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Feel my way … outline judgements … I made some pictures …

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Phenomenology: tracing lived experience through drawing

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Abstract

Feel my way … outline judgements … I made some pictures is a first person chronological account of an ongoing (three years and counting) group of serial drawings. Incorporating illustrations I trace some of the development of seriality as a drawing method that facilitates and identifies research questions; however my tale is also a paradox in that it is concerned with research methods that are not then positioned to answer formal research questions. Theory, drawing practice and drawing fictions are intertwined. I encounter the early pioneering work of Rhoda Kellogg and her notion of Aggregates in children’s drawing and I acknowledge The Fictional Museum of Drawing as a repository, rationale and conceptual space for my textual (drawing fictions) and drawn works.

Figure 1: Phil Sawdon, First Draft, Detail, Text, paper and dust, 2016, © Phil Sawdon
This image also features in Dirt Drawn into Dust, Phil Sawdon, Drain Magazine, 2017.
Sometimes I advocate that drawing as a creative opportunity … an ambiguous and evasive practice can be represented as a drawing that interweaves William Empsom’s seven types of ambiguity in literary criticism. The Drawing (Figure 2) can be read as follows:

Drawing: Any nuance of multiple meanings where the innumerable content is said to be alike through diverse properties. These various meanings are resolved into one of numerous infinite ideas that are connected through a context that can be given in one word simultaneously when two or more meanings that do not concur interweave to elucidate a complex conceptual condition which is discovered in the act between nothing and something, invented as axiomatic, a fictional opposite to conceal dissonance (Marshall and Sawdon 2013).

The following is an extract from The Contagious Drawing: An Artists’ Conditions (Sawdon 2012):

At all times endeavour to engage with a work room that is in a low and damp situation … One that is seldom in a critical context, examined or aired. If you draw through a space that is dank, depleted, and ill-ventilated, take every opportunity to embrace the condition. The further subordinated and drearier the position, the more conducive it will be, and the longer it will defer the infallible token of approaching death.

When you are drawing shut any windows, blinds, curtains, the door … encourage any concepts to become fetid. The windows of any common stairs and passages should always be sealed.

Be cautious to not let any air pass through any papers or alternative supports. A warm and ill-aired drawing will produce soundness by itself. Resist hanging any
works before an audience and keep the ground, chalks and mediums, as soiled as possible.

If appropriate always wear during the day the attire you slept in and be mindful to wear them for as long as possible.

On opening a new work, dip a flannel or sponge in ink and give your whole body a rapid and vigorous wash, rubbing it raw with a hard rough towel. Cold ink is preferred, but warm may be used, if cold is not acceptable. Accustom any apprentices not to be afraid of the cold ink flannel. They will come to abhor and adore it, and apply it randomly themselves. If your works are filthy you must refrain from ever washing particularly once the work is finished. Pay no heed to your face, hands or neck.

Do all you can to avoid hanging your works to dry. Nothing is more dangerous to health. Soapsuds, foul water, ink and filth, should be introduced without delay.

Use as much static in the drawing as you possibly can. Carrying it in is laborious, but the labour will be well repaid.

When a contagious drawing is in your studio, separate, as much as you can, the nauseous works from those that are well …

Allow idle gossip to enter; and visit a gallery or museum. You thus facilitate the spread of disease.

The Curator, the Collector, and those who are necessarily in the constant habit of visiting contagious art works, must go to bed without divesting themselves of every article of dress, and sponging or washing every part of their body with cold ink.

Whether the drawing dies or recuperates, be sure to judiciously swab every tool and material employed. Use a solution of honey, liver and almonds, sprinkle the floor often, and keep a bowl on the floor. Do all in your power to keep the dead drawings in the same room with the living.

The best method of using the honey, liver and almonds is to add a tea spoonful to a quart of warm ink. This should be employed daily by all who are exposed to infection, and having a small quantity exposed in a bowl, changing it every one or two days, and sprinkling the passageways.

Do all in your power to prevent the drawings being archived. This nefarious, detestable, loathsome and ignorant practice must be entirely put down.

Lead coffins are little or no protection against the escape of noxious vapours; the lead constantly bursts, and if the infected vapours are sufficiently powerful to force open the lead, how much more easily will they penetrate through the support which separates the drawing from the pencil above.
I advocate that drawing is an ambiguous practice …an example of the creative potential of interdisciplinary intersections.

