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## GLOVE AND HAND: AUTOFICTION DISCUSSED THROUGH REFERENCE TO DRAWINGS THAT CONCERN THE OBSERVATION OF PERCEPTION

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The article introduces the literary genre of autofiction as a means of self-debating drawings, and suggests the efficacy of this kind of writing as a means of articulating the 'I' of the drawing-based artist as subject within their work. After a brief introduction to autofiction's history and theory, the body of the article concerns an example of autofiction written by the author to discuss the subjective basis of his drawing practice that concerns the observation of perception. This is followed by some indication of autofiction's possible usefulness to other drawing-based artists. The autofictional narrative involves a conversation of a fictional character and his interlocutor friend concerning two drawings, with some academic reference embedded in the conversation. The main formal and conceptual component of the drawings, generated by factors of perception and particularly relating to the second of them, is a space left open between its first and second layer, which is interpreted according to Lacan's theory of the Thing. Besides Lacanian theory, the article makes reference to Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory of distanciation, and ends at a point of revelation, to the author, of distanciation in practice through a chance encounter with another artist's own use of writing. It is suggested that this encounter is similar to how autofiction, if written by the drawing-based artists, may help them in relation to their visual work.

## Introduction

The literary genre of autofiction is proposed as a means for debating one's involvement in drawing. The main body of the article presents an example of my own, as the author-artist, concerning my subjective motivation towards two reproduced drawings, and use of relevant theory.

Autofiction is the embroiling of autobiography and fiction in terms that constructs or reconstructs factual content as much as it discloses. A derivation of this imbroglio would be to structure the narrative in terms that call the factual content to question, and by so doing, also expose the fictional artifice. In the article's autofictional discussion of two drawings, the question of content and its reliability is considered to be the ratio of objects to perception, where perception is mainly visual but not excluding involvement of the other senses, especially touch. The other sentient element, automatically concerning both literary fiction and drawing, is that of imagination and how the latter may be driven by desire.

'Autofiction' is a term coined by the critic and novelist Serge Doubrovsky for his novel *Fils*, of 1977, and is a blend of "Fiction, of real events and facts" (Hansen, 2017: 3, citing Dubrovsky). However, the French writer Nina Bouraoui, in her article (2020), introduces ten writers whose work is in her view within the genre of autofiction because they are concerned with '[...] the truth, without altering or falsifying the facts [...]'. Bouraoui cites Hervé Guibert as the 'father' of autofiction, '[...] finding that perfect balance between truth and beauty', and of Knausgaard's six-volume novel *My Struggle (Min Kamp)*, published between 2009 and 2011, that it is '[...] brutally honest autobiographical writing'. The key in these quotes of Bouraoui, however, that infers the ambiguous heart of autofiction, is her use of the term 'beauty', suggesting that a certain license may be taken with truth. Critiques of autofiction mostly point to the genre's dimension of ambiguity. Also, according to Gibbons (2017: 121), besides the autofictional author's straightforward use of their own name as the character, there are also '[...] other forms in which the central character does not take the author's name'.

Two novels of autofictional implication are Michel Houellebecq's *The Map and the Territory* (2012) and Doris Lessing's *Alfred and Emily* (2009). In Houellebecq's novel, a narrative is invented around Houellebecq's life as a writer that ends with his own ritualistic murder. Lessing's novel describes in its first half the story of Lessing's parents' real-life past and her upbringing in Rhodesia, while the second half is a fictionalized account of a better life her parents might have had if they had not married and certain historical events had not occurred. It may of course be said that there are elements of autofiction in many novelists' works without their participation in the genre, for example those of the major literary figure W. G. Sebald (1944-2001). In the preface of his book of short stories *The Final Martyrs*, the Japanese novelist Shusako Endo (1923-1996) states that he '[...] forged intimate familial ties with these characters, who are reflections of a portion of myself' (1994: n.p.n).

Among several questions posed by the call for papers for the Autofiction symposium, Royal College of Art (2019), were 'the place of fiction in academic writing', and among the suggested themes was 'the "I" that is not me – writing as another'. The question of academic writing may often be problematic for visual artists whose work is research based, due to such writing's relative suppression of personally reflexive involvement that is often such a crucial element of one's creative work. Autofiction – as also other more creative modes of writing – increasingly offer alternatives that enable greater acknowledgement of the role of 'I'. In autofiction, such first-person basis can simultaneously be challenged within and as part of the writing's structure.

Autofiction will also be implicit in the screenplay of much film and video. To suggest but one example where the filmmaker both declares his own-life position in relation to his work and sees himself mirrored through his continual use of a single main actor, is the Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang. Debatably, the actor Lee Kang-sheng is an altar ego or *other* of the filmmaker. According to McGrath (2019: para. 2) on Ming-liang's approach to filmmaking, "[...] despite his big-hearted empathy, he remains a distanced observer," and in Ming-liang's own words (ibid: para. 23) "[...] through Lee I express my sexual orientation, my anxieties."

## Theoretical Basis of Autofiction

While one may refer to one's internal centre as the *self*, and that as the pronominal 'I', the self as a concept is often questioned in philosophy. Ricoeur (1994: 53) refers in a spatial context to oneself as the '[...] zero point in relation to which all other places become near or far'. The self is debatably not so much questioned as diminished in Buddhist cultures by the quest of selflessness. Even Freud did not often use the term self, and in the process of psychoanalysis the analysand will lose sense of himself and '[...] only a subject remains, a voice unto itself in dialogue with itself' (Tauber, 2010: 4). Ambivalence and ambiguity of one's position in the text may be considered as both the pivot and mode of operation of autofiction; passion called to doubt by and as the genre in which mixed feeling is enabled to flourish. In this sense, the idea of an inner voice that speaks through one with a degree of autonomy is not only suitable definition for the aspect of autofiction that challenges author/ity, but may also have as a comparable material metaphor the obfuscating capacity of drawing, which one often refers to as an alternative form of language.

