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ELAINE

INTRODUCTION

Elaine is an adult in her mid-twenties and is working as a professional, exhibiting artist. Elaine's narrative offers a significant contrast to those of the other participants. She is the only one of the four included in this research who has continued to study art as a practical subject in higher education. She is also the only one of the four participants who is still actively engaged in the production of art work. The majority of her narrative includes a discussion of drawing practice relating to work done outside of her formal art education. However, it is also her brief reflections on her secondary school art education that provide a significant contrast to the other narratives.

Elaine had worked with technicians when producing work as an undergraduate and they assisted her with aspects of her exhibitions, due to the physical nature of the work she wanted to produce and display, and the coordination difficulties she identified. Examiners on her course challenged her over the amount of help she had received and the connections here between the concept of art production relating to the skilful hand appeared to resonate with Elaine's experiences as an undergraduate on a fine art, sculpture, degree. She discusses drawing from observation as a central aspect of her practice, from the perspective of one who identifies with having a physical disability. The ways in which she has developed strategies to produce and exhibit her work and the ways in which she engaged with physical production of the work was a potential source of tension during the assessment of her final exhibition.

My initial contacts with Elaine were through a number of e-mails. These 'conversations' provided a useful starting point for further discussion and I was also able to view some of the recent work that she was producing via her web pages. There is a difference between the interviews based on transcriptions of the spoken word and these written interactions. E-mails can be modified and edited by the participant prior to sending. They are not the same as the transcribed interviews which did not give the participants the same opportunities for reflection on what had been said, yet they may appear more spontaneous than a formal written account. The e-mails seem to sit somewhere between the spoken and the written word and suggest a different type of communicative space offering links to Elaine's work via the social networking opportunities of 'My Space' which, although immediately accessible, was also transient and is no longer available.

Elaine is the only female participant. The nature of this research does not offer any kind of representative sampling, but the ratio of 3:1 reflects the disparity between male and female pupils recognised as having some form of learning difficulty. Boys in compulsory schooling are more likely to be diagnosed as having dyspraxia

and this may reflect cultural norms about types of behaviour and levels of ability apparent in a gendered diagnosis. Following a medical model of diagnosis it is argued that boys are more prone to dyspraxia and dyslexia (Portwood, 2003), yet this is acknowledged here as a contested terrain was discussed in Chapter 4.

Elaine was anxious to establish the disputed nature of her perceived disability, acknowledging that she was unsure as to whether her coordination difficulties were associated with dyspraxia or not. The difficulty with diagnosis and the degree of comorbidity for those with dyspraxia was also discussed in Chapter 4, and the inability to determine what some might describe as a 'clean sample' is highly problematic (Rosengren and Bradwell, 2003). The suggestion of dyspraxia potentially being, or not being, a factor in particular experiences appears to reflect the context specificity of this learning related disability. Elaine wrote:

I am not actually diagnosed with dyspraxia therefore it is unclear whether my coordination difficulties are a result of undiagnosed dyspraxia or of my muscle condition (which is neurological). If I am still of use to your research please let me know.

I decided that Elaine was of 'use' and that her reflections offered some distinct differences to the experiences of others. The focus on drawing from observation, art production and physical coordination and definitions of ability make Elaine's short narrative highly relevant.

Elaine was working as a professional artist and exhibiting her work at the time of this first contact, moving from a comparatively supported environment, with the potential for technical assistance in higher education, to a more isolated position without the infrastructure of technical support provided at her university and, arguably, without the technical support that might be afforded by a more established or affluent artist. The type of art production that she has engaged with may be perceived as constrained by physical limitation yet can also be considered in terms of offering different types of potential and the opportunity for participation. Elaine suggested that her difficulty in working with 'traditional' sculptural materials and techniques enabled her to develop work with a difference, and she appeared to embrace the opportunities that using a range of materials presented for her.

I have learnt that certain ways of working suit me more than others. My disability makes it difficult to operate a spot welder (although I really enjoy welding). However, I am fine with sewing, casting, simple woodwork and gluing things together. I find that this gives me quite a lot of scope and that in a sense the limitations give my work a unique edge (there are a lot of massive metal sculptures about but not many people make work with liquid silicone!)

Her reference to a contemporary female artist, Tracy Emin, and the use of stitched fabric to develop sculptural forms also appears to have provided an opportunity for working in accessible and less traditional ways and again this type of contemporary art influence singles out Elaine's experiences as distinct from the other participants.

At school I enjoyed papier-mâché. I liked making 3D forms even then. Also I did a lot of collage/painting as I was/am interested in texture. There was not

much opportunity to do sculpture but I did sculpture where possible. In my A levels I moved from papier-mâché to stitched fabric inspired by Tracy Emin.

