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WRITING THE WALL, RIGHTING THE WORLD.
EXPLORING THE DIONYSIAN DIMENSIONS OF WALL GRAFFITI FROM THE AGORA TO FACEBOOK

Abstract: The turn of the current century has witnessed the re-negotiation of materiality and the growing ascendancy of the virtual, the immaterial over the real or tangible. Though it would be presumptuous to claim that the virtual has totally assumed control over the real, it can be asserted that the figure of the wall as a transfusion between the real/virtual and the self/other has emerged between the two. Based on constructions of textuality articulated by theorists such as Roland Barthes and Friedrich Nietzsche, and a pastiche format that mimics the functionality of the wall of scription, this article brings together multiple enactments of mural scriptions that include the concrete, textual, textile, vegetative and the virtual in order to articulate the Dionysian property of wall-effects. It traces successive actualisations of the wall, analysing how the virtual Facebook wall assimilates and re-dynamizes the traits of the tangible walls through an array of intertextual/inter-medial modalities.

Keywords: wall, graffiti, scription, wall-effects, abjection.

Introduction

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed the re-negotiation of materiality and the growing ascendancy of the virtual or immaterial over the real or tangible. Though it

cannot be said the virtual has entirely totally taken over from the real, it can be asserted that between the two has emerged a new element: the wall. The wall, from its traditional connotation of separation, has attained new meanings, standing as a transfusion between the real/virtual, interior/exterior and the self/other. The wall, like the world, is an ambiguous concept. From its concrete materiality, the wall has been re-articulated through various wall-effects, sometimes communicating ambiguous and contradictory meanings but never losing a certain Dionysian property.

From the last decades of the twentieth century to contemporary times, the world has been experiencing what can comfortably be referred to as *social media boom*. Advancements in communication technology have led to the flourishing of media outlets combining the expansion of traditional media of communication like the radio and television with the flourishing of new social media and Internet as popular modes of expression. These new social media spaces include Facebook, Twitter, Google+, tumblr, LinkedIn, Qzone, Tencent Weibo and Sina Weibo (in China), Cyworld and me2day (in South Korea), Orkut (in Brazil), VKontakte and Oddonoklassniki (in Russia), Tuenti (in Spain) etc. All these constitute an important dimension of globalisation, networking and a worldwide flow of ideas, opinions and knowledge. The media expansion into hitherto remote parts of the world is spectacular even though it would be illusory to think that these media networks would gain a totalising effect following at any time in the human future. Nevertheless, with the advent of these spaces, an ubiquitous catchphrase of our times is "the wall". This concept is a polysemous and sometimes contradictory signifier which can be approached from various dimensions depending on the interest of the researcher. In this article, I discuss the wall as an interstitial space of creative self-negotiation and socio-political expression. Through an inter-medial and intertextual analysis, I argue that the new social media connotations of the wall bear a complex rapport with the traditional meanings of the wall as expressed in cultural, socio-political reality and their creative representations. The paper engages in a genealogical trajectory of the wall in the human language as a medium of communication and political expression. The crux of this article is the wall of social media and how it becomes an inscriptional space and a genealogical succession of antecedent mural scriptural forms.

Facebook was created in 2004 on the heels of MySpace and other preceding social media fora. Statistics show that each month people collectively spend around

three hundred billion minutes on Facebook (Standage 2013: 7). What are the affective potentials of the wall as a space of inscription? How is the wall attuned to the challenges of self-expression and political articulation? What are the complexities of text production and response on the wall? What congeniality connects the Facebook wall to other imaginations of the wall that coincide with or precede this technological innovation? How does the solipsistic propensity (Holmes 1997: 35) of the Internet co-exist with its role as a space of public expression? These are the questions that will be addressed in this essay.

The Facebook wall as a cyberspace of inscription appears on the heels of earlier forms of inscriptional surfaces like the scroll, the "tablet", the slate etc. which have characterised writing before the advent of the ink and paper, arguably the most enduring medium of writing. David Holmes posits that it is by operating such a diachronic study that we can understand how certain technologies have moved from being mere "appendages" of social life to being determinant spaces of social constructions (1997: 43). The Facebook wall accumulates the basic semantic traits of previous/simultaneous materialisations of the wall, while amplifying their sense of immediacy, virality and distance reduction. Thus, I argue that the distinctive factor of the wall as an inscriptional space of the modern era is the Dionysian charge that it carries and its transgression of the private/public dichotomy and production/reception boundaries. Regarding the use of the term "Dionysian" in critical theories, it stems from Friedrich Nietzsche's analysis of two Greek gods of arts, Apollo and Dionysius, underscoring the distinctive tendencies in temperament and creative energies between them. The former is the god of visual (plastic) arts while the latter is the god of non-visual arts. Considering his own creative practice as lodged in the centrifugal tension of Dionysian sensibility, Nietzsche posits in *The Birth of Greek Tragedy* that:

> ...my instinct at that time turned itself against morality in this questionable book, as an instinctual affirmation of life, and a fundamentally different doctrine, a totally opposite way of evaluating life, was invented, something purely artistic and anti-Christian. What should it be called? As a philologist and man of words, I baptized it, taking some liberties (for who knew the correct name for the Antichrist?), after the name of a Greek god: I called it the Dionysian (2008: 5).

Both the Apollonian and Dionysian drives exist within every human being or artist and are engaged in a contest of influence. The Dionysian drive is the domain of stupor, exuberance, enchantment, revelry, rhapsody, shock, mixture, intuition, joyousness, laughter, excess and non-Cartesian deconstruction. Nietzsche opposes the Dionysian disposition to the Apollonian, which is characterized by dream, tranquillity, contemplation, systematicity, dialectics, Socratism, peace of mind and methodic reason. In the domain of philosophy and literary criticism, Nietzsche's pioneer elaborations have subsequently been echoed by authors such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. The Apollonian/Dionysian divisions, intended more as metaphors than pristine categories, are neither absolute nor self-exclusive. Rather, the distinction seeks to define the organising principles of artistic production, however subtle and obscure. By carrying the notions of the Dionysian to the realm of mural inscriptions, I stress not only the state of mind or method of the writing subject, but also the way the medium functions, with the vibrant coexistence of participants of different backgrounds, social and existential conditions, ideological dispositions, all yoked together on a single wall in a potent as well as fragile, engaged as well as volatile conversation. In this light, mural inscriptions, especially in its Facebook phase, comes off as the space of the carnivalesque, affect, virality, liveliness, proliferation, viscerality, and excess, hence their Dionysian tendencies.

