



Drawing and Visualisation Research

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**Drawing In-Situ**

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# DRAWING IN THE REALITY OF SPACE

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## DRAWING IN THE REALITY OF SPACE

*The greatest test of a recorder's ability and a gift to anyone interested in making records is to be present...<sup>1</sup>*

Drawing can articulate our relationship to space and location, and the experiential act of drawing in-situ is central to how we record the world and our encounters with it. Experiences of drawing on location also allow an exploration of the nature of drawing itself, its relationship with materials, processes and the drawing surface. This paper explores the proposition, through practice-based research, that the reflexive process of drawing affords an expression of embodied relational knowledge and can reveal a 'subjective truth'<sup>2</sup>, drawing parallels to phenomenological ideas of being and consciousness.

The series of drawings *Logical Atomism* (Charley Peters, 2012, yarn and fishing wire in the landscape) were first published in *Terror*<sup>3</sup>, an issue of London-based art collective TBC's online journal '12-Pages'. TBC comprise a group of artists and writers engaged in research-led projects that explore contemporary approaches to drawing processes. Through collaboration and discussion TBC develop projects that use drawing as a performative, interventionist or documentary medium, removing it from a solitary, studio-based act and considering it in an expanded context.<sup>4</sup>

*Terror* challenged a group of artists and writers to respond to contemporary understandings of conflict in an era where first hand experience is mediated by digital technologies. We have become familiar with participating in shared events that we are not physically involved in. In the introduction to the publication Laura Davidson, a writer whose work explores emergent themes within digital culture and artistic practices wrote,

*Nine eleven was a trigger of this phenomenon. The removal of physical self in the Web 2.0 era has somehow come with a natural ease. It seems logical to concede that there has always been a concealed science fiction desire to be in two places at once. A strong trend has emerged in which major news stories are broken on*

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1 Farthing, S. (2008). Recording: And Questions of Accuracy. In: Garner, S. ed. 2008 Writing on Drawing: Essays on Drawing Practice and Research, Bristol: Intellect Books. Ch. 9

2 Heidegger's notion of Wahrheit as discussed in Heidegger, M (new edition 2004) On the Essence of Truth, Continuum Impacts.

3 *Terror*, published online August 2012, <http://12-pages.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/terror.html>

4 For example, by considering the notion of an expanded field of practice discussed in: Krauss, R. (1979). Sculpture in the Expanded Field. In: *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44

*Twitter by amateurs, often more rapidly than the conventional broadcasters. Major news events are also increasingly made out of something minor. The continual stream of news that is attached to each person through personal computers and smartphones maybe gives us more of a physical sense of being somewhere when we are in fact completely absent....*<sup>5</sup>

This sense of the intangible proposed by Davidson and its contrast to the haptic experience of drawing inspired the development of *Logical Atomism*, a series of ephemeral drawings made in and by the urban landscape. Richard Serra's notable declaration that 'Drawing is a verb, not a noun', reinforces that drawing is a *doing thing* rather than a static activity, and is a pertinent way to exemplify the artist/author's relationship with drawing as a means of exploring creative practice and research - drawing as a tool for active engagement and response, which evolves in relation to material and spatial considerations.

The central concerns of the philosophical methodology of phenomenology are with the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear within them, as a matter for systematic reflection and analysis. In examining the role of such phenomena in generating meaning in the world, this reflection can be defined '...as the study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view.'<sup>6</sup> requiring the self to account for the meanings that events have in our actual experiences. Correspondingly, in the introduction to *The World of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty declared that phenomenology enabled a consideration of levels of consciousness in order to '...seek an understanding from all [these] angles simultaneously, everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships.'<sup>7</sup> Therefore, phenomenology and drawing, and in particular drawing in-situ, offer the possibility of generating a first person, embodied account of space, time and the world.

