

Drawing on the “Lived Experience” —An Investigation of Perception, Ideation and Praxis

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Abstract

“When we do not have the words to say something, drawing can define both the real and unreal in visual terms” (Kovats, 2007: p. 8). The paper addresses the question: what is the relationship between perceptual experience and its interpretation through drawing? It is proposed that drawing, as knowledge and experience, is a particular way of coming to know the world that is explicated within artistic practice. The research examines how drawing, through its expression of the concrete and the imaginary, provides interconnected ways of orientating knowledge that contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the “lived experience” (Dilthey, 2010). The study draws on philosophy, in particular the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to consider the complexities and interconnections of mind, object and body that are experienced through drawing. A central tenet of the research is an examination of the role of the body in constituting and explicating experience. In considering how we, as objects, are integral to the world and its phenomena, it is proposed that our “sense experience” (*Sentir*) (Heidegger, 1962) furnishes us with the ability to enter into this world as sensate beings; to interact, affect and engage with the world in both time and space. Maurice Merleau-Ponty in an essay entitled “Eye and Mind”, first published in 1961 (Johnson, 1993), contends that it is through contemplating a connection between the “seer and the seen”, in a direct reference to artist and viewer, that our experience of the world is “opened up more fully” (Johnson, 1993: p. 124). That is, by being immersed in the visible, the concrete, through the body, the visible is not appropriated, but is instead revealed by the act of “looking”. The practice of drawing is a means through which the act of looking is evinced in a tangible form. Investigating practice: Drawing, it will be argued, can make the invisible visible; exploring through sensing, feeling, thinking and doing. It questions and investigates the possibilities of experience, ideas and memory through its ability to retain and articulate traces of the past, the present and imagine the future. In attempting to define and refine conceptions of the foundations, or beginnings, of practice, its development and emergence, philosophical paradigms offer the practitioner ways of thinking: these include historicity, presence and intention. It is this first person’s point of view, subjectivity, and

its role that becomes the principal focus of investigations. The outcomes document, as a visualisation and a transcript, a progression, from description of the “lifeworld” (Moran, 2005) or “lived experience”, towards an interpretation of the immersed, subjective experience.

Keywords

Drawing, Practice-Based Research, Philosophy, Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Art, Fine Art

The research direction evolved from a need to try to understand, more analytically, the developmental process within drawing. The enquiry began by examining my belief in the importance of the “lived experience” (Dilthey, 2010) as a foundation for drawing to achieve powerful and satisfying forms of personal expression, often beyond the scope of words. Thus, a principle question evolved: what is the relationship between perceptual experience and its interpretation through drawing?

As the boundaries of art practice shift and alter the research investigates drawing as way of revealing knowledge and experience. Underpinning the investigation is an engagement with philosophy in attempting to understand the complexities and interconnections of mind and body, ideation and practice. The opportunity to engage in practice-based research challenges and unpicks fundamental assumptions about making art and artifacts. It is predicated on the notion that there “has to be permission to admit what you do not know...” (Graham, 2000: p. 50) as well as openness to creating something that tests and challenges ideation, making and outcomes.

The enquiry examines how drawing provides interconnected ways of orientating knowledge that contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the “lived experience” (Dilthey, 2010). A central tenet of the research is an examination of the role of the body in constituting and explicating experience. In considering how we, as objects, are integral to the world and its phenomena, it is proposed that our “sense experience” (Sentir) (Heidegger, 1962) furnishes us with the ability to enter into this world as sensate beings; to interact, affect and engage with the world in both time and space. Which in turn re-orientates drawing as an activity which constitutes the relations between, rather than or as well as, the things themselves.

The experience of the individual is pivotal to the production of a relational knowledge, which, it is proposed, is revealed through the process of making. As Huebler (1969) acknowledges, the process of engagement with the world characterizes art:

...As an activity that extends human consciousness through constructs that transpose natural phenomena from that qualitatively undifferentiated condition that we call “life” into objective and internally focused concepts... (Huebler, 1969: p. 173)

Heubler’s conception offers a phenomenological paradigm within which the “lived experience” (Husserl in Moran, 2005; Dilthey, 1985, 2010) is orientated through a mediated interpretation, drawing, conjoining experience, memory and imagination.

The importance of drawing within my own work has emerged progressively and now is integral to my artistic practice, driven by a belief in the fundamental importance of drawing as a way of learning about the world, its objects and how our experience of them shapes thinking. Initially ideas were fixed around assumptions that knowledge is based on understanding; drawing from observation, encouraging looking, seeing and thinking about the object and its context. These ideas have developed, through the research process, to explore and extend the boundaries of personal assumptions, in examining the how and why of drawing: perception and experience, the visible and the invisible, the real and the imaginary.

From a personal perspective, I needed to develop a way of examining not only the drawing process, but also my thinking about it. It is this first person point of view, subjectivity, and its role that becomes the principal focus of my investigations. A methodology is established through constituting the reflexive analysis of observation, ideation and drawing activity within different methods of working: drawing in the landscape, working in the studio, photography and films of drawing activity. The outcomes document, as a visualisation and a transcript, a progression, from description of the “lifeworld” (Moran, 2001, 2005) or “lived experience”, towards an inter-

pretation of the subjective. The challenges to personal practice, through investigating perception and ideation, are explored within the context of the phenomenological parallels witnessed in the author's practice-based research.

