

Unfinishings
De-actualised
Complete me
Local plz: if you love me
sketch for an unsaved soul
confessions of a dangerous kind
The final composition (version 7)

The ‘expanded’ of Read the Room’s ‘expanded literary practice’ tagline might imply that drawing is merely an appendage or derivative of ‘literature,’ something literature might expand or dive into in order to get outside its existing limitations and discover new found freedom. But, considering drawing predates the written word, as an efficient and comparatively accessible means of communicating ideas, such a reading would overlook the fact that it was the prehistoric act of drawing that first ‘discovered’ how to write. To skirt around the underlying principle inherent to both drawing and writing - ideas and the desire (or need) to communicate them.

John Berger wrote in his 1953 essay, *Drawing is Discovery*, that the ‘shorthand’ of drawings, their simplicity and directness, is concerned primarily with the artist’s own, private, needs. “It is this,” he writes “which explains why painters always value so highly the drawings of the masters they admire and why the general public find it so difficult to appreciate drawings.” In front of a painting or sculpture, you interpret images for their own sake, but in front of a drawing, you identify with the artist, straining to see through their eyes.

From Berger’s perspective, drawing is an ‘unfinished idea’, a draft that remains open to the possibilities of its future completion.

Being an incomplete production, Berger’s ‘working drawing’ was distinct from those more ‘complete,’ impersonal, forms such as commercial illustration, animation, architecture, engineering and technical drawing, in that it does not attempt to construct an event in itself.

Such a distinction is perhaps more apparent now that these latter forms are primarily produced by software that ensures precision for the architect or engineer. Now, almost seventy years later, the provisional status of taking pen-to-paper, of drawing as ideas rather than ‘events,’ is even more discernible.

What then, would it be to draw or trace a seemingly ‘finished’ image such as an ad, font, brand or icon? Could this be a kind of ‘un-finishing’ of the image? A return to a former draft-like condition. A demotion from symbol to sketch - from brutalist monolith to loose floorplan in a forgotten notebook.

To unfinish such an indifferent image is to soften its edges, to re-introduce the personal to impersonal or ‘external’ structures.

Ander Rennick’s Punk Café (RIP) show, *School for Sex & Design* (2016) was in precisely this sense a

show of unfinishings. Visual-merchandising-grade, flattened out Acne patterns, traced with pencil on oily-transparent butchers’ paper alongside equally archetypical, traced and transparent inner-city Gays. The show was less about the promise of design and more about the memorialisation of recently expired (hot in 2010), relatively short-lived, trends, brands, people. However, the archival quality of these works did not undermine their sense of movement, foregrounding the cyclical, and therefore moving, nature of consumerism and desire. In ‘unfinishing’ the slick, engineered Acne patterns, re-committing them to the status of a draft or plan, Ander reduced these previously solid or ‘complete’ symbols to empty abstractions. All that is solid melts into air (cliché but whatever).

“A guy wearing nothing but a North-face jacket getting fucked in an Uber” (Ander Rennick, 2016)

The word ‘draft’, a preliminary sketch from which a final copy is made, refers to both something drawn and to something written. It stems from the misspelling of draught - a flow or current of cool air through a room or confined space.

The eight drawings in *SOMething Drawings* are confined to the surface of a single A4 sheet of paper and monochrome palettes. It is as though they’ve been made with the biro or pencil at hand, ripped from a diary, a journal, a sketchbook. A moment in time that assuredly spills over the limits of that moment. There is no promise that these drawings will undergo some sort of future development, and yet this possibility, this implied futurity, is always suggested by their mere form. Yet drawing is also archival, an account grounded in sociocultural specificity. And it is for this reason also historical. It is timeless and yet leans on its immediacy.

It is fitting then, that the period predating the written word should be called ‘prehistory’ - as though drawing exists outside of time altogether.

Berger considered drawing autobiographical in the sense that it is a record of the artists discovery of their subject matter. However, what is also implied in his essay, although not explicit, is that drawing is inherently personal and intimate - regardless of the masterly status of the drawer and the technical insight such drawings might offer.

While the etymology of draft served my earlier pretensions, when used in the context of writing, it does not quite capture the private, interior nature that Berger suggests is inherent to drawing. Perhaps Berger’s drawing has its textual equivalent in diary writing.

Like the drawings of the masters, the practice of posthumously publishing the diaries of literary

and other notables became commonplace in the 19th century.

The Diary of Anne Frank became a bestseller in the U.K in 1952, the year prior to Drawing is Discovery. It is therefore surprising that Berger should undervalue the 'general public' appeal of exhibiting once private forms.

Confessional narratives of individual suffering and overcoming hardship seem to be endlessly renewable. Melbourne's own Roy Morgan reported earlier this year that the second most watched TV genre in Australia, next to the News, is Reality TV, which is seen by 41% of Australians in an average week.

The 'illness memoir' became a distinct literary genre in the 90s and Bookseller magazine even named a genre 'mis lit', short for 'misery memoirs' telling of personal triumphs over personal trauma. Child abuse, sexual assault, addiction and so on make for good memoirs and television.

A painting by Victoria that hangs above my bed reads, in dripping letters, "Local plz. if you love me, [redacted] [redacted]." And signs it, "Edgy" with a love heart.

More than an admission of guilt, sins or faults, to confess is to make public, to reveal, something personal that the confessor may ostensibly prefer to keep hidden.

Whether it's the Catholic confessional box, Step 5 in Alcoholics Anonymous, a to-camera testimony or talkback therapy, the confessional is an incredibly pervasive cultural structure.

In religious contexts, salvation is the ultimate promise of confession, in therapeutic discourse, including self-help and more New Age practices, 'overcoming' remains central with promises of 'actualisation', success, stability and psychic security. In both, one strives for the promise of 'finishing' the self through death or transcendence. However, unlike theological salvation (resting on the grace of a higher power), the individual is now tasked with their own redemption.

The first ever AI-powered astrology app, Co-star, notified me yesterday, or the day before, that: "Your salvation is your responsibility."

In the 19th century, religion was famously said to be the opiate of the masses. In the 20th, it was named therapy - and our search for salvation, actualisation, wholeness, remains deeply entwined with confessional tropes.

'It's not about war or beauty,' Victoria messages me, 'but desperation and sedation.'

Faced with the inevitable losses and suffering of life, we crave these promises to remain composed.

But must we remain so composed? Perhaps this isn't the final composition?

Stephen Fry followed up his first semi-autobiographical novel, *The Liar* (1991), with three autobiographies: *Moab Is My Washpot: An Autobiography* (1997); *The Fry Chronicles: An Autobiography* (2010); and *More Fool Me: A Memoir* (2014).

How *does* one close the final chapter?

In Ander and Victoria's work, the personal, or apparently confessional, is pushed up against impersonal, symbolic, structures and the tropes of the confessional itself.

Ander tells me he's revisiting old mood boards as representative of the failed promises of creative and cultural life.

Is it the intimacy of drawing that directs me to mention only my closest friends in the exhibition?

A collage by Ander that is blue-tacked to my wall (to the left of Victoria's painting) features a National Geographic cut-out - a natural stone that could be mistaken for a jellyfish. Stapled to the coffee-stained, artificially aged paper, is a linocut bird print and what looks like a business card that reads 'Fate' in gothic typeface.

Nothing seems quite so set in stone when it's on an A4 piece of paper.

"Because paper has more patience than people" - Anne Frank



Audrey
Schmidt