

## **LINE BETWEEN: BECOMING DRAWING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to identify drawing as an exploratory and performative process for recalling memory and recording temporal presence. The most basic aspect of drawing – the line – as mark is adopted as the focus and means for questioning and testing how drawing functions as a way of documenting and discovery. The emphasis is on latency, not so much on what the line *is* but what it can *do* or *be*, where drawing is predicated on touch and derives from thought and memory, rather than appearance or observation, indicating that the condition of 'seeing' is not a prerequisite; drawing exists with and without seeing. Demonstrating the essential involvement of the haptic in drawing, moving drawing beyond the limits of vision alone is key. The moment of making a mark without sight relies on memory, while in the seeing of the actual drawing again one is remembering. Inspired and informed by Gilles Deleuze's notion of the line representing a fluid in-between, a 'becoming', and an *entredeux*, the activity of drawing lines suggests a middle and expresses a concept of movement. The line is temporal and dynamic, and like Paul Klee's line, is in action.

To explore drawing beyond simply a way of thinking or communicating, two series of work will be examined (and related to works of other practitioners): one, *Marking Time*, premeditated labour-intensive durational drawings on paper and walls in the indoor studio/gallery space, which are 'seen' in the process of their making; and two, *Line Journeys*, which by contrast are 'unseen' and aleatory drawings that take place in specific familiar outdoor locations. Drawings on paper either visibly track the movement of the body through the small seismic shifts of the hand while walking, or tread new invisible lines directly on the land leaving little trace of the process. Through repeatedly drawing the line on surfaces in an indoor space, or incessantly marking while walking in the outdoor environment, each drawing is a record of performance and the passage of time. Durational and contemplative dialogues emerge, while also demonstrating drawing as means for negotiation and change. Drawing is always in process, always becoming, where marks delineate materiality and bodily presence and absence. Drawing leads to somewhere else, and in this way is open to continual discovery as liminality is embedded in drawing itself.

### **BECOMING LINE**

The Deleuzian notion that it is not what the line *is* but what it can *do* or *be* underpins this paper and my drawing practice. The line can be mark, trace, contour or outline, visible or invisible; a boundary dividing, or a bridge connecting. It is in a process of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 293; 1983: 19) embodying sameness and difference, forever adjusting and unfinished, neither before nor after, here nor there. Encapsulated in the French *entredeux*, 'between two', the line is temporal and dynamic, representing the middle and consistent with Deleuze's thinking of things in terms of lines rather than points (1995: 111,161). 'It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting; the beginning and end are points. What is interesting is the middle.' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: 39). The act of drawing lines, real or imaginary, occupies a middle that resonates from action to memory, memory to action. Through Henri Bergson's theories where memory is coextensive with duration, and echoed in Marcel Proust's voluntary and involuntary memory, Deleuze (1991) reveals a platform on which to reconfigure drawing's memorial potency.

While an obvious underlying temporality exists in drawing, my concerns are how to represent time by utilising the line as a record of durational corporeal movement, and how the act of drawing prompts memory, enabling the Bergsonian/Proustian leap between the present

and the past, where moments of the past can inhabit the present. As a practitioner, I am attempting a repetitive back and forth movement of drawing lines to spatialize duration and mark time as evidence of the passage in and for itself, and to preserve the virtual as memory-images to be recollected at random (Bergson, 1988).

Shadowed by the concept of what drawing can do and operating between inside and outside spaces, two approaches to my drawing practice have coexisted to address and communicate these concerns: on the one hand the seen and the premeditated, on the other the unseen and the accidental. Both methodologies attempt to convey that I am present, but not physically there – being here and yet not here. The drawings set out to record performance and movement whether visible, as the graphite on paper or walls; or invisible, by simply marking the surface with my feet as I journey through a place. My primary concern is ‘to’ draw, doing, rather than being. Using my body as medium, as a performative tool denoting time through space in an endeavour to mark presence and evoke memory, whether it be voluntary or involuntary, from habit or memory-image.