1. Why Drawing?

“What is drawing? At first glance the question seems simple enough to be superfluous; but upon reflection it becomes not only difficult, but perhaps not even definable.” (Jacobs, 1991: p. 10)

The history of drawing is the history of human involvement with the world (Rawson, 1987, 1979; Berger, 2008). Since the earliest times we have sought to communicate, record and remember through the activity of drawing. Principally drawing affords “insightful glimpses” (Sale & Betti, 2004) into particular experiences without making the relationship between the personal and the universal explicit. The process of looking, seeing and viewing enables us to interpret experiences “visually, emotionally and aesthetically” (Sale & Betti, 2004: p. 6). As we move into the 21st century we are at a point where both everything and nothing can be thought of as drawing (Jacobs, 1991; Kovats, 2007; Harty, 2012; Sawdon & Marshall, 2012). Post-modern approaches to practice seek to explore drawing as an expansive and inclusive way of working which has begun to dissolve the boundaries—blurring the borders of disciplines such as photography, painting and sculpture. This approach has then opened up a huge territory over which drawing can roam. Freed from the shackles of material and outcome artists have moved to utilize drawings' ability to record the immediate as well as explore the third and fourth dimensions. The character of contemporary drawing practice can be defined by its inherent ambiguity (Sawdon & Marshall, 2012); that is activity and outcomes which hint at the subtleties of the subjective experience contained within the activity itself. As Meskimmon identifies, “The moment of drawing, as an act of relating, is one of sustained engagement, of unwavering attention.” (Meskimmon cited in Sawdon & Marshall, 2012: p. xi) and thus, in “relating”, connects experience, artist and viewer within a shared “moment”. As the boundaries dissolve and are remade by artist and viewer, drawing demonstrates its ability to cross conceptual territories, between and over thresholds whilst at the same time engaging modes of consciousness within the act of making. Within these contexts, drawing can be said to be a particular way of thinking about the world and its objects that is not confined to paper or pencil.

2. Why Phenomenology?

Phenomenology has been “...identified as a manner or style of thinking...” (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: p. x). Its primary concerns are with the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear within them, as objects for systematic reflection and analysis. In examining their role in constituting or giving meaning to the world, such reflection can be “...defined as the study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view.” (Woodruff Smith, 2007: p. 1). Thus, engaging the self in considering the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology turns directly to lived experience to provide descriptions of experience and of objects, rather than causal explanations.

The purpose of a phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, identifying phenomena through the consideration of experience from the perspective of the individual (Lester, 1999; Woodruff-Smith, 2007). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004) in his introduction to *The World of Perception*, declared that phenomenology enabled a consideration of levels of consciousness in order to “...seek an understanding from all [these] angles simultaneously...” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: p. xxi). Therefore, based within a phenomenological paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, assumptions are “bracketed” (Ricoeur, 1996; Lester, 1999; Bailey, 1982; Moustakas, 1994; Wrathall, 2007) in order to gain an understanding of experience. Thus, phenomenological standpoints offer a variety of ways of considering differing aspects of drawing practice. In seeking primarily to describe, rather than explain, phenomenological investigation begins from a standpoint free of hypothesis and preconceptions (Lester, 1999), although this remains a contentious viewpoint (Plummer, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

In considering phenomenology's primary objective of seeking to describe rooted in the subjectivity of personal experience (O'Riley, 2006; Bailey, 1982) it can be argued that drawing offers pluralistic visualizations of that same subjective experience. These parallels are evinced through the roles of drawer, drawing and drawn viewed within a reflective and analytical paradigm. Phenomenology and drawing offer each other the possibilities of new ways of thinking, describing and interpreting experience.

3. Describing Experience

In contemplating the characteristics of phenomenological description Paul Ricœur's (1996) outline of Edmund Husserl's primary phenomenological concern offers an insight into Husserl's fundamental principles. Husserl (1970), who is considered its founder (Zahavi, 1994), contends that Phenomenology is essentially concerned with the making of the structures of consciousness (Woodruff-Smith, 2007). In particular, the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness, as objects of systematic reflection and analysis, and thus its role in constituting or giving meaning to the world (Ricœur, 1996). Husserl's (1970) phenomenology contends that this begins with a consciousness of experience itself, articulating a conception of phenomenology founded in the epistemology of experience. Husserl (1970) further developed conceptual assertions (Moran, 2001) that led him to propose that in order to study the structure of consciousness there must be a distinction between the act of consciousness and the phenomena at which it is directed (the object-in-itself, transcendent to consciousness) (Husserl, 2001). These concepts became fundamental to the development of Husserl's phenomenology, in the distinction that he drew between an *act* of consciousness, its *content* or essence, and its *object* (Moran, 2001; Ricœur, 1996; Woodruff-Smith, 2007). It is this distinction between the act of consciousness and the its object offers a way of considering the experience of drawing, its *content* and its *object*, as it is described through the act as well as the outcome. That is to say that the object, for example landscape, as it appears in consciousness can be separated from consciousness of the object through the activity of drawing. Drawing admits the object to consciousness but also allows reflection and analysis of the object within the activity, thus constituting the distinction between the object and the act of consciousness. The drawing itself, as object, adds another dimension to the complex subjective experience of object, drawing and the drawn.

As I turn my attention inwards to think about the interweaving perceptions, as I walk, I am aware that everything is happening outside of me. I am within, reaching, straining to be out, my body as a part of the experience.

When I begin to draw I focus all of my attention on all of these perceptions. They are a part of the experience, but how can I capture the smell of the morning, the sound of the water, the feeling of the sun as it seems to glare into my thoughts?

Is it this that I want to capture—is it even possible?

