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Relational Drawing as Pedagogical Action: Locational Strategies

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Abstract: Drawing in relational mode emphasises process and tends to be propadeutic, incomplete and provisional. It opens boundaries for interdisciplinary visual arts practices and entails the mapping of points in space deployed through locational mapping strategies involving bodies-in-action. The translation from ideas to open-ended materialisation is crucial to relational drawing. Three case studies are presented and analysed. The projects involved play out in particular contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand where they have geopolitical and pedagogical implications. On the periphery of centres of visual arts production, the projects make their own respective impacts and undermine claims to universality within the larger arena of contemporary visual arts production in the world. Through the provisional register of their relational drawing registers the projects enable ongoing negotation through collaborative action and communal learning.

Keywords: Relational Drawing, Interdisciplinarity, Spatiality, Locatedness, Mapping, Pedagogics

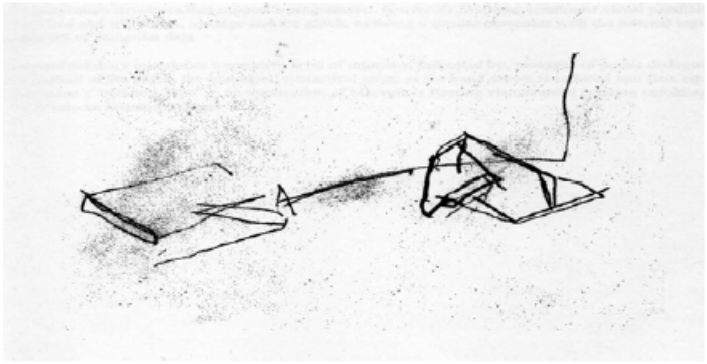

Figure 1: Kurt Adams, *Working Grayscale Drawing*, Digital, 2000 (© the Artist)

Introduction

THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES on drawing as a visual arts practice; more specifically on drawing as an interdisciplinary and relational activity which always remains provisional and which has pedagogical implications. The mode of drawing under discussion does not so much result in a discrete object or motif, but rather in drawing as a 'verb' – as so succinctly put by Richard Serra in contrast to being a 'noun' as more recently argued for by Laura Hoptman (Borden, 1977: 51 & Hoptman, 2002: 12). In conversation with Bruno Latour, Michel Serres argues that: "Everything that is solid, crystalline, strong, that flaunts its hardness, that seeks to resist…all of that is irrevocably archaic and frozen. Whereas fluids, most living things, communications, [process,] relations – none of that is hard. Fragile, vulnerable, fluid…what I seek to compose, to promote…is a mobile confluence of fluxes, an assembly of relations" (1995: 122). In this light, Serres argues for interdisciplinarity as a "translation between domains" (122).

The drawing focused on in this article often seems incomplete, like a sidetrack to a main event, and like a *propadeutic* moment, or a preparatory stage before something else comes along to complete it. Martin Heidegger argues for a sidetrack to dominant modes of thinking and doing and maintains that operations on such a sidetrack would be relational, provisional, incomplete and of an anticipatory nature. Such operations would critique dominant modes of being. According to Heidegger, we are not supposed to become finished with something as quickly as possible, but rather to hold out in a process as long as possible as it is in the process itself that we learn and become critical. (See Vedder, 1995: 643-660.)

Through its very *propadeutic* character drawing can have pedagogical implications, especially when it entails a slowing down or a holding pattern, that is, when it is provisional and incomplete and 'in the process' rather than focusing on a final outcome. In this mode, drawing often opens its borders to other disciplines – for example involving the spatiality of architectural settings and the body-in-action as in performance art – and thus it has become in recent

years arguably the most interdisciplinary of arts practices.

Thus the most salient characteristic of such drawing is its focus on relationships between points in space (Figure 1) and its connections to other materialities and the disciplines they have traditionally adhered to. Drawing between points and drawing with text are simple examples of these characteristics. Drawing as an occupation over a long period of time function relationally in a temporal sense, with samples in larger systems relinguishing any claim at autonomy outside of those systems. This was recently particularly in evidence at a 2008 retrospective of Marlene Dumas's work at the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her walls of drawings involve systems, although each unit within the larger schema is distinctive and invites us to consider difference rather than sameness. In some of her wall systems, drawing's fragility and evanescence, its ability to be simultaneously present and almost absent, is vividly demonstrated**.**

The kind of drawing focused on in this article can be scant and very simple. Alongside one of his own small drawings, John Berger writes: "Drawing is about becoming, precisely because we can't just be, be a child, be crazy, be an animal, be a mountain. But we can become a mountain. If we are lucky we can even become the air around the mountain or the buzzard which drifts in circles above and around it…" (Berger, 2005: 126).