The Wall: Basic Semantic Connotations

The virtual world ushered in by the Internet technology has been perceived as revolutionary on the grounds that its content and mode of functioning have come to compete with, if not replace, to a certain extent, the world of the "real". Even though the "real" world can be perceived as a construct, in line with a long tradition of diverse brands of deconstructive philosophers ranging from Plato, through Nietzsche, to Jean Baudrillard, we can still consider as being real anything that bears at least a sensual and tactile contact with human subjects. The relationship between the world of the real and the realm of virtuality can be perceived in the nomenclature in current use in modern digital jargon. Internet and social media labels like "wall", "site", "key", "window", "home", "gate", "open", "enter", "close", "leave", "dock", "exit" are examples of

metaphors borrowed from the "real" world, especially the domains of human habitation. In recent, these virtual life terminologies have gained almost equal frequency with their real-life denotations, leading to inter-spatial negotiations of media of interaction and "cohabitation". The above terms can thus be referred to as linguistic negotiations of "virtual reality". This system of lexical borrowing or transposition is not fortuitous; rather, it plays on the basic functional similarity between the borrowed term in the tangible world and the virtual world. The correlation between these two realms remains the contraction of spatial distance and time lapse, important properties of modern technology. My interest rests on the terminology "wall", the most common, visible and widely used "space" of the social media.

The wall is an essential concept in human culture and civilization. First and foremost, it is a basic component of a dwelling space, the latter being one of the most important foundations of human culture and a sense of stability, protection and security. No one can imagine a home without walls. Thus, walls are inherent components of the structure called a house or home. The home becomes a limitless vacuum, incapable of providing comfort, privacy or protection. The basic definition of a house/home is that it is made up of four walls and a roof. Though traditional conventions of the housing and building have been deconstructed and reconfigured in postmodernist architecture, the structure or framework that separates the building from the outer space is still referred to as a "wall". In the same light, the house is protected from exteriority by the walls. More so, beyond the physical protection against hazards, the wall also provides a collective shield to those contained within the house/home. A home with porous and transparent walls could stand as a metaphor for infirmity, weakness, lack of integrity as well as exposure to hazards, sabotage and vulnerability. As a result, certain discussions must "remain within the four walls" of a home while some proverbs even insinuate that "walls have ears" when some confidential information is shared or confessions are made.

The Graffiti Wall in the Greco-Roman Agora

After several centuries of neglect, graffiti has become a rather essential aspect in the study of cultural histories and popular cultures ranging as far back as ancient Rome and Athens. One cannot think of the Athenian/Roman agora/fora, the public sphere that

provides the most ancient cognate of the Internet forums, without graffiti. In the public sphere, graffiti were inscribed on the walls of the theatre, gymnasia, basilicas, brothels etc. (Wallace-Hadrill 2015: 3). Graffiti encompassed expressions of common social practices and reactions to government policies and practices, though did not represent a fully reliable barometer for popular opinion per se. However, they portrayed popular mentalities that might not be articulated in formal political jargon. In his study of the myriad dimensions of graffiti in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome, Peter Keegan concurs that graffiti "record informal individual and group responses to the formalised processes and institutional arrangements of political power", articulating "the multiple layers of the ancient political landscape" (2014: xvi). It is important to state that such spaces of the interaction between the private and public sphere are not unique to European spaces. The likes of the agora, the forum, the exedrae etc. have also had their cognates in every human society. John Kelechi Ugwani and John Schofield (2018) analyse the arena or village square in the Ibo community of Nigeria, while Edward R. Swenson (2018) dwells on the importance of temporary gathering and the preservation of immaterial culture and socio-political life in the Moche culture of Northern Peru. These articles analyse the importance of spaces of interaction, popular expression, public debates, in/formal socio-political commentary, in ancient non-Western societies, a subject that still begs for further research. In this work, however, my tangible historiographic examples have been drawn mostly from the Greek and Roman contexts due to the availability of documented data regarding the scriptural practices that prevailed in these landscapes and spaces, especially in the form of graffiti.

The graffiti space is a forceful appropriation or an interpolation of the public wall to create a space for alternative markings that "capture expressions of practical action and private opinion" by the disenfranchised and dispossessed (Keegan 2014: 183). Such a space is not just there to be appropriated and re-invented by marginal voices in order to forge a presence that interrogate mainstream views This inscription could be a form of contestation, in a deeply political sense. For example, on many walls in Emperor Nero's Rome one could find a sententious and intrepid graffito such as "Nero, Orestes, Alcmaeon – matricides" (Keegan 2014: 158). Otherwise, the inscriptions on the public spaces could be of a private order, without any political bearing. This can be considered as public performance of privacy, so to say. On the other hand, most graffiti are based

on parody or sarcasm, disentangling the official notice, lampooning hegemonic ideas expressed on the wall. This stands as a wall version of newspaper cartoons, some of the greatest channels of critique in many countries. In her *Graffiti in the Athenian Agora*, Mabel Lang asserts that:

> Such pretty communications and expressions of individuality achieve a kind of importance by virtue of their very triviality. The writers, intent on their own concerns and giving no thought to the searching eye of history, reveal themselves unselfconsciously and give us not only an insight into everyday life in each succeeding period but also pure and unadulterated evidence concerning the history of literacy (letter shapes, letter values, spelling, direction of writing, use of abbreviation, and so on) (1988: 3).

