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“Your thought will find the
contours...”

Anne Douglas and Amanda Ravetz
KFI Associates



Our aim in this presentation is to report on research we have been doing around drawing and filming. As associates of Knowing from Inside, we are interested in discovering in what sense drawing and filming can be considered experiential ways of 'knowing from inside'.

As with the sewing and framing (the seminar theme), drawing and filming have sometimes been opposed to one another – if to draw is to join, then to film, by its characteristic framing action, is to separate, to un-join. But they can also be seen as resting on a dialectic between two contrary movements of joining/separating.

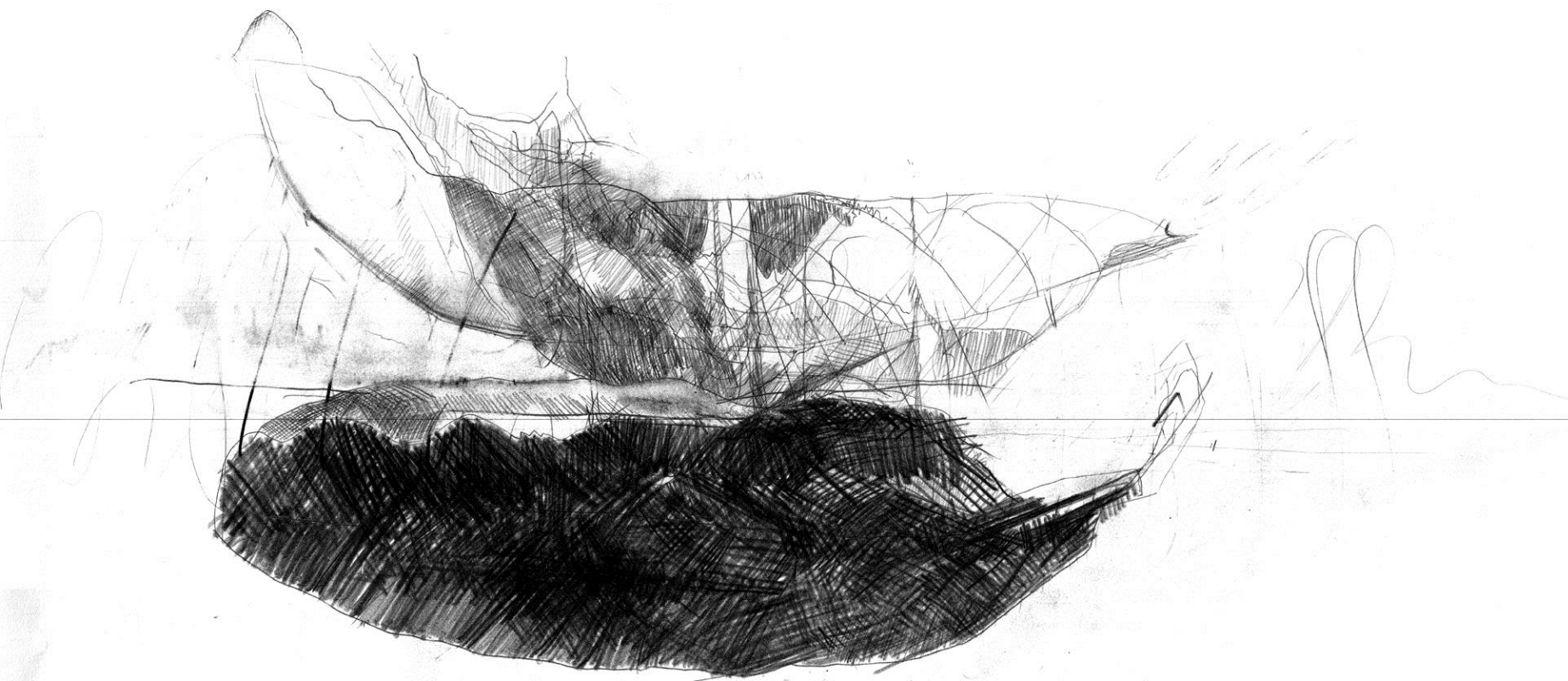


Before beginning our joint research we had each noticed the generative power of this tension between joining and separating while filming or drawing.

Amanda's video of WW2 piece

An example happened while filming with my sister at AWM. The man who made this garment while held as a prisoner of war on the Burma railway took parts of garments and joined them together as a practical way of protecting his body. But we might also imagine that he was using sewing as a way of holding his humanity together in the midst of annihilation. The activity of sewing opened a space for making that allowed him a modicum of control and human dignity.

Filming is for me an analogous activity – viewed narrowly, through a technological lens, it can be seen as a mode of cutting out pieces of experience from some larger continuity; but understood as a *practice* it can become a way of holding open a space for the occurrence of something surprising – by following the line of the unfolding experience and creation of form.



This drawing became about finding the contour of light and dark- as I did that, there was a constant expanding into the space and a retraction, somewhat like breathing, where the outward breath is a kind of joining with the world and the inward breath is a framing, a kind of separation from the world.

