

Fluid Temporalities: drawing as moving image

Gali Weiss 2015

To draw a portrait is to draw out a multiplicity of presence: the drawn portrait connects the presence of the hand and eye that mark, with the represented subject. To draw the portrait of a parent adds another dimension to the hand that marks – that *feels* –sight; that of temporality, in the process of making and in the representation itself.

Both John Berger (Berger 1985, 146) and Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1993, 39) – the first comfortable with the language of drawing, the second at odds with his lack of draughtsmanship – write of their compulsion to draw their parent at the time of death. How is it that drawing offers itself within such a private moment? Perhaps at such a time, drawing becomes a site for intimacy as a place that allows for ‘touching’ the subject when actual touch is at once desired and confronting. What is it about drawing that is so simple and immediate, yet so powerful in meaning that it can substitute for words, even for the wordsmith? Drawing is at once descriptive and experiential; as Berger notes, the nature of drawing is that it reveals the process of its own making, its own looking; even an unaccomplished drawing reveals the process of its own creation (Berger 1985, 149). Despite the frustration with his drawing, I imagine that Derrida’s temptation to draw his dying mother was not only to capture her likeness, but to lengthen or still her aliveness before death.

In his essay ‘Drawn to that moment’ (Berger 1985), Berger relates that in drawing the face and head of his dead father directly from observation, he was conscious that what he was seeing was going to be seen for the last time. In realising that the drawing of this last sighting was what was to remain, it is reasonable to presume that his action would be emotionally charged. Yet Berger claims his intent was to capture an objective rendering, a true likeness of his dead father’s face. Each drawing, he claims, was the site of a departure, for he was documenting a face that itself was now only documenting a life. The result was an unmistakable likeness of his father as dead.

Living with one of the drawings now framed, Berger continues, the drawing changed in meaning. Over time, his subjective relationship with the drawing grew richer, to become

the 'immediate locus' of his memories of his father. Instead of marking the site of a departure, the drawing 'began to mark the site of an arrival', one that was inhabited, rather than deserted. The drawing was changing from a drawing marking the object of absence – a memento – to one inhabited by the spaces in between the forms marked: 'For each form, between the pencil marks and the white paper they marked, there was now a door through which moments of a life could enter' (Berger 1985, 147-8).

Berger explains this as a doubling of image of his father – it both draws out the past in the memories of the son, and projects the future in the image that continues to grow in familiarity. 'My father came back to give the image of his death mask a kind of life' (Berger 1985, 148). So that now, looking at the drawing, he sees aspects of his father's life, even though someone else will still see a death mask. In other words, his subjective relationship to the drawing has changed both its content and its function.

Drawing Aaron

In 1999 I drew a series of portraits of my own father. Though my father was not dead nor even dying at that time, he was old, and with each drawing I was faced with deliberations over representing a lifetime of meaning in a singular representation. As I prepared my initial studies of *Aaron* it became clear that each drawing reflected a different Aaron, whether due to my differing interpretations or my perception of his different moods.

Like Berger, I wanted an objective likeness but I also wanted to depict the sense of temporality that Berger refers to in his growing intimacy with the drawn object. I was seeking to evoke a sense of a simultaneous past, present and future within that likeness that was not literally descriptive nor limited to a subjective familiarity. I wanted that fluid evocation to be sensed by the viewer as an opening to a relationship with intimate looking.

To do this, I decided to merge the stilled presence of photographic representation with my gestural and immediate drawn observational response. I employed the photocopy/solvent transfer of a photograph of my father overlaid with repeated applications of charcoal drawing of him. I was making the point that portraying *Aaron* in a naturalistic way could not be limited to an essentialist moment as in a photographic or

highly representational interpretation, but as a fluid image. Rather than reconstructing the form of the face and features to suit a new version for each studio sitting of my father, I layered analogous layers on the one drawing that eventually formed a continuous whole resulting in an impression rather than descriptive characteristics of face.



Fig. 1: Gali Weiss, *Aaron #1*, 1999
charcoal, graphite, photocopy transfer
76 x 56.5 cm



Fig. 2: Gali Weiss, *Aaron #3*, 1999
charcoal, graphite, photocopy transfer
76 x 56.5 cm.

