

THE NEW BOUNDARIES LIKE EXILE OF CONSCIENCE

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Keeping wondering about the value of the military barriers built with defensive purposes, we continue our study reaching the present day. This time, the attempt to transpose graphically a phenomenon that is difficult to perceive because of its dimensional and social magnitude prompted us to use as the interpretation key the comparison between two great defence works, belonging to the same kind: the continuous wall system.

The *Great Wall* of China and the *Tijuana Wall* are two experiences that may appear similar, but they are culturally and temporally distant. This essay analyses them aiming to generate a tool for understanding the phenomenon of building spaces. In order to do this, the graphic synthesis process becomes the place for thinking about the ideological contents and the social involvements that are intrinsic in every single barrier built.

INTRODUCTION

This work is an in-depth analysis of the former one, titled *Limes et confinis* (Pastore, Sisci 2019). Together, they constitute an attempt to build a graphic model able to interpret the mind perception of the space limits and lead to an objective view of them.

In *Limes et confinis* the attention was focused on 23 works made with the objective of defence, starting from the Roman Empire age until the post-II World War. The aim was to build a visual cognition of objects –in some way make them visible– which for their territorial extension and temporal distance from the present times, have lost the value of elements capable of building space.

In this essay, we consider walls with defence purposes built in the period starting from the fall of the Berlin Wall until today, trying to analyse the visual and perceptive implications of these ‘new boundaries’. Effectively, the objective, remains the same for the two papers, a part for the temporal distance of the buildings considered. The first important step of research is to observe the fact that peculiar phenomenon keep developing independently from the civilizations that generated them and still keep eluding the visual and mental perception of those who try to understand them.

Having to represent objects that are impossible to experience completely, it was necessary to identify a unitary criterion for their observation. A first analysis led us to observe the low architecture value of these barriers: the construction systems range from a simple barbed wire to reinforced concrete prefabricated elements. For this reason, besides focusing on the immaterial peculiarities more than the material ones, it has been chosen to structure a comparative process in order to achieve a representation based more on their ideological meanings rather than the morphological one.

THE IDEOLOGY OF SECURITY

The urban walls –or fortification walls in detached provinces—are traditionally intended as devices to safeguard and to bound territories. Whether it was a small State or a big Empire, the making of bastions, towers and walls had multiple functions: to intimidate the enemies (preventing them from invading); to consolidate borders and celebrate conquests, obtaining in this way outposts in far lands; to promote propaganda which the political class would use to give the people a sensation of strength and safety; to create a civil harmony excluding the threat of the ‘outside’, empowering the idea of the ‘inside’ . Between all of them, the latter is the one that kept being the main elements promoting the building of military works of this kind.

We can say that even today the presence of walls is mainly due to similar strategies, based on the will of making a symbol of political strength, at the same time satisfying the need for protection.

The first reason supporting walls is the construction of an ideology of safety. This is confirmed by the fact that some of these expensive and anachronistic works don't even follow the actual State borders and they cannot be considered genuine fiscal signs to mark territories. For example, the wall that divides the city of Belfast into the Catholic and Protestant zones is a ‘boundary within a boundary’: one is the physical border of the political organisation –the national border–, the other is cultural and religious boundary to clearly distinct from ‘the different’ –inside the same city.

Therefore, the focus shall be, the dialectics between the inseparable hendiadys space-power and the binary concept friend/enemy intrinsic of the thanatopolitics. Such dialectics identifies in the border not only a peripheral and defining element of a population but also the non-place within where this dialectic happen (Cavalletti, 2005; Augé, 2009).

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Martin Bureau in his art project *Walls of Disorder* (Figure 1), opens with a question his video *Israel and Palestine – They asked nobody*: “And the question is: what do you think when you see the wall?”. A statement follows: “They asked nobody. They don't ask anybody. This is military order”. Then, a sequence of citizens' testimonies, leads those who listen to see the reality, with few simple words.



Fig. 1 Separation Wall (Israeli) or Apartheid Wall (Arabic), Bethlehem (a) Qalqyilia (b). Photos by Martine Bureau.

Acknowledging such questions, this research wants to understand the meanings of the barriers made with anti-migration or segregation purposes, from 1945 to 2016, starting from the *space practice* (Lefebvre, 1974), and reaching a visual/graphical translation that can show the importance of the phenomenon, to eventually make it comprehensible.

