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DRAWING/CLIMATE: EXPLORING AN ATTENTIONAL MODALITY OF DRAWING

Matt Gunn

University of Tasmania

Climatic chaos has been the rule in the planet's material unfolding, not the exception. The concept of Anthropocene is underpinned by theories of growth and development. Climatic chaos adds greater weight to its enviroing: burdening, persevering, or what may be called undergoing. This article argues that such an undergoing is a contingent and transformational modality of learning where drawing is understood as a medium of experience, rather than as conventional object experienced in relation. It can therefore leverage a sense of learning into. The approach to drawing in this essay explores an attentional modality of drawing that can offer a process of learning through self-inquiry, which I name flow drawing. This practice is situated within the context of a sandy low-lying isthmus known as The Neck, a geomorphology that connects the two landmasses of lunawuni / Bruny Island in Tasmania, Australia. The work is performed in a dynamic-dialectical mode that addresses the understandings of climate, identity, and the ontological foundations of drawing practice. In doing so, it attempts to raise existential questions and offers practiced paths to follow, rework, and extend.

The Neck

Climate is a medium that encompasses all terrestrial experiences and practices. A relationship to climate prefigures just about everything including diet, shelter, clothing, and language. The climates that environ various cultures are constitutive of a *Long Summer* (Fagan, 2004) known as the Holocene epoch, an exceptionally calm ten thousand-plus years since the retreat of the last Glacial Maximum. This epoch granted *Anthropos* flourishing across the globe. However, there is currently a condition of departure from this relative climatic stability that presents itself in the form of climatic crisis. In the scale of deep time, it is a return to a relative norm of climatic chaos, framed in this essay as a condition inherent to a formulation of an Anthropocene thesis.

The magnitude of this epochal drift includes the demand for participation with nascent psychic content. My work aims to find ways to engage with this nascent dimension by utilizing theory, phenomenology, and drawing. My inquiries typically develop a theme for creative potential, facilitated by an interplay of conventional text and drawings executed both on location and in the studio. Each theme is developed to communicate a particular experiential account within the context of an Anthropocene thesis. Broadly, each theme consistently refers to an experiential dimension of climatic change that is participatory, thus characterized by a *learning into*, because a transforming climate is a forcing function that perpetually disrupts fixed modalities of being in the world.

This work is catalyzed by a situated inquiry in dialogue with global, and thus cosmic, considerations. The location for my work is a low-lying sandy isthmus known as the Neck on *lunawuni*¹ / Bruny Island. The island is located roughly forty kilometers southeast of the Tasmanian state capital of Hobart in Australia. It covers an area of approximately 360 square kilometers with a permanent population of less than one thousand, spread between two predominantly Jurassic dolerite landmasses. These landmasses are connected by the Neck isthmus and its ephemeral late Quaternary period sands. The objective description of the Neck that I have just given is one way of framing it as a conceptual object for creating meaning. However, what my work aims to achieve is developing other ways of communicating the experience of climate from the inside, since the experience of climate is inseparable from habit and habitation.

The reason for situating my work on The Neck is because it holds a significant meaning as a place of attachment. It forms part of a larger narrative of The Neck as a geomorphology that connects *lunawuni* and protects channel communities to the west by creating a barrier to the eastern sea. This place holds a psychological and symbolic presence, which is heightened in the context of increasing climatic volatility. The Neck is not just an object-event exposed to particular moments of climatic volatility. The Neck itself is an event, a constraint of organization for an entire island community, including its emotional attachments. The material conditions of The Neck follow a timeline of global sea level rise, increased weather event severity, and storm tidal surges. These are the corollaries of accelerating coastal erosion and longshore sand transportation dynamics. As a result, the layers of sand-binding grasses and coastal wattles are retreating and erasing, succumbing to the tidal surges that are reshaping the land into new

¹ Place names are guided by advice from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation. Firstly, Indigenous place names are presented in italicised lower-case, followed by conventional colonial settler names. Afterwards, only Indigenous names are presented.

forms. This potentially includes the evacuation of flora, fauna, and practices that are integral to the island communities' organization.