Gibbons (2017: 120) refers to autofiction as a 'hybrid form of life writing' that also manifests as other art forms. Gibbons (ibid, 121, citing Sturgeon) "[...] eschews the truth vs. fiction debate in favor of the question of how to live or how to create". Concerning the autofictional narratives of Chris Kraus and Frédéric Beigbeder, Gibbons (ibid: 122) states that they are writing '[...] out of a fragmented, fictitious identity, textual identity and towards a metamodern affect, whereby subjectivity is linked to external reality through personal connection and situatedness'. 'Metamodern' concerns a reading of modernism in terms of "structure of feeling", where the author of autofiction reaches out from him- or herself to relocate as '[...] a place, a time and a body. It also pertains to represent truth, however subjective that truth may be' (Gibbons, ibid: 118). Such self-distancing may confer with the above-mentioned idea of *subject* as the name of one's personal sense of core as opposed to self. In the context of the phenomenological analysis of text, or hermeneutics, Ricoeur terms the projection of oneself into and as the text 'danciati3n', which is further discussed in Developing Practice, below.

Pyyhtinen (2019: 49) refers to Knausgaard's novel *My Struggle* as knowing nothing of 'adventure' apart from '[...] the adventure of language, perhaps'. Knausgaard's novel unfolds as a narrative of precise personal detail, over six volumes. A subtitle of Pyyhtinen's article reads: 'Autofiction: memory as an art of invention' (ibid: 51). On the level of cognitive memory recall, Knausgaard's reasons for change and/or reinvention of memories is that he suffers from 'poor memory' (ibid: 52). Alternatively, Knausgaard's memories are [...] dependent on practices: the memories come into being along with the practice of writing' (ibid: 53). As a genre, 'Autofiction needs to constantly balance between being true to art and being true to life' (ibid: 53). Pyyhtinen relates autofiction back to the mode of truth telling of ancient cultures known as *parrhēsia*, due to which it is appropriate to consider Knausgaard's writing, no matter how personal, as directed to the public sphere (ibid: 53, citing Foucault). However, among the

comparisons that Pyyhtinen suggests, Knausgaard's relation to the reader as being similar to that of the patient towards their psychotherapist or psychoanalyst implies the challenge of defensiveness, reluctance and resistance (ibid: 55). Where the latter might manifest in disguise, as it were, is in Knausgaard's degree of invention of that which he cannot precisely remember.

If phenomenology is relevant to the discussion, so too, arguably, may be considered Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. Merleau-Ponty and Lacan were in fact close friends and were influenced by each other's theories. – Lacan (1981: 71-5) cites Merleau-Ponty on his understanding of *the gaze*, as elucidated in Merleau-Ponty's last work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) –. Lacan (2006: 247) refers in the psychoanalytical context to one's history as '[...] the future anterior as what I will have been, given that I am in the process of becoming'. One may consider 'history' in this sense be what is constructed between the analysand and analyst in and as the analysis, rather than as a past that is assumed potentially recoverable. In terms of fictionalized autobiography, whatever one externalizes of the internal as construction may influence, if not determine, how others perceive one, while subsequent reincarnations of the same process roll forwards. Pyyhtinen (2019: 56) refers to autofictional writing as: '[...] a strange kind of objectivity arises, something which at one and the same time belongs to the inner and the outer [...]'. Compounding the above quotes of Lacan and Pyyhtinen, the autofictional mode creates a lateral or tangential sense of a subject who/that is at first in advance of one as the artefact, as text or other mediums, which one then eclipses by the next new work. While this idea infers an externality to one's practice, the compulsion of autofiction as a textual practice that is potentially transferable to visual practice is that involves centering of one in a developmental process. This concerns the authoring of a story, on the one hand, and the story's being invented by and through the language of one's medium – Pyyhtinen's suggestion, above, of Knausgaard's 'adventure of language'.

## An Example of the Author's Autofiction in Practice

"What glove is to perception, hand is to consciousness," Morry mumbled, as he turned his mind to a new drawing idea and donned older age for the purpose." This was and would increasingly be a question of observing perception in and through observational drawing. "Is it possible," Morry would ask himself, "to isolate, articulate, or even just to point to perception as itself driver and motivator of observation?"

"It's all about in-betweenness, with him," Morry attempted to suture, "the gap or anomaly that constitutes the subjective in the midst of intentionality; to draw, and whatever are one's assumed objective interests. Of course, the author appreciates that one can never be completely objective, but it's the fact that he tips in his own mind towards an altogether subjective kind of reality that he feels is often in opposition to what he tries to do."

"And? That still doesn't answer why *you* have to be the agent of the work," the interlocutor queried, a friend of Morry coincidentally called Friend.

"Well, if he goes in there with his own self – this is his idea – he also seeks to observe himself in action, and he feels he can do this better through the surrogate of me. I'm the *other*, insofar as the self is comprised of self and other, each aspect of oneself looking at the other. I'm the part of the ratio that looks back, in a sense, from the advantage of apparent externality."

