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# Drawing together: Sketching a multimodal collaborative ethnography

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, we introduce and reflect on co-drawing as a methodology for multimodal and collaborative ethnographic analysis. Co-drawing is part of our joint exploration of how to collaborate across our individual PhD research projects using multimodal methods and materials. Prompted by a creative impulse, we sent two sheets of paper – one for drawing, and one for writing – back and forth between us, using old-fashioned snail mail. Taking turns, adding drawn and written reflections, and responding to those of the other, we explored what drawing and writing together could do for us as we tried to make sense of an empirical phenomenon we had both encountered in our respective fieldwork. Co-drawing became a simultaneous act of co-creating and thinking through an ethnographic place on papers and between us: a shared space of multisensory expression and inquiry that helped us generate insights, stay with the process of analysis, and reflect upon our (shared) researcher-selves. In this article, we use co-drawing as a case to argue for collaborative and multimodal forms of research to explore other cognitive pathways and pluralise knowledge-making, while committing to research as a relational practice.

**Keywords:** collaborative research, multimodal ethnography, artful research practices, drawing, multisensoriality

## March 2024

*I hesitantly put the tip of my pencil to the blank A4 paper in front of me. The first line appears. Then another one. I keep moving my hand, more steadily now. First the trunk, then the branches.*

*I sit back and look at the paper. The tree turned out bigger than I meant. Am I taking up too much space? I will mention it in the notes.*

*I'm curious what Hanna will draw in response. I hope she won't think it's too simple what I did, too much like a kid's drawing.*

*I lick the envelope shut. It's out of my hands, for now.*

*I check the mailbox frequently, twice a day, sometimes thrice. There it is, the envelope, tucked in-between flyers and a bill.*

*I open it in the kitchen, eagerly. Too eagerly, tearing it. I greet the content with excitement and inspiration, respond instantly, drawing, writing, standing in the kitchen. Hand and thoughts flowing over paper sheets.*

*I take a step back. Hesitation. Is this good? Enough? Maybe. A sense of calm and trust. It is good enough for this playful adventure of ours.*

*I reinsert the sheets in the envelope. Seal the top, tape the torn parts, replace my address with Simone's. I return to the mailbox.*

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## Introduction: Doing things differently-together

In this article, we introduce co-drawing as a methodology for multimodal and collaborative ethnographic analysis, and reflect on the potentials of doing things differently-together. Co-drawing[1] involves two sheets of paper – one for drawn lines and one for written – the two of us taking turns drawing and writing, and the Swedish postal service delivering the papers. To begin with, we explain how we came to the practice of drawing together as one way to understand and analyse ethnographic experiences, and enrich our research processes. Then, we engage with the literature on multimodality and ethnographic drawing to think through the epistemology of co-drawing as an analytical method. From there, we discuss what drawing together can and cannot do in ethnographic analysis through processual and material excerpts of our co-drawing. We end by discussing the paradox that follows from transforming our process-oriented and fairly unbounded experiment into a disciplined and output-focused format in order to share and explain it.

### *Cross ethnography*

Our idea for co-drawing emerged within a research practice that we have come to call 'cross ethnography'. Cross ethnography is a multimodal mode of working wherein we craft multi-layered and multivocal interpretations across our projects. We developed the approach in the beginning of our PhD journeys in response to a creative impulse. While we are pursuing our individual ethnographic research projects – Simone on organic and permaculture farming in Kyrgyzstan and Hanna on regenerative farming in Sweden – we felt a need to enrich our individual work in multimodal and collaborative ways. We wanted to explore how we could creatively generate insights together, across our PhD projects, while meeting the requirements of an individual PhD degree. Cross ethnography is about finding ways of making sense differently-together: a multisensorial methodological experimentation to open other cognitive pathways, and to commit to knowledge-making as a relational practice.

In cross ethnography, we engage with each other's individual research materials – consisting of different media/modalities – through artful research practices (Petitt and Servais 2024)[2], thereby pluralising perspectives and modes of engagement. With poems, photography, video, soundscapes, and drawing, we interpret and respond to each other's fieldnotes and field materials, thereby creating additional and multimodal forms of meaning-making. It is a mode of research where "knowledge emerges as field-materials flow between different people at different times" (Pink and Morgan 2013: 354). Cross ethnography is, thus, not a process of comparative analysis. Rather, we put our respective fieldwork experiences, materials, and ponderings into dialogue with one another, aiming for analytical insights by way of resonance or 'echolocation' (Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009a: 382). Our 'creative respondings' (Thorpe et al. 2023) offer a change of perspective that "has the effect of seeing the patterns in new ways and discovering connections that were not obvious before" (Butler-Kisber 2010: 38). Our aim is not to come to shared conclusions (although we might end up there), but to explore both commonalities and differences as

[1] Throughout the article, 'co-drawing' refers to the drawing and the written notes together.

[2] We thank Andrea Petitt, Véronique Servais and the other founders of the Multispecies Ethnography and Artistic Methods (MEAM) network for the term 'artful' methods to capture the travelling of the space in-between artistic work and traditional research work.

sources of questions.

