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DRAWING CLOSE - ON VISUAL ENGAGEMENTS IN FIELDWORK, DRAWING WORKSHOPS AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

ABSTRACT

Participatory visual methods are becoming the new hype in anthropology. Researchers tend to present participatory visual methods as attractive approaches to not only promote innovative research that engages informants in original and collaborative ways but to engage students eager to find bridges between the academic world and a world progressively addicted to visual consumerism. But while still and moving image-capturing devices are being democratized as anthropological tools thanks to their recent wide availability and ease of use, some view the practice of drawing (participatory or not) as a more serendipitous niche activity. Unlike photographing and filming, doodling-sketching-drawing – participatory or not – is more about linear image mental processing and communicating (and thus somewhat akin to handwriting, lack of linguistic encoding and propositionality notwithstanding) than an “objective” visual method. Drawing thus elicits a completely different kind of comprehension of the “field”, as well as new forms of social interaction, such as the “public and open spectacle of recording” that anthropologist-draftswoman Carol Hendrickson describes (2008: 119). Based on discussions from a workshop dedicated to “ethnographic

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drawing” in the University of Aberdeen, we propose to tackle some of the features of the drawing practice, hoping that its much-misunderstood potential as a knowledge tool helps us reconsider what anthropological understanding is.

KEYWORDS

Drawing, graphic anthropology, fieldwork methods, representation vs imagination

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Is drawing a suitable medium for acquiring and transmitting anthropological knowledge? If yes, is it definable as a visual method in anthropological research?

These are questions seldom put forward and answered in mainstream anthropological theoretical publications. These questions, however, are quite engaging for a growing number of researchers who are also practitioners of an equally increasing variety of graphic-based productions: sketchbooks made during fieldwork, illustrations of anthropologic materials, creation of comic art and graphic novels, and uses of drawing in participatory research approaches (Collredo-Mansfield 1999: 49 ff, 2011; see also Afonso & Ramos, 2004).² There is a fundamental ambiguity upon which current research and teaching are based: anthropologists growingly use visual non-graphic recording techniques such as photographing and filming, to go about collecting field data, and also use visual materials produced by others to complementarily compose anthropological discourses.³ These activities tend not to be clearly distinguished from that other one that is to understand how cultures construct, constrain and direct visualisation, be it at an individual perceptive level or as collective imagining.⁴ The need to be clear about what we mean by visual anthropology, and to neatly distinguish the above two activities, are basic requirements when it comes to the use of participatory methods: when the anthropologist invites, requests, lures or gives people with whom they relate the opportunity of having a say at a specific phase of the production of a discourse (graphic or otherwise) that somehow involves them. Inter-subjectivity is an appealing catalyst for a discourse that aspires at richness in meaning, and participatory methods seem to have the potential to offer that possibility. But to which extent is this valid? Aren't they rather a rhetoric claim, on the part of the anthropologist, of effectiveness in bringing in the "other's" vision into work in his/her discourse, that becomes even less questionable when he/she uses non-graphic methods to frame that inter-subjective, participatory or collaborative discourse? As with everything in life, there are drawbacks to an excessive reliance in the benefits of the so-called visual methods in the production of anthropological knowledge. Some of these drawbacks are practical; others are more of the epistemological kind.

The present paper does not directly address these muddles. However, in discussing the use of drawings in anthropology, partly involving a measure of social participation by way of presenting the results of a recent group discussion on this same theme, we modestly wish to offer some clues for a future clarification of the questions delineated above.

² For further reference to drawing and anthropology see: Newman (1998), Ramos (2010 and 2015) and Azevedo (2014) explorations of drawing as a tool for field research in anthropology and a means to present its results; Ingold's approach on "graphic anthropology" (2011a, 2011b and 2013); Geismar's (2014) analysis of fieldwork sketches by Bernard Deacon; Kuschnir's (2014) work on teaching drawing to anthropology students as well as Collredo-Mansfeld (1999 and 2011), Ramos (2004), Hendrikson (2008), Taussig (2011), Kuschnir (2011) and Azevedo (2016) for general methodological reflections on drawing in anthropology.

³ On multidisciplinary visual participatory approaches, see Pink, 2006: 90-96; 2013: 23.

⁴ On a good recent example of this, see Segre, 2007; on the ambiguous intersection of the two approaches, see Banks & Ruby, 2011: 3 ff. Already in 1996, Jay Ruby had identified this ambiguity, as well as the fragmentary nature of the field, the gap between the broadness of the subject and the limitedness of the practices (Ruby, 1996: 1345).

ETHNO-GRAPHIC DRAWING?
AN ENGAGING WORKSHOP

At a recent two-day Workshop⁵ organized by the authors of the present paper at the University of Aberdeen, UK, a group of interested academics examined a number of aspects concerning past, present and potential future connections between drawing and anthropology. The participants ranged from anthropologists doing fieldwork with no prior training in drawing techniques but enjoyed (or aspired to) doodling and sketching to artists who had an appetite for, but lesser knowledge of, anthropological research heuristics. In between, there were people sketching during fieldwork and/or using various ways of graphic thinking and communicating as part of their anthropological or artistic production, and engaging others through their sketches at different stages of their research.

The most stimulating result of the workshop was participants' coming to a consensus around two ideas:

- that drawing is not to be seen as a specific area of what has come to be agreed as visual anthropology;⁶ and
- that such thing as "ethnographic drawing" – though a growingly attractive catch-word – is a highly questionable category.

Also quite relevant, but more contested, was the debate that participants generated around the blurring of borders between writing and drawing. In all, this was possibly the most epistemologically challenging debate we have participated in for years. What the workshop exposed was that by thinking through drawing, the centrality of "grand ideas" and the validity of argumentation formats in anthropological thinking and doing was as very much likened to the emperor's clothes. The strange exercise of "knowing from the inside" made possible, even if for a brief moment, looking at the discipline from the outside of its academic mental borders.⁷

Very much at stake was the concept of what it means to do "ethnography", and by implication, that of qualifying graphic practices in the field as method. The open-endedness that the drawing-writing activity implies goes against the grain of all talk of outputs, results and finished products as the *raison-d'être* of anthropological knowledge. We took the question, "how can all this translate into, and be reconciled with, the academic and publishing requirements that engulf us daily and shackle us permanently," as a fundamental, even if non-answerable, question.⁸

It is worth referring the above discussion here since the sort of questions that framed it point to a particularly acrid subject from which anthropologists ought not shy away. If drawing can be conceived, using Tim Ingold's terms, as a "knowledge from the inside," then it does not really relate to "visual anthropology" inasmuch as it is not a visual research method but a two-way (from the outside world to the hand, through the brain, and back again) immersive and unending understanding and imagining practice. As such, it is more engaged comprehension

⁵ The workshop was held at the Meeting Room of the King's Museum, Old Aberdeen Town House, University of Aberdeen on 22nd and 23rd October 2015, under the umbrella of the ERC project Knowing from the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design, led by anthropologist Tim Ingold,

⁶ At least not in the narrow, traditional, sense, where "Visual Anthropology" tends to be conflated with "ethnographic film" and "ethnographic photography".

