

# UNDRAWING: A GLOSSARY OF DAILY DRAWING

**PhD Bart Geerts**

*LUCA School of Arts, the Higher Institute for Philosophy of KU Leuven, Belgium*

## Abstract

Since June 2021 I have been working on the Daily Drawing project. I draw on a daily basis and make one drawing public every day. Although I have always been drawing in (private) sketchbooks, the public format of the Daily Drawings has revitalised my practice. It forces me to reach out and to let go of control. It is the drawings that are in control and that guide me through their visual tracings. The glossary presented here is an ongoing project that aims to build an understanding of a drawing practice and of drawing in general by interacting with the Daily Drawings in a word-based language. The glossary will not analyse the drawings, but interact with them, learn from them and reach out to them. It is a speech act of undrawing in the double meaning of that word: rendering something visible (as in the undrawing of a curtain), and erasing or undoing what one has just drawn. Drawing, thus, not only as a process of learning and knowing, but also as a process of unlearning and unknowing. The glossary will engage in dialectical research of drawing as an exploratory research method complementary to writing and thinking.

**Keywords:** *drawing, glossary, daily practice, exploratory research.*

## Introduction

This glossary consists of an alphabetically ordered list of terms and their explanations that are closely related to the Daily Drawing project that I started in June 2021. In this introduction I will briefly introduce the Daily Drawing project.

---

*Culture Crossroads*

Volume 22, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55877/cc.vol22.445>

© Latvian Academy of Culture, Bart Geerts

All Rights Reserved.

ISSN: 2500-9974



The main text of this article consists of the glossary itself. The concluding remarks will first discuss the revised and tentative nature of the glossary and how it relates to the actual drawings. Secondly it will frame both the drawings and the glossary as tools for reflection and ponder ideas of drawing and writing practices as valuable explorative research methods in artistic research and dissemination.

The Daily Drawing project did not specifically start as a research project. In fact, it was deliberately not a research project as its conception was in every way opposed to most of the research projects that I have been involved in during the last years. These projects mostly came with funding and hence they were written out in project applications before the actual research started. The Daily Drawings, on the contrary, started without such a design, without clear questions and objectives, without predefined methods and without predictable outcomes. There was no overall plan, except to draw on a daily basis and to publish one drawing a day on my personal website. Everything was allowed and ideally that still holds true, despite the fact that, for practical reasons all the drawings have been made on A4-sized drawing paper. The A4 size feels familiar, is easy to handle when I travel, and is big enough to ensure that what I do does not immediately turn into a kind of miniature like thing. Additionally, it's the maximum size my digital scanner at home can handle and scanning the drawings is a fast and reliable way to create a digital copy of the original drawing. A copy that I can consequently share and archive on my website.

The glossary was started when the Daily Drawing project had already been going on for five months. Like the drawings, the glossary is ongoing. Terms are added or deleted, explanations are refined, references are added.

## GLOSSARY

### Archive

*A productive storage capacity that invites one to wonder/wander.*

The best way to navigate the archive is to get lost as described by the French writer and language virtuoso Georges Perec (who could definitely not be accused of lacking a methodological, meticulous, and rigorous approach) in his "Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One's Books". When trying to arrange his books he always discovered books he had somehow forgotten, which led him to acts of re-reading instead of re-arranging and classifying. *This [trying to order one's books] is a trying, depressing operation, but one liable to produce pleasant surprises, such as coming upon a book you had forgotten because you could no longer see it and which, putting off until tomorrow what you will not do today, you finally re-devour lying face down on your bed* [Perec 1978: 152].

On my website the Daily Drawings are ordered chronologically. A new drawing is added every day on top of the others. I do, however, also have a backup archive

on my computer which is ordered alphabetically on the file's titles. Every day the scanned image is downloaded as a JPEG file with a title consisting of DD (Daily Drawing), followed by the date. So, the file for the drawing of 14 June 2021 reads DD140621. This means that my computer orders the files in a different way as the website. DD140621 is followed by DD140721, DD140821, etc. Of course, I could change my computer's settings, but it is nice to see the drawings appear in a different kind of chronology. It allows one to see different patterns of a specific colour use on different 14<sup>th-s</sup> of the month.

Getting lost in drawing is a good thing. It is one of its most appealing assets. Realising you have no idea where the drawing is taking you and then either finding some kind of way out, or realising that this strange place might be a good place to stay for a while.

