



# TRACEY

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## Drawing||Phenomenology: tracing lived experience through drawing 2019

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### DRAWING IDEAS SOCIETY

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This article explores the possible relationship between drawing and contemporary art practice in the shift of art into public life. In this shift artists have invented ways of working that situate their work socially, economically and aesthetically in new configurations. How might we rethink drawing as opening up to society? What might drawing reveal about ideas in society? What might drawing become? The article focuses on a drawing research experiment (2017/19) as part of an accumulation of experimentation that seeks to rethink drawing as an activity that can be shared by more than one person within different experiences of community. Jean Luc Nancy's 2013 text *The Pleasure of Drawing* opens up insights into what drawing means as a practice within social experience and what drawing in turn reveals about what we imagine society to be.

## Introduction

We currently live in a society in which the arts are increasingly opening up to issues and content normally considered outside of art, to ecological and social issues such as identity, social justice, health and biodiversity. In this opening the social function of art has shifted from that of representing the world by creating objects of contemplation, to participating, contributing alongside others, melding with the world rather than reordering it from an objective distance. This has brought about a movement away from instituted ways of working as an artist that are purely dependent upon the concert hall, gallery and museum and their associated economies and forms of practice. Although these institutions continue to have an important function, it is in relation to a movement of contemporary art practices into public life and *its* processes. Artists have invented new ways of working as part of this change. These reconfigure traditional skills, techniques and public/private forms of dissemination and engagement creating new poetics of practice that situate the work conceptually as well as materially, aesthetically and economically in the world.

The opening up of the arts to public life stems from a growing dissatisfaction from the mid twentieth century onwards with the widening gap between artist and their audiences. Herbert Read (1967, pp. 13-14), writing in the mid twentieth century, described this as a form of alienation between the individual and society that had emerged with industrialization. While it might be tempting to see the root cause as economic, in capitalism and its current development in neoliberalism, Read attributed alienation to the separation between human beings and nature that was an unforeseen consequence of industrialization. This had brought with it a separation between artist, artwork and viewer in modernism that had not been the case in pre-industrial civilizations (Read 1967, pp.13-14). Artists such as John Cage (1912-1992) and Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century developed experimental processes that specifically addressed the gap that Read highlighted, in their case as a counterpoint to the increased commodification of the arts. Claire Bishop, the critical theorist and Grant Kester, the art historian, have traced the emergence of participatory forms of art practice to an avant-garde tradition and the increasing desire on behalf of artists to reconnect critically with larger economic and political issues and structures, uncovering possible alternatives to current ways of living and their systems of value (Douglas 2018).

What of drawing? What might it become in response to this shift in the social function of the arts? What might drawing reveal about what we understand society to be? What is 'idea' to drawing?

As a practicing artist and researcher, drawing has always been an important part of the way I think and explore the world. For a number of years I have been involved in researching the changing relationship of art to public life through doctoral and postdoctoral research that is predominantly practice-led and experimental (Douglas, 2016; Douglas and Gulari, 2015). Drawing is dynamically positioned in this research between a personal, quite intimate activity of exploration and the social, relational and verbally discursive practice that public art has become. As such drawing jostles for a relevant place and function as a practice and a research approach in relation to emergent forms of art in public life.

In this article I refer to a number of drawing experiments. Many of these have been part of other funded research. These experiments have a number of characteristics that are relatively unusual in comparison to mainstream drawing practices. First, all of the experiments are participatory activities, sometimes shared between several individuals, sometimes two or three. Some involve the use of scores or instructions as a means of sharing the space of an experience, influenced by the work of Allan Kaprow,

the American artist and theorist. Kaprow used score poems to rethink the relationship of art to life as a shared experience (Kelley, 2004). Another method is copying the work of more established artists. Taken as a whole this body of experimentation brings drawing in relation to the shift of art into public life. (Of less importance is what each experiment generates in itself). These experiments create spaces of different kinds as experiences of community in which singularity is an important element, in contrast perhaps to the more familiar idea of drawing as a lone activity between artist and their material production. The asterisks indicate the experiments that I reference in detail in the article.

- *Calendar Variations* 2011, the Barn Banchory in collaboration with Georgina Barney, Chu Chu Yuan, Chris Fremantle, Reiko Goto-Collins, Fiona Hope, Jono Hope, and Janet McEwan (Coessens and Douglas, 2011)
- *Sounding Drawing* 2012, AHRC funded *Time of the Clock, Time of Encounter* research PI Johan Siebers 2012-13 in collaboration with the Orpheus Institute of Research in Music, Ghent (Douglas and Gulari, 2015; <https://ontheedgeresearch.org/sounding-drawing/>)
- *Sipping Water* 2013 in collaboration with Amanda Ravetz, Manchester Metropolitan University and Kathleen Coessens, Brussels Conservatoire (Douglas and Coessens, 2013)
- \* *Why drawing, now?* In collaboration with Amanda Ravetz, Kate Genever and Johan Siebers, AHRC funded Connected Communities research investigating the legacy of artists within 'Connected Communities' research (PI Pahl, 2014-5) (Douglas et al., 2014)
- \* *Drawing out the white* 2017 in collaboration with Nicola Chambury, Marc Higgins and Paulo Maccagno, ERC-funded *Knowing from the Inside* advanced grant into experiential ways of knowing across anthropology, art, design and architecture (P.I. Ingold, 2013-18)
- \* *Finding something small* 2017 in collaboration with Chris Fremantle
- *Copying Klee* 2018, a second project funded by the ERC-funded *Knowing from the Inside* (2013-18)

This list functions to provide a context for an ongoing set of research questions. However, I will start in the middle with *Why Drawing Now?* (Douglas et al., 2014) as an example of an experiment in more detail and therefore not move from project to project. Then I will discuss the new experiment, *Finding something small* 2017. Underpinning all the work is the question: If drawing is fundamental to the practice of art, then how does it relate to contemporary art practice and its emergent relation to public life?

## Why Drawing Now? (2014)

In *Why drawing, now?* Ravetz, Genever and I undertook a series of drawing experiments as artists and researchers. We explored drawing as a material process of mark making, consciously withholding any sense of an end product or outcome. We set out to understand what drawing might be beyond an individually centred experience, in particular how drawing might help us understand a possible interplay between individuality and community.

By sharing drawing activities of different kinds over a time limited to three days, and reflecting on these with the philosopher, Johan Siebers, we came to understand through this particular experiment that drawing is profoundly entangled with us and the material world of surfaces, implements, techniques and skill. This entanglement becomes visible through the dots, lines and planes that trace our interactions.

A way to imagine the implications of this approach as a social, cultural experience is perhaps through Deleuze and Guattari's description of improvisation manifest through the refrain and its function in society. They explore this function through three scenarios that are all part of the same phenomenon. In the first the child copes with the dark by means of a song whose rhythm counters the black hole of chaos. In the second we are at home. But home does not pre-exist. It needs to be created by drawing a circle around a fragile centre in which the forces of chaos are contained as much as possible. The third aspect of the refrain is the opening back out into the world from a different point in the circle where old forces press against it i.e in another place that allows for a small degree of control (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002, pp. 310-11).