Thereby, to keep asking about the various kinds of defensive superstructures and which techniques are used to make them, becomes an important inquiry. The assumptions underpinning the study are firstly the trend of abandoning the practice of building space-time perception models like maps, replaced by acritical and undifferentiated mapping practice for any phenomenon. The other assumption is the transformation of the social qualities towards an extreme fragmentation.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find out that the current period is the one when the barriers which pretend to defend territorial identities are seeing a remarkable increase in number.

Thirty years after Berlin

The age of the big defensive structures seemed to end with the fall of the Berlin Wall (11/1989), and the decline of the 'Iron Curtain'. In the European territory the freedom of movement, favoured by the globalisation processes, started a period of profound change in which the strict control on the borders clashed with the easiness of crossing them by airplanes.

A crucial event in migration that showed the illusion of a world with no boundaries, was the landing of the Albanian ship *Vlora* at the port of Bari –in southern Italy– on the 8th of August in 1991 (Figure 2). About 20.000 people taking advantage of the opening of their country borders after the downfall of the socialist regime of Enver Hoxha, highjacked a ship docked in Valona to head towards the Italian coast. Later, this episode became a symbol of the global immigration phenomenon.

Fig. 2 The ship *Vlora* on 8th August 1991 morning at the port of Bari.



In 1984 Foucault said “you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development, but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (Foucault, 1984/2010).

In the genesis process of defensive structures, Imagination is the key element, twice: firstly for those who imagine a different, better future beyond the barriers, then for those who build them, interpreting the difference as a threat to be kept under control. The demonstration of the growth of a need for safety, born after the constitution of fluid geopolitical spaces needing the definition of their new boundaries, is the exponential increase of the barriers built to prevent migrations.

The *Université du Québec à Montréal's* study (Vallet, 2014) traces the following evolution: 27 years after the fall of the *Berlin Wall*, we went from 16 barriers to 63 ones, disseminated on the whole planet, 2 of which in America (National borders partially or fully fenced-off. The majority of Brazil's proposed barrier comprises a non-physical 'virtual' wall, monitored by drones and satellites), 16 in Europe, 12 in Africa and 36 in Asia. The reasons declared by the governments are: to prevent illegal traffics, contraband, and illegal immigration and to control the territory.

Their presence reveals the self-recognition processes of an individual within today's society, increasingly fragmented. The disintegration of the logics of identification and belonging to a group, seems to have awakened ancestral fears that result in realising methods to control the territory, whose practice is lost in history. This need for safety and safeguard of the good, private and communal at the same time, becomes the bearer of xenophobic feelings which were not so evident in other times of human history.

The Tijuana Wall like the Great Wall?

"Are you ready? We will build a great wall along the southern border – and Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. [...] On Day One we will be working on an impenetrable, physical, tall, powerful, beautiful, southern border wall. We will use the best technology, including above–and below–ground sensors [...] towers, aerial surveillance and manpower to supplement the wall." (Donald J. Trump during a major speech on immigration in Phoenix, Arizona. 31 August 2016).

The *Tijuana Wall* extends on the whole border separating the U.S. from Mexico, but today not all of its 3140 km have been completed (Figure 3). Its building started in the nineties with the proclamation of the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* by President George H. W. Bush and it is a physical monument of American hard-line immigration policy.

This impressive defensive structure recalls the memory of an image that is often compared to it: the *Great Wall* of China (Figure 4). However, their ontological difference is real and to understand it, it is necessary to observe each of these two experiences trying to assume the viewpoint of the time in which they happened. The great defensive works like the *Great Wall* of China or the Roman *limes* can be intended more like zones of exchange and spatial knowledge, than sharp dividing lines of different things (Waldron, 1993).

The huge time gap that separates the *Great Wall* of China and the *Tijuana Wall* allows to make a comparison on different levels, for instance, historical, technical and ideological, to reveal, based on consolidated data (*Great Wall* of China), new data still in the process of development, not yet historicized (*Tijuana Wall*).

The first great difference is the forming process. The *Great Wall* –that goes through a big portion of current China– was born at the will of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) which decided to unify some pre-existing regional fortifications. In the following centuries, other dynasties kept contributing to the construction of what still nowadays can be considered the greatest work of border demarcation in the ancient world. Contrarily, the *Tijuana Wall* has been built just recently, pushed by the apparent requirement of defending the southern American borders from the migration stream of the peoples of the south. Its evolution is therefore quick and totally new. Analogously to the Wall of China, the *Tijuana Wall* is the greatest fortified border of the contemporary world.