I can find parallels to this approach of layering with the painter Gerhard Richter's references to analogy in his art-making: 'I would like to try to understand what *is*. We know very little, and I am trying to do it by creating analogies ... When I make a representation of something, this too is an analogy to what exists; I make an effort to get a grip on the thing by depicting it' (Richter 1995, 63-64). Kaja Silverman expands on the meaning of analogy referring to Richter: 'In an analogy, both terms are on an equal footing, ontologically and semiotically. They also belong to each other at the most profound level of their being. Richter does not produce them; rather, he waits for them to emerge' (Silverman 2009, 173).

The drawing in my case becomes the means for tenacious explorations, with an emphasis on observation of the *now*, the subject's presence being not only observed but experienced and re-experienced as if for the first time. In Richter's words: 'Letting a thing come rather than creating it.... in order to gain access to all that is genuine, richer, more alive: to what is beyond my understanding' (Richter 119).

My own use of analogous layering in these portraits of 1999 was an attempt to consolidate a number of moments, a number of presences, into one, simply by doing

and positioning. No single and separate depiction in itself satisfied me as a totality, yet as drawings overlaid and in relationship to each other, a fluid representation emerged. By revisiting my subject with each overlaid drawing I was also inadvertently relating to my previous drawn layer in the process of making. The concepts of time and presence were already then relevant to my practice, both in terms of the time-marked face of my subject and in terms of creating a fluid image which would allow the viewer a mobility of perception and engagement (Weiss 2001, 6). My interest was not in describing my subject or revealing his inner essence, but in opening up possibilities for multiple relationships; between the viewer-artist-subject, the marks, the materiality of medium. That, in my mind, was what created a genuine sense of presence in the viewing experience.

His Daughter's Father: Moving Aaron

Over a decade after portraying Aaron, I decided to return to the work of that time, revisiting one of those past representations of Aaron and experimenting with recreating the representation as a moving image using simple digital animation techniques based on incremental changes of frame by frame.

What reflected back to me along the process of this re-visit of the portrait of 1999 was a new level of intimacy towards my subject and sensory aspects of materiality, paradoxically through distance – of time or translation or re-production, in a medium that overturned the hand-eye relationship of traditional drawing methods. As I will demonstrate, ultimately I was enacting a renewal similar to John Berger's renewed content in the unchanged form of his father's representation. However, whereas Berger's renewed content is reflective and due to the relationship of image, mark and memory, my renewed content distances itself from memory; it lies in the process of actual change and movement itself.

While it seems counter-productive to explain a moving image work without actually experiencing it in time, this essay does not intend to reflect on the success of the artwork itself to convey meaning. Rather, it attempts to convey my explorations of drawing in its relational capacity: how, when one medium or method intersects another, it can serve in an analogous relationship to relate conceptual embodiments of time.

The current work, *His Daughter's Father* 2015, is constructed from two fixed images: a photograph of my father that I took in 1999 as a source of reference, and one of the drawn portraits of him from that time – the layered drawing positioned over his photographed image. These two fixed images used in the current moving image work are copies: a photocopied transfer of the original photograph, and a photographed image of the drawing, both transferred again to digital format. The moving image work occurs between and along these two images of copy, in the search for a living subjectivity.

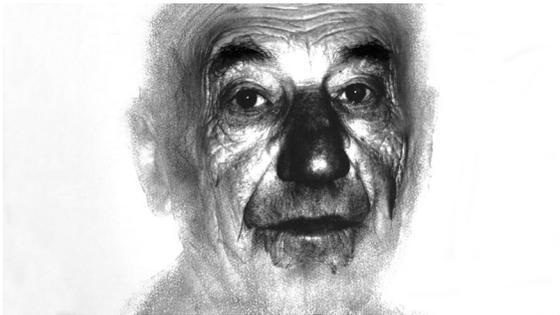


Fig. 3: Gali Weiss, *His Daughter's Father* 2015, frame 0001



Fig. 4: Gali Weiss, *His Daughter's Father* 2015, frame 1102

Despite the simplicity of the premise of 2 images morphing into one, and the process in between performed, the continuity of re-representation in this work is complex in implication. Between the two still positions is a process of drawing or movement – facilitated through Photoshop cloning, another form of copy – that evolves from marks sourced from the original (end-result) drawing but gestured independently in transitions that relate movement. The process of performative drawing – drawing that relates to its own making – through re-created gestures, simultaneously creates new marks and trajectories while revealing marks of past ones.

