

Including the Invisible, Drawing, and Thought

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ABSTRACT

In this self-reflective narrative, two design academics engage in a dialogue focused on their shared passion for drawing and their academic challenges. We delve into the unseen realm against societal shifts such as the pandemic and technological advancements, emphasising the crucial role of thoughts in the design process. Drawing from personal experiences and influenced by recent changes in design education, including movements like #feesmustfall and #decolonised education, we explore the transformative potential of drawing in navigating complex concepts. Drawing inspiration from feminist theory, we navigate our postgraduate journeys using visual and arts-based methodologies to unravel our cognitive processes. Through self-reflection, we link narratives, dialogues, and visual representations, shedding light on the various functions of drawing as a tool for critical inquiry and expression within academia. Our exploration encompasses intricate illustrations and abstract compositions, offering unique perspectives on the interaction between drawing, cognition, and scholarly discourse.

Keywords: Introspective, Discourse, Academic, Drawing, Autoethnography

1 Introduction

My colleague and I embarked on a journey of self-reflection and intellectual exploration in design academia. We share a strong passion for drawing, and this journey compels us to confront the intersection of our academic interests and our love for this artistic medium. Our story delves into the realm of thoughts, going beyond individual struggles with academic performance. We strive to uncover hidden aspects of our academic journey as the world grapples with the impact of a pandemic and the advancement of technology. We find ourselves at a crossroads of adaptation and innovation amidst transformative changes in design education, from movements like #feesmustfall (Greeff et al., 2021), #decolonised education (Tuck & Yang, 2012) to the influence of the #4th industrial revolution (Schwab, 2017). Through drawing, we seek to comprehend conceptual thinking and the art of embracing change as we navigate the ongoing demand for upskilling. Our creative practices, the complexity of our design processes, and the ideas that shape our discipline are deeply rooted in our academic discourse. Archer (2010) states, "Academic discourse functions on a hierarchy of epistemologies creating a disjuncture between systematised knowledge of design and everyday common sense knowledge". We respond to the call for transformative thinking as we witness the evolution of this conversation and strive to shed light on the more challenging aspects of our intellectual journey. It is a recognition that, despite the ever-changing world around us, "thinking" remains uniquely human and a process we hold dear.

We embark on a journey of self-discovery by drawing upon feminist theory and leveraging the power of visual and artistic methods. Drawing serves as a medium for our creative and intellectual processes (Kim, 2011) while also communicating our ideas visually. Through autoethnography, we engage in this intimate conversation to communicate with each other and illustrate the development of our work.



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Our efforts have culminated in this exhibition, showcasing several pieces visually depicting the ideas generated during these discussions. The collection features a range of artwork, some featuring intricate and detailed drawings, while others take a more abstract approach. Drawing is a potent tool for inspiring and expressing our thoughts, as exemplified by the diversity of our artwork, which mirrors the diversity of our ideas. As design academics, we invite you to join us on this journey. We aim to shed light on the unseen, contemplate the profound, and express our ideas through imaginative and introspective strokes.

2 Materials and Methods

In our reflective journey, we actively explore the influence of drawing in academia amidst shifting societal landscapes and academic hurdles. Drawing from our personal experiences and inspired by contemporary movements, we uncover its transformative potential (Paek, 2019). Guided by feminist theory, we employ visual methodologies to navigate complex concepts, unravelling our cognitive processes with each stroke. For our exploration, we select unconventional materials that reflect the dynamic nature of our inquiry. We create a versatile canvas for our self-reflective narrative using fine-liner pens on Mul media paper and ballpoint pens on 200-cartridge paper. Typically associated with artistic expression, these materials transcend their conventional roles, becoming vehicles for critical inquiry within academia. With our materials, we embark on a methodological journey grounded in self-reflection and visual exploration. Drawing is our primary method, enabling us to unravel our cognitive processes and navigate complex scholarly discourse (Wasserman, 2013). Through intricate illustrations and abstract compositions, we interweave narratives, dialogues, and visual representations, shedding light on drawing's multifaceted functions as a tool for critical inquiry and expression (Wasserman, 2013). Our methods go beyond traditional academic practices, embracing creativity and self-reflection as essential to scholarly inquiry.

3 Theory and Calculation

Some perspectives on the drawing act regard the function of the body, particularly the hand, as crucial to its significance. According to Hill (1966: 1), the act of drawing is the source of the topic of drawing. A single stroke, according to Hill (1966: 2), reflects the convergence of three factors: materials, muscular action, and visual (artistic) aim. Drawing, according to Rawson (1969), is essentially a record of a two-dimensional movement in space created by a tool functioning as a proxy for the hand with its fingers. He regards this movement as the underlying drawing character, with its structure established by activities performed in time.