Leaving the territory observation and moving to the architectural one (Figure 3c, 3d), it is immediately possible to make a comparison of the constitutive elements. The two

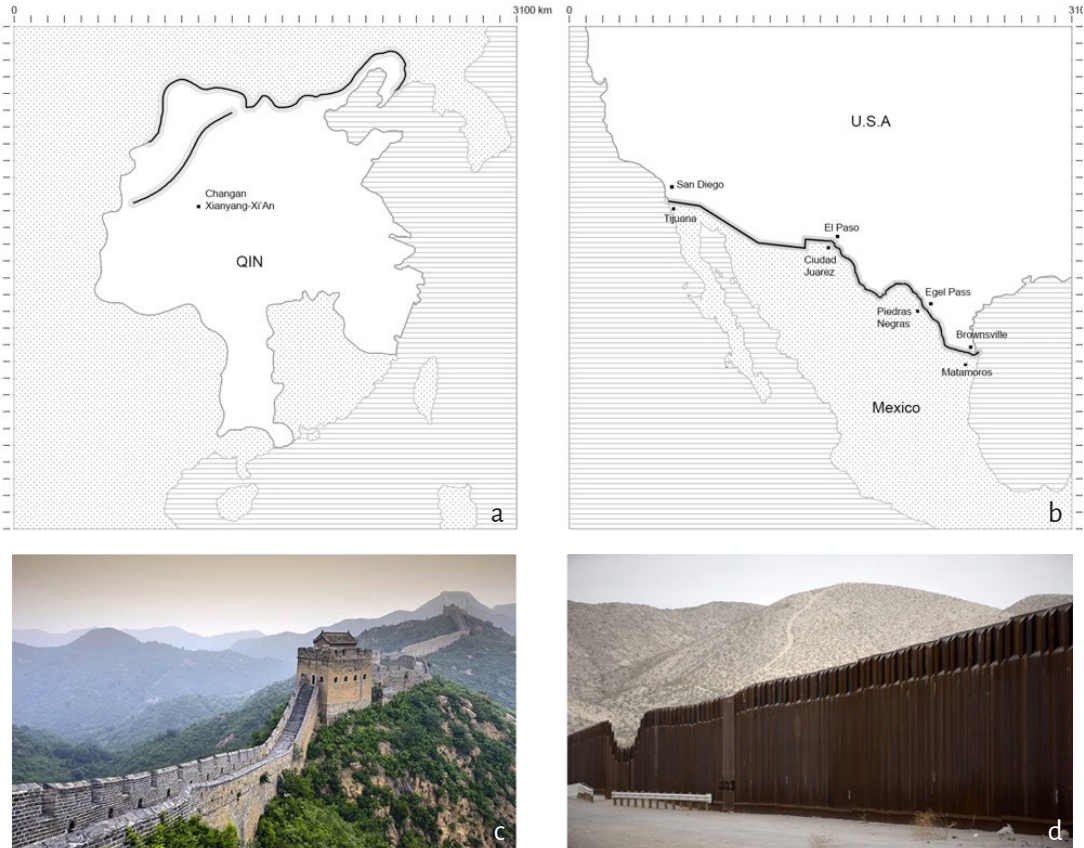


Fig. 3 Map of Qin Dynasty extension 221-206 a.C. (a). USA / Mexico border wall map (b). Building technique: *Great Wall of China* (c). *Tijuana Wall*; photo by Martine Bureau; video project *Wall of Disorder* (d).

walls are both linear, open and continuous, but different in techniques and materials used to build them. The construction method in stone blocks of the *Great Wall* embodies the extraordinary ideological strength that generated it: the mind representation matches the imagination. This unified image, solid and recognisable, is supported by military architectural elements like battlements, embrasures, towers, and forts made in what will be later called Oriental-style, which contributes to characterise the work (Ambrosi, 2015).

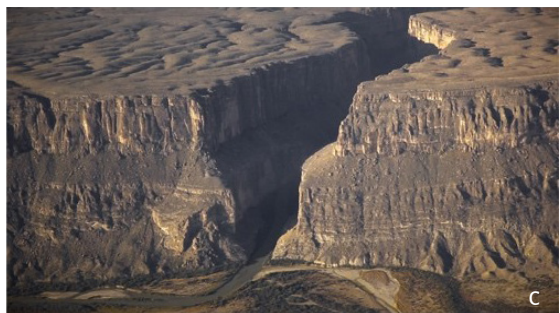
The *Tijuana Wall* is as well a work of defence, open and continuous, but the elements that make up it are just prefabricated structures in reinforced concrete or iron. The reiteration of a single module makes up the whole structure. The final walls image separating the USA from Mexico is less imposing, and over-

all it is anonymous as it is not possible to recognize the mental image—draw—that might have generated it.

