



berlin

# along the wall strip

30 years under transformation





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## Introduction

Axel Klausmeier

Director of the Berlin Wall Memorial

In the days following August 13, 1961, when the GDR began building the wall and sealing off East Berlin, few could imagine that 28 years, 2 months and 27 days would pass before the Berlin Wall would be peacefully overcome, making German unification and freedom in the fall of 1989 possible again. It was also unimaginable that the most visible symbol of the Cold War would cost at least 140 lives in Berlin alone.

In February 2018, we commemorated 10,315 days with and 10,315 days without the Berlin Wall. During its 28-year existence, the Berlin Wall underwent constant change; it expanded and in a perfidious sense improved, becoming more effective at preventing escapes. Similarly, after the political fall of the wall, the one-time barrier and security strip also underwent a transformation. Political, local, urban planning and social factors, like the "Capital Resolution" of 1991, were responsible for this

change. It was expected that a construction boom would follow, accompanied by an unprecedented influx of new residents to the capital, but this did not happen immediately.

Even before Germany was politically unified in October 1990, the first sections of the wall had already been deemed worthy of conservation as historical monuments; by the end of 1990, only 12 relics of the Berlin Wall had been added to the Berlin monuments list. The general mood in the city was dominated by the constantly repeated chant "The wall must go!" and thus, Berliners followed the words of their former mayor Willy Brandt, who had been demanding exactly that since 1961.

Today, in the 28th year since the fall of the wall, some 30 pieces of the wall have been listed as historical monuments. Some, such as the sections on Rudower Höhe and on Zimmerstrasse at the Topography of Terror, have required special protection with a fence. At the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Straße, the large, thick metal walls enclosing the sides of the official "Monument" also attest to the long debate over whether to preserve the wall as a monument, a discussion that continued for more than a decade before this goal was achieved politically.

The speedy demolition of the border fortifications in 1990 created several “non-sites” illustrated by the pictures in this publication. The emptiness that was left behind became a “shadow monument” and reminder that this had once been a historic site of international significance. Now overgrown with vegetation, it has become banal.

Meanwhile, Berlin continues to boom and develop, the grounds around the former border strip in some ways reflect other developments taking place in the city: here urban density and the optimization of floor area values, there recreational opportunities and the establishment of commemorative sites and memorial columns. Visitors may still encounter urban wastelands at a few sites, but these areas are becoming fewer. For those with knowledge of the history, a few areas of the former border strip function as memory storage sites. At the same time, in recent years the state and city of Berlin has become increasingly aware of its duty to remember the past. The most frequently asked question by Berlin tourists from all over the world continues to be: “Where was the wall?” At several sites, such as the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Strasse, this question is answered exemplarily.

There is still much to be done, however, in the area of political commemoration. This book takes a step in this direction by once again addressing this unusual heritage.

## **Berlin, a wall that divided, a memorial that unites**

Jordi Guixé i Corominas

Historian and director of the European Observatory on Memories

The moon peeped cautiously from behind the searchlight of the lonely old watchtower near Treptower Park in Berlin. A tower that was built to control and divide and was part of the 155 kilometres of the famous wall which, from 1961 until 9 November 1989, divided the people of Berlin, German society, the citizens of Europe and the whole world. The tower stood guard over the great social, human and political prison that was the wall. It also controlled the checkpoint on the beautiful old Oberbaum Bridge. There, not many years ago, repression, surveillance and division were the heaviest burden weighing down the everyday life of the men and women of Berlin.

We shall soon be commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the demolition of that dividing wall. Memorial processes must

serve for us to learn and build fairer societies. To unite what the violence of the past tried to separate. That is why we at the European Observatory on Memories, among other initiatives, have published this volume. In order to learn. Through a task of photographic and artistic research, a reflection on the public space, on the traces of a wall ten years after it was almost totally demolished. Those traces, whether modified or not, shape an eternal legacy. An aesthetic symbol that goes beyond the way the city has evolved: considerably. The urban, architectural or physical modification of the traces of the wall speaks to us of that. So do the parts that have not been modified – and how! And they speak to us of ourselves. For memory is the transmission of the past into the present. As the authors of *El Globus Vermell* collective say, the transmission of the images they have collected since 1997 introduces us into the urban fabric of Berlin through three key aspects, well found and closely linked: the restitching of unexplained traces of the wall; intervention, that is to say, conversion into a monument or a museum; and non-intervention. They are by no means lacking a story; quite the opposite; they are full of interactions with silences, disuses, random improvised marks of time and people in the public space.

