



Drawing and Visualisation Research

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WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE DRAW?

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This paper is a reflection on drawing in two parts. The first gives a brief outline of anthropology's engagement with this practice, bringing out the distinction between the 'retrospective' approach of Alfred Gell, which begins with the finished drawing and works back to the intentions of the drawer, and the 'prospective' approach of Tim Ingold in which drawing is understood and actively engaged with as a *skilful* activity, as a form of knowing in rhythmic, uncertain negotiation between observation and gesture. The second part elaborates a series of ruminations on drawing drawn from my own practice, whose aim is to articulate some of the strangeness of drawing as a practice, the way it unsettles any simple understanding of what we do when we draw.

The word 'draw' in the simple phrase 'draw a line' has something like the following meaning: an object such as a fingertip, piece of chalk, pencil, needle, pen, brush, having something like a tip, which we refer to therefore as a 'point', is intentionally moved (drawn) over a fairly continuous track on a surface. This action leaves, as the trace of its path, a mark of some kind, and is done for that purpose (Maynard 2005: 62).

Patrick Maynard's definition is as good a place to begin as any, its generality highlighting the ubiquity and importance of drawing to human ways of life as well underscoring its relevance to any discipline exploring the possibilities of these ways of life. But it also leaves a nagging feeling that the real work of understanding both the act and mark of drawing has just been kicked along the road into neat boxes labelled 'intention' and 'purpose'. This is a paper of two parts: the first gives a brief summary of anthropology's engagement with the practice of drawing, from finished artefact to be interpreted within the logic of the social, to a methodology for capturing and understanding the social. The second part brings my practice of drawing – as mode of making sense of the world and sharing it – into correspondence with this Anthropological tradition as a series of ruminations; each an attempt to articulate the strangeness that belies common-sense understandings of what it is to 'draw a line'.

THE DRAWN LINE

Anthropology has, on the whole, been interested in the finished work of art, in the drawing as finished artefact to be understood through its social and symbolic life (for examples see Boas 1955, Layton 1991, Gell 1999, and Hatcher 1999). Despite differences in approach, the challenge for studies of material culture has been to read artefacts through their function: why were they made? What were they used for? What part do they play in social relations? Alfred Gell's (1999) 'theory of the art nexus' is a good illustration of both the strengths and pitfalls of treating art 'as a repository of works, already complete and available for analysis' (Gunn 2009: 1). For Gell, art objects are 'material indexes' from which human agents *abduct* meaning. Abduction is a process of metaphorical or analogical inference that works back from the finished work to the intention it embodies. What interests Gell is how individual works of art or artefacts communicate or mediate human intentions and social agency. His exploration of material culture as "proliferating fragments of 'primary' intentional agents in their 'secondary' artefact form" (Gell 1999: 21), complicates any simple 'reading' of the semiotic or symbolic by enmeshing people and things in webs of distributed agency and social action. Despite this welcome complication, all movement eventually comes back to its origin in human ideation.

Here we return to Maynard's commonsense definition of drawing, which can all too easily conjure up a simple understanding of intention or agency based on Rational Man, set apart from the rest of Creation, championed and institutionalised by Enlightenment thought:

“[the] self-governing reflective individual whose inner life can be conveyed at will to a public composed of similarly sovereign individuals” (Massumi 2002: xiii). Or as Gell puts it,

Agency is attributable to those persons (or things) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events (1999: 16).

We know what we do when we draw a line and if we have drawn it well, others should too. With many writers in the anthropology of art and material culture, Gell's is a backwards or 'retrospective' reading of the creative process which “finds the creativity of action by tracing the novelty of its outcomes in unprecedented ideas in the minds of individuals” (Ingold 2011: .6). This implicit 'hylomorphism' situates creativity in the generation of new ideas in the mind of the artist, whilst the artistic process is reduced to the more or less successful projection or translation of these ideas into material form. Whilst the most interesting anthropologies of art and material culture situate art objects within living, ongoing, performative socio-cultural processes, there seems to be little curiosity about the process of making itself (as a living, improvisatory, performative socio-cultural process) and what it has to teach us about human possibilities of being in the world.

