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# PROLOGUE: OF 'THINGS BETWEEN THINGS'

*on behalf of the  
Drawing On: Surface and Installation editorial team*

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# PROLOGUE: OF 'THINGS BETWEEN THINGS'

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In the conversation published as a prelude to this issue of *Drawing On*, architect and artist Alexander Brodsky speaks of a depth of surface in his work:

“When you make etchings—this kind of mysterious technique... [it] gives you the feeling of really deep space behind the paper... [I]t is a wonderful feeling that even if you don't like the drawing itself, it still has some space inside.”<sup>1</sup>

Drawings, Brodsky suggests, whether those made on the thin surface of paper or “space drawings” taking the form of installations, embody a certain kind of generosity, a feeling of depth, that goes beyond their immediate material quality or content: they make “space inside” themselves, within which we might install ourselves. They offer a space for thinking, for invoking “wonderful” feelings.

It seems appropriate to begin this, the second issue of *Drawing On* with such a description of generosity, not least because our previous issue, *Drawing On: Presents*, grew from an interest in gifts. Framed by the gestures of reciprocal gifting described in the opening lines of the poem *Presents* by Norman MacCaig,<sup>2</sup> *Drawing On: Presents* explored the gifts given and received in and by design research practices. In design and research this gifting and these gifts, as the prologue to our first issue posited, are of different kinds.<sup>3</sup> Gifting is a presenting of the Self to the Other through work, for example the presentation of a project or the staging of an exhibition. In design-research this gifting also takes the form of a presentation to the Self through the Other: the way work is presented offers the work the opportunity to act upon and remake the Self.

Presentation (the drawing of a drawing, the installing of an installation) is an affective act. Following Witold Gombrowicz's proposition, here to design is not simply to concern oneself with the shape of things, but with the shape of *things between things*, with one's relationship with the world described, navigated and mediated through objects and processes of design.<sup>4</sup>

Although framed as an invitation to participate in a research symposium, the gestures of generous offering (and receiving) described in MacCaig's poem, and the understanding this evokes of the particular relationship between a researcher and work, seems equally pertinent to the theme(s) of *Issue 02: Surface and Installation*, themes that we see as autonomous but complimentary conditions and acts (the surface, the installation, surfacing, and installing). We understand surface and installation both as means of presenting work to others (the surface of a drawing, the situation of an installation) and as acts that present work to ourselves, that allow us to see the space (for thinking) made by these design acts.

It is in the materiality of the surface, Brodsky suggests, and the materiality of surfaces in installation that we may begin to notice what is offered, to see a space for wonderful feeling. This space, offered by a surface, by the working of a surface, by engaging with the very material of a surface, opens up the chance (choice perhaps) to forgo the uncritical, contemplative (in Benjamin's sense)<sup>5</sup> approach to the work of architecture, art, or scholarship, and instead to re-think what 'quality' might mean, what we think might constitute 'good' design. The space of the surface fosters criticality.

In the call for submissions for this issue of *Drawing On* we sought to emphasise the significance of matter, of making-material as a key step in developing such a criticality, in moving from critical enquiry (a question) to critical methodology (a way to question, of questioning). Installing, drawing, presenting, indeed any process, however temporary, where ideas are physically *drawn out* (made in material, made (to) matter) is both a register in itself of situation, and a situation that might in turn be registered, recorded, represented. Surfacing and installing thus offer ways to question, to develop ways of questioning, through making material. This is made possible because by way of design, unlike by way of the algorithm or rationalism, matter (the material of a surface or installation, but also that which matters in surfacing or installing) can extend beyond any initial programme, intention or expectation placed upon it; enabled by the spaces for thinking made by design, matter can transgress situations, states, forms. Surfaces and installations, we wrote by way of a call for submissions, “record relationships within and beyond their own limit: upon, beneath or above their own surfaces, between situations. Therefore, drawing on surfaces and installations, we open questions of how to draw out the worlds of and between here and there.”<sup>6</sup> Surfaces and installations questions those *things between things*.

The work of Alexander Brodsky makes the methodological status of surface and installation evident. From the prints made with Ilya Utkin in the years of “paper architecture,” to the more recent installations at the Cultural Centre in Vienna or Pittsburgh, surfaces are more than surfaces, installations more than the re-presentation of complete works. Surface is at once the means for receiving and a vehicle for offering new depths. Installation is not merely a space filled with spectacular works, but a situation of engagement with the matter(s) at hand, in which a layered intersubjectivity paves the way for ‘re-making’ oneself. Both open up unexpected conditions of spatiality, an eloquent depth that is beyond the reach of metrics, of metricity.

It is in this sense, through the coupling of complementary acts of making space—drawing on surfaces and making installations—that the current issue seeks to nourish a discussion of critical design research methodologies. Encouraged by the works of our contributors, the insights of the reviewers and critics, and the discussion of Alexander Brodsky’s design *oeuvre*, we are pleased to

present to you the second issue of *Drawing On: Surface and Installation*.

## NOTES

- 1 See A. Brodsky, M. Dorrian, and R. Anderson. 2017. ‘Space Drawing: A Conversation with Alexander Brodsky’, in *Drawing On*, Issue 02: Surface and Installation, available at: [drawingon.org/issue/02](http://drawingon.org/issue/02) (accessed 10th March, 2018).
- 2 “I give you an emptiness, I give you a plenitude, Unwrap them carefully. One’s as fragile as the other.”  
N. MacCaig. 1974. ‘Presents’ in MacCaig, Norman. 1993. *Collected Poems*. London: Chatto & Windus, p.316. See also D. Wiszniewski. 2015. ‘Prologue: Drawing On Plenitude and Emptiness’, in *Drawing On*, Issue 01: Presents, available at: [drawingon.org/issue/01](http://drawingon.org/issue/01) (accessed 10th March, 2018).
- 3 See D. Wiszniewski. 2015. ‘Prologue: Drawing On Plenitude and Emptiness’, in *Drawing On*, Issue 01: Presents, available at: [drawingon.org/issue/01](http://drawingon.org/issue/01) (accessed 10th March, 2018).
- 4 Gombrowicz paraphrased, see Goddard, Michael. 2010. *Gombrowicz, Polish Modernism and The Subversion of Form*. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, p. 32.
- 5 See Walter Benjamin and Michael W. Jennings, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [First Version],” *Grey Room*, 39 (2010), pp.33–34. Thesis 18.
- 6 See ‘Call for Submissions: Surface and Installation’, in *Drawing On*, Issue 02: Surface and Installation, available at [drawingon.org/issue/02](http://drawingon.org/issue/02) (accessed 10th March, 2018).