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Hyperdrawing [IN: Hyperdrawing: beyond the lines of contemporary art]

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Hyperdrawing

Russell Marshall and Phil Sawdon

In 2007 *TRACEY* [1] curated *Drawing Now: Between the Lines of Contemporary Art* [2]. *Drawing Now* developed a consideration of drawing's peculiar dependence on a direct and physical process — the relationship between the hand, the drawing material and the paper. The book is founded on the premise that drawing thinks/talks in a particular way.

Drawing Now curated works, within the context of contemporary fine art practice, as an ongoing process focused on traditional drawing materials used in a manner to convey drawing as a conceptual process. *TRACEY* worked with the assumption that drawing is most often thought of as certain materials on particular types of support to produce a representational outcome.

This context established a remit or boundary for *Drawing Now* that supported *TRACEY*'s curatorial approach. Following the drawing of this disciplinary boundary, the consequence of adopting a particular material approach indicated the presence of a boundary within a boundary, a sub-boundary?

The prefix 'sub-' can be freely attached to elements of any origin and is used to indicate 'under,' 'below,' 'beneath' identifies this boundary within a boundary as a hierarchical element within the disciplinary boundary, a supra- boundary?

The prefix 'supra-' meaning 'above, over' or 'beyond the limits of, outside of' confirms this hierarchical representation, a particular view of drawing within contemporary fine art practice.

The sub-boundary, whilst clear and unbroken in the proposal for *Drawing Now* becomes perforated into a dashed delineation. The punctuation of this boundary, this line, with regular empty space presented a challenge, firstly to constrain an expanding field within the remit of *Drawing Now* and secondly, to consider a position for drawing that wanders or weaves across and through this boundary.

An essentially restless position could be argued to be unconstrained by the limits of definition. This ambiguity presents an opportunity. *Drawing Now* sits wholly within the sub-boundary as defined but also allows for an unfolding of those limits from sub- to supra- or from hypo- to hyper...drawing.

The situating of the Hyperdrawing space both within and without that occupied by *Drawing Now* established a series of pragmatic curatorial criteria that helped form the architecture of the book. These criteria were four-fold. Firstly, both works set out to curate contemporary drawing within fine art practice: *Drawing Now* takes a seven year view from 2000-2006, Hyperdrawing takes a five year view intersecting 2006 through to 2010. Secondly, *Drawing Now* established a particular view of materials and support. Hyperdrawing partly emerged from this bounding of the space, taking a broader and unconstrained approach, beyond rather between, where drawing could be identified across any and all material approaches. Thirdly, neither curation is a deliberate and objective survey of drawing within the respective spaces. Artists were invited reflecting the situating of their work within the Hyperdrawing space. As already

established the sub-boundary that marks the territory of *Drawing Now* lies wholly within that of Hyperdrawing and thus featuring of artists within one does not preclude their presence in the other, as demonstrated by Jordan McKenzie, Maryclare Foa and Sarah Woodfine. The final and possibly fundamental criterion was that irrespective of material, and / or our position on Hyperdrawing, the artists themselves had to describe their work as 'drawing(s)'.

Hyperdraw(ing) - the expression

We have appropriated the expression 'Hyperdrawing' (noun) and 'hyperdrawing' (verb) with an understanding that the prefixes sub and supra provided an articulate way of identifying and structuring drawing territory. *Drawing Now* made apparent the structural nature of the view taken of drawing within contemporary fine art practice. A clearly defined focus for the works to be curated presented the challenge of how firmly the criteria for inclusion could be adhered to. Inevitably, identifying a position assumes debates about terminology and definition. The result, or perhaps more accurately, the ongoing process, led us to resist becoming constrained by this assumption. The position adopted was to seek opportunity in the areas that are ill defined, that prove problematic with the inflexibility of definition, and that begin to manifest within a structure of drawing where there is the possibility for a space outside of normal or supposedly well understood areas of activity. The development of this space / these spaces and their structure could not shy completely away from terminology, a mechanism was required to at least differentiate between the space within and the space without and to provide a means to discuss drawing that moves between spaces. This led to the adoption of the common prefix 'sub' used to identify the subordinate elements of drawing territory such as the traditional view embraced by *Drawing Now*. Without actually requiring the definition of the contents of the territory the prefix merely reinforces a hierarchical structure and provides distinction whilst still supporting flexibility. Identifying a space or region as sub, logically suggests the presence of its inverse, a 'supra' space that encompasses and completes the basic structure. Here sub boundaries are drawn that encompass a particular view of drawing practice. A supra boundary then encompasses the sub-boundaries and the space between them. Exactly what the supra boundary delineates is open for discussion but may conveniently be used in this context to differentiate between disciplinary fields. In exploring this view, what was initially a series of positive sub boundaries within the negative unidentified space between them, became inverted, the focus shifted from the eye being drawn to this range of sub boundary elements to the unexplored otherness. In beginning to explore this otherness, this other-space, the structuring of these spaces suggests that, in this context, it is a location for Drawings/drawing that cannot be located within the sub-boundaries. In following the Latin root of these terms, what might be called Supradrawing. However, supra is much less synonymous with the visual than its Greek etymological equivalent, hyper. Thus Hyperdrawing inhabits this other space and manifests as or exploits being 'over', 'above', 'beyond' and usually implying 'excess' or 'exaggeration' or 'more than normal'.

