



Journal of Liberal Arts and Humanities (JLAH)
Issue: Vol. 1; No. 7; July 2020 pp. 48-58
ISSN 2690-070X (Print) 2690-0718 (Online)
Website: www.jlahnet.com
E-mail: editor@jlahnet.com

Falling for the Wall

Christina Parte

University College London
Department of German
E-mail: c.parte@ucl.ac.uk

This article is an enquiry into the nature and function of walls. It looks at the Berlin Wall (1961-1989) in particular and the way in which it has been fetishized before and after its fall. Lars Laumann's in sight fulfillment portrait of the objectum sexual Eija-Riitta (Eklöf) Berliner-Mauern life with models of the Berlin Wall in Sweden (Berlinmuren, 2008) is used as a case study to shed light on the obsessive relationship between human beings and iconic, for bidding architecture. While the scale models of the Berlin Wall function as phallic substitutes, Eija-Riitta's desire for objects which divide (fences, walls, guillotines) highlights and subverts the role of the fetish in an amusing and grotesque way. The scale models of the Western Wall are fetishized as screens, screening off the actual fortification system, but are also revered as dividing agents. I argue that Eija-Riitta's object love points to identifications and affects vis-à-vis the Berlin Wall that go beyond official sanctioned discourse and make the Wall's paradoxical nature and historical situatedness between contested border wall and object of desire visible.

Key terms: Berlin Wall, Cold War, Fetishism, Iconic Architecture, Objectum Sexuality

Introduction

The architect and architectural historian Wendy Pullan differentiates between two kinds of walls.¹ The function of old, pre-modern walls of protection and civic participation 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. New, modern walls of exclusion, on the other hand, are meant to divide populations. New walls, according to Pullan, represent draconian measures to 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." ("Spatial Discontinuities," *Locating Urban Conflicts*, 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 (1961-1989) 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.² 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 that 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 they help to screen out suffering or destitution." (*Walled States* 121)

¹ Wendy Pullan, "Spatial Discontinuities: Conflict Infrastructures in Contested Cities," in *Locating Urban Conflicts*, eds. Wendy Pullan and Britt Baillie (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 17-36.

² Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2014).

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 (*Walled States* 25-26).

Not only did the Berlin Wall as material object stop the steady flow of refugees and make attempts to escape 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.^{III}

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.” (*Walled States* 40) Because of the already existing postwar 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, the seemingly 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, the sociologist Andrea Komlosy argues^{IV}. As a result, the bipolar order, which characterised 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. (*Grenzen* 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 comprehensively developed personality (allseitig entwickelte Persönlichkeit)^V had to be forged. 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 Greg Eghigian as “the sheltered, defended human” (“Homo Munitus,” *Socialist Modern*, 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. (“Homo Munitus,” *Socialist Modern*, 59)

Thus, the Wall as concrete metaphor and precondition for realising 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 (“Homo Munitus,” *Socialist Modern*, 56).

Distorted and Partial Views

In his introduction to *The Lost Graffiti of Berlin* Ruggero Guarini reads walls primarily as linguistic signs, ‘carved in stone’, denying entry or exit.^{VI}

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. (8)

^{III} See Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 2014), 66-117; and Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall. East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 109-116.

^{IV} Andrea Komlosy, *Grenzen. Räumliche und soziale Trennlinien im Zeitenlauf* (Wien: Promedia, 2018), 183-223.

^V Greg, Eghigian, “Homo Munitus: The East German Observed,” in *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, eds. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 45.

^{VI} Ruggero Guarini “Introduction,” in *The Lost Graffiti of Berlin*, Francesco and Alessandro Alacevich (Rome: Gremese, 1991), 7-15.

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, the anthropologist Tim Ingold points out, was enclosure.^{vii} 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.^{viii}

At the same time 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 Austrian philosopher Wilhelm Berger's argument for fences^{ix}:

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. (*Über die Zäune* 15)

(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.)

Not only did the Berlin Wall as barbed wire fence and later 'solidified' intervention go hand in hand with the dynamism it provoked, its paradoxical character was heightened by the fact that it was Janus-faced, with its two sides, and eventually two walls^x, facing in opposite directions, forcing the onlooker, whose view was blocked by the material structure, 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^{xi}, acquired a body. It epitomised, what Etienne Balibar called an over determined border^{xii}, 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" ("What is a border?," *Politics and the Other Scene*, 79) 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.^{xiii}

^{vii}Tim Ingold, *Lines* (London: Routledge, 2007), 42. 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.

^{viii} See Briese, Olaf. "Wartungsarm und Formschön. Zur Ästhetik der Berliner Mauer," *Weimarer Beiträge*, vol. 55 (2009): 430-454. Briese discusses the different generations of Berlin Wall and their aesthetic effects.

^{ix}Wilhelm Berger et al., *Über die Zäune* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2011).

^xSee Olaf Briese, "Wartungsarm und Formschön," 433-447. 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.

^{xi}See Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain. From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 375-388.

^{xii}Etienne Balibar "What is a border?," in *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002), 75-86.