Standing at the narrowest point of the Neck, which barely spans fifty paces, there is a sense that one is standing on a thin thread. From one direction, there is the potential for the disintegration of the Neck's material conditions, which could lead to the separation of the island into two. Simultaneously, from the other direction, there is the hope and ambition upheld by global timelines of economics, technology, politics, and knowledge. The Neck reveals a desire for redemption in positivist narratives of technological prowess, and this impulse obscures the receptivity that bears witness to the Neck's finitude. This is where the process of exploring environmental destruction in a global abstract sense collides with situated inquiry. It is not only a destruction of a physical place, but also confrontational in terms of situated narratives and broader symbolic potentials that hold meaning and significance.

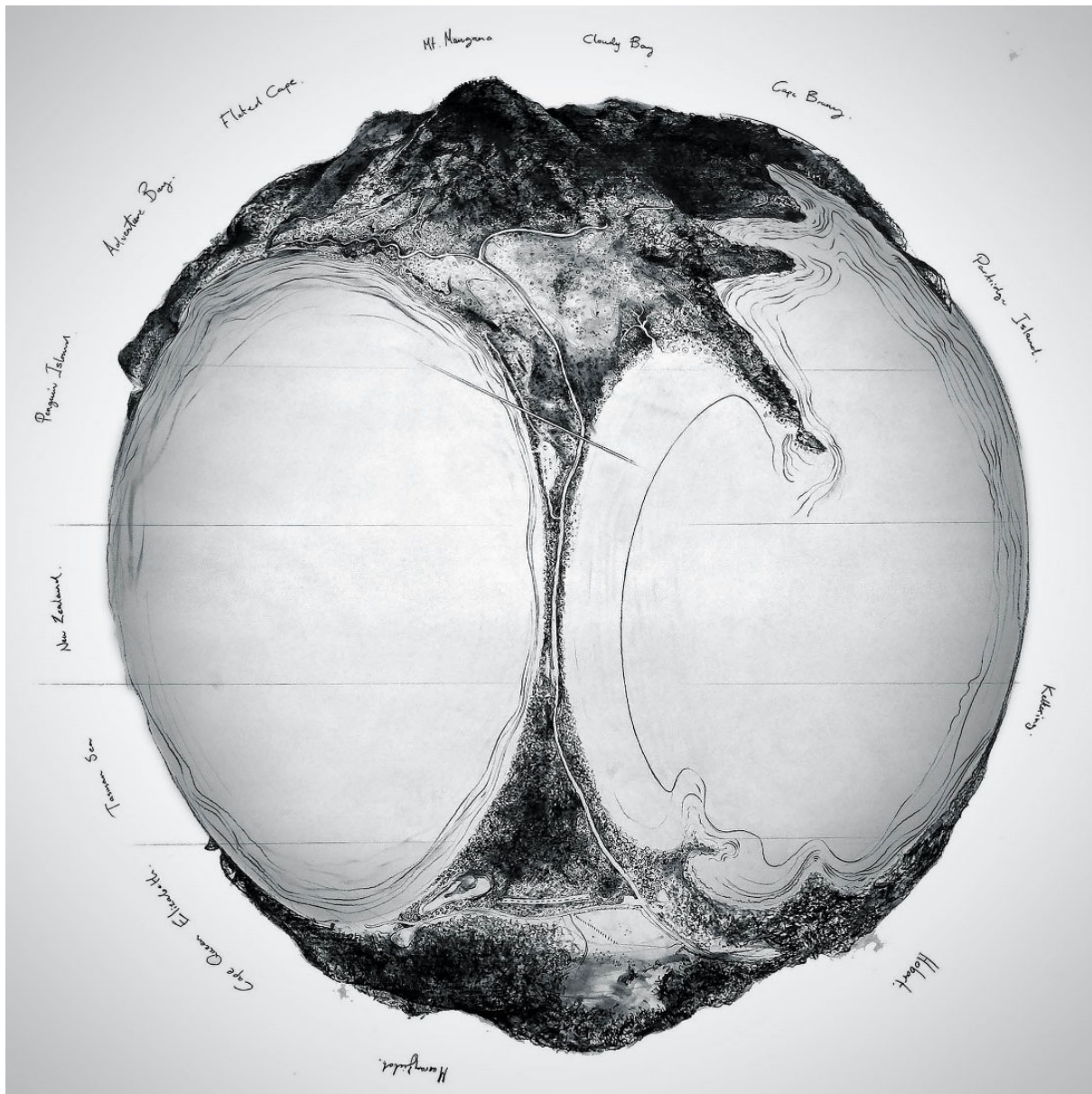


FIGURE 1: [REDACTED], *PLANET BRUNY ISLAND*, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 150x150CM, 2019.

