

**DRAWING in DUOS:  
THE *JOURNEYS AND INTERSECTIONS* COLLABORATION BETWEEN  
ISTANBUL AND WORCESTER**

**Abstract:**

This paper focuses on a collaborative drawing project carried out between two undergraduate drawing courses, one in İstanbul and the other in Worcester, during the Fall 2015 semester. Duos -teams of two working remotely- took turns to work on the same drawing in correspondence for three months by means of communication and sharing the changing images on-line with one another. The project introduced a collaborative method of learning based on drawing, initiated cultural exchange and cooperation. The role of drawing in the project was critical due to the direct but gradual nature of transmitting meaning onto paper. Outcomes of this project consisted of a flexible and playful creation process for students making use of the element of chance. They sought alternate ways to finalize a drawing and experienced the benefits of artistic co-production. The project has the capacity to inspire artists, instructors and others interested in creative partnership in different disciplines and can be of value as an educational model.

**Keywords:** drawing, collaboration, international education, cultural exchange

**Introduction**

This paper examines *the Journeys and Intersections Collaboration*, a drawing project conducted in the fall 2015 semester between two universities, with the participation of twenty students from each university, one in Worcester, United Kingdom and the other in İstanbul, Turkey. The class in Worcester was offered as part of the mandatory coursework in the illustration curricula geared towards students in

graphic arts. The class in Istanbul was a part of media and visual arts curricula, an elective open for all students in a liberal arts college. The collaboration did not take place in an actual studio environment but was constituted of on-line communication and image exchange. The students were allowed to use a set of different techniques to foster varied drawing approaches within the confines of each course's agenda. The diversity of drawing techniques were enriched by students backgrounds<sup>1</sup>.

The project idea initially stemmed out of instructor's observations of student drawing processes, that is that they are usually self-oriented. While student drawings benefit from individual work and training, the typically solitary practice of drawing may hamper engagement with diverse techniques or ideas during the drawing process, lacking the polyphony in visual language that can enrich an artistic work. The *Journeys and Intersections Collaboration Project* emerged from this idea, with the urge to investigate not only drawing techniques but also drawing circumstances. The research question in relation to this aspect of drawing education emerged with an idea to manage chance and interaction in an international platform. The project envisioned the value of a social interaction when it is intertwined with a visual one. This gave most students an awareness about the collaborative methods of drawing, a metacognitive development that is helpful in expanding the potential of drawing. Highlighting collaboration as well as participation is echoed in the ludic play that dominates many of the artistic practices today (Stott 2015). **Ludic play as suggested** by Stott does not offer a total freedom but a flexible environment that also comes with certain restrictions. This environment often allows a participation of another person to finalize the artwork resulting one to follow

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<sup>1</sup>Majoring in different disciplines, students in both courses included exchange students from other countries such that when all were assembled, the group was extensively international. Students from eleven countries including Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States participated in the project. The language of education in both universities was English, such that communication between the students was fluent.

an indeterminate and a relational process. Claire Bishop (2012) argue that participation in art is significant especially due to its open structure and its mediative quality with a capacity to initiate new ideas and experiences.

The project strived to encourage students to open up their work processes to another student for a period of three months, enabling them to be exposed to new habits of drawing and experiment, a potential gain for future teamwork environments requiring creativity. The drawing process intimately interweaved three acts: understanding one's own way of doing things, perceiving another student's practices and considering how to work out a way for productive collaboration. The project broke the conventions of traditional drawing, shadowing the contemporary expansions of the drawing medium that are highly flexible (Fays 2013). Traditional drawing is typically utilized in preliminary sketches for a future work or to heighten observational skills to accurately present visual forms (Enstice and Peters 1995).

This project was influenced in part by the work of musical composer Essl, who explored uploading his algorithmic variations of music to be altered by others. The creative intervention is the introduction, as Essl puts it, of 'chance' into his production. Building on John Cage, Essl defines 'chance' as a behaviour changing element of his career, "a highly personal version of the work is invented by each listener who in turn becomes an active participant in the whole creation process" (2013: 306). Visual artist Knowles also uses deliberate use of chance by attaching drawing tools to willow trees to trace the action of wind. These arrangements lead to pensive explorations of mark making that is beyond the full control of the artist (Fay 2008). Introducing elements of chance by studying these artists is useful for students to gain an artistic view on co-production.