Our friend and director of the Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation, Axel Klausmeier, reminds us that its enormous task of memory is connected to the present and is seen as a process in the ongoing construction of our democracies. Without that work on the present, memory is petrified and frozen; it does not act on our society. The Berlin Wall Memorial is a living one, in which the city and its people take part, rich in debates and in struggles to ensure the endurance of a memory which is uncomfortable for some but which the citizens did not want to disappear. Like the authors of this work, they wanted to fix the traces of that memory in a particular place: the remains of the Berlin Wall.

One of the most active agents in the defence of keeping the remains and a memorial more than 1.7 kilometres long was Manfred Fisher who, from the decree for the demolition of the wall –approved on 13 June 1990– fought to preserve scraps and stretches as a collective public heritage to avoid oblivion and the building of more walls. In the face of the pressure to remove every trace of it Fisher said: “We need some physical, palpable remains in order to understand what happened and what it meant.” As a defender of tangible memory he faced the bulldozers to resist its total disappearance. As did the local

people with the first proposal to turn it into a museum, which aimed to replace the original with a “symbolic, mural” sculpture. Those citizen groups brought pressure to bear on the governments that promoted the architectural competitions from 1998-1999, which were decisive for the survival of original parts and their conversion into a memorial.

The photographs which the reader can appreciate in this work bring new meaning to and hand on the memorial heritage of the wall. Different kinds of buildings, monuments, archaeological, architectural, artistic, testimonial and museographic interventions are represented here in the recent past, in contrast with the present. Not with any ecumenical intention, but because the authors –I deduce– see it and live it as an open process. According to Klausmeier, “a closed memorial petrifies, a memorial in a constant process of evolution and action dignifies and exemplifies about the present past.”

The memorial project, highly concentrated, true, at Bernauerstrasse, continued to evolve, preserving one tower, refurbishing the church as a rebuilt symbol of the past and of local action, or the field of cereals that are still harvested and

collected in a symbolic ceremony and truly effective memorial. But as we see in the book, the city is full of "wall". And since 2009, the Berlin Wall and its memorials –in the plural, since more than 25 other sites of memory are currently managed in the city– are an example and a European and international icon.

The story the Berlin Wall tells us is more topical than ever owing to the new waves of exiles and the misfortune of the new walls that are being built all over Europe and on the other continents. The perplexity of the present condemns us to the negligent stupidity of not learning from the lessons of the past, in both the public and political spheres. The Berlin Wall is in demand as a democratic heritage on the five continents for working on memory and human rights. But events also mark the present. The world is full of walls built by the greed of wars or the contemporary racial or social "apartheids" of postmodernity. History is not cyclical, events will never be the same, but we see how the democracies, sometimes so forgetful, are now retrieving spaces for internment and building new walls, where the recent, not so distant, genocidal dictatorships had shut up and repressed human beings.



The 45km of the strip of the Wall that separated Berlin  
monitored, observed, photographed from south to north in 1997 and 2018





























































