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### **Scribble: postdevelopmental art, or 'the becoming that breaks out of time.'**

#### **Abstract/Introduction**

Children's scribble is often under-valued and thrown away as junk. It is a ubiquitous part of young children's mark making, and from a developmental perspective is invariably labelled early, random, unintentional, at best experimental mark-making, indicative of a child's movement towards more mature communication. Educationalists may even be trained to spot fixed stages of development through children's scribble, as adults gradually persuade the child towards written or drawn recognisable shapes.

What is visible is not necessarily legible. Developmental educationalists' observations on scribble run very little further than reductive categorisation. For example, art educationalist Victor Lowenfeld fixed scribble as the first stage of creative and mental growth in human development (aged 2), viewing it as 'simply records of enjoyable kinaesthetic activity, not attempts at portraying the visual world.' We now know it is glib at best and discriminatory at worst to label the scribbles of primates and children as 'primitive' marks towards increasingly sophisticated artistic evolution. How much- or how little- progress is developmental or linear, particularly the playful, creative kinds?

If writing is visually representing verbal communication in an encoded, discernable form, scribble's code is less readable. Scribble escapes through the holes in the sieve, in that it is marked out by nonsensical, non-durable, or illegible forms of transfer. Scribble is therefore not strictly proto-writing, or deliberate mnemonic symbols, as with children's attempts at recognizable letters forms. Scribble is a riddle. Given examining a riddle requires lateral methods, this piece will draw from a selection of ideas by key thinkers mixed with adult and children's artistic practices, not in pursuit of a single –or even cohesive- argument, but a postmodern, post-developmental, somewhat fragmented series of scribbles on the subject.

The artist Paul Klee –among others- searched through his work for something freer and younger than writing or drawing, not just as a child is young, but as a process or culture starting out is at the same time complete in and of itself; what he called 'a line that eats and digests scribbles.' Using young children's scribbles juxtaposed with avant-garde artworks, this chapter will explore and illustrate how we might define scribble, its practices and institutional expressions related to 'development' and artistic creation, and explore how scribble is characteristic of what critic Georges Bataille (1929) termed the 'informe' or formless, falling beyond the boundaries of reason and control; a postdevelopmental 'capture of forces'. Full of bodily sensation, sensory beauty and dynamism, scribble has the potential to be as young or as old; as timeless as air. As such, scribble is a critique of single-path homogenising development, and via an unconditioning of the known, a reconsideration beyond developmental limits.

## defining scribble

‘Scribble’s origins are mid-15c., from Medieval Latin *scribillare*, diminutive of Latin *scribere* ‘to write’ (from root ‘skribh’-to cut). The noun, ‘hurried or careless writing,’ emerged in the 1570s, from the verb.

Naville & Marbacher’s recipe for development *From Scribbling to Writing* (1991) lists ‘feel’ in the fingers (tactile-kinaesthetic perception), mobility (fine motor coordination) and muscular control (fine dosage of tonic impulses) as all that is required of either. For them, a child in ‘the scribbling stage’ is not drawing symbols for objects. Children like to scribble because it gives them a chance to move their hands and arms around freely. The act of scribbling is kinaesthetic. No educator expects children to ‘pick reading or writing up’ yet, oddly that remains the approach to scribble and much drawing, as ‘naturally’ acquired. Bryant Cratty (1986) termed scribbling ‘motor babbling’, implying that just as babbling is a natural way to acquire language, scribbling is a natural gateway to motor and muscle control or coordination.

For Dewey, experience came to mean not an empirical act of representing the external world, nor was it anchored in the layering of child development in a linear model of psychological motivation and growth. ‘Rather, it came to mean a *shared social activity of symbolically mediated behaviour* which seeks to discover *possibilities* of our *objective situations* in the *natural world* for meaningful, intelligent and fulfilling *ends*. And the skill at doing this Dewey calls ‘art’ (Alexander, 1996, p. 119; emphasis in original). But Rudolf Steiner has always thought of it first. Steiner’s philosophy of child education and development is concerned with the detail of organic processes, focusing equally on each phase of development, ‘seeing the relationship between the whole and the parts, and not valuing the stage of “flowering”, for example, more than that of “foliage”’ (Alwyn, 1997, p.20). Across fourteen lectures given in Yorkshire in 1923, Steiner pre-empts Dewey’s model of education as ‘growing’ (Dewey 1938, p.36) using metaphors of ‘arresting’ or ‘forcing’ versus ‘liberating’ in the case of the arts, saying that ‘if we force intellectual powers in the child we arrest growth, but if we liberate the forces of growth, we approach the intellect by way of art’ (Steiner 1972, p.123).

