

Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice

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POSITION PAPERS

MAJELLA CLANCY AND STEPHEN FELMINGHAM

Plymouth College of Art

Drawing out: Encounter, resistance and collaboration

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Abstract

This collaborative paper is written against the backdrop of a current crisis in art education and provision in UK secondary schools. Education policy and the introduction of the European Baccalaureate (EBacc) has led to an increasing decline in the hours of arts teaching and number of arts teachers in England's secondary schools (Cultural Learning Alliance 2018). The results of this educational turn are well documented and the effects are being felt now in higher education, in wider culture and in the outcomes for young people in their creative capabilities, global outlook and wellbeing. Drawing pedagogy is considered with reference to this wider context and through the lens of Gert Biesta's philosophy of education that brings children and young

people into dialogue with the world. It juxtaposes Tim Ingold and John Dewey in a discussion of a collaborative drawing project, Ailleurs (Elsewhere), an exchange between Plymouth College of Art (PCA) and Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain (MoCo ESBA) in 2017. The intention is to bring a pedagogy of collaboration, resistance and encounters to bear, to argue for drawing as a singular means of working within this set of tensions. The text concludes that as research or enquiry-led teaching is at the root of an increasing amount of University teaching, finding a route into this from results-led education is a clear challenge to higher education and it sets out a collaborative, peer-to-peer learning strategy as an approach to drawing pedagogy.

At the start of the origin of the awareness of *self* lies the presence of *you*, and perhaps even the presence of a more general *we*. Only in dialogue, in argument, in opposition, and also in aspiring towards a new community is awareness of *myself* created, as a *self contained* being, separate from another. I know that I am, because *another* is.

(Tischner in Kapuscinski 2009: 68, original emphasis)

This paper has emerged from a dialogic European drawing exchange project and conversations between three teaching staff in higher education that have become writing – a dialogue about dialogue. As the project and the writing has progressed, it has become clear that there is an increasing urgency in the questions posed in the paper and the conclusions drawn for the agency of drawing, not least in respect of the statements on art education above, but also when we consider the wider societal imperatives. We are in a phase in our history characterized by the advance of populist politics, imminent environmental challenges and the shifts in global markets and communication systems. In this context, the epigraph to this paper sets out the significance of working with the Other as a matter of critical importance. Written by Father Josef Tischner, eminent Polish philosopher and first chaplain of the Solidarity trade union during the anti-communist uprising of the 1980s, it makes clear a philosophy of dialogue that has at its heart a critical and ethical encounter between Self and the Other. It also makes clear the difficulties and resistance inherent in this attitude towards the world and the responsibility that derives from our relations with another person. Enriched by themes in Emmanuel Lévinas's work, Tischner states that the Self not only has to relate to the Other, but must assume responsibility and be prepared to bear the consequences of such a decision, as a matter of sacrifice, renunciation and humility (Tischner 2006).

The challenge that Tischner alludes to comes at a time of increasing specialization, isolation and individualization in our consumerist and desire-driven society. It means that a major challenge is to rediscover how we may work together through encountering the Other and in doing so employ our

innate creativity as human beings, to ‘forge a concordance’ as John Dewey writes (Ingold 2016). The resistance arises not least from the work of being one’s Self, of being able to meet the world as a ‘self contained’ or formed human being while at the same time meeting the Other with openness and a gesture of hospitality and welcome. It is a difficult middle ground and much of our paper is to do with working in this space, of having to hold both positions simultaneously. The role drawing could take as a discipline in order to manage this necessary dialogue, in our teaching and with students who arrive in our institutions with a need to make artwork, is articulated in this paper through the writings of educational theorist Gert Biesta:

I am interested in looking at art [...] in terms of the *doing* of art. And what I tend to see there is that art is precisely this ongoing, literally never-ending exploration of the encounter with what and who is other [...] of what it might mean to exist in and with the world.

(2017: 66, original emphasis)

It is an exploration in which we argue that drawing finds its role, as it mediates between the physical and the metaphysical, between thought and perception and refers to both simultaneously: ‘It works much like a figure-field switch, in which the peripheral becomes necessary and central at the same time as being an addition’ (Downs 2007: xvii). It leads us into a discussion of the grammar of the middle voice later in the article, as a way of describing how the line of drawing can open a space of collective action, a mode of encounter for connecting places and people that is reciprocal.