Drawing on Pink (2015), we think of cross ethnography as being part of the process of creating 'ethnographic place'. Conceptualising places as unbounded, open, spatio-temporally specific events, "ethnographic places are not fieldwork localities, but rather the entanglements through which ethnographic knowing emerges" (Pink and Morgan 2013: 354). Ethnographic places comprise not only the material, emotional, and embodied traces of fieldwork localities and encounters, but also the context and practice of analysis and research dissemination (Pink and Morgan 2013: 354). While for Pink ethnographic place refers primarily to "the places that we as ethnographers make when communicating about our research to others" (2015: 42), we draw on her thinking to understand the materiality, sensoriality, and temporality of our shared process of analysis.

Indeed, in cross ethnography, we emphasise the research process. Instead of approaching analysis as a "transitional stage between fieldwork and theory, [...] a mere point of passage before settling on an empirical finding or category", we aim to enliven and immerse ourselves in the practice of analysis by expanding its timespace (Ballestero and Winthereik 2021: 5, 7). Our collaborative experimentation is furthermore an explicit recognition that research is a social endeavour, and knowledge always co-created. Academic work involves the bouncing of thoughts, ideas, insights, and experiences between different people at different times — a process of reverberance and resonation before the crystallisation of an argument or theory sets in. While cross ethnography builds on the generative potentials of co-authoring, it extends beyond specific texts to form an approach to research that stretches over time, research projects, and modalities.

Cross ethnography is our small contribution to calls for changing academic doings and relatings away from individualised career advancement and a hastened focus on output that is narrowly expected to be textual (see for example Culhane and Elliott 2017; Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019; Laplante et al. 2020; Law 2004; Middleton 2020; Murphy 2025; Pels 2003; Petitt et al. 2025; Selkrig 2022; Van Roekel and Murphy 2024). For us it is important to engage in critical conversations on the structures of academic work already as PhD students, rather than waiting until we have obtained a particular status within these structures. We wish to productively work in a way that we are ethically comfortable with. Moreover, we believe in the collective nature of change making and the power of reverberance: of ripples flowing from people who start to do things differently.

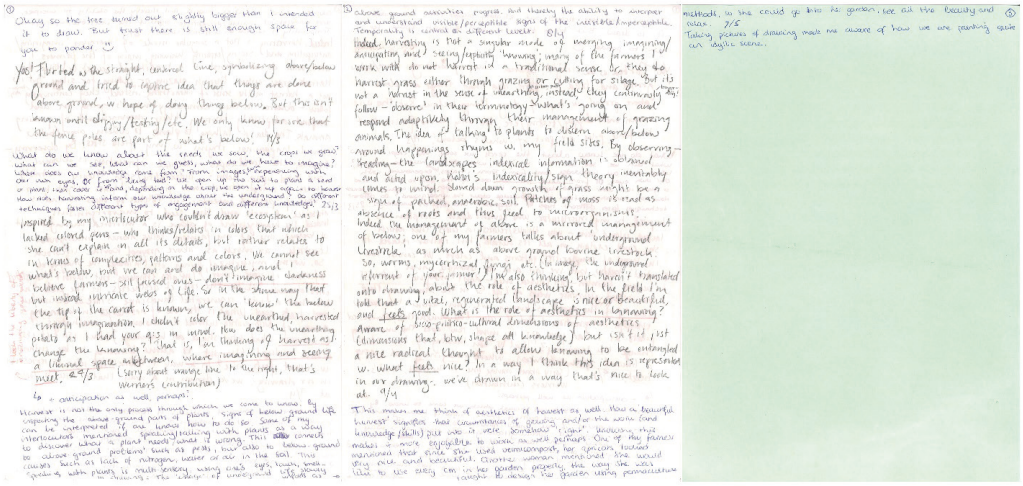
### *Co-drawing*

Within our cross ethnography, co-drawing is one of several methods of shared inquiry (for examples of other cross ethnographic modalities we have used, see de Boer and Wernersson 2025; Wernersson and de Boer 2022). Importantly, we see co-drawing not as a replacement, but as an addition to more established modes of analysis: we use them in tandem. Specifically, we decided to explore the potential of drawing together for a multisensorial analysis of the notion of 'limits to knowing' among our respective farmer interlocutors. On a daily basis, farmers engage with, depend on, and reshape more-than-human worlds that cannot be fully known due to the complex entanglements of life. The notion of 'limited knowing' kept coming up for the both of us, and, being fascinated by it, we wanted to 'stay with' (Haraway 2016) this point of connection between our research through a joint and multimodal exploration. Throughout this article, we use our delving into the phenomenon

of limited knowing as a case to present and reflect on the methodological potentials of drawing together.

Inspired by the children's game 'back-and-forth drawing', we started to send two sheets of paper between us, one for drawing and one for writing. We did not impose a hierarchy between text and image; writings and drawings were created alongside each other, intimately connected as part of the same process. Taking turns, we drew, wrote, and responded to experiences, insights, and events related to the notion of limited knowing encountered in both our fieldworks. The process of co-drawing immediately added new questions, angles, layers, and points of references; the initial drawn lines soon evolved into an ethnographic place, in both a material and immaterial sense. Materially, it became a world on papers that both represents and extends beyond our fieldwork sites. Immaterially, co-drawing was a shared space of making sense.

