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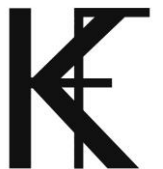
The Graphic Line-‘an event in its own materialisation’

Making Traces Symposium 19-22nd November
2014

Anne Douglas, Grays School of Art,
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

Amanda Ravetz, Manchester
Metropolitan University

KFI Associates



Amanda is a film maker and anthropologist. I am a visual artist with a background in sculpture. For the past couple of years, we have been collaborating together as associates in Tim Ingold's research project, exploring drawing in relation to filming as a way of *knowing from Inside*. We work experimentally in both media, occasionally with other interested researchers from the same project. This paper does not focus on the detail of the experimental processes and collaborations, though you will see one of two examples. Process was the subject of a presentation in Weimar earlier this year and currently available on the KFI website. Instead we want to take a reflective trajectory through the work, drawing on artists and philosophers who have kept us company in the process of the research.

The form of the presentation will become apparent.

Dear Amanda

I have made several false starts on the paper for *Making Traces*. Part of the issue is trying to co-author a paper that we both 'own' and that is appropriate to our research within *Knowing from Inside*. Although we have managed this at a distance in the past, for some reason I miss building this as a collaborative effort.

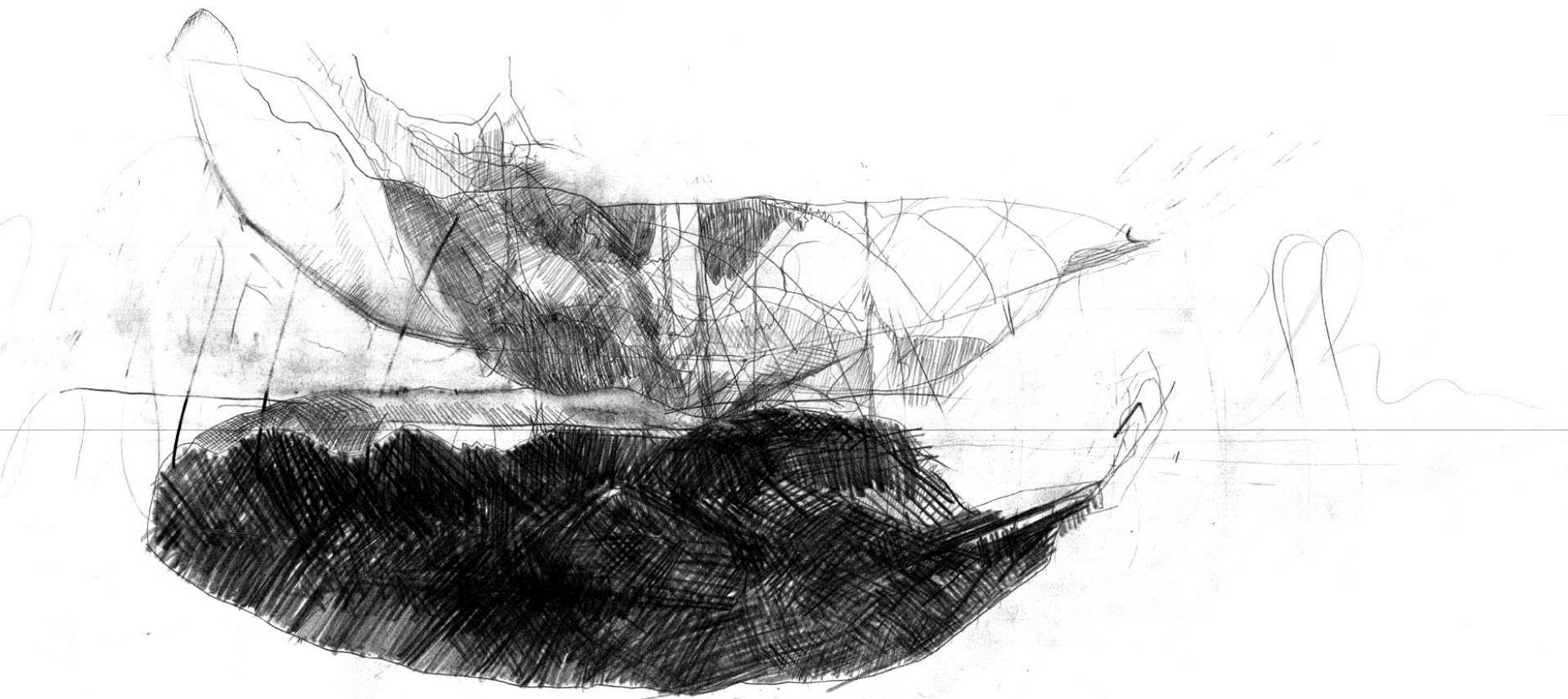
Sitting having a coffee in central Aberdeen today, I started to write to you, working through my thoughts on a napkin. This felt a better way to approach the paper than trying to construct a formal voice that neutralises our distinctive approaches. What if I offer some thoughts on the work to date from Aberdeen that you could perhaps respond to from where you are now, in Australia and in a different experience from where we left off in the summer.

