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ABSTRACT:

Opening with a consideration of the distribution of the two graphic acts – drawing and writing – this article offers a comparative study of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy’s respective exhibitions and catalogue essays on the subject of drawing. Through a comparative examination of what I take to be their central theoretical contributions to the study of drawing – Derrida its ‘rhetoric’, Nancy its ‘rhythm’ – this article moves on to suggest how these concepts inform a theory of poetic lineation.

INTRODUCTION: KAFKA’S WRITING-PAD

A brief event in Kafka’s *The Trial* provides me with a point of entry into thinking the irruptive relation between writing and drawing. Oblivious to the content of the charges against him, K. resolves to write an impossibly comprehensive plea for his defence anyway. He is interrupted by the deputy manager, who bursts into his office, laughing:

at a Stock Exchange joke he had just heard, a joke which required for its understanding a drawing which the deputy manager, taking the pencil from K.’s hand and leaning over his desk, now executed on the writing-pad intended for the plea.¹

In the case of K.'s plea, a response to an inscrutable mobilization of juridical power, we are offered a parody of the scene of writing. That is, if writing is understood as an accounting of the self, made through a manual act of inscription, traced with a linear movement of differentiation which is both graphic and syntactic. What this illustrative episode presents might be reduced, thus, into a preliminary and provisional graphic order. Writing, emblemized by the plea, is consequential, patient, and difficult, oriented towards inscribing the line of the self. Drawing, emblemized by the joke, is flippant, throwaway, and facile, oriented towards inscribing the line of the other. If manual writing proceeds along the projected, invisible lines of an intention, those lines are always liable to disintegrate into the lines of the drawing; in one there inheres the in-eliminable possibility of the other. Additionally, rather like the charges against K., we are left to guess at the actual contents of the joke and its drawing. Famously, for Freud, the pleasure in telling a joke is derived less from the particulars of content than from the economic 'savings' that it yields: typically because the psychic energy that would otherwise have been spent on maintaining the inhibition of libidinal or aggressive energy is momentarily relieved.² K. assumes the role of the Freudian third person, who isn't there to get the joke but to be told it: to provide the joke-teller with the requisite subject, or medium, for the pleasure of telling.³ In other words, in the telling, K. has the same function as the writing-pad in the drawing. In each case, the subjectifying operation of drawing takes place according to a logic of exclusion.

What this scene has to do with Derrida and Nancy is that, in its sketchy economy, it marries their respective pre-occupations regarding the philosophy of drawing: that is, for Derrida, the notion of substitution, of the significant implication of drawing within the logic, or the 'graphics', of supplementarity, and for Nancy, drawing as the formation and medium of pleasure. Indeed, parts of Nancy's *The Pleasure in Drawing (Le plaisir au dessin)* explicitly resume the thinking of *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* in order to outline the co-extension of the emergence of aesthetic pleasure and the inauguration of form. Furthermore, despite the rarefied circumstances of the art exhibitions that serve as the bases for these two texts, Derrida and Nancy are not

motivated by connoisseurship: the claims they make apply equally to expert drawings as they do to children's (or, for that matter, bank manager's) drawings. The core of this article is a comparative reading of Derrida's and Nancy's accounts of drawing, particularly Nancy's *The Pleasure in Drawing* (first published in French in 2007 as *Le Plaisir du dessin*) and Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (first published in French in 1990 as *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines*). Much has been written on the complex proximities of these two thinkers, particularly the ways in which Nancy's thinking both enters and departs from the orbit of deconstruction.⁴ That Derrida and Nancy alike turn towards abstracted accounts of drawing while curating exhibitions of graphic works remains an unexamined comparative encounter. In focussing on this, I am not just motivated by the intrinsic local value of reading these texts alongside each other in the context of a broader consideration of the overlapping or diverging contours of these two philosophical projects. I am motivated too by a demand of what I have referred to in the title as a poetics of drawing, which refers rather literally to the ways in which theories of drawing lend themselves to theories of poetry. Both Derridean and Nancean versions of drawing, I will argue, sponsor such a poetics, in different but complementary ways: Derrida with what he calls the 'rhetoric of the *trait*', and Nancy through an enigmatic consideration of the rhythm of drawing. My work here will be oriented towards developing these concepts.