It is noted that HyperDraw(ing), Hyper Draw(ing), Hyperdrawing have established themselves within various digital, computer based, activities including music editing and digital drawing. In addition, Hyperdrawing as a term might be assumed to have a digital emphasis, however that is one of the assumptions we will challenge through the works and artists chosen i.e. 'more than the normal' expectation.

Hyperdrawing – the position

In exploring Hyperdrawing the curation process was directed primarily by the criteria outlined earlier: there was no material / support restriction; artists with outcomes identified as fulfilling the 'traditional' criteria for *Drawing Now* were not precluded from also featuring outcomes within *Hyperdrawing*; to address the contemporary focus of the book works would be post 2006; and irrespective of the authors' view the artists must refer to the work as drawing.

Hyperdrawing through its other space configuration identifies outcomes that are exploratory and travel the length and breadth of a very large territory. Curating *Hyperdrawing* presented a challenge in identifying the hyper-ness of one drawing over another and in meeting this challenge a series of discussions began to map this territory. As presented, there was no intention to establish a representative sample from across Hyperdrawing but it was important to explore the possibilities and survey the location of the established boundary (this would assume that the boundary is well defined). This process identified a series of ad-hoc categories used initially as a pragmatic methodology for managing the complex scope of the book.

These categories were not entirely rigorous and were not exclusive, with works that could easily have sat within more than one. One such category was hyperreal (e.g. Glenn, Gluzberg, Haendel). Hyperreal works were a convenient and largely well understood area in which to categorise Hyperdrawings. Hyperdrawing also manifest through its opportunity to explore dimensions. The 2D3D4D category (e.g. Blankenstein, Cooper, Coyle, Siebert) explored artists who exploit the ability to break boundaries between dimensions. Media opportunities were identified through categories of: Light, Sound, Technology and Strange stuff (e.g. Bertola, Blankenstein, Curtis, Lewis, Vogl). Notionally 'difficult' or slippery categorisations were represented by categories such as Alternate Reality (Blankenstein, Grayson, Haendel, Hill) that explored the subtle and ambiguous territory of the hyperreal, beyond that of photorealism.

Emma Cocker, Siún Hanrahan and Marsha Meskimmon were invited to contribute to a discussion around Hyperdrawing through an individual essay from ambiguous disciplinary perspectives.

The starting point for this particular part of the process was a briefing in the invitation to both the essayists and artists that included a position on Hyperdrawing. This position as already discussed focused on what drawing might be and deliberately established that the book would not be about defining 'what is drawing' and by extension 'what is Hyperdrawing'. Instead the position adopted was that terms such as drawing and Hyperdrawing are inherently ambiguous and that contemporary drawing research would benefit by agreeing that drawing is an ambiguous practice [3]. The response was interesting in that all contributors appeared comfortable with this proposed position and also capable of either situating their work, or adopting their own position relative to, or perspective of Hyperdrawing. In developing their relative positions / perspectives the essayists establish common territory or themes within the boundary of Hyperdrawing.

Siún Hanrahan identifies three categories of Hyperdrawing, these categories establish a further hierarchical representation situated at a macro level, above those presented earlier. The three categories: self-identified as drawing; inter-media specifying drawing; and self-differentiated as

drawing, differentiate between Hyperdrawings and expand upon our final criteria for inclusion in the book. Hyperdrawings thus become one of: drawings; called drawings but...; and not called drawings and... The first two are included within this book and there are examples of work easily and comfortably identifiable as drawing in addition to those that are called drawings but may sit less comfortably. The final macro category is not covered within this book as it includes work directly opposed to our final criterion for inclusion.

In establishing categories that encompass Hyperdrawings, that are not called drawings, Siún Hanrahan creates an interesting tension that hints at the subtleties of individual and collective perspectives on drawing.

