

PATRÍCIA DAUDER. DRAWINGS AND FILMS AS SYNTHETIC IMAGES

Patrícia Dauder's drawings and films call for careful, conscious observation – for their apparent simplicity belies great complexity and very dense material.

Drawing is one of the main media in which she carries out her research, joined in recent years by film. Her drawings emanate delicacy, due in part to the materials she uses: mainly pencil and paper of varying degrees of transparency, although, as in *Overlapping 5*, she sometimes uses coloured paper. Up close, viewers can appreciate the meticulous construction behind each drawing. These pieces are created by slowly laying down a series of layers. Each of Dauder's drawings is made up of layers which are either, as in previous cases, the same lines being erased and then remade, thus accumulating possible mistakes or changes in approach, or, as in her latest pieces and in *Overlapping 5*, are made up of overlapping pieces of paper to create the final piece. This requires viewers to have a keen eye, since the different layers gradually reveal themselves as viewers come closer and cast their eyes over the surface.

Each piece of paper, each unit within these constructions, contains a series of links, lines, networks, etc. which in their final setting, and in relation to the other units of paper, finally come together to form spaces. The units of paper become fragments with respect to the piece as a whole, where what stands out is a space: the fashioning of a space without specific references to constructions or urban realities, but with clear ties to other spatial possibilities. Spatial constructions in Dauder's drawings stir our memory in search of an anchor in images we more readily associate with utopian architectures or other times, either in a distant past or a faraway future reachable only through science fiction. They are, in any case, far from anecdotal.

Her drawings expand in depth and density, giving the medium a more dynamic nature; they evolve like a living being. These pieces are not presented as stable objects; movement, instability and shift are there from the start and can be traced back to their origins. *Overlapping 5* seems to emerge out of a vibrating square. The drawing stretches out over a wooden support (like a platform) and lifts it off the ground, and it is in this horizontal position, close to the ground, that viewers relate to the piece. In *Overlapping 5*, two of the sides seem to be still vibrating and the superposition of the broken lines that make them up creates an unnerving instability. However, the sides of the square do not mark out a specific area; the drawing 'escapes' from the limits set more or less by the general form. *Overlapping 5* creates a space in the hollow of its inside – a square, more or less empty space – and on the edges a few scraps of colour partially set off the expansion of the lines and areas.

The fact that materially the drawings are made by superposing pieces of paper reveals that editing plays a key role in Dauder's work. The task of editing usually involves creating a continuum from the juxtaposition of fragments, bits from a broken series. In addition, the emphasis on cutting and fragments stresses the material nature of the discipline in which she works. Dauder edits the drawings to create a spatial dimension that both spreads out and reaches greater depths.

Dauder started to include film in her work in 2004 in response to the extremely ephemeral nature of drawings. When asked about this new approach, Dauder speaks of a certain need to record something that is as ephemeral and fragile as her drawings, hence the fact that her first film was a recording of the different stages in creating a drawing. She also says that film lets her include outside reality, a different reality to that created by thoughts.

Film offers the chance to work with what you find outside, some distance away. This then raises the issue of selecting: what to film outside, how to film it and why.

Her first film related to the outside, *Surfers* (2005), was filmed on Super-8 in colour without sound and then transferred to DVD. At 3 minutes and 20 seconds, the entire film is a single fixed shot of waves which start to roll from the top of the screen and gradually crash against the bottom. In the upper third of the image, viewers can make out three people, soon reduced to two. Only their head and part of their upper body can be seen, and only if you look carefully can you just make out at times the outline of a surfboard. Towards the end, one of them manages to get onto the surfboard and glides over the surface of water carried by a wave that finally knocks him off, which is when the film ends. Since the film is slowed down, viewers have no problem in following this sequence.

For her first film related to outside reality, Dauder deliberately chose to return to the origins of cinema and to film an event, an action that structures the whole film in an act of observation. This kind of cinematic image can be considered as an extension of photography, since there is a fixed image displaced in time. At times like these, film offers an irrefutable testimony of the outside world. In contrast to photography, though, cinematic images have the added dimension of time and incorporate movement, thus perpetuating the moment so the ephemeral is recorded for ever.

Viewers find themselves in front of an action that takes place in front of a camera and have to wait for the action to occur. The fact that there is no sound produces deeper concentration and greater emphasis on the visual aspect. There is no editing in this film. Nothing is explained; an action is simply shown.