In terms of the wider context of this comparison, the shift from drawing to poetry may seem an abrupt veer. But, I argue, drawing, the art of non-linguistic line-making and marking, is a privileged other of poetry, the art of lineated language.⁵ If the history of modern poetry is, partially, the history of its migration, as a medium, from speech to paper, then it is too a history of its increasing proximity to the graphic arts.⁶ This is not just a theoretical proposition: it is a demonstrable preoccupation for poets, too. Yves Bonnefoy, for example, develops the analogy in the metaphor, not of the writing-pad, but of the common ground of the blank sheet: 'drawing is less defining contours, finding their truth, than venturing into that whiteness and discovering there the precarity of all that has been acquired [...] and thus drawing near to that reality-unity that

language robs us of. *In this way, the drawing, the “great” drawing, will be poetry* [emphasis mine].⁷ Bonnefoy’s projection of poetry as the apotheosis of drawing comes from his predication of those two forms not on their fulfilment of certain media-specific formal requisites and limits (‘defining contours’), but instead on a common epistemological sensibility, anterior to the work, towards the withdrawal of received form.

This, in turn, recalls Walter Benjamin – oft-cited in literary-critical approaches to drawing - whose gesture, like Bonnefoy’s, is towards a pure definition of drawing. For Benjamin, what distinguishes drawing from painting is its taking place against, and activation of, an unexhausted ‘background’. ‘The graphic line,’ he writes, ‘marks out the area and so defines it by attaching itself to it as a background [...] The pure drawing will not alter the meaningful graphic function of its background by “leaving it blank” as a white ground’.⁸ For a drawing to be a drawing, for Benjamin, the intervention of the mark must coincide, dialectically, with a commensurate letting-be of the background: a finite marking of an unfilled field. The drawing *subjects* the ‘area’ it appropriates as a background, in the senses of both domination and constitution (it is exactly this dual sense that Derrida develops with his distinct but comparable term for the material support of the drawing, taken from Artaud: the ‘*subjectile*’).⁹ Art historians might shrug this all off as commonplace, or as a mere rehash of the classical *disegno/colore* distinction, but time and again, one of the elements that draws philosophers, poets and literary theorists to the abstraction of a pure graphic art, is this interplay with, variously, the ‘whiteness’, the ‘writing-pad’, the ‘*subjectile*’, or the ‘background’: the simultaneous ground and negation of form which it, not coincidentally, shares with writing in general and poetry in particular. Nancy and Derrida pursue their versions of drawing against this backdrop.

In the case of both of these texts, it is necessary to bear in mind their geneses as extended catalogue essays. I will, therefore, begin with a brief overview of the exhibitions. *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines* was the name of the exhibition curated by Derrida at the Louvre in 1990, as part of the gallery's *Parti-pris* ('Taking Sides') series. Each exhibition in the series was curated by, as the catalogue puts it, a 'personalit[y] known for their critical abilities'.¹⁰ The idea was that each invited personality would take their pick from the Louvre's graphic arts collections to assemble a discursive exhibition, meditating on the 'argumentative value' of the selected works. Underpinning this format is the notion that drawing, as a field of conceptualization in visual art, may lend its generative potential to the theoretical treatise (Hubert Damisch's exhibition was entitled, appropriately, *Traité du trait*). It is perhaps owing to the precepts of the *Parti-pris* series that Derrida's book is so literally *thematic*: a treatise on drawing and blindness that finds its visual material, mainly, in drawings of the blind.¹¹ Of the works exhibited, of particular note are studies of the blind by Antoine Coypel, a series of searing self-portraits by Henri Fantin-Latour, and Joseph-Benoit Suvée's *Butades, or the Origin of Drawing*.