There are striking similarities between the developmental paths described by psychologist Lev Vygotsky and education reformer Rudolf Steiner, who both saw development proceeding through gesture and speech to thinking; ‘gesture [being] the initial visual sign that contains the child’s future writing as the acorn contains the oak’ (Vygotsky 1978 pp107-8). In the beginning, argued Vygotsky, language has an entirely affective-volitional character, where children go through transitional phases such as private speech before inner speech, or babbling before thinking. Yet is scribble not a visualised form of babble **and** thinking? It could be argued that scribble operates like psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas’s notion of the ‘unthought known’ (1987): manifestations of preverbal, unschematised early experiences which may determine behaviour unconsciously, yet are barred to conscious thought or direct expression. Scribbles are recognised as symbolic drawing development of some kind, revealing feeling, often at unconscious level. Lowenfeld linked scribbles to the child’s experience of ‘enjoyment in motion’ (Lowenfeld 1982 p156) and more recently John Mathews (1999) sees them as ‘action representations, that is, representations of an object’s motion’. It is thus characteristic of the scribble to be on the move, just as the scribbler is.

In her study of conflicting paradigms of vision in drawing development research, Sheila Paine lists many stakeholders:

‘psychologists, artists, educators, designers, art historians, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists’, all of whom essentially hold different views and categories of drawing and development associated within their discipline, but sharing a ‘medieval view of the activities of children as trivially playful because essentially not adult’ (Paine 1992 p4).

She feels that is why sculptor Eric Gill’s call to ‘abolish art and teach drawing’ in 1941 (arguing, like teacher Rudolphe Töpffer in 1848, for the superiority of children’s drawing) was so provocative. Paine also points to philosopher Henri Rousseau’s ‘extraordinary fantasy of the development of one child, Emile’ serving his father’s vision with framed drawing “specimens” round the room in degrees of perceived progress, as having ‘persisted far beyond its credibility’ as a model of researching drawing development, especially given Rousseau apparently actually knew very little about either art or parenting.

Friedrich Schiller’s view of the “wise child” paired with “noble savage” fostered his revolt against affectation, whilst Töpffer’s analysis of children’s drawings (compared with graffiti in Pompeii and on soldier’s barrack walls) pointed to the intuitive, instinctive conceptions of drawing often lost with schooling. Idealistic views such as those of Friedrich Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi are thought to stem from their own suffering at school, and ironically resulted in rigid systems of for the teaching of drawing, linked to Jean Piaget’s evolutionary, followed by Jerome Bruner’s cognitive growth models. All this drove what George Boaz calls the ‘cult of childhood’ as a form of cultural primitivism, denying the child their reality and serving to displace adult artist or educator inadequacies (Boaz 1966 pp75-80). Paine reminds us that researchers have enough examples of children exceeding or disrupting staged schema (the subject, Margaret, drawing *God Carrying a Soul up to Heaven* at 4 years 8 months, for example) to emphasise *variation*.

Psychotherapist Melanie Klein’s conclusion to her earliest work ‘The Development of a Child’ (1921) reflects on the relation of education to psychoanalysis. In case study material featuring her own son which she called ‘a case of upbringing with analytic features’, she argued for allowing and encouraging children greater curiosity and freedom. The irony was that her own son revealed he did not necessarily want to know more *from her*. As Klein respectfully noted, ‘on the other side, there is a great deal that the child holds back that belongs to the development of the child.’ Klein called this ‘development as it takes place’. (p.44) Another of Klein’s young cases, Inge, wrote letters to her therapist which contained ‘nothing but scribbles’ (p.53). Inge, however, could say a great deal about these phantasy letters and Klein ‘knew that she wished to write beautifully and quickly like grown-ups.’ Klein commented in her notes that ‘the compromise between this wish and her intention was scribbling,’ (p.72) and her later paper on child analysis (1927) spoke of the ‘enormous complexity of development we find in even very little ones [and] their severe conflicts’ (Klein quoted in Britzman 2015 p43).

