⁰ See Leo Schmidt and Axel Klausmeier, *Die Berliner Mauer: Vom Sperrwall zum Denkmal* (2009).

art on the concrete surface of the Western Wall or in close proximity to it on a nearby firewall has been continuously fostered over the 28 years of the Wall's existence¹¹.

There is seemingly no escape from the dizzying mixture of colourful Wall segments, Wall pecker pieces and other objects of the border zone, all of which have been collected or sold and re/appropriated. A brief look at the Berlin Wall Memorial's *Lapidarium*, the collection and archive of diverse Wall artefacts, testifies to the conundrum between fact and fiction. Next to derelict parts of watchtowers, bricks, concrete blocks and tubes, pieces of wall cast in synthetic resin and Wall 'stones' presented as if they were 'gemstones' in little, attractive boxes, donations of diverse Wall peckers, can be explored¹². The threshold where historical artefact morphs into fetish and fetish parades its historical, material embeddedness, at least at the *Lapidarium*'s online site, can easily be traversed in either direction. All of them are remnants of the material structure, diverse and often problematic fragments, but fragments in spite of all.

Veil- and Tear-Images on and of the Wall

At the various memorial sites then, in contradiction to the linear narration of the end of communism and the eventual disappearance of the Wall, material artefacts, in their fragmentary form, testify to a more complex and contradictory past: the Berlin Wall in material 'ruins', where fetish and fact are piled on top of each other. Instead of a historical continuum, the historian has to deal with a pile of highly cherished or discarded historical artefacts and tease out the historical tension buried within them and expressed in images. As dialectical images, namely veil- and tear-images, they represent key objects of analysis in this thesis, in which historical knowledge is derived from their analysis.

¹¹ See Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011), (17-21).

¹² See www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/en/berlin-wall-memorial/historical-site/collection-archive. Accessed 19 February 2022.

In his essays, 'On the Concept of History' (1940) and 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"' (1940), Walter Benjamin attacks historicism for merely 'narrating' history and promoting the continuum of historical existence through the concept of historical progress (especially, in Benjamin's eyes, practiced by the Weimar social democrats) and thus creating a progression "through a homogenous, empty time" (394-395). Instead of a historical continuum, history needs to be interrupted, momentarily brought to a standstill. Only then can a "unique experience with the past" (396) be established, "the oppressed past" (396) liberated and the historical object released from imprisonment in time and space. At the very moment, when time and space collapse, the historical object, in form of a dialectical image, "the involuntary memory of redeemed humanity" (403), releases an energy, which enables historical knowledge in the present (403).

In order to unearth historical knowledge in form of dialectical images on and of the Wall as material structure, derived from highly compromised material artefacts, which exist only as fragments, Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis of veil- and tear-images proves useful. In *Images in Spite of All* (2008) French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman writes an apologia for the testimonial character of four photographs taken by members of the Sonderkommando, Jewish prisoners who were forced to work in the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau, in 1943-1944. The images have indexical character but whether what can be discerned on the photographs is able to provide an insight into the unimaginable horrors of Auschwitz and death in the gas chambers or runs the danger of becoming an icon of horror is debatable. However, Didi-Huberman argues that not only what was recorded, but how the recording came into being forms part of the image's material reality. If nothing else, the images, in their very materiality, have survived the men taking the photographs, not only

risking their life but eventually facing certain death¹³. As momentary gestures they embody and are material proof of the willingness and simultaneous impossibility of giving full testimony.

For Didi-Huberman, who follows the Lacanian tradition, images are essentially “lacunary” (59) in nature. They lure the observer into believing to be presented with perfect mimesis, the ‘full scene’ of reality (78) while, in fact, only a fragment of reality is recorded and framed. However, to dismiss images as pure illusion would not do them justice either. As material ‘sensing’ objects they record light impressions on light sensitive paper, they record what has been. In Didi-Huberman’s words, images are “in turn, fetish and fact, vehicle of beauty and site of the unbearable, consolation and the inconsolable. They are neither pure illusion nor all of the truth, but a dialectic stirring together *the veil with its rip.*” (80)

Didi-Huberman distinguishes between *veil-images* of the fetish and *tear-images* which release a fragment of the real in a momentary flash of recognition¹⁴ where the real¹⁵ of past constellations can simultaneously be comprehended intellectually and affectively. As already mentioned, most of the material structure of the Berlin Wall has vanished in situ. While fragments of it continue to exist as parts of memorial sites in Berlin and elsewhere, others have turned into coveted Cold War trophies in private and public collections. These fragments like the abundance of photographic and filmic images, which documented the erection of the Wall, its 28-year existence and its eventual demolition, must be approached in dialectical manner as fetish and fact in order to shed a light on the ‘real’ of Cold War

¹³ See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All* (2008), 45-46. In regular intervals Sonderkommando members, working in the death camp killing areas and having to dispose of the corpses were gassed themselves. With the exception of one member of the Sonderkommando nobody, neither in front of nor behind the camera, survived.

¹⁴ See Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’ (1938-1940). Benjamin demands of materialistic historiography to understand historical events in form of thought-images, brought about by shock encounters of past constellations in the present and momentarily arrested in form of an image.

¹⁵ See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), 91-104. The real is read in the Lacanian tradition as an essential lack in the field of vision. A coherent vision of the world depends on position and perspective and the constitution of the subject within the scopic field.

constellations which brought about the Berlin Wall, its ‘fall’ and its continued existence in fragmentary form. While veil-images of and on the Wall predominated the Cold War political scene, tear-images, images that triggered powerful affects vis a vis the Wall, or their all too visibly felt absence, will come to the fore.

Veil- and tear-images were produced in many ways. They were produced, when a photograph was taken, a film recorded of the Wall, an image inscribed onto the Wall treated as canvas or when a city map of divided Berlin was consulted. The Wall as geopolitical barrier triggered affects, internalised, and externalised in form of images; whether as mental maps¹⁶ and the often discussed ‘Wall in people’s heads’¹⁷ or ‘monstrous Wall’¹⁸, assuming—due to its inner-city meandering form, which conjured the illusion of life through movement—a creaturely, zoomorphic, serpentine-like form. Therefore, I discuss the Wall not only as photographic or filmic image, but also as surface onto which images and texts were inscribed and as material object which functioned as geopolitical barrier and membrane, blocking or channelling movement, producing sovereign space, prompting interaction, triggering powerful affects, recalled, and stored in the form of images or visually striking metaphors such as the Iron Curtain.

¹⁶ See Gerhard Paul, *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016). Paul describes in which way Cold War cartographic maps shaped the way of perceiving and internalising a bipolar global order (365).

¹⁷ See Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper* (1983). The first-person narrator in Schneider’s well-known novella about life in divided Berlin muses whether the wall in people’s heads will outlast the actual material object (102).

¹⁸ See Norman Gelb, *The Berlin Wall* (1986). Norman Gelb starts his popular, historical account of the Berlin Wall by describing its creaturely monstrosity (9). See also Willy Brandt’s speech of November 10, 1989, in West Berlin. Brandt speaks out for keeping a piece of the Wall as warning reminder and historical monstrosity, similar to the retention of the ruin of Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church) after the Second World War. www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/deutsche-teilung-deutsche-einheit/43709/rede-von-willy-brandt-am-10-november-1989-vor-dem-rathaus-schoeneberg/. Accessed 8 September 2023.

The Wall as Overbearing Veil of Images and its Kitsch Aesthetics

As material, concrete fragment a Berlin Wall segment of Grenzmauer 75, the last generation of the Wall, speaks of mass-produced, steel-reinforced pieces of concrete with a smooth, whitewashed surface and a concrete pipe on top, 3.6 meters high and 1.2 meters wide, weighing 2.7 tons. The industrial production of individual Berlin Wall segments not only enabled a *coherent*, modern, streamlined ‘*image*’ of the fortified borderline through inner-city Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s¹⁹, but at the same time functioned on its Western side as surface which invited interaction in form of graffiti and Wall art by artists, West Berliners and tourists alike, who tried to sully and deface the Wall’s Western screen-image, a *Mauer* (a wall as material object) which had turned into a *Wand* (a wall as surface to paint on)²⁰. Graffiti and Wall art fall into the broad category of illegal aesthetic interventions in public space, but are generally differentiated between predominantly textual graffiti, expressing individual affects, reaching back in time as far as the antiquity, American style writing as a form of urban calligraphy and name inscription (tagging) of the disenfranchised urban youth as well as street art, which is characterised by more elaborate artwork and in many cases a clear political agenda (Blanché 2010; 2024). All three phenomena were found on the Western side of the Berlin Wall. Personal expressions of anger, frustration, hope ... to name only a few were sprayed or painted on the Wall from the 1960s. Only in the late 1970s, with the last generation of the Wall, Grenzmauer 75, which was whitewashed on its Western side, more elaborate artistic interventions could easily be executed. Personal graffiti and conceptual Wall art existed side by side, whereas very little style writing covered the Western Wall. While the diverse aesthetic interventions were meant to deface and overwrite the Wall’s forbidding

¹⁹ See Johannes Cramer, et al. *Die Baugeschichte der Berliner Mauer* (2011), 245-251. From the mid 1970s Grenzmauer 75 segments started to replace older generations of the Wall, which often existed side by side on different stretches of the Wall’s course and gave it a partly dilapidated and make-shift character.

²⁰ See Frederick, Baker. ‘The Berlin Wall and the Bastille: Tearing down Walls and building Myths’, (1995). The archeologist and media scholar Frederik Baker was the first to distinguish between *Mauer*, the German word for a wall as material structure and *Wand*, the German word for a wall’s surface (158).

character, the ephemeral, anarchic mix between often banal personal graffiti and more self-reflective, politically engaging artwork was diluted at its most prominent stretch between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie in the mid-1980s. Instead of anarchic ubiquity, the individual image/texts were integrated by French artists Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet into an ornamental structure, resembling an endless series of, predominantly figurative, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms in faux-naïve, pop-art inspired and neo-expressionist styles. While the transformational power of art was hailed and encouraged by civil rights activists such as Rainer Hildebrandt, who organised art competitions in close to proximity to or on the Wall, defacement gave way to decoration. Instead of a dizzying mixture of graffiti and Wall art, neatly arranged murals decorated the Western Wall in the American zone, now resembling an open-air gallery. I argue that the emerging ornamental structures, while celebrating the paradoxical enjoyment of life in the shadow of the Wall, lost its potential to deface, forming a continuous screen of image/texts rather than tattooing the Wall and making it porous (Baudrillard 1976; 1987). As kitsch, in the sense of easily recognisable figurative forms triggering stock emotions, they came closer to Clement Greenberg's 1939 discussion of kitsch than to his reflections on autonomous avant-garde art, whose styles were copied. Instead of keeping "culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence" (Greenberg 5), the decorative image/texts as kitsch mirrored "vicarious experience and faked sensations" (Greenberg 10), forming a veil of images. At the same time, as ornamental structures, applied to the surface of a divisive, potentially lethal, spatial barrier, they gave expression to an extraordinary urban experience. For the media philosopher Vilém Flusser kitsch means cultural waste, which has found its way back onto the cultural scene. Deprived of informational content, communication is diluted to chatter in kitsch, since the intention of kitsch is not to produce information and challenge the status quo but to 'talk it to pieces'. According to Flusser kitsch represents the possibility of dying 'comfortably' in the face of the

absurdity of life (Flusser 296-297). I attest a similar sentiment vis a vis the happy-go-lucky images and pleasing ornamental structure on the Western Wall of the military fortification system.

A simple look at the extraordinary popularity of the colourful segments and pieces of the Western Wall which decorate museums worldwide²¹ shows that the Wall's veil-images in form of its Western surface inscriptions have by far outweighed individual attempts to tear the eventual Western screen of the colourful ensemble of graffiti and Wall art called Kilometerkunst²² between Checkpoint Charlie and Potsdamer Platz in the 1980s.

Today's 'fragmentary character' of what used to be the Berlin Wall could be complemented by the abundance of documentary material in form of photographs and film material. Again, one encounters the same problem as with the Wall itself. Due to the GDR ban on taking pictures of the fortified borderline that separated East from West Berlin between 1961 and 1989, a predominantly Western perspective, images taken by Western press photographers and Western broadcasting stations, has been recorded and archived.²³ In *Image Critique & The Fall of the Berlin Wall* (2008), an in-depth analysis of the one-sided Western view on and of the Wall and the evolving narrative of Western triumphalism, Sunil Manghani describes the Western visual appropriation as Berlin imaginary, a collective, imaginary identification with images (116)²⁴. While divided views and one-sided positions were part of the Wall's Janus-faced material character, with the two sides facing in different directions, the tension on the visual level was heightened by popular interventions on the

²¹ See Anna Kaminsky, *Die Berliner Mauer in der Welt* (2021).

²² See Ralf Gründer, *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007), 200. Artists like Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet spent two years (1984-1986) turning the anarchic, individual surface inscriptions on the Western Wall in the district of Kreuzberg into a formalized, ornamental pattern they termed Kilometerkunst (kilometre-art).

²³ See Gerhard Paul, *Das Visuelle Zeitalter* (2016). Despite the abundance of photographs and documentary material, the majority of images served the narrow purpose of feeding the Western media public with limited Western views (608).

²⁴ See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973). Manghani bases his concept on the Lacanian idea of imaginary misrecognition at the mirror stage in child development. The infant identifies with the coherent form of the own reflection in the mirror and internalises the image. In this way the self is experienced and misrecognised as whole rather than as a fragmented entity.

Wall's Western surface as well as the swift circulation of images of the Wall's predominantly Western side in Western media, and the very absence of its other side in representation. Only border guards, Stasi officers and trusted GDR citizens, permitted to live in close proximity to the border zone, were able to take a look at the Wall for purposes of inspection and defence, record damage or give in to simple curiosity²⁵.

Iconic images documenting the distress of Berliners facing the erection of the Wall, their relief about successful escape attempts, their despair over deaths at the Wall and their euphoria about the 'fall' of the Wall, have become part of what historian Gerhard Paul calls, a visual canon, dominated and recorded by the Western camera-eye²⁶. In 'Vom Mauerbau zum Mauerfall' (2009) sociologist Maria Nooke describes the experiences felt and the affects caused by the Berlin Wall as sight and site of geopolitical division in the following way:

Die Bilder von der Ungeheuerlichkeit dieser Grenzschießung gingen um die ganze Welt. Die Verzweiflung der betroffenen Menschen und die Ansicht vom Brandenburger Tor mit einer menschlichen Mauer aus schwer bewaffneten Grenzposten haben sich tief in das kollektive Gedächtnis eingepägt.

Am 9. November 1989 stand das Brandenburger Tor wiederum im Mittelpunkt des weltweiten Interesses: Die Mauer war gefallen. Nun sah man Bilder von jubelnden Menschen, die auf der Mauerkrone vor dem Brandenburger Tor tanzten. Die Euphorie über das Ende der Teilung bewegte nicht nur die Berliner, nicht nur die Deutschen in Ost und West, sondern wieder die Menschen in aller Welt. (10)

²⁵ See Leo Schmidt, 'Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente' (2009), 322. Because of the GDR's strict ban on images of the fortification system, the Eastern perspective onto the Wall had to be computer generated in the post-unification era.

²⁶ See Paul. Paul argues that due to the Eastern invisibility, the visibility of the Western perspective on the Wall was heightened and heavily exploited by Western media (608).

The images of the monstrosity of this border closure circled around the world.

The despair of people affected by it and the view of the human wall of armed border guards in front of Brandenburg Gate haven been deeply imprinted into the collective memory.

On November 9, 1989, the Brandenburg Gate was once again at the centre of worldwide attention. Now one saw images of cheering people, who were dancing on the top of the Wall in front of Brandenburg Gate. The euphoria about the end of the division moved not only Berliners, not only Germans in East and West, but again people worldwide. (my trans.; 10)

Human terror, despair and euphoria were clearly the defining affects felt on both sides of the Wall at the time of its construction and again at its ‘fall’. However, it is important to keep in mind that the pictures of the tragic events at the Wall were predominantly taken from West Berlin. The positionality of the Western (camera) eye recording history must be considered in order to avoid reinforcing the Berlin imaginary, the internalized Western perspective on the Berlin Wall, its fall as well as its visual and eventual material ownership. Next to the large amount of ‘voluntary memory’ images rarely found ‘involuntary memory’ images must be redeemed. There is a need to acknowledge the dual system of images as fact and fetish in the context of the Berlin Wall, to discern and disown the all too pervasive and happily appropriated Western *veil-images* by approaching the *tear-images*, as Georges Didi-Huberman calls them, images in the Lacanian sense which create turbulences in the ‘full scene’ of reality²⁷ and confront the viewers with their own positionality and imaginary identifications through the unmasking of the subject’s constructedness in the field of vision. Images, according to Didi-Huberman, are simultaneously the *eye of history*, by recording and

²⁷ See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), chaps. 6-9. Lacan discusses in which way one’s own viewing position is either playfully enhanced by the function of trompe l’oeil images and the illusions it produces or cruelly unmasked by anamorphosis, the sudden revelation of the subject’s constructedness in the field of vision.

making visible. But they are also *in the eye of history*, taken at often, tumultuous, moments of suspense (Didi-Huberman 39). Rather than being one or the other, the image will embody and body forth, both the screen and its tear, and must be located at the threshold of both (Didi-Huberman 38).

Similarly the thesis follows in its analysis the thorny path of oscillating between a position vis a vis the Wall as screen and tear, tracing the transformation of the Western Wall into a screen of images and the transformation of the Eastern Wall into a propagandistic amplifier for the building of socialism, while pointing out historical and aesthetic entanglements between Western and Eastern positions as well as moments of turbulence, moments of the undoing of the screen.

The Wall as Facilitator of Veil- as well as Tear-Images

This thesis focuses on a number of visually recorded historical moments, ranging from the Wall's construction to its demolition. The aim of this thesis is to draw attention to the subject position of the viewers and their historical knowledge and/or affects derived from their viewing position while repositioning them within a framework that reproduces the Western frame for historical reasons and goes beyond it at the same time. It argues that the positionality of the viewers vis a vis the Berlin Wall in its material and visual form at a particular historical moment frames sense making and affects the senses: whether in form of frontal views and the experience of the Western Wall as surface and screen or panoramic views from the top of a Western observation platform across the fortification system towards the East, or whether, by means of a heightened position, the viewers are prompted not to look across to the other side but along the Wall's meandering path, and finally whether the viewers are excluded altogether from the viewing position or made to experience the position of absence (of subjectivity) by means of *trompe l'oeils* morphing into anamorphosis on the

Western Wall, which at first enhance and then unmask the viewing position, since the background against which they protrude is the Wall's deadening, material other side.

In *Reassembling the Social* (2005) Bruno Latour coins the term oligopticon, a localised as opposed to a totalising view, a limited perspective that allows for a narrow but very detailed enquiry. Rather than a pre-given perspective and structure (as for panoramas) the fragility of the connections between the separate parts forming the structure is emphasised (181-188). The same Western viewers, who might have enjoyed a panoramic view across the Wall, who might have consumed and been consumed by the totalising view of the images on the Wall, might have been attracted by a particular graffiti, stepped forward, touched concrete, sensed colours. They might have also been drawn into the liminal space opened up by a particular trompe l'oeil on the Wall and at the same experienced the negating otherness (of the Wall as military fortification system). Both, panoptic and oligoptic views can be traced at the Wall. While the former predominated, the latter remind us of the fragility and otherness of the parts forming the whole (picture). Or in Jane Bennett's words: "We at first may see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of 'talented' and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self)." (Bennett 99) This also has political implications, since, from the point of view of material vibrancy, it is not only human agency that is involved in the contestation of power and promotion of interests.

Well-known GDR filmmaker and experimental artist Jürgen Böttcher²⁸ traces in his documentary *Die Mauer* (1990) the Wall's demolition (1989-1990) with great care. The camera eye provides the viewer with long shots of the now abandoned and easily

²⁸ Jürgen Böttcher also known under the pseudonym of Strawalde originally trained as an artist but soon ran into troubles with the GDR nomenklatura for not conforming to the prescribed socialist realist style in the early 1960s. After his expulsion from the Association of Fine Art in 1961 and being banned from working as a fine artist, he trained as a filmmaker achieving success and recognition by portraying the world of industrial production for DEFA, the GDR state-owned film studios. He managed to produce experimental films such as *Hermann Glöckner* (1985) and *Verwandlungen* (1981) during the communist regime. See https://www.filmportal.de/en/person/jurgen-bottcher_efc0caa3e27703c1e03053d50b372d46. Accessed 2 July 2024. See also Ursula Böser 'Preserving the Wall's Ambivalence' (2010).

approachable death strip but at the same time moves, changes sides, zooms in and explores one discarded Wall segment after the other. In this way the Wall's texture is explored, its increasing porosity is traced, individual artistic interventions are shown, either out of context, since the Wall does not exist in toto anymore or in close-up, rendering the images ever more abstract. The clever alteration between long shots and close-ups invites the viewer to be aware of not only the Wall's overall transformation in 'real' time but also of its vibrancy; a material alterity as agency, prompting people to caress it or aggressively hammer into it, curiously peek through holes in newly made openings or enjoying a stroll on the former death strip.

In Böttcher's carefully montaged scenes the haptic and embodied interaction between humans and the Wall is foregrounded in such a way that the common position of the controlling (Western) eye capturing the historic event of the Wall's demolition from a distance, from behind the camera, is challenged and defied by the complex interaction between different human and nonhuman actants, appropriating or discarding Wall segments, resisting and persisting *as* Wall segments.

The Wall as Membrane and its Creaturely Aesthetics

In *Post-Wall Berlin, Borders, Space and Identity* (2011) Janet Ward counters the all-too-common pre-scripted views and resulting frozen veil images of the Berlin Wall with an account of the Wall's permeability, its very own agency and dynamics conceptualized as membrane, reacting to and filtering the flow of people and goods at its checkpoints.²⁹

²⁹ See also Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010). Two years after the Wall's erection, Willi Brandt, mayor of West Berlin at the time, pushed forward with a politics of small steps, gradual rapprochement, the so called Ostpolitik (Eastern Policy), which rather than insisting on reunification sought to accept the status quo. By means of Ostpolitik Brand hoped to make the Wall porous and in the long run, achieve a change in politics on the other side: *Wandel durch Annäherung*, change through rapprochement. When Brandt became German chancellor in 1969, he pursued his Ostpolitik with even greater fervor. In 1972 the Basic Treaty and the Transit Treaty were signed between the FRG and GDR. The GDR was formally recognized and transit traffic through

Applying Ward's concept to the aesthetic level and treating the Wall as an aesthetic object with a painterly surface will show that not only at the Wall's gates but also on the Wall's surface and by means of the Wall's meandering form, dynamic exchanges took place, human affects were triggered and filtered.

The Wall, as material reminder of partition and traumatic absence, and in its function as membrane, recording, filtering and channelling 'human transactions' assumes what Hal Foster in his analysis of the brutal aesthetics of 20th century artists such as Jean Dubuffet and Asger Jorn, calls the creaturely: the necessity to come to terms with dehumanized or nonhuman forms of existence. Foster describes the postwar European landscape which engendered the turn to brutal aesthetics, the exploration of disfigured but creaturely being and brute materiality, in the following way:

... after all they [Dubuffet, Jorn and others] operate not only on the ruins of a world war but also in the vise between Soviet totalitarianism to the East and American triumphalism to the West. This was an overdetermined situation—an old liberal order destroyed by Nazi and Fascist regimes, these regimes overcome in turn but at immense cost, and then a treacherous Cold War locked in place ...

(Foster 19)

It is all the more surprising that modern artists like Jean Dubuffet, Asger Jorn, Eduardo Paolozzi and Claes Oldenburg, partly inspired by Georges Bataille's analysis of the performative, ritualistic character of the prehistoric paintings in the caves of Lascaux³⁰,

the GDR was regulated. West Berliners and West Germans were given the right to travel to the GDR. East Berliners were allowed to visit the West on urgent family matters (198).

³⁰ See Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture* (1955). According to Hal Foster Bataille locates the origin of art not in Egyptian or Greek artworks but in the prehistoric cave paintings in Lascaux. Bataille, whose main aesthetic focus lay in the interplay between art and ritual, argued that in cave art image and referent were not entirely separate, that the cave wall was not perceived as surface but membrane channeling communication with the spirit realm. Since the animals represented on the cave walls such as bison and horses were not part of the daily diet of prehistoric man 20 000 years ago, Bataille rejects their mimetic and foregrounds their totemic character (Foster 71-90).

decided to operate outside common Cold War aesthetic frameworks. According to Foster, Asger Jorn depicted postwar man as human beast, a shape shifter, passing back and forth between human sovereignty and monstrous, animal alterity by tearing apart the ‘wholesome’ human form. In ‘The Human Animal’ (1950-51) Jorn reassesses Kafka’s work with regard to human to animal transformations, dismissing the metamorphosis being an expression of existential angst and relating it to ancient traditions. For Jorn, a depiction of shifting between human and non-human states reflects the human condition which oscillates between a social, human and primal, erotic mode of being, where the bestial can be humanized through love, unfulfilled in Kafka’s literary works (57). Foster describes Jorn’s paintings as obscene in the sense that they “tear at painting understood as protective screen or a sublimatory scene.” (Foster 121) Jorn’s creatures confront the viewer with human alterity, the brute materiality and bare life of human existence.

While human forms on the Wall were not necessarily torn apart exposing their creaturely aspects but were predominately drawn in faux-naïve, pop-art inspired styles, the surface they were painted on instantly made them obscene. It reminded mindful viewers of the brute materiality of the Wall as military fortification and confronted them with the possibility of bare life in between the front- and hinterland Wall. Even if the Western Wall functioned as screen and painterly surface, its canvas was not ‘neutral’ but a border wall, a brutal barrier and membrane, where the exposure to bare life in the case of an escape attempt on the Eastern side sieved through and always already constituted the underside of any Western artistic intervention³¹.

During the Cold War artworks were exhibited in competition with each other on either side of the Iron Curtain or at later stages side by side; however, only at the Berlin Wall

³¹ See Anna Saunders, *Memorializing the GDR* (2018). Saunders discusses the controversial practice of installing white crosses along the Western side of the Wall in memory of the victims of failed escape attempts in the 1960s and their post-Wall afterlife (218-231).

were Western artistic interventions directly connected to and based on an Eastern brutal and aestheticized material presence, the Western surface of the Berlin Wall. On the one hand the graffiti and Wall art at the Berlin Wall constituted a *mélange* of styles, ranging from cartoonish, faux naïve, expressionist, pop art to more abstract interventions, and were seemingly reaching back in time, reflecting early twentieth century modern art movements. On the other hand, the image/texts were applied to and absorbed by contemporary, postwar modern, whitewashed, steel-reinforced concrete, whose ever present dividing function cut into the surface interventions. Western surface interventions and Eastern material presence became entangled in such a way that screen and membrane, veil and tear, criss-crossed each other. Contrary to early postwar art movements, which in the GDR as well as the FRG picked up Weimar modernism but increasingly became disentangled from each other, the artistic interventions at the Berlin Wall and their concrete, bordering canvas were bound to each other in an uneasy tension: an ornamental, colourful *danse macabre*.

Whereas modern art, as already mentioned, formed the basic link in the common Eastern and Western Cold War aesthetic framework, the depiction of man's 'creaturely' aspects was generally shunned. The realistic depiction of the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust were either deemed unrepresentable³² or represented from the point of view of the fierce antifascist resistance fighter³³. At the same time postwar art movements in East and West Germany struggled to distance themselves from National Socialist propagandistic aesthetics³⁴.

³² See Sarah E. James, *Common Ground* (2013) for a detailed discussion on Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's position on mimesis and Adorno's thoughts about the corrupted post-holocaust subjectivity (40-41).

³³ See Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011). In the context of the GDR the border soldier, defending the GDR against continuous Western fascist and imperialist tendencies, protecting the GDR citizens from harm and upholding peace has been a predominant pictorial motif (30-61).

³⁴ See Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanies: Cold War Cultures* (2009). Art historian Sabine Eckmann states, that while both Germanies tried to distance themselves from the past on the visual, aesthetic level, neither of them entirely succeeded (54).

In “The Propagandistic Role of Modern Art in Postwar Berlin” (2008) Maike Steinkamp points out that: “Modern Art in postwar Berlin can be understood as a political act, a statement—a break from the National Socialist regime and its cultural politics.” (23) Modern art was regarded as the expression of liberal democratic values in all Allied occupation sectors in postwar Berlin, but different routes were taken in the Eastern, communist, and Western, capitalist zones:

While the politicians in the western sectors, and later in West Germany, sought a close connection with modern Western art and its alleged aesthetic autonomy, the SMAD³⁵ and the SED in the Soviet sector, and later in the GDR, explicitly promoted a *wirklichkeitsnahe* and *volksverbundene* art, a realistic art connected to the people as defined by the doctrine of socialist realism in the Soviet Union. (27)

When between 1948 and 1951 the exhibition *Abstract Painting from America* toured the Western occupation zones (but not Berlin) and when the exhibition *American Painting: Past and Present* was shown in West Berlin in 1951 (27-28), the foundation for the general aesthetic tenor had been laid. Abstract and abstract expressionist art by American artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock as well as American art criticism were to dominate the Western German cultural scene. Clement Greenberg’s dictum, in the wake of the Second World War, for an autonomous, abstract art, independent of and above politics, stood in stark contrast to the socialist realist concept of art³⁶. Cultural functionaries of the SMAD and the SED (socialist unity party) dismissed the apolitical, formalist, abstract tendencies in modern

³⁵ SMAD was the Soviet Military Administration, which was in charge of the Soviet occupation zone in postwar Germany and Berlin until the foundation of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 (Steinkamp 24).

³⁶ See Clement Greenberg, ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ (1939). Only art, which originally emerged from bourgeois culture but became autonomous of it and is now removed from public life and the culture of the masses, is able to truly express the condition of modern man (8-10).

American art as ‘reactionary’ and after the Formalism Debates of 1948-49 and 1951-1952³⁷ sought to draw the line between modern Western abstract art and socialist realist art, which was meant to be realistic, figurative, and oriented toward popular, vernacular styles (Steinkamp 29).

The Wall art and graffiti, which covered the Berlin Wall’s Western surface in the 1980s and its overall aesthetics, echo, complicate and blur the dividing lines of early Cold War debates on art and freedom from political instrumentalization or, on the contrary, political engagement. The simple fact that the Wall formed the joining point, where a serene, aestheticized Eastern material presence met with predominantly kitschy and irreverent surface interventions in the 1980s, had already created a hybrid aesthetics. Additionally, the eventual Kilometerkunst on the Western Wall, created by artists Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet, reminded in their kitschy harmlessness of an inverted socialist realist aesthetics, cunningly propagating the unstoppable progress of democratic, liberal capitalism as well as celebrating the transformative power of art.

In *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (1996), Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock contextualise Clement Greenberg’s intervention in a debate about the revolutionary role of art, which had started, long before Cold War aesthetic polarisations, in the interwar period. Greenberg’s seminal essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch’ (1939) was published by the New York based, communist, *Partisan Review*. In the America of the Great Depression (1929-1939) Greenberg argued for the necessity of an autonomous avant-garde, which was sustained by bourgeois culture but had successfully freed itself from it. Only an autonomous avant-garde was able to produce paintings, which in their abstract form and not unlike music would foreground, not the communicative role of art, but lead, via reflection, to the appreciation of

³⁷ See Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann *Art of two Germanies: Cold War Cultures* (2009) for an in-depth analysis of the Formalism Debates. Art in the emerging GDR was expected to serve the building of socialism, which meant it had to be realist and collectivist in outlook. Abstract modern art was criticized as formal and apolitical (15-49).

the sensations it triggered in the recipients. Contrary to the mass culture provided by the American culture industry, which had gone global in the form of kitsch and had become the easily perceived and passively consumed subject matter of kitsch produced for the manipulation of the masses in fascist Europe and Stalinist Russia, avant-garde culture and its abstract art were the only means to keep a meaningful, progressive culture pushing forward:

Yet it is true that once the avant-garde had succeeded in “detaching” itself from society, it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics. The revolution was left inside society, a part of that welter of ideological struggle which art and poetry find so unpropitious as soon as it begins to involve those precious “axiomatic” beliefs upon which culture thus far had to rest. Hence it developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to “experiment”, but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence. Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. “Art for art’s sake” and “pure poetry” appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague. (Greenberg, ‘Avant Garde and Kitsch’ 5)

Greenberg stresses the advance of culture, a culture left entirely to its own devices, exploring the potentialities of the material possibilities and limitations of its very own art form.

The transformative power of art, evolving historically was also frequently evoked at the Berlin Wall. Art, encouraged and cultivated, as already mentioned, through art

competitions at, on and about the Wall, was to overcome geopolitical and social divisions.³⁸ Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, today's Mauermuseum, organised, among many others, an art competition in 1983, whose declared motto was "Überwindung der Mauer durch Bemalung der Mauer" 'overcoming the Wall by painting it' (my trans.; Kuhrmann et al., 18)³⁹.

Despite the colourful expressiveness of the graffiti and Wall art and their 'free and autonomous application' on the Berlin Wall of the 1970s and 1980s, despite their potential to provoke and engage the viewer as well as GDR border guards, they were, in form and content, a far cry from Greenberg's idea of an autonomous, abstract expressionist art produced by an avant-garde which would *move* culture and keep it from stasis. As popular, predominantly figurative and kitschy, artistic interventions they rather recalled GDR wall art, commonly known as *Kunst am Bau*, art-in-architecture. In his comprehensive study of GDR wall art and its function Peter Guth stresses in *Wände der Verheißung* (1995) that art-in-architecture had to follow figurative, socialist-realist principles dictated by the SED and was meant to intervene in public space by promoting images of harmony, peace, and the socialist society to come. While in the beginning GDR wall art, which loomed large at the entry or

³⁸ See www.culturaldiplomacy.org/berlinwall30/index.php?en_exhibition. Accessed 26 June 2023. In the online exhibition 'Berlin's Wall Art' by photojournalist Walter Kuzdas for the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall, hosted by the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, Berlin Mayor (1988-1990) Walter Momper's remarks on the importance and transformative power of Berlin Wall art are cited. Momper's well known comments originally embellished the Monte Carlo auction catalogue, when on June 20, 1990, 81 spray-painted segments of the Berlin Wall were auctioned off as art in public space. See also Ralf Gründer, *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007) and Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011) for a detailed account of aesthetic interventions, on an individual level or prompted and organized by Haus am Checkpoint Charlie Museum, which opened one year after the construction of the Berlin Wall and dedicated its activities to the documentation of human rights breaches at the Berlin Wall (Gründer 60-61). In 1979, Haus am Checkpoint Charlie organized the art competition "Where World History is Relived in all its Impact". The task was to paint a monumental mural on the firewall of the museum next to the the border crossing Checkpoint Charlie between East and West Berlin. Artists were meant to assess and represent the genius loci. In 1983, Haus am Checkpoint Charlie organized the art competition "Überwindung der Mauer durch Übermalung der Mauer" 'Overcoming the Wall by painting on it; my trans.'. This time, the artists painted directly on the Western Wall close to Checkpoint Charlie (Kuhrmann 18).

³⁹ See Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011). Founder of Mauermuseum at Checkpoint Charlie was Rainer Hildebrandt (1914-2004), who tirelessly collected artworks and photographs which addressed life in the shadow of the Wall or documented deaths at the Wall and escape attempts. The museum is now run by his daughter Alexandra Hildebrandt. See also www.mauermuseum.de/ueber-uns/geschichte/. Accessed 19 February 2022.

inside public and/or residential buildings as well as factories, was meant to promote, by means of skilful illusionary paintings, the image of a socialist space, later interventions were meant to create a socialist space by direct artistic interventions in space, which, Guth stresses, were rarely successful due to strict party lines and lack of proper funding (371-372). The declared aim of GDR wall art was that the effect of the sensuous perception of the painted popular socialist themes, reinforced and framed by organic, later geometric ornamental structures, would overcome class antagonism and create the desired harmonious surroundings for a future, classless society (99-119).

The graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall, which consisted of a conglomerate of styles in which figurative, faux-naïve and pop-art tendencies attracted most of the attention despite other, more conceptual and abstract attempts at artistic interventions⁴⁰, was meant to overcome, not class antagonism, but the deadening presence of the Wall as constant reminder of Cold War divisions in the capitalist enclave called West Berlin. The graffiti artists in Berlin were not alone in their endeavour.

Artists like Richard Hambleton, Gérard Zlotykamien or Harald Naegeli had left their mark all over Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, testifying to, according to Martin Papenbrock, a particular, predominantly European sensibility among graffiti artists of giving voice to the existential threats of the time: the dangers of nuclear power stations, the Cold War arms race, the horrors of the Second World War with the Holocaust and Hiroshima as constant reminders of a past that needed to be confronted. While Zlotykamien and Hambleton outlined the shadows of human figures recalling victims of the Holocaust and the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Harald Naegeli revolted with his stick-and-dance-of-the-dead figures against urban and environmental decay (Papenbrock 124-127; 136). Naegeli's

⁴⁰ See Ralf Gründer, *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007) for in detail research on the graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall.

sensitive but critical, figurative poetry stands in stark contrast to what Papenbrock sees as the abstract, aggressive, American-style writing techniques, whose main aim was to inscribe identity, making a name for oneself or one's crew (Papenbrock 136).

Very little American-style writing was found on the Berlin Wall in the 1980s but memento mori motifs in form of skulls and skeletons, references to Nazi concentration camps, playful and thoughtful allusions to Dadaist poems and common GDR jokes filtered through a common European Cold War sensibility alongside what historian Edgar Wolfrum called the Berlin Wall's pervasive and transgressive "Katastrophenkunst" (Wolfrum 118). Katastrophenkunst, catastrophe art, was transgressive in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense. Transgressive in the literal sense because the inner-city borderline between East and West Berlin had to be transgressed in order to paint on the Wall's Western surface. Transgressive in the metaphorical sense because by means of imaginative, ludic aesthetic interventions the Wall's political character of deterrence and division was overwritten (Wolfrum 118), at least for the Western viewer. At the same time the Wall's brutal material presence in form of an inner-city military fortification system was covered up by the cheerful use of colour and the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms of Kilometerkunst (Wolfrum 114), the ornamental ribbon created by Noir and Bouchet on the Berlin Wall in the American sector in the 1980s. Kilometerkunst also inscribed Western identity on the Western part of the Berlin Wall, making a name for the artists involved and turning the Western Wall into a popular tourist attraction.

Kilometerkunst was fetishistic *Katastrophenkunst* and became creaturely only through constant erasure by other artists or by GDR border guards in charge of its maintenance. *Katastrophenkunst* reacted against the Wall's forbidding material reality while at the same time functioning as screen against the very same catastrophe, which exposed East Berliners to

the unmediated and brute force of GDR sovereignty. People, who tried to escape from East to West Berlin after 1961 by scaling the Wall or digging underneath it, risked their life⁴¹.

The Wall as Veil, Membrane and Creature in History

The concept of the creaturely resulting from the Wall's double function as screen and membrane helps us to trace the viewers' affects triggered by the Wall and its aesthetic surface manifestations. The creaturely can be characterised as a 'borderline' experience. It refers to the potentially traumatic, direct confrontation of the Western viewer and the Eastern refugee with sovereign power.

In *On Creaturely Life* (2006) Eric Santner takes Rainer Maria Rilke's account of *die Kreatur*, the creature, in his eighth *Duino Elegy* (1922) as starting point for his discussion on the creaturely as biopolitical concept. Rilke's creature, in the form of animal or plant life has the capacity to inhabit *das Offene*, the Open, a space without the borders of self-consciousness and mediation in form of representation. Man, on the other hand, is removed from the creaturely and "condemned to the ceaseless production of mediating representations" (3); he experiences the creaturely only as child or becomes creaturely in the process of dying. Santner expands Rilke's musing on the creaturely via Martin Heidegger's philosophical discussions on being human, grounded in the "ontological difference between Being and beings" (6), Carl Schmitt's concept of the rule of law, the drawing of a boundary between the inside and the outside of the law, exemplified in the recurring, regulatory violence of the state of exception, and Giorgio Agamben's notion of the paradoxical state of the sovereign, embodiment of an inner boundary, simultaneously representing the law by

⁴¹ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer: Geschichte einer Teilung* (2009). Until the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, 1200 people died when attempting to escape from the GDR, between 122 and 200 lost their lives at the Berlin Wall (Wolfrum 21).

implementing the state of exception, while being outside and above the law (13-14). The creaturely then is for Santner with regards to the experience of modernity, man's

... exposure to a traumatic dimension of political power and social bonds whose structures have undergone radical transformations in modernity. The "essential disruption" that renders man "creaturely" ... has ... a distinctly political—or better, *biopolitical*—aspect; it names the threshold where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform the very matter and materiality of life. (12)

I argue that the Berlin Wall, in all its materiality, not only metaphorically as the GDR's propagandistic 'antifascist protection barrier', but as military fortification system, which overnight sealed off East from West Berlin with barbed wire and a wall to come on August 13, 1961, bodied forth sovereignty and embodied the creaturely, man's biopolitical threshold, at the same time.

In 'Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente' (2009), German art historian and conservator Leo Schmidt states that the GDR rulers worked hard on controlling the image of the border closure and the construction of the Berlin Wall as necessary anti-imperialist measure, fending off a potential West German, fascist onslaught. The Wall thus embodied an anti-imperialist protection wall in GDR propaganda (321; 323). Hagen Koch, Ex-Stasi officer and in charge of actually outlining the white inner-city borderline between East and West Berlin in 1961, and historian Thomas Fleming, critically refer to the GDR border as the 'soul' or 'essence' of the GDR, nurtured by its nomenklatura, who propagated the inner-city borderline and the Wall to come as a 'social system', where as many GDR citizens as possible, from local residents to border militias⁴², were ideally engaged in securing it (Fleming and Koch 132).

⁴² See also Katja Hoyer, *Beyond the Wall* (2023). Walter Ulbricht, aware of the negative press he would receive concerning the construction of the Wall as a final means of securing the inner-German border, mobilised the, in his eyes, "political and military fighting power of the working class" (174). Especially the voluntary militia force, strongly identifying with the building of socialism, enthusiastically joined the ranks. While for some border soldiers and members of the people's police the temptation of defecting was a possibility, as a

Martin Schaad, citing the historian Stefan Wolle, confirms the importance of the GDR border: The GDR was not a state with a border, but a border with a state (Wolle in Schaad 25).

If the relationship between the state and its fortified border is conceptualised as an assemblage, in which the Wall functions as actant, then the creaturely is the effect and the affect caused by the Wall's biopolitical power. Its very existence directly affected people's lives, it blocked East Berliners' and East Germans' escape route to the West, reduced the freedom of movement of West Germans and turned a city in two, eventually ever more independent politically and economically opposed halves.

The creaturely also comes to the fore when the fetishistic veil is lifted, however temporarily, by exposing the cracks in the Berlin Wall imaginary and all its accompanying surface manifestations in the form of propagandistic metaphors⁴³ such as the Iron Curtain⁴⁴ or the Anti-fascist Protection Barrier⁴⁵; as well as in the form of commodified photographic images, almost exclusively, of the Wall's Western side and in the form of Kilometerkunst on the same side.

In general, the Wall must be positioned on the threshold between state sovereignty and the creaturely, conceptualised as Wall as screen and Wall as membrane. The tension between the two represents the transformative power of the Wall as 'magic' wand, a bending and

counterweight, the Free German Youth (FDJ) was strategically deployed to demonstrate a readiness to defend socialism at the border (175-176).

⁴³ See Leo Schmidt, 'Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente' (2009). Leo Schmidt points out that the Wall, from its very beginning, had been perceived as an image (rather than material structure) and imprinted as visual metaphor in people's minds and memories. The visual metaphor, Schmidt stresses, was determined before and after its fall by a Western perspective (321).

⁴⁴ See Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain* (2007), for an analysis of the history of the metaphor, which can be traced back to iron curtains in theatres and their function to prevent fire from spreading, eventually turning into the leading metaphor for the theatre of the Cold War. Winston Churchill used the metaphor in 1946 to describe the unbridgeable divide between capitalist Western and communist Eastern Europe and to discursively contain communism within its boundaries (375-376).

⁴⁵ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer: Geschichte einer Teilung* (2009). On August 1, 1962, two days before the Wall's first 'anniversary', the GDR unit for propaganda and agitation created the metaphor. The Wall was from then on referred to as the antifascist protection barrier against the capitalist, imperialist West (80).

twisting ‘stick’, embodied by its inner-city meandering form, undoing the Wall’s petrification in form of fetishized images and inviting corporeal engagement with the Wall. Due to the Wall’s material structure as concrete barrier and boundary, it is always already invested with its contestation, an engagement of ‘all senses’ with the Wall.

The Wall as Spatial Barrier and Distributor of the Sensible

The Wall is generally treated as a socio-political intervention in space and its growing aestheticization, in form of more sober looking streamlined segments of the last generation of the Wall onto which image/texts were applied, as a secondary phenomenon. This thesis contests the separation of the two phenomena. They are both, the Wall as material structure and the aesthetic interventions on the Wall, treated as socio-political and aesthetic arrangements of visibility and invisibility, forming a shared base—as *sight* and *site*—of particular communities in West and East Berlin. Seen as a distribution of the sensible in Jacques Rancière’s sense⁴⁶ the apportionment of parts and spaces due to the Wall’s dividing function at a particular moment in time and over its 28-year existence determines the possibility of participation or non-participation vis a vis the communality of the Wall, which constitutes my primary object of investigation. Participation in form of confrontation with the Wall as spatial barrier was certainly easier on the Western side. One could face the barrier head on, touch, spray, paint, attack and deface it (with certain limitations), leading to the emergence of a temporary autonomous space in front of it and the formation of an alternative community in Kreuzberg⁴⁷. A similarly embodied and direct engagement with the Wall on its

⁴⁶ See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000). The distribution of the sensible as a political-aesthetic form of social arrangement determines and delimits what is sayable, seeable, hearable, doable, thinkable ... at a particular moment in time thus generating the social base of a particular community and the possibility of individual participation. (7-14).

⁴⁷ See Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (2014). Especially in chapter 5 (Capital of the Counterculture) Pugh describes in which way 1950s West Berlin, frontstadt and showpiece of the West, transformed into a hotbed for countercultural activities fueled by the 1968 students protests and the 1980s squatter movement.

Eastern side was only possible in the 1960s, before the single barrier was turned into a fortification system with a frontline and a hinterland wall. Houses bordering the hinterland wall in East Berlin were bricked up in 1961, their inhabitants forcibly resettled, and the houses or what was left of them used as additional barriers. The surrounding area was then transformed into an additional border zone, where only trusted GDR citizens were allowed to reside, traffic was heavily restricted, residential buildings, arcades and factories were demolished to form an open terrain and any kind of social life was nearly made impossible⁴⁸. To say the least, direct engagement with the Wall was severely limited. Additionally, the GDR's ban on photographic images of the Wall and the border zone further restricted direct participation in the distribution of the sensible for local East Berliners.

According to Rancière an analysis of the distribution of the sensible entails paying close attention to "... what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time." (Rancière 8) It also entails that dominant views onto the Wall, in most cases from the West, are scrutinised and turbulences in the dominant distribution are of specific interest since they represent the tear in the screen, the possibility for change and redistribution. An aesthetically designed community can, according to Rancière, be replicated or disrupted by artistic intervention (13-14), leading to a reification or a re-arrangement of its common forms of order, visibility and interaction.

It goes without saying that the Wall, even if direct engagement was impossible, has been successfully dealt with indirectly in the arts, in literature, film and painting to name only a few on both sides of the Wall⁴⁹. I have decided to narrowly focus on 'the object of dispute',

⁴⁸ See Gerhard Sälter, 'Policing the Border Area in East Berlin' (2021). According to Sälter the pressure to conform in the border area was great. It was increasingly monitored by border troops, the people's police and the secret police. At the same time residents of the border zone became more obstinate and resisted constant surveillance and the severe restrictions of the border zone. Frequent arrests were the order of the day (49-51).

⁴⁹ See Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011) for a good introduction to the topic.

the Wall as spatial barrier and material presence instead, in order to closely examine which forms of participatory engagement the Wall made possible or impossible, visible or invisible, which spaces and communities were formed or destroyed and which visual regimes on and of the Wall predominated, which effects and affects they triggered while functioning as frame for the distribution of the sensible. Since nowadays only fragments of the Wall are left, I will follow Walter Benjamin's lead as historical ragpicker and sift through the fragments of history.

Historical fragments in form of dialectical images, revealing a historical constellation in the present moment, veil- and tear-images as fetish and fact, reinforcing or undoing the Wall as screen, have been consciously chosen since they harbour not only a historical arrangement of forces but the potential of the redistribution of the sensible. Veil-images were generated in my argument by one-sided views and their reproduction in form of iconic images on both sides of the Wall: the formation of Kilometerkunst and the imaginary identification with it (Manghani 2008; Lacan 1973), as well as panoramic and panoptic views onto and of the Wall. Tear-images result from the oscillation between trompe l'oeils and anamorphic effects (Lacan). They were caused by individual aesthetic interventions on the Wall, by the overwriting of geometric, straight borderlines by disruptive, discontinuous lines or organic, undulating forms causing psychic excitation and the rekindling of fossilized states of emotion (Warburg 1923), as well as by the gaze of the Medusa, as defined by Freud (1922), expanded by Kristeva (2012) and Mitchell (2005). Images have the power to enthrall and destabilise the onlookers' perspective, drawing the viewers into the space of representation turning them into the image of the picture's gaze. The position thus occupied is characterised by loss of control and the feeling of abjection. Together they form the visual archive (appendix), I base my analysis on.

If the Wall is seen as a particular form of social and aesthetic arrangement in space, one must pose the question of the affordance of the Wall's form. In *Forms* (2015) Caroline Levine defines the affordance of forms as the latent potentialities in aesthetic and social arrangements expressed by particular forms. Abstract shapes and patterns are seen as organising principles with the potential to constrain, to differentiate, to intersect, to overlap and to travel prompting socio-political consequences in specific historical contexts while at the same time exposing the artificiality of any social arrangement. With regard to the Berlin Wall, I argue that the Wall affords the potential of constraining, screening, decorating and defacing, giving in to permeability and inviting utopian projection. While these affordances may intersect and overlap, they form the ordering principle of my thesis. Each of the main chapters investigates the affordance of the Wall as screen, membrane and amplifier of utopian desire.

Methodology

The conceptual framework of this thesis positions itself within the binary structure dictated by the material object but seeks to engage with the Berlin Wall from multiple angles and perspectives. First because certain perspectives have been heavily suppressed (the Eastern perspectives) and views have always already been divided, and second because the Berlin Wall has been demolished and all that is left are fragments in material or visual form. Since these remnants constitute partial views of the Berlin Wall, the task of this work has been to trace the relation between the individual fragments and their history of being sensed and made sense of; a history of the dialectical relationship between the veil-images and tear-images of, on or enabled by the Wall as material structure and as threshold between its screen and membrane function; a history of the Wall as material object, as barrier and aestheticized surface manifestation, as instrumentalized image or fetishized remnant, as sensing agent

and affect-triggering entity producing tear-images and creating turbulences in the otherwise binary, Cold War constellations.

In this material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall the (un)approachability, the (in)visibility, the differing point of views and (non) hegemonic visualities of the Berlin Wall as well as its transformation over time have been analysed and arranged within a multi-perspectival framework. In order to do justice to my chosen approach a method has been chosen, where insights taken from history, political philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, art history, architecture and cultural studies intersect. The conceptual framework is based on the historical data which reflect the experience of fragmentary and partial sensing and making sense of the physical structure itself.

In “Berlin” (1994), first published in an Italian translation by Guido Neri in 1964, French philosopher Maurice Blanchot gets straight to the heart of the necessary confrontation with fracture and fragmentary thinking vis a vis Cold War Berlin. For Blanchot, the city’s division, its physical fracture, must, first and foremost, be approached, indirectly via fragmentary reflection and the problematization of the idea of striving for the definite (73-74). The real scandal of the Wall, according to Blanchot, was that it concretized, made visible and tangible, an abstract, ambiguous relationship between the halves of, formerly, the same city (75). Blanchot points out that even before the Wall was erected in 1961, crossing the border between the Western Allied and the Soviet occupation zone in Berlin entailed not only the confrontation with an inner-city zonal border but, on the abstract level, the passage from one system and its held beliefs to another, diametrically opposed system and its held beliefs, within the same city, thus constituting for Blanchot the indivisible problem of two cultures within the same cultural context:

Until August 13, 1961, the absence of a visible separation—even though regular and irregular checks prefigured the enigmatic approach of a line of

demarcation—made the nature and the meaning of partition ambiguous: What was there? A border? Certainly, but it was also something else, something less than a border, since each day people could cross it en masse by slipping through the security checks, but also, much more, because crossing it meant crossing not from one country to another, from one language to another, but, within the same country and the same language, from “truth” to “error,” from “good” to “evil,” from “life” to “death,” and thus to undergo, as if unconsciously, a radical metamorphosis (yet without being able to decide, except by a partial reflection, where exactly this brutally divided “good” and “evil” were located).

(74)

Tracing the ‘fault lines’ of the Berlin Wall as fortified inner-city border while at the same time making visible the imposition of the abstracted, ambiguous relationship between the two city halves and eventually two cities, allows me to develop a framework, which enables a more nuanced examination of the Wall’s political aesthetics and material and psychic history.

Chapter summaries

Apart from an introductory chapter on the history of walls in general and the Berlin Wall in particular, the sequence of chapters is loosely structured around the idea of the Wall as one-directional fetishistic screen, screening off the other side; its opposite, the Wall as multi-directional membrane, being porous, filtering not only human and material flows but also affects. Not only did the Wall function as fetishistic screen and porous membrane in my argument, it was also instrumentalised as annihilator of the historical and amplifier of the utopian project for the building of socialism in the GDR and fulfilled the role of triumphalist trophy representing the ‘victory’ of capitalist liberal democracies in post-Wall Germany.

I position myself at the threshold of common discourses on the Wall as screen of images inviting the Berlin Imaginary (Manghani 2008), the Wall as permeable and porous (Ward 2011), the Wall as quintessentially modern geopolitical barrier (Pullan 2013) and the Wall as spectacular premodern form of intimidation (Brown 2014), all of which will be discussed in the following chapters. Above all, Wilhelm Berger's brief but insightful philosophical and socio-political outline (Berger 2011) on the inherent ambiguity of fences and walls has shaped my approach. According to Berger the greatest paradox of fences and walls is the fact that they simultaneously connect inside and outside, while separating the former from the latter (Berger 14).

Each chapter offers a partial glimpse of the before mentioned aspects, which, taken together, form a multi-perspectival whole. This reflects my overall approach to the material and psychic history of the Berlin Wall, which stresses the many-sidedness of the material object, causing binary geopolitical relations as well as diverse human affects, depending on the position taken and the side one was standing on. The equal weighting of the four main chapters is understood as a shift in perspective, resulting in an aesthetic approach, which allows for the sensing and sense making of the Berlin Wall from different, often contradictory sides. I argue that in today's Germany, from a post-Wall, post-unification point of view, room must be given for different narratives to unfold in the same space since it was the frictions rather than the political and socio-economic system that the FRG and GDR historically had in common. The faultlines not only make the distribution of the sensible visible but harbour the potential for a future common ground derived from a political-aesthetic re-arrangement of historical fragments.

Chapter 1 examines the function, history and aesthetics of walls as fortification systems over time, points out commonalities and significant differences. It serves to demonstrate the heterogeneity, polysemy and often overdeterminedness (Balibar 2002) of

border walls. All walls analysed in chapter 1 share the function of differentiating between an inside and an outside and contribute to identity formation ranging from binary oppositions between nomadic/sedentary, civilized/uncivilized to capitalist/communist. All walls are inherently ambiguous, a fact that the cultural historian Tobias Prüwer sums up in the dialectic of walls: while they are erected as material signs of prohibition and obstacle to unhindered movement, they at the same time invite to be transgressed (Prüwer 11). All walls are markers of relations either between the profane and the sacred realm, between common and private land, between borderlands or the borders of nation states, or mark off the realms of political and ideological influence. The aesthetic aspect is not of the same relevance to all walls, mentioned in chapter 1, but most of them were built as means of deterrence and to display sovereignty in a spectacular way. The Berlin Wall shares many of the before mentioned aspects and differentiating functions with other walls but stands out in one respect: it was built not to deny unimpeded access to outsiders but to keep its population inside the state boundaries.

Chapter 2 discusses the function of the Berlin Wall as fetishistic screen, screening off the other side, inviting collective identification with one's own side, which, despite better knowledge, is presented as the only available perspective and subject position.

Psychoanalytic theories, particularly Freud's discussion of fetishism and the gaze of the Medusa, Laura Mulvey's concept of the fetish as symptomatic signifier and Lacan's discussion of the imaginary as misrecognition in the visual field and the role of the gaze as anamorphic reminder of this misrecognition serve to analyse the positionality of viewers vis a vis the Berlin Wall, perspectives taken (eg.: frontal or panoramic views) or denied within pre-given structures on either side of the Wall. Manghani's concept of the Berlin imaginary (2008), the collective identification with images generated on the Western side of the Wall, reflecting a Western point of view, will be discussed and applied to the graffiti and Wall art

on the Western Wall. While graffiti and Wall art were meant to deface and overwrite the Wall's divisive message, I argue that over time the anarchic onslaught of image/texts was rearranged (Kilometerkunst) in such a way that individual aesthetic interventions started to—collectively—resemble ornamental structures. Defacement gave way to decoration and the reinforcement of the Wall as screen, mirroring back Western desires. Chapter 2 closes with the case study of self-proclaimed objectum sexual Eija-Riitta Eklöf and her fetishistic relationship with the Berlin Wall. In my argument, Eija-Riitta, while fetishising the Western Wall in its actual and miniature form, at the same time engages with the Wall as material agent on a subject-to-subject level. This reflects not only a vibrant materialism but opens the discussion to non-hegemonic positions vis a vis the Wall, its fall and reunified Germany.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that Wände (the Berlin Wall as Wand/screen) at specific moments, by means of Wende ('seen' and felt e/motions in form of twists and turns), pass into much more dynamic constellations: wands (the Berlin Wall as 'twisting and turning wall') or Gewand (the Berlin Wall as 'cladding' in motion) transforming the Wall into a porous membrane.

I analyse the Wall's function as membrane, starting out with Siegfried Ebeling's early 20th century architectural theories of walls as membranes and filters for social processes in space, it continues with Gottfried Semper's concept of the archetypal wall not as a solid structure but as textile enclosure and leads to general anthropological discussions of the permeability of walls, whose outward 'cladding' (Gewand), as in the case of the Berlin Wall was aestheticized. While the different generations of the Berlin Wall were solid, concrete structures, the aesthetic interventions on the last generation of the Wall on the Wall's Western side and its ornamental character in form of Kilometerkunst, kilometre art, created a tension between the Western frontline wall and the sober military system behind it. I argue that the tension was heightened by illusionist images, trompe l'oeils, which lured the viewer

to take a step forward into the space of representation, where effect turned into affect, as the viewer occupied the position of the forbidding object itself. Gilles Deleuze's insights into effect and affect, the sensational and sensation in the paintings of Francis Bacon as well as his reading of Leibniz's concept of the Baroque house as self-contained but affectively enfolded monad serve as means to make the tensions on the fetishistic Western surface as well as the fortification itself visible. Borderlines as well as the Wall's inner-city meandering form, with the help of Aby Warburg's concept of pathos formulae, will be seen to express further affective tensions and serve as memory traces, transforming a petrified *Wand* (surface to paint on) into a 'magic' *wand*, a twisting and turning stick, set in motion by the aesthetic interventions and the inscription of affects on the *Mauer* (the material structure) itself. Instead of the veil-images of chapter 2, the tear-images and the creaturely aspect of the dialectic of the Berlin Wall will come to the fore, the aesthetics of Kitsch on the Wall's Western surface will be distorted by the brutal aesthetics of a vibrant materialism, giving way to quasi-Baroque sensibilities and dynamics.

Chapter 4 takes up German literary and cultural historian Klaus Theweleit's concept of the Wall as facilitator of historical amnesia vis a vis the Nazi crimes against humanity, conveniently annihilating history or blaming the other side for its catastrophic outcome. I argue that the 'annihilation' of the historical has continued in divided, postwar and reunified Germany, where the alterity of history, mourning the demise of the GDR as loss of the egalitarian base of society and the social (Scribner 2005, Buden 2009) has been overwritten by hegemonic discourses of Western triumphalism and has found its, particular, visual expression in form of the historical panorama, used in the GDR as well as in reunified Germany as a means of projecting a specific totalising view on historical events.

Arguably, history's historicity had already been abandoned when artists, who followed in the footsteps of the early 20th century avantgarde, envisioned an endpoint in the

human development towards a just and egalitarian society based on Hegelian notions of historical consciousness or its Marxist, materialist counterpart, the classless society. Whereas socialist realist artists in the GDR, with their wall art in public spaces, were to actively take part in and bring about the end of history by foreshadowing the classless society on the aesthetic level, Western, postwar abstract expressionist artists sought to establish with their wall works a cultural and aesthetic autonomy, which was meant to be free from aesthetic constrictions and independent of the socio-political realm. Not only had walls on both sides of the Iron Curtain been aestheticized and transformed into embedded or autonomous works of art, but they had also been invested with utopian desire. I argue that the Berlin Wall as well displays characteristics of a 'wall of great promise'. As propagandistic antifascist protection rampart it was meant to create the necessary space where the GDR's classless society would flourish peacefully, undisturbed by Western imperialist and fascist tendencies. After the fall of the Wall, due to Western triumphalism and the lingering popularity of the modernist concept of a directional history, fuelled by Francis Fukuyama's highly contested vision of the actualisation of historical consciousness, whose only viable form was regarded to be capitalist liberal democracy, pieces of the Berlin Wall transformed from 'wall of great promise' into artworks and cultural artefacts, ready for consumption.

While deeply invested with utopian desire, I argue that Klaus Theweleit's demand for the transformation of the Berlin Wall of historical amnesia into the Berlin Wall as historicised membrane, filtering socio-historical and aesthetic processes on both sides, had been actualised at the same time. In the 1970s and 1980s artists on both sides of the Wall engaged in the mutual intellectual and artistic exchange of ideas and practices as well as exhibiting their artworks side by side in the shadow of the Wall. After the fall of the Wall open air exhibitions of the immediate *Wende* were staged on historical ground, the wasteland of the former border fortification system, and in the spirit of mutual, historical entanglement.

Despite the predominance of panoramic visions of historical events vis a vis divided Germany and the Wende period, visualised by the Wall as fetishistic screen, annihilator of the historical and amplifier of utopian desire, it has always functioned as historical, political-aesthetic membrane at the same time.

I conclude with an enquiry into the fetish of history understood as one-directional and monumental, as has often been the approach taken vis a vis the Berlin Wall as material object. Using Achim Landwehr's historiographical method of replacing the term history by the historical, I try to sound the Wall as historical fragment, mediated and experienced in different ways, against a commonly practised historical triumphalism, arguing against a necessary historical linearity, stressing the loose wickerwork of the historical (Landwehr 2016) instead, while laying bare the effects and affects caused not only by the material object but by the hegemonic views and historical discourses it prompted. Jürgen Böttcher's 1990 documentary *Die Mauer*, the 2011 exhibition *The Other View: The Early Berlin Wall* organised by German Federal Cultural Foundation and the 2018 German contribution to Venice Architecture Biennale *Unbuilding Walls* serve as examples for the heterogeneity of discourses and visual approaches of engaging with Germany's historical wickerwork.

Chapter 1: Function, History and Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall

Introduction

In ‘Spatial Discontinuities: Conflict Infrastructures in Contested Cities’ (2013), Wendy Pullan differentiates between old, pre-modern walls of protection and civic participation, whose main function was to shield the city against external enemies as well as to provide a unifying factor for those who, as citizens, enjoyed the privilege to reside in the city, and new, modern walls of exclusion, which are meant to divide populations. New walls, according to Pullan, represent draconian measures to contain political conflicts, where walls serve as barriers between opposing social groups: “Rather than identifiers of urban culture or citizenship, these walls have come to act as hallmarks of contested space and icons of irreconcilable differences.” (22) Contrary to the old, thick city walls, whose gates allowed human traffic and the exchange of goods, new, thin city walls are above all security walls keeping people apart. For Pullan, the Berlin Wall embodied such a quintessential new wall, where rigid controls, isolation and the petrification of city life went hand in hand with the vilification of the other side. Whereas the Berlin Wall was undoubtedly a security wall resulting from ongoing conflicts between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union and the question of how to administer the occupied city of Berlin, it also functioned as a protective wall, which—because of the brutal division of the city in 1961—formed the basis for the emergence of opposing, but also reassuring identifications with one’s own point of view.

According to Wendy Brown walls have an archaic quality and function like pre-modern signatures in a modern world. Solid, visible walls have reassuring psychic effects. They can generate powerful illusions of protection, shelter and the recovery of a lost potency. They can serve as images which theatricalize and spectacularize state power, especially at moments when state sovereignty is endangered or contested. Brown argues that such political walls are structured like a fetish, which despite better knowledge, are believed to be highly

effective: “They help to restore images of national self-sufficiency, and help to screen out suffering or destitution.” (Brown 121)

While walls as material obstacles and signs of interdiction are more or less easily overcome, walls as images and embodiment of sovereign jurisdiction and power are designed to incite awe and respect in those they try to deter and those they try to subject (Brown 25-26).