The Neck is also a place of personal attachment through a lifelong connection to the island. There has been a family presence further south of the Neck for over fifty years. This often involved traversing the isthmus at speed to catch the ferry to the mainland, late-night spearfishing for flounder in Isthmus Bay shallows, sketching along its shores, camping on South Neck Beach, and hiking along Mars Bluff. Simultaneously, there was an absence, an unknown known: the acknowledgment of the island's original *nuenonne* culture. It was not respected; it was willfully destroyed, ignored, and covered up by generations of family and community, including myself. The awareness of the *nuenonne* lifeworld and cosmology provides an impetus throughout my interactions with the Neck, challenging settler colonial values and offering possibilities inherent in reflecting on other worldviews.

Climate

An experience of climatic change historically has been indivisible from adaptive modes of being. The experiential relationship to climate has largely been built on an existence of movement, flexibility, and opportunism in a condition of the sojourn. For the *nuenonne*, less concentrated resources necessitated a relatively large set of specialized skills and activities that were afforded by seafaring. Prior to colonization, their experience of this region was based on seasonal rhythms of movement as the foundation for their lifeworld. They inhabited territory encompassed by rich hunting zones where boundaries coincided with well-marked geographical features, such as rivers and lagoons. These boundaries ranged from a sharp, well-defined line associated with prominent geographical features to a broad transition zone that was typically built on a friendly relation between other groups (Tindale and Rhys 1974, p.325). Groups broke up, dispersed, or reformed according to need. In times of natural disaster, such as drought, a group on the east coast might disperse into other "hearth" groups and visit other areas where there were relatives in other groups (Ryan 1975, p.20). Adaptability through the already contingent ability to roll with the climate's enviroing was the ground of their lifeworld.

In a similar vein, bioethicist Tetsuro Watsuji (1961, p.2) writes, climate "environs us" whether one likes it or not. That is to say, the environment exercises upon "us". This occurs in the case of "us" as biological and physiological entities, and in other cases the "us" that compose formational activities of the polity. What is of concern, in Watsuji's examinations of climate, is whether climate should be treated as a natural phenomenon. He understood that it is proper for natural science to treat climate as events of natural phenomena; however, he rejects the phenomena of climate as, in essence, objects of natural science.

Watsuji explores the function of climate as a factor in existence by investigating what he calls the "intentional" (1961, p.2) objective relationship between climate and experience; the common-sense modality whereby climate impresses itself upon us, as in "we feel the cold". It is deemed natural that the cold is imagined as a separate and independent conceptual object, in such a manner whereby the cold infuses the skin and creates a directional or intentional relationship by which one feels the cold. But is this so, asks Watsuji? What does one really know of the existence of the cold prior to feeling cold? It is only when the body feels cold that cold is discovered. It is when the intentional relationship is formed that the cold is discovered to be impressing itself on the body as an external, objective phenomenon. Further to this, he writes that the intentional relationship is structural, "directing itself towards something" (1961, p.3). The feeling of "feeling the cold" is not a moment that establishes a direct relationship to the cold: it is a relationship by virtue of its feeling.

Moreover, Watsuji writes that atmospheric phenomena are not experienced in isolation from others of its kind. Cold has been experienced in relation to warmth, heat, wind, gales, etc. A whole series of phenomena called the weather. The relationality of weather carries on further when one considers descending scales of topography down to the soil. A storm on the Neck may be experienced as a stiff whistling breeze while one is huddling down in tufts of grass, or atop the highest dunes it may be the abrasiveness of the whirling sand that reveals heightened sensitivity in the lips. As the storm surge takes another bite of the dune's escarpment, one may even find that storm ignites a curiosity to write an essay about it. We find ourselves, as an Anthropocene thesis implies, as ourselves, as elemental in the mutual relationship of climate.