"So if you're the mirror, what's the theory?"

"It's hackneyed by now, with the author: the *Lacan* fixation, but in itself fascinating; that the aspect of ourselves that we call identity is comprised of the merger of bodily and felt awareness, even before the acquisition of language, with recognition of the other of us, our image in the mirror, which is both *of* us and in significant respects separated. Yet we tend to project into that image the expectations that were foisted on us by whomever were significant to our young lives, pre-linguistic. It's available. It's there in Lacan's early paper 'The Mirror Stage'." (Lacan, 2006: 75-81)

"You've aged with him?"

"Physiologically, yes, but in his imagination I'm forever the guy who works on a market stall by day, swims seriously several times a week and is adventurous with my personal life. Actually, all of that's been true. I just fit the bill, when the bill can be quite varied. According to the Lacanian psychoanalyst Roberto Harari, whose work I've been reading, the human as his own subject can be – one might even say inevitably *is* – different to how he appears to himself, and this is in the context of the scopic drive, the instinctual conditions that underpin vision. (Harari, 2004: 119) Okay, the latter is more graspable, since we tend to assume that we cannot really see ourselves for who and/or what we are. But it's something almost necessarily obfuscated that's projected back and forth between the components of self and other in oneself, which causes feelings of alienation that are paradoxically *integral* with oneself. I'm being less than emphatic, whereas in Lacanian theory this kind of thing *is* emphatic. The weakness in the theory may be that unless one gets involved in analysis it more or less remains just that: theory. We can play with its concepts, of course, which is what the author's doing. I'm part of a game that involves drawing, and writing about drawing."

"I can kind of see it though. There's him, and the motif that looks back, with you in the middle cajoling between both ends of a relationship. What was it you suggested? Between perception and observation?"

"Yes, I'm a homunculus that wavers between the observer and the observed and threads possibilities of what there can be within the perception other than cognitive and sensory-motor activity; the psychical in the embodied."

"Here's the drawing, you see?" Morry called up an image and handed his phone to Friend. "Now with this it's important, I think, that it's the second drawing in a proposed series." (Figure 1)



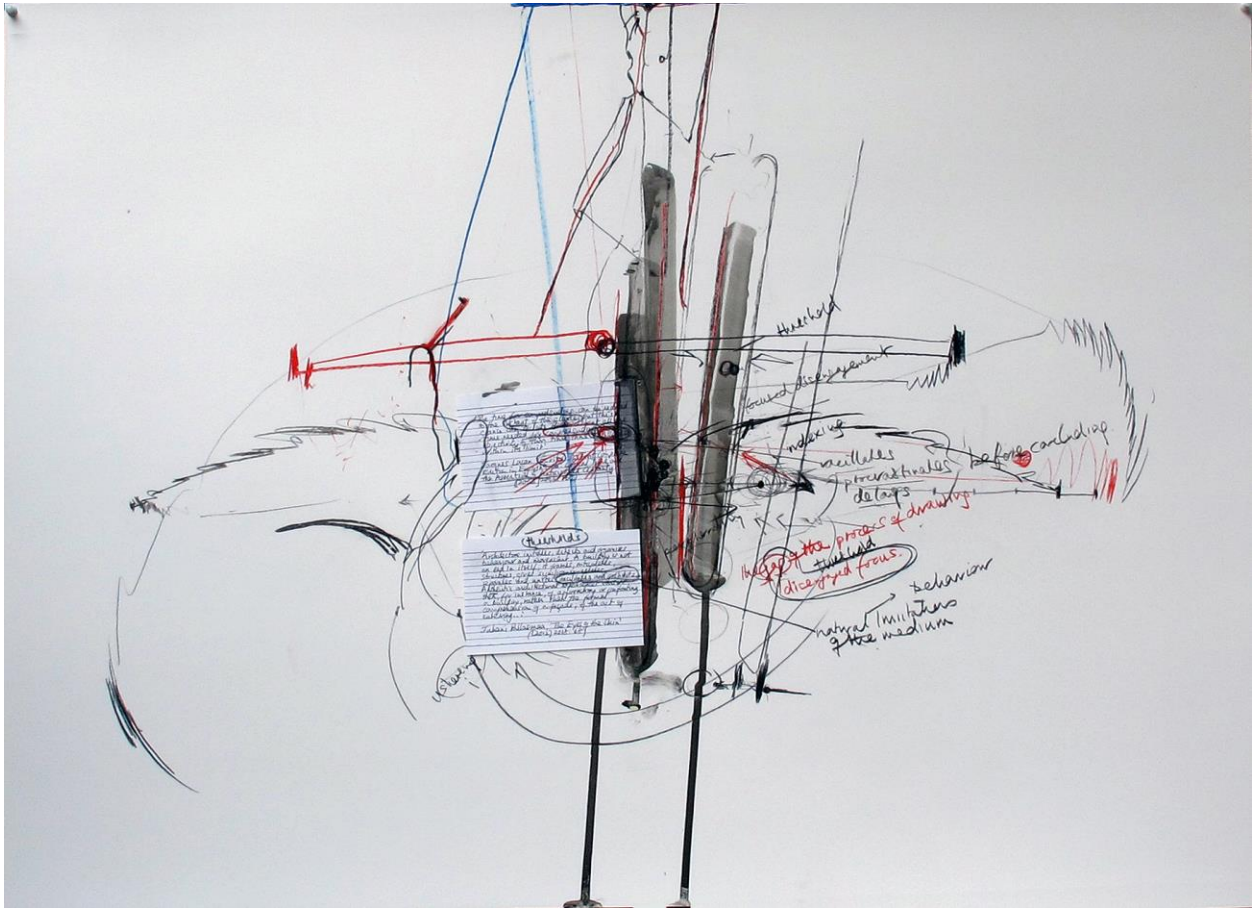


FIGURE 1: OBSERVATION OF PERCEPTION, FINISHED DRAWING. DERMATOGRAPH PENCILS, BLACK INK AND ATTACHED FILING-CARDS ON WHITE LAMINATED CARDBOARD, 109x79cm. ATTRIBUTED TO MORRY, 2019

“Why’s that important?”