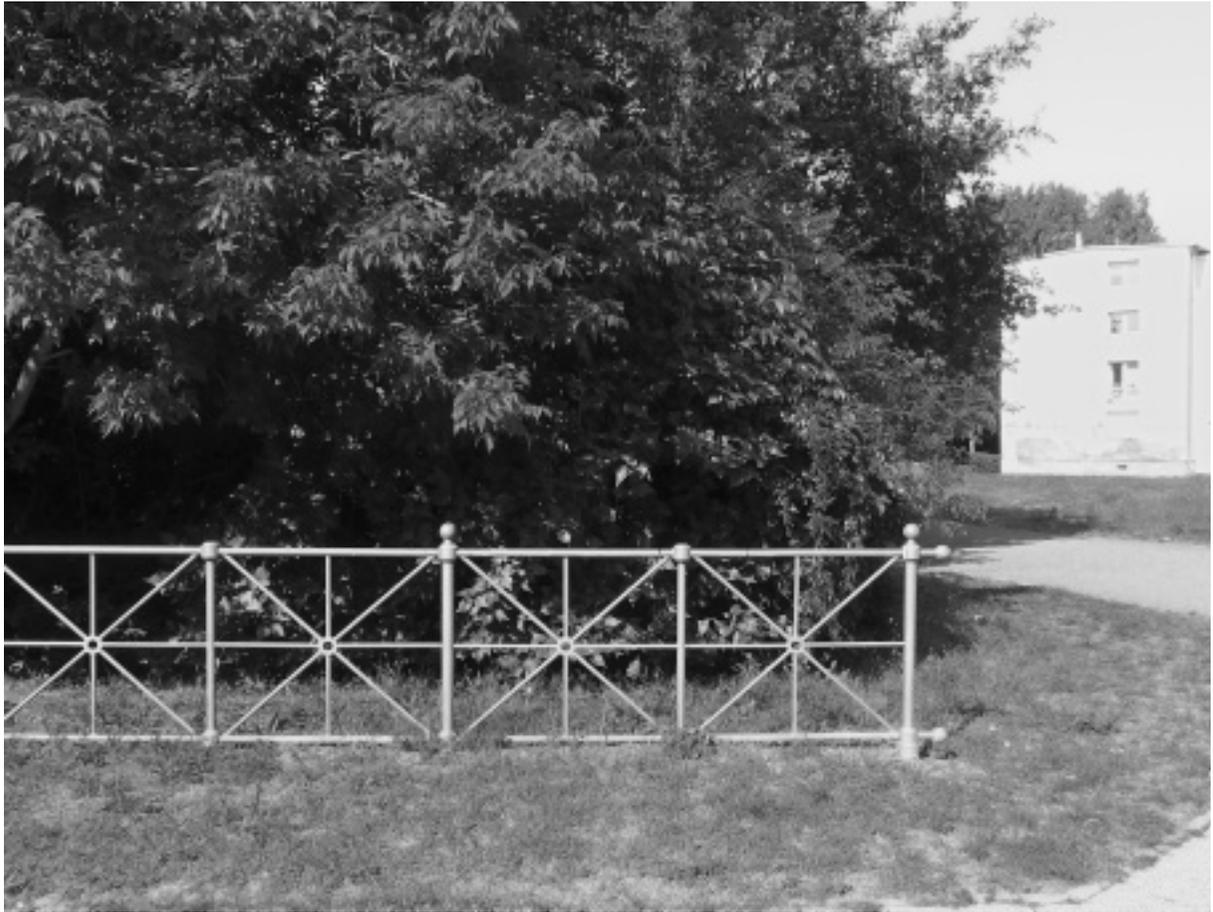






































































































































































128 | 1997 | Bernauer Straße, between Swinemünder Straße and Wolliner Straße





























142 | 1997 | Berliner Mauerweg, between Heinz-Brandt-Straße and Dannenwalder Weg













## Memory and atonement

Pere Buil Castells

Architect & partner at *vora arquitectura*, associate lecturer at ETSAV-UPC

Any city, observed with interest and curiosity, provides us with an opportunity to read its history through its urban form and architecture. If we pay attention we can see how cities explain themselves: the origins, the stages of growth, the historical episodes, the social and economic dynamics. Cities are social, organic constructions and their endurance makes them repositories of their own history. The physical traces of the architecture and, most of all, of the urban fabrics are difficult to eliminate.

That superimposition of various physical and morphological traces makes up their identity, constructed over the years, which will continue to shape itself with the changes in the society that will inhabit them in the future.

If cities are living organisms that speak of themselves, the monuments and memorials speak to us especially of the tale

society tells of itself; also of what the dominant ideas construct at each moment to shape their collective identity.

The tales are ephemeral, changing, like the monuments.

