Peer Review Article

Drawing New Relationalities with Migrants and Immobile Exiles

Camille Courier

Université du Québec à Montréal
Corresponding author: courier_de_mere.camille@uqam.ca

Laura Winn

edge

Abstract

In this paper, we explore how drawing can be used as transformative educational practice in the context of climate change shifting our relationships with the living world. As a starting point, we share our understanding that we are entering times where the relationships with living systems around us are no longer stable and predictable (Morizot, 2023). Some people experience this instability through forced exile and migrant journeys. Others do not travel but become immobile exiles (Morizot, 2023). This context has invited us to start a co-inquiry into relationality through the practice of drawing. We ground this exploration in four examples from our respective work in the fields of systems change, education of the arts and participatory arts-based research. Each of the examples illustrates how small groups of people - both children and adults - can develop awareness of changing relationalities between humans, other living beings and vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010). In the workshops we have facilitated,

the images themselves come alive as quasi-organisms (Simondon, 2022). With a phenomenological gaze, we reflect on their capacity to support the becoming visible of micropolitical agencies with the potential to reconfigure systems towards decisive mutations of plurality (Glissant, 1996).

Keywords
drawing, art-based research, transformative education, systems change, relationality, climate change, migration

Introduction: Climate Change, Exile, Systems Change and Drawing

In this paper, we will begin by sharing our understanding of the context we situate ourselves in, and our approach to systems change and drawing. Then we will share four examples of our explorations of new relationalities in the fields of systems change learning and visual arts education, presenting each through a description of our practice alongside with key concepts we use to inquire into relationality.

Climate Change Exiles Us All, and Calls for New Relationalities

As we write, wildfires sweep across northern America and southern Europe, cyclones swirl in the Pacific, and torrential rain causes floods everywhere. Weather patterns defy us, each season is the hottest on record. As people flee and migrate they become unconsenting shape-shifters in fast-changing landscapes (Baillat, 2018). Baptiste Morizot invites us to consider that we have entered new "mythical times," where overwhelmingly the relationships with living systems around us are no longer stable and predictable (2023, p. 31).

As people migrate, in numbers much higher than ever before owing to climate change, they become exiled from their places, and end up living in other places which are themselves already tipped into the mythical times of unstable relationships. Millions of migrants meet billions of people Morizot calls immobile exiles (2023, p. 80), who have not physically moved to another country but who have a sense of exile from the familiar in the rapidly shifting relationships with the living systems around them. Through the experience of *solastalgia*, an emotional state produced by the disappearance of the reliable rhythms of the world as we know it, immobile exiles have been offered what Morizot (2023) describes as the dimensions of loss and wandering that exiles have sung (p. 80). Collectively, we all become co-creators of new co-evolving worlds. Founders of new mythologies. Out of promise, out of necessity.

The climate crisis being a crisis of relationship to the world around us, as practitioners we are invited to explore new relationalities for systems change. Climate change is often framed as an objective scientific phenomenon we humans have created and are called to act upon. This is only part of the picture, as the

root causes of climate change can be uncovered through the shift in the nature of our relationship with the rest of the living world. A significant era of this change began in the seventeenth century with the widespread adoption of the Cartesian mindset, which sees Man becoming master and possessor of Nature. This mindset, seeded in Europe, was increasingly imposed across the world through colonial expansion, and supported the development of an extractive dominating relationship with the living world and with people living in kin relationships with their places. It now underpins much of the modern world: our industries, our agricultural model, our speculative finance, our growth-driven economy, our geopolitics. We understand climate change, and the interrelated crises of biodiversity collapse, pollution, increasing migration and rising inequalities to be the result of the exponential development of this mindset that purports an absence of mutual relationality between humans and all other life. Terrellyn Fearn, project director at the Turtle Island Institute, reflects on the climate crisis in these terms: "Many people call it an ecological crisis, but it's a relational and spiritual crisis as well" (personal communication, 3 July 2023).

We are therefore inevitably working in the context of a world increasingly shaped by the effects of climate change. As systems change practitioners we seek to address root causes of interconnected global challenges, and we feel compelled to explore other patterns of relationship as the deeper tissue of our desirable futures. Our complex world is path-dependent (Boulton et al., 2015) meaning we do not seek to go back to a previous state of relationships, but to explore what is possible from here on out.

We use the term "relationality" because it expresses a quality, a state. It is a processual term, in contrast with "relationship" which designates a thing. Relationality can be understood as simply the condition of being in relationship, however it can also imply the idea of being constituted by relationships with others, in inter-being. This seems crucial to us in the exploration of intra-active (Barad, 2007) potential for systemic change, which is to say that the deeply interconnected nature of people, other living beings, and material things can be a source of agency for change. A qualitative methodology is then necessary to explore relationalities, focusing on the process itself, and looking for outcomes that defy a quantitative noun-based idea of results.

Our working hypothesis is that if we are able to foster the emergence of new relationalities between humans, and between humans and living beings all around us, we can work on a deep level towards supporting the capacity of life to regenerate and survive the critical state we are collectively in right now.

To develop this hypothesis we sometimes work directly with the challenges of forced migration in the context of climate change. For example, this article will describe Camille Courier's arts-based research with migrant children and adults in France and Canada. However, we also bring awareness of this context to all the other work we do which is not explicitly about climate or exile but which in our view cannot escape these realities. For example, Laura Winn facilitates learning about systems change and regenerative development which develops

capacities to work relationally, without explicitly working on the challenge of migration. We believe that working on new relationalities in any setting is indirect work on these global challenges of climate and exile.

Drawing at the Edge of Learning

We are two author-practitioners writing between educational practices at the edge of the field of systems change and the visual arts. We experience the strength of liquid boundaries between the languages we speak—French and English, the continents we straddle—Europe and North America. In the context of the climate crisis and a rapidly changing world where forced migration and immobile exile are increasing exponentially, we are participating in learning processes in which learners have to discover and design the skills that will be needed in the new milieu they are meeting.

We can summarise the respective practice grounds from which we meet at the edges, as follows. From the perspective of a systems change practitioner, Laura Winn works with visual practice to support professionals in the fields of sustainability and social change to engage with complexity and move through overwhelm to agency. She explores new systemic and regenerative imaginaries that enable us to transcend paradigms. Her translation work bringing regenerative thinking into business contexts, or supervising the adaptation of learning content into both French and English, is a core practice that helps develop heightened awareness of the cultural and linguistic richness of systems change work. Camille Courier is a visual artist, researcher and teacher who works with the singular strengths of traditional and digital drawing mediums, creating large format works, often *in situ*. Artistic experimentation, pedagogy and theoretical reflection are co-generated in her process. Paying close attention to the technical and micropolitical dimensions of visual culture and artistic gestures, she is currently working on collective drawing creation processes, including a participatory project with female and LGBTQI+ exiled visual artists in Montreal, Canada. Her work continues to explore paths opened during her doctoral research (Courier, 2022), through arts-based or creation-based research. Together as co-authors and practitioners, we are exploring how visual practices, in particular drawing, are essential to the emergence of new relationalities in the context of a living changing world impacted by climate change.