In the context of this project, the unforeseen drawing of the partner leads to and forces students to – time and again – reconsider their direction and to appreciate the notion of ‘meaning’ as something that is always incomplete and always in the process of being negotiated. Chance, in this regards, played a key role from the time of having a partner and continued to be explored during the project especially in the development of the composition in a dialogue. Duff (2005: 2) mentions that the “inconclusive way” of drawing is captivating, moving the artist / student forward. The unsettled process through drawing and editing acted as an ebb and flow, a journey of its own. These working drawings or layers were scanned and uploaded in an on-line folder in sequence and observed by both students and instructors.

### **Drawing as an Interactive Process**

Besides the capacity of drawing as a direct and pluralistic language, a primer for visual literacy, it generates further benefits when practiced collaboratively. This study expands upon experiments in collaborative drawing that have been implemented in diverse disciplines. How this knowledge may be furthered via the drawing education is thus a point of interest for this project. As mentioned by Kim et al., interdisciplinary collaboration initiate divergent thinking and flexibility that positively influence the end results (2015: 118). The increasing use of drawing in interdisciplinary platforms as an interactive process may be connected to its capacity to directly engage and transmit information that is at times hard to attain. Sale and Betti remark “Drawing is capable of mapping both the visible and invisible worlds, of recording intensely private moments, of conveying ideas of time and space, and of telling stories.” (2008: 240). Dialogic or collaborative drawing as studied by Rogers (2008) focuses on the encounter of the artist and other people via the utilization of visuals instead of words having a potential for

new modes of communication, research and materialization. The encounter via the act of drawing not only enables the creation of a shared space but also permits the transmission of that which is personal.

Guyotte et al. argue that collaboration is increasingly essential in contemporary creative thinking: “these potential benefits align with contemporary visual arts practices that strive to move beyond the individual and embrace dialogue, collaborative action, and interdisciplinarity as vital aspects of the creative process” (2015: 2). For instance, Foa, Grisewood, Hosea and McCall (2009) chose to work on a collaborative drawing performance entitled, “line process echo repeat” to be able to explore commonalities that they have observed in each other’s works that conceptually inquires the concept of presence. The juxtapositions of four artists enabled the drawn line to resonate with repetitive gestures and movements in space.

Another example of collaborative artistic pedagogy is a joint drawing scenario that was implemented between craft and medicine students in order to heighten the observational skills of students through drawing the human body together, that was found to benefit, for instance, medicine students in clinical diagnosis (Lyon et. al. 2013). The findings in this educational intervention was parallel to the connections that was experienced between students of this project facilitating peer learning. Students in most cases heightened their skills in drawing and composition while learning from each other.

### **Drawing as an Intercultural Intersection**

The project acted as a cultural bridge activated by drawing together. Collaborative drawing was thus used to build communication across different cultures and disciplines in a way that enhanced plurality, in a way invoking Mendoza and

Matyók's argument that "Through engagement, students can develop as **global citizens**: develop the knowledge and skills necessary to explore a model of society in which all are invited to create a shared narrative." (2013: 219). The role of intercultural encounter that emerged during the project not only expanded the classroom space, but also introduced a **fluid state**, an in-between structure that students created via their drawing process. The new space was ambiguous and dynamic materialized via the act of drawing itself while heightening student attention in terms of attentiveness to process as much as end product (Burnard et al. 2016).

As Betty Edwards (2012: 262) states, "drawing can reveal much about you to yourself, some facets of yourself that might be obscured by your verbal self." Cultural co-production through drawing reveals one's identity through lines, shapes and textures. In this regards, the drawing process reveals not only elements of a student's own identity but transforms it through interpenetrations with that of the other. During this process, narrative drawing is critical as a catalyst, "the world cannot be directly and instantly known and understood, but must always be interpreted. This is why Ricoeur is interested in the stories that we tell –ultimately including the stories that we tell about ourselves, which is what we call our "identities" (Gauntlett 2007: 166). The collaborative nature of this work not only helped students to be able to negotiate drawing space but also build together in an abstract space of understanding serving a greater purpose.