In our experiment we effectively contained (but by no means controlled) the chaos of everyday life within a temporary space. In this way we created the conditions within which to take risks and move beyond our individual comfort zones, before opening back into everyday life. As three artists working together collaboratively, we encountered an additional element– the need to discuss and agree a set of parameters within which we would work. The time and space afforded by this experiment created a world in formation, a world that could not have been anticipated. It was an experience of community between initially three, then four people working together. Community was immanent, its presence rendered visible through the lines and marks that literally traced our collaborative effort, including reflective writing.

The contribution this phase of work has made to the relationship of art, ideas and society was to rethink a common belief that community can be constructed. This assumption is rehearsed by governments, for example, as they increasingly reduce public funding, putting pressure on citizens to make good the gap in public resources. Nancy argues that community is a state of being. It can neither be constructed nor escaped. Human existence is dependent upon social relationships. Community is an aspect of life itself (Nancy, 1991). In our small experiment we experienced community in this, Nancy's sense, as immanent between three people exploring the materiality of drawing (Douglas et al., 2014).

## Finding Something Small (2017/19)

This current article takes a different trajectory underpinned by the same concerns developed through a different quality of experimentation. The underpinning research continues to address how and what we know through the arts, including how the practice of art, in this case drawing, reveals the tropes through which we imagine society. This new work is written as a letter to the author, "C", of an experimental score (Figure 1). The author is a close friend with whom I have collaborated on thinking and writing for many years. Unlike the first experiment, the process did not consciously set out as a research experiment. It began as a generous gesture on behalf of one friend helping another to address a creative block.

The score created a set of constraints that I needed to attend to each day by drawing, alternating between the space of home and the outdoors. The account that followed the drawing is written from a first person perspective. I found myself handling the writing as a generative process that parallels the drawing. The resulting letter is therefore not an analysis of the drawing experiment (as had been the function of writing in *Why drawing, now?*) but a creative, open-ended and exploratory process in its own right. I have taken my time, listened carefully to the way I responded to each day's instruction and tried to communicate the sense of this experience through the correspondence with "C". I explore selectively

where the score took me within a process of reflection. As such both drawing and writing as a response to something given, simultaneously undertake a 'research' and a 'creative' function, sensitising me to insights that I had not previously recognised.

The second part of the letter deepens the experience by creating a context through Jean Luc Nancy among others, in particular Nancy's short series of essays "The Pleasure of Drawing" (2013).

I conclude by recounting a recent conversation in which "C" has helped me to see the body of work as an accumulation that all along had addressed the question of drawing and the social turn in the arts. I came to realise that each experiment had constructed and continues to construct spaces and experiences in which community and singularity come together, co-constituting social experience but without undermining difference. In fact difference comes to the foreground as an important way of experiencing community as lived, as felt.

*Finding something small* 2017 is a collaboration in this case between just two individuals, the author and a friend with whom I correspond and who has shared the research journey into art in public life. There are a number of stages to the dialogue of *Finding something small*; the framing of a different kind of experience in the form of a score that is gifted, the response in drawing and the reflection that is offered back. It is perhaps unusual to imagine this experiment as a participatory and social experience when it appears to narrate the experience of only one correspondent.

It is important to acknowledge that the dialogue has continued since 2017 when the first version of this article was written and so this article becomes a moment in time of a more extended, reciprocal process. It is also important to note how we have worked, corresponding through email, text and image i.e. practices of communication that are integrated into our social, political and economic order. In this way "C" and I are acting in a world as bodies created by discourses that already exist, to which we join. We become involved as individuals that are shaped by such discourses while also shaping them. In so doing we enact a social relationship in which "I" does not stand outside, but within the social and cultural. In this sense both projects *Why Drawing Now?* (2014) and *Finding something small* (2017/19) question the tendency to separate the private and public into different spheres and instead seek the private within the public, acknowledging the one as co-constituting the other.

Dear Anne:

## The Score

- Day 1 Find something small and man-made in the street and draw it.  
Make a noise with the piano that 'represents' it.
- Day 2 Find something small and natural in the street and draw it.  
Make a noise with the piano that 'represents' it.
- Day 3 Find something large and man-made in the street and draw it.  
Make a noise with the piano that 'represents' it.
- Day 4 Find something large and natural in the street and draw it.  
Make a noise with the piano that 'represents' it.
- Day 5 Hear something man-made in the street and draw it.  
Imitate the noise with the piano.
- Day 6 Hear something natural in the street and draw it.  
Imitate the noise with the piano.
- Day 7 Rest
- Day 8 Start again

FIGURE 1 THE SCORE 2017

Dear C

Many thanks for the score. It is wonderful, thought provoking, reminiscent of the 1970s *Calendar* score of Allan Kaprow (2003, p.120) that we worked with as a research group back in 2011 and that you are still working with. I wanted to take the opportunity to write to you about how I have gone about interpreting this new score through drawing and the kinds of thoughts and associations it has provoked along the way. I suspect there will be many deviations, developing a narrative that is more drawing-like in the way I understand drawing as an open-ended process, rather than one of resolved thought. I wanted to lead with this recent drawing experience as a way into drawing and phenomenology.

I have taken the liberty to interpret some elements in this new score. For example, 'noise' has become 'sound'. I understand 'sound' to be anything that we hear i.e. a wider category of things than 'noise'. I understand 'noise' to mean a sound that is not particularly pleasant. I know you understand these terms differently. Your 'noise' is my 'sound'.

Also sound (in my meaning) gives me more scope. I am finding this element by far the most difficult aspect of your proposal and have frankly made very few real attempts to create sound though I intend to do so. The suggestion to "make a noise with the piano" that represents what I have drawn is a complex task as sound is immanent, it surrounds us and cannot represent anything other than itself. Nonetheless I want to acknowledge how sound is influential in what I have been developing visually.

On Day 5 for example, the instruction is as follows

*Hear something man-made in the street and draw it*

*Imitate the noise with the piano*

I heard the *whoosh* of a car passing, or rather a number of cars passing at chance intervals. Through this sound and its stochastic rhythm I became intensely aware of how the infrastructure of the street and car is man-made and formally consistent but the quality of sound of each vehicle is distinctive and subject to chance. I tried to reproduce the *whoosh (fading)*, with various drawing materials – thick charcoal, pencil, black conté and a sheet of paper. My response felt a bit literal (Figure 2).

