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On Encountering the Divine in the Act of Drawing

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Practice-led MA by Research

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[acknowledgements]

The *three of us* found a discerned multitude with endless patience:

dr Tilo Reifenstein (Academic Supervisor), Darren Taylor (Clinical Supervisor), Revd Paul Payton (Spiritual Director), and Simon Coulson. They kept me grounded, focused, and inspired.

I would also like to thank all the people who pushed me to test my limits and confirmed I could do it all by myself, while giving me the freedom to listen to that voice within which always *knows*.

[abstract]

The aim of this research was to define, circumscribe, and contextualise my drawing practice and understand its “encounter with the divine” while looking for a framework that would validate those experiences.

While I noticed how most of the literature always points back to the artefact as the means to understand the method and the artist, I used drawing followed by a self-reflective journaling system to explore the processual part of the practice with regards to these spiritual experiences. Once I realised that both performativity and in-the-zoneness were providing incomplete answers, materiality presented a connection to alchemy which offered a means to reading my drawing experience.

The findings confirmed the spiritual experiences, but also indicated that among all the assessable parameters, at the conjuncture between the Artist, the Material, and the Work, there is always something elusive and ineffable.

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Throughout this exegesis, the three parts of the supporting document *The Polyhymniades* (as in Writing, Images, and Video) will be referred to as PH§W, PH§I, and PH§V.

A digital copy of *The Polyhymniades* and a link to the Video can be found at <https://www.matildetomat.com/ma-by-research-ysj>

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FIGURE 1 DRAWING RESEARCH PRACTICE, MTOMAT, 2023

introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the occurrence of spiritual events during my drawing practice. The goals were to define, circumscribe, contextualise the practice and understand this “encounter with the divine” while looking for a framework that would corroborate those experiences. My regular drawing practice was used as a way of “understanding and examining” the experience [McNiff, 2008:9]. I am also aware that researching anything spiritual which is not easily observable, testable, and measurable is a risk, but this does not mean that the experiences are not real.

This submission comes in two parts.

This one is a critical exegesis which intends to inform, reflect, and critically communicate the knowledge available in the discipline while referring to the practice and the events themselves, all the while situating the notion of the divine in relation to the research on drawing. Due to the large scope of the investigation, this would have exceeded the scale of this research. It would have been easy while considering materials to explore Quantum Mechanics, while informing on spirituality to investigate various strands of Jewish exegetical work, or when examining in-the-zoneness to discuss the association between Buddhism and Neuroscience. In the following pages, as holding onto a metaphorical red thread, I will

outline the drawing practice and then explore movement and performativity; I will then move onto the idea of embodiment and in-the-zoneness which offer a comparable experience to my “encounter with the divine”. While the state of being-in-the-flow experienced by some artists is felt as an effortless movement akin to mindfulness or meditation, a spiritual experience (while providing similar bodily responses) adds a definite sense of transcendence and connection with something that is recognised as beyond human. I will be using “spiritual” and “divine” regardless of religious affiliation or dogmatic approach, as something that could be interchangeably described as God, Source, Energy, Oneness, mystical experience, or similar. Having found all of the above artistic theoretical avenues to provide fragmented answers to my query, I will take you to explore materiality. There, alchemy as a language closer to describing tangible experiences will assist me. I will then present the impact of the colour blue and the realisation that among all the parameters that I took into consideration along this journey, there is still something elusive and ineffable. A Deleuzian rhizomatic approach [Deleuze and Guattari, 2021] will emerge throughout to show the potentiality of further studies and is intended to be strictly necessary and never deterring from the main exploration. The aim is to find overlaps and interplays but also to explore the fragmentation to delineate the gap I feel is present in the research.

The second part of my submission, *The Polyhymniades*, provides a testimony to the practical side of this year-long research, offering a rigorous self-reflective journaling practice (with the implementation of additional introspective tools), images and a link to a video. I will refer to those within this exegesis. I will later expand on the methodological need for the writing practice to translate the personal encounter, the rhizomatic meandering of my thinking and experiencing.

During this research I discovered two very different drawing marks in my practice I was not aware of and found a confirmation that the literature and research seem to be still very much focused on the artefactual nature of the drawing and not enough on the processual part of the *practice*. I have also questioned the validity of my methodology when presented with an ethical conundrum. Most importantly, I had a confirmation of the presence of the divine in various encounters during this research.

Discovering the relevance that materials and the physical world have in my practice as a means to these spiritual experiences, led me also to question my approach to faith.

on the three of us – or: introducing the research

As much as I do not fully subscribe to the in-the-zone experience, I am aware that my research intends to add to this facet of the drawing discourse. The state of being-in-the-moment experienced by some artists (as being immersed in a feeling of effortless movement while feeling connected to an activity) is at times compared to a mindfulness and/or meditative experience, which is more grounded on the losing the confines of self-centeredness. A spiritual experience differs from the previous ones by providing an inner sense of a deep relationship with the divine, i.e. a sense of transcendence, aliveness, and spiritual interconnectedness. Looking at the works of Mihaly R. Csikszentmihalyi [2013], Kevin Nelson [2012] and Steve Taylor [2018] we can notice a marked difference between the experiences in terms of self-awareness and effortless performance versus dissolution of boundaries and expanded consciousness. Spiritual experiences are marked by a definite connection with something that is perceived as larger than us, beyond us, *supra-worldly*, and which leaves us questioning their impact on our lives¹. Hence, I have focused my research on works that allow me to define and circumscribe the practice of drawing, followed by works on the gestural aspect and movement due to its importance for my research as an artist who stands up in front of (and moves along) a large sheet of paper. These are followed by texts that describe and define the embodied aspects of the practice which consent me to frame the in-the-zoneness experience and explore the spiritual in art, and concluded by works on materiality which take me to what is unseen and lead me to an alchemical language which allows me to understand my engagement with the tools; because I can only start with what I have: a pencil, a large sheet of paper, and me. *The three of us*. I draw. An act perfect as a means for inquiry: to experiment, investigate, and present. Anita Taylor [2020] identifies it as making, facilitating, seeing, exploring, discussing, and advocating. Whether collaborative or solitary, representational or abstract, detached or subjective, drawing is “born from an outward gesture that links inner impulses and thoughts to the other through the touching of a surface with repeated graphic marks and lines” [Carlson, 2017:59].

¹ For an extended discussion regarding “having a spiritual experience” as different from “being in the zone” see the following literature: Bray and Moore, 2020; Chalmers, 1997; DeRoo, 2018; Kabat-Zin, 2013; Rankin, 2008; Siegel, 2021; Webb, 2022.

[outlining]

As a highly personal practice, Dieter Schwartz considers drawing as something that “despite all changes in style and approach, remains identical: an intimacy of expression that is otherwise considered the province of writing” [in Lee and Mehring, 1997:11] echoed by Ian Berry and Jack Shear [2011:9] as “the most intimate art form. [...] a secret window, opening onto the thoughts and process of its maker” which especially resonated with me due to the solitary nature of my practice and the succeeding encounter. Jean Fisher and Stella Santacatterina define it as something “always beyond perception” [in Berry and Shear, 2011:164] while Sathyaraj Venkatesan and Anu M. Peter [2018] as a cathartic form of visual art, allowing for its potential curative implementation in art therapy: drawing “facilitates self-reclamation by resolving their chaos through creative expression” [Stevenson-Taylor and Mansell, 2012:104].