Nancy, meanwhile, curated the exhibition *Le Plaisir au dessin* with Sylvie Ramond and Eric Pagliano at Lyon's Musée des Beaux-Arts in 2007. In contrast with Derrida's exhibition, the Lyon exhibition foregrounded the graphic act itself over possibilities of representation. In keeping with this, whereas Derrida thematizes drawings of the blind, Nancy thematizes drawings of the hand (but, as Nancy seems keen to point out in the exhibition press release, he eschewed, in his curation, any overall thematization).¹² A significant proportion of the drawings exhibited are autographic, scribbly and spontaneous: the first image is an untitled 1966 ink drawing by Joan Miró, composed of four rapid strokes of varying lengths, and a few spare blobby drops. There are, too, examples of Surrealist automatism, including by its most enthusiastic practitioner, André Masson. This is mentionable because Nancy's proposal that drawing constitutes the spontaneous and libidinal inauguration of form arguably finds its most apt artistic precedents in that practice.

Neither thinker is invested in what art historian Benjamin Buchloh, in a significant essay, calls the ‘diagrammatic’ turn in drawing in the wake of Cubism.¹³ Here, Buchloh seeks to shift the critical focus away from the material support – undoubtedly a preoccupation in twentieth-century Western art – and towards other dialectical frontiers. If, as Buchloh argues, drawing conforms to a dialectic between ‘the authentic corporeal trace and the externally established matrix’ (52), then Nancy and Derrida alike dispense with the latter, as well as any other notion of extrinsic interaction or dialectic, for the sake of clearing the way for a unilateral philosophy of the line considered against nothing other than the plain sheet of paper, the material support, as a stand-in for ontological ground. Both, of course, are licensed to be tendentious by the constrained format in which their narratives of drawing take place: relatively small exhibitions drawn largely from museum collections of works on paper. Notwithstanding this, central to Buchloh’s argument is the claim that the diagrammatic has been historically occluded in favour of, among other prominent, epistemic motifs, ‘mimesis of libido’ (52): a phrase which provides as good a description as any for what Nancy sets about recuperating for drawing in his essay. This is to say that, like Benjamin’s, Nancy and Derrida’s basis for thinking drawing is rather lacking in art historical perspicacity, but in any case they are less interested in drawing’s place in visual art than they are in a fundamental relation to writing, language, and signification.

DERRIDA AND THE ORIGIN OF DRAWING

Derrida’s writing on drawing orbits around Pliny the Elder’s famous account, in the *Natural History*, of the origin of drawing. The same scene as that depicted in the Suvée painting included in the Louvre exhibition, Pliny tells the story of the daughter of a Corinthian potter named Butades who, enamoured with a young man who was soon ‘to go abroad’, drew ‘in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp’.¹⁴ As Derrida will develop, this provides a model of the graphic line

– or *trait* – as both a traced outline and the mark of an affect or intention. The Plinian origin of drawing is thus essentially and acutely melancholic, in the sense that, as Giorgio Agamben succinctly defines it, ‘melancholy offers the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object’.¹⁵ Drawing thus becomes an anticipatory marking of melancholy that persists after the loss of the object.

Derrida’s first encounter with the Plinian scene comes via his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. As Derrida notices, Pliny lies behind Rousseau’s aphorism, early in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, that ‘love [...] is the inventor of drawing’.¹⁶ Rousseau’s broader point, famously, is that gesture originates from need and language originates from passion.¹⁷ Butades’ daughter thus presents a kind of intermediate expression, between need and passion: neither pure gesture nor language, but a gestural inscription that, if not forming the basis of language, at least elicits or creates the conditions for imagined or supposed linguistic equivalents. Rousseau evokes this trajectory in a passage that is important for Derrida’s reading: ‘How she could say things to her beloved, who traced his shadow with such pleasure! What sounds might she use to work such magic! [*Quels sons eût-elle employés pour rendre ce mouvement de baguette?*]’ (6).¹⁸

