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Farewell Terpsichore – an improvisation on smiles, shadows and breath

Doris Rohr

Via Appia. The Heat. All outlines fuzzy, shapes dancing, vibrating in the dusty air. These were strange creatures, fantastic, some shaped like columns, some with large dark black crowns. Resinous. Mysterious. At their feet were cones, sticky to touch, larger than anything at home, more tactile, with more spaces for her little fingers to explore: in and out.

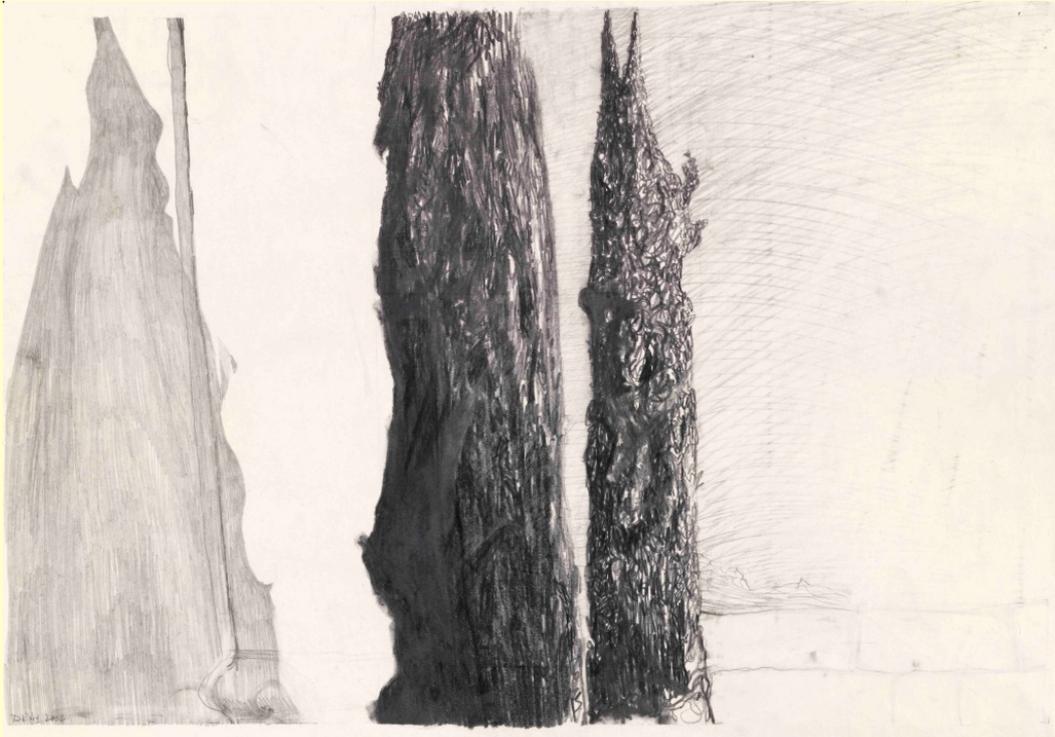
She had thought about standing up to look, but was too tired and too thirsty. Apart from that she had been told to wait. So wait she did. Crouched on the earth. Her mouth ached. She had a loose tooth she continued to fiddle with, passing the time.

I am trying to think back into my own head. A small girl's head, more than forty years ago. Finding myself filling the gaps with projections rather than memories. All I have is the bare outline: a family of seven, father, mother, two brothers, two sisters. A summer holiday. Italy. Rome. A visit to the antiquities. Walking along Via Appia. Being tired, too tired to walk any longer. Too tired to stand. Being the youngest, all others stepping ahead, having more energy, coping better.

Here I am filling in again. Projecting on what I know or think I know. No mere outlines but interpretation.

She can't recall the waiting being painful. There is no resentment, there was none. She can't remember being in a panic or in pain, beyond knowing that this tooth had to come out, but she didn't want to let go. Frightened to pull it or to have it pulled. (Later the

motherly Italian landlady of Villa Forresteria succeeded over the failed attempts of her whole family to remove the tooth).



Doris Rohr (2006) *Cypress* pencil on paper

Perhaps she was more tired than usual, because later on during this holiday she became ill. Rubella? One of those infections children get. She became confined to bed in a hotel in Palermo, not understanding, nor appreciating the blood red colour of the orange juice she was served. A treat! Her family's miscomprehension about her lack of appreciation. Having to swallow large pills her father tried to disguise in small sections of banana.

A news item in June 2016 reveals that in Japan parents had left behind their boy at a roadside rest. Alone he soon got lost in the woods and was only found several days later. Don't really know what to say. It resonates. I can see why these things can happen, even if no good. I feel unable to join the tirade against the parents.

A while, a few hours perhaps not even, a few minutes perhaps, but it must have been hours, her dad came looking for her and found her on the spot where she was left behind. Was it that her parents simply not notice her absence until much later, engrossed in studying the antiquities of Rome? Did she imagine to have been told to wait?

Dad praised her for staying in the same spot, for not wandering off. A happy ending. It felt good to be praised, to get the attention. Or at least that is what she suspects she felt.

