

DE GRUYTER

# TRANSDISCOURSE 2

EDITED BY JILL SCOTT

**TURBULENCE AND RECONSTRUCTION**

DE  
|  
G



## TURBULENCE AND RECONSTRUCTION

Cultural Studies: An anthology of viewpoints on society from the arts and the sciences. The authors in this book were collected together because of their shared concern for society. They all believe that the arts and the sciences are effective spaces to raise public awareness and to encourage us to think differently about our old and out-dated concepts of representation and categorization and reconstruct new potentials about how the designs of the future might benefit our environment and the survival of our bodies. Essential to all writers is the need to drop our old disciplinary boundaries to question our interdependent relationship to technology and to reality. Turbulence and reconstruction are processes that not only affect our representation and categorization, our designs for agriculture, urban nature and energy consumption but also our relation to media and technology – the virtual, digital ideologies of interaction and substitution.

### THE AUTHORS:

ANNA ACHELNIK  
TERESA CHEN  
HUGH DAVIES AND VINCE DZIEKAN  
ANGELIKA HILBECK AND HERBERT HILBECK  
SUSANNE N. HILLMAN  
AGNIESZKA JELEWSKA  
CHRISTOPH KUEFFER AND JILL SCOTT  
ELLEN K. LEVY  
JOHANNA LIER  
BORIS MAGRINI  
PATRICK MORIARTY AND DAMON HONNERY  
JUERGEN MORITZ  
JAN SŁYK  
KIT WISE

ISBN 978-3-11-046981-3



www.degruyter.com

## INTERROGATING THE SUBLIME: RECONSTRUCTIONS

Anna Ahtelik

*The “sublime” was a term used by American critics to describe the vastness and emotion of landscape paintings in the beginning of the 19th century. These artists like Asher Brown Durant, Albert Bierstadt and William Hardt from the USA and Caspar David Friedrich in Europe focused on the mastery of humans over the landscape and at the same time the insignificance of humans embodied in nature. Here they explored a romantic reconstruction of nature and simultaneously, because of the Industrial Revolution, a disorder or turbulence that underlay their investigations. The “sublime” embodied nature is conceived as having a great, overwhelming and mostly dangerous capacity to simultaneously evoke awe and fear. Nature within these paintings was seen as the untouched natural utopia, which has the capacity to overwhelm the individual through its unpredictability.*

The pastoral and sublime grew out of the Dutch and Italianate landscape tradition of the 17th century. While the pastoral created a safe and escapist view of the progress that surrounded the time, the sublime broke with this safely constructed utopian view, of calm nature without human influence. Due to the industrial revolution, landscape painting inhabited these two distinct spheres, which mirrored human thought about nature and their resultant place within it. The pastoral, with rolling lush landscapes showed us a tame version of the natural, a nostalgic and symbiotic view of our environment. Its definition aligned with a

very romantic, utopian and peaceful harmony. The other sphere was the untamed, uncontrolled natural space, or the wild, symbolizing a loss of control from human interference. The sublime landscape became in a sense a new form of the *memento mori* or *vanitas*, where there is a sense of our own frail and entropic eventuality (1).

Today, utopian awe and unpredictable fear, are still two sides of the “sublime” natural world, which artists are still exploring today. This includes the navigation of our abilities to control and restructure chaos, through technology and social constructs,



as well as how nature, ecology, and technology are positioned within societies to create new orders or chaos. While turbulence and reconstruction are not limited to positive or negative aspects, the affects of new technologies on artistic production are still interesting for artists to explore. The artists in this gallery were chosen because they believe in confronting the reality of our current issues or satirizing this “sublime” escape, to create a complex causality and confront the affects of our technologies seriously.

For example, a causality that Tamiko Thiel and the artist group T+T investigated was based on the history of the Berlin Wall. As is well known, the Berlin Wall stands for a man-made division from turbulent times. As a virtual enactment and tribute to this disorder, T+T (media artist Tamiko Thiel and architect/media artist Teresa Reuter) created *Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall*. This work is an interactive 3D virtual reality installation “on” the Berlin Wall and the surrounding street and landscape directly next to the section. The location primarily centred on Heinrich-Heine-Strasse to Engelbecken. All three share a common interest in artistic interventions in the public domain by comparing the virtual with the real - and in creating spaces of memory to explore cultural, social and political issues (see Figures 1-3).

The resultant work is a pioneering, virtual bodily experience to augment a set of dramatic and poetic capabilities of interactive reality as an experiential and participatory *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Based on Reuter’s architecture and urban planning studies in Berlin, where she examined the effect of the Berlin Wall - and later its disappearance - on the

fabric of the city, the work explores themes of cognitive mapping, appropriation and identity.