Here goes...

We are approaching *knowing from inside* through a common interest in drawing. Our approaches to drawing come from different experiences and different perspectives. In your case, filming forms your point of entry to drawing and in my case sculpture is my equivalent. Both are visual media that have a particular **relationship with time**. The one in some sense, is the inverse of the other.

Film has grown out of sequencing a number of discrete images so that they could be experienced as continuous. Film still retains something of this quality of constructed movement even in a digital realm not least through the editing process.

Drawing in English references both process and object. The noun and gerund are the same word. It seems therefore that both filming and drawing work with the tension between movement and stasis in quite distinctive ways. On the one hand it is difficult to imagine 'image' in drawing without undermining the specific quality that makes a drawing, drawing. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine film as a still object of contemplation, in the way that an icon, for example, functions as an image (Nancy 2005).



In developing a sculpture practice in the past, I increasingly concentrated on the process through which 3 dimensional forms emerged, sometimes unexpectedly, from a set of procedures and relations built up over time and in materials. A drawing could act in my earlier practice as a point to point procedure, like conventional Western notation, determining through precise measurements, a trajectory through the material. I then increasingly developed work by establishing a set of self imposed constraints, *within which* anything could become possible. I have described this as a form of improvisation. Drawing as a quality of sculpture marked for me the difference between the success and failure of a work, even though I might not have been able to say exactly what that quality was.

What is your interest in film? How would you describe your approach?

Within the KFI research, we have now set up a series of experiments that set out to imagine one medium, filming for example, in terms of the other, drawing, and vice versa. In this way we have moved out of a comfort zone of default solutions that we know how to do. By each encountering the other's way of working, we have needed to suspend disbelief and consciously avoid the temptation to predetermine a result. Line emerges as an important element in the short films that you have made whether it is consciously created through pencil on paper or followed with the camera, as in tracing a path or journey. Both forms of drawing a line occur through time as well as by means of materials



“ Each line is inhabited by its own history, it does not explain, **it is the event of its own materialistion**”

Cy Twombly in Nancy 2013: 42 (authors' emphasis)

I am wondering what Twombly means by 'event' and 'materialisation', why we were drawn to this as a title.

Twombly points to a seeming paradox at the heart of drawing, a tension or interplay between the continuous and the discrete. 'Each' line is a discrete occurrence. It comes to be (and is not brought about through cause) but nonetheless each occurrence has its own distinctive past. In appearing, a line interrupts what has preceded it, differentiating from what has gone before.

What is distinctive and important to the inflection that Twombly offers our understanding of drawing?

“To make sculpture the sculptor must lie down slipping to the ground slowly and smoothly, without falling. Finally when he has achieved horizontality, he must concentrate his attention and efforts on his body, which pressed against the ground, allows him to see and feel with his form the forms of the earth...

