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# UTOPIA OF ALLIANCES, CONDITIONS OF IMPOSSIBILITIES AND THE VOCABULARY OF DECOLONIALITY

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## Lines of Vienna. History for Kids

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In this text, I refer again to what I wrote in my exercise book 14 years ago in the classroom of the poet Erwin Einzinger after studying the Swiss writer Peter Bichsel. *Children Stories*, the title of this very book by Bichsel, which I can still find in the book collection of my father, who passed away in 2009. Back then, I was thinking about my mother. And wrote a text entitled »lines.« Together with my twin brother, I was living at my father's place in Upper Austria; my mother was living, since the separation from my father in 1991, with my two younger brothers in a small town in Carinthia. She loved to draw and she was drawing at night on the floor of her small flat, smoking, going to work the next day in the elementary school. She was running a gallery.

The text should express my love for her. I tried to describe how she, night after night, without actually having a space for it, would be drawing a diary in heavy black lines. How much the narrow(-minded) town mistrusted the self-empowering act by abstract drawing of a woman with children without a husband. And how she was continuously subjected to the loveliest of all dull statements about art: my kid does the same. Thus I was furious about the cowardly contempt against autonomous ways of life in Austria. In the second part of my essay, in order to contrast such a situation, I listed those lines that are always swallowed without a thought: strokes in mathematics, lines as boundaries, and lines on the road and so on.

It is said in the blurb, adults, too, are fascinated by children's stories. In the second half of February 1704, the state was bankrupt because of constant wars. In Hungary, the catholic House of Habsburg oppressed brutally the widespread Protestantism and in Vienna, the first Vienna bank was sliding into bankruptcy in the year of its foundation. At the same time, Emperor Leopold I signed a recommendation for the insurance of the City of Vienna. A key component of the plan was to enclose finally the suburbs with a »Linea« – a fortress of ditches and palisades. Court mathematician and cartographer Johann Jacob Marinoni determined the route of the wall most firmly and arbitrarily – across streets, fields and land. At the end of the 19th century, on this location, one of the main city roads, the Gürtelstraße, was built.

Under the supervision of the City Guard Colonel Obrist Marchese Obizzi, every person from 18 to 60 years old – probably also many more, younger than that – had to build with their own shovels and picks what would later be called the »Linienwall« – the »Line-Wall.« Thereafter, a tremendous number of foreign workers were enrolled in the building; through the *Codex Austriacus* from February 12, 1684, they were »invited« to Vienna to work, to rebuild and recondition the suburbs, which had been burned down following an order by Starhemberg in 1683. From the surrounding areas, a tremendous amount of oak trees – 24,390 in number – was procured to build

the palisades inside the zigzagging line. Twice the authorities collected general taxes from the people. Nevertheless, in late summer 1704, the line construction stopped, only half-finished. At first, the line was allowed to be crossed at nine gates. Decades later, the fortress was bricked up.

To the child it is told: The Vienna Line-Wall was erected in 1704 by the Emperor Leopold I for the protection of the suburb population of Vienna. The child still has in mind the words of the policeman, who likes to have his job described as such: security and safety of the population. WE UNDERLINE THIS WITH A RULER.<sup>1</sup>

Why then was the Line-Wall built and how effective was the developed system? Common stories mostly cite the protection of the (suburban) population from the »incursions« of the Hungarian Kuruc (Kuruc, kuruc, kurucok, kuruci, etc), omitting the reason for the foundation of this anti-Austrian guerilla movement. It developed in regions of present-day Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine as a reaction to the violent politics of catholicisation. Additionally, it often goes unmentioned that in 1704 the advance of Bavarian troops toward Vienna had been, indeed, seen as a threat. In the story of lines, this is simply left unmentioned because, in the recent history of Austria, »the East« has been seen as the most dangerous and diffused direction from which waves of doom and destruction crashed towards Austrian borders. Decades of military contemplation about an external defense entrenchment had certainly helped the final decision, but it alone cannot explain this enormous construction of thirteen and a half kilometers. The line was hard to oversee, the rain afflicted the pile of earth heavily, people used the wall for animals and plants, and the whole system was in reality a dirty construction site, which in the case of a siege would not have stood at all.