In the same way as I have to think to look and see, concentrating on one small aspect and working outwards, I will have to begin to think in a different way. The experience is a large and vital thing; I have to look at each aspect in turn focusing my thoughts on each aspect, isolating it. (Extract from author's journal)

This conception of the relationship between acts of consciousness and the phenomena that appear within them could be said to be explicated within drawing practice, as can be seen in the reflective writing within the authors journal. The epistemological experience of drawing posits phenomena within consciousness which, in turn, become "objects for systematic analysis and reflection" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004), describing not only the object, or phenomena, but also emerging consciousness of that object, the drawings themselves. Husserl's phenomenological way of looking at objects is characterized by examining how we, in our many ways of being intentionally directed toward them, actually "constitute" them (to be distinguished from materially creating objects or objects being figments of the imagination) (Ricœur 1996). These ideas then begin to separate, or introduce, categories of objects, the landscape being different from a created object—a drawing. A drawing however can be said to have a dual role as an object, created in which the self is invested, and as an object in itself outside of the activity of making or creating it. Drawing's duality, as activity and object, can be defined through its ability to describe, or show reality, as well as being able to "...describe how it describes." (O'Riley, 2006: p. 2) This duality can be seen through the distinction of description, as *object*, and "describing how it describes" as being an active *process*; drawing activity. This duality comes to the fore in drawing in situ, or the landscape. Drawing in a particular place engages the drawer in describing the relationship to the landscape alongside the "lived experience" of being there. As the drawing unfolds across the paper it begins to drive itself as the drawer is caught up within the sensory experience (Figure 1). The process of looking, absorbing and relating allows the process to come to the fore, reflection and analysis is caught up within the activity of the mark making.

4. Conjoining Relationships

"When we do not have the words to say something, drawing can define both the real and unreal in visual



Figure 1. Niederau-charcoal and watercolour on paper.

terms” (Kovats, 2007: p. 8).

Drawing is in itself an act that requires, in some form, a physical response and the complex relationship of object and consciousness can be said to be founded in that subjective experience. Butler and De Zegher (2011) define drawing in “*On Line*” as “A kinesthetic practice of traction—attraction, extraction, protraction—drawing is born from an outward gesture linking inner impulses and thoughts through the touching of a surface...” (Butler & De Zegher, 2011: p. 23)

Geoffrey Bailey (1982) in *Drawing and the Drawing Activity: A Phenomenological Investigation*, examines the phenomena of drawing from this philosophical standpoint. Bailey’s consideration of whether drawing, the “draughtsman”, is able to make actual, or visible, a “perceptual interchange” through a reflection of the world, essentially defines drawing as a process that constitutes a move towards meaning. This movement, Bailey contends, is evident in the imaginative engagement that “brings time and space together” (Bailey, 1982), a coalescence. This demonstration of “a move” from the “lived experience” to a consideration of that experience, establishes the order and sustainability of the “drawings world”. It is proposed that this becomes evident through a movement in thought: from the concrete towards the imaginary.

Drawing, as a knowledge of experience, is a particular way of coming to know the world both philosophically and practically, as a complex network of thoughts, feelings and awareness which holds particular significance and value subjectively. Prosser (2004) asserts that “phenomenology is determined not to be either a science of objects or the subject, but that of experience: it concentrates upon where being and consciousness make contact.” (Prosser, 2004: p. 6). And so a paradigm emerges within which personal practice is able to found itself in a conception of drawing as a way of learning about the world and its objects, at the point where being and consciousness intersect.

As I settle myself to draw, I feel the slithering sand beneath the rug and notice the wind whipping at the edges of the paper. I select my graphite, before beginning to draw I look around and orientate myself in this particular place. I feel the dunes at my back, sheltering, as I begin to draw the line traces the relationship between the forms that stand in relation to me, describing a relational space. The slip of land across the estuary the tracts of the ebbing tide, the breakwaters emerge vertically to counter the horizontality of the sweeping sands and dunes. The scrubby trees, at the periphery of my vision, are bent and twisted by the insistent wind high on the rising headland. The line begins to plot the relationships between, the space between. (Extract from author’s journal)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2006) writing, in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, extends Husserl's phenomenology, through his analysis of perception and concrete experiences to expand conceptions of the phenomenology of experience. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both considered themselves Phenomenologist's but what separated them was their different interpretations of what was meant by "experience" (Johnson, 1993). Merleau-Ponty (2006) contends that experience cannot be considered without including the body as a means or "nexus" (Dilthey, 2010) of embodied experience, something he believed was overlooked by Husserl (Zaner, 1964; Kocklemans, 1967; Zahavi, 1994). Merleau-Ponty (1964a) viewed the body not as the physical body as the object of Biology, but rather a site of a complex set of concurrences, as "...the structure of the perceptual field is the coexistence of subject and phenomena as lived interrelatedness..." (Rowley, 2007: p. 47). Merleau-Ponty's (2006) aim was to develop a description of embodied experience through his consideration of the body as object already within the world. Merleau-Ponty addresses the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy through the constitution of the body as an "object" and so begins to orientate a conception of an objective world which exists "out there" (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: p. 72). An outside world that is distinguishable from the thinking subject is then, no longer an autonomous subjectivity that is found "everywhere and nowhere" (Merleau-Ponty, 2006), in reference to Husserl, but a realization of "... the transformation which it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence". (Merleau-Ponty, 2006: p. 72) For Merleau-Ponty perception is not merely the result of functioning organs but a vital, human, complex and performative act. Merleau-Ponty's (2004, 2006) ideas can be viewed through the conjoining the relationships of "object" and the act of drawing alongside the drawing as object and within the context of an embodied experience. It is this approach that could be said to conflate theory and embodied activity within the paradigm of personal, subjective, drawing practice (Figure 2).

