READER DIDACTIC LAB

Understanding Practice as Research
MO THROP
CCW Graduate School, Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London

Practical music philosophy - fostering curious, critical minds of classical musicians.
ANDREA VOETS
Hochschule für Musik ‘Hanns Eisler’, Berlin

So you want to be a good musician? You better start researching now!
HENRICE VONCK
Codarts University for the Arts, Rotterdam

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Instructions for a Drawing Class
CHLOÉ BRIGGS
Paris College of Art
Opening question/statement:

Understanding Practice as Research. How to support practice based/lead PhD students in an understanding of their practice itself as research and what implications might this have for the format of the final submission which usually requires a written component (30,000 at the UAL).

Abstract

The requirement by the University of the Arts London of a submission of 30,000 words for a Practice-led PhD has invariably raised anxieties – as artists – about their relationship to theory. In response to this I run a series of seminars for first year PhD students Understanding Practice as Research, in which each student (of a cohort of usually between 10 and 15 students) presents their research project - alongside their artworks - to the group for discussion once a term. The presenting student makes a ten-minute presentation outlining the aims of their research project; this is followed by a discussion of the artwork within the context of their project by the group. The aim of the group discussion is to address the practice in terms of the aims of the research project and address the practice itself as research.

This initiative is to support the new area of practice-led research as a generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of knowledge. Considering the artwork itself as imminently articulate and eloquent in its own right is to acknowledge how the process of creating the works has the potential to reveal new insights which could not have been known or anticipated outside of this process. We are then able to contemplate how the written component for the thesis – how the writing might be attempted – and to find alternatives to qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

We approach the artwork as a discursive possibility, as speculation, as proposition – as an act of finding and exploration. In these seminars, we engage then with the presented artworks critically within the projects own terms of reference. In responding to the artwork we inevitably come to address the process of the works’ production; intuition, conjecture and experience are addressed as legitimate processes in the making of the work. What then of the subjectivity and the agency of the researcher in this process? We are responding to the work and offering insights which might be helpful in the articulation of the actual artwork as research. We consider the proposition that the artwork might assert, or propose an argument or a critical relation or dimension; how it operates as an object in the world – how it is encountered by the viewer – its performative potential. The work then refuses the role as illustrating a research question through considering how it might become /perform an ongoing exploration of a particular research question which does not necessarily know the outcome.

Out of this scrutiny we also consider how to devise a strategy for writing - to consider how the written element of the thesis, as discursive form contemplating how the performative nature of the artwork might come to
challenge and reconfigure theoretical propositions. The written element would not then necessarily explain or contextualize the practice but rather address how the ongoing work might shift accepted or presumed notions or ideas and so serve as a vehicle to address how the artwork provides an opportunity and a forum to reconfigure theoretical positions.

In focusing on a response by the group to the presented artworks (in the context of a research proposal) we have been able to investigate possibilities for how the artwork might make explicit the research that is in fact integral to the practice itself. Addressing and understanding the artwork as embodying and evidencing it’s research, its processes and research methodologies, has allowed a more dialogic relationship between the studio practice and the written component - which rather than merely providing a commentary, exploration or contextualization for it, could become a critical vehicle for considering and disseminating alternative possibilities.

The group considers the student’s own self-reflexive mapping of the practice-led work as enquiry, exploring how the process of making and doing might challenge pre-conceived notions and suggest unforeseen possibilities for the project.
Practical music philosophy -fostering curious, critical minds of classical musicians.
ANDREA VOETS
Hochschule für Musik 'Hanns Eisler', Berlin

Opening statement
The classical music world faces many existential problems, like a declining audience halls combined with an overload of highly skilled musicians. To survive, conservatories should deliver versatile, interesting musicians that can live up to the challenges that lie ahead.

'Practical music philosophy' is a course that is tailored to the special living world of musicians. With the help of important thinkers -that would otherwise have remained inaccessible- the students develop critical thoughts and foster their natural curiosity. The results -a broader horizon, supported arguments and the occasional rebellion- do not threaten the traditional aim for excellence of classical musicianship. On the contrary: inspired by great minds, the students will be able to make convinced career choices, leading towards an authentic, fulfilling artistic existence. Exactly these kind of musicians will be able to update the classical music to the 21st century.

Extra information
Practical music philosophy
-fostering curious, critical minds of classical musicians-

Professional classical musicians spend a lot of time in isolated practice rooms, which makes it easy to overlook the fact that they remain artists, who need extra-musical inspiration to develop their artistry. Many music students express the desire for a solid introduction to music philosophy, to strengthen their ability to reflect on their own work in a diverse and critical way; an important skill in the swiftly changing cultural field. Unfortunately, the scholarly way of teaching philosophy is not intended for, nor relevant to the professional practice of musicians.

Their particular way of accessing, creating and experiencing music, calls for a new way of teaching music philosophy, merging two worlds to bring out the best in both. Since October 2014, harpist-philosopher Andrea Voets (1989) merges these worlds in her innovative course 'Practical music philosophy' at the 'Hanns Eisler' conservatoire in Berlin.

The course:
-discusses the most important ideas in the history of music philosophy in a language, understandable for music students
-focuses on the practical implications of music philosophy in the performing practice
-nurthes a curious spirit, enabling the students to ask critical questions about their profession for years to come, inspiring them to think "outside the box"
-teaches students how to access complicated texts and challenges them to form a founded opinion and voice their thoughts

The topics include a.o. (our role in) the cultural industry, anxiety, interpretation, ethics, working attitude, barbarians, social significance and the language of music. Adorno, Plato, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Alain de Botton are the first philosophers to hand, to be followed by Langer, Baricco, Driver, Baricco and writings of the great composers.

Previous experience has shown very positive results. Students find themselves in a group with motivated, adventurous colleagues, which creates an exciting atmosphere in which there is ample room for discussion, argument, personal growth, doubts and profound questions.

