

T+T
VIRTUELLE
MAUER
RE-CON
STRUCTING
THE WALL

a multimedia art project by Tamiko Thiel + Teresa Reuter



Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall

www.virtuelle-mauer-berlin.de

CONCEPT SUMMARY 2008

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For decades the Berlin Wall was a symbol of repression and of the division of Germany, Europe and indeed the entire world into two politically opposing systems. For the East German government, that built the Wall to prevent its own citizens from fleeing to the West, it was the “anti-fascist protective barrier.” For the West German government, which refused to officially recognize its existence, it was an “unlawful” consequence of the East-West conflicts of the Cold War.

Only a year after the fall of the Wall in November 1989, almost all traces of it had been removed. As the premiere symbol of the division of the world into two opposing political systems, people in both East and West Berlin wanted to eliminate the Wall as quickly as possible. For those who did not experience the Wall themselves, the effects of this structure on Berlin’s urban space, and on the political and sociological divisions engendered by this “Wall in people heads,” are not comprehensible today. Young people especially have difficulty understanding the threat posed by the Wall and the constraints it created in everyday life.

In the virtual reality artwork **Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall** the artist team **T+T** will rebuild part of this historically significant structure in a virtual space, depicting its physical, political and social effects on life “in the shadow of the Wall.” The principles of **T+T** are: Tamiko Thiel, an American VR (virtual reality) artist, internationally known for her use of VR technology to create socially critical artworks; and Teresa Reuter, a Berlin architect and 3D artist with metroGap–Association for Urban Theory and Practice, whose work is strongly influenced by years of experience living with the Wall and dealing with the urban development of Berlin since the fall of the Wall.

The VR artwork:

The project **Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall** will create a virtual reality (VR) artwork, an interactive 3D computer graphics environment that allows users to experience a section of the Berlin Wall in its former complexity. The VR artwork will allow those now vanished structures to speak of the emotions and conflicts they engendered and represented in the past. After extensive research we have selected a site for our “virtual stage” stretching **from the former border crossing at Heinrich-Heine-Strasse, over the ‘Engelbecken’ to Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm**. We examine how the presence of the Wall affected the environment of this site, its urban development and the consequences for the residents in East and West. Based on the spatial characteristics and the historical events of the site we are developing a dramatic concept for our “virtual stage” using dramatic techniques of interactive virtual reality such as **simulation, interaction and time travel**.

Using the fruits of our extensive research in archives, including those of the former East German Secret Service (Stasi,) we weave archival material – sound, image, video – into the 3D computer graphic simulation, creating a dramatic encounter that involves the user as the protagonist in a surrealist dream. Our approach goes far beyond a purely documentary reproduction of a vanished location: the user herself, via a simple navigation console, determines where to go and what to do, thus determining the sequence of scenes in the experience. As in a 3D computer game, users can wander along the Wall – not in the role of the omnipotent border guard, gun in hand, but in the role of a normal Berlin resident who must live day in and day out with the presence of the Wall.

Project partners

The project was conceived and developed together with the **Cultural Department** of the **Berlin Senate** as an integral part of its **Memorial Concept for the Berlin Wall**.

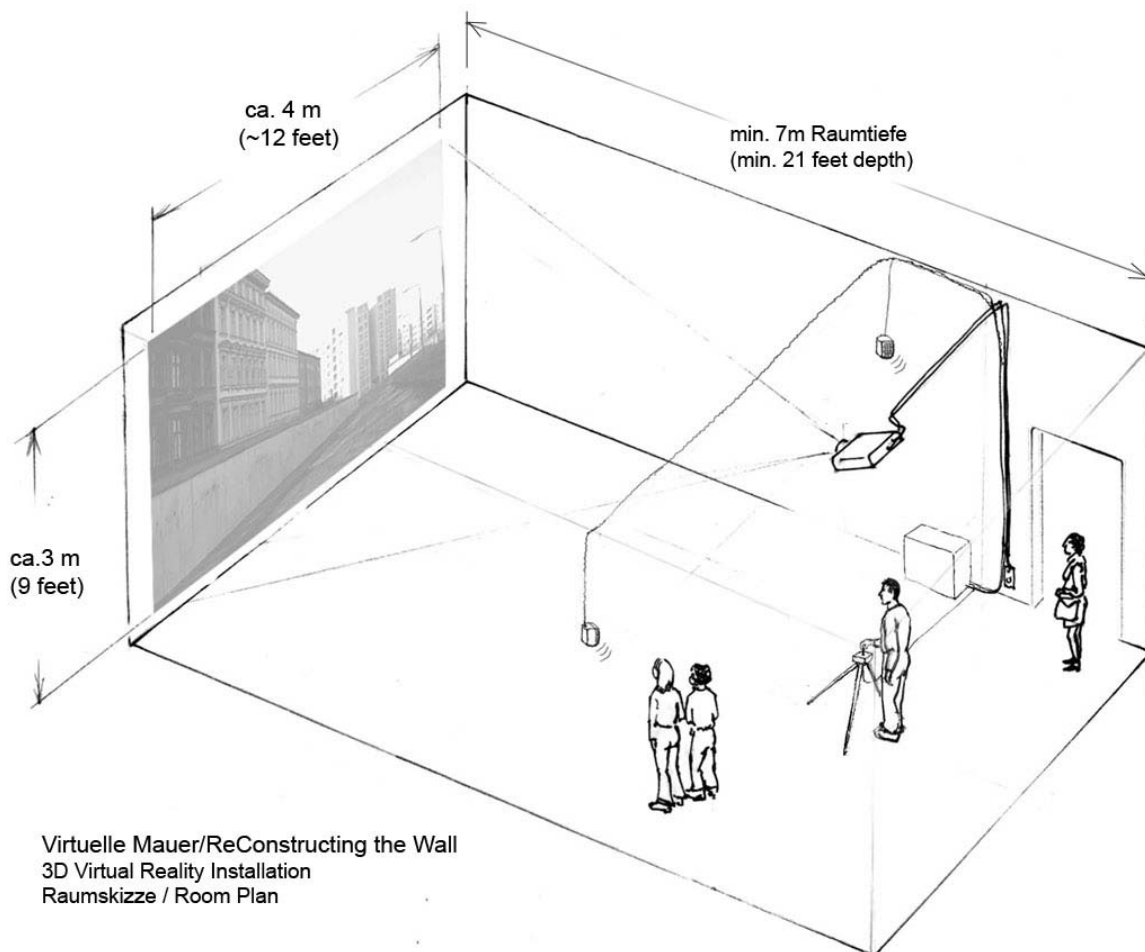
Further partners, supporters and sponsors of the project include:

- Hauptstadtkulturfonds (Capital City Cultural Fund of Berlin): primary financial sponsor
- Berlin Wall Documentation Center
- Museum for Communication in Berlin
- Federal Republic of Germany State Department
- Goethe-Institut Boston
- Dr. John Czaplicka, PhD – Harvard University Center for European Studies
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology – Center for Advanced Visual Studies
- metroGap e.V. – Association for Urban Theory and Practice
- Bitmanagement Systems – a leading provider of interactive 3D technology
- Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, letter of intent for Documentation DVD (Federal Center for Political Education)

Exhibition concept

The VR installation **Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall** is an interactive, kinesthetic and immersive encounter that will give users a sense of how it was to live „in the shadow of the Wall.“

The virtual artwork is installed on the hard drive of a Windows PC. The image of the virtual world is projected life-sized via a video projector onto a ~9'x12' screen. Sound from the virtual world is heard via 2 stereo PC speakers. Users move through the interactive 3D world via a simple joystick or navigation console. (Detailed technical information on request.)



Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall
3D Virtual Reality Installation
Raumskizze / Room Plan

Background information brochure

The virtual reality installation is conceived to give users an immersive, kinesthetic experience in the spaces divided and created by the Berlin Wall. For users who want more explanatory background information, we will provide several copies of a **brochure (in English and German)** containing information on the political context, the social differences between East and West Berlin and the urban situation in our project area. An overview map will show how the Wall encircled West Berlin; a chronology will give an overview of the historic and political events of that time. Archival texts, photos, panoramas, aerial photos and maps, taken from different eras – post-WW2 – Cold War – after the Fall of the Wall – will give users an idea of how the Wall affected the urban landscape in this part of Berlin.

Artist team T+T: Biographies

Tamiko Thiel

Tamiko Thiel has a B.S. in Product Design Engineering from Stanford University (1979), an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from MIT (1983) and a Diploma of Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (1991.) She has been creating artworks that cross the borders between art and technology since 1983, and exhibits internationally in venues such as the International Center for Photography in New York, Siggraph, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, and the ICA/London. Since 1994 she has been concentrating on developing the interactive and narrative capabilities of virtual reality as a vehicle for cultural and socio-political content.

She has taught and lectured internationally at universities such as Carnegie Mellon University and the MIT Media Lab in the USA, and the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany. In 2004 she was a research fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, where she began the research for "Virtuelle Mauer / ReConstructing the Wall."

Selected projects in virtual reality:

- "The Travels of Mariko Horo," 2006, a reverse Marco Polo journey to the exotic Occident
- "Beyond Manzanar," 2000, on scapegoating of minorities in times of crisis
- "Geometries of Power," 2002, on power relationships between terrorists and politicians
- "Starbright World," 1996, a virtual playspace for seriously ill children created in cooperation with Starbright Foundation chairman Steven Spielberg.

Website: <http://www.mission-base.com/tamiko/>

Teresa Reuter

Teresa Reuter graduated in 1994 with a degree in architecture from the Technical University Berlin. She was a co-founder of metroGap e.V. – Association for Urban Theory and Practice – and was chair of the association until 2002. In 2003 she founded an office for architecture, visualization and graphics. Since 1997 she has been involved in numerous "art actions," artistic interventions in the public domain on themes of surveillance and privatization of public spaces.

Action art in public spaces:

- Thematic city map I: "der gefährliche Stadtplan" ("The Dangerous City Map"), 1997.
- Thematic city map II: "shoppen – aber sicher" ("shopping - to be sure"), 1998.
- Potsdamer Platz: "Sie verlassen den öffentlichen Raum" ("You are leaving the public sector"), 1998. Info-Gerüst - temporary info-scaffold installation on the Kosovo War 1999.
- metroZone – Video surveillance of public squares, 2000.
- "wachsende Gerüstskulptur" (accretive scaffolding sculpture), 2001.

Exhibits:

- Stadtpassage – ("City Passage") scaffolding sculpture in front of La Fabrik (2001),
- metroClip – video project for the exhibition "hybridvideotracks" on control, surveillance and biometrics, NGbK, 2001.
- "Scaffold sculptures from 1995-05," exhibition at IBA Lausitz, 2005

Lectures:

- Babylonia: lecture series on Berlin „Metropolenrisse“ ("Ruptures in the Metropolis,") 1996.
- metroZone: Event on video surveillance in public spaces, 2000.
- Lecturer at the College of Arts Weissensee/Berlin in the interdisciplinary seminar „Fremdkörper-Hygiene-Raum" (Foreign Body-Hygiene-Space,) 2003/2004.
- Lecture on an audio-spatial scaffolding installation for the projekt „Terraphonien,“ IBA Lausitz, 2004. Lectures for the project seminars "Parallel Worlds" and "Break" at the Lina Morgenstern School, 2005/2006.

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