Giuseppe Penone 1970

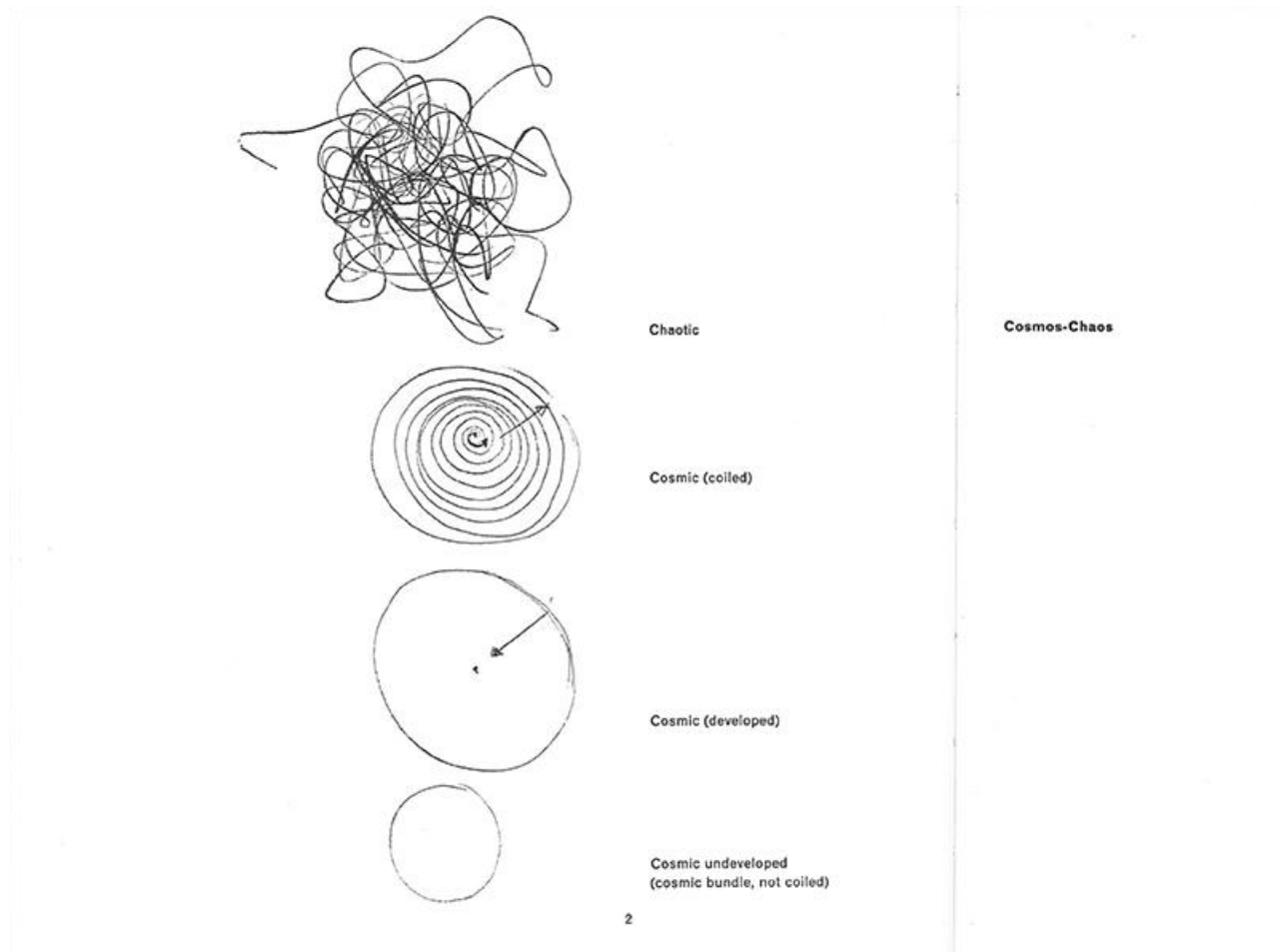
Germano Celant, Milan: Electa 1989

It reminds me of the artist Guiseppe Penone's thought experiment imagining sculpture purely through the body and ground. It is a particularly vivid instance of *knowing from inside*.

"To make sculpture the sculptor must lie down slipping to the ground slowly and smoothly, without falling. Finally when he has achieved horizontality, he must concentrate his attention and efforts on his body, which pressed against the ground, allows him to see and feel with his form the forms of the earth. ...The sculptor sinks... and the horizon line comes close to his eyes. When he feels his head finally light, the coldness of the ground cuts him in half and reveals, with clarity and precision, the point that separates the part of his body that belongs to the void of the sky from that which is solid of the earth. It is then that the sculpture happens" (1970). "Untitled Statement" in Germano Celant, *Guiseppe Penone* (Milan: Electa 1989).

