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The Affective Flows of Art-Making

by Bronwyn Davies

I am always slightly surprised by what I do. That which acts through me is also surprised by what I do, by the chance to mutate, to change, and to bifurcate.

—Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope* (1999, p. 281)

Clementine and I have been drawing, painting, and story-making together since she was less than two years old. What we have each become through our art-making encounters, and what our art materials have become in their encounters with us, has continually taken me by surprise. We did not come to our art-making encounters as fixed entities; rather, we discovered what it was possible to be and to do when we “entered into composition” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 257) with each other, affecting each other and being affected, and also affecting and being affected by the space of my kitchen-turned-into-art-studio. It is this *capacity to be affected* that I am interested in here, since it is through the *affections* that a “body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained” (Spinoza, as cited in Deleuze, 1988, p. 49).

In this philosophy, each of us is defined not by our category membership and not in isolation from others, but by our immanent powers of becoming—powers that depend on our capacity to be affected by those ontological and epistemological possibilities in relation to which we find our lives being played out. Affects, in this Deleuzian sense, are both transient and surprising. They emerge not from within isolated individuals, but from the forces that pass between one being and another, creating a change of state in which something new might be generated (Deleuze, 1997). The “beings” involved in our art-making included Clementine and me, the art materials, the stories we created, and the communities and places we lived in. We were, all of us, in Barad’s (2007) terms, a “*mutual constitution of entangled agencies*” (p. 33, emphasis in original), affecting each other and being affected as we generated that “mood of enchantment or that strange combination of delight and disturbance” (Bennett, 2010, p. xi) that emerges in the surprising unfolding of art-making.

The art materials that Clementine and I worked with as we made art together were not inert matter for us to manipulate in order to express our own individualized essence. Rather, as I will show here, the emergent processes of becoming-art-makers that we engaged in were an unfolding in intra-action with each others’ emergent becoming, where others included both human and nonhuman materialities, both ontologies and epistemologies.

Lines of Ascent and Descent

Being open to the new is vital to any art-making endeavor. Yet continuity and repetition are also important. Bergson's (1998) concepts of lines of ascent and descent offer a subtle and complex way of thinking about these apparently contradictory lines of force. A line of descent is made up of cultural forms and their endless repetitions, making an order that always potentially becomes a force resisting change. To make an art space together, Clementine and I had to create an order, but not one that overrode openness to lines of ascent through which the new and surprising might emerge. It takes continual effort to work against lines of descent; language that enforces order "is not made to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience... Every order-word, even a father's to his son, carries a little death sentence—a Judgment, as Kafka put it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 76). But these two lines, ascent and descent, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, lines of descent create life's "conditions of possibility" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 85) and are inseparable from the line of ascent that opens up the unexpected and the new. The line of ascent corresponds "to an inner work of ripening or creating, [that] endures essentially, and imposes its rhythm on the [line of descent], which is inseparable from it" (Bergson, 1998, p. 11).

When two bodies or ideas affect each other, entering into composition with each other, they generate something new. Or, alternatively, they may decompose each other, threatening their coherence:

When a body "encounters" another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts... we experience joy when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and sadness when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threaten our own coherence. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 19)

The line of ascent that enters into the joyful creation of a more powerful whole is most often found in art and literature. However, it is not only and always joyful. It is mobile and unpredictable and its capacity to deterritorialize established order can threaten our habituated sense of coherence. Making art is a complex dance between lines of descent (making life coherent and predictable) and ascent (opening up the new and unexpected).

To keep the line of ascent open one must work *both with and against* lines of descent as they appear both in one's own habitual individualizing, interiorizing practices, and in the places where art-making happens. To turn my kitchen into a place where art-making could happen—where we could become and go on becoming art-makers—required of us both that we abandon old habits and ways of being.

Places “are formed through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation; practices, moreover, through which the constituent ‘identities’ are also themselves continually moulded” (Massey, 2005, p. 154). On the one hand, we needed to set up workable rules and expectations, and on the other, we had to work against those same rules and expectations when they blocked or ran counter to the emergence of the new, the surprising, the line of ascent.

Documenting this double movement involves looking at the smallest details in motion, tuning into the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007, p. 33, emphasis in original). Tuning into affect, as it flows between one body and another, means tuning into movements that are always already changing the nature of the materialities they are working through, changing what they are and what they might be, as they are each affected by the multiple materialities and forces at play.