### **Project Overview**

The project started by asking each student to insert their best drawing along with their biography and e-mail addresses into a shared on-line folder. As the instructors of the courses, we overviewed images and matched students based on their artistic work, with the idea of creating complementary partnerships (*Figure 1*). At the end of the

matching process, each student had a partner from the other university, someone who either had a common inclination in relation to drawing practices or demonstrated resonating stylistic features. Partners were then introduced on-line by means of the shared folder where the guidelines to the project and weekly deadlines for submission were offered.



Figure 1. Individual work of partners F.E.A.(left) and J. W.(right)

As part of the introduction to the project, instructors reflected upon international collaborations of different sorts, pinpointing to the unique characteristics of this project. In many international artistic exchanges, we observed that partners exchanged artworks or worked on similar themes, but did not actually create together. Co-production and intensive collaboration acted as an amalgamating concept in our project that lured students into the work as a means of experiencing one to one encounter through drawing. We anticipated that the project would give each of us a chance to orchestrate drawing ideas in an unpredictable platform, resulting in innovative cooperation. In this regards, we discussed in class how chance, as an element of artistic production may enrich a drawing.

The *Journeys and Intersections Collaboration Project* aimed at a fusion of personal drawing styles at the end of a playful process. The initial role of instructors constituted of the formation of a narrative encapsulated as “Journeys and Intersections”,

a common denominator that was a starter for dialogue. This was helpful since many students work dealt with diverse narratives. An analysis of the individual works, as in Figure 1, exemplifies that the works were not only focusing on different narratives but were confined in terms of visual language, not giving much attention to diverse elements. For instance, F.E.A. made use of a uniform textured surface cutting in and out of the white background via a cursive line. J.W. in contrast, made use of highly saturated colors sharpened by accentuated outlines. When compared with these individual pieces, their collaborative work presented in Figure 2, revealed a richer structure with varied lines, textures and color combinations. The co-produced piece demonstrated different techniques and approaches to the given narrative, resulting in an array of explorations.

### **Project Process**

We gave students the narrative idea of “journeys and intersections,” intended as a common point of departure for all, and at the same time referring to the geographic distances between us which was, in the end, bridged by artistic dialogue. The theme could be explored either as part of the process as intersecting visuals and ideas or with more literal adaptations and supportive visuals representing physical journeys. The narrative drawing which was the starting point of the project was helpful in forming a common ground.

The students were allowed to use numerous mediums to work on their drawing, ranging from traditional to digital ones. There was a set size of paper, 26 x 40 cm, to be used horizontally, that enabled each student to alter the image easily on a uniform platform and then scan if necessary. Weekly submissions had to be saved separately as layers until the end of the semester so that all classmates could view the progress of the



piece. An alternating member of a duo uploaded their layer at the end of each week to the shared folder, requiring each student to draw and upload a contribution every two weeks.

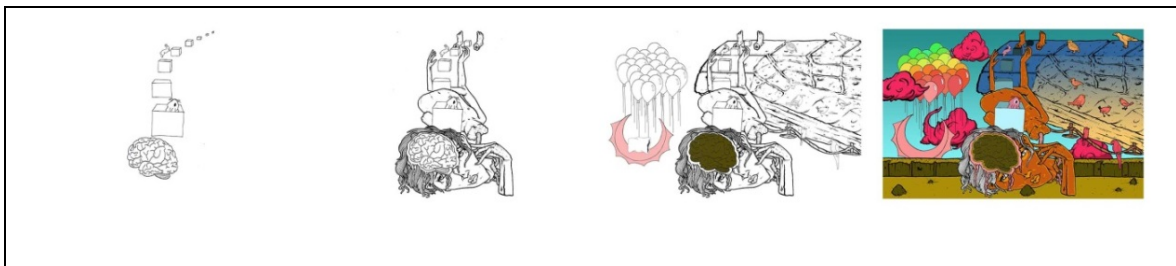
The students were encouraged to first work on freehand drawings and then move into digital techniques. When the first layer was created, either the original paper had to be scanned, or the digital-born work had to be uploaded in high resolution to the shared folder in tiff, jpeg or psd format. There was an option to submit the work in Photoshop layers that could support making alterations at later stages easier. Then, the partnering student could download the work and keep working on it through the following weeks. Week by week, works evolved and changed in an improvisational manner, with students reacting creatively to whatever came back to them. In the meanwhile, partners e-mailed each other and exchanged ideas and sought each others' views on how the work could further evolve. In critical cases, students were allowed, when it was their turn, to erase partner's work, minimize the size of an object and make changes that they found necessary to improve aesthetical and conceptual qualities of the work. In the end, students on both sides were given a chance to finish the piece according to their personal preferences, resulting in two variations of the same work. This actually improved some of the works while supporting the idea of variable and alternating outcomes. Thus, in most works there was a single end-product with variations in colors that was the result of negotiation among the duos. The instructors were instrumental in conducting the evolution of each work by carrying out in-class critiques as well as recommendations outside the class during office hours and via e-mail. The in-class critiques allowed everyone to comment on each individual work. During this time, students answered critical questions posed by the instructors on each individual work and posed their own questions. This process was more engaging than in class critiques

