

DRAWING TIME

Trace, Materiality and the Body in Drawing After 1940.

Edward John Krčma.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Edward Krčma

ABSTRACT

Drawing Time:

Trace, Materiality and the Body in Drawing After 1940.

Focusing on specific episodes from the rich history of drawing practice after 1940, this thesis examines issues of time, materiality and the body in relation to drawing's production and reception. The stakes and potentials of modern drawing remain largely under-theorized and under-acknowledged. Here I explore the way in which drawing involves an array of bodily, imaginative and affective investments; how it has been configured in relation to other technologies of representation; and how it has provided a small-scale, unspectacular yet complex means for artists to investigate problems of signification, materiality, and the registration of time. I concentrate largely on drawings from the 1940s and 50s, although I do also open onto a small number of key works from the late 1960s and early 70s, as well as some crucial contributions to contemporary practice.

My thesis is organised into five chapters, which are bracketed by an introduction and a coda. Chapter 1 explores the relationship between drawing, writing and cinema as it is played out in Henri Matisse's suite *Dessins: Thèmes et variations*, made in the early 1940s. Chapter 2 examines drawing's physical and discursive 'smallness,' framed with reference to Rosalind Krauss's formulation of the 'expanded fields' of artistic practice. Here I focus on the drawings of Wols, as well as drawing's 'flight from the page' in the late 1960s and early '70s. Chapter 3 looks at the mobile work of erasure in the drawing practices of both Willem de Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg. Chapter 4 explores drawing's immersive material engagements, specifically in relation to liquidity in the practices of Joseph Beuys and Marcel Broodthaers. Lastly, Chapter 5 brings my concerns up to date with an examination of Tacita Dean's blackboard drawings framed in relation to the digital/analogue binary.

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Introduction

Definitions of Drawing

Drawing is more productively conceived as a constellation of modalities than as a sharply defined set of technical procedures or material components. The benefit of using the term *modality* rather than *medium* is that the former privileges possibilities of action and capability, whereas the latter is primarily harnessed to the conventions of the deployment of particular physical elements.¹ This is not to say that modality and medium can or should be clearly divorced, and throughout this thesis I will stress the importance of regarding drawing as a *material* practice. But the distinction is useful, from the outset, in ensuring that attempts to articulate the potentials of drawing take aim from the best angle. So although it would be disabling *not* to address the question of how drawing should be defined (we would then be left in a conceptual no-man's-land), the need to avoid the arbitrary application of boundaries should also be emphasized. Consequently, when an attempt is made to answer the laboured question 'What is drawing?', the target is not a watertight categorical limit, but rather a richer and more precise exploration of what drawing can *do*.

This formulation distances my project from other influential ways of categorizing drawing. For example, the most explicit and unambiguous definition available is that provided by New York's Museum of Modern Art, which holds that a drawing is 'a unique work of art on paper.'² Such decisiveness is institutionally expedient and its rewards are obvious: it allows for the efficient partitioning of the museum's collection, to be housed and administered accordingly within separate departments. Drawing takes place on paper: this serves to separate it off from painting (which happens on canvas) and sculpture (which is manifested in three dimensions). The uniqueness of drawing distinguishes it from other

¹ Debates around the medium have been rekindled in recent years, owing primarily to the work of Rosalind Krauss. For productive critical responses to her formulations, see Alex Potts: 'Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s', *Art History* (Volume 27, Number 2, April, 2004), pp. 283-304; Michael Newman: 'Medium and Event in the Work of Tacita Dean', in *Tacita Dean* ex. cat. (2001), pp. 24-27; and Tamara Trodd's introduction to her unpublished PhD thesis, *Mediums and Technologies of Art Beyond Modernism* (University College London, 2005).

² MoMA's current use of this definition was confirmed by Kathy Curry by email (4th June 2007). The drawings department also houses works with a cardboard support.

paper-based media: both from photography and older forms of reproducible image-making (printmaking). The museum's drawings must also be considered art; this is to separate them not from other objects in the collection, but from all the other objects in the world excluded from that institutional and discursive system (including, that is, most drawings³). The historical range explored in this thesis is broad: from the 1940s to the present. It is by no means a survey, but a survey is not required to encounter forms of practice which we would want to call drawing, but that do not fit with MoMA's definition. What would be done, for example, with wall drawings like those of Sol LeWitt, Richard Tuttle or Giuseppe Penone, or the blackboard drawings of Joseph Beuys or Tacita Dean? Or even, more problematically, with the so-called 'drawings in space' of artists such as Eva Hesse and Gego? If, as I would argue, such flights from the page demand to be thought of in terms of drawing, or even themselves as species of drawing, then clearly MoMA's criterion of paperiness will prove more a hindrance than a help.

Functional institutional requirements might not be the only reason for seeking such definitional clarity, however. Clement Greenberg's arguments for 'medium specificity' were driven by a desire to construct a coherent narrative to account for Modernist painting's historical development, to establish a measure by which to understand and assess present contributions as meaningful interventions in an authentic, progressive, avant-garde project.⁴ And this agenda was by no means divorced from questions of modality, geared as it was to the production of aesthetic spoils the quality of which should rival those offered by the best art of the recent past. Yet with all the critiques of Greenberg's model of aesthetic experience, and the widespread abandonment of his faith in aesthetic quality as the ultimate guarantor of artistic value, his system of criteria has been unsparingly dismantled. Indeed, Greenberg himself had to confront the limit-case of his reliance upon 'medium specificity' as the prime issue for advanced art: what to do with a blank canvas tacked to a wall?

³ Of course, drawing operates across a hugely varied range of practices outside the field of art (industrial design, commercial advertising, cartographical enterprises, classroom whiteboard diagrams, the archaeological Harris matrix, distracted office-bound doodling, etc.). My engagement with such deployments of drawing will be very limited in this thesis. This is due to limitations of both available space and of expertise, as well as the need to maintain the coherence of the project. However, I do address the issue of drawing's 'expanded field' in Chapter 2.

⁴ For Greenberg's formulation of the theory of medium-specificity, see 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939), 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940), 'The Crisis of the Easel Picture' (1948) and 'Modernist Painting' (1960); all reprinted in John O'Brian (ed.): *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 volumes (1986-1993).

By the same token, what might the limit case of a conception of *drawing* look like, based upon a conception of its fundamental physical characteristics? For MoMA, it might be a barely marked piece of paper tacked to a wall (or perhaps to a desk). But perhaps even more dominant than the criterion of paperiness, is the widely held belief that drawing has fundamentally to do with *line*. This criterion is the most frequently cited in dictionary definitions of drawing, and continues also to sustain many academic definitions.⁵ Taking line as definitive, then, a limit case might look something like the famous Line of Apelles, with a line that becomes ever more subtle and refined.⁶ But one of the things that Pliny's story can be used to demonstrate is that however fine and elegant a line is, it is already also a mark, already has a thickness, and so constitutes itself as a field which can itself be marked. Of course, not all lines are materially manifested, so perhaps a limit case of drawing could be an imaginary or abstract line: Piero Manzoni's *The Infinite Line* (1960), perhaps, touching and deflating infinity,⁷ or the lines produced by vector digital drawing software, which only have thickness when printed or projected (as discussed in Chapter 5). But to make these immaterial lines fundamental to drawing would mean excluding material marks from our model, which also seems unsatisfying. Indeed, the injunction to alight upon any one key definitive physical trait, proposed as valid for all drawings, will ultimately prove disabling.

My premises will be different, and the partitionings I wish to construct will not be so impermeable or exclusive. As has already been said, the task of exploring drawing's modalities will be more pressing than that of arriving at any stable, universal definition.

⁵ Some dictionary definitions of drawing include: 'a picture or plan made by means of lines on a surface, especially one made with a pencil or pen without the use of colour.' (*Collins English Dictionary*); 'the art or technique of representing an object, figure, or plan by means of lines.' (*New Penguin English Dictionary*) An exception is *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines a drawing as: 'n. picture or diagram made with a pencil, pen, or crayon rather than paint;' however, as a verb, drawing is defined as to 'produce (a picture or diagram) by making lines and marks on paper.' Recently, Patrick Maynard, in a major study of drawing that differs considerably in agenda from the current one, has argued that 'marking lines over continuous surfaces seems to be at the heart of our idea of drawing.' (*Drawing Distinctions*, 2005), p. 62.

⁶ Pliny, in his *Natural History*, has it that Apelles once visited the house of the famous artist Protogenes on Rhodes. Finding him out, Apelles encountered only a prepared panel, on which he drew an extremely fine line. This was to stand as a kind of signature, the origin of which, given its perfection, Protogenes would surely recognize upon his return. He did so and, not to be outdone, Protogenes drew a subtler line over that of his rival, which he left waiting for Apelles, should he call again. When Apelles did return, and on encountering Protogenes's drawing, he drew a third line on top of and dividing the existing two, which was so subtle and refined that it ended this competitive display of craftsmanship, and Protogenes admitted defeat. See Michael Newman: 'Marking Time: Memory and Matter in the Work of Avis Newman', in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Inside the Visible, An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, In, Of and From the Feminine* (1996), pp. 271-9, and James Elkins: *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (1998), pp. 22ff.

⁷ On Manzoni, see Briony Fer: 'Series,' in *The Infinite Line* (2004), pp. 26-45.

Crucially, drawing's capacities and potentials are best specified *in relation* to other forms of practice. In a recent theorization to which I will refer in more detail shortly, Michael Newman argues that drawing might appear pre-historic and self-evident, but that 'the meaning and apparent ahistoricity of drawing is determined by the other technologies of representation that co-exist with it at any given moment.'⁸ Why draw? Why draw and not paint, sculpt, write, take photographs, dance or make films? Or rather, how is our conception of drawing inflected and enlivened when set in relation to this constellation of other practices and technologies? Throughout this thesis, I will be asserting the critical importance of drawing's ample capacity to bring into dialogue an array of very different visual, technical and semiotic modes. Such capacities we might call drawing's *affects*: its potential to affect and be affected within its field of operation.⁹

Importantly, once drawing is thought about *relationally*, it must also be thought about *historically*. The reason for this is that the field of relations in which it is embedded is always shifting, always becoming: new technologies emerge, new problems require solutions, new modes of experience invite exploration. So drawing, like any other category of practice, changes its identity over time: it is attributed with different capacities, put to different uses, given different dimensions. This mutability, the acknowledgement that definitions change, is both enabling and disabling. Disabling because the goal of a universal definition of drawing seems less and less possible to achieve. But enabling because that goal appears also to be less and less necessary or even desirable. To conceive of drawing as both relationally configured and as historically contingent is to unburden ourselves of the futile search for a final, immutable (while also non-arbitrary) definition. Rather, and more productively, it enables an exploration of drawing's specific potentials within an expanded field of cultural production at any given juncture.

The artistic mode to which drawing is most frequently compared is painting. Indeed, painting (and especially oil painting on canvas) is often used, implicitly or explicitly, as the natural standard against which drawing should be defined. So, following that logic: while painting has to do with patches and fields of colour, drawing has to do with monochrome

⁸ Michael Newman: 'The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (2003), p. 105.

⁹ The term 'affect' is often used, in a similar way to 'emotion,' to designate a dimension of specifically human subjective experience. As we will see in Chapter 1, not only can and should the term be separated from emotion, but affect can also be used to describe a whole spectrum of relational interactions. That is, it is not something proper to the human, but can also usefully describe the behaviour of concepts, for example.

line.¹⁰ Painting happens on canvas or panel; drawing happens on paper. Drawing is a dry medium; painting involves the messy materiality of liquids and pastes (see Chapter 4). Drawing is small, inexpensive and contingent, whereas painting is larger and more durable (see Chapter 2). Related to this latter point, and moving on to think about drawing as a *verb* and not just as a noun, it has conventionally been attributed a primacy and directness: it is the mode in which initial ideas for compositions and details are first developed, and is thus the thing closest to the artist's inner workings (see Chapters 1 and 3).¹¹ Painting, by contrast, before the modern period at least, took on the character of the resolved, completed, more fully 'digested' pictorial statement.

While none of these conventional divisions is strict (drawings can also be colourful; some drawings employ liquid means; not all paintings are larger than all drawings; the linear is not exclusive to drawing...), they are dominant and do persist. In 1995, Michael Craig-Martin defined drawing, loosely, via a set of general properties: 'spontaneity, creative speculation, experimentation, directness, simplicity, abbreviation, expressiveness, immediacy, personal vision, technical diversity, modesty of means, rawness, fragmentation, discontinuity, unfinishedness, and open-endedness.'¹² It hardly needs saying that not all drawing is spontaneous, simple or unfinished. But viewed against most painting (at least until the late 19th century), we might understand why these claims are made. But can we address the relation between drawing and painting with more precision?

At the beginning of a short text entitled 'Painting, or Signs and Marks,' written in 1917, Walter Benjamin argued: 'The graphic line marks out the area and so defines it by attaching itself to it as its background. Conversely, the graphic line can exist only against this background, so that a drawing that completely covered its background would cease to be a drawing.'¹³ Here, rather than focusing upon any particular material surface, Benjamin argues that drawing's identity has to do with a certain transitive relationship to its ground (whatever material form it takes). A drawing that *covers* its ground ceases to be a drawing and becomes, by implication, a painting. This distinction between a mark 'touching' or

¹⁰ Yve-Alain Bois deconstructs the hierarchized binary opposition between colour and line in his suggestive essay, 'Matisse and Arche-Drawing,' in which he argues that "The difference between a painting and a drawing is determined not by the axis presence/absence of colour... but by the number of colour parameters implicated in the relations of the whole." Bois: *Painting as Model* (1990), p.60.

¹¹ Deanna Petherbridge, for example, entitled her influential 1991 drawing exhibition, *The Primacy of Drawing* (London: South Bank Centre).

¹² Michael Craig-Martin: *Drawing The Line* (1995), p. 10.

¹³ Walter Benjamin: *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. (1996), p. 83.

‘covering’ a surface has been further explored in some more recent theorisations of drawing. Norman Bryson has argued that without oil painting’s ‘density and opacity’ permitting ‘endless acts of revision and alteration,’ the drawn line is always ‘raw’ and ‘on permanent view.’¹⁴ ‘If painting presents Being,’ Bryson argues, ‘the drawn line presents Becoming.’¹⁵ It is the openness of the drawn line with respect to painting that distinguishes the two media: painting shields the marks of its coming-into-being, while drawing performs no such withholding.¹⁶ To stand by this definition, we would have to re-classify the work of several artists usually discussed in terms of painting. Here, the linear skeins of Jackson Pollock would be among the most prominent; after all, they do not cover the canvas onto which they were dripped. But is it satisfying to talk of Pollock’s pictures in terms of drawing and not of painting? Several of the aforementioned conventions would mitigate against it: the heroic scale of Pollock’s pictures, their stretched canvas support, and the insistent liquidity of the paint, all make this re-categorization problematic.

By focusing on the individual *trait* rather than entire surfaces, Michael Newman inflects the issue of drawing’s distinction from painting rather differently: ‘The *trait* of drawing, as stroke, ‘touches’ the surface, bringing out its texture, in a way that is different from the way in which oil paint ‘covers’ the surface, unless painting is brought to the condition of drawing, as it is in watercolours, and certain oil-paintings of Cézanne.’¹⁷ So even if together the marks do not cover the entire surface, singly they might still be described as painted.¹⁸ Newman also introduces a certain potential for *non-exclusivity* in the attribution of categorical identities: painting can be ‘brought to the condition of drawing,’ as in the work of Cézanne.¹⁹ That is, paintings can contain marks that we might reasonably describe as drawn, or at least take on a meaningful relation to the conventions of drawing (Agnes

¹⁴ Norman Bryson: ‘A Walk for a Walk’s Sake,’ in de Zegher op.cit. 2003, p. 149.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 150.

¹⁶ Bryson’s model assumes in drawing a ‘fundamental principle of non-erasure’ (Ibid. p. 149), which gives it limited purchase in engaging with a number of drawings discussed in this thesis (issues of erasure are dealt with in detail in Chapters 3 and 5).

¹⁷ Newman op.cit. 2003, p. 95.

¹⁸ Watercolour and thinned oil paint provide a particular problem here, in that they neither cover nor touch their ground, but rather seep into it, like a stain. See Ibid. pp. 97-99.

¹⁹ This point was argued, if more briefly, by Deanna Petherbridge in 1991: “In an age where painting aspires to the condition of drawing, that is, where spontaneity, fragmentation and immediacy are privileged, the designation *drawing* seems only a matter of degree: it is perhaps more irresolute or intimate than a painting, or simply executed on paper and not on canvas.” *The Primacy of Drawing*, exhibition catalogue, p. 12. She continues: “The closer a drawing approaches a finished painting – the more it sublimates its brief – the more it is subject to the hegemony of sanctioned style;” (p.17) Petherbridge argues that drawing provides a space for artists to meet “outside the specificity of the period,” so that the paintings of Romney and Matisse are extremely different, their drawings are more comparable.

Martin's canvases would constitute an extreme case in this respect). And this dialogue is also reversible: drawings can be brought towards the condition of painting, as in some works by Joseph Beuys, for example. As outlined above, then, these categories are impure, involving overlap and oscillation along various *continuums* of qualities.

That said, drawing, in respect to painting, can be aligned with touch and with the open display of the trace. By emphasizing this quality, drawing is afforded newly resonant capacities for connection with other forms of practice based upon *contact*, such as casting or photography. This is indeed the trajectory of Newman's argument: he opens his discussion by addressing drawing to its mythic beginnings; to Pliny's story of the daughter of Butades tracing the outline of the flickering shadow of her departing lover on the wall. Depending upon contact and subsequently attesting to separation, here drawing 're-enacts desire and loss,' affording it 'a peculiar privilege in the deconstruction of presence.'²⁰ This argument hinges around the *indexical* status of the drawn mark, to use C.S. Peirce's vocabulary. The index is a sign that refers to its object through a physical or causal connection (a shadow, for example), rather than by resemblance or convention. Exploring the status of this indexical quality of the drawn mark, Newman closes his essay with a suggestive coda proposing an alignment between drawing and analogue photography.²¹

Elsewhere, Newman develops the ethical connotations of this formulation of drawing as contact:

'Whatever else it might be, drawing, in its moment of genesis, is contact. Thus its origin lies not in vision and light, but in blindness and obscurity, although it has its own lucidity and wisdom... What is at stake in this is an *ethos*, an 'ethic' not in the sense of a moral law, but as a way of being-in-the-world, that would include habits and bodily comportment towards things and others. It is an *ethos* of adherence, of touching and being touched, in the world and at the limit.'²²

Drawing, then, speaks more compellingly of the blindness of touch than the distance necessary to enable vision.²³ These ideas help to articulate the way in which drawing enables a shift away from the authority of visual form in artworks, and towards a consideration of their material, temporal and transitive aspects. To see drawing in terms of

²⁰ Ibid. p. 95.

²¹ Ibid. p. 105. I discuss the implications of Newman's important coda in more detail in Chapters 1 and 5.

²² Newman: 'Sticking to the World: Drawing as Contact,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Giuseppe Penone: The Imprint of Drawing / L'impronta del disegno*, ex. cat. (2004), p. 107. For a discussion of Penone, see Chapter 2.

²³ Newman has elsewhere provided a detailed reading of Derrida on this matter: 'Derrida and the Scene of Drawing,' *Research in Phenomenology* (Volume 24, Fall 1994), pp. 218-34.

the transitive, Pamela Lee argues, is to point to the fact that it is an action performed upon something else, involving ‘an explicit trafficking or oscillation between materials, forms and gestures.’²⁴ Indeed, the idea of drawing as a practice sustained by symbiosis and interdependence has gained considerable currency in recent years. This is not only in terms of each mark’s indexicality, but also addresses how the arrival of marks upon a surface brings that surface into being *as a ground*, and how those marks function together in that place. The philosopher Alain Badiou has recently offered a suggestive meditation on drawing, identifying at its heart an ‘intense fragility,’ born of the subtle reciprocity enacted between the drawn mark and the ground it brings into being.²⁵ For Badiou, there are similar ethical implications in the fragile relations by which drawing is constituted: ‘This is precisely the goal of the pure Drawing: to institute a new world, not by strength of means, like images, painting, colours, and so on, but by the minimalism of some marks of lines, very close to the inexistence of any place. Drawing is the perfect example of an intensity of weakness.’²⁶

But predominantly, drawing does not only communicate a moment of inscription or exhibit a complex of marks. Drawings also generate (or rather catalyze) mental images and evoke ideas and feelings relating to more than just the gesture of their execution. In this, drawings function as signs, and therefore set up a relationship to language. Of course, to follow either the criterion of paperiness or that of linearity, would mean that most written scripts would qualify as drawings. So can all writing be considered drawing? Can drawing also be considered writing, or is drawing the more capacious category here?²⁷ How can drawing be ‘brought to the condition’ of writing, and vice versa? These questions will be explored in more detail in Chapter 1, but I would like to introduce this relationship here to engage with a broader theoretical problem: the question of the viability of Structuralist semiotic models to adequately address drawing’s central concerns.

With its emphasis upon the synchronic relations of language systems, Saussurean semiotics asserted that for language to function, each of its units must be discrete, clearly isolable one from the other, and therefore separable and repeatable. Most importantly, each

²⁴ Pamela Lee: ‘Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art’ in Cornelia Butler (ed.): *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process* (1999), p. 43.

²⁵ Alain Badiou: ‘Drawing,’ *Lacanian Ink* (Issue 28, Fall 2006), pp. 42-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 49.

²⁷ Tim Ingold explores the connection between drawing, writing and other forms of notation in his wide-ranging and suggestive book, *Lines, A Brief History* (2007). He argues that ‘writing is itself a modality of drawing.’ p. 147.

unit produces meaning not through its own specific qualities, but rather through its difference from all other signs: language is a closed, discontinuous system of pure difference without positive terms.²⁸ The applicability of such a model for the analysis of pictures has been forcefully disputed by James Elkins, amongst others, who is critical of the tendency, since the 'semiotic turn' in art history, to bypass any rigorous or sustained examination of the pictorial *mark* in its hurry to 'read' pictures as one might a text or narrative.²⁹ Elkins demonstrates the difficulty of isolating in pictures the fundamental semiotic units necessary for language to function according to that model. The pictorial mark, for him, has a more complex and unstable relationship both to its ground and to other marks.³⁰

Indeed, how are we to think of the way in which drawing (and visual language generally) *means*? Should meaning be conceived as limited to signifying operations, as it is for a Structuralist (for whom the sudden, retroactive arrival of language, as Newman argues, constitutes a 'catastrophic' rupture)?³¹ Or can a broader conception of the meaningful apply, one that is based upon a wider range of effects upon the subject, beyond what is signified in linguistic terms? If meaning is restricted to signification, then a slight modification of the weight, colour or direction of an individual mark may make little difference: the marks together may well still describe the same nameable referent. If however, the meaningful is opened up to include aesthetic, expressive and empathetic aspects, then such modifications will be more likely to produce a change in effect.

In his 1952 essay, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,' Maurice Merleau-Ponty offered a suggestive discussion of such 'tacit' meanings available in artworks. Throughout the essay, visual art is brought into dialogue with language, each inflecting the other so as to better elucidate both how they might be aligned, and how they function differently. The essay begins with a discussion of Saussure:

²⁸ For a lucid and concise introduction to Structuralism from an art-historical perspective, see Yve-Alain Bois: 'Formalism and Structuralism,' in Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss: *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (2004), pp. 32-39.

²⁹ See Elkins, op.cit. Chapters 1 to 5. See also, Newman op.cit. 2003, pp. 99ff.

³⁰ Elkins op.cit. pp. 29-30: 'Marks exfoliate into fields, and ultimately into surfaces, and they also gather surfaces into fields and finally into marks, so that visual artefacts are nothing but marks. Because *both these possibilities are continuously true* of graphic mark making, it is not sufficient to say that graphic marks 'wear away,' giving up their uniqueness, repleteness, or 'rhetoric' and drawing near to writing.'

³¹ Newman op.cit., 2003: 'It will have always already been the case that human being as speaking being is absolutely separated from beings as a whole. That which separates human being from beings as a whole is not something but rather nothing. The condition for the sign is the absence that makes possible substitution. Absence must have come into the world, and this is the 'catastrophic' dimension of semiotics.' p. 99

‘What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark out a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs. Since the same can be said of all other signs, we may conclude that language is made of differences without terms; or more exactly, that the terms of language are engendered only by the differences that appear among them. This is a difficult idea, because common sense tells us that if term *A* and term *B* do not have any meaning at all, it is hard to see how there could be a difference of meaning between them... But the objection is of the same kind as Zeno’s paradoxes; and as they are overcome by the act of movement, it is overcome by the use of speech.’³²

Strangely, Merleau-Ponty saw this concern with the speaking body as in sympathy with Saussure’s own priorities, apparently ignoring the latter’s insistence that the appropriate object of linguistic study was the system of language (*langue*), and not particular utterances (*parole*).³³ Responding in a complex way to contemporary arguments made by both André Malraux and Jean-Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty examines the relationship between painting and language, problematizing the idea that language can offer transparent access to the world, while also combating Malraux’s quasi-mystical claims for art as privileged vehicle for trans-historical meanings.³⁴ In regarding both painting and language as having their own qualities of opacity and transparency, Merleau-Ponty viewed both practices as kinds of *incomplete* utterances: both have their own eloquence, but neither offering up thoughts and meanings in a complete or totally explicit way. Merleau-Ponty argued that ‘Language is more like a sort of being than a means, and that is why it can present something to us so well.’³⁵ ‘To understand it,’ he writes, ‘we do not have to consult some inner lexicon which gives us pure thoughts covered up by the words or forms we are perceiving; we have only to *lend ourselves to its life*, to its movement of differentiation and articulation, and to its

³² Merleau-Ponty: ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,’ originally published in *Les Temps Modernes* (June and July, 1952), reprinted in Galen A. Johnson (ed.): *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader – Philosophy and Painting* (1993), pp. 76-120. (Hereafter: ‘Indirect Language,’ this quotation from p.76).

³³ Merleau-Ponty first delivered classes on Saussure between 1947 and 1950 at Lyon, the École Normale and the Sorbonne. He also engaged with Saussure’s ideas extensively in his unfinished manuscript of *The Prose of the World*. Barthes described him as the first French philosopher to have engaged seriously with Saussure’s linguistics. Barthes: *Elements of Semiology*, p.24. For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Saussure, see James Schmidt: *Maurice Merleau-Ponty – Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (1985), pp. 102ff.

³⁴ For an excellent account of this essay and its intellectual context, see Alex Potts: ‘Art Works, Utterances, and Things,’ in Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen (eds.): *Art and Thought* (2003), pp. 91-110.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty: ‘Indirect Language,’ p. 80

eloquent gestures.³⁶ Saussure notwithstanding, expressions *are* successful, Merleau-Ponty argued, and something *is* understood.³⁷

For Merleau-Ponty, a renewed attention to acts of speech and expression helped to articulate a 'lived logic,' a means to move beyond the dichotomy between the existing and the possible, the constituted and the constituting. Leaving to one side for the moment questions of language, artworks, for Merleau-Ponty, were testaments to such a lived logic, emerging from what appears in retrospect to be an unfathomable array of possibilities, which the artist gathers together into a 'coherent deformation' imposed upon the visible: a new expressive solution which produces an unforeseen 'tacit meaning on the surface of the world.'³⁸ As I argued earlier, by openly displaying evidence of the movements that produced it, drawing leads the viewer to engage with the scene of its production, its 'utterance.' But what, from the viewer's perspective, can be known about this manual work of drawing? What kind of opacity does drawing retain? What will inevitably fall away from that which the trace is able to articulate?³⁹

Towards the end of the essay discussed above, Newman argues that, in the wake of the deconstruction of expressive origins and the arrival of compulsive or automatic drawing practices, graphic gesture has been divested of its conventional communicative function. The belief, central to expressive models of drawing, that marks could authentically offer up access to the interiority of the creative subject, became untenable.⁴⁰ No longer meaningfully externalizing the contents of a coherent inner psychological realm, drawing would now refer to an inaccessible latency or to nothing at all but itself. Bereft of a unified expressive origin, gesture has become shorn of any specific communicative capability. Instead, and here Newman follows Giorgio Agamben, drawing's gesture becomes a gesture in meaninglessness, making visible our pure mediality in language, the 'communication of a communicability' and nothing more.⁴¹

³⁶ Ibid. p. 79 (my emphasis).

³⁷ 'Signs do not simply evoke other signs for us and so on without end, and language is not like a prison we are locked into or a guide we must blindly follow; for at the crossroads of all these linguistic gestures, their meaning appears – to which we have been given such total access that it seems to us we no longer need the linguistic gestures to refer to it.' Ibid. p. 118. It is not clear, however, to what extent Merleau-Ponty allowed for the possibility of mis-recognition.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 118.

³⁹ See Lee op.cit. p. 33.

⁴⁰ Newman op.cit. (2003), p. 103.

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben: *Means without End*, quoted by Newman, Ibid. p. 104

However, rather than referring to a unified origin, compulsive or automatic drawing was understood to be motivated by another agency, an ‘outside on the inside:’ the unconscious.⁴² From a Freudian position, the graphic gesture, if not confidently ‘expressive’ in the conventional sense, is nevertheless not *meaningless*. Serge Tisseron, in an analysis of the spatial development of the manuscript, argues that, in its role in the child’s development, graphic activity functions to further the development of ‘an active control over separation anxiety.’⁴³ Enacting a process of separation and recapture, the drawing hand (first governed by motor impulses and only later guided by the eye) rhythmically stages the mother’s coming and going, ‘so as to tame and master the experience in the imaginary.’⁴⁴ The hand’s activities therefore relate to Freud’s famous *Fort-Da* game, with the page imaginatively invested as a metaphor for the child’s own body and that of the mother, a containing form in which psychically invested contents can be cast and retrieved.⁴⁵

For Tisseron, the manual activity involved in graphic practices is harnessed to certain primary principles of a psychic economy. In order to help bring these to light, he urges that we pay attention to the parerga, doodlings, crossings out and embellishment that accompany the development of the manuscript, although he himself does not attempt any specific readings in this essay. Indeed, without an applied example, it is ultimately unclear as to how these suggestive formulations would help a viewer attend to the specificity of any particular case, or how it would serve to move beyond the confirmation of its own premises. Here it is important to recognize the limits of attending only to drawing *as such*. After all, drawing’s potentials are not abstract possibilities or pre-arrayed alternatives; rather, they arise within singular situations, and it is through an engagement with specific practices that they are best elaborated. Throughout this thesis I will engage with the question of what it is like to look at particular drawings, and how best to think about the scene of their production. In an attempt to address compelling aspects of these encounters, however, some interventions need to be made into the way in which dominant art-historical models have attended to questions of art’s ultimate en-framer: the embodied subject.

⁴² Newman, *Ibid.* p. 103.

⁴³ Serge Tisseron: ‘All Writing is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript,’ in *Yale French Studies* 84: *Boundaries: Writing and Drawing* (1994), p. 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 41.

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‘What is designated by the terms *glance*, *hand*, and in general *body* is a system of systems destined for the inspection of a world, capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining hollows and reliefs, distances and deviations – a meaning – in the inconceivable flatness of being.’

Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁴⁶

Although within the last few decades of art-historical writing there has been no shortage of accounts of the body and its investments, arguably too little attention has been paid to the body as a ‘system of systems’ that *moves* and *senses*. I would like here to articulate some of the reasons why this has been the case, and to open up a space to develop a more satisfying conception of embodied experience, using both mid-century phenomenological ideas, as well as the more recent theoretical tools provided by contemporary Canadian theorist Brian Massumi. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty offered a model of perception embedded within the body and inextricably bound up with the situating of that body within a physical environment. He critiqued purely optical models of perceptual experience, emphasizing the tactility, spatiality and temporality inherent in processes of seeing. Perception was not a kind of functional instrument, enabling only the completion of specific tasks, but rather a way of being, the pre-supposed ground against which all acts stand out.⁴⁷ During the 1960s, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy seemed very conducive to discussions of art that were attempting to move beyond the Greenbergian faith in ‘opticality,’ and towards a dramatization of the kinaesthetic and participatory response of a viewer immersed and active within the same physical space as the object.

⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty: ‘Indirect Language’ p. 103-4.

⁴⁷ In the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, he wrote: ‘Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not ‘inhabit’ only the ‘inner man,’ or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.’ (Translated by Colin Smith, 1962), pp. x-xi, quoted by Stephen Melville: ‘Phenomenology and the Limits of Hermeneutics,’ in Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds.): *The Subjects of Art History, Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (1998), p.145. For other excellent accounts of Merleau-Ponty’s uptake within an art-historical context, see Alex Potts: ‘The Phenomenological Turn,’ in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (2000), pp. 207-234; Stephen Melville, op.cit. (1998); Amelia Jones: ‘Meaning, Identity, Embodiment – The Uses of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology in Art History,’ in Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen (eds.): *Art and Thought* (2003), pp. 71-90; and James Meyer: ‘The Uses of Merleau-Ponty,’ in Nina Möntmann (ed.): *Minimalism* (1998), pp. 178-89.

However, already by the mid-1960s, Merleau-Ponty's star was waning. His emphasis upon direct perceptual contact with the world was supplanted by apparently more tough-minded theoretical models based upon a critical analysis of the role of ideology and language in the construction of subjective and social experience. When set against the explicitly oppositional rhetoric of much structuralist and later post-structuralist theory, Merleau-Ponty's focus upon embodied perception seemed to lack both sufficient reach and radical purchase. Indeed, although, as we have seen, he did develop an involved dialogue with Saussure, this was begun after the publication of his *Phenomenology*, for which he was most widely known (especially after its translation into English in 1962). There, in his recourse to a pre-linguistic bodily realm, Merleau-Ponty's thought appeared to support a bankrupt humanism that sought to universalize and depoliticize subjective experience. Despite his life-long commitment to Marxist thinking, his thought seemed to offer no model of ideological mediation, and appeared inattentive to the politics of identity difference.⁴⁸ Neither was Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic project expressed in oppositional terms. For many, the open, elegant and sometimes elliptical nature of his writing lacked the hard-edged conceptual utility required to effectively attack prevailing hegemonic structures.

Structuralism and semiotics appeared to offer far more effective tools for understanding and critiquing the ideological systems into which subjects were interpellated. For such critical theoretical models, the body was (and is) primarily talked about in terms of its *coding*: how it is inscribed discursively with a particular status in relation to the major differential categories of race, gender, sexuality, and class, for example. But what kind of a body is the body-of-ideology: the Subject? Kaja Silverman describes how the term 'subject,' by foregrounding a relationship between ethnology, psychoanalysis and semiotics, helps us 'to conceive of human reality as a construction, as a product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious.'⁴⁹ The Subject's body is a discursive object or a vehicle for the expression of unconscious forces. It is attended to insofar as it is determined psychically and socially, and insofar as it

⁴⁸ For critiques of Merleau-Ponty from a feminist perspective, see Judith Butler: 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*,' and Iris Marion Young: 'Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,' in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jennifer Allen and Iris Marion Young (1989), pp. 51-70, and 85-100 respectively. See also Luce Irigaray: 'The Invisible of the Flesh,' in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (2004), pp. 127-153.

⁴⁹ Kaja Silverman: *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), p. 130.

occupies a position on the ideological map, coded with a particular political status. Its body is thoroughly mediated, 'one with its signifying gestures.'⁵⁰ As opposed to the activities of a self-propelled, coherent, centred individual, the expressions of the subject speak, unwittingly, its orchestrated formation. Potentials for resistance are then proposed in the form of counter-signifying practices: to decode the world against the grain of the dominant ideological framework, to demystify mystified consciousness, to arrive at a truthful representation of an oppressive determining system. But, from Massumi's Deleuzian perspective, if the Subject can only embody and reflect a pre-determined system, a system which prescribes every possible signifying or counter-signifying move, what has happened to the possibilities of transformation and change?⁵¹

Massumi re-introduces a discussion of the body, not as a purely coded entity, but as a 'system of systems,' to use Merleau-Ponty's phrase, that involves both movement and sensation. A body is no longer conceived merely as an entity that signifies and that is inscribed by linguistic codings, inhabiting a semiotic position. Rather, it is a dynamic entity that transforms itself and senses itself in transformation. The ontological priority is reversed: movement is prioritized over stasis, passage precedes position, and signifying structures are now seen to take form in the wake of an ongoing unruly emergence, which always retains a margin of contingency, escaping absolute capture by generalized laws. Expression, a critically maligned concept, again becomes key, although in a radically depersonalized way: 'The force of expression... strikes the body first, directly and unmediatedly. It passes transformatively through the flesh before being instantiated in subject-positions subsumed by a system of power. Its immediate effect is a differing. It must be *made* a reproduction.'⁵²

This is not to say that emergence is not 'captured' by organising systems and structures, and that these systems do not then feed-forward into ongoing processes of emergence (importantly, Massumi argues, 'the field of emergence is not presocial'⁵³). Rather, it is to insist upon a crucial gap between the world's expressions and their articulation within a system of contents, meanings or positions. This is a gap inhabited by potential. So, for example, aesthetic or linguistic utterances first strike the body, produce a differing in that

⁵⁰ Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002, hereafter: *Parables*), p. 2.

⁵¹ See Massumi's Introduction to *Parables*, pp. 1-21, and his 'Introduction: Like a Thought,' in *A Shock to Thought, Expression After Deleuze and Guattari*, edited by Massumi (2002, hereafter: *Expression*), xiii-xxxix.

⁵² Massumi: *Expression*, xvii (my emphasis).

⁵³ Massumi: *Parables*, p. 9.

body, before being integrated into the body's habitual and regulatory circuits, transforming them (in whatever small way) in the process. The unreal body of discourse elides the body as the site of such transformative conversions. Massumi's project is to think the body again, in terms of the movement, affect and sensation proper to its functioning, and as both a ground and an horizon for change.⁵⁴

Massumi objects to phenomenology for its insurances upon, firstly, a stable division between subject and world and, secondly, upon a relationship of identity or conformity between those two terms.⁵⁵ This, however, is also the criticism that Merleau-Ponty, in his late writing, levels against his own earlier efforts. In a working note dated July 1959, included in *The Visible and The Invisible* (his unfinished manuscript and working notes, published posthumously in 1964), Merleau-Ponty wrote: 'The problems posed in *Phenomenology of Perception* are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'- 'object' distinction.'⁵⁶ He regarded his earlier work to have woven the fabric of perception too tightly, to have separated too distinctly subject from object. In his later essays, Merleau-Ponty instead regarded self and other as coextensive, with the body and the world in a relationship of mutual envelopment and encroachment within the binding synergy of the 'flesh': 'Things are an annex or prolongation of [my body]; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body.'⁵⁷ Subject/ object relations are conceived in terms of an intertwining, or 'Chiasm,' by which each element would lean or bend toward the other in their coming into contact.⁵⁸

Although Merleau-Ponty often stressed the correspondences and connectivity between subject and world, his concept of the 'flesh' was not one of simple correspondence or

⁵⁴ See Ibid. p. 4: '[This project] was based on the hope that movement, sensation, and qualities of experience couched in matter in its most literal sense (and sensing) might be cultural-theoretically thinkable, without falling into either the Scylla of naïve realism or the Charybdis of subjectivism and without contradicting the very real insights of poststructuralist cultural theory concerning the co-extensiveness of culture with the field of experience and of power with culture.'

⁵⁵ See Ibid. p. 191: 'For phenomenology, the personal is prefigured or 'prereflected' in the world, in a closed loop of 'intentionality.' The act of perception or cognition is a reflection of what is already 'pre-' embedded in the world. It repeats the same structures, expressing where you already were. Every phenomenological event is like returning home. This is like the *déjà vu* without the portent of the new.' And footnote 14, p. 287-8: 'The notion of intentionality is often used as a way of establishing an identity between the structure of the world and the structure of the subject in the world. The insistence on such an identity is a tacit assumption of a divide. An objective-subjective split is backhandedly enshrined in this way of thinking. A mediating instance is then required to bring the two realms back into harmony. The senses are assigned to the job.' Architecture, for example, is enlisted to provide an expression of this ideal fit – 'to close the loop.'

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty: working note entitled 'Dualism-Philosophy,' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 200.

⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty: 'Eye and Mind,' p. 125.

⁵⁸ See the Merleau-Ponty's essay, 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm,' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 130-155.

identity.⁵⁹ Flesh does not constitute a unified totality, but is constituted by gaps, splits, and fissures: 'I call the world flesh in order to say that it is a pregnancy of possibilities.'⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty describes it as 'a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being;' it is a dynamic ground, shaken by desire, and by the demand for expression.⁶¹ Henri Michaux, an artist and poet who will make appearances throughout this thesis (Chapters 1, 2 and 4), wrote of the processes recorded in his 1950-1 book of drawings and poems, *Mouvements*: 'It involved gestures, interiors, for which we have no limbs at our disposal but only the desire of limbs, tensions, *élans*, all made up of living cords.'⁶² The benefit of the term 'flesh,' is that it insists upon the intertwining of subject and world as a corporeal event, rooted to 'The secret and feverish genesis of things in our body.'⁶³ 'Every thought known to us,' Merleau-Ponty asserted, 'occurs to a flesh.'⁶⁴

So while Merleau-Ponty's earlier phenomenology sought an identity between the subject and the structure of the world, weaving the fabric of perception tightly, his later philosophy opens up a model that attends to the gaps and fissures within this carnal field. This then has more in common with Massumi's priority upon self-difference and self-transformation: not mirroring or closing the loop between self and world, but rather 'dizzying with potential.'⁶⁵ Indeed, an impetus to engage with the potentially transformative phenomenological encounter with art has been explicit in the recent resurgence of interest in Merleau-Ponty amongst art historians such as Alex Potts and Amelia Jones, who engage productively with this issue while also avoiding potentially overblown, cathartic, portentous or transcendent rhetoric.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ 'Nature is on the inside,' says Cézanne. Quality, light, colour, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them. Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence.' 'Eye and Mind' pp. 125-6.

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty: *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.250.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 139.

⁶² Henri Michaux quoted by Jean Starobinski: 'Le monde physionomique,' in *Henri Michaux*, ex.cat. (1978), p. 69.

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty: 'Eye and Mind,' p. 128.

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty: *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 146

⁶⁵ Massumi: *Parables*, footnote 14, p. 288.

⁶⁶ Using Merleau-Ponty's notions of reciprocal interchange and the flesh, Amelia Jones offers the following commentary on an encounter with Courbet's *Origin of the World*: 'And the exchange goes both ways: as with any conversation or engagement with another, our reading of it changes us, if infinitesimally, as subjects.' (Jones op.cit. p. 79). Concluding his rich essay on Merleau-Ponty, 'Art Works, Utterances, and Things,' Alex Potts argues: 'The very real sense we have of being able to surpass and move beyond our immediate circumstances is generated within the fabric of the intersubjective, material world we inhabit: it is nothing less and nothing more than an intensely activated aspect of continual self-transformation.' (Potts in Arnold and Iversen op.cit. p. 108.)

One facet of the phenomenological encounter with artworks that has so far been poorly accommodated into art-historical accounts is that of its *affect*. As described by Massumi, affect is very close to the concept of ‘intensity,’ but quite far from that of ‘emotion,’ as it is fundamentally not personal or ownable. These distinctions will be explored more fully in Chapter 1; for now, I would like to flag the inability of dominant semiotic models to account for this crucial aspect of embodied experience, one which cannot be ignored if a satisfying account of art’s potential effects is to be developed. Affect is associated with autonomic bodily responses: not those connected with reflection, expectation or adaptation, but rather with unmediated and unassimilated states of shock, suspense or intensity. It is intensity that exceeds any harnessing to a determined subjectivity, and cannot be assimilated into causal narratives and meanings.⁶⁷ That is not to say that affect does not operate in relation to linguistic contents, but that this relationship is not one of conformity or correspondence. It is rather a question of ‘resonance or interference, amplification or dampening.’⁶⁸ The elaboration of linguistic determinations (a verbal description of an image, for example) might heighten or deaden affect, but this does not occur in conformity with recognizable semiotic qualifications of what is being seen. The elaboration of the determinate properties of an image does not necessarily produce a more intense effect.

Affect is a liveliness, a felt vivacity, an intensity that cannot be said to be *experienced* exactly, given that it is more a question of the body absorbing its outside than of cognitive or perceptual assimilation. But this is not to say that affect is exactly *outside* experience either: ‘It is immanent to it – always in it but not of it. Intensity and experience accompany one another like two mutually presupposing dimensions or like two sides of a coin.’⁶⁹ Affect is always escaping the confines of any given body or context, escaping from perception and from experience. It is ongoing, always beyond attempts to back-form or en-frame its progress. But that escape itself can also not help *but* be perceived, ‘as long as one is alive.’⁷⁰ This continuity of affective escape gives a sense of one’s vitality, changeability

⁶⁷ See Massumi: *Parables*, pp. 26-7: ‘Approaches to the image in its relation to language are always incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level, however that level is defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these in combination, as a Symbolic). What they lose, precisely, in the expression event – in favour of structure.’

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 33

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 36

and potential for interaction. It is a register of intensity that accompanies all embodied experience, constituting something like the felt reality of relation.⁷¹

Attentiveness to affect is very helpful in exploring both the scene of drawing's production and the ways in which its objects remain compelling for the viewer. In thinking about processes of making, we might ask: what is involved in lending oneself to the language of drawing, of participating in the world, as Michaux put it, *par des traits* – 'by way of marks'?⁷² Throughout this thesis, I will attend to this heightened scene: whether it involves eroticized encounters with a model in an other-worldly studio environment (Chapter 1); or the teeming, feverish proliferation of tiny marks on diminutive paperscapes (Chapter 2); or the unruly mobility of liquids as they bleed and spread across the sheet (Chapter 4). I will explore the experiential correlates of these micro-dynamics of process, affording their immersive appeal some theoretical weight.

The model of embodiment outlined above also helps to unseat two unhelpful misconceptions concerning spectatorship: firstly, that it is a passive activity, and secondly, that it is temporally discrete. Once the framing of the art object is recognized as enacted by the embodied subject, it is very difficult to sustain any idea that the process of viewing can be passive. In ordering and intensifying sensations, perceptions, and ideas, the viewer takes on a creative, active agency. As Jacques Rancière has recently written:

'Emancipation ... begins when we dismiss the opposition between looking and acting and understand that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection. It starts when we realize that looking is also an action that confirms or modifies that distribution, and that 'interpreting the world' is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it. The spectator is active, just like the student or the scientist: [S]he observes, [s]he selects, [s]he compares, [s]he interprets.'⁷³

In this process of enframing, of generating a response to the object of attention, there is an oscillation between different modes of engagement. These modes (such as heightened perceptual awareness, conceptual reflection, imaginative projection, affective reminiscence) are not necessarily in any mutually exclusive relationship, but in fact can cumulatively overlap and feed into each other (see Chapter 4). Significance is woven around compelling experience, plugging it into an associative matrix that connects it up with related (in

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 220ff.

⁷² This was the title of Michaux's last book, published in 1984.

⁷³ Jacques Rancière: 'The Emancipated Spectator,' *Artforum* (Volume 45, Number 7, March 2007), p. 277.

whatever capacity) thoughts, perceptions, memories, and desires. The point is not to separate the affective as somehow the soft subjective remainder to the more durable and trustworthy objective dimensions of experience. Rather, it is to recognize that thinking itself always carries an affective charge. It is not a question of affect disabling critical or conceptual faculties, but rather it is to acknowledge that thoughts are 'backgrounded' by their embodied context.

'It is sometimes forgotten,' Briony Fer has recently written, 'that the art you carry around with you in your head is even more important than the art that you see as you see it.'⁷⁴ This insight radically reconfigures how we think of the *time* of reception. The phenomenological encounter with the work of art is by no means dismissed, but it is unseated as the sole site of reception (or rather, that phenomenological encounter is recognized as temporally *dilated*). Perceptual experience constitutes a starting point (and can itself be repeated), which then sets in play a whole range of other temporalities, as works of art are recalled, thought over, and recombined in the mind. This complex process of reception encroaches onto everyday experience, and becomes incorporated within the fabric of memory and meaning-making that inflects activities in other spheres of life. It is difficult, therefore, from this perspective, to claim autonomy for art's effects. From these broad theoretical sketches and propositions, I would now like to briefly situate my project historically, and to explore drawing's status *vis-à-vis* theories of the avant-garde.

Drawing Since 1940

Current art history lacks a substantial, coherent and critically satisfying account of twentieth century drawing. This is no doubt not least due to the vast scale of such an enterprise. But it is not only this: it has also proved difficult, and perhaps not even very desirable, to integrate drawing into dominant theories of the avant-garde.⁷⁵ Indeed, the majority of the artists discussed in this thesis are better known for other facets of their

⁷⁴ Briony Fer: 'Eva Hesse and Colour,' *October* (Number 119, Winter 2007), p. 26.

⁷⁵ This is not to play down the pivotal work of the Drawing Center in New York, which, especially under the directorship of Catherine de Zegher, has mounted brilliant exhibitions of drawing, often accompanied by substantial catalogues. One such project of primary importance to this thesis has been the 2000 exhibition and its catalogue: *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux* (ed. de Zegher); others include: *Ellsworth Kelly, Tablet: 1948-1973* (with an essay by Yve-Alain Bois, 2002), *Between Street and Mirror: The Drawings of James Ensor* (ed. de Zegher, 2001), *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (ed. de Zegher, 2001), and *Shadows of the Hand – The Drawings of Victor Hugo* (Florian Rodari, et.al. 1998).

practice: painting (Matisse, de Kooning, Wols), sculpture and installation (Beuys, Broodthaers), 'combines' and silkscreens (Rauschenberg), and film (Tacita Dean). The general comportment towards drawing within accounts of the avant-garde is benign neglect. It is not that drawing is specifically inimical to radical aspirations, but rather that no one has known quite how to integrate it into the theoretical premises of other such practices. This thesis certainly does not pretend to constitute the above-mentioned comprehensive study. Rather, by way of a series of specific encounters between artists and writers, it attempts to map out ways in which drawing has offered compelling potentials that provoke questions of how models of artistic radicality themselves might productively be re-thought.

Bearing what has already been said in this introduction in mind, it is not difficult to see how drawing would be uneasily accommodated into formalist teleological narratives of autonomous, self-critical progression. Given drawing's conventional alignment with connoisseurship, as well as the centrality of *disegno* within academic discourse, nor would it seem a conducive vehicle for strategies of shock and negation. Drawing is neither exclusively *of* the modern, nor is it *anti*-modern; rather, it combines both a '*non*-modernity' and a 'smallness' of physical dimensions and cultural status that has tended to prevent its attribution with radical potential (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, there have been moments at which drawing is recognized to have played a very significant part in avant-garde activity, and these two moments in some sense bracket the historical scope of my project. The first came with the emergence of automatist and compulsive drawing practices in the 1920s and 1930s within Surrealism (Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism* was published in 1924), and in the reception of the art of the mentally ill (Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* was published in 1922). The second arrived in the late 1960s, with the self-conscious presentation of drawings in relation to Process and Conceptual Art, beginning with Mel Bochner's seminal 1966 'Working Drawings' exhibition.⁷⁶ Interestingly, both moments constituted an abandonment of subjective expression, as drawing was rendered compulsive and mechanical, delivering no cathartic or epiphanic message, but rather confined within (differently automatic) systems of reiteration. Of course there have also been sustained engagements with drawing practices falling in between these two crucial moments, but these have remained largely confined to monographic catalogue essays. Rarely in accounts

⁷⁶ For discussion of the role of drawing at this historical juncture, see Cornelia Butler, *op.cit.*; Anna Lovatt: *Seriality and Systematic Thought in Drawing c.1966-1976: Ruth Vollmer, Sol LeWitt, Eva Hesse, Mel Bochner and Dorothea Rockburne* (PhD thesis, 2005); and Briony Fer: *The Infinite Line*, 2004.

of the art of the 1940s and 50s are painting and sculpture unseated as the primary arenas in which ambitious artistic activity was manifested.

Why begin in 1940? There is some historical convergence between the theoretical touchstones of this thesis and the objects with which it engages. My key thematic preoccupations here concern time, materiality and the body. These issues were given sustained philosophical consideration in a number of key phenomenological texts published during the 1940s. Some significant examples are Gaston Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*, (1942), Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Yet I do not note this convergence to imply a causal relationship between the drawings I discuss and these philosophical models. Although each of these texts, especially the first two, were widely read by the Parisian artistic community, I do not wish in any way to imply that they were direct, determining influences on the arrival of the drawings with which I engage.

There is no single event that took place in 1940 that inaugurated a coherent artistic sea change to which the practices that populate this thesis are related. Of course the most obvious historical marker is the catastrophic trauma of the Second World War. Indeed, it would be impossible to make sense of the work of, for example, Joseph Beuys or Wols by ignoring this cataclysmic historical rupture. However, I do not interpret such historical events to have determined every significant facet of their practices, and the War and its repercussions will not constitute the 'final signified' of the artistic endeavours under discussion. As Cesare Casarino has argued in another context, the theoretical reaction against the once pervasive faith in the 'timeless' creative genius has too often merely reversed the binary opposition to re-address the writer or artist in her or his 'timely' context.⁷⁷ In his project of so-called *philopoesis*, Casarino instead wants to engage with a region that remains unthought within this binary: the 'untimely.' The untimely, he argues, is 'the unhistorical time of potentiality.'⁷⁸ 'And it is precisely from what Nietzsche called the unhistorical vapours of the untimely,' Casarino continues, 'that those potentialities emerge that disrupt the status quo of history and of the world.'⁷⁹ Begetting thoughts of

⁷⁷ Cesare Casarino: *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (2002), pp. xxxvii ff. 'In reacting against the myth of the timeless genius, we run the risk of rushing to the opposite pole of this binary relation – namely, the timely writer – without, however, having necessarily stepped outside the conceptual, epistemological, and political perimeter of the binarism.' (p. xxxviii).

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. xl

⁷⁹ Ibid.

resistance in the present, potential neither occupies a timeless realm of universals, nor is bracketed as a purely determined product of a past historical moment. It is with something like what Agamben called a 'halo' of potentiality, that I would like to impart to the objects under discussion here.⁸⁰ Casarino again:

'If the love of potential can deliver that name, it is so because such a love is above all the exercise of a principle that is anathema to any process of reification: love of any thing or any body is mutually exclusive with possession of that thing or that body. And this is also to say that if we love our possessions, it is in spite rather than because of possessing them that we do so and it is not qua possessions but rather as unspent potentials that we can love them at all.'⁸¹

It is no longer sufficient (although it is still necessary) to point out art's commodity status, its circulation in the market, and the power of institutions in determining, to an extent, experiences and meanings. These structures and systems have powerful agency in policing both art's identity, and in channelling its effects in the world. Needless to say, systems of ownership are most often enforced to prevent access, to amass wealth, and, consequently, to contain creative expressions of resistance, and to thereby stifle art's radical aspirations and potentials. But to insist *only* upon art's compromised predicament, as irretrievably mired in the assimilations and appropriations of spectacle and the culture industry, no longer seems productive. There is no use denying that art, too, is thoroughly entangled with the commodity form, yet a repeated insistence upon its total and foregone impotence is no longer helpful (or, indeed, accurate). This re-focusing does not necessitate an abandonment of indignance and critical negation; 'it is a question of dosage,' as Massumi says: 'It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting. You are that much less fostering. There are times when debunking is necessary. But, if applied in a blanket manner, adopted as a general operating principle, it is counterproductive. Foster or debunk. It's a strategic question. Like all strategic questions, it is basically a question of timing and proportion.'⁸²

Here I would like to affirm instead that drawing can productively articulate forms of attention and organisation that run counter to the negligence and banality of prevailing modes of consumption. I do not mean to privilege drawing over all other forms of

⁸⁰ Casarino quotes Agamben's *The Coming Community*: 'One can think of the halo... as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indiscernible. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility...' (p. xxxvi).

⁸¹ Casarino, op.cit. p. xxvi

⁸² Massumi: *Parables*, p. 13.

production, but rather to articulate some specific modalities that drawing is able to effect. A certain modesty of material means and of implicit 'rhetoric' enables drawing to sustain some radical claims; drawing has not yet had to shoulder the burden of aspirations that wider social, political and economic developments have then dashed. Familiar cycles of unbounded utopian expectancy, followed by deflated disillusionment, and finally by jaded resentment, have not yet played themselves out in relation to drawing. To avoid such a trajectory, in this thesis I want to anchor my claims to the corporeal, experiential, transformative (but not exactly solid) ground of the body as a site of potential change. The potentials that I want to claim for drawing are based upon contact between objects and bodies. There is adherence in that encounter, instigating a process of reception that is temporally complex and crosses many experiential registers.

Towards the beginning of this introduction, I aligned drawing exactly with this transitive emphasis upon contact between materials and forces. I would also propose writing, too, as a kind of parallel creative activity based also upon a formulation of reception as contact between objects and processes, or objects as processes.⁸³ Drawing fosters and embodies *attentiveness* to these events of contact: what Michaux called their 'instantaneous and gradual quid pro quo,⁸⁴ their dynamic and reciprocal progress. This attentiveness (heightened, immersive, yet also remembered and dwelt upon subsequently) constitutes a mode of comportment towards the world and its objects that counters the current dovetailing of voracity and flippancy. Cultivating alternative modes of relating to the world, drawing can perform what Michaux described as a 'dis-alienating' function.⁸⁵ Of course, 'dis-alienation' is obviously very different from a complete release from alienation, and great care needs to be taken when claiming dramatic effects for artistic interventions in the present climate. We need be less tentative, however, when formulating potentials in the world that might still be productively fostered, augmented and actualized. In stressing the importance of the specificity of an embodied encounter with art objects, it must be accepted that the returns are in many respects self-evidently modest. It is much easier to claim the effect of discursive overhaul when you are not reliant on such transformations taking place

⁸³ See Simon O'Sullivan: 'The Aesthetics of Affect, Thinking Art Beyond Representation,' *Angelaki* (Volume 6, Number 3, December 2001), pp. 125-135.

⁸⁴ Henri Michaux: 'En Pensant au phénomène de la peinture' (1946) in *Passages* (1963) p. 117-8. Reprinted in de Zegher: *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux* (2000), p. 23.

⁸⁵ Michaux: *Par des Traits* (1984), unpag. 'Signes qui permettraient d'être ouvert au monde autrement, créant et développant une fonction différente en l'homme, le désalienant.'

through specific encounter and in actual bodies. Yet even if the manifest gains of my approach are small, paling in significance against a vast backdrop of urgent problems, I hope that they nevertheless retain the advantage of being both credible and energizing.

Drawing / Writing / Cinema

Dessins: Thèmes et variations

When, in 1941, Henri Matisse was visited by the poet and novelist Francis Carco, the writer was confronted by rows of line drawings pinned to the studio wall (Figures 1.1 and 1.2):

‘Having taken up his invitation I was received in the big room on the left that he uses for a studio. Arranged in several rows, one above the other, a series of drawings executed after an initial study covered the walls. You could read there, as in an open book, the succession of states and abbreviations by which the study was transformed into an arabesque and passed from volume to line, with the most subtle and sparse of scripts.

