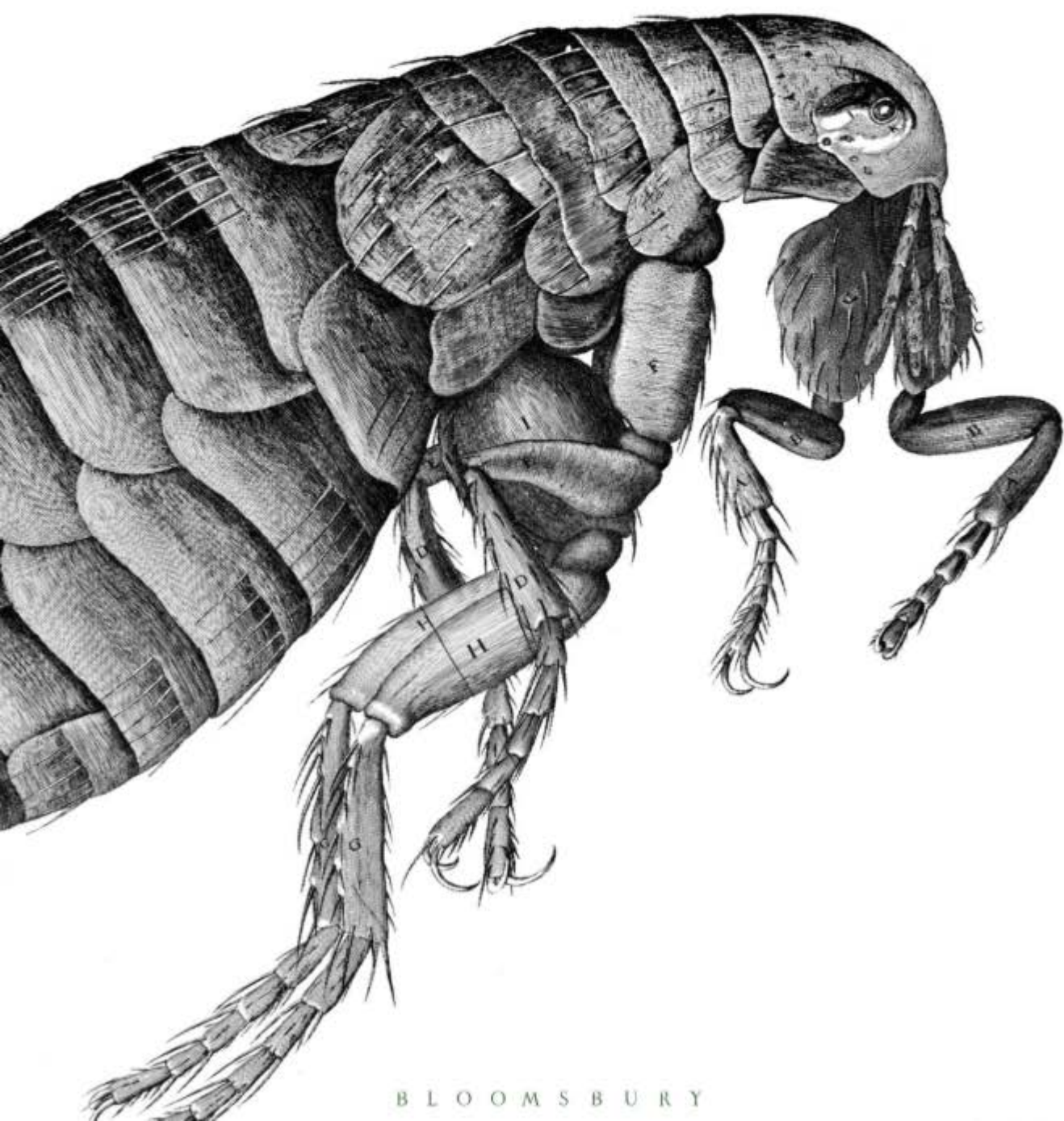


Sarah Casey and Gerry Davies

DRAWING INVESTIGATIONS

Graphic Relationships with Science,
Culture and Environment



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uncertain and survivors difficult to trace. In this work he used drawing to take statements from victims. Sitting in conversation with displaced people, drawing and dialogue formed a careful debriefing. By drawing alongside villagers and rendering their descriptions visual he took visual affidavits. The drawings account for the events they experienced, where and when they took place. They also establish who the perpetrators were, who they targeted and even what vehicles they took people away in. Drawn in pencil often in notebooks the drawings are purposefully investigative. While just below the surface they boil with anger Ahmed's drawings gather evidence, establish timelines and act as potential instruments for future moral and legal accounting.

Jason File: Drawing the body into life

Drawing as evidence also features in the practice of Jason File, a lawyer and artist with a multimedia practice that includes drawing. Recent art projects have seen File take an event from contemporary culture and re-frame it in the gallery, for example erasing a classified document.⁸⁶ Through this approach, material from a specific institutional context, such as international news or politics, is relocated and altered by insertion to the spaces of art, its aesthetic methods and critical discourses. File's aim is to reveal how the subject is changed through institutional process and the extent of the cultural and political impact on an audience's attitudes and behaviour.

Our interview with File at the start of this chapter focuses on his drawing project *The Earth and the Stars* (2015). File's subject was material encountered in his work for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), namely autopsy drawings from forensic examinations of human remains exhumed from Srebrenica and other sites of mass graves (Figure 6.6). File transcribes the autopsy drawings directly onto the gallery wall. Enlarged from just a few centimetres to approximately 1 metre in height the image is redrawn in dense charcoal lines. This material and its residue which falls to the shelf below speaks immediately of ash and remains; the forensic evidence of the drawing's making also suggests the cycle of organic carbon into and out of living bodies.

