

# Tracing the Body Through Drawing

Amba Sayal-Bennett Drawing Room Course Proposal 2025



Anatomical figurative sheets, Wellcome Collection.

Through a series of talks, text discussions and practical activities, this four-session course will explore how the body is produced in different ways through practices of drawing.

## Session 1: The Body Abstracted

In this session we will explore how, through different material and technological concatenations, the body is produced as a drawing machine. We will discuss Margaret Iversen's notion of the 'graphic trace' as a hybrid form of representation- a diagram generated by the body. We will explore medical images and recording instruments that trace involuntary movements of the body, such as the breath or heart beats. We will build on this idea of the graphic trace which combines the physical and symbolic to devise different ways to record aspects of our bodies. By drawing on a range of materials and technologies we will develop a series of non-mimetic portraits.

Suggested Reading:

Margaret Iversen, 'Index, Diagram, Graphic Trace: Involuntary Drawing,' in *Tate Papers no. 18*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/18/index-diagram-graphic-trace>

## Session 2: The Body Dissected

This session will explore the history, processes and implications of Western anatomical drawing to investigate the relationship between medical practices and architectural representations. We will discuss an excerpt from Beatriz Colomina's 'X-Ray Architecture' which explores how architecture is shaped by the dominant medical obsessions of its time. We will focus on the cut-through or cutaway, a mode of drawing that centres the functional role of each dissected fragment. Through varied drawing activities we will explore the impossible perspective of the cut-through as a state of enclosure rendered visible through the diagram. Working with processes relating to the layered anatomical figurative sheets in the Wellcome collection (pictured above), such as transparencies, we will use a layered approach to construct imagined bodies.

Suggested Reading:

Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture*, Lars Müller, 2019.

### **Session 3: The Body Distributed**

This session will look at practices of drawing which distribute or displace the body. We will explore the notion of mobile anatomy through film and printing methods, as well as the relationship between drawing and writing. The session will begin with a talk exploring movement through print and film, such as Vesalius' *Fabrica* – a series of medical illustrations of human anatomy. The *Fabrica* was a watershed moment not only in medical illustration but also in printing, a process which enabled the transfer and travel of anatomical images. The talk will also explore embodied movement within film, considering cinematic drawing methods through writing movement onto filmstrips as continuous lines and sinuous strands. We will experiment with different printing and recording techniques to distribute the body through image and text.

Suggested Reading:

Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves*, Duke University Press, 2008

Jade Montserrat, 'Drawing as Contagion', *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*, 2020

### **Session 4: The Body Emplaced**

In this final session we will explore walking as a method of drawing with the body. We will explore de Certeau's notion of individual 'pedestrian speech acts', or footsteps and walking movements that spatially 'act' and 'live out' the space of the city. In this formulation, city becomes palimpsest as pedestrian enunciations and pathways are superimposed over old ones. We will develop work from collections (object and image-based) gleaned from walks around the Drawing Room site. We will explore what is left from urban encounters, such as traces in environments, discarded objects, and experiences of these walks and movements through space.

Suggested Reading:

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984

Jaspar Joseph-Lester, Simon King, Amy Blier-Carruthers, Roberto Bottazzi (eds) *Walking Cities: London*, Camberwell Press, 2016.