Creating an Art Space

The possibility of engaging in art-making with Clementine came from our mutual belonging to an inner-city community. We live in an apartment block with a café next door. In the café, there are planned and spontaneous meetings, as well as solitary activities. Here you can find, for example, young parents and their children, gay couples, actors, writers, lawyers, and business men and women; they include a retired architect/artist who is illustrating a book for the café owner, an older woman with dementia who sometimes rings the café owner to ask where she lives, and me, whose attention is ineluctably drawn to small children becoming restive at their parents’ intense involvement in conversations. I find myself offering them my pencils and the back of whatever paper I happen to be working on to see what they might do with them.

The first *drawing-story* with Clementine happened when she had just come back from a picnic with her cousins at Centennial Park. Her mum, Claudia, needed to do some shopping and asked me to mind her. Clementine climbed up on the seat opposite me in the café, and I ordered her a babyccino and a muffin. I asked her to tell me what she had done at the park. At Because she was eighteen 18 months old, the task of telling me a story of what they had done was just outside her reach. So I said, surprising myself, “Let’s draw it.” “Did you run?” I asked. “Yes,” she said, so I quickly drew a stick-figure running, giving it curly hair and clothes like Clementine’s, pointing out that the running figure had buttons on her dress the same as Clementine had on her dress. “Did you jump?” I asked. “Yes,” she said, so I drew a picture of her jumping. “Not like that,” she said, and climbed off her chair and showed me how she jumped. I rubbed out the first jumping figure and made it jump just as she’d shown me. The story grew through several pages to include each of her cousins, looking more or less recognizably themselves, playing together in the ways I offered and she assented to, and ways

she told me or showed me. We created a story of climbing the magnificent old trees, and looking at the ducks on the lily pond. “The pond was scary,” she said, staring at the duck pond I had drawn—, waiting, it seemed, for its danger to be made evident by the quickly moving pencil. I attempted bland reassurances about the benign nature of the pond, which she didn’t find at all convincing. So to reflect her feeling that the pond was dangerous, I took up the affect of danger and offered her a crocodile with its nose peeping out of the water. She liked the crocodile and its possibilities very much. Would it bite her toes? we wondered.... And so the story unfolded itself. I took the pages to my place and bound them together to make a book called *Clementine’s Visit to Centennial Park*, and we presented it together to her delighted mother.

Some months later, the idea of turning my kitchen into a place to paint seemed a natural extension of our story-making. To transform my kitchen into an art-space meant giving up, to the extent that I could, the lines of descent of my quotidian kitchen practices (a fastidious attention to cleanliness, order, and predictability) and opening myself up to the surprise of the new. Clementine, for her part, had to be able to forgive those small anxieties attached to order. Some months into our painting together, I exclaimed “No!” as she was about to do something I didn’t want her to do. She literally jumped in her seat and I realized with a shock how hard she worked at accommodating my ongoing quotidian lapses. Despite my passionate attachment to lines of ascent, I find in my notes from two years after we had begun painting and drawing together, the following moment:

Clementine dipped a pencil in the paint and made some dots. I said that wasn’t what the pencils were for. She looked up at me, hesitating, and I realized what a stupid thing that was to say. So I said, “Sometimes adults have ideas that are wrong. Show me what you were doing.” She showed how she could make small vivid dots using the pencil. I told her that was good, and that experimenting was good, and that sometimes I say things that are wrong, though often I am right as well. She seemed happy with that. She made some more dots, but then wanted to clean the paint off the pencil. I was appalled at myself.

Each time we got together to paint, I covered the bench surfaces with newspaper so I wouldn’t worry about where the paint landed, and we painted on recycled paper from my study to avert any unwanted anxieties I might have about waste and so there wouldn’t be any demand from the paper that only perfectly executed paintings could appear on it. Spillages of paint and water, or wet paintings that landed upside down on the floor, came to be defined by us as accidents, over which there would be no drama. Clementine’s paintings, when she was especially pleased with them, went up on the walls

of her own apartment. Some of mine went up on my kitchen walls. What I sought in this new order, these lines of descent, was a space in which art could happen, where we could joyfully and without any unnecessary anxieties open up lines of ascent as we experimented with art-making.