- How to move between drawing and filming
- How to approach that relationship so that it becomes generative and creative
- How to encounter both activities as ways of 'knowing from the inside'

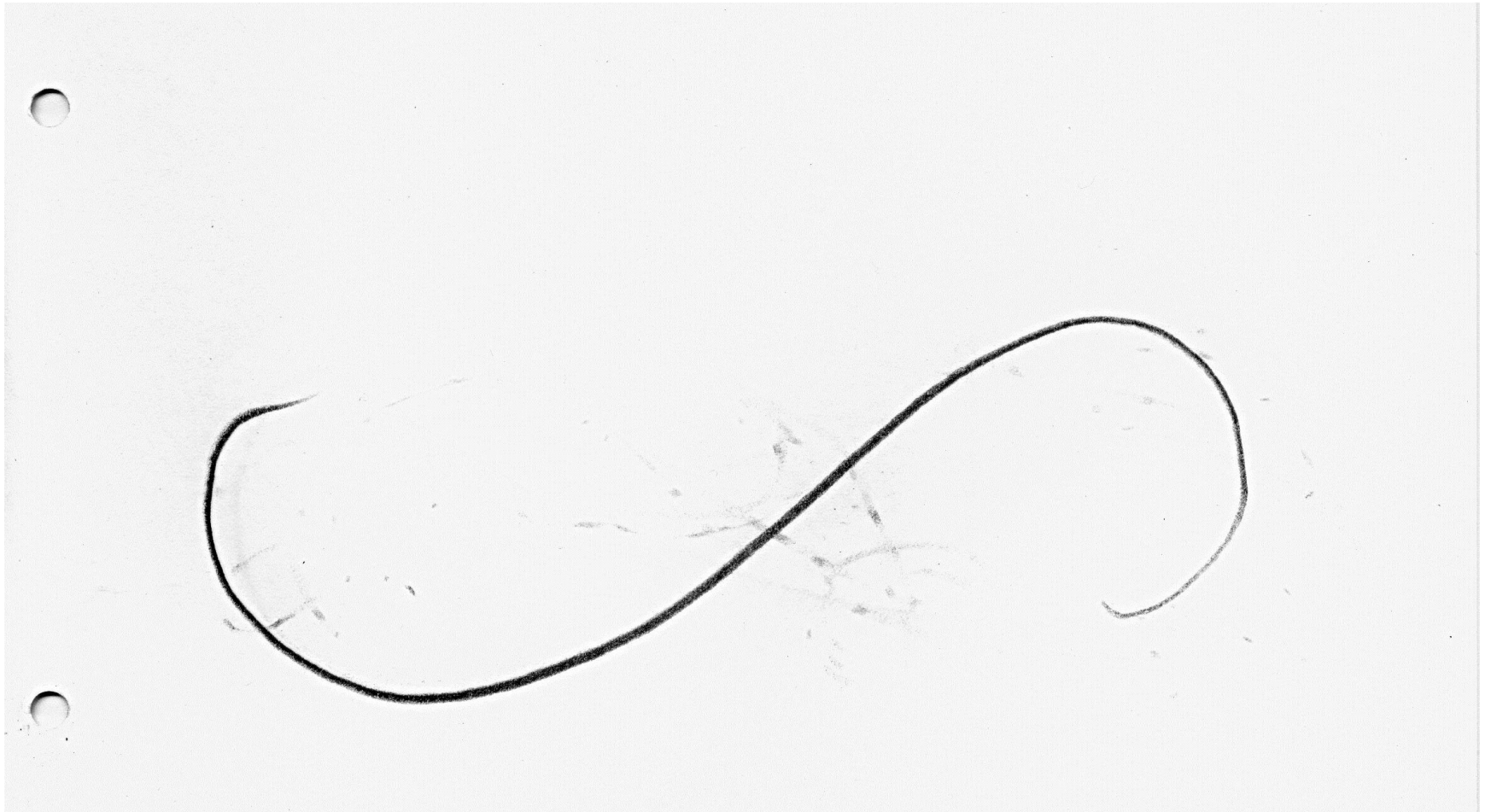
These qualities of experience draw together seeming opposites: acts of framing with acts of sewing. Together they appear to be a kind of generative force – by which we mean a creativity that moves the maker’s experience on in unexpected ways. This is what interests us. It is in a sense the way the world *is* as creative energy; but we wanted to be clearer about what is involved in aligning ourselves with that creative energy and how this allows something unexpected to happen. In the current research we followed up these experiences through three key concerns:

How to move between drawing and filming

How to approach that relationship so that it becomes generative and creative (indicating that we understand that neither filming nor drawing are necessarily either generative or creative – film as capture, drawing as preconceived design- a set of instructions that determine what will become)

How to encounter both activities as ways of ‘knowing from the inside’

'A line on a walk, moving freely,
without a goal' Paul Klee

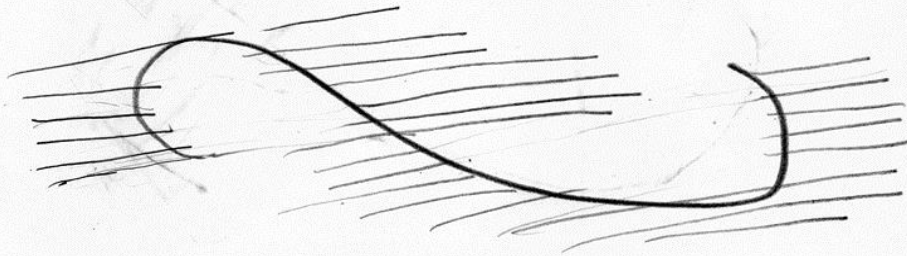


The parameters of our exploration were set initially by qualities of line suggested by Paul Klee in his Pedagogical Sketchbook.

‘A line on a walk, moving freely, without a goal’

This marks the first impulse to move from a point of stasis, from the dot, inserting oneself within the flow of movement, opening up a new form, working with forces such as gravity, a joining with the world.