What Tim Ingold calls the meshwork (2011, pp.148-149), is the foundation for the enmeshment of agent and environment, it is where everything binds with everything else. To describe Ingold's concept of the meshwork is to start from the premise that every living being is a line, or a bundle of lines, and the interpenetration of lifelines is the mesh of life. His contention is that lives are lived not inside places, but around, through, to and from them, from and to sites elsewhere. Existence is not place-bound, but place binding, unfolding not in places, but along paths. Proceeding along a path, each inhabitant leaves a trail where paths cross and become intertwined. Every intertwining is a knot, and the greater the intertwining, the greater the density of the knot (ibid, p.148). In Ingold's world, where things are coming into being through a process of growth and movement, a bundle is coherence in movement, compounding forces of tension and friction, pulling tight and releasing in a way that is continually generative of new forms.



FIGURE 2: [REDACTED], *KELP BUNDLE*, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 29x42CM, 2020.

Along Neck beach is a continual and irregular procession of bundled knots of kelp. Depending on conditions, the bundles can consist of bull kelp from the low tide mark, cray weed from slightly deeper water, then further out is common kelp, and finally giant kelp from deep waters. Bundles of kelp flow in a way that belies an initial appearance of thickening or coagulation when strewn on the foreshore. This contrasts with its form in the medium of the sea where it is experienced as a kelp forest, stretching from the seabed, they reach for the surface as trees reaching for the sky.



FIGURE 3: [REDACTED], *KELP AND CUTTLEBONE* (DETAIL), GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 29X42CM, 2020.

The morphing topology of the kelp bundle is such that one can never determine what is on the inside and outside. As Ingold writes (2015, p.23-24), bundles are formed of interstitial differentiation: their surfaces, rather than enveloping their form, lie between the lines that make them up. Ingold, reflecting on how knots and knotting may register in the field of environmental communication, notes that, during their lives, people express this knotting by reflecting how one feels “joined” or “connected” to the lifeworld (ibid, p.20). Perhaps it is the same with perception in the environment: when one encounters any kind of relationship, does this not bring into existence something fresh that is neither one nor the other, but in the process also simultaneously gives something of their own existence? In the meshwork, each constituent line, as it moves along, leaves its own trail from within the interstices that bind it with otherness. Ingold (ibid, p.22) argues that the joining of being is the continual differentiation, and the knots formed in the process are not inclusive or encompassing, wrapped up in themselves, but always within the midst of things. Their ends are on the loose, rooting for other ends to join with.

The bundled lines of the meshwork are joining, but never joined-up, because tying things up would imply finality in a condition of recursive regeneration. Lines carry on as the intertwining of the meshwork; lines possess an internal feel for one another, rather than external conditions. This force is what Ingold, following Deleuze, calls interstitial differentiation. Difference continually arises from the midst of joining within the ongoing sympathy of going along together, it is the process by which beings and things literally answer to one another over time (ibid, p.23).

The metaphor of kelp has been utilized to explore and represent the phenomenon of meshwork, with its quality of binding and knotting. It serves the function of describing the characteristics of meshwork abstractly by pointing to an object of experience. However, what are the principles that underpin interpenetration as the medium of experience? How can these principles provide a relationship to drawing, whereby it is understood as a medium of experience, rather than a reification of subject and object? Any naturalistic representation of the Neck will always be of the past, and this was true well before the arrival of any climate crisis.