To move towards abstraction is to be able to move towards uncertainty, and is itself a subjective construction. Does this move then represent a different level of thinking? The reinterpretation of form more "abstractly" is achieved through being able to embrace ambiguity, a move beyond appearance. The mark becomes the embodiment or essence of the thought. Whilst the mark may be abstracted from figuration it still has resonance in terms its reference to experience, constructing meaning within the making process as well as through analytical reflection (thinking about the thought).

In these terms, a single mark may come to embody "form" in connection to the subject's intention; its relationship within the spatial organization, its correlation to the symbolism of representation and interpretation of past, present and future, considering form as an end in itself of the "moment". Form, within drawing, is the structure through which the phenomenological reflection is articulated. (Extract from author's journal).

5. Seer and Seen

Merleau-Ponty (1964a) goes on to further extend embodiment through the context of art practice in his essay



Figure 2. Sunderland Point-graphite and charcoal on paper-sketchbook.

“Eye and Mind” which was first published in 1961 (Johnson, 1993). This essay saw the emergence of Merleau-Ponty’s refined articulation of the concept of the “visible and the invisible” (*Ibid*). “Eye and Mind” demonstrates a concerted move towards an ontology that is explicated within a more specific consideration of both the visible and invisible that, Merleau-Ponty (1964a) asserts, can be evidenced within painting and drawing. The theme of relations between the visible and invisible is taken up by Merleau-Ponty (1964a) and made explicit through his reflections on “modern” painting. Whilst the focus of this research is drawing, Merleau-Ponty’s writing holds insights for personal practice that moves beyond materials, and techniques. As contemporary practices, in the early 21st Century, blur the lines between disciplines in must be remembered that Merleau-Ponty was writing at a time when these boundaries were more defined and came with their own histories. This is evinced through the illustrations included within the essay. They are reproductions of the work of Paul Klee (1879-1940), Nicholas de Stael (1914-1955), Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), drawings by Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) and Henri Matisse (1861-1954) and the sculptures of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and Germaine Richier (1902-1959). It is interesting to note that at the time of Merleau-Ponty’s writing of “*Eye and Mind*” all of the artists were dead apart from Alberto Giacometti. Indeed, the works specifically referred to in the text, were produced from between 1882 up until Giacometti’s drawing, “*Portrait d’aime Maeght*”, 1960, but predominately refer to the early modernist movement in Western Art and are identified through the canons of traditional Fine Art practice; painting, sculpture, drawing, etc.

And so, in attempting to begin to formulate a new phenomenological way of thinking, Merleau-Ponty (1964a), focuses on “the painter”. His reflections are founded in his assertion that it is the primacy of the body that allows the artist to engage with the world, as it is “...by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into painting.” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Johnson, 1993: p. 123) This “lending” of the body to the world implies a dissolving of Husserl’s distinctions between object and subject through inner and outer interaction and engagement. Merleau-Ponty begins to establish the idea that it is through this interchange of body and world, that the process of transubstantiation begins, the process of an “intertwining of vision and movement” (*Ibid*: 124). Merleau-Ponty focuses wholly on the interaction of vision and movement, privileging vision above the other senses. He goes onto clarify his term “vision” as being more than causal in nature; predicated on, and founded in movement.

It is this interaction, movement and visual engagement that, he believes, establishes a “personal” landscape that is “carried over onto the map of the visible” (*Ibid*: 124). He proceeds to further elucidate this complex relationship between the “visible” and the immersed world of the body, through considering their imbrication. Merleau-Ponty contends that it is through contemplating this connection that the seer “opens onto the world” (*Ibid*: 124). That is, by being immersed in the visible, through the body, the visible is not appropriated, but is instead revealed by the act of “looking”. This paradox, of both being “seen” and the “seer” is derived from the body simultaneously looking at all things as well as looking at itself: “It sees itself seeing: it touches itself touching: it is visible and sensitive for itself.” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Johnson, 1993: p. 124)

The immersion in the visible and the movement of the body becomes part of a relational space that is essentially founded on a self-knowledge, as “my movement is self-moved” (*Ibid*: 124) and emanates from the self. In being able to look at all things as well as itself, the body is able to acknowledge both sides of this looking. It is this very duality that engages the body with the world, being “caught up” in it. It is the undivided nature of the “sensing” and the “sensed” that characterizes the presence of the human body and it is the “strong system of exchanges” (*Ibid*: 125) that begins to articulate a conception of painting that is engaged with a mode of experience, at the core of which is an immersed body.

Although Merleau-Ponty focuses on painting, his conceptualization of the integral nature of the body in considering experience and the activity of making speaks directly to drawing and its practice. If phenomenology’s primary aim is to “describe”, as discussed earlier, then the body could then be said to mediate this “lived experience” through its presence as both “seer and seen”. This act of mediation, the duality, offers the potential to bridge the gap between description and interpretation and enables object, activity and outcome to be viewed as something that is concurrent and intertwined as oppose to consecutive.

That is, by being immersed in the visible, the concrete, through the body, the visible is not appropriated, but is instead revealed by the act of “looking” (Figure 3).

Within these contexts drawing, it can be said, is able to make the invisible visible: exploring through sensing, feeling, thinking and doing. It questions and investigates the possibilities of experience, ideas and memory through its ability to retain and articulate traces of the past, the present and imagine the future.

