

10. TEACHING DRAWING FORMALLY, NON-FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY. DRAWING PRACTICES TO IMPROVE OUR PERCEPTION

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Abstract: *In this presentation, I will discuss the potential of drawing practice to amplify our perception and learning capacity. I will describe firstly what I consider formal, non-formal and informal drawing related to the different types of education. Then I will point out which aspects of our learning process can be affected by each of these modes or types of drawing and framework. Some concrete exercises and results will also be explained in order to demonstrate and exemplify the characteristics described previously. In the last part, I will go deeper into a set of non-formal exercises entitled *Drawing While Moving*, the main part of an educational innovation project at the University of Murcia. This journey will allow me to conclude with some appreciations linked to environmental awareness and how the scarce connection with the natural space (planetary body) and our own body can be approached through the practice of drawing.*

Key words: *drawing, learning, embodied cognition, multi-sensory perception, ecology*

“Drawing is always about problem solving” (Garry Barker, 2020)

1. Introduction

This essay emerges from the encounter of several lines of experience and experimentation with drawing throughout my professional career as a teacher and artist. It reflects, on the one hand, a knowledge based on the teaching of drawing in the academic field, specifically with students of the first degree in Fine Arts, in the course *Drawing and Form*. On the other hand, the teaching innovation project at the University of Murcia: *Drawing While Moving*, which took place during the 2023-2024 academic year and includes experimental practices conveyed through drawing. In this project, in addition to undergraduate students, other participants in higher education, such as master's and doctoral students, are also involved.

These would be formal and non-formal education channels respectively. Finally, I would point in a third place to my practice as an artist, which integrates the frequent use of drawing, both as a constituent material and as a vehicle for connection, analysis and exchange in collaborative and participatory works of art. These works involve the participation of a diverse and plural audience in terms of age, education and background. There is no clear objective of teaching on my part, or learning on theirs, which is why I classify them as informal. I write thus from the confluence of my profile as a teacher, researcher and artist, from the observation of the impact and effect of the practice of drawing on a diverse public.

2. Formal, non-formal and Informal, Teaching and Drawing

If we look at the classification of formal, non-formal and informal education in the field of educational practice, we have to consider to a large extent the setting in which such education takes place. Formal education takes place in educational institutions with a specific curriculum, would be classroom-based, certified,

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systematised, planned and organised, possibly with a degree of compulsory nature. Non-formal education, although it may be provided in recognised educational institutions, is not part of compulsory education and the type of certification it offers does not correspond to a planned educational system.

Informal education is usually provided in connection with a specific situation or setting, is ad hoc and spontaneous, is voluntary and, to a greater extent than the two previous types, would be associated with the entertainment and enjoyment that the experience can provide. The main objective in this last type of education is not so much the acquisition of specific professional skills, but rather growth through an enriching experience at various other levels. It does not result in any certificate or documentation that would support the transmission of any knowledge.

In the subject that concerns us, the teaching of drawing in a formal, non-formal and informal way can be studied from a double prism. On the one hand, the type of education (described above) and on the other, the type of drawing. For this reason, I will define the basis from which I start by referring to formal drawing, non-formal drawing and informal drawing. By formal drawing we mean those practices in which visually controlled drawing prevails, i.e. drawing based on looking, observing carefully and drawing; “the term visually controlled drawing is used as an overall term for the seeing-drawing process” (Frisch, 2010, p.3). We assume that the expected result of this type of practice is a close resemblance to reality. It is a realistic drawing, in which the degree of similarity indicates the level of knowledge and control of technical competence and skill.

This type of formal drawing is one of the courses taught in all faculties of Fine Arts and other official teaching institutions. It instils an understanding of the basic principles of drawing, universal to all art disciplines: mass, volume, form, contour, texture, and shadow. Drawing skills impact also rational thought, as it explores knowledge. It is considered one of the foundations of knowledge to be acquired by students who will in the future be engaged in the production of works of art, and also by those who will apply the knowledge to the accurate representation of flowers, plants, human and non-human animals; as well as by those engaged in the representation of architecture (Cooper, 2001) and other organic matter (Bryson, 1990).