When I personally explored the work in Thiel’s studio, it was on a regular computer screen, in Munich. I was struck by how real the experience became in the instant that Thiel asked me to approach the boundary line in the East. The format I explored was not the original full dark room installation, where even the height of the projection was taken into consideration to give the effect of walking into the space of the Berlin Wall. Even on a computer screen in full daylight, I became aware of apprehension, and surprisingly even panic while “walking” up to the guards. I am aware that my own background and growing up in Warsaw, Poland, does contribute to this. Thiel explained that it was not uncommon for people with no ties to this history, to react with a sense of self-preservation, aligning their identity to a new experience; learning through an experience which promotes “false memory construction”, the hidden and unwritten rules of survival on both sides of the Wall. In addition to the creation of a fully interactive space, the artists (with T+T group member Sabe Wunsch), also created 2D digital paintings so as to distort the landscape, compress time and space or to draw single images from complex histories. “We created these images partially because 2D allows the artist to collapse time and space into a single, pregnant image in a way that the interactive experience of the *Virtuelle Mauer* itself only unfolds over time.” Thiel (June 2015). This work uses the seduction of virtual reality to explore the interactive memory space of communication, time travel and dialogical city walks with residents, children and contemporary witnesses in Berlin.



Fig. 1: *Virtuelle Mauer/ReConstructing the Wall* by Tamiko Thiel, Teresa Reuter & Sabe Wunsch, Berlin, 2008.

In doing so it investigates a novel mix of nostalgia “the sublime” and “pregnant” reconstructions of the negative affects of restrictive urban division. The sublime in this case is not the overpowering and uncontrollable effects of nature by the individual, but a human construction that grew wildly and ended evoking both awe and fear.

In another project called *Dancing with Drones* a project by Josephine Starrs & Leon Cmielewski. these urban divisions are

becoming more porous with the invention of new technologies like Drones. With drone surveillance, the main question is: who is controlling the gaze and who becomes the subject? In *Dancing with Drones*, Starrs & Cmielewski integrate drones, cinema, theatre and live choreographed dance performance. In their documentation on Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/115416708>, a theatrical version of the performance, the choreographer and dancer Alison Plevy exhibits a range of different emotions, including curiosity, agitation, engagement





Fig. 2: Border Soldier Luckauerstrasse, Tamiko Thiel, Berlin 2008.

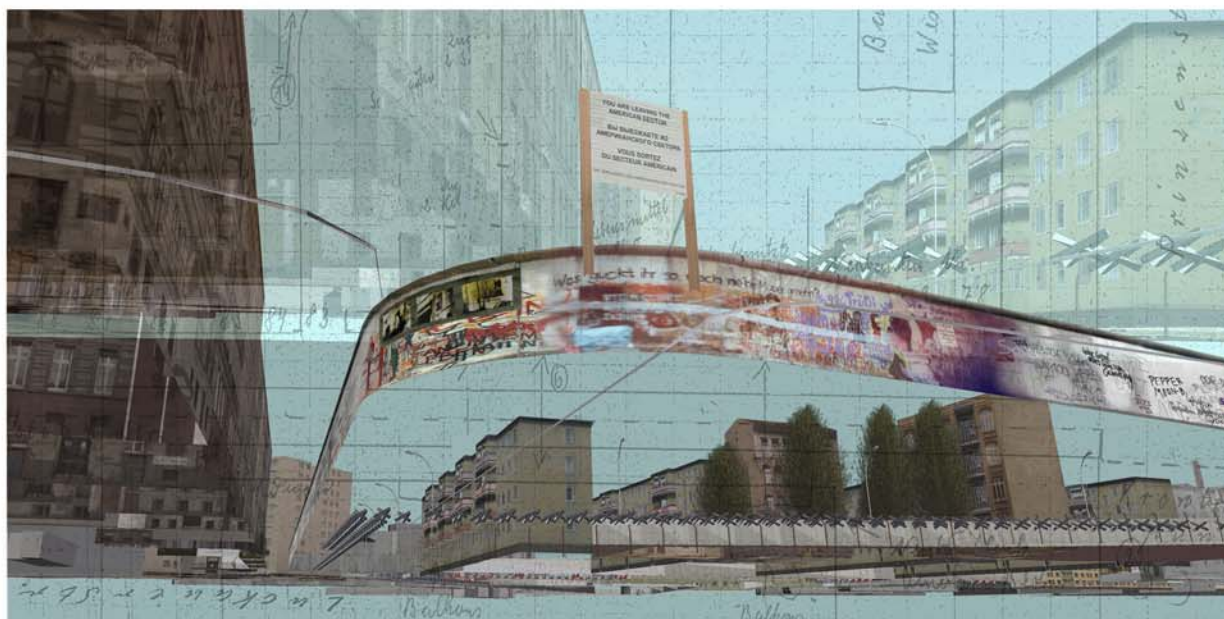


Fig. 3: Tunnelflucht Sebastianstrasse, Wunsch and Reuter, Berlin 2008.