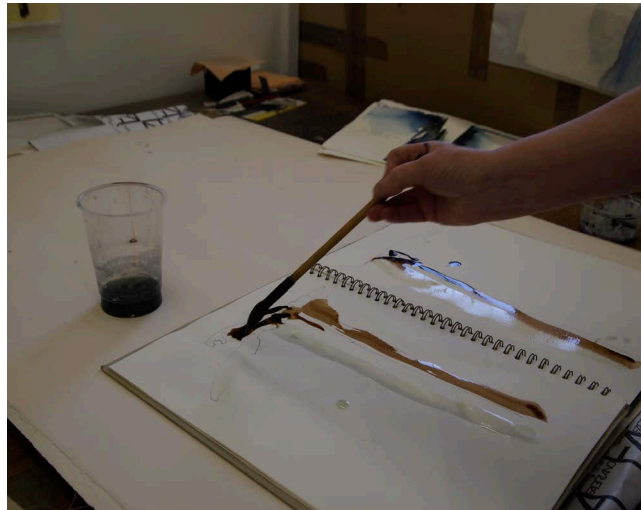


Figure 3. Author drawing in the studio.

So what is it that I am looking for in the remembered experience that I want to express in the drawings? What was it that was the most important element? I began to mentally strip away the different perceptions and impressions within the memory. As I removed an element, say the feeling of the wind as it swirled around me, I would look at its different aspects, almost as if that element were a ball in my hand, turning it this way and that, trying to think of all the permutations and determine its importance.

There comes a point within the process, when the built knowledge and experience become intrinsic to the development of the idea. Increasing levels of reflection and evaluation lead to opportunity to see the work on a more holistic level. Aiming for that balance or equilibrium, that reveals, in part, the essence of the experience at a moment and in the moment. The stripping away of the peripheral structures and marks within the image allows a distillation process to take place. Within the drawing process I have begun to suspend the “analysis in process” side of making. Trying to allow the work to drive itself, with the aim of freeing myself from embodiment within the image, allowing the drawing to connect with itself.

It has form and content, it is about itself as well as indicating something else. It is as realistic as possible and as abstract as possible. (Extract from author’s journal)

6. Phenomenology and Drawing

The philosophical writings of Husserl (1970a, 1970b, 2001), Merleau-Ponty (1964a, 1964b, 2004, 2006) and Heidegger (1962, 1971), as previously discussed, can be seen within the context of drawing and drawing practice as offering ways of considering the artist’s engagement and interaction with the experience and activity of drawing. Husserl’s writing allows the process of drawing, as object and activity to be seen within the context of knowledge and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger’s writing point to a more fundamental ontological foundation of drawing in “experience” and in particular a “human” way of being within the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*). Although it could be argued that these ideas often would seem to preclude or exclude each other in competing for ascendancy, however, within the context of drawing practice, the artist’s engagement with both act and activity is predicated on a multifaceted working methodology (Cain, 2010; O’Riley, 2006). Although ways of working differ within practice, it can be argued, a central tenet emerges in which ways of working combine and conjoin the concrete and the imaginary, the visible and the invisible.

The artist’s complex involvement with object, world, experience and outcome illuminate a complex way of thinking about, in and through a particular way of coming to know the world. This could then, be said to be illustrated through the movement in thought that is realized within the movement of drawing. In this way, Merleau-Ponty (1964a) argues, artistic practice defines our “access to Being”, a “human kind of Being” (Heidegger, 1962) that is orientated through our body being in the world. It is a mode of experience as well as a mode of “thinking”. Merleau-Ponty makes specific reference to the corporeality of the body within the process of making by stating that:

It is, therefore, by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. And so, “To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.” (Rowley, 2007: p. 47)

Merleau-Ponty (1964a) bridges the gap between internal and external, visible and invisible, through his analysis of the use of colour. This focus on colour may be why his writing in “*Eye and Mind*” (1964a) and “*Cezanne’s Doubt*” (1964b) seems to privilege painting—bearing in mind the time of his writing. It is colour, he argues, that “presents us with things” (Johnson, 1993: p. 133)—the world—colour as a dimension rather than a quality, which illuminates, identifies and concentrates experience. He does not profess that colour holds the “master key” however it does, as he sees it, return to “the heart of the thing”—beyond appearance.

To illustrate these ideas he moves to analyze Cezanne’s painting “*Portrait of Vallier*” through examining the colour relationships within the image. The movement contained within the juxtaposition of colours, illustrates, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, a moving depth, as planes, advance and retreat, overlap and intermingle. This is not intended to be an organization of an illusion of depth or the simulation of an empirical vision; it is instead a “concentration...of the visible” (*Ibid*: 141). Merleau-Ponty suggests that the painting ultimately relates to nothing in experience but is instead a “spectacle” that shows “how the world becomes world” (*Ibid*: 141). This is then how painting establishes itself “a secret of pre-existence revealed through the painters seeing—*depth, space and colour*” (*Ibid*: 142). This “re-examination and reuse” Merleau-Ponty articulates through his examination of the figure/ground relation. The focus on line, he argues, cannot be attributed directly to experience, line does not “circumscribe” instead it becomes form, emerging into the “visible”. This viewpoint would seem to point to line’s function being to interpret rather than describe.