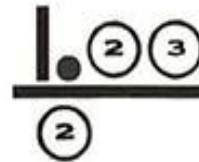
Penone draws his understanding of sculpture from the simplest possible starting point - the body and its relation to gravity. It involves him drawing back into a horizontal plane, losing dimensionality, collapsing difference into a single point, a point of absolute stillness at which anything that is superfluous is expelled. By spreading one's arms, the line of the horizontal body creates a plane in two dimensions. Like Twombly's line, Penone's dimensionality emerges not as something caused, but materialised in this case out of the body's sensations of contact with the ground. In Penone's encounter, the ground is felt to be cold, *not* light; solid, *not* void. The ground and sky are clearly differentiated and in this way reveal themselves to the sculptor.

Paul Klee *The Thinking Eye*

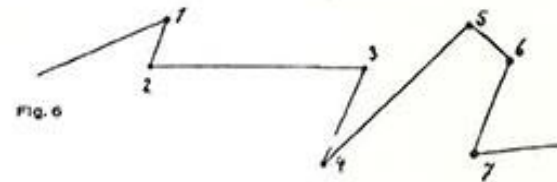


Penone resonates Paul Klee, who also throws light on CY Twombly's insight. Klee, like Penone, seeks a primary point of departure for line, in a point. Where Penone creates 'point' as a means of addressing and simplifying the complexity that sculpture has accrued over time, Klee enjoys the ambiguity of what a point could be—an organising moment in the midst of chaos, a kind unmeasurable nothingness or the very beginning of time itself.

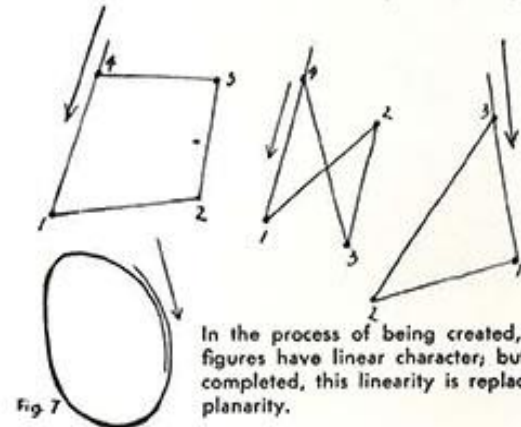
Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*



An active line, limited in its movement by fixed points (Fig. 6):



A medial line which is both: point progression and planar effect (Fig. 7):



In the process of being created, these figures have linear character; but once completed, this linearity is replaced by planarity.

The sequencing involved moves through active, medial and passive states. These are not just abstract relations but qualities of relations perceptible in nature, in the body itself and its internal dynamic relationships.

Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*

I. 8

8

Material Structure. in nature.

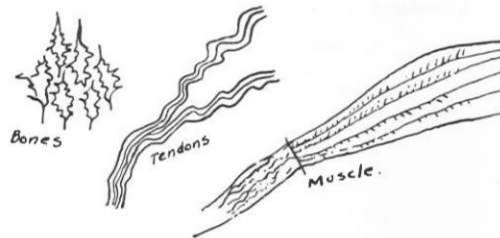


Fig. 21

Structural concept in nature:

The grouping of the smallest recognizable entities in matter:

Bone matter is cellular or tubular.

Ligament structure is a sinuous-fibrous web.

Tendons are continuous with the connective tissue of the muscle, strengthened by cross grain.

I. 9

9

The natural organism of movement as kinetic will and kinetic execution (supra-material).

A

Bones are coordinated to form the skeleton.

Even at rest they depend on mutual support.

This is furnished by the ligaments.

There is a secondary function; one could speak of a hierarchy of function.

The next step in motoric organization leads from bone to muscle. The tendon is the mediary between these two.

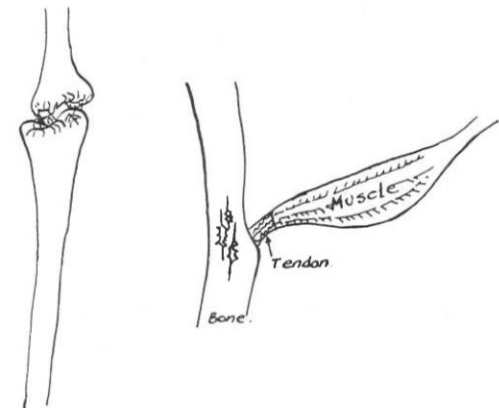


Fig. 22

For example, bone, tendon and muscle are interdependent in that bone provides structure and support (passive). Muscle has the potential to stretch and contract controlling movement(active) and tendon mediates between the two. Mobility becomes possible in the dynamic interrelationship between all three elements and what they afford materially: bone is cellular, muscle is fibrous and tendons are continuous.