⁷ It would be tempting at first sight, to qualify the issue in terms of pre- and post-processing, but that would imply the acceptance of rational thinking is fundamentally language-based – fascinating discussion but beyond the scope of the present paper.

⁸ All the more so as drawing isn't (at least yet) eligible for scientific financing in social sciences' programmes, part of mainstream teaching programmes, and quotable and countable in bibliometric platforms (Ramos 2015: 144).

than method, and more doing than done, thus being both beyond (academic) argumentative format and beneath (commercial) artistic format.

Originally titled “Ethnographic Drawing,” the Workshop had the following intentions, as stated in the announcement:⁹

Although drawings have been present in anthropological works from the dawn of the discipline, they have increasingly disappeared from view, side-lined by other visual practices such as photography and film. There is a forgotten history of ethnographic drawing that has still to be recovered and studied. Today, interest in drawing is being revived in a number of fields, including anthropology. This workshop will take a critical look at the practice of drawing in contemporary anthropology. Can anthropologists draw? Where, why and how should they do so?

The aim of the workshop was to consider the practice of drawing both as a method of anthropological research and as a way to present its results. Thus we are not concerned with the illustrative uses of drawings, nor with studies in which the drawings of our research subjects are to be analysed. Our concern is rather – and specifically – with drawing as a practice of anthropology, done by anthropologists, and as a way of anthropological thinking and knowing.

Around 20 people of differing backgrounds, ranging from PhD students, post-doc researchers and lecturers in anthropology to graphic artists, painters, designers and architects, of a variety of nationalities, enrolled in the workshop and enthusiastically attended it until the final celebration in a nearby pub.

CONFESSIONAL BRAINSTORMING

At the start of the first day, we invited the participants to present drawings produced during their fieldwork and to talk briefly about how they felt about the connection between the activity of drawing and anthropological research. The intention was two-fold: to perceive if drawings were present in the anthropological work and how participants faced this presence or absence. During this “Confessional Brainstorming Introduction (participants’ views),” we registered and grouped the following testimonials from the participants:

- *Drawing and/as writing*: Enrico Marcoré mentioned instances of suffering “sketching blocks” during his fieldwork with the villagers of Pescomaggiore, Italy, during the unofficial reconstruction of their dwellings after the 2009 Aquila earthquake; he would feel freer to draw upon return, as a complementary activity to writing. Just as it happens with writing, drawing has a set of internal rules that foster imaginative processes; as such, it is also naturally subject to blocks during fieldwork (Ramos 2014: 239). Sketching after fieldwork, when rounding up information, helps structuring the writing process.

- *Is “ethnographic drawing” what one does?* Paolo Gruppuso, who did fieldwork with the farmers and environmentalists of two protected wetlands in Agro Pontino, Italy, insisted on the unfinished nature of sketching in fieldwork: sketching would then

⁹ In www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi/news/7157/ retrieved on 8 March, 2016.

be part and parcel of the immersive understanding of a social context.

- *Doodling, sketching or drawing?* Germain Meulemans, who works on anthropogenic environments, and particularly on the epistemology and ontology of urban soils, introduced the notion of “minimal drawing” as an open-ended flow where sketching, mapping and writing meet.

- *Drawing and context:* Anne Douglas, who explores the role of the artist as a catalyst for social change, testified on the importance of drawing’s role in one’s being in a place, i.e. in discovering the meshwork of one’s relationships with that place.

- *Drawing and mapping as a way to understand social context:* Mitch Miller, who produces what he calls “dialectograms” (or dialectic diagrams) of urban locations, a meeting point between ethnography, documentary, socially engaged practice and mytho-geographic aesthetics, in depicting a range of often vulnerable urban locations, stressed the importance of drawing as a meditative practice in developing a “pigeon-eye” perspective of social and spatial contexts.

- *Thinking and drawing:* Tim Ingold, who presently leads the ERC-funded Project *Knowing From the Inside*, an inquiry into how knowledge derives from thinking with, from and through beings and things, which hosted the workshop, reflected on how drawing is a performative and communicational thinking tool.

- *Drawing and future memory:* for Peter Looovers, who investigates human-animal relations in the Canadian Arctic, drawing maps and plans of places, paths and tracks, is an essential pinpointing activity for memorization of a constructed imagination of the field.

- *Participatory drawing and mapping (making plans) during fieldwork:* Rachel Harkness, who has been researching into the interfaces between anthropology and architecture, expanded on the uses of populating maps and plans together with informants, insisting that drawing together is an *ad hoc* yet precious social ice-breaker.

- *Drawing, and painting:* Laura Siragusa, working on verbal and non-verbal communication between humans and animals with Russian Finno-Ugric speakers, reflected on the distinction between lines and colours: for her, colours are used for relaxing, non-verbal mind processes, namely memorisation, that help noticing a context; drawings, on the other hand, acts more as an exchanging material: drawings are offered and in some instances exchanged - people usually ask for her drawings, which thus enable conversation and comments from people.

- *Drawing as out-of-the-box thinking:* Caetano Sordi, who researches into feral pig trapping in Southern Brazil protected areas, a Brazilian, views drawing as a tactic to understand mental boundaries and overlapped spaces in fieldwork, and a way to gauge the relevancy of both the collected materials and the methodological tools used by the anthropologist.

- *Thinking through sketching or sketching through thinking*: Pelayo Benavides, currently studying knowledge dynamics around protected predators in south-central Chile, considered sketches a helping tool to (re)thinking processes, either in the field or during the subsequent writing process; they are also materializations of a wandering, imaginative thought.

- *Drawing and fictional work*: an unidentified participant referred that drawing can be part of thinking and imagining processes during the post-fieldwork writing process, but one that risks being blocked due to the requirements of the academic writing format.

- *Drawing practice and anthropologic research*: Ina Schröder, a PhD Candidate in Germany researching on moral education of indigenous youths in Western Siberia, dealt upon the difficulties of connecting drawing as a free graphic practice with the highly formatted production of knowledge in anthropology.