The tension reflects discussions about the *order* [4] of drawing and whether Taylor's [5] view of the boundary busting nature of contemporary drawing leads to the fallacy of circular reasoning. The circular reasoning in this case is created by the drawing disciplinary boundary that encompasses various sub-boundaries and the intersecting Hyperdrawing space within and between. Thus the discipline of drawing appears to contain work that is not called drawing.

However, are the drawing boundaries a fallacy?

Is drawing so ubiquitous as to make boundary searches redundant?

Emma Cocker and Marsha Meskimmon both establish Hyperdrawing as a form of *techné* where drawing practice is not constrained by spatial boundaries.

Emma Cocker states:

It is in these terms, that Hyperdrawing might be considered a form of productive knowledge—or *techné*. Here, *techné* is not used in its habitual sense, where it is taken to simply mean the skilful art of making and doing, the practical knowledge or technical facility of craftsmanship.

...

Rather than referring to drawing solely in spatial terms, where the attempt to go beyond is conceived as one of giving shape to new forms, or of making—and leaving—a space wherein something unexpected might materialize; drawing can also be understood temporally, as the act of making time and of deciding how to act.

Marsha Meskimmon states:

Techne does not distinguish sharply between the hand and the machine, nor assume a hierarchy of materials, processes or procedures in creative practice. Rather, *techne* is open-ended, seeking to fold processes in upon themselves and to cross genres. Like drawing, *techne* permits the possibility of inexhaustible extension, elaboration as temporal agency, risking ephemerality, exigency and excess.

Hyperdrawing is identified as being less about where and more about when. The 'above' and 'in excess of' nature of Hyperdrawing suggests a two or three dimensional view with Hyperdrawing inhabiting space that is mostly unconstrained and capable of an inter/intra/cross-disciplinary view. However, Hyperdrawing is equally if not more of a fourth dimensional view where the spatial boundaries are broken by a dimension where such boundaries are diminished to a point that they no longer act as a constraint to drawing practice and instead merely provide context and a means to establish Hyperdrawing through establishing what is not Hyperdrawing. Fundamentally, what this fourth dimension view provides is the opportunity and openness that characterises Hyperdrawing practice, the opportunity not in doing but in being able to do or in establishing the conditions to be able to do.

All three essayists refer to time in their discussion of Hyperdrawing. Emma Cocker distinguishes between chronological time (chronos) and kairotic time in identifying Hyperdrawing's position in not only being subject to and able to embody the concept of time passing but also the time of opportunity or timeliness. Siún Hanrahan offers a less overt discussion of time through the moment of drawing.

Siún Hanrahan states:

The moment of drawing, as an act of relating, is one of sustained engagement, of unwavering attention. The sustained 'presence to' of (observational) drawing models the response demanded in the moment of encounter with that which is other, be that the world as it is in itself or other persons.

...

The sustained 'presence to' of drawing thus holds the possibility of hearing back, not as a promise of immediacy, but as the possibility of such commitment revealing the object of attention as it is in itself.

Marsha Meskimmon also considers Hyperdrawing in and through time but also 'remind(s) us of drawing's exceptional ability to materialise thresholds between disciplinary fields or conceptual territories while engaging with many modes of making at once.'

In returning to thresholds and boundaries another common aspect of the Essayists' collective view is the opportunity embodied within Hyperdrawing for movement within and between drawing boundaries but also across dimensions. A restless wandering, an unfolding, a becoming?

Hyperdrawing – becoming drawing

Siún Hanrahan states:

'Hyperdrawing', as a curatorial gesture, challenges assumptions about what is proper to drawing in terms of purity – it refuses to assume that the conventions of other mediums have no place in drawing. 'Hyperdrawing' and the practices it assembles, as a spur to discourse, might thus prompt reflection upon what makes an event or object a drawing. That is, 'Hyperdrawing' suggests a discourse that

seeks to extend the conventions considered to be generated by 'drawing as a medium' so as to establish the practices and outcomes of hyper-drawing as proper to drawing.

'Hyper' is over and above a traditional view of drawing 'what is proper to drawing' not necessarily hyper to a more open view of drawing. Is Hyperdrawing simply ... drawing?

It could be argued that Hyperdrawing positions itself within the space outside, and we are not trying to break the boundaries as to what is drawing. Indeed as stated previously are drawing boundaries a fallacy? We are saying these are drawings, end of discussion and that the challenge is more to discuss the content critically within contemporary fine art practice.

However, in stating this position we are not arguing that (Hyper)drawing can be anything.

As Emma Cocker states 'Nor is the Hyperdrawing a doodle where a wayward line plots its own course guided only lightly by the blind hand floating the tide swell of drifting thought.'