The next day perhaps, or sometime later during the holiday, her dad bought her a medallion. A Greek muse. She danced, and was carved out of multicoloured shell. Terpsichore. She treasured her and wore it all that holiday. Or that's what she thought she did.

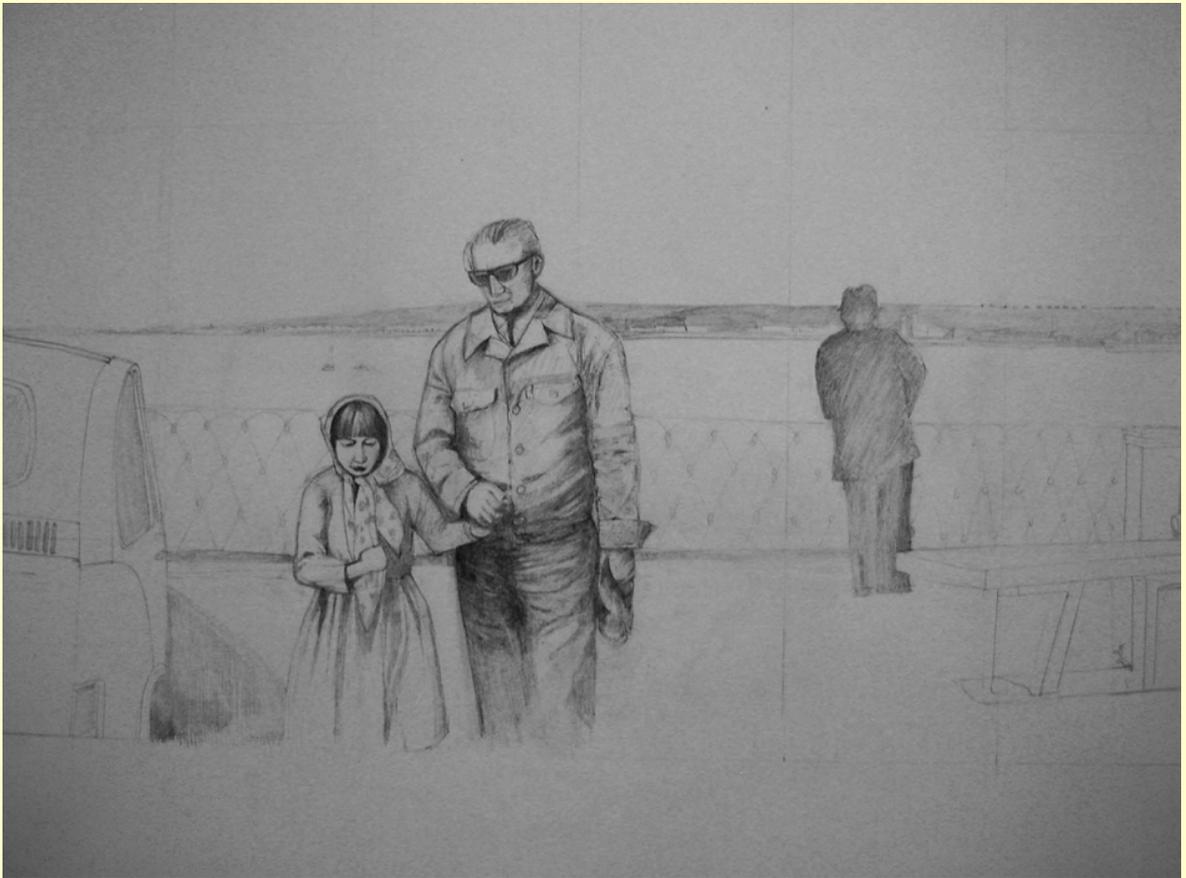
Or that's what I think she did.

She kept that trinket until one day, her and her boyfriend's flat got broken into and the few items of jewellery she had owned, were stolen.

Nearer to the beginning of their journey, in Venice, her brothers and sisters tried in vain to teach her good taste, but she insisted on her parents purchasing the gaudy plastic moulded model of a gondola, complete with multi-coloured fairy lights. The tasteful black wooden model that came on her brothers' and sisters' recommendations, was rejected (probably with little girl tantrum), like the Sicilian red orange juice. The gondola plugged into mains and rested on her bedside at home, after their return, sending her to princes' sleep for many years to come.

All these, fuzzy images in a slideshow. Shadowy pine trees, cypresses, interspersed with a smile by an Italian landlady. No clear pictures emerge, but that of a photo my mother

took of me and dad, standing at a Southern Italian harbour wall, dad taking my hand, my head covered in a head scarf.



Doris Rohr and Ingeborg Rohr (2010) *untitled* pencil on paper, co-authored of sort, my mother took the photo, I reproduced in above drawing many years after, after her death, as an act of paying respect to her absence, her double absence – the negative space implying its originator.

I look tired and grumpy. Dad looked Italian with his black sunglasses. He holds my hand. The awkward angle perhaps a projection in my redrawing of this scene? The person behind the framing of this photo: my mother, the onlooker. What a gift for composition. Me, the daughter, taking it as legacy, substituting mother's milk she was no longer capable of giving. Perhaps this the meaning of *viaticum* Jacques Derrida refers to (2001, 64) – those gifts which are handed to us after the person who originates it has passed away, a

delayed gift, a substitutional gift, that stands in, though surely does not transubstantiate. My protestant upbringing betrays me. Embodiment. Little faith.