Once it got around that I valued scribble whilst researching it in a Primary school, quite a few children presented me with scribble as gifts. Some of these children had special educational

needs and I was reminded that although what they called writing falls short of the usual educational assessment for their age, the pieces spoke of a very successful compromise between wish and intention, or development as it takes place:

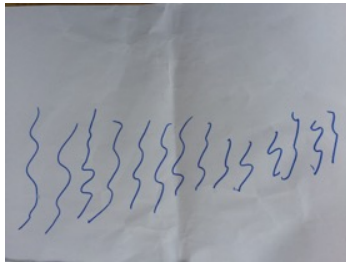


Fig. 1 Example of scribble gifted in the playground. Felt-tip pen. Age 9. Feb 2018

I would suggest that any timeline of links between scribble, drawing, writing and the formation of a child is thus more suggestive of fixed cultural models serving subjective if not suspect psychological ends. How children and mark-making “grow up” is perhaps more complex, associative, and ‘in-the-moment’ than we might like to admit.

### **scribble as developmental marker**

With the young, scribbling is frequently categorized in fixed developmental phases, “milestones” or stages, as a prescription:

Stage 1: (broadly 1-2yrs old) “random” or uncontrolled scribbling, featuring large movements from the shoulder, fist-held tools, a whole body scrubbing motion and an emphasis on sensory experience. Little or no concern for what marks are made.

Stage 2: (2-3yrs old) “controlled” scribbling; attributed to better muscle control and pencil grip, children make repeated marks on the page—open circles, diagonal, curved, horizontal, or vertical lines.

Stage 3: (3+yrs) moving towards controlled lines and patterns that are viewed as emerging or early signs of ‘developmental’ writing, the naming of scribbling, or ‘fortuitous realism’. (Lowenfeld, 1949)

The astonishing influence of Viktor Lowenfeld’s study *Creative and Mental Growth* of 1949 has produced the lasting conviction (Salome & Moore 2010), particularly in American education, that what follows scribble are the ‘pre-schematic stage’ (‘floating organisation’ of marks and symbols, 3-7yrs), the ‘schematic stage’ (repeated symbols for objects, such as stick-figures, 6-11yrs), the ‘transitional stage’ (some perspective with linear contradictions) and finally, the ‘dawning realism and pseudorealism stages’ (producing art work in the manner of adult artists, 9yrs+) before the adult period of ‘decision or crisis’).

As with many developmental scales, questions remain as to what exact purpose the categories serve, and though psychologist Rhoda Kellog claimed that ‘drawing ability is more closely related to chronological age than almost any other behaviour’ (Kellog 1959 p.129) she also admitted that her study of over 100,000 drawings and paintings made by children age 2-4 can ‘prove’ nothing but that ‘all human activity has unity with the physical universe’ (Kellog 1959 p124). Interestingly, she observed teachers encouraging anxious, non-drawing children to return to scribbling to allow them to relax ‘for all children are artists when free to fall back

on the scribbles' (Kellog 1959 p126). Kellog was one of the first to point out that our vocabulary to describe children's 'pictures' was impoverished, and that assumptions of children 'trying' to picture external reality as if at some constant life drawing class is erroneous. Her research observed children expressing 'inner imagery' (p.8) 'rhythmic body balance' (p.13), and, in the attempt to categorise early drawing types into what she calls 'sequential unfolding' (p.1), Kellog listed '20 basic scribbles' and documented them.

Claire Golomb (1993) later simplified Kellog's model as it proved awkward to use in further research, focusing on two types of scribble: loops and circles and parallel lines. This, logically enough, co-joined with research such as Chris Athey's (1990), resulted in schemas such as 'dynamic, circular, enclosure, vertical and rotation' which is still applied in Early Years education today. Yet schemas are both visually and physically predetermined, carrying the assumption that all children, whatever the diversity of their personal, cultural, social, physical or aesthetic circumstances, will 'fit' somehow (or adults will find a fit) and thus – conveniently enough- the children will be testable by those measures. Is this really Bataille's vision of the 'mathematical frock coat' that form wears, to avoid facing the possibility of the formless world? (Bataille 1929 p382).

Social studies exposés of race and social class deprivation and underachievement as the consequence of educational 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton 1948; Rist 1970; 2000) demonstrate school systems (with its sets, streams and schemas) *conform* to, rather than *transform* negative social effects. Similarly, after decades of critiquing the barriers to cultural and linguistic capital, Shirley Brice-Heath now argues for 'meandered learning' in ways that acknowledge the importance of 'hands-on' haptic experiences: what she calls the 'thinking hand' (2014), citing treatises on early child development which underscore the relationship between learning structured symbolic systems and exploring and representing the world with the hands and arms through gesture (McNeill 2005; Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl 1999), where gestures are both the imagery and components of language. This in turn links to socio-dramatic play lending narrative and meaning to the 'imagery-language-dialectic' (McNeill 2005) of gesture and mark-making (Brice-Heath 2013). The smallest element of McNeil's dialectic is called the 'growth point;' a snapshot moment of an utterance at its beginning psychological stage.

Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner's study *Artful Scribbles* (1980), aware that 'educators who should know better- 'use 'scribble' as 'an expression of disparagement' (p.18), also insisted on the link from scribble to the child's other 'evolving capacities' (p.14). Though Gardner's observations of his own children's pleasure in mark-making are described as 'primitive' or 'nascent ability to use a tool and create something with it' (p.24), one episode of frenzied scribbles (two dozen drawings in less than ten minutes) he declares a 'microgenesis' of temporal, spatial and motor-development, as if scribbling was to the toddler like an athlete's programme of muscle development. Gardner recognised how scribble, action and babble ('running through a corpus of words and sounds') often play out together with the young child, in half-conscious states, where: 'impersonal developmental forces, the stuff of growth itself, rather than the child's own emergent skills of planning seem regnant', though he also admitted 'we will not be able find a final -or even a first- cause for what is intrinsic to the processes of development' (Gardner 1980 pp.33-37).



Fig.2 Wall action scribble in chalk. Age 5. Feb. 2018

On one such corpus observation of a Reception (age 5) child, I watched a boy scribble for over ten minutes on a wall board and the surrounding bricks outside, accompanied throughout by a running humming, singing rap commentary ('ooh, ooh, red and blue, bhaji, bhaji, in the dot-dot-dot-dot, wah, wah, wah, wah, a-go, a-go, les' go, rah, rah, rah, I'm in the lava, in the lava, I've got a sabre and a star and a star...') with frenetic jiggling or dance steps. This all whilst also holding a large plastic steering wheel, a glove and an orange in one hand, and his chalk in the other.

With the major rupture that abstract expressionism brought to the arts, critic Harold Rosenberg described the canvas for 'action paintings' as 'an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyse or express an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event' (Rosenberg, 1952, p.324). Throwing your energies into a charged moment of creation was central to the feel and expressiveness of the event.

Children (at this phase) are attracted to creative energy, and freely participate in such happenings, particularly outside, as did I and a few others, joining in the dance movements and watching the scribble event intently. Yet, interpreting this as 'microgenesis' patronises the endeavour as abnormally small, whereas the actions are actually writ large, and represent an emergence of discernible, continuous growth. When one child asked, "Are you making a scribble?" the artist replied "No, a picture." Relative status begins even here, and though "picture" is perhaps better than scribble, it is still a hopelessly impoverished description of the 'image-gesture-language-dialectic that actually took place. Once complete, with that characteristically abrupt "Finished!" he told us that it was "everything separated out: "me, sabre, lava..." etc, naming all the specific areas depicted in different colours. The whole action event was also a mapping of itself, like one of Steiner's famous blackboard lectures.

Children giving their scribbles names or titles has rather sneeringly been labelled 'romancing' or 'fortuitous realism' (Gardner, 1980; Grosse & Hayne, 1999; Colomb, 2004) yet Patricia Tarr's critical assessment (1990) suggests the close visual attention children give to scribble is suggestive of it being more than just movement, carrying representational meaning in quite as complex a process as any later artistic phases.

Children often extract a story form their art (not least because one is demanded of them), or, as Boaz laconically remind us, 'if one defines the end of art, ...as an optical illusion, someone has to be taken in' (Boaz 1966 p.82).

Developmental vocabulary offers a series of positional or directional metaphors (higher, middle, lower; working towards, working at, working deeper) and time, or age-based metaphors ('early', 'late', 'advanced', 'delayed', 'moving towards', and so on) marked out by medicalised and educational signposts or milestones coupled to demonstrable skills or abilities which children either fall short of, fit, or exceed. This views both skills and knowledge as product separated from process; even as untransferable. Theory must then be adapted to serve this questionable cause, from a (surely questionable) perceived process of decline in aesthetic production in young childhood towards adolescence followed by an eventual rebirth referred to by Gardner (1990) as the 'u-shaped curve' in aesthetic development, or Ofsted's criteria for an "unsuccessful" Reception year representing a "false start" in their report *Bold Beginnings* (2017 p.9). We must not imagine for a moment that children don't also feel these developmental strictures: whilst I was scribbling in a Reception class, a boy came up and urgently advised me "You better stop squiggling." Why?" I asked. "It might get messy, or not be right," he maintained. And this in a free-flow classroom!