The drawings in the series *Logical Atomism* were made on location and rely on the physical characteristics of the urban landscape to generate each drawing. The works are engaged with the relationship between our perceptions of terror and spatial negotiations in the urban environment. Cities are designed and re-designed in line with shifting notions of the threat of terror, and inhabitants' flow through urban spaces are marked by indications of counter terror tactics. Areas of cities are acknowledged as high risk and this identity is drawn onto the landscape, such as the 'ring of steel' in London, the popular name for the security and surveillance cordon surrounding the City of London installed to deter the IRA and other threats. Similarly, people are subjected to spatial arrangement in the terrorised city. The police

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson, L. (2012). Note from the Editor. In: *Terror* (Summer 2012), p.3. published online as cited above. More of Davidson's writing on digital visual culture can be read here: <http://lauraelizabethdavidson.com>

<sup>6</sup> Woodruff-Smith, D. (2007). *Husserl*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon Woodruff Smith, p.1

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (2004). *The World of Perception*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon. p.xxi

technique of Kettling (also known as containment or corralling) is a methodology for controlling large crowds during demonstrations or protests by forming a physically determined containment area for those involved.<sup>8</sup> The works in *Logical Atomism* use the drawn line to negotiate space in the urban environment near to the artist/author's home in London. In each piece lines of acrylic yarn are stretched and knotted to subsequent lines to create spatial demarcations in public places synonymous with fear or discomfort - urban parks as daylight starts to fade, shared stairwells in tower blocks, and depopulated alleyways littered with debris - making three-dimensional drawings in space. Bachelard's notion that the mind is given form through the places and spaces in which we dwell, reinforces this reciprocity in that, it is those places themselves, that influence our memories, feelings and thoughts; '...*Je suis l'espace où je suis* (I am the space where I am)...'<sup>9</sup> The physical challenges and time consuming processes of stretching, knotting and securing the yarn in uncomfortable surroundings elucidated the connection between the world and the artist/author's intentions, the object of experience (drawing in-situ) and the object itself (the drawing). In *Art as Experience*, Dewey considers that the artist's subjective experience of the world, as self and world, could '...qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges.'<sup>10</sup> The potential of experience explored by Dewey and its relation to the activity of drawing in-situ suggest a vision that brings '...to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total.'<sup>11</sup> This relates not only to the artist's experience of being but also to the actions of drawing.

The drawings embrace the working methodologies often symptomatic of representational sketching on location: an economy of line to map the characteristics of a specific site; a lack of control over environmental conditions; a response to and record of a particular place; an engagement with materials to make unconscious or unplanned marks. The lines of yarn are anchored to their surroundings by fishing wire attached to adjacent architectural or natural features such as trees, park benches, handrails and fences. Each drawing is therefore created both in and by its situation, its form being shaped by the physical features of its positioning in the world. The drawings mirror their immediate environment and connect intrinsically with it, becoming both a reflection of their location and part of the site itself, 'making themselves'<sup>12</sup> due to their experience of 'being' within a specific space. The process of drawing in-situ in *Logical Atomism*, therefore, is itself a conduit for authorship, which determines both the form of the drawing and the record of its location. The drawings present a document of a period of time spent working in-situ in each location. Conventional drawing tools such as pens and pencils

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<sup>8</sup> The contentious technique of kettling as a means of maintaining social order during large group protests was pioneered by the Met Police in the 1990s, who used it extensively in the years proceeding the publication of *Terror*.

<sup>9</sup> Bachelard G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, Boston USA, p.137

<sup>10</sup> Dewey J. (2005). *Art as Experience*. Pedigree, New York, USA, p.36

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* p.14

<sup>12</sup> A reference to Dorothea Rockburne's series 'Drawings Which Make Themselves' (1971), in which Rockburne folded paper causing it to change from a passive surface and suggesting drawing's identity as a three-dimensional consideration.