The monuments that glorify settings, episodes or heroes that are the constructors of collective pride are a reductive and simplistic way of looking at one's own history. Biased narratives of their own glorified episodes or characters, free of shadows.

The construction of more complex narratives of collective memory is more interesting, especially in the cases of historical episodes that are difficult to digest from a contemporary standpoint.

They are the memorials that do not glorify, but commemorate. Reminders of what the community is not proud of, episodes in whose commemoration it questions itself, criticises itself, remembers that it does not want to repeat them and wonders why they happened. Tools for the construction of a morally acceptable collective present and future.

### Berlin as a paradigm

Here the case of Berlin is exceptional. To a large extent it has constructed its present identity on the story of its role in the

most dramatic history of the 20th century. It has even made it an element of cultural and tourist attraction.

Berlin strips itself naked to reveal its dramas and wounds, to acknowledge German guilt before the world and to incorporate those events into the global story of the 20th century. Also to explain the division of the world into two impermeable blocs.

The line of the remains of the Berlin Wall explains the division of the city into two for over forty years. As do the urban discontinuities it generated, consequences of the development of the city with that interior frontier.

The Wall as a vehicle of atonement allows us to speak of at least three strategies. Three ways of dealing with its physical presence (or absence):

- The monumentalization and museumization of some stretches of the Wall as a fossilized reality, a support for an explanation from the sensibility of the present, commonly accepted but also part of a construction of identity.
- The stitching of the city on the void left by the Wall when it was demolished. Here the 'constructed' traces are interesting. Above and beyond the commemorative monuments and plaques of all kinds, the small marks are

striking, suggestive rather than informative (such as the laying of a line of slabs on the asphalt paving, for example), unexplained traces, distortions of an alien reality that represent the collective will not to forget and to construct its present identity on getting over, but never forgetting, that historical event.

- Non-intervention, beyond the museumized stretches and the vanished and redeveloped ones. Those neglected remains that still stand, smothered in graffiti, devoid of any story; remains in the residual public space that confront the anonymous, even indifferent, passer-by and the critical 'seekers' with a reality that allows them to reconstruct historical events without an 'official' explanation.

Moreover, in Berlin we find many commemorations of the Holocaust. The way Germany has tried to accept its liability for that tragic historical episode is exemplary. The country has monumentalized it from the preservation, interpretation and erection of new structures to keep alive in the collective memory a tale of guilt and shame, a permanent warning.

Germany concentrates atonement for almost all the guilt of the Holocaust, whilst other societies claim to be blameless

victims. A reductionist vision of black and white, good and bad. The collective memory is often the result of a wilfully simplistic story. The Holocaust had many accomplices, active and passive, all over Europe. It is simplistic to present the Nazis as the only guilty ones and all other Europeans as innocent victims of a regime and a war. It is all too simple a story.

In many parts of Europe, through remains, traces that still endure but which no-one has bothered to incorporate into the respective constructions of collective memory, a more complex, ambiguous, uncomfortable, story still lies hidden. A story which, if brought out, can explain and make all Europeans aware of many events from which we should learn, as Berlin has learned.



## Memorialisation of the past Collective memory or product consumption

Anna de Torrónategui

Social architect and member of the Raons Públiques cooperative

On the 9th of November 2019 the world commemorates the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. A wall that for 40 years not only divided the city in two but also Germany and the entire world: Capitalism versus Communism, West versus East. The 30th anniversary is a splendid opportunity to remember themes like the division of the city, the Cold War and all the events that lead up to peaceful reunification in 1989-1990. But this date is also an opportunity to remember the importance of learning from the past in order to be able to live a more conscious present and work towards the construction of a brighter future.

This date also made me think about how the memorialization of the past can be used to construct a collective memory and identity. How much can the transformation of the wall trail

and its so called "sites or places of memory" be used as enduring elements of remembrance?