This linearity has always been contested- even from within educational psychology- as for example Jerome Bruner's (1960) process-led viewpoint was that 'any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development'. Does not scribble – in all honesty- exist outside these markers?

### **scribble as artform**

In *Der Blaue Reiter*, (*The Blue Rider*, possibly the first journal to publish children's art for artistic reasons) painter Auguste Macke praised "savagely" (sic) artists and children's artwork, 'who have their own form, strong as thunder!' (Macke quoted in Bersson 2004 p522). David Maclagan, in his study of scribble and doodling, points to the possibility of a 'mythology of unconscious form creation', what the painter Barnett Newman called 'contrived spontaneity'. Maclagan argues that 'Modernism's quest for imagery as close as possible to the 'original' sources of creativity—in the 'primitive', the 'childish', the 'mad' or the 'outsider', for example— has arguably led, in each case, to the corruption of that source's innocence' (Maclagan 2013 p15).

'As for the innocence of eye' as George Boaz demanded in *The Cult of Childhood*, 'with what crime has the adult artist been charged?' (Boaz 1966 p92) This view of the child or naïve artist as clear channels to the primal forces of creativity is of course (hopelessly) Romantic, and may well be an artistic reaction to (over-developed) forms of modernity, allowing the adult artist a kind of illusory opportunity to 'invent themselves from scratch' or enjoy a 'perennial avant-garde', resisting the fetters and conventions of their times, avoiding formal instruction for an 'organic unfolding of intrinsic creative energy' (Wilson 1992 p19) often manifest in abstract or expressionist forms. Yet, to be fair to child artists, Wilson's research suggests that 'the graphic vocabulary of children's drawings seem nearly as regular as that of their verbal language. Cultural differences extended to syntax as well,' (Wilson 1992 p.21) so the power of cultural reference and adult direction is enormous. He argues that child art has lost the status it once had and with the 'postmodern disassembly of child art, the little child is no longer leading the way to artistic paradise.' For Wilson, 'the dream of children as creative artists was mere Modernist ideology. More and more, we see how absurd it was to believe that children could be kept in a perennial state of pre-conventional creativity' (Wilson 1992 p23).

The dilemma of artwork aspiring to certain conditions of the unconscious or child-like, such as has been implied in the work of Expressionist artist Paul Klee. Klee wrote at length about his own sketchy drawings, formally titled many of them scribbles, and reflected on the 'progress possible on the line', where 'the possibility ripened in me of harmonizing my swarming scribbles with firmly restraining linear boundaries. And this will bear for me a further fruit: the line that eats and digests scribbles' (Klee, 1964, p.260). Yet Klee, reacting to comparisons made between his work and that of children, pointed to a central contradiction:

'Child's play! ... The critics often say that my pictures resemble the scribbles and messes of children. I hope they do! The pictures that my little boy Felix paints are often better than mine because mine have been filtered through the brain'. (Klee quoted in Wiedmann, p.224)

'Don't translate my works to those of children... They are worlds apart... Never forget the child knows nothing of art... the artist on the contrary is concerned with the conscious formal compositions of his pictures, whose representational meaning comes about with intention, through associations of the unconscious.' (Klee quoted in Gardner, p.8)

There is an immediacy about scribble's kind of creativity; a rapid making in the moment, but we should resist the cliché that, like children's art, it arises directly from the unconscious without apparent purpose. As Heather Malin has observed, 'all too often children have been seen as all spontaneous, free expression and completely lacking intention in their art making.' (Malin, 2013, p.2) Malin reminds us of 'child-like' European artists such as Klee, Jean Dubuffet or Wassily Kandinsky who may have contributed to this notion of the child artist. It is important to remember that, though aspiring to the condition or spirit of the child in their material and conceptual approaches, these artists did not simply emulate children's art techniques and in fact took pains to highlight key distinctions between trained adult artists and children; their work being described as 'a form of art which heads towards childhood... with the means available to adults' (Alenchinsky cited in Lambert, 1984, p183).