I remember the figure of Terpsichore, more so its touch to the finger, the lightly raised surface of the white shell revealing the amber coloured shell below as background – Terpsichore’s negative space. The space to dance in, waving her garments. Moreover I remember the silver chain and its delicate segments. Then the fairy lights glistening amongst the false gold of the gondola’s canopy; the old-fashioned plug of which my brothers said that it was made of Bakelite, no longer safe, in need of rewiring.

The tactility of memory, the real memory in contradistinction to the memory retold by others, the false memories or appropriated memories, the constructions of one’s self Sigmund Freud let the *analysant* whisper into his large hearing ears. Sigmund’s unconscious structured like the city of Rome.

The Freud Museum in Hampstead archives Sharon Kivland’s fabricated evidence dreamed up on Freud’s behalf¹. These photos are shadowgrams, evoking Atget’s photos of Paris Walter Benjamin so admired. Kivland’s photos are in black and white, and appear older than they are, as if of a different time. They evoke the empty streets of Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries*, when Isak Borg, the ageing professor, stumbles through depopulated streets, puzzled by clocks with timeless faces. Long shadows. Streets that remind me of a city in a hot climate at noon. Or a western shantytown with the bandit at large. Not Sweden. *Ingmar, the son of a priest*.

Neither word, nor image, certainly least the false precision of the photo can substitute experience. Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, they scratched until the white support

¹<https://www.freud.org.uk/exhibitions/10021/freud-dreams-of-rome/>

of the photographic paper revealed what photos are, fake memories. Is that too hard? Maybe not fake, but incomplete ones – so much left out. So then what happens? The image is substituted by a wall of words, like chain armour: *maille*. Making the vulnerable soft body inaccessible. The words shatter, and are just what they are, another pretence. Another layer disguising the truth. And that is unreachable, it's not an absolute truth, not the truth of philosophers, but the subjective truth of subjective origin. No capitals. It is recognition. The unfamiliar face of the self in the other.

Octavio Paz's magnificent elucidation on the act of seeing resonates: 'Seeing is an act that postulates an ultimate identity between the seer and the seen.' This is how he begins. To then describe with poetic vision the misapprehension that recognition is, bringing to my mind Jacques Lacan. So very soon this illusion of recognition makes way to another insight, in Octavio Paz's words this is where '[t]he eye retreats.' Mostly we tend to close the gap, this fault line, or 'crevice', as he refers to it, by building 'bridges', again Octavio Paz's words, not mine. Bridges of language. This bridge building is futile, so it seems. Certainly as a means to discover, recognise, find truth. Henry Michaux, the subject (or mediator?) of Octavio Paz's musings on seeing, remained stoically fixed to look down the abyss. 'What does he stare at? The hole, the word, absence.' (*Henri Michaux*, 1978, 6)

Let's stop here. Here again the negative space, the formless, the undecided, ambiguous and amorphous, to approximate the meaning of seeing. Seeing what? Looking as an act of recognition becomes unreliable, meaningless. 'Looking becomes a negation, an asceticism, a critique.' (16)

There are no certainties, least of those of language. Seeing with its prophetic inner eye supersedes looking. Henri Michaux's courage is to abandon the self, to make way for

vision. This an act of the supernatural engaged with the mortal identity of the self, here the artist-prophet. But with Michaux this is a 'struggle *against* phantoms, gods and demons.' (18, my emphasis). For or against, the wrangling with gods is an act of possession, of mutuality. Being possessed by the divine. Jakob wrestling with the angel. Christ contemplating god's abandonment at Golgotha. A black negative space, a vacuum of faith, absence or presence, invented boundaries, as the reality is perforated, light piercing shadows, shadows enveloping light, faith's other: it's negation.

Absences creating presences. Jacques Derrida talks about the moment of not seeing, the blink, as necessity for seeing in *Memoirs of the Blind*. Blindness and Seeing. Drawing on absence.

[*T*]he thought of drawing, a certain pensive pose, a *memory of the trait* that speculates, as in a dream about its own possibility. Its potency always develops on the brink of blindness. (1993, 3)

'Drawing, writing, what expeditions, what wanderings, and at the end, no end, we won't finish, rather time will put an end to it.' (Cixous, 1993, 16) Indeed, Hélène, writing and drawing - your 'twin adventures, which depart to seek in the dark, which do not find,' (17) are also mine. Not finding: because there is too much light, too much to see. Closing my eyes to let the darkness unfold presence. Not finding because wide eyed. Image writing letter text, this splitting into separateness it's stopping me from finding. Henri Michaux, you knew about this all along. And you found:

As soon as I begin, as soon as a few colours have been set on the sheet of black paper, it ceases to be paper and becomes night. [...] I come to blackness. Blackness takes me back to bedrock, to origin. [...]