Within one of the most traditional of all professional art educations, the urgency of giving critical, curious spirits the space to unfold is growing every day, not in the least since the classical music world is struggling with the question how to outlive the 21st century.
“So you want to be a good musician? You better start researching now!”
HENRICE VONCK
Codarts University for the Arts, Rotterdam

**KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR BUILDING A THRIVING ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROGRAM**

The Master of Music of Codarts University for the Arts, Rotterdam, has developed a thriving Artistic Research (AR) curriculum.

The first key success factor is the small **TEAM OF EXPERT ARTISTIC RESEARCH COACHES**, led by a research coordinator. These seven coaches:

- are musicians-researchers (1 PhD, 1 PhD candidate, 3 Masters)
- are well educated on the job in both AR methodology and in group and individual coaching of the students;
- each head their own AR domain in the field of their personal expertise, consisting of 14-20 students;
- meet once a month for peer review and discussion of their domain, the students and the further development of the curriculum;
- are stimulated to execute their own artistic research, which has a link to and will contribute to the AR curriculum.

The second key success factor is a well-described and communicated **ARTISTIC RESEARCH CURRICULUM**, in which:

- the students receive thorough education in a research methodology, in and through performance and creation, that has the Intervention Cycle at its core;
- the students build their own supportive AR network, comprising their AR coach, their main subject teacher, peers and external experts;
- the students keep a research blog to document and communicate the research progress;
- the research progress is constantly being monitored in four successive examinations (alternating formative and summative);
- the work is evaluated based on a set of clear and well described criteria;
- the students are trained in presenting their research in Clinics and Research Performance Labs.
In the research module I spy with my little eye, 10 students of Academy Minerva made contact with 10 people living with dementia from care home Blauw Borgje about making a portrait.

What does portraying mean when it concerns people with dementia?

What kind of encounters took place? And how did this assignment influence the artistic practice of the students?

Portraying people in a vulnerable context outside the protected area of the Art Academy enables the students to be the owner of the how and the what they are portraying.
Re-enact: creating an active living archive
LOUISE O'BOYLE
Belfast School of Art, University of Ulster

The compilation of archives and collections by and held within tertiary educational institutions is not uncommon. They are often valued as records of past outputs for current and future audiences both inside and outside of those institutions.

The changing landscape in higher education has seen the evolution of the learning spaces that reach beyond physical and/or time boundaries. Could the creation of a digital archive that depicts student practices be useful as a learning resource? An archive which reflects more holistically the contexts in which practice happens; inclusive of the students, their environment, the surrounding sounds and possible visual markers of the time. Could it act as a tool for self and peer reflection? Demonstrate students’ knowledge and understanding of arts practices? The creation of such an archive with students in Belfast School of Art will be discussed. As will the key themes emerging from the evaluations over the past two academic years that the archive has been in existence.

- The student as the documenter and their collecting strategies
- Greater insights into students’ perceptions of their learning experience
- The use of the archive as an enhancement to the learning experience
- The use of the archive to gain a deeper insight into students’ artistic evolution

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How important for the future evolution of arts education is the interpretation of the contexts/spaces in which learning happens?

With the demise of the homogenous student body, how do we ensure the inclusivity of all our students in a meaningful manner that increases equity and decreases exclusion?

Technology, used at the centre of learning can be both motivational and transformative to both teaching approaches and students learning. How much would you agree?

With increased emphasis on global citizenship and improved digital literacy, how can we best prepare our students to negotiate meaning within intercultural communication contexts?

In an age of continual technological advances, how can digital archives be conserved for the future?
Instructions for a Drawing Class
CHLOÉ BRIGGS
Paris College of Art

In 2008 I was invited to speak at an event called, ‘8 People Are Invited To Give Talks About A Specific Significant Educational Experience’ at an artist-run space in London called KEN. A member of the audience spoke about how he had recently found a folder of paper assignments collected from his BA in Graphic Design at Central Saint Martins, a course he had completed some years ago. He described with enthusiasm the experience of re-reading the design briefs. For him, with little memory of contact time with teachers, the texts were ‘where the teaching was.’

Since that event, I have been investigating the different forms of the art assignment and searching for historical and contemporary examples from art schools. Until recently, the only printed collections of art school assignments were to be found in books on the Bauhaus, and a rare edition called The Developing Process: A compilation of projects for the new Foundation Course in Art and Design in the UK (1959)1. In 2012, Draw It with Your Eyes Closed: The Art of the Art Assignment published by Paper Monument2 brought together eighty-nine art school assignments remembered or invented by its contributors. And last year, designer Nina Piam curated an exhibition at the 26th International Biennale of Graphic Design in Brno, titled ‘Taking a Line for a Walk’: An exhibition about Assignments in Design Education. In her search for the content of the exhibition, Nina confirmed that little historical documentation exists.

The process of teaching in art school has, quite naturally, been a predominately oral one. Teaching here is in the continual exchange between teacher and student: a conversation. I think in most contemporary art schools the one-to-one tutorial is the preferred format over group exercises where students are asked to respond to the same set of instructions. And, as is the nature of conversation, the dialogue/the teaching, is reactive, experiential, and personal.

What interests me about the writing of an art assignment as a method of teaching distinct from the spoken tutorial is that it requires the artist-teacher to identify, synthesize and pin down the nuts and bolts of a creative process – to make it tangible and universal. In my experience, art school teachers hand out a required, photocopied brief (with aims, outcomes, grading policies etc...) and then animate the idea orally in front of a group of students. Most often, the papers end up on the floor unread, just a token of the protocol that institutions have to abide by.

What made the student from Central Saint Martins want to keep his for years? Could this piece of writing have qualities in its own right? Is the art school assignment a particular form of writing? Are there interesting things to discover if we take such assignment writing as a genre?