Through such playful mixtures of codes, graffiti on the Greco-Roman public sphere brought to life a tangled space that combined various types of discourses whereby "the sacred occurs alongside the profane, politics mix with religious sentiment, commerce with superstition, the concrete with the ideal, myth with history, the ethical with the disdainful" (Varone 2015: 114). It constituted a vibrant space of syncretism where drawings intermingled with ideograms, where the gods mingled with the banal things of life. In a similar light, Tom Standage discusses the graffiti as part of an evolving culture of popular literacy and opinion sharing in the Roman public sphere. He asserts that:

> The Walls of Roman towns and cities were covered with written messages of all kinds including advertisements, political slogans, and personal messages. These messages, sometimes with accompanying images, were either scratched into plastered walls of Roman buildings, painted onto them, or written with charcoal. The traditional layout of a Roman house faced inward, with rooms looking onto an internal courtyard. Facing the street was a blank wall, which provided plenty of space for graffiti. Such walls served as huge public message boards (2013: 38).

Such practices converted the neighbourhoods into democratised spaces operated in a conversational and friendly but also critical spirit. Thus, the definition of the private and

public was quite difficult to demarcate in Ancient Rome. Regarding the specific case of Pompeii, Wallace-Hadrill corroborates Standage's above description by asserting that:

> The very promiscuity of the writing on walls facing streets in Pompeii suggests that, just as the public had right of access to pavements laid and maintained at private cost, and sheltered by the overhang of private balconies, so it was taken for granted that a private facade was a suitable location for messages addressed to the passing public (2015: 4).

The internal format of the private home favoured graffiti inscriptions. Such areas of private houses were regarded as *communia,* "on the grounds that the people could come in as of right even uninvited" (Wallace-Hadrill 2015: 5). Those were propitious spaces to leave a message, just as what the forum meant for official information forum (2015: 7). Thus, within the domestic sphere emerged the metaphor of *quasi-public space,* blurring the distinctions between public and private writing.

Be it on private walls or public spaces, graffiti tested the limits of one's openness to friendly critique, while architecture made room for spaces of inscription. Therefore, modern day graffiti is nothing new but rather follows a long genealogy of public inscriptions in bygone cultures and civilizations. Predictably, the sexual brags and scatological humour common with modern graffiti in public lavatories can also be found in Pompeii: "I have screwed a lot of girls here", "Celadus the Thracian gladiator makes all the girls sigh", "Secundus defecated here" (Standage 2013: 40). Such graffiti ranged from "highly intimate, profoundly favourable remarks to deeply offensive, obscenely explicit vilifications" (Keegan 2014: 256). It can be said that the more lurid and impudent comments were possible on tangible public walls due to their anonymity. However, such a claim could be discounted by the flurry of vulgar comments on particular sites by users, some of whom use pseudonyms that accord them androgynous or transgender identities, while others assume their real identities. In the same way that a public comment on a Facebook wall can become private by an in/advertent addition or omission, the *public* can instantaneously become the *pubic* and vice versa, due to a process of insertion, incision, scratching or cancellation. Nevertheless, graffiti provide an indispensable path into conceptions of and debates around areas as diverse as sexuality, politics, religion, commerce and sports in ancient Greco-Roman societies in

almost the same way that the lively exchanges on Internet walls provide a window into and measure the tempo of present current events and topical issues, with their inherent tensions and occasional diatribes in an era of polarising global debates.

Wall and Ideology: The Berlin Wall

Fig. 1. Graffiti on the Berlin Wall. http://www.thegoldenscope.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/02b9ca11e516d98ce5a0c2abfb2ab418a5.jpg

In another sense, the wall is portrayed in the history of human conflict as a means of protecting the in-group as well as a physical separation between two entities in an ideological conflict. It thus becomes a marker of negation, division, dichotomy and even opposition. In the expression of Marc Silberman, "throughout history, walls have functioned as effective markers of power, lines of defence, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and divisions between 'us and them'" (2011: 2). Examples abound, such as The Great Wall of China built by the Chinese dynasties to shield their dominions from raids in the northern borders by the Eurasian nomadic tribes; the Wall in Ancient Rome, one of the most famous being the Hadrian Wall, built by Emperor Hadrian as a defensive fortification in the northern province of Britannia, a century after Christ, marking the northern limit of the Roman Empire; the Maginot Line, built by the French in the 1930s along their border with Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, as a bulwark against possible German invasion. In the present world order, one of the greatest political markers has been the ideological wall between the Capitalist and Communist socio-economic systems. This ideological divide is summarised in the figure of the Iron Curtain (wall) in *The Sinews of Peace* Speech by Winston Churchill given at

the Westminster College Missouri on the 5th of May 1946 to underline the ideological differences between the Western Capitalist nations and the Eastern bloc led by Stalin's Soviet Union. The concrete demarcation of this wall found a solid anchorage in the 14-feet Berlin Wall (1961-1989), built by the defunct Democratic Republic of Germany to prevent the influx of East Berlin citizens under communist regime from streaming into West Berlin under capitalist regime. The Fall of the Berlin wall stands as one of the greatest connotations of political and ideological upheaval in modern history. With the image of the "falling wall", a sheer amount of spectacularity is granted to the changing times and scenes of the late nineties whose ripple effects influenced socio-political relations in countries that hitherto had been proxy battlegrounds between the Soviet Communism and American Capitalism. The 155-kilometre wall has gone down in history as one of the semiotic epitomes of political ideological differences. However, in spite of the political rationality behind it, some cultural theorists uphold that the wall came to assume an independent cultural identity. According to Olaf Briese in *The Different Aesthetics of the Berlin Wall*:

> The actual designers were no longer in control of the architectural result of their work. This experiment in construction had long ago taken on a life of its own. The final product had an aesthetic will of its own that transcended the horizon of its producers by several dimensions. The Wall enjoyed a career as a thing of its own making. Things, as cultural studies proved long ago, are objects that can act. They determine actors as much as they are determined by them. Things, or objects, have a specific agency that propels them onwards of their own will. The series of generations of world builders became relentless servants of an architectural experiment that led unrelentingly into the logic of pure emptiness, pure death (2011: 47-48).