Not only did the Berlin Wall as material object stop the steady flow of refugees and make attempts to escape very difficult; the image of the Wall as fortified national border also legitimized a state that was in danger of its undoing due to the heavy loss of an important part of its valuable workforce.

Certainly, pragmatic and strategic reasons led to the erection of the Wall. Brown, however, reminds us of the fact that the Wall “was originally conceived as a protective cordon around a fragile new society, a society based on work, cooperation, and egalitarianism, rather than individualism, competition and hierarchy.” (40) The sociologist Andrea Komlosy stresses the fact that because of the East-West-divide in terms of wages and the standard of living due to the exclusion of the communist states from Western reconstruction aids such as the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, seemingly the only way to protect the socialist model and guarantee the possibility to economically catch up with the West within one’s own political system was isolationism. In this way the resulting bipolar order, which characterized the Cold War era, came to be based on an opposing system of values. While in the capitalist West private property, parliamentary democracy and Christian values were upheld, in the communist East state ownership, the primacy of the communist party and atheism were the doctrines to adhere to (Komlosy 183; 223). However, the majority of the GDR subjects had been supporters of imperialist, capitalist Nazi Germany and only a small minority had welcomed the new communist state, therefore

socialist reeducation was one of the major political goals. A new, so called all-round developed personality (allseitig entwickelte Persönlichkeit) had to be forged, according to Greg Eghigian. The East German population was not only regarded (by its rulers) as unreliable but also in need of protection from dangerous Western capitalist, imperialist diversions. Only within a sheltered context would a new socialist consciousness unfold. The Berlin Wall enhanced and made concrete in national, spatial terms what had already been asserted for the common 'East German psyche': the necessity of a protective cordon in order to develop from 'homo munitus', defined by Eghigian as "the sheltered, defended human" (41), into a socialist subject.

The figure of homo munitus ... is an image of the East German propagated by East Germans ..., seeing human beings as products of their environment, requiring security and guidance in order to unleash and rescue their full potential. (Eghigian 59)

Thus, the Wall as concrete metaphor and precondition for realizing the goals of socialism served to enforce a new socialist state and bring about a new socialist subject. Eghigian distinguishes two strategies, carried out by the GDR rulers: the soft line of reeducation of the defended, sheltered subject within a protective state and the hard line of policing its borders necessary for the development of the communist state and its subjects (Eghigian 56).

Clearly, the Wall fulfilled several functions at the same time: on the one hand modern security wall in a zone of urban conflict, on the other hand premodern looking (especially in its early stages) means of assertion of power as well as facilitator for the building of socialism and the socialist subject, to name only a few. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the Wall's different functions in order to stress its complexity and heterogeneity. Some of these functions, as the following historical overview of ancient and modern walls as well as historical walls in Berlin will demonstrate, are shared by bordering devices and border walls

in general. However, the function of the severe restriction of physical mobility of the inhabitants of an allegedly protective enclosure was—in its extreme version—more specifically related to the context of the Cold War, where transgression was equalled with desertion of one's own geopolitical camp.

Function

- **Hard Border, Impediment to Movement and Creation of New Spaces**

On August 13, 1961 the GDR unilaterally closed its sector boundary in Berlin with barbed wire and started to erect a wall, sealing off East from West Berlin. Before the inner-city border closure, two borders, according to Patrick Major in *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010), existed. The mainland inner German border was originally part of the Demarcation Line between the British and American occupation zones in postwar Germany on the one hand and the Soviet Zone on the other, and the sector boundary in Berlin between the American, British and French occupation sectors and the Soviet sector in postwar Berlin. While the Demarcation Line was closed and consolidated as a fortified borderline between the GDR and the FRG in 1952, the sector boundary in Berlin was open until 1961, at times marked by a white stripe on the road and signage informing potential trespassers that they were leaving a particular sector (89-90). Before 1961, so called Grenzgänger (border crossers) crossed the sector boundaries, between the Eastern and Western sectors because of work, others crossed it for leisure activities (93-96). The last loophole to leave the GDR for personal, political, or economic reasons (between 1945 and 1961 more than 3 million East Germans, a sixth of the GDR population, had left the country) was soon to be closed.

For Gareth Dale, the mass exodus from the GDR was due to a severe economic crisis, triggered by forced industrialization, a shortage of raw materials and the drive to compete with the economically more advanced FRG. Also, the traumatic memory of the June 17,

1953, uprising, which nearly brought the GDR to fall and “shook the SED to its foundations” (Dale 34), confirmed the GDR elite in their belief in hard and fast measures in order to avoid another near dismantling of state power at a time of economic crisis in 1960.

After Stalin’s death in March 1953 discussions about political and economic reforms were in the air but only half-heartedly pursued by the East German communist party. When in the same year East German building workers in charge of the GDR’s most prestigious architectural project, the construction of Stalinallee, went on strike demanding the revocation of the rise in work quotas, the strike swept across the country and turned into a rebellion, calling for freedom of speech and free elections (Dale 21-22). Only with the help of Soviet tanks could the June 17 uprising be brutally and successfully crushed. At the same time the rebellion remained a powerful “symbol of the population’s potential power” (Dale 34), memorialized and instrumentalized in iconic images, such as *Berlin Uprising* taken on June 19, 1953. It shows East German workers, some of them carrying German banners, marching in protest against Soviet martial law through the Brandenburg Gate from the Soviet Zone into the Western sector of Berlin on Charlottenburger Chaussee, which was renamed Straße des 17. Juni, 17th of June street, after the failed uprising and its victims⁵⁰.

In order to curb the mass exodus from the GDR, which was undermining the GDR’s legitimacy, the sector boundary between East and West Berlin was closed, the Wall was built and the socialist system consolidated in the Wall’s shadow. By erecting a hard border between East and West Berlin the GDR successfully managed to stop the steady flow of refugees and to recover economically, after Erich Honecker became first secretary of the SED in 1971 and the partial return to socio-economic central planning (Major 166-168).

⁵⁰ See also Anna Saunders, *Memorializing the GDR* (2018). Saunders discusses post-Wall, reunified German memorial culture, trying to come to terms with divided memories vis a vis the GDR. The June 17, 1953, uprising, from the time of the actual events to contemporary commemoration practices, has been predominantly remembered from a Western point of view. Western directed images taken in Cold War Berlin, reinforcing the literal as well as metaphorical strive for freedom visually predominate and are commemorated at sites, such as 17th of June Street, which had little to do with the historical uprising (160-161).

A sixth of the population had opted for *Republikflucht* before the erection of the Wall:

The act even had an official name: *Republikflucht* or ‘flight from the Republic’, with connotations of *Fahnenflucht*, or military desertion from the flag.

Absconders were crossing a frontline and leaving fellow fighters for socialism in the lurch. As one police commander put it, even for non-communists,

‘Republikflucht is betrayal of the Workers’ and Peasants’ State, betrayal of the GDR’s working people. (Major 56)

One of the main functions of walls is the “intentional obstruction to free and uninterrupted movement” (Unwin 25). Walls deny space, Simon Unwin argues in *An Architecture Notebook: Wall* (2000) and by doing so create and define spaces, paving the way for the transformation of space into space/s and place/s (25). When the sector boundary between the Western and Eastern occupation zones turned into a hard border in 1961, in East Berlin and East Germany the socialist project was pursued by force. At the same time and because of the border closure, West Berlin’s character as ‘Frontstadt’ (frontline city), was reinforced and eventually altered⁵¹. As a Western outpost within the GDR and the Soviet sphere of influence, it functioned as capitalist showcase and geopolitical stronghold.

Hard borders in urban conflict zones, as Pullan argues, generate thin, modern walls, whose purpose is predominantly to separate opposing social groups. Cities and their populations are torn apart, often in the densest and liveliest areas and urban life petrifies; even after urban reunification, a recovery of common infrastructures and shared life is unlikely. Despite Pullan’s bleak visions, 60 years after the erection of the Berlin Wall and

⁵¹ See David E. Barclay ‘A ‘Complicated Contrivance’, West Berlin behind the Wall, 1971-1989’, (2012). Barclay stresses that West Berlin’s ‘heroic phase’ comprising the Airlift in 1948-49, when West Berliners were completely cut off from West Germany by land and had to be supported by air, had lost its glamour by the mid 1960s. West Berlin had been subsidized since the 1950s and continued to depend on subsidies until the fall of the Wall. According to Barclay later generations, who had not lived through the immediate postwar ‘heroic times’, had made a home in a truncated city, which managed to keep a cosmopolitan culture alive despite its isolation. Barclay compares this ‘open but bounded life’ to life in a “luxurious Alcatraz” (123).

more than 30 years after its ‘fall’ (November 9, 1989) and Germany’s reunification (October 3, 1990), Berlin has recovered its lost center, the district of Mitte is alive and thrives, and the city has regained its structural and social unity. However, 40 years of division, in which postwar Berlin developed into two cities, have left their architectural traces, as permanent markers of contested spaces at the frontline where “two competing political, economic and cultural systems collided and competed spectacularly” (Barclay 113).

Indeed, East and West Berlin, from the foundation of the two Germanies in 1949, watched each other very closely, tried to demonstrate presence and competed in outshining each other in art as well as architectural exhibitions and urban design, in short on the cultural level, which was one of the main battlefields of the Cold War.⁵² Since, after the war, Berlin lay to a large part in ruins, the city lent itself to utopian visions of grand architectural programs. In the early 1950s West Berlin’s Kurfürstendamm was rebuilt and turned into its leading commercial street, *the* showroom for consumer culture. In the late 1950s the International Building Exhibition developed new concepts for a housing project (1957-1961) in Hansa Viertel near Tiergarten. The low built high rises in modernist style (each of which was individually designed by a different architect) formed a loose ensemble in order to stress the “Western liberal principles of freedom, individuality, and the nonauthoritarian order of democracy and the marketplace” (188) as Brian Ladd points out in *Ghosts of Berlin* (1997). Hansa Viertel’s new design consciously set itself off from East Berlin’s showcase architecture in Stalinallee (1951-1960), characterized by ornate monumentality, axial orientation and centralized order (181-183). GDR architects had envisioned a housing project that defined itself against the formalism and cosmopolitanism of the interwar period,

⁵² See Emily Pugh. *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (2014), 11. In her comprehensive study of spatial identity politics and architectural achievements in divided Berlin, Pugh stresses that the transformation of one city into two, brought about by the Wall, resulted in prestigious architectural projects on both sides of the Wall in order to shape the identity of the respective half of the city.

returning to “national and local styles—meaning above all the Berlin neoclassicism of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. By 1951, construction had begun on buildings in the new style, an amalgam of Schinkel and Stalin.” (183)

While the historic center of postwar Berlin (then in East Berlin) was initially neglected, attention shifted eastwards to Stalinallee, which was to provide first class apartments for GDR workers as well as spaces for restaurants, stores and cultural institutions. If we are to take the aesthetic expressions of the two regimes before the building of the Wall as central to their respective ideologies, late Western international modernism and heroic, national, ornate, classical architecture confronted each other. The former consciously positioned itself within a greater, non-German, cosmopolitan context in order to break with the *völkisch* as well as classicist, monumental (architectural) Nazi past, whereas the latter strove to overcome the excesses of purist, abstract, modernist architecture by re-appropriating and popularizing (critics of the time spoke of communist kitsch⁵³) the neoclassical tradition. Both projects (West and East) proved to be too expensive, so that in the 1960s (after Stalin’s death and the erection of the Wall) housing projects (in East and West Berlin)—functional, concrete constructions—started to more and more resemble each other (Ladd 189). After the erection of the Wall and in its shadow, overt attempts of outshining each other seemingly shifted towards more mundane demands of providing low-cost housing for the respective populations. While East and West of the Berlin Wall the differentiation of spaces between the Western Allied and the Soviet occupation zone was reinforced and West Berlin and Berlin, capital of the GDR, were to emerge as distinct places, post-war housing developments soon returned to an architectural common ground.

⁵³ See Brian Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin* (1997). While Stalinallee’s false pomp was heavily criticized in the West as totalitarian kitsch, after the fall of the Wall it was re-discovered by postmodern architects, who had distanced themselves from the formal purity of modernism and playfully returned to the importance of ornament in architectural design (186).

- Janus-Faced, Differentiation and Identity Formation

In *Enclosure and Ethics in the Modern Landscape* (2015) Thomas Oles draws attention to the double character of walls. According to Oles walls are never one thing, socially constructive or socially destructive, dwelling or coercion, nurture or violence. They are always both at the same time—creation and destruction—due to their differentiating function. Walls transform like into unlike and by means of exclusion and inclusion create dichotomies which are then spatialized (13-17).

In other words, walls are Janus-faced, they face inside, reinforcing a community, building a collective within particular spatial parameters (eg.: house, city, nation) *and* they face outside, excluding those, who do not belong and are to be located elsewhere. In this way, walls function as screens, they screen and screen off the other, reinforcing identification with one's own side.

Long before the Berlin Wall was erected, evidence was growing that the postwar partitioning of Germany and Berlin into four occupation zones would not result in shared political, cultural and economic administration but fall apart along systemic and socio-economic lines. In *Three Germanies* (2011) Michael Gehler stresses that the Potsdam Agreement (August 1, 1945) between the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union about the postwar military occupation and reconstruction of Germany was not followed in important respects: “The Potsdam Agreement, treating the whole of Germany as one economic unit, was not adhered to by any of the occupying powers.” (46) France, a late comer and the fourth occupying power, rejected the idea of a central Allied administration, which resulted in the Allied military forces acting on their own in their respective occupation zones. Before the foundation of the FRG (May 23, 1949) and the GDR (October 7, 1949), a British-American economic ‘Bi-Zone’ was formed in 1947, whereby in the British zone raw materials and the basic industries laid the foundations for the manufacturing industries of the

American zone. By 1949 France had joined the British-American 'Bi-Zone' while the Soviets refused to be part of the Western Allied economic zone. The Western 'Tri-Zone' resulted, according to Gehler, in "a precedent for the division of Germany." (47)

The two Germanies evolved through the reification of socio-economic and systemic borders, not only being internally partitioned but eventually separated along the geopolitical divide between the Western capitalist bloc and the Eastern communist bloc. The process of differentiation which had been set in motion by the Allied occupation forces had resulted in *the* hardened 'overdetermined border' between the FRG and the GDR, capitalist West Germany and communist East Germany, leading to the formation of two mutually exclusive German nations. In other words: "When walls, borders, and boundaries become completely sealed off, they cause hardened social "edges" to emerge: groups essentially split in two and different communities develop on each side." (Silberman et al. 2)

- [Spectacular Means of Assertion of Sovereignty Rather Than Effective Means of Division](#)

For Brown, as already mentioned, it is the archaic character of walls, rather than their actual dividing capacity, which is most useful in modern military confrontations. While walls can be easily overcome, they are highly effective, often spectacular symbols of division and deterrence, especially when the nation state and sovereignty are under threat or on the wane:

... there is a markedly archaic quality to the slow and manifest construction of walls fashioned from concrete, brick, iron, steel, barbed wire, or even synthetic mesh. Compared with the evanescent, protean, and depthless traits of late modern culture and politics, walls seem solid and permanent, and appear to lack capacities for guile and dissimulation. (Brown 80)

The sheer materiality of walls as well as the time-consuming process of construction insinuate permanence and monumentality. While West Berlin was sealed off from East Berlin

overnight by means of barbed wire (during the night of August 12/13), the symbolic advantage of a wall, at least in the inner-city area, was soon recognized. Shortly after the unexpected closure of the sector boundary, GDR officials decided to start building a wall. This wall, commonly referred to as the Berlin Wall, eventually consisted of two walls (a frontline and hinterland wall) with six different stages of extension, constantly being improved over its 28-year existence and, except for its inner-city appearance, lacking in coherence (Cramer and Rütenik 90). While the growing priority of the inner-city wall facing West Berlin was to convey stability, permanence, and homogeneity behind, what Johannes Cramer and Tobias Rütenik call the aesthetic border (152), an extended, military urban border zone continuously developed. The ‘facadism’ of the Western frontline wall, its aesthetically pleasing side, served as a ruse to distract from the inner workings of the border zone.

Winston Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ metaphor⁵⁴ has often been used to refer to the Berlin Wall as literal, concrete manifestation of a hard border. Rather than concrete manifestation, a concrete, staged facade does justice to the petrified frontline in Berlin. As ‘anti-fascist protection barrier’ it served, in GDR propaganda, to ensure peace and protect its citizens against harmful, Western capitalist influences⁵⁵.

The propagandistic idea of a peace-making wall resonates with Thomas Hobbes’ concept of the *Leviathan* in his famous political treatise of the same name (1651). The biblical monster transforms into the monstrous sovereign, who has been granted sovereign

⁵⁴ In his well-known speech ‘The Sinews of Peace’ (March 5, 1946) Winston Churchill deplored the fact that, metaphorically speaking, an ‘iron curtain’ had descended between Western Europe on the one hand and Central and Eastern Europe on the other hand. At the same time, he discursively staked out the Soviet sphere of influence by locating Central and Eastern Europe behind an iron curtain, which geopolitically divided ‘the West’ from ‘the East’ at the beginning of the Cold War.

⁵⁵ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer* (2009). On August 1, 1962, less than two weeks before the first anniversary of the Wall’s erection GDR propagandists coined the term anti-fascist protection barrier. The erection of the Wall was promoted as a heroic deed carried out by militia of the working class in order to shield the socialist republic against Western fascist and imperialist tendencies (78-88).

power by the people to uphold peace. Hobbes, according to German art historian Horst Bredekamp, used a mythological creature in order to better illustrate and dramatize his theory of the state and the modern sovereign's desired ability of 'peacemaking' terror (Bredekamp a, 13-18).

On the frontispiece of the treatise, underneath the image of the Leviathan as personified modern sovereign, space is left for a curtain, which carries the title of Hobbes' treatise. The curtain, seemingly inviting the reader to turn the page and move from image to text, plays more than a symbolic role for Carl Schmitt, political theorist of Nazi Germany. For Schmitt the curtain embodies the Leviathan, in the form of a Baroque facade. The curtain splits sovereign power into outside and inside, facade and content. Outside the legitimacy of sovereignty is spectacularly displayed but the workings of power inside are covered up (Bredekamp b, 69-72). In this way the image of the terror-inducing-but-peace-making sovereign state is potentially reduced to facadism⁵⁶.

In Schmitt's concept of sovereignty, the 'visible' focus shifts from the 'who of law' to the 'where of law'⁵⁷ foregrounding the mythical origin and constitution of law in the primeval act of land appropriation. In *The Nomos of the Earth* (1950) Schmitt writes:

Nomos comes from *nemein*—a [Greek] word that means both “to divide” and “to pasture.” Thus, *nomos* is the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible—the initial measure and division of

⁵⁶ See Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (1938) and *Glossarium* (1947-1958).

⁵⁷ See Nick Vaughan-Williams, who in Chapter three of his book *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (2009) discusses and problematizes the modern geopolitical imaginary based on the concept of the state border accompanied by a traditional inside/outside logic. At the state's borders, legal territory is demarcated from extra-legal, 'exceptional' territory, a reason why borders often acquire an almost mythical dimension (73). Vaughan-Williams refers to Carl Schmitt's work on state sovereignty, which is defined by Schmitt as the right to decide on the state of exception, being subject to the law but unable to claim rights, within the legal territory. In *Nomos of the Earth* (1950) Schmitt discusses his concept of the normative order of the earth based on *nomos*, land appropriation in the sense of appropriating (*nehmen*), dividing (*teilen*) and making use of the earth (*weiden*) (75). Land appropriation, the 'where of law' then is constitutive of law for Schmitt, who conceptualizes a socio-economic and legal order based on space (75).

pasture-land, i.e., the land-appropriation as well as the concrete order contained in it and following from it. (70)

Nomos, an act of legitimacy and spatial ordering, expressing the “full immediacy of legal power not mediated by laws” (73) is for Schmitt, who refers to Germanic linguist Jost Trier’s research, of ritual and sacred origin:

‘In the beginning was the fence. Fence, enclosure, and border are deeply interwoven in the world formed by men, determining its concepts. The enclosure gave birth to the shrine by removing it from the ordinary, placing it under its own laws, and entrusting it to the divine.’ [Trier in Schmitt] The enclosing ring—the fence formed by men’s bodies, the manring—is a primeval form of ritual, legal and political cohabitation. (74)

For Schmitt, ideologue of the Third Reich, borders, in form of enclosures erected or constituted by men, made visible the primeval link between land appropriation and the violent constitution of law. Law might not have been constituted when the first generation of the Berlin Wall was built but it certainly enforced it by ‘cementing’ the inner-city sector boundary. Powerful, propagandistic images of armed GDR militiamen guarding the border in front of Brandenburg Gate recall Schmitt’s idea of the enclosing ring or manring. In a deliberate and/or a deliberately deceptive way a natural, ‘primeval’ link between the soldiers’ formation, the ‘lawful act’ of fortifying the border, and the foregrounding of its Western facade as ‘visible sign of the sovereign’, was established. In this way, the GDR managed to assert its sovereignty by mystifying and naturalizing its claims.

- [Inherent Ambiguity of Walls, Movement, Doors and Membrane Function](#)

In *Welt aus Mauern. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (2018) Tobias Prüwer gets to the heart of what he calls the dialectic of walls: “Wo Mauern hochgezogen werden, will man sie zugleich auch

einreißen oder überschreiten.” ‘Where walls are built [pulled up], one at the same time wants to tear them down or transgress them’ (11; my trans.)

Not only did Berliners build tunnels underneath the Berlin Wall in the 1960s, attacked and crashed with their cars into the early generations of the Wall, which lacked in sturdiness, or simply tried to surmount it, GDR border guards, who were supposed to patrol the border to West Berlin, were also tempted to defect. Two days after the border closure, East German border soldier Conrad Schumann leapt across the barbed wire rolls from East to West Berlin at the corner of Ruppiner Straße and Bernauer Straße. Schumann’s defection, which was captured on camera, was immediately exploited by Western media and hailed as ‘leap into freedom’.⁵⁸

While the GDR had built a wall to halt the flow of refugees and to shield itself from Western competition so that the socialist state could properly ‘unfold’, Berliners on both sides of the Berlin Wall tried to undermine state rule by simply transgressing the obstacle or sullyng its Western facade.

Walls have surfaces and surfaces prompt interaction. A wall’s surface, according to Simon Unwin, functions like an interface between a space which can be occupied and another which cannot. In the case of primitive cave walls, for example, the other side was solid rock. Unwin argues that primitive cave paintings diverted the eye from the rock’s blankness and solidity. By means of trompe l’oeil and other illusionary paintings the flatness of the rock’s surface was overcome, a non-existing third dimension was brought about, and the rock’s deadening materiality overcome (Unwin 38).

⁵⁸ See Dirk Schindelbeck, ‘Die Mauer und ihre Bilder’ (2011), 40. See also Elena Demke, ‘Mauerbilder: Ikonen im Kalten Krieg’ (2009). Schumann’s defection has been exploited and instrumentalised ever since. Over time the iconic image of defection, the refusal to live in the GDR dictatorship and the choice of Western liberal democracy has enjoyed great popularity but acquired, according to Demke, a more universal meaning: the refusal to participate in the Cold War (113).

The Berlin Wall did not lack a ‘third dimension’, but it could only be properly approached from its Western side. From the Eastern side, the first generation of the Wall would soon be extended by a hinterland fence, later a hinterland wall and a military control strip in between. East Berliners could not approach the border area without special permits and were not allowed to take pictures of it. Interacting with or reacting against the Wall’s interdiction of–no entry/no exit–was primarily reduced to an engagement with the Wall’s Western surface. Especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when *Grenzmauer 75*, the last generation of the Wall, had replaced earlier versions in the inner-city area between East and West Berlin, the Western Wall’s whitewashed surface had to ‘withstand’ an onslaught of graffiti and wall art. Art against concrete was the common battle cry, in an attempt to symbolically undermine and overcome the Wall’s forbidding, deadening message and potentially deadly other side (Wolfrum 112-118). While the Berlin Wall’s Western side was not ‘torn down’ by artistic surface interventions, it was enlivened and made porous, it caused GDR border guards’ reactions, even if only by painting over the graffiti and wall art.

Every wall is also a door, Tobias Prüwer argues, quoting American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. The function of the wall as door may be interpreted either as warning against transgression or promise of eventual entry, depending on point of view (Prüwer 131). Literal, not only metaphorical, doors in *Grenzmauer 75* (the last generation of the Wall), were a necessary means for accessing and maintaining it, as well as regularly whitewashing it. In the 1980s, 35 doors opened onto the Western side of the frontline wall, which was strictly speaking still on GDR territory. The doors could only be opened by two border guards, by two different sets of keys, in order to ensure mutual surveillance and prevent defection (Cramer and Rütenik 124-125).

If every wall is also a door, which prevents as well as invites passage or incites transgression, a wall’s materiality, its very solidity transforms into a different texture, which

rather resembles a membrane, channelling flows, than a petrified barrier. From surface medium the wall turns into interface, demarcating as well as mediating between an inside and outside. Even the Berlin Wall as quintessential geopolitical hard border, ‘weathered’, displayed its porosity, channelled movement between East and West Berlin at checkpoints and allowed doors for maintenance and repair work. Conceptualized as bordering membrane, its Western surface turned interface functioned not only as canvas to paint on but resembled living, breathing skin: “Als Grenzmembran fungiert die Haut beim Menschen, ist Medium und Mittler zur Welt und als Basis für die Innen-Außen-Unterscheidung wesentlich für die Subjektconstitution.” ‘Human skin functions as bordering membrane, is medium and mediator onto the world and essential as basis of the inside-outside-differentiation for the constitution of the subject.’ (Prüwer 31; my trans.)

When on August 13, 1961 barbed wire was rolled out, paving the way for the first generation of the Wall to come, when streets were blocked, railway and underground lines were cut, when border crossings between West and East Berlin were reduced to 12 and when between August 26, 1961 and December 17, 1963, all border crossings to East Berlin remained closed (except for the Allied forces and their personnel), East Berlin and East Germany had seemingly succeeded in completely sealing themselves off from West Berlin and West Germany. A permeable sector boundary had petrified into a hard military border. However, the hard border between East and West Berlin was also a heavily contested Cold War frontline, where possible conflicts were staged, not necessarily carried out. American and Soviet tanks faced each other, as, for example, in October 1961, when the unhindered Allied right to cross the border to East Berlin was breached, by stopping Allan Lightner, US

Chief of Mission in West Berlin, at Checkpoint Charlie on his way to a theatre in East Berlin⁵⁹.

In the 1970s, when the four power agreement (September 3, 1971), the transit agreements (June 3, 1972) and the basic treaty were signed (November 8, 1972), reaffirming the presence of the Western Allied forces in West Berlin, making the USSR and the GDR abstain from interrupting the transit of civilians and goods to and from Berlin, regulating and easing traffic between the GDR and the FRG, recognising the common border between the two German nation states, the Wall as fortified border in divided Berlin had already become more permeable. Willy Brandt's politics of *détente vis a vis* the GDR had borne fruit and meant the end of the Hallstein Doctrine, which had geopolitically isolated the GDR in the 1950s and 1960s⁶⁰. Citizens of West Berlin were allowed to apply for a visiting permit and could spend up to 30 days a year in the GDR. East German pensioners had been able to travel to West Berlin and West Germany since 1964. After the ratification of the Basic Treaty, East Germans could visit the FRG on urgent family matters (Gehler 143-144; Major 198). Human traffic between the two Germanies was not entirely blocked anymore but rather, due to signed contracts and mutual agreements, channelled and strictly controlled by the GDR. On the material level, the Wall transformed from hard border to bordering membrane. On the symbolic level it split into two (sur)faces, its Western graffitied, seemingly harmless (sur)face

⁵⁹ See Elena Demke, 'Mauerbilder: Ikonen im Kalten Krieg' (2011). The stand-off between American and Soviet tanks on October 27, 1961, which did not result in an actual military confrontation, challenged but eventually strengthened the Berlin Wall's dividing function. The image of American and Soviet tanks facing each other at Checkpoint Charlie has become part of the iconic Cold War image canon (112).

⁶⁰ See Michael Gehler, *Three Germanies* (2011). The Hallstein Doctrine, conceived by state secretary of the foreign office Walter Hallstein and announced in the FRG government declaration on September 23, 1955, declared that the FRG was, in terms of foreign policy, the "sole legitimate representative of German interests" (103). As sole representative of all Germans (in the FRG and the GDR), the FRG was ready to end all diplomatic relationships with countries who upheld diplomatic relations with the GDR and thus recognized its sovereignty. While effectively isolating the GDR on the geopolitical level, Gehler implies that the Hallstein Doctrine severely weakened Konrad Adenauer's politics of strength, paving the way to the erection of the Berlin Wall (105).

and its Eastern military (sur)face whose function was to make visible and prevent any attempt of illegal escape from the GDR.

- [The Order of Walls](#)

In sum, walls are two-sided and multifunctional. They enclose and carve out space, they deny or channel movement, they create difference and its contestation, they connect what has been disconnected. Walls are above all, in Tobias Prüwer's words, "Beziehungsanzeiger" (Prüwer 22), signposts of a relation. They establish a relation and are the manifest sign as well as the embodiment of that relation.

Mauern teilen den Raum auf und gestalten ihn, stecken Lebensräume ab, greifen in Landschaften ein, ordnen das Sinnliche. ... Mauern sind wesentliche Elemente der Raumbildung. Sie umgrenzen und grenzen ab, trennen, verbinden und vermitteln, sie schaffen Differenz und Fakten und weisen Orte zu. Wände und Wälle ermöglichen und verunmöglichen, können Freiheit und Unfreiheit nach sich ziehen. Als Grenzmarker erzeugen sie binäre Gegensätze wie drinnen/draußen, öffentlich/privat, zugehörig/fremd, legal/verboten, normal/deviant. Mauern sind mindestens janusköpfig. (Prüwer 17)

Walls divide up space and order it, they stake out living space, create territorial interventions, distribute the sensible. ... Walls are essential elements of the creation of space. They enclose and demarcate, they separate, connect and mediate, they create difference and facts, they allocate places. Walls and fortified walls enable and disable, may have freedom or unfreedom as consequence. As border markers they create binary opposites such as inside/outside, public/private,

belonging/foreign, legal/illegal, normal/deviant. Walls are at the very minimum
Janus-faced. (Prüwer 17; my trans.)

As ‘Beziehungsanzeiger’ the Berlin Wall embodied the overdetermined hard border between ‘the capitalist West and the communist East’; it dramatically reinforced the emergence of mutually exclusive, geopolitical spaces on both sides of the Wall, giving room to new identity formations by means of demarcation and differentiation. It represented a spectacular facade, against which Cold War conflicts were staged. It also functioned as stage for the GDR to assert its sovereignty. Despite being a potentially lethal obstacle to free movement and a means of geopolitical division, the Berlin Wall at the same time ‘connected’ the two German states, which had been ‘made unlike’. As connecting, bordering membrane it channeled human and other traffic and absorbed Western artistic surface manifestations and protests. As hard border the Berlin Wall was meant to halt movement, but it incited the movement and interaction of those, who disagreed and wanted to surmount the obstacle, at the same time. As bordering membrane the Berlin Wall was meant to channel movement according to mutual agreements between the two German states and the Allied forces. However, it continued to function as hard border for a large part of the East German population.

As ‘Beziehungsanzeiger’, signpost of a relation, the Berlin Wall was above all characterized by its double sidedness and its Janus-faced structure. Not only did a single border wall (facing inside as well as outside) develop into two walls, a frontline as well as a hinterland wall, but both walls developed different aesthetics. While the Western, inner-city, frontline Wall was continuously maintained and homogenized to create an image of order and stability, the hinterland wall often consisted of a conglomerate of different generations of the Wall. On the periphery a fence rather than a wall separated West Berlin from East Germany. While parts of the Western inner-city, frontline wall eventually transformed into suitable surfaces for graffiti and Wall art, being heavily fetishized, since *a fragment* of a larger

fortification structure attracted *all* the international media attention, behind the Berlin Wall's Western facade (frontline wall) a military fortification system expanded and was ever more perfected. The Berlin Wall never had just one, it always had at least two sides even if one side tried to screen off the other. In general, due to the Wall's function as partitioning wall and due to its very own diverging aesthetics (West/East), the sensible, as discussed by Rancière was re-distributed. Certain perspectives predominated, were made 'visible' (from the West); others were made invisible or hardly visible (from the East), resulting in a constant tug of war between the two Germanies about dominance on the visual level.

History of Walls

- [Introduction](#)

As previously argued, walls have several functions and so did the Berlin Wall. It did not only represent a spectacular inner-city hard border, where sovereignty was asserted and contested; it also served as barrier in front of and behind which new, exclusionary, identities were formed and new, exclusionary, spaces opened up; as newly formed city halves they began to compete with each other. At the same time the Wall also functioned as membrane channeling flows of people and goods. Above all, the Wall distributed the sensible, obstructed and invited certain views and perspectives in the Cold War contest for visual dominance.

The graffiti and Wall art on the Wall's Western side predominantly mirrored a Western perspective and screened off the plight of East Germans. At times it triggered affects, reaching out to and being shared with the other side: the Western screen then turned into, I will argue in the following chapters, a primal interface, a surface of psychic excitation in East and West. While for most citizens of East Berlin and East Germany in general the Berlin Wall and the inner-German border meant imprisonment, the building of socialism—freed from direct, visible competition with Western capitalism in the short term—could be

pursued with greater ease after the Wall's construction. In the long term the hard border between the two city halves, which had transformed into separate cities, became more porous and, also the site of economic and cultural exchange. Even though the Wall as 'Iron Curtain' and 'Anti-fascist Protection Wall' was conjured up as everlasting, unbreakable and 'monstrous', it was overcome again and again on an individual and collective level.

Walls are inherently ambiguous, they face inside and outside, they protect and imprison, and they also, as will be shown, have a history of their own. Even though a modern, 20th century border wall such as the Berlin Wall may, at first sight, not have much in common with the premodern walls of Skara Brae or Catalhöyük, walls of antiquity such as the Roman Limes, the Chinese Wall, medieval or early modern city walls, or the frontline fortifications of the Second World War, aspects and echoes of other walls can be detected. They serve the purpose to demonstrate that even though the Berlin Wall represents a modern, interventionist wall in a zone of conflict, cementing a borderline between capitalist West and communist East Berlin, other affordances of other types of walls in history are at specific moments in time reflected on and at the Wall.

Premodern walls predominantly functioned as aestheticized interfaces between the everyday and the world of the ancestors, either literally buried in the wall or represented on it. I argue in the following chapters that the graffiti onslaught and other turbulences on the Western side of the Berlin Wall fulfilled or tried to fulfill a similar function, turning a hard surface into a colourful, affect ridden screen and at times an interface leaking affect in both directions.

Both the Roman Limes and the Chinese Wall have assumed mythical dimensions of sheer endless barriers between 'civilization' and 'barbarism', whereas in reality they often functioned as unilateral assertion of sovereignty, means of segregation but also contact zone between nomadic and sedentary cultures. At the Berlin Wall two diametrically opposed

socio-economic systems confronted each other. Even though in the first years after the erection of the Wall contact between East and West Berliners came to a complete halt, the following years show that the mythically inflated, allegedly impermeable 'Iron Curtain' became increasingly more porous. At the same time a zone of heavily guarded contact and (asymmetrical) exchange came into being.

Medieval and early modern city walls granted city dwellers property rights and freedom from the serfdom of the countryside, but it also subjected them to heavy taxation and the necessity to build a visible enclosure around the city. Participation in medieval city life came at a price. Similarly, the building of socialism with its promise of a future classless society, could, as the example of the GDR shows, only be pursued within heavily fortified borders, under dictatorship and at the cost of loss of civil liberties.

The concrete fortifications and bunkers of the Second World War, though monumental and awe-inspiring, were in reality characterized by their eventual inefficacy. The Berlin Wall suffered a similar fate. Not unlike the Maginot Line in the 1930s East Berliners decided not to scale the Wall anymore or build tunnels under it but to move around it by seeking refuge in the German embassies of Prague and Budapest, hoping to escape through the already open Hungarian border in the early summer of 1989.

Not only is the Berlin Wall historically situated and contextualized by means of the following short overview but it shows, by rephrasing Balibar's thoughts on borders slightly, walls are never just one thing. They are highly complex manifestations in space, changing over time, distributing the sensible, negotiating participation in space.

- [Neolithic Walls–Corrals, Hedges and 'Ecological and Spiritual' Membranes](#)

According to Tobias Prüwer, constructing walls is as old as civilization itself. Prehistoric walls were used in hunter-gatherer societies as corrals to chase, herd and kill animals. In a

sedentary lifestyle, on the other hand, walls became part of the architectural structure of protection. Walls started to enclose human dwellings, shielding against the unpredictability of nature, providing comfort as well as functioning as storage spaces for grain (Prüwer 10-13). In other words, in sedentary societies walls and hedges were used to shape the earth, grow crops and protect livestock. Walls and hedges had a ‘nurturing’ function, nurturing and defining the physical as well as social landscape. A Hedge generally referred to an enclosure and consisted of stones, shrubs and trees found on the land (Oles 29). The German word ‘Gehege’ is still used to express both functions, a hunting ground and, more generally, an enclosure of land to keep animals.⁶¹

The unusual ‘Gehege’ of the Neolithic village of Skara Brae (approx. 3000 BCE) on the Orkney Islands, for example, consisted of vegetal and animal household refuse. The earthen compost pile, Thomas Oles points out in *Walls* (2015), created heat, kept humans warm and enabled human life to flourish within. The prehistoric ‘waste wall’, archaeologists assume, provided an intimate link to the world of the past, possibly the life of past generations. Individual houses were made of stone, whose walls were not only insulated by the compost material but also housed the dead (Oles 26-28). The extraordinary earthen bank, which enclosed the village of Skara Brae, functioned as ecological membrane, filtering the exchange between inside and outside, as well as literally functioning as binding material between the life of past and present residents.

Other prehistoric walls, which directly connected the here with the beyond, can be found at Catalhöyük (approx. 6500 BCE) on the Konya plain in Central Turkey. Agriculture and trade made the settlement of Catalhöyük prosperous and large, housing up to 6000 inhabitants. Not unlike Skara Brae, no designated area for a religious practice can be

⁶¹ See *Duden*, meaning and etymology of Gehege, from Middle High German *gehege*, Old High German *gahagium*, enclosure; generally used in the sense of animal enclosure, in hunter’s jargon it refers to the hunting ground; www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Gehege. Accessed 25 August 2021.

identified. However, on the walls of approximately forty houses of the ancient city, wall paintings were found, which depicted domesticated and wild animals, such as the aurochs, as well as the bucrania of the same animal, which were most likely of a cultic origin. Together with striking traces of handprints on walls, seen as being part of a ceremonial practice when replastering them, religion is assumed to be practiced on and through domestic walls themselves: “People placed their hands on the walls because those walls were ‘a membrane between them and the spirit realm.’” (Oles 38)

- [Ancient Walls–Hedges and ‘Civilizational’ Barriers, Bordering Membranes and Symbols of Empire](#)

In antiquity, Astrid Nunn stresses in *Mauern als Grenzen* (2009), walls served different functions, among them, as already mentioned, to protect livestock, to demarcate and protect arable land and the peasants, who worked the land, from nomadic raids. While these, protective walls touched on ownership and agricultural profits to be made, they did not express territorial claims to power. The concept of territories and borders was rather vague in antiquity, linear borders being a result of the emergence of the modern nation state and the imperialist, colonialist practice of grabbing and staking out land in the 19th century. Natural barriers such as mountain ranges, rivers, woodlands or deserts were perceived as borders, on top of which untouchable, uninhabited mythical borders enclosed the known world. Walls were built primarily as a means of defence against unwelcome outsiders as well as a means of channelling trade with those, whose lifestyle, whether nomadic or sedentary, was seen as incompatible with the own civilizational standards. Walls, which enclosed a particular territory, fostered the feeling of belonging while setting up imaginary boundaries of a socio-cultural nature (9-13).

In this way, the Great Wall of China, commonly believed to be one, homogenous, long (more than 5000km) wall, having outlasted more than 2000 years (the first wall was

built in the 7th century BCE), will turn out to be a conglomerate of walls, built or extended at different times for the purpose of protecting the ancient Chinese states and later Imperial China against various nomadic tribes from the Eurasian Steppe. While protection was the desired effect of the Chinese wall(s), the most well-known being the wall of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the ‘Great Wall’, according to Alexander Koch, served, above all, as a monumental cultural barrier:

Hier, also jenseits der Mauern, perfekt an ein Leben in der Steppe angepasste Nomaden, die eine klassische Weidewirtschaft, vor allem Viehzucht betrieben, dort, auf chinesischem Territorium sesshafte Bevölkerungsgruppen, die Ackerbau betrieben, in Siedlungen lebten und Hochkulturen hervorbrachten. Die Große Mauer war damit von Anbeginn eher eine monumentale Kulturgrenze als ein wirksamer Schutzwall vor feindlichen Angriffen. (Koch 159)

Here, meaning beyond the walls, nomads being perfectly adapted to a life on the Steppe, doing pasture farming instead of breeding livestock, there, on Chinese territory, sedentary population groups, cultivating the land, living in settlements and advancing civilization. The Great Wall was therefore from the very beginning rather a monumental cultural boundary than an effective fortified barrier against enemy attacks. (Koch 159; my trans.)

By demarcating territory under Chinese rule from territory, which was not part of Imperial China, a Chinese collective identity was reinforced and, ideologically, strictly separated from what was considered to be uncivilized, barbarian and located beyond the wall. Despite great efforts to maintain a strict separation as well as an efficient, fortified defence, at times the wall(s) channelled a lively exchange of goods between the Chinese and their nomadic neighbours rather than keeping them apart. Alexander Koch speaks of the emergence of

markets and organised trade in close proximity to the wall(s). Chinese jade, silk, mirrors and grain were traded against fur, leather and horses, on offer by the nomadic tribes from the Steppe (160). By the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the 'Great Wall' was losing its significance, since the succeeding Qing emperors (1644-1912) ruled over territories on both sides of the 'Great Wall'. The 'Great Wall of China' would have been forever buried in oblivion and continued to be used by locals as quarry for the provision of construction material, if Mao Zedong had not realized its propagandistic potential for the People's Republic of China (1949-present). Only three years after the foundation of the People's Republic a significant stretch of the Great Wall north of Beijing was re-erected, serving as a popular destination for foreign state visitors. The reconstruction of the 'Great Wall' reached its height in the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, who called for the complete rehabilitation of a national symbol all Chinese citizens were expected to be able to identify with:

Die Große Mauer ist seit vielen Jahren ein Mythos, sie steht für eine bis heute ungebrochene Vorstellung und ist ein wichtiges Motiv von nationaler Symbolkraft. Sie vertritt ein bauliches Monument der Superlative, das zunächst chinesische Politiker für ihre Anliegen zu nutzen wussten, inzwischen aber längst von der chinesischen Nation in Anspruch genommen wird. Die Chinesen sind stolz auf ihre Große Mauer als Symbol der Stärke und historischen Einheit Chinas. (Koch 164)

The Great Wall has been a myth for many years, it stands for an, until today, unbroken belief and is an important national emblem. The belief is fed by a monument of superlatives, which at first was cleverly used by Chinese politicians for their own purposes, by now it has been appropriated by the Chinese nation.

The Chinese are proud of their Great Wall as symbol of strength and historical unity in China. (Koch 164; my trans.)

Similarly, the Roman Limes, built after the Romans lost against the alliance of Germanic tribes in 9 CE in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, demarcated Germania Superior and Raetia, the Roman provinces west of the Rhine and north of the Danube, from territory occupied by 'non-romanised' Germanic tribes. As visible symbol of the Roman Empire's outer border, the Limes signified an outer limit to the "Imperium sine Fine" (Scheuerbrandt 100-101) mission, unlimited Roman expansion, which until then had been propagated. It also established a clear-cut legal and cultural border between those, who had the rights to enjoy the "Pax Romana" (Scheuerbrandt 101)⁶² within the Roman Empire's limits and those, who were excluded from Roman civil rights.

Up until the 4th century CE the Limes Romanus covered approximately 7000 km. By first clearing a path in the forest and then adding wooden observation towers, wooden palisades, forts, and roads of transport for the Roman border legions, the Limes came into being and evolved over centuries. It was never meant to function as an unsurmountable barrier or effective means of defence, as the Limes was too long and too poorly staffed to be able to withhold a serious attack from the Germanic tribes. The Limes rather demarcated a 'borderline' as well as designating a contact zone between two cultural areas, according to Jörg Scheuerbrandt in 'Der Limes: Grenze des Imperium Romanum zu den Germanen' (2009): "Der Limes war die sichtbare Abgrenzung des römischen Provinzgebietes von der barbarisch geprägten Außenwelt. Hier wurde der Grenzverkehr kanalisiert, kontrolliert und reguliert." 'The Limes was the visible boundary between Roman territory and the outside

⁶² See Jörg Scheuerbrandt, 'Der Limes: Grenze des Imperium Romanum zu den Germanen' (2009). Scheuerbrandt stresses that those, who succumbed to Roman rule, enjoyed considerable civil rights. Within the Roman Empire universal Roman law was applied, a common currency and a common lingua franca (Latin) guaranteed a certain degree of equality and prosperity (101-102).

world, characterized as barbaric. It was here that border traffic was channelled, controlled and regulated.’ (93; my translation)

Even though ‘*limes*’ in the sense of ‘*finis and limes*’ (limit and line), which originally designated in Roman property law the agreement between two neighboring property owners of their common borderline, has ever since signified a linear, territorial, political border, the *Limes Romanus* represented a border zone rather than a clear-cut border (Komlosy 14-15).

In *Grenzen* (2018) Andrea Komlosy distinguishes between the concept of *limes* (Latin) in the sense of a crossing path, with equivalent German words such as “*Saum, Bord*” and “*Rain*” ‘Border(lands), bounds’ and ‘confines’ (Komlosy 16) designating a border zone and a liminal space, *limes* (Latin) in the sense of land and property rights and contested borders with the German equivalents of “*Grenze, Schwelle, Mauer, Wall, Mark*” and “*Front*” ‘Boundary, limit, wall, border zone’ and ‘territorial expansion’ (Komlosy 16) and *limes* and *finis* (Latin) in the sense of a linear border with its German equivalent “*Grenze*” ‘Boundary, border’ (Komlosy 16).

The versatility and many-sidedness of *limes* as ‘border concept’ and its historical development via Roman property law, Roman territorial expansion and the limits of the very same expansion, demonstrates the complexity of ancient border walls and their functions.

- [Medieval, Early Modern and Modern Walls–Land, City and Property Rights, Linear Borders and Fortified Frontlines](#)

While in German words like *Saum, Bord, Mark* clearly referred to border zones, German *Grenze*, a Slavonic loanword, which replaced these older expressions from the 16th century, came to designate land and property borders, borderlands, fortified borders of territorial expansion and eventually the clear-cut territorial borderlines of the modern nation state

(Komlosy 14). Today's concept of 'Grenze', of a borderline, has not only historically evolved but connotes more than one process of demarcation and differentiation.

Medieval city walls, for example, functioned as means of defence of the citizens within the *Stadtgrenze*, the city's border. At the same time, they regulated passage in and out of the city for the purpose of the exchange of goods and services. For Thomas Oles, medieval walled cities were places of 'fortified' habitation, with designated zones of contact between the inside and outside, separated by the city's walls, channeled by the city's gates. It was in the "shadow of the wall" (64), where intra-mural (eg.: markets) and extra-mural activities (eg.: housing the victims of the plague) were organized and controlled, that the modern city emerged (64).

Medieval 'Wehrmauern', walls of defence, whose heyday was in the 12th and 13th century, gradually transformed from defensive walls into 'toll walls', demarcating and designating urban areas of trade in the 16th and 17th century (Prüwer 49-51). Medieval city dwellers, who traded with local farmers and merchants from the region, were, like Roman citizens, protected against intruders from outside as well as legally bound. They enjoyed city rights as well as obligations (owning property and paying taxes), above all they enjoyed freedom from serfdom and feudal despotism of the surrounding countryside. The "Stadtluft macht frei" 'Town air breathes freedom' (Prüwer 47; my trans.) slogan, which was coined in the 18th century, glorifying the life of the medieval burghers, indirectly referred to the unfreedom of those, who worked on or leased aristocratic land. Walls and fences encircling the city granted the citizens civil rights and freedoms the peasant population was denied (Prüwer 47-48).

From the 17th century also, common land, such as moors, heaths, fens or marshes, started to be enclosed by dry-stone walls in England, transferring public ownership into private property, giving way to capitalist notions of cultivating land for profit making and

paving the way for the industrial revolution (Kesselring 384). In ‘Reflections on Sustainability’ (2014) Thomas Kesselring points out that many of the enclosed plots, which had formerly served as common land to nurture all villagers in form food, fuel and building materials, were converted into privately owned grazing land for the keeping of livestock, primarily sheep. The resulting wool production, together with the mechanization of spinning and weaving mills, provided the necessary preconditions for the English industrial revolution (1760-1840). Kesselring sees in the enclosing dry-stone walls of the 17th and 18th century double edged swords, constituting the capitalist mode of production and notions of progress while depriving villagers of their livelihood, forcing them to migrate and depopulating entire counties:

This development process has a reverse side: many people fell into poverty with the privatization of land. Entire villages were abandoned and fell into disrepair.

The exploitation of natural resources—which had already been taking place modestly for centuries—accelerated by leaps and bounds. ... without the transformation of migrating rural populations into the industrial urban proletariat in the cities, there would never have been a boom in factories. (385)

Not only notions of the economic sovereignty of private property but also new notions of the political sovereignty of the nation gave new impetus to the function and meaning of partitioning walls. Thomas Oles refers to John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) and compares Locke’s idea of the need for a social contract to Thomas Hobbes’ concept, argued in *Leviathan* (1651), of the necessary handover of power to the sovereign in order to avoid lethal conflicts within ‘the social body’: “Whereas for Hobbes the social contract was rooted in people’s need to preserve their own bodies, for Locke its original and chief function was to protect *property*.” (Oles 68) By staking out property, transforming a piece of common ‘waste’ land into private land for cultivation, Oles sees the nation state in

the making: since for Locke “the natural right to property preceded all other forms of sovereignty.” (Oles 69) Locke uses the metaphor of the fence, at once sign and material structure of fenced in, private property, as agreement and ideal relationship between the state ruler and the ruled in, the empowered, new property holders (Oles 71). When rights of property replace rights of use, the resulting dividing fences and walls become constitutive of a nation based on capitalism (Oles 81).

Apart from outlining private property, fences and walls became the signature lines on the imperialist maps of the 19th century. As already mentioned, the concept of a linear border instead of a border zone belongs to the emergence of the modern nation state and especially to the imperialist practice of dividing up entire continents by means of ‘a pencil and a ruler’ on the imperialist map of the world. At the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, convened by German Reich chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the African continent was carved up among the competing European colonial powers into colonial territories and spheres of interest. The geopolitical divisions were driven by colonial and economic interests, disregarding grown and natural borders and peoples. The colonized had no voice in ‘the scramble for Africa’⁶³. According to Astrid Nunn approximately 70% of today’s borders were designed on paper, demarcated, and fortified between 1885 and 1910 (9).

While in the late 19th century European colonial territorial claims were made and delineated on the African continent, in the 20th century the fortified frontlines of the First and Second World War on the European continent were meant as a means of spectacular defence against enemy attacks. The concrete fortifications and underground bunkers of the French

⁶³ See www.bpb.de/apuz/202989/bismarck-und-der-kolonialismus?p=1. Accessed 9 September 2021. In ‘Bismarck und der Kolonialismus’ (2015) Jürgen Zimmerer points out that, at the Berlin Conference, the diplomats of the European colonial nations, the US and the Ottoman Empire mainly discussed free trade in the Congo Basin, freedom of navigation on the Niger and Congo and rules and regulations about territorial claims by the colonial powers. The endeavor of the colonial powers of entirely opening up trade on the African continent, was regarded as being in the interest of the ruled over, the colonized peoples, who would benefit from the merits of ‘civilization’ in ‘exchange’.

Maginot Line built in the 1930s against foreign invasion, the concrete fortifications and bunkers of the German Westwall and Atlantikwall built by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s as a means of defence against Western Europe and an anticipated Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe, share one thing in common. According to Astrid Nunn they only fulfilled their function in the medium-term; in the long run they were either overrun or the attacking military forces moved around them, as in the case of the Maginot Line. Despite their eventual inefficacy, the fortified frontlines of the First and Second World War are cunningly alive in the popular imagination (Nunn 21-22). If we are to agree with Paul Virilio, it might be the spectacularity of the military fortifications themselves rather than their functionality, which fascinates the postwar visitor. In *Bunker Archeology* (1976) the abandoned, concrete, bunkers of Hitler's infamous Atlantikwall⁶⁴ remind Paul Virilio of discrete objects, architectural, 'funeral' archetypes, such as Egyptian mastabas or Etruscan tombs, "funerary monuments of the German dream." (29) The monolithic structures, which have quasi-naturally become part of the postwar European littoral landscape, seemingly assume anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms and embody the ultimate theatrical gestures of the (failing) Nazi war machinery (45-47).

The borderline between communist and capitalist Europe (1945 to 1991) symbolized as 'Iron Curtain'⁶⁵, part and parcel of the propagandistic Cold War machinery, must be seen

⁶⁴ See www.atlantikwalleurope.eu/en/page/the-atlantikwall. Accessed 18 September 2021. The Atlantic Wall, consisting of concrete bunkers, manmade barriers and natural obstacles, was built between 1942 and 1945 and meant to completely seal off Nazi-occupied Western Europe, from the North Sea to the Atlantic Coast, against an Allied sea-borne invasion. The West-European coast was expected to be transformed into an impregnable fortification and should ease defence at a time when Nazi Germany was preoccupied with its Eastern front. Due to lack of materials and manpower 6000 out of the expected 15000 bunkers were built along the French, Belgian and Dutch coast. Along 6200 kilometers of coastline, fortifications, bunkers and brickwork buildings together with anti-tank ditches and anti-tank walls were erected until the end of the Second World War despite clear indications of eventual military superfluosity.

⁶⁵ See Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain* (2007), 375-376. The origin of the metaphor of the Iron Curtain can, according to Patrick Wright, be traced to 19th century European theatres where literal iron curtains were introduced, in order to prevent fire from spreading by creating a *complete barrier* between stage and audience. Wright points out that the first person to take the metaphor from the theatre to international politics was the British writer and convinced internationalist Vernon Lee. For Lee, the impenetrable barrier functioned like a distorting mirror and psychological deadlock cancelling mutual empathy and exchange at the time of the First World War (115). In 1946, Winston Churchill used the metaphor of the 'Iron Curtain' in his well-known speech

as a particular kind of frontline. For Andrea Komlosy, the heavily fortified borderline between communist and capitalist states must be understood as a frontline, a line of (cold) war and contestation, where human and other traffic were severely restricted and the borderline of states coincided and was additionally loaded with socio-economic, political and ideological differences (127).

The Berlin Wall, as concrete manifestation of the 'Iron Curtain' undoubtedly was such a frontline, where conflicts were staged and 'immortalised' in form of iconic images. In 'Mauerbilder: Ikonen im Kalten Krieg' (2011) Elena Demke sees the Berlin Wall and images of the Wall as starting point and means of identification as well as allocation of good and bad in the Cold War. Both sides, according to Demke, used the Wall in propagandistic images in order to denounce the other side. On August 31, 1961, the East German newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* juxtaposed images of soldiers of the Wehrmacht tearing down a street barrier at the border with soon-to-be-occupied Poland and SA-troops triumphantly marching through the Brandenburg Gate in 1939 with the image of militia men protecting the now socialist border gate against fascism, imperialism and capitalism in 1961 (116).

Demke points out that the 'war of images' started soon after West Berlin had been cordoned off and the Wall was erected in 1961. From August 15, 1961 the West German newspaper *Berliner Morgenpost* had been publishing a daily image series, documenting the erection of the Wall under the title—Ulbricht's⁶⁶ concentration camp—, comparing the increasingly fortified barbed wire, inner-city border with Nazi concentration camps. In later years, especially at the time of political détente in the 1970s, the FRG abstained from accusations of fascism, whereas the GDR continued to defend the Wall as necessary, peace-making anti-fascist protection barrier against West Berlin and West Germany (116).

'The Sinews of Peace' at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. The 'Iron Curtain' as political symbol described the allegedly unbridgeable divide between capitalist Western and communist Eastern Europe and at the same time was meant to (discursively) contain communism within its boundaries.

⁶⁶ Walter Ulbricht, first secretary of the SED in the GDR from 1950-1971.

The Berlin Wall (1961-1989) was more than a zonal boundary turned state boundary while always already embodying a geopolitical divide. Andrea Komlosy's tripartite conceptualisation of *limes* as borderline, limit, contested or to-be-agreed-on border and border zone (Komlosy 14; 106-107) seems to be useful. A former 'crossing path' had been transformed into a contested border and *limes* as limit, cordoning off the 'capitalist realm' from the 'communist realm', while over the 28 years of the Wall's existence, the Wall as fortified linear border also developed into a border zone and liminal space. Treaties enabled and channelled traffic between East and West Berlin, through the Wall's 'gates'⁶⁷. In the 1970s and 1980s artistic interventions, graffiti and Wall art on the Wall's Western side were meant to symbolically overcome the Wall and communicate with the 'other' side. As sovereign, socialist 'Gehege' it protected and enabled the socialist state and its ruling elite while severely limiting its population, 'hunting down' opponents.

Hedges and advanced sensor engineering were to replace a large part of the fortification system behind the frontline wall by 2000. In 1988 GDR military engineers started drawing up plans for a high-tech wall consisting of electronic sensors registering escape attempts before reaching the actual border zone, which would be largely secured by densely grown hedges. The future GDR's security was envisioned as the seamless intertwining of high tech with natural obstacles (Cramer and Rütenik 174).

History of Walls in Berlin and the Berlin Wall

From the Middle Ages walls and hedges were a necessary part of city and village life. The so called 'Einhegungspflicht', the obligation to fence in the city or village had to be carried out

⁶⁷ See Johannes Cramer and Tobias Rütenik, *Die Baugeschichte der Berliner Mauer* (2011). Up to August 13, 1961, at 81 Allied checkpoints passage from the American, British, French to the Soviet occupation zone was permitted. After the cordoning off of West Berlin, the number of checkpoints dramatically decreased to 12, after the erection of the Wall human and other traffic between East and West Berlin was channeled at seven inner-city checkpoints. There were specific checkpoints for specific groups of people: foreigners, diplomats, personnel of the Allied forces, West Germans and West Berliners. (16; 175-179).

by its inhabitants. The first ‘walls’ around the medieval twin cities of Berlin and Cöln, founded at the turn from the 12th to the 13th century CE, were most likely hedges and fences. In *Steinzeit: Mauern in Berlin* (2011) Olaf Briese states that only from the end of the 13th and in the 14th century stone and brick walls started to enclose Berlin-Cöln (56-57). In exchange for sovereign, feudal protection the city and its burghers were forced to finance and built a ‘protective wall’, which was meant to function as a means of defence against outside intruders but above all symbolised the margrave’s power to tax the city. Contrary to common depictions of medieval fortified cities, these, ‘unloved’ walls were not homogeneous and aesthetically pleasing. They consisted of a conglomerate of materials and were ‘anarchic walls’ in Briese’s eyes, displaying the city dwellers’ grudging resistance to taxation and the imposed fencing in (57-60).

During the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), from 1626, the electors of Brandenburg and dukes of Prussia transformed Berlin-Cöln into a properly fortified city with a permanent garrison. By the end of the 17th century 13 bastions, eight-meter-high and six-meter-wide defensive walls and ditches of a width of 55 meters were proof of the transformation of the medieval twin city into a Baroque star fort, where the electors ruled with absolutist power over their subjects (Briese 95-97). While visually impressive because of the serenity of the early modern geometry of the city’s ramparts, Briese points out that, on the material level, the construction was a waste of time. It took 25 years to build the fortification system around Berlin-Cöln, after which the defensive walls and bastions existed for another 26 years before they stopped serving their purpose and were demolished. On the ideological level, the planned, fortified city represented the new form of absolutist and centralized power of the sovereign, mirrored by the streamlined, ‘disciplinary’ form and bird-eye views from its ramparts and bastions as well as by the expansion of the twin city in a grid-like system, dominated by the military needs of the permanent garrison (102-105). Due to the city’s

growth in the 18th century, its ramparts became useless and were replaced by an ‘Akzisemauer’, an excise wall, where taxes on all goods, which passed the city’s gates, were collected. In addition, the ‘Akzisemauer’ served the dual function of customs and anti-desertion wall, at a time when forced recruitment into military service under Frederik William I of Prussia (1688-1740), known as the ‘soldier king’, was intensified and the ‘inner militarization’ of Prussia was in full swing (Briese 114-120). While under the ‘soldier king’ the customs wall in Berlin and Cöln, which had become part of it in 1710, consisted of a ring of wooden palisades and ditches, the southern part of the city was later ‘ennobled’ by an ‘Akzisemauer’ made of stone. For Briese, the plastered, ornamental, stone wall perfectly camouflaged, what it stood for: repression by taxation. The de facto financial harassment of the city’s burghers was hidden behind a Baroque facade (129). Even the Brandenburg Gate, which was originally conceived as a monumental rather than a functional gate, was not spared by the customs wall but simply incorporated into it:

Das Tor hatte, wie alle anderen Berliner Tore auch, mehrere Aufgaben. Vor allem war es eine repräsentative Stadtdominante, ein Triumphtor mit Signalcharakter nach innen: pure absolutistische Selbstfeier, ein nicht nur verschämtes, sondern unverschämtes Symbol der Adelsmacht am Ort finanzieller Repression gegen den Bürger. (134-135)

The gate had, like all other Berlin gates too, several functions. Above all it was representative and visually dominated the city, it was a triumphal gate with inward looking signal character: pure absolutist self-adulation, a not only bashful but unabashed symbol of aristocratic might at the place of financial repression against the burgher. (134-135; my trans.)

The excise wall enclosing Berlin was made porous and eventually superfluous by the advent of the industrial revolution and the city's growth in the 19th and early 20th century. For trains and other forms of modern transport the customs wall was an impractical barrier and impediment to modernity, which is why it was demolished by 1868.

Berlin's extraordinary population growth, with the population rising to more than four million by 1925, demanded quick solutions to a growing housing crisis for the industrial proletariat associated with the proliferation of *Mietskasernen*, the rental barracks, which were densely built multistorey apartment blocks. The less desirable apartments of the *Mietskasernen* were located at the back, facing a small courtyard. Due to notorious overcrowding, poor sanitation, and unhealthy living conditions, they came to symbolize the plight of Berlin's working class (19-21).

Olaf Briese mentions *Meyer's Hof* in the Berlin district of Wedding, founded in 1874, as an extremely densely built *Mietskaserne*. Not only a proletarian 'ghetto' with seven courtyards, housing 1,200 people, it also combined living, working and production space, exemplifying the walled-in existence of its inhabitants at the time of the industrial revolution (252).

While the city's walls were torn down in the latter part of the 19th century in order to accommodate technical progress and socio-economic change, fully unleashing capitalist production and proletarian misery (Briese 252), the geopolitical conditions of the Cold War, hundred years later, resulted in the 'resurrection' of an archaic looking, enclosing ring around West Berlin.

The modern, enclosing ring around West Berlin must be differentiated from the medieval palisades or the Baroque star-fort around Berlin-Cöln, which protected and taxed those, who enjoyed city and property rights, and channeled trade at the city gates. However, tendencies and similarities can be detected. A combination of freedom, protection and

repression ruled over the city's burghers: freedom from serfdom and freedom to own property while being repressed through taxation. In the 18th century, the taxation wall served as anti-desertion wall in a then highly militarized, geometrically streamlined and more easily controllable city, preventing soldiers from defection. When the city's walls were demolished in the 19th century, infamous Mietskasernen, rental barracks, enclosed the city's workers and kept them in miserable conditions.

As will be shown, the Berlin Wall protected the socialist state in the 1960s against impossible competition from the West, granting the GDR the freedom of building socialism within a clearly confined space, while repressing the personal liberties of its citizens.

History and Aesthetics of the Different Generations of the Wall

In their comprehensive study on the building history of the Berlin Wall, *Die Baugeschichte der Berliner Mauer* (2011), Johannes Cramer and Tobias Rütenik stress several misconceptions about the Berlin Wall. First of all, today's image of the Berlin Wall, which has been engrained in our collective memory, is determined by *Grenzmauer 75*, the last 'generation' and fifth expansion stage of the Wall, which started replacing older versions from the mid-1970s:

Die für die aktuelle Wahrnehmung der Berliner Mauer maßgebliche Grenzmauer 75 aus *Betonfertigteilen der fünften Ausbaustufe* (1976-1982/83) entstand an der Außengrenze auf etwa einem Fünftel und an der Innengrenze auf etwa drei Vierteln der Gesamtlänge, insgesamt also auf allenfalls einem Drittel der Grenze gebaut. (224)

Grenzmauer 75, playing a significant role for current perception of the Berlin Wall, was made from *prefabricated concrete components of the fifth expansion*

stage (1976-1982/83) and covered, considering the entire length, approximately one fifth of the outer border and three quarters of the inner-city border, in total it was built, at best, on a third of the border. (224; my trans.)