“Well, because by then I had ideas of how to do it based on the first drawing’s trial and error basis – conditions not completely unknown to me, but much less so. I didn’t know before the first drawing what I’d see of an action camera that I wore in front of my eyes that was recording video, but of course it, no less than any other of my drawings lately, is comprised of a range of the marks and gestures familiar to me, that I know tend to repeat and cluster as abstract motifs: it’s a method. The circular nodes, for example, some of which are just visible in reproduction, that stand for points of my eyes’ focus, and give me little islands of time when deciding what to do and where to go next. And the narrow bands of the action-cam itself, of course, that move as my head moves, offer directives in terms of a repeating band of diluted black ink. But much of this is also due to adaptation of known material characteristics. So it’s the reproduction, and the carrying over from the first drawing to this second one of elements and locations.”

“Sounds technical!”

“It’s the idea that there are elements that form associations with one another across different locations, which comes from a paper I’ve read on the adaptation of Boolean maps theory to reading visual patterns.” (Huang; Pashler, 2007: 609)

"But is pattern even a consideration? The drawing doesn't look like a pattern, at least not obviously, and its spatial implications also go against the idea. The drawing's *associations*, to use the term you've cited, don't stay flat to the plane."

"I know, but why this idea of elements and their locations might apply is that the drawing at this stage is only one-layer deep, done in a single session. Ignore the spatial suggestions, which are often in any case more pronounced in reproduction, when the actual work will be drawing your attention to its material surface. There are also Boolean 'don't care conditions' (Karnaugh, 1953: 595-6), which are component inputs entered on a Boolean table or diagram whose output is not important. Now aren't *they* a gift! A kind of disclaimer; that a consequence of looking for some sort of logic for what one does from another domain is to find a *nonsense* factor associated with such logic that then seems its most fitting aspect."

"And space and time? Are these not also important, and do they not also *map*, as it were?"

"Yes, and actually through aspects of the aesthetic that counter the patterns, this Boolean idea, where marks and shapes and material collage such as the filing cards overlap. The associations are multiple, but I bring them towards one another between left and right while drawing both working hands. They come in and out of space."

"So how about that as time? Do you imagine you're pulling associations in and out of duration?"

"Yes and no! There's time involved, of course, that frames the beginning and end of the drawing, but each of the associations kind of hold a sustained sense of their individual *present* while they're being developed. The quantum physicist Carlo Rovelli (2018: 75) writes about duration as stopping and starting – something about jumping like a kangaroo from value to value. I'd need to show you how the transcripts from the drawings look, since I make videos and record my observations about the drawing while drawing. (Figure 2, below) Apart from my awkward speech because my thoughts are flitting from their spoken formation and as visualization simultaneously, there are times when I do clearly pause, where I think I'm just lured into the drawing process as if into a vortex. In this respect it's very centralized, difficult to equate with the continuous *arrow* idea of duration. Only the videos really convey a sense of flow; in relation to which the two impulses of drawing and speaking kind of push and pull."

"An orchestration of movement, maybe?"

"Yes, I like that idea!"

"But what's important, it seems, is memory; the basis of what you do more or less in memory."



*Observation of Perception*, video screenshots, 00:01:41 - 00:06:17

Okay I'm look I'm I'm, I'm fixing at this, I'm fixing at this point actually I'm fixing at this point. . . which I can't see. It's behind this narrow band, but peripherally. . . I can see. . . what I'm doing, on the page I can see the circles that I'm drawing on the page. I can see my hand, and the pencil drawing the circles. . . but this is through, the, the white of the viewfinder. It's like the white of the viewfinder's an X-ray so I can see through it. This side-- Okay. I'm still looking at this point, this side. . . um, is, the, clear view of the, paper, and it's as though, my, my left eye, is looking around. . . around this, side of the action-cam, towards the, centre. . . This is convenient. I can say that-- I'm still looking at this point. All of this, work here is peripheral, to my, view. I can say that. . . I'm inclined to say that here I'm, ushering in. . . the space, of the drawing. . . and this is convenient. This idea of ushering is convenient because of my, left-eye dominance. . . Both eyes work perfectly well. Each eye works perfectly well, but my dominant eye, is my left eye. So, it's as though, um. . . it's as though the facility of my right eye, is. . . Again, I constantly reiterate, I'm looking at this point, roughly. If I move this way, the point has moved here. Peripherally, I can now see this. . . moving back to the centre. . . So, peripherality. . . to coin a, term, because I don't think this is in the dictionary. . . peripherality. . . can involve, a very narrow circumference of one's, vision. . . It's more than this, it's more than this, but, I can see this point. This point is. . . looking centrally at this, focusing on this, through, through the, dark band, of the action-cam. . . um, I can, see my left hand peripherally. I can see my right hand peripherally. I can can, continue to see, continue to see, continue to see, continue. I get the feeling that, probaly this, distance, is-- Ah. . . it would help if I, held the pencil up the right way! This distance is, a little bit shorter, I don't know. So I can see, I can see my hand and pencil, moving. I can draw them back in again. . . So pulling and pushing. . . with the medium. . . down to this. . . This is about the width of the band. . . I'm still looking at this point.

