

Experiencing the line

{ An exploration of drawing, magic and the physical act of drawing the circle }

Introduction

For this essay I would like to discuss the application of the body in a given space, and the impact this has on a body of work, how this ultimately changes the space and the way in which we interact with it.

Looking closely at the relationship between drawing and the body and discussing our experiential understanding of the line in relation to drawing the circle.

As my work is centring around the use of the circle I will be looking more into the symbolic meanings, and how it was used in our ancient history thinking about what relationship this has to my practice.

The material - questioning the relationship between the body and the drawing material.

The impact and exploration of space in drawing - how this can refer to 'experiencing the line' - illustrating this notion with the works of artist Monika Grzymala to discuss and illustrate the relationship between these two aspects.

I will be referring to the writing architects one of whom discusses at length the experiential nature of architecture, seeing it as a language we are born with as children and grow out of in adulthood.

For more reference on performative works within drawing I will be looking at the work of the artist Rebecca Horn whose work uses her body to describe her experiences of the world through symbolic shape and mythology to develop her work. In reference to experiencing the drawn line through a body, I will be discussing Horns 'pencil mask' performance and the idea of drawing tools as a way of extending the movements made with the head, which plays a large role in how we perceive the line in performative drawing. I will be questioning the point at which drawing, performance and space come into how an artists practice can be transformative.

As a part of my investigation of the spatial aspect of drawing I would also like to discuss drawing and magic - how the two are connected, using circular drawing as a way to create symbols that represent the body within a form of ritual and how drawing is also a part of that ritual.

I will be discussing a recent performance workshop and event I took part in with artist Serena Korda to think about incantations for invisibility through singing through an object perceiving it to be a form of magic within an artist's practice - by creating a folk lore element within a body of work in order to give the work ritualistic power to create a shared collective experience within a work.

Connecting this with how the presence of an artwork and the participation of the observer in it becomes a collective experience of a place and therefore how place is changed.

Experiencing the line and the sum of all gestures.

What does it mean to 'experience' a drawn line?

In this section of the essay I will be looking at how through drawing the artist is an embodiment of the very act, the tools and the space that they make the work in, in this way a practice is rich with a life of its own and can become transformative for the artist and the viewer.

Although a line can be fixed in space, how do we make the connection that it is in fact moving?
what is the relationship between drawing and movement?

How can we 'read' lines?

Is drawing a tool to explore space and its relationship to people/objects?

Is experience in drawing the line about movement?

During the past few months my practice has become concerned with the more spatial elements of drawing, using my body to work with the space in my studio my understanding of the relevance of space in my work is deepening.

How does drawing explore our physiological and emotional aspects of architecture?

In questioning drawing and its relationship to the three dimensional, I have recently discovered the artist Monika Grzymala's spatial tape drawings as a way to think about bringing drawing to intervene in a space and to manipulate how people interact with it.

what connection is there between space and line?

what is the connection between space and the body?

In a current exhibition called 'Drawing Now 2015' curated by the Albertina Gallery in Vienna as part of an ongoing cross examination of how drawing is used in contemporary art practice. A short film has been made during the time the artist created a spatial drawing using black and white masking tape titled 'Vortex'. the 3.6km (total distance of tape used) work was designed specifically for the space - a hallway like space, two walls facing one another became the transitory space for the drawing to take flight. In the film we see Grzymala is mentally focused, her bodily position, her fingers and limbs working frantically to capture the waves of overlapping lines she perceives in the space. Wrapping, twisting, clinging, heaving and sculpting line after line using her fingers as the points by which the drawing pivots and leaps from every surface it encounters, the tape appears to be fixed yet the line, the body and the space are not.

“Drawing represents for me the most honest gesture, the moment of truth when the paper and I breathe together, the line offering in its simplicity many variable forms of expression”. (Monika Grzymala.M, 2014) ¹

The artist intervening in the space in this sculptural way opens up Grzymala’s drawing practice to that of a more experiential one, while she is making the spatial drawing she is travelling as far as the tape can go, the coordinates and geography of the two intertwined. into where they have been within the two dimensional and three dimensional planes. Grzymala uses the measurement in each roll of tape to give a total of the distance that her body as the line has travelled in her explorations of the space. Grzymala believes the distance to be an important aspect to the process of her work as it best describes the mental and physical process in every spatial drawing she makes. It gives a sense of scale, velocity and geography to the work, it is also interesting to realise how space is both flat, compressed and directional and yet so vast elastic and liquid at the same time.