‘That’s what I call the cinema of my sensibility,’ he told me right away. ‘When my study is done, or rather my point of departure is established, then I let my pen run where it wills. There are all the steps which, from the form to the rhythm, permit me to watch my own reactions. I enjoy that: I don’t know where I am going. I rely on my subconscious self and the proof of this is that if I am disturbed during the process I can no longer find the thread of it again.’¹

The drawings referred to are a selection from Matisse’s *Dessins: Thèmes et variations*, produced between autumn 1941 and spring 1942, with facsimiles published by Fabiani the following year.² In Carco’s account, Matisse re-affirms some common assumptions about drawing, while at the same time offering suggestive new avenues of enquiry. The artist harnesses drawing to his ‘sensibility,’ claiming it as the faithful registration of his ‘reactions.’ The production of his drawing is not guided by any rational faculty, but rather by a ‘subconscious self,’ which follows an unpredictable and fragile logic that is easily interrupted by disturbances during the process. Such rhetoric replays a familiar expressive conception of drawing: the willed abnegation of conscious control in an intense creative endeavour, striving to authentically translate interior subjective experience into visual language. Carco aligns these drawings with written language specifically: as they cover the wall of Matisse’s studio, Carco describes how he is able to ‘read’ them ‘as in an open

¹ Francis Carco: ‘Interview with Francis Carco,’ in Jack Flam (ed.): *Matisse on Art*, (1995, hereafter *MoA*), p.135.

² Henri Matisse: *Dessins: Thèmes et Variations*, preface by Louis Aragon. (Paris: Martin Fabiani, 1943), 32.5 x 24.7 cm, printed in an edition of 950.

book,' admiring the spare lines which together constitute 'the most subtle and sparse of scripts.' While Carco is making a connection between drawing and writing, Matisse is reported to have made a different and more surprising conjunction: that of drawing and cinema. Although the title *Themes and Variations* refers to a musical form, I want here to investigate the implications of this unexpected triangular relationship between drawing, writing and cinema as it is played out in this suite.³

Drawing and writing have been entwined in a close and complex dialogue throughout their long histories. Indeed, the Greek word *graphein* meant both to draw and to write. Both in terms of the (pre-)historical development of graphic activities in the evolution of humans as a species, and in the development of such faculties in the infancy of each individual subject, drawing and writing are closely connected. We think of the earliest pictographic and hieroglyphic sign systems; of the production of illuminated manuscripts; of how the 'gesture' of writing is read in graphology. Matisse frequently made reference to his drawn marks as 'signs,' to his practice as 'plastic writing.'⁴ But how is an inscribed surface to be apprehended as either written or drawn? What is at stake in the difference? Attending to the dialogue between the categories of mark, sign, figure and alphabetical character foregrounds the tension between legible and visible, substitutable and specific, codified and unmediated. How, then, do linguistic structures complicate expressive claims made for drawing, and in what ways do we find Matisse self-reflexively engaging with problems of the sign? Importantly, both drawing and writing begin as *manual* activities. I will argue that when drawing is seen as the direct presentation of the artist's internal workings, the hand is presented as performing a transparent role for the mind's benefit. When, however, we attend to the hand's own embodied, fleshy logic, we find it operating under a principle not of subservience, but rather of what I want to call *truancy*. In my discussion of drawing's relationship with writing, then, issues of signification and embodiment arise as types of interference, disturbing the claims of expressive models that propose drawing as capable of the straightforward conveyance of singular subjective contents.

While drawing's dialogue with writing is well established, its conjunction with cinema seems surprising. Powerful impulses in discussions of drawing describe a practice that is

³ For a discussion of the musical analogy, see Jack Flam: 'Matisse's *Dessins Thèmes et variations*, A Book and a Method,' in *Henri Matisse, Zeichnungen und Gouaches Découpées* (1993), esp. p. 22.

⁴ Matisse: 'Notes of a Painter on His Drawing,' in *MoA*, p. 131. In his introductory essay, 'Matisse-en-France,' Louis Aragon also several times makes appeals to a graphologist in apprehending the artist's 'signs;' for example, Aragon I, p. 66.

ancient, private, expressive, interior, rudimentary. Prominent within its complex history has been drawing's link to the externalization of an internal content (be it a *disegno interno* or inner image, an idea, or a particular feeling or emotion); it has been considered the most direct and intimate of mediums. Indeed, in Matisse's practice, there are correspondences between the kinds of claims for intimacy between artist and audience achieved by *viewing* drawings, and between the artist and model enabled by the *act* of drawing. Within this kind of framework, then, drawing, as both noun and verb, is deemed capable of providing access to the interiority of the other. Cinema seems to work in opposite ways. As a quintessentially modern spectacle, it serves as a shorthand for spectacular culture. The cinematic image is dynamic, comprised of a sequence of stills that articulate an illusion of movement. Historically, cinema has appealed to a mass audience. It involves an array of modern technological mechanisms, placing it in contrast to the apparent simplicity of pencil and paper.

It might seem, then, that there can be no meaningful relation between these modes. But, as Michael Newman argues (and as discussed in my introduction), it needs to be recognized that 'the meaning and apparent ahistoricity of drawing is determined by the other technologies of representation that co-exist with it at any given moment.'⁵ That is, with the arrival of new modes, the status and potentials attributed to existing ones must be reconfigured within this changed field. So how might drawing emerge, in light of the cinema? The question takes on particular resonance in relation to this wall of drawings by Matisse. For Newman, drawing's indexical and tactile qualities align it with analogue photography, both having a privileged relation to the trace, and each sharing the status of a 'resemblance produced by contact.'⁶ Whereas Newman's focus is trained upon the individual drawn mark, I am more interested here in how marks operate in combination, and through this how they both refer to the activity of their production, as well as generate a sense of movement upon reception. Firstly, then, this oscillation between movement and stillness, insistently foregrounded in the serial structure of Matisse's *Themes and Variations*, will be considered as fundamental to both drawing and to cinema. Secondly, the affective and phantasmatic investments of Matisse's studio practice will be considered in relation to cinema's similarly immersive operations, as both artist and viewer are woven

⁵ Michael Newman: 'The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (2003), p. 105.

⁶ Ibid.

into a heightened, eroticized scenario. My attention here, then, is not primarily trained upon the exploration of the considerable aesthetic interest of these drawings. Rather, I aim to explore the structures of temporality, signification and embodiment that are articulated through this triangular relationship of drawing, writing, and cinema.

Themes and Variations comprises a total of 158 sheets, mostly of dimensions roughly 40 x 53 cm.⁷ The drawings are organised into 17 groups, each group is sequenced alphabetically, and each drawing is numbered. Most frequently the drawings depict a single female model, yet there are also a number of still life studies. All but five groups comprise a 'theme' drawing executed in charcoal (Figure 1.3), and a series of 'variations,' ranging in number from three to nineteen, and made with either black conté, crayon or pen and ink (Figures 1.4-1.9). The Fabiani editions were unbound, and were accompanied by an essay written by the French Surrealist writer Louis Aragon, of whom Matisse produced a connected series of drawings in March 1942.⁸ Matisse was evidently very pleased with the suite, writing to his son Pierre in April 1942: "For a year now I've been making an enormous effort in drawing. I say *effort*, but that's a mistake, because what has occurred is a *floraison* after fifty years of effort..."⁹

The majority of 'theme' drawings were produced slowly in charcoal, often over more than one sitting.¹⁰ Matisse wrote of the relaxed nature of these sessions, in which, erasing and redrawing, he carried out, as he put it, 'a banal conversation' with his model.¹¹ 'This image,' he later wrote, 'is revealed to me as though each stroke of charcoal erased from a mirror some of the mist which until then had prevented me from seeing it.'¹² Addition is paradoxically aligned with subtraction: the creative process having as much to do with the erasure of perceptual barriers as with the generation of forms. Matisse's rhetoric is of increased intimacy and understanding. His metaphors involve light and clearing, qualities at

⁷ Some other sheets are 52 x 33 cm (eg: D and L series), others 50 x 63 cm (eg: M series). All my illustrations of the *Themes and Variations* are taken from the 1943 Fabiani edition.

⁸ Louis Aragon: *Henri Matisse, a Novel* (2 vols.), translated by Jean Stewart (1972, hereafter Aragon I/II).

⁹ Henri Matisse in a letter to his son Pierre, 3rd April 1942, quoted by John Elderfield: *The Drawings of Henri Matisse* (1984), p.121.

¹⁰ Lydia Delectorskaya: *Henri Matisse, Contre vents et marées: peinture et livres illustrés de 1939 à 1943*, (Paris, 1996, hereafter Delectorskaya 1996) p. 304.

¹¹ Matisse: 'Portraits,' in *MoA*, p. 222. Letter to Aragon 17-18th March 1942: 'When I am working differently, at my studies, I can carry on a conversation on a more or less cloudy level which is unconnected with the work I'm doing.' Aragon I, p. 236.

¹² Matisse: 'Portraits,' in *MoA*, p. 222.

odds with the cloudy weight of the charcoal as it has been rubbed and smudged in during the time of working. The claims for insight and direct apprehension intensify. Following the work of the 'theme' drawing, Matisse said that he then had the confidence to give 'free reign' to his pen.¹³ The 'variation' drawings were produced in a burst of concentrated effort. In contrast to the atmosphere of the 'themes,' here he required absolute silence and stillness: 'While I am working at my inspired drawings,' he told Aragon in 1942, 'if my model asks me the time and I pay attention, I'm done for, the drawing is done for... I come out of a different world.'¹⁴

The scene of drawing is presented as intense and immersive. Matisse's 'inspirational' moments are disturbed by any intrusion from the everyday, such as questions about time. Matisse asserted that the success of his drawings depends upon a creative tension that is focused and undistracted, and he situated this intensity within a language of expression. In 1939, Matisse wrote: 'My line drawing is the purest and most direct translation of my emotion.'¹⁵ Drawing, Matisse continues, is above all 'a means of expressing intimate feelings and descriptions of states of being... which should speak without clumsiness, directly to the mind of the spectator.'¹⁶ Drawing, as a product of this intense, focused expressive effort, should provide the viewer direct access to the artist's 'intimate feelings.'

Affect and Emotion

Matisse's statements frequently employ the words *émotion* and *sentiment*, to convey a sense of an interior feeling that he then exteriorizes through drawing. But when we are addressing this question of expression, must we assume that what we are referring to is a defined, thing-like 'content' that is capable of being 'translated?' A shift in vocabulary might be useful here. Rather than thinking in terms of internal contents, of personalized feelings or emotions, we can instead employ a term that offers a renewed series of potentials: *affect*. Building on my introductory remarks concerning this term, here I want to develop more of its specific implications. "Affects are," writes Simon O'Sullivan,

¹³ Matisse: 'Notes of a Painter on His Drawing,' in *MoA*, p. 131

¹⁴ Henri Matisse quoted in *Aragon I*, p. 236. See also Delectorskaya 1996, p.203, and Flam op.cit. 1993, pp. 126-7. Flam describes the variations as produced in 2-4 hour sessions, in focused concentration and silence, with the model used only as an occasional reference.

¹⁵ Matisse: 'Notes of a Painter on His Drawing,' in *MoA*, p. 130.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 131.

“moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter. We might even say that affects are *immanent* to matter. They are immanent to experience. (Following Spinoza, we might define affect as the effect another body... has upon my own body and my body’s *duration*).¹⁷ Affect is, then, an effect of intensity upon a body. Importantly, however, it is not yet *personal*. That is, it *precedes* ownable feeling. This important point requires a detour.

In his book *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi offers an exhilarating meditation on an experiment conducted in the early twentieth century by David Katz. Experimental subjects were asked to match their memory of the colour of a good friend’s eyes (or the red of their own lips, or the brown of the bricks of their childhood home) with a colour sample. A repeatable result was produced: in almost every case, the colour was remembered as too bright, too dark, or too saturated, suggesting that ‘the co-functioning of language, memory, and affect ‘exaggerates’ colour.’¹⁸ In this experimental situation, the subject and the experimenter have a different relationship to language, to the word ‘blue’ for example. For the experimenter ‘blue’ plays a standardizing function, enabling an ‘objective’ comparison. For the subject, it is a trigger for affect and memory, producing an ‘ineffable singularity of experience.’¹⁹ Colour has struck, and a singular excess has been produced: the memory is ‘too-blue.’ Neither is the excess limited to or exhausted by this given experimental situation: ‘The next time the subject remembers his friend’s face, those familiar eyes will still be too-blue.’²⁰ Yet this experience, this event, is not yet explained in terms of the *personal*. It only becomes personal when the experimenter informs the subject of the mismatch (of which, until that point, s/he is unaware), to which the subject must then own up. The event is cloven in the experimental context: between the scientist’s objective information, and the experimentee’s subjective waywardness. ‘*Experience becomes personal socially*.’²¹ Once informed of her error, the subject then explains the arrival of this elusive excess on an accumulation of familiarity and fondness that triggered this friendly memory. But these personalized emotions do not wholly account for this singular striking of colour:

¹⁷ Simon O’Sullivan, ‘The Aesthetics of Affect, Thinking Art Beyond Representation,’ *Angelaki* (Volume 6, Number 3, December 2001), p. 126.

¹⁸ Brian Massumi: ‘Too-Blue: Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism,’ in *Parables for the Virtual – Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), pp. 208-256.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 211

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 212.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 211-2.

‘As it transpires, the excess of blue is owned by the experimentee only retrospectively. It makes ingress in excess of its expressibility as a personal feeling. The ‘excess,’ then, is less the quantity of feeling than the surprising manner in which the feeling preceded itself into the context: it is the contextual precession of ownable feeling. That is why the excess is not simply a quantity of feeling, however great. It is a qualitative surplus over any quantity of feeling. It may well not have come about without an antecedent accumulation of familiarity and fondness. But it is not reducible to that personal ‘investment’... As a discursive content, it [the striking of colour, the too-blue] comes to be. As excess, it continues. It runs through this containment, jumping to the next contextual rigging.’²²

Massumi advises that we reserve the term ‘emotion’ for the personalized content, and ‘affect’ for the continuation: ‘Affect is trans-situational. As processional as it is precessional, affect inhabits the passage. It is pre- and postcontextual, pre- and postpersonal, an excess of continuity invested only in the ongoing: its own... Impersonal affect is the connecting thread of experience.’²³ So affect is not ownable. It can be defined as a stable content only retrospectively, once captured within a context and tethered to a set of personal investments. But fundamentally it is processional, it exceeds such capture, it moves across given contexts, it connects events. In an earlier chapter, Massumi spells out the distinction between affect and emotion: ‘An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized.’²⁴

Affect, however, is not containable in language. It is extra-linguistic. To assert this obviously produces the problem of how to talk about something that exceeds language. But I do not propose the use of the term affect so as to *contain* anything: affect ‘is not entirely containable in knowledge but is analyzable in effect, as effect.’²⁵ But what purchase does this shift in terminology afford our discussion of Matisse’s drawing practice? Most obviously, it allows us some distance from the idea that what is at stake is a stable, communicable, emotional object. Affect is of the body, not of the person. It is not an internal content to be conveyed, but an intensity to be produced within a situation. Matisse

²² Ibid. p. 216-7.

²³ Ibid. p. 217.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 28.

²⁵ Ibid. Footnote 3, p. 260.

comes closer to it when he wrote in another context of an 'intensity of emotional shock.'²⁶

Intensity can be equated with affect, and has particular stakes regarding temporality:

'Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback that momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static – temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It's like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it.'²⁷

We remember that Matisse himself gave the example of a question about the time to illustrate how easily his work was disturbed: 'if the model asks me the time... I'm done for... I come out of a different world.' We will now move on to consider how Matisse constructed a scenario in which this 'different world' could be sustained, in which he could be released from his everyday functional perceptions and preoccupations: a studio encounter in which narrative or linear time is scrambled, a zone instead to redouble affect's 'resonance and feedback.'

La Grande Songerie

Matisse's heightening of affect should be considered in the context of the embodied, charged studio encounter between artist and model. His language of lightness and clearing (removing mist from a mirror) is at odds with the heady erotic atmosphere of his studio, which speaks more compellingly of cloudy sensual reveries than of limpid insight. Matisse's encounter with his model was conducted in a situation of intense physical proximity (Figure 1.10). Lydia Delectorskaya, Matisse's secretary and longstanding model (although not for this suite),²⁸ writes of how he would work at arm's length, or even with his board resting on her knee: 'His easel almost on top of his subject, he generally painted seated within two metres of the latter as if to be immersed in its atmosphere.'²⁹ Aragon similarly reported Matisse 'Sitting alarmingly close, an arm's length away.'³⁰ This intense proximity is evidenced in an untitled drawing from 1935 (Figure 1.11). In this image, the

²⁶ Matisse: 'The Role and Modalities of Colour' (1945), in *MoA*, p. 156.

²⁷ Massumi, op.cit. p. 26

²⁸ In a 1968 note to his introductory essay, Aragon reports that the model for series B, C, D, E, F and K, L, N, was Nézy-Hamidé Chawkat. Aragon I, p. 125.

²⁹ Lydia Delectorskaya: *With Apparent Ease, Henri Matisse, Paintings from 1935-1939*. (1988) p. 25.

³⁰ Aragon I, p. 234.

model looms arrestingly close in the right foreground, her foot perched on the support of the artist's board. The composition arcs round to a reflection of the scene in a full-length mirror to the centre and left. Here we see the artist with pen to paper, with the model to the right, sitting on a stool, her legs straddling two others. The viewer occupies the position of the artist, and is thus invited to engage empathetically with his creative endeavour. To reach out would be to touch, to possess. The model's head rests on her left knee, so close to the artist (and by inference to us also), that we might feel we would hear her breath, even feel the heat from her body and smell her skin.

The desire invested in such a scenario is invoked as Delectorskaya reports Matisse's words: 'A cake seen through a store window doesn't make your mouth water as much as when you enter and it's right under your nose.'³¹ This evocation of salivation and taste vividly brings into focus the sexual charge of this encounter between an aging, bourgeois artist and a naked young female model.³² Here I take issue with Yve-Alain Bois, who argues that the artist's desire was invested exclusively in his pictorial concerns and not in the bodies he employed to develop them.³³ Without reducing Matisse's encounter with the model to a scene of glorified lechery, the (asymmetrical) economy of sexual desire in such a charged situation cannot realistically, I think, be denied. Many of the drawings certainly convey an erotic charge. Although the model never appears completely nude in the *Themes and Variations* drawings, she is often semi-naked and, more frequently, is clothed in exotic garb provided by the artist (Aragon refers to Nézy-Hamidé Chawkat, Matisse's model for many of these series, as a 'Turkish princess').³⁴ In the N series, the head and torso of the model are naked but for a long transparent veil, a necklace and a bracelet (Figures 1.12 and 1.13). Often depicted here with an arm raised above her head, the integrity of the bodily

³¹ Delectorskaya op.cit. 1988, p. 25.

³² Such synaesthetic interminglings are also suggested by Aragon when he reports Matisse illustrating the 'conviction' (not decisiveness, as Aragon had proposed) of his line with the example of delivering a 'slap' to someone's face. Aragon writes: 'His drawings are certainly finished slaps, one involving the next,' then prefers a comparison with a scent, and in the end asks: 'But when you think it over, what difference is there between a slap and a scent?' Aragon I, p. 82-3.

³³ "Let there be no mistake concerning the object of his desire: it is not the model (at the very most a stimulant that the painter frequently said he would like to be able to dispense with); it is painting itself." Bois: 'On Matisse: The Blinding', *October* (Number 68, Spring 1994), p. 63. Bois is referring to one of Matisse's letters to Aragon dated March 17-8, 1942: "My progress, I consider I have made some progress when I note in my work an increasingly evident independence from the support of the model. I should like to do without it completely one day – I don't expect to, because I haven't adequately trained myself to remember forms." But, as Aragon says, he does not say 'doing without a model,' but without the support of one – "the model as starting point is a principle which he never calls into question." Aragon I, pp. 235ff.

³⁴ Aragon I, p. 125.

form is taken over by the sensual play of Matisse's line. In variation N4, for example, the arabesques develop a flowing, strangely anthropomorphic shape at the centre of the composition. Throughout the series, the veil serves to emphasize the model's breasts, which it translucently reveals. In N6, the left breast is securely described, while the small circular line that indicates the right nipple is almost indistinguishable in its repetition among the beads of the figure's necklace. Such games of exposure and concealment generate a sexual frisson that pervades these drawings.

This sensual theatricality was heightened by the nature of its stage: Matisse's luxurious studio. From the 1920s, Matisse moved between a sequence of comfortable Nice hotels, constructing in each a space of private fantasy.³⁵ Filled with wonderful and exotic objects, plants, birds and fantastic decorations, these were places of voluptuousness, imagination and wonderment, constructions facilitating the protection of Matisse's practice from the harsh realities of the Occupation, family difficulties, as well as the de-sensitising banalities of everyday living.³⁶ Aragon, displaying his own investments in the oneiric as a prominent Surrealist, called Matisse's studio *La Grande Songerie*: the storehouse of dreams, a 'harem of forms and colours.'³⁷ In 1944, Marguerite Bouvier described visiting Matisse's studio in Vence (Figure 1.14): '...he collects hummingbirds, mirabilis, Bengalis, and guittes or blue Budgerigars. Congolese tapestries hang on the walls, panther skins. Persian rugs... Matisse and his legend reign over this unreal world.'³⁸ 'Matisse,' Aragon wrote, 'pale-skinned and neat-bearded... is the sultan of this world of fluttering pigeons.'³⁹ Although not to be pursued in this chapter, the problematic orientalism of these scenarios and descriptions must be acknowledged.⁴⁰ Encouraging his sensual and aesthetic reveries, this space of

³⁵ The *Themes and Variations* drawings were produced near Nice, at Matisse's apartment at Le Régina, a hotel in Cimiez. It is not clear which room Matisse made his *Themes and Variations* drawings; while a number of visitors have offered extravagant descriptions of his studio, Carco suggested that he made the drawings in the more Spartan 'Camera Lucida.' However, a later series of photographs (1946), also included in Aragon's book, show him at work on a fusain study in a more busy and plush room at Vence (see Aragon I, pp. 253-265). It is perhaps possible that he made his theme drawings surrounded by his array of objects and decorations, while producing his more focused variations in this other, minimally adorned space. This is, however, speculation on my part.

³⁶ For an authoritative recent biography, see Hilary Spurling: *Matisse, The Master – A Life of Henri Matisse Volume Two, 1909-1954* (2005).

³⁷ Aragon I, p. 231.

³⁸ Marguerite Bouvier: 'Interview with Marguerite Bouvier,' in *MoA*, p. 151.

³⁹ Aragon I, p. 231.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Marilyn Lincoln Board: 'Constructing Myths and Ideologies in Matisse's Odalisques'. *Genders* (Number 5, Summer 1989), pp. 22-49.

dreamy plenitude insulated Matisse from everyday preoccupations, a 'hole in time,' to use Massumi's phrase, irreconcilable with that of the clock.

Matisse's working practice was structured by a series of repetitions: of scenarios, encounters, objects, routines, gestures and felt states. His working routine was consistent; he would paint from nine in the morning until noon, take a siesta and then draw from three until six in the evening. He returned to familiar subjects obsessively throughout his career. Chief amongst these was the female body; Matisse painted and drew from the model constantly over five decades, often keeping the same model for a number of years. He also repeatedly drew and painted from a familiar array of still life objects: favourite vases, jugs, jars, tins, bowls and plants (Figure 1.15). 'Objects,' Matisse said, 'which have been of use to me nearly all my life.'⁴¹ For Aragon, Matisse had come to deploy this range of objects as he would units of a language: 'I've got it,' he exclaimed, 'we should call this a vocabulary of objects.'⁴² Moving between residences, then, in each Matisse was able to construct the same '*songerie*,' the same 'materialized day-dream.' Through such repetition, the artist endeavoured to regain and develop the intensity he had previously felt in front of the model, to 'work in the same frame of mind on different days, to develop these sensations.'⁴³ In 1941, he said to Carco, "In order for things to click I must recover the idea I had the previous day."⁴⁴ John Elderfield draws out the Proustian connotations of this method, elaborating how at each sitting memories and experiences from previous encounters fold in on the present, 'forging a sensuous link between past and present, causing their common nature to stand out, and removing both from chronological time.'⁴⁵ Elderfield quotes Proust: "The grandeur of real art... is to rediscover, grasp again and lay before us that reality from which we live so far removed and from which we become more and more separated as the formal knowledge which we substitute for it grows in thickness and imperviousness"⁴⁶ Addition and creation become paradoxically linked to a desire to remove, to unpeel sedimented obfuscations, to return to see freshly and without mediation.⁴⁷

⁴¹ A note written by Matisse on the back of Adant's photograph (Figure 1.15), which sent to Aragon in 1946. See Aragon I, p. 247.

⁴² Aragon I, p. 249.

⁴³ Matisse: 'Notes of a Painter,' in *MoA*, p. 42.

⁴⁴ *MoA* p. 136

⁴⁵ Elderfield, op.cit. p. 55.

⁴⁶ Proust in *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ In 1953, Matisse entitled a text 'Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child.' Henri Matisse: 'Il faut regarder toute la vie avec des yeux d'enfants,' *Le Courrier de L'U.N.E.S.C.O.*, VI, 10 (October 1953), based on an interview by Régine Pernoud. See Flam, *MoA*, p. 217-219.

It is his sensation, then, that Matisse is endeavouring to recapture in the process of working. We remember that in 1939 he described his line drawing as ‘the purest and most direct translation of my emotion.’ But in the same text, and with regard to his models, he asserted: ‘My plastic signs probably express their souls (a word I dislike).’⁴⁸ So there are two competing claims here: on one hand, that Matisse’s drawing conveys his *subjective* emotional state, and on the other, that they express the fundamental, *objective* being of the model. The benefit of employing the term ‘affect’ is that it arises in the interaction of elements, escaping capture as a kind of property that could be *of* a given person or object. Affect, as Massumi argues, inhabits the gap. Matisse did approach this issue of the gap, which he articulated in terms of ‘identification,’ a process of willed empathy through which a profound access to the model’s being could be won.⁴⁹ Writing in 1954, Matisse claimed his encounters with the model to be a means by which a mutual understanding was fostered, in which took place an ‘interaction of feeling that makes each one sense the warmth of the other’s heart.’⁵⁰ This empathetic notion might be re-framed in terms of Bergson’s notion of intuition:

“Intuition is not simply the discernment of natural differences, qualitative differences or differences in kind; it is the inner orientation to tendency, to the differences between tendencies. It is the capacity to understand natural differences beyond a monistic or dualistic model, not as a relation of two terms, but as the convergence of two tendencies or dispositions, not marked by negation but brought together through contraction/ dilation.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Matisse: ‘Notes of a Painter on His Drawing,’ in *MoA*, p. 131-2. ‘*Mes signes plastiques expriment probablement leur état d’âme (mot que je n’aime pas) auquel je m’intéresse inconsciemment ou bien alors à quoi?*’ in Dominique Fourcade: *Henri Matisse, Écrits et propos sur l’art* (1972), p.162. We should also be aware that Matisse wrote this one year after, and perhaps in response to, Claude Roger-Marx’s 1938 piece in which he claimed of Matisse’s drawings: “These young women, adapted to the décor devised to harbour them and decked out in accessories not of their own choosing are... nothing but a pretext for him to assert himself... it is in the volumes or in tonal relationships that he is interested, and never in the soul.” See *MoA*, note 6, p. 285.

⁴⁹ Aragon I, p. 110.

⁵⁰ *MoA*, p. 223. Jack Flam supports Matisse’s claims: ‘If we see her through *him*, to a certain degree we also see him through *her*.’ Flam op.cit. 1993, p. 124

⁵¹ Bergson quoted by Elizabeth Grosz: ‘Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming,’ *Parallax* (Volume 11, Number 2, April-June 2005), p. 9. Grosz writes: “Bergson’s philosophical method, intuition, has very little in common with how this term is commonly understood, as a vague empathy or feeling. There is nothing impulsive or vague about intuition, which is a rigorous philosophical method for an attunement with the concrete specificities of the real.” (p. 7) For a discussion of Matisse in relation to Bergson, see Mark Antliff: ‘The Rhythms of Duration: Bergson and the Art of Matisse,’ in John Mullarkey (ed.): *The New Bergsonism* (1999). pp. 184-208.

This orientation towards a difference in tendency is some distance away from Matisse's claim to be expressing souls, about which he himself was evidently uneasy.⁵² While we may remain sceptical of Matisse's ability to capture (or even his interest in addressing) the complexity of his model's *subjectivity*, we might also suggest that what he was attempting to address was not entirely 'of himself' either. Indeed, Matisse many times (and often in rather vague terms) described the process of drawing as an escape from self, and as enabling the activation of faculties beyond any analytic or rational determination. In 1942 he annotated the draft of Aragon's essay, 'Matisse-en-France:' 'Close to the model – within it – eyes less than a metre away from the model and knees within reach of its knees – as in the room at Ciboure where I seemed not to exist.'⁵³ Drawing is 'analogous to the gesture of a man groping his way in the darkness';⁵⁴ he executes them 'almost as irresponsibly as a medium.'⁵⁵ There is always a danger that this rhetoric of the abandonment of conscious control constitutes only a worn cliché. Yet this cliché can be re-potentialized when framed in terms of an affective engagement, which precedes a division between the subjective and objective, and puts pressure on claims for the faithful expression of resolved emotions. Affect inhabits a *situation*; it does not pre-exist in a *context*. The contextual 'pertains to nominal identity,' in which 'identified subjects and objects are considered, in principle, to cross the affective gap between contexts essentially unchanged.' The situational, however, accommodates 'the unbiddenness of qualitative overflow,' the vivacity and anomalies of any singular event.⁵⁶ It is within a situation then, with its share of unpredictable liveliness, that Matisse's drawings were produced. But given that here I have not been wanting to anchor the drawings to the 'personal,' nor to any given object or content, to what do Matisse's 'plastic signs' refer? What do they present to the viewer, and what is their relationship to other kinds of signs (and to that of writing in particular)?

⁵² We remember that he wrote that his signs *probably* express the models' souls (a word he 'dislikes'). Privately, Matisse also sounds more cautionary notes; in a letter to his son Pierre (dated 7th June 1942), Matisse wrote: 'I do not find myself there immediately, the painting is not a mirror reflecting what I experienced while creating it, but a powerful object, strong and expressive, which is as novel for me as for anyone else.' *MoA*, p. 143.

⁵³ Matisse note to Aragon's text, Aragon I, p. 104.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 234

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 129

⁵⁶ Massumi: *Parables*, p. 218.

Plastic Signs and the Truant Hand

In his variation drawings, the models and objects are depicted by the same characteristically economical line: predominantly mellifluous, but also punctuated by knotty episodes and inky overflows. Nevertheless, Matisse's line retains its identity irrespective of the things it describes; 'it is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing,' Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1960, but rather 'a certain disequilibrium contrived within the indifference of the white paper.'⁵⁷ Different entities are caught up together, subsumed into the formal logic, the pictorial 'syntax' of his compositional schemes, a kind of 'Matisse-grammar.' In his discussion of Matisse's studio mentioned earlier, Aragon described how *La Grande Songerie* constituted 'both the place where the *songe*, the dream, takes place and the materials it uses.'⁵⁸ The sitter becomes one amongst them (Figure 1.16). Aragon wrote of his experience: 'I was an object then, like those green plants, shells, armchairs, gourds and vases in his *songerie*.'⁵⁹ The specificity of each thing is cancelled, equalized by the reifying action of the drawn line.⁶⁰ Not only this, but in several sheets, the kinds of signs and strokes that describe specific parts of the body are also found duplicated or echoed in other areas of the composition. For instance, the model's bracelet will often replicate the enfolding of the fingers (eg: Variations D5 and E4, Figures 1.17 and 1.18); or the 'M'-like scribble of the eye will be repeated in the pattern of a fabric (eg: Variations K5 and L7, Figures 1.19 and 1.20). One effect of these echoes is to unify the pictorial field, to establish a pictorial 'syntax' that pervades each image. Each individual compositional element is subsumed under a cohering graphic principle.

We recall that Aragon described Matisse's objects as a 'vocabulary,' and that Matisse referred to his drawing practice as 'plastic writing,' and to his marks as 'signs.' The analogy between line drawing and writing is frequently made, and is dwelt upon in some

⁵⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' (1960), in Galen A. Johnson (ed.), *The Maurice Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston; Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 144.

⁵⁸ Aragon I, p. 232

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 234

⁶⁰ This system of substitutions and equivalences was more easily enabled with respect to the female body than the male. The conventional associations of woman with flowers and plants, as well as with decoration, allowed Matisse to perform a 'Daphneification,' whereby the sign for woman is blended with fabrics (I7, L9) and foliage (C4). The same economy of substitutability and fluid metaphorical exchange did not exist in the representation of men. It is not now enough to say, as Flam does, that 'in some of these works, the metaphor of woman and flower is extended into the metaphor of woman as flower. "This tendency of the sign to move from one object to another is characteristic of human language," as Bergson observed.' Flam: op.cit. 1993, p. 130.

depth in Aragon's introductory essay. In it, he asserts that Matisse 'writes [the mouth] rather than drawing it,'⁶¹ and in 1949, Matisse remarked on how he had come to know Lydia 'like the alphabet.'⁶² So what is it to know someone 'like the alphabet,' as if to draw them was to write down their name? What is the relationship between writing and drawing in this context? An entry-point into this discussion is provided by a letter sent to Aragon by the artist, dated 16th February 1942 (Figure 1.21). Around text that is at times difficult to decipher, Matisse has drawn groups of mouth-signs. At the top of the letter is a line from Mallarmé: '*Imiter le chinois au coeur limpide et fin.*'⁶³ With this suggestion of a pictographic language, he then writes: '*Recherche d'un thème, d'une formule plutôt, d'un signe pour chaque chose* [sic].' He is looking for a sign for each thing, as he puts it. Of the mouth, for example: '*La bouche, la lèvre inférieure touche la lèvre supérieure – un baiser continu exprimé parfaitement dans le signe du chiffre 3e nombre.*'⁶⁴ Although Matisse crosses the word out, body parts do become *chiffres* or figures; he compared the lines necessary to draw a mouth with numbers 3 and 8. Of the model's mouth, Matisse was building a figure that could encapsulate its fullness, the touch of lip upon lip. Aragon reports how Matisse had engaged him in similar discussion around other 'feminine signs': for breasts, hands and eyes, for example.⁶⁵

So in what way are such 'plastic signs' like language? To return to a previous example: in variation L7, we not only see a clear demonstration of the sign-for-a-mouth, but the zig-zagging 'M' mark that describes the eye is also used to describe the pattern on the model's headscarf. That is, to use a structuralist vocabulary, the same signifier connects up with very different signifieds. The meaning of such marks, then, is dependent upon the field of relations within which they are situated. Indeed, such is the economy and abbreviation of Matisse's mark, that it is frequently the case that very similar lines will describe very different objects. Matisse could be interpreted as playing the kinds of precise semiotic games that abound in Cubist collage, which Yve-Alain Bois in particular has powerfully aligned with Saussure's structural linguistics (which was being developed independently at

⁶¹ Aragon I, p. 107.

⁶² Matisse in conversation with Brother Rayssiguier, January 18 1949, quoted by Pierre Schneider: *Matisse*. (1984), p. 576.

⁶³ 'Imitate the Chinese with a clear and delicate heart.' (My translation).

⁶⁴ 'The search for a theme, or rather a formula, for a sign for each thing,' 'The mouth – the lower lip touches the upper lip in a continual kiss, expressed perfectly by the character for number "3".' (My translation).

⁶⁵ Aragon I, p. 106ff.

exactly the same time).⁶⁶ So are Matisse's pictorial marks analogous to the arbitrary sign as proposed by Saussure?

Saussure's model of the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is helpful in establishing why we can read an 'M' mark as describing a pupil and iris in one instance, and a floral decoration in another. But we will find a structuralist model of language unsatisfying in developing a discussion of Matisse's drawn signs for two main reasons. The first is the obvious point that the effect of a drawing is not just a question of linguistic signification. The identification of nameable signifying units is not the main reason why we keep looking at Matisse's drawings. They are significant beyond what they signify, and this significance is anchored in the realms of aesthetic, empathetic and associative response. It has to do with the relations between pictorial elements, but relations in which the positive physical properties of marks are far from irrelevant. To take again Matisse's mouth sign. As it is deployed in the *Themes and Variations*, this sign does not approach the numerical figure to the extent suggested in Matisse's letter. However, it does arrive repeatedly and with a consistent form (for example, in Variations B5, E5, F9, I8, L7 and N6, Figure 1.22). Changes in the form of the sign affect not only what expression or mood the viewer projects onto the depicted model (partially a question of linguistic identification), but also the aesthetic configuration of the whole sheet.

A second limitation of Saussure's linguistic model for a discussion of these drawings stems from his emphasis upon *langue* over *parole*, that is, for the synchronic and structural aspects of language over its particular arrival in speech (let alone writing).⁶⁷ In an essay entitled 'Alphabet,' first published in 1948, the Surrealist writer Michel Leiris attends to the corporeal dimension of language, arguing that far from constituting a transparent code, it is something issuing from the body and settling there.⁶⁸ He constantly stresses the *orality* of words and sounds: '*Alphabet* is, in short, something you hold in your mouth when you pronounce it out loud or silently: what is called a concrete word, which fills with a perceptible content the cavity surrounded by your throat, tongue, teeth and palate.'⁶⁹ Likewise, Matisse's sign-for-a-mouth is not 'a coded telegram sent to us by the ambassador

⁶⁶ See Bois: 'The Semiology of Cubism,' in Lynn Zelevansky (ed.): *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (1992), pp. 169-208.

⁶⁷ See my Introduction, pp. 24ff.

⁶⁸ Michel Leiris: 'Alphabet' in '*Scratches*,' *Rules of the Game*, Vol. 1, translated by Lydia Davis. (1991), p. 38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 31.

of an absolute remoteness:⁷⁰ it has bodily origins. Indeed, the economy and clarity of Matisse's line foregrounds its status as trace: its *indexical* aspect insistently brings to mind and leaves open to view the manual action that inscribed it. That is, part of what is 'read' in our apprehension of Matisse's line is the movement of the hand as he lent himself to the language of drawing when making it. The mouth sign, for example, issues from a single movement: it begins at the top left, curves down slightly, and rises and fluctuates to describe the ripple of the upper lip. From the right it then returns to describe the separation of the lips, then takes a generous sweep from left to right to delineate the bounds of the lower lip. As well as signifying a mouth by convention and (minimally) by resemblance, then, this sign also attests to a fluent, pleasurable movement of the hand.

What, then, is the role of the hand in the production of these drawings? Within expressive models based upon the successful conveyance of internal contents, the drawn line refers to a hand at the service of the artist, transparently translating subjective ideas and emotions into visual form. However, all transactions between artist and image are dependent on the body's relays and corporeal mechanisms. Rather than directly translating interior mental contents, the hand has its own premises, its own thickness and interference, its own 'formula of movement.'⁷¹ In the 1930s Henri Focillon wrote of drawing: 'Such an alchemy does not, as is commonly supposed, merely develop the stereotyped form of an inner vision; it constructs the vision itself, gives it body and enlarges its perspectives. The hand is not the mind's docile slave. It searches and experiments for its master's benefit; it has all sorts of adventures; it tries its chance.'⁷² We might regard the carnal logic of the hand as an unruly, *truant* principle at work in the generation of Matisse's signs.

Expressions of the hand's experimental truancy pervade the *Themes and Variations* suite, periodically hijacking representation. For a remarkable example, we will turn to the set of thirty-four pen and ink portrait drawings Matisse made of Aragon in March 1942, thirty-two of which were first published in grid formation over four pages of Aragon's book *Henri Matisse, roman* in 1971 (Figures 1.23).⁷³ Aragon gave each drawing a number, although he admitted that these may not correspond to the sequence of their production. By

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 38

⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty: 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,' (1952), in Johnson op.cit. p. 102.

⁷² Henri Focillon: *The Life of Forms in Art* (1989), p. 180.

⁷³ Aragon discusses the drawings in Aragon I, pp. 233ff, and Aragon II, pp. 47ff. The drawings are reproduced on the following pages: Themes: Aragon I, p.171, II pp.15, 48 and 49. Variations: Aragon I p. 233, II pp. 50-54.

degrees, the hand disturbs representation, and on occasion overpowers this imperative almost completely, producing images of extreme distortion. In drawing 50 (Figure 1.24), for example, the hand has absconded from its representational duties and plays crazily around the contours of Aragon's face. Whereas milder liberties taken with representational codes are generally assimilated into a discourse of expressive distortion, these dramatically wayward and almost infantile manual wanderings speak more compellingly of a hand off-duty.⁷⁴

Matisse's practice was sustained by repeated studio encounters with his models; the drawings of Belgian-born poet and artist Henri Michaux also distress the boundary between drawing and writing, and explore the desires of the hand but without reference to any external object. Michaux began producing drawings in the 1920s, although by his own account he only developed his practice in a sustained way from 1936 onwards.⁷⁵ In 1927, Michaux produced two pen drawings entitled *Alphabet* and *Narration* (Figure 1.25 and 1.26). Here, sequences of glyphic characters in varying orderly rows populate the sheet. Although the artist subsequently exchanged the pen for the brush, these early drawings inaugurate a series of concerns with which Michaux would engage throughout his long career (he died in 1984). Michaux's heightened engagement with the unruly, small-scale dynamism of his materials will be explored in subsequent chapters.⁷⁶ For now, I will concentrate upon his dramatization of the dialogue between drawing and writing. In both *Alphabet* and *Narration*, Michaux's pictogrammatic signs are arranged sequentially in rows: in this, they instantly recall the organisation of words on a written page in a way that Matisse's marks do not. Although inviting efforts to 'read' them, these gestural marks will never coalesce into any recognizable code or system. Indeed, through drawing, Michaux hoped to escape the banality, generality and entrapments of formalised French (laconically addressed in Aragon's 1924 poem *Suicide*, which simply listed the letters of the alphabet). He opened his 1972 book *Émergences-Résurgences* by saying, "Born, raised, educated in an environment and culture uniquely given over to the 'verbal,' I paint to *decondition*

⁷⁴ As discussed in my Introduction (pp. 26ff), Serge Tisseron's enquiry into the 'psychic investments' involved in graphic activity might point to the hand as being, unwittingly, on some other kind of duty for the unconscious. See Tisseron: 'All Writing is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript,' in *Yale French Studies* 84: *Boundaries: Writing and Drawing* (1994), pp. 29-42.

⁷⁵ See Michaux's 'Some Information about Fifty-Nine Years of Existence,' (1959), included (with additional biographical information) in Leslie Jones: 'Chronology,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): (ed.) *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux* exh. cat. (2000), pp. 217-236.

⁷⁶ See Chapters 2 and 4.

myself'.⁷⁷ Yet Michaux maintained a faith in the sign in opposition to codified alphabets and words, rigid syntaxes and grammars. At times stretching towards a utopian vision of a 'visual Esperanto,' as one commentator has put it, Michaux strove to generate a pre-linguistic, universal, gestural lexicon.⁷⁸ Inspired in part by Chinese pictographic characters (an aspect of Chinese writing frequently over-emphasized by Western commentators⁷⁹), Michaux elaborated a vast proliferating series of glyphic manual marks. For this purpose, the hand is released from conscious constrictions, freed to try its chance in the generation of unforeseen gestural signs.

Michaux's aim was to create a language capable of expressing the singularity of lived duration: "I wanted to draw the consciousness of existing and the flow of time. As one takes one's pulse."⁸⁰ His emphasis is on the transformative process of making, a 'transfer of creative activities,' which he described as 'one of the strangest of all voyages into the self. Strange decongestion, putting to sleep one part of the mind, the speaking, writing part (part, no rather system of connections).'⁸¹ Akin to a scaled-down, less spectacular, 'drawn' version of Rosenberg's Action Painting,⁸² it is the substance of the event (or duration) of making rather than the visual properties of the result that, for him, is important. Drawing is harnessed to a language of becoming, of open, headlong passage:

Signs not to retrace steps
But to facilitate headway at every instant
Signs not from copying
But by way of signs piloting
Or headlong being piloted
Signs, not to be complete
But true to one's passing.⁸³

To express the singular passage through time, then, Michaux hoped to create a supple language of unbroken flow and flexibility that could respond to the excitations and fluctuations of embodied experience: a kind of seismography of duration. While very different in that, unlike Michaux, Matisse strove to create visual signs adequate to both the being of the model and to the 'intensity of emotional shock' he experienced during the

⁷⁷ Michaux: *Emergences/Resurgences*, (1972) translated by Richard Sieburth (2000), p. 9.

⁷⁸ Laurent Jenny: 'Simple Gestures,' in de Zegher, op.cit. p. 187

⁷⁹ See Richard Sieburth: 'Signs in Action: The Ideograms of Ezra Pound and Henri Michaux,' in Ibid. p. 209.

⁸⁰ Michaux: 'To draw the flow of time' (1957), republished in Ibid. p. 7.

⁸¹ Henri Michaux: *Passages* (1958 and 1963), in Ibid. 17.

⁸² This connection is made by Sieburth, op.cit. p. 210.

⁸³ Michaux: *Mouvements* (1951), in Vera Dickman: *Henri Michaux ex. cat.* (1999), unpag.

encounter, both artists' projects are linked in that they have predominantly been conceived of in terms of a number of key continuities. The first, which we have already discussed and to which we will return, concerns a continuous expressive operation: the fluid passage of emotion from artist, via the sign, to the viewer. The second, to which we will now turn, concerns the technology of drawing specifically: that it presents a continuous becoming.

The Cinema of Sensibility

Matisse's variation drawings have most often been discussed in terms of unity and fluid continuity. John Elderfield writes: 'Each spontaneously realised image is complete unto itself, and each gives us the subject in its wholeness,' while the 'serial' execution of the drawings 'provided a sense of temporal flow.'⁸⁴ For Pierre Schneider: 'What was crucial was not speed [of execution] itself but continuity (...): it did not matter if lines flowed slowly, as long as they were unbroken.'⁸⁵ There are certainly qualities of the *Themes and Variations* that court this language of continuity and synthesis. Firstly, the artist pays acute attention to the role of the white space of the page in articulating the drawings and generating light. He expressed pride in his having retained the radiance of each sheet: 'Notice that every page of my drawings has kept... the touching whiteness of the paper, even when a stroke divides them into sections of varying quality.'⁸⁶ If the drawings are successful, for Matisse, it is in no small part because they each retain their luminosity, which subsumes any unevenness. Secondly, although frequently knotting around a wrist, flower, or piece of jewellery, Matisse's drawing is predominantly composed of undulating, serpentine arabesques, which often traverse considerable distances without rupture. Attending to the drawings with the strange comportment of a score-keeper, it is remarkable how few distinct lines are required to comprise each image.

Nevertheless, in insisting upon such continuities, the fundamental structural cuts and gaps which articulate the suite are suppressed. Firstly, although the seriality of the drawings produces a sense of development in time, this can only be conceived as a flow by an imaginative filling of the gaps between each sheet (of which more shortly). Secondly,

⁸⁴ Elderfield, op.cit. p.123. Claudine Grammont writes: 'Le dessin avance alors comme une onde, un rythme qui renaître ou, au contraire, s'épuiser de lui-même.' ['The drawing advances like a wave, a rhythm which is reborn, or, rather, exhausts itself' – my translation] *Matisse, Une Seconde Vie* (2005), p.104.

⁸⁵ Schneider: op.cit. p. 586.

⁸⁶ Matisse in Aragon I, p. 138.

drawing's registration of time is fragmented: it presents traces of the pen's contact with the page, but is mute about the activity of the hand in between strokes. As discussed in my introduction, in a recent essay Norman Bryson has argued that drawing, specifically, reveals an open time of becoming: 'If painting presents Being, the drawn line presents Becoming. Line gives you the image *together with* the whole history of its becoming-image.'⁸⁷ This distinction assumes in drawing 'a fundamental principle of non-erasure,' where each mark is open to view as it arrived, and in painting the action of over-painting, alteration and concealment.⁸⁸ As we will see in Chapter 3, such a conception of drawing is clearly not appropriate to the cloudy, powdery density of the theme drawings, and even in relation to the line variations, it needs complicating. Indeed, we must acknowledge that it is not a *whole* history that line drawing presents, but a fragmentary one. Between each mark there is temporal space that refers to a silent, unbounded time full of the fleshy deliberations that formed the conditions of emergence for the next mark. This gap is a space of contingency and potential.

While the time of these gaps is not directly registered by the drawn lines, it nevertheless has determined the arrival of each visible mark. This time of becoming is the silent ground from which language emerges or, as Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1952, 'the threads of silence that speech is mixed together with.'⁸⁹ A facet of this ground is revealed in a film made by François Campaux entitled *Matisse* from 1946. The film includes footage of Matisse at work on a painting and a slow-motion sequence shows his hand as it wavers ponderously between strokes (Figure 1.27). Merleau-Ponty wrote of this sequence:

'That same brush which, seen with the naked eye, leaped from one act to another, was seen to meditate in a solemn expanding time – in the imminence of a world's creation – to try ten possible movements, dance in front of the canvas, brush it lightly several times, and crash down finally like a lightning stroke upon the one line necessary... It is slow motion which enumerates the possibilities. Matisse, set within a man's time and vision, looked at the still open whole of his work in progress and brought his brush toward the line which called for it in order that the painting might finally be that which it was in the process of becoming. By a simple gesture he resolved the problem which in retrospect seemed to imply an infinite number of data... And yet, Matisse's hand did hesitate. Consequently, there was a choice, and the chosen line was chosen in such a way as to observe, scattered out over the painting, twenty conditions which were unformulated and even

⁸⁷ Norman Bryson: 'A Walk for a Walk's Sake,' in de Zegher op.cit. 2003). p.150.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 149

⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty: 'Indirect Languages and the Voices of Silence', reprinted in Johnson, op.cit, pp. 83-4.

informulable for any one but Matisse, since they were only defined and imposed by the intention of executing *this painting which did not yet exist*.⁹⁰

Commenting on this footage to Brassai in 1946, Matisse said: 'I have never been so frightened as I was sitting there, watching my poor hand start off on the adventure, in slow motion, as if I had been drawing with my eyes closed.'⁹¹ The hand seemed to move without relation to sight; as Tisseron argues, 'Neither the paradigm of the eye or that of language allows us to grasp the meaning of 'first draft' dynamics – the moment when its enunciation is born in distinction from what it enunciates.'⁹² Slow motion, draws attention to the constructed nature of film's articulation of temporal unfolding. Something of its strangeness is conveyed by Merleau-Ponty's later description of Matisse's hand in this footage as 'floating among objects like seaweed, but not *moving itself*.'⁹³ For the artist, slow motion offered a new means to watch and reflect upon his own movements. This recalls Matisse's remarks to Carco with which we began: that his drawings, pinned to his studio wall, permitted him to 'watch [his] own reactions.' Whilst Aragon called this room a *camera lucida*, Matisse described this wall as the 'cinema of my sensibility.' So what is at stake in this alignment between drawing and cinema? My discussion will bear predominantly upon questions of temporality and the trace. But before attending specifically to such issues, I want first to recall the luxurious, theatrical scenario in which the drawings were produced. This will prompt a consideration of the shared phantasmatic dimension in the two mediums.

Matisse uses the word *sensibilité* to describe that which is 'projected' in this cinema of drawing. In this word there is the implication of a tremulous, heightened sensitivity, and in thinking of this illuminated screen, we might recall Proust's narrator in his childhood bedroom at Combray, who is given a magic lantern, which 'substituted for the opacity of my walls an impalpable iridescence.'⁹⁴ Matisse, we remember, was satisfied with his success in retaining the luminosity of his sheets, and we recall too the Proustian flavour of what he hoped his work would achieve: to recapture the intensity of previous sensations. The wall's 'iridescence,' then, was involved in a reflexive re-staging, a mechanism by

⁹⁰ Ibid. pp. 82-3.

⁹¹ Matisse in conversation with Brassai quoted by Yve-Alain Bois: 'Matisse and Arche-Drawing,' in *Painting as Model*. (1993), p. 46.

⁹² Tisseron, op.cit. p. 29.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty: 'Eye and Mind,' reprinted in Johnson op.cit. p. 145.

⁹⁴ Proust: *In Search of Lost Time Volume 1: Swann's Way*, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. (2002, originally published 1913), p. 8.

which the gestures cast out by the artist could exhibit their ‘answer.’ And this within the charged scene of Matisse’s encounter with the model, the tension and intensity of which being strikingly at odds with the atmosphere of lassitude with which Matisse’s work is often associated. Delectorskaya recounts how, when engaged in his variation drawings, Matisse would have his models sit motionless and in silence, referring to them only infrequently.⁹⁵ It is as if he was caught up in the unfolding of his ‘cinema,’ as one drawing followed another within this phantasmatic setting. Indeed, Laplanche and Pontalis argue that, in phantasy, ‘The subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images.’⁹⁶ Matisse became immersed in the reiterating progress of his own drawings, which became a mechanism for the accumulation of momentum, redoubling affect like a feedback loop.

Despite the stillness, silence and tension of the encounter, however, the drawings, as we have noted, nevertheless imply movement. As Laura Mulvey has recently argued, the ‘entwinement’ of movement and stillness is essential to the identity of celluloid cinema, which depends upon the dynamic articulation of a series of still photographic frames. This essential characteristic of film has been brought into relief with the arrival of digital technologies.⁹⁷ The dynamic of movement and stillness is also central the *Themes and Variations*, both in terms of the way each series of drawings implies movement, and in relation to each individual sheet, where each single mark is taken up into the workings of the whole page. As Mulvey argues, the binary of movement and stasis opens onto the terrain of a longstanding opposition: between the inscriptive or indexical domains (aligned with material facticity), and those of narrative and representation (aligned with fiction and illusion).⁹⁸ Notwithstanding the obvious objection that these drawings, as nouns, do not

⁹⁵ Delectorskaya 1996, p.203. ‘Les quelque deux, trios ou quatre quarts d’heure consacrés aux dessins au trait se passaient dans un silence absolu, le modèle immobile, intérieurement tendu, gagné par une sorte d’anxiété injustifiable. La fin d’un dessin, le temps que Matisse prenne une nouvelle feuille de papier, faisait pousser au modèle un discret soupir, comme si pendant cinq ou dix minutes il avait retenu sa respiration.’

⁹⁶ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis: ‘Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origins, origine du fantasme,’ *Les Temps Modernes* 19 II, 1964, p.1868.

⁹⁷ Laura Mulvey: ‘Passing Time: reflections on cinema from a new technological age,’ *Screen* (Volume 45, Number 2, Summer 2004), p. 148. See Chapter 5 for an extended discussion of the implications of digital technologies on conceptions of drawing.

⁹⁸ Mulvey, op.cit. 2004, p. 147. In another essay, Mulvey quotes Raymond Bellour: “On one side, there is movement, the present, presence; on the other, immobility, the past, a certain absence. On one side, the consent of illusion; on the other, a quest for hallucination. Here, a fleeting image, one that seizes us in its flight; there, a completely still image that cannot be fully grasped. On this side, time doubles life; on that, time returns to us brushed by death.” Mulvey: ‘Stillness in the Moving Image: Ways of Visualising Time and its Passing,’ in Tanya Leighton and Pavel Buchler (eds.): *Saving the Image, Art After Film* (2003), p. 83.

themselves move, the opposition is nevertheless crucial in articulating how they are received. In her discussion of cinema, Mulvey attempts to entwine the terms of this opposition; I will also argue for such a chiasmic interaction, attending to the fact that stillness is itself apprehended from within the time of the viewer's looking, which can have its own animating agency.

When Aragon remarked that 'the essential thing is the serial character of the drawings,' Matisse wrote in the margin of his text, 'T.B.' – *très bien*. 'That is,' Aragon continued, 'in terms of a game of billiards, each drawing is itself a cannon, but one which starts afresh from the situation left by the previous cannon.'⁹⁹ The logic of the individual 'still' is taken up in that of the sequence. Elderfield sees the differences between each image reconciled 'in flashing frames of light,'¹⁰⁰ the serial structure forging links in the viewer's mind between each term.¹⁰¹ The layout of the Aragon drawings, for example, reminds us of a storyboard or contact sheet and we are encouraged to project between the gapped 'stills' to create a sense of motion. Indeed, Aragon likened one series of variations to Walt Disney's Snow White, forging a link with animation. Elderfield, thinking instead of Sleeping Beauty, projects a scene of awakening onto the F variations: 'the model seems to awaken from sleep, gradually uncoil her entwined arms, then find a new, more comfortable position before settling, more relaxed, ready for sleep again.'¹⁰² Jack Flam, too, detects in the C variations shifts in the model's mood: 'At times she is active, at times more passive. At times she seems almost to be flirting with the artist (and thereby with the viewer), at times she is turned away and seems self-absorbed.'¹⁰³ The imagination of these male commentators animates the still 'frames,' generating scenarios of sensual phantasy.

Connected with this implication of motion, the drawings also suggest additional cinematic devices. Firstly, the large number of drawings of Aragon (four themes and thirty-four variations), far more than in any of the published groups (the maximum number there is nineteen), suggests that, as in film, Matisse edited his output for public exhibition. Secondly, the groups of drawings in the suite are connected through a series of abrupt and seemingly arbitrary cuts (a series of a reclining model is followed by a table-top still life,

⁹⁹ Aragon I, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ Elderfield op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁰¹ As in a game of billiards, the kind of sequential structure that orders the drawings is not fixed and linear. Although the drawings are numbered, the Fabiani editions are unbound and so can be recombined. My thanks to Eva Hackney and Helly Nahmad Gallery, Cork Street, for allowing me to do this with their Fabiani edition.

¹⁰² Elderfield, op.cit. p. 123.

¹⁰³ Flam, op.cit. 1993, p. 122.

for example), again echoing cinematic montage. Thirdly, some sequences explicitly mimic the camera's pan. The G series, for example, consists of six pen variations without a theme drawing, and depicts a tabletop still life arrangement (Figures 1.28 – 1.33). G1, reminding us of Aragon's 'vocabulary of objects,' depicts a number of discrete items: a plant, a shell, fruits, a vase, a china pot, a jug, all arranged on a patterned surface and against a striped background. As the series progresses, the viewpoint zooms into the group and pans around to the left, enabling us to see the table's edge, with some new objects looming into view (the pumpkin and the small vase with ivy leaves in G5 and G6). The striped background has disappeared by G5; the objects, larger now, are cropped and crowd the picture space.

Mulvey remarks that in very early film screenings, the projection began with a still, which would then 'come to life.'¹⁰⁴ The still image projected onto the screen, like a photograph, retains the logic of the index, presenting a moment which *was now*, a 'this-has-been,' 'an emanation of past reality,' as Barthes famously wrote.¹⁰⁵ But this indexical quality then gives way to another logic, that of the narrative, of movement: 'There is a presence, a 'here-and-now-ness,' that the cinema asserts through its 'objective alliance' with storytelling that downplays, even represses, the aesthetic attributes it may share with the photograph.'¹⁰⁶ An analogy might be made with the shift from the theme to the variation drawings. The theme drawings are a dense matrix of traces, attesting to marks added, scrubbed, erased, reconsidered, worked over. These single studies, made over the course of several sessions, spanning a number of days, convey a complex temporal 'thickness.'¹⁰⁷ This thickness then cedes to the spare, cursive lines which sweep over the variation sheets. The series is initiated, and the trace gets caught up in both the aesthetic composition of each sheet, and in the narrative aspects of the series as a whole.

The emergence of any new technology, any new form of language, inflects upon those that already exist. Soon after its arrival at the end of the nineteenth century, the cinema famously entered the philosophical vocabulary of Henri Bergson. For Bergson, the cinema's reduction of duration to a divided sequence of static frames, to then be artificially re-animated by the projection apparatus, stood for a model of false consciousness:

¹⁰⁴ Mulvey, op.cit. 2003, pp. 88/9.

¹⁰⁵ Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida, Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. (2000), p. 88.

¹⁰⁶ Mulvey, op.cit. 2003, p. 84.

¹⁰⁷ Mulvey quotes Mikhail Bakhtin on the issue of the image's then-ness: 'Time thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible.' Mulvey, op.cit. 2004, p. 146.

