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Modelling Subjectivities:

Life-Drawing, Popular Culture and
Contemporary Art Education

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, University of Sydney, 2010.

This thesis examines life-drawing as a social, cultural and aesthetic practice. It is principally concerned with the changes occurring within life-drawing classes since the mid twentieth century; and how life drawing has spread from being a highly regulated practice confined to art institutions to proliferating among a variety of recreational, semi-professional and pedagogical settings. It is also critically concerned with the discourses surrounding life-drawing, and how these discourses permeate the spaces and practices within life classes. This thesis is concerned with the blind spots in vision, the invisible spaces in the life-room, and how life-drawing as a social practice mediates and manages the imaginary spaces between all participants; spaces of desire, aspiration, alienation and agency.

In examining life drawing as a constellation of discourses, aspirations and behaviours, occurring across a number of social and cultural fields, this thesis moves through a number of critical disciplines. The interdisciplinary research involved in this thesis, has involved the development of a number of critical methodologies derived from cultural studies and feminist art theory, and redeployed in a critical examination of life drawing, as a social practice, as a discursive field, and as a compelling and troubling site for inter-subjective encounters. The research for this thesis has been fuelled by the author's experiences as a visual artist and artists' model in Sydney, and informed by extensive participant observation of life-drawing classes in Australia and internationally. The research consisted of interviews with over fifty participants, comprising artists' models, artists and senior art-educators, from Sydney, New York, Paris, and the United Kingdom.

This thesis develops an account of life-drawing as a performative practice, enabling life classes to exist as liminal spaces where the boundaries between art and sex, education and recreation, and between various cultural milieus claiming and affiliation with 'high' art are actively produced and contested. Most critically, this thesis demonstrates the necessity and possibility for the socially reflexive grounding of critical examinations of contemporary art practice. In consciously examining the tacit values aligned with institutionalised categories of art practice and examining the claims, discourses and practices within a range of professional, paraprofessional and amateur art settings, this thesis develops a rigorous interdisciplinary account of how life drawing is experienced, and how a critical understanding of art as a social and cultural practice is necessary to any appreciation of contemporary art and visual culture.

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Preface

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts, University of Sydney.

Except where indicated, all material is the original work of the author, and has not been submitted for examination for any other award.

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Dedication:

Michael (Predator) Carlton: 1971-2004
biochemist, blogger, squatter, supergeek and life model.

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PROLOGUE

Crawling Inside a Pose

1. *Posing marathon*

It's April 2003 and I'm modelling for a drawing marathon. I'm naked, and perched on a high chair with my feet supported at different levels, to give an illusion of a *contrapposto* twist. My right arm rests on the back of the chair and holds a book. Although I remember my pose, I can not remember what the book is. But I remember discreetly flipping the pages, using the thumb and index of my invisible left hand. Invisible reading is another trick of the trade.

I am silent and apparently still. No one complains. I know how to do my job well. I relax into the pose. My arms, hands, feet and buttocks have a strong sense of where they press into the chair beneath me. All else failing I mark the chair, mark my drape with masking tape, or draw a chalk outline like the corpse at a crime scene. I 'spot' the angle and position of my head with my eyes. (Where does my peripheral vision end? What is my nose pointing at? How much of my body can I see?) After three days of this, I know the room, and the objects in it, intimately, probably even more than the students do.

I hold this pose for three six-hour days: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. All up an eighteen-hour pose. Actually I've calculated the exact posing time down to the last minute. I divide each three-hour class by six. Assuming a five-minute pause every twenty-five minutes, I have calculated that I will pose for 150 minutes for each class. However, usually there is a fifteen-minute tea break. 135 minutes. Plus the class usually takes about ten minutes to arrive and set up. 125 minutes. Usually the teacher will stop the class five minutes before the end. 120 minutes. That's two hours for every three-hour class. Multiply this by six classes. Actually it's only twelve hours of actual posing. A cinch. And I know this chair, know my body, I know I can manage this pose.

I also know the inevitable pain that accompanies all life modelling. The first morning I relax into the pose. I enjoy the breaks as I get up, stretch and wander around. I notice which muscles have lengthened and which have contracted as I do reverse stretches. I have that limber, light feeling that is similar to yoga classes. I am aware of my body in a pleasant way. By the afternoon, I find the pose habitual, my muscles fall into it automatically, without my

thinking. My eyes rest on familiar points in the room. Towards the end of the first day, my right leg goes numb, and I have a mark in my arm from the edge of the seat. On the train home, I feel tired and heavy.

The second day starts much as the first. But fatigue kicks in sooner. My right leg goes numb after fifteen minutes. My lower back aches. I am more sure of what muscles I must stretch in each break and I rub ‘*Tiger Balm*’ on my back, necks and hips. I rehearse my mental calculations of how long I have come, how long there is to go. I count my breaths. See how slowly I can breathe. For a long pose I will count 360 breaths for each twenty-five minutes. During the day I can slow this right down to 200 breaths or 120 if I’m really comfortable. This time I’m not. Each breath takes about ten seconds, making six breaths a minute. I’m in the zone, eyes faded, voices sound blurry. I’m aware of my body and yet not aware of my body. My mind is soft. Too soft to read the tome I’ve borrowed from the library.

By day three I’m scared I won’t be able to go on and that I’ll have to break the pose. I keep hoping silently that the students will turn up late, and extend their tea-break to twenty-five minutes. I look at the students. ‘Do they really need me here?’ I ask myself. After all I am just one element in a huge still life set-up in the centre of the room. We are surrounded by students. I say we, because on the other side of the set-up is another model. We can’t see each other, and only talk while resetting the timer and when muttering a few words in the break, comparing pins and needles. Still, it’s kind of nice to realise I am not alone here, and the timed breaks and quick chit chat provide a pacing and a comfort. During the breaks, I shake myself from my stupor and get chatty, trying to cheat a few extra minutes before returning to the pose. By this stage it is obvious that the students are getting as mentally tired as I am. Maybe we function to hold their attention, and as empathic objects that they can pace themselves with. Drawing and posing are both arduous at this stage. Physically and mentally. So we are there as psychic props, and also because bodies are more interesting than pot plants. Bodies move, and have to be repositioned and corrected every half hour. As they check if it’s them and not us that have moved, the students are made aware of their own bodies. Some students put tape around their feet on the floor to make sure they don’t move. Others adopt a stiff martial posture, swinging their arms like soldiers. It’s very odd to watch. A song by *Kraftwerk* comes to mind. The refrain keeps me entertained until the break.

Pain is a mind game. Oh yes, now I remember the book. It was Elaine Scarry’s *The Body*

in Pain.¹ How appropriate. No wonder I couldn't read it. Scarry's argument that pain evades or destroys language is an interesting one, but my experience is that texts themselves evade experience, process, sensation.² The level of pain I am in is not very intense, and is mainly present as an irritation. My mind can't concentrate or remember much at all. I feel cross at myself, cross at the students, cross at the pointlessness of it all. The main thought I have is 'Why?' My eyes are the most active part of me. They flit around the room as I wonder 'What the hell is going on? What am I doing here? Why are these people pretending to be robots? Do they have any idea what they are doing?'

I return to my book. However, reading about pain only makes me more aware of my own pain and discomfort, and the effect it is having on me. My eyes lift from the tome and look around the room. The floorboards. I count them. And forget. The bricks. I count them. And forget. The splashes and marks on the boards of the student in front of me. I follow Leonardo da Vinci's advice and imagine endless worlds in each abstracted gloop. I take my mind on a little holiday. I should do paintings based on them. But I forget. What Scarry apparently forgot to mention about pain is that it produces amnesia. The more intense the pain, the more relief in each break and the more instant the amnesia as soon as I break the pose. By day three – when I break for the pose – I forget how to return to it. I forget to stretch between poses – because I forget how much pain I've been in – and where I've been straining. This is the mind game of posing. After doing a long pose some models get scared they'll forget how to move. One model had a complete psychaesthetic crisis and thought he was part of the immovable still life objects around him. I absent myself from the scene, from my body, and forget where I am, what I'm doing, and what it feels like.

Except my eyes. Flitting around the room, my eyes catch onto the students, and then catch onto the flittings of a blowfly, swooping and diving from the fluorescent lights above, down through the students, around the easels, and back up again. 'Please don't land on me,' I say silently, invisibly to no-one in particular; and as my skin recoils in anticipation of the tickles of a slow crawling insect, I try to banish the thought from my mind. Trying not to think, trying not to feel, my senses draw inwards, I can hear my breaths, and the cadences of the soft hush of charcoal, punctuated by the frenetic rubbing of gum erasers grinding into paper, producing a responsive creak and squeak and slide from the easels, as hands and arms push

¹ E Scarry, *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*, Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford, 1985.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

into and strain against the armature supporting the surface of the paper, now drawn, now erased. Tiny animal noises of sighs, arm movements and soft steps, creakings and leanings become linked to a new theme, as a soft drone wafts in an out and between the cadences of marking, breathing, moving, becoming a continual note, a theme. My mind catches onto this, and I can hear nothing else. It's as if the fly is crawling inside of me, catching my bodily irritation and taunting my fixity with its mobility. I feel my mind's eye wanting to join the fly, as its drone catches in my ears and becomes a crawl along my skin. This is unbearable. The fly must be five metres away from me and yet I can feel it, sense it with every pore of my skin, every nerve in my head. My mind has banished everything from the room, and the world is reduced to my stillness, pitched against the buzzing, swooping crawling irritation. The timer bleeps, and I breathe again, sighing and releasing myself into a few minutes of movement.

In the five-minute break, I forget the fly, and when I resume posing, my eyes settle into a slower scan of the room, and the students around me – discreetly - because I've learnt to maintain an unfocussed glazed-over gaze from portrait modelling. Don't point your eyes at their eyes, even when you can see that they are looking straight into your eyes. I do this by opening my crow's feet and letting my brows and lids fall. It's only polite. Curiously, I spend a lot of time peeping at the bodies of students, and feeling stupid for looking at a woman's cleavage, while my breasts are bared. Sometimes the staring turns to perving, because I'm in pain, I'm bored, and thinking about sex is a nice distraction. I'm female so my body isn't going to betray my thoughts, and I'm queer, so I know how to perve without being seen to do so, or to do so more obviously, if needs be. The young woman in front of me looks butch. Gaydar alert. She's buxom, and trying to hold her body like set of compass points. She holds her arm straight, sucks her tummy in and sticks her bust out further. Her top creeps up her bared midriff. I stare past. Not oblivious. How many models have looked at me like this while I was drawing in an ill clad manner? With men, you can usually tell. By their eyes. Idiots. God I'm glad I'm a woman sometimes. Don't look at her eyes. My eyes move to the wall behind her. Bricks. This banal ping-pong continues for two days. We never speak; she's shy like most baby dykes at art school, and has no desire to pet and fuss and possess me like the middle-aged middle-class women. Back to posing, she struggles with her drawing. She can't hold her body with that lanky straight-edge ease that the young boys manage. Her lines are too heavy, too stiff, too awkward. I remember my own marathon charcoal battles four years earlier. There's a photo of me, hair cropped, charcoal smudged, kicking the wall with my

Doc's. But she battles it out. Finally it's the end. I've stuck it out, and can finally robe up and run off. My head throbs, but I check out some of the drawings en-route to the back of the room, where I'll put on my clothes. The student in front of me has produced a formalist outline of my body, pot plants, chair and other objects. On her drawing my head is an outline with a fringe. I am represented as faceless with enormous, erect nipples. This is a curious representation of my small pale and generally inverted nipples. Maybe she felt my eyes boring into her breasts so she erased them and drew my nipples as eyes glaring back into the viewer? I know from drawing that meeting a model's eyes is awkward and difficult. So maybe she preferred to facialise my breasts rather than my face. Fair enough. But maybe she read my mind.

Five years later I find myself clothed and seated on an ergonomic gas lift chair in which it is impossible to reproduce any modelling pose. Liberated from modelling by a PhD scholarship, I have spent most the past five years typing, imagining the future, remembering the past and holding my body static for periods of sixty minutes, sometimes more. While silently tapping out details of my form arranged into another excruciating stillness that is not a pose, I am still haunted by the image of myself generated more than five years earlier. A bare outline: naked, no eyes, large breasts, stomach, hands resting on a book, pubic triangle, one leg folded, the other straight. I have sketched in the pain of my invisible hips, the pressure of my invisible buttocks, but the absence of the eyes and mouth still haunts me. As I sit and type, frenetically, misspelling and mis-typing most words, 'from' becomes 'form' and my form becomes forgotten as I escape into my fingers and the text. Eventually, my bladder nearly bursting, I get up to use the toilet, and find my legs numb and hips stiff. Finding that I have passed from irritation into amnesia, I wonder how my physical stasis of writing, the fixity of my pose, the detachment from my body, its sensations and memories affects my writing, and my ability to articulate a critical memory of posing for and observing the life-class.

2. *Writing my way out of posing*

This thesis emerged from the spaces between irritation, amnesia, and the wayward glances between myself as a model, and the bodies, eyes and drawings of the students surrounding me, and it has continued to embed itself in the gaps between bodies and desires, between seeing and sensation, between vision and representation, and in the various dislocations of time, space and imagination that saturate the practices and representations of life-drawing. The account above is based on one of my experiences, modelling to support

myself while studying honours in art history. Life-modelling had been a part time job while finishing my Bachelor of Fine Arts, and my sole income for the three years while I was developing my studio practice as a painter.³ Returning to study art history at university while being employed as an ancillary staff member in art education provoked me to reflect and question what I was doing, and to ponder the gaps between art practice, art education and art theory.

The Sydney instructor of the ‘drawing marathon’ described above claims to be influenced by the drawing marathons run by Graham Nickson at the New York Studio School.⁴ Week-long poses are rare in modern life-classes, but not unique to the marathon, and the poses in a drawing marathon are usually far more comfortable than in a sculpture or painting class. However, after three days sitting absolutely still in the same pose, I was curious about the academic justification for such an arduous experience. More importantly my research project started with the sense of an enormous gap between how visual arts are practised and experienced and how they are described within academic, curatorial or historical texts. In the four years in which I was a full time life-model I posed for over a hundred teachers in Sydney. The formats of classes and types of modelling required varied from neo-classical academy style portrait painting to sculpture classes, and all manner of drawing classes, from design classes at TAFE colleges, Walt Disney animation, experimental drawing, neo-expressionist, neo-classicist and even neo-minimalist approaches. I posed on podiums, on the floor, on ladders, beams, benches and windowsills. I hung from ropes, crouched in boats, posed behind curtains, under sheets, between easels, in beds and under trees. I presumed there would be a lot of theoretical writing somewhere that described, analysed and debated all of these approaches. I assumed that the different uses of the figure would be described somewhere, argued for and contested. I was wrong.

I found myself in a huge gap. Not only a lacuna about the history of artists’ models, or life modelling, but an epistemological barrier between text-based research and one based on practices, habits and impressions. There are very few books that describe what artists’ models do, and nothing articulates what I or countless other models have done, in the act of posing

³ Generally, I use the Australian term *life-models* to describe the models who pose naked for life-drawing classes, although throughout this I thesis I use the term *artists’ models*. Other authors, and some participants use the term *figure models*.

⁴ In addition to directing the New York Studio School since 1987, Graham Nickson runs three-week drawing marathons at the Adelaide Central School of Art, and claims that his approach is influenced by his teacher Euan Uglow who taught at Camberwell College and the Slade School of Art in London.

before drawers. Not one describe how it was done, whether it was done well or not, or what it felt like. A couple of articles repeat anecdotes about practices of disrobing and posing, but there is almost no analysis of why artists' models pose naked, why they pose and how, or what posing is anyway. Almost nothing I have read about artists' models or the life-class has described the strange imaginative leaps between history, imagination and feeling - and I mean deep strange visceral feelings - that come from repeating a pose from history, or seeing a figurative antique as a cluster of poses, I or other models have repeated countless times since. I say almost nothing, because a few texts do capture the strange flights between memory and imagination and try to capture what a sense of a cultural practice is outside of a looming monolithic tradition of masterworks. Contrary to this is the rich field of oral history that I have inhabited as an artist and model over the past decade. Someone told me that models used to wear masks, to disguise their identity, but also because their gaze was seen as threatening to artists. Someone else told me that models used to tie themselves into poses, and use props to maintain the poses as seen in Renaissance paintings. As noted by Frances Borzello, some scant evidence of this can be seen in the odd drawing by Rubens or the Carracci, where you can see the blocks, ropes, staffs and cushions holding an arm, or a leg or even a torso in position.⁵ There are also ways of seeing that I developed from modelling. I would look at old academy pictures, sculpture and drawings for ideas for poses – and wonder – how did the model hold that pose? Then I'd work it out or ask other models and artists'. I found my favourite dramatic death pose was repeated in countless academy sculptures in the Louvre. I knew myself that it combined maximum comfort with maximum simulation of agony, and was delighted to find my impressions confirmed in history. This long and complicated tracery of looks, words, gestures between images, objects, bodies and memory lies largely beyond texts, but it does form a long cultural tradition. It is only by entering into the practices of looking, drawing and posing that the tradition, or a set of barely articulated sensations and experiences and knowledges, can be accessed.

Reflecting on my experience of modelling for the drawing marathon, remembering my sealed mouth in the poses and my silence in the breaks, I recall my downcast eyes, ostensibly looking at my book and not meeting the eyes of the students, not interpellating, not imploring and not seeing. When I consider how this was represented as an effacement, my strongest urge is to fill in the eyes, and note what I did see, and to give myself, if not a mouth, then at

⁵ F Borzello, *The artists' model*, Junction Books, London, 1982, p. 23.

least a voice. It has been tempting to use this thesis as a way of simply filling in the gaps, the blank eyes, the silenced voice of how I and other models have been represented, but rather than simply articulating the capacity of models to observe and speak, I am more intrigued by the spectre of the blank faced model, and the concealment of the queerness of what my eyes were doing as well as seeing, and the flux of movements, sensations, and perceptions occurring between all of the participants; not only in the excised triumvirate of artist, model and image, but among students, artists', models and objects; between their bodies and their drawings, between the drawings and the physical and imaginary spaces of the life-class itself.⁶

The account at the start of this chapter emphasises the largely ignored role of models as witnesses, who observe, reflect and articulate the behaviours and attitudes of themselves and the other members of the life-room. However, I wish to move beyond an idea of the look as a fixed and fixing stare, and emphasise the mobility of looking: as a series of glimpses around the room, as a reversible process, and as an exchange that is related to a broader mobility of perception and imagination than existing accounts would suggest. Drawing on interviews with a number of models and participants in life-drawing, this thesis emphasises the promiscuity of life-drawing, modelling and teaching in Sydney throughout most of the twentieth century, as well as the proliferation of life-drawing classes throughout much of the period commonly associated with its decline. In contrast to much existing literature on life models, I use interview material not so much to present a positivist account of life-drawing as a residual or resistive practice, but demonstrate how the various art worlds of university art schools, training institutions, and amateur art classes are actually linked to broader patterns of subject formation among artists' and arts-workers.

3. Looking at Life-Drawing

The topic of this thesis is not artists' models, but life-drawing classes, and the practices of spectatorship and representation that occur within them. I am not interested in abstract notions of 'the model' or 'the body' or 'the nude' but in exploring specific situations involving modelling, nudity and bodily exchanges. This thesis examines 'life-classes' where naked artists' models are employed in a variety of pedagogical settings, in order to explore the types of cultural and affective exchanges that occur between participants. I am less concerned with

⁶ Due to the ambiguity between terms such as 'the life-class', 'figure drawing', 'life-drawing' and 'figurative art', I use *life-drawing* to describe the practices of marking responsive sketches or illustrations (generally on paper) to the 'live' presence of a naked model and describe the broader practice of artists' models posing before a group of students who may be engaged in drawing, painting or sculpting as *the life-class*.

voicing a silent muse - myself, or other mute, low paid workers - than in articulating those strange points of blankness that occur in most representations of life-drawing. The phrase 'life-drawing' has an ambiguous meaning as both a noun (referring to the actual drawings executed from live observation) and as a verb (denoting the actual practice of drawing).⁷ While aesthetic discourse customarily involves a dissection of specific art images, it is arguable that the separation of images, that is, the products of art practice, as discrete units of analysis undermines a comprehensive critical engagement with art itself as a practice, and a set of behaviours, ideas, discourses and aspirations that inform that practice.

In the ficto-critical account earlier, I have sketched in the room, the model, and the students, but so little has been said about the queerness of what I was doing, as a life model - naked, still, silent, 'posing' myself as effaced before a group of staring strangers - let alone the paradox of 'perving' on a clothed student who was simultaneously scrutinising my naked body. This thesis takes this image of the effaced model as its starting point, and in fleshing the irritation, the sensation, the paradoxes, the amnesia and ennui behind the pose of still silent blindness, it explores a line of inquiry that asks what happens in the blind spots between observation and representation, between display and desire, and in seeing and sensation, when life-drawing classes are observed by those assumed to be blind, and described by those who are represented as silent.

Observation is an inadequate term to encapsulate the immensity of exchanges between bodies, objects and the inexorable flux of time, compressing, expanding and leaping imaginary spaces, tangible objects, visible acts and their representations. Possibly a better term for the type of vision explored in this thesis is witnessing. However, it is arguable that witnessing is itself loaded with an imperative of authenticity, of providing a description that is somehow better, more present, more empathic, or more ethical than conventional accounts. I am more interested in how certain types of seeing, and certain forms of representing seeing, become constructed and construed and aligned with specific cultural affiliations. I am intrigued by vision not only as a discourse, but as a practice, or a set of practices and discourses which contest and confound each other as much as the sheer difficulty of 'capturing' a pose in a drawing. The life-room, with its complex jumble of bodies and viewers

⁷ In the UK and Australia, drawing from the naked human model, whether in extended studies or more rapid *croquis* sketches, is commonly called 'life-drawing' whereas in the United States it is referred to as 'figure drawing'. Aside from the terms *croquis* (sketch) and *academie* (study) in French life-drawings are usually described as '*dessins apres le modele vivant*' or 'drawings from the living model,' life-classes at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris are called '*Morphologie*' or 'study of forms'.

and desires, is an ideal site to explore how seeing is imagined and practised, and to discover the myriad of blind spots in any visual space.

Many descriptions of life-classes evoke an imaginary perspective of a voyeur, as readers are invited to imagine peeking through the keyhole of a closed door of a life-room. Readers feel a personal sense of transgression and titillation in entering an obscure and restricted realm. Another perspective is that of an extant viewer casually observing a well-drawn illustration of a life-class that has been framed and mounted upon a wall. This is the view that pervades most art historical descriptions of the life-class. The reader is able to observe the exquisitely executed detail of every gesture, every detail in the room, which the author has chosen to include, and the whole scene is as impeccably preserved as formaldehyde specimens from a museum of natural history. The life-class, presented as thoroughly researched historical remnant, lies dormant, uninfluenced by discourses or contemporary historical perspectives; equally the reader feels secure and remote from the practices frozen in the tableau of historical research.

Rather than presenting life-drawing classes from the fixed perspective of an extant cultural surveyor or that of a disembodied voyeur, this thesis invites the reader to be physically present in the room where a life-class is taking place. Rather than asking the reader to imagine themselves as a model or a drawer or an easel, the type of embodied viewing I would like to invoke would be that of a fly, not only on the wall, but buzzing around lightly enough to be a mild annoyance and part of the atmospherics of the room. Invoking the mobility and irritation of a buzzing fly as a metaphor for academic research into life-drawing emphasises the performative capacities of research, as well as the profoundly affective relationships between critical discourses and experience of art practice. This thesis argues that historical narratives do not exist outside of the subjects that they purport to describe but often shape the perceptions and experiences of life-drawing classes for its participants. This wandering, affective and somewhat abject image of a fly's view of life-drawing is meant to invoke spectatorship as an intimately corporeal practice. This thesis explores how the practices of life-drawing are based on specific regulation and representation of the physicality of drawers and the posing model subject.

In asking the reader to imagine themselves as a fly, this account is not analogising the imagined view of a fly on the wall, but invoking a particular blowfly becoming of the reader. This thesis presents a view of the life-class that is not that of a voyeur through a peephole, or

an extant surveyor of a classical painted nude, but as a physically present flitting *flaneur*. The vision of the life-class in this thesis is less of a line of flight, than a series of stochastic dartings across the room: swooping from spectator to model, then crawling along hidden surfaces of fabric, detritus and occasionally flesh, before swooping up again towards a bird's eye view from the ceiling.⁸ The imaginary stochastic trajectory from model, to artist, to surroundings is also mirrored by the disciplinary shifts throughout this thesis, which engages in an ambitious interdisciplinary analysis. This thesis develops three major lines of inquiry: the first involves a comprehensive ethnographic study of discourses and experiences of participants in life-drawing classes in Australia and internationally; the second uses oral histories to compile a social history of life-drawing and modernist art education in Sydney; and the third involves an interdisciplinary consideration of life-drawing as a critical aesthetic praxis. The critical vision of this thesis is not that of a fixed observer, adopting a fixed position from which to describe a scene that he or she is assumed to be separate from. This thesis moves among the subjects in the life-room, the elements, the movements, sensations and shifts; it merges with them, and breaks away; so too the analysis shifts from cultural studies, to feminist analysis, art history, ethnography and critical aesthetics.

The fly as flaneur provides an evocative description of a perspective that is not a gaze so much as a series of glimpses, glimmers, glances, and a visual impressions generated by and grounded in the corporeality of whoever is viewing and describing. A critical view of this endless moving about could accuse the author of not wanting to be pinned down or be held to any particular line of reasoning or any discipline. The flitting between positions, across disciplines, countries and decades, defying perspective, could even appear promiscuous, not to mention contagious, or at worst, just a little bit casual and sloppy.

I want to pause for a second, and consider the affective moment where a reader may apprehend all of this intellectual zipping about, before pronouncing judgement. The sensation of reading something that can't be pinned down, that doesn't hold a line, is one of irritation, and even anxiety. Describing the fly, recalling the account at the start of this introduction, I remember irritation was a major feature of my experience of modelling, and of reading existing accounts of the life-class. I viscerally recall the mental chafing of the infinite mobility of the fly contrasting with my own excruciating fixity while modelling; wondering

⁸ Stochastic refers to a process that consists of a series of random sequences that cannot be determined in advance, such as the Brownian motion of small particles, or the trajectory of a blowfly.

what was the point? Why? What am I doing? What are they doing? I am interested in articulating the space of irritation, before pain compels a type of amnesia. It is this space of irritation where text has failed me the most. While trying to remain still, calm, silent in a pose, feeling my thoughts flit and my nerves twitch, and wondering where my own point of collapse was, I wondered more critically about irritation as an epistemology; a mode of knowing, investigation, based on a sense of discomfort, agitation and shifting about. In pondering what it was that could be known or understood in a state of irritation, I wondered how it is possible to articulate the critical sense of irritation, of motility rather than movement, or molecular agitation before sensation coalesces into a line of flight, or of reasoning. By crawling inside a pose, I wish to develop an account of the life-class from the inside: from the fraught and tested subjectivity of the model who in the course of posing imagines and adopts a multitude of perspectives, and then moves inside his or her body, and then out again, counting each breathe, testing the limits of his or her subjectivity, or allowing it to dissolve altogether. This thesis explores the life-class and life-drawing from the refracted perspective of the artists' model, who plays multiple roles, and has multiple view of the invisible gaps in the life-room.

I am interested in artists' models not only as fixed, silent vulnerable employees, but as socially mobile, articulate and critical arts-workers, who participate in far more life-drawing classes than the majority of art students, or art teachers. I am interested most specifically in that moment where the model leaves the podium: the point of flight, of departure from stillness, and the quick perusal of the room, the students and the drawings, before they move on to the next gig, to their studio, to the rest of their lives. This thesis explores life-drawing classes as sites for numerous complex encounters and exchanges, and examines the questions of what life-drawing is, what is it that is being taught in life-drawing classes? What is the point of having a naked person pose before a group of clothed drawers? And what do life-drawings represent?

Introduction: The Disappearing Muse

Researching practice:

At the end of the previous section I listed four central inquiries of this thesis as the following: what is life-drawing? what is being taught in life-drawing classes? what is the point of having a naked person pose before a group of clothed drawers? and what do life drawings represent? In effect the inquiries of this thesis changed in the course of research, as findings emerged that prompted further questions. The central inquiries that this thesis addresses cover six areas and include the question of what is 'drawing' and what is 'life-drawing' and what elements of practice are intrinsic to it? This includes an investigation of what are the practices of posing, spectatorship and mark making that occur in life-drawing classes. The second inquiry concerns the title, what is the status of life-drawing in relation to popular culture and contemporary art education? The third inquiry stems from the first two and asks what aspects of life-drawing lend themselves to further research and inquiry? The last three inquiries concern some of the meta-research of the thesis. The fourth question addresses the practice of life drawing and its research by asking how does the involvement of artists' models contribute to life-drawing as a practice and to critical appreciation of and challenges to it? The fifth question concerns methodology, asking how can life-drawing be critically examined from an interdisciplinary approach? And the final question asks what new forms of knowledge/information are generated by this approach?

Within this introduction I wish to consider these latter three questions, by examining existing literature on life drawing and explaining how and why my research methodology was developed. Although this thesis is concerned more with life-drawing, than artists' models, the vast majority of literature on life drawing discusses artists' models, and artists models played a key role in my investigation. The reasons why I pursued an interdisciplinary approach are also discussed below.

This thesis investigates the practices involved in life drawing as well as the discourses surrounding it in relation to contemporary art education and popular culture. To a certain extent the 'popular culture' component encompasses popular or non-scholarly representations of life drawing as well as its proliferation across a myriad of social settings. In investigating life-drawing as a topic of discourse and practice in relation to contemporary art education and

popular culture, this thesis encompasses art history, aesthetic theory, social history, cultural studies, and ethnography.

In the Prologue earlier, I noted that my research started with a gap, and a sense of an enormous gap between literature on life drawing and its current practice. Indeed the research for this thesis was undertaken continuously in two fields, being literature analysis (scholarly and otherwise) as well as the experiences of life drawing practice among the participants. Much of my analysis involved an attempt to align these two disparate fields, and to examine the interpellations between discourse, expectation and experience surrounding life drawing.

Within each chapter of the thesis I discuss particular fields of literature surrounding various facets of life drawing and how they inform the discourses among participants, and their perception of practice. This movement from practice, to literature, to discourse, to practice is consistent with a cyclical method of applied research. While this thesis does not have a practical component, and is not a practice based body of research, in effect the research for this thesis was continually informed by practice, and the methodologies derived from practice based research in visual art.⁹ I discuss my research methodologies later in this Introduction, where I map the particular alignments of my research approach to particular research disciplines.

Although much of my literature analysis is embedded within my examination of life drawing as a practice, I proceed in this introduction to give a brief overview of the types of published work on life-drawing that exist, as well as research in related fields that have informed my own work in this thesis. There is a considerable amount of published material across various genres, discussing artists' models, life-classes, or broader issues such as nudity, gendered spectatorship, figurative art, art history and art education. The vast majority of literature on life-drawing concerns artists' models and so I commence with a brief overview of the considerable historical literature on artists' models before discussing a number of recent publications on contemporary artists' models and life-drawing. Assembling a variety of published genres and intellectual disciplines into a coherent critical framework has been a considerable undertaking, and suggests that there is substantial scope for critical research on contemporary art practices based on a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis.

⁹ See E Barrett & B Bolt (eds.), *Practice as research: approaches to creative arts enquiry*, I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2007; G Sullivan, *Art practice as research: inquiry in the visual arts*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA., 2004.

Having outlined the breadth of material that has informed my research, I then discuss two of the disciplines that have informed my methodology, particularly the sociology of art, and cultural studies ethnography. I discuss two studies addressing similar topic as this thesis in order to clarify my own positioning in relation to these fields. I then discuss my own research experience more directly before outlining the chapters that follow.

Although the title of my thesis mentions contemporary art education, this is not an art education thesis, as such. Although I undertook a considerable amount of reading and some lecturing in art education research, I felt it necessary to use this thesis to move away from the field of my inquiry into a more flexible interdisciplinary position. As this thesis demonstrates, the status of life-drawing in relation to ‘art’ and the education of artists, is not particularly clear, and was often more easily considered as a collection of cultural and social practices occurring in a number of fields, rather than an ‘art’ practice per se. One of the most significant gaps in literature and discourse on life-drawing has been between the fields of ‘contemporary’ art and art education and that of ‘popular’ culture, or popular discourse. For this reason, bringing these two fields into a critical alignment has been at the core of the investigation within this thesis.

4. Artists’ models and art history

The figure of the artist’s model has been central to Western European aesthetics since the Renaissance, with its origins being cited in Greek antiquity. Many of the central questions of European aesthetics concerning presentation, mimesis and representation have revolved around the mythical triumvirate of the muse (or model), the artist, and the image produced. In nineteenth century Romanticism, artists’ models became conflated with the mythological idea of the ‘muse’ and were described as a source of inspiration. While there is a considerable and expanding body of research on nudity and figurative representation, there is not a huge amount of academic research on artists’ models, and most of what does exist is based on Europe up until the early twentieth century. Most scholarly research on artists’ models includes biographical details of the models for significant figurative works or broader social historical studies of the social relations between artists, models and wider society.¹⁰ While some writers argue that the lack of research on contemporary life-models is due to the

¹⁰ Scholarly studies of artists’ models include: J Banham, & J Berk-Jiminez (eds), *Dictionary of artists’ models*, Fitzroy Dearborn, London & Chicago, 2001; F Borzello, *The artists’ model*, Junction Books, London, 1982; SR Phillips, *Modeling life: art models speak about nudity, sexuality and the creative process*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006; M Postle & W Vaughan, *The artist’s model: from Etty to Spencer*, Merrell Holberton, London, 1999.

prominence of catwalk and photographic modelling,¹¹ even in cultural or fashion studies there is little published research on models or what modelling involves.¹²

Other studies include recent ethnographic studies of or by contemporary artists' models. Much of this resembles research on other body/performance occupations such as sex-entertainment workers, and fashion models.¹³ The relationship between bodily display and labour also is frequently discussed in sociological research on the history of fashion, sex-entertainment and pornography.¹⁴

This is not to say that there is not a lot of general literature on artists' models or the life-class.¹⁵ In addition to biographies or autobiographies of artists' models, short features on life-drawing or artists' models appear in many daily newspapers on an annual basis, complete with coyly staged photograph of a posing model, easels and artists. There are two centuries of popular press clippings, memoirs, novels, and stage plays, based on biographical details of real or imagined artists' models, describing or mythologising the interactions between artists and models. Many of these popular accounts evoke life-drawing classes as a timeless, eternal, unchanging site for a mythic exchange between artist and muse, and are imbued with a fetishised form of historicism that paradoxically seems to exist outside of time. Such texts rarely describe what models actually do, why they do it and how they articulate it. Published outside a critical or research context, they do little to challenge social expectations of

¹¹ Borzello, op. cit., p. 109.

¹² This claim is made by K De Perthuis, *Dying to be born again: mortality, immortality and the fashion model*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2003, p. 3; A number of publications have recently appeared addressing this lacuna. See: T Gronberg, 'Beware beautiful women: the 1920s shopwindow mannequin and a physiognomy of effacement', *Art History*, vol. 20, no. 3, September 1997, pp. 382-384; J Haville-Desmarais, *Model and supermodel the artist's model in British art and culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006; M Maynard, 'Living dolls: the fashion model in Australia', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, Summer 1999, pp. 191-205.

¹³ See: K Frank, 'The production of identity and the negotiation of intimacy in a gentleman's club', *Sexualities*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1998, pp. 175-201; K Frank, 'Body talk: revelations of self and body in contemporary strip clubs' in A Masquier (ed.), *Dirt, undress and difference: critical perspectives on the body's surface*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005; K Liepe-Levinson, 'Striptease: desire, mimetic jeopardy, and performing spectators', *TDR/The Drama Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 9-38; J Lewis, 'Learning to strip: the socialization experiences of exotic dancers', *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, vol. 7, no.1, Spring 1998, pp. 51-67; A Mears & W Finlay, 'Not just a paper doll: how models manage bodily capital and why they perform emotional labour', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 34, no. 3, June 2005, pp. 317-343; G Roe, 'The body of art and the mantle of authority' in A Brydon & S Niessen (eds.), *Consuming fashion: adorning the transnational body*, Berg, Oxford, 1998, pp. 91-107; BL Ross, 'Bumping and grinding on the line: making nudity pay', *Labour/Le Travail*, no. 46, Fall 2000, pp. 221-250.

¹⁴ L. Nochlin, *Woman as sex object: studies in erotic art, 1730-1970*, Allen Lane, London, 1973; A Smith, *The Victorian nude: sexuality, morality, and art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 1996.

¹⁵ This includes a number of autobiographies and biographies of notable artists models, such as: Q Crisp, *The naked civil servant*, Fontana, London, 1977; R Lindsay, *Model wife: my life with Norman Lindsay*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1967; and fictional works about models, such as G du Maurier, *Trilby*, Pan Books, London, 1947.

gendered display and comportment, or to challenge the stereotype of genius artists and silent passive muse.

Scholarly literature on life-drawing classes and artists' models has consisted either of biographies of artists' models made famous by being represented in famous paintings, or of social histories of participants in life-classes that proliferated in nineteenth-century England and France.¹⁶ Life drawing classes and artists' models have been studied mostly as historical phenomena, made interesting by their relationship to significant cultural texts. In the case of the former, the texts are the paintings for which they posed.¹⁷ In the case of the latter, they are the legislation, press articles, journals and letters in which models have been debated or described.¹⁸ There are also two decades of assiduous feminist art history, describing and deconstructing textual fragments surrounding artists' models. The earliest of these books was Frances Borzello's *The Artists' Model*, a feminist social history of the roles played by artists' models, particularly in the development of British figurative art, which was a trailblazer in a field which has only slightly opened since.¹⁹ Borzello undertook a painstaking study of popular press clippings, artists' journals, letters and other textual scraps, in order to generate the familiar feminist patchwork of the lives of the significant others excluded from mainstream art-historical texts. In Australia, art historians such as Juliette Peers have undertaken similar studies, usually on a smaller scale and confined to specific artists, figurative artworks or specific historical periods, such as in the late nineteenth century or the early twentieth century.²⁰ Since the publication of *The Dictionary Of Artists' Models*,²¹ a massive compendium of international research by feminist art historians, one can now find the name of almost any *poseuse* of any major figurative painting from the past four centuries.²² One can discover her pay, her biography, if she painted or not, if she slept with the artist, if she died tragically or quite at ease.

Such knowledge was little comfort to me while modelling, feeling bored and irritable

¹⁶ See: Postle & Vaughan, op. cit.

¹⁷ An example of the examination of artists' models as accessories to famous paintings is J Hobhouse, op. cit.

¹⁸ A Smith, op. cit., & Borzello, op. cit., both do this thoroughly.

¹⁹ Borzello, op. cit.

²⁰ J Peers, 'Bodily excellence is displayed: life models and the nude in Melbourne and Sydney c1880-1940' *Australian Cultural History*, no.13, 1994, pp. 149-161; J Hoorn, 'Chloe: A Curious History' & M Pennings, 'The Nude as Empty Vessel: The Art of Charles Wheeler and Norman Lindsay', in J Hoorn (ed.), *Strange women: essays in art and gender*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1994.

²¹ Banham & Berk-Jimenez, op. cit., includes entries by Australian art historians Juliette Peers and Jennifer Milam.

²² As Frances Borzello points out, the majority of life models historically have been male, the *Dictionary of artists models* gives biographical accounts of the models of famous figurative images, which, due to the prominent role of the female nude, are mostly though not exclusively female.

while posing and frequently irritable with the hideously laboured-over drawings in front of me. Most of these drawings will have been discarded by now, along with the thousands of paintings of me that people have done. While historical studies of artists' models focus on their relationship to significant figurative images, the experience of most contemporary artists' models is to pose for images that are largely unseen. The vast majority of employment for artists' models is in life-drawing classes, which are mostly characterised by rapidly drawn sketches, which, once drawn, are either discarded or buried in sketch-books. Even in situations such as the drawing marathon, or for painting or sculpture classes, the end results are rarely exhibited, but remain stored in homes or studios. As preparatory sketches or foundation training exercises, life-drawings have not formed the basis of much scholarly investigation, and even within the burgeoning field of drawing research there is little mention of life-drawing, and almost no critical analysis of the connection between drawing, spectatorship and the stylised naked performance of naked models.²³ In this thesis, I explore ways to describe the types of practices that lie beneath or outside of texts and which do not produce credible objects of analysis. As part of such research on the invisible, or unwritten, I am dependant on describing my area largely as experiential phenomena.

5. The horses' mouths: research by artists' models

I am certainly not the first artists' model to write about their former occupation. Occasional chapters or unpublished theses indicate that in a number of cases, academic writing has been a way out of life modelling, or a convenient purging of what is for most models, and many students, a casual and temporary job.²⁴ In addition to the auto-ethnographic work of Gordon Roe and Elizabeth Hollander, a number of ethnographic studies of artists' models have been published recently, and interviews with artists' models have featured in a couple of recent studies on life-drawing and art education.²⁵ However, many of the experiences and insights of artists' models, like many of their interventions into performance art or experiments with life-classes, remain at the margins of discourses on contemporary art and art education: isolated, fragmented and forgotten except in anecdotal form.²⁶ While

²³ A Callen, 'The body and difference: anatomy training at the École des beaux-arts in the later nineteenth century', *Art History*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 1997, pp. 23-60; J Marshall, 'Dynamic medicine and theatrical form at the fin de siècle: a formal analysis of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot's pedagogy, 1862-1893', *Modernism/Modernity* vol.15, no. 1, January 2008, pp. 131-153.

²⁴ See: Bell, op. cit.; E Hollander, 'Working models', *Art in America* vol. 79, no.5, May 1991, pp. 152-154; Roe, op. cit.

²⁵ Phillips, op. cit.; Steinhart, op. cit.

²⁶ One example of this in Australia is the performance work by Elizabeth Bell, who modelled for fifteen years and then completed an Masters in Fine Arts in photography. Bell constructed a number of small cameras

Elizabeth Hollander was published in *Art In America*, generally most studies of artists' models, life modelling and life-drawing are published as art history, social history, sociology and cultural studies.

It could be argued that artists' models are a marginalised group of arts-workers who do not have access to the more authoritative discursive arenas of contemporary art institutions, however, there are a number of significant exceptions to this.²⁷ While conducting research for this thesis I met many artists, art historians and art educators who claimed to have worked as artists' models as students or while travelling, and all of the models interviewed in my research were articulate and critically engaged with the practices occurring in life-drawing classes for which they modelled. However, it is curious why life-drawing as a common practice, and life-modelling, as a not uncommon experience among artists, arts-workers and art academics, is still generally cloaked in a veil of silence. Artists and art academics do not generally speak or write about their experiences of modelling, and many of the practices within the life-room remain unexamined.²⁸ There are a number of significant exceptions to this, which include attempts to consider the practice of modelling, its relationship to performance studies, and how or if modelling can be theorised as a form of creative performance.²⁹ While there is considerable scope to explore modelling as a performance, contiguous with other performance studies such as movement analysis, and practices such as contact improvisation and mime, it is imbricated with the more complex relationships between artists and models, and the performative practice of artists.³⁰

which she wore while posing for life-drawing 'performances' at a number of venues including the Art Gallery of NSW. Her recordings of artists drawing her were compiled in a video piece, which included spoken word elements, and footage of her posing. Bell since moved interstate, and aside from anecdotal reports there is no record of any subsequent work or performance.

²⁷ While working as an artists' model in 2002, I participated in the Sydney Life Models Guild. The guild estimated that there were two hundred life models throughout Sydney and surrounding areas, and compiled a list of eighty actively working life models, of which fifteen relied on modelling as their chief source of income. Thirty of the guild's members were studying, exhibiting or practising visual art and ten also worked casually as teachers or technical staff at art galleries, community art centres and art colleges.

²⁸ My experience is that giving conference presentations about the research for this thesis provokes a confessional response where academic participants all 'come out' about their former modelling and are very eager to describe their experiences and impressions.

²⁹ Investigations of the link between life-modelling and performance include: E Bell, *Fragments from the discourse of the nude*, MVA thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, 1996; MC Foa, 'What might 'performance' mean in the context of drawing?', *Tracey: Contemporary Drawing Research*, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/perf/foa.html>; J Marshall, 'Dynamic medicine and theatrical form at the fin de siècle: a formal analysis of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot's pedagogy, 1862–1893', *Modernism/Modernity*, vol.15, no. 1, January 2008, pp. 131-153.

³⁰ Texts exploring forms of performance analogous to life modelling include: E Decroux, *Paroles sur le mime*, Librairie théâtrale, Paris, 1994; B Denham, *Gestural sense: art, neuroscience and linguistic embodiment*, PhD Thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2009; M Hornblow, *Special affects: compositing images in the*

Possibly the silence surrounding artists' models within critical art discourse is a reflection of the marginalised status of life-drawing itself, which appears to occupy a number of paradoxical positions in relationship to drawing, art education and art practice. Throughout the twentieth century, life-drawings disappeared from most exhibitions of contemporary art, while in print figurative illustrations were replaced with photographic or digitally rendered images of bodies. Life-drawing has become almost entirely confined to the practice of studies executed in life-drawing classes, and largely remains uninterrogated and unexplored. The status of life-drawing as a form of visual training is accepted on face value without asking what types of seeing are being taught within particular practise of observational mark making, and what is their relationship to other facets of art education curricula. Although there has been a resurgent popularity of figurative art in the international contemporary art market, the majority of internationally prominent figurative artists do not exhibit their life-drawing studies and some claim to not even use models, but to base their work on photographs or found images. Even when artists use posed figures in their work the status of such 'models' is often unclear; some artists describe the subjects of figurative works as collaborators, sitters or friends rather than models. The status of subjects of figurative art as models or otherwise is confounded by the language used to describe the activity of modelling, posing or sitting for figurative works, in which the assumptions of agency, labour or intellectual property are not always shared or communicated by artists or models. The ambiguity around the status of what models are and what models do is compounded in the case of photography, especially where child models are used.³¹

The relationship of artists' models to contemporary figurative art is a fertile area of research, but to focus on this alone would exclude the experiences of the vast majority of artists' models who continue to be employed within group settings of life-drawing classes. Artists' models are still employed in training institutions from fashion design, 3-D computer animation, 2-D cell animation, architecture, graphic design and theatre design as well as art

bodies of Butoh, MA Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2004; M Hornblow, 'Bursting Bodies of Thought: Artaud and Hijikata', *Performance Paradigm*, no. 2, 2006, pp. 26-44; C Rambo-Ronai, 'Sketching with Derrida: an ethnography of a researcher/erotic dancer', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 3, September 1998, pp. 405-421; K Toepfer, 'Twisted Bodies (techniques for contorting)', *TDR/The Drama Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, spring 1999, p. 104.

³¹ In Australia in 2008 there was a national controversy when a prominent figurative photographer had an exhibition closed and works confiscated, and was arrested and charged with child pornography for exhibiting photographs using adolescent models. See D Marr, *The Henson case*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2008. The public scandal erupting from the images and the soliciting and employment of child models in figurative art led the national administration body for the arts to release a draft set of guidelines for the use of children in art. See: http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/news_items/draft_children_in_art_protocols_released (Accessed 16th November, 2008).

schools, universities, art galleries, private studios, community art centres, youth centres and pubs as well as teaching hospitals for demonstrating anatomy and surgical procedures to medical students.³² It may be that because models are employed less by ‘professional’ artists, and more as part of amateur, recreational or introductory teaching practices, that research into life-drawing classes or artists’ models is not included in publications on contemporary art or art education. It could be even argued that the silence about life-drawing within contemporary art discourses conceals a tacit anxiety towards the status of life-drawing and life-drawing classes as a form of contemporary art and a legitimate form of contemporary art pedagogy. As the following sections discuss, the contested cultural status of figurative images produced in life-drawing classes is one aspect that is overlooked in published research on artists’ models and contemporary life-classes, which often lacks an examination of the connections between modelling and spectatorship and the relationship between life-drawings and contemporary art.

6. *Drawing at the margins: interdisciplinary studies of artists’ models*

During the course of researching this thesis a number of books have been published that could appear to fill the same lacuna identified in the Prologue to this thesis. While it would appear that the silence of artists’ models is being addressed by an increasing amount of published work, it is also arguable that these written accounts have not challenged the silence surrounding artists’ models within the disciplines and institutions where they are employed, and have also failed to critically engage with the status of life-drawing in relation to contemporary art. A recent study by Sarah Phillips was based on extensive interviews with models as well as participant observation in Portland, Oregon.³³ Phillips’ study is contiguous with recent North American cultural studies and sociology that includes ethnographic research with workers and performers in marginalised industries such as sex-entertainment, in order to develop a cultural analysis of transgressive or ambiguous social practices such as naked performance and spectatorship. In addition to studies on artists’ models and art education cited earlier, Phillips cites a number of studies of sex workers and sex-entertainment workers and explores the practice of modelling as a deliberate set of strategies of maintaining particular cultural boundaries between art and sex-entertainment. Phillips assembles anecdotal evidence and interview material into a thorough and nuanced analysis of how distinctions between life-drawing classes, strip shows, photography and soft porn are

³² 2001-2005 Personal Communication with artists’ models in Sydney. See Appendix 2. A lot of employment for artists’ models is still informal, which is why a comprehensive list of employers could not be included.

³³ Phillips, *op. cit.*

actively produced and regulated by participants. However, her work suffers from a lack of contextual analysis of the social capital of life-drawing in relation to broader institutions, practices and discourses of art. While her interview material takes considerable pains to explore the distinctions between nude photography and nude drawing, there is little space to consider that ‘art’ itself may be a contested term. The term ‘artist’ is applied to all life-drawers, and all life-drawing classes are grouped under a general rubric of ‘the art studio’. It is arguable that in emphasising the claims of artists’ models that their work is associated with the legitimate production of serious art, Phillips has overlooked the possibility that some life-classes are not very serious, and may even consciously embrace facets of sexual identification, sex-entertainment and voyeuristic pleasure. By restricting her study to models, Phillips overlooks the sticky affiliations that pass between artists and models, not only in relationship to sexual desire or voyeuristic pleasure, but in relations to the performance and maintenance of the cultural capital of both.

7. Artists’ models, life-drawing, and art

The critical vacuum surrounding the status of life-drawings as ‘art’ is shared by a slightly older and more comprehensive study of life-drawing in New Zealand. Sandra Chesterman’s study traces the origins of life-drawing in Europe, and charts the history of life-classes in New Zealand, and consists of considerable interview material with practising figurative artists and artists’ models.³⁴ However, her analysis suffers from a lack of critical examination of the variable and contested field of art where, arguably, differing practices and discourses and institutional affiliations are often means by which practitioners and arts-workers negotiate their status as ‘legitimate’ artists. In providing detailed interview material with members of a Christchurch sketch club, Chesterman includes images of her subjects’ figurative paintings, without providing any explanation for the pictorial devices or stylistic aspects of the works, or any information on the critical reception of the works or the professional status of the artists interviewed.³⁵ Chesterman’s lack of critical engagement with the aesthetic or critical criteria behind contemporary art becomes especially problematic in relation to her discussion of the changing status of life-drawing in post-war art education. Basing her analysis almost entirely on interview material, Chesterman recites a narrative of the decline of life-drawing, citing a vague cluster of factors including feminism, abstraction and student rebellion, and fails to clarify her subjects’ frequent conflation of life-drawing, figurative art and copying from

³⁴ Chesterman, *op. cit.*

³⁵ The one exception to this is prominent New Zealand artist, Jan Nigro, whom Chesterman interviews.

antique casts. In claiming that current practitioners fight the perception that using artists' models is 'anachronistic', Chesterman evades a discussion of how this disdain is situated within the context of contemporary performance art, figurative imagery in popular culture or the proliferation of sexualised imagery and performance in consumer culture. The claims of marginalisation by the figurative artists in her study are taken at face value, and there is no interrogation of what aspect of the artists' relationships with, behaviour towards, spectatorship or representation of artists' models could be regarded as problematic or anachronistic, by whom, or why. Like Sarah Phillips, Chesterman's account of the role of artists' models in art is limited by an absence of a critical account of life-drawing and its complex relationship to the fields of art education and contemporary cultural practice.

8. Contesting the margins: populist accounts of life-drawing

Not all literature on artists' models or life-drawing fails to critically analyse the context of contemporary life-drawing. Peter Steinhart's *The Undressed Art: Why We Draw* is a comprehensive 'native ethnography' of life-drawing groups in the United States, particularly in the Bay area around San Francisco.³⁶ Steinhart attempts a thorough exploration of what life-drawing actually involves. He uses a combination of scientific literature on sight, cognitive perception, mark-making and language as well as detailed observations and interviews with models and artists in California, Washington and New York to explore what seeing is, what drawing involves, and how modelling actually constitutes itself as a practice. Steinhart's book does have a considerably articulated awareness of the (marginalised) position of life-drawing and figurative art in relation to the contemporary art world of galleries and major art colleges and, as a practitioner himself, he claims to represent the marginalised practices of amateur figurative artists in the late twentieth century. However his repeatedly anxious assertions of the importance of amateur classes increasingly reads as an attack on contemporary art, which isn't helped by his somewhat superficial, unscholarly and often inaccurate references to art history. Steinhart's account appears to group life-drawing sketch clubs within an *arriere-garde* 'camp' of marginalised art practitioners, clinging on to traditional practices of life-drawing against the ravages of an *avant-garde* art world.³⁷ To a

³⁶ I am referring to the term developed by Jesus Salinas Pedraza in his collaboration with the ethnographer Russell Bernard in describing Mexican Indian culture 'from the inside'. Pedraza's shift from being a 'native informant' of an external ethnographic project, to using the tools of ethnography in order to record his own culture, has been remarked on by a number of authors, particularly Charlotte Aull Davies. See Davies, CA, *Reflexive ethnography: a guide to researching selves and others*, Routledge, London, 1999.

³⁷ I use the French term 'arriere-garde' initially to evoke its distinction from the 'avant-garde' or the artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who identified (or who were identified) as the leaders of innovative

certain extent Steinhart's alignment of life-drawing with a rear-garde agenda is facilitated by the considerable amount of avowedly 'traditionalist', anti-modernist private art schools in the United States. However it shares common themes to a number of other populist narratives about life-drawing and art education, which I discuss shortly. What is concerning in such accounts is that they leave little space in which to contest or critique the claims of 'rear-garde' artists to an 'authentic' or 'legitimate' art practice.

Chesterman and Steinhart both include claims that life-drawing is excluded from or derided by contemporary art institutions. Such claims were echoed by a number of my interview respondents, and feature in a number of publications and web sites which include a defence of life-drawing as part of a rear-garde attack on contemporary art and art theory.³⁸ The curious aspect of many of these claims is that life-drawing is largely discussed in symbolic terms: as a representative of a particular set of ideas about art, tradition and art education rather than as a set of particular practices. Even terminology such as 'the life-class' evokes an idea of life-drawing classes as a singular practice: timeless, universal, and not reflective of the particular practices, aspirations and experiences of participants, the pressures placed on particular art institutions, or changes in social attitudes towards art, nudity and spectatorship. By enclosing life-drawing within a rubric of rear-garde practices, apparently hostile towards contemporary art institutions and discourses, such narratives arguably isolate life-drawing from critical cultural analysis and exacerbate the levels of isolation, marginalisation and misrepresentation of life-drawing as a contemporary pedagogical and cultural practice.

Throughout this thesis I explore a number of histories of life-drawing, particularly in relation to the emergence of modernist art institutions in Sydney. Published descriptions of life-drawing as obsolete, anachronistic, regressive or inept often rely on a superficial account of modernism, that reduces the plurality of art and creative practices in modernist society to a

movements of modernist art. While rear-garde art has not styled itself as a distinct movement or recognised community of practitioners, I use this term loosely to evoke consciously conservative artists and reactionary discourses that critique avant-garde art movements as well as the (post)modernity of contemporary art and its institutions. Figurative art and life drawing have frequently been associated with conservative, traditionalist and reactionary 'rear-garde' attacks on modernism. See A Brighton, '“Where are the boys of the old brigade?”: the post-war decline of British traditionalist painting', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 'Tradition', July 1981, pp. 35-43, B Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting' *October* 16, Spring 1981, C Cina, 'TINA's Academy' in N de Ville, & S Foster (eds.), *The artist and the academy: issues in fine art education and the wider cultural context*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, 1994, and J Weiss, *The Popular Culture of modern art: Picasso, Duchamp and avant-gardism*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1994.

³⁸ I give examples of these accounts and discuss them in Chapter One.

narrow trajectory of modernist avant-garde art.³⁹ In overlooking the relationships between amateur art societies, recreational art practices and contemporary art education and art institutions, such accounts belie the fact that the practice of life-drawing actually *increased* in the late twentieth century, as did the level and scope of art and drawing education. Throughout this thesis, I explore how life-drawing classes have proliferated in an enormous range of settings, and play a crucial role in how various practitioners identify themselves with art as a specifically contested field of practices. By examining the social and cultural contexts of life-drawing from a multi-faceted perspective, this thesis disrupts the bifurcations and binaries that characterise much of the existing discourses surrounding artists' models and life-drawing classes.

9. Life drawing and art worlds

Throughout this thesis, I do not attempt to deny that life-drawing has become marginalised in relation to contemporary art practice and contemporary art theory; however, I am more interested in the implications of this exclusion for how life-drawing is articulated as legitimate art practice, or otherwise. The marginalised status of life-drawing in relation to institutions and critical discourses of contemporary art could support a view that it is more a form of 'popular culture' than of critical art practice, and possibly more of a topic for cultural studies or sociology than art history or contemporary art theory. However, assuming that marginal or populist cultural practices are separate from contemporary art, or should be exempt from the same critical scrutiny as consciously theoretically informed art practices, not only serves to bifurcate a field of cultural practices into hazy realms of high and low culture, it also conceals the movements, aspirations and discourses across differing fields of art practice, as well as the practices and discourses which articulate and contest the borders between differing art worlds. I not only explore the social relations of life-drawing as a widespread cultural practice, but I deliberately align many of the discourses surrounding contemporary life-drawing with the types of critical discourses that inform contemporary art practice. In this, I am not so much trying to recuperate all forms of life-drawing within a resistive narrative of it as a contemporary critical praxis, as trying to explore how life-drawing could be articulated in relation to the discourses and institutions of contemporary art in which it still continues to be implicated.

³⁹ While acknowledging that terms such as 'modernism' are contested in social history and art-history, I use it here as a short hand for the social and cultural changes associated with the development of urban consumer culture in nineteenth century Europe and twentieth century Australia.

10. Social analysis of artists

There has been little interdisciplinary analysis of the relationships between the sociology of art and contemporary aesthetic discourse, and almost no comprehensive research into the field of contemporary art practice as a series of multiple interconnecting spheres. A small chapter by British art academic Colin Cina attempted a critical articulation of what he described as the two art worlds within England: the contemporary inheritors of modernism and the establishment world of rear-garde amateurs.⁴⁰ However, Cina's bifurcated account excludes the complex mixtures of class, gender and race in both sectors, fails to mention the FE (or Further Education sector), and provides little analysis of how (or if) the worlds actually relate to each other.

Sociological studies on art are often useful in providing an analytical framework for appreciating the social relations behind art objects and practices, and facilitating a comprehensive analysis of how certain practices, or discourses proliferate and persist within and between differing circles of arts-workers and art practitioners. A number of older studies from the United States did attempt a more complex mapping of art practices across a number of fields of cultural and social relations.⁴¹ In her study of female artists in St. Louis, Michal McCall developed a comparative analytical framework articulating the boundaries between professional, semi-professional, amateur, contemporary and traditional artists.⁴² Like Phillips' study of artists' models, McCall studied artists as 'other' subjects, with whom she was linked only through the research relationship. This possibly contributed to the transparency of her study, as well as her analysis and findings. Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* consisted of a materialist account of how all forms of cultural production is dependent on a large network of 'peripheral workers' providing material and institutional support that facilitates the production and dissemination of activities and objects regarded as art.⁴³ Becker's mapping of the multiple relationships that constitute the production, dissemination and reception of culture, contributes to his account of institutional aesthetics, emphasising the role of institutional practices and cultures in framing any activity or object as 'art'.⁴⁴ This relational model of aesthetics resembles the insistence on a materialist account of culture, and the social relations

⁴⁰ See Cina, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

⁴¹ See Adler, op. cit.; Becker, op. cit.

⁴² McCall, op. cit.

⁴³ Becker, op. cit., pp. 78-83.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 132-138, pp. 365-371.

of cultural reception explored by Pierre Bourdieu.⁴⁵ However, Becker extended his analysis from the reception and appreciation of art, to the social conditions of its production, describing the often invisible or unaccounted for forms of cultural capital, education or interest held by those who worked with artists, or for arts institutions, assisting with technical aspects of production, promotion or circulation of art objects or events. Becker notes that peripheral ‘arts-workers’ such as picture framers, childhood or amateur art teachers, gallery assistants, preparators, or artists’ models are often trained as visual artists and may work in these secondary areas in order to support their practice, if not their education.⁴⁶ Following from Becker’s argument that arts-workers such as educators, curators, printers and life-models often have as much invested in their identity or affiliation with the ‘art’ that their labour supports, in this thesis I argue that within such a context, the practices of the life-class have been less important than the site of life-drawing as a pedagogical theatre where discourses on art, authenticity and history can be performed by all participants.

While sociological studies of art practitioners and art communities provide valuable insight into the social relations of creative practice, they may also be constrained by the slippery and contestable status of practitioners as legitimate artists, or of their practice as legitimate forms of art. A similar paper to McCall’s study, was published fifteen years later by sociologist Henry Finney, who described his practice as ‘exhibiting painter’ as a form of participant observation on a study of a ‘small northeastern American city’.⁴⁷ Finney used three somewhat vague qualitative criteria of ‘definitions and social background’, ‘art styles’, and ‘local art world participation’ to classify local artists into five categories along a fairly simple scale from ‘naïve and grass roots’ to ‘professional artists’. However, the anonymity of institutions, and individuals involved, and the lack of reflexive discussion of his own work, position within, and investment in his hierarchy, limit the utility of his findings, beyond fairly superficial social observation.⁴⁸ His vague invocation of ‘postmodernism’ as a stylistic influence exclusive to professional artists suggests a level of reticence towards, or ignorance of, the complex discursive and theoretical manoeuvres that inform the production, reception

⁴⁵ P Bourdieu, ‘Outline of a sociological theory of art perception’ in P Bourdieu, R. Johnson (ed), *The field of cultural production: essays on art and literature*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 234-237.

⁴⁶ Becker, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷ Finney, op. cit., p. 406.

⁴⁸ Generalised statements such as ‘As shown in several recent local exhibitions, truly naïve art by untrained artists is not only part of the local continuum, but can be among the most vibrant and authentic of its visual expressions’, suggest the author’s ignorance of critical studies on the relationship between art institutions, modernism and primitivism. Ibid., p. 412.

and mediation of art practice and professional identity at multiple levels.⁴⁹ A more coherent critical investigation of the relationship between artists, and the institutions and discourses of professional formation is conducted in Judith Adler's ethnographic study of California Institute of the Arts in the 1970s.⁵⁰ Unlike Finney, Adler articulates her own peripheral position in relation to the subjects of her study, and gives a reflexive account of the tensions in her relationships to her colleagues and subjects of her analysis. Published three years after her departure from Cal Arts, Adler's study represents a more comprehensive immersive form of native ethnography than Finney's paper, which, despite citing the ethnographic methodology of participant observation, displays a form of analysis that is profoundly distancing. Finney stratifies his findings and his subjects into a fixed position of classification, and ultimately his analysis is not accountable to the subjects of his inquiry, but seeks to isolate, fix and silence their own experience and critical agency.

Finney's paper raises a number of key issues about the accountability of ethnographic inquiry to the subjects of research, as well as the reflexivity and transparency of any researcher's agenda in negotiating their roles as participant and researcher, as well as the class mobility and institutional loyalties enabled by the shift from practitioner to researcher. Finney's research methodology resembled that of artists'-model cum sociologist Gordon Roe, who described his modelling work as a form of participant observation.⁵¹ Both approaches raise rather discomfoting concerns about the consent or awareness of the subjects being observed through clandestine research. The ambiguity of the participant-observer's status as participant or observer clouds the status of their subsequent findings, as memories of incidents which are reconsidered and incorporated into critical analysis, or as genuinely responsive observations made throughout the course of conscious investigation. As I discuss in this thesis, the dilemma between observation, memory, participation and representation is not only restricted to scholarly research of art, and art participants, but is one of the fundamental practical dilemmas of life-drawing itself. The status of life-drawing as observation, creative performance, or immersive participation with the naked posing model is an issue that has plagued the teaching, reception and interventions into life-drawing throughout its modernist history. Perhaps the series of shifts and exchanges negotiated in the heat of life-drawing practice itself offers the most appropriate model for researching life-drawing in a rigorous and transparent manner.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁵⁰ Adler, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

11. *Ethnography and interdisciplinarity*

In the above section, I appeared to segue rather quickly from sociological accounts of artists and art practice to ethnographic studies. Admittedly there is considerable overlap within the broad field of inquiry described as qualitative research, between sociology, ethnography, anthropology, and performance research. However, before discussing my research methods and structure of this thesis, I feel that it is necessary to clarify my own disciplinary position. It could be argued that inter-disciplinarity is a vague and generally abused term, that seeks to disguise a lack of distinct methodology or disciplinary self awareness, something that is outside of rather than between disciplines.⁵² My own academic training has admittedly moved somewhat erratically through a number of diverse fields (I hold undergraduate degrees in science, fine arts and art history) and I happily confess membership of Foucault's apocryphal 'great warm and tender freemasonry of useless erudition'.⁵³ According to the literary mapping discussed earlier, it appears that research on life-drawing appears to fall through the gaps between a range of scholarly disciplines and inquiries, broadly connected with embodiment, representation, medical history, social history, art history, art theory, aesthetics, theories of practice and art education. As I have argued above, existing literature on life-drawing, and artists' models, is constrained by an absence of a comprehensive critical engagement with a range of critical and social discourses, linking scholarly enquiry as well as a range of institutional and informal cultural practices. A rigorous account of what life-drawing is, what it means, and how it is experienced by practitioners and is situated socially and culturally, requires a comprehensive engagement with the numerous disciplines and discourses surrounding life-drawing, as well as an intimate knowledge of the practices, experiences and sensations within the life-room.

This thesis presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of life-drawing, in relation to a range of discourses and historical narratives, as well as field of practices and experiences. In doing so, I present a claim that comprehensive analysis of any art practice can, and possibly should, include the multiple approaches explored in my research and analysis of life-drawing. Recently, a number of publications have appeared discussing and developing methodologies for researching art practice, or incorporating art practice as a form of

⁵² This rhetorical proposition is addressed in a paper that articulated a model for critical interdisciplinary research when interdisciplinary humanities studies were just emerging in Australia. See B Hodge, 'Monstrous knowledge: doing PhDs in the new humanities', *Australian Universities Review*, no. 2, 1995, pp. 35-39.

⁵³ M Foucault, 'Lecture at Collège de France', 7 January, 1976, in M Foucault & C Gordon (ed.), *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-77*, C Gordon, L Marshall, J Mepham, K Soper (trans.), Pantheon, New York, 1980, p. 79.

research.⁵⁴ These new attempts to critically articulate art practice in relation to scholarly disciplines offer an exciting challenge for existing humanities based research disciplines to incorporate and include a reflexive relationship with visual arts as a socially situated practice. Explorations of practice-based research are not entirely new, nor restricted to the visual arts, and have existed within performance ethnography and education studies for a number of decades.⁵⁵ Both of these areas emerged from and contribute to qualitative sociology and ethnography.

Ethnography is itself a very broad field of inquiry with a myriad of scholarly genealogies. As noted in the previous section, it is often cited as a series of methods, such as participant observation, loosely applied to broader social studies of particular groups.⁵⁶ The forms of ethnographic inquiry that have informed the research for this thesis are generally associated with early feminist and women's studies, and with cultural studies, and their critical imperative of using marginalised knowledges to transform the institutions and discourses which marginalise and exclude the experiences particular groups of people, who become the objects of study.⁵⁷ It is this *détournement* of ethnography from its anthropological roots that offers a profoundly radical model for a critical epistemology of the relationships between experience, practice and research.⁵⁸

While a considerable amount of the research for this thesis could be broadly described as ethnographic, my analysis is informed by the critical imperative of radical ethnography and cultural studies. Numerous writers have attempted to define the terrain of cultural studies

⁵⁴ See Barrett & Bolt, op. cit.

⁵⁵ L Bresler, 'Toward connectedness: aesthetically based research', *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 48, no. 1, Fall 2006, pp. 52-68; EW Eisner, *The enlightened eye: qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*, Macmillan, New York, & Toronto, 1992.

⁵⁶ See NCM Brown & JS Carroll, 'An Ethnography Of Art As A Discipline Concealed In The Practices Of Two Artists' *Australian Art Education*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1998, pp. 21-35.

⁵⁷ GC Christians, 'Ethics and politics in qualitative research', N Denzin, & LS Lincoln, (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, pp. 133-155.

⁵⁸ *Détournement* was initially promoted by COBRA artists Asger Jorn as a form of a visual *derive*, taking an image and adding suggestive marks or collaged elements in order to change the meaning of the image. It is a more engaging and gentle form of the absurdist collages and juxtapositions of Dada artists from which many of the situationist interventions were derived. Jorn also promoted *détournement* as a broader cultural and social strategy in his writings for the Situationist International. Here I have deployed *détournement* in relation to the changing the movement of researcher centred ethnography in order to promote the agency and authority of the subjects of research in directing the research outcomes. See A Jorn, *Détourned Painting*, Exhibition catalogue, Rive Gauche Gallery (May 1959, TY Levin (trans), viewed 22/11/09, <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/painting.html>>, also DJ Greenwood & M Levin, 'Reconstructing the relationships between universities and society through action research', in Denzin & Lincoln, op. cit., 85-106.

ethnography, including Beverley Skeggs and Martin Hammersley.⁵⁹ In a paper given at an education conference, Alexander Massey described a series of characteristics that appear almost as a series of postulates for ‘legitimate’ critical ethnography.⁶⁰ Despite my reservations about the implied determinism of citing a series of qualifying criteria for ‘legitimate’ ethnography, Massey’s description provides a reasonably comprehensive framework upon which to plot the myriad of approaches used in my research for this thesis. Massey describes ethnography as the study of culture, or a set of practices that define a series of actors into a particular community. He insists that analysis requires the use of multiple methods, and assembles diverse forms of data. He argues that ethnographic research requires a particular relationship between the researcher and the culture being studied, based on a profound level of engagement with and immersion within the culture being studied, insisting on the need for time, for extensive periods of contact and the development of experiential knowledges. He also insists on the researcher’s own need to acknowledge their implication within the practice of research, and their dynamic relationship with the subjects of inquiry and the forms of knowledge produced by it. Rather than requiring ‘objectivity’ and distance, Massey argues that methodological rigour can be obtained through the assembly and presentation of multiple perspectives, of direct accounts, and forms of information that allow the reader to negotiate their own relationship with the findings of the research. He moves to the epistemology of ethnographic analysis, arguing for a reflexive, process-based approach of cyclical inquiry, observation, hypothesising, testing and theorising. Finally he argues that the ‘point’ of ethnographic analysis is not to test hypotheses or provide conclusions, but to facilitate rich or ‘thick’ descriptions of cultures, thus fulfilling the goal of ethnography, which he describes as:

To combine the view of an insider with that of an outsider to describe a social setting. The resulting description is expected to be deeper and fuller than that of the ordinary outsider, and broader and less culture bound than that of the ordinary insider.

Massey’s account provides a cogent summary of discussions raised in a number of papers on qualitative research, and critical ethnography.⁶¹ My own addition to this would claim that

⁵⁹ M Hammersley, *What’s wrong with ethnography: methodological explorations*, Routledge, London, 1992; A McRobbie, ‘The politics of feminist research: between talk text and action’, *Feminist Review*, no. 12, October 1982, pp. 46-57; B Skeggs, ‘Theorising, ethics and representation in feminist ethnography’, in B Skeggs (ed.), *Feminist cultural theory: process and production*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, pp. 190-206.

⁶⁰ A Massey, ‘“The way we do things around here”: the culture of ethnography’, paper presented at the ethnography and education conference, Oxford University Department of Educational Studies, 7-8 September, 1998, viewed 23 May 2005, <<http://www.freeyourvoice.co.uk/html/waywedo.htm>>.

⁶¹ C Geertz, ‘From the native’s point of view’ in RA Shweder, & RA LeVine (eds), *Culture theory: essays on mind, self and the emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 123-136; JL Kincheloe & PE McLaren, ‘Rehthinking critical theory and qualitative research, in Denzin & Lincoln, op cit., pp. 303-342; V

critical ethnography should not only facilitate connection between the inside and outside of a culture, but also elucidate and articulate the movements between and within the cultures being studied, and those who are undertaking inquiry. The presence of the researcher is as an auto-ethnographer, and a profoundly disturbing element of both worlds, who is, arguably, required to facilitate a level of transparency and accountability in their own research, experience and movements between their roles as participant, observer, researcher, and representative.⁶²

Like Massey, I concur that the purpose of this ethnographic project is not to provide conclusions and that this may appear as a somewhat paradoxical position to sustain within an academic dissertation), however I would insist on the necessity for any new research to open up fields for further examination, rather than to produce specific resolutions. The purpose of this thesis is not only to provide a selection of answers about life-drawing, or to fill a number of lacunas in existing research, but to act as a pathfinder for new modes of inquiry into cultural practices and the social relations that bind them.

My own experiences as a visual artist and former life model have fuelled much of the my research for this thesis, and I have deployed ficto-critical accounts with observations derived from extensive participant observation. In many ways the implications of the content of the research into life-classes and art education became imbricated with the methodology. The interdisciplinary flux throughout this thesis reflects the vicissitudes of my own complex manoeuvres between often quite hostile institutional conflicts as well as those between various artists and arts-workers. The research for this thesis involved quite explicit negotiation of my own class mobility as a student, a model, an artist and academic, particularly in the way I adopted various research methodologies: from interviews, focus groups, participant observation and discursive analysis of press and literary publications. The paradox of mobility and fixity is a useful analogy for this thesis, which involved continuous negotiation of the disciplinary boundaries of the research and content.

My interest in life-drawing, and especially amateur life-classes is not as an outsider, a savvy academic exploring the quaintness of this coy setting, but as a former artists' model. I am less interested in amateur life-drawing as a hermetic practice isolated from and seemingly

Nightingale, 'What's "ethnographic" about ethnographic audience research?' in J Frow & M Morris, *Australian cultural studies; a reader* Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, 149-157.

⁶² See A Coffey, *The ethnographic self: fieldwork and the representation of identity*, Sage, London & Thousand Oaks, CA, 1999; P Stoller, *The taste of ethnographic things: the senses in anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1999, pp. 37-40.

oblivious to the professional art world and contemporary social discourses, as in its difficult and mostly ignored relationship to contemporary art and contemporary art education. I am interested in my own ambiguous relationship to these multiple art worlds within which, I, like many other struggling artists, students, performers, writers and teachers, played a specifically marginalised and silent role. It is easy for me to generate amusing anecdotes about the rear-garde, pretensions and aspirations of many of the amateur artists attending life-drawing classes, but it is harder for me to articulate what I was actually doing in that space, how I negotiated it as a practitioner, a student, a critic, and how this world saturated me (or otherwise) as much as I sat within it. In my research, I wanted to explore the ambiguous roles that life-classes have come to occupy within various art worlds, but more pertinently, how this is mediated and experienced by artists' models. I am interested in modelling as a transitional occupation and as a transitional activity; in an alternance between motion and stasis, presence and absence, of mobility and excruciating fixity.

Throughout my research for this thesis I have continued to attend life-drawing classes as a participant observer and maintained an active practice of drawing and exhibition.⁶³ The invisible thread of my practice-based research hopefully does sustain the critical impetus of this thesis to honestly engage with and articulate the practices of and experiences within life-drawing classes. In addition, I participated in a number of online forums of artists and models, openly disclosing my research interests, and trying to ensure that my findings were accountable and accessible to the subjects of my research.⁶⁴ My relationship to art practice does provide a framework by which I have organised a wide variety of findings connected with the life-class, which progresses from literary and discursive analysis, to oral history accounts, to a closer phenomenological interrogation of practices of spectatorship, and finally a critical aesthetic analysis of life-drawings. The claims made in this thesis emphasise the embodied nature of intellectual and affective responses to practices, texts and experiences and the need for any critical discourse to be reflective of and accountable to such embodied experiences of participants and practitioners.

⁶³ From 2003 to 2006 I ran a life-drawing sketch club at 'Alpha House Artists Co-operative' in the inner Sydney suburb of Newtown, and after ceasing modelling in 2004, I continued to attend a range of sketch clubs, as a drawer, in Sydney, Paris, New York and Melbourne until 2009.

⁶⁴ These include *Artists Models & Group*, (D R Quanmen, Administrator) <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Artists-Models/>; *Drawing Research Network* email discussion group (S Garner, moderator) <http://www.drawing.org.uk/>; *lifeART life-drawing forums*, ('Bigfrog' anonymous Administrator) http://www.lifeart.co.uk/art_talk/index.php.

12. Researching experience

The research for this thesis has involved the assembly of an immense amount of material, often in response to the lacunas that emerged in the process of research. The initial research consisted of interviews with thirty subjects who had worked as artists' models in Sydney, Australia, at any time during the twentieth century. Subjects were initially recruited via networks, particularly the networks of the Sydney Life Models Guild, of which I was a member. I then canvassed the Deans and Directors of each Faculty of Fine Arts, and major art school (including one private school and one college of Technical and Further Education). From this two Deans and two Directors responded, and participated in interviews and gave me contact details for drawing staff within their schools. I obtained details of 'informal' employers through the networks of models, as well as details of casual and sessional teaching staff in a number of TAFE, secondary school and adult evening colleges. The initial population consisted of thirty-seven interview subjects, which included seventeen models and twenty 'employers' (artists, professional art educators and informal life-drawing facilitators), some of whom had also worked as models. The time frame of the research was governed by the limits of oral history (two subjects had modelled in the 1930s) and the geographic location was initially restricted to Sydney, firstly to manage the scope of some of the claims and findings emerging in the research, and also to develop a comprehensive account of the changes to life-drawing within the analysis of the development of art education within a specific location.

Initially my concern was with participants' experiences of life-drawing classes, and so for this reason I did not contact policy writers or historians of art or design education. The study consisted of loosely structured recorded interviews. I developed two broad based questionnaires consisting of 25 items, directed to models or to employers. However, the questionnaires were largely used as a means of encouraging participants to discuss various facets of their experience of art education, life drawing, life-modelling, and art practice, and to direct the interview where they felt their interests lay. Interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to two hours.

Three findings emerged from this material, and the process of gathering it. The first concerned repeated references by Sydney-based interview subjects and popular press literature, to a perception that life-drawing had been marginalised or excluded from art education at some point in the late twentieth century. This led me to undertake a close

investigation of post-war Australian tertiary art education, and to develop an account of the development of and changes within art education in Sydney.

The second finding concerned repeated references by local art educators to the influence of particular institutions, practices or pedagogical models from the United Kingdom, the United States or France. This prompted me to undertake research in London, New York and Paris, partly to check the veracity of some of the claims, and partly to ‘triangulate’ some of the comparative findings on informal life-drawing classes. I found considerable amount of written material on the changes to art school curriculum in post-war Britain as well as published research on life-drawing, and I contacted a number of drawing researchers for face-to-face interviews. Peter Steinhart’s book prompted me to focus my research in the United States on the informal or non-college life-drawing sectors, in order to test some of Steinhart’s claims about amateur life-drawing, and to undertake my own participant observation (as a drawer) in a fresh ‘field’ of life-drawing classes from my familiar milieu of Sydney. In New York I canvassed a range of differing sketch clubs from internet lists of “figure drawing”, and also by visiting a number of private galleries in Williamsburg and Chelsea. I attended twenty clubs in Manhattan and Brooklyn and used these as a basis to contact interview participants.

Subsequently the research expanded to a total of fifty interviews, including artists’ models, internationally prominent figurative and performance artists, directors of art schools and senior figures in art education and drawing research, as well as members of sketch clubs in Australia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Additional research included reading literature on the changes to life-drawing and art education and art educational research and curriculum studies in all four nations, as well as my ongoing participant observation of a wide variety of life-drawing classes in Sydney and internationally.

The third finding concerned the number of artists’ models who had undertaken art study and often used life modelling as income support or a form of instruction or networking for their professional art careers. I was fortunate in being able to compile a significant body of respondents who had modelled, studied, and taught across a number of institutions, often simultaneously or in overlap as they developed their professional careers as artists or educators.⁶⁵ The precarity of life-modelling as a casual, temporary and informal occupation,

⁶⁵ Fourteen of the thirty one Australian interview subjects had both worked as models and studied art, and four of the ten UK interview subjects, and three of the ten US subjects were in the same category. Of these, eleven of the Australian subjects had both modelled for and taught life-drawing classes, as had four of the UK subjects and one of the US subjects.

and the proliferation of life-classes across numerous formal and informal sectors have meant that the life-class can be seen as a rather porous and mutable site for a number of encounters, exchanges and movements through differing art worlds. A number of interview respondents explicitly linked their work as artists' models to a means of accessing art education, and of gaining a comparative overview of how life-classes were run in different settings. This view of 'the art world' as a field comprising a number of different institutions, sites and practices is arguably inherent to how artists' models and other marginal, transient and precarious arts-workers actually do experience art education, and is a valuable and provocative means of contesting existing accounts based on fixed institutional lineages. This view of life-drawing as a form of contagion, as a porthole between institutions, arts-workers and marginalised practitioners, as a slippery site where the cultural capital of participants as either 'post-modern', or 'traditional' as professional or dilettante, as conceptual or technical, as feminist or reactionary, may come unstuck, is one of the central themes of my thesis. The accounts presented by participants in Sydney life-drawing classes convey the history of contemporary life-drawing not as a series of differentiating lineages, but as a complex web of interwoven and contesting circuits of experience, aspiration and contestation of art, education and subjectivity.

By exploring modelling as a transient occupation that is linked to models' own career development as artists and educators, this thesis also works to disrupt the binarism of existing literature, which separates the lives of 'models' from those as 'artists'. This thesis does not aim to represent the experience of all models (particularly as many models are not artists or art students), but articulate what aspirations and knowledges the silent performance of an economically precarious and marginalised arts-worker actually contains. By exploring the sociology of life-classes as a porous pedagogical theatre, this thesis situates discourses on life-drawing and articulates how specific techniques of life-drawing perform ideas of neutrality, gendered subjectivity, empathy, tradition, rigour, docility, authenticity and creative agency.

