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Within the Carnal:

Re-reading Merleau-Ponty Through the Language of Drawing.

Helen Farrell

PhD Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Julia Jansen

Head of School of Sociology and Philosophy: Prof. Graham Parkes.

National University of Ireland Cork – Discipline of Philosophy

March 2015

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for another degree at University College Cork or any other institution.

Signed:

Helen Farrell

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List of Abbreviations

Works by Merleau-Ponty:

- CD “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. Micheal B. Smith (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 59–75.
- CPP *Child Psychology and Pedagogy: The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952*, trans. Talia Welsh (Northwestern University Press, 2010).
- EM “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. Micheal B. Smith (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121–50
- ILVS “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. Micheal B. Smith (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 76–120.
- PP *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London, Routledge 1962)
- PW *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O’Neill, ed. Claude Lefort. (London: Heinemann, 1974).
- S *Signs*, trans. *Richard C. McLeary* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern U.P, 1964).
- VI *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern U.P, 1968).
- WP *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver Davis, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004).

Abstract

In order to present visual art as a paradigm for philosophy, Merleau-Ponty investigated the creative processes of artists whose work corresponded closely with his philosophical ideas. His essays on art are widely valued for emphasising process over product, and for challenging the primacy of the written word in all spheres of human expression. While it is clear that he initially favoured painting, Merleau-Ponty began to develop a much deeper understanding of the complexities of how art is made in his late work in parallel with his advancement of a new ontology. Although his ontology remains unfinished and only exists as working notes and a manuscript entitled *The Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty had begun to appreciate the fundamental role drawing plays in the making of art and the creation of a language of expression that is as vital as the written or spoken word.

Through an examination of Merleau-Ponty's unfinished manuscript and working notes my thesis will investigate his working methods and use of materials and also explore how he processed his ideas by using my own art practice as the basis of my research. This research will take the form of an inquiry into how the unfinished and incomplete nature of text and artworks, while they are still 'works in progress', can often reveal the more human and carnal components of creative processes. Applying my experience as a practitioner and a teacher in an art school, I focus on the significance of drawing practice for Merleau-Ponty's later work, in order to rebalance an overemphasis on painting in the literature. Understanding the differences between these two art forms, and how they are taught, can offer an alternative engagement with Merleau-Ponty's later work and his struggle to find a language to express his developing new ontology. In addition, by re-reading his work through the language of drawing, I believe we gain new insights which reaffirm Merleau-Ponty's relevance to contemporary art making and aesthetics.

Introduction

In 1961 Maurice Merleau-Ponty died suddenly and prematurely, leaving a large body of work in an unfinished condition. The incomplete state of these papers is therefore unintentional and must be read, as Claude Lefort, the editor of its published version, states ‘as the author intended, with the thought that all that is written is provisional’.¹ While the re-workings and erasures within the manuscript entitled *The Visible and the Invisible* and the working notes clearly indicate that this is a work in progress, and we can only speculate as to how they would have been completed, my thesis asks if these documents in their provisional condition can reveal additional information about Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy beyond the words they contain. Through an investigation of his working methods and use of materials I explore how Merleau-Ponty processes his ideas and records his thought processes, as they give shape and form to his philosophy, in a similar way to an artist working through an idea in drawing. I approach this research by using my own art practice in order to establish that the language of drawing and the process of writing by hand engage similar embodied thinking that resonates strongly with many of the theories that he sought to promote. Merleau-Ponty’s firm belief in the practice of art-making as a non-verbal, embodied practice allows, I believe, the consideration of his own practice, of tracing his thought processes on paper, as subject to the same criteria as that applied to drawing practice. My thesis discusses why this line of interpretation should be taken more seriously and argues that its potential is obscured by the predominant focus on painting in Merleau-Ponty scholarship.

A great deal of Merleau-Ponty’s writings focus on process as central to his phenomenological enquiry into perception and visual art. This approach counterbalances the fact that much of the writing on the visual arts in philosophy is written from the perspective of the viewer, and the finished product, rather than the creation and making of art. His work has, therefore, valuable implications for advancing philosophical research on the arts and for exploring the nature of artistic practice. Although the discipline of painting, Cézanne’s in particular, is the primary

¹ Claude Lefort, “Editors Foreword,” in *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern U.P, 1968), xxii.

concern of Merleau-Ponty's early writings on art, his later work shows a shift in his thinking. He begins to recognise the value of drawing as a practice that has parallels with his ideas concerning embodiment and perception. Subsequently, the creative methods used by artists such as Paul Klee, Henri Matisse and Alberto Giacometti, who worked predominantly with drawing and line (even in their paintings), begin to appear in Merleau-Ponty's later writings to advance his emerging ontological philosophy. Incorporated into this ontological project is the idea of 'reversibility' as a way of understanding our relation to the world: 'a reversibility of the seeing and the visible...of the speech and what it signifies' (VI: 154). This idea of reversibility builds on his earlier declaration to 'leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy' (PP: 202). It is clear from Merleau-Ponty's texts that Klee's work and writings contribute to his development of this notion of reversibility when, for example, Merleau-Ponty explicitly mentions Klee's observation that he often does not know if he is looking at the forest or if the forest is looking at him (EM: 129). This idea of the reversibility of the visible leads Merleau-Ponty to establish the term *flesh* as a means to describe an 'element' rather than 'matter' or 'substance' which can be classified, he explains, as 'a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being' (VI: 139). The term *flesh* is not an easy concept to grasp, however, as 'there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it' (VI: 139). In 'Eye and Mind' there are echoes of this concept in his description of, 'the visible world and the world of my motor projects' as 'both total parts of the same Being' (EM: 124). And when he describes an 'extraordinary overlapping' the 'see-er' is 'immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible' he does not 'appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world' (EM: 124). Indeed it has been noted that many of the 'categories at work' in *The Visible and the Invisible* are directly linked to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of 'pictorial expression'.²

I demonstrate that in this later work Merleau-Ponty begins to develop a deeper understanding of the complex nature of art practice and to relinquish his privilege of painting apparent in his earlier writing. He begins to realize that drawing should not

² Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon : Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, IN ; Great Britain: Indiana University Press, 2004), 67.

be ‘thoughtlessly’ dismissed as ‘a tracing, a copy a second thing’ (EM: 126) but that ‘there is a kind of drawing, even a single line that can embrace all of painting’s bold potential’ (EM: 132). I show that, when examined separately from painting practice, drawing reveals a closer link to thought processes, to problem solving and the formation and development of ideas. Moreover, I expand on work by the artists Merleau-Ponty engages in his essays, to clarify their techniques of drawing and painting. I also look at works by other relevant artists and teachers, for example Joseph Beuys and Kimon Nicolaïdes, who explicitly reflect on the differences between the two practices. In addition I include reflections from writers who also draw, such as John Berger and Julia Kristeva, in order to consider their understanding of the similarities and distinctions between the creative practices of drawing and writing.

I am aware of the internal contradiction in making my argument for the relevance of the language of drawing in a written thesis. However, institutional implications of communication in particular prevent my argument being fully explored through drawing alone. Therefore, to demonstrate the potential of a practice based approach for philosophical research, a core element of my thesis is a selection of drawings that I made directly from Merleau-Ponty’s manuscripts and working notes at the archives in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. My approach to reproducing these documents (‘translating’ them into my own drawings) offers an opportunity to engage with Merleau-Ponty’s work that, I contend, corresponds bodily with his view that painting, drawing and writing are embodied phenomenological practices.

Because of the difficulties involved in writing about the distinction between drawing practice and painting (sometimes there is no clear distinction), I include the voices of artists as much as possible – through interviews and their own writings – to give a sense of how an artist’s initial intentions develops through the process of making and how this process is integral to the development of their work. By applying the criteria normally used for making and reading drawings to Merleau-Ponty’s final unfinished manuscript, I attempt to establish how important his thinking on creative processes is for re-establishing what Julia Kristeva terms the ‘transverbal dimension in communication’. Kristeva believes this dimension is most accessible

through artworks rather than through verbal thought and communication, which often carry a ‘repressive intellectual weight.’³

My thesis is divided into four chapters with each chapter containing three sections clarifying different aspects of visual art practice that are often concealed or misunderstood. The aim is to demonstrate the relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s thought to specific areas of art-making. In chapter one I discuss Merleau-Ponty’s early phenomenological approach. This includes an analysis of his frequent use of painting as a paradigm for his philosophy, and of his reflections on the creative processes of artists whose work corresponds closely with his own philosophical ideas concerning the nature of perception. In this chapter I also examine each of Merleau-Ponty’s three essays on the visual arts to reveal the development of his understanding of art practice in parallel with art world developments at the time. I look at the difficulties concerning definition and interpretation that surround discussions of painting and drawing, and introduce the idea that the practice of drawing becomes more relevant to Merleau-Ponty in the later phases of his work, underpinning his belief that processes of art-making should be seen as a practical ontology.

Chapter two expands on how Merleau-Ponty’s essays on art confirm that the processes artists use are more important to him than the finished work they produce, or their perceived historical status. Through an examination of the historical development and differences between the various educational methods used to teach observational and perspectival drawing, I then discuss how the materials and techniques artists use influence the work they make. I also demonstrate how the process of drawing may be considered a form of thinking that is relevant across all creative disciplines. Although Merleau-Ponty focused initially on painting practice, I believe an overemphasis on his concern with painting misrepresents his overall view of the nature of art practice. I argue that it is possible to gain a deeper appreciation of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and his understanding of human expression by examining how drawing and painting practice differ and the roles they play in creative expression.

³ Julia Kristeva, “Julia Kristeva Interview with Catherine Francblin for Flashart 1986,” in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 1084–1085.

In chapter three I examine the tacit nature of art practice and challenge the commonly perceived idea that the visual arts do not possess a communicable language comparable to the written word. By selecting three of the artists Merleau-Ponty refers to in 'Eye and Mind', Paul Klee, August Rodin and Alberto Giacometti, I discuss how their practices compare in terms of the processes they use, and in particular the private and public aspects of their art-making. By taking into account art works being made during the composition of 'Eye and Mind' and *The Visible and Invisible*, I explore Merleau-Ponty's later ideas on visual art practice and on the artists he chooses in support of his belief in artistic practice as a practical ontology. I also discuss the work and writing of other artists of the late 1950s and early 60s, such as Robert Motherwell and Cy Twombly, who broke down the distinction between drawing, painting and writing in their work, and expanded on notions of private and public, of authenticity and the nature of the incomplete.

The final chapter explores the role played by correction and re-working in the construction of a work of art, or in a text; a process that is often concealed in the finished work of art and especially in a work of writing. This chapter focuses specifically on Merleau-Ponty's working processes and on my response to his papers at the Bibliothèque nationale de France archives in Paris. I discuss how my engagement with these documents was restricted by copyright and institutional regulations and reflect on how this influenced my response. At the end of each subsection of this chapter I briefly introduce one of a selection of drawings I made from the manuscript pages and working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* and the manuscript of 'Eye and Mind'. I show that in Merleau-Ponty we find a philosopher who is sensitive to the processes of making, including the making of philosophical texts, which is rarely the explicit topic of philosophical reflection.⁴ I argue that there are profound similarities between drawing practice and the act of writing by hand on paper in the manner Merleau-Ponty employed. I further propose that his understanding or reconsideration of drawing played a part in influencing his later ontology. My thesis therefore maintains that by re-reading Merleau-Ponty through the language of drawing instead of painting, we can gain a deeper understanding of his later ontology. Furthermore, through a demonstration of the important role the visual

⁴ Exceptions to this rule include for example Herder's *Fragments* and *On the Origin* in the 18th century, and in the 20th century Derrida and the other deconstructionists who I briefly discuss later in this thesis.

arts and drawing played in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, I contend that the visual arts should be considered a serious and credible form of research that does not replace or diminish current forms of philosophical practice but enriches it with an additional dimension that can, in turn, deepen and enhance the development and understanding of contemporary visual art practice.

1. Merleau-Ponty's Paradigm of Painting.

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being.

(PP: xxii–xxiii.)

Our comparison between language and painting is possible only because of an idea of creative expression which is modern. However, for centuries painters and writers have worked without suspecting their common bond.

(PW: 49)

In an effort to present visual art as a paradigm for his philosophy Merleau-Ponty studied the creative processes of artists whose work he believed corresponded closely with his own philosophical ideas. I show in this chapter how Merleau-Ponty's faith in artistic practice to illuminate the nature of perception underpinned his belief that the processes artists use should be seen as a practical ontology. I begin with an overview of the phenomenological, psychological and Gestalt research that reinforced Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and then examine his three essays on the visual arts. Finally, I look at the difficulties concerning definition and interpretation that surround discussions of painting and drawing, and introduce the idea that drawing, and the practice of drawing, became more relevant to Merleau-Ponty's later work and how this relates to contemporary art practice.

1.1 A Phenomenological Approach

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in 1945, Merleau-Ponty, guided by the theories of Edmund Husserl, presents an account of embodied human existence through our primary experiences of the world, challenging the ‘intellectualism’ found in the rationalist and idealist narrative of human experience.⁵ The human body has instincts and abilities that Merleau-Ponty believed could not be explained through the systematic deductive enquiry employed by the experimental sciences. Scientific enquiry could not, for example, account for the symbiotic relationship that exists between human perception and the environment perceived.⁶ Merleau-Ponty was attracted to Husserl’s belief that many philosophical explanations fail by basing their analyses on inadequate descriptions of the phenomena under investigation. Husserl insists in *Logical Investigations*, for example, that it is the ‘things themselves’ that philosophy should focus on.

...we can absolutely not rest content with ‘mere words’, i.e. with a merely symbolic understanding of words, such as we first have when we reflect on the sense of the laws for ‘concepts’, ‘judgements’, ‘truths’ etc. (together with their manifold specifications) which are set up in pure logic. Meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions—if by any intuitions at all—are not enough: we must go back to the ‘things themselves’.⁷

The problem with philosophical language, according to Husserl, was that it not only restricted the scope of phenomenological description of experience, but also alienated those who could not understand it. It was these limitations within the practice of philosophy through the language of the written word that came to occupy Merleau-Ponty throughout his work, in particular the expression of experience at the moment it is being experienced. Our sensations of colour or temperature, for example, are beyond the scope of language, as Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 391.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, vol. Part 1, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method (London: Routledge & Sons, 1970), 252 Volume 2 Introduction §2 .

At the outset of the study of perception, we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious: I have a sensation of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold. It will, however, be seen that nothing could in fact be more confused, and that because they accepted it readily, traditional analyses missed the phenomenon of perception. (PP: 3)

The danger in this rejection of the language of science and philosophy, however, was that phenomenology would be misunderstood as a form of illogical spiritualism. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both insisted that phenomenology was, on the contrary, a viable and rigorous philosophical practice that nonetheless must acknowledge the dimensions of human experience that cannot be described using word-based language. Consequently, Husserl developed a set of procedures or methods to clarify how phenomenology can convert our ‘natural attentional focus to the phenomenologically reflective one’ and enable us to break from our habitual way of being, which can hinder direct engagement with the world.⁸

Husserl introduced the idea of a ‘suspension of the natural attitude’ or *epoché* as a methodology which would allow a detachment ‘from all forms of conventional opinion’. These methods along with others such as the *eidetic* and *transcendental reductions* were the cause of many divisions among those philosophers who were indebted to Husserl’s phenomenology such as, for example, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler.⁹ Husserl realised, however, that achieving a phenomenological reduction is not a simple matter; it is a ‘direction of thought’ that runs ‘counter to deeply ingrained habits which have been steadily strengthened since the dawn of mental development.’¹⁰ It is precisely for this reason that a ‘fully self-conscious phenomenological reduction is needed if consciousness is to be systematically investigated in its pure immanence at all’.¹¹

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, however, Merleau-Ponty seems to question the viability of the methods proposed by Husserl and, in particular, the possibility of fully implementing a reduction to the extent that Husserl insisted.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, “Pure Phenomenology Its Method and Its Field of Investigation,” in *The Phenomenology Reader* (Psychology Press, 2002), 128.

⁹ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 2–3.

¹⁰ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Part 1:254 Volume 2 Introduction §3 .

¹¹ Husserl, “Pure Phenomenology,” 131.

The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on which we are trying to seize (since they *sich einströmen*, as Husserl says), there is no thought which embraces all our thought. (PP: xv)

Nonetheless, the fact that Merleau-Ponty believes the reduction is impossible does not mean that it should not be attempted. On the contrary, the process of reflection that we engage in, in the effort to achieve reduction, is valuable in itself as an opportunity to reconnect with what Husserl called our ‘pure’ consciousness. As Sara Heinämaa has pointed out, the impossibility of the reduction lies in its potential for completion rather than in its futility. ‘Merleau-Ponty’, Heinämaa writes ‘suggests that reduction is not the sort of thing that can be completed: it is not pure activity but includes an element of passivity’.¹² The reduction therefore is not an active methodology in the traditional sense but aims to bring forward a realisation (to our conscious awareness) of our passive experiencing of the world around us without changing that passivity into something else. Philosophy, Merleau-Ponty warns in *Phenomenology of Perception*, ‘must not take itself for granted’, philosophical practice is an ‘ever-renewed experiment’ (PP: xvi).

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. (PP: xxii-xxiii)

It is within these aspects of phenomenology that we can find Merleau-Ponty’s initial interest in visual art practice and in its viability as an alternative form of human expression of lived experience. Artistic working processes have the potential to provide evidence of the primordial connection between body and world, which, he believed, could not be fully expressed through a verbal language. The first artist

¹² Sara Heinämaa, “From Decisions to Passions: Merleau-Ponty’s Interpretation of Husserl’s Reduction,” in *Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree (Springer Science & Business Media, 2002), 146.

Merleau-Ponty recognised as lending support to his theories was the French painter Paul Cézanne. To Merleau-Ponty Cézanne's paintings 'seem to show nature pure,' whereas, 'photographs of the same landscapes suggest man's works, conveniences, and imminent presence' (CD: 64). Cézanne's painting technique suspended the habits of thought and pre-conceived composition and presented, in Merleau-Ponty's view, a far more truthful record of human perception than a perspectival, classical painting. They proved to Merleau-Ponty that there is a form of expression that performs a phenomenological reduction of sorts, even if its results are 'strange, as if viewed by a creature of another species' (CD: 66).

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Fig. 1 Paul Cézanne
'Mont Sainte-Victoire' late 1890s
Watercolour

Graphische Sammlung Albertina

1.1.1 Painting.

Merleau-Ponty's identification with Cézanne as a fundamental influence on his initial writing on art led him to privilege painting, as Cézanne himself did, above all other art forms. In adhering so closely to Cézanne and his methods, however, Merleau-Ponty also rejected those techniques usually associated with drawing practice.

...the contour of an object conceived as a line encircling the object belongs not to the visible world but to geometry. If one outlines the shape of an apple with a continuous line, one makes an object of the shape, whereas the contour is rather the ideal limit toward which the sides of the apple recede in depth. (CD: 65)

While it is true that drawing that uses only outline will result in a flattened geometric style (often resulting in drawings that are solid but lifeless), there are many more spontaneous methods of drawing from observation that can capture a sense of objects as they appear to the eye (and body) and, as I later argue in more depth, are more effective than painting. However, Cézanne had dismissed the use of drawing in his practice as he believed that 'the outline and the colours are no longer distinct from each other', and in the early stages of his writing on art Merleau-Ponty too seemed to be convinced that only by using colour and paint could a truthful representation of observed reality be achieved. (CD: 65)

The outline should therefore be a result of the colours if the world is to be given in its true density. For the world is a mass without gaps, a system of colours across which the receding perspective, the outlines, angles, and curves are inscribed like lines of force; the spatial structure vibrates as it is formed. (CD: 65)

Merleau-Ponty looked to the creative methods of artists as a form of phenomenological expression, but by restricting his notion of art to the particular technique of painting, and even more specifically to the technique of painting employed by Cézanne, he disregarded more integral and immediate elements of art-making processes such as drawing and line. But why did Merleau-Ponty align himself with this technique so readily? It may be because many modern artists had rejected preparatory drawing as too formulaic, and drawing had indeed become aligned to geometry and perspectival methods which needed to be learned and studied.

Modernism, Jürgen Habermas writes, celebrated ‘the principle of unlimited self-realisation’ and demanded ‘authentic self-experience’.¹³ Deanna Petherbridge explains that there was a tendency at the beginning of the twentieth century to ‘valorise the innocence, spontaneity and irrationality of a free [art] practice untrammelled by rules’.¹⁴ This in turn led to many modern artists, such as those affiliated with the movements of German Expressionism, Russian Neo-primitivism, Dada and Surrealism, studying the work produced by primitive cultures and devising their own intuitive systems for using colour and creating images.¹⁵ Drawing therefore, was deemed too practical and functional: only painting possessed the purity needed for truthful expression. Notably, phenomenologists too have preferred the secondary qualities of colour taste and sound, above the mathematical or ‘primary qualities’ of point, line, plane and ratio.¹⁶

In 1954 Forrest Williams wrote of the ‘common cultural formations that may serve to link philosophical thought and artistic insight’. At the time, Williams explained, the dominant philosophical system in France was phenomenology, and in particular Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

[The] dedication of Cézanne to the objective structure of the subjectively given was precisely, it might fairly be said, the driving principle of Husserl’s phenomenology. It is clear that what Cézanne accepted was not “mere” appearances, in any subjective sense of the term, but the appearing-*of-something as given*: the appearing of the thing.¹⁷

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), 270.

¹⁴ Deanna Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories and Theories of Practice* (Yale University Press, 2010), 414.

¹⁵ Hal Foster in Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism* (Thames & Hudson, 2004), 86–87.

¹⁶ Galen A. Johnson, “Phenomenology and Painting: ‘Cezanne’s Doubt,’” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 12.

¹⁷ Forrest Williams, “Cézanne, Phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 170.

The art of Cézanne, therefore, appears to agree with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception in 'origin, method and outcome.'¹⁸ For the impressionists before Cézanne, in contrast, 'there are no things': in terms of artistic representation what they were interested in was how light reflected on surfaces to create form which, the impressionists believed, needed to be described using colour. Cézanne had found mentors in the impressionists but, as Williams's observes, he went on to practice in a more reflective way and came to 'see through' impressionism.

Far from betraying a willful subjectivity or arbitrariness regarding things, his violations of the impressionist conception of fidelity to appearance was now reflectively controlled by a fidelity to something more important than the surface sensuousness of visual phenomena: the real appearing thing.¹⁹

Merleau-Ponty's fascination with Cézanne was based on far more than the artist's status as 'the greatest of modern painters.' Aided by his work in psychology and Gestalt theory, which became central to his phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty was drawn to Cézanne by his 'particular approach or "method". Cézanne was, in effect, seeking the invariant structure of the thing he was painting.'²⁰ Williams's observations help to position Merleau-Ponty's thinking in the time when he began his reflections on art-making processes and his privileging of painting practice above all other forms of art. They also help us to understand why Cézanne used the methods he did even though, as I show in this thesis, they were not quite accurate enough for his purposes.

1.1.2 Psychology

For Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne was an artist who was seemingly able to access a primitive state from where he produced his work: paintings which resembled 'a pre-world in which as yet no men existed' (PP: 376). Cézanne's paintings attempted to 'recapture the physiognomy of things and faces by the integral reproduction of their sensible configuration' something that 'nature constantly and effortlessly achieves' (PP: 376). Merleau-Ponty believed that Cézanne, partly through his perceived

¹⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹⁹ Ibid., 170.

²⁰ Ibid., 172.

psychological condition, could express his vision without using any established drawing methods. From the various symptoms that Cézanne was reported to display, including a reclusive nature, morbidity and neurotic insistence on a fixed routine, Merleau-Ponty concluded that the artist suffered from ‘schizothymia’.

His extremely close attention to nature and to colour, the inhuman character of his paintings (he said that a face should be painted as an object), his devotion to the visible world: all of these would then only represent a flight from the human world, the alienation of his humanity. (CD: 61)

Bypassing the traditional technique of making sketches or studies of the composition before he starts to paint, Cézanne recorded what he saw, as he saw it, applying paint to canvas without deliniating the pictorial structure of the scene in front of him in advance. His faithfulness to his perception of ‘the phenomena’ in front of him led Cézanne to demonstrate ‘the lived perspective’: in other words his paintings show how human perception differs from ‘a geometric or photographic one’ (CD: 64).

Merleau-Ponty’s focus on Cézanne isolates a particular form of art making that, on close inspection, has separated itself from the processes, such as drawing and using line, that would allow deeper communication and engagement with the world, in favour of making work relevant to its times through a rejection of both classical methods and impressionism. As T.J. Clark has indicated, certain artists create works that ‘show us what it is to “represent” at a particular historical moment’, through their practice they ‘show us the powers and limits of a practice of knowledge’ and Cézanne in particular operates ‘on the powers and limits of a particular system of representation.’²¹ For Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne’s relentless pursuit of questions around ‘form and equivalence’ through colour and painting, corresponded to a particular moment in human development. Clark writes however that Cézanne’s method is both ‘too approximate,’ and ‘too preliminary’

...somewhere at the heart of [Cézanne’s] epistemology is an idea of knowledge built out of singular, equivalent units – events that happen in the eye, and which the dab of paint will analogize precisely.²²

²¹ T. J. Clark, “Freud’s Cézanne,” *Representations*, no. 52 (October 1, 1995): 115–116.

²² *Ibid.*, 116.

The problem with Cézanne's approach arises from his refusal to use a method that would capture his vision as quickly as it appears; his painting technique, using oil on canvas, was too slow to keep up with his visual experience. But, as Richard Shiff explains, using line produced a 'conceptual ordering upon vision' that Cézanne would not accept.²³ Instead, the effect that was produced was a 'vibrating field of colour', an atmospheric flatness that 'projected directly onto the planar surface of the retina'.²⁴ Cézanne's technique was so problematic in fact, that he 'spent his life searching for a means of expression'.²⁵ Consequently the 'unfinished' look of many of Cézanne's paintings give a sense of having been abandoned before they were completed. The dabs of paint applied to the surface of the canvas give Cézanne's work a fractured quality giving the seemingly unfinished surface what Yves Alain Bois describes as a 'molecular' quality which exposes 'the depicted object in the act of germinating under our very eyes' – a quality that was of particular interest to Merleau-Ponty.²⁶

In the last section of the essay 'Cézanne's Doubt', Merleau-Ponty turns his attention to Leonardo da Vinci. Based on the study of Leonardo by Sigmund Freud, and comments on Leonardo's work by Paul Valéry, Merleau-Ponty mostly concentrates on the character of the Renaissance artist rather than an examination of his working methods. While this is a curious addition to the essay, Leonardo does serve as another example of an artist whose psychology, like Cézanne's, can be seen to have influenced his art-work. Leonardo, too, left much of his work unfinished Merleau-Ponty notes: '...he left his paintings unfinished to devote his time to bizarre experiments' and '...he left his work unfinished, just as his father abandoned him' (CD: 73-74). Yet Merleau-Ponty does see in Leonardo the ability to go beyond Renaissance techniques that measure and calculate in order to produce imitations of reality.

[Leonardo] has complete mastery of his means, he does what he wants, going at will from knowledge to life with a superior elegance... He has discovered the "central

²³ Richard Shiff, "Seeing Cézanne," *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 4 (July 1, 1978): 795.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 785–786.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 791–792.

²⁶ Yves-Alain Bois, "Cézanne: Words and Deeds," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 84 (April 1, 1998): 39.

attitude”, on the basis of which it is equally possible to know, to act, and to create because action and life when turned into exercises are not contrary to detached knowledge. (CD: 72)

Despite Merleau-Ponty’s interest in how Cézanne’s and Leonardo’s temperaments affect their art-works, he believes that too much emphasis has been placed on their ‘psychology’. Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, brings the focus back to the phenomenological interest, to the human nature of Cézanne’s embodied perception, and his ability to record what he sees without any regard for tradition or convention.

It is nonetheless possible that Cézanne conceived a form of art which, while occasioned by his nervous condition, is valid for everyone. Left to himself, he was able to look at nature as only a human being can. The meaning of his work cannot be determined from his life. (CD: 61)

Cézanne’s and Leonardo’s work differed greatly in style and technique as their lives were separated by five centuries, but their intention to work directly from nature and to be truthful to what they see was the same. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty initially turned to Leonardo, through an interest in his psychology, to prove that Cézanne’s approach was more faithful to human perception of nature than any Renaissance artist – but instead discovered they had more in common than he first thought.

1.1.3 Gestalt

Merleau-Ponty recognized that Cézanne’s refusal to construct his paintings using measurement and perspective meant that he had to rely solely on his human senses to make sense of the things he saw and wanted to recreate in paint. The work Cézanne created was, for Merleau-Ponty, ‘valid for everyone’: he looked at nature ‘as only a human being can’ before systems and methods of measurement are applied. (CD: 61) Cézanne’s paintings therefore, did not conform to standards of realistic depiction of the classical artists and his sense of perspective was thought of by his contemporaries as odd and distorted. Consequently, Cézanne’s work provided evidence for Merleau-Ponty of the Gestaltists’ idea of human perception that is organized around configurations of mutually reinforcing components which, as Taylor Carman points out, was in direct opposition to the Cartesian-Lockean theory of a “constancy hypothesis,” the assumption that sensory experience is at bottom a kind of mosaic of

sensations, each correlated with a discrete stimulus’²⁷ – a thesis that was revived by behaviourism in the 20th century. Dermot Moran also remarks that through his study and critique of Gestalt psychology, Merleau-Ponty ‘pioneered the study of the relations between consciousness and embodiment’, recognising that there is a ‘symbiotic relationship between the act of perception and the environment of the perceiver.’²⁸ Cézanne’s paintings show his own human experience as it was mediated through his comprehension of structure and form without using artificial means to correct elements of distortion within the composition as he worked. ‘It is not consciousness that touches or feels’, Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, ‘...it is through my body that I go to the world’ (PP: 369-368) And in ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ he explains:

The meaning Cézanne gave to objects and faces in his paintings presented itself to him in the world as it appeared to him. Cézanne simply released that meaning: it was the objects and the faces themselves as he saw them that demanded to be painted, and Cézanne simply expressed what they *wanted* to say. (CD: 71)

Merleau-Ponty came to recognize, in his later work, that many artists throughout history had approached their work in a similar way to Cézanne. His inclusion of a brief study of Leonardo in ‘Cezanne’s Doubt’ indicates that he may not have been totally convinced that Cézanne’s approach to art-making was as new and revolutionary as it eventually came to be seen; because ‘looking back on what we were, we can always find hints of what we have become’ (CD: 72). Williams has pointed out that although Cézanne did not of course hold any ‘philosophical or psychological theory on the subject’, he did paint as if his perception was ‘geared to Gestalts.’

Indeed, what Merleau-Ponty wrote in *Phénoménologie de la perception* could apply word for word to what appears to have been the governing principle of Cézanne’s painting: “The Gestalt [is] no psychological event *of the order of an impression* but *an ensemble which develops an inner law of its own constitution*, ”²⁹

²⁷ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, New edition (Routledge, 2008), 20.

²⁸ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 20.

²⁹ Williams, “Cézanne, Phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty,” 172.

And, I would add, the same could be said for Leonardo's drawings and studies from nature. Indeed Leonardo, like Cézanne, discovered that it was only by working directly from nature that he could understand how structure was found in form. What Leonardo discovered, David Rosand notes, was 'a correspondence between the form of motion in nature and the motion of his own hand in drawing.'

A basic linear structure became his way of both seeing and recording, and it is hardly unique in the history of art that hand and eye so acknowledge their mutual dependence. With pen or chalk in hand Leonardo saw better. Through graphic gesture he could make visible those forces of nature that seemed to lie beyond the threshold of normal perception.³⁰

Recording exactly what the eye sees to capture the essence of form was part of a 'relational chain of ideal practice', Petherbridge observes. Renaissance artists, and those who followed them, would use supplementary drawings after the initial 'rough sketch' adding elements of measurement and proportion to give their work 'the attributes of mimetic representation.'³¹ Leonardo recognised that mathematics developed from and can help with understanding nature, but he also practiced drawing that had nothing to do with mathematics. In fact, as Hugo Chapman reminds us, Leonardo was a representative figure amongst the Renaissance artists in this shift back to drawing from observation, the forms and forces of nature, as the prime focus of their practice.³² Leonardo's approach is described by Martin Kemp as 'a revolution in drawing style which had nothing to do with maths or geometry.'³³ This revolution is most vividly exemplified in the series of drawings by Leonardo for a 'Madonna and Child and a Cat' (c.1478-81) They are a series of brilliant drawings, 'scribbled in a frenzy of creative impatience' as Leonardo spontaneously responded to the movement of both the child and the cat as they intertwined with one another.

³⁰ David Rosand, *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97.

³¹ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 31.

³² Hugo Chapman in *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* (London: British Museum, 2010), 68.

³³ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (London: Dent, 1981), 55.

The cat is in turn seized, cuddled, stroked and half-choked, reacting to each experience with perfectly characterized, feline agility... Never before had any artist worked out his compositions in such a welter of alternative lines. The pattern-book drawing techniques of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which Verrocchio had relaxed in some measure, have been overthrown in a 'brain storm' of dynamic sketching. Such flexibility of preparatory sketching became the norm for later centuries; it was introduced almost single-handedly by Leonardo.³⁴

The spontaneity and immediacy of these drawings are very difficult to reproduce in oil paint, however, and it is one of the 'paradoxes in Leonardo's art and character', Chapman remarks, 'that the naturalism of his preparatory drawings [was] directed towards the production of paintings that are often profoundly unnatural and artificial.'³⁵ An oil painting from the Renaissance period needed to be composed and constructed in a way that needed a clear and defined under-drawing that could support the many layers of paint and glazes that an oil painting in the classical style requires. Chapman concludes that this regime was often too restrictive and rigid for Leonardo and the spontaneity of the original drawing was lost.

Such was the fertility of [Leonardo's] imagination and his love of graphic invention that he clearly found it hard to move from the preparatory stage to the actual business of painting, a process that demanded he select which of the myriad variants contained in his studies should form the basis of the picture. In its most extreme form, the rapidity of the flow of ideas could result in a drawing so dense with revisions that the pen contours coagulated to form an impenetrable thicket of lines.³⁶

The materials Leonardo used to draw with allowed him to work at speed to capture his vision of things observed (even when those things were in motion), as well as capture the speed of his thoughts and ideas when working from his imagination. Pen and ink, chalk and charcoal give fluid, monotone, continuous lines allowing for uninterrupted focus. In contrast Cézanne tried to retain the spontaneity and directness

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

³⁵ Chapman, *Fra Angelico to Leonardo*, 69.

³⁶ Ibid., 68.

of his perception of things seen using oil paint and brush directly onto the primed canvas. But, as I will explain in more detail later, working with colour and oil paint slows down the process of recording and takes attention away from the things observed in order to attend to the needs of the paint and colours.

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Fig. 2 Leonardo da Vinci

Virgin and Child with a cat; and a male head in profile. c. 1475-81

Pen and brown ink, over black chalk and some leadpoint.

28 x19.7cm

British Museum, London.

1.2 Essays on Art

Merleau-Ponty published three essays on art over the course of sixteen years, in which he investigated the nature of artistic processes and their relationship to philosophical practices. While his initial focus was on the discipline of painting, and in particular Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty would eventually develop a deeper understanding of how artists work and look to modern artists, such as Auguste Rodin, Matisse, Klee and his own contemporaries Germaine Richier and Giacometti to illuminate his own ideas. In this section I focus on the progressive adjustment in Merleau-Ponty's thinking regarding art practice, which, I believe, can be traced throughout these three essays. I show how Merleau-Ponty gradually acknowledged the range of techniques artists use to create a language of expression in their work, in particular the possibilities that present themselves when line, and drawing processes are taken into account.

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writing, art works and art practices are often referred to in order to demonstrate alternative modes of language, expression and communication. His three essays 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945), 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (1952), and 'Eye and Mind' (1961) gave him the opportunity to explore the methods and techniques of artists in more detail. Many themes remain constant throughout these essays, in particular the idea that work practices and processes always take precedence over any theories written about them or their perceived historical significance. As Galen Johnson has pointed out, Merleau-Ponty was also not concerned with 'chronological or art historical considerations regarding Cézanne's place in relation to his predecessors and successors'³⁷ What he is concerned with is Cézanne's emphasis on being faithful to his vision of the world rather than adhering to 'univocal, planimetric perspective'. Jonathan Gilmore has observed that the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's choice of artists was always based on those 'for whom the organizing principle of art is the visual interrogating of the world.'³⁸ Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's views on historical perspectives was the driving force of 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', an essay that also reflects the

³⁷ Johnson, "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cezanne's Doubt,'" 7.

³⁸ Jonathan Gilmore, "Between Philosophy and Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen, (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 311.

turbulent political climate between the end of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War. This long and complex essay would also signal Merleau-Ponty's resignation from *Les Temps Modernes*, where it was first published in two installments, and his public break with Jean-Paul Sartre.³⁹ Although the essay is dedicated to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty vigorously opposed Sartre's rationalist view that only the written word can contain and communicate meaning and truth. This essay also introduces Merleau-Ponty's belief in the similarities between the processes of painting and writing. All language when it is 'in the phase in which it is being established', he writes, must feel its way through the multiple alternatives available. The recognition of process as fundamental to expression must also include the gaps and silences that occur and are established and rejected within the possibilities of speech and language. Merleau-Ponty wants to give recognition to the 'lateral or oblique meaning, which runs between words', the 'invisibles' of language, in a similar way to how empty space is used in visual art (ILVS: 84).

As far as language is concerned, it is the lateral relation of one sign to another which makes each of them significant, so that meaning appears only at the intersection of and as it were in the interval between words. (ILVS: 79)

By treating verbal language as one of the 'mute arts' and by looking 'at it as deaf people look at those who are speaking', we can begin to understand the unstated significance, the human element of creativity that can be lost in privileging one art form over another (ILVS: 84).

During Merleau-Ponty's consequent retreat into a political and philosophical isolation he began work on the development of a new ontology of visibility and invisibility that would take his philosophy beyond phenomenology towards a deeper engagement with art processes in his search for a more viable and authentic language of experience. His last published essay, 'Eye and Mind', encapsulates the significance that his consideration of art-making processes, as an alternative, communicative, language, had on his philosophical writings. In this essay he turns his attention away from Cézanne and recognised the work of artists such as Klee who used line

³⁹ Galen A. Johnson, "Structures and Painting: 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,'" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 14.

extensively throughout his work, and worked spontaneously with water-based media. Merleau-Ponty now begins to acknowledge the versatility, and variety of approaches available to artists.

Whether it be representational or nonrepresentational, the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium contrived within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness – an emptiness which, as Moore’s statues show decisively, sustains the supposed positivity of things. (EM: 144)

In ‘Eye and Mind’ Merleau-Ponty also begins to look beyond two-dimensional art forms to consider how sculptors work with space, and determine space within their work. The statues of the English sculptor Henry Moore, mentioned in the quote above, used space in areas of his carved figures that make no sense realistically but work by emphasizing the solid shapes that contain them. In addition the work of Rodin gave Merleau-Ponty the opportunity to discuss how movement through space is constructed in the visual arts, to counteract the fact that artists cannot capture events unfolding before them as instantaneously as a camera can. A photograph captures a moment in time in isolation from the moment that came before or the one that follows, but this does not reflect the reality of human perception. Human experience of space, time and movement is an overlapping experience, a never-ending process of time unfolding, and it is this process that artists have the ability to record in their artworks.

The photograph keeps open the instants which the onrush of time closes up forthwith...Painting searches not for the outside of movement but for its secret ciphers, of which there are some still more subtle than those of which Rodin spoke. All flesh, and even that of the world, radiates beyond itself. But whether or not one is, depending on the era and the “school,” attached more to manifest movement or the monumental, the art of painting is never altogether outside time, because it is always within the carnal. (EM: 145)

Merleau-Ponty’s determination to discover the carnal within human nature led him to the work of artists he believed expressed this fundamental element of human experience in their work. It takes time for him to understand the limitations that exist

within art practice however and the strategies that artists used to work around those limitations.

In what follows, I look at each of these essays in more detail to show the progression of Merleau-Ponty's thought and his gradual move away from painting as the dominant discipline in his writings.

1.2.1 Dimensions of Form

Merleau-Ponty's first essay 'Cézanne's Doubt' was published in 1945, the same year as *Phenomenology of Perception*. The structure of the essay is built on his research into the life of the artist Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) using the correspondence between the artist and the art theorist and painter Emile Bernard (1868-1941), which was conducted at the end of Cézanne's life and career, and with the poet and essayist Joachim Gasquet (1873-1921), who knew Cézanne between 1896 and 1902.⁴⁰ These first hand accounts provided Merleau-Ponty with evidence for the self-reflective nature of Cézanne's practice and for what he saw as the phenomenological nature of Cézanne's painting process. The essay also expands on Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas on painting, addressed in various chapters in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he uses Cézanne almost exclusively to provide evidence for his theory that bodily perception is primary and each individual experience is as valid as any historical text or scientific theory.