As an indexical trace, drawing seems as indicative of the possibility of language as it is of the phenomenal appearance that it seeks, melancholically, to reproduce in outline. It is this twofold quality of the *trait* that Derrida lingers on, although, inevitably, it is less an indicative capacity than it is an indicative incapacity. Derrida writes at length about Rousseau’s rendering of the Plinian scene as the ‘origin of the sign’, where the twofold incapacity is staged as the co-incidence of the twofold activity of tracing and marking:¹⁹

The movement of the magic wand [in French, *baguette* – i.e., stick, stylus] that traces with so much pleasure does not fall outside of the body. [...] It is of course still an image which is traced at the tip of the wand [*au bout de la baguette*], but an image that is not completely separated from the person it represents [...] The distance from the shadow or from the wand is almost nothing [*n’est presque rien*]. She who traces, holding, handling,

now, the wand, is very close to touching what is very close to being the other *itself*, close by a minute difference [*à une infime différence*]; that small difference—visibility, spacing, death—is undoubtedly the origin of the sign and the breaking of immediacy; but it is in reducing it as much as possible that one marks the contours of signification.²⁰

The *trait* records, for Derrida, a fantasy of presence. Note that Derrida's language is not of negation, but of proximity and approximation, through the tactile figures of the tip of the *baguette* and the shadow (even the image is framed not in terms of visibility, but in terms of contiguity). Drawing, in the first instance, appears to represent the closest possible adequation of a fixing of presence. However, everything hinges on the mordant irony with which Derrida writes that the minute difference between tip and line, figure and shadow, is synonymous with nothing less than 'visibility, spacing, death', that is, the instantiation of difference itself, and the radical dissolution of wholeness that is necessary for signification. This is why drawing, for Derrida, cannot be considered akin to, say, a zero degree: while there is a scale of proximity between subject and object, there is no accompanying scale of signification: all graphic activity is equally implicated in the unlimited proliferation of supplementarity. The variable (and unrepresentable) spacing between the drawer and the drawn is superseded by the invariability of spacing itself.

The possibility of 'marking' the 'contours of signification' (or the 'stroke' that opens up 'grammaticality', as Derrida puts it earlier) is distinct from the mimetic, metonymic proximity of tracing (OG, 209). To mark implies a retrospective function, in the sense of commemoration (the French *marquer* shares this with the English verb). Whereas tracing originates from a will to reproduce the contours of a beheld object, *marking* unintentionally inscribes and commemorates an incipient formation of meaning-making *itself*, insofar as the intention to signify, rather than being realized as a presentation of the other, is realized as a kind of memorial of its own impossibility. In other words, the mark, intransitive, makes the origin of signification – the opening of form, situated here ambiguously between gesture and language, passion and need – *visible*. It

abandons signification to visibility, in the same way that the drawing is an abandonment of gesture to the *trait*.

This abandonment is what Michael Newman, writing in a deconstructive mode, is developing when he formulates ‘an undecidability of the relation between mark and signifier’, which ‘would open up the possibility of a continuity between the human and the non-human’.²¹ For Derrida in *Grammatology*, the significance of drawing is that the resistance to that continuity or undecidability is maintained from within by the same graphic gesture that surrenders to it. That is to say that when Derrida writes that ‘Man *calls himself* man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity’ (*OG*, 244), we should understand ‘drawing’ literally as much as figuratively.

I will move on to *Memoirs of the Blind*. What Derrida will go designates here as ‘the rhetoric of the *trait*’ – a rhetoric that is both proper to drawing and a product *of it*—is an expansion of the line of thought, in his reading of Rousseau, but rearticulating the deconstructive approach to graphism within the matrix of visibility, as opposed to that of contiguity. Appropriately for an exhibition catalogue, the text foregrounds the act of looking. Returning to the Plinian origin, Derrida’s reading of the scene is refracted not through Rousseau, but through Suvée’s painting. In this reading, Butades’ daughter tracing the shadow of her beloved becomes a scene of orphic aversion. Since Butades’ daughter must avert her gaze from her beloved in order to trace his shadow, for Derrida, ‘it is as if seeing were forbidden in order to draw, as if one drew only on the condition of not seeing, as if the drawing were a declaration of love destined for or suited to the invisibility of the other’ (*MB*, 49).