DRAWING THE SOCIAL

Drawing has been used by anthropologists, ethnologists and archaeologists in a number of important ways to supplement what are seen as an essentially written or verbal disciplines (Clifford 1990); as part of the idiosyncratic descriptive practices of fieldnotes (Gunn 2009), as a participative research tool (Afonso and Ramos 2004, Wagner 1999, Prosser 1998, Walsh 2003), as diagrams and illustrations in texts, and as illustrated catalogues. Drawing, along with photography and film, has been essential in recording and representing - in 'imaging' - the subjects of the anthropological gaze. How these drawings are both embedded in, and embody, the varied practical, social, economic, and political contexts of the discipline has been considered by many authors in anthropology and art history (Hocking 2003, Pink 2001, Rose 2001, Elkins 1999a, Harper 1987).

Ray Lucas and Wendy Gunn have both approached drawing not just as a means for representing anthropological knowledge but as a particular form of anthropological *knowing*. Lucas's work (2009a, 2009b) tries to understand inscriptive practices as forms of notation: both imaging and interpretation. His focus is on the different 'grammars' that shape them: all drawing, including 'deeply personal works of consciousness' use culturally mediated frameworks that render them legible. Lucas sees these frameworks as both *thematic*: symbolic understanding of content, and *gestural*: understanding mimetically/kinaesthetically how a work was arrived at and the 'thought' it conveys. These conventions underwrite our ability (or lack thereof) to read and engage with particular drawings.

Wendy Gunn (2009, 2006) has worked with practitioners from across the disciplines of art, anthropology and architecture through her research exploring how drawing forms part of their exploratory creative practice. Her work collapses any distinction between learning and research, theory and practice; all are knowledge-practices in which drawing is, or at least should be, implicated. Gunn and Lucas show how drawing – as a descriptive, participatory, analytical and communicative knowledge-practice – can be incorporated into the collaborative, exploratory research that characterises anthropology. Drawing becomes a kind of drawing-out: not just an understanding of what the world is like from a particular place but an exploration of the possibilities inhering in it.

Both of these authors draw on the work of Tim Ingold, which elaborates a *prospective* approach to doing anthropology that combines a particular onto-epistemological framework focused on process, with a concern for pro-ductive as opposed to ab-ductive methodologies (2007, 2011, 2013a). This onto-epistemological framework is drawn, in part, from the phenomenological analyses of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who both emphasis how we, along with all life, are always already thrown into a world not of our making. The ‘intentionality’ of phenomenal experience, its about-ness, is always orientated in response or correspondence to an ongoing ‘lifeworld’ (Ingold 2013a: 91-108). Ingold stresses the importance of pre-theoretical, practical knowledge (a knowing-how) as the basis on which all theory (a knowing-what) rests. This focus on praxis and the practitioner’s view of art-making disrupts the aforementioned reification of ideas – and language as medium – as the basis of intention, creativity and form.

To emphasise making is to regard the object as the expression of the idea; to emphasise weaving is to regard it as the embodiment of a rhythmic movement. Therefore to invert making and weaving is also to invert idea and movement, to see the movement as truly generative of the object rather than merely revelatory of an object that is already present, in an ideal, conceptual or virtual form, in advance of the process that discloses it. (Ingold 2000b: 346).

Approached as a form of weaving, drawing becomes a gestural, rhythmic, uncertain negotiation between eyes, paper, pencil, hand, line, mind and heart. In other words, it combines skills of observation and gesture that are “developmentally incorporated into the modus operandi of the body...through practice and experience in the environment” (2000a: 5). Gesture is shorthand for an epistemology that does not separate perception–judgement–action in a linear causal sequence, which is the mainstream position in cognitive, and to some extent social, sciences. Instead, perception is always already entwined with action or response from the start. In learning to draw from life we learn to observe in particular ways and to learn gestures that adequately articulate the forms being observed.