‘Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristic of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic of this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general... *The mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind.*’¹⁰⁸

The fluid, vital, creative becoming of each thing is immobilized, set in motion again only through the uniform, mechanistic action of the projector. This operation, for Bergson, mirrored analytic modes of thought, which attempted to fix and formalize what was a fluid, durational becoming: ‘form is only a snapshot view of a transition.’¹⁰⁹ This could only divide and solidify moments – create objects and not movements: ‘For we can analyze a thing, but not a process; we can break up extensity, but not duration.’¹¹⁰ Bergson’s conception of a plentiful, unbroken duration, experienced through an act of willed empathy, as we have noted, aligns with much of Matisse’s rhetoric of ‘identification’ with his subject. Bergson’s exhortations also fall into sympathetic relation to Michaux’s project, as outlined earlier. But again, the cinematic enters Michaux’s formulation of his drawing practice:

‘I wanted to draw the consciousness of existing and the flow of time. As one takes one’s pulse. Or again, more modestly, that which appears when, in the evening, the film that has been exposed to the day’s images, but shorter and muted, is rerun. Cinematic drawing.’¹¹¹

Following Bergson, to describe drawing as ‘cinematic’ would be to undermine any goal of creating a faithful analogue for lived duration. Michaux’s hoped to draw ‘a continuum,’ ‘a murmur without end,’ that his marks could echo ‘the very phrasing of life, but supple, deformable, sinuous.’¹¹² As Richard Sieburth has noted, however, the artist faces the problem of blockage in that ‘the continuous line breaks up into a sequence of signs, an impetus is lost, a fixity sets in, the flow of traffic now halted by stop signs.’¹¹³ A cinematic drawing would signal one composed of stills and gaps as fluidity moves to solidity and

¹⁰⁸ Henri Bergson: *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (1919), pp. 322-323.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Douglas: ‘Bergson and Cinema: Friends or Foes?’ in John Mullarkey (ed.): *The New Bergson* (1999) p. 210

¹¹⁰ Henri Bergson: *Time and Free Will, An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (1960), p. 219.

¹¹¹ Michaux: ‘To draw the flow of time’ (1957), in de Zegher, op.cit. p. 7.

¹¹² Michaux: *Emergences-Resurgences*, p. 11.

¹¹³ Sieburth, op.cit. p. 211.

flow towards stasis. Indeed, what Bergson referred to as cinematic modes of cognition would seem to be exactly those that both Matisse and Michaux hoped to overcome. Both stressed the need to get beyond a distancing, delimiting and analytical posture towards one of embodied sympathy and participation. From this point of view, their artistic projects are necessarily failures: the task of faithfully recreating lived, affective duration through drawn signs appears as an impossibility. As Catherine de Zegher has written of Michaux's 'quest' for self-observation: 'it did not consist of discovering its object but in assuring the conditions of its impossibility.'¹¹⁴ Both artists' description of their practice in terms of the cinema could then be read as a tacit acknowledgement of this condition.

Bergson was adamant that from movement one could pass into stasis, but not vice versa.¹¹⁵ But thinking now from the perspective of the viewer: how are the indexical marks of drawing apprehended? These registrations of a past time also function *within* an ongoing present tense. The drawn mark has recently been discussed by Michael Newman in terms of its status as trace and, on account of this status, in relation to (analogue) photography.¹¹⁶ But just because the drawn mark and the photographic image share an indexicality, it does not follow that they register time in the same manner. Newman's suggestive alignment of drawing and photography prioritizes, implicitly, drawing's immobile aspect, and therefore neglects the dynamism inherent in drawn marks' functioning together, as well as the single mark's extension over time. Michaux described his line as 'frisky,' and it is difficult to imagine a frisky photograph.¹¹⁷ That is, the indexicality of Matisse's line is not that of the snapshot: it refers to a lengthier arrival. Why does this matter? How is this 'durational' aspect of drawing, described by Pamela Lee as 'kinesis graphically embodied,' registered by the viewer?¹¹⁸ In a recent article, art historian David Freedberg and neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese explore the implications of the discovery of 'mirror neurons' in accounting for empathetic responses in the perception of bodily action.¹¹⁹ Applying to both depicted and inscribed actions, neurological studies have shown that similar patterns of neural firing occur when an action is *observed* as when it is *performed*. That is, especially when

¹¹⁴ De Zegher: 'Introduction' to *Emergences-Resurgences*, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ See Douglas, op.cit. p. 212.

¹¹⁶ See Newman op.cit. p. 105.

¹¹⁷ Michaux: 'Postface,' *Mouvements* (1951), quoted by Richard Sieburth, op.cit. p. 210.

¹¹⁸ Pamela Lee: 'Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art' in Cornelia Butler (ed.): *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process* (1999), p. 27.

¹¹⁹ David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese: 'Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience,' *Trends in Cognitive Science* (Volume 30, Number 10, May 2007), pp. 197-203.

observing the kind of trace which foregrounds the gesture of its production, Freedberg and Gallese argue that the viewer generates an analogous, empathetic neuronal response. Of course this does not limit or explain such marks' effects or potentials, but it does point to an empathetic dimension of spectatorship that has so far been poorly articulated.¹²⁰ Attending to both the narrative and inscriptive aspects of Matisse's *Themes and Variations*, then, we can identify a dynamic entwining of movement and stasis at work, an entwining that renders the alignment of drawing and cinema compelling.

Coda

Reflecting on his 'rapid' variation drawings in the last year of his life, Matisse wrote: 'Drawings that contain all the subtleties of observations made during the work arise from a fermentation within, like bubbles in a pond.'¹²¹ Although the primary function of this simile is to convey an externalization of internal contents, the inevitable destination of the bubbles in this image undermines this model of expressive practice: once emitted, they will rise to the pond's surface only to lose all form and dissipate into the atmosphere. In a 1969 film *La Pluie (Projet pour un texte)*, Marcel Broodthaers uses an analogous image to laconically figure the failure of enunciative acts to convey messages (Figure 1.34). Throughout his career, Broodthaers interrogated the action of institutional and conventional formations that mediate the experience of language and objects. Here, the artist enfoldes the mediums of drawing, writing and cinema into a single rebus. Broodthaers is filmed outdoors as he sits at a makeshift desk attempting to write. After a few seconds water begins to fall on his desk and paper. Deadpan like Buster Keaton, Broodthaers persists in the downpour, his words dissolving as they make contact with the page. After about two minutes the film ends with a still showing the moment of the passage of signs towards stains, of writing into drawing, and superimposed on this scene are the words 'projet pour un texte.' If Klee famously advocated taking a line for a walk, Broodthaers instead takes his signs for a swim. The kind of articulation necessary for language to function is cancelled by the homogenizing, entropic action of water. In 1924, Aragon had proposed the attempt to translate thoughts and feelings into words as suicidal (his poem 'Suicide' simply presented the letters of the

¹²⁰ This proposition is interesting in light of the promise that cinema seemed to early commentators to make of a new expressive physiognomic language, a gestural lexicon that might be universally comprehended. See for example Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915).

¹²¹ Matisse: 'Portraits,' in *MoA*, p. 223.

latin alphabet); Broodthaers also explicitly positions himself against a model of communicative plenitude, one with which Matisse is centrally associated.

Matisse's *Themes and Variations* operates by way of a cinematic logic, with duration taken up and transformed into static elements. Broodthaers enacts a reversal: letters, distinct units of signification, are entropically merged together, dissipated into material swirls. 'Things' become taken up in movements, writing approaches drawing and stays at the level of a verb. Yet paradoxically this process is recorded by flickering 16mm film: the cinematic itself elaborates the disarticulation of signs, the collapse of the sequence. In tandem with his deconstruction of authorial expression, Broodthaers was also a crucial figure in undermining the central modernist tenet of medium-specificity.¹²² With such hybrid works, Broodthaers implicates the operations of one medium in those of others, forcing their conventions into dialogue. Yet as I have been arguing, drawing has consistently been involved in such hybridity. Its relationships with writing and with cinema constitute two productive sites of such impurity. The kind of cross-fertilizations dramatized in Broodthaers' *La Pluie* were already abroad in the drawing practices of Matisse and Michaux, if in less explicit form. Critiques of an unreflective, unproblematic expressive model distance themselves from a past that was never wholly manifest. The kind of unruliness asserted by Broodthaers's liquids was already present in the truant, carnal logic of Matisse's drawing hand, and affect has never been contained within questions of the personal. Nevertheless, in 1969, the rhetoric of such expressive models still persisted (they do so even now in some quarters), and it is through the probing insights of such artists as Broodthaers that discussions of drawing were able to move into more productive territory. Broodthaers's erosion of the myths surrounding expressive practices, and his elaboration of a dialogue between different mediums constituted a new 'project for a text.' Indeed, in the work of contemporary artists such as Tacita Dean and William Kentridge, such projects are being developed in the present with remarkably rich results, results that we will consider in the last chapter of this thesis. Now, however, I would like to address a set of questions related to this issue of medium, and to explore the nature and dimensions of drawing's 'field.'

¹²² See Rosalind Krauss: *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999). See Chapter 5 for a fuller consideration of Broodthaers in this light.

Smallness

Drawing's Expanded Contracted Field

Expanded and Contracted Fields

Typically, drawings are produced close in at bent-arm's length: at a desk, on a knee, in the hands. Focus is trained upon the mute progress of the hand as it moves across a small paper terrain. Or, if the drawing is 'from life,' the eyes might repeatedly dart upwards, continually calibrating the body to what is seen. While the body hunches in to get closer to the action, the eyes complete this telescoping drive, following the proliferating inscriptions as if through a magnifying glass. There is awareness, both tactile and visual, of the edges of the sheet, but this is slight distraction from the absorbing micro-dynamics of the hand's passage. Such small-scale, intricate, immersive manual work is neither characteristic of all drawing nor by any means exclusive to it. But the contracted nature of the field in which much drawing takes place is crucial to the experience of both making and viewing many of its objects. So while it is not its determining or essential condition, it may be that a certain smallness gives to drawing, in imaginative and conceptual terms, its magnitude.

The title of this chapter deliberately evokes Rosalind Krauss's famous 1979 essay, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,'¹ and I want to begin what is to be an exploration of expansion and contraction in drawing with a consideration of her arguments. Krauss offers a powerful way of organising and differentiating a series of related artistic practices, and of broadening their scope. However, while recognizing the value of Krauss's intervention for thinking about the medium, I will also identify some significant limitations of her model for a discussion of drawing. Here, developing some of the questions approached in my introduction, I want to ask: In what kind of field does drawing operate? Is it possible or helpful to conceptualize drawing as a medium? How does drawing's small scale affect its *modality*, beyond categorical distinctions?

Krauss attempts to account for the seemingly endless heterogeneity of objects, structures and environments that had come to be described as *sculpture* during the 1970s. She

¹ Krauss: 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' *October* 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 30-44.

recounts how the end of the 19th century saw the demise of sculpture's central and defining mode, the public monument. This was superseded by the modernist 'nomadic' object, in which the moveable base replaced the plinth, becoming absorbed into the formal logic of the now autonomous object, giving to sculpture a siteless mobility. By about 1950, Krauss argues, this modernist mode was itself exhausted, and sculpture came instead to be defined in entirely *negative* terms.² That is, a sculpture, for example Robert Morris's *Mirrored Cubes*, was defined as such only by being both what was *not architecture*, and what was *not landscape*. Sculpture became, for Krauss, 'pure negativity,' an 'ontological absence.'³

Krauss then used the 'Klein Group' of binary oppositional terms (borrowed from structuralism and from mathematics), to construct an expanded discursive field in relation to which sculpture took a (now peripheral) position (Figure 2.1). These terms were: landscape, architecture, not-landscape, and not-architecture. This logical grid provided a system by which to organise many of the three-dimensional practices emerging during the 1970s. Sculpture combined the two negative terms (the 'neuter' axis of not-landscape and not-architecture), and three further positions (now engaging with the positive or 'complex' axis) were then made available in relation to which other practices could be located. 'Marked sites' combined landscape and not-landscape; 'axiomatic structures' operated between architecture and not-architecture; and 'site construction' between landscape and architecture. Sculpture as a medium, then, becomes defined not by any *positive* material quality, but by its particular relation to a discursive field that is organized by fundamental oppositions (at root, the 'strict opposition between the built and the not-built, the cultural and the natural'⁴). Krauss's 'expanded field' does not refer to a phenomenologically larger *spatial* dimension, but rather to a broader *discursive* circumstance and implication. It is not the physical magnitude of *Spiral Jetty* that is its central intervention, but the way it constructs an identity in relation to the conceptually enormous idea of landscape and its other.

Importantly, Krauss does not attempt to define any timeless *essence* of a medium. That is, she views the category 'sculpture' as an historical object, the nature and capacities of

² In re-addressing these ideas for the 2004 survey, *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss), Krauss suggests something rather different: that modernist sculpture itself was premised on its being neither landscape or architecture. p. 543.

³ Krauss, op.cit. pp. 34 and 36.

⁴ Ibid. p. 37.

which are modified during the course of its development, and which is subject to radical and discontinuous breaks. Sculpture has no atemporal, ahistorical kernel. So the attempt is to sketch the broad structuring field of sculpture *since the early 1960s*, not of sculpture *as such*. The 'expanded field' is a wider domain of reference, a model that is able to accommodate a particular practice within a more fundamental structure of concepts and cultural dynamics. Specific material and aesthetic properties of the objects under discussion are not considered as these elements, so often the focus of art-historical and critical commentaries, are not those that define and structure the field of sculpture any longer. The determining forces in Krauss's field are fundamental, binary oppositions between conceptual categories.

Krauss's model of a structuring terrain is logical, distilled, and elegant. It is tempting therefore to propose more of such models to describe the dynamics of other mediums at particular historical moments. Indeed, Krauss herself is moved to do so, if only provisionally, in her speculative proposition of the basic opposition of 'uniqueness' and 'reproducibility' as the key tension structuring (then) contemporary painting.⁵ Although it seems clear that these terms do not exhaust the interest in the painting of the 1970s, they are posited as defining its most pertinent and dominant concerns. Indeed, to keep the minimal logic of the Klein group in articulating a conception of the medium, it has been necessary to eliminate a host of potentially significant factors which, although they perhaps do not pertain to the categorical limits of a medium's identity, may well figure powerfully in the experience of the art object's production and reception. Krauss's search for fundamental polarities that organise a particular cultural form borrows from structuralism and echoes its assumptions. She is prepared to look beyond particular utterances or experiences (*parole*), hoping instead to attend to the deeper organizing relations that order any particular manifestation (*langue*). This structure affords Krauss a more sophisticated model of the historical development of artistic mediums (it replaces an often simplistic and conservative historicism), but it has little to say about the phenomenological experience of making or viewing any specific object. To maintain the elegance and simplicity of her model, then, Krauss is forced to make a whole series of exclusions.

Krauss's 'Expanded Field' essay emerged in the wake of her abandonment of an earlier interest in phenomenology. While during the late 1960s and 1970s, she had used the

⁵ Ibid. p. 43.

philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to articulate a discussion of the viewer's active encounter with Minimalist sculpture, by the late 1970s and through the 1980s, her emphasis shifted to Structuralist and Lacanian theoretical models, as well as to the insubordinate, explosive ideas of Georges Bataille. Emphatically rejecting the Greenbergian Formalism so dominant at the time of her intellectual formation, Krauss increasingly considered the operations of visual art to be analogous to those of language. Symptomatic of (and, indeed, influential upon) the momentum of that historical moment in the humanities, Krauss's priorities shifted from a focus upon the subject's phenomenological engagement with the artwork, towards an exploration of the underlying ideological and unconscious dynamics that were seen to fundamentally structure and determine perceptual and cognitive experience.

Saussure's engagement with the sign in terms only of a physical entity (signifier) and a mental image (signified) has the effect of bracketing anything outside that system, either the object *to which* the sign refers, or the interpretant *for whom* the sign is meaningful. This excludes from consideration the external components of the signifying equation, components which would extend the sign's reach beyond its own internal systemic operations. By contrast, a semiotics envisaged in more materialist terms, as Alex Potts argues, drives towards an investigation of how the subject interacts with its objects. The sign, in these terms, 'makes itself known by compelling the subject to take note of it, by intruding into its internal world, or by opposing or resisting its illusions of self-determination.'⁶ These seem exceptionally important issues in addressing the question of how art might effectively function in the world. Yet there is no exploration of how the viewer is 'compelled to take note' of the works that Krauss mentions. The clarity and stability of her construction of sculpture relies not only upon the designation of its status as 'ontological absence,' but also upon the restriction of her analysis to a signifying grid and the bracketing out of any interpretant. What sculpture is an 'ontological absence,' and for whom? Beyond the recognition of a sculptural object's status as both non-landscape and not-architecture, what is the role of the viewer in Krauss's formulation? Once the viewer is taken into account, the purity of sculpture's negativity becomes untenable.⁷ Krauss extends

⁶ Alex Potts: 'Signs,' in Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.): *Critical Terms for Art History* (1996), p. 29.

⁷ As we will see in Chapter 5, Krauss has recently re-visited the issue of medium-specificity. She now regards the medium to consist not only of a set of physical material components, but also a whole array of conventions structuring both artists' modes of making and viewers' modes of comportment towards objects.

sculpture's field at the expense of registering its embeddedness within and its potential purchase upon the material world.

Although heavily indebted to many theoretical gains won as a result of Krauss's work, my conception of drawing's field, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, will be rather different. Like Krauss, I do not look to any essential material components in attempting to define drawing. Neither charged with the institutional task of tidily partitioning a collection, nor able to maintain any faith in the value of Greenberg's reduction of medium to fundamental physical givens, it has become necessary to open our definition of drawing onto a relational and historically contingent field.⁸ But the terms of these relations are conceived, unlike hers, as in part *positively constituted*, relating to specific modalities and effects not just to differential categories, and *impure*, never being founded upon either absolute self-presence or sheer 'ontological absence.' In the wake of its reinvention and subsequent 'exhaustion' in modernist practice, sculpture, for Krauss, could, by the 1970s, only constitute itself negatively. Whereas the demise of painting has also been announced many times (and still remains a prophecy), it is difficult to imagine credible claims for drawing's exhaustion. Could anyone claim the death of drawing, and what would the world be like without it? A drawing, like any perceptible object, cannot be legitimately conceived of as a pure absence; once the viewer is factored into the equation, there is no possibility of such finality. Indeed, it is by way of such ontological problems that philosopher Alain Badiou has recently approached a definition of drawing. For him, drawing, specifically, constitutes a 'movable reciprocity between existence and inexistence,' a reciprocity which affords it a fundamental, but also 'very intense,' 'fragility.'⁹

What does it mean to say that drawing operates within an 'expanded contracted field?' The word 'expand' derives from the Latin *expandere*, to spread out. The verb 'to contract' again comes from a Latin word, *contrahere*, to draw together, from *trahere*, to draw or drag. Drawing spreads out in the world. At its roots, its identity was 'contaminated' by its involvement with processes of counting and writing, and perhaps more than any other representational practice, it has been integrated into a vast array of human endeavours: cartography, industrial design, engineering, architecture, scientific and medical diagrams, narrative illustration, caricature, doodling, plumbing, military strategizing, Pictionary, etc.

⁸ See the first section of my introduction.

⁹ Alain Badiou: 'Drawing,' *Lacanian Ink* (Issue 28, Fall 2006), pp. 44 and 46.

Not only this, but drawing's impurity and promiscuity means that it can encroach upon the domains of other technologies of representation: painting, writing, sculpture, photography, and even cinema, as discussed in the last chapter. Drawing crosses all kinds of disciplinary confines and functional registers: it inhabits the ultimate expanded field. Expansion and contraction in this sense go together: as drawing spreads out across a vast territory, it is able to draw various practices together into relation.

But it is not only in this connective sense that I employ the term 'contracted' here; I use it also for its more commonsense association with smallness. As noted already, physical smallness is not essential to drawing's identity, but it is often significant to the effects it has. I am less concerned to establish crisp categorical divisions than to orient a discussion around more broadly perceptual and experiential questions. The issue becomes: 'what types of experiences and meanings can drawing most effectively embody, catalyze, or generate?' Rather than, 'how can drawing be definitively distinguished from writing / painting / photography / sculpture, etc.?' If drawing expands irresistibly into the social field, it also 'in-spands' (spreads inwards) in the viewer's embodied mind. As Briony Fer has written, 'Bodies seep into drawing as much as drawing seeps into minds.'¹⁰ Before considering what mode of perception the small 'paper-scapes' of drawing invite, it is first worth recalling drawing's marginal or subsidiary artistic status. This might seem an untenable assertion given the centrality of *disegno* in academic discourse on art between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, but even then, when a theory of drawing was *the* crucial institutional doxa, drawings were still not accorded primary cultural status. That is, *disegno* referred to a principle of visual design that was thought crucial to the success of any compositional scheme; its primary object of concern was drawing-in-painting, rather than drawings as such, and this bias has persisted in discussions of the role of drawing in the modern period. This has meant that drawing has never been attributed enough autonomy to shoulder Greenbergian narratives of self-sufficient formal teleology, and consequently has not been victim to the same kinds of deconstruction as its 'larger' artistic siblings. Indeed, despite the demise of the authority of the 'picture' through the 1950s and '60s, drawing remained

¹⁰ Briony Fer: 'Spirograph: The Circular Ruins of Drawing,' in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (ed.): *Gabriel Orozco* (2004), p. 18.

vital to the practice of many Minimalist, Process and Conceptual artists in the mid-late 1960s and 1970s, as will be discussed.¹¹

Drawing's minor status can partly be attributed to the typically modest and fragile nature of its material means. Conventionally, drawings have a physically smaller scale than paintings and sculptures, their material components are less expensive, less complicated to prepare, and also less durable. An artist's drawings would never be as powerful a commodity as their paintings. Indeed, although drawings have always been avidly collected, their exhibition value is compromised by their fragility and sensitivity to light. Drawing, then, would seem to constitute the antithesis of the public monument, and has not conventionally been conducive to heroic, spectacular gestures. Drawing is more like background noise, interference crackling and distorting below the threshold of public consciousness, but nevertheless a crucial reserve and generator for creative ideas, and a bed in which other forms of production sleep.

The majority of this chapter will be concerned with a small number of drawings by German artist Wols (Wolfgang Schulze), made during the 1940s. On the other side of the Atlantic during the second half of that decade, painters in New York were exploring the potential of working on a dramatically enlarged scale. Artists such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman expanded the physical size of their canvases, and with this expansion came increasingly confident claims for the ability of pictures to respond to the epic, traumatic conditions of the post-war world. Such inflation sets into high relief not only the more modest scale of European painting, but also the diminutive graphic activities of artists such as Wols, and prompts a consideration of the perceptual, experiential and associative stakes involved in issues of scale. To attend to drawings is not to deal with images or signs adrift from the material world, but with *objects*, objects with a given size and physical composition. What specific modes of comportment and attention, then, do such objects invite? How do these relate to the conventions attached to the viewing of *pictures*? Indeed, when many artists abandoned the picture, how and why could drawing offer a viable alternative? Towards the end of this chapter, I will look to a moment in the late 60s and early 70s when drawing released itself from the page, extending over walls and across rooms. How, then, does the dynamic of expansion and contraction still structure such work? And how, in its 'expanded field,' does drawing still, importantly, involve the small?

¹¹ On the demise of the picture, see Briony Fer: *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (2004, hereafter, *The Infinite Line*), especially the chapters entitled 'Picture' and 'Utopia,' pp. 5-25 and 188-206.

Wols

Wols's first exhibition opened in Paris at the Galerie René Drouin in December 1945. It consisted entirely of drawings, made in pen and ink, watercolour, and gouache, and displayed in illuminated boxes. He had begun to produce drawings in the 1930s, following his move from Dresden to Paris in 1933, in pursuit of a career as a photographer.¹² But it was only after the outbreak of the Second World War, when he was interned for nine months as an enemy alien, that Wols increased his drawing output. Following his release, he travelled with his wife Gréty to Cassis, a small fishing town in the south of France. Wols would lie in bed, with his rum bottle and mandolin close by, making intricate drawings on small sheets of paper, with his board propped up on his bent knees (Figure 2.2).¹³ During this time, he also wrote numerous poems and aphorisms on tiny scraps of paper, meditations on his artistic practice as well as spiritually inflected philosophical ruminations. In 1942 the couple moved to Dieulefit, where Wols was visited in 1945 by René Drouin, who had come to hear of him through the artist's important early supporter, Pierre-Henry Roché. Drouin offered Wols the chance to exhibit. Accompanying the exhibition was a tiny black catalogue measuring 13 x 10.5 cm. It included fourteen reproductions of drawings, poems by Wols and Camille Bryen, texts on the artist by Sylveire and Roché, and numerous selected aphorisms: from Lao-Tsu's *Tao de Ching*, to Edgar Allen Poe and Lautréamont, to Henri Michaux, Jean Paulhan and Jean-Paul Sartre.¹⁴ Wols selected a quotation from Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea*, and this has become the most frequently cited of the aphorisms included: 'Objects shouldn't touch, for they don't live. And yet they touch me: It's unbearable. I'm afraid of coming into contact with them.'¹⁵

It is easy to see how connections could be made between Sartre's expression of horror and revulsion at being-in-the-world, and the raw, teeming worlds in Wols's drawings,

¹² He adopted the name Wols in 1937 at the time of his commission to document the Fashion Pavillion at the Paris International Exhibition. He was introduced to the Surrealist circle, but did not make a huge impact, and spent most of the 1930s travelling around France and Spain with his partner, Gréty, who would later become his wife.

¹³ See Öyvind Fahlström in Peter Inch (ed.): *Circus Wols: The Life and Work of Wolfgang Schulze* (1978). 'Wols worked sitting on his bed in a hotel room so tiny everything was at arm's reach – watercolour box, outdoor clothes, rum bottle and mandolin.' (Unpag.).

¹⁴ *Wols*, exh.cat, (Paris: Galerie René Drouin, 1945), unpaginated.

¹⁵ 'Les objets, cela ne devrait pas toucher, puisque cela ne vit pas. Et moi, ils me touchent, c'est insupportable. J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux.' Ibid.

which Sartre elsewhere compares to ‘pullulating viruses under a microscope.’¹⁶ At 9.2 x 13.5 cm, an untitled drawing by Wols in the Tate collection (c.1944-5, Figure 2.3) is only a little smaller than most of his several hundred works on paper, many of which, as one commentator noted, are ‘about the size of the palm of the hand.’¹⁷ Like the majority of his sheets, this drawing consists of washes of watercolour and gouache, drawn over with a precise, spidery, intricate line, concentric contours and dense, stippled congregations of tiny ink dots, all applied with a pen. It is impossible to date such drawings with real accuracy as Wols, with very few exceptions, did not supply dates or titles for his work.¹⁸ The focus of this sheet is a centrally placed, irregularly ovular form which extends from the top left to the bottom right of the page. An eye-like concentration of black lines provides the focus, a shape bounded by a broken, trembling contour. It is distinguished from the rest of the pictorial field by the intense pinks and reds that underlie the pen marks. Extending from this centre are intricate strata of irregular, gnarly, but roughly concentric lines. These depleted rings continue outwards until they reach a splintered boundary. From this limit and into the watery, nebulous pictorial space beyond extend an army of tiny, hair-like lines, which tickle and wave their way into a spatial indeterminacy.

Although there is no explicit reference to specific recognizable objects from the visible world, the connotations multiply. The form as a whole pulses and teems with an unpredictable organic vitality: growths, protruberances, internal fluctuations, dissolutions and self-digestions all take place in this tiny raw world. The colour establishes a connection to the flesh; whites, pinks and reds evoke an angry, comfortless bodily experience, as if flayed or seared by the sun. The form itself loosely evokes a sequence of motifs, without describing or representing any of them with certainty. The tiny vortex at the centre, with a highlighted passage to the left, might recall an eye in its socket, lending to the whole shape the suggestion of a head or skull. The concentric rings, however, are familiar from the cross-section of a tree, or indeed from cartographic contour lines; an aerial view of a strange volcanic island perhaps, venturing wiry tentacles out into the sea. Another insistent suggestion is that of female genitalia: a vulva-like opening, the colour suggesting the

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre: ‘Doigts et Non-Doigts,’ in *Situations IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) pp. 421-2.

¹⁷ Franz-Joachim Verspohl: ‘Post-War Debates: Wols and the German Reception of Sartre,’ in Irit Rogoff (ed.): *The Divided Heritage – Themes and Problems in German Modernism* (1991), p. 73.

¹⁸ See Ewald Rathke: *Wols: Drawings and Watercolours* (London: Goethe Institute, 1985), p.90: titles for the works have been supplied by Henri-Pierre Roché and Gréty Wols. Some sheets were given to Kay Boyle in 1941, and those in the Roché Collection were certainly made between 1942-5, but otherwise it is very difficult to classify them.

exposure of an internal realm, the layered washes evoking folds of the flesh. Öyvind Fahlström describes this collection of connotations as typical of Wols drawings from the 1940s: 'Most consist of an aperture. The corners and sides are empty, the middle is condensed. They nearly all have the character of wild cliffs and ravines, of hands, wombs, beings that open out.'¹⁹ Indeed, there is the sense a body pulverised and spread apart, without clear boundaries and without protection enough to defend against external intrusions.

The exhibition was met with almost total silence and none of the work was sold. Undeterred, Drouin then encouraged Wols to experiment with oil paint, supplying the near-destitute artist with materials to get started. The fruits of this experimentation were shown at Galerie Drouin eighteen months later, where forty paintings were displayed, this time attracting a good deal of attention and serving to launch Wols, along with fellow Frenchmen Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier, as a leader of a loose new movement that would subsequently be described as *Informel* or *art autre*.²⁰ Wols, however, died prematurely from food poisoning in 1951 at the age of 38, before the rhetoric that would surround these artists gathered a head of steam.²¹ Aligning with a pervasive post-war 'cult of angst,' a whole metaphors of trauma and despair has, since the 1950s, dominated accounts of Wols's practice. The most influential of such commentaries were delivered in 1954 by Werner Haftmann (and bolstered by a number of subsequent publications), and in a 1963 essay by Sartre.²² Crucial to both accounts was Wols's increasingly self-destructive persona and vagabond lifestyle; the artist's itinerant progress between a series of cheap Parisian hotels, and what was to become a severe addiction to alcohol by the mid-1940s, were dramatized as symptomatic of a deeper psychological and spiritual malaise. This was

¹⁹ Fahlström In Inch, op.cit. (unpag).

²⁰ See René Guilly: *Wols* (1947). Michel Tapié published his book, *Un art autre où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel* (Paris: Gabriel-Giraud et fils) in 1952; Jean Paulhan's 1962 book was titled *L'Art informel (éloge)* (Paris: Gallimard).

²¹ For an authoritative account of the art produced in France in the post-war period, see Sarah Wilson: 'Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute,' in Francis Morris (ed.): *Paris Post-War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55* (1993), pp. 25-52.

²² Wols's most devoted and prolific commentator, Werner Haftmann, positions Wols (broadly) as an expressionist, and Sartre portrays him as the archetypal existentialist artist. Haftmann presented his art as inextricably linked to a dramatic, if desperate, biography, whereby Wols's itinerant lifestyle and severe alcoholism are treated as symptoms of a ravished, distraught soul in crisis. 'It was by consenting to self-destruction that each one of his paintings was given life, directly consuming his vital force, so that each pictorial texture was nothing but the devouring of living tissue. Wols pursued and maintained his own self-destruction for the five years over which his paintings were borne, just like van Gogh!' Haftmann: 'Wols, sa vie et l'oeuvre,' in *En Personne – Aquarelles et dessins de Wols* (1963), p. 44 (my translation).

human life as authentically lived in all its rawness and horror, capped by a tragic premature death.

The title of Sartre's essay, 'Fingers and Non-Fingers,' derives from a Taoist proverb included in the 1945 Drouin catalogue: 'Prendre les doigts pour illustrer le fait que les doigts ne sont pas les doigts est moins efficace que de prendre les non-doigts pour illustrer le fait que les doigts ne sont pas les doigts...' ²³ That is to say, it is more effective to deploy unfamiliar means to express a sense of unfamiliarity, than to aim at this unknown region through the path of things that are known. According to Sartre, around 1940, Wols shifted his drawing style to incorporate pictorial elements that had no definite relation to particular things in the visible world. ²⁴ That is, while many sheets evoke an array of phenomena as if seen from an aeroplane or through a microscope, they do not *illustrate* any specific given subject. Wols's drawings are not miniature versions of particular known objects, and should not be treated primarily as *representations*, no matter how seductive and compelling the 'transsubstantiation permanente' they catalyzed might be. ²⁵ For Sartre, this is a project of defamiliarisation, conveying the ultimate strangeness and unsettling nature of being. Sartre discusses Wols's identification with the passage from *Nausea*:

'What he means is that objects touch him because he is afraid of letting his touch fall on them. They are him outside himself; to see them is to dream himself... he deciphers himself on the knots of tree bark, in the fissures of a wall; roots, rootlets, vacuoles, pullulating viruses under a microscope, the hairy furrows of women and the turgid flaccidness of male fungi compromise him... Inversely, with his eyes shut, withdrawn inside his night, he feels the universal horror of being-in-the-world.' ²⁶

A tiny, teeming world reflects Wols back to himself, allowing him to decipher and dream his relation to the world from his bed. The accumulation of marks on the page becomes like the contraction of a virus. The results 'compromise him.' Sartre compares Wols's model of a ravaged, self-destructive humanity with Paul Klee, who died in 1940: 'Klee, c'est un ange et Wols un pauvre diable. L'un crée ou recrée les merveilles de ce monde, l'autre en

²³ Tchouang-Tseu, as quoted in the 1945 Drouin catalogue, unpag. 'Using one's fingers to demonstrate that fingers are not fingers is less effective than using non-fingers to demonstrate that fingers are not fingers.' Trans. Roger Cardinal: 'The Later Works of Wols – Abstraction, Transparency, Tao,' in *Inch*, op.cit. 1978, unpag. .

²⁴ Sartre, op.cit. p. 424.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 428

²⁶ Ibid. p. 421/2

éprouve la merveilleuse horreur.²⁷ Klee's scratchy, labyrinthine linear microcosms constitute an immediate precedent for Wols's graphic style (Figure 2.4). Indeed, in 1954, Henri Michaux described Klee's drawings in a way that is strikingly redolent of Wols's work on paper:

'Lines living with the little people of dust and dots, crossing crumbs, going around cells, fields of cells, or turning, turning in spirals to fascinate – or to find what had fascinated – umbelliferous plants and agates... Lines contrary to ones obsessed by the container... [Lines] that are mad about enumeration, about endless juxtaposition, repetition, rhymes, notes indefinitely repeated, creating microscopic palaces of proliferating cellular life...'²⁸

According to Wols himself, his father owned work by both Klee and Kandinsky, which was later donated to the Museum of Dresden.²⁹ It is unlikely, therefore, that Wols would have missed the opportunity to see the Klee exhibition which opened at the newly inaugurated Musée national d'art moderne in February 1948. As Klee said, however, and as quoted by Merleau-Ponty: to give the 'generating axis' of man, the painter 'would have to have a network of lines so entangled that it could no longer be a question of a truly elementary representation.'³⁰ Sartre contrasts Klee's optimistic striving towards universality, spirituality, and totality with Wols, who, like a termite building structures from his own dung, exhibits a courageous but acutely painful confrontation with a doleful human predicament.³¹ For Sartre, the insistence upon despair and the horror of being-in-the-world was not simple nihilism, but rather an authentic and politically charged position. Despair became one of the only viable sentiments to affirm in the philosophical, cultural, political and physical aftermath of war and genocide.³²

²⁷ 'Klee is an angel, and Wols a poor devil. One creates and recreates the marvels of the world, the other is afflicted by its marvellous horror.' (My translation) Ibid. p. 413.

²⁸ Henri Michaux: 'Adventures of Lines,' Preface to Will Grohmann: *Paul Klee* (1954), reprinted and translated by David Ball (ed.): *Darkness Moves, An Henri Michaux Anthology: 1927-1984* (1994), pp. 316-7.

²⁹ See Joseph Monteyne: 'Circus at the End of History: Wols in the Late Thirties and Early Forties,' *Revue d'art Canadienne* (Volume 18, numbers 1-2), p. 45.

³⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: 'Eye and Mind' (1960), reprinted in Galen A. Johnson (ed.), *The Maurice Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (1993), p. 143.

³¹ See Maurice Maeterlinck: 'It is a matter of making a pipe, of propping up a course, of constructing cells or alcoves, of building royal apartments, of repairing a breach, of covering a crack through which fresh air could slip, a ray of light, all awful things; and it is still to the residues of their digestion that the termites resort. It could be said that before all else they are transcendental chemists, for whom science overcomes all prejudice, all disgust, who have attained the serene conviction that in nature nothing is repugnant and that all can be brought back to some simple bodies, chemically indifferent and pure.' Roché op.cit. Unpag. (my translation).

³² See Serge Guilbaut: 'Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick,' in Guilbaut (ed.): *Reconstructing Modernism – Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945-64* (1990), pp. 52ff.

Dominant expressionist and existentialist accounts of Wols's work have tended to forego sustained visual analysis in favour of dramatic biographical accounts and philosophical speculations. Rather, some of the most interesting recent research on the artist has been focused upon his photographic practice, much of which was not known until the late-1970s.³³ While Yve-Alain Bois regards Wols's drawings to be too heavily indebted to Klee to be of significant interest, and his paintings as too readily inviting the viewer's projections (Sartre's 'imaging' consciousness), he nevertheless reserves some radical potential for the artist's photographic practice. In addition to portraits and Surrealist-inspired fashion shots, during the 1930s Wols produced a series of close-up images of everyday foodstuffs and kitchen detritus (Figure 2.5). Reminiscent of Boiffard and other photographers associated with *Documents*, these dramatically lit photographs are arresting in the unusual scale of odd bits of cheese, kidneys, rabbit heads, mushrooms, onions, sausages and the like found therein. But rather than ignore the drawings as a consequence of these photographs, it is through the lens of this magnification, and the unfamiliar encounter with commonplace objects that it yields, that we might look again at Wols's drawings, unharnessing them from dominant existential and *informel* rhetoric.

Drawing, Smallness and 'Microscopic Phenomenology'³⁴

Wols's 'kitchen' photographs provoke a defamiliarized perception of everyday objects through the use of close viewpoint and dramatic chiaroscuro. Scraps and morsels of food, usually passing unnoticed or thrown away, are intensely magnified; that which rarely claims major significance in our field of vision is brought alarmingly close, demanding attention. The arresting impact of the images is produced by a shift in scale in relation to the photographic frame: the original prints were themselves quite small (most are roughly 20 x 15 cm), but the proportion of the visual field that these subjects consume affords them an unusual magnitude in the imagination. Indeed, unexpected relationships of scale are crucial in the functioning of both Wols's photography and his drawing. In the latter, however, this is less a question of the enlargement or miniaturisation of an external object, than a teeming intricacy enacted on a literally small stage.

³³ See Christine Mehring: *Wols Photographs*, exhibition catalogue (1999), and Yve-Alain Bois: 'No to... the Informel,' in Bois and Rosalind Krauss: *Formless, A User's Guide* (1997), pp. 138-143.

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard: *The Poetics of Space* (1958, and translated by Maria Jolas in 1994), p. xix.

Given its conventional functions and status, it is not surprising when drawing is small; and it is therefore difficult to integrate drawing's smallness into a model of radical artistic practice based upon shock. On the contrary, drawing has conventionally been associated with intimacy and privacy rather than any powerful public agency. When smallness has been discussed theoretically in relation to cultural production, it has largely been in terms of the miniature: the creation of smaller versions of a familiar world into which the (bourgeois) subject can project and escape. Indeed, smallness gathers around it a connotative field suggestive of the unthreatening and unassertive: intimacy, privacy, slightness, the childlike, poverty, modesty, quietness, understatement, pathos, the overlooked. As Susan Stewart has argued, the miniature attracts a set of distinctly bourgeois cultural priorities.³⁵ To take a celebrated example: Gaston Bachelard's 1958 study, *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard discusses poetic images relating to space (and especially to the home), images that provide a restful, restorative sense of ease. He celebrates expressions of what he calls 'felicitous' or 'eulogized' space; his preference is for poets that are engaged in 'topophilia,' the 'love of place.'³⁶ For Bachelard, 'Imagination augments the values of reality';³⁷ he celebrates the enriching labour of the poetic imagination as it attends to domestic spaces of repose, comfort and privacy.

Although there is also a chapter specifically devoted to 'The Miniature,' questions of scale lie at the heart of *The Poetics of Space* as a whole. Bachelard talks of the 'magnifying glass of the imagination,'³⁸ and metaphors of scale are often used to articulate the experience of imaginative, perceptual or cognitive focus.³⁹ This focus is restorative for Bachelard, and the miniature is explicitly associated with solace, quiet, and dedicated devotion. Referring to medieval miniaturists, he writes: 'All small things must evolve slowly, and certainly a long period of leisure, in a quiet room, was needed to miniaturize the world.'⁴⁰ Enlarging glasses and miniaturization are means by which to detach from the surrounding world, to become lost in a separate microcosmic realm. Indeed, on occasion Bachelard sounds explicit notes against the encroachments of modernity, retreating instead

³⁵ Susan Stewart: *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993): 'The miniature is considered in this essay as a metaphor for the interior space and time of the bourgeois subject.' p. xii.

³⁶ Ibid. p. xxxv.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 110.

³⁹ 'Attention,' Bachelard writes, 'is by itself an enlarging glass.' Ibid. p. 158.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 159.

to Romantic imaginative reconstructions of rural existence, substituting for noisy urban street remembered sounds of the sea.⁴¹ Susan Stewart, in her more recent and extensive study of the miniature, refers to Bachelard, explicitly linking the miniature to a version of bourgeois subjectivity: “The miniature, linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination.”⁴²

This rather sentimental emphasis upon introversion and leisured repose does not seem to lend to the miniature much radical potential;⁴³ and just as this kind of rhetoric does not adequately describe the hot-house atmosphere of Matisse’s studio practice, as we will see it is even less capable of addressing the disturbances of Wols. But although the tone of Bachelard’s account is in places nostalgic and shot through with celebrations of a retreat to the safe, comfortable, bourgeois world of the home, there are nevertheless aspects of his discussion that are energizing in ways not limited to these priorities. For Bachelard, the diminutive is also *vertiginous*: he describes the immersive aspect of the small as a ‘plunge into tininess.’⁴⁴ A magnet for what Merleau-Ponty called ‘voracious vision,’⁴⁵ smallness and intricacy intensify perception’s circuits of desire, demanding ever-closer immersive scrutiny. This heightened attentive mode delivers something analogous to a change in experiential magnitude: the ‘plunge’ infers a depth, a thickness governed by a compelling imaginative horizon to be approached headlong.⁴⁶

It is important to acknowledge the intensifying action of memory in preserving a trace of such perceptual experience.⁴⁷ For Bachelard, the qualitative associations of poetic images

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 27-8.

⁴² Stewart, op.cit. p. 69.

⁴³ See Carter Ratcliff: ‘Notes on Small Sculpture,’ *Artforum* (Volume 15, April 1976), pp. 35-42. He writes: ‘Throughout the modern period, small sculpture has been tainted with connotations of preciousness, luxury, unearned privilege and even secrecy.’ (p.35) Robert Morris was also keen to avoid the form of the miniature, for similar reasons; see Morris: ‘Notes on Sculpture Part One,’ reprinted in Gregory Battcock (ed.): *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (1995), p. 231.

⁴⁴ Bachelard, op.cit. p. 172

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, op.cit. p. 127.

⁴⁶ For an account of an intriguing experiment exploring the overlap of scale and time perception, see Stewart, op.cit. p. 65ff. She describes the experiment conducted by the School of Architecture at the University of Tennessee, which found that, when presented with dollhouses of different scales, adult subject perceived time to go faster, the smaller the dollhouse. More recently, cognitive neuroscientist Vincent Walsh has posited the connection between time, number and spatial perception within a broader Theory of Magnitude. See ‘A Theory of Magnitude: Common Cortical Metrics of Time, Space and Quantity,’ *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* (Volume 7, Number 11, November 2003), pp. 483-488. My thanks to Professor Walsh for his generosity in taking time to talk with me about his research.

⁴⁷ As discussed in my introduction, for an enlivening account see Brian Massumi: ‘Too-Blue: Colour-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism,’ in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), pp. 208-256.

‘reverberate’ within the subject. The imagination’s ‘doublet of resonances and repercussions,’ colours memory and sets up new frameworks for experiences to come, generating a kind of ‘recursive futurity.’⁴⁸ Without replicating Bachelard’s retreat from the modern world, it is nevertheless possible to foster the potential of aspects of his thinking within different contexts.⁴⁹ The point is that the intensities and fascinations of looking at a Wols drawing operate on many temporal registers, re-emerging and getting plugged back into everyday experience, seeping into wider fields of association.

As well as hundreds of drawings, dozens of paintings, and a substantial corpus of photographs, Wols also produced a number of aphorisms and poems. ‘On raconte,’ Wols wrote, ‘ses petits contes terrestres / à travers de petits bouts de papiers.’⁵⁰ The only poem dated by Wols was written in Dieulefit in 1944 and recounts memories of Wols’s experiences at Cassis, from which he had fled two years earlier. Although the poem turns into something like a list of signifiers for eternity and infinity, it begins with a meditation on the experience of peering into rock pools and seaside crevices:

A Cassis, les pierres, les poissons,
les rochers vus à la loupe
le sel de la mer et la ciel
m’ont fait oublier l’importance humaine
m’ont invité à tourner le dos
au chaos de nos agissements
m’ont montré l’éternité
dans les petites vagues du port
qui se répètent
sans se répéter.⁵¹

At Cassis, the pebbles, fish,
rocks seen under a magnifying glass
the salt of the sea and the sky
made me forget about human pretensions
invited me to turn my back
on the chaos of our agitations
showed me eternity
in the little harbour waves
which repeat themselves
without repeating themselves.

This is the everyday ‘vus à la loupe,’ and we recall that Bachelard wrote of the ‘magnifying glass of the imagination,’ remarking on how ‘The man with the magnifying glass takes the world as if it were quite new to him.’⁵² The experience of peering at the low-to-the-ground, of intent concentration on the underfoot, is readily available in everyday life. Staring into pools at the seaside; making worlds of woodland moss and tree stumps; poking

⁴⁸ See Massumi’s ‘Introduction: Like a Thought,’ in Massumi (ed.): *A Shock to Thought, Expression After Deleuze and Guattari* (2002), especially pp. xxii ff.

⁴⁹ I will argue a similar point with reference to Bachelard’s *Water and Dreams* (1942) in Chapter 4.

⁵⁰ Wols in Wols, *1913-1951: Aphorisms and Pictures*, translated by Peter Inch (1971), p. 46. ‘We recount our little earthbound tales on small scraps of paper.’

⁵¹ Wols in *Ibid.* p. 40. (Translation slightly modified).

⁵² Bachelard, *op.cit.* p. 110 and p. 155.

at cracks in the floorboards;⁵³ tracking the gum patterning on pavement slabs at a bus stop: it is an attentiveness to the small worlds abounding everywhere. Opposed to any transcendent conception of the sublime, this experience is not reducible to the kind of rhetoric involving Nature and Eternity, to which Wols was sometimes drawn. Indeed, it can also be a case of heightening a remembered fragment, a magnification of that memory to prompt meditation upon enormous questions of time and the relative insignificance of human affairs.

Yet the contemplative atmosphere of Wols's poem is quite different from that of anxiety evoked by his drawings, especially as seen through the lens of Sartre's descriptions. We remember this passage: 'To see [these objects] is to dream himself... he deciphers himself on the knots of tree bark, in the fissures of a wall; roots, rootlets, vacuoles, pullulating viruses under a microscope, the hairy furrows of women and the turgid flaccidness of male fungi compromise him...' This is quite at odds with Bachelard's construction of the miniature as intimate, comforting and domesticated. Wols's tiny worlds do not convey any sense of the homely or familiar, and neither do they offer up a model of protection.⁵⁴ The reverse is true: the 'plunge into tininess' here is into a de-familiarized world of 'pullulating viruses' and uncanny sexual parts. This vertiginous plunge is dramatized by an untitled 1946 drawing by Wols in the Pompidou (15.9 x 12.3 cm, Figure 2.6). Again, a central, ovular form dominates the sheet, its shifting dimensions described by an array of wayward lines, and by a bulky, dense conglomeration of inky paint patches: umbers, viridians, crimsons and pinks. At the edges of the sheet, lines and colours have been washed out, and this lighter, more airy borderspace is populated by tiny arabesques and cursive spiralling lines. The central form's thick interior seems to breed a world of incident. ('Incident' derives from the Latin *incidere*, meaning to fall into, and the plunge enacted here is towards a microscopic world of unruly, carbuncular activity.) The density and intricacy of detail is impossible to retain in the mind, and compels the eye to constantly reacquaint itself with areas of incident it had shifted across only seconds before. The kind of limpid, peaceful

⁵³ Wols: 'That crack is a living thing. It will grow, change each day like a flower. It has been made by something none of us really understands, the incredible force of nature. That crack is very beautiful, because it was created by the only reality that is reality, a force that is beyond you and me.' Quoted by Roger Cardinal: 'The Later Work of Wols: Abstraction, Transparency, Tao,' in *Inch*, op.cit. 1978, unpag.

⁵⁴ As Jean Tardieu wrote in relation to Wols in 1960: 'Floating within this gigantic plasma, man himself is not more than a giddiness, a nausea, an amoeba, a bubble of steam, a honey-comb in ruins. And if he takes pleasure in gazing on marbled surfaces, this is because the globe of his eye is iridescent with blood.' Tardieu: 'Wols' in *Inch*, op.cit. 1978, unpag.

Taoist acceptance conveyed by Wols's poem is deranged when refracted through the prism of drawing. Clarity and resolution are contaminated by the bodily and psychic investments caught up in the process. Viral life germinates beyond the subject's control, which is quite far from the drive to mastery characteristic of encounters with the miniature as described by Stewart.

The infinitesimal emerges in a comparable way in a series of drawings made in the mid-1950s by Henri Michaux. During the late 1940s and early 50s, Michaux was loosely associated with the existentialist and *informel* circles, sometimes exhibiting drawings with the likes of Wols, Fautrier and Tapié.⁵⁵ However, as a poet and draughtsman, Michaux has been uneasily integrated into narratives of twentieth-century art, with his focus on drawing, and the inextricability of his poetry from his visual art, proving difficult to locate within avant-garde or formalist histories.⁵⁶ Perhaps the best known aspect of his output are his experiments with the hallucinogenic drug mescaline in the mid-1950s, during (and sometimes after) which he made drawings in pen and ink or crayon (Figure 2.7). Some of these frenetic drawings accompanied texts published by Michaux concerning his experiences, and together they offer a compelling account of an impossible inundation of the mind by swarming complexity. 'I had first of all,' Michaux wrote, 'to record the rhythms accurately, and the process of infinitisation through the infinitesimal.'⁵⁷ Michaux's mescaline drawings generate propulsive, dynamic fields that are at once seismographs, patterns of vibration and physical terrains. Octavio Paz wrote of them:

"Bubbles, more bubbles, pebbles, little stones. Rocky cliffs of gas. Lines that cross, rivers meeting, endless bifurcations, meanders, deltas, deserts that walk, deserts that fly. Disintegrations, agglutinations, fragmentations, reconstitutions. Shattered words, the copulation of syllables, the fornication of meanings... Repetitions: mescaline is an 'infinity-machine'. Heterogeneity, a continuous eruption of fragments, particles, pieces. Furious series. Nothing is fixed. Avalanches, the kingdom of uncountable numbers, accursed proliferation."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Guilbaut, op.cit. p. 49, and 'Chronology' in Morris op.cit. pp. 213ff. For example, the 1952 exhibition, *Un art autre* (Galerie Paul Facchetti, organized on the publication of Michel Tapié's book), included work by Michaux, Pollock and Wols. Michaux had shown at the same gallery in October 1951 (*Signifiants de L'Informel*) with Dubuffet, Fautrier, Mathieu, Riopelle, and Serpan.

⁵⁶ A significant enrichment to Michaux scholarship, and an important contribution to the historiography of drawing more generally, was made by Catherine de Zegher's 2000 exhibition at The Drawing Center, New York, and its catalogue, *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*.

⁵⁷ Michaux (1959), translated by John Ashbury, in *Henri Michaux*, Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition catalogue (1999), unpag.

⁵⁸ Octavio Paz: *Alternating Current* (1973), reprinted in *Force Fields – Phases of the Kinetic*, exhibition catalogue (2000), p. 259.

The coursing energy dramatized by the tiny marks of both Michaux and Wols is quite far from Bachelard's restorative vision. Mobile, frenetic and radically impure, the drawings both attest to and offer up an enthralling invitation to intense and precarious immersion. Looking at these jerky, seismographic marks, time becomes concentrated, the imagination consumed by magnitudes out of proportion to the scale of darting, criss-crossing, vibrating ink lines. The incitement to delve into and scrutinize their teeming pictorial incident arrives as a challenge to the eye, a felt need to track this activity, and then again to re-scan to prevent the infinitesimal, miniscule complexity from slipping from visual memory (as it inevitably does).

Drawings and Pictures

For Sartre, visual art was primarily engaged in the production of *images*. The image was, for him, opposed to reality, an ontological nothingness that was neither dependent upon nor informative about the external world. Aligning in this respect with Bachelard's poetics, then, for Sartre it is never the art *object* that is important, but rather the mental *image* to which it gives rise. Although not devoid of intensity or magnitude, it is difficult to attribute the mental image with a particular size. Its lack of fixed dimensions makes it significantly different from a materially manifested artwork. It is a reduction, or levelling of artworks to images that could be enacted by photographic reproduction, a strategy most extensively deployed by André Malraux and his *Musée Imaginaire*, or 'Museum without Walls.'⁵⁹ By juxtaposing images of art objects derived from radically different historical periods, geographical areas and functional contexts, Malraux was able to assert a unity or coherence for art operating under the transcendent principle of style. The levelling effect of such photographic reproduction, inviting a reduction of analysis to morphological comparison, facilitated comparisons between Wols and Jackson Pollock.⁶⁰ Both artists responded to a post-war situation by rejecting both geometrical abstraction and forms of socialist realism to construct abstract pictorial languages that displayed clear debts to Surrealist automatism. Both were championed by influential, existentialist-inspired commentators, and both led self-destructive lives, easily mythologized in biographical

⁵⁹ See André Malraux: *Museum without Walls*, translated by Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (1967) and *The Voices of Silence*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (1978).

⁶⁰ Wols and Pollock were shown together in New York at the Sidney Janis Gallery in October 1950 ('Young Painters in US and France').

accounts, which ended in early deaths. Whilst it is certainly simplistic and unhelpful to ignore the dramatically different economic, cultural and discursive situations in Paris and New York in the late 1940s,⁶¹ another very obvious way in which Wols and Pollock (and *Informel* and Abstract Expressionist practices more generally) differed, was in relation to the physical scale of their output. The immersive, absorbing Abstract Expressionist canvases stood in sharp contrast to the smaller, ruptured and scarred surfaces of Fautrier and Dubuffet, a disparity even more dramatically foiled by the diminutive sheets of Wols and Michaux.

Often accompanied by a dramatic rhetoric of sublimity, Abstract Expressionist painting demonstrated confidence in the potential of art to confront the enormity of the post-war human predicament. Its emergence was accompanied by a powerful theoretical defence of the idea of the *picture* as a mode capable of sustaining meaningful and ambitious artistic practice. The picture, a 'discrete unity attached to a wall,'⁶² was seen to have reached its triumphant zenith in post-war New York. As championed by Clement Greenberg and later, in revised but related terms, by Michael Fried, the modernist abstract picture constituted a unified, bounded whole, in which all elements would be simultaneously present to the eye of the viewer without hierarchical division or imbalance. Delimited by the essential physical components of the medium, the picture should be internally coherent, and, importantly, congruent with the shape of its flat canvas support. Internal details were to be subjugated in favour of coherence and self-presence. The result would be, according to Fried, a single gestalt, a unity that could be apprehended as a pure presence in a temporal experience that was continuous, undivided by separate competing events. That is, the picture could be perceived wholly and at once, generating rapturous experience of 'conviction,' which may well *persist* in time, but which still remained homogeneous – it was not fractured by the intrusion of heterogeneous elements requiring new and separate durations.⁶³

Wols's drawings clearly cannot be comfortably integrated into this narrative. Reviewing an exhibition of the artist's work in New York in the early 1960s, Donald Judd lamented

⁶¹ Serge Guilbaut offers a useful critique of accounts that propose too similar a set of cultural conditions in post-war Paris and New York. See Guilbaut, *op.cit.*, especially pp. 38ff.

⁶² Fer: *The Infinite Line*, p. 5.

⁶³ Michael Fried: 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (1998), pp. 148-172. See also Pamela M. Lee: "'Ultramoderne': or, How George Kubler Stole the Time in Sixties Art," *The Grey Room* no. 2 (Winter, 2001), pp. 46-77.

that, despite some commentators' ambitious comparisons of Wols with Pollock and Tobey, he could only conclude that the former's 'achievement is at most tertiary.'⁶⁴ The reason for this dismissal was that Wols had not arrived at the 'the continuous, all-over surface' so essential to the development of modernist painting. It therefore could have little relevance in the narrative whose conclusion was the luminous stains of Morris Louis, Frank Stella's 'deductive structures,' or Judd's own literalist objects. Wols's drawings seemed to dramatize not the unitary wholeness of the art object, but its proliferation of internal incident. Interestingly, whereas the rhetoric surrounding Wols and Michaux had less to do with intimacy than with registering often discomfiting sensation, artists such as Rothko and Newman courted, even through very large pictures, what they saw as not epic but intimate relations with the viewer.⁶⁵ Indeed, the increased scale of these colour fields would force the beholder into close contact with their saturated surfaces. This was an intimacy of immersion rather than inspection.

Dramatizing a quality characteristic of much drawing, especially that is based on that portable series of small voids, the sketchbook, Wols's work does not engulf the viewer in an expansive sensory field. Instead, the smallness of these objects demands an active, curious eye; they invite inspection and reward exploratory modes of attention. However, what is being inspected has less empathetic appeal than the grand, luminous threshold-like forms of Rothko's fields. Looking closely at the minute progress of these pen marks, the eye is drawn in close to discern the complex and fragile microcosm. Not a question of mastery, the compulsion is rather to sink further into the dense matrix of marks.⁶⁶ The intricacy focuses attention precisely on *detail*. Not a single detail, detachable from an otherwise unitary whole, but rather a field constituted throughout by an unruly intricate fabric. This compels the eye into a mobile relationship with the surface, to move from point of focus to periphery, from one node or cluster of incident to its neighbour. This is quite far from the unified contemplation of a single gestalt.

⁶⁴ 'The image appears in part to be an anatomy study, the heart or the juncture of blood vessels, and in part to be a detail of a plant –tuber, fruit or root system. Neither aspect is specific enough to prevent the other appearing. The ambivalence and the microcosmic delicacy are interesting and each work is definite in form, but one is forced to say that the achievement is at most tertiary.' *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959-1975* (1975), p. 47.

⁶⁵ See Fer: 'Picture,' in *The Infinite Line*, pp. 5-25.

⁶⁶ With small scale, intimate objects, Robert Morris argued, 'space does not exist... The smaller the object, the closer one approaches it and, therefore, it has correspondingly less of a spatial field in which to exist for the viewer.' Morris in Battcock, op.cit. p. 231.