Balibar argues that overdetermined borders are always more than mere boundaries. They resonate geopolitical importance.

^{xiii}See Gerhard Paul, *Das visuelle Zeitalter*. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 582-608.

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. 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^{XIV}.

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. ("From Bulwark of Freedom to Cosmopolitan Cocktails," *Divided But not Disconnected*, 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, commonly referred to as Wall of Shame (Schandmauer) (Fig.1). 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. In this way, the trauma of separation was overcome by the indulgence in the plenitude offered on the Western side of the divided city and by turning the Western side of the Wall into a phallic substitute.

The 'wound' of separation and the unwelcome perception of lack in the socio-historical context has echoes on the psychosexual level. In the 'Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (1924) Sigmund Freud describes the male infant's perception of the female vagina as castrated. In the phallic stage of psychosexual development, the infant eventually overcomes his own castration anxiety by abandoning his desire for the mother's body and identifying with the father's corporeal authority.^{XV} The normal outcome of the Oedipus Complex, according to Freud, is its dissolution and the overcoming of castration anxiety by repressing the initial belief in a female phallus.

For the future male fetishist as discussed by Freud in his 1927 essay 'Fetishism', the tension between the unwelcome perception of the mother lacking the penis and the confrontation with the counter-wish of the mother having the penis will not be dissolved and repressed but resolved in a compromise: the fetish as phallic substitute. Instead of abandoning the belief in the female phallus, it is displaced and intensified in form of the fetish.^{XVI}

^{XIV}Michelle A Standley, "From Bulwark of Freedom to Cosmopolitan Cocktails: The Cold War, Mass Tourism and the Marketing of West Berlin as a Tourist Destination," in *Divided But Not Disconnected. German Experiences of the Cold War*. Eds. Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht and Andrew Plowman (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 105-118.

^{XV}Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: vol.19 (1923-1925), Ego and the Id, and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 173-179. The little girl, according to Freud, does not suffer from castration anxiety but an inferiority complex due to the assumption of having lost the penis at some point. Her dissolution of the Oedipus Complex consists of accepting herself as castrated.

^{XVI}Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, ed. Adam Phillips (London: Penguin, 2006), 90-95.

Laura Mulvey broadens the Freudian concept and describes fetishism as a psychological and social structure that disavows knowledge in favour of belief.^{xvii} Mulvey locates fetishism in capitalist societies of the spectacle, where collective fantasies 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, has been 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. And this is also its weakness. 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. (*Fetishism and Curiosity*xiv)

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. German art historian and conservator 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.^{xviii} 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) (Fig. 2) come to stand in for an ever changing fortification system, characterized by 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 and can therefore be easily incorporated in the already existing Western visual canon. 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'^{xix} (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 welcome screen for the Western viewer.

The Western viewer saw, what was in many ways given to him or her to see and embraced distorted views despite better knowledge. Consciously or unconsciously he or she was constituted and constrained as Western viewer by a visual canon and a limited amount 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 viewer 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.

However, if the screen was removed, a blank, unadorned hinterland wall confronted the onlooker with its military sobriety. The threat of loss of free movement and implicitly loss of life was reinstated. Rather than being in control of what one saw, the blind gaze of the Wall turned the individual into a being who was framed and looked at. In *What Do Pictures Want?* 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 [...] 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)

^{xvii}Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), xi.

^{xviii}Leo Schmidt, "Die Botschaft der Mauersegmente," in *Die Berliner Mauer in der Welt*, ed. Anna Kaminsky (Berlin: Berlinstory, 2009), 228-235.

^{xix}See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism", 90. 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.

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.^{xx} 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 sexual^{xxi}, who was sexually and emotionally attracted to objects, in her case to objects with a rectangular form, parallel lines 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* 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^{xxii} (Fig.3). 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 website^{xxiii} nor in Laumann's video, the Wall as actual fortification system is shown. Eija-Riitta exclusively loved the Western side of the Wall, in front of which she posed 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 was 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 and the window of her room (Fig. 4). The backlit silhouetted cat stares at the viewer from behind the model indicating a possible threat beyond the first generation of the Wall (1961-1962). 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 Wall models' other, Eastern 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.

^{xx} W.J.T Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: Chicago UP. 2005)28-48.

^{xxi} "Welcome to Objectum-Sexuality Internationale", accessed July 1, 2018, <http://www.objectum-sexuality.org/>, 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.

^{xxii} Lars Laumann, *Berlinmuren*, 2008, video, <https://vimeo.com/52427622>.

^{xxiii} <http://www.berlinermauer.se>, accessed June 8, 2010.

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 (Fig.5). The first generation's martial character is tamed by this piece of skillful handwork and epitomizes Eija-Riitta's dangerously cute aesthetics.

In the contemporary Japanese context, Sianne Ngai points out, that cute aesthetics are 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.^{XXIV} Ngai defines cute aesthetics as aesthetics of powerlessness, where the exaggerated cuteness of objects can also provoke sadistic impulses of 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 mute 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 *Strange Love: Married to the Eiffel Tower* 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 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 a post-traumatic stress syndrome due to a dysfunctional family and sexual abuse within the family and later in life.^{XXV}

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 (Fig. 6). 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.