The first time we decided to do painting, Clementine sat up at the kitchen bench watching attentively as I put everything we would need in place. I put a sculpture of an exotic, blue bird on the bench as possible inspiration for our work. I asked Clementine to choose which colours she wanted and squeezed these out in generous dollops, each into its own small indentation on the small palette, and we each chose a brush from among the many differently sized and textured brushes. I showed her how to dip her brush into the glass of water and then into the paint she wanted to work with. To my surprise, she dipped the brush into all of the colours, one after the other, before beginning her painting. I felt a rush of anxiety about this instant “messing up” of colours, exclaiming “oh!” and then watching in fascination as her brush dipped into one and now another of the vivid colours, resisting my resistance.

She began working with great speed, moving from one painting to the next, as far as I could see, ignoring the bird. I too got into the swing of moving rapidly, as I’d already learned to do in our drawing-stories, not worrying about how the “product” might turn out. With rapid brush strokes, I found the bird appearing on my page in a way that delighted me, and that I had not imagined myself capable of. The legs of the bird in my painting were too short as the page wasn’t long enough to extend them to the right length. Realizing that the too-shortness didn’t matter gave me intense pleasure as I found myself liberated from one of many small enslavements to how art *ought* to be. Letting the brush flow and the colours mix in unexpected ways was a skill I began picking up from Clementine right there in that first encounter. Together we listened to each other as we became emergent-artists-together, open to being affected by each other and to what we might create. I was so delighted with my bird painting that it lived on the wall for some time next to the bird itself. On subsequent visits,

Clemmie would point with delight to the bird and then the painting, saying, “See, bird, bird,” as if surprised all over again by what had appeared on my page. (See Figure 1.)

At the end of each painting session, I would move Clementine’s chair over to the kitchen sink and we would wash ourselves and the art materials. Anticipating that there might be danger because the hot tap was in such easy



Figure 1. Two Birds.

reach, I personified each of the taps, giving a deep, gravelly voice to the hot tap, which said, “Watch out! I’m the hot tap. I’m really dangerous!” and to the cold tap a mild, soft voice that said, “Hello, I’m the cold tap. I don’t hurt anyone.” Clementine loved these voices and took great pleasure in repeating them. When it came time to let out the water, knowing that the drain might make a rather startling noise, I invented a funny gurgling voice for the plughole that talked nonsense to Clementine while it took away the water. As we cleaned up together I learned to notice the colour of the water as the paint washed out of the brushes, while she learned the nature of the different brushes and how to care for them. She learned how to be safe with the taps, while I discovered a playful capacity to animate the taps and the plughole. Together with brushes and paint and water, we entered a timeless zone of play where lines of ascent and descent worked together in harmony.

Moments of Becoming Art-Makers

What follows are brief excerpts from the notes I made after each painting session. Out of more than 250 paintings and drawings, I have chosen moments that reveal the surprising nature of our art-making and the intra-active, affective flows in between. I have chosen as well moments that show the tension between the lines of descent, always at work, and the contrasting liveliness and joy of mutual composition.

OCTOBER 13, 2011 ORDER SUPPORTING THE FLOW OF AFFECT AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW

Today was our first session after me having been away for six weeks. When we left her place to come to my place, her little sister Scout cried as she wanted to come too, and Clementine, now two years and 10 months old, explained to her that painting was only for big girls.

When we arrived in my kitchen, Clementine moved her chair over to the bench, saying, “This is my chair,” and climbed up onto the chair, asking, “Where are the paints?” As usual, I talked about the preparation as I got everything ready... I am fascinated by how quiet and how patient she is as she watches it all being laid out...

Today she had insisted that she bring her doll Archer, and announced that she was going to paint Archer. She nodded toward my painting of the bird on the wall and said, “You painted that yesterday” (her word for any time past). I have not at all pressed representation as what we are doing, though I often have something interesting to begin with as inspiration. Today she had chosen Archer, and so we sat him on the bench where we could see him. As I squeezed out the colours, we discussed how red and white together would make pink. She immediately mixed these colours and began her painting

with playful sweeping lines. Then she moved to blue and white, and some gold, overlaying these on the pink.

Meanwhile I began with a pink circle for Archer's face and a pink smile. She glanced at it and said, "That's you." I accepted that I was not painting Archer but myself. We discussed what colour my hair should be and we decided on gold. I gave myself blue and gold eyes and a stick-figure body.



Figure 2. Angry Spider Mother.

Clementine engaged in more experimental mixing of colours and brush strokes, combining blue and pink, incorporating the circle I had begun my painting with. She moved from there to experimenting with combining blue and yellow to make green, using both circular and straight brush strokes.