that dealt with the individual work of the student since what was uploaded by the partners shifted the works dramatically. The instructors also carried out a balancing role between partners, as in certain cases, students sought guidance when considering whether to delete or re-arrange visual elements.

At the end of the project, the students' overall experience were documented via a progress report, submitted alongside answers to a project questionnaire focusing on the process of collaborative drawing. In the questionnaire, students reflected on the gains and challenges of the project in an analytical manner, helping to gather qualitative results. At the end of the project, simultaneous exhibitions in Worcester and in Istanbul allowed the display not only of the final layer, but the step-by-step evolution of the works.

### **Project Outcomes**

The step-by-step visual documentation of the drawings revealed different strategies that each partner introduced. While some works were dominated by shapes and spaces, others focused on textures and abstraction. Evaluating all the steps in a shared folder revealed how the works evolved in time.



*Figure 2. Case Study 1, work by partners F. E. A. and J. W.*

The collaboration between F.E.A. and J.W. resulted in a composition representing a hybrid space mixing a realistic landscape with surreal imagery leading to a novel paysage. The work started with the introduction of a brain image followed by a

set of boxes in diminishing perspective. A rabbit's appearance and disappearance in these boxes led to a dynamic fragmentation supported by the dissected body parts following the path of the boxes. The imagery was balanced by the addition of colorful balloons and magenta clouds, a paradoxical combination of forms. Parts, as well as the whole, of grouped objects across a massive blue structure hinted the idea of chance that was discussed beforehand, while making this piece a platform loaded with visual metaphors. Case study 1 presented the complementary principles of co-production as each partner was bold enough to present oppositional yet reflective elements to the work. These elements somewhat echoed each other such as repeating boxes and repeating body parts and came to be united in an harmonic whole. The work was developed first via a line drawing that was carried out with ink and then manipulated in photoshop. Coloring of this work was carried out only digitally which made it easy to create at least ten different variations in the color palette, then choosing the best one.



*Figure 3. Case Study 2, Work by partners A. O. And K. R.*

A.O. and K.R.'s collaboration is a dramatic one enriched by means of coinciding texture and adventurous layering. A.O. started the work by means of an abstracted image consisting of stripes, patterns and geometric cuts in the composition. K.R., on the other hand, lightened up these rigid fragmentations of the surface with erasures in the shape of leaf patterns. When it was A.O.'s turn again, the sharp black stripes alongside a honeybee image was introduced as a subsequent layer onto the previous drawing. By doing this, two bold surfaces emerged, a light one across a colored one, bringing out the

four shapes distinctively and eliminating the fluid surface of the previous layer. The honeycomb image was taken further by K.R. with black and white imagery pasted repetitively on the surface to follow the rhythm of the previous composition. The work was finalized through the introduction of transparent surfaces that blended into one another while keeping their abstract shapes unified with shades of gray and a hint of the honeycomb appearing from the background. The case study 2 revealed a strategy to amalgamate very different mark makings by taking risks such as eliminating most of the worked on surface at stage 3 by a heavy texture. The bold layers were well embedded into space with the use of transparencies and layering. Even though the work was constantly disrupted by heavy patterns, the fragmentation and overlay was used efficiently. While the work started with drawing with color pencils and markers, the deduction of shapes was carried out digitally. Unlike other cases, this piece made use of scanned and manipulated images like a digital collage and was very sensitive towards textures.