Serge Tisseron, a French psychotherapist, recounts how the hand's "thrown out" motion conjures up the line as its trace. The inscriber pulls back the notion that has been cast forth during the inscription process. "This back and forth motion, tossing and retrieving," helps to build a brain framework capable of retaining concepts. "The drawing gesture of the hand is an essential movement by which thought learns to think for itself." It shoots forth at first like a wild horse, which is subsequently led back and tamed, bound to the line the hand holds tightly to the page" (1994: 36).

A German philosopher, Heidegger (1993: 381), believes hand actions are vital in thinking. When he says, "every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking," he advances the concept that thinking is a handicraft. He claims that the hand's handiwork is more complex than our restricted imaginations allow: it can reach and stretch, receive and retain, carry designs and signs, and grasp and catch. "The significance of apprehension in thinking is self-evident." "To comprehend something is to comprehend it" (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 111). The metaphorical usage of the word "grasp" reminds us that clutching is a cognitive and physical act.

In our dynamic world of design academia, my colleague and I embark on a thoughtful journey of self-discovery and intellectual exploration. We share a deep passion for drawing, and this journey brings us face-to-face with the intersection of our academic pursuits and our love for this creative medium. Our narrative is not just an exploration of personal struggles with academic performance but a profound journey into the enigmatic and intangible realm of thoughts. As the world grapples with the impact of a pandemic and the relentless advance of technology, our ongoing conversation takes centre stage as we strive to make the invisible facets of our academic journey visible.

Amid transformative changes sweeping through design education, from movements like #feesmustfall and #decolonised education to the pervasive influence of the #4th industrial revolutions, we find ourselves at the crossroads of adaptation and innovation. We navigate the constant demand for upskilling, and in doing so, we seek to unravel the complexities of conceptual thinking and the art of embracing change through drawing. Our academic discourse is deeply rooted in our embodied creative practices, the intricacies of our design processes, and the profound thoughts that shape our discipline. As we trace this evolving conversation, we heed the call for transformative thinking and endeavour to illuminate the hidden aspects of our intellectual journey. We recognise that in a world ever in flux, the act of "thinking" remains uniquely human, a process we hold dear, even as the world evolves.

Drawing inspiration from feminist theory and harnessing the power of visual and arts-based methods, we embark on an introspective journey. We use drawing as a medium to illustrate our thoughts and to become a vessel for our creative and intellectual processes. In this intimate dialogue, we turn to autoethnography as a means of conversing with each other and depicting the unfolding of our work. This exhibition, a culmination of our efforts, presents a series of works that visually capture our thought process during these transformative conversations. Within this collection, some pieces offer intricate, detailed drawings, while others venture into the abstract. The diversity in our artwork mirrors the multiplicity of our thinking, highlighting how drawing is a potent tool in encouraging and articulating our thoughts.

In our exploration, we have found that visual journaling, autoethnography, and photovoice are valuable tools for delving into academic topics and personal experiences. When we engage in visual journaling, we jot down our thoughts and ideas through sketches and notes. Autoethnography takes it further by blending our reflections with drawings, helping us delve into broader cultural or scholarly themes. And photovoice? It is like telling a story with photographs and sketches, giving us a powerful way to share qualitative research findings and lived experiences.

These methods are not just about making our work accessible but also about making it engaging and understandable to a broader audience. In our research, we have used photovoice to reflect on our journey in the industry and how it has shaped our careers. Focusing on the process rather than just the results can give a voice to those who might otherwise be overlooked. It is all part of our commitment to being sensitive, respectful, and agents of social change, using visual storytelling to enrich scholarly discussions meaningfully.

3.1 Drawing through the Theory: C. Hugo

This section contains three moving examples of how I have struggled with the large body of literature while conducting my doctoral research. I consider how this scholarly literature has significantly impacted my personal experiences and forced me to face the fears that frequently accompany solitary research. As I navigate the challenging process of converting my thoughts and emotions into the appropriate language of academia, I face numerous challenges. A persistent undercurrent in my reflections is the desire to have my drawings receive the same recognition and value as the written word.

As I use the tactile pressure of my dependable 2B pencil and ballpoint pen to explore the many thoughts and emotions swirling around in my head, I also consider the possibility that Artificial Intelligence (AI) could replace this particular way of making sense. I think about AI's new possibilities and the sense-making of English words and complex concepts.