That without which light loses its fascination. In countries that bathe in strong light, such as the Arab countries, what one is affected by is shadow, living shadows, individual, wavering, pictorial, dramatic, imparted by the feeble flame of the candle, the oil-lamp, or even the torch, other losses of this century. Darkness, cavern whence all may arise, where all must be sought. (Michaux 1987, 38)

What a drawing, this multi-faced brain, you, Henri Michaux, dismissed Rorschach tests, never seeing anything of any importance in them, and intuitively knew to avoid symmetry, this brain in flight over the deserts to reach a destination only known to your body's memory.²

Henri Michaux, when you write about painting, drawing, about making images, you sleepwalk into that night, swift brained, 'putting part of oneself to sleep', migrating an unimaginable distance soaring above the wind, leaving behind language. All this changes, so you say, once you soar into that sky of paint, it 'strangely decongests':

The word factory – thought-words, image-words, emotion–word – giddyingly is drowned and so simply. It is no longer there. The sprouting stops. Night. Local death. Gone desire, eloquent appetite. That part of the head which was the most concerned, grows cold. (41)

You surprise yourself. And then later – when the time will be ripe as you say, that promise: 'What an experience it will be... having gone into the habit of thinking in signs, we are able to exchange secrets with a few natural strokes like a handful of twigs.' (69). Or will we? A handful of twigs, a sparrow's throw, the weave of thickets, inversed, the brains

² This avoidance of symmetry becomes apparent in Michaux's mescaline drawings. They play with near symmetry yet subtly avoid it, lightly filled marks on paper, transcriptions perhaps of brainwaves, these drawings play with an expectation of symmetry only to refute the predictability and oppressiveness of such. MOMA provides the following link to one of the mescaline drawings from 1960 <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/38081>

of trees tossed about by wind, anchored in soil, all the time a neglected neighbour's dog howling into the emerging darkness of approaching solstice.



Doris Rohr (2016) *Trimingham (again)* pencil on paper

Will we ever be able to slacken the straits of language, to walk tight in between words and sounds, over the abyss of having to represent? What exactly? But you who so much were able to overcome the duality of phonemes and ideograms, you loved language as much as one loves an old lover, knowing too well all what is wrong and bores one and one wishes riddance of, yet one cannot live without. It requires habit, that thinking in signs, and so, Henri Michaux, are you not exchanging one old lover for another one to grow old? How else can you form a habit with signs, unless you are beginning to bore each other a little?

It's a sloughing. You explain. You promise: release, liberation, exhilaration, and 'disencrustation' so that (s)he that follows your example 'be able at last to express himself far from words, words, the words of others'.³ I see a crab leaving behind its armature, soft

³ Whoever, having perused my signs, is led by my example to create signs himself according to his being and his needs will, unless I am very much mistaken, discover a source of exhilaration, a release such as he has never known, a disencrustation, a new

skinned for an hour or two while its new coat is stiffening. Vulnerable to predation. Then, like snails, snakes and all beasts with exoskeletons, until a new coat has grown, all is up for grabs. Mindful not to end up in a shark's belly, or worse, in a responsibly sourced tin can floating amongst the oceans. (Apologies, Jacques Lacan).⁴ Does the can smile? (Who has the last laugh I wonder?)

So why so afraid of writing? Is it the loss of voice Roland Barthes speaks about ('writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.' Barthes 1977, 143). Is it that you, Henri Michaux, mediating that loss of origin through making images, imagining? Did you, having lived through catastrophe, did you have to reinvent art, the habit of art, art in the living, to mediate all the unspeakable, that what silenced those who survived, both victims and persecutors, unable to speak, unless prompted in the courts and even then, the laughter of non-comprehension: Hannah Arendt you knew about it (1963); about the non-regret; and then those who were beyond regret, those who stubbornly rebuilt for a future, which as we know has now grown cold and even better now, it is no longer cold or hot, but in the past, perhaps. So ink flowing, stains staining, fat moulding, blood even, for you Josef Beuys, but for you Henri Michaux, the price of rationality, shutting down one part of the brain, letting it go cold, to enable the swift brain to let you lose. On your migration. Yet, the

life open to him, a writing un hoped for, affording relief, in which he will be able at last to express himself far from words, words, the words of others. (Michaux, 1951)

⁴ Lacan's sardine can is a fisherman's story, a parable. Lacan (1978) narrates an event where fisherman Petit-Jean points out a floating sardine can in the sea, with the comment that it didn't look back at him. Lacan disagrees. Beyond illustrating Lacan's theory of the gaze, it could also be regarded as an environmental parable, as looking into the canned eye of the hunted acknowledges responsibility. For a summary on Lacan's gaze see Josefina Ayerza:

The subject that is an object, that is the gaze, is outside: you are looked at, you are the picture. Lacan's sardine-tin story throws light on the issue of the 'all-seen' subject, now splitting in search of itself, now diving, now reduced to zero (Ayerza, 1993)

speechlessness of the late 1940s gave rise to new signs, the ideograms of a generation already breastfed in automatism, in dream sequences, in hallucinatory experiences.

6a

Sorgfältig aufbewahren! **Impfbuch** für

Name: *Rohr*
 Vorname: *Doris*
 geb. am: *19.5.64* in: *[scribble]*
 Wohnort: *[scribble]* Kreis: *Harzheim-Rymont*
 Straße: *[scribble]* Telefon: *5380*

Zugezogen in: _____

(Dienststempel der ausgebenden Behörde)

Blutgruppenzugehörigkeit

Blutgruppe: (ggf. A-Unterguppe)

Rh.-pos.	Rh.-neg.	Formel
*	**	

Rh.-Faktor: _____

Befundeintragung: * = Rh.-pos. bzw. ** = Rh.-neg.

