

DRAWING AND LONGING: PROPOSAL FOR DRAWING AS PARATEXT

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INTRODUCTION

A 'state of drawingness' is proposed and explored by the philosopher H  l  ne Cixous in her essay 'Without End, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner's taking off' [Cixous:20]. The intention of this proposal is to reflect her notion that a subject can be drawn out through the inscription of marks and words that evoke the 'living of life' [Cixous:25]. She speaks of desiring the 'before and after' of a book, invoking the frustration that, for a subject to be legible and visible, it must be approached, bound and delimited through writing or drawing and therefore, paradoxically, taken from life and movement into stasis. Cixous seeks the event itself, or rather, the improvisational means by which, through an open-ended and tentative process of mark-making, erasure and placing, a person or event may be drawn out.

This proposal finds its form in the notion of 'paratext'. This was originally, for me, a means of drawing out subject matter by presenting meta-material through pairings of text, or text with image. However, the idea that a subject may be invoked by components beyond and around it is also reflected in literary theory. Gerard Genette defines 'paratexts' as components of the paraphernalia surrounding texts in publication (prefaces, illustrations, titles etc). For Genette, the paratext is 'More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold... a zone between text and off-text, not only of transition but also of transaction ... an influence that ... is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it' [Genette:1,2].

PARATEXT

The main body of this proposal takes the form of a cluster of paratext pieces (image with text) around the notion of *parastasis* [Frizot:2], defined as 'the act or action of abstracting an image or representation from the continuous flow of time, where the original and its replicant, for an instant, coexist within the same temporal and spatial dimension' (Oxford Latin Dictionary 1850). The notion of parastasis evokes, as does Cixous through her analysis of drawing 'from life', the desire to capture and thereby defy time. The paratexts presented here [Bowen:2006/2008] explore drawing's relationship with photography, the inscription of the 'pencil of nature' incorporating the idea of paper as a performance space.

1: Frame

The Munby Box contains the photographic archive of a Victorian gentleman photographer, Arthur Munby. With his housemaid Hannah Cullwick, whom he eventually married, Munby collaborated on a documentation of Hannah's life as a domestic servant in his household.

One professor's excavation of the Munby Box (to prevent scandal locked at Munby's request until 1950) uncovers a frame whose image has faded to invisibility [Mavor:187]. This exists as surface only, beneath which a handwritten caption describes the moment of exposure:

Hannah, going to the public house for the kitchen beer as she does daily. Taken in the street about noon on Friday, the 2nd of February 1872.

Taken from (the context of) an excavational essay on the contents of the box, this image remains (out of context) a powerful drawing from life. Between the moment, the camera, the first viewer's text and the movement towards it of others who (after 1950) see also, the event of Hannah herself has faded right away. But in the movement, the gesture of one towards another, that which is seen from a distance becomes something else.

'Estranged from this itself, which is the image, we ...re-call the event.' [Blanchot:88].

2: Punctum



That she moves her leg (the blur) pins the moment.

I pan through Photoshop to Cis's leg breaking the pose, although moving in is not what brings her closer or what animates her. It is a particular movement that animates the still, that which draws us. Despite blurring, it is possible to see under scrutiny of enlargement the texture of machine-spun wool. I view ribbing as though it is an archaeological find, lost in miniature. Moving in, the process of blow-up, as if an excavation in reverse, exposes the nearly imperceptible.

As we look, the photograph's history (fused with her being unknown) becomes turbulent [Pearson & Shanks:10]. Like a small wave it throws up something salvaged, the tiny movement that is a narrative fragment, a real history. Punctuation, exposure, the blur in the frame seems to us now, as perhaps for her, a gesture of escape.

'When it's not entirely clear what is being felt or being thought in the body...that's the moment [on which we] seek to draw...And drawing the 'living of life' (what else is there to want to draw?) is...exactly what none knows ...the quick of life. But it's not impossible.' [Cixous:25].