Non-formal and Informal visually controlled drawing processes seek to make a simile, or a “look-alike” representation. The realistic aspect is less demanding and they can train more freely in areas such as gesture, dynamism and expression. It may also work with time, like a sequence which, according to Anning (1999, p.169) would be a rational order for building the drawing. Furthermore, non-formal and informal modes of approach open up the possibility of studying and representing form in alternative, multi-sensory ways. Using senses other than the visual in order to, as Barker (2020) describes, solve ‘the problem’. Pushing eyesight into the background and giving priority to other senses as the inputs to the practice of drawing, points to new embodied methodologies that might uncover ‘unseen’ elements.

3. From Thinking Without a Banister to Drawing While Moving

During the 2023/2024 academic year, the educational innovation project

Drawing While Moving (<https://veronicaperales.eu/drawing/>) took place, focused on the participation of students with a diverse profile from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Murcia (and other universities occasionally) (Figure 1). The main specific goals were:

1. Production of specific content, accessible from mobile devices and published in open access for the students who have participated more actively in the project and all those who wish to try them. This approach responds to the promotion and use of English for Spanish students seeking to improve their bilingual training.
2. Designing exercises that can be carried out ubiquitously and autonomously, accessing them from their mobiles.
3. Conducting several face-to-face and synchronous practical sessions, integrating movement in different ways into these practices. Testing sensory awareness and pointing plurisensoriality, articulating also locative tools in order to create geolocalised narratives connected with drawing.

The first challenge was to introduce the movement originally. I must also say that proposing the simple exercise of drawing something in movement is, in itself, a way of leaving the space of comfort. That is true of any artist. Movement is life; like the sound the earth makes as it turns (Parant, 1993). We are “while moving”, even when there is no displacement. Because our movement is inside and outside us. I started reflecting on Hannah Arendt's statement of thinking without a bannister (2021); she intended to think (philosophise) from scratch, without relying on previous assertions. So did I, I mean, this idea resonated extended to drawing to me.

The main goal was to awaken our multisensory perception. I think this awakening is essential to full appreciation in our lives. Never before had we enjoyed a technological potential like the one we have now: almost perfect lenses, more precise capacitive captors, and more powerful analytical engines... However, it seems that we have never been so far away from our own bodies (not only as individuals but as a planetary corpus). The awakening of our senses and outdoor learning are both vehicles for embodied cognition, empathy and the approach to ecological consciousness.



Figure 1. Documentary image of the practical work carried out for the The Walking Body festival (TWB5). Photo: Fred Adam

These are examples of exercises: *Drawing While Moving: Session 1 Perceiving and drawing the movement inside us*. Drawing what we do not see (but feel through other senses) takes us into a particular and subjective territory, it certainly takes us out of our comfort zone. So, before starting these sessions, it is very important to build the participants' confidence. It is essential for you to understand that there are no right or wrong results, all of them are valid or right ones. The diverse plurality of

all the answers we can get is not a symptom of disagreement, but a confirmation of the differences in perception and representation strategies of each one.

This is the practice: Use just a paper and a marker, we will also need a small piece of sweet; remember we always use a continuous line, which means we do not lift our pen from the paper. Continuous line drawing is a record, not only of what we see, think or imagine... it is a time recording. Time is captured in that line we draw and, somehow, space too. Put the sweet into your mouth and start drawing what happens inside your organism. I know... you can't see, but you can feel it. Do not try to draw from the outside what is happening inside you (I suggest you close your eyes to better draw!). This is about representing –through the continuous line– what is going on according to your senses. How do all those particles move into your body? How do you feel the shape of yourself from the inside?



Figure 2. Documentary image, Session 1: Perceiving and drawing the movement inside us, *Drawing While Moving* (2024) Photo: Verónica Perales

After finish... always after, participants can check drawings made previously by other people (Figure 2). *Drawing While Moving: Session 2* The moving movement inside us. How does being in motion affect our perception? When we walk through a forest –either alone or accompanied– a surprising phenomenon occurs. While we move, everything else stops (I mean, most of the living beings that inhabit the place). If we pause our movement and stay silent and discreet, all those beings will move anew, the whole dynamics will start again. Many times, when we draw we try to “freeze” what is happening, capture a single instant of a continuous flow. This is the practice: As before, use paper and a marker to represent always with a continuous line; you can have another sweet if you want to ... you may need it, this is hard work! The challenge is to represent two movements using just one line: the movement inside your own body (1) and your body itself moving through space (2).

