

WRITING-DRAWING

An Entangled Archival Practice

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Abstract: This article is based on a 2016 talk I gave to a drawing research group led by Lesley McFadyen, Huda Tayob and Sophie Read. In it I look back at my PhD research completed in 2013, with a view to trying to disentangle my complicated relationship with drawing as a practice of architectural research. Working through what drawing might and might not be, I propose that, hand in hand with writing, writing-drawing forms an entangled mode of doing architectural history and theory that draws out something more, or other, than each can do alone.* The mode of writing-drawing is particularly developed in the context of historical research on a building where archival material on the architect's intent, or evidence of the uses of the building once it was built, are missing. I argue two things: firstly, that the building itself can be read as an original archive, as a series of Lacanian part-objects; and that secondly, the writing-drawing research practice creates a further archive, a »living archive« that can be contributed to over time.† The article reflects on the roles of writing and drawing in the PhD whilst incorporating thinking developed in my recent research, chiefly drawn from ethnography, sociology, literary studies, and situated feminist and autotheory writing.*

Notes, indented, act as contextual asides.

Keywords: Drawing, Writing, Maison de Verre, Glass, Dust, Air, Archive, Autotheory

* The idea of entanglement is from Donna Haraway, where she suggests that »thinking with« allows us to entangle our relations in fruitful ways and see the inherent relationality of our existence. Donna Haraway (2016): *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

† See Emma Cheatle (2017): *Part-Architecture: The Maison de Verre, Duchamp, Domesticity and Desire in 1930s Paris*, London: Routledge, Chapter 3, 129–134 for this argument in full. A »living archive« is one that is contributed to in an ongoing way. On the part-object see Rosalind E. Krauss (1994): *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, and Jacques Lacan (2002): *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton; on archival thinking see, Jacques Derrida (1996): *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Arlette Farge (2013): *The Allure of the Archives*, New Haven: Yale University

architectural	drawing	as architecture
site	drawing	as site
survey	drawing	
critical	drawing	as criticism
writing-	-drawing-	-writing
re-	drawing	
observational	drawing	
working	drawing	work
diagrammatic	drawing	
plan	drawing	
	drawing	out
on	drawing	on
methods of	drawing	methods
tactical	drawing	tactics
line	drawing	line
dust	drawing	dust
	drawing	the body
air	drawing	air
	drawing	the invisible
towards	drawing	towards
forensic	drawing	as forensics
archival	drawing	as archive
not	drawing	

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[†] The making of this list-as-image *draws* inspiration from Georges Perec (2008): *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Trans. John Sturrock. London: Penguin, 3–4. It reappears in sections later in the essay.

»(N.B. I'm saying writing-or-drawing, because these are often twin adventures, which depart to seek in the dark, which do not find, do not find, and as a result of not finding and not understanding, (draw) help the secret shoot forth.)«
Hélène Cixous^{**}

I have an ambivalent relationship with *drawing*: I am thinking of the verb and its meanings to draw forth, to draw out. As Hélène Cixous says, drawing seems to me an act of faith performed in the darkness. I find drawing to be fickle and capricious whereas reading and writing are courses of action I am happy to hold hands with. I am perplexed by the act of drawing. *The drawing* – as a noun, an object, a production, held in the hand, looked at – is not, with regard to my own practice, something I find easy to speak of. Drawings »do not find, do not find«. Indeed, when I began my doctoral research, which culminated in the book *Part-Architecture: The Maison de Verre, Duchamp, Domesticity and Desire in 1930s Paris*, I did not imagine I would use drawing as a practice at all.^{††} As a practicing architect turned academic, I had hoped that I would no longer have a need for drawing, with its muteness that often failed to be turned into building, nor bring forth the hidden.^{**} I would no longer feel the test of it, my lack of competency at it, the problematic of its aesthetic value, its questioned relationship to art or to artefact. I would no longer be exposed by what I had always felt was my and its deficiency.

And yet, my PhD research was born from a drawing: »the drawing is born!«^{§§} This drawing, or more specifically a set of four related drawings, had

Press; Carolyn Steedman (2001): *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

* Also see Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2021): »Post Qualitative Inquiry, the Refusal of Method, and the Risk of the New«. In: *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27/1, January, 3–9.