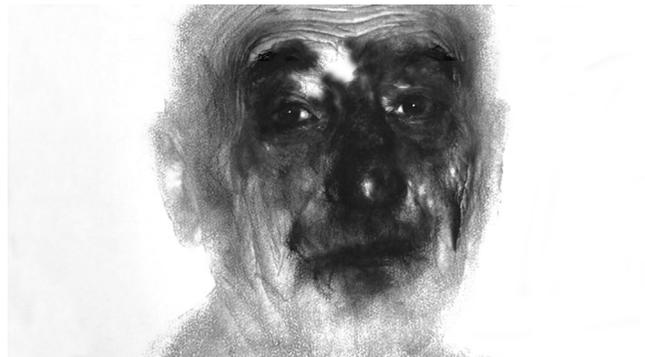


Fig. 5: Gali Weiss, *His Daughter's Father* 2015, detail

video 3.5 mins,

It is time-consuming and methodical, while exploratory and experimental. It is important to me that it is not an automated method, but individualized to each digital gesture. Each gesture or transition is not immediate, as occurs in the hand to paper mark-making, but takes a number of frames to produce in its full trajectory. Where it is experimental is that I cannot predetermine the affective look that will evolve in the subject.

The work displaces chronological time. Marks as evidence of a particular moment of time past are not only re-contextualised but evolve and develop to fully realise an image that already existed. The final image at the end of the video can no longer be viewed as an image from the past, but in relation to the animated trajectory that has led to it. It thus can be perceived as a new past.

However, it is the trajectory that for me acts most significantly as a renewal, embodying a life-force of change through marks that move, that travel in particular forms and directions, and thereby cause affect in the presence of the representation. I argue that it is movement itself that is responsible for the subject's affect, not the form of the imagery.

Writing Aaron

His Daughter's Father is not my first creative experimentation with movement and temporality through my father's presence. A number of years ago I experimented with attempts at tracing a lived moment in time signified by my father's mark, his handwriting. These experiments culminated in a series of three artists' books (*Dear Daughter #1, #2 and #3* 2012).

In 1998, my father gave me his self-published memoir. He had added a handwritten inscription on page 2, dedicating, or rather gifting, that particular copy to me. He had also prepared a copy for my sister, and one for each of his grandchildren, each with a personalized dedication. Four years later, he was no longer able to communicate, afflicted by dementia.

The work with my father's handwriting intended to draw out a sense of presence and renewed meaning from the marks of his hand and presumably his thoughts, and ultimately, to 're-live' some experience of him. I began with an exploratory work, stitching

cotton thread over an enlargement of his scribed dedication addressed to me, which I had copied onto fabric. It was a purposeful, labour-intensive and time-consuming process in contrast with the speed and intuitive gesture of written marks that try to keep up with the thoughts expressed. This process directed my attention not only to the meaning of the words and phrases, but to the drawn form of each word in relationship with an adjoining word and the space around them. Moreover, this act of drawing evolved a relationship for me with each word as it was crafted and materialized by my hand in the 'pathways' left by my father's hand.

At the next stage, I enlarged the text of his dedication and printed it in the tradition of intaglio and relief printmaking processes. In the nature of Tom Phillips' *Humument*, I chose and emphasized particular words from that text over several pages, so that when read in codex book form in flowing text as the pages are turned, a new dedication is created. I was enacting a narrative conversation of possibilities with my father.