Her free and confident brush strokes, layering one colour on top of another and mixing colours, and her idea that I was painting myself led to my own experiment. I was amazed at what emerged. A wild, angry, crazy-looking face. All the grief and anger I feel about my current work situation was suddenly visible on the page.

I was so surprised I held it up for Clementine to see and said, "Look at that!" She looked at it and exclaimed, "Oh! It's a really angry spider mother!" (See Figure 2.)

Her next two paintings incorporated some of the colours and lines of the spider mother. She abandoned the brushes and began doing dots with paint on her fingers and then sliding her fingers through the paint. It was as if my wild painting gave her permission to do something outside the ordinary. She then began a new painting using the same colours with a brush, but this time picked up a pencil lying there and made squiggly lines in the paint that captured the affect of the angry spider mother. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

OCTOBER 25, 2011 EXPANDING THE FIELD OF MATERIAL ENGAGEMENTS

[Clementine has been sick, so this was the first session after a break. After we finished painting and cleaned up, we played with the dolls and then Clementine noticed for the first time my bowl of brightly coloured wool.]

She asked me if she could do knitting. I said she would have to be bigger before she could do knitting. She did not find this at all convincing. I showed her how knitting is done and she accepted it might be



Figures 3. Response to Spider Mother.



Figure 4. Response to Spider Mother.

too hard. She began cutting pieces of black wool into odd-sized strips, taking pleasure in the fact that she could use the scissors so well. She looked at all the rest of the wool and seemed to think cutting it all up would be fun, starting in on a ball of green wool and cutting through the whole ball. I said gently that I hadn't really wanted her to do that, and began an alternative game that we would make a spider from the black bits of wool she had cut. I rapidly made two spiders with red eyes and she thought they were scary and wonderful. We played with those for a while and then she said she wanted to write on the computer. So she sat on my knee and typed the first few words, with me telling her how to spell them and pointing to the relevant keys. She then dictated for me to type:

*Dear clemmie
I hope you are alright.
Dear scoutie
I hope you are alright.
Dear mummy
I hope you are alright.
Dear grandma
I hope you are alright.
Get well soon
We all go to bed last night and
We had sweet dreams*

She was aware that the words on the screen were the words she was saying to me, pointing to the words and repeating what she had said. When I said we had left Daddy out, she said no, he couldn't be there as he hadn't been sick. She hadn't been sure how to end her poem, and so I had suggested the sweet dreams, which she accepted with a smile.

FEBRUARY 27, 2012 JOYFULLY ENTERING INTO COMPOSITION TOGETHER

Today began in the coffee shop. In this story-telling Clementine told the story and I drew it. She began with herself and Scout, and her cousins, and their parents, each with a mermaid tail. Each of the mermaids had spots on their faces, which Clemmie added, at first with pencil and then, realizing we have a red pen, with red pen. The red spots grew into wild scribbles, which could be cuts. The spots meant that everyone was sick and had to be rushed to hospital. I drew an ambulance rushing along to take them to the hospital. We only had one page, so we had to go across to the newsagent for more, as she was determined the story would continue. (See Figure 5.)

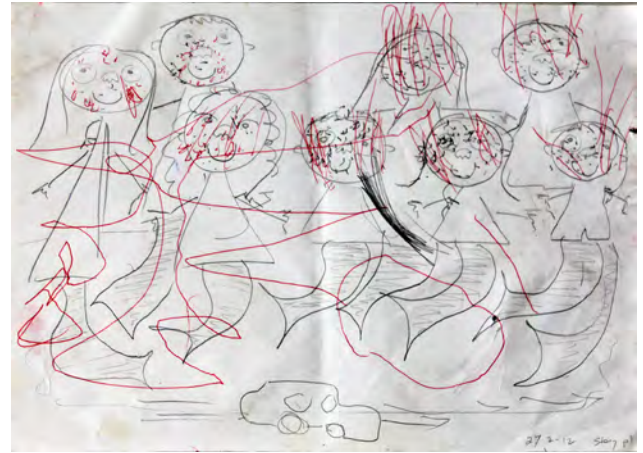


Figure 5. Mermaids with spots.