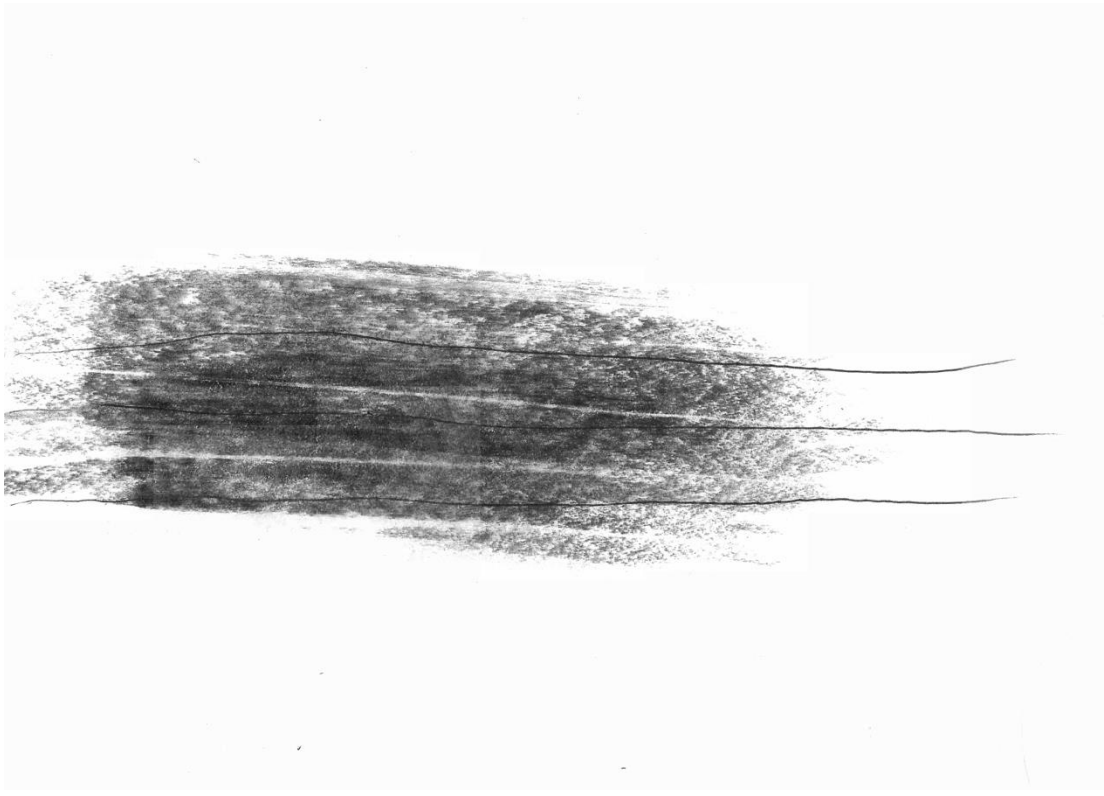


FIGURE 2 DAY 5: A CAR PASSING 2017

The frustration of literalness led me to relook at the work of Tom Marioni (b. 1937) and the book that you lent me entitled *Beer, Art and Philosophy* 2003. Marioni has followed the trace of a movement in a similar way to my response to the passing vehicle in a number of works, but with an additional element. Drawing is an important part of Marioni's conceptual approach. His *Violin Bird* (1972) for example is a sound experiment that results in a visual trace. He describes this piece as follows

*...rubbing and beating against large sheets of sandpaper with steel wire brushes like jazz drummers use. The action is repetitive and makes a rhythmic, rasping sound. As I drum over a long period of time, steel from the brushes is transferred to the paper to make a drawing that reminds some people of the shadow of a bird flying – a pictorial record of the sound activity (Marioni 2003, pp.123-4)*

Copying Marioni's drawings exposed the gap between his approach and my own. The happenstance element of *Violin Bird*, of capturing a moment in which physical materials come into contact with each other, creates something new and unforeseen in this piece. It transports us to a place where we see two previously unrelated things in terms of each other, 'bird' in terms of 'violin', drumming in terms of flight and so on. My copy does not achieve this third unrelated element. In this sense it is literal i.e. neither conceptual nor metaphorical.

What do we mean by 'conceptual' in art? And is this the same thing as 'idea' in society? The Tate Gallery website conflate 'idea' and 'concept' and suggest that it is the idea behind the work of conceptual art that is more important than the finished art object. This is somehow resonant of Plato. Idea 'eidos' referred to 'form' or 'shape' in classical times and through Plato, this was deeply connected to experiences of fabrication. Ideas/forms/shapes were considered eternal, given to the human mind, not



created by it. The craftsman who makes a bed can only follow an idea of a bed or couch. It is the idea of bed or couch that guides his fabrication and this idea does not disappear but outlives his final object (Arendt 1998,pp.141-142).

*Violin Bird* emerges unexpectedly out of a process not of drawing directly but of creating rhythm by drumming. The drawing is a consequence of another action with a different purpose. The idea once born lives on and is repeatable in Plato's sense of the idea of table or couch, living as a repeatable form that we encounter from time to time. In fact different versions of the same process of fabrication have been produced over three decades within Marioni's own portfolio.

The Tate's definition of conceptual art also includes a quote from Sol LeWitt (1929- 2007), who increasingly used instructions that are more directive than the kinds of scores we have been working with to enable his work to be fabricated by individuals other than himself.

*In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.*

*LeWitt, S. 1967 in Tate 2018*

Far from handing over creative agency, LeWitt appears to me to reinforce the persona of the artist as sole author of the creative aspects of a work that can take form as instructions. These are realised by assistants rather than co-creators. His separation of fabrication and idea within a hierarchy of value does not appear to correspond with Marioni's sensibility. Marioni comes across an experience as a phenomenon, as something that he becomes conscious of through an experience. *Violin Bird* resulted from a chance encounter between drummer, drumming, steel brushes and a surface, one that Marioni makes last through its trace as a visual work. It is closer to John Cage's aleatory methods (in music and the visual arts) than Sol LeWitt's instructions.

Let me try to explain what I mean by this difference as it speaks to different understandings of intentionality i.e. how attention becomes directed in an experience. In the body of work *To quieten and sober the mind* (Brown, 2000) that Cage developed with Kathan Brown, Marioni's wife, in the late 70s at Crown Point Press, California, he (Cage) was able to resolve in the visual so many of the problems he had encountered in music in relation to chance methods, managing to counter the tendency of pure chance to overly constrain the creativity of the artist. Cage sought a quality of relationship between constraint and freedom in terms of determinacy and indeterminacy and increasingly brought others (performers, fine art printers) into the creative process. He understood that the artist/composer needed to become very aware of which aspects of the creative process he/she seeks to control or determine in a composition and what can be left indeterminate. Bach, as one of his examples reveals the impact of this kind of creative freedom. Bach rarely indicated in his scores the dynamics of a piece in terms of loud and soft, leaving the performer free to create his/her own dynamic, effectively to become a colourist and transform the sequence of notes of the score from one performance to another (Cage, 1973, p. 35). Is Cage creating the circumstances of happenstance where we come across something that is unforeseen and, in finding meaning, really notice it? Is this what we mean by an experience of phenomenology?

Even though Cage rejected improvisation as too concerned with taste, I have always found this work on determinacy/indeterminacy an important way to understand creativity in terms of improvisation i.e. as working with the contingencies (material, social and/or cultural) that life presents, while refusing to be

trapped by these. Cage appears to get deeply to the heart of what constitutes freedom in life as freedom within constraint.