Most of the artists' models interviewed in this study have worked for between fifty to hundreds of employers and teachers, and thus have been exposed to far more life-drawing and life-drawing teaching than the majority of art school graduates and teaching staff. In a single day, an artists' model can pass from a private graphic design college, to a 'contemporary' art school, to a classical style painting class at an evening college. In any week, models work at a variety of university art schools, architecture or design faculties, TAFE classes in art and

design, and an enormous range of community classes, ranging from the elderly conservative ‘establishment’ settings, to more ‘modern’ experimental classes, or groups at youth centre, galleries, schools or pubs. While not all life models are artists, throughout the twentieth century, life modelling was a significant source of income and training for women artists and students. Life modelling is a transient occupation, and a suitable fit for the class mobility of female and working-class art students and emerging artists. This class mobility has historically been upwards and downwards, as modelling has been a type of rebellion for middle-class ‘bohemians’⁶⁶, as well as a means of cultural insertion for working-class women.⁶⁷ Even now, many artists’ models end up teaching life-classes in the community sector or as sessional staff at major art institutions.⁶⁸

The marginal position of artists’ models is not only as mute workers within a somewhat anachronistic and under-theorised art practice, but more broadly as marginalised participants in art institutions; as casual and precarious members of staff in art schools, as emerging, struggling, unsuccessful, or amateur artists. Unlike most art graduates and art teachers, artists’ models are exposed to an enormous amount and variety of art teaching, and have a significant interest in the quality of that teaching. Uninterested, incompetent or inexperienced teaching is borne on the body of the model. It is borne as fatigue, stress, stiffness and pain. In this thesis I explore models’ accounts, not only of their own experiences of the life-class, but as eyewitnesses of life-drawing in its myriad of settings. The experiences of life models matter, not only because of their cultural contestation of their marginalised position as silent transient and exploited workers, but because their bodies bear witness to the experiences and formation of artists, and art educators. Artists’ models are not merely silent observers of life-drawing, but embodied affective participants. It is by tapping into this cultural memory of affect, the collective memories of bodies, that I develop an account that is critical not only of the life-class as a fixed a-historical phenomena, but a view of life-drawing that sees it as a contingent, flexible, temporal aspect of contemporary art education and cultural practice.

13. Chapter Outline

The following chapters emphasise a common perception, an informal oral history, and even a written history that describe the disappearance of life-drawing from contemporary art and art education. They also develop the argument that the apparent marginalisation of life-

⁶⁶ Borzello, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Lindsay, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Research Interviews.

drawing, in a climate where the role of discourse has been central to the promotion of contemporary art practices and institutions, is largely related to the lack of critical examination or theorisation of it. The first two chapters address the main query at the heart of this thesis concerning the status of life-drawing in relation to popular culture and contemporary art education. Chapter One, *Discourses on drawing* explores the claims of *the death of life-drawing* that populate many press articles and published accounts of life-drawing, and combines international press accounts with interview material from a number of directors of Sydney art schools, exploring the tensions within and between various accounts of the death and resurgence of life-drawing. Specifically this chapter explores the extent to which popular accounts of life-drawing as either a progressive or reactionary practice, contribute to how practitioners and institutions negotiate their cultural capital as educating certain types of artists, and promoting certain ideas of art. The emphasis on discourse analysis within this chapter is deliberate; while I mention some changes to life-classes in England, this chapter emphasises the extent to which popular or vernacular discourses around the life-class emphasise perceptions of its status and relevance, more than any critical analysis of the actual practices.

The second chapter, *Drawing on elsewhere*, explores a number of accounts of the development of life-drawing and art education within Sydney, and the perceived influence of international art movements and overseas trained artists and teachers on local practices. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, this chapter addresses the absence of a published history of modernist art education in Australia's largest city, by assembling a number of oral histories, and also illustrating some of the limitations of generating localised histories of cultural practices based on social, geographic and cultural mobility. The second aspect involves examining the role of life-drawing in mediating some of the contested territory of institutional genealogies, examining the role of life-drawing in relation to institutional claims of authenticity, tradition, modernity, pluralism and professionalism. The final aspect involves a development of some of the claims in chapter two about how discourses surrounding the life-class actually inflect and affect wider discourses on art education, and art as a cultural practice. This chapter returns to the issues raised in chapter two of the perception of a bifurcated field of art practice, and explores the roles that life-drawing plays in mediating and delineating between practitioners.

The next two chapters explore the practices of spectatorship within life-drawing and the

troubling and ambiguous role of the naked life-model. Chapter Three, *The sex issue*, discusses the ambiguous status of sex and sexuality within life-drawing classes, and explores feminist critical engagements with the gendered relationships of display and spectatorship. This chapter discusses a number of contemporary recreational life-classes which border on sex-entertainment, and problematises the binarised accounts of gender which form the basis of much feminist critique. This chapter explores the complexity of how the unease concerning sex and nudity, sexuality and spectatorship continues to play itself out in discourses around contemporary life-classes and the protocol that still governs most life-classes and argues that life-drawing classes are concerned with the management not only of a volatile heterosexuality, but of an even more unsettling sexual ambiguity among participants. Specifically I argue that the heterosexism of some feminist critique serves to contain and stifle this ambiguity, thus obfuscating the critical potential of the life-class to challenge heteronormative conventions of spectatorship and gender performativity.

The fourth chapter enters into the actual practices of observing and mark-making that occur in the life-class, and in particular how the verbal accounts by models and artists inform the understanding of life-drawing. *Contours of blindness* explores how models articulate the often painful and exploitative experiences that many of them have had while working. This chapter presents the genuine frustration and difficulty that models experience as a basis for their imaginative capacity to observe and reflect on the life-drawing classes where they work, and to actively imagine and mobilise the limited agency that they do have within and beyond the life-room. The resistive narratives and practices of life models are part of a meta-argument of the thesis that the status of 'subject' is not a fixed position, but a series of continual movements performances and exchanges among groups of people seeking to regulate and contest the fragility of their ontological experience. This chapter explores a number of pedagogical approaches common to post-war life-drawing, and how they are experienced at an phenomenological level by participants. The accounts present a compelling argument for the necessity of a nuanced and reflexive engagement with the phenomenology of pain and objectification in order to develop a critical articulation of these facets of the life-room.

The fifth and final chapter returns to some of the texts mentioned in Chapter Three, particularly feminist theories of spectatorship and gendered subjectivity. *Drawing the limits* examines the possibility of envisaging life-drawing as an aesthetic or critical form of *praxis*. This is an ambitious chapter that moves between metaphysical accounts of art and the

exigencies of cultural capital within the prosaic practices and representations of life-drawing. IN examining feminist critiques of representation and embodiment, this chapter suggests relationships between life-drawing as a performative experiential encounter, and possibilities of embodied connection that move beyond a representationalist model. By exploring life-drawing as a collectively constituted cultural practice, this chapter suggests ways in which life-drawing could be critically examined by future researchers and practitioners.

The scope of this thesis is considerable, and includes a critical survey of the cultural and disciplinary fields in which life-drawing has currency as a practice and as a topic for discussion or speculation; this includes modernist art education within Australia and internationally, social histories and social analysis of artists and arts-workers such as artists' models, and art educators within public private and informal art milieus; the contested cultural capital of various art world practitioners and employees; and how critical interventions of feminist theory have influenced the troubling ambiguities associated with the gendered relations of the display, spectatorship and representation of naked bodies. Significantly, this thesis brings a number of disparate discursive fields into alignment - examining the claims of drawing as a contemporary art practice, and as a rear-garde, obsolete or marginalised bastion of traditional art, and critically examining what aspects of life-drawing could be explored as part of a contemporary creative pedagogy. It applies findings and methods developed in cultural studies and art sociology to art education, and fills in a lacuna in the history of Australian art education, compiling a rich oral history of modernist art education in Sydney. Most critically, this thesis demonstrates the necessity and possibility for the socially reflexive grounding of critical examinations of contemporary art practice. By not accepting institutionalised categories of art practice as 'given' and examining the claims, discourses and practices within a range of professional, paraprofessional and amateur art settings, this thesis develops a rigorous interdisciplinary account of how life-drawing is experienced, and demonstrates how a critical understanding of art as a social and cultural practice is necessary to any appreciation of contemporary art and visual culture.

Chapter ONE: Discourses on Drawing

*If you look down the yellow pages or local newspapers or whatever, you know, local suburban newspapers, if you were searching for art, it would be likely that the thing that would keep on coming up, would be the life-drawing classes. It's a cultural thing "Ahh, artists do life-drawing".*⁶⁹

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which life-drawing classes in public institutions as well as private, amateur or recreational settings have been represented in popular press and some art historical accounts over the past decade. In particular, I explore public discourses around life-drawing, and especially how 'drawing' has been increasingly mobilised as a metaphor for a range of pedagogical, economic and cultural ideas. By exploring how various historical accounts of life-drawing 'perform' certain cultural roles, I emphasise the extent to which life-drawing is largely configured as a discursive practice, and explores what is obfuscated or overlooked by the metaphorical terms in which life-drawing is evoked, rather than described. As the material in this chapter demonstrates, historical narratives and contesting discourses form a significant part of the 'imaginary' worlds inhabited by various participants in contemporary life-drawing.

The title alone of a recent *New York Times* article 'Trendy artists pick up an old-fashioned habit'⁷⁰ is a clear example of how the contemporary practice of life-drawing is imbued with paradoxical meanings: as both anachronistic and enjoying a resurgence. The alignment of life-drawing with fashion (as 'old-fashioned') sits strangely with repeated evocations in other sources of its 'timeless' qualities; however, as I argue below, the out-of-time/timely alternance is what grounds the life-class as a specifically late modernist cultural formation. Much of the press and interview material compiled in my research has shared the paradoxical assumptions of life-drawing - as being both in decline and being in resurgence - and has associated life-drawing classes either with nostalgic yearning for a fixed and uncontested past or an exciting projection into a technologically driven, post-modern pluralist cultural utopia. The capacity for life-drawing to contain such contradictory aspirations and expectations is largely facilitated by barely submerged discourses about art practice, art education, art history and the art market that often characterise contemporary accounts. Many press accounts of art practices invoke a populist anxiety about what constitutes 'good', 'authentic' or 'worthy' art. For most of the latter half of the twentieth century, press accounts have relied on a general trope of ridiculing or contesting the authenticity or value of contemporary art, as 'art', be it through cartoons mocking Picasso's abstractions, or more blatant attacks on institutions or exhibitions deemed as contemporary.⁷¹ A second theme common to many press accounts is based on the assumed values of distinct and competing art world circles. Since the nineteenth century, modernist art has defined itself as a form of avant-garde contestation against state supported art academies, museums or other institutions. However, the view of a singular art world, split into two 'camps' competing for the same resources of institutional patronage and public recognition is arguably at odds with the enormous complexity and diversity of

⁶⁹ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁷⁰ C Kino, 'Trendy artists pick up an old-fashioned habit', *New York Times*, April 17th 2005, viewed 28 November 2006, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/17/arts/design/17kino.html>>.

⁷¹ See J Weiss, *The Popular Culture of modern art: Picasso, Duchamp and avant-gardism*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1994. In his 1940 Preface to *Academies of art past and present* Nicolaus Pevsner asks 'Why has modern art become so unwelcome, why has it become a laughing stock to some, an object of keen hatred to others?'

practices and institutional and social milieus that claim some sort of relationship to ‘art’. Within this panoply of practices, contestations and communities, life-drawing plays a variety of roles, and frequently appears in a number of apparently contradictory narratives.

The article mentioned above describes a life-drawing sketch club of professional ‘contemporary’ artists located in the modern art metropolis of New York. Describing the ‘east-side loft’ setting, the first paragraph introduces the sketchers as ‘multimedia performance artists’ and ‘art world provocateurs’, thus establishing the avant-garde credentials of the participants as serious, contemporary professional artists. The unspoken assumption behind the anxious assertion of the cosmopolitan credentials of the sketch club is that many self-described ‘artists’ and many life drawers are not professional, contemporary or avant-garde, but amateur, ‘fuddy-duddy’, reactionary dilettantes. This assumption is made less tacit in the following paragraphs, which juxtapose the image of ‘authentic’ artists (with contemporary relevance and cultural authority) with a combination of interview quotations, and rhetorical flourishes describing life-drawing as ‘hokey’, ‘sexist’, ‘nerdy’, ‘geeky’, ‘so traditional’ and ‘impossibly old-fashioned’. The colloquial tone of such comments adds a touch of insouciance to the piece, evoking a light-hearted ‘knowingness’ between the writer, the assumed readership, and the expectations of the contemporary art milieu. The implied complicity of this tone reinforces a rhetorical protocol of the *New York Times* in enhancing the perceived cultural capital of its readership, but it also has strong residues of fashion writing. As noted by Roland Barthes in *The Fashion System*, much of the influence of fashion writing relies on a subtext, which assumes that the reader does (or aspires to) identify with the tastes, which are conveyed rather than declared, of the (often anonymous) author.⁷² Indeed the link between art practice and fashion is made repeatedly in press accounts; either as a slightly ironic throwaway line (‘As *Vogue* might put it: suddenly, drawing is back in fashion’⁷³) or as a more serious condemnation of the corrupting influence of a commercialised art market on art education and practice. This latter tension indicates the contradictions between the various art-fields, and the complex meanings that ‘art’ has come to evoke for an increasingly broad section of society.

To define ‘art’ as a discrete set of practices is almost impossible and somewhat meaningless in light of the numerous and complex associations between terms such as ‘art’, ‘artists’, and ‘the arts’ and wider social contexts of recreation, pedagogy, social change, social mobility, private investment, corporate patronage and state funded institutions. Contestations over aesthetic or social criteria over what ‘art’ is are intensified by what Judith Adler describes as a more fundamental issue of the lack of formal criteria for professional accreditation as a ‘professional’ artist.⁷⁴ Across a variety of discourses ‘art’ is imbued with a profound array of roles: from spiritual redemption to nihilism, national identity, personal growth, commercial success, political revolution, formalist purity, democratic expression, utilitarianism, not to mention the myriad convolutions within the study of aesthetics. Some authors claim that ‘art’ and the activity of artists represent the imaginary space of the capitalist state itself, with the artist as a radical cultural entrepreneur, responding to economic marginalisation and social alienation by creating new links, new spaces for expression and cultural circulation.⁷⁵ Behind

⁷² R Barthes, *The fashion system*, (trans. M Ward and R Howard) Hill and Wang, New York, 1983.

⁷³ S Menkes, ‘Prince Charles: Bringing life-drawing back from the dead’ *International Herald Tribune*, 10 January, 2006. [Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.](#)

⁷⁴ J Adler, *Artists in offices: an ethnography of an academic art scene*, Transaction Books, New Jersey, 1979, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 7, Adler writes: ‘For however much Bohemia might have developed its imagery and its culture through an inversion of the imagery and culture of the world of business, the heroic image of the artists is homologous to the early bourgeois ideal of the self made man whose lonely, wilful, and ruthless devotion to production triumphs over and indifferent competitive world to result in a lasting accomplishment.’

this structural complexity lie the changes in post-war modernist art practices, where avant-garde movements in exhibition and education have increasingly emphasised non-object based art, one based on ephemeral processes, exchanges and relations, over the spatially identifiable and temporally fixed discrete art object.⁷⁶ These avant-garde movements have had a significant impact on large state-funded international art institutions and exhibitions such as Biennale art fairs, as well as the pedagogical practices in university affiliated art schools.⁷⁷ Curatorial practices of large institutions, such as Biennales, state galleries and international studio residencies, have been heavily influenced by avant-garde movements such as fluxus, post-object and conceptual art, derived from nihilistic cultural protests in the early twentieth century, and more recently by ‘relational aesthetics’, whereby prosaic practices of collecting and packing clothes, or serving soup outside a museum have been presented as part of a collective, ephemeral, exchange-based social practice, rather than the situation of objects or images inside a gallery space.⁷⁸ This chapter argues that within this confusing maelstrom of associations, practices and ideas named as ‘art’, drawing, and particularly life-drawing, have come to occupy an important role in harnessing and contesting many of the broader meanings of ‘art’ across a number of social spheres.

As the quotation at the start of this chapter indicates, life-drawing is an activity easily associated with the practice of being an artist.⁷⁹ Whether derided, rejected, ignored, reclaimed, redeemed or challenged, the idea of a group of artists gathering around to look at and draw from a naked model provides a popular and accessible image for what it is that artists do, whether at art school, in the studio or in private sketch clubs. Life-drawing has a myriad of connotations, from elitism to populism, transgression to conformity, fashionability to timelessness, as well as pleasure and utility with the result that it can operate almost as a metonymic representation for ‘art’ itself in the public imagination. The position of the life-class in the popular imaginary is arguably linked to the post-war promotion of art education amongst World War Two veterans and to a broader community or recreational art movement. Presented as an elitist transgressive bohemian practice in the nineteenth century, life-drawing became popularised as a democratic discipline in the twentieth. In a 1996 conference paper titled ‘The end of life-drawing’, Patricia Bickers acknowledged the proliferation of life-drawing as an amateur practice, flippantly claiming that life-drawing had become ‘too common’ to be an interesting or challenging topic for contemporary artists or cultural critics.⁸⁰ Bickers is not the only author to claim that the popularity of life-drawing has led to its ‘death’ as a culturally significant contemporary art practice; however, repeated press assertions of the ‘Renaissance’ of drawing, and of life-drawing classes indicate that it occupies a significant symbolic role in how various art publics conceive contemporary practice.

Life-drawing as fashionable or unfashionable is part of a number of themes that occur repeatedly in popular accounts of life-classes and the changes in post-war art and art education. This chapter demonstrates how these themes or tensions have a broader genealogy throughout the historical emergence of academic art training, and the broadening of art and art

⁷⁶ H Singerman, *Art subjects, the making of artists in American universities*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, pp. 174-80.

⁷⁷ S Dilleuth, O Enwezor, & I Rogoff, ‘Schools of thought’ *Frieze* 101: September 2006, pp. 142-147.

⁷⁸ See my comments on the 2006 Biennale of Sydney, quoted by Lisa Kelly in N Bullock & R Keenan (eds.), *Zones of Contact 2006 - Biennale of Sydney: A Critical Reader*, Artspace, Sydney, 2006; N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. S Pleasance & F Woods, Les Presses du Reel, Paris, 2002, pp. 11-24.

⁷⁹ Singerman discusses the contestation over the status of *the artist*, claiming that it has shifted from the emphasis on skills or proficiency in making art to the performance of a particular type of subjectivity.

⁸⁰ P Bickers, ‘The end of life-drawing’, in P Hetherington (ed): *Issues in art and education: aspects of the fine art curriculum: the role of drawing in fine art education* Tate Gallery, London, 1996, p. 7.

education across a number of sectors in industrial design, recreation and therapy as well as in various avant-garde and even rear-garde art movements. In articulating what is at stake in narratives about the life-class, this chapter assembles a number of accounts from press articles in Australia and internationally as well as a number of recent books on life-drawing, exploring the historical and social connections and narratives that inform much of this writing. These written accounts are compared with interview material from prominent figures in art education in Sydney and internationally in order to explore some of the thematic elements common to press accounts and oral histories, as well as some of the tensions between them. In exploring some of the common themes running beneath a variety of discourses of life-drawing, and the complex associations and meanings of drawing itself, this chapter lays some of the conceptual framework for the case studies and historical accounts of life-drawing explored in the subsequent chapter.

This chapter is divided into seven sections, each discussing one facet of the complex contemporary mythologies surrounding life-drawing. The first section, *Back from the dead*, discusses the ‘back in fashion’ tone of recent press articles on life-drawing, which describe the renaissance of life-drawing, where and how this has occurred, and the corollary implication of such claims of rebirth that life-drawing has died or is dying somewhere else. This section explores how life-drawing is evoked as emblematic of a certain idea of art as in crisis, hence allowing the idea of life-drawing to be promoted as a contemporary critical practice. The second section, *Drawing on fashion*, includes a brief exegesis of some themes from critical theory in order to articulate how some of the tensions of fashionability, modernity and consumer culture are linked to contemporary contestations of the status of fine art practices. The third section, *The linear tradition*, explores how life-drawing has been linked to ideas of history and tradition in a number of recent publications on life-drawing, as well as in the popular press. Here it is argued that life-drawing is invoked as a metonymic fragment of the Renaissance, or classical Greece in a number of incongruous contexts, demonstrating how historical narratives *perform* in order to align life-drawing with certain ideas about art, authenticity, tradition, rigour, humanism, and contemporaneity. The fourth section, *Drawing distinctions*, explores how popular accounts of art, the nude, and art history work to reinforce drawing as a metaphorical phenomenon, and explores the connotations of what the life-class, and drawing represent. The fifth, *Drawing from the academy*, explores how the meanings and connotations of drawing and life-drawing have operated from post-renaissance academies to current academic dominated university art schools. This section qualifies some of the claims made in *Back from the dead*, particularly about the UK, in order to emphasise the paradoxical role that discourses on the life-class have in obfuscating changes in institutional culture and pedagogical practices. The sixth section, *The post-modern conspiracy*, explores some of the rear-garde claims about the decline of life-drawing and traditional skills in post-war art education, comparing these with accounts from university based art schools. The final section, *Us and them: delineating discourses*, explores discourses surrounding the status of contemporary life-drawing practitioners as either avant-garde or rear-garde. It also discusses Howard Singerman’s observations concerning the increasing emphasis in post-war art education on subject formation, arguing that discourses around the status of life-drawing play a significant role in the subject formation of particular types of artists.

14. Back from the dead

The Prince’s Drawing School, (www.princesdrawingschool.org), was celebrating five years since Charles set up the project, convinced that the time-honored techniques of creating art from life needed

*saving from an art world focused on abstraction.*⁸¹

*Representational painting, drawing and sculpture centring on the human figure have returned to assert their prominence in the mainstream of visual art, and figurative art is once again at the forefront of contemporary cultural discourse.*⁸²

*In recent years the art world has seen a revival of the tradition of drawing live models, even among artists whose primary work is not figurative.*⁸³

*There is renewed interest both in drawing and in the human figure.*⁸⁴

The excerpts above, taken from English and North American press, all promote the idea of a current renaissance of life-drawing, of figurative art, and of drawing generally. This account of the return to drawing has also been recently published in the French press,⁸⁵ and was reflected in my interviews with artists and educators in Australia. However, I am less concerned with the veracity of these accounts, than of how they ‘perform’ in relation to contemporary discourses in art education. The idea of a drawing ‘Renaissance’ is typified by the quotation below, which featured in a number of press articles promoting a recently published book on life-drawing written by US naturalist and ‘figure artist’ Peter Steinhart:

*[...] it could be said that a kind of Renaissance of figure drawing is occurring. It is not something you’d note in the galleries or museums, for it is practised, more often than not, by amateurs.*⁸⁶

Behind the apparent ‘popular’ consensus that drawing is ‘back’ lie a number of more ambiguous tensions, and notably in Peter Steinhart, an ambivalence towards an ill-defined ‘art world’, described as being previously or currently hostile to drawing and figurative art. While Steinhart articulates a structured account of an elitist art establishment of art galleries and art schools counterpoised to a more populist, democratic world of amateur, informal drop-in sketch clubs, this dichotomy is somewhat confused by his references to numerous state and college based schools in art and design that continue to employ models.⁸⁷ By not articulating precisely what the aesthetic, social and cultural factors are that separate the ‘college and gallery’ art world from the ‘life-drawing’ art world, Steinhart relies on a more phantasmic cultural assumption about their differing if not opposing agendas. This ‘phantasm’ of oppositional practices and agendas in the art world does inform a considerable amount of discourse on contemporary art training and will be explored later in this chapter. Arguably, it has operated as a central discourse in allowing non-established or marginalised artists to negotiate the porous boundaries of art institutions throughout the history of modernism.

The binary between art establishment and non-art establishment is more confusing in relation to the redemptive mission of HRH Prince Charles, seeking to save ‘time-honored techniques

⁸¹ Menkes, loc. cit.

⁸² ‘Introduction’ New York Academy of Art Website, ©New York Academy of Art, 2002, Viewed 15 January 2008, <<http://www.nyaa.edu>>.

⁸³ K Baker, ‘Life-drawing going strong in the Bay area’ *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 January 1986. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

⁸⁴ M Brenson, ‘Art: figure drawing in the 20th century’, *New York Times*, 29 March 1985. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

⁸⁵ C Firmin-Didot, ‘Le crayon a bonne mine’ *Télérama* n° 2923, 19 January 2006. Electronic Version accessed 17/12/08 at <http://www.erg.be/blogs/communication3/?p=4> (posted by Giampiero on 07/02/06).

⁸⁶ P Steinhart, *The undressed art: why we draw*, Alfred A. Knopf & Random House, New York, 2004, p. 6.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

of creating art from life [...] from an art world focused on abstraction.’⁸⁸ The Prince’s Drawing School was established in London in 2000, and promoted in an idiosyncratically English manner, as a non-elitist, common-sense approach to art and art training. This curious twinning of royal patronage and populism is echoed in the ‘outreach program’ of free life-drawing classes held in high-schools throughout England and Scotland by the British Royal Academy of Arts, the oldest and traditionally most exclusive art institution in the country.⁸⁹ In 2002, Prince Charles extended his patronage across the Atlantic, to the New York Academy of Art. Founded twenty years earlier, by ‘artists, scholars, and patrons of the arts’, the school claims to be the first US institution to receive the patronage of HRH.⁹⁰ Unlike the Prince’s Drawing School in London, the New York Academy appears to be more comfortable with the contemporary art world, mentioning the ‘hipness’ of its Tri-Be-Ca location and listing pop artist Andy Warhol as one of its early patrons. As noted in the earlier quotation, The New York Art Academy proudly declares its participation in the ‘resurgence’ of figurative art in the 1980s. The art-market’s ‘return to figuration’ has also been cited in press accounts and in oral history as one of the reasons for the re-popularisation of life-drawing in art schools and the community sector.

Some of the subjects interviewed as part of this research agreed that there was a general revival in art schools, internationally, of the practices of drawing and of life-drawing, and that it took place in the 1980s. The comment below, by Mike Esson, head of drawing at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney, reflects the view of a populist return to life-drawing:

*I suppose in the mid to late 80s it started coming back, and I think there was a general swing to figuration, you know, it was happening in lots of places. In Europe and America and so on, a return to figuration. And so all of a sudden people started saying, “Hey listen, we’d like...” and you know really it was a demand from the students that, sort of, drove it.*⁹¹

The emphasis on student power as the major driving force for educational reform is echoed by Bernard Ollis, former Director of the National Art School, Sydney:

*[...] in the eighties in Britain, there was a resurgence and students were saying “we need these skills” “we want this information”, “it’s OK saying ‘far out man, let’s have another happening’ we actually want to learn something, give us some tangible stuff to actually, you know, get stuck into.” So, you know, student power brought back the model and observational drawing in Britain, which I think reflects what happened in Australia to an extent as well, of more models being employed.*⁹²

While Esson is less emphatic about the reasons behind the return than Ollis, he elaborated further on the reasons for the resurgence, reiterating the role of student demand ‘for drawing as representative of ‘traditional skills’ in shaping pedagogical practice:

There was “We want to have life-drawing classes” - you know, “we want” in a sense “traditional skills.” And so it was really a student driven thing. It wasn’t an imposition of academic staff saying “you must do this because it’s good for you.” It was very much a student thing, and in fact, often the

⁸⁸ Menkes, loc. cit.

⁸⁹ J Norrie, ‘Art education - drawing down the nude’, *The Guardian* 8 March 1994. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

⁹⁰ New York Academy of Art, 2002, ‘Academy Brochure’, *New York Academy of Art*, viewed 12 December, 2008, <<http://www.nyaa.edu/brochure.pdf>>, p. 4.

⁹¹ Mike Esson, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁹² Bernard Ollis, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

case was that the students wanted a skill based approach and we were always sort of, or a person was always trying to say “Hey listen, skills are one thing, but there’s other ways of dealing with this.” So the skills came along with the process, rather than, you know, becoming the major factor.⁹³

This view of a student-led return to drawing actually was not shared by all of the subjects interviewed, not even within Sydney. One educator claimed that the return to life-drawing was a flow-on from increased art market interest in figurative art, itself a product of emphasis on the body in performance art. Another art school director claimed that there had not been any change in actual life-classes since the sixties and they had continued to be an essential part of art and design training. In France, Philippe Comar, head of *morphologie* at ENSBA in Paris, stated that l’Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts had been relatively sheltered from the massive reforms in French higher education that occurred in the 1970s, and so did not experience a decline in drawing until the 1980s.⁹⁴ Even then, he said, this decline was followed, within a decade, by a regaining of interest in drawing on the part of the students. More interesting still was the comment by Professor Anita Taylor, Director of the Centre for Drawing at the University of the Arts London, about the perceived ‘crisis in drawing’ in the early 1990s:

*There were all these press reports saying, “drawing is dead, no-one’s teaching drawing” ... but all up and down the country, people were drawing, and were teaching drawing, it just wasn’t being shown.*⁹⁵

Taylor gave a number of reasons for the perceived ‘death of drawing’ in public discourse, and noted the relatively low market value for works on paper as a key factor in the reluctance of commercial galleries to show and promote drawings. She stated that the difference between discourse and practice prompted her to start the Cheltenham Open Drawing Competition in 1994, which developed into the Jerwood Drawing Prize, a national competition and touring exhibition that has been running since 2001. In Britain, drawing has been recently promoted as part of the national good, as one website proudly proclaims:

*Welcome to the Campaign with a simple aim: to get everyone drawing. The Big Draw, the Campaign’s annual October showpiece, proves that drawing can be a public activity as well as a private passion. 1000 venues across the UK, from great national institutions to village halls, will be joining in to offer people of all ages the chance to discover that drawing is enjoyable, liberating and at everyone’s fingertips.*⁹⁶

The Big Draw is just one of a number of recent national ‘drawing initiatives’ endorsed by the UK educational and museum sectors, which include the Jerwood Drawing Prize. These included three conferences and publications produced by the Tate Gallery and Wimbledon College of Art in 1993, 1994 and 1995,⁹⁷ and the establishment of the Centre for Drawing Research at the Royal College of Art in 1996. Having appointed its first professor of drawing in 1991 (apparently amidst some controversy)⁹⁸ the Royal College of Art has expanded its Centre for Drawing Research into a national Drawing Research Network, hosted by the Open

⁹³ Mike Esson, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁹⁴ Philippe Comar, interview with author, see Appendix 1. ENSBA is the acronym for l’Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.

⁹⁵ Professor Anita Taylor, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁹⁶ *The big draw* website © Campaign for Drawing, 2009, viewed 2 March 2009, <<http://www.campaignfordrawing.org/bigdraw/index.aspx>>.

⁹⁷ C Frayling ‘Chairman’s summing up’ in Hetherington, op. cit.

⁹⁸ D Petherbridge, *The primacy of drawing, an artist’s view*, Southampton Gallery, London, 1991, notes to p. 13.

University.⁹⁹ Since the turn of the century, a number of other art schools have established drawing research projects, such as the centre for Advanced Research Into Drawing at the University of the West of England,¹⁰⁰ and the interactive site and journal called “TRACEY” run by Loughborough University.¹⁰¹ In addition to drawing shows and seminars hosted by the Tate Gallery, two galleries in London are exclusively devoted to exhibiting drawing, echoing the claim from Suzy Menkes ‘As *Vogue* might put it: suddenly, drawing is back in fashion.’¹⁰²

Although a number of interview subjects dated the revival of drawing to the 1980s, published sources are a little less clear about the time of the revival or of the current status of drawing.¹⁰³ A number of sources claim that ‘after decades of neglect’ drawing was revived in the mid 1990s; however, as early as 1991, the head of the RCA Centre for Drawing Research, Deanna Petherbridge, had written and curated *The Primacy of Drawing: An Artist’s View* as a catalogue to an exhibition hosted by the Southampton Gallery. Again in describing her own experience in the training, teaching and practice of figurative drawing since the 1980s, Anita Taylor claimed that drawing had been maintained, and even developed, as a key pedagogical practice in a number of British art schools through the 1980s.¹⁰⁴ While press and institutional literature describe a current ‘drawing-wave’ it would appear that this has been the result of a sustained development of institutional interest in drawing research since 1990. Given the wealth of material substantiating the consistent, high profile institutional support for drawing for over a decade, then it is curious that in 2005, the director of the Prince’s Drawing School could apparently claim:

*Five years ago it was a pretty lonely business, [...] There was not a lot of figurative painting. Serious observational drawing was not being taught in art schools.*¹⁰⁵

In the same article HRH Prince Charles describes the drawing vacuum of the late 1990s:

*Nobody was teaching life-drawing - it went out of fashion.*¹⁰⁶

In 2005, another press article quoted a British artist as saying:

*“Very few English art schools could teach me how to draw and paint,” says Wilson. “Most of them are still teaching conceptual art.”*¹⁰⁷

While in 2000, another British artist claimed:

I’m the last person of my generation who knows how to draw. It isn’t cool to draw and I guarantee that if I were to go back to art school not one person would be able to do a passable life-drawing. I

⁹⁹ See *Drawing Research Network* website, viewed 2 March 2009, <<http://www.drawing.org.uk/>>.

¹⁰⁰ University of the West of England at Bristol, ‘Advanced Centre In Drawing’, website viewed 15 August 2007 <<http://www.acid.uwe.ac.uk/about.htm>> .

¹⁰¹ University of Loughborough, ‘TRACEY Contemporary Drawing Research’, website viewed 2 March 2009. <<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/>>.

¹⁰² Menkes, loc. cit.

¹⁰³ North American art historian, Gerald Ackerman has claimed ‘Teaching of academic practice almost died out between 1880 and 1950’. See: G Ackerman & G Parish, *The Charles Bargue drawing course* ACR Edition, Paris, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Professor Anita Taylor, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Goodman, Head of Prince’s Drawing School, quoted in Menkes, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁶ HRH Prince Charles quoted in Menkes loc. cit.

¹⁰⁷ F Childs, ‘Back to life portraits are enjoying a surge in popularity, but one studio has been teaching traditional methods of painting and drawing for years, finds Frances Childs’ *The Daily Telegraph* (3 September 2005) © 2005 Telegraph Group Limited, London. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

*could leave my bed unmade but I'm not sure she [Emin] could do a full-scale life-drawing.*¹⁰⁸

The reference to Tracey Emin's installation of an unmade bed, which was shortlisted for the Turner Art Prize in 1999, features prominently in many British press articles on drawing, along with descriptions of other conceptual work, or work made with unusual materials. In the United States, this juxtaposition of claims of the decline of drawing with successful works from the contemporary commercial art market has been made about the work of Abstract Expressionists, and abstract painting and sculpture continues to be blamed for the lack of critical success for figurative or realist artists.¹⁰⁹ I discuss the influence of Abstract Expressionism on life-drawing in Chapter Two, and wish to note the tensions between commercially successful art, the contemporary art market and art tradition in defining and negotiating the boundaries between legitimate or contemporary art practices.

15. Drawing on Fashion

While it is probable that the art market does not encompass the entirety of visual arts practices within a given period, the discursive influence of perceived or actual 'successful' art movements appears to play a significant role in how artists and educators describe their studio and pedagogical practices and articulate their own position in relation to this market. A number of figurative practitioners I interviewed, implicated the rise of 'conceptual' or 'abstract' and other contemporary art movements as contributing to a perception that figurative art, life-drawing or drawing in general were marginalised or excluded from contemporary art. This emphasis on a perception of marginalisation is a significant element in many of the accounts by interview subjects of their training or practice, and arguably is a key element in how artists negotiate their identity as professional, 'successful', or otherwise. I return to the relationship between art trends or art fashions and cultural capital later, but for now, I am interested in the way 'drawing' is mobilised in these accounts of recent art history. In the comment below Deanna Petherbridge draws a historical link between the intensification of drawing and social crisis:

*It would seem, on a more general level, that periods of questioning and crisis in art have been accompanied by a revival and intensification of drawing. The period of flux after the First World War led to a great efflorescence of drawing and we are presently witnessing a similar revival.*¹¹⁰

Describing a revival of drawing in 1991, the comment from a catalogue essay for *The Primacy Of Drawing* does not articulate the specific historical or material conditions shared by the 1920s and the 1990s that would have contributed to a revival of drawing. In its vague evocation of history, the comment resembles similar explanations for the fluctuating interest in figurative art or embodied performance art, noting the value of 'the body' or 'drawing' in 'times of crisis', be they social or personal. Crises aside, the view of art world trends and art world cycles is an interesting one, particularly because it exposes the rather contested social values of what are acceptable commercially oriented practices in a capitalist society, and those which might aspire to be part of deeper, less commercial, if not 'sacred' values. The complex mix of creative, redemptive, pedagogical, recreational and commercial activities that comprises the visual arts also necessarily involves mediating the interests and aspirations of widely divergent social groups.¹¹¹ With this conflict-driven structure at its core, it could be

¹⁰⁸ S Taylor Martin, 'A Prince of a Patron' *St. Petersburg Times*, 20 February 2000. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

¹⁰⁹ Steinhart, op. cit., pp. 173-177.

¹¹⁰ Petherbridge, op. cit., p. 13.

¹¹¹ HS Becker, *Art worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.

argued that the contemporary field of art is destined to perpetually be facing some sort of crisis, and to be in a continuous state of flux.

Accounts of the decline or return of 'drawing', which counterpoise a type of 'transcendent' art practice to art institutions that are deemed faddish, market driven or cynical, form part of a deeper discourse at the heart of modernist art practices themselves. Furthermore the anti-capitalist stance of avant-garde artists is a familiar element of the romantic myth of art as a type of transcendent struggle against the mundane commercial realities of a consumer society.¹¹² However, it could also be said that this mythic role of 'art', if not of 'artists', is itself part of a broader cultural myth that is part of the 'everyday' practices of capitalism itself.¹¹³ Marxist theory describes how commodity fetishism ascribes powers and values derived from religion, social protest, cultural upheaval and psychoanalytic narratives to consumer objects, and many Marxist theorists have explored materialist accounts of cultural practices.¹¹⁴ While theorists of the Frankfurt School have described cultural fetishism, whereby similar values are projected onto cultural objects and practices not regarded strictly as commodities, as a process intrinsic to modern capitalism, these critiques are rarely articulated in relation to specific art practices, such as drawing.¹¹⁵

Tony Bennett explores the ambiguous roles of art institutions in representing the state, or national or corporate institutions, and yet nonetheless embodying a phantasmic projection of the cultural imaginary outside of the state, the nation, or capitalist society.¹¹⁶ As Judith Adler argues, modernist art embodies both of these ambiguous elements at its core, operating as the dreaming space of capitalism, of entrepreneurship and innovation arising from a rejection of the bourgeoisie in the present, aligned with the threat (possibility) of being recuperated by, or superseding it in the future.¹¹⁷ This profound ambivalence towards capitalism and the consumer society is not just embodied in the figure of the avant-garde artist or radical entrepreneur, but is arguably built into the very structures whereby all consumers mediate the practices of desiring, purchasing and discarding commodities.¹¹⁸ The major cultural strategy for mediating the intense affective ambivalence, of seduction, ennui, cynicism and alienation

¹¹² J Adler, "Revolutionary" art and the "art" of revolution: aesthetic work in a millenarian period', *Theory and Society*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 417-435.

¹¹³ *ibid.* On the relationships between cultural practices and social resistance, see M de Certeaux, *The practice of everyday life*, S Rendall (trans.), University of California Press, Berkeley & London, 1988, p. xvii.

¹¹⁴ K Marx, *Capital: a critique of political economy*, Foreign Languages Pub. House, Moscow, 1962 (1857), p. 77. See P Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, R. Nice (trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1984, also P Bourdieu, et. al., *The love of art: European art museums and their public*, C Beattie & N Merriman (trans.), Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1991. The close sociological studies of Pierre Bourdieu on museum audiences and differing forms of high and low culture concentrates on the values associated with the consumption of various forms of culture, rather than closely examining the discourses associated with particular forms of cultural production and practice.

¹¹⁵ T Adorno, *Aesthetic theory*, R Hullot-Kentor (trans.), Continuum, London, 2002 & F Jameson, *Adorno, or the persistence of the dialectic*, Verso, London, 1990 & H Marcuse, *The aesthetic dimension: toward a critique of Marxist aesthetics*, Macmillan, London, 1979. Many Marxist cultural critiques focus on cultural institutions as ideological apparatus, and ignore the complex mix of values embedded in the experiences and discourses among cultural practitioners. Even Bourdieu's examination of the relationships between photography and class is largely famed within a semiotic analysis of the indexical relationship between photography as a metonymic element of mass culture. See P Bourdieu et. al., *Photography, a middle-brow art*, S Whiteside (trans.), Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1990. A critique of Bourdieu's semiotic emphasis and discursive analysis of non-discursive practice is developed in M de Certeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-61.

¹¹⁶ See T Bennett, *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995. Like Bourdieu and other Marxist cultural theorists Tony Bennet's work focuses on the ideological underpinnings of large cultural institutions, and how culture is received and contested by audiences rather than producers and practitioners.

¹¹⁷ J Adler, *op. cit.*, pp. 429-431.

¹¹⁸ De Certeau, *op. cit.*

is through fashion, and fashion relations permeate not just consumer items, but cultural consumption, speech patterns, pedagogy, and subject formation at multiple levels.¹¹⁹

Not all of the subjects interviewed were entirely comfortable with ascribing changes to the status in drawing according to the fluctuation of art 'fashions'. Dean of Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) Ron Newman expressed considerable reservations at the idea of art practice being reduced to fashions:

*I have some problem with the idea of things being new fashioned, old fashioned.*¹²⁰

Newman's reservations could be seen as an attempt to defend the changes in institutional practices of creative art and design from being labelled as mere consumer whims.¹²¹ While references to art practices as 'fashions' may evoke criticism or ironic quips such as in Menkes's article, it is arguable that fashion itself provides a clearer understanding of art, and the values ascribed to it, than previously thought. This refers not so much to sartorial fashions, or consumer crazes for home renovations, as to the discursive structure behind consumer culture. If art can be regarded as contiguous with the imaginary spaces of capitalist society, then the distinction between practices of 'art' and those of consumer society may be more a question of cultural capital than any intrinsic difference between the practices themselves. As Michel de Certeau argues, even the most alienated and contrived situations for recreational pleasure and enjoyment manage to produce a certain level of affective investment and social contestation among participants.¹²² In claiming the affinity between art and fashion, I am not denying the complexity of aspirations, behaviours and effects of creative practice or the importance that the idea of autonomy has contributed to the sense of social agency among art practitioners. However it is arguable that even the illusion of art as an autonomous practice is influenced by ideas of time, and fashion that have currency in broader areas of social discourse.

One of the major characteristics of fashion is the compression of time into a cycling of neo and retro, divorced from any referent outside of itself, and the second is a type of recuperated ambivalence, a structured self-loathing at its heart.¹²³ The proliferation of fashion writing in consumer magazines in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a flood of vociferous protests at the frivolity, uselessness, trivia, danger and waste of fashion in newspaper articles, pamphlets and publications.¹²⁴ Just as the appeal of present fashion is based on the implied repugnance of dated fashion, so too, the apparent triviality, the superficiality and the circular temporality of fashion is grounded on an implied relationship to a profound, linear and transcendent temporality. This relationship may be one of longing, or of insouciant rejection, but the dialectical relationship between the inside and outside of fashion drives the redemptive appeal of fashion and even the desire to reject, or transcend it.¹²⁵ Thus the boundaries of fashion, or of the cynical recuperated consumer world are placed within this superficial cycling of 'fashion-time', whereas the imaginary space beyond the present

¹¹⁹ J Baudrillard, *The consumer society: myths and structures*, Sage Publications, London, 1998, pp. 78-80. Baudrillard's observations were derived from Walter Benjamin's evocative description of the role of fashion in modernist culture. See W Benjamin, *the Arcades Project*, H Eiland & K McLaughlin (trans.), Belknap Press/Harvard University Publishing, Cambridge, MA, & London, 1999, pp. 67-70.

¹²⁰ Professor Ron Newman, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

¹²¹ Ron Newman studied and worked as an industrial designer. See Appendix 1.

¹²² De Certeau, op. cit., pp. 34-39.

¹²³ Baudrillard, op. cit., pp. 99-102.

¹²⁴ In *The theory of the leisure class* Thorstein Veblen centred his critique of capitalism and the consumer society on the frivolity and waste of fashion. See M Carter, *Fashion Classics*, Berg, London & New York, 2003, pp. 41-57.

¹²⁵ See Benjamin, op. cit.

capitalist order exists along a trajectory of a defined linear narrative of the past, linked to a redemptive future by the transcendently invested practices of ‘real culture’ in the present.¹²⁶

The complex relationships between drawing, life-drawing and ideas of time, history and the present could be seen as a variety of strategies by which participants negotiate their own relationships to the temporal relations of consumer culture. As ‘timeless’ or ‘out of fashion’, life-drawing can be regarded as autonomous from the endless cycling of arbitrary signifiers of neo and retro, or at least as creating a space where time can be stopped, slowed down or even reversed. Thus a critical aspect of this sense of agency is the generation of historical narratives that explicitly alter the relationships that drawing has with the present and with the temporal relations of everyday social relations.

16. The Linear Tradition

The ambiguous relationship to time is one of the most curious aspects of the press and rear-garde accounts of the return to drawing and the resurgence of figurative art. The redemptive mission presented of the Prince’s Drawing School, that of saving ‘time-honoured techniques’, evokes a mythical power of history, external to the vagaries of present art ‘fashions’. The slightly ironic quip at the end of the article - ‘Suddenly drawing is back in fashion’ - serves to reinforce the distance between ‘timeless’ tradition and the temporal whims of art-world fashion. This draws on a much older discourse within modernist art, as a quasi-religious figment of cultural imagination, relying on Kantian and romantic notions of art being the pursuit of the ‘sublime’, transcending the quotidian concerns of economics or social prestige.¹²⁷ It is, as argued, a profoundly modernist, or late-modernist discursive tendency, and one grounded in consumer discourses of fashion. The desire for a linear narrative of artistic practice, for a specific account of time, is curiously juxtaposed with discussions of timelessness, of transcendence and of essentialist, primal human activities. The ambiguous subject formation of cultural practitioners is ambiguously linked to time and involves negotiating conflicting desires to be timely, of one’s time, out of time, and timeless.

Drawing is evoked not only in relation to ‘honouring time’, but often in relation to specific times and places that may be very far from the present, as the quotation below illustrates:

*The school adopts the atelier (studio) approach; the time honoured tradition of a young apprentice learning the craft under the guidance of a master. Being able to draw is a fundamental course goal.*¹²⁸

This quotation comes from a 2004 press description of Sydney’s National Art School and reflects a tendency of settler colony institutions to emphasise their academic lineage in relation to Western Europe. A number of interview subjects cited the influence of the ‘beaux arts’ model, or ‘atelier’ model, or ‘academy’ model, or ‘Slade’ influence, or ‘Bauhaus’ influence upon their current educational practice.¹²⁹ The collapsing of a generic ‘life-class’

¹²⁶ Baudrillard, op. cit., 113-114.

¹²⁷ In his post-script titled ‘Towards a ‘vulgar’ critique of ‘pure’ critiques’, Pierre Bourdieu gives an incisive critique of the sociological basis of the subjective interests of autonomous artists, as explored in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*. See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 491-494.

¹²⁸ S Verghis, ‘Art teacher draws a line at poor skills’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12-13 March 2004.

¹²⁹ The *atelier method* is invoked by a number of neo-academy private art schools, such as the studio school established by North American Charles Cecil in Florence. “Charles Cecil is committed to the belief that the atelier tradition is invaluable for a renewal in figurative art. In keeping with this concept, Cecil accepts only a limited number of pupils each year. He personally supervises the progress of their work and is assisted by advanced students and colleagues who return at regular intervals. The aim of the Studio is to train painters and teachers who will excel as artists and evolve the atelier tradition.” From ‘The atelier Tradition’ Charles H. Cecil Studios website. Viewed 12 January 2009, <<http://www.charlescecilstudios.com/>>. A number of historians of art education claim that neither the Bauhaus nor the Ecole des Beaux-Arts provided a fixed

with phrases such as the ‘studio-tradition’, the ‘atelier’, the ‘beaux arts method’ or even ‘the academy’, presents a set of vague picto-historical associations but are not particularly informative about what these practices or pedagogical programs actually are. This chain-link of the life-class, the studio or the cast, produces an effect of a past that is singular, continuous, unbroken and uncontested. It presents a generic ‘olden days’ view of art practice, linking a set of vague associations that become ‘timeless’ by the sheer force of their lack of descriptive specificity of any particular time or place. Arguably, it is the invocation of a linear narrative as timeless that lends weight to the imaginative power of traditional practices as being able to transcend the present. While the discursive role that a *timeless tradition* plays in the present contestations of pedagogical practices and negotiation of cultural capital is interesting, it also obfuscates the very real material conditions under which art practitioners have historically contested the institutionalised relations of training and practice, and continue to do so. While Australian and North American accounts often link drawing practice to a particular (foreign) place, English accounts are more vague, and assume an autochthonian connection between ‘the old masters’ and current practitioners:

*In the past the ability to draw was taken for granted as essential for an artist. For the older generation of Royal Academicians no less than for the Old Masters themselves, daily drawing exercises, in particular from a life model, were par for the course. Today things are different. The dominance of conceptual and installation art has given rise to a fierce debate as to whether life-drawing skills are still a necessary part of the artist’s repertoire.*¹³⁰

The quotation from *The Guardian* above contrasts a fixed monolithic idea of ‘the past’ with a contentious and fractured debate about the life-class in the present. The idea of ‘a western canon’ or a singular narrative of pre-modern art training, or the art academy as a monolithic bulwark, is curiously persistent in contemporary discussions of art education, and is repeatedly cited in relationship to life-drawing, which is presented as a singular, inflexible, invariable practice, stretching from ancient Greece to the present. Unlike *The Guardian*, antipodean narratives of drawing rely on a particular leap of time and space that overlooks the continuous cultural practices of indigenous inhabitants of European colonies, which arguably contributes a certain level of anxiety to the claims of a continuous lineage of practice. The opening pages of Sandra Chesterman’s *Figurework: The nude and life modelling in New Zealand art* contains the account below:

*Traditionally, the depiction of the human body has been regarded as one of the greatest challenges for an artist. Drawing from the life model has therefore been a core component of fine arts training. The art practice of working from the life model has its roots in Greek art of the Fifth Century BC and in the Greek’s increasing desire to achieve greater naturalism in the figures they portrayed.*¹³¹

Published in 2002, Chesterman’s study makes use of numerous interviews with current life models and figurative practitioners as well as a considerable body of research into the history of life-classes in the antipodes and Europe. Reviews and promotion material of Chesterman’s book features similar claims as Peter Steinhart, invoking the life-class as part of an extensive

model for art education or life-drawing instruction and nor was there a fixed model of atelier instruction in Western Europe. See Q Bell, *Schools Of Design*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1963, pp. 13-15; N Pevsner, *Academies of art, past and present*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1973, pp. 220-235.

¹³⁰ Norrie, loc. cit.

¹³¹ S Chesterman, *Figure work: the nude and life modelling in New Zealand art* University of Otago Press, Dunedin, NZ, 2002, p. 5.

tradition that has been undermined or lost to the present.¹³² Given this framework, it is curious that references to the *Ακδημεια* [academy] of ancient Greece continue to frame art practice, thousands of years later on the other side of the world.¹³³ Chesterman's invocation of life-drawing as the extension of a European lineage is quite clear in these opening pages. Commencing with the paragraph above, Chesterman traces a historical narrative of the progression of Western European art education through to the founding of the British Royal Arts Academy in 1770. She describes the spread of the life-drawing *tradition* to the antipodes:

*Two years later, this tradition of working from living models was carried to New Zealand on board the Resolution, on Captain James Cook's second Pacific voyage of 1772-5.*¹³⁴

Chesterman follows this claim with a description of William Hodges, MRA¹³⁵ sketching from Cook's ship while observing the ship's first encounter with Maoris.¹³⁶ While the anecdote is attractive in providing a genesis for antipodean life-drawing, it is also quite far fetched and obscures the very substantial differences between the highly staged academy style life-class, where consenting and self aware models posed for extensive periods of time, imitating a canon of poses derived from ancient Greek sculptures, and the fleeting act of quickly sketching moving, unaware figures from the prow of a moving ship. It also obscures the lack of 'consent' of Hodges's indigenous models, and the fundamental violence of the colonising encounter, and the colonising gaze, trying to reduce and represent what would have been a terrifying and astonishing experience for all parties. To be fair to Chesterman, she does take pains to emphasise the differences between the contrived nature of the eventual painting produced from the study, *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand 1773*, with the central figure of the Maori reduced to a stylised *contrapposto* figure, more reflecting of British Royal Academy studies than anything that Hodges would have observed. However, she continues to cite the practice of New Zealand 'settlers' in drawing 'natives' as a seminal fragment of life-drawing in the new colony. Maori visual art is not mentioned and life-drawing, even in the present, is described as a distinctly *paheka* practice.¹³⁷ By citing life-drawing as an activity disconnected from the spaces, institutions and social relations in which it is embedded, Chesterman relies on a metaphorical idea of life-drawing, obscuring what the activity of life-drawing actually is, and how much it is linked to the self conscious activities of models, in actually posing, as well as the complex cultural and racial affiliations of those who observe and those who draw.

¹³² H Bain, 'Return of the nude', *Dominion Post*, 7 December 2002, p3(c) 2002 Independent Newspapers Ltd.; 'Naked truth about the NZ nude', *Timaru Herald*, 2 December 2002, p10, © The Timaru Herald, INL 2002. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

¹³³ Stuart MacDonald describes the *Ακδημεια* of ancient Greece as being named after a region in Athens where young men would meet to discuss ideas. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 23.

¹³⁴ Chesterman, op. cit., p. 8.

¹³⁵ Acronym for Member of the Royal Academy of Great Britain

¹³⁶ Chesterman, op. cit. p. 11.

¹³⁷ The terms *Maori* and *Pakeha* are explained in 'MAORI-PAKEHA – PAKEHA-MAORI', from A. H. McLintock ed., *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, (1966) published by Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand Website*, updated 18 September, 2007. Viewed 20 December, 2008, <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Maori-pakehaPakeha-maori/en>>. The relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous art practices in Australia and New Zealand are beyond the scope of this thesis however I am wary of supporting any assumptions that historical narratives of the art practices among antipodean colonisers can be written without acknowledging the presence and influence of the cultural practices of indigenous inhabitants. Generally the majority of Sydney artists' models are of European appearance, although anecdotal evidence describes a couple of Aboriginal dancers and actors occasionally working as artists' models. Although none of my Australian interview subjects claimed Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestry, two out of three (Sydney-based) New Zealand interviewed for my research are of Maori descent.

17. Drawing Distinctions

It would appear that drawing provides a particularly potent metaphor for the idea of history as a lineage, a single line stretching from Ancient Greece to whatever particular cultural context wishing to claim a cultural affinity with dominant cultural practices of post-renaissance Western Europe. The idea of the post-renaissance art academy is central to this lineage, linking the *Ακδημεια* of ancient Greece, to various forms of art training in the twenty-first century, including, paradoxically, many that claim a specific agenda that is *anti-academic*. Peter Steinhart's claim of a 'renaissance of drawing' among amateur sketch-clubs is presented with an account of art history that aligns this 'extra-mural' practice of drawing as the *legitimate* heir to the renaissance tradition. Steinhart's account of a vanguard of staunch traditionalists, holed up in community halls and living rooms, bears considerable resemblance to the account of mediaeval Irish scriptoria in Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*.¹³⁸ Written in the 1950s, Clark's account of the history of Western European art was later produced as a television series and widely broadcast internationally in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁹ Ostensibly presenting a publicly accessible and educational account of art history, Clark explicitly traces a lineage of the forms of architecture, sculpture and painting that have been associated with the cultural identity of state institutions of imperial Europe. Clark's *Civilisation* was disseminated in English speaking countries at a time when massive social changes were effecting major cultural challenges on all institutions of art, education and even the state. The increased cultural and economic mobility associated with the post-war consumer boom also fundamentally challenged the values associated with cultural institutions and practices that Clark depicted as 'civilisation', as stable, essentialist, *timeless*, and beyond the social turmoil of the present. It could be said that Clark's account of *civilisation* provided a discursive template followed by populist accounts of art history ever since, which play on the aspirational fantasies of socially mobile audiences within affluent consumer cultures to identify with the institutions and values of 'high' culture.

The influence of Kenneth Clark is interesting not only in relation to generating a quasi populist rear-garde account of European art history, but more specifically to his work in *The nude: a study of ideal art*, discussed in Chapter Three. In a chapter on the changing role of the nude life model in British art, published over forty years after Clark's study, William Vaughan described Clark's distinction between of the naked and the nude as an "urbane and reassuring formulation".¹⁴⁰ While Vaughan identified Clark's distinction as being largely related to cultural capital, he also claimed that Clark's defence of the nude as being 'too late' for contemporary art and art education:

*Art schools were closing down their life-classes not because of the protests of the moral majority, but because staff and students could no longer see the point of doing anything so old-fashioned as studying the human form.*¹⁴¹

Vaughan's generalised claim of art schools closing down their life-classes overlooks the cultural practices of those practitioners whom Clark's assertions were arguably designed to appease. As the next chapter explores, life-drawing classes proliferated enormously in post-

¹³⁸ K Clark *Civilisation: a personal view*, [videorecording] British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1969. Written and narrated by Kenneth Clark. Distributed by BBC Enterprises Ltd., London, 1990.

¹³⁹ *ibid.* The first 6 minutes of 'Episode one: the skin of our teeth' present this view. Viewed 18 December 2008 via *youtube*. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxsvroiUHik>>.

¹⁴⁰ W Vaughan 'The naked and the nude', in M Postle & W Vaughan, *The artist's model: from Etty To Spencer*, Merrell Holberton, London, 1999, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* I discuss Clark, and Vaughan's account of him in Chapter Three.

war consumer societies as a recreational pursuit, outside of art schools. It is in these circles of non-professional artists, with few aspirations towards the transgressive vanguardism of contemporary art institutions or markets, that life-drawing has provided a means of negotiating ambiguous relationships towards voyeurism and sexuality, and the changing aspirations towards cultural capital of an increasingly socially mobile society. Within these populist realms of art practice widely disseminated historical narratives, such as Clark's, have continued to be popular, as providing a general cultural framework for 'appreciating' the nude.

As Lynda Nead pointed out in her analysis of amateur drawing manuals, it is among such texts that some of the most violent and anxious assertions of a reactionary 'patriarchal' view of art are repeatedly asserted.¹⁴² Noting the explicitness of 'culturally unstable' texts in "how images can be encoded with the connotations of art," Nead also observed the role of references to science and objectivity in assuring the cultural authority of the texts and the practices within them. While Nead's study explores how ideas of authenticity and (admittedly quite problematic) agency are performed in amateur manuals of life-drawing practice, it is arguable that the *invisible* speech acts behind the practices, not only of spectatorship and mark making, but also the very act of attending a sketch club, of gathering to draw, and of giving oneself permission to look at a naked stranger, are a vital element in how practitioners negotiate their participation in life-classes. Press articles on the life-class and populist histories and accounts of life-drawing and art history, reflect and reinforce a set of discourses that are performed (often) silently and become implicit 'values' about gender, as well as art, art history and the role of life-drawing as a relevant and contemporary cultural practice or otherwise.

Within populist accounts of life-drawing, such as Steinhart's, the narration of a historical trajectory appears to ground what is arguably an incongruous and ambiguous activity within a larger historical framework. The idea of life-drawing as an *historical* activity removes it from the need to confront its present status as somewhat redundant in relation to broader cultures of consumer pornography and contemporary art. Steinhart is not an art historian, and it may appear harsh to criticise his simplistic account of Western art history as a single lineage from Egypt, to Ancient Greece and Rome, skipping fifteen hundred years to the Italian Renaissance, in which all of the developments of Western European art to the nineteenth century, and those of the United States since, are collapsed.¹⁴³ However, the structure of this account, rendered as a single lineage across a cultural plane that remains as mere empty space, is disturbing because of the way it persists in numerous populist accounts, such that it is almost naturalised as a tacit assumption governing the way practitioners define drawing as a cultural intervention. The art historical narrative from which Steinhart's and Clark's lineages are derived has been substantially challenged in the past thirty years, particularly by the work of feminists, cultural historians, and ethnographers, such that most textbooks on art-history include the work of at least a few women artists, discuss crafts, object design and significantly, present histories of art from some of the many regions of the world that are not part of western Europe, including indigenous cultures of Europeanised nations such as the United States and Australia.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² L Nead, *The female nude: art, obscenity, and sexuality*, Routledge, London & New York, 1992, pp. 50-53.

Nead writes on p. 53: 'The art manual becomes the vehicle for a male-centred standardisation of the female body, and the roles of artist, lover and judge are superimposed and mutually reinforced in its pages'.

¹⁴³ This account also obscures the presence, participation and influence of native Americans and African Americans in North American visual art. From participant observation, African Americans form a small but visible component of artists' models and sketch club participants.

¹⁴⁴ EH Gombrich, *The story of art*, Phaidon Publishers & Oxford University Press, London, 1950, has been

Possibly, it is against this pluralist view of art history, as complex and contested, that these linear accounts of art history, and by extension the ‘rear-garde’ practitioners of drawing in the present, seek to align themselves. Perhaps it is the image of art history as a lineage, and as a singular line across an empty field that informs the actual practice of drawing lines across a blank page, of generating linear representations of figures separated from their clothes as well as the rooms, the people and the historical conditions in which they pose. This may contribute to the lack of questioning, the lack of articulation, and the bizarre fixity of the practices of the life-class across numerous institutions, internationally. While many of the life-drawings appear as singular figures on a blank page, the linear process by which they are generated is profoundly imbricated in the process of separation, of discerning, and of exclusion. Aside from separating a body from the objects that surround it, the processes of generating a life-drawing involve the exclusion of an enormous amount of visual information about the body itself, such as the hairs, wrinkles, bags, freckles and blemishes on the skin. The act of drawing itself involves considerable self control on behalf of the drawers, not only in mastering hand-eye coordination, but in concentrating on the present moment, the present action and in the immense discipline of looking at a naked body, culturally marked as sexually available, and *not* displaying sexual interest. This practice of drawing, as the delineation between elements in the physical, visual, psychological and cultural field, arguably extends into a broader tendency to view drawing as an act of historical contestation. Drawing is important because it delineates; between bodies and spaces, art and fashion, and present uncertainty versus timeless tradition. So it is even more bizarre that this process of delineation cloaks itself in claims of linearity, and a lineage through the blank pages of the past.

Scholarly research on the history of the life-class forms a distinct contrast to the linear view of art history invoked by many contemporary accounts of life-drawing. Even a cursory glance through one of the most authoritative texts on art education history, Nicolaus Pevsner’s *Academies of Art Past and Present*, provides a strong impression that the emergence of European art academies was highly contested and enormously influenced by the geographic, cultural and socio-economic concerns particular to various regions in Europe.¹⁴⁵ Commencing with an account of the *Ακδημεία* in Ancient Greece, Pevsner provides lengthy accounts of the numerous historical changes and controversies that plagued all of the academies from sixteenth-century Italy right through to the Bauhaus movement in the early twentieth century. Published in 1940, Pevsner’s account can by no means be described as post-modern, and is characterised by an assiduous focus on detail and conspicuous polyglotism (including lengthy untranslated sections in Latin, Ancient Greek, Italian, French and German) that restricts its accessibility to ‘classically’ trained art historians. However, Pevsner’s emphasis on the social history of art institutions, facilitates the development of a pluralist genealogy of art education by Arthur Efland, who describes the emergence of state sponsored academies and other forms of institutional patronage as a means by which social and historical struggles were conducted in the sphere of cultural production.¹⁴⁶ Neither author provides much detail on how life-drawing classes were conducted in various settings; however, Pevsner emphasises the central role that life-classes have played in representing social, cultural and economic agendas.

Pevsner’s history largely describes academies as part of the attempt to align certain forms of

modified, however, the narratives of exclusion still persist in Australian art history. Christopher Allen excluded indigenous and female artists from his history of art in Australia claiming that the publisher Thames and Hudson had already produced volumes on Aboriginal Art and Women’s Art. C Allen *Art in Australia: from colonization to postmodernism*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Pevsner, op. cit.

¹⁴⁶ A Efland, *A history of art education: intellectual and social currents in teaching the visual arts*, Teachers College Press, New York, 1990.

visual art production with intellectual endeavours or the interests of social or state groupings beyond those of the Catholic Church, which controlled art patronage throughout much of Europe until the sixteenth century. Pevsner describes how access to life models was used by the French academy in order to destroy the workshop-based guild system of artisan training in the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁷ Under Louis XIV the craft guilds were liquidated in France, and artisans and artists were required to attend drawing classes run at the *Académie Royale du Peintre et Sculpture* in Paris and in branch schools established in regional centres in the eighteenth century. Vestiges of the medieval guild system remained, as artisans and artists worked and trained in the studios of their respective masters, but all were required to attend and complete drawing training at the *Académie*, in order to obtain professional recognition. The French academy system did much for establishing the Louis Quatorze style in art, as well as in furniture and textiles, such that all visual and manual production became an expression of the identity of the state.¹⁴⁸ Under this system life-drawing studies themselves became known as *Academies*,¹⁴⁹ thus establishing the role of life-drawing as a symbolic practice, largely configured as social ordering of a type of transgressive spectatorship (that of the nude), than any particular aesthetic practice of representation. The history of life-classes can largely be equated with the history of distinction among cultural producers. Until the twentieth century, the development and status of ‘fine art’ as opposed to manufacture, artisan, amateur or craft production was intimately linked to those who had access to the life-class and who did not. In the twentieth century the boundaries between fine arts, industrial art and design, plus amateur or outsider art, blurred, shifted and changed completely, and with them, so did the role of the life-class in mediating these distinctions.

Historical narratives of European post-renaissance art reiterate the symbolic role of life-drawing as a central aspect of the academy training of artists, without examining what aspects of drawing, as a particular (and arguably arbitrary) practice have merited its role in western European art. I explore the cultural specificity of the meanings of *drawing*, in the next section. As discussed earlier, it can be posited that the very structure of all cultural activity under modernism is bound up in a dialectical relationship to dominant modes of production. Producers and consumers of culture identify themselves in relation to a perceived dominant cultural institution (from ‘the art world’ to ‘the fashion industry’), polarising their activities as renegade, innovative and authentic or recuperated, anachronistic or artificial. The critical role of drawing, and figurative drawing especially, in delineating the contestations of various cultural groupings within post-renaissance Europe could be related to the ‘primal’ aspects of drawing, as an immediate, symbolic and possibly determinist medium, but it is just as deeply embedded in the language used to represent and inscribe drawing as a cultural practice.

18. Drawing from the Academy

The etymology of the English word *drawing* associates it with a dragging action, or some form of traction and movement over a surface.¹⁵⁰ It comes from the Saxon roots of middle English and so lacks the more elevated Latin connotations of the continental European equivalents such as *dessin*, *dissegno*, and *dibusco*. The genealogy of the word known in

¹⁴⁷ Pevsner op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁴⁸ Efland, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁴⁹ A Boime, *Academy and French Painting*, p. 19, quoted by Singerman, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁵⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word ‘draw’ as follows: Draw (v): (dr) Pa. tense drew (dru); pa. pple. drawn (drn). Forms: see below. [A Common Teut. strong vb. of 6th ablaut series: OE. draan, dró (dróh), draen = OS. dragan, OHG. tragen, ON. draga, Goth. (ga)dragan: only in OE. and ON. with the sense ‘draw, pull’; in the other langs. with that of ‘carry, bear’. Oxford English Dictionary electronic edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000. Accessed via University of Sydney library, 5 January 2009, <<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au>>.

English as *design* and its historical association with drawing instruction provides a rich example of how language has been used to order the field of cultural production. The word *design* is associated in English with a specific type of drawing, the creation of a blueprint for manufactured objects. Derived from Latin root of ‘*designate*’, its connotations are deterministic and practical, and historically separated from the less ‘worldly’ realm of fine arts. However, in Europe ‘design’ is equated with drawing and anecdotal evidence suggests that the word *design* was imported into English in the naming of the Government School of Design, as a mis-translation of the French *Ecole de Dessin*.¹⁵¹ The French translation of drawing is *dessin*, itself derived from the Italian *disegno*. An etymology of *disegno* in turn portrays it as a sign from God: “*disegno = segno di Dio in noi*” (sign of God in us).¹⁵² Thus drawing (and design) is a means of revealing the God ordained harmony and beauty of nature. In typical neo-Platonic formation, drawing is not an imitation of the world, but a means whereby an abstract principle behind nature (Plato’s ideal, or the Christian God) can be revealed.¹⁵³ In the neo-Platonism of post-renaissance academies, *disegno* was regarded as a form of research and even theorising about the world. Aligned with Euclidean geometry, and the renaissance emphasis on perspectival rendering, *disegno* became as much a science as an art.

This view of the centrality of drawing to art was famously articulated in the nineteenth century in the statement by Ingres “...drawing is everything, it is the whole of art. The material processes of painting are very simple and can be taught in eight hours.”¹⁵⁴ This view of drawing, and especially figure drawing as supremely difficult persists in contemporary accounts, which describe it as “the ultimate challenge”.¹⁵⁵ While the processes governing figure drawing are complex, and do require considerable skill, co-ordination and patience, it is hard to argue that direct carving in marble or stone, or the manufacture of tapestries, or the painting of frescoes do not require similar levels of skill. For much of the history of painting, artists had to prepare their paints, by hand, including procuring, preparation and combination of pigments, in a process akin to sophisticated inorganic chemistry, which took a considerable amount of training and intellectual effort.¹⁵⁶ The distinction between drawing as a separate discipline and other processes of manual manipulation or symbolic mark making was largely a product of how drawing was mobilised in social discourses of subject formation within European academies and did not occur within other contemporaneous art traditions, such as China or India. Generally the delineation of where drawing ends and painting begins has been a distinction difficult to make and difficult to sustain.¹⁵⁷ Even within the academy tradition ‘drawings’ have involved both liquid media such as ink and solid media such as charcoal, chalk and graphite. Academy drawing has not only been made with ‘line’, but famously on the pulverising application of charcoal across a sheet of vellum or paper, which is then modelled into forms denoting light and shadow by a stump of dough.¹⁵⁸ Generally academies have made the distinction between drawing and painting based on colour. Drawings were

¹⁵¹ C Frayling, *100 years at the Royal College of Art: art and design*, Collins & Brown, London, 1999.

¹⁵² E Panofsky, *Idea* (1968 trans.) p. 88, quoted by Singerman, op. cit., p. 182.

¹⁵³ F Zuccari, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 182.

¹⁵⁴ J D Ingres quoted in A Boime, ‘The teaching reforms of 1863 and the origins of modernism in France’, *Art quarterly* 1. n.s. (1977) p. 20, cited by Singerman, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ I have taken the phrase from the final comment made by Bernard Ollis during our interview, ‘I think drawing is still a vital part, a central part, to helping you, as a creative being to extrapolate and work out how the world is working. The model is the ultimate challenge.’

¹⁵⁶ J Elkins, *What painting is: how to think about oil painting, using the language of alchemy*, Routledge, New York, 1999, pp. 19-38.

¹⁵⁷ See P Rawson, *Drawing*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, pp. 59-66.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* Also: S MacDonald, *The history and philosophy of art education*, University of London Press, London, 1970, p. 34 & p. 159.

deemed ‘monochrome’ (even when executed with three coloured chalks on a coloured page such as by Albrecht Dürer), and this insistence on the ‘primary’ integrity of line over form, and of monochrome over colour, is maintained even today.

While there appears to be some ambiguity in defining the material limits of drawing, a metaphorical idea of drawing is repeatedly cited in popular accounts, such as the one below, as a fundamental experience of humanity:

Since man first sought shelter in caves he has drawn. In the cycle of life from womb- to-tomb he draws before he talks-or-walks.... Such assertions are true. And no more pertinent than now, given the serious decline in drawing in most of our art schools.¹⁵⁹

The paradoxical coupling above of drawing as an innate human activity with the lament at contemporary trends in art education may not appear to be a particularly critical insight, given that it was made by a deposed art school director in the pages of a Sunday tabloid.¹⁶⁰ However, the author draws on a cultural discourse of drawing as primal, innate or essential that is prevalent even in more ostensibly scholarly texts:

This exhibition is based on the notion of the primal nature of drawing, its universality and economy of means, its expressive intensity, its ability to reveal process and autograph. Drawing is the primal means of symbolic communication, which predates and embraces writing and functions as a tool of conceptualisation parallel with language.¹⁶¹

Deanna Petherbridge’s 1991 book *The Primacy of Drawing*, evokes drawing as a ‘primary’ form of human expression, with the opening sentences above claiming that drawing is both a universal and primal form of communication.¹⁶² It is not hard to slip from ‘primal’ to ‘primate’ and imagine drawing as one of the fundamental conditions of human biology. Indeed this trajectory is taken more explicitly by Steinhart who, in his capacity as a naturalist, draws on a range of psychological, linguistic and evolutionary theories to establish the activities of figurative spectatorship, mark making and symbol recognition as innately and universally human activities.¹⁶³ However, within this assertion of drawing as a primal, essential and universal attribute of humanity itself, there is some vagueness about what drawing actually is. Activities of figurative spectatorship, mark making and symbol recognition are not only confined to drawing, and include activities such as writing, painting, carving, body painting, sand painting, earth sculpture, and even dance. The delineation of certain forms of mark-making and symbolic representation as drawing is a product of a distinctly western European cultural discourse. While this thesis is not concerned with disputing the claims of drawing as biologically innate, or primal, it is informed by a deep suspicion of any alignments between the ritualised activities of drawing within western culture with an undefined realm of ‘nature’. I am curious about why assertions of the universality of drawing are so often accompanied by claims of its marginalisation or abandonment within art institutions such as galleries or art schools. This rather paradoxical juxtaposition may serve as a rhetorical flourish to reinforce the notion of contemporary and institutionalised art as *unnatural*, but it also *naturalises* the discursive split between a somewhat mythic realm of the natural, private, innate and personal, and a generalised public

¹⁵⁹ Jeff Makin ‘Drawing on Life Lessons’ *The Herald Sun* Monday, August 7, 2006. Viewed October 5th 2006, <http://www.johnbuckley.com.au/news/drawing_hs_07-08-06.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Jeff Makin was the inaugural director of the National Art School from 1996 until he was dismissed in late 1997.

¹⁶¹ Petherbridge, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Steinhart, op. cit., pp. 73-81.

realm of art institutions as elitist, competitive, bureaucratised, over-theorised and above all, artificial.¹⁶⁴ However, this critical view of art institutions was not only confined to the avant-garde fringes of cultural production, but has been at the very core of state institutions since the nineteenth century. The romantic view of academies as stifling, stuffy, remote and artificial institutions, alienated from and destructive of the innate qualities of artists as creative geniuses, was not all that separated from nineteenth-century British arguments, based on free trade theories, that, as a state-organised monopoly on visual production, the Royal Academy stifled cultural innovation by the insistence of conformity to a rigidly prescribed program of repetition and imitation.¹⁶⁵

Within European art and art education, drawing has been associated with a specific form of a state-regulated knowledge economy, and to some extent this association continues. *Drawing* appears to be a vague enough term to operate metaphorically on a number of levels, carrying associations with the life-room and tradition, as well as more conceptual associations with process, movement and meaning making. The ambiguity of drawing as a form of general mark making, a form of pictorial recording, as making ideograms, as well as its associations with movement, geometry and gesture allow *drawing* to be cited and even championed by practitioners at polar ends of art and pedagogical practice. As Bill Prosser, artist, drawing researcher and life-drawing teacher says:

*One of the things that happens in the way that drawing is being written about now is that the relationship between drawing as a practice, drawing as an artefact and drawing as a metaphor, have become confused. And I think that for anything sensible to be said about drawing, those relationships need to be separated, and looked at individually.*¹⁶⁶

Prosser's claim that drawing literature is largely confused by the metaphorical, representational and experiential facets of drawing reflects my earlier observations about the extent to which metaphorical associations saturate discourses on drawing. While I explore the varying facets of drawing as a practice and drawings as artefacts in subsequent chapters, I would argue that the practice, experience, representation and understanding of drawing are often constituted by their relationship to each other. It is arguable that the metaphorical associations of drawing become, through force of their utterance, an important aspect to how drawing is performed and experienced as valuable, interesting or otherwise. One of the effects of tradition being invoked as the 'chain link effect' mentioned earlier in this chapter is that art practices themselves are rarely described. The discursive collapse between figurative art, drawing, and the life-room via the use of terms such as 'traditional', 'practical', 'skill based', and 'essential' is that it is hard to discern what it is about any these practices that does reinforce tradition, provide practical skills or communicate an intrinsic aspect of human existence. It also allows for a convenient slippage of all three practices into the realm of metaphor. One of the more paradoxical consequences of this slippage can be seen in the UK where drawing has arguably become a central metaphor for practice-based research within university affiliated art schools. As noted at the start of this chapter, many university art school in the UK have established research programs, published journals, conducted conferences and seminars on the theory and practice of drawing. However, according to a number of interview respondents, since the start of the twenty-first century, the number of

¹⁶⁴ This discursive split between 'natural' art and 'unnatural' art academies shares a considerable genealogy with the *Sturm und Drang* laments of early Germanic Romanticism, and other Romantic movements since. See Pevsner, op. cit., p. 191.

¹⁶⁵ Efland, op. cit. p. 58.

¹⁶⁶ Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

contact hours for studio-based drawing instruction, and especially for life-drawing classes, has been considerably reduced, or eliminated altogether. Bill Prosser described the ‘residual’ situation of the life-class, at the University of the West of England, Bristol:

*To my knowledge none of those have a time-tabled module in the life-room, and illustration only has it in their first year. So that’s one year out of three. But they do have open sessions where people can go, when they choose, but my experience of those is that they’re not particularly well attended.*¹⁶⁷

As noted earlier, drawing research has a high profile at the University of the West of England, Bristol, which appears to be in conflict with the apparently marginalised status of life-drawing classes, described by Prosser. Furthermore, senior staff, such as Roger Conlon, defended the role of life-drawing in contemporary art education, and a number of UWE students have completed doctorates on life-drawing. One explanation for the apparent cuts to life-drawing is in economics. In her book *Drawing: A Foundation Course*, Anita Taylor states that life-rooms have been closed recently for financial reasons.¹⁶⁸ During our interview, Taylor admitted that economic pressures, at the Wimbledon Campus of the London University of the Arts, had forced the life-room to close:

*Wimbledon actually had a permanent life-room until pretty recently. And it’s actually only the pressure on space that means it doesn’t have a permanent fixed life-room.*¹⁶⁹

The predicament of budget cuts was confirmed by other interview respondents. Angela Eames, Drawing Lecturer at Camberwell Campus of the London University of the Arts, described how life-drawing classes for postgraduate students were cut:

*There had been a traditional model budget, which some people know about, who’d done life-drawing. And it just stayed in place, a bit like the title deed of an old property. And it was there! And then other people discovered it... and, um, stopped it.*¹⁷⁰

Like Wimbledon, Camberwell has a strong history of life-drawing and high profile in current drawing research. Eames’s own teaching and work has been in both figurative and digital platforms, and she had sought to maintain and explore life-drawing as a critical research based practice, and included it in undergraduate and research degrees:

*This was about five years ago, yes. But it [life-drawing] was going up until then. So when I first started the MA I could use that pot, and students were able to have one-to-one models, which for that level of work is important. But then it got discovered and it was like ‘where’s this coming from?’ and ‘we could use it for something much better than life-drawing’...*¹⁷¹

Even the Slade School of Art, often perceived as the bastion of British life-drawing, has closed its permanent life-room, and now has optional sessions one afternoon a week where a model is present half the time.¹⁷² Jo Volley, who has taught at the Slade for twenty years, says that, like Camberwell, the life-room had been supported by bequests from benefactors,

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ A Taylor, & P Thomas, *Drawing: a foundation course*, Cassell Illustrated & Octopus publishing, London, 2003, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Professor Anita Taylor, Director, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

¹⁷⁰ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² Personal Observation, Slade College of Art, London, 25 April 2007.

and these had been reallocated to other areas of the drawing budget, as the life-room was seen as less important. However, like Eames, Volley questioned whether or not it could all be put down to economic rationalism, and mentioned other factors in the changing institutional culture of the Slade, such as the interests of teaching staff, and of the students who are being selected:

At that stage it was regarded as not, you know, contemporary or cutting edge enough to work in that way from the figure. And, you know, it began to shrink... in the school here.¹⁷³

Despite the reiteration of budget constraints, Angela Eames pointed out that economic rationalist arguments for closing life-rooms can easily be challenged:

In fact it's probably one of the most efficient uses of money, in terms of art school expenditure! I mean all you need is a room. Easels last for a long time. Maybe you need to maintain the washers and stuff, but those are there. People bring their own paper and boards, and it's cheap!

Jo Volley also hinted that there was also a certain reticence about life-drawing that could have influenced people:

I think it was the influence of working primarily from the model directly that was discouraged. You could work from drawings, you could work from the model, but not as a primary activity... It's not thought...¹⁷⁴

Like many respondents, Volley found it difficult to articulate exactly why life-drawing was no longer regarded as essential to the art school curriculum. It is arguable that the culture of marginalisation around the life-class within art schools is largely comprised of silence. The silence around life-drawing may be interpreted as a form of indifference or embarrassment, as it contrasts with the vocal articulations of life-drawing within amateur or non-institutional life-classes. The 'critical' silence around the life-class could be described as deafening at times. As discussed in the Introduction, aside from a couple of research theses done mostly by former models or practising figurative artists, life-drawing rarely rates a mention in academic research or contemporary art literature. Bill Prosser gives an interesting explanation for the silence around life-drawing:

Well, all I'm suggesting, and it's complete speculation, is that maybe one of the reasons why things have not been written around life-drawing in particular, or not very much has been written about it, particularly recently, is because life-drawing implies a certain kind of approach to drawing. And that approach to drawing now seems to be... at least up for grabs, if not dismissible. And as a consequence, because drawing has become so many other things, life-drawing has been marginalised along with that.¹⁷⁵

Whether or not Prosser's speculation is correct, it is very difficult for academics to defend and argue for funding of a pedagogical practice where there is no research or critical literature justifying its role in contemporary art schools. This lack of discussion within fields saturated by popular or commonsensical discourse has possibly contributed to the idea that life-drawing had 'died' in art schools decades ago, whereas, in fact these claims are not only vague, but not

¹⁷³ Jo Volley, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

entirely correct.