I will now present a first person chronological synopsis of an ongoing (three years and still counting) group of serial drawings. My intention is to trace and relate to you some of the multiplicity of judgements involved in my experience of creating the works.

Collectively I refer to the works as Drawing Aggregates and by extension therefore this part of the paper as Drawing Aggregates [A Serial Tale].

The works encounter the early pioneering work of Rhoda Kellogg and her notion of ‘Aggregates’ (Kellogg 1969) in children’s drawing and acknowledges The Fictional Museum...
of Drawing as a repository, rationale and conceptual space for this author’s text (drawing fictions) and drawn works.

Drawing Aggregates [A Serial Tale] is a first person chronological account that is [more or less] a recreation i.e. a retracing of gestures, instincts and negations.

Underpinning the project is the notion that theory and practice are not opposed or freestanding, they are intertwined. This tale is less about adding a theory or illustrating theory with practice after the fact (in hindsight) and more about finding a place and space to pause in the making of the drawings that enables me to see the theory as it and they emerge from and through the process.

The drawings are serial in nature and this enables the reflections on one or more works to drive forward the next one(s)... this is the research method.

The serial tale is a paradox where the tale on seriality is concerned with research methods that are not deployed to answer formal research questions.

Seriality develops as a method and thus begins to identify research questions, such as what role the concept of the aggregate might play, rather than setting out in advance to answer a question.

My project starts with a modest series of sequential and sometimes simultaneously executed pen and ink drawings on watercolour paper.

When I work unaccompanied (i.e. not collaborating) I draw in series. I work within the notion that my use of the term series is as a number of similar or related things coming one after another (a succession). When I draw I draw as a serial process. One always leads to another. Usefully summarised by the often cited Deanna Petherbridge in an article for Crafts magazine titled Drawing Conclusions, where she describes the process of drawing as a ‘serial process of finding, refining, reformulating, questioning and constructing (Petherbridge 1992)’. A quote I found useful back in the day (Sawdon 2005) and arguably it is still fit for purpose.

The dots, marks, and lines of these initial works might for some resemble micro-organisms, geological and organic features. They did for Mark Jackson in his Drawing Research, Theory, Practice (Jackson 2016) review of Joe Graham’s book Anchor (Graham 2015) for which my drawings were reformatted and re-contextualised as diagrammatic and illustrative motifs within the pages of an essay Frontline Aside[s]: A Drifting Exchange (Sawdon 2015).

For the original series I produced four (Figure 4).
They labour with the collective title of *No Black Lines* for the reason that in reality they are exclusively black lines developed through dots and marks in motion.

I suggest that these drawings combine several separate formal elements, they loosely compact various fragments, and in herding errant dots, marks and lines, I and they … aggregate.

They are open, small (254 x 178mm), diagrammatic, exclusive in the choice of material (pen and ink on 300gsm watercolour paper), have no preferred orientation and adopt aspects of a stream of consciousness approach in transferring continuous thoughts and vision on to the paper through the physical and conceptual space that is between my mind and my hand. They are not automatic.
I set out to make another series within the original remit of the series. This time I made five (Figure 5)

The composition is less open, they remain small (248 x 218mm), they have a preferred orientation, they use multi-crossed lines, they are pre-planned and the materials, pen and ink on 300gsm watercolour paper, are the same as the previous group.

In my thinking they start to resemble World War One trench maps and also refer more directly to my previous mention of the notion of aggregation to the extent that I begin to look more carefully at Rhoda Kellogg’s analysis of children’s drawing in her 1969 publication *Analyzing Children’s Art* (Kellogg 1969) where years ago I had first come across the term Aggregates in relation to children’s drawing.
She classifies Aggregates as being units of three or more Diagrams (definite shapes drawn in outline form) and when that process of forming starts she argues that is when the child begins to function as an artist (Kellogg 1969).

Her discussion of the classification of children’s drawing incorporating Basic Scribbles, Emergent Diagram Shapes, Placement Patterns and the significance of Placement Patterns relationship to the eye’s guidance of the hand no doubt informs my decisions whilst I endeavour not to illustrate the stages of children’s drawing according to Kellogg or be obligated other than intellectual curiosity and respect.