I devised ‘Instructions for a Drawing Class’ as a way to find out. In the context of the drawing class I teach at Paris College of Art, I asked each student to confide to the group what they considered to be their weaknesses when making drawings: where they felt blocked, what approach or experience they thought

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1 The Developing Process / Published by King’s College in the University of Durham on the occasion of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1959, Newcastle upon Tyne : King’s College Printing Section, 1959

they needed to have in order to change their drawing practice. The problems the students shared ranged from a lack of knowledge of technique (“How do I create depth in drawing?”) to struggles with the process, (“it is hard to let go”), and issues with confidence and ‘going wrong’. I then thought about the creative people I knew who make work concerned with similar issues and asked them to set the students individualized exercises that they thought might help.

Paris College of Art has a remarkable international population: currently 48 nationalities; the students’ statements about what they wanted to learn in a drawing class revealed aspects of their previous education and reflected what you could identify as cultural differences in the education of the arts. The laborious task of finding the student their own, personal teacher from the world outside the school was an attempt to respond to all the needs of this mixed class.

The invited artists, writers, and teachers who took part were given no template or specific format for their instructions other than the student’s description of their problem and that the class was to be two and a half hours long. The assignment writing took many forms but the majority arrived by post: all (apart from one set of instructions sent by text message) addressed the student personally. I observed that the arrival of the paper lessons in sealed, addressed envelopes brought delight. Emails and online forums for learning are quick methods for exchange and relatively anonymous, the antithesis to the slow movement and personal nature of a posted letter. This slowing down of the exchange between student and teacher and the individual address were important factors in the context of this experiment – learning to draw is a dedicated, personal practice and it takes time.

The ‘instructions for a drawing class’ assignments I received were as varied as the voices and practices of their authors, ranging from minimal directions that read like an Yoko Ono ‘Instruction Painting’ to passionate engagements with the student’s imagination. But all were prompts and encouragements to make drawings. My role as the teacher was to connect my students to other teachers, to show them that artists are generous and willing to share what they know if you ask. Once the students understood that the ‘one-to-one’ tutorial could be with anyone they really wanted to have a conversation with they realized that there were no limits to this idea. Our teachers can be anyone we wish to learn from.

What I have discovered is that this particular one-to-one exchange – the honesty of the students articulating their needs and the thoughtfulness of the assignments designed in response – has produced a book of lessons inspired by common problems with drawing: art assignments that can be re-activated by others, in new contexts and are not dependent on art school or the presence of a teacher.

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3 *Instruction Paintings*, Yoko Ono, Weatherhill, New York, 1995
Instructions for a Drawing Class

Chloe Briggs
This book is the content of a single class session, out of a 15 week course called, 'Experimental and Creative Drawing', that ran in the Spring of 2012 in the Fine Art Department of Paris College of Art.

Two weeks in advance of the session described here I asked students for frank and specific descriptions of when they got stuck when making drawings – where they feel blocked, uncertain, frustrated – and I noted the responses. I sent each student's problem statement to an artist working outside of the school - in New York, London, Paris, and invited them to design a drawing exercise that they believed could help. My idea was that the artist would share, from their experience, solutions to the problem through the act of drawing. The student would be temporarily relinquished from responsibility for their actions under the guidance of their distant tutor, trusting that their 'teacher' was mindful of their work.

The resulting 13 individual sets of instructions were handed out like gifts in envelopes at the beginning of the class. After the initial frenzy of activity – asking questions, setting up workspaces, organising materials, we worked in silence. I felt the silence was an expression of respect for the time and thought invested in the instructions for each 'class'.

I think that the range of 'problems with drawing' that the students articulated are universal – without age limit, fashion, or hidden agenda. As a result, the set of instructions is a practical drawing course to be followed by anyone interested in learning about drawing at anytime.

Introduction
Mike Wilson instructions for Yoora

Exercise for Yoora

Materials: Several large sheets of paper, ideally around five or six feet high to allow you to relate to the work at ‘one-to-one’ scale; drawing materials such as dilute acrylic paint or broad charcoal sticks that will allow you to work in broad tonal strokes. No eraser.

"Balefully eyeing the silent television set in the lounge one Sunday morning, he had suddenly realized that he could no longer remember its function. It had required a considerable mental effort to recover himself and re-identify it. Out of interest he had tried out the new talent on other objects, found that it was particularly successful with over-associated ones such as washing machines, cars and other consumer goods. Stripped of their accretions of sales slogans and status imperatives, their real claim to reality was so tenuous that it needed little mental effort to obliterate them altogether."

-- J.G. Ballard, "The Overloaded Man" (1961)

Directions: Make an observational drawing or set of drawings but, in the manner of Ballard’s protagonist, take some time before you begin to try to allow the identities and functions of the objects involved to dissolve. Disregard the way that the subject “fits together” or interacts with its surroundings and try instead to sense and inhabit it as a pure abstraction. Do not select exotic subjects but try to recover the alien-ness of the extremely familiar. Do not worry about ‘correct’ proportions or naturalistic realism; concentrate instead on allowing the ‘real’ to fade into the abstract until you experience them as fully contiguous. You may also choose to annotate your drawings. -- Michael Wilson

Yoora

"Controls her drawing too much. Felt that this was better when she was asked to draw abstractly. When drawing from life she gets ‘crazy’ about getting proportions correct and tries to control too much. It is hard for her to ‘let go’. Also feels like she tries to organise her personality too much. Wants to get rid of photo-realistic quality of work."
Helen Barff instructions for Lisa

Lisa's Drawing Class

Equipment: Charcoal, A1 paper, masking tape, a spot light

1. Make five drawings by tracing around yourself in five different positions. Use new paper each time. Do this by laying several A1 sheets of paper on the floor. You will need to stick the sheets together. Draw some positions with limbs sticking out in variety of ways and some more curled up.