- *Drawing as embodied knowledge*: Kari Korolainen, who studies the place of the drawing in Finnish scientific production, hinted at the creative potential originating from the ontological connections between one's drawing activity, and one's research into earlier anthropologists' sketch- and notebooks.

- *Drawing as training in observation in the field*: for Maria Nakhshina, researching into fishing practices in North-western Russia, the play between photographing and drawing is not necessarily contrasting: drawings can be made life or from photos; as they are frequently a way to memorise aspects captured in photos, drawings are not about "objective" or "realist" visualization but about imagination and memorization.

- *On drawing and sketching in the field*: Christine Moderbacher, a ethnographic documentarist working with Arab-speaking migrants, noted that in her experience sketching tended to disturb and disrupt concentration of verbal and non-verbal interactions, but then again so was taking written notes, photographing and filming.

- *Contrasting drawing and photography*: for Jennifer Clarke, working on art and environmental issues in Britain and Japan, drawing tends to be less obtrusive than using a camera as it isn't an obstacle to eye contact.

- *Photographing, filming and drawing*: João Loguercio, who uses photographs and videos in his researches into animal-human relations in everyday working practices in Southern Brazil, preferably produces abstract sketches as thinking aid; in his case, drawing comes after, not during, fieldwork.

The main goal of the Workshop was clearly not the celebration of drawing in anthropology as a tool to produce final research outcomes; neither was it to look at the so-called "ethnographic turn(s)" in contemporary art and its rather predatory engagements with anthropology (on this, see Sansi 2014: 37, 44). It was rather a collective reflection on the relationships between perceiving, thinking and exercising graphic and linear hand skills as part of immersive experiences during and after fieldwork. This

meant that being blocked by lack of skill to draw or questioning the relevance of the connection between drawing and anthropology was not an obstacle but rather an added motivation to the debates taking place. Still, most participants in the Workshop declared their motivation to draw at some point in their research, either during or after fieldwork, which testifies to the presence of this kind of inscription in anthropological knowledge production. But the confessional recognition that drawings can be present in research and even in inter-personal communication is, to a certain degree at least, unrelated to the public use and recognition of the “art of drawing.” During the Workshop we looked at both these two aspects: the (subjective and even intimate) practice of drawing and drawing as an expression of anthropological knowledge - sharing (offering, exhibiting, publishing).

We hence propose to list the main questions raised by the participants of the Workshop as follows: (1) drawing during the fieldwork; (2) drawing as a communicational tool; (3) drawing in the post-fieldwork; and (4) the specificities of the drawing.

Basically, we brought the relation between drawing and fieldwork into the debate as part of the *process of observation* (what could be called “training in observation”), description, registration, comparison, memorisation, meditation, relaxing, thinking, understanding, noticing, finding relations and being present in a place. We also regarded the act of drawing *during fieldwork* as a communicational tool such as in participatory drawing, participatory mapping, populating maps and also as gifts – exchanging material that enables conversation. In the *post-fieldwork phase*, drawing practice complements the act of writing as a thinking-focusing tool. Actually, we discussed drawing through thinking and thinking through drawing as two sides of the same coin. So, we mentioned drawings as an important way to rounding up information and to structure the writing process. For some of the participants, to draw is something that relates mainly with the writing tasks that take place after fieldwork.

Participants best highlighted some *specificities of drawing* when contrasted to photographing and filming, drawings being regarded as less obstructive but also less used than photography and film during fieldwork.

We directed the debate to compare the notion of drawing with that of sketching, doodling and cartooning – and wonder about their differences and similarities – and to questioning the qualitative specificity of “ethnographic drawing,” not as practice but as a communicational (and self-legitimizing) tool.

We elected “minimal drawing” as a concept to encompass different styles of drawings that participants conceived and produced with anthropological intentions irrespective of its form. A more encompassing view of the specificities of drawing related to its capacity of producing future memories, of enabling non-verbal mind processes, and of being a performative action.

LINING UP ARGUMENTS AND SPLITTING HAIRS

Academic workshops generally intend to produce intellectual debate via verbal communication. But it is also a context where many other exchanges do occur – through eye contact, body postures, joint practice of attentiveness and sharing of images (in PowerPoints, for instance). In the case of a workshop such as this, where drawing was subject to verbal analysis, but also potentially promoted as a participative ritual, the reflexivity and self-referencing nature of the workshop activity became a ghostly presence. Drawing was both present and absent throughout the duration of the workshop, and a sense of possibility, and of potentiality, guided the spirit of the discussions. To draw is primarily defined as an individual action inhabiting the space of freedom, dream and fresh inquiries, that combines with, or runs parallel to, the concrete space of achievements and realisations. So, the major concern of the group seemed not to be what we accomplished in the workshop, but how we could, both individually and as a group, accomplish it. A feeling of doubt never left the room, as we all seemed to have more unformulated questions to ask than answers to offer (verbalized thought, anyway; but also paralysis and hesitation in the act of drawing itself). The main concern was to highlight the (actual or potential) coexistence of drawings and anthropology. Having started with a session on the previous presence, disappearance and current rise of drawing in anthropology, the challenge throughout the workshop was to establish, discuss and question how drawing connects with anthropology, and critically revisiting notions such as ethnography, visual anthropology, methodology, art, and so on.

A number of questions resurfaced frequently throughout the two-day workshop. In what follows, our objective is to provide an overview of the discussion, not any final words about it or achievements from it. These were, in our view, the major topics debated: (1) the specificities of the drawing; (2) time and drawing; (3) relations between drawing, visual anthropology and art; (4) drawing and imagining; (5) drawing and writing; (6) style; (7) methodology; (8) drawing and skill; (9) drawing, imprinting, impacting; and (10) terminology.