The wall cast its aura on political actors, conditioning by its stature the form of discourses about and inscriptions on it surfaces. The failure of the wall to guarantee the total blockade of influx from East to West and the deteriorating situation in the East turned the wall into an ambiguous and troubling legacy, even to the originators of the wall. Thus, the wall was exposed to what Briese refers to as the aesthetic of the ruinous. He relates that in 1976, an official inspection tour of the sections of Wall in Berlin-Mitte

and Treptow led to the repeated verdict: "repairs required", "repairs required", "repairs required". Though inscribed by the State, this repetitive inscription can equally be conflated with that of dissidents. The wall needed repairs as well as the deteriorating political culture that welded its people together through State ideological and repressive apparatuses and not through the success of its model. Briese cites one of the East German officials, commenting that segments of the border, especially on Bernauer Street, constitute:

> A terrible sight and damages the reputation of the GDR. There are anti-GDR slogans and damages the reputation of the GDR. There are anti-GDR slogans and commemorative crosses on several sections. Parts are in danger of collapsing... (2013: 48).

The electrified wall, built out of an assortment of materials, thus became a priced space of inscription for many who used it to express their anger, frustration and disgust at its political significance. If its political rationale was to preserve the ideological anchorage of a specific space, dissenters and detractors used it to a different and tactical purpose. The cultural critic, Michel de Certeau defines tactics as the means by which subjects subvert the hegemonic culture from within its constitutive space. Tactics invert the epistemological basis on which the totalizing culture and order of meaning foreground their hegemony. It does not claim access to full knowledge of its own intentionality, but sustains a sense of uncertainty in the hegemonic political and cultural order through its nomadic agility and functionality (Shang Ndi 2017: 89). For many, the wall assumed the character of a slate, becoming the world's largest canvas of subversive painting of political discontent. The inscriptions on it deconstruct the imposing patriarchal surveillance machinery that it was supposed to enforce. In line with tactical subversion a la de Certeau, the graffiti authors "metaphorise the dominant order. They remain other within the dominant order; they make it function in another register" (Rivkin and Ryan 2004: 1249). The fear of detention or recrimination did not deter them from voicing their critique of the repressive regime. Graffiti thus became a vibrant channel for political communication which could be compared to online practices in the new social media technological boom:

Graffiti can be understood as a low-threshold option for political participation or as political protest. Contrary to institutionalized participation or collective forms of protest, it provides the possibility for individual, time-bound but nevertheless grants effective publicity for action. This outcome seems to be comparable to present forms of online Publication (Blog, Twitter etc.) and could be similarly investigated… (2010: 118).

The above viewpoint is especially valid in situations of political repression where graffiti provides a certain degree of anonymity to its authors. The difference with modern forms of communication is the latter's flexibility and deconstruction of spatial distance. It provides a space of effrontery for (anonymous or pseudonymous) citizens or subjects to virtually bring down the wall of official political systems through adversarial commenting and subversive responses. Spaces such as Facebook walls provide the onus for contrary viewpoints to deconstruct dominant policies on their very own wall, making possible a direct engagement with the forces of repression from the perspectives of both endogenous and diasporic communities.

The Prison Wall

Fig. 4. Gilbert Shang Ndi. A restored prison wall in Auschwitz II (Birkenau). Poland, 2013.

Graffiti as a form of a subversive inscription is characterised by a number of uncommon spaces ranging from seminary and college walls to toilet walls (as examined above). However, there is another space where graffiti takes on an existentialist dimension: the prison wall. The prison wall as a space of confinement is by its very nature liable to all forms of graffiti. As a semiotic space of separation from the outside, it shares a semantic fraternity with the political walls I have examined above. However, its impact arises from the fact that the prison wall confronts the incarcerated subject at a very intimate level, restricting even the most basic human function: movement, the very prerogative of human vitality and sanity, which they have been denied as a form of punishment. Deprived of physical movement, the only form of movement accessible to the prisoner is imaginative: a dialogue with the wall. An extreme example is that of the Auschwitz concentration camp, in which communication was almost impossible. The instructions were delivered in German and no excuse was accepted for not understanding that language. Interviewed several years after about what enabled him to cope with the dire situations in Auschwitz, Primo Levi, author of *If this is a Man*, said in an interview that two things were key to his survival: knowledge of (German/Polish) language and some kind of faith in something, be it political, religious or philosophical. While many of the inmates spoke Polish, understanding German made one more liable to follow instructions and advice correctly, though that was not a guarantee against rampant death given that "correctly/incorrectly" was merely a matter of fate in that space. Thus, talking to one another, in a situation in which most of the inmates could not share a common language, was quite frustrating as dialogue with the other only amplified the fear and uncertainty of his/her condition. The wall became a space for communication without any well-defined telos. It became a way of speaking to one's self, to inscribe the frustration on the wall, a symbol of insurmountable power. The tangled nature of the graffiti and its utter illegibility capture the dire situation of the thingified huddled mass, a vehement attempt by the soon-to-die subject to externalize his/her pain and to will/sign the wrecked self onto life.

The exteriorisation of the trauma of imprisonment and the untold mental torture of the condemned is revealed in Victor Hugo's acclaimed work, *Le Dernier Jour D'un Condamné* (The Last Day of the Condemned):

I stood up and passed my lamp around the four walls of my prison cell. They are covered with writings, drawings, strange figures, names that mix with and cancel out one another. It looks like every convict wanted to leave behind a trace, at least on these premises. It is written in pencil, in chalk, in charcoal, giving a mixture of black, white, and grey colours, often in the form of deep cuts in stone here and there, in the form of rusty characters, as if written in blood.

Certainly, were I to be in a more settled mind-set, I would be interested in this strange book that unrolls page after page under my eyes on each stone of this prison cell ... I would love to rewrite in whole these fragments of thoughts, dispersed on the slab; to find each person under their proper name; to make sense out of these mutilated inscriptions, these dismembered sentences, these truncated words, this body without head, like those who might have written them (…) I have just seen, scribbled in white on one side of the wall, an unsettling image, the figure of a scaffold, which, at this moment in time, is certainly being installed for me, the lamp almost fell off my hands (Last Day 441).