In addition I note that I am not a child.

However through drawing it is tempting to argue the linear connection between the work of a child and an adult artist. Kellogg highlights Friedrich Froebel, the founder of kindergarten education and refers to his observation about drawing in E.R. Murray’s Froebel as a Pioneer in Modern Psychology, Baltimore, 1914. Quote:

Much is developed by this action, more than is possible to express – a clear comprehension of form, the possibility of representing the form separate from the object, the possibility of retaining the form as such, and the strengthening and fitting of the hand and arm for free representation of form (Kellogg 1969: 63).

There is now an online digital archive of Kellogg’s collection (Maurer, Riboni, Wälchli, Gujer 2007).

I am mindful of Kellogg’s observation that children never tire of making aggregates (neither do I) and her response to her own query as to what keeps the Aggregates from becoming hodgepodge of forms and her response that it is the child’s seemingly inborn preference for balance and regularity (Kellogg 1969).

I incorporated two of this series as ‘fictional’ floor plans for Gallery #1 and Gallery #2 in The Fictional Museum of Drawing which I contributed as an article (The Fictional Museum of Drawing) to issue #13 of fukt magazine for contemporary drawing in 2014 (Sawdon 2014).

I am the Keeper and founder of The Fictional Museum of Drawing.

Apart from exhibitions and events it also houses within its archives all of my published text based ‘drawing fictions’. These can also be viewed online in the Loughborough University Institutional Repository.

The Museum is a fallacious building in which there is no such place as the middle i.e. the furthest place from fixed points of view.

At this stage my enquiry has nine works. Each has adopted, adapted to and played various roles. Some now move into a digital space. My intention is to more formally recognise their capability to be actual gallery floor plans in The Fictional Museum of Drawing.

Five of the works are then rendered, and coloured using digital software (Figure 6).
They incorporate snippets of images captured and collaged from earlier museum themed works in particular the imagery, marks, notations etc. from a 1978 drawing of mine titled *Pitt Rivers: A Cautionary Tale* (Figure 7).

The series now incorporates five digital gallery floor plans.

The floor plans are then edited together with fictional text into an A1 sized promotional poster for The Fictional Museum of Drawing (Figure 8).
The series inventory now reads as nine *No Black Lines* (#1 to #9), four (#1 to #4) of which are open and notionally stream of consciousness, five (#5 to #9) which are closed outlines knowingly aware of Rhoda Kellogg’s classification of children’s drawing, five digital renderings of numbers #5 to #9 and an A1 digital promotional poster for The Fictional Museum of Drawing (Figure 8).
The portfolio continues …my scholarly enquiry is intrigued and challenged by the idea of using an aggregated form of pictorial composition to illustrate a series of three songs.

At this juncture the series is free to meander as it is not consciously restrained by the awkward tension of illustrating theory.
In the series inventory these drawings are titled *Lyric Aggregates* (#1 to #3). In order to accommodate our ambition (the drawings and mine) I increase the size (760 x 565mm) however the primary materials stay the same i.e. pen and ink on 300gsm watercolour paper.

The new addition is the use of a Shiny S-200 DIY Printing Kit.

The copyright lyrics form the frame of the drawing and the aggregated shapes cluster and vie for attention with silhouette snails and various other representational elements including *Beano* comic characters and interpretations of young children’s drawings of faces, ‘plants and birds and rocks and things’.

I introduce cross hatching as tonal rendering to intensify the spatial ambiguity and compound the level(s) of craft. The works are intended for private viewing.

The songs are *Planet Caravan* (© Iommi, Ward, Butler, Osbourne), *Down Through The Night* (© Brock) and *A Horse With No Name* (© Bunnell).

To bring the project up to the time of writing there is (of course) a further series that emerges from the experiences of draughting the *Lyric Aggregates* and they are called *City Aggregates*.

There are currently four (#1 to #4) and one in progress. However I return at arbitrary intervals to work on any one of the five as and when I need to satisfy a work ethic.

The size remains 760 x 565mm; the materials persist as pen and ink and printed text on 300gsm watercolour paper, sepia and tonal ink block washes are introduced within some of the shapes to facilitate spatial movements in conjunction with cross hatching for tonal shading, secondary volume, and craft intensity.