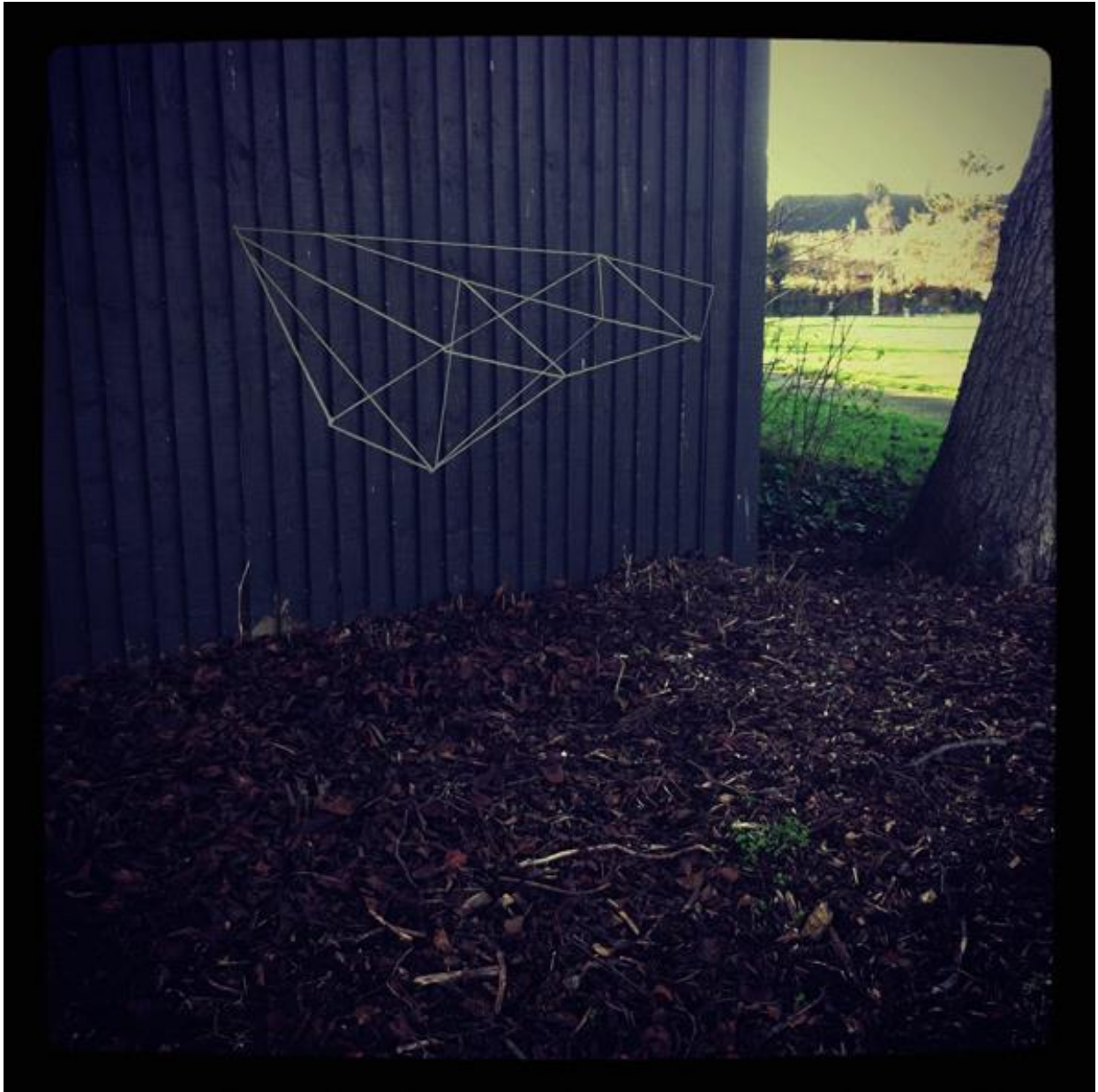
connect the hand and the paper; in *Logical Atomism* the pulled yarn bridges the space between hand and the landscape, making the drawings' locations both subject and surface.

Our 'sense experience' (*Sentir*)<sup>13</sup> enables us to enter into this world as sensate beings, to interact, engage and change the world. Our physical selves are therefore, in the world at the same time as being of the world, simultaneously remaining detached from the world, through the knowledge of our experiences, while also being embedded in the reality of the world. Within this context of embodiment, drawings made in situ, such as *Logical Atomism*, can be said to articulate visually a means of understanding or experiencing the world. This potential is defined by Heidegger as an implicit understanding of what it is for a subject to *be*. For him, the possibility of being is attached to place and in our engagements with the world and its events. The connection between *being* in the world, our embodied knowledge and experiences of landscape can be considered as being essentially connected to place and something that can be revealed through the process of drawing. The drawings in the series *Logical Atomism* could not exist without their direct connection to a physical site, they are tied intrinsically to the means of their production and their *being* in time and space. Their creation in-situ reinforces drawing's capacity to reveal a subjective truth and strengthens the importance of the experience of the physical self in an increasingly virtual world.