While Biesta primarily focuses on the critical importance of an outward facing approach in the formative years of art and education, his writings are equally pertinent and perhaps more urgent in the context of higher education where students not only come with diverse experiences and desires, but arrive as older students with an already formed sense of self. Herein a further challenge lies, when we begin to ascertain how formation can relate to student groups that cut across a generational spectrum and how we might thread through a middle ground, where an encounter with Others and with materials might awaken dialogue. This necessitates the opening of a space for an alternative pedagogy in higher education where drawing is central. To do this we propose entering into what Biesta suggests is an externally facing and world-centred (as opposed to student-centred) educational space. The work of education is, as Biesta writes:

precisely *not* about facilitating expression but about bringing children and young people *into dialogue* with the world. It is about turning them towards the world and about arousing their desire for wanting to be *in* the world and *with* the world, and not just with themselves.

(2017: 53, original emphasis)

The negotiation of this space is considered with reference to Biesta's philosophy of education, juxtaposed with anthropologist Tim Ingold in a discussion of *Ailleurs (Elsewhere)*, a collaborative drawing exchange project between Plymouth College of Art (PCA) and Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain (MoCo ESBA) in 2017. The intention is to bring a pedagogy of collaboration and encounters to bear, to argue for drawing as a singular means of working within this set of tensions, one that is able to express Biesta's active sense of dialogue as a 'turning towards the world'.

In the *Ailleurs (Elsewhere)* project, undergraduate and postgraduate students from PCA and MoCo ESBA exchanged objects anonymously via mail through which a visual response was evoked through drawing. The aim was to initiate new dialogues between people and places that questioned ideas of interconnectedness and dominant forms of communication technology within contemporary culture. The idea of an unknown destination and unknown recipient was an important part of the exchange and interpretation where the object given and object received became a catalyst for an encounter through and with drawing, where an awareness of self in and with the world became heightened. To exist as subject requires an opening up to the world, where one's expression and gesture gain agency through collaboration (Biesta 2017: 63). The dialogic function set out here does not exclude the verbal, but rather preferences dialogue as a positional space, where ideas of conversation can be present in other forms and through other means, for example through tacit encounters with objects, with drawing and with people. Biesta writes that 'to exist as subject thus means to exist in dialogue with the world; it means being in the world, without occupying the center of the world' (2017: 57). This position or space of dialogue within educational learning (existing as subject), necessitates a placing of oneself to one side, an 'off-centeredness' (2017: 37). It is within this difficult collaborative space that we can begin to genuinely engage and be in dialogue with the world and is where we argue the real educational work lies. If dialogue is therefore a space, it needs to be envisioned as a radical space, a space of tension, a space of encounter with potential for change. The question then arises: what role can drawing play in this radical educational space?

The participants in the *Ailleurs* project explored means in which objects can have specific local and cultural significance, by investigating how these objects become completed, altered or transformed through the act of drawing. The project brought to bear the idea of *elsewhere* through an interaction with objects, some familiar and some more culturally specific, from another place and interrogated their potential to influence and affect the work made. The project posed initial questions to students, for example: in what way can the physical action of drawing make space or connect and what are the ways in which drawing can describe our interconnected contemporary condition?

Student Vanessa Allen (PCA) sent a box of drawing chalk to her collaborator in Montpellier. The recipient, student Nicolas Aguirre (MoCo ESBA) responded by mailing back the same box of chalk



Figure 1: Installation view (2017). Ailleurs Drawing Project. © Plymouth College of Art & Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain.



Figure 2: Vanessa Allen (2017). Wall Drawing. © Plymouth College of Art & Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain.



Figure 3: Ratna Saksena (2017). Moving Vessels. © Plymouth College of Art & Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain.

with a set of instructions for a wall drawing. The instructions in French required Allen to draw a common plant inside a transparent box within a given set of dimensions. In this case the encounter through and with drawing arguably positions Allen as 'subject' as she made visible her interpretation while simultaneously drawing out a request from an unknown sender. In an attempt to hold a middle ground, Allen aimed to enact both positions simultaneously, producing a drawing that is not characteristic or recognizable as Allen's practice. The exhibition travelled to MoCo ESBA in July 2017, where Allen sent the remainder of the chalk with a further set of drawing instructions for Aguirre to employ.

