

## Touching Earth: Drawing as Intra-action and Entanglement in Here, Down Below

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### Abstract

The following article presents experiences, observations, and graphic material from the Imprográfika experimental workshop, titled "Here, Down, Below", a drawing workshop dedicated to earth. Specifically, we focus on one of the workshop's units, "Clay Notebooks", where we explored whether and how soil can transform from a descriptive subject into the very material of drawing, and how matter and traces can intertwine in more complex intra-actions and entanglements.

By investigating drawing as a means of fostering a deeper connection to nature, emphasis is placed on drawing as exploration, touch, medium, and agent that operates beyond visual-, anthropo-, and logo-centric regimes. The aim is not only to reconnect, understand, interpret, or protect the fragile earth but also to shift paradigms and move toward drawing as a symbiotic, spontaneous, and ecological gesture. This approach seeks to redefine drawing's materiality and reveal mark-making as a multifaceted practice of inscriptions, imprints, and interfaces.

As a starting point and primary reference, we drew on the work of visual artist Miquel Barceló, focusing on his performance-based mud drawings created in collaboration with choreographer Josef Nadj and captured in the documentary *Clay Diaries* (2011). This multifaceted tracing performance, centered on the fluidity of mud's materiality, served as reference that introduced drawing as an ongoing becoming—far removed from drawing as an object, a finished representation, or other dualistic approaches.

Earthy traces, transcriptions, and textures can touch and be touched, opening up the imaginary of drawing beyond the human and the natural as separate entities, toward the phantasmatic of surviving times, multiple stratifications, and sensitivities.

### Keywords

Drawing; Earth; Intra-action; Posthuman; Touch; Practice.

### 1. Introduction

This article presents drawing as a way of touching nature, and particularly the earth. Moving beyond representational paradigms toward an understanding of drawing as intra-action, this approach examines drawing as an agent for the opening of the form (Nancy, 2013, p. 4) and a form of touching. Drawing-as-touch describes an agential understanding of drawing that transcends dualisms between object-subject, reference and representation, figure and background, body and drawing, and general dichotomies among "culture" and "environment" (Braidotti,

R. 2013). Decentering drawing from the drawer-subject and the drawing for being perceived as a static object, strongly related to visual culture. Rather than treating drawing as merely a fixed and finished product or as an action and process for tracing and depicting, this approach examines drawing as complex mediation—an embodied, non-logocentric, non-ocularcentric form of touching. Drawing as a way of touching, where touch through traces becomes a way to touch nature and earth, to be touched, to be in touch, and to self-touch "with the infinite in/determinacy at the heart of matter" (Barad, 2012, p.215).

The main purpose is to investigate how drawing, as a constantly changing apparatus that is inseparable from the drawer, the material, and the emerging image, enables us to approach and explore the earth as a multilayer entity. Drawing on/for/with earth can be understood in many ways—observational process, embodied experience, an un/preoccupied gesture—and classified in different graphic species—descriptive, conceptual, symbolic, abstract. Even though this article approaches drawing on earth through intra-action as an integrated process that entangles rather than separates, categorizes and at the same time is impossible to describe as a whole.

Drawing as Touching Earth uses as a case study experiences, observations, graphic material, and theoretical and artistic references from the online experimental workshop “Here, Down Below” (Kosma, 2025), dedicated to drawing and earth. The workshop forms part of *Imprográfika*, a blog and series of workshops exploring drawing as graphic improvisation and free action.

### 1. Drawing Nature: A Posthuman Approach

The field of drawing and arts has undergone a significant ecological, more-than-human and posthuman turn in recent years. This is well evidenced by the number of publications, books, journals, as well as exhibitions and related research and educational artistic programs. In this turn, it is also notable that drawing is not perceived or considered as a separate, preparatory, or observational technique but rather as an interdisciplinary medium. This shift is well described, for example, in the editorial note of “Drawing Anthropocene,” a special issue of Tracey’s peer-reviewed *Journal*, by Casey Sarah and Gerry Davies (2024), where drawing is presented as a practice that can balance against ecological pressures. and as an antidote to human power. They also observe, citing Yussof (2018), that “contemporary drawing research addresses issues of capitalism, race, and colonial violence, including extraction, climate change, and deforestation [that also] looks beyond drawing’s traditional borders to engage with other disciplines and global issues (Garner, 2008).”