Merleau-Ponty was clearly attracted to the paintings of Cézanne for his work as a colourist and, above all, for presenting a paradigm for prescientific perceptual experience of the natural world in his landscapes and still-lives. In this first essay Merleau-Ponty writes that 'the world is a mass without gaps, a system of colors... if the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must carry with it this indivisible whole' (CD: 65). Therefore, Cézanne's approach, covering the surface of his canvas with paint, applying one small brushstroke at a time, was, for Merleau-Ponty, an authentic representation of human perception. Seen from a distance, the brushstrokes merge to convey dimensions of form created by the reaction of the colours against each other, each brushstroke relating to and suspending a moment in time, while the artist is looking at a relatively static object or scene, a still life or landscape for example. This technique of using colour to describe form bypassed the

⁴⁰ Johnson, "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cezanne's Doubt,'" 6.

need for a drawing, using measurement and perspective, to create an artificial structure on which paint is applied. Merleau-Ponty's early thinking on art was dominated by Cézanne's technique. As Gilmore has pointed out, Merleau-Ponty believed the painter provided pictorial evidence for what the philosopher was trying to present in words.⁴¹ Cézanne reinforced Merleau-Ponty's belief in the ability of the artist's use of colour to surpass mathematical and scientific components that, Johnson explains, philosophy traditionally favoured, for their 'epistemic repeatability and reliability'.⁴²

Although the impressionist painter Camille Pissarro inspired Cézanne to paint directly from nature, Merleau-Ponty notes that Cézanne soon abandoned the impressionist method and embraced colours that were traditionally excluded from the impressionist palette.⁴³ Cézanne was more interested in colours that depicted the weight and form of objects rather than those that portrayed atmospheric values.

His painting was paradoxical: he was pursuing reality without giving up the sensuous surface, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours, with no outline to enclose the color, with no perspectival or pictorial arrangement. (CD: 63)

Merleau-Ponty explains that this paradoxical approach was the reason why Cézanne's paintings between 1870-1890 appear to have distortions in their composition. By working 'contrary to the laws of perspective' and by 'giving up the outline' he believes Cézanne was 'abandoning himself to the chaos of sensation' (CD: 63). To understand Cézanne we must look at his paintings rather than apply to his work 'dichotomies more appropriate to those who sustain tradition ... we would do better to sensitize ourselves to his paintings own, specific meaning, which is to challenge those dichotomies' (CD: 63). Cézanne was attempting to 'confront the sciences with the nature from which they came' just as the scientific approach of Western philosophy

⁴¹ Gilmore, "The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty," 295.

⁴² Johnson, "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cezanne's Doubt,'" 12.

⁴³ See also: Sean D. Kelly, "Representing the Real: A Merleau-Pontyan Account of Art and Experience from the Renaissance to New Media," in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph D Parry (London: Routledge, 2011), 99. '...Cezanne is importantly different from the Impressionists...as Merleau-Ponty was perhaps first to recognize.'

was repeatedly challenged by Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenological method (CD: 64). The rules of perspective, abandoned by Cézanne, rely on mathematics and measurement and are described by Merleau-Ponty as a mere substitute for our actual perception: 'the lived perspective, that what we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one' (CD: 64).

Merleau-Ponty does, however, recognize that the process of observational painting must by necessity 'freeze' perceived distortions in the process of re-painting them on canvas and 'stop the spontaneous movements in which they pile up in perception' with the resulting picture therefore resembling 'geometric perspective' (CD: 64). He describes this as the 'genius' of Cézanne: his technique with colour compensates for the distortions and, when viewed from a certain distance, objects in the paintings seem to emerge and organise themselves 'before our eyes' (CD: 65). For Merleau-Ponty, the core strength of Cézanne's approach is his ability to bypass the scientific laws of perspective and geometry by recording faithfully his visual experience on canvas using colour.

To trace just a single outline sacrifices depth – that is, the dimension in which the thing is presented not spread out before us but as an inexhaustible reality full of reserves. That is why Cézanne follows the swelling of the object in modulated colours and indicates several outlines in blue. (CD: 65)

In this essay Merleau-Ponty concentrates exclusively on the paintings that Cézanne made from observation. However, Cézanne did also draw in sketchbooks and produced paintings made from his imagination: the series of paintings of bathers for example were worked on at the same time as he worked on the Mont Saint Victoire series. The bathers were in fact a central theme for Cézanne, and Véronique Foti considers Merleau-Ponty's disregard for this aspect of Cézanne's practice as 'especially troubling'.⁴⁴ There are over two hundred paintings in the bathers series, which, Foti points out, were just as important and obsessive a theme for Cézanne as Mont Saint Victoire. The bathers were, however, images that Cézanne did not actually observe; the figures were copied from old master drawings and from photographs.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Véronique Marion Foti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty : Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 18.

⁴⁵ Shiff, "Seeing Cézanne," 804.

‘Is it disturbing’, Richard Shiff asks, ‘to know that Cézanne was probably working on his large scale and synthetic “Large Bathers” at the same time’ as the Tannahill Mont Sainte-Victoire’? ‘It should not be’ Shiff continues, because what Cézanne came to value was not ‘the externalized, objective appearance of the artwork’ but rather ‘the sincerity of the artistic process which led to that result – not the subject represented, but the vision experienced. What came to be expressed was the search for truth.’⁴⁶

Merleau-Ponty makes clear that he believes that art is not ‘imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste’ and this belief leads to an initial narrow focus on one aspect of the work of Cézanne, in particular those paintings made from observation (CD: 67-68). Perhaps this limited view was necessary to allow Merleau-Ponty to establish a theory of how a human perspective of vision can be communicated through art.

Just as the function of words is to name – that is, to grasp the nature of what appears to us in a confused way and to place it before us as a recognizable object – so it is up to the painter, said Gasquet, to “objectify”, to “project” and “arrest”. (CD: 67)

This essay is only Merleau-Ponty’s first attempt to establish his belief in an alternative view of the status of artists and artwork. His emphasis is on phenomenological experience and the secondary qualities of taste, sound, odour, touch and especially colour.⁴⁷ The next two essays show an advance in his knowledge of artistic practice and an increasing interest in a wider range of artists.

1.2.2 Techniques of Representation

A seven-year gap separates ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ and Merleau-Ponty’s next, and much longer, essay on art, ‘Indirect Voices and the Language of Silence’. When this essay was first published in 1952, Merleau-Ponty was Chair of Philosophy at Collège de France in Paris, and preceding this appointment, between 1948-51, he held the Chair of Child Psychology and Pedagogy at the Sorbonne following on from Jean Piaget. Merleau-Ponty’s expertise underpins the arguments he makes throughout ‘Indirect Voices and the Language of Silence’ where he challenged the theories of both Andre

⁴⁶ Ibid., 806–807.

⁴⁷ Johnson, “Phenomenology and Painting: ‘Cezanne’s Doubt,’” 12–13.

Malraux in *The Voices of Silence* (1947-49) and Jean Paul Sartre in *What is Literature?* (1947). It should be noted, however, that while Merleau-Ponty made use of empirical data found in the biological and social sciences he was not a psychologist a linguist or an anthropologist.⁴⁸

Merleau-Ponty prepares the ground for his arguments in this essay with the principles and definitions of signification developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1858-1913). Our language, he reminds us, is learned, not a skill we are born with: we learn language one word at a time ‘from the parts to the whole’.

The prior whole which Saussure is talking about cannot be the explicit and articulated whole of complete language as it is recorded in grammars and dictionaries. ... The unity he is talking about is a unity of coexistence, like that of the sections of an arch which shoulder one another. (ILVS: 76-77)

Words are meaningless without some ‘thing’ to refer to – ‘To speak is not to put a word under each thought; if it were, nothing would ever be said’ (ILVS: 81). Furthermore it is only as the result of its creative use that empirical language is established although, unlike the creative arts, writing must operate within the sign based systems that have been laid down by the rules of that system (ILVS: 82). For Merleau-Ponty, ‘perception is *expression*’, and whether that expression is through the written word, speech or visual art, it has a ‘paradoxical logic’.⁴⁹ For the spoken and written word this paradox lies in Saussure’s theory that signs do not signify anything when ‘taken singly’: yet, Merleau-Ponty writes, if this is the case ‘one would have to know the language in order to learn it’ (ILVS: 76). Such paradoxes, Donald Landes explains, ‘emerge from a classical *pensée de survol*, and just as Zeno’s logical paradoxes are overcome in action, the paradoxes of speech are overcome “by the use of speech.”’⁵⁰ ‘The writers act of expression’ for Merleau-Ponty is therefore, ‘not very different from the painters’ (ILVS: 82).

⁴⁸ Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

⁴⁹ Donald A. Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 146.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the theories presented in *The Voices of Silence*, by Andre Malraux (1901-1976), is one of the main topics of this essay. Originally published in three volumes between 1947 and 1949, *The Voices of Silence* is a vast overview of art history across continents and centuries, and is one of the first books to give such a comprehensive survey of the history of art. The book was extensively illustrated with black and white photographs throughout, as it was Malraux's belief that the new printing technologies of the time enabled the creation of 'art books' that could democratise the experience of art and take the power of display and categorisation away from museums. While highly critical of Malraux's approach, Merleau-Ponty was partly in agreement with his criticism of museums and the role they play in grading works of art according to their historical significance. Indeed, it is a characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's approach, as Taylor Carman has observed, to take an author to task for 'getting it wrong by almost getting it right'.⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty concurred, for instance, with Malraux's criticism that the museum's function is, like the library's, not always in the best interests of those who use them. These institutions must by necessity, he suggests, operate in a compromised state of retrospection, assuming the visitor to the museum will adopt an attitude of appreciation in 'the sober joy of work; and not as we go there, with a somewhat spurious reverence' (ILVS: 99).

The museum adds a false prestige to the true value of the works by detaching them from the chance circumstances they arose from and making us believe that the artist's hand was guided from the start by fate. Whereas style lived within each painter like his heartbeat, and was precisely what enabled him to recognize every effort which differed from his own, the museum converts this secret, modest, nondeliberated, involuntary, and, in short, living historicity into official pompous history. (ILVS: 99)

His objections to Malraux's analysis arise initially from the presentation and selection of artists in 'The Voices of Silence' as those who created 'masterpieces'. Merleau-Ponty wonders how a work determined as a masterpiece can be seen in isolation from the work that goes before or comes after? The painting that is considered a masterpiece does not exist in isolation, separate from the other works by the same artist, and masterpieces do not come ready made from the artist's imagination. If the work leading up to the masterpiece, and the work that comes after, is not given equal

⁵¹ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 194.

value, a false impression is created of how artists make their work. Merleau-Ponty also criticises the ‘special privilege’ that oil painting is given in Malraux’s analysis, a fault that paradoxically Merleau-Ponty himself has been repeatedly accused. The paintings classified as masterpieces present ‘illusions of depth or volume, of movement, of forms, of tactile qualities or of different kinds of material’ without any imperfections to draw attention to their manufacture or to distract from the illusion the classical artists endeavored to create.

These processes, these secrets augmented by each generation, seem to be elements of a general technique of *representation* which ultimately should reach the thing itself (or person himself), which cannot be imagined capable of containing any element of chance or vagueness, and whose sovereign function painting should try and equal. (ILVS: 85)

The value of art can be found beyond the ‘unimpeachable spectacle upon our senses’ that is presented to us by the classically painted masterpiece hanging in the museum or selected as the finest example of its kind in ‘The Voices of Silence’. No valuable painting has ever consisted in ‘merely representing’, echoing his earlier recognition of the ‘patient studies which brought about the representation of velvet to perfection’ (ILVS: 85). Even though classical artists had different expectations of their work from those of the modern artists, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that the impetus for all creativity is the same, relying on ‘the perceptual apparatus, considered as a natural, given means of communication between human beings’ (ILVS: 85).

Merleau-Ponty also repeatedly questions the dominance of the written word as a means of communication and directly addresses Sartre in this essay, who celebrated and endorsed the privilege that literature enjoyed over painting. Whereas Merleau-Ponty believed that privilege was relative, Sartre was very clear in his view that painting could not convey meaning as effectively as words, which can reach beyond ‘the ink marks on the page’. Sartre made this belief explicit when asked whether Picasso’s 1937 painting of the destruction of the Catalan town of Guernica ‘won over a single heart to the Spanish cause’. His answer to this question is negative. ‘The

painter is mute' he writes.⁵² For Merleau-Ponty, however, the truth of human experience was far more elusive than Sartre would have us believe.

What is hazardous in literary communication, and ambiguous and irreducible to the theme in all the great works of art, is not a provisional weakness which we might hope to overcome. It is the price we must pay to have a literature, that is, a conquering language which introduces us to unfamiliar perspectives instead of confirming us in our own. (ILVS: 114)

Merleau-Ponty constantly brings our attention back to the role of the artwork in relation to its processes and away from the work as a cultural object to be viewed in an historical context. Malraux asks 'What genius is not fascinated by that extremity of painting, by that appeal before which time itself vacillates? It is the moment of possession of the world. Let painting go no further, and Hals the Elder becomes God.' To which Merleau-Ponty responds:

This is perhaps the artist as seen by others. The painter himself is a person at work who each morning finds in the shape of things the same questioning and the same call he never stops responding to. In his eyes his work is never completed; it is always in progress, so that no one can exalt it above the world. (ILVS: 95)

In a similar vein Merleau-Ponty refers to a slow motion sequence, in a film about Matisse, which shows the artist hesitating momentarily, before he makes a mark with his brush. Merleau-Ponty again rejects any suggestion of the artist as infallible or as a divine creature who has an internal directory of all possible marks and knows instantly which to choose.

He was not a demiurge; he was a human being. He did not have in his mind's eye all the gestures possible, and in making his choice he did not have to eliminate all but one... Matisse, set within a human'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

⁵² Jean-Paul Sartre, "What Is Writing?," in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), 104.

that the painting might finally be that which it was in the process of becoming.’ (ILVS: 83)

‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ arguably reflects its time to a far greater extent than Merleau-Ponty’s other two essays on art. It is robust in its engagement and dispute with Sartre and Malraux but also, Johnson suggests, questions his own previous phenomenology of painting. Carman agrees that by the late 50s Merleau-Ponty had started to explore ideas around embodiment and perception that introduced a new direction in his thinking comparable to the ‘paradigm shift’ that occurred in the work of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, whose later work also took ‘a sharp turn from the early work that made them famous’.⁵³

1.2.3 Processes of Expression

In 1961, nine years after ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, Merleau-Ponty published his last completed essay on art, ‘Eye and Mind’, which begins forcefully: ‘Science manipulates things and gives up living in them’ (EM: 121). Science, he maintains, separates itself from lived experience, or believes that it is in some way separate to maintain a sense of impartiality. This raises questions for Merleau-Ponty about how we interact with the real world, which science comes ‘face to face with ... only at rare intervals’. By setting itself apart, science reduces itself ‘to a set of data-collecting techniques which it has invented’ what he terms an ‘operationalism’ (EM: 121):

Scientific thinking, a thinking which looks on from above and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the “there is” which precedes it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is in our lives and for our bodies – not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but this actual body I call mine...’ (EM: 122)

It is through the processes of artistic practice that Merleau-Ponty believes the real world can be truthfully examined and recorded ‘in full innocence’ whereas from writing and philosophy ‘we want opinions and advice’ (EM: 123). Even music is ‘too far on the hither side of the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain

⁵³ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 120.

schema of Being' (EM: 123). In this essay he is searching for a new philosophical language that would accept rather than ignore the unfamiliar aspects of the world that cannot be described using verbal language.

Strong or frail in life, but incontestably sovereign in his rumination of the world, possessed of no other "technique" than the skill his eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting, he gives himself entirely to drawing from the world – with its din of history's glories and scandals – *canvases* which will hardly add to the angers or hopes of humanity; and no one complains. What then, is the secret science which he has or which he seeks? That dimension which lets Van Gogh say he must go "still further"? What is this fundamental of painting, perhaps of all culture? (EM: 123)

Merleau-Ponty admits, however, his own perceived lack of competence where art history is concerned, perhaps in order to encourage others who feel equally ignorant about visual art to engage with it: 'It is not illegitimate for a layman such as myself, speaking from his memory of a few paintings and books, to express how paintings enter into his reflections' (EM: 139). Encompassing a wider range of art forms than his previous work, this essay takes into account, for example, the processes involved in making sculpture and photography. Most importantly, Merleau-Ponty is now beginning to look beyond his initial paradigm of painting to the fundamentals of art practice, the processes of problem solving and thinking through ideas that precede the more technical processes of traditional or modern painting practices. He also looks beyond the art housed in museums and galleries to the more primitive examples of images made on the walls of Lascaux caves in the south of France: 'pushed forward here held back there, supported by the walls mass they use so adroitly... I would be pressed to say where the painting is I am looking at' (EM: 126). Recognition of the process of making once again dominates the text. He does not describe the images of the animals in Lascaux, nor does he describe the colours or make any speculation about why they were made: he is only concerned with how they work as artistic language, 'correspondences' creating 'an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence' (EM: 126). He does not know exactly 'where the painting is' he is looking at, and yet it captures his gaze resisting any categorisation as an art object.

For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it. (EM: 126)

It is important to reiterate that, whether he is writing of painting or drawing or expressing himself using any other art form, Merleau-Ponty is always referring to representational art, to art that responds to the world and records it in some recognisable way. Even though he included artists who worked with abstract forms, it is their representational work that Merleau-Ponty focused on. As Foti points out ‘Merleau-Ponty remains rather hesitant to dissociate pictorial space – or any aspect of the visual work – from a reference to the perceived world.’⁵⁴ ‘Let us remain within the visible in the narrow and prosaic sense,’ Merleau-Ponty writes:

The painter, any painter while he is painting, practices a magical theory of vision. He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else that, ...the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects. (EM: 128)

To clarify he then immediately refers to occasions when artists do not ‘paint from “nature”’. The reason the artist paints, he explains, is ‘because he has seen, because the world has at least once emblazoned in him the ciphers of the visible’ (EM: 128) even though the resulting artwork is not an exact representation of the thing seen.

The artist that most fascinates Merleau-Ponty in this essay is Klee who, in contrast to Cézanne, worked with a broad range of techniques and methods, most notably using line throughout his work.

For henceforth, as Klee said, the line no longer imitates the visible; it “renders visible”; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things. Perhaps no one before Klee had “let a line muse.” The beginning of the line’s path establishes or installs a certain level or mode of the linear, a certain manner for the line to be and to make itself a line, “to go line”. (EM: 143)

This is a radical shift in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking from when he wrote in ‘Cezanne’s Doubt’ that ‘the contour of an object conceived as a line encircling the object belongs

⁵⁴ Fótí, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*, 50.

not to the visible world but to geometry’(CD: 65). In ‘Eye and Mind’ Merleau-Ponty is beginning to understand how line and drawing “renders visible” (EM: 143).

It is through an exploration of the notion of a more primitive bodily connection with the world we inhabit that Merleau-Ponty moved away from his previous ideas and methods, put forward in *Phenomenology of Perception*, regarding perceptual experience. He has also moved away from his previous ideas of how artists work and where the work begins. He seems to acknowledge in ‘Eye and Mind’ that he is only just beginning to realise the nature of drawing and its relevance to artistic creativity.

The word “image” is in bad repute because we have thoughtlessly believed that a drawing was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and that the mental image was such a drawing, belonging among our private bric-a-brac. But if in fact it is nothing of the kind, then neither the drawing nor the painting belongs to the in-itself any more than the image does. (EM: 126)

At the same time as he was writing ‘Eye and Mind’, Merleau-Ponty was working on a new ontology resulting in his unfinished manuscript *The Visible and the Invisible*. The deeper understanding of art practice he establishes in ‘Eye and Mind’ helps him to consider the possibility of a form of expression for this ontology beyond the written word. The invisible in this essay is not the nonvisible: ‘The lines of visible things are doubled by a lining of invisibility that is *in* the visible.’⁵⁵ To explore this idea further I believe it is now necessary to establish the difference, in terms of process, method and technique, between painting and drawing.

1.3 From Painting to Drawing

Merleau-Ponty's early writing on art investigated the potential of painting as an alternative to phenomenological verbal language. There is a clear shift in his thinking, however, throughout his essays and in his later work as he recognises that drawing practice has equal value to any other art form. His acceptance of drawing as a primary artistic process reflects a similar recognition in the art world of the Post War period where a renewed interest in drawing was taking place among artists across Europe

⁵⁵ Galen A. Johnson, “Ontology and Painting: ‘Eye and Mind,’” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 53.

and in America. To discuss how this affects a reading of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of art, I first establish the philosophical implications of a comprehensive consideration of drawing practice. I then discuss possible definitions of painting and drawing, and finally I look at how this effects interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Although Merleau-Ponty regarded as problematic the procedures promoted by Husserl, such as the *époché* and the reduction, to achieve a phenomenologically reflective focus on the things themselves, he recognized a potential opportunity in these methods to reconnect with 'pure' consciousness. However, the real problem for the practice of phenomenological description, as Mark Wrathall suggests, is that by thinking about an action as we act, or 'to mediate the movement with thought', interrupts the flow of the movement and the action.⁵⁶ To describe experience as it is being experienced, 'seems to rely on our breaking out of our normal, fluid dealings with things in order to deliberately reflect on how they appear'.⁵⁷

For artists, this problem also raises issues of authenticity over accuracy – especially when making work from observation. Modern painters took the view that truth and authenticity, achieved spontaneously in an unreflective mode, were more important than accuracy, which required learned knowledge and reflection. They therefore worked directly onto their supports (canvas, paper etc.) without using any underpainting or measurement techniques. They were also able to dispense with the laborious oil painting methods, such as grinding pigment with various oils and mediums, as premixed paint was available in metal tubes that facilitated direct application. Eliminating the need to mix paint meant artists could work faster and oil paint could be employed in a way that had only been previously used in wash and water-colour studies, but with added texture and dramatic effect, the brush strokes often still visible in the thick applications of paint, giving a sense of the process the artist was involved in, in a more expressive style.⁵⁸

It is important to recognize however, that *to paint* and *to draw* are two very different activities. Despite this fact drawing and painting are often bundled together

⁵⁶ Mark Wrathall, "The Phenomenological Relevance of Art," in *Art and Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2011), 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Stephenson, *The Materials and Techniques of Painting* (Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1989), 15–17.

by many writers and philosophers as components of painting practice. In addition, the word ‘painter’ is used for artists who work predominately with paint but for artists who draw there is no equivalent in the English language; ‘drawer’ is an awkward and confusing word that has never been adopted for this purpose.⁵⁹

Drawing is an open-ended process, a tool for exploration that has the facility to act as an immediate record of the body’s gesture as it responds to the eye or the mind. In other words, as Rosand writes, drawing is ‘the record of a physical act’.⁶⁰ Whereas painting, up until the modern period was primarily an act of construction, a premeditated, planned ‘finished’ work. There was, however, a resurgence in the use of drawing by artists in the West after the Second World War, and the period between 1945 and 1975 in particular, Gary Garrels maintains, saw artists reinvent the traditions of Western drawing.⁶¹

Drawing gives physical presence to the thoughts and imaginings of humans in the most direct and intimate way. Through drawing artists may discover forms and meanings that had been unknown. We, in turn, may find that we must reconsider the definitions and descriptions of art, its meaning and value, and even how we understand the world and our place in it.⁶²

Drawing requires a certain state of mind to engage with a process during which ‘forms and meanings that had been unknown’ can be discovered. But as it is also ‘the record of a physical act’, it is an activity of the body that (as I will explain in more detail in the next chapter) often bypasses the mind, even when drawing from observation, relying solely on eye to hand coordination.

1.3.1 Drawing

Establishing the difference between paintings and drawings is not a straightforward task, as they have never been judged according to the same criteria. The art of drawing, Yves-Alain Bois explains, ‘evolved in a framework of conventions very

⁵⁹ In the French language the word *dessinateur* does serve this purpose but Merleau-Ponty doesn’t use it. The nearest word to this in English is *draughtsman*, which suggests a more utilitarian activity.

⁶⁰ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 17.

⁶¹ Gary Garrels, *Drawing from the Modern 1945-1975*, vol. 2 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 50.

⁶² Ibid.

different from painting’ for example ‘many things in drawing would not have been accepted in painting.’⁶³ Ed Krčma proposes that many of these difficulties arise from the fact that the ‘materials, techniques and functions proper to drawing throughout history are so varied that claims for the kinds of unity and coherence characteristic of a medium are difficult to sustain’.⁶⁴ While the categorisation of drawing remains elusive, “drawing’ as a noun at least, is cohered by a network of “family resemblances”’:

Although with many exceptions in each case, drawings have tended to prioritise line over colour; to involve dry rather than wet materials; to touch rather than cover their surface; to be of minor (provisional, private, preparatory, supplementary) rather than major status; to be unique rather than reproducible; to be modest rather than heroic in scale; and to arrive serially rather than singularly.⁶⁵

Traditionally, painting was the culmination of a process that involved drawing, but drawing was not in itself the end product; drawing was considered a preparatory activity and therefore of lesser importance. Rosand reminds us again though that it was Leonardo da Vinci who in ‘profoundly personal ways, comes to embody’ the ‘evolving modern notions about drawing’ by making his own practice the object of study.⁶⁶ Leonardo was ‘unique in his articulate appreciation of the dialectical complexity that existed between the sketch, as “componimento inculto,” [intuitive and random] and the sketcher, at once active and reactive.’⁶⁷

And yet Leonardo was indeed speaking for his contemporaries as well, for that generation of artists – and connoisseurs – who were coming to value the documents of the creative process as much as its final crafted product. By the middle of the sixteenth century the position of the sketch had become codified within an elaborated

⁶³ Bois, “Cézanne,” 42–43.

⁶⁴ Ed Krčma, “Time Held Up,” in *Motion Capture: Drawing and the Moving Image*, ed. Fiona Kearney and Matt Packer (Cork: Lewis Glucksman Gallery, 2012), 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

aesthetic system. The first step in the graphic development of a pictorial concept, it also came to represent the critical link with pure idea.⁶⁸

In terms of structure, appearance and categorization, however, as Krčma has indicated, the differences between painting and drawing are more ambiguous. Bois offers a possible analysis by focusing on the support - the surface on which the image is applied.

Since the time of Alberti, the picture plane is assumed as transparent in painting, but the condition sine qua non of this transparency is that the supporting ground be covered over without reserve. Consequently, as Walter Benjamin has remarked, the graphic line can exist only against this background, so that a drawing that completely covered its background would cease to be a drawing.⁶⁹

In other words if the surface of the canvas, paper, wall, panel etc., is completely covered with the image applied to its surface then the work must be complete, cannot be a preparatory work and is therefore a painting. Of course this interpretation is very problematic as there are many examples of paintings where areas of the support are deliberately untouched by paint (traditionally called ‘reserves’ in watercolour painting). Indeed, Benjamin would surely have been ‘troubled’ by an exhibition of Cézanne’s work as he was ‘without doubt the first painter to have abolished this constitutive difference’.⁷⁰ Bois adds, however, that Cézanne too, claimed to be troubled by the appearance of these untouched areas in his painting putting them down to his age and as ““abstractions” that are engendered in him by the “colouring sensations, which give the light””. If this were the case then perhaps ‘the destiny of all of Cézanne’s works even those whose aerated respiration we acclaim, was not to end by being dark and saturated with matter’⁷¹ This is an important point regarding the contradictions in Cézanne’s ‘declared intentions’ for his painting, and the areas left untouched – reminding us of Cézanne’s remarks about the perceived unity of painting and drawing: “Drawing and colour are not separate at all; in so far as you paint you

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bois, “Cézanne,” 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

draw””⁷² By making this statement, Bois suggests, Cézanne perhaps attempted to cancel out the difference between these ‘heterogeneous registers’.⁷³

It remains to be seen if such was his intention. I personally believe that he was obliged to do this: if, as Merleau-Ponty has stated, Cézanne’s goal was to paint perception itself, and if, as he himself put it, he wanted “to see as a newborn” that is to say, at the moment of an originary discrimination, he would have had to activate the opposition between figure and ground that is at the foundation of human perception; and the ascent of the support – namely, the contamination of the pictorial field by the graphic one – was the best route to take, or perhaps, even the only one.⁷⁴

By the time Merleau-Ponty came to write ‘Eye and Mind’ he had developed an understanding of how space, along with colour and line, functions within art-works, and that no one element is primary to the other: ‘There is clearly no one master key of the visible, and colour alone is no closer to being such a key than space is’ (EM: 141). In addition, the unfinished appearance of some of Cézanne’s work, especially his late watercolours, introduces an acceptance for Merleau-Ponty, of the impossibility of completion to painting, which had previously only been a feature of drawing.

Similarly, in the watercolours of Cézanne’s last years, space (which had been taken to be self-evidence itself and of which it was believed that the question of *where* was not to be asked) radiates around planes that cannot be assigned to any place at all: “a superimposing of transparent surfaces,” “a flowing movement of planes of colour which overlap, advance and retreat.” (EM: 141)

The acceptance of the impossibility of completion is an integral part of drawing practice. ‘A drawing’, John Berger maintains, ‘is an autobiographical record of one’s own discovery of an event – seen, remembered or imagined.’⁷⁵ Because exploratory drawing or working drawings are a process of discovery, there is no preconceived

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ John Berger, *Berger on Drawing*, ed. Jim Savage (Aghabullogue, Co Cork, Ireland: Occasional Press, 2005), 3.

idea of what the work will eventually look like. In contrast, Berger describes how a painting is perceived as a ‘finished’ work ‘an attempt to construct an event in itself.’⁷⁶

1.3.2 Context

It is important to remember that Merleau-Ponty’s focus was always on the *process* of making art rather than on the finished product. ‘The painter’ he writes in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, ‘is a person at work’ who everyday asks the same questions of the things he observes, ‘a call he never stops responding to.’ An artist’s work ‘is never completed’ he continues, ‘it is always in progress, so that no one can exalt it above the world’ (ILVS: 95). Foti has pointed out that Merleau-Ponty was alone among philosophers in his attempt to understand the ‘self-relinquishment of painting to its media and to the registers of visibility in its philosophical bearing’.⁷⁷ In contrast to philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty ‘emphasizes neither product nor form, but process’ and successfully ‘thought philosophically – at least to an extent – the detachment of the visual arts, specifically of painting, from the dominance of literature’.⁷⁸

Merleau-Ponty’s focus is also always fixed intently on European art, initially aligning his own ideas to Cézanne’s and by doing so situating those ideas within an art historical time frame. Indeed, Cézanne’s relevance stretched way beyond his own life-time, as his significance to 20th century Post War artists, Sarah Wilson has suggested, is explained by a connection between the Post War artist’s search for a new moral and artistic approach and their adoption of Cézanne as an ideal model.⁷⁹ Wilson concludes that ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ was instrumental at the time in emphasising the importance of authenticity in the life and work of an artist.⁸⁰

It was, however, through Merleau-Ponty’s study of the work and writings of artists such as Klee and Matisse that the role of drawing and the use of line in the visual arts

⁷⁶ Ibid. Berger clarifies that he is talking about working drawings here ‘I do not mean linear designs, illustrations, caricatures, certain portraits or graphic works which may be ‘finished’ productions in their own right.’ 4.

⁷⁷ Véronique M. Fôti, “Bound Transcendence and the Invisible: On Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Painting,” *symploké* 4.1/2 (1996): 7-20, 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁹ Sarah Wilson, “Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute,” in *Paris Post War : Art and Existentialism 1945-55* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

became more relevant to his philosophical analysis: ‘line no longer imitates the visible’ he writes in ‘Eye and Mind’ it “renders visible”; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things.’

Yet this challenging of the prosaic line is far from ruling out all lines in painting, as the impressionists may have thought. It is simply a matter of freeing the line, of revivifying its constituting power; and we are not faced with a contradiction when we see it reappear and triumph in painters like Klee or Matisse, who more than anyone believed in colour. (EM: 143)

This is an important shift in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, as the use of drawing has always been essential to the process of making for artists but has not always been recognized as a primary art form. By 1945, mark-making, line and other forms of drawing, had become a fundamental component in the move towards the expressionistic styles of artists in Europe and America. For example, David Hopkins describes the American artist Jackson Pollock’s use of linear ‘gesturalism’ in his paintings of the 40s and 50s.⁸¹ Similarly, Valerie Fletcher observes how in Post War Paris Giacometti ‘relied on drawing to develop his mature painting style’.⁸² Merleau-Ponty often uses the word line (*ligne*) to describe a particular type of drawing practice that is distinct from sketching or geometric design – drawing that is connected to observation and thinking, and in ‘Eye and Mind’ he writes ‘there is a kind of drawing, even a single line that can embrace all of painting’s bold potential’ (EM: 132). In fact, as Rosand has argued, Merleau-Ponty’s use of painting to illustrate his ideas in his later work is often even more relevant when applied to drawing. When Merleau-Ponty states, for instance: ‘It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings’ Rosand suggests that ‘the movements of the body, actual and imagined, are more directly recorded by the tracing hand’ in drawing practice rather than painting.⁸³ Similarly, Krčma describes the hand of Matisse, in the film of the artist at work, as it dances across ‘an emergent artwork: its achievements were the

⁸¹ David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16.

⁸² Valerie J. Fletcher, “Giacometti’s Paintings,” in *Alberto Giacometti, 1901-1966*, ed. Toni Stooss and Patrick Elliott (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1996), 28.

⁸³ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 15.

result of corporeal rather than cognitive calculation, the latter being purposefully held in suspension to enable the expressive eloquence of the former'.⁸⁴

However, it is worth noting that Merleau-Ponty does not address any of the art work being made in the United States in the Post War period, where drawing practices were incorporated into painting practice on a large scale by artists such as Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Indeed, in 'Eye and Mind' Merleau-Ponty dismisses American culture as artificial and as only concerned with commodities; America is, he writes, a place 'where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines' (EM: 122).

If this kind of thinking were to set out to construct them on the basis of a few abstract indices (as a decadent psychoanalysis and culturalism have done in the United States) – then since the human being truly becomes the manipulandum he thinks he is, we enter into a cultural regimen in which neither truth nor falsehood concerning humanity and history, into a sleep, or nightmare from which there is no awakening. (EM: 122)

This swift rejection of American cultural developments goes some way in explaining why Merleau-Ponty did not see any point in taking into account the work of, for example, the Action painters and Abstract Expressionists. Of course the implications of the Cold War and capitalism in the US would also have deterred the Marxist in Merleau-Ponty from embracing any of the endeavors of the American artists – even though many of them were born in Europe and Russia, some of them even sympathetic to the communist cause.

It is ironic, therefore, that shortly after Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961, English translations of *Phenomenology of Perception* became available and American artists embraced Merleau-Ponty's work. They did not use his ideas for the process of making art however, but rather for taking into account how the finished work is viewed – for understanding the perception of the viewer – which perhaps proves Merleau-Ponty's point above that the Americans were only concerned with commodities. Merleau-Ponty's reticence to engage with certain artists or art movements was very much rooted in this unyielding political stance. Alex Potts reminds us that he was a 'shrewd and hard-headed political commentator' and that the 'ideological underpinning of

⁸⁴ Krčma, "Time Held Up," 12.

Phenomenology of Perception was far from being liberal humanist'.⁸⁵ Paradoxically, the laundering out of the political dimension integral to Merleau-Ponty's thinking, Potts writes, 'probably contributed to the demise of his reputation in the politically conscious art world of the 1970s'.⁸⁶

Merleau-Ponty's concern was limited to the art of Europe and ignored the developments of the New York school where Pollock had taken his work from the easel to the floor necessitating a completely new approach to using his body to make a painting. Pollack's approach would arguably have been useful to advance Merleau-Ponty's thesis had he acknowledged it but Foti reminds us that Merleau-Ponty, even in his late work, 'remains rather hesitant to dissociate pictorial space – or any aspect of the visual work – from a reference to the perceived world (and thus from the primacy of perceptual expression)'.⁸⁷ Therefore, as the art-world turned its attention to America and to those artists who embraced the aesthetic and ideological alternatives presented by the Post War consumerist era, Merleau-Ponty's ideas, developed in the late 50s and early 60s, were overlooked. Potts points out that soon after the 'flurry of translations into English' in the mid 1960s, Merleau-Ponty's work 'began to sink from public view'.⁸⁸

By the end of the 1960s, artists or critics looking to ground their analysis philosophically, and seeking alternatives to traditional rationalist or positivist models, tended to turn to Wittgenstein rather than to the French existentialists or phenomenologists. With his insistence on the centrality of an understanding of language to a conceptually informed critical analysis, Wittgenstein became the thinking artist's and critic's philosopher.⁸⁹

Merleau-Ponty emphasises repeatedly throughout his essays on art that it is the artist's practice that is important to him – not the product or its historical or theoretical importance, and it is this aspect of his philosophy that I believe makes his work

⁸⁵ Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 211.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Fótí, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*, 50.

⁸⁸ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 210.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

relevant to art-making practices today and to drawing practice in particular. Within a contemporary context, Petherbridge claims, drawing ‘has undergone its biggest changes for centuries’ which is ‘related to *making* not context, end product and reception.’⁹⁰ While she believes that the ‘value put on drawing as revelatory practice is keener and more intense than it ever was’ she cautions that ‘many of the rich potentialities of drawing...have been repressed in our time and need to be rediscovered and revalued.’

In particular, drawing needs to be reaffirmed as intelligent practice, which is as much about thinking, seeing and interrogating as inventing, and which communicates as intensely with others as it refers to the affective self.⁹¹

Echoing these sentiments Anita Taylor writes that it is now time to ‘re-evaluate the specific function of drawing at a point when maybe it has become consumed as a product to be marketed’⁹²

While contemporary drawing responds to a broad, ‘boundary-busting’ remit it is essential to remember that critical development also needs to be applied to drawings clearly within those boundaries.⁹³

By re-reading Merleau-Ponty’s work through the language of drawing, new information on his ideas and philosophy can be discovered to offer what Potts has described as ‘an antidote to narratives of positivistic progress’.⁹⁴ ‘Eye and Mind’, Potts suggests, ‘strikes a startlingly contemporary note’ when Merleau-Ponty writes of ‘a deaf historicity, that advances in the labyrinth by detours, transgressions, encroachment and sudden thrusts’.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 432.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Anita Taylor, “Foreword - Re: Positioning Drawing,” in *Writing on Drawing: Essays on Drawing Practice and Research*, ed. Steve Garner (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 10.

⁹³ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁴ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 234.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

As the description of a temporality submerged within the blind contingencies of material existence, it is evocative of significant aspects of the fabric of life in a modern culture increasingly permeated by the anarchic yet rigidly systematized grids of electronic technology and monetary and bureaucratic organization. More particularly, his vision has telling affinities with the aimless directedness and sudden seizures of intensity that characterize the responses elicited by much contemporary art.⁹⁶

‘What is irreplaceable in the work of art,’ Merleau-Ponty writes in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, ‘what makes it, far more than a means of pleasure, a spiritual organ whose analogue is found in all productive philosophical or political thought, is the fact that it contains, better than ideas, *matrices of ideas* – providing us with emblems whose meaning we never stop developing’ (ILVS: 114).

Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty’s paradigm of painting grew out of his research into psychology, Gestalt and his development of a phenomenology of perception, which led him to study the work of artists as seemingly diverse as Cézanne and Leonardo. While he was initially occupied with Cézanne’s paintings in his early writings, Merleau-Ponty gradually widened his understanding of art practice and the nature of visual language as a viable alternative to the written word and as a practical ontology. Although he makes a compelling argument in his first essay ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ for the potential of painting to provide the means to render human visual experience in a truthful and authentic manner, in reality oil paint is a difficult and volatile medium to work with, and Cézanne ended up developing a style that would overcome these difficulties rather than a method of true visual authenticity. Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Malraux, Museums and other historical institutions in his second essay, ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ opened up his understanding for the potential of art practice to describe experience as it is being experienced. By questioning the historical categories that compartmentalise artists and artworks Merleau-Ponty begins to also discover the potential for a communicable language in visual art making processes, which he explores in more depth in his final essay ‘Eye and Mind’.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The complexities that are involved in differentiating drawing and painting are complicated by the inadequacies of the written word to convey the experiential nature of visual art processes. These processes rely on a symbiotic engagement with materials through a consistent experience of making and responding. To write experience down in words, in a way that makes sense to others, comes after the experience as reflection, and is more useful for reflecting on an artwork that is complete than for describing the experience of making the work itself. In the following chapters, I look in more depth at the methods, materials and processes of drawing practice through teaching strategies and artist's techniques. By comparing these components of creative expression with Merleau-Ponty's ideas and developing ontology, I aim to show the potential for drawing as a language in itself that does not need translation into words. In addition I discuss how the handwritten word, and specifically Merleau-Ponty's handwritten working documents, displays elements of the creative expression that is a vital component in drawing practice.