Through this paper, we aim to share the way we facilitate learning through drawing and contribute to creating the conditions for new relationalities to be developed. We draw inspiration from researchers who describe mechanisms that support "learning in the arts and highlight ways in which art and creativity can ignite learning in schools, informal learning spaces, and higher education. The focus is on learning in, with, and through the arts" (Knudson et al., 2021). Examining the design of art-infused learning environments, we are testing arts-based teaching practices in a wide range of *milieux*.

How We Approach Systems Change

Drawing on the work of Anna Birney (2015) and co-inquiry in the early stages of the Illuminate network,[1] we approach systems change as simultaneously outcome, process, and practice. From an outcome perspective, we understand systems change as a "new pattern of organisation or system structure" (Birney, 2015, p. 14), or as Birney now says, a "new pattern of organis*ing,*" as it is not static but about relational doing and being (personal communication, 2020). From a process perspective, we understand systems change to be a continual process of deliberately seeking to create the conditions for change in ways that are systemic. This entails working with patterns to choose nodal interventions, working from potential (Haggard & Mang, 2016) and engaging in continual learning. From a practice perspective, we are particularly interested in exploring visual practices and their role in systems change work focused on relationality.

Our learning approach is informed by action inquiry (Torbert, 2013), and we engage in first, second, and third person inquiry to understand how systemic change processes are contributing to systems change at multiple scales and in multiple relational contexts. First person inquiry invites us to consider our relationship with ourselves. Second person inquiry opens a space to explore collective relationalities with people we inquire with. Third person inquiry stretches our understanding of relationality beyond small groups and direct acquaintances to fields of endeavour we share with other practitioners, and we seek to include relationships with living systems we are nested within and the vibrant matter all around us (Bennett, 2010). In this way we aim to expand beyond the relational practice of systems change that is focused on humans and their power relations (Milligan et al., 2022). Although we wholeheartedly agree with the idea that relationships between people are at the heart of systems change, and addressing human power relations is as necessary as technical approaches, we seek to extend the idea of relationality beyond the human realm, to include all of life and our material surroundings. Milligan et al. (2022) define deep relational work as "a fundamentally different way of being in relationship" (para 10). The assumption in this definition is that relational work is about people, whereas we feel it has the potential to be expanded to include more-than-human agencies, which has implications for practice and invites us to look beyond language-based and conceptual work.

We consider our practice of systems change to be fully embedded in our daily work and life, and grounded in visual approaches and awareness practices that help us see what is changing in complex living spaces. We consider that change can be fractal across individuals—including ourselves—, learning groups, and

---

[1] Illuminate is an international network for people who are seeking to shift harmful systems towards justice, health and balance" https://www.illuminatesystems.org/

whole systems. Therefore, when we are reflecting on what change is being created through a series of workshops, in a learning programme or in a classroom setting, we are interested in what is happening at a micropolitical level (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996) where social practices can be observed within small groups as they engage in collective drawing gestures. We also look at what is changing within ourselves, in our bodies and in our conscious inquiries, as much as the reorganising of stakeholders or macro-scale patterns. Our thinking on multi-scalar systems change draws on the field of sustainability transitions and the practice of multi-level perspective (Geels, 2011) which helps us look at landscape-level context and what is going on in the margins and edges as much as the mainstream flow of work. We draw on the regenerative development concept of nested wholes (Haggard & Mang, 2016) asking how living wholes— from individuals to whole ecologies—are contributing to the evolution of the systems they live within. We also consider the overall ethical political psychology we are working with, following Guattari's approach developed in *Three Ecologies* (2014) which looks at the interrelationships between psychological, social, and environmental spheres.
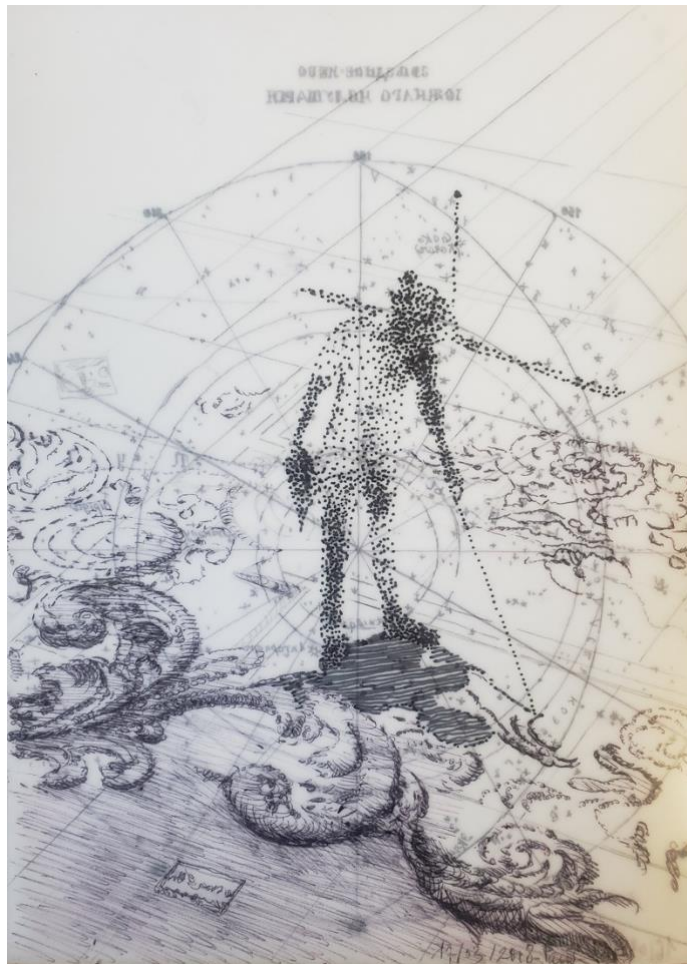

Figure 1. Dessin-scène. Ink on paper. (Courier, 2018; Photo by M. Collet).

How We Approach Drawing

Firstly, we approach drawing as a relationship with images. We both draw every day and live and work continually with images that are shaping us: those we have drawn ourselves, those that have been collectively created in our learning contexts, and those made in the world by the non-human agencies around us. Like Gilbert Simondon, we experience these images as "quasi-organisms":

> Images almost seem to be secondary organisms within the thinking being: parasites or a surplus, they are like secondary monads, sometimes inhabiting the subject, other times leaving it. They may prove to be, against a person's unity, a seed of splitting [dédoublement], but they might also bring their reserve of implicit power and implicit knowledge to moments when problems must be solved (Simondon, 2022, p. 3).

Secondly, we approach drawing as a living process. We design learning processes that use drawing to explore relationality and engage in systems change, working with the inner dynamics of images which we think of as "sheafs of motor tendencies" as Simondon described the first stage of a mental image's existence, in his theory of the image cycle (2022). In this way, through the practice of drawing we align with living systems by enabling a "process of genesis, comparable in its unfolding to the other genetic processes that the living world shows us" (Simondon, 2022, pp. 3–4).