In other words, our current perception of the Wall has been shaped by and is fixated on a particular section of the Wall (inner-city frontline wall) at a particular time (late 1970s and 1980s), both of which have been universalized and fetishized as *the* image of the Berlin Wall. While a 'Berlin Wall fragment' becomes frozen in time and comes to stand in for the whole fortification system, the building process in form of choice and optimization of building materials, the history of different wall generations and expansion stages depending on the number and success of escape attempts, the development of a border zone with a frontline and hinterland wall, the expansion and cutback of military deterrents and obstacles in the extended border zone due to the changing geopolitical climate—gets lost.

According to Cramer and Rütenik, it is problematic if not misleading to speak of 'four or more generations' of the Wall, conjuring up the image of a clear and complete chronological order of successive barriers, consisting of barbed wire and fences, bricks and breeze blocks, finally prefabricated concrete segments. In reality, frontline and hinterland wall, inner-city and outer-city border developed differently and at different speeds. While large parts of the frontline wall eventually consisted of concrete segments, a considerable part of the hinterland was secured not by a wall but by wire mesh fences. Up to the fourth expansion stage in the building process the fortified barrier between East and West Berlin, which it also enclosed, was a provisional arrangement, hastily built and made up of a conglomerate of materials. Only from the mid-1960s did systematic planning, streamlined construction, made possible through efforts of straightening the Wall's course, and a growing concern about the aesthetics of the frontline wall come to the fore (220-225).

It was at the inner-city border between East and West Berlin, where the Wall cut through the old city center, that new ‘generations’ of the Wall were introduced, since the stretch between Brandenburg Gate and Checkpoint Charlie continued to remain the center of geopolitical and media attention.

Zwischen Brandenburger Tor und Checkpoint Charlie zerschnitt die Mauer das alte Zentrum Berlins mit den wichtigen Verkehrsverbindungen zwischen den Ost- und den Westsektoren, wie der Straße Unter den Linden, der Friedrichstraße und dem Potsdamer Platz. ... Durch die große historische und politische Bedeutung des Ortes richtete sich am 13. August 1961 die Aufmerksamkeit der Weltöffentlichkeit vor allem auf diesen fast 2 km langen Grenzverlauf. Was hier geschah, bestimmt im Wesentlichen bis heute unser Bild von der Mauer. Die Bekanntheit des Ortes nutzte auch die DDR-Regierung für ihre Propaganda. Neue „Mauergenerationen“ wurden hier meist zuerst eingeführt. Nirgendwo war das „ästhetische und geordnete Erscheinungsbild“ der Mauer so wichtig wie hier.

(228)

Between Brandenburg Gate and Checkpoint Charlie the Wall cut through the old center of Berlin with its important traffic connections between the Eastern and Western sectors, such as the street Unter den Linden, Friedrichstraße and Potsdamer Platz. ... Because of the great historical and political importance of the place the attention of the world was directed on August 13, 1961, above all towards these 2 km of the borderline. What happened here, still dominates our perception of the Wall. The prominence of the place was also instrumentalized by the GDR government for their propaganda. It was here that new “generations of

the Wall” were mostly introduced. Nowhere else was the “aesthetic and orderly appearance” of the Wall as important as here. (228; my trans.)

While it is necessary to differentiate between different ‘generations’ of the Wall, when discussing their aesthetics, it is important to keep in mind that at no point in the Wall’s 28-year existence did one ‘generation’ alone enclose West Berlin. The Wall’s Western frontline wall, according to Cramer and Rütenik, was constantly homogenized and optimized, whereas the hinterland wall consisted of a conglomerate of concrete walls, garden and courtyard walls and fences until 1989 (90).

In ‘The Wall as a Wall: Some Thoughts on Concrete’ (2011) Olaf Briese points out what came before the Wall: a ‘wall of people’ dividing West from East Berliners: “The very first sealing of the border was done with physical bodies.” (714) East German militia men secured the border to West Berlin on August 13, 1961, demonstrating their readiness to defend potential, Western, imperialist attacks against the socialist state, upholding, in Briese’s eyes, the ideal of “a premodern form of direct physicality” (714). The ‘wall of people’ was quickly followed by rolls of barbed wire, which had two significant disadvantages: barbed wire evoked images of imprisonment (concentration camps, prisoner of war camps) and could not withstand heavy vehicles crushing through (Briese a, 715). Barbed wire⁶⁸, as Anke Kuhrmann also stresses in *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011), served as a popular motif for Western journalists, who used it as ‘ornament’ or ‘frame’ for images relating to the terrible fate of the *other* Germany, thus visually equating the GDR with imprisonment: “Schnell sprach die westdeutsche Presse von dem “Gefängnis DDR” oder “KZ-DDR”. Stacheldrahtmotive zierten in der BRD politische Flugblätter und Broschüren der späten 1950er und frühen 1960er Jahre.” ‘Quickly the West German Press talked about

⁶⁸ See also Gerhard Paul, *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016). Paul stresses that barbed wire functioned as the key symbol of the Cold War. Some used it as the metaphor for political violence in general (469).

the “prison GDR” or the “concentration camp GDR”. Barbed wire motifs decorated in the FRG political leaflets and brochures in the late 1950s and early 1960s.’ (66; my trans.)

By September 20, 1961 the decision had been taken by GDR officials to erect the first stretch of a wall. Briese describes the wall of the ‘first generation’ as a conglomerate of breeze block elements, bricks and concrete, still topped by barbed wire. The rough and shoddy, grey appearance of the Wall of the ‘first generation’, mainly functioned as a (hastily built) means of deterrence and was still associated with concentration or prisoner of war camp architecture⁶⁹.

The Wall’s ‘second generation’ (from 1962) was characterized by minor realignments of the ‘first generation’. In particularly exposed areas, such as the Brandenburg Gate or Checkpoint Charlie, the ‘first generation’ was replaced by a barrier of oblong concrete elements piled on top of each other with a width of 2 m, in order to prevent tanks and heavy vehicles from breaking through.

One year after the border in Berlin had been fortified by barbed wire and a mostly breeze block wall, the GDR’s military strategists started to implement their idea of turning the barrier into a fortification system consisting of a frontline wall (Western wall) a control strip, a hinterland wall and an additional border zone. Already in the mid-1960s the military zone between frontline and hinterland wall/fence consisted of a double run of anti-vehicle barriers and anti-vehicle trenches, a control strip, a light strip with floodlights, a border patrol road, observation towers, and an alarm fence. Wherever necessary houses were evacuated, its population forcibly re-settled. Then the buildings were demolished and only the bricked-up ground floor facade was left standing, which functioned as frontline wall until the late 1970s

⁶⁹ In *Geteilte Ansichten* (2006) Maren Ullrich points out that the wooden observation towers and the barbed wire of the first generation of the Wall, reminded Germans of concentration camp architecture, leading to simplistic connotations, where the communist regime was equated with the Nazi dictatorship because of similarities of architectonic surface structures (22).

(Cramer and Rütenik 257-264). Especially at Bernauerstraße, where many of the tenement houses, standing next to the borderline were demolished, the Wall's shoddy appearance continued until the late 1970s or early 1980s. Briese speaks of an architectural orgy, a mélange of a barbed wire, brick and concrete wall, integrating old cemetery walls as well as bricked up house facades at times (717-718).

In order to change the Wall's makeshift appearance, plans were drawn for a 'third generation' in 1965, whose main elements consisted of industrially produced concrete slabs. These were horizontally inserted between steel girders or concrete posts and topped by a concrete sewage pipe with a total height of 2,9 m. The introduction of the sewage pipe made scaling difficult.

While the Wall of the fourth generation was given a generally more consistent, functional appearance, it proved not to be sturdy enough to withstand collisions with heavy vehicles and escapees still managed to scale it (Briese a, 715). Only with the Wall of the 'fifth generation', Grenzmauer 75, built from 1975 onwards, was scaling without the help of, for example, a ladder made impossible. Instead of horizontal, vertical concrete slabs were used, which were standardized, easily erected and hard to overturn, as well as topped by the sewage pipe. It's smooth surface—it was whitewashed on the Western side as well as on the inner side of frontline and hinterland wall—made the Wall less conspicuous, low-key, of sober military character, hiding a military system of observation and control behind its Western face.

With Grenzmauer 75, different (earlier) aesthetics seemingly come together: prefabricated steel-reinforced concrete segments with a whitewashed finish remind of early 20th century purist architecture as well as conventional military architecture whose preferred material was concrete. Concrete, Adrian Forty writes in *Concrete and Culture* (2012), has always been associated with progressive politics and represents the quintessential building

material of modernity. Concrete, as composite material consisting of water, sand and cement as binding agent, embodied a hardened (social) mass emerging out of disparate elements.

This gave impetus to architecture, murals, bas reliefs out of concrete, which were supposed to celebrate egalitarian politics and the empowerment of the people in the early 20th century.⁷⁰

Indeed, concrete had been the building material of the early twentieth century European architectural avant-garde and their international building style⁷¹. However, during the Cold War, in the 1950s, it was associated with the formalist aesthetics of a Western, cosmopolitan, imperialism, in direct contradiction with the premises of Stalinist socialist realism, which had to be national in form and socialist in content. After Stalin's death in 1953 and the abandonment of German neo-classicist and neo-baroque architectural styles, based on craftsmanship, and preferably the use of bricks and natural stones as building materials, concrete as convenient and cheap alternative was generally accepted in the GDR (Briese a, 718-719).

In this way, the modern, prefabricated, steel-reinforced concrete segments of Grenzmauer 75 were not only easy to produce but also cunningly expressed a 'progressive' politics as well as having a military, protective character⁷², precisely because the production of concrete could be applied to and compared with the emergence of a new socialist society:

⁷⁰ See Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, chapter 5: Forty describes in which way Breslau's newly constructed Centennial Hall out of reinforced concrete irritated German Crown Prince William of Hohenzollern in 1913. It was seemingly built to serve as a space for the congregation of the masses, who, despite their diverse backgrounds, had formed socially progressive, 'classless' and potentially revolutionary unit under its dome. In the same spirit, after the Russian October Revolution in 1917, new buildings built in concrete were meant to foster a "collective social consciousness" (146).

⁷¹ See Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, chapter 4. Forty points out that the universalism of concrete as a building material was falsely equated with the international style as 'universal' style, an architecture and aesthetics indebted to constructions with reinforced concrete, which first emerged in Western European countries such as France in the 1920s (102-103).

⁷² See Forty, *Concrete and Culture*. In the Cold War concrete, according to Forty, was associated with bunkers, hangars, shelters and other military installations, assuming a protective, passive role (149). After Stalin's death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's famous 1954 speech at the Conference of Builders, Architects and Workers, praising the versatility of concrete as building material and denouncing the excesses of socialist realist architecture in the Soviet Union, concrete also became the preferred building material for social housing (150-159).

The socialist ideology of man and society found its appropriate expression in the material of concrete, since it rested on reforming naturally existing materials to a new conglomerate, a homogenous, deindividualized and standardized mass whose production could be planned, and which could be deliberately formed, shaped and reconfigured. Concrete perfectly embodied the key ideological propositions of this newly formed mass of men: it stood for unity, rigidity and permanence ...“repellent,” “impermeable,” “resistant”—were the basics that the Berlin Wall was intended to display. (Briese a, 719)

In another article, ‘Wartungsarm und Formschön’ (2009), Briese writes that the perfectly standardized form of Grenzmauer 75 functioned as collective symbol, representing a perfectly ordered, harmonious society: “standardisierte Qualität einer standardisierten Gesellschaft.” ‘standardized quality of a standardized society’ (441; my trans.).

Above all Grenzmauer 75’s clear symmetry and smooth, white, Western surface reminds Briese of modern, minimalist, functionalist architecture:

Es entwickelte sich eine effiziente, ungeschminkte Formensprache, die auf den Kurs architektonischer Avantgarde einschwenkte: Reduktion auf reine glatte Sachlichkeit, auf pure Architektur, auf bloßen minimalistischen Funktionalismus; ein reinweiß betünchtes Funktionalisat. Die Hinterlandmauer—auf beiden Seiten meist mit aneinandergereihten weißen Quadraten versehen—verstärkte den Gestus einer monumentalen *minimal art*. (Briese b, 441-442)

An efficient, straightforward formal language developed, which turned its course toward the architectural avant-garde: reduction to pure smooth functionalism, pure architecture, simple minimalism; a purely whitewashed functional object. The hinterland wall—most of the time, on both sides, equipped with white

squares—reinforced the gesture of a monumental minimal art. (Briese b, 441-442; my trans.)

The year 1983 plays a prominent role in Briese's aesthetic taxonomy. Not only was the GDR striving for international recognition but was also in dire need of financial support from West Germany, since the second oil crisis (1979) had considerably weakened its economy. The entire Wall, GDR officials had decided, should have a neat, attractive appearance, leading to attempts of kitschy beautification at particularly exposed stretches of the Wall. Thus, at Brandenburg Gate, harmless looking flower ensembles and other greenery, as well as a structurally regular, white, decorative Wall were supposed to please the eye (Briese b, 442). According to Briese, an aesthetics of kitsch was at the same time accompanied by the aesthetics of emptiness. Particularly brutal elements such as anti-vehicle barriers and dog runs were removed from the death strip in order to underline the neat white Western facade and sober grey and white hinterland wall, in between which great, illuminated emptiness confronted the viewer:

Die leere Mitte. ... ein absoluter Raum als Zwischenraum. Ebenso aufgelockert wie komprimiert, besaß die Stadt eine innere Grenze, die sich als expandierende Leerstelle auswies. Sie war urbane Kanüle mit nichts weiter darin als Nicht-Stadt. Was diese Lücke erfüllte war Licht, ewiges Licht. Es hatten sich zwei Perlenschnüre aus Stahlbeton herauskristallisiert, nur beleuchtete Leere dazwischen. (Briese b, 443)

The empty middle. ... an absolute space of in-betweenness. At the same time loose as well as compact, the city possessed an inner border, which represented itself as an expanding emptiness. It was an urban tube with nothing more than non-city in it. What filled this empty stretch was light, eternal light. Two strings

of pearls made from steel-reinforced concrete had emerged, only illuminated emptiness in between. (Briese b, 443; my trans.)

In a bold gesture Briese compares the emptied death strip turned meditative landscape with modern light installations by artists such as Dan Flavin or Olafur Eliasson. While in the 1980s the Wall's whitewashed Western side was increasingly marked by graffiti and Wall art, the fortification system behind it evolved into, what might be called, a modernist white cube⁷³, where demonstratively nothing(ness) was exhibited.

In less flamboyant rhetoric Johannes Cramer and Tobias Rütenik also corroborate Briese's observations. In 1983 documents issued by the GDR border commando 'Mitte' testify that the Berlin Wall fortification system had to be improved in such way, that a visually 'humanitarian' overall impression was to be conveyed towards the West. This entailed several adjustments in the border zone. All too visible signs of a military border such as anti-vehicle barriers were removed. The already mentioned flower boxes, as for example at the Brandenburg Gate, replaced them, functioning as military barriers at the same time. The area between frontline and hinterland wall was demilitarized and the course of the Wall, wherever possible, straightened. Certainly, the Wall's meandering form was not transformed into the clear geometry of a Baroque star fort, but the straightening of the Wall's course concealed the old structures of the city before division (Cramer and Rütenik 257). The border zone expanded eastwards, with the idea of preventing any escape attempts beforehand. Westward-facing firewalls in the border zone were provided, with an additional sheet metal or plastic cladding, hiding crumbling plasterwork underneath. The envisaged 'aesthetic border', which was conceptualised as outwardly aesthetic and transparent, inwardly sober and secure, was to lay the foundations for an overall pleasing Eastern cityscape prior to the 750th

⁷³ See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (1976). The white cube as gallery space embodies modernist aesthetics for Doherty, where objects of art are de-historicized and exhibited out of context. The apparently eternal and autonomous status of the artifact is produced and reinforced by the white 'nothingness', which surrounds them.

anniversary of Berlin in 1987 (Cramer and Rütenik 152). From 1983 then, the Wall's appearance was given priority over its function as military border barrier.

Olaf Briese, in 'Wartungsarm und Formschön' (2009), concludes his aesthetic taxonomy by stressing that less heavily fetishized stretches of the Wall by no means evoked the appearance of an almost invisible, empty monument (for the arts). Because of their rundown, neglected character, the marginalized parts of the Wall were characterized by an aesthetics of the ruinous. Further, the simple fact, that from the Western side observation towers allowed for a good view of and above the fortification system (bird's eye perspective), while from the Eastern side any view (for the normal GDR citizen) of the Wall was heavily sanctioned, enforced an aesthetics of absence resulting in the fetishisation of the unknown other: "Dennoch wurde durch diese Interdiktion das, was nach Westen hin ästhetisch bald als Monument wirkte, nach Osten hin ein instantielles Geheimnis, das sich durch Geheimhaltung potenzierte. ... Es war eine elektrisierende Leerstelle entstanden, ein verborgenes Phantasma, ein mit Bilderverbot belegter Fetisch" 'Still, by means of this interdiction that, which towards the West soon aesthetically seemed like a monument, turned into an instant mystery towards the East, which became even stronger by secretiveness. ... An electrifying emptiness had emerged, a hidden phantasmagoria, an iconoclastic fetish' (446; my trans.)

Briese's aesthetic taxonomy manages to do several things at the same time. As readers we are made aware of the aesthetic aspects of the different 'generations' of the Wall. Because of Briese's foregrounding of the Wall's aesthetics, the Wall's theatricality, its ability to wear different 'masks' and to conjure up different emotions and fantasies at different times (60s, 70s, 80s; night and day) at different stretches of the Wall, becomes evident.

Despite fantasies of total control triggered by the panoramic view from a Western observation platform, the Western gaze was seemingly distracted by the serene whiteness of

the death strip and its dazzling effects, whereas life behind the hinterland wall remained invisible or only partially visible. From the East, the visibility of the Wall for the normal GDR citizen was at best reduced to having a good look at the Brandenburg Gate or secretly watching Western television. Partial views and the repressed or uncomfortable awareness of ever-present blind spots in the field of vision on both sides of the Wall must therefore be counted as another aesthetic (and military) characteristic. In contrast to the enforced partial visibility due to the Wall's material existence, on its Western side the cat and mouse game between the whitewashed, pure, functional architecture of Grenzmauer 75's near invisibility and the aggressive as well as ludic Western interventions in form of graffiti and Wall art, making visible what the East wanted to keep invisible, must be taken into consideration. Eventually the GDR regime gave up the tedious and also costly game of erasing and whitewashing the Wall after each graffiti onslaught. At the same time, an intervention did not seem necessary anymore, the polychrome ornamental carpet between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie had the same dazzling effect as the formerly whitewashed Wall. What lay behind the Wall had once again become invisible, while what was visible was fetishized and boosted the imagination.

In *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016) Gerhard Paul speaks of the dialectics of visibility and invisibility and the importance of visual control in the Cold War. Visual presence was, according to Paul, an important tool in both German dictatorships (fascist; communist) in order to bind the population emotionally and enforce loyalty: "Propagandastrategen generierten >Pseudo-Realitäten<, die die Menschen in einen zeitweisen ästhetischen Rauschzustand versetzten und ihren faktischen Ausschluss von der Macht kompensieren sollten." "Propaganda strategists generated >pseudo-realities<, which temporarily put people in a state of aesthetic intoxication in order to compensate their actual exclusion from power." (735; my trans.)

As functionalist, sober and aesthetically pleasing Anti-fascist Protection Barrier the Wall was supposed to bind the GDR citizen to the socialist state. Western media, on the other hand, chose particular frames and contexts (eg.: the Wall topped by barbed wire or at later stages the Wall covered with graffiti) in order to document, make visible, generate and control a particular reality (eg.: the Wall as prison camp or tourist attraction). At the same time, both sides screened off, made invisible and tried to overwrite the other side's view. The Berlin Wall, in Paul's eyes, was *the* media star of the 20th century (582), no wonder that even its negative presence as well as its eventual demolition had considerable national and international effects.

As Sunil Manghani notes in *Image Critique & The Fall of the Berlin Wall* (2008), the Wall was a *site* as well as a *sight* of contestation (35). As 'media star' the Wall has been predominantly represented from a Western perspective. The Berlin Wall imaginary, a term coined by Manghani in reference to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and imaginary mis/identification in child development⁷⁴, tries to capture this one-sided view of the Wall and West Berlin as *genius loci*, the 'island of the West', the 'free, democratic and capitalist Frontstadt', the frontline city landlocked by the Wall, enclosed by totalitarian communism, constantly fending for its existence (115-116).

The graffiti and wall art on the Western side of the frontline wall in the late 1970s and 1980s were in many ways, as Manghani argues, the signature of the West (126) and part of the Berlin Wall imaginary. What was mirrored back, was the Western freedom of individual aesthetic intervention, defacing the underlying whitewashed, purist aesthetics imposed by the GDR government and military. No 'colourful ornamental carpet' of graffiti and Wall art created by individual artists could be found on the hinterland wall, as the border zone

⁷⁴ See <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm>. Accessed 27 May 2018. In the Lacanian mirror stage the infant identifies with the coherent form of his/ her own reflection in the mirror and internalises the image. In this way the self is experienced and misrecognised as whole rather than as a fragmented entity.

extended much deeper into East Berlin and entry into the border zone was allowed only with a special permit. However, a perspective from the other side of the Wall would have made visible equally interventionist ‘ornamental ribbons’. For example, Walter Womacka’s *Bauchbinde*, an abdominal belt as it was called by East Berliners, a colourful mosaic, glorifying life in the GDR and the benefits of education, decorated Hermann Henselmann’s modernist showpiece architecture—Haus des Lehrers, the house of the teachers—at Alexanderplatz in the mid-1960s⁷⁵. At first sight Womacka’s *Bauchbinde* had very little to do with the polychrome aesthetic screen, which had developed on the Wall’s Western side. The former was commissioned by the state and should clearly propagate communist ideology, the latter came into being when two French artists spontaneously decided to create a quasi ‘ornamental pattern’ out of the individual, chaotic image/texts on the Wall. Both however shared a cheerful, well-ordered agitprop (East), pop art (West) inspired aesthetics, which distorted rather than enlightened life behind and in front of the Wall.

While the Berlin Wall’s primary function was to border and limit, to enclose and to divide geopolitically, its aesthetic transformation and the aesthetic interventions on its Western facade not only reflected the reinforcement of this division on the propagandistic level, played out on the socio-political and cultural stage. As polychrome ornamental carpet the Berlin Wall’s Western facade transformed into open-air gallery and happy-go-lucky mural in the 1980s, forming the dynamic link between capitalist West Berlin and communist East Berlin. As bordering membrane and aesthetic interface it absorbed affects and triggered emotions by means of its concrete material, meandering form and bright colour. Due to the Wall’s Janus-faced character, the Wall’s Western facade on the one hand functioned as an

⁷⁵ See Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (2014). Pugh stresses the fact, that the construction of modern and humane buildings was part of the GDR’s strategy to make communist ideals visible in architecture. The use of colour, according to Pugh, played an important role in counteracting the grey uniformity of prefabricated housing. Colour should serve at the same time as the binding agent for the formation of a socialist community (Pugh 131-135). See also Peter Guth, *Wände der Verheißung* (1995) for a more detailed discussion of Womacka’s frieze (159).

aesthetic screen reflecting back Western distorted images of self-identification. On the other hand, as interface, behind which a fortification system lurked, it channeled affects with different effects⁷⁶.

The Wall's Western facade then functioned as a mirror of a special kind. As Lacanian 'distorting' mirror of imaginary self-identification by means of which the differentiation between West and East, capitalism and communism, was reinforced. But it also functioned as Foucauldian mirror. Foucault further expands and spatializes the Lacanian concept. In 'Of Other Spaces' (1967) the mirror's function is perceived as utopian as well as heterotopian. Utopian because the onlookers' self-image is made visible to them in a virtual space opening up behind the mirror's surface, enabling the onlookers to be seen in a place they do not occupy. Heterotopian because the mirror as material object is real, forcing the onlookers to acknowledge its material reality by momentarily occupying its position and perspective, resulting in the reconstitution of the self. The onlookers will be made aware that the position in front of the mirror will simultaneously open up real and unreal spaces. In a single place several, contradictory spaces unfold (24-25).

The enclosing fortified border around West Berlin reinforced West Berlin's status as highly subsidized Western enclave and enabled the advancement of socialism while repressing citizen rights on the other side of the Wall in the 1960s and early 1970s. In the late 1970s and 1980s, areas on West Berlin's newly created margins turned into creative spaces of social experiment in front of the Western Wall. On the other side of the Wall the failure of the socialist system was looming on the horizon while the GDR citizens were getting ever more restless.

⁷⁶ See Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, *Der Weiße Strich* (2011). Hahn and Willmann document the aesthetic interventions of young, rebellious GDR defectors on the Wall's Western facade in the 1980s. As subversive wall artists they differentiate themselves and their artworks from Western aesthetic interventions, by stressing a carceral, bodily rather than purely visual and aesthetic experience of the Wall (84).

Chapter 2: The Wall as Screen

Introduction

In 'The Berlin Wall and the Bastille: Tearing down walls and building myths' (1995)

Frederick Baker writes:

No single object better encapsulates the twentieth century European experience than the Berlin Wall. ... It was not just the central monument of the 'Iron Curtain', the petrified front-line of the Soviet Empire which ran from the Baltic to the Black Sea; it was also an emblem of the division of the world in the late twentieth century into two political spheres of influence: east and west. (157)

The Wall's quasi-mythical status in European 20th century history and collective memory is undeniable. A sheer endless amount of historical analyses, picture books and travelogues published during its 28 year existence (1961-1989) but especially after its fall in 1989 compete in producing the grand narrative (popular or academic) of the Wall's traumatic effects on the people it divided before its unexpected and well deserved demise, increasing the Wall's mythical status rather than shedding light on it.⁷⁷

Anthropologist and archeologist Frederick Baker (1994) and art historian Michael Diers (1992) were the first to break taboos and analyze the Wall's materiality, symbolism and consumption; in short, its paradoxical status as military and aesthetic object. For both scholars the Wall functioned as an easily identifiable, emotionally charged collective symbol standing for tyranny and the longing for and eventual liberation from tyranny. As a collective symbol the Wall by far outweighed the actual fortification system, which developed, improved, changed and grew in depth over time. Both scholars refer to the much-hated

⁷⁷ See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010) for a detailed analysis of popular and historical accounts on the Berlin Wall, 283 ff..

Bastille prison and its storming by French revolutionaries in 1789 in order to establish an analogy between 20th and 18th century myths of freedom.

Freedom was symbolically attained by the destruction of its most iconic historical material objects. The Berlin Wall as well as the Bastille turned from symbol of oppression into symbol of freedom, cherished by many in form of images, kitschy souvenirs or even the possession of an authentic part of the original object. Already in 1789, Baker writes, the potential for the commodification of an object in ruins (Bastille) was identified by French revolutionist Pierre-Francois Palloy, who traded in miniatures of the Bastille carved from the dismantled blocks of the former prison and other authentic ‘relics’ (161). It goes without saying that the Berlin Wall encountered a similar fate. Immediately after the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, so called Wall peckers chiseled off pieces of the Berlin Wall, paving the way to the illegal as well as legal trade in Wall pieces turned souvenirs/relics/trophies as commodities to come.⁷⁸

The ‘consumption of the Wall’ however, has a longer history, which is due to the Wall’s paradoxical status and the spaces it produced. The Wall as fortification system and object of division between East and West Berlin stood in contrast to its ever changing, aestheticized Western facade, which not only deterred and enraged but also impressed, fascinated and confused the Western onlooker. Michael Diers points out in ‘Die Mauer. Notizen zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte eines deutschen Symbol(l)Werks’ (1992) that the continuous technical improvement of the different generations of the Wall went hand in hand with their aestheticization (68-69). Quite intentionally, Diers argues, GDR strategists hoped that an aesthetically pleasing, at later stages whitewashed, Western facade would eventually turn the Wall into an invisible monument (70). In this way, the Wall’s classicist/modernist

⁷⁸ Not only individuals traded with pieces of the Berlin Wall. After the fall of the Wall the GDR gave away, sold and auctioned off many graffitied Western Wall segments to interested parties all over the world. See *Die Berliner Mauer in der Welt* (2021), edited by Anna Kaminsky.

industrial design in 1975 reflected the aestheticization of GDR politics, which over the years of forced enclosure had changed from brutal gestures of power and indoctrination to the subtle language of image and form (of the Wall) as well as the constant, mostly invisible, control of its citizens.⁷⁹

While monumental invisibility was countered by a Western onslaught of colourful graffiti in the 1980s, the emerging aesthetics of the Western Wall's facade prompted the growing commodification of the Wall. Not only tourists wanted their pictures taken in front of West Berlin's number 1 tourist attraction but graffiti writers and Wall artists also sought a short cut to fame by leaving their marks on the Berlin Wall.⁸⁰ While the fortification system had created a highly controlled border zone in the East, inner city areas, which bordered the Western Wall, attracted students, artists and activists as well as migrants who, especially in the district of Kreuzberg, inhabited and appropriated the now marginalized spaces⁸¹.

Journalist Robert Darnton goes as far as describing the Berlin Wall in the 1980s as a system of support, giving room to alternative lifestyles, where many "lived off" (Darnton 84) the Wall. Most West Berliners, I think it is safe to say, had at least grown used to the Wall's spectacularity and might have once more shut it out of their mind while living in its shadow.

In his introduction to *Military Architecture* (1974) Quentin Hughes praises the honesty of military architecture, which for Hughes is in its essence functional architecture with occasional elements of façadism (eg.: ornate decoration of fortified gates) and camouflage. Nothing, it seems, could be more untrue for the Berlin Wall. Not only did a highly fetishized, colourfully decorated stretch of its Western facade between Potsdamer

⁷⁹ In *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010) Patrick Major describes the GDR as a regulatory state and the Berlin Wall as the embodiment of the state's obsessive desire to regulate and discipline its citizens, who by the majority passively opposed the dictatorship. In later years, overt terror changed into more refined techniques of surveillance (Stasi) and manipulation of the masses, by offering incentives to those who chose to conform (4-5).

⁸⁰ In 'The Graffiti of the Berlin Wall' (1996) Sigrid Mayer describes in which way the growing spectacularity of the Wall's Western facade by Wall art as well as graffiti attracted international attention and prompted artists to make "a name for themselves" (222) on the Wall.

⁸¹ See Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall* (2006), 355-363.

Platz and Checkpoint Charlie visually replace or make invisible the potentially lethal fortification system behind it in the 1980s: From the moment when barbed wire and GDR militia as a human shield marked the first barrier, separating East from West Berliners on August 13, 1961, GDR military strategists worked on building a wall, which, from a military perspective, did not increase defence but, on the contrary, made it more difficult. However, the iconicity of a wall as ‘primal’ object of division, and barbed wire’s negative associations with concentration camp architecture, prompted the swift transition from barbed wire to brick and concrete. The image of a wall imprinted in people’s minds also facilitated the GDR myth of the Anti-Fascist Protection Wall, which was built to keep out Western capitalist, imperialist attempts to undermine the socialist republic. A simple look at the military architecture of the Berlin Wall clearly led to different conclusions: the entire defence system (eg. anti-vehicle barriers, signal fence, a hinterland wall and a highly controlled border zone) was facing East not West to keep East Berliners and East Germans from escaping to the West and bleeding the system of its valuable work force.⁸² East Berliners were forbidden to look and West Berliners, who, from observation platforms, had the chance to look, ‘chose’ to ‘see’ the Western Wall as main wall, ‘courting’ a fetish in order to screen the unpleasant reality behind it. Even if one considers the functionality and effectiveness of the Berlin Wall (and its different generations) as military architecture, it is impossible to ignore its reverse order. What was claimed to be the hinterland wall was effectively the ‘front wall’ and what ‘posed’ as front wall, turned out to be the GDR’s political, aesthetic (often defaced and/or embellished by Western intervention) facade rather than its main defence.

This chapter traces the formation of veil-images predominantly generated on the Western side of the Wall, treated as aestheticized surface and main line of defence. In my

⁸² See Leo Schmidt’s essay ‘Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente’ (2009) where he describes in which the fortified borderline’s iconicity has been exploited for propagandistic purposes in East and West Germany.

argument the Western Wall as material structure and site of conflict eventually transformed into the welcome sight of a distorting screen of images—by means of photographs, city maps, graffiti and Wall art—and invited identification with the Western point of view. Graffiti and Wall art, celebrated for their transformational power, commonly associated with urban defacement and the appropriation of illegal spaces, will turn into its opposite: a fetishized ornamental structure in form of Kilometerkunst, easily commodified and circulated in Western media, where a particular stretch of the Western Wall is perceived as *pars pro toto* for the Wall in general. However, due to the fact that different generations of the Wall invited different forms of aesthetic intervention and because the image/texts on the Western Wall were ephemeral in nature and constantly overwritten, a totalizing screen of images on the Wall's Western surface was disabled. Additionally, the Western Wall's surface, though eventually treated as canvas for aesthetic interventions, was in effect the surface layer of a brutal spatial barrier, recontextualizing the image/texts within geopolitical conflict, the awareness of the loss of control of the viewing subjects, realizing their vulnerable viewing positions dictated by perspective, as well as by the traumatic psychic recollection of division. This differs from photographic or filmic representations of the Wall and of the aesthetic interventions on the Western side, which were more easily appropriated, seemingly 'neutral' and frozen in time.

Distorted and Partial Views

In his introduction to *The Lost Graffiti of Berlin* (1991) Ruggero Guarini reads walls primarily as linguistic signs, 'carved in stone', denying entry or exit.

A wall, then, is above all a linguistic sign, a sort of unspoken word. Mute.

Voiceless. A petrified gesture that repeats the same thing over and over: stop, no entry, no exit—in short, no way in or out. In this sense a wall may even be the primordial form and shape of prohibition and negation. (Guarini 8)

While walls may signify interdiction, they may, depending on the point of view, also signify protection. Rather than exclusion and negation, the primary function of walls, Tim Ingold points out in *The Life of Lines* (2015), was enclosure.⁸³ The first walls were not solid, petrifying walls but pliable structures, plaited from wickerwork that were meant to keep animals in. Therefore, an amended version of Guarini's concept of walls seems necessary for the discussion of the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall was not a solid wall but a barbed wire fence in the beginning. However, a solid wall's iconicity as means of deterrence and barbed wire's negative connotations with concentration camp architecture prompted the swift replacement of barbed wire by a wall consisting of breeze block elements, bricks and concrete.⁸⁴

At the same time, as material object and immaterial sign of exclusion, the Berlin Wall was meant to keep East Germans in, functioning as a barrier, but a barrier to be overcome. The possibility to climb over, dig under, burst through, engage with the Wall was part of the Wall's very presence. In other words, here am I using Wilhelm Berger's argument for fences: "Diese Einsichten verweisen auf die Notwendigkeit, auch die Realität des Zauns als dynamische zu konzipieren. ... Die Möglichkeit ihn zu übersteigen und zu durchbrechen, ist nicht die Negation des Zauns, sondern gehört zu seiner Wirklichkeit dazu." "These insights point to the necessity to describe also the reality of the fence as a dynamic one. ... The possibility to scale it and to break through it, is not the negation of the fence, but is part of its reality." (Berger 15; my trans.)

Not only did the Berlin Wall as barbed wire fence and later 'solidified' intervention go hand in hand with the dynamism it provoked, but its paradoxical character was also

⁸³ In *The Life of Lines* (2015) Ingold refers to Gottfried Semper's (1803-1879) theories of architecture when challenging common misconceptions about walls. Even though we tend to assume that walls are made of solid material, solidity, according to Semper's theory, was not the wall's primary function but a secondary phenomenon.

⁸⁴ See Olaf Briese, 'Wartungsarm und Formsön' (2009). Briese discusses the different generations of the Berlin Wall and their aesthetic effects.

heightened by the fact that it was Janus-faced, with its two sides (and eventually two walls) facing in opposite directions. In this way the onlooker, whose view was blocked by the material structure, was forced to take sides and as a result perspectives. ‘As Iron Curtain turned concrete’, the metaphor first used by Winston Churchill in 1946 as a means to describe the unbridgeable divide between capitalist Western and communist Eastern Europe and to (discursively) contain communism within its boundaries (Wright 375-376), acquired a body. It epitomised Balibar’s overdetermined border, where the unilaterally drawn boundary between East and West Berlin embodied the geopolitical divide between capitalism and communism and due to its 28-year existence fulfilled a “*world-configuring* function” (Balibar 79) by reinforcing the division into political blocs. While each side was screened off from the other side by the material object and mutually exclusive world views, the relationship was asymmetrical. In West Berlin, one was able to approach, look at and over the Wall, while in the GDR it was nearly impossible to form one’s own opinion of the inner-city state border. Access to the highly fortified border zone was reserved for the most trusted citizens of the GDR state, everyone else was exposed to its invisibility in the GDR visual regime or reverted to images of the Wall which circulated in the Western media.

The usual encounter with the Berlin Wall was, as many critics argue, in the form of an image⁸⁵ and from the very beginning was dominated by the look rather than an engagement with the object by other senses. The look, Craig Owens points out in ‘The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism’ (1983), quoting Luce Irigaray, objectifies and masters, sets at a distance and maintains a difference. The predominance of the look over the other senses results in an impoverishment of bodily relations, for the moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality (70).

⁸⁵ In ‘Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente’ (2009) Leo Schmidt points out that the Wall, from its very beginning, had been perceived as an image (rather than material structure) and imprinted as visual metaphor in people’s minds and memories.

Most of the images of the Wall were produced by Western media, which prompted an identification with the Western perspective of and onto the Wall. At the time of the unexpected border closure (August 13, 1961) in Berlin, the Western allies avoided a military confrontation and showed political restraint, which in the eyes of the local population and press was denounced as doing ‘nothing’.⁸⁶ However, as Dirk Schindelbeck argues in ‘Die Mauer und ihre Bilder’ (2011), the ‘West’ did one thing. The Western media minutely documented the construction of the Wall: “Zahllose Fotografen und Kameraleute aus aller Welt, Presseagenturen, Beauftragte des Berliner Senats, Mitarbeiter von Verlagen, Privatleute—sie alle sorgten dafür, dass sich schon innerhalb weniger Tage ein riesiger Fundus an Bildmaterial anhäufte.” ‘Countless photographers and cameramen from around the world, press agencies, delegates of the Berlin senate, staff of publishing houses, private persons—they all made sure that already within a few days a huge stock of images accumulated.’ (40; my trans.)

From its erection to its fall, the Wall was ever present in the Western media. Gerhard Paul states in *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016) that while for people in East Berlin and East Germany the Wall (as material object) was invisible due to the GDR’s ban on images of the Wall, it turned into the Western media’s favorite object of interest, producing a vast amount of images (Paul 582). At the same time the number of images stand in stark contrast to the scarcity of motifs, a small visual canon. Dramatic escape attempts as well as deaths at the Wall, as the longevity of the image of Peter Fechter’s tragic death in 1962 testifies, occupy a considerable part of the Western visual memory (Paul 608).

⁸⁶ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer: Geschichte einer Teilung* (2009). Wolfrum quotes German boulevard newspaper *Bild*, which on its front page (framed by barbed wire) denounced Allied sangfroid on August 16, 1961: “Der Westen tut NICHTS. US-Präsident Kennedy schweigt ... MacMillan geht auf die Jagd ... und Adenauer schimpft auf Brandt” ‘The West does NOTHING. President Kennedy remains silent ... MacMillan [British prime minister] goes hunting ... and Adenauer [German chancellor] gets annoyed by Brandt [mayor of West Berlin]’ (*Bild* in Wolfrum, 43; my trans.).

While in the early 1960s individual attempts to overcome the material object were made by digging tunnels underneath the Wall, its function as a means of division in a bipolar world order remained intact. The divided city became the quintessential Cold War tourist destination, where tourists practiced the Cold War ritual of a visit to the Wall, a peek across the Iron Curtain and a shopping trip to West Berlin's shopping boulevard Kurfürstendamm (Standley 110). Tourism thrived in West Berlin and contributed to the 'petrification' of the Western look. The typical Western Cold War tourist in the 1960s, Michelle Standley points out, visited the Wall, climbed onto a viewing platform, looked across it towards East Berlin, not necessarily seeing what was on the other side but judging the other side through the Cold War lens. Especially the bleak appearance of the Wall as well as East Berlin's cityscape was negatively contrasted with the buzzing life in West Berlin's commercial streets.

Cold War tourism in West Berlin helped affirm the imagined boundaries of the global conflict. For many, seeing the Wall up close—its bleakness, the barbed wire, the no-man's-land and the watchtowers—renewed their [the tourists'] belief in the moral superiority of the West. By participating in such shared Cold War tourist practices as visiting the Wall, peering through the Iron Curtain and finishing with a shopping trip on the Kurfürstendamm, thousands of otherwise unconnected individuals could enact their perceived freedom as defined against the 'imprisoned' communist East Germany and in so doing feel, at least momentarily, that they were members of a larger community known as 'the free world'. Especially for those visiting the GDR capital as an excursion from the West, the encounter with the East German border guards, relatively little car traffic and war-damaged buildings reinforced their perception of West Berlin as freer, more modern and prosperous. (Standley 110)

What one saw or was invited to see and then enacted collectively was a narrowing of perception: East Berlin was reduced to unfreedom, the violation of human rights and lack of consumer choice. The actively promoted image of West Berlin as bulwark of freedom and as capitalist showcase could be cast in an even more favourable light against the background of the forbidding Wall. Western tourists did not necessarily come to Berlin to be enlightened but to experience the close proximity of two mutually exclusive political systems and feel invigorated by the, for many, visible superiority of one's own worldview, reinforced by the existence of the Wall.

According to Paul, the construction of the Wall but even more so the fall of the Wall can be seen as the biggest 'event' staged by West German and international media. Images, generated by Western media, of, for example, the peaceful demonstrations of the civil rights movements in the GDR in the late 1980s or pictures taken by GDR activists themselves, were quickly overwritten by the images of the fall of the Wall in 1989 for the purpose of the anticipated reunification. Together with other iconic images in the twenty-eight-year-history of the Berlin Wall they have become part of the UNESCO visual world heritage:

... Bildsequenzen wie ... von den Ereignissen am Grenzübergang Bornholmer Straße am Abend des 9. November 1989–, eine Sequenz, mittlerweile von der Unesco ebenso wie die Bildsequenzen von Conrad Schumanns >Sprung in die Freiheit< und der Bergung des an der Mauer verbluteten Peter Fechter mit der Aufnahme in das Weltdokumentenerbe geadelt. (608)

... images like those ... of the events at checkpoint Bornholmer Straße on the eve of November 9, 1989–, a sequence, like the image sequences of Conrad Schumann's >leap into freedom< and the salvage of Peter Fechter, who bled to

death at the Wall, by now nobilitated by Unesco officially accepting them as world heritage documents. (608; my translation)

Undoubtedly, images of East Berliners streaming West through gates like Bornholmer Straße, dancing on the Wall at Brandenburg Gate facing East, or together with West Berliners attacking it with hammers, breaking off pieces as trophies, *and* its constant reproduction in the media for each anniversary form part of a visual regime - “the singular, euphoric narrative of victory for Western liberalism” (64), Manghani’s Berlin imaginary. His concept is based on the Lacanian mirror stage where the infants identify with the coherent form of their own reflection in the mirror and internalise the image. In this way the self is experienced and misrecognised as whole rather than as a fragmented entity.⁸⁷ For Manghani, the Berlin imaginary is based on a collective imaginary identification with images “outside ourselves” (116), which perceptively form a coherent entity or narrative and which, as will be shown, have been heavily fetishized.

Leo Schmidt, in his essay ‘Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente’ (2009), seemingly corroborates Manghanis analysis. He points out that the Wall, from its very beginning, had been perceived as an image (rather than material structure) and imprinted as visual metaphor in people’s minds and memories. The visual metaphor, Schmidt stresses, was determined before and after its fall by a Western perspective (322). Not only have the iconic images of the graffiti-covered Western face of the frontline wall (1975-1989) and the Wall appropriated by East and West Berliners (November 9, 1989) come to stand in for an ever changing fortification system, characterized by at least four different generations, but these images have been so thoroughly fetishized that the remaining fragments of the Wall in situ are only deemed worth preserving if they are part of the Western Wall (Feversham and Schmidt 122) and can therefore be easily incorporated in the already existing Western visual canon. This

⁸⁷ See <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm>. Accessed 27 May 2018.

seems especially ironic as most of the remaining fragments of the Wall, such as pieces of hinterland wall, fences, lights, patrol roads are not part of the dominant way of perceiving and remembering the Wall or as Axel Klausmeier has put it in his essay ‘Was von der Mauer blieb’ (2009): “Verallgemeinernd kann festgehalten werden, dass die erhaltenen Reste und Spuren der Grenzanlagen ein grundsätzlich anderes Bild der Grenze zeigen als dasjenige, an das sich insbesondere die westliche Öffentlichkeit aufgrund eigener Anschauung und/ oder der großen Bilderflut von Mauerbildern kollektiv erinnert.” ‘It can be generally stated, that the still remaining fragments and traces of the fortification system show an entirely different image of the border than the one which is remembered collectively, especially by a Western public by means of personal observation or the steady stream of images.’ (163; my trans.)

Historians as well as conservators (Klausmeier 2009, Schmidt 2009, Ullrich 2006) still deplore the fact that the few pieces of the Western Wall in situ seem more desirable than the encounter with a greater number of fragments of the Eastern border zone. It would then not be astonishing either that the double cobblestone line in inner city Berlin commemorates the GDR’s original white demarcation line with West Berlin (Klausmeier 180) rather than running along both sides of the fortification system. Neither would it be astonishing why millions of West Germans, who on the many observation platforms clearly saw that the Berlin Wall was built in order to keep East Germans in and not capitalist/imperialist West Germans out⁸⁸, were medially saturated with and choose to remember the Wall’s Western face, which from an East German military perspective in the 1970s and 1980s seemed of little importance. The real breaching of the Wall by East German refugees would have taken place at what GDR officials cunningly called the hinterland wall. Leo Schmidt and Polly Feversham go as far as to claim that for the West, the most prominent section of the Western

⁸⁸ According to Feversham and Schmidt the whole fortification system faced East instead of West: for example the electric signalling fence faced East, the anti-vehicle ditch gently sloped towards the West (Feversham and Schmidt 34).

face of the Wall, a small, graffiti-covered stretch between the Brandenburg Gate and Checkpoint Charlie in the 1980s came to stand in for the Wall in toto (Feversham and Schmidt 42). In ‘Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente’ (2009) Leo Schmidt sums up:

Aber die Suggestionskraft des Bildes und der Begriffe war offenkundig stärker als dieses Bewusstsein der Fakten. Denn die Grenzanlagen wurden immer und ausschließlich von Westen abgebildet. Das Bild der Ostseite–funktional gesehen war die angebliche “Hinterlandsicherungsmauer” schließlich die Hauptfassade der Grenzanlage–wurde durch die SED derart konsequent und erfolgreich unterdrückt, dass man die Ansicht von Osten heute im Computer generieren muss ... Hinzu kam, so darf man wohl unterstellen, auch ein Element der Selbstbezogenheit des Westens, gar der Eitelkeit, wonach man selbstverständlich davon ausging, dass die Seite der Grenze, die einem so demonstrativ und prominent zugewandt wurde, auch die Hauptseite sein musste. (Schmidt a, 322)

But the suggestive power of the image and the concepts was obviously stronger than this awareness of the facts. Because the border fortifications were always and exclusively represented from the Western side. The image of the Eastern side–functionally the alleged hinterland security wall was after all the main face of the fortification–was so consequentially and successfully suppressed by the SED, that one has to generate the Eastern face by computer ... Additionally, one may insinuate, there was an element of self-centeredness of the West, even vanity, naturally assuming that the side of the border, which so ostentatiously and demonstratively was turned towards oneself, also had to be its main face. (Schmidt a, 322; my trans.)

The Western viewers saw, what was in many ways given to them to see and embraced distorted views despite better knowledge. Consciously or unconsciously, they were constituted and constrained as Western viewers by a visual canon and a limited number of perspectives as well as the by the absence of views from the other side. Instead of confronting the fact that behind the Western Wall a sober military surveillance system operated, the Western viewers preferred to fetishize the frontal view of the Western Wall and the panoramic view across it. The unwelcome perception of the Eastern side of the Wall, constant reminder of the 'wound' of forced separation, was defused by a fixation on the Western Wall which turned into a screen for Western projections.

In *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996) Mulvey describes fetishism as a psychological and social structure that disavows knowledge in favour of belief (Mulvey xi) and locates fetishism in capitalist societies of the spectacle, where collective fantasies/phantasmagoria are projected on a cinema-like screen in order to distract and screen the onlooker from collective repressions. The material that has to be covered up is distorted into the fetish as symptomatic signifier, which, while concealing what needs to be hidden, at the same time acknowledges it.

Returning to fetishism: it is the most semiotic of perversions. It does not want its forms to be overlooked but to be gloried in. This is, of course, a ruse to distract the eye and mind from something that needs to be covered up. The more the fetish exhibits itself, the more the presence of a traumatic past event is signified. ... The fetish is on the cusp of consciousness, acknowledging its own processes of concealment and signalling the presence of, if not the ultimate meaning of, a historical event. (xiv)

Undoubtedly, the smooth whitewashed surface of the Western Wall in the 1980s (fourth generation of the Wall) functioned as near-invisible monument and screen, on which

collective Western identifications could be projected and behind which GDR state violence was covered up. Even though West Berliners were able to physically interact with the Wall, for the majority, the experience of the Wall was determined by sight, substituting the whole fortification system by its Western Wall, even in many cases reducing it to its most prominent section between Checkpoint Charlie and the Brandenburg Gate, *and* hollowing out the material object by its (Western) surface appearance, whose image was widely circulated in the media. The majority, by gazing at or over the Wall rather than engaging with the material object, created the necessary distance for a phantasmatic space to emerge in which a specific image of the Wall could be conveniently fetishized. In short, the majority glanced at and was distracted by the Western Wall's 'Glanz'⁸⁹ (shine) and substituted the material structure with its threatening message by metaphors and images, which could be appropriated, circulated, commodified, and controlled. In their totality they functioned as a regulatory fiction to be internalised by the Western viewer, whose seemingly rigid Cold War perspective could potentially be destabilised by a simple look across the Western Wall into the death strip or by a visit to East Berlin. This privilege was denied to most East Germans and used by most West Germans for other ends. As already mentioned, the majority of West Germans and tourists from the West, when visiting the Wall and East Berlin, came as Cold War travellers and compared their impressions of East Berlin unfavourably with life in West Berlin. In other words, their views were already framed by the Wall before their actual visit to the divided city.

As early as 1963, Helmut Newton, by turning the Wall into the background motif for his fashion shoot "Mode an der Mauer" (fashion at the Wall), exploited the Wall's fetishistic appeal which structured and lured the onlooker's vision. In one of the images, a fashionably

⁸⁹ In 'Fetishism' (1927) Freud discerned a peculiar linguistic displacement at the heart of a young man's fetish, whose 'Glanz auf der Nase', shine on the nose, as fetish turned out to be a 'glance at the nose'. Thus, the fetish, according to Freud was not the shine but the nose (Freud 152).

clad model, legs crossed, back turned towards the viewer, binoculars in one hand, leaning on an observation platform in very close proximity to the first generation of the Wall, poses as (the double-agent) ‘Mata Hari’ at the Wall and gazes beyond the borderline fortification. The Wall’s (first generation) archaic if not desirable presence is reinforced by the fetishized female body in front of it, while its threatening message is toned down by the gaze (of the viewer) directed upwards, following the contours of the female figure, *fantasizing* (not actually looking at) the ‘beyond of the Wall’. In this fetishistic tableau the Wall’s Western side turned into an erogenous zone ready for consumption. While in the early 1960s Newton’s photo series still provoked outrage and overall rejection (Gründer 80), in the late 1970s and 1980s the Wall had fully transformed into an “unintentional monument” (Feversham and Schmidt 12) and tourist attraction with a ‘life of its own’, a popular motif used on, for example, postcards, record covers (Gründer 210) as well as personal mementos.

While the material object was dismantled in 1990, the introjected image of the object, as Peter Schneider asserted in *The Wall Jumper* (1983), might continue to live on. In his well-known novella the nameless first-person narrator muses whether the “Mauer im Kopf” (102), the wall in people’s heads, would not take much longer to dismantle than the material object. The narrator collects stories about divided Berlin and describes in anecdotal form, in which way the political division between capitalism and communism resulted in competing views and everyday practices. For Schneider’s narrator, after the initial shock of a fortified border running through Berlin had been overcome, West Berliners ‘thinned out’ the Wall into metaphor and reduced their view of the East to the inner-city border. The Wall eventually transformed into a mirror, in front of which Western self-relatedness and experience of the self was practiced:

Nachdem der erste Schrecken vorbei war, verdünnte sich das massive Ding im
Bewusstsein der Westdeutschen immer mehr zur Metapher. Was jenseits das

Ende der Bewegungsfreiheit bedeutete, wurde diesseits zum Sinnbild für ein verabscheutes Gesellschaftssystem. Der Blick nach drüben verkürzte sich zu einem Blick auf die Grenzanlagen und schließlich zum gruppentherapeutischen Selbsterlebnis: die Mauer wurde den Deutschen zum Spiegel, der ihnen Tag für Tag sagt, wer der Schönste im Lande ist. Ob es ein Leben gab jenseits des Todesstreifens, interessierte bald nur noch Tauben und Katzen. (12)

After the first shock was over, the massive thing more and more thinned out in the consciousness of the West Germans into a metaphor. What meant the limit of the freedom of movement on the other side, turned into the symbol of a detested social system on this side. The glance at the other side was shortened to a glance at the fortification system and eventually to a group therapy experience: the Wall became a mirror for the Germans in the West, which told them day after day, who was the most beautiful in the country. Whether there was a life on the other side of the death strip, was soon only of interest to the pigeons and the cats. (12: my translation)

West Berliners' apparent disinterestedness in everything behind the Wall was best matched by GDR maps of Berlin. Whereas in Western maps of Berlin, the division of the city was hardly visible and marked only by a broken line, in Eastern maps, as Schneider's narrator tells us, the map more or less ended at the Wall and West Berlin was shown as an undifferentiated yellowish area with a few green patches (10). One of the most striking examples of the GDR's blatant visual erasure of West Berlin is an official city map of 1988⁹⁰, where West Berlin is represented as a white surface with only its outline being clearly marked.

⁹⁰ See Janet Ward, 'Agency at the Wall' (2011), 74.

West Berlin as white blot and eye sore in an otherwise detailed map of Berlin demonstrates bluntly and crudely what is often veiled: a central lack in the field of vision. In Jacques Lacan's well known discussion of anamorphosis as exemplary structure of the gaze, the central lack in the field of vision, which enables our own coherent perception of objects, is made visible. Lacan analyses Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), where two central figures, one in secular, one in clerical attire lean on a table, on which objects, mostly scientific instruments for the acquisition of knowledge, are arranged. A distorted skull as vanitas symbol occupies a central, floating, position in the painting and can only be clearly identified from a particular perspective. In Lacan's eyes, the distorted skull as stain in the field of vision represents the annihilated (castrated) subject's inscription into the picture (Lacan 91-104) as well as a threat to the rational, early modern subject, whose acquisition of knowledge seems to be increasingly based on observation rather than belief. The distorted skull functions in Lacan's reading as a reminder that a coherent image of the 'world' depends on position and perspective and the constitution of the subject within the scopic field. While the 1988 GDR map does not use anamorphic perspective, West Berlin's central position as 'lacking' is striking. Its visible absence not only irritates but cannot be overlooked. The erasure of West Berlin in the field of vision resulted in a fixation on the borderline between East and West Berlin and paradoxically reinforced Western dominance on the visual level. East Berliners were strictly forbidden to look at, approach or take pictures of the Wall and West Berliners, who, from observation platforms, had the chance to look, 'overlooked' the fortification system and exercised visual control by 'choosing' to 'see' the Western Wall as main border wall, 'courting' a fetish in order to screen the unpleasant reality behind it. Total control in the field of vision is an illusion, even if a powerful one. If we are to believe Lacanian theory, the field of vision is always constituted by something that exceeds our visual control that we cannot see, our very own blind spot, the gaze that haunts the human

(controlling) eye. What is all too easily forgotten is, that the feeling of visual control is in itself controlled by a pre-given structure. A panoramic view of the Western Wall and beyond in the 1980s, was not dissimilar to Yadegar Asisi's contemporary reproduction in form of *The Wall*⁹¹ panorama close to Checkpoint Charlie. Asisi, who lived in the GDR until 1978 and then fled and relocated to West Berlin, offers the visitor to his rotunda the possibility to experience an autumn day in Kreuzberg (West Berlin) in the 1980s by standing on an observation platform, looking over the Wall into East Berlin. While the illusion produced in the entirely enclosed space of the panorama is seductive, it is at the same time limiting, as Bruno Latour makes us aware:

... panoramas, as etymology suggests, see *everything*. But they also see *nothing* since they simply *show* an image painted (or projected) on the tiny wall of a room fully *closed* to the outside. The metaphor comes from those early rooms invented in the early 19th century ... The Greek word pan, which means 'everything' does not signify that those pictures survey 'the whole' but that, on the contrary, they paper over a wall in a blind room on which a completely coherent scenery is being projected on a 360° circular screen. Full coherence is their forte—and their main frailty. (Latour 187)

Not the totalising snapshot of life in the divided city is of interest but the structures which enable such a view and can be compared to similar operations in situ in the 1980s. As already mentioned, the Western look across the Berlin Wall was determined by the position and perspective offered by the observation platform. In *Geteilte Ansichten* (2006) Maren Ullrich states that the observation platforms at the inner German border in the 1960s, which in my eyes is also applicable to the divided Berlin, introduced a hierarchical way of looking, enabling the Western viewer to demonstratively look over the boundary set up by the GDR,

⁹¹ www.asisi.de/en/panorama/the-wall/. Accessed 20 June 2018.

locating freedom in the West, imprisonment in the East, visually conjuring up a unified Germany (19; 136). At the same time, the look onto the death strip and beyond, Ullrich claims, had not always been shaped by a sense of longing and empathy but also by self-affirmation and fascination, as well as disinterest and indifference in the 1980s (162). Even on ground level, especially after the first shock and anger of sudden separation had been overcome and a direct engagement with the Wall had been discouraged by a new politics of détente in the early 1970s, the images on/of the Western Wall hollowed out the physical structure. Due to its growing spectacularity, the Wall transformed from three-dimensional material structure into a two dimensional canvas for artistic and other expression. Gazing at and beyond the Wall's Western face not only established a hierarchy of viewing practices (Ullrich 19), but at the same time speeded up the process of turning the Wall into a commodity fetish.

As will be shown, the colourfully graffitied Western Wall of the 1980s eventually functioned like a screen.⁹² One can easily imagine the viewer being fascinated by a 'panoramic view' of anthropomorphic figures, ornamental patterns, graffiti; a view that has predominantly figured on postcards, picture books and in the (Western) media.

Western Screen of Images

In *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) W.J.T. Mitchell states that there is a general tendency to either under- or overestimate images. They are often treated as mere signs, representations for (living) things or on the contrary as autonomous (living) things themselves. However,

⁹² See Janet Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin* (2011). Ward cites Peter Schneider's novella *Der Mauerspringer* (1982), in which he describes the Wall's mirror function for West-Berliners, providing and reflecting self-identity after the adjustment of living in the shadow of the Wall. Ward builds her argument on Schneider's observations, stressing that the Wall created mutually exclusive identities formed by two competing world systems, which were nurtured and sustained by West and East alike. (68-75)

Mitchell claims that most people, without knowing, approach images with a double consciousness:

How is it, in other words, that people are able to maintain a “double consciousness” toward images, pictures, and representations in a variety of media, vacillating between magical beliefs and sceptical doubts, naïve animism and hardheaded materialism, mystical and critical attitudes?

The usual way of sorting this kind of double consciousness is to attribute one side of it (generally the naïve, magical, superstitious side) to someone else, and to claim the hardheaded, critical, and sceptical position as one’s own. (7)

In the case of the Berlin Wall and the Cold War in general, the power of images and diverse reactions to them, cannot be denied. Some, in their naïve belief in the authenticity of images, might have fallen victim to Eastern or Western propaganda. Others might have developed a double consciousness, which characterises, as I have argued, the fetishistic structure of desire (Mulvey xiv). Many, I suggest, have fetishized the Wall in a fragmentary material form often reduced to a screen of images. The majority of West Berliners gazed at the Berlin Wall from a safe distance, appropriated and controlled the threatening material structure in form of an image and engaged physically with it only when the symbol of oppression had transformed into a symbol of freedom after its fall. They, consciously or unconsciously, screened off and mitigated what might have been perceived as the terror-inducing other side.

Freud, in his very short essay on ‘Medusa’s Head’ (1922), argues that even though the head of the Medusa signifies the terror of castration, it is already fetishized (Medusa’s hair represented by snakes in works of art replaces the penis) to mitigate the horror, a horror that makes the spectator stiff with terror. Freud interprets stiffness with having an erection and locates the redemptive effect in the fact of the erection: “Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening

reassures him of the fact.” (69) While for Freud the Gorgon’s petrifying gaze is simultaneously undone by phallic recognition, Julia Kristeva locates the loss of abject, female power by confronting Medusa’s gaze indirectly, in form of an image.⁹³ In a similar way, West Berliners as well as tourists, as already argued, possibly found fetishistic consolation and reassurance of looking at and being on the ‘dynamic, colourful and liberating’ side of the Wall rather than directly engaging with and confronting the material barrier with all senses.

In the introduction to the *Illegal: 1960 Street Art Graffiti 1995 2024-25* exhibition at the Saar Historical Museum Ulrich Blanché broadly defines graffiti as illegal intervention in public space where unauthorised scratched, painted, carved markings and signs are applied to public or privately owned walls. While graffiti serves as an umbrella term for diverse aesthetic interventions, Blanché differentiates between graffiti, style writing graffiti and street art. Graffiti in form of non-official scratched personal, often humorous, messages and sayings have existed since the antiquity, some of which have been studied in detail at archaeological sites in Pompeii and Herculaneum, when the cities or parts of it were excavated in the 18th and 19th century. These short messages were predominantly written in charcoal or chalk; by the 1960s the preferred tools for illegal inscriptions were markers and spray cans (12). Apart from personal concerns common topics according to graffiti scholar Norbert Siegl have been love, sexuality and politics.⁹⁴ Personal graffiti on the Berlin Wall did not greatly differ from other locations, with the exception of the Wall as material object and the GDR as authoritarian dictatorship being addressed directly. While Berlin Wall graffiti

⁹³ In Greek mythology Medusa was killed by Perseus, who cut off her head with his sword. He avoided petrification through her gaze by only indirectly looking at her reflection in the mirror-shield given to him by Athena. The severed head had the power to turn those into stone, who looked at it. See www.britannica.com/topic/Medusa-Greek-mythology. Accessed 25 August 2023. See also Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head* (2012), chapter 3. Kristeva describes the abject power of women in the art historical context. Medusa’s severed head as horrific and horrifying face (vultus) simultaneously displays the power of her female, ‘castrated’, genitals (vulva), which can only be mitigated and confronted indirectly in form of an image.

⁹⁴ See <http://www.graffitieuropa.org/klograffiti1.htm>. Accessed 4 July 2024.

“ICH LIEBE DICH ELLEN” and “BRÜDER HABT ACHT – FASCHISMUS KOMMT NICHT ÜBER NACHT” (Gründer 127) ‘I LOVE YOU ELLEN’ and ‘BROTHERS BEWARE – FASCISM DOES NOT COME OVER NIGHT’ [the original rhymes] (Gründer 127; my trans.) were not particularly site-specific, “VORSICHT MAUER”, “MAUERN GILT NICHT” (Gründer 127) and “DDR–der doofe Rest” (Gründer 124) ‘ATTENTION WALL’, ‘STONEWALLING DOES NOT COUNT’ (Gründer 127; my trans.) and ‘GDR–the ludicrous remainder’ (Gründer 124; my trans.) expressed personal frustrations vis a vis the Wall in a humorous and at times aggressive way.

Very little style writing graffiti was found on the Wall (Henke 323), possibly because the tradition of style writing, first introduced by disenfranchised black youth in Philadelphia and New York in the 1960s, served different ends: the inscription and optimal propagation of one’s name (an alias) in elaborate form. Style writing has been associated with American hip hop culture and the collaborative work of teenage crews gaining ‘fame’ by appropriating public walls and public transport in order to aggressively mark and tattoo them with their tags and ‘pieces’ for maximum visibility (Blanché 13). Graffiti writers, Blanché writes in greater detail in *Something to S(pr)ay* (2010), do not necessarily seek to communicate with a greater public but want to achieve recognition within their own community (26). Similarly, Berlin Wall street artists and style writers did not mix and often practiced their illegal art forms at different locations along the Wall. Centrally, in the American sector close to Checkpoint Charlie, street artists congregated to visually express their protest against the Wall, whereas style writers, propagating their name tags, preferred less frequented areas along the Wall in close proximity to the train station Wilhelmsruh (Henke 323).