What resulted were new texts with new meanings. The original dedication:

To Gali my Dear (sic) daughter and Uri my son-in-law, I hope that you will treasure and keep my autobiography for future generations and hopefully add to it and perhaps even write your own autobiography

became:

*my Dear
my treasure
my hope
my future
my own
my daughter,
treasure my autobiography
add to it
write your own
hope and future
perhaps*

The second dedication:

...my dear granddaughter, I know that you love reading and here in this autobiography.....you will have the opportunity to read about Savta and Saba who love you so much. I trust that you will love reading it and hope it will be of benefit to you in some way

became:

*dear granddaughter
my daughter
I know
I trust
I hope so much
that you will have
opportunity
(embossed page)
that you will benefit
(embossed page)
that you
will be
of benefit
in some way
to some*

The third:

... my dear grand-daughter. It is probably too early in your tender age to read my autobiography but in a few years' time you will be able to read and understand it and through it you will remember Savta Ruthi who loved you so much.

became:

*dear grand daughter
my daughter
(blank page)
in your will
to remember
your will to
read*

*your will
to understand
(blank page)
you will read
you will understand
you will remember
that a few remember
(blank page)
few understand*

By choosing particular words to emphasize and thereby creating new narratives, the text became mine, though not mine alone. I was now author of that text in concurrence with my father. It had meaning as a compound text of past words presented in the present, proposing future possibilities, and moreover within multi-subjective understandings, that is, as an inter-generational conversation.

Yet, these books are not solely designs conceptualising notions of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in semiotic terms. They are artists' books in their materiality. As the philosopher Christian Lotz claims, 'the meaningfulness of an image ... does not depend upon a meaning that is somehow fixed to the object as a property; rather, the meaningfulness is *in* the material organisation and form' (Lotz 2012, 94). The *Dear Daughter* books comprise imagery that performs in visual and tactile ways as well as cognitive ones. The words as dedications began by representing my father's thoughtful meaning, but as my work progressed through the process of handmade printmaking, they emerged as small bodies of material presence, each with shape and gesture and emphasis.

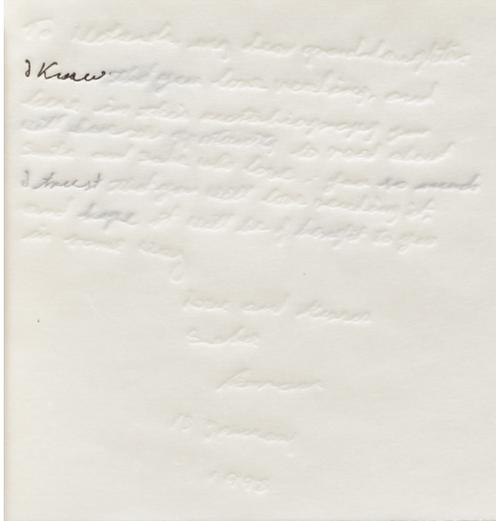


Fig. 6: Gali Weiss, *Dear Daughter #3* (detail) 2012
relief photopolymer on Kozo light paper
20 x 28.5 cm

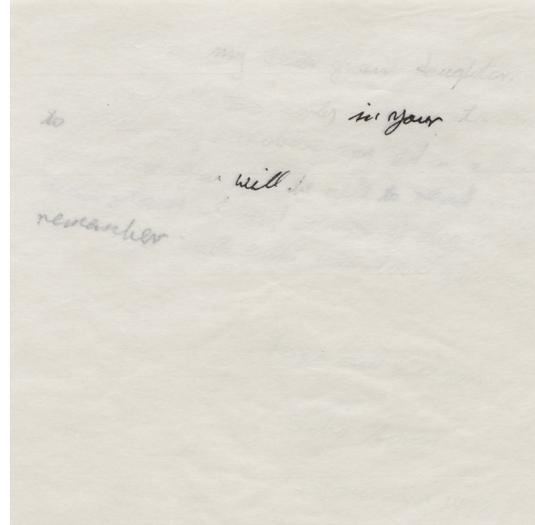


Fig. 7: Gali Weiss, *Dear Daughter #2* (detail) 2012
intaglio photopolymer on Kozo light paper
20 x 28.5 cm

Using semi-transparent Kozo paper, I related to the pages as 'skin', at times revealing the printed forms/bodies, at times a finely textured tissue boundary between words and between dimensions of (viewing and page-turning) time. On this 'skin' is embossed the full text of the dedication, page by page, echoing the words' original context. Here, erasure is additive: the embossed words are both there and not, their ink-ness erased but their trace remains.