### Articulation

*The intention to describe in some way (in a different language, by different means, in another medium) what one is doing.*

In his discussion of the term expositiveness, which holds a central place in the *Journal for Artistic Research* (JAR), Michael Schwab used the phrase *to practice practice as research* [Schwab 2019: 31]. Practice first as a verb and then a noun. To articulate in order to offer multiple perspectives on an artistic practice. Perspectives that might help others to engage with the work, but equally true and interesting, perspectives that allow the artist to get a grip on the material s/he is working with. *Moreover, it means accepting difference in practice and the differentiation of practice as epistemically productive* (..) [ibid.]. Articulation is always a kind of re-articulation. An attempt to rephrase something in the best way possible and even when you stick to the same language articulating always entails minor acts of translation. Saying out loud what you have written, describing what you see, drawing what the body tells you, ... All these articulations double the experience and, as Schwab claims, might become epistemically productive and meaningful.

### Background

*Indispensable ground for a drawing to exist.*

If there is no background, there is no drawing. Walter Benjamin said that much when discussing the graphic line: *the graphic line is defined by its contrast with area. This contrast has a metaphysical dimension, as well as a visual one; the background is conjoined with the line. The graphic line marks out the area and so defines it by attaching itself to it as its background. Conversely, the graphic line can exist only against this background, so that a drawing that completely covered its background would cease to be a drawing* [Benjamin 1917: 83].

In painting, there is no background [Benjamin 1917: 85]. Painting creates a universe, a fictional object that functions within its own boundaries. Drawing, on the contrary, is not concerned with unity, it is limitless, does not adhere to any boundaries. It is always relational with and against its own background.

### Common

(1) (*adj.*) *said of things we can and (therefore) should share, adopt and adapt;*

(2) (*noun*) *resources of any kind that can be either be freely used as source material, or that are made available for others to use.*

Some of my daily drawings start by wondering about something read, seen or experienced during the day. Something from my perspective. Sometimes there's a word or a concept for it. Often there is not. That experience is only rarely directly recorded in a drawing. More often it acts as the starting point for an image search in *The Commons*<sup>1</sup>, Flickr's gateway to photographic archives that have no known copyright restrictions. *The Commons* always lead you somewhere else and my initial starting point is more than often nothing more than a starting point that triggers a chain of events (scrolling through photographs) that make me wander further and further away in a common territory made up of visual landmarks. Sometimes one of these becomes a reference point for a drawing: a specific shape, a colour or a frame that suddenly triggers the drawing of the day.

Last year in an exhibition at *Wiels*, the centre for contemporary art in Brussels, there was a beautiful silkscreen print by the French (living in Belgium) artist Lise Duclaux. On magenta-coloured paper, Duclaux had printed *le commun n'a pas de verbe*, to be translated as *the common has no verb*. The common is indeed an adjective or a noun, but it is not too difficult to imagine a verb associated to its often complex and wide-ranging semantics. *To common: to share, adopt and adapt what we already have in common, and to do so in diverse ways*. Drawing is something quite common that has a verb associated to it.

### Digital twin

*The digital counterpart of a handmade drawing.*

The daily drawings are scanned so as to create a digital twin that can be published online. Through this process of translation there is always a reduction of the material traces of the original drawing. And although "reduction" sounds rather negative, there is in fact nothing wrong with that. Twins (even identical ones) are never identical. There may be a clear physical resemblance that can be cultivated, controlled, or denied. But there is only rarely (to my belief/experience) an explicit

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/commons>

wish from the twins themselves to be identical in all respects. Likewise, the digital twin can lead its own life and soon after the scanning procedure the hierarchy of “the original” and “the copy” is no longer relevant. Both can do their own thing and as the handmade version will always reveal material traces that remain hidden in the digital code, the digital twin can allow for data that are not accessible in the “original”. Next to that the digital twin is a first step to establish connections beyond drawing as such. The drawing becomes linked to a digital file. The digital file acts not as a trace of the drawing, but as an equal representation leaving its own virtual traces. Creating the digital twin as a first step in unfolding the drawing, a machine-driven articulation of the act of drawing.