I have always been predisposed towards drawing as improvisation. This is a concern with how to sustain a quality of life or experience in a drawing. The unexpected will always occur in the sheer materiality of a drawing process but how do we understand its value? How might we harness its energy going forward? Where is 'idea' situated in such a process of keeping something going, energised and alive?

*Drawing out the white* 2017 (Figure 3) was a collaboration with another artist (Nicola Chambury) and two anthropologists (Marc Higgins and Paulo Maccagno). This drawing predates the score you wrote in 2008 *Find something small*. The constraints in this collaborative piece (*Drawing out the white*) were severe and nonetheless very powerful in the direct and simple relationship between material and gesture. The thick paper, water, paint-brush and trace afford a mark that the camera reveals quite unexpectedly as an experience of tone. It was entirely dependent upon the happenstance of being in a room with particular directional light. We did not set out to achieve this result but it occurred in the process of immersing ourselves in the materials, listening and watching carefully to what was presenting itself at the time. We developed the short film to somehow savour the beauty and wonder of this moment.

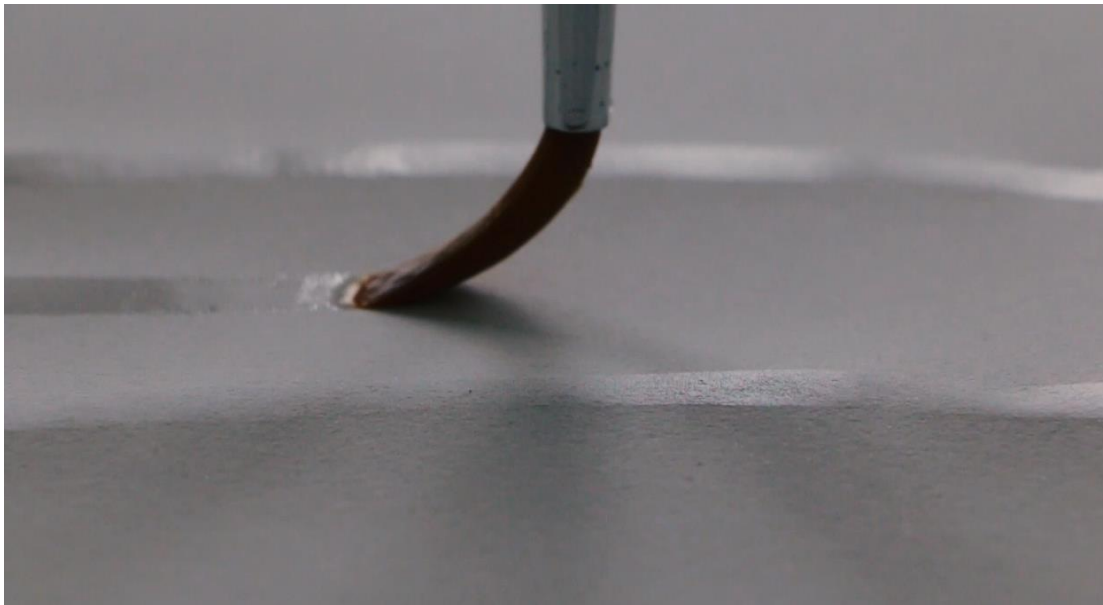


FIGURE 3 STILL FROM *DRAWING OUT THE WHITE* 2017. LINK TO VIDEO  
[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/USER12444840/REVIEW/302481876/D30F63FDDB](https://vimeo.com/user12444840/review/302481876/d30f63fdDB)

Where is 'idea' in this piece? It is not conceptual in Marioni's sense of transposing one experience into another, where a pictorial record of a sound activity makes possible a new sensory experience of the shadow of a bird flying. I am not sure what 'idea' means in *Drawing out the white*? Is it the formal experience of tonal modulation that directs our attention?

Let's return to your score, C...

Movement is powerful in this new score – the movement from day to day, and within each day of finding, drawing, making, hearing. 'Street' for me needs to include 'path'. That is because many of the routes I take from here are semi-rural. Street implies an urban, man-made thing, tarmacked, and under

(human) control. Wendell Berry, the writer and ecologist, talks of roads and paths as evidence of the different ways in which human beings intervene in nature:

*The difference between a path and a road is not only the obvious one. A path is little more than a habit that comes with knowledge of a place. It is a sort of ritual familiarity. As a form, it is a form of contact with a known landscape. It is not destructive. It is the perfect adaptation, through experience and familiarity, of movement to place; it obeys the natural contours; such obstacles as it meets, it goes around. (Berry 2002, p.12)*

Wendell Berry contrasts 'path' with 'road' that somehow works against and resists the land. Roads are worked through haste and try to avoid any contact or experience that might delay progress. Roads 'translate place into space in order to traverse it with the least effort' (ibid). They are destructive, seeking to remove or destroy all obstacles in its way.

*The primitive road advanced by the destruction of the forest; modern roads advance by the destruction of topography. (ibid)*

I like the notion that a path is a habit, a ritual, a thing created and re-created by repetition. Movement is essential to its coming into being. It is also virtuous, respectful and not destructive of its surroundings, in contrast to a road that resists, goes over, destroys. A path, in this sense, is a way to think about drawing, not just in the time-honored sense of Klee, of a line moving "freely and unbound... without a goal" (Klee, 2013,p. 9). Drawing is also a practice. It needs a degree of familiarity, a craft skill or technical knowledge. As a practice there is repetition and rhythm. At the same time, by drawing I am constantly looking for something new and unexpected to occur but the unexpected only becomes possible through repetition.

Repetition in this sense of path-finding, is key to creating something new each time through what is familiar. Perhaps that is why I tend to draw the same subject over and over again as if the sameness will somehow yield difference. A particular thing – subject- can act as a kind of constraint within which infinite variation might be possible? (Figure 4 a,b,c,)

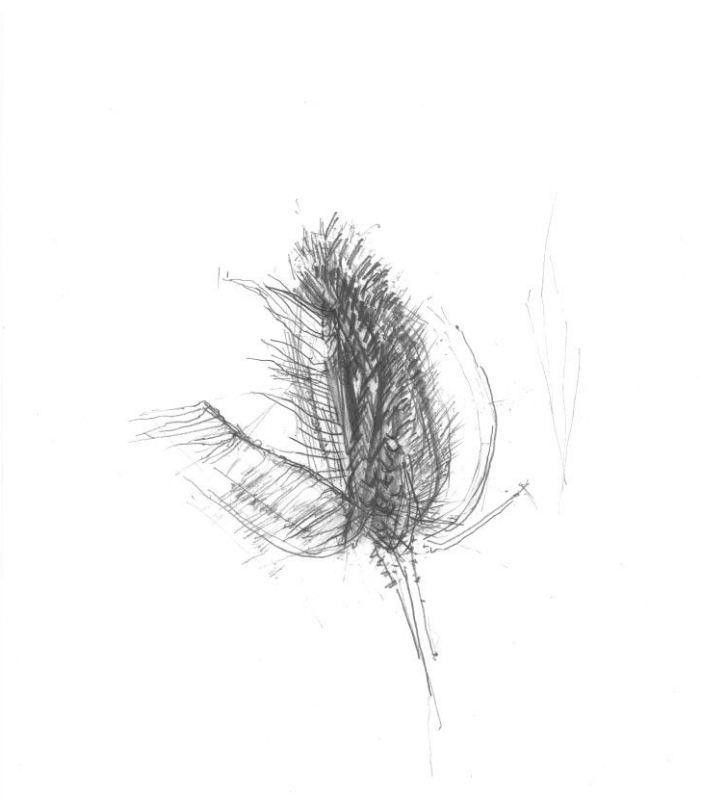


FIGURE 4 A,B,C. DAY 2 TEASEL DRAWINGS 2017/19

Going back to paths and roads, the score has made me curious about what differentiates 'man-made' from 'natural'. On Day 4 the score instructs as follows