Bemerkungen: *[scribble]*

(Datum der Untersuchung) _____

(Stempel des Laboratoriums) _____ (Unterschrift des Arztes) _____

Serum-Injektionen

Art (Diphtherie, Tetanus usw.)	Herkunft (Pferd, Kind, Hammel)	Menge (E, ml)	Datum	An- und Unterschrift des Arztes
<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	E	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>
<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	ml	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>
<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	E	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>
<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	ml	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>
<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	E	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>
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<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>	ml	<i>[scribble]</i>	<i>[scribble]</i>

Besondere Schutzimpfungen gegen Typhus, Paratyphus usw. (z. B. anlässlich Wehrdienst)

Datum	Art der Impfung	Menge	An- und Unterschrift des Arztes
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Anon 'Impfbuch' for Doris Rohr 'countersigned' by Doris Rohr: 'I recognise my childlike scribbles, the imitation of adult writing, the code of grown ups'

The signs, the secret script we kind of understand without having to tell – no literal transcription is required – we recognise the erasure, the undoing of knowing, and I

recognise my childlike scribbles, the imitation of adult writing, the code of grownups, I also recognise this in all those cast nets, bycatch included, (crabs even). Nets of signs, neither representation nor sign, just repetition compulsion. (Incidentally, thanks to Wikipedia, that which is too common and democratic to be quotable in serious academic text, thanks to this commoner's agency, bycatch is defined as 'either of a different species, the wrong sex, or is undersized or juvenile individuals of the target species.')

We become blind to what we see and don't notice what is. How the sound finds its visual realisation on the page once one puts the hooded lid over the eye. How the eye becomes liberated to let the hand go off the leash – playing, running, storming.

Isn't that what Henri Michaux sought to find? The act of labour of not finding - a search for balance of forms resembling script or alphabets, forms created with absence to word meaning, also not signs, but annotations. Tapping into the un-selfconscious in the sense that through both word and image, through drawing and writing, artists wanted to appropriate. Cast the net – that net again - into the elusiveness of subconscious processes.

Ikarus/Absalon.

Absence/ the plain

Soaring sky.

Nowhere to hide

Unless: oblivion.

Ikarus, or

Buried but eyes. Flounder.

Presence/ the thicket.

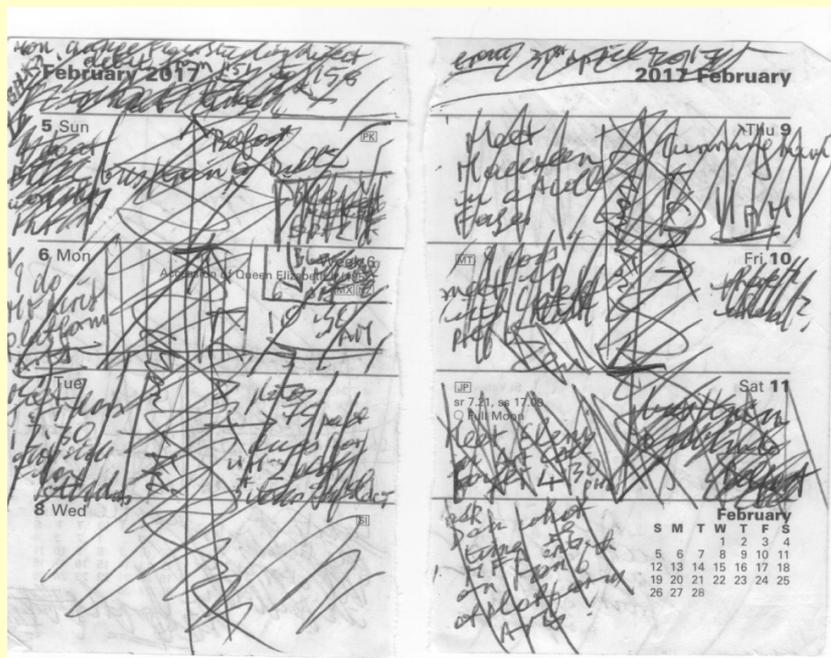
Nowhere to run.

Obstacles.

Shelter. Unkempt.

Absalon

(31st May 2017)



Alastair MacLennan (undated) torn pages from diary, gift to Doris Rohr.

A collection of notes, scribbles, primordial, regressive, erasing legibility or advancing to a code we all know yet cannot be translated. My pre-mature ‘writing’ before I knew writing (the *Impfbuch*, a child’s vaccination record) effacing the parallel voice of authority, doctor’s signatures and validation stamps, is simply this: drawing emulating script. Josef Beuys’s withdrawal - writing turning drawing – performing while drawing, often for hours, is a deliberate choice to shrink the dominance of verbal language. Drawing as an extension of the body. Of its movement or arrested movement. Drawing like breathing. Alastair

MacLennan's performances exercising duration in arrested motion - motionlessness⁵. The undoing of appointments in his diary. Erasure of events. This torn from his diary - a gift when seeking a conversation over green tea. Alastair telling me of his initiation into becoming a true artist after taking lessons in Zen, to seek through living. This is about about undoing time. Henri Michaux, you knew that drawing is duration.