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, M (1962). *Being and Time*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK.

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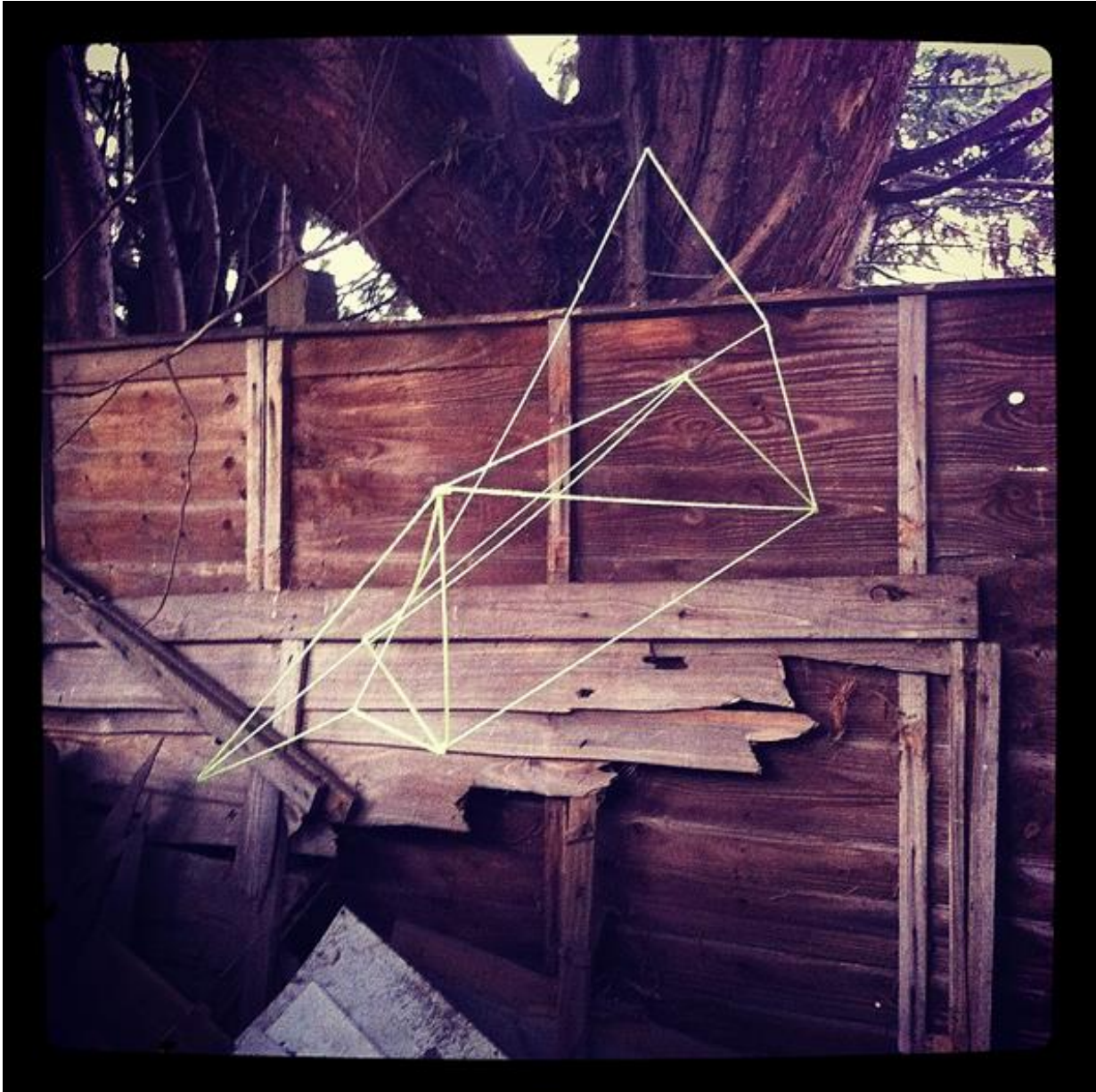