In this article, we introduce co-drawing as a dialogical tool for analysis. In so doing, we make the case for cross ethnography and other forms of multimodal and collaborative modes of academic working. In the next section, we turn to the growing literature on multimodality and collaborative modes of ethnographic work, before turning to the epistemology of drawing as a research method. This lays the foundation for our epistemological argument for the method of co-drawing.



## Theory: multimodality and drawing as epistemological project

### *Multimodality and collaboration*

We understand the work we do in cross ethnography and co-drawing as part of the expanding field of multimodal ethnography and as an engagement with calls for doing ethnography differently (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019; Elliott and Culhane 2017). As Westmoreland (2022b: 174) notes, multimodality is an 'epistemological project' that decentres text as the dominant mode of mediating and analysing research experiences to emphasise the more-than-textual nature of ethnography. Multimodality "[encourages] kaleidoscopic combinations of objects, text, images, and sounds in ways that unsettle lexical

hierarchies" (Westmoreland 2022b: 176). As such, multimodality explicitly acknowledges that knowledge and its creation come in different forms, and emphasises that mediation is part of every stage of the research process (Westmoreland 2022b: 179).

Multimodal ways of working hold many potentials for collaboration. Besides researcher-artist and researcher-interlocutor collaborations, multimodal forms of collaboration between ethnographers have recently gained ground as a way of engaging collectively with research fields and the process of analysis. These experiments in 'duoethnography' (Apostolidou and Daskalaki 2021), 'multiresearcher ethnography' (Pink and Morgan 2013), 'strong collaboration' (Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009a, 2009b), or 'diffractive collaboration' (Thorpe et al. 2023) engage researchers in diverse ways, for parts of the research process or throughout it.

To methodologically prioritise working together is a political choice as it explicitly challenges the long-established notion of the lone ethnographer. It is a recognition and an appreciation of the fact that all knowledge is social (Apostolidou and Daskalaki 2021; Matsutake World Research Group 2009b: 209-210). As such, collaborative forms of research are "unsettling the politics of authorship of ethnographic representation" (Theodossopoulos 2022: no page). Indeed, for us the goal of ethnographic collaborations is not to synthesise or cancel differences between researchers' perspectives and experiences, but to create a collaborative space of multivocality. It is a 'reflexive methodology' (Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009b: 198): a dialectic and dialogical process of joint discovery that allows for subjective nuances (see also Thorpe et al. 2023).

In multimodal collaborations, drawing is increasingly employed to create graphic accounts of social life based on multiple angles and layers of interpretation. The immediacy of drawing makes it a productive conversational tool for multivocal representation (Haapio-Kirk 2022; Haapio-Kirk et al. 2022; Theodossopoulos 2022; van Wolputte 2022; Waterston 2022). Drawing has, however, primarily been used as a collaborative tool between researchers and artists (see for example Haapio-Kirk and Ito 2022; Waterston and Corden 2020), or researchers and research participants (see for example Bliesemann de Guevara et al. 2022; Gameiro et al. 2018; Hunt 2024). The aim of this article is instead to explicate the potential of using drawing in collaborative inquiry between researchers.

### *Drawing as analysis*

Ingold (2011) and Westmoreland (2022a, 2022b) point out that the 'graphy' in ethnography can denote drawing as much as it denotes writing. Expanding the affordances of ethnography this way "challenges the hegemony of text in the production of knowledge" and thereby unsettles established modes and vantage points (Theodossopoulos 2022: no page). To draw as part of the research process dismantles the often-assumed dichotomy between text and image (Theodossopoulos, 2022; Westmoreland 2022a, 2022b). As explicated in the growing field of graphic ethnography, text and imagery are put to work together in different "artful, critical and/or analytical" forms (Theodossopoulos, 2022: no page; for examples see also the Illustrating Anthropology online exhibition[3]). Ethnography is here understood as a practice where the textual and other-than-textual interweave to make sense differently.

Drawing is both a verb and a noun: a way of doing, thinking, and sensing, as well

[3] https://illustratinganthropologycom.wordpress.com/

as drawn lines on paper. As a technique for ethnographic research, drawing can be used throughout the research process: as fieldnote-taking and reflection (e.g., Bonanno 2019, 2023; Hendrickson 2008, 2010; Taussig 2011), as part of analysis (e.g., Douglas-Jones 2021; Jellema et al. 2023), and for communicating research results (e.g., Theodossopoulos 2019; Waterston 2022). In ethnographic research, there is a long history of analysing drawings from interlocutors as data, as well as using drawings for elicitation (Afonso and Ramos 2004: 72-73; see also Cleeve 2023 for a contemporary example of the latter). In what follows, we primarily address drawing by researchers as a technique for reflection and analysis. In so doing, we focus on three key dimensions that emerge from the academic literature on drawing, and that resonate with our approach: drawing as generative of ethnographic insights, as centring the research process, and as encouraging self-reflexivity. Importantly, when speaking of drawing, we do not position it in opposition to, or isolated from, other modalities. Instead, our aim in this article is to highlight the potential of drawing as a mode of expression and inquiry.

