Up Against the Wall
Introduction
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The first volume of this journal was a Special Issue devoted to "Political Theology: the Border in Question," a topic we pursued there mostly in terms of philosophy, literature, music, and art history. Here, in a Special Issue devoted to contemporary walls--the literal and concrete (and sometimes literally concrete) walls around nation-states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries--we return from a more historical angle to some of the issues broached there: questions of sovereignty in general and of nation-state sovereignty more particularly. What is sovereignty and what is the relation between sovereignty and the nation-state, at once historically and conceptually? More narrowly, by pursuing analyses of contemporary nation-state walling (and, in the case of the fall of the Berlin Wall, unwalling), we ask how things stand with nation-state sovereignty today. More precisely still, we are asking: how does the erection of walls at the borders between states currently function to shore up and/or to undermine the ethno-political entities these walls are meant to secure? To what extent, in what ways, and for what reasons do walls attempt to reassure political subjects and citizens that they master their own limits and edges, and the various flows across their frontiers? In an extraordinary recent book on this topic, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), Wendy Brown has characterized the recent spate of wall-building--a global phenomenon, along the borders of the US-Mexico, Israel-Palestine, South Africa-Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia-Yemen, Saudi-Arabia-Iraq, India-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyztan, Botswana-Zimbabwe, Thailand-Malaysia, Egypt-Gaza, Iran-Pakistan, China-North Korea, etc.--as a defensive response to the recent and gradual separation of sovereignty from the nation-state, the "waning sovereignty" of the nation-state in the face of "transnational flows" (of commodities, labor, refugees, immigrants, drugs, weapons, etc.), "neoliberalism," "international economic and governance institutions," and the transnational communication of "culture, ideology, and

religion" (22-3). The walls function in this context as visible counterfactuals, symptomatic symbols that simultaneously deny and exacerbate what they exist to prevent: namely, the partial *waning* of the authority and persuasiveness of the nation-state (which is not to exaggerate and posit, abstractly and prematurely, the pure and simple *disappearance* of the nation-state's existence or power). While the European institution of the absolutist state through the Treaty of Westphalia was supposed to subordinate both religious and economic flows to political decisions, in our current age "declining nation-state sovereignty decontains theological and economic powers, a decontainment that itself abets the erosion of nation-state sovereignty" (62).

Each of the following essays addresses, with reference to particular walls and borders, the confusion that reigns in such a "post-Westphalian" situation, the uncertainties about the legitimate and/or real functions of economic, religious, and political ideologies and institutions. We begin with a general essay on the history of the nation-state and its borders, then proceed with a series of essays specifically focused on the border fence between the US and Mexico, the separation barrier between Israel and Palestine, and the Berlin Wall. In keeping with the interdisciplinary commitments of this journal, we include essays by a specialist in early modern European history, an anthropologist and Latin American Studies scholar, a psychologist, and three German Studies scholars.[1] [2]

Peter Wallace opens the issue with a historical survey of "the inter-related development of nations, borders, and states" from ancient to medieval to modern Europe. Wallace bookends this overview with brief discussions of Alsace as a complex and ambiguous illustration of the borderline between German and French political cultures, a borderland that persists while intermittently changing its status and shape. For Wallace--and in this respect he is in line with Wendy Brown--the crucial transitions in the development of the modern situation, as introduced by the Reformation, are: the Treaty of Westphalia (as establishment of the absolutist solution), and the period from the French Revolution through the early nineteenth century (as establishment of the European nation-states independent of Monarchic control).[3] This trajectory underscores Wallace's main

thesis: "in contemporary international relations the bordered sovereign nation-state is the norm, but that norm is recent and teleologically justified." And perhaps even more to the point of today's walls: "Political identities do not have to be all or nothing, and *unsichtbare Grenzen*, or *frontières invisibles* are complex and . . . situational."

The very different essay by Lynn Stephen could be said nonetheless to unfold some of the implications of this point. Stephen examines in terms of geographically and ethnically dispersed migrant and immigrant "transborder communities" the historical backgrounds and current status of the US-Mexico border fence. To trace the historical vicissitudes of US-Mexico border-determinations, she first analyzes actual maps of this border from different periods, and then she reconstructs key moments in US border-policy. By considering in this context various aspects of identity and situatedness (such as family, society, economy, culture, and community), she juxtaposes and contrasts the nation-state border determinations with the force-field of non-nation-state factors that overdetermine the struggles to control such determinations. At the same time, Stephen is careful not to minimize the significance of the nation-state in the border-reinforcing phenomena--perpetuation of colonialist patterns, racialization of immigrant minorities, etc.--that she is tracing. By emphasizing the "transborder" community as a dispersed multiplicity, Stephen hopes to coaxe policy discussions away from a unidimensionally statist emphasis and toward acknowledgement of the more complex realities and mutual influences of plural identity and citizenship.