## MARKING TIME

Borne out of a relentless desire to index the passing of time, the *Marking Time* ongoing durational work began in 1995 and includes hundreds of drawings, from pages in journals and wall mappings to string installations and scores in the land. Some take several months to complete, while others only a few minutes, but the works all share the recording of time and movement through the drawing process. Here I will discuss three particular works: *Waiting*; *Onehouroneday*; and *September:30hours30days*.

An extended durational drawing in three parts, *Waiting* was suspended from the ceiling in the Jerwood Space in London in 2005. It comprises a continuous white ink line, hand drawn back and forth across three 10-metre rolls of translucent paper. Taking over 100 hours to complete, less than half a metre of paper was exposed at any one time during the drawing process – the past was concealed during the making, and not revealed until unrolled at installation, creating a shifting and subverting of the experience of time.

The next two works explored drawing with specific rules. The first, *Onehouroneday*, is a series of seven one-hour drawings, graphite on paper, one drawn each day for a week in April 2009. Each drawing was started at 10 am and is titled with the date and time and numbered sequentially. A more extended version is embodied in the large graphite drawing *September:30hours30days*. This daily one-hour drawing grew incrementally as the month progressed. Standing close to a large sheet of paper taped to a wall and with a sharp pencil, I scored the first hand-drawn line, and followed my usual trajectory back and forth. Defined by body measure, the length of the line at 30 inches (76 cm) is my arm length from shoulder to fingertips. As part of an online residency at the Centre for Recent Drawing (C4RD) in London, an image was uploaded to the gallery’s website each day to witness the time recorded throughout the month.

Predetermined systems were followed by Robert Morris in his drawings, measuring how many minutes it took to cover a surface with repetitive marks ‘marking time and punctuating intervals’ before exhaustion set in. He disrupted ‘sequential time by denying a logical order or a sense of why one thing should follow another, or indeed why or whether an action would terminate, an event stop’ (Fer, 2000:71). In the *One Second Drawings*, John Latham used a spray gun filled with black acrylic paint for a series of 60 one-second drawings, one per day recording the briefest moment of time that the technique would allow. Each of the drawings was carefully annotated with the time of execution (second, minute, hour), date and a numerical code referring to different features of the work (Latham, 1970). Durational intent is also reflected in Joseph Beuys’s serial drawings, *Words Which Can Hear*, intricate networks of lines covering the pages of his diary for 128 days in 1975 (Beuys, 1981).

## ‘Blind’ Time

The process involved in the *Marking Time* series makes cogent connections between sight and touch and although my eyes are open, a metaphorical blindness exists. Working with my body close to the drawing surface I cannot see the extent of the line as I am making it. It becomes apparent that the condition of seeing is not a prerequisite for drawing; the drawing exists with and without seeing. I do not see what will appear until it is drawn, and it is as though the drawing watches itself emerging – becoming line, becoming surface, becoming thought. (Fisher, 2003: 220). In many ways, the experience of drawing is always in this condition. Jacques

Derrida hypothesises in *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993) that implicit in the act of drawing is blindness, drawing is in itself 'blind', which does not 'see' in its making or its viewing.

While the actual creating of the mark under the graphite point is blind in the act of 'marking time' drawing, in the 'unseen time' drawings my eyes are tightly shut, relying on touch to locate my position. *Unseen Time: 30minutes30days*, evolved during a month-long residency, in 2009. Each day I would draw for one minute moving back and forth along the studio wall scoring the surface with charcoal, allowing the movement of my body to determine the outcome. The ensuing marks, the residue, temporarily embodied the memory of my trajectory back and forth, up and down. For Derrida, the residue is 'a reminder of the non-present *in the very presencing of the present.*' (Newman, 1996: 166)