1. SPECIFICITIES OF DRAWING

Everyone knows, or thinks they know, what a drawing is, but when time comes to define it certainties seem to wane quickly.¹⁰ When trying to talk about drawing, notions such as doodling and sketching appeared again and again. For some people, the doubt about their own drawings as “real drawing” or simple doodling/sketching was quite central. The distinction between one and the other tended to relate to distinctions one would make between the private and public realms. If I am drawing to myself, a doodling is helpful and useful, but this same kind of inscription can be completely unintelligible to my peers. It is important to emphasize these doubts

¹⁰ Or, as J. T. Jacobs has put it, “What is drawing? At first glance the question seems simple enough to be superfluous; but upon reflection it becomes not only difficult, but perhaps not even definable” (J. T. Jacobs, in Ashton, 2014: 47).

about the nature of the drawing. As we highlighted before, the notion of a “minimum drawing” may be a way to assemble together drawing, doodling and sketching as traces, lines and inscriptions of different kinds. Nevertheless, it does not solve the question of inner differences. The debate around drawing as doodling, sketching or even painting led us to explore the notion of “intergraphicity” – as a tool to examine how, within a particular field, different graphic activities are joined.¹¹

2. TIME AND DRAWING

The connection between drawing and time surfaced in regard to thinking about the future, to the potential, in anthropological practice and knowledge formation. A question that arose from evoking personal cases of inevitable anxiety occurring during fieldwork was about the relevancy of one’s subject choices and research courses. “Is it possible to draw potential things?” “Can drawing help lining the future?” This unsolved and slightly pataphysical question led us to reflect about the temporalities of drawing as an (un)finished process. Searching for a common ground or a departure point, the discussion was tumultuous (in a good sense) and inconclusive, but with some interesting clues: we generally perceived a contrast between drawing as a finished product and sketching as an unfinished process. In this sense, we considered a drawing closer to the artistic object, as painting was, than “just” sketching. In turn, we perceived drawing, alone, as a process, as layers, as life. Inscribed in one’s research, the researcher can conceive even the finished drawing as just a step in an unfinished process. Finally, in what concerns its relation to anthropology specifically, we did not perceive a drawing as a finished product – an artistic form – but mostly as a process, even in those moments when drawings become part of the (exhibited and/or published) outcomes of one’s research.

3. RELATIONS BETWEEN DRAWING, VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ART

Commonly, researchers tend to assign “ethnographic” drawing alongside visual anthropology and art. Some demarcation between these fields may be useful to emphasize their similitudes and differences. The main question in regard to anthropologists’ drawing and artistic drawing was: “do anthropologists have to be aware of the art-scholars’ views on what drawing is?” This question echoes a broader relation between anthropology and art: “how to address the views from both fields?” – which means an inquiry about the limits and possibilities of an interdisciplinary dialogue (see Ingold, 2013: 8 ff). But in regard to drawing, specifically, our major concern was: “is drawing to be considered a visual art?” Far from wishing to get at a definite answer to the question, the discussion gave us the opportunity to think about the place drawings occupy both in the outside world and in our par-

¹¹ Although interesting studies were carried out in the seventies and eighties at the intersection between iconology and structural analysis (see for instance Bucher 1977), intertextuality studies seldom thought fit to extend methods and heuristics to researching into corpuses of graphic images. The proposed meaning of “Intergraphicity” bears clear correspondence with that of “intertextuality”. It isn’t really a neologism, since the British sci-fi writer Brian Aldiss, in his novel *Life in the West*, had already cooked up a fictional First International Congress of Intergraphical Criticism (Aldiss 1980: 18 ff).

ticular mental processes. As doubts spread about the accepted view that drawing relates (as in minor relative) to visual art, we gave a bigger scope to the notion that drawing people should not necessarily tie to visualization and visual representation – even if this tends to be the accepted notion in visual anthropology (Pink *et al*, 2004: 7-8), and in art studies in general. “When we think about drawing, are we thinking about visual anthropology or rather about something else?” By dissociating drawing-in-the-field from the boundaries of visual anthropology, we could see that the question “are drawings beyond the visual?” was essential for our endeavor. Thus, we could spell off the discomfort of dealing with previous debates in visual anthropology that were not concerned with drawings, while uncovering new possibilities for future and original developments in research.

4. DRAWING AND IMAGINING

Following the discussion that sometimes pushes drawing closer to and farther from other fields, we discussed the issue of imagination. Our question relates to inquiries such as: “what is abstract, what is visual and what is imagination?” It is not necessary to uphold a strongly determinist Sapir-Whorfian view of language and thought to accept that we are bound to frame our verbalizations by collective semantic and categorical enmeshments, and that abstractness, concreteness, imagination or reality can only acquire and produce meaning within language. When thinking through drawings and not through words, the coherence and functionality of a verbal-based worldview loses strength. In this sense, there is something particular about drawing that encompasses the imagination when it goes beyond the distinction between imagination and reality. As drawings are not exclusively tied to the visual world and the perceived reality, they are able to tap into the potential of the perceptive and imaginary processes that go on in our “spirit-bodies”.¹²

Another important aspect of the confluence between drawing and imagination is the possibility of including other people’s imaginations in the production and exhibition of one’s drawings. “How to integrate other people’s imagination in our own drawings and writing, as a self-critical stance, and as a way to communicate to a larger public, including peers and non-peers?” This kind of questioning relates to the communicational ability drawings can or cannot have during fieldwork and the crossing of the boundaries of the discipline. If we do not concentrate so much in drawings as finished products but as steps in an unfinished – and ending – process, their layered and connecting nature is revealed, be it in the individual drawing itself as it comes into being, in its paradigmatic relation with other drawings in a never-ending flow of (re)invented lines. What concerns anthropology in the drawing is not the artistic status of the drawing but the convolutions that its *intergraphic* nature causes among humans.

¹² The notion of “spirit body”, mentioned in the Workshop, was how an Ethiopian icon painter offered to translate into English his endeavour, during an interview to one of the authors of the present paper: “I’m painting the body-mind of Christ”, he said, as a way to try to describe in English what would be easily said in Amharic, his native language, to express a Christian monophysite (non-dualist) worldview (see Ramos, 2009: 293-297). Drawing, as Alex Ashton puts it (Ashton, 2014: 47), “provides interconnected ways of orientating knowledge that contribute to a multifaceted understanding of [Wilhelm Dilthey’s] ‘lived experience.’”