There are seven beds for the mermaids to lie in, and a doctor with some pills for them, some big double doors to go through. The new baby-to-be, Sunday, is now included, with a bed of his own, and Clemmie has two beds, one for her when she is three, as she currently is, and one for when she is a very big girl. Everyone takes their pills. I draw the pills in their tummies. The two Clementines had to have an especially big pill. When they were well, I added a sports car for Clemmie to drive off in, and I drew her hair whooshing behind her in the wind. She coloured in the car with the red pen. (See Figure 6.)



Figure 6. Mermaids in hospital.

Now the story moves to the park. She loves this part of the story, where her toes are bitten by a crocodile. This has many variations. Today the park had a tree and a ladder and a slippery dip—a long slippery dip at the end of which one could fly down into the boat on the water. Clementine climbed the ladder and went whoosh down the slippery dip, with her hair flying, and landed on the boat. Then she dived into the water, knowing the crocodile would be there. She insisted her arms were not going over her head in a crawl, but in front of her in a dog paddle. So I changed the arms to dog-paddle arms. The crocodile nipped her mermaid tail. She swam fast toward



Figure 7. Mermaids in park.



Figure 8. Mermaids ice-skating.

her mum, calling, “Mum, mum!” who was also in the water. I suggested a Band-Aid for the nip in her tail, and that made it better. On the next page, the mermaids have gone to an ice-skating rink where two mermaids, covered in Band-Aids, go skating. In the top left-hand corner, in red, is Clementine’s drawing of hair flying out behind. (See Figures 7 and 8.)

FEBRUARY 28, 2012 A SURPRISING LEAP INTO SOMETHING NEW: HAIR BLOWING IN THE WIND

Next day, Clemmie is very keen to come to my place to paint, even though I warn her we have only half an hour. She begins with a pink fish and some water and the wind blowing. Next she paints herself with hair blowing wildly in the wind and then Scout with hair blowing wildly in the wind. In each case, the blowing hair takes up most of the page and is full of colour and movement. (See Figures 9 and 10.)

What was magical for me in these sessions was to see the way that our story from the day before leapt over into her paintings with the fish, and the hair blowing in the wind. And much bigger than that, really, is the way she drew on all the skills she has been developing in experimenting with brushes and colour and lines. It was an amazing day.



Figure 9. Hair blowing in wind 1.



Figure 10. Hair blowing in wind 2.

MAY 23, 2012 DRAWING STORIES TOGETHER AS JOYFUL COMPOSITION

[After several paintings] Clementine chose the calligraphy brush and began with dots in the corners representing her house and her friends' houses. Then she drew flowing lines back and forth between the houses, some with mud puddles. She called it Clemmie's house, and all her friends' houses, and visiting friends and adventures with crocodiles. As she painted she told the story of a very brave girl in her painting called Clementine who was the bravest mermaid. Her friends were all there. There were so many crocodiles chasing them and they couldn't run fast enough and the crocodiles were biting them and they had to go to hospital. (See Figure 11.)



Figure 11. Visiting friends and adventures.

At that point, she stopped and asked could we draw a mermaid story. I said she could draw but she was adamant that I should draw because I am “so good at it” and she would sit on my knee, she said, and we would tell the story together. We drew two mermaids, Jazzie and Clemmie. Clemmie was the biggest mermaid. The hands of the mermaids had to look like Clemmie's hand, not the stick fingers I had quickly drawn. (Recently we have been tracing around our fingers and painting them so she has an image of how fingers should be.) Jazzie had a cut in her tail. Clemmie and Jazzie both had thorns in their tails and had to go to hospital. They were each in a hospital bed and very sad. Dr. Bronny came with her Band-Aids and tweezers, and the sad faces turned into smiles. Dr. Bronny pulled out the thorns and put them in a bowl and put a Band-Aid on Jazzie's cut. I said they said “ouch” when the thorns were pulled out. “But they didn't say ‘ouch,’” she said, and she didn't want their words written, so I rubbed them out. Then she noticed that mermaid Scout and mermaid Maxie were hiding under the beds... All during the storytelling and drawing she squirmed with excitement, almost squirming off my lap several times. I wouldn't have known the level of excitement in our drawing stories if she hadn't been in my lap!!

This was one of the most creative and relaxed sessions we have had for a while, and one where the love between us has been palpable.

JUNE 25, 2012 THE EMERGENCE OF THOUGHT ABOUT OUR COLLECTIVE MATERIALITY

This was a most relaxed and joyful session with Clementine—though they are always that, this time together seemed qualitatively different. When we met by chance on the front stairs she jumped up into my arms and hugged me and asked if she could come to my place. She said she had missed me so much

while I was away though I had only been gone for five days... She reminds me the baby is due in three weeks.