Drawing’s opening and reconsiderations on ecologies question its traditional role as a representational medium,

moving away from what Virginia Mannering described as drawing’s role in colonial expansion (2024) toward more of what Casey and Gerry note as drawing’s “capacity to be co-produced with non-human agents” (2024, p. 3). This shift calls for being alert to “new realities and responsibilities,” focusing especially on “drawing’s facility for negotiating polarities of absence and presence through process-based approaches”(Casey & Gerry, 2024, p. 4).

The educational potential of drawing to engage with environmental issues is particularly significant in observing changes in the environment to configure more complex relations and interdisciplinary understandings. By investigating through drawing as a means of fostering a deeper connection to nature, emphasis is placed on drawing as touch for exploration, as a process-based agent that operates beyond visual-, anthropo-, and logocentric regimes. The aim is to extend drawing beyond representation according to a mimetic regime that conceives nature and earth as fixed or separable objects or environments, moving toward a symbiotic, spontaneous, and caring gesture. Drawing here is understood as free gestural drawing that explores, perceives, observes, re/thinks and interprets through non-significant, sentimental, aesthetic traces, with maker, matter, and mark in intra-action, entangled, in becoming drawing, matter, meaning. “The notion of Intra-action (in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful,” mentions Karen Barad. Between material and discursive entities, drawing by touching the earth acts as an unspoken, non-significant, sensed, intersubjective/interobjective agent that can transmit, make reference to environmental materialities (2012), worries and agonies.

### 2. Case Study: Online Drawing Workshop “Here, Down Below”

“Here, Down Below” [“Να, εδωχάμω”] is a local popular expression from the South of Peloponnese, Greece, pointing to something that is here, down, below on the

ground, on earth. People from this region are often playfully called “those below” (Χαμουτζίδες). The phrase evokes Heidegger’s Dasein (“being-there”) and, further, being-with and Being related to earth and soil. In this sense, the workshop’s name “Here, Down Below” refers to the earth not as a geocentric reference but first as being-in-the-world, which first means being in earth, being on a surface (edafos). “Earth itself is a celestial body among others, and everything that lives on it (as well as in it) is of an astral nature [...] To make the Earth into a celestial body is, once again, to render contingent the fact that it represents our habitat” (Coccia, 2019, p. 101-04).

The workshop explores how we draw/trace with/on/for the earth, how we touch it and remain in touch. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it:

A writer doesn’t touch by grasping, by taking in hand but touches by way of addressing himself, sending himself to the touch of something outside, hidden, displaced, spaced. [...] the body is the stranger ‘out there’ (the place of all strange things) because it is here. Here, in the ‘there’ of the here, the body opens, cuts, displaces the out-‘there’ (Nancy, 2008, p. 17-18)

Writing and reading, for Nancy, who continues the thought of Bataille, is to be exposed, to expose oneself to this not-having (to this not-knowing) and thus to “exscription” (Nancy, 1990, p. 48). Exscription, a different communication, a kind of writing, where writing is a praxis of existence, and existence is exposure to the ex-. In the case of drawing as a more-than-human touch, is “writing” traces of/for othering, a diffraction/dispersion of identity “an entangled relation of difference,” an intra-action. For Karen Barad, “all touching entails an infinite alterity; touching the other is touching all others” (2012, p. 209). Touch, the most banal of senses, simultaneously represents “proximate distance”—the approximation of the intimate. Drawing constitutes a kind of touch, a touch of the world through traces, paper, graphic material, hand, and self. Touch is not exclusive to human beings. As Jean-Luc Nancy explicitly states in the *Sense of the World*, even a stone touches (1997, p. 59). Drawing, according to a “logic of the limit,” is liminal, a complex touch is a touch of openness to otherness. Drawing as a touch with

earth is a touch of openness to earth’s otherness. A touch of a complex materiality, and at the same time, a touch with an imaginary materiality and an imminent matter of discourse.