‘The same line, accompanied by complementary forms’ Paul Klee



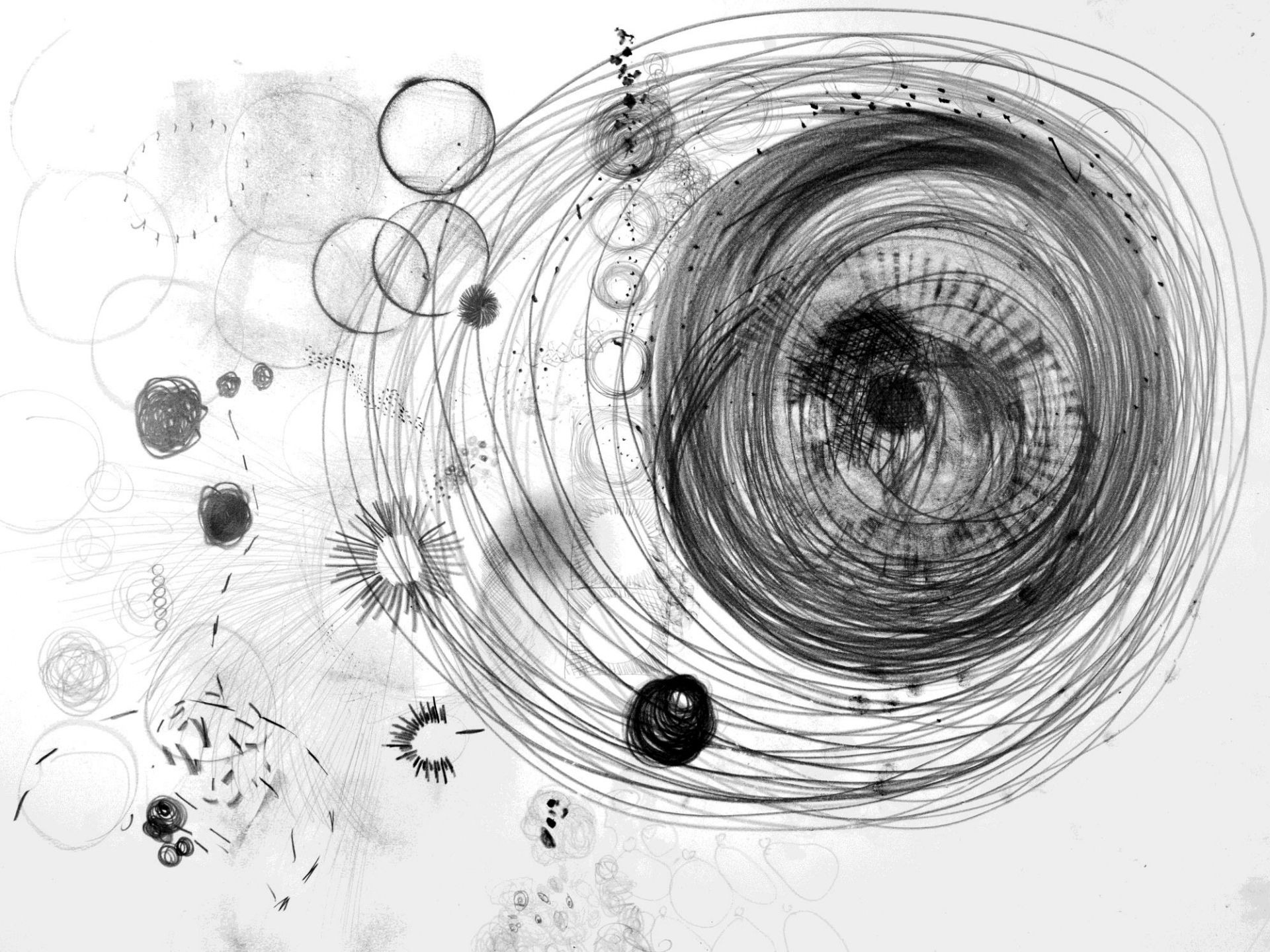
**‘ The same line, accompanied by
complementary forms’**

A line never exists in isolation whether that is within the white page of a drawing or within the space and place of movement.

‘Complementary forms’ may describe the way in which line and context co-constitute each other. One cannot exist without the other.

- January 2014 Filming and Drawing- three days – Amanda and Anne
- April 2014 Drawing-three days – Amanda, Anne and Kate Genever
- June 2014 Filming- two days – Amanda, Anne and Christine Moderbacher

We spent three bursts of time together: three days in January, three days in April and two days in June. In the second and third phase we worked first with artist Kate Genever and second PhD student on KFI, Christine Moderbacher.



EXPERIMENT 1

To begin with, in January, the drawing proved to be extremely difficult. It kept taking us to a default position –a self-consciousness that felt as if we were falling back on empty gestural habit. But despite its apparent ‘failure’, the resulting drawing proved to be a source for later work.

What we realised we needed to do was to step back and work out what we were after. We began to take more time, slow the process down. We tried to generate a dynamic around controlling and not controlling our mark making. We knew we needed to avoid being trapped by our own clichés around what the drawing “ought” to look like –

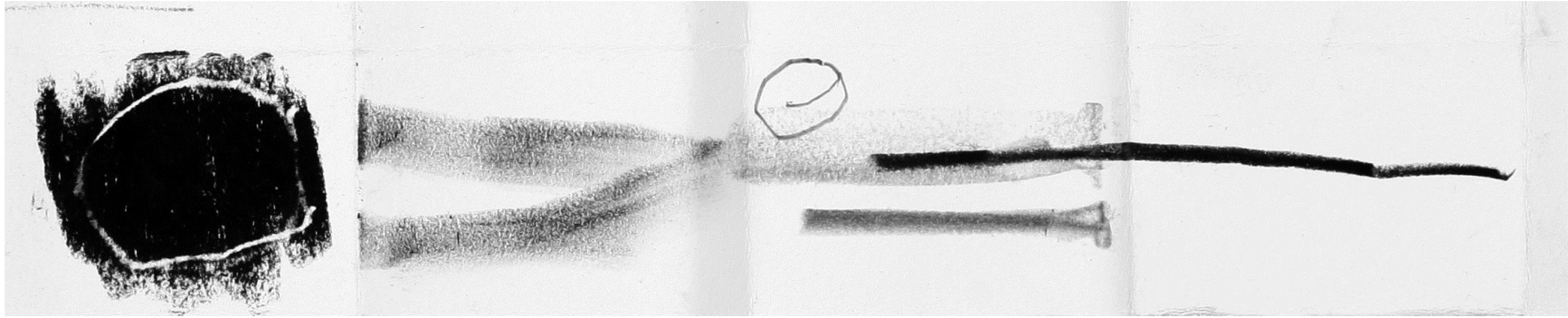
One could imagine this first phase as a kind of entropy, an absence of generative energy, in which separation, or framing is overly narrowing, and sewing as putting together, too expansive. We learnt later that what we needed to focus on was a particular way of opening up of the communication between us.