Simple drawing systems can thus also be embedded in the everyday, in the "quotidian" as analytically presented by Michel de Certeau (1984). Australian artist Greg Creek incorporates the everyday in his 30-metre desktop drawings alongside which one has to walk slowly to engage with notes, scribbles, small figures, tiny portraits, lists, telephone numbers, tiny objects and animals, fragments of landscapes – the bits and pieces of a life lived amidst the "noise" of the everyday as Michel Serres whould have us do. (See Zembylas, 2002.)

Athough drawing can be small and/or simple and from the everyday, it can still speak of large political issues. Tiny drawings by small children showing prison bars and frightening guards were, for example, found at the Woomera Refugee Detention Centre in Australia in 2003. In another context altogether, William Kentridge and Doris Bloom used the simple shape of an ordinary garden gate in their enormous fire drawing (*S 3E: Gate,* 1994) located briefly in the centre of Johannesburg in an eloquent indictment of the fact that nobody in that country can talk casually anymore across a garden gate, despite the end of apartheid in the same year in which the drawing was made.

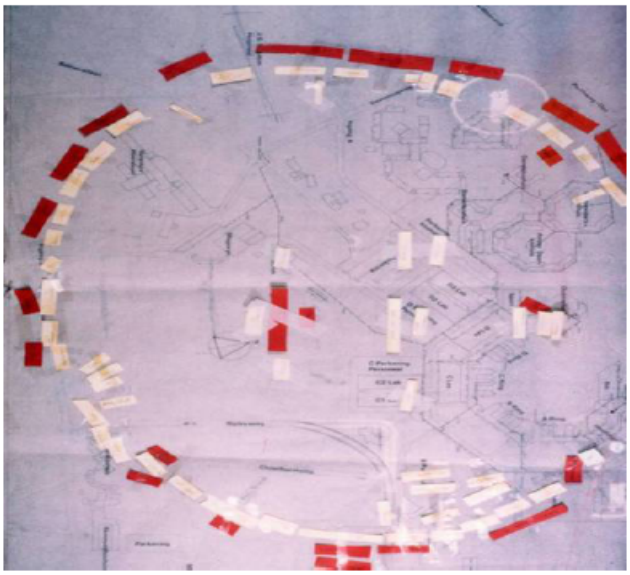

Figure 2: Leoni Schmidt, *First Drawing for the Intercultural Visual Kaleidoscope*, 1986 (© the Author)

In that same city, the author used to work at the University of Johannesburg (RAU) in South Africa, her first country. Around 1986, she was the project leader for the *Intercultural Visual Kaleidoscope* held there during yet another state of emergency announced by the apartheid regime. Despite many difficulties and ironies, it was an attempt to create a space for discussion between people of different ethnicity and language affiliation. In the end about 7000 items were exhibited thoughout the open circle of the complex, conferences were held, and many thousands of students became involved while 48 language groupings participated. The first idea for this project was drawn by the author's body arcing in space with pencil and bits of coloured paper and sellotape on a plan of the campus (Figure 2). It is this processual translation between idea, drawing

and body-in-space which specifically interests the author in this article.

This kind of translation is also demonstrated by the relationships between informal drawings and their architectural outcomes in the studio work of Frank Gehry (*Sketches of Frank Gehry*, 2005). More ambiguous is the translation between idea and drawing and space in the work of Australian artist Margaret Roberts. In one of her works (Figure 3) we see a drawing with red ochre – the traditional material used for sinopie or sketches for frescoes – of a corner in a corner of a room. The work demonstrates connections between points in space; it pulls us in physically as we cannot solve the conundrum only by looking at the corner. We have to move bodily into the space to discover our own role and scale within the drawing and thus we become embedded in the work over time rather than merely looking fleetingly at it from a distance as a final product.