The anthropologist Tim Ingold illustrates this beautifully when he writes about a line drawn on a page to describe the upward trajectory of salmon movement (Ingold, 2011).

Figure 2. Salmon, making their way up-river towards their spawning grounds. Illustration from prologue to Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines. (Ingold, 2011).

Ingold invites a reflection on this drawing as a nodal intervention created collectively by the salmon, the movement in the water, the paper, and himself:

> To be sure, if you merely look *at* it, there is nothing much to see. You have rather to look *with* it: to relive the movement that, in turn, described the vault of my own observation as I watched the

salmon leap the falls. In this line, movement, observation and description become one. And this unity, I contend, is nothing less than that of life itself. (Ingold, 2011, p. 1)

Here we can see how the practice of drawing is first and foremost collective movement and agency. All of life in its movement is drawing, and through learning processes and drawing processes we are life drawing, relationally becoming.

Figure 3. Tattoo. Ink on paper. (Courier, 2016; Photo by C. Majeau).

Thirdly, we approach drawing as a mode discovery in dialogue with language. The inquiry methodology we have developed is inspired by arts-based research and a heuristic approach following the assertion that "drawing is discovery" (Berger, 1953/2013). The way we write is animated by a constant mutual elaboration and an evident intimacy between writing and drawing, inspired by A/r/tography:

A hybridized term of a/r/t and graphy, which means description. The slashes in a/r/t represent the complex and entangled identity of the inquirer as an artist/researcher/teacher(-practitioner) who is engaged in arts-based living inquiry. (Komatsu & Namai, 2022, p. 3)

Figure 4. Schéma problématique II. Ink on paper. (Courier, 2020; Photo by M. Collet).

Figure 5. Illustration of A/r/tography, drawing and writing patterns in author's notebook.
Pen on paper. (Winn, 2023).

All these different threads and conceptual forces come to life in our respective visual practice in learning contexts and through our ongoing conversations as co-authors. An examination of this practice will constitute the rest of the article.

Practice: From Drawing Systems to Drawing New Relationalities

In this part of the paper we will examine three examples of learning activities involving drawing and trace the evolution of our inquiry.

Drawing Systems: The Starting Point of our Inquiry

Through our shared action inquiry over the last two years, we are realising that visual practices which help us navigate and make sense of complexity are no longer sufficient to shift relationalities in a way that is necessary in the context of climate change and forced exile lived through the phenomena of migration and immobile exile. This awareness of the insufficiency of widely used visual approaches such as systems mapping has emerged through our joint conversations about the connection between drawing and relationality, and our assertion that even if we are not working directly *on* the challenge of climate change and forced exile, this is nonetheless the context we are working *in*.

In my work as systems change learning facilitator and regenerative development practitioner, I (Winn) encourage professionals from different backgrounds and cultural contexts to shift their thinking from a mechanistic and linear paradigm to a living systems paradigm. I use visual approaches like systems mapping to bring attention to the dynamic relationships *between* things rather than to the things themselves. This usually involves quickly scribed systemic frameworks and systems maps in notebooks, on flipcharts, and on online whiteboards in the context of fully digital learning experiences. I find this approach rewarding because it generates insights and can open up new ways of thinking for the participants. At the same time, it often feels like a solely intellectual exercise, and as such an insufficient contribution to the necessary exploration of new relationalities in the context of climate change which is the wider framing of my work.

I have found that when considered through the lens of the agency of the images themselves, as what Simondon calls quasi-organisms (2022), more potential becomes palpable. One example of this arose in a recent exercise in an online course I co-designed and co-facilitated with the School of System Change. I invited groups of changemakers to map the flows in the systems they are working with, by starting with the flows themselves rather than the elements or stakeholders in the system. This exercise was insightful because it was so difficult! Our collective mechanistic paradigm, sourced in Newtonian physics and Cartesian philosophy, encourages us when faced with complexity to focus on things, separate them, categorise them, and look at individual parts in isolation.

The exercise I was proposing involved putting aside this habitual way of thinking to focus primarily not on individual things but on flows. We started by identifying as a whole group some of the flows that are likely to be present in most complex ecological-social-economic systems. These include materials, energy, finances, skills, knowledge, etc. The invitation was then for the smaller working groups to take a key flow and follow it as it travels through the system, encountering entities and system structures along the way.

One group started by mapping the stakeholders first anyway and then looked at the relationships between them, in a more traditional "value mapping" approach.[2] Their systems map looked impressive and the group received a lot of praise from other participants, but they had a hard time distilling any insights about the relationships they had drawn beyond a more comprehensive description of the problem. Clearly the flows in the map had not come alive for them.
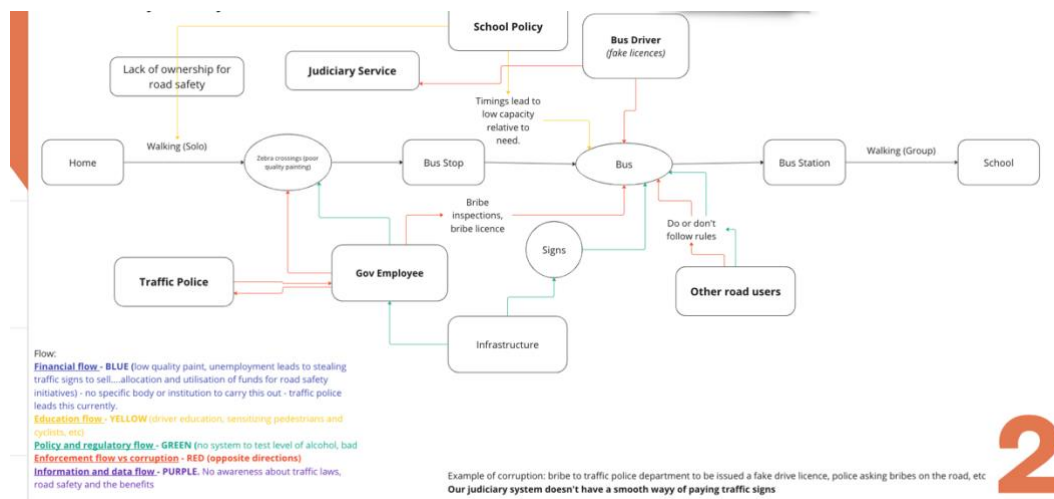
Figure 6. Illustration of group exercise in visual value flow mapping. Diagram presented on online whiteboard. (Oliver Obwana et al., School of System Change, 2023).

The group who got the most out of this exercise managed to connect to the flows in a health system by recognising the flows themselves as active agents rather than passive currencies. They tapped into the potential of the disease itself, of molecules for cures, of knowledge, reputation, and funding to reconfigure the system.