The original forensic drawings are fascinating in themselves and go some way to substantiate drawing as an analytic tool in contemporary science. To explain, in the course of prosecuting war crimes forensic specialists have excavated the bodies of thousands of victims from mass graves. In evidence gathering, photography could not clearly distinguish one body from another or their position in the layered grave, 'the bodies were mixed together, covered with soil'.⁸⁷ Nor could photographs differentiate human remains from fabric, mud or vegetation 'it was all organic matter'.⁸⁸ With their trained eye, forensic scientists could perceive masses, edges and differences



FIGURE 6.6 Jason File. *The Earth and the Stars* (2015). Documentation of site-specific drawing at Stroom, The Hague Charcoal on wall. 114 × 120 cm. © Jason File / photo: Sophie van Loewen.

in texture and so turned to drawing to understand and record the bodies in context. Many hundreds of drawings were made revealing body orientation, articulation and evidence of trauma. File describes the significance of ligatures and blindfolds. Drawing's value as an accurate instrument in the collection of evidence is demonstrated in the space for drawing on ICTY official forensic report form.

Jason File's *The Earth and the Stars* series takes selected drawings from this mass of data to represent a specific body, an individual. The work demonstrates a feature of drawing previously seen in the work of Nancy Spero and Ludwig Meidner of imaginatively projecting a body into other temporal and conceptual spaces. Into new spaces where lives lived, and lives lost, could be seen again. We can know so little of the individual victims of the former Yugoslavia, evidence collected *en-masse* is represented by examples only. Subject to legal rule and precedent, institutionally managed and presented in courts constrained by time and cost, only a small number of forensic drawings, of just a few individuals, must 'stand in' for entire families, villages and events. Jason File's approach to these drawings directly addresses this loss of individuality. By taking the drawings from their original context and making them art, File frees conceptual surplus in what are 'institutionally compressed images'.⁸⁹ Redrawn and exhibited in a gallery they surpass their legal role. They are revived as descriptions of people, as individuals, as the artist himself says 'they came to be human'.⁹⁰