

Empathetic Blossomings: The 'Drawings' of Penelope Haralambidou

Penelope Haralambidou's *Blossoming of Perspective* is a study of methods; methods of representation, of drawing, of viewing and of thinking. It is also a study whose own method recasts the relationships between representation, drawing, viewing and thinking. Representation becomes the problem, drawing a way to think it through, viewing a key facet of reading her findings. Refracting and self-reflective therefore, the work is a challenge to what we might describe as the 'object of study', or to the principles of objectivity, dispassionate observation and remote criticism. Instead the work is, as its title indicates, a seeding, tending and pleaching of her ideas with the work and ideas of others, particularly those of artist, Marcel Duchamp. The resultant blossoming (study) is described by Penelope as 'allegorical', and in this sense it is supplementary, rather than supplicatory, to Duchamp's work.¹ Considered in this way, as a kind of 'post-critical' object/method, Penelope's study, and in particular her large notational drawings, extends the Duchampian object/method into its own margins, and in doing so distends those margins so that they can become the space for her own alluring trajectories, her own spatial, textual and allegorical manipulations.²

Margins are notational sites. They are also sites of commentary, so annotational. While reader's marks make the signs of reading visible in a text, notes in the margin become evidence of the reader 'moving in' to become a kind of cohabitant with the author – sometimes in dialogue with that author, sometimes ignoring the author altogether. To actively use the margin is to assert a suspicion of the object, of its 'monologic truth', to centralise peripheral sites (and by implication voices), to de-hermeticise a text and its ideas. It is then, to commit the work to openness. It is a process requiring empathy and love more than criticism. Love first: the deep recognition of an open invitation to commune, then empathy: taking place in the place of, and with, the other, despite not fully understanding. Then blossoming.

This is the kind of engagement Duchamp would have welcomed, I'm sure. He was himself, a 'marginal' artist. That is to say he loved (the) margins. Always operating against the central expectations of art and the art world, his work's continual use of ellipses, notes, authorial slippage, erotic interpellation and the disavowal of representational or symbolic finishedness, served to produce works 'which are not "of art"'.³ In pursuit of this art 'not of art', or non-retinal artwork,

1 I have chosen to refer to Penelope by using her first name as an indication of my own empathy, as an artist and friend, with her and her work.

2 See Gregory Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism' in Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Criticism*, London: Pluto, 1985.

3 One of Duchamp's notes asks: 'Can works be made which are not "of art"? See Marcel Duchamp, *A l'infinif*, a typotranslation by Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk of Marcel Duchamp's *White Box*, trans. Jackie Matisse, Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk, Northend: The Typosophic Society, 1999, p. 1.

Duchamp prodigiously provided notes, propositions, explorations, instructions and conundrums as extensions or perhaps more appropriately, declensions of his object-based work. And interestingly when Duchamp first published the notes to the *Large Glass*, 1915–1923 (the *Green Box*, 1934), he produced them as a limited edition of 320 near perfect copies of his own handwritten pages. So the notes were presented as notes, with all the annotational disruption included.

So declining to finish the object, to let representation settle, instead Duchamp proposed its continuation through notes and through the viewer. Equally, his obsession with the visually unrepresentable space of four-dimensionality opens up an invitational and indexical space of engagement for Duchamp, a space that is both outside of but coexistent with the object (and its study), a virtual extension (margin) of what cannot be optically known. Consequently, four-dimensionality is an erotic space for Duchamp, a space that can only be engaged with physically, mentally or allegorically, as it cannot be imaged. It is then, where desire meets thought. So while the Duchampian project, stirred by an at times, specious eroticism, is, as Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk write 'an art of rigour and purpose' it too is an art of empathy – engaging with what one doesn't know, tangibly and with fallibility.⁴

Always seminal rather than canonical, in exception to the rule, in flight from their own objects, Duchamp's works, therefore, are marginal with relish, and to engage with them one has to occupy the space of the margin and commit to its disruption, to a thinking object courting its own demise.