What is really important for me about both artists, is their starting point in what appears to be the simplest possible elements: the point and the line, the body and the horizon, but these apparently simple, everyday experiences turn out also to be metaphysical .

Is this the meaning of 'events in their own materialisation'? Events occur 'unmasked' in the world of experience, the fog of uncertainty . Once present, they become organising forces, differentiating and mobilising energy in the form of movement (line) and rest (point), the one constituting the other.

‘An **active** line on a walk, *moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk’s sake. The mobility agent is a point, shifting its position forward.*”

(authors’ emphasis) (Klee 1973:16)

The opening lines of Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook draw together three qualities.

'An **active** line on a walk, *moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake. The mobility agent is a point, shifting its position forward*". (authors' emphasis) (Klee 1973:16)

What is being evoked here is neither the presentation of a closed off form given in advance (like an explanation) nor a perpetual state of novation - a continuous movement. It is perhaps more like an **interruption**. Each new event in drawing, each trace, is a birth of some new potential, a deep form of sensing the pulse of the world contained within a contour.

Coming back to our experiments, this quality of experience is not a given. We have needed to work towards achieving it, constructing enabling conditions, by trial and error, by failing and recognising what it is *not*, by interrupting our immersion into the practices of drawing and filming to reflect on what we are doing, to think through again and again what questions we were asking, reading around the activity, at times more than practising it.

They say that the mind of the philosopher is different from the mind of the poet. Is all this thinking and figuring out simply a delaying tactic to avoid diving in? Or Do we need to arrive at a certain level of understanding to reach more deeply into our practices, to make greater demands upon them?

“1989: In Berlin a wall was torn down, while in Beijing a crowd of students was struck down in and around Tiananmen Square. The world would never be the same. Twelve years later, that fact was driven home once more. This time by an image that transcended all art in its sublimating aesthetics. Fear, tragedy and beauty are sublimely fused in a media image that is forever etched in our memories.”

Pascal Gielen

Creativity and other Fundamentalisms (2013)

Let me offer a stark counterpoint to drawing articulated thus far.

“1989: In Berlin a wall was torn down, while in Beijing a crowd of students was struck down in and around Tiananmen Square. The world would never be the same. Twelve years later, that fact was driven home once more. This time by an image that transcended all art in its sublimating aesthetics. Fear, tragedy and beauty are sublimely fused in a media image that is forever etched in our memories.”

Gielen 2013: 15

Pascal Gielen, a Dutch sociologist of art, goes on to describe the crashing of the two planes into the Twin Towers.

All three events – the removal of the Berlin wall, the storming of Tiananmen Square by students and 9/11, present themselves as images. They share some notable qualities with the discussion on drawing. They constitute ‘occurrences’ or ‘events’ that disrupt what went before them, replacing a familiar frame of reference and meaning with another one – a radical occurrence that changes reality as we know it. These images are mediated, aesthetic in intent.

“The genius of this awful act of terrorism was that the delayed second attack was perfectly timed to assure that the whole world would be watching. These retellings had an increasingly familiar feel. There was music scored for the intermissions, and fancy graphics that flashed across the screen. There was a formula to interviews. There was ‘balance’ and seriousness. This was news choreographed in the way we have increasingly come to expect it, ‘news as entertainment’, even if the entertainment is tragedy ”

Lessig in Gielen 2013: 15-16

Gielen draws on Lawrence Lessig, co-founder of Creative Commons, Harvard academic in law ethics, to understand the aesthetics at work.

“The genius of this awful act of terrorism was that the delayed second attack was perfectly timed to assure that the whole world would be watching. These retellings had an increasingly familiar feel. There was music scored for the intermissions, and fancy graphics that flashed across the screen. There was a formula to interviews. There was ‘balance’ and seriousness. This was news choreographed in the way we have increasingly come to expect it, ‘news as entertainment’, even if the entertainment is tragedy.