What is the relation of drawing to detail, and how do both resist the logic of the picture? Modernist formalist aesthetics has been consistently hostile to detail, regarding it as an excessive, distracting element that disturbs perception of the unitary shape and logic of the support. To take Fried as exemplary: while delivering a positive judgement on Louis's early veils, suggestively describing how they 'ravish the beholder with something like detail,' he nevertheless reserves his most enthusiastic praise from the later veils like *Terranean* (1958), which 'strikes one as wholly devoid of incidental felicities. The stained portion looms as though just risen, its proportions together with the dense brown tonality of the whole connoting overwhelming mass, its internal figuration stark, sharp, almost menacing, at once flamelike and mineral in character.'⁶⁷ Any internal incident should conform to the dimensions of the edge, confirming the picture as a coherent, integrated whole. Naomi Schor argues that detail is culturally coded as feminine, it being associated, since Neo-classicism, with the negatively charged aesthetic elements of the everyday and the ornamental. The everyday, the prose of the world, was associated with the mundane and domestic, distracting attention from the more elevated (masculine) pursuit of Ideals and universal verities. The ornamental, associated with the excessive, decadent and effeminate, would similarly be disavowed as distracting and inessential to the search for more authentic and fundamental aesthetic qualities.⁶⁸ Some of this gendered neo-classical stricture against detail persists in a modernist aesthetics based upon essential properties, unitary forms and sublimated optical experience.

Drawing was crucial to neo-classical aesthetics and to the discipline of expunging the unnecessary and imperfect from pictorial designs. The practice of drawing, for Joshua Reynolds for example, would be perfected in order to render an idealised, sealed, harmonious vision of the human form. Drawing was the means by which to achieve a tightly integrated composition, in the development of which distracting details would be removed; these were, to use Michaux's phrase, 'lines obsessed by the container.'⁶⁹ Yet when considering the priorities and particular modalities of drawing as work on paper, rather than as the structural armature for large-scale painting, we can discern quite a

⁶⁷ Fried: 'Morris Louis' (1971), in Fried, *Ibid.* p. 112. Later in the essay, Fried describes 'the sense in which everything a given unfurled contains is seen when one's attention is brought to rest on the painting as a whole.' p. 121.

⁶⁸ Naomi Schor: *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (1987), p. 4ff.

⁶⁹ See note 28. Reynolds 4th Discourse, 1771: 'The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater.' Quoted in Schor *op.cit.* p. 79.

different set of tendencies. Rather than the properly pictorial discipline of establishing compositional schemes always designed in relation to the dimensions and boundaries of the support, the more contingent practice of drawing tends to proceed from the momentum of the mark. Indeed, the recent resurgence of theoretical interest in drawing re-orientates it away from pictorial concerns, focusing instead on issues of inscription, tactility, contingency, openness, and signification. For example, Catherine de Zegher has seen drawing as an ‘antidote to a rigid modernist model,’ driving against the authority of form.⁷⁰ Indeed, in the last chapter, Matisse’s drawing practice was seen to foreground a productive hybridity between mediums, which runs counter to the Modernist priority on optical experience and medium specificity. As we saw in the introduction, Michael Newman has focused upon the status of the individual *trait* in drawing, engaging with distinctions between such categories as line, mark, stain, sign, trace and gesture; and Briony Fer has charted the way in which drawing offered rich potentials to re-make art following the erosion of modernist pictorial values.⁷¹

Instead of articulating a pre-existing aesthetic field, the drawn mark dramatizes the time and activity involved in bringing it into being. The ground, the marked surface, is crucial in receiving and preserving the trace; as Richard Tuttle noted, ‘the ground is as drawn as the mark.’⁷² Yet this is a very different way of conceiving the surface from the ‘pictorial’ mode discussed earlier. It is not the totality of the ground that is focused upon, but rather its role as a surface to be marked: essentially an openness and not a limit. That is, the surface of drawing is less a delimited shape to which marks are set in self-conscious relation, but rather a space which is an open receptor, and which is potentially extendable.⁷³

⁷⁰ Catherine de Zegher: ‘Introduction (The Transitional Space of Drawing),’ in de Zegher (ed.): *Drawing Papers*, no. 31: ‘Drawing (as) Center’ (October 2002), p. 4.

⁷¹ See Newman: ‘The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing,’ in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (2003), pp. 93-108; and Fer: *The Infinite Line*.

⁷² Richard Tuttle, speaking at the conference: *With a Single Mark: The Models and Practice of Drawing*, Tate Britain, 19th May 2006.

⁷³ See Norman Bryson: ‘A Walk for a Walk’s Sake,’ in de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing*, pp. 149-158, and Alain Badiou, op.cit. This priority on the mobile point over the limits of its potential territory is encapsulated in Paul Klee’s famous description of drawing as ‘taking a line for a walk.’ In his ‘Creative Credo’ (1920), Klee writes suggestively on the mobility also inherent in processes of viewing: ‘The eye is made in such a way that it focuses on each part of the picture in turn; and to view a new section, it must leave the one just seen... The beholder’s eye, which moves about like an animal grazing, follows paths prepared for it in the picture (...). The pictorial work was born of movement, is itself recorded movement, and is assimilated through movement (eye muscles).’ Reprinted in H.B. Chipp (ed.): *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (1958), p. 185.

Flights from the Page

Progressively throughout the 1950s and 60s, two powerful modes of thinking about art, both of which had been brought to a climax in engagements with Abstract Expressionism, were steadily eroded. The first was the idea of the picture as primary site of significant artistic interventions, championed by Formalist critics, as we have seen. The second was the model of art as record of an authentic, self-defining encounter with the world, as famously articulated in Harold Rosenberg's 1952 essay, 'The American Action Painters.'⁷⁴ Not only was there an unravelling of the fabric of the coherent, unified *picture*, but there was also a pervasive move away from a faith in a unified, self-present *subject*, which could constitute the coherent origin of expressive artistic practices. Against the individualism of some popularized existentialist rhetoric, with its cult of angst and talk of the Void, cooler, more opaque and systematic artistic strategies were developed. As Bernice Rose articulated in her 1976 *Drawing Now*, during the 1960s there was a 'drying' of the line in drawing, a movement away from the gestural or expressive mark (although, as discussed in the last chapter, the status of the 'expressive' cannot be taken at face value, even in the paradigmatic case of Matisse).⁷⁵

While painting struggled to find a place within a reconfigured artistic terrain, drawing, which was never fully aligned with the pictorial, flourished. Never having been made to sustain heroic or teleological claims of autonomy and coherence, and never having provided the kind of immersive spectacle to which much recent painting was in danger of being reduced, drawing offered a key space of interchange within art's rapidly expanding field. In the process, drawing migrated from the sketchbook or paper sheet, claiming a new expanded territory on walls, through buildings and across landscapes. Cross-pollinations abounded: between drawing and sculpture (Eva Hesse, Gego), drawing and architecture (Gordon Matta-Clark), drawing and film (Yvonne Rainer, Anthony McCall, Marcel Broodthaers), drawing and writing (Hanne Darboven, Cy Twombly), drawing and walking (Richard Long). In several respects, the contracted nature of drawing's field enabled its expansion. Drawing proved able to 'draw together,' to bring into productive relation, an array of artistic practices and conventions. This was made possible, in part, by drawing's

⁷⁴ Originally published in *ArtNews*, reprinted in Rosenberg: *The Tradition of the New* (1959), pp. 23-39.

⁷⁵ See Bernice Rose: *Drawing Now* (1976); for a useful discussion, see Anna Lovatt: *Seriality and Systematic Thought in Drawing c.1966-1976: Ruth Vollmer, Sol LeWitt, Eva Hesse, Mel Bochner and Dorothea Rockburne* (PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute, 2005).

unobtrusiveness and flexibility, which allowed it to endure even as the fundamentals of the picture were being unsparingly deconstructed (Broodthaers's example is again key here).

Here I want to say something briefly about the dynamic of contraction and expansion as it remained central to one significant mode of drawing's physical enlargement: the wall drawing. The picture had maintained a competitive, even at times aggressive relationship with the wall, attempting to attract the viewer's undistracted attention at the wall's expense (Figure 2.8). Rothko, for example, remarked of his immersive, enthralling environments: 'By saturating the room with the feeling of the work the walls are defeated and the poignancy of each single work had for me become more visible.'⁷⁶ In the late 1960s, drawing set up a relationship to gallery walls in opposite ways. As discussed in my introduction, drawing has arguably always foregrounded the progress of the mark across its ground, prioritizing the touching of a surface over its coverage. This has conventionally happened on diminutive surfaces, but in the work of artists such as Sol LeWitt, Richard Tuttle and Giuseppe Penone, drawing took to the wall. Although the reciprocal dialogue enacted between drawn mark and its ground takes on larger dimensions in these wall drawings, importantly, the point of contact between mark and surface retains its openness and visibility.

Sol LeWitt published his 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' in *Artforum* in the summer of 1967, and began to make proposals for wall drawings in the following year (Figure 2.9).⁷⁷ Here, LeWitt expressed his desire to sever art from any expressionist or aesthetic moorings. Art would be generated by the idea, aimed at the mind of the viewer, with the work's execution becomes a 'perfunctory affair.'⁷⁸ LeWitt issued instructions for wall drawings which were to be followed by his assistants without deviation. Most often conforming to simple mathematical systems, drawings were usually made with the use of a ruler, to fixed dimensions, with endless and interminable repetitions (Figure 2.10). This mode of production would do away with any fetishized expressive hand; the act of drawing now became as mechanical, pre-ordained and tightly disciplined as possible. The results spread, with a modular regularity, across many square meters of gallery wall. The principles to which the lines were made are self-evident and it is clear that the labour takes place *in situ* rather than in the private phantasmatic space of the studio. Indeed, in the case of Matisse, as

⁷⁶ Rothko quoted in Fer: *The Infinite Line*, pp. 13-4.

⁷⁷ Sol LeWitt: 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' *Artforum* (Volume 5, Number 10, Summer 1967), pp. 79-83.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 80.

we have seen, this studio space seems the absolute opposite of LeWitt's scene of drawing, and rightly so in crucial respects. But the opposition might become less stark when we ask: What was Matisse's 'cinema of sensibility,' but a wall drawing?

Other aspects of drawing's smallness are also attributed significance in LeWitt's formulation: 'The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as the finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.'⁷⁹ So, from a simple, minimal algorithmic formula, a whole system of drawing proliferates, covering walls and filling rooms. As the viewer approaches this new expanded territory, she or he is drawn in to inspect the fragile arrival of the line on the wall's surface. There is a constant oscillation between the slightest incident of the mark, the proliferation of the system across entire rooms, the brevity of the formula from which the drawing issued, and the extended time of the labour from which the painstaking grids issued.

Similar dynamics of expansion and contraction are powerfully at work in the drawing practice of Giuseppe Penone. The significance of Penone's mobilisation of touch and the imprint has been extensively discussed in a recent catalogue, but the issue of scale, which his drawing foregrounds no less insistently, has not attracted any such thorough attention.⁸⁰ From the mid-1970s, Penone has used drawing to translate and extend prints taken from the surface of his skin. That is, tiny ink imprints were taken from specific areas of the artist's body using Selotape. These were then set into slides and mounted in a projector. The image was then projected onto walls (in the case of the *Pressure* series, the first of which was made in 1974, Figures 2.11 and 2.12), or onto large pieces of unwoven fabric (as in his enormous *Eyelid*, first begun in 1977, Figure 2.13 and 2.14). The projected image was then drawn over with a charcoal tool. The miniscule creases and wrinkles of the skin are transformed into vast drawn terrains, which engulf the viewer and set up an inevitable relationship to landscape:

"Enlarging the imprint by projection onto the wall, Penone creates wall drawings of the skin's lines that enact a vivid interspace. When displayed together, these drawings seem to waver in front of us. They turn microcosmos into macrocosmos,

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 82.

⁸⁰ Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Giuseppe Penone: The Imprint of Drawing / L'impronta del disegno*, exhibition catalogue (2004).

evoking the feeling of being enveloped in the tiniest cracks of our own sensory surface as well as of the earth's rhizomatically ramified surface."⁸¹

Like a virus or a nomadic army, the proliferation of marks contains the potential for seemingly endless extension. And in a comparable way to LeWitt's simple formulae, Penone's imprints provide a basic starting point, a 'zero image,' a small place from which to elaborate an expansion. The labour required to perform that expansion is also similarly dramatized: painstaking, mechanical, even absurd in its faithful translation of a body-bound 'code.'⁸² While LeWitt's instructions do not appear to have been contaminated by the contingencies of embodied experience, Penone's starting point is squarely and unmistakably placed in the body and at its limits. The skin is both rhythmized by the fluid and linear structures of the inside, as well as inscribed by external forces with which the body comes into contact. This bodily interface is then spread across the limits of the gallery space, suggesting that the 'straits' of perception confer upon the seen a corporeality; or rather, that the seen is itself constituted in the thickness of the flesh, and that perception never stops spreading this thickness across the surfaces of the visible.

The choice of the surface of the eyelid for such magnification is suggestive. The eyelid is the quick, soft shutter that cuts off the body's access to the visible world. With eyes closed, a print is taken. Contact is blind. Dramatically enlarged, the details of this miniscule section of skin are offered up to vision and traced over, again blindly, by the charcoal stump.⁸³ Sightless, the sensate, complex surface of the skin becomes magnified. Without vision, on which we rely so much for the measurement of size and distance, questions of magnitude propose themselves differently. The size of an object can of course be calculated by touch, but that touching is always partial, and its estimations constructed in relation to the size of the body. Without the regulating assessments of vision, tactile sensation asserts its own registers of magnitude. Nevertheless, as we have seen in relation to the drawings of Wols and of Michaux, vision itself does not only delimit a literal size; it is 'voracious,' and is plugged into the magnifications of attention, projection, and desire. In the wall drawings

⁸¹ De Zegher: 'An Introduction to Impression,' in *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁸² This dramatization is even more insistent in Penone's recent series, *The Imprint of Drawing* (2003), which again begins with an imprint (this time an ink fingerprint), the contours of which are followed painstakingly by thin pencil lines, which expand, in concentric circles barely a millimetre apart, to fill very large sheets of paper (120 x 200 cm). And while the concentric rings expand, the tiny irregularities of the drawn lines get incorporated into the next ring and continually replicated. The 'mistakes' become a new contour to be followed, their repetition frequently creating ridges within the concentric circles. See Fer: 'Pressure Points: Penone's Tactile Vernacular,' in *Ibid.* pp. 91-102.

⁸³ See Newman: 'Sticking to the World: Drawing as Contact,' in *Ibid.* pp. 103-9.

of Penone, however, these expansions are not left to the viewer's imagination. Of primary concern here has been the apparently simple question of what happens when a small thing becomes a big thing, when drawing is employed as a technology of expansion. From this discussion of the interrelation in drawing of the apparent opposites, contraction and expansion, I now move on to consider a no less complex intertwining of another pair of operations most often assumed to be antithetical: addition and erasure.

‘To Use the Eraser as a Drawing Tool’¹

What is produced when a drawing is erased? What does the visibility of the work of erasure *in* drawing dramatize? If erasure most often remains an unseen aspect of the production process, a way of silently removing or correcting a mark, then what kind of effect does it have when its action is openly foregrounded? The story with which I want to open up this discussion is by now canonic in histories of the neo-avant-garde, and describes the genesis of the most famous drawing by either one of the two artists involved. In the autumn of 1953, Robert Rauschenberg approached Willem de Kooning and asked him for a drawing that he proposed to erase. In 1965, the younger artist recounted the episode to Calvin Tomkins:

“I had been working for some time at erasing, with the idea that I wanted to create a work of art by that method. Not just by deleting certain lines, you understand, but by erasing the whole thing. Using my own work wasn’t satisfactory. If it was my own work being erased, then the erasing would only be half the process, and I wanted it to be the whole. Anyway, I realized that it had to be something by someone who everyone agreed was great, and the most logical person for that was de Kooning. I actually had a de Kooning drawing that I’d stolen from him once, but that wouldn’t do – the act required the artist’s participation. So I went to his studio and explained to him just what I had in mind. I remember that the idea of destruction kept coming into the conversation, and I kept trying to show that it wouldn’t *be* destruction, although there was always the chance that if it didn’t work out there would be a terrible waste. At first, he didn’t like the notion much, but he understood, and after a while he agreed. He took out a portfolio of his drawings and began thumbing through it. He pulled out one drawing, looked at it, and said, ‘No, I’m not going to make it easy for you. It has to be something I’d miss.’ Then he took out another portfolio and looked through that, and finally he gave me a drawing, and I took it home. It wasn’t easy, so I had to work very hard on it, using every sort of eraser. But in the end it really worked. I *liked* the result. I felt it was a legitimate work of art, created by the technique of erasing. So the problem was solved, and I didn’t have to do it again.”²

¹ Robert Rauschenberg, in: ‘Robert Rauschenberg talks to Maxime de la Falaise McKendry,’ *Interview* (Volume 6, Number 5, May 1976), p. 36.

² Rauschenberg quoted by Calvin Tomkins: *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (1976, originally published 1965), pp. 210-11.

So, after some initial resistance, de Kooning had obliged and, following four weeks of work with a battery of erasers, Rauschenberg produced his *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (Figure 3.1). Traces and residues of the charcoal, pencil and crayon marks are still visible.³ Rauschenberg then set the flecked, evacuated drawing in a gold-leaf frame with an official plaque (written out by Jasper Johns) giving the artist's name, title and date.⁴ On the back of the frame board, now also covered with stickers recording the work's transit between institutions, Rauschenberg wrote: 'DO NOT REMOVE DRAWING FROM FRAME. FRAME IS PART OF DRAWING.' The frame serves to seal the action of erasure as completed, separating it off from the unfinished becomings of the world, and giving it symbolic purchase by inserting it into a pictorial tradition.

Although the work was not publicly exhibited until 1964, news of its arrival spread and it quickly became notorious.⁵ 1953 was a busy year for Rauschenberg, and the apparent negativity and irreverence of this gesture contributed to the building controversy surrounding his work. In the spring, on returning to New York from a trip made with Cy Twombly to Europe and North Africa, Rauschenberg established a studio on Fulton Street in downtown Manhattan. Here, he finished a series of *Black Paintings* that he had begun during his time at Black Mountain College two years earlier (Figure 3.2). These were large canvases of collaged pieces of crumpled and torn newspaper, smeared with black pigment. In the autumn of 1953 they were shown at the Stable Gallery alongside a series of *White Paintings* that he had also produced at Black Mountain in 1951 (Figure 3.3).⁶ The latter consisted of unframed rectangular canvases painted an unmodulated white, hung singly or arranged into small groups. They were received badly, with critics perceiving their radical reductions as gratuitous terminal points in the sheer evacuation of painting on the one hand,

³ Oil paint is also mentioned by Rauschenberg in the film *Robert Rauschenberg: Man At Work*, directed by Chris Grunland (1997).

⁴ "I spend [sic] four weeks erasing that drawing. I used about fifteen different types of erasers – and besides that, there's a drawing on the other side!" In Barbara Rose: *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (1987), p.51. *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is now housed by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Traces of ink and crayon on paper with mat and hand-lettered label in gold-leaf frame, 64.1 x 55.2 cm). See <http://www.sfmoma.org/msoma/artworks/93.html>.

⁵ *Erased de Kooning Drawing* was first shown at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (Connecticut), 6th January – 9th February 1964 with examples of his *Black Paintings* and *White Paintings*, as well as an untitled solvent transfer drawing. The exhibition was entitled 'Black, White and Grey Contemporary Painting and Sculpture.' See Joan Young and Susan Davidson: 'Chronology,' in Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (eds.): *Robert Rauschenberg. A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (1997), p. 563.

⁶ These series, along with some of his *Elemental Sculptures*, were exhibited jointly with work by Twombly at the Stable Gallery from 15 September to 3 October 1953.

and the presentation of a violated, distressed materiality on the other.⁷ The show gained Rauschenberg the reputation of *enfant terrible*, which provided the critical context for the reception of the *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, even as it hung on his studio wall.

In normal usage, the word 'erasure' gathers together a field of related terms associated with subtraction: deletion, cancellation, obliteration, evacuation, and deformation. That is, a constellation suggesting an array of possibilities for radical negative action. And it is principally as an act of negation that Rauschenberg's erasure has been understood. Firstly, the drawing has been read as a piece of Neo-Dada irreverence. Rauschenberg had visited the *Dada 1916-1923* exhibition, organised by Duchamp, held at the Sidney Janis Gallery between 15th April and 9th May 1953. *Erased de Kooning Drawing* immediately rhymes with one the works on show there: Duchamp's defacement of the Mona Lisa in *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919 (Figure 3.4).⁸ But Rauschenberg's choice to erase de Kooning specifically has a number of its own connotations. Rather than standing (like Leonardo) for an established canon of Old Masters, de Kooning was centrally associated with Action Painting, the then-ascendant model of contemporary practice that had grown in influence during the late 1940s, approaching a triumphant zenith in the early '50s.

In the spring of 1953, and immediately preceding Duchamp's Dada show, de Kooning had mounted his seminal exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, 'Paintings on the Theme of Woman' (March 19-April 11). The exhibition propelled de Kooning to the forefront of the burgeoning New York School. In light of this, Rauschenberg's act took on not only a quality of irreverence, but also a more specific connotation of Oedipal patricide. Rauschenberg, together with Jasper Johns and Cy Twombly, so the account goes, put paid to the ideology of the directly expressive mark, in favour of an interrogation of the mediations, sublimations and conventionality that underpin its discursive operations. Rauschenberg's act becomes an aggressive killing of the father in order to forge a distinct individual artistic identity.⁹ Indeed, the tight, mechanical, repetitive manual action of

⁷ In a review of the exhibition, James Fitzsimmons described the *White Paintings* as a "gratuitously destructive act," and a Black Painting as 'a city-dump mural out of handmade debris.' 'Art,' *Arts and Architecture* (Volume 70, Number 10, October 1953), pp. 32-36.

⁸ For a discussion of the Dada show in relation to Rauschenberg's development, see Branden Joseph: *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (2003), p. 89ff. For a discussion of Rauschenberg's early work in relation to Duchamp, see Benjamin Buchloh: 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,' *Artforum* (Volume XXI, Number 1, September 1982), pp. 43-56, and John Paul Ricco: 'Name No One Man,' *Parallax* (Volume 11, Number 2, April-June 2005), pp. 93-103.

⁹ Calvin Tomkins described *Erased de Kooning Drawing* in exactly these terms: "The implications were so blatantly Freudian, the act itself so obviously a symbolic (if good-natured) patricide" (*Off the Wall: Robert*

Rauschenberg's painstaking erasure would seem as far away as possible from the improvised expressive gesture.

More recently, interpretations of Rauschenberg's erasure have shifted from reading in it iconoclastic or Oedipal aggression, to crediting it with more affirmative potential. Such readings are closer to Rauschenberg's own statements about the work, and with the ideas of John Cage, arguably his most important creative influence at this time.¹⁰ Rauschenberg had met Cage in summer 1952 at Black Mountain College, where the latter was teaching. This encounter, Branden Joseph has argued, "initiated a new paradigm of avant-garde production, in which the idea of difference was conceived not in terms of negation but rather as a positive force."¹¹ Rather than a gratuitous act of extremism, Cage had famously regarded Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* as "airports" for "the lights, shadows and particles."¹² Rejecting the idea of absolute nothingness, he saw in Rauschenberg's series an incorporation of the dynamism of the non-art realm. Joseph reads *Erased de Kooning Drawing* through the ideas of Cage, Bergson and Duchamp, arguing that it embodies a removal of intentional imagery and individual expression in favour of being constituted by both contingent visual sensations and by the conventional and institutional devices of the work's framing: "Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* essentially re-enacted the reception of his *White Paintings*: the initial evacuation of expressive or representational meaning in favour of transitional, temporal forces subsequently gave way to a process in which meaning was reattributed to the work from the outside."¹³ Approaching the work from a different position, Thomas Crow asserts that Rauschenberg's erasure "in no way obliterated its object," but rather "diminished [it] to the point that it demanded the same

Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time, 1980, p.96); Moira Roth called it, "his symbolic negation of AbEx" ('The Aesthetics of Indifference,' *Artforum* (Volume 16, Number 3, November 1977), p. 50). Walter Hopps reads the *Erased de Kooning* as "enacting an Oedipal ritual... [a gesture of] revolutionary iconoclasm." *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (1991, p. 161).

¹⁰ For the best discussion of Rauschenberg's relationship with Cage, see Joseph, op.cit. In 1961, Rauschenberg distanced himself from the 'Neo-Dada' categorisation, saying "Dada was anti; I am pro." (see Hopps and Davidson, op.cit. 1997, p. 29).

¹¹ Joseph, op.cit. p. 22.

¹² John Cage: 'On Robert Rauschenberg: Artist, and His Work,' in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961), p. 102.

¹³ Joseph, op.cit. He continues: "Rauschenberg's subsequent mounting of the erased sheet of paper within a gold frame, together with the addition of a carefully hand-lettered label with a new authorial attribution, title, and date (...), simultaneously doubles the visual text with a new signification and calls attention away from the (now depleted) visual aspect of the work and toward the conventional and institutional devices of the work's 'framing'."

slowed-down, hyper-receptive mode of attention [as did his *White Paintings*] in order to yield up its visual rewards.”¹⁴

Rauschenberg himself never claimed any destructive intent for the piece.¹⁵ Indeed, the slow, painstaking work of erasure, lasting weeks and employing a host of different erasers, evokes an act of dedicated homage more than one of parody or negation. But while we can accept such reconsiderations of Rauschenberg’s motivation, an alignment of the erased drawing with the *White Paintings* in terms of how they *operate* is more problematic. Unlike the earlier series, *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is not presented as an open receptive surface, but as a sealed, completed object: a framed scene of unbecoming. The opposition is clearer when we consider Rauschenberg’s intense eagerness to show the *White Paintings* at Betty Parsons Gallery (for such an opportunity he said he would sacrifice any future chances to exhibit¹⁶), whereas *Erased de Kooning Drawing* remained on the artist’s wall throughout the 1950s. Indeed, to retrieve the work on aesthetic grounds seems forced, and it would be hard to endorse the level of importance it has attained based upon the “visual rewards” it proffers.¹⁷

A more productive avenue of exploration might be to use this early work by Rauschenberg to open up a discussion of erasure’s role in drawing more broadly. Indeed, what Rauschenberg forcefully alerts us to, and something that has so far gone unexplored in commentaries upon this encounter, is the way in which erasure is already deployed very extensively in de Kooning’s own drawing practice. So rather than constituting a ‘problem solved,’ as Rauschenberg had it, I want to ask how this limit case opens up a wider enquiry into the aesthetic and conceptual functions of erasure in both de Kooning’s drawings from the early 1950s, and in Rauschenberg’s later solvent transfer method. If erasure is, as John Paul Ricco argues, “a means of doing as a means of undoing,”¹⁸ what kind of means is it, what precisely does it act upon, and what effects does it help generate?

¹⁴ Thomas Crow: ‘This Is Now: Becoming Robert Rauschenberg,’ *Artforum* (Volume 36, Number 1, September 1997), p. 96.

¹⁵ For example, talking to Maxime de la Falaise McKendry, Rauschenberg said: “It was nothing destructive. I un-wrote that drawing because I was trying to write one with the other end of the pencil that had an eraser... To use the eraser as a drawing tool... I was doing monochrome no-image.” ‘Robert Rauschenberg talks to Maxime de la Falaise McKendry,’ *Interview*, p. 36.

¹⁶ See Joseph op.cit. Chapter 1, ‘White on White,’ pp. 25-72.

¹⁷ When Leo Steinberg asked Rauschenberg if it would make a difference if he saw the erased drawing, the artist replied “Probably not.” Steinberg: *Encounters with Rauschenberg, A Lavishly Illustrated Lecture* (2000), p. 22.

¹⁸ John Paul Ricco, op.cit. p. 96. Ricco’s agenda is in many respects similar to mine in his focus upon the role played by erasure, as a productive form of ‘unbecoming,’ in both Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning*

Erasure in de Kooning

By the time of its first exhibition, de Kooning's *Woman I* (1950-2, Figure 3.5) had already attained a certain mythical status. The month before the Janis show opened, Thomas Hess published his 'De Kooning Paints a Picture' in *Artnews*.¹⁹ Displaying an indebtedness to his close colleague Harold Rosenberg, whose influential 'The American Action Painters' had been published in *Artnews* in December 1952, Hess describes de Kooning's eighteen-month-long struggle with *Woman I* as a paradigmatic case study in Action Painting. It is described in terms of a Romantic voyage, a "metaphysical... embarkation."²⁰ The voyage, Hess asserts, is an "exploration for a constantly elusive vision," and the result "can be compared to a new map of the human sensibility."²¹ The artist's practice is conceived in broadly existentialist terms, with the priority being placed upon de Kooning's extended labour of creation for which there was no pre-given design, the artist instead courting instability and "ambiguity." Aligning with Rosenberg's bias, and with the subject position of the artist assumed from the start, Hess regards the relevance of the voyage to far outweigh the importance of any "stops en route".²²

Drawing and within a Derridean conception of drawing more generally. Following Derrida and Barthes in establishing the anonymity of writing (and drawing), Ricco sees Rauschenberg's gesture of erasure as one that "absolutely disrupts the logic of the first-person present indicative from which the validity and legitimacy of the signature is derived" (p. 98). This, he argues, points towards a model of sociality that "is neither inter-subjective fusion or some oedipal conflict, but the pleasure and joy of facing in the same direction, that leads to an expenditure of signatory traces (ie. identities), and is the dissolution of distinctions between self and other, absence and presence, creation and destruction. Together, they face in the same direction, onto a future without individual egos and the sociality that is in relation of ego to ego that typically goes by the name of community" (p. 100). Ricco's main focus is upon problems of legibility and sociality; and he does not specifically address the issue of what it is like to look at art objects. Indeed, although he does briefly address the issue of de Kooning's own use of erasure, he does not develop a discussion of a viewer's encounter with any specific drawings.

¹⁹ Thomas Hess: 'De Kooning Paints a Picture' *Artnews* (Volume, 52, Number 1, March 1953), pp. 30-33 and 64-67. *Artnews*'s '...Paints a Picture' series began with Matisse in 1941. Recent articles had described the work of Hofmann (Feb 1950), Pollock (May 1951), Kline (Dec 1952), Larry Rivers (Jan 1954), Fairfield Porter (Jan 1954), and Ad Reinhardt (summer 1956). See Ellen G. Landau (ed.): *Reading Abstract Expressionism, Context and Critique* (2005) p.10. Hess's article was accompanied by a series of photographs by Rudolph Burckhardt showing the artist in his studio, as well as a number of shots of the painting in progress.

²⁰ Hess op.cit. 1953, p. 30.

²¹ Ibid. p. 31.

²² Ibid.

For his Janis exhibition, de Kooning also exhibited sixteen drawings alongside his *Women* canvases (Figure 3.6).²³ Many of them, it is thought, were produced during the summer of 1952, when de Kooning and his wife Elaine took a break from New York to stay with Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend in Southampton, Long Island. One amongst the many de Kooning drawings included in the show in which the use of erasure is pronounced, is *Two Women II* (c.1952, Figure 3.7). Here, the forms of two female figures are unsteadily articulated within a shifting field of winging sweeps of graphite, cursory dashes and layered traces. They operate in dialogue with each other, instantiating a play of oppositions running throughout the composition: between convexity and concavity, openness and closure, positivity and negativity, definition and indeterminacy. These oppositions are evident as the eye shifts horizontally between the two figures. The concavity and angularity of the thighs and hips of the left-hand figure oppose the bulbous convexity of the right; the relative definition and legibility of the belly and genitalia on the left foils the unbounded confusion on the right; the framing containment of the breasts by the arms on the right contrasts with the raised arms which open out, expanding the torso on the left; a belt of erasure that divides the head from the torso on the left is foiled by the dense horizontal strokes across the shoulders on the right; the framing of the head on the right mirrors an uncontained matrix of erased traces on the left.

Evidence of heavy working with an eraser is apparent throughout the composition: prominently around the figures' heads, in the space between their bodies, and defining the contours of their hips. Delineations of form, emerging with wildly varying degrees of legibility, organize themselves out of a dense field of erased traces. Forms are animated and destabilized as they are driven through by the action of the eraser. The faces of both figures, for example, are built up out of the residues of previous rubbings. Facial features are precariously re-inscribed over these marks, allowing us to read blank, slightly startled expressions. We are made strikingly aware of the fact that erasure, while supposedly the subtraction of matter from drawing, is performed with the aid of what is literally a lump of rubber. De Kooning's use of the eraser is varyingly subtractive: at times the eraser appears only to drag, smear and smudge graphic marks (around the faces and heads), and at others it

²³ Of the sixteen drawings exhibited, thirteen were pastels, one was graphite, and two were oils on paper. See Paul Schimmel: 'Summer of '52,' in Cornelia Butler and Paul Schimmel (eds.): *Willem de Kooning – Tracing the Figure*, exhibition catalogue (2002), pp. 141-151.

performs a more deliberate task of removal (between the figures, on the right-hand figure's right hip).

Although a genealogy is well beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting here the obvious point that the dramatization of processes of erasure in drawing does not originate with de Kooning. As we saw in Chapter 1, one modern artist to insistently foreground the role of such processes was Matisse (another would be Alberto Giacometti). Matisse's charcoal 'theme' drawings, in contrast to the spare linear economy of the 'variations,' foreground these dynamics of erasure and redrawing. Accompanying the artist's slow work towards an understanding of his subject, the rhythm of addition and subtraction constitutes a kind of breathing of drawing, and evidences the shifts and revisions attending the attempt to integrate the model's body into the artist's plastic vocabulary. Although Matisse spoke about this work as developing towards a state of clarity, the theme drawings retain the cloudy weight of charcoal as it has been smudged over and re-drawn. It is a palimpsest of marks, a registration of the labour necessary to reach a point at which he could, as he said, "give free reign to [his] pen."²⁴

Considering Matisse's reputation at this time, the avidness with which American painters studied French journals such as *Cahiers d'Art*, as well as de Kooning's particularly keen awareness of European artistic developments, it is unthinkable that he would be unaware of Matisse as a model.²⁵ Indeed, between 1949 and 1953 there were four substantial New York exhibitions including numerous examples of Matisse's drawing.²⁶ Although de Kooning is rightly seen as working more closely with Picasso's visual vocabulary, the correspondence in his use of erasure and that of Matisse is compelling.²⁷ For Matisse, though, erasure functioned as an element of the looser, less testing preliminary work of drawing, which he used to prepare himself for the more rigorous and demanding feats with the pen. The comparative looseness of this slow build-up of form, performed in a

²⁴ Matisse: 'Notes of a Painter on His Drawing,' (1939) in Jack Flam: *Matisse on Art* (1995), p. 131

²⁵ De Kooning's friend John Graham was able to provide access to *Cahiers*; see Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan: *De Kooning, An American Master* (2004).

²⁶ See John Elderfield: *The Drawings of Henri Matisse* (1984), pp. 292-3: April-May 1941, *Drawings by Matisse. Small Pictures by French Painters*, Pierre Matisse Gallery (22 drawings); Feb 1944, *Modern Drawings*, MoMA (17 drawings); Oct-Nov 1945 *Henri Matisse Recent Drawings*, Pierre Matisse Gallery (22 drawings); Feb 1949, *Henri Matisse. Paintings, Papiers Decoupees, Drawings - 1945-1948*, Pierre Matisse Gallery; Nov 1951-Jan 1952, *Henri Matisse*, MoMA (18 drawings); Oct 1952-Jan 1953, *Les Fauves*, MoMA (14 drawings); Feb 1953, *The Sculpture of Henri Matisse*, Curt Valentin Gallery (24 drawings).

²⁷ For de Kooning's relationship with Picasso, see Robert Rosenblum: 'Notes sur Picasso et de Kooning,' in *Willem de Kooning* (1984), pp. 11-15. For a reading of that relationship from a feminist perspective, see Linda Nochlin: 'Painted Women - Pablo Picasso, Willem de Kooning,' *Art in America* (Volume 86, Number 11, November 1998), pp. 106-111 and 141.

relaxed atmosphere of 'banal conversations' with the model, would bear fruit in the lightning variations, which would foil this earlier work in almost every way. For de Kooning, re-adjustment and ambiguity are always left open as a possibility; the kind of resolution sought by Matisse, complicated of course by his production of drawings in series, was never a goal for de Kooning, who did not generally work from a life model.

In his 1972 book on de Kooning's drawing, Hess elaborates on the artist's manipulation of marks with an eraser:

"I remember watching de Kooning begin a drawing, in 1951, sitting idly by a window, the pad on his knee. He used an ordinary pencil, the point sharpened with a knife to expose the maximum of lead but still strong enough to withstand pressure. He made a few strokes, then almost instinctively, it seemed to me, turned the pencil around and began to do over the graphite marks with an eraser. Not to rub out the lines, but to move them, push them across the paper, turn them into planes. The method to destroy (erase) was being used as a means to create – in much the same spirit and philosophical attitude that motivates de Kooning to tear drawings and paintings... De Kooning's line – the essence of drawing – is always under attack. It is smeared across the paper, pushed into widening shapes, kept away from the expression of an edge. But then, on top of the erasures and rubbings will come more lines. The edge will be reaffirmed, underlined, modeled. And then the wiping, erasing action resumes – until the drawing stops, because the artist has seen something he wants to keep; or it is destroyed; or, more rarely, it is brought to the sort of completion that de Kooning seeks in his paintings where the mutually exclusive concepts of line and plane are held in tension."²⁸

For Hess, then, de Kooning uses erasure productively: with this reversible pencil, he 'attacks' his lines, moving them around the page, converting them into 'planes.' In this way, the line is prevented from expressing an edge or contour. Other marks are added to these erasures, developing towards an openness or ambiguity that remains forceful enough so that the artist can reconcile himself to it, at which point he can stop. Hess identifies the tension between creation and destruction inherent in the interplay between addition and erasure, and connects this to the artist's practice of tearing and cutting his images in the development of his compositions.²⁹ Richard Schiff has more recently addressed the

²⁸ Hess: *Willem de Kooning Drawings* (1972), pp. 16-7.

²⁹ Hess famously referred to de Kooning's practice of dismembering and recombining drawings on the canvas as his 'Procrustean' method. As well as using drawing to trace and record compositional elements of canvases before they were scraped down or painted over, de Kooning would also cut up and re-order his sheets, attaching them to canvases as they progressed: "De Kooning has devised a method of a continuous series of drawings which are cut apart, reversed, exchanged and otherwise manipulated on the painting. It is like Procrustes, who cut or stretched travellers to fit his bed, but with the important difference that this Procrustes does not know the dimensions of his bed." (Hess, op.cit. 1953 p. 31) Hess cites two main advantages that this method afforded the artist. The first was technical: the pragmatic ability to store and reproduce sections of compositions. The second was conceptual and concerned the actualizing of ambiguity. Dismembered parts of

ambiguity of addition and erasure in de Kooning's practice: "Every element of de Kooning's technical practice, from the most positive to the most negative, can become its opposite: the marks are both direct and indirect, spontaneous and controlled."³⁰

The model of painting as Romantic voyage was founded on a celebration of an undaunted, exploratory artistic endeavour: wedded to a particular conception of the pictorial mark, it championed painting as an heroic dedication to the discovery of unforeseen self-expressive rewards. The gestural mark would authentically reflect the artist's identity, conveying something of the 'metaphysical substance' of the artist's being, to use Rosenberg's phrase.³¹ What impact, then, does the operation of erasure, so much at the heart of de Kooning's drawing practice, have upon such a conception of the expressive or 'autographic' mark? And beyond the purview of expressive claims and their deconstruction, what other potentials does erasure introduce into the language of drawing?

Here it is worth revisiting some ideas introduced in Chapter 1 concerning expressive models of the pictorial mark. Typically, discourses on expression have relied upon premises based on the idea of the communication of contents; that there is some correspondence between an expression and its (prior) contents. As Brian Massumi, following Deleuze, has argued:

"The content is viewed as having an objective existence prior and exterior to the form of its expression. The assumed solidity of the content transfers, across the mirror-like correspondence or moulded conformity, into a trustworthiness of the subjective expression... In this model, content is the beginning and the end of communicative expression: at once its external cause and guarantee of validity."³²

So, if something of the artist's authentic sensibility (separate from but released in the act of expression) is to be communicated, there must first be a content that is prior to that action. Under such expressive models, the specificity of these contents is rarely described; instead

drawings could be re-mobilised in different compositions, and within the anatomical schemes for different figures. Through such interchange, a knuckle could become a thigh, an arm a leg.

³⁰ Richard Shiff: 'De Kooning Controlling de Kooning,' in Cornelia Butler and Paul Schimmel (eds.): *Willem de Kooning – Tracing the Figure*, exhibition catalogue (2002), p.156.

³¹ Harold Rosenberg: 'The American Action Painters,' in *The Tradition of the New* (1959), p. 28.

³² Massumi: 'Introduction: Like a Thought,' in Massumi (ed.): *A Shock to Thought, Expression After Deleuze and Guattari* (2002), pp. xiv-xv. In a 1977 critique of the work of Rauschenberg's work, Harold Rosenberg chided him for failing to mobilize the qualities that gave Abstract Expressionist works their 'tension,' p. 124/5: "He wanted, in sum, to discard the philosophical and emotional motivations of the Abstract Expressionist mode while elaborating its visual traits." p. 125: "With the deletion of subjective content on which the tension of its compositions depends, Abstract Expressionism could appear a program of wantonness."

they are evoked within a generalized language of emotion, feeling, heroism, honesty, struggle, or catharsis. As Michael Newman has argued, in such conceptions (from which he himself departs, as we have seen), “the point is not *how* we read [a gesture], but *that* we see it as an epiphenomenon of the inner life and destiny of the subject.”³³

Erasure would seem to be directed precisely against such models of expressive plenitude. Erasure, the (albeit partial) removal of marks, obeys a logic of withholding rather than proffering. A given thing is subtracted from, receded from a state of relative fullness. Moreover, this process is governed by a mediating consciousness; a mind that is making choices and alterations: goading a mark from one position to another, driving through a line to counter or inflect its trajectory, reducing an area’s legibility so that it approaches indeterminacy. The result is a palimpsest of traces that signals the time of over-working, of redress, of amendment – not terms associated with the spontaneous communication of contents.

In significant, although paradoxical ways, erasure draws attention to rather than obliterates the identity of the gesture as trace: its residue becomes the trace of a mark, which is itself a trace of manual action. This foregrounding evokes Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the twinned terms, trace and origin. For Derrida, “The trace is not only the disappearance of origin – within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin.”³⁴ Just as the first term of a series is only constituted as such by the arrival of subsequent terms, the trace, too, brings into being its first term: the origin. Through an analysis of the mutual dependence of this (hierarchical) binary ‘origin/trace,’ Derrida deconstructs the rhetoric of presence with which the idea of origin is centrally associated. This has important consequences for discourses of self-expression. If the origin (the expressive subject) is constituted only by the existence of its fragmentary traces, then the notion of the communication of *prior* contents must falter. It is only de Kooning’s marks that manifest these internal contents as the origin of those very marks – they are the origin of the origin. Derrida dismantles a rhetoric of expressive plenitude, one to which action

³³ Newman: ‘The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing,’ in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (2003), p. 103.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (1976), p. 61. See also Newman’s discussion of Derrida: ‘Marking Time: Memory and Matter in the Work of Avis Newman’, in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Inside the Visible, An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, In, Of and From the Feminine* (1996), pp. 271-9.

painting had been tightly harnessed. And in his remarkable use of erasure, rather surprisingly, de Kooning himself offers an implicit acknowledgement of this conclusion.³⁵

The danger of performing such deconstructions is that we end our discussion there, with the model of authorial expression being held up like a straw man, to receive more (and by now unnecessary) thrashings.³⁶ It should be accepted that a language of creative *origins* is no longer satisfying, and that what is at stake in de Kooning's mark can no longer be seriously defended as the communication of internal contents. De Kooning's drawings do not, and never did, deliver to the viewer the contents of his psyche. This is not to say that marks are not importantly *autographic* – in the sense that an autograph expresses a specific habit or tendency of the hand – but that, as discussed in Chapter 1, the hand's logics are neither in conformity with, nor subservient to, those of consciousness. The question arises, then, of how to re-approach the work if it is to be seen as more than a broken promise (an always already failed attempt to express individual sensibility): what is to fill this vacuum left by the departure of such convictions?³⁷

The doxa of expressive artistic practices has been most efficiently replaced by semiotic theoretical tools. From this methodological shift have emerged compelling analyses of how de Kooning's work signifies in relation to broad discursive networks, with particular emphasis upon questions of gender and the politics of sexuality. Despite de Kooning's rather benign stated concern for what he calls the "intimate proportions" of anatomy, the violent connotations of both the gestural energy of his marks and his 'Procrustean' tearing and dismembering of drawings, have been developed in relation to patriarchal neuroses and misogyny. Working through the lessons of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, his subsequent Cubist figures, and his violently distorted female figures of the 1930s, de

³⁵ We also find complications of any straightforward claim to 'autographic' expressive marks in de Kooning's few but interesting writings. "Whatever the artist's personal feelings are, as soon as an artist fills a certain area on the canvas or circumscribes it, he becomes historical. He acts *from or upon* other artists." (Italics mine) 'A Desperate View' (1949), *Collected Writings* (1988), p. 13.

³⁶ John Paul Ricco has, however, recently provided a stimulating and productive account of the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* from a Derridean perspective. For Ricco, "Erasure is the un-drawing or better yet the with-drawing of drawing, of drawing with the eraser that is the withdrawal of drawing, without necessarily being drawing's negation or annihilation." Ricco, *op.cit.* p. 95; see note 18.

³⁷ It should be noted, as Branden Joseph does, that Derrida himself did not in any way proscribe other avenues of enquiry: "By no means do I draw the conclusion that there is no relative specificity of effect of consciousness, or of effects of speech (as opposed to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no performative effect, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence or of discursive event (speech act). It is simply that those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them, term by term; on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility." Derrida 'Signature Event Context' (1971), quoted by Joseph: 'Rauschenberg's Refusal,' in *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, exhibition catalogue (2005), footnote 42, p. 272.

Kooning is seen participating in the conventional (ab)use of the female body as the “arena in which the anxiety of influence still played itself out.”³⁸

In a nuanced recent discussion of the *Women* canvases and the drawings that relate to them, Ann Wagner has combined analysis of psychoanalytic and discursive questions with close attention to de Kooning’s technical processes. Hess’s 1953 article, Wagner asserts, has presented something of a ‘Primal Scene’ for commentators on de Kooning, with the artist enacting some prolonged sado-masochistic drama with his *Woman I*. Sections of drawings, hanging loosely from the incomplete victim-canvas remind her of peeling skin.³⁹ Hess’s casual sexism is acknowledged,⁴⁰ and Wagner is always careful to engage with bodies as discursively coded entities. She positions herself against reductive psycho-biographical accounts, and describes her aim as being to develop productive aspects of de Kooning’s practice that he consciously and intentionally strove to elaborate, ones that often get forgotten in the struggle to find in his *Women* symptoms of personal or social neuroses.⁴¹ In this, Wagner is attentive to de Kooning’s drawing and makes ambiguity her key term. Despite considerable attention to considerations of process and form, however, she is explicit in her priorities: “The issue involved,” she argues, “something other than a set of formal moves and procedures an artist sought and found. To speak of ambiguity rather differently – as a representational posture or purpose – is what I aim to do.”⁴²

Her arguments follow two strands: firstly, that drawing functioned as de Kooning’s chief means both to pursue and then turn away from mimesis; he would finally suppress his supreme facility to rob the figure of its likeness, its familiarity. Secondly, and out of this lack of familiarity, de Kooning mobilises an unanchored ambiguity in *Woman I*, shedding the kinds of relational and comparative operations afforded by the two-figure compositions (as in *Two Women II*, discussed above) from which, she powerfully argues, *Woman I* developed, to leave the single figure alone in all its undecidability. The female body’s already being the supreme site of riven cultural otherness (icon of both fullness and lack),

³⁸ See Nochlin, op.cit. For an energizing feminist account of de Kooning’s *Woman I*, and its mobilization within MoMA’s curatorial project, see Carol Duncan: ‘The Modern Art Museum: It’s a Man’s World,’ in her *Civilizing Rituals – Inside Public Art Museums* (1995), pp. 102-132.

³⁹ Wagner: ‘De Kooning, Drawing, and the Double, or, Ambiguity Made Clear,’ in Cornelia Butler and Paul Schimmel (eds.): *Willem de Kooning – Tracing the Figure*, exhibition catalogue (2002), p. 170.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 172.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 171: “The result is that what is laborious and intentional about de Kooning’s process, what pictorially is worked over and through, has ceded to a focus on personal pathology, his “obsessive dismantlings” of figures giving evidence of passionate love or hate, whether unconscious, avowed, or both.”

⁴² Ibid, p. 173.

gives extra charge to these ambiguities, the most powerful of which she identifies as the marks below the figure's breasts, that suggest hands but are positioned "like an odd set of genitals."⁴³ Despite the concern for process and for mark-making, then, for Wagner de Kooning's ambiguity is ultimately a matter of representation, an undecidability between one signifier and another. Wagner's nuanced consideration of material practice is made subservient to issues of signification.

In the hope of constructing an account of de Kooning's drawings that is more adequate to their dynamism and unruliness, my intention here is to complicate such readings based upon signifying operations.⁴⁴ Henri Focillon once wrote of the 'volatility' of matter in drawing, and this idea of the volatile, of a shift or conversion between states, might offer some alternative to the swift procession from the singularity of the mark towards the identification of signs.⁴⁵ "The problem," writes Michael Newman, "is to 'slow' the consideration of the mark, so that it does not move too quickly towards line, contour, figure or image, to allow it to hesitate on the edge."⁴⁶ It is this unstable edge that the action of erasure keeps open and prevents from settling. Here it is important to insist that erasure be taken as a process or operation: a partial and incomplete direction, a becoming-erased, a movement away from identity (as line, contour, sign, image), and towards a blur, smudge or residue:

"Drawing, because of its status as becoming (blot becoming mark, mark becoming line, line becoming contour, contour becoming image, image becoming sign... the direction of this movement being always reversible) posits a continuum of sense, from one sense of 'sense' to the other, yet it seems impossible to observe, or to catch hold of, the precise moment, or experience, of that flip-over from the pre-

⁴³ Ibid. p. 177.

⁴⁴ In some respects, my investigation aligns with the phenomenological readings of de Kooning's work elaborated in a series of recent essays by Richard Shiff. Shiff's emphasis is on the kinaesthetic, visual and tactile registers of response to the artist's work. He is in sympathetic relation with de Kooning's project, and his key terms are ambiguity, doubt, transition, derangement and glimpse. The relevant essays by Shiff are: 'Abstraction not Abstraction,' in *De Kooning – A Centennial Exhibition* (2004), pp. 7-16; 'De Kooning Controlling de Kooning,' in Butler and Schimmel op.cit. pp. 152-167; 'Abstraction not Abstraction' in *De Kooning – A Centennial Exhibition* (2004); "'With Eyes Closed:' De Kooning's Twist' *Master Drawings* (Volume 40, Number 1, Spring 2002), pp. 73-88; and 'Water and Lipstick: De Kooning in Transition,' in Marla Praler (ed.): *Willem de Kooning Paintings* (1994), pp. 33-73.

⁴⁵ Focillon wrote: "One might reasonably suppose that there are certain techniques in which matter is of slight importance, that drawing, for example, is a process of abstraction so extreme and so pure that matter is reduced to a mere armature of the slenderest possible sort, and is, indeed, very nearly volatilized. But matter in this volatile state is still matter, and by virtue of being controlled, compressed and divided on the paper – which it instantly brings to life – it acquires a special power. Its variety, moreover, is extreme: ink, wash, lead pencil, charcoal, red chalk, crayon, whether singly or in combination, all constitute so many distinct traits, so many distinct languages." *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934, reprinted 1989), p. 141.

⁴⁶ Newman, op.cit. p. 96.

sign, differentiated, but not yet diacritically caught in an opposition, to signification, image, and meaning.”⁴⁷

This continuum does not just arise from each mark taken singly, but from the co-habitation of marks on the same sheet, all at different stages of definition and legibility. Asignifying (or, rather, sub-semiotic) gestures, smudges and traces operate within and around a semiotic structure, although not secondary or supplementary to it. In a recent meditation on the possibility of a semiotics of art, Hubert Damisch has spoken of a fold between the semantic and the semiotic placed “somewhere on the joint of the readable and the visible,” with the semiotic conceived, following Kristeva, “as a modality (which one could in fact call psycho-somatic, with a direct hold on the body) of the process of significance, and as a moment logically, genetically, productively anterior to the symbolic, but which in the latter is made the object of a *raising* by which it is integrated there.”⁴⁸

Erasure in drawing performs the withdrawal of line and sign towards mark, a regression (or re-intensification) towards the non-signifying, the modality that has its first purchase in and on the body before being definitely secured into any semiotic systems. The flux of movements between mark and sign, the erasures and re-inscriptions, the recessions and re-assertions of form are strikingly evident in a drawing produced by de Kooning as he was at work on *Woman I: Woman* (1951, Figure 3.8). A single female figure stands at the centre of the composition. Her body, from flame-tipped head to bizarre talon-like foot, traverses the length of the vertical sheet. The figure is organized by a lozenge-shaped arrangement of energetic, darting charcoal lines emerging from a dense matrix of erasures. An architectural setting is suggested by the rectilinear forms flanking the top half of the figure, foiling the extraordinary vigour and swerving dynamism of the marks describing the body. De Kooning has here appropriated a cubist aesthetic language, infusing the figure with an explosive energy that renders the legibility of its forms insecure. A head, two huge pneumatic breasts, torso and thighs explode from the web of traces. The charcoal marks are constantly being re-addressed by the eraser, which has been used to reduce whole networks of lines (as in the lower torso, hips and thighs), or to intervene in the progress of individual vectors, (as in the heavy marks to the right of the figure’s head, or those to the left of its legs). The integrity of the face, again, is barely maintained by some cursory pencil work

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴⁸ Hubert Damisch: ‘Eight Theses For (or Against?) A Semiology of Painting,’ *Oxford Art Journal* (Volume 28, Number 2, 2005), p. 266.

and notational marks to signal two bemused eyes. It is from a fabric of non-signifying traits that legibility emerges – and back into which it always has potential to descend.

This is a figure caught in the pulp of duration. In a recent discussion of duration from a Deleuzian perspective, Elizabeth Grosz locates forces of unbecoming as central to emergence:

“[Life’s] becomings are contingent only on its capacity to link with, to utilize, and transform, that is, to unbecome, the apparent givenness and inertia of material objects and to give to these objects new virtualities, new impulses and potentials. It needs to unbecome, to undo its actuality as fixed givenness in order for its virtualities to be capable of a new or different elaboration... The becoming of life is the unbecoming of matter, which is not its transformation into (inert) being, but its placement in a different trajectory of becoming.”⁴⁹

The marks and erasures in de Kooning’s *Woman* place lines and stable forms under the sway of forces of deformation. Never so ordered as Hess’s proposition that de Kooning’s erasure moves line to plane, the network of marks generate a dynamism that is both temporal and spatial: the viewer is invited to attempt a tracking of the marks in space and into some pattern of formal order, as well as to consider their emergence as developing within a temporal thickness: a duration alive with the forces of emergence and recession. These marks and forces are presented neither as independent of the figure, nor as contained or subsumable within that body. In this respect, as well as aligning in terms of the deformatory agency of erasure, we might invoke Deleuze’s important concept used to deal with the work of Francis Bacon: the “Diagram.” Framed within the context of the painter’s battle with a set of “figurative and probabilistic givens,” the diagram is the scrambling of these certainties:

“What does this activity of painting consist of? Bacon defines it in this way: make random marks (lines-traits); scrub, sweep, or wipe the canvas in order to clear out locales or zones (color-patches); throw the paint, from various angles and at various speeds. Now this act, or these acts, presuppose that there were already figurative givens on the canvas (and in the painter’s head), more or less virtual, more or less actual. It is precisely these givens that will be removed by the act of painting, either by being wiped, brushed, or rubbed, or else covered over... For example, the head: part of it will be cleared away with a brush, broom, sponge, or rag. This is what Bacon calls a ‘graph’ or a *diagram*: it is as if a Sahara, a zone of the Sahara, were suddenly inserted into the head; it is as if a piece of rhinoceros skin, viewed under a microscope, were stretched over it; it is as if the two halves of the head were split open by an ocean; it is as if the unit of measure were changed,

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Grosz: ‘Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming,’ *Parallax* (Volume 11, Number 2, April-June 2005), pp. 10-11.

the micrometric, or even cosmic, units were substituted for the figurative unit... It is as if, in the midst of the figurative and probabilistic givens, a *catastrophe* overcame the canvas.”⁵⁰

This is a rather different ‘catastrophe’ from the one that Michael Newman attributes to Structuralism’s conception of the sudden, absolute rupture that the arrival of language enacts.⁵¹ This is not the insertion of absence or nothingness into the world, but rather a deformation imposed upon existing forms and structures. This deformation might involve a dramatic shift in scale or viewpoint (Deleuze’s mention of microscopes in this context echoes the discussion set out in Chapter 2); it might involve the splicing or over-laying of a foreign element into the system being disrupted. In the case of visual production, this ‘diagrammatic’ work is frequently carried out in sketches, although not necessarily so (Bacon suppressed his use of drawings); and for de Kooning, drawing and painting are thoroughly intermingled (often physically, with sections of drawings being tacked onto unfinished canvases).

De Kooning’s erasures perform such a scrambling of givens, of familiarity and certainty, which are deformed by the imposition of ‘assignifying traits’ that are “nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative.”⁵² In the last chapter, I discussed Wols’s production of teeming detail through a set of by-turns inky and intricate means. The work of erasure in de Kooning’s drawing can be regarded as another technology for the production of a different kind of detail: the tiny assignifying traits of smudge and residue that both interfere with and nuance the more substantial drawn marks. Like the intrusion of radically foreign elements into a figurative scheme, the diagram serves as a site of potential from which new forms, new “possibilities of fact,” can emerge. De Kooning famously described himself as a “slipping glimprser;” erasure was one means by which he kept off-balance, remained mobile and forestalled entropy or ossification.⁵³ His was a constant resistance to stability, to

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon, the logic of sensation*, (1981, translated in 2003), pp. 99-100.

⁵¹ See Newman, op.cit. p. 99.

⁵² Deleuze, op.cit. p. 100.

⁵³ “Content is a glimpse of something, an encounter like a flash. It’s very tiny – very tiny, content... I still have it now from fleeting things – like when one passes something, and it makes an impression, a simple stuff.” ‘Content is a Glimpse,’ BBC interview with David Sylvester; *Location* (Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1963), in *Willem de Kooning: Collected Writings*, pp. 82-4. “Because when I’m falling, I’m doing all right; when I’m slipping. I say, hey, this is interesting! It’s when I’m standing upright that bothers me: I’m not doing so good; I’m stiff. As a matter of fact, I’m really slipping, most of the time, into that glimpse. I’m like a slipping glimprser.” From ‘Sketchbook No.1: Three Americans’ (Robert Snyder film, 1960), in *Collected Writings*, pp.176-7. It is interesting to note how similar these statements are to some of those by Rauschenberg: “And so I’m not terrified of changing – in fact I’m terrified of exactly the opposite. If you’re not moving, then you’re heading to rot.” In Rose, op.cit. p. 59.

closure, to static comprehension, to straightforward legibility. The diagram is a scrambling of existing givens, and does not enable an ambiguous straddling of two legible contents (hand or genitals, for example), but rather spreads chaos over the very condition of legibility. Erasure for de Kooning becomes an operational tool for the de-formation of signs, a disarticulation of the stable and known, an effective way of delaying the passage of mark to sign.