---

[2] Climate KIC has developed a methodology and workbook around value network mapping, where elements in the system are mapped first, and then the relationships between them. It can be consulted here: https://transitionshub.climate-kic.org/publications/value-network-mapping/
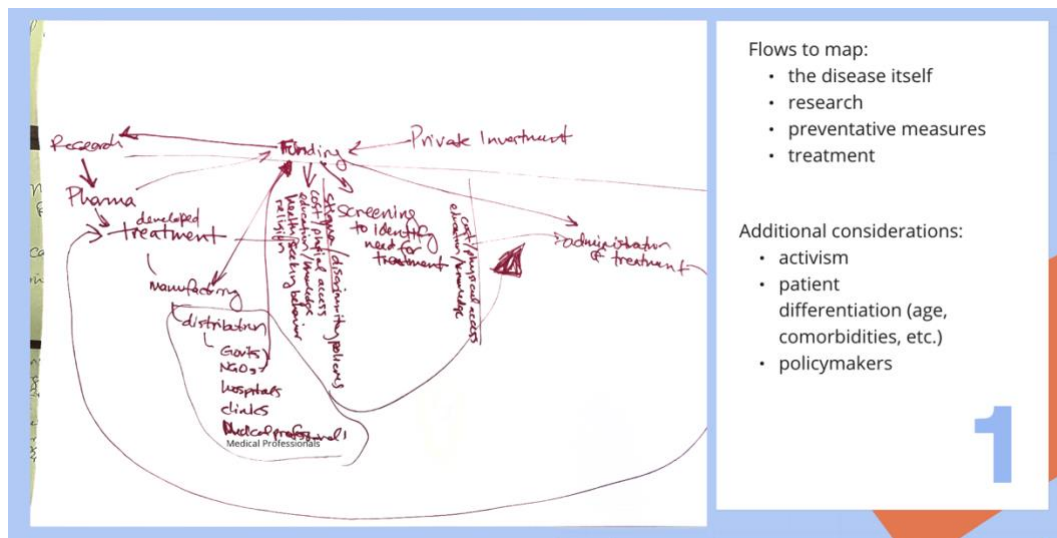
Figure 7. Illustration of group exercise in visual value flow mapping. Photograph of hand-drawn diagram presented on online whiteboard. (School of System Change, 2023).

Karen Barad's term "intra-active" is particularly potent to describe the insights that this group was distilling about the complex relationships in the system they were drawing:

> Intra-action signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate entities that proceed their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not proceed, but rather emerge through their intra-action (Barad, 2007, p. 33).

In this case, the drawing exercise enabled the group to see how all of the flows and entities on the map were constituted mutual agencies in the system, rather than just separate components in relationship. Interestingly, this team also chose to do the exercise on paper and then put a photo into the online space to share with the whole cohort. I noticed that the act of drawing—which involved putting pen on paper, following messy arrows, turning the page to write in different angles—was a more embodied exploration of both the messiness of the system they were considering and of the relationships and flows.

In summary, the exercise was designed to help the participants collectively bring awareness to the relational nature of systems and the need to explore new relationalities for systemic change. The group who managed to work with the proposed challenge of starting with flows, and who spontaneously adopted an approach to drawing that was more about movement than structure or the ability for others to easily grasp their thought process, expressed a higher level of awareness about relationality. This supported me to think further about the agency created through drawing processes, and the potential to bring more arts-based practice into my learning design.

The co-inquiry with my co-author and the active resonance between visual practices in systems change learning and arts-based research has led to a deeper understanding of what is going on in these learning moments. Our shared gaze on participatory drawing situations is coloured by a creative and "*critical reconfiguration of phenomenology. This reconfiguration sheds light on the social-political possibilities of a movement that might have seemed, on the surface, to be only about description*" (Al-Saji, 2017, p. 143, emphasis added). This seems an accurate representation of the difference between the two drawings produced by the groups in my online course: one was about description and the other created a movement with social-political possibilities towards new relationalities.

Our shared inquiry space brought the visual practice of systems mapping into resonance with another visual practice—participatory drawing—which has been developed to work directly on the experience of exile through the collective elaboration of different relationalities. Whereas systems mapping produces cartographies of intelligible relationalities, other forms of drawing can support us to explore unintelligible[3] relationalities, that is, those emerging in a world where our ideologies, our visions for the world, our castles in the sky are starting to crumble to move beyond human nature, goodness, tolerance that are so fugitive, but enter into decisive mutations of plurality accepted as such (Glissant, 1996). The next section of the paper will examine two participatory drawing workshops, illustrating this resonance.

Participatory Drawing as Transformative Education with Children in Primary School

In my work as a visual artist and educator, I [Courier] propose transformative educational relationships embedded within mainstream system contexts (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2012). Here I will share two examples with different groups, where people collectively experience image as movement (Simondon, 2022), as a migration process and a shared exploration of new relationalities.

The first example takes place in French primary schools, as part of a visual arts and art history programme for children between 6-11 years old. The schools are in Northern Paris where there is a high proportion of migrant children arriving in France for the first time from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Morocco, the Comores, and West African countries like Mali and Sénégal. In France, attending primary school is mandatory for all children. With the increase in migrant children, some schools have been given the means to set up classes for non-French-speaking students run by specialised teachers. The children join all the

---

[3] "Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility." (Barad, 2007, p. 149)

official classes and follow the curriculum with a view to being fully integrated into the French system.

In contrast to many learning contexts, in visual arts practice young children can easily engage in transformative education. The children are not *taught*, based on a classical verbal approach to knowledge, nor asked to express or heal trauma, but they are becoming—through *dividual* (Massumi, 2017) awareness—together. By this, we mean that each child is "set in tensions by a turbulence of heterogeneous tendencies, divided between them in his relation to himself" (Massumi, 2017, p. 1). In contrast to individual awareness, dividual awareness is necessarily relational and collectively produced through the intra-action of complex movements. In this context, a new relationship between affects and politics must be elaborated between the art teacher, the students, the space, and the materials we create images with. If this new relational configuration is made possible, these sessions can embody a parasitic movement at the frontiers of normative relationships. The living images (Simondon, 2022) have the art of accelerating border crossings between conscious and unconscious, individual and collective, opaque and visible. In this indirect way, the new relationality can transcend the structures and norms of migrant integration policies as manifested in the public education system (Haney et al., 2004). The sessions can work on changing relationality at a societal level between migrant children and "immobile exiled" children who following Morizot's thinking are exiled from their places by the effects of climate change without having undertaken a migratory journey (2023).

I start the cycle of eleven drawing workshops by miming a legend that was invented and told in order to explain the invention of drawing and painting. This story started in Ancient Egypt, was adapted in Ancient Greece, and later written down by a Roman author, Pliny the Elder. So, this is first an African narrative, which then becomes a European narrative, mirroring the migration pathways of many of the children themselves. It is a story of exile, where a young woman, Calirrhoé, draws with charcoal the silhouette of her lover on the wall when he/she is called off to war or for a long journey from which he/she may never return. The father of the young woman, a potter, fills in the silhouette with his clay, thus seeding the creation of sculpture out of drawing. We mime this narrative in the class so that children who do not speak French can understand.