Lessig in Gielen 2013: 15-16

What is it about this account that feels to be transgressive? Lessig is pointing out that images are already aesthetized by the media and it is this aesthetization that is shocking! It takes the form of a well-rehearsed set of procedures that **process** the content in particular ways, telling us what to think.

Amanda, what might this insight offer our experimentation? What we do and make is fragmented, at times un-dramatic, at others chaotic. Nonetheless, it demands skill and effort, not passive acceptance of what is already pre-formed. Our experimentation frequently fails but we are driven by a deep desire to keep going, to keep simplifying.

Dear Anne....



Dear Anne,

I think what you are missing is my proper attention to this – my “whole-bodied, sense-saturated, meaningful coordination and attunement”. This is just how things have turned out, with my being in the southern hemisphere, busy with other papers, talks, and all that entails. But your intuition of a letter, cuts through this other busyness – for who can fail to respond to a direct and personal voice? Not me, at any rate.

You begin by talking about knowledge and what we know – drawing, film and sculpture. Yes, I suppose we do know these things in some ways. We have some experience, some skills. But what I have been thinking about a lot here is the value of *not* knowing. By which I mean a thinking that is a feeling towards, but which doesn't rush to know, to settle, establish. Is this a little like the line that is still being drawn?

My approach to film? Someone told me the other day that in Alexander technique, when you get up, you should lead with your head; when I film I try to lead with my body. Even if I am using a tripod, and my body is apparently disconnected from the camera, I want my attention to be as close as possible to the camera's operation. This is achieved by looking through the lens and attempting, imaginatively and sensorially, to become part of what I am seeing. I think of it as drawing with my body– if I move around someone I am filming, I am casting lines and marks in relation to them, and they, as they gesture, respond, move, stay still, are leaving traces in relation to me.

You ask about Twombly's idea of a line as an event of its own materialisation. I like the way you explore this. To me this phrase proclaims that the line is in and of and for itself. It is not orientated towards knowledge, but existence. This reminds me of thinking as doing – the idea many artists have that we can think without becoming attached too soon to some graspable knowledge, to answers. Someone, I think it was Graham Sullivan, said that art moves from the unknown to the known. It seems that drawing is also like this.

And Penone's beautiful words about sculpture. I don't entirely understand these – but I feel them in my body – can imagine what it is like to slide down smoothly and then become still. Does Twombly's sentence remind you of this because in both his and Penone's words there is a movement, through time with a form of attention that is open, turned outwards, that is there for things in the world that are for themselves rather than for ourselves? In other words, as the line in Twombly exists in and for itself, so the sculptor to be a sculptor in Penone's terms, must become part of this 'knowing with' – or 'being with'...both invoke drawing as something that has its birth in a tension between doing, movement and attention, stillness. How hard it is to write about these things. And how much harder still to experience them as someone trying to be an artist, or as a viewer of work.

The idea of interruption. Yes. And opposed to, or compared with this, the idea of continuous novation is quite menacing. Interruption always makes me think of coitus interruptus though – i.e. of a pleasure curtailed. Would rhythm be a way to think of this movement of pieces, of, as you have said before, bipedalism, that encounters different materials, atmospheres, frictions and stoppages? The pulse of the world, as you say. And as well as stopping to reflect, there are also the minute pulses that attend all movement, however smooth it might seem at a certain scale.

I watched some fragments of film yesterday by the Australian filmmaker Rob Nugent. Rushes from his new film *Night Parrot* – and in it was a German philosopher saying something like – “the philosopher reflects on the world but does not change the world”.

The poet on the other hand – and poetics in its Greek meaning – *does* change the world by contracting it – as in birth contractions – an idea also borrowed, this time from Paul Carter!

What do the examples of disaster on screen – screen memories – offer? You suggest they are transgressive of our conception of drawing. Yes, they are. Not because they are screen memories maybe, but because the way they have coalesced into images – the way something has protruded from the traces of which they are made, speaks to a set of ideas that are radically different from our own. Where we want open-endedness, open handedness, at least where we can bear it, they seem to want certainty, knowledge and closure.