Erasure in Rauschenberg

If *Erased de Kooning Drawing* prompts a productive re-visiting of de Kooning's own drawing practice, how does it affect our understanding of Rauschenberg's trajectory? How does drawing figure in Rauschenberg's subsequent work, and in what ways is the foregoing discussion of erasure relevant to that work? As elaborated at the beginning of this chapter, *Erased de Kooning Drawing* can usefully be viewed in the context of Rauschenberg's other contemporaneous attempts to evacuate the art object of familiar contents and associations. In the early-mid 1950s, Rauschenberg was developing ways to work creatively with materials while unharnessing his practice from any expression of private sensibility or conventional metaphorical associations: "I don't want a painting to be an expression of my personality, I feel it ought to be much better than that... I've always felt as though, whatever I've used and whatever I've done, the method was always closer to a *collaboration* with materials than to any kind of conscious manipulation and control."⁵⁴ The radical *White Paintings*, as previously discussed, offer the ultimate evacuation of metaphorical or subjective contents.⁵⁵ The *Black Paintings* were similarly bereft of expressive traits, or so the artist thought. Yet to Rauschenberg's frustration, their distressed, crumpled surfaces and black pigment set off trains of association regarding violence, nihilism, and despair. This echoes the kind of existential rhetoric encountered in the previous chapter regarding Wols, and was exactly the clichéd terrain that Rauschenberg

⁵⁴ Rauschenberg quoted by Calvin Tomkins, op.cit. 1976, p. 204.

⁵⁵ In a suggestive recent catalogue essay, Branden Joseph has elaborated on the implications of the reduction towards a supposed 'purity' of medium, arguing that rather than arriving at some essence of a medium, the result is rather a 'hybridization:' "Thus, what the *White Paintings* seem finally to have demonstrated to Rauschenberg is that at the endpoint of one medium and, when it is hunted or tracked back to its essence, is neither nothingness or purity, but the conditions of other media. Painting whittled to its core opens onto sculpture, environment, and cinema, not all at once and indiscriminately, but in the type of heterogeneous or hybrid articulations Dick Higgins would define nearly a decade and a half later as 'intermedia.'" Joseph, op.cit. 2005, p. 266.

strove to avoid. He lamented: “[Critics] moved immediately into association with ‘burnt-out,’ ‘tearing,’ ‘nihilism’ and ‘destruction.’ ... I’m never sure what the impulse is psychologically, I don’t mess around with my subconscious... If I see any superficial subconscious relationships that I’m familiar with – clichés of association – I change the picture.”⁵⁶

Rauschenberg continued his attempt to divorce materiality from private sensibility with a series of *Elemental Paintings*, produced between 1953 and 1954. These were made in series, each cohered by the use of a specific material: dirt and mould, gold leaf, or tissue paper. The series of *Red Paintings*, which followed during 1954, accommodated an array of found detritus, an inclusive, ‘maximalist’ drive towards incorporation that would find its full expression in Rauschenberg’s celebrated *Combines*. The latter famously integrate thick swathes of paint with a host of heterogeneous collaged objects: newspapers, cartoons, signs, shirts, ties, colour swatches, fabrics, photographs, drawings, reproductions of Old Master paintings, stuffed animals, etc. A bustling multiplicity of forms, with images, objects and signs flowing into the vacuum left by the departure of an exhausted expressive paradigm.⁵⁷

But what of drawing? Rauschenberg said that prior to 1953, he had enjoyed drawing very much.⁵⁸ Subsequently, however, he had little use for its conventional forms. During a trip he had made to Cuba with Cy Twombly in 1952, however, Rauschenberg first developed a new mode of drawing with which he was able to explore, on a more modest scale, some of the central concerns of his later practice: the integration of found materials;

⁵⁶ Rauschenberg quoted in Dorothy Seckler: ‘The Artist Speaks: Robert Rauschenberg,’ *Art in America* (Volume 54, Number 3, May-June 1966), p. 76.

⁵⁷ It can be argued, however, that Rauschenberg took as much from de Kooning’s affirmative, sensual enjoyment of colour and material, as well as his integration of advertisements and transfers from newsprint, as he did remove himself from the existentialist metaphors that bombarded that kind of Abstract Expressionist practice. Indeed, de Kooning developed his own collage aesthetic, famously employing the mouth of the woman in the Lucky Strike T-Zone advertisement in his drawing, and covering his wet canvases with newspaper to keep them from drying too hastily. This meant that the solvents in the paint allowed a transfer of newsprint to take place onto the wet paint – a good example of this is *Easter Monday*, 1956 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Dorothy Seckler, in introducing an interview with Rauschenberg, wrote: “Although [Rauschenberg] does not recall having paid much attention to abstract expressionism’s philosophical premises in existentialism and Zen, he apparently took seriously that part of its moral position which emphasized risk and openness and keeping the artist’s activity – with all its precarious balancing – clearly in view.” (Seckler op.cit. p. 74) Much of de Kooning’s rhetoric also complements that of Rauschenberg in his affirmation of the value of heightened everyday encounters. For example: (from ‘Content is a Glimpse, 1963) “I am here and I like New York City. But I love to go out in a car. I’m crazy about weekend drives, even if I drive in the middle of the week. I’m just crazy about going over the roads and highways... Like the signs. Some people want to take the signs away, but it would break my heart. All those different big billboards.” (*Collected Writings*, pp. 88-9).

⁵⁸ Rauschenberg in Barbara Rose: *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (1987), p. 51.

an address to the everyday mass cultural sphere; and the development of alternative strategies of mark-making to the gestural flourishes of Action Painting. This 'solvent transfer' method would be developed in a sustained way from the late 1950s onwards,⁵⁹ and it is with its diverse array of marks that issues connected with erasure are brought back into focus.

Located between the operations of drawing, photography, collage and frottage, the solvent transfer process involved the soaking of photographic images (from, for example, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, *Life*, or *The New York Times*) in a solvent (Rauschenberg used lighter fuel), placing it face down on the paper and rubbing its reverse side with a blunt instrument (an emptied ballpoint pen) so that the pigment leaves an inverted residue of the original image (Figures 3.9 and 3.10). The scale of this indexical translation is always one-to-one, and the finished drawings retain the intimate proportions of the magazine and newspaper cuttings. The transfer process is conducted blindly, with the resulting image only visible once the clipped photographic image is lifted from the paper. The density, definition and weight of this resultant image vary dramatically, depending on the strength with which it is rubbed, and the degree of saturation in the solvent. This image emerges from a dense pattern of striated marks, a repetitive scrawl bringing the delicate, flickering picture into existence. *Mirror* is one such drawing made by Rauschenberg in 1952 (Figures 3.11). Roughly 27 x 22 cm in size, it consists of solvent transfers on paper, with other marks in pencil, gouache, oil, watercolour and crayon, as well as a piece of collaged paper. The sheet contains a disparate array of transferred images: an Old Master reproduction (framed on the left by pencil lines), a missile being launched (to the bottom right below the large 'X'), raised hands (the statue of liberty rises from the bottom of the sheet, neighboured by another palm), reversed letters of the word 'Mirror,' a laughing baby, and a bucket.

Rauschenberg here constructs multiple plays on the themes of mirroring and cancellation. Of course, the transfer is already a mirror of sorts, the resultant image being a reverse of the original, a feature made explicit by the reversed letters spelling 'Mirror.' Other doublings occur: the broad white paint stroke at the top of the page is mirrored by the collaged paper below, painted white, and placed at a reversed angle, as if reflected by an

⁵⁹ The celebrated Dante drawings will be discussed below; Rauschenberg continued to produce transfer drawings throughout the 1960s; see *Robert Rauschenberg – Transfer Drawings from the 1960s*, exhibition catalogue (Jonathan O'Hara Gallery, 2007).

invisible horizontal axis at the centre of the sheet. The two hands double each other (they are both left hands), and the 'X,' although standing at an angle, is symmetrical through both axes. Duplication is matched with a variety of forms of negation and (partial) deletion. Perhaps most obvious is this large 'X:' the sign for an error, a cancellation. Effacements are also suggested by the thick black mark to the centre and right, and, most forcefully, by the broad sweep of opaque white paint in the upper section of the sheet. Most significantly for my discussion, however, are the transfer images themselves, which emerge faintly from a field of striated diagonal marks, which, whilst born of the process of rubbing in, visually suggests the action of rubbing out.

Rauschenberg's most substantial exploration of the solvent transfer method came with his *XXXIV Drawings for Dante's Inferno* (1958-60).⁶⁰ Working with Michael Sonnabend (a Dante scholar) on John Ciardi's translation, Rauschenberg illustrated the text canto by canto. In her discussion of the Dante suite, Rosalind Krauss describes how the project plunged Rauschenberg into the 'domain of the connotational,'⁶¹ with substitutions and metaphors ricocheting through the sensorium: signs for smells, sounds, atmospheric conditions. This play of associations is enabled, Krauss argues, by the maintenance of a standardized format, as well as a unified 'matrix of slippage,' consisting of areas of 'rubbing, veiling, and liquidity,' which both 'open vignettes of space,' and 'reaffirm that surface.'⁶² Krauss's attention is trained upon questions of formal structure, and she sees the transfer drawings as having, firstly, moved away from the horizontality of the *Combines* to restore the pictorial logic of the 'diaphane' ('the sense of a visual field falling in a transparent but decidedly vertical veil before the viewer's upright body').⁶³ Secondly, she argues, the roughly rectangular patch of pigment attending many of the transferred images provides each with a contextual frame (Figure 3.12). Krauss regards these innovations as preparing the way for Rauschenberg's later silkscreens, with their vertical format and

⁶⁰ Rauschenberg began work on the project in late Spring 1958. By that autumn he had made six drawings and applied for a grant to complete the remaining twenty-eight. He was not successful, and Rauschenberg, discouraged, left the project aside until mid-1959, when he resumed work in earnest. It was completed in late-1960 after a six-month retreat to Florida to enable the dedication of his undivided attention. The thirty-four drawings (36.8 x 29.2 cm; transfer drawing, gouache, watercolour and pencil on Strathmore paper) are housed by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Facsimiles were produced in 1964 by Harry N. Abrams in a limited edition of 300, with an introduction by Dore Ashton.

⁶¹ Rosalind Krauss: 'Perpetual Inventory,' in Hopps and Davidson op.cit., pp. 206-223. See especially, p. 215.

⁶² Ibid, p. 215.

⁶³ "To return to the veil, and thereby to the diaphane – or to the frame, and hence to the window model of the picture plane – was, then, to arise from this flatbed, in which Rauschenberg's originality as an artist had been invested." Ibid. p. 216.

loosely gridded structure: “the storage and retrieval matrix of the organized miscellany of images, which presents the memory as a kind of filing cabinet of the mind.”⁶⁴

But how legible and therefore how retrievable are the images in the Dante suite? And what kind of forces of deformation and distortion are enacted upon these found images in the transfer process? Besides ‘verticality,’ what else does their veiled, ‘diaphanous’ quality mobilise? To locate the transfer drawings on a trajectory towards the gridded, photographic silk-screens, is to downplay not only their specific context as illustration, but also further points of interest arising from their technical facture. Again, an adequate engagement with these drawings requires that we slow the passage from mark to sign and from residue to image.

It is obviously appropriate to present the characters and structures populating Dante’s Hell as spectral, diminished presences. They are, after all, dead souls – “shades” in a bleak, grey, indistinct world, where the figure of Dante alone has carnal embodiment. Yet there is a whole array of classes of mark populating the thirty-four drawings: the solvent transfer image itself, pencil marks (both ruled and in a kind of staccato freehand), and dabs and pools of watercolour and gouache paint. The patches and washes of colour provide a variety of functions: sometimes a conventional task of representation (of sludge, for example in Canto VI, Figure 3.13); sometimes serving to distinguish a particular image, by adding specific chromatic highlights to a largely monochrome network of forms (for example, the figure of Fortune in Canto VII, Figures 3.14 and 3.15); sometimes playing a primarily aesthetic role in visually connecting otherwise disparate elements. Foiling this mobile liquidity, Rauschenberg uses ruled pencil lines to structure his sheets, giving rectangular frames to particular vignettes, or, equally as ubiquitous, to divide the drawings horizontally recalling a different type of frame, that of the TV screen.⁶⁵ Amidst the general mist and fug, other cursive, splintered, stabbing pencil marks also populate the drawings. These work to loosely suggest qualitative and quantitative properties of sound and motion. Dante’s *Inferno* is described in multi-sensory detail, with evocative descriptions of the clamour, tumult and lamentation of its prostrate inhabitants. The staccato pencil marks give some sense of the barrage and affliction befalling these sorry sinners.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 217.

⁶⁵ This unstable quality has been discussed by Branden Joseph in relation to the flicker and lack of resolution of early TV sets. See his chapter, ‘Split Screens,’ in Joseph op.cit. 2003, pp. 172-207.

The most pervasive matrices from which images emerge, however, as has been noted, are constituted by the striated residues of the transfer rubbings. Obliquely, these marks combine both the linearity of the pencil (they are made with an empty ballpoint), and the liquidity of the washes (it is the liquid solvent that allows for the transfer of pigments). This aqueous quality varies in the way in which it blurs and softens the resultant image. Dependent too on varying pressure in the rubbing action as well as the strength of the surrounding washes, the images are at times relatively distinct, and at others barely discernable. They thus take on the paradoxical quality of being at once spectral and sensory: insistently material, but by turns withered and diaphanous. At their most indefinite, the images struggle to emerge from their constituent marks, resembling a frail stain or watermark. This is seen, for example, in the drawing for Canto VII (Figure 3.14). Here, Virgil and Dante have reached the Fourth Circle of Hell. Immediately confronted by a babbling Plutus, who is firmly silenced by Virgil, they then descend and look upon the hoarders and wasters, whose souls are ‘dimmed past recognition.’⁶⁶ These souls are condemned to push great weights against each other, clashing them together and shouting ‘Why do you hoard?’ and ‘Why do you squander?’ They then cross this circle and encounter a dismal stream in which gurgle the wrathful and the sullen, whose incoherent protestations bubble to the surface: “This litany they gargle in their throats as if they sang, but lacked the words and pitch.”⁶⁷ Rauschenberg divides the page into three horizontal bands. The first, and the slimmest, lines the top of the sheet. A blue band of liquid describes Plutus, with his garbled words written in reverse; Dante is signified by the legs of the ubiquitous contemporary Everyman of the ‘True Temper’ golf clubs advertisement from *Sports Illustrated* (Figure 3.16); the yellow mark next to him suggests Virgil, and links him chromatically with Fortune, who is discussed in the Canto and who takes position in the top left hand corner of the lower ‘frame’ (Virgil is part of the positive offerings dispensed to Dante by this figure governing felicity of human affairs, Figure 3.15).⁶⁸ The second frame depicts, with diagrammatic arrows and dotted red and blue lines, the haulings and crashings of the great weights. The final section presents the submerged souls of the wrathful and the sullen, represented by transfer images of screaming babies’ faces (Figure 3.17). The babies’

⁶⁶ Dante Alighieri: ‘Inferno,’ Canto VII, line 54, in *The Divine Comedy, The Inferno, The Purgatorio, and The Paradiso*, translated by John Ciardi (1954, written in Italian between 1308 and 1321), p. 62.

⁶⁷ Canto VII, lines 125-6. Ibid. p. 65.

⁶⁸ The figure of Fortune is transferred from the only female figure in the True Temper advertisement (Figure 3.16).

heads are oriented in different directions and emerge from patches of grey markings. Some of these heads are relatively clear (for example, the one just to the right of centre at the bottom of the page), whilst others seem to be fading out of definition, or are overtaken by nonsignifying traits, as in the right-hand section of this frame, where the force of the staccato marks and smudgy rubbings have disintegrated the forms. The hoarders and wasters, too, anonymously populate a grey, undiscernable terrain from which they are barely differentiated. The transfer process produces withered, insubstantial images, emerging and fading, hovering between image and stain, departing and dissipating into material wash. This wavering of identity encourages the viewer to look slowly and carefully, as images disclose themselves at varying rates from within the texture of drawn marks.

The spectral quality of the transfer image suggests diminished presence, a recession from complete identity, as if it has been erased. Yet erasure is invoked, here, not only through this quality of the image, but also by the repetitive, quasi-mechanical manual action of rubbing over the clipped fragment (see Figure 3.10).⁶⁹ These striated marks maintain their flickering identity irrespective of the kind of image they serve to make manifest. Such manual movements are the antithesis of the cultivated specificity and improvisatory brilliance of the action painter's supposedly liberated gesture. The hand, attempting only to produce an even coverage across a surface, moves indiscriminately over the back of the small magazine clippings. There is a certain repetitive order to the parallel strokes, although at times the hand is allowed to exercise itself in a looser manner, and the hatchings become more wayward. In opposing the unbounded agility of the expressive hand, Rauschenberg's marks recall the desublimating scrawls of his friend (and companion on the 1952 trip to Cuba), Cy Twombly, one of which was incorporated into Rauschenberg's 1955 Combine *Rebus*.⁷⁰ Importantly, however, here the action of the hand,

⁶⁹ See Bitite Vinklers: 'Why Not Dante? A Study of Rauschenberg's Drawings for the *Inferno*,' *Art International* (Volume XII, Number 6, Summer 1968), p. 101: "Transferred by parallel hatching across the back, the images appear as if they had been shaded in this manner across their face also – or more precisely, as if an eraser had been rubbed in parallel lines across them."

⁷⁰ Twombly's mark has been interpreted as a violent, aggressive redress to the autographic Abstract Expressionist stroke. During the mid-1950s, he was producing marks akin to graffiti and to the traits of a violent effacement; Krauss argues: "Gaining in power and coherence in a work like *Free Wheeler*, made several years after the *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, Twombly's mark brings the violence inherent in the strokes of Rauschenberg's eraser out into the open. Both are deployments of the index in the face of action painting's drive to authorial self-presence, just as both are engaged in repetition and randomness as a strategy for 'not composing'." '1953,' in Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss: *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (2004), p. 372. For Roland Barthes, however,

mimicking that of erasure or effacement, is, paradoxically, the very pressure that *produces* the image: what looks like rubbing out is in fact rubbing *in*. Indeed, what the solvent transfer stages so insistently is the lack of conformity between gesture and image, between expression and content. The manual work of rubbing has no other relationship to the image transferred than the application of force.

In two recent articles, Joanne Morra has discussed the Dante drawings in relation to this psychic and mnemonic interface between subject and world, asking, ‘Do the framed, veiled, blurred, hatched, layered images constitute a visualisation of the transfer(ence) that occurs between skin (Ego) and its cultural or historical context?’⁷¹ Using Anzieu’s concept of the Skin Ego, and Derrida’s writings on Freud and inscription, she presents Rauschenberg’s transfer drawings as charged, resonant surfaces that register the traces of external cultural, social and political realities in a manner analogous to that of the psyche. Integrating a concern with the material distortions produced by the transfer process, she develops a discussion of psychic inscription as ‘path-breaking,’ as a material act of ‘breaching’ the forces of resistance. This is analogous, for her, to “the violence enacted by the process of inscription [which] uses up and distorts both the clipping and the image.”⁷² Recalling the operation of Deleuze’s diagram, the force of this transfer process performs a similar deformation on the visual givens of these found media fragments.

These aspects of the drawn *mark* are vital to the impact of the solvent transfer drawings function. As *images*, the drawings already catalyze a proliferating multiplicity of associations through the extraordinary range of objects they evoke (body parts, animals, insects, plants, trees, advertisements, figures, text, contemporary politicians, astronauts, sportsmen, policemen, suits, planets, machines, cars, buildings, statues, weapons...). Importantly, and aligning in this respect with Dante’s text, Rauschenberg engages explicitly with issues of contemporary political concern (many of the drawings were produced during the run-up to the 1960 US election). In Canto XII, for example, Dante and Virgil are

writing in the mid-1970s, Twombly’s mark is not violent but, almost the contrary, speaks of an ‘indolence,’ that is neither assertive nor prescriptive, but essentially permissive: “a garble, almost a smudge, a negligence.” ‘Non Multa Sed Multum,’ (1976) translated by Henry Martin, in *Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper* (2004) p. 24.

⁷¹ Morra: ‘Rauschenberg’s Skin: Autobiography, Indexicality, Auto-Eroticism,’ in *The Prosthetic Aesthetic*, edited by Joanne Morra and Marquand Smith (*New Formations*, Number 46, Spring 2002), p. 55. See also, Morra: ‘Drawing Machine: Working Through the Materiality of Rauschenberg’s Dante and Derrida’s Freud,’ in Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra (eds.): *The Prosthetic Impulse – From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (2006), pp. 48-63.

⁷² Morra, op.cit. 2006, p. 280.

represented as John F. Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson respectively (Figure 3.18). This canto concerns the crimes of the ‘violent against their neighbours,’ and below, in a red pool of blood prepared for such sinners, languishes Richard Nixon.⁷³ The rich and diverse iconography launches the viewer into a dense fabric of the connotational, and the drift and ricochet of associative intermingling outstrips the bonds of reference that these drawings have to Dante’s text.

But here we have not just been concerned with the heterogeneous iconography of these images. Centrally, it is Rauschenberg’s subtle and extensive inventory of *marks* that both manifest and animate this texture of connections.⁷⁴ The diminished, spectral transfer images are accompanied by a host of forms of expression: ruled lines, arrows, notations, staccato dashes, fluid spills and stains. This array of devices affords a diverse means to blur and sharpen, reveal and withhold, indicate and obfuscate. The transfer image itself, enfolding the modes of scribble, seepage, print and effacement, provides a resonant generator of aesthetic and conceptual effects. Materialized in a flickering stain, the results are images in passage: volatile, mobile, impermanent.

Coda

“It is not a matter of bringing about total disappearance, for erasing does not mean rubbing out, it means articulating, bringing emptiness to a sort of action. Erasure carries out a reduction. Gerhard Richter says: ‘Yes, reducing everything until there’s almost nothing left, in any case obtaining something which is not so false, which doesn’t spring so stupidly into view’.”

Birgit Pelzer⁷⁵

All traces are susceptible to erasure. But erasure is never complete or absolute: traces of traces persist, tokens of departure. But erasure’s reduction is also a re-animation, a re-

⁷³ For Rauschenberg’s engagement with American politics in his transfer drawings from the 1960s, see Lewis Kachur: ‘Paraphrase: on Robert Rauschenberg’s Transfer Drawings from the 1960s,’ in *Robert Rauschenberg – Transfer Drawings from the 1960s*, exhibition catalogue (Jonathan O’Hara Gallery, 2007), pp. 8-15.

⁷⁴ Indeed, in the climate of post-war America, erasure itself carries its own connotative field, resonating with the intense politicization of speech and silence brought on by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and with the haunting images of shadow-traces left by the victims of the Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For an account of Duchamp, Cage, Cunningham, Johns and Rauschenberg within the political context of 1950s America, see Moira Roth: ‘The Aesthetics of Indifference,’ *Artforum* (Volume 16, Number 3, November 1977), pp. 46-53.

⁷⁵ Birgit Pelzer: ‘Lines Escaping the Gaze,’ in Dieter Schwarz (ed.): *Gerhard Richter – Drawings 1964-1999*, *Catalogue Raisonné* (1999), p. 166.

intensification. Its effect, in the cases of both de Kooning and Rauschenberg, is to dramatize passage over position, and to see beings as becomings. Erasure is therefore also additive: it adds to a stable thing a margin of mobility, of contingency and of potential. Gerhard Richter described his drawings, which often make extensive use of erasure, in terms of a search for *Stimmung*, a quality of encounter that translates roughly into the following words: disposition, humour, mood, sentiment, spirit, temper, tune. "A certain type of drawings return to my memory, those are the ones I like, the ones that have this strange *Stimmung*. They are abstract, but they also have a slight veil of that strange music by Cage, they are very fragile, noiseless, they have structures, they have mixed media, so they are at once soft and hard and they say very little, those are the ones I want."⁷⁶ Erasure becomes a means to prevent a quality, a discovery, from springing 'stupidly into view;' it is a way of preventing the closure and designation of a becoming.

'Time has no loose ends,' writes Brian Massumi, 'only existential interweave.'⁷⁷ The partial and incomplete nature of erasure separates analogue images from the finality and cleanliness of digital data. Digital information is composed of pre-arrayed sequences of 'zeros and ones,' the most fundamental binary division signalling absolute presence or complete absence. A digital file can be deleted, and the disc written over again without residue: a field of 1/0 combinations cannot constitute a true palimpsest. When a material mark is rubbed out with an eraser, however, some residue is always left behind. Erasure in drawing becomes an action on matter; it involves contact, requires manual effort and leaves some material remains. It is to this question of materiality that I want now to turn. Traces can be washed away or rubbed out; erasure can be performed by liquid means or by dry ones. Neither is relevant to digital production. I will explore the formulation of drawing as an 'analogue' technology in Chapter 5. In the next chapter, however, I want to consider the imaginative, affective and conceptual dimensions of drawing's *material* engagements. Drawing is most commonly thought of as an essentially *dry* medium, but I now want to consider its relation to *liquidity*.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Richter, quoted by Pelzer, *Ibid.* p. 167.

⁷⁷ Brian Massumi: 'Painting: The Voice of the Grain,' in Catherine de Zegher and Brian Massumi (eds.): *Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: The Eurydice Series* (2001), p. 13.

Two Liquidities: Broodthaers and Beuys

Marcel Broodthaers is seated outside at a writing table. On the table are a pot of pens, some paper, an inkbottle, and a packet of Gitanes cigarettes. Painted in capital letters on the white wall behind the artist are the words 'DEPARTEMENT DES AIGLES.'¹ Pen in hand, Broodthaers begins to write. After a few seconds, rain starts to fall onto his page and, as the drops become a flood, his ink letters silently dissipate into a torrent of eddies and wash. Soaking, Broodthaers persists, undeterred by the surrender of his words to this small-scale deluge. I have already discussed this film in Chapter 1 (*La Pluie (Projet pour un texte)*, Figure 4.1), where its conjunction of drawing, writing and cinema was briefly explored. Here, I want to use it to open up a discussion of the role of materiality (specifically, liquidity) in drawing, and in particular in the early drawings of Joseph Beuys.

In Broodthaers's film, the materiality of the liquid cancels language: never allowed to dry out, the words instead retain their mobility and figure the literal entropy of the sign. In place of ideas and feelings, what is registered here is rather the very failure of writing to convey such contents. The implication is that in the act of writing, an inundation occurs which prevents authentic communication. As Louis Aragon proposed in 1924, and as theorists such as Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes would later insist, there is something suicidal about the attempt to translate ideas and emotions into a pre-arrayed linguistic code: the code will always win.² Instead of attempting to convey authentic contents, then, Broodthaers presents the writer as Sisyphus. Finally, after about two minutes, the artist puts down his pen, and the film ends with a still presenting the passage of signs into mute material swirls. Superimposed on this image are the words 'projet pour un texte.'

¹ *La Pluie* was filmed in the garden at Rue de la Pépinière, during the period of Broodthaers's Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXe siècle. See Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Michael Compton (eds.): *Marcel Broodthaers, Cinéma* (1997), pp. 88ff.

² Broodthaers is known to have read both Lacan and Foucault, whose work informed his ideas about language. See Birgit Pelzer: 'Marcel Broodthaers: The Place of the Subject,' in Jon Bird and Michael Newman (eds.): *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (1999), pp. 186-205; and Rachel Haidu: *Marcel Broodthaers, 1963-1972: or, The Absence of Work* (PhD thesis, New York: Columbia University, 2003).

Broodthaers had proposed this opposition between materiality and language in his opening gambit as a visual artist (Figure 4.2). In 1964, he had sunk the remaining fifty copies of his last book of poetry (*Pense-Bête*) into a wedge of plaster, in an attempt to signal the prohibition that aesthetics places upon legibility: as it is, the books cannot be read but only looked at. But to remove them from the plaster would destroy their 'sculptural aspect.'³ To regard a thing as an aesthetic object, Broodthaers asserts, prevents you from reading it and therefore from extracting meaning from it. Moreover, if an object is to be inserted into the established institutions, economies and discursive systems of 'art,' the codes governing these structures will inevitably overwhelm and reify that object. And given that such structures are so thoroughly assimilated into the smooth functioning of the dominant economic and political order, any attempt at radical or subversive communication within them is in grave danger of being merely neutralized and appropriated: 'The way I see it, there can be no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political, without running the risk of being burned by artifice.'⁴ Broodthaers uses objects as 'zero words' in order to forestall their assimilation, to act as 'booby traps' to upset the usual circuits of understanding: 'It remains to be seen,' he wrote, 'if art exists anywhere else than on the level of negation.'⁵

We can place Broodthaers's project of negation, laconically stated in *La Pluie*, in direct opposition to that of Joseph Beuys. If Broodthaers consistently figures the *refusal* to provide a clear message, Beuys constantly attempted to *shore up* the significance of his art with the explanations he gave. From the early 1960s until his death in 1986, Beuys, through an increasingly energetic schedule of teaching and public speaking, wove a dense fabric of esoteric meanings around the forms and materials employed in his work. These were most often derived from various alchemical, scientific and philosophical traditions. Moreover, as Beuys's ideas developed, he began to conceive of his object-based production as just one facet of a hugely ambitious, utopian artistic agenda: *Soziale Plastik*, or 'Social Sculpture.' Beuys's ideas were given their most comprehensive articulation in the catalogue for his 1979 retrospective exhibition at New York's Guggenheim Museum. In close collaboration with Beuys, Caroline Tisdall wrote the entries, frequently intertwining her text with the artist's words:

³ Marcel Broodthaers: 'Ten Thousand Francs Reward' (1974), in Benjamin Buchloh (ed.): 'Marcel Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs,' special issue, *October* (Volume 42, Fall 1987), p. 44.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 39, 42 and 48.

'This Theory of Sculpture describes the passage of everything in the world, physical or psychological, from a chaotic, undetermined state to a determined or ordered state... The moulding processes of art are taken as a metaphor for the moulding of society: hence, SOCIAL SCULPTURE. Fat is an ideal material for demonstrating the Theory, since it can exist as a physical example of both extremes, as a chaotic, formless and flowing liquid when warm, and as a defined and ordered solid when cold.'⁶

For Beuys, Sculpture (*Plastik*) was a form-giving process, a movement from a chaotic liquid state, to one of order and solid form (Figure 4.3). A large part of this form-giving endeavour was enacted through the prescription of specific symbolic and metaphorical significance to the particular materials Beuys employed in his work. Most notoriously, Beuys linked his use of fat and felt to the story of his wartime rescue and rehabilitation at the hands of Tartar tribesmen. However, as Peter Nisbet has argued, this story emerged significantly later than some commentators have recognized (around 1970), and was only given its fullest articulation in the 1979 catalogue already mentioned.⁷ Nevertheless, well prior to the Plane Crash story, Beuys had already constructed a complex explanatory schema for the unusual materials he deployed. A fluid, chaotic materiality would, Beuys hoped, be productively articulated by the order and stability of his symbolic system. For now, it is enough to say that Beuys's attempts to prescribe the meanings of his works have been regarded as deeply problematic by a number of authors critical of the artist's project.

Broodthaers himself openly opposed Beuys's agenda, criticizing his recourse to esoteric explanations ('Magic'), as well as his attempt to engage contemporary art in a utopian project without recognizing the paralyzing assimilation of art itself into the dominant political and economic order.⁸ For now, I want to focus upon the opposed ways in which

⁶ Caroline Tisdall: *Joseph Beuys*, exhibition catalogue (1979), p. 72.

⁷ See Peter Nisbet: 'Crash Course,' in Gene Ray (ed.): *Joseph Beuys, Mapping the Legacy* (2001), pp. 5-18. Benjamin Buchloh mistakenly claims that the story had been outlined in Beuys's 1964 *Lebenslauf/Werklauf*, see '1964a,' in Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss: *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (2004), pp. 480-1.

⁸ For Broodthaers, Beuys had demonstrated a dangerous inability or unwillingness to comprehend the implications of the Guggenheim Museum's attempted censorship and eventual cancellation of Hans Haacke's 1971 exhibition. In spite of this blatant demonstration of art's powerlessness in the face of institutional forces, Beuys continued to champion its unproblematic emancipatory potential with his Bureau for Direct Democracy at Documenta V in the summer of 1972. This situation led Broodthaers to send Beuys an 'Open Letter,' published in a Düsseldorf newspaper (*The Rheinische Post*) on 3rd October of that year. In the fictional guise of a letter from Jacques Offenbach to Richard Wagner, which he claimed to have found damaged (hence the broken prose) in a dilapidated Cologne tenement block, Broodthaers wrote: 'Your essay 'Art and Revolution' ... discuss ... magic ... politics [...] the politics of magic? Of beauty or of ugliness? [...] I can hardly go along with this contention of yours, and at any rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics ... and ... magic [...] King Louis II had Hans H. sent away to castles. His majesty prefers you to this specialist of compositions for the flute. I can understand – if it is a

liquidity has figured here so far: for Broodthaers, it is mobilized as an entropic agent, inundating and cancelling linguistic communication, rendering any attempt to convey specific messages futile. For Beuys, it is a similarly chaotic condition, but one that can be brought to a solid condition of form by the artist, and made into a vehicle for his ideas. A sheer, obdurate negation of language, then, or an aspiration towards transparent semiotic presence: two liquidities that cannot mix, like oil and water. This chapter focuses upon a small number of drawings by Beuys, and questions the adequacy of both of these positions. But, I will also ask, adequacy *to what*? What do we hope to glean from an encounter with the drawings under discussion? Are they only properly considered as part of a 'project for a *text*', to be decoded for a set of linguistic meanings? It is worth bearing in mind Broodthaers's comments upon the impact of his *Pense-Bête*, mentioned earlier:

'It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition on to the viewer – at least that's what I thought would happen. But I was surprised to find that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far, no matter who, has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. 'Look! Books in plaster!' No one had any curiosity about the text; nobody had any idea whether this was the final burial of prose or poetry, of sadness or pleasure.'⁹

Broodthaers's 'booby trap,' it seems, did not catch anyone because no one was curious about its contents: the prohibition on reading did not feel like a prohibition, because the encounter lacked the appropriate desire to explore and to know. What, then, might compel the viewer to explore Beuys's drawings? C.S. Peirce once described as a 'knock at the door,' that quality of the sign that would engage the 'interpreter's eyes and forcibly turn them upon the object meant,' a 'pure psychological compulsion.'¹⁰ A central aim of this chapter is to explore the 'psychological compulsion' involved in the engagement with liquidity in drawing. Here, I will work under the assumption that not everything that these drawings *do* is described by assertions of what they *mean* in linguistic terms. So here I want

matter of artistic choice. But is not the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you not motivated by a political choice as well? I hope this disturbs you as much as it does me. What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How? Miserable artists that we are.' Broodthaers: *Magie: Art et Politique* (1973), p.13. Through an imagined dialogue between two nineteenth-century composers who had pursued opposite strategies in the wake of the failure of the 1848 European revolutions, Broodthaers mounts a critique of Beuys's attempt to find aesthetic and esoteric solutions to political problems. Indeed, Beuys would himself soon suffer at the hands of such institutional powers, being dismissed from his post at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie for continuing to implement a policy of open admissions to his classes.

⁹ Broodthaers, op.cit. 1974, p. 44.

¹⁰ C.S. Peirce quoted by Alex Potts: 'Signs' in Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.): *Critical Terms for Art History* (1996), p. 26.

to ask an additional question: in the making of drawings, how do materials occupy the mind?

Beuys and Drawing

Interestingly, Beuys's drawing practice has escaped the vitriol of his detractors. Unspectacular, contingent and exploratory, the rhetoric of drawing is rather different from that of his more celebrated public performances. As discussed in Chapter 2, drawing is not conventionally aligned with monuments and spectacles, but, rather, most often operates on a diminutive scale and embodies a powerful sense of incompleteness. Without the burden of grandiose or heroic rhetoric, and not aspiring to the discrete finality of the picture, drawing instead tends toward mobility, contingency and speculative experimentation. Rarely conceived of or presented singly, and typically made on paper grounds without stable supports, drawings most frequently make sense in groups and in series. They are also made close to the body, with attention focused upon what might be called the 'micro-dynamics' of process. In her discussion of the trajectory that can be traced through the 'paper world' of Kurt Schwitters, to Beuys and Blinky Palermo, Briony Fer has highlighted drawing as a low-key, scaled-down, yet sustained aspect of Beuys's practice; 'Palermo's watercolours,' she argues, 'share with Beuys's paper output an ephemeral quality and an extraordinary liquidity.'¹¹ It is the potential of this 'extraordinary liquidity' that I want to explore in this chapter.

I will concentrate on a small number of works, all taken from Beuys's most substantial collection of drawings, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, first exhibited in 1974. Consisting of 327 sheets made from 1936 onwards and arranged chronologically, *The Secret Block* was first shown at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in the spring of 1974. Over that year, it then travelled to Edinburgh, Dublin, and Belfast. The enigmatic title, which was in English, refers to James Joyce, who Beuys had first read in 1950 and for whom he continued to feel strong admiration and affinity.¹² By the time of his death, Beuys

¹¹ Fer: *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (2004), p. 202.

¹² Beuys had read *Finnegan's Wake* in 1950 at a 'Haus Wylmermeer' in the Lower Rhine region. Between 1957 and 1961, years in which he felt himself recovering from a severe physical and mental crisis, Beuys produced his *Ulysses-Extension*, whereby he extended Joyce's novel by two chapters (he claimed) "at James Joyce's request." The extension consisted of six exercise books filled with drawings. See Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes: 'Joseph Beuys 'extends' James Joyce's Work,' *Circa* 104, Summer 2003, pp. 35-9, and *Joyce in Art, Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce* (2004).

had expanded the group to 456 sheets, and it is now a part of the collection of Erich Marx. Notes from a telephone conversation with Caroline Tisdall were published in the Oxford catalogue, in which Beuys described the special nature of the drawings on show: “These are the drawings that I have put aside over the years, a few each year here and there... as a whole [*The Secret Block*] represents my selection of thinking forms in evolution over a period of time.”¹³ Beuys elaborates that his drawings derive from a speculative endeavour, research that is “most clearly expressed in question marks.”¹⁴ Question marks also constitute the titles of the majority of these drawings.

The drawings I will be discussing all date from the late 1940s and 1950s (indeed, 321 of the 456 drawings that comprised the final manifestation of *The Secret Block* were produced before 1961). From a time, that is, when Beuys was not yet Beuys: before he was appointed Professor of Monumental Sculpture at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in 1961, before any of his notorious performances and pedagogical public lectures, and before he had constructed his mythified, shamanic persona. During the 1940s and 50s, in what might be described as a long apprenticeship to art, Beuys occupied no significant position on the national, let alone international stage.¹⁵ In 1941, at the age of twenty, Beuys began his military training as an aircraft radio operator, and he subsequently flew for the Luftwaffe during the Second World War. Following the war, and convinced of becoming an artist, in 1947 Beuys enrolled at one of the then only two functioning art schools in Germany, the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie.¹⁶ He studied for a few months with Joseph Ensling, before establishing himself in the class of Ewald Mataré, from which he graduated as master pupil in 1951. At the Academy, Beuys developed his interest in the behaviour and symbolic properties of materials, and made contact with a wide range of philosophical, scientific and cultural traditions: from the 16th century Swiss alchemist Paracelsus, to the German Romantics (especially Novalis and Schiller), to Rudolph Steiner and Carl Jung, Leonardo da Vinci and

¹³ Beuys in conversation with Caroline Tisdall, in Heiner Bastian (ed.): (ed.) *Joseph Beuys: The secret block for a secret person in Ireland* (1988, hereafter, *The Secret Block*), p. 48.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ A crucial year in Beuys’s meteoric rise to notoreity came was 1964. It was then that he first exhibited his work at a major international arts fair (Documenta III in Kassel, June 27 – October 5), and, more spectacularly, his photograph, complete with bloodied nose, was widely distributed in the media following the ‘Festival of New Art’ at the Technical University of Aachen (July 20), in which Beuys was attacked mid-performance. It was for this festival, too, that Beuys had produced the document by which he first married his artistic output to a mythologized autobiography: the *Lifecourse/Workcourse*. See Pamela Kort: ‘Joseph Beuys’ Aesthetic 1958-1972,’ in David Thistlewood (ed.): *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques* (1995), pp. 65-80, for connections between the *Lifecourse*, *The Secret Block*, and an exhibited series of photographs documenting Beuys’s actions and artistic production entitled *Arena*.

¹⁶ See Ibid. p. 69.

James Joyce. Having graduated from Mataré's class, Beuys took advantage of the privilege granted to all master students, the use of a studio in the Academy, which he shared with his friend Erwin Heerich until 1954. Although he suffered a physical and psychological collapse in 1956, entering into a prolonged period of depression that was to last well into the following year, Beuys continued to produce work, exhibiting periodically, mostly in group shows. Although he also produced a number of sculptures during this time, the vast majority of his efforts were made in what Bernice Rose describes as a 'loghorrea' of drawing.¹⁷ For Beuys, drawing was the primary means by which his ideas could be first digested by the material world, 'the first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible powers to the visible thing.'¹⁸ Drawing was a generative resource, 'a kind of reservoir.'¹⁹

With reference to a drawing entitled *Water Pliers* (1953, Figure 4.4), Beuys commented to Tisdall: "The redemption of the world through water: these are *Water pliers*: water as life, continuity and resurrection... (the continuous flow: 'Finnegan's Wake'; the beginning and end of all life on earth... the collective unconscious...)." ²⁰ As notes from a telephone interview between Beuys and Tisdall, the text is splintered, with references accumulating in short lists, terms getting added to concepts without the benefit of connective explanatory tissue. So here, in the most unfluid textual manner, water is harnessed to a metaphorical and archetypal apparatus of flow and continuity, becoming a generalised and flexible symbol able to accommodate, apparently unproblematically, glances towards writers like Joyce and Jung.

Something of this connective flexibility is demonstrated in another drawing associated with water. *Watercarrier* (1949, Figure 4.5) is a pencil drawing on a rough-edged piece of thick paper. The image depicts a hermaphroditic figure kneeling in a bare landscape with his arms outstretched. Cropped at the knee by the lower edge of the sheet, the figure's lower legs jut awkwardly to each side. Behind and to the left is a cross shape, which also suggests a standing figure with arms stretched horizontally. To the right is a sun (or moon)

¹⁷ Bernice Rose: 'Joseph Beuys and the Language of Drawing' in Bernice Rose and Ann Temkin: *Thinking is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys* (1993), p.74. Still, by 1964 Beuys was primarily known as a draftsman – asked to participate in Documenta 3 in 1964, but to submit only three drawings; he managed to convince the organisers to allow him to exhibit sculpture also.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 73

¹⁹ Beuys interviewed by Heiner Bastian and Jeannot Simmen: *Joseph Beuys. Zeichnungen, Tekeningen, Drawings* (1979), pp. 93-94.

²⁰ Beuys to Tisdall in *The Secret Block*, p. 49.

hovering over the horizon, which casts a long reflection down to the bottom of the sheet, a motif borrowed from Edvard Munch. The composition is dominated by the horizontal and vertical axes, punctuated by repeated spiral shapes which unfurl from the figure's solar plexus and reproductive organs, as well as describing the circular form of the heavenly body above the horizon. The cross-form and spiral, with their archetypal symbolic associations, allow for a series of substitutions to proceed whereby one element is iconographically and symbolically bled into others. What is perhaps most striking in this image, though, is its resistance to another kind of metaphorical liquidity: that of the fluid gesture. In contrast to a flowing, mellifluous line, connoting a coherent, sensuous expressive gesture, Beuys's marks are awkward and broken. The area describing the kneeling figure's shoulders and head in this drawing is a nervous tangle of fractured and jerky lines, and the spiral forms are remarkable in their maladroit inelegance. Yet if Beuys opposed the controlled ease of the *metaphorically* fluid line, he frequently sets down 'pools' of wash with various *actual* liquids.

Throughout his life, Beuys maintained an experimental fascination with materials, which was underpinned by a longstanding engagement with scientific and alchemical practices. As a child, Beuys had collected all sorts of plants and animals with his playmates, and in 1930 (aged 9) had built a makeshift laboratory at his home in Rindern, near Kleve.²¹ In 1941, having graduated from secondary school, and on leave from his military training, Beuys attended lectures in biology, botany, geography and philosophy at the Reichuniversität Posen.²² Whilst at Düsseldorf, he developed his interest in alchemy and later, having graduated from Mataré's class, set up a laboratory in the studio he shared with Heerich:

"[Beuys] had set up a lab, just as he had done in his parents' house as a boy, and experimented with all kinds of chemicals, examined plants and animals, and made analyses using microscopes, magnifiers, forceps, needles, dishes, and tubes. In short, Beuys was assembling the equipment and materials with which he would deepen his knowledge of scientific and especially biological relationships, of microcosmic events, and of bodily functions."²³

²¹ See Claudia Schmuckli: 'Chronology and Selected Exhibition History,' in Mark Rosenthal (ed.): *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments* (2005), p. 150.

²² Ibid. p. 152.

²³ Heerich quoted by Heiner Stachelhaus: *Joseph Beuys* (1991), p. 34.

Beuys's deployment of a range of symbolic materials in his sculptures, environments, vitrines and performances is well known. Some of the most prominent include: fat, felt, iron, copper and honey. Such material experimentation was also central to Beuys's drawing practice; as well as pencil, watercolour and oil paint, the array of materials included *braunkreuz* (a thick brown housepaint), ink, iodine, acid, iron chloride, gold leaf, dirty water, beeswax, sulphur-based pigment, fat, coloured chalk, and blood. As Franz Joseph van der Grinten, who, with his brother Hans, were Beuys's most important early patrons, remembers:

"Dirty water, or just water which has been contaminated with rust, dust or soot, or water which contained the residues from bath and dish water, water which was muddied in some way and which was not fresh, was used as the artistic medium, and sometimes it might just as well have been this uncoloured, stained appearance which evoked the artistic impulse. In a similar way, other liquids usually used for other purposes, like tea, coffee and broth, were used on paper; also, the natural juice of fruits, vegetables and herbs and the secretions of flesh were used."²⁴

The range of supports is hardly less varied. Invoking the makeshift and throwaway paper world of Kurt Schwitters, Beuys drew, puddled and scrawled on torn sheets, found scraps, paper ripped from ringbound sketchbooks, gridded graph paper, diary entries, envelopes, semi-transparent onionskin paper, cloth, bits of card, lined writing paper, newsprint, business letterheads, and perforated accounts pages. Often paper fragments are mounted, taped or glued onto larger sheets of different colours (as in *Water Pliers*, already mentioned).

In 1952, Beuys produced a series of untitled drawings of women in pencil and a liquid known as *beize*. *Beize* is an iron chloride solution, a corrosive that was used as a wood stain. Its coloration ranges from a light yellow ochre to a deeper reddish brown. Roughly bounded by pencil contours, the pools of *beize* are sometimes even in consistency (Figure 4.6), and sometimes more modulated (Figures 4.7 and 4.8). In the latter case, like a thermal mapping of the body, the drawings foreground a liquid seeping, suggesting a slow migration of intensity. In this, they recall the unruly watercolour washes of Rodin's erotic drawings, a connection which has recently been elaborated by Pamela Kort and Max Hollein in an exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (Figure 4.9).²⁵ Beuys was first

²⁴ Franz Joseph van der Grinten: 'The Distinctive Juices' in Franz Joseph and Hans van der Grinten: *Joseph Beuys Wasserfarben: 1936-1963: Joseph Beuys Watercolours* (1975).

²⁵ *Rodin Beuys*. Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 9 September – 27 November 2005. Exhibition catalogue edited by Pamela Kort and Max Hollein (2005).

introduced to Rodin's work, according to Franz Joseph van der Grinten, through Rainer Maria Rilke's 1903 book, reissued in 1949, in which the author described Rodin's forms: "nameless – vases... works that produced warmth."²⁶ In Rodin's drawings, the bleeding fields of pigment suggest sexualised waves of sensation. Although Beuys talked of the body as 'sensorium',²⁷ these drawings (unlike others in *The Secret Block*) lack an explicitly sexual charge. Rather, Beuys's emphasis is on women's reproductive biology. The female bodies, sometimes missing a head (Figure 4.10), sometimes limbs (Figures 4.8 and 4.9), invariably possess prominent, swollen hips and belly. Other studies in *The Secret Block* focus more explicitly on pregnancy and menstruation. In an extraordinary 1957 drawing, made with a mixture of iodine and blood, Beuys represents three views of the cropped thighs and lower torso of a menstruating woman (Figure 4.11). Two pencil drawings from 1949, both entitled *Woman*, depict, as if by X-Ray, an intrauterine baby (Figure 4.12).

The *beize* women evoke non-Western fertility figures, and their numinous edges and weathered features recall unearthed statuary. Whereas Beuys uses male figures to express an 'over-intellectualised concentration on the powers of the head',²⁸ women, for him, signified fecund spiritual and generative biological principles, an archetypal femininity transcending history and discourse. In this, Beuys serves to reaffirm the dominant anchoring of femininity to both transcendent archetypes, and to the confining exigencies of nature and biology that Sherry Ortner famously analyzed in 1972.²⁹ Beuys's choice of *beize*, a corrosive wood stain, in this context might then strike us as surprising, even anxious, with its strong connotations of toxicity rather than generative potential.

Women, for Beuys, are not only more closely associated with 'raw' nature, but also the cycles, processes and flows associated with female bodies are mapped onto geological formations and phenomena found in the animal kingdom. A principle of liquidity is used by Beuys to metaphorically transpose elements from one physical system to another. Aligning with a conventional discursive mapping, men become associated with crystalline structures – hard, defined and rational – whereas female bodies are connected to aspects of landscape

²⁶ See Pamela Kort: 'Rodin – Lehmbruck – Beuys,' in *Ibid.* p. 74ff.

²⁷ 1974 lecture by Beuys given on the opening of an exhibition of his drawings in Krefeld, 1974, quoted by Fer: *The Infinite Line*, p. 203.

²⁸ Beuys in Tisdall, *op.cit.* p. 50

²⁹ Sherry B. Ortner: 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' *Feminist Studies*, (Volume 1, Number 2, 1972), pp. 5-31. Amazingly, given the title of his essay ('Why Do Some of the Women Joseph Beuys Depicts Show Their Genitalia So Prominently?'), Dieter Koepplin fails to address these questions of gender politics. See *Rodin Beuys*, pp. 201-232.

such as glaciers and volcanoes, which have to do with movement, process and flow. In the pencil drawing *Glacier* from 1950 (Figure 4.13), Beuys formally rhymes the geological phenomenon with female anatomy. The repeated sloping lines describing rock strata also evoke muscle tissue; the form of the valley and the flowing passage of ice suggest vaginal discharge. Beuys's system of metaphorical and iconographic transpositions extends to encompass specific aspects of the animal kingdom. *Stag's Head* from 1954 (Figure 4.14) is made with pencil and *beize* on paper. Instead of branching into forked spikes, however, the ends of the antlers have been morphed into ovaries. This is coupled with two strands of *beize* emerging from the crown of the skull extend downwards to suggest the form of a uterus. Antlers, shed after mating season each year, held special significance for Beuys, their being the product of the slow cooling and sedimentation of the living fluids circulating within them.³⁰ Notions of cyclical renewal and processes of transformation serve, for Beuys, to link female biology with the anatomy of the stag.

In a watercolour and pencil drawing from 1958, connections are forged between woman and hare (Figure 4.15). Here, the body of a woman is haphazardly described by amorphous pools of flesh-toned watercolour. With limbs stretched out, the figure recalls Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man*. In her hands she holds certain ill-defined objects (perhaps a shield and slingshot). Her body is all disarticulated puddles and boundaries broken: her breasts are indicated by two misshapen blobs of liquid, and jets of liquid spurt from the inside of her knees. Below the woman's spread legs, a schematic symmetrical hare, cut from a folded piece of white paper, has been glued to the sheet. Of this animal, Beuys wrote: "the hare as a sign of alchemical transformation and chemical change: the mobility of blood, the relationship between the hare and menstrual blood, birth and incarnation: the upper half for the soul, and the lower for fertility..."³¹ The hare takes on potent symbolic properties for Beuys, and is one of the animals, along with bees, stags and swans, that he employs most frequently in his work. He celebrated the hare's crossing the Eurasian continent. The preoccupation with exchange between the territories of East and West also led Beuys to be interested in Genghis Khan. In 1979, Beuys spoke of the importance of Genghis Khan's

³⁰ Beuys explains: "the mercurial nature of the stag is expressed in its antlers. The flow of blood through them reflects a twelve month-year-cycle: the mobility of blood, sap, hormones." Beuys to Tisdall (1974), in Bastian, op.cit. p. 49

³¹ Beuys in Ibid. p. 50.

daughter in these mythic journeyings, and this reference to travel may account for the explosions behind the woman's kneecaps in this drawing.³²

Aside from the essentializing gender politics of Beuys's formulations, there is a fundamental problem with the kind of *transparency* that he proposes for his work, as if meanings inhered in the objects themselves and were not worked out in the social field. For whom, for example, does the hare signify 'alchemical transformation'? In 1980, Benjamin Buchloh issued his notorious and scathing critique of Beuys, a significant aspect of which concerned the artist's apparent inability or unwillingness to engage with the consequences of either Saussurean linguistics or Duchamp's Readymade.³³ Both Saussure and Duchamp had asserted the *relational* formation of meaning, insisting that meanings were not inherent in signs or objects, but rather constructed within linguistic systems (Saussure), and within discursive and institutional contexts (Duchamp). Indeed, in 1964, Beuys had explicitly declared his opposition to the latter in his televised performance: *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated* (Figure 4.16). For Buchloh, then, Beuys's energetic attempts to prescribe the meanings of his works (whereby, 'this object stands for that idea, and that idea is represented in this object'), was deeply regressive.³⁴

³² The preoccupation with exchange between the territories of East and West also led Beuys to be interested in Genghis Khan. In 1979, Beuys spoke of the importance of Genghis Khan's daughter in these mythic journeyings, and this reference to travel may account for the explosions behind the woman's kneecaps in this drawing. In the 1979 Guggenheim catalogue, Beuys said of Genghis Khan's daughter: she 'carries... a plan for the historical organization of the future. Inside her head are the vital elements: the horse's head of the Mongolian nomads, a hind, the cosmic movement of planets, a sun wheel, birds, cooking pots, a sponge, fontanel communication tubes and the sign of equality.' Tisdall op.cit. 1979, p. 50.

³³ Benjamin Buchloh: 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique,' (1980) reprinted in Buchloh: *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (2000), pp. 41-64. Aspects of Buchloh's critique, which have attracted far more critical attention, pertain to Beuys's artistic persona (and especially, the Plane Crash origin myth), as well as his esoteric rhetoric of mysticism and archetypes. Developing Broodthaers's acute comparison of Beuys to Wagner, Buchloh lances Beuys's disingenuous self-mythologization and his failure to confront his involvement within recent traumatic historical events. For Buchloh, Beuys was an artist both messianic and infantile, expressing an agenda of hopelessly naïve utopianism, whilst failing to address specific intellectual or cultural developments that would threaten to unsettle his authority as mythic, cultic creative leader. "Nobody who understands any contemporary science, politics, or aesthetics, for that matter, could want to see in Beuys's proposal for an integration of art, sciences, and politics – as his program for the Free International University demands – anything more than simple-minded utopian drivel lacking elementary political and educational practicality." (p. 43). Buchloh notes, however, that Beuys does use formal strategies developed by modern artists such as Schwitters and Arman, but argues that these borrowings not only remain unacknowledged, but are essentially cosmetic (p. 151).

³⁴ Buchloh, op.cit. 1980, p. 52. Eric Michaud writes: "It is on this naïve certainty of an absolute transparency between form and matter and the 'idea' that Beuys's system is constructed. It offers the immense advantage of allowing the artist to create as if in flashes of lightning in which the opacity of (the) work in process is eluded, in which form is always adequate to the idea." Michaud: 'The Ends of Art According to Joseph Beuys,' *October* (Issue 45, Summer 1988), p. 39.

In 2001, Buchloh offered a nuanced revision of his earlier polemic.³⁵ Now acknowledging (but by no means celebrating) Beuys's attempts to reflect upon recent German political history, and relenting on his earlier Freudian characterisation of the artist as proto-fascist anal-retentive, Buchloh nevertheless still retained his 'primary critique' of Beuys. This pertained to the his "renewed foregrounding of the artist as a privileged being, a seer that provides deeper and higher forms of transhistorical knowledge to an audience that is in deep dependence and in need of epiphanic revelations."³⁶ In prescribing a fixed, if supple, system of meanings, Beuys disempowered his audience, leaving them dependent upon his pronouncements to gain intellectual access to his work. The dominance of Beuys's rhetoric in determining the reception of his work had re-affirmed a retrogressive system of 'metaphoricity.' Without this system, Buchloh argues, his work lacks the specificity required to prevent the invasion of a disabling infinity of interpretive options.³⁷ Buchloh opposes Beuys's strategies to those of the Fluxus group (with whom Beuys associated in the early '60s), championing the latter's ludic, interactive model of viewer-author exchange. By contrast, Beuys's objects now present themselves as relics. Without the charisma and energy of the artist, Buchloh argues, the work is so underdetermined as to invite 'an infinity of spectatorial interpretive projections,' 'a more or less infinite range of readings.'³⁸

So the question for Buchloh is of *readings*, and in Beuys's absence the objects themselves lack the specificity required to 'initiate cognitive changes.'³⁹ Visual practices, for Buchloh, are best discussed as 'part of a linguistic system, a discursive system.'⁴⁰ But, as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, *reducing* visual practices to how they operate in linguistic terms has its (sometimes quite severe) limitations. Whilst Buchloh is not necessarily guilty of such an explicit reduction, he is nevertheless uninterested in elaborating how Beuys's works might exceed their discursive placement. Clearly it *does* make sense to see these drawings as things that signify: in relation to Beuys's ideas and powerful artistic persona; within the historical evolution of formal visual languages; as implicated in wider signifying economies (we have highlighted the drawings' discursive

³⁵ Buchloh: 'Reconsidering Joseph Beuys; Once Again,' in Gene Ray (ed.): *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (2001), pp. 75-89.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 82.

³⁷ Ibid p. 83-4.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 84 and 86.

³⁹ Buchloh, op.cit. 1980, p. 209.

⁴⁰ Buchloh: 'Reconsidering Beuys,' p. 82.

relation to gender politics here). But, while the drawings do require such interpretation, linguistic spoils are not the *only* things that they offer. If we think of these objects as species of *text*, how do we approach the question of what it is like to look at them, and what happens to their insistent materiality, their extraordinary liquidity? While acknowledging the immense critical value of Buchloh's analysis, we also need to ask if a 'reading' is the only (or even the most productive) thing to extract from an engagement with Beuys's drawings. Approaching the drawings not just as symptoms of a faulty artistic program, but also as objects with relevant potentials for now, we can argue that they are not exhausted or rendered redundant by such discursive readings. So what else *is* going on? The issue hangs on Beuys's small-scale, heightened, exploratory engagement with an array of diverse materials.

What conceptual tools are available to address this kind of engagement? How has materiality, and specifically liquidity, been discussed in relation to the processes of production and reception of art objects (we will return to address drawing more specifically shortly)? Conventionally, dominant accounts of the role of materiality in art follow the logic of Ovid's story of Pygmalion: the male artist breathing life into dumb, inert, feminized matter through the power of his creative will. Form is what is imposed upon a passive, receptive material realm through the creative process. In this 'hylomorphism,' the *morphe* (form) is certainly the valorized term over the *hyle* (matter). This prioritization of form over matter persists in modernist formalist art theory. Greenbergian treatments of the work of Pollock are paradigmatic: the floor-bound, gravity dependent, messy materiality of Pollock's drip paintings are lifted from the ground to the wall, given vertical orientation and addressed exclusively to the eye as weightless optical forms. For Greenberg and Fried, Pollock's paintings transcend their literal, material objecthood and become pure visual fields, immaterial images. This (extremely brief) sketch recapitulates the analysis of Krauss who in 1996, together with Yve-Alain Bois, staged a powerful critique of modernist formalism's central tenets in an exhibition based around Georges Bataille's 'operational concept' of the *informe* ('formless').⁴¹ In response to such sublimating attempts to transcend the material realm, Krauss and Bois interpose Bataille's Base Materialism. This is matter as always in excess of categories and systems:

⁴¹ See Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois: *Formless, A User's Guide*, exhibition catalogue (1997).