The drawing of Butades’ daughter becomes an illustration of Derrida’s central polemic, in *Memoirs*, that ‘the heterogeneity between the thing drawn and the drawing *trait* remains abyssal’ (45). As an illustration of that thesis, it is, admittedly, a rather counter-intuitive one, since the scene unavoidably presents the straightforward coincidence of the seen and the traced. Butades’ daughter

averts her eyes from her lover, but never loses sight of his shadow. The point, of course, is that there is necessarily always some displacement, in the same way that the logic of supplementarity ensures that any relation to the other cannot be extricated from an abyssal referral back to the self.²² Derrida writes: ‘Butades writes [*écrit*], and thus already loves in nostalgia’ (45).²³ She does not draw (*dessine*); she *writes*. Thus we have a reversal of Kafka’s writing-pad, that is, the sudden substitution of drawing by writing. If drawing proceeds as an anticipation of loss, its immediate replacement by writing takes place, in part, as an instant petrification of that anticipation into nostalgia (again, the commemoration of the mark).

Memoirs of the Blind tells various versions of this – drawing giving way to writing - which I am tempted to refer to as graphic events. Perhaps the most compelling of these events is autobiographical. Referring to his boyhood jealousy of his brother’s superior draughtsmanship, Derrida writes: ‘I suffered seeing my brother’s drawings on permanent display [...] As if, in place of drawing [...] I was called by another *trait*, this graphics of invisible words, this accord of time and voice that is called (the) word—or writing, scripture. A substitution, then, a clandestine exchange: one *trait* for the other, a *trait* for a *trait*?’ (*MB*, 37). Here, like Butades’ daughter, Derrida writes in -- and *as* -- a nostalgia for drawing. His anecdote takes place on the same ‘sacrificial’ level as the portraits of blindness assembled for the exhibition, that is, it proffers a thematic representation of an unrepresentable origin, an originary substitution in the metaphor of a volitional exchange. Note how, this time, the substitution of the *trait* is a passage of recourse from the visibility of the displayed drawings through to, via a renunciation of sightedness, writing as a graphic system whose object is essentially withdrawn.

Derrida characterizes this inextricable relation between drawing and writing, via the *trait*, as a rhetoric for perhaps two reasons. Rhetoric implies a sustained reliance on the substitutions of figural language as well as it implies a temporal movement of discursivity (the operative phrase being Derrida’s ‘accord of time and voice’).²⁴ In these two senses, rhetoric, for Derrida, captures

the quality of drawing as, itself, a figure of writing –its *trace* – and the quality of drawing as the ambivalent record of a discrete movement or gesture –its *mark*. To return to the question of non-human mark-making, in *Memoirs of the Blind*, it is precisely the rhetoric of drawing that distinguishes it from non-human marking, since drawing ‘never goes without being articulated with articulation, without the order being given with words [...] Drawing comes in the place of the name, which comes in the place of drawing: in order, like Butades, to hear oneself call the other or be called (by) the other’ (*MB*, 57).

Drawing is ‘articulated’ – partially detached but conjoined - with articulation itself, that is, the nascent intent to signify. According to Derrida, drawing becomes less an art form than a form of address, or form *as* address: a form founded on the way in which it is co-formed with other modes of address. Here, the chiasmic relation or exchange that drawing occupies with naming – yet another graphic irruption – is a consequence of the status of drawing as, at once, the opening and abandonment (hence the ‘ruin’) of the possibility of address and, therefore, of an ethical encounter with the other.