Through the coupling of perception and action, the artist is drawn in to the world, even as he or she draws it out in the gestures of description and the traces they yield. (Ingold 2008: 87).

As such, drawing is an ‘engaged’ practice of description, qualitatively different from the ‘non-correspondent description’ of ethnographic writing, championed by Clifford (1990) and others, in which the author ‘turns away from observation and dialogue’ in order to describe (Ingold 2008a: 87-88). Equally important is drawing’s temporal dimension: practised over time, it provides a record of the very engagement with, and education within, our lifeworld as a social ‘environment of joint activity’ (Ingold 2008a: 82). In his essay on *Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art* (1972), Gregory Bateson locates what works in the work of art, not in the ‘story’ it tells – the “objects, persons or supernaturals” (1972, 139) it represents – but in its *style*, its non-representational capacity to move us to see the world differently. In his discussion of a painting by the Balinese painter Ida Bagus Dja ti Sura, Bateson follows the move from the “lower level redundancy” of mastered habit – embodied in the representational conventions of Balinese painting – to its ‘modulation’ to give ‘higher orders of redundancy’ that communicate a way of seeing, a gracefulness, previously unknown.

Consider the case of the man who goes to the blackboard ... and draws, freehand, a perfect reindeer in its posture of threat. ... "Do you know that his perfect way of seeing—and drawing—a reindeer exists as a human potentiality?" The consummate skill of the draftsman validates the artist's message about his relationship to the animal—his empathy. (1972: 153-4)

It is this possibility of a new way of seeing, a new way of feeling and relating to the world, that touches on a communicative potential of drawing beyond the representational and illustrative (see Higgin, forthcoming, for a fuller discussion of Bateson’s notion of grace in art).

The second half of this paper speaks with a different voice, coming from my practice of drawingⁱ. Its ruminations do not keep to an orderly line of argument but instead circle around the idea of drawing as ‘correspondence’ outlined above, as knowledge practice *with* and *about* the world.

FROM A MOLAR TO A MOLECULAR UNDERSTANDING OF DRAWING

In their work together, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1977, 1988, 1994) continually undermine the reification of already-thrown forms of social life by sociologists and anthropologists from Durkheim onwards as sufficient explanation for this social life. A good illustration of this ‘molarity’ would be the individual agency at the root of Alfred Gell’s theory of art. Gell takes both the individual subject and her agency (as intention) as natural, pre-given entities that are then enrolled into an explanation of social life. Deleuze and Guattari,

by contrast, approach both the subject and agency as emergent phenomena, arising from a more fundamental ‘molecular’ flow of life. Experience is ontologically *immanent*: it is a pure flow of life before subject and object are precipitated out. The important point for them is not how difference or novelty emerges out of the Same (social structure, identity and so on) but rather how the Same is organized from a more fundamental difference or becoming.

Lucas’s focus on notation as culturally mediated traditions of legibility, whilst grounded in a gestural understanding of drawing and reading, concentrates on already constituted or organized conventions. I’m interested here in bringing out the ‘molecular’ processes of drawing that lie just beneath the surface of these conventions. Without an exploration of these molecular processes, notation, through appeal to cultural mediation, becomes too easily confused with schemas or codes - memes, cultural patterns, habitus - that are either hard-wired into the brain as properties of the perceptual and cognitive system (as in the works of Gombrich 1977, 1982) or somehow transmitted ‘culturally’ (through language, discourse or practice) intact from person to person, generation to generation, and capable of being read as a text.

