

## SITE RESPONSIVE DRAWING & THE MIDDLE VOICE

I first contemplated the possible equivalency of the grammatical middle voice and site-responsive drawing in the summer of 2021 while attending a lecture by American philosopher Jane Bennett entitled 'Out for a Walk in the Middle Voice'.

Can a parallel be drawn between the grammatical middle voice and site responsive installation? In Classical Greek, the middle voice is often used for material processes where the subject is both the actor (the one doing the action) and the medium (that which is undergoing change). In the middle voice, the subject is not an agent outside the process represented by the verb, but inside it, and affected by it.

The tangible product of my investigation takes the form of site-responsive drawing/installation. I work outside the traditional notion of drawing, notating a physical site rather than rendering an illusory version of that site. Drawing is traditionally considered to be a two-dimensional re-presentation of the three-dimensional. What if drawing was liberated from its conventional role of descriptor and rather employed as a strategy where tactics might include nomination, and notation contingently, where materials move outside of standard mark makers and paper, and thus a line drawn by the artist is equivalent to a line created by an existing site element, something as ordinary as a visible drywall seam or the branch of a tree? Within this context, two dimensions would no longer be a boundary that confines drawing. Within this context, an artist would not be outside agent or sole author of, but rather agent inside and amidst and therefore equally effected by the process.

Thereby operating within the middle voice.

In her 2021 lecture Bennett suggested the middle voice to be a 'mode of action whose prompts come from multiple sources and who's efficacy is a function not of a discrete agent or agency but of a complex recursive process. The middle voice denotes action where the actor is the process not the individuated participants in the process.'

Site-responsive drawing, drawing the site, site drawing, each iteration no longer points to an active human agent impacting or re-presenting passive non-human objects. Rather it denotes a provisional set of conditions in which all agents are influencers and simultaneously influenced by the others.

Or as Hannah Arendt states in 'The Human Condition' 'the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings' (Arendt, Human Condition, 190)

## ETHICS & AESTHETICS

How then to exemplify this 'complex recursive process' from my place within the process?

I find art production at the intersection of theory and practice an

intriguing and demanding way of working. Questions arising from theoretical studies are articulated in the artwork; resulting products are then examined and mined for further questions. Although reflexive, this dialogue between idea and 'object' is not insular. Rather, I attempt to maintain an open approach, centrifugal in nature, generating inquiries at the edge of current methods and disciplines. Through artistic practice my intent is to produce work that yields questions rather than asserts conclusions. Thus, the effectiveness of my practice is bound to the quality of my questions.

As a site responsive installation artist, the physical evidence of my ideas typically manifests in a gallery or museum and is intended to create a heuristic state in which the audience 'completes' the work. Yet, these are not typical times and my practice by way of research and contemplation has yielded much in the intangible construction of knowledge and production of questions, but little in tangible form. Thus, the work and ideas I have been considering are a combination of recent yet untested theories such as the middle voice as well as questions surrounding indexicality which have lay dormant as I pursued other areas of inquiry.

In my view, the transformation of raw material into art requires an additional component, the audience. With the addition of a participant, a string of words can tell a story. It is audience that activates the latent power of paint on a piece of canvas stretched around a wooden frame. I've found my recent attempts to create site responsive drawings in my own space whether interior or exterior felt superficial and ineffective, and without audience completely idle. Perhaps, I could have resolved this with time, but as the endemic begins to replace pandemic, as one must, I began to question my own position in the world.

Contemporary philosopher, Rosi Braidotti suggests the 'politics of location' requires one to 'speak from where you are & account for your situated position' and therefore it is to my own backyard I turn to make manifest my musings.

In the introduction of his essay 'The Grammar of Action in the Critical Zone' (2020) sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynki submits the following question

"How might we speak of action in the critical zone, the near-surface layer of the Earth where most living things reside? This region of the Earth's extended body is a complex, dense world, filled and folded, crowded with entities and processes, movement and transformation, activity and signs, whose powers and conditions of existence are hard or impossible to disentangle.'

Later in the essay he goes on to suggest the middle voice is 'a grammatical relation that can help us articulate the structure of becoming in the critical zone'.

'earth work, operations within the middle voice', a series of ongoing site responsive explorations within a .25 acre partially wooded area, seeks to enact both Braidotti's and Szerszynki's submissions, Using raw materials found on site the project engages with the premise of an equivalency between site-responsive installation and the grammatical middle voice. In the middle voice, the subject is not an agent outside the process represented by the verb, but inside it, and affected by it. These operations from the middle voice will examine the concept of indexicality, reconsider the role of artist in relation to art object, and engage with an expanded notion of drawing.

In semiotics indexicality is the phenomenon of a sign pointing to (or indexing) some object in the context in which it occurs. This set of actions will both address/respond to the space and simultaneously refer back to it.

As an artist who is captivated by the everyday my focus often narrows to the smallest of cracks on the sidewalk, the faintest of shadows on the wall, and the subtlest shift of light on a log in the forest. The discovery and exploration of the properties of the everyday is the source of my investigation. My aim is to produce work that explores an expanded notion of drawing, questions the edge of perceptibility, and reconsiders the role of the artist and audience in relation to the art object. Within these investigations my intent is to produce work that yields questions rather than asserts conclusions. Thus, the effectiveness of my practice is bound to the quality of my questions.

## DRAWING

Within the context of art, a drawing is primarily understood to be a 2-dimensional representation of the 3-dimensional. In his essay 'Anyone Can Learn to Draw' artist Mel Bochner divides drawing into three categories.

- a. Finished drawing; A rendering of object or place. Drawing, or rather, a drawing is the end product. 'Drawing is a noun. '(Bochner, 61)
- b. Working drawing; Drawing is thinking on paper, a sketch of an idea. Drawing is a means to an end. 'Drawing is a verb.'(Bochner, 61)
- c. Diagrammatic drawing; Drawing is standardized, drawing describes, and delivers accurate information. 2-dimension can then be executed in 3-dimensions. 'Drawing is a language. '(Bochner, 61)

Yet even with Bochner's divisions the notion of drawing is hardly expanded. Drawing is not the 'thing' it is of the 'thing'. It continues to be a 2-dimensional illustration of object and/or place; a depiction always once removed from the experience of the object or place it describes. If drawing is separated from its assumed role of descriptor, illustration would no longer be synonymous with drawing. Rather, illustration would become just one tactic by which drawing could be used to make ideas visible.

Operating under the notion that visual art is a physical demonstration of idea; drawing in this context becomes means toward that end. Drawing as noun, drawing as verb, drawing as language are all employed towards a

specific goal of representing meaning through concrete forms. Drawing is a strategy. A strategy whose tactics could include illustration, notation, and nomination and a strategy whose materials would go beyond the standard mark makers and paper.

This definition of drawing as strategy is not only pertinent to work that has yet to be made, but can also be a framing device for previous works. For example, in Bochner's 'Measurements' it is not only the lines and numbers marked on the walls, but also the wall, door frame, floor, the space in totality that becomes the materials of the drawing. The drawing is not an illustration of the space, but rather it is of the space and the space simultaneously. Drawing and drawn are both present; drawing is no longer once removed from what is drawn.