Now it is necessary a reflection to make evident that the unquestionable recognisability of the *Great Wall* of China is mostly guaranteed by its architectural characters, and just secondarily by the surrounding landscape (Figure 3c). On the contrary, the *Tijuana Wall* twists and turns continuously identically in changing sceneries: the landscape is, in fact, the only factor that allows us to recognise it from many other similar barriers (Figure 3d). To break the monotony of the sequence of the prefabricated modules come the *Grand Canyon* of Santa Elena and the *Rio Grande* river, in the *Big Bend National Park* in Texas, which define the division between the Mexican land, on the south side of the slopes, from the U.S. territory on the northern side. Just thanks to this view, despite the apparent space continuum, the idea of a difficult barrier to cross takes shape and becomes geographically recognisable (Figure 4c).

Fig. 4 Geography and walls: *Great Wall* of China(a), *Tijuana Wall* (b). In Texas the Rio Grande River draws the frontier. In *Big Bend*, it's topped with cliffs up to 1960 feet high (c). Photo b and c by Martine Bureau. Video project *Wall of Disorder*.

That becomes even more evident if the two works are deprived of the context, using a graphic clean representation. In Figure 5b and 5c both the barriers are represented only by their fundamental elements, without the variable which are not able to make any significant difference.



The clear recognisability of the *Great Wall* of China and the necessity that the *Tijuana Wall* has of the surrounding landscape to be recognised, are both aspects related to external observers. How these walls are related to the surrounding territory, is instead a further level of reading.

Architecture, including the defensive one, has always been an expression and representation of the society that generated it. The construction methods and the defence and control needs are connected to the historical period in which they are built. The will of control and expansion of the Qin dynasty, therefore, led to conceive a defensive system that could be at the same time a place for observation and a place to hide in. This configuration was produced considering the war technologies of the time, which were not still able to make long-distance attacks. The safe viewpoint from which to monitoring the territory, is located 'inside the wall'. Doubling itself, it becomes an inner and continuous connecting path (Figure 5a). The will to control creates an object that presents features of surveillance both dynamic, along the crenelated walls, and static, inside towers fitted with firing positions.

Following once more an equal and opposite analogy, the *Tijuana Wall* does not consider an 'inside', but just following the uninterrupted and imaginary state border, determines the changing position of its point of view (Figure 5c). Rather than guards, even hiding, the monitoring of the southern American border makes use of drones that fly over the zones considered high-risk. Just in some cases, compatibly with the available funds, guards patrol portions of the barrier.

Dematerialising the point of view into a moving and not defined entity, generically placed at a high elevation, transforms this kind of barrier in something else. From a defensive and monitoring system, it becomes an object that embodies the ideology of refusal. This 'new limit' declares the will of demarcation and separation