THE DRAWING OUT OF HABIT

The white sheet of paper is never empty. It is peopled with habit: habits of seeing, habits of feeling, habits of gesture. Objects, artefacts, people and landscape seem to be common-sense enough subjects for drawing; a figurative ideal we, in the West at least, are schooled in from our early years. The apparently benign question, ‘what is it?’ that accompanies drawing both at home and school implicitly values conforming to these conventions. Amanda Ravetz, following Millner, distinguishes two types of drawing:

...a commonsense [figurative] view that uses a narrow focus and translates in her drawings to outlines of separate objects and has its roots in preconceived ideas about what the finished drawing should look like; and a transfiguring view using a dispersed awareness that emerges in the drawings as ambiguous boundaries, revealing a different ordering of the whole and openness to the moment (2011: 168).

The aim of an interesting teacher of life drawing is to play with, and disrupt, any easy notion of the figurative (or Gibson’s perceptual literal-ness). Or, put another way, the aim should be to break the tyranny of the eye as figurative overseer. I had a teacher in Bristol who used all sorts of tricks to this end: stopping us every minute to leave the drawing we were working on and swap with our neighbour, using our non-dexterous hand, sketching at a distance using bamboo poles with pencilled ends, swapping drawing implements, outlawing outlines and always drawing fast to avoid us settling down into comfortable habits. Her aim was to free gesture to describe its own line that resonates with line of the haptic or touching eye. Bodies, faces, bowls of fruit break down into more fluid lines, forms,

shades and colours. Amanda Ravetz's description of her experience following intense drawing classes at the beginning of her art degree beautifully illustrates this:

I felt dispersed beyond my skin into everything I was drawing and into the entire room. I was aware of different sounds – the roar of traffic outside, my breathing, the clicking, tapping sounds of charcoal and pencils on boards. I felt my weight on the floor and the movement of my back, arm and hand, and saw the black lines appearing on paper. Everything was vivid, alive and present and I was suffused with a feeling of joy (2011: 157).

The 'trick' of this practice of drawing is 'to slow down or even block and divert the way by which we so speedily, even instantaneously, transform sensory knowledge into knowledge' (Taussig 2009: 188); to slow down the speed of habit in order to see, to feel and think otherwise. Otherwise familiar objects begin to lose their outline; instead of still life waiting to be re-presented, we start to open up to life that is itself in the throws of becoming.

In my practice, I am constantly confronted with the role *chance* plays in generating form, which is another way of saying that all sorts of materials and forces come together in the creation of form, not all of which are controllable or predictable by its 'maker'. While we may come to know the world through form, form is never 'already given' – either as an idea in the mind nor as object to describe out in the world - but is constantly emergent within the relations between materials and forces, only some which can be claimed as 'human'. Art, as cultural form, is never a wholly *anthropological* affair but is a 'mode of action' that develops the world around us, both human and nonhuman.

PAUL KLEE, PICTORIAL SPACE AND THE DRAMA OF FORM-ATION

This leads us to a second problem of approaching drawing as a purely re-presentational activity: it takes as its reference, and meaning, something beyond the paper itself. A picture becomes a 'framed window', a sign signifying an absent signified. Here we follow the artist-teacher Paul Klee into drawing's sun-commonsense. In what he called his pedagogical sketch books, which combine drawings, diagrams and text, Klee breaks with his inheritance, as an artist in the Western tradition, of drawing as describing and representing a 'real-life' beyond.

First, he does not attach such intense importance to natural form as do so many realist critics, because, for him, these formal forms are not the real stuff of the process of natural creation. For he places more value on the powers which do the forming than the final forms themselves (Klee 1966: 45).

For Klee, the dramatic theatre of drawing takes place in the pictorial space of the paper (or canvas), it emerges in the tensile play of what he calls its 'constituent parts' – what

Deleuze and Guattari call the ‘molecular’ or ‘intensive’ space (in contrast to a Euclidean, neutral *extensive* space). Klee boils these constituent parts down to **line**, **weight** and **colour**. These elements combine and coalesce into forms that make contact and group together in mutual relation and combination. This combinatory phase is critical, as there is the ever present danger of forms falling into ‘appointed’ or received order. The essence of the craft of drawing is to wrestle them into ‘new order and form an image which is normally called the subject’ (Klee 1966: 29). Every drawing, for Klee, is puzzle or problem within the pictorial space that aims at a sense of movement or turbulence, which has ‘the effect of giving it life’ (ibid.: 35).