Interview material suggests that in the United Kingdom life-drawing classes have been marginalised or cut from a number of prominent art schools, but this is a recent trend and not the pattern internationally. In Sydney, Australia, life-drawing instruction is offered in Bachelor of Fine Arts programs at all of the art schools, and in the design degrees at three universities, while both of the state funded art galleries, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Museum of Contemporary Art, offer life-drawing classes.¹⁷⁶ Directors and teaching staff at university art schools in the five countries where I conducted research were all explicit in endorsing life-drawing as a pedagogical and research practice.¹⁷⁷ While I claim that life-drawing as a practice is still regarded as important to contemporary art institutions, I would suggest that it still largely operates within a critical vacuum, which may contribute to its marginalisation as part of the discursive field of contemporary art.

In a recent journal article, Petherbridge claims that the discursive lacuna surrounding life-drawing is based on the reluctance of art educators to explore the critical and ethical dilemmas of using naked models. Petherbridge's claim forms part of a general discussion of the ethical dilemmas of the confusion of genres of drawing within contemporary art education. Initially, discussing the republication of the *Charles Bargue Drawing Course*, Petherbridge also refers to the ideological deconstruction of Walt Disney comments by exiled Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman.¹⁷⁸ In exploring the ideological relations of particular styles of drawing, Petherbridge expresses her suspicion of the increasing popularity of graphic illustration in contemporary art and among students in art and design, and the tacit values associated with 'the return to drawing':

*In a classroom where a naked male or female body on a plinth is still regarded as a neutral object outside discourse, Mickey Mouse remains a harmless little joker.*¹⁷⁹

In the quotation above, she claims that if contemporary art educators cannot articulate a critical engagement with something as obviously discomfiting as naked bodies, then there would not be much hope for engaging with the more contentious areas of contemporary art, such as the involvement of commercial sponsors of art schools or broader ethical issues of teaching creative practice. This observation returns to Petherbridge's other criticism of the silence surrounding 'the sexual issue' discussed in Chapter Three. In many ways the critical lacuna surrounding life-drawing returns to similar territory explored in Chapter Three, and it is arguable that the absence of contemporary critical engagements with life-drawing may be based on a reluctance to acknowledge and address the sexual implications of using naked models. I return to a discussion of the banal pluralism of contemporary celebratory discourses on drawing in the following chapter; for now I am interested in how *the idea* of a critical discourse on life-drawing and art practice has been cited as one of the reasons for the decline of life-drawing.

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix 2: Institutional Life Drawing in Sydney.

¹⁷⁷ Outside of Australia I visited studios and life-drawing classes and spoke with students and teaching staff at Turku Fine Arts Academy in Finland; the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris; the Slade School of Art, University College London, University of the West England, Bristol; New York Academy of Art; New York Studio School and Montclair State University, New Jersey.

¹⁷⁸ A Dorfman, & A Mattelart, *How to read Donald Duck: imperialist ideology in the Disney comic* International General, New York, 1975.

¹⁷⁹ D Petherbridge, 'On models and Mickey Mouse' *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, Vol 24, No. 2, pp. 126-137.

19. The Postmodern Conspiracy

*With the growth in conceptualism and abstraction in the 1950s, rebellion against tradition in the 1960s and the rise of feminist consciousness, the use of the life model was often viewed as anachronistic. Where once those who worked with the figure were derided for their impropriety, they were now criticised for their conservatism.*¹⁸⁰

One of the interesting features of discourses surrounding life-drawing has been the affiliation with or disavowals of contemporary theory in relation to art practice. In the quotations above the excerpt from the publisher's review of Sandra Chesterman, *Figure work: the life-class and artists model in New Zealand*, appeals to a broad, zeitgeist account of modernity, but it fails to specify *why* attitudes to the use of the model changed. Like many accounts, it relies on assumptions that the life-class was viewed as anachronistic, or conservative, and includes feminist critiques as part of its marginalisation. Chesterman's own discussion of the negative influence of feminism on the life-class slides from art education to art history, citing the 'inevitability' of feminist critical attention to the depiction of the female nude:

*The demise of the life-class in art schools was also related to the rising feminist consciousness of the 1970s and 1980s [...] it was inevitable that the depiction of the nude and its interpretation would be a focus for post-modern feminism.*¹⁸¹

The term 'post-modern feminism' is not defined by Chesterman, but is mentioned as part of a general description of feminist interventions surrounding figurative representation and art practice. In a couple of paragraphs Chesterman cites a range of critical strategies from critical analyses of art history and the nineteenth-century emphasis on the female nude, discussion of the gendered social relations in figurative representation and feminist critiques of 'the careful reasoning of art historians such as Kenneth Clark'.¹⁸² Chesterman also cites the interventions of female artists in New Zealand: exhibiting figurative studies of male nudes, and challenging gendered conventions of female representation in their images of their own and other women's bodies.¹⁸³ Life-drawing is collapsed into a general rubric of figurative art, which includes painting and photography, and there is no specific articulation of how feminist critiques of figurative representation actually challenge the practice and instruction of life-drawing in art schools. Like the 'chain link effect' of history discussed earlier, feminism is evoked as a generalised effect, rather than a specific set of strategies and circumstances. Chesterman's curious citation of 'post-modern feminism' is not a reference to a particular tendency of either post-modernism or feminism, but invokes and conflates both as part of a general impression of contemporary critical hostility towards the gender relations of traditional figurative art.

Chesterman invokes feminist influence on life-drawing as part of a general contemporary zeitgeist, not entirely separate from the provocatively rear-garde headline of British magazine *Art Review* in 1997: 'The Nude: Is it a Victim of Feminist Claptrap?'¹⁸⁴ The headline advertised an article by Brian Ashbee, who is also notable for producing 'A Beginners Guide

¹⁸⁰ 'Figurework' University of Otago Press website, viewed 10 December 2008.
<<http://www.otago.ac.nz/press/booksauthors/backlist/figurework.html>>.

¹⁸¹ Chesterman, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 99-104.

¹⁸⁴ B Ashbee, 'Naked Pleasure' *Art Review* 49, Sept. 1997 pp. 56-7 cited in R Barcan, *Nudity: a cultural anatomy*, Berg, Oxford & New York, 2004, p. 41.

to Art Bollocks and How to be a Critic' also published by *Art Review* in 1999.¹⁸⁵ Ashbee is a trained painter and has taught art and exhibited at Britain's Royal Academy and explicitly aligns his criticism of critical theory with his familiarity and expertise as a practitioner. In Ashbee's writings and other rear-garde accounts the familiarity of practitioners with the physical material 'reality' of studio-based practices is evoked as a more authentic counter to the vagueness of abstract art, conceptual art, critical theory and feminism.

Aside from published references to the influence of 'postmodernism' or 'feminism' on life-drawing, a tacit understanding that feminism would inevitably oppose (or problematise) life-drawing is present in many verbal accounts. A number of interview subjects expressed some apprehension about my own 'feminist' agenda in undertaking research on the life-class, from the discipline of gender studies. Presumably the idea of *feminism*, in this context, is broadly based on a populist caricature of 1970s theories of representation and embodiment, discussed in Chapter Three. The vagueness of the idea of inevitable feminist opposition to life-drawing arguably facilitates a number of shifting associations between feminism, time, life-drawing and contemporary art. In the comment below, Bernard Ollis describes an ambiguous alignment of feminism, modernity and prudishness in opposition of life-drawing:

A friend of mine who was until recently head of [an art school in the UK], when I talked to her about using models at the National Art School she said to me "you still don't use that Victorian peep show stuff do you"¹⁸⁶

In the quotation above the phrase '*Victorian peep show stuff*' deliciously combines a disdain for history and sexuality, caricaturing the life-class as a nineteenth-century prudish conceit. Ollis described the speaker as a '*hard line feminist*', and in the same breath linked this to her alleged belief in abstraction and geometry. These comments produce a vivid alignment of hard-line feminism with hard-edge abstraction, and an effect of a visceral disdain with the soft contours of flesh, figuration or messy entanglements of nudity, sexuality and ethics. This rapid shift from a discussion of political ideas to aesthetic preferences illustrates how ideas about both feminism and history are deeply embedded in how art practices are articulated and defended.

Despite the generalised anxiety about feminist attitudes to the life-class, feminist theory has had remarkably little to say on contemporary life-drawing. Feminist theory of the 1970s was involved in a broad critique of figurative representations of women in art history and popular culture, but numerous feminist artists were actively involved in participating, teaching and experimenting with life-classes. Feminist art-historian Lynda Nead undertook a close critical reading of a number of amateur life-drawing manuals in the 1980s, and drawing researcher Deanna Petherbridge has continued this since.¹⁸⁷ While Nead was actively critical of many of the practices of the life-class, she also described numerous feminist interventions and experimentations with the life-class and figurative drawing. Like much scholarly or critical art literature, much contemporary feminist art writing is concerned with the aesthetic issues of photographic, non-objective, performance or new media art.¹⁸⁸ The emphasis of contemporary art literature and curatorship on discourses and concepts surrounding art practice has increased the sense of marginalisation of artists working in 'traditional' media. Arguably, it is the lack of discourse on life-drawing, within contemporary art institutions, that exacerbates the cultural assumptions that life-drawing is 'dead' or marginalised.

¹⁸⁵ See, 'About Brian Ashbee', Brian Ashbee Website viewed 15 December 2008, <<http://brian-ashbee.com/>>.

¹⁸⁶ Bernard Ollis, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

¹⁸⁷ I discuss Nead's and Petherbridge's work in Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁸⁸ See H McDonald, *Erotic ambiguities: the female nude in art*, Routledge, London, 2001.

The second aspect of relevance here to rear-garde defences of the life-class is the invocation of post-modernism, again as an undefined and yet monolithic entity, which has sought to undermine or eliminate existing art practice or art education. As the following quotations by two Australian artists demonstrate, post-modernism is invoked as the enemy of education, of traditional skills, and of free expression:

*Margaret Olley has called for education to be saved from postmodernist clutter.*¹⁸⁹

*“What it really indicates is that postmodernism tends to downgrade traditional forms of expression,” former student Tim Storrier said.*¹⁹⁰

Rear-garde accounts citing the loss of traditional art skills in an art establishment obsessed with ‘art fashion’, the art market’, abstraction, conceptualism, post-modernism or academia have become a staple of press coverage of contemporary art education internationally.¹⁹¹ They also form the bedrock of many accounts by amateur artists about their motives for participating in life-classes.¹⁹² Criticisms of an academic style of art, which rely on generalisations about contemporary art as abstract, non referential, conceptual, or unskilled, shift focus away from specific pedagogical practices within institutions to a unfocussed attack on ‘the art world’, consumer capitalism or on postmodernism itself. The spectre of postmodernism features repeatedly in the Australian press, as the excerpt below indicates:

*[...] its bias is towards the kind of art that has become the staple of biennales around the world. It is an international academic style that, for all its ostensible political content, is more closely related to mass media and advertising than to what some dismissively refer to as the residual art practices of painting and sculpture.*¹⁹³

The comment above, from an opinion piece by an art history lecturer, uses the trope of a rather vague ‘international academic style’ in criticising a university-based art school. However it falls into a similar trap to Steinhart, and fails to address the fact that many university and college art institutions, and many Biennale art fairs, do include a substantial amount of drawing, painting and sculpture. It also fails to address *why* the conceptual culture of university art education and research has generally been seen to align itself with contemporary art movements of the late twentieth century, such as post-object art, new media, and performance art, rather than traditional plastic media of painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking or photography.¹⁹⁴ Some of the reasons for the shifting emphasis of post-war art institutions are explored in Chapter Two, as are accounts of how a number of students and staff experienced changes to art education in Sydney, London and the United States during the past four decades.

In recounting their experience of art education during the 1970s, a number of interview subjects cited the culture of separation between old and new media as having manifested itself in a sense of an general cultural exclusion of painters from the forms of extra-mural art

¹⁸⁹ E Gosh, ‘Art school merger plan draws out critics’, *The Australian*, 11 October, 2006. Viewed 15 October 2006 <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20560720-2702,00.html>>

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Menkes, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹² I am defining amateur artists here as those without a Bachelors degree in art, and/or those who teach outside of the tertiary art and design education system.

¹⁹³ C Allen ‘Art’s classic controversy’ *The Australian*, 11 October 2006. Viewed 31 October 2006 <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20557945-12332,00.html>>.

¹⁹⁴ Singerman *op. cit.*, pp. 199-203.

activities such as performances, exhibitions, happenings, group studios, warehouses and gallery spaces. Arguably this exacerbated their sense of alienation from an increased pedagogical emphasis on professional induction and networking, which was part of the institutional culture of ‘university’ art schools.¹⁹⁵ As noted by other authors, this emphasis on the non-materiality of art practices was a result of increasing numbers of modernist art practitioners being employed in art schools while experimenting with radical forms of art making and teaching.¹⁹⁶ It also challenged the culture of art schools, from one based around the material and spatial locations of studios, to one based far more on a set of intellectual affiliations or discursive citations. Dean of College of Fine Arts (COFA), Professor Ian Howard taught at COFA’s predecessor Alexander Mackie in the 1970s, and recounted a vivid anecdote about how the cultural shift manifested itself in the spatial and bodily practices of different artists:

I have this little story I tell about seeing painters, who had really been very much pushed to the sideline or the background or whatever during the late seventies and early eighties, that you’d occasionally see a painter, at a performance event trying to look over other people’s shoulders, to see, because they really didn’t want to be committed to it. They just were kind of looking casually.¹⁹⁷

Some interview subjects expressed a sense of their own marginalisation from the ‘other’ art world, of ‘contemporary’, abstract, video or electronic artists and the academics that support them. While not all of these articulations of marginalisation had the same rear-garde vehemence of many of the press accounts, many of them did echo the sentiments of some of the ex-students from art schools in the 1970s and 1980s. In many ways resentment appears to come from a sense of being ‘left out’, of not being at the centre of things, or the centre of discourse. The account by a 1970s art student of the debilitating effects of silence, of being excluded from critical feedback or any serious discussion, articulated more fully, the effects of this discursive shift:

There was a general feeling, when you went off to do your thing that you had to do it their way. And if you don’t really know what their way is, it became very difficult. So for life-drawing, the whole thing about being creative or avant-garde was very much the go, but you know, I really wanted to be creative and avant-garde and out there, but there was a fjord between that and having gone through Ashton’s, where everything was very traditional and ‘look-and-put’. Well I needed a big helping hand getting across that fjord, but all I had were people who just stood there and gave me no info. So you don’t even know the right questions to ask! There’s just...it’s very difficult!¹⁹⁸

Arguably, the role of discourse in shaping practices as either central or marginal, is critical to how artists and students perceive their own subjectivity as practitioners. This role of discourse is easily expressed by art magazines, which, as other authors have shown, attract target audiences according to their coverage of either electronic, new or plastic media, but also the terms of reference for such coverage; either providing technical information, biographical narratives, philosophical discourse, or more critically a series of citations, establishing a genealogy of the work, but also playing on the reader’s own recognition of and identification

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁹⁶ L Soutter, ‘What Lies Beneath’, *Frieze*, Issue 101, September 2006, p. 177.

¹⁹⁷ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

¹⁹⁸ Former student at Alexander Mackie, 1970s, name withheld, interview with author, Sydney, 2005.

with that genealogy.¹⁹⁹ This role of discourse as a genealogical citation allows (contemporary) subjectivity to be performed as a series of iterations and reiterations, and it is principally through the mechanics of appellation and recognition that admission to the contemporary ‘art world’ is policed. Artists are less identified as contemporary or otherwise by their media, subject matter or process, and more according to their capacity to identify and be identified with contemporary art. Their marketability becomes far more a matter of the artist’s perceptible cultural capital, than of any material or connotative properties of the work.

Judith Adler argues that many of the changes in art education reflect continuous anxiety about the inability of the visual arts to define its professional boundaries.²⁰⁰ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, life-drawing was used as a major means for academies to regulate who could be regarded as a professional artist, but avant-garde movements of the twentieth century completely challenged not the significance of figurative verisimilitude, but the very boundaries of art itself. As Singerman notes, the proliferation of and increasing access to art instruction in amateur and vocational training sectors implied that ‘professional’ art institutions needed to devise a new set of criteria in order to maintain the distinction of their students and alumni:

Among the tasks of the university program in art is to separate its artists and the art world in which they will operate from ‘amateurs’ or ‘Sunday painters’, as well as from a definition of the artist grounded in manual skill, tortured genius, or recreational pleasure²⁰¹

Singerman’s argument of the centrality of discourse in pedagogy, and his emphasis on the shift from the production of *art* to the production of *artists*, seems to anneal some of the paradoxes in accounts of contemporary art education.²⁰² This notion of ‘profession’ as an identity which divides social classes into those that ‘do’ their work and those that ‘are’ their occupation, forms a tacit backdrop to much of the anti-academic bias of rear-garde criticisms of contemporary art education. Accounts aligning art education with music training, and against ‘intellectual trends’ or ‘postmodern clutter’ ignore that, unlike music or dance, practices of visual art, and especially drawing, have been centrally identified with the intellectual and discursive structures of Europe since the Renaissance, and with twentieth-century avant-garde movements since. The paradoxical defence of ‘academy’ art against ‘academic’ art does not only belie a semantic lapse, but could be said to ignore some of the fundamental affective appeal of visual art as a critical cultural practice.

20. Us and Them: Delineating Discourses

The increasing perception of the life-room as marginal to the major subject formation of university based art schools, does play a role in how various institutions negotiate their definitions of art, but it does not necessarily reflect on the dynamism of the life-class itself or the less known narratives of where it has been a site of challenge and critique. It also belies the repeated emphasis in the popular press and rear-garde accounts that that the life-class is in decline, or has declined or has been degraded in contemporary art education. Although the flaws and discrepancies in many of the ‘decline of drawing’ accounts have been critiqued in this chapter, they still have considerable resilience in public depictions of contemporary art education, and were at the heart of a recent public controversy in Sydney based around the proposed merger of the independent ‘studio based’ art schools, the National Art School (or

¹⁹⁹ Singerman, op. cit., p. 207; Adler, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 2-9.

²⁰¹ Singerman, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁰² *ibid.*, pp. 199-203.

NAS), with the College Of Fine Arts (COFA), a faculty of the University of New South Wales. Many of the claims made in the public campaign waged in Sydney by supporters of the NAS opposed to its merger with COFA resemble the rear-garde claims about life-drawing and art education explored in this chapter.²⁰³ Supporters of the NAS repeatedly referred to life-drawing as emblematic of the unique status of the NAS, and eventually the school was granted independent status.²⁰⁴ To an extent, the contrast between the visible defence of the National Art School ‘drawing tradition’ illustrates how populist ideas of life-drawing, and rear-garde narratives of art education do have some impact, at least in Australia, on public perception of art education, if not policy. At the same time as the NAS ‘controversy’, a high-profile faculty of visual and performing arts at the University of Western Sydney was closed with almost no media coverage or public comment.²⁰⁵ The UWS faculty was associated with a considerable amount of innovative art practice and interdisciplinary creative research (including research on life-drawing), which is relatively more difficult to represent and defend than the iconic image of the life-drawing studio and its link to ‘tradition’. The closure has not only meant the end of innovative arts research, but also a reduction in access to the forms of networking, part-time employment and extra-mural studio access that supported a range of practitioners in Western Sydney.²⁰⁶ Rear-garde accounts attacking universities, postmodernists and academics and declaring that art cannot be taught, are less frivolous in a political climate of considerable cuts to tertiary education, and criticisms of contemporary art education, even from generalising, inaccurate, mythic rear-garde accounts, deserve to be engaged with, if only to dispel some of the inaccuracies. Where the life-class is mobilised as a lode-stone of a perceptively populist rejection of contemporary art or art education, then it and the situations where it is practised, also warrants some scrutiny. Possibly it is as a marginalised site for a ritualised gathering of a variety of artists and arts-workers, excluded from the centres of educational institutions, that the life-class has had a more dynamic history.

It is arguable that rear-garde press accounts attacking the avant-garde or (post) modernist art institutions provide a discursive pole around which practitioners are able to align themselves, as *either* sympathetic to the claims of amateur practice maintaining a dying tradition – allowing an important sense of their social distinction as ‘serious’ artists as – *or* as familiar with, or aspiring towards, inclusion in this *other* world of institutions and practitioners of contemporary art. In the face of a considerable number of ‘rear-garde’ critiques of the ‘contemporary’ sectors, it is notable that few contemporary publications or institutions make much mention of other sectors.²⁰⁷ This silence around amateur sketch clubs, community art

²⁰³ C Allen, ‘Art’s classic controversy’ *The Australian*, 11 October 2006. Viewed 31 October 2006

<<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20557945-12332,00.html>>

²⁰⁴ J Morgan, ‘Good as gold: art school finally gets to cut loose’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 31, 2009, p. 11.

²⁰⁵ Western Sydney is a large area of recent suburban development with a single university and few facilities for visual arts education. See Appendix 2. There was minimal press coverage of the closure and no press releases from either the Tertiary Educators Union or the National Association of the Visual Arts. See: ‘Art school cuts leave west facing a blank canvas’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 October, 2006.

<<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/art-school-cuts-leave-west-facing-a-blank-canvas/2006/10/08/1160246010771.html>>.

While a number of artists weblogs commented on the dispute,

<<http://artlife.blogspot.com/2006/10/art-life-security-threat.html>> including one established by UWS

students, <http://saveuwsarts.blogspot.com/2006_10_01_archive.html>. Subsequently local councils have

condemned the closure and tendered for an external university to establish a faculty of fine arts. See

<<http://saveuwsarts.blogspot.com/2007/12/wsroc-media-release-15-december-2007.html>> All websites

viewed on 14 February 2008.

²⁰⁶ See Appendix Two.

²⁰⁷ As noted in my Introduction, Colin Cina discussed rear-garde practitioners in a conference paper. See C Cina, ‘TINA’s academy’ in N de Ville & S Foster, op. cit., pp. 41-60. As noted in the introduction, there have been a number of studies of differing art worlds, but these have mainly come from sociology or cultural

associations and private art schools includes the life-class, and appears to form a more tacit distinction between what is included in the discursive field of *art* versus *non-art*. Arguably avant-garde institutions police their own boundaries of what is admissible as *art*, by including it as *discourse*, and politely ignoring the rest. Asking academics about the non-academy sector, exposed a certain level of unease, as this conversation between two academics from University of the West of England, Bristol, Roger Conlon and Iain Biggs shows:

Biggs: There's a sort of 'Clifton art'...

Conlon: Oh, yes, yes, there is.

Biggs: How would you describe it? It's a sort of slightly bohemian middle class... people who take their life-drawing and their art very seriously...

Conlon: And use it as a way of understanding lots of other visual arts really. It's easy to dismiss them...

Biggs: No, no I wouldn't dismiss them, I'm just thinking where in terms of the socioeconomics...

Conlon: Leisure painters, leisure artists, all the magazine area deal with that as well.²⁰⁸

The comments above reinforce Judith Adler's argument about the continuing difficulty of policing art as a distinct professional field. The uneasy attempts of Conlon and Biggs to distinguish between types of artists arguably stem from a desire to be seen to be non-elitist, while still needing to articulate a critical sense of distinction about *what type of artists* higher education is associated with. They also expresses a tacit view that university art schools are, by the nature of their selectivity, the contemporary equivalents of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century academies, able to separate art students from the undescribed realm of amateur artists, and admit them into the professional realm of 'legitimate' artists. Roger Conlon, who participated in a BBC television series *Life Drawing*, and has taught at the more conservative Royal West of England Academy of Art,²⁰⁹ (Queens Road, Bristol), expressed some of the complex negotiations behind the 'amateur sector':

Well you can trace that life-room at Queen's Road back to Gaudier-Brzeska can't you? He was there as a student – and even further.²¹⁰ But there's often, it's a bit like St. Peter, people easily trace themselves back to Degas, and that sort of thing, and that's where I think that sort of observational drawing comes from. Those Daumier cartoons of people coming out and being rejected from the academy, they're not so far removed from people wanting to draw in the life-room still.

The analogy between the rejected applicants from the academy with '*people wanting to draw in the life-room still*' operates tacitly to assert the progressive University of the West of England, Bristol as the new academy, able to accept or reject would-be students and practitioners. In citing Daumier cartoons of rejects from the nineteenth-century academy, Conlon suggests that the genealogy of the current Royal West of England Academy life drawers is not within the academy, but outside of it. Conlon identifies the desire of 'people

studies, rather than within university art schools or art history and theory.

²⁰⁸ Iain Biggs and Roger Conlon, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

²⁰⁹ See Royal West of England Academy of Art website, viewed 16 December 2008, <<http://www.rwa.org.uk/>>.

²¹⁰ Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was a French figurative modernist who moved to England in 1910. I am unfamiliar with claims that he had lived or studied in Bristol.

[to] easily trace themselves back' as a way of generating a lineage, or a credible institutional affiliation, which 'professional' artists gain through a university qualification in Fine Arts. The role of genealogy and distinction among and between life-drawing practitioners and fine art institutions is explored further in Chapter Two, and it is mentioned here only to reinforce the symbolic role that an idea of 'the life-room' plays in mediating a broad field of cultural practice. In particular, the associations between life-drawing and traditional European art academies arguably allows a broad range of practitioners to claim a form of genealogy with what were extremely elitist and restricted institutions.

This chapter has explored some of the metaphors and values associated with life-drawing as a particular cultural practice associated with Western European visual art. In particular this chapter has explored the numerous paradoxes and anomalies of how life-drawing is represented, described and evoked in a range of written sources and in verbal narratives of practitioners and art educators. In particular, it has examined the metaphorical associations of 'drawing' within European art history, and the particular cultural genealogies evoked by the combination of drawing with figurative spectatorship. In claiming that the definitions of drawing are both arbitrary and contested, I have also tried to link some of the material specificities of what is included as drawing, with some of the metaphorical connotations of the emphasis on line, monochrome, and observational trace. This chapter has not produced any definitive findings on whether life-drawing is 'dead' or otherwise, nor if it is 'fashionable' or not. While the accounts assembled frequently describe the life, death, fashionability or timelessness of life-drawing, they do not provide a definitive narrative on how, when, where or why post-war life-drawing may have declined and returned as a contemporary pedagogical practice. Rather, they express an enormous amount of unease about the values associated with drawing, art and modernity. One of the most significant cluster of paradoxes concerns time, and the ambiguities of how life-drawing is evoked as being a contemporary or traditional practice. The key aspects of these differing temporal alignments involve the values that are ascribed to differing epochs, and the implied values between time, temporality, art and broader forms of cultural or social practice.

In many popular accounts, the life-class is repeatedly invoked in relation to art history, and linked to a temporal contestation of contemporary culture. Historical narratives are repeatedly mobilised as a means of contesting or transcending the present, and life-classes are presented as a fragment of 'history'. This chapter contends that the notion of history mobilised within such accounts is a profoundly contemporary cultural product, and one linked to a view of art as a form of modernist contestation. Arguably, modernist art has been historically aligned not only with cultural innovation but with the revolutionary if not spiritual imaginary of industrial capitalism.²¹¹ As this chapter demonstrates, all discourses of art mobilise some facets of the tacit expectations that artistic practice represent a form of cultural, social and even political resistance to an (often ill defined) institutionalised other. Possibly, this notion of art as a reflexive if not resistive site of cultural practice indicates that across social milieus, 'art' is a contemporary site of social hubris. As one of the 'dreaming spaces' of capitalism, all art practices are imbued with some remnants of romanticist myths of personal redemption, as well as possibilities of radical entrepreneurship and cultural contestation that have been at the heart of modernist cultural practice for over two centuries.²¹² If the current contestations about the forms of 'art' and the role of contemporary art education can be seen as part of a broader genealogy of modernist subject formation, then historical narratives do play a vital role in

²¹¹ M Weber, 'The religious foundations of worldly asceticism' in *The protestant ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [Pub. Unknown], New York, 1958. cit. in J Adler 'Revolutionary art and the art of revolution: aesthetic work in a millenarian period', *Theory and Society*, vol. 3, no. 3, Autumn 1976, pp. 417-435.

²¹² *ibid.* p. 432.

informing dangerous memory: of what contestations have been silenced, what imaginary spaces can exist beyond the present, and how institutional relationships inform even the tacit realms of the possible.

This chapter has argued that the vagueness and contradictions in the historical relations evoked in discourses on life-drawing, suggest not only a temporal dislocation, but more bizarre realignments across geography and class. By discussing published histories of life-drawing in United States, New Zealand and Australia, this chapter has noted how *drawing* has been mobilised in non-European, English speaking cultures as a means of denying indigenous peoples their visual cultures and the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous participants in visual art practices. The following chapter explores some of the tensions in generating a historical account of life-drawing in a particular location, arguing that the imaginative spaces in which life-drawing is performed often actively work to obscure or reconfigure the physical spaces in which it is practised. This discussion opens up to a deeper phenomenological exploration of the experiences in observation and mark making that occur in life-drawing classes. This chapter has explored the paradoxes in discourses on life-drawing, and the meaning and associations that drawing has in contemporary culture, and I return to this analysis in relation to nudity in Chapter Three. The influence of the broader cultural associations between drawing and nudity on life drawing are articulated in the comment from Ian Howard:

But somehow, the reason why life modelling has survived for these years and has the place it has, within culture and within the visual arts is probably because of this cute little trick that's been played, and I mean this in a positive way, of the seriousness of the occasion. And so for everyone it's a formal thing, it's a class, we probably paid money for it, we have great expectations, we know it's going to be hard, there's going to be a quiet time, where we're all doing this difficult work. And that then allows us to have this confrontation, you know, between the naked person and the clothed person. And so the device of the drawing class, just kind of melts that otherwise big gap, or welds that gap, or whatever it is, back together again.²¹³

It is hard to discern what the 'device of the drawing class' is from the complex and often paradoxical associations and meanings of drawing. Rather than annealing a gap, close examination of the life-class, and the silences permeating it, exposes numerous gaps in time, in place, and in aspiration. The silences permeating the multitude of press articles, catalogues, publications and comments on drawing from naked models conceal an enormous number of gaps: between views of art history, accounts of art education, beliefs about modernism and contemporary art. Furthermore, the metaphorical associations of drawing and of life-classes continue to be mobilised as a means of discursive contestation between competing sectors of the art world, identified as rear-garde or contemporary, and between classes of artists and arts-workers such as models and teachers.

²¹³ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

Chapter TWO: Drawing on Elsewhere

I was doing this pose that I imagined was some kind of Roman toga-y thing and I had some drape, and I was doing that [demonstrates] and I thought they were going to draw this Greek statue-y looking thing... And I saw his drawing of me, and I thought I was going to look like this Greek statue. And it was really a lovely drawing, in that it was an illustrative type drawing. But it was a drawing which showed this young girl, with a Band-Aid on one of her toes, slightly pigeon-toed, with a dirty old towel! It was really quite cute! But it was what it really looked like, you know? Hair all over, and that's what it really looked like!²¹⁴

This chapter explores some of the confusing associations between drawing and place and how historical narratives of life-drawing and art history serve to create paradoxical tensions between physical locations and the imaginative spaces of life-drawing and art practice. While the previous chapter explored some of the metaphorical associations between life-drawing and time - particularly broader notions of history, tradition, modernity and contemporaneity - this chapter explores a number of accounts of the development of life-drawing and art education within Sydney, and the perceived influence of international art movements and overseas trained artists and teachers on local practices. This chapter takes Sydney as a starting point for a localised case study for how ideas of life-drawing plays a number of complex roles in the territorialising and deterritorialising narratives of cultural practitioners.

It could be argued that as a practice life-drawing is based upon a displacing of the present into an imaginary world, or a number of imaginary worlds. In the anecdote above, Wendy Sharpe describes her imaginary aspirations while modelling for a life-drawing class at Seaforth TAFE in the 1970s, and how the very action of posing involved an imaginative pretence of being the subject of a Greek statue; her towel became a toga and her hairy living flesh becoming smooth, white marble. The invisible shift in this imaginative leap involved not only the transformation of a young Australian model into an Ancient Greek statue, but leaps across time and space, whereby a 1970s Narabeen classroom became a curious outpost of Ancient Athens.²¹⁵ While this imaginative leap was restricted to the model's private fantasy, and was starkly contradicted by the realist illustration of one of the drawers, it indicates that life-drawing classes are populated by an enormous number of invisible spaces, imagined

²¹⁴ Wendy Sharpe, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²¹⁵ Narabeen is the Anglo-Aboriginal name of the beach-side suburb adjacent to where the Seaforth Institute of TAFE was located. The Seaforth campus closed in 1999.

times, and fantastic possibilities. This chapter explores how the imaginary spaces of life-drawing saturate the experience and articulation of it in relation to particular histories of art education and art institutions.

The previous chapter criticised the historical narrative of life-drawing presented by Sandra Chesterman and other art historians, whereby antipodean art practices have been excised from the complex encounters of colonial and indigenous cultures and tacked-on to a genealogy of the fine arts of Western Europe. In piecing together a historical overview of life-drawing in Sydney, I have been wary of following the tendency of existing historical narratives on the cultural practices of colonial societies, which literally whitewash the active, continuous and contesting cultural practices of indigenous inhabitants. As noted in Chapter One, the participation of Aboriginal Australians in life-drawing classes within Sydney is considerably less than the visible presence of models and artists of Maori descent in New Zealand, however, a wide variety of art produced by Australians of Aboriginal and Islander descent has received increasing levels of international recognition, critical acclaim and commercial success. The presence and influence of indigenous art within non-indigenous art institutions, indicates that the boundaries between indigenous and non-indigenous art are less clear than existing accounts would suggest, and also plays a role in how non-indigenous artists articulate their own place and practices as legitimately Australian.²¹⁶

Sydney is an intriguing site from which to reflect on the historical development of life-drawing, as the pattern of European colonisation coincided with the British Industrial Revolution as well as the emergence of discourses concerning the crisis in artisan training and manufacture. It is arguable that European colonisers brought a view of art to Australia that was already fraught with a distinctly modernist notion of crisis, and this had a considerable influence on the types of educational and collective practices that developed here. There has been relatively little published scholarly research on tertiary art training within Australia and the major comprehensive histories of Australian art tend to focus on particular individuals or

²¹⁶ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the mediation of nationalism and authenticity in indigenous and non-indigenous visual arts, beyond noting that the separation of Indigenous and European art frequently occurs in rear-garde narratives of Australian Art. Christopher Allen concludes his history of Australian art with a brief mention of the Papunya Tula paintings of the 1970s, before declaring “That is why aboriginal art has had, practically speaking, no effect on contemporary Australian art; it can only – once again – stand for an experience of belonging that is the antithesis of our own sense of homelessness, and which for us remains a dream.”, C Allen, *Art in Australia: from colonisation to postmodernism*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p. 215.

stylistic tendencies, rather than a historical analysis of art instruction.²¹⁷ Literature on the history of Australian art education has consisted of biographies or memoirs of significant art teachers or artists.²¹⁸ There are a number of unpublished theses on particular institutions, and catalogue essays in alumni exhibitions for particular art schools, but these do not provide a critical overview of art education as a whole.²¹⁹ A 1986 catalogue from a drawing exhibition in Melbourne included interviews from artists about their experiences of studying and teaching drawing during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and occasional articles and catalogue essays referred to changing trends in post-war art education, but provided little analysis or evidence for their claims.²²⁰ A number of memoirs and exhibitions about modernism in Australia do provide a contextualised discussion of the emergence of a number of art schools and art movements in twentieth-century Sydney, as well as some of the institutional battles fought between ‘rear-garde’ and ‘avant-garde’ cultural groupings.²²¹ However, aside from a number of government reports and conference papers there is almost no published research on changes to art education and contemporary art since the start of the 1970s.²²² As this chapter

²¹⁷ The first major study of Australian art did include a chapter on art schools: W Moore, *The story of Australian Art: from the earliest known art of the continent to the art of to-day*, Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney, 1934. Other histories which mention of art schools include B Smith (with T Smith), *Australian painting: 1788-1990*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991; R Hughes, *The art of Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., 1970.

²¹⁸ Autobiographies by significant art educators in Australia include J Ashton, *Now came still evening on*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney & London, 1941; C Colahan (ed), *Max Meldrum*, Alexander McCubbin Publishers, Melbourne, 1917. Biographies include M Eagle & J Minchin, *The George Bell School: students, friends, influences*, Deutscher Art Publications, Melbourne & Resolution Press, Sydney, 1981; G Docking, *Desiderius Orban: His Life and Art*, Methuen Australia, North Ryde, 1983. In 2009 the Manly Regional Art Gallery launched a website on Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo, which includes a biography, interviews with former students and letters between Dattilo-Rubbo and the gallery.

²¹⁹ Institutional histories include; D Beck, *Hope in hell: a history of Darlinghurst Gaol and the National Art School*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2005; G Caban, *Artists and designers: ten years of Sydney College of the Arts*, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, 1985; Ivan Dougherty Gallery, *It's about time: Mackie, the first five years*, The University of New South Wales, for the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Paddington NSW, 1995; T Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof: art, passion, and politics at the Tin Sheds Art Workshop*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1995; T Kenyon, *The studio tradition: National Art School*, Manly Regional Art Gallery, Sydney, 2003; V Parish, *Julian Ashton and his school*, (unpublished thesis) University of Sydney, 1980; Power Institute of Fine Arts, *Dr John Power & the Power Bequest: the Power Institute and the Power Foundation: an illustrated survey*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1975.

²²⁰ T Gott, *Backlash: the Australian drawing revival: 1976-1986*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria & McPhersons Ltd., Melbourne, 1986.

²²¹ I Burn, *Dialogues*, Power Publications, Sydney, 1981; I Burn, N Lendon, C Merewether, & A Stephens, *The necessity of Australian art; an essay about interpretation*, Power publications, Sydney, 1988; E Chanin & S Miller, *Degenerates and perverts: the 1939 Herald exhibition of French and British contemporary art*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2005; G Dutton, *The innovators: the Sydney alternatives in the rise of modern art, literature and ideas*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1986; B Smith, *The antipodean manifesto: essays in art and history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1976; A Stephen, *Modernism & Australia: documents on art, design and architecture 1917-1967*, Miegunyah Press & Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, Vic., 2006; H Topliss, *Modernism and feminism: Australian women artists, 1900-1940*, Craftsman House, Roseville East, NSW & Arts International, USA, 1996.

²²² Bernard Smith authored a national report based on questionnaires of art students in 1975, see: B Smith, *The*

recounts, this is when the major structural change in Australian art education occurred, and when art education became part of university education.

While broad histories of Australian art have been based around a comparative discussion between the major capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne, Sydney is distinct from antipodean centres such as Melbourne, Adelaide, and even Dunedin and Christchurch in New Zealand, in the pattern of how art education emerged in the late nineteenth century. A number of commentators have noted that Sydney has never really had an official state-sponsored art academy, but has always been characterised by a number of institutions and associations funded both privately and publicly in order to promote various forms of cultural development, recreation, training, social therapy and cultural contestation. It is here that the complex associations with and roles of drawing intersect with the ambiguities of defining what constitutes art, art education or training, and its history. While histories of Sydney-based ‘fine arts’ institutions are relatively few, there is a considerable amount of historical research on what has been described as *technical* education, in which drawing and life-drawing has played a considerable role.²²³ While information on the history of life-drawing in these works is minimal, they provide a social context for the development of adult and technical education in Australia, and the broader social and cultural values associated with teaching of particular types of drawing. There is also a considerable amount of published research on art education for children and secondary students, and to a large extent the early history of adult education in Sydney included drawing as part of elementary training in writing and mathematics. To a large extent the roles of drawing instruction in numerous facets of education illustrate some of the tension between art education and the education of artists, which, as this chapter demonstrates, has been a feature of art and adult educational institutions throughout the European history of Sydney.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, discourses on life-drawing encompasses a myriad of complex and ambiguous cultural values in relation to sexuality, obscenity and

teaching of fine arts in Australian Universities, The Australian University, Carlton, Vic., 1975. Other reports on higher education include; G Parr et al, *Tertiary visual arts education in Australia: a report to the Visual Arts Board*, Australia Council Arts Information Program, North Sydney NSW, 1980; Australia Council for the Arts Visual Arts Board, *National seminar on art education and art teacher education: held at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, from 26 to 28 May 1974*, Australia Council for the Arts Visual Arts Board, [Sydney? 1974?].

²²³ J Cobb, *Sweet road to progress, the history of state technical education in NSW to 1949*, Department of Education & Training Press, Sydney, 2000, D Whitelock, *The great tradition; a history of adult education in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1974; PC Candy & J. Laurent, *Pioneering culture: Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia*, Auslib Press, Adelaide, 1994.

gender, as well as art, fashion and history. Life-drawing is taught and practised across a range of institutional and non-institutional settings, and, like drawing itself, challenges the definitions and boundaries of legitimate, authentic or professional art and other cultural and pedagogical practices. In examining the historical emergence and proliferation of life-drawing classes in Sydney, I have found that issues of genealogy of local art education have always been troubled by the issue of place, and also of social context and class aspirations associated with differing types of drawing instruction.

Initially I undertook to compile an oral history of participants' experiences of life-drawing, largely in order to derive a coherent account of the changes in post-war art education. My own desire for a narrative, for a neat story that would 'make sense', was confounded by the complex and convoluted accounts that many participants gave, not only of their own art education, but of their own movements through different and changing institutions as students, models or teachers. The impression I gained from interview material was that life-drawing has proliferated not along distinct divergent paths, but through a series of intertwined and circulating networks of artists, arts-workers and students. The second factor involved the difficulty in generating a local history of cultural practices based on social and geographic mobility. Life drawing involves not only the imaginative leaps between European colonies and the elsewhere of European academies, continental ateliers, or ancient Greece, but reflects the actual geographic mobility of artists and arts-workers. Many of the subjects interviewed have done part or all of their study in a different country from where they currently reside or work; international residencies are part of the institutional support for professional artists and, as a casual and often informal occupation, life modelling is an attractive and accessible form of employment for travellers.²²⁴ References to other places of study or work, of overseas institutions and international traditions and trends form a palpable component of the professional capital of art educators and their pedagogical style. The instruction of life-drawing is filled with references to elsewhere, and arguably the blank pages on which the trace of the model's figure is drawn operate as a profoundly displacing device. For this reason this chapter presents a rather porous version of a local history of life-drawing, incorporating accounts from other centres where art educators have studied and have repeatedly cited as significant influences on their teaching and creative practice. Researching

²²⁴ The link between life modelling and a mobile workforce arguably reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century when an enormous number of Italian refugees moved to Paris, and later London, and provided a large pool of professional artists models. See: F Borzello, *The Artists' Model*, Junction Books, London, 1982, pp. 39-41.

the concurrent changes in life-drawing within institutions cited as ‘the source’ of local practices enables a demonstration of the artificiality of these citations as fixing international institutions into an idea of the past, and displacing practices of life-drawing from the social and historical implications of the particular sites where they are practised.

Chapter One explored the problematic way in which art history is evoked in populist accounts as linear, and how discourses on art and art education function to articulate an arguably authentic, timeless, traditional idea of ‘fine art’ from what is generally a complex, ambiguous and contested field of practices and ideas. Much of the current chapter continues this deconstructive work, and, in sketching out a historical narrative of post-war art education analyses many of the tacit elements of common historical narratives about the history of life-drawing and of art education. Although I have identified a lacuna in post-war histories of Australian art education, this chapter focuses on the social history of life-drawing as it has developed within Sydney, specifically. I have found this necessary in order to contain and contextualise the oral histories generated in my research. Rather than describing how art institutions have ‘branched out’ from a single institution or academy, this chapter undertakes to map the proliferation of life-drawing as a constitutive practice allowing participants to articulate their cultural capital and negotiate their position and mobility through what art sociologist Howard Becker termed ‘art worlds’.²²⁵ In this chapter, the accounts of life-drawing and art education demonstrate how ideas of history and tradition, and discourses about institutional heritage, *perform* as constitutive elements of personal or institutional capital.

This chapter weaves through accounts of post-war art education in a number of ways. The first section, *Life-drawing and the antipodean academy*, explores the role of fledgeling art societies and drawing classes in establishing an idea of a legitimately European cultural presence in the early colony of Sydney. Section two, *Genesis: art institutions in Sydney*, introduces the field of Sydney-based art education by exploring how public discourses negotiate definitions of ‘art’ institutions within Sydney, and their institutional lineage.

²²⁵ H Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982. As discussed in my Introduction, Becker undertook a significant analysis of all cultural production as a collective activity, highly dependent on a series of inter-relationships, which challenged the notion of autonomy of art or of artists, and provided a structural analysis of the networks of arts-workers, affiliated technical specialists, educated audiences and specialised cultural promoters that collaborate to produce and circulate objects and activities within various art spheres. Becker’s insistence on art being defined by a series of tacit but collectively agreed upon conventions of practice and interpretation allows for an account of changes in the values and practices of art and art pedagogy to be linked to the changes within institutions, such as art schools.

Drawing on interview material as well as publications associated with a number of art schools, this section explores how ideas of a singular origin of art education structure current accounts.

The following two sections rely largely on secondary sources to develop an overview of how three strands of drawing education emerged in Sydney. Section three, *From school of the arts to The Arthouse*, narrates the various genealogies connected to the institution and location of the Sydney Mechanics School of the Arts; section four, *The Sydney Art School*, discusses the history and influence of Julian Ashton on art education in Sydney. Section five, *Other places: Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo and Italy*, explores the flourishing of modernist artists and modernist art instruction in the inter-war years. It examines some of the tensions and ambiguities in how modernist art teachers negotiated their shifting positions within Sydney. Section six, *Technical instruction*, explores the role of drawing and art education in the history of East Sydney Technical College, noting the role of drawing and technical instruction in legitimising government funded art education.

Having described the structure of early drawing instruction in Sydney, the following sections combine interview material and primary research in order to examine the relationships between life-drawing, life modelling, modernism, art education and class. Section seven, *Modelling modernity*, describes how life modelling enabled working-class artists to gain an art education; section eight, *Life-drawing and antipodean modernism*, explores how life-drawing was experienced in post-War art education, and section nine, *The 'sixties and modernist change*, examines the tensions in accounts of Australian modernist art between the influence of North American abstraction, the decline of life-drawing, and the emergence of local figurative and avant-garde art movements.

The last three sections explore how the values and roles of life-drawing shifted in the emergence of university of art education in Sydney since the 1960s. Section ten, *The new academies*, traces the development of art subjects in universities, and the emergence of Colleges of Advanced Education in Sydney, and how life-drawing was perceived to be marginalised within the new institutions. Section eleven, *Ideas over skills*, examines the shifting emphasis of university art education towards subject formation of a particular class of artists. The final section, *Drawing skills and creative economies*, examines the revival of skills in contemporary art education and questions why life-drawing has been reduced to a question of observational training. This discussion of observational training is continued in

Chapter Four, which critically examines the practices and relationships in ‘observational’ techniques of life-drawing.

The twelve sections described above explore a myriad of imaginative spaces, trajectories and affiliations associated with the history of life-drawing classes in Sydney. Exploring the institutional settings of life-drawing classes enables the imaginative spaces of life-drawing to be linked to broader social and historical conditions, and to be considered as a site of cultural contestation, institutional rivalry and social mobility. This chapter is the most ambitious of the thesis, as it involves addressing a major lacuna in Australian art history, as well as contextualising many of the claims and discourses explored in Chapter One. The disciplinary intervention of this chapter involve a re-narration of Australian art history and art education based around art practices, rather than institutions or individuals. In examining historical relations around the practice of life-drawing in Sydney, this chapter demonstrates the possibility and necessity for a comprehensive history of art practices to be written. More significantly, the performing narratives within this chapter demonstrate the complex contestations of place and genealogy in which all historical studies of antipodean cultural practices is embedded.

21. Life-drawing and the antipodean academy

Conflicting ideas of history, prestige and place form a part of many narratives of life-drawing practice, and the imagined associations of particular institutions or historical figures. Blue Mountains artist Margaret Weatherall has modelled throughout Sydney for forty years, and used to run her own weekend workshops, and make elaborate costumes for her posing. She is well acquainted with the playful worlds occupied by models, and also drawers. Weatherall was evocative in describing the aspirations of amateur drawers:

Because they want to hang onto something. It's a dream. It's like an illusion, and it's like, when I model down at Norman Lindsay's [gallery], and you've got that type that go there, maybe some younger ones. And they start talking about the past. And if you get down into where they had the water-hole down there, you can walk down there. And people are really reminiscing, they are saying 'I wonder what it was like' and they start talking about it, this amazing life with people in costumes running around the garden or naked and these amazing parties going on. And they visualise this thing in their head that probably hardly existed. [...] You know, people don't look at the real stuff, and see well – somewhere, somebody has made this work, and a lot of it. But they have a dream, like Ashton's

and 'Oh yeah, the fabulous Ashton's school'.²²⁶

The importance of genealogy and history has been a recurrent aspect of the history of life-drawing and the development of local academy-style art institutions in Sydney. According to Jean Riley, the first 'official' life-classes in Sydney appear to have been held in 1880 by the Art Society of NSW; however, other accounts suggest that this may not be correct.²²⁷ William Moore describes the opening of art schools in Sydney in 1812 and 1815, although it is unknown whether these held life-drawing classes or not.²²⁸ In contradiction to the claims made by Christopher Allen, an Art Academy was established in Sydney at the same time as Victoria's National Gallery and National Gallery School.²²⁹ The NSW Art Academy met in 1871 in order to establish a National Gallery, and a National Gallery School. Antique casts were provided by London's Royal College of Art and classes in Drawing, Painting and Sculpture were given by two graduates of Rome's *Accademia di San Luca* at rented premises in the city known as Clark's Assembly Rooms.²³⁰ Drawing classes were given by Giulio Anivitti from 1875 until 1879 when he returned to Italy.²³¹ While no mention of life-drawing classes at the NSW Art Academy has been made, Anivitti had offered to teach life-drawing at the Mechanics School of Arts in 1874, and been declined. The NSW Art Academy was short-lived, and is often confused with the Art Society of NSW, which emerged briefly afterwards, in 1880.²³²

The Art Society of NSW was apparently formed as an objection to the lack of professional artists in the NSW Academy of Arts, and the lack of exhibition space.²³³ The society successfully petitioned for state government provision of exhibition space and funding for classes from 1885.²³⁴ However a group of local artists and students started to protest at the increasing influence of non-artist members of the NSW Art Society, and after a midnight meeting on the steps of the post office, they established a separate organisation; the NSW

²²⁶ Margaret Weatherall, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²²⁷ Riley (op. cit., p. 226, Note 26) states that the Royal Art Society commenced classes on 26 August 1880.

²²⁸ Moore op. cit., p. 214, See Appendix 3, Fig 1: Clarks Assembly Rooms.

²²⁹ The National Gallery of Victoria was first proposed in 1860, and classes ran from 1870. Moore, p 217

²³⁰ W Moore op. cit., p. 224

²³¹ A Bradley, 'Anivitti, Giulio (1850 - 1881)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, © 2006 Australian National University. Viewed on 16 January 2009, <<http://www.edb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030041b.htm>> .

²³² Moore op. cit., p. 168.

²³³ *ibid.*, p. 161.

²³⁴ See *The Royal Art Society of New South Wales* website. Viewed 16 February 2009, <<http://www.royalart.com.au/history.html>>

Society of Artists.²³⁵ The Art Society of NSW had initially received a government grant of £250 per annum in order to start a school, and when the Breakaway Society of Artists was formed, it received equal funding from the State Government. In 1908 the two societies were persuaded to re-amalgamate by the threat of both losing their funding if they refused, and with regal recognition, the Royal Art Society continued to use a combination of government grants and member subscriptions to hold regular classes in its rented chambers and organise regular exhibitions, competitions, and travelling scholarships.²³⁶

22. Genesis: art institutions in Sydney

Chapter One mentioned a press controversy over a proposed merger of two of Sydney's fine art schools, the National Art School (NAS) and the College of Fine Arts (COFA). Press coverage included lengthy opinion pieces written by art history staff at each institution in the only national daily newspaper, as well as a number of articles in the local press, including lengthy commentary by art reviewer, John McDonald. As noted previously, much of the controversy centred on the role of life-drawing and traditional studio skills in the identities of the two institutions. However, the dispute also extended to the issue of genealogy, and the historical roots of each institution. The assumed truths of what defines an art school are especially pertinent how both institutions describe their historical trajectories. While both institutions have only emerged in the past 35 years, they both claim direct lineage from drawing classes held at the oldest publicly funded tertiary institution in Sydney. On its website, the College Of Fine Arts describes its genealogy thus:²³⁷

*The College of Fine Arts, a faculty of Sydney's University of New South Wales (UNSW), can trace its history to the formation of The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts in 1833, which then evolved into Sydney Technical College in 1878.*²³⁸

This gives a narrative account that produces an effect of a continuous institutional lineage of more than 170 years. Curiously enough in its website the National Art School, *also* claims the same institutional root, but lists the date as 1859:

The National Art School has a long and fascinating history stretching back to 1859. It had its

²³⁵ Moore, op. cit., p. 168

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 170. Moore states that the two societies amalgamated in 1908 when the State government threatened to remove funding from both.

²³⁷ 'History of COFA', *College of Fine Arts* website © University of New South Wales, 2006, viewed 1 July 2007, <<http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/about/history.html>>.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

origins, over a century and a half ago, as the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts.²³⁹

The NAS/COFA controversy suggests that the complex associations of life-drawing with rigour, training, dilettantism, pluralism and post-modernity are mediated not by any particular practices within the life-room, but by the cultural capital of particular institutions where it is practised. Institutions often rely on genealogy in order to legitimise their own status as credible art institutions, as well as the status of particular teaching practices or philosophies. It is arguable that the anxiety over origins and influences is exacerbated in colonial cultures, where fine arts is often about importing, copying or reproducing practices and institutions that emerged elsewhere. This anxiety is compounded and complicated by the fact that the cultural and intellectual circles within emergent colonial societies are usually very small, and very interwoven, which makes any claims of distinct institutional lineage somewhat tendentious.

23. From School of the Arts to The Arthouse

The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts was never an art school or art academy as such, but was a hybrid institution for adult instruction, based loosely on the development of Mechanics Institutes and Schools for the Arts in nineteenth-century Britain. The aims of the Sydney Mechanics School of the Arts were outlined by its founder, Rev. J. Carmichael as: ‘... engaging for the benefit of members, teachers and lecturers of the various branches of science and art’.²⁴⁰ The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts was followed by the foundation of similar institutions throughout the 1830s, in regional centres such as Newcastle, Maitland and Taree, as well as in larger centres such as Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.²⁴¹ The aims of these Mechanics Schools always seemed to be torn between utilitarian training for tradesmen and the moral edification and cultural activity for members of the working and middle classes. Within these ambitious aspirations, drawing classes were instituted in a variety of circumstances and ostensibly to address quite distinct, if not conflicting, needs of creative fulfilment and commercial training. The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts predated the University of Sydney, and so was the first formal attempt at any sort of educational or cultural institution. Carmichael’s proposals for an institution that would promote the edifying qualities

²³⁹ ‘NAS History’, *National Art School* website © NSW Department of Education and Training 2007, viewed 1 July 2007, <<http://www.nas.edu.au/History.htm>>. The entry for the ‘National Art School’ in Alan McCulloch’s *Encyclopedia of Australian Art* also lists the founding date as 1959. See A McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Hutchinson of Australia, London & Melbourne 1968, p. 400.

²⁴⁰ Henry Carmichael, Reg. #3, SMSA Minute book, vol.1, 7&8 March 1833, cit. in J Riley, ‘The movement’s contribution to the visual arts: three New South Wales case studies’ in Candy & Laurent, op. cit., p. 212.

²⁴¹ D Whitelock, *The great tradition; a history of adult education in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1974.

of science and art among the labouring classes of the British Empire were applied to a small penal colony in the south Pacific, where the transportation of enslaved members of the British working classes as convicts had only just ceased and where identifiable classes of mechanics or artisans were easily confused with the jumble of educated, semi-educated and illiterate immigrants, aspiring to class as well as geographic mobility.²⁴²

While William Moore claimed that drawing classes did not commence at the Sydney Mechanics School of Art (SMSA) until 1859, a series of lectures on ‘the principles of drawing’, was given by John Skinner Prout in 1841.²⁴³ By 1843, Prout expanded his lectures to actual classes, and by the 1848 the SMSA offered geometrical and architectural drawing on a regular basis, and appointed an art examiner in 1857.²⁴⁴ Instruction in drawing allowed the emerging and crisis bound SMSA to be seen to address a number of facets of education: from the idea of art as moral improvement for the working classes, to a form of demonstrable technical education, a form of discipline and a means of promoting and developing a fine arts culture in the new colony. In addition to drawing classes, the SMSA purchased numerous books on art for its library and organised an exhibition in 1857.²⁴⁵

While the SMSA seemed to have been a hybrid institution for cultural development and education, there was increased pressure for it to provide utilitarian instruction for working and artisan classes.²⁴⁶ Mechanical drawing began to be offered in 1865 as well as a separate ladies class in 1869.²⁴⁷ By the 1870s the Chancellor of Sydney University was proposing the establishment of a distinct Working Men’s College.²⁴⁸ The Working Men’s Technical College was established in 1878 and initially administered by the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, although in 1883 this was transferred to a government run Board of Technical Education. In 1884 the Board of Technical Education advertised a range of evening classes, private classes, ladies classes and free popular lectures at Sydney Technical College.²⁴⁹ By 1886, advertisements for Sydney Technical College stated that: ‘Females may join any of the

²⁴² Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-5.

²⁴³ See Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

²⁴⁴ Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 9, Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

²⁴⁵ Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

²⁴⁶ Cobb (*op. cit.*, p. 166) claims this maybe have been due to the subsequent founding of the university of Sydney, as well as the massive economic and population growth in Sydney, and the foundation of London’s Royal College of Art.

²⁴⁷ Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

²⁴⁸ Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Whiting, (*op. cit.* p. 173) claims that Woolley first proposed a Working Men’s College in 1860.

²⁴⁹ See Appendix 3, fig. 3.

classes'.²⁵⁰ I return to a discussion of the trajectory of drawing instruction and art education within Sydney Technical College later, but firstly wish to discuss the field of art and art education which had emerged in late nineteenth-century Sydney.

In many ways the history of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and the Working Men's College illustrates the difficulty in ascribing a specific genealogy to art and educational institutions. Having been founded before any other educational or arts institution, and with a broad charter of general promotion of science, literature and art, the SMSA influenced and enabled the founding of numerous other institutions - from the Board of Technical Education in 1883, to the numerous evening colleges which were later managed by the board of public instruction, to the adult education movement. The collaboration between the SMSA and the University of Sydney later flourished in the involvement of Sydney University tutorial program in running public tutorials through the Workers' Educational Alliance and the establishment of its own extra-mural courses.²⁵¹ After the establishment of the Sydney Technical College, the SMSA became incorporated as a separate organisation and still continues to offer a range of classes and lectures, as well as operating a lending library.²⁵² During the 1980s a number of rooms at the top rear of the building were used as artists' studios and exhibition spaces, and as the venue for life-drawing classes running most weekdays.²⁵³ This only ceased when the SMSA building was sold in 1987, the life-classes moving to a warehouse in Brandling Street Erskineville where they continued to run until 2006.²⁵⁴ The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts building was renovated in the 1990s and now operates as "The Arthouse Hotel", which hosts life-drawing once a week, as well as "Dr. Sketchy's Anti Art School", and recently "The Artful Hen".²⁵⁵ Possibly this uncanny hybrid of Bauhaus citation, burlesque entertainment and academy pastiche is the most fitting progeny for an institution, which seemed from the outset to be always grappling with a multitude of conflicting ideas and aspirations around the roles and ideals of art and commerce.

²⁵⁰ See Appendix 3, fig. 4.

²⁵¹ B Peace, M Tennant, P Manser 'The evolution of evening colleges in New South Wales', in M Tennant, *Adult and continuing education in Australia, issues and practices*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 248-50.

²⁵² See 'About Us', *Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts Website* ©Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 2007. Viewed 1 February 2009, <http://www.sydneymsa.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=26>.

²⁵³ Riley, op. cit., p. 224, and Jane MacGowan, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²⁵⁴ Jane MacGowan, interview with author, see Appendix 1. MacGowan sold the warehouse in Brandling Street in 2006, and the sketch club was renamed 'Brandling Art Society', and continues to organise life-drawing 5 days a week in rented premises.

²⁵⁵ I discuss these sketch clubs in Chapter Three. See 'What's On' *The Arthouse Hotel, 275 Pitt Street, Sydney. Website* Viewed 1 February 2009. <<http://www.thearthousehotel.com.au/index.asp?id=85>>; C Purcell, 'The hairy Adonis', *The Age*, 23 December, 2003, p. 9. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 November 2006.

24. The Sydney Art School

There is one art school in Sydney that has a continuous history longer than any others. In its current formation, the Julian Ashton Art School, is not readily associated with the notion of a professional, cosmopolitan, or even legitimate art school; however, it does have a considerable and prestigious association with many twentieth-century artists, as well as justifiably claiming to be ‘Australia’s oldest continuous fine art school’.²⁵⁶ Julian Ashton was a significant early member of the Art Society of NSW, having been president from 1886 and instrumental in establishing the art classes of the NSW Art Society.²⁵⁷ Ashton was heavily influenced by his training under the French teacher Rodolphe Julian, who opened an independent ‘free’ (or open) academy of art in Paris, catering for the numerous foreign, female and working-class artists who were excluded from the Ateliers of the *Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, but wished to study drawing and painting.²⁵⁸ Initially moving to Sydney as a press illustrator, Ashton gave private instruction to lady students from 1886, but apparently started a life-drawing class for women after requests from his students. As his second pupil Alice Muskett recalled:

*When I joined it, there was no such thing as a life-class for women in Sydney; so when the number of student increased, we asked Mr Ashton to start one and he readily assented.*²⁵⁹

Ashton had been appointed instructor at the NSW Art Society in 1892, This last activity led to Ashton being dismissed from the NSW Art Society School, which led him to establish his own *Académie Julien* in 1895, funded largely by subscriptions from current and former students. Although Ashton insisted on an apprenticeship with the antique cast before entering the life-room, he apparently regarded the casts as ‘models of convenience’ a form of general observational practice, rather than the traditional academic ideal of the human figure.²⁶⁰ Ashton was also strongly influenced by modernist emphasis on avoiding copying, and encouraged quick sketching, influenced by progressive Parisian ateliers and the Slade School of Art in London. Ashton’s arrival in Sydney coincided with the establishment of a number of press publications and a booming demand for cartoonists, illustrators, printmakers, and sign-writers. Julian Ashton, many of his alumni, and associates in the NSW Society of Artists, undertook illustration work, and were active printmakers as well as painters. The emphasis of

²⁵⁶ See: Appendix 3, Fig 15, The Julian Ashton Art School website.

²⁵⁷ Parish op. cit., p. 3.

²⁵⁸ J Milner, *The studios of Paris: the capital of art in the late nineteenth century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, p. 117.

²⁵⁹ Alice Muskett quoted by Moore (after Julian Ashton) op. cit., p. 224.

²⁶⁰ Parish, op. cit., p. 12.

Ashton's school on drawing arguably served the dual purposes of instructing aspiring artists as well as training competent commercial and press illustrators. In 1907, Ashton's school was renamed 'The Sydney Art School', and continued its association with the re-amalgamated NSW Royal Art Society, and successful alumni such as George Lambert, Ellioth Gruner and Sydney Long.²⁶¹

Whereas in the nineteenth century, Julian Ashton was associated with the freedom and modernism of bohemian Paris, by the twentieth century, he became associated with the rigid parochialism of the Sydney art establishment. A number of histories of Australian art cite the changing status of Julian Ashton, Norman Lindsay and Arthur Streeton as they shifted from their avant-garde stridency of the late nineteenth century into their conservative establishment role in the twentieth, although to fix Julian Ashton's School into an antipodean version of the rear-garde academy obscures the numerous levels at which the classes at 'Ashton's' provided for education, networking and employment for a range of artists, designers and illustrators.²⁶²

Julian Ashton's relationship with female artists appears to have been ambivalent. On the one hand he provided education, support and employment to numerous women students, and yet he often recounted stories or comments explicitly denigrating the frivolity of his female students, associating their art study with marriage aspirations.²⁶³ In a number of anecdotes, Ashton was more explicit about the link between art education and a particular form of feminised subject formation, as illustrated by this quotation from William Moore:

*One of the students, on saying good-bye to Mr Ashton on the eve of her marriage said, "you have taught me the way to be a good wife; you have taught me the way to live in teaching me how to draw..."*²⁶⁴

Possibly the contradictions in Ashton's treatment of his female students may relate to his own clumsy attempts to mediate the varying class aspirations of his female as well as male students. Ashton earned the loyalty and gratitude of model Rose Soady, by providing a network of other artist employers, as well as additional work in cleaning as well as modelling for the school.²⁶⁵ Despite the prominence of male alumni and teaching staff in public collections and on the board of the Art Gallery of NSW, Ashton's was not entirely separate

²⁶¹ Moore op. cit., p. 225. See Appendix 3, Figs. 13, 14: The life-class at Julian Ashton Art School, 1931.

²⁶² Bernard Smith and Ian Burn critique this viewpoint.

²⁶³ R Lindsay, *Model wife: my life with Norman Lindsay*, Ure Smith, Sydney & London, 1967, p.10.

²⁶⁴ Moore op. cit., p. 225. On Page 1 of his Introduction, Moore claims: 'I got much information from Julian Ashton, who related incidents so well that I took down his stories almost word for word.'

²⁶⁵ Lindsay, op. cit., p.12.

from the emerging female-dominated modernist movement in Australian art. Ashton was the first teacher to offer life-drawing to women in Sydney, and the majority of Ashton's students in the nineteenth century were female, with many of them continuing to have serious careers as artists, often training and exhibiting in England and France.²⁶⁶ Ashton employed the modernist artist Margaret Preston to teach design from 1920 to 1932, and other modernist artists such as Jean Bellette, Thea Proctor, Rah Fizelle, Grace Crowley, Anne Dangar and John Passmore also taught at the school.²⁶⁷

Although William Moore's 1934 study of Australian Art described the Sydney Art School as 'the leading institution for the teaching of art in New South Wales' it was not the only art school operating at the time.²⁶⁸ After studying at the Atelier Colarossi in Paris, Ashton's former student Joe Watkins returned to Sydney and opened a highly successful art school, which by 1934 had instructed over 3000 students.²⁶⁹ According to former students, Watkins did not use antique casts, but emphasised observational sketching from life models.²⁷⁰ Watkins remained on good terms with Ashton and was an active member of and taught at the Royal Art Society. It may be that Watkins avoided any conflict with the Sydney Art School by being seen to appeal to a different type of student, as the Sydney Art School became increasingly associated with the establishment institutions of the Royal Art Society and the Art Gallery of NSW, Watkins' classes at the Royal Art Society were in 'life-drawing for commercial art', and he is associated with having trained Sydney's commercial illustrators and designers.

25. Other places: Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo and Italy

It is arguable that Ashton and Watkins provided an antipodean connection to the Paris atelier teaching of the late nineteenth century. By establishing small private art schools, open to any students who could afford the fees, they enabled a laissez-faire version of modernist art education to emerge. However the main influence on Sydney modernist art came from Italy, via Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo, who opened his own art school in 1898, scarcely three years after Ashton established his academy.²⁷¹ Dattilo-Rubbo is famous for having taught modernist

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8, Parish *op. cit.*, p.12.

²⁶⁷ Parish, *op. cit.*, p. 9, Image 3.

²⁶⁸ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

²⁶⁹ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 230. Neither Moore nor McCulloch give dates for the founding of Watkins school, although McCulloch provides Watkins' dates as birth; 1866, arrival in Australia, 1882, death: 1942. McCulloch *op. cit.*, p. 571.

²⁷⁰ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²⁷¹ J Campbell, *Cav. Antonio Dattilo- Dattilo-Rubbo - Painter and teacher and some prominent pupils*,

painting and having encouraged students to travel to Europe; however, he was also a prominent member of and instructor at the Royal Art Society for 25 years. Rubbo's presence at the Royal Art Society was probably derived from his association with the Royal Academy of Naples, from which he had graduated before migrating to Sydney in 1897. However, Rubbo's Italian connections were largely with European modernism, and through his frequent trips to Europe he enabled many local artists and art students to have access to images and ideas that were radically reshaping art practice and instruction around the world. While Rubbo's teaching had a significant effect on the generation of early Australian modernists such as Grace Cossington Smith, Roy de Maistre, Nora Simpson, Roland Wakelin, Rah Fizelle, Dorrit Black, Grace Crowley and Anne Dangar, his position at the Royal Art Society was arguably based on his association with the academic tradition, literally embodying a lineage from Renaissance Italy. Dattilo-Rubbo's school received no government assistance and he continued to teach drawing at high schools and the Royal Art Society in order to support his family and his own painting practice.²⁷² Dattilo-Rubbo was one of a number of European immigrants who in private art classes brought levels of innovation to the periphery of art instruction that were excluded from or marginalised within the more established art schools of Ashton's and East Sydney. However, Dattilo-Rubbo's almost contradictory associations as both traditionalist and modernist, may explain the relative success he obtained in comparison with other European modernists, such as the exiled Hungarian modernist Desiderius Orban, who opened an art school in 1938 and continued to teach art until the 1970s.²⁷³

26. Technical instruction

Before World War One, the NSW Government had provided funding for a range of art and adult educational institutions, from the Royal Art Society to the National Art Gallery of NSW, as well the NSW Department of Education Gallery. Throughout the twentieth century, government funded art education became increasingly focussed on Technical Education. By the 1890s Sydney Technical College was firmly established in newly built premises in the inner city suburb of Ultimo. In addition to classes in architectural and mechanical drawing,

exhibition catalogue, Manly Art Gallery & Museum, 5 December 1980 to 18 January 1981, reproduced on *Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo: Mentor, Teacher and Artist*, website ©Manly Art Gallery & Museum 2008. Viewed 3 February 2009, <http://www.antoniodattilorubbo.com.au/life_dattilo_rubbo_3.html>.

²⁷² Manly Art Gallery & Museum, *Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo: Mentor, Teacher and Artist* website © Manly Art Gallery & Museum 2008. Accessed 3 February 2009,

<http://www.antoniodattilorubbo.com.au/life_dattilo_rubbo_3.html>.

²⁷³ See Chanin & Miller op. cit., pp. 83-86.

the college offered a range of art courses, including life-drawing and sculpture modelling, as well as painting and copying casts and reproductions.²⁷⁴ In addition to art instruction, Sydney Technical College also developed a collection of fine manufactures, in order to serve as models of study for design students, and the museum of manufacture and design remained on the Ultimo site, eventually developing into the Powerhouse Museum.

In 1922 the Department of Technical Education transferred its art and design courses to the site of the old Darlinghurst Gaol, in what became known as East Sydney Technical College.²⁷⁵ The art courses developed into a five-year diploma of art or design, which was the only State recognised professional accreditation.²⁷⁶ The diplomas offered at East Sydney were not in *fine arts*, but in Drawing, Painting, Sculpture and Design, and as noted by Christopher Allen, the status of East Sydney ‘Tech’ as *an art school* has been under continual contestation throughout most of its history.²⁷⁷ By the outbreak of World War One the diploma course at East Sydney Technical College had been reduced to a two year certificate, with the department renamed as Elementary and Applied Art, emphasising ‘instruction’ for ‘practical use’ in specific ‘vocations where the ability to make a descriptive sketch, or drawings qualified to fill particular trade requirements, is of infinite value’.²⁷⁸ While the Diploma course in *Art* was re-established by 1930, applied arts and design continued to be taught, and the emphasis on ‘industrial arts’ was maintained in many official documents produced by the Department of Technical Education.²⁷⁹

To a certain extent this tension between a utilitarian applied arts training and a more abstract notion of fine arts training reflected similar concerns that plagued London’s Royal College of Art (RCA), which was also overseen by a government Department of Science and Art. The courses offered in the late nineteenth century at Sydney Technical College resembled those offered at the RCA: being a mixture of ‘fine arts’ subjects such as sculpture and painting; with certificates in art teaching; and ‘applied arts’ such as repoussé work, pottery, black and white illustration and art decoration.²⁸⁰ Like the RCA, East Sydney appears to have been fraught with tension between a ‘utilitarian’ industry based *applied* arts course, and a

²⁷⁴ See Appendix 3, Fig 4, Plaster cast drawing room, Sydney Technical College, 1889 & Fig. 4, Life –drawing and painting, Sydney Technical College, 1909.

²⁷⁵ Kenyon, *The studio tradition*, p. 15.

²⁷⁶ Allen in Beck, op. cit., p. 182.

²⁷⁷ Cobb, op. cit., p. 156.

²⁷⁸ Allen in Beck, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 182-183.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 178

broader education in *fine arts*. While in England the class anxieties about the roles of art and design were principally regulated through restricting access to life-drawing, this appears to have not been the case in Sydney.

In many ways, East Sydney Tech could be regarded as a satellite institution of the South Kensington system, which oversaw the RCA and many colleges of design throughout the United Kingdom, but the genealogy is not as straightforward as it appears.²⁸¹ South Kensington supplied casts to the NSW Academy of Arts, and the staggered progression of drawing subjects from casts to still life to the life model occurred in a number of local institutions. Although the South Kensington system had considerable influence on Australian art education, particularly at East Sydney, commentators have noted that the development of life-drawing classes in Australia was associated less with the sort of Victorian prurient anxieties than in the UK or in New Zealand.²⁸² Where New Zealand artists often had enormous difficulties procuring models, and many artists undertook training in Sydney or Europe, Australian art of the early twentieth century appeared to be associated with a rugged modernist enjoyment of the naked body as part of a nationalist athletic ideal.²⁸³ Naked or near naked bodies characterised many early modernist works, and commentators have argued that life-drawing was promoted as a ‘no-nonsense’ and ‘practical’ training consistent with an athletic, sun worshipping, anti-elitist ideal of colonial nationalism.²⁸⁴

27. Modelling modernity

The inter-war years were a ‘boom’ period for the expansion of art and drawing instruction in Sydney and increasing numbers of women and modernists started running their own courses and sketch clubs. While Norah Simpson had taught art classes from 1915, Grace Crowley used life-drawing classes in her studio, as an alternative to her confining experiences teaching at Ashton’s and East Sydney.²⁸⁵ Mary Marsdon opened a sketch club at Sydney Teachers College in 1919, and from this the Teachers College Art Society developed a collection of prints and books on modern art, and scholarships for its members.²⁸⁶ The trainee-teacher Rah Fizelle was the first beneficiary of the Teachers College scholarship, which

²⁸¹ Cobb (op. cit., p. 12) claims that Sydney Technical College did not want to be associated with the South Kensington system.

²⁸² Chesterman op. cit. pp. 36-39.

²⁸³ J Peers ‘Bodily excellence is displayed: life models and the nude in Melbourne and Sydney c.1880 to 1940’, *Australian Cultural History*, no.13, 1994, pp. 148-163.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁸⁵ D Modjeska, *Stravinsky’s lunch*, Picador, Sydney, NSW, 1999, p. 187.

²⁸⁶ Chanin & Miller, op. cit., p. 103.

enabled him to spend 1921 as a day student at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School.²⁸⁷ After studying at Ashton's, and travelling in Europe, Fizelle joined forces with Crowley, and their school increasingly became a sort of early modernist salon, acting as a social node where artists of various persuasions could gather, draw and talk. Access to the naked model seems to have acted largely as a structural pretext for networking and creative exchange among artists and students excluded or alienated from the larger institutions, and it also allowed a greater variety of potential artists to have access to modernist art education.

Nancy Borlase moved to Australia from New Zealand in the 1930s to study art, but being unable to afford any formal art training, she worked as an artists' model and attended night classes. Living in the bohemian Sydney suburb of Kings Cross, Borlase discovered the Contemporary Art Society and the circles of modernist artists in Sydney and in Melbourne. In both cities, Borlase used modelling as a way of accessing networks of contemporary artists and teachers. In Sydney, Borlase combined modelling at East Sydney with attending and modelling for the Crowley-Fizelle school:

I think it was [19]31. I got to know a lot of people and I was always open to criticism and as I say Grace Crowley was very good and so was Rah Fizelle. They had studios down at George Street and I would go there and draw and so and I got to know other people that were very helpful.²⁸⁸

Borlase was not the only artist who used life modelling as a way of accessing and paying for their art education. Tom Bass moved to Sydney from Brisbane in the 1930s, specifically in order to draw. He was unsure where he should go to study, and asked the advice of another artist, Wolfgang Cardamatis, who replied:

"I know exactly what you could do, you go and get bookings as a model, at every art school in Sydney." And he said "While you're posing, just listen to the teacher teaching, and in the rests, you can walk around and look at the drawings and talk to the students, and you'll very soon find out what school you'll want to go to." And he was right.²⁸⁹

Borlase's and Bass's comments convey an impression that for Australian artists, modelling had less of the moral opprobrium attached to it than in England, North America or New Zealand. Unlike the experience of Rose Soady thirty years earlier, Borlase claims that she did not suffer any stigma or disdain from other artists or students because of her work as a

²⁸⁷ B Smith, *Australian Painting*, p. 199.

²⁸⁸ Nancy Borlase, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²⁸⁹ Tom Bass, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

life model:²⁹⁰

.....and I think this person was talking to me was aware of the fact that I used to pose in the nude. Nobody thought anything wrong with it at all.²⁹¹

However, both artists also described the difficulties associated with modelling and with their poverty. Borlase participated in a Melbourne strike of artists' models over lengthy poses and lack of heaters, and was never able to complete any formal qualifications in fine arts. Bass paid for lessons at at Rubbo's by posing, but had to wait until after World War Two to be able to study at East Sydney Tech. Night classes and small art schools offered a source of income and a flexible access to art education, but the professional education of artists was still associated with daytime classes at East Sydney and the Sydney Art School. Distinction between artists and non-artists was enforced along class lines of those who could afford not to work, and attend full time art classes and pay the fees.

While Australian art education had less prurient anxiety around life-drawing than England or New Zealand, for most, the life-room was still regarded as a privileged site. Unlike England and France, male models in Sydney were expected to wear a *cache-sex* while posing until the late 1960s.²⁹² Although life-classes had been open to female students and those from varying class backgrounds since the 1890s, and despite the open access to life-drawing at numerous venues during the inter-war years, throughout the last century, the education of artists became increasingly regulated and associated with the reputations of the Sydney Art School, or East Sydney Technical College, where access to life-drawing was restricted to the higher echelons of art training.²⁹³ The need to protect the anticipated pleasure of naked spectatorship from associations with recreation is what arguably separated the 'professional' artist from the amateur or dilettante, and linked the pleasure of the life-room to distinct associations of professional privilege as a *serious* artist. The idea of 'rigorous' life-drawing is what arguably characterised *serious* art schools from more *laissez-faire*, private or amateur institutions, and could have contributed to the reputation that the Sydney Art School and East Sydney Technical College had as Sydney's 'academy' institutions over the art schools run by Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo and JS Watkins. However, the major difference

²⁹⁰ Lindsay, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁹¹ Nancy Borlase, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²⁹² Tom Bass, Robert Eadie, John Bell, interviews with author, see Appendix 1. Eadie said he purchased a sporting 'truss' support (jockstrap) from the chemist and John Bell said he improvised with a hanky and string.

²⁹³ Parish, op cit., p. 19; Lindsay, op cit., p. 10.

probably lay in the capacity of the former schools to attract substantial numbers of day students to their full time courses in painting and sculpture.

Although drawing classes at the Royal Art Society also followed the Academy style progression from cast to model, it never seemed to develop any status as a serious art academy, and the organisation folded in 1941.²⁹⁴ The Royal Art Society was not the only casualty of the war, as the Art Schools operated by Dattilo-Rubbo, Grace Crowley and Rah Fizelle had all closed, and JS Watkins's school ended with his death in 1941. By the 1940s the elderly Julian Ashton had retired from teaching, and Sydney Art School was renamed 'The Julian Ashton Art School' in his honour. Ashton had protested vociferously at government funding of art education, and his school remained outside of any government system of art accreditation.²⁹⁵ The school stuck defiantly to its nineteenth-century program, retaining the staggered introduction of the life model to the present day.²⁹⁶ As Leila Spencer, who attended Ashton's after having completed a TAFE certificate in the 1970s, recounts:

*I was at Julian Ashton's, and it was about 12 months after being in the antique room. So the life-class was supposed to be a kind of very ... something you had to work up to. It was a very precious moment when you finally walked into the life-drawing room.*²⁹⁷

The fortunes of the Julian Ashton Art School changed after World War Two, principally because of the boost that Commonwealth Repatriation Training Scheme funding gave to Veteran education at the Government-managed East Sydney Technical College.²⁹⁸ This caused an explosion not only in student numbers, but principally in the *types* of students studying art. Like Ashton's, for most of the early twentieth century, the fine arts classes at East Sydney Tech had been dominated by affluent female students seeking careers as artists or as art teachers.²⁹⁹ After World War Two, the gender balances of both institutions shifted considerably, as did their status and credibility as serious, professional art schools.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁴ Bernard Smith rather savagely described the demise of the NSW Royal Art Society (which reformed in the 1960s) as follows: 'Under W. Lister-Lister, a painter of huge uninspired studio-painted "*plein-air*" landscapes, who was the president for 41 years from 1900, a group of ageing professionals increasingly irritated by contemporary fans of expressionism joined with aspiring but inept amateurs to champion exhausted forms of naturalism inherited from Bernard Hall, Julian Ashton, Arthur Streeton and Hans Heysen.' B Smith, *Australian painting*, p. 189.

²⁹⁵ Parish, op cit., p. 25.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Leila Spencer, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

²⁹⁸ The Commonwealth Repatriation Training Scheme, like the GI Bill in the USA, provided government funded places for the training of returning veterans of World War Two. See T Kenyon, *The studio tradition*, p. 15.

²⁹⁹ Ian Burn notes that art education had been dominated by women students since 1870. I Burn, *Dialogues*, p. 109.