§ The making of this list-as-image *draws* inspiration from Georges Perec (2008): *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Trans. John Sturrock. London: Penguin, 3–4. It reappears in sections later in the essay.

** Hélène Cixous (2005): »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather: The Executioner's taking off«, in: Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. Trans. Catharine A. F. MacGillivray, London: Routledge, 17.

†† Cheatle, *Part-Architecture*.

** See Robin Evans (1997): »Translations from Drawing to Building«, in: *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, London: Architectural Association, 153–193.

§§ Cixous, »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather«, 16.

been made many years before. These drawings responded to a 1992 visit as a student to the iconic modernist house and integrated gynaecology clinic, the *Maison de Verre* (Pierre Chareau, Paris 1928–1932). During the tour of the building, neither the words gynaecology nor clinic were mentioned; the room in which surgery had once taken place stayed locked and not spoken of. Instead, the house was glossed into the iconic, modern, mechanistic yet domestic space as written by 20th-century architectural historians. On our return to London I made drawings in response – drawings as an analysis of the gap, the absence of discourse on the history of the gynaecology clinic in the house. The drawings used architectural conventions of plan and section, and various scaled details of the building. Using the same architectural style they located and positioned the gynaecological body into the spaces, and explored her and the building's interior detail through her exposure and absent presence.

I consciously describe here with writing rather than the images themselves, to experiment with the idea that Cixous's »writing-or-drawing« becomes the non-binary entanglement of writing-drawing. The idea of writing-drawing also takes reference from Walter Benjamin's »thought image« and Jennifer Bloomer's »[s]crypt«.^{**} The drawings I refer to in the text can be seen instead in the book *Part-Architecture*, or in my thesis online in the UCL library.

These drawings were hand-drawn with Rotring ink onto A1 tracing paper. Collage made from newspaper and magazine images, and Letraset lettering and texture were added. A full size photocopy was made onto thick cartridge paper then painted with acrylic color to pick out a few key details in the drawing. The final four drawings were the most successful I had completed as a student. They stayed with me, as did the parallel conundrums of the *Maison de Verre*, and yet I cannot now write anything further about them. Although I talked about them at length in a public review, I am now not sure what I was thinking. They are drawing-without-writing. As Cixous states: »The drawing wants to draw what is invisible to the naked eye. It's very diffi-

^{**} See Walter Benjamin: »This is how the angel of history must look. His face turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe« from Walter Benjamin (1992): »Theses on the Philosophy of History«, in: *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press, 257; Jennifer Bloomer (1993): *Architecture and the Text: the (S)crypts of Joyce and Piranesi*, London: Yale University Press, 3–23.

cult. The effort to write is always beyond my strength«.^{††} The drawings remain talismans I carry around with me – one of the tracing paper originals is framed and sits at the end of the bath in our bathroom – but they are mute objects heavy with their own beauty. And yet, they are part of the forming of my younger feminist self, and of my position in relation to architecture. And they later launched my PhD.

But as I said, I did not plan to draw during my long revisit of the *Maison de Verre*.^{***} My intended analysis would instead be through the firmness of words, the incisiveness of theoretical and historical architectural analysis, with the clarity and criticality that writing could bring.

And yet, drawing, as it turns out, remained a necessary part of opening up and making explicit the building that I understood the *Maison de Verre* to be. In the PhD, and the subsequent book, drawing became a critical process to survey, observe, notice, and imagine what is there, might be there, and is no longer there.^{§§§} I became akin to a detective, an ethnographer of the absent; drawing became a forensic tactic aimed at speculating upon and drawing-out the formerly overlooked, the absent, the invisible.^{****} My assertion was that the then illegal abortion and contraception occurred in the house as well as a range of daily domestic, social, and sexual interactions, and yet none of this was archived in the traditional ways. To begin with, I sat in the *Maison de Verre* itself for long periods of time, in different spaces, and sur-

^{††} Cixous, »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather«, 20.

^{***} See Jenny Erpenbeck (2010): *Visitation*. Trans. Susan Bernofsky, London: Portobello.

