

# generative scribing

A SOCIAL ART  
of the 21st CENTURY

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## **generative scribing**

*Generative scribing is a drawing process with which we open to the unknown to bring it to life—of, and for, a social body.*

My experience with this kind of work, where we operate from source, leads me to believe that the key to generative scribing is sensing from the heart.

It's not circling or hovering. It's not counting the minutes until a person stops speaking and we can go home. It's not staying comfortable with me-them. It's not *not* caring.

It is piercing through to something essential. Seeing clearly without fear of the result or consequence of what comes forward. It requires trust in the complete blankness of things. It can only happen when the social body (a handful or thousands of people) is committed to being together in place and time—and in right timing—committed to joining in the absolute present moment. (See appendix Figure 26.)

It's groping in the dark to find threads of hope, and getting that out and up on a wall for others to see.

It's believing that anyone who witnesses the drawing is an active participant in its creation. There is no "other."

There is a hand that holds a marker, that leans forward from the extended arm of an upright physical body acting purely on behalf of the whole.

I draw because we exist; I draw as a social act.

***Generative scribing is drawing to ease the challenge of societal inversion, where we are shifting from a state of division to a state of inclusion, traversing an unknown.***

I have often wondered—especially in light of symbolic art, such as that of indigenous peoples—about the true potential of scribing to cross physical and spiritual lines.

Can a scribed image embody the dimensionality of past, present, and future in a larger timelessness, all at once?

How far can we push the comprehensive limits of systems, and our own limits, to shift the place of understanding between known and unknown worlds? Can scribing generate a vibrational field that goes beyond literal words and transcends the moment?

To date, to attempt to shift into this space, I have taken an integrative approach to revealing unnamed wholeness; I've synthesized multiple threads of content into one encapsulating picture, or a series of pictures. In a way it's the opposite of storytelling, which I have interpreted as the sharing of existing data in linear flow.

Once when I approached three very large, looming, black banners of blank paper, I recalled a similar sensation of darkness, of uncertainty. (See appendix Figure 27.)

It was tied to a memory from a night sailing on the ocean with my dad and brother. We had charts, but there was no land in sight—just cold rolling waters, an impenetrable indigo through which the boat somehow cut. For a few hours, or maybe it was only one hour, we had no radio and no indication of whether storms or other vessels were headed our way.

But my dad, having navigated for years in all kinds of weather and water, has always been confident in his ability to read the conditions and guide a boat. That night—aside from a close encounter with a fishing vessel, which we approached more out of curiosity than in lost wandering—we were, indeed, fine.

***Generative scribes aid with societal tacking.***

As a verb, “to tack” is “to change course by turning a boat’s head into and through the wind.” As a noun, “tack” is “a small, sharp, broad-headed nail” and “a long stitch used to fasten fabrics together temporarily, prior to permanent sewing.” All of these meanings make sense in scribing! Scribed images can inform a redirection in corporate strategy (changing course), land a point with precise language (as a nail), and hold ideas together as they take shape (fasten).



***As our society rolls in and out of foggy waters, scribes can help chart the seas.***

Scribes create visual structures that aid in navigating disconnects. In doing so, we balance the challenges of the times with hope for our times. (See appendix Figure 28.)

This demands constant fluidity between sensing, comprehending, and crafting. Before drawing, I center myself. I find someone in the audience and look them in the eye to activate my heart. I question the structure and dynamics of the setting. I absorb many words before knowing which ones are the pearls and emptying those onto a two-dimensional plane.

## *We listen to empathize and to represent.*

It is with a continually swaying spirit—between what is and what could be—that I draw, that I write.

And, with a far-flung aspiration, I encourage anyone who has reached this point in the book to take on the challenge and transformational gifts that generative scribing has to offer. If your craft or practice is something other than scribing, then you can apply a generative approach to that too!

My experience is just a starting point. It's our opportunity, together, to further define this art form and tap its full possibility.



## **the call**

*"Our time is a time for crossing barriers,  
for erasing old categories—for probing around."*

—Marshall McLuhan

It is astounding to think about where scribing is today, as a practice, when it did not even exist just forty years ago. When I first got involved in 1995, it was before digital cameras, America Online and the Internet were just taking off, and the only way to share drawings with others remotely was through an elaborate process of redrawing, photocopying, and distributing copies by hand or post.

Knowing how much this practice has transformed over the past few decades, I can only imagine what the future will hold for scribing, and for generative scribing—forty, twenty, even five years out.

***Will generative scribing, which comes to life through a mix of intuition and social context, be one art-based answer to preserving the human spirit?***

When artificial intelligence has the ability—and superior acumen—to visually map a conversation, where will the human capacity fit in? How will scribes need to adapt their current methods, which will be increasingly challenged by technical permeation and by more diffused distribution?

Certainly there will be shifts having to do with time and distance. We already can draw digitally and project images onto mega-screens during conferences. And we can work remotely, using a tablet to live-stream our drawing into an online video meeting.

I think there will soon be more co-creation across time zones and between locations. I will be working on one image in one place, and someone else will be working on another image in another place. But the level of integration will increase.

Maybe we will work on the same image at once, or maybe our two images will simultaneously display side-by-side in another location. There will undoubtedly be new complexities to consider when the practice shifts beyond a place-based effort that is contained in one room, in one slice of time.

I wonder what will happen when both the number of scribes and the number of people in the participant-audience increase. Right now one person draws for many people. It is still usually through one person's hand that an image is crafted.

What will happen when more people can create an image at once? What if a hundred or a thousand people could visually contribute to one drawing simultaneously, the way they now provide input via a hashtag to a Twitter stream?

How will the visual maintain its aesthetic coherence? How will sensemaking occur, when multiple inputs lead to a data blitz?

I have no idea about the mechanics of this. But I do predict that the level of field activation will increase and thus will require an expanded container to hold the amplified energy.

***Generative scribes will be called to expand our consciousness and deepen our capacity.***

Generative scribing as we know it today—of the field, through one hand, for the field—will remain just that, or it will progress with the times to serve an evolving social field. As our species advances and expands its consciousness (and I trust it will), generative scribing, a burgeoning art form, will follow suit.

***If generative scribing is a participatory art, then the nature of its creation will change along with changes in the social field.***

We need people—of all ages and from all places—to take this practice into the streets and merge it with other art forms, to take it beyond corporate and organizational environments, to take it into parts of society where money doesn't determine where creativity can flourish, to grow this practice so that visual communication becomes as commonplace as writing a sentence or talking with a friend.

Since this is a visual medium, the more people who experience generative scribing—as makers, as part of the social fabric that requires the making—the more room and call there will be for invention and improvement of our methods.

With the fervent hope that we will increase our ability to see, meet the complexity of our times, and break through to a more harmonic way of co-existing with ourselves and our planet, I issue this plea: to expand the true potential of this unique art and its practice, and to serve our species, look inward.