5. DRAWING AND WRITING

It seems unfair to discuss the written and the drawn tasks side by side in anthropology, since we have been so conscious about the former and so unaware about the later. Also, it seems easier to write about drawing than to draw about writing. Even so, both activities appeared to be extensively intertwined both during fieldwork and in post-field thought processes: “do we really need to distinguish between drawing and writing in the field, and even after the field?” Probably this distinction is not necessary, unless we are trying to give institutional room to drawings in the discipline. In this case, it will be useful to understand further what kinds of fiction we are dealing with when drawing and when writing. The questions “are drawing and writing convergent or divergent fictions?” and “is writing so different from drawing?” may be displaced, since beyond the comparisons between drawing and writing we may establish, what is definitely intriguing is their actual relationship and commonality. Of course, the question, “does a drawing stand by itself?” – which seems a natural query on the possibility of a drawing being displayed without a written text that explain it or contextualize it – pertains to language, written or spoken, and seems totally irrelevant from the perspective of drawing. Although we were not trying to reach any final consensus about the issue, the communicational sense seemed to be prevalent to us when drawing and anthropology walk together and this led us to the recognition of the need of a deeper dialogue between drawing and writing, where drawings do not appear as illustrations of texts, but, at least in some instances, the opposite. Then again, the function that Roland Barthes aptly called “l’effet de réel” (Barthes 1968: 84 ff) in literature, and which has been, since Herodotus at least, the spinal chord of ethnographic style, is becoming equally central in today’s use of drawing in anthropological published productions. The *I’ve been there* effect is a trope that lends itself to clichés and risks impoverishing the potentialities of drawing in anthropology. Of course, drawing is not a magical wand for anthropologists: it does not allow us to see completely through other people’s eyes, at best, we can try using other people’s styles, observational techniques and aesthetics.¹³ It is deeply subjective, but a kind of subjectivity that does away with the self-legitimizing stances upon which many of the self-referencing illusions of anthropological writing rely (Gomes da Silva 2006: 14, 19).

6. STYLE

Naively, the style motif can appear as a simple aesthetic choice. But according to the history of “ethnographic drawing” – a history that someone still has to recover, understand and revise – we can recognize different drawing styles abounding in anthropology, from the typical 19th century anatomic drawings (human types/human sizes), and illustrations of material culture (including tools, artefacts, animals and techniques), to all manner of “abstract” graphisms (diagrams, charts, maps and

¹³ As Rudi Colloredo-Mansfield puts it, writing about his “participatory” drawing experiences with the Tigua of the Andes, “after 6 weeks of drawing-mediated encounters, I began to see and feel in practical ways more of what they saw in their paintings. I also better understood what they intended them to do as cultural objects” (Colloredo-Mansfield 2011: 5).

plans, and other figures) and even in the various geometric and visual metaphors generally used in anthropological writing. Researchers do not frame contemporary drawing in anthropology in any particular acceptable style. But it is not style-free, either. On the contrary, researchers should view the revival of drawings in anthropology with caution. Free-style drawing risks people denying it as it is caught by an academic discourse that inevitably converts freedom into mandatory forms. On the other hand, there is inevitably an implicit grammar, a perceived choice of style, and recurring clichés. With these thoughts in our minds, we questioned whether “it is possible to do away with style, with the (rhetorical) claim to a subjective legitimacy as anthropological knowledge producer.”

Another development of this topic related directly to the constraints of the academic format that hurdle anthropological production. In the Workshop, we discussed the towering problems in which not only anthropology but all academic disciplines currently delve, is because academics frame them by an international consensus that tends to belie creativity and out-of-the-box productions, as an important site of dispute where drawing does have a roll: “can drawing help undo the usual academic format in anthropological production or will it be absorbed and formatted?” This is a question that someone can only answer once academics embrace a self-critical stance toward what Steve Pinker called, “the devilish curse of knowledge” (Pinker 2014: ch. 3).

7. METHODOLOGY

Drawing as a research method in anthropology was an overhanging discussion theme throughout the meeting, and we developed other topics as a corollary to it. If at all, drawing is a soft method, relying on informality, individual freedom, escapism in the face of writing formats. The chances that drawing could take centre-stage as a viable method, not just for in-the-field observation but to guide anthropological production of knowledge, the group considered bleak until one of our guest speakers, Mitch Miller (a graphic artist and post-doc researcher at the Glasgow School of Arts) presented his work and raised the following question: “can drawing itself offer a form to present a research methodology?” Working with what he calls “dialectograms” (Miller 2014: 193 ff), Miller presented his thesis methodology as a combination of drawings and written captions combined in a single large cartographic composition that invites the observer to engage with the paths inscribed in the “dialectogram”. Although acceptable and appraisable in an art & design school today, it may take some time until social science schools can open up to the possibilities of presenting drawing compositions as a research methodology in anthropology. Still, thanks to such examples, the group’s mood became more optimistic in regards to the inclusion of drawing in academic research toward the end of the Workshop.

Drawing is, admittedly, a poor reflective medium. Standing alone, it does not go far in reflective terms. However, when interacting with words, it can produce powerful and interesting results, as Will Eisner's and Scott McCloud's theoretical works in sequential art showed (Eisner 1985; McCloud 1993). It can also work as an important check on the traps of verbal thinking. Thinking is not limited to verbalization (Bloch 1998: ch. 2), as participants made clear in the Workshop: when discussing the imaginary ekphrastic depictions of unseen exotic animals (George Stubbs' painted kangaroo and Albrecht Dürer's engraved rhinoceros), and Dan Sperber's anti-relativist rhetoric, where ancient stories of Ethiopian unicorns become entangled with horned dragons in a purported dialogue with an aged Dorze informant (Sperber 1980: ch. 2).¹⁴ The practice of drawing promotes the observation of non-verbal interactions, an immersive way of knowing the place, of creating integrative memories, and of contouring them in a non-abstract way. Even when put in words, memories need framing hooks that are not simply computational: they are imaginary.

8. DRAWING AND SKILL

The distinction between drawing as an "acquired" or "natural" skill was a controversial point. Despite the common sense around the drawing skills of children, some participants were not so confident about their previous and actual ability to draw. So, we questioned: "is it essentialist romanticism to think that anyone can draw or should we recognise that not everyone draws?"

An extreme view was that there is not much that differentiates hand-writing and hand-drawing as mechanical projections of the imagining mind. In this view, writing is but a specialized form of drawing, one that school education over-values and teaches to contrast to the act of drawing anything other than letters. Regaining the ability to draw would then involve an undoing of the mental block that creates the conceptual contrast between drawing and writing. If one focuses more on the act of concentrating one's attention in capturing a particular context, and not on the end product itself, confidence is likely to build up and the ability to be rediscovered. This possible untying of the Gordian knot that is the "skill" or the "talent" to draw, would not, of course, address the problem of communication through drawings as an academic effort: "one thing is to draw and sketch, and the other is to communicate through drawing (the same applies to writing) – so, again, what is drawing anthropology?" Just as writing requires skill, training and proficiency, so too does drawing as a communicable research product entail a measure of acquired and trained ability. Yet, it can be democratically nurtured in academia as part of the teaching of anthropological tools and techniques.¹⁵

¹⁴ Dan Sperber begins the chapter "Apparently irrational beliefs" of his book *Le savoir des anthropologues* with a quasi-theatrical dialogue "extracted" from his purported fieldwork diary, in which the old man Filate tells the anthropologist of an unknown creature: "Its heart is made of gold, it has one horn on the nape of its neck. It is golden all over. It does not live far, two days' walk at most" (Sperber 1982: 149).