Digital scanning is actually an interesting procedure in which the machine takes over. The only thing I do is a basic (automated) colour check in Photoshop and a slight adjustment of the file’s exposure to make sure that the whiteness of the page does not blend with the white background of my online archive. Photographing the drawings might also work, but I lack the patience and knowhow to translate the drawings into photographs. The hand and the eye for pushing the button and framing the image have already been involved in the creation of the drawing in the first place. They do not need to interfere with the creation of the digital twin.

### **Drawer**

*A drawer can refer to a person who draws (and hence also undraws) or to the place where drawings are stored.*

A drawer (as a person) always tries to gain access to an imaginary drawer (as a place) that contains all potential drawings. The drawer’s drawer as the visual counterpart of the *Library of Babel* that was described by Jorge Luis Borges.

### **Epistemic object**

*An object that contains a specific, yet difficult to articulate, type of knowledge.*

A drawing is imbued with a type of knowledge that is diffuse and ambiguous. It touches upon the boundaries of knowledge itself when knowledge is considered as something stable and definitive. Sharing that knowledge calls for acts of articulation, mediation and questioning. The drawing can be very clearly and specifically delineated in terms of scale, lines, and colours. Yet at the same time, the drawing is never finished and points to endless change, flux and potential alternatives.

### **Fumble**

*A disinterest in virtuosity (in drawing).*

I do not believe in virtuosity in drawing. Rather, I believe in the moment that you no longer understand what you are actually drawing. The state of wonder about

what you do not know while thinking that you know exactly what it is you are doing. Mika Hannula has talked about artistic research as an act of fumbling (of a sort). The irony of fumbling is that no matter how hard you try, how systematically, rigorously, methodically you practice it, you are not supposed to ever fully master it. Mastering it would be the end of fumbling altogether. *The point of calling artistic research an act of fumbling of a sort is that this fumbling is not the aim; it is just a means for us to get going and get going somewhere else. Fumbling as an act of focusing on the various misunderstandings, discrepancies, luring wishing wells as well as the nasty operators that we are surrounded with, going with full attention and force into the act, but then, letting the act to lead you to another place, another site – a site that you can't get to via the shortest route, not with the help of a manual and not only intentionally. You need to move slowly, out of the light and into the semi-hazy quarter of a darkness of asking things differently. It is about learning to see, feel and be with* [Hannula 2013: 91].

### **Hand**

*Part of the body that is crucial to execute a drawing. Sometimes the sensation arises that it takes over control.*

Drawing is a learning process that prioritises the hand (and the eye) over the mind. A process in which doing leads to visual and tactile wondering. If you are open to let the drawing guide you, to give the drawing the chance to reveal something you did not think about beforehand, or something you do not even understand while it is happening, you might actually start to undraw the drawing.

### **Horizontal**

*The lying position of the drawing while it is created as opposed to a vertical position of hanging a drawing (or painting) against a wall.*

All the drawings are made lying flat on a horizontal surface. This position might be a factor that differentiates the drawings from more painterly work that may be executed vertically, horizontally, or through a combination of both. The horizontal position of the paper on a working table creates a firm surface that can easily support the hand and arm when drawing. So, drawing uses a specific scale and technology of the hand (as opposed to that of the body).

### **Imaginary migration**

*The exploratory process of looking for a new place to stay for a while.*

Imaginary migration is nothing compared to actual processes of forced migration (due to geo-political, economic, or social factors).

### Nearby

*Close at hand, within reach, intimate.*

My drawing practice does not aim to represent, visualise, or illustrate reality, concepts, or projects, but on the other hand starts from or tries to keep to what is close at hand and uses that to start a conversation. Sometimes I start a drawing by tracing the outline of whatever it is that is lying on my table: a box, a glass, a sheet of paper, ... So, drawing not in the sense of to draw *something* or to make a drawing *about something*. Rather, drawing as an attempt to get to know what is happening right in front of you through the process of drawing itself. To realize how you are shaping the drawing and how it shapes you. Drawing that is not predefined, but that defines the drawer. Of course, I am indebted here to Trinh Minh-Ha's notion of *speaking nearby*, a cinematic speech act *that does not objectify topics and subjects but reflects upon itself and is capable of approaching topics and subjects from up close* [Migration: Speaking Nearby 2019].