Instead of one vision to the exclusion of others, I wanted to draw the moments which end to end make life, to show the inner phrase, the worldless phrase, the sinuous strand that unwinds indefinitely and is intimately present in each inner and outer event.

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

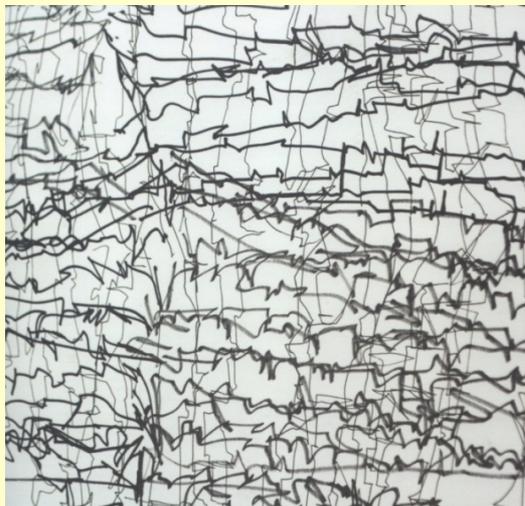
Cinematic drawing. (Michaux, 1957; reprinted in *Henri Michaux*, 1978, 98)

'For me it's the word that gives rise to all pictures.' (Beuys, quoted in Koepplin, 1988, 9). There is no finite outcome, only a chain of ideas. This flexibility and tolerance for formulation and reformulation is also shared with poetry and literature. Josef Beuys's speaks about drawing as imprint, and such, if understood as legacy, as having left an impression in the viewer, or reader, is more conceptual than material. Even though materiality is implicit, it is the resonance of an artwork that is its true imprint. In an interview with Bernice Rose Beuys suggests that

⁵ In an interview with Alastair MacLennan Nicholas Stewart teases out the complex relationship between the non-material practice of performance and the role of duration or of arresting motion in MacLennan's performances, and the importance of Zen in directing MacLennan's practice. Drawing, as for Josef Beuys, is a dematerialised practise for MacLennan, part of the body, and part of the rhythm of existence. 'Drawing is breath', MacLennan told us in a lecture given to University of Ulster Staff and Students in 2017. The diary pages were kindly given to me when spending a little time with Alastair MacLennan drinking green tea and supping pea soup in the Merchant Hotel on the 10th April 2017. Drawing here defined as the moment of erasing the events of a notebook or diary, not necessarily a deliberate conceptual act, more a way of re-using paper spent once in a different way (Stewart, 1983)

Drawing is the first visible form in my works.... The first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible powers to the visible thing... It's really a special kind of thought, brought down onto a surface [...] You have also incorporated the senses... the sense of balance, the sense of vision, the sense of audition, the sense of touch. And everything now comes together: the thought becomes modified by other creative strata within the anthropological entity, the human being... And then the last, not least, the most important thing is that some transfer from the invisible to the visible ends with a sound, since the most important production of human beings is language.... ' (Rose 1993, 73)

Yet Beuys's understanding of language is the voice, and the use of written language is not restricted to an alphabetical understanding. His use of signs in his drawing is diagrammatic, characterized by what is neither gesture, nor drawing, nor text, or all of it in a multilingual, post- or pre-linguistic dimension. Beuys's fascination with language as a system that unravels itself, is evident in the body of drawings that accompany the performance *Hauptstrom (Mainstream)* (1967) a ten-hour performance in an isolated space involving fat and objects⁶.



Sandra Johnston detail of *Breathing Backwards* in *Archiving Time & Place: Contemporary Art Practice in Northern Ireland since the Belfast Agreement*, Millennium Court Arts Centre, Portadown 2009. Image © Sandra Johnston

⁶ Josef Beuys Drawing from 'Hauptstrom' performance <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/95517?locale=en>

Drawing as illumination is mediated through the body. Sandra Johnston's drawings are performed drawings. In *Breathing backwards* language is emptied of linguistic or semiotic references, reduced to the elemental, the primordial. The reference to breath homage to Josef Beuys, as for Beuys, as for MacLennan, *drawing is breath*. As Ann Temkin puts it 'Beuys's attitude toward drawing implied it to be as intrinsic to him as breathing' (Temkin, 1993, 27) So the body performs – repetition, breathing, moving, gesture, control of space, in space of environment as much as on the space of the paper, as all drawing implies its negative space and lives through it. Negative as defined as other, as that which needs to be internalised to make meaningful sense out of everyday life experience.

The writer Heinrich Böll, friend of Josef Beuys, collaborator of sorts to atone the past, painstakingly scouring the soil so riddled with blood for the rhizome of fascism, left behind by the trials of 'Entnazifizierung', that incomplete weeding exercise by those allegedly allied forces. Heinrich Böll makes his character Dr Murke, a professional sound recorder for radio, collect silences, splicing the tape to remove air time, and reconfiguring them into a tape of silences, sighs, whispers, breath withheld, emanated, exhaled, inhaled. The spaces of non-speaking. (Böll, 1992, 37 - 55).

