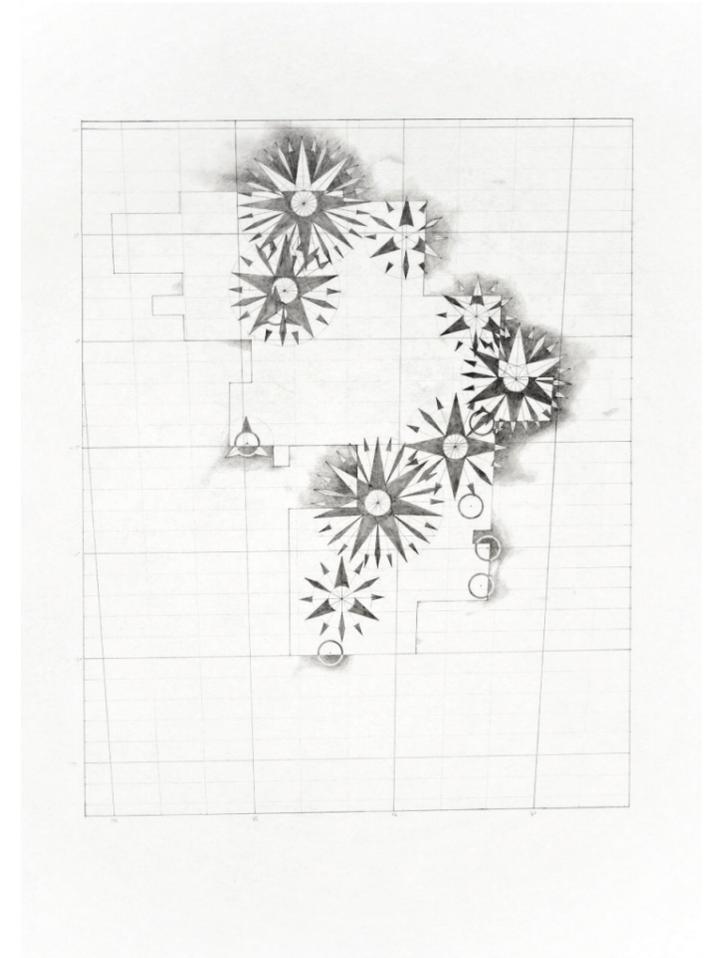


SPATIAL DRAWING



BENJAMIN FORSTER

TOM FREEMAN

CLARE PEAKE

DRAWING IN THE EXPANDED FIELD.

Faced with the blank page and its related formal limits, I have struggled to contain the world in this limited lexicon of lines and curls. Where does one start, with drawing? Certain things appear to require prioritisation, and thus others must be excluded for space is, possibly, limitless, as are the methods used to hold it. Like sculpture, the term drawing has become elastic, bound to a recognisable tradition whilst expanding to fit many new forms. Perhaps, with the confidence of Euclid, it is perhaps best to decide on some points and hope for the best when moving between them.

POINT A: The Dot and the Line.

In 1963, architect Norman Juster published a short picture book called *The Dot and the Line*. A ‘romance in lower mathematics’, the book describes, simply, the attempts of a line to impress the object of its affection: a purple dot who is unfairly in love with an ‘unkempt’ squiggle. The dot considers the line to be dull, until, frustrated by unsuccessful attempts to impress the dot by assuming roles as ‘a leader in world affairs’ (the equator), or a celebrated daredevil (a tightrope), the otherwise dependable line teaches itself angles. In mastering an array of geometries, ellipses and a linear reduction of Paul Klee’s *Little Jester in a Trance*, the line’s versatility finally wins the heart of the single-minded dot.

The acrobatics of the lovesick line neatly describe the similar adaptability of drawing, its myriad of applications in fields of both art and science. Taking a line for a walk might result in the drafting of a cathedral, or the plotting of the stars, or something more primal and magic, the manifestation of an interior world.

POINT B: Working Drawings.

Drawing has traditionally been considered a preparatory medium, a means to an end rather than an end itself. This ‘questionable’ status has perhaps contributed to its endurance: drawing has, unlike painting, never required a public resurrection. Even as the 1960’s saw artists systematically ‘dematerialise’ the art object, critiquing its formal and philosophical function, drawing remained central as a methodology. Often cited as the first exhibition of conceptual art, Mel Bochner’s 1966 display of ephemera collected from his peers – a John Cage score, Donald Judd’s bill from a supplier, Sol le Witt’s plans for large-scale wall works – was titled *Working Drawings and Other Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, expanding the definition of drawing as both a noun and a verb. Not only could drawing be divorced from the rabid expressionism of the preceding generation, the collection suggested the extension of drawing beyond the physical remnant itself, as a temporal, spatial, performative activity. A drawing could exist not only as a collection of marks on a page but also as the exchange of capital, the movement of the body, even the procession of a shadow on a wall.

POINT C: The Symbolic Axis.

