

The border materiality:  
gazing the myth

*La materialidad fronteriza:  
contemplando el mito*

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**Abstract**

*From the beginning of his presidential campaign, Donald Trump used the construction of a border wall as a platform, forcing the American public to confront their own identity. Although the discussion in both countries –Mexico and the United States– has tried on all fronts to tackle the wall, neither has looked directly at it. What do borders have that obsess us so much? Where does this outrage come from? This article aims to address these questions by looking at the wall and its effects, its design, construction, function and application. After all, looking at the wall is looking at ourselves and at them simultaneously. The walls always speak, and they can't hide the truth.*

**Keywords:** Border wall, Visual Culture, Nationalism, Objectification, media, technology.

**Resumen**

*Desde el inicio de su campaña presidencial, Donald Trump utilizó la construcción del muro fronterizo como una bandera, obligando al público estadounidense a confrontar su propia identidad. Aunque ambos países –México y Estados Unidos– han intentado por todos los frentes comenzar una discusión sobre el muro, ninguno lo ha mirado directamente. ¿Qué mística despertarán en nosotros las fronteras como para obsesionarnos tanto con ellas? ¿de dónde viene esa indignación tan compartida? Este artículo pretende abordar dichas preguntas al observar directamente el muro y sus efectos, así como su diseño, construcción, función y aplicación. Después de todo, mirar el muro es mirarnos a nosotros y a ellos simultáneamente. Las paredes siempre hablan y no saben mentir.*

**Palabras clave:** Muro fronterizo, Cultura Visual, Nacionalismo, Objetivación, Medios de comunicación, tecnología.

On June 12, 1987, US President Ronald Reagan addressed the world at the Brandenburg Gate, in West Berlin. As any other Post World War II US President, Reagan proclaimed himself as leader of the so-called *free world*, and from that messianic position, his words were soon going to be known as a prophetic declaration. In his speech, President Reagan openly requested USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev: “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall”. On November 9, 1989, the *free world* watched and celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall, a symbol of the Cold War era coming to an end. As if it were the only wall standing in the world, and as if it were the only one being pull to pieces.

In fact, just months before, the border fence between Austria and Hungary had also been removed, an act that had enormous and much more relevant implications, and yet, they were almost completely ignored by the media (Frye, 2018). Back in 1989, everybody’s eyes were fixed in Berlin. Every political effort, request and speech from the West was focused on THAT wall: everybody’s wall. It was the physical manifestation of the West frontier, a reminder of the limits of the promises of expansion of the Manifest Destiny (Grandin, 2020).

The Wall was torn down, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, and the world welcomed a new era led by the United States, or that is what history tells us. An era, as US President George Bush declared on December 26 1991, would “guarantee a peaceful and prosperous future. A future grounded in a world built on strong democratic principles, free from the specter of global conflict” (New York Times, 1991). That future never came and if it did, it did not last more than five minutes.

Instead, since 1991, more and more wars had to be fought: *ethnic* conflicts arose and multiplied, the US embarked itself in a crusade for *democratizing* the world –again–, and when it didn’t, dictatorships worked just as fine as they used to. Violence spread as fast as climate change’s effects, terrorism made its debut on US soil on November 9th, 2001, and the so-called *war on terror*

was declared. People were forcedly displaced and when they thought conflict, poverty, drug cartels, death, crime, natural disasters and political and religious persecution was over, they found themselves trapped, enclosed within walls, fences and structures that we did not ever notice were built up.

All these issues are not new, for humanity has its own habit of repeating history time and time again. What is true, however, is that perhaps never before these issues had been so broadly and simultaneously broadcasted. The *CNN Effect* that started in the 1991 Gulf War, had never been more relevant than today.

Thirty-three years have passed since Reagan condemned the existence of a wall such as the one that used to divide the city of Berlin, but it did not take the US long to start building their own walls across the five continents, like journalist Miller points out: “Today, the shift toward border enforcement is global [...] the number of border walls is on the rise –there are seventy-seven around the world–, a significant increase since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 when there were fifteen” (2019: 33). Soon enough, the United States forgot Reagan’s claims about how the West stood “ready to cooperate with the East to promote true openness, to break down barriers that separate people, to create a safe, freer world” (Reagan, 1987) and in 2016, Americans were shouting “build that wall” at Donald Trump’s rallies with the same excitement they wanted the Berlin Wall to be smashed.