FIGURE 2: SCREENSHOTS OF TRANSCRIPT SECTION FROM OBSERVATION OF PERCEPTION — WITH READING GLASSES LATER SUPERIMPOSED, 38.44-MINS, 2019

"Memory is a basis, yes," Morry retained from Friend, "but from time to time within that remembered, adapted and developed process there are occasional flashes of creative insight. The quantum physicist David Bohm suggests that sudden insight is actually the only kind of thought that's not based on memory. (Bohm, 2004: 54) Bohm also reckons that such flashes are the working of direct perception. (ibid: 65). I need this, you see! I need to know that perception can work without memory being involved, even if only occasionally. I even imagine that sudden insight may frequently *drive* something like drawing." Morry hesitated for a moment: "An *embrocation*, I was going to say, of revelations, but that's wrong; that's a body thing, isn't it, a balm!"

"Nice though: drawing as a meditative act that's as good for the body as the mind!"



The next drawing concerned the same material elements: cardboard, Dermatograph pencils and ink, but without the recording media and where the observed motif was the inside of his orange framed glasses. (Figure 3)



FIGURE 3: GLASSES DRAWING. DERMATOGRAPH PENCILS, COLOURED INKS AND BLACK INK ON WHITE LAMINATED CARDBOARD. 109x79CM. ATTRIBUTED TO MORRY, 2019

Morry attempted to explain the aforementioned question of an in-between plane in his own terms to Friend.

“Regarding this idea of projecting one’s being somewhat outside and in front of one, consider the open-sided enclosure of the coffee shop in which we’re at present sitting, for example, where we imagine the beams and lintels as divider, as a kind of transparent skin that separates inside from out.”

“Yes, but you’d need to demonstrate this in terms of drawing,” replied Friend. “It’s like you’re suggesting a plan. What you’re saying is interesting, but it’s a hypothesis that really does on this occasion need to be either tested or constructed. Of the latter option, the hypothesis might not so much prove wrong as alter according to its own practical feasibility when tested. Back to the question of practice-based research, I suppose.”

“Well, look at this latest drawing, of my glasses.” Morry again called up the image and offered his phone. “In terms of demonstration, see the space that’s physically opened up if I range my glasses at a distance in front of, but facing towards, the image.” He held the phone in such a position that Friend could also see, with his glasses ranged in front of it, indicating the physical distance in between. (Figure 4)



FIGURE 4: TWO PHOTOS OF GLASSES SUSPENDED IN FRONT OF THE DRAWING IN WHICH THEY ARE REFERENCED, SHOWING THE SPACE INCURRED BETWEEN DRAWING AND GLASSES IN ORDER THAT THE DRAWING SHOULD APPEAR THE SAME SIZE AS THE IMAGE. VARIABLE DIMENSIONS, PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR, 2019

“So this physical distance in here is also the space of imaginative possibility,” Friend ventured, while pointing between the phone and the glasses.

“Exactly. In there is the space of fantasy, even if we don’t illustrate it as such. I see it as a psychical in-between. Lacan talks about the ratio of need expressed by the infant, interpreted as demand by the mother, opening the space of desire, and refers to desire’s early foundation as ‘passions for being’. (Lacan, 2006: 524) It’s not that I expect anything material to go into that space, even though it kind of invites the question. Paradoxically, such a space both opens the possibility of desire being expressed and entails that any overt expression of it need not be necessary, even if it were possible.”

“Suggesting that in the psychoanalytical context covert eye saccades are underplayed in vision due to defensiveness, whereas in fact it does go on; like the voyeur obtaining secret pleasure from surreptitious looking,” added Friend.

“Exactly! I like that idea; that the immaterial but imagined plane between perception and observation opens a non-visible space in which the visible of desire – whatever that may be and entail – is cited in non-visible, therefore still hidden terms. We’re getting somewhere! Between us, we’ve moved to a possibility that the Alberti net, or in the famous Durer woodcut what looks like a wire gridded frame, is also like a plane of being. (Gombrich, 1977: 244) Or better still, the plane of Lacanian unknown knowledge of the unconscious.

“Does that guy never go away?”

“Not from me! It’s the conceptualization that he offers. The insistence that nothing is quite ever as it seems, as in his derivation of Descartes’ *I think; I am*’, where in his Seminar XVII he says of the psychical split in the subject, I’ve heard it roughly paraphrased: ‘I think where I’m not, and I’m not where I think’.”

Lacan in *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: ‘If “where he is not, he is thinking,” and if “where he is not thinking he is,” it is indeed because he is in both places’ ((Larvel Subjects, 5.02.2007))

“Still, it’s the question maybe not so much of how you feel or illustrate it as how you *know* it, if it’s effectively unknown knowledge.”

“This is why I’m deflecting things onto the question of perception itself, and write Lacan into my theoretical repertoire, as is likely in response to such a question. There’s something I’ve been reading by a certain Pecher and other authors concerning sensory-motor awareness, where Pecher cites theory that meaning is grounded through a combination of sensory-motor activity and language processing....



