

Conversa com a parede/Conversation with the Wall

Carla Guagliardi

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The temporary artworks by Brazilian artist, Carla Guagliardi, whose work focuses primarily on basic questions of sculpture in space, are among some of the most exciting discoveries in contemporary art today. Her latest installation at [ka:jeta:n] Berlin is eminently demonstrable of this claim.

The Wall

'Pictures efface walls',¹ observes Georges Perec. The fact that this is not always the case is exemplified by Carla Guagliardi's work *Conversa com a parede / Conversation with the Wall*. This site-specific installation not only withdraws to the wall and thus to the edge of the room but also withdraws into the wall itself, physically becoming a part of it. It is impossible to determine whether or not the work—comprising copper pipes, a rubber band and pieces of wood—is disappearing into the wall or growing out of it. Both interpretations are admissible. Neither dominating nor appropriating the wall, the emerging form is like an organic part or extension of it. As a boundary or bulwark to space, the wall becomes a constitutive component of the form, which appears to stand on an equal footing and doesn't retreat behind it. What emerges instead is a dialogic structure. As such, *Conversation with the Wall* reveals a kind of productive co-dependency between burgeoning form and pre-existing form and, as a result, enacts a process of becoming in space, which itself takes place fundamentally as a becoming part of that space. What is being shown here is the inherent reciprocity of the wall and form posited as a precarious balance, whereby one can arise on the other or by means of the other. The emerging form penetrates the existing form and, indeed, space itself, opening up both. This acquisition of form, likewise enacted as an 'opening of form'² and of which form is a prerequisite, becomes thus a palpable modality of becoming.

Tear

Carla Guagliardi has torn open the wall of the gallery for her installation. She has sawn it open and effectively broken into it. As in Ovid's famous story, in which the rift in the wall, the small crack, served the star-crossed lovers Pyramus and Thisbe as a conduit for their thwarted affections, here too there is a tear, or more precisely the

enactment of tearing open so that form may arise. For Heidegger, the tear, or 'rift' as it has been officially translated, is as a constituency of form '[carrying] the contestants into the source of their unity, their common ground ... fundamental design [and] outline sketch',³ and is consequently that very rift in Being which, in turn, enables a manifestation ('bringing into form') and grounding in Being. When the artist saws open the wall, she is simultaneously tearing open the space and the existing form in order to inscribe a new form and a new ground into this tear. Indeed, she has literally opened up the existing form—the shape of the wall and, with it, the given space—in order to install copper pipes that house and protect a rubber band. In the gap thus created, in this 'bring[ing] forth [of] locality',⁴ she is able to house the copper pipes. She actually installs them. That is to say, she constructs or deploys them, as the literal translation of the Latin term has it, and closes the wall again. The form not only dwells in the wall, it is firmly anchored in it. She moves into the wall and inhabits it. This moment of dwelling happens in secret. Not just space but also the wall itself becomes the 'receptacle and, as it were, the nurse of all becoming and change'⁵ or bringing into form, which it houses. As a result, the installation coalesces as a spatial structure in the very proportions and relations of its visible and invisible elements, whereby the invisible and the hidden become the nod to the very openness inherent in the work's enactment. Via the act of penetrating the wall as well as its use as a housing renders it permeable; as a permeable structure, it corresponds to the actual meaning of the word, which, as a weave, differs from the hermetic edifice of, say, a solid outer wall. The very opening up of the wall brings out the moment of separation, of division and renders its essential Janus-faced duality palpable. The holes that have been made in the wall, through which the rubber band is fed out of and into it, undermine its status as a boundary and become the dynamic focal point of our perception, igniting our imagination and perpetually engaging our gaze.

The Visible and the Invisible

The apertures in the perforated wall don't provide a view of anything as such. The rubber band merely travels out of them and back inside once more. Its trajectory implies the space behind the space. The attempt to follow these partly visible, taut lines, defies the viewer's capacities, pushing perception to its limits. The entry points, which are likewise the rubber band's exit points, become thresholds that separate the visible from the invisible, the inside from the outside, thereby rendering these differences palpable in the moment of their liminality. However, not in the sense of an elementary duality, but rather in terms of the observation that in whatever we perceive, the other is necessarily always present as a negation. According to

this idea of a 'negation reference',⁶ can it be possible for the one to be visible at the expense of the other's invisibility, just as the inner and outer can only be experienced in their negative relationship to one another. In opening the wall up, the ultimate moment of this separation is both repudiated and manifested. Therefore, it simultaneously becomes an explicit reference to what has been separated, as well as a revealing of an implicit connection in the very separation that has been enacted.