I then invite the children to work in pairs to draw each other. We use a bright light on vertical surfaces and projected shadows to produce silhouettes that are larger than life. Each participant draws the shadow of another child using charcoal, one of the oldest drawing materials in the history of humanity, obtained from simply burnt branches. Each exiled child, draws the silhouette of the other, is drawn by the other. They then take back their shadow silhouettes and fill in their body mass with charcoal to make a dark mass, changing their position from vertical to horizontal plane.
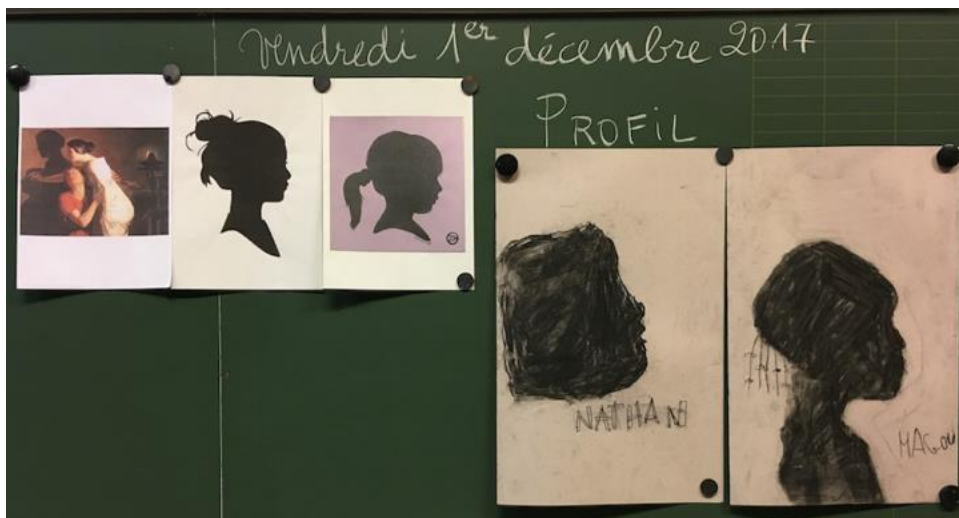
Figure 8. Vauvenargues Primary School, Paris, France. Charcoal on paper. Drawn between 2017-22. (Photo by C. Courier).

Figure 9. Mame (left) and Brianna (right), Vauvenargues & Budin Primary Schools, Paris, France. Charcoal on paper. 2017-22. (Photo by C. Courier).

Then we stage and arrange all the silhouettes-shadows together into one installation which illustrates the legend. I encourage collaborative gestures of drawing so there is no individual property of the trace, rather collective authorship. Large format becomes the *milieu* in which the children, the legend, the studio space, the materials all act and participate. Through this collective drawing process where the whole body is involved because of large format paper or canvas, what kind of transformation can occur?

Firstly, we can notice a shift in the lived experience of agency. The collective drawing process creates a lived experience of distributed action and creation,

which is a very different pattern of intra-active relationship where there is no possible individual action. Composite gestures of intra-action enable the children to become aware that they are connected in ways that they have never felt before, that as living beings we are networked agencies organised in non-hierarchical, non-stabilised relationships between gestures, instruments, charcoal, paper, space, humans. So the children become aware that there are no individual agencies, and as members of a "political ecology" (Bennett, 2010) they have more agency than they previously experienced.

This shift in experience is most strongly expressed in the moment when the children take their oversized outlines drawn by someone else to colour them in. A new awareness is created and voiced that the artwork is not individual, it is dividual, it belongs to all the agencies involved. This key moment of awareness is produced by design. At the beginning of the cycle, we share the idea that drawing collectively will require a relationship not between separate individuals, but between the parts of us that are non-individual which will communicate without mediation. This premise is posed in the paradoxical context of a societal paradigm where the artist is highly individualised, and where people engaged in a migratory process are totally tied up within their own cultural references.

The emergent property of this encounter, every time this cycle of workshops is offered, is laughter and hilarity. The children find their larger-than-life outlines, with the deformations caused by the trembling fingers of their classmate or the wavering light beam of the projector, extremely funny. Because it is a shared experience, they are willing to be seen with these deformations, and can take ownership of their surprising forms as they place them on the horizontal plane on the table. The children comment out loud the metamorphosing forms they see emerging from their own outline as drawn by a classmate, and they start to invent stories about these shape-shifting characters on the paper. The energy in the room is bright and hilarious as they fill in the outlines with black charcoal.

Secondly, the process begins to transform the configuration of the wider system at a societal level. The laughter fertilises potential relationships and symbiotic imaginaries (Courier & Winn, 2023) across and beyond the whole group for the follow-up workshops. This new creative energy becomes available in the system. As the children become more conscious of their capacity to perform various shades of their own visibility, they move from mandatory invisibility to the possibility of registering their own micropolitical presence in society. For exiled children who are experiencing displacement and instability, understanding their own learning abilities and skills is a key element that they can develop through education. Being able to imagine new roles and metamorphoses for themselves is a contribution to a vision for change in the societal system they participate in.

Participatory Drawing with Exiled Young Adults

A second example was experimented in 2021 in Canada, where I [Courier] was asked to create two workshops with the organisation Action Refugees Montreal[4] who have worked with migrant people in the city for 25 years to help them access protection and justice, and to develop a sense of belonging in Canadian society. I used the same cycle of workshops as the experience in Paris with children, in an analogous but relationally different context. These two opt-in sessions were proposed to young adults from across the African continent, in particular DRC, Nigeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. The participants had the official status of "refugee" which gives them a particular entry point into Canadian society, so although not in the context of a formal education system, they were strongly situated in a societal system.

These workshops also sought to activate new micropolitical potentialities in the context of their experience of exile, through the collective practice of drawing self-portraits, that are not about being recognisable but visible to themselves, and to others. As migrants and refugees, there is a desire to remain unidentifiable, to resist the *taking* of identity through fingerprints, bio-identification, for the purpose of control. The workshops using projected silhouettes enable the co-creation of identity and sense-making from exiled pathways.

Figure 10. Action Refugees Montreal. A woman (E.) poses for the camera in front of a wall of large format silhouette drawings. Charcoal on paper. [Photo by C. Courier, 2021].

So in what way are these workshops in this setting a practice of systems change? The systemic effects can be observed in one key moment of collective awareness of a change in relationality, when the participants showed their self-portraits and then their silhouettes to the others. They voiced how the drawing

---

[4] More can be found out about the organisation Action Refugees Montreal on their website: https://actionr.org/what-we-do/

process had made exile pathways visible and intelligible in their plurality. As migrants, their everyday experience is of having to hide and become invisible. In the workshops and through their drawing, the participants clearly expressed both a refusal to be visible, and a desire to be seen. The gestures insist on rendering the materiality of their shadows. Crossing their trajectories, the participants expressed how unique they felt within this small group.

Figure 11. Montreal (2019). Two women (H & K.) are drawing large format silhouette drawings of themselves. Charcoal on paper. (Photo by K. Ahmad).