Breathing without words: sighs

Sighs without sound.

Emptied speech.

Edited.

Drawing: writing without words.

Overwriting

Unwriting.

I am struck by Derrida's comment of sight being breath. Breath is life. If sight is breath, and if our capability to see is impaired, as we are blind or partially blind to perceive fully, then we constantly hover at this threshold of life/death. [...] Derrida, in the paragraph about breath, talks about his own illness. Coincidentally (but there is no coincidence for Derrida), he had suffered from a rare virus resulting in one of his eyelids not being able to perform its important blinking function. This led to facial paralysis. He describes the 'loss of the 'wink' or 'blink', therefore this moment of blindness that ensures sight its breath' (Derrida 1993, 32). Derrida muses over the kinaesthetic explorative 'gaze' of contemporary science where sound and wave patterns explored the lack of sight in his affected eye. Any medical attention brings us to contemplate mortality as we become the subject of such detailed interrogation through instruments and machines, and the human end receiving these data to help us back to health (Rohr, 2016, 195).

Drawing in its use of white space mediates between the said and the unsaid. Illegible, using symbols, drawings can operate on a similar visual or symbolic, even ritualistic function, as words. Is a handwritten word a drawing, or can a drawing become a word? What is the name for this nethering?



Doris Rohr (2017) *testing* (ink on paper)

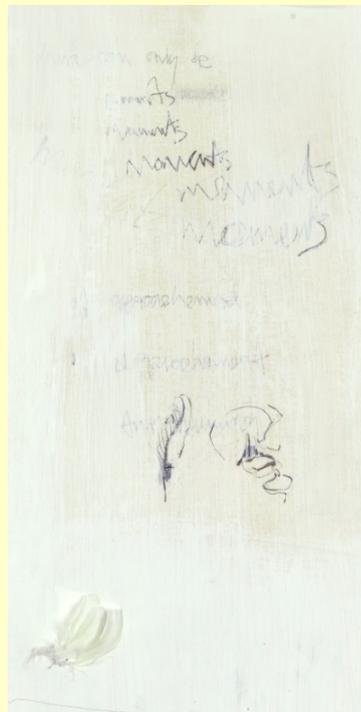


Doris Rohr (2016) Notebook page

Exercising my fingers I walk them across the page, marking the paper on my journey. Walking my eyes across the maze of black symbols on a white page, letters become images in my head and I envisage buildings, arches, mountains, moss, rocks, ridges, refuges, weeds, debris, litter, waste, islands, arms and angels. A passage. (Ibid, 58)

The impossibility of agreement of meaning – a doubted faith in transparency of language. We know how to doubt. The ambivalence of writing as *trait* and drawing as *trait* (Jacques Derrida) allows me to consider my handwriting, the notes and annotations in my sketchbook, my journal that to equal measure contains graphic representation in symbols and letters, and drawings of a descriptive, representational nature. Drawing, it digests, transforms my understanding of text distributed by others into a language of my own, my own babble that in turn needs translation through words. Moreover, drawing makes text out of sense and experience – it compresses space, time, the third and fourth dimension, like the novels do, into a congested edited field of marks. One leaves far more out than in. Even Marcel Proust's search for lost time left out millions of seconds. One cannot write fast enough to catch the moment.

Indeed, Hélène Cixous, time puts an end to it.



Doris Rohr (2007) *Devolve* pencil and feather and gesso on paper

The many deaths. Death of singularity. Of the image, of the text. Of the author. Of the genius. Of the maker. Of saints, martyrs, gods. Of loved ones. All is co-authored. The network of relations, underground.

Roland Barthes' photo of his mother in the winter garden, withheld from the reader, so you can fill that gap with your own mother in a winter garden? A picture constructed through words, or rather its ambience is set somewhat shadily and it is fuzzy, like a memory we cannot fully retrieve, or a dream at the periphery of consciousness; an overexposed image, or one that has become unreadable with time. An image as bright and stark and almost illegible as Sharon Kivland's fabricated evidence of Freud's Rome.

He refuses to insert his mother into the space of the not-represented wintergarden. Who refuses? Me? Derrida? First he refuses, refutes, the possibility of writing an epitaph for a friend (in *The Work of Mourning*). Then he writes what seems to me an apologia, because writing comforts, temporarily, it soothes, it covers the paper, perhaps it helps him to cope, I think, projecting what *I* do onto him, no longer there to refute my projections.

I do not put myself in his place, I do not tend to replace his mother with mine. Were I to do so, I could be moved only by the alterity of the without-relation, the absolute unicity that the metonymic power comes to recall in me without effacing it. He is right to protest against the confusion between she who was his mother and the Figure of the Mother, but the metonymic power (one part for the whole or one name for another) will always come to inscribe both in this relation without relation. (Derrida 2001, 58)

When Derrida writes on Barthes, this eulogy, it takes the place of a long exposure. Barthes's mother becomes substituted with the non-representativeness of the son Roland Barthes. He cannot be summed up. The man he knew and loved, the man he recalls mostly during travels, face to face or side by side –

I shall not make of this an allegory, even less a metaphor, but I recall that it was while travelling that I spent the most time alone with Barthes. Sometimes head to head, I mean face to face (for example on the train from Paris to Lille or Paris to Bordeaux) and sometimes side by side, separated by an aisle [...] (55)