Even when lines are described as “clumsy, imprecise, untruthful, coarse, lazy, rushed, approximate” by James Faure Walker [in Davies and Duff, 2005:16] while describing the drawings of Picasso and Matisse at the Tate, drawing is still seen as the obligatory preparation of artists’ portfolio with them being asked to think about “drawing as a way of seeing” [Berry and Shear, 2011:9]. Drawing is “beyond argument, the foundation of art” [16]. There is a certain consensus in research that regardless of the outcome, the act of drawing is paramount. Such an elusive practice, Steve Garner [2008] informs us: whether it is just an “outline, gestural sketch, diagrammatic notation, study drawing” [27] still needs to be positioned within the academic spectrum of the arts: it is a “fundamental pictorial act” since a “single line upon a surface immediately transforms that surface, energises that neutrality” [28].

“With few exceptions, line is indelible, final, irrevocable” Norman Bryson points out [in de Zegher and Newman, 2003:149]. Regardless of these being scribbling, or doodling as informal marks, marginal drawings, or pictorial malingering these are both unconscious and made in a “distractive state [...] divorced from conscious awareness [...] outside conscious control [as in] spiritualist automatism” [Maclagan, 2014:12]. Scribbling is considered the most elementary form of mark-making [33] and still comparable to Cy Twombly's offering of more crafted and self-conscious learned scribbles, a sort of unlearned drawing-skills [42]. Doodling is seen as a “natural, spontaneous and universal phenomenon” [53] which then lost

part of its charm and mundane character and was instead intended to show the presence of a “universal latent creativity in everyone” [53]. Conversely, Taylor [2020:6] portrays drawing as an impulsive act to depict the world and as an “intellectual activity which extend visual thinking” [7] and being multifaceted, subliminal, pre-verbal and transcending place, time, and culture. Her research suggests what is of value in the practice:

a good drawing would inherently seem to be one that is [...] a synthesis of idea, form and content that forms an equivalence to the experience it conveys and facilitates a new, or renewed, relationship with its subject and content for the viewer (and maker) [8-9].

Drawing, for her, is active, concrete, and transformational.

Tim Ingold [2016] illustrates lines as either *traces* left by a continuous movement on a solid surface (as paths and tracks) or *threads* as filaments balancing in a three-dimensional space (including rhizomes and the vascular system). As far as drawing and this research are concerned, they are wayfaring of graphite “continually on the move” [78]. Said traces characterised Cy Twombly, who “gained a reputation for a vigorous, at times frenetic, use of line that suggests a link between drawing and writing” [Lee and Mehring, 1997:214].

In my practice, there is no conscious exercise in depiction, nor desire for representation, or notation. Drawing is experienced and experimented as a compulsion, an “irresistible impetus” [Nancy, 2013:15]. Deanna Petherbridge [in Garner, 2008:29] mentions the “autonomy of drawing”, and how it “resists completion” because of its appropriate positioning of rebelliousness, an act which does not want to be contained, or defined. Nor labelled: drawing “constitutes the grammar of art”, a “signifying system”; a “common element” and still so mercurial in its ability to morph. Then, Philip Rawson, echoing Wassily Kandinsky, defines drawing as the most “fundamentally spiritual of all visual artistic activities” and this is the perfect preamble to this research, its starting point: drawing is “irresolute [...] - neither entirely medium nor message. [...] always pointing to somewhere else” [32]. There the communication opens, between paper and me; a pencil almost as a *key*, like an old “songline”, an amulet, a sigil. The act is inconclusive and open: it is saying “I am available”.

In this simplest way in which ideas take form, *the three of us* expand.

[methodology]

Mine is a graphic practice, if we consider the root of the word as in the Greek γράφω | gráphō, i.e. to scratch, to write, and to draw. I draw and then I write. These actions are very similar, and I consider writing as a form of drawing letters [Ingold, 2016].



FIGURE 2 THE THREE OF US, MTOMAT, 2023

My drawing practice is free-hand, abstract, non-figurative nor representational, carried out by using HB or softer graphite. I use a 3.8 Koh-i-noor mechanical clutch lead-holder for drawing and my faithful 0.5 Kuru Toga Mechanical Retractable Pencil for writing.

The paper is the 200gsm Fabriano Accademia which comes in a roll of 1.5 x 10m. It is hung on a wall, with its top side at about 2.15m from the floor which allows me to draw with my arm fully extended above my head. This paper, made entirely from cellulose, is very soft and powdery to the touch and comes in an almost milky white colour. I feel a definite

emotional bond to the material which has been present since a very young age, a perception of both the contribution of the tools and the transformation of materials, aided by an almost ritualistic procedure in the handling of utensils and resources, a “secrecy of know-hows [...] all hands-at-work” [PH&W:47].

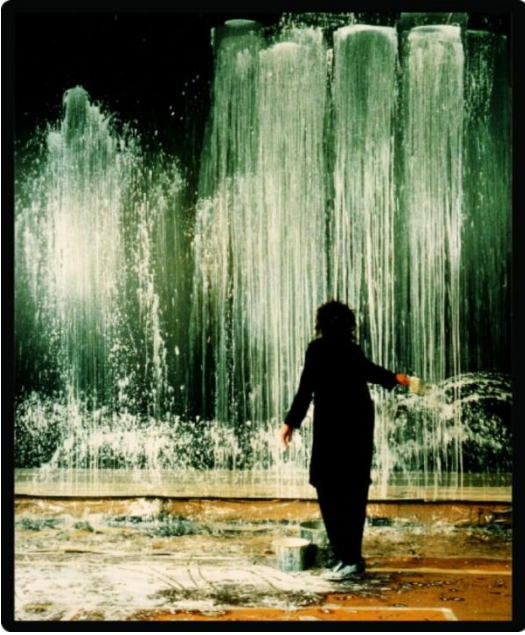


FIGURE 3 PAT STEIR, ERIC BOWMAN, 1990



FIGURE 4 UNTITLED (BACCHUS), CY TWOMBLY, 2008

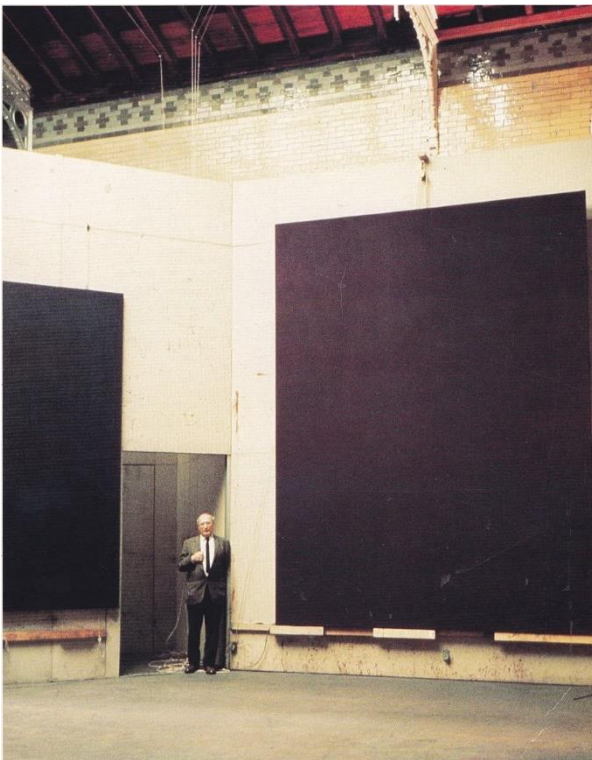


FIGURE 6 MARC ROTHKO, ALEXANDER LIBERMAN, 1965



FIGURE 5 CLEARING VII, ANTONY GORMLEY, MTOMAT 2019

My drawing is shaped by bodily movements and reactions to the surface; these are rhythmical and performed during a series of repeated uninterrupted sessions of about two hours each. The rhythm is determined only by my body and not by music. I am aware of the main influence of Cy Twombly [del Roscio, 2014] in his large-scale, careless, and calligraphic

marks, analogous to Pat Steir and Mark Rothko's paintings of epic proportions and their shared desire to convey emotional force by feeling fully immersed; I would also include the minimalism of forms and colours and the kaleidoscopic repetitiveness of smaller parts within the 3D work of Antony Gormley [2019].