Michael Newman suggests that '[t]he operation of drawing thus brings forth a virtual stage, a floating stage on which memories and emotions play their part, mix and flow.' (Newman, 1996: 23). Memory undoubtedly played a determining part in Robert Morris's *Blind Time Drawings*, some 350 in six series over a period of almost 30 years (1973 – 2000). With his eyes closed or blindfolded, he falteringly groped for the parameters of the sheet of paper attached to the wall, the action of his hands obsessively smudging and smearing the medium on to the surface. Even though Morris deprived himself of vision, producing what appear to be random marks, the works are anything but haphazard. He relied solely on touch and intuition for guidance; yet, he imposed systematic order, noting his activity at the bottom of each drawing. Using a blindfold, fellow American artist, William Anastasi, also produced unsighted drawings directly on to the wall. While Morris and Anastasi were not the first artists to relinquish the primacy of the ocular, there is something unique about the measured, timed and predetermined approach to their drawing practice (Criqui, 2005: 14).

### **Between Sight and Touch**

Although predetermined, Morris's and Anastasi's work surrendered to the random process of making, with contingency a primary element. Anastasi made several small *Unsighted Drawings* in the early 1960s by transferring graphite from a pencil stub onto folded paper in his trouser pocket. His later *Subway Drawings* were made while travelling on the New York subway to his regular chess games with John Cage. Holding a pencil in each hand at an angle of 90 degrees and with a drawing board on his lap, Anastasi would close his eyes and allow the vibrations of the subway train to move his hands, marking tangles of lines on the paper.

Motivated by the significance of the play between vision and touch, rules and chance, my 'unseen' drawings, extended to a series of outdoor works titled *Line Journeys* begun in 2005. Without looking down at the paper, the drawings remained unseen during the process of walking back and forth between familiar places (which I will discuss further in the next section). Holding a pencil in one hand against a small piece of paper in the other, intricate networks of lines are made by the small shifts of my hand as I walk from place to place, recording movement, duration and distance. The drawings are capable of bringing to mind a time past that I am encountering in the present, the self in motion and an experiential connection to existing in the world.

I will now turn to consider the line, more palpably bound to the *entredeux*, the passage between, in the outside environment, reflecting on walking as drawing and the relationship of the temporalised body making a line, often with bare feet touching the ground, often with pencil and paper. While the significance of drawing is still the personal touch, the hand is no longer dominant, with the foot taking its place as an equal means of contact and mark making. The body is 'a connecting link', wrote Bergson, 'the *place of passage* of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen' (Bergson, 1988: 151). A hyphen, a gap, with the body as passage tracing a trajectory *between* places in the outside environment.

### **LINE JOURNEYS**

Reflecting on the between and Deleuze's becoming as the moment when the line frees itself from the point (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 294) alongside Klee's description of the point turning into movement and line (Klee, 1961: 78), movement being the prerequisite for change, I put thought to action, left my studio and went for a walk. Leaving the indoor/studio structured line drawings for the outdoors allowed for chance – the aleatory and the ephemeral.

The paradigm shift to the outside also raised issues of place and memory as the walks centred on three familiar locations: rural Suffolk; urban London; and childhood New Zealand. The locations provided surfaces for registering temporal presence while serving as mnemonics

for prompting memory, both conscious recollection and random recall. I became fascinated with the complexity of the memorial potency of these familiar places, 'perception and recollection always interpenetrate each other' and past images 'constantly mingle with our perception of the present' (Bergson, 1988: 66-7). Now resonances were in the site-specific practices of Francis Alÿs in marginal city spaces, Richard Long in isolated rural landscapes and Robert Smithson in site/nonsite environments. Smithson expounding the between: 'going from some place to some place...To be located between those two points puts you in a position of elsewhere' (Lippard, 1973: 89). For Alÿs, Long and Smithson, their work involving constant shuttling back and forth between here and there, between centre and periphery, is preoccupied with time, the journey incorporated recording and measuring, latency and revelation.