*Figure 4. Case Study 3, Work by partners I.O. and J. D. H.*

In Case Study 3, the idea of journey was introduced through the introduction of five stones lined up in a row, one placed on a piece of land next to a body of water, the others placed in the water, the row ending in the middle of the pond. The presented objects were similar in nature hinted at a literal handling of the theme, and not making use of chance as much as Figure 2. In this piece, instead of dramatic transformations in composition as in the example of Figure 3, the composition was built gradually. Organic

forms synthesized with each other as well as with the whole, resulting in a harmonious union involving pensive details such as the line drawing of a flower in the dark sky. Case study 3 was an endproduct of a pair with a shared aesthetic understanding. Yet, this work was more predictable and subtle than others also due to one of the partners minor role by introducing only small elements that would work well with the given space. The other partner played a dominant role and did not risk the initial landscape with alternate objects or cancellations. The black and white brush work was carried out on paper while coloring took place in photoshop.

The main obstacles students faced and the solutions they came up with during the project differed. The large negative spaces at the beginning of the project were inviting and giving partners enough space to perform as they liked. As the drawings got busier, it got harder to decide what to eliminate requiring daring action. Difficulty of managing a coherent visual composition, managing different techniques as well as approaches to the theme made it more challenging to continue. The project was more playful at the beginning, and required a more thoughtful action towards the end. At this point, each student handled the concept of chance from a different perspective, at times taking sides, focusing on either pros or cons. Some of the students said that the distance between the two countries was an issue and on-line communication was not sufficient when making critical decisions on the piece together with a partner they had not worked before. One student, A.A., wanted to heighten her empathy towards her partner, stating,

“ I thought the more I know about her I can try to adjust the style in a better way, I’ve added her as a friend on facebook and chat with her, learned that she likes watercolors so that I used a watercolor painting on my second layer.”

This approach did not necessarily make the piece better but was responsive since many students said that it was challenging to let go of a personal style and accept

another technique intruding in their work. For most of the students, accustomed to the more usual process of envisioning the whole piece at the beginning with sketches, the week by week evolution of the drawing was a challenge, since they at times received an unanticipated layer to work on. While some students regarded the unexpected new layers as an obstacle, others thought they were fun to work with. It was therefore critical to the project, to constantly force students to actively consider the outside stimuli and regular irruptions which at the end were integral to their work. Overall, students were expected to hone their skills to be part of this drawing process involving play by calibrating the elements of chance.

Our findings resonate with those of a study investigating the creative experience with a set of interviews with artists and scientists. These interviewees were not working with a partner but still reflected upon how the unexpected situations emerged in their work. The interviews hinted at the importance of an individual's interaction with the environment and reflexivity to outside stimuli in the process of triggering creativity. In these interviews, what came up was that, despite excitement when a creative idea arose, there was also concern of not being able to turn the idea into a successful endproduct. However, the dualistic nature of surprise or chance was able to be managed as follows: "Open-mindedness, flexibility, willingness to trust hunches and curiosity are factors that emerge repeatedly as facilitation and favoring creativity" (Rosner and Abt 1970: 382). The open-ended structure of the project was actually a desired way of working: variable meaning and form was the desired result rather than premeditated agreement between partners. Handling the elements of chance was an asset for collaborative and solo work.

The peer learning as well as mutual problem solving was a process that had educational value both from the perspective of students as well as instructors. It evidently paved the way for interdisciplinary learning (Tarchi and Pinto 2015) and build

work based on dialogue. As A.K. concluded, this process helped her to look at the work more critically and from a distance, to think about what needed to be changed. Similarly, some students gained an understanding of why some works did not work out. B.B. reflected, for instance, on the fact that their compositions did not work when both of them used dominant visuals and colors, as the work in this case could hardly be turned into a uniform piece.