The filming was also very challenging. We tried to connect the drawing on paper with an exploration of found line in the world through film. It was hard to find a cinematic quality that could work appropriately with the graphic qualities of the drawing. Nevertheless we found things through filming in the world that we later took back into drawing - the free flowing line, a single line joined by a secondary line and so on. The impulse was not to document but to create another opening onto experience.

Start film

To move beyond this point we knew we had to refine our method.



We used an aleatory process to trick ourselves into rediscovering creative experience of drawing and filming in some primary way. We folded the paper into squares so that at any one point in the making process, we could not see the whole, mimicking the surrealist game of consequences. We developed a vocabulary of marks with reference to the filming process, and we limited our drawing implements and threw dice to determine which type of mark, its positioning and which implement could be used.



We took it in turns to draw. These aleatory methods limited our capacity to determine the outcome to choices of materials including marks, leaving indeterminate the specific outcomes, which were always surprising.



This is where we realised that up until now we had been acting on the world but not acting reciprocally.

There is a paradox here – why would using aleatory methods that apparently constrain personal agency open up communication between ourselves, and with our environment? It seemed to have something to do with rebalancing action and listening. The methods increased our sensitivity to materials and line, enabling us to find rather than control the contours.



These insights have informed our preliminary work in putting the two media of drawing and filming together.

Show film.

Manchester April 25-27th



EXPERIMENT 2

For the 2nd experiment we expanded the brief – we set up an encounter through drawing between three people.

This experiment was part of an AHRC funded Connected Communities project, working with artist Kate Genever.

Learning from the first experiment we tasked ourselves to each come up with a question concerning drawing. What was interesting was that each of our questions touched fundamentally on “why drawing?” as a context and a subject of research. To simplify the experiment, we concentrated only on drawing this time, with a view to returning to filming at a later date.

Again we found it difficult to leave preconceptions at the door, to keep open the space of communication between us, while managing our individual expectations.



On first day we borrowed a technique from the artist Gabriel Orozco, rolling an inked ball across a plane of paper. Sustaining the ball's movement was very demanding and focused an intensity of effort around collaboration. Our choice of Orozco came initially through an interest in exploring a procedure around drawing that could be shared with a number of individuals. However, the experience of following this procedure revealed deeper qualities within Orozco's aesthetic approach that are important to the relationship of drawing to the idea of an ontogeny – a coming into being.



To understand this we might look at Orozco's aesthetic. As an international artist of Mexican birth, Orozco has increasingly focused on making visible the invisible forces that form experience through investigating (frequently found) everyday objects and materials in relation to the forces that made them.

Yielding Stone 1992
Gabriel Orozco



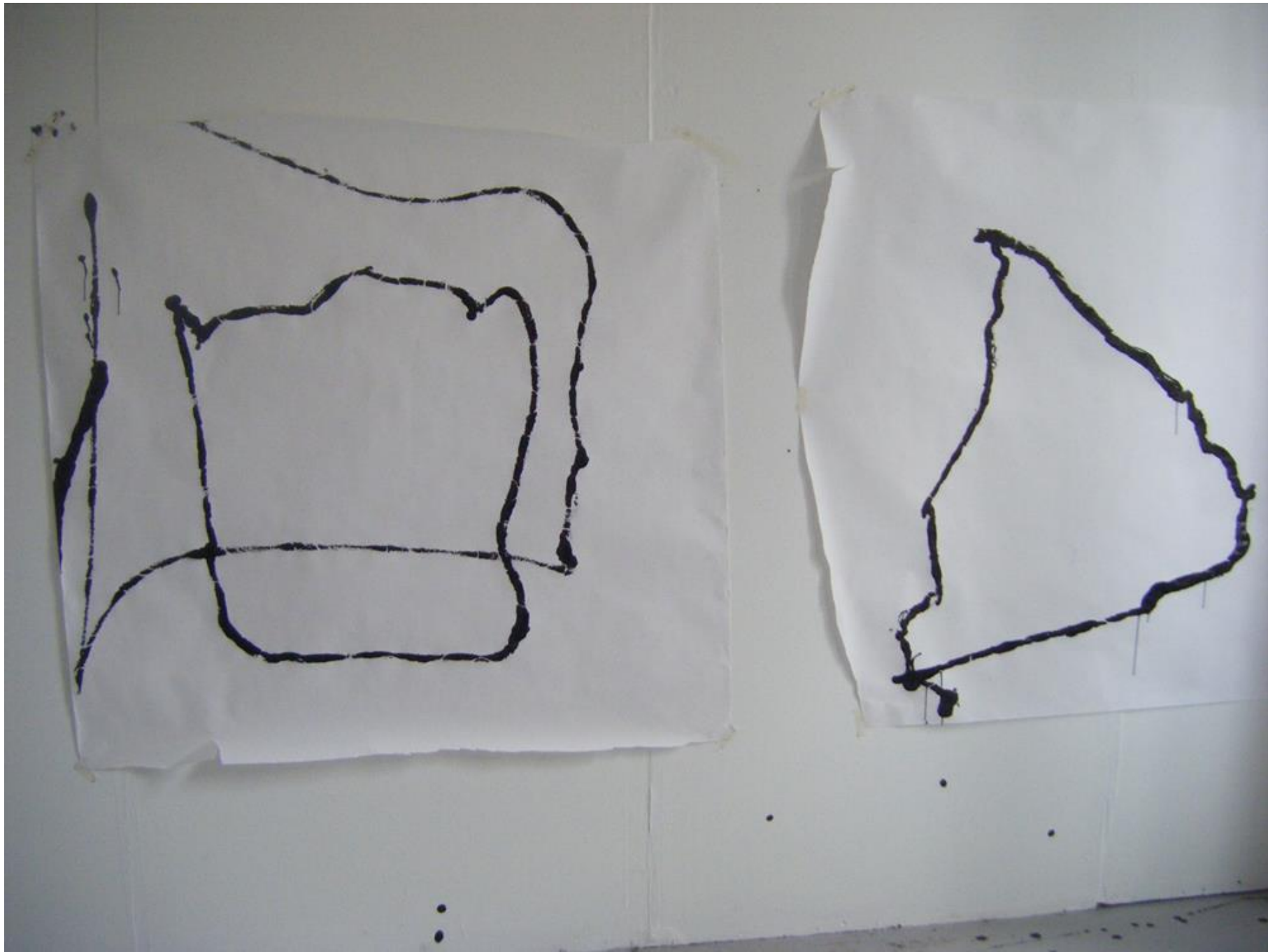
Yielding Stone, 1992, for example, consisted of a solid ball of grey plasticine that was rolled through the streets in Monterrey, collecting dirt, debris and pebbles on its surface. The work was then exhibited in a gallery space where it continued to collect dust and attract foreign objects to its surface, taking what we would normally discard and not notice, into our field of vision and systems of value. In this 'anonymous sculptural production' (Buchloch 2012 Guggenheim Conversations Dec 14th 2012), the artist follows the course of objects as phenomena through simple acts of intervention. In Orozco's work the institutions of art draw attention to the invisible in the world. This "framing" produces a quality of attention to phenomena that would otherwise be overlooked, the hidden processes of forming/sewing that are at once political, social and environmental.