We might further think of the act of moving a page that reveals another connection to another word and another meaning, as an act of drawing – the hand that reveals marks of meaning through action, that moves through space to make links, invisible lines and layers with another body or mark. The visual formation of the text that evolves through these tactile relationships and spatial actions likewise reveals an evolving and possibly cyclic meaning.

The words as images of *Dear Daughter* perform not through the theoretical or semiotic meaning alone, but together and through their materiality and placement, and the participation of the reader-viewer in the act of simultaneously looking, touching, feeling, moving – *with* reflection. Movement continues internally: 'the image—throughout our reflection—will change because it dynamically unfolds itself in front of our thinking about it' (Lotz 93).

The *Dear Daughter* series reflects, and reflects on, presence in a material, embodied way. Each book is in some way corporeal, though of course it does not represent the body, but rather the presence of a person through a relationship of referent and artist, and the marks of both. Here, representation is driven by analogy.

As noted previously in this essay, Kaja Silverman claims analogy as an integral element within Gerhard Richter's work. My reading of Silverman's writing on the artist has provided significant insights not only to his work, but to my own. I have found conceptual parallels between my practice and the author's understandings of Richter's work, as well as his own writings that reveal his motivations, and that I now investigate in regard to my interest in positions of subjectivity and temporality.

In a compelling demonstration of the complex analogous relationships of Richter's subjects, Silverman analyses the series *October 18, 1977* (1988), in particular 8 of the 15 paintings that relate the women terrorists Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, members of the radical political Baader-Meinhof Group (the German Red Army Faction). The title of this body of work refers to the day RAF members Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe, were found dead in their prison cells. The sources of the eight paintings of Meinhof and Ensslin are photocopies of police and magazine photographs of them dead in their prison cells (Meinhof had committed suicide in her cell a year earlier).

Richter's intent in this series, however, expands from concerns of political subject matter, to existential ones:

To start with, I wanted more to paint the whole business, the world as it then was, the living reality – I was thinking in terms of something big and comprehensive. But then it all evolved quite differently, in the direction of death (GR 227).

Silverman argues that Richter's interest in the women beyond their role as terrorists began much earlier than his paintings of them in 1988. It came about unconsciously in 'the elaborate constellation of analogies that linked them to his daughter, Betty'. (KS 190). In 1976, the magazine Stern published a photograph of Meinhof's dead head, on a flat surface and looking up in profile, the photograph revealing the gash on her neck left

by the rope she used in her suicide – a photograph that objectifies Meinhof and invites a spectatorial relationship to death (KS 194). Not long after this publication, Richter photographed and painted his daughter Betty's head and torso in a similar position to Meinhof's, though open-eyed and gazing towards the viewer – *Betty* 1977.

According to Silverman, Richter unconsciously put his daughter in Meinhof's place and, through this affective identification, was able 'to register the terribleness of what happened to her [Meinhof]. As a result, what now horrifies is not Meinhof herself, but the violence to which she was subjected'. (Silverman 195)

Eleven years later, in his *October 18, 1977* series, Richter referenced the Meinhof photograph in three paintings entitled *Dead* (Tote), to which I will return later in the essay. An additional painting of Meinhof in this series is *Youth Portrait*, based on a 1970 studio photo. In *Youth Portrait*, Richter depicts Meinhof as girl-like, much younger than her 36 years. For Silverman, Richter here returns to the analogy between Betty and Meinhof. However, this time he reverses its terms. By depicting the older Meinhof with the innocence of youth, she takes the place of the young Betty, and Richter "... is now able to experience her death not merely as a horror but also as a loss." (Silverman 197)

This juxtaposition, or exchange and re-exchange of subjects, positions his daughter in a relationship with the woman terrorist in a way that sheds the specifics of identity without objectifying the subjects. It is through these relationships that Richter can explore meaning and possibilities of existential concerns. The daughter and the terrorist are unified in the relationship that he forms with subjectivity.