The number of humans having to dismantle their previous life and attempt to rebuild it elsewhere is increasing exponentially. My research-creation is responding to the urgency of developing sensitive knowledge from exiled people and disseminating their knowledge during this "time of catastrophes" (Stengers, 2009), through exploring how their experiences can be perceived as enrichment by the country of adoption. The process is built on sharing my practice of drawing, which is a *stage of drawing* (De Zegher, 2003) on which exiled people can explore invisible and minor gestures. Drawing becomes a research operator (Zwer & Rekacewicz, 2021), engaging corporal and kinesthetic presence in time and space, with situated bodies performing their becoming visible.

In parallel to the exploration of the systemic effects of drawing in the context of migrant experience, as co-authors we are connected more widely to a field of practice inquiring into the same questions with the medium of drawing. We see our work as a contribution to this wider field, and we seek to lift up some of the work that has had a particularly potent effect on our own thinking.

One example can be seen in the work of LAB619, a Tunisian collective of illustrators and graphic novel writers. They invited exiled artists from different

countries and illustrative styles to come together in a residence to create a collection of stories of exile called *Migrations* (Figure 12, LAB619, 2021). Here the multicultural visual process layers individual lived experience and gestures, with collective and dividual awareness of exile, in a country that sees both immigration and emigration trace lines across the landscape. The cover illustration, from one of the individual stories in the book, resonates with our practice through the presence of the projected shadow of the migrant woman and the living non-human protagonists in the form of birds in the sky that remind us of different, more free, migratory journeys which are also being affected by climate change.
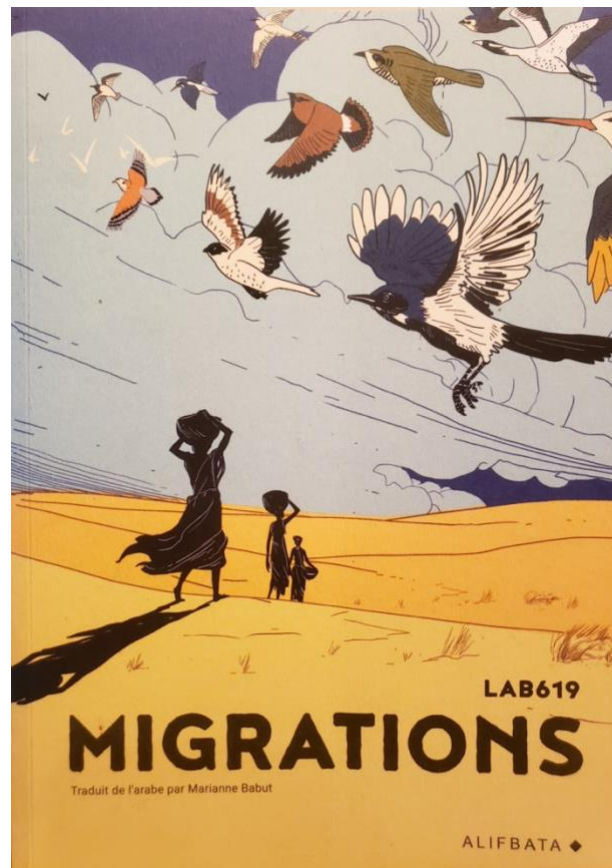

Figure 12. Cover of French version of Migrations: Drawing exile, published by Alifbata. (LAB619, 2021).

Another example is the co-written co-illustrated graphic novel by French authors Edmond Baudoin and Troubs, created on a visit to the valley of the river Roya on the frontier between France and Italy, a well-known border crossing for migrants. The two illustrators encounter many of the people involved with helping the migrants, and also many of the migrants themselves, whom they offer the opportunity to have their portrait done. These portrait moments are described as "magical," when the people decide to be seen rather than be invisible, and are given their image on paper to take on their ongoing journey.

Some also do the portrait of the illustrator, in exchange. Baudouin writes about the portrait sitting as a moment of being seen:

> I start with the eyes. They avoid my gaze, but I insist by putting two fingers in my eyes. Then all of a sudden, they accept the silent dialogue… And it's me who panics when I see what they show me. [...] How long has it been since they last looked someone in the eye? How long has it been since they have been looked in the eye? (Baudoin & Troubs, 2017, p.58)
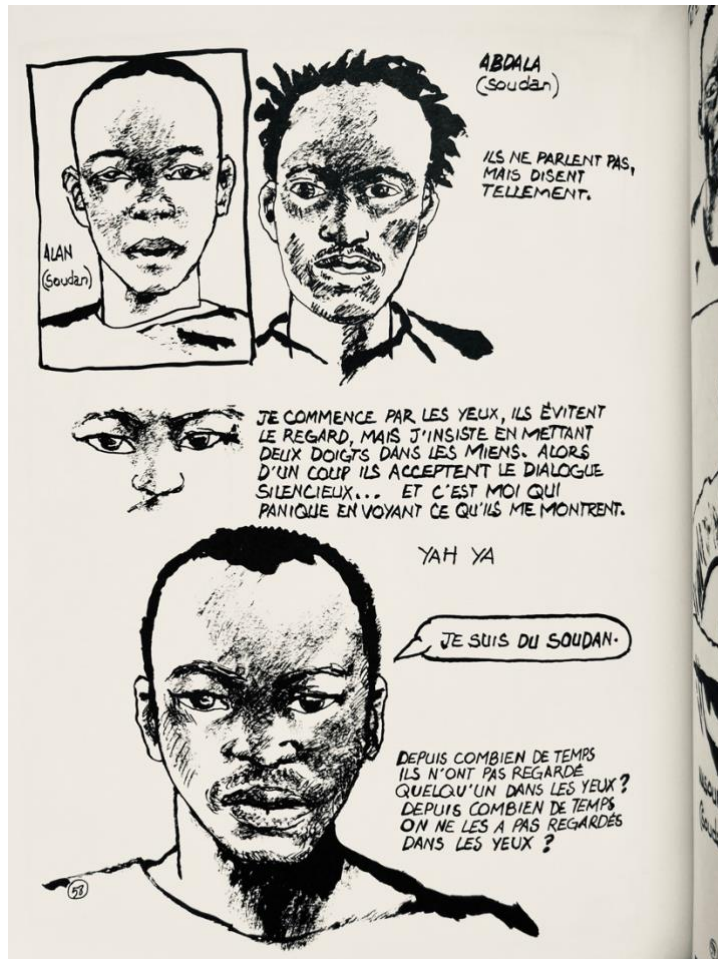

Figure 13. Migrant portraits. (Edmond Baudoin & Troubs, 2017).

This description by the artist of the silent dialogue and the migrants' choice to be visible, to show themselves and their story through the medium of drawing, serves as a resonant confirmation of the effects seen in the workshop Camille Courier facilitated in Montreal.

From Facilitating Visual Practice to Creating the Conditions for Images to Come Alive

In this section of the paper, we reflect on the dynamic relationship between us as learning designers and facilitators of visual practices, and the facilitative capacity of images themselves.