Scribble has no 'form' in terms of art practice, as drawing or painting do. Like Klee's 'child-like' art, George Bataille's idea of 'l'informe' or formlessness was a reaction to formalist, rationalist classification and linear structure within the arts. Of course resistance to form concedes that art is concerned with form (or visual shape as a metaphor for conceptual form). As Bataille and others predicted, over the course of the twentieth century, the very notion of *form* became suspect, creating a challenge for the visual arts: to find a form for formlessness. Scribble is just that, perhaps.

Rolande Barthes, writing about the abstract artist (and master scribbler) Cy Twombly, argues:

'The fact that his 'graphisms', his compositions, are 'gauche' refers [Twombly] to the circle of the excluded, the marginal, where he finds himself, of course, with the children, the disabled, (or the 'lefty') as a kind of blind man.' (Barthes 1982 p163)

Twombly paints by evoking the act of left-handed, awkward handwriting (labelled 'guache by Barthes'). Twombly both breaks with the rules and plays with the movement possible,



experimenting by drawing with his left hand, by balancing on a friend's shoulders or in the dark in order to arrive at what he called 'primordial freshness'. (Pinkus-Witton, 1974).



Fig.3. spectators in front of Cy Twombly's *Untitled* and *Bacchus*  
Musuem Of Metropolitan Art & Tate Gallery

Jacques Derrida's characteristic of drawing is also a relation to blindness with the artist groping for marks, and the drawing itself a blind or 'intransitive act', an image drawn in turn from artist Henri Michaux's writing:

Line loathe to " arrive," line of blind investigation. Leading nowhere, intending neither to be artful or interesting, traversing itself without flinching, without turning away, without twisting, without clinging to anything, without the perception of any object, landscape, figure. Sure of step, sleepwalking line. Curved here and there, yet never entwining. (Michaux 2001 p11).

A view begins to emerge that children's artwork –setting out, rather than arriving- has its own rules and meanings, linked to Peter Fuller's notion that 'all good drawing is 'transitional' (Fuller 1985 p.7). Here development is continuous, incremental and cumulative. Fuller argues that the person drawing, by mingling subjective and objective experience in a way which transcends fantasy or the factual rendition of obvious perception, 'creates... an illusion of a third area of experience- unattainable though say dreaming or photography- to which the word 'revelation' can legitimately be applied'(p7). Thus, 'good drawing mingles perception and aperception.'(p.13)

Fuller cites the artist Roger Fry quoting the words of a child, who, when asked how she produced her drawings said: 'I think, and then I draw a line around my think.' [in Fuller 1985, p.8].



Fig.4. Scribble produced at home. Felt-tip pen, Age 2.

Madeline's scribble, in the 'third space', is in advance of her being able to articulate it in language, but it is clear evidence of the complexity of her thinking in the moment of making: bold curves, sweeps, dots and dashes, and seminal use of space.

## scribble as vibration of thinking and resistance

‘conjugate deterritorialised flows. Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves with new points located outside the limits and in other directions. Write, form a rhizome.’

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, *A Thousand Plateaus* p.12)

Gille Deleuze’s use of iris roots as a metaphor for networking was transformed to the rhizome paradigm with Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). François Dosse describes the rhizome as ‘a different way of thinking along horizontal lines, on the plane of immanence, according to a botanical model of rhizomatic plants with proliferating horizontal ramifications’ (Dosse, 2007, p.361). The rhizome, with its horizontal shoots, growing non-hierarchically (unlike the tree of knowledge or family tree)- was used as a weapon against hierarchical cause-and-effect, with neither starting point nor end but infinite number of meaningful connections, including breaks called ‘signifying ruptures’ or offshoots, functioning like cuttings. Without orthodox roots, a series of ‘folds’ emerges. Dosse suggests this has caused simplified readings ‘sacrificing content for collage’ (Dosse 2007 p363) where in fact the idea of transversality, as branches form in all directions, allows for rigorous examination of ‘a plane of consistency of multiplicities’, like those of a plateau. Shoots, genetic material, cells and neurons operate in ‘uncertain, probabilistic systems’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987 p17).

‘The rhizome is neither a matter of tracing something already there nor some genealogical ancestry: it is open to novelty, to capture, towards forever new lines of flight, an opening onto an outside.’ (Dosse 2007 p364)

Though critics such as Badiou have warned of ‘the tyranny of revisionism’ behind the rhizome, the metaphor has undoubtedly had huge influence for rethinking artistic creation: neither focusing on the quest for mimesis nor truth in representation, but a series of ‘becomings’: places where various forms cross, how they meet, creases in the fold, and certain lines of flight.

Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizomatic networks’ inform Marg Sellers’ (2013) lyrical phrase ‘becoming curriculum,’ emphasising how given children can produce their own subjectivities through what matters most to them. Terms such as ‘emergence’, ‘tracings’ resist hierarchical knowledge structures, yet, as Elizabeth Wood & Helen Hedges (2016) point out, there is a risk that educational systems too loose and mercurial would not necessarily produce life and culture-changing educational results, such as greater world literacy. Their term ‘working theories’ allows for William Pinar’s (2011) dynamic interpretation of curriculum, whilst acknowledging the working, changing theories of play and learning that teachers and children themselves experience.

Deleuze characterised the research undertaken with Guattari as ‘a vegetal model of thought’; (Deleuze 1995 pxvii) with becoming as a model of inventing and inhabiting territory; a process of individuation, ‘constituted as a series of striations or phase transitions within a constantly singularising entity that’s understood less as a pre-existing form than as an

ongoing series of variations.’ (Deleuze 1995 p86) These variations move through self-organising patterns called ‘refrains.’

‘In the case of the child, gestural, mimetic, ludic, and other semiotic systems regain their freedom and extricate themselves from the “tracing”, that is, from the dominant competence of the teacher’s language ’(Deleuze & Guattari 1987 p16).

Scribble might be seen as the child’s tracing out of the hegemony of the signifier.



Fig. 5. Scribble inspired by Big Hero6.  
Felt-tip pen. Age 6.

### **scribble’s inconclusive conclusion**

‘We may be inclined to view this field as a battle field: since the various elements- of cognitive, linguistic and physical development- are so intensely fought over and occur in different patterns in competing theories which, at different times, gain dominance’ (Alwyn 1997 p.19).

Through a post-developmental lens, developmental norms, standards or stages can be questioned as not necessarily having to be linear (Evangelou et al. 2009) but viewed as culturally deterministic and hegemonic (Blaise 2010). If one sees either childhood or scribble as a developmental given, reduced to a harmless, soon-over homogenous learning stage, this is surely oversimplifying what childhood or scribble might be.

Howard Gardner’s recent (2017) reflections of his scribble study of 30 years earlier points to changed perspective:

...like others at the time, I was tremendously affected by the work of psychologist Jean Piaget and especially the universal stages of development that he laid out. I now feel that, while a convenient expositional term, "stages" may be too stark a term. Much of development turns out to be smooth; other aspects can be jagged, containing both "progressive" and "regressive" facets. ... In marked contrast, today I regard developmental trends as being domain-specific: what is happening with symbolization in the graphic area may, but might not, be related to symbolization in language, or pretend play, or dance, or musical expression and the like. (Gardner, 2011, p.157 )

Early childhood development draws on predominantly positivist ontology and epistemology around the biological processes of aging, the mechanisms of learning, cognitive, social, emotional change or adaptation, which has been tested, rated and measured in phases, scales, categories and norms through which a number of western developmental ‘truths’ have come to be understood. Educationalists and policy-makers have, in turn, perhaps too-unquestioningly taken up such categories and evidence-bases wholesale as given or proven markers; milestones of educational growth and achievement, allowing these to shape (or progressively sequence) learning goals, curricula, pedagogies and assessment on that same basis. Taken too literally, they become a kind of trap.

Rather than measuring object-phenomena (Rousseau’s ‘sure hand’, Nicolaidis’ rules of drawing’, O’Connor’s ‘superior visual perception’ or Henley’s ‘developmental disablement’) transitional understanding allows for analysis of expressive, innocent, less-influenced, less repressed marks (Paine citing Franz Cizek 1992 p8),

Children’s drawings often seem to display *in their own terms* many of the concepts usually associated with mature adult performance: control of the media, subtlety economy or complexity of expression (in images or ideas underpinning them), and great imagination (Paine 1992 p11).

Mathews observed Nursery age children drawing alone and with peers, noting dynamic reciprocal processes such as skidding marks accompanied by vocalisations, harmonising and resonating, drawing as mark-making that encompasses representation, time and space. These correspondences between action and speech become part of what he calls ‘action representation’ in ‘continual dialogue between child and drawing production’, those ‘cross-modal associations which are the basis of aesthetic sensibility’ (Mathews 1999 pp31-34). These ‘kinematic actions’ are grouped together in a drawing: meaning-making, dynamic action and effect according to creative, not developmental purpose, forming a ‘four-dimensional language’ (Mathews 1999 p38). Mathews resists developmental models in favour of viewing ‘the symbolic systems used by the child [as] legitimate and powerful systems capable of capturing the information the child feels essential.’ The media is the message, as drawing *itself* ‘actually initiates and guides the child’s further detection of structure’. (Mathews 1999 p33) As John Berger said, ‘drawing is discovery (Berger 2005 p3).