We can find terrifying similarities between the narrative and theatrical performances of the Berlin Wall era, and the ones of the US-Mexico border. We have been paying so much attention to what Trump keeps repeating, that it prevents us from looking beyond HIS wall and even more precisely AT it. Out there, across the five continents, border structures are being built up. They all share the same anonymity as the Cold War border fence between Austria and Hungary but are as important or even more than the so-called Trump’s Wall. The US-Mexico border wall is just the last piece of a much bigger fort: a border empire that is actively on the making, controlled and defined by the US, a country so

self-centered that even when it comes to sports, they play and compete among themselves and have the audacity of naming the winner *the world's champion*. A world in which most of us are not counted, not seen, not considered sensible subjects.

The border empire is dividing the world between the rich and the poor, the safe world from the threats, the ones who count and the ones who do not. In that sense, border structures serve to display a double capacity that on the one hand, show the benefits of being a citizen, the wealth, the power, the nation pride, and on the other, hide a crashing system, its failures, the lack of national unity and the limits of the discourse. A double capacity that points out *what is not there* (Foster, 1996). By bragging, discussing, and cheering the border wall, the truth shows itself: no border wall exists the way is being pictured by Trump supporters. It is not “big, fat and beautiful”, as Trump has claimed, and it is hardly even a wall. The idea of the border, however, protects the ones inside from the real world, for the real escapes representation (Foster, 1996). Thus, the wall is not a monument, a representation of hatred and racism, but a stage for trauma to trigger itself.

Border walls being built and fully funded by the US in many countries, as Aristotle would put it, answer to a trauma experienced by the collective unconscious of those who count and possess the ability to speak (Rancière, 2004). The US refuses to see the limits, the frontiers, and therefore, the end of the endless promises of expansion and conquer. They build walls as conquest flags to the ones inside, always recreating the illusion of undiscovered lands beyond the horizon. As long as walls stand, the delusion of expansion and domination can be read in future terms; as a possibility, as a rightful claim. As long as border walls are still there, the US is not forced to give up on its fantasy, and no other autonomy besides its own needs to be recognized; no mourning is needed for nothing had been lost but found (Foster, 2016). In Grandin's (2019) words: “[border walls] offer their own illusions, a mystification that simultaneously recognizes and refuses limits”.

Borders are a “missed encounter with the real”, explains Foster (1996: 42), a technological tool that serves to screen on and screen off reality; their structures, in that sense, are frames through which we experience and perceive life at different levels. What is real lays behind concrete and wire, built upon for triggering the nostalgia of the US imperialist past. Simultaneously, the border in itself is capable of suspending time, of bringing the past into the present, and rewrite it for the future. Anytime at the border is what Walter Benjamin would call *Jetztzeit*, a moment “in which the present and past are drawn into a messianic relation” (Benjamin, 1942 as cited in Beiner, 1984). The border is the punctum that Barthes talked about, “a confusion between subject and world, inside and outside”. The wall is what we added to the border “and what is nonetheless already there” (Barthes, 1980 as cited in Foster, 1996). When someone is at a border, any border, the time stops, and that someone could be in two countries at the same time, being here and there while the lines between spaces become more and more blurred. The absurdity of it all shows itself.

If the punctum is what Barthes (1981) describes as “the element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (Foster, 1996: 43), then borders too can be read as scars, as reminders of *what is not there*. In that sense, Grandin argues that “the point isn’t to actually build *the wall* but to constantly announce the building of *the wall*” (2019:267).

The border then cannot exist as such. The imaginary of its existence is what counts, what is being consumed and because it is being consumed it cannot be possessed. “It is in no way something that one can *have*. It is always in the past or in the future and, as such, cannot be said to exist in nature, but only in memory or anticipation [...] Therefore, it cannot be had but in the instant of its disappearance” (Agamben, 2007: 83). Wounds cannot be possessed, they are lost parts of us, something that went missing, the part of us that was hurt and therefore was taken away a created absence that by nature cannot be present.