In this way the idea of ‘experiencing the line’ is crucial in the departure from drawing with your hands onto a flat surface/table- in the traditional sense to using your whole body as an extension of the line. In a recent conversation held at the drawing room in London, (2009) Grzymala spoke at length about her work and the ongoing thinking process behind it -

‘I think the viewers of my installations can in a certain sense feel that somebody has developed the spatial drawing from the proportions of the body and the space combined.’ (Gryzmala.M 2015)²

the idea that having performed an action in a space and through the recorded traces of movements within it, there is an ongoing dialogue with the drawing, the space, the artist and the observer which becomes intrinsic to the vocabulary of drawing.

How can we sense that a work has come from the body?

By being interested in how people engage with an artwork, the manipulation of space through drawing raises many questions about how one would navigate through a space - is drawing about being in transition, is this how we experience the line?

‘every one of my spatial drawings is developed from the body’ (Grzymala.M, 2009)³

Grzymala works predominantly in Black and White tape, this is to keep the work centred around the form and momentum of the drawing and so does not depend on colour in the same way that a painting might. In a recent exhibition titled ‘spaceliner’ in Istanbul Grzymala designed a new drawing for a chosen space in the gallery by working with the exhibition curator Barbara Heinrich. The work was titled ‘poyraz-lodos’- due to the artist becoming inspired by the movement of the wind in Istanbul, the coming and going in two directions - poyraz and Lodos - which also reflected the nature of the space itself (two walls facing each other, high ceiling and

a narrow passageway). A shifting landscape of fleeting lines, growing, diving, breaking, bursting, fingers climbing, sticking to the surface. The space is in flux and our bodies are in flux as we perceive the space in a new way - Gryzmala's spatial drawings sit somewhere between the real and the imaginary, the physical and the emotional. In the work although it often has a strong directional force through it also has a certain sense of disorder to the work too, in the fluidity and depiction of a constant and movable state - the lines are entropic. Already through the connotation of 'poyraz-lodos' names which have been adapted from Greek mythologies - poyraz from Boreas the Northern god of wind, gives shape to the way the drawing and Gryzmala interacts with the space. This embodiment of an elemental force in a drawing is a way for the artist to also become the drawing in behaving like the wind, as fearful and as destructive as a storm, the lines not only connect to the movements but also to the history of a city shaped by the wind.

If a line is fixed, is movement fixed?

The line and body - are they a representative of boundaries?

Measuring the space with her body, drawing long lines through the space. The drawing is a very physical act and performative, Grzymala's body plays a crucial role in how the drawing is shaped and defined as she draws into the space with her body. The energy used while creating the work is transferred into space and becomes an active part in manipulating the way the observer experiences this too. Gryzmala in a recorded dialogue at the Drawing Room in London with Micheal Newman, professor of Art writing at Goldsmith university, London when asked to describe her practice says -

"my drawings are a personal line of flight, a language to experience space...to describe the relationships between things...my work is escaping gravity and looking to manage it in a different way" (Gryzmala.M 2009) ⁴

In discussing drawing and performance it seems appropriate for me to also touch on the work of Rebecca Horn an artist who after becoming seriously ill yearned to escape the confines of her bed and whose drawings were a release, and also a way to think about how to extend her body and metamorphose her behaviour.

In Horn's seminal work 'pencil mask' made in 1972 a drawing device made with fabric, pencils and metal. In a documented performance filmed in 1973 we see Horn slowly approaching the papered surface of the wall, after watching the film several times over, Horn appears to look more and more uncomfortable suggesting she has been forcibly bounded by the mask, perhaps even unwillingly led by the mask to become like a mechanism in a large drawing machine. Horn is at first tentative, eyes glancing, blinking as thoughts gravitate towards the white space in front of her. As she begins to move her body and head from side to side, the impact of the pencil points interfere and distort the artist's vision. She is no longer aware of herself anymore, but of the mask and the impact of each pencil scratching, flickering, glancing over the surface of the papered wall in front of her. Twentieth century French philosopher Jacques Derrida believed

that the act of drawing had something to do with blindness and that drawing is also blind suggesting that drawing is about the interaction between the artist, environment and the activity, a not knowing, starting from a fear perhaps, of being in the dark. This exploratory way that Horn treats the act of drawing has a connection to this theory.

