

The Violence of Space

A Drawing-Based Approach to Violence between Body and Site

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Abstract

This video paper is the result of a drawing-based research on the indirect violence that occurs between natural and architectural sites and bodies in the production of social space. It intertwines three different perspectives on a critique of violence in drawing contemporary practices: the radical nature of violence embodied in the language we use to define drawing; the process of spaces violating bodies and of bodies violating spaces.

The paper focuses on two representational spaces and the events they generate: the 2014 eruption of the volcano Pico de Fogo in Cape Verde and its impact on the community of Chã das Caldeiras; the industrial architectural ruins of Oliva, a massive foundry in the North of Portugal that declared bankruptcy in 2010, revealing a vulnerable social interstice in the urban fabric.

To address spatial violence, a different way of artistic engagement through drawing is proposed: one that replaces an aesthetic of distance – grounded on the objectification of space as a visual set for violence – with an aesthetic of material presence, based on a direct encounter with the indirect violence produced between bodies and places.

As a practice that combines optics with haptics, materiality and performativity, drawing can bear witness to the sensible and non-visible effects of violence in a meaningful way.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Introductory Remarks

The ubiquity of violence in different strands of human action stresses the fact that violence is more than a repressive process. It is bound to the opening of form and to change. As a nexal concept, violence also acts as a

lens of enquiry into other concepts.^[1] In this video paper, we explore the relationship between violence and material thinking in drawing practices in a reflexive review of two drawing-based projects through which we re-enact a representational space and a space of representation: the experience of walking in Chã das Caldeiras, a small community in the crater of the volcano Pico de Fogo in Cape Verde, after the 2014 eruption; and the industrial architectural ruins of Oliva, a massive foundry in the north of Portugal, which declared bankruptcy in 2010, leaving several families unemployed.

Both representations of space and representational spaces of violence are related to non-material or ideological characteristics of places that manifest themselves as symbolic or physical acts of violence. Following Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, these spaces may be physically present in the landscape as natural accidents, barriers, ruins or buildings and are often used to materialise certain societal ideas.^[2]

As artists, we are interested in the indirect violence that occurs between natural and architectural sites and bodies in the production of social space. As a practice that is responsive to different modes of perception, drawing is also a projection of a body moving in space. Combining the haptic and the optical, drawing can bear witness to spatial violence with all our sensory capacities. We want to understand how the indirect violence of space enters into dialogue with the material and performative processes of drawing. Simultaneously, we want to approach drawing from the standpoint of a critique of violence.

How does the spatial geography of violence underlie the experiences of the drawer's body in relation to natural and architectural sites? How does it act upon the body?

To address these questions, we need to replace an aesthetic of distance by which violence is objectified as a spectacle for contemplation, of no consequence with an aesthetic of presence. This approach involves drawing as an act of engagement, a way of being-there. It intertwines subject and space in their complementarities and antagonisms. An aesthetic of presence rests on a direct encounter with the indirect violence produced by both bodies and places.

The video paper was conceived and written in three voices. It brings together three different perspectives on a critique of violence in contemporary drawing practices: the speech acts of drawing, spaces violating bodies and bodies violating spaces.

Footnotes

1. Rae, Gavin and Ingala, Enna. *The Meanings of Violence: From Critical Theory to Biopolitics*. New York: Routledge. 2021 [2019]. p. 2.
2. Tyner, James A. *Space, Place and Violence—Violence and the Embodied Geography of Race, Sex and Gender*. New York and London: Routledge. 2012. p. 16.

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