Cuttlebone and Recursivity

Yuk Hui’s principle of recursion is functionally constitutive of what he describes as soul. The recursive goes beyond something mechanical or repetitive: it is characterized by a spiraling movement of returning to itself in order to determine itself. Every movement is open to contingency, which in turn determines its singularity (2019, p.4). Hui uses the structure and operation of the spiral, in which it determines its own becoming, partially from the past circular movement that extends its effects and intensity. In the same way, every time the soul departs from itself, it differentiates its own reflection in traces as memory. It is this differing that witnesses the perception of change in the environment, while simultaneously modifying the being that is itself time, that consequently constitutes the dynamic of the whole. Every difference is a differing. Hui writes that recursivity is both structural and operational, through which the relationship between being and becoming is sublated. The sublation gives definition to the oppositional theses (thesis and antithesis), giving rise to and comprising the synthesis. Being is preserved as adynamic structure whose operation is open to the incoming of contingency, which can be called *becoming*, and which implies movement and identity (2019, p.5)

With this sense of recursivity in place, one can observe the cuttlefish bone entangled occasionally within the tendrils of kelp. Cuttlebone (Fig. 4) is found in all members of the family *Sepiidae*, commonly known

as cuttlefish. The internal shell and buoyancy organ are made primarily of aragonite, with a porous and granular texture and brittleness similar to perlite. It is composed of horizontal shells separated by vertical pillars, and the thickness of the pillars gives the bone its wavy form. Furthermore, it has been observed that the cuttlebone is a rich source of calcium for the birds and crabs that inhabit the shores of the Neck, as well as for beachcombers who remove it to supplement the diet of their caged birds at home.



FIGURE 4: [REDACTED], CUTTLBONE, PHOTOGRAPH, 2020.

It is possible to consider ontological implications of recursivity by looking beyond the material qualities of the cuttlebone, to the structure and operation of its exposed layers. John Dewey's principle of Habit (1922, p.21-32) is illustrative in this regard, in the sense of a recurring pattern that lies beyond direct apprehension. For Dewey, habit is not settled but moving and extends beyond particular activities or modes of conduct to include environmental response. Habit is a life process in which the things one does

perpetually shape the conditions under which both they and others relate. Dewey argued that the basic character of habit is that every experience undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes the experience, and this modification affects the quality of subsequent experiences, whether one desires it or not. It is an entirely different entity that enters subsequent experience.

The layers of cuttlebone are most easily seen in the convex side. Immersed in a condition of weathering of sea, sand, and kelp, the top layers flake away and reveal a staggered history of its formation. In the newest layer, one still sees the faint traces of the first which blends into the bone's superstructure, to the point where one cannot say where the structure begins and the first layer forms. It is as if there were no actual beginning, just a blending in. This phenomenon is very much reminiscent of the way one looks at the seasonal growth rings of a sawn log. An important distinction is made here: the growth habits are habitual, not intentional. The cuttlefish and the tree do not intend to grow, the growth is based on habit. Intention is always directed towards something, whereas habit is something that happens to the tree when the ground is staked by the seedling. It is actively undergone. One is active, and the other is passive, so how can we act and undergo at the same time, and why did Dewey find it necessary to merge the two?

The merger is critical to what Dewey meant by habit. The undergoing contains the execution. It begins with an intention in mind and ends there with the intention fulfilled in the world. For example, one repeats a task, but they will not be the same person doing it. The one who does a drawing is not sovereign, because what one does is not drawing, but one is actually doer as drawer. To experience anything is to be always already inside it. The experience is something one undergoes and yet this undergoing is active, not passive. It is something one does: to experience anything is to do undergoing. In other words, one dwells in habit, and the terms habitat and clime are intimately connected.

Flow Drawing

I organize my materials and set the intention to *do* a drawing. But once drawing begins, intention falls away and drawing becomes rather differentiated from the actual intention. I become drawing as drawing takes itself for a drawing session. Drawing is there inside itself, animated by pathological rhythms wherein each line modifies itself, not from one state to another, but as a totality of recursive renewal. As the drawing moves along, it is seen that the line is projected futurally in the space between the lines. Past, present, and future are simultaneously attended to as graphite skids along the surface of the paper.



FIGURE 5: [REDACTED], FLOW DRAWING PRACTICE, PHOTOGRAPH, 2020.

While developing this drawing practice, it came to be known as “flow drawing”. A central concern in its development is the potential for bringing out the attentional modality of drawing. The closest precedents found to compare this work have been the artworks of Giuseppe Penone and John Franzen (2016). Franzen’s drawing is something akin to an enacted, artistic performance of John Conway’s Game of Life ruleset. Franzen’s embodied ruleset is: each line, one breath. The variation that emerges from his practice shows individuation emerging from a simple and focused pattern of behavior into a multitude of patterns.