¹⁵ Tom McGuirk, reflecting on "drawing as a knowledge generating activity that integrates perception, action and cognition", alerts to the fact that the main drawback of absorbing drawing, and generally art and design in university education derives from what Pierre Bourdieu names the repressive exclusion of *métier* from scholastic practices (McGuirk 2014: 297).

9. DRAWING, IMPRINTING, IMPACTING

If drawing and writing are akin, that is chiefly because they are variations of a basic, universal and primal human behaviour: that of making marks in surfaces, of inscribing, of creating traits in surfaces, of carving materials. Tim Ingold's previous theoretical work on these matters (Ingold 2011a: 220-226; 2013: 129-132) chaperoned our exploration of the relationships between the diverse attributes of that behaviour: doodling, sketching, calligraphy do vary because they serve different purposes but they derive from the same double cradle: they are visible inscriptions that mirror and activate our mind processes, and they are tools and signs of our will to communicate the images in our mind to fellow humans. They are both creative developments of an evolutionary social need: that of sharing with others the imagery that flows in one's mind. Drawing in the field is helpful, not necessarily or primarily to share a finished result but for sparking further intellectual processes through memorized imaginations. Would we call this "knowledge from the inside" or as "embodied cognition"? No matter how we wish to define this gripping subject, the fact remains that a greater concern with the rapports between the oral, the written and the drawn would have made possible an alternative path in the history of the "discipline of words" that is anthropology,¹⁶ had field researchers been less obsessed with "knowledge from the outside" and "verbal-based cognition" (Bloch 1998: 15-17).

10. TERMINOLOGY

We initially titled the workshop, "Ethnographic Drawing Workshop", referring to the traditional relation between drawing and anthropology since the dawn of the discipline. Obviously, we distinguish "ethnographic drawings" from other kinds of drawings, and refer to the specificity of the anthropologist's practice. However, we soon considered the workshop's name an unhappy choice, since it was not our aim to endorse previous practices, but to imagine a new one. One possibility would be to endorse "graphics", a growingly popular catch-word, but "ethnographic graphics" would have sounded an oxymoronic pun. Instead, we focused in a more far-reaching conceptual doubt: "why *ethno* in the *graphic*? Why not simply graphic anthropology or drawing anthropology?"¹⁷ There is a paradoxical laxity in the accepted and generalized use of the expression "ethnography" as defining a practical research practice and writing style that directly contradicts the otherwise quasi-neurotic critical attitude to that has historically marked anthropologists' approaches to the discipline's lexicon. Furthermore, if colonial anthropology was partly responsible for popularizing anything "ethnic", people have long criticized and dropped this concept. So, we tried to move away from this misnomer that felt hardly a valid heuristic, and incapable to describe what was our topic: the uses of drawing as knowing and imagining practice by present-day anthropologists.

¹⁶ Though not at all concerned with drawing, Margaret Mead coined the notion of "discipline of words" to remind us of the belittled role of the "visual" in the history of Anthropological research (Mead 2003: 3-4).

¹⁷ Tim Ingold is clearly unsatisfied with associating drawing and ethnography. For him, ethnography is burdened with "descriptive accuracy" in a particularly formatted writing style, and as such opposed to world-engaged creative process; in his vision, anthropology gains in being taught by the world, "from the inside", and arts and crafts practices may foster a new anthropology, providing new directions in immersed research. Dan Sperber's view is worth noting here: although his prospects for the future of anthropology differ radically from Ingold's (on the debate, see Whitehouse 2001), he is even less benign on characterizing as flawed the "forced marriage" between anthropology and ethnography and he pushes for an outright divorce between the two (Sperber 1982: 16). Interestingly, it's the interpretative and creative character of ethnography that Sperber abhors, though he later in the text recognizes the highly formatted style of ethnographic academic monographs (1982: 46), whereas for Ingold, anthropology as an interpretative, engaged and creative process, needs to distance itself from formatted ethnography.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS TO DRAW?

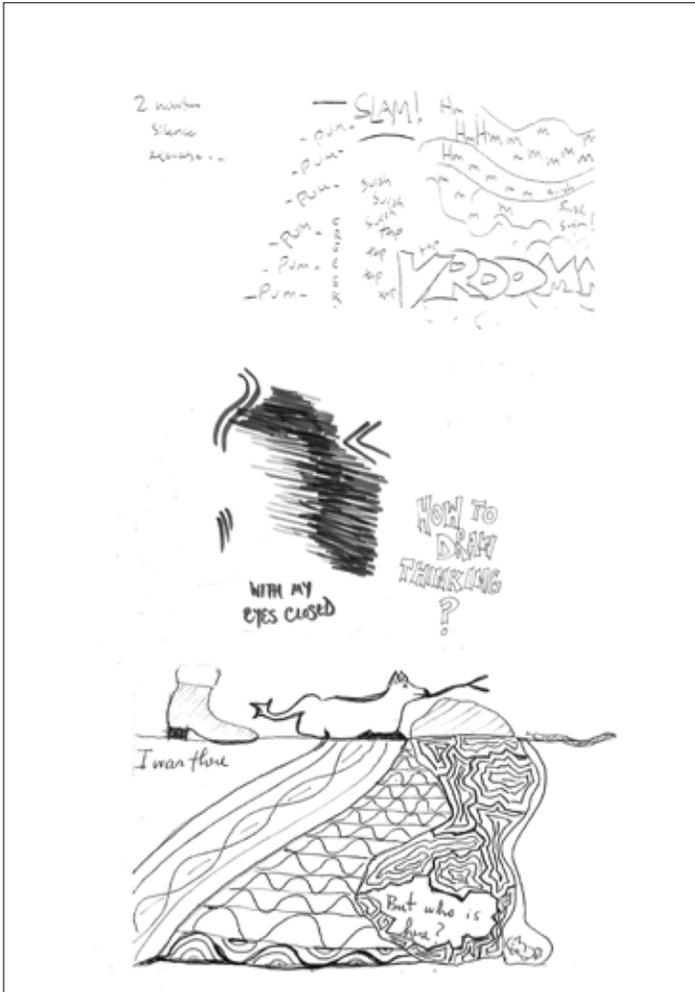
A question has been left hanging in the preceding pages: when we ask “what is it we do when we draw?” are we not actually asking, “can we know what ‘to draw’ through talking and writing about it?” We can of course talk and write about how drawing serves the purpose of knowing and imagining a place, a social context, etc. We can hint, as we did above, at its aptitudes as a tool for observation of social practices, as a medium for interaction and active participation in the field. We can even delve into its complex relationship with written and visual techniques of representation. But at the end of the day, we best answer the question, “what is to draw?”, “from the inside” – that is, through drawing. By saying this, we are not simply offering a poetic subterfuge to conclude a paper. We are, on the one hand, giving testimony of the tension felt during the two-day workshop between the various forms of verbal interaction among the participants on the subject of drawing and the doodling and sketching that kept recurring both as an individual (with a certain degree of privacy) practice and as a collective dialoguing endeavour. Participants took up drawing spontaneously and it acted as a mnemonic register of the workshop and as a silent dialogue with words that people uttered and ideas that popped up. On the other hand, we are inviting the reader to understand through the practice of drawing in the field that the academically formatted “graphic reason” (a term coined by Jack Goody, 1977: 81) has not been able to adequately tap into vast areas of non-verbal knowledge and communication prevalent in all human societies (on a critical take on Goody’s perspective, see Bloch 1998: 152 ff; Gomes da Silva 2006: 15 ff; Ramos 1999; Street 1984: 44 ff).