PAUL KLEE, *LE TIMBALIER*, 1940

Drawing does not derive its primary power from its resemblance or reference to ‘real life’ – it is not its ‘material interpretation’ (ibid.: 31) - instead, it is a means to explore the process of *formation* itself, the ‘coming into life’ within the pictorial space. For Klee, every line and tone taking shape on the canvas vibrates with its own *tremendous fragments of meaning*. Roger Lipsey notes that the original German – *Stückwelten des Inhaltes* – translates more literally as ‘part-worlds of content’ (1988: 178), the ‘molar’ breaking down to its ‘molecular’ currents. Each of these ‘part-worlds’ draw forth a response from us, ‘they show us all the contrasts in the psychic-physiognomical field, contrasts which may range from comedy to tragedy’ (Klee 1966: 35). Here we arrive back at Gregory Bateson’s non-representational capacity of the drawn line to surprise and move us; not only the spectator but also the one drawing it.

MEANING AND THE AFFECTIVE LINE

This is my experience of drawing: every line drawn is an affect, a musical tone with an intensity or direction of its own that draws forth the next in response. Bryson puts it far better:

The outside mark on paper leads as much as it is led; it loops inward from the paper to direct the artist's decision concerning the line that is next to be drawn, and it loops back out, as a new trace in paper, sewing the mind into the line, binding line and mind in a suturing action where the threads grow finer and tighter in the passage from the initial mark to the final outlines circumscribing the scene's legible forms (Bryson 2003: 154).

This *sewing* is a lovely way of describing the process of improvising a passage through a world in the throes of becoming. The feeling that brings me back, again and again, to drawing is the experience of being stopped in one's tracks by what emerges from the paper.

Recently, Ingold (2013b and 2013a: 61-74) has begun to incorporate *imagination* into his onto-epistemology of skilful practice, developing the idea of a 'roaming, wandering imagination that opens up paths in and through the world', a distinctly *pragmatic* understanding that stands against the Modern grain in which imagination is understood as an image-making faculty located in the private recesses of subjectivity, 'our word for what does not exist', or is only made to exist through an act of artifice. Within Ingold's pragmatist account, imagination becomes integral to our being-in-the-world, or the becoming real of the world, as a sensibility attuned by an intimate perceptual and gestural engagement with one's surroundings that opens up new paths in and through this world, a performative feeling forward vital to the ongoing, improvisation of lives in a world that doesn't stay still.

One figure he uses to illustrate this is a composer at work, whose imagination of music runs ahead, like a bird in flight, while she desperately tries to keep up with pencil and paper. But in counterpoint to this bird in flight, to an imagination set loose by a rare virtuosity and mastery, whose line of flight leads a body and material world that follows, Ingold has also stressed imagination as a mode of undergoing, as responsiveness to what happens, a moment of exposure opening onto the unknown. The danger of the bird in flight is that a false dichotomy is set up between an active imaginative foresight and the passive drag of material transcription, whilst glossing over the more prosaic imaginative and affective work with the paper and lines in front of us. The friction of paper on graphite can liberate as much as slow down; a chance swerve can make visible something previously unimaginable to which we nevertheless respond.

What makes this fundamental situation emotionally and intuitively resonant is that it allows the image to immediately contact, in the here and now of ongoing time, transactions between the artist's inner and outer worlds, in the many registers of being that visual art is able to engage... Active, the line draws the image forward under the artist's guiding will, but the moment it launches forth, it exists in the outer world, no longer transparent but opaque, dense, obdurate (Bryson: 158).