Although line is characterized as a property of drawing, Merleau-Ponty believes that is not ruled out within painting. He refers to the artwork of Matisse and Klee as combining both line and colour, not seeking imitation, but instead line revealing or “rendering visible”. This leads him to speculate on two modes, as he sees it, within painting. One mode is epitomized by Klee’s adherence to an idea of the line as the “genesis of the visible” (*Ibid*: 143). The second mode can be seen within the work of Matisse, where the line is imbued with an essence, as a “characterization of the entity” (*Ibid*: 144). Line, in both modes, displays an activity and a passivity that modulates an ordinary spatiality. Through the paradoxicality of the paintings’ plane, surface, and the spatiality of the image upon it, Merleau-Ponty (1964a) believes, that painting offers “glimpses” of the transitions of movement, active and passive, which coalesce into a whole.

Paul Klee also takes up these ideas in his concern “...with the process by which a point becomes a line, a line becomes a plane and a plane becomes a body.” (Butler & De Zegher, 2011). Here, Klee’s connection between, point, line, plane and form have resonances with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the painter “...seeing—*depth, space and colour*” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Johnson, 1993: p. 142). Both line and colour are connected, in drawing, through their desire to generate the “visible” as well as being able to refer to an “essence” that is moving beyond mere description and towards interpretation.

Merleau-Ponty’s reflections and analysis of both activity and outcome within artistic practice begin to render visible the connections between experience and its interpretation through drawing: the immersed experience of the body—a thing of the world—is connected through both the activity of drawing as well as the outcome. The drawings themselves, describe their own experience, and the focus on line and colour allows the drawings to be seen within the context their ability to both describe and interpret (Figure 4).

7. Drawing on the Landscape

The conception of drawing as both description and interpretation of the immersed experience must then be viewed within the context of what is described or interpreted. Personal practice is rooted within the context of the experience of the landscape and the specifics of “place”. Bachelard’s proposition, in *The Poetics of Space*, that the mind is given form through the places and spaces in which we dwell, reinforces the reciprocity of experience, in that, it is those places themselves, that shape and influence our memories, feelings and thoughts; “...*Je suis l’espace où je suis* (I am the space where I am)...” (Bachelard, 1994; p. 137). Bachelard’s focus on the public and private spaces with the domestic house explores the interplay between experience, consciousness and memory and how different spaces engage and affect conceptions of inside and outside, internal and external, experience and memory. If indeed, as Bachelard asserts “...*Je suis l’espace où je suis* (I am the space where I



Figure 4. Sketch-graphite and watercolour on paper.

am)...” (Bachelard, 1994: p. 137) then the specificity of the landscape must be considered in its relation to the notion of “Place” within artistic practice. The phenomenological ways of thinking, outlined above, offer ways of considering this relationship between landscape, artist, activity and outcome. Landscape, and place, it will be argued reveal a fundamental connection between embodied experience and the activity of drawing.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964b) in an essay “Cézanne’s Doubt” contends that it is the essential experience of the landscape that demonstrates the intimate connection of body and experience. In the essay he quotes Cézanne’s conversations with Emile Bernard (Rowley, 2007) as saying that “The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: p. 17). The painting, or drawing, becomes then not a *representation* but instead an extension of it “...a trace of body/consciousness/world in a continual process...” (Rowley, 2007: p. 48).

These ideas can be said to be echoed by Hooker (1987) who believes that, as “the artist is inward with the otherness of the landscape” (Hooker, 1987: p. 11) so this “inwardness” enables the paradox of the intimacy of experience to be explored from a distance, and so it is “...this degree of estrangement [that] renews the world, and may transfigure it” (*Ibid*: 11). This distance can be utilized to separate the immediate involvement with landscape, from the “lived experience” (Husserl in Moran, 2005; Dilthey, 1985, 2010) that considers or is conscious of that “place” and its subsequent interpretation (Figure 5).

This deep sense of immersion and the totality of this world came alive only through the use of line and colour. The move towards generating the line, enabling me to work quickly, in response to the fleeting impressions, it gives depth and allows me to grasp that “time”, to fix it, just for that moment of working.

In looking internally, at the memory of that experience of perceiving and drawing within the landscape, I think about that experience which I have been able to “see” through the line drawings and strip away all that is superfluous to that experience—what is left as I look intently? (Extract from author’s journal)

Alison Rowley (2007) in *Helen Frankenthaler: painting history, writing painting* specifically explores the artist connection with the landscape in relation to Helen Frankenthaler’s “breakthrough” work “*Mountains and Sea*” painted in 1952. The work was produced after a holiday that Frankenthaler took with Clement Greenberg to Nova Scotia in 1952. Rowley postulates that the series of drawings and paintings that emerged from this trip owe a debt to Cezanne in that Frankenthaler had been influenced by the 1952 exhibition in Chicago of his work (Rowley, 2007). Rowley (2007) in Chapter 3 “A Spatial Feeling Connected with Landscapes” argues that Helen



Figure 5. Halo-pigment and graphite on paper.

Frankenthaler's work, which emanated from the trip to Nova Scotia, points to her re-engagement with landscape through her "situatedness": being in a particular place. Frankenthaler herself admits that "I see most of my paintings as landscapes or vistas, changing views, motion caught. I get some of my ideas from making studies outdoors or just noticing the designs and complications of nature" (Frankenthaler cited in Rowley, 2007: p. 45). Frankenthaler goes onto elucidate this connection in an interview with Henry Geldzahler for *Art Forum* in 1965 (Rowley, 2007):

In 1952 on a trip to Nova Scotia I did landscapes with folding easel and equipment. I came back and did the "Mountains and Sea" painting and I know the landscapes were in my arms as I did it. (Frankenthaler cited in Rowley, 2007: p. 45)

Here Frankenthaler makes explicit the corporeal link between the activity in the landscape and working in the studio. Her statement "...the landscapes were in my arms as I did it..." when viewed in conjunction with [Bachelard \(1994\)](#) and [Heidegger's \(Malpas, 2008\)](#) assertions, opens up the possibility of levels of consciousness intertwining and working alongside each other but essentially founded in the experience of drawing/painting in the landscape itself.