This chapter offers a story of exception to the other narrative cases and provides a breach in the reading of the participants' experiences. To some extent her case offers points of departure from school practice and, therefore, discussion of observational drawing practices that sit outside the regulatory discourses of compulsory education and the systems of assessment associated with it. There is a sense that she acknowledges that she is decentered from a 'norm' of physical activity, yet she discusses her participation from within a centre of participation in art practice. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, there are a number of centres of practice. Elaine, acknowledging a physical disability, may be perceived of as excluded from participation in some activities (such as spot welding on large metal sculptures), yet as a practising artist she may also appear as an 'authentic' participant in art practice, a status from which even the most physically 'gifted' of pupils would be excluded by their association with school art practice, as opposed to being an exhibiting and practising artist.

Elaine's experiences of working from observation are discussed as the following narrative themes: the first offers an exploration of the apparent focus on 'accuracy' and 'perfection' in association with an 'ideal' perception of observational drawing and the subsequent tensions for Elaine's art practice; the second narrative centres on the existence of private spaces for observational drawing and the subsequent permission this establishes for the production of 'messy' drawings; and the final theme relates to the connection between the ownership of observational practice and the relationship with the ways in which personal knowledge about the environment may be sought. The narratives are discussed under the following headings:

- Accuracy and perfection as ideal observational practice
- Private spaces and messy drawings
- Owning observation as personal knowledge seeking

ACCURACY AND PERFECTION AS IDEAL OBSERVATIONAL PRACTICE

When asked directly about her experiences of drawing from observation, Elaine indicated that this had formed a significant part of her school experience, but she was keen to emphasise that the approach taken by her teacher prioritised 'mark-making and expression' rather than accuracy. Elaine makes a connection between accuracy and drawing from observation. What is also significant is the role that the teacher may play in the reinforcement or challenging of certain views on what may or may not constitute drawing from observation. However, although Elaine's teacher did not focus on the role of accuracy, Elaine describes her own frustrations with her perceived inability to draw accurately.

Claire: I would be really interested to know about your school experiences of art and design particularly drawing. Did you do much drawing of observed objects?

Elaine: Yes we did quite a lot [of drawing from observation] however the teacher was more interested in mark-making and expression so accuracy was

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not too much of an issue however, I am a perfectionist and have always been frustrated by my lack of accuracy.

Elaine described herself as a perfectionist suggesting that she connected the concepts of drawing from observation with accuracy and perfection. The association between this particular art practice and concepts of 'high quality' in the term perfection (with all the associations with flawlessness, faultlessness, precision, rightness and excellence) suggests that Elaine was striving for this within her own drawing but had been unable to produce work of the 'right' type. Elaine was clear that her teacher was less likely to focus on accuracy and their interest in mark-making and expression, as a way in which one might respond to drawing from observation, suggests that the focus may have been on something other than a closed representation in a particular style, with 'expression' possibly suggesting a personal response and a degree of freedom to make marks that may not have been 'accurate'. Ruskin (2007:22) connects a slow controlled mark with accuracy where 'the real difficulty and masterliness is in never letting the hand *be* free, but keeping it under entire control at every part of the line'. Here accuracy is connected not with visual similarity but with the physical control exerted over the drawing. It is impossible to know what Elaine's teacher would have been interested in but the suggestion that it was Elaine that strove for perfection and accuracy is marked out as different from the motives and expectations of the teacher. Although Elaine might regulate her own drawing practice, there is a sense that permission appears to have been given, by the teacher, for a range of responses to drawing from observation.

Observational drawing is identified with a range of purposes not only representation. Elaine's description of the centrality of drawing in her work as an artist offers a range of different perspectives, as she appears to use drawing in a number of different ways. She describes drawing and observation as removed from her own descriptions of striving for perfection whilst at school, as she uses drawing for a range of purposes, none of which seem dependent on the degree of accuracy previously described.

Claire: Do you do this [drawing from observation] now as part of your own work?

Elaine: Sometimes, usually at the beginning of a project. If I am doing site-specific work I usually start by drawing bits of the site I am interested in. I find this a useful way of familiarising with the surroundings. I usually also take photos as I draw small details, as these usually interest me more than the whole and I need a wider more accurate perspective as well.

The role of drawing from observation in this description does not relate to a particular style of representation but the use of looking and drawing as a way of understanding the environment. The drawing product appears to become less relevant and the drawing activity is also supplemented by the use of photographs. Interestingly Elaine shifts from drawing to photography, employing a different type of technology in order to include a 'more accurate perspective', suggesting that this would not be realised in her drawing but that 'accuracy' is both desirable and necessary in

informing her work. Here the ‘freedom’ to select technology to support the nature of her observations marks a distinction between her experiences and the experiences outlined in the previous case studies.

