

# on drawing (*after badiou*)

Drawing is a darkening of the page.

It lies in the relationship between paper and pencil, between *ground* and *figure*.

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Mallarmé, referring to writing, wrote: 'man pursues black on white' - a filling in of the void, simply preferring a presence as opposed to an absence. Beckett echoes the thinking, offering no reasons for dialogue; merely presenting an animating of the stage (often stark like a drawing).

But, for drawing, this is too unbalanced a notion. In drawing, presence and absence dance. The darkening of the page isn't merely an escape from whiteness (a muttering into the abyss, 'this pleat of somber lace') - in a Hegelian way, our absence and presence construct each other, like Derrida's ellipsis.

The page is *ground* in that it offers a surface to construct line upon, while the line is *figure* in that it constructs space on the paper.

In this way, there is always a fragility in drawing. Its two faces lean on each other for their existence, both of them threatening to annihilate one another by virtue of their presence.

This essential fragility of drawing should be celebrated and accentuated. The interplay between figure and ground, between absence and presence, should form the content of the work - by doing this, we allow drawing to come alive at that point where it is close to its irreducible essence.

In creating a sober, fragile drawing, we are effective in our construction of an aesthetic object and manage to employ drawing in its unique aspect; neither disguising drawing as something else, nor attempting to do *what only drawing can do*, with other things.

(Drawing is neither the totality of all drawings that has ever existed, nor a description in words - it is itself, in its being, at the point of irreducibility).

For this reason I favour a drawing that approaches *disappearance*, employing only the trace of line and the near elimination of contrast - we *enact* fragility while representing it and use it to gesture gracefully at truth.

White space is precious and the dark line is simultaneously destructive and constructive in its power - in creating a drawing we are embarking upon a precarious activity that rewards timidity and restraint. Drawing is full of care - shepherding a space into existence through the gentle guidance of a line. In this, we avoid the trap of dramatic contrast and the seduction of dominant shade, the lazy comfort of bulking form, and the corruption of easy composition.

We haven't spoken of colour - while drawing lives most happily in the stream between black and white, colour offers a further way of exploring fragility. Used well, colour can bring a sense of gentle juxtaposition, a softness

of tone, an appearance of fading distance - these provide additional routes for our approach to fragility, but must be employed sparingly for fear of collapsing the balance that we aim to protect.

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On form and figuration, I borrow from Allen Grossman in his discussions of poetry.

Grossman argues that poetry isn't language.

The sentences of poems can't be considered statements (for if they were, we would disqualify them as subject to laws of logic) nor the speech of a person - instead, the words become subsumed in the totality of the poem - as-artifact, rendering them something different than they once were.

*'Language in poetry is an example of a natural thing which by being framed or contextualised in a powerful and singular way has changed its nature'.*

This is true for all the components of art - things with the appearance of utility and (quotidian) meaning, borrowed to become transformed as metaphor: to *be* and *mean* something else.

In drawing, we borrow material paper and transform it into animating emptiness, we borrow whiteness as formless ground and transform it into constitutive space, and we borrow recognisable shapes/lines and transform them - in their interplay with the paper - into aesthetic forms with metaphorical significance.

As with presence and absence, we should seek to accentuate this dynamic of drawing - favouring abstraction over figuration, but often deconstructing arrangements found in the world and recontextualising these features as something new.

In the case of total abstraction I say it is desirable to create shapes that oscillate between the coherent and the impossible, threatening to collapse into a graspable form or dissolve into pure line at a glance.

In considering composition, we should look to the *dynamics* we find in the world and recontextualise those - through metaphor - to echo and render finite the irreducible truths that sit behind our phenomenal experience of reality.

Indeed, this is the grand aim of all artistic creation; to create a 'powerful and singular way' in which to change the nature of an object-at-hand into something new, that acts - through metaphor or analogy to an irreducible truth - as a completely singular *embodiment* of something we cannot otherwise grasp.

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We loop back to our simple expression of drawing as fragility - noting that drawing, and particularly drawing, has this capability of rendering certain aesthetic truths as finite objects. And those truths are the truths of fragility and of disappearance.

Here, I make the case for the relevance of drawing.

This world needs to be filled with humility, vulnerability, openness, timidity, fragility, carefulness, slowness, intimacy, tenderness, quietness, reflection, calm, gentleness, togetherness.

I think drawing is all of these things and by creating drawings I hope to add to the world's stock of this depleted - humane - resource.