^{§§§} The development of my drawing-thinking was particularly in the context of Jennifer Bloomer's practice of writing and drawing, see for example: Bloomer (1993): *Architecture and the Text*; Jennifer Bloomer (1992): »Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tables of Bower«. In: *Assemblage*, 17, 6–29. It was also developed in conversation with, for example, the drawing practices of Roni Horn, Louise Bourgeois, and Diller and Scofidio, see in particular Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio (1994): *Flesh: Architectural Probes*, London: Triangle Architectural Publishing; as well as the writing of Mieke Bal, see Mieke Bal (2001): *Looking In: The Art of Viewing*, Amsterdam: G and B Arts International; Mieke Bal (2001): *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: the architecture of art-writing*, London: University of Chicago Press; Jonathan Hill (2006): »Drawing research«, in: *Journal of Architecture*, 11, 329–333; W. J. T. Mitchell (1994): *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Katja Grillner (2007): »Fluttering Butterflies, a Dusty Road, and a Muddy Stone: Criticality in Distraction«, in: Jane Rendell/Jonathan Hill/Murray Fraser/Mark Dorrian (eds.), *Critical Architecture*, London: Routledge, 135–142.

^{****} See Lauren Fournier (2021): *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Richard E. Ocejo/Brian Bond/Kyoichi Tachikawa (2012):

veyed. I used the conventions of measured architectural survey plans, with the addition of observational and analytic annotations and lines: lines of sight, lines of activity, lines of movement through the house. The lines were sketched in various colors and thicknesses, and dotted or dashed to form mappings of imagined, proposed, and guessed-at inhabitations. I also took notes in a diaristic mode, written onto the drawings themselves, as fictional or imagined, and made observational annotations. Then, when I returned to the studio, I redrew these, »drew them up«, transformed them, using mostly digital drawing. I made new plans inscribed with lines unfolding the views and trajectories that underpin the building's strange interior, and its correspondence with Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23).^{****} My aim was to situate and embody the inhabitants of the building. The drawing drew out their potential relationships using collage and line. I made folded paper drawings, books with drawn pages, drawings of the *Large Glass* itself, of the cracks and dust in its glass, and drawings of its later counterpart *Étant donnés* (1946–66).^{****} Throughout the six years of research, I filled numerous A4 sketchbooks – 13 in total – which now sit in a box file gathering their own dust.

Throughout all of this work, the drawing line – line, collage, photocopy, print, paper fold – paralleled, no, entangled with, the written line. Informed by social and historical research on sexuality, gynaecology, and abortion, as well as art, culture, and literature of 19th and early 20th-century Paris, various forms of writing were used, both critical and creative.^{\$\$\$\$} The writing line

Ethnography and the City: Readings on Doing Urban Fieldwork, London: Routledge; Giampietro Gobo (2008): *Doing Ethnography*, London: Sage.

**** The *Large Glass* and *Étant donnés* are housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The drawing and notational practices of Marcel Duchamp – full of homophones and puns – underpinned this practice. See for example, Marcel Duchamp (1994): *Duchamp du signe: écrits*, Paris: Flammarion; Marcel Duchamp (1973): »The Box of 1914«. Trans. Elmer Peterson, »À l'Infinitif«. Trans. Cleve Gray, in: Michel Sanouillet/Elmer Peterson (eds.), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, New York: De Capo.

**** Marcel Duchamp (1987): *Manual of Instructions for Étant donnés*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

\$\$\$\$ The social theory and novels used were extensive: see for example, Shari Benstock (1986): *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940*, New York: University of Texas Press; Alain Corbin (1990): *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1950): *Journey to the End of the Night* [1932]. Trans. John H. P. Marks, London: Vision Press.

rewrites the history of the building through sexuality and the gynaecological body. It is contiguous with – written through, alongside, in dialogue with – the drawing research I made while in the building.

Although Cixous suggests writing and drawing might be »writing-or-drawing«, she continues to prove them to be both inseparable yet partial: »twin adventures, which depart to seek in the dark, which do not find«. Cixous describes the sense in which writing-drawings are »expeditions« or »advance[s] into the unknown«, but also bound to failure: »we won't finish«; we »lose ourselves«.**** My drawing is a mode of forensics – a tactic for uncovering the absent but imagined or implied, for tracing clues to the past, seeking out a suggested inhabitation. Yet it is a melancholy mode, one bound up with loss and failure, as it fails to definitively find evidence, fails to fully demonstrate, fails to completely solve the mystery. Writing pulls it back from the failure – frames and tethers its ideas back down to the ground. The imaginary of writing takes us somewhere, along the path, to a logical conclusion. Even if we disbelieve the ending, we reach it.*****

In my PhD research there are three entangled writing-drawing trajectories. These are framed through the three main chapters which identify and follow three materials present in the *Large Glass* and *Maison de Verre*.

