



Painting the wall: Becoming-other in a holey space

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Somebody in the process of applying a layer of paint on a large billboard. The transition from a previously tarnished surface to the freshly painted plane mesmerized me. It was a chance encounter with the moment of its erasure. Jahne Pasco-White, 'To accrete a surface', 2017

Walls create borders, order chaos and provide us with security, or so we say. They enclose difference, tame the wild, reorganise space and direct movement. We tend to think of walls as concrete stable structures and fundamental elements of the built environment. We believe that they neatly separate the inside from the outside. In a Heideggerian sense, walls, we are taught, are not simply 'things', but the very foundations of our being.

In this essay, I seek to challenge the static representation of walls and show their fluidity by drawing on a patchwork of theories, concepts and spaces. I travel to different places and practices to engage with Pasco-White's work. The central purpose of this essay is to discover how walls become experimental and creative minor spaces. I argue that borders shift as walls move. This essay is ultimately about 'other spaces' that create escapes in thought and practice. It represents my broader work on borders, walls and affective relations. The aim is not to present a coherent 'analysis' of walls, but to create

a patchwork of ideas and practices to show how walls constantly change shape and function in politics and art and thus create disruptions. Each section operates independently to create this patchwork. I first follow the lines of concepts to present the theoretical underpinnings of connections and disruptions created by walls and boundary-making practices. I then travel through the West Bank, Palestine, to examine how the Separation Wall has become a canvas for activating moments of resistance. Finally, I discuss Pasco-White's work to discover how a wall once again has turned into a creative canvas in a holey space.

De/framing

In *Earth Moves*, Bernard Cache (1995) presents us with a dynamic image of a wall that does not belong to a static geography, but that moves. He redefines architecture as an art of the frame and encourages us to rethink the relationship between the interior and the exterior. Cache disturbs the traditional housing and boundary-making function of architectural practices that seek to stabilise limitations and separations between the inside and the outside. There is nothing stable in Cache's world; everything changes with entanglements of the human and the non-human. Architecture is not a closed system. It does not represent the outside world, pre-given

identities, boundaries or categories; rather, architecture constantly induces new forms of life, entanglements and movements that allow for endless connections. Cache is concerned with questions about ‘becoming-architecture’ and seeks to understand these fluid connections and flows between the interior and the exterior. His ambition is to create a dynamic, shifting and fluid form of architecture that does not belong to a ‘static geography’ or ‘a complete plan’, but is ‘always open to variation, as new things are added or new relations are made’ (Boyman in Cache 1995, viii). This unconventional notion of architecture is defined in terms of mobile space, unstable territory, and shifting boundaries. De/framing plays a central role in this unstable territory:

A territory is not the immobile closed space of “the context” to which a building must be mimetically adjusted; and the relation of architecture to territory is not that of a complete plan or organized system. Rather architecture is “the art of the frame,” and the “architectural” in things is how they are framed (Boyman in Cache 1995, xi).

In a Deleuzian sense, the frame territorialises space; it temporarily orders chaos and defines the binaries that guide our lives in a desired direction. The frame separates the domestic from the wild, the outside from the inside, the self from the other, while simultaneously creating these categories. However, it would be wrong to perceive Cache’s notion of the frame simply as a form of territorialisation; rather, the frame functions as a fold expressing a flexible continuity and connectivity between the inside and the outside. Paul Harris (2005, 40) suggests that as a fold, the frame does not work from the inside (a pre-existing whole) to the outside (a boundary); rather, it operates from the exterior to the interior. The boundary does not dictate interiority but offers unlimited flexibility. Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 187 and 188) describe this productive force of the outside as de-framing. The system of framing ‘carries out a kind of *deframing* following lines of flight that pass through the territory only in order to open it onto the universe’. The frame never fully envelops the content; ‘the picture is also traversed by a deframing power’ and ‘the painter’s action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 188).