THE RHYTHM OF DRAWING

Whereas Derrida broaches the domain of poetics through a shared ‘graphics’ of drawing and writing, Nancy’s account of drawing broaches a poetics through an enquiry into the fundamental relations between forms of art. This distinction extends to their critical engagements. While Derrida’s approach to drawing, from *Grammatology* to *Memoirs*, circles around the Plinian origin (whether mediated through Rousseau or through artistic representation) as both sign and spatiotemporal inscription, perhaps the most instructive inclusion in one of Nancy’s ‘sketchbooks’ is a brief passage from Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’. These sketchbooks – collections of brief and unannotated quotations on the subject of drawing from artists, writers and philosophers - follow each section of *The Pleasure in Drawing*, function as resonant interruptions,

and effectively extend Nancy's curatorial project into text. The 'sketch' or scrap excerpted from 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is Heidegger's exposition of the linear movement of the *Aufriss*, the 'rift-design', that is, the twofold movement of drawing *on* and drawing *from* by which the work of art – sculpture, painting, poem – is instantiated between the phenomenal 'world' and the material 'earth': 'to draw out the rift and to draw the design with the drawing-pen on the drawing-board' (*PD*, 35).

My reading is that, with Heidegger, drawing generally relates less to the graphic matrix than it does to the broader architectural register present in his turn to language: the formational foundation (Heidegger tends to refer to it as *Zeichnung* – drawing, draught) from which 'the house of Being' is realised.²⁵ Nancy modifies and extends a Heideggerian approach to drawing, inasmuch as his thought of drawing sponsors a thinking of the originary and formational movement that gives rise to all art media. Unlike Heidegger, he is, at the same time, concerned with thinking drawing *as such* (despite his reliance on figures of draughtsmanship, Heidegger omits the draughtsman from his roster of artists – not unlike Hegel's exclusion of drawing in his lectures on aesthetics, where painting is allied with *colore* only). Philosophical influence aside, *The Pleasure in Drawing* is an elaboration of a line of thought initiated by Nancy in *The Muses*, that is, defining the whole aesthetic realm according to a radical heterogeneity of arts that Nancy calls, characteristically, a 'singular plurality'.²⁶ In organising his graphic aesthetics around a Freudian principle of pleasure, Nancy rehabilitates the practical handbook cliché of drawing as a source of idle pleasure. To provide some context, the association between drawing and pleasure has significant antecedents in French art history, too; Joyce Bernstein Howell demonstrates, for example, that Eugène Delacroix established the precedent that practising drawing can be a democratic source of pleasure for *anyone*, thereby breaking with the contemporary doxa that pleasure is experienced according to a strange polar logic, that is, either by viewers or by masters practising their craft.²⁷ That democratic ideal of availability remains present in Nancy's configuration of drawing as the humble essence of all artistic expression.

Nancy identifies the graphic impulse as the defining element of what he calls an essential ‘gesture of art’, where gesture might be understood as a single, unrepeatable, and necessarily somatic expression made from within a circumscribed field of possibility. As Ginette Michaud glosses it in her perceptive exposition of Nancy’s text: ‘drawing is the artistic gesture par excellence: an act, a passage, not as acting out, but as passage *of* the act itself, its on-the-spot actualization’.²⁸ Like Derrida, Nancy is drawn to drawing as an intimate performance of immediacy, as the locus of a contraction between subject and object, and as both art and act. But unlike Derrida’s abyssal ‘minute difference’, at the tip of the stylus, Nancy’s evocation of the drawing subject reproduces a version of sameness, the sameness of a body, guaranteed precisely by the technicity of the stylus. Drawing, he writes, offers ‘an immanent *signifiance* [...] without the sign taking off toward the signified, but a sense that is offered right at the body [*à même le corps*]’.²⁹ Nancy is quick to clarify that his argument is not for a naïve privileging of actual somatic presence: ‘this gestural body is different from the organic body, without being a body without organs. Rather, it becomes the body-*organon* of art; and thus of the technique (*ars-technè*) that is in play’ (*PD*, 39). If Deleuze and Guarrati’s concept of the body without organs is a *virtual* body, then Nancy’s body-*organon* is distinguished as a *technical* body (the Greek *organon* referring both to the instrumentality of tools and the instrumentality of the vital organs), a body which produces and which is produced by -- and which only ever exists in and as this simultaneity -- a given work of art, irrespective of medium.