Jacques Lacan's understanding of the part-object and his L Schema underpin my thesis. Lacan describes the outcomes of different parts of his schema enacting on each other, with the part-object as »like a bump in the fabric of something else«, a kind of present absence. The bumps can also be thought of as leftovers, which he associates as seeing (glass), waste products (dust) and speech (air). Part of my research reformulated the L Schema into a Part-architecture Schema as an index for the research practices. In the *Large Glass* and *Maison de Verre*, glass, dust, and air are: »intrinsic and connected materials. Glass predominates, forming a surface for dust collected intentionally on the surface of the *Large Glass* or as a by-product in the *Maison de Verre*; air, contained within the glass walls, both activates their interior life, whether metaphorically (the *Large Glass*) or literally (the *Maison de Verre*) and oxidises their materials causing

**** Cixous, »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather«, 16.

***** On the construction of stories as history see Hilary Mantel's Reith Lectures »Resurrection: The Art and Craft«, at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08vkm52/episodes/player>. Retrieved 23 November, 2021.

further dust. Each material variously signifies sexuality, domesticity and modernity [...] glass signifies visual interaction, or the visuality of sexuality; dust suggests the past, bodies, unwanted matter, decay, cleaning and archiving; and air the breath of life and the carrying of sound and smell.«*****

1. Glass

**[observational drawing-
-survey drawing-
-plan drawing-
-drawing out-
-drawing tactics-]**

Here, drawing is a form of ethnographic observation, creating knowledge through observation and close attention. I use architectural drawing to capture and represent what is materially present, to scale and with a level of rational accuracy. This could be described as Justine Clark, following Andrea Kahn, writes: »as an architectural object configuring architectural knowledge«.***** These drawings are plans, always plans, with added sight-lines and arrowed, dotted, colored lines indicating routes, with sometimes additional annotations and collaged images. The directional colored lines follow, imagine, and index the spatial connections of several potential inhabitants of the building: the salon visitor; the gynaecological patient; Madame Dalsace (the owner of the house); and her husband gynaecologist, Dr Dalsace. They make (mark) possession of the private, domestic, and private/public gynaecological spaces in which events – gynaecological and sexual, familial, and public – must have taken place. Yet as Jacques Derrida writes, we are blind when we draw; drawing is blind.***** We do not know and cannot see these past inhabitations. They remain speculations.

***** See Cheatile, *Part-Architecture*, Chapter 3, 47, 50.

***** See Justine Clark (2019): »Smudges, Smears and Adventitious Marks«. In: *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, 1-8, and Andrea Kahn (1992): »Disclosure: Approaching Architecture«. In: *Harvard Architectural Review*, 8. I am indebted to Clark for some of the new references in this text.

***** Jacques Derrida (1993): *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2. Dust

[-drawing the body-
 -drawing as archive-
 -forensic drawing-
 -drawing dust-
 -drawing as archive fever-]

The bodies of the past have gone from the building. There is no record of their visitation or the activities that went on there; no archival remains. The glass drawings, despite being of material lines, merely map from the outside, failing to actually capture the real embodied presence of these past witnesses.^{*****} Dust as a material is composed substantially from human skin, hair, and clothing. Layers of it remain embedded in the corners and cracks of the building no matter how many times it is cleaned. Dust hence constitutes the leftovers of past inhabitations, fragments left behind from previous iterations of the body. Dust then is the only real archive. I became a cleaner in the house, and swept up its dust, from the nooks in the Nevada glass lenses to the crannies of the gynaecological surgery and its equipment. Departing from the drawing as line, the dust drawings are made from dust itself, re-presented through the old fashioned ink-dust-transfer method of photo-copying. The dust collections and their drawings attempt to get closer to the past body and archive its real presence. Yet the collecting of the dust became a painful corporeal experience in itself. It got inside me, up my nose, ingrained in my fingers. I ended up sneezing and ill with an allergic response. Even now though, I continuously return to dust, dirt, the ground: full of anomaly and contradiction they suggest both our presence somewhere, our history, and, with Haraway's thinking on compost and the »humusities«, our interdisciplinary kinships and relations.^{\$\$\$\$\$} Dust is always a remainder worth looking at.^{*****}

^{*****} On the materiality of lines see Catherine Ingraham (1991): »Lines and Linearity«, in: Andrea Kahn (ed.), *Drawing/Building/Text*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 73.