³⁰⁰ The Julian Ashton Art School continued to attract a variety of notable contemporary artists up until the early

Nowadays, the cultural capital of the privately owned and non-award based Julian Ashton Art School may be conveyed by its website, which as sponsored by a commercial art index and linked to a number of animated banners for commercial galleries, artists supply outlets and tourist attractions, does not present a particularly imposing aura of academic respectability.³⁰¹

Before World War Two, the majority of art students at East Sydney were women; however, after the war all courses at East Sydney Technical College became increasingly dominated by young male war veterans from a variety of backgrounds, and with a variety of aspirations. Tom Bass and Guy Warren had both attended night classes at Rubbo's and Watkins's schools, and after undertaking military service during the war, they both attended East Sydney in the late 1940s. East Sydney Technical College was not only boosted by the development of a post-war modernist art movement, but by the massive expansion across the entire Technical Education sector that occurred during and after World War Two. Numerous Technical Colleges were opened in suburbs of Sydney and provided the chief form of training for military personnel, in which technical drawing and illustration played a considerable role. While art education was marginalised during the War, the proliferation of drawing instruction across a government administered network of Technical Colleges arguably provided the basis for a regulated system of professional recognition in fields associated with technical instruction, such as drawing and modelling.³⁰²

Christopher Allen claims that the name 'National Art School' appeared in 1935, although it did not receive greater currency until after World War Two.³⁰³ The 1950s have been described as the 'golden age' of the NAS as a number of its male alumni and teaching staff came to occupy significant positions in terms of state patronage, particularly modernist sculptors such as Lyndon Dadswell, and painters such as Godfrey Miller and William Dobell.³⁰⁴ In his 1968 encyclopedia entry on The National Art School, Alan McCulloch described it as 'the most advanced art training centre in Australia during the period 1938-62'. He also claimed that the institution had been renamed as the 'National Art School' in 1960 with the art schools in Technical Colleges at St. George, North Sydney, Newcastle, Canberra

1970s. John Olsen studied there and led students on a protest at AGNSW in 1953. See Dutton, op cit., p. 122.

³⁰¹ The home page of the Website for the Julian Ashton Art School features a miniaturised image of a classical nude with the invitation to '...develop your artistic skills as you walk the same path as the many great Australian artists before you'. See Appendix 4, Fig. 16.

³⁰² NSW Department of Technical and Further Education, *Spanners, easels & microchips: a history of technical and further education in New South Wales 1883-1983*, NSW Council of Technical and Further Education, Sydney, 1983, pp. 89-90.

³⁰³ C Allen, 'The bones of a history' in Kenyon, *The Studio Tradition*, p. 58.

³⁰⁴ Allen in Beck, op. cit., p. 184.

and Wollongong incorporated as 'Branches'.³⁰⁵ By the late 1960s, art courses were offered at Technical Colleges in the Sydney suburbs of Meadowbank, Dee Why, Kogarah and Nepean and throughout rural New South Wales. As commercial demand and public funding increased for technical training in fashion and industrial design, as well as commercial illustration, a number of private fashion and graphic design colleges opened. In the 1960s and 1970s, the formerly professional realm of private sketch clubs expanded into an expanded sector of community or recreational education at adult education colleges, suburban art galleries and community art centres, and this has continued since.³⁰⁶ As life-drawing increasingly became associated with an accessible form of skills acquisition and creative leisure, the emphasis of artists' education underwent a considerable change.

28. Life-drawing and antipodean modernism

Before World War Two, a number of staff at East Sydney had been associated with modernist art, and in 1933 the entire staff had petitioned the Art Gallery of New South Wales to purchase prints of modernist works from Europe.³⁰⁷ However, the format of drawing classes, especially life-drawing, at the National Art School, remained fairly rigid until well the 1970s. Robert Eadie, a student at the National Art School in the 1960s, claimed that despite some acknowledgements of modernism, the curriculum was still very conservative:

*Because we actually had to do... I remember doing the Diploma, and as part of the Diploma you had to do set pieces, and one of them was a nude study. And you were marked on that almost as a classical study, which was ridiculous.... It could be one in the manner of a cubist painting, or the manner of a post impressionist painting, or something like that. You could impose something on it, but it was still a nude study, and that was the deal.*³⁰⁸

The Dean of the College Of Fine Arts, Ian Howard, completed a Diploma of Art Education at the NAS in the late 1960s and, as he put it:

...we went step by step. We didn't just rush into the flesh. So we spent, either a whole session, a semester, or even the year, doing life-drawing. I think it probably was even called life-drawing, but in fact very dead life-drawing, because they were plaster casts, and then, the second year, we went onto life modelling, drawing live figures, and so it would have been 1966 I suppose, and that was all fairly

³⁰⁵ McCulloch, op cit., p. 401.

³⁰⁶ See Appendix 2: Current Life-Drawing Classes in Sydney.

³⁰⁷ Chanin & Miller, op. cit., p. 123.

³⁰⁸ Robert Eadie, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

normal.³⁰⁹

The paradoxes in these accounts of a modernist art school retaining a highly conservative and unchallenged format of life-drawing instruction are exacerbated in relation to the particular way in which Sydney post-war modernism has been described in art historical accounts. In a famous manifesto and in a number of subsequent essays, prominent art historian Bernard Smith based his claims of a post-war Australian modernist art movement based on the development of figurative art.³¹⁰ Given that art students in Sydney were studying the figure according to a nineteenth-century format until the 1970s, this account could appear to be completely implausible. However, it is arguable that the contradiction between art education and art history may reflect on the changing status of the values attached to the life-class, as the culmination of the exclusive education of artists.³¹¹ After World War Two, drawing education proliferated in numerous technical colleges and design courses and the fixed format of the life-room became increasingly associated with a form of *training* or practical education in applied techniques rather than with the subject formation of professional artists.

The staggered format of art education, where life-drawing was seen as the culmination of months or years of *dogged* study, was an imitation of the post-Renaissance training within European academies, but it reflected class anxieties surrounding naked display and spectatorship that were particularly English. The development of the South Kensington system of graded drawing instruction for designers has been discussed elsewhere, and it had a considerable influence on artists' education in former British colonies such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa throughout most of the twentieth century.³¹² It appears that the South Kensington model of graded instruction allowed life-drawing to be taught across a range of settings, according to a format that appeared to be rigorous and legitimate, and yet without any scope to question or articulate the purpose of drawing from life models, or the particular drawing techniques, or their relationship to the types of art and design that were

³⁰⁹ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, see Appendix 1. See Appendix 3, fig. 11, Cast drawing at East Sydney Technical College, 1960s.

³¹⁰ B Smith, *The antipodean manifesto: essays in art and history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1976; B Smith, *Two commentaries on the exhibition 'Aspects of Australian figurative painting 1942-1962: dreams, fears and desires'*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1984.

³¹¹ In subsequent publications, Smith clarified his claim, stating that figurative modernism emerged in Melbourne, and post-War modernist art in Sydney was geometrical or colour field abstraction. B Smith, *Australian Painting*, pp. 325-330.

³¹² MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 163. MacDonald describes the 23 stages of drawing instruction introduced by Henry Cole, which continued until 1946. *ibid.*, p. 204.

being promoted in courses. As Guy Warren, a student at the NAS in the late 1940s puts it:

But the use of the model was, at that stage, to do with the idea of the human figure as a high order in classical form. And I remember in fact saying “Why do we have to do this?” and it had nothing to do with, say sexuality, or eroticism, or all of the normal things that a nude figure is associated with. It had to do with an idea that you don’t hear much now. It’s now regarded as good to draw because it’s so variable and easily accessible. And it’s interesting. It’s more interesting than a bowl of fruit or something like that. But that wasn’t the case then. It was good for you.³¹³

The fixed format of life-drawing reinforced the importance of representing the human figure as the pinnacle and centre of serious art practice, and at the NAS was undertaken with separate classes in anatomy and perspective. As late as 1974, students still studied anatomy, as Noel Thurgate, former student, teacher, and head of drawing at the NAS recounts:

It was a two hour lesson every week, and then we’d draw it, you know draw that particular bone, and it was learning the medial, lateral, posterior, interior ends of everything, all of the protruding lumps and bumps...³¹⁴

While life-drawing remained fairly rigid, by the 1960s, the influence of abstract constructivism had already reached the East Sydney sculpture department and abstract drawing was already a part of the curriculum. The NAS was not immune to student radicalism either, with students taking to the streets in 1967 to protest the conservative curriculum and requirement for drawing from the cast.³¹⁵ However the disjunction between academic life-drawing and formalist abstraction in studio practices remained, as Tom Bass, recalls:

In 1973 I was asked to go and teach the life study at the National Art School, and I was there for one year. And in the course of that year, I realised I could never teach what I wanted to teach, in the way I wanted to teach, at that place.³¹⁶

Bass’s frustration with the NAS prompted him to establish his own sculpture school, including life-drawing and figurative modelling as part of the training of artists to see accurately and without prejudice, and to work creatively and expressively with their materials.³¹⁷ It appears that the post-war ambience of the National Art School was marked by a combination of rigid academy-style instruction, progressive modernist classes, as well as a

³¹³ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³¹⁴ Noel Thurgate, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³¹⁵ Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof*, p.14.

³¹⁶ Tom Bass, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, see also Tom Bass Sculpture Studio School website, viewed 12 March 2009, <<http://www.tombasssculptureschool.org.au/>>.

certain amount of critical ferment among students.³¹⁸ Guy Warren articulated how, despite the curriculum, the NAS became a site for progressive encounter and exchange:

So the emphasis was quite definitely on the figure per se, and this came from the traditional European background of the figure being central to the training of an artist. I mean the fact that Abstract art had been around for a while, and lots of interesting things had happened at the beginning of the century, 1910, 1920, but they hadn't reached the parameters of East Sydney Tech. But amongst the students there was an awareness, and you know, people like Tony [Tuckson] and other people, a German boy called Klaus Friedeberger, and, you know, things were... we were questioning, doing things that hadn't been seen there before.³¹⁹

It is arguable that institutional cultures are not merely products of pedagogical programs, but of how students negotiate their instruction in relation to their own subject formation as artists. The notion of how an art school generate certain types of artists became central to the changes that occurred after the 1960s, specifically with the emergence of university-based art education. The associations between life-drawing and tradition were already coming into conflict with an increasing interest among art students and educators with modernism, and as later sections show, as institutional identities moved away from their emphasis on structured pedagogy, the structured format of life-drawing classes appeared to become redundant to contemporary art education.

29. The 'sixties and modernist change

In the mid 1960s a deep revolution in the history of art took place – so deep, in fact, that it would not have been an exaggeration to say that art, as it had been historically understood, came to an end in that tumultuous decade³²⁰

The comment above, from North American art philosopher, Arthur Danto, may appear to be slightly far fetched in relation to 1960s Sydney, which was still largely dominated by a conservative and parochial art culture. Many of the arts funding bodies and the Art Gallery of NSW were dominated by the small circle of artists and critics associated with the Sydney Art School, who fiercely defended a parochial version of post-impressionist landscape painting, against the perceived decadent influence of European modernism.³²¹ An exhibition of modernist paintings from some of the major European art galleries was icily received in the

³¹⁸ See Appendix 4, Fig. 9, Life-Drawing class, East Sydney Technical College, c. 1940s & Fig. 10, Life-Drawing Excursion of the 'Strath Art Group'.

³¹⁹ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³²⁰ AC Danto, *Encounters and reflections: art in the historical present*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p. 6.

³²¹ B Smith, *Australian Painting*, p. 168.

late 1930s, with both National Galleries refusing to display the exhibition. During World War Two, the Art Gallery of NSW had only reluctantly agreed to store the collection, including works by Picasso, Mondrian, Monet and Matisse, in their basement, preferring to save wall space for the luminaries of the Sydney Royal Art Society.³²²

The challenges to the parochial rear-garde of Sydney art institutions made by modernist artists, curators and educators occurred in the 1960s, and Danto's comment relates to a number of themes in how Australian modernism has been described, particularly in relation to modern art and local art institutions. A number of critics have noted how post-war accounts of Australian modernism have been fraught with a tension between cultural identity and geographical positioning that manifests itself around time and place - in particular the notion that Australia is isolated from contemporary art, and that local artists are always trying to catch with a modernism that has already occurred elsewhere, or to reinvent a cultural heritage for art practices that have lost their European roots.³²³ Art critics have only just recently started to note the acute ethnocentrism that such accounts imply, and that calls for an 'authentic Australian' art ignore the emergence of Indigenous modernist art movements since the 1970s.³²⁴ While contemporary Australian art has reoriented itself in relation to an increasingly globalised international art market, modernist art history still narrates itself in relation to the elsewhere of Northern Europe and the United States, and Australian modernism is largely configured as a problem of white origins and Anglo-Saxon affiliations.

Danto's claim is an important preface to post-war changes to Australian art education, because it signals the shift in art institutions towards a form of progressive cosmopolitanism and awareness of and participation in international avant-garde movements, which persists today. Whereas professional Australian artists had almost always travelled and often studied in Europe, from the 1960s they start travelling to and studying in North America. The influence of United States modernism on Post-war Australian art and art education has had a significant effect on how local artists and institutions articulated their practice and positioning in the shifting waters of contemporary international art practice. The idea of 'the sixties' as a time of concentrated radical change operates metaphorically arguably in order to contain and explain the enormous changes that did occur in art institutions after World War Two. It is hard to deny that the effect of these changes was cataclysmic and dramatic, not only on

³²² Chanin & Miller op. cit., pp. 208-214.

³²³ See I Burn, N Lendon, C Merewether, A Stephen, *The necessity of Australian Art: an essay about interpretation*, Power Publications, Sydney, 1988, pp. 66-94.

³²⁴ T Smith, 'Postmodern Plurality' in B Smith, *Australian Painting*, pp. 510-516.

institutions, but on students, teaching staff and the types of artwork that were produced. The changes were also linked to wider socio-economic changes in Australia, which included increased class mobility and access to tertiary education, as well as the development of new social protest movements, which emphasised links between avant-garde cultural production and social change.

Although it was held at the end of the 1960s, *The Field* exhibition of North American-influenced Australian abstraction, held at the Art Gallery of NSW, arguably represented the culmination of the enormous cultural change that had swept through the Sydney art establishment in the preceding decade.³²⁵ According to Ian Burn, who exhibited in *The Field*, it was one of three major events in the sixties that signalled and promoted a major shift in how Australian artists viewed contemporary art. The same year as *The Field* opened in Melbourne, Clement Greenberg gave a lecture at Sydney University Fine Arts department, while the year before, the Art Gallery of NSW had hosted the blockbuster exhibition of *Two Decades of American Painting*.³²⁶ As noted by Robert Eadie, the major exhibition of post-War US abstraction became indelibly associated with major change in local art institutions:

*Well, the abstract change, happened... the massive one was when the American exhibition showed in 1969, and that broke the art world wide open. There was nothing like it: Rothko, and Pollock, Ad Reinhart and people, nobody had ever seen anything like it. But there was certainly a move away from the rigidity of the classical ideals and post impressionist ideals during the sixties, but it wasn't really strong until that came. And it hit like a bolt. Everyone could forget all the other stuff, and the art school had to contend with it. It was simple.*³²⁷

'Ben', who studied at the NAS in the 1950s, was less enthusiastic about the influence of US abstraction, saying that it commercialised art practice, and led to teachers being appointed according to exhibition success rather than drawing skills:

*I noticed when I came back to teaching in the seventies, I really thought a lot of them were up themselves and real egotists. Some of them were imposing their own ideas of style on people and they couldn't draw themselves anyway. Some of them couldn't draw, so they were sort of making style instead of just doing what they were supposed to be doing. Which was teaching people to draw the body as it is. But it all ties in with what I think happened during the sixties.*³²⁸

Mike Esson, who had originally studied in Edinburgh, also spoke of the influence of US-

³²⁵ I Burn, 'The sixties, crisis and aftermath' in I Burn, *Dialogues*, p. 99.

³²⁶ Although Eadie dates the American exhibition as 1969, published sources state that it was shown at AGNSW in 1967. Clement Greenberg addressed the Power Institute in 1968, and *The Field* exhibition of Australian modernism opened in Melbourne in 1968 and Sydney in 1969.

³²⁷ Robert Eadie, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³²⁸ Name withheld, interview with author, Sydney, 2005.

based abstract art on Australian art education practices:

*I was quite shocked when I came back to Sydney, in the late seventies, because abstract expressionism had really a very strong foothold here, and I hadn't seen the evidence of that in Britain, the sort of abstract expressionism, which is largely an American notion.*³²⁹

The influence of North American abstraction on art education is cited in a number of accounts, including those from the United States itself, as in this excerpt from Peter Steinhart:

*Since the middle of the twentieth century, abstraction and expressionism have been the lodestones of fine art, and drawing has been diminished and disparaged.*³³⁰

The rise of abstract art, or abstract expressionist art, is often implicated as one of the reasons for the decline of life-drawing, and figurative art generally. Claims such as those by Steinhart, above, are supported by interview subjects such as Nancy Goldring, who has taught and practised in New York since the 1970s:

*Life drawing really fell on hard times with the rise of abstract expressionism, and this idea of a universal abstract language, and art as a kind of medium for this abstract language. It wouldn't necessarily have to negate the idea of a life model and extracting from it, but it wasn't done. And maybe it had something to do with photography here too, and a kind of division of tasks. But it was considered banal, and this idea of rendering reality was not of interest anymore.*³³¹

While some accounts argue that this marginalisation was a product of the increasing art market popularity of abstract art, this does not account for the decline of instruction in life-drawing. While a lot of modernist abstract painting was specifically non-objective or anti-representational, other work had elements or traces of figurative gestures or marks. Many of the abstract expressionist artists had studied life-drawing, and some continued to teach it. Carole Robb, who studied at Glasgow College of Art in the 1960s, said she studied the figure as part of abstract rendering:

*When I was in art school, we would have people come over, younger painters from New York would come over and maybe work with us for a week or so. And they would have known De Kooning, or they knew him at that time, because he was dealing with the figure at a certain point.*³³²

More convincing explanations can be found in accounts of the changes in art institutions themselves. A number of interview subjects mentioned the increasing role of universities in art education as being responsible for the major changes in art instruction. Harold has taught sculpture in New York and Philadelphia for over thirty years. He described the training in figurative skills as having been 'purged' from US art education, and said:

³²⁹ Mike Esson, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³³⁰ P Steinhart, *The undressed art: why we draw*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2004, p. 5.

³³¹ Nancy Goldring, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³³² Carole Robb, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

*Well I think it started probably... when most American art schools were under the university system. American art schools didn't become a very important part of the university system until after World War Two.*³³³

Howard Singerman cautiously links the rise in university based art training to the dominance of abstract expressionism, but did not ascribe the decline in life-drawing to a direct result of the formal properties of abstract art itself, but more as part of a cultural affiliation between avant-garde art movements and the new forms of art education:

*Both its critics and its supporters maintained that the teaching of abstract expressionism took place and took hold on campuses rather than in the art schools... the claim is exaggerated, but abstract expressionism was understood early on as a university style...*³³⁴

According to Singerman, the influence of abstract expressionism on North American art education had less to do with the intrinsic aesthetic principles of abstract painting itself, than the changing socio-economic circumstances of post-war artists, and the shifting priorities of post-war art education. In the United States, post-war art education expanded considerably after World War Two through the 'GI Bill', which, like the CRTS scheme in Australia, provided government-funded places for returning veterans, at accredited art schools.³³⁵ The complicated process of accrediting art courses led many art schools to amalgamate with universities, and fine arts was offered as part of a college degree in Liberal Arts.

While US art education became increasingly dominated by university colleges, this does not necessarily explain why the focus shifted entirely to abstract art, or why life-drawing became excluded from college art education. Singerman cites a number of factors explaining why the 'New York School' of abstract painting became critically harnessed to a nationalist ideal of post-war modernism and scientific supremacy, some related to the philosophical properties of the work itself, and others relating to the socio-economic factors influencing the increasing presence in the 1960s of internationally successful artists in college art classes.³³⁶ Similar explanations were given by Ian Burn, but these still do not explain why life-drawing specifically was marginalised in university art schools.³³⁷ Singerman claims that the shift in

³³³ Name withheld, interview with M. Mayhew, New York, 2007.

³³⁴ H Singerman, *Art Subjects: making artists in American universities*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, p. 150.

³³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 128-129. The GI Bill principally boosted the expansion of college based art education, as universities were the most well equipped to justify art instruction as being in the national interest as part of a general 'liberal arts' degree.

³³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 130.

³³⁷ Actually Singerman cites Ian Burn's critical discussion of modern art and art education. *ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

post-War American art education away from the studio practices of life-drawing wasn't connected to the formal properties of modernist and late modernist art but to a more intrinsic shift within art colleges, from an emphasis on skills acquisition to one on subject formation. I return to a discussion of the issue of subject formation later, but firstly I wish to recount how university art education emerged in Sydney, and the role of life-drawing within this.

30. The new academies: university art education in Sydney

University art education did not emerge in Australia until after World War Two, and then it was largely through the support of private sponsors and benefactors. In 1946, *The Melbourne Herald* supported the establishment of the School of Art History at Melbourne University, and in 1963, with the death of his wife, John Power's bequest of nearly two-million pounds to the University of Sydney came into effect.³³⁸ John Power was an Australian doctor who had moved to the United States and had been influenced by the US college education model.³³⁹ The Power bequest was dedicated to three areas within the university; the first was the power fine arts library, the second was the development of a collection of contemporary international art, and the third was to establish a faculty of fine arts within the University of Sydney.³⁴⁰ The ambiguity of the term fine arts; encompassing studio based art instruction and history and theory of fine arts appears to have caused some controversy. Therese Kenyon claimed that the first director of the Power Institute, Bernard Smith, was adamantly opposed to the teaching of fine arts practice in university³⁴¹. In a 1964 essay, Bernard Smith claimed that a Faculty of Fine Arts within the University of Sydney would be in direct competition with the National Art School, and recommended that the University concentrate on separate areas of fine arts than the education of artists.³⁴² The Power Institute hosted public lectures by international figures in art history and theory, such as Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg, and organised a three-year program on the history of European modernism, North American art, and eventually Australian art.³⁴³ Lecturers included Donald

³³⁸ Burn, et. al., op. cit., p. 55.

³³⁹ B Smith, 'Sir Herbert Read and the Power Bequest', in B Smith, *The antipodean manifesto: essays in art and history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1976, p.70.

³⁴⁰ See: *Dr John Power & the Power Bequest: the Power Institute and the Power Foundation: an illustrated survey*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1975; Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof*, p13: John Power's will charged the university of Sydney to 'bring to the people of Australia, the latest ideas and theories [...] concerning contemporary art'.

³⁴¹ Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof*, p. 12. Kenyon quotes Marr Grounds who was teaching Architecture, and lobbied Smith for the fine arts department to support an art studio at the university.

³⁴² *ibid.*, p. 78.

³⁴³ *ibid.*, pp.12, 13.

Brook, a British trained sculptor and critic who had arrived in Australia in 1962.³⁴⁴ In his classes on cubism and dada, Brook encouraged students to engage in practical activities such as making collages, and to consider the materiality and processes embedded in art objects as well as their meanings and history. Brook's interest in studio-based instruction coincided with those of Marr Grounds, a recently appointed lecturer in the faculty of Architecture.³⁴⁵ Architecture students had received a general form of art instruction emphasising drawing since the 1960s. From 1967 many of these classes were taught by painter Lloyd Rees, who taught and stored his teaching materials and plaster casts in a vacant shed adjacent to the University.³⁴⁶ Through a chance encounter on a bus, Rees offered a number of classes to Guy Warren:

*With Lloyd [Rees] I was helping him teach drawing, whatever that was. At the tin sheds, there were courses being offered to people, so I taught painting, and if there was drawing, I taught drawing.*³⁴⁷

The 'Tin Sheds' were a collection of corrugated iron sheds adjacent to the university that had been used for electroplating and other industrial research by the CSIRO, and were gradually being vacated. From 1968 a couple had been used intermittently for art classes and in 1969 Marr Grounds, Donald Brook and a number of tutors working at the university decided to break into the locked sheds, and establish all of them as permanent open artists' studios.³⁴⁸ A number of the lecturers and tutors such as Bert Flugelman and Marr Grounds opened up their studios to students from all faculties within the university, encouraging them to collaborate on projects.³⁴⁹ Bert Flugelman worked with electrical engineering students to develop kinetic sculptures and Guy Warren established his own painting studio on-site in which he encouraged students to visit and collaborate on works. Warren continued to teach studio classes for Lloyd Rees, but he became more excited by the challenges offered in tutoring design course being developed by Marr Grounds for Architecture students. Warren and Grounds supported a student strike in 1972, enabling the experimental work at the *Tin Sheds* to be credited to architecture degrees.³⁵⁰ Grounds introduced a radical interdisciplinary program where non-architects devised tutorials programs interrogating the social, ethnographic, and critical nature of formal elements of space, colour, form and how people

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 11.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁴⁷ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 20.

interacted with and could influence their built environments.³⁵¹ Subsequently Warren became director of what was formally titled as the Sydney University Art Workshop from 1973 to 1975.³⁵²

In its early years, the *Tin Sheds* became the centre of a convergence of social and cultural movements, becoming a site for a radical experiment in art education and practice, that echoed some aspects of the practices occurring at California Institute of the Arts but also included a more politically radical approach to involving the local community and protest movements in art practice.³⁵³ Throughout the 1970s a number of collectives continued to operate at the *Tin Sheds*, including the Earthworks collective who produced hand-made posters for anti-War protests, feminist movement and the green bans movements, and sculptors making props and banners for political protests and street parades. The Women's Art Movement met and produced work and held exhibitions at the *Tin Sheds* and many students and artists lived on site, prefiguring the artists squats established in surrounding suburbs and inner city areas of Sydney.³⁵⁴ The 24-hour presence facilitated the fusion of creative activity with living conditions, allowing a cross fertilisation between performance, new media and radical social theory as well as traditional studio arts media such as drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking and ceramics.

Amidst this radical ferment, the role of the *Tin Sheds* as a University institution continued. By 1976 Sydney University fine arts students were also allowed to have subjects at the *Tin Sheds* credited to their degree, and the workshops continued to provide studio based instruction for University students and the wider community. While life-drawing was not 'abandoned' at Tin Sheds it wasn't interrogated either, and in an environment where everything else was under radical critical scrutiny, it appeared to have occupied a somewhat peripheral role. Guy Warren showed a photograph of him teaching a life-class at the *Tin Sheds*, and stated that it was offered, but mainly 'as a look and put thing.'³⁵⁵

The role of life-drawing classes as an unquestioned exercise in 'look and put' appears to

³⁵¹ *ibid.*

³⁵² *ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁵³ For a detailed discussion of the experiments occurring at California Institute of the Arts in the 1960s and 1970s, see J Adler, *Artists in offices: an ethnography of an academic art scene*, Transaction Books, New Jersey, 1979 and M Schor, *Wet: On painting, feminism and art culture*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1997.

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

³⁵⁵ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1. See Appendix 3, Fig. 12: Life-drawing class, Tin Sheds Art Workshop, 1970.

be an extension of its role in the vocational training courses run by TAFE. It appears that across a number of sectors life-drawing became disassociated from the subject formation of artists, and reduced to a manual exercise, with the messy implications (and exciting possibilities) of observing and responding to naked models largely left ignored. It could be argued that the reason for this shift lay in the relationship to emerging art schools and university faculties and the Department of Technical Education. Rather than life-drawing being associated with the *ancien régime* of a recognised state academy, it could be argued that in Sydney, life-drawing was associated with the unquestioning compliance of training courses administered by the Department of Technical Education. Although art history students were encouraged to take studio-based subjects, the *Tin Sheds* maintained a closer connection to the Faculty of Architecture than to the Department of Fine Arts. Ultimately, practical instruction became linked to the professional formation of architects and designers, while the Power Institute increasingly concentrated on art history and theory. In her history of the Sydney University Art Workshop, Kenyon claims that many of the artists associated with it felt that art education in Australia was split between a technical instruction emphasis of TAFE and the NAS, and the purely academic training of fine arts department at Sydney University.³⁵⁶ Whereas the South Kensington system had been challenged in the UK by the Coldstream Report, that instruction in Sydney stuck to a nineteenth-century format, inspiring a 1967 march on State Parliament by NAS students, and the establishment of a state inquiry under Gleeson, for which Guy Warren had made a submission.³⁵⁷ Kenyon claims that the Gleeson committee was the basis for the major shifts in art education which occurred in the 1970s; however, it seems that the late 1960s and early 1970s provoked numerous state and federal conferences, reports and inquiries into art education, the education of artists, and art teachers.³⁵⁸

Australia had its own version of England's Coldstream Report, in the form of the 1964 Martin Report into tertiary education in Australia.³⁵⁹ This recommended the establishment of multidisciplinary Colleges of Advanced Education, which would train paraprofessionals such

³⁵⁶ Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof*, p. 11.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ The Coldstream report had an enormous influence on British Art Education, and many of the British trained Australian art educators, however I have refrained from including a discussion of it in this thesis. Annotated versions of the Coldstream and Summerson reports are published in C Ashwin, *Art education: documents and policies 1768-1975*, Society for Research into Higher Education, London, 1975. See also L Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: the art school revolution*, Frances Lincoln Ltd, London, 2008.

as teachers, nurses, pathologists and agricultural scientists.³⁶⁰ Often based on Teaching, Nursing or Agricultural colleges, the Colleges of Advanced Education were similar to British polytechnics - a kind of multi-disciplinary half-way institution between trade-based TAFE training and the professional subject formation of universities. The recommendations of the Martin Report were not translated into legislation until 1972, when a left-wing Federal government was elected. Despite their vocational emphasis, the Colleges of Advanced Education emphasised intellectual skills, and provided a massive boost to tertiary education throughout Sydney and rural NSW. Whereas art teachers had undertaken separate training in studio art, followed by a general Diploma of Education, under the CAE system, art training developed as a specialised form of teacher education, and allowed numerous art education degrees to be offered right through NSW. At the start of 1960, NSW had one art school (the NAS), and three universities (Sydney University, the University of New South Wales and the University of New England). By 1975, NSW had four universities, and CAE art education degrees in Macarthur, Penrith, Paddington and Balmain, as well as Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and Lismore. The CAE degrees in art teaching linked training in practical art to broader liberal education in psychology, literature, history as well as pedagogy.

The specific institutional genealogies of the various arts institutions, colleges and faculties that emerged are a little confusing. Administration of the CAE's was jointly between the NSW government, the senates of the University of Sydney and the NSW Institute of Technology, and the Department of TAFE.³⁶¹ It is reasonable enough to claim that the fine arts Colleges of Advanced Education were hybrid institutions of the NSW department of TAFE and Sydney University Teachers College. In 1961 the Sydney Institute of Technology was formed from a number of the professional courses at Ultimo TAFE, and this eventually included a School of Adult Education and the School of Design from Sydney Institute of the Arts. Meanwhile a separate teachers college had been established and named after Alexander Mackie, the progressive founding principal of Sydney University Teachers College.³⁶²

In 1975, the art department of the NAS amalgamated with Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, while its design school amalgamated with Sydney Institute of the Arts,

³⁶⁰ Burn, et. al., op. cit., p. 55 & endnote 5.

³⁶¹ For some of the circuitous name changes of Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney Institute of the Arts and Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, see 'SCA administrative history', *University of Sydney Archives* website, viewed 9 February 2009, <http://www.usyd.edu.au/arms/archives/scae_adminhist.shtml>.

³⁶² LA Mandelson, 'Mackie, Alexander (1876 - 1955)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 311-312. Accessed electronically on 9 February 2009 at <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100304b.htm>>.

forming the Sydney College of the Arts, of which Guy Warren was the inaugural director. The remaining courses of the National Art School were split between the Randwick and Darlinghurst campuses, which, like other suburban TAFE colleges, continued to provide a two-year certificate courses in fine arts, graphic arts, ceramics, or design. The effect of this has been described as cataclysmic and arguably contributed to the ongoing culture of antagonism between COFA and the NAS. Effectively, art education was separated into two realms: a ‘technical’ training sector, managed by the TAFE system, and a fine arts education course, managed by the Colleges of Advanced Education. The TAFE courses were usually run in ‘departments of art and design’, and consisted of two-year certificates in specific subjects as ceramics, sculpture, design, fashion, photography or painting. Admission was by portfolio and a drawing test and they were seen as part of a general post-school visual education for those intending to pursue specific training in ‘technical’ areas of design and illustration or possibly to attend an art school.³⁶³ Admission to Colleges of Advanced Education required completion of Higher School Certificate or a TAFE diploma in art, and was initially based around educating art teachers, although separate courses for artists, designers and curators later emerged. This emphasis on academic prerequisites signalled the increasing emphasis on the latter institutions instruction in art as an intellectual discipline. The studio-based fine art course was broken up into a number of modules, including courses in child psychology, cultural theory and social history. The hours of face-to-face instruction were dramatically reduced, as students were encouraged mainly to work independently in their studios, and seek advice or instruction from teaching staff, when required. As Noel Thurgate, a student at East Sydney Tech and Mackie College in the early 1970s, says:

*Oh yeah well in those days Mackie was a new beast, it was a totally different mindset. Life drawing was programmed in the course but you had to actively seek it out.*³⁶⁴

Throughout the following two decades, the names and institutional affiliations of Mackie and the three other Sydney art based CAE’s shifted. Ultimately all of the CAE’s were amalgamated with universities and became faculties of fine arts or design.³⁶⁵ Most interview

³⁶³ Until the 1970s, high school education in New South Wales was separated into the Leaving Certificate, for students who wished to leave school at 15, and enter the workforce or an apprenticeship with the TAFE sector, and the Higher School Certificate, issued after two further years of study and intended for students who wished to pursue academic education. Concerns at increasing youth unemployment in the 1980s and changing workplace demographics have now increased school retention rates considerably and since the 1990s, most students complete the Higher School Certificate, and it is seen as essential for most entry-level training and employment positions.

³⁶⁴ Noel Thurgate, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁶⁵ See Appendix 2: Current Life-Drawing Classes in Sydney.

respondents claimed that life-drawing was marginalised or excluded within the new institutions. Interview respondents studying the figure at art schools in the 1970s and 1980s reported *feeling* marginalised or ignored by students and staff members, with some ex-students stating that they had to work against institutional culture in order to access life models or instruction. ‘Jean’, a Sydney based figurative artist and teacher, claimed that she knew of students who were unable to access any life-drawing classes at all in the early 1970s:

*I was there, only a very short time after that, but there was still a general feeling, a general undercurrent of embarrassment attached to, felt by anybody who wanted to draw, in a representational manner, from the model. It was still tolerated more than anything else, certainly not encouraged.*³⁶⁶

‘Joanna’, a Sydney based figurative artist, studying at Mackie College in the early 1980s described the culture of marginalisation of figurative artists as follows:

*[...] you were meant to do abstract things, but you weren’t meant to do figuration. That was considered to be really retrograde and you shouldn’t be doing it. “That’s passed and why are you doing all this rubbish?” So you had to fight for it. So I remember them saying all that and you weren’t allowed to and whatever it was, and it was a big fuss. And I think we did eventually get, we did get models but you had to fight for it.*³⁶⁷

Mike Esson, teaching at Mackie in the late 1970s, described more fully how drawing was marginalised as part of a conceptual disagreements about contemporary art:

*I started teaching in ’77, and that was a period where, a lot of artists wouldn’t admit to draw, first of all. And, you know, nobody had drawing exhibitions. They were all... works on paper. And never, nobody ever admitted to drawing, and indeed, certainly didn’t deal with figuration. And I remember having quite heated arguments in the common room, with some of our more senior abstract painters and artists and so on, of that time saying how irrelevant the figure was.*³⁶⁸

Ian Howard, who taught at Mackie in the late 70s, agreed that drawing had been marginalised for a time:

Certainly there was a low ebb in drawing classes, one seems to remember, and we could check these through course offerings, and programs, and I might be wrong, but certainly my recollection was that during the 70s and early 80s then that was the low ebb for drawing.

However, as Esson pointed out, drawing, and life-drawing was still being taught:

[...]and of course there’s a number of people who say that life-drawing, and drawing full stop, went

³⁶⁶ Name withheld, interview with author, Sydney, 2005.

³⁶⁷ Name withheld, interview with author, Sydney, 2005.

³⁶⁸ Mike Esson, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

out of the window. But there was a few of us here at COFA, and COFA's former glory, if you like, who maintained quite a strong drawing tradition here. And that was drawing just generally, but life-drawing was included in that.

The marginalisation of life-drawing was not confined to Alexander Mackie. Guy Warren taught at Sydney College of the Arts from 1976-1985, and described the fluctuating interest in life-drawing at the Tin Sheds and later at Sydney College of the Arts as follows:

There were times when you could try to get students to go to life-drawing... in fact just before I left Sydney College of the Arts, you couldn't get students to come to a life-drawing class, they just weren't interested. A year after I left they had several life-drawing classes; they had three classes going.³⁶⁹

Warren's description of Drawing at SCA matches comments by Jean and Joanna about Mackie during the 1970s and 1980s: that the presence of life-drawing fluctuated, and that there was a unarticulated feeling of boredom with or alienation from life-drawing. In 1988 a separate federal government report recommended that the CAE system be amalgamated with universities. The design school of Sydney College of the Arts amalgamated with the University of Technology Sydney (formerly Sydney Institute of Technology), and the school of art amalgamated with the University of Sydney. Alexander Mackie College had undergone a number of name changes in the 1980s, but was renamed College Of Fine Arts (COFA) and amalgamated with the University of New South Wales. Meanwhile a fourth university was created in Western Sydney through the amalgamation of five CAE's and the University of Western Sydney developed a faculty of fine arts from the art schools of the Colleges of Advanced Education in Macarthur and Nepean.

By the 1990s government funded art schools in Sydney consisted of fine art faculties at three universities, and the departments of fine arts in four TAFE colleges.³⁷⁰ Despite claims of a resurgence in figurative art and even in drawing instruction, life-drawing classes at university art schools appeared to remain in the same marginalised state as they had in the 1970s. Nick Strike, who studied at East Sydney (the NAS) and Sydney College of the Arts during the 1990s, described the culture around the 'functional' life-classes at the latter:

And Sydney College, I don't think there was... oh, they had optional life-drawing, which they tried to make compulsory when I was in second year there, which was when I started. And no-one there seemed really enthusiastic, so I think the whole atmosphere or environment of everyone together,

³⁶⁹ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁷⁰ Note that this excludes faculties of design, TAFE campuses offering diplomas of design and certificates in fine arts subjects, and the extensive network of Adult and Community Education colleges and community art centres that emerged in the 1970s. See Appendix 2: Current Life-Drawing Classes in Sydney.

*being enthusiastic, [we] didn't really get much out of it.*³⁷¹

Strike's comments are echoed by a number of other students who have studied at university and non-university art schools.³⁷² They describe a general sense of alienation within the classroom or a detachment from a feeling of collective excitement about life-drawing. The sense of excitement and the atmosphere or culture around life-drawing classes is arguably one of the key elements between differing fields of art education, and was highlighted by COFA Dean Ian Howard in the comments below:

..there's one other minor component, and that is the culture. And there's a culture about being an artist, there's a lifestyle thing. And although we would, at COFA we would play that down, there are other institutions, such as the National Art School, who really do see the lifestyle of the artist, with the history of the National Art School, and [...] this thing of artist and art as a culture. Art as a lifestyle. And they've been very successful in bringing that up and bringing generations of people who warm to the lifestyle culture in [and] around them. And a key part of that artistic lifestyle is life-drawing.

Howard's remarks claim that the key difference between COFA and the NAS, lies precisely in the role of life-drawing in relation to the type of artist subject, with which each institution is associated. Howard aligns NAS with the promotion of a romanticist view of 'artist lifestyle', which he later associates quite explicitly with life-drawing sketch clubs among amateur artists. The implied corollary of this alignment is that the collective enjoyment of life-drawing as a social culture is not a part of the subject formation of professional contemporary artists. As discussed in Chapter One, life-drawing appears to have become marginalised in art education, not through any direct criticism of or hostility towards it, but more paradoxically, through a lack of discussion or interrogation of the practices occurring within the life-room. The location of the 'lifestyle culture' within university art education shifted away from studios and towards avant-garde ideas and conceptual practices. Within pedagogical programs that increasingly emphasised the role of discourse, of speech, of critical interrogation of all art practices, the envelope of silence around the life-room seemed to lend an atmosphere of muffling or stifling ennui, rather than intrigue or mystery.

31. Ideas over skills: artists' education in universities

There are a number of explanations for the silence surrounding life-drawing in university art schools, which claim that the marginalisation of life-drawing was linked to a general

³⁷¹ Nick Strike, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁷² Chrissie Iannsen, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

devaluing of studio-based skill in art education, and an increasing emphasis on ideas. The idea that university art schools exercised a new set of distinctions was echoed in the comments made by Ian Howard. In describing the history of COFA, and its predecessor, Alexander Mackie, Howard described the context in which drawing was marginalised, indicating the change in emphasis of art education, if not its purpose:

*The whole conceptual art thing was raging; the importance of ideas over skills was paramount. The whole ephemeral, you know, the artwork was important, not because of the physical object, the sculpture, or the drawing, the painting or whatever, but the idea behind the object. Which was an important characteristic, the dematerialisation of the object, all that stuff, idea art, a whole lot of... all the performancey stuff. So that was all very important, and therefore the skill acquisition thing and the kind of concentrating on making the fine, finished object and even necessarily being competent in constructing something with your hands, like a drawing, probably was less important.*³⁷³

‘Jean’ described her frustration with the conceptual emphasis of the new pedagogical culture at Mackie:

*Yeah, well I probably wouldn't have minded it so much if we got some more feedback from the teachers. But we got next to nothing. I think there might have been... I can only remember one or two teachers that were good. That actually taught. And somebody said to me, and so I did find out that one of the good things to do, was to go in with a big list of questions. But of course, if you're not really sure, or if you don't really know....*³⁷⁴

Howard's comment about *the importance of ideas over skills* echoes Singerman's observation that post-war college art education in the US has emphasised subject formation based on an entirely different set of social and cultural criteria from the previous academy system or the trade based system. Singerman argues that this emphasis is not just concerned with reflecting market trends, but involves a more profound internal shift from imparting the skills in producing art works, to the consciousness of producing oneself as an artist subject:³⁷⁵

*The artist's speech in the teaching of art - precisely in its ambiguous excessive relation to the work of art and the task of instruction - called on students to position themselves. It demanded that they place themselves in professional relation to the position of the speaker. What does this mean to me, to my being an artist?*³⁷⁶

In a book entitled ‘*Art Subjects*’, Singerman gives a Foucaultian account of the subject

³⁷³ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁷⁴ Name withheld, interview with author, Sydney, 2005.

³⁷⁵ Singerman, op. cit., p. 153.

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 144

formation associated with particular forms of art education, which similar to earlier accounts made by Judith Adler.³⁷⁷ In an auto-ethnographic study of California Institute of the Arts during the conceptual art boom of the 1970s Adler claimed that the new institutions of art education were principally concerned with supporting and promoting a particular class of contemporary artists.³⁷⁸ Singerman traces this shift back to the 1950s, claiming that the emphasis in post-war art education shifted from instructing students on how to produce art, to encouraging students to reproduce themselves as artists. The emphasis on abstract and then conceptual art, on discourses, and the cult status surrounding the avant-garde artists all linked to an increased emphasis within art colleges on subject formation.³⁷⁹ The emphasis on art training as a formation of the artist as a type of subject, uniquely privileged to access and communicate the cultural mystique of modernist aesthetics, was arguably amenable to the type of education offered by universities generally. Universities have been associated with the subject formation of professional classes, who identify *as* their occupations, rather than *with* the activities undertaken by them in work hours.³⁸⁰ Like the academies, this university-based art education was largely based on maintaining class distinctions between ‘fine’ artists, commercial illustrators, and the increasing numbers of amateur artists.³⁸¹

The integration of art courses into university education operated as much to ensure class distinctions in the aesthetic tastes of liberally educated professionals as to provide academic literacy to a new class of contemporary artists.³⁸² The emphasis on intellectual affiliations coincided with the perceived program of university education of subject formation of a class of self-conscious professionals.³⁸³ By detaching art pedagogy from the embodied acquisition of manual skills with specialised materials, and focussing more on a reflexive and critical engagement with the social and cultural values of ‘being an artist’, university art education has promoted the formation of a new type of pedagogical subject. The development of a university sector of art education has been coupled with a massive global increase, not only in commercial art sales, but also in the forms and scale of state and corporate sponsorship of art exhibitions, residencies and international biennale art fairs. Art education not only provides

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ J Adler, *Artists in offices: an ethnography of an academic art scene*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, NJ, 1979.

³⁷⁹ Singerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44, cites Ernest Brigg’s description of Rothgo’s teaching style at Buffalo as walking around students’ studios, discussing baseball scores with students, and playing on his celebrity status to promote a type of contagious confidence among certain students.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 192

³⁸¹ *ibid.*

³⁸² Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁸³ Singerman, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

skills for ‘para-professional arts-workers’ such as designers, illustrators and school-teachers, but an increasingly sophisticated network of curators, managers, publicists, writers, and contemporary art educators. These ‘new’ art subjects, are required to demonstrate considerable intellectual flexibility and a cultural cosmopolitanism, amenable to a rapidly expanding and flexible art market, and also, as described in Richard Florida’s work on creative economies, increasingly suited to intellectual labourers of neo-liberal capitalism.³⁸⁴ Within the increasing complexity and cosmopolitanism of contemporary art practice, art education combines instrumentalist instruction with a avowed pluralism about the possibilities of a wide variety of art practices. Arguably, the pluralism of contemporary art institutions operates as a subtle form of pragmatism, acknowledging the potential commodification value of any form of creative practice.

32. Drawing skills and creative economies.

As discussed in Chapter One, there now appears to be a general resurgence in life-drawing in art education and within the broader community. Over the past decade, university art schools have increasingly claimed an interest in drawing, and in the life-class as ‘integral’ to their pedagogy. In my interviews, all art school directors in Sydney defended the use of the life-class, in almost identical terms, and, following international trends, a number have hosted exhibitions or conferences on drawing as a form of research. A number of interview subjects explained the revival of life-classes as due to a resurgence interest of students in life-drawing. This resurgent interest is, as mentioned in Chapter One, often attributed to ‘student demand’ and frequently aligned with a desire for a concrete outcome based subject. Life drawing classes appear to have been revived as emblematic of the provision of skills, and it is arguable that the issue of skills has been revived in art education as a type of neutralising argument, over any questioning or challenging of particular techniques. Despite the emphasis on conceptual development and intellectual discourse in higher education, there is an increasing emphasis on university based art pedagogy being able to produce demonstrable outcomes such as skill acquisition. Professor John Aiken, Director of the Slade School of Art, noted the apparent transparency of drawing as a pedagogical methodology:

Drawing is associated with “rigour” because it has a measurable outcome – and we can perceive

³⁸⁴ R Florida, *The rise of the creative class: and how it’s transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*, New York: Basic Books, 2002. For the link between art education and creative economies see Daniel Pink ‘The MFA is the new MBA’ in *Harvard Business Review*, April 2004, cit. in ‘Schools of Thought: Okwui Enwezor’ (Dean of academic affairs at San Francisco Art Institute), *Frieze*, October 2006, p. 142.

*what people are doing. And it is teachable.*³⁸⁵

The new role of the life-class as a value-free pedagogical exercise, is typified by the comment from Professor Ron Newman, former Dean of Sydney College of the Arts:

*I think that life-drawing is simply one of those activities that's in the educational mix, and students enjoy it and get into it and work very hard at it.*³⁸⁶

It is arguable that in many ways, this view of the life-class, as functional, or 'in demand' exacerbates its continued marginalisation from the institutional emphasis of university based art education which is, as I have been arguing, based primarily around subject formation through discourse. By reducing life-drawing to an value free exercise in 'observation', spectatorship itself is excluded from the realm of discourse or of critical investigation. The morally problematic aspects of observational emphasis in modernist life-drawing are examined in Chapter Four, but it is worthwhile examining the tacit values of defending life-drawing as a form of utilitarian training. In explaining the fluctuating status of life-drawing, Ron Newman added the following comment:

*I have some problem with the idea of things being new fashioned, old fashioned. There is no doubt that thirty years ago that we would draw a component part for manufacturing by hand with ink pens, and now we print it out on a bubble jet printer, after drawing it in CAD. So I use that example quite specifically, because there is a drawing methodology that has changed, from pencil and ink, out of a brain, and with implements that keep you square and round and measured, to CAD systems, Computer Aided Drawing systems that allow you to do it and then to print it.*³⁸⁷

Newman's comment appears to endorse an idea of drawing as being beyond fashion, of being part of a conceptualised practice of observation and illustration, with the changes from manual to mechanical rendering merely representing changes in methodology not content. This is arguably not all that different from the ideas of drawing as a *timeless tradition*, only drawing is reified not only beyond the realms of social history, but now beyond that of the human body. While Newman's comment is referring specifically to drawing within industrial design, it reduces the human involvement in drawing to that of an automaton, and drawing becomes a depoliticised, sexless, functional mechanical process. Life drawing has been collapsed within this rubric of 'mechanical' drawing or industrial drawing as a content free exercise in manual skills, and graphic design, animation, and industrial design are some of the

³⁸⁵ Professor John Aiken, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁸⁶ Professor Ron Newman, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁸⁷ *ibid.*

few areas where life-drawing classes have been retained as mandatory course components. However, life-drawing does not always sit easily within the general rubric of ‘fit for purpose’ drawing in educational institutions. As discussed in Chapter One, a number of art educators and commentators expressed considerable ambivalence about the life-class: on the one hand proudly claiming its return, but also expressing some disdain about its associations with amateur artists or rear-garde narratives which reject contemporary art.³⁸⁸

Life-classes themselves appear to be remarkably resistant to any form of experimental pedagogy whatsoever. From observation and interviews, it is apparent that the same class structure, the same exercises, the same texts and the same artist examples have been used in life-classes right across Sydney. Students attending a life-class in Kuringai Community Centre, Sydney University’s Tin Sheds, the College of Fine of Arts, Willoughby Art Centre, the National Art School, the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, the Enmore Design Centre at TAFE, often receive almost identical training, and work with identical models, and often the same teachers. Given the complexity and diversification of art and design education, it may seem paradoxical that differing institutions with different pedagogical philosophies, and different students populations would offer the same form of instruction. It is arguable that even within homogenous institutions, the life-class is rarely a fixed universal experience. Practices of spectatorship, conventions of mark-making vary between tutors, and are experienced differentially within classes. However, it is also possible to claim that, in the lack of discussion, questioning or understanding of the practices of life-drawing that ‘the life-class’, with its fixed and unchanged format, relatively unchanged for well over a century, has managed to retain its position in a wide variety of settings and practices. As Roger Conlon, from University of West England notes: ‘It’s a bit like the poor, it’s always with us.’³⁸⁹

The official discourses of distinct institutional identities are undermined somewhat by the economic realities of art education as a precarious and transient occupation for many teaching staff, and arguably function little more than as a marketing gloss over porous, mutable and precarious institutional affiliations. This is not to deride their importance, however. The rapid shrinking of public sector education funding over the past two decades has been coupled with an enormous international art market boom. There are not only unprecedented numbers of art school graduates and post-graduates, there is also a flourishing local and international sector in various forms of visual culture production, management and education. In such an

³⁸⁸ Professor Ian Howard, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

³⁸⁹ Roger Conlon, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

economic environment of precariousness and potentially enormous cultural and economic gains, there is a far greater imperative for institutions to create and maintain a perceptively distinct pedagogical culture. The institutional ‘image’ is a key factor in how art schools negotiate the cultural capital of their alumni and current staff (many of whom are practising artists), and arguably far more important than the practical exigencies of course components. This is exacerbated by the ambiguities in actual pedagogical practice, and the fact that life-drawing is practised in a variety of educational institutions without any discussion as to why, and I return to the issue of the purpose of life-drawing in Chapter Five. It is worth noting that the purpose of life-drawing is still articulated with a considerable amount of ambivalence by some practitioners. Guy Warren described his ambivalent feelings about his participation in a sketch club during the late 1970s:

And I went down there, and drew from the model, and it was fun to get back to the old skill of drawing the model again, but I don't find it useful. And in fact, if you were to ask me, "do I think it was valuable?" I would answer in the same way that I would answer about any of the teaching that I got at East Sydney Tech. And that is that, I had a very academic background, very academic teaching. There are times when I'm enormously grateful for having had it, and there are times when I wish to Christ I'd never been anywhere near art school. And both things are a valid response.³⁹⁰

Warren's frustration with the confining experience his academic training in life-drawing appears to be related to an apparent conflict between skill acquisition and creative agency, that has its roots in a broader historical tension between academic training and expressive freedom. His description of life-drawing as ‘the old skill of drawing the model’ echoes his earlier comment of it as being a form of ‘look and put’, where it is reduced to a physical discipline, and a practical exercise, devoid of any capacity for critical inquiry or creative exploration. It appears that Warren's frustration with life-drawing stems from his own sense of proficiency with it as a skill, and it is arguable that the reduction to life-drawing to an exercise in skill acquisition reduces the capacity of it to be a site of critical engagement or discourse. In explaining some of the ambiguous associations of life-drawing and its role within university art schools, Professor Anita Taylor made the following point:

Well, I think partly the muddle of why we look at a naked person, and the idea of the subject – and the political stance of that – and the subjectivity around it, and I also think it's been about a skill base,

³⁹⁰ Guy Warren, interview with author, see Appendix 1. In the mid-1970s, while head of the SCA, Warren participated and even hosted the sketch club that later moved to the Sydney Mechanics School of the Arts and then to Jane MacGowan's warehouse in Brandling Street, Alexandria.

*and what are we doing it for.*³⁹¹

It is arguable that even in its current pluralist formation, life-drawing in tertiary art institutions is still predicated upon a profound displacement away from the troubling encounter between the bodies of observing students and teaching staff and the exposed, silent and still bodies of the models. The tacit excision of the interpersonal relationships upon which life-drawing is based is effected through the side-stepping away from the troubling link between nudity and observation, to reduce observation to a dry exercise in ‘look and put’, as if the hands and eyes were not connected to the bodies, the loins, the minds and the desires of students, or the more complex forms of observation and non-observation performed by models, and even teaching staff. Arguably it is the fundamental reluctance to see life-drawing as a interpersonal exchange with an enormous potential for challenge and experimentation, that arguably limits the extent to which it can be critically engaged with, challenged or enjoyed by students or staff. The first two chapters of this thesis have explored the complex social and historical relations surrounding the practice of and discourses on life-drawing. The remainder of this thesis intends to enter into the spaces within the life-class, between the performance of the model and the tracing of marks on a page, and in the interstices between aspiration, projection and recitation.

This chapter claims that life-drawing has largely been configured in contemporary art education as a practice of skills, with what Anita Taylor referred to as ‘the muddle of a naked person’ left unexamined. The following chapter explores some of dilemmas concerning the troubling presence of naked artists models in life drawing classes. Where the first two chapters have examined what practitioners imagine life-drawing practice to be in relation to their own cultural capital and subject formation as artists, the following chapter explores the relationships between nudity, sexuality and cultural capital. This chapter demonstrates how discourses on sexuality, participants’ experiences of sexualised behaviour, and their articulation of sexuality in life-drawing are inextricably linked to social relations of class and gender, and perceptions and performances of cultural capital.

³⁹¹ Professor Anita Taylor, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

CHAPTER THREE: The Sex Issue

I have to say, being a student using life-rooms, [having] taught life-drawing, and being a model at various times, anything less erotic than the life-room, would be very hard to imagine! It's more like a butcher's shop, than a...whatever³⁹²

This chapter explores two connotations of 'sex' in relation to life-drawing practice: the uncomfortable and paradoxical connections between sexuality, and the relationships between sex and gender, in the discourses and practices of life-drawing. The ambiguous status of sexuality in life-drawing classes is linked to the presence of naked models, and the complex imbrication of nudity and sexuality. The relationships between sex, sexual desire, naked spectatorship and the regulation of sexual behaviour and representation are a significant historical factor in the status of life-drawing classes, and despite the protestations such as the comment above, form a considerable if tacit element of the experience and perception of current practice. While historical studies have described how, particularly in English-speaking countries, life-drawing classes have been structured to contain and control the sexually threatening aspects of nudity, there has been little exploration of how *the sex issue* rests within other facets of life-drawing, such as cultural capital, socio-economic status and creative agency. This chapter explores how subjectivity, sexuality, agency and pleasure are mediated in the complex settings of life-drawing classes, and how artists' models articulate the complex and ambiguous roles they play, both within and outside the life-room. By linking sexuality and sexual identity to subjectivity and social mobility this chapter opens up the dominant view of the life-room as intractably split between the artist and the model, observer and observed, and male and female into a site for a richer imaginative field of exchanges and movements between creative becomings, sexual becomings and gendered becomings.

The second facet of the sex issue concerns the relationship between sex and gender, and how genders are performed, regulated and represented among all participants in life-drawing classes. The relationships between gender and life-drawing, figurative representation and observation have been critically explored by feminist artists, historians and cultural critics and arguably represent one of the most sustained critical interventions surrounding contemporary life-drawing practice. The scope of feminist critiques of gender, representation and spectatorship extends to all social relations and cultural practices and, as this chapter demonstrates, discursive management of 'the sex issue' of gender relations within life-drawing classes is influenced less by specific feminist interventions, and more by a general idea of feminism that has popular currency. This chapter explores how some of the concerns raised by feminist critiques are mobilised by practitioners in order to mediate the social and cultural capital of their own relationships to life-drawing classes. It also critically examines a number of feminist critiques of life-drawing and their relationships to feminist art criticism and feminist critiques of visual culture. In particular, this chapter critiques the binarised assumptions of gender that characterise the majority of feminist interventions in life-drawing classes.

As discussed in the Introduction, most research on artists' models, life-drawing, figurative representation or 'the nude in art' has been based on analysing culturally significant

³⁹² Iain Biggs, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

representations arising from the practices using artists' models. The majority of figurative images historically accepted as culturally significant have tended to be done by male artists, and to feature images of naked women. Critical analyses of life-drawings or figurative images have tended to follow the binarised model of gendered power imbalance as outlined by John Berger in the early 1970s: the notion of the passive female viewed and objectified by the cyclopean gaze of the active male viewing subject. As noted by Frances Borzello, although artists' models have been of both genders and all ages, since the proliferation of images of the female nude in the late nineteenth century, artists' models have been generally assumed to be female.³⁹³ The tacit assumptions of gender fixity that permeated accounts of artists' models appear paradoxical in the face of the visibility of models' genitalia, evident while they are posing naked, however, the representation of the classical nude, has very little to do with bodily nakedness or what information the naked body presents.³⁹⁴ The fixity of the gender within accounts of artists' models and life drawing involves a number of problematic aspects. The first is a general assumption in popular and academic literature that the life-class is based around a female or feminised model, and a male viewing/drawing public. Paradoxically, this has perpetuated a discursive blindness towards the genitalia and gender identities of participants in most life-drawing classes historically and in the present.

The second is how a fixation on gender relations, and a binarised view of gendered subjectivity, actually obscures some of the other more fraught relations within life-drawing classes, such as social class, and race. This is more complex than the idea of 'working-class model' versus 'professional/privileged artist'. As noted in the Introduction, twentieth century life-drawing classes have involved groups of precarious arts-workers and artists negotiating their cultural as well as personal capital, and have been a site for social mobility, especially for women. Structuralist accounts separating models from artists, homogenising models as a feminised group, fixed into their role of being exploited and objectified, and aligning the role of artist with an implacably masculine, objectifying subjectivity, ignore the complex circuits of identification, disavowal, dissimulation and aspiration that move between and among both models and artists.

The third is how limiting gender to physically visible genitalia obscures the deep ambiguities of how gender is performed and played with by artists' models and artists. This chapter argues that the instability of this encounter with gender is not so much genital based as deeply ambiguous, and queerly contagious. This chapter explores this ambiguity and how it is contained and straightened, but not entirely eliminated, by the discourses and practices that surround life-drawing.

Feminist theory has given considerable attention to the vexed and contradictory position of the subject, in relationship to art and epistemology. Within the visual arts, subjectivity has been variously hailed as masculine and feminine, and modernist art movements often veered between a neutral stance (attributed to a dissimulated masculinity) or to an exaggerated emphasis on a form of subjectivity gendered as aggressively masculine and heterosexist.

³⁹³ F. Borzello, *The Artists' Model*, Junction Books, London, 1982, p. 5. As Borzello and others have noted, Renaissance art studios used male studio assistants to pose as female figures, and art academies in continental Europe exclusively used male models until the late nineteenth century. See M. Mayhew, ' "Just act natural" models, mannequins and muses' (Part I), *Philament* Issue 8, June 2006, pp. 60-62. Viewed 12 February 2009, http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue8_pdf/MAYHEW_JustAct.pdf, and M. Mayhew, ' "Just act natural" models, mannequins and muses' (Part II), *Philament* Issue 9, December 2006, pp. 108-111. <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue9_pdfs/MAYHEW_JustActNatural2.pdf>.

³⁹⁴ For a lucid art historical discussion of the differences in genital representation between the classical approach of Dominique Ingres and Gustave Courbet, see S Faunce, 'Courbet: feminist in spite of himself', A Bond (ed), *Body* exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1997, pp. 101-104.

Within the former paradigm, where art and observation were regarded as *objective*, femininity is denied as excessive, subjective, and emotional; within the latter, it is reduced to an object of lust, hatred or fear by masculine protagonists. Beyond such paradoxes within the ascription and marginalisation of feminine subjectivity, subject positions assumed to be either masculine or feminine, even when performed by members of the opposite gender, are still pertinent to the types of subjectivity that are enabled by life-drawing, or precluded from the life-class, altogether.

The complexity of relationships, discourses and practices concerning sex, sexuality, subjectivity and gender in life-drawing classes could comprise an entire thesis, or several. However, I am reluctant to separate ‘the sex issue’ from other discourses, practices and experiences among life-drawing participants. The sex issue rears its head repeatedly in numerous facets of life-drawing: from discourses around the status of life-drawing classes and the cultural capital of practitioners; social histories of post-war life-drawing; the experiences of observation and representation; the status of life-drawings as images in relation to visual culture; and the metaphysical implications of sexuality, spectatorship and subjectivity. This chapter explores some of these facets of ‘the sex issue’ and identifies a number of lacunae in how gender and sexuality are articulated in a variety of discourses surrounding life-drawing classes.

2. Exploring sex and gender in life-drawing

In order to develop a critical account of life-drawing as a practice of managing a field of complex and changing social relations, this chapter challenges the gendered assumptions behind widely known critiques of spectatorship, based on structuralist accounts of a split between a male viewing subject and a female viewed object. This chapter argues that the blind spot of feminist interventions into the life-class has been largely to avoid engaging with a possibility of a sexually specific female spectatorship, while relying on monolithic accounts of masculine spectatorship as cyclopean and singular. Referring to theoretical work on female spectatorship as ‘transvestite’ or masquerading male spectatorship, I argue that this view assumes that male spectatorship is singular, fixed and universal. I explore a variety of accounts of looking in the life-class in order to explore spectatorship as a series of deliberate, anxious and contested collections of performative techniques and discourses.

This chapter is divided into nine sections, each of which considers *the sex issue* from a particular angle, using a range of methodologies. The first six sections consider the ambiguous status of sexuality in the life-room and its relationship between nakedness of artists’ models and the cultural values of nudity. The first section addresses what British drawing researcher Deanna Petherbridge coyly terms ‘*The sexual issue*’.³⁹⁵ It explores the ambiguity of much of the discursive culture around life-drawing, which appears to quite pointedly avoid discussing or admitting that life-drawing has anything at all to do with sex, sexual desire, or sexual behaviour. The second section, *The nude issue*, explores some of the complex cultural associations of nudity and art, including a brief discussion of the meanings, reception and critiques of Kenneth Clark’s work. Section three, *Classing the nude*, explores the work of feminist cultural historians on the meanings of nudity and the practices and representations of life-drawing.³⁹⁶

Having described sexuality in life-drawing classes as a field of differing expectations and practices, in the following three sections, I assemble a range of interview materials and case

³⁹⁵ See discussion below. Petherbridge is one of the few writers to raise the ethical dilemmas of working from naked life models as part of aesthetic critiques of contemporary drawing practice and pedagogy.

³⁹⁶ R Barcan, *Nudity: A cultural anatomy*, Berg, Oxford & New York, 2004, p113.

studies to examine differing experiences and implications of sexual desire and sexualised behaviour in life-drawing classes. Section four, *Transgressing the boundaries*, explores how ideas of social and sexual transgression are articulated by life-drawing participants. Borrowing its name from a prosaic Australian slang term for sexualised staring, the fifth section, *The peeping issue*, explores the issue of spectatorship and how various practices of observation in life-drawing are articulated and managed by participants.³⁹⁷ This section relies on interview material to illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of practices of looking in life-drawing, and the contradictions and tensions in participants' accounts of their own experiences. Section six, *If looks could thrill*, examines the popularity of life-drawing events at Hen's nights, to explore the links between gender, spectatorship, pleasure, transgression and life-drawing.

The last three sections map some of the terrain of feminist critical discourse on life-drawing and figurative representation, arguing that gendered accounts have limited the scope for a dynamic critical engagement with the issue of nudity in life-drawing classes. Commencing with a discussion of recent feminist critical interventions into the life-class, section seven, *Looking at the life-class*, discusses the structuralist feminist critiques of spectatorship and figurative imagery on contemporary feminist interventions into life-drawing. The eighth section, *The sexual subject*, discusses the implications of gendered accounts of spectatorship for current feminist interventions around life-drawing and Section nine, *The issue of subjectivity*, returns to a discussion of some of the moral aspects of nudity raised in the first section, and interrogates the ontology of life-drawing, and why nudity is essential to it. I return to feminist interventions in art theory and practice in the final chapter of this thesis, which in discussing the relationships between representation, subjectivity, explores how life-drawing could operate as a framing device for a range of profound and complex inter-subjective encounters.

3. The sexual issue

In a published conference paper on life-drawing, British artist and drawing researcher, Deanna Petherbridge raises the issue of sexuality, while briefly deconstructing the neutralised account of 'the human body' frequently articulated in practitioners' accounts of the value of life-drawing:

*And we all know that the nude or naked human body is neither 'natural' nor 'neutral' but the site of very complex constructions of meaning. Let's call this the sexual issue.*³⁹⁸

Petherbridge's separation of 'the sexual issue' into a distinct realm, seems like an awkward attempt at containing the messy implications of sexuality, nudity, morality and pleasure, which nonetheless flavours the tone of her comments:

I deplore that we no longer have a concept of the body outside the sexual

³⁹⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary describes 'perve' as colloq. (orig. Austral.) and defines it as 'To act as or like a sexual pervert, esp. to look at someone lustfully or pruriently; (in weakened sense) to look at something or someone with excessive interest. Usu. with at or on.' It also has three separate definitions for 'Perv' as: '1. A sexual pervert; = PERVERT n. 2. An act of watching pruriently or lecherously; a lustful look. Also attrib. 3. Pornography.' *Oxford English Dictionary electronic edition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000. Accessed via University of Sydney library, 5 January 2009, <<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au>>.

³⁹⁸ D Petherbridge, 'Drawing Backwards Into The Future' in P Hetherington, (ed.), *Issues in art and education: aspects of the fine art curriculum*. Conference papers from The Role of Drawing in Fine Art Education 1994, Wimbledon School of Art in association with Tate Pub., London, 1996, p. 58.

*and the fetishised. Nevertheless we can't jump backward in to the life-class, the nest of nudity, in a state of theoretical nakedness.*³⁹⁹

This is quite a strong statement, and the expression 'deplore' seems to give a moral tone to Petherbridge's critique of the apparent saturation of the concept of the body with the sexual and the fetishised. It is difficult to determine if what she *deplores* in the concept of the body, is the sexualisation and the fetishisation of the nude, or its totalising grip on how the body can be conceived. The curious search for a concept of the body *outside* the sexual, expresses an almost physical discomfort with the spatialisation of sexuality, and its proximity to *the concept of the body*. The interest in a *concept* of the body, rather than an articulation of the material and temporal experiences of embodiment, conceals and exacerbates this discomfort with bodies, with sexuality, and with nudity, which often seems like the elephant in the room in discussions on life-drawing.

Petherbridge exquisitely describes the life-class as 'the nest of nudity' and cites a metaphorical sense of nakedness in order to insist on the necessity of a theoretically informed critical engagement with the sexual issue. Petherbridge is one of the very few contemporary commentators who repeatedly interrogate some of the awkward aspects of using naked models; however, aside from deploring the conflation of nudity with 'the sexual issue', this paper does not explore the many meanings and connotations that nudity has in contemporary societies. In other publications, Petherbridge does address other implications of nudity, particularly in the links between the naked model and the naked corpse in life-drawing classes, and these links are explored in the same paper which mentioned 'the sexual issue'.⁴⁰⁰ In the remainder of the paper Petherbridge closely examined some techniques of British life-drawing and figurative art, strongly critiqueing the violence and misogyny within both.⁴⁰¹ However, her work does not describe a productive relationship between life-drawing and *the sexual issue*, or explore how the exploration of sexual desire and feeling could contribute to the dynamism of a critically engaged life-drawing practice. It is even arguable that the slight coyness around 'the sexual issue' limits Petherbridge's critical capacity to articulate the complex relationships between the myths of neutral observation, and barely repressed pleasure in looking at, associating with and fantasising about the naked human subjects of figurative works.

The affective intensity surrounding the issue of sexuality in life-drawing is shared not only by the acknowledgement of sexuality in life-drawing, but in comments that seek to repudiate or deny its presence. Artist and drawing researcher Iain Biggs is based at the University of the West of England at Bristol, where Petherbridge was also based, and yet in the comment below he appears to negate the presence of sexuality in the life-room:

*I have to say, being a student using life-rooms, taught life-drawing, and being a model at various times, anything less erotic than the life-room, would be very hard to imagine! It's more like a butcher's shop, than a...whatever...*⁴⁰²

Biggs couples an adamant refutation of the life-class as 'erotic' with a rather disturbing comparison with a butcher's shop. The uncanny coupling of eroticism and death performs a

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ D Petherbridge, *The quick and the dead: artists and anatomy*, South Bank Centre, London, 1997.

⁴⁰¹ I discuss Petherbridge's critiques of life-drawing and modernist figurative art in Chapter Four.

⁴⁰² Iain Biggs, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

repudiation of sexuality through the force of its alignment with the commercial dissection of animal carcasses for human consumption. It is probably reasonable to claim that Biggs would be appalled by this particular interpretation of his comment, as during the course of the interview he evoked drawing as a profoundly humanist and empathic activity and repeatedly criticised the cold-blooded violence of figurative movements in British modernist art. It is arguable that the Freudian lapse in Biggs's comment hinges on the monstrous potential implied by the 'whatever'. Twinning eroticism to the undescribed and infinite 'whatever' enables the image of a butcher's shop to operate as a containing device; the 'whatever' is counterpoised to the banal familiarity of a public retail outlet, and the erotic potential of the life-drawing class is abjected beyond the realm of death.

While the anxiety around sexuality is not as explicit as in the above comments, Australian researchers and practitioners also display a certain level of unease or clumsiness, around the relationships between sexuality and life-drawing classes:

So to be an artist, "I've gone to my life-drawing classes, and I come out with my board under my arm, and I sat on a donkey, and I had a live model" and then "Oh you had a life model?" and then there's all the tit, tit, tit... all that kind of sexual, you know, the light sexual kind of connotations, associated with life-drawing."⁴⁰³

In the comment above, the Dean of College of Fine Arts, Professor Ian Howard makes a slight Freudian slip in noting the 'light sexual connotations' of life-drawing, and its appeal to amateur artists. The 'tit, tit, tit...' is not a reference to breasts but an onomatopoeic reference to the uncanny way in which an awareness of sexuality pulses within the practices of observation and mark making. As he is a prominent Australian conceptual artist and head of a university faculty of contemporary visual arts, it is arguable that Howard was keen to emphasise his familiarity with many of the tensions and critical dilemmas associated with life-drawing, without condemning or dismissing it as a practice. Howard's remark above was part of a discussion of non-institutional life-drawing groups in which he linked the appeal of life-drawing to amateur artists to a contained and sublimated sexual tension. Articulation of the presence and mediation of sexuality in life-drawing by the directors of 'professional' art institutions is complicated by the need to maintain professional distance and convey a sense of cosmopolitan ease, especially when students within departments of performance art, photography and film may be undertaking highly confronting and explicitly sexual work. Critical concerns with sexuality and life-drawing may seem hopelessly redundant within the context of contemporary art institutions, and merely an issue for amateur practitioners. It is arguable however, that Howard's pluralist cosmopolitanism is also imbued with a tacit anxiety around sexuality in life-drawing, which he mediates by making the sexual issue into one of cultural capital. By confining the sexual issue to the amateur realm of 'traditional' artists, the troubling threat of sexuality in life-drawing classes of a contemporary professional institution are neatly side-stepped. Sexual awareness or anxiety in life-drawing has a strong historical link to connotations and contestations of social class, and other commentators have noted that access to life-drawing classes has been used specifically to delineate the particular subject formation of artists.⁴⁰⁴ Even now the dissimulated denial of the sexual interest in or awareness of the sexual connotations of life-drawing is linked to the professional formation of serious art students. Often life-classes are described as a type of initiation, whereby art

⁴⁰³ Ian Howard, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴⁰⁴ A Smith, *The Victorian nude: sexuality, morality and art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, pp. 17-20.

students are able to set aside the associations between nudity and sexuality in favour of the professional rigour of the art school drawing class. The process of initiation is described by former National Art School director Bernard Ollis:

*If you've never experienced it, you might have all these delusions or illusions about what it might be, and that it is smutty, or that it is ... you know, and you might get carried away, or turned on... And whatever else you might think could happen doesn't happen when you step inside it. It is, certainly, you are looking at shapes, forms, structures, and if you spend the first ten seconds giggling as a seventeen year old, after that you've got over that bit and here on in... you've got to start drawing.*⁴⁰⁵

I return to the fluctuating awareness of sexuality in life-drawing at the end of this chapter. For the present, I am concerned with the variety of approaches used by commentators and practitioners to contain the awareness, presence or threat of sexuality in life-drawing. A number of other discourses confine the sexual issue to a question of genitalia, and specifically sexed genitalia, as the quotation below illustrates:

*"Male models are a difficult thing. The penis is not a still object, it moves. A good life model will ignore it — so will the students," [the artist] says.*⁴⁰⁶

The comment was recently published in an Australian newspaper, and allegedly quotes an artist and life-drawing instructor. The quotation was highlighted in bold beneath a large photograph of a life-room, complete with modestly posing male model framed on one side by an arm drawing over an easel, also concealing most of the charcoal drawing. It is unclear whether the speaker is implying that 'good' models and 'good' students would ignore the penis or its movement, but it is clear that in this case, the penis is at the centre of the problem of sexuality in the life-room, and probably best ignored. The unease around models' penises and their possible movement is not confined only to Melbourne. Sarah R. Phillips's study of artists' models in Portland, USA repeated the intense anxiety of models and instructors about avoiding erections and maintaining a professional atmosphere in life-drawing rooms.⁴⁰⁷

While a number of models interviewed in my own research also articulated a number of problems with penises, including erections and leaking, most models described their concerns with 'the sexual issue' in relation to an enormous range of bodily experiences and encounters: from practices of spectatorship between artists and models, eye and hand contact, robing and disrobing, and speech. The role of models in the maintenance of a professional atmosphere in life-drawing rooms was linked to broader issues of bodily capital such as personal hygiene, and the provision of clean drapes and designated areas for changing, disrobing and posing. It is arguable that the complications of sexuality extend beyond visible genitalia to the meanings and connotations of nudity itself and how this moves throughout the multiple surfaces and spaces of life-drawing rooms.

4. The nude issue

Life drawing involves observing people revealing their naked bodies in the company of

⁴⁰⁵ Bernard Ollis, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴⁰⁶ C Halliday 'Dressing down for art's sake' *The Age* (Melbourne), 28th October 2008, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁷ SR Phillips *Modeling Life: Art Models Speak About Nudity, Sexuality and the Creative Process*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2006, p. 58-63; M Gressor 'Revelations for the true buff', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 September 2004, p9. © John Fairfax Holdings. Accessed via Factiva, University of Sydney Library, 28 February 2009.

other observers. In most public settings, naked bodily display is regarded as transgressive, and looking at naked bodies is regarded as a private pleasure, rather than a public activity.⁴⁰⁸ The affective links between nudity and power, vulnerability and shame, arguably intensify the types of social relations between students, teaching or supervision staff and the models and the ethical concerns connected with developing and maintaining appropriate professional relationships.⁴⁰⁹ The complexity of issues surrounding nudity in life-drawing classes is apparent in this comment from Ron Newman, former Dean of Sydney College of the Arts:

Well, complete nudity, in front of one's colleagues and teachers, in my view, it overtly brings people closer together. In the sense that, the person that is naked before us, is naked before us. We know a lot more about that person than we do about anybody else. Because we see it all. Now, I'm not embarrassed by that, or I'm not prudish about that, I don't have any great problem with it, but I perceive there may be issues at some time, with somebody, in the mix, and so it would strike me that, for instance, in an undergraduate class, I probably wouldn't encourage one undergraduate student to model for the rest of the undergraduate students. I think it would have to affect their relationship with each other, student to student, peer to peer. But they do do it. They do performances at exhibitions completely naked, they model for each other in photographs. And there are some anonymous nude photographs or other types of nude photographs where I would have no idea who the person is.⁴¹⁰

Newman's quotation illustrates much of the complexity of how nudity affects relationships within a professional art institution. He highlights the links between nudity, nakedness and intimacy, arguing that in practice, nudity can disrupt or confuse the boundaries between students and between students and staff. Newman's comments reinforce common cultural assumptions that nudity allows us to know a lot more about people than if they are clothed, before (paradoxically) describing nude photographs of student exhibitions as anonymous. Newman speculates that nudity must affect relationships between students, and expresses his own reluctance to employ students as models. He articulates this as a structural issue, in relationship to the types of roles and relationships expected of members within an institution, without articulating precisely how nudity could compromise these roles. At the same time he is quite emphatic that he himself is not a prude, and not embarrassed, and he later stated that he did not have a moral issue with nudity.

The paradoxes and ambiguities in Newman's account above, illustrate the ambiguous position of Newman as the Dean of a university faculty of visual arts, specialising in contemporary performance and conceptual based work. As he notes, students are often naked in live performances, figurative photography and film; thus any moral concerns about nudity in life-drawing classes would appear to be overshadowed by its apparent ubiquity in other areas. Furthermore, the proliferation of nudity in performance, photographic and digital art

⁴⁰⁸ Barcan op. cit.

⁴⁰⁹ Phillips, op. cit.

⁴¹⁰ Ron Newman interview with author, see Appendix 1.

requires a certain level of concealment of any prudish discomfort with nudity or sexually explicit work. Newman's reservations about 'issues' of maintaining appropriate relationships within an art institution could also be described as ethical concerns, and they highlight the complexity of moral issues surrounding nudity, which include boundaries between the public and the private, the professional and the personal, and also managing the volatility and vulnerability of employees who work naked. Although issues of power and the vulnerability of naked workers are generally related to sexuality, the cultural and affective connotations of nudity extend to far more than sexual desire.

As noted by Ruth Barcan, the meanings, associations and discourses surrounding nudity in contemporary consumer societies are complex and often paradoxical.⁴¹¹ The relationships between nudity and life-drawing classes are affected by an enormous range of discourses, beliefs and practices concerning embodiment, subjectivity and ethics.⁴¹² Life-drawing has strong historical associations with medical dissection, and the uneasy connotations of immobile, naked models with the cadaver of the anatomy theatre continue to haunt current practices.⁴¹³ There has been considerable research into nudity and its relationship to visual art and representation. Probably the most well known work in this area is Kenneth Clark's book, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art*, first published in 1956.⁴¹⁴ Clark's theories of the nude have been extensively critiqued since, particularly by feminists such as Lynda Nead and Marxists such as John Berger; however, his division between the reified *nude* as a product of the mystical cultural alchemy of fine art, and that of the *naked*, pertaining to depictions of or encounters with an unmediated unclothed human form, still has a considerable cultural purchase.⁴¹⁵ Clark's opposition between the naked and the nude mobilises familiar binarisms in Western European discourse between nature and culture, passion and reason, female and male, aligning the *naked* with the former realm, and *the nude* with the latter. As other commentators have noted, even the criticisms of Clark reinforce his binary model; Berger merely inverts the values ascribed to the realm of *the naked*, challenging the bourgeois values of culture that produce *the nude* as a form of masculine cultural property, and valorising the natural realm of *the naked* as having a more authentic relationship to social reality and cultural production.⁴¹⁶ Nead's critical engagement with Clark's *nude*, is to regard it as a structuring device for regulating the ambiguous and troubling field of images of women's bodies. She describes Clark's philosophical explanation for the nude as a framing device, allowing the legitimisation of certain types of images as high culture, and the exclusion of others as various forms of pornographic or kitsch imagery.⁴¹⁷ Nead's Bourdieu-inflected analysis of how Clark's 'nude' operated to distinguish a field of representational practices was deployed more directly by William Vaughan in a historical study of life models in British art, co-edited with Martin Postle:

⁴¹¹ In her survey of judeo-christian influenced meanings of nudity, Barcan describes some of the metaphors including: simplicity, Lack of Artifice, Honesty, Openness, Innocence, humility, Childhood, Freedom, Nature, Authenticity, Truth, Exposure, Sin, Criminality, Sex, Death, Shame, Anxiety, poverty, wretchedness, Vulnerability, Humanity, Savagery. Barcan, op. cit., pp. 83-139.

⁴¹² Like Barcan, I use 'nude', 'nudity' and 'naked' interchangeably.

⁴¹³ The relationships between death and life-drawing is a massive area which I have chosen not to explore in this thesis, other than to note its chilling presence. During the course of my research, two of my modelling colleagues died and one interview subject recounted a story of a Sydney life model dying on the podium at a suburban art college in the 1980s. There is a considerable amount of historical studies in this area including Barbara Stafford, Martin Kemp & Marina Wallace, Deanna Petherbridge, Phillippe Comar, Anthea Callen and Jonathan Marshall, and present-day dissection artists such as Sarah Simblett and Michael Esson.

⁴¹⁴ K Clark, *The nude: a study of ideal art*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1956.

⁴¹⁵ See Barcan, op. cit., pp. 33-35.

⁴¹⁶ H McDonald, *Erotic ambiguities: the female nude in art*, Routledge, London, 2001, pp. 8-9.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. I return to a fuller discussion of Nead and Clark in Chapter Five.