(Pecher, Boot, Van Dantzig, 2011: 16, citing Andrews, Vigliocco and Vinsen (2009))

I need this; that language is within the fray, because Lacan's take on language is that it cannot be simply transparent due to its obfuscation by the unconscious. It's almost a matter of belief. (Soler, 2014: 40) Either you believe in the psychodynamic unconscious in the formative Freudian dynamic sense, from which Lacan's work is derived, or you don't. If you don't, the argument, anyway, from a psychoanalytical perspective is that this is likely due to one's internal defensiveness!"

"So you write, and build in the idea of an interfering unconscious that manifests through language?"

"Yes, where your metaphor of building counts for the visual-material manifestation, with the latter taken as a type of language. Language is therefore doubly and hence more strongly represented."

"I think I'd still like you to have a go at explaining what might be there in the middle of the space. I dare you!"

"I will. Let's first see how much nearer we can debate our way towards it." Morry scrolled further through his photos. "Here's this one; the glasses image observed and drawn a second time onto the action-cam drawing." (Figure 5)



FIGURE 5: OBSERVATION OF PERCEPTION, FINISHED DRAWING, WITH A DRAWING OF GLASSES LATER SUPERIMPOSED. DERMATOGRAPH PENCILS, COLOURED INKS, BLACK INK AND ATTACHED FILING CARDS ON WHITE LAMINATED CARDBOARD, 109x79CM. ATTRIBUTED TO MORRY, 2019

“Ah, it looks spatial! I mean, there’s an interim space between the first drawing layer and the second, a receptacle.”

“It looks a bit painful to me, but enjoyably so!” Morry reflected, as if a detached observer.

“I get that,” Friend ventured, “the enjoyment of the intellect with its trials and tribulations eclipsing matters of the body, and I can see how desire is never quite achievable, at least in terms that abate its centre in and as yearning. I get it, really: at the core of it all is *void*, the empty space of the *Thing*, as Lacan calls it, that does pose an urgent and perplexing question of the sheer point of life when it orientates around a need for an unknown that one cannot find, search as one may. Whether that would really be *me* or not, I don’t know. I tend not to delve too closely.”

“But do you see how the idea can map with a medium such as drawing, which is a kind of visual-material language, and in terms of the opacity of language, lends itself rather well? Not even a *means* of working, just *working* with that which is inarticulate – let’s say one’s subjectivity – in developed and habitual procedures, and ever pushing towards new and experimental ones that key into intuition and sensibility.”

“I suppose you have it in this two-layer version of the drawing; a sense of *bowl* in the middle, as I see it, transparent like glass or something? It’s like a bowl mixing itself,” Friend ventured. (Figure 6)



FIGURE 6: GLASS BOWL, AND THE OBJECT DIGITALLY MONTAGED IN ITS SUGGESTED PLACE IN THE DRAWING. VARIABLE DIMENSIONS, PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, 2020

“Ha, I like that: a bowl mixing itself! Concerning Freud’s theory of the unconscious, Lacan suggests that in the psychoanalytical process the ‘true connections’ between sequences of forms existing in the mind is found somewhere other than in rational explanation. (2008: 58) Such connections *are* accessible – only through the spoken word, we can safely assume, with Lacan – and of course memory plays its part. Lacan likens memory to the relationship between perception and consciousness, and uses the metaphor of glove to hand. (ibid: 60-1). And then it’s with whatever the weight of experience is, or whatever’s signified between perception and consciousness – a ‘signifying structure’, I think he’d call it – that the unconscious interferes, or the Freudian ‘pleasure principle’.” (ibid: 61)

“And you’re strapped for time, which we can gamble will later become a word count. But you’ll be enjoying the gloves metaphor! Such items are not often experienced in this climate. It’s getting at the fit, the snugness, and yet always a difference that, if I hear you right, without an analytical interlocutor you cannot know.”

“And, since you mention experience, in the case of medical gloves that I use when finger-drawing with oil paint, there’s the sheer stickiness of sweat. Something that needs to be washed away afterwards, as though put back in place. Or even as the dirt of the medium on the hands, and then, when this idea is inversed, the dirt – perception – there on the page in relation to the hand of one’s consciousness, when the hand’s engagement with the page is therefore both perception *and* consciousness. The unconscious only cajoles with one from time to time. But if I understand this idea of the unconscious correctly, it manifests in the interstices, in the in-between not only of glove and hand but also language itself. I might say that it maintains its presence even in how one punctuates speech. I feel I notice this a lot when I transcribe my recordings of observations while drawing. The relationship of glove to hand in that case is the pulling in and out between drawing and speech, when one interrupts the other.”

“So in this case you’re saying that perception and consciousness interact in a way that isn’t always amicable? If it’s definitely a ‘Not’, then it’s even a state of ‘emergency’. Isn’t that how Lacan puts it? (ibid: 55) Although it’s interesting that in this noun there’s the suggestion of something like anxiety and revelation.”

“Nice! This could lead us to that whole question of the pleasure principle; the psychic mechanism as theorized by Freud that regulates the instinctual drives, specifically involving the curtailment of too much pleasure through its regulation by unpleasure.”

“Well, to cut a long the story short,” Friend again quipped, “what’s the principle of *your* pleasure? What’s there in the bowl, in a word, or is it simply the bowl that you’re chasing?” Friend responded.