This is knowing, this open-endedness. And for me it is reverie too. Or what Keat's called negative capability. It's interesting to think about the history of this in terms of an intellectual history of the artist's need for not knowing – beginning perhaps with the romantics? I don't know, I'm not an art historian. But perhaps we are part of an age that seeks process, movement, openness and so on, in direct relation to what we experience as a dramatic closing down of future possibilities. Drawing as an emblem of and experiential encounter with hope, the concrete utopia that Bloch wrote about? What do you think, Anne?

Dear Amanda...



Dear Amanda , I have not read Bloch sufficiently to comment and perhaps this is comes next

In the opening lines of his text on the pleasure of drawing, Jean Luc Nancy proposes that drawing “is the opening of form” in two senses: a beginning *and* an inherent capacity (Nancy 2013:1). The first evokes the live gesture of drawing that is different from a tracing. The second, indicates an incompleteness, “a nonclosure or non-totalising of form” (ibid). In both senses drawing can never be detached from a sense of movement or becoming. This seems to come close to Twombly’s notion of the line as participating in its own making. It stands in opposition to image in the mediated images that are already formed and shockingly irreversible. Nancy argues that drawing is not a given, available, formed form, but a form to come, that is desired and anticipated, like birth (Nancy 2013: 3).

‘Form’ in this sense equates with ‘idea’ – the drawing through which a painter might represent the preliminary thoughts he/she might have towards a sense of truth or the inner life of a work. In the same way the architect’s, engineer’s or botanist’s drawings are not merely an imitation or reproduction of a thing found in the world, but the means to produce an idea, thought or sense of something. The difference between the architect/engineer and the artist might lie in the mode of truth at play – the one is in some sense verifiable and the other, not yet imagined, the presentation, perhaps, of a (different) way of seeing.

Nancy traces drawing back to its etymology in 'de-signare' meaning to designate, a way of showing that unfolds through stages so that the showing can be "followed, accompanied and carried throughout its progression" (p 10-11). Again I feel this resonates with the notion that the line does not explain, but lives its own history, one that nonetheless can be followed as a kind of tracing or re-tracing experienced as if for the first time. There are echoes here of Arnheim's double edged mind: the intellect and intuition. The eye in conjunction with the brain scans and synthesises, creating a Gestalt that is more than the sum of the parts. In perception we respect the inherent nature of the situation that we confront. Each moment of perception is an event of drawing together multiple sensations into a unique, singular form, as a sense making. We draw with our eyes, bodies, senses and imagination as much as with our hands and specialised implements. In doing so, we do not reproduce the world. We create it by working closely with what is there. Curiously, the activities we associate with thinking – differentiating, comparing, singling out, foregrounding, mirror those activities associated with drawing in which we also differentiate, distinguish, delineate, compare, single out, foreground and place in the background.