In Cache’s architecture (1995), a frame has three functions: it separates, connects and arranges. A frame separates by means of wall, but it simultaneously

re-establishes connections and flows. In her discussion of Cache’s moving architecture, Elizabeth Grosz (2008, 14) writes:

The wall divides us from the world, on one side and creates another world, a constructed and framed world, on its other side. Though it primarily divides, the wall also provides new connections, new relations, social and interpersonal relations, with those on its other side. The wall destabilises and reinflects the territory created by the floor, yet within and through the wall another reterritorialization of the earth is always immanent.

Framing then always carries a potential to activate movements of disturbances. Such movements connect an inside to its outside and transform enclosed spaces delimited by walls into experimental and creative minor spaces that betray their primarily disciplinary functions (Ozguc, forthcoming). De-framing is what Grosz (2001, 151-55) describes as ‘spatial excess’; that is the inherent instability of the authoritarian function of architecture which offers a radically ‘antifunctional’ alternative. A spatial excess reveals the possibility of *becoming-other* (Ozguc, 2020; Ozguc, forthcoming).

Becoming-other

In *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari define the process of becoming as bodily transformations that reflect our capacity to change. They unpack how bodies experience change when they encounter one another. Becoming refers to a relational process that corresponds to the affective power of bodily capacities for transformation (Patton 2000, 78). Deleuze and Guattari describe the transformational capacities of bodies as ‘affectations’; that is ‘additive processes, forces, powers, expression[s] of change – the mix of affects that produce a modification or transformation in the affected [and the affecting] body’ (Felicity 2010, 11-12). Becoming is the power of affect. As Brian Massumi (1992, 96) explains, becoming functions as a borderline whereby bodies move away from the boundaries of molarity, it ‘unfolds potentials enveloped in a singular individual at a crossroad of mutation’.

Becoming always refers to *becoming-other*, which begins with the questioning of taken-for-granted narratives and positions: territorialised bodies and captured lives. As Massumi (1992, 93-105) suggests, becoming-other is ‘bodies-in-escape’ and thus is always a social, political and collective project that opens life into new connections and contestations. Becoming-other creates new spaces



within old ones. These new spaces promise ‘spatial excess’ in our most troubled territories in which we define ‘home’ only through our given identities, names and narcissistic desires. Becoming-other promises us an escape, affirming our hopes of realisable utopias. As a power of affect, a relational, collective project, becoming-other is always *becoming-with*, as Donna Haraway suggests. It refers to our potential to become a stranger to ourselves in our world-making entanglements with others, human and non-human animals. When bodies encounter one another, they discover endless possibilities of creativity together and might seek to transgress set territories. Becoming-other shows our potential to become different. As an inherently political project, becoming-other is thus a process of ‘making kin’:

Making kin seems to me the thing that we most need to be doing in a world that rips us apart from each other, in a world that has already more than seven and a half billion human beings with very unequal and unjust patterns of suffering and well-being. By kin I mean those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can’t-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences. I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me (Haraway 2019).



Making kin is not a genealogical process. It is not a search for roots. It leads to the establishment of rhizomatic connections with human and other-than human beings. Making kin is finding new ways of co-existing with others. It is the finding of those people who are ‘missing’; that is those who are marginalised or silenced or those seeking alliances with them. It is a collective movement of metamorphosis: a collective moment of those people who are ‘rising, each emerging from his or her hole as if from a mine in all directions’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 414). Making kin is a moment of becoming-other, becoming-a-stranger to ourselves in our encounters with others and it is those encounters in which we identify the ‘excess’ of walls.

The spatial excess of the wall

In the summer of 2011, I sought to identify the spatial excess of the Separation Wall (the Wall) in the West Bank. Over two months, I searched for the possibility of ‘making-kin’ in these troubled lands and kept asking myself whether



the Separation Wall could operate as something other than its initial function which was one of occupation and colonisation.

The Wall is certainly one of the most well-known apparatuses of Israel’s colonisation and occupation machine in the West Bank. Its construction began in 2002 during the *Al-Aqsa* Intifada. Since then, its colonising power has increased incredibly. The Separation Wall and its associated regimes of control undermine Palestinian lives. It significantly hinders the Palestinian freedom of movement and destroys livelihoods. Despite all these effects, that summer many Palestinians told me to write about their everyday resistance and the ways in which they disrupt the colonising function of the Wall. That is why, that summer, I kept asking myself: could the Separation Wall, as Grosz might suggest, ‘destabilise and reinflect the territory’ contributing to the deterritorialisation of that



occupied territory? That summer, rather than searching for the oppressive function of the Separation Wall, I considered the process of its becoming and asked: how did the Wall reveal possibilities for creativity and connectivity; how did it function as a contact zone in which bodies encounter one another; and finally what was its potential to contribute to those processes of ‘making kin’?