I'm looking for Cis McLachlan, around four years old in Glasgow being photographed by Alexander McNab for a calling card.

When I see her one more time she is an undated teenager sitting for a studio portrait in Braintree, composed and still. Then I lose her.

Still blur draws me to the point, the *punctum*, the cut through space that creates the still [Barthes:27]. It is not that movement itself animates, because movement in a photograph emphasises arrest. We cannot see movement, the moment, but held in tension with now, a gap opens between moments, hers and ours. The performance, the exploration, the not knowing becomes a double subject.

Moment by moment, this is the measure of difference. Time is difference. One and one is now.

'But where does one stand to look at the nature of time itself?

No image can still time. However it is the frame of the still image that offers us a means to engage with time in its virtuality. The frame frees the image from reference to an actual time and place and offers us an opening for time travel – an opening that may well become a portal for our inner rhizome of experience. We are now changing places and admit that we are bound in time....all the stories we might invent are only attempts to look at the image anew...

We are always looking for a place in order to see' [Ross with Wegener: 57].

Between the viewer and the still (the true still always moves) lies an extension of images, forward from camera-time to now which runs backwards. In between, Cis moves out of the frame towards Braintree and beyond, and we plunge in to meet her, clutching the calling cards (they are the only ones with which we have to play, playing around Cis's leg, all of us gathering momentum, moving around the point, the punctum).

Measuring the gap between her time and ours, we tell her story.



3: Street Scene

'Moving objects leave no impression on the sensitive surface', Samuel Morse [Frizot: 28].



Morse observes Daguerre's slow image, the street seen through a camera obscura from the photographer's Paris studio on 7 March 1839. Taken through Photoshop a hundred and fifty years on it is possible to detect, in the same image, traces of what Samuel Morse could not see, a street population present at the time but going too fast to show up. These (the ghosts of carriers, carts, pedestrians and dogs) manifest as constellations of pixels, barely visible galaxies.

4: Drawing and Longing

John Stezaker's 'Third Person Archive' is a collection of background figures found and cut out of nineteenth-century photographic travelogues and postcards [Stezaker 2009]. The notion of a third person refers primarily to the camera itself, mediating unseen between viewer and viewed. Re-framed from above, the ground is viewed obliquely. Shadows run from corner to corner so that each figure appears set diagonally across the ground as if in an oriental miniature. Here we see, between tracteries of shadow thrown by flights of steps and lamp-posts, the ghosts of children moving too fast to be completely caught. The unilateral edit takes them from a larger ground upon which they are incidental figures, a rupture that (as if introducing another lens) refocuses and

brings them into sight. The photographed figure, appearing as a surface mark, can be said to mark a movement, *ecceity*, the 'here is' [see Note 1: References]. This is not chronology, but that which is between ourselves in time, so that the particular in photography, its predication of a body, a lamp post, a flight of steps, may take the measure of what is now and who is here. These are subjects imaged not in memoriam but in anticipation of being noticed, brought to bear upon, tenderly dislocated in order it be seen again. Exerting pressure, tracing the contours of that event, we find another present, the trace of a life reconstituted outside itself.



Also in the Archive is the 'walking man', a barely perceptible photographic fragment pasted onto a sheet of A4. After initial resistance to expectations of scale, the impulse is to brush the speck away as you would detritus when drawing.

In the darkness of a second-hand bookshop the image is found and taken, made particular. The scene originally caught to lure the traveller is manhandled, dislocated, cut short. Cutting around what he chooses (for us) to see Stezaker draws the frame, exposing his own perception, the cut that draws us in. Taking the figure from its photographic ground he re-duplicates and at the same time reverses the photographic event. Resisting the temptation to re-scale the fragment, he does not take the most obviously intriguing route of enlargement, the digital or darkroom blow-up, but makes a manual zoom by cutting around what he wants us to see. This is re-framing the instinctive, optical way, as a child might make a telescope of its fist, peering through to clarify the distant object.