CHARLEY PETERS, *LOGICAL ATOMISM* (2012), ACRYLIC YARN AND FISHING WIRE IN SPACE



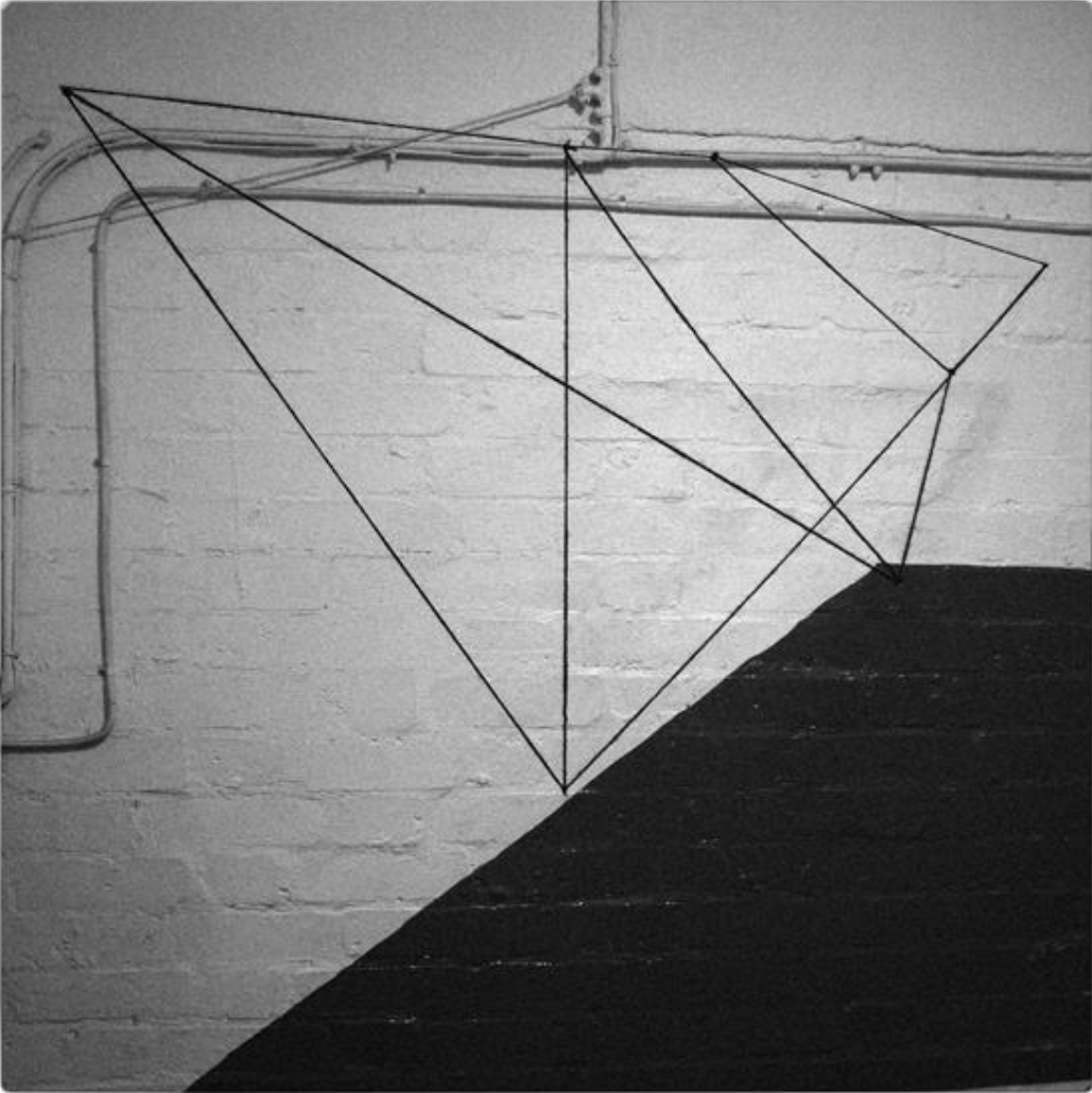


CHARLEY PETERS, *LOGICAL