*As long as the figure was 'nude' and not 'naked', the argument went, it was 'art'. You were therefore able to enjoy contemplating it as a pure aesthetic experience. There was no connection between what you were doing and the kind of things men in macs got up to in Soho.*⁴¹⁸

Vaughan describes Clark's binarism as an 'urbane and reassuring formulation' designed to appeal to members of a conservative public who would both identify with highbrow associations of the fine art nude, and want to distance themselves from the expanding popular industries of print pornography, sex-entertainment, and the pop culture phenomenon of post-war sexual libertarianism.⁴¹⁹ As other commentators have noted, there is an extensive cultural history of the selective application of religious or philosophical metaphorical connotations of nudity in order to demarcate the enormous range of experiences and practices involving nudity into fields of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and representations.⁴²⁰ A number of cultural historians have noted the intense anxiety in Victorian England around differentiating life-drawing classes from the burgeoning sex-entertainment industries and, as Barcan notes, much of the legal wrangling over life-drawing classes in the nineteenth century was concerned with discerning the role of nudity in public institutions of art from the covert and fiercely gendered industries of sex-entertainment and pornography.⁴²¹

5. *Classing the nude*

Demarcating certain forms of nudity as acceptable or inappropriate is not only a matter of metaphors but has included specific behavioural directives on how nudity is displayed and represented. A number of authors include lengthy discussions of the public controversy surrounding naked figurative representation and the employment of life models in the United Kingdom in the debates over proposed legislation during the 1850s and 1860s, which included specific directives for the management of life-drawing classes.⁴²² A number of recent studies note that contemporary life-drawing classes are also characterised by a range of informal protocols tacitly understood and generally observed by artists, teachers, students and models.⁴²³ Arguably much of this protocol in English speaking countries is descended from the UK legislation of 1851. Entry to the life-room was prohibited except for members of the royal family, and this persists in the current practice of closing the doors of life-drawing rooms while models are posing, while a British nineteenth-century legal stipulation on artists' models to remain completely still while posing has continued to influence the use of changing rooms and robes and, particularly in English speaking countries, the practice of short

⁴¹⁸ W Vaughan, 'The Naked And The Nude' in M Postle & W Vaughan, *The Artists Model From Etty To Spencer*, Merrell Holberton, London, 1999 p. 110.

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁴²⁰ Barcan, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-83.

⁴²¹ Barcan, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36 cites A Stuart, *Showgirls*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1996 and J Blessing 'The artifice of striptease: Gypsy Rose Lee and the masquerade of nudity', L Rado (ed.), *Modernism, gender and culture: a cultural studies approach*, Garland, New York, 1997.

⁴²² This proliferation of nudity in popular and consumer culture, in images and performance, led to enormous official protests and inquiries in England, which was also largely directed at regulating life-classes. Various legislation attempted to ban life-classes, or banish them from government funded schools, and even ban nudes from public art galleries. After the passage of the obscene publications act in 1857, the life-class was retained but with considerable restrictions on the protocol of who could enter a life-room (single men under 25, and women were excluded) communication between models and students, as well as regulations on how the model undressed, and appeared naked. See A Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20, 25-33; Borzello, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-84; Vaughan, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-114.

⁴²³ Peter Steinhart and Sarah R. Philips discuss protocol in contemporary life-drawing classes.

successive poses during the *croquis* or warming-up section of life-drawing class.⁴²⁴

In addition to the protocol surrounding the behaviour of models, a number of studies explore how particular techniques of life-drawing encode particular regimes of spectatorship and representation of naked figures to ensure that they conform to culturally dominant ideas of appropriate or artistic nudity. Lynda Nead and Ruth Barcan both examined the tacit values of nudity, embodiment and aesthetics embedded in the instructions published in life-drawing manuals and a number of feminist critics have explored the misogynist underpinnings of particular practices of life-drawing.⁴²⁵

I return to a discussion of feminist critical interventions later in this chapter and in this thesis but wish to note that many of these critiques of life-drawing manuals, particularly by non-practitioners, appear to overlook that the status of such manuals, or of life-drawing classes as ‘art’, may be contested. It could be argued that the nineteenth-century distinction between the nude of art and the nude of commerce was replaced in the twentieth century by the nude of the avant-garde versus the nude of the rear-garde, and studies of modernity and fashion describe how the changing shape of fashion mannequins, in the twentieth century, served to demarcate a field of differentiated consumer practices.⁴²⁶ However, to divide the complex mixture of modernist art movements and changing cultural practices of the twentieth century into two camps of ‘avant-garde’ versus ‘rear-garde’ is, in its turn, a gross simplification, and ignores the fluctuating affiliations and disavowals of various art practitioners with stylistic preferences of traditional art, graphic design, modern art and pornography. It is more useful to envisage art as a field of contested practices and discourses, within which the multiple and ambiguous connotations of nudity are differentially enunciated, performed and regulated.

As the next sections illustrate, participants articulate their experience of the ambiguous status of sexuality in life-drawing classes often in relation to their own contestation of social, cultural, bodily and institutional capital. The status of apparently transgressive practices of naked display and spectatorship is linked to judgements about the geography, culture, professionalism, ethics and economic power of the transgressive parties. I use the word ‘transgressive’ quite consciously in a Batailleian sense of something that is intrinsically linked to the act of symbolic crossing as a way of demarcating a boundary or a series of boundaries between what is permissible and what is ‘off limits’.⁴²⁷ Arguably life-drawing has provided a means of negotiating ambiguous relationships towards voyeurism and sexuality, and the changing aspirations towards cultural capital of an increasingly socially mobile society.

6. Transgressing boundaries

The desire to contain, sublimate or deny the presence of sexual desire or sexual behaviour in the life-room is a strong element of many accounts by both models and artists, but this does

⁴²⁴ In France and continental Europe, artists’ models often move during the ‘croquis’ stage of the class, and artists are encouraged to sketch the naked figure in movement. See J Marshall, ‘Dynamic Medicine and Theatrical Form at the fin de siècle: A formal analysis of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot’s pedagogy, 1862–1893’, *Modernism/Modernity*, vol.15, no. 1, January 2008, pp. 131–153.

⁴²⁵ Barcan, op. cit., p. 34, discusses A Thompson, *A handbook of anatomy for art students*, Dover, New York, 1964 (1929). Nead, (op. cit., pp. 50–54) discusses five examples of what she refers to as a ‘widely circulated, cheap, ‘do-it-yourself’ life-class manual’.

⁴²⁶ T Gronberg, ‘Beware beautiful women: the 1920s shopwindow mannequin and a physiognomy of effacement’ *Art History*, vol. 20, no 3, September 1997, pp. 382–384.

⁴²⁷ See M Foucault, ‘A Preface to Transgression’, in F Botting & S Wilson (eds.), *Bataille: a critical reader*, Blackwell, Oxford & Malden, MA, 1998. Like Foucault, I am not only interested in prohibition demarcates an accursed share of excessive desire, but how the productive capacities of transgression are linked to wider patterns of subject formation.

not actually mean that sexual desire is absent. It is arguable that the prohibition of sexuality within the life-room could operate as a productive force, generating a type of sublimated frisson as students, models and teachers negotiate their own sexual, professional and creative boundaries. Many of my interview subjects combined their insistence on the asexuality of life-drawing with an anecdote about some form of sexual behaviour by models or teaching staff usually deemed inappropriate, awkward, transgressive or amusing. Bernard Ollis gave a couple of examples from when he was appointed as the inaugural director of an art department in Darwin, and had to advertise and interview prospective artists' models:

I had three or four in a row. I had firstly, and I think I've never gone through this before or since – I think it says a little bit about the extremes of Darwin I have to say, all right? – to put it in context.⁴²⁸ The first man that came in was very worried and kept talking about what happens if he got an erection. So I tried to talk to him about how it was the most unsexual environment and non-sexual environment and how it is highly unlikely this will occur unless ... well... you're just there.... And you're just going to stand there ... and you don't.... Yeah. It's not going to happen. I tried to reassure him, but after he kept talking about this as a constant thing I just thought that "There's something a bit strange here". I don't want to get into psychology here, but I thought "He's not necessarily the right person for the job, he seems to be too preoccupied with his own penis". So let's move onto somebody else. The next girl that came in, and told me that she spent her time on the beach, in Darwin called Casuarina Beach, and she had an all over tan. She was very proud of her all-over tan. And I said "Well that's good but that's not really a criteria for a life model" and she said, "Well let me show you", and she proceeded to take her clothes off. And she got down to the point of almost dropping her pants and I said, "Just put your clothes on. Please!"⁴²⁹

Models' anecdotes of sexually inappropriate or transgressive behaviour in life-drawing classes are far more discomfiting. For models, sexualising comments or behaviour in life-drawing classes often reveal brutal imbalances of power. Prominent figurative artist and former life model, Wendy Sharpe had a number of anecdotes about her experiences of sexually transgressive situations while modelling. Sharpe's experiences of sexualised behaviour in life-drawing classes were linked to her social and economic mobility as a model, a casual teacher and as nationally recognised artist. At the start of the interview Sharpe recounted a couple of 'horror' stories from a particular sketch club where she had modelled while studying art in the 1970s:

And they used to have sketch groups there and they always had young girl models, and this was when I was a young girl model. And it was all really

⁴²⁸ Darwin is a small tropical city located in Australia's Northern Territory and geographically closer to East Timor than most major Australian cities. Non-indigenous residents are often associated with the stereotypes of the colonial frontier, exhibiting crude libertarian excesses, or banal forms of social transgression conveying a studied defiance of the expectations or cultural aspirations of the colonial metropolis.

⁴²⁹ Bernard Ollis, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

*sleazy, but you're too young to quite realise how sleazy it is.*⁴³⁰

Sharpe continued:

They'd talk to you like, they'd say, "Do you want a lift?" I needed a lift up to some bus stop or some thing. And they'd all say "I'll give her a lift! I'll give her a lift!" It was a bit like, it was all yucky. And it was all, as though you were... if not a prostitute, then certainly a woman of easy virtue, as opposed to a very nice young girl. And also, a couple of times I went there and drew myself. And when they saw me drawing they went "Oh, you're doing a bit of drawing dear?" "Well, yes, I'm an art student", which I was at the time [thinking] "yeah, you know". And they were surprised and a bit... because you're not meant to do that, you're just girlie. All you are is girlie. That would all have gone by now because all of those people were quite old, and they've all passed on, and it's not a bad thing!

Sharpe did not analyse the behaviour of the male artists but blamed her own youth, ignorance and innocence in allowing herself to be employed in such vulnerable and humiliating situations:

Sharpe: This was because, when I was young, I was very, very ingenuous and innocent and ignorant. I was not streetwise, definitely not streetwise. And so I was sort of stupid and trusting. And one of these old men asked me to model for him privately, in his flat in Mosman, which I agreed to do. And he wanted me to do all these girlie, like photos like those ones from the f-stop magazines!⁴³¹ And wanted me to get into a bath of bubble bath, and do one of those[demonstrates pose]

Interviewer: Oohh, eeugh! Ohh! And he was drawing it?

Sharpe: Yeah! But then he wanted to get in too.

Interviewer: Ohhhh No!!!

Sharpe: It was all really yucky, yucky, yucky.

Interviewer: So what did you do?

Sharpe: I got away, it was all right. But it was YUCKY! I really felt like a prostitute.

Interviewer: I had a similar gig like that. It was just ugh!

Sharpe: Really horrible. It's horrible! But that's what they think you just

⁴³⁰ Wendy Sharpe, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴³¹ 'F-stop magazines' is Sharpe's term for photography magazines featuring soft-porn photographs of female models.

are. Either a prostitute or you're nearly a prostitute. You're sort of close to being... You could be a prostitute, given the opportunity! (laughs) But when I won the Archibald, I got squillions of phone calls and letters and things, including someone who said that they had a photo of me, a nude photo of me, I think from when I was about 19, doing all that. And I probably posed for him to take photos, that man, and I think I probably posed for photos in that perve club too. And he said he's got photos of me and was sort of... I think he was trying to blackmail me. And I said "Fine! I don't care! You got photos? Print them!" I mean I was a pretty nineteen-year-old girl! What have I got to be ashamed of? They weren't anything porno, just me in the nude going like that. [demonstrates pose] So what?⁴³²

Sharpe insisted that this particular sketch club was an exception, and interviews with other models confirmed that the sexist behaviour of that particular sketch group was a fairly isolated case:

But the interesting thing about it is, in all my time modelling, and involved in teaching and involved in drawing, that's one of the very few times that I've ever been anywhere that's sleazy. Because they usually aren't, and that's what people don't realise. Which I'm sure you would agree, that most people who've got nothing to do with life-drawing, who've never had any experience of it, think that there's got to be quite a big element of perve. There's 'I'm sure there's some people are there drawing seriously, but there's got to be a big pervy element' but there isn't. It's very, very rare. It doesn't happen. It's rare!⁴³³

While Sharpe says that the 'perve element' is rare, sexual desire, sexual references and discomforting sexual behaviour feature in a number of accounts and anecdotes by artists, teachers and models. Sharpe recounted a job interview she had as a casual life-drawing instructor with the eccentric director of a private art school in Sydney:

So then he told me this other story, which was about how he was a teenage boy again, and he's at a swimming pool, and there's all these girls in their bathing suits. And he has an excuse to perve at them because he's drawing. And so he can get to draw girls. That's the real story! [laughs]⁴³⁴

This anecdotal confession of sexuality arguably functions to generate a form of complicity and intimacy between the 'transgressive' artist and the potential employee, but it also reinforces the particular power imbalance between a male director of an art school and a precariously employed casual female teacher. It resembles similar anecdotes by female models performing a knowing 'laughing off' of publicly sexual comments or remarks by male

⁴³² Wendy Sharpe, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴³³ *ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

teachers.⁴³⁵ Mia Lovelock has worked as an artist's model for over a decade, and has modelled for a range of nude and fashion photography. In recounting her first life modelling gig for a private art school in Sydney, she specifically prefaced the transgressive behaviour of her employer with an assertion of his bohemian status as an 'eccentric artist':

Lovelock: Oh, Dave's⁴³⁶ very... he's very.... a kinda eccentric artist and he would get very passionate about his art work and he can swear at people and get very passionate and also.... Actually, that's right, the very first time that I actually worked there the whole group went to the pub down the road afterwards, just to have pool and drinks, and yeah, he came out [and said] "I wanna fuck you".⁴³⁷

Interviewer: So what did you say?

Lovelock: For some reason I just sorta could understand Dave and I said "Oh really Dave?" And apparently some models could put up with him but a lot of models couldn't. So a lot had to... I imagine a lot of models got turned away. But, yeah, it was a great art school, very passionate.

The gendered social relations of sexual transgression, whereby female employees are invited to share, and expected to silently tolerate, the sexual transgressions of male superiors, maintains sexual desire and behaviour as a transgressive and uniquely male privilege. It also enables the performance of romantic ideas of bohemia and social transgression and their link to art.⁴³⁸ It is this link to 'art' that contains the more menacing implications of workplace sexual harassment within a relatively safe cultural format. Rather than being a transgression of social boundaries, Lovelock reduced Dave's proposition to a slightly risqué performance of his cultural capital as an eccentric artist. By laughing off Dave's comment, Lovelock not only ensured her own continued employment, but also effected a *détournement* of her compliance as a vulnerable employee into complicity with the transgressive cachet of a bohemian life-class. This complicity effects a performance of a dissimulated bohemian ease around sexual transgression and Lovelock is able to assert her own cultural capital in identifying with and participating in art making practices. This point is a particularly important factor in how artists' models mediate their experiences of vulnerability and exploitation with their own sense of agency; arguably the investment that many artists' models have with their occupation includes their sense of cultural capital as a particularly specialised class of arts-workers. Possibly Lovelock's willingness to identify with the bohemian aspirations of 'Dave's' private art school may have also been linked to the fact that she had not studied art and had not been exposed to the conventions and protocols governing life-drawing classes. At the time of the incident, Lovelock had recently moved to Sydney from Canberra, and may have been more willing to accept and explore the libertarian behaviour of 'bohemian artists' in the larger metropolis.

The identification of artists' models with the apparently bohemian aspirations of some life-drawing classes is arguably linked to their own cultural capital outside of the life-room

⁴³⁵ Another model described an incident where a male teacher looked into her changing area and, appraising her body, exclaimed 'Nice!'.

⁴³⁶ 'Dave' is a pseudonym.

⁴³⁷ Mia Lovelock, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴³⁸ Borzello, op. cit., p. 97.

and not all models are willing to mediate or manage the transgressive behaviour of teaching staff. Artist Chrissie Ianssen has studied at a number of art institutions in NSW and the ACT, and modelled in Sydney and Wollongong, including at one institution where she also studied. Describing her former art school as ‘prime for this sleaze factor’, Ianssen recounted the following harrowing anecdote:

I was doing a class for [a prominent landscape artist]. It was a weekend course. He was doing a special course, he wasn't a regular teacher, but he was a mate of someone's.

He had white wine or champagne or something and he was feeding it to the students. And I was in a pose, he set me up standing there, and I think I had my hand on something, and my other hand here, so I was really exposed. My arms were held away from my body. And he went and stood at the other end of the room, facing me and crossed his legs, crossed his legs, standing there, practically hand on hip, drinking his champagne and smirking while he was looking at me. He was completely foul and drinking champagne.

And I couldn't drink champagne because I had to be still. I couldn't move my head, because I had to be still. I mean I could have, of course. But he was relying on my situation, my work ethic I suppose. And I was young too.⁴³⁹

Ianssen's anecdote highlights the particular constellation of factors in the specific activity of life modelling that exacerbates the powerlessness and vulnerability of artists' models. Models are required not only to work naked, but to remain still in a pose and generally silent. Nudity functions to separate the model from other participants in life-drawing classes, marking them as a particular type of subject excluded from the privileges of clothes, of movement, of talking and participating in the bonhomie of a recreational studio setting. The combination of nudity, stillness and silence exacerbates their vulnerability to the humiliating behaviour of even the most subtle gestures of sexual harassment. In the incident described above the discomfiting implications of a smirk or a ‘perve’ enabled humour and sexuality to be mobilised across a power differential that was simultaneously exacerbated by the transgressive movement across the tacit boundaries between employer and employee. As the status of the life-drawing class oscillated between serious study and recreational or voyeuristic pleasure, the model's own stasis compounded their lack of agency to mediate the type of spectatorship, representation and behaviour of the spectators within the life-room.

7. The ‘perving’ issue

The regulation of sexuality in life-drawing classes as appropriate or inappropriate is often related to practices of spectatorship. ‘Perving’ rates a mention in a number of accounts of life-drawing by models and also by former students. In Ianssen's anecdote the immobilising power of the instructor's stare, fixing her in place as the object of his painfully unambiguous scrutiny, reduced her own sense of agency and subjectivity. In trying to explain the loss of her own agency, Ianssen indicated the complexity of the forms of observation that were occurring around her:

⁴³⁹ Chrissie Ianssen, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

If I was older I suppose, I dunno, I would have just looked away, or something, or said, "I want a break now". Something. But everyone else was drawing. So it was a completely different way of observing. It's analytical. And of course they're perving at the same time and you know, whatever perving means at that point.

These particular anecdotes about transgressive staring or behaviour reinforce voyeurism as a male privilege, and it is hard to imagine a male model being equally humiliated by the sexual provocations of a smirking female instructor. Although equal numbers of male and female models were interviewed for this study, none of the male models described similar incidents of sexuality being mobilised by female artists or instructors in a manner that was humiliating or harassing, and in fact a number of teaching staff recounted anecdotes of male models staring at female students or artists in a manner that made them feel uncomfortable.⁴⁴⁰ However, this finding does not necessarily endorse the universality of the binary formulation of 'men look; women appear' as articulated by John Berger.⁴⁴¹ While gender does influence the ways in which naked display and spectatorship are performed in life-drawing classes, factors such as racial origin, social class, self-confidence and cultural capital are also important.⁴⁴² While none of the male models reported incidences of sexual harassment or unwelcome sexual staring in life-drawing classes, a few did acknowledge that being observed could occasionally make them feel uncomfortable. Artist and former model Nick Strike evocatively described a particular situation in life-drawing classes that made him feel self-conscious:

That's another thing; being asked to adopt a pose for the teacher to demonstrate to the students how to draw this pose. Suddenly I'm very conscious in that set up of these eyes who are not behind pencils, if you like. Unpencilled eyes! Seeing you. And in that sense I become very self-conscious and it's interesting just for myself. Just thinking, "well it's the same people looking", but they're looking differently when they're not drawing."⁴⁴³

Strike's description of the uncanny threat of 'unpencilled eyes' is reminiscent of the expression, 'the naked stare', and is a reminder of the multiple associations of nudity in relation to feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness as well as metaphors of honesty or brutality. I return to issues of complexity of spectatorship and subjectivity in Chapter Four; however, it can be argued that life-drawing classes involve multiple forms of looking which shift between registers of analytical, sexualised, transgressive or compliant, which affect and

⁴⁴⁰ I am reluctant to draw too many generalisations from this finding. Gordon Roe described an incident of a male model being harassed by female students. See G Roe, 'the body of art and the mantle of authority', in A Brydon & S Niesson (eds.), *Consuming fashion: adorning the transnational body*, Berg, Oxford, 1998, p. 99.

⁴⁴¹ J Berger, *Ways of seeing: based on the BBC television series with John Berger*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London & Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985, p. 47.

⁴⁴² The issue of racial origin and cultural capital was articulated in a performance piece by model and poet Miles Merrill for the Sydney Writers Festival in 2006. In 'The Spokes-Slamming', Merrill adopted a series of short poses, clad in a pair of boxer shorts, while narrating the questions put to him about his racial origins, by members of a conservative Sydney sketch club. He evoked the discomfiting associations between the scrutiny of the model's naked flesh in a life-drawing class, the bodily scrutiny of African American slaves and the orientalist discourses behind the physiognomic scrutiny of miscegenation in racist cultures.

⁴⁴³ Nick Strike, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

contest boundaries of sexual or non-sexual behaviour as well as expectations of gender. Comments from artists and models suggest that some level of voyeuristic behaviour or ‘perving’ is present among many participants in life-drawing classes, as Wendy Sharpe admits:

And I remember when I was a student. And these are all of the stories and incidents that you remember where it kind of keys into it. Being a student and there’s a totally nude model sitting out there, and you’re perverting, because it’s just natural to perve at anybody. You’re perverting at someone; I can remember two perverting instances - a girl with a singlet and no bra. And she’s moving and you’re just trying to see her breast.

This comment about the paradoxes of ‘perving’ on semi-clothed students in the presence of naked models highlights some of the contradictions of sexuality and spectatorship noted in the Prologue to this thesis. Unlike my own account, Sharpe’s story naturalises her ‘perving’ as based on (presumably natural) curiosity rather than (transgressive) sexual desire:

I can remember thinking, “I’m actually trying to see her breast, but I can see that one for nothing!” and I can also remember a boy. A strange boy, an ugly strange boy that used to wear these very wide shorts... No underwear and you didn’t really want to see what you could see! But what you could see, it’s still more interesting, even though you don’t really want to look, you still find yourself looking at that rather than [a beautiful male model] with no clothes on!

The ambiguity of ‘perving’ as a form of transgressive looking is implicated with a range of behaviours, relating to gender, sexual desire, heterosexual performance, and judgements of bodily capital. Discerning how sexuality fluctuates through a range of appropriate and transgressive looks in life-drawing is difficult, and complicated by the connotations of cultural values associated with differing forms of spectatorship. Spectatorship is repeatedly cited as a significant arbiter of how life-drawing is differentiated from sex-entertainment. In describing her own observational practices while life-drawing, Chrissie Ianssen insisted that the looking involved comparisons and judgements that were, as she put it, not ‘sexy’:

But in terms of the looking, yeah; you’re constantly, not necessarily judging, but making, on lots of different levels, comparisons and ... I mean it’s not a sexy thing. It isn’t.

Bernard Ollis delineated life-drawing from other sites of naked display and spectatorship such as pornography, specifically by a particular performance of observation:

I think that is a very cold, clinical in general, analysis and observation – which is a long way removed from closing your eyes and dreaming fantasy. It is, whilst it is there in front of you, you are extrapolating and getting as much information from that thing as you can. And that’s a cold, calculated, intellectual or intuitive act, but it is always about looking; it is always about observing. And I think that aspect, as I say, is very separated from anything

else that one might imagine.

The assumption underpinning this description of a cold analytical gaze is that clinical observation is somehow exempt from the messy implications of fantasy, desire or sexuality. This assumption has been extensively critiqued in the work of Roberta McGrath and others, and it is worthwhile to note how the idea of clinical analysis is mobilised in order to ensure the asexuality of the form of professional observation, even among artists.⁴⁴⁴ The comparison with anatomical studies and with science reaches a more visceral intensity in the comment from Iain Biggs, discussed earlier. Imagining the life-room as ‘more like a butcher’s shop than a whatever...’ the ‘cold clinical [...] observation’ cited by Bernard Ollis is chilled to the icy knife edge of an analogy with butchery, and evokes a comparison between the naked flesh of life models and the naked flesh of animals, with the butcher’s knife replaced by the rapier-like intensity of the artist’s ‘objective’ scrutiny. I return to the sadistic implications of objective spectatorship in Chapter Four, but wish to stress that the unease surrounding practices of observation in life-drawing classes is not only linked to sexuality, but to broader associations of nudity such as death. As Iannsen notes:

It’s a very slippery area, because analytical looking is never analytical looking only.

Iannsen admitted that she had occasionally felt desire or pleasure at looking at some models, and also admitted the complexity of motives in her own decision to work as a model, and the power of naked performance:

And I guess I started to see my own motives for posing as well, when I was drawing other models, young women. It’s a sexual power thing, you know? They want to be looked at, by men, and young men, or young women. And for men it’s kind of similar I think.

Iannsen is not the only model to admit that naked modelling is linked to an empowering expression of sexuality. Other models were more explicit about the pleasure they derived from being able to display their naked body in ways that could be seen as sexually provocative, and a couple of female models described feeling sexually aroused while modelling. It is possibly the coyness surrounding sexuality in the life-room and its presence as an undercurrent that a naked model can activate and de-activate at will may contribute to the frisson of pleasure passing through a dynamic life-drawing class.⁴⁴⁵ Given the gendered imbalance of power in dominant sexual politics surrounding women’s sexual display and agency in most heterosocial contexts, life-drawing classes, with their prohibitions on sexual and physical contact between models and spectators, offer a very rare opportunity for women to explore their sexual agency without having to be responsible for the reactions of viewers.⁴⁴⁶ As Iannsen explains:

It’s like power with your body, and I think that’s why a lot of women are

⁴⁴⁴ R McGrath, *Seeing her sex: medical archives and the female body*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 2002.

⁴⁴⁵ Recalling the earlier comments about the penis, it is worth noting that this pleasure is restricted to female models or those male models who can avoid getting an erection while modelling.

⁴⁴⁶ Similar arguments have been made in accounts of sex entertainers working in enclosed peep-show booths. However, the avowedly non-sexual status of life-drawing classes enable a more fluid movement between differing forms of bodily display that the purely sexual and acutely normative bodily aesthetics of sex-entertainment industry.

drawn to it, because you are a commanding force in that context. Yeah, on one level. There are lot of other levels to it.

The levels and ways in which sexuality is sublimated, acknowledged, performed, or parodied varies considerably between various settings where life-drawing occurs, and forms a perceptible component of how artists and art institutions negotiate their cultural capital. While some private sketch clubs are extremely strict about maintaining traditional protocols of professional life-drawing classes,⁴⁴⁷ there is a burgeoning movement in explicitly sexual, burlesque or erotic life-drawing across a number of subcultures internationally.⁴⁴⁸ In 2008 the Sydney Leather Pride Association held a life-drawing event during the annual Leather Pride Week featuring models who were gagged, bound, corseted and pierced as observers drew them.⁴⁴⁹ The implications of the *détournement* of practices of life-drawing such as the restraint and silence of models into a specialised fetish arena are troubling and fascinating, and beyond the scope of this chapter to explore sufficiently. Needless to say, it is not only the sexual connotations of life-drawing that appeal to the public imagination. In New York artist Michael Alan organises and poses for highly theatrical ‘*Draw-a-thons*’ which involve large groups of models in various states of costume and undress posing successively over the course of six or eight hours.⁴⁵⁰ During the course of the night, drawers are invited to strip and participate briefly in the group poses, which spontaneously play with a range of cultural associations of nudity and figurative representation.⁴⁵¹

Life-drawing events have also proliferated in drinking establishments, in Australia and internationally. In New York, ex-fashion student, illustrator, ex-life model and burlesque performer Molly Crabapple started *Dr. Sketchy’s Anti Art School* as a response to her own acute boredom modelling for life-drawing classes.⁴⁵² *Dr. Sketchy’s* features female burlesque performers in makeup and elaborate eccentric performers such as Amber Ray who perform a coy strip tease during the course of posing, without exposing their nipples or genitalia, combined with a number of playful drawing contests and drinking games.⁴⁵³ *Dr. Sketchy’s* started in a small bar in the ‘hip’ Williamstown art precinct of Brooklyn and has toured nationally and been copied internationally.⁴⁵⁴ Arguably it manages to mobilise the coy nostalgia surrounding burlesque as an obsolete form of sex-entertainment and combine it with a cultural practice that retains an idea of social propriety and cultural capital. The cultural capital of the practitioners is presumably enhanced by combining a form of ‘knowing’

⁴⁴⁷ Life-drawing classes are characterised by a range of informal spatial and behavioural protocols regulating contact between models and artists and models behaviour while dressed, naked, or transitioning between the two states. This is discussed in Sarah R. Phillips and Peter Steinhart.

⁴⁴⁸ According to Peter Steinhart San Francisco runs a Gay Men’s life-drawing groups, Steinhart op. cit., p. 7. In New York, The Queer Men’s Erotic Art Workshop ran fortnightly life-drawing sessions, and held an exhibition at the Leslie-Lohman Gallery in Chelsea in February 2007. See H Redding, RW Richards, RH Rosen, *Dirty Little Drawings: The Queer Men’s Erotic Art Workshop*, Bruno Gmünder Verlag GmbH, Berlin, 2007.

⁴⁴⁹ Participant observation, Sydney, July 2007

⁴⁵⁰ <http://www.michaelalanart.com/drawathon.html>

⁴⁵¹ Participant observation, February 2007. Models in Michael Alan’s *Draw-a-thons* often pose partially or fully dressed in gorilla outfits or animal masks, fake blood and household implements such as garden shears and ironing boards. Many draw-a-thons are based around particular themes, usually referenced from b-grade horror, sci-fi or cult films, which allow an ironic and knowing play on the cultural references of participants in New York’s East Village.

⁴⁵² Molly Crabapple, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴⁵³ Amber Ray, interview with author, see Appendix 1. See: *Amber Ray Professional Sensationalist* website, © 2009 Amber Ray, viewed 2 April 2009, <<http://www.amberray.net/confessions.html>>.

⁴⁵⁴ *Dr. Sketchy’s Anti-Art School* website © 2006 Molly Crabapple Illustration & Malloreigh.com, viewed 16 November 2008, <<http://www.drsketchy.com/>>.

engagement with the sexual pleasure of burlesque spectatorship with a detached familiarity with life-drawing. At the three sessions I attended in New York, the drawers were an equal mix of genders, all white, mostly young and sporting similar fashions to the college-trained audiences at the many art openings in the area.⁴⁵⁵ The status of life-drawing in relationship to the perceived cultural capital of different practitioners has been discussed in previous chapters, and it is worth noting that familiarity with or association with contemporary art would also influence the way that certain forms of sexualised spectatorship are contained within the performance of a cultural cosmopolitanism.

8. *If looks could thrill*

In October 2007, *The Sydney Morning Herald* published an article with the caption above, about the use of male life models at bridal Hens' Parties.⁴⁵⁶ Quoting 'happy customers' such as prominent fashion designers and other female professionals, the article promoted the life-drawing classes as part of a 'sassy', fashionable trend among the presumably educated aspirational and 'post-feminist' readership of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.⁴⁵⁷ The article featured the life-classes run by artist Rayni Bonne, who is depicted, despite the titillating caption, along with her gaggle of hens, looking earnestly and seriously at the naked male model, who towers above them. A brief perusal of the website of '*The Artful Hen*' reinforced this idea of life-drawing as an exercise in fun but 'tasteful' female agency.⁴⁵⁸ The images focussing on the drawings, on the women at their easels, looking and laughing, contrast with those on the website for the rival Hens' Night drawing group run by Tony Johansen in his Kings Cross studio, also known as 'The East Sydney Academy of Art'.⁴⁵⁹ The images on his 'Bohemian Arty Party Hens Night' seem to show more of the flesh of the female spectators than of the male models. Johansen's students appear to be remarkably passive, recumbently seated and smiling broadly, passive before the almost phallic mastery of their teacher.⁴⁶⁰

Hens' nights have boomed in the past two decades as an increasingly ribald upscaling of the traditional 'bridal shower', a female-only prenuptial exchange of gifts. Sex segregated prenuptial gatherings feature in many cultures, but in twentieth-century consumer societies male versions of stag or buck's nights became increasingly linked to commercial sex-entertainment such as pornographic 'stag films', strip clubs, and outcall sex performers.⁴⁶¹ While the 1970s feminist movement extended into feminised consumer cultures through soft porn magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Playgirl*, it was not really until the 1980s that male based sex-entertainment became 'mainstream'. Touring strip shows such as *The Chippendales*, *Sydney Hotshots*, *Hunkmania* and *Wild Boys Afloat* started performing and

⁴⁵⁵ Participant observation, Lucky Cat Hotel, 245 Grand Street, Williamsburg, New York. February & March, 2007. My ethnographic observations of the Williamsburg art scene were published in a guest review on *the art life* weblog, 12 March 2007, viewed 1 December, 2008, <http://artlife.blogspot.com/2007/03/dedicated-to.html>.

⁴⁵⁶ C Marcus 'If Looks could Thrill' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13th October 2007, viewed 16 October, 2007, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/hens-cockahoop-at-life-drawing-classes/2007/10/13/1191696235773.html>>.

⁴⁵⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald* is a broadsheet daily newspaper mixing national and global current affairs with lifestyle features, sport, entertainment and reviews or listings of theatre, music, fine arts, restaurants and books. The only other daily newspapers are tabloid format, emphasising local current affairs, sport and celebrity gossip.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Artful Hen* website, © 2000 The Artful Hen, viewed 20 October 2007, <<http://www.theartfulhen.com.au/>>.

⁴⁵⁹ Kings Cross was the centre of Sydney's sex industry for much of the twentieth century.

⁴⁶⁰ *Sydney Hens Night Ideas* website © Tony Johansen, 2006, viewed 20 October 2007, <http://hensnightideas.com/>.

⁴⁶¹ *Stags, Smokers & Blue Movies: The Origins of American Pornographic Film*, Exhibition viewed at Museum of Sex, NYC, January 2007. See <http://www.museumofsex.com/exhibitions/STAGS/index.html>.

touring suburban nightclub venues, which became a site for ‘girls’ nights’ where women could go out and have a giggle and a ‘perve’ together in a space away from men. The complex affective politics surrounding the spaces of male strippers and girls’ nights are beyond the scope of this thesis, and I mention them only as a way of contextualising ritualised spaces of female spectatorship and male nudity within a framework entirely directed towards the construction and containment of gender, sexuality, and spectatorship within rigid codes of heteronormativity.

Hens’ nights have become an increasingly important sphere of the wedding industry, which has boomed in the past two decades. Despite the earnest and ongoing attempts of some gays and lesbians, marriage has been legally reinforced in Australia as an exclusively heterosexual ritual. It is interesting to observe how weddings are performed among middle-class women, those who profess an affinity with some form of feminism (or post-feminism) and how they perform their agency as socially mobile, sexually aware and confident subjects within the often downmarket milieus such as Hens’ nights. The curious mixture of titillation and an insistence on ‘taste’ and decency in *The Sydney Morning Herald* article produces a frisson, which arguably adds to the appeal of life-drawing as a transgressive practice. The boundaries being transgressed include ideas about social propriety and class but more specifically between genders, within a space that is self-consciously heteronormative.

Most social analyses of sexualised spectatorship assume that it is a uniquely male and exclusively heterosexual activity. Within the critical framework built around John Berger’s ‘men look; women appear’ analysis,⁴⁶² female spectatorship of male strippers or participation in hens’ nights life-drawing can be explained as a simple role reversal; the hens’ nights could be seen as a pop-culture recuperation of feminist claims for gender equality. However, the gender relations within hens’ life-drawing cannot be reduced to a simple role reversal and are complicated by a range of factors connected to judgements about the performance of masculinity and bodily capital by the male models.

The photographs on the website for *The Artful Hen* feature a well known artists’ model (and postgraduate philosophy student) whom I interviewed for my research and whom I have also drawn and modelled with.⁴⁶³ Unlike the model used in the press article, his pose is not ‘dominant’ or masculine, he is smaller than the female figures, and curved into the baroque *contrapposto* poses for which he is famous within Sydney’s life-drawing communities.⁴⁶⁴ When I viewed the website, recognising the model and looking at the images provoked a shudder of dismay. Possibly this was related to the juxtaposition of elaborate and specialised life-drawing poses with the relatively frivolous setting of a semi-sexualised recreational life-drawing event.⁴⁶⁵ Artful Hen organiser Rayni Bonne is herself an ex-model and takes considerable pains to pay her models generously and ensure they work in conditions that are comfortable and safe.⁴⁶⁶ However, the awkward affiliations of recreational life-drawing with some of the more judgemental aspects of consumer culture, penetrate into the arena of safe, tasteful pleasure endorsed by *The Artful Hen*. These are most apparent in a number of quotes

⁴⁶² ‘Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.’ Berger op. cit., p. 47.

⁴⁶³ A couple of female artists’ models also posed as ‘hens’ for the website photographs.

⁴⁶⁴ The Artful Hen website. loc. cit.

⁴⁶⁵ My empathy may also be that of an ex-model and knowing the effort and pain associated with the particular poses.

⁴⁶⁶ Rayni Bonne, personal communication with author, Sydney, 2007. Interviews with two of Rayni’s models confirmed her claims. Ngahuia Freed, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

from the *Herald* article attributed to Rayni Bonne:

"The art modelling world, on the male side, tends to be over fifty, fat and balding and we don't do that," Ms Bonne said.⁴⁶⁷

The blatant ageism and 'body fascism' of the above comment is quite shocking, and it is hard to imagine female artists' models being described in such brutal terms in a broadsheet newspaper such as *The Sydney Morning Herald*. If they were, there would probably be a considerable protest by the female and possible the male readership of the *Herald* who generally identify with the cultural capital espoused by eschewing the more blatant sexism of the tabloid press. Bonne does organise life-drawing for buck's nights, and similar conventions of using only young, slender and commercially appealing models are also followed, but this was not mentioned in the *Herald* article, which focussed on the selling point of the body capital of male models:

"I think our business wouldn't be as hugely successful if we even considered doing that. Our guys are all fit and friendly. [Women] don't want to go see a stripper because it's really tacky and it's over so quickly. We have also got that risqué aspect of looking at a good-looking guy."⁴⁶⁸

The above quotation emphasises the tricky movements between taste and tackiness that *The Artful Hen* negotiates. In soliciting for a commercial audience of drawing participants, the responsibility of promoting the cultural capital of *The Artful Hen* is borne on the body of the male model. Arguably the broader social relations that allow a male artists' model to be reduced to a 'risqué aspect' reflect not so much on the triumph of role reversal or even pop feminism but the very limited agency of female spectators attempting to perform a reversal of 'the male gaze' within the confines of heterosexist consumer culture. Arguably the transgression of the form of spectatorship promoted by the hens' nights life-drawing, involves a 'naughtiness' that reinforces the position of the female spectators as *girls*; infantilised sexual subjects who can get away with blatant articulations of ageism and body fascism because in reality they are the subjects who will most likely suffer the effects of gendered ageism and body fascism in mainstream society. A fat, balding fifty-year-old man may not have much appeal to the female life-drawers of *The Artful Hen*, but middle-aged men generally wield considerably more social, financial and economic power than young brides-to-be, and may even appeal to younger women as sexual or marital partners. The gender flipping, and the pose of sexual or aesthetic rejection of an older man by the 'hens', arguably functions to demarcate the hens' night as a carnivalesque conceit.⁴⁶⁹ The European tradition of carnival was to have one day where the dominant social order was reversed, fools became kings, and the police and rulers were pelted with garbage and chased by the mob. At the end of the day, the rulers returned and order was restored, and reaffirmed by its tolerance of a temporary usurpation.⁴⁷⁰ On the eve of marriage, the frisson of a carnivalesque fling only serves to reinforce the intractable and fixed roles of heterosexist society.

A century and a half after life-classes were democratised by allowing women and working-class men to participate, they continue to straddle an ambiguous and awkward realm between state-sponsored art institutions and unofficial realms of amateur artists, private art schools,

⁴⁶⁷ C Marcus, loc. cit.

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ Michael Bakhtin's ideas on the carnivalesque were championed in a number of catalogue essays for the 'bad girls' exhibitions of the 1990s. See JA Isaak, *Feminism and contemporary art: the revolutionary power of women's laughter*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996.

⁴⁷⁰ See MM Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, H Iswolsky (trans.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.

and recreational practices of spectatorship and display. As subsequent chapters will explore, life-drawing often represents an accessible idea of ‘art’, and of practising art, without the ego encumbrance of defining oneself as, or professing a knowledge of, or an affiliation with, that slippery and pretentious realm of ‘the artist’. Within a libertarian sex-positive culture, naked spectatorship is associated less with prurient anxieties of the nineteenth century, and more with the performance of a cosmopolitan, post-modern, post-feminist ease with sexuality, and sex-based entertainment. The increasing proliferation of life-drawing at hens’ nights, illustrates the complex negotiations of class and cultural aspiration amongst the participants, which extends from the suburban hens’ night cultures of Chippendales, male strippers and underwear parties, to a sophisticated ease with exploring ‘one’s artistic side’ a realm of the ego distinctly intimidating to consumers who have never studied art or possibly even attended an art gallery.

The confidence to ‘play’ with art as a practice that is neither professional nor *naif* is a world away from the widespread mythology of artists as geniuses or art as an innate expression of a reified ego, and can only be performed within a context where the art making is a form of familiar and collective bodily habitus (as in the studio-based classes of an art school) or becomes subsumed within a socially transgressive practice of spectatorship. As stated earlier, in general, naked display is almost exclusively associated with sexual availability, and (in particular circumstances) looking at a naked figure and not displaying sexual interest seemingly involves the performance of a mastery over the self and one’s sexual desires. The extensive participation of women in an enormous variety of contemporary life-drawing classes involve a number of classes of female spectators and, presumably, a wide variety of desires, aspirations and distinctions passing among female participants as well as between female artist and models of both genders.⁴⁷¹ Existing critical accounts reduce figurative spectatorship to a question of sexuality, and one that is exclusively heterosexual, and exclusively one way, with female spectatorship explained as a form of transvestism of ‘the male gaze’.⁴⁷² The remainder of this chapter explores how the view of men as voyeurs and women as viewers has remained as the dominant account of spectatorship, even within more explicitly feminist interventions into the life-class.

Feminist art historians have undertaken considerable analysis of the spectatorial relationships in art history and popular culture.⁴⁷³ However recent feminist art scholarship has generally based around dominant forms of visual culture such as Hollywood cinema or magazines in consumer culture. The contemporary gendering of viewing practices within visual arts remains largely unexplored. Within cinema studies, female spectatorship has been generally theorised according to psychoanalytic frameworks, which often reduce it to an account of symbolic transvestism, where female spectators (such as the participants in a mix gendered drawing class) apparently imitate and conform to the performance of a masculine

⁴⁷¹ There is considerable scope to study the interactions between mature age and young female art students, and between those of differing classes and differing sexual identities. From personal observation, the ways in which women students of various ages and classes interact with artists’ models in the mixed settings of art school life-drawing classes involves the performance of an enormous range of complex behaviours. While working as a model, I experienced a number of occasions where clearly middle-class mature-age women students would approach me and attempt to touch or rearrange my limbs while posing, without speaking to me. No other types of students or teachers ever did this.

⁴⁷² See L Mulvey, ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” inspired by *duel in the Sun*’, C Penley (ed), *Feminism and film theory*, Routledge, New York & BFI, London, 1988, p. 72.

⁴⁷³ See T Garb, ‘The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France’ reprinted in K Adler & M Pointon, *The Body imaged : the human form and visual culture since the Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p35-36, and L Nochlin, *Woman as sex object: studies in erotic art, 1730-1970*, Allen Lane, London, 1973.

objectifying ‘gaze’, or a narcissistic identification with the (female) object of the (male) gaze.⁴⁷⁴ This may reflect a tacit investment of much populist second-wave inspired feminism and subsequent ‘post-feminism’ with heterosexuality and the maintenance of distinctly binarised gender identities, or it may reflect a broader lacuna in critical engagement with the social and historical specificities of art practice. Contemporary life-drawing, whether at Sydney hens’ night, Leather Pride Week, a compulsory class in a suburban TAFE, inner city art faculty, or among a group of retirees, is open to examination of how the complex relations of power and subjectivity are performed and represented as gendered. However, reducing this complexity of contestations and possibilities to the cyclopean mastery of a singular male gaze denies the very real and rich relationships to embodiment, spectatorship and gendered becoming that a ‘safe’ theatre of naked performance can provide for all participants.

9. Looking at the life-class

*To look at the naked body of a stranger is both privileged and peculiar. Most drawing instructors ignore the tangle of political, sensual, erotic, and critical issues created by this scenario. The unspoken expectation is that art students observe the naked body scientifically and objectively, without eroticism or other feelings.*⁴⁷⁵

Published in 1999, in the US College Art Association’s *Art Journal*, the article ‘Reviewing The Nude’ potentially offers an important critical engagement with the pedagogical technologies of life-drawing. Written by Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik, both practising artists, teachers and feminists, the article refers to a number of canonical texts in relation to aesthetic theory and drawing practice: notably Kenneth Clark’s *The Nude*, as well as Kimon Nicolaidis’s *The Natural Way to Draw*, and Robert Beverley Hale’s *Masterclass in Drawing*.⁴⁷⁶ The major theme in Bostrom and Malik’s article is an emphasis on a project of de-aestheticisation or critiquing the myriad of tacit cultural conventions that separate and reify the *nude* life model from the more prosaic, problematic and censored realm of the *naked*:

*We propose to critique the defective vision of aesthetic distance in viewing the nude. Aesthetic distance refers here to the tradition of seeing the nude as naked, as an arrangement of formal elements. Aesthetic distance is a device used to convince us that unclothed bodies, used in the classroom, are neither sexual, social nor political; they are exempt from common human behaviour.*⁴⁷⁷

The authors’ stated intention of critiquing aesthetic distance is matched by a list of explicit pedagogical strategies in order to remind students that they are looking at a naked human being with a specific gendered identity, and to explore how models and artists can challenge gender stereotypes, through the use of gesture, collage, and drag - asking models to pose, and students to imagine and draw each other posing or dressing as members of the opposite sex.

⁴⁷⁴ See MA Doane, ‘Film and the masquerade, theorising the female spectator’ in A Jones (ed), *The feminism and visual culture reader*, Routledge, London & New York, 1993, p. 70. Admittedly Doane allows for a more complex set of possibilities for female spectatorship than Mulvey’s rigidly Freudian account. Doane also gives a phenomenological account of the gendered difference in spectatorship rather than relying on a deterministic account of a symbolic order of the phallus and its lack.

⁴⁷⁵ L Bostrom & M Malik, ‘Reviewing the Nude’, *Art Journal*, spring 1999, p. 42.

⁴⁷⁶ I discuss the status of Hale and Nicolaidis among life-drawing practitioners in chapter four.

⁴⁷⁷ Bostrom & Malik, op. cit., p. 42.

However, on consideration, a number of the exercises, most notably those encouraging students to collage images from magazines creating their own post-gendered chimeras or cyborgs, led me to question the assumptions of gender, representation and process present within the article. Arguably there is a considerable difference between cutting and re-assembling elements of photographic or indexical figurative imagery, and trying to manipulate amorphous materials such as charcoal, paper and clay to represent the experience of looking at a naked human figure.⁴⁷⁸ Collage involves a series of stop-start temporal experiences; where the punctum of a pre-existing photograph is broken apart and juxtaposed with another instantaneous indexical element. The composite image may operate as a projection of a pre-existing image, or (ideally) may operate as the basis for an imaginative projection of a new image or idea. Life-drawing is embedded in the simultaneous actions of looking and manipulating materials into forms that may, or may not, resemble the subject being observed. Drawings do not have the indexical status of photographs, and it is presumptuous to regard art students' drawings as representations.⁴⁷⁹ Many of the exercises recommended by Bostrom and Malik rely on the assumed proficiency of found images to represent an internal repertoire of images of bodies or subjects (even subconscious, androgynous or chimeric) as gendered, and reinforce the questionable idea that gender can be confined to a representation. Such exercises seem to overlook the actual material difference between drawing, as an exercise of varyingly competent forms of responsive mark-making, and the use or generation of other forms of imagery. They also largely rely on an engagement with what figurative images represent, rather than an exploration of what trying to see a naked person, and create a visual record of that seeing, actually might involve, what it might feel like, and how what it looks like can be intelligently critiqued.

My critique of Bostrom and Malik is not concerned with their introduction of pop art aspects of collage, mime, drag and deconstruction to the life-room, but the unchallenged structuralist underpinnings of their advocacy of a multitude of contemporary approaches, within a contrived pedagogical theatre which is largely reified as *traditional* with its performative conventions left unexamined and unchallenged. The structuralist reduction of visual material to a set of symbolic codes allows for a collapse of observation and representation of the nude figure. Not only are various modalities of figurative representation conflated, but culturally dominant *representations* of the figure are equated with the *practices* of controlled spectatorship within the life-room.

Despite their criticism of Kenneth Clark, Malik and Bostrom appear to rely on his dichotomy of the *naked* and *the nude*, and in citing feminist critiques of the values Clark ascribes to *the nude*, it would appear that they follow John Berger's mistake of merely inverting the terms, and espousing the object, thus reifying the problematic realm of *the naked* as an 'object subject' as a more authentic and natural way of approaching the study and representation of unclothed figures. Bostrom and Malik do not seek to censor or remove the study of naked figures from the classroom, but to reinvigorate or revive it with a greater sense of the social, emotive and political complexity with which embodiment, desire and spectatorship are generally associated:

*To de-objectify the body in the classroom could allow for the revival of the figure as an object subject, fully explored and critically examined.*⁴⁸⁰

Bostrom and Malik's 'object subject', occupies the place of Berger's *naked*; an authentic,

⁴⁷⁸ I am not using the term *indexical* in Peirce's sense, but generally according to status accorded to photographs as signifiers of the subjects depicted in them.

⁴⁷⁹ I discuss the relationship between process, representation and life-drawings in Chapter Five.

⁴⁸⁰ Bostrom & Malik, op. cit., p. 44.

troubling counter to the processes of objectification, which they see as central to the creation and maintenance of aesthetic distance between the viewer and the nude.

Bostrom and Malik see aesthetic distance as the basis of the *myth of observation*, which they see as intractably associated with the life-room, claiming ‘Life drawing is one of the few areas of art making left that depends on the myth of observation.’⁴⁸¹ The ‘myth of observation’ is never really examined, merely cited as the end point of a set of dominant cultural ideas concerned with maintaining aesthetic distance. Although the article starts with an anecdote problematising *seeing* as an ambiguous behaviour, it never really addresses what seeing actually is. Despite the authors’ emphasis on a gendered critique, only the gender of the model is mentioned, and the spectators remain as a sexless, anonymous throng, split between the docile students of the life-room, and the transgressive voyeurs peeping in through the classroom windows. Seeing is conflated with representation, and the precise micromanagement of spectatorship within the life-room is reduced to ‘a complex set of agreements between the model, the classroom, and the society’,⁴⁸² a curiously detached explanation, which reduces the bodies of the spectators within and outside of the life-room to disembodied fragments of a predetermined cultural code.

Bostrom and Malik appear to be blind to a number of aspects of the texts they are criticising. Nicolaidis is condemned for his ‘unnatural’ use of the naked model, in his text *The Natural Way To Draw*, which is a rather glib dismissal of Nicolaidis’ repeated references to the importance of the artist’s body, and of experiencing drawing as an empathic encounter of spectatorship, gesture, imagination and feeling between bodies and objects.⁴⁸³ Nicolaidis is not an unproblematic text, and the paradoxes in his use of naked bodies are addressed in Chapter Four, but Malik and Bostrom’s dismissal of his approach as *unnatural* only compounds their own apparent refusal to examine how seeing is linked with the reifying and gendered cultural conventions of representing the nude that they wish to challenge. This blind spot on their behalf is more bizarre in their examination of Robert Beverley Hale’s *Masterclass in Drawing*, which they rightly critique as sexist, reductive and literally objectifying in its approach, which encourages students to reduce the human figure to a set of geometric elements, and visual techniques from the ‘old masters’.⁴⁸⁴

To Hale, the artist is a man who visualizes the future in ideal terms “Trained artists, when they draw from the model, mostly set down a ‘secret figure’ they have long since created”⁴⁸⁵

The quotation used by Bostrom and Malik indicates that Hale’s technique is premised on *not seeing*, but representing a *secret figure*, presumably based on the artist’s imagination or memory of an idealised blueprint developed in the classical training of copying from the antique.⁴⁸⁶ Bostrom and Malik manage to conflate Hale’s emphasis on a representation of an

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁸² *ibid.*

⁴⁸³ Bostrom & Malik use one of Nicolaidis (uncited) exercises in their suggested pedagogical techniques.

⁴⁸⁴ Bostrom & Malik include a copy of Page 23 of Hale’s text, which features a copy of Thomas Eakins, *Nude woman Seated Wearing a Mask*, and Hale’s accompanying text, addressing the male student and describing the breast as a ‘thing’ in starkly anatomical terms. Hale’s instructions also include a bizarre description of the direction of the model’s nipples which literally evokes the geographical location of the Art Students League of New York, ‘so you should always place the breasts so that they look this way and that way. This one is looking up at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and this one is looking to the police precinct on 58th Street.’ RB Hale *Masterclass in figure drawing*, Watson-Guption, New York, 1985, p. 23.

⁴⁸⁵ Hale *op. cit.* p. 80, *cit.* in Bostrom & Malik, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁸⁶ Hale’s text is punctuated by a series of aphorisms, such as the opening of the chapter on the knee, ‘First we draw what we see; then we draw what we know; finally we see what we know.’ Hale, *op. cit.* p. 48.

idealised and invented nude with *the myth of observation*, by aligning both with the process of *objectification*, which they argue is inherent to the creation and maintenance of aesthetic distance. Objectification and aesthetic distance appear to be intractable facts of the life-room, impermeable to history, to gender or social change. This reference to *tradition* and to *form* excises the life-room from a dynamic view of history, placing it within a reified and inaccessible realm of the symbolic:

*Traditionally the relationship between the dispassionate artists (assumed male) and the observed model (assumed female) is a culturally acceptable erotic form that has been woven into the social fabric. The democratisation of the art class (female students, male models) has not really changed this. The underlying form remains the same.*⁴⁸⁷

Like many second-wave feminist critiques, including that by John Berger, Bostrom and Malik's paper relies on the symbolic split between active viewing subject as male, and passive viewed subject as female. They deploy the familiar element of feminist critique of western Cartesian epistemology as dividing the world into a system of gendered dualisms: between the active, civilising, aggressive, viewing and knowing masculine subject, and the passive, nature-bound, receptive, viewed and studied feminine object. Structuralist feminist described the symbolic economies behind art practice, such as in Laura Mulvey's description of the mechanics of gendered spectatorship within Hollywood narrative cinema:

*In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly.*⁴⁸⁸

Originally published, in 1975, Mulvey's account of gendered spectatorship within cinema had considerable influence over structuralist feminist accounts of gendered representation and spectatorship across visual culture. However, over the past two decades, feminist art theory has moved away from an emphasis on psychoanalytic and structuralist accounts of subjectivity to explore the articulations of sensations, experience, embodiment and meaning from a wide range of angles.⁴⁸⁹ Despite this shift in contemporary feminist philosophy and aesthetics, recent feminist accounts of figurative spectatorship in life-drawing, still appear to be bound to an implacably gendered model of subjectivity that rely on essentialist ideas of gendered ontology, as in Bostrom's comment below:

*A female nude, even if created by a woman, still takes on the position of object/symbol/nude- the other in relation to the socially dominant male subject*⁴⁹⁰

Bostrom's comment above bears a similarity to the confessed discomfort of other feminist attempts to critically engage with the sexual specificity of female spectatorship. A sexually specific articulation of female spectatorship does not necessarily have to produce an essentialist account of the female gaze, but arguably it does have to engage with the historical, social and material relations and conditions in which female artists and models articulate their

⁴⁸⁷ Bostrom & Malik., op. cit., p. 47.

⁴⁸⁸ Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975) reprinted in Jones, op. cit., p. 47.

⁴⁸⁹ McDonald, op. cit., pp. 20-30. See R. Betterton, op. cit.; K Deepwell, *New feminist art criticism: critical strategies*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 1995; M Meskimmon, *Women making art: history, subjectivity, aesthetics*, Routledge, London, 2003.

⁴⁹⁰ Bostrom & Malik., op. cit., p. 46.

experiences of life-drawing classes. While a considerable amount of historical research on art education describes the extensive participation of women in life-drawing classes since the start of the twentieth century, there is little discussion of what women's experiences of observing naked male and female models actually involved.⁴⁹¹ Furthermore there is little critical exploration of the implications of women's paradoxical relationships to naked figurative spectatorship. Since the late nineteenth century differing groups of women have often mobilised simultaneously to increase their own access to life-drawing classes and to shut down life-drawing classes and censor figurative representations. Feminist agency has itself often reflected the complicated, multiple and contradictory roles of women in terms of asserting their own creative agency and sexual pleasure, and containing and managing the sexuality of men.

Associating sexual pleasure in spectatorship with the abstracted masculine figure of *the voyeur* allows it to be removed from the bodies of female spectator or feminist critics, and it also denies the very real possibilities for female spectatorship to be articulated as a troubled and troubling field of possibilities, and like the hens' nights encounters, female viewers are reduced to girls, and female spectatorship to a form of transvestising play. The blind spot of many feminist critiques of spectatorship is underpinned by the tacit assumption of models as females and artists or art students as male, which obscures the gender composition of most life-classes, and reinforces the view that *if women do see, then what they see or how they see does not matter*. In denying the materiality of the body and material specificity, the symbolic accounts of gendered spectatorship have paradoxically exacerbated fixed and essentialising notions of gender and a critical agency in spectatorship and artistic practice, and continue to limit the capacity for an articulation of practices that could be *feminist*. While Petherbridge is troubled by the lack of a concept of the body outside *the sexual*, I am troubled by this desire to evade or side-step the sexual issue, and more interested in how embodiment can be re-thought through bodies, and through the troubling relationships between gender, sexuality, and subjectivity.

10. The issue of subjectivity

The invisibility of female spectatorship of the nude continues to underpin more recent feminist theoretical engagements with life-drawing. A thesis by Karen Wallis at the University of the West of England, Bristol, explicitly sets out the project of her doctoral research which:

*Examines the possibility of re-presenting the painted nude in a manner that avoids a possessive gaze*⁴⁹²

Wallis's exegesis of feminist theories of the nude reiterates the binarised split between a male viewer and a female object of the gaze.⁴⁹³ Despite the use of her own body, and installation of images of her body figure in female toilets and a women's clothing store, Wallis does not explore the possibility that female spectatorship could be substantially different from the male gaze problematised by feminism:

It is inevitable that feminism should object to life-drawing where the female

⁴⁹¹ An extensive discussion of the women's historical participation in life-drawing is beyond the scope of this chapter, and has been discussed by other authors. See: T Garb, *Sisters of the brush: women's artistic culture in late nineteenth-century Paris*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994.

⁴⁹² K Wallis, *Painting & drawing the nude: a search for a realism for the body through phenomenology & fine art practice*, PhD thesis, University of the West of England, Bristol, 2003, 'Introduction' p. 1.

⁴⁹³ Wallis, op. cit., p. 11.

*nude is perceived as an object of desire for others. It follows that female artists will naturally seek alternative methods of expressing the body.*⁴⁹⁴

Wallis's characterisation of feminism as inevitably and implacably hostile to the representation of the female nude operates as a starting point for her to explore the phenomenology of spectatorship and representation as difficult and ambiguous processes, which offer enormous potential for a re-articulation of subjectivity, empathy and connection between bodies. Rather than simply condemn aestheticisation as a form of culturally prescribed detachment and distancing from the troubling ambiguity of the naked body, Wallis articulates this difficulty as the legitimate basis for a critical aesthetic praxis⁴⁹⁵. I return to Wallis's thesis in Chapter Five, but wish to suggest that the strength of Wallis's investigation into spectatorship and representation is based on her account of *all* subjectivity as difficult, fleeting and contestable.⁴⁹⁶ Wallis's deployment of phenomenology allows her to move beyond an account of spectatorship as gendered, into a general exploration of the fragility of the subjective encounter with the world and with others.

The confusing and fluctuating status of the sexed subject is arguably intermeshed with the confusing and fluctuating status of sexuality within and surrounding the practices of life-drawing. As this chapter has demonstrated, sexuality cannot be reduced to a distinct 'sexual issue' but involves a constellation of many issues, discourses and experiences of nudity and embodiment. This chapter has emphasised that many of the experiences and discourses involving sexuality in life-drawing are imbricated with issues of class mobility, cultural capital and social distinction. Both the performance and reception of sexualising discourses and practices are often mediated by participants' sense of their own social agency or their own cultural aspirations. This last aspect cannot be over-emphasised, as desire is an inseparable element of sexuality and creative practice. The topic of desire is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth noting as an invisible thread running through all of the discourses and practices explored in the remainder of this thesis. I return to the roles of yearning, of promise, and possibility in the final chapter, but I would suggest that one of the enormous affective appeals of creative practice lies in an acceptable public performance of desire, yearning and aspiration, to connect with others and to become someone else, a trajectory shared in narratives of romantic love or spellbinding sexual attraction.

Desire saturates the secret contours of creative practice, and the invisible spaces of life-drawing classes are populated by a multiplicity of desires, sensations and feelings. Arguably sexuality is ubiquitous in life-drawing classes, in its reception and performance as much as its sublimation. Some of the most evocative descriptions of life-drawing come from an acknowledgement of the movement from a state of sexual awareness or apprehension into other encounters between naked and clothed bodies, such as this comment from Ian Howard:

And I think the thing that is interesting then is that when it actually happens, you kind of get used to it so quickly, but I don't mean in a 'oh this is boring' way, but you do actually just get used to it. And here's this person, and you've got to draw them and you look at all the fine details, and you've just got to do it. So its surprising that in terms of our clothed selves, we have somehow built up a huge difference between the clothed body and the

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 13

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 63.

*unclothed body, but when you come to a life-drawing class where it's black and white, the difference just kind of melts. And we're all sitting around and that person is naked, and we're all clothed, but it becomes a very little big deal. Which is an interesting phenomenon.*⁴⁹⁷

Howard describes the movement from an awkward sexualised awareness of the difference between naked and clothed bodies into a habituation where, as he puts it 'the difference just kind of melts'. Although I would presume that Howard would describe this melting as a one-way movement from discomfort to professional ease, I am intrigued by the potential of a melting of difference, as a quality of intersubjective exchange peculiar to life-drawing. I'd like to imagine how life-drawing, as *the melting of difference* could evoke a protean image of exchanges, encounters and transformations. I would suggest the 'very little big deal' within life-drawing classes concerns the protean forms of sexuality and sexual difference and how they are mediated in the encounters between naked and clothed subjects. Arguably, sexuality is such a troubling element of life-drawing classes because it cannot be pinned down or isolated, but moves in and out and across sensations, feelings and desires of participants that are just as, if not more affectively charged.

This chapter commenced with a quotation from Iain Biggs where he adamantly stated that life-drawing classes are not erotic. While I have suggested that the violence of Biggs's denial of sexuality probably emphasises its threatening presence, I would also agree with his later observations on some of the other elements of life-drawing:

*The sort of titillating thing of having a naked figure there and drawing it, in my experience is extremely rare in drawing classes. And something else replaces it, which I think is to do with the inarticulated body, which involves people on a much more passionate and compassionate level. It's really interesting when you feel it take the room over, and you think "there's something else happening here".*⁴⁹⁸

What interests me in the above comment is the tacit acknowledgement of sexuality in the line 'and something else replaces it'. Arguably, it is the articulation of how sexual sublimation works in practice that allows an evocation of the complexity of empathic exchanges between models and artists, and the spaces in which they work. It is unclear in Biggs's vague reference to 'the inarticulated body' whether he is referring to the naked body of the model or the barely acknowledged bodies of drawers, or the images of bodies generated on paper, and this vagueness that potentially offers a space where exchanges, encounters and becomings can be acknowledged. Arguably it is in the inarticulated forms of the imaginary bodies, and the invisible spaces of life-drawing classes where some of the richest desires, feelings and sensations occur. Sexuality flickers throughout the feelings, desires and sensations of life-drawing - acknowledged one moment and sublimated the next - but arguably creating a pulsion of sensations, of affects and percepts that ripple throughout the participants in a collective charge of engagement, or stagnate in the deadening fug of boredom or frustration. Arguably, it is this collection of sensations, imaginings and desires that, according to Biggs 'take[s] the room over'. As an inarticulated body, a movement of messy possibilities and

⁴⁹⁷ Ian Howard, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁴⁹⁸ Iain Biggs, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

impossible desires, the oscillating sexual awareness in life-drawing moves well beyond a performance of individual sexed subjectivity into what Biggs describes as ‘something else happening here’.

I return to the metaphysical issues of subjectivity and sexuality in the final chapter. The following chapter is concerned with articulating the invisible spaces of life-drawing classes, and the blind spots of the ‘look and put’ emphasis in life-drawing as a skills-based observational exercise. By examining the limitations of observational ‘training’, and the ethical dilemmas of applying observation to a naked living subject, the following chapter invites a closer examination of life-drawing as an inter-subjective encounter. By examining the microcosms within the life-class, and the complexity and ambiguity of the experiences of subjectification and alienation experienced by all participants, the remainder of this thesis explores how life-drawing can be critically envisaged as a dynamic and challenging contemporary practice.

Chapter 4: Contours of Blindness

And he allowed me to take the most ridiculous pose, so that for three months I used to be regularly crucified, every Friday. And I thought “I’ll never forgive this man, in my life-time, to have allowed me to have taken this pose”, and then I learned, that at that time, he was actually blind. And I heard this, one of the teachers at the school said to him, “Julian, do you think you should go on teaching?” He said, “Ohhh, they all make the same mistakes you know!”⁴⁹⁹

By the time that Tom Bass started life modelling in the 1930s, many people were aware that Julian Ashton was going blind. Seventy years later, Bass’s recollection of the pain, and his vow *I’ll never forgive this man* contradicts the claim made in my prologue, that pain produces amnesia. For Bass, the excruciating fixity of the pose has remained as a clear but isolated memory of an incident from which he was able to move on, developing his own career as a sculptor and an educator. Possibly it was Ashton’s blindness that ruptured the conventional ‘scopic regime’ of the life-class, whereby a silent, fixed model is viewed by an ambulant, vocal, and optically competent instructor.

In *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry argues that pain is precisely that which destroys language.⁵⁰⁰ The association between pain and the inability to speak arguably forms an affective complex of horror, and eventually amnesia.⁵⁰¹ Pain is constituted in the condition of unintelligibility, remaining outside of language; banished to a realm of horror or shame, it becomes cloaked in the need to forget. British legislation of the nineteenth century prescribed a series of legal conventions governing the life-class, including a prohibition on any contact between students and models.⁵⁰² The taboo of contact is still continued in the informal protocol of life-drawing classes, particularly in educational institutions, whereby models avoid meeting the eyes of students while posing, and remain silent.⁵⁰³ These conventions of

⁴⁹⁹ Tom Bass, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁰⁰ E Scarry, *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, p. 4. This argument is developed and repeated throughout Scarry’s introduction.

⁵⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 38. The argument that pain produces amnesia is my own. Scarry is concerned more explicitly with the relations between sensation and representation than with the relationships of horror, shame and amnesia. She describes the operations of torture as combining the intensity of aversive sensation with a precise and deliberate destruction of the external objects of the prisoner’s world, so their subjectivity is reduced to mute sentience.

⁵⁰² A Smith, *The Victorian nude: sexuality, morality, and art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 1996, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁰³ A number of models I interviewed in Australia described how and why they avoid eye contact with students while posing, as well as managing of undressing and talking while naked, in order to maintain a sense of professional distance between themselves and the students. A number of venues in the US list a series of regulations surrounding contact between models and drawers. At the Art Students League in New York, participants must address all questions or queries concerning the model through the moderator or time-keeper (participant observation, New York, 2007). See SR Phillips, *Modeling life: art models speak about nudity*,

the life-room are cited as strategies whereby models maintain a sense of propriety and professionalism, but they effectively reduce the model to a blind and mute worker, unable to articulate his or her pain or discomfort, except where the glossolalia of their body takes over, muscles tremble and sweat, and breathing becomes laboured and heavy. Silence enables a dissemblance of mistrust and pain, and it is arguable that this dissemblance of pain, by the model, contributes to their representation within the life-class as something other than sentient beings, as objects. Possibly it is the artists' dissembling of the model's discomfort or feeling (or their awareness of it) that allows the process of *objectification*, necessary for representation, but the dissemblance is predicated on the silence of the model, as well as a specific form of blindness by the artist.

This chapter is concerned with life-drawing classes as meeting places between vision and the silent, unmentionable experience of modelling - that of discomfort, if not pain - and how these experiences of embodiment and embodied encounter enter into systems of representation or are stifled within them. My focus is on the blindness that surrounds the specific types of viewing acknowledged and represented within and about the life-class. The image of the blind drawing teacher operates as a metaphor for the blinkered gendering of popular representations of the life-class that assume male spectatorship and female display, as well as the blindness within the culture of the life-room itself, from accounts which repeatedly deny the presence of sexuality to a pedagogical culture assuming the neutrality and objectivity of rigorous tutored spectatorship. A considerable part of this chapter looks specifically at the work of the life-class, of viewing and responding to a naked human being, and examines the physical techniques of posing, spectatorship and mark-making as social technologies, which enable certain ideas of artistic and gendered subjectivity to be negotiated and performed. I deliberately opened this chapter with an account from a male model in order to challenge the gendered assumptions of conventional representations of the life-room. As discussed in the previous chapter, gender is a vital aspect of how power relations between artists and models are mediated, and yet it is incorrect to assume that powerlessness, pain and objectification of artists' models are exclusively female or feminine experiences. This chapter explores the tacit associations between gender, subjectivity and vision in discourses of the life-class, and also traces the historical specificity of the performative conventions of specific pedagogical techniques of spectatorship that emerged in modernist life-drawing.

sexuality, and the creative process, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006, pp. 54-57; P Steinhart, *The undressed art: why we draw*, Alfred A. Knopf & Random House, New York, 2004, pp. 25-28.

The anecdote above by the male model, Tom Bass, contains a number of paradoxes that contradict the conventional accounts of the life-class, which posit the model as viewed, and the artist as viewing. As I discuss later in this chapter, numerous models have anecdotes of teachers ignoring their pain or discomfort, and it is arguable that this form of empathic blindness is legitimated by the assumption that the life-room is dedicated to a specific type of spectatorship, devoid of emotions, sexuality, or empathy. The acceptable professional blindness of the authoritative and neutral instructor becomes challengeable only when it is linked to a physical disability in seeing. The evident illegitimacy of Julian Ashton as a blind artist, unable to see the pain and discomfort of the model, unable to speak the words that would release the model from his ‘crucifixion’, produces a fissure, into which the model’s own language eventually takes its place. The second paradox relates to this figure of the blind pedagogue, and his alleged defence of his teaching by the throw away line ‘*Oh they all make the same mistakes you know*’. Ashton’s light-hearted performance of professional cynicism towards his students operates to reinforce the distance between the singularity of the instructor as master artist, and the plurality of his students as an anonymous throng. Within this, Ashton’s repeated insistence on the importance of seeing, and of drawing as a form of spectatorship responsive to the present time and present place, sits awkwardly with the generalisation of his throwaway line that untutored vision, rather than being an unwieldy field of lapses and errors, could be reduced to a limited number of repeated mistakes. Arguably this tension between the specificity of drawing as an observational practice responsive to the particularity of the present time and the present place, and the generalisation inherent in any approach to drawing as an objective or neutral practice is common to much of the pedagogy of the modernist art school. Teaching drawing by the application of a number of detached, generalised and neutral methods has made it transparent as a practice of spectatorship and mark-making, but the emphasis on drawing as ‘objective’ and seeing as neutral, by definition, denies the subjectivity of the artists or students, and also of the subject under observation.

The flippancy of Ashton’s comment also reinforces the gender distinctions between Ashton and his numerous female students, about whom he allegedly made frequent derogatory comments concerning their limited aspirations as young middle-class women, whose single status was frequently derided as waiting for a husband, filling in time.⁵⁰⁴ The statement ‘*Ohhh, they all make the same mistakes you know*’ not only homogenises his

⁵⁰⁴ See my discussion of Julian Ashton in Chapter Two, also V Parish, *Julian Ashton and his school*, (unpublished thesis) University of Sydney, 1980, p. 12.

students but it implies that *what they see doesn't matter*. Even if they do not all make the same mistakes, the teacher will behave as if they do, and refuse to see otherwise, reducing the students' capacity to defy or exceed his pedagogy, beyond what he decrees as possible. Spectatorship is reduced to an act of collective blindness, and a collective submission or deference to the authority of the instructor as *knowing* all there is to see, even if he cannot see it. While the instructor, Julian Ashton, was male, the majority of his students, as in most life-classes during the twentieth century, were female.⁵⁰⁵ As noted in Chapter Two, Julian Ashton offered the first life-drawing classes to women students in Sydney, which was a highly progressive move, paralleling the fledgling development of female life-classes in Western Europe and North America.⁵⁰⁶ Like many artists' models and the vast majority of nude models in continental Europe, the model in my earlier example was male. While it is arguable that the vulnerability and silence (as well as the covering of genitalia) acts to feminise the male model, it is over-simplistic to reduce all models to a singular category of 'the feminine'. As noted in Chapter One, other authors have noted that the majority of spectatorial relations within the twentieth-century life-class were of female observers, on female as well as male bodies.⁵⁰⁷ This chapter is concerned with the relationships between observation and ontology, and how practices within modernist life-drawing have enabled particular experiences of subjectification and objectification among artists and models of both genders.

Previous chapters in this thesis have explored how many accounts of life-drawing reduce it to an exercise in observational training, ignoring the complex implications of naked spectatorship. This chapter specifically examines the implications of observation and challenges the assumptions of neutrality, associated with observational drawing. I draw on the critical work of Jonathan Crary, who examined observation as a social discipline peculiar to modernism, as well as the work of Elaine Scarry and Kelly Oliver in exploring ethical issues of subjectivity, empathy and spectatorship, in order to scrutinise the practices of modernist life-drawing. This chapter discusses a number of modernist techniques of life-drawing as they became popularised in the twentieth century and have been retained in contemporary life-classes, and the tacit values and contradictions associated with them, as embedded in

⁵⁰⁵ See Appendix 3, Fig 5 & 6.

⁵⁰⁶ See J Peers, 'Bodily excellence is displayed: life models and the nude in Melbourne and Sydney c.1880-1940', *Australian Cultural History*, no.13, 1994, pp. 151-152; A Smith op. cit., pp. 40-44; T Garb, 'The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France' in K Adler & M Pointon, *The body imaged: the human form and visual culture since the Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁰⁷ F Borzello, *The Artists' Model*, Junction Books, London, 1982, pp. 8-9.

discourses around problematic areas such as sexuality and pain. I explore the genealogy of two approaches which, despite being criticised by feminist artists, teachers and writers as reinforcing gendered relations within the life-room and in figurative art, have continued to be utilised in a variety of settings to the present date.

This chapter is divided into three broad sections, and a number of sub-sections. The first section, *An objective tradition*, explores the development of objectivity in drawing, most specifically the ‘dot-and-carry’ technique developed in the 1930 at the Slade College of Art in London’s Euston Road. The dot-and-carry technique influenced the New York Studio School, and was the basis of the ‘drawing marathon’ discussed in my prologue. This section combines published critiques of the Euston Road tradition with interview material from students, teaching staff and models from the UK and USA. In exploring the ambivalence about objective drawing, this section prepares the ground for a closer examination of how objective drawing techniques are experienced by models and artists.

Section Two, *Becoming intense, becoming object*, assembles accounts from a number of models, artists and teachers from the UK and Australia, exploring the subtleties of how *desubjectification* is actually experienced. This section examines some of the conflicting accounts from students and models of the British figurative painter, Euan Uglow, often regarded as the leading exponent of the Euston Road tradition. These accounts are juxtaposed with interview material with Australian models, exploring the relationships between pain, timing, power and endurance. I examine model’s accounts of pain in relation to the exploration of the ethology of spectatorship by Elaine Scarry and Kelly Oliver. In exploring the ambiguities of subjectivity, empathy and memory, particularly in relation to the subjectivity of witnessing pain, I argue for a nuanced critique of *objective* drawing that acknowledges the fragility of *all* subjectivity and subjective encounters.

The third section, *Seeing the natural*, explores the possibilities and limitations of a drawing methodology that has been promoted as an empathic and embodied alternative to *objective* drawing. This section explores the attitudes and employment of the observational techniques promoted in ‘*The Natural Way to Draw*’, a drawing manual that has been reproduced and used widely in Australia and the US, both within and outside the university art schools. I examine two techniques promoted in the book, ‘blind contour’ and ‘gesture drawing’, including descriptions of the techniques by models and artists. I examine the genealogy of the blind contour technique and question some of the assumptions about nature,

subjectivity and vision promoted in ‘the natural way to draw’. Assembling material from a number of instructors, this section claims that, contrary to the haptic emphasis of Nicolaidēs’ other techniques, the ‘blind-contour’ exercise can easily be applied in order to reinforce the idea of viewing as neutral, and of drawing as a form of objective tracing of the eyes’ movement over forms in space. *In noting the influence of social conventions of spectatorship and observation, even on ‘natural’ observation, I argue for the necessity of critical empathic drawing to move away from an emphasis on ‘the natural’.* This chapter ends with a discussion the work by Judith Butler, in relation to how taboo or abject elements of experience can be productive of a critically informed subjectivity. This section returns to Kelly Oliver’s use of Butler explored in Section Two, arguing that the subjectivity of models can be performed through a constative witnessing of their experience of objectification, so to, artists’ own internal objectification, or self censoring of desire or feeling, can be realised as a productive movement, towards a richer, more critically engaged and ethical form of intersubjective exchange.

Throughout this chapter, as in the previous chapters, I want to avoid entertaining ideas that mark-making can have a gender, and suggestions of a gendered ontology of drawing, spectatorship or subjectivity. By examining the impossibility of objectivity and the contingency of all subjectivity, this chapter opens up a discursive space for examining how life-drawing can be used to articulate and connect the fragments, movements and shifts in subjectivity, including its disavowal, dissemblance and abjection among participants.

1. An Objective Tradition

Modernist drawing and Euston Road

As chair of the Coldstream committee into art and design education, William Coldstream was not only associated with the major post-war changes in British art schools, but he was also a central figure in one of the most significant approaches to *life-classes*, at least in Anglophone countries, in the twentieth century. During the 1930s, William Coldstream, Victor Passmore and Claude Rogers opened a school of painting in London’s Euston Road. These studios were part of the Slade School of Art, and brought the emphasis on direct observation developed in the Slade life-drawing classes to the practice of painting from the model as well as *plein-air* landscape painting.⁵⁰⁸ The Euston Road school was highly

⁵⁰⁸ S MacDonald, *The history and philosophy of art education*, University of London Press, London, 1970, p.

influenced by the forms of analytical planar distortion typified by Cézanne as a precursor to Cubist abstraction that retained sufficient pictorial references as to be aligned with representationalism. However, where Cézanne concentrated on landscapes and still life objects, the Euston Road approach increasingly emphasised the life-room as a controlled site for the training of the eye; with an emphasis on seeing as an *objective* process, and drawing as an *objective* record of what the eye saw. Deanna Petherbridge, in her critique of what she referred to as the Euston Road tradition, characterised the emphasis on seeing as follows:

*There, to put it crudely, the hand acquires skill in the service of what used to be called by Roger Fry the 'innocent' eye; there is a moral imperative to draw what one sees and not what one knows. Copying from other art is wicked; objects and bodies and landscapes are neutral sites, and their representation is subject to stern notions of 'accuracy' and observable proportion. That is, the object of drawing is also its subject, and represents a definable truth which allows no deviation.*⁵⁰⁹

Coldstream remained at the Slade until the 1970s, and a number of other prominent British artists and writers, such as Roger Fry, Lawrence Gowing and Euan Uglow, also became associated with what has been referred to as the 'Euston Road tradition,' which combined an almost moralistic fervour about the cultivation of an impartial, rigorous and honest form of seeing with an equally impassioned emphasis on the need for drawing and painting to be an accurate and neutral record of observation.

The gendered eye

The myth of objectivity is a familiar subject to feminist deconstruction, where the presumed neutrality of the impartial detached observer or knowing subject has in fact been demonstrated to embody a subjectivity aligned with the idealised version of public masculinity: rational, detached, unemotional and able to reduce, rearrange and remake the world around him.⁵¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the version of art pedagogy closely aligned with this masculinist myth has also attracted the critical attention of feminists.⁵¹¹ In the paper cited above, Deanna Petherbridge undertakes a thorough attack on the 'Euston Road tradition', and the ideologies underpinning it:

Coldstream's and Uglow's method is ideologically suspended between realism and the formal language of mathematical abstraction; and the inflexibility of this marriage of opposites as well as its cult status militate against questioning its logical contradictions. In its rigour it is not that far

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⁵⁰⁹ D Petherbridge, 'Drawing backwards into the future: formulating an agenda', in P Hetherington, (ed): *Issues in art and education: aspects of the fine art curriculum*, papers submitted at conferences held at the Tate Gallery in 1993 and 1994, organised by the Wimbledon School of Art in collaboration with the Tate Gallery, Tate Gallery, London, 1996, p. 60.

⁵¹⁰ G Lloyd, *The man of reason: 'male' and 'female' in Western philosophy*, Methuen, London, 1984, p. 19.

⁵¹¹ L Nead, *The female nude: art, obscenity, and sexuality*, Routledge, London & New York, 1992, pp. 23-25.

removed from the classical *académie* but its claims to objectivity and neutrality are patently absurd. However sacrosanct to its practitioners, it reads as little more than a stylistic affectation which involves a pretence of male neutrality.⁵¹²

As part of her critique of the myth of neutrality, Petherbridge makes a number of sharp criticisms of the misogynist connotations of the words and images of a number of male modernist artists, challenging the claims to objectivity which have underpinned modernist pedagogy:

Euan Uglow's 'Nude From 12 Regular Vertical Positions From the Eye' 1972,⁵¹³ where he has sliced the body into sections, with arrow forms marking the moving of the apparatus he used for measuring the drawing, reads like an attack on the body with sharpened knives. There is nothing 'neutral' here.⁵¹⁴

Although this evocative analysis is persuasive, Petherbridge's critique of the 'Euston Road tradition' is limited by a collapse between male-dominated modernist art and modernist life-classes. She links her pertinent critiques of artists such as Picasso and Matisse and of Uglow's images to a succinct summation of the 'dot-and-carry' technique which characterised Euston Road teaching, particularly under Uglow at the Slade's F-Studio in the 1970s and 1980s. The technique is called 'dot-and-carry' as a way of conveying how the artist's hand and eyes move while drawing, ideally in a form of slightly controlled stochastic scanning across the pictorial plane in front of the artist. As the artist scans the view in front of them with their eyes, they *carry* their hand across the vertical page in front of them, and make a *dot* on the page at particular points where objects meet, or where planes intersect. The figure is reduced to a series of points within a general field, which in its most exacting practice resembles the view through a fish-eye lens.⁵¹⁵ Petherbridge is quite vehement in her dismissal of the approach:

The supposed rigour of the methodology, the dot-and-carry (or fly-shit technique) of drawing, means that by a remote and inviolable system of measurement, plotting of planes and proportional grids, an 'accurate' drawing, bereft of expressive distortion can be arrived at.⁵¹⁶

However, she does not enter into how techniques such as 'dot-and-carry' actually work to detach and fetishise a presumably female nude from the presumably male drawing subjects. British drawing researcher Angela Eames questioned Petherbridge's rather glib dismissal of

⁵¹² Petherbridge, *Drawing backwards*, pp. 60-61.