2. Making Sense of the Process of Drawing

*I must circumscribe my vision, mark (on a standard of measurement I hold)
what I call the “apparent size” of the moon and of the coin, and finally,
transfer these measurements onto paper.*

(ILVS: 86)

*The drawing is no longer to be read the way it was until recently. It is not to
be dominated by the look. We are no longer to find in it the pleasure of
embracing the world. The drawing is to be received. It will concern us like
some decisive word.*

(PW: 150)

Merleau-Ponty's essays on art reinforce his philosophical analysis of bodily perception while concentrating on activities of making that are responses to the world. It is, however, clear that the processes artists used were more important to Merleau-Ponty than the end result of those processes or their perceived historical status. In other words he was more concerned with visual art that reveals a sense of inhabiting the world as opposed to art that strives to be an equivalent rendition of the world. Although Merleau-Ponty focused initially on painting practice, I believe an overemphasis on his writing on painting misrepresents his overall view of the nature of how artists work. In this chapter I argue that it is possible to gain a deeper appreciation of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and his understanding of human expression by examining the distinct methods of drawing and painting and the different roles they play in creative expression.

Through an examination of the differences between the various educational methods used to teach observational and perspectival drawing I discuss how the materials artists use influence the work they make. I also demonstrate how the process of drawing is a form of thinking which is relevant across all creative disciplines. Finally I look at how important communication and the role of truth in expression was

for Merleau-Ponty, and how this indirectly relates to his phenomenological and ontological philosophy.

2.1 The Nature of Drawing Practice

The terminology that surrounds drawings and drawing practice is complex and somewhat confusing as there are a wide range of practices that fit into the terminology of drawing, and these in turn cover many different modes of representation. Although not all drawing is concerned with working directly from observation, Merleau-Ponty's essay's on art always focuses on representational art-making processes. Therefore I concentrate here on drawing practice that works directly from life or nature.

Merleau-Ponty's writing on art is initially focused on Cézanne's constant need to begin at the beginning, to suspend his knowledge and approach each experience as if it were the first. 'He did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear', Merleau-Ponty writes in 'Cézanne's Doubt' (CD: 63). Perspectival accuracy was not Cézanne's priority, but rather he was concerned with rendering in paint the reality of what he could see, painstakingly, one moment at a time: 'A minute of the world is going by which must be painted in its full reality' (CD: 67). For Merleau-Ponty, perspectival accuracy was linked to the Cartesian idea of drawing, which was reduced by Descartes to its function as a means to create an illusion of depth, space and a third dimension. For example, in the third section of 'Eye and Mind' Merleau-Ponty challenged Descartes' limited understanding of drawing on the grounds that, for Descartes, the power of drawing was dependent 'upon the ordered relationship between it and objective space established by perspectival projection' (EM: 133). Through his repeated confrontation with Descartes' ideas, Merleau-Ponty comes to revise his own preferences and his earlier dismissal of drawing in favour of painting. The type of drawing Descartes used was just one part of a method of constructing a composition, which was mathematical, technical and artificial and did not reflect Merleau-Ponty's idea of human perception, which is not in need of thoughts and words. Nor do Cartesian drawings reflect the reality of how artists work when they want to respond directly to things observed.

For Descartes it is self-evident that one can paint only existing things, that their existence consists in being extended, and line drawing alone makes painting possible by making possible the representation of extension. Thus painting is only an artifice that puts before our eyes a projection similar to the one things themselves would (and do, according to the commonsense view) inscribe in them. Painting causes us to see, without real objects, just as we see things in everyday life; and in particular it makes us see empty space where there is none. (EM: 133)

Merleau-Ponty's preference for painting practice was thus partly a reaction against the Cartesian view of drawing as the structure that supports painting. Modern art had dispensed with this structure but had not dispensed with the practice of drawing in its more immediate and spontaneous forms.

The most sustained investigation of drawing practice by Merleau-Ponty, written a number of years before 'Eye and Mind', was in the form of a short prose fragment that came to be entitled 'Expression and the Child's Drawing' and posthumously published in the unfinished *Prose of the World*. In this essay, he examines the multi-sensory perception a child will use when engaged in 'objective' drawing. This is drawing practice in its most intuitive form, totally unselfconscious and unconcerned with method or technique. This type of drawing, he writes, can be valued for what it is, as a 'positive accomplishment', rather than a pursuit that is lacking because it does not conform to a common language that can be understood and read (PW: 149). The activity the child is engaged in when drawing is for her or himself, it is not a means to communicate with others in a common language. It is futile therefore to read into the work of a child an attempt to progress towards the rules of perspective, and it is therefore wrong to try to 'define the child's drawing solely in relation to the final stage at which it rejoins two-dimensional perspective' (PW: 148).

Crucially this essay reveals Merleau-Ponty's recognition that the primal compulsion to create remains at the core of why and how artists work. It is also wrong, therefore, to assume that a child's drawing is inferior to that of an adult just because they do not draw with the skill and accuracy of an adult.

... two-dimensional perspective is not a form of realism. It is a construction. To understand the stages preceding it, we must not speak of *inattentiveness* or *synthetic*

incapacity as if perspectival drawing were already there before a child's eyes, and the whole problem were to explain why he was not motivated by it. On the contrary, we should try to understand the primordial modes of expression for their own sake and as positive accomplishments. (PW:149)

Recognizing the value in the primordial nature of a child's drawing, Merleau-Ponty believes the child can demonstrate, by leaving on paper 'a trace' of their visual contact with the object, the development of human perception from its earliest stages. Two-dimensional perspective he writes, 'gave us the finitude of our perception, projected and flattened out, until it had become *prose* under the gaze of a god' (PW: 151). The artist who creates work using only human perception can regain their childlike abilities to respond authentically to their visual observations.

The child's ways of expression, once they have been deliberately recaptured by an artist in a genuinely creative gesture, will, on the contrary, yield us the secret resonance through which our finitude opens up to the being of the world and becomes poetry. (PW: 151)

For Merleau-Ponty, thinking processes, for both children and adults, are aroused by vision or the other senses, not the other way around. He thereby directly opposes the Cartesian theory that 'there is no vision without thought' (EM: 135). Instead, as Mikel Dufrenne maintains, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl's model of passive synthesis; vision does not 'organise the visible, nor does it bestow meaning upon it or constitute it as readable and expressible in words'.⁹⁷ When we encounter formed objects that we have not ourselves generated, our experience is initially passive, but structured by that which is already given.⁹⁸ This child-like way of experiencing, before knowledge or judgement come in to play, is, as Dermot Moran suggests, 'somehow layered in with

⁹⁷ Mikel Dufrenne, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 257–258.

⁹⁸ See Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis : Lectures on Transcendental Logic.*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock., Edmund Husserl Collected Works ; v. 9 (Dordrecht ; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

our adult way of seeing'.⁹⁹ 'Thus vision doubles', Merleau-Ponty writes in 'Eye and Mind':

There is the vision upon which I reflect; I cannot think it except *as* thought, the mind's inspection, judgment a reading of signs. And then there is the vision that actually occurs, an honorary or established thought, collapsed into a body – its own body, of which we can have no idea except in the exercise of it, and which introduces, between space and thought, the autonomous order of the composite of soul and body. The enigma of vision is not done away with; it is shifted from the "thought of seeing" to vision in act. (EM: 136)

For an adult to regain their childlike abilities of observation, however, often requires learning methods to enable them to let go of knowledge and judgment that interfere with unselfconscious perception.

2.1.1 Methods

Drawing from observation, without the use of perspective or measurement, is tested by many factors, external and internal. One of the internal factors that can interrupt paying close attention to the thing observed is the everyday habitual way of looking that we develop as we become adults. This way of looking is more concerned with identification than appearance and does not take in, and therefore provide, enough information for the adequate description of objects in a drawing. Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* that 'objective thought is unaware of the subject of perception', objective thought 'presents itself with the world ready made' as it must if we are to move through the world efficiently (PP: 240). But an artist must engage fully with their perception in order to obtain the information needed for the task of drawing. This, David Rosand advises, is 'a complex action', which 'involves subject and object, perception and representation, eye and mind, and, most obviously – yet too often the neglected component in critical discussion – hand and body.'¹⁰⁰ When drawing from observation, mind and thinking should have very little to do with the act of drawing itself and can in fact interfere with progress. The mind contains

⁹⁹ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 167.

¹⁰⁰ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 13.

judgment and critical thought of how the work is proceeding and whether or not the drawing ‘looks like’ the object being drawn. This leads to over-thinking instead of looking at what is really there and often inhibits the drawing’s development. In fact, much of learning to draw from observation involves bypassing preconceptions of the thing observed and instead concentrating on developing eye to hand co-ordination.

One of the most accessible descriptions of an exercise for developing eye to hand co-ordination can be found in the writing of Kimon Nicolaïdes who developed his methods of teaching at the Art Students League in New York in the 1920s and 30s (although his work was not published until after his death in 1938).¹⁰¹ Nicolaïdes emphasis was on ‘correct observation’ by learning to draw through ‘learning to see – to see correctly’. Nicolaïdes emphasises however, that this type of drawing ‘means a good deal more than merely looking with the eye’.

The sort of ‘seeing’ I mean is an observation that utilizes as many of the five senses as can reach through the eye at one time. Although you use your eyes, you do not close up the other senses – rather the reverse, because all the senses have a part in the sort of observation you make.¹⁰²

This idea that our perception is a bodily multi-sensual action rather than an activity restricted to vision is again analogous to Merleau-Ponty’s own ideas on perception. ‘True experience’, he insists, is inadequately described by phrases such as ‘I see with my eyes or hear with my ears’ (PP: 246).

I say that my eyes see, that my hand touches, that my foot is aching, but these naïve expressions do not put into words my true experience. Already they provide me with an interpretation of that experience which detaches it from its original subject. Because I know that the light strikes my eyes, that contact is made by the skin, that

¹⁰¹ Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw: A Working Plan for Art Study* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1972). First published in 1941 Mamie Harmon one of his students and a collaborator undertook editorial work as Nicolaïdes was reluctant to put into final form his constantly developing methods of art teaching.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

my shoe hurts my foot, I distribute through my body perceptions which really belong to my soul, and put perception into the thing perceived. (PP: 247)

For the visual artist, there is often a conflict between learning to trust this perceptual experience, to engage fully with the ‘original subject’, and the desire to create an image that conforms to the common notion of what such and such a thing *should* look like. Proportionally accurate drawings on the other hand, can be achieved using geometry and the rules of perspective, techniques that can be learned by learning the rules rather than engaging with experience. Creating an image from human observation alone (instead of fixing accuracy within methodology based on ‘quasigeometric systems’) is more challenging, Deanna Petherbridge maintains, because often the results do not conform to an ideal image.¹⁰³ Nicolaïdes’ rigorous teaching methods offer an alternative to a purely technical approach and were developed with adult students in mind, specifically those enrolled in an art college. He advises that there is a significant difference between ‘drawing’ and ‘making drawings’; the practice of drawing must be repeated ‘over and over again’ the results will only track the ‘effort of study’ producing not finished art-works but the by-products of a period of ‘mental and physical activity.’ ‘Your progress is charted’, Nicolaïdes concludes, ‘not on paper, but in the increased knowledge with which you look at life around you.’¹⁰⁴

Nicolaïdes also stresses the importance of beginning each drawing as if it were the first, as ‘there is no such thing as starting where Cézanne, for example, left off’. Instead, ‘you have to start where Cézanne started – at the beginning – and you have to start with the same integrity and the same interest’.¹⁰⁵ It is therefore through the experience of drawing that true knowledge is acquired, the knowledge of how to look at the object for the information needed to make an image on paper. The initial drawings of an adult student will often rely on previous knowledge and classification of an object rather than on accurate observation. They will draw what a thing, a chair an apple, a face *should* look like and take very little information from the object in

¹⁰³ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 231.

¹⁰⁴ Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

front of them. The exercises Nicolaïdes developed deal with one single observational method at a time that, if studied correctly, will become second nature and become ‘welded’ into the students drawing practice ‘the habits thus formed will contribute to every drawing you make’.¹⁰⁶

There is only one right way to learn to draw and that is a perfectly natural way. It has nothing to do with artifice of technique. It has nothing to do with aesthetics of conception. It has only to do with correct observation, and by that I mean a physical contact with all sorts of objects through all the senses.¹⁰⁷

The important aspect therefore is the process itself not the end result of that process. Nicolaïdes understood that concentrating on the technical and theoretical side alone – by learning the rules of anatomy, perspective, scale and proportion – places accuracy of representation over expression. He developed exercises that were meant to increase student awareness of all their senses and to teach them how those senses relate to their visual experience at the particular moment when they are making a drawing.

Because pictures are made to be seen, too much emphasis (and too much dependence) is apt to be placed upon seeing. Actually, we see *through* the eyes rather than with them. It is necessary to test everything you see with what you can discover through the other senses – hearing, taste, smell, and touch – and their accumulated experience. If you rely on the eyes alone, they can sometimes actually mislead you.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, to facilitate a direct response to observation materials need to be flexible and, like perception, continuous. Drawing instruction manuals, such as the one by Nicolaïdes, often divide drawing materials into dry (charcoal, pencils, etc.) and wet (ink, paint etc.) This distinction, which also affects responsiveness and speed, also

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

applies to the wide range of more unorthodox materials used in artistic production.¹⁰⁹

2.1.2 Materials

The materials used for drawing are often chosen for their ability to sustain momentum and quickly respond to the movements of the hand as it responds to information given by the eye. In addition, erasure of line and form in drawing become a part of the process of its making and the erasable properties of a medium can be a deciding factor in its use. It is these linear qualities of drawing, Petherbridge observes, that constitute a ‘cognitive mapping’ of the ‘gestural traces of the hand and the echo of the body’ and is one of the defining elements that distinguish drawing from painting.¹¹⁰

It is the condition of linearity that unless lines and *pentimenti* [second thoughts] have been deliberately erased, drawing asserts, or has the power to assert, the fully extended history of its own making, unlike the self-obscuring layers of the painterly project. In this sense, drawing constructs its own narrative of making, distinct but inseparable from its subject matter.¹¹¹

The painterly projects of the classical periods, using many layers of oil paint, did indeed seek to conceal rather than reveal the process of their making. Water-based painting techniques, however, due to their transparent nature, speed of application and compatibility with other drawing media, traverse the drawing/painting distinctions and demonstrate the ambiguous and complex nature of drawing terminology.¹¹² The muted or transparent nature of water-colours and inks, although related to the innately sensuous and suggestive nature of colour media, incline more towards the tactile, directional qualities of drawing.

¹⁰⁹ See for example: Claudia Betti, *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach*, 3rd ed (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992). Sarah Simblet, *The Drawing Book* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2009). Mick Maslen, *Drawing Projects: An Exploration of the Language of Drawing* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 118.

In 'Eye and Mind' Merleau-Ponty uses language that evokes the intertwining nature of an artist's use of materials to trace their thought processes as they respond to the external world.

Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these correspondences in turn give rise to some tracing rendered visible again, in which the eyes of others could find an underlying motif to sustain their inspection of the world? (EM: 126)

Merleau-Ponty identifies a human need to create images of the world, even in the prehistoric age before language, when he refers to the prehistoric images of animals found on the walls of Lascaux caves. (EM: 126) The characteristics of these monochromatic cave paintings, created using mineral pigments and charcoal, in fact relate more to drawing than to painting practice, indeed many of these primitive materials are still in use by artists today.¹¹³ In 'Eye and Mind' Merleau-Ponty also acknowledges the integrated nature of drawing within artistic practice.

Anyone who thinks about the matter finds it astonishing that very often a good painter can also produce good drawings or good sculpture... The effort of modern painting has been directed not so much toward choosing between line and colour, or even between figurative depiction and the creation of signs, as it has been toward multiplying the systems of equivalences, toward severing their adherence to the envelope of things. This effort may require the creation of new materials or new means of expression, but it may well be realized at times by the reexamination and reuse of those already at hand. (EM: 142)

It is common for artists of all disciplines to use drawing throughout their practice (even though, it should be noted, not all artists draw) but especially at the beginning stages of their thought processes. In order to keep up with vision or thought, the materials used must be capable of speed and continuity, responding immediately to the senses, or an object being perceived. In the case of an artist responding to the perceived world, it is important that the artist's attention be fixed on the object and

¹¹³ Ibid., 122.

that the materials not interfere with the response to that object. Introducing colour to this process is to introduce another element of engagement with materials that takes attention away from the object perceived. Paint, when it is the vehicle of applied colour, especially colour that is faithful to the object or scene observed, demands a lot more attention than a pencil, charcoal or other monochromatic drawing media. The management of colour relationships in an artwork can in fact interrupt thought. For example, Alberto Giacometti expresses his frustration when trying to use colour when he admits:

I try to paint with colours...but I can't apply colours without a structure to start with. To build up this structure on the canvas is already an endless undertaking. And to go on from there to colour seems next to impossible. I don't know how to do it, I simply can't see it.¹¹⁴

The discipline of representational painting using colour, David Ryan argues, demands a form of attention that must, to a certain extent, attend to its properties, its substance, its interactivity and its colour relationships as they introduce into the creative process, a 'negotiation of the medium.'¹¹⁵ This negotiation is necessary in order to attend to the needs of the paint. These needs will depend on which type of paint is used (thick, thin, oil based, water based) and onto which type of surface (absorbent, textured, smooth) it is being applied. These considerations, even when the techniques of application are fully integrated into the artist's practice, take the artist's attention away from the object observed – to a greater extent than drawing does. This is why an artist will often make preliminary studies in a medium that will quickly record visual experience, in order to inform subsequent work made using paint.

Furthermore, the choice of colour will also often be made for practical reasons, rather than for accuracy; for example, some pigments are more expensive than others. There are also times when colour can have an effect on the artist's decision making through unexpected emotional responses certain colours may inspire or provoke, as the painter Hughie O'Donoghue candidly describes:

¹¹⁴ James Lord, *Giacometti: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 399.

¹¹⁵ David Ryan, "On Painting," *Art Monthly*, no. 355 (April 2012): 11.

I don't trust cadmium yellow ...it can seduce you pull you in with its brilliance. Cadmium yellow is buried under rather a lot of my pictures... Recently I have started covering it with variants of burnt sienna. On the whole burnt sienna seems to have a good influence on cadmium yellow and cadmium red – it keeps them in check makes them behave. The problem of the cadmium yellow and the cadmium red is irritating me. They are like naughty children. As soon as I lose my patience with them I am immediately given to forgive them. They clamour for attention.¹¹⁶

O'Donoghue also notes how unpredictable colour can be even when using different pigments of the same hue:

I used to use a colour that was called 'black'. I thought it was black, it certainly looked black. One time I was waiting for this colour to dry, it was cold and wet and it was taking forever. Eventually I tried to paint over it and the paint still was not dry and things just became terrible and chaotic and muddy. I talked to another painter who said 'use Mars black, it dries quickly. It's a warm black.' At this point I realised I didn't know much about black.¹¹⁷

To facilitate a direct response to observation, materials need to be responsive and maintain a sustained uninterrupted flow of mark-making. Paint interrupts the response to things seen because of its needs and volatility, thereby complicating the process of observation. 'The problem of simultaneously managing colour, quality of pigment, tone, texture, grain, and so on', John Berger concurs, 'combined with the longer time needed to work with paint, and often the larger scale of the job, make painting a complicated means of expression.'¹¹⁸

2.1.3 Processes

Drawing, especially from observation, involves a process of bodily engagement as the hand mimics the movement of the eye and the hands and fingers coax and smudge marks or line into coherent forms. The record of a physical act, drawing has the

¹¹⁶ Hughie O'Donoghue, *Hughie O'Donoghue: Via Crucis* (Munich: Haus Der Kunst, 1997), 44.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁸ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 3.

potential to authentically display a phenomenological encounter, as the artist lends ‘his body to the world’ (EM: 124). To understand how this works Merleau-Ponty writes in ‘Eye and Mind’ we must ‘go back to the working actual body...the body which is an intertwining of vision and movement’ (EM: 124) An artist engaged in this expressive way of tracing the experience of seeing needs to trust the process they are engaged in, Rosand advises, in order to respond to the needs of an apparent ‘double dialectic’ that unfolds as they work:

Once the first mark disrupts the blank paper, the draughtsman enters into a double dialectic: with the object before him (or the idea imagined) and with the emerging graphic construction itself. As the drawing develops, its demands upon the draughtsman begin to take precedence over those of the object (or idea) before (or within) him; the drawing asserts itself as the main object of concern, the primary other in the subject-object relation.¹¹⁹

As the drawing begins to emerge, through the materials and techniques interacting and doing their work, it inhabits the world in a way that precedes any representational function that may be subsequently imposed upon it. What is of most interest to Merleau-Ponty is the work of those artists who strive to retain this embodied nature of the process in which they are engaged.

The painter’s vision is not a view upon the *outside*, a merely “physical-optical” relation to the world. The world no longer stands before him though representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming – to-itself of the visible. Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all “autofigurative.” (EM: 141)

The embodiment theory of perception and creativity proposed by Merleau-Ponty is, John Haworth argues, comparable to the ‘intimate reciprocal influence between the

¹¹⁹ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 13.

[artist] and the artwork'.¹²⁰ Through interviews with artists, including Sol Witt and Jasper Johns, Haworth outlines how the making process itself reveals how cognition 'can be seen as embodied action influenced by pre-reflexive and reflexive thought', combined with the artist's own experiences that 'may well result from a joint enfolding and unfolding of the environment and the person'.¹²¹ Contrary to the traditional theory of art as a process driven by artistic intentions and a search for ideas, Merleau-Ponty's believes that 'we do not see the world, but see with the world'.¹²² Notably, Haworth writes, Merleau-Ponty's theory of art views the artwork as 'an "enriched being" in its own right' rather than as just an illustration or representation of some external factor.

[the embodiment theory] proposes that this enriched being is not produced primarily by intentional acts, as traditional art theory claims, but by the reciprocal influence of consciousness, the body, techniques and materials. The work of art is also considered visible or meaningful in a stronger sense than everyday perception is.¹²³

Indeed, in 'Eye and Mind' we find Merleau-Ponty using language that suggests that the artist's body, and the materials used, are all one in the process of tracing experiences of the world through painting or drawing.

The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is *that which* has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand. (EM: 127)

It is this reciprocal engagement that prompts Merleau-Ponty to write of the 'carnal formula' that allows things in the world to 'arouse in me an internal equivalent' (EM: 126). He finds expression and evidence for his theories in the work of visual artists and these notions of reciprocity and reversibility are expanded and developed in his

¹²⁰ John Haworth, "Beyond Reason: Pre-Reflexive Thought and Creativity in Art," *Leonardo* 30, no. 2 (April 1997): 144.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

philosophical writing and especially in his later ontology. This ontology, which is already taking shape in *Prose of the World*, culminates in his establishment of the term *flesh* to propose that our bodies and the world are two aspects of a single reality.¹²⁴ In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty clarifies that flesh ‘is not matter’ or ‘substance’ nor is it “material” or “spiritual” it is more like an element such as ‘water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea’ (VI: 139). These ideas directly challenge, and continue his earlier critical engagement, with a number of traditional ontologies that obscure our inherence in the world through their adherence to a subject-object dichotomy.¹²⁵ Reversibility demonstrates how flesh (an unlimited ‘domain’) can be understood in human terms when Merleau-Ponty uses the example of ‘the hands of one same body’ touching each other (VI: 141).

When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one sole man touches one sole thing through both hands. (VI: 141)

The touching in this example is a physical, literal touching but the notion of flesh also encompasses the closeness or overlapping of, for example, our senses, language and perception and the ‘seer’ and the visible world (VI: 155). Contrary to traditional philosophies, perception and embodiment are not for Merleau-Ponty just *properties* of minds or subjects.¹²⁶ Descartes and Kant for example ‘*detached* the subject or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it’ (PP: x). Merleau-Ponty takes this a step further in *The Visible and the Invisible* where perceptual experience is described as a more basic bodily continuity with the world

¹²⁴ Fred Evans, “Chiasm and Flesh,” in *Merleau-Ponty : Key Concepts*, (Acumen Publishing) (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 187.

¹²⁵ Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2008), 125.

¹²⁶ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 30.

we perceive below the threshold of conscious awareness.¹²⁷ In 'Eye and Mind' he argues that visual art practice alone is capable of 'those gestures, those tracings' that can reveal what seems 'to emanate from the things themselves' a 'prehuman way of seeing things...illustrating and amplifying the metaphysical structure of our flesh' (EM: 129).

'Merleau-Ponty did not say that ideas are not important in art', Haworth explains, 'but rather that they have their origins in embodiment.'¹²⁸ What is implacable in a work of art? Merleau-Ponty asks, and in reply he writes:

The fact that it contains, better than ideas, matrices of ideas, the fact that it provides us with symbols whose meaning we never stop developing. Precisely because it dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have a key to, the work of art teaches us to see and ultimately gives us something to think about as no other analytic work can; because when we analyze an object we find only what we have (consciously) put into it. (ILVS: 114)

This understanding of how an 'internal equivalent', or a process of reversibility, is achieved through art practice, and by extension within viewing the embodied art work, is most evident in the process of working from a model in life-drawing. Commenting on his own experience when drawing from life, John Berger remarks: 'I saw and recognized quite ordinary anatomical facts; but I also felt them physically – as if, in a sense, my nervous system inhabited his [the model's] body.'¹²⁹ For Berger, drawing from life creates an awareness of engaging all his senses with the art-making process – taking him beyond the everyday mode of looking at the world. Life-drawing (a human body being drawn by a human body) is by its nature a 'mesmeric discipline', Petherbridge observes, that generally emphasises, 'the responsive, the affective, the spontaneous and the phenomenological.'¹³⁰ Similarly, self-portraits, which held a particular fascination for Merleau-Ponty, engage the artist in a process

¹²⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹²⁸ Haworth, "Beyond Reason," 137.

¹²⁹ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 8. 'Life-Drawing' first appeared as the basis of 'All Painting and Sculpture is Drawing' in the *New Statesman Magazine* 1960.

¹³⁰ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 232.

of connecting with a human form that is, Petherbridge argues, ‘more than a simple matter of convenience or narcissism.’¹³¹ The encounter between the self and the reflected self, both observed and observing, ‘serves to shape such drawings into commentaries or meditations on vision, as well as constructions of identity’.¹³² Accordingly, in ‘Eye and Mind’ Merleau-Ponty considers the role mirrors play in the process of translating and reproducing, as the mirror ‘anticipates, within things, the labour of vision’ (EM: 129).

Mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another, and another into myself. Artists have often mused upon mirrors because beneath this “mechanical trick,” they recognized, as they did in the case of the “trick” of perspective, the metamorphosis of seeing and seen that defines both our flesh and the painter’s vocation. (EM: 130)

When drawing from observation, artists depend upon materials and techniques to facilitate the process of making and not to interrupt the flow of interaction between making and observation. Keeping the flow of the work continuous also facilitates the flow of ideas, thinking through working, while developing a reciprocal engagement with things in the world. There is, Haworth suggests, a complex interplay between ‘reflexive and pre-reflexive thought and between action and its outcomes.’¹³³ In addition the drawing process, as a tool for creative reflection, is an intimate activity that maintains an inclusiveness and acceptance of the work for what it is. There is a cumulative effect in its making, even when those accumulations are erasures. As a means of expression and replication, the creative act of drawing provides a means of reflection by its visible tracing of embodied perception – a process that has no concern for its end result. In *The Prose of the World* Merleau-Ponty realizes that the point of a drawing is ‘no longer to construct an “objective” emblem of the spectacle’.

The aim is to leave on the paper a trace of our contact with this object and this spectacle, insofar as they made our gaze and virtually our touch, our ears, our feeling

¹³¹ Ibid., 288.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Haworth, “Beyond Reason,” 144.

of risk or of destiny or of freedom to vibrate. It is a question of leaving a testimony and not any more of providing information. (PW: 150)

Therefore, for the viewer of the drawing, there is no key to the ‘numerical relations true for any and all perceptions of the object’ (PW: 150). The testimony that drawing presents contains doubts as well as certainties which, on reflection, can often switch sides, the doubts becoming certainties and those areas of drawing that seemed to be working and correct becoming re-worked or obliterated but yet still contributing to the recording processes.

2.2 Creative Thinking

In order to progress, creative thought, observational or imaginary, needs to be recorded, set down – externalised. This externalisation may appear raw and unfocused initially and often needs to be reworked or restarted. While this is the case for both visual and verbal language, the written word will proceed by adapting rules of grammar and vocabulary whereas visual language develops its own elements and structures; ‘linear momentum obeys no ready rule’, as Rosand maintains, ‘the trajectory of the line is open’, and it is within this openness that we find ‘expressive potential’.¹³⁴ When thoughts are externalized, creativity provides the impetus to mould ideas into forms that inspire more thought, but at the thinking and making stage communication is not yet a priority. Bodily engagement through drawing initiates thought and incorporates the senses, but it is primarily ‘the record of a physical act’.¹³⁵ Drawing connects us to our thought processes in an immediate way that enables the discovery of the experiential nature of our perceptions. ‘For the artist’ Berger writes, ‘drawing is discovery’.¹³⁶

Artists who were also educators, such as Paul Klee and Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), saw drawing as fundamental to both their teaching practice and their own studio practice. Like Klee, Beuys made thousands of drawings using a wide array of materials both traditional and unorthodox. Bernice Rose claims that for Beuys drawing was ‘a process of opening thought beyond the habitual patterns imposed by

¹³⁴ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³⁶ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 3.

speech; [drawing] gives form to what is impossible to say – for Beuys believes that to think is to create form'.¹³⁷ In an interview with Rose, Beuys described drawing as

...the first visible thing of the form of thought, the changing point from the invisible powers to the visible thing...it is not only a description of the thought... you have also incorporated the senses ...the sense of balance, the sense of vision, the sense of audition, the sense of touch.¹³⁸

Beuys also recognized the connection between drawing and writing or 'spoken forms – how we shape our thoughts into words' as opposed to 'thinking forms', writing and drawing therefore are both ways of creating form from thought.¹³⁹

If you just observe a little what the hand does there, these funny squiggles, then you can see it's also drawing. That's why I say that everyone is an artist who draws, since everyone represents, some more, others less. Of course that's linked to the profession you choose. But in living consciously, drawing probably appears anyway.¹⁴⁰

Drawing practice is a form of creative thinking 'to really see what's there': a practice that Beuys maintained all professions could benefit from to engage in a mode of 'conscious attention'.¹⁴¹ He recognised, however, that there is a culture of perfectionism around art-making, which makes people believe they cannot draw or that they are incapable of learning how to draw.

...we still live in a culture that says: there are artists and there are non-artists. This becomes something inhuman, giving rise to the concept of alienation between people. No, every person continually performs material processes. He continually creates interrelationships.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Bernice Rose in Garrels, *Drawing from the Modern 1945-1975*, 2:21.

¹³⁸ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 448 fn.71 .

¹³⁹ Joseph Beuys, *What Is Art?: Conversation with Joseph Beuys* (East Sussex: Clairview Books, 2004), 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

To explain the fundamental nature of drawing, Beuys uses the everyday example of giving directions by drawing a map to ‘show someone the way, ... showing him how the roads go, then I’m drawing of course.’ Drawing in this sense can be seen as a form of planning ‘one embodies, represents, gives experiential form to something or a spatial relationship, or just relationships of size.’ Although we may not realize it, drawing takes place throughout our lives, according to Beuys. This is true especially for children, ‘and if we haven’t done it on our own initiative then we have been made to do it, for instance drawing geometrical shapes at school’. Beuys strongly believed that we should be a lot less inhibited about our creativity, ‘never saying: that’s someone who can draw, but I can’t. There’s no such thing. Everyone can draw.’¹⁴³ Beuys acknowledges that the intention and results of drawing will of course differ from person to person, depending on experience and skill, but he insists that encouraging everyone to draw doesn’t diminish the value of drawing as a rigorous form of expression: it ‘doesn’t mean that you can’t aim for perfection – that one shouldn’t value rigor and direction.’¹⁴⁴

The drawings Beuys made frequently incorporated handwriting within the marks and images as he believed that ‘even when I write my name I am drawing’¹⁴⁵ (fig. 3.) His drawings seem private and intimate, but they still maintain an equal status in the ‘shamanistic project’ that he pursued.¹⁴⁶ However, this type of creative thinking through drawing, which is familiar and accepted today, was not widely recognized as such in the period up until the 1960s. In fact Merleau-Ponty was writing in a time when drawing was thought of in a formal sense, as ‘draughtmanship’. For example, Renaissance drawings were studied, as James Faure Walker points advises, ‘not in terms of “visual culture”, but in order to learn the mechanics of drawing’.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁵ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 426.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

To take your bearings from cave drawings, or from a theory about the ‘body’ and how it is to “be in the world”, would have been laughable – unless you studied with Klee or perhaps Anthony Caro.¹⁴⁷

It is remarkable, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty refers to drawing in 1952 as ‘no longer to be *read* the way it was until recently’ and that he now maintains that it ‘is a question of leaving a testimony and not anymore of providing information’ (PW: 150). Acknowledging that the work of “‘primitives,” the drawings of children and madmen’ were recognized in a new light and their ‘pictorial expression’ encouraged, Merleau-Ponty questions the ‘historical creation’ of classical art and literature as somehow separate and more significant (PW: 147).

What we call *significant* art and literature are significant only in a certain cultural area and must therefore be connected with a more general power of signification. Objective art and literature, which claim to appeal only to significations already present in every man and every thing, are in form and substance inventions. (PW: 147-148)

The thought processes of the so-called ‘primitives’ and the creative expression that they produce are just as significant for Merleau-Ponty as the canonical art in galleries and museums. The drawings of children, for example, are not inconsequential manifestations of a child’s lack of skill, or as ‘progressions towards perspective.’ Merleau-Ponty saw possibilities of expression in the visual arts that he felt could not be expressed by any other means and the value of reawakening in adults the perceptual pre-conceptual experiences of children.

¹⁴⁷ James Faure Walker, “Pride, Prejudice and the Pencil,” in *Writing on Drawing : Essays on Drawing Practice and Research*, ed. Steve Garner (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 86.

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Fig. 3. Joseph Beuys
'Untitled' 1964
Oil paint, gold paint, ink and graphite on paper.
29.5 x 20.8 cm

2.2.1 Perception

The pedagogical research of the psychologists Georges-Henri Lucquet and Jean Piaget was part of a new approach and recognition of the abilities of children, ‘primitives’ or ‘outsiders’, including the mentally ill, that began in the late nineteenth century and would have a major influence on the work of visual artists in the twentieth century. Artists such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst and Jean Dubuffet were looking for a more authentic form of human expression to challenge the artificiality of classical perspective, and these artists believed that children and Outsider artists expressed a genuine human perspective, unconstructed or preoccupied by convention in a way that opposed the recently established realism of photography.

While Merleau-Ponty recognized the contribution Lucquet and Piaget made to progress beyond classical psychologists’ dismissive attitude to children’s drawings, he is critical of their assumption that children lack comprehension regarding the nature of reality.¹⁴⁸ The nonperspectival drawing of a child is not, according to Merleau-Ponty, indicative of a lack of comprehension, Talia Welsh observes, but rather an indication of ‘a connection to lived experience that is educated out of the Western Adult’.¹⁴⁹ In his Sorbonne lectures on child psychology and pedagogy (1949-1952), Merleau-Ponty also challenged the emphasis placed on the child as ‘a future adult’ and the negative labeling of any perceived ‘failures’ to achieve established stage requirements for their age group. Instead, he repeatedly aligns children’s drawings with those of adults; both are, in his opinion, equally valid expressions of perception.

The difficulty arises because Lucquet studies drawings only from the point of view of a “visual realism” that children *must* follow, and thus judges everything in relation to a developmental ideal. He speaks of an internal model without making the consequences of this idea explicit. Because he does not take the child’s drawing as it is given, but rather

¹⁴⁸ Talia Welsh, *The Child as Natural Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty’s Psychology* (Northwestern University Press, 2013), xvi.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

judges it as the work of a future adult, Luquet's description is strikingly negative, even before the terms (ie., "accidental," "failed," etc.) are chosen. (CPP: 167-168)

By assuming that photography is the most realistic representation of nature, Luquet and Piaget fail to appreciate the immediate connection to perception that is available to a child.¹⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty emphasises that 'the drawings of children can never be seen as a copy of the world which offers itself to them, but rather as an attempt at expression' (CPP: 165).

For the child, continuity exists between the thing and its graphic representation: the child tries to represent *the thing itself*. In a sense children go further than adults in this regard. Their drawings are at one and the same time more subjective and more objective than those of adults: more subjective because they are liberated from appearance, and more objective because they attempt to reproduce the thing as it really is, while adults only represent things from one point of view: their own. (CPP: 170)

Children, in contrast to most adults, do not yet have the accumulated knowledge and thinking habits that tend to interfere with a purely perceptual response. Their drawings will of course lack certain aspects of form, as their motor skills will be limited, but their powers of concentration and observation are often more advanced than those of adults. Furthermore, because of their ignorance of the rules of perspective, children will represent things as they actually see or feel them.

In a way paradoxical only in appearance, two-dimensional perspective is adopted from a certain point of view in order to achieve a notation of the world that would be valid for everyone. It congeals the lived perspective and, in order to represent what is perceived, adopts an index of deformation which is characteristic of my standpoint. (PW: 149)

Merleau-Ponty imagines what it would be like to be 'liberated from the constraints that perspective imposed on drawing' and instead to only represent 'a human view of the world' (PW: 149-150):

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., xvii.

We would then be...free, for example, to express a cube by six squares “disjointed” and juxtaposed on the paper, free to draw in the two faces of a bobbin and join them by a sort of bent stovepipe, to represent death by transparency in its coffin or the look by two eyes separated from the head, free not have to mark the “objective” contours of the alley or the face and in contrast to indicate the cheeks by a circle. This is what a child does. (PW: 150)

It is also, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges, what the modern painters do. In the published student notes from the Sorbonne lectures he describes the ‘radical reconsideration of all problems involving painting since Manet’ (CPP: 164). Making a noticeable switch here from children’s drawings to adult ‘paintings’, not adult drawings. Given the radical nature of modern painting it was inevitable, Merleau-Ponty maintains, that modern painters would discover that the ‘child’s mode of expression which, though not yet a full-fledged form of expression, is itself “radical” as well’ (CPP: 164). Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of children’s drawing may be applied to some modern artists’ drawing practices, but at this stage he still makes a distinction between painting, as a ‘full-fledged form of expression’, and drawing, as either two-dimensional perspective, used to provide structure to classical paintings, or something practiced by children. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty did identify characteristics in children’s drawing that were not acknowledged in developmental psychology until the late 60s. ‘Piaget’s seminal work on Stage Theories in children’s development,’ Angela Anning argues, ‘underpinned developmental psychology from the 1930s to the 1980s’, but other influential research did exist to challenge Piaget’s theories.¹⁵¹ For example, while most research focused on the drawings children made as finished products, Anning notes that in 1977 Jacqueline J. Goodnow ‘argued that we *must* look at both the processes and products of children’s drawings if we are to make sense of them.’ In addition, Goodnow stated:

¹⁵¹ Taylor, “Foreword - Re: Positioning Drawing,” 10.

Graphic work is truly visible thinking. The features it displays – thrift, conservatism, principles of organization and sequence – are all features of problem solving, whether by children or adults.¹⁵²

Up until the age of around seven or eight, a child's perception will indeed precede any intellectual judgments about the objects they are looking at or engaged with, but when children get older, they gradually acquire a preoccupation with literal realism and adopt formulaic and conservative approaches to drawing'.¹⁵³ As children grow into adults, societal and cultural pressures, and a desire for the image to accurately represent the thing observed, increasingly influence the type of artwork they make – if indeed they continue to make art at all. In modern times 'accurately represent' is still often defined by the photographic image, the perceptively correct version of the object caught in a moment in time. For an adult with limited or no previous visual art education, to really look at an object and translate what is seen into a drawing requires a relearning of how to see and how to engage fully with their perception.

2.2.2 Observation

When drawing from observation, it is impossible to look at the object under observation *and* the emerging drawing of the object, at the same time. We must therefore rely on our memory of what was seen a moment before and draw it as we remember it. In practice, this is a rapid action, eyes moving from object to drawing and back again, over and over, but it requires that a constant simultaneous engagement with memory and vision in order to deal with the 'memory gap'.¹⁵⁴ Describing the process of drawing in terms of what he sees from one moment to the next, John Berger identifies the perpetual uncertainty of the truth of the image as it constantly changes within his vision.