2. Cut out the five drawings of yourself.

3. Twist, loop, and turn the cut out drawings into between one and three sculptural objects, securing them with masking tape. You can cut slots in them, thread them through each other or use folds. The result should be three-dimensional and either sit on the floor or be secured to the wall.

4. Choose one of your sculptural objects. Sit / stand next to it. Have a new sheet of paper and charcoal ready. Close your eyes. Feel the contours and shapes of the sculptural object with one hand and draw what you feel with the other. Draw every detail and don't peek until you're done. If you lose your place just go back to the nearest estimated spot, but don't open your eyes until you think you're done.

5. On a new piece of paper, with your eyes open draw your sculptural object just using line, without taking your charcoal off the page. Make the drawing at least double the size of the object.

Lisa: "'Limited in the way that I draw', which bothers her a lot. Her teacher at school 'watched and inspected' and as a result she doesn't have confidence. Afraid of 'big strokes', she only uses thin pen lines."
rub out your last drawing, including the sculptural objects.

6. Lay out all your drawings, including the sculptural objects.

7. On a new piece of paper draw the sculptural objects using just tone, i.e., no line. Use a stick of charcoal on its side. You can break the charcoal to make it shorter, but it mustn't get less than 2 cm. This drawing should be at least double the size of the sculptural object. Use a spotlight to help make strong shadows. Get the black really black and leave the white white.

8. Layout all your drawings, including the sculptural objects.
Dear Jorge,

I'm happy to meet you via this assignment. I understand that you like the control of the pencil, and that you want to learn how to draw bodies, faces and hands.

Materials you'll need are:
- Pencils (HB, 2B, 6B) and a soft graphite stick if you can, and graphite dust. Graphite will be best for you because you can than use pencil with it, but if you can't get the graphite stick and dust, get big sticks of soft charcoal and/or charcoal dust, and a charcoal pencil.
- Erasers: a soft putty eraser and a white plastic eraser (Staedler or similar). If you can, get a Chamois leather – it's best (for soft erasing) – if not, use a soft clean cloth (t-shirt material). Stump or torchon (a pencil shaped drawing tool made of compressed paper pulp – alternately wrap a blunt pencil tip in a clean rag/t-shirt material).
- Good paper makes a big difference.. plain drawing paper is fine for the warm-up exercises. For the longer drawing, get white Coventry rag paper or something similar (you could substitute other paper that has some texture but not too much.. if using Charcoal, ridged charcoal paper. If using graphite, a surface that is 'eggshell' finish – matt-feeling but not super-textured.

First, here's a warm up exercise that compels you to abandon control – but uses the pencil!

**Blind contour drawings: ½ an hour.**
Set yourself up with a pad of drawing paper, a sharp HB or 2B pencil and a timer. I understand you'll have a model, but want you to start by drawing one of your own hands with the other.

This exercise is all about looking – concentrating 100%...
Use the same approach for drawing hands. Try to see the biggest shapes first—particularly avoid outlining each finger but draw only the shapes of the shadows and light with erasers graphite.

Take your pencil and put your drawing hand underneath the top sheet of paper—so you won't be able to see what you're doing. Set the timer for 10 minutes. Turn off cellphone and any other distractions. Take a few deep breaths and slow down. Concentrate until you can imagine that the pencil is touching what you are looking at.

1. Look at the hand you are drawing and focus on the contours (lines around the edge and lines across the forms—cross contours). Follow them slowly and as carefully as you can. If you lose your place stop. Re-focus and start drawing again. Press hard and light in response to the thickness/darkness of the contour you are following. Don't look at the drawing. If you can go for longer than 10 minutes—do.

2. Repeat the above process looking at the model and drawing first the face, and then the body. Allow 10 minutes for each drawing and don't stop before that time, but by all means go on longer if you can.

Take a short break.

Using the graphite dust, cover a couple of sheets of A3 (18x24") paper using the Chamois leather or cloth, so that the paper is a light mid grey.

Set up your model so that light is coming strongly from one direction.

Starting with the head, and working slightly larger than life size, squint your eyes to eliminate detail, and work out where the lightest areas of the head are. Don't think of it as a face, but a large form made of shapes of light. Erase the light areas using soft and hard-edged erasing as appropriate. Always try to see the largest shapes first, working from them to smaller shapes. Next look for the darkest dark shapes and put them in with either the graphite stick or with a stump/torchon dipped in graphite dust. Work between light and dark, and only use pencil and line very sparingly at the end of the drawing for definition. Avoid 'outlining'.
Dear Sabrina,

In my instructions I have chosen to concentrate on the very first sentence of your statement and invite you to practice working from life. The problem with 'life' is that it rarely stays still for any length of time. As I write this, I am sitting by the window looking down at the 'life' on a Paris street, and it seems to me that 'life' is a constantly moving spectacle of cars, buses, chairs, adults, children, clouds, leaves, light, shade, sound, pigeons, bicycles… I would like you to think about drawing from life as a form of notation – both in the sense of recording something observed, as in the act or practice of note-taking, and in the sense of a system of representation, as in music or dance. In that second sense, the marks used to record sound, light or movement can sometimes be very abstract; nevertheless, they are instantly legible to someone familiar with the system. In both cases, the emphasis is on speed and documentation: the point of legible, accurate note-taking is that it can be done fast and the notes taken can serve as an aide-memoire for future work.

You won't be asked to produce technically perfect drawings in your class today, but to think about the following questions: What, of life, is worth recording? When you are out in the world, what strikes you as noteworthy, and why? How might you begin to develop a system of notation to capture life with a speed and precision that makes sense to you? The instructions will ask you to start out with writing as a way into drawing...