Spatially the drawing is at eye level situating Horn in a very personal and direct bodily position to her drawing. In a recent interview with art magazine (2015) Horn speaks about her drawing -

'I started working with large-scale paper. It's an extension of performance, because the pieces are the size of my full body.' (Mckvey, Kurt , 2015) ⁵

What is significant about the marks made in a drawing having a strong connection to the body?

Does it allow the artist to speak through their work as a whole?

Does it strengthen the connection between the artist and their work?

What effect does this performative drawing have in the vocabulary of the experiential line?

In thinking about drawing as a trace or memory of an action - as observers we experience to some extent the moment at which the marks were made, this connectivity found in performative drawings is part of the vocabulary of drawing, reading each trajectory of a line like a written word.

The trace of movements left behind in 'Pencil Mask'(1972) at its core uses the body as an extended drawing tool, utilising the everyday movements that we make in order to interact with each other and communicate through drawing. Horn uses simple rotational head movements to make the drawing, allowing the mechanical, repetitive nature of her body to become the drawing language, and also to embody her own intimate experience with the space she occupies. In the description of Horns 'Pencil mask'(1972) now as part of the Tate collection, London Horn describes the performed action she used within the work;

"All pencils are about two inches long and produce the profile of my face in three dimensions...I move my body rhythmically from left to right in front of a white wall. The pencils make marks on the wall the image of which corresponds to the rhythm of my movements." (Horn.R 2004) ⁶

what is the relationship between drawing, movement and space?

what is the critical point where all three are in exchange?

Our understanding of the world around us is connected to our bodies, our senses and our minds are in a constant state of flux Drawing addresses the space in between, which helps us to navigate our experiences and understanding through its many layers, tools and spaces. Drawing in this sense is about the embodiment of all aspects used to create it including the artist.

"I use my body, I use what happens to me, and I make something." (Horn.R 2005) ⁷

Drawing and the magic of circles

What transformative processes does drawing allow us to access?

By physically being in a drawing, are we effectively entranced by drawing?

are circular drawings a way of invoking the ecstatic?

what bodily connection is there to drawing circles?

Artist Antony Gormley's sculpture 'As above so below' made in 1989 consisting of a human sized figure suspended hanging upside down against the back of a wall arms and legs open as if to emphasise the surrounding space. In an article Gormley wrote concerning this work as part of a larger body of work in an essay titled 'Learning to Think' he writes

'From 1984, I began to be interested in how you could use works as a lever to undermine the certainty of the spectator in his or her position in space.' (Gormley.A, 1991)⁸

As part of a larger series spanning several years of work, in each set the figures are positioned in a way that they appear to be defying gravity, and to ultimately disorientate the viewer and seem to suggest the room is spinning freely in space.

In an essay written by Oystein Hjort titled '*the silent language of the body*' Hjort likens the symbolism in the unusual stasis of motion that the figure is positioned in to Leonardo Da Vinci's vitruvian man in relation to the perfect proportions of the body as depicted using geometric shapes such as the circle and the square. The title of the sculpture 'As Above So Below' also has a historical connection to the work of the 14th century Swiss alchemist called Paracelcus. Who made a series of alchemistic writings about man being a mirror of the entire universe. It was soon to become part of popular belief that man was a small scale model of the universe a perfect balance, a microcosm, As above so below. Hjort describes the balance of energies within Gormley's sculpture as:

'a cyclical exchange of energies between spirit and matter, between the psyche and sexuality.' (Hjort.O 1989)⁹

This cyclical nature of how the Gormley's sculpture takes on this active cyclical symbolism and the spatial relationship it has taken on with movement within the space connects with how the

frame of the circle and the relationship the body has to it in a wider sense leads me to ask is drawing a form of excavation?

Is drawing a representation of a gateway?