The context for performing these drawings can be anywhere. They are not intended to be related to as external sites of observation. The observation is focused inwardly to bare sense experience. Pathological symptoms of the nervous system are treated as ecological curiosities to be observed and potentially investigated or dissolved back into nothingness. This occurs through attention being returned to the enacted movement of drawing. There is a further observation on this aspect of dissolving. The term is used intentionally, because in the moment that the ultimately discarded curiosities arise, they appear as subtle and fleeting apparitions of a thought that never had the opportunity to clarify itself. It is like a pot of stew on a stovetop coming to a simmer: there is an intermediary moment where bubbles simply threaten to break the surface before letting go of a tiny whisper of steam and subsiding back down. In this way, it cannot be said what was discarded because only the initial apparition of it registered. As for the drawing itself, it draws itself, with a minimal sense of volition after the initial intention is set.

After inhaling, I draw a long, continuous line with a pencil or pen while slowly exhaling. The nature of this first line can take on subtle differences depending on a myriad of causal circumstances: what is happening in the external environment? Is it cold or warm? how much coffee was consumed this morning?

After this first line, I take another deep breath and begin to exhale, laying down a second line, spaced apart from the first in a way that would allow for an effective gestalt relationship that emerges as a holistic form, one that can be reflected upon in the completed drawing. While drawing this second line, attention is directed to the first line, not the line being drawn. The line being drawn follows the previous line's perturbations. Drawing through this second line, an optimal point of attention is found. This arrives when the speed of the drawing matches the apprehension of the previous line's form. The line being drawn seeks to mimic the previous line in this mode of attention. This is a consciously self-aware mode of subtly swinging back and forth between a state that could be characterized as order and chaos. It involves observing the first line and trying to copy it as precisely as possible, as quickly as possible. Too slow and it becomes illustration, too fast and it becomes scribble.

Then, this process of drawing continues as the recursion of this simple ruleset that has been described. As time progresses one may become attuned to the interval of orderly illustration and scribbled chaos. Like swimming perfectly in the midstream of a river, there is a moment where one cannot legitimately say there is a left bank and a right bank. In this analogy, the drawer cannot say where the boundary between drawing and drawer is at all.

Working through this process and entering an optimally recursive state of mind, the noticing of patterns morphing in time may be registered. As this process speeds up and enters an optimal point, consciousness becomes less viscid, and perceptions of time begin to drift. In that first line that was placed, peaks and valleys emerge by way of small jitters and tremors in my neuro-muscular system; then later, pathological symptoms of fatigue in the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, fingers. The peaks and valleys grow larger and deeper, separating and turning into waves and bays that resemble algorithmic Belousov-Zhabotinski spirals and complex patterns. They drift, eat each other, self-terminate, then are born again. The form of their patterning is never identically repeated: forms come into being based on causal interactions of neuropathology that is continuous with the clime. In this way, the non-linear dynamics of this method of drawing remove the mind-body dualism and viscerally demonstrates the attentional and enactive experience of the medium of drawing.



FIGURE 6: [REDACTED], FLOW DRAWING PRACTICE, PHOTOGRAPH, 2020.



FIGURE 7: [REDACTED], *FLOW DRAWING*, GRAPHITE ON DRAFTING FILM, 84x120CM, 2020.

The flow drawings that have been presented here are less concerned with mastery. What is of value is understanding through direct attention. The body undergoes, rather than masters the drawing and its blank page. Aches unfold in the experience of a drawing enacted because the drawing cannot detach itself from the aches perceived in the experience of drawing: they become biographical, and a narrative can unfold that is about them. Not once can I say that this type of drawing is mindless. The drawing itself is thinking, but it is not purely operative at the level of cognition. Drawing is the work of mind freely mingling in the ecology. One does not think while drawing, one thinks as drawing. And this thinking is a way of taking in the world so that the world becomes less the topic than the medium of knowing.