Berger writes of drawing as the 'essential structure of the human spirit [...] [where] drawings offer hospitality to an invisible company which is with us' (2005: 117). French sociologist Marcel Mauss in his essay *The Gift* conceives of the gifted object as active, it possesses something of the giver (1954). He describes the bond created in an exchange as a bond created between people. Tim Ingold writes further on the gifted object:

[...] the gift I give you, and that is incorporated into your very being, remains fully conjoined to me. Through the gift my awareness penetrates yours – I am *with* you in your thoughts – and in your counter-gift you are *with* me in mine.

(2016: 10, original emphasis)

Ingold describes this as interpenetration and states that as long as we continue to give and receive, this can be sustained, describing it literally as two hands clasping, or a meeting of minds. This collaborative act enables another space and level of understanding to unfold. It is the presence or spirit of the giver held within the object that renders the object active and enables interpenetration to occur. In the *Ailleurs* project and in the example above the active object is then further linked, completed, or altered through the act of drawing adding an additional channel for interpenetration within that exchange. Arguably, drawing here expands and deepens this permeation between people and adds further slippage between subject and object, active and passive, yours and mine.

From her collaborative partner Huan Liu (MoCo ESBA), student Ratna Saksena (PCA) received a CD with a sound recording, a postcard and a small jar of water from a fountain in the centre of Montpellier. These objects became the catalyst for a complex work comprised of drawing and film. Saksena focused on what she felt were the autobiographical embodiment in the objects, utilizing drawing as an attempt to capture the movement of water from Montpellier held within them. A physical drawing emerged that appeared to complicate binary notions of 'you and me', where Saksena occupied an *offcentredness* in the collaborative space, as subject, enabling the emergence of dialogue and another's presence.

In return, Huan Liu received an antique surveyor's measuring tape from Saksena. Liu writes:

66 feet is a response to an English measuring tape in feet. 66 feet is close to 20 meters – two indexes marked on the same tape. Here I explore the link between measurement and the human body using the tape to draw a circle in the sand on a beach in the Mediterranean.

(Huan 2017: n.pag.)

In this work Liu literally and metaphorically takes a line for a walk, and it is in this example that the relationship of drawing and collective action to the mode of the middle voice is described. In his seminal work *The Thinking Eye* (1961), Paul Klee described the line in terms of three types of movement: active, middle or passive:

[Klee] oriented himself in the grammar of ancient Greek, with which he was familiar through his classical education. There is a middle voice between the active and passive in ancient Greek, which is used for all those actions that are neither actively directed nor passively endured, such as 'appearing', 'speaking', 'dancing'. Drawing as the movement of a point 'that sets itself in motion' can be seen as such a middle voice.

(Kudielka 2002: 54)

In Klee's cosmogony the middle voice is represented by a line which 'is short of time' and 'wants to get to 1, then to 2, then to 3, etc. as quickly as possible' and this he sees 'more like a series of appointments than a walk' (1961:105). Liu's response to the measuring tape is process-led, setting up a circumstance where the measuring tape makes the drawing through the agency of the artist, the line in the sand becoming Klee's 'series of appointments' along the arc of the circle. Liu occupies the space of subject, activating the dialogue inherent in the object (the tape). As a resonant contradiction in the piece, she is both central (as the pivot point of the circle) and off-centre (as subject) simultaneously.

Tim Ingold (2016) describes the functions of the middle voice as a means of understanding reciprocity. For Ingold, the middle voice is the agent inside the process of his or her action, inside the verb, not separate from it. The line of becoming walks, draws or sings, neither in the active voice nor in the passive, but in the voice of the middle. Drawing in Liu and Allen's work required a willingness, a desire to enter into a complex, unknown space with another through and with drawing. It involved a relinquishing of the mastery of an active subject, without however assuming the position of passive object of another's action. The effect is a relinquishing of the self, where the drawing evinces none of the expressivist sentimentality that causes us to look through the work to the creator prior to it: rather it focuses us on materiality and gesture, the drawing *itself* as it were. And in this absence we realize the relative omnipresence of the self (but not the objective self of identity, but of

their subject-ness), so eloquently expressed in Huan Liu's work with the circle in the sand and revealed in Allen's wall drawing.