Because the faculty of sight is continuous, because visual categories (red, yellow, dark, thick, thin) remain constant, and because so many things appear

¹⁵² Angela Anning, "Reappraising Young Children's Mark-Making and Drawing," in *Writing on Drawing: Essays on Drawing Practice and Research*, ed. Steve Garner (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 94.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Maslen, *Drawing Projects*, 22.

to remain in place, one tends to forget that the visual is always the result of an unrepeatable, momentary encounter.¹⁵⁵

This is the essential point for the observational drawing process. It is from my memory of what I have just seen that I must draw – retaining the image in my mind *as* I draw. Therefore, developing the ability to draw as much as possible without looking away from the object being drawn can assist the accuracy of the drawing.

To encourage students to let go of their pre-conceptions about how to draw, Nicolaïdes developed exercises, like the contour drawing exercise, which incorporates the sense of touch as a way of guiding the eye across the contours (including but not exclusively the outline) of an object being observed, without looking at the drawing being made until it is finished (or, at least after a set period of time). Because the student cannot see what they are drawing, they cannot influence the process by using previous knowledge or memory.

The student begins this exercise by focusing their eye on a particular point on an object directly in front of them and then imagining that the pencil they hold in their hand is actually touching that object (instead of touching the paper). As their eyes then slowly move across the object's contours, so the pencil moves across the paper and is guided by the eye, but through the sense of touch. The pencil must co-ordinate exactly with the eye, and the eye must not leave the contours of the object being observed.¹⁵⁶

This exercise and others like it encourage the student to let go of their pre-conceptions of how to draw, and can be seen as a suspension of the everyday way of looking – a re-learning, through the use of the senses and intuition, of how to see. With practice, the drawings made using this method can come to resemble closely the actual object observed (though that is not the point of the exercise). However, initially the resulting drawing only reflects the student's disorientation because they are not able to track the progress of the drawing. 'When you looked at your first completed contour drawing, you probably laughed', Nicolaïdes writes:

¹⁵⁵ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 67.

¹⁵⁶ Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw*, 11.

No doubt the lines sprawled all over the paper, the ends did not meet in places,
...That should not worry you at all. In fact, you will really have cause for worry if
your drawing looks too ‘correct,’ for that will probably mean either that you looked at
the paper too often or have tried too hard to keep the proportions in your mind.¹⁵⁷

This exercise is only one principle of drawing which Nicolaïdes has isolated for the purposes of study and which will in time become, along with many other principles ‘welded into one act of drawing’.¹⁵⁸ During the contour drawing exercise there is no need for students to retain images in their head as they draw because their eyes do not leave the object at any stage during the drawing. Contour drawing is of course an exaggerated form of observation, which greatly simplifies and constrains the act of drawing in order to encourage the student to break free of preconceived ideas of what things look like. The observation in this exercise must remain constant and consequently the mark made must also be continuous. Use of materials is therefore key, using a brush and paint, for example, would not work for this exercise as the brush would need to be recharged and that would interrupt the process. In *The Elements of Drawing* (1904), for example, John Ruskin offered a solution to the problem of the ‘memory gap’ by suggesting that the student ‘take a pane of glass’ and using paint that will ‘adhere to the glass, the landscape may be traced on the glass as you see through it’. Images traced in this way are, according to Ruskin, ‘in true perspective’.¹⁵⁹ However, in normal practice, working on paper, Ruskin warns against using a brush, ‘being soft at the point’ it ‘causes so much uncertainty’.¹⁶⁰

It is better to take, in early practice, some instrument with a hard and fine point, both that we may give some support to the hand, and that by working over the subject with so delicate a point, the attention may be properly directed to all the most minute

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 125. This slow exercise is taught alongside very fast line gesture drawing (which again bypasses thinking processes) and drawings using tonal values to develop an awareness of form. Later in the student’s development, when they need to make more accurate, detailed drawings, they are given exercises by Nicolaïdes that aid memory retention and concentration.

¹⁵⁹ John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), xx.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

parts of it. Even the best artists need occasionally to study subjects with a pointed instrument, in order to discipline their attention.¹⁶¹

The practice of drawing from observation and exercises to facilitate the development of observational drawing skills formed the basis of visual art education throughout 20th century Western Europe. In the Bauhaus for example, Johannes Itten wrote that his first aim was ‘to awaken a vital feeling for the subject through personal observation’.¹⁶² And William Coldstream’s approach at the Slade in London emphasized ‘investigative observation over the imitation of method and style’.¹⁶³ However, this practice of ‘observational realism’, as Emma Chambers points out, ‘was in constant tension with exemplars of art history’.¹⁶⁴ Coldstream outlined the difficulties, in his time and before, with an educational programme ‘based on an ideal of painting which had no existence anywhere.’¹⁶⁵

It produced a situation in which one was almost bound to postulate the kind of painting which didn’t exist and which one couldn’t imagine. One was trying to do something quite impossible as far as the academic side of it went.¹⁶⁶

Although Coldstream was skeptical of the pressure to teach students to imitate ‘art-historical prototypes’, Chambers writes that ‘he was convinced of the importance of art history in providing an intellectual foundation for the students’ studies’.¹⁶⁷ But this

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Johannes Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later* (John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 12. Johannes Itten ran the first *Vorkurs* or preliminary design course at the Weimar Bauhaus from 1919-1923, Petherbridge, 204.

¹⁶³ Emma Chambers, “Prototype and Perception: Art History and Observation at the Slade in the 1950s.,” in *The Concept of the “Master” in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 196, William Coldstream trained at the Slade under Henry Tonks between 1926-1929 and subsequently was a founder of the Euston Rd School and Head of Art at Camberwell Art School, 189.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

skepticism, within art school education, towards art historical models and masterpieces that art students should aspire to, is analogous to Merleau-Ponty's own dispute with historical archetypes. He does not often engage with individual artworks by description or analysis; he is more concerned with the artists' writings and reported *sayings about* their working processes.¹⁶⁸ He has no interest in examining the role works of art play in the art world, and argues at length with Malraux on what constitutes an 'accomplished work' (ILVS: 88).

The painter at work knows nothing of the antithesis of humanity and world, of meaning and the absurd, of style and "representation." He is far too busy expressing his communication with the world to become proud of a style which is born almost as if he were unaware of it. It is quite true that style for the moderns is much more than a means of representing. It does not have any external model; painting does not exist before painting. (ILVS: 90-91)

Merleau-Ponty is preoccupied during this argument with Malraux in proving that artists are only concerned with making their work and have no concern for their place in history: 'The painter works and leaves his wake', Merleau-Ponty writes, 'there is only the allusion of self to self, in the familiarity of one's personal hum' (ILVS: 89). His argument here, however, is against the relevance of a particular type of *theoretical* reflection which he believes should be of no concern to the 'painter at work'. Merleau-Ponty does, however, have a profound interest in the role practical reflection plays in creative expression and would examine this theme in greater depth in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

¹⁶⁸ Fóti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*, 49. 'In 'Eye and Mind' ...Merleau-Ponty...tends to engage more closely and consistently with the writings and reported sayings of painters than with their actual works...'

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Fig. 4. Illustration from *The Natural Way to Draw*, Page. 10,
Example of a students' Contour Drawing.

2.2.3 Reflection

Reflection, when it is a retrospective activity, where we reflect on previous actions in order to learn and progress on to the next action, is a separate cognitive engagement and distinct from the activity on which we reflect. Merleau-Ponty notes, for example, in ‘The Philosopher and His Shadow’, that for Husserl (in *Ideas I*) ‘to reflect is to unveil an unreflected dimension which is at a distance because we are no longer in it in a naive way’ (S: 161).

There is indeed an I which makes itself “indifferent,” a pure “knower,” in order to grasp all things without remainder – to spread all things out before itself – and to “objectify” and gain intellectual possession of them. This is a purely “theoretical attitude” which seeks to “render visible the relationships which can provide knowledge of being as it comes to be” (S: 162)

It is clear for Merleau-Ponty, however, that Husserl also located a form of reflection distinct from the ‘theoretical attitude’, which functions outside of ‘subjective’ ‘objective’ distinctions ‘to unveil a third dimension’ in our consciousness (S: 162).¹⁶⁹ Ted Toadvine has noted that it is these ‘residues or remainders that are not “exactly adjusted” to consciousness,’ that would come to preoccupy Merleau-Ponty more urgently in his later work. Ultimately, building on his description of a ‘second-order reflection’ introduced in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty calls for a “hyper-reflection” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, ‘that would measure the distance between reflection and the pre-reflective situation that it aims to express.’¹⁷⁰

These issues, suggesting a kind of semi-conscious form of reflection that is capable of concentrated attention and observation, are also apparent in visual art practice, and particularly in drawing practice, where reflection is often integrated or intertwined within the activity of, and as an integral part, of the process of

¹⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty’s reference here is: *Ideen II*, Husserliana. Bd. IV, p.180.

¹⁷⁰ Ted Toadvine, “Phenomenology and ‘Hyper-Reflection,’” in *Merleau-Ponty : Key Concepts*, ed. Jack Reynolds and Rosalyn Diprose (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 27–28.

making. The decisions that need to be made when drawing require rapid assessment of the progress of the work, combined with longer more comprehensive reflections to take in the work as a whole. While perception and observation, as they are used in drawing practice, can be explained up to a point – for example through the description of learning techniques and exercises where action is slowed down and exaggerated - it is more difficult to explain how they integrate with reflection and knowingness, rightness, how decisions are made. Accumulated experiential knowledge contributes and responds to materials, vision, senses and memory, but this kind of thinking and making does not rely on established signs and facts but moves forward by establishing personal signs and marks. In addition, description of the process is complicated by the fact that the reason why a decision is made or a route followed may not have a comprehensible logic. ‘In our own practices’ Paul O’Kane writes ‘we might decide that something will be so and set about making it so, but other forces beyond our understanding determine or divert our wishes.’¹⁷¹

They act prior to our acts, undermine our will, and are equally present and influential during what we like to think of as the making of our art. Experience teaches us that art asks to be teased out rather than dragged from wherever it hides; it shuns direct confrontation.¹⁷²

It is clear that there is a process taking place in art-making that requires some form of reflection as an integral part of that process, but how does it function if the ‘gaze’ of reflection causes a withdrawal ‘into transcendence’, as Merleau-Ponty writes, or if, as O’Kane describes, art ‘shuns direct confrontation’? It is perhaps the definition of reflection as a form of interrogation that is the problem, an interrogation that needs clear-cut answers that can be measured and quantified. ‘Careful reflection does not keep means and ends separate’, Michael Jarvis reveals, ‘but enables one to define them interactively in response to a problematic situation’.

¹⁷¹ Paul O’Kane, “On Making Art,” *Art Monthly*, no. 360 (October 2012): 2.

¹⁷² Ibid.

This type of thinking and problem solving is often alluded to but less explained, as a crucial approach to knowledge and skill acquisition. It can be seen as a critique of prevailing, traditional hierarchies of knowledge where general, theoretical, propositional knowledge has enjoyed a privileged position as against a more problem solving, speculative and ontological type of knowledge where the mode of being or thinking is more intuitive than deductive.¹⁷³

In chapter one of *The Visible and the Invisible*, entitled ‘Reflection and Interrogation’, Merleau-Ponty refers to the ‘labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions’ that we face when we try to ‘articulate...into theses or statements... what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is...’

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher – the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute “opinions” implicated in our lives. (VI: 3)

In our normal day-to-day lives we trust our faith in the world as it is, unquestioningly, as we must in order to move through it and get on with our lives. When we confront the world through ‘theoretical’ or ‘propositional’ means then the faith and trust must be questioned and interrupted and is therefore no longer a part of the subject of study. Jarvis proposes, however, that in art practice reflection is possible on two levels, ‘reflection on action’ which is the retrospective response between actions, and ‘reflection in action’ which refers to ‘a more spontaneous or intuitive response’ that does not interrupt being in the world.¹⁷⁴ This is possible through the artist’s use of and interaction with ‘hand, body, tools and materials’ and the tacit sensations and responses, which, Jarvis writes, makes ‘the artist the quintessential ‘reflective practitioner’.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Michael Jarvis, “Articulating the Tacit Dimension in Artmaking,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 6, no. 3 (October 2007): 206.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty's quest in *The Visible and the Invisible* was to find a language for philosophy that would serve the purpose of describing experience as it is being experienced. Even though the world is there for us to see, he writes, 'nonetheless, we must learn to see it' by acting as if 'we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn.'

But philosophy is not a lexicon, it is not concerned with "word-meanings," it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it does not transform it into something said, it does not install itself in the order of the said or of the written as does the logician in the proposition, the poet in the word, or the musician in the music. It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression. (VI: 4)

Many of the ideas that Merleau-Ponty was developing in *The Visible and the Invisible* were initially sketched out in *The Prose of the World* and which lead on to the "indirect ontology" which would sustain his final work.¹⁷⁶ For example in the short section in *The Prose of the World*, that has been titled 'The Specter of a Pure Language', he questions the validity of replacing thought and experience with words in order to communicate.

The word possesses no virtue of its own; there is no power hidden in it. It is a pure sign standing in for a pure signification. The person speaking is coding his thought. He replaces his thought with a visible or sonorous pattern which is nothing but sounds in the air or ink spots on paper. (PW: 7)

How could communication possibly carry us beyond our power of reflection, he asks, 'since the signs communication employs could never tell us anything unless we already grasped the signification' (PW: 7). To communicate effectively of course we must use a universal language, but Merleau-Ponty wonders if there is communicative meaning to be found outside of verbal language. On the last page of this section he observes that 'after all, we understand what is said to us

¹⁷⁶ Claude Lefort, "Editor's Preface," in *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O'Neill (London: Heinemann, 1974), xv.

because we know in advance the meaning of the words spoken to us'. Interestingly, connected to this sentence is a note to himself: 'Describe the contrast between meaning which is at hand and meaning which is in the process of creation' (PW: 8).

2.3 Communication Through Expression

Merleau-Ponty repeatedly emphasises the importance of communication throughout his philosophy and his essays on art. Artists and philosophers alike, he maintains in 'Cézannes Doubt', must 'awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others' (CD: 70).

If a work is successful, by following the clues of the book or painting, by establishing the concurring points of internal evidence and being brought up short when straying too far to the left or right, guided by the con-fused [sic] clarity of style, will in the end find what was intended to be communicated. (CD: 70)

At this stage Merleau-Ponty is focused exclusively on painting and painters when exploring the visual arts. He also seems to believe there is a straightforward means of communication: if the viewer engages in the right level of attention and effort, all will be revealed. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he clarifies and expands on our ability to comprehend the intentions of others beyond typical cognitive understanding.

The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his. (PP: 215)

While he admits that it is 'impossible to draw up an inventory of this irrational power', Merleau-Ponty insists that we must 'rehabilitate the experience of others which has been distorted by intellectualist analyses,' just as, he adds, 'we shall have to rehabilitate the perceptual experience of the thing' (PP: 215).

In his later essays on art, Merleau-Ponty reveals a more complex understanding of how visual art communicates even when the work appears to be in an incomplete state. Although communication needs recognizable signs, a language of signification to communicate, Merleau-Ponty understood that we have the ability to understand how ‘empty’ space, or the absence of sign, has meaning, provides rhythm or balance, has weight even when there is ‘nothing’ there. ‘But what if language’ he asks in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, ‘expresses as much by what is between the words as by the words themselves? By that which it does not “say” as by what it “says.”’ (ILVS: 82).

In an earlier version of this essay, published in *Prose of the World* as ‘The Indirect Language’, Merleau-Ponty reminds us that modern thought and modern art ‘loosened the false lines which tied a valuable work to the finished work’ (PW: 56). The viewer’s engagement with a work that has an unfinished aspect is quite different from a work presented as complete or finished. When the work is complete there is very little for the viewer to do but read the work as presented, take in the information given, appreciate the skill involved and engage with the piece quite passively. When a visual work has an unfinished quality the viewer can be unsettled by how the work should be read – can it be read if it is not finished? Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘since perception itself is never *finished*’ the work that has a sense of incompleteness engages the viewer in its ‘partial perspectives’ and recognizes ‘a mode of communication which does not pass through objective evidence, a signification which does not refer to an already given object’. An unfinished work has the power therefore, to suggest and establish ‘its object... because it awakens and rallies our whole power of expression and comprehension’ (PW: 56). It is in the knowledge or arena of a ‘communication prior to communication’ that we engage with visual art, he writes, by opening up our senses to knowing that there can be ‘reason before reason’ (PW: 56). And artists working in the modern period, Merleau-Ponty notes, used techniques in their exhibited artworks that would have previously been used only in the preparatory stages of a painting, presenting

...sketches as paintings which classical painters would have kept for themselves, even when they were more eloquent than their paintings, or would have tried to translate into the quite explicit language of a finished work. (PW: 55)

Just as he had begun to recognize the space between words in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in 1952, in 'Eye and Mind' (written in 1960) he acknowledges that space as it functions in drawing, between the lines and the empty sections of the composition, gives depth to the work: 'there is no one key of the visible, and colour alone is no closer to being such a key than space is' (EM: 141). Merleau-Ponty's recognition of the working study, or work in progress, or work that employs this aspect of creative expression within the fabric of the work, is in evidence throughout his later writing and also corresponds to his philosophical investigations in *The Visible and the Invisible* where, for example, he writes:

Between the alleged colours and the visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things. (VI: 132-133)

Merleau-Ponty's work was however rooted in the twentieth century, he was attempting to pursue truth in a world where science, morality and art were segregated, leading to what Habermas has described as their separation from the infrastructure of everyday communication.

Communication processes need a cultural tradition covering all spheres – cognitive, moral, practical and expressive. A rationalized everyday life, therefore, could hardly be saved from cultural impoverishment through breaking open a single cultural sphere – art – and so providing access to just one of the specialized knowledge complexes.¹⁷⁷

It is clear that for Merleau-Ponty there are no easy answers to how art is capable of detaching 'itself from illusionism' to 'acquire its own dimensions' (EM: 139).

¹⁷⁷ Habermas, Jürgen, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," 274.

In fact he often seems lost for words or an adequate vocabulary to ask the questions in the first place.

The question, rather, concerns the dimensions of color, that dimension which creates – from itself to itself – identities, differences, a texture, a materiality, a something... (EM: 141)

His uncertainty seems to also reflect and question his own focus on the discipline of painting above all other visual art forms. By considering how space works and communicates, and paying attention to the areas on a canvas or paper that have no mark or colour, Merleau-Ponty now acknowledges that ‘there is no one master key of the visible’ and admits that ‘colour alone is no closer to being such a key than space is’ (EM: 141).

2.3.1 Mark-making

When Merleau-Ponty writes about drawing he is usually referring to drawing as line, from the self-evident use of line in linear perspective, to his recognition in ‘Eye and Mind’ of ‘a single line, that can embrace all of paintings bold potential’ (EM: 132). His critique of perspectival line challenged the limitations of perspective which can only ‘present the object by its outside, or its envelope’ (EM: 133). The use of line by modern painters on the other hand had shown that they no longer had to choose between line and colour because they had severed ‘their adherence to the envelope of things’ (EM: 142). Line is considered here as a component of modern painting practice: it has been freed from its role in creating a structure on which paint was applied, or the measuring system that divided up two-dimensional space constructing the illusion of three-dimensional perspective, line was now free to ‘reappear and triumph’ (EM: 143). While line does maintain a primary function in drawing practice, it is only one of the various types of mark-making used to make a drawing. It is therefore worth considering how our mark-making instinct develops, in order to fully understand the range of expression that is included in drawing practice.

Mark-making is one of the earliest skills learnt in childhood and has been identified as an important signifier in a child’s attempts to achieve independence.

The first drawings made by a child, Serge Tisseron observes, are essentially gestural with the ‘eye [following] the hand without yet guiding it’.¹⁷⁸ Around the age of two ‘the possibility of visual control over marking and gesture appear: the eye no longer follows the hand but guides it’.¹⁷⁹ Early childhood drawings are therefore explorations of movement rather than visual responses. For the child, this activity of mark-making develops into a type of game, the practice of which produces meaning. The bodily movements of the child creating marks on the page eventually develops into the ‘hand’s drawing gesture ...by which thought thinks itself through’.¹⁸⁰ This action of processing thought through embodied movement creates a trace of the child’s activity on a two-dimensional space, contained and accessible.

Similarly, in adult observational drawing practice, the hand, combining a visual response within the limitations of embodied expression, replicates the movements of the eye. Drawing, therefore has the potential to leave on paper a testimony or trace of human contact with an object. The resulting image, Rosand observes, is ‘both self-referential and representational’ because it maintains an identity of its own while alluding to ‘something beyond itself’.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, drawing retains a sense of ambivalence, as ‘an essential and functioning aspect’. This quality allows drawing to resist ‘surrender to the mimetic imperative, to pictorial illusion’.¹⁸² The impetus to draw comes from a visceral thinking process the urgency of which creates drawings that include line but also employ a wide range of marks that are difficult to describe in words. Everyone has their own unique set of marks, Jack Southern and Mick Maslen maintain, ‘and every medium has its own unique quality of mark.’¹⁸³

Marks are the alphabet that forms the words that make the prose, and the

¹⁷⁸ Serge Tisseron, “All Writing Is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 84 (1994): 33.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸¹ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 2.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Maslen, *Drawing Projects*, 28.

elements with which the drawing is made. Mark-making is the broad term used to include all marks that are made visible as a manifestation of applied or gestural energy. It is the gestural language of drawing, and marks are the component parts within it. There are an infinite number of marks possible, and our nomenclature for them is very limited – lines, dots, dashes, smudges, etc... It is difficult to refer to specific marks, and know that the term adequately communicates its intended meaning.¹⁸⁴

Drawing is a response to the world seen, but the marks and lines do not replicate marks and lines seen in the world, ‘line itself’ Petherbridge advises, ‘does *not* exist in the observable world.’¹⁸⁵ Gestural lines and marks may ‘carry the imprint of the bodies that have made them, and therefore seem to be part of the phenomenal world’ but line is a ‘representational convention, if a primary element in the formal arsenal of making art.’¹⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, too, recognises that ‘there are no lines visible in themselves’, and he understands that ‘the beginning of the line’s path establishes or installs a certain level or mode of the linear, a certain manner for the line to be and to make itself a line, “to go line”’ (EM: 143).

Guided by the writing of Paul Klee, Merleau-Ponty muses that ‘it is impossible to say that here nature ends and the human being or expression begins.’ (EM: 147)

Because depth, colour, form, line, movement, contour, physiognomy are all branches of Being and because each entwines the tufts of all the rest, there are no separated, distinct “problems” in painting, no really opposed paths, no partial “solutions,” no cumulative progress, no irretrievable options. There is nothing to prevent the painter from going back to one of the emblems he has shied away from - making it of course speak differently. (EM: 148)

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 90.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Although his language here is evocative of drawing practice, Merleau-Ponty keeps referring back to painters and painting. The essay 'Expression and the Child's Drawing' shows Merleau-Ponty opening up to the possibilities of drawing practice, but his findings are then applied to modern painting rather than adult drawings. It is, however, the gestural mark-making of childhood that holds the key to the language of drawing we develop as adults. The early childhood years of unself-conscious expression, Talia Welsh notes, do not mean that the child is partially, minimally, or limitedly experiencing the world. Merleau-Ponty realized that the drawings of children can provide a valuable 'insight into the nature of childhood perception and thereby, the basis of adult perception'.¹⁸⁷ Engaging in drawing practice as adults, we develop a deeply personal language that grows out of problem solving strategies and direct responses to visual observation, but also depends upon the limitations and gestural abilities of our own embodiment.

2.3.2 Gesture

In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty proposes that gesture brings 'certain perceptible bits of the world to my notice' whether through speech, music or art gesture invites an interception, 'communication is achieved when my conduct identifies this path with its own' (PP: 215). It is the body of the speaker, the musician or artist that creates the gesture, and 'it is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things.'

The meaning of the gesture thus 'understood' is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlived by the gesture, and which I take up on my own account. (PP: 216)

Similarly, Kimon Nicolaïdes advises his students that the term 'action' is not sufficient when trying to understand the role gesture plays in making art: 'we may think of gesture, rather, as the character of the action'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Welsh, *The Child as Natural Phenomenologist*, 114.

¹⁸⁸ Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw*, 29.

By gesture we do not mean simply movement or motion or action. A thing does not have to be in motion to have gesture. You seek for it when the model is relaxed as much as in a very active pose.¹⁸⁹

Furthermore, gesture does not only apply to animate beings and objects, ‘there is gesture in which a newspaper lies on the table or in the way a curtain hangs’.¹⁹⁰ Through the exercise ‘Gesture Drawing’ Nicolaïdes encourages his students to make rapid drawings, from a few seconds to several minutes, of a model or an object, responding directly to the gesture as they see it – ‘not the details of the structure’.

You must discover – and feel – that the gesture is dynamic, moving, not static. Gesture has no precise edges, no exact shape, no jellied form. The forms are in the act of changing. Gesture is movement in space.¹⁹¹

The speed at which these drawings are made requires a spontaneous response to visual perception and an engagement with sensation rather than thought. Guided by instinct the student should ‘reason with the pencil’ and ‘listen to yourself think’ rather than force thought onto their actions. As with the Contour Drawing exercise, Gesture Drawing relies on the student engaging fully with the process and not being concerned with the finished product. The knowledge gained gradually accumulates and becomes instinctive when making more sustained studies.

In his essays Merleau-Ponty’s writing frequently slips into the first person when he describes the mechanics of making an art-work, positioning himself in the role of the maker, even though there is no evidence that he ever drew or painted in the traditional sense. In ‘Cezanne’s Doubt’ for example he writes: ‘it is true that I freeze these distortions in repainting them on canvas; I stop the spontaneous movement in which they pile up in perception and tend towards the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

geometric perspective (CD: 64). But later in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' Merleau-Ponty is less sure of himself: 'like the functioning of the body', he writes, 'that of words or paintings remain obscure to me' (ILVS: 112). There is an element of spontaneity in creative expression, through gesture, that does not correspond to logical explanations.

The words, lines and colours which express me come out of me as gestures.

They are torn from me by what I want to say as my gestures are by what I do. In this sense, there is in all expression a spontaneity which will not take orders, not even those which I would like to give to myself. (ILVS: 112)

Jacques Taminiaux suggests that for Merleau-Ponty there was 'a link between the activity to which, as a philosopher, he had devoted his life and the activity to which painters devote theirs'¹⁹². Michael B. Smith endorses this view, pointing out that Merleau-Ponty used his method of writing and philosophy as a 'form of motivated creation' and lived experience 'it is not unlike other art forms. It completes, or at least prolongs and keeps open, original experience; it is not a gloss on a closed main text'.¹⁹³

This was an unusual position for Merleau-Ponty to take. In Western philosophy, the two activities are, as Taminiaux maintains, 'antithetical' because 'the flaw of art is that it rivets us to the sensible'.¹⁹⁴ It is this paradox that Merleau-Ponty, 'from the beginning until the end of his work never stopped denouncing', and by studying the writing of, and interviews with, artists, he immersed himself in the processes they used, but not on the process he himself used, his mark-making, line and gesture, in his handwritten manuscripts.¹⁹⁵ His focus is always on those artists, primarily painters, who attempt to record as

¹⁹² Jacques Taminiaux, "The Thinker and the Painter," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael Gendre, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 278.

¹⁹³ Michael B. Smith, "Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetics," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 211.

¹⁹⁴ Taminiaux, "The Thinker and the Painter," 280.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

faithfully as they can, the truth of their perception, to record exactly the truth of what they see.

The actual world of the visual arts that Merleau-Ponty was exploring seems to exist in books and the collections of museums and galleries and public spaces of Paris and Europe. He does not write about experiences of visiting artist's studios or talking directly to artists about the processes they use even though he did know the painter Francis Tailleur, whose house in the South of France he stayed in when writing 'Eye and Mind'.¹⁹⁶ He was therefore reliant on the historical contexts applied by institutions and could not take into account any work not considered appropriate for exhibition. It is on the historian that philosophical meditation must rely to uncover what exists, he writes, as it is too big a task for the philosopher to go searching himself.

...such a labour demands a long familiarity with history. I lack everything for its execution, both competence and space. But since the power or the fecundity of works of art exceeds every positive causal or linear relation, it is not illegitimate for a layman such as myself, speaking from his memory of a few paintings or books, to express how painting enters into his reflections, and to register his sense of a profound dissonance, a transformation in the relationship between humanity and Being, when he holds up a universe of classical thought, contrasting it en bloc with the explorations of modern painting. (EM: 135)

Is his modesty and reticence, aligning himself with the 'layman', a good enough excuse for not engaging more with the wealth of work being made in Paris in the 50s and 60s? Would his philosophy have benefited from recognizing the work of those artists working in the US who were changing the course of art history, many of whom would be influenced by phenomenology, and by Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* in particular? For Merleau-Ponty it is enough to restrict his attention to a narrow range of artwork, as it is all a continuation of the same effort, no more settled than the 'figurations of literature or philosophy'. 'If no painting completes painting,' he suggests in 'Eye and Mind', and 'if no work itself is itself ever absolutely completed,' then it is still possible that 'each

¹⁹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Œuvres*, Quarto Gallimard (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 89.

creation changes alters, clarifies, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates, or creates by anticipation all the others' (EM: 149). To try to keep up with the progress of history is, he writes, like 'trudging in a circle, to call "Being" that which never fully is' (EM: 149).

Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty's interest in art-making is linked to his studies of embodied perception, which led him to examine the creative processes of not only modern artists but also children, Outsider artists and 'primitives'. Artists in Post War America were also challenging the nature of creativity and breaking down the boundaries of private and public spheres of engagement, but he refused to engage with the art being made in the United States for political and ideological reasons. Nevertheless, at the time of his death Merleau-Ponty was beginning to consider the art being made by his contemporaries in Europe who were, like the US artists, beginning to blur the distinctions between art forms and in particular the distinctions between painting and drawing.

3. A Transverbal Dimension

We must give up every signification that is already institutionalized and return to the starting point of a non-signifying world.

(PW: 58)

It seems important to me never to neglect the transversal dimension in communication to take into account the visual factor, the plastic aspect of the icon as signifier, which lends itself more readily to playfulness, to invention, to interpretation, than verbal thought, which can have a repressive intellectual weight.

Julia Kristeva¹⁹⁷

In this chapter I begin with an examination of the tacit nature of art practice and its commonly perceived lack of a communicable language. I then select three of the artists Merleau-Ponty refers to in ‘Eye and Mind’, Paul Klee, August Rodin and Alberto Giacometti, to discuss how their practices compare in terms of the processes they use, in particular the private and public aspects of their art-making. By taking into account the art work being made when he was writing ‘Eye and Mind’, which overlapped with his work on *The Visible and Invisible*, I explore Merleau-Ponty’s later ideas and approach to visual art practice and the artists he chose to support his belief in artistic practice as a practical ontology. I finally focus on the work and writing of other artists of the time who employed

¹⁹⁷ “Julia Kristeva Interview with Catherine Francblin for Flashart 1986,” in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2nd ed Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 1084–1085.

drawing techniques in their work and painting to expand on notions of private and public, of authenticity and the nature of the incomplete.

3.1 A Tacit Language

A painting and a novel are similar, Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1952, insofar as they both employ tacit means of expression. In other words, what the writer and the painter leave out of the finished work is as much a part of the decision making process as what they leave in; what remains ‘visible and what invisible, what was to be said and what to remain unspoken.’ For instance he continues ‘The desire to kill is thus not in the words at all. It is between them, in the hollows of space, time, and meaning they mark out, as a movement at the cinema is between the immobile images that follow one another (ILVS: 113). The writer, however, must always operate within given language systems, letters, words, and sentences, which rely on each other to go beyond themselves towards what they signify (ILVS: 117). Classical and representational paintings, as they were presented to the public, also adhered to certain symbolic principles in order for the story to be understood or the objects to be recognized. Ideas worked through by classical artists in private were by contrast, free to fail, to be discarded, adapted and reworked; but all trace of this creative process was eliminated through technical means in the publically presented painting.¹⁹⁸ The tacit nature of the presented artwork was commonly thought to inhere in its lack of language – its perceived silence. Merleau-Ponty recognised that visual artworks also had the potential to contain a communicable tacit meaning, in the unfinished gaps and spaces of the composition. The modern artist’s ‘tolerance of the incomplete’ and use of abstract forms demonstrated a willingness to engage with the ‘problem of knowing how one can communicate without the help of a ‘pre-established Nature’ (ILVS: 88-89).

Writers must not underestimate the painter’s labour and study, that effort which is so like an effort of thought and which allows us to speak of a language of

¹⁹⁸ Michael Jarvis, “Articulating the Tacit Dimension in Artmaking,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 6, no. 3 (October 2007): 202.

painting. It is true that, scarcely having drawn his system of equivalences from the world, the painter invests it again in colours and a quasi space on a canvas. The painting does not so much *express* the meaning as the meaning impregnates the painting. (ILVS: 92)

In the early twentieth century, a more immediate, spontaneous style of work, which would once have only been practiced by artists in private, gradually became accepted as suitable for public exhibition. Modern painters claimed to have exposed the once hidden processes of creativity, encouraging the viewer to exercise their ability to respond to the work's unrefined, tacit dimensions. As long as these preliminary creative processes were kept private the mythology of divine inspiration was reinforced, a view Merleau-Ponty believed was perpetuated by the policies of museums.

The museum adds a false prestige to the true value of works by detaching them from the chance circumstances they arose from and making us believe that the artist's hand was guided from the start by fate. Whereas style lived within each painter like his heartbeat, and was precisely what enabled him to recognize every effort which differed from his own, the museum converts this secret, modest, nondeliberated, involuntary, and, in short, living historicity into official and pompous history. (ILVS: 99)

Therefore, the more misleading concept of the artist suddenly stumbling upon, as Michael Jarvis puts it, a 'key pivotal concept which will have revolutionary consequences' did not reflect the reality of the laborious process of making a painting.¹⁹⁹

There was much debate, however, among the many emerging modern art movements of the early twentieth century about how paintings should be made and what they could depict, now that it seemed they were free to be or do anything at all. Modern painters no longer needed to be concerned with representing the world as it appeared but could describe the spiritual quality of nature and human existence through abstract forms, expressive gestures and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 203.

colour combinations. In France, for example Robert Delaunay noted that Cézanne had broken the fruit dish and that ‘we should not glue it together again, as the Cubists do’, while in Germany Wassily Kandinsky published his influential book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.²⁰⁰ It has been suggested by Hal Foster that this emphasis on the spiritual and the abstract gives the impression that there was an anxiety amongst modern artists that abstraction might be considered arbitrary ‘in the sense of *decorative* or in the sense of *meaningless*’.²⁰¹ They therefore tended to overcompensate with ‘tendentious claims of absolute meanings – transcendental for Kandinsky, revelatory for Malevich, utopian for Mondrian, and so on’.²⁰²

Merleau-Ponty was aware that painting was situated within its time, historically and geographically, but he always focused on the processes of making art, processes that he believed were fundamental and could not be reduced to any historical lineage. He repeats this view throughout his essays on art beginning with Cézanne, whose work he believed to be ‘valid for everyone’ because of its human perspective: its ‘meaning will not become any clearer in the light of art history’ (CD: 61). Then, in 1952, Merleau-Ponty writes, that the work of art ‘dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to’ (ILVS: 114). Similarly, in 1961, he claims that ‘there is clearly no one master key of the visible’ (EM: 141). The artists’ initial intentions remain the same throughout history – each visual art movement begins with the same processes of inquiry, only the public presentation, and the reception of the work changes.

It is the work itself that has opened the perspective from which it appears in another light. It transforms *itself* and *becomes* what follows; the interminable interpretations to which it is *legitimately* susceptible change it only into itself. (EM: 139)

It is here in ‘Eye and Mind’ that Merleau-Ponty makes his most concerted effort to understand artistic processes. By weaving together artistic methods from

²⁰⁰ Foster and Krauss, *Art Since 1900*, 118.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

different phases of the modern period, he demonstrates similarities in their approaches to recording the world as they see it, no matter which period of art history they derive from. By finding a common thread in this way, he presents art practice as a model of an open inquiring process. This is, he believes, in contrast to the text-based sciences, which rarely come ‘face to face with the real world’ and instead treat everything as ‘an object-in-general – as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our ingenious schemes’ (EM: 121). There are however, flaws in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of artistic processes, in particular regarding painting and drawing, and regarding the possibilities inherent in each practice.

In order to discuss this in more detail, I now examine the work of three artists Merleau-Ponty refers to in ‘Eye and Mind’: Paul Klee, Auguste Rodin, and Alberto Giacometti. This discussion centres on how these artists’ working processes compare, given the art movements they were connected to and the years separating them. I also introduce Merleau-Ponty’s references to drawing and line and how this affects his thinking on how art is made.

3.1.1 Private Practice

Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the work of Paul Klee begins in the essay ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, where he compares Klee’s ‘tolerance of the incomplete’ to that of Cézanne, linking them together as ‘those moderns who present sketches as paintings’ (ILVS: 88). The sketch-like quality, small scale, and private nature of Klee’s early work attracted harsh criticism, however, and his paintings were initially considered ‘hardly suitable for public exhibition’.²⁰³ Even though some of the paintings may be ‘pleasurable to look at’, critics wrote, they did not ‘possess the kind of public meaningfulness required of art’.²⁰⁴ Klee did though have a supporter in the critic Wilhelm Hausenstein. An important defender of expressionist art. Hausenstein’s critical writings reveal the ‘hotly disputed issue’ of ‘art’s privateness’ in the early twentieth century.²⁰⁵ Within the

²⁰³ Annie Boureuf ‘An Art of Privacy?: Wilhelm Hausenstein on Paul Klee’ in Mathew Gale, ed., *Paul Klee: Making Visible* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 37.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

context of the political situation in Germany during and after the First World War, Annie Boureuf observes, ‘concepts of publicness and privateness (artistic or otherwise) in play were very different from those that are in use now’²⁰⁶

Hausenstein viewed what he saw as the private scale of Klee’s sheets or pages, and the idiosyncrasy and subjectivity of his drawing, as intimately connected to historical conditions, from the conditions of urban commodity capitalism to the negation of the individual in industrialized warfare.²⁰⁷

Klee did not share this highly politicised opinion, however, and he distanced himself from Hausenstein’s comments, preferring to remain ambivalent, although these frequently adopted views were facilitated to an extent by the proliferation of Klee’s own, often confusing and contradictory, written work.²⁰⁸ This has led to the tendency, among some of his admirers, towards what Rosalind Krauss has described as a ‘narrativisation’ of Klee’s paintings. Along with his ‘suggestive captions and titles’, this has also led to projections of personal interpretive accounts.²⁰⁹ The most famous of these is perhaps Walter Benjamin’s 1940 essay ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, which projected the tragic identity of an ‘angel of history’ onto the painting *Angelous Novus* (1920) obscuring its original ‘satirical potential’.²¹⁰

Klee’s prolific output gives the impression that all the work he exhibited was produced spontaneously, constantly moving on to the next work rather than making preliminary sketches or reworking his paintings. This perceived spontaneity is often used as an example of modernist art making that is in direct contrast to the carefully constructed oil paintings of the classical artists. In his *Creative Credo* (1920) however, Klee claims that his paintings were straightforward constructions: ‘Can a work of art be made instantaneously? No,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 41.

²⁰⁹ Foster and Krauss, *Art Since 1900*, 141.

²¹⁰ Annie Boureuf in Gale, *Paul Klee, Making Visible*, 49.

it is constructed piece by piece like a house'.²¹¹ In *On Modern Art* (1924) Klee clarifies this statement and describes the processes involved in art making as 'so numerous and of such importance, that it would be unjust to refer to it as "construction"', Klee now prefers the term 'composition', but in either case, he continues, 'these final forms are not the real stuff of the process of natural creation' because artists place 'more value on the powers which do the forming than on the final forms themselves.'²¹² Referring then to the fact that the primary activity of both the artist and the philosopher is to examine *how* things come into being rather than describing what things look like, Klee concludes, that the artist 'is, perhaps unintentionally, a philosopher.'²¹³ Klee, John Sallis argues, 'places more importance on the formative forces...than on the end-forms' and has no regard for expectations of what an object or thing 'should' look like.²¹⁴

Thus it is incumbent upon the artist to press beyond appearances to the genesis and forces underlying them. These invisible, underlying elements constitute the "real truth" that the artist strives to reach and to represent. It is a striving that in this respect has an affinity to philosophical striving.²¹⁵

The work Klee exhibited in public was, however, carefully constructed from numerous drawings and studies; he filled many sketchbooks but few remain in collections or museums.²¹⁶ One sketchbook that has survived, known as the *Bürgi Sketchbook*, is not a traditional homogeneous work, but what Wolfgang Kersten describes as 'a workbook in which the artist looks back, works on

²¹¹ Paul Klee in Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 235.