What is actually revealed doesn't reveal itself entirely. Some parts disappear into the wall and do their stuff in secret. Mercurial, the work is elusive and draws the viewer in, for whom the whole, in the interplay between visible and invisible elements, remains steadfastly opaque. Drawn thus into the mode of disappearance, the viewer is likewise drawn into existence, inasmuch as '[...] things live only on the basis of their disappearance',⁷ as Baudrillard observed.

The relationship between the visible elements attached to the wall seems to be variable. Devoid of a recognisable fixed order or a system to speak of, there is also no discernable body as a finite and compact entity to define the space. The individual pieces of wood differ both in shape and dimension. Fastened between the wall and the rubber band, different configurations arise as a result of and dependent upon the intersecting pieces of wood. The individual elements and the overall configuration derive cogency from very tension generated by the resistance inherent in these forces. The tone thus generated develops the degree of its intensity commensurate with stretching of the band necessary to incorporate the pieces of wood. The forces at work in this dynamic field are in opposition to and strive for equilibrium so that form can ensue. This induces an unstable balance of mutually dependent components, with which the wooden sticks are fastened between the wall and the rubber band, as is the band in the wall. In the emerging form, the dependence of the whole on its individual parts becomes clear, its existence manifesting itself both as a unity of difference and as something extremely unstable. The removal of one single part will not only affect the entire installation but also the individual parts themselves. Every emergence of form is characterised by this vulnerability and fragility and points to the need for equilibrium between the individual elements as the constituent mode of the form itself.

The rubber band is red and seems to be fragmented. It binds the individual parts of the installation into a whole just as it binds the viewer's gaze. At the point where it disappears into the wall, the intensity of our gaze wanes, revealing a blank, a void, and sparking the desire to trace its trajectory.

The 'Red' Golden Thread*

Any desire on the part of the viewer to assimilate the installation as a whole can only bear fruit if he tries to put together the individual parts successively and using his imagination. From one aperture to the next, the eye scans the open form that offers little visually other than the disordered and non-hierarchical relationship between points and fragmented lines. The viewer traces his path—the direction and course of which remaining variable and freely selectable—along the given elements that effectively become the stewards of form. This permits ambiguous readings of the installation, the result of which giving rise to what Max Imdahl terms 'continuous figures';⁸ an enactment and a sequence in which time becomes a palpable property. Section by section, element by element, moment by moment, i.e. additively and the result of a visually sequential approach, the work opens up yet remains inaccessible as a whole. Indeed, it becomes an experience of temporality that contradicts the traditional manifesto of sculpture as a spatial art.

The dominant design element is the line; the 'action of the hand',⁹ which can be considered *per se* as a visualisation of time. The (red) golden thread running through the installation is the same thread in the form of a red rubber band that Carla Guagliardi has spanned in, out, through, and across in her *Conversation with the Wall*. Its course is a cyclical with no defined end and remaining open to the viewer. Metaphorically speaking, the (red) golden thread/rubber band is simultaneously a bloodline and lifeline as well as being a guideline. It shows the direction of travel, it is the path. Existence depends upon it and can only be experienced via its enactment, remaining impenetrable to us as a whole.

* Translator's note. 'Ein roter Faden' is a German idiom used to describe a common theme or recurring motif in a piece of literature, a series of artworks, narrative description of any kind, &c., and is usually rendered in English with the cognate idiom 'golden thread' which 'runs through' a story, for example. For the purposes of this translation, it should be noted that the original German text plays on this similarity and metaphorical cohesion, so that the 'red (golden) thread' running through—i.e. literally in and out of the wall—is actually a red rubber band.

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- ¹ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.39.
- ² Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure of Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p.1.
- ³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, in M.H., *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1–56, here p.38.
- ⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Art and Space*, trans. Charles H. Seibert. <https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/art-and-space.pdf>. Last accessed 15.10.19
- ⁵ Plato, *Timaeus [and Critias]*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p 66.
- ⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 257.
- ⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?*, trans. Christ Turner (London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2011), p.31.
- ⁸ Max Imdahl, “Norbert Kricke. Raumplastik M.I.”, in Norbert Kunisch, ed., *Erläuterungen zur modernen Kunst* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1992), p.129.
- ⁹ Paul Klee, *Kunst-Lehre* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1987), p.102.