Figure 3: Margaret Roberts, *Space Drawing*, Red Oxide on Wall and Floor, Approx. 3 x 3 x 4 Metres, Sydney, 2003 (©the Artist)

Following on from the above introduction regarding the mode of drawing focused on in this article, three case studies are presented and analysed below with reference to relevant texts. These texts involve ideas concerning *propadeutic* drawing, process, the body-in-action and spatiality, while the three case studies are further connected through the pedagogical implications of locational and mapping strategies in particular geographies.

Through the particular case studies aspects of being located in specific places are explored so that participants can learn about themselves and others. This process involves the politics of geography and here one can quote Edward Said where he writes: "…none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (1994: 21).

Such ideas and imaginings are fluid and can often be mapped through the incompleteness and provisionality of drawing, itself a kind of mapping exercise. "Mapping [as a verb rather than as a noun] refers to plotting points…it benefits from the lack of finality denoted by the word *map*. Where maps measure and notate the world, mapping is, in the words of landscape architect James Corner, a 'collective enabling enterprise', a creative act that describes and constructs the space we live in, a project that 'reveals and realizes hidden potential" (Abrams and Hall, 2006: 12, quoting Corner, 1999 in Cosgrove: 1999: 213).

The case studies focused on below configure the relationships between *propadeutic* drawing, process, spatiality, the body-in- action, and locatedness and its geopolitical mapping in different ways and contexts. The conjunction of these terms and the ideas and imaginings underpinning them may seem a heavy burden to impose on the case studies presented and analysed below. However, the projects involved are multi-layered and were chosen for discussion precisely on this basis.

Case Study 1: Valley

Juliet Novena Sorrel is a Dunedin-based New Zealand artist currently still working on a project entitled *Locational Drawing.* This project involves her own practice and her work as a primary school teacher in Warrington, a small valley settlement near Dunedin on the eastern coast of the South island of New Zealand. Land and one's locatedness on the land is at issue here. Novena Sorrel takes as a primary site

for her work the valley farm owned for many generations by her family of European descent, a place where she grew up (Figure 4). She studies maps of the farm in its geographical context and translates these into working maps, highlighting areas of specific importance to those who settled there (Figure 5). Placing herself in the landscape, she works on a series of observational drawings of these areas (Figure 6), "collecting" them as it were towards an installation corresponding to the map as planned for 2009.

Translating her own practice into a teaching strategy and inspired by the Reggio Tutta project in Emilia, Italy – which inspired children to map place – Novena Sorrel helps children in primary school to map their own habitats in Warrington (Figure 7) in relation to each others'. The project translates from paper to playground and from two dimensions to three dimensions plus the fourth dimension of children's bodies actively engaging in time with drawing and sculptural materials, with their surroundings and with each other (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 4: View from a Cliff on Juliet Novena Sorrel's Valley Family Farm in New Zealand (© the Artist)

Figure 5: Juliet Novena Sorrel's Working Map for her *Locational Drawing* Project, 2007 (© the Artist)

Figure 6: One of Juliet Novena Sorrel's Observational Drawings for the Project, 2007 (© the Artist)

Figure 7: From Juliet Novena Sorrel's Children's Drawing Project in Warrington, New Zealand, 2007 (© the Artist)

Figure 8: From Juliet Novena Sorrel's Children's Drawing Project in Warrington, New Zealand, 2007 (© the Artist)

Figure 9: From Juliet Novena Sorrel's Children's Drawing Project in Warrington, New Zealand, 2007 (© the Artist)

Novena Sorrel's project involves various overlapping dimensions. She locates herself within the landscape as a fourth generation Pākehā or New Zealander of European descent. Drawings in the format of the sketchbook mimic the colonial documentation of the early explorers, while bringing parts of the land close to the artist's body where she sits with the sketchbook on her lap.

When she extends the project to teaching, Novena Sorrel facilitates learning about location and habitats through processual drawing as mapping. The primary school children she works with are provided with a context within which they can freely explore their own sense of locatedness and its relationships with those of others. Peter Turchi writes: "Our sense of place is in many ways more important than objective fact. The impressions we carry of the house we grew up in and the places where we played as children are more important to us than any mathematical measurements of them" (2004: 28-9).

Through strategies of upscaling and consequent construction, the children's bodies-in-action become involved. This incorporates a political dimension as their placement within the larger map becomes contentious: the artists tells that one of the children even started to "sell real estate" in an inadvertent replication of early settler proclamations of the land previously under the collective guardianship of the *tangata whenua* (Māori first people of the land) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Novena Sorrel's teaching project includes children of different ethinicites. Lucy Lippard writes: "…senses of place, a serial sensitivity to place, are invaluable social and cultural tools, providing much-needed connections to what we call 'nature' and, sometimes to cultures not our own. Such motives should be neither discouraged nor disparaged" (1997: 33).