In the undergoing of drawing, one surrenders something of one's agency. The mind's grip on the ecology is revealed in drawing to be the ecology's grip on the mind. As drawing proceeds, the pencil is adjusted in every moment of hesitation and uncertainty. An attentional modality of drawing is what it means to inhabit the practice of drawing. The drawer is no longer the "I" who performs in front of the paper, but exists in the midst of the drawing's environing. In the recursive loop of the drawing returning to the next line transformed, the drawer is continually re-discovering the self by forever apprehending agency in its wake, rather than as intentional cause that follows through. Taking up a fixed position or standpoint while drawing, where one can check up on what is happening in the drawing, continually pulls the drawer out of attention. Flow drawing is then about taking a person out of a predominant disposition with a secure center, in favor of an uncertain future.

To attend to things or persons carries connotation of abiding with them, following what they do. Therefore, it is a practice of conscientiousness. My contention is that the understanding of the habit of drawing, as opposed to the volition of doing a drawing, affords ontological priority to the attentional. Intentions are like the layers of the cuttlebone, signposts of phases in life, revealed in hindsight when plucked from the kelp. Finally, a corollary of the attentional is an ethical dimension that introduces the practice of "taking care": one cares for people and things by giving attention and responding with conscientiousness. The drawer is a being that responds, and the responsiveness precedes agency. As a responsive being, responsibility of care is an action staked rather than claimed, and it comes in the attending to the recursion of the clime in its totality.

Taking Care

Is this aspect of "taking care" just an idea, or is it a real medium of the cosmos, in the same way as a cuttlebone is real? One can measure and research the cuttlebone and the connectivity of its microstructure; it exists as part of the animal kingdom. Is care as real as the cuttlebone? Does neglecting to attend to a duty of care create a real rip in the medium of the cosmos? Entering the Anthropocene under the belief that the cosmos has no moral structure is one option. Another option is to reflect on the moral structure of the cosmos. The erotic merger between the nervous system and drawing, the nervous system and the earth: what is the value of these ideas in the Anthropocene and what can they offer? The drawing practice also reveals a simple truth of habit, knowing that some of the most intimate details of life, such as giving care and attention to a simple drawing, is primary. There is a reality to this private, hidden world, the kind of world that modernity analyzes, and one that post-modernity aestheticizes. Drawing in this way is then a way to reconfigure narratives of the ultimate ecology and how one is nested and enmeshed within it.

When one looks at the way commodity systems relate to nature, it is not a relationship of civilization living in ecosystems. Ecosystems also live within the constructions and paradigms of civilization. The same way a spider may take up residence behind a car's rear-vision mirror, there is a 'double internality' (Moore 2015, p.3) where the individual is contained by the biosphere of the ecosystem, but then the ecosystem is also contained by cultural production.

In this way, the Anthropocene refigures the most basic assumptions of existence, which means there can be a reflection upon the nature of life and the material world. This includes the self-problematizing relationship of humanity regarding its own existence, and the stories humanity tells itself about that relationship. As Cary Wolfe (Anthropocene Curriculum, 2014) remarks, what is the 'auto' of the autobiographical animal? Because the Anthropocene suggests that humanity has never had a linear and intentional relationship to its own stories and concepts, since the very condition of possibility for humanity is technologically based. When one realizes that humanity is comprised of deeply prosthetic individuals that only come into existence based on something that is not zoological, then perennial questions of the natural and the technological begin to be nested within each other.

The nesting of the natural and the technological is a double internality, and it is ontologized in the Anthropocene to the point where there are no externalities. There is nothing other in the cosmos, it is all held within ideas and habit. It has always been the case, yet with the transition to the Anthropocene, and an accompanying perspective of the *modern*, there is a disclosure of double internality that is epochal in magnitude. As has been shown through drawing, it is an issue of subject and object. When subject and object are included in one another, what is more primary, the perceiver or the natural world? An attentional modality of drawing is one way of performing and testing these types of phenomenological and metaphysical inquiries. There are many pieces to the story that surround the nature of relationality that will continue to disclose themselves. One story right now can be the refiguring of care as an ontological reality, not as a cultural construction or a causal byproduct of evolution and matter. Through drawing, the world can look different and thereby one acts differently within it.

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