Drawing has an unsettling nakedness. My practice has been to accept the ill-formed, wayward monsters that come to life on the paper in front of me. This is difficult; it requires a hesitant touch, the patience and generosity to let things be and the quietening of judgement (especially the figurative overseer we encountered earlier).



The responsive improvisation that characterises drawing is a delicate muscle, a delicate feel for these emergent forms; a kind of midwifery. ‘Opaque, dense, obdurate’, they seem to have a life of their own from which they call us; from which they elicit, sometimes, a spontaneous felt response. They have their own fragile, ‘tremendous fragments of meaning’ that, as Amanda Ravetz (2011) says, are both ‘created and discovered’.

We are certainly a long way from any commonsense understandings of intention, will and agency; a long way from Le Corbusier’s Modern man who “walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it” (2007 (1929): 11). Following the ‘pack-donkey’s way’, James Elkins (1999b) speaks of the labour of painting as a ‘daily struggle with materials’ that resonates with devotional prayer. Working always at the limits, you have to learn to how pay attention to what is becoming sensible on paper. In a fundamental sense, the sensible world in which drawing takes place is not, as the empiricists would have it, *given* and already constituted. Rather, it is better described as a becoming-sensible situated and shaped within the practical, attentive inter-action that marks a particular practice.

From this perspective, drawing allows us to reflect on how we are sensibly caught up in the world; a mode of knowing from which we can explore the ways of perceiving, feeling, thinking and doing that have grown, like knots, within our relational development in the

world. As a play of outer and inner, of line and response, it is a powerful form of non-verbal and non-representational correspondence 'to [one]self, to others, and the world' (Ingold 2008a: 87), that operates within a much wider field of marks and response (animal tracks, cloud formations, the flash of salmon swimming). The drawn line brings forth particular 'tellings of the world' (Gunn 2009) that have become fundamental to human ways of being. It is this mediation of affect, feeling and emotion that gives pictorial art its vital 'meaning' or *life*. Its capability to carry referential, representational and symbolic meaning is secondary and, in a sense, parasitic, and testifies to the extraordinary creative strength of this particularly human play with the surfaces that surround us. The stories we tell through these marks have developed and sedimented to such an extent that they obscure the tracks that lead us back to their creation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried to articulate a sense of what is important to the practice of drawing for me as an artist and as an anthropologist. Whilst acknowledging the contribution that drawing can make to anthropology as a descriptive methodology that combines participation, description, analysis and communication, I have attempted to make a space for drawing as a creative imaginative practice that gets us beyond commonsense traditions of form to an *un*-commonsensical exploration of the processes of form-ation themselves.

Within this account, drawing involves and invokes our anticipatory, kinaesthetic responsiveness to the world, and imagination is a 'feel' akin to midwifery; a close paying attention to what is present or *presenting*. Through making marks, we invoke particular felt responses that are only ever partly 'ours', that nevertheless allow us to 'tell the world' in particular ways (Gunn 2009). This focus on affective responsiveness problematises both poles of the usual binary opposition of supra-individual structure and individual agency. Conventions of drawing as formative, culturally mediated grammar are not ontological givens awaiting anthropological inquiry. Instead they are organized/constructed out of an underlying stratum of creative responsiveness. By the same token, the intentions of sovereign individuals, as 'spontaneous creations ab nihilo' (Sartre quoted in Rapport and Harris 2007: 309), have no place in this account. The challenge is trying to adequately describe (in words) the improvisatory, emotional, careful work of *making* in general; the creative, generative play at the heart of human relationship with the world of materials.

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ⁱ While I draw, print and paint I hesitate to speak from the position of the 'artist'. For my research, I characterise an artist as someone that not only makes things we could recognise as 'art' but who makes a living as an 'artist'. An 'artist' becomes an identity that emerges within a collective work of exchange and recognition within an 'art world' (Becker 1984).