*Find something large and natural in the street and draw it*

It happened to be Sunday. I found a forest at Scolty Woods, Banchory, Aberdeenshire and started to draw, understanding but not fully realising that it was a pine forest planted by the Forestry Commission and no doubt soon to be cropped. It is large but is it natural? It grows but in a highly controlled way. What interested me was the odd intrusion/subversion in which nature tries to take back control. Other tree species, a rowan or birch, kept appearing at the edges of the forest. A spindly tree creaked, protesting that its height had overreached what its girth could normally support in the force of upward growth in search of light. The tree was in danger of being forced over by a strong wind. In the forest nothing stops. Everything constantly changes in this confined, yet over determined space. Even the forest debris is recycled into new forms of energy (Figure 5).



FIGURE 5 DAY 4 FOREST AT SCOLTY, BANCHORY 2019

Day 8's instruction is the same as Day 1 as follows

*Find something small and man-made in the street and draw it*

I glanced at various urban drain covers, thinking about pattern in something that is highly functional, wondering if pattern in this instance was significant or merely decorative. I thought of them at first as a kind of willful excess and then thought of pattern as a very important way in which we read and make sense of the world, then realized that the drain covers needed to communicate a lot of information and physicality, not least preventing us as pedestrians from slipping (Figure 6 a,b,c).