Facilitative Capacity is Needed for Systems Change Practice

An initial step into exploring new relationalities for systems change is often a recognition of non-linear, beyond-binary relationality in the world as it is now. This can be lifted up by exploring the flows in complex systems through mapping, or through participatory drawing exercises as we have illustrated in this paper. However, these practices do not lead to inherently more just or regenerative outcomes, it is *how* they are used that enables meaning-making. We need to remember that practices have lineages and design choices behind them. Many systemic practices have been developed within Indigenous knowledge and ancient wisdom (Goodchild, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2019); these wield a deep understanding of relationality and structural relationships. The structural design is sourced in the deep connection with the land, and the living emanations of the land in the form of elements, processual dynamics, plant species, animal species including humans and ancestors. Discernment of what is between—we might say living within, inhabiting—the lines, is a key capacity if we are to work with these thinking technologies to shift paradigms.

Similarly, participatory visual arts practice does not inherently engender awareness and exploration of new relationalities. For the micropolitical dimension of the work to be engaged, the learning is facilitated in a way that situates the drawing process in a wider sociopolitical context. Today's drawing is resituated within the lineage of drawing, and the framing and invitation to participate emphasises how creative processes are embedded in sociocultural activities (Glăveanu, 2015), connected to human and other-than-human distributed agency. All of this is conveyed in simple and easily understandable terms that speak to the lived experience of children and adults alike.

We are reminded of the importance of facilitative capacity for this work, which supports people to engage with our power and positionality, and with knowing what we don't know. This is another layer of relationality, where beyond exploring the relationships within a given system, we bring awareness to our own relationship to the system and our collective agency.

Engaging with the Ways of Being of Images Themselves

At the same time that we recognise the need for facilitative capacity in learning environments seeking to bring awareness to and develop new relationalities, we are equally aware of the power of images themselves to facilitate change. If we

are able to create the conditions for people to engage through the drawing process with the ways of being of the images themselves, this can be enough.

We can illustrate our experience of this through a collective project where we spent time together in Egypt participating in an informal, opt-in educational initiative with children in Gurna (Arabic: القرنة) near Luxor. I (Courier) was involved over several years and Laura Winn joined me during one season. Two other French artists—a graphic novel illustrator and fashion artist—created in 2001 a project for children in the place where they lived. The "workshop" was open to local children and adolescents from 3 to 16 years old, with no cost, one day a week. It was a place of pluralistic artistic practice—illustration, textile, drawing, sculpture. When I (Courier) joined the team, I introduced the possibility for the children to work in large formats, directly on the raw earth walls, so they could explore a space larger than their own bodies.

Figure 14. Gurna children's workshop. From left to right : Fatma, Camille, B., M, Amani, Laura, Walid. Collective drawing and painting on large format paper made by the children. Egypt. (Photo by E. Viet & D. Cottet, 2002).

In the village of Gurna there is a strong tradition of figurative wall paintings, both interior and exterior, on raw earth walls. The children who come to the workshop are immersed in this culture of wall paintings. Their parents, brothers and sisters are painters and sculptors in this medium. They are surrounded by temples and tombs covered with ancient wall paintings. The royal tombs are extremely stylised. The tombs of the artisans—Deir El Medineh—are covered with more fluid, living images like those of grape vines.

Figure 15. K. and F. M. drawing and carving for the boat project. Gurna, Egypt. (Photo by E. Viet & D. Cottet, 2002).

In this context, we were able to create the conditions and provide some materials which became the territory for artistic creation. My greatest insight through this work was that we did not need to *teach* anything. Bodies move in collective gestures and as visual practitioners we are just in the presence of flows of images. Drawing becomes the primary language in a plurality of languages gathered through the children's relationship with tourists, ancestors, older and younger family members, the desert and the river. Fine art and elitist culture connect with popular culture and multicultural relationships in the flow of the drawings in the workshop. We know learning is happening because of the joy and laughter that accompanies the activity (Yunkaporta, 2019).

Through one project on the theme of boats, designed towards an exhibition of the children's artwork in Paris at the Egyptian Cultural Centre, they created images and became cartographers of their territory and beyond, representing the trajectory their images would take all the way to Paris. In this manner, they became aware of lines of relationship across liquid edges, across space and time.

In a film called *The Slightest Gesture (1971)*, Deligny and Manenti inspire the way we can read a mapping process. Deligny rejects the dominance of language and proposes a method of cartography called *lignes d'erre* (wander lines) that is founded on a deep consideration of milieu, as related to subjectivity. Working with autistic children, he drew their paths among the houses, studios and outdoor spaces constituting the "network" of the space around their collective place of living. He drew on tracing paper or other transparent materials, and superimposed them, building up a complex cartography of relationship (Alvarez de Toledo, 2001) This is not revealing a binary relationship of child and topography, more an intra-active becoming. Barad asserts that to understand the complexity of the world, we need to focus on "dynamic topological reconfigurings/ entanglements/ relationalities/ (re)articulations of the world" (Barad, 2007). Drawing is in this sense a material-discursive practice embodying ongoing

translation and rearticulation of the world in its living and mattering. Although these movements and minor gestures were not intentionally drawn for systems change, Deligny (2015) has been influential in seeding a new paradigm where neurodiversity is recognised and celebrated, rather than in need of correcting or controlling. The way he drew these children's paths highlights his own displacement/shift about emerging relationalities. He began his career working as an *educator,* intending to teach or cure the so-called "difficult" children and teenagers. While he was recording with a pencil on tracing paper these wandering footprints, he wrote that his approach changed, and focused on "living with" our environment, and the children.

In these situations, in Gurna and in the Cevennes, we see systemic change happening as the children are no longer being *taught* but are producing learning and belonging through their collective lived experience of drawing. The children in Gurna are free to come and fabricate their own agency, with no utilitarian goal, unlike when they create artworks for tourists. They are not empowered by teaching but through an open process of developing their own power, and we know this is happening through the pleasure and joy they express. This explores a new pattern of relational equity between children and adults in society. In the context of an imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society (Hooks, 1994) which thrives on the domination and exploitation of the "weak," whether women or children, this "workshop" became a space of liberty where the children were free to develop this horizon of equity through drawing joyfully on the walls, in relationship with all the available teachings of their ancestors, families, the live materials of their place, and with the feeling of joy itself. These are modes of existing, relating, and being that we share with all of the living world, but that we adult humans no longer practice freely.

Conclusions: New Relationalities to Explore

What Kind of New Relationalities Are We Seeing Emerge?

Drawing practices can bring awareness to and enable the exploration of new relationalities, "decisive mutations of plurality" in a changing world. As practitioners, we learn through proposing visual arts practice to others. It is a rhizomatic co-evolution process, beyond the duality of teacher and student. We see relationalities emerging in these mythical times that are decidedly beyond duality; embracing all of life in configurations that are sometimes symbiotic, sometimes parasitic, always *polytical*: Damasio coins this term "*Polytics*" meaning a political stance which surpasses binary camps in order to organise inevitably multiple relationships (Damasio, 2020).

Whereas the mechanistic paradigm can be characterised by the conceptualisation of simple cause-and-effect relationships, a living systems paradigm is sourced in complex multitudes of relationships. Agency is enabled through nodal interventions rather than hierarchical authority. The binary of

black and white, good and bad, female and male, top and bottom, etc. gives way to a nuanced and ever-evolving plurality.