Repeating Orozco's drawing experiment, again utilising everyday objects as opposed to specialist drawing implements, revealed how the lifting and lowering of the 'surface as frame' in a controlled way, created a particular inter-relationship between mark and surface. As in *Yielding Stone*, the surface was simultaneously a material support, a closed entity or 'frame' *and* an active open surface in which marks accumulated. It was the marks, their varying scale, density and dynamic relationship that in some sense created the white space of the background



We developed this initial tactic in a number of ways. In discussion we tried to identify opportunities such as developing the instruments with which we were drawing, refining the unexpected qualities that were emerging. We made a cradle for the inked ball that would allow for a different kind of control – which led to rolling the ball to one another across the floor;



Specifying the shape such as a square or triangle, requiring greater levels of collaboration and control.



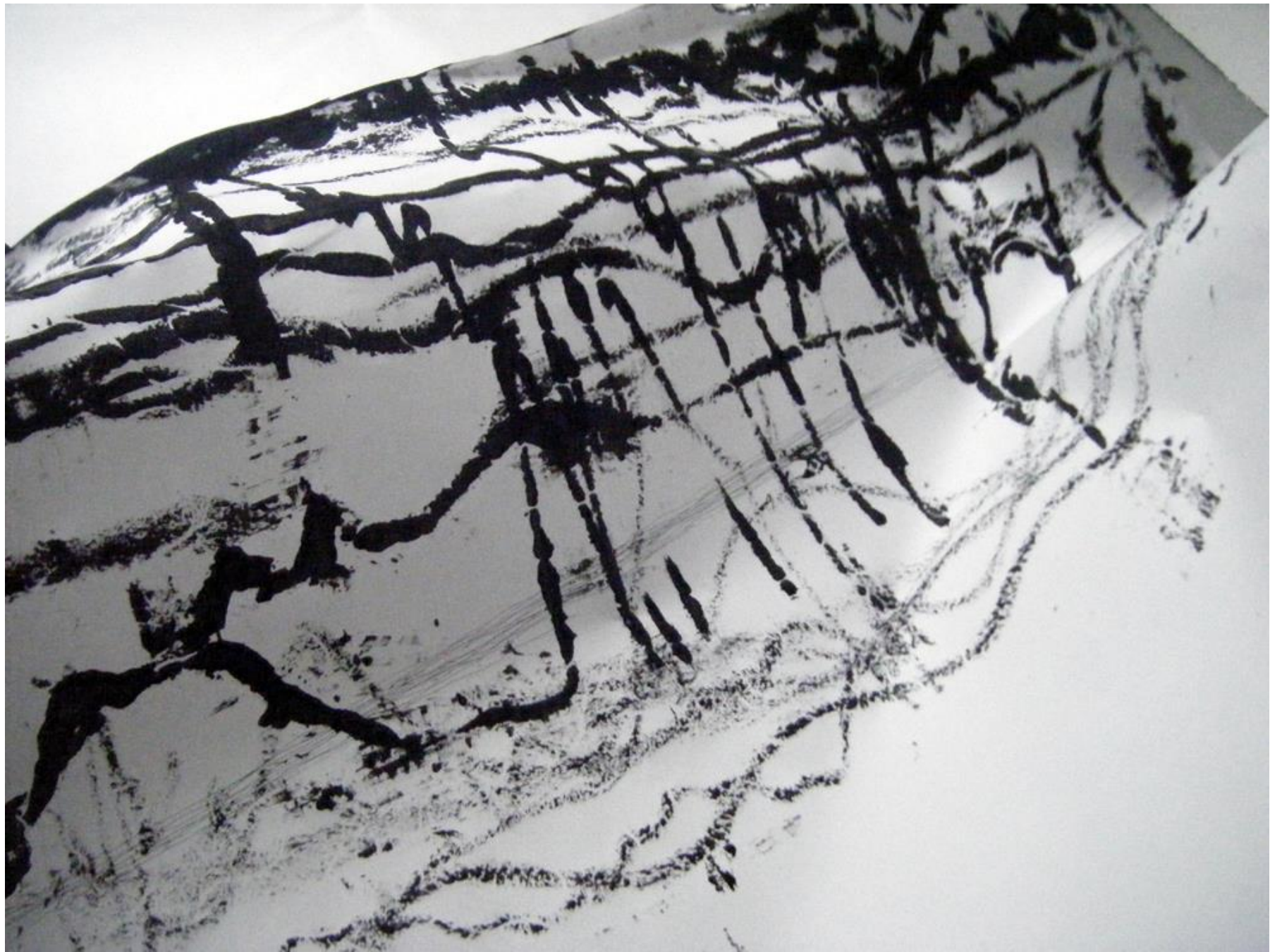
A key moment of tension came in on 2nd day where we were aware that we needed to step back into the line, so to speak i.e. sustain or keep developing the quality of attention of the day before and the knowledge that this could not be achieved by repeating the same tactics For example we moved from ball to string as a drawing implement. This led us into unknown territory focused by our experience rather than borrowed experience. This not to say that mimesis isn't creative. It is to say that to be creative there needs to be a subtle transfer of ownership of the experience, moving from the outside to the inside.