²¹² Paul Klee, *On Modern Art*, Faber Paper Covered Editions (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 45.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ John Sallis, *Paul Klee: Philosophical Vision, from Nature to Art* (McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2012), 15.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁶ Wolfgang Kersten in Stefan Frey and Josef Helfenstein, eds., *Paul Klee Rediscovered: Works from the Bürgi Collection* (London: Merrell Publishers, 2000), 249–250.

present issues, and looks forward to the future, in a to and fro that involves success and failure to an equal degree'.²¹⁷

It is an unfinished artist's book that came from the private thoughts of this master of Modernism, and was never intended for sale. As a document of an artist's pictorial output, it refutes the notion of a linear continuum, with Klee steadily stepping from one work to the next...²¹⁸

Drawing had been a primary element in Klee's early exhibitions, but increasingly he kept this activity private and confined to these types of sketchbooks and within his studio practice. This may have been because of his development of a transfer technique, allowing him to transfer an image of a drawing without damaging the original.²¹⁹ Alternatively, Klee may have felt an increasing need to keep them for his archive or there may have been a lack of demand for them by collectors.²²⁰ But as all the visual artwork Klee made during his lifetime was meticulously numbered and archived, it is clear that he made many preparatory drawings, variations or experiments of paintings as they are noted as such above the title in the handwritten catalogue entitled *Oeuvre*.²²¹ It is through the work and writings of Klee in particular that Merleau-Ponty begins to recognize the potential of drawing and line. Quoting Klee in 'Eye and Mind', he writes '...line no longer imitates the visible; "it renders visible"; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things' (EM: 143). Drawing, Merleau-Ponty now realises, is not just about outlining the 'contour of an apple'; and, he admits, it never really was, as da Vinci had already written that the 'secret of the art of drawing is to discover in each object the particular way in which a certain flexuous line, which is so to speak its generating axis, is directed through its whole extent' (EM: 142).

²¹⁷ Ibid., 252. The Bürgi family were friends of Paul Klee and owned a large collection of his work.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Gale, *Paul Klee, Making Visible*, 49.

²²⁰ Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, The Library of Great Painters (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 49.

²²¹ Kersten in Frey and Helfenstein, *Paul Klee Rediscovered*, 252.

However, Merleau-Ponty also notes that Klee questions whether this is truly possible: ‘It is just that, as Klee said, to give the generating axis of a 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”’ (EM: 143). For a solution to this excess of perception Merleau-Ponty looks to the drawings of Klee and Matisse who use a single line to capture the ‘prosaic, identifying characteristics of the entity and the hidden operation’ which ‘constitute it as *a nude, as face, as flower*’ (EM: 144). This simplification of forms is of course just one of many drawing techniques that can be used to draw from observation, and it was a technique that was popular in the modern period. It is also one of the simplest to describe in words, and Merleau-Ponty seems to struggle as much with the language of describing art-making processes as with explaining the function of those processes themselves. Klee likewise recognized the problems inherent in writing about art-making, and he believed these difficulties arose from the multidimensionality of art-making combined with the fact that language is ‘incapable of communicating several processes simultaneously’.²²² The written word is structured and linear, each word placed side by side to create sentences and paragraphs in a temporal continuum.

It is not easy to arrive at a conception of a whole which is constructed from parts belonging to different dimensions... This is due to the consecutive nature of the only methods available to us for conveying a clear three-dimensional concept of an image in space, and results from deficiencies of a temporal nature in the spoken word.²²³

What the artist has to deal with, Klee continues, is the simultaneous multidimensionality of things and nature, as we perceive them. To explain this process using words will always be a problem as it is ‘something that we cannot find in the world of verbal didactic expression’.²²⁴ Merleau-Ponty too understood this problem and encountered his own difficulties with writing on art. He was not

²²² Grohmann, *Klee*, 40.

²²³ Klee, *On Modern Art*, 15.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

afraid however, to tackle the complexities of describing how artists approach recording their observations of things in the world.

Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it is given as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the hallmark of the visible is to have a lining of invisibility in the strict sense, which makes it present as a certain absence. (EM: 147)

To back up this seemingly contradictory statement Merleau-Ponty quotes Klee who writes ““These oddities will become...realities...because instead of being limited to the diversely intense restoration of the visible, they also annex the occultly perceived portion of the invisible”” (EM: 147). Klee is instrumental in Merleau-Ponty’s appreciation of the multidimensionality of an artist’s approach to capturing visual experience. If an artist, Klee writes, wants to get ““closer to the depths”” of the visual and the visible then they must take into account movement and the temporal nature of vision and engage with all of their senses in order to reach beyond ordinary appearances ““to get to the root of things”” (EM: 147).²²⁵

²²⁵ Sallis, *Paul Klee, Philosophical Visions*, 16.

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Fig. 5 Paul Klee
'Thunderbolt' 1924
Mixed media
42.5 x 29.5cm

Réunion des Musée Nationaux (RMN)

3.1.2 Public Nature

The multidimensional nature of art-making was also the concern of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), but mostly through the three dimensional discipline of sculpture. As a professional sculptor Rodin's main source of income was creating statues of important figures in society that required a life-like resemblance. To achieve this in sculpture involves techniques for producing 'realistic' figures, but the proportions of these statues were geared towards how the work would be viewed in public spaces. Sculpture, when it is made to be viewed out in the open in public spaces, is traditionally constructed to a monumental scale with the aim of having the greatest possible impact. The construction therefore needs to take into account the fact that the viewer will see the finished work either from a distance, where the entire sculpture can be seen, or from directly below where the monumentality of the work is more apparent. Rodin, who initially studied and revered the sculptures of Michelangelo, was frustrated by the mechanics of these procedures, as he believed they took away from the true nature of human form.²²⁶

To counteract the restrictions imposed by the traditional approach, and to look for alternatives to making sculpture from life, Rodin worked through the problems he was encountering by making drawings. He developed a personal style of drawing that emerged when he began to study un-posed models moving around his studio, quickly capturing their movement and poses with an expressive, fluid, drawing technique. This practice was to radically change the 'body language' of his sculptures in the 1880s, and although he claimed to have invented this practice of drawing from a moving model, such classes were in fact a regular feature at the Petite Ecole where Rodin was a student.²²⁷ Drawing very quickly, Rodin would keep his eyes fixed on the models as they moved around his studio, and draw without looking at the paper. This form of instantaneous drawing, he claimed, eliminated thoughts about technical problems that might

²²⁶ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 240.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 483 fn. 25. The classes at the Petite Ecole were taught by taught by Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran.

‘arrest the flow of my feelings...from my eye to my hand’, and with no concern for creating a preconceived image Rodin often achieved surprising results. Some of the effects he achieved were interesting, he observes, ‘positions that are suggestive and stimulating,’ but that is not the objective he is working towards it is rather to ‘test to what extent my hands already feel what my eyes see’.²²⁸ Rodin’s sculptures consequently began to reflect this practice of drawing from direct observation, which he combined with the traditional method of working from preparatory drawings using measurement and perspective. It has been suggested by J. Kirk T. Varnedoe that this transformation of Rodin’s practice, through a dedicated observation of nature, and a ‘life long search for expressive gesture’ can be compared to that of Cézanne who also sought to create from direct observation an art that he felt ‘subsumed’ the great principles he admired in the art of the past.²²⁹

His revelation through his contact with Michelangelo, was the realization that the most telling access to the wellsprings of human expression lay not in such dedicated mining of tradition, but instead in the close observation of the natural, transitory movements of un-posed models. This is a transformation that echoes not only the development of other artists such as Cézanne, but also some of the most profound currents of change in the culture of the epoch.²³⁰

Like Klee, Rodin would eventually assemble a vast archive of his own work on paper, preserving several thousand of his drawings and watercolours for future reference.²³¹ Varnedoe maintains that the ‘twenty-six years between the entrance into the Petite Ecole and the commission for *The Gates of Hell*’ were for Rodin a ‘long, gradual process of self-definition, and imaginative transformation of sources in earlier sculpture, worked out in private drawings.’²³² Rodin’s study of

²²⁸ Albert Edward Elsen and Kirk Varnedoe, *The Drawings of Rodin* (Praeger Publishers, 1971), 85.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²³² *Ibid.*, 18.

movement through drawing revolutionized his sculpture simply because he switched to working from actual life-size human measurements even when his sculptures were cast in monumental proportions. In addition, even though his sculptures are of course static objects, Merleau-Ponty identifies how Rodin ‘makes movement visible’ through his ability to compose figures from multiple viewpoints (EM: 45).

Movement is given, says Rodin, by an image in which the arms, the legs, the trunk, and the head are taken at a different instant, an image which therefore portrays the body in an attitude which it never at any instant really held and which imposes fictive linkages between the parts, as if this mutual confrontation of impossibles could – and alone could – cause transition and duration to arise in bronze and on canvas. (EM: 145)

It is not clear if Merleau-Ponty was familiar with Rodin’s drawings, although it is the artist’s investigations of movement that captured his interest primarily in ‘Eye and Mind’, and Rodin’s drawings are evidently where those investigations began. Galen Johnson suggests that ‘the impact of Rodin in particular upon ‘Eye and Mind’ has been underappreciated’, but Merleau-Ponty refers only to Rodin’s constructed, public art-work, his sculpture, and not his drawings.²³³ While Rodin worked ‘within the public institutions and competed for public commissions’, Johnson remarks, ‘he did not seek to overthrow the classical models...nevertheless, he sought an art that brought itself closer to the primacy of feelings and to the natural, uncorseted human figure’.²³⁴ Rodin articulates, for Merleau-Ponty, the reality of freezing human perception in order to create a three-dimensional object that cannot be seen from all viewpoints at the same time.²³⁵

²³³ Galen A. Johnson, *The Retrieval of the Beautiful: Thinking through Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics*, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 41.

²³⁴ Ibid., 83.

²³⁵ The Musée Rodin in Paris has exhibited Rodin’s drawings since 1919, so there it is possible that Merleau-Ponty saw them there. <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/museum/musee-rodin-paris/hotel-biron>.

Painting searches not for the outside of movement but for its secret ciphers, of which there are some still more subtle than those of which Rodin spoke. All flesh, and even that of the world, radiates beyond itself. But whether or not one is, depending on the era and the “school,” attached more to manifest movement or the monumental, the art of painting is never altogether outside time, because it is always within the carnal.’ (EM: 145)

Merleau-Ponty is referring here to painting but he could in fact be writing about Rodin’s drawings, as many of them are highly erotic and combine pencil and graphite with watercolour and wash.²³⁶ Rodin does not shy away from including every bodily detail and enhancing areas of interest later, Petherbridge observes, ‘imparting a hint of a bloody carcass’ for example or outlining ‘the contours of a ‘figure with impatient red brush lines in a later gesture, as if to open up the wounds (of looking) again.’²³⁷

With his studies of Cézanne, Klee and Rodin, Merleau-Ponty was initially engaged with the art of the past, but in his later writings, he came to recognize the work of his contemporaries; for example Germaine Richier and Alberto Giacometti. Although Richier is only mentioned once by Merleau-Ponty, she is an interesting choice as her work was the focus of a national controversy in the early 1950s for her ‘scarred, eroded crucifix’ commissioned for the church of Assy in 1949. Richier blurred the lines between human and animal forms and as, Sarah Wilson identifies, ‘created explicit metaphors of nature’s physical invasion of sculpture’.²³⁸

It was this element of regression and decay which caused fear and repulsion in Richier’s crucifix for the church of Assy in 1950. On a poetic and etymological level, the fusion of body and bark in Richier’s crucifix evoked the metamorphosis of event to symbol.²³⁹

²³⁶ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 391.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Wilson, “Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute,” 42.

²³⁹ Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty, writing in 1960, recognised that: ‘some of Rodin’s fragments are statues by Germaine Richier *because they were sculptors* – that is to say, enmeshed in a single network of Being’ (EM: 148). Although Rodin was revered as a great artist in France at the time, and Richier’s work had recently caused a scandal, Merleau-Ponty recognised an intersection in their processes and approach beyond historical, political, and in Richier’s case religious, significance. The pitted surfaces of Richier’s, and also Giacometti’s, sculptures, the substance of the clay pinched and moulded with their figures, scored and gouged with tools, connect the finished work with the space surrounding it. Whereas the smooth surfaces of a classical statue set it apart – a clean line of separation from its surroundings giving it more impact as a public monument.

Merleau-Ponty also briefly refers to the work of the British sculptor Henry Moore, whose large smooth figurative sculptures played with the idea of their solidity by his use of holes, allowing the viewer to see beyond the work to the space behind, breaking up the form and creating a ‘disequilibrium’. Comparing this approach with drawing, Merleau-Ponty describes how ‘a certain hollow opened up within the in itself’ creates a space which is ‘empty’. This is a negative space, which ‘sustains the supposed positivity of things’ (EM: 144). Moore, like Rodin, draws attention to the material of the sculpture by disrupting the viewer’s expectation of the finished and complete. This focus on the actual material and visual properties of its surfaces or its internal occupancy of space creates a disconnection from what it might represent.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 233.

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Fig. 6 Auguste Rodin
Woman Holding Her Breast n.d.
Watercolour and graphite on cream coloured paper
32.7 x 25cm

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA

3.1.3 Still Life

By using drawing methods to study form and movement using human perception, instead of techniques using measurement and perspective, Rodin expanded the possibilities of how sculpture could be made. Similarly Alex Potts suggests, Merleau-Ponty ‘offered a provocation to rethink sculpture’ and to acknowledge its complexity and vitality in a way that he had once thought possible only through painting. Potts points out that while lines in sculpture can be seen to literally exist in empty space, it is often through a ‘close engagement with painting’ that sculpture has ‘been reconceptualised’.²⁴¹

While there is no indication that Richier, who was based in Provence and died only shortly before him in 1959, was influenced by Merleau-Ponty, it is evident that Giacometti, embedded in the intellectual life of Paris, was greatly influenced by *Phenomenology of Perception*. Although often associated with Existentialism through his friendship with Sartre, it has been pointed out that it is possible that phenomenology was more important to Giacometti’s ‘unique brand of realism’ and specifically ‘the original work of perceptual phenomenology presented by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’ whose ‘stress on the ambiguity of space and vision and the importance of subjective intuition is echoed in many of Giacometti’s statements.’²⁴² In particular, Giacometti’s work reflects Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on ‘re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world’ which can offer an ‘account of space, time and the world as we ‘live’ them’ (PP: vii). In other words, rather than only presenting the end result of a process, the processes ‘as we ‘live’ them’, our ‘primitive contact with the world’ becomes the primary, essential component providing the impetus to express and communicate lived

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Francis Morris in Alberto Giacometti and Tate Gallery Liverpool, *Alberto Giacometti: The Artist’s Studio* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), 10. See also Wilson, 31. and Michael Peppiatt, *Alberto Giacometti in Postwar Paris* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press in association with the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 2001), Peppiatt explains that Giacometti’s friendship with Sartre brought him into contact with Merleau-Ponty: ‘...whose work on the nature of perception fascinated Giacometti.’ 14.

experience. And although Merleau-Ponty's references to Giacometti are also brief it is quite possible that Giacometti is one of the artists he has in mind when he wrote that 'anyone who thinks about the matter finds it astonishing that very often a good painter can also produce good drawings or good sculpture' (EM: 142). Although Giacometti worked with many disciplines, drawing, painting and printmaking for example, he is best known as a sculptor, working with clay, plaster and bronze. Alex Pott's writes however that it is Giacometti approach to art-making that was of most interest to Merleau-Ponty.

...as a paradigmatic figure in the modern art world of the time, what mattered above all was [Giacometti's] obsessive reworking of an artistic problem most people envisaged in terms of life drawing and painterly depiction, and not in sculptural terms. Indeed it was as a painter rather than as a sculptor, that Merleau-Ponty himself found Giacometti most intriguing.²⁴³

Giacometti's main concern was of human perception – how to express the reality of what he sees as he sees it. His process treats each work as a conditional attempt rather than a definitive representation; a process that is comparable to Cézanne's repeated attempts to paint Mount Saint-Victoire. And as a great admirer of Cézanne's dedication to the exact study of appearances Giacometti engages in a similar endless, obsessive routine that illustrates Merleau-Ponty's statement: 'Expressing what *exists* is an endless task' (CD: 66). Giacometti believed that painting, in contrast to sculpture, creates a 'total illusion of the reality'. When we see 'a person in a particular position and a particular environment', for example, 'you can't separate the person from that environment' both must be painted together using the same materials.'²⁴⁴ In contrast when working with sculpture, form is created as volume, separate from its original environment and supplanted into the environment and reality of the viewer.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 226.

²⁴⁴ David Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, new edition (London: Pimlico, 1995), 211.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

Giacometti began to make paintings and drawings directly from life in 1945 as he was frustrated by his progress working with sculpture. Sculpture had made him a ‘slave of tradition’ he explains in an interview with David Sylvester in 1964:

I think we have for so long automatically accepted the received idea of what a sculpture head should look like that we have made ourselves completely incapable of seeing a head as we really see it.²⁴⁶

Giacometti was searching for a ‘fundamental vision of reality’ therefore, he states ‘in order to know how I was seeing, it became necessary for me to paint’.²⁴⁷ When working directly from the figure, Giacometti’s working processes encapsulated the phenomenological dilemmas that occur in our bodily perceptions, both in terms of our own bodily awareness, but also our awareness of the spatial realities of the bodies of others. In sculpture it was necessary for Giacometti to rely a certain amount on his knowledge of how the human figure is constructed in order to include those parts of the body he could not see all at once whereas in painting he could follow in the footsteps of Cézanne and attempt to ‘paint nature as if no one had painted it before’ faithfully rendering ‘his own sense of visual experience.’²⁴⁸ By the early 1950s Giacometti had developed and defined a painting style using fine-tipped sable brushes, ‘like long pencils’, that translated his technique and fluidity of line into oil on canvas.²⁴⁹ By painting in this way, Valerie Fletcher argues, he could more efficiently achieve a ‘pictorial equivalent of his perception of reality’

[Giacometti] emphasized the intrinsic motion of line as a connector of separate points. His lines flow not only over and within forms but also link those forms with peripheral areas in a kind of optical dance. In addition, such lines create painterly textures perceived and followed by the viewer’s eye. Thin brushstrokes

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Giacometti quoted in Alberto Giacometti and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, *Alberto Giacometti, 1901-1966* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1996), 28.

²⁴⁸ Lord, *Giacometti*, 184.

²⁴⁹ Fletcher, “Giacometti’s Paintings,” 28.

in oil paint leave slender ‘trails’. Not only through illusionistic space but also across the canvas surface, contradicting the solidity of forms and creating a dynamism that is essential to Giacometti’s pictorial aesthetics.²⁵⁰

Giacometti’s paintings employed drawing techniques that were fundamentally a record of his bodily responses to the object observed, during a period of intense concentration, attention and orientation, as his eye guided the movement of the brush in his hand. When Giacometti worked directly from a model in his studio, the model would return his gaze back to him, while his hand recorded and documented the information given by his eye immediately, with no correction only reapplication or complete removal of previous marks. As a result, the figures in Giacometti’s paintings are, Potts maintains, presented as ‘human presences simultaneously mirroring and distancing themselves from the viewer’.²⁵¹ The process of investigation (or interrogation) was begun over and over again until Giacometti could go no further, usually because the model was no longer available to sit for him and their interaction in the studio therefore ended. Consequently, Giacometti’s painting progressed through applying multiple layers of lines of paint, which gradually accumulated into a solid mass with none of the delicacy and simplicity of the line drawings made by Klee or Matisse. Giacometti’s working processes show how observational drawing processes are taken a step further than their traditional role, as a private working drawing, or preliminary sketch before painting begins. He used line and drawing techniques, but in order to ‘make a painting’ (a public form of artwork) he simply used paint as a medium with which to draw. Working in this way allowed Giacometti to make public the end result of a private encounter, or a collaborative performance between artist and model. Whereas Klee and Rodin, in contrast, used their observational drawings and sketches to inform their public work, but their drawings remained, as artworks, private – archived.

One of Giacometti’s principal models for much of his work was his brother Diego. This was partly because he was consistently available but also because

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

²⁵¹ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 208.

Diego's features were so familiar and his personality did not obstruct Giacometti's vision. Many of the paintings of Diego are therefore some of the most densely worked especially the later works known as the *Black Head paintings* (Fig. 7). These late paintings convey an even greater sense of the figure dissolving into its surroundings yet maintaining what Fletcher describes as an 'irreducible, essential being beyond the vagaries of transitory appearances.'²⁵² Giacometti's painting method used line, but avoided trying to achieve naturalistic colour, in order to retain a spontaneous and truthful response to what he saw. He sat close to the model and both chairs and the easel were registered with marks on the floor to make sure each sitting was at the same place to ensure continuity. John Berger has described Giacometti's process as an interrogation of appearances:

Every artist discovers that drawing – when it is an urgent activity – is a two-way process. To draw is not only to measure and put down it is also to receive. When the intensity of looking reaches a certain degree, one becomes aware of an equally intense energy coming towards one, through the appearance of whatever it is one is scrutinising. Giacometti's life's work is a demonstration of this.²⁵³

While there are strong parallels to be found between Giacometti's method of working in the 50s and 60s and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Alex Potts advises that there is a 'formidable gap to be negotiated between Merleau-Ponty's understanding of visual art and the mind-set of the artists and theorists' who were to adopt his philosophy of perception for their own needs. Some American sculptors, such as Richard Serra and Robert Morris, for example, showed a brief interest in the work of Merleau-Ponty following the 1962 English translation of *Phenomenology of Perception*, but they were more interested in exploring the 'immediate field awareness' of the viewer as it related to the 'point-horizon' rather than to 'figure-ground', and they used Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a basis for creating work that would be viewed in public in a certain way.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Fletcher, "Giacometti's Paintings," 30.

²⁵³ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 77.

²⁵⁴ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 216.

Furthermore once ‘phenomenology was displaced by structuralism, then post-structuralism,’ Potts writes, ‘the imperatives of the newly popular linguistic and semiotic models made a focus on perceptual processes seem old-fashionedly humanistic.’²⁵⁵

Merleau-Ponty’s own mission to ‘interrogate painting itself’ is matched by the extreme, concentrated effort Giacometti uses in his own working processes.²⁵⁶ Giacometti’s painting technique, using drawing as its basis can, I believe, give us a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s view that painting in particular can trace ‘the very roots of Being... the impalpable source of sensations’ (EM: 121). Both Giacometti and Merleau-Ponty attempted, through their working processes, to investigate how it is that we are *open onto* the world but are also *embedded in it*, perception is at once our “absolute proximity” to things yet our “irremediable distance” from them (VI: 10). For Merleau-Ponty, ‘the world is made of the very stuff of the body’, the philosophical mystery that occupied him in his later work and illustrates his desire to uncover a new approach to perception and investigate the ontological implications of our embodiment (EM: 125).

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 210.

²⁵⁶ Johnson, “Ontology and Painting: ‘Eye and Mind,’” 44.

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Fig. 7. Alberto Giacometti
'Head of Diego' 1962.
Oil on canvas
92 x 76cm

Musée Granet

3.2 Inscribing a Moment of Being

In Merleau-Ponty's later work, when he was concentrating on the development of a new ontology, drawing, and the use of line specifically, becomes more apparent in his writing. In 'Eye and Mind', for example, while he reiterates the fact that 'there are no lines visible in themselves' in nature, he now understands how lines are 'indicated, implicated, and even very imperiously demanded by the things, but they themselves are not things' (EM: 143). He recognises that line 'develops a way of extending itself actively into that space which sub-tends the spatiality of a thing': the line therefore activates space, making it as visible as the things themselves whether it's 'a man or an apple tree' (EM: 143). Merleau-Ponty, however, questions if it is really feasible for an artist to effectively record things and the space surrounding them using line. Would this not, he asks quoting Klee, make a 'truly elementary representation' impossible? By trying to record everything, seen and unseen, an artist would surely end up with a network of entangled lines that would, Merleau-Ponty seems to imply, make no sense. Even though the lines in Giacometti's paintings and drawings are entangled beyond the point of any straightforward representation, Merleau-Ponty doesn't refer to this but instead suggests two alternatives to avoid this situation.

First, the painter may, like Klee, decide to hold rigorously to the principle of the genesis of the visible...and then leave it up to the *title* to designate by its prosaic name the entity constituted, in order to leave the painting free to function more purely as painting. Or alternatively he may undertake, ... to put into a single line both the prosaic, identifying characteristics of the entity and the hidden operation which combines such indolence of inertia and such force in it as are required to constitute it as *nude*, as *face*, as *flower*. (EM: 143)

In this section of the essay, Merleau-Ponty again tries to understand a process of which there is no evidence that he ever experienced himself first-hand, and there is also no evidence that he ever spoke directly to any of the artists who were his contemporaries about their working processes. He refers to artists' writings, he

looks at their work in galleries, but does he look at their sketchbooks, or visit their studios and look at work in progress? Although he remarks in ‘Eye and Mind’ that he does not believe that it is ‘illegitimate for a layman such as myself, speaking from his memory of a few paintings and books, to express how painting enters into his reflections’ it is doubtful whether the practical differences between painting and drawing can be fully understood without direct experience. An experiential engagement with art-making is the most efficient way to understand how different the mode of thinking used in drawing practice is from that used in painting practice (EM: 130). For example, in drawing practice, the process itself will often determine the end result, rather than there being an end product in mind at the outset – a process where attention is focused on exploration and experimentation, and on recording that process. In painting practice there are added complications ensuing from the practicalities of dealing with paint, as it is a substance that needs attention separate from the attention given to the emerging image or to the object perceived.

In contrast, we can find in the writings of Julia Kristeva for example, inadvertently perhaps echoing the work of Merleau-Ponty, a more explicit understanding of art-making processes and of drawing in particular, which she believes, ‘links contemplation to action’.²⁵⁷ Kristeva reveals in her essay ‘On Drawing: Or, The Speed of Thought’ that, although she was able to paint to her satisfaction ‘thanks to colours and brushstrokes’, drawing was not something she had ever felt she had mastered.²⁵⁸ This, she believes, is because she was ‘never able to inscribe the moment of being, in the spontaneous ellipsis when conception and execution merge’ as drawing requires an intense level of concentration and a multidimensional level of making.²⁵⁹

Drawing has always seemed to me the proof of a maximal concentration through which the most subjective intelligence, the most intense abstraction, makes something exterior visible and suddenly perceptible to the artist and nevertheless

²⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, trans. Jody Gladding. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

so intimately connected to the viewer that it registers, equally absolute and singular, as proof.²⁶⁰

As the drawing develops, however, the lines already established will to some extent inform the placement of the marks that follow. A variation of marks, lines and shading, accumulate on the paper creating a vocabulary of marks that quickly describe what is seen by the eye. Erasure, if it is used, contributes to the mark-making vocabulary even though it removes or subtracts parts of the drawing; the space created still has a substance (a gestalt) as it once contained a solid mark. Merleau-Ponty comes very close to describing this process in his early writings on phenomenology, even though he is not explicitly discussing drawing. He describes, for example, in *Phenomenology of Perception* a process of attention, of sustained looking and recording as a ‘kind of attentiveness and wonder’, which is unconcerned with meaning. Rather, it is through the process that ‘meaning comes into being’ (PP: xxiv).

When the artist’s attention becomes conflicted, between the needs of the object being drawn and the needs of the emerging drawing, the work is often abandoned and a new drawing of the same object is begun. Beginning again may mean moving on to a new sheet of paper (like Rodin) or erasing all the previous marks and starting again on top (Giacometti or a combination of both like Klee). The future use of these drawings, which usually remain incomplete, may be of a private nature and never shown in public, or they may inform consequent artworks for exhibition, sculpture, painting etc. Beginning again is key, as to continue would risk the needs of the drawing taking precedence over the object perceived in order to make the drawing ‘work’. Catherine Dunton has identified this spilt in attention as an issue that Merleau-Ponty did not address in his theory of the reciprocity between individual consciousness and the physical world.²⁶¹ Where we should give special consideration for the act of drawing, Dunton

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.

²⁶¹ Catherine Dunton, “Meaning and Appearance: a Merleau-Pontian Account of Leonardo’s Studies from Life,” *Art History* 22, no. 3 (September 1999): 334.

argues, is in the fact that drawing from observation ‘impacts directly on any theory of intention and attention within perception.’

As the artist draws he does not keep his eyes constantly on the object under consideration but rather oscillates rapidly between the object and the image emerging before him on the paper. The importance of this practicality is that there is now an additional element in the reciprocal process of vision. As well as the viewpoint and the visual field, there is the graphic, enduring collection of marks that grow organically from their interaction and which, at the same time, interact and inform the process.²⁶²

Therefore, as the drawing emerges, attention becomes entangled with intention. The eye, rather than moving across the object freely, enters into ‘a highly sensitive relationship with the choreography of lines that take up their own rhythm and pace.’²⁶³

Each time the eye leaves the object for the paper the hand must improvise, continuing by allowing the rhythm of the stroke initiated by the sight of the object to continue. A look back at the object checks the hand’s initiative and already the next stroke is begun.²⁶⁴

As this process takes place rapidly, structural lines or guidelines often become integrated within the drawing even though these lines, usually lightly drawn, do not describe any physical thing that is seen by the eye. They hold in place a space of reference for later marks, establish an angle or indicate where weight is supported without the need for measurement. These markers are necessary because of the fluidity and temporal nature of vision. ‘Just as the construction of an image is not static in space’ Dunton remarks, ‘neither is it static in time.’²⁶⁵

²⁶² Ibid., 341.

²⁶³ Ibid., 342.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

3.2.1 Reversibility in Vision

In his essay 'Action Painting and the World-as-picture'(1988), Wayne J. Froman identifies Klee as a precursor of 'Action Painting' (also known as Abstract Expressionism), as Froman believed that Klee was 'not concerned with rendering a prior image on a canvas'.²⁶⁶ Although we now know that the perceived spontaneity of Klee was partly a myth, that he did in fact carefully construct many of his paintings for public exhibition from his private archive of sketches and preliminary studies, Froman goes on to observe that Merleau-Ponty recognized in Klee the ability to 'introduce the viewer to that space which sub-tends the spatiality of a thing, a man, or an apple tree, the site of reversibility in vision'.²⁶⁷ The thing therefore, is no longer the subject of painting, and in action painting the work proceeds 'by making the motion of the painting the subject of the painting'.

The open-ended movements of the painter, animated by strains or tensions in the traces left on the canvas of the overlap of the visual and motor fields, discompose the apprehension of world-as-picture. In the oscillation of those traces between associations out of which images emerge and a sheer interplay with other such traces, action paintings hold open possibilities for modes of world-apprehension other than the apprehension of world-as-picture essential to the metaphysical foundations of the modern epoch. This makes action painting, foundational art.²⁶⁸

The 'foundational art' that Froman is describing here, the 'movements of the painter' engaged in an immediate response, spontaneously recording the traces of movement is, I would suggest, a possible description of drawing practice and specifically gesture drawing. Rather than being treated as a preliminary step towards a 'finished' artwork, drawing is integral to the creation of the work that just happens to be using paint as its medium.

²⁶⁶ Wayne J. Froman, "Action Painting and the World-as-Picture," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 343.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 344.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 347.

One of the few artists who successfully articulated the nature of the creative processes being developed in America during and after World War II was Robert Motherwell (1915-1991). Acting as an unofficial spokesman for the New York avant-garde movements, Motherwell was informed not only by his own painting practice but also by an undergraduate degree in philosophy from Stanford University, and graduate study at Harvard and Columbia.²⁶⁹ In a lecture Motherwell gave in 1949 called 'Reflections on Painting Now' he explains his understanding of philosophical subject-object relationships.

Philosophers often talk about the so-called "subject-object" relationship; for many of them including Descartes, Locke, and Hume, this relationship is the basic pattern of experience. The "subject" is the knower, in their terminology, as when someone is perceiving a picture; the "object is the thing known, in this example, the picture."²⁷⁰

Echoing Klee and Merleau-Ponty, Motherwell goes on to say that it is common for artists to 'have the illusion' that this "subject-object" relationship works in reverse'.²⁷¹ Motherwell's reference here is neither Klee nor Merleau-Ponty but the German lyric poet Baron Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg (1770-1801) also known by the pseudonym Novalis.²⁷²

"In this state of illusion," as Novalis says, "it is less the subject who perceives the object than conversely, the objects which come to perceive themselves in the subject." So a painter, in working a canvas, sensing it all over, watching it shift and change and slowly emerge from its flat void, mere extension, may have the illusion that the picture is not being painted by him, but rather is painting him, that he who is supposed to be the subject has become the object, that the picture knows him better than he knows it.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Robert Motherwell, *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 68 fn.,2.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66.

This description of the picture not being painted by the painter but instead painting the painter is similar to Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'auto-figuration' discussed in the previous chapter. In Motherwell's case, however, he does not work from an object, a scene or a figure in the external world but from a variety of internal sources that he initially accesses through 'psychic automatism' (informed by the Surrealist's method of automatic writing), which allows him to dispense entirely with any reference to an object.

Spontaneous improvisation of this kind was a key impetus not only for Motherwell's work but also for many of the other Abstract Expressionists – most notably Jackson Pollock. The spontaneity and improvisational nature of this method allows for an exploitation of the dynamic between the artist's body and the materials as the work progresses: the artist is completely immersed in the process of creating an image while collaborating with and sensitive to the needs of the materials used. While Pollock would employ automatism throughout his entire process – gradually building up a linear mass of paint directly onto the surface of his canvases, Motherwell used automatism mainly as a starting point for his creative process. He did however make several series of drawings on small-scale sheets of paper where he would work quickly from one sheet to the next. These drawings exist as works in their own right but also feed into his larger paintings and monumental work on canvas where he would begin with the spontaneity of automatism, placing 'dabs of paint scrapped across the surface of the canvas with razors or sticks or spatulas'. Unlike Pollock however, Motherwell would in addition work towards resolving a canvas by adding 'a more formal architectonic surface' and incorporate space within the composition.²⁷⁴

My continuing struggle... has been to find an equilibrium between the automatic and the formal beauty that is the end result of an emergent process, in the sense of a dialectical evolution...²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 146.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

The tension that this struggle creates, between the primal simplicity of the spontaneous automatic drawing and the more formal complex compositions of the larger paintings, is therefore incorporated as another element in the process of making that Motherwell employs.

The largest series of Motherwell's small-scale works on paper, which were made using 'unadulterated automatism' is 'Lyric Suite' of 1965 (Fig. 8) There are almost six hundred drawings in this series, made using fountain pen inks and sable brushes on Japanese rice paper, each one was created in seconds working without 'revisions or additions'; a complete immersion in the processual, embodied nature of the activity he was engaged in without any concern for the outcome of that process.²⁷⁶

Unable to control spread of ink, which varied according to heat and humidity – never knew what one would end as, until "set"; *each picture would change before my eyes after I had finished working on it*, sometimes for hours – as the ink spread, like a spot of oil.²⁷⁷

Even after he had finished working on them 'the pictures literally continued to paint themselves as the ink spread in collaboration with the paper', and although he was tempted to use blotting paper to halt the spread of ink, 'at a miraculous moment', he never did.²⁷⁸ A line or a dot could therefore end up spreading into a mass or a space left open may become invaded by ink. Motherwell may begin by making a drawing with linear attributes but the absorbency of the paper and the fluidity of the ink often combined to instill a painterly quality: offering another example of how the distinctions between painting and drawing are not always clear-cut.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 171–172.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 172.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

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Fig. 8 Robert Motherwell
'Lyric Suite' 1965
Black ink on rice paper
23 x 28cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

3.2.2 Drawing with Paint

Merleau-Ponty's references to drawing are always limited to artists who use line, and in particular line used to describe objects in the world, in an informal and personal way. As we have seen in his examinations of drawings by Klee and Matisse, his interest lay in the aspects of their drawing practice that retained a descriptive role even when they were immediate responses to observations, thoughts and ideas. In 'Eye and Mind' he also refers to the work of Giacometti, but the reference is brief and the illustration used is one of Giacometti's portraits of Aimé Maeght using pencil on paper. Giacometti had however, advanced the use of drawing beyond its function as a tool to describe objects in a private informal way. By developing his technique of using paint as a medium to draw with, Giacometti produced drawing in a form considered suitable for public exhibition and made work that was as much evidence of an experience as a description of an object.

At the same time as Giacometti was exploring the possibilities of using paint as a drawing medium, artists working in America, such as Motherwell, Pollock and Willem de Kooning were also making their own advances in the use of drawing techniques to make paintings, although in a far more expressive and abstract way. Potts argues that though Pollock and de Kooning seemed to embrace a 'Merleau-Ponty like idea that gestural painting embodied the bare outlines of an expressive enunciatory act', he goes on to speculate that Merleau-Ponty would not have responded positively to their paintings had he been familiar with their work.²⁷⁹

Merleau-Ponty's symbiotic view of the process of artistic fabrication made good sense in relation to the priorities of the modern art world of the time. Painters like Picasso and Pollock, for example, were filmed in the act of generating a drawn line on a piece of glass. Painterly, gestural painting, and the sketchiness

²⁷⁹ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 226. In *Eye and Mind* Merleau-Ponty criticises the "decadent psychoanalysis and culturalism ... in the United States" 122.

of an informal drawing, were assumed to be infused with the artist's creative impulses in ways that more consciously elaborated works were not.²⁸⁰

The film and photographs of Pollock at work in his studio (in action) by Hans Namuth in 1950 advanced the reappraisal of how paintings were made, even though it is questionable to what extent Namuth choreographed and edited his documentary to give the impression that Pollock was engaged in a continuous, spontaneous and therefore authentic act of creation.²⁸¹ The free-association techniques used by Pollock and the other Abstract Expressionists allowed them to dispense entirely with any reference to an object (although de Kooning's work was resolutely figurative) enabling the act of making itself, not just the end result, to be exposed. Pollock and de Kooning in particular challenged the notion that painting was a discipline that needed to respect the rules of its application in a slow and methodological way. Instead, by embracing a combination of methods of mark-making to respond to the actions of the body as well as thoughts and ideas, Pollock and de Kooning increased the speed at which paint could be used and the effects that could be achieved. The artwork produced, much of it very large scale, prompted a reappraisal of accepted value systems and the nature of public and private art-making processes. Rather than working standing at an easel, for instance, Namuths' photographs showed how Pollock painted on un-stretched canvas laid out on the floor, using sticks and household paint as well as brushes and oil paint. Without touching the surface of the canvas he was photographed, and subsequently filmed, dripping and splashing paint in an aggressive and experimental manner that is associated more with the exploratory and informal nature of gesture drawing. This resulted in his actions, and the traces of his actions, becoming the subject matter, his body the object creating the painting.

This concentration on the gestural movements of the whole body, not just the eye, and the Abstract Expressionists engagement with the surface of the painting

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 227.

²⁸¹ Jarvis, "Articulating the Tacit Dimension in Artmaking," 203. As Robert Motherwell remarks 'An awful lot of painting is just sitting and thinking' – but this would not have made a very interesting film or documentary.' 287

was described by Harold Rosenberg in 1952 as being created in ‘an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyse or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined’²⁸² In addition Pollock and de Kooning made no distinction between their paintings and their drawings: their work was dominated by line with the gesture itself the basis for a new form of abstraction.²⁸³ The work was therefore intensely physical, and Richard Schiff, writing of de Kooning, describes how the artist ‘sought to disconnect perception (what the hand could feel) from preconception (what the eye would automatically measure against as an existing standard, counteracting the effect of chance and the skill that produced it).’²⁸⁴ Without any preconceived notion of what the painting should look like, artists in the post-war period were free to work at the speed of drawing while exploiting the qualities of paint, its colour, substance and permanence. ‘Drawing is faster than painting, perhaps the only medium as fast as the mind itself’, Motherwell remarked, and warned that ‘painting can overcome one with its sensuousness ...in a way that drawing cannot’. Motherwell admitted, however, that the terminology available for defining drawing, and how to therefore separate it from painting practice, was very confusing: ‘drawing satisfies our sense of definition’ he writes ‘even if we cannot define drawing itself’.²⁸⁵

3.2.3 Painting with Text

It is common for discussions of drawing to confuse its definition with the tools, medium and materials that are used to draw with, even though as Petherbridge notes, ‘there have been few inventions in drawing technology beyond those shared with writing and print-making’.²⁸⁶ Yet the written word is not usually

²⁸² Garrels, *Drawing from the Modern 1945-1975*, 2:16.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 2:18–19.

²⁸⁵ Motherwell, *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 194. This confusion is evident in Merleau-Ponty also when he writes how artist’s often ‘...draw themselves in the act of painting (they still do – witness Matisse’s drawings.)’ ‘Eye and Mind’, 130.