As per what I call spiritual experiences, they happened frequently, naturally and welcomed.

While the drawing in-the-zone is normally described as a state of heightened concentration, with an altered sense of time and with an almost automatic effortless performance, my experience goes further and turns into one of intensified perception, expanded awareness and sense of Oneness with a "presence" that is beyond what I consider human. Whether we intend these distinctions to be different incrementing stages of one single process or simply different experiences, depends on one's approach to spirituality.

The experience I call the "Encounter with the Divine" could be described as Samadhi, the disappearing of the self into the Oneness of the unchanging reality of Brahman as Sacchidānanda (सच्चिदानन्द) or existence, consciousness, and bliss² [Mascaró, 1984; Sankaracharya, 2017]. As someone born Catholic, gifted with an inquisitive mind, and who devoted the last thirty-four years to a personal spiritual investigation which led me to read extensively, and to alternatively learn how to pray, chant, prostrate, meditate and divinate like a child in a spiritual sweet shop, I was interested in pragmatically exploring the occurrence of these experiences and to look for a framework which would allow me to contextualise and understand them. While I admit approaching the vast field of spirituality rhizomatically and non-dogmatically, I hope that regardless of my meandering and getting lost, I have always treated it with respect.

² For an extended discussion on the concepts of the Divine, Oneness, and Spiritual Encounter see Behr, 2021; Bourgeault, 2020; Bray and Moore, 2020; Chopra, 2004; Duffy, 2020; Gathercole, 2021; Gauḍapāda Ācārya and Raphael, 2002; Gough, 2002; Guénon, 2004; Hart, 2013; Jacobs, 1982; James, 1985; MacGregor, 2019; McGraw, 1992; Mascaró, 2003; Miyazaki, 2004; Nikhilananda, 1931; Osho, 2015; Redfield, Murphy and Timbers, 2003; Reeves, 2010; Saraswati, 2003; Saraswati, 2019; Schneider, 2015; Swahananda, 2021; V., 2013; Vivekananda, 2017. Also see a YouTube playlist of relevant videos [HERE](#).

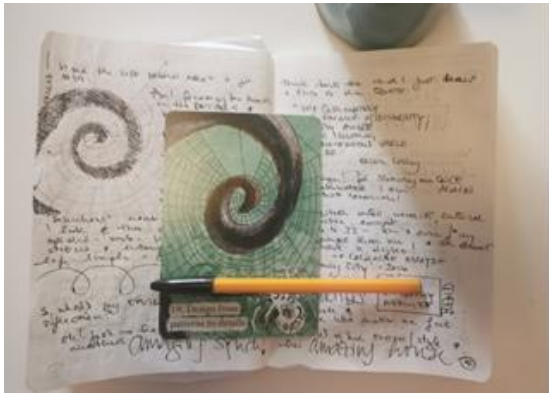


FIGURE 7 A PAGE, MTOMAT, 2023

Following my drawing act, regardless of whether I have or not an experience, I bring bodily response and sensory memory to the pages of my journal. The methodological requirement for the writing stage, besides a personal predilection for the craft, stems from the need to create a breathing space between the mainly subjective phenomenological responsive experience of drawing, and the academic critical and reflective, objective and detached approach within this exegesis. Even though I do not abide by a definite split between mind and body, it is clear that these seem to be polar opposites of a reality which exists on a continuum. Almost mirroring a spiritual approach that moves from the physical plane to the divine via the individual, journaling is a needed methodological steppingstone that allows me to move from drawing to exegesis, as a transitory element of criticality. Both practices reflectively support each other and hence work together towards the enquiry [Hagman, 2017; Rose, 2012].

I also implement the writing routine with tools such as material testing, meditation, solitary walking, supervisory sessions from an analytical Jungian school, dream analysis, oracle and tarot introspection, and an archetypal and alchemical perspective towards individuation, tools which always lead me back to journaling.

This thesis comes in two parts: this one as a critical exegesis on the drawing practice, the literature and arguments about drawing, body awareness and materials, and what it might mean to have a spiritual experience while referring to the practice and the events themselves; and the accompanying supporting documentation. These two parts are both intended as stand-alone pieces and as a dialogue between theory and experience, between mind and heart.

The supporting documentation bears the title of *The Polyhymniades* to indicate the inspiration of the muse Polyhymnia who is said to preside over hymns and sacred writing - by extension, writing, drawing and photography. This comes in three parts: the Writing, the Images, and the Video. The written part also includes images of the journal, tarot spreads, note-taking, etc. As much as the exegesis wants to be objective and factual, the narrative translates the rhizomatic meandering of my thinking and experiencing, and also mimics the spontaneous and

serendipitous aspects of my drawing practice. This practice of deep stylistic freedom and openness to enquiry allows for a continuous connection-making that is not hierarchical but consent fictional, historical, literal, critical, soteriological, and tautological stemming. In said text references, citations, clarifications, and any academic requirement have been deliberately omitted to allow for the flow. Furthermore, the images and the video are offered only as a testament to the research itself and not to the artefactual nature of my drawings. I hope that both texts will be an invitation to go and draw without fears nor contradictions, quicksand, or quagmires³.

When I did not find the literature helpful, I found comfort in my drawing practice. During one of the sessions used to record a video, I noticed a striking difference in my mark-making [PH&I:89,98]. On the first paper, the marks were large, round, cyclical, fluid [PH&V:0:58]. I noticed later that I was almost repetitively writing my grandfather's name (Romano) and then Bernoulli's ⁴ [PH&I:97]. There was consistent marking throughout. It was effortless, smooth flowing along the paper, back and forth, until the encounter happened. It felt almost like flirting. I knew "something" was going to happen, until it happened. The following day I laid another sheet of paper on top of the previous one and I approached it in the same way but instead of my large, round, soft marks, these became frantic, fast, and strong, akin to a seismogram, which now I recognise as asemic writing [PH&V:1:40]. That session felt like an explanation, a translation, a transliteration of the encounter was needed. I had to transcribe what happened the previous day, an event so beautifully overwhelming that I could not transpose it directly into my journal.

A transcription of something else; and that something else is always more important than the writing itself [Schwenger, 2019:5].

Asemic writing (similar and still different from Twombly's example of calligraphic drawing previously shown) made so much more sense when considering how I always thought of writing as "drawing letters", regardless of Ingold's differentiation insofar as writing is drawing, but a drawing that includes notations [PH&W:62,99].

³ For an extended further discussion on reflective methodology see Atwood, 2015; Maugham, 2001; Oates, 2003; Woolf, 2013. In my practice, I have been applying Julia Cameron's *The Artist Way* [2016] and her *The Right to Write* [1998] since 2012.

⁴ Daniel Bernoulli [1700-1782] was a Swiss mathematician known for his studies on fluid mechanics.

Spirally, practice informs and expands my writing, which entices more reading and which then in turn renovates my drawing. There, the two of us move along the paper, drawing and writing, chasing and tempting. Moving through space and time; transforming and being transformed.