Figure 1: Cheri Hugo: *Large body of work, fine liner on mul paper*

In Figure 1, my rage line drawings visually express my inner turmoil and reflect the challenges I faced during my PhD journey. Each bold stroke represents a moment of frustration, doubt, or triumph as I navigated the complexities of my research. Using a fine liner on mul paper, I found a way to channel my emotions and confront the obstacles that stood in my path, ultimately emerging more robust and resilient.

Similarly, in Figure 2, my exploration of complex concepts through a ballpoint pen on cartridge paper mirrored the intricate dance between advancing AI capabilities and upholding ethical standards. With each line, I confronted the ethical dilemmas inherent in leveraging AI to navigate the complexities of my research terrain. The delicate balance between technological advancement and ethical responsibility (LaunchCLT, 2023) weighed heavily on my mind as I charted new intellectual territories.



Figure 2: Cheri Hugo: *Complex Concepts, Ballpoint pen on cartridge paper*



Figure 3: *Cheri Hugo: In my own words, Ballpoint pen on cartridge paper*

Figure 3 became a canvas for my inner dialogue as I grappled with the ethical dimensions of my academic journey. With every stroke of the ballpoint pen, I sought to navigate the fine line between innovation and integrity, striving to ensure that my research remained ethically grounded in the face of technological evolution. Through this creative process, I confronted my inner struggle head-on, seeking to find harmony between the transformative potential of AI and the moral imperative to uphold ethical principles.

Reflecting on the challenges I have encountered during my doctoral research, I have realised the significant impact of scholarly literature on my academic journey and personal experiences. Navigating this vast body of knowledge has often forced me to confront fears associated with solitary research. However, amidst these challenges, I find comfort in expressing my thoughts and emotions in academic language, even as I desire my drawings to be valued as highly as written text. Lastly, I find my voice and stories in my own words. I colour them with my ideas and thoughts, paint them with undercurrents of theory and ink wash, and use broad brush strokes of ink in hope. In the invisible, so much is clear.

3.2 Drawing through thought: S. Wicomb

My colleague's drawings are poignant reflections of the mind's journey in the intricate dance of thought and creativity. In Figure 4, "Thoughts processing," created with a ballpoint pen on cartridge paper, we witness the unfolding of ideas, the intricate web of thoughts taking shape on the page. Figure 5, "Lucidity acquired," continues this exploration, capturing moments of clarity amidst the complexity as the lines flow purposefully and with direction. Finally, in Figure 6, "Thoughts realised," we see the culmination of the journey as the thoughts crystallise into tangible form, each stroke a testament to the power of the mind to bring ideas to life. Through these drawings, Wicomb invites us to contemplate the thought process, from inception to realisation, and the beauty of creativity in motion.