The body is left with a scar, a reminder of a space that cannot be filled, put back together, made *complete*. Wounds can, however, become visible through the scars, become readable, traceable, almost present, never fully there.

Border walls are visible scars, the reminder of a wound. They and are always *almost* there, *almost* finished, *almost* present: “something other than *nothing* that becomes] visible in that *almost*. One actually can see, then, something else, simply in the looking forward to it or the desiring of it” (Didi-Huberman and Repensek, 1984). Thus, desiring the border, is what makes it visible, traceable, desirable. Under this perspective, I argue the wall would be a visible manifestation of a previous wound inflicted, of what we imagine was once there and yet, is not anymore. Border walls allow us to “retrace, in other words, tell, retell a story, but also trace a line over it, a line that, will make the original trace ‘represent a subject for other traces’” (Didi-Huberman and Repensek, 1984). Border structures let us retell the story of what was lost in terms of what can be found. In rephrasing the wound and re-designing the scar, new narratives appear, other possibilities are instantly born. Border walls serve to make visible the invisible, and, simultaneously, they open spaces for the appropriation of meanings, for the restaging of the past. Border walls are media, for they communicate, translate and frame meanings. As media, I argue that borders too, organize our desires; thus, they create a relation of dependency from which we cannot escape. The anticipation of the border wall, the need for it gives us the idea of emptiness as constitutive of who we are, as lacking something, as an incomplete nation, power, state, society, culture. Therefore, the border as a reminder of a wound –as a scar–, of an absence, of lack of meaning, of emptiness, demands to be filled, to be present, *to be* something rather than nothing.

Border walls are media structures that negotiate meaning. They stand just between us and the meaning –the real– and defines, not only what and how we gaze, but the gaze in itself. Borders are frames that vanishes everything that remains outside

into nothingness. What is outside the borders allows the ones inside to be defined. In other words, borders allow the inside to exist as such, because borders are proof that there is an outside. In the same way that white people are defined just by witnessing the other, by calling the black subject, by pointing at what they are not (Fanon, 1952), the border is a constant calling on the outside, on the faceless, uncountable, and anonymous mass of barbarians, aliens, others. If borders are media structures, they are also apparatus of captivity capable of making us depend on them. The border captures and controls the other/ the outsider/ the alien and its representation upon which oneself is being defined.

In that sense, border walls are the illusion, the fantasy of insiders being desired by the desire of others –the outsiders. In the case of Trump’s wall, the possession of the border is needed, for it allows the illusion of desire to unfold itself. If we possess only what we see, the border has to make itself visible.

Moreover, borders are also key elements for the processes of identification, objectification, value and ownership claimed on bodies of others by the state apparatus (Feldman, 2005). However, not all borders are visible and not all are at the edges of a politically defined state. There are, too, borders that define one’s humanity or inhumanity within the state, built for us and by us. Borders give and take away what we are.

According to Aristotle, what defined a political being was the ability to speak, to possess the language. In that sense, women, slaves, children, and animals held the capacity only to understand the language but not to possess it. To be able to speak meant to be in possession of language “which is what enables him to discuss the just and unjust, while animals have a voice only to express pleasure and pain” (Rancière, 2004: 5). Borders separate bodies, and in doing so, they also create a symbolic order, in which some are in possession of language, and thus, hold a human status while others do not. Therefore, the political identity within the nation is only possible to be defined upon the axis of exclusion, in Rancière’s (2004) words: “politics [are] the result



of an anthropological invariant” and it is upon this where the border is drawn. In that sense, borders of any kind, are not just mere structures, not just walls. They need to be activated, put in action and performed more than they need to be physically built, yet, paradoxically, borders come to exist when in motion. As an act of performance, borders are the space where the communalities and differences meet between the sensible and the insensible subjects or how Aristotle would put it between the “logos” and the “phone”; between those capable of speak and those who are only able to express emotions by using noise. What takes place at the border is politics, an active exercise of renegotiation of what counts and what lays beyond the count; between the counted and the uncountable. Marginalized communities take possession of language every day, forcing the insiders to listen and acknowledge their humanity.