### 3. Drawing and Earth: Drawing Genealogies in the Workshop

To analyze drawing earth as touch, this article examines experiences and materials from the online drawing workshop “Here, down below.” The online workshop was held in the spring of 2025 and consisted of weekly two-hour live sessions, which were recorded to be shared later, over a duration of six weeks.

Each session module highlights different relations, artistic and pedagogical research on drawing and earth. It was practically structured in three parts: (a) the introduction to the module-approximation, related references, as well as the graphic experimental proposal of the session; (b) the practical session where each participant had the opportunity to develop their graphic experiments on the proposed subject; and (c) the interpretational part where produced drawings were shared and commented upon. Each session had a ritual, from input-introduction to a graphic problem and invitation to experiment, to action and then to reflect. Many times, comments and feedback opened the cycle for more action, experimentation and interpretations. Drawing sessions were practically invitations to draw freely, unpreoccupied, leaving behind preconceived biases, fears, and thoughts related to the culture that often judges, classifies and critiques artworks, generating a creatively sterile and rigid environment. Drawing online workshop intended to work as a sentimental creative laboratory, a safe place to explore, experiment, “make mistakes,” share and estrange oneself and others. Even though each participant was working individually, it can also be said that ultimately the workshop was a collaborative drawing experiment.

A common proposal for graphic experimentation generated a common environment for exploration of drawing as touch, focusing on earth. Participants, by sharing on the screens their workspace, and “hands” in action, managed to transmit the experience of a collective laboratory even at a distance. What follows is a brief description of the main scope of each module, forming a constellation of approximations on the issue. Finally, one session and its outcomes are going to be described in more detail.

## The Six Modules:

### 3.1. Auto/Bio/Geo/Graphies

Drawing as self, life, and earth/geo kind of writing. Traces on the surface of a paper, personal biographic systems of notations and traces on the surfaces of the earth. In the world of the miniature, these different scales and types of tracing can come together and be easier to understand. Paper becomes our map, with borders, limits, textures, and folds representing earth in a graphic model. Crumpled paper serves as a miniature microcosm representing the fragile surface of the planet. How do we re/trace, touch it? Paper textures and irregular geometries invite reverie, exploration, and at the same time, as an autobiographic “letter,” on worries and ecological wisdom.

### 3.2. Stratigraphies

This experimentation moves from earth as fragile surface to earth as palimpsest. An introduction to earth’s geological layers and materiality was calling drawers to move from earth’s flat or crumbled fields to its verticality. From “walkers” on a surface to “surgeons” or “geologists” that search the earth’s stories in layers, sections, seeking “writings” of palimpsests. From Leonardo da Vinci’s layered drawings to Kathy Prendergast’s geological cross-sections, the session invites to draw the unseen, the invisible, the layering, the passage of time.

### 3.3. Blindly

To experiment with drawing as touch unlinked from ocularcentric culture, an exclusion was proposed. Draw the earth in blindness. Use the visual limitation to pay attention to other senses and to how drawing is a blind “writing” (Derrida, 1993). A blind graphic exploration with no coordinates or destination, where gestures “navigate” and explore without knowing, controlling, or seeking specific outcomes. Touching the earth in blindness is an opening to sense the earth in affection with its materiality.

### 3.4. Rhizomatic Writings

Cuts in the varied geological stratifications are often disrupted by plant rhizomes or other creatures’ paths. Exploring earth in its verticality, sections, layering and palimpsests opens the possibility to explore more complex connections, such as the root nets. The hidden life of roots is used as an introduction to rhizomatic connections, to non-linear thinking, to drawing as the impossibility of configuring the complexity (see Figure1) and at the same time an introduction to line’s materiality as field rather than a border that divides two spaces (Barad, 2007, p.156).

### 3.5. The Scent of Time

Memories, aromas, smells, and animistic life. Unlinking drawing from visual culture to explore entanglement with senses, emphasis was placed on olfactory touches and imageries. Senses and memories from Earth’s aromas are also an invitation to pay attention and connect with more complex, non-defined, subjective ways of understanding. This module was an invitation to earth’s materiality as a carrier of time. For this graphic exploration Collage and mixed media techniques are used, proposing synthesis and configurations organized from parts, fragmented, monstrous, undefined drawings formed as multiple organs and certainly not as specific objects, closed contours etc.