Penelope's 'thinking drawings' are equally marginal, allowing her to 'worry the work through' – notational, elliptical, rife with other voices, they are open, probing, desirous – an invitation to the reader/viewer.⁵ Penelope describes them as having served the function of a space in which to think, and to think in a spatial (or drawn) way. And while they equally are 'not of art', they are 'now of art' in their display on tables in the main space of the Domo Baal Gallery and as such they broaden not only their own terms of engagement but also those of Duchamp's art, of art in general, of study and of architecture.

Penelope has told me that the works presented here on tables in the exhibition space, are drawings. Or 'drawings'. 'Drawing' means many things, but essentially 'drawing' moves between the conditions of 'primacy' and 'provisionality', or what Andrew Patrizio has beautifully described in relation to Claude Heath's drawings, as 'the importance of not knowing, during'.⁶ Penelope's works are certainly some kind of hybrid; visual or drawn, sometimes collaged, frequently incorporating handwritten texts. They are also clearly the sites for unrefined (primary), exploratory ideas. In our discussions it has emerged that the kinds of 'drawings' that they are (now), are troublesome. Or disruptive. One might consider them marginal and viewing them as exhibited works in a gallery (or reproduced on the catalogue page) we might assume that they are staking a claim to permanence. But I would suggest instead that they are staking a claim to 'drawing'. But to 'drawing' as note, as resituated margin, as thinking vehicle, as virtual (fourth) dimension. So they are only troublesome in relation to the expectations we may

4 Duchamp, *A l'infinif*.

5 Rachel Whiteread, quoted in Tania Kovats, ed., *The Drawing Book: A Survey of Drawing: The Primary Means of Expression*, London: Black Dog, 2005, p. 193.

6 Andrew Patrizio, 'Perspicuous by Their Absence: The Drawings of Claude Heath', in Angela Kingston, ed., *What is Drawing?*, London and New York: Black Dog, 2003, p. 34.

have of drawing, or indeed of an artwork, or, as is particularly pertinent in this case, architecture. For Penelope they were not troublesome, they were the perfect way to *think* the concerns of her research: representation, dimensionality, vision, criticism.

But there is more to this. Penelope is trained as an architect. And the architectural drawing is (traditionally and still perhaps) different to the artist's drawing. Occupying the trajectory of presentation rather than representation, the architectural drawing precedes that which it describes, in order to bring that 'thing' into being. Catherine Ingraham has described that relationship as a 'lament for objecthood – as many architects will produce far more drawings than they will buildings'.⁷ And Robin Evans, in his essay 'Translations from Drawing to Building' has remarked upon the architect's tendency not to work with 'the thing itself' but always 'working at it through some intervening medium, almost always the drawing'.⁸ While not discounting much of the experimental work that challenges this traditional practice, in general, what is produced, in an architect's drawing, is a projection. Both orthographic and propositional (re)presentation.

Penelope's drawings while based in that tradition and often using its tropes are critiques or ripostes to its method. They do not critique architecture itself (they are expansions of architecture), but rather the kind of method of architectural drawing that Evans describes, where drawing is an estrangement from the object to be made, where drawing is a 'not', not a 'thing'. But more than thinking drawings or resituated notes, in these works what we have is an architect's love of the *trouble* of drawn space and her empathy with an artist also in love with troubling space and fixity. In both, the monocular (monological) legacy of perspectival representation on our world is questioned and the work ultimately extends this singularity into the dynamic nature of stereoscopic vision, where 'the other eye', firmly placed in the margins, is reactivated and brought to bear on vision, such that 'the thing itself' is incorporated and incorporealised into the contingent and ever-changing vagaries of the viewer's world.

As works in themselves, the drawings' own method is crucially 'post-critical'; exploration or even argument, the margins become *arbre-type* (arbor-type or tree-like), forcing the centre to enlarge, pushing in and up and beyond.⁹ For this is to me what these drawings are, first love, then empathy: the work, blossoming.

7 Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity*, London and New Haven: Yale University, 1998, pp. 125–26.

8 Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, London: Architectural Association, 1997, p. 156.

9 In his notes, Duchamp uses the term *arbre-type* to describe the Bride's desire-filled blossoming. See Marcel Duchamp, *Marchand du sel: Ecrits de Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet, Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1958; and Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, a typographic version by Richard Hamilton, trans. George Heard Hamilton, Stuttgart: Hansjörg Mayer and New York: J. Rietman, 1976.