Street art is also characterised by the self-authorized, illegal inscription of images in the public sphere, often re-appropriating public space and overwriting a visual regime which is dominated by official and commercial signs. Street artists make use of a variety of tools

and techniques such as stencils, posters and stickers and generally want to reach a wider public with their artworks. Unlike graffiti artists whose name tags can be hard to decipher because of unusual fonts, reminding of modern calligraphy, street artists want their images and messages to be easily understood. While both, style writing and street art are ephemeral art forms with a short lifespan, they enable artists to reach out directly to the public circumventing official, state-sanctioned or commercial systems of exhibition and distribution (Blanché, *Something to S(pr)ay*, 26-27). Street artists are often politically engaged and form part of protest movements, travelling to different cities intervening with their poetic and provocative artworks in space as well as propagating their political messages. Among the first to use street art as a political tool were the Paris students of the 1968 cultural revolution. Parisian students were inspired by Guy Debord, founding member of the Situationist International, who incorporated graffiti in his political-aesthetic interventions. He turned the graffiti “NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS” (Blanché, *Illegal*, 49) ‘NEVER WORK’ (Blanché, *Illegal*, 49; my trans.) on a Parisian wall into a photo postcard in the 1960s, circulating widely his rallying cry against the capitalist society of the spectacle. Posters (affiches) and stencil art served the May 1968 protesters as a means to successfully voice their anger and frustration against the effects of capitalism in all areas of daily life (Blanché, *Something to S(pr)ay*, 30).

Many well-known street artists left their mark on the Berlin Wall. Among them were internationally known North American artists Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Hambleton, David Wojnarowicz and Keith Haring, all of whom had been active on the streets of New York before coming to Berlin in the 1980s, as well as conceptual artist Deborah Kennedy or French artist Nora Aurienne. Others, like French artists Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet achieved ‘fame’ by obsessively painting on the Wall for several years. Seen as individual aesthetic interventions on the Western Wall many street artists successfully appropriated the

illegal surface and transformed the military terrain in front of the Western Wall into an anarchic, liminal space while interpellating the Western passer-by with their witty and provocative messages. Over time, I am going to argue, Wall art, graffiti and style writing formed a decorative screen inviting for a stroll along an open-air gallery rather than opening up a temporary liminal space, where the brutal division of space imposed by the GDR nomenklatura in 1961 was defied and the practice of art was indistinguishable from the practice of life. This is all the more astonishing since graffiti and avant-garde art practices share a common legacy.

In 'Graffiti. Formen, Traditionen, Perspektiven' (2016) Martin Papenbrock and Doris Tophinke trace modern graffiti's relationship to avant-garde art movements back to the Mexican muralists and the American New Deal of the 1930s, where mural art was supported, financed and instrumentalised by the American state as a visual means to unite Americans and pull through the economic depression. According to Papenbrock and Tophinke, the emergence of illegal graffiti in the US in the 1960s can be seen as a reaction to officially sanctioned mural and public, propagandistic art, while the revolutionary impetus of Mexican mural art was certainly appreciated by US graffiti artists (104). The energetic painterly style of abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock or Cy Twombly's combination of abstract art and writing as well as Jean Dubuffet's embrace of 'low art', the art of children and the mentally disabled, in the postwar period show overlaps with the evolving aesthetics of American graffiti in the 20th century. While the desire for the symbolic marking and transformation of commodified public space is comparable with the French situationist strategy of *détournement*, graffiti's greatest influence must be located in American pop art's embrace of mass culture, the use of comic book characters and stylised writing. Very few American graffiti writers, among them Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat, were able to

cross the line back and forth between anonymous, ephemeral graffiti and public, commercial pop art practices (104-106).

Only in the 1980s New York graffiti, as part of the American hip hop scene and eternalised in films such as *Wild Style* (Ahearn 1983) and *Style Wars* (Chalfant/Silver 1983), was more widely recognised as a popular art form. The use of spray cans, invented in the 1920s and 1930s and a mass product by the 1950s, boosted the quick application of heavily stylised forms of writing in the 1970s and 1980s on New York house walls and underground trains. While American wild style graffiti proved very popular in West Germany, but did not figure prominently on the Berlin Wall, spray cans were quickly withdrawn from the market in the GDR after the opening night of the American hip hop film *Beat Street* (Lathan 1984). In this way, Papenbrock and Tophinke point out, any emerging graffiti culture was crushed from the very beginning in East Germany (95).

Certainly a common legacy between progressive politics, mural art, abstract expressionism, art brut, pop art and graffiti can be traced, however graffiti's development was immediately suppressed in East Berlin and quickly commodified on the Western side of the Berlin Wall. On the Western Wall, graffiti's irreverent, anarchic potential has been diluted only to be praised as transgressive works of art on individual Wall segments in the post-Wall era. With the growing ubiquity of figurative, pop art inspired Wall art, known as Kilometerkunst carried out by soon-to-be-well known artists in the 1980s, earlier, loose arrangements of diverse graffiti with individual figurative elements were marginalized and with it a culture which, according to Papenbrock and Tophinke, is characterized by anonymous, illegal and collective aesthetic interventions in space:

Die Graffiti-Bewegung hat eine eigene kulturelle Praxis ausgebildet, die sich von der der bildenden Künstler und der Kunstwelt stark unterscheidet. Ihre Parameter sind Anonymität, Illegalität und kollektives Agieren. Damit stellen sie das

herrschende Bild der Kunst und des Künstlers in Frage. Auf der anderen Seite verstehen sie sich selbst als Künstler und entwickeln in einzelnen Fällen technische und ästhetische Kompetenzen, die ihre Arbeiten als Werke der Kunst erscheinen lassen. (105-106)

The graffiti movement has developed its own cultural practice, which differs greatly from that of practitioners of fine art and the art world. Their parameters are anonymity, illegality, and collective action. With it they undermine the prevailing image of art and of the artist. On the other hand, they see themselves as artists and they develop in individual cases a level of technical and aesthetic competence, which makes their work resemble works of art. (105-106; my trans.)

Collective action on the Berlin Wall can only be attested in its broadest sense. Undoubtedly, every inscription or image on the Western Wall was part of an aesthetic transgression. However too diverse were the motivations, content, form and practices of such interventions to form a collective, where its practitioners acted in unison.

Lutz Henke, who traces the genesis of graffiti and Wall art on and in proximity of the Berlin Wall⁹⁵ in 'Mauerkunst' (2011), argues that the diverse manifestations on the Western Wall, such as political graffiti, love/ hate graffiti, name graffiti, Wall art ... in the late 1970s and 1980s should be classified as aesthetic interventions (318). These developed from simple, monochrome, anti-communist graffiti slogans to colourful Wall art over the years and oscillated between being read as 'free'/subversive expressions of a Western, pluralist, democratic society or mere decoration (325). Because of the early Wall's rough surface, artistic interventions took place in proximity to the Wall rather than on the Wall, which was

⁹⁵ Compare Anke Kuhrmann et al., *Die Berliner Mauer in der Kunst* (2011). Kuhrmann states that up to the 1970s artistic interventions took place in front of or near the Wall rather than on it. The Wall functioned as stage for events and only later (*Grenzmauer* 75), additionally, transformed into the necessary 'canvas' for art/graffiti on it (152).

gradually covered with political and other conventional graffiti. In 1961 an international symposium of sculpture took place near the Wall in front of the Reichstag, where artist Ben Wagin planted his first trees (later known as *Parliament of Trees*) as a living reminder of the forced separation between West and East Berlin. A year later, Christo and Jeanne Claude's intervention of blocking rue Visconti in Paris for eight hours with oil barrels (total height 4,30 m), not only echoed events in Berlin but also used the metaphor, coined by Winston Churchill in 1946, which soon replaced the actual Wall: *Rideau de Fer* (Iron Curtain). In 1963 Helmut Newton provoked the German public by staging his fashion shoots for Vogue magazine in front of the Wall and Joseph Beuys caused a public outcry by suggesting to increase the Wall's height by 5cm for aesthetic reasons: better proportion (318-320). Architect Rem Koolhaas praised the Wall's aesthetics in 1971 and compared the anti-vehicle barriers to minimalist art:

Sogar die Mauer selbst kann als Kunstwerk betrachtet werden. Rem Koolhaas beschreibt sie 1971 im Rahmen seiner Diplomstudie als "heartbreakingly beautiful", sieht in den Panzersperren eine "endless line of Sol LeWitt structures" ... (318)

Even the Wall itself can be regarded as a work of art. Rem Koolhaas describes it, while doing research for his master thesis in 1971, as "heartbreakingly beautiful", declares the anti-vehicles barriers to be like an "endless line of Sol LeWitt structures" ... (318; my trans.)

While the Wall itself, from the very beginning, was seen as military intervention as well as (perverse) object of art, fairly little was actually written on the Wall in the 1960s and 1970s, a curious fact, which is generally attributed to the Wall's rough, shoddy and makeshift appearance before *Grenzmauer 75*. Even though the 1968 student protesters used the Wall as

a billboard in order to voice their dissent, their interventions cannot be compared to the explosion of graffiti in the 1980s (Feversham and Schmidt 154).

With the advent of the fourth generation of the Wall (1975 onwards), whose smooth whitewashed Western side functioned as the perfect surface for graffiti and Wall art, colour saturated the Wall. Henke, following the historical development of graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall, stresses the “Sieg des Bunten”, the victory of the colourful (316), as dominant contemporary metaphor. He cites, among others, American singer David Hasselhoff performing on the Wall at New Year 1989/90, kissing a coloured fragment of the Wall, celebrating its fall: “It turned from black and white to color.” (Hasselhoff in Henke 316) Not only did colourful graffiti and Wall art overcome the Wall in the popular imagination, they were also much preferred by the GDR to the anti-communist slogans of the 1960s and early 1970s, as Henke drily states: “Ein Grund für die weitgehende Duldung des polychromen Treibens dürfte gewesen sein, dass die Gemälde dem “Antifaschistischem Schutzwall” besser zu Gesicht standen als antikommunistische Parolen.” ‘One reason for the overall tolerance of the polychrome restlessness (carnival) might have been that the paintings complied better with the “Antifascist Protection Wall” than anticommunist slogans.’ (322; my trans.)

Figurative, naïve kitsch, according to Henke, competed with more abstract images and forms of aesthetic intervention in the 1980s and after the fall of the Wall:

In den achtziger Jahren wird auch der stete Gegensatz zwischen mimetischer Kunst und gegenstandloser Kunst deutlich. Dieser Gegensatz zwischen gefälligem Kitsch und konzeptionellen Arbeiten, zwischen Materialschlacht und Vorstellungskraft sollte sich nach dem Fall der Mauer fortsetzen und noch verschärfen. (328)

In the 1980s, the growing contrast between mimetic and abstract art becomes evident. This conflict between pleasing kitsch and conceptual works [of art], between sheer material quantity and the power of imagination was going to continue after the fall of the Wall and should even intensify. (328; my trans.)

While mostly personal graffiti continued to thrive on the Wall and intervened with colourful Wall art as well as kitsch, which dominated the Wall's surface at its most popular sites, New York-inspired name graffiti was leading a rather marginalized and geographically isolated existence on unassuming stretches of the Wall (323). Henke describes the dizzying mixture of high and low, abstract versus figurative, political versus personal graffiti as the dominating feature of the Wall in the late 1980s, and its practitioners as vaguely politically motivated (328) while always already being political⁹⁶. At the same time the Wall and the artistic manifestations on and in front of it were ever more commodified. Henke comes to the conclusion that politically motivated aesthetic intervention and (personal) Western capitalist promotion overlap in such a way, that specific cases have to be singled out and analyzed (339).

In sum rather than political slogans, abstract expressionist, surrealist, dada, pop-art inspired colourful Wall art, naïve kitsch and more or less banal personally motivated inscriptions by Berliners as well as tourists dominated on the Wall's iconic Western side in the American sector between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie. The most striking characteristic of this ornamental carpet in the late 1980s was certainly its uncanny polychrome harmlessness, while keeping in mind that site-specific interventions took place and that each intervention must be seen as low-level dissent. The site-specific graffiti relate,

⁹⁶ Since the Western Wall and several meters in front of it belonged to the GDR, any intervention on GDR territory was illegal and the act itself political. "Jede Aktion an der Grenzmauer fand ja auf dem Staatsgebiet der DDR statt und wurde per se zu einem politischen Akt." 'Every intervention along the border wall took place on GDR territory and became, in itself, political.' (Henke 317; my trans.)

according to Heinz Kuzdas, “directly to the Wall, its meaning and function, with the majority of images depicting the hope of overcoming borders, and wish for the Wall to fall.” (Kuzdas 22) He mentions zippers, holes, doors, ladders, stairs as characteristic motifs. In Ralf Gründer’s thoroughly researched *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007), which functions as a comprehensive introduction to the graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall from the 1960s to the 1980s, trompe l’oeil interventions can be found, where by means of painted illusions the Wall seemingly dissolves into the (now protruding) object actually standing on the Eastern side. In this way, illusion artist Yadegar Asisi reconstructed East Berlin’s St. Michael’s church on the Wall in 1986. While the church building was blocked from view by the Wall, the trompe l’oeil produced an illusionist reunion of painted church facade on the Western Wall and actually visible cupola in the East.

Sigrid Mayer notes that one of the dominating languages on the Wall was English which, in her eyes, reflects “Western directedness” (Mayer 218) and stresses the fact that “the graffiti are not so much an expression by Germans against a Wall built by Germans as they are an answer by the people in the West to the concrete “stone-walling” of the East.” (Mayer 218) The enquiry into the “Western directedness”⁹⁷ on the textual level has to be extended to the figural level as well. Most of the graffiti and Wall art, as already mentioned, were concentrated in the American sector, in close proximity to Checkpoint Charlie and Museum am Checkpoint Charlie, which fostered artistic intervention, and more generally in the district of Kreuzberg: “a kind of centre for the counterculture it is also the home of many young artists.” (Gray 40) Varieties of two distinctly American/Western styles (pop art and abstract

⁹⁷ In *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (1999) Mary Fulbrook states that: “The area behind the Iron Curtain was, for most West-Germans, one of the blank spots on the map, about which they had little curiosity.” (209) The ‘imagined community’ for West Germans was the Western World, Western Europe and America in particular (209).

expressionism) proved very popular in the art works on the Wall; apart from the omnipresence of the English language:

The dominant character of the paintings on the Wall is Neo-Expressionist. There are influences of older artists such as Picasso, Philip Guston, and a strong relationship to comic strip art as well; the latter may be responsible for the pervasive use of the English language on the Wall, for there is no German tradition of comic strips. Consequently, English is the language young Germans associate with comics. (Gray 43)

Curiously enough the Western core values of freedom of expression and democratic intervention displayed on the Wall in the form of ‘freely articulated’ graffiti and Wall art, despite their banality, naivete, illusionist playfulness and general disrespect and dissociation from the Wall as material object as well as political metaphor on the level of content, were predominantly executed and fostered at a very specific site, in a very specific language and in very specific styles reminding of early Cold War ‘culture wars’⁹⁸. Seen in their polychrome totality graffiti and Wall art easily formed a fetishistic screen on which the spectacular display of image/texts was read as the monolithic expression of ‘the people in the West’ who collectively identified with the Western democratic notion of freedom, the freedom to pursue self-determination,⁹⁹ and collectively located socio-political oppression behind the Western Wall. This was clearly not the case, as Emily Pugh stresses in her article ‘Graffiti and the

⁹⁸ See Stephanie Barron, and Sabine Eckmann, *Art of two Germanies: Cold War Cultures* (2009). In this exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles county museum of Art, January 25 to April 19, 2009) various essays (eg.: Barron 15-16; Eckmann 49-54; Lang 105; Leeb 119; Huyssen 225) stress the fact that abstract expressionism and pop art (West) and socialist realism (East) were instrumentalized in the early Cold War (1950s) in order to either display the superiority of autonomous, ‘free’ art (abstract expressionism) and ironically reference Western abundance and consumerism (pop art) or celebrate the building of socialism and the advancement of society (socialist realism).

⁹⁹ See Branor Hesse ‘Two Concepts of White Sovereignty’ (2021). The development of Western liberal democracies and their concept of state sovereignty is not universal but culture specific. It is based on the illiberal exploitation and colonization of nonwhite peoples. Especially the discourse on the American way of life and its cultural freedoms means something very specific: freedom of consumer choice and freedom from political constraints (87). For Hesse, both the US and the USSR represented forms of white sovereignty during the Cold War, where white, Western liberal democracy was pitched against its deviant form: white totalitarianism (90).

Critical Power of Urban Space' (2015). Western positions were far from monolithic, and criticism voiced on the Wall or the walls of Kreuzberg also expressed a critique of democracy in its Western, capitalist form. In the late 1970s and early 1980s graffiti and street art were used as political tools by the growing squatter movement in Kreuzberg. By tattooing the facades of Mietskasernen, the early 20th-century inner-city tenement buildings, which were illegally occupied by squatters, protest against the city's housing policies and its inability to offer low-cost housing, its tendency to demolish old, grown structures and replacing them by anonymous, modernist housing was voiced: "Festooning squats with graffiti and banners was as important in this regard as demonstrating in Berlin's streets. The aesthetics the squatters embraced were part of their 'spectacle' of urban occupation and critique." (426) In this way divisions, not between East and West but within the Cold War West emerged, according to Pugh, while the street, house facades and increasingly the Wall were used as surfaces to stage popular discontent (427).

Thus, each aesthetic intervention, according to Pugh, must be embedded within its political, economic and spatial context (432). However, even Pugh detects a moment in time, when the ubiquity of graffiti and Wall art on the Western Wall in the late 1980s became mainstream and lost its disruptive potential; this was not due to the fact that the slogans and imagery were not overtly political in content anymore. As Karl Markus Michel argued in "Ein Kranz für die Literatur: Fünf Variationen über eine These" (1968) for the May 1968 Parisian cultural revolutionaries and their aesthetic interventions, it was not necessarily the content of an individual stencil graffiti or poster which counted as successful reappropriation of space but their ubiquity and the embodied performance of protest by defacing sacrosanct walls of sacrosanct institutions and teaching facilities:

Man kann die Graffiti auch anders lesen. Man *muss* sie anders lesen, will man nicht davon absehen, dass sie, statt auf Papier, auf Wänden stehen, zum Teil auf

ehrwürdigen Wänden, die zu beschmieren nicht nur als grober Unfug, sondern schon als Vandalismus erscheint. Ihr Kontext ist dann weniger die Summe der einzelnen Sprüche als vielmehr die Situation, in der es zum Akt des Schreibens kam ... Ja, insofern die >Botschaft< der Graffiti in diesem provokanten An-die-Wand-Schreiben besteht. Dieselben Losungen sind, wenn in Buchform publiziert, wie schon mehrfach geschehen, andere Losungen. Sie zeichnen sich dann durch einen hohen Redundanzgrad aus, ihr Informationswert ist minimal, der Provokationsgrad gleich Null, während die Provokation der Mauerlosungen gerade mit ihrer Redundanz zu tun hat: nicht ihre Einmaligkeit ist ihre Stärke, sondern ihre Allgegenwart. (170-171)

One can also read graffiti in a different way. One *must* read them in a different way, if one does not want to dismiss the fact that they are found on walls, to some extent on venerable walls, where the act of their defacement counts not only as rude nonsense but already appears to be vandalism; and not on paper. Their context then results less from the sum of the individual slogans than predominantly from the situation, which triggered the act of writing ... Well, as far as the >message< of the graffiti consists in this provocative writing-on-the-wall. The same slogans, when published in form of a book, as has been done more than once, are other slogans. They are then characterised by a high degree of redundancy, with minimal information value and a zero degree of provocation, while the provocation of the wall slogans has everything to do with its redundancy: their strength does not lie in their uniqueness but in their ubiquity. (170-171)

As will be shown, the graffiti and Wall art were certainly ubiquitous but only at a particular stretch of the Wall in the American zone, where graffiti and Wall art were tolerated, even fostered by anti-communist civil rights activists like Rainer Hildebrandt, who organised art competitions next to or on the Wall in 1979 and 1983. They lost their disruptive potential, because they increasingly formed an ornamental pattern decorating the Western Wall rather than an anarchic onslaught of image/texts tattooing and defacing it. Additionally, with their growing spectacularity and circulation in the media, certain images (Kilometerkunst) were fetishised and instrumentalised for Western discourses of freedom and self-determination.

Apart from a close analysis of the politically disruptive potential of seemingly harmless, often non-sensical aesthetic interventions on the Wall, the paradoxical role of graffiti and Wall art must not be overlooked: on the one hand Western means of dissent and rebellion against an oppressive system of spatial division and control affecting West and East Berliners in different ways, on the other hand unwelcome aestheticization of a material structure, seen by East German dissidents such as Marianne Birthler as nothing more than the “gallows” (Birthler in Pugh 432).

As early as 1982 Joachim Schmid deplored that the previous presence of political graffiti had given way to fantastic imagery, plants, animals, human figures, mostly pleasing and drawn “zum eigenen Lustgewinn” ‘for your own pleasure’ (Schmid 56; my trans.), turning the Wall into a depoliticized playground. Contrary to the squatters of Kreuzberg, who championed the preservation of the old tenement buildings by using the house facades as surface for their political slogans and banners, the Berlin Wall painters increasingly pursued a politics of pleasure. A ‘politics of pleasure’, however, had its own tradition in West Berlin where members of the 1960s countercultural commune *Kommune 1* believed that “Revolution should be fun” (Hockenos 34). One of their rallying cries was “All Power to the Imagination” (Hockenos 34), which turned anarchic pranks into political tools:

Wearing outrageous costumes or cross-dressing, the hell-raisers broke rules just to show how ridiculous rules were. They fired off typewritten manifestos and communiqués that mixed nonsense, political critique, and scathing digs at hierarchical power in all its manifestations. (Hockenos 34)

In comparison to Kommune 1's ludic political interventions, Wall painters Thierry Noir and Cristophe Bouchet, seemed rather serious in their 'pursuit of pleasure' at the Wall. They spent two years (1984-1986) incorporating isolated wall art and graffiti into a colourful ornamental carpet with the ambitious aim completely to cover its surface, kilometer after kilometer, using repetitive patterns, images, and Wall art (Kilometerkunst).

[Es dauerte] noch ca. zwei Jahre, bis sie [Noir and Bouchet] das Konzept der Kilometerkunst entwickelten. Isolierte Werke wurden von einem Strom aus Farbe und abenteuerlichen Formen umflossen und modifizierten dabei die Mauer zu einem kontinuierlich im Wandel begriffenen Gesamtkunstwerk. (Gründer 200)

[It took] approximately another two years until they developed the concept of kilometer art. Isolated pieces were surrounded by a stream of colour and unusual forms and modified the Wall by turning it into a continuously changing total work of art. (Gründer 200; my trans.)

Rather than having a political agenda, they wanted to create an explosion of colour and forms, breathing life into an ugly, forbidding object, displaying "pralle Lust am Leben" 'excessive lust for life' (Gründer 157; my trans.), neutralizing previously politically motivated graffiti. In this way Jean-Martin's Tandetzki's figure "Nasenmonster", the nosemonster, was not only integrated into the polychrome, carnivalesque Kilometerkunst, but entirely lost its political meaning (Gründer 173). The original "Nasenmonster" was accompanied by a speech bubble saying "Der Letzte macht das Licht aus!" 'The last person

turns off the light' (Gründer 173; my trans.). Bouchet painted over the punchline of a wellknown, subversive GDR joke, equipping the "Nasenmonster" with the absurd comment "Eat your feet!" (Gründer 173). The original punchline, referring directly to the Wall, telling a disconcerted Erich Honecker, general secretary of the SED, after coming back from a state visit and finding his country deserted because of a hole in the Wall, to turn off the lights—him being the last person in the GDR¹⁰⁰, was found in variations on the Berlin Wall. By making Tandetzki's formerly isolated figure become part of a larger structure, a mass ornament, where, similar to Siegfried Kracauer's Tiller girls¹⁰¹, content was reduced to abstract form and patterns, colours, figures and senseless scribbles with Dadaist overtones ruled supreme, the image lost its individuality as well as its political fervor. Defacement and the will to decorate seemingly went hand in hand with a growing indifference vis a vis the Wall, best summarized by Ruggero Guarini's comment on the Berlin Wall's ornamental character and Kilometerkunst:

Surrealism and Dadaism, expressionism and pop-art, comic books and every type of avantgarde and graphic art: this wall of signs is, in its way, a map. Of what? Not, certainly, of recent trends and styles in the visual arts. We could describe it as the impression left by them on the collective imagination, a kind of store-room for which, I think, we need a better name since this repository is really more like a mental archive, a remembered account than a productive workshop for original forms. ... it's not this piece nor that fragment of the Painted Wall but its totality that expresses a composite sensation, where various feelings and ideas mix

¹⁰⁰ Keeping in mind that Erich Honecker was in charge of the erection of the Wall and the fact that the GDR's Palace of the Republic, the seat of parliament, was pejoratively called Erichs Lampenladen, Erich's lamp shop, referring to the abundance of lamps in the entry hall of the people's palace, demonstrates to what degree the joke was political and site specific.

¹⁰¹ Cultural critic and architect Siegfried Kracauer detected the uncanny survival of the ornament in modernity. In his 1927 essay 'The Mass Ornament' the performance of the American dance troupe Tiller Girls served as the prime example of the mass ornament, in which individual girls were transformed into anonymous, geometrical clusters, reduced to a "pure assemblage of lines" (76), a linear system devoid of (erotic) life.

without abrading contrasts: lyricism and sarcasm, tenderness and brutality, utopianism and complete indifference. And it seems that beyond the desire to satirize and provoke we sense a throbbing, secret, perhaps unconscious will to oblivion. (Guarini 12)

In 1986 Noir and Bouchet (mass-) stenciled 42 pop art-inspired identical images of the Statue of Liberty in various colours close to Checkpoint Charlie in celebration of the statue's 100th anniversary¹⁰², a present for the American allies (Gründer 274). Whether the complicity with the Allied forces and the core Western value of freedom (of choice) was naïve or tongue in cheek or simply part of *the style* they had chosen to render the images in, can only be answered by the artists themselves. Some of the polychrome, identical figures were partly overwritten by much smaller caricatures of the Statue of Liberty (Alacevich 18-19), ridiculing the original series, exposing the freedom of facing a wall a farce. Clearly, the graffiti functioned to critique and subvert Noir's and Bouchet's ornamental, oblivious work. True to the democratic spirit of freedom of expression the anonymous graffiti commented on and overwrote the original iconic message, only to be erased by the then already famous New York pop artist Keith Haring, who had been invited to paint on the Wall by Haus am Checkpoint Charlie in 1986.

When Haring painted his figure chain in black, red and gold over the images of the Statue of Liberty, Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet were offended by Haring's appropriation (Gründer 61). Haring's strategy was not necessarily in line with graffiti

¹⁰² See Isabella Woldt's discussion of the concept of freedom and its visual representations in the course of centuries. The Statue of Liberty (1886) was a gift to US by the people of France and was meant to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the American declaration of independence (1776). According to Woldt liberty was, at the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), associated with freedom from slavery and oppression, but went beyond these narrowly defined concepts. The Statue of Liberty embodied the republican values based on a democratic constitution in an admittedly rigid and monumental form. It also served as a reminder that even though independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain and democracy had been in place for a while in 1886, the need to fight for liberty had to be replaced by the need to secure and maintain liberty (Woldt 377-379).

writers'¹⁰³ but certainly with 'the artist as defacer practices'.¹⁰⁴ The images of the Statue of Liberty could still be seen underneath the mass-ornamental figure chain and the tension between the two images (human figures in colours of the West as well as East German flags overwriting but not erasing the symbol of American freedom) was further heightened by Skip Parrish's additional 1986 self-portrait with skull inserted in the figure chain (sub) titled: "Don't look back" (Gründer 60). Thus, the rather inoffensive looking figure chain was complemented by a memento mori (if one dared to reverse the look-behind the Western Wall towards the death strip). Many responses to Haring's piece, however, were negative:

Während Haring sein Werk als "a political subversive act—an attempt to psychologically destroy the wall by painting it" verstand, sah die alternative taz darin eine einfallslose "Banderole Lapidarhumanismus". Ein Berliner Zuschauer urteilte: "This is valium, there's no provocation in it. In every toilet in Kreuzberg you can see the same graffiti". (Henke 324-325)

While for Haring his work was "a political subversive act—an attempt to psychologically destroy the wall by painting it", the alternative (newspaper) taz interpreted it as a "package band of lapidary humanism". A Berlin bystander judged: "This is valium, there's no provocation in it. In every toilet in Kreuzberg you can see the same graffiti". (Henke 324-325; my trans.)

The very act of painting on the Wall, as already pointed out, was political and Haring's intention of creating an image signifying peace and the future reunification of East and West

¹⁰³ In *The Graffiti Subculture* (2001) Nancy Macdonald points out that in graffiti subculture going over another person's graffiti or crossing it out is a sign of great disrespect as each writer's tag is 'sacred' (Macdonald 208).

¹⁰⁴ In *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (1990), in their chapter on graffiti, Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik mention Robert Rauschenberg's 'infamous stunt of erasing a drawing by Willem de Kooning' in the 1950s (Varnedoe and Gopnik 93). Also Simon Morley in *Writing on the Wall* (2003) describes Marcel Duchamp's defacement and punning of a cheap print version of Leonardo's Mona Lisa. Apart from Mona Lisa being moustached the print bears the additional graffiti 'L.H.O.O.Q.' which when spoken "sounds like a French phrase that loosely translates 'she's got a hot ass'" (Morley 63).

Germany (Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 428) in its sheer harmless playfulness, I argue, a site-specific provocation in it itself. Haring's role as a dedicated American graffiti and street artist as well as his political activism¹⁰⁵ lent credibility to the desire to expose "the ridiculousness of all walls and enemies and borders" (Haring in Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 428). According to Pugh Haring hoped that as a well-known international figure, public attention would be directed towards the Wall and together with his figure chain image the universal message of international understanding would be widely disseminated. Indeed, several mass media outlets covered Haring's intervention on the Wall and Rainer Hildebrandt, anti-communist, human rights activist and director of Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, who had invited Haring to participate in the art competition with the motto overcoming the wall by painting over it, additionally sold postcards with Haring's Wall work at his museum shop (Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 430). Pop artists like Haring located themselves at "the very heart of mainstream" (Gopnik and Varnedoe 204), reaching out and embracing "a politics of pleasure" (Hebdige 140); at the same time the commodification of the artworks was seen as a process of democratization by Haring, making them easily accessible and purchasable for a general public (Pih 17-19). Haring's overall intention, according to a published interview in the New York Times in 1986, was to create a "humanistic gesture" (Haring in Special to the New York Times C9), a visual expression of "both sides coming together" (Haring in Special to the New York Times C9). The effect of Haring's intervention and pop aesthetic of mass consumption was much more ambiguous: the (mass) reproduction and exposure of a remembered form—a *human chain* (primal form, humanistic gesture versus

¹⁰⁵ See Darren Pih 'The Public Has a Right to Art' (2019). For Pih, Haring's illegal chalk graffiti in the New York underground in the 1980s and his later aesthetic interventions which oscillated between public and gallery spaces all have one thing in common: they created a direct, democratic system of communication between artist and viewer and enabled a new form of participation as viewers and mass consumers of Haring's easily accessible artworks as commodities (17-19).

Lapidarhumanismus, an unadorned, straight forward if not cynical humanism carved in 'stone' claiming universality, speaking for West and East Germans alike while geopolitically and site specifically being embedded in a Western liberal, capitalist context), linking as well as separating West from East Berlin like the Wall itself; challenging the status quo while at the same time reinforcing it. In hindsight, Haring had already anticipated what was going to happen on November 9, 1989, when Berliners climbed the Wall in front of Brandenburg Gate, formed a human chain and physically as well as symbolically appropriated the material structure by a 'humanistic' gesture. Noir and Bouchet's as well as Haring's interventions of intentionally or unintentionally creating ornamental structures are in many ways multilayered. To read Kilometerkunst as a totalizing Western, capitalist, visual regime only, misses its ephemeral nature, its complex system of image making/writing and defacement as well as its internal ambiguities. By weaving and altering individual image/texts into a more abstract, ornamental form, which despite its longevity was always under threat of erasure, the artists might also have attempted to give (a particular) order and (a particular) form to a highly complex experience.

However, the idea of an 'illusionist curtain of images' veiling the 'Iron Curtain turned concrete' is tempting. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973) Lacan discusses in which way one's own viewing position is either playfully enhanced by the function of trompe l'oeil and the illusions it produces or cruelly unmasked by anamorphosis. Lacan refers to the classical anecdote of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, two painters who excelled in the art of illusion. Whereas Zeuxis painted perfect grapes on a wall so that the image deceived birds, Parrhasios painted such a lifelike curtain on the very same wall that Zeuxis literally expected the curtain to be lifted. This ultimate deception of the eye and its eventual unmasking, is read by Lacan as the triumph of the gaze over the eye (103). The lifting of the 'illusory veil', removes the screen which normally mediates between the eye and the gaze

and serves as a reminder of human insertion into the scopic field. Whereas animals lack self-consciousness and react to the lure's form, humans are able to play with the lure if it is identified as such.

Only the subject—the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation. (107)

Man, according to Lacan, is able to play with the illusions of his own making, produced by perspective, unless desire dulls perception. Driven by the desire to look behind the veil, Zeuxis mistakes the veil for reality. The Kilometerkunst on the Western Wall could then be understood as a lure, an invitation to stop and marvel at the colourful images on a wall, which is either desired to be a canvas or played at being a canvas. A devotion to and play with illusions can be safely attested to encounters with the Western Wall, where a politics of pleasure was pursued despite and because of the life-threatening circumstances on the other side. The attitude of artists like Thierry Noir, Christophe Bouchet or Keith Haring shares similarities with Octave Manonni's¹⁰⁶ analysis of fetishism:

Manonni thus delivers a structural formula for sexual fetishism: there is knowledge and, at the same time, a libidinal fixation on a (desire-based) illusion.

And there is also a specific, seemingly paradoxical connection between these two

¹⁰⁶ See Octave Manonni, *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'Autre Scène* (1969). According to Manonni illusions feed on better knowledge. He refers to Sigmund Freud's 'Fetishism' (1927) essay, in which the tension between an unwelcome perception (the mother lacking the penis/castration) and the force of the counter-wish (the mother having the penis) is resolved in a compromise: the fetish as phallic substitute (Freud 154). For Manonni, Freud's essay demonstrates in which way a belief (in the female phallus) is abandoned and at the same time preserved. The ego splits in a knowing and in a believing side. The difference between mundane disavowal and fetishistic disavowal is that under normal circumstances one would be aware of the illusory character of the illusion (I know very well ... but nevertheless). For the fetishist however, the *but nevertheless* is replaced by the fetish (11-12).

sides: *knowledge is the condition for the devotion to illusion*. ... Manonni

emphasizes that both sides of the ego-split form a complex structure in which the 'knowing' side does not form the opposite to, but instead the backup for, the 'believing' side. (Pfaller 41)

Manonni's well known example in 'Je sais bien, quand même' (1964) refers to the Hopi Indian Talayesva's (1890-1976) autobiographical account of being initiated to the kachina ritual dance. As a child Talayesva was made to believe that the kachina dancers were the actual spirit beings. Even before initiation to adulthood but demonstrably at the initiation Talayesva found out that the kachina dancers were humans, members of his own tribe. This revelation did not result in demystification but in a belief system characterised by an ambiguous, double structure. The initiated knew that the kachina dancers were not spirit beings but believed them to be present while the tribal dancers engaged in the kachina ritual (14-17).

I argue that artists like Thierry Noir or Christophe Bouchet knew very well that their pursuit of pleasure at the Western Wall was superficial and their treatment of the Wall as canvas only affected its surface layer and screened off what lay behind the Western Wall; at the same time they gave voice to the absurdity of being encircled by the Wall by devoting two years to completing their Gesamtkunstwerk in order to celebrate the intense lust for life in the shadow of the Wall. This fact resonates heavily with Walter Momper's (governing mayor of West Berlin 1989-1990) often cited remarks on the healing power of Berlin Wall art in the context of the divided and then re-unified city: "Art versus cast concrete. Art won." (Momper in Haacke 115)¹⁰⁷ Did Momper and many others fall victim to a magical belief in

¹⁰⁷ See Hans Haacke, *Working Conditions: The Writings of Hans Haacke* (2016). Hans Haacke refers to the Monte Carlo auction of June 20, 1990, when 81 spray-painted segments of the Berlin Wall were auctioned off as art in public spaces. In the auction catalogue Walter Momper wrote "Art versus cast concrete. Art won." (115)

the power of images and art(e)facts or was he simply exploiting the Western triumphalist perspective?

Whereas a relatively small stretch of the Western Wall between Checkpoint Charlie and Brandenburg Gate was marked by graffiti and Wall art, the individual, painted segments of this section have not only been coveted but also endowed with an extraordinary transformational power, which brings us back to the believing side of Mannoni's structural formula of fetishism. The 'knowing side' might have been perfectly aware that the actual course of events was more complex.

Geopolitical events, such as political reforms and restructuring efforts in the Soviet Union (Perestroika), as well as a domestic crisis due to the crumbling economy in the GDR, the rise of protest movements and the mass exodus of GDR citizens via Hungary, which had already opened its border to Austria in May 1989, brought about the dramatic changes on November 9, 1989, and the eventual demolition of the Wall. Factual knowledge, rather than demystifying the alleged effects of the artistic interventions, seemingly strengthens it. No wonder that Berlin's East Side Gallery, a 1.3-km-long stretch of a former, GDR hinterland wall close to the river Spree, which was painted by 118 artists from 21 countries *after* the fall of the Wall, is a popular tourist attraction and has enjoyed heritage status since 1991. What is experienced as 'authentic', according to Jonathan Bach, is not so much the authentic GDR hinterland wall still in situ but, if we are to believe the gallery's 2014 mission statement, the "visual testimony of the joy and spirit of liberation" (Bach 56). The "visual testimony of joy", as we have seen, was carefully crafted so that the human eye was spellbound by spectacular surface manifestations.

However, if the screen is removed, the gaze as reminder of the central lack in the field of vision, is exposed. A blank, unadorned Wall confronts the onlooker with its military sobriety. The threat of loss of free movement and implicitly loss of life is reinstated. Rather

than being in control of what we see, the blind gaze of the Wall around us, turns us into beings who are framed and looked at. In *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) W.J.T. Mitchell describes the Medusa effect as the power of the image to enthrall, transfix or paralyse the beholder in a specific way,

... turning him or her into an image for the gaze of the picture in what might be called “the Medusa effect.” This effect is perhaps the clearest demonstration we have that the power of pictures and of women is modelled on one another, and this is a model of both pictures and women that is abject, mutilated, and castrated.

The power they want is manifested as *lack*, not as possession. (36)

If we are to agree with W.J.T. Mitchell, images not only enthrall, but also have the potential to destabilise the onlooker’s perspective. The following example will demonstrate the confrontation with and exposure to the abject, castrating power of the Berlin Wall in the field of vision. The trauma of division will not be veiled but exposed as ‘wound’, experienced as such through corporeal engagement with the dividing agent.

Screen versus Thing Power

For Swedish Eija-Riitta (Eklöf) Berliner-Mauer (1954-2015), at the age of seven, the images of the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 on television brought about an intense object love. She obsessively collected images and postcards of the Wall, constructed models of the different generations of the Western Wall, embraced, caressed, touched *him* on her rare visits to Berlin between 1961 and 1988, and eventually ‘married’ *him* in 1979.

Eija-Riitta Eklöf was a self-declared objectum sexual¹⁰⁸, who was sexually and emotionally attracted to objects, in her case to objects with a rectangular form, parallel lines

¹⁰⁸ See www.objectum-sexuality.org/. Accessed 8 July 2018. Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer and fellow objectum sexual Erika Eiffel are commonly seen as the founding members of the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale Organisation, which provides information on objectum sexuality.

and a dividing function. She saw herself as an animist not a fetishist who believed that all objects were living beings, had a soul and communicated with her. She lived in a small village in Liden, central Sweden, in her parent's house with a large number of cats and models of the Berlin Wall as well as other models of fences, bridges and guillotines, some of which were also exhibited in a small museum in the same house.

In Lars Laumann's filmic portrait *Berlinmuren* (2008) the viewer learns that Eija-Riitta visited her 'husband' several times in Berlin but mostly contented herself with self-made scale models of the Berlin Wall, which she treated as living extensions of the original. The fact that the Berlin Wall fell and was eventually demolished, was experienced as a catastrophe by Eija-Riitta, who championed object rights and denounced the demolition of the Berlin Wall after its fall. In *Berlinmuren* she admitted to having completely repressed the traumatic event and preferred to see her 'husband' as past his prime.

Even though Lars Laumann's clever montage of postcards, photos and film clips foregrounds her loving rather than sexual relatedness to objects, at the same time a fetishistic structure of desire vis a vis her object choice comes to the fore. In *Berlinmuren* Eija-Riitta, who was well aware that her husband was regarded by others as *the* symbol of division between capitalism and communism, denied having any interest in politics. While disavowing the Wall's historical importance, the sheer abundance of Berlin Wall models scattered in her house, some of them playfully obstructing doors, reveals the Wall's domineering function in her personal space.

The fact, that she felt sexually attracted to objects with an all too often deadly dividing function (guillotines!), reinforced, on the structural level, what was denied in reality. Neither on her former website¹⁰⁹ nor in Laumann's video, is the Wall as actual fortification system shown. Eija-Riitta exclusively loved the Western Wall, in front of which she posed

¹⁰⁹ www.berlinermauer.se. Accessed 15 June 2010, now obsolete.

for photographs to be taken, with or without a model wall in one of her hands. In this way, not only the Berlin Wall's symbolic character and dividing function but also its material structure were negated, only to re-emerge in slightly distorted form in the personal sphere. In a memorable scene in Laumann's video, the viewer sees one of Eija-Riitta's cats comfortably resting in the space between a model Berlin Wall (West) and the window of her room. The backlit cat, whose silhouette is nicely foregrounded, stares at the viewer from behind the model, indicating a possible threat beyond the Western Wall. Indeed, Eija-Riitta thought of her cats, whose images appear lovingly side by side with pictures of the Berlin Wall on her bright, red wallpaper, as endangering her models in real life. Since the Western wall models' *other* side is seemingly occupied by her feline cohabitants, the awareness of 'life beyond the Wall', however demonized, feared and loved at the same time, is undeniable. Again and again the viewer is confronted with the double structure of the fetish, where the disavowal of the actual historical context goes hand in hand with its displacement onto the structural level.

The more harmless and beautifully crafted Eija-Riitta's scale models appeared, the more disturbing their function in reality, from geopolitical division to beheading, became. Even though Eija-Riitta lived with her objects in a subject to subject relationship, treating them as beings, some of them, according to her, wanted to be put on display and thus became objects to be looked at in her small museum. Laumann's video exposes Eija-Riitta's paradoxical relationship with the living objects and animals in her personal space.

Apart from photos of the Berlin Wall and her cats, the viewer is struck by a neat embroidery of the first generation of the Wall, where concrete blocks and barbed wire turn into perfectly fitting domestic wall decoration. The first generation's martial character is tamed by this piece of skillful domestic handwork and epitomizes Eija-Riitta's dangerously cute aesthetics.

In the contemporary Japanese context, Sianne Ngai points out, that cute aesthetics is characterized by ambivalence, the oscillation between *kawaii* and *kowai* (cute and scary), as in for example Takashi Murakami's pop art-inspired trademark Mr. DOB figures, which range from cute incarnations of a cartoon mouse like figure to rather disturbing images of beings dominated by their eyes and bare teeth (Ngai 822)¹¹⁰. Ngai defines cute aesthetics as an aesthetics of powerlessness, where the exaggerated cuteness of objects can also provoke sadistic impulses in the subject, who derives pleasure, not from cuddling the cute object, but from testing the object's resistance to rough handling. In a dialectical reversal, the subject's veiled or latent aggression can turn into explicit violence. Whether behind Eija-Riitta's militant activism for object rights might have also been a desire to master and control them is up to speculation. She certainly empathized with the mutilated and later demolished Berlin Wall, while consciously repressing the actual fall in 1989. Her perfectly intact scale models functioned as screens, which only partially screened off reality.

Articulate Erika (Naisho) La Tour Eiffel, a fellow objectum sexual and friend of the late Eija-Riitta shares her love for the Berlin Wall. In Agnieszka Piotrowska's documentary *Married to the Eiffel Tower* (2008) Erika expresses the wish to become part of, if not *be* the Berlin Wall. Asked for the reason of the partial or even complete imaginary identification with/transformation into the Berlin Wall, Erika explains her sympathy for and consolation in the Wall by comparing the Wall's 'life circle' with her personal experience of being brought into the world, rejected, battered, but still, if only in ruins, standing. Erika, the viewer learns, suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome due to a dysfunctional family and sexual abuse within the family and later in life.

¹¹⁰ See Sianne Ngai, 'The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde' (2005).

The Berlin Wall's 'powerlessness' and victimization vis a vis its demolition is turned into a political tool by objectum sexuals like Erika and Eija-Riitta. They vehemently criticized the so-called wall peckers, individuals, who chiseled off pieces of the Western Wall as personal mementos or for profit after the fall of the Wall in 1989. For Eija-Riitta, the Berlin Wall was a 'German being' with a right to continue to exist. It belonged to West and East Germany, which should not have been reunited. Only one framed newspaper article recalls the traumatic event of the fall of the Wall in Eija-Riitta's house.

American actor and singer David Hasselhoff, who became successful with the American action series *Knight Rider* (1981-1986), where he played field agent Michael Knight in team with a technologically highly advanced, animated car named KITT, comes across as Eija Riitta's worst nightmare. His own entanglement in animated high-tech materialism renders his, for Eija-Riitta 'horrific' and in Laumann's documentary *muted*, performance at the Berlin Wall even more outlandish. What the informed viewer does not hear but knows is, that Hasselhoff, towering above a cheering German-German crowd sitting or standing on or next to the Wall at Brandenburg Gate at New Year 1989/90, fires them up with the song 'Looking for Freedom'¹¹¹. While Hasselhoff's actual performance faintly recalls 80s camp à la Wham!, and the song's lyrics voice a mild criticism of the freedom of the American way of life solely based on financial freedom¹¹², the viewer of *Berlimuren* is exposed to Laumann's alienation effects: blurry images of Hasselhoff moving frenetically on

¹¹¹ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJ2Sgd9sc0M. Accessed 24 August 2023.

¹¹² See Sarah James, 'What Did 'Freedom' Really Mean?', <https://www.frieze.com/article/germany-celebrates-30-years-after-berlin-wall-what-did-freedom-really-mean>. Accessed 8 July 2024. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall Sarah James re-assesses Hasselhoff's performance which has been dismissed by filmmaker and visual artist Hito Steyerl as the most dreadful and kitschy pop-cultural odes to freedom, exalting the Western, liberal notion of freedom, which in the 21st century means nothing more than freedom from any form of socio-economic regulation, freedom from solidarity, freedom from certainty, freedom from employment to name only a few. For James, Hasselhoff's cover version of the 1978 song co-written by Gary Cowtan and Marc Seaberg does not necessarily represent an homage to a victorious capitalism. On the contrary: "It couldn't have been produced as a better parody of both capitalism and individualism's hopeless and false quest for contentment if it had been the brainchild of East German propagandists."

an elevated platform while the sounds of an electric guitar heighten a tension that hovers between the dramatic and the ridiculous. In an instant the viewer comprehends Eija-Riitta's dismay. What about objectum rights and their freedom?

Undoubtedly, Eija Ritta's imaginary identification with and empathy for the Berlin Wall as vulnerable, deformed being with a 'right to exist', was repressed but all-pervasive; due to the object's resistance. The ability to withstand rough handling, Sianne Ngai argues, shifts control from subject to object, which persists and resists. The aggressed mute object returns as an impotence on the part of the subject (Ngai 837). However ridiculed and abused, the women assuming the position of the 'wounded' object or object as 'wound', also persist and resist. Women like Eija-Riitta, while fetishizing, indulged in the object's abject power and felt attracted to its vibrant materialism, which might not only be due to perverse female desire but to the object's excessive materiality.

In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001) Jane Bennett contests the narrative of modernity's disenchantment, the inevitable sense of loss (the feeling of being disconnected from 'things') through the process of rationalisation and scientisation. Despite loss and alienation modern man has the possibility of actively engaging with and being enchanted by objects, according to Bennett. She describes the moment of enchantment as moment of pure presence when the object is animated and the magical momentarily erupts amid the everyday. The self is spellbound by the object, a state which oscillates between pleasure and a sense of the uncanny (5). Contrary to 'classical' Marxist views, commodities do not only mask power relations, create a false aura and invite fetishization for Bennett, but also offer the possibility—through bodily engagement—of experiencing the non-commercial effects of commodities:

Moreover, the animation of artifacts that Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno lament might not be all that bad. It might embody several dissonant possibilities; it might have all of the following incompatible effects—pressing people to submit to the

call to consume, distracting them from attending to the unjust social relations embodied in the product, reminding them that they share the world with nonhuman modes of agency ... (126-127)

Eiija-Riitta's engagement with the Wall in situ as well as in model form must be seen as a form of engagement with nonhuman modes of agency. Certainly, the engagement was multi-layered and ambiguous. Her fixation on the Western Wall reproduced the classical fetishistic structure of the Western Wall as screen, based on sight and perspective, resulting in the disavowal of the fortification system behind it. On the corporeal, level, however, Eiija-Riitta experienced the object's vibrant materialism, where the 'pure presence' of the Wall's dividing function generated powerful, transformational affects: an identification with the battered object's power of resisting the subject's brutality.

For the anthropologist Roy Ellen, the ambiguous relationship between control of objects by people and of people by objects is one of the defining characteristics of fetishism. Ellen emphasizes "the universal human character of fetish-like behavior" (Ellen 219), which can be found in everyday practices such as anthropomorphism and the tendency to conflate, in semiotic terms, the signifier and the signified, when, for example, the host in catholic mass does not represent but become the body of Christ (Ellen 226).¹¹³ It is therefore not surprising that graffitied fragments of the Western Wall were kept by many Berliners and tourists as souvenirs, trophies, even relics, or turned into commodities for sale. Art historian and conservator Leo Schmidt describes the anarchic handling of the Wall after its fall in figurative language, attributing human or animal-like qualities to the Western Wall, explaining in which way the material structure had been animated and transformed into a monster-to-be slain:

¹¹³ See Roy Ellen, 'Fetishism' (1988).

Die Überwindung der Mauer läutete die physische Auflösung der nunmehr funktionslos gewordenen Grenzanlagen ein. Tausende von Mauerspechten fielen über die Grenzmauer her und pickelten unzählige Fragmente aus dem Beton; Fragmente, die wie Reliquien geschätzt wurden und rasch den Weg in alle Welt fanden. Wo die Mauerspechte ganze Arbeit geleistet hatten, blieb fast nur das Gerippe der Stahllarmierung übrig. Diese spontane, individuelle Überwindung und Aneignung der Mauer hatte den Charakter eines Volksfestes –man genoss das Triumphgefühl und zerstückelte gemeinsam das besiegte und wehrlos am Boden liegende Monster. (Schmidt b, 175)

The overcoming of the Wall heralded the physical dissolution of the now functionless fortification system. Thousands of wall peckers attacked the border fortification and broke countless fragments off the concrete structure; fragments, which were appreciated like relics and which soon were found all over the world. Where the wall peckers had worked thoroughly, not more than the steel skeleton of the object remained. The spontaneous overcoming and appropriation of the Wall had the character of a folk festival—one enjoyed the feeling of triumph and, together, ripped apart the beaten and defenceless monster. (Schmidt b, 175; my trans.)

Whereas before, any East German climbing on, attacking or chiselling off pieces of the Wall would have become the target of GDR border snipers, as Robert Darnton points out in *Berlin Journal* (1991), on November 9 and New Year 1989/1990, people not only climbed the Wall but danced on it at the Brandenburg Gate, where the Wall was 2m thick. “Their [young East Berliners/East Germans] world came walled. So to dance on the Wall was to turn the world upside down: *Wahnsinn* (crazy), as they kept repeating.” (117) A taboo had been broken; the

‘first ascent’ and the physical appropriation of the Berlin Wall was experienced by many as a magical moment (Darnton 86), a moment of enchanted materialism, however brief, when the former symbol of division had been transformed into a symbol of freedom overnight.

The triumphant appropriation of the Berlin Wall after its fall recalls, as already mentioned, the storming of the Bastille in 1789, which had also turned from symbol of state oppression to symbol of freedom. After the storming of the Bastille, which, on the symbolic level, marked the end of the Ancien Régime and its absolutism, the much-hated prison was quickly dismantled and model Bastilles as relics were carved out of the original material. The once notorious state prison, as Lüsebrink and Reichardt point out, which at the time of its storming only held four prisoners captive, served as a collective symbol: it embodied the totalitarian, monarchic regime. While historically the Bastille did not exercise despotic power anymore, its mythical status guaranteed that its demolition and a festive dance on the ruins of the former prison would turn into powerful symbolic acts (Lüsebrink and Reichardt 3-5). Similarly, the Berlin Wall at the time of its ‘fall’ had long turned from terrifying military fortification system to tourist attraction or simply a fact of life, at least on its Western side. What was celebrated on November 9, 1989, and turned into a ritual at New Year 1989/1990, was the transformation of one collective symbol (despised border wall within a divided city) into another collective symbol (destroyed border wall and ‘liberated’ city), which did not necessarily reflect the actual living conditions while the Wall was standing and after its fall. After nearly thirty years of living with the Wall, East and West Berliners were forced to adjust and what used to be one city turned into two separate entities, with their own political, cultural, and economic centres. Undoubtedly, ‘the magical moment’ experienced by East and West Berliners due to the sudden opening of the checkpoints on November 9, 1989, created a common bond but, like the actual demolition of the Wall, the process of re-unification has proved to be much longer and more complicated.

Esther Leslie's snow shaker demonstrates the ambivalent attitude towards the Wall in an exemplary way. In 'Snow Shaker' (2009) Leslie discusses a seemingly harmless souvenir celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall. She describes a snow globe, which contains the graffitied Berlin Wall breached by an East German (car) Trabant. The image recalls Birgit Kinder's mural at Berlin's East Side Gallery, which commemorates, in condensed form, the fall of the Wall and the Trabants driven through the unexpectedly open checkpoints. In the snow shaker, several East Germans stand on the Wall and face "west, towards their new life." (516) What might be another snapshot of 'history' to be relived forever in memory, the image of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Western directedness of the people has several flaws. Leslie points out that whenever shaken "snow falls endlessly on this vision of the defrosting political relations." (516) This complicates the all-too-common narrative of exuberant happiness in the face of new freedoms. Also, Leslie mentions, the snow shaker allows only a front-on-view (518). Similar to the function of a dolls house, as discussed by Susan Stewart, the snow shaker is carefully controlled by perspective and projects an imaginary world of interiority.

In *On Longing* (1993) Susan Stewart defines the miniature as a fixed form, a tableau, unfolding in space rather than time, whose tendency towards silence and spatial boundaries reinforces and offers a transcendent view to the observer. The most abstract of all miniature forms, according to Stewart, is the dolls house, a domesticated space, a model of order, creating the illusion of a hermetic world of profound interiority/nostalgia, a possible "monument against instability, randomness and vulgarity" (62), erasing all but the frontal view.

While West Berliners (and East Berliners in mediated, televised form) were actually exposed to more than the frontal view of the Western Wall and corporeal engagement was possible on the Western side, the majority chose to fetishize, before and after the fall of the

Wall, various, myth-producing, substitutes. In reality, an East German Trabant, infamous for its lack of sturdiness, might have crashed into the hinterland wall but would, most likely, not have come as far as breaching the front wall in the 1980s; despite the fact that Grenzmauer 75 was lacking in sturdiness in its early manifestations too¹¹⁴. In the ‘mythical space’ carefully contained within the snow shaker, such a breach is possible and is more likely to be ‘true’ to ‘the magical moment’, experienced by many Germans on the 9th of November 1989. The viewers, holding the snow globe in their hands can safely indulge in a fantastic tableau *in miniature form*. In an almost Baroque gesture, the owners of the snow globe might be intensely aware of the contradictions at the heart of their souvenir and—as art historian Erwin Panofsky so pointedly described Baroque sentiment—“quiver with emotion.” (Panofsky 7) They might even cherish the souvenir as the embodiment of ‘the magical moment’ as well as its parody on a small scale.

In this light, Eija-Riitta and her friend Erika, taking their husbands/model Walls on a ride, sledding on a road through winterly Sweden in *Berlinmuren* seem less exotic. Not unlike the wall peckers and other souvenir hunters, they have de-contextualised the Berlin Wall and incorporated it into their own personal life story. Eija-Riitta’s home, which transformed into a model-living-space cum model museum, reminds of Susan Stewart’s dollhouse, a bounded and carefully controlled space, which might have been experienced as sanctuary by Eija-Riitta, effectively drawing the line between herself as animist and objectum sexual, and the outside world. Certainly, Eija-Riitta lived with ‘a miniature world of objects’ and believed in the objects’ animation and agency, while a wall pecker or souvenir hunter would most likely have dismissed such ideas and rejected such practices.

¹¹⁴ See Janet Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin* (2011). In chapter four, ‘Agency at the Wall’, Ward comments on the lack of sturdiness of early versions of Grenzmauer 75, which, as tested by GDR border guards, could be overcome by the use of explosives, a ladder, or smashing parts of it down with the help of a heavy vehicle (83).

In a more general sense, a world of inner longing or interiority has also structured the mainstream perception of the Wall and its legacy: The ‘fantastical’, playful inscriptions on the Wall gave structure to the experience of living in the divided city and imaginary identifications with predominantly its Western side were part of common coping strategies as well as fostered in the context of the Cold War. After its fall, fragments of the Western Wall were kept as trophies or sold for profit, while whole segments of the Western Wall were auctioned off as ‘concrete art’ in public space. A former hinterland wall covered with diverse Wall art murals on both sides (East Side Gallery) stands for and is supposed to recall ‘the authenticity’ of that ‘joyful moment of liberation’ in 1989. The question, that needs to be posed, seems to be whether we embrace and believe, or critically engage with the fantasies that structure our reality and explore in which way corporeal engagement with the object brings about powerful, potentially transformational, affects such as empathy for and an identification with the abject other.

Brought wonderfully to the foreground through Eija-Ritta’s and Erica’s protest against the Wall’s demolition and disappearance is the underside of the Berlin Imaginary. Instead of embracing Western triumphalism, celebrating and remembering the magic moment of the Wall’s fall, the tragic loss of identities (different nation states) shaped by the Wall and the Wall’s material support are mourned and introjected. The women’s desire for the Wall’s existence, also reflects what Axel Klausmeier and Leo Schmidt describe as a lacking awareness

of any positive values connected to the Wall. For one thing, many people have – understandably – not forgotten the grief of separation and division. For another, the narrow-minded perception of the negative economic effects of reunification has produced the desire in some people to re-erect the Wall and to return to simpler

conditions which existed on both sides of the Iron Curtain in earlier times.

(Klausmeier and Schmidt 21)

Most of us associate with the Berlin Wall, despite its pleasure-inducing Western face, the trauma of division and the production of strong collective affects, such as outrage, despair, and later indifference. However, what has been underestimated is the fact that the division also generated clear-cut, mutually exclusive, possibly comfortable, identities and positive affects. Eija-Riitta's and Erica's disavowal of the negative effects of division, provocative desire for the dividing agent and embrace of the abject castrating power of the Berlin Wall recall these, often marginalised discourses with respect to the Wall and its fall. The Wall was not only experienced as prison but also as sanctuary by some, which reminds on a more general level of the appeal against reunification launched by reform communists and dissident intellectuals in November 1989. Under the leadership of Christa Wolf, the East German cultural intelligentsia pleaded for the continued existence of a reformed, democratic socialist state upholding hard won achievements such as a society of solidarity based on peace and social justice.¹¹⁵ Critical voices were eventually silenced in the general reunification euphoria after November 9, 1989. When the Berlin Wall as 'screen' was dismantled in 1989, it had long been introjected and remembered in form of a, predominantly, colourful image, while its battered, ruinous other side, has continued to haunt the imagination.

¹¹⁵ See <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/appeal-for-our-country-november-26-1989>. Accessed 8 July 2024.

Chapter 3: The Wall as Membrane

Introduction

By fetishizing the Wall as an image (photos), a metaphor (Iron Curtain, Antifascist Protection Wall) or in miniature, fragmented form (post-Wall pieces of the Wall, models of the Wall), the traumatic experience of the separation of Berlin into two halves (West, East) by the actual, material barrier could be diluted and displaced. In this way the Wall as screen or veil of images turned into a separated signifier, 'loved' for itself. Jacques Derrida states that the aesthetic experience of the fetish equals an attachment to substitutive signifiers (204) in *Of Grammatology* (1967). This substitutive, symptomatic signifier, which signifies absence and loss but at the same time screens this very absence, is characterized by a double, distorted structure: veiling while acknowledging absence.

Critics quickly point to the fetishization of the Wall on its Western side, especially in the American sector—on the stretch between the Brandenburg Gate and Checkpoint Charlie, where a spectacular, colourful, ornamental carpet of graffiti and Wall art in the 1980s eventually transformed the Wall as barrier (Mauer¹¹⁶) into the Wall as painterly surface (Wand¹¹⁷), forming a screen; screening and mirroring Western desires back to the West, thus reinforcing Western identities by reproducing the *Berlin Imaginary* (Manghani 2008). While the Wall's Western spectacular facade was clearly fetishized and the seemingly individual, democratic expressions of (often whimsical and nonsensical) discontent and artistic interventions on the Wall were partly scripted, graffiti's ephemeral, grass-roots democratic structure (anonymous writing, marking, commenting, erasing) certainly punctured, possibly

¹¹⁶ German word for wall as material object.

¹¹⁷ German word for wall as painterly surface. In 'The Berlin Wall and the Bastille' (1994) Frederick Baker points out the difference between the Berlin Wall as Mauer and the Berlin Wall as Wand.

subverted the fetishistic structure of the Wall, ‘dressed up’ in dazzling, polychrome camouflage (Gewand¹¹⁸).

The Western expressive, colourful interventions as well as their eventual fetishization stand in contrast to the Eastern strategies of the communist elite to turn the Wall into an invisible, ‘natural’ monument in the late 1970s and 1980s by attempting to standardize its ‘look’ and whitewash the structure as well as foregrounding the Brandenburg Gate, the most fetishized structure of the Antifascist Protection Barrier, on the visual level. Undoubtedly the unintentional/unconscious Western as well as intentional/conscious Eastern attempts at camouflaging the Wall, turning it into a screen, resulted in and reinforced the formation of mutually exclusive Western/Eastern identities on the imaginary level. Janet Ward, in *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space and Identity* (2011), stresses the fact that the Wall was only the last, concrete sign of difference between two competing world systems, which in the case of Berlin, were and had to be maintained on constant display:

Both the West and the East, in a sense, created and maintained the Wall as an architectural manifestation of the ideological divide that existed between them. Despite the global border that it represented (and the deadly serious tanks, special ops forces, and nuclear arsenals that stood on each side of it), the Wall proved to be co-scripted, and took on new meanings. In this light, the Wall amounted to an affect-ridden projection screen that both sides used in order to respectively articulate their own advantages and each other’s relative misery. (68)

¹¹⁸ German word for dress, clothing. In *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (1995) Mark Wigley analyses modern architecture’s difficult and complex relationship to colour, ornament, ‘dressing up’ its basic structures. Modern architecture has never entirely been able to completely negate the proximity between its most basic unit, a box made of walls, and its (however basic) cladding, which according to Wigley (who bases his argument on Gottfried Semper’s turn of the 19th/20th century theories of the textile essence of architecture as clothing for the architectural body) is also expressed by the shared linguistic root of Wand and Gewand (12).

Ward speaks of a collective identity-mechanism and mirroring urge on both sides of the Wall, which were best reflected in the attempts by the GDR and the FRG to outshine each other on the architectural level (75). Competitive architectural exhibitions and housing projects in the late 1980s, in preparation for the 750th anniversary of the city of Berlin (1987) clearly point in this direction.

By keeping a close look at the other while looking only at one's own (West/East) reflection, the Wall was fantasized as a totalizing screen, conveniently defining the other side as that which was not on display but could be looked at and closely watched (more easily from West towards the East but also—at least for border guards and people living in the border zone—from East towards the West). Actual, partial visibility (Ward cites the fact that Berlin city maps in West as well as East Berlin blanked out the other side) or invisibility (most East Berliners were forbidden to approach, see and touch the Wall) were consciously suppressed or unconsciously repressed as well as replaced by the visibility of the Wall as fetish, camouflaging its own permeability, punctures and instability. Ward's strategy to counter the fetish's hegemonic presence by providing the Wall with a living, breathing 'body' and working with the image of the Wall as membrane, which reacts to, filters, as well as exchanges inner and outer 'fluids' (people crossing—legally or illegally—the border, television/radio waves passing from West to East and vice versa ...), is undoubtedly helpful.

