I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me
Los Tigres del Norte

Nature imposes its own borders: drastic changes in topography, rivers and oceans all constitute borders because of the inability of other species to cross them; nevertheless, they ignore human borders and constantly pass over them. The rivers that have been used to delineate political borders change their course over time, despite the frustrated efforts of humans to straighten them out. Mammals, birds and insects migrate across the walls erected by nations to impede the movement of people. Flying insects freely cross from Central America to North America: you can't ask them for a visa. Nature demonstrates the artifice of the attempt. Any territorial border imposed by man is arbitrary and uncomfortable, a violation of the right of free movement. None is definitive.

As humans, we need borders and limits to deal with the infinite reality that confronts us. Each division we make of this reality allows us to appropriate units that we can comprehend in an attempt to understand it a little bit more. For this reason - which is natural and human - we surround ourselves with borders, both symbolic and physical. To a certain point, it's inevitable.

As is the case with other species, nomadism and migration are phenomena that have accompanied us ever since our origins. It's in our nature to explore a territory to understand it and dominate it. One of the greatest human aspirations has been to transcend borders: those of knowledge, of language, of information, of stereotypes and, finally, of territory. Borders invite us to cross them.

Consciously or unconsciously, borders are conceptualized as a division between civilization and barbarism; they conceal a contempt for the other. Social inequalities, political conflicts and war force millions of people to migrate to other territories to survive or improve their living conditions. When walls are insurmountable, these migrations occur by means of other routes. This is a phenomenon that cannot be peacefully avoided and has become a source of fascination for many disciplines: its complexity makes it a difficult problem to solve. Nevertheless, some urbanists and architects have been imagining nomad cities since the 1970s and there has been increasing interest in studying these proposals. An interconnected and globalizing world in which mobility and immediatism are privileged above all else seems to contradict the growing demand for border walls.

The imaginaries that surround the idea of security are often contradicted by the impulses that define our condition in the world. We live in a reality composed of different types of cells, created with the certainty that their security increases to the extent that they close themselves off. The concept of the border is traditionally defined as the line delimiting two states, but nowadays we can say that borders can appear anywhere, can be of any size and can take on any form. Cities contain physical, symbolic or imaginary borders, which are sometimes invisible. We consciously or unconsciously cross them or avoid them. The great urban walls sell a naive idea of security while they deny the city. Thoroughfares create borders that drastically divide the urban fabric, instead favoring mobility and immediatism.

Some borders are established to try to control and protect cultures, identities, diversities or endangered species. Respect begins with setting limits. We need them to mark differences in social agreements and for legal and administrative organization. To define ourselves and, through self-knowledge, to engage in a cultural exchange with the other. Borders also protect identities.

Etymologically, the word frontier is related to the word facade. Without limits and walls, there could be no architecture, as each architectural element constitutes a border in some fashion, including the high walls that conceal the mystery sought by Luis Barragán. The act of tracing a line has, since its origins, been an exercise of power. Whether good or bad, it is a reality that must be explored through architecture, urbanism, landscape and design, because it is a habitual practice in these disciplines and it would be naive to ignore its political meaning. No dividing line or wall is a neutral ideological entity and its meaning can be read differently depending on which side of it you are on. The Berlin Wall had a powerfully imagined cultural meaning that ended up legitimizing capitalism: simple cartographical lines become discourses of power that play a decisive role in the inhabited territory. Walls that configure space accompany us every day, but each wall, each border, each limit has a symbolic meaning that can be emancipatory or asphyxiating.

In territorial borders (geographical, academic, mental), dual or multiple realities are generated and manifested that, among other things, reflect asymmetrical power relations. In these border regions, it becomes possible to understand and produce the identity of each one of the divided territories, with their deepest and darkest aspects in tension: their reality is a mixture of both sides as well as something new, indecipherable, disordered, enveloped in an intense, complex tension. To truly understand a territory, a concept, a mental state or a field of knowledge, one must begin by understanding its limits.

Identifying the types of borders that can exist is to understand their meaning and to define which are truly necessary. They may be solid, porous or open, allowing for an advantageous exchange for both parties: a space for communication with the other. Who we are is always defined in our reflection of the other.

Cristina López Uribe

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FE DE ERRATAS: Página 014. "Casa en Crestón…" Dice: "La casa en la que nos estamos enfocarnos". Debe decir: "La casa en la que nos estamos enfocando".