Fig. 6. Scribble/manga inspired drawing. Pencil and felt-tip pen. Age 10. Feb 2018. Mathews argued that scribbles are invariably where we can best see a child’s meaning as free-flow mark making is never random, if it is spontaneous, not imposed or directed. Anyone who sees a child singing, humming, muttering, beating our rhythms as they begin to draw and paint he considers is also making ‘an intellectual journey which has musical, linguistic, logical and mathematical as well as aesthetic aspects’ (Mathews 1999 p23). Gadamer’s open-ended model of a conversation, where each remark calls for another, emphasises the role of

difference and disagreement in the formation of understanding, as does his attachment to play as a defining characteristic of language and art. Like play, scribble's key is that it is *unfinished*; its 'metaphorical sense draws our attention to a to and fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end' (Gadamer 2004 p103).

Just as 'evolutionary schemes may be forced to abandon the old model of the tree and descent' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987 p10) 'development' actually means very little outside of its application, as education is not rule-bound but an unpredictable, open-ended *process*. Richard Jolley argued that direct observation of picture-making processes 'may provide us with a new theoretical framework for understanding children's development in the twenty-first century' (Jolley 2010 p. 318), but to break with categorising schemas we have used for centuries is no easy matter and requires more than just an academic desire for change. But traditions are for transforming. Rhizomes – and scribbles- are non-compliant. I believe that C21st children themselves are creating the conditions for change as they shift away from trust in fixed, testable categories to modern, digital, social, fluid experiences of cultural exchange. Development needs to be uncoupled from milestones, academic selection, setting, ability grouping, and labelling. Education as formation ('Bildung') allows us all to be individuals in the making, where the motivation of wanting to understand one another 'implies a process of transformation,' (Nixon 2017 p56) rather than conformity.

Is it the case that 'for academics to be happy, the universe must have shape?' (Bataille, 1929, p.my trans). If postdevelopmental thinking allows us to rethink preconditioned givens and imagine development differently, then understanding of children's scribble fortuitously remains in a somewhat confused state: combining child-centred models of children's creativity 'naturally' unfolding (strongly critiqued by Michael Eisner in the 1970s) with patterns or schema (Lowenfeld 1949; Gardner 1980; Athey 1990) to more recent thinking of 'less a ladder of stages with orderly progression towards a goal of competence (associated with visual realism), [than] a repertoire of personal styles and genres... ours to nurture or to narrow' (Anning quoting Wolf 1992, p.105).

Do we really grow up or perhaps grow along, grow inside? Do we really know what the most significant growth points are? Do we need beliefs, or just open observations? Early aesthetic experience – pre-verbal, pre-schematic, such as actions deep within our early life experiences– can form part of Bollas' 'unthought known'. As he put it, 'the experience of the object precedes the knowing of it.' These pre-thoughts–as with scribble- comprise 'apprehensive' rather than 'comprehensive' knowledge; a kind of subtext to the main text, known at some unknowable level, yet carrying the power to shape the psyche. Bollas' 'aesthetic mode' in adult life is a key aspect of well-being, epitomized in 'an experience of reverie or rapport which does not stimulate the self into thought' (Bollas 1987 p35).

In fact, 'if something has already become thought, it is no good for art', declared Rudolf Steiner (REF Goodwin) This repertoire of involvement, rapport and reverie is the unthought known in scribble, as we take a line for a walk and enjoy its sense of presence, unmeasured and unthinking. Scribbles, as evidenced by the fact that they are nearly always thrown away, resist 'being-there' as they are tracings of 'becoming.' Barthes' description of Twombly's scribbles as 'tracings' (markings) insists on the 'ing' suffix: the grammatical form known as the gerund, suggesting a continual present, a continuing dynamic activity instead of something represented and complete. The line takes time and IS time as a temporal trace, thus

scribble is in itself a form of growth rather than development, and as such it remains unfinished, always...

Title quote: 'The becoming that breaks out of time, yet is never reduced to it' taken from Dosse, François. (2011) *Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives, (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)* Columbia University Press.

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