⁵¹³ An image of Euan Uglow's 'Nude From 12 Regular Vertical Positions From the Eye' 1972 is on John Moore's 22 online catalogue, Walker Art Gallery website © 2008 National Museums Liverpool, viewed 15 February 2009, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/johnmoores/22/previous_uglow.html>.

⁵¹⁴ Petherbridge, *Drawing backwards*, p. 61.

⁵¹⁵ See A Taylor & P Thomas *Drawing: a foundation course*, Cassell illustrated, Octopus publishing, London, 2003, pp. 74-80.

⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*

dot-and-carry drawings as ‘fly shit’:

And I think “Why did you have to say that?” [chuckles] Dot and carry is better than fly shit. It’s already... [fly shit]...it’s imbued with something that is sort of... that’s rather nasty or that it’s unnecessary, or that it’s very male.⁵¹⁷

Eames also challenged the tacit alignment between a simulated neutrality and a pejorative masculinity at the heart of Petherbridge’s critique of the approach:

And I don’t like that actually. The sort of identification...it’s not just that women are gestural and men are “choo, choo, choo” [imitates dot and carry method] which is a superficial thing that I think does tend to happen a bit...⁵¹⁸

Eames acknowledged that the F-Studio approach was associated with a distinctly gendered bias, which she identified with the insistence of both male teachers and students on using exclusively female models. However, she separated this from the processes of spectatorship, and the styles of mark-making, which she was reluctant to describe as gendered. Like Petherbridge, Eames studied art in South Africa, and underwent an intensely rigorous graduated training in observational drawing at a time when it had been eliminated from most post-war art schools in Europe and the USA. She continues to work with and theorise intricate and laborious processes of observational drawing and measuring such as computer modelling, as well as freehand life-drawing.⁵¹⁹ In refuting the idea of certain forms of drawing as *male*, Eames also questioned the implications of Petherbridge’s own drawing practice, which consists of large-scale studies of architectural interiors:

They’re enormously complex, and you take it on! And it takes a certain sort of mind and logic to deal with that, which is very, very close to fly shit drawings.⁵²⁰

Eames did not elaborate on what *sort of mind and logic* she meant, or if it was gendered, but her emphasis on drawing as a series of processes and relationships and practices that are communicable and transferable between people, and across media, leads me to suspect that she holds little interest in essentialist associations between art and gender. In Chapter One I discussed feminist criticisms of life-drawing and noted the limitations of the lack of material specificity of particular situations, techniques or practices of spectatorship and drawing.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ A Eames, ‘Too much polish and not enough spit’, *TRACEY: Contemporary Drawing Research*, Drawing and Technology Theme, April 2002, viewed 14 February 2009, <<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/dat/eames.html>>.

⁵²⁰ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵²¹ I discuss this issue further in Chapter Five and note that Vicki Kirby’s critique of feminist epistemology could equally apply to feminist art theory. See V Kirby, *Telling Flesh: the substance of the corporeal*, Routledge, London & New York, 1997.

The reluctance of feminist critiques to articulate *how* the practices of drawing embody, perform or iterate gendered subjectivity reduces their capacity to challenge the implicit gendered bias in many accounts of drawing, and life-drawing. By not describing what makes the process behind dot and carry male, fetishising or misogynist, Petherbridge's critique has limited purchase on the continuing eulogomania of Euston Road and Uglow. At the same conference at which Petherbridge's paper was presented, John Stezaker, a former student of Uglow's, gave an almost hagiographic account of the same painting that Petherbridge had criticised as misogynist:

*[...] This work seems to me a perfect metaphor for the experience of life-drawing and of a particular way of teaching life-drawing. The gaze is represented literally as a kind of incision upon the body, a cutting up of the body itself in arrow-like incisions, so that it converts the model into a Saint Sebastian figure. The life model as martyr to art.*⁵²²

Stezaker avoids any reference to gender in his discussion of Uglow and F-Studio life-rooms, and in the above quotation, uses the *male* figure of St. Sebastian as a metaphor for *the model*. This tacit overlooking of the fact that all of Uglow's figurative images were of young *female* models appears to naturalise the relationship between the female model and male artist/observer as inevitable. Paradoxically, within this schema, the female model does not even have a gender, but is reduced to neutered allegory, 'the martyr to art'. I return to Stezaker later in this section, but firstly I wish to explore some of the paradoxes within objective drawing itself.

The objective mystique

The 'Euston Road tradition' was not unanimously supported throughout England, and feminists are not its only opponents. As noted in Chapter Three, Iain Biggs, who studied at the Royal College of Art with Philip Rawson, was fiercely critical of the modernist emphasis on objective seeing:

*This is a big part of the English drawing tradition and the negative side of the Euston road tradition and it has its roots in the nineteenth-century desire to observe 'the species/nature/phenomena'. Objectification is a way of killing off subjects as if they were a part of the living network of things of which we are a part.*⁵²³

The objectivist approach was not unique to the United Kingdom and, being heavily influenced by the Bauhaus and early twentieth-century art, shared many features with modernist pedagogy in other countries, particularly in the United States, where Hans

⁵²² J Stezaker, 'Drawing and cutting' in P Hetherington op. cit., p. 78.

⁵²³ Iain Biggs, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

Hofmann had a significant influence on mid-twentieth-century art instruction.⁵²⁴ Jayne Holsinger studied at The New York Studio School in the early 1980s, and experienced a form of instruction under Jean Detheux that emphasised a continuous observational mark-making of the space of the room, rather than developing a descriptive line along the contour of the model. Holsinger described her experiences as follows:

When I entered, it was like, incredibly hard, because I had all these ideas, and basically I realised that I was bored. I would keep drawing ideas and stuff, to entertain myself, and it was kind of like a breaking through of that until you just thought 'ok' you know? It was the same model every day, and for the entire semester, in the same pose.

Detheux emphasised an approach to drawing through a plotting of small marks, which followed the eyes' stochastic movements through the three dimensional space of the life-room, rather than drawing a contour separating the form of the model from the environment in which the model was placed. This emphasis on spatial plotting bore considerable resemblance to the dot-and-carry technique emphasised at the Slade, and the long poses equally resembled the practices in Uglow's F-Studio students in London. Holsinger described the practice of observation as follows:

So you took in the whole space of the room, you took in the periphery of your vision, and just in recording those little sensations it was kind of not... I guess some people might have worked with a little more of a structural line, but basically I was just kind of making marks.⁵²⁵

The nude as object

After describing the emphasis in Detheux's classes on drawing as a form of spatial mapping, Holsinger laughed when I asked her what was the point of a naked model, and replied *that's funny you should say that*. She speculated that the body or the face would hold more interest for some, as a complex structure with multiple planes, but reiterated that for her, the approach was centred on the experiences of the drawer observing and moving in a spatially controlled environment. A catalogue essay from a retrospective exhibition of the New York Studio School hints at some of reasons for the use of the figure:

⁵²⁴ NYSS was established in 1964 by Mercedes Matter, who walked out of Pratt College talking a group of students and teachers with her, after publishing an article 'What's wrong with US art schools', in *Art News*, September 1963, pp. 41, 56. Her teaching was based on that of Hans Hofmann, who had his own school on 8th Street New York in the 1940s and 1950s, and with whom many Studio School teachers, such as Matter, Carone, and McNeil, had themselves studied. See: M Matter, 'The school, its history', New York Studio School website, ©2000-2002 New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, viewed 16 February 2009, <<http://www.nyss.org/schoolhistory.asp>>. Also 'Biography and interview with Mercedes Matter', *Hans Hofmann: Artist/Teacher, Teacher/Artist: A documentary film by Madeleine Amgott*, documentary website viewed 16 February 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/hanshofmann/mercedes_matter_007.html>.

⁵²⁵ Jayne Holsinger, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

*The object, whether the still life or the figure, was basically an armature - an excuse - for organizing forms in space.*⁵²⁶

This appears to be a curiously detached explanation for a school where the figure was, as at the Slade, regarded as the central element of most instruction. The figure is interchangeable with a still life, reduced to an object ‘*an excuse - for organizing forms in space*’. The phrase invites the question of *what is it that needs to be excused?* Is it possible that *organising forms in space* requires an excuse? Or is *the excuse* the point where the eye lingers, or wishes to linger, but is impelled to move away from, and back to the detached scanning of Detheux’s plotted field? The emphasis on seeing as *objective* and detached from any emotional attachment to a descriptive form of drawing creates a somewhat paradoxical tension between *the object* and *objective seeing*. Objectivity requires that the model be reduced to the status of an object, and that the artist ignore his or her own feelings or ideas in order to record seeing, as a detached ‘honest’ form of information gathering, rather than an embodied form of sensual awareness. Furthermore, objective seeing requires that the viewer detaches not only from his or her own ‘subjectivity’ but from any connection or identification with the objects in the space in front of them; objects must be reduced to forms, planes and masses, devoid of colour or light relations, and marked only in terms of mass, density and complexity of planes.

The death of subjectivity

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the objective figuration promoted at the New York Studio School resembled the Cézanne-inspired planar distortion of London’s Euston Road, it did not claim a direct lineage until the late 1980s when current director, Graham Nickson took over as director of the School. Nickson studied at Camberwell School of Arts and Craft under Euan Uglow who subsequently taught at the Slade F-Studio. Despite not having studied at Euston Road, Nickson has repeatedly cited the influence of Uglow, and developed the rigorous format of three-week drawing marathons, as a way of replicating the intense hothouse atmosphere of Uglow’s ‘F-Studio’. Just as Holsinger gave a rather mixed account of the value of her experience at the NYSS, former students of F-studio, such as John Stezaker, also expressed some ambivalence about their experience of extended observational drawing:

At the Slade we used to call the life-room the death room. This was an obvious joke, I suppose, but it was something we all understood. It was an unspoken feeling about the place, a sort of atmosphere of morbidity that surrounded it. One felt that one was involved in a semi-voyeuristic way in the presence

⁵²⁶ J Sachs-Samet ‘The continuous mark: forty years of the New York Studio School’ *New York Sun*, February 17, 2005. Reproduced on *Art Critical.com* website © D. Cohen February 2005, viewed 17 October, 2007, <<http://www.artcritical.com/samet/jscontinuous.htm>>.

*of a sacrificial rite of some kind. This gathering of clothed people, all sitting on donkeys around this isolated naked person, seemed peculiar.*⁵²⁷

Aside from his allegorising of the model *as a martyr to art*, this is the only mention of the fact that the ‘subject’ of the F-studio teaching was an *isolated, naked person*. Stezaker quickly moves from this discussion of the model to the processes of drawing, reiterating the myth of objectivity as ‘killing’ subjectivity:

*When at the Slade we referred to the life-room as the death room, it was another kind of death that we had in mind. It was the death of subjectivity beneath the gaze of objectivity.*⁵²⁸

He details how, like Detheux in New York, Uglow’s teaching also emphasised the *death of the line*, moving away from delineating figures from their surroundings and reducing them to a collection of points in space, intersections between discernible planes of light and shadow, painstakingly plotted and measured over several months. However, Stezaker has a different interpretation of the objectivist ideal:

*Rather than Euston Road actually teaching, if you like, the foundation of objectivity, what I got out of it was a sense that absolutely everything was purely subjective. When you start plotting the lines, plotting points in space in relationship to the model, you began very quickly to realise that the line itself was your subjective contribution to the process. It was purely imaginary.*⁵²⁹

Describing drawing as ‘something that one had to survive’ Stezaker said he left F-studio after first year, but had appreciated the process immensely, and it continued to inform his later practice in photography and collage:

*Life-drawing was perhaps the first time that I had removed myself from the urgency of drawing in the world. It taught me a kind of stilled contemplation of the minutiae of the world, and it also got me very involved in photography.*⁵³⁰

This echoes Jayne Holsinger’s comments about her education at New York Studio School, where she valued the emphasis on teaching as a way of challenging her preconceptions of what a drawing should be, and concentrating on the experience of drawing:

*So it was really... that was actually a really interesting way of letting go of imposing upon the drawing, and it was a rich experience.*⁵³¹

Jo Volley, who studied under, modelled for and taught with Uglow at the Slade, was more articulate about the experiential value of the dot-and-carry approach to artists:

The here and now of it, and the relationships with that and something out there, and the self in that

⁵²⁷ J Stezaker, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵²⁸ *ibid.*, p78.

⁵²⁹ *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ Jayne Holsinger, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

*position, this is happening now, only once and will never happen again. And the flickering glance... how do you interpret what we see? Is it preconditioning, is it art, is it whatever? And that's why for me it will always be very exciting.*⁵³²

2. *Becoming Intense, Becoming Object*

Modelling objectivity

The cultivation of a close attention to detail and an intense awareness of the present time and the present space is possibly the strongest argument in favour of *objective* drawing methodologies, such as dot-and-carry, as well as the drawing marathons held at the New York Studio School. However, it still does not explain why this requires a naked human being to be present amidst the settings arranged for students. Model and artist Nick Strike described the frequent conflation of models with still life set-ups in objective drawing, arguing that ignoring the humanity of the model reduces the ability of students to be aware of objective factors such as time, and place:

*And someone actually saying to the class, 'treat them like they're another object amongst this set-up' - to me is really de-humanising, and missing the whole point. You're not the same as an object, you're actually someone who's putting time into this time and place. Concentrating the time and the gesture, and the result of years of experience, whatever that may be.*⁵³³

Unlike Jayne Holsinger and John Stezaker, Jo Volley was able to give some account of why an artists' model was a necessary part of the arduous hours spent observing the minutiae of the F-Studio settings:

*The great thing about the model is that they're not really still.*⁵³⁴

Referring to the movement of the model as a living being, Volley breaks with the myth of the model as an object or as interchangeable with still life elements, which appears to be tacitly accepted by the others. The fact that even the most disciplined model *moves* added a level of intensity to the scrutiny engaged in by Uglow and his students. An account by Elaine Maffrett, who modelled for *The Pyramid* confirms the awareness of minutiae of movements that was shared by Uglow and his models:

*When I sat Euan would remark that it took at least forty minutes for me to settle into the pose and my knees and back to lower to the correct level.*⁵³⁵

Maffrett's account lends itself to a more nuanced engagement with the ambiguities of

⁵³² Jo Volley, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵³³ Nick Strike, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵³⁴ Jo Volley, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵³⁵ E Maffrett, 'Modelling for Euan Uglow', *Bare Facts* (UK register of Artists Models), September 2001, viewed 15 January 2008, <<http://www.modelreg.co.uk/Articles2.htm>>.

subjectivity and objectification within the dot and carry approach. Maffrett's description of time, and her active role in maintaining her body as Uglow's spatial anchor, evokes a deeper level of complicity and engagement with Uglow's observational project than the term *objectification* would suggest. She explains how this extended beyond the studio:

*... he'd often mark, in biro, dots and dashes on my skin, just like you can see in the picture. I'd then have to keep these marks between sessions, I'd have to ask my partner or friend to highlight them each day. Over the three years some would disappear and others would come about.*⁵³⁶

Beyond the studio

Maffrett's matter-of-fact description of maintaining Uglow's marks on her skin is a rather bizarre reminder of the level of internalised self surveillance required to continuously sustain the anticipation of being observed even when clothed, or in more prosaic settings of nudity, such as with her partners or close friends. It is arguable that the contiguity between the ritualised theatres of the life-room and broader social practices of gendered spectatorship and display makes it easier for female models to acknowledge and articulate their experiences as viewed. In many ways Maffrett may appear to have been completely totalised by the imperative to maintain herself as the object of another's gaze, which echoes John Berger's formulation:

*The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.*⁵³⁷

Uglow's paintings, his use of models, and his teaching could also be seen as a deliberate backlash against the critiques of figurative spectatorship made by progressive and feminist theorists, particularly in England. The glory days of 'F-studio', and Uglow's market success, coincided with the increasing political conservatism of England in the late 1970s, and the promotion of painting, and figurative painting especially, as a form of rear-garde retaliation against the critical challenges made by feminist theorists such as Griselda Pollock and Laura Mulvey.⁵³⁸ In the article cited earlier, Deanna Petherbridge is quite explicit about linking dot-and-carry to an ideological agenda that is not only misogynist, but politically conservative:

I have looked at the Euston Road tradition, because I see a danger of its resurrection in the dash back to the life-class without a properly formulated agenda. It strikes me as rather disturbing that the

⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

⁵³⁷ J Berger, *Ways of seeing: based on the BBC television series with John Berger*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1972 & Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 47.

⁵³⁸ N Mirzoeff, *Bodyscapes: art, modernity and the ideal figure*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, pp. 24-25. Nicholas Mirzoeff spends most of his introduction discussing the influence of British art critic Peter Fuller in promoting figurative painting as part of the conservative cultural values espoused by Margaret Thatcher's Tory Government.

'return to basics' campaign for drawing has involved a return to much earlier models, rather in the way Thatcher and Major have served up so-called Victorian 'family values', forgetting the repression, exploitation and cruelty of Victorian times.⁵³⁹

Aside from his associations with a cultural conservatism, Uglow was regarded by many students, colleagues and models as highly charismatic and persuasive, which may have contributed to the seductive allure of his project.⁵⁴⁰ However, to reduce 'his' models to the mute position of 'the object' or the exploited is to deny their perception and awareness of, and investment in, what is occurring around them.⁵⁴¹ Not all models were as equanimous as Maffrett, and many voiced strong objections to Uglow's demands of them within and outside of the life-room.⁵⁴² While I am not trying to defend Uglow's treatment of models, or minimise the implications of their objectification, I am intrigued by how models experience, mediate and articulate this process of objectification, how it occurs and what it feels like. Angela Eames also recounted a model's story of modelling for Uglow which gave an engaging perspective on the minutiae of looks passing not just between the artist and model, but around the studio and beyond:

There was a woman in the pub who was the model for I think it's called Root Square Five?⁵⁴³ And she'd modelled for that, and she said she could count the leaves on the tree outside, because it had been seven hours a day, seven days a week, for seven months. And she'd seen the leaves grow!⁵⁴⁴

The feeling of time

Like Maffrett's testimony, Eames's anecdote emphasises time, and how duration shaped the body of the model, and the experiences of both model and artist in being aware of their processes of looking and feeling and remembering the pose, the work, and the spaces around

⁵³⁹ B Buchloh, 'Figures of authority, ciphers of regression: notes on the return of representation in european painting' *October* 16, Spring 1981, p.111. Buchloh proposed that the resurgence of figuration throughout the twentieth century in flight from modernism, have each time signalled a return to a 'cultural climate of authoritarianism'.

⁵⁴⁰ During our interview, Jo Volley described Uglow as immensely charismatic and charming. Also see: L Checkettes, 'Euan Uglow', *Modern Painters*, vol. 2, no. 2, summer 1989, p. 104.

⁵⁴¹ This argument about the awareness and agency of models, in understanding and mediating their objectification was raised by Gordon Roe. See: G Roe, 'The body of art and the mantle of authority' in A Brydon & S Niessen (eds.), *Consuming fashion: adorning the transnational body*, Berg, Oxford, 1998, p. 104.

⁵⁴² The online magazine of the UK Register of Artists' Models *Bare Facts* prefaces Maffrett's testimony with the following: 'The name of Euan Uglow, who died last year, was held in reverence by some models, but to others it evoked only pain and resentment. Euan was notorious for keeping some of his female models in excruciating poses for years and he was unforgiving of those who failed him. In the case of at least one member of the Register, it's best to stay off the subject of Euan Uglow altogether.' See 'Bare Facts: a selection of articles from our former online magazine' *UK Registry of Artists' Models* website, viewed 14 February 2009 <<http://www.modelreg.co.uk/Articles2.htm>>.

⁵⁴³ I suspect she may have meant Root Five Nude, titled because of the dimensions of the canvas which measured the square root of 25.

⁵⁴⁴ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

and between them. An unavoidable element of posing for long periods of time appears to be pain. As articulated by Maffrett, time and pain become inextricably linked:

*Like with any pose it initially seemed easy to sustain and one I could relax into, but sometimes it would become unbearable.*⁵⁴⁵

The model in Eames's account also emphasised the intensity of concentration, and of the minutiae of suffering:

*She said that in the intensity of that, you eventually get into a place where it's automatic. But that takes a long time.*⁵⁴⁶

Maffrett linked the processes of sustaining the pose to keeping an eye on the clock, a small and secret one, *tucked away from his view*:

*I would aim to sustain the pose for at least thirty-minute stints. Euan gave me a small clock that I could keep an eye on, tucked away from his view. Then I'd take a break for five to ten minutes, we'd chat and have a cigarette.*⁵⁴⁷

Many models reiterated this link between pain and timing, and the psychological need to have control over time, or to count time while posing.⁵⁴⁸ As most drawing classes feature a combination of short sketches and longer drawings, models have a repertoire of short 'dynamic' poses with balance and stretching, as well as a range of seated or reclining poses which can be sustained for longer periods of time. Not all teachers are aware of this, however, and Wendy Sharpe described a harrowing experience from when she modelling at Seaforth TAFE in the late 1970s:

*So he would say to you 'two-minute pose', 'one-minute pose', and you would do one of those things where you're arching your back or you're twisting, or you're on one foot, or something which you know that you can only hold for one or two minutes. And he would leave you and leave you and leave you. And you'd be there for fifteen minutes or twenty minutes and you'd be in real agony, and shivering with it.*⁵⁴⁹

While the timing of poses is often left to a teacher or class monitor, many models bring their own timers, to ensure they are not left in a pose for too long, or to monitor and regulate their endurance. Sharpe's description of *the agony* of being poorly timed, led her to articulate the internal dialogues used by models to remain in positions of pain:

And because you're also young and stupid you don't say, "I can't hold it any longer. This has got to be longer than two minutes!" You just think, "He's going to stop soon, he's going to let me go soon,

⁵⁴⁵ Elaine Maffrett, loc. cit.

⁵⁴⁶ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁴⁷ Elaine Maffrett, loc. cit.

⁵⁴⁸ Scarry states 'The act of counting (here and in many other contexts) has a fixed place in the landscape of emergency' Scarry, op. cit., p. 192, and discussed the link between counting and pain. Ibid., note 9, p. 358.

⁵⁴⁹ Wendy Sharpe, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

*it's got to be soon. I'm going to count to ten." You know? You're doing all that rubbish!*⁵⁵⁰

The object of pain

Sharpe's explanation of youth and stupidity as reasons for remaining in the pose is somewhat simplistic, as many experienced and intelligent models also have experience with remaining in poses that are painful and sometimes physically harmful. Model Nick Strike articulated some of the more complex reasons why models sustain difficult and painful poses:

*But sometimes it can just be like a hurdle that you get past, and it's quite satisfying to get past that. It's only when the pose ends and you have to drag your leg along or whatever.*⁵⁵¹

Model Sam Tidbeck also described the challenge of posing as akin to endurance sport:

*It's a bit like... running or something where you're using the same muscles, essentially. Not quite because running it's a different kind of pain, I can't really describe it, but it's [modelling is] quite exhausting. I always find working for sculptors the most demanding.*⁵⁵²

While Tidbeck described the long term endurance of pain as exhausting, Strike said that having a sense of how long there is left is an important aspect of maintaining *integrity* and a sense of his agency in posing for others, even while feeling discomfort:

*Yeah, yeah, and who is it for? Is it for them? and also [considering the reasons] for your own integrity. I mean while I'll have said "I'll do this for this time", it becomes a physical thing, that sense of discomfort as well.*⁵⁵³

Strike's question of 'who is it for?' and his reference to maintaining his integrity is echoed by Tidbeck's description of the end point of endurance modelling:

*Really, it starts to become a bit crazy, really you start aching. And so your body just gets tired. I mean if you do that pose for an hour, in another class, you don't really feel it, but by the end of it you're exhausted and your muscles are really aching. But you can do it.*⁵⁵⁴

It is unclear what or who starts *to become a bit crazy* in the long-term endurance of suffering, and Tidbeck contains the psychological element of endurance within a somatic level:

*I'm sure there is this unconscious programming of your body: "We are going to do this for five weeks". And at the end of that five weeks, just the thought... Your body has gone through the trauma, because of course it is a trauma... "Nup! No way! Not even one more week, even for double the money!" Of course that never happens, but you know this.*⁵⁵⁵

Tidbeck's reference to *the unconscious* neatly side-steps the more disturbing connotations

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁵¹ Nick Strike, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁵² Sam Tidbeck, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁵³ Nick Strike, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁵⁴ Sam Tidbeck, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*

of a *conscious* decision to remain and return to a position of discomfort, if not actual suffering, which is that it is, clearly, *a bit crazy*. Even if we reduce model's consent to suffering as an extreme form of a desire to please, this does not explain why artists and students would want bear witness to the coerced suffering of another human being, or why this would remain as a central element of art training.⁵⁵⁶

Painful exchanges

While it can be argued that artists and students are simply unaware of the pain of the model, it is somewhat mind-boggling that precise observational rendering of the external appearance of the *serratus magnus* or the *corraco brachialis*⁵⁵⁷ could coexist with not seeing the beads of sweat forming on the surface of the skin, the tremors that rock the trunk or limb as the overworked muscles start to shake, or the changing hues of the model's skin as he or she blushes or grimaces with the effort of resisting movement and enduring pain. The emphasis on minute observation of physical detail arguably functions to train students into a form of blindness to observable visible reality that is redolent of the dilemma raised by Elaine Scarry:

*How is it that one person can be in the presence of another person and not know it - not know it to the point where he himself inflicts [pain] and goes on inflicting it?*⁵⁵⁸

Without wanting to place figurative artists such as Uglow in the same category as the torturers discussed by Scarry, there are elements of the protocol within the life-room that implicitly acknowledge some form of awareness by the artists that they are placing the model in some form of discomfort or pain. In Maffrett's account cited earlier, she mentioned how Uglow *gave* her the clock to hide and view in secret. According to Eames, the model for "*Root Five Nude*" described a similar *giving* by Uglow, of an object for the model to hold onto during the pose:

And as we were talking about it she said "Well if you look at the painting very carefully, Angela, you

⁵⁵⁶ There is a considerable history of macabre practices in anatomical training undertaken at art academies, particularly at the British Royal Academy when Dr. William Hunter was the professor of anatomy. Hunter used to obtain the corpses of executed criminals, remove the skin and then arrange and cast the flayed bodies in arranged poses to be displayed alongside the posing models. See M Kemp & M Wallace, *Spectacular bodies: the art and science of the human body from Leonardo to now*, Hayward Gallery, London & University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001, pp. 85-87; A Callan, 'The Body and Difference: Anatomy training at the École des beaux-arts in the later nineteenth century', *Art History*, vol. 20, no. 1, Mar 1997, pp. 23-60.

⁵⁵⁷ These are respectively the main intercostal muscles along the side of the trunk and the smallest muscle under the biceps along the inner arm. See H. Gray, *Anatomy: descriptive and surgical*, Longmeadow Press, Stamford, CT, 1991, p. 252.

⁵⁵⁸ E Scarry, op. cit., p. 12.

*will see in my hand, a nail. Euan gave me the nail, and you'll see it if you look." And she held it... in case...*⁵⁵⁹

Eames did not specify what eventuality was being warded off by the nail, but she followed the words *in case* with a chuckle, acknowledging the *craziness* of mediating what could be described as agony. Scarry describes pain as a form of intense sensation without an object, with which to represent and mentally externalise it.⁵⁶⁰ She cites physiological studies that suggest that the suffering of pain can be reduced either by counting or by asking the patient to imagine or hold an object into which the pain is localised as external to the sufferer's body.⁵⁶¹ Uglow's attention to the minutiae of observable detail arguably included a certain awareness of the minutiae of sensation and of suffering that he was asking models to endure. How he identified with or disassociated from that suffering is another question, but elements of it are present in the paintings, which possibly contribute to the complexity and intensity of the work, as Eames says:

*But honestly, it's just the tip of the nail, and I'd not noticed it before. So yeah, I think there was a form of sadism there, almost, but also the intensity.*⁵⁶²

Seeing the tip of the nail allows the viewer to witness a tacit exchange between the model and artist, a tacit acknowledgement of the pain, and a certain level of sadomasochism between them. The tip of the nail functions like the tip of the iceberg on an enormously intimate history of consent and empathy with pain, as well as a feigned detachment or denial of it. Eames's acknowledgement of sadism *and* intensity is a visceral reminder that observation can never be outside of the bodies, sensations and subjectivities of those engaged in looking and being looked at, and that looking is a multidirectional and profoundly ambiguous process, deeply embedded in duration as well as space. She gave an anecdote of her own relationship to pain, articulating how *that intensity* worked as a contagious element between her and the model. Describing the sketch club she had established with a group of female friends, including the model, she said that on one occasion she was drawing while suffering intense period pain. Having resolved *to work through it*, Eames asked the model to adopt a comfortable lying pose, while she attempted a challenging routine of drawing on two boards, alternating hands each five minutes:

⁵⁵⁹ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁶⁰ Scarry, *op cit.*, pp. 13-14. Scarry discusses torture survivors' use of objects in pp. 291-2.

⁵⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 17. Scarry cites a conversation with Ronald Melzack, McGill University, Montreal, 9 June 1977.

Melzack is one of the major medical researchers on pain in the late twentieth century, and is currently Emeritus Professor of Psychology at McGill University. In addition to developing the McGill pain questionnaire, he wrote *The Puzzle of Pain*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, which Scarry also cites.

⁵⁶² Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

And I got to the point where one of the others actually said “Angela, I don’t like to interrupt but, the model hasn’t had a break, and it’s two hours!” And I came out of it and said “Oh my goodness! I’m sorry I just wasn’t there!”⁵⁶³

The spatial and temporal relationships in Eames’s account are quite fascinating. Her desire to work through the pain, by linking intense observation with a challenging use of her own body, allowed her focus to be drawn away from her abdomen. Paradoxically her focus on timing herself and her own drawing allowed her to forget the passage of time in the room or within the body of the model whom she was observing. Eames’s exclamation *I just wasn’t there!* invites the question *where were you?* to which the model apparently gave an intriguing reply:

And the model said to me, “Actually that was extraordinary! I felt as if you were crawling all over me!” She said it was just an incredible experience because of the attention and just the absolute focus.⁵⁶⁴

Possibly this statement is a testament more to the empathy of the model than to any contagious influence of Eames’s intense scrutiny. Arguably models’ own capacity to move out of their discomfort or pain and identify with the artist, with the *objective* of life-drawing, or the mythologies associated with modelling and art, allows them to endure the discomfort of posing, as well as their *objectification*. Sam Tidbeck was quite open about admitting that objectification does occur in the life-room:

But I think partly, it’s probably an inevitable part of the process that you sort of have to become, you have to be almost prepared, to be objectified.⁵⁶⁵

Without elaborating on how anyone can *prepare* to be objectified, Tidbeck argued that the nudity of the life model was an intrinsic part of how they became separated from the artists:

Something that’s interesting, is that in a life-modelling environment, frequently, is that you’re taking your clothes off, you’re making yourself different. You make yourself the performer. And it’s interesting how people can actually, rather than identify with you, rather than that, they actually disassociate themselves from you.⁵⁶⁶

While suggesting that objectification was possibly inevitable, Tidbeck argued that it is not the only part of life-drawing, and articulated when and how it happened:

And I suppose maybe it’s part of that whole objectification that has to happen in the initial part of the drawing. You’re having to see the person as object in order to get the figure down on the page: dot dot

⁵⁶³ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Sam Tidbeck, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*

*dot, the whole objectification process.*⁵⁶⁷

Tidbeck has drawn, taught and modelled for life-classes for over a decade, and so her reflections come from a wealth and variety of experience, but it was interesting to note how – almost within the same breath - her account shifted from the ‘subject position’ of the model as a performer to the ‘subject position’ of an artist *having to see the person as an object*. It is tempting to conjecture that the distancing she describes as occurring between the model and the drawers equally occurs *within* the model, removing his or herself from an internal sense of his or her own comfort, interests, or desires and into imagining what it is that artists want, or feel. Arguably the shift is not one way, but an oscillating movement back and forth. As the drawers’ eyes flicker between the model and the page, the model’s awareness alternates between a sense of projection, of performing, and sensing his or her body, to one of detachment; *surveying herself (or himself)* imagining what the artist might see or desire or respond to, imagining the drawing boards as planes of a panopticon, capturing the surveillance of the model from every angle. The idea of subjectivity as oscillating fits elegantly into the familiar rhythm of most sketch clubs, which are characterised by the stop-start action of short poses at the start of the session, as well as the alternating focus of drawers’ eyes, moving between subject and page. It also allows for a more generous appreciation of the subtlety of encounters and exchanges that occur over time during the course of a pose, and a drawing session. This theme is developed further in the next chapter, but Tidbeck’s idea that objectification inevitably forms *part* of the drawing process also allows her to articulate a more pluralistic vision of how drawing can happen over time:

*One only hopes that the re-humanising element, the subjectification, does kick in, in some part of the drawing.*⁵⁶⁸

It is unclear whether the one hoping is the artist, the viewer or the model or all three, but certainly the burden of objectification is mostly borne on the body of the model. Eames’s account is interesting because she mentions a gender-specific form of pain as the basis for her movement away from an awareness of her body and into an intense engagement with observational drawing:

*Because of trying to get rid of the other thing, the pain, and not worry about that, you’re putting something else of equal strength in its place. So it’s got its... it was an incredibly emotional thing and probably the two best life-drawings I ever did in my life. [chuckles]*⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

This may appear to have nothing to do with Uglow's approach, or the Euston Road Tradition, in which drawing was articulated as the precisely controlled movement of a disembodied, genderless, unfeeling *eye*. Eames's description of her experience as *emotional* would also appear to align her experience with that of the empathic figuration by female artists described by Deanna Petherbridge. In the article discussed earlier, Petherbridge examined 'the sexual issue' by including quotations from a number of prominent figurative artists.⁵⁷⁰ The quotations from Henri Matisse and Roy Kitaj aligned their spectatorship of the nude with transgressive behaviours and fantasies such as voyeurism and rape, while the quotation from Alice Neel was completely different:

*You know what happens to me often, after someone poses for me for a couple of hours? When they leave me if I'm in the apartment alone, I just feel awful because I have really been living in them. I feel like an untenanted apartment. I feel frightful, because I have exercised such empathy, that in a way, I leave myself and feel as though I have no self.*⁵⁷¹

Neel's moving account of her shift away from a sense of her own subjectivity - *leaving herself and living in them* - parallels Eames's exclamation that *she wasn't even there*. While Eames's movement out of herself is prompted by an aversion to her own sensation, Neel articulates hers as an empathetic desire to be with or *inside* the models, *living in them*. Both accounts differ from the accounts by male figurative artists presented by Petherbridge. In their articulation of the artists' feelings *while drawing*, both Matisse and Kitaj are quick to distance themselves from their admitted feelings of sexual arousal, linking them to social observations or generalising them as creative metaphors, mythologising what are arguably idiosyncratic and banal sensations and desires. It is difficult to distinguish between culturally dominant discursive conventions and actual feelings, but I am extremely reluctant to draw any intrinsic links between the discursive performance of masculine artistic subjectivity and the *subjective* experience of a physical encounter with naked spectatorship. I am also highly suspicious of any analysis that links female subjectivity and women's art with culturally gendered attributes of emotion, or empathy. If nothing else, it ignores women artists' own complicated relationships to models, which do involve levels of objectification, desire and even exploitation.

While Eames described her drawing as *incredibly emotional*, it was also based on the very likely discomfort of the model. Her account of her mental flight away from her pain, her

⁵⁷⁰ Petherbridge, op. cit., p. 61.

⁵⁷¹ Alice Neel, quoted in J K Collischan Van Wagner, *Lines of vision: drawings by contemporary women*, Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1989, p. 105. Cited by Petherbridge, op. cit., p. 62.

body, the room and time itself *through* the process of intense observational drawing arguably mirrors the empathic flight of the model, away from the discomfort of remaining in a pose for two hours, and into an identification with Eames's spectatorship as a form of touch. Eames linked the quality of the work to the intensity of this aversive movement away from her own sensation, into this other space so *she wasn't even there*. As she says, "So there's all sorts of things going through in that. Quite incredible".⁵⁷²

Eames used the word *incredible* to describe the productive qualities of the complexity of exchanges which was reflected in the final drawings. Thus associations between *objective drawing* and *credibility or incredibility* multiply in the gaps between what is visible, what is felt, and what is observed in the processes of objectifying the model. This echoes Tidbeck's description of being objectified:

*And it's incredible how they do forget that you're a person! And you can get cold, you can get uncomfortable, you need a break.*⁵⁷³

Describing how drawers *forget* the model as *incredible*, Tidbeck makes a pithy link between subjectivity, sentience and memory. The incredulity of the model that artists could not be aware of their discomfort operates as a elegant corollary to Scarry's link between the experience of pain and its unbelievability to others. Her evocation of objectification as a form of amnesia, as leading to *forgetting* the model, at whom they are looking, is resonant with Eames's exclamation that *she wasn't even there*.

Seeing as believing

The tangled constellation of belief, memory and subjectivity that lies behind what appears to be a straightforward act of observation recalls the observations made at the start of this chapter about the crucified model and the blind drawing teacher. Returning to Scarry's question of how is it that people can knowingly observe another person in pain, it is arguable that the complicit muteness of Ashton's students in not interrupting the pose or protecting the model, also functions as a form of blindness. Rather than seeing a semi-naked young man *in agony*, they saw a silent still figure, a collections of shapes or a banal parody of the torture and execution of the Christian God. In fact what they saw remains as a mystery, since the only account of the class belongs to the model. His credibility as a witness is largely ratified by the common acceptance that the teacher was medically blind, and the students too

⁵⁷² Dr. Angela Eames, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁷³ Sam Tidbeck, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

subservient, silent or anonymous to have supported or challenged his account.

The circumstances of a crucified model, a blind drawing teacher, and mute students, raise issues of ethology, spectatorship and subjectivity that are discussed by Kelly Oliver, in *Witnessing, Beyond Recognition*.⁵⁷⁴ Like Scarry, Oliver explores the complex moral dilemmas surrounding spectatorship, agency and subjectivity in the case of human rights violations, torture and genocide. Oliver argues that subjectivity is constatively performed through a conscious form of ethical spectatorship, which she describes as witnessing.⁵⁷⁵ Oliver claims that the basis of witnessing is an empathic acknowledgement of the experiences of others, however difficult or incomprehensible they may seem, and an active attempt to articulate this empathy.⁵⁷⁶ Oliver's complex argument linking speech and subjectivity is reiterated by the moving observation from Sam Tidbeck, describing how the conventions of silence in the life-room reinforce the position of the model as *dumb*:

*One thing I've noticed about life modelling, the job of being a life model is essentially you are a figure standing there. You're... it's your body that's being hired. And so you're not being hired to talk. And it is assumed, you are hired in your muteness. You are a mute worker. And there are quite a few people, where you say something and people are completely surprised. It's almost as if they'd expect that you didn't have a voice or an opinion maybe. Or because people have this opinion, or there's this idea that if you don't talk, you don't have an opinion. There's something; the dumbness is also stupidity, that other kind of dumb.*⁵⁷⁷

She spelled out the implications of this assumption further:

*And also people frequently think that you wouldn't know as much, or you wouldn't know very much about art, or drawing. But of course in order to be good, you have to know something about it.*⁵⁷⁸

Despite the claims of numerous models and artists that good models are often artists, it is assumed that as *mute workers*, models are *dumb*, ignorant about art, and probably life-drawing as well. This assumption of *dumbness* obscures the frequent uses artists have made of modelling as a means of accessing art education, and reinforces the low status that models still have in the art world. This low status extends to the treatment of models who have complained or taken action against poor conditions or inadequate supervision, and are frequently not heard, not believed or not hired, as a result.⁵⁷⁹ It appears that the oscillating movements between objectification and subjectification experienced by models while posing,

⁵⁷⁴ K Oliver, *Witnessing: beyond recognition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2001.

⁵⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁷⁷ Sam Tidbeck, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ The unfortunate histories of physical and mental breakdowns experienced by life models are equalled by equally unfortunate histories of coercion and bullying when models have attempted to make formal complaints. Most of this is anecdotal, and beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with adequately.

become fixed outside the classroom or studio into a particular relationship of marginalisation and desubjectification, where they become mute workers, subservient to teachers or artists, and blind, ignorant or unreliable witnesses to the practices of life-drawing in which they participate.⁵⁸⁰ It is arguable that the marginalisation of artists' models outside the studio, and within the art-worlds of educational institutions, is based on a generalisation of the silent performance of posing to an essentialised view of models as *dummies*: unseeing, unspeaking, non-subjects.

It could be said that Tom Bass's anecdote about Julian Ashton has a particular currency, not because of its shocking implications, but because of the status and credibility of Bass, who is a nationally significant sculptor and prominent educator. The anecdote has been recounted in a number of publications and articles on Tom Bass, and functions as an affecting embellishment on a rags-to-riches narrative. It is arguable that the credibility of Bass's account stems less from his capacity as an ex-model to witness and articulate his own suffering, than from his legitimacy as a recognised artist and senior educator to narrate his own history. Oliver argues that the function of the eyewitness account is not so much as to establish an objective truth of a pre-existing event, but to perform a constative discourse of an empathic subjectivity.⁵⁸¹ Under this formulation, the speech acts of describing painful events, of articulating feelings of suffering, anger, grief or empathy with the sufferings of others, are what actively constitutes subjectivity. Oliver also discusses how the formation of of an ethical subjectivity, involves the capacity to bear witness to one's own suffering, or oppression.⁵⁸² It is unclear whether Bass's narrative could be regarded as a constative speech act, or as the retrospective application of an externally established subjective legitimacy, but it serves to highlight the desubjectification of the other silent witnesses to Bass's suffering. The silence, passivity and acquiescence of Ashton's students to the supposed mastery of their teacher not only reduces them to the status of blind acolytes, but it denies their own capacity for subjectivity. As mute witnesses of suffering, their witnessing becomes irrelevant, their subjectivity extinguished from the memory of the event as recounted by the model. The relationship between witnessing, spectatorship, subjectivity and power also extends to

⁵⁸⁰ This facet of the social relations of artists' models and teaching staff arguably forms the basis of the interest by many models in having a forum to describe their work. As I noted in my introduction, one of the limitations of many existing accounts by, or of, artists' models is that they are separate from publications on art theory, drawing or art education. There is considerable scope for future research on life-drawing and art education to include the accounts, critiques and reflections from models who participate in and witness various techniques and practices of drawing instruction.

⁵⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

observation itself. As noted by Jonathan Crary, even the etymological roots of the word *observe* have connotations of servitude to an external entity.⁵⁸³ Whereas observation is frequently associated objectivity, Crary links the practices, technologies and discourses of observation to specific historical and social relations of European modernism, arguing that the social and technological changes in the nineteenth century produced a shift in the link between subjectivity and vision, such that ‘vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work’.⁵⁸⁴ Crary explores modernist optics as a field of practices and technologies across a single surface, discussing an array of optical devices as well as painting.⁵⁸⁵ Crary’s argument enables modernist life-drawing to be understood as a particular historically situated social discipline, contiguous with other contemporary practices, and based on a mode of optics that detached vision from the other senses and the bodies of practitioners.⁵⁸⁶ Within this modality of observation, the paradoxical projection of objectivity upon naked living human beings (surely the most empathically compelling subjects imaginable) serves to reinforce the emphasis of rigorous observation as profoundly decorporealised. However, this argument may also serve to deny the rich field of encounters and experiences within which life-drawing has proliferated as a modernist practice, and possibly serve to anxiously cloak the troubling ambiguities of how issues such as sexuality and suffering are (awkwardly) managed in contemporary life-drawing.

Possibly it is this denial of the self that is at the heart of the allure of the denial of the other on which objective drawing is arguably based. In denying the presence, subjectivity and suffering of the other before them, the observers in a life-class are able to deny their own bodies, their own subjectivity, their own discomfort, and as in Eames’s admission to be not *even there*, but be somewhere else, or even something else. This process becomes not altogether different from Neel’s description of empathic drawing cited earlier; however her claim that *I leave myself and feel as though I have no self* reads less like an empathic encounter with the subjectivity of the other, than a moving admission of the objectification within herself. Eames’s anecdote paradoxically provides a distinctly personal and embodied account of how objective spectatorship is subjectively experienced as a movement away from

⁵⁸³ ‘In a sense more pertinent to my study, *observare* means “to confirm one’s action, to comply with”, as in observing rules, codes, regulations and practices’, J Crary, ‘Introduction’, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century*, MIT press, Cambridge MA, 1990, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 20-23.

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 19. ‘The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space.’

the self and the pains and responsibilities of subjectivity. This may hint at the appeal of *objectification* for models as well: the imaginative flight away from the discomfort of stillness, and the discomfiting implications of silence into an identification with the artists, their observation and their objectives.

As discussed in Chapter Three, life-drawing has proliferated in a variety of settings which indicate an active desire on behalf of all participants to explore sexuality, desire, fantasy, as well as subjection, pain and suffering. It is arguable that modernist observation is not a hegemonic practice, but one predicated on the complex and continuous movements between obeisance and disavowal, among all participants. While not trying to deny the tendencies of *objective* drawing towards a discomfiting association with sadism and exploitation, I am more interested in exploring the complexities and paradoxes of objectification than in reinforcing an apparently intractable divide between subject and object or oppressor and oppressed. While the arguments by Oliver and Scarry are based on an examination of the relationships in blatant and deliberate forms of cruelty, they are useful for my examination of the tacit levels of suffering that do occur in the life-class, and their links to subjectivity. According to Oliver's formulation, models' accounts of suffering and the painful experiences of *objectification* produce a paradoxical effect of articulating their status as an object, while simultaneously enunciating their subjectivity.⁵⁸⁷ Arguably the movements between the status of subject and object, articulated by life models, suggest that the status of 'subject' is not a fixed position, but a series of continual movements, performances and exchanges among groups of people seeking to regulate and contest the fragility of their ontological experience.

3. Seeing the natural

Nicolaides' legacy

*Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see - to see correctly - and that means a good deal more than merely looking with the eye. The sort of seeing I mean is an observation that utilizes as many of the five senses as can reach through the eye at one time. Although you use your eyes, you do not close up the other senses - rather the reverse, because all the senses have a part in the sort of observation you are to make.*⁵⁸⁸

In contrast to the emphasis on a detached and almost disembodied eye, Nicolaides' book, *The Natural Way to Draw*, promotes a form of observational drawing where physical

⁵⁸⁷ Oliver, op. cit., p. 99. Oliver explores the paradox of bearing witness to one's own suffering, arguing that performing witnessing contradicts the silence of objectification, the process of witnessing involves sensing and admitting the shame and pain of objectification, and that finally, the experience of being an object cannot be articulated precisely because it involves the experience of becoming inarticulate.

⁵⁸⁸ K Nicolaides, *The natural way to draw: a working plan for art study*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1969, p. 5.

sensations, within and between the bodies of the artists and models, form an intrinsic part of how *seeing* is explained. Published posthumously, the book is based on the exercises and notes used by Kimon Nicolaides while teaching at the New York Art Students League in the 1920s and 1930s. There is almost no biographical information about Nicolaides beyond what is written on the flyleaf of the book; born in the US in 1891, he served in the French Camouflage Corps in World War 1, and died in 1938.⁵⁸⁹ The Art Students League was a breakaway group from the New York's National Art Academy in the late nineteenth century. It represented modernist progressive approaches to academy style teaching of fine art - its emphasis was based around increased access to the life-class, as well as the ability for students/subscribers to select the teaching staff. The heyday of the League was limited to the inter-war years, as its emphasis on figuration was eclipsed by the rise of post-war abstraction that had its basis in New York, and it continues largely as a school for amateur artists and illustrators.

While the Art Students League currently operates in a somewhat marginal position in relation to professional art schools in New York, the legacy of some of its early teachers continues today. Some of the 'key' drawing textbooks used by teachers in art schools and amateur classes internationally are written by or about teachers from the League, such as Kimon Nicolaides, George Bridgeman and Robert Beverley Hale. Due to the selection of teaching staff by students, the Art Students League has never had a distinct pedagogical vision as such. The three textbooks represent highly divergent and even antithetical approaches to figurative drawing: Hale emphasised a neo-classical approach to copying from Renaissance 'Masters', whereas Bridgeman developed a mechanistic view of studying human anatomy as a series of blocks, hinges and pulleys. Bridgeman and Hale taught at the same time as Nicolaides, whose approach was mostly experiential rather than based on abstracting from the figure, or following a set of stylised conventions.

In the last chapter, I discussed some feminist critiques made of life-drawing manuals, including *The Natural Way to Draw*. Despite the criticisms raised by some authors, the book and its author Kimon Nicolaides are generally associated with a humanist and empathic approach to drawing as a form of feeling and connection, among many artists and teachers internationally. In addition to creating performance pieces around mark-making, movement

⁵⁸⁹ This information apparently comes from Mamie Harmon, a student of Nicolaides, who collaborated with Nicolaides on *The Natural Way To Draw*, ensuring its posthumous publication in 1941. Sketches, notes and correspondence from Nicolaides exists in the Mamie Harmon papers in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

and the body, prominent US performance artist Carolee Schneemann, has studied, modelled for and taught life-drawing in numerous institutions.⁵⁹⁰ In our interview Schneeman emphatically praised the book:

Reading Nicolaidis was really important: that helped me so much. I love that book. I love it. And when I teach drawing, sometimes it works that my students just fall right off their chairs! They start really experiencing the intensity of space, and they go there optically and they're no longer in this predictive linear sense of self. I love it when they fall over! [chuckles]⁵⁹¹

Schneemann cited Nicolaidis, along with Cézanne, as one of the major influences on her intellectual and creative reaction to the boredom of modelling for conventional life-drawing:

No, as you know, it's very boring. And it's so boring, and annoying, because the teachers were teaching in ways that I thought were poor, or inhibitory, or missing the real energy and dynamic of having you there as a model. Having anyone there as a model!⁵⁹²

Schneemann's criticism of the limitations of most life-drawing instruction reflected the enormous influence that objectivist approaches held over life-classes in the 1950s and 1960s:

Well, they were more conventional and static, and they didn't really have a sense of the eye, really out, meeting the body and moving dimensionally around it and through it. They tended to want surface and edges and all these calculated definitions, which weren't really about space and dimensionality.⁵⁹³

Schneemann insisted that a knowledge of space had to come through the drawers' awareness of, rather than a detachment from, their bodies, and an awareness of feeling:

So if you're really involved in the space, it's a huge confluence in which you, as you stand with some self-determination to be the perceiving vehicle, you are also part of the dimensionality of what you're looking at.⁵⁹⁴

In the comment above, Schneemann links perception to an act of subject formation or self determination linked to a sentient experience of the spatial context, and connection, to what is being viewed. The exercises in Nicolaidis appear to promote a form of spectatorship that challenges the distance of voyeurism or the abstracting qualities of geometric plotting, and link seeing with feeling.

Seeing with feeling

The emphasis on an imagined tactile contact with the subject lends itself to an approach to drawing that is empathic and experiential, rather than projecting a series of abstracted

⁵⁹⁰ See Carolee Schneemann, *Up to and including her limits*, 1973-76. Image and description on artist's website, viewed 19 February 2009, <<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>>.

⁵⁹¹ Carolee Schneemann, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁹² *ibid.*

⁵⁹³ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ *ibid.*

geometric shapes and anatomical principles. It also insists on an understanding of perception intimately tied in with an experience of the artist's own body, an approach which model Nick Strike agreed with:

Well also the other aspect, as you just raise your hand, it's the body taking the whole hand. It's attached to the body, and that full muscularity of the body connected to the perception. We know that from Nicolaidis, he's so brilliantly clear about it.⁵⁹⁵

Strike also expressed his frustration with the number of life-drawing teachers who do not share this awareness:

But when I was a life model there didn't seem to be that sense of kinaesthetic connection to the muscularity of perception.⁵⁹⁶

Strike's frustration with objectivist approaches, and their remoteness from the body, was palpably compounded by his own paradoxical role as the model for such classes, which he was quite emphatic about criticising:

I can see the point of that for the formalists and the objective lookers, but to me it's too tied in with a scientific objectivist rationalist approach, which misses the humanity. And that doesn't mean that drawings need to be expressive, or whatever. For the people drawing, I'm quite happy for them to do objective drawings, just so long as there's that engagement, and if they're being told not to, I think "fuck you!"⁵⁹⁷

One teacher whom Strike praised was Pam Vaughan, who has run her own sketch club, and taught life-drawing at Sydney College of the Arts and the National Art School, as well as a number of secondary schools and community colleges. Vaughan described life-drawing as an embodied practice, analogous to embodied practices such as yoga:

I studied a lot of yoga all through the mid to late nineties and I actually use a lot of yoga stuff in teaching it too, just about the way you even hold your charcoal, and sit at the easel, or stand at the easel, and breathing and feeling and relating to the model.⁵⁹⁸

Vaughan only discovered Nicolaidis after her undergraduate training, when her ex-teacher suggested that some of the exercises might be good 'pointers' for her own students. She has since become what she describes as a devotee:

I actually think in a way Kimon Nicolaidis does use some of those things without calling it yoga. He's talking about relating to the model not just through your eyes but through a sense of touch and through a sense of feeling the pose in your own body and all that kind of stuff.⁵⁹⁹

Aside from repeated insistence on the need for artists to be aware of their bodies, *The*

⁵⁹⁵ Nick Strike, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ Pam Vaughan, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁵⁹⁹ *ibid.*

Natural Way To Draw uses a number of exercises, not entirely dissimilar to many of the ‘experimental’ approaches practised in French free ateliers in the late nineteenth century, such as the *croquis* or fast, loose sketch, based on either a moving or rapidly changing model.⁶⁰⁰ However, whereas the *croquis* could often be reduced to a rather competitive exercise in speed and hand-eye co-ordination, Nicolaides develops it into a specific form of empathic seeing of ‘the gesture’ of the pose, its movement, direction and energy:

*Gesture is a thing in itself without substance. Gesture is intangible. It cannot be understood without feeling.*⁶⁰¹

Nicolaides effectively uses the abstract qualities of *gesture* to return to an insistence on feeling. Describing the gesture in ‘things’ - ‘the way a chair invites us to sit in it, the way a lamp spreads out to shield a flame, the way a tree moves upwards’, Nicolaides insists ‘To be able to see the gesture you must be able to feel it in you own body’, encouraging an empathic connection with objects as well as human subjects.⁶⁰² His vagueness about *gesture* is as deliciously evocative of the vagueness of plastic media themselves, of masses of charcoal moving over a page, and of the plasticity of the human figure, shifting, turning and contorting into a myriad of shapes:

*Gesture has no precise edges, no exact shape, no jelled form. The forms are in the act of changing. Gesture is movement in space.*⁶⁰³

Blind contours

Aside from the series of ‘gesture drawings’, Nicolaides recommends another exercise, *blind contour drawing*, which is based on meticulously following an imaginary contour around the body, with the eye, while simultaneously drawing it on the page. A *Blind Contour* drawing may take five, ten or even thirty minutes, during which the drawer is not allowed to look at their drawing, but must execute it ‘blindly’, trusting that their hand will follow their eye, and trying to develop his or her own kinaesthetic awareness and hand-eye co-ordination.⁶⁰⁴ Many of my interview subjects use it in their own teaching, and recommend it as an exercise in concentration, in observation, and in a focussed, almost meditative practice of empathic engagement at least with one’s drawing tools. Vaughan emphasised this meditative aspect of the exercise:

⁶⁰⁰ See M Postle, ‘From academy to art school’ in M Postle & W Vaughan, *The artist’s model: from Etty to Spencer*, Merrell Holberton, London, 1999, p. 14.

⁶⁰¹ Nicolaides, op. cit., p15.

⁶⁰² Ibid. See Appendix 3, Fig. 17 & Fig. 18.

⁶⁰³ ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ See Appnedix 3, Fig. 19 & fig. 20 for examples of ‘quick blind contour drawings’ from Nicolaides.

*I'll talk about drawing as a form of meditation. One definition of meditation is any activity in which you totally immerse yourself in the present... and really in blind contour drawing I'm saying, "Your reality is the one millimetre of contour that you're looking at and noticing which way it's turning, and you're responding to it by doing the same with the charcoal".*⁶⁰⁵

She took pains to emphasise how blind contour promotes the minutiae of observation as an exercise in intense concentration and awareness of movement, and materials, and perception:

*If it goes to the right one millimetre at forty five degrees, the charcoal will do that, if it goes left, and don't think that five millimetres past thinking whether you got it right or wrong, or the tricky ten centimetres coming up, you're simply in the one millimetre, responding with the arm, so yeah you have to get pretty specific at times.*⁶⁰⁶

Mike Esson agreed that the link between concentration and an intense embodied awareness was a key element of the success of the approach:

*And I think it's not just, again, this process of blind contour, but it's really the focus, the concentration that's required, the absolute feeling that your pencil is on the model, and not on the paper.*⁶⁰⁷

Esson also qualified his advocacy of the blind contour, claiming:

*I mean that blind contour thing, there's a lot of people who've taught that over the years, and I've seen so many different incredibly poor results from that too.*⁶⁰⁸

He suggested that the poor results came from teachers who had not been trained to draw, or who lacked confidence in their own bodies and with figurative drawing, before reiterating his own emphasis within his classes:

*What I'm trying to emphasise is that you have to feel that you are participating, you actually have to feel the whole sensuality. You know, the whole business of feeling a pose, rather than looking [at] a pose.*⁶⁰⁹

In discussing what it was like to model for blind contour drawings, Strike made an interesting observation, saying *it's been described as following an ant walking over your body*, which was reminiscent of Eames's quoting of her model in the anecdote discussed earlier. When I asked if this tactile seeing made him uncomfortable, he replied:

*It's like you're clothed, or the person drawing is clothed in the pencil. So, you know what I mean? It's like its socially acceptable for me to be drawn by them, clothed in the pencil. I guess when they're naked in their seeing, I'm suddenly uncomfortable. It's reverse psychology.*⁶¹⁰

He immediately referred to his own experiences teaching, insisting on the *point* of life-drawing being the ability to convey a sense of the tactile qualities of the subject:

⁶⁰⁵ Pam Vaughan, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁶⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ Mike Esson, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

⁶⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ Nick Strike, interview with author, See Appendix 1.

*If you can get your eye to feel touch, then that's what you're trying to get to, a real sense of what it is that you're drawing. So I don't have a problem with people drawing in the same way.*⁶¹¹

Strike's shift from model to teacher in making a point is reminiscent of Tidbeck's earlier shift from model to artist in her explanation about the inevitability of objectification. To a certain extent it allows the model to move out of the uncomfortable or discomfoting associations of a particular process, by identifying with the pedagogical project at hand. While *objectifying* the model promotes an excessive distance from the model, the alternative possibility, evoked by the blind contour exercise, suggests an idea of touching the model that is intensely intimate, and which itself touches upon some taboo associations between nudity and physical contact, which are discomfoting for both artists and models.

Contours of memory

Nicolaides' blind contour approach resembles another exercise from the nineteenth century.⁶¹² In, *The Training of the Memory in Art and the Education of the Artist*, French instructor Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran described a remarkably similar exercise, which he used at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts as early as 1844:

*Being suitably placed for studying the object that you wish to commit to memory, draw its forms in your head, and to concentrate your attention the better, follow the forms, at a distance, with the end of your finger or anything pointed. Then shut your eyes, or look away from the object, and draw it again in the air.*⁶¹³

Published in France in 1847, the book was translated into English in 1911, and the exercise used in a number of British art schools, principally as a form of training students in remembering the appearance of a body, even when they could no longer see it. Of course Lecoq de Boisbaudran's exercise differs considerably from Nicolaides' in its temporal disjuncture between observation and mark-making; the former insists that the students observe intensely, trace the image with their finger, and then turn away and draw from memory. He insists on an internalisation of what is observed into a memorised image which is then executed. While he describes the finger tracing method as *the best*, all of his observational exercises are based on a training of the eye to observe, and to memorise aspects of what has been observed, independently of a physical activity of recording or transcribing observation.

⁶¹¹ *ibid.*

⁶¹² I am indebted to Roger Conlon from UWE Bristol for noting the resemblance between the two exercises.

⁶¹³ H Lecoq de Boisbaudran, *The training of the memory in art and the education of the artist*, LD Luard (trans.), Macmillan and Co., London, 1911, p. 43.

Lecoq de Boisbaudran's approach is undoubtedly a product of its time, and the fact that he had the approval and support of the rigorously Cartesian architect Violet Le Duc suggests that he could hardly be described as revolutionary.⁶¹⁴ However, Lecoq de Boisbaudran is undoubtedly quite modern in his approach. In scenes redolent of the most indolent Norman Lindsay fantasia, numerous exercises involved models moving, and posing in groups, often outdoors, where their forms would be prey to the shifting lights, shadows and perspectives around them.⁶¹⁵

Lecoq de Boisbaudran's approach combined a modernist emphasis on drawing as a responsive spectatorship to 'spontaneous' phenomena with an explicit development of an internalised authoritative sense of how to represent the visual encounter. To a large extent his techniques are contiguous with the *académie* tradition where artists were trained to absorb a set repertoire of configurations or poses that a model could take. These were based on studies from the antique, which students were meant to have copied extensively before they entered the life-room, and which models then imitated. Students used life models to make precise and particular studies of certain features or variations from an idea of the human form which they had internalised, much like Hales' *secret figure*, discussed in Chapter Three. De Boisbaudran's method also encourages the development of such secret figures, proliferating in the gap between seeing and drawing.

The gap between seeing and drawing, ostensibly filled by the *trained memory*, reduces human perception to a form of ocular authority, detached from the body, and localised within the internal subjectivity of the artist. The disciplined and disembodied eye becomes linked directly to the faculties of reason, memory and order, which will then instruct the fallible body to execute the internalised image. The eye, employed in the service of memory, becomes god-like, monocular, mono-vocal, and able to direct the body rather than respond to it. It is interesting how the unwieldy potential of the free sketch has been managed in art training, specifically by its harnessing to a view of the observation as neutral. While Lecoq de Boisbaudran's use of quick sketches was linked to an emphasis on training the memory of the artist, in modernist teaching it became detached from the memory and subjectivity of the

⁶¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ Lecoq de Boisbaudran's text reflects only of the crisis of the nineteenth-century academy, but also the crisis in representation posed by the invention of the Daguerreotype. Photography itself encompassed the performance of a disembodied, invisible, and temporally displaced *observation*, which under the Enlightenment, as Jonathan Crary argues, had become a central metaphor for spectatorship and subjectivity. Crary, *op cit.*, p. 24.

drawer and became utilised as a form of instantaneous tracing or recording of *the eye*.⁶¹⁶

Touching the Imaginary

It is curious in Lecoq de Boisbaudran's method that the separation of seeing from physical sensation or activity should occur through a series of deliberate and controlled physical yet quite sensual movements, and curious how this aspect of his approach, the imaginary tracing of the finger along the naked skin of the model, has been used in an apparently antithetical approach in the *blind contour* exercise. The emphasis on simultaneity in Nicolaidès' approach, the collapse of the gap between seeing and drawing, could be seen as the collapse of *the subject*, or of artistic *subjectivity* in the traditional sense as espoused in Lecoq de Boisbaudran and in Robert Beverley Hale.⁶¹⁷ The paradox shared by both approaches is that seeing is connected with a form of tactility, regarded as highly taboo within the settings of life-drawing classes. Rather than linking seeing to actually touching, the contour exercises more explicitly link it to a form of imagining or desiring touch.

Arguably the form of subjectivity performed by such approaches is of a completely disembodied eye, one that can imagine and desire touching, but can have contact only with the mediating surface of the flat page. The infinitely complicated possibilities of two figures touching, of pressure, movement, exchange and even contamination, are reduced to the one-way inscription of charcoal or pencil over flat fibrous paper. While the sensuality of paper lends itself to analogies with bare human skin, paper is not elastic, it does not have hair, it is generally flat, but most importantly it is a surface, devoid of depth connections with nerves, blood, muscular tissue, immune cells, or bone. To reduce human skin to its most superficial structure of the epidermis, reduces subjectivity itself to a banal palimpsest, incapable of feeling, responding or remembering any encounter or exchange. At its worst it promotes an almost necrophilic fetishising of the figure, reducing the possibilities of imagining tactile contact between artist and model to an insipid stroking of the dead surface cells of the

⁶¹⁶ In the late nineteenth century, it appeared that what Pevsner describes as a general history of contention over *académie* training coincided with the development of lithographic techniques for reproducing illustrations. A number of drawing manuals and printed editions of illustrations for copying cited a crisis in French education in design and the beaux-arts. See comments by E. Chesneau, 'Le Constitutionnel', 5, 12, & 20 December, 1865, reproduced in a brochure 'On models for drawing classes', Goupil & Cie, Paris, 1868, reproduced as Appendix 1 of G Ackerman & G Parish, *The Charles Bargue drawing course* ACR Edition, Paris, 2003, p. 361.

⁶¹⁷ In the neoclassical form of *academy* training, life-drawing involved the rehearsal a neo-polykleitian composite of ideal imaginary forms. The classical art subject is not one who sees, but one who, like the blind Ashton, *knows* all there is to see. See H Singerman, *Art subjects: making artists in the American university*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, pp. 181-183.

epidermis.

The limitations of this particular tactile imaginary penetrate the practices of spectatorship, and representation of the figure itself. The unease around male genitalia, discussed in the previous chapter, envelopes the practices of objective drawing such as blind contour, and while most blind contour drawings feature eyes, breasts and even nipples of naked models, very few feature male genitalia.⁶¹⁸ The wrinkled forms of penis and testicles, folded between the buttocks or resting against the thighs, rarely make an appearance. Many blind contour drawings gloss over the genitals of male and female models, tracing the barest hint of an outline around the invisible contour of the pubic triangle.⁶¹⁹ While the pubic triangle demarcates the zone of pubic hair concealing the vulva of female models, on life-drawings of men, the strange castrated triangles appear to reinscribe the *cache-sexe* worn by male models in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶²⁰ The prudishness may be linked to immense cultural taboos around the erect penises, as well as the acknowledgement that flaccid penises are unlikely to remain still while touched. The obscenity of models' penises may also be linked to the fact that to ask a class of drawers to imagine they are touching a model's penis implies asking them to imagine they are sexually arousing the model. It is curious that the possibility of rupture of the disciplined immobility of the model's body is confined to the male penis, and is arguably based in little more than a cultural reluctance to acknowledge that nipples also have erections, that vulvas engorge, that vaginas and noses leak fluids, and anuses gas.⁶²¹ Like the sexual issue, the focus of drawers on the penis as the only site of rupture, or of the only aspect of models' bodies that can exceed the discipline of the life-room, re-inscribes the cultural emphasis on the penis as phallus, and as the mythic centre of power and transgression within naked display and spectatorship.⁶²²

⁶¹⁸ Personal observation. This appears in all types of drawings and paintings of male models, but the paradox is more intense in relation to blind contour drawings.

⁶¹⁹ See Appendix 3, Fig. 11 & Fig. 12.

⁶²⁰ Alison Smith gives a similar description of the pictorial techniques of avoiding genital difference used in the nineteenth century. See A Smith, op. cit., p. 34. The models interviewed by Sarah Phillips state that drawers either completely ignore the penis of male models, or focus on it exclusively. Phillips, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁶²¹ In my interviews, one model recounted an anecdote of his own erect and leaking penis, and another female model described modelling with a male model who had an erect and leaking penis. Both subjects claimed that these incidents were less embarrassing than incidences of excessive sweating, breaking wind, menstruating and incontinence that they had experienced.

⁶²² James Elkins discusses how the paradoxes in observational life-drawing are often revealed by how students draw models' genitals. See J Elkins, *The object stares back; on the nature of seeing*, Harvest Harcourt, San Diego, 1997 pp. 90-93. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to scrutinise the role of the *phallus* in the cultural imaginary of contemporary life-drawing, other than to note that Lacanian narratives of the symbolic imaginary of the nude and its representation have been explored by other authors. See G Pollock, 'Painting, Feminism, History', in M Barrett & A Phillips (eds) *Destabilizing theory: contemporary feminist debates*,

The censoring eye

Although the blind contour method develops an experience of vision closely aligned with tactile contact and encourages a certain level of bodily awareness and possibly empathy, it is not without its limitations. The absent penises of many blind contour drawings indicate a number of blind spots in the exercise, revealing it to be far less *natural* than proponents would suggest. The first ‘blind spot’ involves the arbitrary nature of selecting which contour can be drawn. ‘Outer edge’ may seem fairly obvious, but the process of delineating an outer edge, of excising the subject from his or her surroundings, involves a series of deliberate choices. Drawers choose how and where to excise the body from the surroundings, and their imaginary touch becomes a means of eliminating all of the other contact points that the subject has within the room; thus the line becomes a perfect sheathe around the figure. The second aspect involves the selective elimination of internal detail, and of where and how the model appears to touch herself (or himself), and where their skin folds, wrinkles or invaginates into an orifice. It is very hard to see a contour from the hairline to an eye, and drawers invent a contour, generally tracing it lightly across. Blind contour drawing specifically involves a training and restriction of eye movement - especially the stochastic darting or saccading quality of most human vision - into a single focussed linear progression.⁶²³ By slowing down the eye and training the hand to follow an imaginary continuous linear progression, the method also censors the body’s own capacity to mimic or echo the tendency for our eyes to make searching darting glimpsing movements. Within this method, more than any other, visual capacity becomes reduced to a fixed, fixing and legible gaze.

Denaturalising drawing

Rather than being its opposite, in many ways, *the natural way to draw* reiterates many of the prejudices of the Euston Road tradition, with the insistence on *honest* seeing being promoted as a moral virtue over any intellectual or imaginative practices that might be involved. Nicolaides’ insistence on the inextricable links between seeing and *the body* arguably denies the possibilities for drawing as activity that might involve the mind. Rather than developing a holistic view of spectatorship, sensation, mark-making, and imagination, it as if the realm of the mind remains separate from the body, as well as spectatorship. In the temporal collapse between seeing and drawing, subjectivity is not the only casualty; the

Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993.

⁶²³ For a discussion of human eye movements and the optics of vision, see S Ings, *The eye: a natural history*, Bloomsbury, London, 2007, pp. 44-45; also Elkins, op. cit., pp. 207-208.

possibility for *memory* is also completely extinguished by the flattening of perception into a continuous endless present. While the passing of time could be seen to be embedded within the drawings themselves, it is hard to see how five centuries of what Norman Bryson described as an anti-deictic image-making could be overturned by a popular but relatively marginal practice within art education.⁶²⁴ While the possibilities for drawings to embed and represent time are discussed in the following chapter, it is worth noting that Bryson's critique of *the natural effect* of European post-Renaissance painting could well apply to *the natural way to draw*:

*Essential to the work of naturalisation and of the habitus is the mobility of the place at which the 'Join' between cultural and natural words lies hidden, as a kind of blind spot or blank stain within social consciousness: travelling through time and across the shifting cultural spaces, its invisible accompaniment and participation is vital to the process of cultural reproduction.*⁶²⁵

The blind spot within techniques such as the blind contour exercise involves a denial of its links to modernism, and to drawing practices where the figurative representation is profoundly culturally determined. The idea of any spectatorship as natural, and devoid of the complex performativity of subjectivity, identity and gender, denies the capacity for spectatorship to actively contest these latter aspects.⁶²⁶ Moreover, the shift from the tutoring of a knowing subject, to the emphasis on seeing as a detached and neutral exercise which the tutored subject could merely trace, has been a means of denying the ambiguous possibilities of subjectivity raised by the increasing presence of female and working-class students in life-rooms throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Possibly it is this shift from the authority of the knowing subject to the authority of a neutral eye (sexless and cyclopean) that works to conceal rather than eliminate gendering, and conceal the points where gendered pedagogies can be effectively critiqued.

The object subject

The evident awkwardness surrounding sexuality and embodiment even while drawing *the natural way* indicates how social and cultural attitudes to the body and sexuality saturate the levels of practice even at the most *rigorous* level. Under a Lacanian formulation the psychic threat of the erect penis would threaten to disrupt the symbolic order of the life-class, whereby

⁶²⁴ N Bryson, *Vision and painting: the logic of the gaze*, Macmillan, London, 1983, pp. 87-92. Bryson discusses the 'erasing' quality of oil painting, which conceals all traces of its production, contrasted with the *deictic* quality of Chinese ink painting, in which the temporal quality of each mark is retained.

⁶²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶²⁶ Simon Ings discusses the link between the study of vision and cultural practices of optics, claiming that almost all human vision is bound by the cultural and linguistic optical regimes in which they are embedded. Ings, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-174.

the subject of the drawing, the rigid model, sheathed in a continuous line, is transubstantiated from a naked person in a room, potentially mobile and visible in contact with objects and people in the room, into the impeccably phallic figment of the nude. However, the abject qualities of naked bodies - of tumescent genitals and leaking orifices - can also indicate the abject qualities of artistic subjectivity itself. The previous section argued that rather than being a fixed site for the oppression and exploitation of life models, *objectification* is often articulated as a more slippery tendency that flits between the enunciations of both models and artists. The invitation to a form of seeing that is impossible, and a form of touch that is taboo, arguably promotes a form of subjectivity that is impossible to actually perform or sustain as a bounded entity.

The multiple paradoxes inherent in the project of *objectively seeing* the model involve an enormous amount of contrived blindness to the sexual implications of nudity, to the likely discomfort of the models, to the power differentials in the room, and to the affective and physical responses an admission of these conditions is likely to evoke. However, these tacit and taboo elements of the life-room can be also seen as productive. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler designated the abject as a type of Bataillean excess, produced in the impossible zones of social proscriptions.⁶²⁷ Butler's queering of the forces of exclusion enables subjectivity to be rethought not as a mute product of social technologies, cultural practices or power relations, but as a slippery, reactive and contesting form of ontology. This enables a more lucid movement between the positions of subject and object than other ontological accounts. Butler's evocation of ontology as a process is shown in the comment below:

*The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive or outside to the subject, and abjected outside, which is, after, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation.*⁶²⁸

Butler's view of subjectivity as constituted by its own abjection provides a more sympathetic engagement with the paradoxes and ambiguities in accounts by models and artists that have been presented in this chapter. Objectification can arguably be seen as a set of practices and discourses that are often inadequate, inept and contradictory. The imaginative flights by the observer and observed hint at the affective and imaginative capacities embedded

⁶²⁷ Butler acknowledges the influence of Michel Foucault's account of the relationships between prohibition and transgression in the sexual economy of Victorian England. See M Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, Vol. 1, R Hurley (trans.), Penguin, London, 1990. Foucault's account of the repressive hypothesis was derived from Georges Bataille's account of sexuality, desire, prohibition and taboo See G Bataille, *The accursed share: an essay on general economy*, R Hurley (trans.), Zone Books, New York, 1988-91.

⁶²⁸ J Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*, Routledge, New York, 1993, p. 3.

in *objective* drawing, which despite its claims to neutrality, arguably still works as a compelling, rich, and as Eames describes it, an often *perverse* process. If this capacity for an imaginative flight between artists and models could be acknowledged explicitly as part of *objective* drawing, then this may contribute to a richer critical engagement with the limitations and possibilities of approaches such as dot-and-carry. Arguably, it is the aversive qualities of *objective* drawing, its denial of the body of the artists, and studied ignorance of the discomfort of the model, that can create the sites for an imaginative movement away from the fixed position of artistic subjectivity, into a deeper exchange with something else, into another space, or into another becoming.

Seeing is not an instantaneous process and mark-making never is. Memory permeates every cell of the body, every muscle fibre, every neurone, and memories disrupt, distort and saturate every attempt to make a mark. A way to articulate these hidden contours of subjectivity, squeezed into the narrowing gap between spectatorship and representation, might involve an admission that *the natural way to draw* contains numerous gaps: between looking and seeing, between seeing and touching, between desiring and touching, and between desiring and actually drawing. Arguably the site for the articulation of such gaps is in the spaces where *objectivity* and *subjectivity* fail, or come apart, or even come together. It is the spaces of these becomings and unbecomings that the next chapter explores.

Chapter Five: Drawing the Limits

And then he did something that left me completely perplexed. [...] without removing the cigar from his mouth, David concentrated his attention on the center, where he placed the gigantic figure of a woman, naked, her thighs spread wide apart. And he did all this in such a convincing matter-of-factness that the obscenity of the gesture with which he had drawn so quickly in the snow only struck me as my view, still dazzled by the sunlight, slowly began to penetrate and rapidly melt [...] So there was this splendid body before us, several hundred meters across, and there were the skiers, their tiny bodies wrapped up in the most incredible disguises, registering naked shock... The route back down the valley obligated them to desecrate this naked figure.⁶²⁹

At the end of Chapter Three, I concluded my discussion of the ambiguities surrounding ‘the sex issue’ in life-drawing with a suggestion that desire has a positive role in drawing and creativity. This chapter explores how sexuality and desire can be considered as critical elements of creative praxis contiguous with the practices of life-drawing. Part of this exploration involves considering the relationships between sexuality, life-drawing and broader cultural practices of figurative representation. In previous chapters I have noted the work of feminist critics in challenging the aggressively heterosexual and frequently misogynist undertones of figurative art, and of practices linked to life-drawing. In this chapter I am interested in how feminist critical theory and aesthetics can be used to re-imagine life-drawing as a dynamic and troubling encounter, enabling the exploration of disturbing and challenging possibilities of sexuality and desire as part of a critical aesthetic praxis. A crucial element of this reconfiguration involves a sensitive engagement with the ethical implications of working with naked models and generating images of bodies, and considering the relationships between the practices of observation and mark-making and the human subjects of life-drawing. The ethical dilemmas of life-drawing often cluster around issues of representation, and the meanings attributable to marks, gestures, and images connected to looking at naked bodies. In this chapter, I consider the relationships between life-drawing, subjectivity and representation, and examine what life-drawing is, as a practice, and what aspects of posing, observation and mark-making can be considered as useful and productive elements of life-drawing as a critical creative practice.

The account above is an anecdote about North American figurative artist, David Salle, skiing an image of a woman in the Swiss Alps. Originally published in a monograph on Salle, it was reproduced in an article by feminist artist Mira Schor, criticising the hagiographic journalism surrounding Salle and other ‘bad-boy’ figurative artists of the 1980s. Schor claims that Salle’s crude and often violent images of women operated in order to appropriate the sexual imagery of feminist artists of the 1970s, re-imposing an aggressively heterosexual masculine essentialism on figurative representation. Schor’s critique raises a key area of tension for feminists negotiating the exploration of sexual pleasure within a culture that has based the representation of sexuality on the subjugation of women. Her inclusion of the anecdote about David Salle also raises a number of questions about the limits of life-drawing and figurative representation. Salle received notoriety and some critical acclaim for his deliberate confusion

⁶²⁹ M Kruger, *David Salle*, M Scutt & A Crone (trans.), Hamburg, 1983, p. 8, cit. in M Schor, ‘Appropriated Sexuality’ (1986) republished in *Wet: on painting, feminism and art culture*, Duke University Press, Durham NC & London, 1997, p. 10.

of the genres of photographic pornography and figurative painting, and his ski-field image could also be described as a type of 'life-drawing'.

Salle's ski-field drawing did not involve a live model, but relied on the generation and recognition of a crude ideogrammatic representation of a sexually available woman. However it is arguable that much of the history and even contemporary practice of life-drawing often uses the life model as a pretext for executing an internalised ideal or representation of the nude, rather than an observation or response to the presence of a 'live' naked figure. Chapter Three suggested that the appeal of life-drawing as a contemporary practice is based in its status as a liminal zone between art and entertainment and between the performance of a contemporary cosmopolitanism and the recital of traditional skills, and this chapter explores how the liminal spaces within life-drawing classes can be articulated as a critical element of life-drawing as praxis.

The second possibility raised by Salle's ski-drawing is in relation to the other skiers 'registering naked shock' as they viewed the image while skiing over it. It is unclear whether the naked shock comes from viewing an obscene image etched into the snow, or the connotations of skiing over and 'desecrating' a blatantly sexualised representation of a woman's naked body. The image of a naked body united all the of the skiers into a brief moment of life-drawing, or at least of something similar to it: they were observing a body, and using the force of their own bodies, moving across a substrate, dragging and sliding across snow, etching marks into the snow and onto the figurative image itself, in effect producing a collective life-drawing in the snow. If life-drawing could be considered metaphorically, then it would arguably involve a type of collectively performed process of figurative spectatorship and responsive mark-making, yet to consider the ski-field incident as a life-drawing denies the presence and participation of a naked model, who is replaced by a crude ideogram of a naked body, violently gendered and desecrated as a woman.

I started this chapter with the account above in order to highlight a number of tensions surrounding an aesthetic analysis of life-drawing. The first tension concerns the definition of drawing, and of life-drawing, and articulating the limits of life-drawing and its relation to figurative representation in art and visual culture. The second tension concerns the status of life-drawings as representations, as opposed to or distinct from the practices of posing, observing and marking that occur in the process of life-drawing. While life-drawing could be regarded purely as a performance, or a practice, this doesn't resolve the issue of what the drawings are, in relation to this practice, or how they can be critically described. The third issue concerns the troubling relationship between embodiment, subjectivity and figurative spectatorship, and the ethical issues of presenting, observing and representing the naked bodies of other people. As noted in the previous two chapters, the observation of naked models, obliged to remain still, often silent, and frequently in discomfort or even pain, raises an enormous number of troubling issues of consent and empathy as well as the disturbing possibilities of sadism or cruelty. Articulating an aesthetics of desire, especially in the case of life-drawing, requires an articulation of the limits of that desire, or a clear acknowledgement that the expression of desire involves a careful and continuous negotiation between multiple desires and multiple possibilities.