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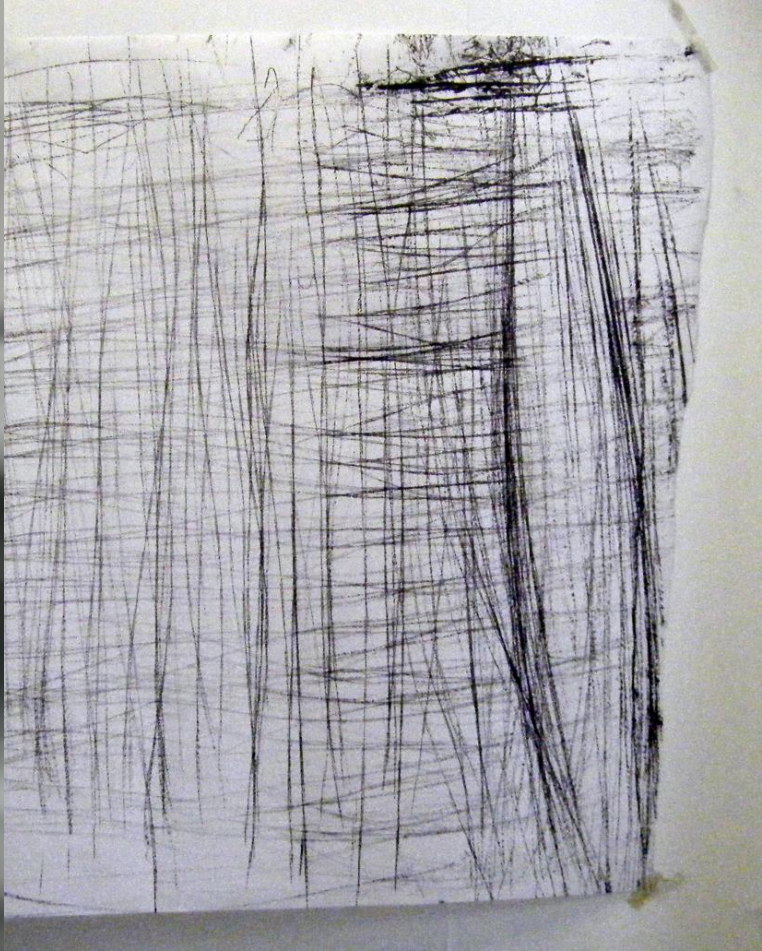
For example we moved from ball to string,