In *Addicted to Walls* (2014) Anne Vieth points out in a comprehensive survey on contemporary wall works that the concept of the wall as membrane has been part of a long discussion in art and architecture. She refers to the critical essays of Bauhaus architect and artist Siegfried Ebeling, who, in his book *Space as Membrane* (1926), described the wall as filter for social processes in space. Ebeling, who championed organic architecture in the first decades of the 20th century, dismisses modern architecture's conceptions of material structures as protective shells. In his view, his contemporaries failed to take the human body

and lived experience, an inside, which, via the human surface called skin is in constant exchange with its surroundings, an outside, into consideration. A material structure, a house in this case, would then have to be understood as a *cell* rather than a *shell* that mediates between inside and outside, at the same time channeling the flow of energy in both directions. Ebeling dismissed the architectural visions of Bruno Taut, who in 1917 envisioned the social transformation of society through means of an all-encompassing crystal-clear palace of the people made of glass towering over and above the city as “Stadtkrone”, a city crown (Scheiffle 166). Taut’s utopian architecture was primarily based on vision, whereby man was uplifted by the kaleidoscopic play of light and colour refracted through the glass crystal. Whereas crystalline architecture forces human beings to subdue themselves to its fluorescent but abstract laws, organic, cosmic architecture functions as a pneumatic structure, an organic cladding, centering on and around man. In this case, man is not ‘transformed’ by a monumental, one-directional, crystalline form but invigorated by the two-directional exchange of light and energy passing through the porous wall-as-membrane of the human dwelling; ultimately connecting man with the cosmos (Ebeling 20-23). In his turn towards the organic, Ebeling replaces the crystal as leading metaphor for architecture with the plant:

Das neue Ursymbol der Architektur wird die lebende Pflanze. ... Wir sollen sie [die Architektur] nicht wichtiger nehmen, als sie ist. Wir sollen ihr keinen Ewigkeitsstempel aufdrücken. Monumentalität und Repräsentation durch Massenwirkung, Massenkuppelung, sollen ihr fern liegen. Der Stil sei in unserem Leib verkörpert und in dem, wie wir den Leib ins Geistige steigern. Das Wesentliche ist der Mensch: Das Ding (und zu ihm gehört alles, was mit der Architektur zusammenhängt) ist jenem gegenüber untergeordnet. Unseren Lebensstil den Dingen aufzuprägen, d.h. mit modernen Schlagworten >Wille zur Gestaltung<, >Konstruktivismus<, gehöre vergangenen Epochen an. Alles, was

die Architektur leisten kann und soll, erhebe sich nicht über das Prinzip der Rinde, oder vom Zellkern aus gesehen, über das Prinzip der Membran. (Ebeling 22)

The new arch symbol of architecture will be the living plant. ... We shall not take it [architecture] more seriously than it is. We shall not press upon it the stamp of eternity. Monumentality and representation by means of mass appeal and mass coupling shall be alien to it. The style is to be defined by our body and in the way in which we augment it onto the spiritual level. The most important thing is man: the thing (belonging to it is everything which has to do with architecture) is subordinate to the body. To force our lifestyle onto things and mould them accordingly, which means such modern slogans as >will to composition<, >constructivism<, should belong to times gone by. Everything, which architecture can and is supposed to achieve, shall not go beyond the concept of the skin of a plant, or from the point of view of the cell nucleus, the concept of the membrane. (Ebeling 22; my trans.)

The Western Wall as “affect-ridden projection screen” (Ward 68) not only ‘refracted’ Western desires back into the West, but also made it porous, paving the way for the emergence of the Wall as membrane. The Wall not only transformed Berliners on both sides of the Wall by providing them with mutually exclusive identities but the Wall itself was also transformed by them: borders were crossed legally or illegally, the Western Wall was tattooed by graffiti and Wall art for example. We might even take a step further and see the Western Wall as “inorganic shield”, not so much as a filter as a painful “threshold” (Papapetros 271) that sustains the communication of the subject with an impossible surrounding. In *On the Animation of the Inorganic* (2012) Spyros Papapetros draws attention

to Jacques Lacan's brief comment on Daphne's flight from Apollo in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960). Daphne's subsequent transformation into a tree is seen by Lacan as an exemplary case, in which pain due to a hopeless situation is preserved as "animated architecture" that comes to enclose the subject.

Isn't something of this suggested to us by the insight of the poets in that myth of Daphne transformed into a tree under the pressure of a pain from which she cannot flee? Isn't it true that the living being who has no possibility of escape suggests in its very form the presence of what one might call petrified pain? Doesn't what we do in the realm of stone suggest this? To the extent that we don't let it roll, but erect it and make of it something fixed, isn't there in architecture itself a kind of actualization of pain? (Lacan 73)

Papapetros points out, that the subject's rigidified outer layer, the bark of the tree Daphne turned into, prevents her complete transition into the vegetal state and functions as the threshold for the preservation of her inner, sheltered psychic life (Papapetros 263-282). In this way, the Wall as affect-ridden projection screen can acquire the additional function as threshold in the service of architecture as a form of psychic excitation, where distress is formalized and preserved in and on the material structure itself.

By shifting the point of view from the viewing subject fetishizing the Wall on display, to the embodied subject affected by and affecting the Wall, the Wall seemingly metamorphoses from screen to membrane/threshold, and back again. As material structure it always already affected people's lives by its painful, obstructive presence. Different, sometimes competing, aesthetics of the Wall in a sheer endless cat and mouse game of 'mutual exchange' in the late 1970s and 1980s (Eastern whitewashed, modernist, purist, 'cultured' Wall design versus Western ornamental, chaotic, colourful, disorienting onslaught of graffiti and Wall art) not only erased but also reinforced the other side's strategies and

visual effects/affects, creating a dynamic structure on an enlivened surface. A Baroque theatrical landscape emerged, where the excessive, ornamental surface decoration of the Wall's Western facade dazzled the observers only to send them on a carefully co-scripted journey along the Wall and onto an observation platform, in order to glance into the serene and dazzling whiteness of the death strip. While indeed the Berlin Wall as *Mauer* had been transformed into a painterly surface, a *Wand*, which allowed Westerners to overcome the material object's prohibitive message (no entry/no exit), on the architectural, aesthetic level, a *Gewand*, an erotic, excessive, seductive dress came to 'clothe' an essentially unchanged classical frame.

German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) dismissed the long-held conception of the archetypal wall as a system of support, based on columns and beams such as in ancient Greek and Roman architecture, and instead traced it back to textile enclosures. Not only did the etymological link between *Wand* and *Gewand* point to a common origin for Semper, but also testified to a desire to dress and decorate the structures enclosing the human body. In this way architecture had to be understood as a form of 'petrified' and monumentalized cladding (Semper 247-248).

In all Germanic languages the word *Wand* [wall], which has the same root and basic meaning as *Gewand* [garment], directly alludes to the ancient origin and type of the *visible* spatial enclosure.

Likewise, *Decke* [cover, ceiling], *Bekleidung* [clothing, dressing], *Schranke* [barrier, gate], *Zaun* [hedge, fence] (similar to *Saum* [hem, fillet]), and many other technical expressions are not linguistic symbols applied to building at a later stage but clear indications of the textile origins of these building elements.

(Semper 248)

In the *The Life of Lines* (2015) social anthropologist Tim Ingold also refers to Semper's theories of architecture. Even though we tend to assume that walls are made of solid material for the construction of buildings, this, according to Semper's theory, was not the primary function of walls. Early walls, which were used to enclose space in order to keep animals and restrict their movement, were pliable and plaited from wickerwork. Solid walls made of stones were of secondary importance and meant to enhance personal protection.

The essence of wall-building, then, lay in the joining or knotting of linear elements of the frame, and the weaving of the material that covered it. Even with the addition of stone walls and fortifications, wall-building for Semper never lost its character as textile art. (28)

In order to make his point clear, Ingold also mentions Vilém Flusser (1920-1991), who distinguishes between solid walls "hewn from rock or built up from heavy components" (29) and screen walls "generally of woven fabric" (29). Screen walls, like in traditional Japanese houses, are semi-translucent, thus enable an interplay between inside and outside, light and shadow. The screen wall, Ingold is quick to point out, has to be differentiated from the traditional white wall:

Indeed, the very word 'screen' suggests, to Flusser, 'a piece of cloth that is open to experiences (open to the wind, open to the spirit) and that stores this experience. Notice how different this is, however, from the screen or 'white wall' of cinematic projection, which in the ideal case, is perfectly featureless and homogeneous in texture and utterly insensitive to the images that play upon its surface. (29)

While the Wall's Western face certainly functioned more like a traditional white wall, an impermeable cinematic screen, leaving no room for transparency, it was at the same time exposed to inscription (graffiti) and weathering and thus marked by 'experience' in form of

human interaction and the effects of corrosion. If we were to pursue Semper's argument further, and accept his firm belief that paint in ancient architecture was a form of ornamental cladding and that ancient polychrome architecture as described by the architect Jakob Ignaz Hittorff (1792-1867)¹¹⁹ preceded white pristine architecture, which simply represented the neoclassical ideal associated with the ancient model (Payne 44-45; Di Palma 26-27), an entanglement between walls, cladding, colour and, as we will see, lines, builds up an architecture of 'excitation', a Wall of affect (Gewand, cladding), which, I argue, must be considered to be the underside and complement of the Wall as fetishized screen (Wand).

In her historical account 'A Natural History of Ornament' (2016) Vittoria Di Palma discusses the difference between affect and effect vis-à-vis ornament. Both are rooted, according to Di Palma, in sensation and involve the body but conceive of the individual in different ways. Di Palma describes a relationship between observer and object observed, which produces effects, as one-directional. Effects are transmitted from object to observer. A relationship, which triggers affects, on the other hand, is understood as two-directional and conceptualised as a tension which affects observer as well as object in such a way that both categories become unstable.

Affect, like effect, is rooted in sensation. Both concepts attempt to theorize (to greater and lesser extents) the response mechanisms of a relatively primitive, instinctual part of the brain. By operating on a biological level, by privileging the body and its forms of knowledge, both affect and effect also hold out a promise of potential universality. ... Yet despite these important similarities, effect and affect are premised on radically different notions of the individual. Whereas effect sought to theorize architectural response as a one-way relationship, something

¹¹⁹ See frontispiece (1851) of Jakob Ignaz Hittorff's architectural study, 'Architecture Polychrome chez les Grecs' (1830): www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/larchitecture-polychrome-chez-les-grecs. Accessed 8 September 2023.

transmitted by the building to its spectator, affect is configured as a much more dynamic and reciprocal force. Affect, moreover, dissolves rigid categories like object and subject, imagining instead a distributed field in which distinctions between human and nonhuman no longer apply. (33)

In order to conceptualize the oscillation between effects and affects on the Wall, which turns from Wand into Gewand, I will introduce two other, etymologically related terms: the German term *Wende* (in the sense of a twist or turn) and the English word *wand* (in the sense of a bending stick). *Wand* and *Gewand*, on the linguistic level, are related to *Wende* and *wenden*, twists and turns, implying movement and the unmaking of the 'veil'. A *Gewand*, according to the German online Duden dictionary¹²⁰, can be traced back to Middle High German *gewant* and Old High German *giwant*, originally referring to a folded (turned; gewendet) cloth. A German *Wand* the same dictionary suggests, might be related to *Want*, a term used in shipbuilding, whose allegedly original meaning designated that which had been wound.

The etymology of the English term *wand* as explained in *The Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (1999) seems to be particularly useful for my discussion in connection with the German word *Wand*. The meaning of the word *wand* goes as far back as 1200, signifying a rod, a flexible, bending stick. It would take another two hundred years before *wand* acquired the meaning of a slender stick used by fairies or magicians. *Wand* shares the same root with Old English *windan* (to turn, to twist), Old English *wandrian* (to move about aimlessly) as well as Old English *wendan* (to go, to turn); all of which have correlates (meanings are deflected over time) in Modern English as well as Modern German (to wind, to wander, went—to go; winden, wandern, wenden), sharing the sense of flexibility, movement and the possibility of bending, twisting, changing. When up to one million people went to the streets

¹²⁰ www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Gewand. Accessed 7 August 2013.

in East-Berlin and demonstrated against the political conditions in the GDR on November 4, 1989, one of their rallying cries was “Wende statt Wände” ‘Change instead of Walls’ (Wolfrum 134; my trans.), demanding the implementation of more civil liberties after Erich Honecker’s overthrow as general secretary of the SED on October 18, 1989. While Honecker had vehemently opposed any change in the GDR, his successor and former head of state security Egon Krenz introduced the term Wende (Wolfrum 134), meaning a gradual change, rather than the crumbling of the Berlin Wall (the Wall, which metaphorically ‘fell’ on November 9, 1989).

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In ‘Die Wende. Plädoyer für die umgangssprachliche Benutzung des Begriffs’ (2007) Michael Richter discusses the controversy around the usage of the term Wende in post-Wall Germany since the term was associated with Egon Krenz, the communist elite and false promises of greater freedoms and democratic change. Krenz, Richter argues, coined the term when looking for a German equivalent for Perestroika (restructuring), the Russian movement of reform within the communist party initiated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s. Clearly, Krenz hoped that he and the communist party could stay in power if the party system was reformed. However, according to Richter, Krenz did not have a change of system (democracy) in mind. The East German population did not appreciate Krenz’s deceptive

rhetoric. At the mass demonstration against living conditions in the GDR on November 4, 1989, at Alexanderplatz in East Berlin, East German writer Christa Wolf hit the mark in her speech when taking up a critical stance towards the term *Wende* and the politics of *Wendehülse* (turncoats), who adapt easily to new circumstances and potentially profit from them. Following a long tradition of comparing state rule with the steering of a ship, she explained, that in sailing a *Wende* implied a change in direction in order to cope with strong (opposing) winds while maintaining the same captain. The ship crew cowers, when the mast sweeps across the surface.¹²¹ The term *Wende*, in Wolf's eyes, had to be replaced with the concept of revolutionary renewal, since it implied a change not from above (communist elite) but from below (GDR citizens, 'the people'). A revolutionary renewal, which liberates language from oppressive terminologies and discourses, should refrain from simply twisting language in order to serve the new movement.

Jede revolutionäre Bewegung befreit auch die Sprache. Was bisher schwer auszusprechen war, geht uns auf einmal frei über die Lippen. Wir staunen, was wir offenbar schon lange gedacht haben und was wir uns jetzt laut zurufen: Demokratie—jetzt oder nie! Und wir meinen Volksherrschaft, und wir erinnern uns der steckengebliebenen oder blutig niedergeschlagenen Ansätze in unserer Geschichte und wollen die Chance, die in dieser Krise steckt, da sie alle unsere produktiven Kräfte weckt, nicht verschlafen; aber wir wollen sie auch nicht vertun durch Unbesonnenheit oder die Umkehrung von Feindbildern. (Wolf 119)

Every revolutionary movement also liberates language. What until now was so hard to express, suddenly flows freely. We are astonished about, what we had apparently been thinking for a long time and what we now shout at each other:

¹²¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSk-ytE9c20. Accessed 12 January 2017.

democracy—now or never! And we mean rule of the people, and we remember the attempts in our history, which came to a standstill or were crushed and we do not want to miss and oversleep the chance that is inherent in the crisis, because it awakens all our productive forces; but we also do not want to waste it either by imprudence or the inversion of enemy images. (Wolf 119; my trans.)

Instead of superficial and deceptive political twists and turns associated with the problematic term *Wende*, a complete re-structuring of society as well as a new form of government were envisioned by Wolf. Only five days after the mass demonstrations at Alexanderplatz, ‘the Wall came down’ and the term *Wende*, Michael Richter stresses, was re-appropriated by the East German population in November 1989. Instead of the SED-*Wende*, the term *Wende* in popular usage referred to the demand for change within and eventually of the political system, which was forced and fought for by the East German population. *Wände*, walls, were demolished and the two Germanies were reunified in on October 3, 1990, after a rather short period of political disorientation and indeterminacy in the GDR commonly referred to as the time of *Wende*.

Historians argue whether *Wende* is able to do justice to the period of transition shortly before and after the fall of the Wall and before reunification. Some prefer to speak of upheaval or the breakdown of an authoritarian system, which had been in dire conditions for a long time, weakened by the nascent civil rights and exit movements in the GDR as well as lacking the support of the Soviet Union. The idea of the ‘peaceful revolution’ of 1989, brought about by the political *Wende* in the GDR, lent itself to myth making. It would have signalled the first successful revolution of the people on German soil but did not gain wider currency. As Andreas Rödder put it, East German voices were left unheard in the reunified Germany (Rödder 85-86). More than thirty years after the fall of the Wall, the discussion about the term *Wende* has not abated. In 2019, the German Bundestag (parliament) issued the

document ‘Der Begriff ‘Wende’ als Bezeichnung für den Untergang der DDR’¹²² in which diverse academic positions vis a vis the concept of Wende as appropriate term to describe the demise of the GDR are summarized. Because of the sheer endless polysemy of the term— SED-Wende (top down), revolutionary Wende (bottom up), period of transition (after the fall of the Wall and before reunification) to mention only a few, historians and sociologists agree that a ‘Wende-concept’ is too vague to be able to function as useful umbrella term for highly complex political events. According to the historian Konrad Jarausch, the term Wende can be misleading since it seems to imply a change in policy rather than a system change. The unassuming concept Wende enjoys popularity because by using ‘neutral’ terminology to describe highly political events one’s own political stance can be left in the dark.¹²³

In order to avoid confusion, I will, on the one hand, use the term Wende and its etymological embeddedness in bending, twisting and turning motions, to make visible effect-seeking as well as effective surface interventions on the Wall. On the other hand, I will also refer to the meaning of Wende as “einschneidende Veränderung”¹²⁴ (a radical change) suggested by German encyclopedia Brockhaus online and mentioned in the Bundestag document. “Einschneidend” in German is derived from ‘ein/schneiden’ (to cut or cut into), implying a cut, a wound, an event deeply affecting body and mind. By means of effects of and on the Wall and affects triggered by the Wall, sensational aesthetics seemingly compete with an aesthetics of sensations, depending on point of view and corporeal engagement. Instances, where effects set affects in motion, will be termed Wende in order to trace the ‘becoming political’, the becoming creaturely of the Wall’s aesthetics.

Affect, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue in *What is Philosophy?* (1991) is “... not the passage from one lived state to another but man’s nonhuman becoming. ... It is a zone

¹²² See www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/677932/da844372419109a378e7060523ec4477/WD-1-024-19-pdf-data.pdf. Accessed 27 August 2020.

¹²³ Ibidem.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons ... endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. This is what is called an *affect*.” (173)

When the Wall, the image/texts on the Wall and the people engaged with the Wall become entangled in such a way that a zone of indistinction momentarily arises, affect shows its twisting and turning potential. ‘Becoming political of the Wall’s aesthetics’ will, with reference to Gilles Deleuze, describe a process where the Wall’s always already political aesthetics (Wall of shame for ‘the West’, Western capitalist screen, anti-capitalist protection wall for ‘the East’, Eastern fortified, unilateral border) will loosen its own petrification and pass into another, animated level of intensification, where human affects and movement will not halt at the Wall but pass through it; as if through a membrane functioning as threshold.

In *Francis Bacon* (1981) Gilles Deleuze differentiates the violence of sensation, where the world seizes the subject by means of powerful affects, from the violence of the sensational, which is based on representation, the symbolic and clichés (28). According to Deleuze, the English painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992) excelled in the art of creating sensations by clearly delimiting the plane on canvas, where a tortured figure seemingly dehumanizes and becomes animal. Becoming animal, in the Deleuzian sense, does not mean a transformation in appearance (looking like an animal) but a transformation in the way sensations are processed. Becoming animal then will entail a reduction to the pure presence of the body in spasms without the possibility of distancing oneself from it by means of language and representation. The human eye is liberated from the yoke of following the lines and outline of representation and will turn into the polyvalent eye that sees and feels with all body parts:

Painting is hysteria, or converts hysteria, because it makes presence immediately visible. It invests the eye through color and line. But *it does not treat the eye as a*

fixed organ. It liberates lines and colors from their representative function, but at the same time it also liberates the eye from its adherence to the organism, from its character as a fixed and qualified organ: the eye becomes virtually the polyvalent indeterminate organ that sees the body without organs (the Figure) as a pure presence. Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes ...). (37)

Contrary to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, where infants, who are not yet in perfect control of their body parts, gain a feeling of visual control by looking at their reflection in the mirror, the Deleuzian eye/I is an "I do not see myself in the mirror, but I feel myself in the body that I see ..." (35). Instead of visual control, instead of a Lacanian optical eye/I, the Deleuzian eye/I in the process of transformation is based on haptic vision; it 'sees' and experiences the body's very presence. Painting, Deleuze argues, has the power to make the body's "mannered postures" (112) visible by means of non-figurative lines and colour. In Francis Bacon's paintings 'a zone of indistinction' Deleuze calls a diagram, which is demarcated by a clear contour, functions as "agent of transformation" (109) where the formerly figurative (representation; resemblance) passes into the figural (trait; abstract resemblance). At the moment when the figurative transforms into the figural, contour functions as membrane filtering the exchange between the 'plane of the figure' and the 'plane of colour as material structure' which surrounds the figure. The transformation can be set in motion by an inner force which is aroused from within or an outer force which traverses from without (111-112).

In this chapter I will argue that Wände (the Berlin Wall as Wand/screen) at specific moments, by means of Wende ('seen' and felt e/motions in form of twists and turns), pass into much more dynamic constellations: wands (the Berlin Wall as 'twisting and turning wall') or Gewand (the Berlin Wall as 'cladding' in motion). A change in point of view might

trigger the transition from the Wand/Mauer dichotomy to the Wände/Wende dyad. The person looking straight at the Western Wall will make use of his/her optical eye in order to decipher the image/texts on the Western Wall, the same goes for the person standing on an observation platform enjoying the unobstructed view across the city, whereas the person looking down at the fortification system from a heightened position might follow its meandering course. For the former the Wall will function as screen or surmountable visual barrier, for the latter as membrane, filtering commotion, inhaling and exhaling its very own 'mannered postures'.

The intimate relationship between Wände and Wende in connection with the Berlin Wall can already be seen in 1961, when young border guard Hagen Koch mapped the course of the Wall to come in form of a white line. The image of the *wand* as quasi-magical, flexible, bending stick comes to mind when referring to Hagen Koch's brush with which he mapped the course of the Wall (August 15, 1961). By tracing the outline of the Wall and bringing about the Wall to come, a 'magic' link, a magic *wand*, between the line as sign (for separation) and the line as thing (materiality, the actual white line) was at the same time established, characterizing a structure of desire where sign and signified are interwoven rather than separated, pointing to a pre-modern, mythical way of making sense of the world.

In *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) W.J.T. Mitchell insists on the double meaning of drawing a line. Drawing a line according to Mitchell consists of the act of tracing or inscribing lines as well as the act of pulling, dragging or attracting, being drawn by desire, literally drawing desire. In this way the line functions at the same time as the representation of desire as well as its performance (59).

The actual and desired radical closeness of the white line as image/sign and the white line as thing/referent, as actual borderline, simultaneously bodied forth a 'presence', an

animated, ‘monstrous’, living line, best summed up in the often-cited Cold War metaphor of the Wall as snake/monster winding its way through the city¹²⁵.

Even though in *Of Grammatology* (1967) Derrida deconstructs Western logocentrism, the desire for an originary and teleologic presence (of language) and introduces writing as the always already built in difference/differance in discourse, forever denying/postponing self-sameness between the sign and its referent, he singles out moments in which the sign is not entirely separated from that which it represents and the sign’s immediacy can still be felt.

The movement of the magic wand that traces with so much pleasure does not fall outside the body. Unlike the spoken or written sign, it does not cut itself off from the desiring body of the person who traces or from the immediately perceived image of the other. It is of course still an image which is traced at the tip of the wand, but an image which is not completely separated from the person it represents; what the drawing draws is almost present in person in his *shadow*. The distance from the shadow or from the wand is almost nothing. (Derrida 234)

The Wall’s outline/shadow traced and brought into motion by Hagen Koch, represents a case of radical self-sameness between sign and thing bodying forth the powerful illusion of a living, breathing, animated sign. While ‘monsters’ as living symbols come into being, they can be undone, magic spells can be broken, a *Wende* can take place. In less theoretical terms, we are reminded that the linear border, which demarcated as well as set up a clear division between East and West Berlin, was, from the beginning, unstable and animated as well as rigid and petrifying.

Ingold differentiates in *The Life of Lines* (2015) between two kinds of lines. A dynamic, organically growing line, which evolves while walking along a path, and a

¹²⁵ See Norman Gelb, *The Berlin Wall* (1986). Gelb starts his history of the Berlin Wall in the following way: “GRIM AND FORBIDDING, the Wall snakes through the city of Berlin like the backdrop to a nightmare.” (9)

predetermined, static, straight line, whose function is to connect individual points.

Cartographers, when mapping (colonial) territories, impose abstract lines on an abstracted surface. The cartographer's knowledge turned map, according to Ingold, is bounded and based on observations from fixed positions, whereas the wayfarer's knowledge turned mental map engages bodily movement and is built up while following or finding a path (47). Rather than building their own mental maps, I argue, East and West Germans internalized the maps drawn by the geopolitical order of the Cold War.

Maps, Gerhard Paul stresses in *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016) have always functioned as an important tool not only to represent but to generate clearly demarcated geopolitical spaces as well as ways of seeing and inhabiting the world.

Insgesamt hatten Karten und Infografiken die Funktion, mentale Orientierungsräume zu schaffen sowie Herrschaftsräume im Kampf um die globale Vorherrschaft zu markieren. >Gerade mittels der zahlreich publizierten Landkarten wurde die bipolare, politische Aufteilung der Welt ebenso wie das Ost-West-Erklärungsmodell als grundlegendes Narrativ des Kalten Krieges im Bewusstsein der Deutschen verankert<. Karten und Infografiken präfigurierten darüber hinaus Diskurslinien, Seh- und damit Denkgewohnheiten, die über den zeitgenössischen Kontext hinausweisen, indem sie eine dichotome Weltsicht generierten und die Geopolitisierung des Diskurses fortsetzten. (365)

Overall, the function of maps and infographics was to create spaces of mental orientation as well as to stake out spaces of authority in the fight for global domination. >Especially by means of the large amount of maps, which were published, the bi-polar, political division of the world as well as the East-West-explanatory model were firmly established as grand narratives of the Cold War in

the German mind<. Furthermore, maps and infographics prefigured rules of discourse, habits of seeing and thinking, which went beyond the contemporary context, by generating a dichotomous view of the world and by fostering the geopoliticisation of discourse. (365; my trans.)

By means of the generation of bi-polar thinking in form of visual impulses mutually exclusive identity formations (West, East German) were rigidly enforced and maintained. The linear border and the Berlin Wall created a demarcation as well as the desire to overcome it. Desire, born by the traumatic geopolitical split was halted by the Wall as fetish (signifier of absence) in a Freudian reading, and not consumed but kept at bay by forever courting the fetish. While dichotomies such as East/West, Mauer/Wand invite a Freudian/ Lacanian reading, *Gewand*, *wand* and *Wende*, in my eyes, point towards a different ‘architecture’ in which two-dimensionality is transformed into a three-dimensional border space. Beside and below the dichotomy and aesthetics of *Mauer/Wand*, a primal energy (of twisting and turning) in form of a ‘*magic wand*’ must be taken into consideration, embedded in *Wende* and *Gewand* (turned cloth, fold), opening up deceptive and real spaces of transformation, where frontline and hinterland wall are separate but connected by the same energy, furl and unfurl like Deleuzian folds. In ‘Four Things Deleuze learned from Leibniz’ (2010) Mogens Loerke discusses Gilles Deleuze’s reading of the works of the German philosopher and mathematician of the 17th and early 18th century. Loerke refers to Deleuze’s concept of the world as a complex curve, constituted by events, folds and inflexions, which is derived from Leibniz’s philosophy. In *The Fold* (1993) Deleuze follows Leibniz’s train of thought in his inquiry into the nature of matter and in which way thought and affect are enfolded in it: “the universe appears compressed by an active force that endows matter with a curvilinear or spinning movement ... Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns ...” (5).

To conceptualize matter as a force in the infinite process of folding and unfolding, constituting a series of events rather than a set of discrete things, enables Deleuze (via Leibniz) to analyze difference without introducing division and discontinuity between subjects and their complex relationship to the world or as Mogens Loerke extrapolates:

... there is, on the one hand, the fold of the world which must be *expressed* or *actualised*; on the other hand, there is the folding or enveloping of the world in the subjects that *express* or *actualise* it. The world in which we live is thus folded into us; it is us who bring this world into actual existence through our inner perception of it. (Loerke 30)

By shifting the analytical point of view from the Berlin Wall as discrete fetishized object, to a complex relationship of the subject seeing with all organs, moving, along, between and through a fortification system, where two walls point in different directions and fulfill completely different roles, I hope to make visible the inner tension between the frontline and hinterland wall as well as the tension between conceptualizing the Wall simultaneously as fetish and ‘folded’ membrane.

The Dynamics of Visuality and Visibility

In *Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations* (2020) William Callahan uses the dynamic dyad of visibility and visuality as his framework for analyzing geopolitics. His insights are based on Mitchell’s understanding of the dialectical relationship between the social and the visual. The focus on visibility in critical analysis traces the representation of social, political and economic power relations in the visual field. The concept of visuality allows the critic, instead of analyzing the social construction of the visual, to explore the performativity of the visual, the way in which images “can work in nonnarrative and nonlinear ways to construct social relations by provoking emotions—pride, awe, disgust,

outrage, fear, and hope—that are themselves political performances.” (35) In this way the affective economy of the visual has to be taken into consideration. In order to illustrate the dynamism between visibility, the social construction of the visual, and visibility, the visual provocation of social relations, Callahan refers to the Chinese character for map: tu. When the character refers to the noun it means picture, diagram, chart, table, map, when it is used as a verb it acquires the meaning of anticipating, hoping, planning, scheming, plotting (47).

Similarly, I am tempted to argue, the Berlin Wall as Mauer and Wand, material object and image/screen has to be conceptualized with its dynamic turning and twisting other, the line, which, as Simon Unwin points out in *An Architecture Notebook* (2000), is nothing but a wall on the plan of the architect:

A line on a plan is very often the representation of a wall’s surface in reality.

Although it shows a *horizontal* slice through a work of architecture, one of the primary purposes in drawing a plan is to determine the positions of *vertical* surfaces—walls that demarcate, delimit, control, govern, modify, manage, organise space and the horizontal occupation of it on the ground. Drawn plans tend, pre-eminently, to be ‘about’ walls. Lines on a drawn plan *are* walls and, when they have been built, the walls themselves are ‘lines’ ‘drawn’ in the real world to establish a matrix of spatial separations and relationships. (30)

In this reading, the borderline, the Wall and the graffiti and wall art on its Western surface are not only representations of the ‘Cold War social’, but active agents, provoking the ‘Cold War social’ by demarcating, delimiting, controlling, governing ... organizing space as well as by twisting, turning, overcoming, plotting against the obstacle due to powerful affects.

In ‘Bringing Things to Life: Material Flux and Creative Entanglements’ (2022) Tim Ingold offers an intriguing concept of animism by building on Paul Klee’s early twentieth

century observations of form-giving lines¹²⁶ and Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of things not as discrete objects but as gatherings and becomings, as a bundle of lines where chaotic matter is not simply delimited and given shape by the artist but where matter is traversed by forces it captures and the artist's task is to make them visible¹²⁷. In contrast to a hylomorphic model of creation where an 'agent' with a particular intention creates an object with a particular form out of passive, inert matter, a shift in perspective allows Ingold to foreground things in the processes of formation and not objects as final products:

... animism is—I argue to the contrary—a way not of thinking *about* the world but of being alive *to* it, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is in perpetual flux, never the same from one moment to the next. In such an environment, there are no objects to be animated. There are only things. (Ingold, 'Bringing Things to Life')¹²⁸

Whereas an object derived from Latin *objectum* according to Ingold, who bases his insights on Vilém Flusser's theories, poses a problem in form of an obstacle to confront, a blocked passage to be opened, a thing is not perceived as a clearly bounded entity but as a knot whose life-lines trail beyond and mingle with other lines. (Ingold, 'Bringing Things to Life')¹²⁹

This chapter will trace the movement from visible screen to visual and 'animated' membrane, which entails a shift in perspective from the Wall as discrete

¹²⁶ See Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye* (1879-1940). As modern artist and teacher (1921-1931) at the Bauhaus Dessau Klee understood art not as the reproduction of visible objects in space but as making things visible by the movement of lines on canvas. In this way the artistic genesis of movement was of utmost importance. For Klee, a point as primordial, cosmic element sets itself in motion and grows into a structure (103).

¹²⁷ See Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), chapter 11 'Of the Refrain' (377).

¹²⁸ <https://www.lakeside-kunstraum.at/en/bringing-things-to-life-material-flux-and-creative-entanglements/>.

Accessed 9 July 2024.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

barrier and surface onto which discrete image/texts were applied to the perception of the Wall as a material structure traversed by forces—‘life-lines’.

Certainly, the graffiti enlivened the Wall, speaking to the viewers/readers, expressing the frustrations, desires, hopes, witticisms, political persuasions ... of their anonymous creators, possibly inciting some to action. They also, eventually, formed an ornamental structure where slogans, graffiti writing and Wall art merged into a colourful carpet of images veiling as well as subverting the Wall as military fortification. At this point critics usually dismiss a more in-depth analysis of the graffiti on the Berlin Wall, since the common assumption is, that the colourful image/texts on the Wall’s Western side transformed into a screen mirroring Western desires back to the West. Manghani, for example, reads the steady accumulation of graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall as the signature of the West, an inscription of Western presence and appropriation, incapable of reaching out to, interpellating an Eastern public, reflecting Western desires back to the West. His argument of an accumulation of Western veil images is convincing. The image/texts must be located in the realm of Western desire and remembrance; however, the interaction with the colourful Western Wall must be conceptualised in more dynamic terms on the concrete as well as theoretical level. As will be shown, the graffiti and Wall art were signatures of the West but they also had the potential, which was at times actualised, to become creaturely, enlivened signatures, gestures of e/motion in their own right.

In ‘Kool Killer, or the Insurrection of Signs’ in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) Jean Baudrillard states that graffiti turns the city’s walls (and subway cars) into a body marked by primitive inscription/tattooing (82). By tattooing, graffiti frees the walls from their architectural constraints and turns them into living social matter. Graffiti, then, animates, it inscribes movement onto the walls in form of a signature/name/tag. Not only are walls freed

from constraint and movement is inscribed, graffiti itself has the power to abandon or distort meaning.

For Crispin Sartwell graffiti subverts order because it deconstructs text and inscribes being. He bases his argument on the graffiti writer's practice of concentrating on the materiality and form of individual letters and the overall aesthetic of the signature/tag on the Wall rather than its readability. In this way, graffiti tears apart words, twists their meaning, and creates new constellations (Sartwell 185). While a lot of the graffiti on the Berlin Wall was fairly conventional and all too easy to understand, the obsessive tattooing of the Wall could be read as an attempt to tear apart the monumental, deceptively 'eternal' presence of the Wall and re-inscribe it with diverse, obscene, kitschy, banal but dynamic living transitoriness.

In this way Manghani's dismissal of the image/texts as signature of the West must be expanded by a Benjaminian understanding of dialectical images and the workings of Baroque allegory. In *Walter Benjamin: Or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981) Terry Eagleton explains Benjamin's concept of baroque allegory in the following way: In the baroque signifier sound and script, materiality and meaning "confront each other in a dense polarity". (5) As shape and sound are those means of expression, which escape "the fateful enslavement to meaning" (5), these "sensuous residues" (5) allow "creaturely rights to language which is grimly subdued to significance." (5) When in the dialectical image, by means of a transfigurative flash materiality and (aural) form temporarily overlap, the image in Eagleton's reading of Benjamin becomes a signature "a monogram of essence, not the essence itself in a mask". (23)

Even though, on visiting the Berlin Wall in 1983, as Baudrillard states in *Cool Memories* (1987), he could detect nothing but cold signs, "conductors of a lethal energy" (134), on Berlin's graffiti covered Wall, functioning as an aesthetic shield/screen against a

murderous fortification system reflecting back Western responses to the Wall, he misses the 'dense polarity' between cold signs and bodily engagement with the Wall in form of aesthetic interventions. Unlike in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s, only few Berlin Wall graffiti writers mastered a particular style, inscribed 'their monograms of essence' by throwing their name tags/signatures—masterfully executed lines forming a stylized image of identity and appropriation—on the Wall, animating and tattooing the object which might have otherwise functioned as simple canvas. As membrane, however, the Western Wall absorbed all, obsessively carried out inscriptions and often engaged the practitioners repeatedly and over long stretches of time, possibly causing similar sense impressions to those experienced by 20th century photographer Brassai.

On his expeditions through nocturnal Paris in the 1930s, Brassai thought to have discovered a world of elemental images on Parisian walls. Graffiti's primal forms created a world in flux and the wall itself was neither surface nor barrier but "a shadowy zone with uncertain boundaries where the propositions of nature and man's dispositions meet halfway." (Warehime 101) According to Brassai's 'surrealist' perspective graffiti allowed access to a primitive state of mind. Men, animals and their representations were intricately linked and in constant mutation: "Everything is formed, evolved and unmade according to the particular logic of the dream or music." (Brassai 55) While the economy of affect and the liminal space it produces has to be taken into consideration, when analysing the image/texts on the Wall, we must not forget that, as Kirk Varnedoe stresses, graffiti is a composite phenomenon:

Graffiti as a whole is a composite phenomenon, part childish prank, part adult insult. It is whimsical and political, amused and angry, witty and obscene, often tending toward the palimpsest, and made up of elements of imagery, writing and simple marking. (Varnedoe 77)

Not only did graffiti and Wall art coexist, the diverse image/texts existed in isolation as well as (over time) within an ornamental pattern, while commenting on as well as erasing each other. Truly political slogans were hard to find in the early 1980s on the Berlin Wall. They, together with politically inspired wall art, covered the infamous squatted, dilapidated 19th century Mietshäuser, the tenement buildings, in Berlin-Kreuzberg (Hiller von Gaertringen 274-279), whereas the blank, white-washed surfaces of the Grenzmauer 75 seemingly invited ludic, whimsical, aggressive and faux-naïve interventions. At the same time as the aesthetics of the Wall changed from brutal deterrence to ‘purified’ painterly surface, the ways of interacting with the Wall’s Western side underwent change too due to newly accentuated states of (in)visibility of the Wall.

In *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016) Gerhard Paul speaks of a dialectics of visibility and invisibility. For Paul, the emergence and eventual dominance of the media like photography, film and television in the 20th and 21st century in everyday life as well as politics has led to a fierce fight for or against visual presence. In an age, in which visual reality functions as an additional layer of lived experience, the question whether sovereign power, a political force or the individual are visible or invisible is of utmost importance. Strategic visibility is clearly not restricted to commerce and product placement but concerns society as a whole. Paul stresses that the world must be kept under control by those in power, on the physical as well as the visual level. On the visual level, the strategy has been to be ever present in the media while trying to minimize the visual dominance of respective enemies. Visual presence was, according to Paul, an important tool in both German dictatorships (fascist; communist) in order to bind the population emotionally and enforce loyalty: “Propagandastrategen generierten >Pseudo-Realitäten<, die die Menschen in einen zeitweisen ästhetischen Rauschzustand versetzen und ihren faktischen Ausschluss von der Macht kompensieren sollten.” ‘Propaganda strategists generated >pseudo-realities<, which temporarily should put

people in a state of aesthetic intoxication in order to compensate their actual exclusion from power.’ (735; my trans.)

Western media have from the very beginning understood the importance of visually documenting the construction and existence of the Berlin Wall, choosing particular frames and contexts (eg.: the Wall topped by barbed wire or at later stages the Wall covered by graffiti) in order to make visible and generate a particular reality (prison camp or tourist attraction), denounce and/or profit from this strategy. The Berlin Wall, in Paul’s eyes, was *the* media star of the 20th century (582), no wonder that even its, often seductive and fascinating, negative presence as well as its eventual demolition had considerable national and international effects.

Wim Wenders’ lyrical portrait about the fate of angels Damiel and Cassiel in divided Berlin in *Wings of Desire* (1987) will serve as example for the generation of an intoxicating Western-directed pseudo-reality, where visibility, the social construction of the visual, and visuality, the performativity of the visual, seemingly merge.

For Robert P. Kolker and Peter Beicken Wenders’ film as “quasi-documentary of Berlin” constitutes “a painful vision of modernity” (Kolker and Beicken 138). Berlin, predominantly perceived through the eyes of angel Damiel is geopolitically divided because of the Cold War and haunted by its Nazi past. While Wenders foregrounds Damiel’s desire to become human and consummate the love relationship with trapeze artist Marion, Damiel’s and Cassiel’s main role as guardian angels eavesdropping on Berliners, registering their hopes, fears and anxieties, possibly preventing them from coming to harm, recedes into the background. Similarly, Damiel’s human becoming and redemption through love fails to confront the viewer with a more accurate knowledge of history, where history, fantasy and romantic love are less entangled (Kolker and Beicken 154). The angelic-turned-human wanderer through divided Berlin is redeemed through romance and art in form of, the often

highly lyrical ruminations of human consciousness recorded by the two angels and the extraordinary experience of Daniel becoming 'alive' in rather desolate looking parts of West Berlin close to the Wall, while being romantically engaged with a circus artist dancing along the beats of Nick Cave's rock music.

In an interview given to the British Film Institute in July 2022 Wenders explains that the choice of two guardian angels crossing walls and eavesdropping on Berliners was his way of coming to terms with the paradox of the divided city, the contrast between West Berlin's shabbiness and its countercultural artistic dynamism.¹³⁰ While predominantly shot in West Berlin and on location, Wenders had to reconstruct the Wall since he was not given permission by GDR officials to film it. When angel Daniel is reborn as a living human being in front of the Western side of the Berlin Wall, the Wall is represented in its visually most compelling form as a succession of colourful, faux-naïve images executed by the Wall artists of the time. The neat arrangement of Wall art, reminding of an open-air gallery, in combination with an explosion of colour leaves a strong sensual impression on the viewer. The contrast between the neatly raked, whitewashed death strip behind the Western Wall and its neatly arranged, polychrome Western surface, almost devoid of human interaction, is stark. Kitschy cartoon-like figures capture an atmosphere of heightened contrasts in West Berlin: the grey and melancholic city half is at the same time enlivened by the transformational power of art and the irresistible appeal of its (female) artists. The foregrounding of romantic sentiment between Daniel and Marion against the background of the Wall full of hyperbolic contrasts seemingly reproduces what philosopher Konrad Liessmann identifies as one of the characteristics of kitsch:

¹³⁰ See <https://www.bfi.org.uk/interviews/every-person-universe-wim-wenders-wings-desire>. Accessed July 9, 2024. Wenders mentions the inspiring presence of musicians, painters, writers and the room given to punk subculture.

... im Kitsch generiert das moderne Bewusstsein eine eigenständige Ausdrucksform gerade für jene Gefühlswelten, die durch keine Moderne wegzurationalisieren gewesen waren: Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung und Schönheit. (Liessmann, 'Kitsch!', 307)

... with kitsch modern consciousness generates its own means of expression for those sentiments which no modernity had been able to rationalise away: faith, love, hope and beauty. (Liessmann, 'Kitsch!', 307; my trans.)

Indeed, human romantic sentiment and artistic pathos recorded by angels as well as figurative kitsch on the Western Wall abound in in this otherwise 'painful vision of modernity', where the inhabitants of the divided city struggle to come to terms with the atrocities of the past and the challenges of the present.

The images on Wenders' reconstructed Wall as well as on the Berlin Wall were strikingly conventional and kitschy, once they had been transformed into Kilometerkunst. In Wenders' film *Damiel*, the angel-turned-human being, takes an energetic and pleasurable stroll along the Wall past a seemingly endless row of Thierry Noir's trademark "stone heads" (Gründer 47), followed by Kiddy Citny's well known heads of "wall princes" (Gründer 221). For the observant viewers images which were found on the Wall but within a different arrangement and intensity, *Damiel's* encounter of the exaggerated vividness of the Wall art will cause a feeling of irritation. What one sees seemingly contradicts what one knows. Fact and fiction intermingle.

In 1939 Clement Greenberg identified kitsch as aesthetic category in contrast to avant-garde art as "mechanical" operating "by formulas" (Greenberg 10), representing "vicarious experience and faked sensations" (Greenberg 10), while being easily instrumentalised by the ruling regime in order to please the masses (Greenberg 12). Without

going as far as Greenberg, the chosen stock images by well-known Wall artists and Damiel's display of stock emotions such as relief and joy in front of the Western Wall seem, emotionally and historically, only to scratch the surface while being firmly embedded in a Western context.

For Janet Ward, Damiel's transformation from invisible spiritual entity to painful but passionate, visible, human existence, follows the movement from colourless borderlessness (there are no borders for angels), entering the liminal space of the whitewashed death strip (filmed in black and white) turned theater of birth, to the awakening (filmed in colour) in front of pop art-inspired images on the Wall's Western side. What is stressed, according to Ward, is a bordered, sensual, colourful, visible Western existence (Ward 124-125). However, despite the deceptive and effective the image production of life and colour on the Western side in its stereotypical visibility, the structural tension, its visuality, in form of a 'dense polarity' between Western polychrome facade and the monochrome military fortification system behind it as well as the angels' monochrome perspective and the human perspective in polychrome are affectively conveyed at the same time. On the more general and abstract level, the interplay between colour as living force and its absence or withdrawal is pervasive in *Wings of Desire*. As experiential structuring device it reminds of Blanchot's 1964 analysis of the Wall as means of making visible the invisible, abstract border relations between East and West Berlin; the paradoxical experience of geopolitical overdeterminedness when crossing the border within the same cultural context.

Mauer and Wand

The interplay between the Berlin Wall's whitewashed purified Western facade and its polychrome, ornamental transformation reminds of (in reverse order—white walls as a reaction to historicist, ornamental facades) early 20th century discussions in architecture,

when architects like Le Corbusier, in line with Adolf Loos' argument of the superfluosity of 19th century, historicist, sensual ornament in modernity¹³¹, championed white walls as the defining feature of modern architecture. According to Le Corbusier and Ozenfant in their 1920 essay 'Purism' white or carefully chosen monochrome walls should, in an act of purification, enable the spectator to concentrate on the object's sublime outline and thus make the spectator appreciate the harmony of perfect forms rather than being distracted by the interplay of colours: "In summary, in a true and durable plastic work, it is *form* which comes first and everything else should be subordinated to it. Everything should help establish the architectural achievement." (Le Corbusier and Ozenfant 63) Naturally white, black and strong, stable colours such as ochre yellows, reds and ultramarine blue help to enhance the architectural quality and the volume of an object, whereas any combination of colours results in a dizzying painterly effect. Since the object of enquiry in this chapter is the heavily fetishized Western facade of the Berlin Wall in the 1980s, it is tempting to argue that the communist regime created a late modernist, purified, serene material structure (*Mauer*), merging with its whitewashed Western facade (*Wand*) in such a way, that the strength and beauty of its *form* would override its deadly *content*.

The mythic sign, according to Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1957) is derived from the linguistic sign, whose primary meaning has been impoverished. The sign's formal aspects come to the fore and acquire a secondary meaning, which can only be generated by feeding itself off the loss of primary signification: "It is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth." (Barthes 141-142) Primary meaning, as already mentioned, loses its value, it is decontextualised and dehistoricized and will be

¹³¹ In 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), Adolf Loos's manifesto against the use of ornament in modern architecture, the ornament is granted an erotic function, but its use is relegated to pre-modern, primitive urges of decorating and tattooing the body, childish forms of artistic expression or criminal practices (tattoos). Loos insists that the ornament is no longer organically linked to the modern experience (22). In a modern society, the (magical) function of the ornament has been lost, and new forms of (capitalist, mass-) production make the use of ornament in architecture and design inefficient as well as superfluous (23).

replaced by the idea of the concept, which contrary to meaning is full of presence. In the case of the Berlin Wall the military fortification system was overwritten by the form of its modernist, whitewashed Western wall, replacing its primary meaning (no entry/ no exit) by its secondary: pure form. By stressing the architectural/sculptural qualities of the ‘outer’ wall, its military function recedes into the background and a mythic, timeless, ‘beautifully’ white structure emerges. The colour white in this case was used to stress an industrial, functionalist architecture with classical overtones, in which the individual, prefabricated Wall segments echoed classical columns (Mayer 216).

Everything points in this direction: after a brief post-war period of building in the Stalinist nationalist neo-classical style (tenement buildings in Stalinallee, 1951 -55), modernist architecture, especially the construction with prefabricated concrete blocks (Platten), was regarded the perfect and only means of expressing a socialist way of living (Holper and Käther 116-117). While the prefabricated Wall segments perfectly matched the socialist egalitarian ideals of post-stalinist Platten (concrete block) architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, the individual Wall segment’s structure with a base, slim body/pillar and pipe as quasi-capital, remind of Le Corbusier’s early modernist fascination with the beauty of classical architectural forms. In his collection of essays *Toward an Architecture* (1923) Le Corbusier celebrates ancient Greek architecture, especially the Parthenon temple on the Athenian Acropolis, for its pure, geometrical symmetry, where architecture reflects a harmonious inner state, originating from a “pure creation of the mind” (Le Corbusier 231). About the Propylaea, the monumental gateway to the Acropolis, Le Corbusier muses:

Where does emotion come from? From a certain relationship between categorical elements: cylinders, polished floor, polished walls. From an accord with the things of the site. From a plastic system whose effects encompass every element of the composition. From a unity of idea extending from unity of materials to

unity of contour modulation. ... The emotion comes from a unity of intention. (Le Corbusier 235-236)

Is it an accident or intention that *the* symbol of early German classicist architecture, the Brandenburg Gate, which was modelled on the very same Propylaea, Le Corbusier was so fascinated with, stood in close proximity to the Wall and, from the beginning, replaced the Wall in East German propaganda?

When the Brandenburg Gate was designed by Carl Gotthard Langhans and eventually finished in 1791, the new, monumental city gate was meant to embody the new, enlightened era of late 18th century bourgeois culture and thinking as well as mark the reign of Friedrich Wilhelm the Second, whose main aim was to renew and improve the city wall and its gates (Patschke 40). It is debatable whether Friedrich Wilhelm also wanted to draw the line between his reign and Friedrich the Second's by establishing a sharp contrast between the new, classicist structure and the old Baroque city of his predecessor (Patschke 40). Fact is that the Brandenburg Gate and everything it stood for could not have differed more from the surrounding Baroque palaces, which was also stressed by its colour.

Originally, the Gate of course embodied the new humanistic ideal of Greek antiquity. Thus it should have been built out of marble, in order to correspond with the purity of this ideal. But in the parsimonious and austere Prussian economy of the late eighteenth century not even the king could afford marble—at least not for a city gate. That is why the Gate was made of the cheapest available building stone, stuccoed and covered with lime-wash, the white colour of which had to represent marble. (B. Schneider 14)

Instead of today's 'natural' sandstone-coloured Brandenburg Gate, we have to imagine a whitewashed object, which is superficially modeled after the great Greek ideal, while developing, according to Ralph Patschke, its own contemporary, classicist form. In 'Das Tor

und seine architekturgeschichtliche Stellung' (1991) Patschke stresses, that Langhans, by making the Doric columns of the Brandenburg Gate taller and slimmer as well as putting them on a base and thus clearly departing from the original dimensions of Propylaea's Doric order, was orienting himself more towards Prussian house building at the end of the 18th century (29).

Whether by accident or design the Greek classical ideal of perfect order and form was adhered to and modified via early modernist, purist architecture, when mass-producing the segments for Grenzmauer 75; enhanced by the German classicist gate in close proximity to the Wall, which no longer embodied humanist ideals but represented the Cold War division into an Eastern and Western hemisphere. In which way the Brandenburg Gate and the whitewashed Berlin Wall meant to be one and the same in Eastern propaganda, can be easily traced by the recurrence of the Brandenburg Gate as embodiment of the 'Antifascist Protection Barrier' on the visual level.

The iconic image (taken on August 14, 1961) of a group of GDR militia men, guns in their hands, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate in such a way, that the men seemingly merge with the classical columns of the gate, forming a wall of people ready to defend their country, was heavily exploited by GDR propaganda.¹³² The men, who filled the empty spaces between the columns of the Brandenburg Gate, with a bit of fantasy, already foreshadowed the 'collonade' of concrete slabs to come. In classical antiquity, John Onians argues, "the erectness, and disciplined regularity of a row of columns" (8) which held together a temple, easily prompted military associations and the wish that "the disciplined immovability" (8) of the columns reflected back on the strength of their soldiers forming a phalanx. As will be

¹³² See Gerhard Paul in *Das visuelle Zeitalter* (2016). According to Paul, the image of the GDR militia in front of the Brandenburg Gate evolved into *the* icon in GDR, which was meant to overwrite Western images such as the desertion of GDR border soldier Conrad Schumann, who leapt across barbed wire from East to West Berlin in 1961 (584).

shown, soldiers, columns and concrete slabs had become interchangeable in the imagination, not only reinforcing the collonade's strength but also giving it a human face.

For each anniversary of the construction of the Berlin Wall the same image of the armed soldiers in front of the Brandenburg Gate was circulated in East German newspapers. The *wall of people*, according to Elena Demke in 'Mauerfotos in der DDR' (2004) functioned as a visual euphemism, a human/humane protective wall, replacing the fortification system of the first generation with its trademark barbed wire on a visual as well as on a verbal level (95). In order to underline her argument Demke cites letters to the editor in communist party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (1966), in which the Wall is described as "lebender Wall" (living barrier) and "leibhaftige Mauer" (incarnate, embodied wall) (95). While East German Hans-Joachim Näther as early as 1950 was shot for illegally distributing leaflets showing members of the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend, communist youth organisation) imprisoned behind the classical columns of the Brandenburg Gate (Gründer 28-29), 11 years later the same columns were successfully transformed into protective structures magically interchangeable with the people defending the GDR; an image that would later seem aged and lifeless but never entirely lose its fascination.

For Berlin's 750 year's anniversary in East Berlin in 1987, one of the 300 'living' images (lebende Bilder) of the historical procession was formed or rather haunted by some of the aged militia men of 1961 in front of a Brandenburg Gate dummy (Demke 94). This hollowed out image of a sovereign, living protective wall (of and for the people), has very little in common with the original human wall of GDR militia men at Brandenburg Gate in 1961. Rather, a living corpse was on display in 1987. Marion Detjen in her article 'Die Mauer als politische Metapher' (2011) compares the Wall as *pars pro toto* for the GDR border regime with a pretentious Hobbesian Leviathan, a caricature of Thomas Hobbes' 1651 (visual) concept of the powerful, sovereign state agreed upon and made up by its people,

whose main aim was to silence the even more monstrous inner opposition (Behemoth), as well as the enemy from outside.

Die Mauer als pars pro toto für das Grenzregime der DDR zeugte eben nicht von einem harmonisch gegründeten Staat, nicht von einem Leviathan, sondern nur von seiner Karikatur, dem Möchte-gern-Leviathan, dem Polizeistaat, und reizte gerade deshalb die Menschen immer wieder, sie zu überwinden und der Karikatur einen Streich zu spielen. (433)

The Wall as pars pro toto for the border regime of the GDR testified precisely not to a harmoniously founded state, not to a Leviathan, but to its caricature, the wannabe-Leviathan, the police state, and precisely because of this fact tempted the people again and again to overcome it and to play a trick on the caricature. (433; my trans.)

The illusion of the Wall's menacing, quasi-classical anthropomorphic military strength was first picked up and problematized by American street artist Richard Hambleton. His trademark *Shadowman* paintings in the New York of the early 1980s and Hambleton's 1984 *Secret Mission* and *Shadow Mission* on the Berlin Wall shall illustrate my point. Hambleton's black shadow figures of his *Night Life* cycle in New York were seemingly omnipresent and intimidating: "Die schwarzen Männer waren überall präsent: sie hockten an Fassaden, lauerten an Straßenecken oder warteten an Garagenwänden." 'The black men were present everywhere: they were crouching on facades, lurking on street corners or waiting on garage walls.' (Gründer 242; my trans.) The uncanny presence of his silhouette figures was reproduced in several European cities as well as on the Berlin Wall in 1984 and, according to Hambleton, was part of "a planned secret and unified statement" (Hambleton in Gründer 237). Whether some were reminded of popular spies in novels, such as John Le Carre's

(1963) mystery *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, by *Secret and Shadow Mission*, or of the aftermath of nuclear destruction at the time of the Cold War arms race or of soldiers, a menacing presence could be felt. Ghostly figures seemingly emerged from a white screen wall, creating the illusion to be semi-translucent, ‘presencing’ the shadowy figures located (in the imagination) in front of or behind the Wall.

Hambleton, consciously or unconsciously, might have also reacted to another characteristic of the Wall’s whitewashed surface. In *White Walls* (1995) Mark Wigley compares modern architecture’s purist white wall with “the eye of truth” (8), a figure of control, which ‘cleanses’ and manipulates the way we look at it. Instead of a feeling of reassurance or awe when facing the Wall as purified, whitewashed, abstracted, powerful, ‘eternally living’ structure, Hambleton reproduces its darker side: the anonymous, ever-present control by human figures: “This is a wall of people, made by people ... Before the wall went up there was a wall of soldiers.” (Hambleton in Gründer 237) Ironically enough Hambleton’s menacing black silhouettes on the Berlin Wall were also subsequently humanized by anonymous or well-known graffiti writers and Wall artists. German Wall artist Indiano, for example, inserted anxiously looking white figures behind Hambleton’s shadowmen turning them, in Ralf Gründer’s eyes, into a feminized protective force:

Bei Dämmerung oder Nacht wirkten die lebensgroßen Silhouettenmenschen in der unwirklichen und trostlosen Maueratmosphäre bedrohlich. Durch Indianos Ergänzungen veränderte sich die Bildaussage, und aus den strukturlosen Farbkumpen wurden heroische Beschützer femininer Zartheit. (Gründer 57)

In the twilight of the evening or at night the life size silhouette figures appeared intimidating in the unreal and bleak Wall atmosphere. Indiano’s amendments

modified the meaning of the image, and formless lumps of colour turned into heroic protectors of feminine tenderness. (Gründer 57; my trans.)

Whether menacing or protective, Western artists reacted to the Wall's Eastern modernist purist aesthetics and functional material form. Already in the late 1970s conceptual artist Gordon Matta-Clark compared the Wall's aesthetics to modernist high-rise housing, both of which functioned as architectural forms of social and spatial control and represented a failed modernism for him. Matta-Clark saw in the Berlin Wall the continuation of a "preworld war Bauhaus vision" (Matta-Clark in Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 425) and the uncanny return of the "German design machine" (Matta-Clark in Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 425), which had returned via the US¹³³ to Berlin. In his aesthetic intervention at the Wall Matta-Clark wanted to make the Wall's ugliness and the desolate space, the modernist border structure had created, visible. *Made in America* (1976) consisted of a collage of billboard advertisements of German consumer products combined with slogans "MADE IN AMERICA" and "FROM USSR MIT LOVE" (Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space', 424), creating a hybrid image resembling a flag according to Pugh, where the US and the USSR literally, visually intermingled within the German context. Whereas Matta-Clark was still preoccupied with consciously confronting the Western viewer with the Wall's political-aesthetic and spatial presence, in the 1980s aesthetic interventions by street artists were, as already mentioned, varied and often less overtly political in nature. All of them were increasingly treating the Wall as a painterly, whitewashed surface (Wand), onto which their criticism, anxieties and desires could be banned and made visible. White in West Berlin was not necessarily understood as a cleaning

¹³³ See https://www.bauhaus.de/en/das_bauhaus/81_nach_1933/. Accessed July 10, 2024. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 in Germany, they closed the Bauhaus school and prominent members of the Bauhaus, such as Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy emigrated to the US continuing to teach and practice their concepts of architectural and artistic modernism. They exerted considerable influence on American urban design, while American Beaux Arts traditions were increasingly pushed back.

agent enabling the purist sight of a beautifully regular structure but as surface layer, waiting to be defaced or decorated.

Gewand and (Mass) Ornament

While modern architecture wanted “to recover the purity of ancient cultures it has desecrated, restoring the white surfaces it has graffitied” (Wigley 8), the white surface, according to Mark Wigley, far from being neutral and ‘pure’, manipulates the onlooker. It introduces a new form of visibility, where the white wall functions as screen between the material object and the observer. Whereas the highly ornamental, stuccoed 19th century historicist facades invited sensuous touch and a corporeal engagement with the object, the white wall as screen strove to reduce the wall’s sensuousness to a bare minimum in order to create ‘a well balanced’ distance between the viewer and the object. Wigley compares modernity’s white walls to white shirts and fabrics (*Gewand*), which signal hygiene, clothe as well as conceal and separate the body from the onlooker in such a way, that rather than being touched it is kept at distance and has to be fantasized:

The white wall, like the white shirt, institutes the very distinction it appears to merely demarcate, carving out a space that was not there before. The white surface does not simply clean a space, or give the impression of clean space. Rather, it constructs a new kind of space. Or, at least, it restores the kind of space that was supposedly erased by the overly sensual decorative interiors and facades of nineteenth-century architecture. Such ornamental schemes block the fantasy of a body behind them and even of a discrete body in front of them. The body of the building and the body of the observer disappear into the sensuous excesses of decoration. To look at decoration is to be absorbed by it. (Wigley 7)

In order to understand the Grenzmauer 75's dazzling, 'naked' whiteness and distancing effects as well as the particular modern distaste of a decorated facade, shared on both sides of the Berlin Wall, the focus of attention needs to be directed away from the most fetishized stretch of the Berlin Wall in the American/Soviet sector and dwell on the history of 19th century tenement buildings in Berlin, some of which were reduced to their facade at Bernauerstraße in the French/Soviet sector, functioning as barrier between East and West. The tenement houses in Bernauerstraße belonged to the Soviet sector while the pavement in front of the houses were part of the French sector. This is why, after barbed wire suddenly separated East from West Berlin on August 13, 1961, the decision was taken to forcibly relocate the population at Bernauerstraße, strip the tenement buildings to their ground floor facades, which were bricked up and functioned as borderline wall until the late 1970s. Photos, archived at the research center at Bernauerstraße, reveal not only the architectural orgy of barbed wire and bricked up ground floor facades so convincingly described by Olaf Briese in 'Wartungsarm und Formschön' (2009). They also attest to the melancholic beauty of a bricked up house facade, whose entry door is still decorated by a pair of columns in 1979, a truly ironic fact, considering the GDR's clear rejection and large-scale removal of the historicist facade of tenement houses after 1945.

In *Schnörkellos: Die Umgestaltung von Bauten des Historismus im Berlin des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2012) Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen states that in East Berlin (but also in West Berlin) the historicist facades of tenement houses were removed for several reasons. First, the decorated facade veiled the miserable life of its working class inhabitants in the 19th century (270). Second, the decorated facade did not comply with the GDR's idea of a modern, purist, socialist city, which should house and nurture a new, socialist society after the horrors of imperialism and nazism (264). Since the means to completely demolish Wilhelminian house building (partly carried out in West Berlin) were lacking, the offensive

stucco ornaments on tenement houses were removed, especially on streets, which were frequented by the communist elite on their way to work. Also houses, whose facades were visible from the West, were frequently ‘de-decorated’ (245-247). The impression of a truly modern city was to be created. Similarly, the stucco facades in West Berlin did not express the modern zeitgeist anymore and often the individual owners of the tenement buildings decided to remove the irritating decor to make their houses appear more modern, brighter, cleaner and friendlier (238). Stucco and modernity seemed incompatible on both sides of the Wall.¹³⁴

The desire to replace earlier, make-shift generations of the Wall by a cultured, purist, modern version, despite the enormous costs of maintaining Grenzmauer 75, does no longer surprise. Ironically enough, by the 1970s an awareness of the historical if not aesthetic value of the 19th century facades (first in West then also in East Berlin) prompted some of the tenements houses to be re-decorated. West Berlin championed the conservation of the tenement buildings and its facades after violent tensions between the city officials and alternative, left-wing squatters in the 1970s and 1980s in Kreuzberg. East Berlin preserved the buildings and re-decorated its facade only if they were of major historical worth or once again if the tenement buildings could be seen from West Berlin. Together with the well-maintained but later graffitied Berlin Wall, the newly re-decorated buildings bordering the West conveniently concealed the overall ruinous state of the GDR, whose economic downturn was seemingly reflected by the houses’ crumbling facades. According to Hiller von Gaertringen, these crumbling facades soon turned into *the* Western visual icon, *the pars pro toto*, for the perceived overall failure of the communist system (290).

¹³⁴ While the stucco of historicist buildings was rejected in postwar GDR architecture as sign of bourgeois suppression and hypocrisy, the ornamentation of socialist housing projects was encouraged in the 1950s. As will be argued in the next chapter, the ‘socialist ornament’ was perceived as organic embellishment, belonging to the people, organizing and promoting the building of socialism. See also Peter Guth, *Wände der Verheißung* (1995) (15-48).

Clearly, the visual effect of the modern, purist, facade of the Berlin Wall in the late 1970s cannot be understood properly without the knowledge of the joint Eastern and Western zeal to modernize and ‘de-decorate’ if not demolish the city’s historicist, run down, residential buildings before they were re-valued and re-decorated in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, the purist Berlin Wall facade, which was not only meant to look modern and clean but also to create the modern, distancing look and introduce a predominantly visual economy, has always already had its, decorated, sensuous, distance-destroying other. When the Wall’s whitewashed Western ‘*Wand*’ invited the heavy onslaught of graffiti and Wall art to come, we might argue that it had already been waiting to be ‘re-decorated’, testifying to an urge to inscribe, ridicule and sully as well as enliven, beautify and decorate.

Cultural critic and architect Siegfried Kracauer detected the uncanny survival of the ornament in modernity. In his 1927 essay ‘The Mass Ornament’ the performance of the American dance troupe Tiller Girls served as the prime example of the mass ornament, in which individual girls were transformed into anonymous, geometrical clusters, reduced to a “pure assemblage of lines” (76), a linear system devoid of (erotic) life. The mass ornament, lifeless and meaningless, persisted as an empty, abstracted form, Kracauer associated with capitalist reason (*Ratio*) in opposition to his utopian belief in the possibility of a de-mythologizing engagement with ornamental structures, which bodied forth reason in its pure form:

It is the *rational and empty form* of the cult, devoid of any explicit meaning, that appears in the mass ornament. As such, it proves to be a relapse into mythology of an order so great that one can hardly imagine its being exceeded, a relapse which, in turn, again betrays the degree to which capitalist *Ratio* is closed off from reason. (84)

While in capitalism *Ratio* retreats from reason, giving rise to mute nature in form of the mass ornament, participating in mythic historical (capitalist) progress, the ornament itself, according to Henrik Reeh's analysis of Kracauer's work on modern culture occupies an ambivalent position. According to Reeh, the concept of the ornament in general functions as a means of organising the modern urban experience in Kracauer's essays on urban phenomena (1922-1931) of which the dystopian mass ornament and its critical, reflexive counterpart are examples (Reeh 63-94).

