

Some walls are open. Some are closed.

What separates out a wall as a protector to that of a wall which is an obstruction?

What determines a wall as a healthy boundary as opposed to an aggressive barrier?

At this time our walls were moving.

For each of us these walls were institutional. Walls which had constructed our relationships to money, to family, to labour, to our daily rhythm.

Who took the bomp from the bompalomapalomp?

Who took the ram from the ramalamadingdong?

Who took the bomp from the bompalomapalomp?

Who took the ram from the ramalamadingdong?

How are you?

Fine, thank you.

How are you?

Fine, thank you.

The walls around me were toxic. I had begun to speculate they were built with asbestos, to which I was physically reacting. It transpired this physical reaction was a daily surge in the hormone Cortisol induced by walking through these walls. Over extended adrenal glands couldn't function in the finely tuned balance of the endocrine system which had started to falter, resulting in disturbed periods, migraines, uncontrollable weight loss and an unbridled surge towards sugar and caffeine which made the circuit of cortisol worse and the body twist in imbalance.

Bodies are moved by walls as well as kept in place by them.

For you the walls were not made of fake asbestos, they were made of a Victorian penal code. Each day you crossed walls and simultaneously became one too. As a nurse in the prison system you were both protector and obstruction. The National Health Service scrubs and prison issue belt chain denoted your official capacity as giver of care and the guardian of remedies from pain, including various pharmaceutical analgesics, heroine substitutes (Subutex™, Methodone), Elastoplasts and surgical bandages which you used to patch and plug bodies.

In walls like these, pain is the driver for infrastructural relationships. Relationships to the hierarchy, and relationships to one's own body and other substances which modify or alleviate the body in pain. Access to a respite from the pain in the body, albeit a temporary reprieve creates the basis of a febrile hierarchy of relations. Pain has moulded bodies over many years – indeed it has vanished the capacity to imagine a body without pain.

These walls attempted to mould the bodies back into a state of compliance, back to the normative. By force, forcing the body back to a state before pain.

But it is a lot to expect from a wall, especially when the brick are blunt and unsupportive. And so other types of wall appear, covert walls, black-market walls offering their illicit support of pain-relief. When these walls falter the body ricochets back into the official wall – slamming hard into its resistance, doubling down on the pain.

Far from being a Nurse Ratched¹ type figure your bricks of humour started to construct the first lines of defence and internal self-protection. You didn't want to be inserted in this circuitous power relation of pain, bodies under duress and reform, but once within these walls you tried to find the refrain that would work, you tried to be the salvation in the walls.

Who took the bomp from the bompalomapalomp?

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¹ The fictional character and main antagonist in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey (1962).

Who took the ram from the ramalamadingdong?

How are you?

Fine, thank you.

How are you?

Fine, thank you

Bradley, John, 100 mls Subutex™, 3 times daily.

Wright, Richard, 400 mls Subutex™, twice daily.

Walser, Robert, 200 mls Subutex™, 3 times daily.

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We both tried to keep our rhythms buoyant over the dominant rhythms of the walls around us. But the refrain of the walls repeated at a pace too slow and dragging that eventually our refrain was drowned into silence.

In Jean Genet's 1950 film *Un Chant D'amour* a poignant scene depicts two prisoners exchanging cigarette smoke through their adjoining cell wall using a straw from their mattress. Breathing in rhythmically, filling each other's lungs with the exhaled breath of the other the small smoke particles presume an act of defiance which even the voyeuristic prison guard cannot dominate. The guard responds with frustration beating violently the older prisoner and forcing him to suck on his gun. The only vocabulary available to the guard is slow, obvious, blunt and silent. It is the vocabulary of the walls. A vocabulary the guard reiterates back into the walls.

Ironically, in 1966 film distributor Sol Landau attempted to exhibit *Un Chant D'Amour* in Berkeley, California, he was informed by a member of the local police special investigations department that were he to continue screening it the film "would be confiscated and the person responsible arrested." Landau responded by instituting the case of *Landau v. Fording* (1966) in which he sought to show Genet's work without police harassment. The Alameda County Superior Court watched the film twice and declared that it, "explicitly and vividly revealed acts of masturbation, oral copulation, the infamous crime against nature [a euphemism for sodomy], voyeurism, nudity, sadism, masochism and sex..." The court rejected Landau's suit, further condemning the film as "cheap pornography calculated to promote homosexuality, perversion and morbid sex practices." He was similarly rebuffed in the District Court of Appeal of California, which accepted that Genet was a major writer but cited this as a lesser work of an early period and declared that in the end it was "nothing more than hard-core pornography and should be banned." When the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, the decision was confirmed once more, in a 5-4 vote in which the justices simply stated that *Un chant d'amour* was obscene and offered no further explanation².

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² *The Encyclopedia of Censorship*

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Our house was built in 1968. It conforms to many of the post-war architectural principles that prevailed at the time; light, visibility, openness, functionality, modernism. Principles which now garner criticism, amongst theoretical architectural and design fields. Principles that would be utilised against themselves in the dawn of the neo-liberal turn effectively creating cover for more pernicious operations. In this turn the vocabulary of modernist design has been re-calibrated to create an illusion of a refrain. For example, the extensive use of glass as a material for corporate buildings, reflecting outwards the glory of the walls whilst the unethical, illegal and damaging internal dealings of the business pervade within. Here the material of the walls is a mirror, reflecting out illusion.

1968 was still a time of the earnest belief that open walls were possible and that by opening the walls the refrain which designed these walls would extend to alleviate pain, to help sculpt bodies in a way desirable and beneficial to the well-being of society.

But as mentioned before this is a lot to expect from a wall.

As the walls around us consisted to move us we realised the refrain was our way through. The refrain might not make sense, like the act of inhaling and exhaling smoke between the prisoners in Genet's film or like the *ramalamadingdong* or the *bompalomapalomp*. It was the rhythm we needed to inhabit to make sure the walls were protective, healthy and without pain before we became too rigidly sculpted by the qualities of that pain.

I often think about how the 1968 house saved us. I knew from its picture it would and it did.

Such a normal set of walls, exactly four sided. In a simultaneous movement that did not make sense; *how can walls save you?* It offered a physical moment of finding the rhythm – the refrain that could row us across, that could repeat at the pace of resistance, not a resistance rooted in irreversible pain or self-harm but in chorus.

There can be salvation in walls where the refrain within holds non-sense with a corporeal logic of rhythm and repetition.

Little Richard knew this, Genet knew this and Kathleen Hannah knows this.

Perhaps even all poets know this. It is these refrains that keep the walls flexible, firm, negotiable, protective, protecting, responsive, erotic.

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Rachal Bradley