

An Imbricated Drawing Ontology:
Economies of Pattern, Chaos and Scale

Dr. Steve Fossey

University of Lincoln

Keywords

Networks, Structures, Mapping, Constellations, GPS, Locative Technologies, Site-Specificity

Abstract

This article extrapolates material from participation in a project titled *A Line Made by Walking Without Marking the Earth* (2011) which fed into *Walking Through the Field*, part of my Practice as research (PAR) Ph.D titled *Site-Specific Performance and The Mechanics of Becoming Social* (2018). *Walking Through the Field* is reworked in this article to present an imbricated drawing ontology that is composed from, and understood through, a process of layering materials generated whilst walking, sharing personal histories and being tracked by satellites. A chaotic assemblage of personal thoughts and memories is layered with the ordering capabilities of the satellites which track movements in space to create drawings from the traces, lines and patterns these technologies generate. The methods used to bring together these traces, lines, patterns and memories seek to articulate a sense of what social scientist Doreen Massey refers to as ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey 2005) and speak to what Massey might describe as an ‘ever-shifting constellation of trajectories’ (ibid: 151). An imbrication of micro and macro events of space and place speak to a purposeful disruption of stable definitions of site (Kaye, 2000), connecting a multiplicity of people, events and specificities to create an imbricated drawing ontology.

Introduction

Walking Through the Field (2011) is the title given to a research project born out of my collaboration in *A Line Made by Walking Without Marking the Earth* which was a Live Art Development Agency (LADA) DIY initiative led by Daniel Belasco Rogers at the Yorkshire sculpture park, UK (YSP). The collaboration fed into my PAR Ph.D. titled *Site-Specific Performance and The Mechanics of Becoming Social* (2018). *A Line Made by Walking Without Marking the Earth* broadly explored the practical application of global positioning satellite (GPS) tracking technologies in art, but my participation in the project was concerned with how the products and processes of interrelationality can be rethought to better understand social space and site-specific performance. This article takes this collaboration and frames it to present what I describe as an imbricated drawing ontology, produced by and understood through a process of imbricating the materials generated whilst walking, sharing personal histories and being tracked by satellites.

In *Walking Through the Field* I sought to combine the chaotic assemblage of personal thoughts and memories with the ordering capabilities of the satellites which track our movements in space. I aimed to create drawings from the lines and patterns these technologies generate as they track our moving bodies from outer space by bringing those lines back into contact with my own body in space (back to Earth?) in an imbrication of traces. The methods used to bring together these traces, lines, patterns and memories articulate a sense of what social scientist Doreen Massey refers to as ‘throwntogetherness’ and speak to what Massey might describe as the ‘ever-shifting constellation of trajectories’ (Massey 2005: 151). Interaction between human beings and the global positioning technologies that track them combine to create an imbricated drawing ontology.

In the opening propositions of her 2005 book *For Space* Massey proposes that ‘we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’ (ibid: 9). The methods of creating lines and patterns discussed in this article sought to mobilise Massey’s propositions by making drawings from the dynamics of interrelations and interactions on both micro and macro levels. The ‘product’ that Massey refers to as space is reconsidered in and through methods that lead to the product(ion) of drawing. The material introduced here takes a conceptual position that asks what Massey’s ‘product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the

immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' might look like when realised as lines and patterns. It asks how the potentially chaotic coming together of immensely global and intimately tiny interrelations might lead to new ways of thinking about how dialogic drawing comes into being and how social interrelationality contributes to this ontology.

The methods employed in this process sought to both explore being with others *during* the intended GPS walks, being together in the weeks *leading up to* the walks, and the effects of the walks on our relationships *after* the walks. I was concerned not with positioning the YSP as the site of the work, rather I sought to defer a stable location for the drawings by identifying places, lines, shapes and patterns, gathered through a process of *being* together. This intention positions site as a process rather than fixed location and takes performance studies scholar Nick Kaye's writing on site-specificity as a point of departure. In *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) Kaye focusses on a concept of site-specificity that is in a continual process of deferred locational fixedness, with proper, original and fixed meanings attributable to an event's relationship with its location continually at odds due to ever-shifting signifiers. Understanding site in wider spatial terms as that which is fluid and connected to a multiplicity of places, people, events and specificities provides a frame in which to understand this article's positioning of an imbricated drawing ontology.