Walter Benjamin had previously, as far back as 1917, described drawing’s particular relationship with space, stressing that viewing drawings vertically ‘conflicted with their inner meaning’. Despite the presumable operation of drawing, like painting, within the frame of its surface, drawings might be better understood if viewed flat: “...there are two sections through the substance of the world... the longitudinal section [of painting] seems representational: it somehow contains the objects. The cross section [of certain pieces of graphic art] seems symbolic; it contains signs.”ⁱ Drawing is perhaps more closely aligned with the map than the painting: it requires, suggests, navigation.

Perhaps this can be demonstrated by use of an example: Clare Peake’s drawings reference a landscape, but do not represent it. Instead of aiming to fix a particular view in place, Peake’s drawings distil their subject into close-to-abstract glancings that, in their oscillation between organic chaos and mathematical structure, might be macro or micro. These signs hover in an undefined field of horizontal distance that occasionally ruptures into physical space; shifts and repetitions imply a state of constant recalibration. In containing this landscape in a symbolic, rather than representational axis, Peake allows the mountain to be as fugitive as the electron.

POINT D: ‘Psychocartography’

Where the map or the blueprint requires precision in its simplification of space into signs and symbols, plans made using the reflective prisms of reaction or of memory, its corrosive nostalgias and dilatory pleasures, might prove somewhat less reliable. Guy Debord suggested ‘psychogeography’ as method of purposefully rupturing the usual, pedestrian experience of urban space; embarking on a ‘derive,’ the individual moves through the city at the behest of whim and intuition. Psychocartography could perhaps be considered an appropriate term for the ability to record that experience, for a draughtsmanship similarly at the whim of subjectivity.

Again, an example: when Tom Freeman reproduces an element of the Peterborough Cathedral, he continues a drawing that could be seen to have begun at the Perth International Airport, continuing toward Peterborough at an altitude of 30 000 feet. Or, his drawing could have begun even earlier than that, with a similar aeronautical line drawn in reverse, charting the emigration of his mother to Australia, for Freeman’s interest in the architecture of that particular building and location stems from his personal, family history, from overheard stories and borrowed memories of the towns in which his mother spent her early years. His attempts find personal significance in geography and architecture determines not only the focus of his drawings but also his motivation for moving through the world: the objects that he produces act as sincere, yet not quite reliable, signposts for that journey.

POINT E: Uncertainty.

More diagrammatic models for comprehension, despite performing usefully, can delineate space with such authority that they lead us astray. The beautiful and beguiling congruent polygons of the Platonic Solids, one of which Benjamin Forster has engineered to hover portentously above the gallery space, caused Johannes Kepler in 1596 to postulate that the solar system was in fact modelled *after* their constructed geometry, despite their only occasional appearance in other natural forms. Evidently, Kepler’s theory proved inaccurate but his investigation of it did lead him to discover that the planets moved in ellipses rather than circles and that misunderstanding can prove constructive if explored.

The fallibility of measurement is especially evident when these methods are applied to the largest of scales, the (allegedly) ever-expanding universe. Another of Forster’s borrowed models, the Zodiac, neatly carves up the heavens into 12 30-degree segments, each roughly aligned with a constellation. However what we commonly know as the Zodiac was drafted without taking into account the slow orbital precession of heavenly bodies: those stars are no longer where they should be. Furthermore, there is also what is sometimes referred to as a 13th constellation, Ophiuchus, that cuts into the familiar collection of stars: like Forster’s ‘hidden’ work, bound to a post in an opposite building, this constellation reminds us that our best methods of containment, the heavens, the world, the gallery, are full of false borders.

POINTS A – E: Space is the greatest thing, as it contains all things.ⁱⁱ

Juster’s *The Dot and the Line* is dedicated to Euclid, “no matter what they say”ⁱⁱⁱ. ‘They’ might refer to Albert Einstein, whose theory of general relativity implied that the standard idea of Euclidian Space could only be accurate in physical spaces of limited gravity. Even the simplest of geometries cannot be taken for granted: Euclid’s rules seem almost intuitively obvious, however non-Euclidian models – in which two parallel lines can in fact intersect – have been postulated. Indeed, since the era of the subatomic, space has become infinitely less certain.

Freeman, Forster and Peake’s systems of containing space, fraught with memory and half glimpsed narrative or arrested momentarily in flux, are telling in not only what they depict but also in what they do not. They serve as a reminder: the confidence of a connecting line between two, or even any number of points is at best a suggestion of what might potentially occur between them.

Gemma Weston, Co-Director of OK Gallery, Northbridge, WA

ⁱ Walter Benjamin, “Painting and the Graphic Arts”, in *Selected Writings, Volume I*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996) 82

ⁱⁱ Apologies to Thales, and Benjamin Forster.

ⁱⁱⁱ Norton Juster, *The Dot and the Line*, (London, United Kingdom: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964)

Cover left: Tom Freeman, *Peterborough cathedral turret model* 2012, pine and glue, 170 x 50 x 50 cm
Cover centre: Clare Peake, *dead reckoning* 2012, glass, dimensions variable, fabrication: Hyaline Studio
Cover right: Benjamin Forster, *□ or Ophiuchus or the serpent-bearer* 2012, pencil on paper, 56 x 76 cm

EXHIBITION DATES: 27 July – 31 August 2012