The cycle of movement

Silverman makes the point that this subjective juxtaposition between the girl and the woman challenges the idea of 'generation' – it is, in fact, one of the most significant achievements of *October 18, 1977*. With the reversal of analogies, Richter 'undoes chronological time. ... The past happens all over again, in a new way'. (Silverman 208)

The ambivalent 'voices' in my work *Dear Daughter*, move similarly between temporalities. In this case, the generations of father, daughter, mother and even granddaughter are interchangeable in time and in identification. The dedication 'voiced'

by the father is also the daughter's. And the daughter, who is also the mother, addresses her own children and possibly her future grandchildren, as mediated through the father's hand. Similar again to the sense of displaced temporalities, the video drawing *His Daughter's Father*, dislodges chronological time when drawn gestures that are directly sourced from the drawing of the past, appear and evolve in present (viewing) time. The moving imagery suggests new subjectivities in its additive process of construction, yet the outcome of accumulated gestures ends not as a new image, but as an excavated image – the image of the original representation drawn in the past. The past is the work's beginning and its end, and in a way, its future when viewed during the time of its construction. The last image of *His Daughter's Father* returns to the distance of time, not only to the distance of a specific past/future in which a particular image was/will be created at a particular time, but to the digitised image distanced from the immediacy of its making, that paradoxically offers an intimacy of mark and process in its viewing.

Analogy here is offered as a temporal narrative that is relational and non-linear. Dietmar Elger refers to *October 18, 1977* series as a 'cycle' of paintings that have no sequence (DE 284). In each of their exhibitions, Richter varies their hanging, according to the particular space provided rather than a sequential order, and the viewing can start at any of the paintings. This is despite the paintings comprising a number of series of three – “Three times Baader, shot. Three times Ensslin, hanged. Three times the head of the dead Meinhof after they cut her down....Three time Ensslin, neutral...” (GR 175)

The three grey paintings of *Dead Person* each depict the same subject matter – Meinhof's head and torso, in profile lying on a flat surface – but vary in their formats, layouts, and their blurred painterliness. When exhibited in a way that prompts the viewer to move from the biggest to the smallest, Meinhof's features become more diffused and less distinct from the background in each painting, 'blurring the dividing line between life and death' (Silverman 194). However, it is not in their particular sequential order that the paintings can be understood, but in their relationship to each other. (Richter 192) This is why, in my understanding, the series is open to be exhibited in various sequential contexts; it performs in relationship to its content but also to the movement of the viewer. Richter presents the series as a cycle and a possibility: 'I don't believe in the absolute picture: There can only be approximations, experiments and beginnings, over and over again' (Richter 199).

In Silverman's analysis, the dissolution of Meinhof's image releases her from a spectatorial viewing relationship to death that was encouraged in the original Stern exposure of her corpse (Silverman 194). Richter has described his painting as an alternative world that can create meaning even when it only repeats or recalls something: '[Painting that recalls the RAF] can give us new insights. And it can also be the attempt to console – that is, to give a meaning. It's also about the fact that we can't simply discard and forget a story like that; we must try to find a different way of dealing with it – appropriately' (Richter 194). The *Dead Person* paintings seem to be searching for a meaningful way to deal with death in its universality and particularity, and within and between them they provide a transitional space conducive to viewer participation within that search.

In thinking about my work in Richter's above-mentioned terms as a recollection, it is of recollection as re-positioning of the past, rather than re-enacting the past. In this, and through analogous subject positions, images and words become relational. Work that literally moves, by its nature, invites a participatory viewing; as a result, the viewing itself can become relational, within and between reflection and embodied presence/identification. What is offered is a viewing of movement in tension with restraint, through a choreography of stillness and change, embodiment and ambivalence. The search, for me, as both creator and viewer, is for an engaged moment of being.

Afterword

The referent of the portrait is long dead. The artist-daughter is revisiting her original artistic representation of her father – her original point-of-view – within renewed and evolving analogies. Representation itself has shifted its meaning, from the depiction that refers to the father beyond the image, to the performance of his presence. The work experiments with relationships of time, mark and subject matter, not so much as memory or even as *becoming* that is inclusive and between temporalities, not as a past relived nor re-presented, but as a space for concurrent temporalities, in which past, present and future are embodied subjects. Ultimately, in the end, though changed in its resonance, drawing itself continues.

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