As an active negotiation, borders need to be reinvented as well, relocated, redesign. As soon as one border is transgressed, pushed, torn down, another one is already being built in order for the political identity to be restored, in order for maintaining the symbolic order. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the era of Walls that followed in which we live in today, are thus just an example of the reinvention of borders, of the continuous relocalization of the act of politics.

Yesterday the Berlin Wall and Communism were the source of all evil for the West, what laid beyond the border; once they disappeared, the threat needed to be embodied again, the performance of the border demanded to be put on stage. The other needed to be seen and called out, in order for it to be fought against. Within the narrative, the threat has been presented with countless faces and names: women, communism, Islamic fundamentalism, immigrants, blacks, populism, HIV positive, homosexuals, transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, and most recently, the *Chinese virus*. The discourse is framed in terms of the dangers that these threats cast upon Americans, Western civilization, and the outdated term *free world*. In it, it is imperative to



refer to the threat as a *thing* –insensible objects– and the threatened as humans –as sensible subjects. I argue however, that it is not a matter of who is being threatened by what? But the other way around, what is being threatened by whom?

I contend that the existence of the difference between insiders and outsiders –which is always in conflict– is what threatens the border in which a war between membership and representation is being fought. This ongoing transformations and fluidity challenge the fixated nature of borders and demands them to adapt, to move, to include, to be relocated and be retold as Didi-Huberman and Repensek (1984) would state.

Now that I have made clear all the temporal dimensions borders have; the symbolic order they represent for the collective; the illusion they are capable of creating; the desire they trigger; the separation of bodies, levels of humanity, I consider important to look closer into an actual border.

What happens when we look at the US-Mexico *Wall*? What is there and how does it transform our perception of ourselves? As for today, around 700 miles out of the almost 2000 that separates the US and Mexico have some kind of visual structure; now and long before Trump took office. Across those 700 miles, the border changes repeatedly in shape, form and function. Some portions of it, which all together make 353 miles, are intended to prevent pedestrians from crossing while almost the other half (300 miles) are designed for stopping vehicles, 37 miles have secondary fencing and 14 miles have a third barrier as well (FAIR, 2019; Miroff and Blanco, 2020).

Nearly all of the new fencing the Trump administration has built is considered *replacement* fencing, swapping out smaller, older vehicle barriers for a more elaborate and costlier border wall system. The administration has been slower to build new barriers where none currently exist, primarily because those spans require the acquisition of private land. On the other side, the materials the current structure is made of include recycled corrugated metal, steel mesh, slats, posts and panels; wire, more recently. In

2018, 1,800 military troops installed concertina wire rows covering up the barrier from top to bottom on the US side of the wall<sup>1</sup>. A total of 180 miles were covered between California, Arizona and Texas (American Homefront Project, 2017).

Community members in San Diego, Nogales, Tucson, Laredo and McAllen complained about the measures taken by the federal government. In some cases, they argued that the wire rows were installed at very “inconvenient” spots where tourism and business used to take place. Yet, others raised questions about why some portions of the fence were left unprotected. The Nogales City Council, meanwhile, demanded the Federal Government to take the wire down arguing that anybody who try to climb the border would be killed or harmed and that “is only found in a war, prison or battle setting” (Nogales City Council Resolution, 2019). As a result of the opposition made by many community members and residents from California to Texas, some portions of the wire have been removed.

It seemed like a prison, a battle setting, because that’s what it is. The border as a war zone, a zone of chaos and hazard, threatened by “hordes of immigrants”, drug dealers and Mexican rapists has been carefully planned, crafted and socialized as such at least for the past 70 years. The use of war materials along with the ever-expansive hiring of Vietnam and Korea veterans set the conditions to foster an anti-immigrant, white supremacist, violent space.