At least for now the position held coincides with that of Taylor [6]. Whilst drawing may be very broad it is essential that drawing (research) acknowledges disciplinary boundaries and that in a process of becoming does not throw the baby out with the bath water.

From the discussions thus far it is clear that drawing is very context sensitive and also governed by perspective or viewpoint. The ambiguity formed between these positions can lead to confusion and is possibly the primary driver for looking to define or map the territory in an attempt to remove or mitigate the inherent ambiguity. However, the position adopted by *Hyperdrawing* is that an acceptable, inter/intra/cross-disciplinary view of drawing will never be reached. Thus, a lack of definition should be embraced. This lack of definition can then transform from being a compromise position into one of opportunity.

This position and particularly the position of Hyperdrawing, and the opportunities it affords, is not fixed. It is not a position that welcomes definition, it evolves from not looking to define. This ongoing evolution suggests that Hyperdrawing is becoming, as opposed to being. Becoming embodies the opportunities of not being constrained, of not having arrived, in essence a restless unfolding within a bounded or dimensional context. Whilst this suggests that becoming is a point of view, that point of view is also not fixed, which is clearly an ambiguous position to take and by extension returns us to the fallacy of circular reasoning.

S: 'Hyperdrawing is an ambiguous practice.'

Q: 'Why?'

Q/A: 'Because Hyperdrawing can't be defined?'

Q: 'Why can't Hyperdrawing be defined?'

A: 'Because the definition would be ambiguous.'

Circular reasoning is where two conclusions are directly or indirectly based upon each other. Thus, if you follow a line of reasoning, one of the conclusions is presumed by an earlier conclusion. Whilst a fallacy, circular reasoning can actually be a useful tool. The reverse of various logical or mathematical arguments can be proven through its use, where otherwise this

proof would be very difficult. The logic presented here is that the reverse of defining Hyperdrawing is *proven*.

The reverse of defining Hyperdrawing is not, however, a position where drawing can be anything. Given the becoming nature proposed of drawing, drawing will ebb and flow and may become broad enough to be anything in some space and time.

Our perspective on becoming is that (Hyper)drawing acknowledges where it is, and allows itself to be comfortable with what it is. From this position the view should then be forward, the opportunity in what can be as opposed to what is.

All of the essayists offer similar perspectives on Hyperdrawing: Siún Hanrahan discusses the promise and possibility of seeing anew; Marsha Meskimmon suggests that Hyperdrawing offers the potential to unravel; and Emma Cocker proposes that Hyperdrawing is directed towards keeping things open and mutable.

Perspective, as a drawing convention, supports a rationalised and ordered representation that on the surface provides a comforting stability. However, perspective is in fact ambiguous in nature [7]. In this way it is becoming, perspective advocates fixed points, rules and embodies assumptions in establishing a form of understanding. Yet, the perceived ordered nature of the perspective system is illusory, it is a deliberate distortion, a compromise, to represent a three dimensional subject in a two dimensional medium. A concept not lost in curating this book as some artists considered for inclusion in *Hyperdrawing* had works that could not be adequately represented in a two dimensional format.

Perspective represents a comfortable, accepted, de facto position that is easy to interpret and yet is a deliberate distortion. Indeed, all drawing systems could be argued to be artificial in nature, yet their establishment and enduring appeal reflect their accessibility. The accessibility of perspective and other such conventions are also inherently compromised by the constraints they impose. The alternative is inevitably much less accessible. However, if it is possible to look beyond, then this 'hyper' view recognises and embraces the opportunities of ambiguity, of becoming, of Hyperdrawing becoming drawing.

Hyperdrawing as an ambiguous practice presents the prospect that a lack of a definition, a position of ambiguity, is desirable. The possibility is that a lack of definition is not only desirable, it is also a necessity. The viewpoint is that the ambiguity that inevitably stems from a lack of definition forms a strategy that enables and sustains drawing practices [8].

Endnotes

[1] TRACEY: the open access journal of contemporary drawing and visualisation research [online]. Available from: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/> [Accessed 08/12/2010].

[2] TRACEY, *Drawing Now: between the lines of contemporary drawing*. London: IBTauris London, 2007.

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- [7] Talbot, R., Ambiguity and the development of Linear Perspective, *TRACEY: Ambiguity*, September 2006, pp. 1-13 [online]. Available from: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/ambi/images/talbot.pdf> [Accessed 08/12/2010].
- [8] Sawdon, P.J. and Marshall, R: *Drawing: An Ambiguous Practice*.

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