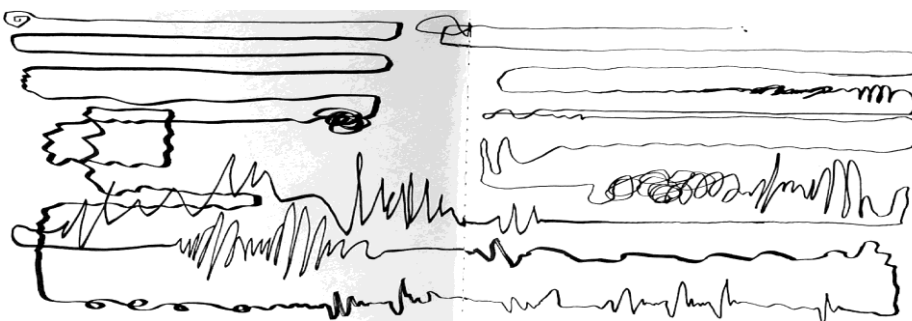


Figure 3. Documentary image, Session 2: The moving movement inside us, *Drawing While Moving* (2024) Photo: Verónica Perales

Remember that this is a challenge, a formula that never has been resolved ... until now. Can't wait to see the outcome! (Figure 3) We (ourselves) belong to the

planetary body, so we are all potential Gardens of Eden. While moving, we are *Eden in Motion*²³⁴. I have always been seduced by the variations (drawing, painting, engraving) that Paul Klee made on the figure of the tightrope walker. No doubt the line of the rope and the body is a continuous line of drawing. As the whole flows, they are written and inscribed.

This is the practice: Use a paper and a marker while walking the "tightrope". For this one, you will also need a tape and a thick marker. First, define a line with the tape. Draw on it the line that the tightrope walkers (Eden(s) in Motion) will follow. While the tightrope walkers move without leaving the line, they draw. The exercise ends when the energy stops and one of the bodies manifests it. Share with the group how movement affects your spatial perception and the experience of peripheral vision during this practice.

4. Awakening of ecological consciousness

“Once we start embracing difference not as a rigid separation but as uncanny affinity, (...) we see that humans are more like non-humans, and non-humans are more like humans than we think”. (Morton, 2021, p.61)

In addition to my role as a teacher and researcher at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Murcia, I have had a solid artistic production since the early 2000s. Firstly, collectively, around climate change, the disappearance of species and the connections of those extinctions and technological development and market; and later on an art production (solo) differentiated by an ecofeminist perspective in which I've been dealing also with non-human identities and uniqueness. It was with the Transnational Temps collective (the New Yorker Andy Deck, the French artist Fred Adam, and myself as a Spanish partner), that we began to use the term eco-artivism. Today this concept is already present in some international research and publications. Remains, however, somewhat unknown.

Ecoartivism comes from the term artivism which brings together activism and vindicating artistic practices. It implies a social movement and is conveyed through non-violent strategies that emphasize collaborative methodologies. This spirit owes to the notion of activist art as defined by Nina Felshin in *But, is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (1994), is an emblematic text in which activist art is defined as having “a foot in the art world and another in political activism” (2001:73). Far from producing traditional art objects, this type of art promotes cultural forms that activate collaborative and creative processes to promote social changes and empower movements and communities.

In the long run, the main objective is to change the rules of the game. It could be said that in artivism art reflects the vital posture of a society that demands a multi-directional dialogue, an active listening and answering; a society that expresses a creative disobedience. Ecoartivism frames a set of artistic practices corresponding to the bases of artivism which, moreover, have a clear ecological focus. Ecoartist interventions and artworks would, therefore, be “those aiming at unleashing that change towards more just and sustainable societies, which point to new forms of understanding and relating to the cosmos” (Perales, 2020, p.299). However, I think it is crucial to stress that I'm not trying to homogenize or categorize; instead, it is

²³⁴ Any *Eden in Motion*, Festival The Walking Body 05 took place in Guimarães, Portugal, in March 2024. <https://veronicaperales.eu/blog/?permalink=any>

about to underline points of connection and confluence, without ever sacrificing tissular diversity. In a way, my whole life project is eco-activist, and although this approach may appear in a more or less subtle way in what I do, it permeates my teaching, my research and my personal work.