²⁸⁶ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 4.

considered a part of the discipline of drawing, at least not in Western terminology, beyond illustration and calligraphy. Some of the generation of artists that followed the Abstract Expressionists, however, would combine gestural marks with text or calligraphy as a means to create a sense of energetic activity on the surface of an artwork. This calligraphic mark-making ignored the rules of legibility, in a similar way to that used by Klee, but remained within the realm of metaphor, causing the viewer to search for meaning and recognizable symbols in an attempt to 'read' the work. This adulteration of the purposes of the written word, its resistance to any decorative function, has led artists and critics to define this way of working as 'graffiti' which, while historically deriving from the Greek *graphein*, to write, is of course the term which has come to be used to describe illegal or private marks made on public sites. Public areas covered with graffiti, are termed as 'ugly' and 'defaced' – an idea that, Francesca Pietropaolo claims, appealed to artists who wanted to challenge established notions of beauty and the authority of the written word. The language of graffiti 'based on line as scrawl rather than as contour 'is incised in, immersed in the ground to evoke a formless image...speedy graffiti-like marks let the image emerge from within.' This process of 'mindless scrawling', Pietropaolo concludes, 'responds to the need to reach back to a primordial stage before rationalisation, where all that counts is the tactility of touch and the body, the impasto'.²⁸⁷

When Paul Klee used this kind of subversion of the written word in his paintings he incorporated words and letters of the alphabet intermingled with drawn images. In an attempt to encourage participation in the work Klee exploited the human need to make sense of something, like text, that is usually expected to convey meaning. The means by which Klee constructed and presented his work, however thwarted any resolution of absolute meaning, but the search for meaning was something he believed could be used to 'capture and retain attention to his work', sometimes delighting in meaning being found 'when there was none.' 'What was important for Klee', Claude Cernuschi maintains, 'was that his work exposed this yearning for meaning' whilst 'prompting and suspending that experience.' Frustrating the viewers search,

²⁸⁷ Francesca Pietropaolo in Garrels, *Drawing from the Modern 1945-1975*, 2:24.

‘forces us to revisit the state when reading was not the effortless activity [most adults] take for granted ...but the slow arduous task it is for pre-literate children.’

Beneath his art’s look of innocence and his apparent playful temperament Klee laboured to hold our full understanding in check, perhaps hoping to learn something, however rudimentary or basic, from the frustration or lack of fulfillment experienced as a result.²⁸⁸

By holding our full understanding in check, Klee holds our attention on the work as we search for meaning, scanning the surface of the picture as we do so. ‘To mark the erasure of meaning’ Cernschi concludes, ‘Klee, ironically enough, had to erase meaning from his marks.’²⁸⁹

Working on a much larger scale than Klee, the American artist Cy Twombly’s paintings also incorporated letters, words and phrases into his mark making vocabulary, but in the form of gestural handwriting, scribbles and corrections. The scale of Twombly’s paintings are comparable to frescos or murals, and Roland Barthes observes that a canvas by Twombly may contain what looks like writing but it is an ‘*allusive* field of writing’.²⁹⁰ Rather than using the ‘formed, drawn, deliberate, shapely writing’ found in calligraphy, Twombly is ‘saying that the essence of writing is neither a form nor a usage but only a gesture’

The essence of an object has some relation with its destruction: not necessarily what remains after it has been used up, but what is *thrown away* as being of no use.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Claude Cernuschi, “Paul Klee and Language,” in *Paul Klee: Philosophical Vision, from Nature to Art* (McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2012), 116.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, “Cy Twombly: Works on Paper,” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 158.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

What Twombly retains, therefore, ‘is the gesture, not the product.’²⁹² Barthes describes gesture as ‘something like the surplus of an action’ and distinct from the ‘*message* which seeks to produce information’ and the ‘*sign* which seeks to produce an intellection’. Gesture produces a surplus ‘without necessarily seeking to produce anything.’²⁹³ While Twombly did produce paintings, using a deliberate amalgamation of mixed media, it is through ‘*showing* their engendering’ that he linked his paintings to the practice of drawing, in particular ‘sketching’ the fleeting nature of thought, the messy nature of creativity.²⁹⁴ Barthes describes how Twombly’s “drawing” gives way to the surface it inhabits, mobilizes, torments, scores – or rarefies’.²⁹⁵ The language used by Twombly in his paintings is the language of drawing that appears to be in the process of becoming a written text. Borrowing elements from *informel* art, Dubuffet in particular, Twombly’s chaotic scribbles are described by David Hopkins as evoking ‘the splotches revisions and erasures of childish script.’²⁹⁶ In addition the paintings Twombly made were defined by the materials used in their making (and the process of working with those materials) as much as they were about the images that the paintings finally depict.

²⁹² Ibid., 160.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 165.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 173.

²⁹⁶ Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945-2000*, 50.

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Fig. 9 Cy Twombly
'Poems to the Sea', Rome 1959'
Oil, crayon, pastel and coloured pencil on paper.
31 x 31.7cm (sheet 16 of 24)

www.cytwombly.info

3.3 Materiality

In the brief final section of 'Eye and Mind', Merleau-Ponty reflects on the similarities underlying visual art practices even when they are categorised in different historical and stylistic periods. 'Rouault's contours' may not be the same as 'those of Ingres' according to the history books, but there are no 'separated, distinct "problems" in painting' (EM: 148). The traditional techniques that used the effects of light and shade to create an illusion of form and space were no longer relevant to modern artists: the charms of those traditional techniques had, Merleau-Ponty declares, 'withered away at the beginning of this century' (EM: 148). The developments of Modernism had opened up new possibilities for artists, but in the wake of the Second World War, when the true horrors of human cruelty and suffering became evident, artists such as Jean Dubuffet and the other members of the *Informel* movement felt compelled to respond by presenting the realities of life in all its ugliness. The messy nature of creativity that was once hidden, 'expelled at first by the painters of matter', Merleau-Ponty writes 'reappears finally in Dubuffet as a certain texture of matter' (EM: 148). Therefore, what is important according to Merleau-Ponty are the initial stages of discovery, traditionally hidden underneath layers of technique. The end result may look different but beginnings are always the same, and there can be no one type of painting that will end the search.

Thus what he has found he does not yet have. It remains to be sought out; the discovery itself calls forth still further quests. The idea of universal painting, of a totalisation of painting, of painting's being fully and definitively accomplished is an idea bereft of sense. For painters, if any remain, the world will always be yet to be painted; even if it lasts millions of years...it will all end without having been completed. (EM: 148)

Clarifying his use of the term 'painting' Merleau-Ponty explains that it encompasses 'depth, colour, form, line, movement, contour, physiognomy' and as they are all 'branches of Being' they are all intertwined. Even within sculpture

Rodin and Richier are ‘enmeshed in a single network of being’ (EM: 148). There is therefore some evidence in ‘Eye and Mind’ that Merleau-Ponty was beginning to reconsider his adherence to painting processes and to revise his opinion of drawing practice:

Whether it be representational or nonrepresentational, the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium contrived within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain hollow opened within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness...which...sustains the supposed positivity of things. (EM: 144)

As I have previously mentioned Merleau-Ponty does not give non-representational art-making processes very much attention and, as Véronique Foti has discussed at length, he totally disregards the abstract artists working in America after the war. This is unfortunate, because his focus on art making processes, which only deal with an ‘interrogation of phenomenal reality’ Foti argues ‘leads him to focus on its mimetic power, rather than consider that motion, or dynamic energy, need not be mimetically presented to be conveyed by a work of art.’²⁹⁷ It also indicates that he dismisses those artists who, through adapting drawing processes within their practice, incorporate paint as a means of spontaneous and immediate expression in a manner that is not possible when using paint for representational means. Merleau-Ponty understands that the traditional techniques that created illusions of form and space were no longer relevant, but he goes no further than Dubuffet in his examination of ‘a certain texture of matter’. Although he accepts that ‘the world will always be yet to be painted’ (EM: 148), Merleau-Ponty did not seem to realise that the means, or procedures, by which the world had once been simulated using paint, for many artists, had become an end in themselves.

²⁹⁷ Foti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*, 53.

3.3.1 Material thinking

When the art-world turned its attention away from Europe to America, artists embraced the aesthetic and ideological alternatives presented by the post-war consumerist era. Artists working in America were aware of the developments of the *Informel* art movement in Europe and were attracted to their anti-aesthetic principles and primal use of materials.²⁹⁸ The approach that artists would have traditionally used at the very beginning of their work, the private, exploratory and experimental stages, became extended and transferred to the use of mixed media, and presented as publicly exhibited artworks. The materials artists used contributed to the progress of the work, rather than the materials contributing to a method or technique to achieve a preconceived idea.

It has been suggested by Sarah Wilson that the origins of Dubuffet's use of pastes of thick matter in his painting were influenced by the lectures he attended by Gaston Bachelard at the Collège de France in Paris during the Occupation. Bachelard presented theories on the primal nature of *pâte*, or doughy, soft, viscous material, such as when earth is mixed with water to make clay, and the first human experiences of a child in the womb.

Bachelard's link between his elemental and primordial theorizing of the *pâte* and the infant's first material grasp of the world tally with contemporary interest in child mentalities that would reappear in Merleau-Ponty's Sorbonne lectures later in the 1940s.²⁹⁹

Dubuffet embraced the idea that the materials he used in his paintings conveyed bodily excesses in both their substance and application. Rather than the innocent and playful nature of children's drawings that had inspired Klee, Dubuffet found inspiration in the infantile, primal, and unrefined nature of human existence. Dubuffet's paintings were, however, resolutely figurative, while the Abstract Expressionists working in America, with the notable exception of de Kooning, had rejected all use of objects or figures in their work. By the time of Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961, the limitations of common conceptions about what art is,

²⁹⁸ Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945-2000*, 19.

²⁹⁹ Wilson, "Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute," 33.

and can be, became less about creating illusion or referring to an object and more to do with the materiality of the work itself. Rather than being seen as individual disciplines, painting and sculpture often became merged – the work became about, and came about, through the use of materials. Printmaking and drawing, which had been traditionally seen as secondary to painting and sculpture, became primary to many artists' output; for example Robert Rauschenberg's collages and combines, and Andy Warhol's screen-prints. Paintings with objects stuck on their surface broke out of traditional two-dimensional square or rectangular form and were often massive in scale. Sculpture had painterly elements, and all disciplines incorporated and embraced the mass produced images and objects that were increasingly becoming part of everyday post-war existence.

The fabrication and form of the new kinds of constructed painting in the 50s and 60s is described by Richard Shiff as a 'reorientation of modernist interests' located within the physical nature of this new work in its construction and the effect it had on the viewer.³⁰⁰

At issue is touch: the painter's touch becomes the vehicle for a metonymic exchange between an artist's or viewer's human physicality and the material, constructed physicality of an artwork. When we see a picture in terms of its material references to touch (as opposed to its fictive allusions to vision), we reorient not only a local pictorial order but also our global sense of how bodies contact their surroundings; we reconstruct the functioning of the body and senses, how it relates to the world.³⁰¹

Shiff believes this physicality can be traced back to the expressionistic brush-work of Cézanne, and his concerns with visual truth and depth. Cézanne's attempt to represent the solidity of things in the world through the use of multiple, thick brushstrokes, draws attention to the paint itself, and by extension to the picture surface. This surface, the space, which provides a container for the beginnings of the art-work is identified by Merleau-Ponty as key to artistic process. 'Painting is an art of space' he writes, 'carried out on canvas or sheet of

³⁰⁰ Richard Shiff, "Constructing Physicality," *Art Journal* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 42.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

paper and so lacks the wherewithal to devise things that actually move' (EM: 144). The energy created through the gestural mark-making of drawing sets in motion a reciprocal dynamic between the artist, the materials and the support – its absorbency, texture and resilience.³⁰² The language artists use to describe this dynamic often suggests that there is no real distinction between the elements involved. For the artist Richard Talbot, for example, 'placing a piece of white paper on the wall' is the first part of a 'process of orientation' a way of orientating himself in the world before he begins work.

I am creating a place in which to operate, a thing to work with that acts as a go-between – a medium in the correct sense of the word. Therefore for me, the act of drawing could be considered to be the medium, rather than the stuff I draw with.³⁰³

A symbiotic relationship is therefore created between the materials used, the space within the piece of paper, the artist's body and the wall he is working on.

3.3.2 Symbiotic process

The interaction of artists with their materials, and of materials with each other, takes on a further dynamic if the work is non-representational. Motherwell describes how 'the artist's medium is his collaborator and his conscience', especially when working in an abstract way or recalling a past experience. Without an object to observe an artist will rely even more on their materials to inform the process.³⁰⁴

The failure of much psychological writing about artistic activity and the unconscious is out of an inability to comprehend, in a verbally oriented culture, the depth and the intimacy of the marriage between the artist and his *medium*.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 4.

³⁰³ Richard Talbot, "Drawing Connections," in *Writing on Drawing : Essays on Drawing Practice and Research*, ed. Steve Garner (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 45.

³⁰⁴ Motherwell, *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 141.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

This is a 'triadic relation', Motherwell maintains, 'composed of the artist, the subject, and the medium.' Without an object to divide the artist's attention the process of painting is free to proceed as fast as the medium will allow - therefore painting, a liquid medium, can be used at the speed of drawing, usually made using dry media. The materials used in abstract painting, replaces the object, and as 'the subject does not pre-exist', Motherwell argues, it 'emerges out of the interaction between the artist and the medium'.³⁰⁶

An artist brings to this interaction an energy, through motion, that transforms the matter the medium is composed of; whether it be charcoal, paint or graphite, matter needs energy to be transformed from its inert state. Merleau-Ponty recognized the ontogenetic fact that to be human is also to be composed of matter, all human life began, he writes, 'by being a fragile mass of living jelly', which contributes to the symbiotic process of art-making (VI: 14). The act of creativity therefore does not happen at a distance from the world but from within it: the substance of the materials, liquid or solid, informs the course of the work.

What sets Merleau-Ponty apart from other phenomenologists, John Haworth argues, is his understanding of the co-existence of all elements and organisms in and of the world. It is only through an engagement with this co-existence that primary meaning can be achieved, whereas intellectual meaning can only be reached through analysis.

The body does not find meaning pre-existent in the world, but calls such meaning into existence by its own activity and by the virtue of the fact that the body is combined with time and space, rather than being in and conceiving of time and space. The body has its world or understands its world without having to use its symbolic, or objectifying functions.³⁰⁷

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenological inquiry recognizes the eternal nature of attempting to reveal things as they actually are. The problem for phenomenology however, a problem that Merleau-Ponty returns to repeatedly, is the inadequacy of the written word to record what is seen or experienced, as it is

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 134.

³⁰⁷ Haworth, "Beyond Reason," 137.

being seen or experienced, accurately and at the same time coherently. To be understood, the written word requires previous knowledge, and that knowledge cannot be avoided if meaningful communication is to be achieved.

Merleau-Ponty believed that the process of creation employed by painting could describe the world accurately and also be understood by others in a way that literature never could. But paint needs attention: it has a substance before it is applied to a surface, and therefore takes attention away from the thing observed in order for the artist to attend to its application. So when Merleau-Ponty writes that the ‘phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being’, then painting is not the best artistic practice to apply (PP: xxii-xxiii). ‘Phenomenology is’, he continues, ‘the laying down of being’, which can only be achieved, I would argue, through drawing practice. Only the most spontaneous forms of painting, which are mostly based on drawing practices (and are not concerned with accurate representation), can fulfill Merleau-Ponty’s desire for a philosophy which, ‘is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but like art, the act of bringing truth into being’ (PP: xxiii).

Potts reminds us that Merleau-Ponty was not an artist or an art critic, but a philosopher for whom ‘the visual arts served less as an object of concern in their own right as models that might help to illuminate his general speculation on the embeddedness of vision in the physical, material world.’³⁰⁸ The artwork and its process of becoming, however, is a thing in itself, but a thing as a response to the world and as a product of human action that participates in the artworks coming into being. Merleau-Ponty’s theories of the flesh of the world in his later work illuminates this process further. As he writes in ‘Eye and Mind’, quoting Henri Michaux, painting is ‘a spectacle of something only by being a “spectacle of nothing” by breaking the “skin of things” to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world’ (EM: 141).

Conclusion

Although Merleau-Ponty does not engage directly with the artists who were involved in the aesthetic advancements of the twentieth century, I believe his

³⁰⁸ Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, 224.

philosophical investigations and their construction provide a complimentary framework to the artwork being made during and after his lifetime.

While there is also no evidence of him considering his own process of writing as a creative act in the same sense as an artist making a drawing, I think it is worth expanding on writing and the process of writing (and in particular his own process of writing) to find out if new insights into Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can be found.

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4. Giving Form To Thought

...the universe of thought that is opened up by reflection contains everything necessary to account for the mutilated thought of the beginning, which is only the ladder one pulls up after oneself having climbed it.

(IV: 35)

We do not undertake analyses of works because we mean to copy them or because we suspect them. We investigate the methods by which another has created his work in order to set ourselves in motion.

Paul Klee ³⁰⁹

Beginning with a discussion of the role that correction and re-working play in the construction of a work of art or text, I discuss how this process is often concealed in the finished work of art and especially in a work of writing. I then discuss Merleau-Ponty's own working processes, focusing on my examination of his last manuscripts and working notes at the Bibliothèque nationale de France archives in Paris. My response to these documents was restricted by copyright and institutional regulations, and I reflect on how this influenced my engagement with these papers. At the end of each section I will introduce and discuss one of the drawings I consequently made from the manuscript pages and working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* and the manuscript of 'Eye and Mind'. I argue that drawing practice is connected to the act of writing, and that Merleau-Ponty's understanding or reconsideration of drawing influenced his later ontology. Finally I explain how my approach to examining and reproducing these documents offers an opportunity to engage with Merleau-Ponty's work that

³⁰⁹ Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, Paul Klee Notebooks, v. 1 (Woodstock, N.Y: Overlook Press, 1992), 99–100.

physically corresponds with his view that writing is an embodied phenomenological practice.

4.1 A Process of Correction

Philosophy operates by using the written word to communicate ideas and theories to its public audience, but what is the equivalent in philosophy of the artist's private work, sketches and drawings kept in the studio? An artwork has a private/public aspect, and so too has the written word and literature. The public aspect of any work presented for an audience needs to communicate, and therefore present its ideas within the arena of either printed (or, nowadays, online) text in the case of philosophy, or within the various kinds of making that visual art employs. Philosophy is an open, inquiring, active process. Its given form is within the realm of literature and the written word, but what happens when our attention is drawn to the marks made in the process of thinking through philosophical problems and ideas? What does thought look like as it is given form by the movement of the hand across the paper? If the words came easily, then the first draft would look like a final draft. To keep track and record the process of thinking through the written word often requires an activity similar to drawing which, as John Berger observes, 'proceeds through corrected errors'.³¹⁰ Both the work of drawing and the work of writing progress, therefore, through a process of correction and reflection. It is through this process of making that the work is moved forward, ideas advanced, and a body of work is accumulated. The motivation is always to progress, while the buildup of paper, or whatever means used to contain ideas, needs to be adapted, reworked and eventually discarded in favour of the polished, finished version. While twenty-first century digital technology has made it possible to completely erase/delete rough drafts, it is misleading, however, to pretend that the 'end-products' of thinking or drawing are therefore not the products of preliminary 'sketches'. To disregard the process of making in favour of the finished result in an investigation of how ideas develop, and how thought processes work, is to overlook a crucial element in creativity both in art-making and philosophical writing.

³¹⁰ Berger, *Berger, On Drawing*, 110.

This process of thinking, making and correcting, is evident in the documents that were found in an incomplete state after Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961 and, I would argue, demonstrate his attempts to establish a new form of philosophical practice and illustrate his struggle to find an appropriate way to express that philosophy. Access to these private documents is difficult, because it is a unique body of writing, and any work on paper is fragile and needs to be handled with care. In addition, copyright restrictions exist to guard against violations and protect ownership/authorship. They further limit engagement with the work in its original state. Manuscripts of this kind are rarely on show to the public, and handling them is strictly monitored. Yet Merleau-Ponty's working processes are integral to his philosophy, and his written work in its embryonic stage has the potential to simultaneously present and elucidate the significance of this process.

Working drafts and notes in an unfinished state can retain something of the humanity of the author, his or her 'corporeality', as it were. We can only speculate as to how the work would have been completed in Merleau-Ponty's case. He might have abandoned or destroyed these papers had he lived.³¹¹ The version of *The Visible and the Invisible* that is now most familiar to readers is the printed version published in 1964 and edited by Claude Lefort. As the few structural outlines that exist tend to contradict each other Lefort struggled to determine how to structure the text he found in the documents.³¹² In addition, the work Merleau-Ponty was engaged in included an intention to 'reflect on language', in particular on the 'form of language which is the philosophical discourse'.³¹³ But again, it is not clear from the documents what he means by this, and Lefort could not envisage how this would have been manifested.

³¹¹Lefort, Editor's Preface to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World* (London: Heinemann, 1974), vii.', vii.

³¹² Claude Lefort in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern U.P, 1968), xxxiv.

³¹³ Ibid., xxvii.

It is a noteworthy fact that should we wish to reconstitute the principal articulations of the work he was preparing, we would find it materially impossible to do so.³¹⁴

Merleau-Ponty's death was sudden and unexpected. The notes and manuscript he left behind do not give many clues as to how he would have completed these writings because he himself did not know. He does not offer an 'exposition of a method', Lefort explains. In fact, Merleau-Ponty cautions 'against what is commonly called method'.³¹⁵ The completion of the work was therefore reliant on his own experience of continuing to work through his ideas on paper: 'the necessity of the interrogation whence they proceed'.³¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty's 'reluctance to draw up plans' in advance was more than a 'matter of temperament'.³¹⁷ Rather than dominating the work with intentions, methods and 'schemata', Merleau-Ponty wanted to 'test it in the writing',³¹⁸ which is itself an important theme of his later work. Leaving the manuscript in its unfinished state and presenting it as it is, as a record of his thought processes and of his experience of testing them by means of various 'externalisations', would most certainly not have been an option had he lived. While presenting work in progress had become almost *de rigueur* for visual artists in the twentieth century, it would most likely not have been feasible, or professional, for the philosopher Merleau-Ponty to follow suit.

The manuscript found within Merleau-Ponty's documents, entitled *Le visible et l'invisible*, consists of a hundred and fifty large pages 'covered with a dense handwriting'. It has been reworked using 'copious corrections' with most of the pages written on both sides.³¹⁹ In order to help the reader make sense of this manuscript, to 'clarify its meaning', Lefort decided to include a selection of working notes as part of the published version.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid., xxvi.

³¹⁶ Ibid., xxiv.

³¹⁷ Ibid., xxvii.

³¹⁸ Ibid., xxviii.

³¹⁹ Ibid., xxxiv.

[Merleau-Ponty] was in the habit of jotting down ideas on paper, ordinarily without concerning himself with style nor even obliging himself to compose complete sentences. These notes, which sometimes contain but a few lines and sometimes extend over several pages, constitute drafts for developments that figure in the first part of the work or would have figured in its continuation. From the end of the year 1958 on, they were as a rule dated and labeled.³²⁰

While the printed version of *The Visible and the Invisible* gives a comprehensive indication of Merleau-Ponty's ideas and intentions, it was clear that I would need to find a way to view Merleau-Ponty's papers in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris in person. I was interested in discovering how his manuscript was materially constructed, how he used, paper, ink, pens and pencils, arranged his marks and words in the space of the pages of the manuscript, and what form the working notes took as he thought through his ideas. This is information that cannot be gathered from the printed version of his work, and I hoped to find evidence that Merleau-Ponty drew or even doodled as he wrote, or that I would find more references to drawing practice in his writing — evidence of drawings may indicate that he, even sub-consciously, attempted to find forms of expression for his thought beyond language and text.

I was eventually granted permission by the BnF to view the manuscripts in the summer of 2013, under strict instructions not to photocopy or photograph anything, and I was given unlimited access to his work on microfilm. The pages of the manuscript and working notes I saw, carefully edited by Lefort and presented in bound hardback volumes, were covered in marks and corrections on top of a tiny, barely legible, handwriting that at times veers off in all directions. It is in itself 'a strange text', writing on top of writing, using various coloured inks (not apparent on microfilm), writing in the margins top and bottom and within the severely slanted margin on the left. The documents are worked and reworked as Merleau-Ponty searches for an adequate means of expression for his thought. Because of the copyright restrictions that made any kind of electronic

³²⁰ Ibid., xxxviii.

reproduction impossible (even printouts from microfilm is forbidden), it was important for me to find a way to respond to what I saw in the manuscript and to describe them visually. Restricted to eight days with each volume (with written permission to retain the volume needed each day) my options were also limited by having to work in the archives reading rooms, where I could only take notes using pencil. Although I was disappointed not to be able to take electronic or photographic copies away with me, along with sketches and notes, to work on at a later date in my studio, working in the environment of the library ended up becoming a vital component of my research. Making copies by hand using coloured pencils, on paper that came as close as possible to the size and weight used by Merleau-Ponty, I attempted to copy the marks he made as accurately as I could, without any intention to make replicas (coloured pencil cannot replicate ink for one thing), but by responding by way of a “translation” of this private work into a form that can also be seen by others.

I have made a selection from the fifty or so drawings that I made while I was at the BnF, which are interspersed, with brief introductions, between the sub-section of this chapter. Where relevant, I have included a reference in brackets to the corresponding page number of the published versions.

Drawing No.1. This is a complete page of text from *The Visible and Invisible* manuscript (VI: 254-257). Copying this amount of handwriting took a considerable amount of time and concentration and was completed over several days with breaks in between to work on other drawings. Consequently this is the only drawing that shows a full page of text from the manuscript in its entirety. It gives a sense of the layering of text and colour, and how Merleau-Ponty inserted ideas from notes into the body of the text. It also shows how he often changed his mind and the multidimensional way he filled the space of the paper. Other pages of the manuscript have been packed full of words to a greater extent; they are so dense with writing and corrections that the words are completely illegible.

No. 1

4.1.1 Written by hand

While there are many examples in the history of philosophy of non-prosaic modes of writing: dialogues, letters, fragments and aphorisms for example, a prose style of writing appears to be most useful to current philosophy as its form facilitates a clean clear presentation of concepts and theories, which are necessary for complex ideas to be coherently illustrated, argued and communicated. In twentieth century France, the dominant model of the writer-philosopher was epitomized by Jean-Paul Sartre. ‘The style makes the value of the prose’ he declares in ‘What is Writing?’ warning, however, that ‘it should pass unnoticed’: the reader should focus on the ideas contained within the text not the look of the words on the page.³²¹ The words therefore need to be invisible or, as Sartre puts it ‘words are transparent’.³²² Favouring the ‘utilitarian’ form of prose writing, he argued that poets like painters, created objects that had ‘no meaning’.³²³ Words without meaning have no ‘verbal unity’, Sartre argues, and are ‘frittered away into sounds and strokes of the pen’.³²⁴

It is true that the prose-writer and the poet both write. But there is nothing in common between these two acts of writing except the movement of the hand which traces the letters. Otherwise their universes are incommunicable and what is good for one is not good for the other.³²⁵

By claiming that prose writing is an ‘attitude of mind’, Sartre suggests that there is no creative element involved, and if you put your mind to it the words will come easily.³²⁶ When philosophy becomes an ‘attitude of mind’, it becomes an ideology, and it is therefore only the content of the words, their message, that is relevant. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty argues against Sartre and Malraux over this type of restrictive conception of writing in his essay ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’. He returns to this problem in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

³²¹ Sartre, “What Is Writing?,” 110.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid., 107.

³²⁴ Ibid., 104–105.

³²⁵ Ibid., 107.

³²⁶ Ibid.

The denial of the relevance of revealing the creative processes of writing is comparable to the stance in painting practices of the classical periods when drawing too was kept private and was regarded as only a means to an end. As I have shown, the modern study of drawing practices has illuminated the essential role played by drawing in the coming into being of many works of art that would have once been thought to have been painted or carved directly with no previous uncertainties. We now know that in fact many of the developments in Italian Renaissance art were rehearsed and took shape on paper through drawing practice that did not use technical means; drawing and working studies were ‘vital to producing the enquiring, analytical, observational and creative reflexes of the artists whose work define the period’.³²⁷ In a similar fashion to the insistence during the Renaissance that the rules of perspective be applied to all painting, the written word also began to diverge from any connection it once had with drawing practice. Its reclassification as typography ran parallel to the insistence that perspective must ‘assign a structure to the visual space’ that Martine Reid describes as ‘a veritable corset determined by geometry and the precise limits of representation’.³²⁸ Many artists and writers of the 19th and 20th centuries challenged these restrictions of course, but Reid explains that there was a lingering mistrust among certain writers of any linkage of image and text.³²⁹

We are aware of the way in which Sterne and Mallarmé (to cite two of the best known enterprises) play with and challenge literary space. The end of the nineteenth century sees the invention of the comic strip in which text and image work together on the semantic field. But the very status of this “ninth art,” in principle reserved for children, bespeaks the condition of a poor relative of drawing with respect to writing.³³⁰

³²⁷ Chapman, *Fra Angelico to Leonardo*, 72.

³²⁸ Martine Reid, “Legible/Visible,” trans. Nigel P. Turner, *Yale French Studies*, no. 84 (1994): 4. See also: ‘...the geometrically constructed letters of the Renaissance theorists, Paccioli and his like, ...sought to restrict and confine the art by arriving at perfect, that is immutable forms.’, in Nicolette Gray, *Lettering as Drawing*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 4.

³²⁹ Reid, “Legible/Visible,” 5, fn.13.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

The Deconstructionists, such as Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, also challenged literary conventions in the late 1960s and early 70s, but rather than showing the work of writing in the raw state of its becoming, they engaged in what Clive Cazeaux has described as a deliberate disruption of text using puns and word-plays, and the ‘revivification of etymological roots’.³³¹ Derrida, de Man and the other literary theorists associated with Deconstruction shifted attention ‘to the way in which metaphors, turns of phrase, and distinctions adopted by the author can turn around and thwart her intention’. The Deconstructionists regarded ‘texts as works which could be interpreted purely on their own terms, looking only at the words of the page’: they were not concerned with ‘historical artifacts or reflections on events or insights into the life of the writer.’³³² Even though philosophy has acknowledged the development of art practice through aesthetics, the presentation of philosophy remains firmly rooted in the form of the printed word and rarely presents any indication of its formation, its process of becoming or its ‘textual genetics’. Reid claims that it took until the 70s, with an increasing interest by researchers in author’s manuscripts, that a reevaluation of the process of ‘textual production’ was instigated. This reevaluation changed the focus from the end product to the beginnings, ‘the germ of the written work’.³³³

Textual genetics reasserts the value of the active, fluid process that is the textual production of the writer “at work,” the evolution of the writing towards its final form. It does indeed take into account a chronology of its appearance in text form (and may also seek to reveal the traces of the unconscious in this raw material). And it goes still further: it watches out for signs of an energetic pen, or of a lazy one which hesitates, deletes, jots, scribbles, or draws. On this point, textual genetics is close to preoccupations of an aesthetic kind.³³⁴

³³¹ Clive Cazeaux, 'Introduction: Poststructuralism and Postmodernism' *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 374.

³³² Ibid., 373.

³³³ Reid, “Legible/Visible,” 3.

³³⁴ Ibid.

The use of the term ‘textual genetics’ in the 1970s refuted the previous decade’s rejection, via Roland Barthes, of any reference to the text’s history or the personality of the author.³³⁵ Indeed, even though Barthes introduced the idea of ‘the death of the author’ in 1968, by 1976 we find Barthes describing his own act of writing and comparing it to a ‘work of art’.

I feel my hand move, turn, join, dive, and lift, and often, through the act of correction, delete or expand a line, taking the space right up to the margin, thus constructing from the apparently functional lines of the letters a space that is quite simply that of a work of art. I am an artist, not because I am representing an object, but, in a more basic sense, because in writing my body knows the joy of drawing on and rhythmically incising a virgin surface (its virginity represents the infinitely possible).³³⁶

The transformation of a handwritten text into printed text eliminates all of these excesses, hesitations and second thoughts giving the impression of authority and certainty. All writing systems, Steven Fischer observes, ‘no matter how revered or innovative are imperfect and conventional.’³³⁷ This is because although writing is based on speech it does not seek to preserve speech in all its idiosyncrasies; the intention is to communicate information.³³⁸ The driving forces behind the development of writing systems, Fischer notes, are ‘precision, greater phonetic salience, resistance to change, unambiguity, veneration and many more, often superficial factors’.³³⁹ Throughout history, as well as writing systems adapting to speech, speech has been influenced by the written word and each advance in the technology of writing, the printing press, typewriter and computers for example, has further influenced how language is spoken.

³³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³³⁶ Roland Barthes in Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 1.

³³⁷ Steven Roger Fischer, *History of Writing* (Reaktion Books, 2004), 301.

³³⁸ Barry B. Powell, *Writing: Theory and History of the Technology of Civilization* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 5.

³³⁹ Fischer, *History of Writing*, 295.

Printing with moveable type changed language itself. Until the age of printing, every scribe who was writing creatively – that is not copying – wrote phonetically. He (only rarely she) tried to reproduce each word as he spoke it. (And copyists wrote according to local monastic or chancery guidelines) With printing new standards were set. Printers usually printed the languages of the commercial centre where their books were sold. This was done in order to be understood by the largest number of potential clients – in other words, for greater profit.³⁴⁰

Handwriting retains a connection with embodiment, and human fallibilities are often recorded along with the words, whereas printing avoids such errors. The process of printing, Fischer suggests, ‘ensures uncontamination and authenticity, converting the entire text into a seal of authority’.³⁴¹ However, while the printing process undoubtedly provides a more legible outcome, it also results in distancing the written word from its original human creation in favour of what Reid calls a ‘maximum degree of legibility’.

The legible (“a far clearer, more precise voice”) is now *too* legible. Such excess is perceived as a danger, and that danger is the danger of *detachment*. What the penstroke linked together, the printing press sets apart. The manuscript was a mirror of ink, an object both personal and personalized, but when it is transformed into print, that intimacy is shattered.³⁴²

The work of the mind by the hand in a hand-written text attracts the eye of the viewer in the same way a drawing does, as they are both direct records and traces of a human activity. This process is nullified in the mechanized printing process which, Reid insists, is not only used to ensure legibility but also serves to emphasise the printed word’s distance from aesthetic form, ‘text is a text, that is to say it exists to be read’.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 283.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 265.

³⁴² Reid, 9.

³⁴³ Ibid., 10.

Merleau-Ponty's manuscripts retain something of the process of making described by Barthes as they are not yet formed into a complete text, and in the case of *The Visible and Invisible* never will be. *The Visible and Invisible* can only give a reader clues as to how it would have developed. Many sections of the handwritten pages do not follow a linear sequence and instead expose the complex nature of creating a work of writing.

Drawing No.2. This is a drawing of a page from the manuscript for 'Eye and Mind'. In this drawing the right hand side of the page that I've left blank is in reality tightly packed with writing. I have concentrated instead on Merleau-Ponty's writing in the margins of the page and his use of arrows to link this text with the main body of text. The middle arrow leading from an x in a circle to the writing in the margins has been crossed out by Merleau-Ponty in blue, the colours he uses create a temporal component; as he changes his mind he changes the colour of his ink to make it clear to himself his thinking has moved on.

VI

Poubé

Il n'y a pas la expiation de l'attente spars
ni de "soulagement" ordonné ni de respect car - en fait -
à distance sans autre / pas de souvenir, en fait, pour la
méditation, l'attente n'est que de la souffrance de / l'attente et la
passion de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente.

Il n'y a pas la expiation de l'attente spars
ni de "soulagement" ordonné ni de respect car - en fait -
à distance sans autre / pas de souvenir, en fait, pour la
méditation, l'attente n'est que de la souffrance de / l'attente et la
passion de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente.

Il n'y a pas la expiation de l'attente spars
ni de "soulagement" ordonné ni de respect car - en fait -
à distance sans autre / pas de souvenir, en fait, pour la
méditation, l'attente n'est que de la souffrance de / l'attente et la
passion de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente. Et c'est la souffrance de l'attente à elle-même
qui est la souffrance de l'attente.

(1) l'attente de l'attente à elle-même
en la souffrance de l'attente

4.1.2 Paper: Supporting the word.

Functioning as a container for thought and observation, paper was (and still is) a cheap, durable and efficient surface on which to record marks made by the gestures of the hand, and in Merleau-Ponty's lifetime both writing and drawing took place by hand on paper. Paper also accommodates erasure, which drawing often utilizes in the choice of media used, but which writing, when using pen and ink, seems to ignore preferring to let any corrections accumulate on top of each other. For example, we can see in Merleau-Ponty's manuscript pages on which, as the corrections built up, he changed the colour of ink and used various personal marks that allowed him to continue with one train of thought, while indicating that there is more work needed on the page at a later date, but never entirely removing the text from the paper's surface.

Work on the manuscript, which took place in the late 1950s up until his death in 1961, was interrupted in a state well before it was ready to be typed up in a legible form; and he would have had no other option at the time, if his work was to be taken seriously, than to present the work in the form of a printed book. As Reid points out, 'writing is the reproduction of an established set of signs' and therefore it 'remains in the domain of the legible'.³⁴⁴ It would be judged on its content, and not on its 'aesthetic' values, as 'illegible writing shows things to be what they are not'. Therefore the manuscript, presented in its unfinished and at times illegible form, would have been seen as 'transgressive'.

That is why [illegible writing] is "sanctioned" by whatever means possible (by various authorities, from school on). It is accused of trying to hide something, of being a disguise. It is "read" (by graphologists and others) as a gesture of refusal, as antisocial. It is at least an indication of the tenuous, fragile nature of this legibility of the most basic kind. It shows the legible to be a category that is forever under threat, forever in danger of disappearing, of becoming lost, *despite* appearances, in a paradoxical obscurity where writing indicates in fact that the sign has been

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

remorsefully eaten away by its own figurative nature, and that it does indeed take almost nothing at all for the figure to resort back to its status as a mere drawing.³⁴⁵

To write legibly requires control. Contact with the hand on paper is essential in handwriting in a way that is not always the case in drawing; the range of marks used in drawing often require more expansive arm movements and distance from the paper, standing or sitting. Handwriting, in contrast, relies on a limited set of symbols that create words, and the body of the writer is similarly restricted in its movements. This creates an intense relationship with the spatiality of the paper and with the thought process that drives the mark-making. Serge Tisseron describes this mark-making process as ‘the ebb and flow of thought as it gets on and gets waylaid, multiplies, fades, and backs away’.³⁴⁶ Tisseron argues that in both handwriting and drawing ‘the “thrown out” gesture conjures up a trace, a line.’ The inscriber uses this line ‘which seems tied to his movement, ...to pull back the thought that has been cast out in the act of inscription.’³⁴⁷ This movement is essential for ‘thought to think itself through’ and for the production of meaning to occur.³⁴⁸ When it comes to reading a text and reading a drawing, the parallel remains unresolved for Tisseron, but ‘the fact that writing and drawing follow the same creative logic at the time of tracing is a matter beyond doubt’.³⁴⁹

This act of tracing gestures was not always carried out on paper of course - papyrus, clay tablets, ivory, wood and bone are all examples of surfaces that have served this purpose.³⁵⁰ The cheapness and durability of paper, however, allowed for correction, and for second thoughts to be indulged and recorded in a way that was not possible on other surfaces. The availability of paper can be seen as a determining factor in the nature of how thought could be recorded due to its versatility; marks can be erased or retained and reworked in parallel with the process of thinking, facilitating a continuity and reflection on thinking. Identifying Leonardo da Vinci as arguably the

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Tisseron, “All Writing Is Drawing,” 36.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁵⁰ Ian Sansom, *Paper: An Elegy* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), xix.

first artist to use a ‘process of continual, incessant sketching and drawing’, Ian Sansom observes that other artists before Leonardo probably had the same capacity for thinking through ideas, but they ‘simply weren’t using a material that allowed them first to express and then to store and keep their second thoughts for us to study’.³⁵¹ In addition, for the artist or author the paper they work on becomes an extension of themselves allowing them ‘to be present – or appear to be present – when in fact [they] are absent’.³⁵² Lines and marks made by hand on paper therefore communicate far more than the symbols, ideas and thoughts they represent.

[Paper] both breaks and bridges time and distance. I am talking to you now, for example, on paper. You cannot see me, and you cannot hear me. I may, for all you know, already be dead. But by the mysterious application of pen to paper, and by your patient reading we have between us conjured the illusion of communication: a voice on the page, and my disappearance into that voice on the page my self erasure.³⁵³

We also accumulate a proliferation of paper over a lifetime that survives, and in a sense replaces us, when we die; official documents, certificates, personal letters etc. ‘We are born human’, Sansom concludes, ‘but we are forever becoming paper, as paper becomes us, our artificial skin’.³⁵⁴

Merleau-Ponty seldom reflected on his own writing practice, although in 1945 in *Phenomenology of Perception* he did remark that ‘the paper, my fountain pen, are indeed there for me, but I do not explicitly perceive them’ (PP: 483). But I believe there is evidence that he was beginning to develop an awareness of the significance of his own process of constructing words on paper in his later work. For example, in *The Visible and the Invisible* he reflects on ‘the mutilated thought of the beginning’ when discussing the process of reflection. This ‘mutilated thought’ could only become visible when he creates words on the page. It is however, ‘only the ladder one pulls

³⁵¹ Ibid., 119. Sansom also points out that handmade paper was prohibitively expensive until the beginning of the 19th century.¹¹⁸

³⁵² Ibid., xxi.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., xix.

after oneself having climbed it', and by necessity, a means to an end and nothing more (VI: 35).³⁵⁵

Drawing No. 3. Made from a working note for *The Visible and the Invisible*, this drawing shows three small diagrams Merleau-Ponty inserted within the body of the text. Besides a few diagrams like these, none of the papers I saw contained any recognizable drawings. When my time was running out with the original manuscripts I made notes of the colours he used and continued to make copies from microfilm by tracing the marks projected onto paper placed on the base of the microfilm cabinet. This drawing contains all the writing and corrections on the note.