### Memorialisation of the past

In 2008 Aleida Assmann wrote in one of her articles about the fact that the past used to be regarded as fixed and closed, a stable succession of historical events ordered by age and strongly influenced by the actions and decisions of a few. Currently, though, we are experiencing a shift to what Zygmunt Bauman described as liquid modernity. A time in which the idea of a solid past melts into a liquefied and constantly reconstructed recollection of the past that profoundly determines the future. This paradigmatic shift alerts us of the entangled relationship between history and memory. But it also allows us to reflect upon what Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon called "truth". The realisation of how the recount of historical events occurred in a time and place has historically been influenced by the interests of the ruling powers. Assmann gives a clear description of how the relationship between history and memory has evolved over time up to a postmodern stage characterised by a new interest in the interactions between both. History can no longer be seen as polarized from memories but rather a form of it. Since the 1980s

a new interest in modes of remembering as a form of social and cultural practice has arisen among historians. They started asking questions such as “What is known of the past in the present? Which events from the past are selected and how are they presented? What kinds of commemoration acts are devised?”

The ways in which the past can be memorialised can and do take multiple forms. Symbols, texts, images, rites, celebrations or even places can all be used as encoded narrations that give meaning to the present. For instance, Aldo Rossi demonstrated in many of his studies how architecture and urban structures are “elements of continuation” with the urban past. Their formalization and the meaning ascribed to them are strongly intertwined with the identity of the place and consequently with the identity of its inhabitants.

The places in which we live and the memories that these distil shape our behaviour and the way we think as much as our experience in them transforms them both physically and symbolically.

All memories, individual or collective, are anchored to a spatial framework. But, who decides what this constructed environment is, what and who determines what should be preserved, commemorated or erased?

### **Preservation as a form of memorialisation**

Rem Koolhaas and his studio were approached by Beijing government in 2002 to investigate and define a specific form of preservation for China. The team involved in the project started by looking at the history of preservation in terms of what has worldwide been preserved. They soon realized that “everything we inhabit is potentially susceptible to preservation”. It became the first time that someone was possibly thinking of preservation as a prospective activity instead of proactive, as it had always been. Taking into account the mediocrity of much of our currently constructed environment, they stressed the importance of deciding in advance what will be built for posterity. Consequently, and bearing in mind the dominance of lobbies to keep themes such as authenticity, ancientness and beauty, Koolhaas threw an invitation to imagine a kind of barcode super-imposed over the entire centre of Beijing. The barcode will determine what has to be preserved forever or systematically scraped.

However radical this proposition might sound it is also, without a doubt, a much more democratic and impartial way of preserving not only part of the physical environment but also the activities and people hosted in it.

Similarly, Christine Boyer strongly criticizes the “pseudo-historical” imagery used in commercial operations of urban renovation in her book “The city of collective memory”. Hilde Heynen also reinforces this view when talking about monuments and memorials in current times: *“On the one hand they enjoy an immense popularity, attracting ever more people as visitors, or in more active roles as caretakers and defenders. On the other hand it is often stated that historical consciousness is waning and that the tourist gaze directed at monuments fails to grasp their real meaning as connectors to the past.”*

Berlin, like many other cities around the world, seems to have found a new source of income through an endless number of tourist activities that somehow claim to memorialize the past. But where does the awareness of a past that can help us to understand and construct our collective memory and identity end and where does it start to be a mere consumption of a product? In a time of mass information how do these mummified spaces and all that is said about them become meaningful to us? Do all visitors of the Berlin wall have a genuine interest in it? And even more importantly, who is deciding what parts of the wall should be preserved and which memories recounted?

### **Collective memories**

Susan Sontag argued that there is no such thing as collective memory. Whilst individual memory is a term everybody feels at ease with, collective memory is a contemporary concept, whose real meaning is not completely clear. Sontag says that all memories are individual and irreproducible as they are created in one’s mind and will die with the person. Collectively we can share the account of individual’s memories, exchange them, select them, think about them, but we cannot collectively remember. Although Aleida Assmann agrees that *“experiential memories are embodied and thus they cannot be transferred from one person to another”*, she also argues that they can be shared. Once an individual shares a memory with a group, this memory becomes a part of a more complex and inclusive view of the past. When the term “collective memory” was coined for the first time by Maurice Halbwachs, its author connected it with another term: “social frame” to avoid misunderstandings. According to Halbwachs, *“no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections”*. Each of us, as individuals, is part of distinct groups to which we ascribe, according to a structure of shared concerns, values, customs and experiences that constitute a social frame.