Another interpretation would rather focus on the suburban properties, which were rebuilt after 1683 during a construction boom outside the city. Prince Eugen and other wealthy noble neo-suburbanites were also determined to protect their (expanding) Baroque properties. In addition, it was necessary to redefine the scope and jurisdiction of the city of Vienna in the early period of transition toward becoming a capitalist city. The city began to systematically purchase suburban property. Due to the demolition of many suburban homes in 1683 and the resulting financial losses, the politics of the municipal authorities strived in a tug of war between the feudal landlords and the state administration for the expansion and legal demarcation of the city fortification, within which the city could collect taxes.

## Not a Line

A border was needed. A border, which has, at the least, the socio-spatial function to keep outside of the line undesirable people, goods and partly also thoughts, or to require permission to only enter under restrictions, charges and control. All people who, in this new imaginary in-or-out world of thought, crossed the border made themselves suspicious at the moment of their passage. They could have supposedly crossed the immense wall of earth, regulations and surveillance illegally. And because a border without smugglings, illegal crossings, etc., is not to be called a border,

every border maintains its own arsenal of images of horror: »scum,« »aliens,« »beggars,« »illegals,« »drugs,« »dirt,« »muck,« »fake,« etc. In the beginning of the 18th century, the Line-Wall was to keep out the »scum,« meaning, in the logic of lines, that the »scum« was in the eyes of those in power (and the local people?) already there, inside. The outcasts are already present when »the scum« and similar enemy images are created inside in order to construct one's »own identity.«

In 1974, two authors explained the Line-Wall's function as such: »... not a very powerful fortress, but it protected the Viennese suburbans from prowling scum, and offered some protection against diseases that were now brought in slightly less than before.«<sup>2</sup> The sentence surprises by the affirmative adoption of the pejorative diction of »prowling scum.« In the mid-1980s, Wolfgang Mayer publishes a story about the Line-Wall in the journal *Wiener Geschichtsblätter*. In it, he argues – at least in inverted commas – as reason for the barrier's construction the prevention »of suspicious scum creeping in.«<sup>3</sup> It underlines once again, indirectly, that all who pass (transgress) are to be put under suspicion. One could wonder if complaints about beggars, etc., had not been a real influence on the decision to build the »lines.« The likely situation was that the line was not completely random in the time of a slowly emerging and partially migrating mass poverty, and then, once (expensively) built, the military border line had to be of use. Despite the uncritical reproduction of »scum« – which, aptly spoken, would be »poor« or »travelers,« etc., – the statements at the least indicate that the line also fulfilled other – almost modern, steeped with resentments – borderline functions besides the military defense against late gallant armed forces. In 1851, another decree was passed to »reject and in reported cases also to detain such people who are questionable in any way, or who, by occupation, work or way of life, have in the residential area nothing at all to do, but could only develop into dangerous subjects.«<sup>4</sup>

## Ghost Lines

The Line-Wall was riddled during the 19th century by the officially authorized creation of passages for transport of goods and railways. At the end of the century of industrialization, the city government commissioned the complete demolition of the line construction in order to gain space for new buildings and infrastructure. But, one can say, that along with the demolition, the visible and even sensual experience of the 200-year-old border area was only put aside and replaced by roads and railway lines. The above-described social and spatial effect of the line has functioned as an invisible – inscribed – border, as a ghost image, to this day.

Furthermore, those fears, functions and practices that were linked with the Line-Wall have, on the one hand, been re-located to the so-called external borders, and on the other hand, they have settled over the whole »open« city. In addition to the old ghost lines, new lines have evolved in the modern city, on which arbitrary monitoring and controls – often in the name of protection – have occurred, also with the use of demonizing imagery.