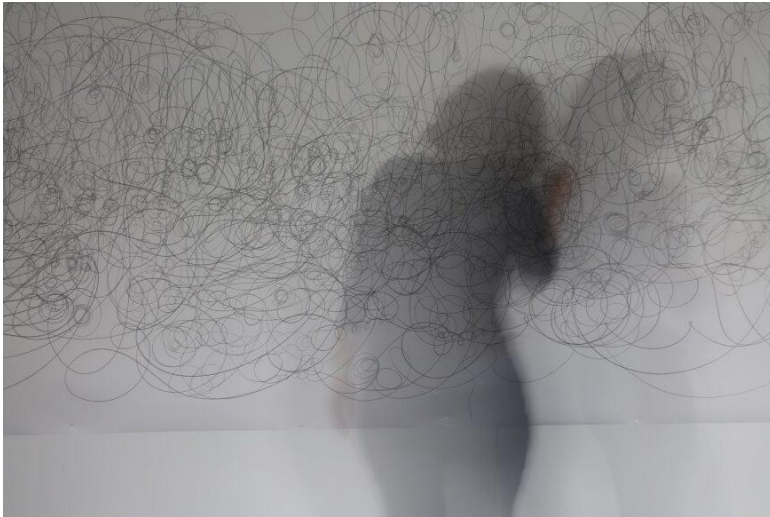


FIGURE 8 ME MOVING, DIANE HOLT, 2023

on moving

I recognise drawing also as a spatial experience, where my body enacts an unconscious-verbal activity [Crowther, 2011:25]. Ingold depicts it as an embodied gesture at the confluence of what is internal (psyche, thought, memory, emotions, body reactions, limbic system) and external (surfaces, paper, pencil). Drawing becomes action through gesture: seeing what the body does, and how the body helps in the process [Stewart, Woodward and Gough, 2020]. It becomes a visualising of what is thought, almost like a hand scribbling in the air, a materialised elucubration, or the conducting of an invisible orchestra [Luzar, 2022], contributing to an “almost rhythmic sense of form” [Lee and Mehring, 1997:44]. Research confirms that drawing is no longer seen in the most conventional form with paper and pencil, but it becomes a doing: a spatial doing in real-time. In a way, through my research I have started seeing drawing as an alchemical *summa* of Ingold’s 4 A’s of Making [2013]: creativity, in space, through time, offering material and human inner transformation, or: art, architecture, archaeology and anthropology. Drawing turns into a medium to relate to individuals through desire and pleasure via the making of something that may or may not be final. Drawing is also to think: “thinking is what drawing might be said to performatively do” [Luzar, 2022:4]. The thoughts and the thinking appear not just in the representation on paper, but through the work itself, the actions, and the movements, involving time, space, tools, and body. The body allows one to act about the transformation of thoughts. Drawing is the true form of things, the gesture that proceeds from the desire to show this form and to trace it to show the form [Nancy, 2013:10].

The French Philosopher Catherine Clément calls it ‘syncope’, “a dissonance or movement in counter-time” [...] variously experienced as a loss of breath, an ecstatic flight, eclipse in reason” [Berry and Shear, 2011:167]. Anil Newman describes drawing as “the materialization of a continually mutable process, the movements, rhythms, and partially comprehended ruminations of the mind: the operation of thought” echoing the importance of the gesture by Catherine de Zegher “to parallel the primal gesture of reaching out to the departing mother” and adding that “in drawing, [the unconscious] exists as a memory trace in the mark and is that which conditions the action of the moment - it is acted out rather than performed” [de Zegher and Newman, 2003:67,80,165].

Hence, the crossing of disciplines between drawing, writing, and dancing becomes evident when adding time and space to this bi-dimensionality: the body moving in space becomes a tool expanding the meaning of drawing, developing into an exploration of line-in-time. Foá and colleagues [2022:12,15,29] suggest we look at Kazou Shiraga who used mud on his feet “to create large tactile works” and at Piero Manzoni’s pieces with paper, ink, and body “focusing on performing the line”. These resonate with Jane Grisewood and Carali McCall’s graphite and charcoal time-based performances of mark-making, as a dialogue of tracing and retracing lines, and in the work of Helena Almeida where “the phenomenological elements of drawing in the inhabited body interact with active imaginary figures” [30].

The incarnated gesture allows the body to communicate while showing the limits of language. There is meaning and its absence, the silence of the unmeaning. Within gestures, there is no difference between “cause and effect, motivation and goal, expression and persuasion” [Dillon *et al.*, 2009:11]. The practice becomes “sensing memory as played through the viscera” where “gestured marks are an embodied language [...] capable of transmitting the emotional span of its maker as articulated through the qualities of the inscription on the page” [Schneckloth, 2008:279-280]. Drawing communicates and shows. It creates mental images and suggests ideas and emotions which are more complex than just the gestures of its creation. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, quoting Ferdinand de Saussure, declares that

“signs do not signify anything [...] do not so much express a meaning as mark out a divergence in meaning between itself and other sign [...] language is made of differences” [Krčma, 2007:23-25].

Roberts and Riley [2012] analysed the gestural aspect of the practice as a very physical process: they observed the function of its compositional nature, the tones, the densities, whether marks are repeated or not, the dynamism of the composition versus the observation

of the singular sign, with each mark depicting a movement of the body in space and time, questioning whether these marks carry social meaning. All of these parameters offer their semiotic significance and relevance representing the artist's choices and who they are. Marks and movement: almost like co-speech gestures, these semiotic modes need to account for the fact that they are, compared to static visual signs, more than merely visual [Mittelberg and Hinnell, 2022]. Still, the artifact is a reminder of "a body that moved", of things past, in retrospect. When considering drawing as the movement of the body in space and time, the body becomes a semiotic entity of itself: something more than – and different from – a purely natural organism. The meaning becomes embodied, and the body turns into the first ground of a semiotic function as the plane of expression [Violi, 2012:67].

This embodied meaning becomes the relationship. Still, while Kimbal Baumstead [Carlson, 2017] beautifully performs to an audience creating pieces which represent and communicate his experience, it feels that an area of research that would explore solitary artists, in a room, silently drawing to no one, is neglected. The descriptive and almost formal aspects of drawing meet the unplanned, instinctual experience of moving on this long sheet of paper and still, I do not seem to find a language that would fully encompass what occurs. These virtually symbolic masculine and feminine sides are moving hand-in-hand, "holding the tension of the opposites", to use Jungian terminology. I go back to the paper and witness this meeting of Shiva-pencil with his Shakti-paper. I try to play some music and then I switch it off immediately. Instead, the music is inside of my body, the pencil as a baton and me conducting a silent and invisible orchestra:

it is an Argentinian tango where men allow women to be sensual and rightfully transform them into powerful goddesses, and where these women of mine allow the men to show their delicate side and dance with eyes closed, trusting, while they are being watched over. It is a couple taming the powers of the elements while playing by their natural rules. It is a game of hide and seek, while seeking to hide [PH&W:19].

The research does not seem to explain my disappearing, this sense of dissolving, while making. The available sources seem to bring me back to the artefactual nature of the practice with an emphasis on semiotics and the physical. This reminds me of the adage that the photo is the proof of the (unseen) photographer, its presence. In my drawing, the experience of seeing, doing, touching always presupposes an external object, against which (in my desperate attempt to prove the existence of the divine) I am rebelling. Do we need to look at a

piece to relate and understand what the artist must have felt? Of course, someone might say: this is all we have. I must concur and disagree at the same time. While I felt curious, grateful, and sympathetic towards the literature available the reflections show me frustrated with the continuous semiotic emphasis [PH&W:58], and fiercely protective of the “practice” side of my drawing with minimal mentions of the drawing outcome [PH&W:87]. I am aware that the artwork is the only physical object that will give us access to the presence of a body - in space - through time. Albeit asemic, this nature of the drawing-writing still provides a reflective approach to the act, an “inferring” from a very subjective point of view. Any reading of the artefact does not provide only a descriptor of this ephemeral body – in space – through time, but also presentations of metaphors, symbolism, perspectives, emotions; merely conjectures [PH&W:77].