3.6. Clay Notebooks: This session focuses on earth’s materiality, where soil itself becomes both drawing’s medium and objective, entangling matter and imagination. Drawings as traces on wet earth, or earth worked as drawing’s matter. Practically this approximation on drawing was a way to comment on dualistic thinking in drawing and design culture and reduce distance, dichotomies, and separations among medium, drawer and object of exploration. At first, the artistic reference in the work of the Catalan artist Miquel Barceló’s on mud, and the film documentary directed by Isaki Lacuesta on the performance under the title “Clay Diaries” [El cuaderno de barro] (2011), was the introduction and invitation to draw in contact, by touching the earth.





Figure 1. Rhizomes 2025, by Jose Rubio Mira (with permission of the artist).

#### 4. The Reference: Clay Notebooks

In performance, Barceló, with the choreographer Josef Nadj, called *Paso Doble*, influenced by a region of Mali where the artist spent many years working and reconnecting his art with the area, its people and practices, presents an act where clay serves as background and active agent for infinite transformations, and possibilities for plasticity. Bodies and matter entangled reveal not only how clay touches and is touched, traces and is traced, but also their ability to connect and invite phantasmatic elements/entities that inhabit them to emerge. In the African traditional village of Gogolí (Malí), in front of its people, mud as an active agent gave sense to matter as the possibility for an encounter that was able to trespass time, enabling deep involvement and emotional implication. The artists immersed themselves in the soil's materiality, converting and revealing building and everyday local material into artistic matter, liberating its poetic potentialities and alterities.

"Poetry lives in certain places  
where the cliffs need nothing  
but a sign to come alive:  
two or three lines, a marking,  
and silence begins to speak

(Vicuña, 1997, p. 47- 48)"

Barceló's performance in constant tracing and working with the clay manages to "break" material's "silence." In a playful activity, with a "purposiveness without purpose," searching and provoking the unexpected, to be expressed, new occurrences appeared. In this intra-action, matter manages to relocate, liberate, and bring to the surface of the scene, almost animating unimaginable phantasmatic figures (see Figure 2).

Another important factor that Barceló's work reveals is that mark-making does not occur on neutral or empty surfaces, nor is earth or mud a matter with no properties and life. We have moved far from notions of drawing and earth as *tabula rasa*. Our traces and marks on earth, depending on their intensity, can become fateful. Our perception of how we touch/trace the earth is changing. From an architectural and constructive perspective, how do our drawings touch, contact, extract, or reshape the earth? The architect Francisco Díaz in his collections of essays "*Suelos*" [Floors] writes: "In temperate climates, a cubic meter of soil contains around 50,000 millipedes or centipedes, 100 million algae formations, 100 billion fungi, and nearly 10 trillion bacteria... every time we excavate soil to lay a foundation, we commit environmental genocide on billions of microscopic lives." Considering the above, he also confesses that "if I knew all this before, I would have never studied architecture" (2024, p. 21).

Barceló's work as an emotive reference and mud's immediacy as the medium itself provoked in the online drawing laboratory a climate that resulted in the production of a series of significant drawings. Approaching drawing as touching earth, where earth could be the trace and the traced, the medium to touch but also the touched entity at the same time, managed to reduce distances often imposed by representational regimes and canons that flood and mediate our perception—bird's-eye views, photographic reproductions—returning to nature and earth through drawing as touch.



Figure 2. Clay Diaries. Source: Tusiata Producciones, open-access article.

## 5. The Experiment

Throughout the works, we approached aspects of drawing as touching the earth, with the purpose of understanding and rethinking drawing as a complex way to reconnect with nature. In this part, some of the drawings produced during the workshop and the session dedicated to “clay diaries” are going to be presented and analyzed to reveal significant aspects of drawing and its appearing (Seel, 2005) as an entangled touch.