[Rowley \(2007\)](#) goes onto make specific links to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay *Eye and Mind* referring to his argument for a mode of thinking which is located "...at the site of the body as it is lived in association with things in the world..." (Rowley, 2007: p. 47). It is this relationship between body, landscape and painting activity, Rowley asserts that what it "...reveals is the normally invisible ground of the visibility of things as we see them in our everyday lives" (Rowley, 2007: p. 49). And so, as Rowley goes on to postulate, Frankenthaler, working in the studio was in the process of "making visible"; connecting the Nova Scotia landscape through the intertwined movement of "eye and hand" which Rowley specifically locates "...in the painted marks of the sketches made *in situ*" (Rowley, 2007: p. 52).

These complex connections give a direction to a conception of the "lived experience" (John Dewey, 2005; [Merleau-Ponty, 2006](#); [Dilthey 2010](#)) that considers the experience of drawing both in the landscape and subsequently in the studio in order to investigate the differing levels of consciousness that would seem to co-exist. As [Rowley \(2007\)](#) goes onto point out, artworks exist for artists primarily as "...present, phenomenological worlds, perceptual fields within whose vision the painter comes to exist as painter" (Rowley, 2007: p. 54). Although [Rowley \(2007\)](#) and [Merleau-Ponty \(1964a, 1964b\)](#) refer consistently to painters and painting, if we return to Phenomenology as a "style of thinking" ([Merleau-Ponty, 2006: p. x](#)), drawing far from being excluded, could in fact be considered a more fecund site for evincing the connection of landscape, the "lived experience" and artistic practice.

8. Praxis

The role of the "lived experience" and the immersed body, as discussed earlier, can be viewed more specifically in relation to the activity of drawing in the landscape and the studio. It is this immersed experience of drawer

and drawing which founds both description and interpretation within personal practice.

Drawing began with graphite in the landscape as the basis for working in the studio, utilizing memory to inform gesture and mark making. Personal practice in situ and the studio was filmed and the experience of drawing in both situations was analyzed and reflected upon in a journal. Personal drawing practice, this perceptual entry into the world, the coalescence of experience, memory and imagination, is rooted in the landscape. I began to consider how the activity of drawing describes and mediates its own reality, through considering O'Riley's (2006) assertion that art, potentially, not only "describes or shows reality" but also can describe how it describes; being at one and the same time in the drawing but also of the drawing.

Initially, drawing *situ*, in the landscape, attempts to capture the essence of the experience of "being there" (*Da-sein*) (Heidegger, 1962), situated, within an embodied and relational world. Strokes of graphite begin to plot the space between forms. The marks expand, within the areas of positive and negative space, to describe the uncertainty of this temporal experience as a triangulation between self-landscape-drawing.

The landscape, or place, *in situ* is described within the drawings through the linear connection of form. Form (Langer, 1953; Focillon, 1992; Carroll, 1999) orientates both subject and object in "being there". What emerges within the drawings is the connection between self, embodied relational world and the temporality of experience, at one and the same time, in the drawing, as well as articulating a description through drawing. Line repeatedly traces form, inserted successively as each drawing describes a series of viewpoints, articulations of the same space, capturing varieties of possible aspects and appearances.

The absorption, within the narrow confines of the activity of each drawing, enhances the experience; heightening perceptions of light, form and of being in a specific moment; the concrete, the real. Drawing, in these respects, engages the self within this enlargement of the world, in attempting to define my relationship to the landscape, as a physical presence at a point within the panorama.

These experiences within the living, changing and moving landscape, form a relationship to the other, visualized within the drawings as the coalescence of an emergent structure or rhythm, as it occurs for a moment, from a point or generating structure. This point of coalescence emerges from within the drawing process, revealing a relational given moment, both internal and external, enlarging the world without confining it. In this way, "...the space of inner and outer—of mind and world—are transformed..." (Malpas, 1999: p. 5), thus, the other, as external space, is internalized and inner space is itself externalized. In considering these ideas, it is possible, then, to construct a cogent argument that begins to see the dissolution of the object/subject dichotomy; just as our "inner" selves can be discovered through place and the embodied space in which we dwell, in turn, the other or external space is incorporated within us as memory, as drawing.

In beginning to examine these connections, place and embodied space, memory and drawing, the activity moved to the studio in order to clarify methodologies and methods of working. The studio offers the possibility of the suspension of the direct experience of both the landscape and drawing activity within it. It allows a focus on those aspects of my intentional acts and their contents that do not depend on the existence of a represented object, "bracketing" (*epoché*) (Husserl in Woodruff-Smith, 2007) the experience to enable the suspension of assumptions about the external world.

I was struck by the monochromatic dominance of line within the drawings. My thoughts at the time of making were involved with line tracing the form of structure within the landscape. The majority of the drawings were done outside. The move into the studio, to work on aspects of these sketches on a larger scale, then transformed the working process. The drawings served as a starting point, a re-drawing, I could feel and remember the process of mark making, looking closely and carefully at the intersections and relationships, defining the underlying structure. As I began to work in the studio, the visualized experience of these drawings metamorphosised, or was translated, becoming a visualization that was defined by colour.