“Matter cannot be reabsorbed by the image (...). Bataille’s ‘matter’ is shit or laughter or an obscene word or madness: whatever cuts all discussion short, whatever reason cannot drape with a ‘mathematical frock coat,’ whatever does not lend itself to any metaphorical displacement, whatever does not allow itself to be in-formed. According to Bataille, matter is seductive waste, appealing to what is most infantile in us, since the blow it strikes is devolutionary, regressive, low.”⁴²

Krauss and Bois champion the mobilisation of matter as impenetrable to the “play of transpositions” of which Bataille spoke, as emphatic interruption of the false order of symbolic systems. While Bois deals severely with most *Informel* production, it is left to Krauss to strike Beuys from the roster of admissible artists, for reasons which we have already encountered: “Beuys’s allegorical use of substances, and his constant insinuation of his own body into a network of myth, was devoted to this idea of breathing logos into his materials, so that by assuming form they would also be resurrected as meaning.”⁴³

Deployments of materiality more appealing to Krauss and Bois include the *Liquid Words* of Ed Ruscha (Figure 4.17). Condensing arguments made in an earlier catalogue essay, Bois convincingly argues that these works stage an opposition between the articulations necessary for language to function, and the entropic action of liquids.⁴⁴ These precise oil paintings depict words in a process of melting, of losing their form, in a movement towards the inarticulate material poolings of blobs and spatters:

“Ruscha is preoccupied by the becoming inarticulate of words, but also by all forms of erosion to which language is victim (for example, the devitalization words suffer when they turn into clichés), and by the inevitable and irreversible nature of this process. His liquid words have no relation to the ‘illegible’ scribbles which modern art has supplied so many variations (perhaps best known are Henri Michaux’s calligraphies): for while the latter are like Rorschach tests inducing the viewer to project linguistic meanings onto them and thus to rearticulate them, Ruscha’s *Liquid Words* leave no role to our imagination other than to complete the work of decomposition.”⁴⁵

Injecting movement into the equation, this work of decomposition is exactly what is staged in Broodthaers’s *La Pluie*, with which we began. Broodthaers dramatizes the vulnerability of words to entropic disarticulation, a vulnerability induced by the materiality on which they depended to become visible. The resulting “liquid scattered suspension,” to use

⁴² Bois: ‘The Use Value of the Formless,’ in *Ibid* pp. 29-31.

⁴³ Krauss: ‘No to... Joseph Beuys,’ in *Ibid*. p. 146.

⁴⁴ See Bois: ‘Liquid Words,’ in *Ibid*. pp. 124-9, and Bois: *Edward Ruscha, Romance With Liquids* (1993).

⁴⁵ Bois: ‘Liquid Words,’ p. 129.

Duchamp's phrase,⁴⁶ was mobilised for a project of negation, a desire to puncture the assumptions upon which dominant comportments towards written and visual language are based. Materiality is deployed to counter any flights of linguistic association or imaginative recuperation; it is attributed a powerful negative capability, a means to subvert the oppressive dominance of symbolic structures. The real is opposed to the symbolic, and the imagination only moves one-way: towards entropy.⁴⁷

But does the materiality of Beuys's drawing figure only as a sheer literal objecthood, resistant to any other kinds of productive interaction? If we don't believe in Beuys's explanations any more, does his drawings' materiality just stand as meaning's mute remainder? Whilst the radical potential of Krauss and Bois's engagement with Bataille's concept is energizing and provocative, the radical negativity of the *informe* does not readily provide tools with which to build a satisfying account of what it is like to manipulate materials or to look at the resulting objects. To demand more than cancellation from matter is not necessarily to re-instate an outmoded symbolic system or 'metaphoricity.' Rather, it is necessary to ask what kinds of imaginative and affective stakes are involved in drawing's small-scale material engagements. Before revisiting some phenomenological debates concerning the imagination, I want first, against the advice of Bois, to turn again to the rich and suggestive writings of Michaux.

Material Imagination

During the late '40s, Michaux produced a number of drawings mobilizing the truant properties of inks and watercolour (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). In his writing, Michaux dramatizes the immersive intensity of the drawing process, in which substance, perception and duration become entangled. This from 1946, later published in *Passages*:

'Water of watercolours, as immense as a lake, water, omnivore-demon, carrying away islands, creating mirages, breaking down dams, overflowing from worlds... I note with a secret joy that becomes increasingly evident this leakage from the line of my

⁴⁶ See Sarat Maharaj: 'A Liquid Elemental Scattering': Marcel Duchamp and Richard Hamilton, in *Richard Hamilton*, (1992), pp. 40-48.

⁴⁷ Broodthaers is explicit in his commitment to maintaining such oppositions. He responds to Breton's project: 'This one I know by heart: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a state of mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, no longer seem contradictory." I hope I have nothing in common with that state of mind.' Broodthaers op.cit. 1974, p. 43.

drawing... This truancy that so closely resembles the pattern of my life... fascinates me and restores me to myself, through the success of this instantaneous and gradual *quid pro quo*, making an absurd muddle of my lines that were clearly marked out to begin with, that swim away on all sides, carrying off my subject towards a blur that unceasingly dilates, or changes tack, surface of dissolution, divergence and distortion, journeying towards a re-absurdity that leaves me gaping on the shore.’⁴⁸

Liquids have carried off Michaux’s lines, with dissolution itself becoming the object of fascination, rather than the entities being dissolved. Importantly, Michaux attributes an agency, a piloting role, to his materials, with which he is in responsive dialogue. He is engaged in a reciprocal ‘quid pro quo’ that is both ‘instantaneous’ and ‘gradual,’ and which restores him to himself. This is an affective relation, generating in the artist a stream of imaginative and associative resonances. It has little to do with subjective contents to be possessed, and far more to do with the *reality of felt relation* before any cleaving of the event down the subjective/objective divide.⁴⁹ Michaux, in his quest to ‘decondition’ himself, may have been looking for ‘Signs, not to be complete / But true to one’s passing,’ but it is not clear that it is a coherent or stable subject that is steering that passage.⁵⁰ Rather, it is an ongoing transformative activity that is caught up in intense and dynamic relation with the substances of the world.

Michaux’s exhilarating articulation of the drawing process prompts us to revisit the role and status of the imagination in such small-scale, aleatory material engagements. A place to begin is provided by Gaston Bachelard and his notion of “material imagination.” Over several books, the first of which was published in 1938, Bachelard attempted to theorize the psychological resonance of the four elements: Fire (1938), Water (1942), Air (1943) and Earth (1948),⁵¹ with his model of the imagination organised around a series of binary oppositions.⁵² In *Water and Dreams*, the most significant of these is his distinction between

⁴⁸ Henri Michaux: ‘En Pensant au phénomène de la peinture’ (1946) in *Passages* (1963) p.117-8. Reprinted in de Zegher: *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux* (2000), p. 23.

⁴⁹ Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), p. 16. This issue was discussed at some length in Chapter 1, pp. 140ff.

⁵⁰ Michaux: *Mouvements* (1951), in Vera Dickman: *Henri Michaux ex. cat.* (1999), unpag.

⁵¹ *La Psychanalyse du Feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), *L’Eau et les Rêves, Essai sur l’imagination de la matière* (Paris: Corti, 1942), *L’Air et les Songes, Essai sur l’imagination du mouvement* (Corti, 1943), *La Terre et les Rêveries de la Volonté, Essai sur l’imagination des forces* (Corti, 1948). See Edward Kaplan: ‘Gaston Bachelard’s Philosophy of the Imagination: An Introduction,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Volume 33, Number 1, September 1972), pp. 1-24. For a wide-ranging account of philosophical debates on the imagination, see Richard Kearney: *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (1991).

⁵² See Margaret Higonnet: ‘Bachelard and the Romantic Imagination’ *Comparative Literature* (Volume 33, Number 1, Winter 1981), pp. 18-37.

the 'formal' and the 'material' imagination.⁵³ The former is connected to an engagement with novelty, the unexpected, the picturesque. The latter, more significant to Bachelard, relates to a deeper, richer, denser imaginative realm. These twinned registers are organised around the opposition of surface and depth, superficiality and profundity. Allied to this is the opposition between the sensory and the sensual: "Only sensual values offer 'direct communication.' Sensory values give only translations."⁵⁴ Beyond the sensory world of forms, for Bachelard, there is a deeper, more resonant space of elements: "One cannot dream profoundly with *objects*. To dream profoundly, one must dream with *substances*."⁵⁵ In his discussion of the psyche's relation to water, however, Bachelard is concerned with material objects themselves, but rather exclusively with poetic *images*. He does not engage with visual art, preferring to limit his engagement to fragments of poems: "Only poems," he declares, "can bring to light the hidden forces of spiritual life".⁵⁶

Amongst the multitude of water's psychic and poetic resonances (there are chapters on clear, running, fresh, deep, heavy and dead waters), Bachelard attributes to it a privileged relationship to time. We remember Wols's poem 'A Cassis' (discussed in Chapter 2), in which the artist peers with fascination into seaside rock pools, causing him to reflect upon humanity's place in the scale of things. Bachelard affirms: "A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away."⁵⁷ As with both Beuys and Michaux, liquidity is associated with movement and, in relation to language, continuity.⁵⁸ Bachelard's own language often tends toward the florid and rhetorical, and the restriction of his discussion to images and not objects makes him an unlikely tool with which to rethink a relationship to material quiddity. Nevertheless, and as Sartre notes in his discussion of *Water and Dreams*, there is some productive potential in the idea of a material imagination that can be unharnessed from Bachelard's own rhetoric.

At the end of his *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and in reference to Bachelard's project, Sartre urges: "What we must do is to attempt a psychoanalysis of things... Yet in truth the term *imagination* does not suit us," he cautions, "and neither does that attempt to look behind things to their gelatinous, solid, or fluid matter, for the 'images' which we project

⁵³ Bachelard: *Water and Dreams*, p.1ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 22.

⁵⁶ Bachelard: *L'Air et les Songes*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Bachelard: *Water and Dreams*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ "Water is the mistress of liquid language, of smooth flowing language, of contained and continuing language, of language that softens rhythm and gives a uniform substance to differing rhythms." Ibid. p. 187.

there.”⁵⁹ Rather than look for images, Sartre seeks the ontological truth of things, the meanings which *really* belong to them: “Material meanings, the human sense of needles, snow, grained wood, of crowded, of greasy, etc., are as real as the world, neither more nor less, and to come into the world means to rise up in the midst of these meanings.”⁶⁰ Sartre famously elaborates such meanings in relation to the *visqueux* (*slimy*), which embodies for him a dystopian foil to Bachelard’s romantic and idealist vision of penetrable waters and pastes. For Sartre, the slimy threatens his very being: a slow, flaccid, sticky adherence and clinging possessiveness. As in Bachelard’s discussion of pastes, Sartre’s account is deeply gendered: for Bachelard, pastes invite masculine dreams of penetration, whilst for Sartre the slimy induces a horror and loathing of a feminized, devouring material state. These meanings of things in the world, for Sartre, have nothing to do with the constructions of the imagination. Indeed, for him, imagination is entirely separate from perception, the one excluding the other. Imagination is based upon nothingness, a solipsistic operation of consciousness separate from being. In his *The Psychology of the Imagination*, he wrote: “In a word, the object of the perception overflows consciousness constantly; the object of the image is never more than the consciousness one has; it is limited by that consciousness; nothing can be learned from an image that is not already there.”⁶¹ Imagination was a flight from and negation of being.

Owing to Sartre’s ontological split between being and nothingness, perception and imagination must operate in separate and conflicting ways. The imagination, unlike perception (and to a lesser extent thinking and emotionality), functioned without being bounded by the givens of body, time and place. This unharnessing from the world afforded the imagination a singular freedom and spontaneity, although it could evoke things only to confirm their absence, their existence as pure possibility. For Sartre, then, there is no productive dialogue between the imagination and perception, only a relationship of mutual cancellation. However, to take the suggestive power of Michaux’s writing seriously, our analysis will not pertain to the autonomous generation of images *ex nihilo*, but rather to the co-emergence of perception and imagination in a creative endeavour. To develop the implications of such work, we would need a conception that posits not a “dualistic

⁵⁹ Sartre: *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (1958; first published as *L’Être et le Néant*, 1943), p. 600.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sartre: *Psychology of the Imagination* (1972, originally published 1940), p. 12.

bifurcation” of these registers, but their overlapping.⁶² This kind of model is found in the later philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, who explicitly resisted Sartre’s model: ‘Precisely because it dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to, the work of art teaches us to see and ultimately gives us something to think about as no analytical work can; for when we analyze an object, we find only what we have put into it.’⁶³ Whilst Merleau-Ponty’s meditations on painting and the imagination reach their climax in his late essay ‘Eye and Mind’ (1960), we find the philosopher in more direct dialogue with Sartre over these issues in the essay from which this passage is taken, ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,’ written in 1952 shortly before the two philosophers’ split and Merleau-Ponty’s resignation from *Les Temps Modernes*.⁶⁴

In his 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had been influenced by Sartre in attributing to the imagination a reduced importance in relation to perception. An integrated and tightly knit model of perception maintained the integrity of the perceiving subject that would not be compromised by a reversible relation with its objects, or by the hollows opened by the interventions of language in embodied perceptual experience. Perhaps despite himself (and for which he would later criticise his early work), Merleau-Ponty had given in to a dualism of subject and object, real and unreal, perception and imagination. As discussed in my introduction, in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,’ he allowed for a less monistic view of perception:⁶⁵

“We must therefore recognize that what is designated by the terms *glance*, *hand*, and in general *body* is a system of systems destined for the inspection of a world capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining hollows and

⁶² My analysis is indebted to Galen A Johnson – p28ff – and this is his phrase.

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty: ‘Indirect Language and the voices of Silence (1952), reprinted in Galen A. Johnson: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader – Philosophy and Painting* (1993), p.114.

⁶⁴ See Johnson’s introduction to this essay, ‘Structures and Painting,’ in *Ibid.* pp. 14-34. For a very useful discussion of ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ from an art-historical perspective, see Alex Potts: ‘Art Works, Utterances, and Things,’ in Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen (eds.): *Art and Thought* (2003), pp. 91-110. On the dialogue between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty specifically, see Marjorie Grene: ‘The Aesthetic Dialogue of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty,’ in Johnson op.cit. pp. 212-232; and Jon Stewart (ed.): *The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty* (1998).

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty would later devise his concept of ‘Flesh’ to articulate a less dualistic model of self and world; in a working note from May 1960, included in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty described this concept: “Flesh of the world, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment... That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (...), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world (...), they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping.” (p. 248)

reliefs, distances and deviations – a meaning – in the inconceivable flatness of being.”⁶⁶

The imagination here allows some access to the ‘silences’ and ‘hollows’ of both physical space and of language. Explicitly engaging with Sartre’s rejection of poetry and painting for prose (Sartre had argued that the former two consist merely of fabricated images unattached to the exigencies of reality, whilst the latter has the power to unveil the truth of a situation), Merleau-Ponty is at pains to stress that neither painting nor language has the capacity to transparently convey an exterior reality, but also that neither was entirely mute or divorced from the contingencies of the material world. The imagination is involved in working with the silences of visual and textual languages, fleshing out meanings existing there in potential. These ideas would find more explicit expression in ‘Eye and Mind’ where Merleau-Ponty would declare the imagination as giving to vision “that which clothes it within, the imaginary texture of the real.”⁶⁷ Here, Merleau-Ponty speaks of painting as infringing on stable distinctions: “Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible – painting scrambles all our categories, spreading out before us its oneiric universe or carnal essences, actualized resemblances, mute meanings.”⁶⁸

Merleau-Ponty’s meditations provide some ground from which to engage with the register of intense perceptual and imaginative experience conveyed by Michaux’s writings. Rather than Surrealist automatism, which aimed to reveal the subterranean machinations of the unconscious, Michaux’s drawing practice was rather a struggle for fuller consciousness. Following Michaux’s own account, Laurent Jenny sees in the production of his signs an analogue for the forces of his own becoming: “Painting for Michaux ... will replay the self’s negotiation with dissolution or compactness, inertia or movement, through the meeting of materials: the dissolving liquidity of watercolours, the rapidity of ink, the glue of gouache, and so on... [Painting] will also confront the subject with formal and imaginary feedback that paper offers it.”⁶⁹ This ‘imaginary feedback’ delivered by Michaux’s marks (described as “tiny crossroads of impressionability and event”⁷⁰) allowed the artist to, as he

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty: ‘Indirect Language,’ pp. 103-4. Galen Johnson comments: “Imagination remains a variant of perception, but the fabric of perception is more loosely knit, allowing interruptions and discontinuities, mixings, foldings and intertwinings between visible and invisible, real and imaginary.” (op.cit. p. 30)

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty: ‘Eye and Mind’ (1960), reprinted in Johnson op.cit. p. 126.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 130.

⁶⁹ Jenny: ‘Simple Gestures,’ in de Zegher op.cit. p. 190.

⁷⁰ Michaux: ‘To Draw the Flow of Time’ in Ibid. p. 7.

put it in a late text from the 1980s, “open to the world differently.”⁷¹ In this formulation, the imagination does not construct images to enable an *escape* from the world, but rather serves to embed the subject more firmly within it.

For Sartre, a fluid being is one “which is everywhere fleeing and yet everywhere similar to itself, which on all sides escapes yet on which one can float.”⁷² We might say the same of an imaginative process: in reciprocal dialogue with the mobile work of perception, it forges new patterns of connection and maintains the mobility and openness of cognitive and perceptual categories. ‘It alone manages to diagram without stilling,’⁷³ writes Massumi: ‘Imagination is felt-thought, thought only-felt, felt as only thought can be: insensibly unstill.’⁷⁴ This insensible unstillness suggests a self-differing, transformative movement that escapes confines yet remains buoyant. As it is compellingly rendered in Michaux’s writings then, a ‘material imagination’ accompanies the immersive micro-dynamics of process in drawing, registering and recasting the mobility of its liquid agents. This affective dimension of process cannot be absorbed into any symbolic schema. But to admit this does not then consign materiality to the limited role of meaning’s remainder. Rather, it is fully insinuated into the dynamic, associative and affective ground that renders such creative practices compelling.

Beuys and Materiality

Discussions centred on a phenomenological encounter with Beuys’s work remain rare. The critical debate surrounding the artist is often repetitive, tending to articulate itself around a celebration or denigration of the artist’s verbally-stated project.⁷⁵ Offering a productive alternative, Alex Potts has recently discussed Beuys’s sculptural materials in

⁷¹ Michaux: *Par des Traits* (1984), unpag.

⁷² Sartre: *Being and Nothingness*, p. 607.

⁷³ Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), p. 134.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 134.

⁷⁵ One significant recent exception is found in the work of Gene Ray. Addressing the accusation levelled against Beuys that he did not engage with the trauma of Nazism and the Holocaust, Ray argues that, although it was not elaborated in his verbal statements, Beuys did in fact engage with the Holocaust in powerful ways in his work. In this, Ray moves beyond a reliance on Beuys’s explicit statements, and rather sees the artist’s project as necessarily embedded within wider discursive and representational systems. In this way, by unharnessing Beuys’s signature materials (fat and felt), from their redemptive moorings in Beuys’s rhetoric, Ray plugs them into an altogether more disturbing signifying economy associated with the documents and testimonies emerging from the death camps. Nevertheless, although Ray does appeal to his experience of an encounter with Beuys’s late installations, he does not offer any sustained exploration of what it is like to look at Beuys’s work. See Gene Ray: ‘Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime,’ in Ray op.cit. pp. 55-74.

terms very different from those prescribed by the artist; instead, Beuys's work is discussed in relation to the work of other 1960s avant-garde practitioners: Eva Hesse, Jannis Kounellis and Claes Oldenberg.⁷⁶ Potts addresses issues of medium and materiality amidst the commodification and changing industrial conditions in the 1960s. The imagination is an essential component in shaping his response to the works discussed: in viewing Kounellis's lumps of coal, Potts cannot but register the memory of glowing embers; Hesse's resins are re-animated with projections of gelatinous motion; we wear Beuys's felt suit, he argues, in the 'mind's eye.'⁷⁷ For Potts, each work with which he engages "is an everyday material thing that we see and feel immediately, but ... still just foils being taken for what it literally is."⁷⁸ Such art offers resistance to the dominant illusions of the consumer economy that 'human ideas and desires could somehow be fully lodged in material things.'⁷⁹ The tension that Potts identifies between the production of a 'heightened awareness of our interactions with the material world,' and the 'literal and basic' means by which this is accomplished, is powerfully at work in Beuys's drawing.⁸⁰

To take Beuys's 1949 watercolour drawing, *Lift*, made on a piece of roughly torn card (Figure 4.20). Pressing heavily on the boundary between drawing and painting, the surface is dominated by an amorphous, bleeding field of red watercolour wash, which disperses itself unevenly over the centre and left-hand parts of the sheet. At times concentrated, at times diffuse, the seeping progress of the pigment has been recorded, soaked into the porous ground. This field is punctuated by lacunae, gaps which reveal the passage of a previous, more diluted wash beneath. To the centre and right, the material conversations become more varied and intricate. With the water now evaporated, the residues describe intricate liquid narratives, attesting to the discovery of torn edges, slow decelerations into adjoining pools, complex osmotic transactions between fluid bodies. To the right of centre, a red diagonal column, bleeding at each end, is prominent in its bold colour against pale surroundings. Its shape is vaguely phallic, the surrounding forms might suggest hip joints, the bleeding red surface could evoke menstruation; but these biological and physiological associations are not securely founded. Such resonances are alive here, but it would be a

⁷⁶ Potts: 'Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s,' *Art History* (Volume 27, Number 2, April, 2004), pp. 283-304.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 300

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 301

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 300.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 302

mistake to allow an imposition of tidy linguistic determinations to overwhelm the compelling *non-signifying* narratives of material progress also dramatized.

To explore Beuys's experimental engagement with the materiality of his means, we might recall his invocation of Joyce. Joyce's *Ulysses* has been subject to many rather solemn interpretations, which assume the novel to be a vast repository of trans-historical significance.⁸¹ This bias operates at the expense of an engagement with the comic, ironic and radically sceptical aspects of Joyce's project. Without wanting to bring the artist and the writer into too close an alignment, it might also be noted that the majority of reactions to Beuys, fuelled by his utopian and increasingly mythologizing pronouncements, have focused upon the idealistic, ritual and earnest aspects of his agenda. Beuys himself, whilst for the most part encouraging such readings, sometimes sounds more measured notes. In 1979 he discussed his self-presentation as shaman: "My intention is obviously not to return to such earlier cultures but to stress the idea of transformation and of substance... It is a reminder of a constant human need to come into intense physical and psychological contact with the material world, to understand and feel its energetic substance rather than skim over the surface of experience."⁸²

In thinking about Beuys's drawings (and, indeed, his work more broadly), we may well be sceptical of the way in which they have been over-determined by the artist's rhetoric. This, however, does not mean that their meanings are generated in an entirely *arbitrary* way. Materials are not Saussurean signs, negative entities constituted only by relations of pure difference. While it is compelling to view materials within a relational spectrum, it is important to acknowledge that this spectrum is by no means limited to issues of signification. Importantly, Beuys drew significance (albeit selectively) from the particular physical properties, history and behaviour of the materials he employed. Felt, made from matted animal hair, does insulate; copper is an effective conductor; honey is the product of a certain communal process; blood is iron-rich and circulates through the body. Of course, how these qualities are then extrapolated to signify larger social models or gender identities needs to be discussed critically. Yet such an attempt to derive meanings from the singular tendencies, capacities and associations of a heterogeneous array of materials might still prove valuable. Keen attention is paid to the specific physical properties of his material

⁸¹ See Michael Hollington: 'Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time,' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.): *Modernism, A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (1976), p. 438.

⁸² Beuys in Tisdall, op.cit. 1979, p. 23.

means: colour, texture, dilution, capillarity, porosity, viscoscity, solubility, etc. And these all with a psychological or imaginative correlate: an 'imaginary texture of the real,' to use Merleau-Ponty's phrase. Akin to a kind of everyday alchemy, and aligning in this respect with a Deleuzian 'nomad' or 'minor' science, a Beuysian model for drawing would progress through an invested, experimental and sustained engagement with a range of substances.⁸³

Joyce delivers an invigorating model for such experimental attentiveness to the substance of language. In a well-known passage from *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus muses: "Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies... Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells."⁸⁴ While employing some remarkable onomatopoeia, Joyce also prompts reflection on the very nature of the visible. The literalist project dreams of compelling material self-evidence; but how is it that 'what you see is what you see?' It may well be that 'matter cannot be reabsorbed by the image;' but how is the object absorbed by the subject? And what kinds of conversions, transductions and heightenings occur in that absorption? Broodthaers used liquidity to undermine assumptions about the communicative capacities of language, and to give visibility to the kinds of prohibitions that a commodified culture industry places upon any artist with radical aspirations. But the work of art is not just the communication of messages; it can also embody a wider mode of comportment towards the world and its objects. And equally, from the viewer's perspective, material qualities do not remain external to imaginative, associative, cognitive and affective circuits for long. The 'mobility and cross-prompting'⁸⁵ of human thought soon begins to rhythm the fabric of the visible. This is to suggest, then, and as is powerfully upheld in Beuys's drawing practice,

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari oppose 'nomad,' 'itinerant,' or 'minor' science to 'major' or 'State' science. The latter, they argue, impose sets of concepts and theoretical apparatuses onto mute matter. The former develops eccentrically, solving contingent problems by following specific material properties ('singularities'), and working from principles of becoming, heterogeneity, and continuous variation. "Royal science is inseparable from a 'hylomorphic' model implying both a form that organises matter and a matter prepared for the form ... [M]atter, in nomad science, is never prepared and therefore homogenized matter, but is essentially laden with singularities (which constitute a form of content)... From the point of view of nomad science, which presents itself as an art as much as a technique, the division of labour fully exists, but it does not employ the form-matter duality (...). Rather, it follows connections between singularities of matter and traits of expression, and lodges on the level of these connections, whether they be natural or forced." Deleuze and Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (1987), p. 369.

⁸⁴ James Joyce: *Ulysses* (1994, originally published 1922), p. 45.

⁸⁵ Barbara Maria Stafford: *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (1999), p. 138.

that the goal of sheer, mute literalism is as mythical as that of pure, transparent semiotic presence.

Coda

The kind of 'material imagination' I have been outlining, and which is compellingly expressed in the writings of Michaux, seems to depend on the dynamism of the drawing process. This process, however, as it is evidenced by the work, is an activity now stilled, and, as in Chapter 1, we must again confront the problem of stasis. The viewer is presented with deposits that *attest* to a liquid mobility, but do not retain it. Bois articulated the movement away from solidity and stability in terms of entropic dispersal. But do all processes of 're-liquification' produce disorder and disarray? What of the active, re-organising faculties of the subject? Is entropy the best way to think about emergence?

In 1997, Brazilian-born artist Vik Muniz began a series of works entitled *Drawings with Chocolate*, in which drawings were made with chocolate syrup after (often iconic) photographs.⁸⁶ The photographic image is projected onto the surface on which Muniz then draws; and, before the syrup dries (which only allows him about an hour to complete the task), the drawing is photographed. The prints are then 'magnified over a hundred times,' a shift in scale that aims to establish a more powerful relationship with painting.⁸⁷ In 1999, Muniz chose to make a drawing after an image of Beuys that was taken during his 1970 performance, *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony*, and later included in Tisdall's Guggenheim catalogue (Figures 4.21 and 4.22). It shows Beuys holding aloft a blackboard drawing made during the performance. The chocolate varies from pools of deep, swelling umber to lighter whisps and dribbles that describe fingers, folds of fabric and facial features. The glistening sheen of these expertly managed dashes and blobs is retained. The dynamics of movement and stasis become quite complex: the original photograph 'solidified' an ongoing performance; that photograph was then re-animated by Muniz in the act of drawing; the gloupy material mobility was then captured again by the camera.

In the process of viewing, the photograph is again re-animated, re-liquified. The work sets in train a whole range of complex perceptual, cognitive and affective associations. Careful attention has been paid to the specific nature of the material. Muniz notes that

⁸⁶ Muniz's subjects include Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, Charles Baudelaire and Sigmund Freud.

⁸⁷ Vik Muniz: *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer* (2005), p. 76 and p. 79.

‘chocolate makes you think of love, luxury, romance, obesity, scatology, stains, guilt, etc.’⁸⁸ Chocolate carries a host of powerful sensory qualities connected with taste, smell, texture and colour, as well as a rich range of conceptual and historical associations. Chocolate has a privileged relationship to pleasure and desire, which is why it was such an important element within Duchamp’s *Bachelor Machine*. Indeed, Beuys had mixed chocolate together with *braunkreuz* to paint the sign for his televised 1964 declaration *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated*. The material, then, brings with it a whole constellation of sensory, psychological and art-historical resonances.

But not only this: together, these marks form a basic but irresistible visual illusion, whereby a material blob is married to acute representational precision. Muniz describes his images as crude forms of illusion – it is impossible to be truly deceived by them – yet they are fascinating because it is also impossible *not* to recognize their subject matter. This is hardly the kind of ‘magic’ that Broodthaers once warned against in Beuys’ work, but it might instead point to a less spectacular appeal to the imagination fostered by the scaled-down appeal of drawing. When looking at Muniz’s images, the suspension of disbelief is unwilling: we are neither able to perceive only amorphous liquid matter, nor can each globule be fully sublimated to disavow its sticky brown objecthood. Rather, these elements are mutually embroiled, their overlap generating a compelling friction which indicates not only our embeddedness in the material thickness of the world, but also our desire to draw this thickness closer into the co-ordinates of our experience: to intensify relations, recognize patterns and generate associations.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 76

Analogue and Digital

‘The meaning of the apparent ahistoricity of drawing is determined by the other technologies of representation that co-exist with it at any given moment... Drawing becomes ‘archaic’ in the age of mechanical reproduction, yet this archaism makes contact with the tactility of the most up to date mediums. And if writing with light began by imitating drawing, as analogue photography itself becomes an archaic medium, drawing will aspire to the condition of the photograph, not as a projective representation, but rather as a resemblance produced by contact.’

Michael Newman¹

What would be the effect of describing drawing as an analogue technology? Aside from the insightful analysis of Michael Newman, drawing is an unfamiliar term in the frequently constructed opposition between the analogue and the digital; within the visual arts, that binary has been set in play predominantly in relation to photography and the moving image.² There may well be good reasons for this lack of enthusiasm for involving drawing in these issues. After all, does it really make any sense to describe drawing as specifically *analogue*? The connection might seem tenuous, given that the term is most frequently used within the field of electronics to describe a type of signal. ‘Analogue’ does, however, have a broader frame of reference, as I will elaborate. In Chapter 1, I argued that drawing had been powerfully aligned with the cinematic in Matisse’s practice as early as 1941. In this chapter, I want now to explore the trajectory of that conjunction as it arrives in contemporary art, revisiting some issues connected with film and cinema, but mainly focusing on the alignments between drawing and analogue modes. Over the course of my discussion, however, the relevance of the opposition between analogue and digital will become uncertain, shift ground, and migrate into unexpected regions.

¹ Michael Newman: ‘The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing,’ in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (2003), p. 105

² See, for example, Laura Mulvey: ‘The Index and the Uncanny,’ in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed.): *Time and the Image* (2000), pp. 139-148, and ‘Passing Time: Reflections on Cinema from a New Technological Age,’ *Screen* (Volume 45, Number 2, Summer 2004), pp. 142-155.

The impetus to explore the alignment between drawing and the analogue was provided by a recent retrospective of Tacita Dean's work at Schaulager Basel. Entitled 'Analogue,' it was the most comprehensive show of her work to date.³ In her brief catalogue essay, Dean, with characteristic eloquence, explicitly states her commitment to the term, in opposition to the digital:

'Analogue, it seems, is a description – a description, in fact, of all the things that I hold dear. It is a word that means proportion and likeness, and is, according to one explanation, a representation of an object that resembles the original; not a transcription or a translation but an equivalent in a parallel form: continuously variable, measurable, and material. Everything we can quantify physically is analogue: length, width, voltage and pressure... Thinking too becomes analogue when it is materialised into a concrete form; when it is transmuted into lines on paper or marks on a board. It is as if my frame of mind is analogue when I draw... [The digital] just does not have the means to create poetry; it neither breathes nor wobbles, but tidies up our society, correcting it and then leaves no trace. I wonder if this is because it is not born of the physical world, but is impenetrable and intangible. It is too far from drawing, where photography and film have their roots: the imprint of light on emulsion, the alchemy of circumstance and chemistry, marks upon their support.'⁴

Whilst I will return to other suggestive aspects of this passage in due course, it is worth noting here Dean's emphasis upon *drawing*. Best known for her analogue films, this emphasis is surprising (the most unexpected lesson of the Schaulager show was how central drawing is to understanding both Dean's development as an artist and her current practice). The alignment between drawing and other analogue media is explicit: drawing's inscribed marks serve as an origin point for photographic practices. Indeed, the scope of the term 'analogue' is also broadened to describe a certain 'frame of mind,' an idea to which we will return.

One initial problem Dean presents is the task of finding a functional definition of 'analogue.' As she suggests, the word derives from the Greek *analogos*, meaning 'proportionate' (*ana-* + *logos*, meaning *reason* or *ratio*). Its most common technical use is within the field of electronics, where it describes a type of signal that is continuous in both time and amplitude (a microphone, for example, registers the pressure from sound waves, which is converted by a transducer into a corresponding change in voltage). Analogue

³ 'Tacita Dean, Analogue: Films, Photographs, Drawings 1991-2006' was held at Schaulager Basel, 13th May – 24th September 2006.

⁴ Tacita Dean: 'Analogue,' in Theodora Vischer and Isabel Friedli (eds.): *Tacita Dean: Analogue – Drawings 1991-2006* (2006), p. 8.

signals thus move across *qualitatively* different registers (sound wave into electrical charge). Its progress, too, is subject to interference or ‘noise;’ external factors like temperature or pressure will affect the quality of the transmission. Unlike with a digital signal, which is composed of a series of discrete 1/0 units of information, every value of an analogue signal is in principle significant. That is, whereas in digital technologies an input value of 0.9 will be rounded up and registered as a full 1, within an analogue system, every shift in value is proportionately represented. The analogue, then, is ‘continuously variable.’

The development of the modern programmable digital computer is rooted in the code-breaking projects of World War II. Although there are digital technologies that do not operate under a binary logic, the vast majority do, and it is the transformation of a signal into binary ‘1/0’ data that I will take to be characteristic of digital media in this chapter. Any analogue signal can be transformed into digital data with the use of an Analogue-to-Digital Converter (ADC) in a process called ‘sampling.’⁵ As the most basic, fundamental expression of difference, the ‘1/0’ binary code has a thoroughly arbitrary relation to the type of input it represents: sound, light, heat, pressure – all can be converted into the same kind of 1/0 sequence. Not only this, but, conversely, a digital data set can then be used to generate various different types of file – image, sound, text, etc. – files that have no intrinsic connection either to the input signal or the data set. As media theorist Friedrich Kittler writes:

‘The general digitalization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface. [...] Inside the computers themselves, everything becomes a number: quantity without image, sound, or voice. And once optical fibre networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitalized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. With numbers, everything goes. Modulation, transformation, synchronization; delay, storage, transposition; scrambling, scanning, mapping – a total media link on a digital base will erase the very concept of medium.’⁶

We cannot say that the analogue is a *medium* exactly; it is rather a set of conditions under which the concept of medium itself makes sense. As Mark Hansen comments, digital media are no longer ‘motivated.’ The digital no longer has ‘an elective affinity with the concrete reality it presents,’ and so ‘the very task of deciding what medial form a given rendering

⁵ The accuracy of a digital signal will depend upon the quantization level (or ‘bit depth’), which describes the number of different values that can be represented by a particular sample. This is measured in bits – an 8-bit quantization level can describe 256 different values per sample, a 16-bit level, 65,536 values.

⁶ Friedrich Kittler: *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999), pp. 1-2.

shall take no longer follows from the inherent differences between media (which have become mere surface differences).'⁷ Debates around the status of the medium, rekindled recently by the work of Rosalind Krauss, have concentrated predominantly on its provision of a meaningful set of conventions and criteria by which to gauge the validity and quality of artistic contributions. In negotiating this debate with reference to the analogue, we will find useful Newman's alternative formulation of the artistic medium as a particular 'concretion of time.'⁸

Since the late 1980s, digital media have come increasingly to dominate visual mass culture: Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) is used to construct increasingly sophisticated illusions on the big screen; graphics software packages such as Photoshop (first released in 1990) ease the advertiser's task of retouching or 'correcting' media images;⁹ digital spreadsheets facilitate the efficient design and modification of newspaper layouts. The impact of digital media has been no less felt in the visual arts, and the permissions and new potentials it offers have been taken up, often with a considerable degree of self-reflexivity, by artists of all kinds. The incorporation of digital technology into contemporary photographic practice is very well known and extensively documented (Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky are among the most celebrated). Since the 1990s there has been a growing new field of artistic endeavour exploring the energizing possibilities opened up by the Internet. Yet for the purposes of this chapter, I want to retain sharp focus on *drawing* as seen through the lens of the encounter between analogue and digital. There has also, since the 1950s, been a rich vein of creative exploration into the potential of computers and algorithmic coding for the production of drawings.¹⁰ This fascinating field is beyond my expertise at this point, and I will not be addressing it here. Indeed, there is clearly an enormous range of practices relevant to my argument, but, for the purposes of this chapter, I will limit my discussion primarily to the work of Tacita Dean (with one or two sideways glances). My engagement with digital drawing, then, will be largely restricted to considerations of a theoretical nature.

⁷ Mark Hansen: *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004), pp. 21-2.

⁸ Newman: 'Medium and Event in the Work of Tacita Dean,' in *Tacita Dean. Recent Films and Other Works* (2001), unpag.

⁹ Although it should be noted that such retouchings and manipulations had been used extensively for over a century before such digital tools became available.

¹⁰ Artists of interest include Roman Verostko, Harold Cohen, Lillian Schwartz, Mark Wilson and Vera Molnar. My thanks to James Faure Walker for introducing me to the 'Algorists,' and for his guidance on this issue.

Until recently, drawings produced by digital means have not received much art critical attention. However, since the 1980s, AutoCAD (Computer Aided Design) has increasingly come to dominate industrial, architectural and commercial design drawing. The mouse or stylus replaces the pencil, pen or brush, and the grain of the paper is substituted for the frictionless, untouchable luminosity of the computer monitor. Digital Drawing Tablets have been available for the home computer for over twenty years. Here, a sensitized surface acts as a page, and a stylus is used like a pencil to draw onto it. The drawn image often does not appear on the tablet's surface itself, but rather on a separate monitor (although this is not the case for Wacom's Cintiq range, for example, which incorporates an LCD into the tablet itself, so that the marks appear just below the surface as it is worked). There is an infinitesimal delay perceived between pressing on the tablet and seeing the result appear. Sensitivity to the pressure and tilt of the stylus is now very sophisticated, as is the replication of visual effects generated by different brushes, pencils, crayons and erasers.

Perhaps the most obvious point about digital drawing instruments is that they are not as varied, materially, as the drawing tools that they often attempt to duplicate. In the last chapter, I explored the imaginative, conceptual and affective resonance of engagements with the truant mobility of a range of different liquids in drawing. Such substances as watercolour, ink, blood, chocolate and corrosive chemical solutions allowed Beuys, for example, to have his ideas first 'digested' by the material world. My emphasis was on the artist's responsive engagement with the run and bleed of liquids, and with the complex associations that different materials evoke. Literal liquidity or dryness do not have any purchase in digital production, where the hand comes into contact only with the durable plastics of computer hardware. An optical engagement with a screen replaces the varied tactile engagements with different papers and drawing tools; and the pixel (which is only a device and not a given), replaces the powdery dispersal of charcoal or the liquid truancy of ink. Nevertheless, to be viewed, digital data must be converted into some perceptible form. Most often this happens thanks to a computer monitor, but digital drawings are also printed and projected in various ways. In taking physical form, the data no longer consist only of abstract 1/0 combinations, but rather are now exposed to the contingency of the material world.

The stunning progress of digital technologies towards ever-higher resolutions has meant that it is often extremely difficult to distinguish, for example, a digital photograph from an

analogue one on the basis of visual evidence alone.¹¹ This presents some significant problems, especially with regard to the importance attached to the recognition of the *indexical* properties of analogue images. The indexical status of the photograph has been posited as perhaps *the* central quality absent from digital media. As we have seen in previous chapters, the drawn line, too, has been classed as an indexical trace, and this is an aspect of drawing that has also become increasingly significant to theorists of the medium: the drawn mark as the direct physical inscription of the hand. But what significance can be claimed for a sign's indexical status if that status is invisible to its viewer? A digital print can replicate with extreme accuracy many kinds of manually inscribed marks, making it almost impossible to determine whether a mark was made by the heads of the printer cartridge or by the pressure of the draughtsman's hand. There are, of course, also many types of drawing practice that modify or *distress* the ground in such a way as to foreground the physical work of drawing as contact between materials and surfaces: the weight of the hand as it inscribes a mark; the slight buckling of the paper as it receives pigment; the varying textures of the tiny deposits left by pencils, crayons, inks, pastels. That is, much drawing dramatizes, often in small ways, the material quiddity of its production and physical composition. Nevertheless, the problem does not evaporate, and the danger of an inappropriate over-investment in the indexical at the expense of other important considerations must be acknowledged. That said, the issue of the trace and its vulnerability to degradation is self-consciously dramatized in much contemporary drawing (including, prominently, that of Dean). Erasure in drawing, as we saw in Chapter 3, enacts a significantly different kind of unbecoming from digital data, and the stakes of that difference are worthy of elaboration.

What follows is a consideration of the 'analogue' properties of drawing, based largely around an engagement with Dean's blackboard drawings. In discussing the analogue and in seeking out its potentials in relation to the digital, I do not intend any technophobic invective against the latter. This will not be an appeal for a regression to more ostensibly trustworthy or straightforward times. Nor do I seek to downplay the extraordinary new

¹¹ In the above-cited essay by Dean, she insists on the relative inadequacy of digital photographic technologies to capture visual appearance, when compared to their analogue predecessors: 'We are giving up our ability to make as near as perfect simulacrum of our visual world, which digital still fails to replicate despite its increasing proliferation of pixels, and we are doing so willingly.' (in Vischer, op.cit. p. 8). Ultimately, a distinction framed in terms of chromatic range or accuracy will most likely soon be rendered problematic as digital technologies become ever more powerful, and their levels of differentiation surpass even those of miniscule grains of pigment.

potentials of the digital; its enabling capabilities clearly surpass those of the analogue in crucial respects. Instead, rather than indiscriminately counterposing the relative value of these modes, or regarding the one's triumph over the other as inevitable, I hope that, in seeing drawing through the lens of the analogue, some better descriptions can be built of material practices and processes that remain compelling. Not only this, but, following Brian Massumi's Deleuzian theorization of the analogue, I shall be extending my concerns away from these specifically technical registers towards a consideration of the analogue and digital as opening onto opposed models of embodied mental activity and of emergence. This argument will hinge on the reduction, in digital media, of heterogeneous inputs to a pre-arrayed, homogeneous series of discrete units of binary opposition. Ongoing transformative complexity is reduced to the most basic units possible, before being re-configured and re-articulated into a pre-delimited data set. This is at odds with the kind of continuous qualitative transformations at work in analogue systems in their broad sense. Indeed it will be thinking and feeling, or rather thought-feeling, emergent and intense, that ultimately need to be regarded in terms other than the computation of pre-ordained codes.

Blackboards

Long thought lost and only rediscovered in a London storeroom in 2004, *Sixteen Blackboards* consists of a series of sixteen photographs (each 50 x 50 cm) of a single square blackboard (in reality two 4' x 8' horizontal boards joined together), taken by Tacita Dean over a period of weeks whilst studying at the Slade in 1991 (Figure 5.1 i–xvi). The exact timing of each photograph and the length of the intervals between shots were not recorded. What we are presented with is an uneven record of the incremental augmentation and erasure of various ideas speculatively embodied on this dark, dry, chalky surface. *Sixteen Blackboards* does not chart the ordered progress of a single scheme, but witnesses the emergence, recession and sometimes cohabitation of several lines of enquiry developing together and in each other's shadow. Whilst some images clearly relate to specific films made by Dean, many drawings and notes remain unanchored from particular works realised in other media. For example, there are references to Dean's *The Story of Beard* (realised in 1992 – see Figures 5.1ii and vii), to *The Martyrdom of St Agatha* (realised in 1994 – see Figures 5.1vii, ix, x and xi), and, self-reflexively, to *Sixteen Blackboards* itself (Figure

5.1xiv). But many of the boards display instead either the foggy remnants of notes and drawings that have been erased (Figures 5.1 viii, xii, xiii, xv), or plans for an unrealised project connected with feet (Figures 5.1 i, iii-vi). The words 'The Story of Perfect Feet' are written on Board 3 and are not erased until Board 6; yet seemingly it is an *imperfect* gait that most interests Dean: 'an Oedipus' (swollen foot) or 'a Byron' (with his club foot). Dean notes the connection between walking and film in the word 'footage,' and we will explore the filmic dimension of Dean's later blackboards in due course.¹²

The various markings, like thoughts and memories, have unequal life spans. Some details arrive in one image only to be scrubbed into a chalky cloud with the next photograph. Others are left intact longer, sometimes outliving the notes or images that initially provided their framing context by several boards. Some marks are only ever present as smudges: traces of thoughts that were put down and rubbed off too quickly to be registered by this sparsely punctuated, irregular cinema of drawing. When displayed in a single row, as at the Schaulager, the viewer is able to track the progression of motifs across the images.¹³ In the second half of the series (especially after Board 7), the cloud of erasures becomes denser, with new marks competing with a fog of partially erased half-legible chalk residues.

One significant aspect of *Sixteen Blackboards*, one of Dean's first exhibited works, is the priority it places on the sketch and on note-taking, foregrounding the coming-into-being of ideas. Drawing here is aligned with this mobile and contingent component of art's work, qualities in marked and perhaps surprising opposition to the stillness and stasis of many of Dean's films. The schematic, diagrammatic aspect of drawing was put to use most insistently by artists in the late 1960s and 70s involved with Process and Conceptual Art (vividly dramatized by Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings* exhibition of 1966),¹⁴ and this is a legacy to which Dean owes a debt. Yet, thinking about that late '60s / early '70s moment, there are two more obvious and explicit instances in which blackboards were substantially employed by artists; that is, by Joseph Beuys and Cy Twombly. Indeed, it is worth pausing

¹² Tacita Dean in conversation with the author, 1st December 2006. Dean explored the connection between walking and film in *Boots* (2003).

¹³ A 4 x 4 grid formation was used when originally shown at the Slade in 1992.

¹⁴ As Briony Fer has argued, however, Bochner's exhibition of photocopied drawings has little to do with the idea of process; see Fer: *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (2004), pp. 80-3.

on the properties and associations of the blackboard, which after all is not a very common support for drawing (beyond the classroom that is, and even there too it is now obsolete).¹⁵

Blackboards, in their most familiar context, are instrumental objects: surfaces designed to receive explanatory writings and drawings that accompany a taught lesson. They connote didactic instruction, and continue to carry such associations beyond the classroom context. Indeed, it was for explanatory (almost evangelical) purposes that Beuys employed blackboard drawings, and most of the drawings were made during (and to help illustrate) his taught classes and public lectures. Making explicit reference to the pedagogy of Rudolph Steiner, Beuys hoped that the boards would help to clarify and demonstrate his ideas. Never thought of as separate, autonomous aesthetic objects, the boards were tools to further the successful dissemination of ideas. As part of what Beuys regarded as creative 'capital,' the boards could take their place alongside other means of communication, as in *The Capital Room 1970-1977* (1980/4, Figure 5.2), which Beuys made for the 1980 Venice Biennale and which was later bought by the Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland. Here, numerous blackboards are displayed stacked together on a wall, lying horizontal or propped on the floor. They share the environment with a grand piano, speakers, film projectors and a screen, as well as other objects used in previous performances and actions. The boards diagram elements of a philosophical system: arrows connect differentiated states and processes; a dense web of concepts is woven as Beuys attempts to express his ambitious, synthesizing conceptual schema. Infused with a Romantic faith in the power of artistic production, Beuys's blackboards stand as relics of utopian aspiration.

Dean's relationship to Beuys is complex. By her own account, she was not drawing intentionally on this precedent when making her boards in 1991.¹⁶ Her use of the blackboard arose much more contingently from her need for a functional surface on which she could write notes for people and make small erasable sketches. Of course, this use of any surface that is to hand to make a drawing, and the self-conscious display of such a method, might recall Beuys's practice, as might the situation in which Dean made many of her subsequent blackboard drawings: performatively, in situ in the gallery space, and over a limited period of time. Indeed, although Dean plays down any strong influence of Beuys on her ideas and practice, he nevertheless does figure both implicitly and explicitly in several

¹⁵ Much classroom drawing is now done on digitized Interactive Whiteboards.

¹⁶ Dean in conversation with the author, 7th November 2006.

of her projects, and many things draw him into Dean's orbit. As well as the connection with the blackboard, Beuys was also included both as a maker and as a subject in 'An Aside,' the Hayward Touring Exhibition that Dean curated in 2005, and which was installed at the Camden Arts Centre, London.¹⁷ Indeed, she is currently undertaking a project to film inside the 'Block Beuys' installation at the Museum of Darmstadt.¹⁸

Nevertheless, by far the more conscious and explicit artistic touchstone for Dean's drawing is Cy Twombly. Dean produced an undergraduate dissertation on Twombly when she was studying at Falmouth in the late 1980s, and her concern with his work has persisted; in 2003 she gave a talk on the artist at the Dia Art Foundation in New York.¹⁹ When she first became interested in Twombly, it was for his negotiation of a classical tradition, rather than for his blackboard erasure drawings, but these latter have become the focus of more recent attention. In the mid-1950s, Twombly produced some six or eight works in wax crayon and chalk on rough canvas covered with black house paint. All but one of these are now lost (*Panorama*, 1955, still exists), and the series is known mainly through photographs. In direct dialogue with Pollock's all-over drip paintings, Twombly recodes the Action Painter's mark as a form of 'staccato graffiti.'²⁰ rather than Pollock's 'liquid, variegated, organic webbing,' he installs an awkward, jumpy, discontinuous texture of scrawled glyphs.²¹ As both homage and affront to Pollock's achievement, the series, in alignment with much of Twombly's output, is also placed in subversive relation to writing as tool for communication. If Beuys seemed to aim at transparency between his work and his ideas, Twombly's blackboard drawings operate at the opposite pole of the communicative register.

¹⁷ See Dean: *An Aside*, exhibition catalogue (2005). Significantly, perhaps, the two sculptures connected with Beuys included in this show date from 1946-7, at the very beginning of his artistic career and almost twenty years before he would gain the kind of fame and notoriety that he subsequently enjoyed.

¹⁸ Dean's sustained engagement with Marcel Broodthaers, with W.G Sebald, and with a Romantic visual language encourages an exploration of her relationship with Beuys. Beuys might join the other failed questors with whom Dean is evidently fascinated (Donald Crowhurst, Bas Jan Ader, Tristan), and will soon enter the small family of male artists to whom she has dedicated homages (Broodthaers, Smithson, Mario Merz). Some initial exploration of these relationships has been made by Mia Lerm Hayes: 'Post-War Germany and 'Objective Chance': W.G. Sebald, Joseph Beuys and Tacita Dean,' in Lisa Patt (ed.): *Searching for Sebald* (2006).

¹⁹ 'Tacita Dean on Cy Twombly,' lecture for the series 'Artists on Artists' at Dia Art Foundation, 9th October 2003 (unpublished).

²⁰ See Buchloh 'Hesse's Endgame: Facing the Diagram,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Eva Hesse Drawing*, exhibition catalogue (2006), p. 125

²¹ Kirk Varnedoe: *Cy Twombly, A Retrospective* (1994), p. 203

Yet Twombly's project is not limited to a critical dismantling of expressive and communicative effects. Between 1966 and 1972, he produced a second series of blackboard pictures, maintaining a dialogue with writing, but this time foregrounding too the aesthetic effects of repeated, cursive loops and their erased traces (Figure 5.3). The first results were shown at Leo Castelli Gallery in autumn 1967. The staccato edginess of the earlier works is replaced by a continuous, if still awkward, pattern of repeated ovals and slants. In this, they have been related to the Palmer Method exercises imposed upon schoolchildren learning to write.²² In 1976, Roland Barthes argued that Twombly's graphism functions outside the task of conveying messages, but rather is grounded in a certain permissive manual *expression*. That is, not expression as the conveyance of contents, but rather as the generation of the atmosphere that surrounds communicative action but remains entirely supplementary to it: 'Everything flows, and tumbles, showers like a fine rain or falls like grass – erasures made in indolence as though it were a question of giving a visibility to time, to the very tremor of time.'²³ Twombly presents everything about writing that is edited out of typed or word-processed documents. The typed code does not furnish its product with any evidence of the hesitation and flow, the tangled re-thinkings, the bodily momentums and excitations that accompany the activity of writing. In Twombly's work, graphic marks become 'indolent' diagrams of the hand's activity, without assertiveness or communicative determination but rather registering the 'tremor of time.'

It is the aesthetic and conceptual impact of this texture of traces and erasures that attracts Dean's interest. Dean's own blackboards do not operate under an iconoclastic impulse, nor do they indulge the unfettered somatic desires of the hand. Her marks are often legible and organised, yet this legibility is so surrounded by the dusty remnants of previous inscriptions – a kind of communicative 'noise' – that it is clearly at some distance from any Beuysian didactic project (not that that project exhausts the interest of Beuys's blackboards). Yet while the non-signifying erasures are foregrounded, these elements nevertheless interact with legible fragments of text, shapes, arrows and figures. If Dean has little in common with the proselytizing impulse of Beuys, her boards nevertheless retain a relationship to the diagrammatic function. Indeed, in its self-reflexive exhibition of the coming-into-being of

²² Varnedoe, op.cit. p. 216.

²³ Barthes: 'Non Multa Sed Multum,' (1976) translated by Henry Martin, in *Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper* (2004) p. 24.

creative ideas, *Sixteen Blackboards* constitutes something like a diagram of mental processes, a diagram of thought.

Diagrams of Thought

To say that *Sixteen Blackboards* can be viewed as a diagram of thought is to assert that the work *resembles* thought in some way, that it has an *iconic* aspect, in Peirce's vocabulary. As Michael Leja has recounted, Peirce's idea of iconic resemblance was by no means limited to the visual register. Signs did not have to *look like* their referent to resemble them: 'Peirce classified as icons both mimetic images and diagrams, both illusionistic landscape paintings and maps.'²⁴ Maps or diagrams, then, might function as kinds of analogues in the way that Dean herself indicated in the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay: '[Analogue] means proportion and likeness, and is, according to one explanation, a representation of an object that resembles the original; not a transcription or a translation but an equivalent in a parallel form... Thinking too becomes analogue when it is materialised into a concrete form; when it is transmuted into lines on paper or marks on a board.' I am interested to explore the way in which *Sixteen Blackboards* figures mental processes, the way in which it constructs this exploratory, contingent, experimental phase of creative activity. The boards are both a product of creative thinking and a record, a making-visible, of that process. Dean suggests that thinking becomes analogue when it is manifested in some material form. But could it also be that, following the implication of this work, we might formulate a model of mental activity that is itself physical, plastic, *analogue*?

Sixteen Blackboards provides a reconstructed visual record of a developmental process. The original blackboard on which these workings were performed no longer exists. Photographs were taken at chosen intervals in the process, without prior knowledge of the board's future states. The work is retrospective in that it is a self-consciously re-organised account of a process, but at each interval, when a photograph was taken, the future progress of the board was uncertain. Within this discontinuous sequence, aspects of continuity are established: each board takes its place on a trajectory in the course of which some elements

²⁴ Michael Leja: 'Peirce, Visuality, and Art,' in *Representations* (Issue 72, Fall 2000), p. 112. Peirce himself produced what he called 'Existential Graphs' for his ideas, of which he said: 'I place a high valuation upon my [system of] Existential Graphs... The use of it arises from its furnishing as icon of thought which in formal respects is of the highest exactitude.' (Quoted by Leja, pp. 101-2).

persist and others are erased. While the cinematic aspects of this serial structure will be explored in due course, in thinking about a diagram of thought, I want here to focus on the layering of time within each image, what Barthes described as ‘rendering effacement legible.’²⁵ Indeed, from the first photograph, Dean’s blackboard was always a kind of palimpsest. Erasures of previous markings are visible at the top of the image, and this quality is only intensified as the series of images progresses: marks and signs are constantly being produced, effaced, superseded. What Dean finds extraordinary in Twombly’s work is insistently demonstrated here: an aesthetics that foregrounds the emergence and recession, the persistence and echo of drawn marks, qualities that are absent from digital practices.

Since Freud’s celebrated 1925 essay ‘Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad,’ this kind of palimpsest has provided a suggestive metaphor for the perceptual and mnemonic apparatus of the mind. The Mystic Writing Pad is composed of three layers: a wax slab on which lies a sheet of wax paper, which in turn is covered by a more durable sheet of celluloid. Any stylus can be used to write onto the celluloid sheet, which presses the wax paper onto the slab, recording the marks. The celluloid protects the fragile wax paper from damage. When necessary, the two sheets can be lifted from the slab to provide a newly inscribable surface, ready to receive new impressions. In this apparently simple system, Freud sees a compelling (if imperfect) model of mental processes. Consciousness holds a protective layer guarding against dangerous external stimuli, and the ‘appearance and disappearance of writing’ on the wax paper can be compared ‘with the flickering up and passing away of consciousness in the process of perception.’²⁶ Not only this, but the wax slab, which retains the trace of all impressions, corresponds, for Freud, to the unconscious. The unconscious stretches out feelers into the world through perception/consciousness and immediately withdraws them once it experiences the ensuing excitations. The discontinuities enacted by the sudden removal of the sheets from the slab are, for Freud, analogous to this withdrawal of cathexis by the unconscious, a withdrawal which produced a discontinuous current of innervation that he regarded as characteristic of mental life.²⁷ Freud explicitly rejects the blackboard as a model of such mental activity because of its failure to adequately preserve the trace. Yet the blackboard *plus photography* removes the problem of preservation and

²⁵ Barthes, op.cit. p. 31.

²⁶ Freud: ‘A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad’ (1925), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19 (1955), p. 230.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 230-2.

yet retains a rendering of the physicality, thickness and density of the trace, as opposed to simply a 'flickering' of thought.