The wall, as a "reality screen", captures with great vividness the internal disintegration of the subject through prison experiences. There is an element of intertextuality between the projections of distress and confusion of the previous inmates with the anguish of the protagonist narrator. The wall is a cogent expression of the degree of inhumanity, hopelessness and grief that is characteristic of prison conditions. The narrator supposes that the writings, as casual as they seem, project the innermost despair of their unknown authors. It is thus a visceral form of writing, written with multiple instruments which the dehumanising state of their existence in the camps. It is a writing in blood, as surmised by the narrator. The fact that some of the writings and drawings are not simply written on the surface of the stonewall but rather inscribed into them, shows the dire conditions of the inmates but also their will to express their state of mind and to survive. The narrator expresses the idea of remembering the distorted, destroyed and dis-membered selves in the inscriptions, but he himself is caught up in similar abjection, as his thoughts are interrupted by the impending hour, the imminent reality of being hanged.

A T-shirt in Ayacucho

Fig. 5. Gilbert Shang Ndi. T-shirt exhibited in the Memorial Museum in Ayacucho (Peru) set up by mothers who lost their sons/daughters in the armed struggle between the Luminous Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Peruvian Armed Forces. 2015.

Another imaginative rendition of the wall worth examining is the clothing of the deceased in war. In the Memory Museum of Ayacucho (Peru) dedicated to the memories of the victims of the 1980-2000 guerrilla war led by the Maoist guerrilla Group, Shining Path, one encounters a striking figure of a wall. The T-shirt recovered from the box of an assassinated Peruvian, young graduate of an art school in the town of Ayacucho. As a tradition, well-wishers, friends, classmates and teachers inscribe their wishes to the graduate on his/her T-shirt on the day of graduation. However, the ensuing war completely obverted the intentions behind such traditions and practices. In this specific case, the practice carries a rather tragic connotation. Few days upon graduation, war broke out in Ayacucho in 1980 and the owner of that T-shirt was found dead in the countryside on Ayacucho. It is not yet established whether he was murdered by the armed rebels or by the Peruvian military forces. The T-shirt, one of his most precious belongings, was recovered by the memory museum to serve as a portrayal of the anguish that war distils. Thus, the inscriptions on the "T-shirt wall" stand as a reminder of the wishes and dreams of the young boy, curtailed in the most brutal way by the war. The T-

shirt, a multifariously inscribed wall entertains a tactile and haptic relationship with the body of the boy and the very fact that the body is now absent adds to the painful memory of violence. The fact that it was once worn by a body in flesh and blood, now absent, turns the T-shirt into an unsettling organic wall. It is an incarnation of dreams deferred, of truncated futures and displaced utopia of juvenile imaginaries.

The Tree-Wall: Organic Text in Leipzig Market Square

Fig. 6. Gilbert Shang Ndi. Inscriptions on a "walled" tree in Leipzig, Germany. 2012.

The tree can also become a wall of inscription. The text can be considered as organic when it interacts with the growth process of the tree, preventing the inscription of any master sign that is irreversible. The organic text writes back as an active and a reactive medium; it grows and covers up the previous texts, creating space and opportunity for further inscriptions. This reminds me of this tree in a small public square of Leipzig that has borne the weight of multiple inscriptions expressing a variety of experiences by its authors. The perennial tree carries love letters, social commentary, curses, slangs,

wishes, in short, a wide gamut of social experiences brought to bear on the poor stem. One is poised to wonder how the tree will grow with so much weight of private and public memorial inscriptions. However, the arborescent text keeps growing as a plant but also as a writing surface, amongst the chaos of inscription, assuming functions beyond the biological. The writing materials brought to bear on it differ; some are pen-written, others scratch-written with sharp nails, blades, pincers etc. Some tear parts of the tree's bark to re-inscribe texts into its stem, sometimes leading to an overflow of sap in the course of the writing process. These messages are in-between drawing, painting and writing, mixing these various codes beyond recognition. Some of the messages, in their inscriptional processes, hamper while others enhance the growth of the tree. It would be no wonder that the growth of the tree might be slowed, but it nevertheless grows.

The Tablet-Wall of Artistic Inscription

Fig. 7. A painting of the Battle of Taillebourg by Eugene Delacroix. http://www.grandspeintres.com/tableaux/delacroix/high/taillebourg.jpg

In an insightful article on the French poet-painter Eugene Delacroix, Marcel Lobet discusses the intricate harmonisation of poetic talents and painting skills in Delacroix's

oeuvre. However, through analysing evidence provided by the author from Delacroix's diary, the latter seemed to perceive himself fundamentally as a painter, unlike other ambidexters like Lord Byron who acknowledged he was more dexterous in poetry than painting. Delacroix attempts to justify his ingenuity in painting by the very nature of the substantive material on which he paints and how he relates to it: "You see your tableau at a glance; on your manuscript, you cannot even perceive the entire page, that is, you cannot embrace it entirely with your spirit. In fact, the canvas cannot be compared to Mallarmé's blank page" (1981: 9). Delacroix was thus enchanted by the idea of totality of his apprehension and mastery of the painting surface and the joyful pre-emption of the creative act to be exercised on it: "Delacroix was obsessed by this idea that the tableau is a total revelation, whereas the book only reveals its secret only page by page" (Lobet 1981: 3).

Delacroix perceives the tableau as a totality he can fully embrace whereas the paper of the book unfolds its secrets page after page. Every inscriptor, artist or non-artist develops an affective relationship with the basic material on/with which they exercise their inscriptional activity. This material tends to assume an active role in the imagination and to interact with the author in a peculiarly productive way. In a like manner, the virtual wall on which one writes on Facebook can be related to Delacroix's quotation in one determinant way: its flexibility. At the same time as it can be possessed affectively by the writer, it unfolds, not one after the other like the paper, but as one seemingly endless sheet. It unrolls like the scroll, but for the fact that its edges are almost endless, able to contain the thoughts of the author in their very process of intensification and expansion. The wall can also be scrapped and "folded" by the sleight of the hand. It is this flexibility of the wall of inscription that accords it a Dionysian dimension of profuse creation, radical revision and cancellation, the (re)creative power to do and undo. In another dimension, the idea of having a text on the (Facebook) wall means that the text would be apprehended more as an interpellative image than something that needs to be read laboriously and soberly.