Thus, »rabble,« »beggars,« »vagrants,« »homeless,« »lazy,« »stranger« or otherwise undesirable individuals increasingly transgress the lines of the capitalist city's grid. Everywhere observed by the landowners of the city – private or municipal – they are displaced with a lot of creative effort, and, if necessary, by executive powers.

As long as the Line-Wall existed, either as strict fortification or as romantic promenade, there were constant laments about the line trench being used as an unpleasant dumping ground. As if by magic, since the 19th century, vast quantities of waste have disappeared to be stored in locations outside the urban perception. Yet the creeping feeling that dirt, waste and pollution are omnipresent is aroused in quite a number of people in the city. Following the advertising line of the city administration department no. 48, each and every Viennese holds responsibility in his/her own hands – by picking up what has no place on the streets – for an even cleaner »Commercial Street.« With a wagging finger, the neo-feudal power says: »Don't make a mess« – and, with its campaigns, underlines where the polluters, the dirty boys of our world, are to be found. Not at all in the heads of supermarkets, not even in industrial production and capitalism, but in that infamous clientele, who stole trolleys only to leave them abandoned and blocking precious parking spaces or throw wrapping paper into the blind spot of the pavement edges. »You hold it in your hands.«

### Wiener Linien®

In spring 2000, the car dealer Karl Heinz Grasser takes office as finance minister in the new ultra-right-wing government (»right-right-wing government« – referring to the term »left-left,« ironic hint that both parties in the government were right). He, his buddies and Chancellor Schüssel know how to make money. In the following years, they sell the state-owned enterprises: BUWOG, Post, VA Tech Voest Alpine, Telekom Austria, Austria Tabak, State Printing, Vienna Airport, Dorotheum, VA Steel, Strohal rotary printing, Böhler Uddeholm, VA Erzberg, etc.

The social-democratic City of Vienna, having »privatized« the essential communal services just a year earlier, founded in 1999 the »Wiener Stadtwerke Holding AG.« Many of the infrastructure companies, acquired in the late 19th century by the city government, were introduced onto the stock market: the transport companies, power stations, gas works, communal funeral homes, Municipal Department 43 (Cemeteries), Badner Bahn, and so on. Today they are called »Wiener Linien,« (Vienna Lines), »Wien Energie« (Vienna Energy), »Bestattung Wien« (Vienna Funeral House), »Beteiligungsmanagement« (Participation Management), »Friedhöfe Wien GmbH« (Vienna Cemeteries, Inc.) or »Wiener Lokalbahnen« (Vienna Local Railways).

*Wiener Linien GmbH & Co. KG* is therefore a bare 12 years old. On the website, presented in just few words, the history ranges back to the year 1865, when the »first public horse car of Vienna from Schottentor to Hernalds was opened.« The behavior of the young company with »limited liability« is such that the entire differentiated history of the transport services can only be understood as reduced funding, as advertising heritage material. This results in serious consequences, which are

reinforced by the fact that the complexity of urban transport is in the minds of a historical business administration melted into a technocratic exercise, in which it simply comes to push »customers« from »A to B.« Because of the bizarre view on history, it is barely of little meaning to the creators of the new traffic worlds that infrastructure companies are »outsourced.« The more that is outsourced, the slimmer the company called »City,« the clearer and clearer the shape; this is the late capitalist logic. To what extent outsourcing – there are indeed no cancellations – prefers its dirty flip side, the incorporation of structural problems, of invisible work, of disavowed responsibility, of ambivalent history – at least on the surface – is not considered. In this sense, Wiener Linien GmbH, since 1999, has incorporated, so to speak, many of the repressed aspects of the history of the obliterated Wiener Linien: issues of control, social segregation, arbitrariness, etc., which were and are exercised on public transport. These aspects are now hidden in the closet of Wiener Linien GmbH.