Paris, Monday, 19th March 2012

Kate Briggs
Here is an example of a well-known shorthand system:

**The second 30 minutes: Shorthand**

Firstly, place your note on 9 pages of your sketchbook. The notes can be as long or as short as you see fit. courthouse, church, theatre, museum, café, park, school, studio. After the notes have been transcribed, check them over by translating them into full words, then compare the shorthand version to your original written notes, analyzing the legibility and speed of your shorthand.

**The third 30 minutes: Writing**

Repeat the exercises above, only this time instead of writing full words and sentences, try to develop a shorthand of your own: abbreviate words as you see fit, omit punctuation, develop a kind of writing system that is legible to you and can be produced much faster than your normal writing speed. Your shorthand should be your own personal shorthand, and you should experiment with it until you find a system that works for you. It is not necessary to develop a shorthand of your own to take notes, but it can be a useful skill to have.

What you will need:
- A phone with an alarm so your timings are precise
- A blank sketchbook
- A range of pencils, pens and mark-making tools of your choice
The next 60 minutes:
Repeat the exercises above, only this time the notes can be either written words, the symbols and marks you will continue developing as your own form of shorthand, drawings in the more conventional sense, or a combination of all three. Think of each page of your sketchbook as a space on which to place your 'notes'. In other words, rather than writing line by line, place your notes on the page as you would if you were drawing. Think about the relationship of those notes and marks to one another on the space of the page. This time you can also take longer to produce each note: change position every 10 minutes, but take the full 10 minutes to produce one note (if necessary). At the end of this hour, you should have at least 6 new pages in your sketchbook.

The final 30 minutes:
Go back into School and look over the 24 pages in your sketchbook. Select the pages of notation that you feel work best for whatever reason: the ones that work best visually, the ones that are most legible to you, the ones that capture best what you observed of life. Go to the photocopier and make copies of the pages you are happiest with, playing around with scale: What happens if you blow one of your notations up? Or reduce it in size? What happens if you take a section of a page and make that bigger? At the end of class, you should have selected a notation or a sequence of notations that you wish to present…

I hope you enjoyed yourself! I really look forward to seeing what you produce…

Kate
Nicole Zehr instructions for Heather

3-26-12 Drawing Session: Figure in Space

Nicole Zehr

Materials.

Conté crayon or Nupastel. You’ll want to break off a 3/4” piece and hold it from the side so you can draw with the flat edge or the tip. The goal is to have a working tool that lets you easily make marks using both edge and tip in a single stroke.

Drawing paper and/or heavyweight newsprint – 11” x 17” would be a good size since it’s large but hopefully still manageable for working on-site.

Drawing board and clips.

Watch or stopwatch for gesture drawings.

Book excerpts are from:

The Natural Way to Draw, Kimon Nicolaides

Figure Drawing, Nathan Goldstein

If possible, read the short excerpts before the class.

Location

If a figure model is available these could be done in the studio. However just as good or better would be drawing at the Louvre. My suggestion is going to the Italian sculpture rooms where Michelangelo’s Slaves are located. I’m suggesting you work from one of the Slave sculptures before the class.

It is possible, read the short excerpts before the class.

Gesture Drawings – 20 one-minute drawings

Spend the first 20 minutes doing twenty one-minute gesture drawings. Work from figure sculptures (entire figures, not busts or fragments). Try choosing models that are active or tense. You could work from many different sculptures or simply work from one for the whole class.

Exercises

Currently views her drawings as an, ’expression of her body’. Interested in how sometimes ideas feel like they cannot be made in any other way – they are distinctly about drawing. She has a lot of energy for the work but feels that it is flat and one-dimensional. She wants to explore how to create ‘depth’ in drawing.
This would ideally be another drawing of the same figure, from the same or similar point of view. This time, focus on drawing your model in space, in relationship to you. How far is your model from you and how far away is the wall behind? Thinking about Giacometti again, try working with vertical and horizontal lines to establish markers of relationships in space. Don’t worry about details; instead think about establishing larger relationships and points to define the space.

You still want to start working out in a loose or gestural way, except instead of focusing on just the figure, think of wrapping the space around the figure and planting the figure in that space. Again, let your drawing be layered and dense. Remember that the space you see and experience is in relationship to you, and you are within the space.

Drawing 3: Figure in Space – Planes and Structured Lines

Now you’ll start on a drawing you’ll work on for the rest of the time. You’ve drawn thinking about the energy and tensions of the body, and again thinking about the figure enveloped in space. By now you have a sense of underlying energies and tensions of your subject as well as of the space you and your subject are in. These things will inform your longer drawing.

In this drawing there’s no set way for you to work. You might end up depicting surfaces and contour lines more than you did in the last drawings. If you do, try to think of your lines as defining planes, while those planes are the outer surfaces of masses (see the first Goldstein excerpt). Pay attention to line quality.

As you work, think about using line, created with the side of your drawing tool as well as the tip, to define structural plane relationships on the figure. Most curved lines you see on the body are a succession of convex and concave curves that define the intersections of different muscle change position to view the same sculpture from a different point of view. Use a full page of newsprint for each drawing. As you draw think of the gesture as a movement in space and as you work try to feel that the blank page represents space. Try to spend no more than one minute on each sketch, then move on to the next.

These are fast, scribbly gesture drawings capturing movement and energy inherent in the pose (see excerpt from The Natural Way to Draw by Kimon Nicolaides for more about gesture drawings). Structural Drawings

For the rest of the drawing session, you’ll create at least three drawings focusing on exploring structure in different ways. Don’t worry about doing accurate representational drawings. For these drawings you’re not concentrating on light and shadow, reflections, or other surface effects. You shouldn’t use an eraser. You want to start out each drawing with the gesture energy you’ve started off with.