Currently my practice involves the drawing of circles, using very gestural and exaggerated marks travelling the circumference of my body. The circle also serves as a boundary for which I can push myself and test the limits of my body within the circle. The circle is also a reflection of the nature of my studio space, at the bottom of the room there is a semi circular space in which I like to work, above this is a large circular ceiling cast in which I have hung a work titled 'dance of bantu' spiralling installations from. Although the work is partly a response to the space there is also a longstanding development of my interest in how this shape connects to the body and to the ritualised methods I use in my practice. As a result i have become interested in thinking about the relationship between drawing and magic. Performing the line with the body I am somehow linking this to the way a magical ritual may have been performed in a witchcraft tradition.

can repetitive drawing be a form of incantation?

'Drawing often has intimations of the magical: occultist draw on the floor before they try to raise the devil. Drawing has been used to invoke or exercise; it offers some believe direct access to the magical and to the unconscious. Joseph Beuys certainly believed this; he described drawings as doorways to a state where the invisible could be seen: "They attempt, he said, 'to get hold of the state, attempt to visualize how forces hang together, give shape to invisible configurations, but also relate to visible ones"' (Godfrey. T, 1993) ¹⁰

With this in mind I recently attended a workshop at Oxford Modern Art Oxford gallery in which I worked on a project with London based artist Serena Korda for her show 'Shifting sands: Hybrid rituals and symbols in contemporary culture' As part of the show, the artist invited members of the public to come and be a part of the accompanying performance piece 'ectoplasmic variations or otherwise known as the jug choir. Korda's practice is underpinned with research in abandoned histories particularly around folk lore/community culture. Her work also highlights the ritual in the everyday through developing large scale performances to accompany the objects she makes to be used within them. The workshop comprised of several movement based exercises in which we were using our bodies like a machine whilst visualising a particular kind of machine such as a 'dog walking device' we would then assemble as a group into the machine and make a sound that corresponded to the action. This later served as the basis for the kind of sound we would chant into the large 17th century bellarmine witch jugs' which were used historically as a counter magical objects in which urine, pins and needles, red thread, red wine,

rosemary and human hair were put inside and then the bottle would be buried in the hearth to ward away any curses/evil.

In the final performance of ectoplasmic variations using various loop pedals and other percussive instruments to play onto the bellarmine jugs, we chanted several incantations whilst maintaining a constant circle of breath, 'don't stop breathing or you'll die' and 'fit fat' were among some of the chants we sang into the jugs. This way of breathing was a strong connection for me with my own work, the body operates through the repetitive motion of breathing in and out in the same way lines are drawn, back and fourth, high and low. Seeing drawing as an extension of breathing, a series of life lines. In the performance 'ectoplasmic variations' breathing became a central focus for the work to have rhythm and projection into both the object and the space, relating it back to the circle of breath, and the circle.

Historically the circle of breath was a technique used in many cultures. During the 13th century it was used in the metalsmiths practice when working with silver or gold - the technique allowed them to blow continuously through a pipe in order to shape the metal. This method was also used by woodwind instrumentalists who kept the flow of air continuous by blowing through their noses and inhaling through their mouths.

Is breathing a way to access a trance like state - akin to that in drawing?

In thinking about drawing and the body, the circle of breathing, the circle of magic in relation to 'becoming through drawing the line' this transformative state that drawing allows us to access links to certain dance performances too. Mary Wigman's *'Hexentanz'* performed in 1926 was a seminal piece conceived by Wigman as a way to access 'ritualised trance' as she dances invoking a dark and fearsome aspect to her own persona as a dancer.

Seated on the floor she begins by drawing a veil of fingers over her eyes slowly reaching then snapping into form scratching into the air, one directional her gaze looking skyward. Her hands become enchanted from this moment as Wigman begins to draw 'magic' from her surroundings and appears to channel the sound vibrations of the cymbal which accompanies her performance to concentrate on her centre. Rotating her head Wigman begins to lean and rock from side to side, at one point becoming bird like as if about to take off or as if to cock feathers at the viewer - as a sign of threat/danger to the masked dancer. The dance becomes almost violent now, as wigman begins to lurch her body forwards, closer to the screen a wanted confrontation perhaps. She appears more squatted and powerful in her seated stance - The dancer stomps one foot after the next, beating with the cymbal, rotating her body to make a full circle.

Are circular and bodily drawings a way of invoking the ecstatic?