³⁵⁵ There are echoes in this passage to Wittgenstein who writes 'My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 1974), 89, §6.54.

l'air bleu

Projeté et "l'air bleu"
vert + 6 rotation

En fait, comme on voit (l'air bleu et l'air bleu)

Cher. f. l'air bleu 1936 : l'air bleu l'air bleu
par l'air des l'air bleu / et l'air bleu de l'air
l'air bleu l'air bleu

l'air bleu : l'air bleu :



en fait = la l'air bleu et l'air bleu - et ne sont
le l'air bleu et l'air bleu

l'air bleu fait de la l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu de la l'air bleu et l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu

visible sur la l'air bleu et l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu

En effet la l'air bleu et l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu



de l'air bleu et l'air bleu

à si on voit la l'air bleu est la l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu

l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu
l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu l'air bleu

4.1.3 Ink: the medium of language

Merleau-Ponty's intention for *The Visible and the Invisible*, according to Lefort, was to revisit many of the themes he had analysed in his early work: the thing, the body and the relationship between the seer and the visible, with a view to creating a new ontology. In order to do this, Merleau-Ponty felt he needed to confront the form of language that philosophy had traditionally inhabited and find an 'original mode of expression' for his philosophy. In the foreword to the published version of *The Visible and the Invisible* Lefort did not initially believe the language of art or poetry was an option Merleau-Ponty would have ever considered. But reflecting on the handwritten documents, Lefort modifies this opinion and acknowledges:

...when we read the writer, ...it turns out that his own words do not contain what they say, that their meaning always overflows immediate or direct signification, and that finally their power to open upon being is bound to the force of interrogation that animates them. Should we not understand that the philosophical language is precisely the interrogative language?³⁵⁶

Philosophical language as an 'interrogative' language indicates a forceful questioning and persistent re-examination of thoughts, ideas and concepts. This is a form of questioning that demands a response and, as Leonard Lawlor points out, is the 'guiding idea for Merleau-Ponty's final philosophy'.³⁵⁷ The arena in which this 'force of interrogation' takes place for Merleau-Ponty is handwritten on paper using ink and sometimes pencil without a preconceived plan or theory that would dominate the work.³⁵⁸ Meaning should instead be tested, questioned and re-examined in the act of writing and, as Merleau-Ponty himself writes, through 'an expression of experience by experience' (VI: 155). The interrogative language does not guarantee answers, but

³⁵⁶ Lefort, "Editors Foreword," xxxi.

³⁵⁷ Leonard Lawlor, "Verflechtung: The Triple Significance of Merleau-Ponty's Course Notes on Husserl's 'The Origin of Geometry,'" in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology: Including Texts by Edmund Husserl*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2002), xxxii.

³⁵⁸ Lefort, "Editors Foreword," xxvii.

the experience of writing down the process of questioning, searching and sometimes reaching dead ends, generates expression in the form of the written words and marks on the page.

Words written by hand in ink on paper commonly use a cursive style, joining the letters together to allow the writer to keep up with his or her thought. Ink's fluidity is more apparent in a handwritten text, and its volatility can sometimes lead to inconsistencies, when the ink does not flow or when too much ink floods the nib of the pen. While it is certain that Merleau-Ponty wrote with a fountain pen, I am less certain whether he also used a ballpoint pen (a Biro or Bic). The ink in a ballpoint pen is thicker and more viscous (based on printers ink) in order to dry more quickly and would have been available, in an affordable version, in Paris since 1950.³⁵⁹ Some of the inkblots on Merleau-Ponty's papers do seem to have the viscous quality of a ballpoint but he does not write about the media he uses or give any consideration to how his materials contribute to the experience of expressing his thoughts. His writing process was a vehicle for his thought and the writing instruments he used facilitated this. To put it simply, if he had tried to write with a stylus engraving into a clay tablet, or with a reed pen onto papyrus, his experience would have been completely different and his thinking would not have been accommodated as efficiently as it was using ink on paper.

Invented simultaneously by the Egyptians and the Chinese around four thousand years ago, ink has been valued ever since for its fluidity as it allows for creative innovation and stylistic variations. Originally composed of carbon or soot mixed with water and gum arabic or animal glue, the quality of ink was gradually developed to improve its stability and durability over time by refining these core ingredients.³⁶⁰ However, it was the development of the instruments for writing with ink that changed most, from brushes and quills to nibs and ballpoints, along with the invention of reservoirs to hold ink in the pen itself eliminating the necessity to repeatedly dip the

³⁵⁹ Philip Hensher, *The Missing Ink : The Lost Art of Handwriting (and Why It Still Matters)* (London: Macmillan, 2012), 220.

³⁶⁰ Simblet, *The Drawing Book*, 34–35.

nib into an inkpot. Most importantly these innovations attempted to link the speed of writing to the speed of thought.³⁶¹

This process is however disposed of in the finished product when a manuscript is typed up and then printed for publication. To print words on paper in the twentieth century (before digital printing) required ink to be rolled onto pre-prepared, carved letterblocks (each letter made in reverse) that had been arranged (backwards) into words and sentences by typesetters. These printed words therefore are assembled from letters that are separate from each other and are arranged in a clearly defined system that is easy to read: quite different from the handwritten cursive style that connects all the letters together.³⁶² Consistent but fragmented, printed words are observed and a route followed by the reader that has been carefully planned and laid out in advance. The excesses of the thought process that created the work have been erased prior to being printed, and the reader does not need to follow the dead ends and false starts that the author endured but can, as Tim Ingold has suggested, ‘survey the page as if from a great height.’

Routeing across it from point to point, like the Royal Navy on the high seas, [the reader] moves in terms of area. In doing so he occupies the page and asserts his mastery over it. But he does not inhabit it.³⁶³

In contrast, Reid’s earlier description of a handwritten manuscript as a ‘mirror of ink’ suggests that the reader does inhabit the same space as the writer when the work is written by hand: the reader follows the traces of the hand-made lines and gestures because a manuscript is ‘an object both personal and personalized’.³⁶⁴ Some writers, such as the novelist, poet and dramatist Victor Hugo (1802-1885) exploited the creative potential of writing by hand with creatively individualised manuscripts. Hugo’s writing, Reid notes, was ‘constantly accompanied by graphics’ and in many cases pushed to the limits of legibility.

³⁶¹ Innovations linking speech to the written word, in contrast required different technology and training, i.e., stenography and shorthand.

³⁶² Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 143.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁶⁴ Reid, “Legible/Visible,” 10.

...not to mention the endless and remarkably varied scribbles (each inkblot appears as an invitation to pictorial representation), caricatures, playlets, etc. Here, it is the work in its entirety which acquires an incredible graphic dimension, with the “penwork” that the author himself showed great interest in, as can be seen from the care he took with his notebooks and albums.³⁶⁵

Hugo would often take this activity to the point of ‘the negation of the writing,’ or ‘quite simply its elimination (one whole page is entirely covered with black ink)’.³⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty does not engage in this kind of ‘penwork’: there is no apparent playfulness or marginalia such as doodles in his manuscripts. He applies himself to the task at hand and does not veer too far from the creation of a text that is propelled by his philosophical ideas.

Drawing No. 4. This is another example of a diagram within the text of a working note. Again there is a lot of text missing from this drawing as my interest was focused on the drawing of the diagram. This diagram has been reproduced in the printed version of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The original drawing by Merleau-Ponty, however has not been used, it has been graphically reproduced and printed in reverse (VI: 241). In addition, although my original drawings are in pencil the copies documented here are now made using ink – through the printing process. Even though the printer has replicated the ink to look like pencil, the pencil marks are really only apparent in the original drawings.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

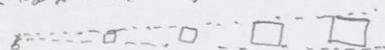
76

Mars 1960

Notion de "rayon de work" (d'après Smith)
(ou type d'habitats)

C'est l'idée, en un d'une bande de terre agricole

ce. Stimulation : tout a été fait pour
à partir de ces un d'habitats



ce. L'yt de fait les autres bandes et
petites bandes de travail.

ce. L'yt de fait les autres bandes et
petites bandes de travail.

4.2 Structure of Interrogation

The words ‘interrogative’ and ‘interrogation’ are used repeatedly by Merleau-Ponty throughout *The Visible and the Invisible*, and three of the chapters include the latter in their title; ‘Reflection and Interrogation’, ‘Interrogation and Dialectic’ and ‘Interrogation and Intuition’. While it was Lefort who constructed these chapters in the process of editing the manuscript these titles nevertheless imply that Merleau-Ponty is intent on developing a more rigorous philosophical structure for reflective and pre-reflective experience. Merleau-Ponty’s interrogation suggests a form of attention – of paying attention *to* something, through repeated questioning and cross-examination of himself as much as anything else.

Philosophy is not science, because science believes it can soar over its object and holds the correlation of knowledge with being as established, whereas philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question.
(VI: 27)

The process Merleau-Ponty is engaged in is an interrogation of the human experience of thinking, through the written word. In his hand-written pages we see this process in its rawest form, an outpouring of words, marks and personal symbols, tracking and recording his thought, working within the space of the page and sometimes against it. He fills the manuscript pages from the thoughts in his head, which feed into and from his notes, which generate more notes in a continual progression of the work.

The philosophy of reflection practices the philosophical interrogation and the resultant effort toward explicitness in a style that is not the sole possible one; it mixes in presuppositions which we have to examine and which in the end reveal themselves to be contrary to what inspires reflection. (VI: 32)

Reflection through the written word must use ‘presuppositions’ that result in an over explicit style which is contrary to experience but is necessary for coherence. But we must remember that this style of reflection is ‘not the sole possible one’. Merleau-Ponty’s examination of the work and practice of artists and painters like Cézanne

gave him glimpses of alternatives to a written interpretation of experience and reflection. He believed that the philosopher and the painter were both engaged in a process of expression, but because he concentrated so much of his efforts on the discipline of painting he also believed that the philosopher and the artist were separated by their use of materials (CD: 68).³⁶⁷ The method and materials of painters and philosophers may differ in Western culture, but if we look at the drawings made by artists, especially those made in the initial stages of drawing an object from observation for example, then we can see a similarity in the methods of investigation, of recording, reworking and rewriting. Both activities require intense concentration and are not concerned with the end product – that comes later on reflection, if at all.

Lefort suggests that a transformation of Merleau-Ponty's language occurred between 1952, shortly after abandoning work on *The Prose of the World*, and 1959, the year before he writes 'Eye and Mind'. It is during this period that Merleau-Ponty 'discovers the delusions in which "philosophies of consciousness" are trapped' and which he himself had not escaped.³⁶⁸ In order to redefine his approach he began to construct an ontological foundation by returning to the analyses of the body and perception within a rough draft, originally entitled *The Origin of Truth*, which eventually became *The Visible and the Invisible*.³⁶⁹

The philosophical ideas that Merleau-Ponty was pursuing were rooted in finding a philosophical language that is authentic yet does not become mistaken for poetry or art. He does, however, examine the work of writers who experiment with language, even if there is no evidence that he would follow their example. For instance, in his radio lectures *The World of Perception*, broadcast in 1948 (but not published until 2002), Merleau-Ponty reflects on the work of the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

The poet...according to Mallarmé, replaces the usual way of referring to things, which presents them as 'well known', with a mode of expression that describes the essential structure of the thing and accordingly forces us to enter into that thing. (WP: 75)

³⁶⁷ Gilmore, "The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty," 299.

³⁶⁸ Lefort, "Editor's Preface," *The Prose of the World*, xv.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

Mallarmé's 'acute sense of poetry' Merleau-Ponty observes, is carried 'entirely by language' but this language does not refer to 'the world as such, nor to prosaic truth nor to reason.' Mallarmé is engaged in the 'creation of language, one which cannot be fully translated into ideas.' In other words the perceived object and the poem are things in themselves, and their form cannot be separated from their content: 'what is being presented cannot be separated from the way in which it presents itself to the gaze' (WP: 75). Merleau-Ponty is making a clear distinction here between the form and content of poetry, which can be inhabited and entered into, and philosophical language, which has no form only content to be received in a detached way, from on high, in line with the views of Sartre.³⁷⁰ However, Merleau-Ponty goes on to question this distinction and notes that some of his contemporaries, in particular Maurice Blanchot, had been suggesting that Mallarmé's approach to poetry should be extended to the novel and literature in general.

A successful novel would thus consist not of a succession of ideas or theses but would have the same kind of existence as an object of the senses or a thing in motion, which must be perceived in its temporal progression by embracing its particular rhythm and which leaves in the memory not a set of ideas but rather the emblem and the monogram of those ideas. (WP: 76)

To pursue this reflection fully, Merleau-Ponty would have needed to acknowledge and embrace his own practice of putting words down on the page, by hand using a pen and ink on paper. But he continues to contemplate the idea that philosophy could become more immersed in the 'world of culture' instead of standing apart from it.

If these observations are correct and if we have succeeded in showing that a work of art is something we perceive, the philosophy of perception is thereby free at a stroke from certain misunderstandings that might be held against it as objections. The world of perception consists not just of all natural objects but also of paintings, pieces of music, books and all that the Germans call the 'world of culture'. Far from having

³⁷⁰ See Thomas Baldwin, "Introduction," in *The World of Perception* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 26.

narrowed our horizons by immersing ourselves in the world of perception, far from being limited to water and stone, we have rediscovered a way of looking at works of art, language and culture, which respects their autonomy and their original richness.
(WP: 76)

Merleau-Ponty is conscious here of the possibility of creating work that would be misunderstood or objected to because it does not conform to expectations. This is a dilemma that he tackles again in *The Visible and the Invisible*, when he explores and interrogates the ontological implications of a philosophy of perception, which respects its own autonomy and ‘original richness’. Again, however, it is not possible to get a true sense of this from the printed version which does not give any indication of how his work was constructed – his process of putting words down on the page.

Drawings No.5 and No.6. It was common for Merleau-Ponty to use both sides of the paper and the next two drawings are of two notes written on either side of the same page. The outline I have made in pencil around the text in drawing No.5 shows the size of a typical note (smaller than the manuscript pages). In drawing No.6 Merleau-Ponty has contained some of the text in a blue outline open on the right-hand side.

enlignes de quelques ~~est~~ incisable, plus je suis
 doute, version ~~de~~ de fait à des limites vides.
 mais à l'âge des vps
 n'est le point?
 mais de tout autre tout ~~est~~ ~~un~~ en son
 mais qui ont beaucoup vécu à mon égard ~~est~~ —
 Riforme à l'air ~~est~~ d' (Orlovsky) ^(Menschikov)
 u une - a' - (121-122)
 son avec un enlignes ~~mais~~ un élogne. On un
 l'ouait l'ouait de la à chers pure que si l'ouait
 n'ait un, vps ~~est~~ - la vps ce l'ouait —
 le a pps qui nom... L'ouait est si vps ~~est~~ n'ait
est - l'ouait. la est est est (120-123)
 l'ouait est (l'ouait) et l'ouait de monde est
 (125-129)
 Par la' vps à la est est le x est:
est - l'ouait est est, est est
 l'ouait de vps est.
 l'ouait est l'ouait à l'ouait: non
 [la est est; que est est
 le chiasma.]
est est est est est (123)
 Conclusion: est est est
 la philosophie est est est
 (125) (126)
 (126)
 TWP Exemple la
 la
 le

10 months (p. 117).
 10 months H. 12-15
 6 days H. 125-130
 100-130

4.2.1 Aspects of reversibility

At the end of the chapter ‘The Intertwining - The Chiasm’, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that words should not be seen as a replacement or a more genuine version of experience, an added layer of ““psychic reality”” (VI: 155). The belief that words can achieve this substitution has resulted in a ‘landscape overrun with words as with an invasion’ he writes (VI: 155). Instead we need to recognize, ‘as Husserl says’, that the language of philosophy has the capacity to restore the ‘power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience’ (VI: 155). While he believes that this approach can clarify the ‘special domain of language’ he goes on to state, after Valéry, that:

...language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth. (VI: 155)

These two aspects of reversibility are encompassed within Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of ‘flesh’. It is this idea that M.C. Dillon has identified as key to understanding how Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘reversibility’ works within our ‘expression of experience by experience’ and yet is the expression or ‘voice of no one, since it is the very voice of things’. Expression, therefore, is attributed to experience rather than to a subject.

Experience is an event in the contact of flesh with flesh, sentient flesh with flesh that may or not be sentient. Experience expresses itself in language and the language that speaks is the voice of things. Things demand expression, the world demands its song and predelineates the lyrics.³⁷¹

I would argue that this pre-delineation is even more apparent when applied to drawing practice and by extension to handwritten text in the development of ideas. If

³⁷¹ M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana U.P, 1988), 214–215.

experience is, as Dillon writes, an ‘event in the contact of flesh with flesh’, then materials and processes are constitutive moments rather than means to an end. In Merleau-Ponty’s manuscripts and working notes, I witnessed the expression of his experience. My response and engagement with his papers adds another layer of experience, which can be presented to a wider audience in a way that the original documents cannot. My drawings also display elements of Merleau-Ponty’s working process that cannot be explained fully in words. In addition, these drawings reflect back to Merleau-Ponty’s initial encounters with these ideas within the work by artists such as Cézanne and Klee in particular.

Merleau-Ponty was initially attracted to Cézanne’s work, for example, because he disregarded the historical conventions of painting ‘realistically’ in favour of painting ‘truthfully’ – faithful to his own initial experience of his perception – to the thing perceived. To paint realistically, in the convention of his times, Cézanne would have had to use the scientific methods of perspective to mould his painting into realistic forms. The philosopher in writing of his experience, his thought, had no choice but to abandon the traces of experience as they occurred within ‘embodied consciousness’ in order to articulate that experience to others. However, expression through the ‘articulation’ of experience, Gilmore argues, ‘risks introducing distortions because it casts the experience in just those explicit and objective representations that scientific description employs’ (and phenomenology rejected) as it ‘is alien to the experience as it occurs to an embodied consciousness’.³⁷² It is this contrast between ‘experience’ and its ‘linguistic articulation’ that Merleau-Ponty seeks to dissolve, Gilmore observes, ‘suggesting that the structures of the two are interdependent.’

Here, at least, his treatment serves as a counterinstance to the charge that a philosophy of art invariably subordinates art to philosophy or deforms the art in making it amenable to philosophical analysis. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges in a way that the artist can engage in a kind of philosophical analysis or experience that is not entirely open to the philosopher.³⁷³

³⁷² Gilmore, “The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty,” 299.

³⁷³ Ibid.

Again, if the work of the artist were only considered in its publically exhibited form, then Merleau-Ponty would have indeed perceived a gap in the activities of the philosopher and the artist. But from the early 50s on, with Merleau-Ponty's recognition of the role of drawing and line in artistic practice, I believe he was beginning to discover that the gap was not as wide as he once thought: 'the figurations of literature and philosophy', he writes in 'Eye and Mind', are no more settled than those of painting' (EM: 149). Revealing the structure of Merleau-Ponty's interrogation into his own methods opens up an engagement with his work on a level that cannot, in my opinion, be accessed in the printed version. The dense printed prose of Merleau-Ponty's published philosophy allows us to understand the ideas he is proposing and to engage with his arguments; we can write on the pages of the book, underline words, highlight them in colour, and make notes in the margins, write essays, theses, and engage in critical discussions. These valid and valuable modes of engagement do not, however, reach far below the surface (to the 'flesh') of experience, penetrating from the exterior meaning into the core inner meaning. The aspects of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty returned to again and again need to be actively explored below the surface of reason to reach into his process of thinking, and to be accessed just as visual artists display their work – often with all the detritus of thought included.

The drawings I made of his writing are evidence of my own embodied engagement in rendering his embodied act of writing visible (this is what I saw); through tracing his thought processes I drew the writing's structure. Paying attention to his drafts in this way and recording them, 'translating' them into drawings, opens up an avenue of engagement with his work that suits and reflects the ontology he was developing. This is a different kind of 'translation' from the one offered through the printed word. The drawings are limited by time and depend on my training and experience as an artist to connect with and record what I see, while negotiating the restrictions of my human capabilities within the institutional regulations of the library archives. To have photographed or photocopied his papers would not have involved a temporal dimension or a corporeal aspect. The drawings therefore are not replicas: my aim was not to make exact copies that can be read as text. In fact, many of my drawings have large areas of text missing, some of them are more about the colour used, the pattern

of the marks, or the arrows and other symbols beyond the alphabet and punctuation. By following the lines of writing (usually backwards) I make words without intending to – drawing (rather than re-writing) them feels more like paying attention to details that are too numerous or detailed to capture them all – like when drawing the leaves of a tree or the stones in a wall, it is sometimes necessary to resort to approximations.

Drawing No. 7. The working notes are calmer than the manuscript pages, with fewer corrections and more empty space around the words. At first sight some of these notes resemble verses or poems. This drawing, dated May 1960, is a complete copy of a working note Merleau-Ponty made in blue ink (VI: 251).

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4.2.2 Thought and embodiment

It is through our bodies, within their limitations and experiences, that our perceptions of the world are governed, but it is crucial for Merleau-Ponty that we realize we are part of the world, in it and of it, not viewing it from a distance. Therefore, in the act of copying Merleau-Ponty's manuscript, to make the marks he made I had to figure out how he used his body, as the way he positioned the word on the page was quite unusual. The way he sat, the angle he held his arm and hand, determined the character of his handwriting, and his body position seemed to remain constant as he moved the paper around to add more text. Merleau-Ponty's tiny handwriting and its severe slant – the writing on the right decreases and the sentences get steadily shorter as the margin on the left widens – was very difficult to replicate and was an unnatural posture for me to draw in so that it became painful after a while. It was also easier to work backwards, in reverse, over the text so that rather than copying words I was copying shapes; if I recognized words my instinct was to write them, in my own much larger handwriting, rather than copying them as they had been written by Merleau-Ponty.

My time with each manuscript was restricted by the BnF archive to eight days. Within that time I tried to reproduce as many pages as possible by hand, and at least one complete drawing of a heavily corrected and multi-coloured page (Drawing No.1). However, because I had to work in the library archive's reading rooms and was not allowed to use ink, only pencil, these needed to be sharpened constantly, working on paper that matched, as close as possible, the size and weight used in the manuscripts. Sometimes I ignored the text altogether and just made drawings of the marks, arrows and other corrections and indicators of Merleau-Ponty's reworking process. This was much easier and quicker as these are faster, sometimes violent, marks (in one instance the nib of his pen had ripped through the paper).

Throughout this process I was aware of how chaotic Merleau-Ponty's writing looked compared to many of the other ancient manuscripts being examined alongside of me in the BnF reading room. The handwriting in these much older texts, in beautifully formed calligraphy, was graceful in a loose rhythmic manner; their flowing movements seemed closer to Eastern traditions than the 20th century Western text I was examining. While Merleau-Ponty used a metallic nib to write with, these

ancient documents would have been written using a quill made from a sharpened bird feather. It was this change in particular, from quill to metallic nib, Tim Ingold maintains, that changed how the Western writer used their body.

We are used today to allowing the hand that holds the pen to rest on the page while most of the work of manipulation is done by the fingers. Thus our only arm movements consist of periodic adjustments of the hand's resting position as the writing proceeds across the page, while the remainder of the body is relatively passive and immobile. Perhaps this contributes to a feeling of disembodiment, to a sense that, in writing, the hand, along with the tool it holds, obeys the dictates of the mind that inhabits a world of its own, aloof from the action it initiates.³⁷⁴

In contrast Ingold describes how a Chinese calligrapher would be totally absorbed in the action of writing, 'with the whole of his being, indissolubly body and mind'.³⁷⁵ The writer and the materials achieved a sense of unity as lettering, drawing and painting were considered virtually different branches of the same activity.³⁷⁶ Writing as lettering in the Eastern tradition would normally mean brush-drawn calligraphy. This was a discipline that was practiced by most artists in Eastern Asia using the same brush and the same types and variations of line as those used in painting.³⁷⁷ While modern nibs and pens have reservoirs for ink, a brush and a quill need to be regularly dipped in ink, a movement that would be incorporated into the rhythm of the writing process. Furthermore, the use of ink in painting, as well as a brush for writing, is described by Stephen Addiss as a 'significant feature of East Asian art for more than a millennium'.³⁷⁸ Anyone who was literate would have learned to write with brush and ink on paper, 'using thousands of different scripts':

³⁷⁴ Ingold, *Lines*, 144.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Gray, *Lettering as Drawing*, 1–2.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Stephen Addiss, "The Ink Painting Tradition And Tawara Yūsaku," in *Universe Is Flux: The Art of Tawara Yūsaku* (Indianapolis, IN : Seattle, WA: Indianapolis Museum of Art ; University of Washington Press, 2011), 25.

This meant that scholars, monks, and poets – in fact, all educated people – developed considerable skills with the brush and ink and could move easily from calligraphy to images.³⁷⁹

This was made more straightforward by the Chinese system of words written as characters, many of which began as pictographs, which made it ‘especially easy to move from writing to painting and back again’.³⁸⁰ In contrast, Addis continues, Western painting traditions do not use the same materials for writing.

Instead, tempera and then oil paints – and now perhaps acrylics – have been the primary tools of painting for some centuries, along with brushes that are quite different from the pens and pencils of ordinary writing. Walls, wooden panels, and canvas have been the major surfaces utilized, instead of paper or silk.³⁸¹

In addition the training and materials to become an artist, (associated with the body and not the mind), in the West are quite separate and distinct from literary training, (associated with the mind and not the body), while in East Asia writing and painting ‘merely require a slightly different understanding and use of line and form’.³⁸² Additionally, written characters were considered by the Chinese artists, and later by viewers and collectors, to be ‘depictions of the mind, the traces of profound thought’:

Facing a painting or calligraphy by an important figure meant that one was almost literally in his or her presence; and this kind of communing with someone highly admired, usually from the past, meant a great deal – perhaps even more so when the artist was not a professional painter but an important poet, philosopher, or monk.³⁸³

It is notable however, as Ingold observes, that this idea of a unity that exists between thought, embodiment, marks made and materials used was once also embraced in the

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 26.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 26.

³⁸² Ibid., 25.

³⁸³ Ibid., 26–27.

writing traditions of the West, but was abandoned in favour of diminishing the role of the body to a mere “conduit between the mind and the surface of the paper”, authentically passing messages and content from one to the other’.³⁸⁴ With the invention of the typewriter keyboard this diminished role of the body was further cemented as the hand and the arm became even more restricted.

Drawing No. 8. This is a drawing of the first page of the essay ‘Eye and Mind’. There are three other attempts to start this essay which, although heavily corrected and then abandoned Merleau-Ponty didn’t throw away: they have all been retained in his documents at the BnF.

³⁸⁴ Ingold, *Lines*, 144.

4.2.3 Bridging the gap

In the earlier version of ‘Indirect Language’, published in *Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty reflected on the ‘perceptual conversation’ that occurs between art forms.

The history in which the artist participates (and it is better the less he thinks about “making history” and honestly produces *his* own work as he sees it) is not a power before which he must genuflect. It is the perceptual conversation woven together by all speech, all valid works and actions, each, according to its place and circumstance, contesting and confirming the other, each one re-creating all others. (PW: 86)

Although he wanted to find a way to connect his own activity as a writer to the practices of painters he admired, the Western traditions of art-making, art history and politics had constructed boundaries and hierarchies between and around creative processes that complicated their interaction. However, Merleau-Ponty’s disillusionment with politics and history in his later life opened up new possibilities in his writing and understanding of art practices that, I believe, he was beginning to apply to his own philosophy.

It was phenomenology that provided the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s initial philosophical enquires into perception, in particular Husserl’s advocacy of a philosophy that operated within the life-world rather than surveying it from a distance. Husserl also provided the model for Merleau-Ponty’s own efforts, John O’Neill notes, ‘in uncovering the ontological history of perception and expression in art, literature, language and philosophy.’³⁸⁵ Husserl’s commitment to a philosophical approach through phenomenology was never reduced to a ‘methodical certitude’, however, and similarly the unfinished documents that comprise both *The Prose of the World* and *The Visible and the Invisible* do not give any indication of method to guide the editors.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ John O’Neill, “Translator’s Introduction: Language and the Voice of Philosophy,” in *The Prose of the World* (London: Heinemann, 1974), xl.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

...we do not find in *The Prose of the World*, any more than in other words of Merleau-Ponty, an exposition of method. By the same token, what we find of this in working notes and programmatic statements does not lie there through any failure of inclusion or organisation but stands as it is – the trace of a philosopher's working life to be understood the way he himself spoke of the artist's sketches.³⁸⁷

The works in progress that are contained in Merleau-Ponty's incomplete manuscripts do not represent failure, but are, like an artist's working drawings, the traces of a working life. Artists' sketches and drawings, however, are never translated into a universal form the way handwriting is when it is transformed into printed text. The words surrounding drawings or images of drawings may try to influence how the work is read, but it is mostly left up to the viewer to make sense of the work based on their own experience and situation. In fact, as we have seen with the examples of Klee and Twombly, artists will often incorporate illegibility into their work to encourage the viewer to actively engage in experience beyond their comprehension.

Similarly the South African artist William Kentridge has recently spoken of his interest in 'questions of imperfect translation and construction' that adds an element of 'provisionality' which he uses in his own work to encourage an active participation from the viewer.

I am thinking here of a bridge or a plank over the gap of what you don't hear or don't understand, or of what's not in the narrative and hence requires the activity of the viewer.³⁸⁸

Kentridge's technique of making charcoal drawings, which are filmed using stop-motion animation, is credited along with other artist's of the mid-1990s with demonstrating the renewed importance of drawing practice. Situating his work, which often tackles political and human rights issues, within the sphere of cartoons and animation challenges our perception of art forms usually reserved for children.³⁸⁹ His

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ William Kentridge and Rosalind C. Morris, *That Which Is Not Drawn* (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 5.

³⁸⁹ Rosalind Krauss in, *Art Since 1900*, 652.

charcoal drawings are heavily worked and then partially erased and redrawn for each frame of the film; erasure therefore becomes part of the construction and performance of the work rather than its negation. In addition the ideas and story develop within the activity of making rather than on a pre-planned storyboard: ‘The activity and the performance, whether it’s the performance of drawing or the performance of speech and conversation, is also the engine driving new thoughts.’³⁹⁰ Connecting the activity and performance of making and speech to ‘the engine driving new thoughts’ exemplifies the role bodily gestures play in expression and communication. Kentridge also suggests that it is possible for an artist to maintain a place for themselves where they can ‘establish meaning in the world’ that would not be susceptible to ‘cross-examination’.³⁹¹ The moving image allows Kentridge to avoid meaning that is static and rigid: his work is as much about becoming as it is about being.

Merleau-Ponty too understood how art and artists inhabited a place apart from the rules of language and grammar they could, he believed, draw upon a ‘fabric of brute meaning’ and do so ‘in full innocence’ (EM: 123). Whereas for the writer and the philosopher, he writes in ‘Eye and Mind’, ‘we want opinions and advice’; they are not allowed ‘to hold the world suspended’ the way a visual artist can (EM: 123). These statements indicate something of the frustration Merleau-Ponty felt for the place in the world he, as a philosopher, must inhabit and the forms of expression available to him to maintain that place and reputation and avoid rejection.

...the most insignificant student, after Nietzsche, would flatly reject philosophy if he or she were told that it did not teach us how to live life to the fullest. It is as if in the painter’s calling there were some urgency above all other claims on him. Strong or frail in life, but incontestably sovereign in his rumination of the world, possessed of no other “technique” than the skill his eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting, he gives himself entirely to drawing from the world – with its din of history’s and scandals – *canvases* which will hardly add to the angers or hopes of humanity; and no one complains. (EM: 123)

³⁹⁰ Kentridge and Morris, *That Which Is Not Drawn*, 11. Many of Kentridge’s films are available to view online for example ‘Felix in Exile’ can be accessed on at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaTnchoukdY>

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

This may be an idealistic view of how artists work but it does touch upon the dilemma, identified by Husserl, of the change that 'naïvely performed acts' must 'necessarily undergo' in the process of reflection that is needed to record those 'acts' in words.³⁹² A process of reflection and recording experience in words is necessary to achieve 'firm results, capable of being self-evidently reidentified on many occasions' in other words outcomes that are quantifiable, measurable and communicable to others in verbal form.³⁹³ Merleau-Ponty addresses this problem through an investigation of bodily gesture that Dillon argues, provides significant and necessary evidence of the possibility of bridging the 'gap between prelinguistic and linguistic phases in the evolution of the significantly speaking animal'.³⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty recognises that artists record these bodily gestures in the marks they make and the visual language they develop. Is it not fitting, therefore, to consider the marks of Merleau-Ponty's own gestures as he worked towards shaping and forming his ideas? His search for a language was in itself a language of expression, although it is not clear that he was convinced of that himself. In fact, I would argue that we are left with a gap in his theory of expression when his own experience of writing is only translated into the language of words and prose as it appears in printed text.

Drawing No. 9. Several of Merleau-Ponty's working notes are made on College de France headed notepaper. In this note we can see how he moved the paper around to write in different directions. The space to the right of two lines of vertical writing is in reality filled with text.

³⁹² Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Part 1:255 Volume 2 Introduction §3.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 187.

4.3 Connecting Meaning

Merleau-Ponty uses two words *sens* and *signification*, which are usually translated into one word in English, *meaning*. Meaning has therefore, two distinct aspects for Merleau-Ponty. *Sens*, which is derived from the verb *sentir* (to feel or to smell), refers to the meaningfulness of the perceptual world; the meaning we intuit through our senses and exists without the need for a constructed language. *Signification* is meaning that has been formed and made available to us through words, language and speech.³⁹⁵ Meaning as *signification*, however, is dependent on *sens*, and not the other way around. In fact, for Merleau-Ponty, the meaning found in words, language and speech are not separate from the corporeal meaning of *sens* in which thought and flesh originate. In the introduction to *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty argues against the idea that meaning can only be found through language.

But listen, someone will say, the reason why speech is more than noise or sound is that thought has deposited a burden of meaning in it – primarily its lexical or grammatical meaning – so that there is never any contact except between thought and thought. Of course sounds only speak for thought, but that does not mean that speech is derivative or secondary. Of course the very system of language has its thinkable structure. But when we speak we do not think about it as a linguist does; we do not even think about it – we think about *what we are saying*. (S: 18)

Thinking and speaking ‘overlap one another’, and that overlapping also occurs when thought is written down as words, through expression: ‘Expression is a matter of reorganising things-said, affecting them with a new index of curvature, and bending them to a certain enhancement of meaning’ (S: 19). The connection of meaning to language takes place through expression, through a gathering of ‘that which is to be said, and that which ‘is as yet no more than a precise uneasiness in the world of things-said’ (S: 19). The activity of expression assembles language from ‘intercorporeal communication’ our ‘afterthoughts and underthoughts’, which, remain private and secret until language makes them public ‘and almost *visible*’ (S: 19).

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 215.

These transformations of private into public, of events into meditations, of thought into spoken words and spoken words into thought, this echo coming from everywhere makes it such that in speaking to others we also speak to ourselves, and speak of what exists. (S: 20)

Our thoughts are not only made up of words, however. We are able to understand and search for meaning in marks and symbols that do not have any linguistic function. Conventional language evolved from primitive gesticulation Dillon notes, and involved the ‘increasing separation of sound/mark/signifier from meaning/signified.’³⁹⁶ Language may be detached from its referent but it never completely loses its ‘corporeality; its flesh is another body which is “less heavy” and “more transparent,” yet nonetheless worldly flesh.’³⁹⁷ The sign’s connection to the world ‘which remains its origin and final measure’ is the very reason why we find meaning in words, as Dillon observes:³⁹⁸

What happens when a new text begins to make sense, when words that were initially connected only by juxtaposition begin to resonate with each other and display such a cohesive unity that none could be altered without disturbing the meaning of the whole? We read the text sequentially, word by word, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence. But these elements do not acquire their proper meaning as parts until they are seen in the context of the whole that it is their purpose to convey.³⁹⁹

It is only by connecting the parts that meaning emerges, but how, Dillon asks, ‘do we arrive at the whole – since understanding it is presupposed for the elements that convey it to perform their function?’⁴⁰⁰ For Merleau-Ponty the generation of meaning is rooted in reversibility and his concept of *flesh*. Body and language both ‘resonate with the world in the generation of meaning’.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 219.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

In one case Merleau-Ponty speaks of corporeal intentionality; in the other, he speaks of the significative intention. In both cases the intention, the process of apprehending/constituting meaning, is grounded in a response to the world, and in both cases the meaning taken from the world returns to the world to inform it. This is the circuit of expression and sedimentation, but now it is conceived as a relation of flesh to itself rather than as a relation of consciousness to thing.⁴⁰²

The process of ‘apprehending/constituting meaning’ can often be deliberately waylaid and diverted from conventional forms of language when artists and writers attempt to prolong the experience of searching or defeat the search altogether. Merleau-Ponty’s interest in the work of writers who used experimental forms is clear from his references to authors such as Mallarmé, (as well as Rimbaud and Artaud) but he doesn’t explore their work to the same extent as he does with painters and visual artists. Reflecting on ‘The Book’ that Mallarmé never ultimately realized in a published form Merleau-Ponty writes:

...it is Mallarmé, at the other extreme of the field of speech, who is fascinated by the empty page because he wanted to say everything. He postponed indefinitely writing The Book, leaving us in the name of his *works* writings which circumstances snatched from him...(PW: 145)

Merleau-Ponty left no evidence of attempting to explore ‘the other extreme of the field of speech’ to the same extent as Mallarmé, even though the language he uses is often poetic, and he frequently uses metaphor. But the form his manuscript pages were aiming for, their structure, was prose.

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in its published form is not poetry: there are no line breaks in his prose, for example, to break up the structure of the text, or rhythmic or rhyming sequences. In printed form the text is dense, long sentences, few paragraphs; although ‘Eye and Mind’ is, unusually, divided into five sections. His hand written text is also dense but its colours and additional marks, the arrows etc., draw our attention to the gesture that made the marks and chose the colours. His arm moving

⁴⁰² Ibid.

freely and spontaneously in reaction to the words, to reject, rework, underline or emphasise. As readers we must sort through this debris to find the words and make sense of them. When this is not possible and we give up, we can then engage with the work as if it were a drawing. The marks, traces and gestures made sense to Merleau-Ponty, they are not random doodles and squiggles, but a form of communication with himself and perhaps to his future self – ‘this is what must be done next’ or – ‘what do I want to say here?’ Some of the marks, corrections and negations are recognizable to us as such because they are universal symbols: x’s, arrows, strike-throughs and underline, for example are understood in many languages even though the words underneath these marks may be foreign to the reader.

Drawing No.10. Some of the working notes have very little written on them. This is a complete copy of four lines of text written in black ink floating in the space of the page.

Donc on va
à ~~la~~ voir :
Klaus le fils de Louis
le fils de Louis.

4.3.1 Translation

A written text, whether it is a novel, prose or poetry, is usually expected to contain meaning either explicit or implied. This meaningfulness is reassuring when it is easy to find and frustrating when meaning is withheld in some abstract or vague way, or if it does not adhere to the rules of literary language. This process is complicated further when translating a written text from one language into another as it involves a certain degree of compromise to find equivalent words and phrases to effectively capture the meaning of the original text. While a perfect translation from one language to another may not always be possible, Graham Parkes reminds us that ‘this does not necessarily rule out communication altogether – especially if both sides learn the other’s language’.⁴⁰³ The English translator of *Signs*, Richard C. McCleary, compares the difficulties we find when we encounter a foreign language to our encounters with forms of creative expression, which ‘after all are always alien to our already established languages.’⁴⁰⁴ McCleary describes creative expression as a ‘thought in act’ (whether that be speaking language or painting) that learns to express what has been perceived ‘only by drawing upon the past expression present in the body’s hidden motor power and making its intended meanings visible.’⁴⁰⁵ We therefore strive for recognizable meanings in the work we write or make ourselves, in order to communicate to others, and search for meaning in the work of others in order to understand.