### *Drawing as generative of ethnographic insights*

Drawing is an embodied and sensory process of thinking that shifts focus away from word-based analysis (Causey 2017; Ingold 2011; Jellema et al., 2023; Westmoreland 2022a). Drawing helps us attend to specific details of life following a multisensorial direction of attention: the act of drawing is an embodied activity where the researcher's hand, mind, bodily memories, and imagination flow together (Causey 2017; Middleton 2020; Taussig 2011; Westmoreland 2022a). To draw is to materialise shape and form, to directly tend to the materiality of life. Drawing can, as such, restore social relations to their bodily and experiential realities (Bonnano 2019; Theodossopoulos 2020). To draw is, thus, to purposefully connect to the materiality, corporeality, and temporality of the site of research, reminding us "that the experiences under analysis were dynamic and alive" (Petitt and Servais 2024: 10).

Drawing is both an expression and a generative process of inquiry. Drawing understood as generative of ethnographic insight carries an in-between-the-lines logic that can give space to what could, might, or might not be there. As noted by Bornemark (2019: 5), "[a]rtistic perspectives have always been able to stand in relation to what we do not know yet, and to new thinking that we so far can only presage". Through drawing, we can explore the 'negative space' (Causey 2017: 80) as part of the analytical process to make meaning from the spaces in between the subjects and imagine that what is not readily available. In other words, drawing can be used to capture that what is hard to express in linear academic text: affective states, the imagined, the suggestive, and the fragmentary (Azevedo 2021; Taussig 2011). In this sense, to draw is not to transfer or project finished thoughts onto paper, but to conceptually generate and invent (Causey 2017; Ingold 2011; Westmoreland 2022a). Drawn lines are thus not only important for what they record, but also for what they lead us to perceive and imagine in multisensorial ways.

### *Drawing as centring the process of knowledge production*

Drawing explicates the process of coming to know. To draw is to leave visible traces of the analytical process: to make the largely unseen process of analysis – literally – visible

(Bonnano 2019; Douglas-Jones 2021; Petitt and Servais 2024). In this sense, drawing as a tool for research is a form of 'autobiographical record' of coming to know (Berger 2007: 3 in Taussig 2011: 22). Drawing visualises the complex interplay of "questioning and documenting" (Causey 2017: 14); simultaneously depicting a social world, and our embodied and analytical conceptualisation of this world. Thus, drawing explicitly invites the researcher to recognise and stay with the non-linearity of the research process: the different stages of research do not happen at neatly demarcated points in time but instead occur in a "looping movement" (Laplante et al. 2020).

In drawing, the surface of a paper need not be filled. Instead, the blank spaces could be regarded as a 'reserve' (Ingold 2011: 220) that emphasises the lines that have been drawn and could be drawn: it is an invitation to revisit, rethink, and be affected again and differently. When using drawing as part of analysis, the point is not the product per se. One may produce rubbish, or the drawing may never be finished; what matters is the act of drawing. In fact, through its partiality and incompleteness, drawing invites us to relate to research as "dynamic *in-formation* as opposed to static information" (Middleton 2020, no page, original emphasis; see also Taussig 2011). It is, as such, one way of managing instrumentalising tendencies in the research process; to temper "the impulse to turn every observation into a finding or theory" (Middleton 2020, no page; also Petitt and Servais 2024; Taussig 2011). Drawing encourages us to "follow the temporality of sense and emotions, rather than the progressive and linear unfolding of events" (Bonnano 2019: 51). It is an invitation to be attentive to that which is felt, urged, and intuitively pointed towards in the field and beyond. When drawing, we are invited to slow down and "[let] the journey occur before we close in on it" (Laplante et al. 2020).

### *Drawing as reflexive mode of working*

As with any other mediation of research experiences, drawing requires reflexive honesty and curiosity regarding "the subjective insights it provides" (Causey 2017: 54; see also Petitt and Servais 2024: 12). What is drawn, or not drawn, and how, says something about the researcher self: a drawing does not represent a reality but resembles "reality as we both sense and make sense of it" (Bonanno n.d.: 6; also Bonanno 2019). Indeed, drawings are explicitly embodied, integrating and implicating the perspective of the researcher and, as a result, produce "new modes of (self)reflexivity" (Bonanno 2019: 39; also Jellema et al. 2023; Theodossopoulos 2022). A drawing explicitly guides the viewer to ethnographic details by way of employing certain scales, perspectives, and colours, thereby keeping the sense of mediation vibrantly present (Taussig 2011; Theodossopoulos 2020). This overt mediation centres the researching self in the audience's – and researcher's – mind. Drawing, thus, invites us to regard representations critically and always ask "how could this be thought otherwise?" (Douglas-Jones 2021: 105).

While the merits of drawing as part of the research process are increasingly established, to the best of our knowledge, little has been written about drawing as part of a collaborative research process between ethnographers. In the remainder of this article, we reflect on our experience of co-drawing and make the case for drawing together as a form of collaborative analysis.

## Findings: Collaborative analysis through co-drawing

Co-drawing, we suggest, is a constructive technique for analysis as it mobilises the potential of both drawing and collaboration to generate ethnographic insights, centre the process of analysis, and encourage reflexivity. As we have described, co-drawing was an analytical exploration to detangle a point of connection between our individual fieldwork experiences: the notion of limited knowing among organic/permaculture and regenerative farmers. We came to drawing because, for us, it felt like an invitation to make sense differently-together.