Clearly, the 'ornamental carpet' on the Berlin Wall (as argued in the previous chapter), must be read as an organising principle for an exceptional urban experience. The decorative structures on the Berlin Wall in the 1980s can be considered in their totality as mass ornaments, a collection of life- and meaningless signs, appropriated by the urban observer for his own personal use while fetishizing a particular stretch of the Berlin Wall. However, the mass ornaments on the Wall, in their sheer, distracting excess, also succeeded in overwriting the use value of the Wall (separation) and might have opened the way to an entirely different experience.

[Magic Wand, Colour and Dadaist White Line](#)

According to Peter Unsicker, whose ludic interventions on the Wall and in his gallery facing the Wall in Zimmerstraße near Checkpoint Charlie were meant to be disruptive and unsettling, not everyone wanted to be confronted with the Wall, its history and the 'histories' along its course; while he tried to put a finger on the wound of separation, at the same time a 'buffer zone' emerged between his studio and the Wall:

Gewiss, für viele blieb es unmöglich, sich mit dieser zeitgenössischen
Grausamkeit zu konfrontieren—sich dieser Daseinsschwierigkeit und
„Riesenleinwand Mauer“ zu nähern, den unSinn des Mitgeteilten zu erkennen. Es

entstand vorübergehend eine „Pufferzone“ zwischen der Mauer und meinem Atelierfenster ... (Unsicker 17-18)

Certainly, for many it was impossible to confront themselves with this contemporary brutality—to approach this difficulty of existence and “huge canvas Wall”, to recognize the (non)sense of the message. Temporarily, a “buffer zone” between the Wall and the window of my studio existed ... (Unsicker 17-18; my trans.)

In addition, the sheer saturation of colour of Kilometerkunst between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie in the 1980s points, apart from belonging to a Western capitalist seductive visual regime, to more primal forms of intervention with a ‘menacing or awe inspiring’ outside world. In *What Color is the Sacred* (2009) Michael Taussig argues, that from an anthropological point of view, colour must be considered a living force rather than a mere sign. Colour should be understood as calor, heat, a polymorphous magical substance rather than “a surface layer applied to a preexisting form” (48). Colour (as well as song) was experienced as transformative agent in the indigenous cultures Taussig worked with, which as a play of light and energy entered and merged with the shaman’s body in ceremonial practice. Tim Ingold also stresses in *The Life of Lines* (2015) that colour retains a dynamic and affective quality:

... colour gets inside us and makes it so that whatever we do, say, draw or write is done with a certain affection or disposition. ‘Drawing gives shape to all creatures’, wrote the encyclopaedist Denis Diderot, ‘but colour gives them life.’

Thus does colour lend atmosphere to the line. (104)

Could a similar boost in affection have resulted in the loss of distance between the intoxicated viewer and the polychrome excess on the Western Wall? Was *the often-hailed*

Sieg des Bunten, the victory of the colourful (Henke 315-316), in Western media based on color or colour's false aura? The answer is complicated and a detour to Austrian Art Brut seems necessary. The heavy, colourful tattooing of the Berlin Wall certainly reminds of Austrian Art Brut artist August Walla's (1936-2001) obsessive confrontation and bodily engagement with colour, image and words, which enabled him to 'survive' in an allegedly extremely menacing environment. For Stephen Barber in 'August Walla: Devil/God, Image/Text' (2010) the saturation and collision of images (mostly human and animal figures) with words, he inscribed on the furniture and wall in his room, on the street, on trees ... enabled Walla to effectively play out inner conflicts since the "zone between word and image is one that gathers confrontation, and sensitizes the work to transmit corporeal, political, historical or sexual conflicts." (321) Walla's universe was characterized by the confrontation of monstrous, malign as well as benign figures with textual references to religious, political, historical as well as personal matters. Into this 'zone of combat', Barber argues, Walla entered with his body, which in the field of image/word tension was exposed to terror as well as underwent transformation, enabling him to elude complete (psychic/corporeal) annihilation (328). A similarly obsessive corporeal engagement such as Walla's with image/texts on hard surfaces can, apart from the repeated tattooing of stretches of the Western Wall, rather be attested to the hard surface itself and its function as inner city border. The historian Martin Schaad mentions in '*>Dann geh doch rüber<: Über die Mauer in den Osten* (2009) more than 400 cases of people climbing/jumping over the Wall from West to East. One of the most famous cases was unemployed West Berliner Arnold Kabe, who breached the Wall eighteen times (1974 -1977). Despite several stays in psychiatric clinics and great efforts by the Stasi to make Kabe respect inner city borders, he continued to jump over the Wall (128-136). While Kabe was driven by inner necessity, activist John Runnings, used a similar strategy for political ends. He relentlessly climbed and ran on the Wall, attacked it with a sledgehammer,

tried to ram it, was arrested and had to serve prison sentences in the GDR between 1986 and 1989 (161-184).

Also, a similar willingness to enter ‘the combat zone’ of words, images and colour, as August Walla did, was with regard to the Berlin Wall more often due to optical illusions than inner necessity. In his essay on Walla, Stephen Barber shows several photographs of Walla kneeling on the street, covering it with images, text and symbols, lying next to the finished work. The close proximity between the image/texts and Walla’s imposing body underline Barber’s convincing argument. Walla, who was suffering from schizophrenia, certainly used words (from different languages), common symbols and images to abate their terror inducing otherness. He transformed the threatening all-encompassing visibility of image/texts and rendered them bearable by performing the visual:

Word and image together constitute one variant of an endless proliferation of doubled entities whose imminent threat Walla must exclaim, but whose expansive inscription (in the form of painted surfaces and objects), and performance (in the form of photographed actions), allows him to defuse to the point where, for a moment at least, that threat will not reach his body. (328)

Did Walla erect a buffer zone, a magic wand against the abject power of the images/texts of his own creation, which seemingly swallowed his body? Possibly. Under specific circumstances (eg.: cultic or traumatic), I am tempted to argue, bodies enter the liminal space of colourful image/texts and while absorbing the diverse sensations around them are absorbed by them. Obsessive Kilometer artists like Thierry Noir or Christophe Bouchet might have become entangled with their artwork and posed in front of it for a photograph, but a similarly intense bodily experience of and engagement with graffiti has been recorded elsewhere¹³⁵.

¹³⁵ In ‘Eiffe verbessert die Welt’ (2007) Mererid Pew Davies analyses student activist Peter Ernst Eiffe’s radical intervention in the public realm by obsessively covering Hamburg’s walls and street signs with absurd, non-sensical, ironic political graffiti in a ten-day session in 1968. According to Davies spraying graffiti was fairly

However, as already pointed out and wonderfully explained by Mark Wigley, the function of ornamental structures in general is to lure, seduce and eventually merge with the viewers and their environment. While deceptive and dazzling, the polychrome Western facade, at least in the beginning, managed to re-introduce a corporeal, sensual engagement with the Wall and the dissolution of its menacing form on the psychic level, it eventually turned into a screen again, inviting the look but not necessarily the touch. According to Mary Beth Stein, the Wall, in the late 1980s had turned into an all-too-common monument, whose specific history had been forgotten:

The Wall in West Berlin defines and frames the physical landscape. Colorful and approachable for most of its approximate 100 miles, it provides Sunday strollers and tourists with a unique walking route along the borders of the city. Scattered along its length are various look-out towers for those interested in seeing the "other Berlin" and memorials marking where people lost their lives attempting to escape to the West. The prominence that the Wall enjoys in the physical landscape, however, is largely supported by the media and tourist industry. It obscures the fact that the Wall has more or less disappeared in the "cognitive landscape," i.e., in the socio-political consciousness of the average West Berliner. With the exception of special events and holidays, when West Berlin politicians evoke the Wall as symbol, it has become everyday. And in becoming everyday, it has been more or less forgotten. (Stein 85)

What were the possibilities to puncture the colourful screen, which had become so approachable from the West, that it was mostly ignored? Janet Ward, whose understanding of the Wall is that of a living, breathing, vulnerable membrane, mentions little cement doors in

new at the time and Eiffe, who occupied a rather marginalized position within the student movement, was one of the first to use and interact with the new medium in order to propagate his political convictions.

Grenzmauer 75. Through these doors border guards could access the Western side of the Wall, which still belonged to the GDR, inspect, clean and repair it.

Yet these *Mauertore* caused no end of security headaches, with several keys from different officers needed just to open them and the ladders for repair-work kept at a distance—just in case a border guard tried to get away. (Ward 82)

Unsurprisingly, this Eastern military vulnerability was reflected in the West. Several illusionistic doors can be found on the Wall's Western facade or comments such as the following on one of the real doors: "Das gehört (beiläufig) nicht hierher." 'This (by the way; incidentally) does not belong here.' (Gründer 163; my trans.) The line is taken from Kurt Schwitter's absurd Dada love poem *An Anna Blume* (1919)¹³⁶, which, according to Michael White in 'Sense and Nonsense in Kurt Schwitters' (2010), challenges common sense as well as appeals to the senses:

As in English, the German word *Sinn* (sense) connotes both 'meaning' and 'feeling'; the 'twenty-seven senses' mentioned by the poet indicate an abundance of both and the poem prompts manifold interpretations and sensations. It has a strong degree of pattern, produced by the repetition of certain lines, breaking it into distinct sections ... frequent mention of intense colour ... physical texture ... sound ... (203-204)

Not unlike Schwitter's poem, the Berlin Wall's ornamental carpet might have deeply affected the viewers' senses, while they tried to make sense of the accumulation of images, words, colours, lines. Taken as an intertextual reference, the graffiti, seemingly functioned as a reminder of making sense of senseless juxtapositions on the Wall in general, which gave rise to diverse sensations. Taken literally, however, it immediately made sense and its irony could not be missed. Neither the Wall nor the inconspicuous door, used by the GDR border guards

¹³⁶ "Das gehört (beiläufig) nicht hierher" is the fourth line of the poem.

to swiftly pass through in order to control the small stretch of GDR territory on the Wall's Western side, did—incidentally—not belong here (Berlin). This mixture of non/sense while always appealing to the senses was consciously or unconsciously used by a group of young (East) Berliners, who wanted to puncture, if not cut through the Wall's polychrome screen, and challenge its veil-images by the re-introduction of tear-images.

Wolfram Hasch on November 4, 1986 (shortly after Keith Haring's intervention and not far from it at Lenné-Dreieck) was certainly taken by surprise when suddenly a door opened in the Wall and three GDR border guards arrested him for illegally drawing a white line on the 'Antifascist Protection Wall'. Hasch, together with four other expatriated GDR rebellious youth, had decided to create a Dada inspired, only partly politically motivated, intervention at/on the Berlin Wall: "Die Idee des Weißen Strichs war für mich weder politisch noch künstlerisch, vielleicht eine Mischung aus beiden." 'The idea of the White Line was for me neither political nor artistic, maybe a mixture of both.' (Hasch in Hahn and Willmann 123-124; my trans.) Already in their home town of Weimar they had been observed by the Stasi and arrested for various provocations against the GDR state such as dressing up as punks, spraying subversive graffiti on Weimar's walls, distributing leaflets calling for the boycott of local elections, asking to be exempted from military service on religious grounds, participating in discussions on peace and environmental topics organized by the local church ... (Hahn and Willmann 19-29). After their (gradual) expatriation and immersion in the bohemian life of Kreuzberg on the Western side of the Wall, their intention was to make visible what had become invisible: the border line. While for West-Germans or international artists, who had come to West-Berlin because of its special (inspiring) Frontstadt status and had not experienced the brutal division of the city themselves, the Wall

had positive connotations¹³⁷, for the ex-GDR youth however the Wall was a constant, corporeal, reminder of their separation from their families and former life in the GDR:

Die Mauer war uns nicht Feind, doch wir nahmen sie wahr, mit unserer Geschichte, unseren Körpern. ... Wir versuchten uns als Künstler zu outen, als kreative Geister ohne eindeutig politischen Hintergrund. Das Ganze eine dadaistische Aktion. (Schuster in Hahn and Willmann 84-85)

The Wall was not an enemy, but we were aware of it, with our history, our bodies. ... We tried to come out as artists, as creative spirits without any clear political background. The whole thing a Dadaist intervention. (Schuster in Hahn and Willmann 84-85; my trans.)

The ludic aspect of the Dadaist performance (eventually gone awry) was made clear by their selfmade masks, “Mutantenmasken für ironische Ungeheuer” ‘Mutant masks for ironic monsters.’ (Hasch in Hahn and Willmann 125; my trans.) which, rather than being a simple protection against identification by the GDR border guards, functioned as grotesque reinforcement of the intended transformation from Wall as screen to Wall as (border) line of separation. The original idea was to whitewash a large stretch of the inner-city Western Wall but for lack of colour and money they contented themselves with a white line crossing out the Wall art and graffiti on the Wall. Unintentionally they had dramatically heightened the effect of their aesthetic intervention, since the GDR border guards observing them from their watchtowers did not read the white line primarily as an artistic provocation but a politically subversive attempt to re-draw the borderline. Instead of running several meters in front of the Western Wall, the white line suddenly appeared on the Wall:

¹³⁷ In Hahn and Willmann’s *Der Weiße Strich* (2011), Frank Schuster, one of the participants of the aesthetic intervention, says in an interview that the Wall created room for self-realization (Raum zur Verwirklichung), being a Frontstadt citizen was something special (84).

Mit einem weißen Strich pflegten die östlichen Uniformierten selbst die Grenzlinie zu markieren. Wenn also die Maskierten ebenfalls so einen Strich aufmalten, so mussten sie dasselbe Ziel verfolgen: die Grenzlinie kenntlich zu machen. Jedoch befand sich der Strich nicht auf der Grenzlinie, sondern auf der Mauer selbst, die mehrere Meter hinter der Grenze stand. Demnach versuchten die maskierten Männer also, die Grenze um mehrere Meter nach Osten zu verschieben! Dies wurde als Angriff auf die Souveränität der DDR interpretiert, dem entgegengetreten werden musste—eine Kunstaktion vermutete im Osten niemand hinter dieser Performance. (Hahn and Willmann 67-68)

By means of a white line the Eastern men in uniform used to mark the borderline themselves. If the masked (men) themselves also painted such a line, they had to pursue the same aim: to mark the borderline. However, the line did not match the borderline but was on the Wall itself, which stood several meters behind the border. Thus the masked men tried to shift the border by several meters towards the East! This was interpreted as an aggression against the sovereignty of the GDR, which had to be prevented—nobody in the East suspected the performance to be an aesthetic intervention. (Hasch in Hahn and Willmann 67-68; my trans.)

The Dadaist white line, in my eyes, coincided with the white line as memory trace, recalling states of emotion for the ex-GDR youth (separation, imprisonment) as well as the GDR border guards (original white borderline, defining the GDR state), prompting Eastern reactions, which, simply by judging from the young men's improvised intervention and grotesque masquerade, might have been entirely different in another context. Not unlike Tim Ingold's ghostly line, an invisible line of experience with all too real affects/effects (Ingold a 47-50), the white line as memory trace triggered strong reactions. Suddenly a field of force,

into which all participants entered, had opened up and the *white* line itself had assumed the role of transformative agent, calor, while the polychrome excess it crossed out remained distracting surface decoration. In the momentary zone of indistinction humans, movement, white line, colour, image and Wall merged, optical vision passed into haptic vision, as if seized by a force, where lines and colour are experienced and ‘seen’ with all organs.

Undulating lines, walls and Baroque illusions

In *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918, 1923) Ernst Bloch reflects in his second essay on the genealogy of ornamental structures and its effects. According to Bloch, ornaments, which support and harbour life instead of death, are characterised by expressive lines, which exceed a strictly geometrical structure. Bloch sees in Baroque furniture’s excessive ornamentation and vivid lines a perfect example for the possibility of ornamental structures to transcend mere style:

there are Baroque armchairs too significant for practical use, that make something new out of the strange attitude, out of the removed mask, so to speak of “sitting down”: something casually spectral, fabulous, the most remarkable line. No longer taste; no longer deliberate, laboriously stylized, autonomously immanent form; rather what emerges here—and extends into a sphere in which stands only the ultimacy of pure art—an impression from life, indeed an already indicatively descriptive formal sign, a seal of the depth and the waking dream: painted as if to copy the skin, and carved as if to copy the skeleton of a wraith, a spirit, an inner figure. (16-17)

Indeed, I argue, that the Wall’s mass-ornamental carpet, due to its character as a fetish, never erased its other side: the symptomatic re-collection of expressive lines in form of individual graffiti, Wall art and white line(s). They must be counted as traces of the other living

ornament, shock experiences in which inner figure and outward form momentarily overlap, paving the way, not necessarily to a true, pure, spiritual carpet of outward form in the Blochian sense nor a strictly de-mythologising engagement with ornaments in the way Kracauer had envisioned it. Rather, an enlivened magic wand came into being, where human figure, material structure and surface decoration became entangled: as reaction to the often deadening regularity of Kilometerkunst, expressive living lines *emerged as surface inscriptions echoing the overall meandering form of the Wall as material structure.*

Similar to the living lines of the infamous Sprayer of Zurich's abstract expressionist Liniengeister (line ghosts), which voiced Harald Naegeli's revolt against the inhuman, modern, concrete architecture in the Zurich of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the graffiti of the Berlin Wall, at times, haunted the onlooker in my eyes. Manfred Schneckenberger, in his defence of Naegeli's 'vandalism' wrote in 1982:

Die laufenden, jagenden, tanzenden Linien legen ihre Schlangenfinger auf Wunden, die wir den Städten geschlagen haben. Sie diagnostizieren Betonagonie mangels Phantasie und blasen hier und da sogar noch eine Brise Sauerstoff ein. (Schneckenberger 50)

The running, speeding, dancing lines put their serpent fingers on wounds, we cut the cities. They diagnose agony of concrete (architecture) in absence of imagination and here and there supply a bit oxygen. (Schneckenberger 50; my trans.)

Not only did a roughly executed, Dadaist white line create havoc by putting its finger on a never ending border dispute in 1986 but I argue that on a more general level, the image of a 'line in motion', crossing or criss-crossing the Wall's regular surface decoration functioned as a Warburgian pathos formula in which states of emotion became fossilized in images in

motion (Didi-Hubermann in Michaud 7-15); and where the unintentional re-collection of such pathos formulae as pre-existing forms stirred the experience deposited in them.

Nora Aurienne's illusionistic images drawn onto the Berlin Wall in the 1980s come to mind. In her trompe l'oeils dishes, arrows, snakes are seemingly flung against the Wall, attempting to break, breaking at (dishes, arrows) or crawling up (snakes) the barrier. The expressive force, anger and frustration, with which the objects confront the Wall, can be *felt* by the viewer, who is drawn into the now ambiguous space of representation by means of the trompe l'oeil. Entering the 'shadowy zone' of ambiguity, where images acquire an uncanny presence, the viewer, like the creator of the images, might feel a certain relief, having banned and displaced an unbearable tension at and on the Wall.

In *On the Animation of the Inorganic* (2012) Spyros Papapetros dedicates a chapter on the movement of snakes. At the very beginning of his chapter he quotes from Paul Soriau's (1852-1926) *Aesthetics of Movement* (1889) which served the art historian Aby Warburg as textual source for his "psychology of motion" (71). Soriau presumed that the limbless movement of snakes, without any external signs facilitating locomotion, must have prompted the observer to equate the recoiling pattern of the reptile with animation and life in general. For Soriau, the movement of snakes resembles the "progression of a wave moving from head to tail" (Soriau in Papapetros 83). One of Soriau's contemporaries, the architectural historian James Fergusson (1808-1886), described the movement of snakes in a similar manner, as anorganic, pneumatic movement due to its visible lack of agency (77-78). Nora Aurienne's illusionistic snakes flung against the Wall, then do not only appear animated because of the cleverly carried out trompe l'oeil but also because the snakes' anticipated movements generate e/motion.

The careful reader of Aby Warburg's observations on Pueblo Indian rituals in 19th century America will immediately be reminded of the Walpi Indian ceremonial practice of

throwing real snakes against their stylized representations in sand in order for them to merge and as embodied messengers of lightning bring the necessary rain for survival:

In einer anderen Kiwa wird auf einem Sandgemälde eine Wolkenmasse dargestellt, aus der vier verschiedenfarbige Blitze, den Himmelsrichtungen entsprechend, in Schlangenform herauskommen. Auf dieses erste Sandgemälde werden die Schlangen mit aller Wucht geworfen, wodurch die Zeichnung zerstört wird und die Schlange sich mit dem Sand vermischt. (Warburg 53)

In another Kiva [a subterranean, circular, ceremonial room] an accumulation of clouds is depicted on a sand painting, out of which four multicoloured flashes [lightning] corresponding to the cardinal directions, in serpentine form, emerge. Onto this first sand painting the serpents are thrown with full force, by which the drawing is destroyed, and the serpent mingles with the sand. (Warburg 53; my trans.)

In his analysis, Warburg compares this magic throw with similarly violent, expressive gestures in representations of Greek mythology in antique art/cultic images; such as the Maenads (in the cult of Dionysus) dancing with live snakes in one hand before tearing the sacrificial animal in their other hand apart, or Laocoon and his sons being engulfed by the deadly force of snakes. Rudolf Raulff in his 1988 afterword to the first German edition of Warburg's Kreuzlingen lecture 'Schlangenritual' (1923) stresses the phobic potential of snakes more than any other animal. He cites from Balaji Mundkur's interdisciplinary study *The Cult of the Serpent* (1983), in which Mundkur attributes the prevalence of the ancient serpent cult in many primitive cultures as (an almost natural) reaction to the terror inducing meandering movement of the reptile, in order to corroborate Warburg's own observations (Raulff 103-105). Unlike the Greek Maenads, the Indians do not sacrifice the animal

anymore. Instead, it is released and turns into the symbol of lightning bringing the necessary rain for the Walpi tribe. However, Raulff points out, the serpent as symbol is not entirely reduced to a verbal or visual image but, in Warburgian manner, must be read as a living symbol (Raulff 105). In this way Warburg locates the 19th century Indians as occupying a middle ground between magic and logos, oscillating between mimesis and abstraction. Not only does Warburg find Greek primitive passion and living symbols in the ‘prairie’ (Raulff 96), he also traces and detects the expression of antique passion in 15th century Italian Renaissance art, in which antique pathos formulae, psychic states of emotion, survived for him as motion in ornaments, ‘dead’ accessory forms, for example, the curious agitation of garments and hair in Botticelli’s female figures (Venus, Spring) in *The Birth of Venus* (1486). By linking distinct and temporally distant cultures through the expressive gestures of their visual repertoire Warburg on the one hand risked leveling out significant historical and cultural differences, on the other hand, he revolutionized the art history of his time, by restoring a primal pathetic violence to 15th century Renaissance art in form of an anthropology of the visual as well as establishing a history of fossilized states of e/motion. Above all, Alina Payne, stresses in *From Ornament to Object* (2012), Warburg, as art historian and in his art historical analysis, brought the importance of bodily sensations to the fore.

But what constituted the real watershed was the experience of the snake ritual of the Pueblo Indians, which revealed to him, with a vividness that no theory-writing could achieve, the importance of the body as lightning rod of reception, the importance of touching and handling as epistemological moments, as moments of great intensity that throw the user into an abyss of time and allow vertiginous shortcuts to exist between cultures. (153)

Following Aby Warburg's path and possibly running the same risks, I read Nora Aurienne's 'magic throw' of snakes as an expressive, violent gesture, a sensuous epistemological moment, echoing the experience of looking at similar pathos formulae in history. Image and object enter into a field of force, become entangled and transform into a 'living snake', a living symbol, which, like in Seth Tobocman's contemporary comic *Disaster and Resistance* (2008), as 'wall-snake' encircles and imprisons (in this case occupied Palestinian) land and people (102-104), but might just as well self-destruct/disappear into the desert as a messenger of lightning bringing rain; recalling the ambivalent character of the snake as symbol of destruction as well as re-birth, echoing the Janus-faced, destructive/protective character of the Wall itself. Or in terms of modern art, a white line in charge of outlining/giving life to an, in this case oppressive, object is being freed from its yoke, taken out of context; on its way to transformation.¹³⁸

In his 1910 essay 'Die Linie' Belgian-Flemish painter, architect and designer Henry Van de Velde defines the pre-historic primal line as the displacement of expressive bodily gestures on the picture plane, caused by primitive psychic states of excitement. While the primal line has given way to the 'tracing, communicative' line, which gives objects their shape, it has not entirely disappeared and still represents a challenge for the latter (183-184).

Not only the Dadaist white line stung and stirred deep-seated emotions. Already, the very first white line, 'drawing the line between East and West', was emotionally charged. In a tense moment in history Koch was in charge of marking the (communicative) line between capitalism and communism in Berlin. He traced the outline of the Wall to come, a wall, which in a brutal gesture was to ensure the political and economic existence of the GDR. At

¹³⁸ Compare Markus Brüderlin, *Ornament and Abstraction* (2001). In *Ornament and Abstraction* Brüderlin traces the importance of ornament for the emergence of modern art and discusses the increasing ornamentalisation in works of some modern artists (e.g. Sol LeWitt or Frank Stella).

the same time, I argue, a more primitive state of excitement, found its expression and was reinforced by the Wall's meandering course.

The Wall itself, seen from an aerial perspective, embodied movement and almost 'naturally' found its meandering path along the GDR demarcation line, assuming shape and life, cleverly evoked by the perspective and movement of the 'camera' in a German educational animated video¹³⁹; but best understood by land artist Andrew Goldsworthy's *The Wall that Went for a Walk* sculpture (1990) in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, which wound along the surrounding trees so perfectly as if it was its natural habitat and a large reptile rather than a stony wall following its winding course. Goldsworthy's large as well as small scale works often assume snake-like forms, but rather than referring to the animal itself, they connote time and change (Malpas 119), possibly the time it takes to choose, build and wander along its winding course as well as the changes the open air sculptures will be exposed to. Goldsworthy states in Kenneth Baker's introduction to *Wall* (2000), a collection of (aerial) photographs of Goldsworthy's wall sculptures:

I am not interested in the symbolic or representational aspects of the snake ... But I have to admit that when I see snakes, they are the perfect sculptural form—no legs!—and their movement is such a perfect expression of their form. They draw the path they're taking, and I look for the same quality in the sculpture I'm making. There is this form I can't stop making which is really snakelike, but I often think of it as a river. It's the idea of fluidity that is the connection, but I'm not really talking about a river either. It's the movement that interests me.

(Goldsworthy 13)

¹³⁹ In *Walled In!* (2009) the inner German border as well as the Berlin Wall at Bernauerstraße are not only reconstructed in this animated educational video by German Deutsche Welle broadcasting but seemingly re-animated. In the beginning of the video the inner German border is shown winding its way from the southeast and coming to a halt in the north(east), separating East from West Germany. In Berlin, the imaginary camera travels along the Wall from a heightened perspective lending movement to the Wall's (meandering) course. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwQsTzGkbiY>. Accessed 25 November 2012)

Following Goldsworthy's train of thought of perfect form and radical self-sameness, the Berlin Wall spoke, not only by means of human intervention such as graffiti, Wall art, performance art but simply through its meandering course, creating the illusion that instead of a brutal political intervention the Wall almost naturally followed its own path through the divided city. Effects, as argued before, can pass into affects or oscillate between them. When the serpentine movement overrides the symbolic form, matter and the observer enter into a field of force. Instead of the 'animated' figure of the serpent, the figural aspect of serpentine movement comes to the fore. In Deleuzian terms, 'the figure' passes from figurative into figural, no longer representing anything but its own movement.

The Wall as animated, ornamental and 'naturally given' monument in the 1980s reminds of Baroque undulating walls, which were first introduced by Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) in the Roman church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. The highly decorated church facade¹⁴⁰, according to Sigfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), not only created flexibility and a wave-like movement but through the clever arrangement of the facade's décor an upward straining impulse (110-111). At the time of the counter-reformation, an undulating wall was one of the best ways to attract the attention of potential believers in a narrow Roman street, who would then immerse themselves in the theatrical wonders of the facade while eventually gazing upwards, towards heaven. The pleasurable, dizzying effect created by artifice (highly decorated undulating facade in this case) was proof of and guide to God's supreme being and power.¹⁴¹

In the late 1980s the Wall's most ornamental and fetishized stretch without doubt created an immersive (transformative as well as deceptive) space, which might have sent the

¹⁴⁰ For Sigfried Giedion, the undulating wall has become a "constituent fact in architecture" (20). Le Corbusier, for example, used it to bring movement to and enhance the effect of his modern, purist buildings.

¹⁴¹ In *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (2004) Norman Klein traces the history of Baroque special effects as 'pleasurable' instruments of power from the 16th to the 21st century.

viewers upwards towards one of the observation platforms, where they could have enjoyed the unobstructed panorama. It's just as much likely that they were equally dazzled by the serene whiteness of the death strip, which seemed even brighter due to the sharp contrast with its Western facade. Whether polychrome and ornamental or white and purist, the Wall's different clothings (Gewänder) seemed equally deceptive; serving either Eastern attempts of purifying, whitewashing 'raw' state power or Western attempts of appropriating the Wall through ornamental, polychrome interventions. While both strategies seemingly oppose each other, they paradoxically share the same narrative: they invite the viewers to follow a co-scripted path—from Western excess outside to Eastern purity inside and vice versa.

One of the defining characteristics of Baroque space Gilles Deleuze writes in *The Fold* (1988), apart from the infinite movement of (un)folding, is the strict severance of the facade from the inside of a spatial structure. In a double movement of folding and unfolding, the facade thrusts itself forward while the inside closes in on itself. In the Deleuzian reading of Leibniz's concept of the monad consisting of pleats of matter and the folds of the soul, the Baroque world is "a world with only two floors, separated by a fold that echoes itself, arching from two sides according to a different order." (33). The dark chamber on the upper floor is windowless and closed in, the facade on the lower floor is open to sense impressions which transform and eventually resonate through the movement of the fold in the upper chamber.

It is the upper floor that has no windows. It is a dark room or chamber decorated only with a stretched canvas 'diversified by folds,' as if it were a living dermis. Placed on the opaque canvas, these folds, cords, or springs represent an innate form of knowledge, but when solicited by matter they move into action. Matter triggers 'vibrations or oscillations' at the lower extremity of the cords, through the intermediary of 'some little openings' that exist on the lower level. Leibniz constructs a great Baroque montage that moves between the lower floor pierced

with windows, and the upper floor, blind and closed, but on the other hand resonating as if it were a musical salon translating visible movements below into sounds above. (4)

The extreme tension between open facade and hermetic inner volume, which are independent of each other as well as regulated by a preestablished connection (fold), is described by Deleuze as almost schizophrenic (36-37).

Nothing could be more true for the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s. The visually highly effective but from a military point of view completely superfluous Western Wall stood in stark contrast to the serenely functional military system behind it. While the Western Wall could be experienced as one big, ornamental illusion, a magic wand pushing forward, inviting the viewer to enter a protective buffer zone, where the subject-object relationship transformed into a relationship between partial subjects, the death strip behind the facade remained seemingly unrelated, a closed, in this case, white chamber. The awareness of the 'deadly, closed white chamber' however, could have influenced the expressively carried out lines and images on the Wall in such a way that emotion and motion, like in Aby Warburg's pathos formulae became interchangeable. A petrified outer polychrome landscape might have become animated by e/motion while at the same time an inner, seemingly unrelated deadliness destroyed life and movement by inviting the look, pushing the viewer back and establishing distance.

While outer Western facade and inner death strip as well as hinterland wall had hardly anything in common, they evolved from the same mold and shared a Baroque aesthetic, which led the viewer from the fascinating chaos on its Western side, via panoramic vistas to the serene whiteness of the closed Eastern chamber (and back again).

The illusion of movement on or of the Wall itself, apart from being deceptive and serving narrowly defined Eastern and Western ends, created a zone of indetermination which

triggered affects. Affect-ridden Wände, as already discussed in the introduction to the chapter, always already contain within themselves a Wende, an ‘einschneidend’ (cutting, radical) twist, a turn, an unmaking, and sometimes, as was the case for the Berlin Wall, inner figures and outer form do not only condition each other but converge and instead of the figurative the figural emerges.

While the Wall itself was demolished, some of its segments and an abundance of photographs and filmed material survived, some of which have been heavily fetishized. Especially near today’s Mauermuseum and the replica of US Checkpoint Charlie fact and fiction intermingle. While the Berlin Wall at its most well known inner-city stretch—with exception of remnants of the Wall near the Topography of Terror Documentation Center—has completely disappeared, a Berlin Wall panorama in form of an entirely enclosed space reconstructs the experience of the Western viewer taking a look at and across the Wall. Yadegar Asisi, who painted the optical illusion of the body of St. Michael’s Church on the Wall (Gründer 266-267) when it was still standing, has cleverly staged the Western perspective on the Berlin Wall in the 1980s near Checkpoint Charlie¹⁴² in form of a panoramic image. Baroque ‘trickery’, it seems, has survived the disappearance of the Wall and once again might prove more effective than its material remains. Western-directed veil-images, in form of Asisi’s panorama and the iconic images of/on the Western Wall or its placeholder, the East Side Gallery, dominate in the popular imagination. The production of tear-images however, as this chapter has argued, initiated in many cases by artists, surely

¹⁴² More than twenty years after the fall of the Wall, Asisi, who had experienced the divided Berlin himself, managed to build a monumental panoramic image (60 meter length and 15 meter height) located in Kreuzberg close to the Wall and the border crossing Heinrich-Heine-Straße, re-constructing from more than thousand photos and detailed drawings a fictitious day in November 1980, on the actual historic site. It had taken Asisi three years to create the panorama, whose images are based on personal experience. Born in Vienna but growing up in East-Berlin, Asisi was forced to leave the GDR in 1978 and decided to live close to the Wall on its Western side. Condensing life in the shadow of the Wall, Asisi confronts and overwhelms the visitor, standing on a quasi-observation platform, with a world, which he and others sought to overcome. See euromaxx highlights of September 29, 2012), www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,16273844,00.html?maca=de-podcast_euromaxx-highlights-2112-xml-mrss, Accessed 2 November 2012. See also www.asisi.de/panorama/die-mauer. Accessed August 2023.

always already lies in waiting. Let's not forget that both, affect and effect 'vibrate' in the body and a simple forceful throw of imaginary arrows might dissolve the illusion, create a 'slit' in the panoramic vision cast upon the Wall, generating the transformation from protective, fetishistic shield to porous membrane.

In *What is Philosophy?* (1991) Deleuze celebrates the violence of sensation a poet like D.H. Lawrence demanded of art while denouncing the violence of representation:

In a violently poetic text, Lawrence describes what produces poetry: people are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos ... (203)

Chapter 4: The Wall as Annihilator of the Historical and Amplifier of Utopian Desire

Introduction

In his polemical essay ‘Von Mauer, Schild, Schirm und Spalt’ (1995) Klaus Theweleit drily remarks that in the 1970s and 1980s the Berlin Wall replaces the ‘German forest’ as German national symbol to unify the ‘German national body’. While imperialist and Nazi Germany drew its unitary, military strength from the image of the ‘German forest’, with the erectness and stability of each individual tree forming part of the whole and where man’s bodily armour was modelled on the tree’s bark as a shell, another ‘shell’ began to function as mass symbol¹⁴³ for Germans in the FRG and GDR. The Wall, according to Theweleit, enabled West and East Germans alike to separate and remove their guilt of and responsibility for the Holocaust and the Nazi atrocities from their own national histories. Not only were socio-economic and political failures automatically ascribed to the other side by means of the Wall, but the Wall also functioned as common ‘Abspaltungs- und Verdrängungsmauer’, a wall of ‘removals’ and repression, which conveniently walled off and away the historical awareness of the Germans on both sides:

die Mauer beerbte den Wald; der Deutsche (beider Staaten) lief nicht mehr zusammen, um im Heer die Aufnahme in den gemeinsamen Großen Körper zu erleben, er baute sich neu als gereinigter, durch die Mauer von der *Geschichte abgetrennter* Körper, Körper einer neuen Geschichtsepoche des Nichtkriegs, des Patts zwischen den Blöcken; des Patts, dessen sichtbarster Ausdruck die Mauer war. (23)

¹⁴³ Theweleit’s analysis on mass symbols is based on Canetti’s insights into the workings and ‘the manipulation of the masses’ in *Crowds and Power* (1960).

the Wall succeeded the forest; the German (of both states) did not rally to experience within the army the incorporation into the Great [National] Body, he rebuilt himself as purified body, *a body split from the past* by means of the Wall, a body of a new historical epoch of non-war, of the stalemate between the [political] blocs, of the stalemate, whose most visible embodiment was the Wall. (23; my trans.)

On the one side of the Wall, in the FRG, Theweleit sees 'history' dissolve into commodity fetishism located in the architectural body of the department store, on the other side of the Wall, in the GDR, 'history' and with it the responsibility for the Nazi past is simply cut off by the concrete barrier. The new historical epoch of non-war, as Theweleit puts it, is produced and framed by the Wall, which enables 'history' itself to be evicted or to be placed to one side in order to house the political stalemate between the capitalist and communist blocs. The Wall as protective shield and fission guaranteed 'historical atonement' and disengagement in form of severing the connection with the past in West and East Germany (24). Theweleit goes as far as talking of a strategy of *Geschichtsvernichtung*, the annihilation of history (29), which, regarding the reunification of the FRG and the GDR in 1990 and the coming to terms with the history of the GDR, he sees in the process of repeating itself. Reunification, in his eyes, represents the impossible process of wanting to reunite a *Spalttablette*, a 'splitting' pill, and is fervently decried by him: "Die Spalttablette wiedervereinigen zu wollen: Genau darin steckt der Wahnsinn. Man kann >das Spaltende< nicht wiedervereinigen, es *bleibt* Spalttablette, nur größer; Spalttablette hoch zwei ..." 'Wanting to reunite the 'splitting' pill, this is madness. One cannot reunite >the splitting<, it *remains* 'splitting' pill only on a larger level; splitting pill squared ...' (30-31; my trans.)

Instead of shielding and severing one's own body and the imaginary, reunited body of the nation¹⁴⁴ from the past, by undoing the faultlines between formerly split nations, the awareness of personal and (former) national borders would prevent historical amnesia and the erasure of collective shame. Sensible and sensitive borders, such as the skin (of one's own body) shall, in Theweleit's eyes, replace (splitting) walls. *Haut statt Mauern* (34), skin instead of walls, is his rallying cry. It transforms the Wall into an interface, a membrane, which senses and filters socio-historical processes instead of severing and erasing them.

Instead of the Western-directed triumphalism of the reunification period seemingly forever enshrined in collective memory, the idea of the Wall as conceptual membrane, would undo past and present erasures by making the historical faultlines visible *as well as* laying bare its function as material and collective (national) binding agent.

A good example for the exposure of historical faultlines rather than its erasure can be found in *Requiem for Communism* (2003). On the one hand Charity Scribner bemoans the experiential loss of collective labour as locus of solidarity embodied in communist material culture in postcommunist (East) Germany, on the other hand the Open Depot Museum in Eisenhüttenstadt, formerly Stalinstadt, planned and built as a socialist living complex in the 1950s to house workers of the nearby ironworks, has made an effort to collect the abandoned GDR products, which used to be part of communist material culture. While the collected, out-of-use, everyday objects, such as radios or television sets, do not form part of the community, which produced them, anymore, they serve as reminders that: "Small things circulate within the collective and bind it together just as effectively as a stone wall that encloses a village or a factory gate." (26) Eisenhüttenstadt, according to Scribner, has not erased its socialist past. The city's architecture, its grid-like structure with its wide boulevards bordered by socialist

¹⁴⁴ The analogy between the individual body and the 'body of the nation' has, according to Theweleit, a long tradition in political philosophy. The topos of the state or the city in form of the human body equipped with head and limbs can be traced back to the antiquity (18).

realist multistorey buildings testify to socialist city planning and communal life. Unlike Berlin and other cities, few street names have been changed and “many of its citizens reside at addresses named after communist revolutionaries, like Karl-Liebknecht-Straße or Clara-Zetkin-Ring.” (27) Unlike Berlin, Eisenhüttenstadt has not been characterised by imposing, spectacular socialist showpiece architecture such as Berlin’s television tower (1965-1969), which visually bound together Stalin-Allee (renamed into Karl-Marx-Allee after destalinization in the 1960s) with Alexanderplatz, over which the tower still hovers and Marx-Engels-Platz, renamed into Schlossplatz after reunification, where the long-demolished People’s Palace¹⁴⁵ was erected in 1973. On the contrary, Scribner stresses, that instead of a visual consolidation of power, common socialist architecture was the main architectural feature and function of Eisenhüttenstadt: “The city’s centrifugal force found its epicenter in the Living Complex (*Wohnkomplex*), which comprised trundling, uniform blocks of flats, shops and schools. Originally erected to gird the workaday with freedom, equality, and unity ...” (27)

Even though Eisenhüttenstadt’s inhabitants like in many other former East German cities had to face severe socio-economic changes after reunification in 1990, especially a high unemployment rate as a result of the closure of the city’s ironworks and the dismantling of the GDR heavy industry, the, what Scribner calls, *alterity of history* (42) is still visible in the city’s architecture while its former material productivity, the ‘debris’ of socialist commodities, have been collected and are now housed at the Open Museum.

¹⁴⁵ The GDR People’s Palace was eventually demolished more than ten years after reunification in 2006. In 2020 the controversial and hotly debated Humboldt Forum, a cultural forum housing Berlin’s ethnological and Asiatic art collections, was opened. The facades of the Humboldt Forum, with the exception of Franko Stella’s modern facade facing the river Spree, were remodeled after the Berlin Stadtschloss, the Baroque city palace of the Hohenzollern, transformed into a Baroque residence by architect Andreas Schlüter at the beginning of the 18th century. After the Second World War the Berlin Palace, which was then located in the Soviet occupation zone, was badly damaged and eventually torn down. The GDR People’s Palace was erected instead. See www.humboldtforum.org/de/programm/feature/geschichte-des-ortes-31309/. Accessed 15 September 2022.

Neither triumphalist *Geschichtsvernichtung*, annihilation of history, nor postcommunist *Gesellschaftsverlust*, loss of society and the social, bemoaned by philosopher and cultural critic Boris Buden, have entirely taken hold of Eisenhüttenstadt and the city's inhabitants. The faultlines of an-other socio-economic and political structure are still traceable in the city's built environment and material culture and can possibly be rekindled. In Berlin, where the debris of a socialist past has remained visible in East Berlin's remaining socialist architecture and the remnants of the Wall in situ, reunification has resulted in a greater, postmodern homogenisation on the architectural level. Pockets of former socialist life and living structures function as weak reminders of the alterity of history, a history, which has been all too willingly cast aside.

In *Zone des Übergangs* (2009) Buden states that the Wende of 1989/90, which led to German reunification in 1990, above all entailed a profound change concerning the conception of society and the social. For Buden the experience of Wende, the period of transition between the demise of the GDR and the reunification with the FRG, must be described as a profound experience of loss, the loss of society and the social he terms *Gesellschaftsverlust*. Since liberal capitalist democracy, hailed by political scientist Francis Fukuyama as the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" (Fukuyama 4) in 1989¹⁴⁶, figured the horizon towards which the citizens of the failing GDR state eventually oriented themselves, their own communist past was regarded as contemptible, something that had to be overcome by catching up on Western standards¹⁴⁷. What was lost, according to Buden, in

¹⁴⁶ Three years after his hotly debated essay 'The End of History?' (1989), Fukuyama reiterates and tries to clarify his main points in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). By the end of history Fukuyama did not refer to the end of historic events but to the endpoint of a directional history, based on Hegelian ideas of a historical consciousness being actualised in a current socio-political situation. With the demise of the communist bloc after the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, Fukuyama sees in capitalist liberal democracy the only viable form of human governance.

¹⁴⁷ Buden alludes to Jürgen Habermas' concept of *nachholende Revolution*, a revolution understood as catching up with the West in terms of socio-economic growth and liberal democratic rights (Buden 52).

the process of catching up with the West was not the actually existing socialist society but the experience of the social per se:

Die Tiefe des Verlustes, um den es hier geht, lässt sich nicht ausloten, indem man die Vor- und Nachteile der beiden Systeme, des untergegangenen Sozialismus und des ihn ersetzenden liberaldemokratischen Kapitalismus quasidialektisch gegeneinander abwägt. Was verloren ging, ist eine fundamentale Erfahrung des Sozialen. Deshalb tut die Leere, die dieser Verlust hinterläßt, so weh. Es ist eine Leere, die den abwesenden Grund der Gesellschaft als Gesellschaft offengelegt hat. Sie lässt spüren, dass es Gesellschaft selbst nicht mehr gibt. (166)

The depth of loss, which it is all about, cannot be fathomed by quasi-dialectically assessing the advantages and disadvantages of both systems, of the now defunct socialism and the liberal democratic capitalism which replaced it. What was lost is the fundamental experience of the social. Therefore, the void, which this loss leaves behind, hurts so much. It is a void, which lays bare the absent base of society qua society. It makes us painfully aware that society per se does not exist anymore. (166; my trans.)

Rather than the communist state's institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, factories ... which formed the fabric of socialist everyday life, Buden declares the base of society, the concept of the social, to have been demolished and eroded in the postcommunist process of transformation. In reunified, capitalist, liberal democratic Germany Buden sees society and the social in a state of dissolution, precisely because the social in form of an anticipated future classless society as social base and goal-to-be-achieved has vanished.

Building socialism meant more than building for a future classless society, it meant laying the structural foundations for a future classless society, as in the case of

Eisenhüttenstadt. The socialist architecture and homogeneous grid-like structure of a planned but open city for industrial workers was to frame and ensure its egalitarian future. Whereas the concept of a directional history has found a fertile building ground in Eisenhüttenstadt, Berlin's divided and walled-in status has resulted in competitive forms of architecture reflecting conflicting models of society and anticipated futures. At the same time industrial modernity with its promise of economic progress, according to Buden and Scribner, has taken its toll on both sides.

For Buden as well as Scribner the *Wende* period of 1989/90 not only meant the loss of the concept of the social, of the experience and practice of collective labour, of the experience and practice of solidarity, it meant, above all the end of industrial modernity on both sides of the Wall. Scribner argues that the socio-economic crisis experienced in communist countries in the 1980s was part of a larger process which affected industrialized countries in general. She therefore refers to the *Wende* as a postindustrial *Wende*, which in countries like the United Kingdom during Margaret Thatcher's uncompromising privatisation and deindustrialisation campaigns in the 1980s eventually led to the breakdown of trade unions if not the disappearance of the working class (Scribner 5). The loss of industrial modernity and the loss of a socialist past have however not resulted in complete historical erasure. "Shards of the revolutionary past" (Scribner 132) have found their way into museums such as the Open Depot in Eisenhüttenstadt. In Eisenhüttenstadt's postcommunist era socialist 'debris' in form of produce has been collected and socialist building structures have largely been left intact. Contrary to Berlin's iconic socialist structures such as the landmark tv-tower at Alexanderplatz and Karl-Marx-Allee with its socialist showpiece architecture, Eisenhüttenstadt's more conventional socialist architecture has not been reduced to a historical oddity in form of a tourist attraction but continues to breathe history in situ. This should come as no surprise, since iconicity, according to Peter Geimer in *Die Farben*

der Vergangenheit (2022) breeds loss of history. Based on Roland Barthes' analysis of iconic images in *Mythologies* (1957) Geimer stresses that iconic images, with their stagedness in form of favourable perspectives and the pathetic gestures they produce, make them easily readable and at the same time destroy historical complexity by repressing the all-too-often coincidental nature of events now presented in form of a historical determinism (124-125). Geimer's argument directly relates to Buden's dismissal of the iconic images of the Wende period.

Buden, who, as already argued in the introduction, speaks of the Wende as cynical, since in the all too well-known iconic images of the fall of the Wall, which form part of our collective memory, the point of view of the cynical Western onlooker, who expects the agents of the revolution in Eastern Europe to catch-up to Western standards, is foregrounded. Buden dismisses the Western hegemonic perspective as posthistorical Mauerfall Kitsch, fall of the Wall kitsch, which twists the 'truth' of the historical event and its utopian potential by means of visual manipulation: "Dem Bild ist die emanzipatorische Wahrheit genommen worden, die dem Ereignis, das es dokumentiert, innenwohnte." 'The image has been robbed of its emancipatory truth, which was inherent in the event, it documents.' (Buden 100; my trans.

Anyone familiar with the visual archive, which forms part of our collective memory of the Berlin Wall, has come across press photographer Thomas Kienzle's image¹⁴⁸, taken on November 10, 1989. A group of people can be seen standing on the Berlin Wall, forming a human chain, with their backs to West Berlin facing the Brandenburg Gate in the East. The viewer, together with the Berliners on and behind the Wall, looks up to the Brandenburg Gate, which seemingly promises the new 'reunified' state to come. Even though the human chain posed at considerable distance from the Brandenburg Gate on the Berlin Wall, on the visual level, by means of clever use of perspective, columns and human chain form a unity

¹⁴⁸ See Benjamin Drechsel 'Mauer' (2011).

reminding of Hobbes' body politic symbolically authorizing a new, in this case, democratic form of government.

The image of a human chain, 'dancing' on the Wall in front of Brandenburg Gate, facing East, not only memorialized a 'magic moment'¹⁴⁹, suggesting that the Wall had been overcome in a peaceful way, but it also cleverly and triumphantly overwrote another iconic image: the image of the 'human wall' of GDR militia, securing the border at Brandenburg Gate in 1961. Instead of military rigor, Kienzle's picture insinuates an overcoming of the Wall by means of liberal, playful ease: a now human/e wall easily transforming a concrete wall as Benjamin Drechsel observes in 'Mauer' (2011).

Kienzle's photograph of the fall of the Wall overwrote and made invisible the iconic image of its erection and also changed directions. While the GDR militia still faced West in 1961, protecting the East, the people on the Wall in front of Brandenburg Gate in 1989 faced East, not only physically appropriating the Wall but also reinforcing the dominant Western perspective: West to East (Drechsel 135). Both images reinforce the Western perspective, the visual and actual appropriation of the Wall and posit the Western viewer as bystander of historic events.

Mauerfallkitsch replaced what might in analogy to Buden's critique be called Mauerbaukitsch, the propagandistic kitsch of (the necessity of) securing the inner-city border by representatives of 'the people' and building the 'Anti-Fascist-Protection Wall'. The iconic images of the erection of the Wall and its fall, uncannily meet Buden's as well as Theweleit's verdict. The topos of the sovereign body composed of 'the people' Theweleit calls *Körperimago* comes full circle. The image of the sovereign in form of 'the militarized people' securing the GDR border in 1961 is substituted by the image of 'the soon-to-be

¹⁴⁹ See Drechsel 'Mauer' (2011). The catchphrase on November 9, 1989, was "Wahnsinn" 'madness; beyond belief' (131; my trans.).

reunified, peaceful people' dancing on the Wall. Indeed, the Wall has replaced the German forest as national symbol. It is tempting to argue that while the erectness, not of each individual tree but each individual Wall segment, symbolized the strength of the GDR as sovereign state, on November 9, 1989, the Wall as military metaphor crumbled and was symbolically appropriated by 'the people of the West and the East'. The visual compliance of each individual body with the body of the sovereign does not only echo Thomas Hobbes' famous frontispiece with the *Körperimago* of (the) *Leviathan* (1651), the terrifying image of the peace-making sovereign, but also reflects, in Theweleit's eyes, the desire of each individual citizen for being reunited with the 'body of the nation'. This desire, according to Theweleit, had been particularly virulent in the German inter-war period after the First World War, where Germany was frequently perceived and represented as body in fragments, which, according to the nationalist and national socialist policies of the time had to be restored:

Es gibt kaum einen Text zur Lage >Deutschlands< aus dieser Zeit, keinen Bericht, keine Biographie, keinen Roman, kein politisches Pamphlet, die nicht das im Krieg besiegte Deutschland als zerstückelten Körper dargestellt hätten.

...

Die Glieder sollten wieder ran; die Körper Ganzheit wiederhergestellt werden. Das ist die affektive Grundhaltung der völkischen Politik die zwanziger Jahre hindurch. Hitler wurde ihr bewusster Vollstrecker.

Die >Heim-ins-Reich<-Bewegungen, alle Abstimmungen in den >abgetrennten< Gebieten, alle Gebietsannexionen vollzogen sich als phantastisches Wieder-heil-Machen des Körpers Deutschland. (19)

There is hardly a text about the state of >Germany< from this time, no report, no biography, no novel, no political pamphlet, which would not have represented the in-the-war-defeated Germany as ripped apart body.

...

The members had to be back; the body's integrity restored. This is the affective attitude of the racial, nationalist policies throughout the twenties. Hitler became its willing executioner.

The >Back home-into-the Reich<-movements, all votes in the >severed< territories, all annexations of territory were executed as phantastical make-the-body-of-Germany-whole(some)-again. (19; my trans.)

Ironically, it was the Wall as military barrier and metaphorical placeholder for the GDR, which was appropriated, eventually demolished, its pieces sold off as souvenirs, works of art or turned into rubble. After the fall of the Wall, the image of Mauerspechte, Wall peckers, attacking the Wall with hammers, breaking off pieces as a personal memento or for professional gain and the image of the Wall in ruins, its segments stripped off their colourful surface, with the steel reinforced support laid bare, looking as if a monstrous entity had been slain, scavenged and ripped apart, have overflowed our visual archive. A similar zeal of destructive energy was exercised regarding the Bastille at the time of the French Revolution in 1789. As mentioned before, the much-hated prison was quickly dismantled and model Bastilles as relics were carved out of the original material while a festive dance on the ruins of the former prison would turn into a powerful symbolic act of appropriation (Drechsel 131-132).

Bearing in mind the allusions conjured when looking at Kienzle's now iconic photograph, Buden's critique of the visual representation of the fall of the Wall as quasi pars pro toto for the experience of Wende is dead on. Not only is the perspective of the

protagonists of the East German revolution, of those East Berliners, who on November 9, 1989 flocked to the checkpoint at Bornholmer Straße between East and West Berlin and pressured the border guards to open the gate, disregarded: in Kienzle's photograph, those standing on the Wall, already anticipate and share the same Western perspective as the passive Western bystanders, who, in Buden's argument, unlike the passive bystanders at the time of the French Revolution are not seized with the—seen and felt—revolutionary zeal but reassured of their own superior position:

Wir brauchen ein anderes Bild vom Ende des Kommunismus. Jenes vom Fall der Berliner Mauer ist zum ideologischen Kitsch geworden. Es läßt eine Wahrheit der Vergangenheit als kleine opportunistische Lüge der Gegenwart erscheinen. Daran ist nicht das Bild schuld und auch nicht das, was es zeigt, sondern der Blick des passiven Zuschauers von damals. Er jubelt nicht der großartigen Tat der Akteure zu, sondern sich selbst: >Schaut her, wie großartig meine Welt ist. Eine bessere kann es gar nicht geben.< (Buden 100)

We need another image of the end of communism. The one of the fall of the Berlin Wall has turned into ideological kitsch. It makes the truth of the [historical] past look like a small opportunistic lie of the present. It is not the image which has to be blamed nor that, which is shown, but the gaze of the passive onlooker at that time. He does not cheer the great deed of the protagonists [of the revolution], but he cheers himself: >Look, how great my world is. There cannot be a better one.< (Buden 100; my trans.)

Unlike Buden though, I argue that not only the perspective of the Western bystander, which insinuates the position of being on 'the right side of history', but the way the image is framed, its composition as well as the allusions it makes use of, make it truly misleading if not

cynical. In this way and despite the photograph's indexical and documentary character it has more in common with 19th century historical, panoramic paintings, which, while putting the viewers in the position of the eyewitness to lure them into believing that they truly see a battle scene or its victorious outcome with their own eyes, are carefully composed and idealized.

In this chapter I argue that the historical, political-aesthetic positioning and visual 'framing' of the Wall has been nurtured by utopian projects in the GDR (the building of socialism) as well as in post-Wall Germany (the building of a reunified Germany). It is based on notions of a directional history and the continued influence of the historical avant-garde's radical break with historical, aesthetic traditions in order to transform life through art and engender new social forms, where the practice of art is indistinguishable from the practice of life.

On the one hand annihilator of the historical, screening off responsibility for the Nazi past, suppressing historical alterity by disowning postcommunist *Gesellschaftsverlust*, and amplifier of utopian desire, the Wall at the same time functioned as membrane filtering socio-historical and aesthetic processes, counteracting a one-directional, historical façadism, transforming the potential utopian unfolding into heterotopinan spatialities (Foucault 1986).

The Wall as Historical Panorama and its Undoing

In *Shivers Down Your Spine* (2008) Alison Griffiths locates the spectator of a 19th century panorama within the virtual space produced by the image itself. The spectators were, in Griffiths's eyes, enveloped by the image space produced by skilful visual illusions and able to immerse themselves in what felt to be the 'the reality' of the painted scenery, most commonly the exoticized and colonized landscape of the Americas or a European battle scene. The effect and the experience of the panorama were heightened because of its

monumentality. Panoramas were hung in a special, circular building, a rotunda, almost completely sealed off from the outside world, while the spectators, standing on a viewing platform within the rotunda and being literally enveloped by the panorama, became part of the world created by the image and experienced it as 'real'. Additionally, the details of the depicted scenes increased the panorama's reality effects:

Panoramas laid claim to the historical and geographical real through an indexical bond, premised on their status as topographically correct and authentic reconstructions of battles, landscapes, or ancient antiquities such as the Acropolis in Athens. (42)

Cleverly designed architecture and the careful composition of painterly visual effects such as trompe l'oeils as well as the painting's minuteness created powerful affects, which enhanced the spectators' suspension of disbelief and increased their visual pleasure, sending, as Griffiths puts it, shivers down the spine (36). Griffiths compares the corporeal experience of the visitor of the panorama with a religiously devout person's multisensory exposure to the sacred space of the Gothic cathedral, which greets the person with a "riot of color radiating from the stained glass windows" (19). Griffiths argues, that the affects caused and the experience felt in the immersive architecture cum image space evolve around the realm of the dead, the world beyond, the past event:

immersive types of viewing share a special communion, mutually informing one another through their similar interest in bringing back the dead and reconstructing an experience that invites the spectator to revisit that which has occurred or simply been. (42)

I argue that what we do not see on Kienzle's photograph but have to conjure is the Western immersive space as lure, created by the Wall encircling West Berlin, the colourful, predominantly kitschy images on the Wall's Western side and the crowds of curious East

Germans streaming into that space through the unexpectedly opened Bornholmer Straße checkpoint on November 9, 1989. In this way, not only the image of what has been but the past event and the experience of it will be structured by the immersive image-space which enveloped them.

A panorama artist like Yadegar Asisi, who experienced life in divided Berlin, who left East for West Berlin in 1978, whose famous trompe l'oeil on the Berlin Wall of the church of St. Michael in East Berlin, whose cupola could be seen from West Berlin with Asisi visually restoring the body of the church on the Western Wall for an unimpeded view; an artist whose famous St. Michael's church trompe l'oeil now stands as individual Wall segment in the gardens of the Vatican¹⁵⁰; an artist, whose Berlin Wall panorama close to former Checkpoint Charlie has enjoyed considerable popularity since 2012, testifies to the effects and affects the immersive image space on the Western side of the Wall together with its deadly and deadening other side engendered¹⁵¹. Asisi's snapshot of everyday life in Kreuzberg close to the Wall and the border crossing Heinrich-Heine-Straße sometime in the 1980s, invites the visitors of the panorama to climb the steps of an imaginary scaffolding in Sebastianstraße and cast their eyes on the Wall's graffitied Western side, across the Wall, across the death strip towards Berlin Mitte, with East Berlin's tv tower, a factory chimney and the cupola of St. Michael's church as common landmarks. In the accompanying catalogue, the careful reader will find the following information on page 16:

All the details shown in the Panorama can actually be historically assigned to this section of the Wall. Even if the total picture appears almost like a documentary, all the elements and details—like in a painting—have been deliberately staged and

¹⁵⁰ See Ralf Gründer, *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007), 264.

¹⁵¹ See www.asisi.de/en/panorama/the-wall. Accessed 17 September 2022.

sometimes exaggerated. Little of that which naturally fits into the whole picture is still able to be found in place today. (Asisi 16)

Instead of a typical day of a life in the past whose material traces have almost entirely vanished, an intensified day awaits the visitor of the panorama. Like the view across the Wall, the area in front of the Wall in Kreuzberg is packed with, among other things, the visual representation of a warning sign, an observation platform, a squatted house, a petting zoo, a petrol station. Each individual object has indexical character but together they constitute the quasi *faux terrain*¹⁵² of the panorama. As cleverly staged re-enactment of the Western viewing position Asisi's panorama, which "makes no claim to being historically exact or complete" (Asisi 16), courts the fetish while speaking the 'truth' to the contemporary visitor.

The birth of the panorama, according to Oliver Grau in *Virtual Art* (2003) can be traced back to military surveys, when rebellions, such as the Jacobite rebellion of 1746, unleashed by the Stuarts to regain the English throne, were crushed. Topographical draftsmen in the service of the military were sent to Scotland to create detailed views of the landscape for future military operations in the occupied territories (53). While the detailed cartographic data integrated into the new form of visual representation enabled the military strategists to plan, for example, positions of advance and retreat more effectively, new perspectival techniques inserted the individualised observer into the centre of the image space formerly occupied by 'the eye of God', seeing and surveying everything.

Military strategists, who readily made use of the panoramic views packed with military details, soon recognised the propagandistic value of panoramas of battle scenes, which enabled the urban, civilian visitor of the panorama to be immersed in and enveloped by

¹⁵² See Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine* (2008), 61. Faux terrain normally consists of attrapes (hoax objects) located immediately in front of the panoramic illusion and related to its subject matter to heighten its effect and to blur the boundary between real space and the space of illusion.

a historic battle while taking a comfortable stroll along the viewing platform. As “permanent monuments to military battles” (65) the panoramas helped to gain support for further military operations.

The essence of the panorama, Oliver Grau points out, is the entrapment in the ‘real’ through a game of deception whose effect is heightened by haptic elements of faux terrain and sound and other effects such as the noise of the battle, artificial wind and smoke (70). A space of presence, Grau borrows the concept from art historian Wolfgang Kemp, is created, which is either experienced as ‘real’ by the oblivious visitors of the early panoramas or as a source of aesthetic pleasure by later, more experienced visitors (70).

When August Werner’s *The Battle of Sedan* panorama commemorating the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), resulting in the unification of the diverse German principalities under Prussian leadership and the formation of the German nation state in 1871, was opened at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz on September 1, 1883, the anniversary of the actual battle, it “was a political and media event of the first order ... Media interest in this event was comparable to Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s wrapping of the Reichstag in 1995” (91-92) Newspapers reported enthusiastically about the experience of being transported to another place, the battlefield of Sedan, which did not look painted but was experienced as ‘real’, while still being in the city of Berlin. Kaiser Wilhelm I could be pleased to have ensured popular support for further military interventions by means of deceptively real views of the battlefield:

This was achieved through von Werner’s composition of images, which thus moved into, whether through idealistic aberration or conscious falsification, the sphere of propaganda. The method follows the schematic *authenticity = illusionistic effect + idealized composition = propaganda*. (98)

In public von Werner played down the illusionistic elements of the panorama and true to its political message of victorious triumphalism in the service of nation building stressed its documentary value “produced by endless labors of reconstruction” (98). Panoramas as ‘authentic’ spectacles of historic events became less popular by the end of the 19th century, being replaced by panoramic photography. For example, the contemporary photo-panorama of Michael Fischer-Art’s 2009 mural in faux-naïve, self-proclaimed free-market realist¹⁵³, style on a large firewall near the Leipzig train station, commemorates the peaceful revolution of 1989 (Metz A. 186-187)¹⁵⁴, which gained momentum by the non-violent protest of GDR citizens in Leipzig on October 9, 1989. As a visual means of nation-building however, the classical panorama continued to play a role in the 20th century in the divided Germany.

In the early 1970s Werner Tübke, then rector of the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig, was commissioned by the GDR government to paint a battle panorama commemorating the German Peasant War (1524-1525) as an example of an “early bourgeois revolution in Germany”¹⁵⁵. While Tübke avoided turning the topic into state propaganda by means of meticulous research and attention to detail when depicting the Thuringian uprisings against late feudalism around the theologian and radical reformer Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525), it took him and his team more than ten years to finish. The panorama of the German Peasant War on the Schlachtberg near Bad Frankenhausen was opened in September 1989, shortly before the fall of the Wall and the crumbling of the communist system. Even in today’s reunified Germany panoramas seemingly continue to be part of nation-building. Apart from *The Wall* panorama Asisi created, among others, panoramas of far-reaching

¹⁵³ In opposition to the socialist-realist style he grew up with in the GDR, where he worked as a mason, painter and nurse. After the fall of the Wall, he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig and has enjoyed considerable success. See www.fischer-art.de/. Accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁵⁴ See www.360cities.net/es/image/michael-fischer-art-wall-paintings-in-leipzig?pano_detail=true&portfolio_view=false. Accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁵⁵ See www.panorama-museum.de/en/monumentalpainting.html. Accessed 31 August 2023.

historic events such as the bombing of Dresden in 1945 and the Battle of Nations at Leipzig in 1813¹⁵⁶.