It is only fitting that this paper ends with a double cautionary word. The practice of drawing in the field helps make it clear that there are grave limitations in the stance that verbal *and* written (preferably in English) cognitive tools are sufficient to successfully forage the world of the human mind in society – and that such limitations are not understandable by simply erecting a categorical wall (as Edmund Leach would have put it: 1971: 3) between the written and the visual. But is also important to state that we are not naïf to the point of suggesting that the practice of drawing in the field ought to be elevated to the status of a wand that can magically clear the anthropological horizons from deeply ingrained epistemological and methodological conundrums. Ours is but a modest invitation to look into how much there is still to know about what drawing can and cannot do, and to inquire about it really is when practiced by an anthropologist during his/her fieldwork immersions.

It is our hope that the reader accepts this invitation. In regard to the testimonial nature of this paper, namely about what went on beyond-beneath-behind-beside words in the Aberdeen workshop, we feel it is appropriate to conclude it with a non-filtered presentation of the drawings made by its

participants. Like most doodles and sketches, the intention was not for publication, and indeed, no one did them consciously thinking we would share the drawings at all beyond the four walls of the meeting room of the Old Aberdeen Town House. That later decision was somewhat external to the practice and, even if the participants authorized their use, the organizers are to be held solely responsible for publishing them. We depicted the main topics of this paper, which includes, the situation of the workshop itself, its participants, variations of a Stubbs-like Ethiopian dragon-rhinoceros-unicorn,¹⁸ dialectograms, and illustrations made during a “field” visit to the hyper-modernist building of the new Sir Duncan Rice Library of the Aberdeen University.¹⁹ So, let the sketches become drawings and talk to the reader-become-watcher.

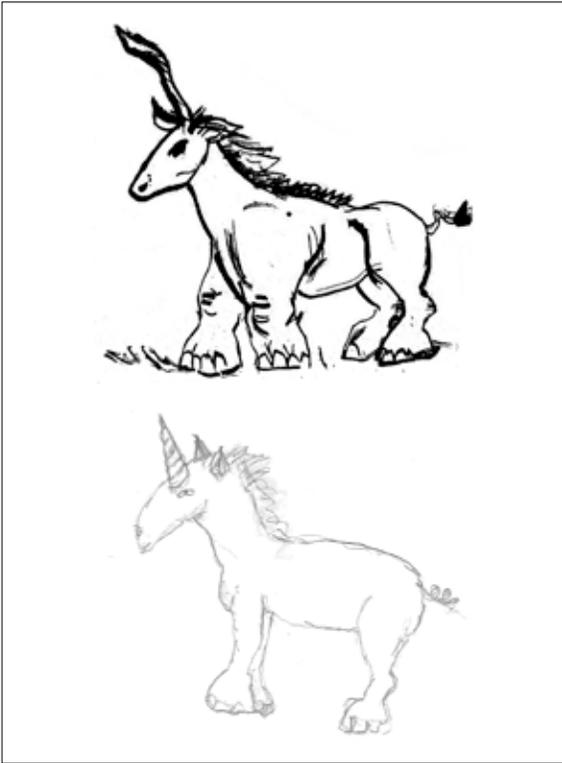
IMAGES



1. BEGINNING WITH EYES CLOSED. PARTICIPANTS STARTED THE WORKSHOP BY CLOSING THEIR EYES FOR FIVE MINUTES; THEREAFTER, THEY WERE INVITED TO DRAW WHAT THEY “SAW”, HEARD, IMAGINED (DRAWINGS BY PELAYO BENAVIDES, RACHEL JOY HAARKNESS AND JOÃO LOUGUERCIÓ).

¹⁸ An ironical take on Dan Sperber’s “extract of my fieldwork diary” where a Dorze informant describes an animal with a horn, a golden heart and golden skin, and the researcher oddly classifies it as a “dragon”, setting him out to analyse the outlandish and apparently irrational exotic beliefs of (Christian) Ethiopians, as if the concept was totally alien to French religious symbolism (Sperber, 1982: 51).