Sometimes, though, some social groups such as one's family, country or gender are integrated as part of our identity and we refer to them as "we". But on occasions the history of the group surpasses our lifespan and then we cannot remember our collective past, we have to memorialise it. In this sense collective memory is a crossover between semantic and episodic memory.

Any social group does not "have" a memory of themselves. They need to use memorialisation of symbols, myths, narratives, ceremonies, images, monuments or even places to "make" one. Both the identity and the memory of the group are constructed based on a permanent process of inclusion and exclusion that defines their boundaries.

### **Group identity in place**

*"Each aspect, each detail of this place has in itself a meaning intelligible only for the members of the group, because each part of the space corresponds to as many different aspects of the structure and the life of its society, at least as regards whatever is most stable in it."* Halbwachs poses with this statement an interesting counterpoint to a study undertaken by Brian Osborne. His study looked at the strategies used in Canada to integrate people separated by geography, history,

ethnicity, class and gender with the aim to consolidate a national identity. Hilde Heynen also supported the idea that places harbour memories and therefore sustain identity. The physical environment in which we live, either its buildings or urban structures, can be seen as a historical theatre, a long-lasting observation of human life which provides us with a sense of continuity and truth. Similarly to the collective memories, places and their inherent meaning are mediated items whose preservation or demolition is at the mercy of the interests of ruling powers, whether political or economic. Perhaps the most eloquent question in the current days is not who should decide which buildings represent better our identity but whether buildings can still express any identity at all. What could be the interest of preserving the facades, for instance, of Buckingham Palace if there was no Monarchy to host and no British citizens felt identified with the values and ideas behind its construction? Hilde Heynen reminds us that "before the Industrial Revolution, people lived their lives in environments that changed only very slowly. Individuals could experience their own life as a passing instance against a background of permanence and continuity." Then, the explosion of global growth and the increase of migratory flows implied a shift in the relationship with the past,

undoubtedly a shift in the way new societies identify themselves, in an everyday more individualised world.

### **And now?**

In this text we mention how the memorialisation of the past is used to construct collective memories and identity. The 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall constitutes an excellent example of this. Berlin is exceptionally interesting because the fall of the Wall left a strip of around 43 kilometres across the city physically empty but full of memories.

Our past is not a linear and clearly layered succession of events but rather a complex system of events of which much is still largely unknown. To make an analogy with the world of construction, we could imagine our history as a stone wall whose foundation is the earth itself and the wall is built with all kinds of stones, with different sizes and properties, some local and others from afar. Some stones are purposely cut and others recycled from previous walls. The stones can be arranged and rearranged depending on the needs and interests, as our history has been.

Today around 3.5 million people live in Berlin, a population composed of more than 20 different ethnicities, each of them

carrying their own memories and identities. This could suggest that perhaps the importance should not be placed on remembering a past that can no longer apply to everyone. As Koolhaas suggests in relation with the preservation of our cities, we should start deciding what part of our collective present is worth preserving and what is not. Could we then perhaps stop fixing our attention on what we have been and start to imagine the community that we would like to become in the future?



## (Land)marks

Carles Serra Hartmann

Architect

Any summer Sunday at the Schlesischer Busch. People strolling along the canal, cyclists dodging them as they hurtle past, kids chasing each other and shouting rude words, teenagers listening to canned music, couples rolling on the grass, groups of friends playing “kubb”... If Franz Hessel could go for a walk there –once he had got over the initial shock and disorientation– he would certainly take out his notebook and jot down some observations on the hustle and bustle of the life there. He would sniff the scent of the smoke rising between the oaks, where people have their picnics in the shade of the trees. And he would also take note of the strange appearance and exotic accents of the members of those groups, of different ages and generations and generally in a very good mood. Hessel would not know that, but it is highly likely that they are refugees who have arrived in the country in the last wave of migrants. People who in most cases would have