To a greater degree than Derrida, Nancy remains sensitive to the polysemy of the French word *dessin* as both *drawing* and *design*, and thus both form and concept. In this sense, he retains a fidelity to the Renaissance conception of *disegno*, according to which drawing was venerated as the twofold capacity of art to represent and to invent. The source of invention and creation, *disegno* was correlated with divinity; as David Rosand puts it, particularly in the case of Leonardo, ‘*disegno* comes to be recognized not only as the means of realizing ideas but as the very source of ideas itself’.³⁰ But when divorced from the religious faith in which the discourse of *disegno* is ultimately

an investment, the co-determinacy of means and source, as with Nancy's body-*organon*, comes to resemble a lacuna or an event, an irruption of form, an 'opening'.

Indeed, *The Pleasure in Drawing* is, primarily, a treatise on form, where form is dynamized and temporalized in chiasmic relation with what Nancy refers to as 'force': 'the *formative force* of this very form [of drawing], or again, of the *form in its force* [...] is what constitutes the drawing of art or the art of drawing' (*PD*, 12). All form, for Nancy, is perpetually *unfinished*: a discrete artistic form does not exist in phenomenal or aesthetic autonomy, but rather as a fleeting, fragile instance of a continual and inexhaustible emergence of sense. It is for this reason that Nancy locates a theoretical resonance in Freud's economic account of pleasure since, as he puts it, pleasure, whether libidinal or aesthetic, 'comprises a renewed dynamic, revived by the desire to which it responds' (17). That pleasure, and thus form, are generated by an inexhaustible cyclicity of desire and 'revival' provides the background for what Nancy will go on to call the 'rhythm' of drawing, where rhythm stands for an interruptive countermovement inherent to the formative force of drawing.

The triumvirate of rhythm, form, and pleasure is well-trodden territory in the field of poetics. In his intervention into the theory of the lyric, Jonathan Culler argues that rhythm plays a supplementary role in lending the experience of reading lyric poetry a kind of embodied experience. 'Rhythm,' he argues, 'gives lyric a somatic quality that novels and other extended forms lack—the visceral experience of rhythm linking it to the body—[...] and thus contributes to a different sort of pleasure'.³¹ While the specific kind of pleasure derived from reading poetry and 'experiencing' rhythm may be one of the criteria for a theory of lyric form, Nancy would have that pleasure, rhythm, and form are connected in a more primary way. 'Rhythm', Nancy writes, prescriptively, 'whose double value of *scansion* and *schema* (*ruthmos* initially had a meaning close to "figure") could no doubt be brought to express a pulse of nascent form—should find its place in the analysis of drawing' (*PD*, 50). In understanding *ruthmos* as a concatenation of scansion and *schema*, Nancy finds a succinct formulation for his account of graphic and aesthetic form, and one

which inevitably relies for its expression on the language of poetics. Scansion, normally understood as the graphic representation of metre, becomes instead the graphic trace of rhythm itself; not the rhythm of phonetic patterns, but the rhythm of thinking and forming. Meanwhile *schema*, that is, form itself (and, in Kantian philosophy, the rule by which an intuition is correlated with an external object), comes to name the process or ‘force’ of formation implied by this graphic account of rhythm.