In the workshop, the paper’s surface became our earth, earth in miniature. As Bachelard notes, “Among the most normal imaginary functions is the transformation into miniature” (2002, p. 74). A miniature to inhabit the world. “Material imagination substantiates. And this substantiation condenses images born from sensations yet placed within imagined matter. One dreams beyond the world and closer of human realities” (Seguí, 2010, p. 71). In this session, clay becomes the miniature, wet soil—soil becomes pigment, awakening the latent forces of materials. Drawing’s touch—touch with earth—goes beyond representation or impression; it is an embodied touch, a sensory experience, “an encounter with the infinite alterity of oneself.” Playing with the clay is playing with its modifications. Clay is a body, an agent that can trace and be traced at the same time. Drawing with earth as matter, as well as drawing with the earth as a surface—a place to trace. Earth as graphic matter itself to configure and touch through. The touch also understood as a kind of friction. Friction is the resistance that one surface, object, or body encounters when moving over another. In friction, the closeness between the materialities produces a feeling of warmth (Bachelard, 1987). But in touching the wet earth of clay, friction becomes an ‘electric duct’ that penetrates and makes explicit drawings’ plasticity, connection, and infinite becoming.

The resulting works demonstrate many issues among them:

- Drawing with earth as matter and surface, a place to trace
- Earth as graphic matter itself to configure and touch through
- Drawing as territory, a field for reverie
- Drawing as a magmatic process, revealing drawing’s plasticity and infinite possibilities
- Coexistence, symbiosis, entanglement, osmosis, entropy
- Earth and water as plasticity connectors
- Islands as isolated places for salvation, capsules, and “secret poems” in the earth’s crust. Earth is not a landscape to be represented, imitated, or outlined, but the imaginary of a fragile territory.
- Writings on earth: traces, retracing, rewriting, redrawing in infinite layers
- Clay as “ink,” “color,” medium itself to trace, apply, paint, mark
- Territories and unknown geographies from inside, not above
- Places that call forth phantasmata, where matter becomes animate.



**Figure 3.** Clay touch 2025, by Anthi Kosma (with permission of the artist).



Figure 4. Μονολατώ, Path(ώ) as a verb 2025, by Dimitra Papaspyrou (with permission of the artist).



Figure 5. Matter/realities, 2025, by Maria Nikolopoulou (with permission of the artist).



Figure 6. Land, 2025, by Elena Chrysafidou (with permission of the artist).



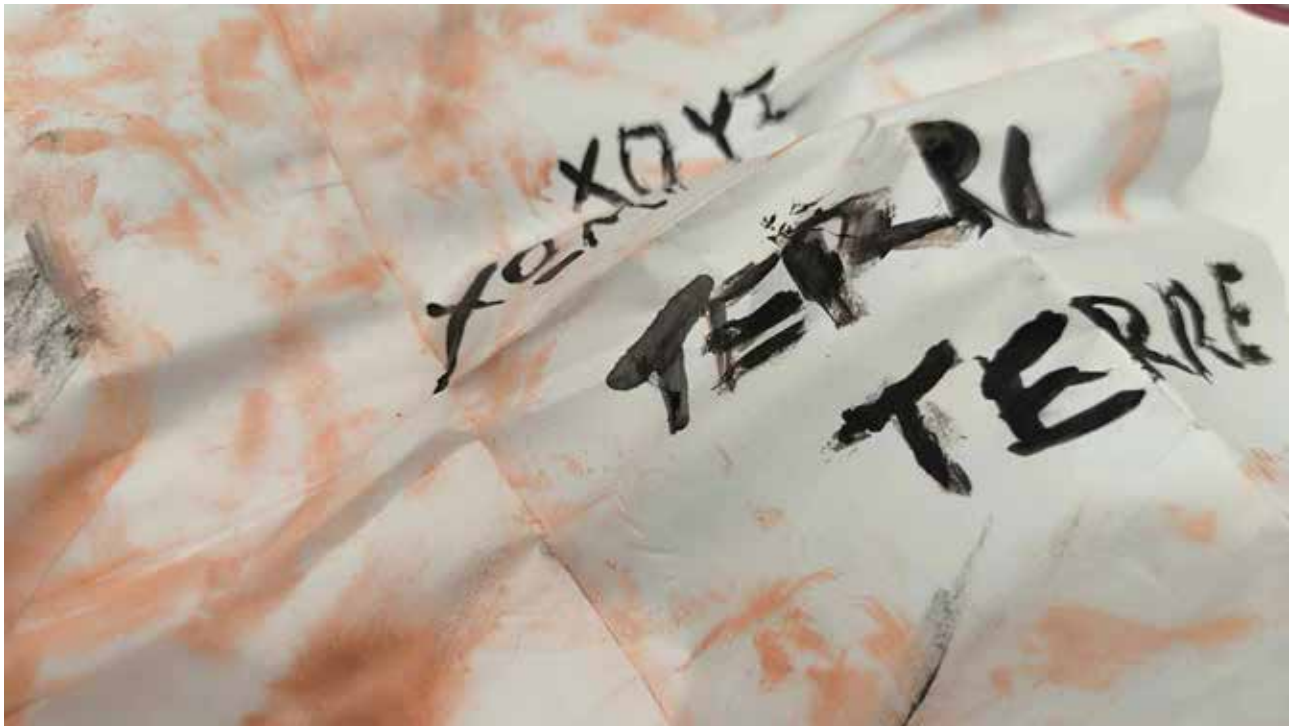
Figure 7. Not ordinary notes 2025, by Nikoleta Bourou (with permission of the artist).