Case Study 2: Port

Also in Aotearoa New Zealand, Rachel Stephenson involved members of the Dunedin community in a project entitled *Mapping Ōtākou* during 2007. Koputai/Port Chalmers is part of the city of Dunedin (also on the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand), a tertiary education centre where the author of this article now lives and works. Port Chalmers was developed around the deep sea port where Captain Scott and his men set sail for the South Pole, never to return. It was where the predominantly Scottish settlers arrived to live in Dunedin, the "Edinburgh of the South". It was named "Koputai" by Māori, which means "high tide or deep water". Ngai Tahu are the *tangata whenua* or original people of the land in the Ōtākou/Otago area. Directly opposite Port Chalmers one finds Portobello on the harbourside coastline of the Otago Peninsula. Otago is derived from the Māori name for the area and for the village which still exists at the mouth of the harbour. With its coastal location, this was the area of largest occupation and it was an established trading and whaling village in early colonial times.

Between the two "fingers" of Port Chalmers and Portobello jutting into the waters of the harbour, early settler ships arrived in the mid-19th century. Approximately 150 years later, in 1997, the British Crown – still represented in New Zealand by a Governor General – apologised for unfair seizure and purchases of land owned by Māori and for the unfulfilled promises made both in the Deed of Sale of the Otago Block and under the conditions of the Treaty of Waitangi. Ten years after this, Rachel Stephenson – an artist and curator identifying as Ngai Tahu –invited people from the Dunedin community

to narrate their own stories and experiences directly on the walls of Koputai Project Space.

A huge map of the surrounding area, land and sea was painted with local red clay to scale on the walls and floor. Some of the historic Māori placenames were provided but much was left blank so that the information would come from the local participants in the project. Early changes in the area and further subsequent changes were drawn on the walls and on the floor of the space (Figures 10-12). *Kaumatua* (Māori elder) Huata Holmes relayed the histories of this place. As time went by many people became involved and would arrive to spend time in the space, often with their children, others bringing findings from the area such as a *kohatu* or Māori anchorstone. Other local historians – Bill Dacker, Ian Church and Lyndall Hancock – also took part in the work.

Mapping Ōtākou can be seen as part of a continuing working through of relationships between Māori and New Zealanders of European descent in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed by representatives of the Crown and by Māori Chiefs in the mid-19th century. Its current implications and interpretations are complex and Stephenson's project in Port Chalmers provided the local community with space and time and dialogue to work through some of their particular issues – side by side– through drawing images, maps, stories and trajectories there, using, amongst other materials, clay as the very body of the land under contention to connect with the place in an embodied way (Figure 13). An important, locational factor for this project was that the 19th-century Deed of Sale for the Otago Block was signed by the Crown Representative and Māori Chiefs on the site of the corner of the gallery building.

Mapping Ōtākou was artist-in-residency work undertaken by Rachel Stephenson in seeking to learn about the area and to provide a broad base of information for future artists who might also work in the Koputai Project Space. Starting points for this work were governance, cultural histories of the area, placenames and the coat of arms for Dunedin with its motto: "following in the footsteps of our forefathers".

This collaborative project involved many people and translations between materialities, each adding to the whole. It is interesting how the photographic documentation of the project highlights the relational aspects of the work. One thinks of Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of a "relational aesthetics" where the process of working together has its own specificity and validity alongside the actual outcome. He writes that "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary or utopian realities but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real…" (1998/2002: 3).

The particular "real" within which *Mapping Ōtākou* played out was and is fluid and conducive to negotiation. Irit Rogoff contends that there has been a recent shift "…from a moralizing discourse of geography and location, in which we are told what ought to be, who has the right to be where and how it ought to be so, to a contingent ethics of geographical emplacement in which we might jointly puzzle out the perils of the fantasms of belonging as well as the tragedies of not belonging" (2000: 3).