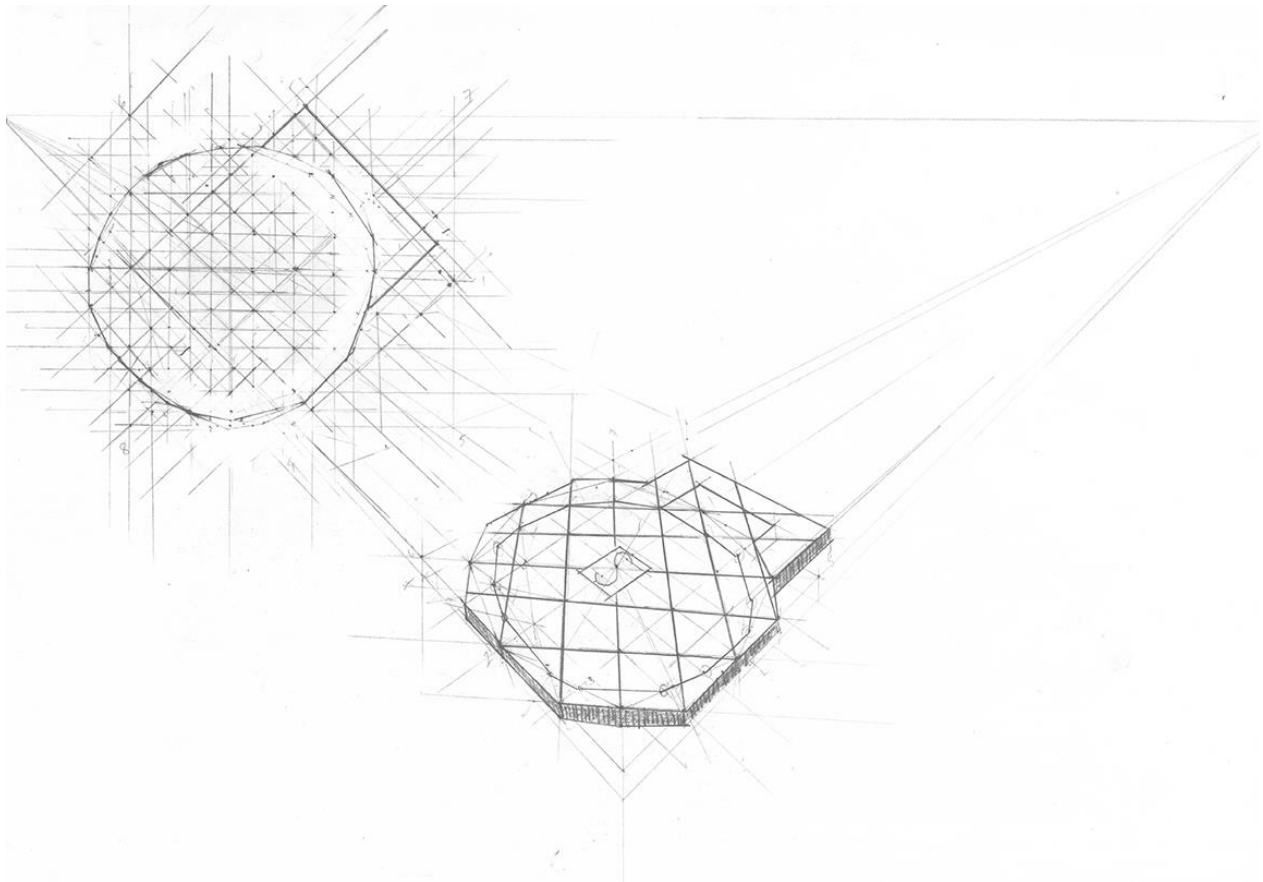


FIGURE 6A DAY 8 DRAIN COVER 2019

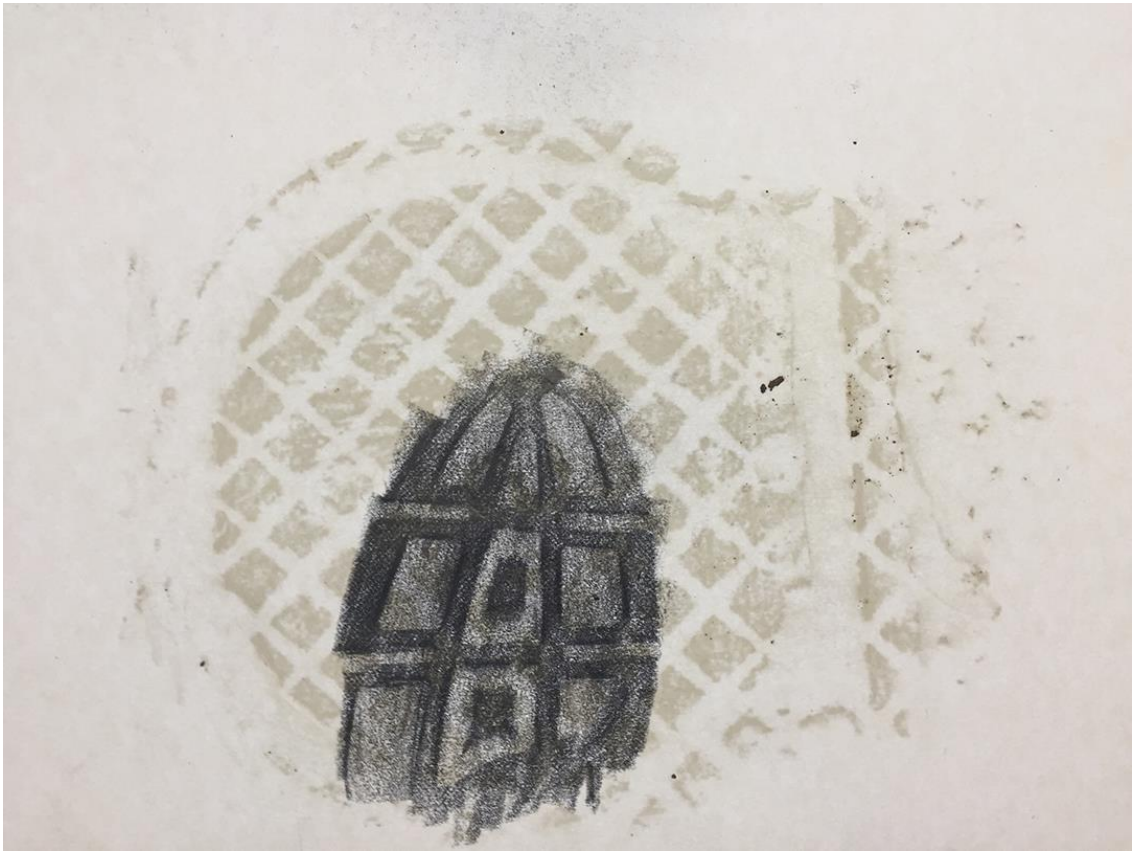


FIGURE 6 B & C DAY 8 DRAIN COVER 2017

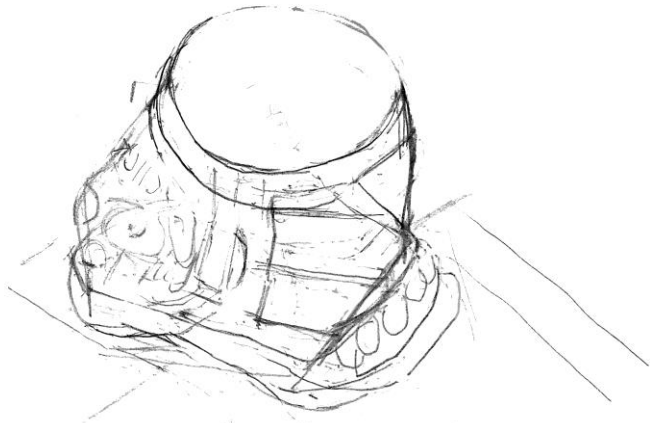


Pattern is crucial in the work of the ecology artists, the Harrisons', as a means of reading the specificity of place and what it affords in terms of its ecology.

*But nonetheless this work [The Serpentine Lattice] represents a basic strategy wherein the artistic, ecological, and ethical agenda is set by asking four questions. 1 — Where is here? 2 — How big is here? 3 — What's happening here? 4 — What do we see as needed in this here as we experience it? (Harrisons, 2001 unpaginated)*

Pattern is difficult to draw convincingly. The Harrisons handle this difficulty through maps, manipulating their patterns visually to create emphasis and to draw out an ecological point.

However, I needed to take a different tack and go back to the world of objects, of the flow of energy through three if not four dimensions i.e. including the flow of time. When I came across a discarded noodle pot in a narrow passage en route to and from the local secondary school, its distorted shape distracted me. It was energised in its crushed state. I picked it up, brought it back, washed it and drew it (Figure 7 a,b). It was challenging to draw, hard to capture that sense of the huge architectural upheaval that had occurred when it had been pushed out of its original geometry.



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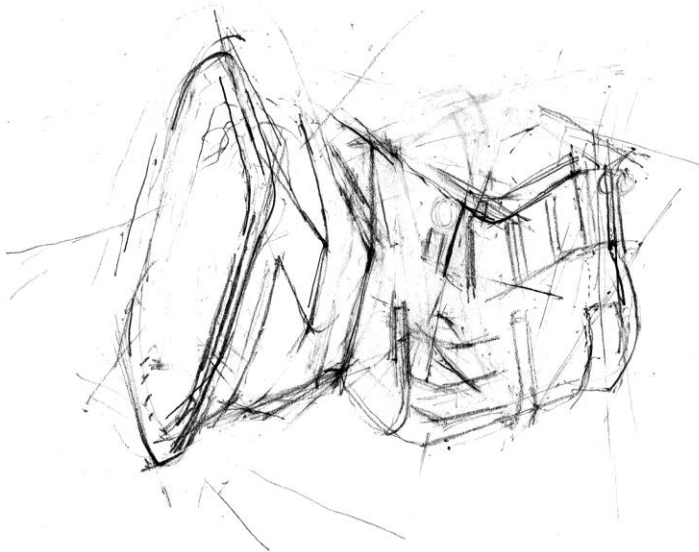


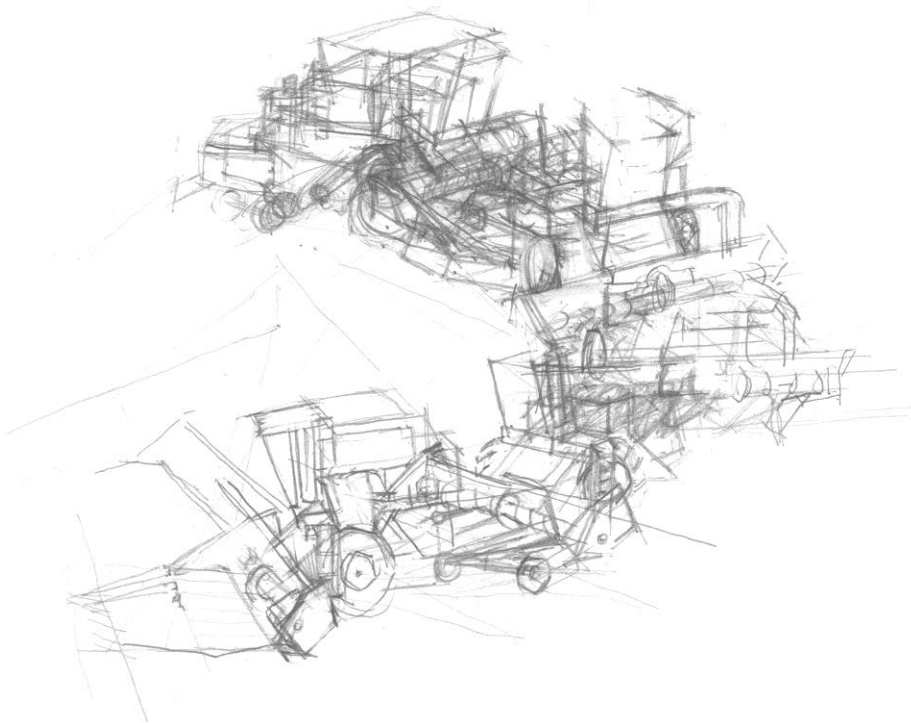
FIGURE 7 A & B NOODLE POT DRAWINGS 2017/19

## Day 3

*Find something large and man made in the street and draw it*

The direction in Day 3 took me to a combine harvester parked in a field just off the path at Newton Dee. A few minutes into the drawing a couple of young farmhands appeared. One jumped in the cab, drove off and started harvesting the crop in that field and another adjacent to it. I was forced to abandon the 'still life' and walked on.