In that sense, the US-Mexico border has served as a stage, in which veterans can repeat their war years, redirect their rage and fears of otherness and find again a purpose in the only thing they learned how to cope with: killing *the other*, keeping *America* safe. The border wall design fills them with nostalgia for the “good old days” from the battlefield. As Foster claims: the repetition not only produce traumatic effects, they produce them as well” (1996: 42). The border wall is what triggers their uncertainty, the

1 To see the Concertina Wire rows installed in Nogales, Arizona, visit: [https://tucson.com/news/local/nogales-city-council-calls-on-feds-to-remove-all-border/article\\_ad246ca8-2a7c-11e9-8de7-ab64b6199f2d.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/nogales-city-council-calls-on-feds-to-remove-all-border/article_ad246ca8-2a7c-11e9-8de7-ab64b6199f2d.html)

awareness of their wound, of what is missing. It allows veterans to fight for a future, for the present is absent, has been stolen, must be restored.

And so, Border Patrol Agents repeat their trauma as trauma demands repetition. Every time they find, stop, imprison, beat, hurt, or kill an immigrant, they repeat what they witnessed in Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Bosnia, Uganda, Syria, and so on. Only then, they can look at themselves, by witnessing the killing of the alien, the enemy, the strange. Incapable for empathy, veterans recognized the pain of their pray, as an animal, never an equal, not enough human. Even today, the US Border Patrol still gives preference to War Veterans in order for them to join their ranks. That, in itself, carries a lot of consequences. Furthermore, the long list of Operations<sup>2</sup> for containing the increasing number of immigrants trying to cross produced the need of hiring more Border Patrol Agents, mostly veterans, who found themselves deployed in a war-like zone, with orders to perform the act of the border as they SEE fit. As more and more agents were needed, less and less mental evaluations and background checks were requested for them to pass, even to present. Now, the Border Patrol finds itself with the highest record of suicide among its agents compared to any other federal agency (Rohrlich, 2019). Veterans, one could say, do not have the capacity to distinguish a war enemy from an immigrant child. For them and for the country, both are the same, incapable to speak and thus, to become human.

The border when looked at, is nothing compared to what we imagined and what we have been told. It is not a wall, it is not clo-

2 These operations started just as the World War II ended, with President Truman, but they increased since the *war on terror* began. In 2006, the George W. Bush Administration launched Operation Jumpstart, which mobilized 6,000 National Guard agents to fight “illegal immigration” (Curch, 2009). It lasted almost two years and cost around \$1.2 billion dollars (Jones, 2017: 41). President Obama continued with the trend and launched Operation Phalanx in 2010, “authorizing up to 1,200 soldiers and airmen along the 1,933 miles southwest border in support of the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency” (Globalsecurity.org). His administration spent around \$145 million dollars according to the United States Government Accountability Office Report (2011). Finally, in 2014, Texas governor Rick Perry requested 1,000 troops for the Operation Strong Safety, that by 2018 had cost Texas’ Taxpayers \$2 billion dollars (Del Bosque, 2018).

sed. It is not even fixed. The actual border *wall* cannot be gazed without being demystified. It must always be kept at a distance, as a sacred space that only could become sacred through the ritual of sacrifice like Khosravi (2007) points out:

The border ritual reproduces the meanings and order of the state system [...] It is a secular and modern sort of divine sanctity with its own rite of sacrifice [and] the vulnerability of border transgressors is best demonstrated by their animalization. The terminology used in this field is full of names of animals to designate human smugglers and their clients [...] Represented in terms of chicken and sheep –two animals traditionally sacrificed in rituals– the border transgressors are sacrificial creatures for the border ritual.

Khosravi's remarks also alludes to what Agamben (2007) emphasizes. In Agamben's view, the path towards the sacred status, is achieved only by sacrifice. A path that allows the transition from the human to the divine sphere. Thus, exposing the actual border wall, would separate the myth and the ritual, would bring the wall back to the human sphere. If that happened, Trump's wall would cease to be a symbol upon which the order is being defined and enforced. If the mirror is taken away from the child, no desire for the future self would exist (Lacan, 2006).