At this point, we may underline how ecoartivism connects with the exercises described previously. To this question my answer would be bold and clear: It connects in that it blurs the boundaries between inside and outside. To start with an example, on the very first day of class, I ask my students (to help me memorise their names), to draw a small portrait of themselves. I tell them: you can do it however you want but, personally, I prefer you to draw yourselves from the inside and not from the outside. They are first-year students, and many of them look at me without really understanding what I'm talking about. Of course, I explain, you can pick a picture (a photo or selfie) of yourselves from your mobile phone and copy from it, or you can draw yourselves as you know you are (that is, from the inside, from your deep knowledge of yourself (that may not be only visual).

The limit between the inside and outside of our bodies is key to addressing the connection or relationship we have with the planet; I consider it to be crucial, a determining element in the ecological transition we need. It is totally different to take care of someone else's body than one's own body. This false limit between us and the other also affects our relationship with other living beings. When we discover that there is really no boundary between our body and what surrounds us, as Timothy Morton states: "Once we start embracing difference not as a rigid separation but as uncanny affinity, (...) we see that humans are more like non-humans, and non-humans are more like humans than we think" (2021, p.81).

We are body; the understanding that our mind is connected to the planet, as Tonia Raquejo states, brings us not only to the emergence of ecological consciousness but also to models in which art is the engine. For Professor Raquejo, it is not so much about claiming that art transforms the processes of nature, "but rather our way of seeing, feeling, recognizing and experiencing it." (2015, p.17), then also, the way we are acting. As we know, the corporealization of knowledge (also called embodied cognition) consists of those learning processes in which we depend to a large extent on the abilities of the physical body; in those processes, the body plays a causal (or may I say constitutive) role in the cognitive process. In general, when speaking of learning we tend to give a clear primacy to the mind; however, as you know, the more neuroscience advances the more the notion that the body is an inseparable part of the mind gains traction.

Everything is connected: our senses impinge on thought, and thought conditions our perception. But, less and less we live in natural environments. In 2000, we, the Transnational Temps collective, talked about losing touch: "For the many people who live in 'media rich' societies, losing touch with the condition of the biosphere is easy (...) Although much information is produced and exchanged concerning environmental problems (...) The constant duplication of digital imagery blurs the status of the things pictured (...) the natural world is difficult to recognize"²³⁵.

²³⁵ *Novus Extinctus*, Transnational Temps (2001). <http://www.artcontext.org/novus/>

5. By way of an open-ended conclusion

What I would like to stress in this article is that from the practice of non-formal or informal drawing, we can provoke or stimulate our perception; “In a very real sense, drawings make parts of the self and/or levels of development visible” (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart et al., 2011, p. 30). The power of our perception (Tafalla, 2019), our imagination and nature itself may be taken as a form of ecological inquiry. From that we may propose a pedagogical approach “that prioritises relationships and connections to the natural world, bringing an ecological lens to imagine a more regenerative approach to arts education” (Hay, 2024, p.413). A good example of informal learning of drawing skills can be seen in the artwork *Ecology of an Embrace*²³⁶ (2018), in which the exercise of drawing can lead to an awareness of one's own physical limitation, “to understand the world “anew”, from another vision” (Perales, 2023, p. 256).

I firmly believe that “culture and the arts are integral to the holistic and inclusive development, resilience, and overall well-being of individuals and societies. Culture is at the heart of what makes us human, and provides the foundation of our values, choices and relationships with one another and with nature, endowing us with critical thinking, a sense of identity, and the ability to respect and embrace otherness” (UNESCO, 2024). I will end with a personal reflection, which is important to me in my timeline. It also points to movement.

In 2004, two decades ago now, I was completely immersed in the writing of the doctoral thesis that I would defend in January 2005. The title of the thesis was: *With the body into the head*. The head (my head) was at that point the operating theatre where everything happened, the catalyst for all the inputs that surrounded me. Twenty years later, paradoxical as it may seem, if I were to rename the art-based research I am now engaged in, I would say: *With my head into my body*, that is, a notion of the body as a complex ‘thinking’ organism. Thus, in my personal research, the text subverts the established grammar in a search for alternative ways, the line escapes (runs), and my own body ‘text’ rebels and overwrites itself. The head into the body, a silent head, a head that listens and tries to decipher the code. Which is not yet to be composed, it was and it is already written.

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