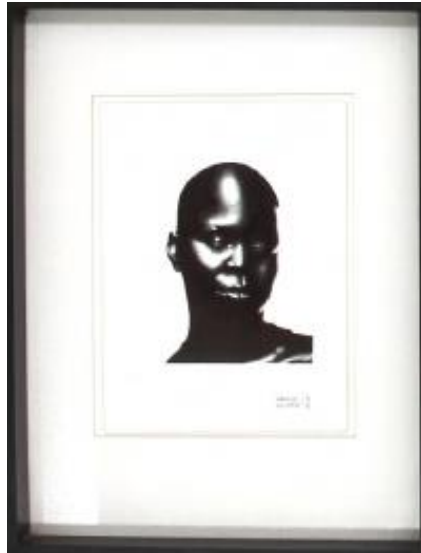


Figure 4: *Samuel Wicomb: Thoughts processing, Ballpoint pen on cartridge paper*

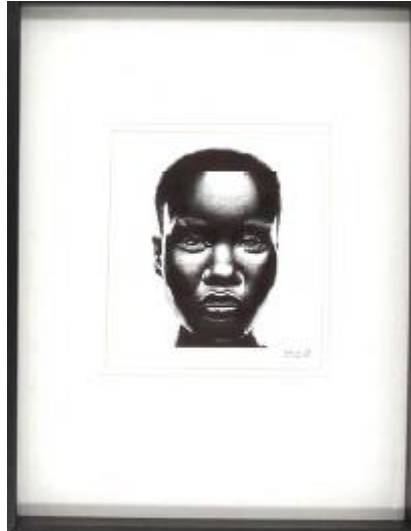


Figure 5: *Samuel Wicomb: Lucidity acquired, Ballpoint pen on cartridge paper*

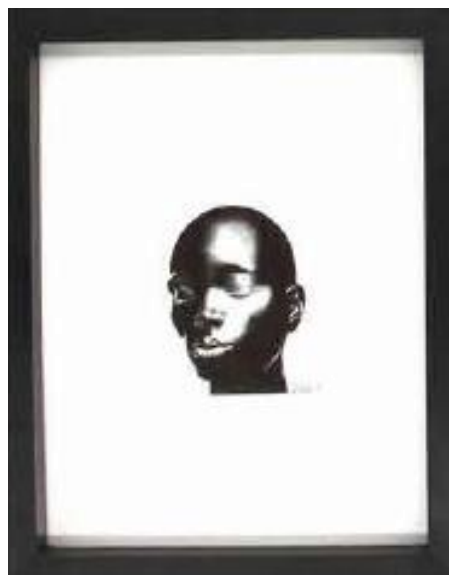


Figure 6: *Samuel Wicomb: Thoughts realised, Ballpoint pen on cartridge paper*

The drawings above form part of a series of drawings that were done over two years. I created the artwork while busy with preliminary research for my doctoral proposal. Initially, when I started on the series of sketches, I did not place a premium on the drawings; I was just feeling inspired and wanted to create as my research was taking shape. As the drawing intensified and progressed, I realised the weight it carries; for instance, I chose to draw with a ballpoint pen as I am comfortable with the medium, but also the pen is unforgiving; it is a harsh medium that does not allow mistakes, one is not able to erase and start again, as is the case with a pencil. The pen is like a tattoo, permanent; if I made an error, I had the option of integrating, covering, or starting over. Each one of the corrective measures meant I wasted labour both physically and mentally. In the task of avoiding errors, I understood that there is more to drawing than just making simple marks or an aesthetically pleasing sketch; there is a hidden dimension that goes beyond the physical realm. The drawings I did took many hours of labour; some went fast, but others dragged on for days and weeks to complete. I adapted my perception of just drawing and made it a ritual as I understood that hours of drawing facilitate thinking. Whenever I drew, I did it in complete silence, with no music in the background or earphones; I sought explicitly to connect with my thought process. Sometimes, I would be oblivious to where I was and enter a trance-like state after drawing nonstop for hours. I remember on numerous occasions becoming upset when my family members came to check if I was okay as I made sure to draw in an isolated space away from the hustle of home life. In the end, I realised that I was not chasing to draw the best I could, but instead, I wanted the space to sit and engage with my thoughts, and drawing so intensely for more than two years allowed me this rare opportunity to connect with my inner being truly.

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, our exploration of academic reflection, creative expression, and design education has been enlightening and transformative. As design academics immersed in drawing, we have delved into the act of thinking while using a pencil or a brush. This endeavour has been especially significant given our academic struggles and the impact of the pandemic and technological advancements on our lives. At the heart of our exploration is recognising that thoughts are integral to the design process. Although often unseen, these thoughts drive our creative work and guide us through our research and academic journey. Our mission has been to bring these invisible thoughts to the forefront and celebrate their influence on our work and lives. Drawing from changes in design education, such as movements like #feesmustfall, #decolonizededucation, and the ongoing influence of the #4thindustrialrevolution, we have sought to understand how drawing can help us navigate complex concepts and change. Our creative practices, design processes, and disciplinary thoughts have converged in this exploration, shaping our understanding of drawing's role in academia and society. Through our conversation, we have exchanged ideas and responded to the call for transformative thinking, making visible the previously unseen aspects of our academic journey. We value thinking as a fundamental human activity in a constantly changing world. Central to our methodology has been using visual and arts-based methods rooted in feminist theory during our postgraduate studies. Through drawing, we have unravelled the concepts of our research and deepened our understanding of the world. Our exhibition showcases visual manifestations of our thought process, capturing the intricacies of our thoughts and offering glimpses into our imagination. These drawings demonstrate how drawing catalyses thinking and helps us make sense of the world. In this dance between thought and drawing, we have found a means of expression and a pathway to deeper understanding. As we continue our academic journeys, we aim to inspire others to embrace art-based methods, such as photovoice and other visual approaches, to engage with and reflect upon their thoughts, experiences, and transformations. The power of the visual medium, combined with reflective narratives, can help us appreciate the invisible and make it visible for all to witness and ponder.

5 Publisher's Note

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