Drawing as a specific practice to explore, to take notes, and to imagine in constant relation to a background, a notion, a glimpse, something unnoticed before. To draw what is under your wallpaper.<sup>1</sup>

### Recording

*Capturing something in a different medium.*

Perhaps drawing can be considered as a way of recording something that is not clear yet. Recording without knowing what it is that you are recording. Along the way you may evidently lose track of what you are actually recording. John Cage's 4 minutes and 33 seconds is actually a drawing.

### Score

*An invitation to interact.*

Every drawing, however chaotic it may be, contains some kind of structure that functions as a score: both a trace of something that has happened and a starting point to re-trace, re-create, or re-construct that happening and to go beyond it. The act of drawing is a performance, the drawing its document in the form of a productive score. In relation to the drawings of Cy Twombly, Roland Barthes talked about "production" and describes how Twombly's works become an invitation to do something similar, not as a copy or an imitation, but as a production in its own right.

---

<sup>1</sup> Derived from Georges Perec's essay Approaches to What? in which he introduced his thinking on *l'infra-ordinaire* [the infra-ordinary]. *It matters little to me that these questions should be fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they should seem trivial and futile: that's exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we've tried in vain to lay hold on our truth* [Perec 1973, 211].

*je ne copie pas le produit, mais la production. Je me mets, si l'on peut dire: dans les pas de la main*<sup>1</sup> [Barthes 1979: 58].

### **Selection**

*The process of selecting a number of drawings for an exhibition.*

When there is an opportunity to show the actual drawings in an exhibition context, I invite someone to make a selection from the drawings. That someone, the curator, or president of the selection committee, can also reflect on the space that is available and align it with the selection process (how many drawings? which drawings? how to group them or not?). The invitation to select is also an invitation to become part of the Daily Drawing project, a way to activate the drawings. The curator is invited to the studio/exhibition space to go through the archive of drawings in order to make the actual selection. The whole process and conversation are audio recorded. The recordings will be used as input for a separate work, a side project, called *The Selection*. Eva Cardon (Ephameron), who made the first selection, is a young colleague of mine that I did not know that well in advance. After the selection she said she had the feeling that she got to know me quite well through the drawings.

### **Sous rature**

*The practice of partially hiding a trace.*

You cannot make mistakes in drawing. Hiding or erasing a trace might highlight it.

### **Translation**

*Going from one state to another. Deliberate act of displacement.*

Can you translate something that is not yet given, something that you do not yet know, or that you are not aware of knowing? Translation, articulation, and mediation are closely related. Writing a glossary about a drawing practice is a translation of sorts. *Translation is its own undoing. A feedback loop. A Möbius strip or trip. An unwriting of the original, which is never the same as itself anyway. A writing of the unoriginal translation* [Antena 2013].

### **Undrawing**

(1) *to draw open or aside; to pull back a layer of fabric. A curtain, for example, that you undraw to see what is behind it;* (2) *to clear or erase part of a drawing.*

To un-draw in the second sense is not a typical use of the word. But it makes

---

<sup>1</sup> *I do not copy the product, but the production. I put myself, so to speak, in the steps of the hand.*  
(translation mine)

sense. If drawing a curtain means to close the curtain and undrawing refers to the act of opening the curtain, one could infer a similar relation between drawing in the straightforward sense of sketching and un-drawing. If the act of drawing results in something like a picture, a pattern, a diagram, or in general, a trace; then undrawing refers to the process of erasing, deleting, or hiding. Undrawing as a dialectical way of drawing that un-does the drawing in order to be able to draw again.

It is this interaction that often makes drawing (and art in general) so interesting. To show what is hidden and to hide what you want to show. Showing and hiding how something can be shown and hidden, and that again and again, but never completely new. In ancient Greece, this dialectic was already made visible by the legendary painter's battle between Parrhasius and Zeuxis. As is well known, Zeuxis had created a painting depicting grapes. They were painted so convincingly that, as soon as the painting was uncovered, the birds immediately came to pick at them. The painting made by Parrhasius, on the other hand, was still waiting behind the curtain. Zeuxis wanted to see the work of his rival and immediately wanted to undraw the curtain to see what was on the painting behind it. He was fooled of course, because Parrhasius' painting was the curtain itself. In all its apparent disguise it had been plainly visible all the time. Undrawing of the highest order.

### **Unpower**

*The opposite of power.*

The delicate process of keeping track, being in charge, and losing control of the drawing. Allowing for proliferation and digression. Undoing the power relation the drawer might hold over the drawing. Confronting the drawer with his or her disability to draw. Undrawing the drawer's doubt, hesitation, fear, longing, and failure. Establishing a relationship of true reciprocity.