Importantly, co-drawing is a dialogical tool for analysis and should not be thought of as research data in and of itself: co-drawing is a multimodal dialogue wherein we created a composition and condensation in lines and colours to generate analytical insights. Our co-drawn world became part of making 'ethnographic place' (Pink 2015). It is an evolving place of analysis that extended our ethnographic fieldwork encounters beyond their specific locality, and beyond individual processes of sense-making. In our work, we think of analysis as a process that is simultaneously creative and organised, "a practice where bodies, instruments, theories, debts, curiosities, and responsibilities coalesce around the desire to make something present, to draw something into being" (Ballestero and Winthereik 2021: 6). Through the convergence and dissonance between specific details of our two ethnographic field sites, we came to create and see meaning across and beyond these sites. What is more, co-drawing, as it turned out, also prompted discoveries and questions regarding ourselves and our process of knowledge-making.

In what follows, we share snapshots from our process of line-making – excerpts of written notes and close-ups of the drawing-in-formation – to exemplify the potential of co-drawing to generate ethnographic insight, centre the analytical process, and encourage reflexivity. Here, we want to emphasise that the drawings and excerpts are meant to be regarded in tandem, as meaning emerges from the resonance between them.[4]

### *Co-drawing as generative exploration*

Drawing together generated ideas, insights, and experiences that helped us further analyse the notion of limited knowing among our organic/permaculture and regenerative farmer interlocutors.

> "Where imagining and seeing meet"
>
> Simone: *What do we know about the seeds we sow, the crops we grow? What can we see, what can we guess, what do we have to imagine? Where does our knowledge come from? From images, from experiencing with our own eyes, or from being told? We open up the soil to plant a seed or plant, then cover it up and, depending on the crop, we open it up again to harvest. How does harvesting inform our knowledge about the underground? Do different techniques foster different types of engagement and different knowledges?*

[4] A complete chronological visual representation of the co-drawing process is included earlier in this article.

Hanna: *Inspired by my interlocutor who couldn't draw an 'ecosystem' as I lacked coloured pens—who thinks/relates in colours to that which she can't explain in all its details, but rather relates to in terms of complexities, patterns and colours. We cannot see what's below, but we can imagine, and I believe farmers – soil focused ones – don't imagine darkness but instead intricate webs of life. So in the same way that the tip of the carrot is known, we can 'know' the below through imagination. I didn't colour the unearthed, harvested potatoes as I had your questions in mind. How does the unearthing change the knowing? That is, I'm thinking of harvest as a liminal space in between. Where imagining and seeing meet.*

[Simone: *I took the liberty of underlining your words*]

As shown by the excerpt of co-drawing above, line-making took us from the starting point of limited knowing among complexities, to the concept and practice of imagination as a way of managing these limitations. At this point, the co-drawing was a visual exploration of the human imagination; a way of engaging with both our interlocutors' and our own imaginations in and of the field. The co-drawing materialised imagination as an everyday practice: an emplaced puzzle-solving activity (Ingold 2000: 419) of the farmers, trying to make sense of their agrarian worlds, and a practice of ethnographic inquiry, as we tried to make sense of their multisensorial experiences, including their imaginations (see also Pink 2015: 40).

"The 'image' of underground life slowly unfolds"

Simone: [...] *By inspecting the above-ground parts of plants, signs of below-ground life can be interpreted if one knows how to do so. Some of my interlocutors mentioned speaking/talking with plants as a way to discover what a plant needs/what is wrong.* [...] *The 'image' of underground*

*life slowly unfolds as above ground activities progress. And thereby the ability to interpret and understand visible/perceptible signs of the invisible/imperceptible.* [...]

Hanna: [...] *The idea of talking to plants rhymes w. my field sites. By observing–reading–the landscapes, indexical information is obtained and acted upon.* [...]. *Indeed, the management of above is a mirrored management of below; one of my farmers talks about 'underground livestock' as much as above ground bovine livestock. So, worms, mycorrhizal fungi etc. (In image, the underground referent of your farmer!)* [...].

Some lines later, we explored how limited knowing is managed in and through multisensory reading of signs in soil, plants, and landscapes. Signs, and the reading of them, acted as mediators between the unknown and the known, and directed the actions of our farmer interlocutors, making the 'unknown' workable.[5] Similarly, for us, the process of drawing the phenomenon of limited knowledge as a way of trying to understand it, was a process of conceptualisation. The farmers' reading of signs became a visible and tangible process as we tried to express it through lines and colours. The co-drawing helped us closely think through, and sensorially remember, experiences from the field, and to imagine experiences of the farmers.

As with farmers connecting fragmented signs in the landscape to make sense of complexities, our drawn lines accumulated and interconnected to form an ethnographic place wherein we made sense of their sense-making. In other words, through drawn lines

[5] For a more elaborate discussion of the role of the imagination and reading signs in daily farm doings, see de Boer (forthcoming).

we moved towards concepts and understandings, by making them and their connections perceptible for ourselves and the other. It was a movement between theoretical insights and empirical discoveries that reflected and expressed both the reach and limits of our own understanding (Douglas-Jones 2021; Jellema et al. 2023).