We have heard how art is a mode of encounter for connecting places/people. The middle voice opens a space of collective action and here Ingold again defines his idea of *correspondence* as an attainment of a certain 'like-mindedness', enabling those with different experiences of life, both young and old, to carry on together. This is not about the exchange of information, as communication is often understood today; it is rather about 'forging a concordance' (2016). As John Dewey writes: 'Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common' ([1916] 2004: 4).

This is to reach out to others who are – at least initially – different from us. To understand the meaning of communication we could perhaps revert to the medieval usage of 'to common' as verb. To communicate with people is then to common with them, in the participatory process of living together. In joining with others each of us comes into our own as a person with a singular and recognizable voice. With the effacement of the distinctions between subject and object, active and passive, comes a slippage in the boundary between places and identities of the protagonists. In the *Ailleurs* project as a whole, drawing emerged as a material practice and collaborative act, a mode for the middle voice and for 'commoning' as a potential for communication and encounter.

Our concluding statement returns us to the beginning of the paper, to Josef Tischner and his philosophy of dialogue that addresses the issues of people, the Self and crucially their relations with another person, with the Other. This enriching orientation towards broader ethical issues and a radical application of philosophical thought to man as an individual, separate and unique being has taken us by way of Lévinas to the writing of Gert Biesta, where this fundamental thought is applied to education. Biesta reasserts the significance of the teacher, one who turns the student towards the object, where resistance is met from the limits of the world and where the learning is not to push so hard that the world is overcome nor in a contrary manner to give up on initiatives and ambitions, but rather to maintain the balance of a dialogue or middle ground. An exchange with the Other, through the bond of the gift, means that the students assume a relationship and are 'able to live in the world without occupying the centre of the world' (Meirieu 2007: 96) Their drawing (and for this we should read their identity) becomes part of a dialogue with the Other, through the object shared. There is a correspondence through the process of exchange and participants become connected, across borders, through drawing. Staying in the difficult middle ground, as we have discussed, means operating with the middle voice and relinquishing the mastery of an active subject, without however assuming the position of passive object of another's action (it is Tischner who returns us to the necessity of being 'self contained').

Finally, the pedagogical project we have described sets out the object given and object received as a catalyst for an encounter through and with drawing, where an awareness of self in and with the world became heightened. For students arriving with diverse experiences and desires from



Figure 4: Huan Liu (2017). 66 Feet. © Plymouth College of Art & Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Montpellier Contemporain.

secondary education, but also mature students with an already formed self-awareness, this becomes a difficult physical and metaphysical space of encounter. This exchange between Self and Other heightens the physicality of being present, of the materiality of the object and the gestural act of drawing, merging in a 'turning towards' the world that is felt in its resistance, connecting the participants in ways that go beyond contemporary ideas of virtual connectedness. The *Ailleurs* project itself has developed its methodologies more recently through further timely iterations in Europe and at Tate Exchange, in printmaking, drawing and exchanges through food culture and potlach meals. While the methodology employed within the *Ailleurs* project has its antecedents in numerous educational exchange projects, re-framing this as we have done here, through an encounter with the Other and its tensions, demonstrates that drawing has a critical role in developing collaboration in our pedagogies, towards a process of 'reconciling ourselves to reality' (Arendt 1994: n.pag.) and of encountering each other in dialogue.

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Contributor details

Dr Majella Clancy is an artist, lecturer and programme leader for BA (Hons) Painting, Drawing and Printmaking at Plymouth College of Art. She holds a BA in Fine Art from Limerick Institute of Technology (2000). She completed an MFA (2006) and a Ph.D. (2013) both at Ulster University, Belfast. She has presented her research nationally and internationally, most recently, 'The Thinking I: Self, Materiality and Paint Practice', *Teaching Painting International Conference*, Royal Academy, London (2018), 'Ailleurs 2', with Dr Stephen Felmingham, *Impact 10, International Printmaking Conference*, Santander, Spain (2018).