The work discussed here is born of a framing of site that celebrates its discursive and dialogic potential and speaks to practices that utilise what could be described as 'conversations' between places, peoples and technologies. Art historian Miwon Kwon describes 'the way in which (site-oriented) artwork's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate' (Kwon 2002: 26). Site, in this way, becomes that which *produces* discussion, but also *is* discussion. Specificities are produced through a discursiveness and 'fragmentary sequence of events and actions through spaces' that frees the site-specific art-maker from geographical fixedness, in turn allowing 'nomadic narrative[s] whose path[s] [are] articulated by the passage[s] of the artist' to overlap and intertwine (ibid: 29). The paths and passages referred to here imply both physical place and movement *through* place. It is this fluctuation between movement and stillness, stability and instability that gives the idea of an imbricated drawing ontology its foundation.

Anthropologist Marc Augé's definition of place also provides a useful supporting framework. Augé defines place as that which is 'anthropological': 'places of identity, of relations and of history' (1995: 52) that have their historical signifiers on show and where social life is possible. Place as a stable concept is contested as Augé describes how the excessive space of Supermodernity has led to the prevalence of non-place, a term which can be understood differently to place as that which is transitory and resultant of an overload of information and meaning. Augé argues that in our constant and excessive need to give meaning to the 'whole of the present' (ibid: 34) we are losing our sense of place, but this article provokes the idea that there is potential for a greater social interrelationality and sense of place if place is seen as multiplicitous space that embraces excesses of connectivity and information. Place, as perceived in this way, can be opened up to a spatial re-imagining where histories spill into one another and social trajectories collide.

Walking Through the Field and Drawing Together Common Grounds

To begin a process of gathering material for the drawings in *Walking Through the Field* I started with the exchange of personal geographical histories. My aim was to explore how people who have never met before negotiate the unfamiliar social space they find themselves in, observing how common ground is sought and found through conversation. Sociologist Fran Tonkiss describes the physical negotiation of common spaces between strangers in urban areas as the 'improvised ballet of the streets' (Tonkiss 2005: 22), and I sought to build on this thinking by moving geographically (speaking metaphorically) through conversations to locate common ground and 'draw-together' co-ordinates and lines on imagined maps. Moving geographically through conversations can be understood here as an act of place-naming, an act that I argue below becomes a dance between places in our memories.

Before meeting Rogers I had begun to think about the places I knew we had in common, and in email conversations with him I metaphorically jumped between places in an attempt to find common ground. When we met in person I moved beyond our digital email dialogue and began looking for common ground in *actual* conversation with him. In the first moments of meeting on the day of the YSP collaboration we discussed the places that we knew. A mental map was beginning to be created that can be understood as a conceptual cartographic

representation of our shared geographic history. Massey comments that ‘maps are representations, and obviously, and inevitably too, they are selective (as is any form of representation)’ (2005: 106), and Rogers’ map and mine were no different. The map Rogers and I made in these initial conversations was selective representation of the places that united us.

We began a process of selective mapping that recalled times and places whose selection was determined by common place, and by common place I mean both the physical ‘here and now’ site of the YSP, but also the ‘then and there’ of the places ‘revisited’ in conversation. The duality of being here and there in the exploration of common ground illustrates a sense of the chaotic complexities of our spatial relationships. Our words traced a map that we followed through the recalling of histories, drawing moments and places together in a ‘ballet’ of place-name exchange. The drawing together of histories and geographies began to produce patterns in our imagination before any actual patterns had been drawn.