In a recent interview Rebecca Horn reveals her thoughts around a work titled 'Space for the Nameless' made in Vienna (1994)

'I try to experience this chain of reactions which is also a learning process. There are rituals of circling and dancing which develop a certain energy, and they can sometimes lead one toward a certain transformation.' Morgan, Stuart (1994) ¹¹

what does it mean to transform? and what role does drawing play in this?

In this way Horn is describing the learning process through action and ritual as a way of changing oneself. This is quite a profound and interesting statement which I think also belongs to the vocabulary of drawing. In the way Monika Grzymala uses her body as an extension of the line, there is a transformation of the scale of the body and power it has to reach new spaces. In Rebecca Horns pencil mask through containment and fear, which has then been transferred into the marks, the transformation is a powerful tool in being able to overcome ones own pain and fears.

Is the act of drawing a form of transformation through the experience of making a mark?

'I do not apprehend my hand in the act of writing but only the pen which is writing; this means that i use my pen in order to form letters but not my hand in order to hold the pen. i am not in relation to my hand in the same utilising attitude as i am in relation to the pen; I am my hand. the hand is only the utilisation of the pen' (Cox.G 2006) ¹²

In seeing the body as an embodiment of the performed action, we can begin move towards a firmer understanding of what it means to be transformed by a drawing.

With this in mind the use of the mask and other performatory tools can be another catalyst for this to happen.

how does the mask aid drawing performance?

Are masks a powerful transformative tool in drawing?

A documentary about Mary Wigman in it she describes her thoughts behind the 'Hextentanz'

"I suddenly knew that fabric and that mask belonged together... the mask when the creative urge happens it causes a split process in one...it compels the dancer to a certain kind of metamorphosis. It breathes and lives like a frozen face within its form" (Wigman.M 1973) ¹³

Throughout history masks have been used throughout performance to enhance a characters position in a play, to bring the power of magic through dance and even as protective tools for toxic work. 'Pencil mask' seems to be polarizing these uses, becoming more of a prison for the wearer.

Awareness of place - the significance of place in an artwork - drawing the circle as excavation

"All of our awareness is grounded in forms of spatial experience, and that spatial awareness is not pure, but charged with emotional stress from our first born affinities. It is in fact the first language we ever learned, long before words." (Wilson.J, 2014) ¹⁴

Working in my studio space I often find myself wondering about all of the actions and events that have happened in the same space I am occupying. After reading about a residency artist Lucy Gunning did at the centre for drawing in Wimbledon Gunning spoke about how she wanted to tap into the history of the site, which was previously a family house, and so this became the orientation of the work. By interacting with the space in this way, her performative works were documented in photographs and films stills, so the drawing process the artist was primarily using in her work links to a form of excavation on the site and within her performances. Therefore connecting with site and personal work in this way relates drawing to the nature of digging both historically and mentally.

'the environment in which the work is placed, or perhaps the relationship between environment and the work, is almost as important as the work itself. the work becomes, as it were, a node in a bigger organisation. the environment can contribute to the sense of the work.'source - steve garner- writing on drawing

How does drawing embody an environment?

What about a drawing that represents not a physical spatial environment, but a digital one, one that is sound based such as sound and visual artist Julien Bayles created a digital work titled '*uncommon circles*' (2015) in which a series of generative circular shapes appear to build together, around and on top on one another as a series of minimalistic sound clips play . Like a sketch that has been erased and redrawn again and again, the circles appear in the centre of the

screen, they are tetchy nervous yet growing. Every second you linger on looking at the piece. The sound is insect like, minimal yet like a coded set of signals to the viewer. The sound becomes emphasised, with larger pauses- the circles become more structured and dynamic, leaping from large to small reminding me of the way the pupil reacts to being exposed to intense forms of light. The circles through their movement become architectural as if they are designing new forms of space within the endless nonspace of the digital. Like breathing, walking, drawing, I am hypnotised.

In an interview for the future of light festival 2014 Bayle discusses his relationship to using sound and drawing (as light) together -

But the really fascinating thing about light is its ability to change the atmosphere of spaces. Considering a constant space, with objects, with people, if you change the light (brightness, orientation, color temperature, blinking frequency especially), you change everything. source - phillips - (Bayle. J, 2014) ¹⁵

The generative circles describing and reacting to the sound waves in 'Uncommon Circles' have become the environment in which the viewer can visualise within the white digital space. In this way the drawing has embodied the space.

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