

## Drawing Pattern and Chaos: gestures of care

### Introduction

The terms pattern and chaos might easily be posited as dichotomous, but what is obvious from this special issue edition is that this is far from the case. My interest in the theme comes from discussions within the Pattern and Chaos Research Group at Norwich University of the Arts (NUA), a group of academic staff and doctoral students interested in exploring the correlations and contradictions between these two constructs through practical and written research. Asking how these might be articulated within contemporary drawing practices, the call for papers for this issue asked for considerations of drawing across the widest range of disciplines. This resulted in submissions from fine art, textiles, geography, philosophy and architecture, perhaps not surprising given the extent to which elements of pattern and chaos seep into all aspects of our everyday lives.

More intriguing, perhaps, is the extent to which drawing practices seen in these submissions made reference to the social dimensions of everyday living, such as conversation and walking. Because of this I will focus on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre as a sociologist and philosopher who wrote extensively about the everyday. I will look specifically at his book *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) - about patterns that underpin everyday routines - and explore the capacity of drawing to examine, displace or disrupt patterns of thought and assumptions that underlie routinised practices of lived experience.

In Lefebvre's analyses of the everyday he observed the potential for any action, even the apparently simple event of a woman buying a pound of sugar, to reveal the 'sum total of capitalist society, the nation and its history' adding that within these humble gestures lie 'an infinitely complex social event, richer than the many 'essences' it contains within itself' (Lefebvre 1991 [1947]: 57). Everyday events are embedded in and imbued with the social and cultural influences or determinants of their condition. Connections to the everyday within the drawing practices seen within this issue vary but drawing as an activity itself appears diverse and ubiquitous, connecting to the world through the built environment, the social, geographical, the micro and the macro. Lefebvre describes the process of eating and sleeping as the everyday, and others – the way one dances, sings, makes music – as extra-everyday. Where might drawing sit in this continuum?

In *Rhythmanalysis* Lefebvre describes how in our everyday behaviours time, place and the expenditure of energy produces rhythm. He defines a difference between cyclical and linear rhythms, the cyclical being the rhythms of the body (circadian rhythms) and within the days and seasons, the linear being the process of birth, growth, peak and decline (2004: 15). The linear is also defined as those movements that derive from human and social activities, especially the movements or '*gestes*', of work (2004: 90). These rhythms become crosshatched together, acted out through gestures of the everyday that are learned and repeated.

### Repeat, repeat, repeat

The repetitive drawn gesture is an obvious connection to make when considering the title 'Drawing Pattern and Chaos' and would appear to be highly relevant judging by the numbers of drawings in the 2017 Jerwood Drawing selection that featured abstracted and heavily repeated marks and motifs. **Lesley Halliwell** (see this issue's featured drawing [/s](#)) overlays repetitive marks until the surface of the paper support tears. When describing the surface of her drawings she talks of these breaks as points of 'entry', being able to slow down the process of looking. Lefebvre writes that it is only when rhythm is disrupted, when the irregular begins to pervade the expected, that we become fully conscious of the pattern, 'stops, silences and blanks, resumptions and intervals' bringing with it a 'differentiated time, a qualified duration' (Lefebvre 2004: 78). The gaps in Halliwell's drawings (some would refer to them as glitches) are critical: they are where the act of looking and perception

is allowed to pause and deliberate. Similarly, the act of looking is thwarted by the shine and gloss of the materials; they prompt a point of resistance producing an active and productive tension for the viewer.

‘Drawing is an activity that itself takes time as a legible phenomenological gesture. It is easy to imagine how much time a drawing took.... The minutes and hours elapsed in a drawing are legible in a way that time is not for ready-mades or conceptual works or even for film’ (Gronlund 2013: 23). This inscription of temporality is useful in as much as it demonstrates a comparison or metaphor for repeated behaviours, the cycles as written about in *Rhythmanalysis*. By understanding these cycles we develop more understanding of the everyday. Inscribed also within time is the implication of what Lefebvre refers to as ‘dressage’, how rhythms within the everyday are inculcated through the processes of education, social environment and working life. However, through the gaps and glitches that we can create within these everyday practices, through disruption, the non-routinised or the introduction of the chaotic, we exercise agency.

In the case of **Andrea Stokes’** drawing ‘Ghost Flower 1 for MM’, by tracing the patterns of the net curtain she recalls her own childhood, and through transcribing from a mass-produced object presents questions about the value of the curtain and issues around decoration and taste. Emma Cocker writes that where once the practice of copy and appropriation was a tactic of cool critique it might also be performed ‘with emancipatory intent, even love’ (Maier 2015: 34). In referring to the manufacturing of the net curtain Stokes calls to mind the many hands through which this design has passed and the conditions for these workers. There are social implications in the repeated gestures inherent in this drawing. As Lefebvre might observe, the ‘whole chain of the commodity conceals itself inside this material and social object’ (Lefebvre 2004: 82).

The important role that repetition has on the creative process within drawing is evident in the way that many of these writers describe their working methods. ‘Pattern and the Boundaries of Order’ is an essay written by **artist Lucy Ward and physicist Felix Flicker** exploring the ‘friction’ between periodicity (the regularity of intervals) and disorder in Ward’s drawings. Ward draws patterns generated from everyday situations and observations, disrupted to create non-regular patterns that are generated from mathematical classifications of order and disorder seen in the structure of crystals. The link in these drawings to everyday behaviours and observations points to Lefebvre’s plea to identify rhythmanalysis as a methodological structure or tool and not just a theoretical construct. In their attempt to create a methodology Ward and Flicker articulate the incompleteness or inadequacy of attempting to demonstrate pattern without the chaos.

### **Looking, looking again and looking differently**

At NUA’s 2018 ‘Beyond Pattern and Chaos’ symposium I witnessed artist Danica Maier’s performative reading entitled ‘Looking Again’. During this event she presented projections of her work at the same time repeating spoken texts that either alluded to the content of the visual work or to more personal references (specifically her grandmother’s sewing and grandfather’s love of calligraphy). The words illuminated but didn’t explain the works. Rather, they enhanced it, supplemented it and gave context to her own practice. Repetition of language was used in her drawing and echoed in her lecture. The drawings were in stitch, or in pen, or in paint, the meanings of the words somehow both reinforced and dissipated as she repeated them. As she spoke the words ‘Writing letters to feel the twirl’ she described an embodied act of making, enticing us to ‘move closer.... zooming in and zooming out’. She talked of looking, looking again and looking differently (Maier 2018).

This type of looking differently characterises **Kate Farley’s** research project perfectly. These drawings take her observations and transcriptions of woven cloth as the basis for creating surface pattern.

Again, her project begins with looking, with observation and analysis, both exposing and defamiliarising her understanding of cloth. In Farley's process it is the chaos prompted by the glitch or by tedium that gives rise to new awareness. It is the push and pull of repeating, both the comfort and the discomfort of repetition. Farley and Stokes provide insight into the duality of repetitive processes – the pleasure and impetus to repeat until this repeating becomes tiresome and something new has to be introduced to refresh and re-invent. Farley writes of 'reaching out to invite glitches' to undo the order. There is a structure to this kind of chaos and a balance to the rule-breaking. For Farley the glitch is productive.

In **Katarina Andjelkovic's** essay she champions the way Bruce Goff's drawings "choreograph" pattern in contrast to other 1950s Midwest American architects, attesting to the way they encompass the phenomenological, sensorial, decorative and "expressive". Andjelkovic also finds that by embracing elements of chance and surprise Goff's drawings combine symbolism with Surrealist drawing strategies. This link to Surrealism is echoed in **Krzysztof Fijalkowski's** review of Tomás Saraceno's exhibition *On Air* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, where the authorial source of the drawing is problematised by the use of chance in both automated drawings and in the complex and awe-inspiring patterns produced by Saraceno's chief 'collaborators' – spiders. By making comparisons between these and Saraceno's large sculptural interactive installations Fijalkowski invites us to make connections to larger forces at play in the creation of pattern and chaos.

In his article 'Drawing as Pattern Information Extraction: Linking Geomorphology and Art' **Brian Whalley** advocates the use of drawing as a tool within geomorphology to identify, extract and illustrate common patterns that recur in various natural phenomena. These can expose the diversity of geopatterns and their mix of order and disorder. The art of such drawing is now rarely taught to students within this discipline. Whalley demonstrates the usefulness of such activity as a means of active cognitive perception and transfer of information, pointing out that whether one is drawing for geomorphology or other purposes it is possible to begin with an idea that is speculative and support or test that starting point through drawing. Using digital apps in conjunction with observational drawing Whalley reminds us of the symbiotic relationship that new and traditional technologies can enjoy. Whalley concludes by suggesting that this versatility could be taken further by practitioners within other disciplines.

The translation from the haptic to the digital is also evident in the drawings of **Justin Garnsworthy**. Blu-tack is formed and arranged on the bed of the scanner, to create a composition that is then scanned and further altered using Photoshop. He refers to his research as updating our understanding of frottage, referring to this technique as 'optical light rubbing'. He describes the mechanised process of scanning as removing any human emotion, although his decision-making still implies authorship. As a methodology "digital frottage" explores the territory between control and its lack, creating labyrinthine images.

The immersive scale at which Garnsworthy's works are presented are a reminder of Lefebvre's reference to the macro and micro as being equally elusive, but both gradually knowable through our analysis of what we have to hand and what we know through our senses. Lefebvre writes that '(t)he theory of rhythms is founded on the experience and knowledge [*connaissance*] of the body; the concepts derived from consciousness and this knowledge, simultaneously banal and full of surprises – of the unknown and the misunderstood' (Lefebvre 2004: 67). Farley, Whalley and Garnsworthy use drawing as a way to edit what they see to make sense of the known and unknown, at the same time recognising the role the digital can play in re-ordering these observations.

**Robert Luzar and Sarah Flavel** provide an argument for the consideration of Daoist principles in relation to performative drawing to replace what they describe as problematic 'metaphysical'

assumptions about performance in drawing practices. They contend that there is a disconnect to certain frameworks in the West that may have led artists to explore alternative, often non-Western, modes of thought. Daoist principles could give an account of precision and expertise through practiced, therefore highly skilled, behaviors, offering what the authors consider to be a robust theorisation of performative drawing practices.

Through their article Luzar and Flavel pave the way for further debate and more specific investigation into the way Daoist principles could be applied to performative drawing that relies on repetitive patterns of gesture and mark-making. This is one type of bodily engagement among many. **Stephen Fossey**, in 'An Imbricated Drawing Ontology: Economies of Pattern, Chaos and Scale' uses the example of a specific event at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park as a point of physical and conceptual departure. His drawing research project involved the activity of walking and GPS records of these walks which Fossey describes as a collaboration between the body and satellite technology. (Fossey reminds us that our physical location is always accompanied by markers of space - GPS or locative technologies - and our digital presence in various online platforms.) Including both spoken and written conversation, the work culminated in a drawing performance that layered these various iterations of the project. Through this method Fossey examines how a complex 'dance' exists between social interactions and place, a layering of experiences whether these are physical, digital, performative, social or isolated, and the expressions of these through drawing. Fossey's drawing project refers to a finding of 'common ground' that is both physical and experiential, a geographical and social coming together discovered through spoken and written conversation.

**Stephen Felmingham** also brings the social into focus as he considers the relationship between speaking and drawing, both of which are underpinned by the making and recognition of pattern. Felmingham urges us to think of speech and drawing as socially embroiled; when brought into a dialogue with each other they are well-placed to 'generate and encourage the embodiment of collective gesture and will in the human being'. Drawing in this context sits somewhere between the everyday and the super-everyday. It is able to give voice to groups of people or concerns, the distinctions between speech and drawing being blurred to become a vehicle for broadening our social interactions. In these scenarios drawing becomes a gesture of care.

### **Drawing as 'sweet' resistance**

Melissa Gronlund writes that drawing is 'not only about stories but is itself a vehicle of transference, a way to communicate in absentia' (Gronlund 2013: 26). For **Jean Boyd**, writing about Ariella Azoulay's drawings of the 'unshowable photographs', drawing is also a form of dissensus, a way of turning the civic gaze upon the divisions and distortions of the photographic archive and the events depicted within them. Azoulay makes drawings from the photographic archive of the International Committee of the Red Cross of the repatriation of thousands of Palestinians during the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Boyd shows how this act of copying, rather than being a mindless activity, is a way of acknowledging what Boyd calls a strategic representation - an act of transcription that brings the artists - and the viewer of Azoulay's drawings, closer to the moment, to position an act of care, to pay attention.

This act of looking and re-representation might also be thought of as a form of 'resistance' of the everyday as Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol describe. This resistance is not necessarily synonymous with opposition being closer to the term used in electronics and psychoanalysis - a force that slows down another force.

(r)oom remains for micro inventions, for the practice of reasoned differences, to resist with a sweet obstinacy the contagion of conformism, to reinforce the network of exchanges and

relations, to learn how to make one's own choice among the tools and commodities produced by the industrial era (de Certeau et al 1998: 188).

So, through the gesture of caring enough to draw the photographs Azoulay re-presents these images, projecting from the past to the present. Simultaneously this gesture exposes the archive as a repository for power, in as much as the archive inscribes or imposes patterns of language and order that give it a sense of authority. This is drawing as an act of intervention, illuminating historical patterns of division and redistribution. This drawing as intervention can also challenge these modes of prevailing thought to create new patterns of what Boyd describes as 'being-with others'.

### **Conclusion**

Tania Kovats wrote that we draw to get the measure of a subject, to contain and to 'know' it in a way we didn't before (Kovats 2005: 46). When I embarked upon this project little did I expect that the patterns I would be writing about would be geographical, political and social in nature. I have been jolted out of my comfort zone to consider what drawing can help us know about pattern and chaos in the everyday. By mimetically copying or tracing we attempt to get 'inside' the object, to gain insider-knowledge. In the case of Stokes the tracing of pattern alludes to the repetitive labour inherent in the manufacturing of the net curtain she draws. Whalley sees drawing as a way for geographers to schematize and chart the patterns of the unknown into the known world. For Luzar and Flavel, when seeing performative drawing practices through the lens of Daoist principles, knowledge is that which arises from precise and practised behaviours, highly skilled awareness of the body and its capabilities. In many of the cases in this issue it is the body that is the connection through the body's repeated action. Work and the body, the drawer drawing, crafting and caring - humble gestures perhaps, but holding within them the wealth of the everyday.

Pattern and chaos are slippery notions, neither of which can be valorised over the other. There is a fine line between repetition as something routine and reassuring, and repetition as something that is alienating. Pattern may appear to be reassuring and can provide a sense of comfortable familiarity. But when does that repetition become an irritant? When looking at a continuum of order and disorder it is the 'in-between' area that makes for the most intriguing as artists look for different ways to disrupt or re-think pattern to create alternative modes of thought. Undoubtedly there is value in the repetitive, but clearly seen in the chaotic - the disrupted, the disorderly, the glitch - is a route to alternative forms of perception and communication. Through the activity of drawing, the most everyday and super-everyday gesture, 'new patterns of being-with others may become possible' (Jean Boyd).

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