A number of art historians have offered suggestive accounts of the resonances between the Mystic Writing Pad and certain graphic practices.²⁸ Here I am less concerned with the formulation of a model of the unconscious, than with the stress that Freud places upon the physicality of mental processes, what Derrida has discussed as 'breaching' or 'pathbreaking.' The mental trace is forged through contact with the resistance of the surface: 'Breaching, the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path. Which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached.'²⁹ Such a dynamic, plastic conception of mental activity has been developed significantly in recent years in the field of neuroscience. That is, a conception of the brain as always in formation, with its neuronal structure 'sculpted' in relation to the subject's repeated engagements with the external world. The 'primary repertoire' of neurons with which we are born is ergonomically 'pruned' through the repetition of experience, developing more defined and structured sets of connective webs (the 'secondary repertoire'). Important here is the sense of the formation of the mental apparatus through *contact*. It is this physicality of the inscription process that is so insistently foregrounded in Dean's blackboard drawings. Chalk marks have been rubbed, smudged, scumbled, effaced, overdrawn; the chalky residues are testament to the physical work of removal and re-inscription. Effaced marks gradually recede over several boards, and new drawings emerge from an already layered and worked surface. Yet this 'diagram of thought' appears quite far from a model of ergonomic efficiency toward which brains are supposed to tend. Different ideas emerge together in interference, the echoes of one persisting in the space in which another arises. Dean presents an enlivening structure of mental activity that contests the streamlining characteristic of the subject proposed as uniform and acquiescent. If there is a long history of the idea of art as a 'device' for resisting uniformity and making the world

²⁸ See, for example, David Lomas: *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (2000), p. 18ff; Rosalind Krauss: *The Optical Unconscious* (1996), pp. 54ff; Tamara Trodd: 'The Apparatus of Drawing,' in *Mediums and Technologies of Art Beyond Modernism* (PhD Thesis, London: University College London, 2005); and Joanne Morra: 'Drawing Machine: Working Through the Materiality of Rauschenberg's Dante and Derrida's Freud,' in Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra (eds.): *The Prosthetic Impulse – From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (2006), pp. 48-63.

²⁹ Derrida: 'Freud and the Scene of Writing,' in *Writing and Difference* trans. and with an introduction by Alan Bass (1978), p. 200.

strange again, it is only recently that this radical agency has also been positioned within the dynamic, plastic space of the brain's neuronal structure. Norman Bryson writes:

'In the traditional accounts of the avant-garde that were forged during the era of modernism, avant-garde art tends to be portrayed as significant yet marginal, operating in a separate aesthetic domain away from the central motivating forces of society located in the spheres of economics, politics and technology. But if the central arena of cultural development is the 'neural interface,' those art forms that are able to directly access the inner activity of the brain have the potential to create new configurations of image, space, and time, to forge new pathways in the mind/world nexus, that can challenge dominant forms of cultural expression on their own ground.'³⁰

Towards the end of this chapter I will return to this embodied, plastic conception of mental activity, looking further at its *qualitative* dimensions in relation to the analogue. For now, though, I want to emphasize the formulation of mental processes as figured by the inscription and erasure of marks. Here we can set Dean's blackboards in relation to William Kentridge's 'drawings for projection,' about which I will also have more to say in due course. Although working in very different contexts, there are several ways in which Dean and Kentridge could be productively compared, for example in their methods of avowing the past, their implementation of oblique narrative, their comportments towards the obsolescent, etc. For now I want to pause briefly on the way in which both artist's figure movement through drawing (Kentridge has referred to drawing as 'a slow motion version of thought'³¹). As Kentridge works over a single charcoal drawing, erasing and re-drawing, he periodically records each stage in one or two film frames (Figures 5.4). Each shot of the resultant film records the progress of a single drawing thus reworked, and the dynamic image becomes a texture of erasures, with traces of the drawn marks from previous frames still visible in subsequent ones: 'each erasure leaves a snail-trail of what has been.'³² With only a single drawing for each shot, this form of production contrasts with the animator's proliferation of separate sheets.³³ In discussing Kentridge's work, Krauss opposed his texture of visible erasures to the fantasies of unfettered transformative power envisaged by Eisenstein in relation to animations like those of Walt Disney. As Kentridge's characters and scenes transform themselves before our eyes, a 'drag' of erased traces trails in their

³⁰ Norman Bryson: 'Introduction: The Neural Interface,' in Warren Neidich: *Blow Up: Photography, Cinema and the Brain* (2003), pp. 18-19.

³¹ William Kentridge in conversation with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: 'Interview,' in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Dan Cameron and J.M. Coetzee: *William Kentridge* (1999), p. 8.

³² Kentridge: "'Fortuna:" Neither Programme Nor Chance in the Making of Images,' in *Ibid*, p. 114.

³³ Kentridge in conversation with Christov-Bakargiev, *Ibid*. p. 8.

wake: 'a resistance or pressure,' Krauss argues, against an illusion of 'weightless fluidity.'³⁴ As with Dean's blackboard drawings, there is a materially dense medium through which movement takes place. Introducing a relation between this kind of palimpsest and photographic technology, Kentridge makes another suggestive comparison: 'There is a great affinity between the velvety grey tones of an X-ray and the softness of charcoal dust brushed onto paper.'³⁵ X-rays dramatize *resistance* and *passage through* very powerfully. Although the thrust of Kentridge's comparison is aesthetic, it is worth considering how the velvety tones of the X-ray are produced by the uneven and impure passage of rays through the material density of the body. Also dramatizing such material density, Dean's *Sixteen Blackboards* describe a model of thought encountering similar resistances: embodied thought, path-broken thought, thought becoming and unbecoming in duration.

Following Bergson and Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz has offered a suggestive description of the necessary place of unbecoming in duration:

'Duration is the 'field' in which difference lives and plays itself out. Duration is that which undoes as well as what makes: to the extent that duration entails an open future, it involves the fracturing and opening up of the past and the present to what is virtual in them, to what in them differs from the actual, to what in them can bring forth the new. This unbecoming is the very motor of becoming, making the past and present not given but fundamentally ever-altering, virtual.'³⁶

The manner in which analogue information deteriorates or 'unbecomes' differs markedly from digital deletion. A unit of digital data is discrete; its identity is not modified or influenced by the external world. It is purely quantitative: a '1' or a '0', it is there or it is not and that is all. Likewise, a digital data set is readable or it is corrupted. Analogue information, an index of continuous variability, degrades gradually and constantly through contact with the weathering contingency of the world. This difference is foregrounded in an aspect of *Sixteen Blackboards* not yet discussed: at seven of the sixteen instants when the blackboard was photographed, there was affixed to it at least one collaged element. The collage elements are sometimes drawings on paper, sometimes photographs, sometimes reproductions of art works. None of them remain on the board for more than a single image. In marked contrast to the residual clouds of chalk and half-legible fragments of writing

³⁴ Rosalind Krauss: 'The Rock: William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection' *October* (Volume 92, Spring 2000), p. 17.

³⁵ Kentridge quoted by Krauss, *Ibid.* 2000, p. 28.

³⁶ Grosz: 'Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming,' *Parallax* (Volume 11, Number 2, April-June 2005), pp. 4-5.

which can be tracked over a number of photographs, then, the collage elements are conversely either present or absent, like digital data. They foil the continuous weathering of the drawn chalk marks, which appears all the more gradual and incomplete in relation to these sudden additions. Nevertheless, Dean is explicit in her preference for the aesthetic and conceptual resonances of analogue unbecoming over 'digital silence,' which she finds 'inhospitable.'³⁷

Continually exposed to contingent external forces, the analogue follows an entropic trajectory into deterioration and 'noise.' In Dean's blackboard drawings, this noise is registered by the dusty deposits left from the erased chalk marks. Dust has frequently provided a strong analogue for forms of entropic action (most famously, perhaps, in Man Ray's 1920 *Dust Breeding*, which records the surface of Duchamp's *Large Glass* as it lay in his studio), and it is on this tiny dry remainder that we might pause briefly. The chalk dust is the miniscule, microscopic trace that persists after erasure. Having once been articulated into language, diagrams, drawings, the chalk has been scrubbed over, bloomed into a fog. Such dissipation of chalk deposits features in another of Dean's works from the early 1990s, *Ztráta*, shot when she was in Prague in 1991 and presented as a work in 2002 (Figure 5.5). *Ztráta* is a three-and-a-half-minute black and white film which functions as something of a rebus. The film is shot in a classroom, many floors up at an architectural college in Prague. A flecked and smudged blackboard is wiped and the Czech word *Nepřítomnost* (absence) is written in capital letters on it. The camera scans an empty classroom. 'Ne' is then erased from the board, leaving *přítomnost* (presence), and the camera pans to reveal three students talking with the teacher. *Nebezpečí* (danger) and *Monument* are also written and enacted. Finally, *Ztráta* (meaning 'loss' or 'disappearance') is written on the board. It is wiped off using a piece of cloth, which is then thrown out of the classroom window. The camera follows its contingent descent, and we are left to imagine the fate of the chalk dust, which was just seconds ago organised into legible words, as it dissipates into the atmosphere. This process is not reversible. The same configuration of particles will never again be achieved; unlike a digital data set, analogue information cannot be retrieved intact.

The parallels between *Ztráta* and Broodthaers' *La Pluie* are unavoidable. Although not a conscious influence in 1991, Dean has subsequently worked extensively with the legacy of

³⁷ Conversation with the author, 1st December 2006.

Broodthaers' *oeuvre*, producing numerous works for a show in Dusseldorf dedicated to the artist in 2002.³⁸ *La Pluie* enacts the dissipation of language in flooded writing. As Broodthaers sits at his desk, his words are inundated from above and run off on all sides of the page in a chaotic dilution. Both *Ztráta* and *La Pluie* dramatize the entropic erasure of language – enabled in both cases by making the physicality of the signifier excessive. A deluge of water overruns the controlled materiality of the ink words so that they lose all form and become unreadable. They are not, however, deleted. Dissipation is not deletion, and the material run-off from language will re-embed itself in the fabric of the world, lodging itself again into new material configurations. Neither, indeed, are the inscriptive surfaces rendered utterly void. Just as the blackboard was smudged and flecked at the beginning of *Ztráta*, so traces of the signifier will persist after being wiped off.

The analogue does not deal in zeros. The idea of an energetic yet undetermined space of potential has been insisted upon by many twentieth-century artists and writers deeply concerned with the materiality of their means. The surfaces onto which inscriptions are made or in which expression happens are never neutral or blank – they await and welcome that activity, inviting and configuring it in materially specific ways. In the essay quoted above, Barthes writes: 'No surface, no matter what the distance from which one looks at it, is truly virginal. A surface is always and already asper, discontinuous, uneven and rhythmized by accidents: there's the grain of the paper, the smudges, the trellicings, the interlace of tracings, the diagrams, the words.'³⁹ As discussed in Chapter 3, Gilles Deleuze, in his account of Francis Bacon's 'Diagram,' suggested that, even before any marks are made, there are 'already figurative givens on the canvas (and in the painter's head).'⁴⁰ For Rauschenberg there is no such thing as an empty canvas; for Bergson there are no zeros in nature; John Cage demonstrated the impossibility of absolute silence.⁴¹ The material grounds of analogue media await activation; on the paper sheet or the photographic film

³⁸ Tacita Dean. 12.10.02-21.12.02, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Dusseldorf 12 October – 21 December 2002.

³⁹ Barthes, op.cit. p. 27.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (2003; first published in 1981), p. 100.

⁴¹ See Branden Joseph's chapter 'White on White,' in *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (2003), pp. 24-71.

there are virtual pictures. Within the material contingency of the world, the installation of a digital '0' seems fabricated and 'inhospitable.'⁴²

Blackboards and Film

The self-reflexivity with which Dean foregrounds the 'analogue' status of her medium is at least as pronounced in her drawings as in her work in film (for which she is certainly better known). Having already glanced at some ways in which her drawing resonates productively with film, we can now re-join this line of enquiry, initially developed in the first chapter of this thesis. Correspondences between Dean's blackboards and her films has been powerfully dramatized by Tate Modern's juxtaposition of Dean's 1996 anamorphic film *Disappearance at Sea* and her series of blackboard drawings *The Roaring Forties: Seven Boards in Seven Days* (1997, Figures 5.6 – 5.9). Both the film and the drawings are obliquely connected with the story of the ill-fated voyage of amateur sailor Donald Crowhurst. While neither straightforwardly illustrates that narrative, connections are invited by their shared maritime theme coupled with their titles, and, explicitly, by the accompanying text Dean wrote on the Crowhurst story.⁴³

Disappearance at Sea was filmed at Berwick Lighthouse in Northumberland, a final outpost of humanity before the open expanse of the ocean. Shot at dusk, the film moves between close-up footage of the rotating lighthouse lamp, and broader shots of the sea, cliffs and setting sun (Figure 5.10). There are no pans or zooms, with the camera remaining

⁴² Dean: 'On Obsolescence,' response to Artist Questionnaire, edited by George Baker: *October* (Volume 100, Spring 2002), p. 26. She continues: 'I like the time you can hear passing: the prickled silence of mute magnetic tape or the static of a record.'

⁴³ In 1968, Crowhurst was one of nine competitors to enter the *Sunday Times* Golden Globe Race to be the first to circumnavigate the world solo and without stopping. Crowhurst was psychologically and technically ill-prepared for the voyage, and, having set out from Teignmouth, it did not take long for him to realise that his boat would not survive long in the treacherous Roaring Forties. So he went about faking his journey: he hung around in the South Atlantic, careful to avoid shipping lanes and made detailed but false entries in his logbook. He broke off radio contact so as not to be discovered. After several months, during which time he had begun to make increasingly incoherent entries in his journal, Crowhurst re-established radio contact with the race officials: 'But Crowhurst no longer knew where he was. He had lost all track of time and developed an obsessive relationship with his faulty chronometer, the instrument that measures Greenwich Mean Time on board. He began to suffer from 'time-madness', a familiar problem for sailors whose only way of locating their position is through zealous time-keeping. Once his sense of time became distorted, he had no further reference point in the shifting mass of grey ocean. Overwhelmed by the enormity of his deceit and his offence against the sacred principle of truth, what he believed to be his 'Sin of Concealment,' Crowhurst 'resigned the game' and appears to have jumped overboard with his chronometer, just a few hundred miles from the coast of Britain.' See Dean: 'Once Upon a Different Sort of Time – The Story of Donald Crowhurst,' in Roland Groenénboom (ed.): *Tacita Dean*, exh. cat. (2001), pp. 34-41.

immobile throughout. The opening sections are dominated by the chromatic intensity of this spectacle and the hypnotic rotations of the lamp's clanking machinery. As darkness descends, the bulb is illuminated and projects its rays into the night (Figure 5.11). The sense of fragility and isolation is palpable as the beam seems inundated on all sides by an implacable and unreadable darkness. Metaphorical connections with Crowhurst's mental state seem inevitable. The sequence of shots proceeds with an unhurried patience, like the turned pages of a book. As is almost always the case with Dean's films, there are no technical manipulations and the frame of the shots barely moves, although the dynamism of the filmic apparatus produces a slight yet constant tremor.⁴⁴ The depicted action, too, is minimal: the setting of the sun, the rotating bulb, the changing sky. The viewer registers these slow movements, with time to absorb the by turns luminous and ominous anamorphic images. Any narrative suggestions remain implicit and secondary to the contemplative, even hypnotic, presentation of the lone lighthouse in the dying day.

As with many of Dean's films, the projection equipment is installed upright in the gallery space and viewers are able to watch the reel of film as it runs before the lens. This acknowledgement of the medium's physicality is extended by the connection that suggests itself between the projector's beam and that of the lighthouse, both intervening in the darkness in an analogous way. As Patrick Murphy has commented: 'for what do we have but a light and a lens projecting an image of a light and a lens, the whirring of the projector echoing the sound of the lighthouse.'⁴⁵ The film closes with a finger of light cutting through the blackness with a slight, glancing beam, which barely picks out the details of the rocky cliffs and shifting contours of the night sea. Walking out of this darkened room at Tate and into that which contains the blackboards, it is difficult to avoid the rhyme between this beam of light projected onto a nocturnal landscape and the white chalk marks which

⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy has described Dean's films as a 'fixist cinema.' 'It is not a matter of stopping on a particular image, but of an immobile shot that moves in a constant, infinitesimal way, crossed by minute variations – of the image, of the light, of the picture's graininess – vibrations that move on the spot with a sort of movement that is not displacement from one place to another but an alteration of place.' Nancy: 'The Taciturn Eternal Return,' in *Tacita Dean* (box set of seven books: *Essays*), unpag.

⁴⁵ Patrick T. Murphy, 'Dean's Emblematics. An Introduction to the Work of Tacita Dean' in *Tacita Dean*, ex.cat. (1998), p. 9. For an extended description of this film, as well as some precise and incisive arguments with Dean's negotiation of medium-specificity in her films, see Tamara Trodd: 'The Space of Film,' in *Mediums and Technologies of Art Beyond Modernism* (PhD Thesis, London: University College London, 2005), pp. 363-422.

emerge from the darkness of the boards' ground (in another context, Dean remarked, 'I am always drawing through the night').⁴⁶

In contrast to this film, however, *The Roaring Forties* has a more explicit relation to the unfolding of a dramatic story, openly engaging with movement and narrative on several registers. The seven boards, each over two metres square and made over seven days working *in situ* for an exhibition at the Drawing Center in New York, chart an open narrative of maritime storms, sailors' struggles and an eventual homecoming. The depicted action shifts from a close-up depiction of a group of seamen battling with ropes and rigging, to wider 'shots' of the plunging, endangered vessel, to another close, horizon-less shot of a rough sea, to the more secure viewpoint of the sailors rowing ashore. Accompanying these depicted scenes are written fragments of text offering descriptions of time, action, and atmosphere.

The blackboard drawing is, for Dean, deeply connected to the sea: 'The flux, the drawing and the redrawing, the erasure and the rubbing out belong to the sea, and nothing else has that same flux. I need that for working with the chalk. The drawings can't be fixed because it would take the chalk off. They are a kind of performance. They are always made *in situ*, more or less, and I always run out of time.'⁴⁷ Indeed, nearly all the boards that Dean has made after *Sixteen Blackboards* are connected with maritime subjects: *Girl Stowaway* (1994), *Disappearance at Sea I-VI* (1995), *The Lure of the Sea* (1997), *Sea Inventory Drawings* (1998), *The Sea, with a Ship, Afterwards an Island* (1999), *Wake* (2000), *Chère petite soeur* (2002). In these drawings there is a palpable sense of the image having been drawn out of obscurity, the chalk smudges and gleams emerging from the dark ground. Materially, the grain of the blackboard and the dustiness of the chalk prove to be exceptional means for rendering the swell, ridge and wash of the sea. Paradoxically, the driest of drawing mediums has provided the finest analogue for the shift and flux of the liquid surface.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Dean in conversation with Marina Warner, in Jean-Christophe Royoux, Marina Warner and Germaine Greer: *Tacita Dean* (2006), p. 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 'I realised that the nature of the blackboards is very connected to the sea, its constant motion, flux, change. What's stopping me from making any more blackboard drawings is that the making of them is for me so bound up with the sea that I'm paralysed... I need that abyss, the dark abyss of the ocean.' Tacita Dean quoted by Theodora Vischer: 'The Story of Linear Confidence,' in Theodora Vischer and Isabel Friedli (eds.): *Tacita Dean: Analogue – Drawings 1991-2006* (2006), pp. 18-9.

⁴⁸ Dean has explored the resonance between celluloid and the surface of flowing water in two very beautiful films, *Delf Hydraulics* (1996) and *Noir et blanc* (2006).

Both Dean's blackboards and the sea might be considered, following Deleuze and Guattari, as kinds of 'smooth' as opposed to 'striated' spaces: spaces of continuous transformation: 'In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory... It is as if the sea were not only the archetype of all smooth spaces but the first to undergo a gradual striation gridding it in one place, then another, on this side and that.'⁴⁹ This process of 'striation' has been furthered immeasurably by the advent of digital satellite technology, which enables a plotting of position without recourse to the vagaries of the chronometer. Preceding this, forms of drawing (mapping, plotting, charting) were central to the process of 'striation' which the seas underwent. Indeed, drawing, under the aegis of *disegno*, might be thought of as a striating technology: its contours, grids, perspectival systems all serving to parcel up space, to distribute it evenly, homogeneously, to establish measurable position and scale. Drawing has been a tool to secure stable and measurable identities rather than describing flux, potential and changeability. 'Sorry Leonardo,' Dean writes in the second board of *The Roaring Forties*. Although this is actually a reference to New York-based artist Leonardo Drew, who helped Dean with this project, the name will obviously also invoke the more familiar Renaissance precedent.⁵⁰ The latter's legacy is not irrelevant to Dean's project, with his own celebrated enquiries into fluid dynamics, his innovations in drawing, developing the technique of *sfumato* and an extensive use of erasures and *pentimenti*. With *The Roaring Forties*, each image seems embroiled in its own coming-into-being, as well as taking its place within a broader narrative unfolding which occupies the gaps between boards.

This engagement with movement and flux is furthered through the connections Dean builds between the blackboards and film. Dean herself has said: 'These huge wreckings, that scenery, they are not really related to films that I might make, but it's in order to give the impression that these are films already. Somehow, they *are* films.'⁵¹ In developing this conjunction, we might first note the surprising scale of these boards. At 240 x 240 cm, they are considerably larger than their viewers, having more affinity with cinematic screens than with drawing's more conventionally intimate proportions. This large scale is a feature of all

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (1987), pp. 478-480.

⁵⁰ Dean in conversation with the author, 2nd May 2007.

⁵¹ Dean in Vischer and Friedli, op.cit. p. 18.

of Dean's blackboard drawings, of which the smallest is 180 x 180 cm.⁵² Manifested in cinematic proportions, this series of blackboards will also recall another filmic mode: the storyboard. The seven boards make sense as a series: action is implied between each board, in the gaps. The written directions signal various atmospheric conditions and instructions for how the depicted action might be articulated in film. In Board 4 (Figure 5.7), as six sailors are hauled over a mast gathering in the sails, instructions are left for a cameraman: 'ACTION – out on the yard,' 'zoom in expression of fear,' 'look yonder (out of frame),' 'fx wind.' A curved arrow with the words 'to and fro' indicates the movement of the mast as it sways in the wind. These written cues invite the camera-eye of the imagination to animate parts of the image, producing a gamut of fabricated zooms, pans and sound effects. Talking to Roland Goenenboom, Dean said: 'I call them dysfunctional storyboards. They are non-chronological ... But there is always an action, a passage of time going on within each blackboard. They are not still images, but rather in-between images. They have a very hybrid quality.'⁵³ Hybrid structures: here, the blackboards are the support for drawings which, by employing a serial structure and fragments of written text, are inflected with filmic qualities. The resultant temporal structure is complex. Dynamism and instability characterise the mark (literally unfixed and resting on a shifting field of erasures), the individual image (whose visual unity is complicated by the legible fragments of text), and the serial nature of the whole work (the series generating a broader sense of narrative progression).

In Chapter 1, I discussed the relationship of drawing, writing and cinema as dramatized in the practices of Matisse and Michaux, and as explicitly figured, to very different effect, by Broodthaers. Indeed, Broodthaers was a crucial figure in furthering the deconstruction of boundaries between artistic mediums in the late 1960s and 1970s, and it is not surprising that his should prove such a productive model for Dean to engage with. Different mediums are juxtaposed and spliced together throughout Broodthaers's work. Drawing, writing and film are inter-mingled in *La Pluie*, as we have seen. Film, painting and the book are set in relation in his work connected with his *Voyage on the North Sea* (1973-4, Figure 5.12 and 5.13). Here, Broodthaers used photographs he had taken of an unremarkable maritime painting, bought from a cheap Parisian shop, to make a film and a book. The same painting

⁵² Indeed, this is in marked contrast to a number (though by no means the majority) of her films. Films such as *Zrúta*, *Delft Hydraulics*, *The Green Ray* and *Palast* are all projected small.

⁵³ Dean in Groenenboom: 'A Conversation with Tacita Dean,' in Groenenboom op.cit. p. 93-7

was used in an accompanying piece, *Bateau Tableau* (1973, Figure 5.14), which comprised a sequence of eighty slides of different views of the painting, taken from different angles and distances, from full face, to small detail, to the sides of the canvas, the frame etc. In 1972 Broodthaers made a film of a found postcard (itself possibly a photograph of a lithograph), again of a maritime theme, which he titled, following the message of the verso, *Chère petite soeur* (Figure 5.15). In preparing a 2002 exhibition based on Broodthaers's artistic model for the Kunstverein in Düsseldorf, Dean made two large blackboard drawings based on this last work, and also entitled *Chère petite soeur* (Figure 5.16).

Krauss has discussed Broodthaers's knowing annihilation of the specificity of artistic mediums as a key (and complex) precursor of the 1990s craze for inter-media installation art. The latter, however, she regards as failing to achieve the former's astute reflexivity and critical acumen. Rather, a casual, inattentive hybridity in contemporary practice has, for Krauss, had dire consequences for the possibility of maintaining a meaningful set of criteria for artistic value. With the abandonment of the specific, layered conventions that govern each medium's operations, Krauss views such voracious inter-media projects as having cast themselves adrift from any discernable criteria for success, and thus annihilated their ability to resist the appropriating pull of the culture industry and spectacle. In an effort to resist such appropriation and to install some historical awareness, Broodthaers had adopted 'positive countertypes,' mined from a medium's specific history, in opposition to new dominant forms: the nineteenth-century collector (liberating objects from utility) as opposed to the modern art collector (following the vagaries of the market); the archaic cinema of Buster Keaton against the slick, big-budget spectacles of Hollywood. In plumbing the outmoded layers of a medium's conventions, some oppositional and even redemptive promise might be salvaged, these layers only becoming visible with the arrival of new technologies.

Krauss also sees such strategies of resistance, formulated through an engagement with the self-differing conventions of specific artistic mediums, developed in the work of James Coleman and Kentridge. Kentridge has already been mentioned in this chapter, and he is worth discussing further in this context. Krauss argues that Kentridge, in his 'drawings for projection,' has invented a mode of drawing practice that is distinct from animation. While filmic animation provides the technical support or ground, Kentridge's engagement is with the layered conventions of *drawing*. Whereas animation presents the world as weightlessly

fluid and endlessly transformative, Kentridge insists upon the texture of erasures and the material drag that accompanies movement, 'thus investing that change with a kind of weight (emotional? moral? mnemonic?)'⁵⁴. 'There is a sense in which the body's rhythms have penetrated Kentridge's support, to slow it down, to thicken it, to give it density.'⁵⁵ Kentridge's engagement with the palimpsest, combined with his adoption of a graphic style recalling earlier forms of political draughtsmanship (Beckmann, Daumier, Goya), affords his practice a complex relationship to history and the politics of memory. Not only this, but here the palimpsest is infected by technology – it takes up a relationship to Marey's chronophotography and to modes of photographic image-making: CAT scans, X-rays, as we have already seen. And as the distinctions between animation and film are eroded by the omnipresence of digital media, Kentridge's adoption of outmoded and primitive drawing technologies, mined from drawing's specific history, carries a resistance to the spectacularization of memory.

As has recently been analysed by Tamara Trodd, Krauss's return to the question of the medium retains Modernist critical values of opposition to the commodified mass cultural sphere (blanketly labelled 'kitsch' or, frequently since Debord, 'spectacle').⁵⁶ The problem, for Krauss, is that without the 'guarantee of tradition,' a coherent standard by which to 'test the validity of a given improvisation,'⁵⁷ the aesthetic sphere simply leeches into the social field in general.⁵⁸ She laments a current age in which 'everything, from shopping to watching wars on television takes on an aestheticized glow.' Radical, oppositional artistic practice should engage with the medium to defend against this seepage of the aesthetic beyond its proper sphere, against the complete generalisation of the aesthetic.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Krauss op.cit. 2000, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 20.

⁵⁶ Trodd writes: 'Medium-specificity became the difference, for modernists – or what guaranteed the difference – between modern art and forms of 'affirmative' culture. The theory is founded, for Adorno or Greenberg, as much as for Benjamin Buchloh or Krauss today, on a categorical disdain for the forms of thought and experience provided by mass, popular culture: 'kitsch', in the terminology of Greenberg, and 'culture industry', in the sweepingly negative characterization given by Adorno.' Trodd regards such critics as 'locked into an ossified and implacably hostile sense of the conditions which surround most of us in our everyday lives.' op.cit. pp. 31-2.

⁵⁷ Krauss op.cit. 2000, p. 11

⁵⁸ Krauss: 'A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (1999), p. 56.

⁵⁹ See Krauss Ibid. Dean's model would seem to fit perfectly with Krauss's formulation of a practice rooted in an engagement with the self-differing aspects of artistic mediums. The suitability of Krauss's formulation is problematized, however, by her restrictive assignation of the 'proper' place of the aesthetic. As Trodd has convincingly argued, Dean's work, combining rich aesthetic effects with narrative suggestion and affective intensity, does not offer resistance to the seepage of the aesthetic into the everyday. Trodd op.cit. pp. 363-422.

Newman's conception of the medium is rather different from that of Krauss. For him, the success of Dean's practice is not so much to have held mediums apart and maintained the specificity of their respective conventions, but rather to have confronted a situation, brought about by the ascendancy of digital media, in which the very possibility of a medium is being liquidated. This is the medium understood as a 'concretion of time,' a specific mode by which to figure, delay, condense and spread out time in particular ways. Of course, debates and anxieties about the medium have always borne upon a model of temporality (we need think only of the celebrated antipathy of Fried to interminable 'literalist' time). Indeed, the temporal is central to Krauss's discussion of Kentridge and Coleman, but is not the motivating drive behind her resuscitation of medium specificity, which remains the maintenance of assessment criteria.

The arbitrary relationship between digital data and the physical form the output takes cancels any intrinsic relationship between that information's material manifestation and the event that gave rise to it. As Newman argues, with the analogue being superseded by the digital, 'What is lost is the physical sense of the transcription of an irreversible, finite temporality into a medium that is itself finite and subject to degradation and loss (the loss of loss).'⁶⁰ The direct contact at work in analogue technologies (what Dean described as 'the alchemy of chemistry and circumstance') is unmoored, dissolved into a swarm of minute units of basic separation (0/1). And, following Newman, I would argue that it is the arrival of the digital rather than the vogue for installation art that is the more relevant development in light of which to see Dean's endeavour. This potential dissolution of mediums does not so much threaten to erase a means to assess *quality*, but rather cancels the possibility of embodying a certain comportment to the singular, transitory, unrepeatable event; it changes a relationship to *contingency*. It will be in developing this point that I will extend my consideration of the analogue beyond the kinds of technical considerations that have been my central concern thus far. While I will re-engage with problems specific to drawing at the end of this chapter, for now I would like to probe the potential of the analogue/digital binary for thinking about other compelling aspects of Dean's practice and, by extension, for articulating a relationship to both the unforeseen and affective. I assert that a broader consideration of the analogue can help articulate two elements of particular relevance: first, an adaptive, receptive comportment towards the contingent unfolding of

⁶⁰ Newman, op.cit. 2001. He continues: 'Indeed, against the unification and totalisation of media through the digital, the finitude of mediums stands out all the more strongly.'

the world and its events; second, a model of the embodied mind that deals in qualitative shifts and intensifications, rather than the computation of homogeneous codes.

The Analogue and Contingency

‘The digital is a numerically based form of codification (zeros and ones)... Digitalization is a numeric way of arraying alternative states so that they can be sequenced into a set of alternative routines. Step after ploddingly programmed step. Machinic habit.’

Brian Massumi⁶¹

‘‘Fortuna’ is... something other than cold statistical chance, and something too outside the range of rational control... This reliance on ‘fortuna’ in the making of images or texts mirrors some of the ways we exist in the world even outside the realm of images and texts.’

William Kentridge⁶²

As we have seen, Kentridge’s drawings for projection explore the productive entanglement of drawing and animation. What I want to focus on here, however, is a ‘range of agencies’ involved in his creative method which concern the accommodation of contingency as a generative principle in his practice. Kentridge articulated this principle in a 1993 lecture, ‘‘Fortuna:’ Neither Program nor Chance in the Making of Images.’⁶³ By first contrasting his method to the traditional animator’s need to work out a film fully in advance, Kentridge describes *Fortuna* as a contingent and transformative agency that guides the artist from one sequence to the next, that enables his arrival at solutions that were not (and perhaps could not have been) planned in advance. One example Kentridge provides arose while he was working on *Mine* (1991). The problem was how to move from the mine owner Soho Eckstein having breakfast to his workers descending into a mineshaft. In Kentridge’s studio that day there was a *cafetière* (it could easily have been a teapot, he remarks), and he began to draw the descent of the plunger, drawing, erasing and re-drawing the dark column a little further down (Figure 5.17). It was only in the act of drawing that he realized how perfect a correspondence there was between the *cafetière*’s plunger and the mine shaft: ‘The sensation was more of discovery than invention. There was no feeling of

⁶¹ Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), p. 137.

⁶² Kentridge: ‘Fortuna,’ in Christov-Bakargiev op.cit. pp. 118-9

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 114-119.

what a good idea I had had, rather, relief at not having overlooked what was in front of me.’⁶⁴ Neither a question of rational problem-solving, nor of self-expression, *Fortuna* operates as a principle that is emphatically grounded in a responsive and imaginative relation with the outside world, taking cues from the drawing as it develops and the objects and practices that surround that process of making (something like the ‘interference’ of the world). Its results are never the consequence of pre-programming.⁶⁵

This open creative principle is close to that articulated by Dean in her introductory text for *An Aside*, the show she curated in 2005 mentioned earlier: ‘I did not, and could not have, pre-imagined this show; it is not at all what I expected it to be, and that’s the point: I have at least been faithful to the blindness with which I set out, and even if my methods have veered from the intuitive to the social, and from the orthodox to the inexplicable, this exhibition has taken form from itself, and not despite itself.’⁶⁶ In developing this exhibition, Dean cultivated her receptivity to the unexpected, and willingly pursued contingent connections between artists and works as they arose. This openness to the unforeseen is certainly not limited to this curatorial project: it is a defining characteristic of her creative method as a whole. ‘I had always courted chance,’ she wrote in a text on ‘Collections,’ which concerns her unusual ability to find many-leaved clovers, those famed harbingers of good fortune (*Four, Five, Six and Seven Leaf Clover Collection*, 1972-present). Indeed, much of her practice is concerned with and sustained by a peculiar relationship to coincidence and serendipity.⁶⁷

Dean’s courting of chance extends to an adoption of certain Surrealist strategies (the found object, for example), as well as a creative exploration of particular concurrences arriving in the process of making a work. Throughout the 1990s, Dean developed something of an addiction to flea markets, and the potential for the chance find stored therein. The spoils of this activity have been assembled into a book of found photographs (*FLOH*, 2001), and a series of photogravures (*Russian Ending*, 2002). There is a similar

⁶⁴ Kentridge quoted by Krauss, op.cit. 2000, p. 7. My analysis of this lecture is indebted to Krauss’s account here.

⁶⁵ Kentridge: ‘Fortuna,’ in Christov-Bakargiev op.cit. p. 119: ‘It is only when physically engaged on a drawing that ideas start to emerge. There is a combination between drawing and seeing, between making and assessing that provokes a part of my mind that otherwise is closed off.’

⁶⁶ See Dean: *An Aside*, exhibition catalogue (2005), p. 4.

⁶⁷ An extraordinary series of synchronicities is charted in her early project *Girl Stowaway* (1994), which documents a relationship to the story of the Australian self-smuggler Jean Jeinnie, who, in 1928, hid herself on ship bound from Port Lincoln to Falmouth. More recently, in her book *W.G. Sebald*, Dean relays another story that travels full-circle through a series of bizarre coincidences. See Dean: ‘W.G. Sebald,’ in *Tacita Dean* (box set of seven books, 2003), unpag.

integration of the unexpected as it arises in the making of her films. We can return to Dean's engagement with the story of Donald Crowhurst for another example: after making her *Disappearance at Sea* films (a second was made in 1997), Dean then set out to find Crowhurst's trimaran, *Teignmouth Electron*. She discovered it on the Caribbean island of Cayman Brac, to which she then travelled, producing a film and a number of photographs of the dilapidated vessel. She found the island otherwise rather sterile and uninspiring, but, as she explored the environs, she stumbled upon what the locals refer to a 'bubble house.' Another ruined structure, this piece of failed futuristic hurricane-proof architecture was left unfinished when its French owner had been imprisoned for fraud. Inspired by the correspondences between the 'bubble house' and *Teignmouth Electron*, as well as the shared fraudulence of Crowhurst and the Frenchman, she produced a film with her remaining stock. The windows of Bubble House provided an ideal cinematic frame from which to view the oncoming weather (a storm was brewing on the horizon just at the moment when she began filming),⁶⁸ a serendipitous complement to the cinematic self-reflexivity engendered by *Disappearance at Sea*.

But how does this comportment towards the contingent, opposing the pre-ordained or logically deduced, relate to our concern with the analogue? To explore this question, I will employ the suggestive theoretical propositions of Massumi. Contesting the prevalent association of the digital with the virtual, Massumi argues that in fact the digital is limited to approaching the less vital terrain of the possible and the probable. Here it is important to outline how Massumi differentiates between his key terms: *virtual*, *potential* and *possible/probable*. For him, these modes offer different ways to conceptualize emergence and, significantly, its predictability and uniformity. The probable is connected with the possible, which describes emergence as an array of 'organizable alternatives.'⁶⁹ That is, a model of development assuming a series of pre-arrayed alternatives, posited on the basis of pre-known and discrete entities, as opposed to entities or processes that transform themselves in their becoming. 'Probabilities are weightings of possibilities according to the regularity with which they might be expected to appear. Since probability approaches possibilities *en masse*, it approximates potential... It has nothing at all to say about any

⁶⁸ Dean in conversation with Roland Goenenboom, op.cit. p. 105: 'I set the camera up filming in all innocence because it was a complete crisp blue horizon when I started. And literally a storm came in. It was quite extraordinary, completely transformative. I used that shot as the centrepiece for the whole film, because that was the event.'

⁶⁹ Massumi, op.cit. p. 134.

given conjunction... It targets only the general level, applying not to the event but only to an averaging of the mass of events.’⁷⁰ So the probable ‘approximates potential,’ it deals with quantitative questions of regularity within general conditions, it does not approach the specific instance; it is something like Kentridge’s ‘cold statistical chance.’ Immanent within the unfolding of each specific instance, Massumi argues, there is *potential*, which is ‘the tension between materially superposed possibilities and the advent of the new.’⁷¹

‘Possibility is a variation *implicit in* what a thing can be said to be when it is on target. Potential is the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way.’⁷² This is the meeting of concrete material circumstance and the force of its becoming, which will involve unpredictable change. This ‘advent of the new’ angles onto the realm of the *virtual*: a fleeting that is not directly accessible to the senses, transformation in itself, real but abstract. The virtual, as opposed to the possible or probable, is a force of self-varying deformation, an excess of the world over itself. Rather than emerging in a sequence of pre-arranged steps, the virtual is the register in which the real deforms, convulses itself into the unforeseen and genuinely new. The digital, being a ‘numeric way of arraying alternative states so that they can be sequenced into a set of alternative routines,’ can only ever approach the possible: ‘digital coding is possibilitistic to the limit.’⁷³ It is the analogue, for Massumi, that shares this principle of continuous variation and transformation, which aligns it with the unruliness of the potential and even the virtual. We will return to Massumi’s arguments shortly. For now, I would like remain with the implications of the term ‘potential’ and how this might relate to Dean’s chosen subjects.

Dean, like Kentridge, is consistently open to encountering the unforeseen: the specific instances and singular conjunctions of which the world is composed. Yet she is not interested in the *virtual* as such, her ‘subject matter’ (object matter) is always grounded in the materiality of the world. The people, places and events that attract her interest are the singular, ephemeral results of the world’s becoming, yet it is not this ‘pure becoming’ itself that interests her (as it might a philosopher). Massumi describes potential as ‘a situating of the virtual’.⁷⁴ Dean is interested in people, things and events as they arise from and are

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 135-6. “Possibility is back-formed from potential’s unfolding... Possibility is a variation *implicit in* what a thing can be said to be when it’s on target. Potential is the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way. Implication is a code word. Immanence is a process.” (p. 9).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. p. 9

⁷³ Ibid. p. 137

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 141.

anchored to material contingency. As has been frequently noted, these objects and events often have an uneasy relationship to the present. Dean writes: ‘Everything that excites me no longer functions in its own time.’⁷⁵ It is as if the potential that accompanied their emergence has not been fulfilled by the world that became around them. As Newman has written in relation to Dean’s work: ‘By conjoining non-synchronous times, the homogeneity of the present moment is broken apart: our own time becomes non-identical with itself. The present contains pasts and futures other than those continuous with it.’⁷⁶ This impure, nonsynchronous, heterogeneous model of time aligns with the potential, ‘a multiplicity of possibilities materially present to one another, in resonance and interference.’⁷⁷ Perhaps it is the absence of such heterogeneity that prompts Dean to remark, ‘I cannot be seduced by the seamlessness of digital time; like digital silence, it has a deadness.’⁷⁸ Dean’s work speaks of the desire to re-activate the potential of objects and events that would otherwise be abandoned to the unrelenting passage of time. The fact that the blackboard, a ruined boat, or a discarded family photograph, objects which have ceased to function in their own time, can be retrieved and re-injected with potency and meaning speaks powerfully of a model of time as out of joint, as composed of a multiplicity of co-present possibilities, never absolutely determined and always under way.

The Mind as Transducer

‘[The analogue is a] continuously variable impulse or momentum that can cross from one qualitatively different medium into another. Like electricity into sound waves. Or heat into pain. Or light waves into vision. Or vision into imagination. Or noise in the ear into music in the heart. *Or outside coming in.* Variable continuity across the quantitatively different: continuity of transformation.’

Brian Massumi⁷⁹

If the digital is fundamentally *quantitative* in its functioning, the analogue involves *qualitative* transformations. We have discussed Dean’s fostering of the unforeseen as it arrives around her. The artist’s response to people, objects and events – the singular

⁷⁵ Dean: ‘On Obsolescence,’ in Baker op.cit. p. 26.

⁷⁶ Newman: ‘Salvage,’ in *Tacita Dean* (box set of seven books, *Essays*, 2003), unpag.

⁷⁷ Massumi, op.cit. p. 136.

⁷⁸ Dean: ‘On Obsolescence,’ op.cit. p. 26.

⁷⁹ Massumi, op.cit. p. 135

expressions of emergence – is also a qualitative one, and cannot be approached adequately by quantitative means. Likewise, the viewer's response to Dean's work (and, of course, not to hers alone) needs also to be approached qualitatively, requiring an account of reception that could articulate and account for the simultaneity and intermingling of differing registers of response: aesthetic pleasure, conceptual reflection, narrative projection, mnemonic linkage. So while the digital computer has provided perhaps the most frequent metaphor for conscious activity, its discrete, quantitative functioning cannot give an adequate account of these transformative conversions involved in the reality of felt relation. Massumi elaborates using the example of word processing: "What is processed inside the computer is code, not words. The words *appear* on screen, in being read. Reading is the qualitative transformation of alphabetical figures into figures of speech and thought. This is an analogue process. Outside its appearance, the digital is electronic nothingness, pure systemic possibility."⁸⁰ To be anything other than such 'pure systemic possibility,' the digital must 'circuit into the analogue.'⁸¹ For code not to remain a meaningless, intangible abstraction, it needs to be enframed by the subject. In this 'circuiting,' then, the embodied mind acts as something of a *transducer*, capable of performing conversions and transformations across different qualitative registers. This capability involves considerable creative, active (but not necessarily conscious) input, as the mind clothes memories, sensations and perceptions with significance, connecting them up to a whole array of other contents.

Given this emphasis upon the embodied work of reception, and upon the circuiting between more formalized codes and what Barbara Stafford has called 'nonformalizable moments of flexible insight,'⁸² we find that the conventional polarity between analogue and digital media loses some of its familiar purchase. Whether conceptualized in terms solely of material attributes, or by also addressing the specific, self-differing *conventional* underpinnings of a medium, the focus in thinking about reception shifts away from the work itself, toward a prioritisation of the event of its reception. The viewing subject becomes the chief en-framer of meanings and effects, clothing and intensifying incoming information. Ultimately, such information might have been produced by analogue or by digital technologies, but the point is that as it ends up, in the event(s) of reception, it does

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 138.

⁸¹ Ibid. 'The processing may be digital – but the analog is the process.'

⁸² Barbara Stafford: *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (1999), p. 138.

not remain purely as information or code. This is absolutely not to abandon the importance of the conventions of language and discourse in shaping the reception of artwork, but it is to propose that these discursive structures and conventions neither delimit nor guarantee the productive potential of the viewer's experience. It is also to suggest that if the analogue nature of the technology (or the indexical nature of the sign), is not legible or apparent in some way, then this aspect of its identity will not put the viewer's mind in those interpretive gears. These ideas have something in common with Mark Hansen's Bergsonian critique of Krauss's arguments and his emphasis upon the enframing body, which he argues has been foregrounded and made necessary by the onset of digital media.⁸³ While his propositions are suggestive, I do not find it necessary to regard them as applicable only, or indeed even primarily, to work produced with digital media. Indeed, the kinds of heterogeneous, poly-sensory engagements he champions can equally be thought in terms of the reception of material art objects.

Dean's oeuvre delivers a particularly rich resource for this embodied en-framing process. Firstly, her work conveys a subtle, invested and yet unprecious comportment towards her subjects. There is an avowal of what is to disappear, recognition of the unrepeatability of people and events that is integrated into an affective system of desire and longing. This is expressed in the work's aesthetic resolution and richness, as well as in Dean's insistence that images and objects be given sufficient time and space to impress themselves on the viewer's mind. The viewer is encouraged to adopt a similarly attentive, receptive comportment towards the work as Dean has evidently shown towards her subjects. And such a comportment is rewarded; not just by the aesthetic effects of the films, drawings or photographs, but by way of a whole range of further temporalities in which art functions. That is, how works of art are subsequently dwelt upon, connected up with other art and with other memories and everyday experiences; how they are invested, probed, turned over, imbued with significance; how they are qualitatively, intensively and creatively maintained by the subject. Jean-Christophe Royoux has described Dean's oeuvre as 'A space that gathers together and enables gathering.'⁸⁴ Sustained by the coherence of the artist's comportment, it is notable how cumulative this process of gathering becomes, acting something like a feedback loop: in aesthetic, conceptual and affective terms, Dean's

⁸³ Hansen, *op.cit.* p. 22: 'With the flexibility brought by digitization, there occurs a displacement of the framing function of medial interfaces back onto the body from which they themselves originally sprang. It is this displacement that makes new media art 'new.''

⁸⁴ Royoux: 'Survey,' in Royoux, Warner and Greer, *op.cit.* p. 95.

works resonate productively together, the one being inflected and reconfigured by the arrival of others. This gathering goes on within Dean's own body of work, as well as, as we have seen, extending outwards to bring into relation an array of other artistic (and, indeed, non-artistic) practices.

Drawing has proved a crucial means in enabling these connections. With what we might call its uniquely broad *valency*, drawing threads together an expansive array of creative practices and varieties of object. In so doing, it inflects the co-ordinates of this wider field, unassertively presenting itself as a rich and diverse means for contemporary exploration. Dean and Kentridge are two of the most prominent artists to have compellingly remade and renewed drawing for the present. They respond to a situation in which technological advancement has accelerated the rate at which oldness is brought into the world. But this is not achieved through any melancholic lament for the passing of valued things. Rather, as we have seen, the temporal models that Dean presents are more complex: instead of simply superseding the analogue, the arrival of the digital has forged a series of reconfigurations and re-intensifications within the visual arts. As I have argued throughout this chapter, these shifts bear as importantly upon how we might think about thinking, as they do on the physical composition of the objects and images being attended to.

Coda

Drawing and the Diagrammatic

Why frame drawing as a specifically *analogue* technology? Is there a confusion going on here between a form of practice that is merely materially grounded, and this more specialized term? Indeed, how much purchase does this framing have if, as Tacita Dean writes, ‘Everything we can quantify physically is analogue?’¹ But, as I argued in the last chapter, this move is indeed a productive one; it allows us to articulate a conception of drawing that is responsive to a contemporary situation in which information predominantly takes a form that is *not* anchored to a specific material ground, and of marks that are *not* directly related to proportionate physical forces. The arrival of the digital throws into relief the immersive material engagements characteristic of analogue drawing, its ability to condense and spread out time in compelling ways, as well as its inevitable deterioration.

Throughout this thesis, I have been especially interested in how the mind is immersed and the body caught up in the micro-dynamics of the drawing process. This process is premised upon transformative *contact* between bodies, materials, affects and ideas. The kind of heightened attentiveness involved in drawing’s production (and, indeed, its reception) takes on an exemplary importance given the widespread current negligence towards such material encounters (a negligence which drawing quietly foils). All the varied substances and tools of drawing, small fragments of the world rendered suddenly intense in use, offer particular permissions and obstructions: the various papers, boards and other grounds; the pencils, pens, erasers and assorted tools; the inks, chalks, solvents, dyes and other fluids; all enable specific ways of embodying a process, impulse or scheme. This array offers a compelling spectrum of qualities that crucially informs the desire to make – liquidity and dryness, transparency and opacity, slickness and viscosity, precision and waywardness, truancy and obedience. Unlike digital data, drawn marks are not arbitrarily connected to their physical constituents; and whereas a line generated digitally can be copied, deleted or pasted elsewhere, the inscribed mark must be forcibly and imperfectly prised from its ground, never to be reproduced exactly intact.

¹ Tacita Dean: ‘Analogue,’ in Theodora Vischer and Isabel Friedli (eds.): *Tacita Dean: Analogue – Drawings 1991-2006* (2006), p. 8.

My emphasis on drawing's temporal, material and bodily investments has led me to explore some of its alignments with other visual practices. Prominent here has been the (at first surprising) intertwining of drawing and cinema. I have charted the trajectory of that connection in the work of Matisse and Michaux, through that of Broodthaers, and arriving at the rich contemporary explorations of Dean and Kentridge. Indeed, as discussed in my introduction, drawing is frequently 'brought to the condition' of a host of different modes. Recently, the motif of the diagram has been usefully employed by art historians Benjamin Buchloh and David Joselit to theorize some of the work that drawing has done in avant-garde practices.² Opposed in significant respects, a comparison between these two formulations helpfully addresses drawing to wider debates concerning art's radical potential.

Although not his own term, it is possible to see Buchloh's essay as an account of how drawing was, from the 1910s to the late 1960s, brought to the condition of the digital. This might seem a strange reading of Buchloh's argument, given his anchoring of the 'diagrammatic' to Duchamp's exploration of the *indexical* sign. Yet it may well be that it is the point at which the digital 'circuits into the analogue,' to use Massumi's phrase, that yields particular interest. For Buchloh, drawing since Cubism had been organised by the dialectical opposition between two possibilities: 'voluntaristic self-deception' and 'voluntary self-defeat.'³ The deluded and the resigned: the first, embodied in the 'authentic corporeal trace,' asserts the false possibility of 'unfettered subjective expression.'⁴ An example of such practice would be de Kooning's fields of gestural strokes. The second, the 'externally established matrix,' by contrast, signalled the 'insurmountability of the pervasive control of even the most microscopic gesture.'⁵ The 'diagrammatic,' for Buchloh, is allied with the latter; it is 'the one variety of abstraction that recognizes externally existing and pre-given systems of spatio-temporal quantification or schemata of the statistical collection of data as necessarily and primarily determining a chosen pictorial order.'⁶ This recognition is expressed by the subjection of the discrete, minimal drawn unit to a systematized, pre-determined formal structure (a grid, for example).

² See David Joselit: 'Dada's Diagrams,' in Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (eds.): *The Dada Seminars* (2005), pp. 221-239, and Benjamin Buchloh: 'Hesse's Endgame: Facing the Diagram,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.): *Eva Hesse Drawing*, exhibition catalogue (2006), pp. 117-150.

³ Buchloh, *op.cit.* p. 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Buchloh constructs a trajectory of such 'diagrammatic' pictorial systems, beginning with Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages* (1914), and continuing in the work of Francis Picabia, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse. He sees in each artist's drawing a laudable refusal to offer any 'false consolations'⁷ to a human predicament that is mired in a 'fully administered world,'⁸ and in which 'the very sphere and ground of the subject's bodily experience and perception had been decisively reconditioned within [...] horizons of surveillance, production, and control.'⁹ This began with Duchamp's mobilisation of the 'language of industry,'¹⁰ through his adoption of the map, chart, grid and techno-scientific diagram. It continued in Johns's 'systemic staccato, breaking down all acts of recording and notation into the smallest possible units,' which were then arranged 'within tightly circumscribed fields.'¹¹ The endgame of such strategies arrived in the work of Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse. Sol LeWitt's 'pre-programmed permutational matrix'¹² dismissed both subjective involvement in production, and a whole range of expectations usually involved in the viewing situation. For Buchloh, Hesse's arrival at her achromatic, disembodied grids in 1966 constituted the most forceful demonstration of this endgame, announcing 'drawing's decisive tendency towards historical disappearance.'¹³ These drawn grids, then, are read as demonstrations of wider external conditions; they figure the pervasive withering and confinement of autonomy within the context of advanced western capitalism. The page figures a disenchanted world; the contracted field of drawing embodies an expanded set of social and political conditions. Yet it is necessary to ask how this equation between page and life-world is sustained; or, at least, it should be recognized that this interpretive extrapolation is a strategy and not a given. Alain Badiou uses a similar strategy when he asserts that 'In Drawing, the world is symbolized by the background, pages, screen, or wall.'¹⁴ While not seeking to restrict the scope of commentaries on drawing, it seems necessary to ask to which aspects or spaces of the world does the ground of drawing refer, and how?

⁷ Ibid. p. 145

⁸ Ibid. note 19, p. 149.

⁹ Ibid. p. 122

¹⁰ See Molly Nesbit: 'The Language of Industry,' in Thierry de Duve (ed.): *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (1991), pp. 350-384.

¹¹ Buchloh, op.cit. p. 144

¹² Ibid. p. 140.

¹³ Ibid. p. 146. In this dire situation, 'Only in rigorously controlling the surface and by blocking access to any form of compensatory bodily plenitude for subject and sociality alike could drawing act as a manifest instigation of resistance and remembrance.'

¹⁴ Badiou: 'Drawing,' *Lacanian Ink* (Issue 28, Fall 2006), p. 46.

For Buchloh, the 'diagrammatic' drawing refers to a bleak world. Whereas in the 1960s, radical, oppositional moves could still be made without being fully subsumed into the integrated spectacle of the culture industry, in the contemporary context, Buchloh powerfully argues, any autonomous spaces for genuine oppositional practices no longer exist. Readers familiar with Buchloh's writing will recognize his 'dire diagnostic,' as Yve-Alain Bois has called it.¹⁵ The development of post-war capitalist regimes has progressively withered the spheres that once enabled oppositional gambits, and with that annihilation of opposition came a complete integration of cultural production into spectacle and commodity exchange.¹⁶ In this situation, and Buchloh's arguments align here with Rosalind Krauss's formulation of the medium, if contemporary artistic production has any potential for resistance, it is in its ability to enable the remembrance of earlier subjectivities and socialities, now annihilated. This mnemonic activity could provide an avowal of a destroyed past which might yet provide a spectral model for a removed future. Rather than looking to augment present potentials, affirmative strategies are withheld, deferred for a time to come, beyond a redemptive revolutionary horizon.

The tone of this thesis has been at odds with such a strategy. This is not to question the severity of the problem; it would be difficult to claim the availability in the present of a fully autonomous cultural sphere, outside the action of capital and with uncompromised oppositional potential. Rather, it stems from two sets of questions: the first relating to its construction of what is to be opposed (kitsch or spectacle), the second concerning the available mechanisms for change (or lack thereof). Does this withering of an 'outside' automatically entail the homogenization and complete subsumption of all cultural practices into 'spectacle?' Isn't the terrain rather more differentiated and multiplicitous than that term would suggest? Secondly, how *exactly* do the advanced forms of reification serve to insurmountably control the most microscopic of our bodily gestures? What model of the body does this claim rely upon? And what are the consequences of employing such a model when thinking about the processes of art's reception?

¹⁵ Bois in 'Roundtable: The Predicament of Contemporary Art,' in Bois, Buchloh, Foster and Krauss: *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (2004), p. 673.

¹⁶ See Ibid. p. 676. Buchloh: [T]he very construct of an oppositional sphere of artists and intellectuals appears to have been eliminated; certainly this is true in the realm of cultural production. That production is now homogenised as an economic field of investment and speculation in its own right. The antimony between artists and intellectuals on the one hand and capitalist production on the other has been annihilated or has disappeared by attrition. Today we are in a political and ideological situation that, while it is not quite yet totalitarian, points toward the elimination of contradiction and conflict, and this necessitates a rethinking of what cultural practice can be under the totalising conditions of fully advanced capitalist organisation."

For Buchloh, artists such as Hesse and LeWitt successfully figured the complete restriction of subjectivity within absolutely determining pre-given systems. Viewed through the lens of his analysis, their drawings from the mid-late 1960s can be interpreted as aspiring towards the digital. That is, and following my discussion in Chapter 5, their progress is confined to a pre-arrayed series of possible routes and permutations. Each unit is subjected to the fully determining, delimited order of a prior structure. Yet, as has been discussed, as a model of emergence, this model is problematic in its subtraction of *potential* from any given situation. As with the ‘possibilistic’ logic of the digital code, there is no room here for ongoing transformative processes, processes through which the basic ‘units’ involved are themselves reconfigured. Rather, all routes are prescribed, and there is no margin of contingency, no vivacious unruly remainder to temper a thoroughgoing pessimism.¹⁷ But as has been implicit throughout this thesis, analogue drawing is ill-suited to the task of embodying such grid-locked predicaments. Whilst vector-based digital drawing programs enable the production of a line that has no physical dimensions, that always remains a vector under any degree of magnification (until, of course, it is printed), the marks of analogue drawing are materially constituted, issuing from within the thickness of the world, and therefore subjected to its modicum of unforeseen variation. To take an extreme example: when LeWitt’s assistants execute their tightly prescribed task, drawing precise regular lines upon a wall, those lines will always be subject to an infinitesimal margin of variation, a truancy that escapes the dead-set order of geometrical systems. The emergence of a drawing cannot figure an *absolute* subjection to a pre-given code because, as a material practice, it is always ‘circuiting into the analogue.’

How then might we conceive of an ‘analogue diagram?’ David Joselit’s slightly earlier essay, ‘Dada Diagrams,’ is a useful place to start. Again, Duchamp provides the entry point. In 1919 he offered an eccentric wedding present to his sister Suzanne, entitled *Unhappy Readymade*. This consisted of a geometry book that would hang outside by strings; the weather would ‘choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages.’¹⁸ The mathematical diagrams and formulae would be exposed to the aleatory action of the

¹⁷ It should be noted that in concluding a 2004 essay on Thomas Hirschhorn, Buchloh articulates more affirmative claims for art’s work, which, in the case of Hirschhorn, he argues, initiates a process that ‘continuously and collectively enables and enacts a multiplicity of micrological steps towards self-constitution and subjectivity.’ Buchloh: ‘Thomas Hirschhorn: Lay Out Sculpture and Display Diagrams,’ in Buchloh, Alison Gingeras and Carlos Basualdo: *Thomas Hirschhorn* (2004), p. 88.

¹⁸ Duchamp talking to Pierre Cabanne, in Joselit op.cit. p. 221.

elements. Framing his discussion in terms of the hybridity between visual and textual modes, Joselit explores the diagram as one of Dada's three principal formal innovations (the others are photomontage and the readymade). Indebted to yet departing from Cubism's 'implosive' effect, whereby 'objects collapse under their own semiotic obscurity,' Dada diagrams (by, for example, Francis Picabia and Marius de Zayas), instead enacted an expansive principle involving 'a free play of polymorphous linkages.'¹⁹ Vectors and relations would emerge from the open visual and semantic systems operating in works such as Picabia's *To Give Fleas to One's Dog* (1919). This 'heterogeneous principle of assemblage among bodies and signs,' Joselit argues, 'differs sharply from the closed-circuit mechanisms of an actual technological ensemble.'²⁰ Rather, Joselit looks to a different conception of the machine, as provided by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who offer the following model of the diagrammatic machine:

'Defined diagrammatically in this way, an abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme instance. Rather, it plays a piloting role. The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.'²¹

The emphasis is displaced from the search for a particular *referent*, to the new kinds of connections and assemblages that diagrams *generate*.