made a long journey across many borders and who, at weekends when the weather is fine, released from their integration courses, relax in the open air as they used to do at other times and in other parts of the world. He would take note, then, of that cascade of life and colour and would not suspect that just thirty years ago this bit of Berlin was quite different. “The Wall passed through here”, we would tell him, “the border”. The unnameable Todesstreifen. But in view of so much joie de vivre, he would find it hard to believe. At the Schlesischer Busch today nobody seems to be aware of it. Least of all the refugees, who know more than enough about borders. Only a crumbling watchtower which no longer inspires fear but looks more like a harmless electric substation still stands as a witness to those times.

Hessel would be astonished at the things that have happened to his city since his days as a promeneur. We would have to bring him up to date with the countless episodes of destruction and reconstruction that have taken place since then. And in view of the appearance of streets, parks and squares, of the free flow of pedestrians and vehicles, of the healthy aroma breathed by the Berliner Luft, he might come to the conclusion that the dreaded Wall is no longer there.

And indeed, if only in physical terms, the border has practically disappeared from the image of the city. It has become invisible to the unschooled eye and the locals cross it thousands of times a day without realising. Today the Wall only features in the tourist's morbid urge to have his picture taken at the hot points of the Cold War and the expert eye of the scholar who comes in search of it. Discreetly signposted, its line is now fully integrated into an urban fabric in an advanced state of regeneration. The successful exercise in town planning and historical memory that is the Mauerweg, with its string of roads, parks and amenities, with its informative and documentary panels, and the informal uses generated on the few plots of land that are still empty, has been fully taken on board by the citizens. The robust social health enjoyed by places such as the Schlesischer Busch is a good example. But so are the armies of cyclists and in-line skaters who train along the Teltowkanal between Rudow and Plänterwald, the throngs that flock at weekends to the Mauerpark or the Hanami festival on the avenues of cherry trees in spring. Here Hessel might come to the conclusion that the urban regeneration, the healing of the wound opened by the Wall is –as far as the public space is concerned– clean, smooth, complete. A thing of the past. The completion of the

fabric of buildings would also seem to confirm that: today there are few gaps along the trail; the ones that are left are being rapidly filled in and the volumetry of the streets has recovered a compactness that in many cases dates back even to the years before the Second World War. A regeneration that is undoubtedly fostered by the juncture of economic boom and building fever the country is living through.

Nevertheless, it may well be that the expert eye of our promeneur would also analyse the material, the fibre of which the private space –the offices, the dwellings– is made, that goes with the Mauerweg today and frames these parks and these roads. And while he was doing that he might jot down in his notebook that, despite the physical disappearance of the Wall, there still seem to be symptoms of the persistence of a certain kind of border, of an intangible and invisible, but nonetheless real, wall. And that would not be the evident cut in the life stories of so many people affected by the events that began in August 1961 – in the final weighty analysis, the victims and their families. Nor of that other wall of the mind which, despite the generational change since 1989, means that even today there are many Berliners brought up on one side or the other –Ossis or Wessis– who find it strange to

be treading sectors of what was once “enemy territory”. Nor the invisible –but undeniable– wall which, thirty years later, determines deep cultural and economic differences between the two Germanys.

No, Hessel would not write about the long shadow of the ideological propaganda on either side of the old political border, nor the duplication of structures of a divided city forced to become artificially multcentred. Looking more closely at the fibre of that regenerating flesh it is highly likely that he would think more of the survival of a wall that is becoming a border in itself, a kind of excluding socioeconomic limes that rises above the rest of the fabric and runs through the city like a haughty, glittering roof ridge. A kind of fold, a protruding seam within the reach only of the few. An invisible social wall –in short–, erected under the sign and in the age of globalisation, hardly a response to the current demand for affordable housing, more a contribution to a rapid gentrification process. That would be the case, for example, of the latest residential projects along the Mauerweg on Bernauer Straße (whose landscaping and documentary handling is, however, impeccable) and many other interventions on the immediate hinterland of Prenzlauer Berg.