Stephenson's project deployed drawing in provisional mode and bodies-in-action in a collaborative mapping and spatial exercise which never claimed to be complete or final; it remained *propadeutic* and thus open to future negotiations, just as the Treaty of Waitangi remains a dynamic document open to continuing interpretations in Aotearoa New Zealand. With regard to this project, one remembers that Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson tell us that "…human societies are spatial phenomena: they occupy regions of the earth's surface, and within and between these regions material resources move, people encounter each other and information is transmitted…Spatial order is one of the most striking means by which we recognise the existence of the cultural differences between one social formation and another…" (1984: 26-7).

Mapping Ōtākou invited bodies-in-action to participate in the project. Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire argued for knowledge through action – such as that deployed in *Mapping Ōtākou* – and believed that informal dialogue between people can result in "conscientization". (See Smith, 1997 & 2000: s.p.) This entails becoming critically aware and being able to translate experiences into actions that can make a difference to the world. His critical pedagogy has become integral to what is now known as PAR: "Essentially Participatory Action Research (PAR) is [and can be practice-based] research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it… Participatory action research is not just research which is hoped will be followed by action. It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants" (Wadsworth, 1998: s.p.)

Figure 10: Rachel Stephenson et al, *Mapping Ōtākou*, Koputai Project Space, Port Chalmers, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2007 (© Rachel Stephenson)

Figure 11: Rachel Stephenson et al, *Mapping Ōtākou*, Koputai Project Space, Port Chalmers, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2007 (© Rachel Stephenson)

Figure 12: Rachel Stephenson et al, *Mapping Ōtākou*, Koputai Project Space, Port Chalmers, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2007 (© Project Leader Rachel Stephenson and Photographer Chris Reid)

Figure 13: Rachel Stephenson et al, *Mapping Ōtākou*, Koputai Project Space, Port Chalmers, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2007 (© Rachel Stephenson)

Case Study 3: Horizon

Figure 14: Still Images from: Victoria Edwards & Ina Johann, *Fishing in a Bathtub: Tormenting Luxury 2007/2008*, *Chapter Two: Everything is Permitted,* Godley Head, Christchurch, New Zealand (© the Artists)

Further north on the eastern coastline of New Zealand's South Island, interarts practitioners Victoria Edwards and Ina Johann work with the histories of land and sea near the city of Christchurch. The specific site they focus on for their project entitled *Fishing in a Bathtub* is Godley Head, which overlooks the ocean below. Their actions take place within the battery gun emplacement areas there, consisting of concrete pads recently restored by the Godley Trust. The walls surrounding these emplacements function as a kind of "proscenium" in front of the action one cannot see and which never happened outside of the country's imaginary, i.e. the feared invasion by sea during WW 2 of New Zealand by Japan.

The rounded walls within which the artists perform create a constructed horizon which suggests the conventions of the 18th-and 19th-century panorama. Stephan Oettermann points out the importance of the horizon within these conventions, as well as the connections between the horizon and points of observation in the landscape. He writes about the observation platform disguised as a hilltop and how this is often recreated in panorama construction by a circle of canvas (1997: 5-12). Oettermann's readers are also told that the word "panorama" in its Greek derivation "refers to an elevated geographical formation or the view from such a lookout point" (5). We are apprised of the fact that "panorama" is also a term denoting landscape painting which reproduces a 360-degree view (6).

Edwards and Johann use the walls of Godley Head as an artificial horizon and as a "canvas" of sorts against which they perform certain actions with their bodies and a limited number of props in a 360-degree circumference. Their audience, however, is not directly privy to the performance on Godley Head. Instead, we experience the project via its moving and still documentation. This results in an enrichment of the project as the materialities of drawing, as well as of painting (as if on canvas) become visible, while the theatrical actions and the shadows they project become contracted and intensified. While watching the documentation of chapter two of this four part piece (especially in its moving format), one is constantly aware of the dialogue between the artists' different modes of performing; and one is constantly aware of *viewing* actions which are experienced *kinaesthetically* in space by the performers.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre makes a crucial distinction between dominant and dominated space within Western culture. For him, dominant space is conceptualised, authoritarian and based in vision; while dominated space is activated through our bodily lived experiences and has an affective dimension. He argues for "spatial practices" through which these alternatives can interact with one another to create a dialectical tension, a dialogue between opposites (1974/1991:39-49). The author would argue that it is within the duration of such a tension – within a consequent holding pattern created – that we learn affectively through our bodily involvement

with elements drawn in space and that this process pertains to a project such as *Fishing in a Bathtub*

Fishing in a Bathtub juxtaposes two actions in dialogue. One figure (dressed in white) seems carefully intent on sweeping and preparing the area for future action. The sounds she makes with a metal rake within the gun emplacement are loud and mechanical. On that site one thinks of military operations performed with scientific precision. The other figure (dressed in red) performs quite diferently. Her movements create fluid lines of drawing appearing and disappearing in black across the textured ochre of the site and the white of the other figure. She also walks precariously on the "proscenium" wall, while we as viewers are aware of the sea and the crashing waves, of imminent danger there (albeit a danger merely imagined by the people of New Zealand circa World War 2).