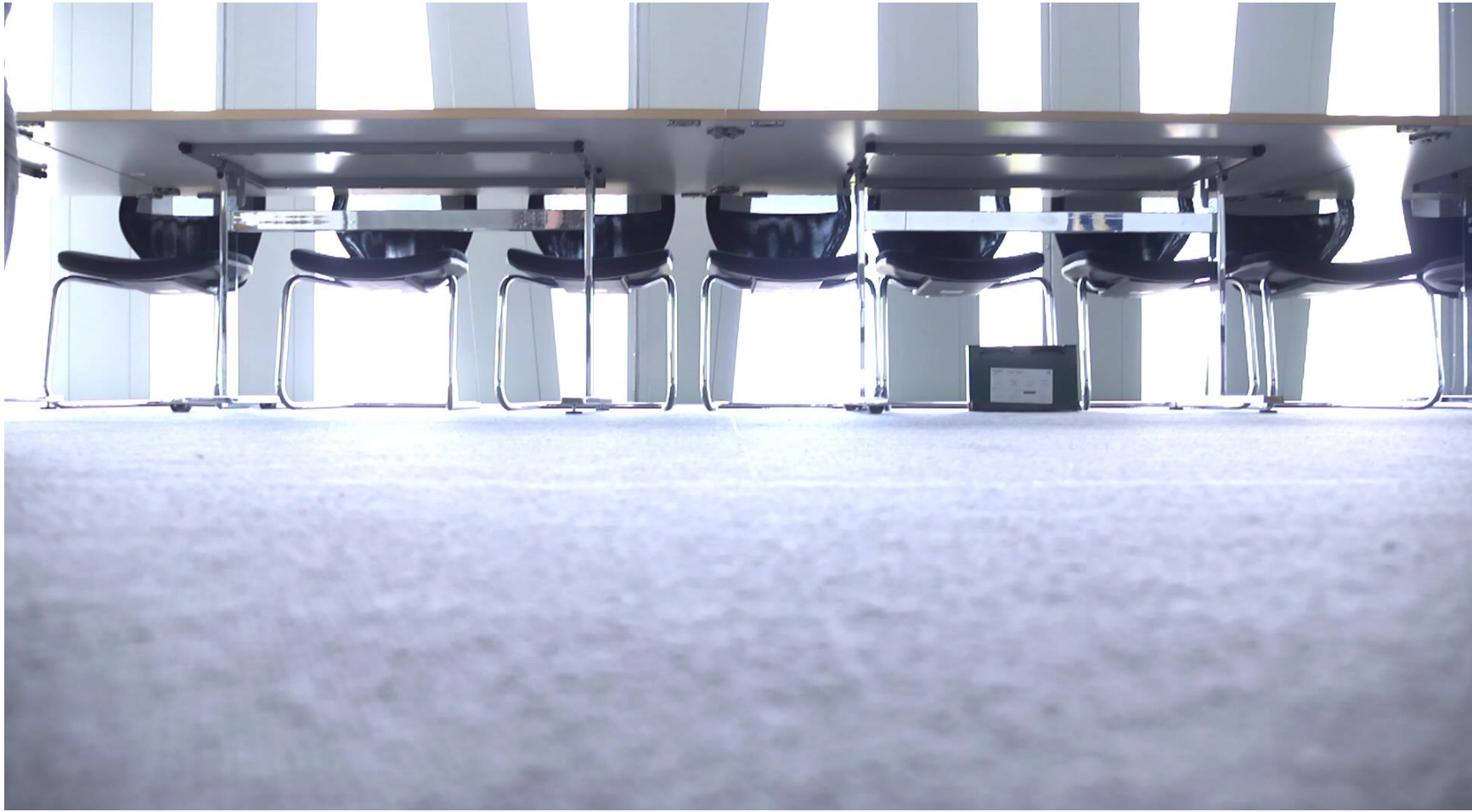
We rolled the paper, constraining the space of the surface we were drawing on;



and we discovered energy in the beating motions of string against surface. These new moves and experiences alerted us again to the significance of the tension between containment and generative force.



And we discovered energy in the beating motions of string against surface. These new moves brought us back inside the experience.



EXPERIMENT 3

In the third phase we returned to filming and with Christine spent a day using cameras to explore a room in Aberdeen University library. Again we began with Klee's line. On the first day we explored the contours of the architecture, inside hidden recesses, in the movement of objects, and in each others' movements.

What we gained from this phase of experimentation was using the camera as a sensory probe or a pencil in a 3 dimensional space. The camera allowed us to extend the body sensorially and filmically exploring aspects of our movement through the space in ways that were surprising although we had less reflective time than previously. (Note: editing like drawing needs to be undertaken by individual

Knowing from inside in some ways could be characterised as that struggle with activity and reflection leading to insight. There is a need to reflect in that same space where the making is happening and to struggle there. This is the value of the kind of drawing and filming we are talking about.

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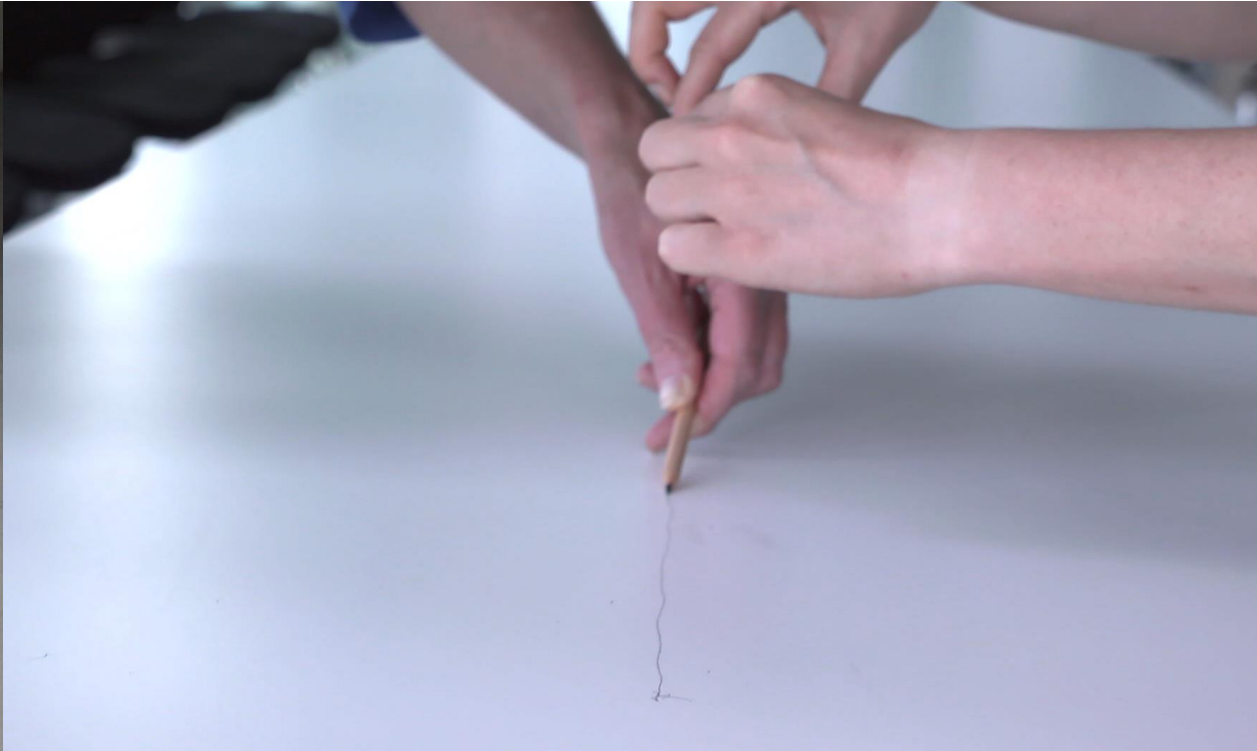
“Your thought will find the contours...”

