

Iain BIGGS | Extract from a presentation on 'polyvocal' drawing

My presentation tries to respond – perhaps a little obliquely – to the two questions proposed:

What can the act and process of drawing contribute to, or invest in, an understanding of place? And how can a consideration of place inflect a drawing practice?

I will do this, however, in largely personal terms. That is to say I'm going to talk about the notion of 'polyvocal' drawing because that's the kind of drawing I make for the most part. My own drawings usually explore hunches – often about landscape or landscape related issues – through combining different media and/or categories of sign and mark. They are an informed 'playing around' that aims to keep different elements – including both the perceptual and conceptual – 'talking' to each other, rather than trying to arrive at a final aesthetic resolution. That said a certain aesthetic quality remains indicative for me of imaginative 'fitness for purpose', where the aesthetic is rather like the goodwill that sustains a conversation between people who hold very different views on a topic. I see drawing (the process) as a performative, temporal art in itself, rather than as subordinate to producing a 'finished' work of art.

I should perhaps explain why I want to use the term 'polyvocal', as some of you know,

I'm very interested in song and vernacular music. In music, polyphony refers to a musical texture consisting of two or more independent melodic voices, as opposed to music with just one voice (monophony) or music with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords (homophony). I use the term very loosely, partly in a bid to get away from historical and sociological perspectives, because it helps me think differently about how drawings evoke might the complexity of landscape.

My starting point is a question. Does the use of multiple 'voices' in drawing allow us to work and/or play with the tensions between 'opening-onto and distance-from', between phenomenological 'enchantment' and the necessary and inevitable 'distance' of critical thought, in ways that subvert unhelpful oppositions and the fixed identities they reinforce?

This question is asked in the context of three quotations that I hope illustrate a sufficient link between my question and to Judith Tucker's two questions about drawing and place.

'The argument here is that (*geographies of love*) constitute a fracture forbidding any phenomenological fusion of self and world; entailing instead a simultaneous opening-onto and distance-from. It is within the tension of this openness and distance, perhaps, that

landscape, absence and love are entangled'.
John Wylie Landscape, absence and the geographies of love (forthcoming):

'Landscapes refuse to be disciplined. They make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (History) and space (Geography), or between nature (Science) and culture (Social Anthropology)'
(*Barbara Bender, quoted Doreen Massey 2006*).

'Eternal tourists of ourselves, there is no landscape but what we are'.
(*Fernando Pessoa, The Book of Disquiet 2002*)

Since I am particularly interested in trans and inter-disciplinary work – or what Mike Pearson calls 'loitering with intent on the fringes of other disciplines' – I'm always looking for other ways of thinking about the kinds of drawing that interest me. This presentation makes a tentative proposal about how we might think about certain kinds of drawing. Some of the drawings reproduced relate to landscape, many do not. However, I hope my provision proposition is suggestive in the context of our concerns today.

If for a moment we were to see drawings as a means to share metaphorical 'maps' constructed from the multiplicity of our experiences, we might argue with Guy Claxton that:

'There are dozens of maps of London, all good for different purposes. The traveller has no problem switching between the *Tube Map* and the *A to Z Street Map*; she experiences no epistemological crisis as she does so. Why should we restrict ourselves to just one map? Should we not, after all, allow ourselves a set of complementary perspectives as we try to make sense of our personal and social waywardness'?

Or, indeed, allow ourselves to use a composite map that draws on the *Tube Map*, the *A to Z Street Map*, the weather chart for the day, and maybe other maps as well.

My hunch is that we need to more explicitly identify a 'poly-vocal' approach to drawing that works between different conventions and traditions; that works between both different traditions and cultures and the various different imaginative 'worlds' struggling for coherence within our geographical corner of the increasingly complex global culture of market democracy.