Elaine describes working in an autonomous way. Others do not direct the drawings that she produces and she uses drawing as a tool, which is only one part of the making/understanding process. The drawings are process rather than product focused and the elements of observation do not relate to an attempt at reproduction of an external referent, but are rather a means of developing her understanding of the local environment. What is also significant in her descriptions of autonomous activity is the absence of teacher in conceptualising the work, and as audience and assessor. She decides the focus of the drawing activity and employs drawing for different purposes dependent on the context. The drawing, to develop her understanding, does not sit within an educational context. It is for personal use and is therefore different to the observational drawings described in the other narratives where the drawing products could be seen as having a role in the assessment process and therefore a role in the formation of particular learner identities. Although Elaine describes these drawings as objects she might learn through, they are not formalised within an educational setting. Paradoxically, this description of drawing as removed from a formal education setting appears to offer opportunities for learning to take place (Baldacchino, 2008) and this is confirmed by the way Elaine positions the drawings for her own reference. I asked her about the role that drawing had for her:

Claire: Do you do any drawing now?

Elaine: Yes but mainly for personal reference however I am producing some sculptures with drawn elements at the moment.

Claire: What types of drawing?

Elaine: The sculpture with drawn elements involves very simplistic drawn shapes that work within an overall form and become 3 dimensional. They draw different elements of a place together and are intended to be semi recognisable as wallpaper/furniture patterns but also suggestive of natural growths. So I would describe them as sculptural drawings - they take on form and shape and both encompass and transcend observation.

Elaine described drawing as having a central role in her art production, but in this description her sculpture work and the description of her drawings begin to merge into sculptural drawings that involve recording from observation but are discussed as objects that go beyond what has been observed. The observed element, although directly related to the art product, is acknowledged as not the only element of this work. Elaine’s use of the word ‘transcend’ is significant here since by definition the work she produces appears to have more value than only as a product of observation, suggesting that they go above and beyond a direct representation. This sense of departure between her work and the objects she observed is recognised as a strength rather than the weakness that was alluded to in previous narratives, and there is also some resonance with the ideas of Ruskin and Blake (discussed in Chapter 5) where observation as representation and imitation is perceived as inadequate and

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the imaginative ‘difference’ that can be inserted by the artist adds value. Within this discussion the observational drawing shifts from representation as reproduction to the production of something new and unique.

Elaine experiences drawing from observation as a central and integral aspect of her art practice. It is employed as a technology that promotes her participation, although it is only one way in which she gathers ideas and information that inform her practice. She can work autonomously to move between different ways of observing in order to devise the most appropriate forms of production for her purpose. It is possible to consider Elaine’s participation with and through drawing from observation as an ‘ideal’ participation in learning and practice. In decentering observational drawing from a formal learning environment it emerges here as a narrative space for being included in a centre of learning. Elaine appears less subject to concepts of regulation than other participants. However, it may also be possible to consider Elaine as a product of particular forms of regulatory power that have created her as a disciplined subject now trained in the processes and practices of meaningful participation. It is also possible that Elaine’s drawing practice, authenticated by her status as an art graduate, now has a different type of ‘symbolic power’ by which she can participate in ‘a field of restricted production’ (Bourdieu, 1993:15). Elaine as a practising artist sits within a different type of cultural field from those involved within a compulsory art education setting and, as such, she may be perceived as a legitimate player.

PRIVATE SPACES AND MESSY DRAWINGS

As well as this combined sculpture/drawing product, Elaine describes ‘sketches’, and the way in which these other drawings are described distinguishes them from other more formal drawing. A sketch by definition implies something that is unfinished, or a starting point, again locating this type of work as process rather than product focused. She said:

I also sketch. My sketches are a way of jotting down ideas and are done with whatever I have access to biro/eyeliner/pencil or whatever I have to hand, flyers/bits of newspaper/sketchpad. They are intended for my reference only and include bits of annotation. They are messy and would confuse a more ordered mind.

Elaine’s descriptions of this type of drawing define the playful, haphazard approach as she works with a range of materials, on surfaces that suggest she is not overly concerned with her idea of ‘perfection’ discussed earlier. Elaine is very clear about defining these sketches as being for her personal use only, indicating that they might also include written notes. Lastly, she confirms the preparatory and personal use of these sketches as she defines them as ‘messy’. Here messiness is associated not only with her sketches but also possibly as a representation of the way she thinks, as she suggests that they might confuse others with less messy minds. The sketches appear to operate as a way of thinking and Elaine has created a private space to engage with the ‘mess’ of thinking and making. She has permission here to work in ways that others, possibly as potential critics, may not understand. However, ‘mess’, by being a covert

activity, may be perceived as having less legitimacy rather than being a way of working that acknowledges complexity and difficulty with the representation of particular ideas and contemporary life and culture (Law, 2004). Here messiness is associated with less than ideal types of behaviour. It is interesting, in light of the focus for this research, that the drawings done for her personal use are described as 'messy' and that this is perceived of as a reason why others may not understand them fully. This separation of 'messy' appears to remove Elaine from a centre of ordered logical practice and ideal 'pupil' behaviour more appropriate to be observed by others. It may be argued that Elaine regulates her own practice in this respect.