Drawing 1 (20 minutes)

Structure and Energy – Inside Out

Before you draw you might want to look at the drawings by Giacometti. Think about line moving inside and through solid forms in an exploration of structure and energy. Starting out working in gesture mode, work towards defining internal structure – the spine, the axis of the torso, the line from hip to hip and shoulder to shoulder and the masses and energy that you see. Where is the weight of the figure concentrated? What kinds of marks best express the pose? You may find you use a lot of curved lines or you may want to simplify using straight lines. This drawing can be abstract and diagrammatic if you want it to be, but as you work, think about building the figure from the inside out almost as if you were working with clay. Let your drawing be dense and don’t worry if it’s messy. You probably want to spend about 20 minutes on this drawing.
masses. Overlapping or broken lines can help define space relationships. Before you work, look at the drawings by Cézanne and Albers. Notice the structure and energy in the lines in the Cézanne drawing and the way the lines are structured and broken as planes meet or change directions. Take a look at the way Albers uses the flat side of the charcoal to carve out the planes where the flat side of the charcoal is used to carve out the planes. Perhaps in your drawing you want to use tones to help define the planes, but don’t get distracted by incidental shadows and tones—not all shadows detract from the structure and tonal values in your drawing. Take a look at the way the lines are structured and broken as planes meet or change directions. Before you work, look at the drawings by Cézanne and Albers, and imagine overlaying or breaking lines can help define space.
Peter Smith instructions for Chloe

College walks

Peter Smith

Using a sketch pad go for a walk around the college and draw a view of the structure, building, space, corridor, doors, light sources, architectural details and texture of the environment, inside and outside the building.

Divide your time of 2.5 hours into 10 minute drawings, which will make 15 in total, at the end you should have a journey through the building from start to finish, in a sequence of drawings in any materials and marks to convey place and space.

Arrange the drawings in a line to show how you moved through the building and the selection you made on your path to reach the end.

Four Sides of a Room

Take a seat in the middle of the studio, face a wall and draw in charcoal, use of line, blocks of tone and texture will be part of your approach to the structure.

Next turn 90 degrees to face the next wall, rub out with hand on the marks of the previous drawing, the second stage of what is in front, being aware of the distance between you and the wall.

Turn again 90 degrees to the next wall and rub out the last drawing lightly and proceed to draw what you see in front, using a rubber to create more light.

My drawings are almost always about the line – a spindly, jerky, sometimes sensuous line. I want to be able to make thick, heavy drawings that give an illusion of space. I admire drawings that conjure up space.
reflect these 2 qualities in the marks you make. Build the drawing up, slowly or quickly in any of drawing materials and tools available. Your marks will be taking shape on the paper and dynamic will appear in front of you.

The last drawing is of the final wall to be drawn and this can be done using charcoal and rubber in order to gain things that were lost and found again in the work. This is the end of the exercise.

Wrapped Object
Find an object, organic or manmade, next wrap the object in brown paper, as it is stiff and will create contrasting edges and forms, which might disguise the contents. Use string to hold it together and be inventive with the string. The relationship of the two materials should emerge.

Drawing 1) Draw the wrapped object in soft pencil, using marks and lines to describe direction, tone, light and shadow.

Drawing 2) Unwrap part of the package to expose the object inside, when revealed start to draw the contrast between the two surfaces, texture, pattern and structure, use charcoal.

Drawing 3) Next unroll and strip away the brown paper, so as to reveal much more of the object. This time work with ink, marks and lines to describe the distinction between the materials, texture, pattern and structure.

Drawing 4) If there is time, place the whole of the object inside the box, place a spotlight to highlight the contrasting parts, there will be heavy dark areas and white light areas. The history of your marks will be taking shape on the paper and dynamic will appear in front of you.

The last drawing is of the final wall to be drawn and this can be done using charcoal and rubber to gain things that were lost and found again in the work. This is the end of the exercise.
Project for nine sheets of paper

Terry Smith instructions for Carolina

Materials
- One hard pencil
- One ruler
- Charcoal
- Nine sheets of paper (no spare or replacement sheets)
- Use both sides

1. GRID: Variations.

First hour

1.1 15 minutes
Take first sheet measure all sides and diagonals write sizes on the sheet.
Decide on a border and within the border make a grid.

1.2 15 minutes
A different border, different size grid. Use both sides.
Sieve on the sheet.
Take three square measure all sides and draw grids within.

1.3 15 minutes
A different border, different size grid. Use both sides.

1.4 15 minutes
A different border, different size grid. Use both sides.

"I am very illustrative and usually have to start drawing from photographs. I would like to free myself from this and not always have to "represent" something in my drawings."
2. SHAPE

Charcoal / pencil / eraser
Second hour

2.1 15 minutes
Make a shape on the paper side one with charcoal.
Make the same shape on side two in pencil.

2.2 15 minutes
Cover the whole sheet of paper in charcoal (do not fix).
With eraser make a series of lines.

2.3 15 minutes
Make a series of grids over and over without using a ruler.
Make one grid erase with hand or cloth, make another
and erase.
Continue until time is finished.

2.4 15 minutes
Cover the whole sheet of paper in charcoal (do not fix),
cover a section of paper with charcoal, and then use by
flicking the ruler onto the sheet.

3. FIN
Final 30 minutes

3.1 15 minutes
Take a piece of paper attach to wall. Look at it for
14.59 seconds then make a single mark.

3.2 15 minutes
Take one of the drawings made at random and quickly
tear into sections.
Write down as many words as possible that describe
what you have done throughout the session.
Two different things on both hands.
Draw two objects on a sheet of paper, with 2 pencils between them.
Draw these objects on a sheet of paper with 2 pencils in both hands.
Draw an object that you saw this morning.

Introduction - warm up

(10 minutes)

Without looking at your paper

(10 minutes)

Draw an object that you saw this morning.

(15 minutes)

Graphite Pencil:

1. Make two separate points on your paper, join it by a quick and straight line. Try to make the line very straight and smooth.
2. Draw a circle with one line; try to make it smooth and regular. Draw circles clockwise and counter-clockwise.
3. Draw two parallel segments and try to join them by two other segments. This has to become a square. Try to make it smooth and regular. Draw circles clockwise and counter-clockwise.