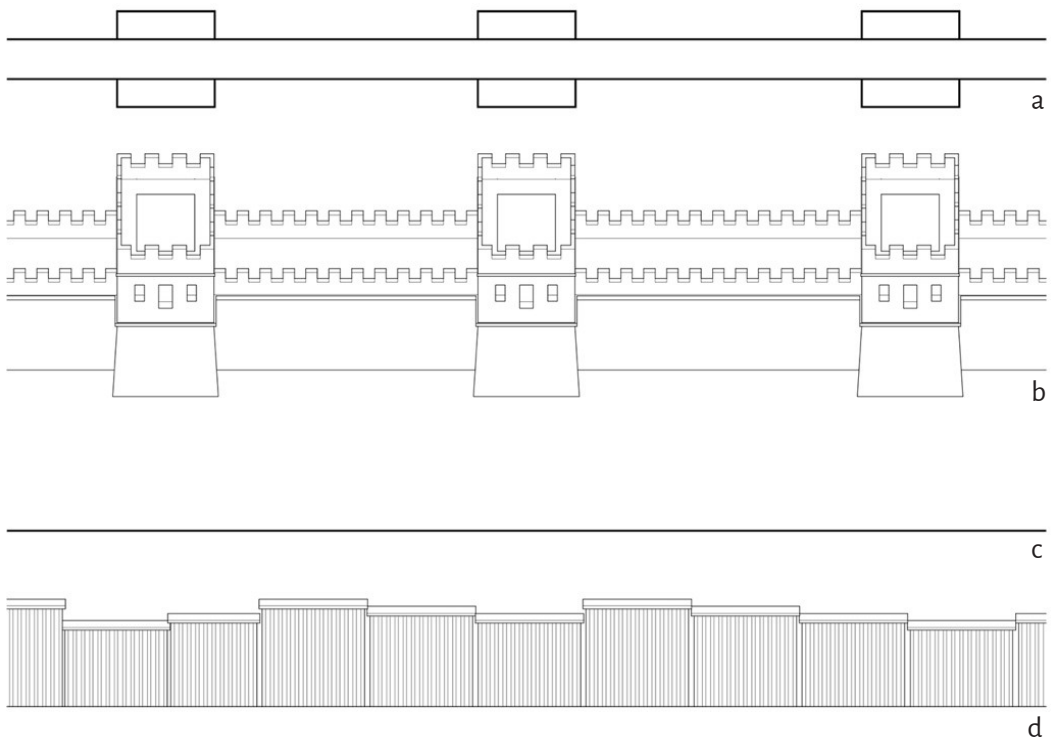


Fig. 5 Planimetric and axonometric diagram of *Great Wall of China* (a) and of *Tijuana Wall* (b).

from who is different. In this regard, an emblematic case is the *Brazilian wall* that not having any physical fence but an imaginary barrier realised exclusively through the usage of drones.

It is eventually easier to associate this wall and all similar constructions, to a further form of punitive ideology and strategy, as presented by Michel Foucault in the famous essay *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975). These barriers can be intended as further space expression of the identification process of the excluded ones, a method that uses the analytical subdivision of the power to be legitimated (Foucault, 1975).

The new state racism is practiced through the conflict life/death –more precisely “right to *take* life or *let* live” is sets at the basis of politics that in this way becomes the guarantor of life and safety of everyone (Foucault, 1997, p. 227).

THE GEOGRAPHY OF DIVERSITY

The considerations exposed so far allow seeing more organically the complex of the 63 walls built around the globe with purposes singularly different but similar after all. Their presence tells about a society in evolution, since a long time, towards a model based on an ideology centred on safeguarding the 'Self' through the negation of the 'Other'. The monumental architecture of this, without human presence, configures itself like a symbol and like other space at the same time (Foucault, 2010). The heterotopy, in this case, appears not only as a place of partial removal of the human itself but also as a total refusal of the human being, through its primary elements of definition: the culture of origin and religion.

To describe this phenomenon visually, we represent it with a new geography that shows what is different from us, which is something that we experience continuously: "The presence of the enemies at the borders of her land, gives [to Fernand] the precious sentiment of the existence" (Clément, 2014, p.31-32). The Wall and the Difference are two entities closely connected and the attempt to remove them from the representation and the conscience is the first proof of their influence on our daily life. Let's think of the Israel/Palestinian wall, the *Green Line* of Cyprus or the walls that separate the city of Belfast, just to recall the more well-known and extreme cases.

So, the geography of diversity as a collection of all these heterotopies matches the representation of all those places that constitute a periphery of human conscience. For this reason, not all the barriers have a physical aspect, and sometimes they take place just in the separating power of the language. A paradigmatic example is the self-exclusion of Great Britain from the European Union, with the invention of the word *Brexit*.

Using the peculiar aptitude of cartography to represent reality through the transposition of actions into images (Falchetta, 2015), we have tried an attempt to making a map reporting as much as possible the ideology that leads to the action of building walls. A physical planisphere was used as a base

Fig. 6 Following page: World map, Istituto Geografico De Agostini © (a). World map to which 63 visual changes have been applied (b).

THE WORLD



THE WORLD



(Figure 6a), as it is the most consolidated and reassuring visualisation of the planet and it makes simultaneously visible the coexistence of natural features of the whole Earth.

At this map, 63 changes were done through the modification of morphological territories. New mountain chains, rivers and seas become the natural instrument for changing the image, right in those places where portions of space are denied to our conscience by the presence of walls.

This process of transfiguration determines a point of view that generates a new sight floating between the initial image and the final one, like in some Gerhard Richter' *Fotobilder*. This, therefore, becomes the gap between two worlds and two spaces, in which we can look at and try to measure the distances of the interruption of the reality (Garbin, 2012). The result is a different world, whose differences from the original are almost unnoticeable.

The opacity of result leads to reflect on the value of these new boundaries and to carry on this analysis work to make it further communicated through more media and graphic decoding. If these barriers, on one hand, might seem to go unnoticed, remaining indifferent to our visual experience, on the other hand, have the frightful power to change human geography.

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