

### Three Thoughts about where drawing is and what drawing might be today.

How drawing is perceived in society and education, and a review of an exhibition of drawing in multidisciplinary practice.

### **HOW 'DRAWING KNOWLEDGE' IS BEING ADDRESSED TODAY.**

At a recent Drawing Out conference in London a number of cartographers spoke of their ambivalence towards drawing. These quietly spoken yet I would argue insidious comments went apparently unnoticed by the majority of the attendees. No other speakers or audience members defended the essential role of drawing within our society- that everything manufactured by humankind must first be drawn and designed before it can be formed is (as Andrew Graham Dixon termed in the title of his 2006 BBC TV series) the secret of drawing. Yet why should it remain a secret when drawing by rights is surely (alongside reading writing and arithmetic) the fourth R. Our lives are directed (the design and construction of the roads, vehicles and communication technology we employ) and constructed (the buildings we live and work in, the tools we use, the clothes we wear) through drawing. Is it the case that technology has separated the majority of professions from using hand tools so that we forget the sudden gap between our learning processes at our first school – where we were encouraged to draw as a process of learning and developing our thinking and understanding, and secondary school where suddenly drawing was seen as child's play without value and time off from more serious work. These are no doubt sweeping generalizations, yet still there is enough element of truth to make a valid point. So how is drawing knowledge being addressed today? Evidently by those outside the fine art practices – with a general blindness towards the essential presence and fundamental influence of the process of drawing within our everyday lives. Yet there are also problems within the Fine Art forum where drawing knowledge is being addressed with an elitist attitude that is equally blind to everyday drawing processes- overall drawing knowledge is being addressed today–without due care and consideration, and we are in danger of losing a vital learning thread.

### **What drawing is today?**

In 1972 artist and teacher Carl Plackman wrote a text describing what drawing is. Published in *Out of Line: Drawings from the Art Council Collection*, Artist's Notes eloquently contained Plackman's concepts of drawing practice at that time.

A drawing is the writing on the wall

A drawing makes sense out of nonsense and nonsense out of sense

A drawing contains more time than it takes to look at it

A drawing is a history of experience and its content is non-visual

A drawing is never non referential, a drawing is a way of thinking

A drawing is a means of searching for identity

A drawing is sometimes the catalyst sometimes assistant and sometimes the critic A drawing's space can be finite and it can be limitless

A drawing's content is never wholly contained in the drawing

A drawing is always made by somebody'

In the 1970's I attended an Art School where Life Drawing was compulsory three days a week for the first year of study. But Plackman's concepts widening the boundaries of drawing and offering the possibility of exploration within that practice, did not reach me as an undergraduate student. And although being immersed into observational drawing was a worthwhile process for the development of my practice, in hindsight my understanding of drawing was also limited to that observational methodology. I propose that Plackman's concerns for process content and intention within the possibilities of 2 dimensional drawing are issues that still remain fundamental to drawing practice in the 2010's. However as current practice has shifted from the hand made towards the conceptual (in some instances snaggling drawing as an invalid method between technology and conceptual practice), the processes of drawing in the 2010's have expanded. Building on and in response to Plackman's text, and considering the changed technologies, bias towards conceptual thinking and possibility of collaborative practice, that have occurred in the past thirty years, I have comprised a list of the elements that I understand now exist in drawing practice today. These elements consider multidimensional and multidisciplinary materials and methods, while also baring in mind the practitioner as a number of people working together, and the audience as an element of the work (witness to the performance).

## DRAWING; A CONVERSATION WITH CARL PLACKMAN 2009

A drawing is an intentional evidence of presence,  
A drawing leaves, lays down or hovers a mark,  
A drawing can be physical, cerebral, sonic or virtual,  
A drawing may include the present, the past and the brink of becoming,  
A drawing can come and go and show the route it has taken,  
A drawing is a thought brought into the world and open to change,  
A drawing can be marked, formed, sounded, implied or suggested,  
A drawing can be 2d, 3d, timed based or imagined,  
A drawing can be seen by the eye, perceived in the mind's eye, or heard by the ear, A  
drawing measures practitioner in relation to place and vice versa,  
A drawing is a performative action, repeating that which it draws,  
A drawing when witnessed is a performance drawing.

## **2. Where drawing is in education today ? Calling for the fourth R**

Drawing is a democratic process, employed by activities of all disciplines, not exclusive to any one discipline age or culture, nor adhering to any one system of application. Andrew Graham - Dixon in his television series *The Secret of Drawing* (2006), visualised how drawing underpins humankind's industry, throughout different fields of research, application and production. From medicine to music, fine art to flying, whether directive diagrams, proposed concepts or designed solutions, the drawing process enquires, narrates, designs and conceives everything that is made by humankind in the world. Graham-Dixon's series was not published in book form, although extracts from the series can now be accessed on Youtube. There appears to be a dichotomy in the current reception of drawing, on the one hand drawing is an elitist practice only deemed interesting within the confines of Fine Arts, on the other drawing is a democratic process fundamental to humankind's development and production in the world. I propose that dialog across disciplines concerning processes, methods and applications,

might significantly contribute towards greater understanding of the multiple and essential purposes of drawing. Another problematic issue related to drawing exists within school education. Our educational system while understanding the value of literacy and numeracy (supporting learning through words and numbers across disciplines), often discounts our third method of learning through images, (supporting learning through observing and imagining the world

<sup>5</sup> Stephen farthing , Anita Taylor Aileen Stackhouse, Phil Sawdon, Eileen Adams, Jayne Bingham, Steve Garner, Kelly Chorpening, 'Summary of Discussion by Group 5', Steve Garner (chair), Maryclare Foa, James Faure Walker, Tanya Kovats, Marie-Claire Isserman, Angela Rogers, Charlotte Hodes, Freya Smith, Paul Bowman, Rebecca Man, in Drawing: The Network, a one day forum on drawing research. Wimbledon College of Arts University of the Arts London, Tuesday 20th March 2007, Chelsea Space: 2007, p. 61.