Undoubtedly, Eija-Riitta's empathy for the Berlin Wall as vulnerable, deformed being, that had been mutilated, was repressed but all-pervasive and 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 interpellated subject ("The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde", 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.

Conclusion

In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* Jane Bennett contests the narrative of modernity's disenchantment, the inevitable sense of loss and 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.^{XXVI}

^{XXIV} Ngai, Sianne. "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, vol.31, no.4 (Summer 2005): 811-847.

^{XXV} Piotrowska, Agnieszka. *Strange Love: Married to the Eiffel Tower*, June 8, 2008, documentary, tv movie, <https://vimeo.com/19783541>.

^{XXVI} Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001)3-16.

She describes the moment of enchantment as a 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 fetishisation 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)

Eija-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 side of the 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, Eija-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.^{xxvii} Ellen emphasizes “the universal human character of fetish-like behavior” (“Fetishism”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 (“Fetishism” 226).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. 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^{xxviii}:

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 Stahlarmierung 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. (“Vom Symbol der Unterdrückung zur Ikone der Befreiung”175)

(The overcoming of the Wall heralded the physical dissolution of the now functionless fortification system. Thousands of wallpeckers 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 wallpeckers 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.)

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 the historian Robert Darnton points out, 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.^{xxix} “Their [East Berliners] world came walled. So to dance on the Wall was to turn the world upside down:

^{xxvii} Roy Ellen, “Fetishism,” *Man, New Series*, vol. 23, no. 2 (June, 1988): 213-235.

^{xxviii} Leo Schmidt, “Vom Symbol der Unterdrückung zur Ikone der Befreiung – Auseinandersetzung, Verdrängung, Memorialisierung,” in *Die Berliner Mauer. Vom Sperrwall zum Denkmal*, ed. Wienfried Heinemann *et al.* (Bühl/Baden: Konkordia, 2009), 169-186.

^{xxix} Robert Darnton, *Berlin Journal. 1989-1990* (New York: Norton, 1991)74-86.

Wahnsinn (crazy), as they kept repeating.” (*Berlin Journal* 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” (*Berlin Journal* 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 reminds of 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, the much-hated prison was quickly dismantled and model Bastilles as relics were carved out of the original material. The once notorious state prison, according to Lüsebrink and Reichardt, which at the time of its storming only held four prisoners captive, served as a collective symbol: it embodied the totalitarian regime.^{xxx}

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 (*The Bastille* 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 had turned into two separate entities, with their own political, cultural and economic centres.^{xxxI} 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.

In this light, Eija-Riitta and her friend Erika, taking their husbands/ model Walls on a ride, sledding on a road through wintery 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, might have been experienced as sanctuary by Eija-Riitta and effectively drew the line between herself as animist and objectum sexualand 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.

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 the ‘joyful moment of liberation’^{xxxII} 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.

^{xxx} Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, eds., *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

^{xxxI} See Emily Pugh, *Architecture*, 69-84; 158-160.

^{xxxII} See Jonathan Bach, “The Berlin Wall after the Berlin Wall: Site into sight,” *Memory Studies*, vol. 9 (1), 2016: 48-62. 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” (“The Berlin Wall after the Berlin Wall”, 56).

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^{xxxiii}. 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^{xxxiv} describes 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. ("Was von der Mauer blieb" 21)

Most of us associate with the Berlin Wall the trauma of division. However, what has been underestimated is the fact that the division, reinforced by the dividing agent as phallic substitute, also generated clear-cut, mutually exclusive, possibly comfortable, identities. Eija-Riitta's and Erica's disavowal of the negative effects of division and provocative desire for the dividing agent remind of 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. When the Berlin Wall as 'screen' was dismantled in 1989, it had long been introjected and remembered in form of an image, while its battered, ruinous other side, has continued to haunt the imagination.

Legend

Figure 1: photograph (13 August 1964), Ernst Schwahn, West Berlin, Berlin Wall at the corner of Bernauer Straße and Wolliner Straße, view from West Berlin © Bundesregierung B 145 Bild-00014170, Koblenz

Figure 2: photograph (10 November 1989), Klaus Lehnartz, Brandenburg Gate West and East Berliners sit or stand on the Berlin Wall, view from West Berlin © Bundesregierung B 145 Bild-00012815, Koblenz

Figure 3, 4 and 5: film stills, Lars Laumann, *Berlinmuren* (2008), projection video, 23 minutes 56 seconds © Lars Laumann, courtesy of Maureen Paley, London

Figure 6: photograph (20 February 1990), Manfred Uhlenhut, Wall peckers at work
© ddrbilarchiv.de/Manfred Uhlenhut

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^{xxxiii} See Sunil Manghani, *Image Critique & The Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008). 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: "the euphoric narrative of victory for Western liberalism" (64).

^{xxxiv} Axel Klausmeier, "Was von der Mauer blieb", 161-168.

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