As an artist, I do not want to be *seen*. As a researcher, I do not feel *seen*. I know of artists who experience catharsis and feeling of “in-the-zoneness”, of embodiment. I go back to the paper aware of this dichotomy, between this desire to see beyond the marks, and the inexhaustibility to do that. I turn to journaling and then pirouette to that part of literature to learn more.



FIGURE 9 MY HAND, DIANE HOLT, 2023

embodying

Besides the gestural and performative components, drawing is seen by practitioners and researchers as embodiment. Naoto Fukasawa [Fukasawa and Suri, 2018:13] beautifully writes:

this is what drawing a contour line [...] entails. I think you could possibly call this ‘embodiment’. [...] Incarnation; manifestation; avatar; symbol; paradigm; epitome; quintessence; expression; materialization; ideal. [...] It is possible to draw this contour line because the unseen countenance has been revealed.

He explains that human beings, as animals, learn about the world through their bodies and their senses: “it is embodied cognition that helps us get a lot done in the world, without conscious thought” [9]. Together with him, there are numerous artists such as Sara Schneckloth [2008] and Brooke Carlson [2017] who describe their practices as embodied ones, as an interaction between a lived experience and the observed world and objects; between body and gesture and the response not only to the material used but also the audience watching and participating. Performativity has become important in the drawing practice: it is seen as a “tool to open up and explore aspects of the self” [Carlson, 2017:59]. Others instead see performativity closer to the confines of self-reflectiveness: researchers have investigated artists such as Kimvi Nguyen who plays with the audience’s boundaries and perception of space; Agnieszka Karasch and Ram Samocha who engage with the resistance and the interplay of their bodies allowing for the medium to become the third

party; and Robert Luzar and Claire Undy who are more interested in the “spirit of drawing” than the signs left behind, this line that is “always unfolding, always becoming” [65].

Drawing becomes a testimonial in space and time of the presence of a human being [Crowther, 2011:73]. Touching and sighing have different relationships with our material world: vision is intended as cognition, knowledge, transcendence; sight is celebrated as the “foundation to empirical knowledge” [Biernoff, 2005:40] and still, touch has always been considered the sense vital for survival: “[t]ouching, then, is a question of life and death” [Derrida 2005:47]. Sensations become material images. We are bodies with flesh, but flesh is not *just* body. We are two in one flesh, as matter and form, the visible with the invisible, the immanent with the transcendent.

More akin to religious contemplation, embodiment and carnality do not resolve logical categories: flesh is like fog and the gaze is immaterial, metaphorical. If the vision reveals both the perceiver and the perceived, our bodies are both subjects and objects [Biernoff, 2005]. Griffith and Griffith [2003:49] questioned the looking for a Truth (which comes from our need to control and feel safe) because of our continuous involuntary flow of information regarding our body, both from internal and external components.

David Bullen in his exploration of the relationship between hand, breath, and surface draws attention to a unison of theory and practice, and his understanding of drawing “as a bodily and experiential practice in which the relationship with the world is subjective, objective and collaborative” [Bullen, Fox and Lyon, 2016:131]. Drawing, finally here, is seen as a process and not as an object to be decoded. He realises this awareness of how things are; his receptivity is akin to meditation, where touch, skin and paper are always present and at the forefront of his study. Drawing becomes a “way of developing mind, body and habits” [138]. Echoing Bullen, John Torran reveals “the physical intimacy of drawing” where the artist’s body and hands are embedded in the marks, as “an extension of and particular to his musculature” [Berry and Shear, 2011:155-166]. As running athletes *become* their track, the artist *becomes* the pencil: the body slows down, deepening the sense of embodiment [Foá *et al.*, 2022:52]. Deliberate slowness and tension are expressed in the words of John Vernon Lord:

I find I am holding my breath for ages [...] sometimes I actually get dizzy from lack of oxygen [...] Picture making is such an intense occupation [in Duff and Sawdon, 2008:34].

This slowing is more akin to catharsis and meditation. There is a body of literature such as

Duff and Sawdon [2008:35] who state that “[d]rawing ‘well’ seems to come from the heavens as much as from experience and hard work” and Foá and others [2022:30] who illustrate the work of William Anastasi who, by using pencil on paper to record his movement, used a “meditative approach abandoning visual control”. Crowther [2011] reported that the images created are normally “being regarded as embodiments [...] of some privileged physical portal between the real and the spirit world” [53]. They transform the appearance of reality because they allow us to engage with some of our deepest spiritual needs [56] allowing us to understand our role as creators. Drawing is then seen as that practice that “mediates between the metaphysical and the physical, or relating thought and perception” [Tracey, 2009:xi] as confirmed by Venkatesan and Peter [2018] who connects balance, vision, audition and touch via imagination, metaphors, symbols. This cathartic process of desubjectification is akin to a loss of the self into another state of consciousness, it is “resistance, rebellion, rejection of the world and dissolution of the subject.” [Berry and Shear, 2011:167]. In this sense, Michael Berreman describes drawing as escapism, his way of dealing with reality: “I create my own reality” [Dillon, 2009:24]. Fukasawa compares it to an unconscious feeling that would transcend time and space [Fukasawa and Suri, 2018:14] and John Cage would forget himself while finding “a language of silence and immanence” [Larson, 2013:136].

Carlson [2022] draws attention to how the performative event can initiate a condition of catharsis for artists and audience by researching the experience of powerful physical states. My body is a “lived structure of ongoing experience” [Fox and Pam, 2016:114-118]. It is then conceivable that Carly Stewart, Martyn Woodward, and Rochelle Gough [2020] explored drawing as a methodological practice to further explain and visualise the experiences felt while practising yoga with the evocative depiction of ecstatic experiences, sensory reactions to poses, the sweat, the body moving through and beyond the space, and this the mind-body-world connection. This body is experienced as a living animate organism amongst other living organisms, while this absent presence akin to meditation is enabled by the rhythm of breathing, almost as a love affair: “[w]hen our eyes touch, is it day or is it night? [Derrida, 2005:2]. Schneckloth [2008] asks where our satisfaction lies, if in the hands touching the surface and making a mark (in the hope that the marks we leave communicate something to a viewer) or in the next mark following, called by the previous one.

Furthermore, artists such as Bruce Connor [in Berry and Shear, 2011:33] are fascinated with life and death and have a continuous “exploration of trance-inducing and contemplative organic forms” while Jim Shaw [129] with how his drawings are “reminiscent of a psychedelic experience [...] by delving into the subconscious [and stepping] into different

psychic realms”. Deleuze expressed this creative process as “an encounter with the unthought” [167] as reported by Fisher and Santacatterina who describe their dissolving: “I am becoming-paper, becoming-ink, becoming-brush [...] the drawing is becoming-thought” [167].