Malevich, 1918.

“Your thought will find the contours and stamp them with the seal of your advance”

Malevich, 1918.

Conclusions



Returning to our questions:

1) how we might move between drawing and filming in meaningful ways?

We tried to reciprocate between drawing and filming activities, with different levels of success. We found ourselves approaching drawing, then filming as separate activities with the potential to mutually inform each other through reflective thinking, writing and documenting that fed back into the experimental process, shaping it differently.

We still have to work out what it means to contain drawing and filming within one activity— during the last phase of research in June we began to have a new sense of drawing with the camera. The qualities in our filming of movement, open ended exploration, an approach to coming at the real tangentially were a next step in bring drawing and filming together.

2) how does an activity such as drawing or filming become generative, enabling something surprising to happen?

We found during both periods of exploration, particularly in the early stages, that it is possible to draw and film and to produce a technical material outcome, without necessarily engaging the particular quality of creative experience we are interested in.

If in our experimentation we had been seduced by the comfort of a certain level of success achieved by dissolving or joining into the world as process, we would have evaded or written out risk. If on the other hand we had become too narrowly focused, framing our activity in ways that we could fully control, we would also have eliminated risk.

To go further needed particular kinds of attention. On each occasion we took ourselves away from everyday activities to a space, a studio, a spot in the landscape, a meeting room 'framing' the space of experimentation by 'displacing' ourselves from everyday functionality and focusing on drawing and filming for its own sake. This different space yielded opportunities for play, for creative development and experimentation unencumbered by other agendas and demands.

Within these conditions, we were increasingly trying not to 're-present' what we saw, but to focus within drawing/filming itself. So it would seem that the tension, holding the framing and the joining in tension with each other, are not just physical techniques but something to do with the dialectic within filming or drawing around joining/separating.

3) Could our activity inform a way of 'knowing from the inside'?

We increasingly created artificial conditions for working with few external references. This has taken us to a kind of distillation of experience, at once intense and fragile, in which activities 'within' are immanent, a fusion of being and existence. In this sense the work also operates on a metaphysical level.

Neither drawing nor filming in this experimentation is concerned with how things appear, but rather with how one 'is' in the world, not as an 'individual' but as a 'subject' of a much larger whole. It is significant that we have moved from working between two people to working with three in the way it made the whole become more present, more tangible.

Our exploration to date appears to indicate that the processes of joining in the world and separating from it, co-constitute experience at a deep level. Creating the conditions for creative experience – for this dialectic - has to be culturally, aesthetically, artistically enabled. It doesn't take care of itself, but needs a **particular quality of attention**.

We would express this quality of attention through different constructs.

For Amanda

Creativity has been linked by a number of artists, filmmakers, psychoanalysts and psychologists to a quality known variously as attention, stillness, and reverie.

The artist and psychoanalyst Marion Milner (*On not Being Able to Paint Los Angeles*: Tarcher 1957/1983), for example, observed that children who were unable to experience absent mindedness, were less able or willing to be adventurous creatively. We too are interested in the relationship between creativity experienced through drawing and filming, and a certain quality of attention.

For Anne

Anne might call this quality of attention improvisatory, in which certain givens are present in an activity that is imagined as open-ended. A child negotiating a set of paving stones paces these as a game of hopscotch: two feet together, followed by one foot, followed by two feet together... if I remember correctly. The child knows the game and opens her knowledge up to a new encounter, drawing a line that has never been drawn before with a unique pace, rhythm. Her knowledge frames this quality of opportunity but it is the stitching of her know-how into this new encounter as extending into a world that is permeable, infinitely interpretable.

The title of the essay is drawn from a poem by Kazimir Malevich written in 1918 just before he painted *White on White*, arguably one of the most radical shifts in contemporary art in early 20th century. It is quoted in Alain Badiou's text *The Century*, a text that sets out to explore the thought of the 20th century through its art, in particular its poetry, to explore and possibly try to explain, how the century began with immense and radical forms of creativity and became a century marked by war and atrocity.

The last line of the poem is as follows

“Your thought will find the contours **and stamp them with the seal of your advance**” Kazimir Malevich 1918

Badiou argues (contrary to mainstream articulations of modernism based on the utopian) that it is our inability to confront the real in the 20th century that yielded particular forms of art that did allow us to confront the real. took us there. In interpreting Malevich’s poem, Badiou makes three points that resonate with our experiences of filming and drawing as holding a tension between separation (framing) and joining (sewing).

Confronting the real, according to Badiou, requires a rebirth, or new birth, to avoid repetition

Confronting the real also requires a cleansing of the senses “Attentiveness is realised as the invention of an outline, the seal of an advance, but not by grasping a pre-existing reality” p 57

This inventiveness occurs through an act of subtraction, in that place of minimal difference suggesting that the real is to be found tangentially

We were drawn to Orzco’s anonymous processes of making sculpture. We were drawn to aleatory chance methods of drawing. We were also drawn to the inner recesses of the library. These are all spaces of minimal differences, although we may not describe these as emerging out of “an act of subtraction”. As Griselda Pollock has written art is not an abstraction from the world, it is a world. It comes forth from the world and returns to it, differenced.

Thank you....