“I love your economy, and your sarcasm’s not necessarily much off the mark either! *Goldfish* would be a word, or the availing of a fish with a drop of water. When I was a child my mother once told me a story of how she and her brother, as themselves small children, had bought a goldfish, but on the way home the bag that held it broke and the water poured out and the fish died. I’ve often wondered about that story; why she told it. Was there guilt involved, or some sort of moral? In any case, myself as a fish in a bowl, or simply the presence of its gold, might symbolize not only working hard, but being seen to work hard: to succeed. Would this have been it? My mother was telling me that I needed to stay the course, and to acknowledge that this was not only for me but also for her. Having water in the bowl to keep myself, as the fish, alive meant acknowledging the debt of gratitude to my mother, and to be myself for her. This both relates to the self and other dialectic, out of which comes self-identity, and the question of *jouissance*, in this case in the form of developing the mind, the type of enjoyment born out of infancy. – I like this idea too, that the birth of identity may start some time after physical birth. – The suffering part of this particular subject of enjoyment is in the sheer difficulty of learning; as felt, anyway!”

“Sounds good, but of course, it’s not always going to be the fish! The bowl just appears by association, and this has led you to the reminiscence. As I understand it, what Lacan is saying about the Thing is that whatever’s thought or felt to be, it will never be *it*; that *it* forever eludes because it was not there in the first place. I don’t mean that there was never an original desire – I don’t mean *source* of desire; I mean desire, itself. But the starting point is from this pleasure-principled game of loss of a pretend object, surrogate for the deeply significant, and its retrieval?”



“Yes, I’d go along with that. It is a psychic game, and in that sense there’s an uncontrollable imperative behind it, but its start from some point further forward from its origin splits it off from the selfsame origin; the *no-no* basis of the ‘emergency’.” (Friend’s reference to Lacan, above)

“Haha. It is something of an emergency: life’s propulsion along the lines of a negative. But then you’re saying that the pleasure principle is really the necessity for unpleasure, the paradoxical compulsion to limit one’s otherwise insatiable quest for pleasure.”

“We could settle for this; that whatever is there in the interim space is prompted by one’s individual founding memories, which substitute for the Thing but can never actually *be* the Thing. The interstitial space between perception and consciousness that results in a stasis, a lack of movement or progress, as of necessity. What I need to be careful of, however, is illustration. Whatever emerges should not be a representation. This idea of bowl has, I think, resulted from the closeness of affinity between you and I – at least here and now, as we know we don’t always get on. But I wouldn’t want to realize the bowl any more than it is. This is where Lacan is right; that the comprehension is best teased out of the situation through language. This conversation is therefore an important part of the process. The question of observation of perception cannot be handled by drawing alone.”

“There’s other stuff you need to work out though,” Friend added, “your relationship to the author; who the hell I am; how my knowledge happens to be so similar to yours, give or take a drawing or two; how we happen to be in a hot climate; your reliance on theory, while I’m less inclined to suck-up to it.”

“All matters for another time, maybe. Most importantly for what we *have* managed to say concerns the inscrutability of the Thing, which might as well be anything one wishes because it’ll never be precisely that which one presumes is out there somewhere in its own original terms, whatever they are, or ever were. But it’s a game, as mentioned already. The theory tells us that the Thing does not exist, that it’s in this sense nonsense but can at the same time seem there in a cogent sense, so we can court it at least hypothetically, which is proposed as existing in the interim space; in or simply as the bowl, as we’ve decided of the suggested motif of the drawing.” (Figure 6, above)

“So you and I are also such elements that make a hallucinatory show of discussion, ghost-like reflections on and from the inside of the void’s glass container.”

“Wow, I like that! I’ll leave you with those last words!”

## Developing Practice

The suggestion occurs several times in the article that drawing cannot convey the entire story; that language is necessary. This is of course a position adopted by visual artists who also use language, but it may also have a grain of truth even for drawing-based artists who approach their practice as research. Cocker, E., Damianisch, A., Seraphin, L., Daus, C. (2020) promote some seventy examples of contemporary visual artists who work with language on their practice-sharing website. The diversity of involvement indicates that autofiction writing is by no means the only way forward. There is mention of generative, art, experiential, speech-genre, prosody, autoethnography, saying-unsaying, performative, dissident, expanded, and more kinds of writing besides, in the context of visual-material practice.

It would also go without saying that language is the main interface of communication in creative education, if not for likely exceptions to the rule. There is, however, a paradox amidst my own

autofictional example. In that particular case not only is the genre of autofiction suggested as a means of bridging drawing practice and its elucidation through language, and as bridging a rift that may exist between practice and academic and/or self-knowledge, but it also discloses my reliance on theory in my drawing practice. However, the integration of theory with a mix of autobiography and fiction can be considered driven by a sense of enjoyment of academic study and the reflection it prompts, the form of *jouissance* in Lacanian terms that concerns pursuit of the intellect (Bailly, 2009: 124).

For the practitioner who does not feel such tension between practice and theory, the above demonstration of autofiction as a means of explaining the internal motivation of drawing in theoretical terms that are more built in, as it were, will probably be of little interest. However, for the practitioner who feels unease between the sense of projection of one's self-interest while at the same time the medium seems to do its own thing, this same ratio that in text Ricoeur (2008 72-85) terms and explains as 'distanciation' may be better seen at work in drawing. This more articulated phenomenon of literary text can be brought into contiguous creative relationship with the visual medium. Ricoeur (*ibid*: 84, citing Gadamer) refers to "the world of the work", and then states:

*[...] to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our infinite capacity for understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self [...]. (Ricoeur, *ibid*: 84)*

Is this not also the situation of oneself in front of one's drawing? This is basically the point of suggesting that autofiction may be of use to drawing practitioners. The above example of autofiction is particularized by my own needs in this respect, but the genre has sufficient ambiguity and structural open-endedness to enable a diversity of shaping.