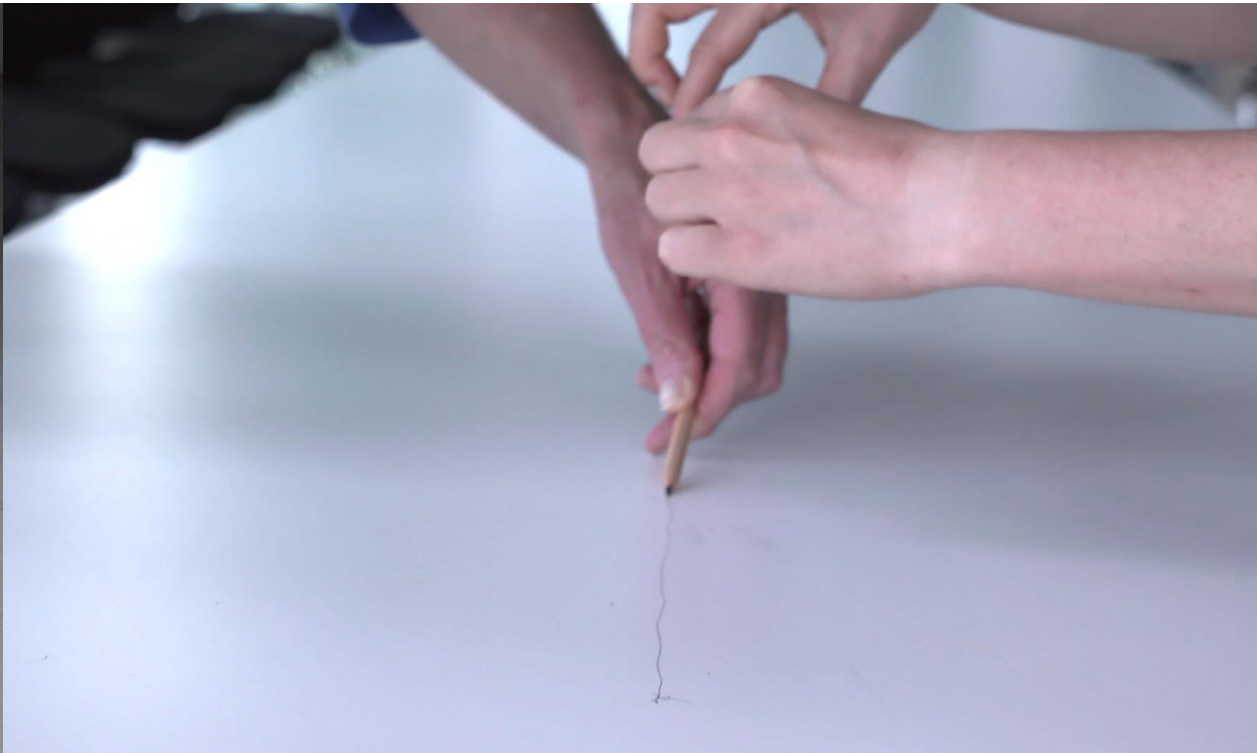
It seems to me that in this sense, drawing is a quality of encounter that is political in the contemporary world. If our understandings of global events are consistently fed by images that are closed to the imagination and to thought, as Gielen's analysis reveals, then what is being denied to us is the openness necessary to our being able to manage, interpret and build meaningfully on their content. This leads to deep anxiety and a neutering of the power to act.

By understanding line as an open, formative force, we are predisposed towards a way of knowing that is not built upon through information - a process of accumulation, like silt, but rather a process of making 'sense' for ourselves.

““ To draw” is at once to give birth to form- to *give* birth in *letting* it be born- and thus to show it, to bring it to light [*mettre en évidence*]-or rather...to allow its evidence to offer and dispose itself”

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*
2007/13

Dear Anne....



Dear Anne,

You make the argument for drawing as a quality of encounter that is political. I believe film can also be a kind of drawing as an opening, a birth. I think here of the films of Jean Rouch, the great instigator of 'shared dreaming' between himself and his protagonists, and of Pedro Costa's extraordinary work in *Vanda's Room* and *Colossal Youth*; or of Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. All have a quality of crescent openness rather than over determined closure. We tend perhaps to conflate film with its technology, to detach image from movement and process. But everything you say about creating the world by working closely with what is there seems to me possible also for film - the screen memories that result can be enigmatic, they don't have to be stripped of their unfamiliarity and strangeness. They can remain plural, full of continued potential life.

So what might we conclude from all of this? The question we began with had to do with trying to understand whether and in what ways filming can inform drawing and drawing filming. If what we have said makes any sense then perhaps what we have discovered is that film helps to illuminate the pulse of drawing – allows us to think about it not as continuous flow but as rhythm; and that film/moving image, can, through its poetics, be a form of drawing, not caught, statically, pinned down into cookie cutter frames. By laying these two things side by side we began in a modest way to further explore these qualities in each supposedly separate medium. And what we came to was the political dimensions and possibilities of these ways of leaving traces in the world.

I think what we are trying to do here is re-find a space in which something is done for its own sake – time spent to deeply experience something that is not leading to something else or become the function of something else. Why is this important in film and its connection with drawing? Because by recognising this, we are inhabiting possibilities rather than being colonised by other preoccupations. As Rohan de Saram said “Life is a continual interaction between what one person would like and what is imposed on them from the outside. **So one can feel that one is being used to do something, your life is being lived rather than you are living it. That aspect comes across very forcibly in improvisation because one’s sense of direction is often being turned towards other channels and one is forced to think along different lines. You may, to a certain extent, guide it – but only to a certain extent.**” (Interview Richard Scott <http://richard-scott.net/interviews/rohan-de-saram/> 8th October 1989).

Recognising this means we value the knowing that comes from experience more than that which comes from information and to go back to the idea of knowing from inside we have set something up in our small experimentation in such way that we can see we can see its unfolding and take ourselves back into that predisposition...

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