Transport policy means radically more than talk of »from A to B.« The reconstruction of transport networks, the social design of transport systems or the available possibilities to use transportation system has significant effects on the daily lives of people, on the perception of space and time, and the possibilities of human socialization in general. Which »ghost lines« have been incorporated in the Wiener Linien GmbH corporate policy? One line may be traced in the specific exercise of control. Control is basically exercised through the price of admission, which is a prerequisite for participation in the transportation system of Wiener Linien GmbH. One who has no money available can either take the risk of unlawful use and get a large fine or walk / bike through the city. Furthermore, Wiener Linien GmbH has imposed house rules over its property, which is strongly communicated.

The owner's house rules prohibit the »use of bicycles, skateboards and the like,« »soiling, staining and damaging of stations and equipment,« »noise / music,« »begging / peddling,« »excessive alcohol consumption,« »smoking,« »dogs without a muzzle and leash,« »blocking corridors, escape paths and technical facilities« and the »misuse of facilities.« But even with a valid ticket, individuals can – according to house rules – be excluded from the use of Wiener Linien, based solely on their appearance. Moreover, it is not allowed to distribute without authorization »leaflets, brochures and the like,« carry out »interviews, collective initiatives, and petitions,« do »shows and events,« or shoot »film, video and photos for commercial purposes (every recording with a tripod!). The house rules are titled with the admixture: »as a matter of good order.« Next to it, the advertising slogan of Wiener Linien GmbH: »The city is yours.«

The house rules sum up only what is anyway a matter of good manners that is the belief of the advertisers. With pleasure, they refer to the imagery of privacy or even etiquette. Hilarious pictures to illustrate traffic. To practice, to internalize as a constant reminder of the place of control within the premises of Wiener Linien GmbH, a comprehensive so-called »wide area«

tacked my brother on the escalator. The station supervisor assured him that it is not possible to get the video. A friend told me how she was a target of anti-Semitic hate speech. Vienna Lines.)

I take a ruler and one by one strike out the house rules on the poster of Wiener Linien.

What is the purpose of this inversion of »free« public space into a private room of order? Or should one say »wish«? The creators of these cynical »You like order. PERIOD. We do too!« messages have only one purpose: »to offer you a pleasant and safe environment.« Funny enough, the regulations are legitimized – with the argument that one follows the deep wishes of the majority of population! Order and cleanliness are set almost equal. At least ostensibly, the creators of these worlds cultivate a terminology of dirt and cleanliness, which they raise up beyond all politically negotiable reasons as a cold timeless beauty. That is indeed wrong, because it is the clean transportation worlds of the postwar modernism that is now, particularly after only 40 years, identified as a synonym for dirt and untidiness by the political grandkids of the former planners and bit by bit eliminated. But a critical mind has never been seen as good by autocratic power. Power means, above all, the indiscriminate availability of time and space to demonstrate, be it only in a timeless adherence of completely intolerable conditions or statements.

How »cleanliness« is used weighs heavy. With the concept of cleanliness, primarily the homeless, beggars, musicians, etc., are kept away or are expelled from the premises of Wiener Linien GmbH. These diverse practices of displacement of those not-able-to-consume were borrowed from the makers of the worlds of shopping, enabled by the cuddly factors of »Security« and »Cleanliness.« Over the loudspeaker, the supposedly righteous customers are encouraged not to hand over money to any that beg for it within the Wiener Linien GmbH! Thereby one only reinforces the problem. One may better anonymously transfer the money to donation clubs! That would be a lot smarter. The concept of cleanliness is also a big thing in the sector of advertising! It goes along quite well, because everyone loves cleanliness. It doesn't matter anyway who actually meets the conditions of the desired cleanliness of the Wiener Linien GmbH. This craving has little to do with concrete cleaning work. I assume that the managers of Wiener Linien GmbH and the advertising folks don't give a shit about underpaid outsourced demanding cleaning work being done by often-discriminated-against people. A good deal more, it is they who produce those filthy conditions with their cost-efficient company policies (only the »profit-takers« can have a sweet nibble!). The billboard shows happy workers with completely empty white spray bottles, with neon-colored jackets and shiny blue buckets. Not even a logo contaminates the spray bottle. The white spot represents ultimate purity. Even the workers themselves leave in the rarest cases traces, in the form of protest, salary negotiations, demands, desires, etc. They work for other private employment agencies or private cleaning companies – and disappear if they complain – without a contact person, with no address, no place in the company – like the dirt that they used to remove. One can only hope that somewhere, somehow, a tell-tale white spot, a clean pool, is left behind.