In Asisi's *The Wall* panorama, which is based on photographic material, as well as in Thomas Kienzle's photograph, illusionistic effects and idealized compositions bring about a documentary authenticity where fact and fiction intersect. Asisi's 'authentic faux images and faux terrain' existed but not in the represented density and intensity. Thomas Kienzle's photograph, commonly regarded as icon of the 'fall' of the Wall on November 9, 1989, was actually taken a day later. Both visual representations reproduce the hegemonic position of the Western viewer of Eastern captivity (Asisi) or Eastern 'liberation' (Kienzle). Under these circumstances, the step towards Theweleit's *Geschichtsvernichtung* is a small and tempting one, since both Asisi's panorama and Kienzle's photograph feel 'real' and are representations of the 'real'. They have indexical character while being framed in favour of Western views, which invite the thus positioned spectator to reconstruct the world of the past.

In the Wende period, in the autumn of 1990, when the physical division between East and West Berlin was still clearly visible, the open-air sculpture exhibition *Endlichkeit der Freiheit* (The Finiteness of Freedom), mounted in both halves of the city, effectively countered one-sided views and Western triumphalism about the end of history and the victorious emergence of liberal, democratic capitalism by confronting the Cold War culture wars. The sculptures and interventions in public space by artists such as Ilya Kabakov, Hans Haacke, Rebecca Horn or Janis Kounellis were paired installations, in dialogue with each other, located in East and West Berlin. Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, for example, confronted the physical and abstract, staged space of Cold War confrontations, which was created by the Wall as physical barrier in his interventions. In the exhibition catalogue Kabakov chose to foreground, by means of found photographic documentary material of Eastern and Western

¹⁵⁶ See <https://www.asisi.de/homepage>. Accessed 31 August 2023.

politicians and notables visiting the Wall in 1964, the Wall as ideal stage and setting for the performance of the political. On the wasteland itself, which still characterised the undeveloped Potsdamer Platz, Kabakov constructed two identical, narrow, wooden corridors facing each other while being divided by an imaginary demarcation line, inviting the visitor to experience their claustrophobic enclosure and the symbolic passage from one ideological system to the other. Dangling from wires across the top of the corridors was debris gathered by Kabakov from the surrounding no-man's land which used to be part of the military fortification system. By attaching texts to the bits of rubbish, which expressed the worries, opinions and mutual fear of each other by the imaginary citizens of the militarized space, Kabakov, according to Claudia Mesch in *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall* (2006) "points to operations that were themselves fictions, and that supported the cultural Cold War—like the furious production of a quasi-monstrous 'other', and with it, one's own paranoia-generated identity." (255) Unlike in Asisi's panorama the visitor is neither transported to another place and nor pleurably intimidated by looking at the minute details of the convincingly rendered dreariness of life at the inner-city border in Berlin. The visitor of Kabakov's *Zwei Erinnerungen an die Angst* (Two Memories of Fear) is invited to occupy the place of the other and to engage with the abject position by sensing and making sense of the fear and worries of life in a divided city. Instead of being drawn into the illusionary image space enhanced by the hermetic architecture of Asisi's rotunda close to Checkpoint Charlie, Kabakov intervenes in the open space of Potsdamer Platz, where the traces of military operations are still visible. Similarly, the documentary character of Kabakov's photographs of visitors at and on both sides of the Wall in the exhibition catalogue is counteracted by their serialisation foregrounding hegemonic structures and patterns—notables at the Wall looking across the first generation of the wall—rather than drawing the attention to an individual event as in Thomas Kienzle's photograph: the people (of East and West Berlin), standing on the

Wall, forming a chain, facing the Brandenburg Gate. Not only Kabakov's but also Kienzle's photograph echoes hegemonic structures. Anyone familiar with Sovfoto's propagandistic image cum photo document of GDR militia securing the border and its closure on August 13, 1961, or anyone familiar with Keith Haring's pop art interventions, the stick figure chain painted on the Berlin Wall in 1986, will be tempted to recognise a familiar pattern of composition—the human/humane wall—apart from the always already predetermined position of the Western (press) photographer.

German-born conceptual artist Hans Haacke also engaged with a specific object in the militarized space of the inner-city border zone. Haacke had a former watchtower restored along the Wall and transformed it into a billboard tower, by topping it with a giant Mercedes star logo. The implied Western capitalist, visual appropriation of Eastern military surveillance architecture demonstrated the mode and structure of the *Wende* transformation. By calling his intervention *Die Freiheit wird jetzt endlich gesponsert—Aus der Portokasse* (Now Freedom is simply sponsored—Out of the petty Cash, Dickel 166) Haacke alluded to the exhibition's general theme: the finiteness of freedom and its dubious system of financial support or dependency. While, as art historian Hans Dickel argues, the Mercedes logo was meant to catch the Western consumer and the future Eastern consumer's eye, the former and future military support, on which the future—reunified—liberal democracy was to be based, were made visible at the same time:

Haacke's blatant coupling of the symbols of the old and new regimes is unsettling to the citizens of the East not yet inured to modern advertising strategies. The Westerners extract different meanings from this Mercedes tower on the death strip: the Mercedes star on the Europa-Center has long dominated the West Berlin skyline, and Daimler-Benz has been the Federal Republic's leading corporation in

turnover terms ever since it embarked on military as well as civil production.

(Dickel 168)

While from a postcommunist, post-Wende perspective the question of the 'finiteness of freedom' needs to be asked and explored, the question of the Cold War culture wars and their impact on the Berlin Wall, its aesthetics and the aesthetic interventions on the Wall, cannot be answered without the modernist concept of a directional history, in Fukuyama's words:

not the occurrence of events, even large and grave events, but History: that is history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times. (Fukuyama xii)

Arguably, cities like divided and reunified Berlin and Eisenhüttenstadt have been shaped according to differing, but equally anticipated futures be they capitalist or communist in nature. Building the future meant building History with a capital h, hence abandoning the complexity and contingency of past events, all of which is reflected in the fetishistic treatment of iconic Cold War architecture and iconic images of Cold War confrontations. Even in the postcommunist, post-Wende period the dominance of the iconic image of the 'fall' of the Wall with its triumphalist one-sided Western-directed twisting of a historical event has continued to overwrite the historical 'debris' of a socialist past, collected in museums such as the Open Depot Museum in Eisenhüttenstadt or encountered in the cities' historical, socialist structures. In other words, the iconicity of the Wall, even in its visible absence, still rigidly frames a visual regime informed by the modernist concept of a directional history. Instead of filtering the alterity of history, the Wall as icon not as membrane works in favour of the perspective of the passive Western bystander. However, already during the Cold War, even the most rigid historical determinism had to confront historical disruption played out on the cultural, aesthetic field.

The Wall as Aesthetic Filter: Socialist Realism, the Avant-Garde and Historical Disruption

In *Art beyond Borders* (2016) the editors of a collection of essays on artistic exchange in communist Europe (1945-1989) point out that the emergence of socialist realism was not a phenomenon confined to communist Eastern Europe only. In postwar Europe in general, the partisans of socialist realism had rejected the style of modernist painters of the late 19th and early the 20th century. Modern artistic movements such as impressionism, expressionism, cubism, surrealism or dadaism, out of which the historical avant-garde emerged, were eventually regarded as out of date and belonging to the late bourgeoisie, unable to advance the revolutionary transformation of society and the building of socialism. While the historical avant-gardes had revolutionized painting on the formal, aesthetic level, social imbalances were not addressed and therefore the bourgeoisie had not been truly contested (13).

For Peter Bürger in his influential but controversial *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) the essential features of the avant-garde were the complete break with the past tradition of art and the critique of the institutional character of art. Besides sharing the modernist characteristics of rejecting a realist representation of the world and a tendency towards abstraction and the exploration of the unconscious, the avant-garde distinguished itself from modernism by its revolutionary, anti-institutional character¹⁵⁷. According to Bürger, the avant-gardist work can be described by its willingness to destroy the organic wholeness of a work of art by tearing it apart and exploring ‘the real’ of each part. This has the potential of political engagement and the transformation of the praxis of life, since the representation of a harmonious, realist totality has been rejected as insufficient and false source of representation. Although, in Bürger’s eyes the historical avant-garde failed to achieve the

¹⁵⁷ See Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* (2009), 1-12, for an analysis and commentary of Bürger’s approach, which is criticised for too narrowly focussing on two 20th century art movements: dada and surrealism; disregarding German expressionism.

revolutionary goal of transforming the praxis of life, it entered into a new relationship with reality:

Not only does reality in its concrete variety penetrate the work of art but the work no longer seals itself off from it. It must be remembered, however, that it is art as an institution that determines the measure of political effect avant-garde works can have, and that art in bourgeois society continues to be a realm that is distinct from the praxis of life. (91-92)

Jérôme Bazin and the fellow editors of the already mentioned *Art beyond Borders* point out, that, apart from East European countries, countries with a strong communist party like France, Italy and Belgium showed an interest in socialist realism, which first developed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and under Soviet leadership spread throughout Eastern Europe after the Second World War. In 1958 the Exhibition of Socialist Countries in Moscow was organised in order to showcase and establish socialist realism on the international level and to visually promote the universality of the class struggle (10).

Socialist realism was conceived as a realist, modern but not modernist art, which was supposed to honour the working class. Socialist realist painters, unlike avant-garde painters, who created aesthetic interventions on the formal level, were meant to be directly involved in the process of social transformation carried out by the victorious working class and were thus supposed to pay homage to the workers and the communist party. While the avant-garde artists, despite being critical of, attacking or destroying bourgeois aesthetics and conventions, still operated within the art world based on the bourgeois socio-economic system with art dealers, galleries and museums, socialist realist painters saw themselves as producers of art for and of a better society. Because socialist realist art was removed from the context of the art world, encounters between artists and workers were encouraged and regarded as mutually stimulating and productive (14).

According to Bazin one of the paradoxes of socialist realist art and the propagandistic aim of indoctrination of the masses was to endow them with a feeling of dignity; while the present and future achievements of the working class were to be celebrated, the cross-alliance between all strata of society had to be taken into account. Since socialist realism became the doctrine of Stalinist cultural politics, rejecting modernism and the avant-garde as a global Western cultural strategy, other Eastern bloc countries followed suit:

In brief, socialist realism and avant-garde present two different kinds of complexity. But both are intimately related to the social history of the societies in which they were born and to the history of the social stratification of socialist societies, from the bottom (the working classes, which were at the same time honoured and still marginalized) to the top (the bourgeoisies, which perceived themselves as threatened). (17)

From a socialist-realist perspective, the emerging Western postwar neo-avantgarde artists, who critically assessed their European modernist legacy and started to engage in happenings, object and body art, installations and conceptual art, these artists still adhered to the modernist doctrine of a 'severed', free and autonomous art, independent of the bourgeois society and the nation they were embedded in and critiqued. In contrast, socialist-realist art had to be national in form and socialist in content, thus twice embedded, first within a national aesthetic tradition and within socialist society and the achievements of the working classes (18).

Russian-German philosopher Boris Groys goes as far as declaring socialist realism in Russia to be the implementation of Stalin's will. The Russian avantgarde of the early 20th century, as a result of their belief and participation in the historical struggle and eventual victory of the working classes, had, Groys suggests polemically, followed the historical path, which was laid out for them or suffered the consequences. When their modernist,

constructivist, formalist aesthetics failed to be seen as beneficial for the building of socialism anymore, they were expected to willingly hand over their expertise to the leader of the communist party, whose historical mission was to realise and fulfil the socialist dream:

The popular definition of the method as “the depiction of life in its revolutionary development,” “national in form, socialist in content,” is based on this dream realism, in which a national form conceals the new socialist content: the magnificent vision of a world built by the party, the total work of art born of the will of its true creator and artist–Stalin.

... “The typical” of socialist realism is Stalin’s dream made visible, a reflection of his imagination ... (Groys 52-53)

The specter of Stalin as demiurge, as artist-creator may be no more than a terrifying trope but the Stalinisation of culture in Soviet Russia and also in the GDR was undeniable. In this way, Groys’ argument of the ultimate aestheticization of the building of socialism should not be taken lightly: “the highest goal in the building of socialism is thus aesthetic, and socialism itself is regarded as the supreme measure of beauty.” (Groys 74) Also Bazin, in less hyperbolic language, insists that socialist realism was not only Soviet in origin but the result of the “doctrine of Stalinist cultural politics” (Bazin 15).

In *Wände der Verheißung* (1995) art historian Peter Guth characterizes the socialist realism practiced in the GDR in the 1950s as the responsibility of the artists to transform the social through their art, to create beauty through the depiction of the anticipated future transformation of society and the joyous, harmonious coexistence of all GDR citizens. At the 5th congress of the central committee of the SED in 1951, the aesthetics of modernist formalism in the arts as well as in literature were rejected, while the realistic depiction of socialist society understood as typical characters in typical situations, the adherence to popular motifs as well as the respect of the German patrimony in form of a national style

were officially decreed sacrosanct (97-98). According to Guth the SED assigned the task to the individual artists in the GDR to anticipate the image of a harmonious, work-oriented, socialist society (99-100). Walter Womacka's already mentioned 'Bauchbinde' in common parlance, the mosaic wall frieze *Unser Leben* (Our Life), which has decorated Hermann Henselmann's modernist building *Haus des Lehrers* (House of the Teachers) at Alexanderplatz since 1964, serves as a good example of exemplary socialist realism, which continued to be popular in the GDR even after Stalin's death in 1953 and the ensuing cultural thaw. On the frieze, which adorns *Haus des Lehrers* like a brightly coloured ribbon, all the generic themes of socialist life have found their place. To name only a few: mother with daughter, child with flower, a classroom situation, a young couple, the dove of peace, meeting of a work brigade, the sun, a harvest scene, steel production, the artist at work, painting a wall frieze while workers attentively follow his brushstroke to demonstrate man's new relation to art ... (Guth 200). While for Peter Guth the accumulation of typical socialist motifs and genre scenes on the 125-meter-long wall frieze have an unintended comical effect, they embodied the SED's prescribed aesthetics in form of a rather kitschy socialist storybook read again and again:

Die vorgeführte Symbolwelt war, das liegt in ihrer Genese begründet, ganz auf eine euphemistische Gesellschaftssicht angelegt, gleichsam auf eine Verbildlichung des vermeintlich schon erreichten, natürlich harmonischen Zustands, und bezog ihre Wirkung nicht aus der Erklärung, sondern aus der Repetition. (Guth 201)

The presented symbolic world was, this is due to its genesis, completely invested in a euphemistic view of society, as if it were the visualization of the allegedly

already accomplished state of natural harmony, and it did not draw its effect from interpretation, but from repetition. (Guth 201; my trans.)

Walter Womacka was one of the most prolific socialist realist painters in the GDR and with the *Unser Leben* (1964) frieze and other state commissions conformed to the dictates of socialist realism, certainly in terms of content, even if at times more modernist in form. Not only in the fine and applied arts but also in photography the socialist realist model was adhered to.

In *Common Ground* (2013) Sarah E. James states that in the GDR photography of the 1950s and 1960s the same forced optimism, accompanied by an aesthetics of simplicity, clarity and typology (103), can be observed. The view of a ‘total’ reality was reenforced via a typologizing perspective, which foregrounded the depiction of socialist types such as the worker at the factory, surrounded by machinery and part of the work brigade. By turning individuals into universal types, what might have been an individual experience was now generalised and elevated to the level of the universal experience of socialist life (105).¹⁵⁸

Clearly, the same strategies were pursued in all the arts after the 5th Congress of the Central Committee in 1951 which was eventually going to put an end to the formalism debates (1948-49; 1951-1952), where the appropriate form of the representation of socialist society was hotly debated and Western abstract, autonomous art was rejected as decadent and reactionary.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ As in painting, GDR photography adhered to the doctrine of socialist realism more or less closely. Changing geopolitical circumstances after Stalin’s death in 1953 and again after the German/German rapprochement in the 1970s prompted temporary cultural thaws. GDR photographers like Evelyn Richter developed a critical realism, not only recording the state-sanctioned life of, for example, women workers but also their frustrations and exhaustion at work (James 109). In general, GDR photographers, as James points out in *Common Ground*, often split their photo archives into official and private, more experimental, work (126).

¹⁵⁹ See Sarah E. James, *Paper Revolutions* (2022). James argues that beside and below the radar of state-sanctioned socialist realist art artists like Hermann Glöckner or Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt continued a ‘lived modernism’. By means of their experimental art practices and/or choice of ephemeral art forms such as mail art, practices of the inter-war avant-garde were, despite state censorship, continued.

Still, East German cultural policies, as April A. Eisman stresses, were subject to variation and often connected to political events. While in the immediate postwar years an openness towards modern German art, which the Nazis had banned as degenerate, was displayed and several retrospectives were organised in East and West Germany, the formalism debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s changed the situation. At the time of the Berlin blockade (1948-1949) and shortly before East and West Germany officially became separate states, the question which role art was to play in society seemed of high importance to the communist nomenklatura. In the end, the view that art was to play an active role in the transformation of society, that art could not be and was never free from politics and that a realist style was the best means of expression for the endeavour gained acceptance. The two phases of formalism debates (1948-1949; 1951-1952)

essentially set the stage for the official insistence on a conservative form of Socialist Realism, based on Soviet models, that emphasized realism, figuration and optimism, as well as monumentality and heroicism. (Eisman, 'East German Art and Cultural Politics' 3)

The cultural thaw after Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's acknowledgement of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Party Conference of the USSR in 1956 eased the situation for artists in the GDR. Socialist realism gave way to critical realism, where the past was examined to a certain degree and the present commented on. Exhibitions of modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, the Mexican muralists, or the Italian realists inspired artists in the GDR, who now had the chance of combining modernist aesthetics with communist politics.

However, when the Hungarian Revolution in October and November 1956 was crushed by Soviet tanks the political crackdown had its repercussions in the cultural realm. Modern art and with it, German expressionism were rejected, and artists were again encouraged to orient themselves towards the Soviet Union and socialist life as models for art.

After the Bitterfeld Conference of 1959 artists were expected to go to factories and to get to know the workers and their daily chores, which should then be reflected in their artworks (Eisman 3). The exchange between artists and workers should not only instil an interest in socialist art on the part of the workers, ideally, they should engage and produce art themselves. The intended organic relation between art and work/life on all sides would in the eyes of the communist nomenklatura help to nurture a well-rounded socialist personality. While in West Germany American abstract expressionism and Clement Greenberg's prewar dictum of an autonomous, abstract art, independent of and above politics exerted a huge influence on West German artists and West German art institutions began to shift their focus away from German modernism towards new art from the US, East German artists were sworn in the 'Bitterfeld Way'.

According to Claudia Mesch in *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall* both Germanies were increasingly dominated by the superpowers in their cultural policies, meaning abstraction in Western and figuration in Eastern visual art, when a decade before they had just started to reassess their Weimar cultural legacy in the form of German expressionism and the international avant-garde. Mesch sees the Weimar legacy as well as the coming to terms with the Nazi past and the Holocaust as a common bond between the two Germanies. This implies the paradoxical situation of East and West Germany, whose socio-economic systems had split apart long before¹⁶⁰, were now also culturally drifting apart in the 1950s, while a common legacy bound them (2-7). Like Theweleit, Mesch stresses their common amnesia vis a vis the crimes against humanity in Nazi Germany. By orienting themselves towards the Western and

¹⁶⁰ See Michael Gehler, *Three Germanies* (2011). Through the *Four Power Agreement* of 1945 between the Allies, each victorious power had absolute authority in their occupied zone. According to Gehler, the Allied Control Council failed to implement a common economic procedure among all occupied zones. This was due to American resistance to the nationalization of the industry while the British showed more interest in the proposal. On January 1, 1947, the Americans and the British formed, against Soviet protest, an economic Bi-zone, which the French joined in 1949. For Gehler, this was the stumbling block which led to the future economic divide in occupied Germany (46).

Eastern superpowers the FRG and the GDR embraced a national identity, which exceeded their own stained national history and German modernism was part of that history. While in East Germany the identification with Soviet-born socialist realism eased the passage into historical and cultural repression, West Germany's embrace of a specifically American notion and practice of an international modernism allowed to suppress the past as well.

In *Art of Two Germanies, Cold War Cultures* (2009) art historian Sabine Eckmann states, that while both Germanies tried to distance themselves from the past on the visual, aesthetic level, neither of them entirely succeeded. In the East, socialist realist art sought to emphasize the interrelation between art and work, art and life, which was reflected in the artworks as a compliance between the artistic expression in form and content with the politics of communism. Since the artworks were realist and figurative, socialist realist art in its dogmatic form resembled national socialist figurative art (Eckmann 54). In the West, where the autonomy (from politics) and freedom (of the artist) of abstract art was seen as the necessary antidote to national-socialist aesthetics, and abstract art was perceived as the appropriate means to mediate liberal democracy, the artistic recourse to primal conditions and creativity echoed, according to Eckman, Nazi mythology (Eckmann 54). Thus in the 1940s and 1950s neither Germanies had tackled the past in the immediate postwar period and neither states had entirely freed themselves from it on the aesthetic level, which points to a common bond of historical repression as well as attempts at establishing another aesthetics as a distancing device and, as we shall see, aesthetic cross-fertilisation.

Contrary to the common bias that confirms the rigidity of the cultural divide between East and West Germany, Claudia Mesch points out that there was a mutual exchange between Western and Eastern art practices and that some artists explicitly chose to adopt the style and socio-cultural preoccupation of the 'other' Germany (Mesch 7). Also April A. Eisman, in 'East German Art and the Permeability of the Berlin Wall' (2015) contends that the idea that

East and West German artists were completely cut off from each other, especially after the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, cannot be upheld.

The East German public was generally aware of West German art and art exhibitions, since many East Germans watched West German television programmes, read West German (art) books and journals which were smuggled from West to East Germany. Even on the official level and especially when Erich Honecker had replaced Walter Ulbricht as head of the GDR in 1971 and come out in favour of the exploration of new artistic paths from the firm basis of socialism¹⁶¹, West German art was not tabooed anymore. West German artworks were critically assessed in East German newspapers and art journals, public institutions had books about Western art or subscriptions to Western art journals. Exhibitions of Western art in the GDR took place, even if with a delay of about ten to fifteen years. Trusted East German artists had the chance to travel to the West and study West German or Western art. After the ratification of the Basic Treaty between East and West Germany in 1973¹⁶², East German artists travelled to West Germany in greater frequency. In this way East German artists were inspired by West German pop art in the 1980s, whereas East German art critics like Peter Guth worked out the differences between pop art and socialist realist or critical realist art (Eisman 600-603).

Both Eisman and Mesch stress the importance of Documenta, the exhibition of contemporary art taking place every four years in Kassel since 1955 for the reassessment of modern art, and later the establishment of international modernism in West Germany. As will be shown, Documenta 6 in 1977 will establish socialist realist art on the West German and international art scene.

¹⁶¹ At the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee (1973) Honecker underlined that “‘no taboos’ should operate in the sphere of culture.” (Mesch 129)

¹⁶² See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010). In 1972 the Basic Treaty and the Transit Treaty were signed between the FRG and GDR. The GDR was formally recognized and transit traffic through the GDR was regulated. West Berliners and West Germans were given the right to travel to the GDR. East Berliners were allowed to visit the West on urgent family matters (164).

Documenta's purpose was to re-establish West Germany's connection with modern German art after the inhuman terror of the Nazi regime and with its cultural politics that had banned and stigmatized modern art as 'degenerate'. For Claudia Mesch Documenta was "from the start an expensive and elaborate staging of West Germany's cultural re-entry into the civilized west." (Mesch 44) The second Documenta in 1959 overwhelmingly favoured Euro-American tendencies in gestural abstraction, leaving behind German expressionism and other artistic legacies, such as dadaism and its connection to the historical avant-garde. According to Mesch, the decidedly internationalist modernist direction displayed at Documenta 2 was based on art historian Werner Haftmann's curating work, who was in charge of the overall curatorial management of Documenta 1, 2 and 3:

... Haftmann staged a newly 'internationalized' West German, or indeed a Euro-American, postwar modernism. Haftmann interspersed the works of German abstract painters with French and American gestural paintings at Documenta in 1959, underscoring their commonalities. One could therefore also speak of Haftmann's conscious turn away from notions of German or even European modernism in his refusal to engage with nationalist aspects of modernist culture.

At the same time, he aggressively promoted American painting (Mesch 45-46).

While the early Documentas contributed to the formation of a firm cultural divide between West and East German notions of art and its function in society, after, as already mentioned, Honecker's succession in the communist leadership of the GDR in 1971 and the Basic Treaty in 1972, the political thaw between the GDR and the FRG was also reflected in a greater mutual interest on the official, cultural level.

At Documenta 6, in 1977, art historian Lothar Lang was in charge of curating Documenta's section devoted to East German art. By choosing the Leipzig school of painters, whose main representatives were Werner Tübke, Willi Sitte, Wolfgang Mattheuer and

Bernhard Heisig, whose professional relationship with the GDR state and its socialist realist aesthetic standards were firmly established in the 1970s¹⁶³, Lang introduced officially sanctioned East German socialist modernist art in an international, Western exhibition (Mesch 128-129).

The move to integrate and exhibit socialist modernist art and West German international modernist art side by side was met with protest by West German painters and GDR defectors such as Georg Baselitz, Gerhard Richter or Markus Lüpertz, who with their specific figurative styles of painting had firmly established themselves on the Western art scene and marked themselves off from socialist realist art. Together they withdrew their artworks from Documenta 6 in protest of Documenta's inclusion of socialist modernist art (Mesch 130). Also, as April A. Eisman points out, the former GDR painters protested against the fact, that official GDR socialist realist art was exhibited while non-sanctioned art and persecuted artists from East Germany were not represented at Documenta 6. Nevertheless, the overall response to the inclusion of socialist-realist art was positive, which made the SED aware of its cultural capital on the international level. As a consequence, Documenta 6 represented the beginning of exhibitions of East German art in West Germany, which would continue until the fall of the Wall (Eisman 609-610).

Not only did the inclusion of East German art at Documenta 6 demonstrate the relaxation of the cultural Cold War between the two Germanies, but it was also proof of a renewed interest in realist, figurative art in the West German context. As organiser of Documenta 6, Manfred Schneckenberger had set the tone by declaring his intention to explore new tendencies in realist art at Documenta 6:

¹⁶³ See April A. Eisman, 'East German Art and the Permeability of the Berlin Wall' (2015), 606-607. According to Eisman, Tübke, Sitte, Mattheuer and Heisig had contributed to the reevaluation of German modernism and with it the turning away from a dogmatic Soviet-style socialist realism in the GDR in the 1960s. While being controversial in the 1960s, in the 1970s their artwork was officially recognised and appreciated in the GDR.

Schneckenberger's interest in exploring "the different developments of Realism" reflected the beginnings of a broader turn in the West—also evident in the "New Image Painting" exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York the following year—toward figuration and away from abstraction that had dominated the Western art market in the years since World War II. ... Although never as all-pervasive as is often presented, abstraction's dominance in the West began to waver in the 1960s with the return of figuration in pop art; it had largely disappeared by the early 1980s with the market dominance of neoexpressionism. (Eisman 607)

Already in the 1960s and despite the Wall's forbidding character as a geopolitical but also cultural divide artists such as Werner Tübke, Willi Sitte and others demanded a less dogmatic form of socialist realism and advocated the return to German modernism and the possibility, on the formal level, of critically engaging with expressive and abstract modernist tendencies as well as; on the level of content, they pressed for the possibility of critically engaging with the past and the present. While US abstract expressionism dominated the Western art scene in the 1950s, by the 1960s artists in the West and later West Germany were influenced by US pop artists such as Andy Warhol or Claes Oldenburg¹⁶⁴. Both Eisman and Mesch stress the false notions of a clear-cut and continuous cultural divide between East and West Germany as well as the commonly held belief of the GDR's cultural isolation. While the cultural exchange between East and West Germany may have been asymmetrical, with the East until the 1970s critically following developments in the West with greater interest than vice versa, despite the Wall's erection in 1961, the cultural flows between East and West were not entirely halted but certainly filtered. Socialist realism entered the West German stage in the

¹⁶⁴ See Claudia Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall* (2006), 134-135. Artists like Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke, who were familiar with American pop art, which had been exhibited at Documenta 4 (1968), presented their own, critical take on pop art in the West German context, which they alternatively referred to as pop art, junk culture or capitalist realism.

late 1970s, while US and UK pop art was not only critically reflected on in West Germany, but East Germany had, with Willy Wolff¹⁶⁵ and his version of pop art, another critical exponent¹⁶⁵. Apart from assessing Western aesthetic tendencies and styles, a group of marginalised artists in the GDR, such as Hermann Glöckner, continued in the tradition of the inter-war avant-garde. With his experimental, miniature sculptures created at times out of discarded East and West German packaging, Glöckner deconstructed modern commodity cultures by re-folding commodified objects and granting them aesthetic autonomy. At the same time he re-embedded them in the everyday of communist, creative production (James, *Paper Revolutions*, 103-140).

In the late 1970s, West German neoexpressionist artist Jörg Immendorf and East German A.R. Penck, who had developed his own pictorial, hieroglyphic style, began to collaborate for a series of paintings on the German-German question. The *Immendorf Visits Y* (1979) series were carried out in Penck's Dresden studio in the GDR. Claudia Mesch describes Immendorf's and Penck's collaboration as a ping-pong match, where one word is matched or erased by another, figures appear or vanish. According to Mesch oppositions between the two painters began to blur and a shared surface emerged (Mesch 154-155).

One of the most striking examples of the complex visual, aesthetic and economic flows across the Berlin Wall in the 1980s has been critically processed by conceptual West German artist Hans Haacke. In 1984 Haacke's installation *Broadness and Diversity of the Ludwig Brigade* was exhibited at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Kreuzberg in close proximity to the Wall. Haacke had divided a room by means of a wall and placed an advertisement of the

¹⁶⁵ See Sigrid Hofer, 'Pop Art in the GDR: Willy Wolff's Dialogue with the West' (2016), 71-79. Hofer argues that American pop artists like Claes Oldenburg and a GDR artist like Willy Wolff shared an interest in recapturing the world of objects. While American pop art provocatively displayed and heightened the triviality and commodification of everyday objects and elevated them to the level of art, thus blurring the boundary between 'high and low' art, Wolff ennobled everyday objects by taking extra care when depicting them and provided, with his close inspection of everyday objects, another perspective in the visual realm dominated by socialist realist happy-go-lucky interpretations of humans and machines (64-68).

Monheim chocolate brand Trumpf on its Western side. On its Eastern side a mock socialist-realist oil painting, depicting Peter Ludwig, collector of East German art and CEO of the Monheim company, together with two female 'workers' was hung onto the gallery wall facing a mock Berlin Wall. Ludwig's pose—a self-confident man in an apron, stirring chocolate with a beater—is closely modelled, according to Boris Pofalla in 'Chocolate, Pop and Socialism' (2016), on August Sander's famous portrait *Confectioner* (1928). The woman to Ludwig's right is his wife, the woman to his left is Erika Steinführer, a well-known *Heldin der Arbeit*, heroine of work, in the GDR. Steinführer, who had been decorated for exceeding her output target in the Narva light bulb factory she worked for in 1976, was portrayed by Walter Womacka in 1980/81, in a for the time unusual Robert Rauschenberg pop art inspired style (88). Peter Ludwig, had in 1983, in the West German city of Oberhausen, founded the Ludwig Institute for Art of the GDR, which predominantly promoted socialist realist or critical realist art by officially sanctioned GDR artists. Ludwig was also the lender of the only Rauschenbergs in the GDR and later bought one of Womacka's two-piece work (88). Both women, contrary to their positions on the East/West divide in real life, carry banners with political slogans expressing their solidarity with the workers and the miserable working conditions at the Trumpf chocolate factory in West Berlin. At the same time some products of the Monheim company were also produced cheaply in the GDR. Haacke's complex installation, full of allusions, implied that Ludwig's successful as well as exploitative business dealings with the GDR also determined the choice of artwork he exhibited in his institute, which was anything but broad and diverse. Haacke's intervention took place, more or less at the same time, as Ludwig's exhibition *Durchblick*, which showcased work from his collection at Staatliche Kunsthalle in Berlin. It goes without saying that Womacka's painting of Erika Steinführer was one of the paintings exhibited at Kunsthalle (88). The sheer complexity of Haacke's installation and its critical dialogue with Ludwig's travelling

collection is of an almost dizzying degree and demonstrates the complex entanglements between East and West Germany on the cultural as well as economic level, despite the ideological divide, whose concrete symbol was the Berlin Wall. It also shows the division within the Cold War West where the reception of GDR socialist realist and critical realist art was not only welcomed but also critically assessed. Thus in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Western Wall was increasingly aestheticized and began to transform into a fetishistic screen, the Wall at the same time functioned as aesthetic membrane filtering a mutual artistic exchange on the level of form as well as content, while being embedded in the socio-economic context of Western art institutions, all of which Haacke cleverly alludes to in his installation.

Haacke's multi-layered installations and critical writing concerning the relation between East and West Germany in the final phase of the Cold War stretch, as we have seen, from the mid-1980s, when the Wall was still standing, to the *Wende* period, when its checkpoints were opened by popular pressure to the time of its demolition, when some of the most sought-after segments of the Western Wall were sold off.

First published as 'Deutsch-Deutsch' in the catalogue of the *Endlichkeit der Freiheit* exhibit (1990), Haacke critically assesses Walter Momper's often-cited remarks, found in the Monte Carlo auction catalogue, when on June 20, 1990, 81 spray-painted segments of the Berlin Wall were auctioned off as art in public space: "Art versus cast concrete. Art won." (Momper in Haacke 150) Haacke undoes Momper's optimism by pointing to the entanglements of the then Berlin Mayor with Daimler-Benz as dubious urban development partner:

Like the Mayor, his new, much-debated urban development partner [Daimler Benz] expressed confidence in the healing power of art, while savouring a choice piece of real estate. In full-page ads placed in the international press, this largest

arms manufacturer of Germany professed its faith in Goethe's defiant dictum

"Art will always remain art". (Haacke 150-151)

Momper's praise of art's healing power against the backdrop of the postwall, urban development boom is clearly unsettling and rather points to the transformation of concrete into purchasable 'segments of art', while clearing the space for urban investment on prime land. Even if Momper referred to the subversive practice of applying Wall art and graffiti on the Western Wall in protest against its forbidding character in the 1980s, the very same Wall art and graffiti had, by then, already been spectacularised and become a tourist attraction. In the end, individual, spectacularised Wall art and graffiti segments have been commodified and turned into conventional artefacts, whose decorative rather than documentary character has embellished museums and public institutions worldwide¹⁶⁶. Ephemeral, unpredictable and diverse image/texts turned into an ornamental carpet, which was perceived, appreciated, traded, and institutionalized as art. Concrete was scratched but did not crumble because of the aesthetic interventions; concrete served as interface for an exchange, which failed to reflect the social transformations (in the GDR) taking place behind its surface manifestations (on the Western Wall) in the late 1980s. The GDR government of the Wende period, with its decision to officially demolish the Berlin Wall, *Volkseigentum der DDR*, property of the people of the GDR, and to sell the most well-preserved segments of the Western Wall, tried to prevent further individual destruction of the Berlin Wall by the infamous Mauerspechte, who chopped off pieces of wall/the Wall as mementos or for personal gain. Thus, concrete was destroyed and fragmented for profit maximisation and to raise funds for the ailing GDR health care system¹⁶⁷. Historian Edgar Wolfrum drily remarks that in the Monte Carlo auction

¹⁶⁶ See Anna Kaminsky, *Die Berliner Mauer in der Welt* (2021) for a detailed analysis of the whereabouts and designated use of the individual Berlin Wall fragments.

¹⁶⁷ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer* (2009). Historian Edgar Wolfrum states that the Berlin Wall, and with it the sale of individual Wall segments, turned out to be the biggest "Exportschlager" (142), an export hit, of the still existing GDR. The GDR-owned foreign trade company Limex was in charge of the promotion and selling of the Wall pieces. They issued certificates of 'authenticity' for the sold segments (142).

a total of 100 meters of history were sold by the London auction house Sotheby for up to 30.000 DM a piece, with an overall profit of 2 Million DM (Wolfrum 143).

In sum, with the recognition and incorporation of individual, segmented, Wall artworks into capitalist modes of exchange, ‘concrete’ pieces of history vanished since their documentary character was overwritten by their ‘abstract’, economic value as sought after, commodified artefact. While the subversive potential of the Western surface interventions petrified and became Berlin Wall screen, souvenir and trophy, the system-changing revolutionary potential of what had been going on behind the Western screen, was soon drowned out by the building frenzy and redevelopment projects¹⁶⁸, which set in after the Wall’s demolition and reunification in 1990.

In *Present Pasts* (2003) Andreas Huyssen reads Berlin as a historical text, which has been constantly rewritten over the 20th century. The thus created historical voids are not entirely erased but traces of different layers of history lurk underneath the ever-changing surface manifestations in a palimpsest-like manner. In general, Berlin is marked more by visible absences than the presences of its past and is above all characterised by its historical ruptures and its discontinuous history (52).

Most clearly, Huyssen argues, the constant change manifests itself in the city’s radically variable architecture: from Berlin’s emblematic, heavily ornamental, early 20th century stone architecture, the apartment blocks known as *Mietskasernen*, as reminders of the collapse of bourgeois life after the First World War, only to be followed by Weimar modernism, which filled the loss of representative bourgeois architecture with, on the one hand, the insubstantial culture of (mass democratic) distraction embodied by ever present movie palaces and, on the other hand, experimental, modernist, non-representational

¹⁶⁸ The inner-city wasteland, which constituted the military control strip between the frontline and hinterland wall of the Berlin Wall during the Cold War transformed into prime land for urban development after reunification. <https://architectuul.com/architecture/potsdamer-platz-masterplan>. Accessed 25 September 2022.

architecture. National Socialism had left Berlin with the literal voids of a total war and a landscape of ruins, whose voids were filled by the sober, pragmatic modern architecture of the 1950s, which resulted from the so called *Kahlschlagsanierung*, the wholesale razing to the ground of entire quarters of Berlin and with it many of the old *Mietskasernen* vanished forever. According to Huyssen, the Wall needed the void of the inner-city border zone between East and West Berlin to come into 'being'. After its 'fall', the void of the seventeen-acre wasteland between Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, formerly part of the border zone, was saturated and haunted by the invisible presence of history (54-56).

After reunification the inner-city wasteland, Huyssen refers to as "the prairie of history" (56), became prime land for urban development and Potsdamer Platz turned into one of Europe's largest building sites. According to Rolf J. Goebel in 'Berlin's Architectural Citations' (2003), even though today's Potsdamer Platz is characterised by the profusion of hypermodern looking skyscrapers representing global capitalism, consumerism and the entertainment industry, remnants of the past can be detected among the saturation of ahistorical, postmodernist architecture. Goebel makes use of Frederic Jameson's notion of postmodernist pastiche with its danger of effacing genuine memory and authentic traces of history but concludes that the historicism of the new, postunification Berlin cannot be altogether dismissed as the sign of willingness for historical erasure after historical disruption:

But the new Potsdamer Platz also re-presents visual remnants of the past, if in a thoroughly dispersed manner. The prewar square, its mixture of rapid-transportation technology, commerce, and vibrant cultural life providing a premier locus of Weimar Republic modernity, was a visually open, star-shaped meeting point of major avenues. By contrast, the new assembly of dizzying skyscrapers is a somewhat claustrophobic and decentered design that at first

glance seems ahistorical and hypermodern. But soon the visitor discovers that the new buildings incorporate uncanny remainders of Berlin's prewar era: the miraculously preserved Weinhaus Huth (a famous 1912 restaurant and wine store), as well as a remnant of the exterior facade and other parts of the Grand Hotel Esplanade (1911), destroyed in World War II. (Goebel 1276)

Goebel sees in the collage of diverse architectural, historical citations a potential for historical disruption. In their dense polarity they may cause the necessary friction to scratch the glossy surface of global capitalism and its implied, continuous history of Western triumphalism. While Goebel teases out the moments of historical friction at Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, no architectural citation points to the formerly divided city in Goebel's enumeration. The socio-economic history of the Wall's wholesale demolition and the rapid transformation of the former border fortification from inner-city wasteland to prime location for urban investment, have made the physical traces of the history of the divided city, characterised by the proximity of two opposing socio-economic, political systems and ideologies, ever more invisible.

It is tempting to argue that the frenzy of building socialism of the 1950s and 1960s has been replaced by the frenzy of building and asserting global capitalism in postunification Berlin: The aim of building socialism in the 1950s and 60s, part of which was the contribution of (Russian) avant-garde and later socialist realist art in the GDR to promote socialist life in the shadow of the Wall, was literally dismantled by the failing GDR government in the 1980s and the dissatisfied, fleeing and protesting people of the GDR, who voted in 1990 to be reunified with the FRG¹⁶⁹. While in the 1950s the GDR showpiece boulevard Stalinallee, with its ambitious and much needed housing projects, was built

¹⁶⁹ See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010), 234-257 for an in-depth-analysis of the demise of the GDR in the late 1980s.

literally out of rubble, namely the recovered bricks of destroyed postwar Berlin¹⁷⁰, after reunification on October 3, 1990, global capitalism was rebuilt in concrete, glass and steel at Potsdamer Platz and the Wall itself became to a large part rubble for roadmaking or triumphalist, faux-transgressive, self-referential ‘artmemorial’.

In *Lob der Grenze* (2011) Austrian philosopher Konrad Liessmann sounds the concept of the border in the cultural and socio-political context. First and foremost, it is art, Liessmann points out, that is often associated with the notion of “Ekstase der Entgrenzung” (37), the ecstatic feeling of ‘unboundedness’, the celebration of transgressing all boundaries in the name of artistic autonomy. Liessmann follows Hegel’s dialectical thought¹⁷¹ by stressing that unboundedness is always already enfolded in boundedness and vice versa. The historical avant-garde of the early 20th century, who forcefully transgressed the aesthetic, bourgeois conventions, which had been guided by norms laid down in classical antiquity, understood itself as vanguard, crossing boundaries into new socio-political and cultural terrain. With almost military fervour, Liessmann drily remarks, the bastions of bourgeois high culture were to be stormed, the boundaries between art and life, between art and non-art, had to be torn down to set free the necessary creative productivity. Paradoxically, the revolutionary fervour to end all previous art was carried out in the name of art, which still constituted the outer limit of the (aesthetic) revolution. Thus, boundaries were transgressed but not in the sense of an envisioned, utopian unboundedness, which would have entailed the dissolution of art in life. Instead of the wholesale disappearance of art in life, aesthetic boundaries were pushed further, extended into new domains. Every transgression of boundaries, Liessmann insists, entails a drawing of boundaries somewhere else (42-44).

¹⁷⁰ See Michael Mackenzie, ‘Painters, Planners, and Bricklayers’ (May 2015), 164-171.

¹⁷¹ See Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic* (1812-1816). Hegel argues that, strictly speaking, limitation cannot be transcended because the finite and the infinite form a dialectical bond, which can only be overcome by the sublation of the antagonistic constellation (Miller 134).

Walter Momper's remark about the transgressive and transformative power of art in general and Berlin Wall art in particular echoes the ambitions of the classical avant-garde: geopolitical and state boundaries were transgressed when paint was single-handedly applied by individual practitioners to the Western side of Grenzmauer 75, 'property of the people of the GDR'. Aesthetic boundaries were pushed when high and low art blurred and transformed into an ornamental pattern on the Wall's Western side. Temporary, liminal spaces were produced through autonomous, artistic practices in the immediate vicinity of the Wall in the district of Kreuzberg and West Berlin in general became "a seedbed for fringe lifestyles" (Phillips 199), where alternative forms of living were explored with great fervor, as Timothy Phillips points out in *The Curtain and the Wall* (2022). Collectives and co-operative groups spanning almost every aspect of life from self-help to residential management were formed in reaction against the West German capitalist cash economy (199).

In her comprehensive study *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (2014) Emily Pugh dedicates a chapter to the transformation of West Berlin from postwar frontstadt and capitalist showpiece to 'capital' of the counterculture. Before the 1980 squatter movement, the 1968 student protests against US geopolitical, economic and cultural imperialism and the Vietnam War as well as the profound critique of West German society vis a vis its National Socialist legacy had destroyed the West German postwar consensus. West Berlin no longer showed a united Western front at a time of continued but easing geopolitical divide. To the contrary, Pugh argues that a division within the Cold War West emerged where West Berlin's students, artists, activists and intellectuals were increasingly at the forefront of a cultural revolution which led to the rejection of the Western liberal, capitalist economic system and its political-aesthetic arrangements. The ensuing formation of alternative socio-economic ways of life was reflected in the dismissal of postwar modernist architecture as anonymous and non-organic. Especially the 1980s squatter movement, as

already mentioned, successfully challenged the wholesale demolition of the historical fabric of West Berlin by squatting in early 20th century tenement buildings. In this way the squatters took control of urban areas in close proximity to the Wall, while on the symbolic level West Berlin's image of capitalist showpiece was replaced by the image of a city marked by its counterculture: graffitied and squatted houses abounded in Kreuzberg. In her analysis Pugh includes the 1987 cover by illustrator Peter Fuchsi of a SO36 (synonymous with the district of Kreuzberg) self-help group, which demonstrates the geo-political division within the Cold War West in an exemplary way. Around a circle of squatted houses in Kreuzberg a wooden palisade has been erected by the Kreuzberg squatters, who have politically reorganised within their clearly bounded urban space into an autonomous district council. One side of the squatters' 'occupied territory' is delimited by the actual Wall (Pugh 219). Left uncommented by Pugh is an additional visual pun played by the illustrator. The wooden palisade and what looks like a magnifying glass zooming in on a 'people's assembly' in the new city within the divided city alludes to the popular comic series *Asterix* (from 1959) by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo depicting a village in Gaul (today's Brittany in France), protected by similar looking wooden palisades, whose defiant inhabitants hold out against continuous attacks by Roman forces around the year 50 BCE¹⁷². A heavily beleaguered, vulnerable autonomous zone comes to the fore. These pockets of alternative living in the shadow of the Wall were due to West Berlin's status as a special occupied territory after the Second World War, even constitutionally severed from the FRG for West Berlin's inhabitants did not have the right to vote in general elections (198). After reunification, when the boundaries between West and East Berlin dissolved, West Berlin lost its special status and with it many of the liminal spaces along the Wall. At the same time, the artistic practices did not, or only temporarily,

¹⁷² See https://mueli77.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/asterix-review-special-15-006_14392238723_o.jpg. Accessed 22 July 2024.

lead to the dissolution between art and life. One of postwall Berlin's main attractions continues to be the Berlin Wall as iconic image and material debris, characterised by the fragmentation and commodification of individual Wall artworks. While the geopolitical boundary between East and West Germany and a larger part of Eastern Europe was overcome, other boundaries, such as the EU's external border, were extended and reinforced.

Berlin Wall's very own *Wände der Verheißung*, walls of great promise, to borrow an expression from Peter Guth's extensive discussion of the socially transformative potential expected from the synergy between (wall) art and architecture in the GDR, determined, on its Eastern side, the outer limit of the building of socialism and, on its Western side, laid bare the limits of aesthetic transgression while filtering mutual artistic exchange.

The Wall and Walls of Great Promise

In *Wände der Verheißung* (1995) Peter Guth points out that, in the immediate postwar years, part of the GDR's official agenda was to re-establish the unity between art and architecture. While the idea of a synergy between the arts and architecture was well established in 20th century architectural modernism in general¹⁷³, a distinction was drawn between architects and schools that pursued the aim of a structural unity between the arts and architecture and those, whose mission was the transformation of society by means of the postulated, organic form of architecture (51).

The principles of Soviet, Stalinist architecture in the national style were strictly followed in the GDR, and when in 1950 the GDR *Aufbaugesetz*, the laws for reconstruction, more or less coincided with the foundation of the *Bauakademie* (1951) as the central organ for architecture and building, the foundations were laid for the building of socialism, which

¹⁷³ See Anne Vieth, *Addicted to Walls* (2014). Walter Gropius, founder of the German Bauhaus art school for architecture and design in 1919, regarded wall art and wall design as an essential part of modern architecture (102).

was to differ clearly from the architectural modernism of the Western occupation zones. Explicitly the satisfaction of human needs, as well as a city planning, which acknowledged the new political life and consciousness of the people, was established in the *Aufbaugesetz*, the building regulations (99). This entailed the radical rejection of prewar modernist architecture embodied by the Bauhaus school for architecture and design (1919-1933) and with it everything, which did not have its origin in the promotion of socialism (99).

Architecture's role in the GDR was first and foremost to make the other arts shine in the 1950s, to foreground the arts and crafts involved as well as to make the wall art an essential part of social housing projects such as the construction of tenement buildings in Stalinallee (1951-55). The organic unity between art and architecture, in its popular, national form, was meant to enthuse and prepare GDR citizens with the necessary energy for their new tasks: the postwar (re)construction of the destroyed cities and the socio-political transformation of society; in Peter Guth's words: "Man könnte aphoristisch sagen, daß das monolithische Bauen dem monolithischen Bild von der Gesellschaft entsprach." 'One could, by means of an aphorism, say that the monolithic building corresponded with the monolithic concept of society.' (109; my trans.)

In Guth's eyes, the postulated art in architecture, in form of wall art, mosaics and freezes, projected a euphemistic view on socialist life for its future occupants (109), which was reinforced by the inclusion of elaborately crafted ornamental structures out of expensive building materials (marble, ceramics, ironworks) (105-106).

Contrary to the classical modernist rejection of the architectural ornament¹⁷⁴, the role of ornament in GDR socialist realist architecture was of great importance. Ornamental ribbons framed ceilings and ennobled windows, door lintels, pedestals and other architectural

¹⁷⁴ See Adolf Loos 'Ornament and Crime' (1908). Loos emphatically repudiates the use of architectural ornaments since they are no longer organically linked to the modern, industrial experience (22).

structures were adorned and consciously betrayed their origins in Baroque and German classicist architecture of the 18th and early 19th century (111). Architectural ornaments and the embedded wall art inside or outside public buildings and social housing projects were seen to form an organic unity. Regarded as convenient means to interpellate the common GDR citizen to identify with the socialist cause, by the 1960s this way of construction proved inefficient and too expensive. From the mid-1960s, according to Guth, the originally intended *Baukunst*, the political programme of ‘building art’ for the people, made way to modern, industrially produced *Bauwerke*, building works, where wall art was no longer an integral part of the architectural ensemble but at best clad its facades and the architectural ornament was reduced to its decorative function (186; 191-194).

Illusionistic Wall art, which until then had created theatrical depth and powerful visions of the victorious workers’ and peasants’ state and filled the dining halls of factories, the hallways of universities and the foyers of theatres, became flat and empty in form and content. Organic, ornamental patterns were replaced by more abstract forms of decoration, which could still be accommodated by the industrial architecture, not of bricks, iron, ceramics and marble, but of concrete (205-210).

While wall art and architectural ornaments were reduced to the decorative, superficial, and repetitive application of political symbols and themes, art in architecture was not used to build ‘a work of art’ that was going to transform society anymore. Instead, *Baukunst*’s main function was to conceal architectural eyesores and unresolved problems in city planning in the late 1960s and 1970s (227). Wall art in and on public institutions and housing projects continued to play a role for agitational purposes but very little of the original pathos was left (157). Not only Walter Womacka’s before mentioned wall frieze *Unser Leben* (1964) at Haus des Lehrers but already his glass window at Sachsenhausen’s concentration camp memorial hall (1960/61) showed, in Guth’s eyes, in which way the pathos of building socialism had

transformed into pathetic gestures and enhanced by an ever-increasing political manipulation of the ornament. Womacka's tripartite glass window *Internationaler Widerstand gegen den Faschismus* (1961), international resistance against fascism, displayed all the common visual language borrowed either from Soviet political iconography, such as the depiction of a partisan fighter with bound hands or pathos formulae, which had already been in use, such as Womacka's allusion to a defiant prisoner of Fritz Cremer's famous Buchenwald memorial sculpture (1958), next to a Soviet soldier holding a child in his arms, reminding of the monumental figure at the Soviet War Memorial (1949) at Treptow park in Berlin, followed by a couple in pieta-like arrangement, mourning soldiers killed in action.

The ornamental pattern of human figures in the background show scenes of the inevitable class war and the victorious liberation of the German people by the Soviet army (157). Seen in chronological order, Womacka's *Internationaler Widerstand gegen den Faschismus* glass window at Sachsenhausen's memorial hall and the *Unser Leben* freeze encircling Hermann Henselmann's *Haus des Lehrers* (1960-64) at Alexanderplatz, seemingly visually frame communist politics in the 1960s and 1970s. The staunch anti-fascist position¹⁷⁵ forms part of the GDR foundational myth, whereas the depiction of the peaceful, harmonious coexistence of all GDR citizens embodied the anticipated outcome of directional history: life in the classless, communist society. In terms of architectural, socialist realist ambitions and *Kunst am Bau*, art in architecture, Henselmann's international, modernist building not only betrayed the influence of Bauhaus architecture but anticipated the GDR's return to modernist design and architecture, temporarily after Stalin's death and the ensuing cultural thaw in the

¹⁷⁵ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer* (2009). Wolfrum stresses that the SED, the socialist unity party, contended anti-fascism to be an essential characteristic of the communist state and its people. German anti-fascists had fought alongside the Soviet army against Hitler-Germany and won. The first German workers' and peasants' state was the logical outcome of the war against fascism and, from the perspective of the communist nomenklatura in the GDR, had to be constantly protected against Western revanchism (80-81).

early 1960s, and permanently, because of the necessities of industrial construction methods for much needed social housing, in the 1970s.

Seen together, the celebratory anti-fascist glass window and the rather kitschy, overly happy wall frieze uncannily find their valid echoes in the Berlin Wall itself. Built in 1961 as anti-fascist-protection wall¹⁷⁶, the application of Thierry Noir's faux-naïve human figures, Keith Haring's human chain or Christophe Bouchet's animal creatures in combination with other tongue-in-cheek, pop art-inspired motifs such as the Statue of Liberty in serialised form, in its later stages known as Kilometerkunst¹⁷⁷ on the Western Wall in the 1980s, conveys the impression of a cynical and care-free 'ribbon', growing in length along the Western Wall, foreshadowing the postwall, postcommunist, triumphalism of Western liberal democracies on the aesthetic level. In this way, the Wall filtered a shared, figurative, popular and populist aesthetic, hovering between the socialist realist dictate of building a better society and its playful, often nonsensical capitalist other (side), at the same time reinforcing the utopian or triumphalist belief in the necessary endpoint of the development of human historical consciousness.

In 'The End of History?' (1989) Francis Fukuyama advances, in the eyes of social psychologist Gregory Elliott, not only "a theory of historical change ... He constructs a historical teleology offering an account of the overall meaning of the human story" (Elliott 52). His Western-centric account of a 'universal' history of a 'global' range, easily discards non-Western point of views.

¹⁷⁶ See Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Mauer* (2009). According to Wolfrum, in official GDR discourse, the erection of the Berlin Wall was propagated as a deeply humane and humanistic endeavour, its main function being the defence of the class enemy and the keeping of peace (84).

¹⁷⁷ See Ralf Gründer, *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007). From 1984 to 1986 French artists Thierry Noir and Christophe Bouchet turned individual, anonymous interventions on the stretch of the Western Wall between Checkpoint Charlie and Brandenburg Gate into a colourful pattern of image/texts called Kilometerkunst, which was supposed to reflect the excessive lust for life in the shadow of the Wall (157).

Fukuyama makes use of the Hegelian concept of the end of history, meaning the endpoint of a directional history, based on the idea of a historical consciousness being actualised in a current socio-political situation. For Hegel, the end point of the necessary and coherent historical development had been reached by securing bourgeois, liberal-democratic rights in the French Revolution of 1789. From a Marxist perspective, which shares the concept of directional history, the end point of history is conceived as classless society, resulting from a change in the material base, the common ownership of the means of production, not in the superstructure,—in Hegelian terms—a change of consciousness. With the demise of the communist bloc after the fall of the Wall on November 11, 1989, Fukuyama sees in capitalist liberal democracy the only viable form of governance (4-5). Instead of the communist vanguard, the communist party, which was to lead the revolution and bring about the end of the class struggle and classless society, Fukuyama calls for the societies in America and (Western) Europe to assume the role of the vanguard and to fully actualise liberal democracy in their countries in postcommunist and posthistorical times (5). While after ‘the fall’ of the Wall, the concept of the end of history was embraced by many Germans looking confidently into a capitalist, liberal, democratic future, more than thirty years after unification, the original euphoria has faded. The *Wende* and German unification have proved unsatisfactory and, in Boris Buden’s words, cynical for those, who instigated the peaceful revolution of 1989, since it unfolded before the eyes of the Western, liberal, democratic beholder: the chants and slogans of protesters in East Germany, who wanted no socialism without democracy, were not reinforced but cynically echoed in West Germany as no democracy without capitalism (Budén 33). The renewed interest in the past does not only foster a nostalgia for the social, communist base of society and labour relations, which have vanished, but the desire to salvage the revolutionary potential of the past events. For Charity Scribner, this nostalgic turn: “signals the redirection of the aesthetic imagination from the

future (as was the case in both the historical avant-garde and socialist realism) to the past (as is the case in much contemporary art and literature)”. (Scribner 10)

In today’s arts as well as museums artefacts are produced or collected, which, according to Scribner, have the potential to redeem the past and go beyond, what Scribner calls, the conceptual Iron Curtain:

Shards of the revolutionary past file into the museum and onto the stage, where they flare up in memory, throbbing like phantom organs. Perhaps this persistence of the past resists the entrenchment of “posthistory.” Perhaps it harbours a latent, utopian desire, a refusal to accept the *fait accompli* of late capitalism as the only imaginable frame of our world. (Scribner 132)

With regard to the Berlin Wall itself, the aesthetic interventions on its Western side or after the ‘fall’ framed a world view: the comfortable and controlling position of the Western viewer was predominantly reinforced. Only in specific cases was the onlooker of the image/texts lured into entering the liminal space of the partial subject and into emphatically occupying the position of the other, the creaturely: touch and engage with the materiality of a concrete wall, feel its presence, divine its utopian promise as well as its carceral terror. Since the Wall was real and at the same time encircled a utopian project, the building of socialism, whose endpoint was not a classless society but real existing socialism, real place intersected with contradictory other spaces: utopian in the East, liminal in the West, where geopolitical and aesthetic boundaries were more easily transgressed and the zone of indistinction could be entered and the passage to otherness explored.

Ironically enough, the cynical Western viewer has taken over the position of the communist party as vanguard, who erected a ‘wall of great promise’ in 1961, while locating the actualisation of the liberal, democratic utopia on the other side of the now vanished Wall. The one-directional viewing position from real place towards a utopian placeless place has

been kept and the chance for the recognition of heterotopia, the Berlin Wall as place, where contradictory spaces unfolded and where the multi-directional oscillation, between real place and its utopian contestation or between real place and its aesthetic transgression, was enabled, has been abandoned¹⁷⁸. The complex production of space¹⁷⁹, which Henri Lefebvre contended in 1974 in his well-known book with the same name, was certainly reduced to hegemonic, one-directional views and the adherence to abstract representations of space in the GDR and has continued to be predominant after reunification, where parts of the Berlin Wall as ‘great promise’ have turned into promising and lucrative works of art.

In the GDR the socialist realist concept of art in architecture in the end produced socialist representations of space but failed to accommodate the diverse spatial practices of the GDR citizens, who increasingly drew the line between the public and private realm¹⁸⁰. Even though the Wall functioned as filter for political, socio-economic and aesthetic developments through its practitioners on its Western side, the lived and appropriated spaces it had produced¹⁸¹ all too often had to give way to the building of global capitalism.

The common legacy of the experiments in modernism has all too often been overlooked. As Anne Vieth demonstrates in her comprehensive account of wall (art) works in the 20th and 21st century, not only Bauhaus architects like Walter Gropius or expressionist

¹⁷⁸ See Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1976), where he discusses the conceptual difference between utopia and what he terms heterotopia. By using the example of looking into a mirror, Foucault argues for the simultaneous unfolding of real and unreal spaces (24-25).

¹⁷⁹ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974). For Lefebvre space is contested and socially produced. While abstract representations of space, such as the conceptualized space of city planners, visually usurp social space, which is perceived but also directly lived, appropriated and transformed (33-39).

¹⁸⁰ See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall* (2010). Major describes society in the GDR as a niche society, where the public and the private was clearly demarcated and under constant threat of surveillance (4-6).

¹⁸¹ See Paul Hockenos, *Berlin Calling* (2017). Hockenos describes the West Berlin of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s as a bastion for alternative cultures, where *Kommune 1*'s communal form of living and its tongue-in-cheek political, situationist interventions paved the way for West Berlin's counterculture in the late 1960s. Especially Kreuzberg, part of Berlin's former center, was cut off and ‘amputated’ by the Wall. The marginalized position along West Berlin's edges in the shadow of the Wall resulted in the deterioration of Kreuzberg's building structure but created the liminal space for, among others, squatters, artists, punks, students, political activists and Gastarbeiter, in search for affordable housing (97-100). East Berlin's alternative, intellectual and artistic scene was concentrated in the 1980s in Prenzlauer Berg, where in contrast to East Berlin's refurbished socialist-realist center around Alexanderplatz, the city's old tenement buildings were still standing, even if in ruinous state (126-129).

architects such as Bruno Taut acknowledged the increasing aestheticization and autonomy of walls and the social potential of producing and ordering space by modern wall art and architecture, the synergy between the art works and the architecture of the gallery space had long been explored by the classical avant-garde. In 1938 at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris, curated by Marcel Duchamp, gallery Wildenstein transformed into a space where the visitor had to consciously pave the way along red walls and seemingly, indiscriminately hung surrealist artworks, across diverse obstacles in between household furniture and other utensils. In order to see the art works, the visitors, who were meant to dive into the depths of the unconscious, were handed flashlights with which to search the walls' surfaces for individual pieces. Instead of the functional, homogenous, white walls of modernism, Vieth points out, these gallery walls should ignite the spark between artist and beholder (Vieth 224).

Even though the whitewashed Wall segments of *Grenzmauer 75* were quickly tattooed by graffiti and Wall art in the 1980s, which must have created an eerie atmosphere at night when the death strip was lit by floodlights, the ignition of a 'spark' between artists and beholder does not loom large in descriptive accounts of life along the Western Wall and the liminal spaces it produced. As Paul Hockenos argues in *Berlin Calling* (2017), the treatment of the Western Wall as canvas to paint on, was met with mixed feelings by many Berliners, since the artistic transgressions depoliticized the Wall, often denounced as geopolitical monstrosity in the West, and turned it into provocative fun (114-115). Seldomly affected by the 'illumination' of the Wall's figurative silhouettes, seemingly protruding in the twilight¹⁸², Wall strollers enjoyed an extensive weekend walk along West Berlin's open-air gallery and

¹⁸² See Ralf Gründer. *Berliner Mauerkunst* (2007). Gründer describes the effect of Richard Hambleton's 1984 silhouette figures (*Secret Mission*) and INDIANO's interventions on the Berlin Wall as uncanny (242-243).

were—possibly painfully—aware of the aesthetic loss after 1989, as Hockenos, together with his friend, personally recalls:

The first reaction of my friend Astrid, an English graduate student, was to bemoan the disappearance of “all that wonderful art” that wrecking cranes would demolish when the Wall went. (In fact, it was tourists with chisels who laid waste to much of the world’s biggest open-air gallery, a foretoken of what visiting hordes would do to Berlin in decades ahead.) Astrid and I had taken afternoon-long weekend walks along the magnificent Wall, gazing at the murals and politically charged graffiti art, stopping periodically for *Milchkaffee* at the little cafés in its lee. (16)

The Wall’s forbidding character and paradoxical status, fetishized as aestheticized border structure, was predominantly met with, what might be called an aesthetic curiosity combined with a frivolous form of disinterest in what lay beyond the Western Wall. Hockenos describes this disinterest as a combination of acceptance and resignation, a taking-for-granted of the Wall and a certain complacency vis a vis its victims (64-65)¹⁸³.

Instead of a surrealist encounter with the unconscious or an exposure to the creaturely, biopolitical aspects of existing on either side of the Wall, an abortion and deadening of affects comes to the fore, which is all the more astonishing, since Berlin as “epicenter of the Cold War” (Hockenos 17), as divided city, in a divided Germany, in a divided Europe as Hockenos sums it up, had undoubtedly been marked by the historical circumstances. Only in rare cases have the graffiti and Wall art on the Berlin Wall created such turbulences that

¹⁸³ See also Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (1999). Fulbrook states that: “The area behind the ‘Iron Curtain’ was, for most West-Germans, one of the blank spots on the map, about which they had little curiosity.” (209) The ‘imagined community’ for West Germans was the Western World, Western Europe and America in particular (209).

affective as well as territorial boundaries were crossed¹⁸⁴, astonishing considering graffiti's and the avant-garde art's historical entanglement.

