

DRAWING CONVERSATIONS: WHAT AND WHERE IS HOME?

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Women who are at odds with home: drawing research, feminism and 'world'-travelling

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How can a feminist approach inform drawing research? Can feminism prompt 'new' questions about the potential of drawing practice to engage with issues of home? Can it reveal new points of analysis? With these questions in mind, in this paper I begin by addressing how and why feminist thinkers have unpacked important ideas about home, and then demonstrate how some of these positions resonate with themes and activities in drawing practice.

I draw the title of this paper, 'women who are at odds with home' (2003: 2009), from the Argentinian feminist philosopher Maria Lugones' essay 'Tactical Strategies of the Streetwalker', chapter ten of her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. In *Pilgrimages* Lugones proposes a notion of home that puts an emphasis on resistance and transformation, challenging the traditional conception of home as private and domestic. Based on the recognition of oppression within home, Lugones acknowledges that home is not always experienced as a safe place. For women, in particular, the concept of home is often inseparable from subordination, deprivation, violence and fear. This has led women to construct, recreate and search for 'new' homes. Inspired by bell hooks' writing on the subject, Lugones speaks of the task of 'making homes' (2003: 191), advocating for what she calls the exercise of "'world"-travelling'. In this paper, I will analyse her writing in order to expand its relevance beyond feminism to propose 'making homes' and "'world"-travelling' as part of the experience of drawing.

The filmmaker and writer Trinh T. Minh-ha also provides a useful theoretical entry point to an embodied understanding of home: she claims that 'the challenge is to deal with women and home, not in terms that oppose female to male but in terms that suggest different modes of dwelling and travelling' (1999: 182). Both Lugones and Minh-ha introduce the need to reflect on geography in their writing. Hence 'to be at odds with home' not only indicates merely moving away from home, but also involves a series of more complex

movements which I argue are important for understanding both women's approach to expanded drawing methodologies, in terms of their questioning of home, heritage and identity, and the relationship between drawing practices and their geographies and cultural and political context. Hence, home is closely related to both the need to leave and the need to return. In fact, according to Maria Lugones, 'this journey back reconfigures the very meaning of home'. In this way, home signifies a need for comfort, safety, belonging, healing – home is also the place of origin, the place where one finds voice and is heard; however, driven by the longing for home, this return journey also implies the need for change and transformation. (2003:192).

In addition, an acknowledgement of women's commitment to home – so commonly associated with notions of care, listening and attention – will enable me to discuss the question of drawing in relation to site differently: to address the physical and emotional attachment to sounds, smells, colours, textures and concrete spatial/material atmospheres (hooks, 1990: 192) that different ways of living at home entail. I will explore these and other ideas in order to speak of drawing in spatial terms, as well as addressing the ways in which certain drawings can come to embody the subtleties of movement (in resistance), and in doing so often acquire a performative dimension.

As such, while articulating a range of perspectives from different feminist authors, the paper will present a selection of drawings which are mostly, but not exclusively, made by women. I do not claim that drawing is an activity that is exclusive to a particular gender: the purpose is to analyse the prominent role that female practitioners (under the influence of the feminist movement) have played in the construction of new conceptions of home, and in the development of contemporary drawing practice (Marsha Meskimmon, Phil Sawdon, 2016). Alongside these works I will present my own work to address my personal experience of moving away from home and returning there after eight years of distance, sharing reflections about how this "world"-travelling' has impacted on my practice.

It was during the COVID-19 pandemic that I started thinking deeply about what it means to be/feel at home. It is not surprising that the pandemic – during which millions were forced to stay at home – has prompted new articulations of this theme. Confined to home, many artists also decided to reactivate their drawing practices. In my case, however, even though I produced writing on the subject, I never drew during lockdown. Nevertheless, it was the pandemic – after I caught the coronavirus and suffered severe symptoms – that precipitated my return to Portugal, and soon after moving back to Porto I started drawing again. What triggered this desire to draw is still not entirely clear to me. But something has changed. In these post-London/post-PhD/post-pandemic drawings, much of the performative dimension of my drawing practice has disappeared, gestures are restrained, and scale is reduced to a minimum. I realise that this new work is somehow getting closer to work I did many years ago. I have also realised that it was through drawing and drawing-based projects that I started my long and ongoing conversation with home (that is, my homeland – my place of birth: and the many intersecting links between poverty, fascism and patriarchy). Perhaps distance always produces the same peculiar effect: the desire to gather up the historical threads of our lives and our (female) ancestors. As such, "world"-travelling' is also time-travelling, since at stake here

there is a geographical/physical distance, as well as a crucial temporal gap. But this 'looking back' is, importantly, not nostalgic. In this paper I will explain why in my case coming back home did not mean a reconciliation with home (as a homeland), but instead implied a deeper questioning of home.

What is home – and where is home, then? I have come to believe that home is the place where you can truly be yourself, without fear or shame; it is the place where you become yourself. Home is a place of freedom. During my presentation I will argue that to have this place, this home, has always been one of the most important demands of women's struggle for equality and emancipation: the right to have 'a room of one's own' (Virginia Woolf, 2019).

My contribution will consist of a twenty-minute presentation. Following the Symposium at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, I hope to participate in the future publication resulting from this event with a written essay expanding on the questions raised above.

bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995)

bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990)

Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: for a Peaceful Revolution* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994)

María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003)

Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017)

Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Sawdon, *Drawing Difference: Connections Between Gender and Drawing* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016)

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989)

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (London: Phoenix, 2005)

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019)