## *Co-drawing as affective and material process*

### *Temporality and materiality*

The co-drawing was an asynchronous multimodal dialogue over the course of two months. We worked on the drawing at different times, in different places. Beyond the principle of taking turns and combining writing and drawing, we did not settle the details of the process beforehand. Nonetheless, we both came to respect and enjoy the materiality and temporality of the project and developed a shared sense of integrity regarding the exercise. We only responded to each other's work on the two pieces of paper intended for that purpose and did not comment nor share photos of the co-drawing during the time it travelled between our mailboxes. We worked intensely and attentively on it when the envelope was in our respective hands, and allowed and trusted the other to do the same. The waiting time and the different, slower rhythm of drawing and handwriting compared to keyboard typing, slowed down our thinking and allowed for deeper reflection. The materiality and the slowness of the co-drawing was, we believe, conducive for the generation of analytical insights.

We also came to value the additional dimension of suspense that an envelope to be received and opened entails. Sending and receiving the co-drawing became a highlight of our workweek, or bi-week depending on the slowness of *PostNord*. This, we believe, is not unimportant: the joy that we received from co-drawing infused energy and quality into this specific exercise but also into our other work. Co-drawing was a joyful and open exploration of how academic work can be done. The recurring doubts we had about co-drawing, the twists and turns it took, and the possibility that it might be plainly useless had a "freeing quality" (Middleton 2020: no page). It was a joint discovery that was unbounded by expectations of output and productivity.

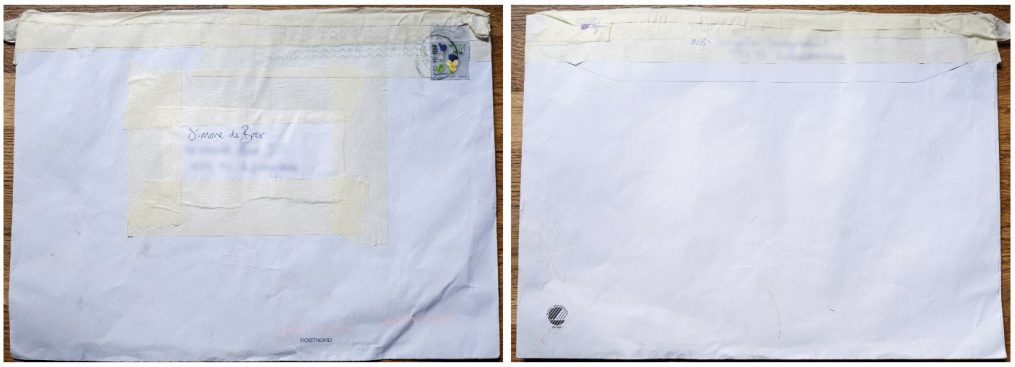
### *Dynamics between us, text, and image: dynamics of coming to know*

In hindsight, we have come to make sense of our co-drawing as a dynamic process of work wherein our engagements shifted organically. During the first turns of drawing and writing, our line-makings were fairly tentative. While we both found the exercise joyful and were curious to see where it would lead us, we were simultaneously unsure and hesitant. At the outset, we were uncertain of the generative potential and the potential for analytical rigour. We also felt slightly insecure towards the other, wondering if the other would appreciate the additions we made. At first, we pursued one concept or question per round and kept to our own domains on the sheets of paper. However, as ideas and expressions of analysis materialised on the papers – as our drawn world became richer – we became more confident, eager, and invested in the process. Multiple lines of thoughts came to co-exist in textual and drawn entries, and we started to interact with and add onto one another's. This progress was materially encouraged as the blank surface of the paper sheets filled up. It also reflected a change of dynamic in our collaboration as we found our individual and shared footing in the exercise. To share sheets of paper is an intimate and iterative process of

creation where to suggest change and additions to the physical document is to re-make it. It therefore requires both a joint sense of purpose of task, as well as an openness to surprise and guidance by the other.

As written and drawn lines accumulated, we became more analytical, gained more depth, and were in some instances more inclined to respond to the text first. At one point, Hanna felt compelled to start with writing instead of drawing, like she had done until then. After a few rounds, Simone started underlining some of Hanna's words before drawing. The shifting order of writing/drawing engagements remained dynamic throughout the process: drawing and writing were intimately connected by the same, line-making hand. To write and draw by hand is indeed "replacing the rigid opposition between image and text with a continuum of scribal practices" (Ingold 2011: 273). In the process of co-drawing, writings and drawings interweave to do explorative, contemplative, and expressive work; the manual activity of drawing and writing emphasises, in a very tangible way, the process of analysis as an entanglement between perception and description (Ingold 2011).

We ended up reusing the same envelope multiple times, taping and tearing the opening, overwriting, and re-writing our addresses. The envelope became a co-created and changing object, a carrier, as well as a material tracing of our dynamic process.