As change practitioners and learning facilitators, we seek to engage in relationalities that are expansive, including all forms of life and vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010). We are learning to develop ways of being-in-the-world intense enough to understand somatically the idea of "all my relations" that we are invited to consider by some Indigenous scholars (Goodchild, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2019). We have explored symbiotic imaginaries (Courier & Winn, 2023) and embrace a broad, political definition that includes parasitic relationships as much as relationships of equitable exchange. Here we include images as "quasi-organisms," "parasites or adjuvants" living within us (Simondon, 2022).

To Conclude: Education Systems as Fertile Habitats for Image-Organisms

Through this co-inquiry into transformative education and drawing practice for systems change, we have felt the potential to support the emergence of new relationalities that can embody new paradigms. In these mythological times, we invite people to unleash the power of an expanded definition of drawing, through a live practice of visual learning to seed new relationalities everywhere. Our proposal is not to make drawing education obligatory, more to support images' parasitic quasi-organism qualities; they are shape-shifting, fugitive, in the cracks, interstitial, unpredictable, emergent. Thus, new relationalities can become ubiquitous intra-active forces for systems change. This is particularly relevant and powerful within the structures of formal education systems which can serve as fertile habitats for opaque populations of image-organisms with transformative power. Just as offshore oil rigs serve as habitats for new reefs and emergent marine life.

We intend to continue to explore new relationalities and visual practices for systems change, with a line of inquiry taking us towards collective and embodied large-scale drawing practice together with more-than-human beings and energies. We have inquiry questions around "Who (else) is drawing?"; "How might we develop new relationalities with images that inhabit us?"; "What can the experience of drawing teach us about how we can cultivate learning for systems change?"; and "How can we partner with the power of images in their becoming, connecting to the deep reservoir of energy for system change that we intuit within the ways of being of images themselves?".

References

Al-Saji, A. (2017). Feminist phenomenology. In S. Khader, A. Garry, & A. Stone (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy* (pp. 143–154). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315758152-13

Alvarez De Toledo, S. (2001). Pédagogie poétique de Fernand Deligny. *Communications*, *71*(1). 245–275. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.2001.2087

Baillat, A. (2018). *Les migrations climatiques à l'épreuve du «schisme de réalité»* [Climate migrations put to the test by the "schism of reality] [Brochure]. Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques. https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ProgClimat-Migrations-climatiques-Juillet-2018.pdf

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

Baudoin, E. & Troubs (2017). *Humains : La Roya est un fleuve.* [Humans: The Roya is a river]. L'Association.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822391623

Berger, J. (2013). Drawing is discovery. *New Statesman*, 53. (Original work published 1953).

Birney, A. (2015). *How might people and organisations, who seek a sustainable future, cultivate systemic change?* [unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Lancaster University].

Boulton, J., Allen, P., & Bowman, C. (2015). *Embracing complexity*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199565252.001.0001

Courier, C. (2022). *Ombres d'exil: du dessin-scène par nuages de points à l'émergence de transagirs micropolitiques* [Shadows of exile: from drawing-scene by clouds of dots to the emergence of micropolitical transagencies]. [Doctoral dissertation, Université du Québec à Montréal]. https://archipel.uqam.ca/15189/

Courier, C. & Winn, L. (2023, April 19). *Engendering symbiotic imaginaries as intra-action between multiple life- and material-matter forms through artistic-scientific drawing practice* [Online conference presentation]. Drawing in Relation online conference. https://blog.lboro.ac.uk/tracey/drn2023-drawing-in-relation-affect-agency-recording/

Damasio, A. (2020). Afterword. In B. Morizot, *Manières d'être vivant* (1st ed., pp. 308–325). Actes Sud.

De Zegher, C. (Curator). (2003). *The stage of drawing: Gesture and act* [Exhibition catalogue]. Tate Publishing and Drawing Center.

Deligny, F. & Manenti, J. (Director). (1971). *The slightest gesture* [Film].

Deligny, F. (2015). *The Arachnean and other texts*. (D. S. Burk & C. Porter, Trans.). Univocal.

Geels, F. (2011). The multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions: Responses to seven criticisms. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, *1*(1), 24–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2011.02.002

Glaveanu, V. P. (2015). Creativity as a sociocultural act. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, *49*(3), 165–180. https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.94

Glissant, E. (1996). *Introduction à une poétique du divers* [Introduction to a poetics of diversity]. Gallimard.

Goodchild, M. (2021). Relational systems thinking: The Dibaajimowin (story) of re-theorizing "systems thinking" and "complexity science". *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change*, *2*(1), 53–76. https://doi.org/10.47061/jabsc.v2i1.2027

Guattari, F. (2014). *The three ecologies*. (I. Pindar & P. Sutton, Trans.). Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350354531

Guattari, F. & Rolnik, S. (1996). *Micropolitics: Cartography of desire*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Haney, W., Russell, M., & Bebell, D. (2004). Drawing on education: Using drawings to document schooling and support change. *Harvard Educational Review*, *74*(3), 241–271. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.74.3.w0817u84w7452011

hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Ingold, T. (2011). *Redrawing anthropology: Materials, movements, lines*. Farnham. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315604183

Knutson, K., Okada, T. & Crowley, K. (Eds.). (2021). *Multidisciplinary approaches to art learning and creativity: Fostering artistic exploration in formal and informal settings*. Routledge.

Komatsu, K., & Namai, R. (2022). Art = research: Inquiry in creative practice. In K. Komatsu, K. Takagi, H. Ishiguro & T. Okada (Eds.), *Arts-based methods in education research in Japan* (pp. 1–23). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004514140_001

LAB619 (2021). *Migrations : Dessiner l'exil*. Editions Alifbata.

Mang, P., Haggard, B., & Regenesis. (2016). *Regenerative development: A framework for evolving sustainability*. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119149699

Massumi, B. (2017). Towards a politics of dividualism. *Multitudes*, *68*(3), 77–87. https://www.cairn-int.info/journal--2017-3-page-77.htm

Milligan, K., Zerda, J., & Kania, J. (2022). The relational work of systems change: Collective impact efforts must prioritize working together in more relational ways to find systemic solutions to social problems. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. https://doi.org/10.48558/mdbh-da38

Morizot, B. (2023). *L'Inexploré*. Wildproject.

Simondon, G. (2022). *Imagination and invention*. Minnesota University Press.

Stengers, I. (2009). *Au temps des catastrophes* [Disaster time]. Éditions de la Découverte.

Torbert, B. (2013). Listening into the dark: An essay testing the validity and efficacy of collaborative developmental action inquiry for describing and encouraging the transformation of self, society, and scientific inquiry. *Integral Review*, *9*(2), 264–299.

Tuck, E. & Wayne Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1*(1), 1–40. https://doi.org/10.25058/20112742.n38.04

Yunkaporta, T. (2019). *Sand talk: How Indigenous thinking can save the world*. HarperOne.

Zwer, N. & Rekacewicz, P. (2021). *Cartographie radicale*. *Explorations*. Editions La Découverte.