There is then a body of literature that describes artists as mystics, alchemically creating without explanations, and producing ideas out of nowhere. These become representations of the concept of self; a somatic experience lived through emotions, transforming thoughts into actions [Luzar, 2022]. Embodiment turns instinctive and shamanic [Roberts and Riley, 2012]. Schneckloth uses the word ‘ritualised. There, energies are playing and being possessed: “the point of origin is not in the hand [...] but the organs, the rushing of the blood and the humors [...] activated by terror, lust, fear, loss” [2008:283]. Herman Nitsch, in his two-dimensional works where religion plays a major role [in Berry and Shear, 2011:105] desires to “release darker inner thoughts in cathartic celebrations”. “In the act of drawing [...] there are flashes, when action is disconnected from perception” [de Zegher and Newman, 2003:165] and it feels like “being guided or dictated by spirits” [Maclagan, 2014]. This is at times compared to the practice of automatic drawing, where a total disconnection of conscious awareness is experienced, similar to other practices such as using a divinity rod, spiritualism, mediumism, hallucinations, and possessions when the individual is believed to be controlled by the subconscious as in psychotic and spiritualist art. Many times spiritualistic drawing, painting and automatic writing were used as a passage from the land of the living to the underworld, and during and after seances [Owen, 2004; Spretnak, 2015]. The artefacts were mostly representational albeit abstract and metaphorical. We need to mention artists such as Georgiana Houghton and Hilma af Klint, of course, and their spiritualised abstraction, symbolic and diagrammatic artworks [Althaus and Mühling, 2019; Maclagan, 2014]. In those instances, the artists are not considered creators but are channellers, more sensitive to otherworldly presences, and collaborating with spirit. Emma Kunz for example is often not even described as an artist but as a healer and a medium due to engaging with a divinity pendulum and her drawings are seen as ritual performances [Foá *et al.*, 2022:108].

Some artists openly link their practices to religious experiences. Jane Grisewood’s [2012] is akin to a prayer, imbued with a sense of reverence for the white paper while Sarah Lightman discusses the affiliation and cultural influence of her Jewishness, using even old sections of

the Torah as a structure for her book, *The Book of Sarah*, where she implements biblical narratives and religious images. She loves the “power and simplicity of the pencil” and while drawing she goes into this “wonderful peaceful place”. Her practice and works are the best vehicle she could find for her thoughts and feelings: “[m]y drawing enables my catharsis [...] I can draw these things, they can be cathartic” [Bhattacharjee and Tripathi, 2021:1213].

Whereas the literature introduced me to artists who describe their experience as performative catharsis, in-the-moment-ness, or even shamanic and mediumistic, I openly define mine as a spiritual experience not shying away from a mystical framework. While af Klint [Almqvist and Belfrage, 2014] or Lightman [2019] depict their religious beliefs, I retreat from any dogmatic religious affiliation because my spiritual connection is informed by different and disparate practices; while David Bullen [2019] is painstakingly and meticulously aware of every single mark he leaves on the paper, I found no other artist losing themselves between the tip of the pencil and the fibres of the paper.

Movement has not answered my questions, semiotics has not helped and now the language used to describe embodiment and in-the-zoneness leaves me unfulfilled. It takes me “almost there” but there it leaves me. It explains the horizontal papery plane of immanence but then it stops. Maybe approaching the spiritual itself will provide some answers. Defining a spiritual or religious experience is not an easy task, and some descriptors and background literature have been provided earlier. One of the reasons for my adoption of journaling as a reflective practice is that it allows me to question the embodied encounter while making sure that I do not confuse it with emotions of elation and rapture.

To start such an enquiry I had to identify and agree on some delimitations, such as that my experience is real and not a result of a chemical or neurological imbalance, nor simply a psychological response. I am also very comfortable with the assumption that this experience is true for me and that it does not have to be true for anyone else. It should go without saying that any experience or non-experience lived by others is likewise valid [Rankin, 2008; Webb, 2022]. Most spiritual experiences are defined as ineffable and come with a lack of words to describe them. Research has also shown that spiritual experiences have happened through “ordinary objects” and not specific religious icons or relics. In my case, the ordinary objects are pencil and paper [DeRoo, 2018].

On the other side, when exploring the literature present on spirituality and art, we find this to be even less strong than embodiment and more tuned towards the artistic representation of the spiritual or art as a mediumistic practice. The 2020 London Exhibition “Not Without My Ghosts” [Grant, Larson and Pasi, 2020] introduced us artists who represented their take on spirituality, or where drawing becomes automated text, and where the emphasis is placed on psychic intensity and vitality, techniques of deep trance, and production of imagery and geometric drawings. There, mediumism becomes the tool and artists (mainly painters) are seen as intermediaries. This is even more expanded by James Elkins [2004] who characterises spiritual art either as rebellious and desecrating or as a form to represent the sublime and the numinous, as a sudden and overwhelming non-verbal presence of the spiritual, surpassing comprehension and akin to mysticism. Or even “just bad art” [20]. This is confirmed by Charlene Spretnak [2015] who established that throughout history we do have artists who either represented the sacred or looked to transmit transcendent ecstatic experiences to open the viewers’ eyes.

As when previously discussing embodiment and the work of the Jewish artist Lightman, such is the case of Makoto Fujimura [2020] who references directly the Holy Spirit in his theological and aesthetic work, and where his practice becomes openly prayer and praise; or Jungu Yoon [2015] whose interest is to represent the numinous while specifically looking for a reaction from the spectators, as elation, wonder and awe, akin to the sensations experienced by astronauts [Gallagher *et al.*, 2015].

While I explored the literature available on drawing, gestures, embodiment, and even now spirituality, I noticed how what I was looking for was *almost* there, but in a fragmented way. I was fully aware of a restlessness even in my searching and making [PH&W:71,80,99], thinking I was getting close to my encounter as much as I was closing in on the research, both so elusive. My voracious pursuit of the encounter mirrored a similar trailing of the literature and an intense journaling elucubration, by repeatedly getting lost in rhythmical spins, in endless circles [PH&W:53]. I could not find anything that would fully describe and explain what I was experiencing that would resonate with me. I found writing on any aspect [Brown, 2001]: books on paper, books on pencils. And then books on drawing; books about representation and others on interpretations. Research on signs and marks. Texts about spirituality, books about materials, volumes about phenomenology, connection, physics, and anthropology but nothing that would bring all these fragments together. I felt I found a

multitude of unsatisfactory incomplete answers and I was left with doubts and more questions.

What is happening *there*? In between. In that liminal space.

If psychoanalysis can explain my dissolving, in the creative practice I marvel at this sense of infinity which I perceive as existing beyond my presence. So, maybe, physics can explain matter disappearing. Holding a pencil in front of a sheet of paper, the gestural, the embodiment, and the spiritual all bring together the ever-changing patterns of a kaleidoscope. Nonetheless, something felt missing [PH§W:32,76]. My research needed further clarification to understand this encounter with the divine while drawing. As much as I believe I am a soul incarnate into this physical vessel, maybe I need to look at a connection with spirit via the material, as a physical tangible explanation, a mirroring of my embodiment.

If paper is made of cellulose [i.e. carbon] and the pencil is made of graphite [i.e. carbon] and I am mainly carbon-based... what is happening when these three carbons meet each other or encounter each other? [...] What happens there? What kind of alchemical arcane process is happening there? [PH§W:23].

Among all those words I found in books, the divine itself felt disappearing. I found artefacts, statues, and icons; and so many explanations. Transcendence felt replaced by detached revering.

I decide to leave again the literature and go back to us three. I have to trust my inner knowledge: I am touching, I am holding, I am experiencing via the senses [PH§I:103,113,116].

I go through bodily responses.

I actively participate in and respond to the act.

I know [PH§W:76].

materiality



FIGURE 10 THE ALCHEMIST, THOMAS WIJCK, CA. 1660



FIGURE 11 THE ALCHEMIST, DAVID RIJCKAERT, 1642

Ingold [2007] encourages the questioning of where the artist *really* ends, and the objects begin since Berger states that “artists and objects are made to evanesce [and] the surface of the page becomes [...] a liquid” [in Dillon *et al.* 2009:10]. I can only start with what I have: a pencil, a sheet of paper and my body “[as] a thing amongst things” [Crowther, 2011:74].