After a number of false starts in terms of trying to capture a moving object, I realised the subject of my drawing could shift to the movement of the blades cutting a path through the crop (Figure 8 a & b).



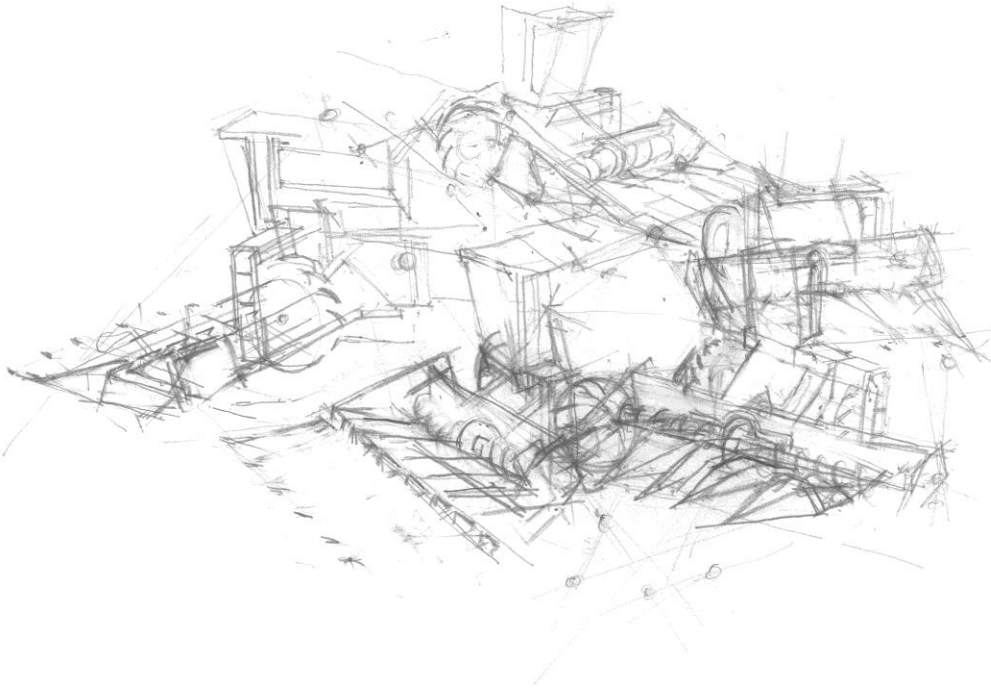


FIGURE 8 A & B DAY 3 COMBINE HARVESTER 2017/19

Thus harvesting became a form of drawing and redrawing of a path through a field, separating wheat from chaff, leaving in one direction a trail of stalks, a new path and pattern, and in another, a heap or mass of wheat to be milled into flour, constant transformation.

Almost a week later I was into day 9

*Find something small and natural in the street and draw it*

Very close to the field I noticed that the grasses that I had walked through and taken for granted as 'grass', were actually a large number of different things growing, each with a unique identity. I picked a small number, all of which had grown within a very short distance of each other, a huge diversity in a very small space. I was conscious that the important thing in the drawing to come was to retain this uniqueness and variety despite similarity (Figure 9). In the process the 'small' thing had opened up. It felt like a very large thing in terms of diversity of species. It made me aware of the monocultures of the fields, each ruthlessly controlled for maximum yield and the cost of this to nature. A comparatively much smaller area at the edge of the field yields significantly more biodiversity and it is within this small border or edge that life keeps going, not in the monotone of the field.



FIGURE 9 DAY 9 GRASSES 2017

## Reflections on Drawing, Idea and Society

These are a small number of the many experiences that the score has offered me. Drawing in the way I have explored through the score, is an experience, a process in time while paradoxically it marks the passage of time spatially, whether literally of a moving object (such as that of the combine harvester) or one's own movement across a page in the act of exploring something still by building up marks.

Is this simply the pleasure of a developing a skill for its own sake in an individual? Is it something deeper?

I struggle a little with where 'idea' comes into the mobility of drawing as tracing a line, making a mark. 'Idea' seems to have come to mean something with a beginning and end, complete in itself and offering completeness to the world – a concept, perspective or understanding, even an abstraction. None of these meanings appear to correspond to what I experience in drawing and why I keep it going, the sense of not knowing but being curious enough to find out, of participating in a world undergoing change and transformation. That said, I can see that drawing also moves in the opposite direction, taking from or taking in the world, distilling in the sense of abstracting or conceptualising as in so called 'objective' drawing.

Writing at the height of the second industrial revolution in the UK in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822 -1888) dared to question science and technology. He proposed that a society without access to ideas was philistine and it was the arts, poetry in particular, that formed ideas.

The arts stood between the individual and a chaotic world, enabling us to cope with the illusory nature of life itself. In this Arnold prefigures aspects of Deleuze and Guattari and their understanding of improvisation.

*But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. ... More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. (Arnold, 1880)*

Herbert Read, writing in the interwar years of 20<sup>th</sup> century, resonates Arnold's positioning of poetry and the arts as the root source of ideas in society.

*Only in as far as a society is rendered sensitive by the arts do ideas become accessible to it. (Read 1932/1967, p. 17)*

Herbert Read wrote *Art and Alienation* at the height of modernism in art. As mentioned in the introduction Read was looking to the arts to counter the alienating effects of industrialization. He also saw this as a loss of audience to make sense of modernist art.

Is it possible for drawing to address this gap in the present? What do we mean by 'ideas' in the context of a phenomenological understanding of drawing as process and movement in the world? Is there an inherent tension between drawing as experience and drawing as 'idea'?

In exploring the human condition through the three domains of labour, work and action in classical societies, Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher points to a profound interlacing between thought and making that gives form to political leadership.