How to start? One possibility might be to record speaking to oneself while drawing, then transcribe the results and reflect on what is said and how one feels. What this does is to bring the reflexive or pre-reflective basis of speech into line with the same principle as and within drawing, and if it is also referenced, situates theory; *within* drawing because there is the component of inherent autonomy of the medium, or what may be considered the medium's 'don't care conditions' (Karnaugh, cited above). This would also be an adaptation of Ricoeur's idea of being in front of the text, as though there is a degree of humility involved in the realization that one is not, after all, fully at the centre of one's concerns. Such a process also causes a degree of tension of interests between the paradoxical sense of focused loss into drawing that one experiences when fully involved, and the same of speaking when speech takes over. Cain (2006: 17, citing Varela) states: '[...] there is no role for the "self" of the drawer to be an independent entity because the connection erodes separate-ness'. Equally, while speaking may also feel like the vocalization of the drift of thought while drawing, there will surely be a greater degree of focus on the conditions of the drawing itself, in process, thereby increasing one's sense of involvement. Where autofiction might start to play a role is in terms of who, or what, one feels oneself to *be* in such eccentric circumstances. In my own autofiction example, I speak of a tendency to displace myself onto the third-person when wearing a glove to draw in oil paint. That character is also dehumanized, by being equated with the glove only. In the narrative, the main character Morry is dehumanized by his own admission of feeling like a 'homunculus' at his referenced 'author's' behest. However, such metaphors in respect of the phenomenon of the *other* in personal and cultural terms are not necessarily as disparaging as they suggest. It would not be unreasonable, for example, to admit that one's interest in the core subject, drawing, is being overtaken by the more academic component of artistic research. If the latter is in any

sense true, then to discover a subjective component to and in the ostensibly academic medium of written research, which brings it more into line with the reflexivity of one's practice, the two mediums may oscillate more enjoyably in the practice-based researcher's experience. It may be argued that there will always be a gap of identification – an in-between or interstitial – the quest of which is to try to bridge, but perhaps one can play with ideas of its resolution through the dispersive as much as consolidating impulse.

## Conclusion

In browsing Cocker, E., et al (referenced above) for artists, if not drawing-based artists, who use language, I discovered the work of Sepideh Karami (2020), which is concerned with politics, decolonization and dissidence. Karami's complex work *The House, The Wings, The Balcony, The Dissidents* includes a short piece of writing called 'Messy Drawings'. The section references a 'plan' – one learns that this is a plan drawn from memory of a now-demolished house – but 'The plan doesn't go into the details'. Due to what is explained as the dissidents' necessity of staying 'stealthy and in disguise', the plan is deliberately 'messy', with enough erasure to prevent others from redrawing it and therefore keeping '[...] the secret of the plan's feasibility' to the dissidents themselves. It might be argued that *dissidence*, while having specific meaning in Karami's work concerning the writing of a 'dissident architecture' that should be acknowledged, could also define the necessity or inevitability of ambiguity between the will towards understanding the self and its transmutation into one's medium of engagement as the subject. This idea would make best sense with regard to specific feelings, motivations and expressions within and of oneself that challenge or run counter to the status quo, however the latter may be defined. It is in any case not unusual for matters of the personal to become politicized in cultures.

Karami's dissidents' plan that embodies the secret of its feasibility could be considered a particular instance, in a sense, of the consequence of drawing, or drawing and writing, where, returning to Gibbons's reference to the 'metamodern affect', the medium both fictionalizes one's affective identification with it and achieves a new relationship with 'external reality' of which one is only oneself aware. Insofar as a drawing, therefore, reads as plan – or pattern, as suggested of the drawings in my autofiction example – while its conceptual basis may be hidden or challenging to the viewer, one's involvement in it remains alive in its arrested movement of becoming. In this sense, perception might be more apparent in action in experientially process-based drawings than their conceptual basis, just as a defaced, or, as in Karami's example, partly erased plan might still convey the visual sense of *plan* while being unreadable.

There is perhaps a certain similarity between dissidence, therefore, and Ricoeur's 'distanciation', defined as understanding oneself in front of the text. I have adapted Ricoeur's theory in the article to the sense of being *in front of one's own work*, in particular, for how it calls to question the presumption of directness of relationship between self and work. This suggests some similarity between distanciation and the challenge presented, to the writer, of their own autofiction. However, the provocation to the article's argument by the work of Karami while I was searching for something in its support has provided me with an example-in-practice of distanciation in front of another's writing; it has caused some alteration to my thinking. The idea of dissidence obtained from Karami's work, albeit in more general terms, suggests a role of autofiction in line with how I have myself used the genre. The conclusion is that autofiction may be considered dissident in terms of a sense of willful disguising, due to its oscillation

between transparency of self-involvement and obfuscation. By extension, the application of autofictional writing to the analysis of one's own drawing may also tease out of the latter an impulse to disguise. In my own case, the question orientates around the imaginative dimension of perception. When such writing comes together with drawing, one's involvement with drawing as an experiential process – whether research-based, directed by theory or whatever else – can be better articulated and understood, while one's sheer autobiographical presence in the drawing remains under partial erasure.

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