When we got to my place she was hungry and asked me to cut up a pear. We talked about how pears and people were alike. The pear had skin like her, and a round tummy like her mummy. She said she had a round tummy too. We then wondered about the seeds and whether she had seeds, but she thought not. I jokingly asked her if she had a stalk sprouting out of her head and she laughed and said no. I asked if she wanted toast, with butter and honey, and she said yes, but she would also like on her toast some of my little red seeds with white fingers. It took me a while to work out that she meant pomegranate seeds, so I cut open the pomegranate and she showed me the little white fingers on each seed, which she said were not good to eat, and I agreed. We wondered how pomegranates and people were alike and decided the red juice in the pomegranate was like blood. She observed that in people it was better for the blood to stay inside and not come outside the body.

Finally we got round to painting. She drew some fluffy clouds, telling me she was good at clouds, and indeed she was. She painted them pink, mixing white and red and told me they were awesome pink clouds. She thoroughly mixed all the colours I had put on the palette, and the resulting muddy paint on her brush then rather spoiled the clouds. I suggested brown was not great for clouds and she stopped, leaving some of the pink still visible. Curiously she named her painting pitta patta rainbow, and when I asked, wasn't it called clouds? she said no. So I have not yet got to the bottom of what she is doing with the naming. (See Figure 12.)

She said she didn't want to do any more painting, so while I finished my painting she drew a picture of her mummy's tummy with the baby in it. She then painted over the drawing, became upset, and wanted to rub the paint off. She was rubbing a hole in the paper, and I suggested she stop before she had a hole. She stopped, but then produced two new watery paintings, which she rubbed a hole



Figure 12. Clouds.

in. She didn't seem upset when she did this—just very intent on rubbing until she got a hole. She asked me to draw Claudia with the baby coming out with Clementine beside her looking sad as she had the hiccups. She insisted that the baby was a girl, though she knows the baby coming is a boy. Next drawing was the whole family, with the baby still in mummy's tummy, and Scout with a baby in her tummy. (“Just pretending,” she said, “It's really Archer, the doll.”) (See Figures 13 and 14.)

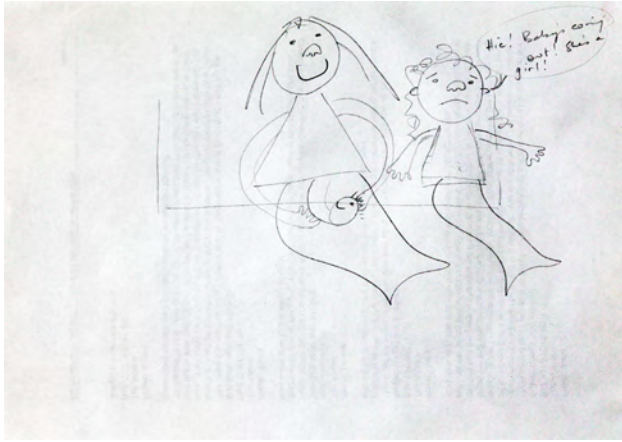


Figure 13. Birth of Sunday.

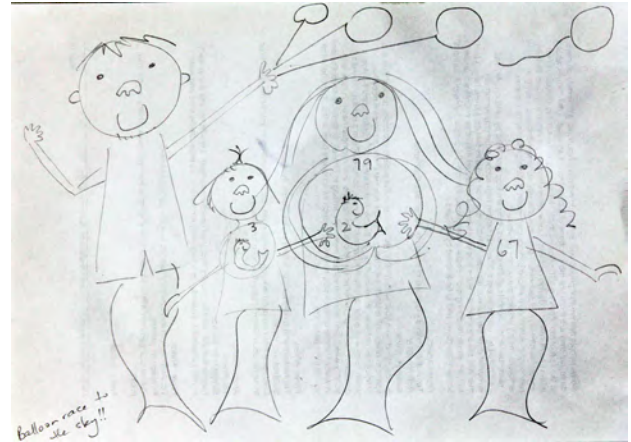


Figure 14. Mermaid family.

JULY 23, 2012 ATTENDING TO THE SMALL DETAILS OF THE FLOW BETWEEN US TWO, THE POPPIES, AND THE BEES

I have Clementine to visit for a few hours. Claudia's baby is due any day.