As a long-term Jung *aficionado*, some of the oracle and tarot cards I use [PH§V:3:52; PH§I:37,95,136] and books

I read introduced me to alchemy⁵. From the 17th century Flemish paintings depicting alchemists devoted to their practices to the representations of Christ holding the *globus cruciger* as a probable allegory of the alchemical symbol $\ddot{\text{S}}$ (salt of antimony, or Cinnabar,



FIGURE 12 SALVATOR MUNDI, ANDREA PREVITALI, 1519

⁵ For an extended further discussion on Alchemy see Agrippa, 2015; Chang, 2011; Coole, 2014; Drago, 2019; Dubois, 2006; Edinger, 1985; Eliade, 1978; Gregory, 1989; Hillman, 2021; Jagodzinski, 2021; Jung, 1990, 2015; Linden, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Loubser and le Roux, 2021; MacCoun, 2008; Mensch, 2018; Principe, 2013; Raff, 2000; Sperber, 1995; Vallack, 2016, 2017; von Franz, 1980; Vones, 2020; Watson, 1992; Wood, 2022. Please find a link for dr Justin Sledge’s website [HERE](#) and his YouTube playlist of relevant videos [HERE](#) .

i.e. the Vermillion dye which is the colour of the mythic alchemical substance capable of turning base metals into gold), alchemy is not a practice out of the ordinary and, yet, still misunderstood. Moving from the Arab world where the original alchemy dealt solely with the transmutation of metals, to the European medieval period where both alchemy and the alchemist turned into allegories for what is hidden and magic, we can observe a rapture between science and pseudo-science, the latter offering esoteric jargon and all things *magik* and which led to what some would recognise as modern New Age. This romantic view of science and the arcane led to other forms of interpretative alchemy as Carl Jung's and Mircea Eliade's, and even forms of spiritual alchemy where the original metallurgy becomes a metaphor for inner transformation of the Self, where Christ is seen as the rejected (Philosopher/corner) Stone, and where rebirth and regeneration (see all the stories of resurrections in the Gospels) are seen as analogies for something mystical, esoteric and, yet, within hand's reach. Alchemical.

Alchemy, as a research language, validates my crossing of boundaries between different approaches when K Vones offers it as “a model for engaging with the concept of cross-disciplinary knowledge generation” [2020:155]. It allows us to see the materials not just by their set intrinsic properties but by their transformative power. I can now see my practice not just as an artist but as someone who handles paper and graphite, a material tester, and someone who experiences the tools. By repetition (or experience by replication), observation and the engagement of the whole body as a vehicle for said knowledge, alchemy becomes a “physical meditation on materials” [157]. The transmutation of the material into something different “has the function of a portrayal or a projection of the alchemist's spiritual development” [Jönsson in Vones, 2020:160]. This shows the links between the material's changes and the artist's development. Alchemy is this form of acquisition of tactile vernacular knowledge residing within materials through practical experimentation to communicate the findings to fellow practitioners. Alchemy is hence a fully transformative force. “Even religious sceptics began to wonder if the alchemists might have understood something about the nature of matter that nineteenth-century scientists had missed” [Smith in Vones, 2020:164].

When investigating objects and events which have meaning and importance, do these objects and events have anything to say for themselves? Is a pencil just a pencil? Deepak Chopra identifies matter as waves of possibility [Chopra and Kafatos, 2017] and Nancy uses the term

for the form's resistance to its deformation [2013:7]. On one extreme we have Materialism declaring that matter is Primary and everything else (mind/soul/ideas) is Secondary. This leads to what we would now call *scientific and reductive materialism*: a pencil is *just* a pencil. It can be noted how Materialism has been competing with theories such as Vitalism where matter is infused with magical and occult properties. Finally, we are seeing the surge of New Materialism and concepts such as Vibrant Matter, seen as a sort of bringing together monist ontology and vitalism: a pencil is *not* just a pencil [Bennett, 2010; Boivin, 2011; Brown and Ladyman, 2019; Coole and Frost, 2010; Tilley *et al.*, 2006].

The pencil, the paper, the body. *The three of us*. This body as an object that we know. An object among all other objects external of us, experienced as a bounded entity. We are then aware of all the rest that lies beyond these boundaries of skin, of a space that contains other objects. If the conscious field is occupied by our environment and the body is a medium that we use to perceive and move within this environment, this body is still quite elusive [de Vignemont, 2020]. For Advaita Vedanta, all of this is just an illusion: the world, my physical body, my mind, emotions, and dreams: it is all Objects that can be observed, the world of appearance [Nikhilananda, 1931]. *The three of us* are seen and is no more.

But *still*: is.

In this sense, this meeting of Vedic (spiritual) and Alchemical (material) languages describe my drawing of lines as more akin to Paul Klee's "taking a line for a walk" [Nemirovsky and Dibley, 2021], as an extension of my own body: where do I end, and the pencil begins?

Graham Harman's [2014] Object Oriented Ontology [OOO] which explores the reality and agency of non-living entities, explains objects as unified realities "that cannot fully be reduced either downwards to their pieces or upwards to their effects". Hence for OOO, everything is an object, everything is real regardless of the experience and this existence is outside of our understanding [Bradley and Bailey, 2017; Brown, 2001, 2010; Cox, 2015; Miller, 2005]. For Quantum Mechanics and Chaos Theory, Materialism is flawed because we do not live in just a microscopic world of atoms. Matter is waves, particles, and chances. Can we see this underlying energy field as a proto-object? Or a blobject as per Terence E. Horgan and Matjaž Potrč [2008]. From this perspective that pencil, sheet of paper and body transform and dissolve: there is just vibration, and matter emerges simply as an invisible field of

energy. I can sense a connection between Vibrant Matter, OOO and alchemy. What I perceived as a tension between what this document would like me to dogmatically do and what the research has pragmatically shown me, here softens.

Elkins' [1999] beautiful book on painting feels like a love declaration to physicality and processes. The Philosophers' Stone was the beginning and the end of it, its purity a synonym for perfection, enlightenment, and bliss (or the unchanging reality of Brahman as Sacchidānanda previously described). Here is where magic happens, where the *lapis* of Lapis Philosophorum is in actuality a word that first in Latin and then Italian and Friulian (my mother tongues) indicates the *pencil*: the Philosophers' Stone transmutes into the Philosophers' Pencil.

Elkins asks us not what a painting (or a drawing in my case) represents but what the substance has to say: “[w]hat happens in the paint?” [3]. What is its material memory? Graphite is entrancing, sweet, and infuriating, and does not allow mistakes. It has a life of its own. The act of drawing is hypnotic, mesmerising, entrancing, addictive, obsessive; and sensual (“almost erotic” as my friend RC described mine [PH&W:75]). There is a fascination for dirty hands, a dark powdery residue as a *materia prima*: the beautiful in the dirt, a remnant of the whiteness of the Lotus flower rising from the decaying bottom of a rotting pond [Katō, 1992]; from heaviness and depression, formless matter with all its potentiality intrinsic to itself grows into something spectacular. The *nigredo* of graphite against the *albedo* of paper. Elkins [1999] calls it the “revelation of divinity in ordinary matter” [72] because alchemy is intertwined with theology and the questions of life, soul, eternity, spirit, incarnation, and death. R.L. Gregory [1989] also defines alchemy as “experimental philosophy - or rather experimental theology - with aims and claims that turned out to be dramatically inappropriate” [559]. This is the ongoing process of creating where Elkins [1999] teaches us, “the act is everything” [73] and what is “engrossing [...] is the act itself” [74]. Hillman [2021] confirms that my practice is the goal: “the transubstantiation of the material perspective into soul through *ars*” [119].

Pure alchemy.