Imagining the Facebook Wall

The notion of the wall is built around an aesthetic of transparency and the idea that our private sphere should not prevent us from belonging to the public realm. Rather, we

own the private so as to avail ourselves to the public, to connect with a larger community. The wall is, therefore, the medium that relates the self to the public. Through the wall, several levels of communities are formed. The wall speaks both to the self and the other in a certain democratic interaction. Deborah Ascher Barnstone Develops the idea of architecture and the notion of transparency in her book wherein she says that: In an attempt to portray a marked distancing from the dark years of Nazi rule, the (glass) walls most public structures in the Federal Republic of Germany were built around an ideology of transparency characterized by

> open public access to the political process especially to the elected representatives, active public participation in the political system, an open market economic system, a free press, and guaranteed civil liberties such as freedom to express one's opinion, freedom of conscience, and freedom to dissent. But a drive towards transparency is not the same as transparency achieved (2005:1).

This definition reflects the concept of the wall as an ontological metaphor of transparency as implied in the case of Facebook. Whatever comes out of one's mind is projected to the public sphere of the wall with a sense of spectacularity. Though by virtue of owning a Facebook profile we own a wall and prerogative over it, the wall also appears to be an inexhaustible public book from which we cut a leaf and inscribe our thoughts and sentiments on it. The wall can thus be considered a metaphor and inscriptional board of globalization, of being in the world/wall and exchanging ideas and opinions with concentric and intersecting folds of communities. Thus, with its flexible transaction across the private and public spaces, the most inherent characteristics of the wall include visibility, evocativeness, exhibition, transparency, spectacle, ostentation and staging. The wall is evocative in the sense that even its absences are made into a spectacular (thus interpellating) void. Writing on the wall is meant to elicit a response and the formatting of the Facebook page along what I call *partial will* entails that the respondent sees their name inscribed under the yet-to-be-written message, merely beckoning, inviting or interpellating them to say a word, to react. In other words, the text is already written and we are invited to append our signature and claim the authorship. When referring to the graffiti practices in Greco-Roman walls, Wallace-

Hadrill surmises that "the activity was so widespread as to be unstoppable: plastered walls simply *asked for* stylus marks" (2015: 7, my emphasis). Like Delacroix' tableau, the open and "empty" wall, but physical and virtual, beckons the imminent inscriptor-painter on, in a specific semiotic language that requests a specific response. Notice that the inscriptional act of the author on the Facebook wall is also in response to the ever-open interpellative interrogation: "what's on your mind?" However, the response to this question gains its autonomy from the "anonymous" questioner who seeks to determine its answer through pre-set sentence types. The writer wrestles with the medium in a Promethean battle in order to gain control and determine the nature of his/her syntax. The system attempts to bring the writer back to the normative sentence, but in a defiant spirit, the writer recreates the language, infusing the formal and conventional vocabulary with regionalisms and idiolectal speech patterns. If the advent of the Television meant that each one of us would have his/her 5 minutes of fame, social media, especially in its Facebook dimension, entails that 24 hours belong to the writing subject. The post on the wall can transform a supine thought into a viral phenomenon, generating a mosaic of meanings that grant different dimensions to the original thoughts of its author.

The Transgressive/Transnational Wall

The transgressive dimension of new social media can be understood as what the Peruvian author and cultural critic, Mario Vargas Llosa refers to as the de-elitization of culture (2012: 35). Though Vargas Llosa partially consents to this need, he however regrets what he considers as the trivialisation of cultural production that seem to have lost their intellectual density to a generalised superficiality of the society of spectacle. Vargas Llosa's critique of the trivialisation of culture through new technological modernities can be inscribed within a long genealogy that includes figures like Seneca (the first century AD), Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Mark Horkheimer. Mark Poster equally considers the transgressive and boundary-breaking nature of the social media platforms, but from a more optimistic outlook:

> On the Internet individuals construct their identities, doing so in relation to ongoing dialogues not as acts of pure consciousness. But such activities do not count as freedom

in the liberal-Marxist sense because it does not refer back to a foundational subject. Yet it does connote a 'democratization' of subject constitution because the acts of discourse are not limited to one-way address and not constrained by the gender and ethnic traces inscribed in face-to-face communications. (1997: 222).

The interactive character of the Internet in general constitutes a marked break with the hitherto communication innovation and "a primary memory machine for universal culture": The Television. If, as David Holmes states, the Television posed as the "spectacular agent of processes of globalization and abstraction because of its broadcast-based reach and its power of simulation" (1997: 27), the Internet subverts this medium's patriarchal verticality, building in its place pro-active, inter-active, mosaic, intersectional and horizontal networks across societies. In this way, the Internet deconstructs pre-given ontological notions of community and provides room or contexts which bring about new ways of being, new chains of values and new sensibilities about time and the events of culture (Holmes 1997: 29).

The Facebook wall is not that of a national dividing barrier that defends essentialist identities. Rather, it is a porous wall, which is webbed by various strata of belonging located at the crossroads of different networks of group identifications beyond race, ethnicities, ideologies, nations etc. Obviously, interactions, discussions and debates can take place on the wall that are shaped by national sentiments and transfused by national innuendos and idioms. Thus, whenever two or more people of a specific nation are conversing on the wall, part of the Facebook public-audience-authors that come from a different nation might be lost in translation, lacking the necessary historical pre-requisites to form part of the discussion. However, even when this happens, these idioms do not mark the frigidity of national boundaries or a sure anchorage of national identity. Rather they reveal the comparability of such phenomena in other national contexts. In his *Transnational Graffiti*, Russel-West Pavlov states that "national identity is based on constantly re-iterated illocutionary acts, acts of speech whose enunciation carries out and gives body to what they say. The illocutionary speech act 'illustrates' what it says in the moment of saying it - but only in the moment of saying" (13). The more nationalities get intermeshed on the Facebook wall, such illocutionary acts become more and more evident. Russel moves to illustrate the

performative and constructed nature of national identities by making recourse to a graffiti on a brothel wall in the north-German town of Lüneburg that reads "German is an illusion":

> Its illustrative force lies in its pointing to its own ephemeral character, to the provisional, unmonumental quality of its mode of enunciation. What could be more ephemeral and 'passing' as a surface of inscription than the rough-cast wall of a brothel? Graffiti does not engrave. It is not grave or serious in the style of more deeply incised inscriptions. Graffiti is a diminutive form, 'little writing', a minor genre, one made up of short-lived 'textlets'. Its very insubstantiality brings forth the insubstantiality of the national that set of spatial identity rules by which we all play but which have no other validity than within the bounds of the game (2005: 13).