There is an appearance of stick men as representative figures engaged in various stages of animation, a lookalike figure from a George Grosz drawing and the text stamp of the seal of The Fictional Museum of Drawing indicating that #3 is on loan from the museum.

Representations of elevations of buildings, plants, trees and snails are interwoven in-between and through linear aggregates. Metaphor abounds … (Figure 9)
The theory remains open as do the drawings … and we are pleased to announce that The Fictional Museum of Drawing is open throughout the year as follows:

Sunday Closed, Monday Closed, Tuesday Closed, Wednesday Closed, Thursday Closed, Friday Closed, and Saturday Closed.

Please note the displays are subject to change and that there is currently parking for at least 300 semiotic Spartans.

If anyone is keen to view particular items they are advised to confirm with The Keeper that the items are on display and will remain on display when they are denied access to visit.

If the items are not on display then it will be necessary to make an appointment to view said items and the request will be denied.

The Museum Council are delighted that the Catalogue is not yet drawn up, and that the work of arranging and labelling the contents of the museum is still incomplete.
This laborious and unnecessary task will be subject to continuous delay so that very little facility may be afforded to the researches of those who wish to enter [minutely] into the study of drawing as fictional monkey business.

The following is an extract from *The Ratcatcher Explains Drawing to a Watercolour* (Sawdon 2015):

Phil Sawdon is by appointment an old English rat catcher and artist in residence to The Fictional Museum of Drawing. His attire was known to include a taxidermy weasel, striped shirt (reluctant collar), boots and awkward trousers, with a sisal belt inset with watercolour shrews.

We found him absorbed in his daily rounds.

His head is scarified with short balayé strokes and the now customary weasel perches uncomfortably whilst Phil began to explain drawing to an old English rat seemingly caught and transfixed by the whisperings.

We were asked to observe from a distance. Muttering in an apparent dialogue, he processed through the galleries from drawing to drawing.

Occasionally he stopped and returned to the vestibule where he sharpened a pencil, and placed the shavings carefully on the ground near the roots of an ash tree.

He laid a bisque doll likeness of Henry Mayhew alongside the mesmerised rat in the midst of the shavings; murmurs then collected them up and proceeded on a habitual itinerary.

We managed to scrape together the following oddments.

‘Why sir, drawing is playing with words! … Pestilent drawings … packed like cups … line upon line … drawings are sparrows huddled up in the corners … once vermin in colour and habit … drawings eat anything.’

‘Under drawing … illustrate goldfish … appropriate in attitude … crossed and marked on the paper … a bag with no lines … learn the drawings haunts … simple methods … use your hand … Bricolage … bricoleur.’

‘Pierce the paper with nibs and teeth … fringe fallacious deckles … scratch the vellum until it scars and festers … the drawings core should be as big as a boil and hard as … squeeze the ink from it … black autumn humors … irritable and drawn watercolour’

‘Lose your pen when ratting … let loose on the surface of the paper and put a bell on … the pen should come back to you … well trained … the weasel’s bite is more dangerous than the pen … this drawing is dying … this drawing is dead.’

Phil paused and we witnessed him draw from an inside pocket yet more pencils seemingly attached by dumb lines to several sparrows.

He began to draw their song, and when they replied with another uneasy and curious mark, he responded, and they drew a different trace.

In the same manner he illustrated the songs, fears, laughs and rattles of many other birds that he had caught and caged in the gallery.
Their songs and sounds in his ear and mouth, drawing in the space between hand and bird. Around his feet amongst the shavings and piles of rubble swarmed what looked like ants, cockroaches and crickets.

Hard-shell black beetles were busy laying eggs and several gnawed at the scraps of paper hanging from numerous empty bottles of ink.

He resumed:

‘Drawing terminates in composition … lines from tails … … washed with ink …

After three hours we were brusquely told to leave. Phil Sawdon, still speaking softly, sat on a stool in the library and with the bisque doll in his arms he turned his back.

And as for the open City Aggregates they have been revisited … they are now #1 to #5 … perhaps these carcasses may now wish to be wrapped in bandages and be quietly interred … however that’s not likely given their serial nature (Figure 10).
References:


