

43.4 Thinking About Drawing As Cause and Consequence: Practical Approaches in Time

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Abstract

This paper, a conversation between Simon Grennan, Carol Wild, Miranda Matthews and Claire Penketh, explores drawing as cause and consequence, applying Grennan's thinking to three drawings as a means of exploring and exemplifying ideas discussed in his keynote at the iJADE Conference: Time in 2023. Following an initial introduction to key ideas that were raised for that audience, the paper explores the ways that three particular drawings operate, with temporality offering one of a number of ways that they may be explored. The paper centres on three questions: (i) What might students learn are the different purposes of drawing? (ii) How might students adjudicate the status of drawn traces? (iii) How might students adjudicate the value of drawing activities?

Keywords

drawing, drawing status, index, temporality, time

Introduction: Framing the conversation

Simon: In *Thinking about Drawing* (Grennan 2022), one of the recurring ideas that I outline has been used to explain the purpose of drawing, guide and educate drafters and students of drawing, attribute value to drawings and adjudicate their status. In summary,

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this idea considers drawing activities as technical activities, in which a limited range of types of marks constitute a set of recognisable tools for making a drawing, the purpose of which exceeds the activity of employing the tools themselves. A craft analogy is apposite because, according to this way of thinking about drawing, a drawing is analogous to a hand-made chair, for example, and drawing activities are analogous to the learned use of specific tools and physical turns by a carpenter, to manipulate the materials until they constitute something else—a chair. The craft analogy bundles together a more fundamental group of assumptions about drawing. First, that the significance of drawing lies in the drafter's or viewer's perception of drawings' visible formal properties. Second, that these visible properties are components of something else and, moreover, the significance of these properties derives from their recognition as components. Third, that perception of the formal properties of drawings is underwritten by reproducibility—that the same type of mark produces the same perceived effect. Fourth, that reproducibility is demonstrated by experiences of existing examples of drawings. At base, this way of thinking about drawing proposes that perceived effects of specific types of marks mimic visual perceptions of a small range of other directly perceived effects, including experiences of other drawings. It has been applied to many situations in which drawings are made, from depictive drawings (in which the visual properties of a drawing seek to reproduce experiences of the visible properties of the scenes they depict), to maps (in which visible symbols are analogous to experiences of the visible properties of the terrain that they map). Accordingly, drawings are considered distinct from the activities that produce them. To pedagogically enable drawing, according to this approach, drafters and students of drawing need only to learn what the craft of drawing's visual tools are and how to use them. To adjudicate the status of drawings is, rather simply, to adjudicate a drawing's compliance with this conception of drawing. In this journal conference issue on the topic of time, I joined with Claire Penketh, Carol Wild and Miranda Matthews to discuss this and other ways of thinking about drawing, through responding to three very different drawings. The brief outline of one way of thinking about drawing, above, makes specific temporal distinctions about drawings. In fact, these temporal distinctions are as characteristic of this way of thinking about drawing as its focus on formal properties, component parts, exemplary reproducibility and the assumption of perceptual mirroring. If drawings are considered distinct from the activities that produce them, then drafters, viewers and drawings occupy times relative to each other. When we casually ask if a drawing is finished (either of ourselves, making a drawing, or of another's drawing), we are demonstrating this approach. The question begs others are all drawings made to be seen? How do drafters draw and view? Do drawings gain their identity on completion (which is the assumption underlying the idea that drawings are considered distinct from the activities that

produce them)? How do the various purposes of drawings and drawing activities produce different temporal relationships? In this paper, we have channelled these questions into three:

What might students learn are the different purposes of drawing?

How might students adjudicate the status of drawn traces?

How might students adjudicate the value of drawing activities?

Carol: In a school setting, the purpose, status and value of a drawing are often defined through it being produced for assessment purposes. We will touch on this in our discussion of the three drawings responded to here.

Miranda: So what might students learn about the different purposes of drawing?

Simon: Fantastic question. So we're looking at a drawing, maybe by a younger child. It's a great idea to start with this in the sense that it demonstrates a number of different ways that one can think about the purpose of drawing. We can describe this drawing as a figure-ground drawing in lots of different ways (Figure 1). There are enclosures, which are talked about a lot by theorists of drawing, concerning students as young drafters. The central enclosure is a line bounding other marks within it. So, there's the inside and the outside. But actually, the thing that interests me about this drawing more than anything else is what I intuit—I can't be sure—that the drafter is making a drawing that is being used as a prop. I suspect that the drafter is trying to make some kind of visual imitation of the visible world with the enclosed area relative to the proximities of other marks, showing a human figure. And I think okay, and so there is an impulse in the drawing towards shared properties, which is what imitation is (A shares some properties with B). But I understand the other marks surrounding the figure in a different way. I also intuit that this drawing is used as a prop in a situation to which I don't belong, never have belonged to (and can't belong to) so I'm post hoc in the drawing of these surrounding marks and that seems significant. When Leonardo da Vinci made the drawing 'Young Woman in Profile' (1490, Royal Collection Trust catalogue number RCIN 912505) its purpose was to be viewed. The artist was the first viewer, and he expected other viewers to act like him. Now this child's drawing is definitely not like that, I don't think, because this drawing is a prop. The drafter is going through a particular type of activity that I can't join, as a viewer. All I can do is look at it retrospectively and think well, that's what might have been going on. And what I mean by that is this line is pretty obviously a journey line. And so the character leans towards imitation, but the other marks are stages that the drafter has made in order to arrive at different points and then move on.

Miranda: So in terms of talking about the drawing as a prop? What is it a prop for?



Figure 1

Drawing Made by a Young Child. The Drawing Is Made in Green Felt Tip on Paper. It has a Figure in the Centre of the Image with Lines Winding and Curling Around the Outer Edges of the Paper.

- Simon: It depends. I mean, it's difficult to answer, because I'm not in the situation—we can't be in the situation in which the drawing was used as a prop, simply by looking at the drawing. I'm reminded that I made similar drawings at a similar age to this, where I recognise that I was using drawing as a prop for play. When I was imagining myself in a particular situation, or I was imagining a story world in play, then I'd be using the drawing to produce either images, or record my actions, or to intensify emotions. This is not really a representation of a journey, except as a representation produced spontaneously in the moment for the drafter themselves. And that's a very different purpose to making a drawing that is going to be given as a record or left as a record for somebody else to use.
- Carol: I think what you're saying is that in it being a prop, narratively speaking, it's episodic.
- Simon: I think so but also it might be a prop in the sense that the figure in the drawing could also indicate that I've been given some special knowledge about the drawing. We can say that this character is also the drafter. But if I hadn't been given that, then it might be that the character is also a participant in a story that I'm showing to myself as the drafter. And so the character is also a prop. It's not just about the staging posts if you see what I mean, this drawing looks like an adventure drawing, in which the drafter visions themselves.

- Miranda: I think I'm just trying to get into this concept of the prop a bit more—that the drawing acts as an enabler, to do something else in a performative way. So whether that's to enable the drafter to play, or whether that's to enable the drafter to communicate something in a different way in a particular setting or to furnish your world?
- Simon: If I think about 'prop' in the sense of theatre prop, that facilitates action and creates part of a storyworld, for actors and audience. Drawings like this do a number of things at once, and so the character might be a participant whereas the drawing might be a prop in terms of its mapping. It might be a prop in terms of its visualising certain types of situation, that are actually only being imagined, which are only made to help the drafter imagine and not to help anyone else visualise.
- Claire: Would this also work in terms of the drawing operating as a design for something that was going to be made?
- Simon: No. I think that's quite different. This is not a drawing that has an afterlife. We're privileged to look at it in its afterlife. This is a drawing that was only really alive in the moment. As a prop, it's not a plan. It's not preparation for something else. This is an activity produced spontaneously in the moment. And the drawing is part of that imaginative production of the storyworld at the moment of drawing. I think the imagination has already done the conveying. As with the glass of wine placed on a table as a prop in a theatre performance, it produces an intensity or a verisimilitude and that's what it's for, or it's one of the things that it's for. However, I also suspect that this is a journey drawing. The character is simultaneously stationary and moving around this page, and that movement is a movement of the drafter in their imagination in a world in which this drawing also exists.
- Claire: So can you say a little bit more about how that works in terms of temporality?
- Simon: This is a wonderful drawing. It's so rich and so affecting. So I think that in terms of drawing and time, one sees, demonstrated here, a number of different times represented in the drawing all at once. There's a static relationship in terms of a moment which exists forever in the depiction of the character and so, I can look at this retrospectively and through various types of system I understand what it is, and it remains static. Simultaneously we have this journey time, where this drawing only reveals itself or rather, it doesn't really reveal itself retrospectively, because its real significance lies in the moment that mark is made by the drafter, in their imaginary world, in producing the imaginary world and making those stops (marks) along the way. And when that play or adventure or imaginary world was exited, this drawing is just left as a residue. So we find that there are two or three different times in the drawing already.

- Miranda: Would you say anything about the particular form of the drawing—that it's in one colour, it's in one particular shade of green? It's mostly using line and is there anything about that that you think relates to the decision making? Or do you think that's just a contingency?
- Simon: I don't know. It's incredibly difficult to say. I suspect that the drafter has used things at hand and therefore there's a certain amount of contingency. If there had been a very thick pen and line, for example, I don't think it would necessarily have made much difference to the work—to the purpose to which the drawing has been put. And so when we talk about its form, I think that there's quite a wide range of possibilities for this drawing to appear different whilst doing the same things or to have the same purpose for the drafter. It's a really great drawing in that sense as well, because it actually encompasses all of that. This drawing doesn't refer to learning the craft of drawing, as given formally, this is a drawing that has been spontaneously produced to facilitate the imagination—a trajectory into an imaginary world. If it was a pink line, for example, I'm not sure that that would have made a massive amount of difference to my thinking about it, or to the drafters thinking about it.
- Carol: I just wanted to draw you back to something you were saying, that props can do numerous things all at the same time. Thinking about that in relation to your use of the word indices (which I understand to mean power) I was wondering if you could expand on what you mean by the word indices in relation to the powers of what a drawing does or enables, as an event, you know, thinking in Deleuzian terms perhaps?
- Simon: When I've been writing about drawing, I use the word index in a limited way. I think about two ideas. One is the trace of the body, which is the direct residue of the body and one is the indexical significance of drawing meaning that the drawing points to its own manufacture without being a direct residue of bodily action. For example, if you think about a drawing made with a digital tablet and a stylus, then there's both trace and index and part of the index includes lots of different bodies, people who made the machinery, people who wrote the program, the Postal Service that shipped the thing to your door. There are lots of bodies involved, and those are all indexed in the thing itself and in the drawing. And that's quite different from the mark that you might make with the hands even with the digital stylus because that mark is made directly with the body. Not only are traces and indices iterative, they are also ideas. In that sense, the idea of trace and the idea of index are generalisations that constrain all iterative activities, in the sense that they have the capacity to influence what we think the purpose of a drawing might be.

- Claire: So can we consider these ideas in relation to our next image and the second question: How might students adjudicate the status of drawn traces?
- Simon: This drawing (Figure 2) has been called an observational drawing. And so it's entirely unlike the previous drawing in terms of its purpose. The purpose of the drawing is to visibly imitate the visible world. In terms of temporality, the beginning of the drawing and the end of the drawing, for example, this starts and finishes in a very different place to the previous drawing which, as a prop, begins when the imaginative world is conjured—not represented but conjured in the imagination of the drafter. It ends when that imaginative world is exited. Alternatively, in this drawing the drafter worked towards visible imitation. It was finished when the drafter was satisfied that they achieved that task in order that someone, retrospectively, could recognise what they have done. This is a drawing purposed for other people to look at.
- Claire: So how might students adjudicate the status of drawn traces?
- Simon: If we think about the status of the marks in the 'prop' drawing, then these marks only gain status from their place in the imaginative storyworld of the drafter. Alternatively, the marks in the drawing in Figure 2 are only significant in creating a visible imitation. When that imitation has been achieved, both the marks and the scene they are purposed to imitate are visible. The retrospective



Figure 2

A3 Pencil Drawing of a Plant Made from Direct Observation. The Centre of the Image Is More Fully Worked with the Image Sketched in Outline Towards the Edges of the Page.

adjudication of drawings of this type by the drafter and other viewers is often based on adjudicating how successful the imitation is. The drawn marks are judged relatively good or bad according to their success in retrospectively appearing to imitate another visible situation.

- Miranda: I'm wondering, just because it comes up in my viewing of this drawing, how the drawing starts to appear as something else. So it's representing clearly a plant but it also has a kind of muscular quality that just reminds me of anatomical drawings of muscles. And I wondered how you would relate the purpose in nature of a drawing where there is clearly this intention to represent in a realistic way, an object potentially for assessment as Carol said. Something else is coming in as a visual cue that is different to its purpose or its representative qualities.
- Simon: It's interesting that this drawing demonstrates struggle. In a way that the previous drawing doesn't. There was no striving to achieve a competency in the 'prop' drawing. However, in drawings like that in Figure 2, I think that there is always slippage, where yes, you and I recognise that this is a drawing of a plant, but we can also imagine that we see something else. In the terms that the drawing sets out for itself, for adjudication, that's a problem. And so I think what we see there is the struggle to achieve imitative likeness. If we imagine we see imitations of things other than the object of the drawing, that is, muscles because these are leaves—a drawing of this type fails in its own terms (being purposed to produce a retrospectively-viewed imitation of some other visible situation).
- Claire: Can I just ask something about that as well in terms of this idea about the failure of the drawing, or not, because you suggested that this task is complete. You said the task is complete when the person who's made that drawing has arrived at that point where they've produced a successful enough representation? I understand what you're saying in that but there's also an institutional constraint around that, which is the production of this drawing under timed conditions, for example. Where the person making the drawing—maybe it's beyond their scope, because they can't have a resolution to this within the timescale, which I think is indicated here. There's this, as Miranda is describing, really nicely sort of muscular form of the worked part of the drawing with the other elements where, you know, they've sort of patched in, so there's the incompleteness, which is an enforced incompleteness because of the time bound boundaries that were set.
- Simon: I'd say, more often than not, drawing activities are not open ended. They're time limited. There are a number of obvious ways in which that happens. If one is drawing in a commercial studio, then one has a particular amount of time allocated by the business in which to draw a particular section of story. And if you don't do that, you fall foul of the boss. All commercial drawing is about deadlines. One of the constraints of drawing craft is what marks can you make in

the time allotted. Let's reveal that Figure 2 is a drawing made for examination for a school qualification, in an allotted time. How a student handles the time allotment is part of the examination. With Figure 2, we might argue that if the student had taken a different approach to the craft of marking they could have made a more complete drawing. And that seems to me fair enough. Some folks who work to deadlines as drafters produce extraordinarily complete story worlds which imitate the visible in systematic ways in incredibly short spaces of time. I don't think that this drawing's incompleteness speaks to a misunderstanding. Maybe it didn't matter to the drafter that they were not going to finish the picture in its own terms. Maybe they adopted an 'it's enough' approach to the examination. We've all done that!

Carol: I was thinking about the situation where students are required to draw in school. There is the purpose that the teacher has in mind for the drawing. You've also got the purpose that the student might have. I can imagine a drawing very similar to this where a student has really got into just colouring in a leaf, therapeutically just entering the time warp of being in the moment with the material, forgetting what the purpose that the teacher has in mind. I wondered if you could respond to that?

Simon: I don't feel that in this drawing. I feel the imposition of the examination structure and the impulse to make as much of the page visibly imitative as possible in order to hit that benchmark, for examination.

Miranda: I wanted to pick up on that concept of the status of the second drawing in relation to the incompleteness that you were connecting with almost as a point of failure, but also, in terms of the qualities of the drawing. It's like the drafter is sort of reaching into the unknown. And often within school art, let's say, there is that sense of the incompleteness, which is a part of the drawing which is the unknown, of the negative space or even you know, in this case of the plant growing out into somewhere new. So yeah, I suppose that comes in where the status of the drawing is subjective, in relation to interpretation?

Simon: Different drawings create their own terms for adjudicating their value. If I look at the first drawing, then the things that I value about it as a retrospective viewer I understand as being very different to the things that I might value about the examination drawing, or about this third drawing of figures moving (Figure 3). The learning context is definitely in our discussion. If you produced a prop for playful imagining under examination conditions then I think that your drawing would not be valued.

Claire: Depending on what the question is?

Simon: Of course! I think that's a really good way to put it. Why can't an advanced drawing examination question be 'make a drawing as a prop for imagination and leave it behind'?



Figure 3

Photocopy of an A4 Pencil Drawing of a Moving Figure. The Figure is Moving from a Walking Standing Position to Bending and from Left to the Right of the Page.

Claire: That sounds like a fantastic question. I'm going to move us on to the third question then just to repeat and maybe address that in relation to the drawing here (Figure 3). So this was a drawing about a moving figure. It is interesting for me in terms of this third question, how might students adjudicate the value of drawing activities? And as you know, Carol's already made the comment there in terms of this adjudication, in terms of value in thinking about assessment processes. And I think within the drawing here, regardless of whether this student might have been thinking around whether the work was being marked or not, I think something else takes place here, outside of an assessment framework, which is a student wrestling with a representation of time inherent in movement. There's an element of struggle, maybe within this around how this idea about the moving figure might be represented. So yeah, so how might students or how might this student think about adjudicating the value of this drawing or drawing activity?

Simon: I really love these three drawings—they've been so rich to talk about. The curious thing is that this drawing connects for me with the first drawing in very explicit ways. If one thinks about the prop drawing (Figure 1), produced for the imaginative moment. The drafter explicitly took themselves on an imaginative journey, of which the drawing is a part. There is an idea about the drafter moving through time and space, and that is retrospectively intuited by me, even though that's not what the drafter was after, when they were drawing. With Figure 3, there's a representative challenge, which has been achieved in the 'prop' drawing, which is

about visualising those movements—visualising the turn. And this is interesting because that's what the student has done here. However, this drawing is a halfway house between the first drawing and the second one. There are two things going on here. These multiple figures, I assume that they're the same figure moving in space, so this is the same figure at different moments in time. Now that figure in time exists in the 'prop' drawing (Figure 1), but they're only represented once and the rest of the line does that work with the prop for the imagination. But Figure 3 is definitely not a prop drawing. It is for me to look at. The drafter is trying to work out what it looks like if you try to make a representation of the same figure moving in time. And so I think in terms of value, this drawing seems to demand that I recognise that it's been made for me to look at and that's part of its value. Whereas, in the first drawing, I don't think that was made for me to look at, it was made for the drafter to use. So the values there are very different. One of the things that we might think about in terms of teaching drawing is to try to intuit different ways of setting up a situation where the drawing acts in one way or another—and there are lots of ways. In many drawings value is derived from the fact that the drawing is a preparation for something else—a plan for making something, for example. Lots of drawings' value resides in the successful communication of a particular route across a landscape, for example. In mapping, you couldn't apply any of the value systems used in the three drawings that we're looking at here. Drawings inculcate their own value systems. A key is to understand how one sets up those value systems so that one can recognise them oneself and have other people recognise them.

- Miranda: So I'm just thinking about this in terms of how this drawing potentially relates to art history or the artists other references, potentially more so than the way it relates to the other drawings. I mean, I can see LS Lowry in this, potentially, people could see other artists connections, and then that affects the adjudication of the value because often in teaching of Art and Design, the students are advised to choose artists that they can connect with and to pick out connections so that the drawing itself doesn't exist in a vacuum its own creation. That's part of the value is through this network of historical connection connections.
- Simon: I think that's true. Other drafters have been in similar situations to each other, in the past, that is, Lowry. It isn't just about thinking about other drafters' drawings, but also thinking about what the purpose of their drawings was and where the value of their drawings lay and how these were negotiated and adjudicated.
- Carol: I was thinking about what happens to the drawing after it's completed and it's out there in the world and our perception of it, perhaps in relation to failure. I'm reminded of seeing an exhibition of Ben Nicholson drawings many years ago. They were ones that he'd crossed out, he'd put a big blue line across them. His failed

drawings (in his mind) were exhibited in a room perhaps against the intention or the purpose of the artist. Could you respond to that?

Simon: This definition of failure derives from the notion that you might teach craft as the formal identification of properties—that if you make a particular type of mark, it will signify a particular type of thing. And if you exhibit a facility for remembering how to do that, and repeating that, you will produce drawings that succeed—that's the toolkit—to choose something from the toolkit of drawing. If you use the tool, right, your drawing's right—it's the kind of 'let's make a chair' kind of way of dealing with the craft of drawing. And failure has a place in that theorization of drawing but because there are so many purposes to which craft has put drawings. The drawing is identified as what the drafter leaves behind. So the first drawing is not really purposed for us to look at. It doesn't really matter what we think of it and doesn't really matter that we can't access it as a success. It can't be successful for us because we're not in the imaginative story world of the drafter—we're never going to be there. It's almost like we're archaeologists looking post hoc and that's very different to the drawings which seek to establish their own criteria for others retrospectively. And so the notion that a drawing might always have to be reified, as a product that has an afterlife, referring to time again, where the afterlife of the drawing sets the values of the drawing, is only one way of thinking about drawing. Western histories of drawing often privilege that. From reification derives the idea of the great work, the canonical work. The idea of a canon in drawing is very peculiar to me, or a canon of artists or drafters is very peculiar to me, because there's so much drawing going on all the time. You think Crikey!, there's so much more to look at than exists in the canon.

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Carol Wild trained as a sculptor and worked as a playworker before becoming an art and design teacher. She has worked in teacher education and development for over a decade, running PGCE, MA and Artist-Teacher programmes. Her research interests are motivated by a long-term interest in the symbiotic relationship between the art and design teacher, their classroom, and their pedagogy, that come into being together with their students. She is interested in ethnographic, site-responsive, arts-led methods of researching in the art and design classroom as an affective, material space. Her research encompasses the historical and current narratives of art and design education, feminist pedagogies for art and design, cognition in art and design, and artist-teacher practice as a playful intervention in classroom relations.

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