As many artists seem not to want to discuss publicly the spiritual aspect of their work, I want to bring it to the forefront: there is not just the horizontality of the drawing, the physical act

of making, of the arm and hand holding and moving a stick of graphite on white paper; there is not just performativity; not only an in-the-zoneness where time seems to stop; not simply a therapeutic effect. Not just this paper on a wall mirroring an inner horizontal landscape. There is also verticality as transcendence: “there is something, something is present. This something is responsive” [Rosa, 2019:258]. Alchemy is all this: a practice of manipulating material, aimed at perfecting the alchemist, towards a psychological individuation, using symbolic language and imagery beyond any logic. There, Art and Alchemy are “sister disciplines” [Elkins, 1999:75]. As an orchestra conductor holds his breath before the first note is played while embracing the whole score within, so a drawing appears while an encounter happens in between: “the work and its maker exchange ideas and change one another” [80].

I take the alchemical “beware the physical in the material” [Hillman, 2021:103] as a hint to go and explore this graphite which is so mesmerising. I learn that even though its colour is steel grey, it transmits a deep blue light: ultramarine, to be precise [Anthony *et al.*, 1990; Korsakov *et al.*, 2015]. That same colour of *lapis lazuli*, that deep blue stone used to create the expensive pigment used to paint Buddhas and Goddesses, and mined in a valley where women were not allowed to set foot. *Lapis* becomes the stone devoted to Holy Women and Sophia Wisdom [Finlay, 2002]. Its geometric structure of layers of carbon atoms in perfect hexagonal rings takes us from the sum of all the internal angles being 720° (which is associated with 720Hz) to the vibration of the Ajna Chakra, or the Third Eye, depicted as a two-petal dark indigo / ultramarine blue lotus, which is said it allows to see what it cannot be described because it is without a form [Blavatsky, 2015a, 2015b; Saraswati, 2003; Saraswati, 2019].

Alchemy’s conceptual openness and richness bring me back to OOO and its approach to materials as having their consciousness, or whatever their version is. In a way, graphite *could* communicate with me. I asked myself: would I draw differently if I used a blue pencil instead of graphite? The experiment is unsuccessful [PH§W:11].

Jung [2010:218] reminds us that our body is carbon, like graphite. That made me reflect on our spectrum of blue, from deep cosmic loneliness to divinity. The two extremes. I am looking at my hands covered in graphite which appear emaciated and bruised. Livid, this

colour of transition and transformation; a colour that is always moving, adapting, and shapeshifting. A colour between *nigredo* and *albedo*: no man's land, a liminal space, multi-shaded, and complex. This alchemical blue is the one which connects to divine logos. Blue as *κυάνεος*, both sea and sky, that detectable and yet unreachable line always further away and at the same time expressing the essence of things and placing them "in a position of unattainable remoteness" [Hillman, 2021:106]. This is never either/or, black/white, facts/fiction: this is a fusing between the perceived and the imaginal world [Hillman, 2021:114] where the soul cries back to its unity.

This is the blue of the gods: Ω ॐ , ॐ .⁶

The beautiful light in the studio [PH§V:0:24] transmutes this greyness into blue. I see my loneliness and melancholia [PW§W:12,33,61,86] during this research in a different light: where does this blue take me beyond the drawing, beyond my hand, beyond the act?

⁶ Odin, Krishna, Jesus.

and then...

I approached my research from different paths, all parallels and at the same time intersecting. In my world, parallel lines do intersect. My paths are aesthetic, psychoanalytical, scientific, technological, tautological, spiritual, speculative, and imaginative. These paths all lead to the Azure Vault, the alchemical *cælum* in a sort of Jungian *Mysterium Coniunctionis* of a thousand names: the heavenly spirit, the *unus mundus*, the universal medicine. The mystical union between sacred and profane, while knowing that the profane is sacred by its own nature and longs to connect with the descending divine. There, in front of the paper, on the paper, the whiteness of its reflected light transmutes the greyness of graphite into a radiating blue. The pencil knows the paper and the paper knows the pencil. There, I am a witness while transmuting myself. I am both the Seer and the Seen and this dance under the Azure Vault is pleasure itself. “Blue-ness itself is the holy” says Heidegger [1982:166] and in its verticality from the depth of Loneliness to the wholeness of Oneness, we encounter ἀλήθεια: the essence of the truth [Heidegger, 2013].

From the very beginning of my research, a suggestion was always present which I did not pay attention to [PH&W:16,64,86,91; PH&I:37]. It spoke of a secret. The closer I got to the end, the louder this voice in its different facets became. It is a secret.

A secret in itself: DAT ROSA MEL APIBUS. *It is the rose that gives the honey to the bees.*

Ethically, I questioned my methodology: if I believed in the process, should I also believe in the method when it tells me that my finding is a “secret”? I felt I was asked to choose between my faithfulness to the academic research or my allegiance to the spiritual. I chose both and I have decided to take you here to the end, where there will be no words anymore.

The practice and methodology showed me that this alchemical expression is formed by multiple elements: paper and graphite. Also light, space, silence, time. We can analyse the symbols, the operators, and all the variables. Still, there is something elusive within the Work that cannot be defined, described, or circumscribed. “Ultimately - Phyllis Curott reminds me – the truly magical ingredients are you and your connection to the divine” [1999:219].

This is the moment where words are needed but intangible and then not needed anymore.

conclusions

I was aware that researching anything spiritual and which is not easily measurable was a risk but knowing that these experiences were real to me spurred me to investigate the occurrence of these spiritual events during my drawing practice. My aim was to first define and circumscribe the practice and then contextualise and situate it within the research. I explored the concepts of in-the-zoneness and embodiment which I found supportive but not exhaustive. I noticed how most of the literature always points back to the artefact as a means without which we cannot understand drawing or the artist. I shied away from this definition, and I kept on looking deciding to explore the materiality of the practice. There, an alchemical framework allowed me to merge my practice, embodiment, the analytical and the spiritual and provided me with a validation of the approach. It seemed to justify the testing, the expansive reading, the meandering, the risk-taking, the getting lost and the evolving of thought along the way.

The findings presented here show how, in this instance, the material is vital as a means to reach the spiritual and how within this alchemical spell there is still something ineffable: something that cannot be said, something for which there are no words, ephemeral and hidden, arcane and subtle, tender and compassionate and which comes as a riddle: DAT ROSA MEL APIBUS.

It is the rose that gives the honey to the bees.

This research led me to question my approach to faith. While Advaita Vedanta and some of the gnostic gospel beautifully expound this Oneness with the divine, the Bliss of Pure Awareness and Consciousness showed me this world of Maya, or this illusion of what and who we think we are. And then drawing, its materiality and the alchemical language, prompted me to question the relevance of the physical in the spiritual. This is all we have: this body, these sensations. This journey in this world, now. A more *bodily* approach which takes form, space and time into consideration as doorways to the formless, is what I desire to explore next [PH&I:136].

These findings came with more questions and showed gaps in my knowledge. In the end, this research feels like a means to something else. Paraphrasing Patañjali [Ranganathan, 2008], this is just the gross experience of a more subtle understanding that flew where it needed to go. I had a confirmation that research never ends: I found new connections and hints,

suggestions and synchronistic events till the very end. Please know that what you find here does not end here. Fortunately, my forthcoming PhD research at Bangor University aims to answer some of these questions.

In light of my research, I would like to see more research just about the *practice* and more funding available to all those artists who are interested in solitary research and not in public presence. I would like to see less stigma on spirituality in the arts; and while I am aware of the arts used to explain and depict sciences, I would like to see more science explaining and enlightening the arts.

Methodologically, I hope to start a conversation where rhizomatic approaches and theoretical and spiritual buffet are cherished and where knowledge is openly shared.

This has been a beautiful and rich journey. While resting at the exit of this Platonic cave, facing the sun, my question for you is: who do you think gave us this metaphorical red thread to follow?

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