This first film of an event, however, resists any attempt to rationalise or set a meaning and keeps to an ambivalent sphere, in the same way as primitive filmmaking did and more recent artists working with film have done. These films are based above all on description, the unpredictable; and, in contrast to those based on narration, are not structured in a hierarchical fashion. As Mary Ann Doane says of the clear distinctions between the two models: "Description is a capitulation to the vast and uncontrollable, and ultimately meaningless, realm of the contingent. It is allied with the visual (a 'picture') and with the contemporaneous. Narration, on the other hand, has an intimate relation with the past (it 'recounts') and is therefore able to testify to necessity and inevitability. The present moment, contingency, and temporality as indeterminate are hazardous to sense."¹

This non-narrative nature is one of the recurring features Dauder explores in her later work with film, based on other aspects of the medium such as editing and/or camera movements and different kinds of shots.

Editing is what stands out most in her film *Cutsurf* (*bclnt.feb.09*), shot on Super-8 in colour without sound, and then transferred to 16 mm. It lasts 1½ minutes and is screened in a loop. Once again it features surfers, who are 'used' to recreate another image. Here Dauder puts images at the service of a language: although what we see is recognisable, the editing stops it developing as an action, and the final result becomes an abstract construction.

¹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time. Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p 12.

Cutsurf (bclnt.feb.09) is made out of fragments, short recordings of surfer's movements shot at different speeds and screened at 18 fps. Viewers can therefore see some movements that would normally be imperceptible to the human eye; the camera reveals things the naked eye cannot see – one of the main goals and chief contributions of photography and film in the mid-19th century. The editing does not, however, let viewers follow any of the moves or twists and turns, which prevents this sport being represented as a show.

From the first to last image, the sea occupies the entire field of vision, meaning there are no spatial references. Each fragment 'brings' a surfer. The opening shots show surfers getting on their board (takeoff); here the segments occur in quick succession, the shots are very short and the syncopated surfers appear first on one side then the other side of the image. Later, the shots become slightly longer and the surfers glide over the waves, the moves becomes more involved and the surfers travel a little further, although not much. Finally, a big wave comes right towards viewers and fills the screen.

In *Surfers* the images inspire enthralled contemplation; in *Cutsurf* (bclnt.feb.09) the editing leaves viewers feeling somewhat uneasy and creates a rising sense of frustration, since all the actions start only to then be cut off.

Whereas *Surfers* explored the fixed shot as part of cinematic language, this time editing is centre stage. Cutting makes its presence felt in the film and shows its double-edged ability to both reveal and conceal, as when a jump breaks the continuity of the action. Some theorists – including Gilles Deleuze – have seen editing as an essential part of the nature of filmmaking, with its ability to break the continuity, to free shots from the movements of objects and bodies and to produce new senses of time.

Parallels could be drawn between the effect *Cutsurf* (Bclnt.feb.09) has on viewers and the twinkling effect artists like Paul Sharits started to incorporate in their work in the last 1960s and early 1970s in order to expand the possibilities of filmmaking from its most material capacities, in what was called structuralist filmmaking. However, although Dauder's work suffers from or takes on similar premises, its results are slightly different. The surfers are 'used' in the strictest sense of creating another image: which could be an abstraction based on the moves made. If we consider the surfers as 'vectors' moving in the cavity of the image, as an exercise of reduction and editing, the resulting film is a sketch-drawing of moves. An abstraction built up by reducing elements.

As research into the possibilities of non-narrative approaches in film, *Flow* (2009) explores the possibilities of observing extremely basic materials such as air and water. *Flow* was also filmed on Super-8 in colour without sound and then transferred to 16 mm. It lasts 4½ minutes and is screened at 18 fps in a loop. This time the images flow smoothly from one shot to the next with no awkward jerks. The film opens with high-angle shots of still water and then shows light reflected off the water. Later the camera looks upward to the sky and the film ends with a black screen. Although there isn't a single reference to space, viewers see a series of images created basically around one of the elements that makes up space: light. *Flow* is a film that focuses on the changes in the light observed in nature and then modified with optical and camera effects - which Dauder then uses to build spaces that, just as in her drawings, gradually expand and contract. Close observation of the shots reveals the presence of superpositions, just as in her drawings. Different kinds of particles can be made out on top of the water; underneath is cracked earth and in the air, around the sun, are reflections superposed as if they were material elements. Something as transparent in appearance as water or air can suddenly become extremely dense.

Dauder's film work explores what lies at the heart of the medium: time and length on the one hand, and editing on the other. To do so, she selects film objects as the objects under study, making no concessions to anecdotes or narrative. This process of reducing the elements she uses, a process she also employs in her drawings, aims to produce perception free from any intermediaries – an experience and perception of something shown at its quintessence, where it is most itself, most basic.

In both her drawings and her films – ie when both representing mental constructions and giving shape to outside realities – Dauder carries out a careful exercise of observation and analysis to produce synthetic images. Only by patiently observing her work will viewers start to see strange textures and the carefully crafted ties between the components and the whole, opening up other possible perceptions of reality.

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