The first four chapters of this thesis examined life-drawing within its historical and sociological contexts; however, this examination didn't address the dilemma of defining what components of drawing, spectatorship or bodily display are intrinsic to life-drawing. Chapter Four examined particular techniques of observation and mark-making prevalent in modernist life-drawing classes, and this chapter explores how life-drawing can be critically articulated in the variety of contexts in which it is currently practised. Part of this involves exploring the

boundaries of life-drawing, drawing and figurative representation, as well as exploring the possibilities of how figurative performance, observation, representation and mark-making can be critically articulated. If it can be argued that historically life-classes have been based on an abstracted ideal of a figure rather than the close observation of a physically present living model, then presumably life-drawing could and possibly should be taught not only from the life model, but also based on print and screen images of naked figures, such as from advertising, pornography, bill posters and internet images. The extension of this line of thought would argue that life-drawing does not actually require the presence of live models, but could be based on representations, or as in the early nineteenth-century academy, the use of cadavers and *écorchés*. Schor's example illustrates some of the critical dilemmas surrounding the status of life-drawing, figurative representation and the use of life model. Given the implied determinism of asking what is the purpose of life-drawing, it may be more useful to consider what life-drawing 'is', and where its boundaries are, and what can be included and excluded in any useful critical engagement with it.

In many ways this chapter presents one of the most challenging applications of my interdisciplinary approach in this thesis, as I examine what it is about life-drawing as a practice, and life-drawings as objects, that could be of interest to critical and cultural theorists. The most ambitious aspect of this chapter is the attempt to explore a critical account of life-drawing that links contemporary aesthetic theory to the articulation, description and negotiation of it as a practice of art. In previous chapters I examined the ambiguity of the relationship between life-drawing and art, arguing that life-drawing has proliferated in settings that are outside of the institutions and discourses of contemporary art. In this chapter I explore how a contemporary aesthetic account of life-drawing as a form of art can inform the critical negotiation of how it is practised in its divergent settings. I explore some of the interfaces between metaphorical accounts of drawing as a performative or constative articulation of subjectivity and the awkward negotiations of social relations of subjectivity, particularly in relation to issues of cultural capital and ethical considerations of human relationships. The issue of subjectivity, cultural capital and agency is discussed in relation to the tensions between drawings as representations and drawing as a practice, and the forms of subjectivity and agency that are implied in each area.

This chapter is divided into six sections, covering three broad areas of enquiry concerning life-drawings as representations, life-drawing as a performative practice, and the relationship between life-drawing, sexual embodiment and subjectivity. Each section is divided into a number of smaller sub-sections, discussing particular facets of my investigation of each issue. As discussed in Chapter Three, feminist critiques of life-drawing have often conflated life-drawings with indexical representations of human figures in visual culture, hence, in this chapter, I explore challenges to the two assumptions underpinning such critiques. Firstly, I examine the relationship between life-drawings and representation, and then I examine the role of subjectivity in life-drawing as a practice of art making.

Section one, *Marking meaning: drawings as representations*, discusses the relationship between Life drawings and figurative representations. This section discusses a range of life-drawings proliferating on the internet, and explore how issues of irony, intentionality, subjectivity and cultural capital are negotiated, and legibly depicted in life-drawings. Having argued that the myriad of contemporary life-drawings make any ascription of intentionality or irony almost impossible,

In section two, *The subjects of drawing*, I examine critiques of representation, and the semiotic emphasis in modernist aesthetic theory. Having explored the cultural capital of life-drawings as 'competent' pictorial signifiers, I argue that life-drawings cannot be meaningfully

understood as representations, or according to a representationalist or semiotic critique. I then explore critical engagements with meaning and materiality, particularly through Vicki Kirby and Barbara Bolt's rereading of Peirce's semiosis.

In section three, *Drawing on performance*, I explore life-drawing as a practice and its relationship to forms of performance and accounts of performativity. I explore life-drawing as a practice, and a number of critical accounts exploring relationships between life-drawing and forms of performance. The particularity of life-drawing arguably involves the imperative of a response to the presence and performance of a life model that arguably remains imbricated with the status of drawings as representations or residues of naked figurative display. I examine Karen Wallis's account of life-drawing as a form of catharsis, and critique the separation between representation and reality underpinning her analysis, as well as her reliance on humanist accounts of subjectivity.

In section four, *Drawing the life of materials*, I move from a comparison between life-classes and theatre to an exploration of the performativity and agency of materials, discussing the relationships between the practice of life-drawing and the subjectivity of models and materials, before examining the critiques of representation, and the performativity of art images explored by Barbara Bolt. I examine Bolt's use of Heidegger, in order to develop a performative account of creative praxis. I discuss Bolt's exploration of Cornford's account of *methexis* as a description of creative practice, based on a constative participatory relationship between artists and materials.

In Section five, *Bodies, desires, becomings: Deleuzian accounts of drawing*, I develop my own account of life-drawing as praxis, exploring the implications for a critical articulation of embodiment. I discuss feminist theories of representation, embodiment and sexuality, particularly in the work of Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz. Noting that life-drawing is distinguished from other forms of art practice by the troubling presence of a naked posing model, I explore the possibilities for a critical reappraisal of embodiment, desire and representation in the practice of life-drawing.

The final section, *Subjective shifts: drawing, mapping, motility*, I discuss Deleuzian accounts of drawing as mapping, and their relationship between contemporary critical aesthetics and the prosaic accounts of life-drawing as a contemporary cultural practice. I return to the issue of cultural capital and subjectivity, raised at the start of the chapter, arguing for a pluralist account of life-drawing based on the acknowledgement of fallibility and an articulation of the productive possibilities of desubjectifying encounters between artists, models and materials. In Chapter Four, I proposed that rather than subjectivity and objectivity being defined as fixed conditions in opposition to each other, they could be considered as fluid states or conditions of awareness that pass within and between participants. In this chapter, I explore the application of post-humanist philosophy to developing an aesthetic account of life-drawing as a form of art practice. In developing an account of life-drawing as a field of troubling encounters between participants and materials, I examine what aspects of posing, observation and mark-making can be considered as useful and productive elements of life-drawing as a critical creative practice.

Throughout this chapter, I refer to and discuss a number of philosophical accounts of aesthetics, semiotics and philosophy, particularly the work of Immanuel Kant, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler. A thorough examination of any of these thinkers is beyond the scope of this chapter, and external to its purpose. This chapter is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive aesthetic account of life-drawing, but to explore the types of philosophical ideas that have currency among theorists and practitioners of life-drawing. I have generally discussed philosophers via

their interpretation in particular texts by artist-theorists or their link to particular comments made by interview subjects. By performing a form of theoretical mapping I explore the terrain of contemporary aesthetics, drawing connections between critical theory and life-drawing as a form of critically engaged praxis.

4. Marking meaning: drawings as representations

Defining the limits: the status of life-drawings

As discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, life-drawing has been generally sustained as a pedagogical practice and proliferated as a cultural practice. However, within the context of contemporary art exhibitions, and major state funded exhibitions, life-drawings have become less frequently exhibited or discussed as *art*, and even prominent figurative artists rarely exhibit their studies from the life-room or with a life model.⁶³⁰ Among the myriad of exhibitions, catalogues and scholarly research on contemporary drawing, very little features life-drawing. Furthermore, the appearance and status of drawings produced in the majority of life-drawing classes has changed considerably from recognisable images of figures to a variety of semi-abstract and frequently stylised marks. The shift in the status of life-drawings is linked to the change in practices, and the increasing amount of time, within educational life-drawing classes, devoted to the *croquis* or short drawings based on unresolved, rapid gestural scribbles. In the majority of art schools, at least half of the life-drawing session is spent on drawings that are usually discarded at the end of the class.⁶³¹ Thus the emphasis on art school life-drawing has shifted from the production of life-drawings, to the practice of life-drawing as an experience of seeing and responsive mark-making. As noted in Chapter Two, life-drawing is largely equated with and defended as observational practice, and for the development of manual skills, rather than for any aesthetic merit.

While many art schools emphasise life-drawing as the production of drawings that are rarely seen, salon style exhibitions of amateur art societies often feature longer studies of models, and life-drawings proliferate on the internet in commercial or private websites and artists' weblogs.⁶³² Such images often sit awkwardly in relation to what could be identified as contemporary art, or other genres of visual culture such as soft porn, commercial illustration, fantasy illustration, gaming culture and animation. Critically negotiating how images work as 'art' or as part of other facets of visual culture is unwieldy at the best of times, but in relation to a cultural practice as widespread and diverse as life-drawing it becomes extremely difficult.⁶³³ In many ways this difficulty is reflective of the sheer slipperiness of the various

⁶³⁰ There are a few very prominent exceptions to this general statement, but generally international figurative artists use photography, animation, video and collage, either with or in place of artists' models. See Marlene Dumas, Eric Fischl, William Kentridge, David Salle, Jenny Saville and Luc Tuymans. Australian figurative artists, including Kathryn del Barton, George Gittoes, Cherry Hood and Wendy Sharpe, claim their images are not produced from a life-class, and rarely with an artists' model present. (Wendy Sharpe, interview with author, see Appendix 1). Arlene Textaqueen, who exhibits line drawings of models posed in situ, describes them as variations on salon nudes, and claims that they have almost no connection to her experience of life-drawing classes at art school, which she described as 'artificial and boring'. Arlene Textaqueen, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶³¹ At the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts* in Paris, students draw on blackboards for the entire duration of the life-class, and erase their drawings before leaving the room (participant observation January 2006).

⁶³² There are a number of borderline cases or exceptions to this statement. Sydney's National Art School has a weblog, maintained by teaching staff, showing life-drawings and other studies done by students. See National Art School Drawing weblog, Viewed 21 March 2009, < <http://nasdrawing.blogspot.com/>>.

⁶³³ See: M Mayhew, 'The Naked And The Blind: Exploring the Badness of life-drawing' *Tracey: Contemporary Drawing Research*, What is good (bad) drawing? December 2008. Viewed 4 February 2009,

circuits in which artists, art students, and arts workers such as models and casual teachers move, negotiating their varying cultural capital not only in relation to institutional affiliation but in terms of adopting or eschewing stylistic conventions of various genres of visual culture. The perceptible competency of the images deriving from pedagogical or studio practices, and how these are presented or integrated into other aspects of practice, arguably form a significant performative and constative component of how artists position themselves as culturally competent or otherwise.

Chapter One discussed popular representations of the practice of life-drawing, and the values associated with it as a broad cultural practice, and it is interesting to note how many of the tacit values of life-drawing are mediated through its visual representation, through images of nude figures, life-classes, or drawing techniques. While exhibitions of life-drawings are rarely seen outside of specialised exhibitions of art schools and amateur societies, the world wide web is full of images of life-drawing classes, figurative drawings and, increasingly on youtube, instruction videos on various techniques of figurative drawing.⁶³⁴ The proliferation of images, video clips, drawing manuals, essays, blogs and websites associated with 'life-drawing' make little distinction between genres of figurative representation. In North America, life-drawing is usually referred to as 'figure-drawing'; however, many images and techniques included under figure-drawing do not rely on the presence of models, but involve working from photographs, imagination or from stylised templates of graphic illustration.⁶³⁵ Many figure-drawings are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and communication platforms; aside from being uploaded and shared via the internet, many drawings are copied from digital images, or drawn onto computer drawing tablets, rather than paper.⁶³⁶ A French website offers a subscription service for photographed images of naked models that can be rotated and adjusted by the viewer.⁶³⁷ Another website operates as an entirely virtual figure-drawing class, inviting models to upload photographed poses of themselves, which are drawn, and uploaded by participating artists.⁶³⁸

The increasing role of digital images and communication technologies, and the displacement of viewing as a live encounter with a digitally mediated set of images, raises an interesting set of quandaries about what life-drawing is as a practice, and how it can be represented and replicated within a global culture where artists increasingly rely on digital platforms to create, distribute and archive work.⁶³⁹ The entanglements of drawing with photography and computer-generated imagery form a troubling knot of contestations and attempts to mark and

<<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/wigd/mayhew.html>>.

⁶³⁴ See: *Blind Contour Drawing*, uploaded by 'drawingwithanna', Sun 07 Dec 2008 23:00:21 PST, viewed 01 March 2009, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjJhZ4DYh50>>.

⁶³⁵ *Real Time Drawing tutorial: Female body*, uploaded by 'AEROblivion', Fri 03 Oct 2008 20:11:05 PDT, viewed 01 March 2009, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTHK8TctyCs>>; *How to draw the female figure from you mind, gesture*, uploaded by 'architectus777', Wed 30 Apr 2008 09:56:28 PDT, viewed 01 March 2009, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZ0fGf10cfQ>>.

⁶³⁶ *Gesture drawing I*, uploaded by 'olszakmike', Fri 14 Dec 2007 08:22:56 PST, viewed 01 March 2009, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zQhkS4yArQ>>.

⁶³⁷ *L'atelier interactif de modele vivant*, website ©2005-2007 Model Lisa.com, viewed 21 March, 2009, <http://www.modelalisa.com/presentation_gb.html>.

⁶³⁸ *Figure Drawing Factory* website, viewed 1 November 2008, <<http://figuredrawingfactory.info/>>.

⁶³⁹ Press coverage of British figurative artist David Hockney illustrates many of the paradoxical associations of drawing, figurative art, technology and tradition. He has been associated with rear-garde defences of drawing, see T Bishop, 'Hockney takes art back to basics' *BBC Online*, 3 June, 2004. Viewed 27 March 2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3773397.stm>> and with embracing cgi as a substitute for draughtsmanship. See C Ruiz, 'David Hockney swaps oils for pixels', *Times Online*, 22 March, 2009. Viewed 27 March 2009, <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article5950441.ece>.

regulate life-drawing as a legitimate cultural practice, distinct from other figurative representations such as pornography, animation and graphic design. They are also complicated by the relationship of drawing and photography to figurative representation: what are regarded as mimetic, legible or legitimate representations of human bodies, and what is regarded as the culturally appropriate role of drawing as a form of responsive spectatorship of naked bodily display.

Many prosaic images of life-drawing from the internet present a number of quandaries similar to the critiques of do-it-yourself drawing manuals raised by Lynda Nead.⁶⁴⁰ As in Nead's critiques, such images could be taken as representations of populist cultural practices, and certain attitudes about art that are aligned with them. They could also be seen as representations of (often problematic) attitudes towards bodily difference and its representation. However, such assumptions based on *what* these images represent make it extremely tempting to try to examine *how* they operate semiotically, and to determine what elements of the gestures, or suggestions of marks in life-drawing operate as signifiers. Such a literal semiotic study of drawings, or drawn elements severs the connection between such images, the context of how they are produced, discussed and evaluated in the various settings where they circulate. More critically, however, they deny one of the most troubling and appealing facets of post-war art, and that is the capacity for the meanings, connotations and suggestions of pictorial imagery to be appropriated and re-appropriated within different genres of visual culture.

By extending the boundaries of life-drawing to include figurative art and visual culture, it becomes unclear what life-drawing actually is. While the critical power of articulating how life-drawing images are contiguous with the moral dilemmas of visual culture generally is elucidating and powerful, it also allows a level of slippage and confusion between life-drawings, figurative art, figurative photography and other genres such as film. This confusion is not limited to feminist critiques, but arguably saturates all discourses connected with bodies. Our understanding and experience of the body is largely mediated through visual imagery, particularly commercial film and photography. In trying to negotiate the ambiguity of how the alignments between art, consumer culture and technology may be linked to a critical analysis of amateur life-drawings, it may be more useful to examine how they *don't work*. Or in other words, what is it about such drawings that exclude them from the critical analysis associated with contemporary art?

Fit for Purpose

Comparing internet images of life-drawing with figurative drawings exhibited in professional art exhibitions also brings the viewer to the coal-face of how various art worlds regulate the tacit values associated with contemporary or professional aesthetic praxis. As contemporary art, the amateur life-class images could be described as culturally incompetent: either they don't function according to the pictorial conventions of proportional or perspectival rendering, or they may rely on stylistic conventions that may align the images with the stylistic conventions of commercial illustration, folk art, soft porn, pastiche, or other facets of visual culture than stated aspirations to contemporary or neoclassical art may imply.⁶⁴¹

It is arguable that within the university sector, the ideal of artistic subjectivity has not so much been deconstituted by deconstructive critiques as subsumed within a superficially pluralist discursive conventions, that disguise the aesthetic and social criteria by which the cultural

⁶⁴⁰ L Nead, *The female nude: art, obscenity and sexuality*, Routledge, London & New York, 1992, pp. 50-54.

⁶⁴¹ J Elkins, 'Being academic, alexandrian, mannerist, precious, and ivory-tower', *The project of painting, 1900-2000*, aka *Failure in twentieth-century painting*, unpublished manuscript, revised September 2001. Viewed on James Elkins website 19 March 2009, <<http://www.jameselkins.com/Texts/failureacademic.pdf>>.

capital of contemporary professional artists is regulated. The idealist residues adhering to the tacit assumptions concerning *art* and *artists* arguably sustain a sticky association between particular aesthetic practices and particular subjectivities, particularly within life-drawing. Observing how university-based artists and drawing researchers negotiate this critical quandary of aesthetic distinction is interesting, as this exchange between Roger Conlon and Ian Biggs reveals:

*Conlon: I don't think there's good or bad art particularly but I don't know what that's a product of, I just think... what about you Iain? You probably have a different view.*⁶⁴²

*Biggs: I mean when you start to think about examples, it includes the tally at the bottom of the mine, that reminds me not to remove a stone out of that site because the whole bloody thing will fall down, to almost everything, to a graphic drawing, to an engineering drawing. All of which is not good or bad, it's about fitness to purpose.*⁶⁴³

Biggs's replacement of 'good' and 'bad' with *fitness to purpose* is reminiscent of Anita Taylor's argument for a pluralist appreciation of drawing:

*I think that's the thing we haven't been very clear about in education, is that there are different types of drawing and they are fit for purpose. If they're not fit for purpose then it's not a good drawing. So you actually have to really deal with the language. The book which Paul Thomas and I did, which is an instructional book, is very much trying to get people to understand that there are lots of different things that can be drawing, but it's about understanding what's fit for purpose, and what's appropriate for the kind of work that's being done, from design right through to everything else. It's an interesting problem.*⁶⁴⁴

The expression *fit for purpose* appears to be a deliciously diplomatic way of negotiating the moral quandaries of casting aspersions on the differing cultural capital associated with various genres of figurative drawing.⁶⁴⁵ However, it is arguable that *fit for purpose* implies that some areas of visual culture, some images, and some practices could be exempt from critical scrutiny. This reinforces a perverse form of elitism, implying that aesthetic judgements should be reserved for a certain kind of image, or a certain kind of creative practice, leaving the rest bereft of critical language. It also implies that certain classes of images could be exempt from the ethical concerns of critical theory, especially in relation to racism and sexism. This account doesn't address the bad feelings that cling to the pneumatic quality of highly polished soft porn nudes, or the awkward orientalist conceits characterising many depictions of non-caucasian life models, or the implied ageism, heterosexism and body fascism of numerous figurative drawings and representations of life-drawing across various genres of visual culture.

The second area of concern in relation to *fit for purpose* is that it may also reduce drawing to a determinist model. However pluralist the implied differentialism of this explanation may seem, the ascertaining of the ability of drawing to *fit* to any purpose, arguably denies the one of the largest appeals of a non-mimetic image making practice, and that is the capacity of

⁶⁴² Iain Biggs & Roger Conlon, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Prof. Anita Taylor, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁴⁵ See A Taylor & P Thomas *Drawing: a foundation course*, Cassell illustrated, Octopus publishing, London, 2003.

failure. While it could be argued that *failure* could be included as a legitimate purpose, reducing the complex ambiguities of how drawing is experienced as a practice, and how drawings are perceived as cultural objects, to a programmatic anti-determinism is somewhat evasive, if not patronizing to those practitioners who *don't aim to fail*, and yet are unable to produce images that communicate a plausible familiarity with the pictorial, stylistic, social or discursive conventions of contemporary art.

The perceived success of life-drawings is generally associated with a form of observational accuracy, which is itself rarely defined, but generally associated with a form of legible verisimilitude, pictorial accuracy or reproduction of certain gestural styles associated with high modernism or neoclassicist pastiche. Possibly it is this mimetic imperative that contributes to the restriction of life-drawing in contemporary art schools to a banal observational exercise. The view presented in Chapter Two of life-drawing as a fairly straightforward assessable component of undergraduate training appears to operate as a smokescreen over the uncomfortable implications of asking 'what is the point of looking at a naked human model?' If '*the point*' can be described as a purpose, then the predicament becomes one of what is the purpose that life-drawing is meant to fit, and why does this purpose require the presence and silent performance by naked models?

While *fit for purpose* may operate well to acknowledge the differing and possibly conflicting roles that drawing plays in various situations, it may also imply a converse need to articulate when something is *unfit for purpose*, and even to admit how and why a life-drawing may actually fail. I return to the issue of failure later, and explore how failure can be critically envisaged as part of an anti-determinist praxis, but I wish to discuss an additional tension within the problem of determining *the point* of life-drawing, and that is the relationship between intention, expression and irony.

Ironic Iterations

Irony has formed a significant component of post-war art movements, such as pop-art and forms a significant thread of the practice, reception and institutional reception of many contemporary art practices from performance and new media art, to figurative work in plastic media such as sculpture, painting and drawing.⁶⁴⁶ As Bill Prosser explains, irony is a central facet of *post-modern* approaches to contemporary art:

Whereas if you take a sort of post-modern approach, if you start thinking about post-modern values, then you don't need to take it seriously anymore; you can just piss about with it really. You can pick up and drop whatever you feel like. I mean I don't think this was true of pop-art particularly, but in the same way that they could quote academicism or they could quote modernism within things like packaging or soap box covers; I mean all of these things that they did in the late fifties and early sixties, that seems to be the way that attitudes towards a whole range of visual approaches, but particularly to dealings with the figure, shifted, and perhaps understood what had occurred through, I don't think of it as a failure of modernism but, the way that modernism played itself out.⁶⁴⁷

Prosser claims that life-drawing is one area where it is almost impossible to practice irony:

I mean the thing is that I'm not quite sure how to deal with the figure in what would now be called an

⁶⁴⁶ James Elkins claims that irony is an essential element of modernist painting. See J Elkins, 'Lack of Irony', *The project of painting, 1900-2000*, loc.cit.

⁶⁴⁷ Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

ironical way, unless it's.... I think could do it actually (chuckles)... but I'm not sure how that would play out in the life-room.⁶⁴⁸

Irony is a term that is arguably as slippery to define as the terrain of ambiguously iterable strategies with which it is associated. Irony is variously attributed to paradoxical situations, sarcastic comments, duplicitous behaviour and subtle humour, and arguably some of the ambiguity in attributing irony is linked to identifying the intention in a behaviour, or locating the agency in circumstances that are imbued with ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes.⁶⁴⁹ Irony is a troubling consideration in relation to life-drawing, or the life-class, arguably because it highlights the ambiguous and shifting terrain in which creative agency and performative intent are ascribed. During our interview I responded to Prosser's remark above with examples of what I considered as 'ironic' life-classes, such as Dr. Sketchy's Anti Art School and the Michael Allan 'Drawathon' in New York.⁶⁵⁰ Prosser argued that these situations were not actually 'ironic', but 'burlesque' as they did not involve ironic drawing or behaviour by the spectating artists, but a genuine response to the playful performance of the model. It would seem that models may deploy irony as part of their own negotiation and even assertion of agency, but the performance of this irony is somehow bound to a tacit agreement that drawers will be willing to spectate the performance 'in good faith'.⁶⁵¹

Prosser's clarification that ironic drawing would necessarily involve an ironic perform of spectatorship and representation by the artists was linked to his argument that irony depends on a level of distancing that is in conflict with the particularity of life-drawing as an actual practice:

Prosser: I mean, one of the dilemmas in thinking about life-drawing in a way that's ironical, would be that you would inevitably leave something out. What you would be leaving out is the lived experience of the presence of the person, because that's not ironical.

Interviewer: You mean that irony is always about editing?

*Prosser: Irony is always about displacement.*⁶⁵²

Prosser emphasised positionality as a key element of how irony works, and described the function of irony as operating across a differential between an awareness of irony and an obliviousness to it. There is a certain amount of disquieting cruelty implied in the displacement of an inter-subjective encounter to a differentiated, and differentiating field of awareness. It is reminiscent of a dialectical mastery of subjectivity dependent on the subjugation or exclusion of the other. While it is arguable that the tradition of life-drawing has been founded on subject formation through the subjugation of, deferral and distancing from Kenneth Clark's *pitiful naked model*, most contemporary practitioners insist that the practice of life-drawing is fundamentally concerned with presence. As Prosser and Blair state:

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Douglas Muecke identifies at least fifteen forms of irony. See DC Muecke, *Irony and the ironic*, Methuen, London & New York, 1982.

⁶⁵⁰ In New York I attended a number of sessions of 'Dr. Sketchy's Anti Art School' a burlesque life-drawing sketch club held in a Public Bar, which has been repeated globally. I also attended the Michael Alan *Drawathon*, which involved various models dressing up in clown and gorilla costumes and posing in succession during a six-hour marathon.

⁶⁵¹ The regulation of spectatorship in life-drawing held in recreational, burlesque and sex-entertainment settings is discussed in Chapter One. Even where life models are employed at hens' and buck's nights, participants are expected to make or dissimulate a serious attempt to draw the model.

⁶⁵² Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

Prosser: It's always about ... you can only be ironical about something if you recognise it from a position which identifies it in a form that is non-ironical. And in a life-room, because you're actually... it's about presence...

Blair: It's about presence.

*Prosser: That's what makes that very difficult to do. And in some sense, you might even find it impossible to do. So the idea of bringing it back into... as it were, a contemporary arena, where irony rules... you can understand why there'd be a bit of a... that's one reason; I think there'd be others.*⁶⁵³

The issues of intentionality, irony and presence continued to perplex me after the interview, particularly in relation to considering the life-class as a meeting place of the intentions of models and artists. I raised this issue subsequently with Sydney performance artist Mark Shorter, who has modelled for a number of life-drawing classes as his alter ego, Renny Kodgers, complete with fake tan and beard, cowboy hat, and a prosthetic ten-inch penis.⁶⁵⁴ Prior to undertaking performance work, Shorter completed a BFA at the National Art School, and he returned to model in character for a class run by his former life-drawing teacher.⁶⁵⁵ He claimed that he was frustrated by the unwillingness of the students to engage with the wit and irreverence of the modelling performance of Renny Kodgers and showed me video footage of the life-drawing class.⁶⁵⁶ The incongruousness of the costumed character model with instructions from the teacher concerning aspects of form, light and tone, seemed to encompass a number of ironies, reflecting what is arguably a central paradox of life-drawing itself: what is the point of looking at a living subject if they are reduced by that looking to an immobilised object? Arguably, the form of observation promoted in many life-drawing classes as 'good faith' involves a form of earnest disassociation from the presence, performance and subjectivity of the model. In many ways the assumption of 'good faith' as an ethical imperative of life drawers to act as spectators of the present is underpinned by similar assumptions of the honest eye, as the emphasis on observation, as promoted in the Euston Road tradition. Rather than being about presence, it is arguable that the form of observation promoted in life-drawing instruction is based upon a considerable amount of distance.

While Prosser's comments about irony appear to reduce it to a calculated strategy of cool dissimulation of any interest in or sympathy with the model, it is arguable that irony may also function as a form of connection. As noted in Chapter Three, publicity for the specialised recreational life-drawing classes of Dr. Sketchy's and Michael Allan Drawathons appeals to the cultural capital of the participants. A visibly ironic engagement with the coyness of Burlesque or the camp kitsch of B-Grade horror movies is performed by models in order to evoke a knowing complicity with the drawing spectators, gathering them in an active collective participation in the culture of the sketch club. At Dr. Sketchy's, participants are encouraged to cheer and wolf-whistle the burlesque stripping models, but prohibited from touching the models, and required to seek permission before photographing them. The issue of how models' performance forms particular types of constituting relationships with drawing participants is a crucial aspect of life-drawing, which I explore later in this chapter. While

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ See: J. Stein, 'Love songs, alter-egos and the performing male subject in Australian art', *Fnews Magazine*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 18 September, 2007, viewed 20 March 2009, <<http://fnewsmagazine.com/wp/2007/09/renny-kodgers/>>.

⁶⁵⁵ Mark Shorter, personal communication with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁵⁶ A brief excerpt of this drawing class is posted on a page of video clips on *Renny Kodgers, the Official Website*, Renny Kodgers 2008, viewed 20 March 2009, <<http://www.rennykodgers.com/videos.html>>.

irony is easy enough to identify in a series of performances or utterances, it becomes more difficult to attribute irony to actual drawings. Part of this difficulty of attribution is linked to the perceived legibility of life-drawings as competent signifiers of intention, perception or style.

As I noted in Chapter Four, contemporary life-drawings do not have the hegemonic status of nineteenth-century *académie* studies, and consist of a variety of rapidly executed sketches embodying a wide variety of pictorial and stylistic conventions. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Sydney life-drawing teachers often work at a variety of institutions, and the level and method of life-drawing instruction is dependent on the interests and preferences of particular teaching staff. Arguably, there is not even a clear boundary between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ life-drawings, or those conducted by graphic designers, sculptors or figurative painters. There is not enough of a hegemonic consensus within visual or even academic culture to attribute intentionality or irony to the appearance of ‘drawings’ or the infinite combinations of graphic materials, stylised use of colour, texture or tone and pictorial conventions such as perspectival rendering, expressive mark-making or anatomical references. Even the issue of ‘drawing skill’ has been confused by the deliberate exhibition of ‘dumb drawings’, or crude, poorly rendered cartoons, by internationally prominent figurative artists such as Sigmar Polke, Marlene Dumas, Sue Williams and Eric Fischl. Furthermore, stylistic mannerisms or pictorial references from differing subcultures are often appropriated or *détourné* within creative practice.⁶⁵⁷ The confusion over irony and intention feeds into broader tensions around the relationship between art and representation. While the proliferation of the mimetic medium of photography allowed modernist art to challenge the assumption that pictures are a mimetic representation of the world, the semiotic emphasis of modernist aesthetics has continued to shape the critical discourses surrounding art.

5. The subjects of drawing

Subjective Gestures

As modernist figurative paintings became increasingly abstract, or deliberately naïve, superficially resembling graffiti or scribbles, rather than the stylised products of specialist pictorial training, art criticism also shifted from an interpretation of painted images to the interpretation of abstract marks as ‘gestures’, which were regarded in structuralist aesthetics as signifiers of the particular subjectivity of the artist. Gesture was regarded as an autobiographical conceit, a means by which artist could mark a subject with their signature. Roland Barthes took this critique of the artist even further:

*The artist (let us retain this somewhat kitsch term) is by status an ‘operator’ of gestures: he seeks to produce and effect and at the same time seeks no such thing... the artist’s gesture or the artist as gesture - does not break the causative chain of actions... but he blurs, confuses it, he starts it up again until it loses its meaning.*⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ In the course of research I made a note that university art school students were less likely to exhibit figurative studies using chalk pastel on coloured paper, than in amateur art societies. However, in 2007 Primavera artist Danielle Freakley exhibited a series of chalk-pastel drawings at Mori Gallery Sydney and a series of chalk-pastel drawings were displayed at the 2008 graduation exhibition of drawing students at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (personal observation, November 2008).

⁶⁵⁸ R Barthes, ‘Cy Twombly: works on paper’ in *The Responsibility of forms*, R Howards (trans.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, pp.160-1, cit. in D Petherbridge ‘Drawing Backwards Into The Future’ in P Hetherington (ed.), *Issues in art and education: aspects of the fine art curriculum*. Conference papers from

The structuralist idea of *the death of the artist* was derived partly from critical analyses of the social organization of artistic production, but it fed into post-structuralist ideas that any subject itself was the product of humanist discourses of post-Renaissance Europe.⁶⁵⁹ However, the critical analysis of gestures, operating metonymically or semiotically as signifiers of masculinity or artistic subjectivity, has restricted itself to prominent figurative modernists, such as Henri Matisse, Willem De Kooning and Frank Auerbach. It is arguable that the lack of semiotic analysis of prosaic life-drawings is based on the difficulty of attributing a defined idea of artistic subjectivity to a wide variety of images produced by people who are clearly have an entirely different subjective identity from prominent international artists. As noted in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, the vast majority of art students, since the 1870s have been women, and life-drawing is practiced by an enormous variety of students from differing class and cultural backgrounds as well.

The relationship between irony and the perceived sincerity of artists striving to represent the model according to pictorial conventions that do not have iconic status as figurative representations, or hegemonic status as legitimate forms of art, evokes a certain level of unease that is arguably linked to the perceived legitimacy of the artist's own subjectivity. While contemporary theory has increasingly challenged humanist accounts of subjectivity, popular cultural practices such as life-drawing and painting have often continued to operate aligned with romantic narratives of art and artists as contained, even autonomous, entities. The idea of the life-class as contributing to the formation of particular and privileged types of subjects continues as a central aspect of the mythology of the life-room, and informs how participants see themselves *as artists* and the life-room as *art*. This extends from the earnest claims of amateurs, to the uneasy disdain of contemporary practitioners, to the emotional investment many models have with the work they are doing. As discussed in Chapter One, rear-garde accounts of life-drawing repeatedly invoke romanticist myths about art and artists in articulating their affiliation to life-drawing as a particular form of cultural contestation. And, as noted in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, models often cite ideas about artists as an exceptional category of subject, or art as an exceptional activity in articulating (and mediating) their own experiences of sexual harassment, physical pain, and experience of objectification. Many of the subjects in Sarah Phillips' study of artists' models repeatedly refer to 'art' and 'artists' as a particular category of privileged subjectivity and endeavour, with which they collaborate.⁶⁶⁰ Paradoxically the reification of art and artists serves to maintain a sense of models' own agency in contributing to a valuable cultural project, even though the reification enables their exploitation or objectification. Historically the subjectivity of the Romantic artist was based on a fragile identity contested against a field of those who, as rivals or as exploited employees operated as *non-artists*. The myth of the avant-garde was predicated on a conscious exclusion of rear-garde practitioners, as well as working-class (designers) or amateur, and most often female artists. Within this the life-class was arguably structured around denying the subjectivity of artists' models, who were reduced to the status of tools. However, it is possible that the paradoxical investment that artists' models appear to

The Role of Drawing in Fine Art Education 1994, Wimbledon School of Art & Tate Publishing, London, 1996, p. 57

⁶⁵⁹ Michel Foucault is the best exponent of this argument, and influenced Judith Butler's arguments of the constative function of iteration, appellation and intepellation. In the *history of sexuality* and *discipline and punish* Foucault explores the changing discourses of subject formation throughout history, whereas in *the order of things* he explores the epistemology of humanist ontologies, claiming that the idea of the human is based in the discursive structures of humanism. *The order of things*, ends with the apocryphal remark, that if these epistemologies came unstuck, or crumbled, then: 'one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'. M. Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, (trans. Unknown), Tavistock Publications, London, 1970, p. 387.

⁶⁶⁰ SR Phillips, *Modeling Life*, pp. 15-17.

have with their ‘objectification’ may also be considered as part of a contagious shift away from subjectivity, which may be experienced by both models and artists.

Life-drawing, representation and verisimilitude

As noted above, a number of authors have noted the perceptible shift in modernist art training, from the training centred on the ultimate execution of an *académie* or sustained, detailed, mimetic representation of the nude figure, to an increasing emphasis on drawings as a collection of marks reflecting the experiential process of perception. Both Howard Singerman and Deanna Petherbridge describe how this emphasis marked the ‘utilitarian’ field of design training, where within the Bauhaus, drawing became less about illustration of ideas or development of manual dexterity, and more on developing a reflexive and imaginative relationship to the experience of embodiment, of perception and mark-making.⁶⁶¹ However, Petherbridge is at pains to mention the genealogy of sketching and *croquis* within Renaissance workshop training. She repeatedly refers to the role not only of small studies, but of repeated playful scribbles in part of the process of *primo pensieri*, or first thoughts: the initial play of forms and ideas by which elaborate figurative compositions were generated.⁶⁶² Petherbridge argues that given the modernist shift in verisimilitude from drawings and paintings to photographs, the site of authenticity for drawing and painting became centred on the *croquis*, rather than the longer studies:

*The expression of process, of mark-making, of intimacy and spontaneity of the drawing as sketch and oil sketch is now pertinent to the ‘expanded field’ of painting, construction and so on. Painting aspires to the condition of drawing just as architecture aspires to the condition of music.*⁶⁶³

This emphasis on authenticity of the moment, and the compression of credibility into as minute a space between perception and mark-making as possible, arguably reflected the increasing importance of photography, not only as the most significant expression of modernist visual culture, but as the centre of how critical discourses around visual culture were organised. In *Vision and Painting* Norman Bryson commenced his critique of modernist aesthetics by highlighting the temporal blindness in most critical analysis of images.⁶⁶⁴ Bryson argued that modernist frameworks of art criticism were derived from photography, and were limited in understanding the temporality of spectatorship of paintings.⁶⁶⁵ Within this, the compressed staccato moment of the photographic lens ‘capturing’ a unidirectional movement of light from the subject onto a photosensitive chemical film became a universalised model for credible spectatorship and representation as instantaneous and one-way movement. Mirroring Saussure’s semiotic model of signification as a singular instance of a *signified* entering into meaning through the transparent arbitrary agency of the *signifier*, the temporality, materiality and possible failure of this *signifier* was evacuated. Meaning and representation across semiotics and art became singular, instantaneous, and unidirectional.⁶⁶⁶

As noted in Chapter Four, Norman Bryson’s critique of modernist aesthetics is based on a precise description of the materiality, spatiality and temporality of spectatorship, and the

⁶⁶¹ See H Singerman, *Art subjects: making artists in the American university*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1999. On life-drawing at the Bauhaus, pp. 81-84; on modernist pictorial language, pp. 89-91; structuralism and drawing, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁶² D Petherbridge, *The primacy of drawing, an artist’s view*, Southampton Gallery, London, 1991, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁶³ D Petherbridge, ‘Drawing Backwards Into The Future’ in Hetherington, op. cit., p. 60.

⁶⁶⁴ See N Bryson, *Vision and painting: the logic of the gaze*, Macmillan, London, 1983, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

social relations embedded in the optical modalities of particular historical paintings.⁶⁶⁷ His insistence on the temporal disjunctures between various modes of spectatorship, representation and interpretation allows for critical articulation of visual culture as a durational practice. Challenging the ‘natural effect’ of the glazed *sfumato* surfaces of European representationalist painting, Bryson argues for a move away from the instantaneity of the painted mimetic image, towards an appreciation of the deictic qualities of art images.⁶⁶⁸ Like Phillip Rawson, Bryson refers to Chinese brush painting as an example of a pictorial tradition that retains the deictic trace, where the duration of painting can be ‘read’ into the surface of the picture.⁶⁶⁹ While Bryson’s account of the temporality of spectatorship was based around painting, and the relationships between viewers and prominent art historical works, it is valuable for critical considerations of life-drawing, as it allows both spectatorship and representation to be considered as a field of differing and profoundly temporal practices. In exposing the optics of European representationalist painting, Bryson allows representation to be articulated as a series of practices, embedded in materiality of paint, light and space, as well as the bodies of artists and viewers. Bryson’s critique of the instantaneity of western European painting has been cited by other authors querying the possibilities and limitations of the project of art as representation, particularly Barbara Bolt. Like Bryson, Bolt insists on the temporality of viewing as a series of encounters, and it is in the temporality of representation as a series of deferred and referring movements, that Bolt articulates drawing as a critical practice.⁶⁷⁰ Arguably this move away from the verisimilitude of the instantaneous image, to one where viewing, responding, perception are constant processes of material becoming, must involve an appreciation for the dynamism of time, and of drawing as a process embedded as much within the plasticity of time as of the materials used.⁶⁷¹

Marking and Meaning: examining signification

As noted in the previous section, the alleged competence of life-drawings or figurative paintings to operate as mimetic images declined under the proliferation of photography. It is arguable that in the twentieth century life-drawings no longer signified *the nude*, but evoked the practice of *life-drawing* itself, the cultural associations of life-drawing as a pedagogical and recreational practice, and the myriad of connotations aligned with the architecture of life-drawing classes and the tactile qualities of the media used. As discussed in Chapter One, *the idea of life-drawing* is often cited as a signifier for art, the art tradition, rigorous art instruction, or conversely as sexist, soft-porn, amateur and rear-garde art practices; however, many accounts include evocations of charcoal dust, the mess of the artists’ studio, the rustle of paper, the fold of drapes, the fall of light surrounding and grounding the naked model in a particular imaginative context.

The uneasy relationship between life-drawing, representation, and the ambiguities of what life-drawings signify, or what happens if and when they ‘fail’ as representations, extends to

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 96-103.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 120-122.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 88-89. See P Rawson, *Drawing*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁷⁰ Bolt refers to Bryson in developing her argument for an examination of the temporal and material specificities of art practice. See Bolt, op. cit., p. 6.

⁶⁷¹ There is considerable scope to explore the articulations of time, materiality and vision in life-drawing, particularly in the relationships between bodily observation, mimetic tracing and embedding within the plasticity of materials such as charcoal. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to articulate the observations on temporality, touch and material plasticity in relation to life-drawing, such an exploration could productively entail the critical collapse of the distinction between subject and object discussed later in this chapter. See C Malabou, *The future of Hegel: plasticity, temporality, and dialectic*, L Dering (trans.), Routledge, London & New York, 2005.

signification itself. Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness by which a signifying word such as C A T operates to signify the separate entity of an actual cat, also muffles the possibility, that in some circumstances, that C A T might actually fail as a signifier, or contain a series of evocations, ambiguities or puns.⁶⁷² 'CAT' is also a shortened form of the name 'Catherine', as well as a common acronym. The phonetics of pronouncing 'cat' may evoke a feline onomatopoeia, or the double entendres of synonyms for 'cat', such as 'pussy.' The tension between signification, connotation and evocation contributes to recent critical challenges to semiotic or representationalist aesthetics, and allows a more productive negotiation of the ambiguous status of life-drawings as exercises, traces, gestures and images.

A considerable amount of contemporary critical theory has addressed the atemporality, as well as the dematerialising tendencies of semiotic accounts of aesthetics. Feminist interventions across a range of disciplines have repeatedly argued for a precise articulation of the meeting of materiality and meaning, and how the textures of flesh, the shapes of language and the material processes of visual culture perform iterations of gendered subjectivity across complex matrices of embodiment and ontology.⁶⁷³ In her critical exploration of the materiality of meaning, Barbara Bolt discusses Vicki Kirby's elegant negotiation of the ambiguities of Saussurian semiotics, and her insistence on the importance of the materiality of signification, and the signified, as constitutive of meaning. Bolt also discusses how Charles Peirce's examination of signification as semiosis can be applied to understanding art practices.⁶⁷⁴ As Kirby argues, the chief value of Peirce's account is the shift away from semiotics as an abstracted code, to an elaboration of semiosis as a process of attribution and relationship to the world as it is experienced.⁶⁷⁵ According to Bolt, Peirce negotiates the ambiguities of Saussure's *signified*, by differentiating between the dynamic object, and the immediate object.⁶⁷⁶ The immediate object is that which is closest to signification, and hence, arguably, to a type of idea or prototype of the object that is represented. The dynamic object is that which exists outside of signification, and, while linked to the immediate object being represented, may also, through the dynamism of its materiality, influence and change how it is signified, exerting a pressure on signification itself.⁶⁷⁷

In relationship to life-drawing, Peirce's differentiation between the immediate object and the dynamic object allows a relatively straightforward articulation of the naked/nude dichotomy in figurative representation. If the nude can be seen as the immediate object, a type of quasi-platonic ideal of naked bodies, denoted by and largely confined within the practices of its representation, the naked, particularly as elaborated by John Berger, could be seen to embody the dynamic object: a richer, more variable, more democratic and more troubling form of nudity, that challenges the ideal of the nude, as well as the conventions of its representation. However, this explanation is not unproblematic and, arguably, retains a residual account of Plato's 'ideal forms', and while acknowledging the influence of 'nature' or 'materiality'

⁶⁷² See F de Saussure, 'Nature of the linguistic sign', *Course in General Linguistics*, Duckworth, London, 1983, reprinted in R Kearney & M Rainwater, (eds.), *The continental philosophy reader*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996, pp. 300-301.

⁶⁷³ See V Kirby, *Telling flesh: the substance of the corporeal*, Routledge, New York, 1997. I discuss the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Donna Haraway later in this Chapter.

⁶⁷⁴ Bolt, op. cit., pp. 172-173.

⁶⁷⁵ Kirby, op. cit., pp. 42-43. Kirby examines the tensions in Saussure's semiotics, allowing for a more productive interpretation of signification, and the relationship between the specificity of *langue* and *parole* than I can do justice to in this work. While I acknowledge that, given Kirby's work, my account of Saussurian signification could also be seen as a caricature, I argue that a reductivist interpretation of Saussurian semiotics has influenced structuralist aesthetic accounts of art, that do reduce representation to an abstracted, instantaneous moment of arbitrary signification.

⁶⁷⁶ Bolt, op. cit., p. 174.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

retains the distinction between materiality and meaning, or nature and culture and nature into semiosis itself. It also reduces life-drawing to representing the figure, when, as I have argued, the complex assemblage of marks, materials and pictorial elements in life-drawings denotes an enormous range of stylistic affiliations and cultural genealogies, and often embodies the psychological and phenomenological negotiations of subject formation and the bodily disciplines of observational drawing. Peirce's articulation of semiosis involved the classification of numerous categories of objects, of signs (or representamen), and interpretants, including mapping of the phenomenological typologies of signs, and how they enter into signification.⁶⁷⁸ In Bolt's exegesis of Peirce she explores the connotations of the typological class of signs, defining the three classes of iconic, symbolic, and indexical signs:

*In Peirce's trichotomy, the icon represents the object by virtue of likeness; the symbol represents objects by virtue of a rule or convention or code, and the index represents its objects by virtue of being really affected by it.*⁶⁷⁹

Bolt explores the index as the site where the dynamic object influences semiosis and, more importantly, where the multiple meanings and sensations of the phenomenological experience of the world enter into the process of representing it. Citing the affective capacities of colour in apples, as well as (and as distinct from) the juxtaposition of colours in paintings, Bolt links Peirce's indexical signs to Deleuze's account of affects and percepts, arguing that paintings are more than mimetic images of the world, but material entities that affect us bodily, and affect our relation to and understanding of paint, and the world.⁶⁸⁰ She also relates Peirce's index to Bryson's deictic mark, as a type of trace, retaining something of the site, the process, and the materiality of its inscription.⁶⁸¹

One of the most useful aspects of Bolt's use of Peirce is her discussion of how indexical signs are partial signifiers, evoking the dynamic object without fully representing it.⁶⁸² Her inclusion of evocation is not to evade a critical examination of artistic practice (contributing the familiar mystification of creativity), but to insist on the complicating excess of materiality, and how materiality exceeds its symbolic encoding and iconic mimesis, and yet affects meaning and representation through its very presence. Bolt's account of creative praxis entails an emphasis on processes and encounters with materials and meaning whereby representation is described as profoundly performative. Her description of art-making emphasises the performative quality of materials and tools of artistic practice, as well as that of the artist. I discuss Bolt's exploration of performativity later in this chapter, but firstly wish to examine how analogies with performance feature in existing critical accounts of life-drawing.

6. Drawing on performance

Performing analogies

As discussed above, it is difficult to differentiate life-drawings from other genres of figurative representation, and even more difficult to analyse them in terms of meanings, styles and

⁶⁷⁸ Somewhat shamefully, I am indebted to the comprehensive article 'Semiotic elements and classes of signs (Peirce)' March 25, 2009, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, viewed 6 April, 2009, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Semiotic_elements_and_classes_of_signs_\(Peirce\)&oldid=279594891](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Semiotic_elements_and_classes_of_signs_(Peirce)&oldid=279594891)>.

⁶⁷⁹ Bolt, op. cit., p179. Bolt cites D Greenlee, *Peirce's concept of the sign*, Mouton, The Hague, 1973, p. 70.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ Bolt, p. 184.

⁶⁸² Bolt, p. 182.

intentions of representation. In differentiating the distinct category of life-drawings from other areas of figurative representation, observational drawing or general drawing, it may be more useful to explore the ontology of life-drawing as an actual practice, based on the presence of a life-model deliberately and consciously posing for one or more spectators who are actively engaged in a responsive practice of mark-making. Rather than analysing drawings, it may be more productive to examine drawing as a practice, exploring life-drawing as a performance, rather than life-drawings as representations. Performance is a recurrent theme in many of accounts of the experiential aspects of life-drawing, and a number of interview respondents made analogies between life-drawing classes and forms of performance. In describing the appeal of the contrived protocol of life-drawing classes, Roger Conlon repeatedly referred to the opera:

*And there's a point that people reach, that is almost operatic, where all of these weird conditions are accepted. And they are really weird conditions, drapes and naked people and people being quiet, but somehow they are rather... I like the atmosphere, I've always enjoyed teaching it, partly because you can teach it, I think.*⁶⁸³

As Bill Prosser describes, the analogies between drawing and theatre operate at numerous levels:

Because the analogy with the theatre is useful here as well. You know, whether you're too close or too far away, and whether you need your opera glasses.

Prosser dismissed the flippancy of his remark about opera glasses, returning to his earlier observations about the role of spatial relationships in determining the nature of life-drawing. He then explored an additional connotation of the analogy between drawing and theatre, in the relationship between performance and play:

*And the other thing is about play of course. Because the notion of play, playfulness, childlikeness, childishness, all of those sorts of things seem very important to me within the context of making, within the context of performing, if you like, on a piece of paper, or whatever it might be. And in the inhabitation of the game, in childhood, is one that we yearn to get back to, as adults, and conceivably it's in this performative, theatrical environment that that becomes accessible to us.*⁶⁸⁴

Karen Wallis also makes an analogy between the practice of life-drawing and play:

*Motion in the act of looking is like the movement to and fro in play. The pictorial image which facilitates the movement and causes a heightened attention in the viewer, is the place to which the self travels before returning to connect with its own existence.*⁶⁸⁵

Wallis's evocation of the capacity of pictorial images to facilitate a subjective movement, becoming a 'place to which the self travels', echoes the descriptions by artists explored in Chapter Four. Angela Eames's exclamation of 'I wasn't even there', and Alice Neel's description of 'leaving herself and living in them', evoke the imaginative shifts within the artists' sense of their position and subjectivity. In exploring the capacity of vision to allow a

⁶⁸³ Roger Conlon, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁸⁴ Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁸⁵ K Wallis, *Painting & drawing the nude: a search for a realism for the body through phenomenology & fine art practice*, PhD thesis, University of the West of England, Bristol, 2003, p. 100.

viewer to leave themselves, Wallis quotes Merleau-Ponty:

*Vision is not a certain mode of thought or presence itself; it is the means given to me for being absent for myself, for being present at the fission of being from the inside – the fission at whose termination, and not before, I come back to myself.*⁶⁸⁶

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of perception from a phenomenological perspective offers considerable potential for a critical consideration of the subjective experience of looking, and phenomenology has had a considerable influence on Performance Studies. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine philosophies of being and perception, it is worthwhile noting that the experience of subjective mobility; the movement from a sense of self to one of an absence of self, promoted by the immersion in experience has considerable resonance with the experiences occurring in life-drawing practice (especially in the accounts from Angella Eames and Alice Neel discussed in Chapter Four). Wallis's discussion of how practices of looking may produce a transforming shift in subjective awareness was echoed by other practitioners. In evoking the analogy with opera, Roger Conlon described the experiences in life-drawing as an empathic shift in subjectivity:

*But it is about that engagement and you get beyond a certain point where you actually start thinking, sort of, 'that person over there is also me', don't you? And then you do feel this, peculiar, and I've described it as a slightly operatic quality where it just lifts.*⁶⁸⁷

In the accounts above, the contrived and artificial space of the life-drawing studio is presented as a safe space for a series of other encounters. This view of life-drawing as facilitating a type of theatre or drama resembles the account of life-drawing as an 'event of realism' described by Karen Wallis.

The event of life-drawing

*In seeking to stimulate an event of realism (by presenting the nude as another person) I am not attempting to substitute an alternative structure – but to reveal the impossibility of an alternative structure by presenting the nude as an other person, facing the viewer across the space beyond the control of either. The event of realism should leave the viewer in a state of uncertainty*⁶⁸⁸

In Chapter Three, I mentioned Karen Wallis's thesis in relation to structuralist feminist accounts of subjectivity and the female nude. Wallis's major argument is to critically consider representation of the nude as an *event of realism*, or a specific setting where viewers could have a safe engagement with 'the real'. Although, as I demonstrate, Wallis's thesis is limited by an assumption that life-drawing can be equated to the representation of the nude, (itself constrained by an aesthetic framework separating reality from representation), her thesis is one of the most sensitive and serious considerations of life-drawing that I've read.⁶⁸⁹ As seen above, many of her arguments about the experience of observation and representation of the

⁶⁸⁶ M Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and mind', in M Merleau-Ponty & JM Edie (ed.), *The Primacy of Perception: and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history, and politics*, C Dallery (trans.), Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1964, p. 187, cited by Wallis, op. cit., p. 95.

⁶⁸⁷ Iain Biggs and Roger Conlon, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁸⁸ Wallis, op. cit., p.115.

⁶⁸⁹ My comments on Wallis's thesis posted on the discussion list for the Drawing Research Network were quoted by S Garner, *Writing on drawing: essays on drawing practice and research*, E-books corporation /Intellect books, Bristol, 2008, p. 17.

nude figure resemble descriptions of life-drawing made by other practitioners. Wallis's view of the life-class as a contrived theatre, providing a structured space of catharsis, or access to an event of realism, bears considerably similarity to earlier aesthetic accounts about the role of the nude in European art, such as by Kenneth Clark. Wallis explores a number of theatrical analogies with life-drawing and cites Bertolt Brecht's work on realist theatre as a way of critically envisaging realist art.⁶⁹⁰ Wallis also uses Gadamer's idea of the work of art as a form of cathartic theatre; allowing spectators 'to observe the tragic without stress'.⁶⁹¹ In developing her account of life-drawing as an event of realism, Wallis cites Gadamer's account of the aesthetic experience, which:

[...] takes the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, by the power of the work of art, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence.⁶⁹²

Wallis presents an aesthetic account of life-drawing as a performance of cathartic theatre. The shifts in subjectivity are described as a type of crisis, which is mediated and ultimately contained by representation. To a certain extent this account of the work of art as a separate and contained space with a controlled access to the dangerous and tragic experience of subjectivity, resembles the description of *the sublime* by Immanuel Kant.⁶⁹³ Wallis's nude (generalised as female) takes the place of the immense threat of nature in Kant's account of *the sublime*.⁶⁹⁴ This alignment between woman, body and nature reflects similar dualisms in western epistemology, and it is also predicated on a separation between the body, and the subject that can understand or represent it. Like Kant's aesthetics, this account depends on the presence of a fixed idea of the subject, such as the artist making the work, or the audience apprehending the event of realism contained in the art object. This account of the performativity of life-drawing depends on a clear idea of who is the subject or actor within this performance, or who has the critical agency to perform the aesthetic transformation. According to this account, the subject of art uses the power of reason and judgement, in order to transcend their senses, thus the shift away from an awareness of themselves facilitates a return to a sense of themselves as connected to but separate from their surroundings.

Although Wallis discusses the critical and ethical dilemmas of ascribing subjectivity to artists' models, her account is ultimately bound to a humanist account of subjectivity. As discussed in Chapter Three, Wallis bases her exploration of life-drawing on a binarised account of the masculinised artist subject and feminised model object and she seeks a means by which the nude (both the naked model and its representation) can be appreciated as another subject. Her exploration of the troubling position of the naked model as 'object' or, as in the above quotation, 'other' subject, allows her to explore subjectivity as difficult, problematic and compelling. Life-drawing is presented as an encounter between subjects, and as an *event of realism*, a particular space where the gaps between subject and object, subject and subject, reality and representation can be explored. Wallis's critical imperative is largely concerned with how to undertake figurative representation without compromising the subjectivity of the model:

⁶⁹⁰ Wallis op. cit., pp. 115-122.

⁶⁹¹ Wallis, op. cit., p. 99.

⁶⁹² HG Gadamer, *Truth and method*, G Berdon & J Cumming (trans.), Sheed & Ward, London, 1975, p. 63, quoted in Wallis, op. cit., p. 100.

⁶⁹³ I Kant, *The critique of judgement*, JC Meredith, (trans.), Alex Catalogue, Raleigh NC, pp. 64-66. Electronic Version accessed via Sydney University Library, 19 March 2009, <<http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au/search~S4?/aKant+I/akant+i/1,5,260,B/1856~b3175722&FF=akant+immanuel+1724+1804&18,,256,1,0>>.

⁶⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 76.

*My suggestion is that, in the somewhat one-sided relationships between artists and model, where it is only the artist who makes a drawing – otherness, which is usually seen as absolutely beyond reach and totally erotic, can here be recognised as something to be respected in its complete strangeness.*⁶⁹⁵

Aside from the above comment, citing the eroticism of otherness, when it is ‘absolutely beyond reach’, Wallis doesn’t devote much attention to the troubling presence of sexuality or desire in life-drawing. Instead, Wallis explores life-drawing as an asexual intersubjective encounter, where she explores how the actions of the artist in drawing from the model can be explored critically and ethically, frequently citing Emmanuel Levinas’s account of the moral imperative presented in the encounter between the subject and its other:

*The artist ‘faces’ the model and the rest of the world as ‘other’, the respectful partnership being maintained by the constant movement in the spatial relationships.*⁶⁹⁶

Wallis’s exploration of life-drawing through phenomenology relies on a humanist account of the subject as a discrete entity, able to encounter, experience and articulate him or herself in relation to the world in which he or she is embedded. However, it is arguable that life-drawing provides a particular challenge to the subject that invites a critical reconsideration of subjectivity itself. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the status of models as ‘objects’ is not a fixed dilemma of ontology, but is experienced and articulated by models as an experience, or as a practice that is temporal, fleeting and linked to a range of experiences of spectatorship, stillness and presence. Despite her experimentation of using herself and her daughter as model-subjects, Wallis’s account of life-drawing as an event of realism appears to reduce the complex exchanges occurring between artists, models and materials to a singular act of representing the female nude subject, and overlooks the possibility of modelling as a contesting performance of ‘the nude’, and its representation.

To a certain extent Wallis’s thesis does explore the practices within life-drawing that lead to the objectification. She suggests that the objectification of the model is based in stillness, and suggests that life-drawing can be envisaged as a respectful partnership by allowing the model to move ‘naturally’:

*It becomes unnecessary for the model to remain static or to pose in a sequence of actions. By allowing voluntary movement within the basic position of a pose the model is permitted to become a person – neither object nor automata. This natural movement is not only more comfortable for, and respectful of the model, it also releases the artists from the inclination to make a blind copy of the pose – which would return the nude to the status of an object.*⁶⁹⁷

This idea of allowing natural movement in the life-class certainly seems appealing, and represents a break with the Euston Road tradition of stillness, intensity and suffering that was discussed in Chapter Four. However, it could also be seen as an attempt to return the model posing as a fine art nude to the status of a (natural) naked subject, much in the manner of the tactics proposed by Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik in Chapter Three. I return to the relationship between posing and subjectivity later, but wish to note implications of Wallis’s proposal on the subjectivity and performativity of the artists. Wallis’s suggestion of releasing the artist from ‘blind copying’ enables an a vision of life-drawing that is sympathetic to the

⁶⁹⁵ Wallis, op. cit., p. 57.

⁶⁹⁶ Wallis, op. cit., p57

⁶⁹⁷ Wallis, op. cit., p. 57.

view espoused by Iain Biggs:

*This is not Euston Road dot-and-carry but “how do I make a dance of marks in response to the phenomena of the world around me?”*⁶⁹⁸

Biggs’s evocative description of drawing as a ‘dance of marks’ suggests that drawing can be critically interrogated, if not as a representation, then as *a practice of art*. As I discuss later in this chapter, a number of critical interventions in contemporary aesthetics do engage with the temporal and material specificities of observing and responsive mark-making as a durational activity. However, Biggs’s statement, like Wallis’s analysis, does not entirely address the tension between the experience of drawing as a practice, and the status of drawings as images or representations. While Wallis’s critical approach emphasises life-drawing as a temporal, spatial and social practice, the status of life-drawings in her work as representations of the figure remains unchallenged. Life drawings are equated with figurative representations, and both are treated as metonymic elements of the naked subject. The life-drawing stands in for the presence of the live model, separating reality and its representation. This reduction of life-drawing to the representation of the nude arguably reduces the performative element of life-drawing to a one-way transubstantiation of reality into representation via the subjectivity of the artist. This account allows little space for the subtleties of how artists negotiate their own observation, mark-making and subjectivity, let alone the relationship of artistic subjectivity and agency to the presence and performance of artists’ models. While Wallis’s critical approach emphasises life-drawing as a temporal, spatial and social practice, the status of life-drawings in her work as representations of the figure remains unchallenged. Life-drawings are equated with figurative representations, and both are treated as metonymic elements of the naked subject. This conflation allows life-drawing to replace the presence of the live model, separating reality and its representation.

It is arguable that Wallis’s exploration of life-drawing is constrained by a certain level of confusion between the ‘event’ of life-drawing (in which the artist is a spectator of the naked model) and the ‘event’ of representation, in which the artist or other viewers view the image resulting from the encounter between the artist and model. This tension is acknowledged by Wallis, who explores a variety of modes for the presentation of her images of the nude, which mostly consist of large scale drawings of her own naked body. Wallis’s thesis was presented in conjunction with her own drawing practice as a highly accomplished realist figurative artist.⁶⁹⁹ To a certain extent her attempt to theorise life-drawing conflates the processes of observing and drawing a naked figure with figurative representations, and she describes life-drawing as a complex encounter between two subjects, the model and the artist. Wallis’s account of the *event of realism* depends on a stratification of subjectivity and reality into discrete realms that are mediated through representation. Arguably, the view of artists as autonomous subjects is dependent on a belief that works of art images function as privileged representations, able to separate and stratify vision into realms of the real and the ideal.

As noted in Chapter Three, many critiques equate life-drawings with figurative representations. While this enables a lucid analysis of the social relations surrounding the production, distribution and reception of visual culture, it arguably reduces the capacity of critics to engage with the compelling ambiguities embedded in the material practices of making images or manipulating visual materials. These compelling ambiguities not only concern the signifying capacities of various materials, but also their relationships to the

⁶⁹⁸ Iain Biggs, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁶⁹⁹ See: ‘Karen Wallis: painting & drawing the nude 1994 – 2003’, *Karen Wallis* website, viewed 20 March 2009, <<http://www.karenwallis.co.uk/nude.htm>>.

cultural capital of particular practices or media, and to the forms of subjectivity implied by a engagement with particular media or practices. Karen Wallis discussed this tension in her introduction, stating that as a realist artist, she had ‘a sense of being outside the forms of contemporary art practice’.⁷⁰⁰ Wallis’s evident skill in drawing competent representations of the naked figure allows her to explore life-drawing as a form of realism, however, as discussed earlier, the status of life-drawings as figurative representations is uncertain. However, it is possible that the myriad of contexts and pictorial techniques associated with the contemporary practice of life-drawing, may facilitate a departure from representation that could also be regarded as productive.

While life-drawing classes could easily be described as ‘theatres’, given the western theatrical tradition of separating performers and spectators, there is some difficulty in locating the creative agency within the theatre of the life-class. While some artists’ models describe modelling as a performance, others, particularly those who are dancers or actors, disagree.⁷⁰¹ Artists’ models appear to straddle an ambiguous realm between subject and object, performer and animated dummy, while artists, or those present within a life-class, are also placed in an ambiguous zone between performing and observing, and exist as both a collective ‘audience’ to a singular performance by a model and as their own creative director over the marks on the page in front of them; the residue of their gestures and observation which may or may not be coded as a representation. Negotiating the agency of performance within the life-room, also involves negotiating the perceptible competence in communicating the intent of a performance, and in negotiating the boundaries and connections between performers and spectators.

The problem may lie in the reductiveness of the act of making such an alignment into an analogy between theatre and drawing. The curious collapse between life-drawing as a practice or an event, the life-room as the theatrical setting for this event, and the piece of paper as the location for an event of responsive mark-making, paradoxically exacerbates the separation of life-drawing as a practice and the actual drawings that result. Life-drawing appears to be either a practice or a fixed image; both can be compared with forms of performance, but only as separate entities. The theatricality of life-drawing includes not only the spectacle of the posing naked model, but also the event of making a drawing, as in this comment from Bill Prosser:

*There is the protocol. All those things seem to have a relationship at least, with theatrical performances. I think the other way to think about it as a theatre, is... It’s often occurred to me, that it’s actually to do with the shape of the piece of paper. In a sense one is performing within the space of the piece of paper, which is very much like a proscenium. So even the act of making something on a piece of paper is a bit like being in the theatre.*⁷⁰²

Prosser’s comparison between the drawing page and the proscenium evokes an idea of drawing as a performance by the artist on the theatre of their page. However, this view of the page as a theatre may also facilitate the separation of the drawing as site of representation from the surrounding reality in which the artist is immersed. In relation to life-drawing, it reinforces the idea of the artist as the main or only performing subject in the room. Even the idea of performance itself can be problematic. Carolee Schneemann’s work in *Up To And*

⁷⁰⁰ Wallis, *Painting & drawing the nude: a search for a realism for the body through phenomenology & fine art practice*, p. 23.

⁷⁰¹ Jacqueline Pascoe, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁷⁰² Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

Including Her Limits encompasses the closest attempt yet to fuse the agency of the naked human figure, constrained by the suspension from her ankle with a harness and rope, to the activity of a dynamic, embodied and performative drawing.⁷⁰³ Schneemann is generally described as a performance artist, but she expressed considerable reservations about the implications of the term:

*Performance has to do with perfectability, predictability, a pre-existing form, you fulfil it. And I always say, you know, 'Men are supposed to perform sexually, animals perform in the circus, violinists perform brilliantly.' As a visual artist, moving energy and materials into space, I wish there was a different terminology for what I do! We're stuck with performance, but I try not use it even though that might define what I have done... so that's, cumbersome.*⁷⁰⁴

Schneemann's emphasis on the material and temporal qualities of her practice as an artist challenges the view of art as a performance, linked to expectations of fulfilling a set of external criteria. Her discomfort with the term *performance* expresses a discomfort with the idea of purposes or ends to an art practice, and an immersion in the means and experiences of it. Schneemann's work has influenced other artists to explore mark-making as a performance, particularly via the incorporation of restraining armatures or implements that constrain and draw attention to the artist's body, and even the artist as a body.⁷⁰⁵ While this is a fascinating area of research, arguably it represents a collapse of the artist-model relationship, where the model is replaced by or subsumed into the bodily display and performance of the artist. I would still argue that life-drawing offers a critical opportunity to consider the particular implications of the relationship between posing model and drawing artists as performance of mobile and shifting subjectivities. Arguably this analysis depends on a consideration of the performativity of the artist, as if life-drawing is seen as a response to a performance by the model alone, then life-drawings can be seen as a shadow or artifact of this performance. To a certain extent this assumption separates the dynamic temporality of the gestural, spectatorial and mark-making *practices* of life-drawing from the fixed spectatorship of a separated and extracted material residue of those practices.⁷⁰⁶ This separation belies the connection of life-drawing to life-drawings, and fixes the relationship between process and object in a one-way direction. It is a very fine distinction between regarding life-drawings as a material residue or

⁷⁰³ Carolee Schneemann, *Up To and Including Her Limits*, Performance & live video relay, crayon on paper, rope and harness suspended from ceiling. The Kitchen. NYC, 1973-1976. Image and artists statement accessed on *Carolee Schneemann* artist's website, viewed 26 March, 2009, <<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>>.

⁷⁰⁴ Carolee Schneemann, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁷⁰⁵ Schneemann's work was impetus for Sydney based drawing researcher Ben Denham's recent exploration with bodily suspension and mark-making in *Pulling Strings*, Performance and video, University of Western Sydney, October, 2005, and ArtSpace Sydney, October 2005. Images, video clips and artists statement accessed on *Ben Denham* artist's website, viewed 26 March 2009, <http://bendenham.com/pulling_strings_1.html>. See: B Denham, *Gestural Sense: Art, Neuroscience and Linguistic Embodiment*, PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2009.

⁷⁰⁶ The dilemma of negotiating the relationships of drawing as performances and representations, was typified by a recent research article that aimed to "demonstrate the performative act of drawing as a process of embodiment". Despite the author's claim of drawing facilitating a gestural reflexivity, the drawings included in the paper resembled reductive formalist illustrations, not entirely out of place in a manual by George Bridgeman. This may reflect on the author's own practice and training as a costume designer, rather than an artist, but it also illustrates the complexity of negotiating intentionality, performance and performativity to drawings that are created and circulated across numerous professional and cultural milieus. H Gravestock, 'Re-presenting the performing body: revealing character through drawing', *TRACEY: Contemporary Drawing Research*, What is drawing for, n.d., viewed 26 March 2009, <<http://lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/widf/gravestock.html>>.

an artifact of a performance, to regarding them as representations of the performance of the naked model, or of the naked figure itself.

I return to this aspect of the subjective exchanges between models and artists later, as I am still concerned with the implications for subjectivity if life-drawings *fail* to signify as competent representations of the figure, or as competent signifiers of art. To a certain extent, structuralist accounts rely on the separation of meaning and subjectivity into distinct realms that are mediated through representation. Recent post-structuralist accounts have explored how subjectivity itself is constituted through representation, and in Judith Butler's work, the performative iteration of a particular subject identity enables that subjectivity to be constituted as a series of collective practices of enunciation, reception and repetition. While Butler's work is arguably limited by a focus on representation (or discourse) as the only site where subjectivity is constituted, her exploration of representation as a process or enunciation, interpellation and reiteration allows a critical engagement with representation as an incompetent performance.

In Chapter Four, I mentioned Judith Butler's work in *Bodies That Matter* to suggest that subjectivity can be constituted through repudiation or abjection. In *Beyond Representation* Barbara Bolt refers to Butler's writing on how subjectivity is constituted through performative representations. She includes Butler's ideas on the relationship between subjective agency and bad, excessive or abject performances:

*Within the reiteration, repetition, or citation of the discursive law, too perfect performances, bad performances, excessive performances and playful performances create what she calls (de) constituting possibilities.*⁷⁰⁷

Bolt's exegesis of Judith Butler's ideas on the deconstituting potential of bad, excessive or playful performances provides an interesting corollary to the Roland Barthes quotation used earlier. Both theorists link representation and signification to subjectivity; arguably, both are concerned with signification and discourse as the only site by which ontology could be critically envisaged. Citing Butler's argument that irony, excess, and parodic re-iterations are destabilising, and can be deployed strategically to challenge cultural and aesthetic norms of practice, Bolt suggests that such strategies contribute to a critical tendency to dissolve material substance into a fluid manipulation of discursive elements:

*Excessive and ironic performances and parodic re-iterations shift the ground of what is considered the norm. In political and artistic practices, these subversive performances have been employed strategically... through such strategies; the work of art becomes concerned with the manipulation of existing signs. Here matter, as material substance, seems to have disappeared into discourse.*⁷⁰⁸

In the above quotation Bolt describes the employment of irony as part of a deliberately contesting strategy of contemporary art.⁷⁰⁹ As in the earlier quotation from Roland Barthes, art is described as a series of continuous iterations and repetitions, continually occurring through time and space. While Barthes claims that artists unable to break the chain of signification, he acknowledges that artists, by their very productivity, are able to 'blur it, confuse it, start it up again, until it loses its meaning'. While many structuralist (and post-structuralist) accounts of art are limited by a separation between reality and representation, the tensions in the close

⁷⁰⁷ B Bolt, *Beyond representation: the performative power of the image*, IB Tauris, Melbourne, 2004, p. 152. Bolt cites J Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*, Routledge, New York, 1993, p. 10.

⁷⁰⁸ Bolt, op. cit, p.153.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

examination of the processes of signification may also facilitate a productive examination of how matter and meaning are enmeshed within each other, and saturate the practices, and the social relations in which the practices of representation are embedded. Bolt critiques the structuralist distinction between substance and discourse or reality and its representation and, like Vicki Kirby, she examines the work of Charles Peirce to explore how signification can be reconfigured as a profoundly material practice.⁷¹⁰

In relation to life-drawing, this examination of representation as a type of performance is a valuable means of negotiating the ambiguities of creative agency or subjectivity of artists and models. However, it offers a means of challenging common assumptions that equate life-drawing with figurative representation, and critically engaging with life-drawing as a practice. While I acknowledge that life-drawing is imbricated with broader conventions of figurative representations, as well as constative discourses of artists' subjectivity, a critical framework that explores life-drawing as a practice of 'iteration' rather than representation, may offer richer possibilities for articulating the complex and often contradictory aspirations and desires saturating the encounters between naked models and clothed spectating artists. To move away from the idea of life-drawing as representing the nude, the figure, or fine art, to being a performative encounter between bodies, materials and discourses around art, also involves a challenge to the assumptions of artistic subjectivity that underpin it. Art is no longer a fixed entity, belonging to the artist that makes it, but is a deterritorialised movement, an encounter within a field of possibilities as fleeting and idiosyncratic as the infinitely of glances flitting across the life-room, or the invisible gestures of tracing, touching and imagining that occur. Rather than regarding life-drawing as an event of realism, it may be more productive to explore it as an assemblage of events, a field of practices, or as a cluster of performances.

7. Drawing the life of materials

Conjuring itself, the performativity of materials

Earlier, I noted that some of the performative accounts of life-drawing acknowledged empathic shifts and subjective affinities occurring in life-drawing between artists and the model. Other accounts suggest that similar affinities occur between the artist and their materials, as in the comment from Bill Prosser:

It's a bit like watching a performance before your very eyes, kind of conjure [itself]. [...] One of the things that everybody who does that realises or knows is that actually there is something going on in the relationship between the image and the person making it that is not within your control. It's a dialogue, all the time. So it is almost as if you're watching something that's outside of yourself. In the same way that if you watch a theatrical performance, you're both on the stage, and you know as it were, empathising with the characters on the stage, but you can't control what they do.

Prosser's account expresses a number of interesting shifts in his own subjectivity and awareness. Describing how a drawing conjures itself, and how artists are not in control of their image making, Prosser evokes artistic subjectivity as a curiously detached connectedness, 'as if you're watching something that's outside of yourself'. His description of drawing as a dialogue implies a certain level of agency in the materials in conjuring an image, that lies beyond the control of the artist.⁷¹¹ This suggestion of the agency of materials, in the

⁷¹⁰ Bolt, op. cit., pp. 181-183.

⁷¹¹ Prosser articulates the equivocating agency of materials, and of images in the *duree* of drawing more directly

capacity for images to conjure themselves, is more directly explored by Barbara Bolt. In the introduction to *Beyond Representation*, Bolt recounts an experience of painting a sitter who was reading while being painted.⁷¹² Bolt describes the shift from her ‘reiteration of habits and strategies of working’ as a skilled painter, performing with materials under her control, to an immersion within a process that was larger than herself and outside of her control:

*The painting takes on a life of its own. It breathes, vibrates, pulsates, shimmers and generally runs away from me. The painting no longer merely represents or illustrates reading. Instead it performs. In the performativity of imaging, life gets into the image.*⁷¹³

Although her description of immersion in the process of art-making resembles earlier accounts of the performative power of vision, and of art as an experience of catharsis, Bolt uses this incident as a departure point to examine the materiality and temporality of signification, and the performativity of materials as more than tools of representation. More significantly, Bolt articulates an aesthetics that is not dependent on a fixed notion of a creative subject, separate from and able to perform a mastery over the materials and world around them, but explores aesthetics as an encounter between subjects, or part subjects/part objects, such as the hands, tools, surfaces and stuff of paint. Bolt refers to Martin Heidegger’s work on the constative handlability of tools, reiterating that it is in their handling, and their use that we lose awareness of tools as objects, but become linked to them.⁷¹⁴ Furthermore Bolt refers to Don Ihde’s reading of Heidegger’s phenomenology, which states that it is through the use of tools that we come to know and experience the world. This is not to say that tools mediate a separation between subjects and the world, but that it is in the connection with objects, with their manipulation and handling for a variety of means, that the world actually exists.⁷¹⁵ Heidegger’s emphasis on the tactile encounter with the objects of the world, and with a phenomenology of touch and use, differs from the optic emphasis in the earlier quotation from Merleau-Ponty. Whereas Merleau-Ponty describes vision as the means by which a subject can become absent from themselves, Heidegger evokes a relationship between the self and surrounds linked to bodily presence and dynamic physical engagement.⁷¹⁶ This shift away from vision and to a bodily awareness mirrors post-structuralist critiques of the optical emphasis in Cartesian epistemology; however, Heidegger’s account of the agency of tools and the phenomenology of praxis is useful in negotiating the ambiguous subjectivity of artists’ models, as well as that of the work of art.

Barbara Bolt’s account of praxis is mainly concerned with her relationships to materials. In her final chapter ‘Working Hot’, she develops a lucid account of how the complex materiality

in the following article: B Prosser, ‘Object drawing’, *Performance Research*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2008, p. 25.

⁷¹² I note the differences in subjectivity and agency implied by the terms ‘sitter’ versus ‘model’. ‘Sitting’ is generally used in relation to portraiture, where the subjecthood of the figure is usually acknowledged, either in being identified by name, or remaining clothed, or being allowed to adopt a more relaxed pose, allowing for their comfort and movement. Even though she is naked, the subject in Bolt’s painting, *Reading fiction, 1995*, is reclining in bed, reading a book, rather than being positioned in a manner that could only be a pose. If we accept this distinction that a subject sits for a painting, whereas a model poses, then arguably it is in the condition of posing, that the desubjectification of the model occurs.

⁷¹³ Bolt, op. cit., p. 1.

⁷¹⁴ D Ihde, *Technics and Praxis*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1979, cit. in. *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷¹⁵ Bolt, op. cit., p. 64.

⁷¹⁶ Although most of the discussion here is based around Bolt’s reading of Heidegger, it is worth noting that Heidegger does this through his discussion of the *poesis* or revealing of the world that *techne* (or the embedded relationship to the materials of the world) allows. His link between epistemology and technology is discussed in Heidegger, M, ‘The question concerning technology’, in Heidegger, M & Krell, DF (ed), *Basic writings from 'Being and time' (1927) to 'The task of thinking' (1964)*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1978, pp. 294-301.

of representation is subsumed within the subjective imperatives of handling, moving and discovering materials. Although her introduction mentions the sitter for a series of figurative paintings, and how the subject matter read by her sitter inflected the materiality of paint, she does not explore the presence and agency of the sitter herself.⁷¹⁷ Bolt's concern is with the performativity of materials, and the art image, rather than the complex negotiations between artists and models. However, I would like to suggest that her account of the dynamism of materials, and the performativity of the 'tools' of art-making can also be applied to life-drawing, and the ambiguous subjectivity of artists' models who pose rather than sit for life-drawings.

Articulating how life-drawing can operate as a performance, rather than the residue or representation of the performance, involves the articulation not only of the agency of media and materials, but of artists' models as well. Rather than trying to describe modelling as a type of creative performance that is copied, traced or represented by the spectating artists, perhaps it is possible to re-imagine artists' models in the terms evoked by Heidegger's account of tools as a constative relationship of praxis. This account allows an articulation of the paradoxical shifts that occur as models shift between poses, or between posing and pausing, and the fluctuating awareness by life-drawing participants of the model's status as a model, or as an object. It is in the immersion of drawing with the model that artists lose awareness of themselves, and of the model as a distinct entity. They become not a prosthetic extension of the artist's subjectivity, but, like the charcoal and paper, a means by which the artist can experience drawing, and experience their own body in the act of drawing. This proposition of including models as a type of dynamic tool sits rather awkwardly in relation to feminist and ethical concerns with the implications of exploitation if models are reduced to the status of bodies or instruments of the artists. The idea of models as dynamic tools can only be acceptable where the artist's own subjectivity is challenged.

In fact, Heidegger's account of praxis is related to a specific challenge to the assumption that artists are independent subjects, separate from and having mastery over their instruments or objects of their practice. Heidegger's challenge to the notion of artists' subjectivity is explored by Bolt, who quotes Heidegger's description of the role of artists in the creation of art:

*[The] artist remains inconsequential as compared to the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.*⁷¹⁸

This account of aesthetic praxis is compelling and is repeated by Bolt a number of times, in articulating the way in which the work of art takes over from the artist's sense of mastery over or separation from their materials. Furthermore, Heidegger's account does not separate the creation of art from its subsequent observation. Art is a condition of particular materials, experiences and sensations that is formed via a participatory relationship between creators and preservers.⁷¹⁹ Bolt links this participatory account of artists and materials to Heidegger's ethology of instruments:

Working with notions of indebtedness and co-responsibility, the artist is conceived of as one contributing element participating in conjunction with other contributing elements in enabling Art to

⁷¹⁷ Although Bolt doesn't discuss the sitter for the paintings discussed in her introduction, in her final chapter, she discusses the reluctance of a sitter for a portrait to be 'captured in paint', *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

⁷¹⁸ M Heidegger, 'The origin of the work of art', in Heidegger & Krell *op. cit.*, p. 166, cited by Bolt, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁷¹⁹ Bolt, p. 107-108.

come forth.⁷²⁰

Earlier, Bolt discussed Heidegger's account of the ethology of materials, as a rising from the *causa*, as a chain of responsibilities and of obligations in the bringing forth of objects and materials, where this responsibility for and obligation to the preceding materials is embodied by matter, at each step of its transformation and bringing into being, as more matter, or as objects, or as works of art.⁷²¹ In articulating the shift from mastery to collaboration, Bolt refers to William Lovitt's description of the *techne* in creative practice as a participatory relationship of conjunction between humans and things.⁷²² Bolt develops this movement away from the artist as the creator or cause of art, into an aesthetic model based on participation, where the work of art emerges out of praxis.