Contact: Plymouth College of Art, Tavistock Place, Plymouth, PL4 8AT, UK.
E-mail: mclancy@pca.ac.uk

Dr Stephen Felmingham is an artist, educator and a senior lecturer in the postgraduate fine art, drawing, painting and printmaking courses at Plymouth College of Art. He studied at Middlesex University, completed his MA in Drawing at the University of the Arts London (Wimbledon) and later his doctorate at the University of Leeds in 2014. His research interests are drawing, creative

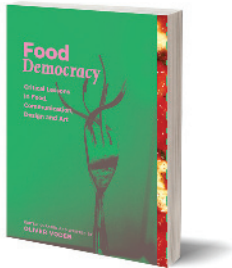
pedagogy and socially engaged art practices and his work is represented in collections nationally and internationally.

Contact: Plymouth College of Art, Tavistock Place, Plymouth, PL4 8AT, UK.

E-mail: sfelmingham@pca.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7461-1045>

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Food Democracy

Critical Lessons in Food,
Communication, Design and Art

By Oliver Vodeb

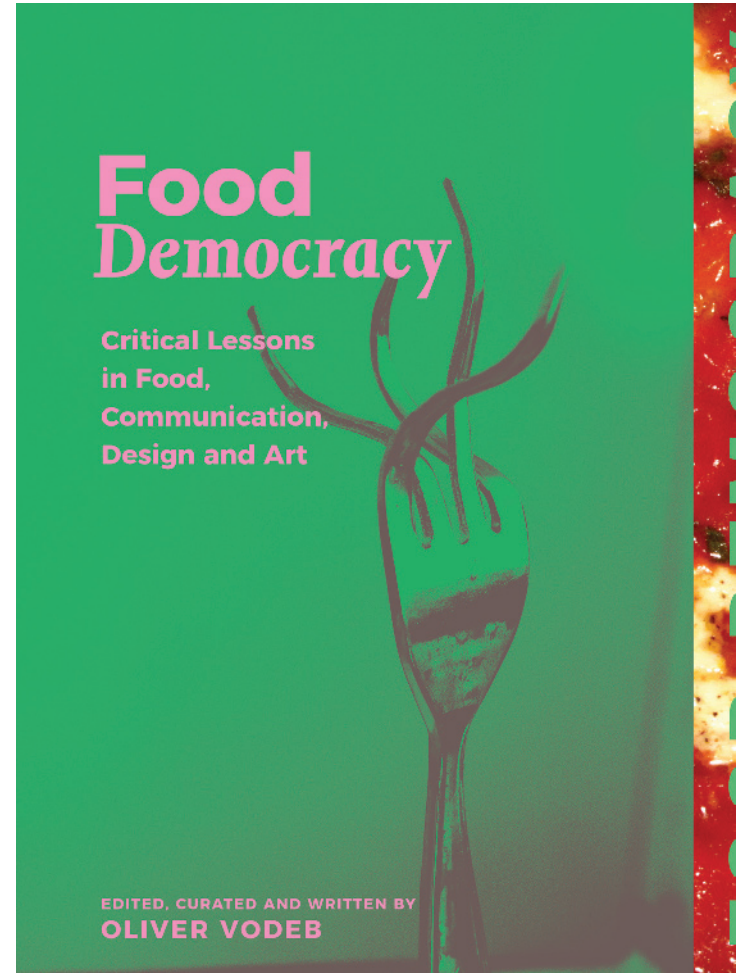
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In a world where privatization and capitalism dominate the global economy, the essays in this book ask how to make socially responsive communication, design and art that counters the role of the food industry as a machine of consumption. *Food Democracy* brings together contributions from leading international scholars and activists, critical case studies of emancipatory food practices and reflections on possible models for responsive communication design and art. A section of visual communication works, creative writings and accounts of participatory art for social and environmental change, which were curated by the Memefest Festival of Socially Responsive Communication and Art on the theme of food democracy, are also included here. The beautifully designed book also includes a unique and delicious compilation of socially engaged cooking by the academic and activist community.



Food Democracy

**Critical Lessons
in Food,
Communication,
Design and Art**

EDITED, CURATED AND WRITTEN BY
OLIVER VODEB