Most students agreed that their first experience of an international artistic collaboration was beneficial in numerous ways. They benefited from the construction of a work, together synthesizing alternative ways of drawing, while observing how another person works and thinks. They also thought the project pushed them to think more when faced with an unexpected scenario, encouraging them to be more creative. Students said that they gained confidence and worked hard to outperform the previous limits of their abilities. Overall, students also commented on the fact that they lost certain presumptions they previously held of the other culture. One commented on the overall experience of collaboration:

“This collaboration has taught me that working with another student can be very fruitful and arduous at the same time. I have learned that being able to leave enough space for the other to express himself is a very important aspect of collaboration and not making the work look overcrowded was a main obstacle for me to overcome. In collaborated works, I believe that it is vital to keep in touch and discuss the changes to be made. That is the only way to create a good artwork, as well as a pleasing experience for both parties. (I.O.)”

At the end of the project, students not only came up with numerous ideas on collaboration, they also saw how a single topic could be handled in twenty different ways. This was helpful in seeing that through the use of visual language, a single theme could expand in diverse ways reflecting the plurality that students shared.

## **Conclusion**

In *The Journeys and Intersections Collaboration Project*, we embraced the factor of chance as a potential benefit for our drawing students by introducing a collaborative drawing process based on negotiation between partners with diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds. Thus the project initiated a space for intercultural exchange, empathy and professional development. Students could exchange ideas on-line while working to attain unity in form and meaning while arranging compositional elements for the purposes of a finalized piece. During this process, the instructors aimed for students to experience a co-production which differed from the usual practice of drawing, that is, of drawing solo. This created an awareness in students in relation to how drawing circumstances may influence the process, perception and the end product.

In return, the results were rewarding from a cultural, artistic as well as educational perspective, sharpening multiple communication skills. While some teams did not communicate as much as others, each partner established their own way of collaborating, refining their skills to facilitate different point of views, resulting in passionate debates. The students responded, talked about and engaged with the project more than any other activity carried out in the class during the semester. This was indicative of the heightened critical thinking, and excitement that the collaboration triggered. The role of drawing in this project emerged as a strategy to intimately engage students with another student for step-by-step problem-solving that slowly flourished in time. Drawing in this case was a unique medium which facilitated a transparent, personal and expressive mark making.

Most students contemplated that their collaboration lead to an intercultural dialogue enriched by a personal connection that made them observe how similar techniques could be put into action presenting different perspectives. The final works displayed an eagerness to create a universal language, as almost none of the students



chose to work with culture-specific forms. Some students felt that the cultural exchange came to a point of unification, as many common ideas emerged between partners. The multimodal communication that was required in this project required empathy alongside visual thinking, verbal interaction as well as written dialogue.

The *Journeys and Intersections Collaboration Project* was not only about attaining unity through visual alterations and negotiations on a paper surface. The project facilitated through co-production merging of minds and thinking together. Some students reflected upon the fact that they were stuck with a visual problem that their partner was able to solve which was a mind-opening experience for them. In some cases, students learned from each other and decided to make use of the same technique in the future. In this regards, the collaborative drawing process expanded the meaning of the end result. Students reflected that the project could be even better if they could contact one another during the class period through Facetime or Skype, to draw together at the same time.

During this project, students learned new strategies through collaboration such as handling the unexpected, organizing opposing elements in a composition, editing through elimination rather than addition of new elements and negotiation. Weekly critiques on the work was helpful for directing the pieces to a coherent one and discussing alternate options. Finally, the project enabled students to receive direct and indirect critiques on their works from two different instructors alongside their classmates and their selected partner, which, in sum, acted as a diverse international jury.

Given that most traditional drawing instruction is based on individual instruction and solo work in class, participatory drawing ideas may be developed further in interdisciplinary contexts to fill a gap that may lead to new scenarios benefiting from drawing. Tarchi and Pinto suggest that collaborative drawing has potential as an

intervention since it changes participant behaviour in a way that can open up new learning and communication strategies (2015). Studying comparatively how different disciplines use collaborative drawing may be motivating since drawing is a general starter activity in planning, idea generation and creative thinking. Collaborative drawing –a unifying platform- similar to discussion sessions may be integrated into future curricula in different educational realms as an emerging need of contemporary culture, a requirement to meaningful involvement with technology, and as a means of cooperative understanding.

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