In developing this conception of the diagram, Joselit invokes mathematician and philosopher Brian Rotman, who recounts how diagrams have been regarded with some suspicion by both the science and humanities communities: for the former, they are dangerously susceptible to subjective interpretation, for the latter, conversely, they are tainted with its association with science and its faith in universal truth. Relaying Rotman's arguments, Joselit draws attention to the fact that whatever 'piloting role' the diagram might perform must be 'activated by the perceiving subject.'²² Joselit theorizes the diagram, in its combination of a 'piloting role' with a sense of a 'real that is yet to come,' as signalling what he calls a '*embodied utopianism*.'²³

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 232.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 234-5.

²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, quoted in Ibid. p. 235.

²² Joselit in Ibid. p. 236. Rotman: 'diagrams are inseparable from perception.'

²³ Ibid. p. 237.

This emphasis on the viewer's active role in en-framing art's potentials has been central to my project. An open site of transformative conversions, the body has been figured as a 'system of systems' that guarantees the ongoing arrival of the unanticipated. Drawing circuits and feeds back into these systems, providing compelling ways to produce shifts in the material fabric of the world, to introduce complex registers of temporal difference, and to re-potentialize figurative and perceptual givens. Encouraging a heightened attention to the 'felt reality of relation,'²⁴ drawing's work encourages various redistributions: 'Artistic practices,' argues Jacques Rancière, 'are "ways of doing and making" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationship they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.'²⁵ Drawing fashions an energizing array of effects from the most modest and unspectacular of means; and it becomes strikingly apparent that while, as Alex Potts argues, 'human desires and ideas' cannot 'somehow be fully lodged in material things' (as the consumerist myth would have it), they can indeed be productively articulated, augmented and explored through such creative activity.²⁶ As Michaux wrote to end his last book, drawing offers a way 'to be open to the world differently,' a means for 'disalienation.'²⁷

²⁴ Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), p. 16.

²⁵ Jacques Rancière: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (2004), p. 13; slightly earlier, he writes: 'Aesthetics can be understood... as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.'

²⁶ Alex Potts: 'Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s,' *Art History* (Volume 27, Number 2, April, 2004), p. 300.

²⁷ Henri Michaux: *Par des traits* (1984), unpag.

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CHAPTER 1

Drawing / Writing / Cinema



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- 1.2 Maurice Bérard: Matisse's Studio at the Hotel Régina, Winter 1941-2. Black and white photograph.



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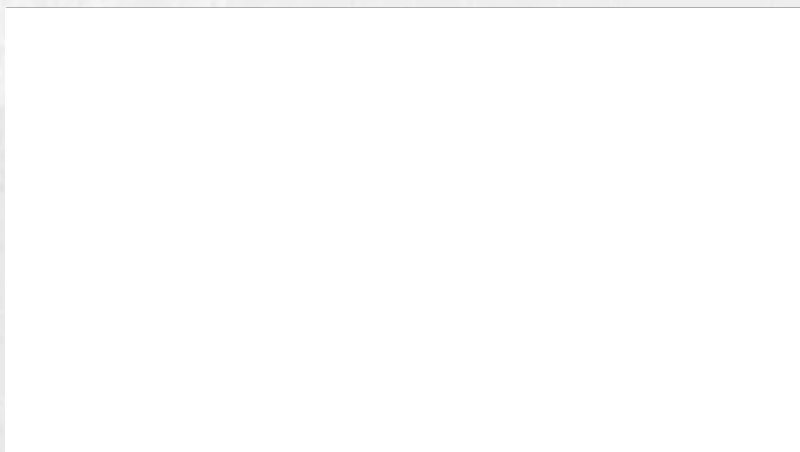
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1.24 – Henri Matisse: *Louis Aragon*, March 1942. Pen and ink on paper, 53 x 40.5 cm. Reproduced in Louis Aragon: *Henri Matisse, a Novel* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, vol. II, 1972, p. 53).



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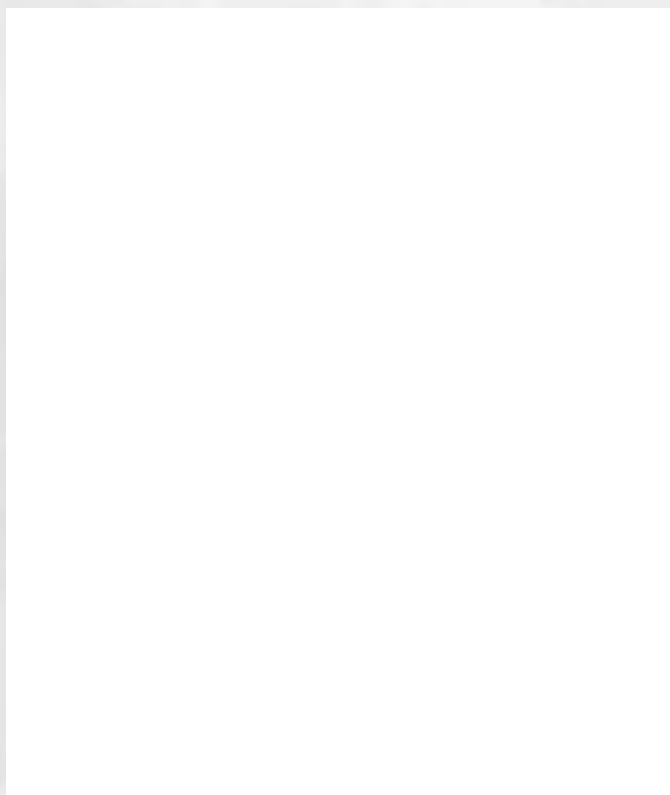
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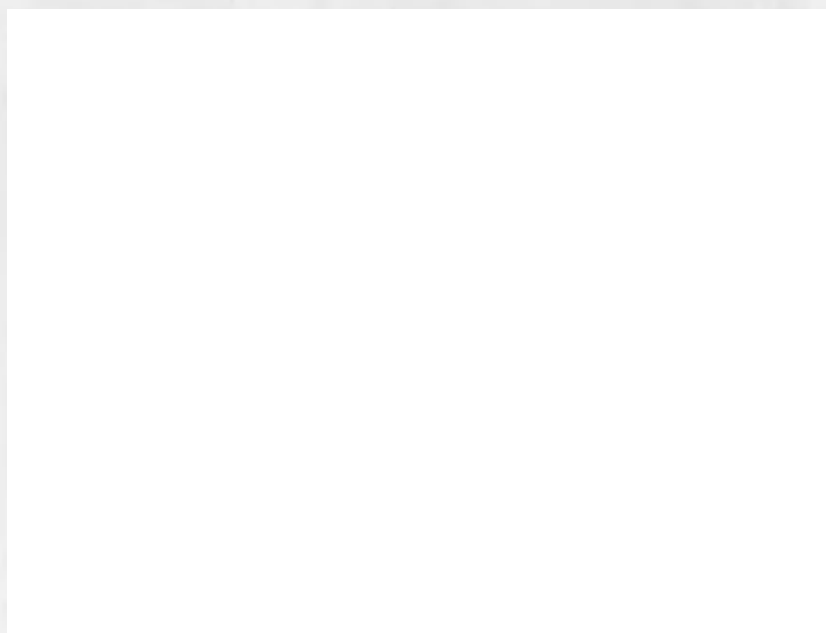
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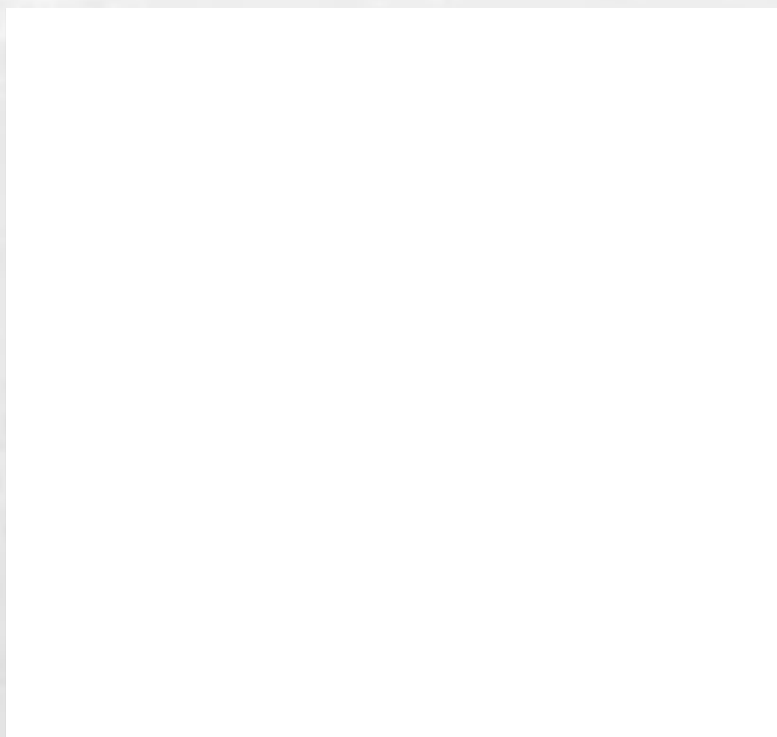
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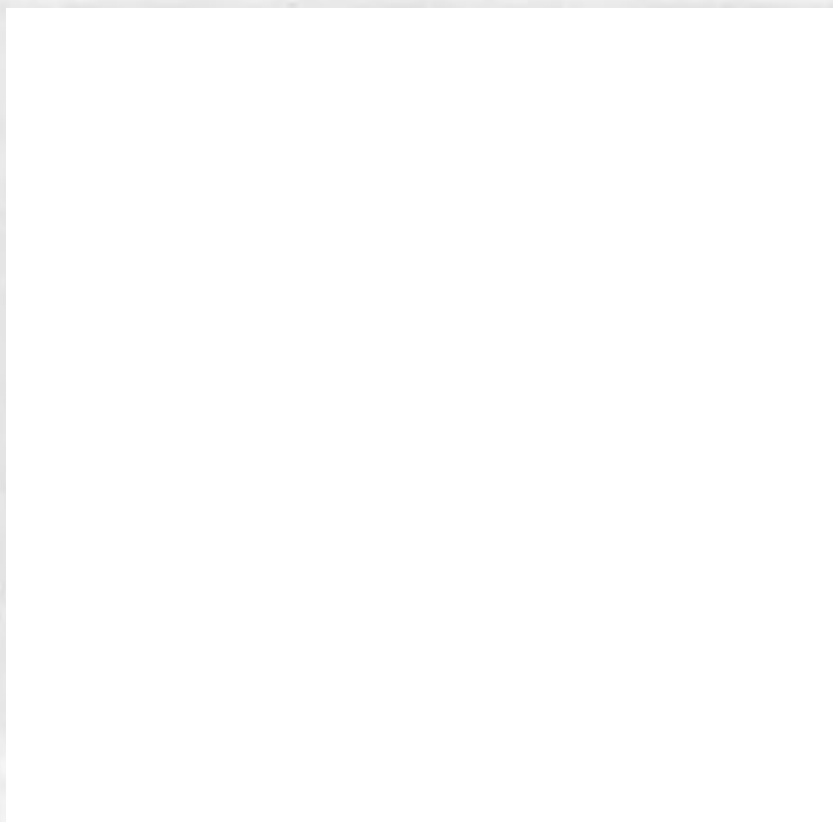
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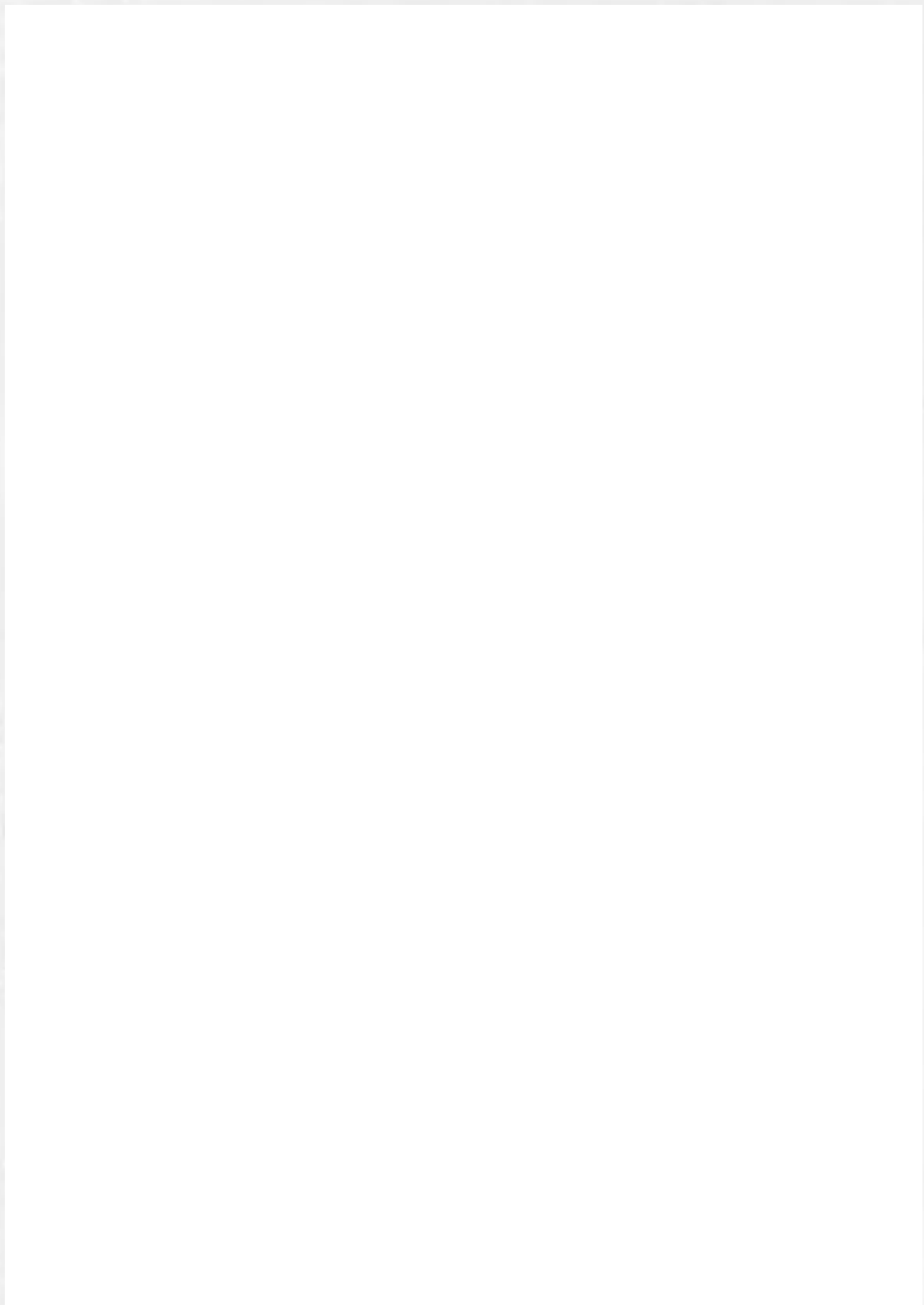
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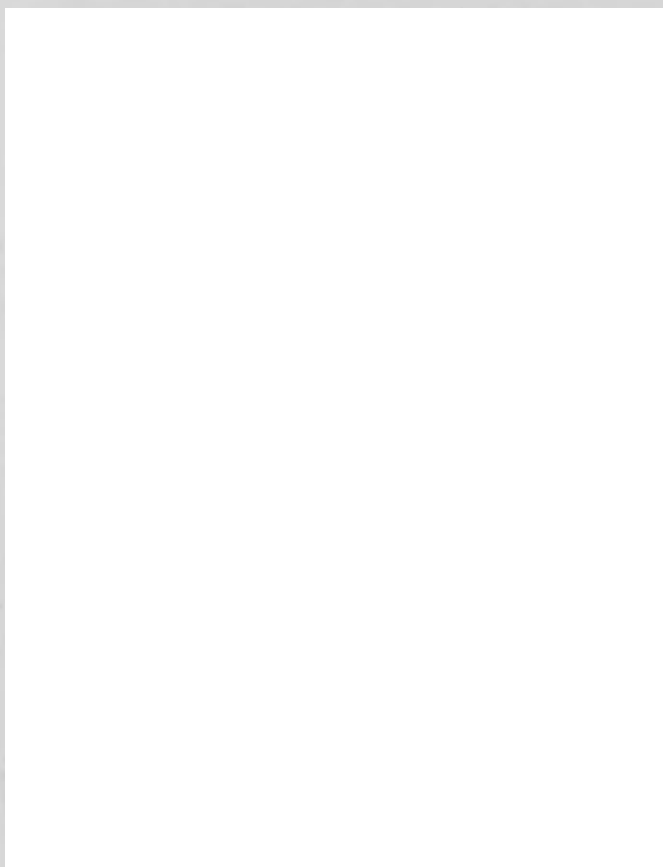
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CHAPTER 3

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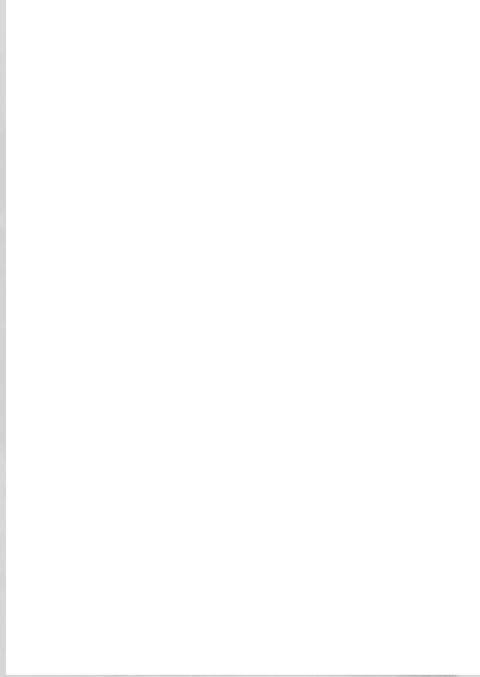
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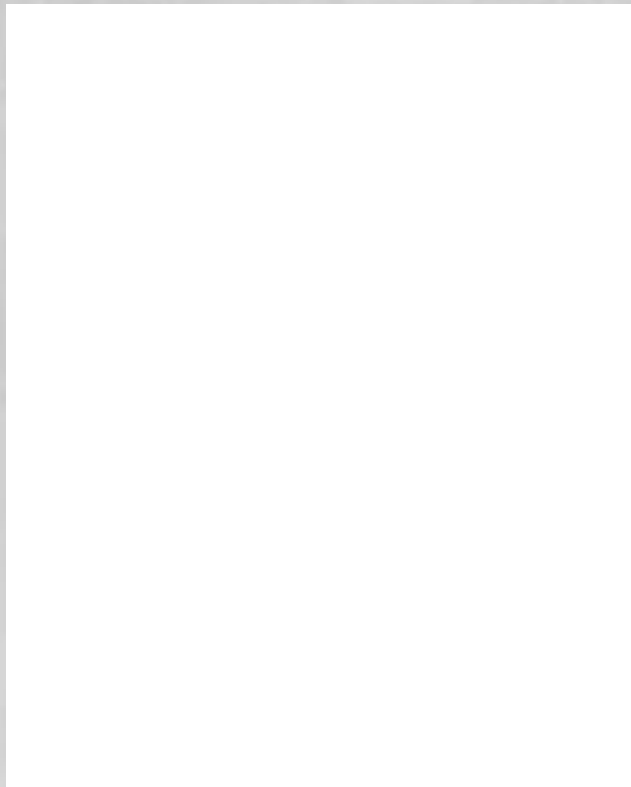
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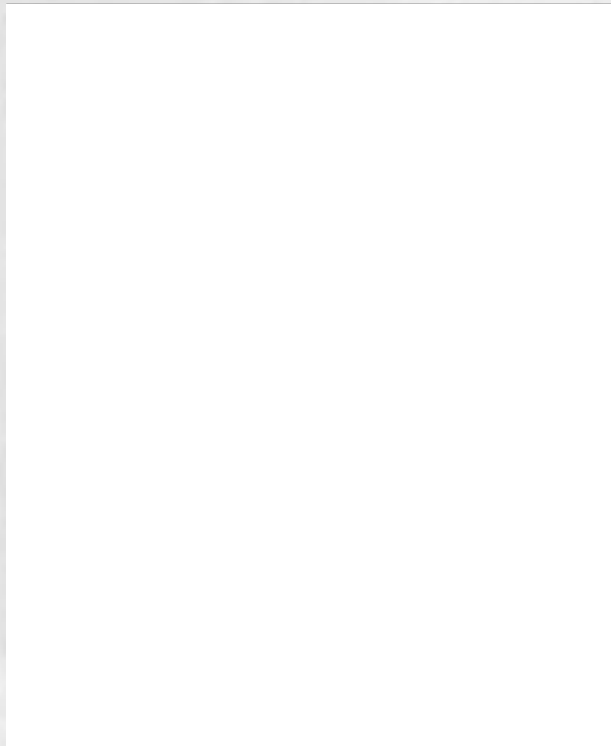
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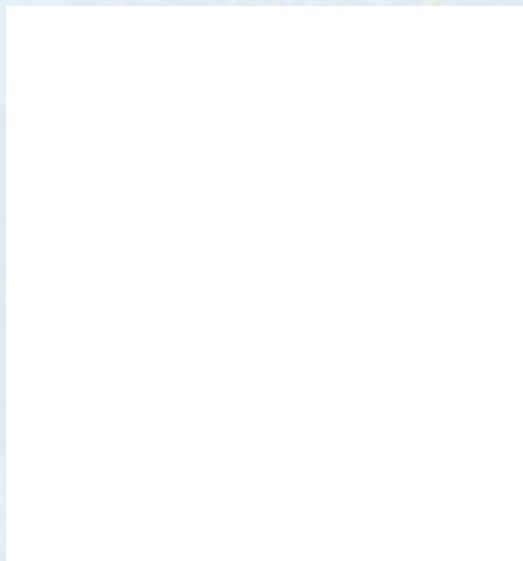
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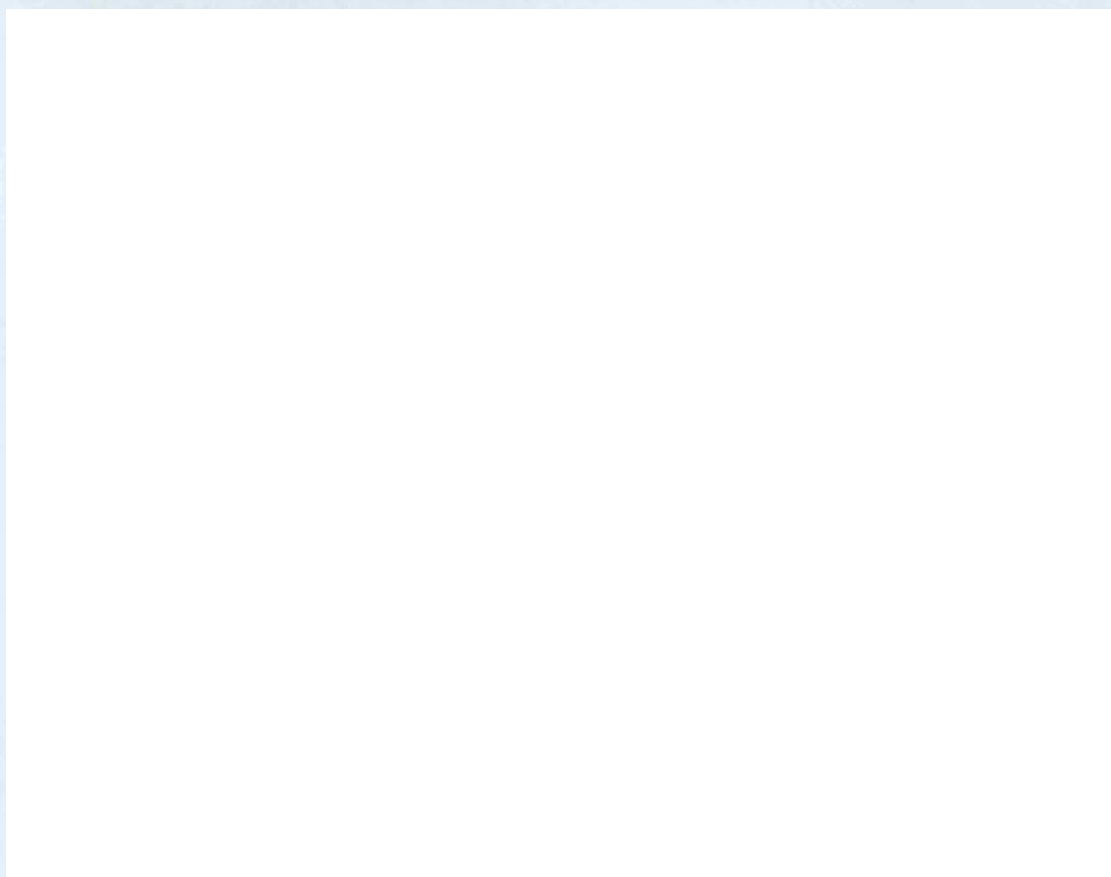
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CHAPTER 4

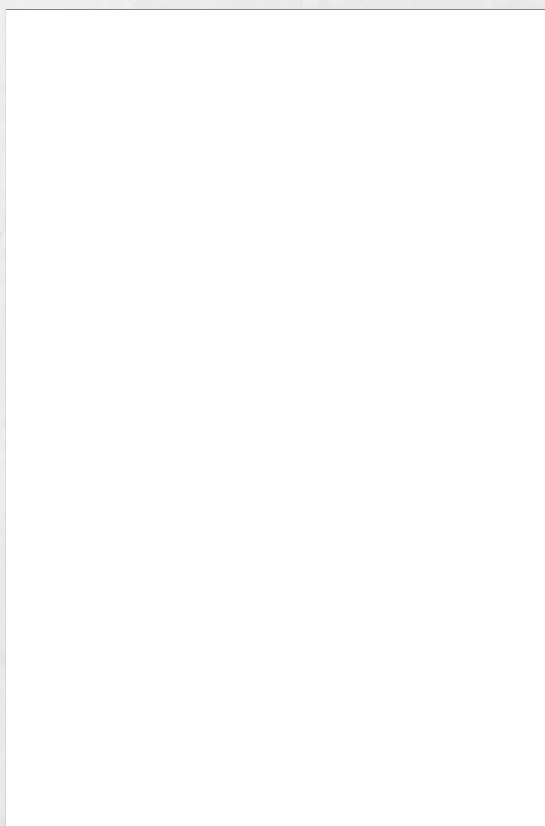
Liquidity



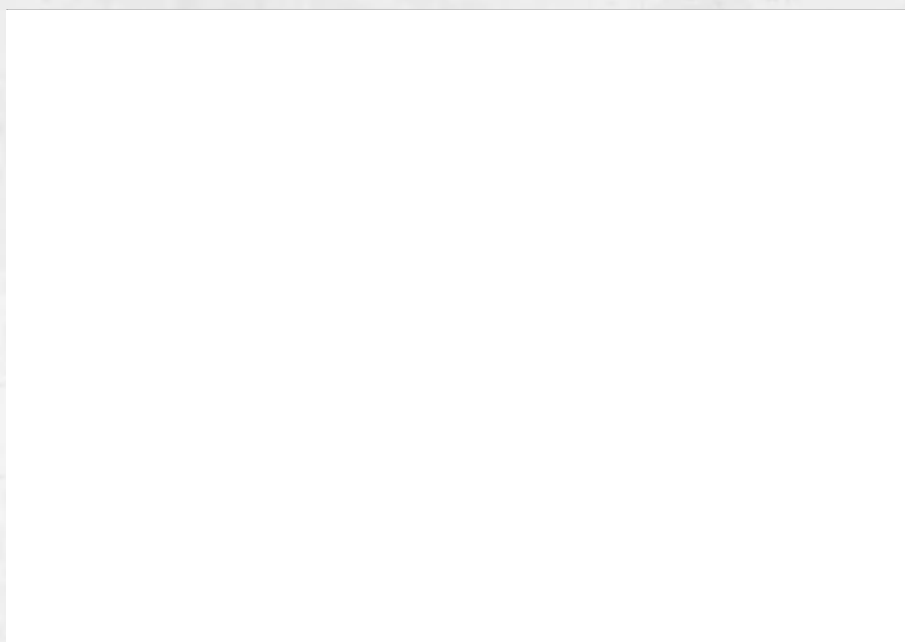
4.1 – Marcel Broodthaers: *La Pluie (Projet pour un texte)*, 1969. 16mm film, black and white, 2 mins (Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, Paris).



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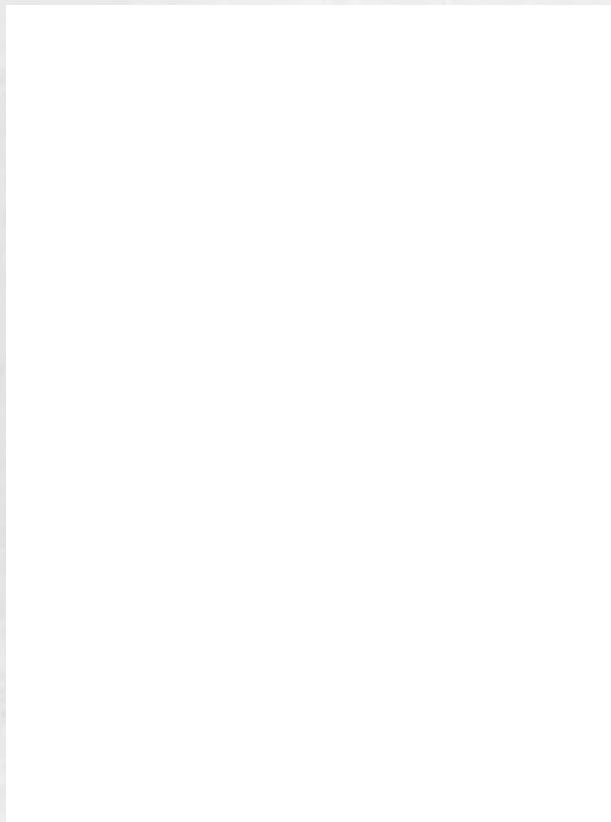
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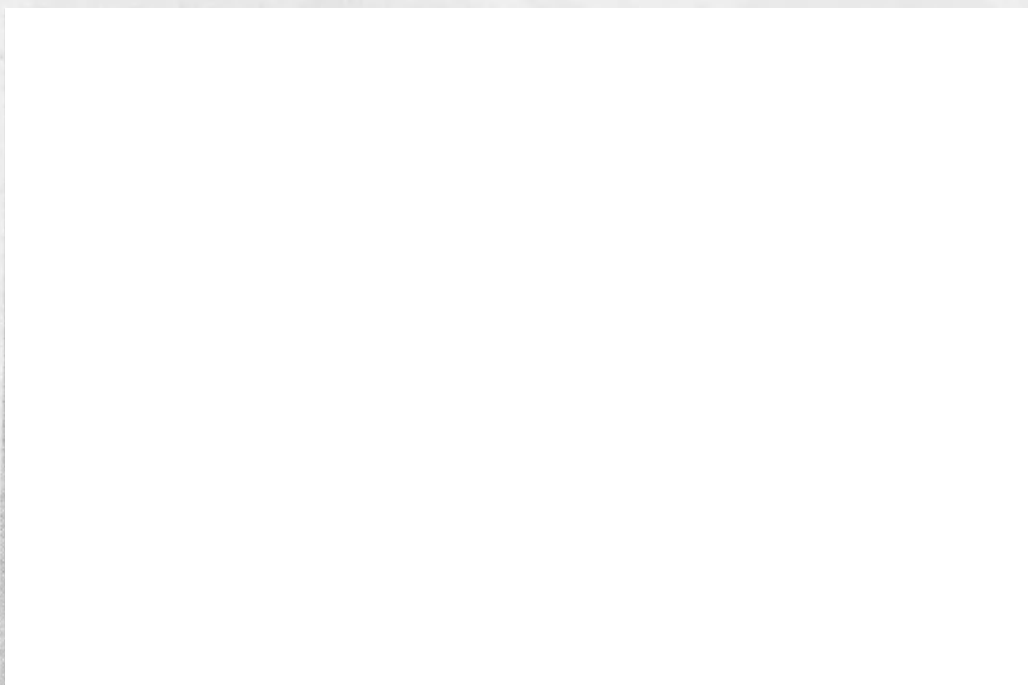
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4.13 – Joseph Beuys: *Glacier*, 1950, from *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, no.36. Pencil on paper, 20.5 x 29.5 cm (Collection of Erich Marx, Berlin).



4.14 – Joseph Beuys: *Stag's Head*, 1954, from *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, no.130. Beize (iron chloride solution) and pencil on paper, 33 x 50 cm (Collection of Erich Marx, Berlin).



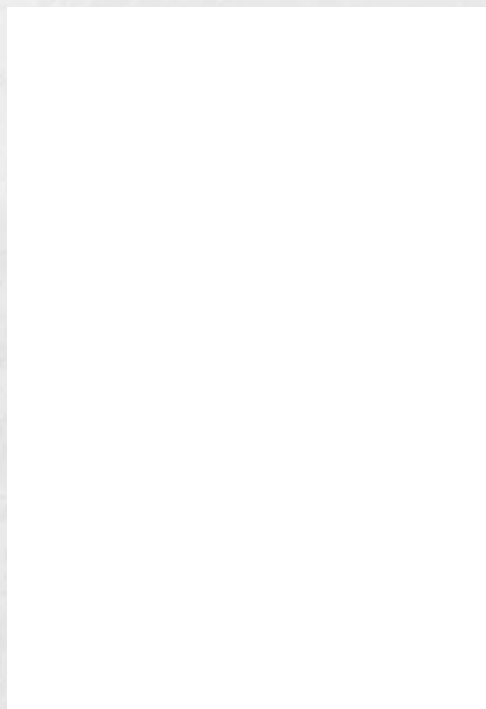
4.15 – Joseph Beuys: _____?, 1958, from *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, no.222. Pencil and watercolour on paper with collaged paper hare, 50 x 36.5 cm (Collection of Erich Marx, Berlin).



4.16 – Joseph Beuys: *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated*, 1964. Paper, oil colour, ink, felt, chocolate, and photograph, 157.8 x 178 x 2 cm (Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Collection van der Grinten).



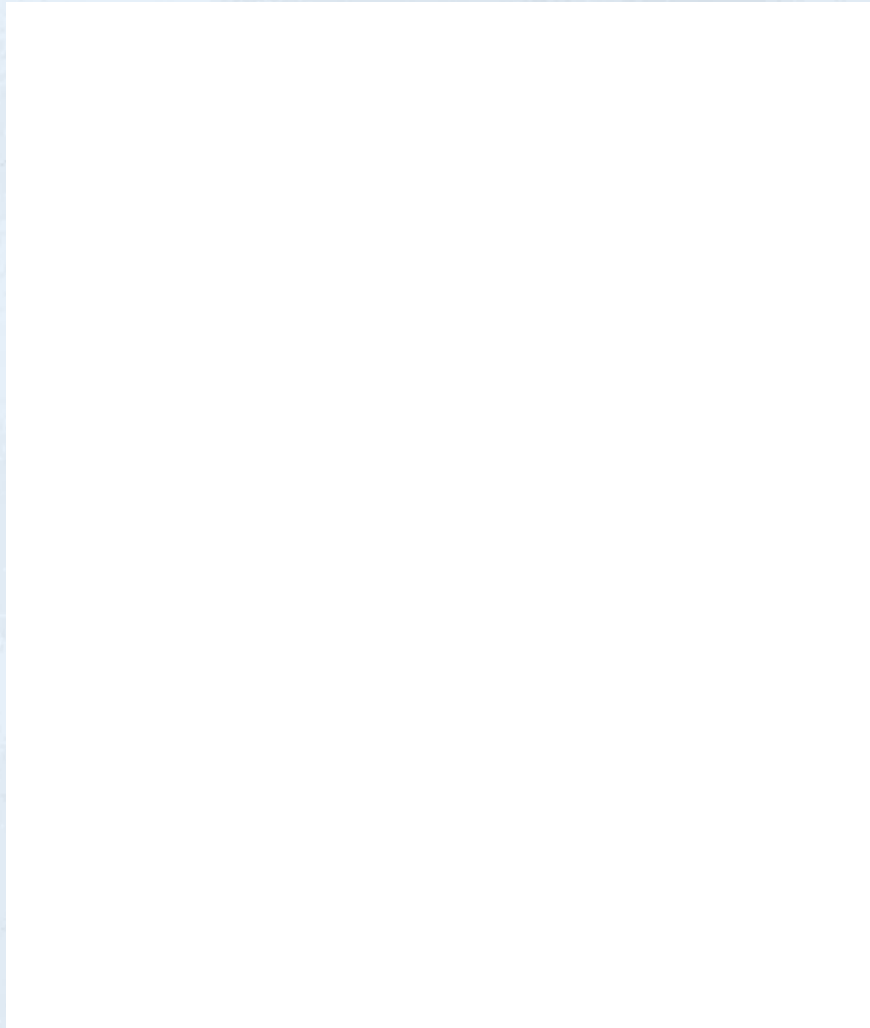
4.17 – Ed Ruscha: *Eye*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 137.2 cm (Oakland Museum of California).



4.18 – Henri Michaux: *Personnage ton bistre*, c.1946-8. Watercolour on paper, 50.8 x 32.7 cm (Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, Paris).



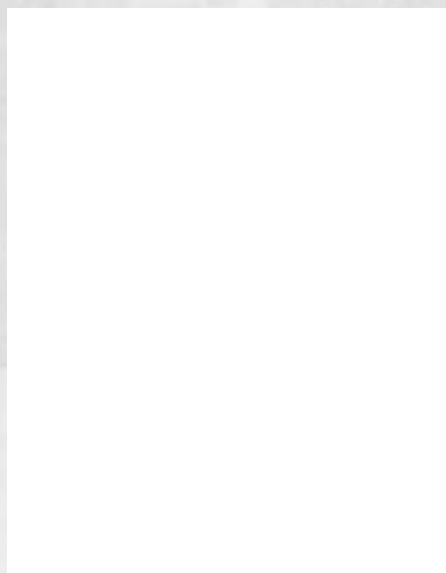
4.19 – Henri Michaux: *Yellow Figure*, 1948. Watercolour on paper, 24.5 x 32 cm (Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, Paris).



4.20 – Joseph Beuys: *Lift* (1949), from *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, no.19. Watercolour on paper, 25.6 x 21.9 cm (Collection of Erich Marx, Berlin).



4.21 – Vik Muniz: *Teacher*, from 'Pictures with Chocolate,' 1999. Cibachrome print, 157.5 x 121.9 cm (Galleria Cardi, Milan).



4.22 – Photograph of Beuys performing *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony*, Edinburgh, 1970. Reproduced in Caroline Tisdall: *Joseph Beuys* (London: Thames and Hudson and New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1979), p. 199.

CHAPTER 5

Analogue



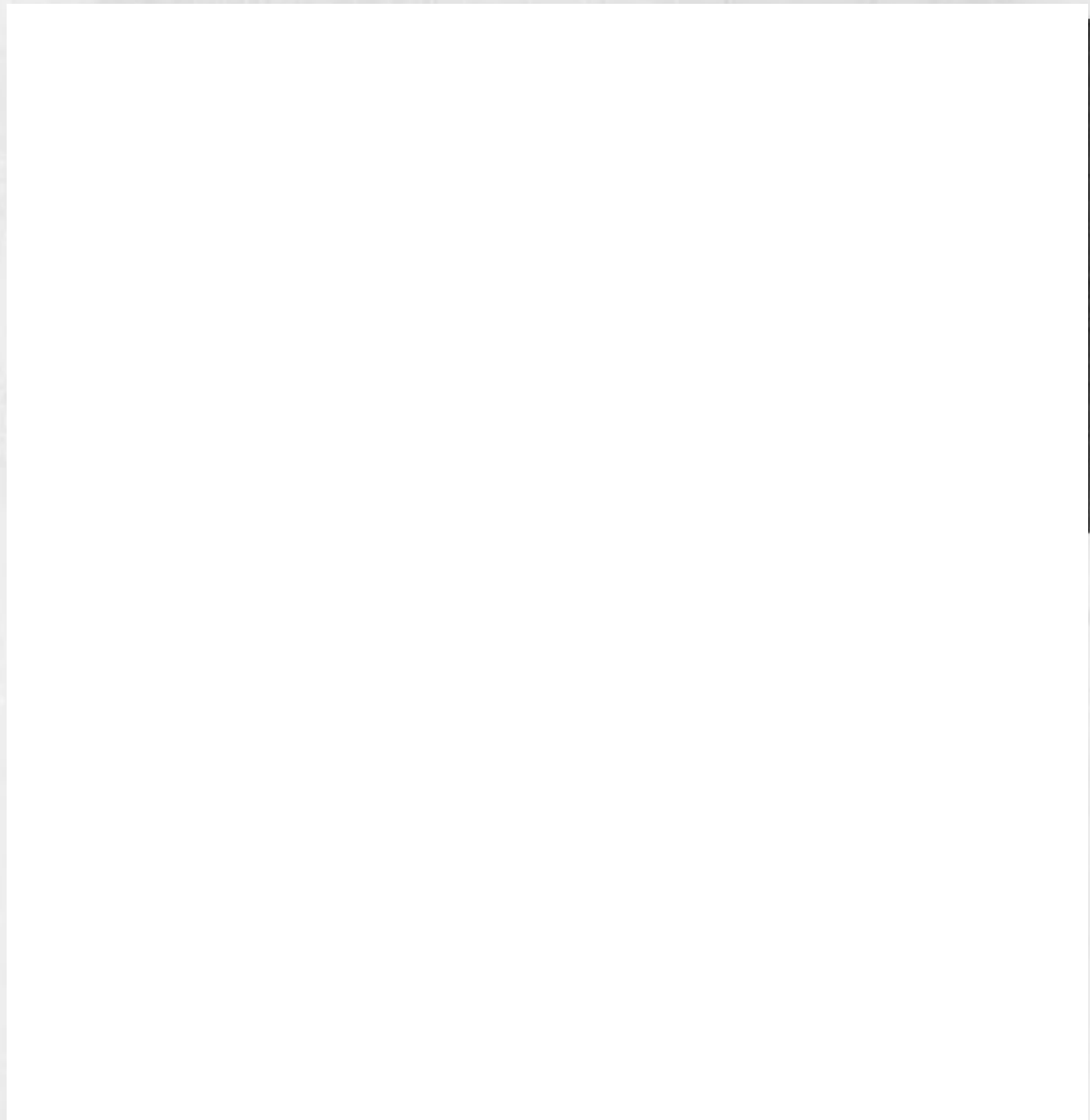
5.1, i - iv – Tacita Dean: *Sixteen Blackboards* (Parts I - IV), 1992. Sixteen parts, photograph on fibre based paper, each 50 x 50 cm.



5.1, v - viii – Tacita Dean: *Sixteen Blackboards* (Parts V - VIII), 1992. Sixteen parts, photograph on fibre based paper, each 50 x 50 cm.



5.1, ix - xii – Tacita Dean: *Sixteen Blackboards* (Parts IX - XII), 1992. Sixteen parts, photograph on fibre based paper, each 50 x 50 cm.



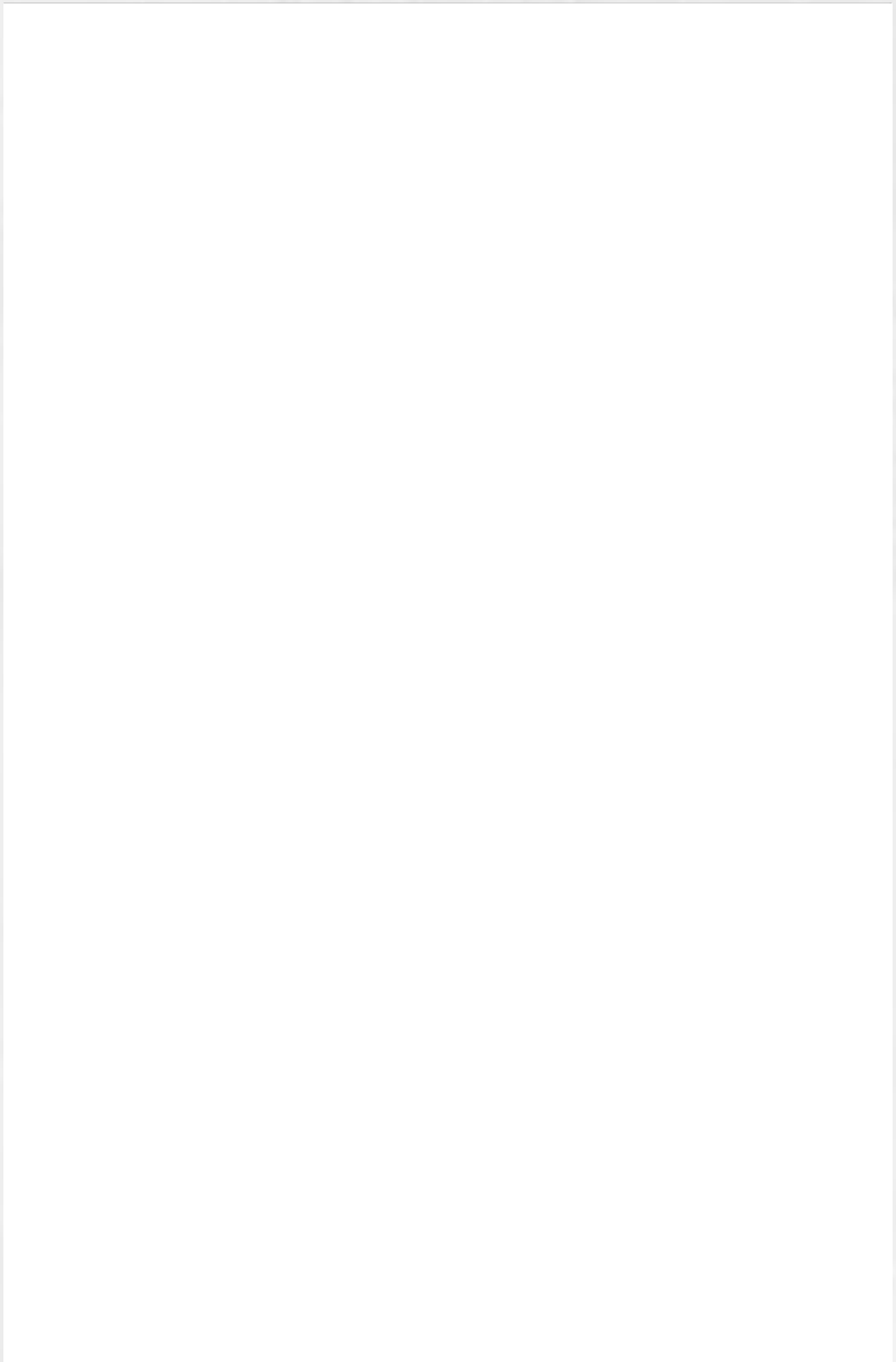
5.1, xiii - xvi – Tacita Dean: *Sixteen Blackboards* (Parts XIII - XVI), 1992. Sixteen parts, photograph on fibre based paper, each 50 x 50 cm.



5.2 – Joseph Beuys: *The Capital Room* 1970-1977, 1980/4. Blackboards, projection equipment, and miscellaneous other objects (Hallen für neue Kunst Schaffhausen, Switzerland).



5.3 – Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, 1970. Crayon and house paint on paper, 70.5 x 100 cm (Private Collection).



5.4 – William Kentridge: *Felix in Exile*, 1994 (details). Charcoal, pastel and gouache on paper, each 120 x 160 cm.



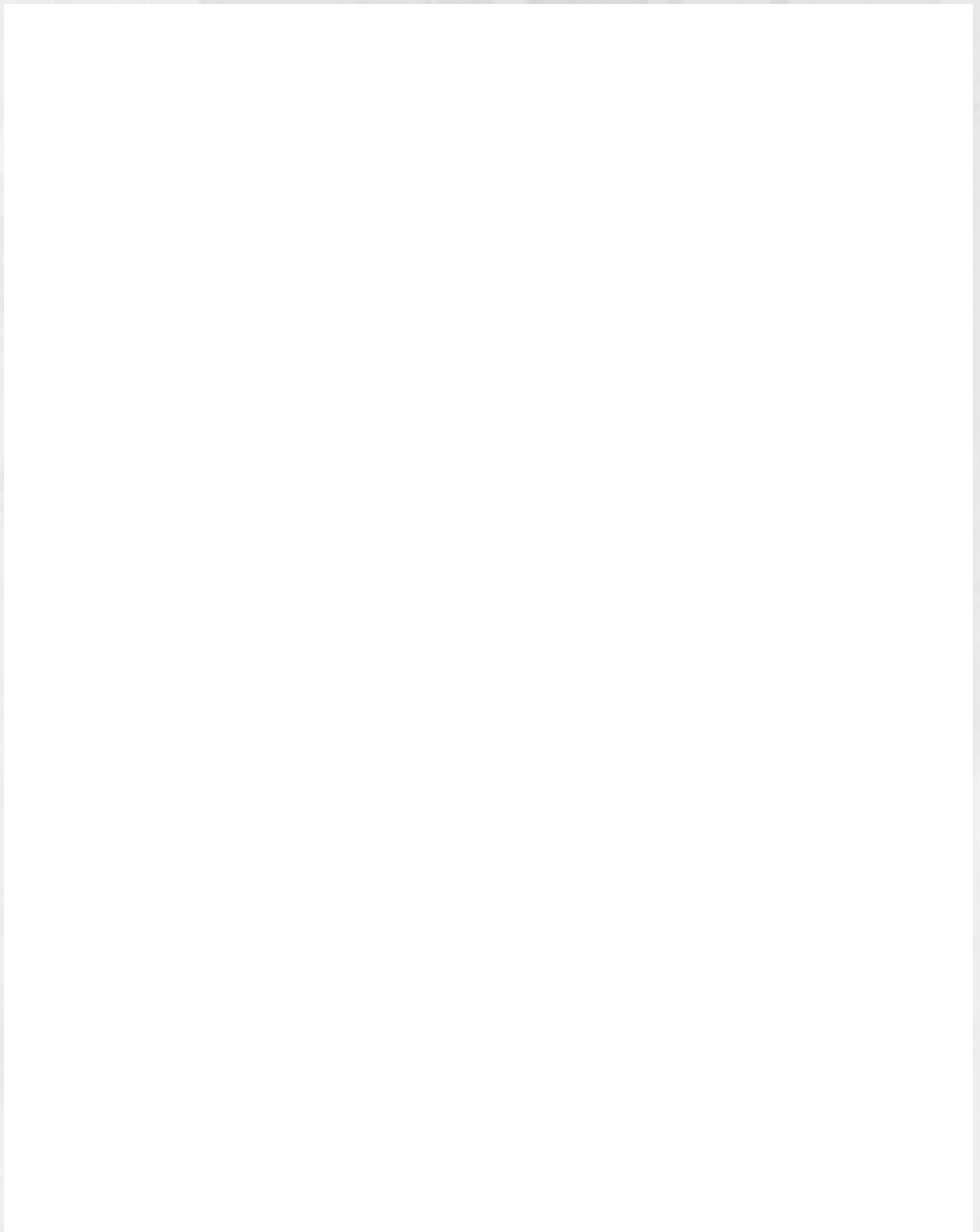
5.5 – Tacita Dean: *Ztráta*, 1991/2002. 16mm black and white film transferred from Standard 8, 3 minutes 30 seconds.



5.6 and 5.7 – Tacita Dean: *The Roaring Forties, Seven Boards in Seven Days*, 1997 (Parts II + IV).
Seven parts, chalk on blackboard, 240 x 240 cm each (Tate, London).



5.8 and 5.9 – Tacita Dean: *The Roaring Forties, Seven Boards in Seven Days*, 1997 (Parts VI + VII). Seven parts, chalk on blackboard, 240 x 240 cm each (Tate, London).



5.10 and 5.11 – Tacita Dean, *Disappearance at Sea*, 1996, film stills. 16 mm colour anamorphic film, optical sound, 14 minutes.

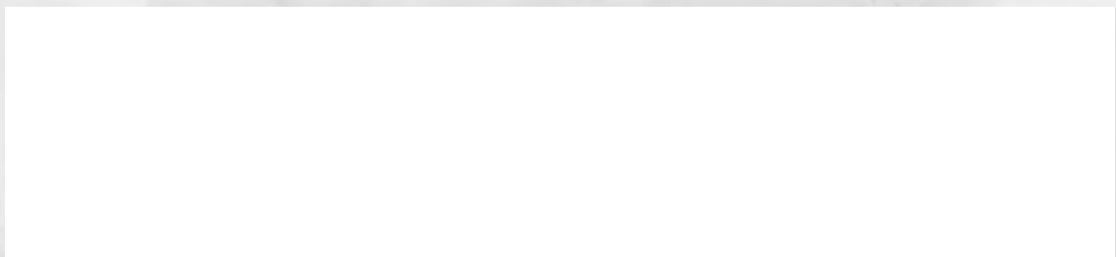
5.14 – Michael Snow, *Shades*, included in *Michael Snow: 1975-2015*, 2015, 14 minutes.



5.12 – Marcel Broodthaers: *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 1973-4. 16mm colour film, 4 minutes 15 seconds.



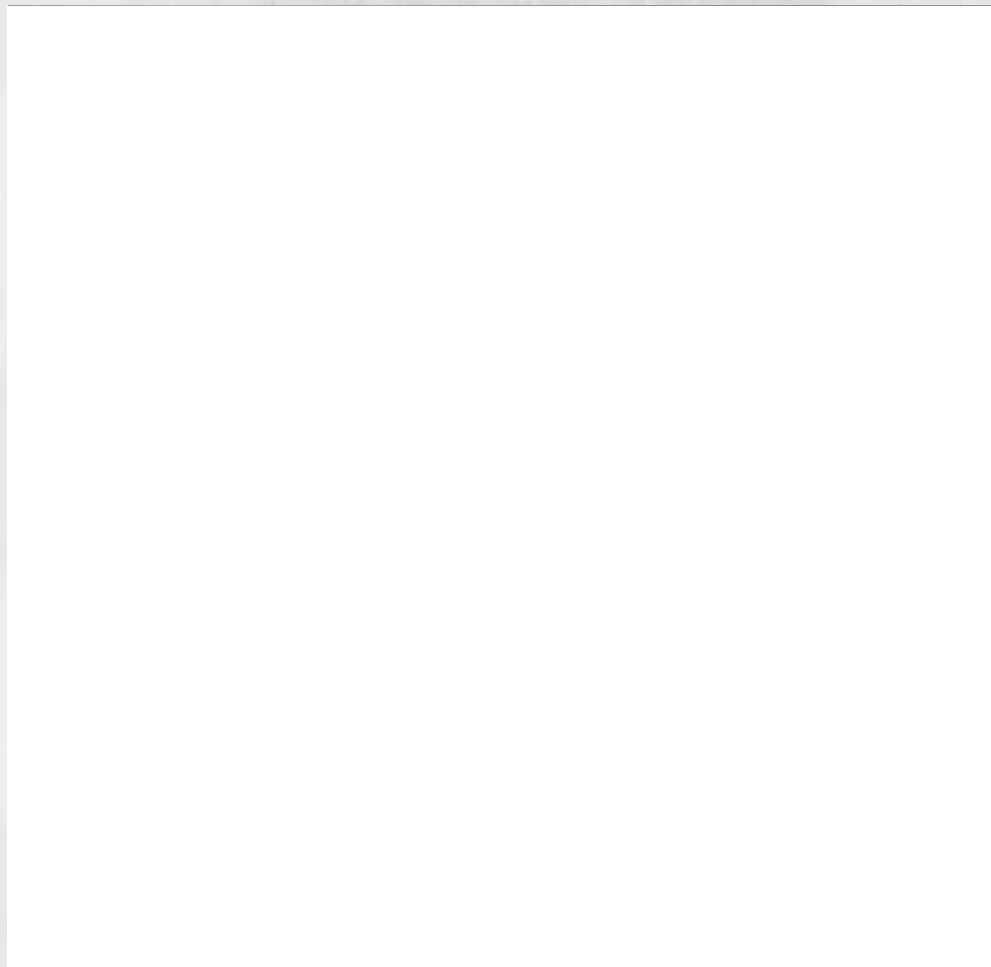
5.13 – Marcel Broodthaers: Pages from *A Voyage on the North Sea*, published by Petersburg Press, London, November 1973.



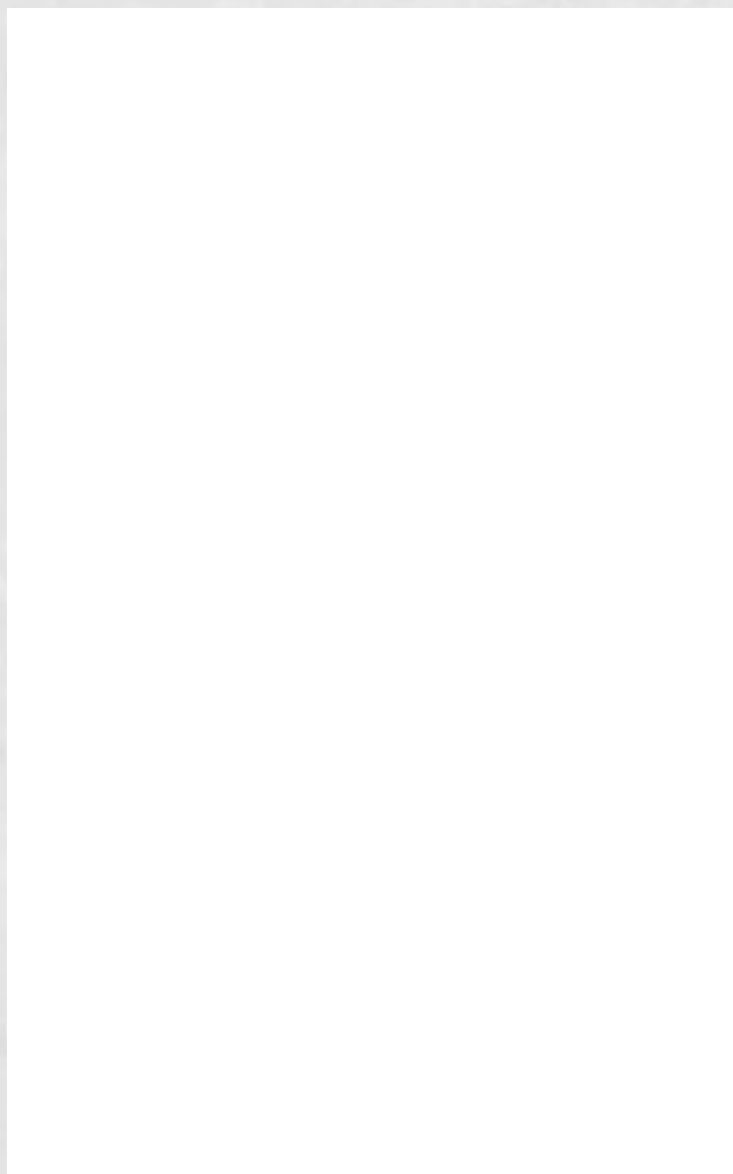
5.14 – Marcel Broodthaers: Slides included in *Bateau Tableau*, 1973. 80 Slides.



5.15 – Marcel Broodthaers: Still from *Chère Petite Soeur*, 1972. 16mm black and white film, 4 minutes.



5.16 – Tacita Dean: *Chère Petite Soeur*, 2002. Chalk on blackboard, diptych, each 244 x 488 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York).



5.17 – William Kentridge: *Mine*, 1991. Video stills.