Elaine monitors her own work and has different spaces for different ways of drawing. As an exhibiting artist she is aware that her work will have an audience, yet the ways that her work might be judged or assessed are not formalised within educational structures. However, she still shares the experiences of other participants who all, to some degree, regulate their own behaviours in anticipation of the judgements, or misunderstandings, of others. Although Elaine is free from some of the constraints offered by formal educational experiences, her art practice still sits within a cultural context where she is conscious of the different ways in which her drawings might be viewed. Drawings that may appear confused or messy are for a restricted audience of one.

Elaine referred to the messiness of her drawings again in a later email, this time in response to an exhibition of Rodin's work, where his drawings appeared to offer Elaine permission for her drawings to be messy and disordered:

My favourite artist I studied at school was Rodin. I recently saw his drawings at the Royal Academy and was happy to see that they are messy and disordered too!

Elaine, in making the connection between her work and that of a well-established artist, was happy to be able to make this connection. Rodin's work is publicly displayed at the Royal Academy and this confirms the authority of his apparently messy and disordered work, amplifying the validation for Elaine's own practice.

OWNING OBSERVATION AS PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE SEEKING

The range of Elaine's work provides a useful starting point in relation to definitions of drawing. Although her work is sculptural she also describes it as 'drawings in paper'. There is an extended concept of what drawing might be and a blurring of the boundaries between pieces in two and three dimensions. She described her recent work as 'an exhibition of paper sculptures' that incorporated drawing and there is no clear delineation between these aspects of her practice.

Elaine introduced herself as a recent graduate who had experienced some challenges in producing and exhibiting her work, and there is an early acknowledgement of the differentiation between the technical and cognitive aspects of art production. Although it appears that this technical dimension relates to hanging the work, she acknowledged that in work such as installation, it is as much about the making as the display. Elaine is clear that it is she, and not the technicians, that have produced the work although there is a potential distancing between her and

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the actual physical production as a whole. This appears highly significant particularly because of the emphasis given to the development of individual technical skills for Matthew. When she described trying to persuade others to help her with aspects of the making process she was clear about her own role in the technical production and her ownership of the work.

Elaine: I did a sculpture degree. At first I found the technical side really difficult particularly installation (not great at hanging my work but getting better with practice) I still find some things difficult and now have to rely on myself a lot more as I used to get a lot of help from technicians at uni and now work mostly on my own however, I am adapting quite well. Sometimes I do bribe people with dinner/alcohol to help me make things however I still consider these to be my work as I came up with the design and how they would be put together but I would say that as an artist I enjoy the hands on aspect of art.

This discussion of a potential support network is interesting in the way in which she acknowledged that there is a distinction between the development of ideas and the ways in which they can be physically realised. She was clear in distinguishing between the physical nature of the production (of which she was keen to emphasise her enjoyment), and the development of ideas and was clear that involving others in the making processes did not negate her role as *the* artist, since it was she who gave the conceptual impetus for the work. The dominance of the physical nature of production and conceptual 'ownership' appears reversed in Elaine's experience and, significantly, she has a greater degree of autonomy over the work she is making.

In comparison, there is no debate about the ownership of her observational drawing practices, which is firmly established as a direct physical negotiation between her, the physical environment and her art production. Observational drawing appears to be non negotiable in its role as a personal technology for the ways in which her work is conceived and exhibited. Although other aspects of her practice might be negotiated by the intervention and support of others, drawing from observation is a direct personal experience central to her art production.

Elaine has just enrolled to start a Post Graduate Certificate in Education in secondary art and design and cited this as a reason why she was particularly interested in being involved in this research. Her story is interesting in terms of the ways in which she may or may not adapt her practices in light of re-entering formal education as a training teacher. Elaine, re-entering the education system as apprentice art teacher will develop and construct her own concepts of what art education might be. Her developing identity as an artist-teacher would form a fascinating further area of work as she is shaped and shapes the educational context she has decided to re-enter as a teacher. The centre she currently inhabits as an exhibiting and practicing artist is potentially shifting to a different type of regulated participation in the production of others' art practice.