The ephemeral text on the brothel wall underlines the temporary, non-foundational and circumstantial nature of national belonging. With reference to the question of belonging, the graffito thus accords salience to concepts of *différance* (Derrida), *affiliation* (Said) and *rhizome* (Deleuze/Guattari). True, the synchronic act of "looking up the (virtual) wall" might align it with the Nazi aesthetics of *Gleichschaltung* (total coordination) that is propitious for mass mobilisation. This phenomenon has evolved from the group looking at a public wall in an urban landscape and the busy private faces glued systematically to their private smartphones nowadays. It is assumed that the "signs on the wall" are read through the mastery of a communal code. However, the rather subjective and affective functionality on Facebook entails that unidimensionality is an impossibility. Socio-political codes are never absolute because various subjects assimilate them differently and differentially. Thus, the Facebook wall could be a propitious metaphor for the community in difference that characterises reflections on modern nationhood.

On Nietzsche's Facebook Wall

My argument in this section is that the functional mode of inscription on the Facebook wall bears close congeniality with the Nietzschean style that is incarnated by his cogent aphorism. In dispensing with the Cartesian pretentiousness of metaphysics, Nietzsche

replaces the dialectical treatises and essays with aphorisms. Defining this stylistic in the framework of Nietzsche's oeuvre, Michel Stevens holds that:

If being honest means, more than anything, being honest about one's own intellectual development, the aphorism is the perfect vehicle. For it demands that its author renew himself with each new addition, and allows for the growth of the reader. It also allows adherents to revisit the old aphorisms without the danger of forsaking the teacher (2004: 38).

The aphoristic style thus makes room for revisions and eventual inconsistencies in a way that us redolent of Facebook wall inscriptions. As Stevens argues with regard to Nietzsche's works, "if truth is no longer the standard, then inconsistency is no objection to a philosophy" (2004: 41). The aphoristic makes it very congenial to the "what's on your mind" space on the Facebook wall that calls for a poignant, assertive, immediate and yet revisable thought. This elastic space calls for a specific creative impulse with a peculiar system. In his *La Civilización del Espectáculo* (The Civilisation of the Spectacle) cited above, Mario Vargas Llosa cogently expresses the connection of modern subjects with the new spaces of expression by surmising that:

It is not true that the Internet is merely a tool. It is a tool that ends up constituting a prolongation of our own body, of our brain, which, in a discreet manner, gradually adapts itself to this new system of information and thought (2012: 210).

Even though Vargas Llosa proceeds to criticise this reality in a manner consistent with the overall argument of his work, his statement summarises the way in which the Internet has come to influence patterns of thought and meaning making in modern societies. The Facebook wall stands as a vivid incarnation of an aphoristic mind-set. The Dionysian charge and the semiotic intensity of the inscriptions on the wall are redolent of a comment quoted by Tom Standage and Peter Keegan where an Ancient Roman citizen in Pompeii wonders in the form of an inscription on a public wall that: "Oh wall, I am amazed you haven't fallen down, since you bear the tedious scribblings of so many writers" (Standage 2013: 42; Keegan 2014: 60) scratched into the walls of the Basilica,

the Large Theatre and the Amphitheatre in Rome. The walls provided vibrant and shared media spaces open to all for the expression of both individual sentiments and public opinions. As one of the thousands of messages in Pompeii puts it, "SCRIPTUS QUI VOLUIT" – "Anyone who wanted to, wrote" (Standage 2013: 42). At the level of private walls, Wallace-Hadrill equally suggests that the question of acceptability of a friend, neighbour or even stranger's message was subjective and dependent on the tolerance and openness of the house owner: "It is very hard to say whether permission is involved, positively or negatively" (2015: 7). This could be paralleled to different ways in which people manage their Facebook worlds and to what extent some are willing to go to gain autonomy of the walls of their homepage.

The Facebook wall is not only a space for the expression of ecstasy. Its very mood/mode of functioning is both ecstatic and affective. Every Facebook post signifies the end of the world and the beginning of newness, but then the world goes on even in its apparent exhaustion, to borrow the expression of Frank Kermode in *A Sense of an Ending* (1967). A Facebook post is an exclamation sign borne out of situations that might be solipsistic, epiphanic or idiosyncratic as well as interpersonal. One does not just write on a Facebook wall but rather breathes on it. Though the typed letter levels everything, one might as well notice that the inscription on the wall is not operated with uniform fluid. In a moment of crisis, both personal, national and global, the evocative force of the Facebook post might reminisce notions of texts written in blood, semen, tears and sweat, connoting the throwing in of the inscribing subject into the inscriptive space of the wall. Regarding ancient graffiti, Peter Keegan holds that they were "cut, scratched, painted, inked or otherwise marked on durable materials like clay, stone and metal – and even more ephemeral physical fabrics like wood, cloth, papyrus and other organic substances" (Keegan 2014: xi). As plain as it seems, to a large extent, the Facebook wall constitutes a modern incarnation of these graffiti practices. Through writings of varied intensities, The Facebook post turns everything around in that joyful spirit reminiscent of Nietzsche's aphoristic style. Joseph Schmidt refers to Nietzsche's aphorisms as verbal hand grenades delivered in "aggressive playfulness" (2009: 2). In the spirit of gay science, profundity and playfulness go gently hand in hand. In the spirit of other mural practices explored in this essay, the complexity of inscriptions on Facebook walls synchronise both the puerile zealousness of Dadié's Climbié as he

scribbles his first learned alphabet on the school wall and the existentialist intensity of the prison wall inscriptions that Hugo's protagonist in *The Last Day of the Condemned* visualises as he flashes his lamp across the prison wall. On the Facebook wall, writing that immerses itself within a technical vocabulary acquires a popular character so as to underline the lived experiences of the author or/and of the online community. The aura of the Facebook wall lies in its brutal transparency. Scribbling on the wall offers the possibility of not only connecting with others' ideas but the mnemonic possibility of exchanging pulse of the heart, states of mind, empathies and sympathies. The reception of the text can be nearly synchronic to its production, as can be seen from the instantaneous responses, sharing and liking that follow posts on the wall.