When I showed Clemmie my vase of poppies as our inspiration for painting, she asked me, did I know that flowers need water and sun and earth to grow? Right then a poppy flower unfolded from its pod and we talked about how it was like a butterfly unfolding its wings from the cocoon that the caterpillar has made. Over lunch we talked about the lettuce seedlings she and I planted in the community garden, and the fact that they are growing, and she said we should get some seeds from the poppy and plant them. I said that the flowers needed bees to pollinate them and there are no bees inside the apartment, so there will be no seeds. She told me that bees make honey, and I got out the honey jar, and she showed me the picture of the bee on the lid. "See bee-honey, bee-honey. See?" she said, pointing to the picture of the bee and the actual honey in turn, showing me how obvious the connection was. We looked in detail at the beautiful yellow centre of the flowers and talked about how bees pollinate flowers. I told her about the little sacs some bees have on their legs to carry the pollen, and about how the flower relies on the bees to put the pollen down the small space in the middle of the flower to begin the process of making seeds. And how the flower, if the bee pollinates it, will turn into seeds that we could plant and make more poppies. We had some toast and honey to get the feel of bees and honey and poppies and how amazing the bees really are. Then we did paintings of poppies, and Clemmie wrote a poem to go with each of the paintings. The "pitta patta" title of her paintings that puzzled me so much for their repetitiveness and apparent lack of meaning relating to the painting has finally budded into a poem that is a little like an ode to a bee and butterfly combined.

*Pitta patta
catty pillar*

*Pitty pea...
I want you
To be my bee.*

Today I wanted to paint the poppies... I asked Clemmie to leave my green paint green and my orange orange, as they were the colours I needed, but she couldn't resist mixing them to see what would happen, and once again the mixes were better than I would have done for myself, adding (somewhat random) depth and variation, whereas I would have happily stayed (boringly and uninspired) with mono colours. When Clemmie flicked drops of wet paint onto my painting I was a little upset. I said, "Oh, I didn't want that," using a tissue to soak up the splodges of water. She looked quite puzzled, not knowing why I might not want those random flicks of colour. She teased me (with a little smile) by using her paint-loaded brush to show me where on my painting I might put some stars (there were some star stickers I had put in the paint box). When I objected quite firmly, she smiled and turned her brush around and showed me with the handle end where I might put the stars. When I said I didn't want stars, she accepted that and continued with her own glorious painting of poppies. (See Figures 15 and 16.)

And So...

Sitting across the kitchen bench from each other, creating an art-making-space together, Clementine and I experience a peculiar attentiveness to each other's drawing and painting that is evident in the elements of our paintings and drawings that jump from her page to mine, and my page to hers; her excitement infects me, just as my pleasure in our quiet play with pencils and paints infects her. Together we have responded to the spaces we have created by developing a joyful engagement in the practice of drawing and painting together.



Figure 15. Poppies 1.



Figure 16. Poppies 2.

The speed with which she painted enabled me to let go of an idea that painting involved slow and painstaking attention to representation. Her mixing of colours gave me the possibility of lines of flight that did not emerge from a carefully laid-down plan or knowledge of colours. I see, too, as I look through the 250 paintings so far, that she returns again and again to the story of the flight to hospital, and I have not mentioned in my notes that she had had firsthand experience of such a flight when she severed her finger in a sliding door.

There was much that happened outside our art-making—my grief at my then work situation, or my visit to an inspiring exhibition of paintings of flowers by the Japanese artist Secca. There were many other forces at play that, of necessity, I cannot be aware of. I notice too that I have not found space to document here the generous and warm encouragement that Clementine’s parents, Matt and Claudia, gave to our art-making. Claudia’s delight in the paintings and drawings and stories Clementine brought home were vital to our work; Matt and Claudia’s filming of some of our times together, their willingness to put her paintings up on their walls—all of this was integral to the community that made our art-making possible—not to mention the forbearance of the workers in the coffee shop who dealt with spilt babyccinos, crumbled muffins, and pencils and papers everywhere. I’d like to think I’ve exaggerated my adherence to quotidian, repetitive lines of descent, but the surprise and exhilaration I felt at being freed from them cannot be made real unless I admit the extent to which they were there, constraining what it was possible for me to do. Being open to that sense of surprise and joy in the affective flow of our art-making is what I have most gained from our work together. I cannot speak for Clementine, and what she might say she has gained, except to note that Claudia tells me she asks almost every day whether she can come to my place to paint.

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