When words on the page have been written by hand the creative expression, the ‘thought in act’, is more evident, and when an author is not available for consultation, an editor or translator needs to make decisions about how to clean up the text to make it viable for publication. McCleary reveals ‘the countless epigrams and counsels of despair of every translator’ adding that ‘a look at

⁴⁰³ Graham Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: UH Press, 1987), 216.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard C. McCleary in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern U.P, 1964), xxii.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty's style will let [the reader] guess how much "translation" is a matter of an existential "transformation"!'⁴⁰⁶

In a working note dated May 2 1959, Merleau-Ponty writes of his experience of two conversations he had in English on a trip to Manchester.

The taxi driver at Manchester, saying to me (I understood only a few seconds later, so briskly were the words "struck off"): I will ask the police where *Brixton Avenue* is. - - Likewise, in the tobacco shop, the woman's phrase: *Shall I wrap them together?* Which I understood only after a few seconds – and *all at once* – ... (VI: 189)

This is how the text appears in the printed version but in the actual note the woman's phrase is written by Merleau-Ponty (in English) '*Shall I wrapp them together?*' While it simplifies our reading of the note to have the word 'wrap' spelt correctly in the printed version, when I saw the word misspelt in the handwritten note, I could feel Merleau-Ponty's sense of disorientation. The extra 'p' is an excess, surplus to requirements, but it held my attention for a second. I realised something was wrong with the word before I realised exactly what, just as Merleau-Ponty writes that it took a few seconds for him to understand what was being said to him in a language that was not his mother tongue.

The practice of translation, John Berger explains, 'reminds us that a language cannot be reduced to a dictionary or stock of words or phrases.'⁴⁰⁷ A spoken language has a life of its own 'it is a body, a living creature, whose physiognomy is verbal and whose visceral functions are linguistic'.⁴⁰⁸ The creaturely nature of language means that it encompasses both the intelligible and the unintelligible.⁴⁰⁹ A translation that captures the true nature of the original text therefore 'demands a return to the pre-verbal' and, Berger writes, when he begins

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ John Berger, "John Berger: 'Writing Is an off-Shoot of Something Deeper,'" *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/12/john-berger-writing-is-an-off-shoot-of-something-deeper>.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

a work of translation he ‘reads and rereads the words of the original text in order to penetrate through them to reach, to touch, the vision or experience that prompted them’.⁴¹⁰

Translation is necessary to convert text from the author’s native language into other languages using the many procedures and structures languages have in common to connect them. By reducing translation to its structures and procedures alone, however, results in the omission of all the non-verbal nuances of the original mother tongue, and the other marks of the thought process, which would have been learned through body language and experience. Converting a handwritten text into a printed text, even when the language of origin remains the same, is also a form of translation in that it omits the bodily, non-verbal elements that were essential to the making of the written work. In contrast, drawing practice stays connected to its origins, its embodied non-verbal ‘mother tongue’, when I’m drawing, Berger writes, ‘I try to unravel and transcribe a text of appearances,’ this language of drawing may be indescribable in verbal language yet for Berger it has an ‘assured place in my mother tongue.’⁴¹¹ Drawing does not use the prescribed structures and procedures of written language: rather it combines an activity of pre-reflection, or the unreflected, with reflection incorporated within its processes. In the section of the manuscript *The Visible and the Invisible* entitled ‘Reflection and Interrogation’ Merleau-Ponty refers to the ‘great philosophies of reflection’ in Spinoza and Kant that are a ‘circle of unreflected and reflection’ (VI: 34). This process, he writes, must begin with the unreflected ‘because one does have to begin’ even though this state of being must then be rendered comprehensible through reflection. He stresses that he does not ‘intend to disqualify’ reflection for the profit of the ‘unreflected or the immediate (which we only know through reflection)’, but he wonders if one can exist without the other, are they not in a ‘reciprocal, if not symmetrical, relationship...where the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning is in the end’ (VI: 35).

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

What is given is not a massive and opaque world, or a universe of adequate thought; it is a reflection which turns back over the density of the world in order to clarify it, but which, coming second, reflects back to it only its own light.
(VI: 35)

Reflection by its nature cannot be involved in the very first encounters with the world when the senses, perception and feelings are engaged in absorbing and responding as, Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘naïve vision occupies me completely’ (VI: 36). To become attentive or aware of this engagement/occupation is to add on an activity, which in fact ‘subtracts something from this total gift...since to understand is to translate into disposable significations a meaning first held captive in the thing and in the world itself’ (VI: 36). The only way Merleau-Ponty believes he has available to him to understand the pre-reflective state of being is, through a process of translation, to use the ‘disposable significations’ of philosophical language and text.

But this translation aims to convey the text; or rather the visible and the philosophical explication of the visible are not side by side as two sets of signs, as a text and its version in another tongue. If it were a text, it would be a strange text, which is directly given to us all, so that we are not restricted to the philosopher’s translation and can compare the two. (VI: 36)

When philosophical language only gives an interpretation of the world through translation into text, it is not factual, because if it were it would be ‘a strange text’. Philosophy is a human endeavour that according to Merleau-Ponty is “everywhere and nowhere” a never-ending task equal to all other forms of creative activity.⁴¹² The process of philosophy is therefore, McCleary writes, like all ‘thought in act’ open-ended.

Philosophy must be a continuing confrontation of fact with essence and essence with fact which seeks to untie knots of meaning, eliminate false problems, and open the way to new truths and solutions – for the times and for a time. In its

⁴¹² Richard C. McCleary in Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, xxv.

essential openness to all meaningful experience, it cannot exclude such indirect or imaginative modes of expression as painting, literature, or religion.⁴¹³

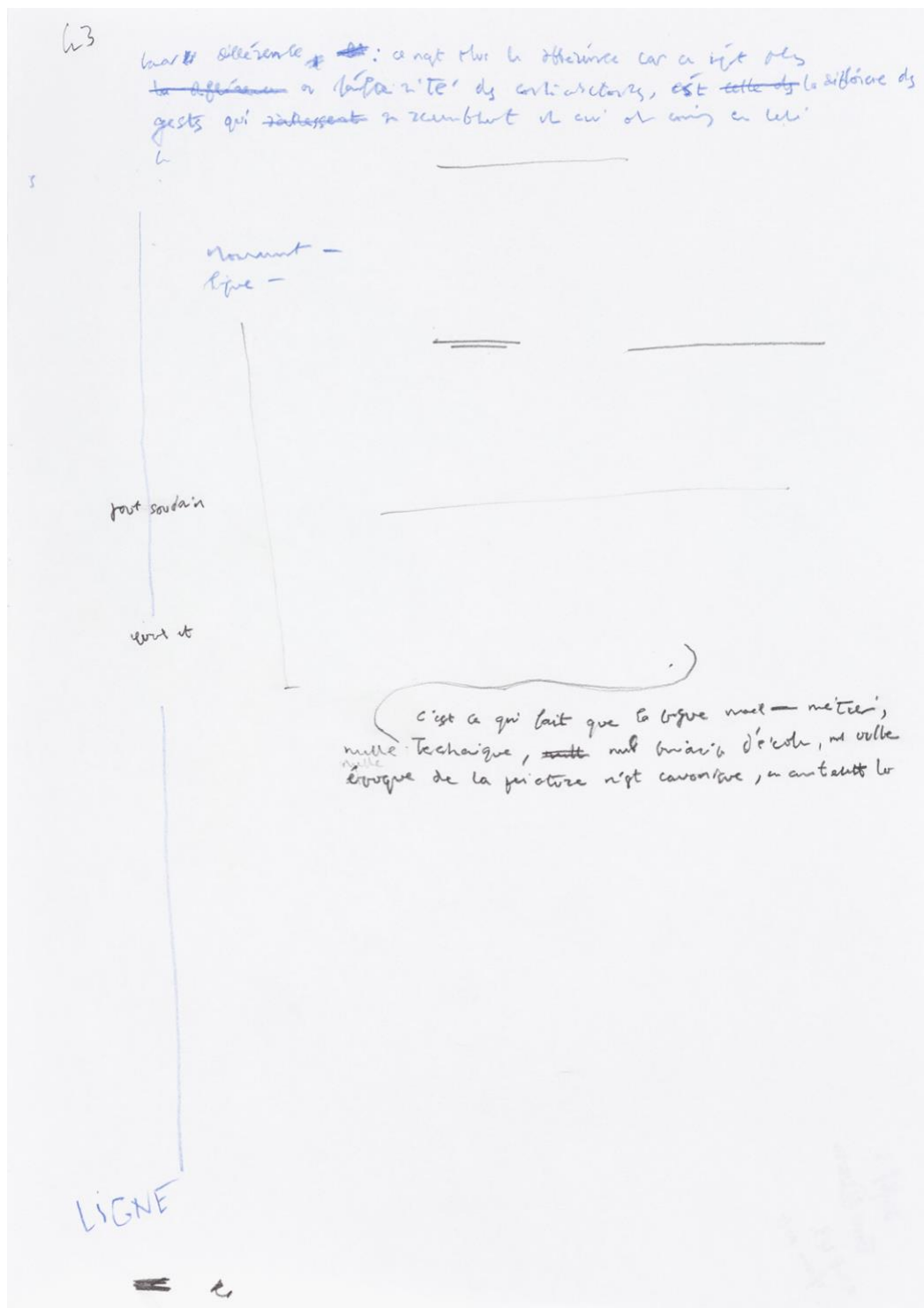
The drawings I made of Merleau-Ponty's manuscripts and working notes translate his written text into the language of drawing as they capture the 'thought in act' that cannot be included in the printed version. For example Merleau-Ponty would sometimes obliterate entire paragraphs line by line striking through each sentence. The layers of correction render the text illegible but the activity of correction is the trace of Merleau-Ponty's thinking through his ideas, rejecting some, reviving others. By making drawings of his documents I translate them into a form that considers these layers as fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's experience of constructing his work: as an accompaniment to his philosophy in the same manner as he wrote of the relationship between reflection and experience:

This is why we must say not that it [reflection] precedes the experience (even in the transcendental sense) but that it must accompany it, that is, that it translates or expresses its essential character but does not indicate a prior possibility whence it would have issued. (VI: 45)

The experience of drawing from observation combines the experience of looking, seeing and recording with reflection intertwined into the process. Reflection therefore accompanies the experience of making, just as Merleau-Ponty's documents display his thought as it comes to fruition.

Drawing No.11. This drawing was made from a page of the 'Eye and Mind' manuscript. Most of the main body of the text, written in blue and black ink, has been left out of this drawing. My focus was on the word 'ligne' written in capital letters at the bottom left-hand side of the page.

⁴¹³ Ibid.



4.3.2 Connection

The language of philosophy becomes problematic for Merleau-Ponty when it sets itself apart from the world. However, he struggles to come up with an alternative to the written word. Part of the problem is that the structure of the written word is linear, constructed incrementally, while the world is complex and multidimensional. Writing also takes place through a process of reflection, but the ‘reflective attitude’ Merleau-Ponty observes, ‘ordinarily avoids – the discordance between its initial situation and its ends’ (VI: 46). When the world is confronted by the mind through ‘consistent reflection’ it is ‘reduced to its intelligible schema’ that ‘dissipates every question concerning the relationship between them’ (VI: 46-47). The disconnection of world and mind is therefore the artifice he sought to correct.

Henceforth their relationship will be one of pure correlation: the mind is what thinks, the world is what is thought; one could conceive neither of encroachment of the one upon the other, nor of confusion of one with the other, nor of passage from one to the other, nor even of contact between them. (VI: 47)

Because there appeared to be no solution to this problem, philosophy avoided it and consequently set up theories to support the separation of mind and world: ‘Philosophy therefore impugns as meaningless every encroachment of the world upon the mind, or of mind upon the world’ (VI: 47). Merleau-Ponty wanted to rectify this separation and re-establish the connection between mind and world to find a way of communicating lived experience as it is being experienced rather than relying on a dislocated form of reflection. By acknowledging the relationship of Being to experience and the connection between art and philosophy, reflection can, Merleau-Ponty believed, become more meaningful.

...for art and philosophy *together* are precisely not arbitrary fabrications in the universe of the “spiritual” (of “culture”), but contact with Being precisely as creations. Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it. (VI: 197)

The physicality that creativity requires connects us to our embodiment and to our sense of ourselves as bodily beings. Engagement with our own experience, rather than reflecting on the experience of others, is therefore vital for us to understand our connection with the world. A philosophy that recognized the ‘correlation between thought and the object of thought’ would eradicate difficulties, problems, paradoxes and reversals. Merleau-Ponty believes he has grasped this reversible correlation of the flesh: ‘I have grasped within myself...the pure correlation between him who thinks and what he thinks, the truth of my life, which is also the truth of the world and of the other lives’ (VI: 48). And yet, he struggles to render it ‘philosophical’, i.e., to express it in philosophical language.

In ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ he writes of the experience of writing and questions whether the ‘writer’s act of expression’ was not ‘very different from the painters’ as the words a writer needs are not there ready and waiting to be ‘reorganised’ they must be constructed in a similar fashion to the way a painting is constructed (ILVS: 82).

The expressive word does not simply choose a sign for an already defined signification, as one goes to look for a hammer in order to drive a nail or for a claw to pull it out. It gropes around a significative intention which is not guided by any text, and which is precisely in the process of writing the text. If we want to do justice to it, we must evoke some of the other words that might have taken its place and were rejected, and we must feel the way in which they might have touched and shaken the chain of language in another manner and the extent to which this particular word was really the only possible one if that signification was to come into the world. (ILVS: 83)

This description of the process of writing gives a clear indication of Merleau-Ponty’s own process as he ‘gropes’ for the right word or phrase often using very physical metaphors to get his point across. Richard McCleary describes his metaphorical style as an ‘attempt to liberate the hidden meanings captive in the present world’ and notes that expression therefore is ‘always a sort of schema of the carnal other side of the flesh of the intersubjective world’.⁴¹⁴ Similarly Clive Cazeaux argues that although

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., xxii.

Merleau-Ponty ‘does not actually discuss or refer to metaphor in any of his writings’, his consideration of the ‘creative use of language and artistic media’ and his ‘re-theorisation of language as an embodied activity’ allows for a theory of metaphor to be applied to his philosophy.⁴¹⁵ But it is the language of visual art, Cazeaux suggests, that offers Merleau-Ponty the greatest potential for engaging with indirect and allusive meaning, as visual art practice has the capability to, ‘intersect and impinge upon what is *beyond the visual*’ incorporating multi-sensory embodied experience.⁴¹⁶ Consequently, Merleau-Ponty’s approach can be seen to reinforce the argument for the ‘epistemic’ value of visual art practice.

...if it is recognized that the visual necessarily opens onto the world through a network of sensory cross-referrals, then there is much that can be done under the heading of research to generate and assess the practices by which art achieves this. The way in which a feeling of time is evoked by a drawing or an atmosphere of the digital is exhibited in a painting will be determined by the kind of work the artist makes *in conjunction with the kinds of metaphor*, that is, the metaphorical themes, that the works elicit.⁴¹⁷

It is important, however, to ensure that work made by hand, including handwriting, retains a place in the repertoire of making that is today increasingly under pressure from technological substitutes. If no space or time is made for the haptic and tacit components of human creative experience then we are in danger of what Tim Ingold describes as, the assimilation of ‘the picture to the photograph and the text to the typewritten’.⁴¹⁸ In this scenario, Ingold warns hand and eye will be gradually replaced by keyboard and camera leading to an estrangement of embodied thinking to creativity.

⁴¹⁵ Clive Cazeaux, “From Sensation to Categorization: Aesthetic Metaphor in Locke and Merleau-Ponty,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4, no. 2/3 (August 2005): 120.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ Tim Ingold, *Making : Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture / Tim Ingold*. (London: Routledge, 2013), 131.

The drift of technological enhancement has been to substitute touch sensitivity at the fingertips for the sentient correspondence of telling by hand. In this substitution, handling, reach and grasp become metaphors of understanding, modeled on bodily experience, rather than animate movements in their own right.⁴¹⁹

Merleau-Ponty's manuscripts and working notes give us the opportunity to reappraise his late work and reengage with the ontological philosophy he was working on that has remained incomplete. There are, I believe, parallels to be found in his endeavour to gain a deeper understanding of art practice and in his own handwritten pages that include all his marks and second thoughts as he goes back over previous passages to rework and revise in a continual process of beginning.

...there is no longer any philosophy of reflection, for there is no longer the originating and the derived; there is a thought traveling a circle where the condition and the conditioned, the reflection and the unreflected, are in a reciprocal if not symmetrical, relationship, and where the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning is in the end. (VI: 35)

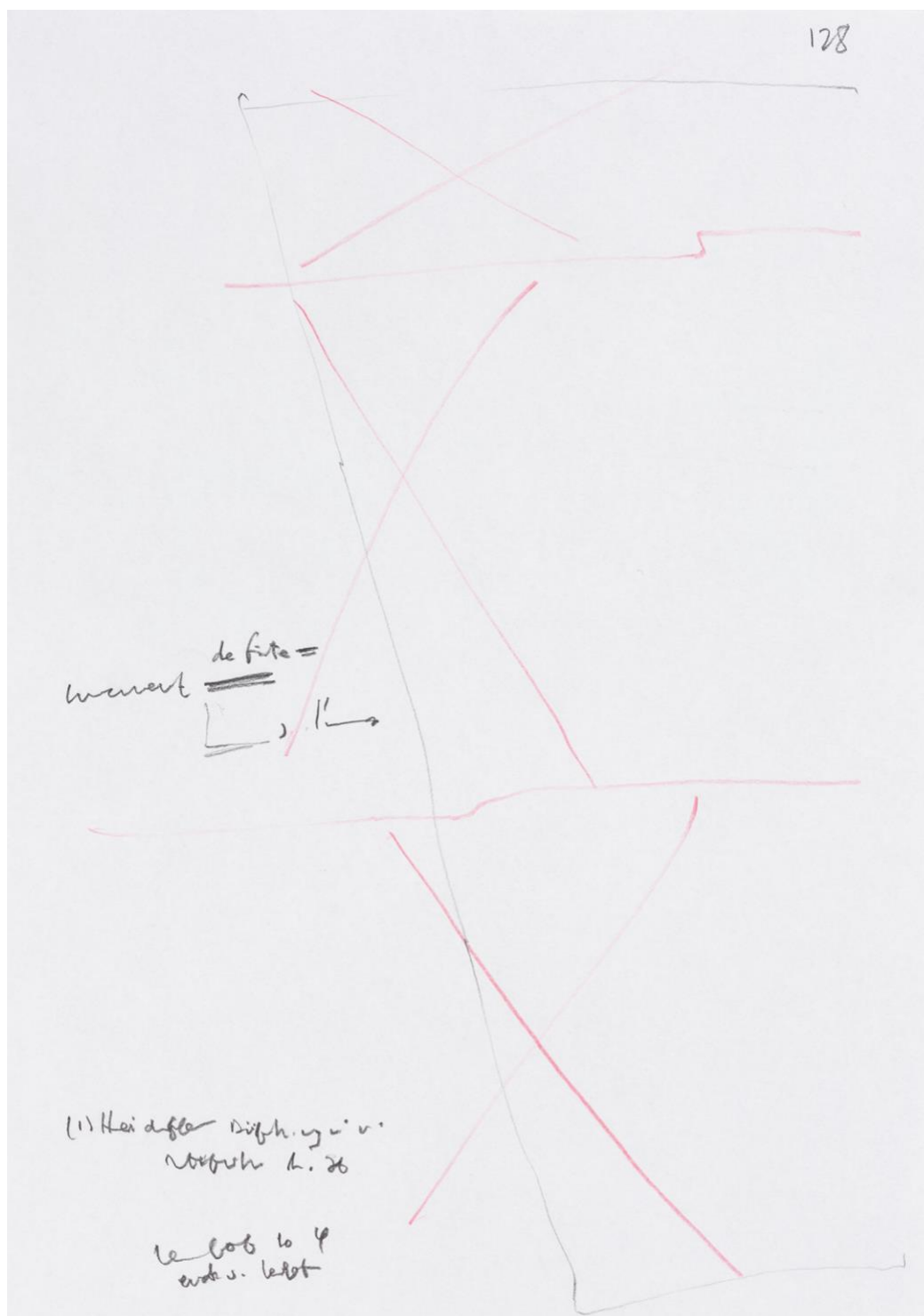
Merleau-Ponty could not have known that the manuscript he was working on would remain unfinished, and Lefort warns that we should be mindful that in its current state it was at best provisional. It is a 'private' work that he did not intend to be seen by others in its incomplete state: 'certain repetitions would no doubt have been eliminated; perhaps the manuscript would have been recast even more broadly'.⁴²⁰ Nonetheless, the connection I made with Merleau-Ponty's unpublished texts by drawing them allowed for the prioritization of those elements of his work that would have been eliminated had the work been typed up for printing. A photograph or photocopy of the documents would have given each page the same level of scrutiny: an accurate replication no doubt, but without any interaction with the work on a human level. The time I spent with drawing the manuscripts allowed me to engage in a dialogue with the materials I was using and with the traces and marks I was working

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁴²⁰ Claude Lefort in Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, xxxvii.

from. The drawings, therefore, are a testimony of that dialogue and a record of the time I spent in their presence.

Drawing No.12. This is a drawing from a page from the manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*. I have left out the text on the right-hand side, which had all been crossed out, and concentrated on the three large red X's he has used to eliminate his paragraphs. The diagonal pencil line underneath the X's is my line to indicate the angle of his handwriting.

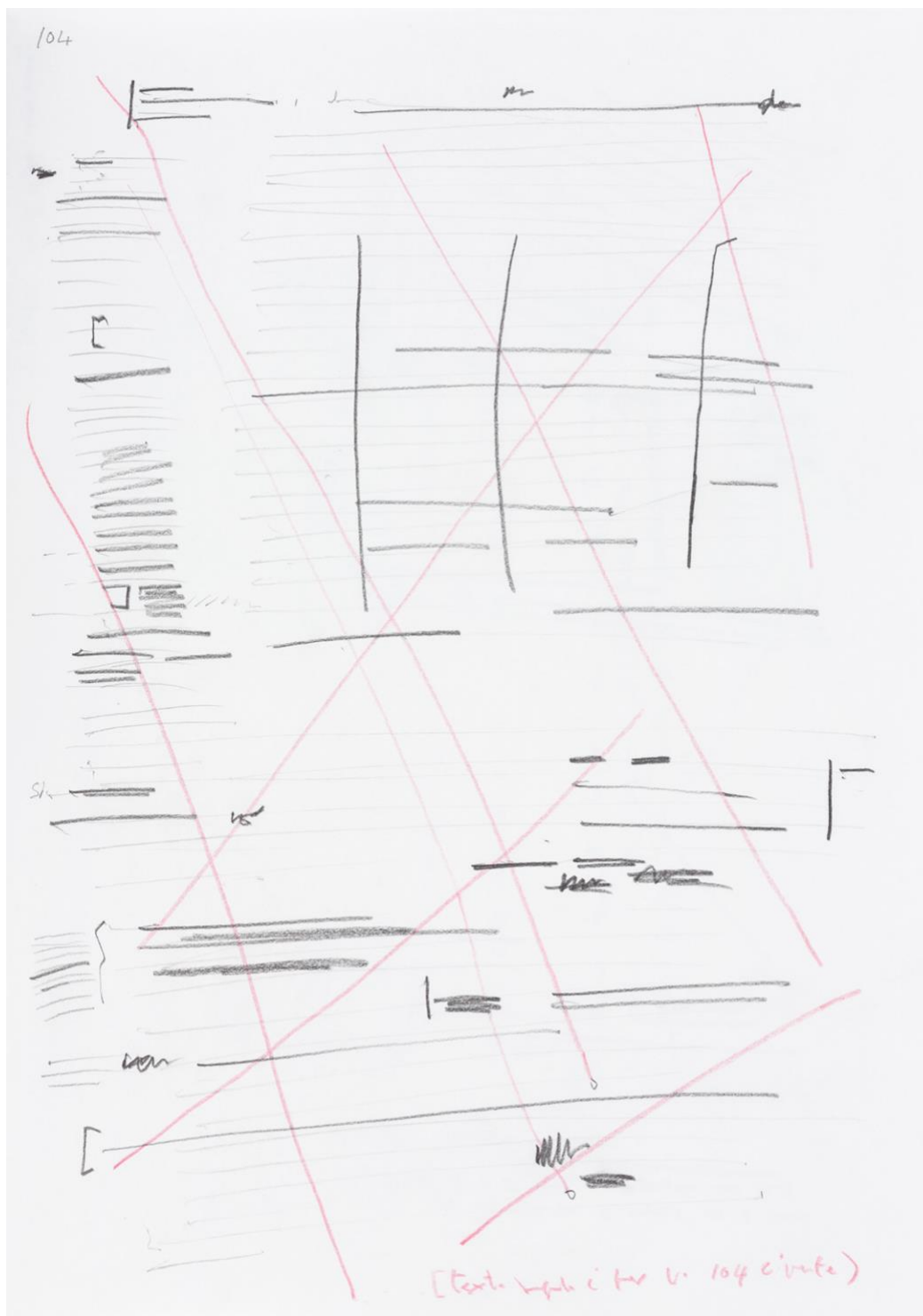


Conclusion

Corrections, reworking and revisions play a crucial role in the coming into being of drawings and the written word. Taking the form of gestural marks and personal symbols this form of reworking tracks thought processes but is usually concealed in work that is considered ‘finished’. My engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s manuscripts and working notes offer an alternative reading of his ontological theories as they were being shaped and formed and highlight his own practice of making.

My approach does not aim to replace or diminish current forms of philosophical practice but to offer the potential for engagement with an additional dimension of philosophical experience. This approach corresponds with Merleau-Ponty’s own belief in the importance of the visual arts for his philosophy and I believe can, in turn, deepen and enhance the development and understanding of contemporary visual art practice.

Drawing No. 13 This is another drawing from a page from the manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible* I’ve left out all the writing in this drawing except for one line in brackets on the bottom right of the page. The rest of the page has again been crossed out line by line in black ink and then crossed out in red ink several times quite violently – the nib of his pen ripped through the paper at one point.



Conclusion

Throughout his work Merleau-Ponty repeatedly acknowledges the limitations of verbal language, limitations with regard to the process of writing, for articulating human experience and for expressing ‘the strangeness of the world’ (S: 22). This questioning of established forms of communication opens up discussions on the possibilities that the language of the visual arts have for accessing and tracing thought and for expressing experience as it is lived. I have located my research mainly within the historical period of Merleau-Ponty’s lifetime in order to clarify the distinctions between painting and drawing as they were understood at that time. I might have considered in more detail artists such as Richard Serra and Robert Morris who were directly influenced by *Phenomenology of Perception*: but Serra and Morris used what they found in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy to influence how the viewer experienced the work they made, not the process of making the work. This type of self-conscious art practice focuses on the consumption of an end product and is still common throughout contemporary visual art. Even some forms of drawing practice today have become less about problem solving and investigation, and more concerned with indexical characteristics or ‘asserting the presence of the authorial self’.⁴²¹ The perceived potential of drawing to give the appearance of authenticity, intimacy and spontaneity in a casual and informal manner, however, can damage its credibility if style and brand are given precedence over a rigorous exploration of embodied knowledge.⁴²²

My focus on Merleau-Ponty’s own process of making draws attention to his struggle to find a language for the meaning that transpires from that experience, and for his emerging new ontology. By drawing the pages of his manuscript I re-engaged with the embodied process of his writing, which, according to the sense of his own philosophy, was also the embodied process of his thinking. It also entailed tracing his embodied thought beyond the meaning of the words on the page and exploring his

⁴²¹ Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing*, 249.

⁴²² Taylor, “Foreword - Re: Positioning Drawing,” 11.

ontological notion of ‘reversibility’, ‘reflection’, and ‘flesh’ in an active way. Of course, such a re-enactment, or ‘performance’, can only be incomplete since embodied sense is in principle inexhaustible. In the preface to *Signs*, for example, Merleau-Ponty, argues that ‘we do not understand a statement because it is complete in itself; we say that it is complete or sufficient because we have understood’ (S: 17). Similarly communication does not always need complete, accurate sentences and spelling to make sense even though the intended meaning may become misplaced. Words and images can communicate because we *want to* understand, and because and we will use means beyond acquired knowledge and education in order to try to make sense of what we see and hear. This is most apparent today, in a sense that Merleau-Ponty could not have foreseen, in the language that has evolved from SMS (Short Messaging Service) text, digital messaging, and email. These forms of communication often operate through the creation of abbreviated words that sometimes contain numbers, and symbols that resemble their referent. A fresh look at Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of the incomplete processes of sense-making and sense-having may also shed new light on these current popular modes of communication.

Digitisation has made a significant contribution to the democratisation of knowledge and education, but more reflection is needed on how to engage digitization as new form of sense-production and communication. Although I could not include an explicit investigation of these interdependencies within the limited space of this thesis, it is obvious that relations between finite and total ‘product’ ontologies and incomplete and infinite ‘process’ ontologies are also influenced by and reflect economic systems. It is very plausible at least that product-oriented ontologies as well as product-oriented art practices are not independent of an overall capitalist ideology. In this context, it is also important to note that the fine art market influences not only correlations of demand and supply in the art world, and the price of art ‘products.’ It also influences the classification and language surrounding visual art, which by and large renders invisible the complex processes of contemporary art-making while instituting and perpetuating a hierarchy of media and genres that, amongst other effects, routinely downplays the significance of drawing.

This thesis is an attempt to make a modest contribution to an exposition of those aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy that – in futures studies and discussions –

might offer us critical means for a better understanding of art practice in the context of contemporary, digital modes of communication, and for alternatives to currently dominating market- and product-oriented approaches to art. It is my hope that in the process of exposing these elements, I was also able to highlight certain of their not yet sufficiently explored implications that come to the fore when Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is put in dialogue not only with painting, as is routinely done, but with drawing.

Historically, the visual arts have always had to deal with seismic changes with each new invention of image making technology, most notably 'perspective' and photography, but it has so far survived by perpetually adapting and finding new opportunities for learning and producing, and by continuously re-evaluating their changing roles in society. With digitisation however there is the added challenge of its ubiquity, creating a qualitative difference to human experience across a range of mobile devices that are always ready to hand. It is, nevertheless, also important not to mistake nostalgia for caution when the advance of digital technology begins to replace what is no longer useful in contemporary life. Merleau-Ponty offers reflections with the potential for a re-engagement with the fallible, human nature of our creative expression, which is today all too easy to conceal, delete and therefore deny: *as writing on a computer tends to render failed attempts invisible*, often even to the writer him- or herself, whose editing efforts would have been more obvious when he or she still had to re-type entire pages for clean new drafts. At the same time communicating through the Internet leaves an indelible trail that can be accessed by unimaginable numbers of people. This can inhibit creativity and risk-taking, leaving younger generations wary of making mistakes and lacking in problem solving skills. It is also for this reason that it is important to re-emphasize again process over product in art-making. I do not believe that Merleau-Ponty is the only thinker and practitioner who can help with this task, but I believe that amongst philosophers he stands out as somebody whose thought and practice can be made especially fruitful in this regard.

On the more narrowly philosophical side, this thesis aims to reopen debate around Merleau-Ponty's ideas on visual art practice and demonstrate how these ideas give important impulses for his overall ontological project. Although much of his later work remains unfinished, I have argued that this should not be seen negatively or be

perceived as lacking in intellectual impact. On the contrary, I contend that precisely in remaining incomplete, his late work opens up his philosophical practice in ways that would not be possible had the work been completed in the conventional sense. By highlighting the differences in approach between painting and drawing, I have also turned attention onto the processes involved in philosophical writing, thinking, knowledge and understanding. Integral to these processes are the radical modes of reflection that Merleau-Ponty identified and that are not restricted to theoretical, retrospective reflection, but include synchronic “reflection within practice”. To fully integrate reflection in this way, however, the progress of the practice should be disrupted as little as possible. I have shown that the very processes employed by painting (and in particular painting from observation in a realistic way) interrupt making processes, if only because of the mechanics of working with colour and the material qualities of paint. A new potential of drawing practices, which need not interrupt in these ways, thus emerges.

Since Merleau-Ponty’s death in 1961 many of the developments in his final work have been overlooked by successive generations. He was instrumental in the development of structuralism through his work on Saussurian linguistics and his critique of the subject-object dichotomy that dominated Sartre’s philosophy: but Merleau-Ponty is rarely given credit for the contribution his work has made to subsequent philosophical movements. Most of the attention he receives is focused on his completed work, his phenomenology, and on his writing on painting. Similarly, the deeper understanding of visual art practice that he achieved in his later work has not been fully appreciated. This is due in part to his ambiguous writing style and its unfinished condition, which leaves his work even more open to misinterpretations than is true of any work. I believe, however, that Merleau-Ponty’s later writings on art processes are only becoming more relevant to contemporary visual art and aesthetics especially as these practices try to position themselves within the rapid technological developments of recent years. Unfortunately at the moment the most prominent role visual art has to play is one of commodity. This is infecting any sense of credibility the visual arts might have once had as an intelligent and authentic form of expression. Merleau-Ponty’s consistent focus on art practice, rather than art as a finished product, offers an alternative process-based approach to art-making and cross-disciplinary

research. His work has the potential to make a valuable contribution to new dialogues and debates into currently neglected and unexplored areas of both philosophical enquiry and visual art practice. Furthermore, through a demonstration of the important role the visual arts and drawing played in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, I contend that the visual arts can be reestablished as a serious and credible form of research.

Drawing No. 14. All of Merleau-Ponty's writing is included here in this drawing of a working note. I've also traced around what looked like coffee cup stains and splashes on the bottom left corner, and tiny holes that looked like cigarette burns.

for spirit of my last of Mike
L. born for love for
L. born for love and love

§ in fact = 6 words in a variant of apt
inc. more in fact as in all the more within

Pre Levi Bröde

Addendum: six limited edition prints.

Philosophy... which paints without colours in black and white, like copperplate engravings – does not allow us to ignore the strangeness of the world. (S: 22)

In his essay 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the limitations of the photographic reproductions of art and artifacts used in Andre Malraux's publication *The Voices of Silence*. Malraux's use of photography was revolutionary at the time and was part of his major project to make art accessible beyond the walls of the museums. Merleau-Ponty takes issue, however, with the false impression given by reproductions when they, for example, enlarge miniatures to the same scale as a fresco or transform 'a section of a painting by its way of framing it' changing 'rugs, coins, and stained glass windows into paintings' and giving 'painting a consciousness of itself which is always retrospective' (ILVS: 96). The 'heart of the problem' he writes, lies in Malraux's meditations 'upon miniatures and coins in which photographic enlargement miraculously reveals the very same style that is found in full sized works' (ILVS: 101). Reproductions of this kind are now commonplace as digital imagery and Internet resources make it simple to source and download images of artworks in full colour. There is a presumption that we are all now sophisticated enough to differentiate between an artwork as a thing in itself and its photographic reproduction. We make allowances for adjustments of scale that are necessary to fit the format of a publication rather than stay true to the dimensions of the original. But when reproductions distort scale in this way, texture is lost and irregularities are often smoothed out or diminished, which can sometimes make the encounter with the real thing feel like a disappointment. In effect what is often missing are the human characteristics of the artwork, the traces of the hand that made the work and the materials they manipulated. In most cases this situation is not really a major problem as the reproductions simply serve the function of illustration and are a means to an end. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I found that using reproductions became an increasingly unsatisfactory means of relating my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's papers, which was informed by a corporeal presence within his documents and by creating drawings that were made through a re-enactment of his marks and traces. By photographing my drawings I was diluting their expressive qualities, as the

corporeality is no longer discernable: no matter how well produced reproductions create a barrier or a veil that obstructs access to the original experience of making. Nonetheless, the series of drawings I made could not in themselves be included in the copies of this thesis, as only one copy of each of the drawings exists and photographic reproduction was therefore unavoidable. But reproductions also lack the ability to give a comprehensive indication of the processes involved in the works coming into being. There is a vulnerability to an artwork viewed in the flesh, as it were, that I believe was also crucial to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the evolution of his ideas, and was central to my own desire to see Merleau-Ponty's manuscripts and papers in the BnF. While the series of drawings I made give a sense of the marks Merleau-Ponty used to track his thought processes, and how these marks map his thought across the page, the reproduction process, using photography, alters their phenomenological presence. The scale changes, the texture of the paper is different and the coloured pencil has turned into ink through digital printing. There is no sense of these images coming into being they are instead frozen in time and the essential unity of the marks bonded to the original surface is absent.

To address this issue I decided to make a series of prints by hand that would allow for a limited number of multiples (or editions) of each print to be produced. This enabled me to insert a set of original prints into each copy of this thesis as a reminder that there is a difference between the artwork 'at work' itself and its reproduction. The source materials for these prints are small linear drawings that I made in several notebooks before I made the series of larger drawings. These quick sketches express my initial response, first thoughts and impressions, to what I saw in Merleau-Ponty's original papers in archives in Paris, and helped to visualize how his writing and corrective marks translate through my own mark making language. The small scale and rapid nature of these drawings helped me to find a way forward but were not made with the intention of their becoming finished artworks in themselves. The prints were made using a drypoint technique on plastic plates overlaid with brushstrokes in red ink before they were printed. Drypoint is a very direct process where marks are scored onto the surface of a plate, traditionally metal, usually copper, making incisions and gouges with a sharp pointed tool creating a drawing straight onto the plate. The weight of the tool and the pressure applied will determine the density of the

mark while the surface structure of the plate, plastic in this instance, participates in the drawing by resisting the sharp point making it slip at times or not allowing the tool to pass cleanly through its surface making lines that are ragged and irregular. Stiff ink is then applied all over the plate to fill the indentations. Any excess ink is carefully wiped off and the plate is covered with damp paper and passed through an etching press.⁴²³ The pressure of the rollers in the etching press pushes the ink out of the incisions onto the paper and the edge of the plate creates an indentation or emboss into the paper surface. This entire process, making the incisions in the plates, inking them up, wiping them and turning the wheel of the press is physically demanding and quite laborious. The printed marks on the finished print are a mirror image of the incised marks and the brush strokes made onto the surface of the plate.⁴²⁴ The inclusion of the brush strokes in red introduces a variable quality to each edition even though I try to replicate the same brush strokes each time.

Although I have put these drawings through a finishing process such as this in order to produce multiples I do not consider these as ‘finished’ works, but as trial or proof prints – the beginning of a process that will continue to explore scale, marks and texture. At this stage they simply consist of a single layer of marks giving them an unresolved quality. A possible continuation of this series would be, for example, to print each plate one after the other onto the same sheet of paper in various combinations. Anything more layered and textured however would necessitate the use of heavier paper, which would be difficult to include into the format of a thesis. This type of simple linear drawing is also suited to retaining something of the rapid notations I made when viewing Merleau-Ponty’s papers while also suggesting possibilities and subsequent projects. Furthermore, these prints are things in themselves – their form and content are one entity extending the dialogue already developed in this thesis around the role of embodied experience in making and viewing artworks. Bodily engagement can be made with these prints offering a multisensory experience that is quite different to the experience of looking at a

⁴²³ The paper used for these prints is the same as that used for the first series of drawings - 80gm Fabriano.

⁴²⁴ Details of this process can be found in Robert Adam and Carol Robertson, *Intaglio* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007). John Ross and Clare Romano, *The Complete Printmaker*. (New York: Free Press ; London, 1972).

photographic or digital reproduction. ‘The body is no longer the means of vision and touch’ Merleau-Ponty writes in ‘Eye and Mind’, ‘but their depository’ (EM: 138). He continually advocated that philosophy should ‘set out to prospect the actual world’ and to realize that the world is around me, not in front of me’ (EM: 138). Most importantly Merleau-Ponty encourages us to continue to question what it is we see ‘since the vision to which it is addressed is itself a question’ (EM: 138).

In an age when the very nature of visual imagery is changing rapidly the work of Merleau-Ponty is, I believe, only becoming more relevant to the times we live in. His philosophy, as I have attempted to show in this thesis, offers ways to reflect on how we engage with all types of images, including digital and photographic, alongside painting and drawing. All of these techniques have value, but Merleau-Ponty provides a structure for exploring and giving recognition to how they differ. His theories of reversibility and *flesh* that emerge in his later ontology are particularly valuable for interpreting the embodied perceptual experience of the visual arts where, he writes: ‘those gestures, those tracings...seem to emanate from the things themselves’ (EM: 129). The series of prints that follow this text have a material presence, a lived spatiality and temporality, that is very different to the presence of a photographic reproduction, which removes many of the nuances that define a work made by hand. They offer an opportunity for a closer engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s own work by hand on paper that was not fixed and static but fluid and constantly changing. These prints also offer an opportunity to find new ways to approach Merleau-Ponty’s ideas and the ontological language he offers us: a language that is always grounded in the realities of the actual world.

PRINT NO. 1.

PRINT NO. 2

PRINT NO. 3

PRINT NO. 4

PRINT NO. 5.

PRINT NO. 6.

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