From mimesis to methexis

As explained above, Bolt explores a number of approaches to considering the materiality of art making as a dynamic and transformative aspect of aesthetics. She discusses Peirce's account of semiosis as a fundamentally dynamic and rich field of interactions between materiality and meaning, and explores Heidegger's critique of representation, and his ethical account of phenomenology, which re-aligns the human subject/material object split into a mutually constituting relationship between entities, each encompassing a certain level of agency in bringing forth new entities, and indebtedness to the entities or substances from which they have emerged. Bolt extends Heidegger's account of the collaboration of materials, entities and subjects to develop an account of material handling based on participation. She cites the theatrical concept of *methexis* or 'working together' to explain the performativity of materials, and of art praxis. Bolt's reference to methexis is derived from Paul Carter's discussion of the constitutive performances of desert sand-dance painting among the Aranta peoples of Australia's Northern Territory.⁷²³ Carter distinguishes the performativity of indigenous mark-making practices from European representation, claiming that the former is based in movement, and an active and constituting relationship to the world, rather than a response to or imitation of it. The dance of marks is not in response to the world, but a means of encountering it, sensing it, and remaking it, and Bolt repeats Carter's description of the indigenous belief in the practices of sand-dance-painting as producing 'real effects both on the human and the divine plane'.⁷²⁴

Like Carter, Bolt sources her understanding of methexis from Francis Cornford's discussion of the mystical roots of ancient Greek philosophy.⁷²⁵ Cornford claims that Pythagorean mathematics were originally developed through the collective practices of an ancient cult, based on a collective participation, a commonality of purpose, and the belief in an immanent collective soul.⁷²⁶ As Cornford claims, and Bolt cites:

The passage from the divine plane to the human, and from the human to the divine, remains permeable, and is perpetually traversed. The One can go out into the many; the many can lose

⁷²⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

⁷²¹ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁷²² W Lovitt 'Introduction', M Heidegger, *The question concerning technology and other essays*, W Lovitt (trans.), Garland, New York, 1977, p. xxiv, cited by Bolt, op. cit., p. 75.

⁷²³ Bolt, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

⁷²⁶ F Cornford, *From religion to philosophy: a study in the origins of western speculation*, Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1980, p. 204.

*themselves in reunion with the One.*⁷²⁷

The Pythagorean cult was based around mathematics, and the divisibility, unity and harmony of all things. However, the *methexic* practice of Pythagorean mathematics was more akin to the performance of music, and had its origins in a cult of Orpheus, the Greek God of music. Rather than mathematics involving the contemplation and manipulation of an abstract code, seeking to represent a distinct and separate material reality, Pythagorean mathematics involved a collective, concurrent production of reality, an exploration of harmony and analogy between numbers and entities, and a reiteration and performance of the passage from the human to the divine.⁷²⁸ According to Cornford, Plato was heavily influenced by Pythagoras, and developed his account of the ideal forms from the relation of an immanent united soul to all living things; however, in his development of an epistemology based on logic, methexis remained a difficult concept to contain. As Cornford describes, methexis was a mystical, non-rational relationship, a collective participation in the divine, that ‘defies rational analysis’. Cornford presents this dilemma in relation to Plato’s account of ‘ideal forms’ as a rhetorical question: ‘How is it possible for one form or nature to be present in a plurality of things, and yet to remain one?’⁷²⁹ Cornford argues that Plato’s solution was to separate the ideas from collective immanent soul of the multiple, and to separate the relation of causality between the ideas and the physical entities with which they were associated. The methexic relationships of collective participation, and the constative connections between the human and the divine were severed into a discrete realms of the real and the ideal. Plato’s doctrine of ideal forms separates the real from the ideal, and yet, there is little more than a tautological explanation of how the undescribed and multiple real comes to partake in the abstracted and remote version of the ideal.⁷³⁰

Although I have not included a discussion of Plato’s doctrine of ideal forms in this thesis, I acknowledge its considerable influence on European aesthetics and the historical practice of life-drawing and have included Cornford’s discussion of Plato for two reasons.⁷³¹ The first is that the vagueness of the relationship between the ideal and the real resembles the tension in Saussure’s account of the signified and the signifier. Just as in Plato, it is unclear what aspect of the idealised nude could be shared by a multitude of naked models, so too in Saussure, as noted by Kirby, it is unclear whether the signified entity signified by ‘CAT’ refers to an actual cat, or a general idea of a cat.⁷³² The severing of the causal connection between objects, materials and their representation means that representation is bound to remain abstract, a proposition which anyone who enjoys the playful connotations of language, or the myriad of possibilities and frustrations in art-making would probably not agree with. It is arguable that methexis allows for an account of representation that is performative and collective, and one that acknowledges the agency of concurrent acts of image making or mark-making.

Cornford is also interesting in relation to life-drawing, because of his account of the mystical

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Ibid. p. 205.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., p. 253.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

⁷³¹ As other authors have noted, the progression from antique copying to drawing from the life-model in European art academies was based on the recitation of a series of recurrent classical forms, assembled into the composite form of the idealised nude. The production of the nude as an assemblage of elements, partaking of the beautiful was mirrored in the myths surrounding the origins of life-drawing in Ancient Greece, such as Pliny’s account of Zeuxis choosing five the maidens as models for Helen of Troy, in order to select the most beautiful features from each. See E Mansfield, *Too beautiful to picture: Zeuxis, myth, and mimesis*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, pp. 19-20.

⁷³² Kirby, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

origins of Pythagorean mathematics, which in post-Renaissance Europe became associated with an acutely abstracted ideology of symbolisation and representationalism. The status accorded to mathematical codes in modernist society renders them as the fixed immutables *par excellence*. Rather than being seen as performative elements of a fluctuating material reality, mathematical principles are held apart, as a transcendent principle by which matter can be subjugated. This instrumentalist approach to scientific epistemology has been critiqued by numerous philosophers, including Donna Haraway, who challenges the semiotic emphasis of what she refers to as ‘technodeterminism’:

*Furthermore, communications science and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – the translation of the world into a problem of coding, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange.*⁷³³

Haraway’s call for a radical anti-instrumentalist scientific epistemology resembles the critique of representationalism and instrumentality explored by Martin Heidegger. Indeed Barbara Bolt links Heidegger’s ethical agency of matter to accounts by Haraway and Bruno Latour of the agency of matter and objects as performative elements, or as Latour terms ‘actants’.⁷³⁴ Haraway’s consideration of materials as ‘actants’ offers a valuable way to reconsider the encounters and exchanges in life-drawing on more productive terms than allowed by the traditional subject/object distinction. This account of materials and objects as actants facilitates an appreciation of the relationship between artists, materials and models as one of collective participation and production. Bolt explores *methexis* as a way of considering the intermingling of materials and representation and the way in which meaning is enmeshed with the materiality and temporality of practices and substances in which signification is embedded. As I argue below, this account of *methexis* offers a profoundly valuable way of negotiating the ontological dilemmas of embodiment and figurative representation that are raised in the practice of life-drawing.

8. Bodies, desires, becomings: Deleuzian accounts of drawing

Redrawing embodiment:

Rather than regarding life-drawing as a mimetic representation of the model’s body, separated from and objectified by the artist subject, much as their tools of drawing, over whom they perform a type of mastery, *methexis* offers a valuable way in which to consider the encounter between bodies and materials as productive of new experiences and new forms of subjectivity. Rather than being described as an event of realism, life-drawing can be critically envisaged as a series of encounters between subjects, objects, materials and meanings: as a space where subjectivity or agency oscillates within and between people and materials, where intentions, meanings, possibilities flicker and pulse, in a continuous collective state of flux and becoming. Rather than resting with the solution of regarding drawings as the residue or shadow of performance or of art, possibly they can be regarded as constative elements of this practice, operating as active elements that inform the spectatorial practices, as well as the labour on the drawings themselves that occur. I discuss the possibilities of regarding life-drawings as critical elements that mediate the temporality of the practice of drawing soon, but wish firstly to discuss the specific implications of linking the practice of drawing to the

⁷³³ D Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p. 164.

⁷³⁴ Bolt, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

presence of a naked body.

As noted earlier, Donna Haraway develops a radical epistemological critique of science that can be useful for addressing the stratifying underpinnings of representationalist aesthetics. However, Haraway's account of the agency of materials is particularly interesting for a critical account of life-drawing because of her focus on a critical materialist feminist account of embodiment. Haraway explores the link between materiality, biology and meaning, developing a similarly erudite account of meaning and materiality as Peirce's complex mapping of semiosis. Her critical challenge to the techno-determinism of sociobiology involves critiquing the reduction of the complex development of life to a question of DNA, seeing it as analogous to the reduction of representation to a mere symbolic index. In articulating the ontology of sexual difference, Haraway explains:

*The 'body' is an agent, not a resource. Difference is theorised biologically as situational, not intrinsic, at every level from gene to foraging pattern, thereby fundamentally changing the biological properties of the body.*⁷³⁵

Haraway's radical conception of the biology of sexual (and other) difference fundamentally shifts the ground on which life-drawing as figurative representation is practised. Rather than the body being regarded as a stable referent – fixed in the realm of nature and external to the practices in which it is represented – Haraway's conception of embodiment as semiotically and materially constituted and contested allows for a fundamental shift in the way that bodily difference is experienced and articulated, rather than reduced and represented.

Haraway's interdisciplinary interventions between sociobiology, scientific epistemology and feminist philosophy resemble other feminist considerations of the ontology of sexual difference by Elizabeth Grosz. Whereas Vicki Kirby explores the materiality of bodily representation, Grosz has explored materialist accounts of embodiment, sexuality and sexual difference, particularly through re-readings of evolutionary biologists such as Henri Bergson and Charles Darwin.⁷³⁶ Drawing extensively on the work of Gilles Deleuze, Grosz has elaborated a metaphysical account of art and embodiment that regards sexuality as a fundamental aspect of creative sexual expression.⁷³⁷ While Grosz describes sexual difference as the ontological basis of being human, and sees creative activity as a specific means whereby creatures express, explore, and perform sexuality, and negotiate sexual difference, she insists on the immense fecundity and variation of this creative-sexual force.⁷³⁸ Sexual difference is not confined to the binarised split between an essential masculine and an essential feminine, but, as in Haraway's quotation above, a constant negotiation and movement between sites where difference is produced, and proliferates as a field of possibilities and becomings.⁷³⁹ As noted by sexologists since Havelock-Ellis, sexual difference is produced at multiple levels in the materiality of bodies, from chromosomes, to hormonal expression, skeletal differences, hair coverage, and a myriad of cross-linked phenotypic expressions, and, as Grosz insists, these differences are imbricated in how they are regarded and represented as gendered or otherwise.⁷⁴⁰ Arguably, naked bodies present an

⁷³⁵ Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁷³⁶ E Grosz, *The nick of time: politics, evolution, and the untimely*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2004, pp. 85-88.

⁷³⁷ E Grosz, *Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 65-66.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

⁷³⁹ E Grosz, *Space, time, and perversion: essays on the politics of bodies*, Routledge, New York, 1995, pp. 196-200.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200. James Elkins proposes a similar argument in his discussion of WH Sheldon's exploration of

infinite array of sexual difference that exceeds binarised categories of male or female, and which is fundamentally deeply troubling, as well as compelling. While it is easy to assume that the visibility of genitalia may render the question of sexual identity as completely redundant, it is also possible that visible genitalia serve to exacerbate and confound the troubling androgyneity of a bare flank, of long or short hair, variations of epilation or thickness of body hair, the gestures of hands, feet, and limbs, the curve of a hip in *contraposto*, soft or hard bellies, chubby or bony knees, or defined muscles along the shoulders, back, or buttocks, or the puzzling ambiguities of the glances, glimmers, smiles and pouts flitting across models' faces. The face of a model does not only present the viewer with an ethical imperative to regard them as a subject, but is one of many bodily surfaces along which sexual identity is coded, performed, iterated, straightened, suppressed and profoundly queered. The immanent presence of a naked body presents us with a plenitude of genders, identities, and possibilities.

The sexual issue reconsidered

The second aspect of Grosz's account of creativity pertinent to a consideration of life-drawing involves the affirmation of desire as productive. In an early essay, entitled 'Desire, bodies, representation', Grosz criticises the tendency in western epistemology to negate the active and immanent presence of desire, in the ways by which we come to know and experience reality, through accounts basing representation on the absence or sublimation of desire, or its separation into an inaccessible realm where it is experienced as a lack.⁷⁴¹ Rather than seeing desire as a separate from the repression or sublimation of the real, Grosz articulates desire as a productive series of practices, intimately linked to the materiality of embodiment, and the phenomenological encounters of beings with the world around them.⁷⁴² The significant aspect of this account of desire and of aesthetics involves the departure from the fixed notion of a knowing subject, separate from the environment that they perceive, and subsequently represent.⁷⁴³ Kant's ideas of the beautiful and the sublime depended on the positioning of a distinct subject that would 'feel' nature, or 'reason' nature, but not be connected to or implicated within it. However, Grosz disavows an articulation of subjectivity as a hermetic condition intrinsic to a distinct category of the human, and explores the contaminating qualities of affects and percepts shared by humans, animals and other entities.⁷⁴⁴ She repeatedly invokes the metaphysics of presence as one that is profoundly fragile and subject to the physical forces in which it is embedded.⁷⁴⁵ She describes practices of art and music as animal activities, linked to atavistic urges to mediate the connection with chaos, through territorialisation of spaces surrounding the body, and the deterritorialisation and movement beyond it.⁷⁴⁶

Describing the libidinous imperative of birdsong and the tracking dance of thorny desert lizards, Grosz is emphatic about articulating creative animal practices as fundamentally

gynandromorphy through charts of 'somatypes', illustrating that the field of morphological differences between human bodies exceed and defy any strict binary classification of gender. See J Elkins, *Pictures of the body: pain and metamorphosis*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, pp. 165-169. For a somewhat dated but pertinent discussion of the limitations of the binarised distinctions between male and female genders, see, H Ellis, *Man and woman: a study of secondary and tertiary sexual characters*, Heinemann, London, 1934, pp. 416-441.

⁷⁴¹ E Grosz, 'Desires, bodies, representation', *Artlink*, Vol. 8, no., 1, 1988, p. 35.

⁷⁴² Grosz, *Space, time, and perversion*, pp. 195-196.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁷⁴⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, territory, art*, p. 35.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

sexual, and linked to desire for a movement beyond one's own body into a connection with and transformation into something else.⁷⁴⁷ Sexuality and creativity are described as profoundly excessive, proliferative and libidinous, as urges that are based in movements towards the deterritorialisation of individuality and space. Like Deleuze, she links the tendencies towards deterritorialisation and an entropic movement, to counter-tendencies towards territorialisation, towards containment, regulation and stillness.⁷⁴⁸ The twin movements towards entropy and away from it are not only animal, but reflect theories of molecular chemistry, where lipid bilayers immersed in water curl around to form self-contained bubbles, but will also move away from each other and bind with emulsifying protein compounds. To describe subjectivity as molecular evokes an ontology of flux, rather than fixing it into an essential category of the subject.

The desert dance of the thorny lizard may seem worlds apart from the contained and reified sphere of life-drawing classes, with the fixed positions of easel bound artists, dutifully following with their eyes and pencil, the posing routine of a naked model on a podium. However, it is possible to consider life-drawing as critically creative praxis, if the taboo aspects of sexual desire, objectification, or desubjectification and the sheer mess of manipulating materials are critically considered as constitutive elements of this praxis. Indeed Barbara Bolt links Grosz's account of desire to the idea of methexis. Quoting Grosz's account of desire as actualisation, as a force, 'aiming at nothing above its own proliferation or self-expansion', Bolt suggests:

Methexis, it could be argued, digs 'desire' out of the hole of lack and locates it in the folds of the ground, along with colour and all sorts of mortal rubbish'.⁷⁴⁹

To 'dig desire out of the hole of lack' in the life-room involves a fundamental challenge to the idea of a fixed artist subject, and their privileged ontology over the artists' model, and the materials used in life-drawing. In Chapter Four I explored the phenomenology of desubjectification, describing life-drawing as a disturbing series of shifts between subjectification and objectification within and also between models and artists. Deterritorialising movements between models and artists occur equally between the artist and the materials; charcoal is ground between paper and skin, becoming a contaminating extension of the fingers of the artists onto the drapes and feet of the models. The physical properties of fluid media intensify this process; the darting qualities of vision are echoed in the flights of ink, or dragged down into the capillary action of slow staining dribbles. Life-drawing can only be seen critically as an extension of desire, of sexuality, of the strange and troubling encounter between bodies iterating behaviours of sexual availability (nudity) and sexual desire (looking). To acknowledge sexual desire does not imply that sexuality in life-drawing should be reduced to the banal misogyny of heterosexist fantasies between artists and models. Arguably, the function of such accounts is to contain the infinity of looks, desires, fantasies and connections pulsing and flickering between the bodies of participants to a territorialising account of sexuality as molar masculinity, following a single cyclopean trajectory of observation, desire and ejaculation. By acknowledging that all sexual desire is complex, reversible, shuddering, perverse and profoundly polymorphous, then it can be critically articulated as a deterritorialising imperative of creative endeavour and exchange.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 94-96. Grosz describes the link between the Arnkerrth (mountain devil) and the paintings of Kathleen Petyarrie. The performative link between animality, sensation, and a way of singing or mapping the landscape through a creative practice resembles the account of methexis as explored by Paul Carter and Barbara Bolt.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁴⁹ Bolt, op. cit., note 8, p.199.

9. Subjective shifts: drawing, mapping, motility

Marking time: drawing, tracing, mapping.

The value of Deleuzian philosophy to developing a critical account of life-drawing and aesthetics is not only restricted to the challenges to subjectivity, or the reconfiguring of desire, embodiment and sexuality as a field of immanent and productive encounters. Deleuze explored critical aesthetics more directly, and in his work with Guattari, explored an epistemological model based around drawing, as a form of mapping, or a mark-making linked to the discovery of the world.⁷⁵⁰ As noted by Barbara Bolt, Deleuze and Guattari's account of mapping resembles Heidegger's description of *dasein*, or the worlding of the world through things.⁷⁵¹ Drawing is no longer a means of representing the world, or tracing an encounter with it, but a means of actively discovering the world through an encounter with materials, objects and surfaces, through a movement in the world, based on the immersion within the materiality of our contact with things. In this contact, things lose their status as namable entities, as discrete objects, and become surfaces and extensions of our own bodies that enable and participate in our bodily experience of the world. This resembles the account of mapping in the Deleuze and Guattari's introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*:

*The map is open, connectable in all its dimensions, and capable of being dismantled; it is reversible and susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to montages of every kind, taken in hand by an individual, a group, or a social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entrances.*⁷⁵²

Deleuze and Guattari challenge the notion of art as an artifact of the world, and invite a radical examination of the differences between drawing as tracing and drawing as mapping. Where they regard a trace as the product of a one-way mimetic response to a performance or an image, they promote mapping as a dynamic process, responsive to and constative of the practices with which it is associated:

*What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields....*⁷⁵³

The latter remark, about how mapping can foster connections between fields, is similar to a comment made by Iain Biggs. From his discussion of 'fit for purpose' drawing, which he described as 'prose drawing', Biggs discussed what he called 'poetic drawing':

*Drawing as a poetics, which is a whole different ball game, which has to do with this notion of magic and transformation. And if it has a social function, it is to do with mediating our conscious and unconscious worlds to each other, basically.*⁷⁵⁴

It is not entirely clear whether Biggs would align his description of the poetics of drawing

⁷⁵⁰ E Grosz, *Volatile bodies: toward a corporeal feminism*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 121.

⁷⁵¹ Bolt., op. cit., p. 71.

⁷⁵² G Deleuze & F Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism & schizophrenia*, B Massumi (trans.), Continuum, London, 2002, p. 12.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

with the account of mapping developed by Deleuze and Guattari. Like his evocative comment quoted earlier - about drawing as 'a dance of marks in response to the phenomena of the world around me' - it is unclear whether this response is performing a repetition or tracing the experience of phenomena that has already passed, or if the dance of marks performs a type of transformation or conjuring of the world that is, and a world to come. It is the latter interpretation that would align Biggs's account with a Deleuzian aesthetics, which is explicitly oriented towards the future.

Aside from challenging a fixed notion of subjectivity, or of any fixed ontology, the aesthetic theories of Elizabeth Grosz and other Deleuzian theorists explore the temporal and spatial metaphors surrounding creativity and representation. Challenging the Kantian affiliations of an account of life-drawing as an event of realism involves a reconfiguring of the temporality of Wallis's metaphor of aesthetics as a framed encounter with, or representation of the real. Rather than describe the work of art as an a-temporal frame around reality or its representation, Deleuze and Guattari describe the plane of composition. This is a multi-dimensional view of art, whereby the plane of composition operates as a metaphorical ground upon which assemblages, exchanges and flows can proliferate as three and four dimensional becomings. Elizabeth Grosz, in her exegesis of Deleuze, describes the plane of composition as follows:

*The plane of composition is the field, the plane, of all artworks, all genre, all types of art, as the totality of all the various forms of artistic production in no particular order or organisation, that which is indirectly addressed and transformed through each work of art.*⁷⁵⁵

Creativity becomes a spatial flight upwards, the product of contingent events between sensations, memories and materials. Rather than art operating as a two dimensional frame containing the separation, and representation of a chaotic field of possibilities into an event that has already passed, the plane of composition is directed towards the future. To perceive art making as a dynamic practice involves a flexible and receptive relationship to the material exchanges in which it is embedded. It also involves a re-conception of the temporal aspects in art and art making, towards acknowledgement that practice involves continual imaginative shifts away from the present, towards memory, and towards the future. Deleuze and Guattari do not deny history, as such, but they do reject genealogical structures whereby historical accounts are deemed to determine the present or the future.⁷⁵⁶ They explore history as immanent, as an element of the present, that is reiterated, repeated and remembered.⁷⁵⁷ It is in the performativity of this reiteration, and repetition, that history forms part of the present, and it is in this movement of this performativity, that memory becomes, not a fixed immutable, but a dynamic aspect of the present. Creativity is the aspect of the performativity of memory; it is the reiteration and recitation, that looks towards the future. Rather than life-drawing being a temporally fixed event of realism, it can be regarded as a collection or assemblage of events, sensations and reiterations.

In Barbara Bolt's exegesis of Deleuze she describes how these movements of repetition and

⁷⁵⁵ E Grosz, *Sensation, the earth, a people, art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p. 70.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 23.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

reiteration have a double nature, operating to stratify performance into history, or release it into creativity:

*In Deleuze's conception, reiteration and repetition can be viewed both as regulatory movements towards molarisation and as a destratifying movement that inaugurates movement and transformation. In this account, here is necessarily and simultaneously, the operation of the double articulation between stratification and destratification. The dynamic relation between bodies-languages inaugurates this double movement.*⁷⁵⁸

In describing how the double movement of performance and time relates to practice, Bolt describes the complex mix of traces and mappings in drawing as analogous to improvisation in dance:

*A dance improvisation begins by referring back, to other dances, to other steps and movements. In the movement back, in the recall, the dancers move forward and the dance breaks open and divides and multiplies. It becomes a production, both a presences and a representation.*⁷⁵⁹

Bolt explicitly links her description of dance improvisation with a critique of representation as a fixed event and the exploration of representation as a performative praxis. After examining Heidegger's critique of representation, Bolt explores Jacques Derrida's re-reading of representation as a temporally dynamic process. In explaining Derrida's account of representation as a *renvois*, or multiple movements of 'sending' meaning back and forth, she aligns the *renvois* with the performativity of dance improvisation:

*The mutability and multiplicity of renvois (so many different traces referring back to other traces) is analogous to improvisation in dance.*⁷⁶⁰

Bolt extends this analogy to the practice of drawing:

*Drawing could be similarly described. One begins by referring back; to the pedagogy of one's training, to the motif or the imagination or whatever is. However in the movement back and forward, from looking up and down and looking back, recalling and doing there emerges a multiplicity where many traces or marks refer back to other traces and the traces of others. In the process of doing we find we are no longer in the grip of representation.*⁷⁶¹

It is interesting that this description of creative praxis uses analogies with dance improvisation and with drawing, as to a certain extent life-drawing involves aspects of both. While I have claimed that posing is not the same as the performativity of dance, the continuous rhythm of quick poses, following in rapid succession, does resemble types of movement work studied by dancers and actors.⁷⁶² Models' improvisation of poses are often based on what they imagine

⁷⁵⁸ Bolt, op. cit., p. 156.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² In the initial research for this thesis, I attempted to examine the work of artists' models in relation to training in 'mime', and in particular, the exercises and theories developed by Etienne Decroux. However, I found that this line of research became unfeasible because modelling does not constitute itself as a distinct practice. Aside from instructions to adopt standing, seated or reclining poses, and variations on *contrapposto*, artists' models do not have a recognised repertoire of poses, and are generally encouraged to improvise poses

as an appropriate art pose or from remembering, and attempting to copy images of the nude. The regulation of life-drawing as serious art or as smut is often mediated through the types of poses adopted by models, in imitation of particular genres of figurative images, such as nineteenth-century painting, or classical sculpture, or post-war soft-porn photography.⁷⁶³ The recitations and reiterations involved in life-drawing are multiple, involving models imitating images of the nude, which artists then try to represent on the page in front of them. Rather than seeing this as a one-way movement of representation as *vorstellung*, where an idea of the nude is set out before models and artists to simply represent, posing and drawing may also be seen as a series of recitations of the art nude, that are generally incomplete, incompetent and flawed. The act of posing does not involve the performance of a recognised repertoire of poses, but involves attempted recitations of fragments of images, mediated by the model's body, memory and imagination. Posing involves multiple shifts and flights of fancy, of pretenses and movements towards and away from fixed ideas of what a pose should and should not be. Arguably, artists do not only represent or copy these poses, but also make gestures towards representation, and then move away, responding to and regulating the poses through a series of micro-gestures and movements. To envisage life-drawing as a dynamic multiplicity of traces and marks, recitations and reiterations requires a substantial shift in the values of subjectivity, authorship and agency among and between participants, and a deeper exploration of life-drawing as a collectively constative activity of bodily encounter and becoming. As part of her doctoral research, Karen Wallis worked with interviewed British figurative artist, Eric Fischl, who also acted as an advisor on the practical component of her research. Wallis quoted the following remarks from Fischl in her thesis:

*The reality is that we're always in a state of becoming, and it's always an awkward state. We're always a little behind how we are physically in the world – or we're not quite ready to meet the moment to come. I love that. To me there's such truth there, that that's really where one should look for inspiration, because it's irrefutable. There's almost no moments when we come together – that outside and inside – and it sort of reflects our spiritual quest.*⁷⁶⁴

Although Fischl's comment is filled with allusions to gaps between reality and cognition, and between the inside and outside of human consciousness, it provides a very evocative account of creative representation. His emphasis on 'becoming', evokes creativity as a practice of movement that seeks to close gaps, make connections and new possibilities. His reference to 'the awkward state' of becoming is a reminder that creative becoming and critical negotiation is an uncomfortable, as well as discomfiting experience.

Everyday Becomings: critically negotiating fields of practice

The above sections have explored a metaphysical account of life-drawing, examining the implications of considering it as a radically deconstituting encounter between materials and sensations, or as Deleuze would say, affects and percepts. However, relating a critically charged contemporary aesthetic account of life-drawing to the myriad of prosaic settings where it is practised is possibly quite tendentious. It is unclear whether life-drawing can be described as 'art', or what elements of its practice would demarcate its status as legitimate art

according to their own imagination of what a pose 'should' look like.

⁷⁶³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore how modelling is constituted as performance, or a performative agency. For a discussion of how models use robes and poses to mediate cultural capital of various settings, see: G Roe, 'The Body Of Art And The Mantle Of Authority' in A Brydon & S Niessen (eds.), *Consuming Fashion: Adorning The Transnational Body* Berg, Oxford, 1998, pp. 92-94.

⁷⁶⁴ Eric Fischl, interview with with Karen Wallis, in Wallis, op. cit., p.173.

practice or otherwise. Some of these tensions between the intentions of community-based and university based life-drawing are described by Bill Prosser :

I mean I think one of the advantages of this, of working in a life-room within a university, or in an art school, is that there is at least the potential to contextualise and to question. I think that one of the difficulties within the sorts of classes that I mentioned, is that that is actually impossible. And it's as if they're in this loop, which we all are I suppose. But it's a particular kind of loop in which they support each other. So it's actually very very difficult to get out of. Very, very difficult. And there isn't any reason why they should. They're protected and if they remain there, then why not?

Prosser's discussion of his experience within amateur life-drawing classes provides an engaging and sympathetic approach to the negotiation across differing art worlds:

I've been in this situation, as you have, on occasions where what I came to realise was, that what they wanted from being in this environment, was so different from anything that I might have thought would be valuable for me, that I became asphyxiated; I just couldn't breathe any longer.⁷⁶⁵

Prosser continued:

And I had to stop. But that's not meant to be a criticism. It's just an acknowledgement that people do this for different reasons, in the same way that people make music for different reasons, or you know, whatever.⁷⁶⁶

The pluralism in Prosser's account doesn't define the drawings themselves as being fit for purpose, but articulates the community-based life-class as a nexus of differing purposes:

But you see I think that what... maybe to speak on behalf of the people who asphyxiated me, for them it might be, if they're living in a... suppose their domestic environment is complicated. Or suppose their domestic environment leaves them no time. You know, they've got three kids, and this is the only two hours of the week that they can get. Now, probably, or conceivably, for them to go and make these drawings for two hours, is the best chance they get, to make what they want to make. And what they want to make might seem completely uninteresting to many others. For them, it is actually a cathartic process.⁷⁶⁷

More importantly, Prosser links this process of catharsis to the way in which the techniques of drawing are practiced and viewed among participants within the life-room:

And the fact that they can make these drawings, and the other people in the room can say 'oh, I really like that, the way you've smudged the...' whatever it might be, I mean that can be a real positive for them. And for them it is a safe space. It is place where they can be what they want to be, just for those

⁷⁶⁵ Sarah Blair & Bill Prosser, interview with author, see Appendix 1.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

*two hours in a week. And I think that's a hell of a lot really.*⁷⁶⁸

Recounting his experiences teaching life-drawing to a community pottery class, Prosser described the sociality of the setting as therapeutic:

*You know it was to speak to their friends, and it was great really. It wasn't pushing the boundaries at all, and I don't think it was self-questioning, but it was therapeutic I think. I think that's what I'm saying. There's a role for these things as therapy, in its broader sense. It's a healing thing.*⁷⁶⁹

Sarah Blair added a comment to this account, which indicated the direction of the therapeutic practices of the life-class, that being towards the future:

Blair: It's also not just about taking some time out, but also possibly a focus for some sort of burgeoning ambition of some description.

Prosser: It can be as well, it can be.

Blair: It's a sort of a promise that, in years to come...

Blair's evocation of the practice of the life-class as *a sort of a promise* towards a future, and towards the realisation of *a burgeoning ambition of some description*, aligns this view of the life-class with a Deleuzian account of creative practice as *a becoming*, and of summoning a people to come, or an as yet unspecified event or possibility to emerge. This lends weight to an argument for the life-class as a conscious and deliberate exercise in indeterminacy, as the activation of a plane of composition in order to summon a future to come, whether it is informed by the critical context of university art education, or by the experiential exigencies of a recreational class. Critically negotiating how this shared ethology could operate across the varying field of life-classes is not so straightforward however. Blair's comment above was interrupted by Prosser's observation below, where he tried to critically negotiate his own alienation from the *therapeutic* setting;

But what's interesting is that... it depends upon the perspective. It varies so much. What, to me, was a completely deadening complacency, for them, was a sanctuary. And it's very easy to forget that not everybody has been as lucky as I have, in being able to spend amounts of time doing various types of things that interest me. And other people have to grab what they can, and make the most of that. And I think that one of the activities that allows that to happen, for whatever reason, is life-drawing. And I think that that's a good thing, rather than a bad one.

While it is arguable that the phrase *for them, it was a sanctuary*, also serves to maintain a distinction between the professional needs of Prosser, the artist researcher, and the recreational or therapeutic needs of the life-drawing amateurs, his emphasis on the social and economic conditions that enable an intensity of creative experience and endeavour allows for a more grounded articulation of his pluralism. It also emphasises the experience of life-drawing as a collectively constituted practice, involving numerous unspoken expectations and desires, the collective adherence to a form of behavioural protocol, the negotiation of a sense of belonging, and a reflexive relationship to the world outside of the life-room. I'm interested in these awkwardness of life-drawing, and its associations with a range of cultural practices

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ *ibid.*

contiguous with broader social regimes of spectatorship, and as a site where the status of art, and or artists is actively, and often ineptly contested. I am intrigued at how the discordances of the implied social, moral, aesthetic and cultural values of a variety of life-drawing classes can be seen as sites for critical contestation and undoing of the tacit assumptions that fix certain types of images, practices, media into immobilising ideas of cultural agency.

The challenge of failure

In relation to life-drawing, the constant threat of failure, and the innumerable experiences of failure in the repeated attempts to *capture a pose*, is cited by numerous practitioners as one of the strongest appeals that life-drawing has, across almost all of its divergent settings. National Art School director, Bernard Ollis, ended our interview with the following comment:

I think drawing is still a vital part, a central part, to helping you, as a creative being to extrapolate and work out how the world is working. The model is the ultimate challenge.

Ollis's claim that 'the model is the ultimate challenge' is reinforced by Peter Steinhart, who quoted 'Cupertino housewife' Robin Schauffer as saying:

*"We are less engaged in producing than we are in practicing.... We do it not because we're good at it, but because there is some prospect that if we keep doing it, eventually we may be good."*⁷⁷⁰

The sentiments of Schauffer, describing the appeal of drawing as a practice, are reinforced in the converse sense, in the comment from Guy Warren:

And sometimes, being able to draw the figure very well is a damn nuisance. It really is, and I'd much rather not be able to draw, and then there are other times when it becomes more useful.

Despite coming from a variety of practitioners, all of the comments above convey an impression that the appeal of life-drawing, for many practitioners, lies in the possibility, if not the actual experience of failure. The possibility of failure, of awkwardness, or incompetence as productive, is also raised by Deleuze and Guattari in their description of drawing as mapping:

*A map is a matter of performance, whereas the tracing always refers to an alleged 'competence'.*⁷⁷¹

In contrast to Carolee Schneemann's association between performance, rehearsal, perfectibility and competence, Deleuze and Guattari evoke performance as a fallible performativity, and a discovery of the world, and connections with it, rather than a competent tracing of paths that are familiar or well known. If the tacit presence or threat of failure can be acknowledged as an important aspect of the experiential appeal of life-drawing, then this may contribute to a richer understanding of how life-drawing can operate as a critical practice contiguous with other aspects of subject formation in art education. Rather than being regarded as a measurable outcome-based exercise, life-drawing could be conceived as part of the practice of failure, an exercise where the equivocating tension between observation and representation is actually interrogated, and the question of 'what is the point?' is articulated in process of drawing itself. By opening up the tacit determinants of life-drawing, of observation, of mark-making and 'responsive' drawing, then drawing itself could be explored as an indeterminate or partly determinate experience.

Beyond the life-room, it has been argued that anti-determinism is one of the foundations of all

⁷⁷⁰ P Steinhart, *The undressed art: why we draw*, Alfred A. Knopf & Random House, New York, 2004, p. 10.

⁷⁷¹ G Deleuze & F Guattari, 'Rhizome', *On the line*, J. Johnson (trans.), New York, Semiotext[e], 1983, p. 26.

creative practice; and this contributes to the appeal of art and a form of personal recreation. In *Material Thinking*, Paul Carter describes the equivocating tension between failure and success as ‘the primary mechanism of discursive creativity’.⁷⁷² If the very status of drawing as a creative activity is dependent on the equivocal nature of drawings to operate as signs, to represent their subject, to represent anything, then this goes against any notion of drawings being *fit for purpose*. The scintillating quality of this equivocation, shimmering between success and failure, meaning and unintelligibility, and the affective nets of seduction, disgust, curiosity and ennui, defies any outcome-based criteria.

To admit the idiosyncrasy of art involves an admission of its fallibility, and the fallibility of *the artist* as having control or mastery over such an event. Within this, the subject position of *artist* is impossible to sustain as a fixed entity separate from other participants in any encounter. This is not to claim that *the artist* is redundant or ‘dead’, however, and nor is it to reduce art to a condition of absolute relativism. If art can be articulated as an assemblage between affects and percepts, between beings and becomings, and primarily as a collection of practices that intensify the experiences of subjects in the world, then *the artist* can still be regarded as someone who is able to place themselves in a position of experiencing art at a more frequent and more intense level than others. This allows for a more compassionate engagement with the differing experiences of cultural practices associated with art, which still allows for a transparent analysis of the material and social conditions under which such practices occur. More importantly, it implies that this subject position, as an artist, is not dependent on the denial of artistic subjectivity among the other participants in art making, but is an expression of mobility, which is enabled or constrained by a variety of social and material conditions, as well as possibilities.

Deleuze’s emphasis on art as an intensification of experience rather than a reification of certain experiences or subjectivities, allows a more flexible critical movement between elitism and relativism. It allows for a critical articulation of structures and representations that limit exchange and movement, and deny imaginative leaps and deterritorialisations, as well as a celebration of those movements, intensities and becomings that do occur. Art is not defined by its differentiation from non-art, but is explored as an intensity, which allows the summoning of possibilities, sensations that have not yet existed.

By deterritorialising art away from the subjectivity of the artist, the possibilities for imaginative associations, exchanges and encounters are able to move far more freely between the participants within a life-room. *Art* is no longer confined to an object or an image or a representation of something that has passed, but becomes a spatial or temporal site for encounters yet to come. The life-room becomes a gathering site for an infinite possibility of looks, movements and sensations between participants and materials. If life-drawings could be regarded as *art* then it would be in a space beyond the life-room where they act as a site for viewers to gather and encounter the marks on a page, thus generating another series of exchanges and becomings. Within the various settings where models pose, and spectators draw, life-drawings are akin to the grains of charcoal dust, rubbings of paper, or the multitude of sighs and drops of sweat moving through the bodies of participants: molecular moments in an infinity of becomings.

⁷⁷² P Carter, *Material thinking*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004, p. 10.

CONCLUSION: Molecular Moments

Painters are the pathfinders to the “there is” because they give their bodies to the world. For the painter there is no Cartesian distinction between subjective data gathering and objective data analysis.⁷⁷³

Indeed, we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body -- not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.⁷⁷⁴

I start this conclusion with the two quotations above in order to emphasise the types of connections, confluences and tensions that have resulted from the interdisciplinary approach that I have adopted. The first quotation comes from anthropologist Paul Stoller, who cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussion of modernist painting as a model for how ethnography could be conducted as an embodied, reflexive epistemology, rather than a distancing intellectual legitimisation of European colonialism. Stoller uses the first sentence of the second quotation, which comes from Merleau Ponty's own discussion of modernist painting, which he cites as a model not only for being in the world, but for understanding it.

As an ethnographic exploration of life-drawing, this thesis could be seen to be encapsulated by the two quotations above. My research has been informed by my own embodied experiences of life-drawing, as both model and artist, and I have used bodily knowledges of models and artists to examine and articulate how life-drawing is constituted as a discourse and practice, and what this entails for its participants. However, the confluence of ethnography and painting with perception and epistemology is not as seamless as it appears, nor as embodied as the above quotations would suggest. In Chapter Five I mentioned my reservations about the humanist account of the subject, upon which Merleau-Ponty's account is based, and in Chapter Four I explored critiques of the limitations of the modernist emphasis on observation, and examined the paradoxes within modernist approaches to figurative art, particularly in relation to the bodily experiences of participants. So I cite Stoller's account of painting and ethnography with a certain amount of caution, and unease, feeling mindful of

⁷⁷³ P Stoller, *The taste of ethnographic things: the senses in anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 38.

⁷⁷⁴ M Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and mind' in M Merleau-Ponty & JM Edie (ed.) *The Primacy of Perception: and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history, and politics*, C Dallery (trans.), Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1964, p. 162.

how a bodily immersion in the world is fundamentally destabilising of any attempts to extrapolate any data or conclusions from it. It is this radical challenge to critical epistemologies that I would hope would be the best outcome of my attempt to explore the various facets of life-drawing and its paradoxical and complex relationships with the bodies and aspirations of participants.

In the Prologue to this thesis I described the central inquiry of my research as exploring what happens when life-drawing classes are observed by those assumed to be blind, and described by those who are represented as silent. Throughout this thesis I have not only explored hidden narratives of life-drawing participants, but assembled a range of disciplinary approaches to studying art history, figurative representation, vision, phenomenology, subjectivity, and drawing in order to articulate many of the blind-spots in existing accounts of life-drawing, and to demonstrate the necessity of rigorous interdisciplinary analysis in order to articulate the complexity of any art practice. As stated in the Prologue, this thesis explored three major lines of inquiry: a comprehensive ethnographic study of discourses and experiences of participants in life-drawing classes in Australia and internationally; a social history of life-drawing and modernist art education in Sydney; and an interdisciplinary consideration of life-drawing as a critical aesthetic praxis. Despite basing my inquiry on a lacuna about critical investigations of contemporary life-drawing, I have found the amount of interview material on life-drawing, on the practices, discourses and experiences of posing, observing, mark-making and representing naked artists' models to be overwhelming. This thesis has had to exclude a great deal of interview material in order to sustain the interdisciplinary inquiry at the heart of my research; however, in doing so, I hope that the findings of this thesis indicate the considerable scope for future research in this area.

The five chapters of this thesis explore a myriad of questions and include numerous findings and observations concerning discourses and practices of life-drawing, and its relationship to popular culture and contemporary art education. Many arguments continue as threads through a number of chapters, while other findings appear to emerge as if by chance on the edge of the major discussions within particular chapters. In order to clarify the most significant finding of this thesis, I have arranged my discussion into six key areas of inquiry identified in the Introduction. In the remainder of this conclusion I examine how each area has been addressed throughout each chapter of the thesis. The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this thesis has been extremely valuable in facilitating connections between differing

discourses of art, and contextualising many claims about life-drawing made by practitioners in existing accounts.

10.1. What is 'drawing' and what is 'life-drawing'? What elements of practice are intrinsic to it?

In the prologue to this thesis I made a number of general notes concerning the terminology that I use in describing the object of my inquiry. In noting the difference between life-drawing and life-classes, I gave a general description of *life-drawing* to describe the practices of making responsive sketches or illustrations (generally on paper) to the 'live' presence of a naked model, and then noted the differing terminology given to life-drawing in North America and France. Admittedly this definition is somewhat contingent on there being a clear consensus on what drawing is, what the role of the naked artists' model is, and what it is that they are actually doing in posing for drawings. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that there is not really any agreement on any of these conditions, and the definition of life-drawing is a matter of a type of in-situ consensus generated through habits of practice. Although there have been a myriad of experiments with life-drawing, including the involvement of photography and video (as well as more traditional materials of the life-class such as paint and clay), the use of performers (and performative activities such as music, dance, acrobatics, singing, poetry recital and burlesque strip-tease) and animals as models, the use of clothed models, and direct physical contact between models and artists, generally, life-drawing is based upon the presence of a live model who removes their clothes in order to adopt a series of still poses that are drawn by spectating artists.

In Chapter One I discussed the relationships between life-drawing and drawing. I highlighted the paradoxes within the metaphorical associations of life-drawing as timeless, fashionable/unfashionable, as natural or innate, and as an artificial product of reified academic training. I particularised accounts of drawing as products of a particular cultural history of Western Europe, suggesting that the parameters distinguishing drawing from, and reifying it above, other visual, cultural and linguistic activities are somewhat arbitrary. Having argued that the distinction between drawing, writing, painting, and even dance are not particularly clear, I problematised a general confusion between metaphorical, material and practice-based accounts of drawing in relation to how it is understood in its variety of settings. Given the proliferation of drawing research among university art schools in the United Kingdom, I suggested that 'drawing' functions as a broad metaphorical term for practice-based research in

the visual arts, and is able to include a range of mark-making, responsive and time-based practices in a broad range of media. However, I suggested that the expanded field of drawing as a contemporary art obscures the lack of discussion or critical appreciation of particular practices of drawing, such as life-drawing. I claimed that the lack of contemporary critical accounts of life-drawing has led to its decline in university art schools, and discussed how a metaphorical account of life-drawing has been mobilised in rear-garde accounts attacking contemporary art and contemporary art education. The aim of this discursive emphasis did not produce a clear definition of what life-drawing actually is, but to explore the myriad of connotations and associations that life-drawing has.

In Chapter Two I developed an account of life-drawing through a social history of drawing instruction and art education in Sydney. In this account, I discussed how life-drawing has proliferated in a range of formal and informal settings and been linked to the education of artists as well as the training of artisans, designers and commercial illustrators/designers, emphasising that life-drawing has largely been constituted as a social practice, allowing artists and arts-workers to gather and network in a collective situation of working practice.

In Chapter Three I examined the implications of nudity, particularly in relation to gender, sex and sexuality, and how these issues are described by a range of artists, art educators and models. In describing recreational life-drawing, I claimed that the naked, semi-naked or potentially naked model allowed a mobilisation of a number of aspects of sex-entertainment as well as art, allowing the iteration and performance of a range of aspirations and distinctions, particularly in relation to the cultural capital of an artist or art institution, their professionalism, bohemianism or cosmopolitanism. In discussing feminist interventions into the life-class and representations of the nude, I problematised the lack of specificity of critical accounts, where life-drawing is not differentiated from figurative art or figurative representation. While presenting a number of contradictory accounts of the role of sexuality in life-drawing, I concluded this chapter with a brief discussion of desire, proposing that life-drawing is a practice based on a complex and controlled meeting of a range of desires and aspirations between all participants. Given the variety of settings in which life-drawing is practised, and its proliferation in experimental, subcultural and recreational settings that seek to actively mobilise and explore the sexual connotations of life-drawing, it is arguable that the presence or possibility of sexualised display or feeling could be defined as one of the criteria for what life-drawing is. This is not to claim that all life-drawing is or should be sexual, but

that the presence of a naked model operates to suggest and contain the possibility of sexual desire or activity, which in more overt sex-entertainment settings (or in sexualised or recreational life-drawing classes) is signalled by the use of erotic lingerie or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, management of the possibility or threat of sexuality in life-drawing is a crucial element of how artists and institutions perform the particular social and cultural aspirations that they wish to convey. Thus, professional art schools tend to dissimulate the sexual connotations of life-drawing, whereas other venues, often align the performance of particular forms of sexualised behaviour with the iteration of particular forms of cultural capital.

In Chapter Four I examined particular practices of life-drawing, and a number of techniques of observational mark-making that became popularised in modernist art education during the twentieth century. I explored two facets of modernist life-drawing: one involving a rigorously controlled response to observation, and the second involving an empathic response to the bodily presence of the model. I noted that modernist life-drawing is distinguished by an emphasis on responsive mark-making to the immediate 'live' presence of the naked model (rather than the painstakingly refined figurative images of nineteenth-century academic studies), and I would claim that this continues to be one of the shared conditions that constitutes life-drawing as a practice. Through the close scrutiny of a number of approaches to life-drawing, I demonstrated that drawing is not natural, nor is the observation aligned with 'natural' or 'objective' drawing practices, but involves the acquisitions of particular techniques of selection and exclusion of visual and bodily information.

In Chapter Five, I explore aesthetic analyses of two aspects of life-drawing, examining life-drawings as well as life-drawing as a practice. I commenced with a brief overview of life-drawing images and videos posted on the world wide web, in order to demonstrate my claim, that life-drawing has proliferated to such an extent that any systemic appraisal of life-drawings as images is defied by the lack of common cultural or critical criteria across the myriad of social fields where life-drawing is practiced. I noted the ambiguity between figurative drawing, life-drawing, illustration and animation, and the increasing use of digital images of naked bodies and photographs of naked models in figure-drawing practice. I also argued that any analysis of life-drawings was confounded by a confusion with figurative images in visual culture, and also, more pertinently, by the common practice whereby most life-drawings are discarded, or almost never exhibited. I then moved to exploring a critical

aesthetic account of life-drawing as a particular practice, examining comparisons with performance and performativity, and exploring issues such as irony, intentionality and subjectivity. Rather than seeing life-drawing as an inter-subjective encounter, I cited Heidegger's account of tools to posit that life-drawing offers a particular situation where humans/objects/materials can meet and mingle as a collection of assemblages. I argued that conceptions of life-drawing need to be linked to the event of its practice, where the artists, the model, the materials and the drawing all participate in an act of collaborative becoming.

11.2. What is the status of life-drawing in relation to contemporary art education and popular culture?

The perceived and actual status of life-drawing was the major topic of Chapter One. As I noted in my introduction, there is not a lot of discussion of life-drawing in contemporary art literature; however, life-drawing significant aspect of popular press coverage of the arts, where it contains a number of contradictory aspirations and associations.⁷⁷⁵ I undertook a discourse analysis of a range of press accounts, examining the values associated with life-drawing, as both fashionable/unfashionable and timeless, as well as other values such as being natural, innate, and universal. I also undertook a closer analysis of the social values attached to life-drawing and life-drawing participants as particular types of artists or cultural practitioners, and discussed these in relation to the contested status of art and legitimate artists. I noted that rear-garde accounts of life-drawing often served to conceal broader issues of declining fiscal support for publicly funded art education, or of the changing cultural capital of particular institutions or practitioners. I compared press accounts with interview material from a range of art educators in Australia and the UK, in order to verify or clarify press claims of the decline or resurgence of life-drawing. I concluded that life-drawing continued to be widely practised in Australian institutions, but that in the UK, life-drawing classes had recently being cut from a number of university art schools. Noting the absence of published research on life-drawing as contemporary art, I suggested that the lack of contemporary critical discussion or research literature on life-drawing was an important factor in the ability or otherwise of university art schools to sustain life-drawing as part of teaching.

⁷⁷⁵ References to life-drawing were made two articles in the Sydney press in the last week of writing this thesis. The first mobilised familiar assumptions about life-drawings as being anachronistic and boring. See T Clement, 'No nudes is good news', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May 2009, viewed 5 May 2009, <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/04/30/1240982331726.html>>. The second was a journalists' eye-witness account of participating in the life-drawing class/dinner event at a commercial gallery. See: L Schwartzkoff, 'Perfectly at easel', *Sydney Morning Herald* 'Metro' section, May 8-14, 2009, p. 22.

In an attempt to address the question of whether life-drawing has changed in the past fifty years, Chapter Two traced the historical development of life-drawing in Sydney and its link to arts institutions, to see if how, and when, it had declined, and what its current status might be. I noted that within Sydney, since the 1880s, life-drawing classes have always been offered in a range of settings, for a variety of practitioners, from designers and illustrators to a range of professional and amateur artists of both genders. Generally, and especially since World War Two, the range and number of life-drawing classes has expanded considerably, facilitated by an expanded TAFE, community education and community arts sector, and by the development of a university art education sector. As noted in Chapter Two, popular lore claims that life-drawing ‘died out’ in Australian art schools in the 1970s, and I focussed on the changes in local art education, including a number of oral histories of teachers and models from the 1970s.⁷⁷⁶ In Sydney, the most significant change to post-War art education involved the establishment of a new sector of art education in the Colleges of Advanced Education, which were eventually amalgamated with Universities. CAE art education was often aligned with teacher training and emphasised theoretical and critical approaches rather than the studio emphasis of TAFE art schools. My sources suggest that life-drawing did not die out, but it did not occupy as central a role in the new art colleges as it had in the former schools. Furthermore, art practice and art education generally expanded and diversified into a number of differing sectors, which emphasised differing forms of media and subject matter. There was a considerable shift in the forms of institutional and state patronage offered to artists, and particularly the discourses surrounding particular practices and institutions. I concluded this chapter with a discussion of how life-drawing has recently become associated with a form of ‘skill-based’ education, and incorporated into art and design education as a generic form of observational ‘training’ with the problematic and compelling aspects of the naked artists’ model glossed over.

In Chapter Three, I explored the popularity of life-drawing as a social theatre in which exhibitionism and voyeurism can be explored in a number of settings that are controlled and relatively safe for all participants. I noted that life-drawing has proliferated in recent years in a variety of recreational settings, where numerous values of sexuality and cultural capital are explored. I claimed that this popular appeal is intrinsically linked to the tacit presence of desire or sexuality (however much it is denied), which is marked and mediated by the naked

⁷⁷⁶ This account recently appeared in a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald. See: D Cooper, 'Top draw ignored the desires of budding artists', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May, 2009.

model. In discussing the dissimulated denial of sexuality among university art educators, I suggested that the general silence within contemporary art institutions around the presence of artists' models in life-drawing may be linked to a confusion around professional boundaries, or to a perception that the transgressive appeal of naked models has been superseded by naked performance in other studio areas.

In Chapter Four I explored the contemporary emphasis of life-drawing on observational training. Noting this shift away from the stylised production of figurative representations, I examined a number of techniques of modernist life-drawing and discussed their origins and influence in a range of countries, and across a number of sectors of art educators, and art practitioners. I traced the genealogy and affiliations of a number of modernist approaches from 'dot-and-carry' to 'blind-contour' drawing, to 'memory drawing' and 'gesture drawing'.

In Chapter Five, I explored the status of life-drawings as art, arguing, as noted earlier, that life-drawing images are extremely difficult to categorise or qualify. I discussed the limitations of existing pluralist accounts of life-drawings as 'fit for purpose', arguing that that the purposes of life-drawings are not always apparent (and, in the case of sexual pleasure, often concealed or denied) and not legible, or discernible. I then discussed the limitations of interpretation, or semiotic decoding of images, before exploring theories of art practice, and how they could be applied to life-drawing. Having noted the lack of contemporary critical discourse on life-drawing, I explored a number of theoretical approaches to art practice, mark-making and subjectivity, aligning them with my earlier findings, as well as interview material. I aimed to explore the possibility for a serious critical account of life-drawing as a popular social practice, which is contiguous with many aspirations of professional or contemporary art, and yet frequently practised outside of the discourses and institutions of contemporary art. Ideally, a critical framework for life-drawing would allow for it to be appreciated as a profoundly social practice, something that draws people together, in a particular situation that has the potential or promise for transformation or encounter.

12.3. What aspects of life-drawing lend themselves to further research and inquiry?

Having made a claim in Chapter One that life-drawing is marginalised because of the lack of critical exploration of it as a practice, in Chapter Five, I undertook an exploration of the relationship between life-drawing and contemporary theories of art practice, in order to map areas for future research or critical exploration of life-drawing. However, throughout this

thesis I have made frequent mention of areas of investigation that were beyond the scope of this thesis to organise. These include a closer examination of the relationships between sexuality, desire, consent, pain, observation, subjectivity and empathy, particularly in the expanding sector of burlesque, queer and subcultural life-drawing classes. There is considerable scope for practice-based research into the role of nudity in life-drawing classes, and the difference between the performance and posing of naked or clothed figures, as well as the use of digital images of figures to create life-drawing communities online.

In my Introduction I identified a lacuna in historical accounts of Australian art education, and there is considerable scope for a comprehensive social history of education in drawing, across fine-art, design, illustration and recreational sectors to be written. It would also be reassuring if the history of post-war life-drawing instruction in a number of countries could be researched and assembled, if only to dispute generalised claims that life-drawing vanished in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, and qualify when, how and what changes actually occurred.

Although I am less interested in life-drawings as objects or images than in life-drawing as a practice, I recently proposed an examination of life-drawing according to three axes: one relates to the ethology of observation and representation, and particularly the types of issues around 'objective' spectatorship raised in Chapter Four; the second relates to the types of affects produced by differing forms of drawing practice and of figurative representations (including desire); and the third relates to the cultural capital and affiliations denoted by particular pictorial or stylistic elements.⁷⁷⁷ This may offer a means by which to negotiate life-drawing as a complex and multifaceted practice, a means more transparent than 'fit for purpose' approaches.

I am interested in exploring life-drawing as a particular practice that is linked to image making, and yet that is based fundamentally in a form of situated practice that is dependent on a particular set of criteria or rules (however arbitrary), such as the presence of a naked model, who is obliged to move between a series of static poses, held for differing lengths of time. As stated earlier, life-drawing has considerable scope to be interrogated as performance practice, particularly in relation to the ambiguous status of the model. A number of artists have used

⁷⁷⁷ See: M Mayhew, 'The Naked And The Blind: Exploring the Badness of life-drawing' *TRACEY Contemporary Drawing Research*, What is good (bad) drawing? December 2008. Viewed 4 February 2009, <<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/wigd/mayhew.html>>.

the social theatre of life-drawing classes as the basis for experimental performance research. I mentioned the work of Elizabeth Bell in my Introduction, and performance artist Mark Shorter has also started using life-drawing classes for performances of Renny Kodgers in a range of differing settings, and among differing mileus of artists.⁷⁷⁸ The popularity of recreational and subcultural life-drawing classes indicates the significance and appeal of the life-room as a form of social theatre, where a particular and controlled form of spectatorship is structured around a particular form of performance by a still, silent model. There is considerable scope to explore what posing is and the difference between forms of performance such as mime and modelling, as well as ‘sitting’. One of the interesting factors, peculiar to life-drawing classes, is the movements between artists and models, and the fact that a significant number of life-drawing participants spend time on both sides of the easel. This makes life-drawing distinct from other practices of bodily display or performance (such as sex-entertainment), and supports the suggestion made in Chapter Five, that life-drawing is probably better understood as a type of collaborative performance of a collection of actants, rather than the performer/audience model associated with performance studies.

While I have suggested a number of areas of research with particular disciplines such as performance studies, sociology, and art history, the major conclusion to be drawn from this thesis is the necessity for a multifaceted approach in researching life-drawing, or any art practice. Although, as noted in my Introduction, an increasing amount of literature is being directed towards the analysis of art practice, and especially practice as research, arguably much of this retains a tacit assumption that art is separate from other aspects of visual culture or social organisation.

13.4. How does the involvement of artists’ models contribute to life-drawing as a practice and to critical appreciation of and challenges to it?

In the introduction, I identified this as a meta-inquiry of the thesis, as the second half of this question is pertinent to why and how I have used accounts by artists models in order to develop a critical understanding of life-drawing. While I have not used model’s accounts in Chapter One, I did briefly mentioned the implications of nudity, in relation to a perception of feminist opposition to life-drawing, and how this enabled the performance of alignments between life-drawing and rear-garde narratives about art. In Chapter Two I used the role of models as witnesses to develop a rich account of twentieth century life-drawing classes in

⁷⁷⁸ Mark Shorter, personal communication with author, see Appendix 1.

Sydney. The inclusion of a number of oral histories from artists who had used modelling as part of their art education and access to artists' networks, developed an account of life-drawing as a complex social theatre. However, the particular experiences of these subjects as naked workers during a period of rapid social change and mobility allowed a richer analysis of the social and gender relations within art institutions than conventional oral history accounts, and these were developed further in the following chapters.

Chapter Three examined models' experiences of sexuality and gendered social relations, and how the presence/threat of sexuality was part of the complex mediation of issues of class mobility, cultural capital and social aspiration. Whereas existing studies of models examine them as a separate class from artists and other arts-workers I examine models' relationships to and identification with art students or emerging artists, and the impact this has on their mediation of bodily capital. I also suggested that the presence of artists' models, as naked arts-workers, possibly contributed to a certain level of unease around life-drawing classes in university art schools, where the relationships between creative agency and professional distance may be confused by the presence of nudity, which may also conflict with the naked bodily performance of students in other studio areas.

In Chapter Four I examined models' experiences of 'objectification', and the complex and contradictory relationships that models have to their identities as objects and subjects. I discussed the difficult, ambiguous and distressing experiences of physical suffering endured by artists' models and problematised this in relation to artists' emphasis on a physically detached and reified modernist scopic regime of 'observation'. While I examined the contrived and ethically problematic implications of a number of techniques of modernist life-drawing, I also explored the investment in and appeal of these approaches to artists and models. Using accounts from a range of models and teachers, I suggested that the bodily presence of artists' models could facilitate a deeper awareness of artists' own embodiment, particularly where physical techniques of drawing, that emphasised a physical experience of drawing were utilised. However, the accounts assembled in this chapter suggested that the experience of detachment, of removal from a bodily awareness and of consciously submitting to a form of objectification actually has some appeal for artists and models. I concluded this chapter with a suggestion that the ambiguous and oscillating role that models play as objectified subjects of drawing, could in itself contribute to artists' experiencing a challenge to their own sense of subjectivity, or subjective mastery over their body, their materials and

their work.

Having noted the increasing practice of ‘figure-drawings’ based on photographs, digital animations, or 3D computer-generated images of models, particularly on the internet, I spent most of Chapter Five examining life-drawing classes as particular social theatres where the naked model is physically present. I briefly discussed the tensions between the agency of modelling as a form of performance, or as sitting or as posing, considering issues of irony and intentionality, both in models and the observing artists. As I note below there is considerable scope for research in this area. In exploring the relationships between aspects of life-drawing and philosophical accounts of art and subjectivity, I suggested that the role of artists’ models, operating as a particular and contingent subject of life-drawings, offers considerable impetus for a richer exploration of the possibilities of affect, embodiment and bodily encounter than has been articulated to date. I suggested that the most compelling aspect of artists’ models is not as another or ‘other’ subject, but as a profoundly destabilising challenge to artists’ subjectivity. Citing existing critical accounts of the agency of materials and the ethology of tools, I suggest that models’ precarious and oscillating condition as part-objects and part-subjects could facilitate a deeper understanding of the artist’s own empathic and ethical relationships to the materials of practice, not as inert tools over which they have mastery, but as other entities with which they enter a performative and productive relationship.

14.5. How can life-drawing be critically examined from an interdisciplinary approach?

In my Introduction I discussed the limitations of current accounts of life-drawing from a single discipline. I claimed that life-drawing had largely been ignored within contemporary art scholarship because of its ambiguous status as a legitimate form of contemporary art. I discussed a number of popular histories of life-drawing and explained how these were limited by a lack of familiarity with art history. I then discussed a number of ethnographic studies of artists’ models, and discussed how they are limited by an absence of a familiarity with the criteria and discourses of contemporary art. In my Introduction I presented claims that life-drawing has an ambiguous status as a form of contemporary art, or a form of contemporary popular culture, and needed a thorough engagement with a variety of scholarly disciplines in order to be understood.

In Chapter One I explored popular accounts of life-drawing and the values associated with it. I combined a discursive analysis of press accounts with oral history, and included a

discussion of the social values and roles attached to life-drawing as a form of art practice. Assembling a variety of sources, served to triangulate and test the veracity of claims that life-drawing was in decline or conversely in resurgence. Rather than proving or disputing the veracity of these accounts, the interdisciplinary approach facilitated a greater comparative analysis of the values and beliefs lying beneath many accounts.

Chapter Two was probably the least interdisciplinary account, consisting largely of an assembly of a series of oral histories of participants experiences of life-drawing with published histories of art institutions in Sydney. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a reasonably comprehensive social history of life-drawing in Sydney, in order to map the terrain of the differing aspects of the discourses, practices and ethics of life-drawing explored in the other chapters. This chapter also aimed to demonstrate the value of exploring participants' accounts of particular art practices to the task of generating broader and more comprehensive historical accounts of art education than currently exist. As noted earlier, existing histories of art education in Sydney have tended to focus on particular institutions, ignoring the fact that many artists, art students, arts-workers and art teachers work in a variety of institutions in numerous capacities. By exploring a practice-based oral history of art education, I was able to generate a broader and more comprehensive historical account than currently exists.

In Chapter Three I discussed the issues of gender and sexuality in life-drawing, claiming that feminist critiques were limited by a lack of familiarity with actual practices of life-drawing, or the status and popularity of particular manuals, among practitioners, while mosts feminist artists' interventions into life-drawing were unfamiliar with contemporary feminist theories of gender, desire and embodiment, often relying on structuralist accounts from the 1970s. I used a variety of methods, including case studies of a number of research papers on life-drawing, as well as press coverage of life-drawing, to explore the complex and shifting roles played by 'the sex issue' in life-drawing and representations of it. I discussed a variety of accounts by models, art students and art-educators, examining the plethora of issues surrounding their articulation of their experiences of sexual desire, pleasure and harassment in life-drawing classes, including the negotiation of social mobility and cultural capital.

Chapter Four assembled art-history, ethnographic accounts, phenomenology, drawing manuals and critical theory to explore the complexity of drawing practices, and their link to the ambiguity of ontology. In generating an aesthetic account of life-drawing, Chapter Five involved an ambitious straddling of two rather disparate fields, and I commenced with a

general discussion of prosaic life-drawings, and noted the difficulty in applying any viable form of critical judgement to what is a disparate field of visual culture. I then explored life-drawing as a performance and as a performative practice, and discussed a number of philosophical accounts that have currency in the published research of drawing and life-drawing practitioners. By moving between philosophical analysis, anecdotal discussion and interview material I tried to illustrate areas of connection between metaphorical aspects of life-drawing and how it is experienced as an everyday cultural practice.

15.6. What new forms of knowledge/information are generated by this approach?

As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of the analysis in this thesis was not to provide definitive answers so much as to indicate the necessity and possibility of particular questions. Throughout this thesis, I have been at pains to emphasise the connections between the institutions, discourses and practitioners of contemporary or professional visual art to a myriad of everyday cultural practices and social relations. My challenge to the reification of art, and the insistence on the social relations surrounding art practices, does not seek to deny the power and appeal that art practice has as a form of cultural and social contestation, and an affectively fulfilling and intellectually challenging endeavour, but I do not want to separate this from the social relations and discourses in which art is embedded.

Life drawing contains numerous ambiguities, as its status as art or recreation is unresolved, and its relationship to contemporary art and contemporary art education is largely inarticulated. As this thesis has demonstrated, contemporary accounts of life drawing reduce it to a banal exercise in observational mark making vaguely associated with a myriad of cultural values concerned with artistic tradition, rigour and bohemia. This thesis has examined life-drawing as a recreational social event and as a foundational element of contemporary art education and interrogated the points of silence occurring within and between both arenas.

By comparing participants' accounts of differing 'artworlds' this thesis has examined the performance of sexuality and iteration of gender within art practice. I have generated an account of sexuality and sexual desire that is profoundly performative, and intimately linked to the performance of cultural capital and social aspiration. This offers a substantial challenge to the binarised account of gender relations, which dominates existing critical considerations of the troubling role of naked models in life-drawing classes. It also opens up the

consideration of nakedness as more than a semiotic cipher for social meanings of nudity, but as an extremely rich field of bodily encounters and possibilities. Throughout this thesis I have taken pains to select and use accounts from models who have also worked as artists or art educators. The purpose of this is in order to ‘unfix’ the idea of artists’ models as silent or exploited ‘others’ of the life-drawing process, and emphasise that life-drawing involves a considerable amount of flux, and that the subjective identifications occurring within all participants are in a constant process of change.

The interdisciplinary approach adopted by this thesis links an intimate description of physical practices of posing, observation and mark-making to the social relations between participants as well as wider discourses of subject formation and the performance of cultural capital. The accounts by models have been used as a means of interrogating and challenging accounts by artists and art educators about practices occurring within life-drawing. The juxtaposition of both accounts, and particularly the exploration of models’ changing roles as models and artists has allowed me to develop an account of artistic subjectivity that is not fixed or gendered, but profoundly motile and formed and shaped according to the flux of behaviours, gestures and interactions occurring between the eyes, hands and bodies of participants and the textures and surfaces of the materials being shaped in the course of practice.

Life-drawing is a fascinating arena to explore the oscillations of artistic identity and cultural capital, and of the subjectivity or objectification of artists’ models, and the implications of this oscillation for a responsive spectatorship and creative practice. While not all art practices are as widespread or as contested as life-drawing, the practice of art is intimately connected to the contestation and legitimisation of practices and the subjects of art. If nothing else, I would hope that this thesis demonstrates the necessity of elucidating the implicit links between the intimate experience of art practice to the social relations and social contestations in which the practices and discourses of all participants are embedded.

APPENDIX 1:

Interview Details with Identified Participants

All interviews were conducted by Margaret Mayhew

Tom Bass, Sydney, 8 June 2006. Art educator, figurative artist, former artists' model. Bass worked as an artists' model in the 1930s and studied with Antonio Datillo-Rubbo in the 1930s, and as a CRTS student at the National Art School in the 1940s. He taught briefly at the National Art School before establishing his own school in figurative sculpture in 1974.

John Bell, Sydney, 18 December 2005. Artists' model. Bell studied at the National Art School in the 1950s, and has modelled casually in Sydney and Melbourne since the 1950s.

Dr. Iain Biggs, Bristol, 24 April 2007. Art educator, drawing researcher. Biggs studied at the Royal College of Art in the 1970s (and did some occasional modelling). He is a Reader in Visual Art Practice, and research program director at the School of Art, Media and Design, University of the West of England, Bristol, and has published a number of works on contemporary drawing research.

Sarah Blair, Oxford, 28 April 2007. Drawing researcher, artists' model. Blair is completing her PhD on animation and illustration at the University of the West of England, Bristol. She has studied, practised and taught life-drawing for a number of years, and collaborated with Bill Prosser on experimental modelling for a range of life-drawing workshops run through the extra-mural program of Oxford University.

Nancy Borlase, Sydney, 2 August 2005. Figurative artist, former artists' model. Borlase worked as an artists' model in Sydney and Melbourne during the 1930s, and participated in a Model's strike in Melbourne. She was an active member of the the contemporary Art Societies in Sydney and Melbourne, and studied informally with Geroge Bell, Grace Cowley and rah fizelle. Borlase was art critic for the Sydney Morning Herald during the 1970s and continued exhibiting figurative paintings until her death in 2006.

Molly Crabapple, New York, 4 February 2007. Figurative Artist, performer. Crabapple studied fashion illustration at School of Visual Arts and worked as an artists-model before developing an interest in burlesque performance. She started Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art school in 2005, which has been copied worldwide.

Philippe Comar, Paris, 24 January 2006. Art educator, drawing researcher. Comar is the director of 'Morphologie' or the 'study of forms' at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris. He has had a successful and high profile international career in contemporary sculpture, and is the author of a number of books on science and art, including Pictures of the body.

Roger Conlon, Bristol, 24 April 2007. Art educator, drawing researcher, figurative artist. Conlon is the Associate Dean of the School of Art, Media and Design, UWE, Bristol. He studied at Bristol Polytechnic and the Royal Academy schools and taught life-drawing at a range of institutions since the 1980s, and co-wrote and co-presented a television series titled 'LifeClass' in 2002.

Robert Eadie, Sydney, 18 October 2005. Figurative artist, former artists' model. Eadie studied and modelled at the National Art School in the 1960s, and claims to be one of the first male models at the NAS to work without a *cache-sexe*, and later returned to teach there in the 1980s.

Dr. Angela Eames, London, 18 April 2007. Drawing researcher, art educator. Eames studied drawing in Capetown, before moving to England in the 1970s, and studying at the Bath Academy, the Slade School, at UCL, and Wimbledon School of Art. She has taught at Camberwell College of Art Since the 1980s and director of postgraduate drawing.

Michael Esson, Sydney, 22 August 2005. Drawing researcher, art educator, figurative artist. Esson studied at Aberdeen, then at Edinburgh College of Art and the Royal College of Art in London in the 1970s before moving to Australia. He has taught at COFA since the 1980s and is currently director of the International Drawing Research Institute. He has taught life-drawing to cosmetic surgeons internationally and works with the relationships between medical anatomy and art.

Nguahua Freed, Sydney, 7 October 2006. Sydney artists' model and photographer, Freed's mother and sister were artists' models in New Zealand and she worked as an artists' and photographic model in Sydney for a decade.

Nancy Goldring, New York, 13 January 2007. Art educator, drawing researcher. Goldring studied in New York and Florence in the 1960s and participated in the SITE collaboration between artists and architects during the 1970s. She is the Drawing Director at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

Jane Holsinger, New York, 24 January 2007. Figurative artist, art educator. Holsinger studied at the New York Studio school in the 1970s then worked as a graphic designer for 20 years before returning to full-time visual arts practice, and teaching.

Professor Ian Howard, Sydney, 22 August 2005. Art educator. Howard studied at East Sydney Technical College in the 1960s followed by Alexander Mackie CAE, and Concordia University in Canada. He was director of Queensland College of Art in the 1990s and has been the Dean of UNSW College of Fine Arts since 1998.

Christine Iannsen, Sydney, 26 July 2005. Sydney artist. Iannsen studied at Julian Ahstons, the Canberra school of Art, and Sydney College of the Arts. She worked as an artists' model at a range of venues in Sydney and Wollongong during the 1990s.

Mia Lovelock, Sydney, 31 August 2005. Artists' model, musician and fashion designer. Lovelock has as an artists' and commercial photographic model since the mid 1990s.

Jane MacGowan, Sydney, 3 August 2004. Arts patron, Sydney and Melbourne. Among other projects, MacGowan participated in a number of sketch groups in the 1970s, organising the life-drawing at the Sydney Mechanics School of the Arts during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1987 MacGowan bought a warehouse in Brandling Street, Alexandria and hosted life-drawing sketch-clubs 6 days a week until 2005.

Professor Ronald Newman, Sydney, 3 August 2005. Art Educator. Newman studied at East Sydney Technical College in the 1960s, and had a successful career in industrial design, before returning to teach in a number of universities. He was the head of COFA's School of Design from 1994 to 2000, and Dean of Sydney College of the Arts from 2002 to 2006.

Bernard Ollis, Sydney, 16 June 2005. Art Educator. After studying at Cardiff and London's Royal College of Art in the late 1960s Ollis migrated to Australia and taught in Darwin, Melbourne and Sydney. He was the director of the National Art School from 1998 to 2008.

Jacqueline Pascoe, Sydney, 10 July 2006. Former ballet-dancer, performance artist, artists' model.

Dr. Bill Prosser, Oxford, 28 April 2007. Art Educator, Drawing Researcher. After working as an illustrator, Prosser completed his PhD in drawing at UWE Bristol, and taught life-drawing in a series of experimental life-drawing workshops at Oxford University with Sarah Blair. He is currently senior researcher at Reading University.

Amber Ray, email correspondence, 26 February 2007. Artists' model. Amber Ray is a New York burlesque performer and artists' model. In addition to modelling at Dr. Sketchy's Anti Art School in New-York and Sydney, Ray has modelled for private artists and a range of art schools in New York.

Carole Robb, New York, 16 February 2007. Art educator, figurative artist. Robb studied at the Glasgow school of art, before studying in Rome and London. She has taught at the New York Studio School since 1988.

Wendy Sharpe, Sydney, 3 August 2005. Figurative artist, art educator and former artists' model. Sharpe studied at Seaforth TAFE in the 1970s before studying at Alexander Mackie CAE. Sharpe modelled extensively in Sydney during the 1970s and 1980s.

Carolee Schneemann, New York, 8 February 2007. Performance artist, art educator and former model. Schneemann studied painting at Bard College and Columbia University before developing her performance practice. Schneemann has continued to teach life-drawing and create and exhibit figurative drawings as part of and alongside her performance practice.

Mark Shorter, email correspondence, 5 May 2009. Performance artist. Shorter studied sculpture at the National Art School in the 1990s and is currently completing PhD in performance at Sydney College of the Arts. He is staging life-drawing classes as performances as part of his research.

Leyla Spencer, 12 August 2005. Art educator, figurative artist. Spencer studied at Gynea TAFE, Julian Ashtons and Alexander Mackie during the 1970s, and has practised and taught life-drawing at Julian Ashtons, the Ryal Art Society, TAFE, community colleges and schools since the 1990s.

Nick Strike, 15 August 2005. Artist, former artists' model. Strike studied sculpture at East Sydney Technical College and Sydney College of the Arts in the 1990s. Strike has worked as an artists' model, drawing teacher and recently completed his MFA at SCA.

Professor Anita Taylor, Sydney, 28 March 2006. Art educator, figurative artist, drawing researcher, former artist's model. Professor Anita Taylor studied at the Royal College of Art and worked as an artists' model during the 1970s. While teaching at Cheltenham College of Advanced education in 1984, she established the Jerwood Drawing Prize with Paul Taylor. In 2003 Taylor was appointed head of the Wimbledon School of Art, which upon its amalgamation with the University of the Arts London, Taylor was appointed Vice Principal, Dean and then Director of The Centre for Drawing. In 2009 she was appointed Director of the National Art School in Sydney.

Arlene Textaqueen, Sydney, 21 September 2004. Figurative artist. After completing a BFA at Edith Cowan University in Perth in the 1990s, TextaQueen moved to Sydney to pursue her career drawing salon-style nude portraits with text-markers. She has exhibited nationally and lives in Melbourne.

Noel Thurgate, Sydney, 19 September 2005. Figurative Artist and art educator, Thurgate studied at the National Art School and Alexander Mackie CAE in the 1970s. He taught life-drawing at East Sydney tech from the 1980s and was head of drawing at the National Art School from 1996 to 2007.

Samantha Tidbeck, Sydney, 8 August 2005. Art educator, artists' model. Tidbeck studied at National Art school and Charlie Shead Studio school, and has worked as an artists' model since the 1990s, and taught painting and drawing since 2000.

Pam Vaughan, Sydney, 20 August 2005. Art educator, figurative artist. Vaughan studied at East Sydney, COFA and Sydney College of the Arts in the 1980s and 1990s. She hosts life-drawing in her studio and has taught life-drawing at the NAS, SCA and a number of high-schools.

Jo Volley, London, 25 April 2007. Art educator. Volley studied at the Slade School of Art in 'F' block during the 1970s. She studied under and modelled for Euan Uglow, and has continued to teach at the Slade since the 1980s.

Guy Warren, Sydney, 25 June 2007. Art educator. Warren studied at JS Watkins in the 1940s and then at East Sydney Tech as a CRTS student after World War Two. He was heavily involved in the Sydney University Art Workshop in the 1970s and the inaugural head of Sydney College of the Arts in 1975.

Margaret Weatherall, Katoomba, 8 April 2006. Artists' model. Weatherall has worked as an artists' model since the late 1960s while pursuing her own practice in figurative painting and object design. During the 1980s she ran salon-style drawing sessions at her studio where she would pose in a series of elaborate costumes, much like Lady Emma Hamilton.

APPENDIX 2:

Current Life-Drawing Classes in Sydney.

University Sector:

There are seven universities in Sydney, five of which are funded through the Commonwealth (federal) Government. Life drawing is offered either as part of BFA degrees, through degrees in architecture or design, and as part of non-award/extra-mural courses provided by universities.

1. University of Sydney (est. 1853)
2. University of New South Wales (est. 1949)
3. University of Technology Sydney (est. 1961)
4. University of Western Sydney (est. 1989)
5. Macquarie University (est. 1967)
6. Notre Dame University (est. 2007)
7. Australian Catholic University (est. 1990)

University Faculties of Fine Arts & Design.

1. University of Sydney: Sydney College of the Arts (est. 1990)
2. University of New South Wales: College of Fine Arts (est. 1989)
3. University of Western Sydney (1989 to 2007)

Architecture/Design Faculties

1. University of Sydney: Tin Sheds Art Workshop
2. University of New South Wales: occasionally run as an elective in Architecture.
3. University of Technology Sydney: Faculty of Design.
8. Australian Catholic University (Strathfield), School of Graphic Design.

Extra-Mural/continuing education

1. University of Sydney: Centre for Continuing Education and Tin Sheds
2. University of New South Wales: University Union Short Courses
3. University of Technology Sydney: Insearch Institute
4. Macquarie University: Students at Macquarie (to 2007)

NSW State Government Sector

NSW government manages and funds a range of educational organisations through the Department of Education and Training.

National Art School at East Sydney:

Life-drawing is a compulsory subject in Bachelor of Fine Arts (and Honours) and Masters of Fine Arts. Life-drawing is offered as part of Non-Award Courses and public programs for secondary school students, and alumni.

NSW Technical And Further Education:

TAFE comprises five institutes across Sydney offering a range of vocational courses in design as well as a limited number of certificate and diploma courses in fine arts, which generally offer one or more modules of life-drawing classes. Each institute consists of a number of colleges:

Northern Institute of TAFE:

Brookvale (seaforth closed in 1999) Certificate courses in Life Drawing.

Hornsby: Drawing as part of foundation courses in graphic design.

Meadowbank aka Sydney Gallery School, Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Fine Arts, and evening classes in Life-Drawing.

South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE:

Campbelltown: Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Fine Arts, Craft, Design, Drafting & Indigenous Arts.

Lidcombe: Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Graphic Design.

Macquarie Fields, Certificate courses in Fashion Design.

Sydney Institute of TAFE:

Enmore Design Centre: Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Graphic Design, Digital Animation, Object Design, Jewellery.

Eora College, Redfern, Life drawing occasionally offered to indigenous students as part of certificate courses in Fine Arts.

St. George: Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Fine Arts, Craft, and Design.

Sutherland (Gymea): Certificate courses in Art & Craft, occasionally offer life drawing.

Ultimo Campus: Life-Drawing offered as part of Advanced Diplomas & Certificates in Drafting, Fashion Design & Fashion Manufacture.

Western Sydney Institute of TAFE:

Nepean Arts & Design Centre: Advanced Diploma, Diploma & Certificates in Fine Arts, Craft, and Design.

ACE Adult and Community Education.

Bankstown Community College

East Sydney Community College

Hornsby Kuringai Community college

Manly Warringah Community College

Mosman Evening College

St. George & Sutherland Community College

Sydney Community College

Workers Educational Alliance

Community art courses/centres.

These are usually managed or funded by local government, or run by community groups on government provided premises.

Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville.

Ku-ring-gai Art Centre

Juanita Nielson community centre

Parramatta Artists Studios.

Pine Street Creative Arts Centre

Waverley Woollahra Arts Centre

Workshop Art Centre, Willoughby.

Public and Regional Galleries

Art Gallery of NSW runs life-drawing through the Art Gallery Society, and 'Contempo'

Brett Whitely Studio Gallery runs regular life-drawing classes

Casula Powerhouse runs short courses in life-drawing

Museum of Contemporary Art: public programs hosts occasional life-drawing events

Hazlehurst Regional Gallery runs regular life-drawing classes

Mosman Regional Gallery runs regular life-drawing classes

Independent community associations

Sydney Mechanics School of the Arts (est. 1841: Offered life-drawing until 1986)

Workers Educational Alliance (est 1913: now funded through ACE)

Mission Australia (independent charity, offers creative courses to young people)

Art Societies

Brandling Art Society

Fairfield Art Society

Kuringai Art Society

Parramatta Art Society

Royal Art Society

St George Art Society

Private Schools of Art

Blue Door Art Studios
Charlie Shead Studio School
Croydon Art Studio
East Sydney Academy of Art
Jody Pawly art school
Julian Ashton Art School
Northbridge School of Visual Arts

Private Schools of design

Australian Business Academy
Australian College QED
Australian Institute of Commerce and Language
Billy Blue College
CATC Sydney - Excellence in Design Education
Cengage Education
Martin College (New South Wales)
Raffles College of Design and Commerce (RCDC)
The Sydney Graphics College
Whitehouse Institute of Design

Private Sketch Clubs

Alpha House
Arthouse Hotel
Friend in Hand Hotel
TAP Gallery

It is worth noting that there is a considerable discrepancy in the number of State government funded art, design and drawing classes in Sydney, which are concentrated in the inner-city, eastern suburbs and inner northern suburbs of Sydney.

There is an area in the heavily populated geographical centre of suburban Sydney, with a 40 km diameter where there is no access to government-funded art education courses. TAFE colleges at Bankstown, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Granville, Lidcombe, Liverpool, Miller, Mount Druitt, Nirimba, Padstow, Richmond and Weatherill Park do not offer courses in any aspect of art, craft or design. Evening colleges in Hawkesbury, MacCarthur, Nepean, Parramatta and Rouse Hill do not offer life-drawing.

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