### *Co-drawing as reflecting (back at) us*

All research methods have limitations that should be reflected upon. We found that co-drawing offered us an explicit opportunity to do so, to self-reflect and engage with our positionality as researchers. In the process of drawing together, we and our lines-in-the-making were exposed to one another, making our perspectives and analytical turns visible and prompting us to ask ourselves how it could be drawn and thought otherwise. We find that drawing together puts emphasis not only on the challenging process of coming-to-know, but also encourages us to be reflexive of the interpretations and perspectives of our individual and shared selves.

> "What is the role of aesthetics in knowing?"
>
> Hanna: [...] *I'm also thinking, but haven't translated onto the drawing, about the role of aesthetics.*

*In the field I'm told that a vital, regenerated landscape is nice, or beautiful, and feels good. What is the role of aesthetics in knowing? Aware of socio-political-cultural dimensions of aesthetics (dimensions that, btw, shape all knowledge) but isn't it just a nice radical thought to allow knowing to be entangled w. what feels nice? In a way I think this idea is represented in our drawing: we've drawn in a way that's nice to look at.*

Simone: *This makes me think of aesthetics of harvest as well. How 'a beautiful harvest' signifies that circumstances of growing and/or the work (and knowledge/skills) put into it were somehow 'right'. Knowing this makes it more enjoyable to work as well, perhaps. One of my farmers mentioned that since she used vermicompost, her apricots looked very nice and beautiful. Another woman mentioned she would like to use every cm in her garden properly, the ways she was taught to design her garden using permaculture methods, so she could go into her garden, see all the beauty, and relax. Taking pictures of drawing made me aware of how we are painting quite an idyllic scene.*

When we arrived at the concept of aesthetics, we became aware of ourselves drawing. Aesthetics, wanting things to look nice, are at work both in the physical field and in the paper field. In the same way as our farmers aimed for pretty harvests and beautiful landscapes, we found ourselves making the drawing look nice. Throughout the process of drawing, we were (subconsciously) informed by a sense of aesthetics that had us exclude violent and less pretty aspects that are also part of farming. The co-drawing stayed on the bright side of things. In this way, co-drawing became a mirror through which our own hopes and views were reflected back at us. To draw is personal; it points to our subjective experiences and understandings of the piece of empirical reality under study (Causey 2017; Jellema et al. 2023; Taussig 2011). Like our interlocutors, we are both involved in growing plants and trying to grapple with questions on how to live well in complex more-than-human worlds.

The drawing, for sure, reflects some of our wishes and aspirations for a world that is ethically and aesthetically good. We are, thus, very much embodied in the drawing (Bonnano 2019; Jellema et al. 2023; Theodossopoulos 2022). Co-drawing not only expresses our research field and how we come to know it as researchers; it is also an expression of and inquiry into our positionality.

In addition, what we drew and how was influenced by our drawing capabilities and the reach of our imaginations. While "cultivat[ing] the skill of drawing is to cultivate an ability to broaden our horizon of research attention and see both expected and unexpected patterns" (Westmoreland 2022a), this also involves a certain risk as we might be inclined to only draw what we are capable of or feel comfortable drawing. That is, we risk underexploring that which we are unable to draw or that we shy away from. This also impacts how, and to what extent, we can come to know through drawing. For us, with regards to our lack of skills, we tried to use instances of struggling to express certain details as opportunities to stay with; as an invitation to keep pondering (see also Causey 2017; Westmoreland 2022a). The co-drawing, as such, explores the edges of our own un/knowing; it points to the limits of our understanding, and suggests ways forward.

## Discussion: Challenges of representing generative processes

When is a co-drawing done? After seven rounds of writing and drawing together we synchronically felt that this drawing was done. It was Hanna who received the envelope last. Guided by a feeling to not continue, she called Simone who felt the same. Materially, there was still room for more lines to be drawn, and analytically, there is always more to be said. Yet, the drawing and written thoughts were rich enough – an ethnographic place had been created and an inquiry shared. It is, we realised, an act of trust to be able to let someone else have the last word and line. That we felt that the drawing was done is, furthermore, important: we have become aware of co-drawing as, and have allowed it to be, an emotional process. Many of the choices we made and paths we took have been guided by something beyond verbal dialogue. Instead, the sheets of paper have presented and represented a space of affect between the two of us, a space of sensorial and emotional co-creation.

Towards the end of our co-drawing process, we presented our methodological experiment at the Swedish Anthropological Association (SANT) conference in Uppsala in 2024. To put our experiment into a linear, worded narrative, to be presented at a conference and subsequently in this article, changed how we engaged with it. The undirected and process-oriented experiment became, in part, directed and output-focused, and acquired a different value and use. As we reflected on the co-drawing and reframed it analytically within academic conventions, some of the open-endedness and spontaneity we experienced at the start were replaced with a sense of closure. This is, to an extent, expected. Understanding the co-drawing as an ethnographic place – an event for analysis, communication, and making sense of fieldwork experiences – means that the academic context, with its conventions, expectations, temporalities, and discourses, is part of, and shapes, this place too. Certainly, to talk and write about the co-drawing, to really think through what we did and did not do, how and why, was insightful. Yet, there is a paradox at play here.