### **Mourning Lines**

My first walks in rural Suffolk were not physically recorded, simply haptic acts held in memory. In time, I found myself returning to one particular walk, titled *Mourning Lines*, the journey between two places, between where I was living and the village burial ground. By drawing invisible lines in space through the simple and solitary activity of walking, I set out to mark this journey for a year, documenting over 100 walks between the two places. The return journey of about a kilometre taking some 20 minutes became as obsessive a process as the *Marking Time* drawings in the studio had been, reframing, repeating and recalling the past in the present. Touch taking primacy, making an indentation into the field across which I passed, occasionally leaving a trail of string or ash, echoing Richard Long's 1967 seminal work, *A Line Made by Walking* – the absent performing body. Long used the idea of map and body as a recorder of time and space, the body operating as a measure, marking the ground (Long, 1988: 58). My desire to experiment further led to the *Line Journey* drawings mentioned earlier.

### **Ghost Lines**

The move from Suffolk back to London continued the itinerant wanderings in an urban landscape, walking the line between my new and former homes separated by a few minutes and a 10-year absence. Determined by a desire to capture something that would resonate as I had spent 20 years in this locality, I set about recording the journeys. Each day for a month, I undertook reflective walks, and with pencil and paper in hand I developed further unsighted *Line Journey* drawings, logging duration and distance. Titled *Ghost Lines* (2009), arising from Michel de Certeau's phrase, 'the absence of what has passed by' (1984: 97), the 'absences' became my 'ghosts' as I passed by the streets I had walked before. The 30 small images of intertwined graphite lines representing each walk, act as further mnemonic devices. Another time is evoked, fragments of a past that I am experiencing in the present. The leap into the past is activated effortlessly when returning to a familiar place, just as Proust's narrator was flooded with memory when he tripped on the paving-stone or tasted the madeleine when he returned to his childhood home (Proust, 1996: 216-17; 1982: 48).

### **Drift Lines**

On re-encountering my native New Zealand I reflected on my peripatetic movement between the southern hemisphere and the northern, and how it would impinge on my drawing practice. I had retraced paths in London, but in the southern hemisphere the paths went back to childhood expressing an intense involvement with the space, where days had focused on the journey between home and beach, grandmother's house and ocean. In this open landscape the horizon appeared infinite – lines everywhere – lines that transected ocean from sky and land from ocean. The first walks on the vast stretch of coast were empty, silent, voiceless, following the same haptic acts held in memory as the earlier rural walks in England. Distant memories were disturbed as I scored long trails and I experienced the tactile sensation and Proustian charge of walking barefoot on the sand. I undertook further *Line Journey* drawings titled *Drift Lines* (2007), converting movement to mark as I had done holding a pencil against paper on previous walks in Suffolk fields and London streets. Through the reflexive marking I was continuing to test drawing's liminality and capacity to lead to somewhere else, in process, always becoming, where marks delineate materiality and bodily presence.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing as synchronous with movement and journeying, situated in a between space, is made possible by the direct use of line. In repeating the line as an open-ended medium, I have attempted to reveal the latency in drawing, shifting between haptic and optic, permanent and impermanent, relentless and disjointed, whereby it hovers in a state of becoming. From the beginning, drawing is in flux with the potential to exist in an elastic present tense, always 'becoming' rather than 'being' – mark *becoming* line, line *becoming* surface. This is germane to understanding drawing as an act of doing.

The performative and repetitive practice of the premeditated *Marking Time* drawings in the indoor space and in the aleatory *Line Journey* drawings in the outdoor environment has identified drawing as a liminal and multi-layered process of recording rather than as a linear progression. The potentiality of the line is questioned, and how repeating the line might create opportunities for rethinking time, which may have no real bearing on the experience of the time of making the work. Prompted by durational experiments, through the activity of drawing, memories unpredictably spring into consciousness, thus unshrouding a Deleuzian-Bergsonian virtual memory-image, via a Proustian potential for random and unexpected fragments of pure past (Deleuze, 1994: 122).

By moving beyond the limits of sight where memory is activated through contact – through touch – drawing exists with and without seeing. It resides in the gap between looking, and it is here that things may be remembered as well as forgotten. Through continual movement and differential becoming, drawing practice is well placed to question positions of visibility and invisibility, sight and touch, transition and thought, and more significantly, of 'seeing' *between*.

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