The 'fine art' practices introduced at the Berlin Wall in the 1980s, turning the Western Wall into a quasi-open-air gallery, signing individual art works, organising art competitions whose aim was to overcome the Wall by painting on and over it and treating the Western Wall as a painterly surface, have firmly situated the quickly aestheticized material structure in a Western, capitalist context. Rather than the destruction of old and the creation of new aesthetic practices, which ideally opened up the necessary space of transformation for a new practice of collective existence, as the historical avant-garde had hoped to do, the oppressive structures remained in place. The Western Wall transformed into a *Wand*, a surface to paint on, whose treatment as canvas was meant to push aesthetic boundaries but rarely did so. However, the tension between the aestheticized Western Wall and its military 'hinterland', which from a GDR perspective represented the actual 'frontline' of the border zone, has triggered affects which can be traced on individual aesthetic interventions on the Western Wall. The Wall's ambiguous status as aestheticized fortification system as well as the aesthetic effects of its meandering inner-city course can in Rem Koolhaas' words be "heartbreakingly beautiful" when seen through the lense of modernism and compared to the "endless line of Sol LeWitt structures" (Koolhaas in Henke 318).

Indeed, seen through the lense of aesthetic modernism and compared with Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawings* of the late 1960s, the *Wall Drawings*' dynamism of mechanically applied horizontal, vertical and broken lines on the surface of individual gallery walls, help

¹⁸⁴ See Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, *Der Weiße Strich* (2011). In 1986 rebellious, expatriated GDR youth created a dadaist intervention at the Wall in Kreuzberg. They crossed out all the graffiti and Wall art (Kilometerkunst) by means of a white line in order to draw attention to the inhumanity of the Wall. GDR border guards interpreted the artistic white line as an insult and an attempt to re-draw the borderline, which was running a couple of meters in front of the Western Wall.

explain the transgressive potential of the Western Wall as well as its eventual transformation into a highly fetishized ‘autonomous work of art’.

In *Addicted to Walls* (2014) Anne Vieth describes Sol LeWitt’s treatment of the white gallery wall as an attempt to redefine the distance creating, auratic space of the modernist white cube¹⁸⁵ as gallery space. Sol LeWitt’s gallery walls no longer functioned as the neutralised background on or in front of which art was displayed but were meant to incite the onlooker to confront the gallery walls themselves as autonomous aesthetic objects intervening in space:

Diese Wandzeichnungen treten als Gitterstrukturen, als dichte Netze und als serielle Permutationen der gewählten Lineaturen in Erscheinung und bringen die Wandflächen häufig zum Vibrieren. Für den Betrachter scheinen sich die Wandflächen zugleich zu öffnen und zu verschließen ... Dank dieses Effekts evozieren die Wall Drawings auch eine sinnlich-emotionale Wirkung, die im Hinblick auf ihre rationale Grundlage überrascht. Nicht selten stehen Wirkung und zugrunde gelegtes System miteinander im Widerspruch. Für den Betrachter bedeutet dies, dass er die in der Instruktion gegebenen Informationen, also das, was er weiß, mit dem, was er sieht, vergleichen muss. (194)

These wall drawings appear as grid structures, as dense mesh and as serial permutations of the chosen graphic lines and often cause the wall surfaces to vibrate. For the viewer the wall surfaces seem simultaneously to open and to close ... Due to this effect the Wall Drawings also bring about a sensual-

¹⁸⁵ See Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (1976). The white cube as gallery space embodies modernist aesthetics for Doherty, where objects of art are dehistoricised and exhibited out of context. The apparently eternal and autonomous status of the artifact is produced and reinforced by the white ‘nothingness’, which surrounds them. The underlying power structure, namely that the white cube as gallery space has been created as a “ritual place” (9) for members of a particular caste or group, is conveniently concealed at the same time.

emotional impact, which is surprising regarding their rational basis. It is not uncommon that impact and underlying structure are in conflict with each other. For the viewer, this means that he has to compare the information, pre-given by the pattern, hence what he already knows, with what he sees. (194; my trans.)

I argue that not the Western Wall's surface but Western Wall's meandering inner-city path, enhanced by Grenzmauer 75's homogenous, whitewashed structure, had a sensual-emotional effect, similar to Sol LeWitt's autonomous wall works, which cut through the gallery space. Not unlike LeWitt's *Wall Drawings* (1969) a conflict emerges between knowing and seeing, between the experience of aesthetic pleasure due to the vibrancy of colourful images on the Western Wall's white surface and the knowledge of simultaneously looking at a military fortification system. However, while the gallery visitor walked through a space made ambiguous by Sol LeWitt's wall works, the visitor of the Western Wall walked along it, stood in front of it, sprayed or painted on it. Thus, the temptation to leave ambiguity behind, treat the Western Wall as autonomous wall work, allow the military zone behind it fall into oblivion, was real.

While the Western Wall has all too frequently been fetishized as an autonomous 'gallery' wall on which 'artworks' were displayed, Rem Koolhaas decided to explore the ambiguous space between the frontline and hinterland wall in his final thesis project at the Architectural Association in London. In a bold move he suggested to re-conceive and occupy the military control strip. By voluntarily becoming captive of the in-between, a mixture between torture chamber and utopian laboratory, the imaginary void of the imaginary no-man's land could be transformed into a strip of metropolitan desirability¹⁸⁶. Koolhaas' *The*

¹⁸⁶ While in the 1970s Rem Koolhaas still provocatively explored the topic of the urban desirability of a radically enclosed and threatening space such as the Berlin Wall death strip, he actually built on it after reunification. In *Unbuilding Walls: From Deathstrip to Freespace* (2018), his project is presented by GRAFT and Birthler as both an homage to the divided city and its transformation (248-251). Between 2014-2019 the new campus building for the Axel Springer publishing house, based on Koolhaas' design and located on the former death strip in close proximity to the existing Springer headquarters in Berlin Mitte, was constructed.

Berlin Wall as Architecture (1970-1972) project was fuelled by his misconception of the Wall's course and his realisation that it encircled West Berlin, usually hailed as desirable, free and open society. In *The Berlin Wall as Architecture* as well as his project *Exodus or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* (1972), where the urban fabric of London is ripped apart by an intermediate strip with enclosing walls running through the centre of London, Koolhaas explores architecture's power to intervene in space and create divisions, which are at once incarcerating and desirable. The inmates of the in-between-zone voluntarily "flee from the existing urban fabric into the new artificial paradise, even though they realize they are being kept in captivity." (Böck 42) In *Six Canonical Projects by Rem Koolhaas* (2015) Ingrid Böck points out that for Koolhaas, inspired by the teachings of Le Corbusier, Carl Schmitt and Thomas Hobbes on sovereign authority as the power of decision making, the horrific 'beauty' of walls such as the Berlin Wall was defined by their decisive position and their potential of erasing the existing urban fabric: "in its 'primitive' stage the wall is *decision*, applied with absolute architectural minimalism" (Koolhaas in Böck 44).

At once utopian and dystopian, the Berlin Wall as wall of great promise read in this way occupies the position of the demiurge as artist-creator, who takes over the revolutionary aesthetic fervour from the classical avant-garde and as sovereign, decision-making instrument spatialises the utopian dream by means of incarceration. An altered version of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as model prison comes to the fore. Bentham's 18th century vision was based on architecture, the circular arrangement of cells, where the inmates of a particular institution were visible at all times, whereas the guard in the central tower could not be seen (but was supposed to see everything).

Koolhaas alludes to the course of the former Wall by deconstructing the building with an expansive atrium, cutting through it, giving room to and echoing the void of the former death strip. While visually impressive the Axel Springer Campus is a far cry from his former ambitions and feeds into the common discourse of Western triumphalism. The building symbolically reinforces the ambitions of the late Axel Springer, who, in the 1960s, had his former newspaper headquarters moved from Hamburg to Berlin, next to the Wall, as a statement of political defiance.

In *Punishment and Culture* (2008) Philip Smith criticises the Foucauldian model of modern disciplinary power based on Bentham's panopticon, not so much because Foucault's theory was lacking in rigor, but on the contrary because it was too theoretical. It disregarded the anticipated socio-economic as well as social benefits of Bentham's model prison. According to Smith, Bentham, founder of utilitarianism, wanted to run a prison like a profitable enterprise, where surveillance costs would be reduced by a clever architecture. At the same time Bentham's prison was supposed to be open to the public, who should delight as well as be intimidated by the spectacle of total visual control of the prison's inmates.

Perhaps more intriguing still, the public gaze was to be something other than the obsessive, dispassionate eye of the invisible guardian. Whereas Foucault sees surveillance replacing spectacle, the real genius of Bentham's proposal was to recruit spectacle into surveillance. ... Looking out on the prisoners would be a "great and constant fund of entertainment ... the scene, though confined ... not altogether an unamusing one." The idea that fun and surveillance could go together was expanded into plans for river excursions and a fantastical panopticon tavern as part of a more complete experience for day trippers. The panopticon, then, would compete with the wax museum and pleasure garden as a public entertainment. (105)

If we use the Foucauldian model, refract it through Smith's prism of "recruiting spectacle into surveillance" (105) and apply it to the Berlin Wall, the result will help to shed light on the notion of the Wall creating a desirable carceral city hailed by Koolhaas and denounced by the Western media. Intimidating (as awe-inspiring fortification system) as well as pleasurable (watching the 'pain' of others¹⁸⁷) panoramic views from Western platforms, even pleasurable

¹⁸⁷ See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). In her essay Sontag analyses the meaning of and the affects triggered by war photography. Regarding images of great cruelty is not, according to Sontag, necessarily accompanied by feelings of empathy and ethical commitment: "Not all reactions to these pictures [photographs

looks from the Eastern side, cannot be entirely ruled out. East Berlin's architectural showcase project of the 1960s, the TV-tower built at Alexanderplatz as a monument to the scientific-technical revolution housed a restaurant and a viewing platform, offering its visitors, the 'walled in' East Berliners or East Germans, a fantastic panoramic view across and beyond the divided city. In this way sovereign power, utopian dream and awe-inspiring architecture were met, not only with disgust and escape attempts but also with pleasurable forms of consumption and visual transgression.

of great cruelties and crimes] are under the supervision of reason and conscience. Most depictions of tormented, mutilated bodies do arouse a prurient interest." (95)

Conclusion

The Wall as Fragmented History and Historical Fragment

In *Memorializing the GDR* (2018) Anna Saunders rightly states that “there are few places where the past impinges on the present quite as much as in contemporary Germany.” (3) Especially the memorialization of divided, Cold War Germany and the legacy of the communist dictatorship has proved difficult and divisive. While the commemoration of the fall of the Wall has become a generally accepted ritual for the assertion and celebration of a reunified Germany, debates have been ongoing on how to contextualize November 9, 1989. First, November 9 also relates to the proclamation of the German republic in 1918, Hitler’s failed putsch in 1923 and the pogroms against German Jews in 1938, ruling out the possibility of November 9 becoming an unproblematic memorial day commemorating the successful fight for freedom and democracy (254). Second, former activists of the GDR civil rights and reform movements, who demanded freedom and democracy and played an important role in bringing about the fall of the GDR nomenklatura and eventually the fall of the Wall, did not necessarily want the peaceful revolution to become part of the greater, postcommunist, national narrative of reunification. While they fought for freedom and democracy, they did not automatically envision a reunified Germany but rather a democratic, socialist state. Saunders speaks of a *Wende*, a twist, a turn, within the *Wende*, the period of political transformation between the fall of the Wall in 1989 and reunification in 1990, when the original protest movements were eventually overruled by the popular demand not just to be *the* people, with democratic rights as political subjects, but to be *one* people, East Germans reunited with West Germans (253). Left-wing critics and left-wing political organizations such as *Die Linke*, a descendant of the GDR Socialist Unity Party, have argued against remembering the demonstrations of the autumn of 1989 in the GDR together with the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, as precursor for reunification. In their eyes, such a monolithic

reading of history would downplay the fact that unification was *not* the principal aim of the civil rights movements (265). Not only Saunders insists on an engagement with the complexities of the history of the German nations, where the memorialization of the past is contested and renegotiated at the present moment. Long before the demise of the GDR remembering and recording life in the GDR had been dictated by particular, contemporary demands.

In *Die anwesende Abwesenheit der Vergangenheit* (2016), Achim Landwehr's essay on history's historicity and the entanglement of historical times, Landwehr mentions, en passant, Anne Barnert's research on 300 documentaries shot in the GDR between 1970 and 1980. The documentaries had recorded life in the GDR at a time when the socialist realist ideal of a classless society had not been realised just yet and were thus supposed to be shown to the general public at some point in the future as proof of an imperfect but future directed past. In Landwehr's words, the records of the then contemporary, less than ideal, life in real existing socialism were produced in the future perfect mood:

Vielmehr waren es >Filme für die Zukunft< —für eine Zukunft, in welcher der Sozialismus das von ihm selbst gesteckte Ziel endlich erreicht haben würde und man dank der Arbeit der Staatlichen Filmdokumentation auf die Vergangenheit der ersten, unvollkommenen Jahrzehnte der DDR zurückschauen konnte, um zu sehen, wie weit man es inzwischen gebracht hatte. Eine Gegenwart produzierte sich damit schon selbst das Material einer zukünftigen Vergangenheit.

Das ist aber nur ein besonders auffälliges Beispiel für einen ansonsten sehr alltäglichen Vorgang. Schließlich sind sämtliche Formen der Archivierung ... in genau diesem Sinn gegenwärtige Produktionen einer zukünftigen Vergangenheit, weil immer heute schon entschieden wird, welches gestern morgen noch interessant sein könnte. (161)

They were rather >films for the future<—for a future in which socialism would have finally reached the goal it had set for itself, and one could, thanks to the work of the state film archive Filmdokumentation, look back onto the past of the first, imperfect decades of the GDR, in order to see, how far along the road one had travelled in the meantime. A present thus produced itself the material for a future past.

But this is only a particularly conspicuous example for an otherwise very common activity. After all, every form of archiving ... is in exactly this sense a contemporary production of a future past, because it has always already been decided today which yesterday could still be of interest tomorrow. (161; my transl.)

What seems to be, at first sight, an outlandish way of producing documentaries for the future reference of past life, is common practice, as Landwehr argues, for archival work. The historical archive, rather than being the place, where historical material is collected and preserved, must be seen as the place where most of the historical material is weeded and destroyed. In fact, Landwehr argues, the archive is a time/place (28), where the decision is taken, which historical material is considered to be part and parcel of a historical event and which one can be discarded, thus the past is in constant negotiation with a present that determines the future way of looking at it.

The binding together of the past for future purposes at the present moment serves Landwehr as an example for what he terms *Chronoferenz*, a concept which takes into account that present and absent times are inextricably interwoven and that the traditional dualism between the present and the past or the present and the future in the science of history needs to be abandoned. Thus, a strictly linear narration of historical events, which, according to Landwehr, seems deceptively natural as we experience our own body's aging process in a

‘direct line’, must be replaced by embedded histories, simultaneously informed by the past and the future, produced by accounts based on the particular perspective taken and the selection made in advance, since there is no stance outside history. As long as we are alive, Landwehr argues, we constantly draft new futures and amend the past by producing new accounts of it in the present (164-165).

The past is either inaccessible, if there is no record left of it, or accessible in form of historical artefacts, which are always already fragments of the past and in fragmentary, decontextualised, form. The historical material, whether available in abundance or rather sparse, cannot embody the entirety of a past event and will always depend on partial and partisan accounts of it in the present. Not only are present and absent times entangled, forming loose textures resembling cloud-like densities, a past event is also inextricably linked to its account of it in the present, since this is the time/place where we access and make sense of it (30-55). Instead of history Landwehr speaks of the historical which he locates as the place where the relation between the past and the present is (re)negotiated (40). The notion of a directional history does not hold in Landwehr’s framework, for accounts of the past and perspectives differ and are always in competition with each other. The narration of a past event based on historical material might lead, not only to the road taken, but to the paths abandoned, bringing to light not only history and its alterities but also historical potentialities. The historical material, as debris and historical source of a past event, does not have the capacity to be formed into a single directional history, Landwehr calls the collective-singular-history, characterised by its linearity and monumentality (292-293). Instead, Landwehr makes use of Michel Serres’ image of the paradoxical and often chaotic passage of time as a folded and wrinkled handkerchief (290)¹⁸⁸, where different historical times are enfolded and at times

¹⁸⁸ See Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time* (1995). In conversation with Bruno Latour Michel Serres discusses the chaotic nature of knowledge by establishing connections between the humanities and the sciences. According to Serres, time as topology, time in space, in contrast to time as a unit of measurement in geometry is characterised not by its linearity but by its chaotic nature, its turbulences, gaps and

come into close contact rather than being strictly separated from each other, while at the same time thinning it out into a cloud-like entity. In this cloud-like entity, times (past, present, future), humans and historical materials are entangled in temporary knots, momentarily moving together along a winding path.

Die Metapher vom Historischen als einem wolkenartigen Gebilde zu verwenden, hat den Vorteil, den Gegenstand, mit dem wir es zu tun haben, hinreichend variabel und flexibel zu halten und damit seiner unübersehbaren Dynamik gerecht zu werden. Gleichzeitig kann man sich durch die Konzentration auf das Zwischen, also auf die Relationierungen zwischen Zeiten, Menschen und Materialien, frühzeitig von allen möglichen Definitionen und letztlich Fundamentalismen verabschieden, die zu beantworten versuchen, was denn >die Geschichte< nun eigentlich sei und wie man über sie >die Wahrheit< sagen könne. Stattdessen haben wir es mit (provinziellen) >wahren Geschichten< zu tun, denen es gelingt, für eine bestimmte Zeit bestimmte Knotenpunkte der Bedeutung zu fixieren. (302)

To use the metaphor of the historical as a cloud-like entity has the advantage to keep the subject we deal with here sufficiently variable and flexible and in this way to do justice to its obvious dynamics. At the same time, by means of concentrating on the in-between, which are the relations between times, humans and materials, one can early on dissociate oneself from potential definitions and ultimately fundamentalisms, which try to answer the question what is actually meant by >the history< and how one could speak >the truth< about it. Instead, we

stopping points. Similarly to an ironed handkerchief time can be measured when spread out flat but becomes complex, multitemporal when crumpled and put into one's pocket. (57-61)

are dealing with (provincial) >true stories<, which succeed, for a particular time, in fixating knots of meaning. (302; my trans.)

The dismissal of the notion of a linear, one-directional history and the awareness of embedded and aestheticized—due to the fact of their dependency on transmission and mediation—histories opens up possibilities for historical enquiry. The entanglement of times (past, present, future) when confronted with the historical material foregrounds the contingency of the historical, which in all its materiality resists meaning while being made sense of. In other words, histories which until now had been enfolded and forgotten could be unfolded and their potential actualised. Landwehr points to Günther Anders' argument that the place of this unfolding is within the arts. In 'Über die Nachhut der Geschichte' (1954) Anders contests that the arts can redeem what the historical moment denies because of its immediacy. For Anders the arts' subversiveness lies in them being transverse to the ephemeral nature of the historical moment. Because of their 'transversiveness' vis a vis the flow of time past potentials can be explored in greater length and instead of an avant-garde an après-garde of the historical should come to the fore. The arts, according to Anders, have the potential to produce an extended image of a historical moment otherwise long gone: "durch die Kunst gewährt sie [die Geschichte] sich den Vorteil mindestens als Bild dasjenige zu werden, worum sie sich durch ihre ständige Selbstveränderung grundsätzlich betrügt." "through the arts it [history] allows itself the benefit of at least in form of an image becoming that which it fundamentally denies itself by its constantly changing nature." (304; my trans.)

In this way historical artefacts are not only fetishized as veil-images and trophies of a monumentalised, directional history but allow images of past potentialities to emanate in the traverse, aesthetic configurations of the arrested moment.

This thesis has demonstrated that an account of the Berlin Wall as historical and aesthetic artefact needs to be based on the concept of fragmented, contesting histories. The

Wall as military fortification system has vanished and at the same time continues to exist in material fragments of differing size and function, ranging from personal memento, historical relic, object of art to simple rubble as a means for road construction and internalised psychic object. Even before being reduced to historical fragments dispersed around the globe¹⁸⁹, its history has, from the very beginning, been fragmented into, at the very minimum, two histories if not more depending on the time, place and perspective of the historical enquiry. Since the lived historical moment, which the Berlin Wall fragments have been a part of, can only be communicated by language, writing, photographs, video recordings and other forms of documentary material, the ‘truth’ of the historical artefact cannot be separated from its medium of transmission in the present, in short, its aestheticization.

When, many years ago, I started my research on the aesthetics of the Berlin Wall and talked to one of the historians in charge at Stiftung Berliner Mauer at Bernauer Straße in Berlin, he greeted me with the comment that I was too late. All the research had already been done, all the archives had been sifted and the Wall as material object had already been described in great detail. Undoubtedly meticulous research had been carried out but the entanglement between times, humans and the historical material had been neglected. Different generations of the Wall prompted different interactions from different sides of the Wall, which were triggered by different perspectives. From the very beginning its separating function as historical fact haunted and has continued to haunt the present moment. Diverse Berlin Wall memorials and an inner-city cobble stone line, tracing the course of the former Wall¹⁹⁰ are only a few examples for the present absence of the (Western) Wall. The present absence of the Wall has also enabled me to reflect on the roads not taken in historiography. While analysing the Wall as fetish and historical artefact, I have tried to undo, what Achim

¹⁸⁹ See Anna Kaminsky, *Die Berliner Mauer in der Welt* (2021). Kaminsky traces the history and location of the individual Wall segments, which have been spread over the continents.

¹⁹⁰ See www.berlin.de/mauer/en/route/. Accessed 1 February 2023.

Landwehr calls the fetish of history (313-316). By laying bare different perspectives –the Wall as historical artefact, the Wall as screen, membrane and utopian project–, which enabled different histories of the Wall and at different points in time led to complicated entanglements, I tried to reframe the often, linear and one-sided, Western directed historical narration of the Wall’s construction, 28-year existence and its eventual demolition. Instead of a strictly chronological a chrono-topographical line plays an important role in my project. The white line, which in 1961 traced the outline of the Wall to come, reproduced as an aesthetic prank on the Wall itself in the 1980s created, as I have argued in chapter 3, a complicated entanglement between notions of clear-cut lines of geopolitical division and fuzzy lines of playful artistic interventions.

When discussing the many-sidedness of the Wall’s histories, in which hegemonic and marginalised histories confront each other in form of images and where many histories will be left untold, because the relevant historical material has vanished or a certain perspective has historically been heavily suppressed for political reasons, Jürgen Böttcher’s documentary *Die Mauer* (1990) comes to mind. Produced by the very same DEFA Studio for documentary films, which had recorded the imperfect past for future reference between 1970 and 1980, *Die Mauer* is a multi-layered montage of historical footage set at the time of the Wende period between November 1989 and August 1990.

Not only does Böttcher record the gradual demolition of the Wall, which has in itself become historical, throughout the documentary he intersperses and projects archival historical footage onto the Wall’s graffitied Western side, showing scenes of its construction in 1961, first escape attempts, military parades through the Brandenburg Gate in Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany and in the GDR as well as postwar commotion in Berlin in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. While these well-known scenes and images from the archival historical footage insinuate the common narrative of Germany’s continuous

authoritarianism and militarism, the materiality of the Wall itself, on the one hand material proof of yet another military intervention, on the other textured screen, which in all its materiality shines through the individual filmic scenes, testifies to and complicates the visible entanglement between past and present times. Since the Wall's texture cannot be overlooked, the illusion of a blank screen, on which history—and a potential, imaginary identification with it through the projected images—unfolds in a straight line, is destroyed. At times the Wall's surface serves as foreground blurring individual scenes, at times its aged and fractured Western side serves as background, creating an irritating material alterity to the displayed footage. Individual scenes of the footage are repeated heightening the impression of the iconicity of the archival historical material, yet the iconicity keeps being disrupted by the Wall's contemporary material presence. In other words, veil-images of carefully selected, historical moments cannot be disentangled from tear-images produced by the Wall's texture and material presence. The passer-by leaning against the Wende Wall at the time of the documentary's making as well as the viewer of the documentary simultaneously see the projection of historical absences as well as the Wall's material presence on the Wall itself.

In general, it is the recording of the Wall's material persistence despite its increasingly fragmentary character and not the 'truth' of the historical event itself, which frames the documentary. While in the opening shots of *Die Mauer* discarded segments of the Wall, often piled on top of each other, are traced by the camera, in the closing shots individual, graffitied Wall segments, obviously kept for their aesthetic value and stored for later sale, turn their (sur)faces towards the viewer. Painted faces on the Wall segments, which seemingly only consist of inquisitive eyes, get ever closer as the camera zooms in onto them, as if a mute, material, historical alterity stares back, recalling the gaze of the Medusa. The chosen perspective is compelling: Rather than us as viewers 'appeasing' the threatening potential of the Wall by appropriating the material fragment or turning it into an image, the

Wall as fragment—‘its severed head’—stares back, turning us into the image of its gaze: a gaze that signifies lack and the dissolution of a central perspective.

In between the opening and closing shots Böttcher, who refrains from commenting on individual scenes, shows human interaction with the Wall. The silent performance of an artist, caressing the Wall, is overshadowed by Wall peckers hammering onto the Wall creating ever greater holes in the material structure. Tourists and Berliners can be seen mingling with GDR border guards during the New Year celebrations of 1990 or when heavy Wall segments are removed amid general applause by massive cranes close to Brandenburg Gate. Among them press reporters and photographers are constantly on the move recording the ongoing transformation of the Wall in the Wende period. One of them is CNN reporter Richard Blythe Stone, who comments on the removal of Wall segments at Brandenburg Gate in the following way:

No parades will be passing through these arches for a long time to come and the Wall over there will remain a blot on West Berlin’s landscape. But the Gate going nowhere, now goes somewhere and all of East Germany knows where it goes.

Richard Blythe Stone, CNN, at the Brandenburg Gate. (Blythe Stone in Böser, 85)

As Ursula Böser rightly observes in ‘Preserving the Wall’s Ambivalence’ (2010) Blythe Stone’s seemingly authoritative knowledge of the past and the future is undone by Böttcher’s recording of him repeatedly going over the same statement until the final version satisfies the filming crew (85). What appeared to be a historical necessity turns into a rehearsed performance through Böttcher’s lense. In this way official history’s hegemonic discourse is unsettled and juxtaposed to other engagements and appropriations of the Wall, which turn into lived history in front of the camera. Not only does Böttcher succeed in creating histories and turbulences on “a structure which has become paradigmatic for the big narratives of a

world order” (88), Böttcher’s camera focusses on the Wall as remnant of the past and agent in the present moment. By foregrounding its growing porosity, fragmentation and increasing lack of military function at the abandoned sites of the inner-city borderline, the viewer of the documentary witnesses the wholesale transformation of the former military fortification system into the gainly backdrop for official and private photo shoots. In other words, the changing state of the Wall prompts different forms of interaction, which Böttcher skilfully captures in loosely connected, montaged scenes and arresting images.

While Böttcher’s camera functions as the eye of history recording the demolition of the Wende Wall, it at the same time exposes its very own being in the eye of history, since the recording takes place at an overdetermined historical site and moment. Past and present historical events literally intersect at the Wende Wall and on its surface. The viewers are interpellated by the Wall as Wand, Mauer and wand: they are exposed to the Wall as screen for historical projections, they follow the transformation of the Wall as material object, and they observe the entanglement between the Wall as projection screen and material object. They also witness the changing relations and interactions people have with the Wall as membrane and material agent, channelling people’s movement, prompting interaction with the Wall.

In the wickerwork of the historical (Landwehr 52) absent and present times are entangled and the Wall as historical artefact is interwoven and embedded in a network of social relations, which have been engendered by the Wall’s partitioning function. By refraining from reproducing the straight line of Western historical triumphalism at the Cold War’s most iconic site, by exposing the Wall’s iconic aspects as screen for literal as well geopolitical projections, by showing the Wall’s creaturely aspects as material alterity and biopolitical agent and by following the winding path of the Wall’s historical entanglement, Böttcher’s documentary lays bare the knots in the historical wickerwork. Depending on the

roads taken or abandoned from the present perspective, they harbour the potential to be undone in the future, where other knots might be tied. Still, the temptation to reproduce the same facade, behind which the discursive violence of sovereign, reunified and triumphalist Germany is hidden, the temptation to tie the same knots and reproduce the same constellations between veil- and tear-images is great.

In *Gegen den Strich* (2023) art historian Michael Diers passes a withering judgement on the German contribution to the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. The Berlin based studio for architecture GRAFT together with politician and human rights advocate Marianne Birthler had, with their project *Unbuilding Walls: From Death Strip to Freespace*, chosen to thematize the spatial effects of German division (1949-1990) and its overcoming. On entering the German pavilion, the visitor was confronted with the illusion of a seamless black wall as deadening screen, which upon closer examination disintegrated into 28 cleverly arranged, individually and freely approachable wall segments; their number referring to the 28 years of the Wall's traumatising existence as well as the wholesome passage of time after reunification in 1990, exactly 28 years in 2018. At first sight, the linear narration from screen to segment reminds on the structural level of the fate of the colourful, ornamental Western Wall with its Kilometerkunst. After the fall of the Wall, as already mentioned, individual, graffitied Western Wall pieces and segments were auctioned off as works of art; works of art which had allegedly overcome and successfully outlasted the concrete border structure. However, instead of the happy-go-lucky ornamental carpet of the Western Wall, a black wall has been visually conjured to obstruct the German pavilion in Venice. An uncanny, death dealing rather than life giving, black wall effectively cut through the white exhibition rooms. While due to its unexpected colour scheme (neither white nor polychrome) and anamorphic effect (the totality of the screen disintegrated into fragmentary segments on approaching) the illusion of the black screen prompted a slightly uncanny experience of a familiar object in the

Freudian sense, reminding of the Wall's other, non-fetishized side as harbinger of death and biopolitical agent¹⁹¹. At the same time the uncanniness was quickly undone by taking a closer look at the individual segments, so that the impression of a linear narration from 'death wall to live projects' was reinforced and foregrounded. On the back of each segment a project, which engaged with the former border between West and East Berlin, between the FRG and the GDR, was displayed. Additionally, interviews with citizens of countries whose lives have been shaped by border walls such as Mexico, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Israel and Palestine, North and South Korea as well as the European external border in Ceuta, provided further insights into geopolitical divisions, the violence of their spatialisation and the consequences for the people affected¹⁹². Diers rightly criticises the triumphalist tenor of the German postwall projects hailed as interventions in space with generally successful outcomes for the ecology (more green space), the economy (more building space) and social life (more space for the clubbing scene) and the overly smooth design of the art installation (Diers 137), masking rather than exposing the tensions and fissures behind the homogenous but uncanny facade. Once again, the close proximity between historical fact and fetish must be noted. However, a closer look at one of the postwall projects confronts the viewer with the ongoing debates about divided views and diverging architectural practices, reinforcing or challenging and denouncing the internalised and seemingly ever-present Western perspective on the Wall.

In the accompanying catalogue of *Unbuilding Walls* the architect Daniel Libeskind shares his view on the building-up of the former inner-city urban wasteland at Potsdamer Platz after the demolition of the Wall. Instead of erasing the past as a result of the almost complete demolition of the Wall and instead of erasing history, a successful intervention in

¹⁹¹ See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919). Freud argues that the feeling of the uncanny, das Unheimliche in German, arises, when what used to be familiar and homely (heimlich in the archaic sense) has been repressed and become a secret (heimlich in the modern sense) and suddenly resurfaces (123-134).

¹⁹² See <https://graftlab.com/en/projects/unbuilding-walls-german-pavillon-at-venice-biennale-2018>. Accessed 29 June 2023.

space should have promoted the exposure to the wilderness of history (Libeskind in GRAFT and Birthler, 100). For Libeskind, the inner-city border constituted a magnetic line, binding and creating boundaries for East and West Berliners. However, like the zig zag course of the former Wall itself history progresses in twists and turns, as well as discontinuities, which is why Libeskind's own proposal for the redesign of Postdamer Platz as a matrix of intersecting lines (of absence), was aptly called *Out of Line* (1991). It showcased, in which way the historical square was traversed by the forces of history, giving room to the emergence of a dialectic space, where the past and a reimagined future confronted each other in the present¹⁹³. Instead of exposing Germany's traumatic historical ruptures and due to the popular desire to mend the urban fabric, the design proposal of Hilmer & Sattler was chosen in 1991 and the reconstruction and continuity of a compact European city was given priority (GRAFT and Birthler 171). However contested, the general tendency in German, reunified, state-sanctioned art and architecture is to smooth over past fractures and historical alterity in order to uphold a reunified urban facade.

Even if the other, Eastern view onto the Wall, the view, which has historically been invisible or made invisible is foregrounded in contemporary memorial practices, the tear, the exposure of visual alterity, cannot entirely escape the veil, the political aesthetic arrangement in the present context: In 2011, fifty years after the erection of the Wall and 21 years after its fall, the German Federal Cultural Foundation mounted an exhibition called "The Other View: The Early Berlin Wall."¹⁹⁴ Writer Annett Gröschner and photographer Arwed Messmer had the chance to organise an exhibition based on classified photos taken by GDR border regiments in the spring of 1966. The photos, which were never developed, were supposed to serve as documentation of the early generation of the Wall to detect weaknesses in the

¹⁹³ See <https://libeskind.com/work/postdamer-platz/>. Accessed 29 June 2023.

¹⁹⁴ See https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/en/programmes_projects/image_and_space/detail/the_other_view.html. Accessed 23 July 2024.

military structure and to amend them. Contrary to the propagandistic images ready for consumption, taken on both sides of the Wall, the negatives of the border regime represented the controlling and sober gaze of the border soldier onto the border fortification (Gröschner and Mesmer 60). At the same time a rare view from the Eastern side of the Wall was presented, revealing its surmountability due to its makeshift character while the shabby parts of West Berlin directly bordering the Wall in the 1960s came to the fore. Out of the individual negatives Mesmer assembled digitalised panorama views onto the Wall, which offered the ‘completely reconstructed’ Eastern view of the inner-city Wall in the mid-1960s. Each panorama was accompanied by captions, chosen by Gröschner, referring to events at the Wall documented by border soldiers. By means of a collage of 324 panoramas and texts, individual photographic and textual fragments were arranged into a new form, for a particular purpose: “The collage, the fragmentary, is a kind of aesthetics that I find most appropriate for describing the recent German past, without moral or ideological ascription.” (Gröschner and Mesmer 62) While the choice of collaged panoramas betrays the desire for impossible completeness, the Wall’s other, Eastern side has been made visible and the past aesthetically repositioned in the present.

This thesis has developed a conceptual framework, which describes and analyses the Berlin Wall as material structure and the real, utopian, heterotopian and psychic spaces, it produced over time, as contested. The Berlin Wall as material structure was contested because a wall per se invites overcoming and undoing the obstacle. It was contested because as front- and borderline between the capitalist and communist bloc each side tried to outdo the other by establishing a favourable, propagandistic visual and aesthetic regime. It was contested because the Wall as material object and dividing agent triggered diverse affects ranging from suppression and fetishization to empathy and an awareness of the creaturely, biopolitical power it exerted.

The conceptual framework has given room to a discussion of the Wall as fact and fetish, material fragment, porous, living, membrane, reified screen and protective shield. Whether the Wall was fetishized and appropriated for individual or propagandistic purposes or experienced as vibrant matter largely depended, in my argument, on the way of perceiving and engaging with the Wall. A predominantly visual perception of the Wall easily led to its objectification and fetishization. An embodied engagement with the Wall made people aware of the agency of the Wall, its resistance and porosity as material obstacle and filtering membrane.

The historical, framed by and condensed in iconic veil-images such as the image of the Wall as ornamental carpet followed by the image of its ‘natural fall’ into individual segments, is at times *actually*, often *potentially*, undone and contested by tear-images; images as e/motions triggering affects: the presence and absence of colour *in* images (colourful versus uncanny black Wall) and images *of* lines (such as the white line on the Wall, the Wall as meandering line or Libeskind’s postwall project), images which do not ‘fall in line’ but remain out of line.

As a consequence of the constant contestation due to always already ‘divided views’ prompting differing reactions and interventions, the multi-perspectival framework demonstrates the following: an analysis of and engagement with the Wall depends on subject position (East, West), perspective (frontal, aerial, close up, panoramic, panoptic), (geo)political tensions in form of binary thinking caused by the Wall as divisive structure asserting sovereignty and prompting exclusionary identity formations. It also depends on (fetishistic) desire in form of visual and bodily engagement with an architecture of ‘psychic excitation’, caused by the traumatic division in 1961, resulting either in a complete visual and haptic ban (East) or in a predominantly apolitical curiosity and playful, artistic appropriation of the Wall (West). The architecture of ‘psychic excitation’ evolved over time but was

heightened in tension with the implementation of Grenzmauer 75. In my argument, an independent Western whitewashed and eventually ornamental facade stood in stark contrast to a sober Eastern military structure, creating an affective tension. What most people saw—a harmless, colourful Western Wall—contradicted what most people knew but eventually chose not to see—behind the Western Wall stood a fortification system with a shoot-to-kill order for Eastern refugees. On the psychic level, the belief in being on the ‘right’ side of the Western Wall obscured its material alterity and prompted an engagement with the Wall that ranged from fetishism and obsessive playfulness or obsessive outrage to indifference. On the aesthetic level a Baroque aesthetics and theatrical sensibility came to the fore where frontline and hinterland wall seemingly had nothing in common despite conditioning each other. The ornamental Western facade, while mythically inflated and eventually fetishized as work of art and liberal democratic showpiece, also functioned as a means to organise the extraordinary experience of urban division.

The multi-perspectival framework also acknowledges the Wall as vibrant matter: a material dividing agent, aging and transforming over time, triggering effects and affects, determining and channelling specific forms of engagement at different times. The forces engaged have been distributed asymmetrically, favouring a Western perspective, but cannot be reduced to a one-sided, linear, Western-directed narration of events (Berlin imaginary). They rather form a wickerwork of wilful historical continuities based on iconic veil-images, hegemonic visibility, cartographic blind spots, geopolitical tensions and denials and their contestation in form of tear-images, urban fractures and artistic exchanges, all of which will be exposed to diverse weather conditions over time.

In sum, this thesis has demonstrated that, due to the Wall as simultaneous *sight* and *site* and the ensuing diverging affordances as screen, membrane and amplifier of utopian desire, a reflection on dissensus and contestation must be the guiding principles in the

analysis of the material and psychic history of the spatial barrier. Historians Konrad Jarausch, Scott H. Krause and Stefanie Eisenhuth rightly demand in their introduction to *Cold War Berlin: Confrontations, Cultures, and Identities* (2021) a new, post-Cold War approach to German-German history:

... a post-Cold War perspective that is no longer doing intellectual battle within the conflict but rather seeks to reflect about it. A new generation of scholarship looks at the two halves of the city without necessarily praising the Eastern “socialist metropolis” as the wave of the future or defending the Western “outpost of freedom” in a red communist sea. The growing emotional distance makes it possible to analyse local consequences of the ideological hostility, continued entanglements that challenged the European division and contested legacies of the Eastern and Western parts of the city more dispassionately. (Jarausch et al., 2)

This thesis has reflected on Cold War battles by means of investigating into the Berlin Wall’s very own affordances and by doing so provided the theoretical framework for future post-Cold War perspectives. It has provided a theoretical framework, which has traced the distribution of the sensible generated by the Wall as spatial barrier in form of visible and invisible perspectives onto the Wall. It has also shown that the resulting collective but also internally divided identity formations on both sides of the Wall formed the basis of participation or non-participation vis a vis the Wall as shared communality I have defined, with reference to Rancière, as a political-aesthetic arrangement in space.

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Appendix

List of Abbreviations

FDJ – Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth)

FRG – German Democratic Republic

GDR – German Democratic Republic

SMAD – Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)

Images

Images Chapter 1: Function, History and Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall



Ernst Schwahn's photograph of the Berlin Wall of the first generation (1). The Wall (decried as Schandmauer, Wall of Shame) blocks Wolliner Street on August 13, 1964. View from West Berlin.

Source: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Böhlau Verlag, 2007, 18.



Anonymous photograph of razed ground floor facade functioning as Wall at Bernauer Straße in 1979 (2). View from West Berlin.

Source: Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer. Bildarchiv, Image no. 8266.

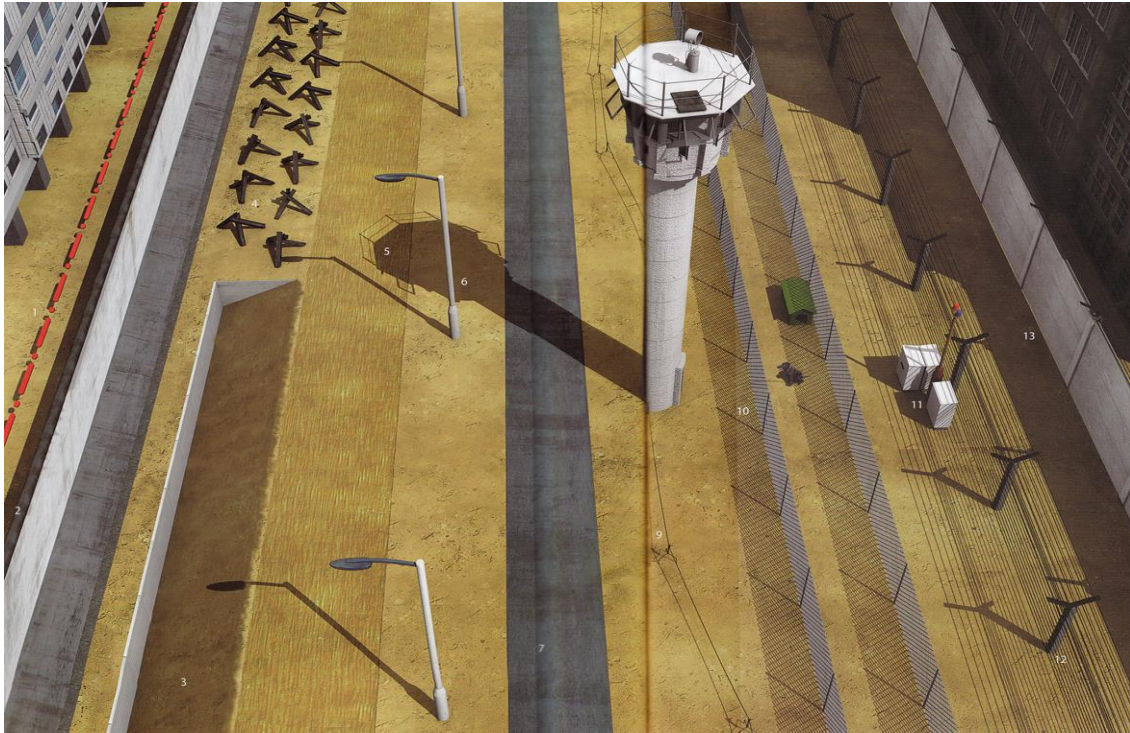


Diagram of Grenzmauer 75 and Berlin Wall as fortification system in the 1980s (3). Left: West Berlin. Right: East Berlin. From left to right: actual GDR border (white line; here marked as red), Grenzmauer 75 (frontline wall), anti-vehicle ditch, anti-vehicle obstacles, control strip, floodlight poles, patrol road, guard tower, dog run, signal fence, hinterland wall. Source: Rottman, Gordon L. *The Berlin Wall and the Intra-German Border 1961-89*. Osprey, 2008, 34-35.



Diagram of Grenzmauer 75 (4), Wall segment (frontline wall) topped by sewer pipe: 3.6m high, 1.2m wide, the platform base is 1.6m deep, the base is 22cm thick, the top is 12 cm thick.

Source: Rottman, Gordon L. *The Berlin Wall and the Intra-German Border 1961-89*. Osprey, 2008, 38.

Images Chapter 2: The Wall as Screen



Iconic image West: Peter Leibing's photograph of GDR border guard Conrad Schumann's defection at Bernauer Straße (5). He leaps across the barbed wire fence from East to West Berlin on August 15, 1961. View from West Berlin.

Source: *Bilder im Kopf. Ikonen der Zeitgeschichte*. Edited by Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Haus der Geschichte, 2011, 6.



Iconic image West: Wolfgang Bera's photograph of Peter Fechter tragically bleeding to death after a failed escape attempt lying behind the Western Wall near Zimmerstraße and Checkpoint Charlie on August 17, 1962 (6). View across the Wall from West Berlin.

Source: www.chronik-der-mauer.de/todesopfer/171420/fechter-peter. Accessed 2 February 2017.



Iconic image West: Wall fetishism and Helmut Newton's photograph of a model at the Wall for a fashion shoot in February 1963 (7). View from West Berlin.

Source: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Böhlau Verlag, 2007, 80.



From individual graffiti to Kilometerkunst. Left: Virginia M. Raimundi's photograph of Jean-Martin Tandetzki's Nose Monster graffiti (8). Right: Virginia M. Raimundi's photograph of Christophe Bouchet's artistic intervention at Bethaniendamm around 1984 (9). View from Parte_The Berlin Wall_A Material and Psychic History IWest Berlin.

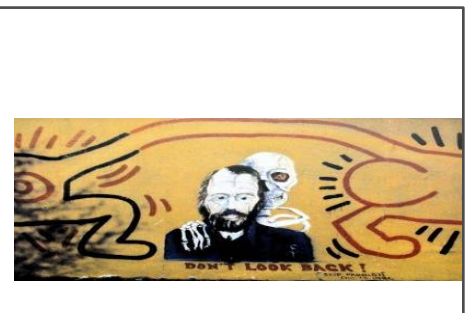
Source: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Böhlau, 2007, 173.



Heinz J. Kuzdas' photograph of Thierry Noir's and Christophe Bouchet's Pop art inspired images of the statue of liberty (10) in 1986 as homage for its 100th anniversary and photograph of anonymous graffiti intervention (11) in the 1980s by Francesco and Alessandro Alacevich. View from West Berlin.

Source: Left: Kuzdas, Heinz. *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Elephanten Verlag, 1999, 51.

Right: Alacevich, Francesco, and Alessandro Alacevich. *The Lost Graffiti of Berlin: The Writing on the Wall*. Gremese International, 1991, 19.



Heinz J. Kuzdas' photograph of Keith Haring's figure chain mural (12) in his Pop art signature style at the Wall and photograph of Skip Parrish's intervention by H.J. Burmeister (13) on December 23, 1986. View from West Berlin.

Source: Left: Kuzdas, Heinz. *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Elephanten Verlag, 1999, 51.

Right: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Böhlau, 2007, 60.



The Western Wall as ornamental carpet: Heinz J. Kuzdas' photograph of Grenzmauer 75 (14) at Waldemarstraße/Luckauerstraße in 1985. View from West Berlin.

Source: Kuzdas, Heinz. *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Elefant Verlag, 1999, 18-19.



Wall fetishism. Eija-Riitta Eklöf-Berliner-Mauer at the Berlin Wall of the first generation (top), the second generation (bottom) with her Berlin Wall models (17 and 18).



Berlin Wall fetishism. Eija-Riitta Eklöf-Berliner-Mauer's cats resting behind the model of the first generation of the Wall in her house in Sweden (19).

Source: Film stills from *Berlinmuren*. Directed by Lars Laumann, Maureen Paley, 2008.

Images Chapter 3: The Wall as Membrane



Iconic Image East: Peter Heinz Junge's photograph of GDR militia in front of Brandenburg Gate on August 14, 1961 (20) and Rainer Mittelstädt's photograph of the aged militia at Berlin's 750 year's anniversary (21) in 1987 in front of a Brandenburg Gate model.

Source: Left: Taylor, Frederick. *The Berlin Wall*. Bloomsbury, 2009. no pag.
Right: Demke, Elena. "'Antifaschistsicher Schutzwall' – 'Ulbrichts KZ'". *Die Mauer*. Edited by Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011, 99.



Bert Sass's photograph of the white line as borderline at Checkpoint Charlie in 1961 (22). Border guards securing the border and the construction of the first generation of the Wall. View from West Berlin.

Source: Landesarchiv Berlin; photo: November 20, 1961.



Anonymous photograph of the Western Wall (Grenzmauer 75) as aestheticized, purist white Wall and potential canvas in 1977 (23). View from West Berlin.

Source: Feversham, Polly and Leo Schmidt. *The Berlin Wall Today*. Bauwesen Verlag, 1999, 153.



Virginia M. Raimundi's photograph of Richard Hambleton's silhouette figures of Shadow Mission and Indiano's intervention at the Western Wall in 1984 (24). View from West Berlin. Source: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Böhlau, 2007, 237.



Colour as calor and corporeal engagement with image/texts. Photographs of August Walla and his work (P. Art Brut KG) (25 and 26).

Source: Barber, Stephen. "August Walla: Devil/God, Image/Text". *Art, Word and Image*. Edited by John Dixon Hunt et al. Reaktion Books, 2010, 318; 325.



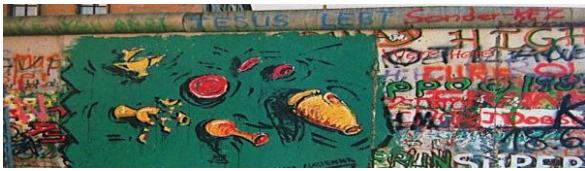
Photograph of Aktion Weißer Strich on November 3, 1986 (Wolfram Hasch Archive) (27). GDR youth and defectors such as Wolfram Hasch crossing out the image/texts on the Western Wall by means of a white line.

Source: Gründer, Ralf. *Berliner Mauerkunst*. Berlin: Böhlau, 2007, 282.



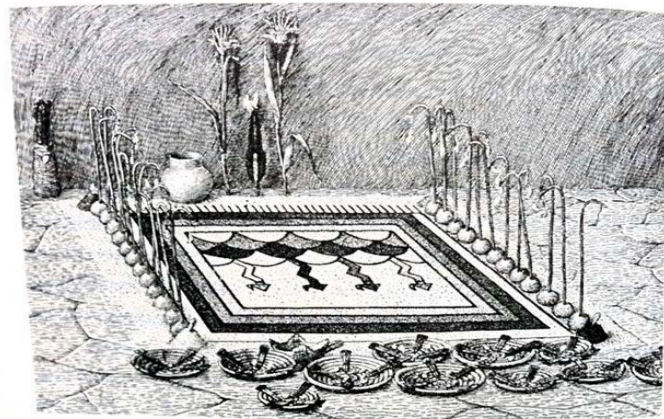
Photograph of the white line as zonal border line between the British and the Soviet sector at Potsdamer Platz in 1948 (Landesbildstelle) (28).

Source: Manghani, Sunil. *Image Critique & The Fall of the Berlin Wall*. Intellect Books, 2008, 97.



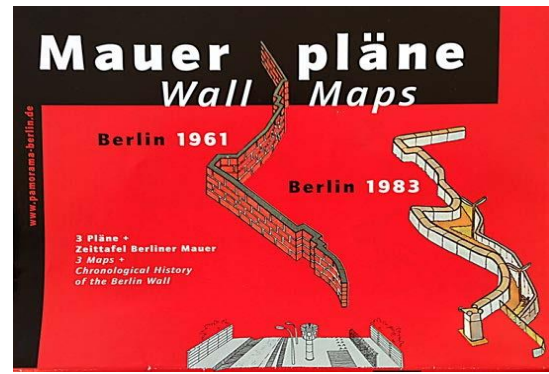
Heinz J. Kuzdas' photographs of Nora Aurienne's trompe l'oeils at the Western Wall in 1983. View from West Berlin (29, 30 and 31).

Source: Kuzdas, Heinz. *Berliner Mauer Kunst*. Elefant Verlag, 1999, 40.



Serpent Ritual of Pueblo Indians in the 19th century. Right: book cover of Aby Warburg's Schlangenritual (1923) (32). Left: 19th century depiction of a serpent ritual in Oraibi, USA (33). Depicted is the sand drawing in a kiva of the four serpents as lightening rods bringing rain.

Source: Warburg, Aby. *Schlangenritual*. Wagenbach, 2011, cover and 104.



The Wall's inner-city meandering course. Aerial views of Cold War Berlin, historical tourist maps 2012 (34 and 35).

Source: *Wall maps*. Presse und Informationsdienst des Landes Berlin, eds. 1961; 1983.



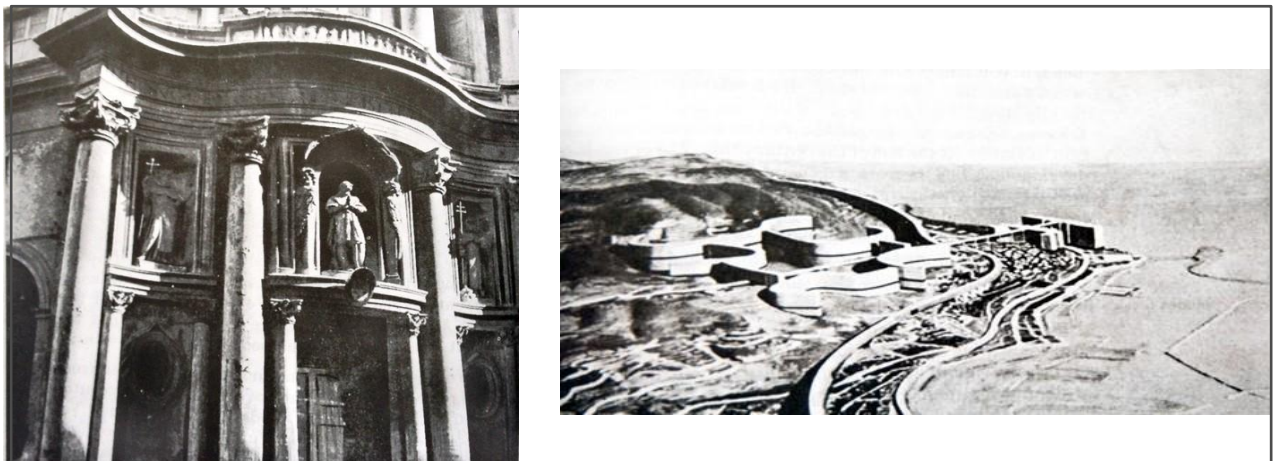
The West Bank Wall as anthropomorphic agent encircling Palestinian land in the Palestinian Territories. Details from Seth Tobocman's comic (36 and 37).

Source: Tobocman, Seth. *Disaster and Resistance*. AK Press, 2008, 102-103.



A 'creaturely' wall, deceptively paving its way through the forest: Andy Goldsworthy's photograph of his sculpture *The Wall that Went for a Walk* in Grizedale Forest, UK, in 1990 (top) and in 1997 (bottom) (38 and 39).

Source: Goldsworthy, Andy. *Wall*. Abrams, 2000, 6.



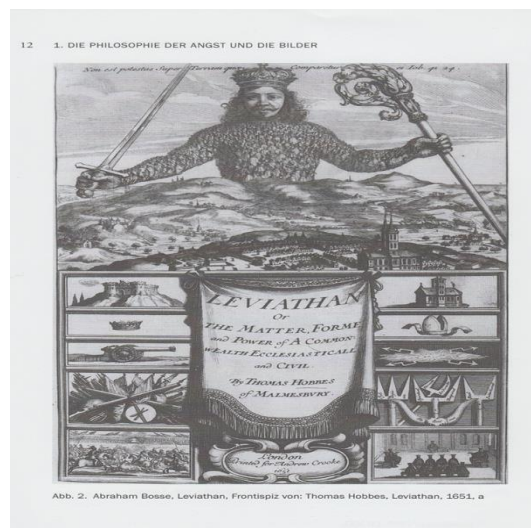
A Baroque undulating wall and its modern incarnation: Sigfried Giedion's photograph of Francesco Borromini's Baroque church facade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane in Rome (1667) (40) and Le Corbusier's (never implemented) Plan Obus (41) for a modern Algiers in 1931.

Source: Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time & Architecture*. Harvard UP, 2008, 156 (left) and 159 (right).



Iconic image of a soon-to-be reunified Germany: book cover of a German history book displaying Thomas Kienzle's photograph (42) of West and East Germans standing or dancing on the Wall in front of Brandenburg Gate on November 10, 1989: a human chain appropriating and overcoming the Wall.

Source: Drechsel, Benjamin. "Mauer". *Handbuch der Politischen Ikonographie*, vol. II. Edited by Uwe Fleckner et al., C.H. Beck, 2011, 130.



Frontispiece by Abraham Bosse of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) (43), the larger-than-life image of the peace-making sovereign, who protects and rules over the walled in city and lands before him and whose armour consists of his consenting subjects.

Source: Bredekamp, Horst. *Der Behemoth: Metamorphosen des Anti-Leviathan*. Duncker & Humboldt, 2016, 14.



Building socialism: Layla Fetzter's photograph of a detail of Walter Womacka's monumental frieze (44) *Unser Leben* 'Our Life' (my trans.) (1962-1964) encircling Haus des Lehrers (House of the Teachers) in Berlin Mitte.

Source: <https://bildhauerei-in-berlin.de/bildwerk/unsere-leben-9799/>. Accessed 14 September 2023.



Building a reunified Germany: Andreas Metz' photograph of a detail of Michael Fischer-Art's well-known mural (2009) (45) on a large firewall near Leipzig Central Station, depicting the peaceful revolution in the Wende period (1989-1990) in the GDR. Among other slogans freedom (Freiheit), free elections (Freie Wahlen) and democracy (Demokratie) are striking.

Source: Metz, Andreas. *Vom Verschwinden und Wiederfinden der DDR*. Neues Leben Verlag, 2020, 186.

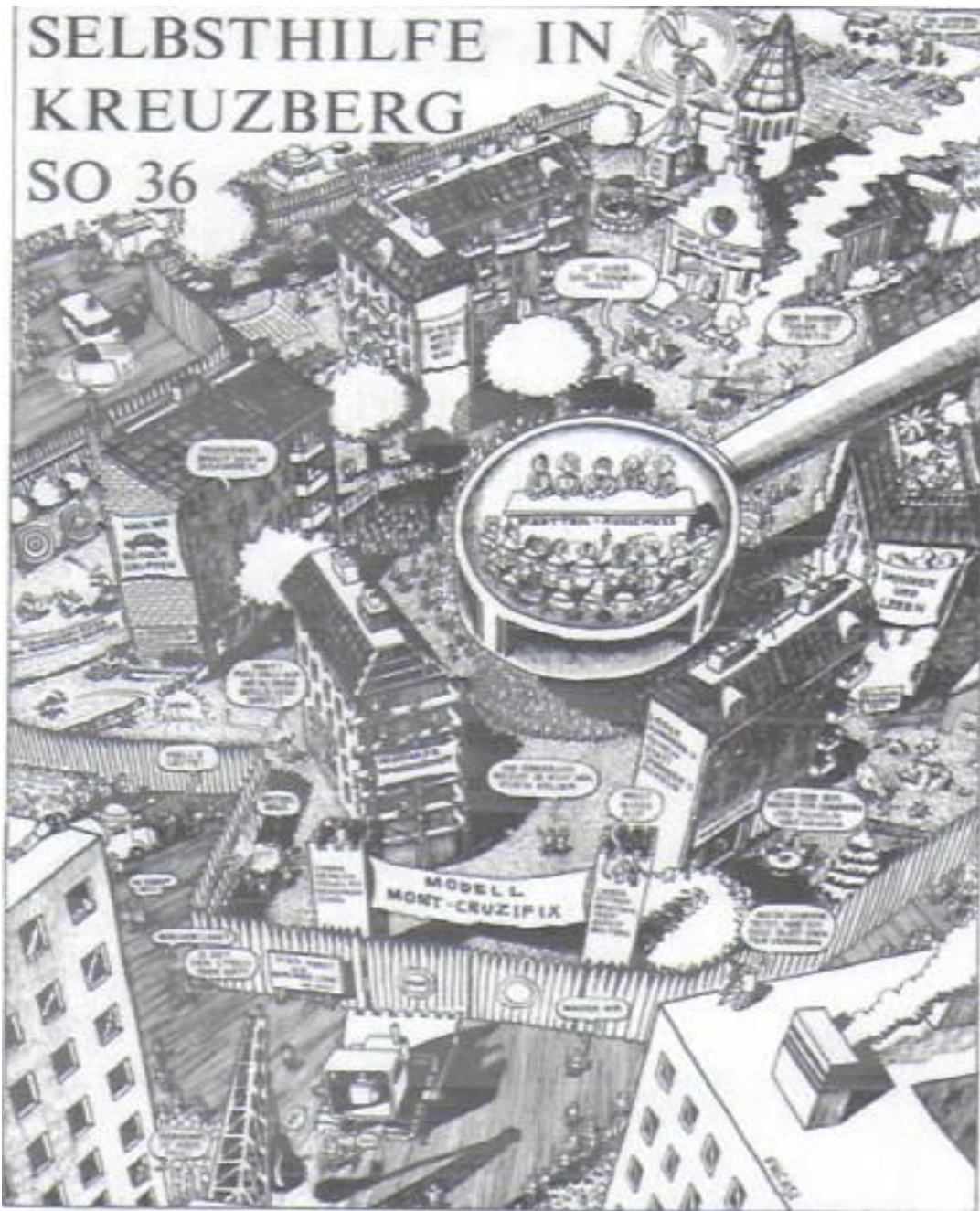


FIG. 4.7. COVER OF *SELBSTHILFE IN KREUZBERG SO36*, FEATURING A DRAWING BY THE ARTIST FUCHSI. THE BOOKLET WAS PUBLISHED AS PART OF IBA-ALTBAU IN 1987, DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER 6. LANDES-ARCHIV BERLIN

Building division in the Cold War West: Cover (1987) by illustrator Peter Fuchsi of SO36 self-help booklet (46).

Source: Pugh, Emily. *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin*. Pittsburgh UP, 2014, 219.

Images Conclusion

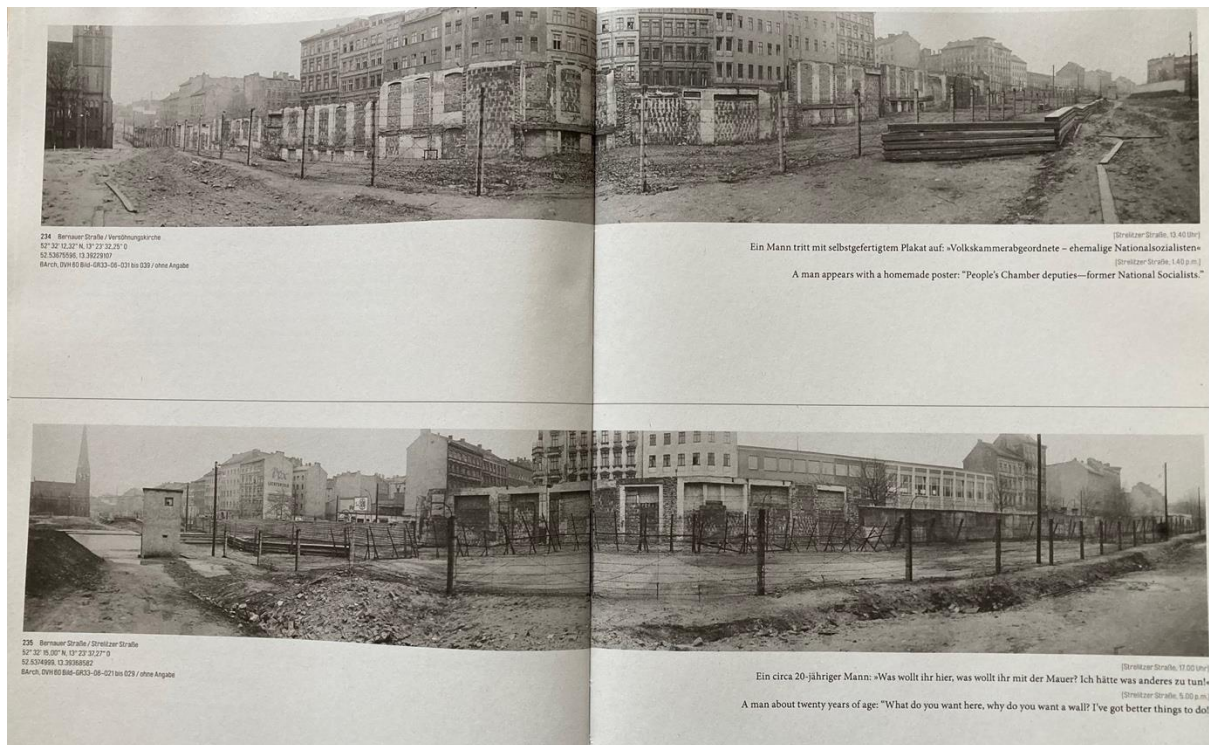


The Wall as discarded object (top) yet haunting the viewer as creaturely, biopolitical agent with its abject stare (bottom). Film stills from Jürgen Böttcher's *Die Mauer* (1990) documentary about the Wende period and the Wall's demolition (47 and 48).

Source: *Die Mauer*. Directed by Jürgen Böttcher. DEFA, 1990.



The 2018 German contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale. Photographs of the installation in the German pavilion (49, 50 and 51). The Berlin Wall as deceptive, black, uncanny screen disintegrating into individual, informative segments on approach.
Source: GRAFT, and Marianne Birthler. *Unbuilding Walls: From Deathstrip to Freespace*. Birkhäuser, 2018, <https://www.unbuildingwalls.de/>. Accessed 14 September 2023.



The other view as panoramic and textual collage (52 and 53). View from East to West at Bernauer Straße in the mid 1960s. The additional captions read: (top) A man appears with a homemade paper: “People’s Chamber deputies–former National Socialists.” (bottom) A man about twenty years of age: “What do you want here, why do you want a wall? I’ve got better things to do!”

Source: Gröschner, Annett, and Arwed Messmer. “The Other View that Makes Our Image of the Wall Complete”. *The Other View*. Edited by Annett Gröschner and Arwed Messmer, Hatje Cantz, 2011, 292-293.