One of the objectives of the workshop was to make GPS drawings of the walks we would do together, but before a map of any walks had been physically generated, a drawing of sorts had been produced that began to link the members of the group. Rogers and I had drawn places like Berlin and Nottingham together, becoming socially acquainted (or *closer?*) through conversation in the exchange of shared geographic histories. A performing of social familiarity had begun, and, certainly to my experience, so too had a sense of social belonging. By the time the next participant arrived I felt more local to the place I was in and performed an identity that postured this belonging. I became conscious of how I was holding my body with confidence and presenting myself as someone who felt securely located in this place. The establishment of geographical commonality had produced social familiarity and I now moved like I belonged. The mechanics of being together in this way contributes to the ontology of drawing that I am beginning to lead to in that my being in the world had shifted through the process described here, and this being would affect the drawings to come.

The next participant arrived and the same social dance through places and histories to find common ground occurred. The second participant and I were both connected to Northampton in some way, and, just like before with Rogers, the mention of someone/somewhere brought us together in both the place that we were in (YSP), and crucially the place we recalled to find common ground (Northampton). Our spatial layering evoked a sense of being here and there simultaneously; we were both ‘here’ at the YSP and at the same time ‘there’ in

Northampton. These places become co-ordinates on an imaginary evolving map, and can be seen to be plotted in an attempt to stake a claim on the foreign territory one finds oneself in with another. Massey comments that a map operates as a 'technology of power' (Massey 2005: 106) and in my attempts to locate myself within the space, I began linking co-ordinates in a performative power-play between me and those who were there with me.

Using the idea of a technology of power in this context serves to support the idea of a conversational mapping process as a way to foster common ground through the experience of place. The word *technology* derives from the words '*techne*' which means 'art, skill, craft, or the way, manner, or means by which a thing is gained', and '*logos*' which means the 'utterance by which inward thought is expressed' (Web.engr.oregonstate.edu, 2016). Understood in these terms, the art of conversation can be seen as a technological method of gaining a sure-footing in a foreign space. This attempt at sure-footing continued as the other participants arrived, with Rogers immediately asking us all to say who we were and where we were from. The initial statement of where we are from can be understood as the declaration that creates the foundation for who we are and who we are to perform as. It is a representation of both place and self, performed through the utterance of one's own name alongside the place one is from.

The naming of places, like the naming of streets, can be argued as an attempt to fix a location and understand its history. It is evidence of a desire to pin down a place and load it with history and authenticity in an attempt at steadying the chaotic disorientation of the space it produces. Like the moment we step off a bus in the city and begin to 'take each other on in an unyielding flow and contraflow' (Tonkiss 2005: 22) in movements that literally knock us off our paths, the chaotic disorientation of a foreign moment in a foreign place dislocates our senses of social stability. Recognition of places we know through the act of naming provides an antidote to the senses of chaotic disorientation described above. Indeed, social theorist Michel de Certeau describes how 'the city keeps us under its gaze, which one cannot bear without feeling dizzy', but 'proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings' (de Certeau 1984: 104). It is this named familiarity that is a necessary part of our script when engaged in the act of becoming social with others.

Starting to Walk

Once we had named our places and found common ground, it became time to walk. Some members of the group decided to walk together but I walked alone. As I moved I felt aware of the other members of the group, with traces of them existent in my thoughts as I made my lines through space. My GPS device displayed an image of the drawing that I was producing in the live moment as I produced it. This image was evidence of my presence in that place made possible by satellite technologies in other places (outer space). I was conscious that my movement was being traced multi-locationally, and in thinking about the others in the group and their movements, I became more conscious of mine (inner space). Each time I felt located in the place I was walking, my location was displaced by the presence of the other people in the places other than mine. The place I *was* in was made specific by the ghost of the places I *was not*.

After several hours of walking we reconvened and made plans for the evening. We ate and drank together and talked more about our lives. Some spoke on mobile phones to their families whilst others updated mood-monitoring apps in efforts to share their emotional senses of being there. We moved constantly between our material bodies situated in Yorkshire and our virtual presences elsewhere. Although located in a particular geographical place, we were also in psychological states of transit as we updated our social statuses on digital platforms with physically distant others. Eventually we left and headed for our hotel, checked into our respective rooms and slept. I thought about the other members of the group and I imagined they thought about me.