Consequently, across the 2000 miles of the borderline there are "rivers, farms, homes, public lands, cultural sites, wildlife reserves, business, tourism, migration routes [and a university]" (Rael, 2017: 78); a whole urban, social, cultural and natural ecology that resists its bisection and is being directly impacted by the wall and the changes made to it. It is vital to recognize the key role played by the infrastructure in the building in our everyday life dynamics. The wall is unequivocally transforming communities on both sides, standing between them and mediating reality, thus transforming it. But not only that, the physical transformations and additions to the wall are changing the atmosphere of

the border communities, the perception of what lays on the other side and a spatialization of our identity. The desire of a wall struggles with the wall that is being built. Once the future is here, it is not what we desired. It turned out that we desired the desire in itself, and by looking at the border wall, that desire disappears, and is transformed into absence and incompleteness. The wound reapers, the scar is the only trace left to follow.

The fact that the wall does come to exist as such only in the future, raises the question of an even more distant future. Once the border wall is completed, then what? It will need to be maintained, invested on and repaired time and time again. As Rael (2017) mentions: “the new wall has already been breached over 3,000 times, incurring \$4.4 million in repairs. The construction and maintenance costs are estimated to exceed \$49 billion over the next 25 years and there are several hundred more miles of wall construction recently proposed” (p. 76). Having it built up is not the last step, but just the first, one that has no intentions to be completed and with reason.

The border wall –as it is today– requires continuous work, repairs, and replacement attributed not only to migrants’ efforts for crossing it, but in more degree to weather factors just like rain, sun exposure and changing conditions of the terrain that degrades the materials<sup>345</sup>. Thus, the border wall does not only deal with some communities complains and resistance to the building of the project and the changes being made; the terrain is resisting and fighting back as well. Mother nature is showing us what the true nature of borders are. The border wall is a demand to the world

3 To see the image of Sundland Park, New Mexico Border Fence, in 2016: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usgao/34117614846/>

4 To see the image of Pedestrian fencing Sundland Park, New Mexico Border, in 2016: [www.flickr.com/photos/usgao/33315955914](http://www.flickr.com/photos/usgao/33315955914)

5 This portion of the Border was replaced in June 2019 (Bock, 2019), funded completely by a Florida non-profit organization called We Build the Wall, founded by Kuwait and Iraq war veteran Brian Kolfage, who suffered injuries on duty that forced him to go under a triple limb amputation procedure. The project cost around 23 million dollars raised with donations. According to the non-profit records, they claim to have one hundred miles ready to be built. Sunland Park was its first finished project, and they are expecting to start its second in Mission, Texas ([webuildthewall.us](http://webuildthewall.us)). They also offer private tours along these border portions and have an online shop offering products from T-shirts to a brick with your name on it.

for adapting itself to the American collective imaginary. It is a fight against the other and also a territorial conquest over nature.

Until this day, it is not clear how much exactly it is going to cost to build the Wall as President Trump imagines it. Early this year, in January 2020, it was reported by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection that \$11 billion dollars had been already spent. That money was used for building the “new border wall system” across 576 miles along the border. In other words, \$11 billion dollars did the US spend in changing the existing fence (NJToday, 2020). Moreover, just back in 2017, a total of 8 prototypes of the border were built in San Diego California, each of which costed between \$300,000 and \$600, 000 dollars. By 2018 it was reported that San Diego taxpayers spent around 2.3 million dollars only in protecting those prototypes (Yurkevich, 2018).

The prototypes were diverse in material, color and construction technique<sup>6</sup>. Some were made out of concrete while others were described by the government as being made with “other than concrete” (Medina, J., Haner, J., Williams, J., and Bui, Q., 2017). Some prototypes allowed visibility to the other side, while others screened off the outside world completely. It was requested<sup>7</sup> for the prototypes to be “aesthetically pleasing” and so, the ELTA North America prototype accepted the challenge and even added color and geometrical patterns to its wall while the Texas Sterling Construction’s prototype opted to add brick design only to the side of the wall that faces the US.