The man walks briskly encircled by glue, a thumbprint of the cutter-sticker who took him out of context. The way he has been framed allows neither viewer nor figure any ground other than

himself walking that day, flicked coat, brisk gait and nothing more. I imagine him annoyingly stuck to one finger and then another until he is finally centralised on the sheet. Evidence of stickiness forms another frame, the mark of an impatient thumbprint [Stewart: 46] that makes you want all the more to swipe him away with the back of your hand as if he is impeding the view.

When the image fragment is enlarged by zooming in, the durational sense evoked by distance seems disproportionately zoomed out, and the relative distance closed between viewing figure and figure viewed. A life invoked by miniature seems to effect the uncanny return of a real figure [see Note 2: References]. Stezaker says he doesn't want to see what enlargement does to the image fragment, although through Photoshop it is fascinating to see blown up what he describes as 'These most distant images of humanity – distant in both space and time – [who] seemed the closest to coming alive as they disappeared into specks like dust caught in the paper skin of reproduction' [Stezaker 2000:47].

5: tac

The autonomous image cuts (and is cut from) movement.

In a similar way (to illustrate) an imagined *tac* operates in the performance of mime. The inner *tac* makes thinking visible and visibly shifts perception. The palms or soles make contact –*tac* – and without a word the surface of a world appears (a wall, a glass of water, the handle on a door, a flight of stairs). *Tac* is a mental sound, a note for the body, a small explosion creating 'some form of enlargement or exaggeration, not necessarily elaborate' [Stevenson].



The enlarging gesture can be almost imperceptibly slight. The act, mime's embodiment of the world's surface, can be imagined for all the world to see, 'like a small tear in the surface of the world, as though we have been pulled through from our own to some vaster space' [Weil], through a sort of death.

POSTSCRIPT

In her essay on reading and drawing, 'Without end', Cixous longs for 'the beforehand of the book' [Cixous:20]. Then we read, 'I just wrote this sentence, but before this sentence I wrote hundreds of others which I've suppressed, because the moment for cutting short has arrived. It's not me, its necessity which has cut the text we were on our way to writing, because the text and I, we would continue on our way'. Stopping somewhere, that's the trick. Where and how to cut.

The practice of paratext, as proposed here in relation to drawing, takes Genette's term as a reference to both the material properties of text (the parameters that create visibility) and also to that 'endlessness' pursued by Cixous, the stream within which we have to negotiate a position from which to see. Through her reading of drawing, Cixous wants the living of [a] life in all its particularity, its very passing. In her reading, for example, of Picasso's 'woman ironing' she longs for 'what passes between us', for some can 'portray passing' [Cixous: 26, 22]. The drawing is scrutinised and its contours followed with concentration. The emotion sought, she says, is 'born at the angle of one state with another' [Cixous: 26].

The book's binding tilts its text towards us. The covers (with preface, postscript and in-between) draw us in / on / through and, from the outside looking in, we form our own perspective.

REFERENCES

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- Stezaker J., The 3rd Person Archive Walther König 2009. The paratext 'Drawing and Longing' is a result of interaction with the original pieces lent me by the artist. Images reproduced by kind permission of John Stezaker.
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- Note 1. *Ecceity* [Lat. *here is*] posited by Duns Scotus as not a thing but a spatio-temporal relationship, a determination, a predisposition of one towards another. Laura Mulvey suggests that the tense of a photograph might be thought of as the 'this is that has been' (Mulvey L., 'The Index and the Uncanny' in Gill C.B. [ed.] Time and the Image Manchester University Press 2000)
- Note 2. In her essay on 'longing', Susan Stewart considers how, from the 'enlargement of experience' through language, emerge conventions of description by which the world may be understood. This is an imagistic means through which experience is (more than conveyed) instead re-made or transformed. Here, longing is an imaginative impulse to collect or re-scale the world.