Writing on the Facebook Wall can be likened to bio-writing. To write is sometimes not an act of creativity, but a battle with creation itself. For to write is to put one's signature not on a piece of paper, but on the tissue of the world itself, even if that signature might be followed seconds or months later by a self-reflexive erasure. Sometimes, in the midst of the battle that takes place within a sentence, a comma (as a punctuation sign) can be a coma, in its medical or clinical sense. Writing involves the quivering of the whole human body as an affirmation of life, of existence. In his autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche insists that:

> For whenever my general vital condition improved, my power of vision also increased. Having admitted all this, do I need to say that I am experienced in questions of decadence? I know them inside out. Even that filigree art of prehension and comprehension in general, that feeling for delicate shades of difference, *that psychology of seeing through the brick walls*, and whatever else I may be able to do, was first learnt then, and is the specific gift of that period during which everything in me was subtilized - observation itself, together with all the organs of observation. To look upon healthier concepts and values from the standpoint of the sick, and conversely to look down upon the secret work of the instincts of decadence from the standpoint of him who is laden and self-reliant with the richness of life - this has been my longest exercise, my principal experience. If in anything at all, it was in this that I became a master (1911: 11, my emphasis).

Nietzsche portrays himself as one whose life circumstances enable him to *see through the brick wall*. There is no better metaphor for utterly epistemological deconstructing and dismantling than this. The prime sense convened here is that of visuality. From its etymology, is the "Facebook" wall not conceived as a surface of images and pictures to be visually perceived? In a Nietzschean sense, seeing on/through the Facebook wall becomes synonymous to breathing, that basic irreducible biological symptom of a living organism, a kind of self-implied forensic quest for one's own traces/faces in the world. Reading from the above quote, Nietzsche's perception of life as a concept that requires a totally radical approach conditions his (non)system of writing. Writing becomes similar to what Sony Labou Tansi qualifies as *committing* as opposed to *committed* activity, a compelling desire to propose a different version of humanity (Life and a Half 9). In a similar light, wall writing is an act of existentialist vitality. To write on the wall is not merely to transpose a thought process that has been undertaken elsewhere. Rather, the medium is a part of the writing process. One does not think on a Facebook wall, one thinks with the Facebook wall. Writing on the wall is done by the subject that Roland Barthes denotes as the *écrivant*, the writing self:

> What defines the writing self is that his communication project is *naive:* It does not allow its message to fall back and close up on itself, and that we read in it, from a diacritic viewpoint, no more than what it intends to say: which writing self would bear a psychoanalysis of its writing? It considers that its speech puts an end to an ambiguity of the world, installs an irreversible explanation (even when he takes it as provisional), or an undeniable information (even if he considers himself as a modest teacher) (1991: 59).

In the above definitions and distinctions, it is evident that the *écrivant* proceeds through a visceral form of writing that arises from the tempo of his immediate situation. In a like manner, in graffiti, "the only guiding force is inspiration and the feeling of the moment" (Varone 2015: 114). In the era of social media, the plethora of information outlets to which one has access in the present social media greatly intensifies "the feeling of the moment" and spontaneous writing experience. If the writer (*écrivain*) gradually guides his/her writing to a natural end, the writing self (*écrivant*) only stops writing rather than completing or ending. The citation underlies in a lucid manner the

activity of writing that one witnesses at play on the Facebook wall, that which is fundamentally Nietzschean in tonality and expression. The writing self's mode of functioning can be likened to the aphoristic mode of writing that is developed in Nietzsche's entire oeuvre. Below is an example:

> I KNOW my destiny. There will come a day when my name will recall the memory of something formidable —a crisis the like of which has never been known on earth, the memory of the most profound clash of consciences, and the passing of a sentence upon all that which theretofore had been believed, exacted, and hallowed. I am not a man, I am dynamite (1911: 49).

The aphoristic text stops (rather than ends) with a kind of explosion, epistemologically. In the same manner, even when effected in humdrum banality, every posting on the wall carries an inherent Dionysian desire and charge to deconstruct or better still, break any previous post or picture. In accordance with Mireille Corbier, Wallace-Hadrill observes that "graffiti may be the time-killing activity of bored young men. The ephemeral documentation of a banal act could add a low-level thrill to your two-asses' worth" (2015: 7). This assertion bears added congeniality with how the Facebook wall functions. A supine wall post might become an "event": caught in-between virality and indifference and located at the interstices of self-willing virtuality and the possibility of popular and excessive reactions. These actions and reactions operate through the contagion, domino and haptic virality. It is also rhapsodic in style, brings urgency and agency into a synchrony, mingling the serious with the trivial, the personal with the public, the ethical with the ontological.

Conclusion

In the above analysis, I have opted for a panoramic exploration of the Dionysian potential and affect of the wall and its inter-medial qualities. In conclusion, it can be claimed on reasonable grounds that the advent of the virtual wall has meant the extension of wall practices (graffiti, for instance) from actual walls onto virtual screen walls. This does not exclude the continued pertinence of physical and tangible walls as an enduring practice of socio-political expression that deserves critical attention from

cultural studies experts. Rather, the popularity of the physical wall is now being shared, in great measure, with a web of virtual agorae that have emerged as virtual inscriptional surfaces providing ample spaces for practices ranging from playful/ludic self-representations to visceral exchange of political views in an era of polarising national/global politics. The key question is whether Facebook and other walls, with their breaking potential, will be able to instigate a sustainable re-invention of the wall beyond its manifestations in history as a symbol of division and exclusion. Ethical challenges have arisen with regard to the exploitation of the spectacularity and virality effects of the medium by users devoid of civility. Thus, the impact of Facebook on modern sociality would depend on the ability of its users to resist these onslaughts of incivility in order to make the wall a transnational interactive space of conviviality and human diversity.

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