Draw this object 2 times at a time with a pencil in both hands.
Draw this object 4 times at a time, with 2 pencils between two different fingers on both hands.

Antonia says she is a 'control freak'. The forms she makes are dictated too much by her mind and not by what she feels. Finds that her drawings are not 'saying anything' beyond a display of technical facility.
Nothing is (30 - 60 minutes)

On the experience of all the previous exercises, represent « nothing ». Nothing is not an object, nothing is not death, nothing is not a smell or a sound. Nothing is just nothing.

Sound (20 - 30 minutes)

1. Close your eyes and focus on the sound that your pencil do on the paper. Play some pencil music.
2. Do it again by looking on the paper. Try to play some music AND create at the same time a composed drawing with variety in gray, texture and line’s qualities.

Sound 2 (10 minutes by sound)

Close your eyes. Focus on an imaginary sound that you repeat in your head like a litany. Represent this sound like you draw a portrait.

Sound 2 Variation (20 minutes by sound)

Same as Sound 2. This time, you keep your eyes open. Represent a sound that you repeat in your head. This time, you can use diverse techniques and colors.

Skin’s landscape (30 minutes)

Draw your skin with graphite or charcoal, pen or large marker. You have to represent the texture of your hand or arm and try to give some expression to the drawing. You have to express the texture of your hand or arm and try to draw your skin with graphite or charcoal, pen or large marker.

(50 - 60 minutes)

Making a portrait.

draw a portrait.

In your mind the a litany. Represent the sound that you keep your eyes open. Show your skin. Focus on the movement sound that you repeat.

(50 - 60 minutes)

Sound 2
Dear Megan,

Here's the information I got about something that "blocks" you in drawing:

You get bored when you draw from life and have a hard time paying attention. You like to draw shapes and designs with fewer "technicalities".

Well, we don't know each other, so it's hard to say what the boredom is about, but I will say that it's true that if drawing from life becomes a painstaking struggle to get every nook and crook in a flower exactly "right"—like you are simply the courtroom stenographer of that flower—yes, that kind of drawing from life is boring. To do and to look at. Drawings that come from such a process are uninteresting because the lines, shading, etc. express the fear of not getting the thing right. In such drawings you see lines that are subservient to the model and always trying to obey—instead of working in a creative partnership with the model.

This kind of spirit of obeying is something we never, ever want to cultivate in life. It is the opposite of freedom and creativity.

So what's the solution? I couldn't track down the quote for you, but Sylvia Plath wrote something very beautiful that applies here. She basically said that the thing that keeps motivating her to write poems is that all the things of this world are always sitting around insisting so hard on the fact that they are what they are. Everything is almost a caricature of itself. A mirror says: Look how silver and exact I am. Precise, precise, precise and unsentimental. Books on...
Be sure to spend time looking first. Make the personalities come out of hiding…energize the model. Identify the parts of the bouquet that jump out with a strong attitude and note what those attitudes are for a handful of them in whatever way comes most naturally to you: words, marks, whatever. At some point just begin. This is an exercise that doesn't care about "mistakes". It should be done like a very focused improvisation. Intensely. You are favoring the accuracy of conveying the different attitudes you find with appropriately varied marks over "photographic" accuracy.

The end result should be a drawing of the bouquet in which the lines and shading speak in a vast variety of different languages, all crammed up next to one another. Some parts should even look like they've been done by different people on different days. But the variety is not for variety's sake. Each different style of mark should have come directly from the nature of the slightly exaggerated personality you found in the bouquet.

You could say that, ultimately, the accuracy of a drawing succeeds in as much as the expressiveness of its marks parallels the complexity of the expressiveness in the model. A refinement of the above technique over time could be a road to achieving accurate drawings of the real, animated presences of things. The point I'm trying to make is that you capture things on paper through an active and creative engagement with the thing in front of you (which is different than doing just pure imaginative drawing)—and if you don't approach things in this kind of way, it's easy to slip into that fearful and obeying kind of drawing.

So why draw from life?

Variety and abundance. It is important.

Maybe you know this famous thing that Jackson Pollock said. Hans Hoffman (a great "modernist" art teacher) was visiting JP's studio and asked him if he worked from nature. Jackson Pollock said "I am nature". That is the famous part of that.

Part of the work of drawing is being active in the way you look at what you are drawing. You force the extremely varied personalities or presences of the component parts of the model to start showing and differentiating themselves. I am sharp and quick! I am sloooow and globby…oozing around! I'm shy, I barely want to show myself! I'm arrogant and completely unconscious of the things around me! etc. This could also be described as you putting in the work of making the model reveal its sensuousness. The lovely feeling of its curves, the broiling feeling that can be radiated by certain kinds of highlights etc. The work of artists is to put energy into things so that they become so, so alive.

**EXERCISE ONE: 40 minutes**

You are going to draw this bunch of flowers as if its tangle of intricate component parts were a group of actors, drunk at a party, acting out their own roles in a game a charades. This means that each leaf, petal etc. is overdoing it a slight bit, a slight bit tongue in cheek. Playing themselves.

This is just a way to think about it. The goal is to identify all the different personalities of shapes and textures that announce themselves in the bunch, and then to ACT THEM OUT with your pencil. The gestures you make with your hand should be a bit theatrical—again: sharp, shy, globby, arrogant…whatever. There are a thousand possibilities. One can think about how to make the right marks that correspond to the different attitudes you find in the bouquet, but the best way is to just dive in and be theatrical – to enact each character as it is with your pencil, with your gesture.
Finally: either reverse the previous one (i.e. 3 minutes imagination, 30 seconds bouquet) or, alternatively, choose a rhythm of alternation that, having gotten the hang of this a bit, seems like it could be fun, useful or interesting. Very important for this exercise is how you handle the changeovers. When you go from drawing the flowers to pure imagination mode, it should be like you have Alzheimer’s disease: you have no idea where such lines could have come from. Start the imaginative part as if someone has handed you a random doodle that you are going to make your own.