I am staggered and entranced by the light. It pervades the senses—warmth, brightness, heat, muffling sound, the warm breeze moving around, stirring the hanging bark of the grey/green and white eucalyptus. I remember the smell of the heat, scented with the unfamiliar, the ochre yellow and red of the earth prickles the skin in a sudden hot dry gust of wind. Splashes of vivid yellow and lilac are strident against a background of spiked white and green grasses that emerge from the ochre sand, scattered with bark and ants.

The bleached white bark of the eucalyptus, small grey green clusters of leaves are announced by the contrast with the charcoal black trunks of the burnt trees. All shown in high relief by the searching white light. Colour becomes heightened and saturated by the light. (Extract from author's journal)

Drawing within the studio suspends the immersive experience and asks instead for an interpretation which, in turn, revealing differing relational aspects. In remembering, the “forgetfulness” (Heidegger, 1962: p. 69) of memory, elucidates temporal relationships alongside interpretations of experience, allowing for a consideration of the degrees of separation, and the interdependence, of relationships between landscape and place, other and self. And so the removal of the immediate experience of the landscape and the move to the studio, articulates an interpretation of the concrete through the utilization of memory and imagination. In remembering, the experience was “cleared” (*Gelichtet*) (Heidegger, 1962: p. 171) and what was revealed was the intertwining of line and colour (Figure 6).

The direct nature of the drawing process became an immersion, each mark, an absorption in the reinterpretation of the remembered experience, each mark, an embodiment of the reinterpreted subjective experience built into a cohesive whole, through layers of line and colour, a “moment” captured, suspended, plotting, tracing, interpreting the interconnection between experience, memory and imagination.

The articulation of the process of revealing, plotting and tracing needed to be more fully explored through the notion of moment. An instance, captured and suspended, examining more carefully a conception of form within a relational space. As the line defines form it begins to oscillate between the reality of the experience and the refinement of the memory. The process of drawing charts, records and re-defines this movement, and in doing so establishes its own reality, its own temporality—the drawing as both concrete and imaginary.

Drawing, as a reflexive and reflective cognitive process, locates itself as a horizon through its articulation of an embodied and relational knowledge, and it is this process of engagement within the world, that allows drawing to articulate, or reveal, a subjective truth (*Wahrheit*), as something that ‘opens up a world’ (Heidegger, 1971: p. 40), a personal truth.

9. Conclusion

The research process has allowed me, as an artist, to engage in considering directly my embodied and perceptual experience as it is brought to the surface of the paper by the process of drawing. As drawing mediates my relational embodied experience of the world, a conception of temporality is embedded, as process, which is explicated through the creative act itself. Seen within these contexts drawing, as corporeality, provides a horizon against which it is possible to begin to examine embodied expression, within the interpretation of “Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962).

Thus, it is possible to say that, as time passes through “Being-in-the-world”, the subject or being, recreates the world, or grasps it, through its temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*). In grasping, our understanding reveals that everything has meaning, and we find that this same structure of being “underlies all relationships” (Merleau-Ponty, 2006). Drawing, through its temporal nature, reveals a subjective truth as something that “opens up a world” (Heidegger, 1971: p. 40);



Figure 6. Jubilee Moor-graphite, pigment and watercolour on paper.

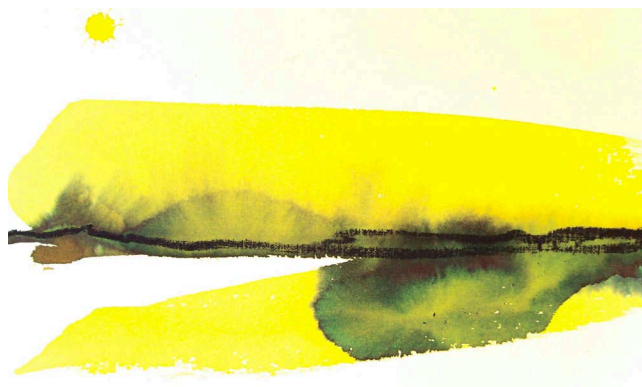


Figure 7. Canberra-pigment and charcoal on paper.

The line drawings that had focussed my attentions within the act of drawing became insubstantial when viewed with this remembered experience. Almost like having two videos running in parallel on a screen inside my head. The drawings that initially I had liked because of their fragility and transience became a thin and pale representation of that experience. The joy, the feeling of aliveness, pleasure and the opening up to absorb, almost become a part of the panorama was missing. This deep sense of emersion and the totality of this world came alive only through the use of colour. The move towards using a fluid colour, enabling me to work quickly, in response to the fleeting impressions, gives depth and almost allows me to grasp that moment, to fix it, just for that moment of working.

So in looking internally at the memory of that experience of perceiving and drawing within the landscape, I think about that experience which I have been able to “see” through the line drawings and strip away all that is superfluous to that experience—what is left as I look intently? Colour. (Extract from author’s journal) (Figure 7)

“Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty 2006), the horizon in front of which all of our knowledge and understanding is placed, provides a phenomenological parallel, within which, drawing can be said to embody the past, present and future; they exist alongside one another, interconnected, intertwined, and revealed through drawing. In one instance stretching out, in another, parallel, instance, drawing, is enmeshed in an imaginary future that has emerged from the its own past and “...in the way of its own being...” (Heidegger, 1971: p. 41).

The act and activity of drawing becomes its own ontological source within the self, through the body; re-creating the world, embodied in the world, as memory and a conjectural possibility of the future. As a “moment” coalesces on a surface, not as a representation of temporality but as temporality itself, literally and metaphorically, not only is the world brought to light but our subjective position and relationships within that world are revealed.

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