Wiener Linien chief executive Michael Lichtenegger says: »Successful balance: information focus, house rules and cleanliness. ( ... ) [The] cleaning and route services are well received by our passengers.« How apolitical the policy of house rules is, is shown by the fact that the »units« were launched »on the initiative of the City of Vienna,« and even the dirt itself shows how apolitically the whole company is run. The main reason for the waste that is visible in the Wiener Linien is, after all, the racist little side newspaper of the »Krone« called *Heute*. In contrast to the flagship paper, *Heute* offers shallow vomit material that may be taken daily and for free in the underground. Shamed be he who thinks it is for political reasons that such trash is borne into the private halls of the house-rules-loving Wiener Linien GmbH. The City of Vienna® – thus (until 2010) the Social Democratic government – has administered in many areas the practices of Wiener Linien GmbH. The rhetoric of cleanliness and house rules are progressively extended over the entire city area. The majority loves cleanliness and cleansing; not much has changed in Vienna in the last 100 years. The racist small-time speakers of the Freedom Party get the biggest laughs when they impute »the left« with a dirty look.

Her last 12 years, my mother lived in Vienna. She weakly taught young children and, due to financial difficulties – a Styrian carpet dealer had driven her into personal bankruptcy – looked (poorly paid) after children in the children's museum on the weekends. Then she retired for health reasons. She painted and drew, wrote and designed books. All alone. Hardly noticed by the art establishment. Then, male real professionals of the Vienna General Hospital performed a final surgery on my mother's body. All in one, from top to bottom, she was cut and quickly stitched up. She lived for two weeks on the line before they shifted her with the intensive care tubes to a neon-lit junk room. The young chief physician, who loved to impress the older doctors with speaking jargon, patted us on the back and handed us a one-sided copy of a Word document on which the most important TIPS AND TRICKS IN CASE OF DEATH were crudely put together. Kids, it's gonna be fine.

*In loving memory of Mum and Dad.*

*Translated from the German by Iris Borovčnik*

## Notes

- 1 And think again about it in future times: protection? Who is protected? What is protected? It's not by coincidence that most of the time this is called cynical – the National-Socialists have named many of their terror organs »protection« (Schutz-) or »security« (Sicherheit): SS – Schutzstaffel, SD – Sicherheitsdienst, RSHA – Reichssicherheitshauptamt.
- 2 Walter Hummelberger, Kurt Peball, »Die Befestigungen Wiens. Mit 19 Kunstdruckbildern und 3 Textabbildungen« [The Fortification of Vienna: With 19 Art Prints and 3 Text Pictures], in: *Wiener Geschichtsbücher*, No. 14, Peter Pötschner, ed., Paul Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna-Hamburg, 1974, p. 65

- 3 Wolfgang Mayer, »Der Linienwall. Von der Befestigungsanlage zum Gürtel« [The Vienna Line-Wall: From Fortification to the Belt Highway], (Katalog zur Kleinausstellung des Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchivs) [Catalog from the Exhibition, Vienna City and Federal Land Archives], in: *Wiener Geschichtsblätter*, supplement 2, 1986, p. 4.
- 4 Cf. Adalbert Zaleisky, *Handbuch der Gesetze und Verordnungen, welche für die Polizei-Verwaltung im österreichischen Kaiserstaate von 1740-1852 erschienen sind: Nach dem neuesten Stande der Gesetzgebung und in alphabetisch-chronologischer Ordnung* [Handbook of laws and regulations published for the Austrian police administration in the Austrian Empire between 1740–1852: according to the latest state of the law and in alphabetical-chronological order], second volume, Verlag von Friedrich Manz, Vienna, 1853, p. 336.

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