*In the Republic, the philosopher-king applies the ideas as the craftsman applies his rules and standards; he "makes" his City as the sculptor makes a statue. (Arendt 1958/1998, p.227)*

However the separation between 'idea' and 'fabrication' in Plato's construction as "first perceiving the image of shape (*eidos*) of the product-to-be, then organising the means and starting the execution" (Arendt 1998, p.225) predisposes us perhaps to create a clear division between 'idea' and 'making' such as is manifest in Sol LeWitt's instructions. This hardening of a boundary also occurs at a societal/political level in the separation between leading and following that Arendt discusses in one of her sections on action, *The frailty of human affairs* (pp.188-192). In Greek and Latin, unlike modern languages, the verb 'to act' is designated by two different but interrelated words: Greek *archein* meaning 'to begin', 'to lead' and finally 'to rule', followed by *prattein* meaning 'to pass through', 'to achieve', 'to finish' or Latin *agere* meaning 'to set in motion', 'to lead' and *gerere*, originally 'to bear' (Arendt 1998, p.189). In Plato these are two faces of the same coin but in conceptualising them and with time they have come to be separated. In Arendt's thinking they have become "spoiled by actualisation" (Arendt 1998,p.302).

Drawing as a practice of 'ideas' in Arnold and Read's sense reverses the hardening of difference. It sharply focuses the inseparability of 'idea' to 'fabrication' as is evident in the word itself. 'Drawing', a noun and verb in the form of gerund, refers simultaneously to process, a product-to-be, as well as the final artefact. Perhaps Plato's sequential process of first perceiving the image or shape of the product-to-be then organising the means and starting execution, has predisposed us towards fixing the meaning

and value of drawing in a singular way as a means of representation, increasingly focusing on standards of 'realism' particularly in Western art. In this sense 'idea' within drawing has come to mean the skill to 're-present' the world through images that correspond to the appearance of things, rather than to more complex levels of experience that include a sense or consciousness of self in relation to the world.

So C, drawing your score invites one to join with the shape that the world takes as it is emerging or becoming. The experiment begins in the spirit of an encounter. Nothing that actually occurred in my experience of it, could have been anticipated, nor is there any reason, cause or meaning to their occurrence. Each day of the score results is an experience of serendipity, of coming across a configuration of elements and then, through drawing, of building on what is there. By closely tracing this process of encounter, listening to its shifts and changes of direction through the writing, I sensitise myself to what is given. This me-and-the score –sketchbook- and -pencil - daily 'routine' is lived experience in which the world pushes back, resists preconditioning to allow something new to be made. Some days, some encounters work better than others. By following the materiality of this process, I become sensitive to its generative potential.

In what sense do these observations enrich our understanding of drawing in the social/political function of the arts?

Jean-Luc Nancy in his text *The Pleasure of Drawing* (2013) notes that drawing is an element that is common to all aesthetic fields if we define aesthetic as feeling, perceiving by using the senses, not a faculty of recording information but a sensing 'ressentir'. Nancy makes a clear distinction between 'sensing' as feeling and 'taking note' as taking in information without necessarily feeling.

*To sense ['ressentir'] is to receive a sense (to receive and give indiscernibly), the sense or value of a sensation...to feel without sensing, as in the simple perception of data (a smooth surface, the noise of a car etc is not to feel ['sentir'] in the strict sense but only to take note. (p. 21)*

For Nancy drawing is fundamental to any act of perception. In art 'sense' as idea, thought, or form is nascent, 'nowhere given in advance'. Drawing is a joining with the movement, gesture, or expansion of the mark ['trait']. But there is a paradox at work in the idea of drawing as forming through movement and drawing as trace, as something left behind

*Its pleasure is in the sensual pleasure ['jouissance'] of this unfolding ...as it invents, finds and summons itself further, projected onto the trace that has nevertheless not preceded it (p. 22)*

To return briefly to the example of *Drawing out the white*, the slowing of time between the action of the paint brush creating a line in water and its yielding of tone within the traced line hints at this experience of unfolding that is sensual and pleasurable for its own sake.

So to draw is to give birth to form – in "letting it be born – and this to show it, to bring it to light [*mettre en évidence*]" . This in fact relates to the etymology of 'idea' from the Greek – *idein* – "to see", to make visible, to form a mental image of something.

Drawing is perpetually mobile. It has no stable state " ...never stops preceding and extending itself beyond itself" (Nancy 2013, p. 25). However 'Idea' is a state of tension between two forces - " birth

cannot simply be an interminable process (a mark must be traced) nor can ostension<sup>1</sup> simply present a formed or closed form” (ibid). It is desire that drives us to continually open up, to form and even deform the fixing of truth. Any completion or conclusion is provisional. Nancy points to the first cave drawings as endlessly modulated in a repetition of gesture and unlimited variation.

He also offers us a new element in our social being. He introduces desire. Desire is not a response to an object but a response/reflection to being itself (Nancy 2013, p. 28), to what might be possible (Nancy 2013, p. 38), to possibility as a principle of existence. We speak of line in music, architecture, choreography and film. All share the same quality of entering into an experience that exceeds intention but opens itself up to its own formation irrespective of what is given.

*Sensing ...is the impulse and pulse of being in the world, and all the senses, sentiments, sensitivities and sensualities are delineations of this impulse and pulse- taken up again in order to be more finely and intensely draw, carried toward an infinite force [puissance] across what we call the arts....The pleasure of making oneself available to this chance, which is the chance and risk of existence...or the pleasure of a certain abandon, surrendering to grace. (Nancy 2013, pp. 41-42)*

## To Conclude

In our recent discussion you pointed out that the commonality between each of the experimental projects we have undertaken beginning with *Calendar Variations* 2011. Where I felt I was oscillating precariously between drawing as a singular, personal activity and the social practice of art, you saw the whole set of experiments as an accumulation of different ways of taking drawing from a singular activity to an activity between more than one person, each time effectively creating a dynamic between whoever was participating and in whatever way. You pointed to the importance of this accumulation of experiments in terms of making the transition from the personal to connecting drawing to the wider issues that contemporary art practice now needs to address, effectively as Nancy suggests opening drawing up to life through chance.

In the same conversation we discussed the importance of method (such as instructions, scores or copying) as a way of moving beyond the conventions of the lone artist in the studio. In this sense each of the drawing experiments has resulted in an experience of community in Nancy’s sense, not as something constructed but as already present, as immanent, effectively brought into consciousness through an experience of art. You also pointed out that this quality of community does not simply fall out of method in the way, for example, that the surrealist game *Exquisite Corpse* generates a result that appears to be collaborative but is instead an inevitable outcome of a technique, not necessarily of experience.

These insights reminded me of some of the struggles we have had between individuals and the group in the different experiments, even between a group of researchers that apparently shared common interests. Difference is crucially important as is being open to conflict and disagreement as this necessitates that we negotiate and arrive at mutual understanding or simply agree to differ and move on.

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<sup>1</sup> an act or process of showing



Well, C, this is a work in progress at all levels – the drawing itself using the score, understanding drawing and its relation to the world. The score has brought me back into drawing as a practice – thank you for this immense gift. It is only by being submerged in that practice that I can feel my way through the issues...and hopefully, by feeling, draw better. It has also brought me to a different level of understanding of the research questions that are not answered as such, but enriched and made more complex by your initiative.

The big challenge is the sound element that is still unresolved but incredibly important. Perhaps I can hand the baton over to you now and look forward to what you make of it.

Stay well

Anne

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