

**MASSIMO RECALCATI**

# The Temptation of the Wall

Five Short Lessons on Civil Life



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# **The Temptation of the Wall**

## **Five Short Lessons on Civil Life**

Massimo Recalcati

Translated by Alice Kilgarriff

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# **Dedication**

To Stefano Coletta and Pietro Galeotti, the first people to believe in this lexicon

The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

## Warning

This book develops the central themes of *Lessico civile*, the short television series broadcast on Italy's RAI 3 in spring 2020 and filmed prior to Christmas 2019. The collective trauma of Covid-19 had not yet reared its head. And yet, the reflections developed back then are still pertinent, even now, in the light of the tragedy that has befallen us.

Before the pandemic exploded, politics was consumed by the enormous global problem of immigration and the need to rethink how we integrate with those who are different from us. In this context, the symbol of the wall appeared as a sovereignist response to the imminent threat posed by the intruder. This sovereignism was not only a political temptation, leading to border closures, a greater military presence at those borders and the radicalization of the securitarian drive, but also reflected a profound mental inclination, as human beings have always drawn up borders, defended their own safety, rejected the risks associated with being open to the outside world.

In this context, the drive does not only manifest itself as a passion for freedom, adventure and travel, fed by a thirst for knowledge and social contact, but, as I repeatedly demonstrate in this book, it also reveals the urge to shut down, to refuse freedom, to avoid the radical responsibility this entails by choosing instead to barter it away in return for one's own security. This is the temptation to wall oneself in, which any lexicon of civility must reckon with.

The trauma of the pandemic that has swept across the entire planet since early 2020 fatally reactivates this temptation as even our friends, those closest to us, our family members could be carriers of this disease. They are