### **Conclusion**

The glossary presented here is ongoing research that aims to build an understanding of a specific drawing practice and of drawing as such by interacting with the Daily Drawings in a word-based language. It aims to establish a meeting ground, a place and invitation to interact with the drawings, to learn from them and to reach out to them and (potentially) to others as well. This version of the glossary is based upon a speech performance I presented at *Various Fields, Approaches, Experiences*, the International Conference of Artistic Research organised in Riga, Latvia in May 2022.<sup>1</sup> During that presentation I recited the terms of the glossary

---

<sup>1</sup> The conference was jointly organised by the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music in collaboration with the Latvian Academy of Culture, the Art Academy of Latvia, the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Arts of the University of Latvia and the National Library of Latvia.

while in the background a slide show of a selection of 200 of the Daily Drawings was shown to the audience. In between the speech performance and the editing of this article some revisions have been made, and that process of revision will go on after its publication. Like any project with encyclopaedic ambitions the glossary will never be finished. Each edition presents the current state of affairs. Of course, the speech performance is fundamentally different from the glossary that is presented here. The graphical potential of the written words does not capture my intonation while reading and the visual information contained in the drawings is absent from the scene in this article. That difference is intended as yet another way to establish connections beyond the visual and the verbal that might disclose, or rather undraw, the kind of tacit knowledge artistic research is always looking for, or rather is always trying to grasp. So, this glossary is not intended as a description, guideline or summary to the Daily Drawing project. I hope it will function as a kind of research method of translation (see glossary) and what I, in previous work, have characterized as mediated redescriptions. *By combining different media, modes, genres, and voices artistic research could provoke different protagonists to talk to each other in different languages hoping to open a conversation that might in the future function as a tool to think things differently* [Geerts 2015: 126].

The glossary builds on that line of thought and explores how drawing and writing are not only tools in artistic research projects, but how combining them works as an explorative and reflective research method. Their outcomes are not easily predictable, but practicing them as practice does force one to continuously reassess what one thinks to know and to reposition oneself in relation to visual material and the words we use to talk about that. It points to a humble position in which the artist-researcher is searching again and again for a voice and image in relation to record what the world has to offer.

### Sources

- Antena (2013). *A Manifesto for Ultratranslation*. Available: [https://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ultratranslation\\_eng.pdf](https://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ultratranslation_eng.pdf) (viewed 17.02.2022.)
- Barthes, R. (1979). Sagesse de l'art. In: Barthes, R. (2016). *Cy Twombly*. Editions du Seuil, pp. 9–36.
- Barthes, R. (1979). Cy Twombly ou “Non multa sed multum”. In: R. Barthes (2016). *Cy Twombly*. Editions du Seuil, pp. 37–64.
- Benjamin, W. (1917). Painting and the Graphic Arts. In: M. Bullock, M. W. Jennings, (eds). (2002). *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 82.

- Benjamin, W. (1917). Painting, or Signs and Marks. In: M. Bullock, M. W. Jennings (eds). (2002). *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 83–86.
- Geerts, B. (2015). Research in doubt: Mediated Redescriptions. In: J. Quaresma, A. Longley, F. Rosa Dias (eds). *Research in Arts: Irony, Critique and Assimilation of the Methods*. Lisbon: Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema; Creative Arts and Industries Dance Studies; The University of Auckland, pp. 120–129.
- Hanula, M. (2013). What Is It Good For? – Artistic Research As an Act of Fumbling (of a Sort). In: M. Hanula, J. Kaila, et al. (eds). *Artists as Researchers – A New Paradigm for Art Education in Europe*. Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, pp. 87–97.
- Migration: Speaking Nearby (2019). *Migration: Speaking Nearby*. Asia Culture Center. Available: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/305194/migration-speaking-nearby/> (viewed 30.04.2022.)
- Perec, G. (1973). Approaches to What? In: G. Perec (1999). *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Penguin Books, pp. 209–211.
- Perec, G. (1978). Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One's Books. In: G. Perec (1999). *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Penguin Books, pp. 148–155.
- Schwab, M. (2019). Expositionality. In: P. de Assis, L. D'Errico (eds). *Artistic Research Charting a Field in Expansion*. Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 27–45.