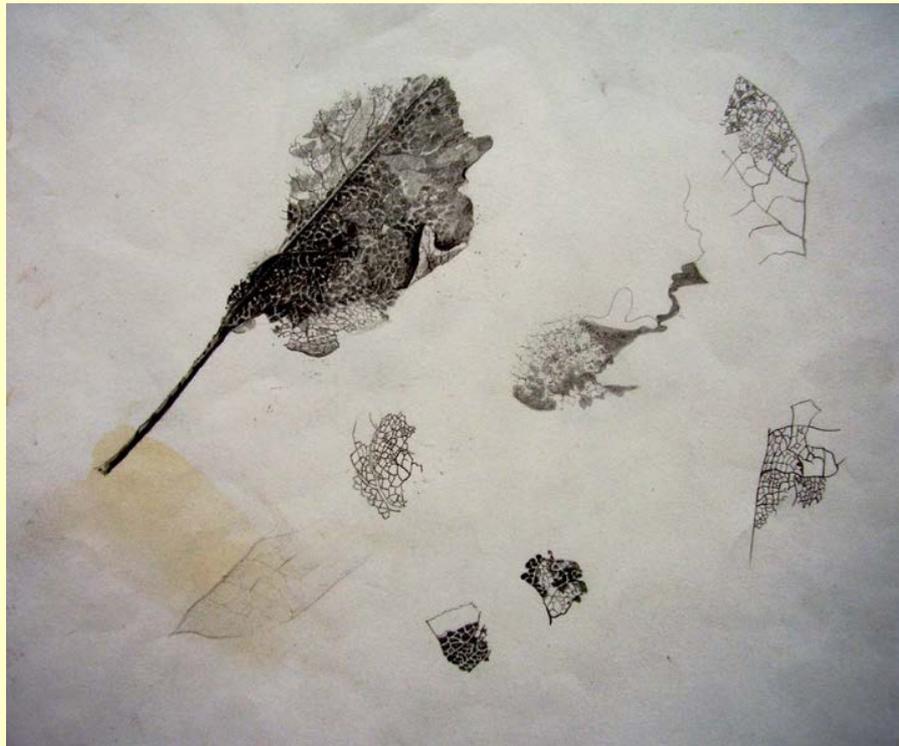
- he describes as if a shadowgram. Like the son Roland Barthes longing for his point of origin, the centre of his life, his mother, consumed by love and respect, and painful realisation that the image he wants to preserve slips through his hands, a reflection at best, rendered unintelligible when the hand touches the surface of that reflection, a ripple of small waves.

‘The image of the I of Barthes’, this is how Derrida characterises the complexities of friendship - as much projection, as much as the text is the product of the reader, so forgive me Roland Barthes for paraphrasing you so lightly, so is the character, the memory of one who is loved and departed, an inscription in the other. As the one who survives one reproduces the textual entity of the person lost. Not lost, remembered. I add, without asking permission of either of them, that one reconstructs that text that is the lost other, the one who has left. Permutations of something that seems essential in the core, yet – like everything – on a bad day one has a different picture than on a good day. Yet perhaps Derrida’s understanding of friendship is more constant, unwavering. Yet, if the text is as much the construction of the reader, (this holds equally of the picture being understood, received, in the viewer, or music performed being completed by the listener), than so is the memory of a person beloved, as a text, an epitaph, an image not reproducible in its entirety, and nothing can replace, substitute or perform this adequately.

So the enigmatic mother, not Mother, yet perhaps so, mediates this non-tangible complex characterisation of the friend Derrida offers as his ‘gift’ (50):

Ever since reading *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes’s mother, whom I never knew, smiles at me at this thought, as at everything she breathes life into and revives with pleasure. (36)

Ultimately as Derrida knows, and so he quotes his friend, ultimately language is insufficient to speak of the other’s significance, (‘the frivolous insignificance of language’), as insufficient as the image (‘the suspension of images must be the very space of love, its music.’) (43). Mazes of words decomposing into lines. Scratches. Affiliations. Rhizomes. Umbilical.



Doris Rohr (approx. 1984?) *Leaf skeletons* pencil on paper

John Ruskin, drawer, writer, performer, preacher - let me get a word in for you, here at the end, as you seem to know already. Let me dedicate a drawing to your method of teaching seeing: leaf skeletons. Rhizomes. Maps. Networks. Affiliations. Miniature mazes. In Joseph Hillis Miller's words on Ruskin all this nethering on words and images foretold, precluded by you:

Ruskin makes the distinction [of word and image] problematic by relating both words and pictures to the primordial material act of scratching a surface to make it a sign. That sign, Ruskin suggests, is always a miniature maze and is always connected to its context by labyrinthine lines of filiation. [...] For Ruskin, not only are signs always both verbal and pictorial, but also any configuration of signs has a temporal and narrative dimension. (Miller, 1992, 75)

The Shadow.

It landed first

With widespread wings.

Enlarged by the oblique

Angle of the morning light.

Shafting.

A moment of relief:

To see the clean neat

White plumage of the

Bird,

Following.

Catching its own shadow.

United.

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