The switch in the other direction—from imaginative to life drawing mode—could be trickier. Don’t just ignore the imaginative work you’ve done… try to work around it, with it. You don’t necessarily have to continue the next part of the bouquet in exactly where you left off. Be creative and try to not let this all dissolve into a mess. Try to keep making it work as a picture with integrity, at each change, no matter how bizarre the drawing starts to get. Be creative. Good luck.

EXERCISE TWO: 1h30 minutes
You need a clock or timer for this.
Same bunch of flowers. (You can rearrange them; crush some of them, whatever you want to make it a different bouquet).
Start drawing the bouquet, trying to represent it precisely and accurately. After 30 seconds, stop doing that. Look at the paper, forget the flowers completely and from what you’ve begun, continue the drawing—but now imaginatively—doing the kinds of shapes, patterns etc. that you like. You must integrate what you’ve begun when drawing the bouquet into your patterns, shapes. After 30 seconds, switch back to the precise and accurate drawing of the flowers. Keep alternating like this every 30 seconds for 30 minutes.

Now try at this rhythm: 3 minutes of drawing from the flowers, 30 seconds imagination. 30 minutes total.
- Ok, welcome to 50 drawings that u think fit
- where I can do
- it happens we are/terminating in 3 mins - the three drawings

Maurice Carlin instructions for Deinte
- Bonjour deinte! I will send 4 instructions today every 30 to 40 mins and I will be following them up here in Manchester. Ok, let’s start! I want to make at least 20 really quick drawings over the next 30 mins. Squeeze out a line of paint onto the paper. Using the side of the ruler, drag the paint across the paper. Try laying the paper on different surfaces, floor, table etc. Try different sizes of paper. Make at least 20 of these. Maurice
- Can I use different colors of paint?
- Yes go for it!
- Hi deinte, hope that went well! Next, put a very fine line of paint on the paper, as little as you can. Drag it across so that the paint is on the ruler, fast, choppy hits. You will notice that the marks made are quite different to the dragging. There is no ‘correct’ way to do this so just have fun! Make at least 20 of these. Maurice
- Ok, next step! Lay out on the floor all of the drawings u have made. Select 2 or 3 that u like the most. Don’t think too much about why yet, just pick a few that stand out for you. Try to repeat each one of these. Make at least 5 repeats of each one. Don’t worry if they don’t look the same. Maurice
- Hi Maurice we are finishing in 10 mins - is there anything else I can do?
- Ok, select 15 to 20 drawings that u think would fit Deinte.

"Comes from an architectural background and ‘architectural point of view’. Likes accurate, intense dimensions. Believes you have to know how to make precise drawings and this helps you to conceptualise. At first, found it hard to ‘break out of mould’ and this was because of a lack of confidence. Wants to explore different media on a bigger scale and become less precious about the end result."
Done! That was actually a lot more fun than I would have thought. Thank you so much for that! I'm glad to have some pictures to get a chance to photograph them and make them into an animation or a stop-motion video. Have a good day, Maurice!
Alys Hawkins’s instructions for Ana:

- Ana gets ‘constipated’ when drawing from imagination and finds it relatively easy to draw from life. She finds drawing ‘super-easy’ most of the time and likes the process of transforming one drawing into another. She doesn’t get bored when drawing.

Instructions for Drawing:

1. Look forward to seeing your drawing.
2. Find a piece of paper and choose a soft pencil.
3. Draw lines and shapes to begin.
4. Devote your attention to the process.
5. Don’t dwell on perfection.
6. Remember that drawing is about exploring and developing your own style.

Remember:
- Keep your work process fluid.
- Allow yourself to make mistakes.
- Enjoy the journey of creating.
Instructions for Yoshiko

I propose that for this drawing class that there is no discussion. For the 2.5 hour session I would like you to work in your personal studio space with your work in progress. Take every object, image, mark, trace in your studio and ‘question’ it through drawing. The discussion will be private – with yourself through the act of drawing. There will be no time to ‘analyse’: the ‘infinite possibilities’ will be in your work. You will use your intuition.

You will replicate each object or image to scale, for example: if there is a nail lying in your studio space, you will make a drawing the size of a nail. If there is a photograph, you will make a drawing of the photograph that is the same size. You will replicate each object or image to scale. For your drawing exercise, I think it is important that you aim for a temporary conclusion. You will bring all your drawings of your studio space back to the drawing class and install them as a trace of your studio and questioning of your work.

Chloe Briggs instructions for Yoshiko.

“…once we KNOW everything, and there is no more mystery left, we become dis-intrigued (sic). I don’t know how to solve this problem but maybe having a discussion about it is good enough. We should all sit and discuss discuss discuss. We will not get anywhere, anywhere in terms of an end, but we will KNOW that you’re not going to get anywhere. So it’s ok that we don’t form a conclusion. It’s boring to conclude. Let the problem mull so that there are infinite possibilities of potential solutions.”
Instructions for Elena:

List 17 reasons for making a drawing:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.
16.
17.

Select/circle the reason that you are most convinced by.

Make a drawing in the spirit of that reason in the time remaining.

Please note that your drawing will be given away and you will keep these instructions.

Chloe Briggs instructions for Elena.

"I guess my problem is that I seek to find some justification for creating things I create in this world of over production! And how can I find a balance between taking pleasure in my creativity and escaping from it in the world of over production? I do not know if this explanation is enough..."
With thanks to all the artists/teachers who shared so generously their experience and to the students who received and worked from the instructions with enthusiasm and open minds.