The next day our GPS drawings were downloaded to become documents of our time being together through walking. For the first time we could see 'where we had been'. By now I had also produced notes written in reflection of our social interrelationality. This text and this downloaded data gave me the material I needed to produce my drawings. An imbricated ontology of drawing could now be understood through a series of parts:

Drawing 1: The downloaded GPS imagery from the walks



These images became drawings made through collaboration between the body and the satellites that tracked us. In Drawing 1 the patterns of the fields as seen from space are interrupted by the lines drawn into them, and the chaotic socialisation that creates imaginary maps discussed above is imbricated with the ordering of GPS technologies. Chaos looms larger than order in this drawing through the presence of the data that sits side-by-side with the traces of my movement. Co-ordinates and place names break up the patterns, and dates and times vie for attention among the green quilt of land.

Drawing 2: The manipulated imagery edited to show only the lines of the walks and nothing else



Order is restored in Drawing 2 as this edited drawing's image sees lines and patterns uninterrupted by data. Everything is stripped back apart from the lines made by walking. The traces of our conversations and locations are present in my mind but are absent to the viewer. However, this image could only come into being through our dances between memorised places. The co-ordinates that plotted our actual physical positions in the world remain but are hidden from view; they have been erased in the process of editing.

Drawing 3: A still image of these drawings projected onto my body (taken from a video of a performance to camera)



With the images created and the time at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park over, I brought my material back to the studio and began thinking about the economies of scale at play in the process I was exploring. Projecting the edited drawings onto my body in a place away from the YSP produces an imbricated drawing ontology where the drawings made *by* my body ‘then and there’ are drawn *onto* my body ‘here and now’ in the live act of performing with them. They moved and so did I as my body struggled to fit itself into the lines and patterns that were projected onto the surface of my skin.

Drawing 4: A still image taken from a performance lecture where I shared the experience of the walks with a live audience



In another layer of imbrication, I gave a performance-lecture. In the lecture the footage from Drawing 3 was projected onto the wall of the space. My live body is seen moving in and out of my mediated body's movements. Chaos is reintroduced to the ontology through my oral recollection of the process of getting to know each other. The detail of our orientational dances through geographic histories becomes a performance text whose voicing is layered upon the bodies and lines visible in the space. The performance-lecture saw me walk around the space, moving my live body within my projected body to overlay simultaneous selves brought together through my movement and the oral recollection of my experience.

Drawing to an End

The drawings presented in this article are representations of the physical walks made with others. They show the lines, traces and patterns of actual movements in space, but they also contain residues of the dialogic movements through space produced by the place-naming rituals that preceded them. Although invisible to the viewer, they hold within them conversations about Nottingham, Berlin, Northampton, Yorkshire and so on. Drawing 2 strips back everything but line and pattern and the body is visibly absent, but once projected onto my body (Drawing 3), the traces of those I once walked with mark my flesh as I move my body with the lines we made together.

In each drawing there is an interplay that destabilizes location. Several layers work together to produce a site-specific process of being together, or indeed, an imbricated drawing ontology. The site of the YSP is imbricated with the sites of the satellites; the site of my body is used as a place to receive the images; the site of the performance-lecture is the site where these elements come together; and the place of the digital documentation within this article becomes another place within the process.

An imbricated drawing ontology fosters a dialogue that layers bodies in conversation, technologies in space that track movements, places from pasts that are recalled, and economies of scale on micro and macro levels. It interconnects people and places, memories and experiences in an attempt to communicate the chaotically disorienting process of being social in the world with others through the medium of drawing. Patterns of behaviour become patterns in drawings. Layers, shapes, patterns and lines that speak to interrelationality and site-specific processes of social orientation destabilise senses of place. A further layer of the ontology is added by you, the reader of this text. In thinking about the places you are from and the places discussed here, the map continues to evolve and your histories of place are imbricated with those of us that moved together then and who still move together in thought now.

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