In this article we have shared and tried to argue for the value of co-drawing as a generative and process-based method. That is, we understand drawing as open, real-time thinking. In this article, we nonetheless present this process in the form of a selection of

arranged excerpts: the excerpts are made to illustrate a process, rather than being enacted within a process. We have, one could argue, tidied up an open and messy process to be illustrative and closed and, as such, employed an output-oriented logic to describe a process-oriented practice. We found that our aim to keep the process open-ended and, to a certain extent, unbounded, can only be achieved up to a certain point. The disciplining tendencies of academic convention enforce a particular form of (written) representation as well as an argument and some form of conclusion. By seeking an audience, by communicating the work beyond the lived experience of creating it, the work is changed and brought to a close.

Arguably, and following a recognition of the multisensoriality of human experience and the value of multimodal forms of knowledge, there is a need not only for developing new research methods, but also for new ways of communicating them. The question is how to move beyond illustration to enable continuing conceptualisation, inquiry, and insight; to keep the process open to extend correspondence and reverberation between researchers, to include the embodied viewer-reader; to invite the academic and non-academic audiences of our work into the ongoing creation and re-interpretation of ethnographic place. What is at stake is the insight "that knowledge is not only what we argue but how we shape, how we move, how we bring thought to life" (Murphy 2025: 7). This article is our attempt to contribute to such a dialogue.

Finally, we want to foreground the challenge of putting something into words that worked for us because it was not only in words: there is a limit to how much and how well we may articulate in writing our multimodal experiment in order to make it understandable, and convincing, to others. The fact that there is a growing commitment to developing new publishing formats (e.g., Petitt et al. 2025) and venues for multimodal research communication (e.g., Allegra Lab, Anthropology and Humanism, Curatorium, Journal for Artistic Research, Journal of Embodied Research, Limn, Otherwise Magazine, Re:think, TRAJECTORIA, Writing with Light magazine) shows we are not alone in trying to grapple with this challenge.

## Conclusion: An invitation to do research differently-together

In this article, we have elaborated how co-drawing can be a valuable method within a mode of working we have come to call cross ethnography: explorative, multimodal, and collaborative ethnographic research. We used an inquiry into 'limited knowing', an empirical phenomenon from our fieldworks, as a case to explore the potential of co-drawing for collaborative analysis.

Our co-drawing involved creating hand-drawn imagery on one sheet of paper and handwritten notes on another. Reusing an envelope, we sent these materials back and forth between us by snail mail. In co-drawing, text and drawing were two interwoven ways of contemplative line-making that helped us express and think through what the notion of 'limits to knowing' means and does in our respective farming field sites. While we both drew and wrote with our own field sites in mind, our aim was not to compare our cases nor come to a shared conclusion. Instead, we were curious to find points of convergence and dissonance that would help us see anew and generate insights beyond our individual fieldwork experiences. As details of our fieldworks flew through and between us (Pink and Morgan 2013: 354), we engaged with our own, each other's, and co-created research materials in multimodal ways. This had us (re)live, (re)view, (re)think, and (re)imagine fieldwork

experiences, perspectives, and insights. The co-created drawing became a composition and condensation in lines and colours that helped us make sense across ethnographic field sites.

In the pages above, we have explicated three ways in which co-drawing holds potential for enriching and deepening the research process: its capacity to generate insights through multisensory, embodied and affective registers and the resonance between text and image; the invitation and inevitability of staying with the process of sense-making; and its conduciveness to self-reflection. Here, we want to emphasise that working together in multimodal ways emerged from our shared wish to explore not only its generative and reflective potential, but also to deepen and broaden our PhD journeys. We did this by following our intuitive need to make sense differently. Cross ethnography is, as such, an expression of our "investment in the potential that insight may emerge as a reflective action sparked by a creative impulse that can help to see things in a critically different way" (Sullivan 2008: 242 in Selkrig 2014: 27). As Estalella and Criado (2023) remind us, creativeness and inventiveness are inherent to ethnographic work. Being generally unpredictable and unruly, ethnographic encounters always require improvisation. With cross ethnography, we work to explicitly extend the inventive condition of the field encounter into analysis (Estalella and Criado 2023).

Importantly, we believe our approach to following our creative impulses is applicable beyond the PhD stage to include other moments in academic work and careers. Drawing together is an accessible example of cross ethnography as it does not require specialised equipment and can be done anywhere in a relatively short amount of time. This was a critical consideration for us, given that our multimodal collaboration – even though it enriches our individual processes of sense-making – mostly takes place on the side of our individual PhD projects. Accessibility and feasibility matter for doing differently-together. This applies not only to materials and techniques, but also to time. The question of doing academic work differently ought not to be about adding more tasks and hours to already full workdays, but to instead use the timespace we have in meaningful and joyful ways (see also Ballestero and Winthereik 2021); to allow for the kind of joy that guides us both towards possibilities, and to one another (Murphy 2025).

While this article is focused on co-drawing, the ideas we present are not bound to drawing together specifically. What we are arguing for, through the example of co-drawing, are different shapes and forms of multimodal and collaborative ethnographic work. Through the methodological contributions of this article, we join calls for working differently-together: to pluralise knowledge and its forms of creation, to stay with, and on, the social side of research, and to stimulate curiosity and creative impulses.

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