ATOMISM* (2012), ACRYLIC YARN AND FISHING WIRE IN SPACE

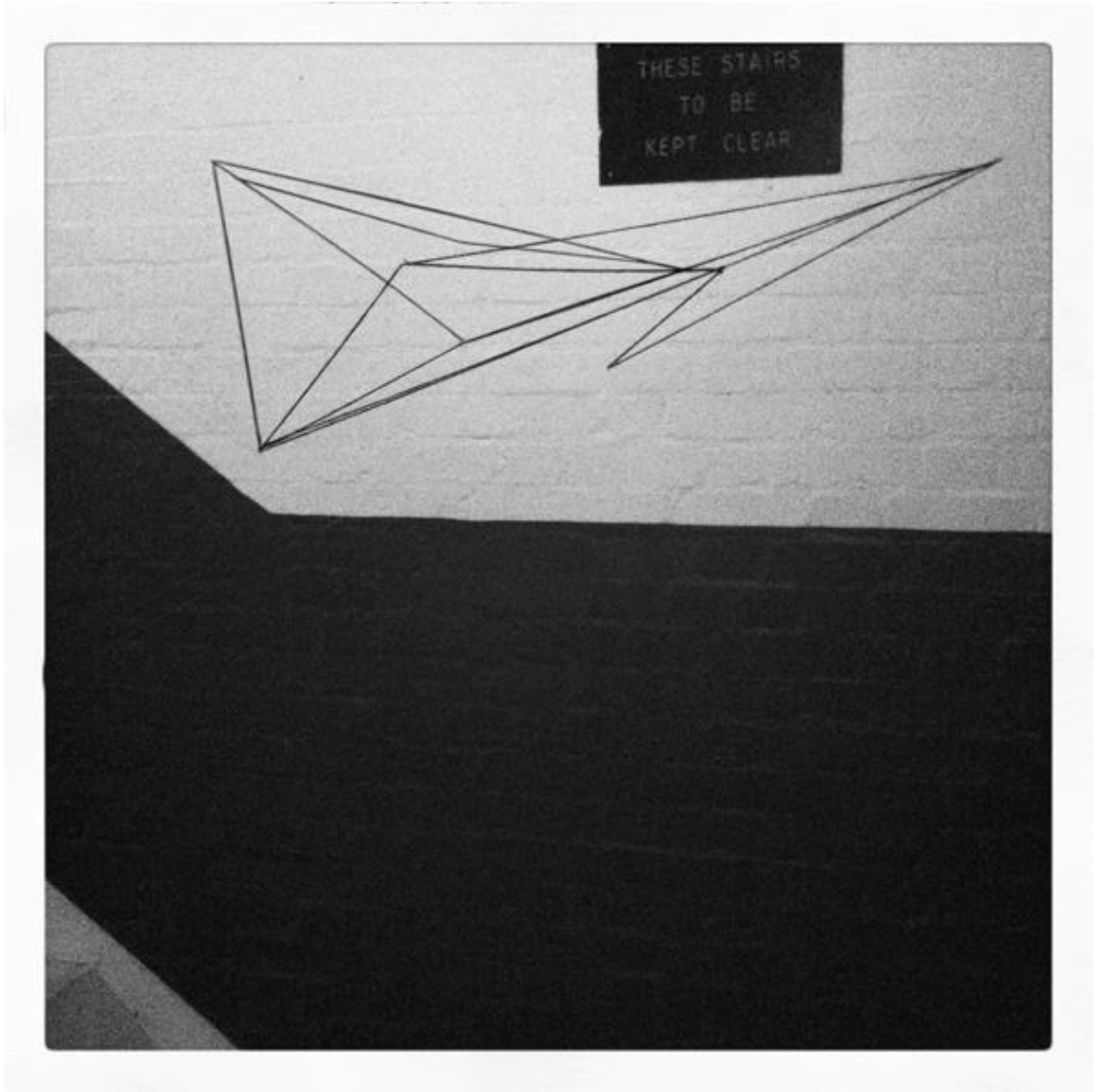


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