My aim in this essay, is not to present a detailed analysis of the Separation Wall, but to focus briefly on the act of painting the Separation Wall and the ways in which art could create a smooth space. In 2011, I observed graffiti at different locations on the Wall and on countless occasions. I stood in front of the restaurant menu that had been painted on the Wall and listened to Palestinians about how the Separation Wall has been reused as a gathering place and a playground to create an alternative space to resist occupation and colonisation. As I did this I kept asking myself if art can generate a new, alternate layer, an excess that reveals not only the inherent instability of the colonising function of the Separation Wall, but also creates an autonomous zone in which bodies collide with one another to make multiple new connections that do not follow predetermined paths, but experimental rhizomatic connections that produce decolonial forms of life in this cramped colonised space (see Ozguc, forthcoming). I asked myself countless times if the Separation Wall and its ‘spatial excess’ could open up a space for the diverse practice and process of ‘making kin’.

Much has been written about the Separation Wall, mostly about graffiti in Bethlehem. The Separation Wall certainly operates as a canvas that makes its biopolitical violence visible. As a canvas, it transmits a political message. Craig Larkin (2014) writes that graffiti with its non-organised and experimental nature functions as a medium for communication in a climate of extreme control in the West Bank. Graffiti in this context operates as a place for ‘counterpublics’ in which multiple and contradictory international voices can engage with the local communities (Larkin, 2014). Through the practice of art, the Separation Wall has become a site at which creative politics materialise. As one of the artists of *Artists without Walls* writes, the practice of art is a form of ‘imaginative politics’, it is the material outcome of the imagination of the viewer and the exchange between the viewer and the artists (Danon and Eilat, 2009). In this space, everyone becomes a political actor. Boundaries between the artist and the viewer, the performer and the audience, the metaphor and the real, and the outside and the inside, blur. The art of the Separation Wall presents a collective project, which turns

Palestine into a ‘site of anti-colonial learning and solidarity, as well as the source of a productive dialogue with other colonial geographies’ (Lambert 2020).

Over the past two decades graffiti, photography, performance art, movies, documentaries and participatory media projects together with the village-based, local anti-wall protest movements, have reconfigured the Separation Wall’s occupational function and turned it into an experimental, collaborative and creative space. However, this does not mean that the Separation Wall simply turned into a space of resistance, rather, I would argue, the Separation Wall turns into a holey space: a space of indetermination, in which smooth and striated spaces co-exist, entangling with and constantly changing each other (Ozguc, forthcoming). A holey space, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 513) write, is both the space of the nomad and the sedentary. In this space, one can find both ‘nomadic assemblages’, cracks, holes, lines of flights and ‘sedentary assemblages’ that seek to capture and reterritorialise the entire field. Art, including all the paintings on the Separation Wall, creates a messy space. The space is transgressive as much as it is capturing. The Wall is still an apparatus of occupation and colonisation. However, at the same time, the Separation Wall leaks.

Creating an ‘other space’

My memories of the Separation Wall and its ‘spatial excess’ remind me of Jahne Pasco-White’s work, *Motion in the Opposite Direction*, a large-space painting (11x7 metres) painted in-situ over several days in January 2017 on an abandoned concrete-wall block in Melbourne. Very much like the art projects on and around the Separation Wall, *Motion in the Opposite Direction* does not simply aim to exhibit pre-determined movements, identities and anxieties; rather, it seeks to generate a new space defined by the intermingling of smooth and striated spaces. Pasco-White’s work is located at an abandoned block in an industrial area alongside Merri Creek in East Brunswick. The outer perimeter of the block is fenced, and one can easily observe discarded trash, ‘plastic water bottles, polystyrene foam pieces, faded chocolate bar wrappers, coffee cups’... ‘strewn through blossoming yellow fennel that measures to over three metres high’ (Pasco-White 2018).