^{*****} Walter Benjamin (1992): »Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century«, in: *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press. See also Teresa Stoppani (2007): »Dust Revolutions. Dust, Informe, Architecture (Notes for a Reading of Dust in Bataille)«. In: *Journal of Architecture*, 12/4, 437–447.

^{\$\$\$\$\$} For Haraway, the humanities should be known as the humusities, to include all species, human and non-human. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

^{*****} Carolyn Steedman aligns dust with all history writing, see: Steedman, *Dust*.

3. Air

[-drawing air-
 -drawing the invisible-
 -not drawing-
 -drawing-writing-sounding-**]**

The drawings of glass were made through visuality. Those of detritus and dust and the leftover body left something [else] to be desired. Dust is death. Vision is partial, tricksy. The building was also described by Dr Dalsace in the 1930s as a big sound machine. The sounds of the family, of the consultations with patients, of the weekly salon of notable avant-garde artists and writers drifted unconfined through the »free-plan«, mingling, and overheard.^{*****} The doctor therefore had a soundproof telephone booth installed to have private discussions with his patients. Madame Dalsace fixed heavy sound-dampening velvet curtains and a thick piled carpet to her boudoir. The sounds and communications of the past are like ghosts that I try to grasp. Ghosts that won't go away because as Avery F. Gordon says, they have knowledges to tell us that we might have turned away from.^{*****} In the 1930s, air was pumped through the building via floor grilles, gently warming or cooling the spaces. The air of the past and the smells and sounds it carried are no longer visible materials but instead sounds in ghostly bubbles. How does one draw the invisible? By not-drawing. These not-drawings were instead audio pieces, performances of sound – of sweeping, of imagined past stories, of breath, of conversation – created on miniature sound chips and then embedded into tiny handmade books. They were neither drawing nor writing, but writing-drawing-sounding: I wrote creative pieces that imagined and followed the ghosts through the thresholds of the building's interior spaces. But can we avoid drawing? The final images in the PhD are plans showing where the books can be found in the building in an imaginary exhibition. The books themselves were lost in a house move several years later.

^{*****} The weekly salon hosted the likes of Louis Arragon, Paul Eluard, Jean Cocteau, André Breton and Walter Benjamin, see Cheatle, *Part-Architecture*, 32, and Maria Gough (2002): »Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde«. In: *October*, 101, summer, 55–61.

^{*****} See Avery F. Gordon (2003): *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

On drawing, I am still uncertain. Drawing does not find, yet seeks blindly in the dark. It extends its line, its mark, meets its lack. Yet hooked through writing it continues to look, to hear, to smell. It potentially helps writing to present the formerly unseen »*living of life*«. §§§§§§§

My research after *Part-Architecture* has re-explored many of the positionings of the thesis, but also moved into new theoretical areas, particularly around embodying architecture and health. In recent work on the rise of maternity buildings and the materialization of the maternal body in the 18th to 20th centuries, I once again assumed that I no longer had a use for drawing, only to find I am reliant on 19th-century »found object drawings« that stand in for the »lost« 18th-century maternity buildings and their absent plans. ***** Reading these requires a redrawing of them in order to analyze how their spaces were inhabited and how maternity, over time, becomes a spatialized social practice. I also redraw the plans of 20th-century maternity spaces in order to understand how the maternal experience is embedded differently in these spaces. Once learnt, drawing as writing-drawing seems to be a practice I cannot leave behind. »There is no end to writing or drawing. Being born doesn't end. Drawing is a being born. Drawing is born.« †††††††

§§§§§§§ Cixous, »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather«, 21.

***** There are very few extant original 18th or 19th-century maternity buildings, and where they do exist, such as the Newcastle Lying-in Hospital of 1826 and the General Lying-In Hospital, York Road in Lambeth, London of 1830, their interiors are substantially converted. See Emma Cheatle (2024): *Lying in the Dark Room: Architectures of British Maternity*, London: Routledge.

††††††† Cixous, »Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, Rather«, 16.

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