Maya Mukamel examines the complexity of political identities in another contemporary nation-state wall-situation, the Israeli-Palestinian "separation barrier," on which she brings psychoanalytic object-relations theory to bear. Specifically, she uses Melanie Klein's analysis of schizoid mechanisms to shed critical light on the ways in which both Israelis and Palestinians (and their supporters) tend to naturalize evil falsely, situating it as the "unique cultural property of the adversary," and thereby justifying their own violence as a defensive war against an enemy deemed morally and humanly inferior. In

Mukamel's analysis, the "separation barrier" is seen as arising out of--and exacerbating--a situation overdetermined by the politicized play of such schizoid mechanisms. The wall functions as a "symptomatic substitute for a missing border, which is a failure of political self-determination." But crucially, as she goes on to show, both the Israeli and the Palestinian goals of independence and sovereignty continue to imply or to require the denial of the sovereignty of the other, a denial that in turn requires justification in terms of the naturalization of the other's evil. According to Wendy Brown, this situation is not unique but endemic to the age of waning sovereignty, in which the notion of sovereignty itself as (nation-state) self-determination is what needs to be rethought and practically reconfigured.

There follow three essays on the East German-West German wall, the first of which, like Mukamel's, is psychoanalytically informed. John Urang examines East German public culture to expose what was the "ideological fantasy" of the Berlin Wall, most centrally its function as an impediment to "that most agile of border-crossers, desire itself." In this scenario, the wall functions to protect not only the sleeping beauty of the GDR qua besieged female virtue, but above all to protect this virtue from its own (in)voluntary self-ravagement. As Urang shows, East German narrative film from the 1960s to the 1980s bears this out by repeatedly presenting a virtuous heroine with the choice between two suitors, one of whom allegorizes Western avarice and consumerism while the other stands for Eastern socialist stoicism. But as Urang argues, by making the Eastern suitor figure the realization of individual happiness, even as these narratives claim that the proper individual happiness coincides with collective realization, they reintroduce through this very claim the danger it is meant to conjure away: the prioritization of individual happiness over the social whole. In this striking analysis, Urang concludes that what he calls the "socialist commodity fetish," the commodity intended to *reveal* rather than *conceal* its social foundations, failed to materialize as distinct from its capitalist counterpart. The GDR citizenry was thus left high and dry, "desiring to desire" within a state culture that never quite managed to resolve the necessity of acknowledging

desire with the goal of state socialist egalitarianism. When the Wall fell, this was because the project of denying desire failed.

With Nikolaus Wegmann's essay, "Walled In Literature: an Architectural Inquiry," we move from the denial of desire to the disavowal of opening. Wegmann undertakes to read the Berlin Will, in the footsteps of Rem Koolhaas, as a purely architectural phenomenon, thereby taking his distance from traditional readings and what he sees as their no longer useful moral and political emphasis. With reference to the work of Dirk Baecker, Wegmann understands architecture as rooted in a shielding function that involves both the creation of an enclosure and the opening of this enclosure onto an outside. He thus situates the "error" of the Berlin Wall in the notion of the possibility of a wall *without* opening. On Wegmann's account, however, this error became--until the inevitable moment of its reversal in the emergence of a breach--the very condition of GDR literature. This literature was the privileged medium for the criticism of the party-driven society of the GDR. As such, it represented the possibility of an opening in the wall that was its own condition. When the wall was opened, consequently, this literature--along with the society it conditioned--disappeared.

In the last essay, we move to the consideration of how formerly East German cultural producers have dealt with this sudden *disappearance*. In his article on the *Wenderoman*--the Novel of Unification, as one might translate it--William Donahue attempts to establish the conceptual contours and extension of this literary historical subgenre-category. His argument includes both historical and aesthetic-normative considerations. He questions first whether or not the usual attempt to limit the category of the *Wenderoman* to "historical" treatments of the periods just before, during, and after the *Wende* is accurate, and he points out that many of these novels are at most pseudo-historical. Secondly, he argues in a more aesthetically evaluative vein that the *Wende*-novelists who depart from depiction of their moment to explore in more general terms the possibilities of reconciliation, and to reexamine Cold War history more broadly, tend to be more interesting, and have the potential to remain interesting longer,

than those who focus more narrowly on accurately painting the portrait of their (now already lost) moment. Ultimately, Donahue suggests, the *Wenderoman* may require us to question the "canons of modernist and postmodernist literary theory," according to which only disruption, negativity, and disintegrative fragmentation count as aesthetically interesting or conducive to critical insights. Instead, Donahue finds in the *Wenderoman* a subgenre in which "*integrative* desire" becomes properly persuasive in a new way, and in which concerns with conciliation and forgiveness can, in some instances, conduce to insightful social, political, and cultural analysis. He suggests that the statement of the desire for reconciliation is perhaps one manifestation of nonsovereign desire tout court, and in this sense goes a step beyond affirmative culture.

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[1] To commemorate the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German Studies Committee at the University of Oregon held a conference in fall 2009 in which we invited scholars to speak about the cultural-historical aspects of nation-state walls in general by addressing a number recent, not so recent, and currently ongoing walling (and/or wall-like border-drawing) projects. The current special issue of Konturen took this conference as its point of departure. We thank for their support the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the University of Oregon Departments and Programs of History, Judaic Studies, Comparative Literature, and German and Scandinavian, as well as the Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences.

[2] Note, however, that when he uses the term "post-Westphalian" he means the situation *inaugurated* by the Treaty of Westphalia, whereas when Wendy Brown uses that term, she means the much later situation inaugurated by the gradual *erosion* of the world created by the Treaty.