Motion in the Opposite Direction transforms this derelict space into a lively place: every additional painting on the wall adds another layer to the surface of the wall and its surroundings. Each additional painting on the surface of the wall has the potential to transform its previous forms, movements and footsteps without completely cancelling

them: '[p]ast and present moments are brought together creating a disparity between tenses, leaving space between each encounter creating a non-linear work' (Pasco-White 2018). Pasco-White's wall intermingles with the existing ecosystem of this place while creating a new space of its own. This once abandoned concrete-block wall changes with each additional layer of paint. The striated, framed space of the wall is simultaneously turned into a smooth space. *Motion in the Opposite Direction* echoes Grosz's spatial excess. An additional material destabilises the wall: its initial function of separation. The painting functions to frame and de-frame simultaneously. It frames the surface with new signatures, colours and functions, while simultaneously creating new connections between the artists, the wall and the viewer. Pasco-White's wall no longer simply functions to separate the inside from the outside; rather, it creates connections in a messy space, a holey space in which striated and smooth spaces become entangled. A wall is a living matter that constantly changes with paint, rain and sun and the movement of human and non-human animals. A wall has its own life, wears a peeled 'skin', very much like a human body and is 'porous and crumbling' (Pasco-White 2018).

On my reading, Pasco-White implies both that a wall affects its surrounding and is affected by it; a wall 'becomes a generative force beyond itself' she writes (Pasco-White 2018). A formerly abandoned block becomes a patchwork of paintings, trash, vegetation, fences, concrete buildings, the artist's own body and so on. Pasco-White's wall attempts to cancel the wall's previous silence. A once derelict space becomes a gathering place or a billboard for anti-anthropocentric decolonial forms of life in which we can also start rethinking our relations with non-human animals, plants and the entire ecosystem. A wall in an abandoned industrial area of East Brunswick now has a voice that does not need to be heard, a voice that is beyond representation, a voice that exists itself. Pasco-White's wall is textural, not architectural. It does not seek to enclose the space, rather it seeks new connections. Very much like the Separation Wall, *Motion in the Opposite Direction*, does not separate the inside from the outside. It is a knot of affective (living and non-living) bodies; 'a knot where people, and the experiences and sentiments they bring with them, come together, interweave and disperse' (Ingold 2015, 29).

Pasco-White's later work, *becoming with* and *messmates*, experiments further with affective bodies in other 'holey', messy, lively spaces. These two exhibitions do not seek to represent or mimic the external milieu in which they position themselves; rather, they present a

space in which multiple, undetermined connections can be established with others constantly changing each other. In deeply Spinozist terms, Pasco-White highlights the body's constant movement and variation; its capacity to change in its affective relations with others. This Spinozist body is the central premise of Pasco-White's work. Thus, a painting on a wall is not a representation or an imitation: it always involves framing and de-framing. Consequently, perhaps Pasco-White's painting is better conceived of '*withs*', rather than '*ands*': it connects concepts with art, with human and non-human bodies and with things, which are all entangled with one another, having, in Pasco-White's words, an 'agential' capacity to affect and to be affected by others. For me, that is the affirmative noise of Pasco-White's work: it does not have predetermined transitions, plots, or points. It is a messy space of becoming that offers us new connections with bodies creating its own excess on a line of flight.

Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, Pasco-White's work seeks the 'anti-fabric' of art. Its smooth space is not limited and closed within the narrow coordinates of the canvas. It transforms itself in such a way that it opens its inside to its outside (Pasco-White 2015; see Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 475-477). Like a Spinozist body, Pasco-White's work, affects and is affected by endless encounters between human and non-human worlds. Perhaps, most importantly, Pasco-White's work reminds us of art's potential to generate new forms of decolonial life, its potential of 'making kin' in the most troubled lands such as Palestine, and of the potential of relational affirmative practices that are 'focused on staying in proximity to strangeness, thus opening up space for particular recuperation and getting on together' (Klumbytê 2018, 226).

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