All eight prototypes were reported to have failed penetrability tests conducted by the government. None of the eight “big, fat, beautiful” mockups –adjectives Trump uses to describe his delusion– resisted to breaching, met the requirements for adaptability nor the prototypes’ resistance to tunneling were tested (Hilburg, 2019). Eventually, none of the prototypes were chosen and the

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6 To see the different Border Wall prototypes, visit: <https://www.borderwallprototypes.org/news/2017/12/20/nytimes-eight-ways-to-build-a-border-wall>

7 The US Customs and Border Protection reported that the requirements that needed to be met by the prototypes were: for it to be aesthetic, “how penetrable they are, how resistant they are to tampering and then scaling or anti-climb features” (Koscak, n/d).

mockups were torn down in February 2019. To this regard, *The Guardian* reported that “the administration has said that ‘elements’ of the prototypes have been ‘melded’ into current border barrier designs and the prototypes have ‘served their purpose’” (Kilani, 2019).

Exposing the current state of the border, its diversity in shape, constitution, function and form, its costs and the projects that have been carried out throughout Trump’s Administration are revealing in many ways. First, they show the challenges and difficulties for adapting the living and ever moving terrain to a static concrete wall. Secondly, they expose the massive human, financial and emotional investment needed in order to do the project and to maintain it thereafter. Third, by looking at the challenges and real condition that the border wall faces ahead, the illusion of sealing the border becomes not only hard to imagine but it forces us to question the real motivations –if any– behind the actual wall. The border spaces have become a stage for the President and other public officials to perform the theatrical act of the wall. They build prototypes so that after they can tear them down; they install wire rows and take them off; they replace steel mesh with panels and panels with steel mesh. The border wall serves for a military parade every now and then. And so, as more and more resources get invested in changing panels, installing wire and patrolling the fences a script that is played and replayed, a scar that uncovers new meanings and paths to follow. One in which the nation state tries to desperately find a cultural wholeness, identity in its imagined enemy; an enemy in those who stand on the other side “the history’s endless return, as veterans travel to the borderlands to rehearse how lost wars could have been won” (Grandin, 2020: 265). Just as a seasonal play, the wall goes from town to town, promising new acts.

Once we looked up close to the reality of the border structure, less it seems to be a fortress and more a contradiction. The official narrative of the wall promises it to be THE solution for keeping its citizens safe and maintaining peace. It is supposed to



divide the chaos from the order, the danger from the safety, or as Frye (2018) would say, the barbarians from the civilized. However, I argue that the border wall is instead merging the spaces of peace and war: the military and the civilian, the battlefield and the upper middle-class neighborhoods.

At border communities' expense, billions of dollars and tons of resources at stake, Trump's narrative actually make sense. It does not matter if a war is being fought or not, but it must be SEEN that way. A war, "crisis", or threat is needed in order to justify the Wall and conversely, the Wall is needed in order to create the conditions of the war, the crisis, the threat. The wall and the war at the southern border need each other, feed from each other, and make sense of each other. The wall is not there from securing the US, but for creating the illusion that they are not safe.

The wire, the concrete, the manpower, the military, the dead migrant and the drug smuggler; the tunnels, the rapists, the crisis, Trump needs them all for the Wall to make sense, to define America's national *ethos*, to retell the story and translate its limitations into possibilities. As Appadurai's (2006) mention: "order is organized around the fact of the prospect of violence [...] it is quotidian war, war as an everyday possibility waged precisely to destabilize the idea that there is an 'everyday' for anyone outside the space and time of war" (pp. 21-32). The wall communicates war, the kind of war that Appadurai refers to, it normalizing death, violence, loss, danger as the given conditions of everyday life and so, "we can no longer imagine a simple opposition between nature and way in one hand and social life and peace on the other" (2006: 31).

The wall is nothing but an idea. A forever unfinished project that will continue to perform whenever is needed. A shift in our discussion around the wall is necessary. It is not about stopping immigration, it is not about the US racist president, it is not about Mexico. The wall is self-referential. When talking about the wall, let's look at the wall. It is about it. About what it screens on and off, about what it is made of, about who protects it and most importantly, it is about those who resist it: us. Let's gaze it directly.

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