On the one hand, the history of Godley Head is being enacted and "taught" through this project. But, thinking about Lefebvre's argument for "spatial practices" and remembering Serres as quoted earlier in this article with regard to frozen and fluid states, the figures also seem to perform two opposing ways of *being* in the world through a joint interdisciplinary practice which is part performance, part theatre, part drawing, part painting and part film.

Returning to Godley Head and *Fishing in a Bathtub*'s enactment of its particular, located history, the author would contend that this project also engages geopolitically – as do the first and second projects discussed as case studies above – but in yet another register. Here, New Zealand's relationship with the wider arena of World War 2 comes into play, an arena perpetuated through recent international events regarding the so-called "threat of terrorism". This country consists of three isolated islands floating in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. On one of them, Godley Head looks outwards, reminding the country's inhabitants of the potential dangers of being part of a larger stage from which perilous actions could move to its shores.

Conclusion

The three case studies presented and analysed in summary form above, involve drawing as a visual arts practice. In all three instances, drawing as an interdisciplinary and relational activity which always remains provisional is deployed. *Propadeutic* drawing, process, the body-in-action and spatiality are connected through the pedagogical implications of locational, mapping strategies in particular geopolitical contexts.

To move towards conclusion of this article, John Berger is quoted here where he points out that "Drawing is a ceaseless process of correction. It proceeds by corrected errors" (2005: 110). Again, process and a state of incompletion are emphasised. The case studies presented above incorporate process and incompletion in order to retain possibilities for negotiation and re-negotiation with regard to locatedness and its political and pedagogical implications.

All three of the projects are exploratory and involve bodies-in-action in particular habitats. Ernst van Alphen writes eloquently that: "Art is a laboratory where experiments are conducted that shape thought into visual and imaginative ways of framing the pain points of a culture…art has a performative function…it [educates] on an embodied level...thought itself, thanks to art experimenting with its limits, is [not] 'just' intellectual. It is – *aesthetic* – binding the senses through an indelible bond forged between the subject and the world it tries so hard to inhabit" (2005: xxii & xix).

Aotearoa New Zealand and its inhabitants may seem far removed from the centres where the specific experiments alluded to above by Van Alphen find materialisation through the visual arts. However, the author of this article agrees with the following argument by Nelly Richards: "The periphery has always made its own mark on the series of statements made by the dominant culture and has recyled them in different contexts in such a way that…their claim to universality is undermined" (2005: 358). Lastly, the author would contend that in doing so, the case studies presented above deploy drawing in its processual, relational and locational modes in order to maintain a sense of incompleteness and thus to preserve a fluid space for continuing navigation of ideas and their materialisation through bodies-in-action. Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather writes: "…from one location to another…we experience spaces as material, bounded locations" (1999: 2). Relational drawing can assist in the opening up of bounded locations to processes of interdisciplinarity, and of ongoing collaborative action and communal learning.

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Leoni Schmidt is currently the Academic Leader: Research & Postgraduate Studies in the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. She is particularly interested in the pedagogical possibilities of the visual arts, specifically in how contemporary drawing and its theoretical and historical underpinnings can facilitate education in a studio and study integration. Leoni has been responsible for the establishment of the Master of Fine Arts Programme at her current institution, a programme which has earned praise from candidates, supervisors, and international monitors and external examiners for its academic rigour and integration of studio practice and theory. She holds a doctorate from the University of Johannesburg (RAU), an MA (Fine Arts) from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and a BA (Fine Arts) from the University of South Africa. Her research focuses on contemporary drawing and its relationships with education in the visual arts, design and architecture; its intersections with other visual arts disciplines; and its functions in particular socio-political contexts. Professor Schmidt is currently the Conference Convenor for the Aotearoa/New Zealand Association of Arts Educators Conference 2009.

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