But we would also find samples at various points of Kreuzberg or Mitte and, needless to say, on the rapidly changing banks of the Spree.

This phenomenon is part of a highly speeded-up change in the character that has made the city famous in the last thirty years. The improvisation, the informality, the casualness that were in the air in the early nineties are disappearing, displaced by the dazzle of property promotions activated by extraneous economic interests. The old Wall strip is becoming an example of that. And to the “bonjour tristesse” that crowns Siza’s contribution to the 1987 International Building Exhibition a more or less enigmatic, but equally revealing, “bitte lebn” has been added. Meanwhile, in the suburbs the filling in of that strip is taking its toll on the image of the city in the shape of sprawling residential areas, of abysmal architectural quality, the product of an ill-conceived laissez faire for private enterprise and the endemic indifference of the town planning authority to the outskirts of the city. Above and beyond the traditional Kleingartenanlagen that line a good part of the Wall trail, recent residential developments in Johannistal, Rudow or Kleinmachnow bear witness to that supposedly idyllic way of life based on the car which so many

Berliners have chosen for their families. Interminable districts of detached houses that embody the enthusiastic swing –on both sides of the old border– towards the victorious market economy.

And so both in the centre and the outskirts of Berlin –and for different reasons– Hessel would see that that physical healing of the wound, apparently so complete and clean, is in fact made relative in the socioeconomic dimension by the kind of needle and thread used. A golden needle and silver thread in the centre and little more than a placebo in the suburbs.

Just as it now seems widely accepted that beneath the official reunification discourse what we have seen in practice is a phagocytosis of the East by the West, the majority also seem to be of the opinion that the building of the Wall was a catastrophic decision with appalling consequences in all spheres. Both the material and ideological absorption of the GDR by the Federal Republic and the ostracism to which German society has relegated that episode of its recent history seem to point in that direction. And today, in no way forgetting or ignoring the calamity it was, the city has a rare opportunity to make amends and shape its future along that

wound that crosses it from top to bottom. Thirty years after the disappearance of the Wall more advantage seems to have been taken of that opportunity in the design and construction of the public space along the Mauerweg than in the private space that provides the backdrop. Exclusion and shortage of affordable housing in the centre and unsustainability and banalisation of the image of the city in the suburbs call for rectifying policies from the Administration or more far-reaching participatory processes.

The healing, then, is still merely skin-deep today, the internal wound persists and, what is more, has changed its nature. It no longer separates political and economic regimes that confront one another all around the world, but residents of the same city according to their wallets. A complex but familiar diagnosis. Perhaps the treatment might consist of retrieving from the store rooms of the past some of the principles that inspired the “behutsame Stadterneuerung” current of the 80s –a social and demographic mix and a range of uses, amongst other things– in order to reach the deepest tissues of the urban skin. Also to resist the globalising steam-roller that is crushing the emblematic character of the city. And given the times we are living in, to call a halt to the ghettoisation of the less

privileged classes, the most evident sign of Germany's historical failure in matters of integration. Perhaps in that way the refugees –notable representatives of those minorities– might face their future with more guarantees, enjoying the private space on the same terms of equality and with the same good humour as they do the public space today at sunny weekends.

Although the popularity of places like Checkpoint Charlie might lead one to think otherwise, the East-West dichotomy is already prehistory and the Wall is no more than a relic of painful memory – if anyone thinks of it, that is. Today there is another border. We are living in the time of a brutal and unjust worldwide confrontation between the North and the South. And with the refugee crisis, Germany at the heart of the European Union and Berlin as its capital have once again become –against their will– the leading players in that confrontation, which is turning the Mediterranean into a deadly border and awakening in Europe old phantoms of a terrifying past. A complex situation, difficult to deal with, which nonetheless offers the city a great opportunity. The chance to persevere through its town planning with the free and tolerant character that has made it famous. And to take

up the challenge which, until quite recently, another famous slogan –on a wall in the “Köpi”– offered to the conscience of the passing promeneur: “Die Grenze verläuft nicht zwischen den Völkern, sondern zwischen oben und unten.” Words which Hessel's notebook would certainly not have ignored.

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