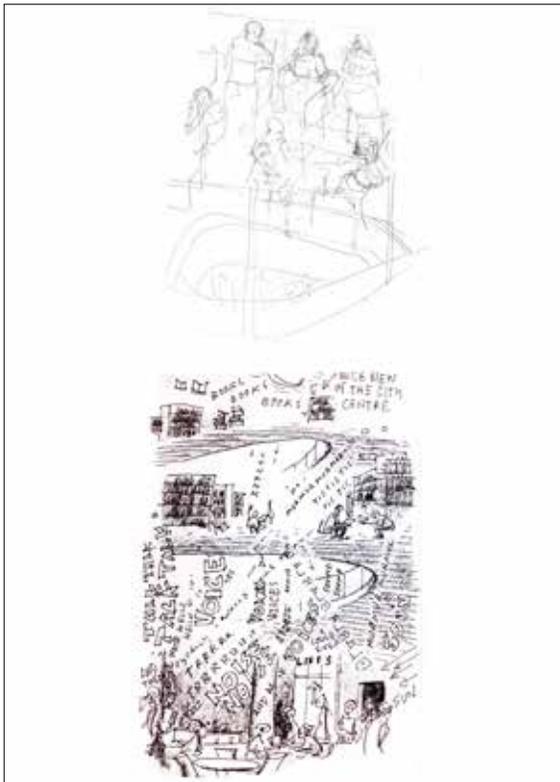
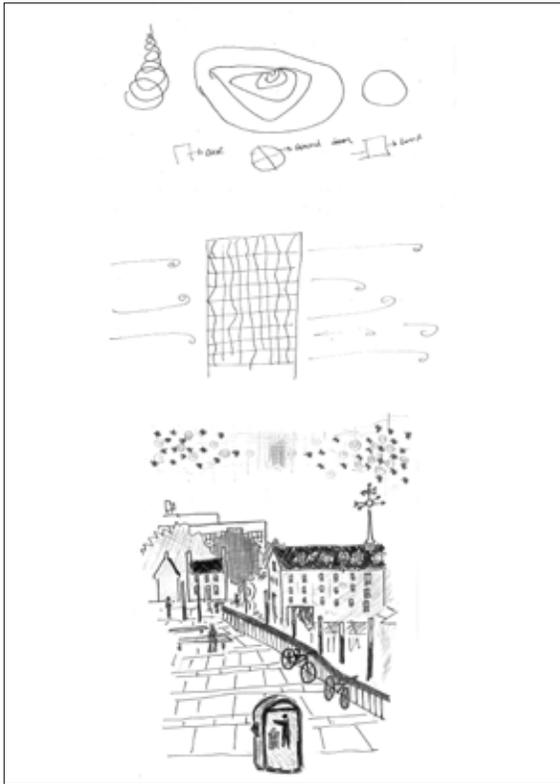
¹⁹ Designed by the Danish architect group Schmidt, Hammer & Lassen, the Sir Duncan Rice Library was inaugurated in 2012. The £57m zebra-skinned cube-shaped building stands in the university’s grounds and towers over all the surrounding area. It’s most striking feature is the oval spiraling atrium connecting all eight stories.



4. DRAWING LIKE STUBBS. INSPIRED BY GEORGE STUBBS - AND ALBRECHT DURER - WHO USED EKPHRASIC DESCRIPTIONS TO DRAW ANIMALS THEY'D NEVER SEEN, SOME PARTICIPANTS DREW AN UNKNOWN ANIMAL DESCRIBED BY AN OLD DORZE MAN TO DAN SPERBER (1982: 149) (DRAWINGS BY MITCH MILLER AND PAOLO GRUPPUSO).



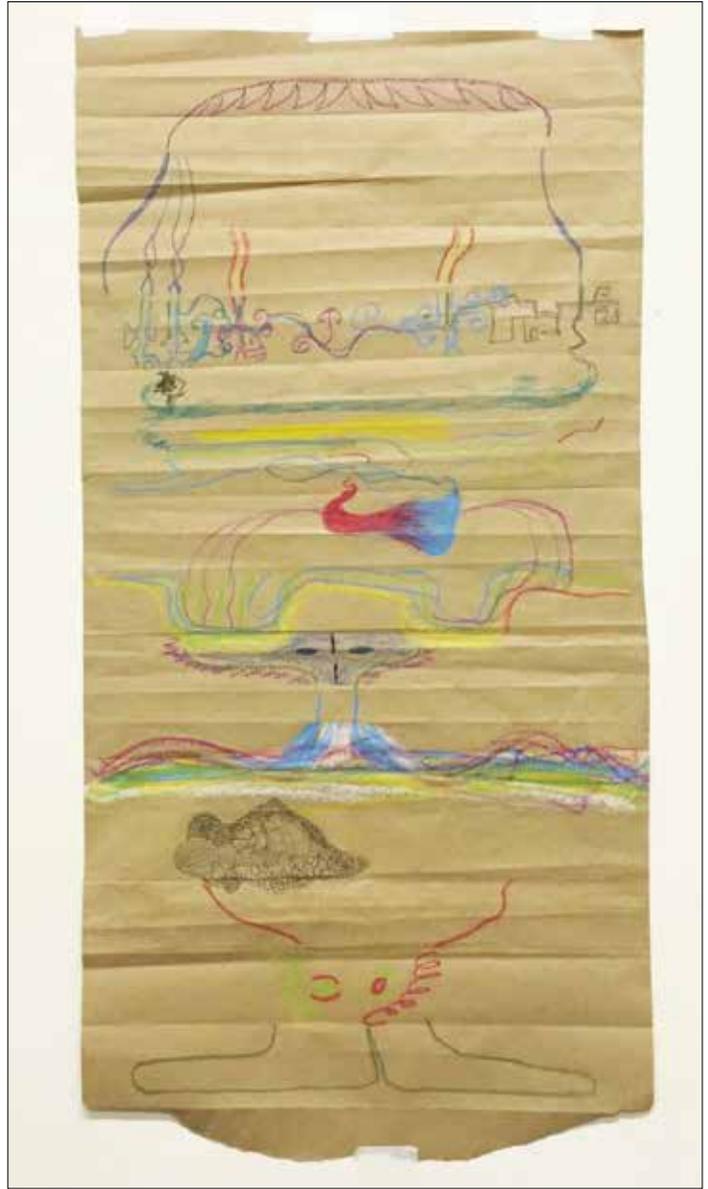
5. THE NOT-ROUND TABLE. THE LARGE TABLE AROUND WHICH THE PARTICIPANTS GATHERED DURING THE WORKSHOP WAS DEPICTED IN DIFFERENT WAYS (DRAWINGS BY JOÃO LOUGUERCIO AND RACHEL JOY HARKNESS).



8A AND 8B. DRAWING SIR DUNCAN LIBRARY. WHILE SOME PARTICIPANTS STAYED AT THE OLD TOWN HOUSE EXPERIENCING AND DISCOVERING NEW MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES - OTHERS LEFT ON A "OBSERVATIONAL FIELDTRIP" TO THE MODERNIST SIR DUNCAN RICE LIBRARY BUILDING THAT TOWERS ABOVE THE OLD CITY (8: DRAWINGS BY AINA AZEVEDO AND CAETANO SORDI; 9: DRAWINGS BY ANNE DOUGLAS AND MANUEL JOÃO RAMOS).

visual ethnography

9. CADAVRE EXQUIS. DURING THE TWO-DAY WORKSHOP, THE PARTICIPANTS WERE OFFERED A COLLABORATIVE DRAWING EXPERIENCE: EACH WAS INVITED TO DRAW A SECTION OF A PIECE OF WRAPPING PAPER, FOLD IT AND LEAVE ONLY THE BOTTOM TIP OF THE DRAWING VISIBLE - THE FOLLOWING PERSON TAKING THESE VISIBLE LINES AS THE STARTING POINT OF HIS/HER OWN CONTRIBUTION, LIKEWISE PARTIALLY FOLDED.



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