**Figure 8.** Islands 2025, by Rouli Prinianaki (with permission of the artist).



Figure 9. No title 2025, by Motchi (with permission of the artist).



**Figure 10.** Χους-Χώμα-Terra-Terre, by Tonia Tzirita Zacharatou (with permission of the artist).

## 6. Intra-action, Entanglement and Drawing's Materialities

Drawing operates through multiple theoretical frameworks: Derrida "On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy" (2005) highlights touch from all senses, an expanded sense; aesthetic experiences as simultaneously logical and sensing; Karen Barad refers on touching as a transformative opening to otherness rather than simple reaction (2012). In "Drawing difference," Meskimmon & Sawdon (2016) considered that in multiple "intra-actions," "boundaries we call "matter" and the constellations we understand as "meaning" might become intelligible, momentarily" (2016, p.69). This approach narrows differences, positioning drawing as holistic and agential experience. Agency, in the sense of power to act (Latour, 2017, p.12) can consider drawing for/with/by earth becomes an act of cultivation and care. Byung-Chul Han's call for attention and reconnection to earth through care, touch and contemplation. In "Praise to the Earth" [Loa a la tierra], he writes:

"As mysterious shell, earth is fragile. Today, we devote ourselves to its brutal exploitation and destruction... From earth comes the imperative to care for it well, that is, to treat it with care... Beauty compels us, even commands us to treat it with care" (2019, 4). In this sense, the drawing session explores earth's characteristics as well as drawing's capacity as an exploratory research tool, and also as a process to pay attention and care. Drawing emerges as a touch of care and radical openness; it constitutes a compound touch: touch between pencil tip and surface, hand, land and pencil, surface, touches and traces, memories, worries, and imaginary materialities. In its perpetual becoming, all agents—different materialities and imaginaries—transform ceaselessly in multiple intra-actions.

## 7. Conclusions

When dry, drawing and earth "apparently" cease to be alive, traces remain as residues, memories of an event of "an out-of-place experience" (Badiou, 2006). The dry drawing's "land" is full of paths, marks, and modifications, indicating the passage of time, the movements, the traces and their modifications. Drawing's fragility refers to the earth's fragility not as a metaphor—passive, representative, or mimetic object—but as part of it, as an active, vulnerable agent that participates in an ongoing material-meaning practice. This exploration of drawing as compound touch with earth opens possibilities for reconceptualizing artistic practice as environmental practice, where every mark carries responsibility, every trace acknowledges its entanglement with broader ecological systems. Through the series of workshop "Here, Down, Below," and in particular with the session "clay notebooks" drawing emerges also as practice of care and becoming—a way of touching earth that acknowledges both its fragility and its agency, creating space for encounters that honor the complexity of our entangled existence with the more-than-human world.

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