Nancy’s recommendation in *The Pleasure in Drawing* of an association between drawing and rhythm develops some of his earlier work in philosophical poetics. In ‘Taking Account of Poetry’, collected in the 2006 volume *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, Nancy suggests that poetry can help to uncover an ‘articulation that precedes language’, which ‘no doubt functions as something akin to “rhythm”, “cadence,” “caesura,” or “syncope” [...] and, at the same time, has the quality of what I would term, so as not to call it “figuration,” an outline [*dessin*]’.³² Here, Nancy anticipates the basic premise of *The Pleasure in Drawing* – an opening of sense and form that may be distinguished from linguistic structures of meaning-making and their discontents via an elaboration of the gestural, conceptual, and formal qualities of drawing. Here, rhythm is allied with other terms from prosody, whose technical specificities are elided in favour of the essential way in which they each stand for an interruptive force that is necessarily both linguistic and extra-linguistic (the value of prosody for Nancy is that it places a focus on elements of speech that cut across phonetic units). Nancy goes on to extend the equivalence between rhythm and drawing in a later essay on Hölderlin, highlighting the way in which both are formed negatively: ‘Rhythm is made of anti-rhythm, like the figure its outline’.³³ Crucially, the connection that Nancy draws between ‘rhythm’ and ‘*dessin*’ cuts across temporal and spatial orders of form. Note, in comparison, the strikingly similar equivalence made by Ezra Pound in his *ABC of Reading*: ‘Rhythm is a form cut into TIME, as a design is determined SPACE’.³⁴

Nancy's approach to rhythm or *ruthmos* emerges from a long philosophical history. In a helpful essay on philosophical approaches to rhythm, David Nowell Smith focusses on Heidegger's 1939 lecture on Aristotle's *Physics*, in which Heidegger interprets *ruthmos* as designating 'the temporal structure by which the entity remains in appearance'.³⁵ For Nowell Smith, the evolution from *ruthmos* to rhythm is a product of a subtraction of temporality from form or *schema*: "The transition from *ruthmos* to what we would today recognize as "rhythm" can only take place once the notion of form (*schema*) has been detemporalized, made static: the remaining temporal element—now grasped as flux, or flowing—gets named "rhythm" (45). Nancy's post-deconstructive rethinking of rhythm aims, precisely, to *re-temporalize* form, as well as it does to formalize temporality. Belonging as much to thinking as it does to the body, the generative and plural rhythm of drawing is Nancy's answer to Derrida's argument that drawing constitutes the abyssal instantiation of difference. Drawing, he writes, 'must be understood as engaging a rhythm, setting in play a beat, a differentiation, displacements, folds': between the arts, between bodies, between lines (*PD*, 70).

CONCLUSION: GRAPHIC TRAIT, POETIC LINE

I will work towards a conclusion by opening onto a broader consideration of how the two accounts of drawing may be put to use in a more direct analysis of poetic form – specifically, the formal unit of the line. In so doing, I am not aiming for a climactic synthesis -- I hope I have already demonstrated how Derrida and Nancy's texts are theoretically distinct, and how, moreover, these texts instantiate broader differences between their thought. However, when it comes to the relation between graphic *trait* and poetic line, Derridean rhetoric and Nancean rhythm become complementary factors. As I have already suggested, a corollary of Derrida's notion of the rhetoric of the *trait* is that the irreducible possibility of the substitution of drawing by writing and vice versa is, in fact, a constitutive experience of both graphic modalities. To write is to mourn drawing, to

draw is to mark possibilities of writing. Echoing his evocation of Butades' daughter writing in nostalgia, Derrida asks, 'Does one ever get over drawing, is one ever done mourning it?' (*MB*, 39). The implication of this chronic mourning is that there remains a fundamental aesthetic question or motivation at the heart of writing. What I want to suggest is that poetry can provide a mode of writing that partakes in and formalizes this mourning (that, as it were, marks it) without overcoming it. But if we import the logic of the rhetoric of the *trait*, we might think of the form of the poem as an expression of the continuity, and thus a suspension, of what Derrida calls the 'clandestine exchange' of the graphic *trait* for the written line. Derrida writes that 'drawing always signals [...] toward the threshold where only the surroundings of the *trait* appear' (*MB*, 54). The *trait* becomes something like the formless generator of form, the gesture that engenders form through what it excludes. The line break in the poem, meanwhile, performs an analogous function. Axiomatically, poetic form is negative, in that it derives not from the line but from the break. Poems may resist or subvert the principle of lineation, and may indeed jettison it altogether, but even in prose poems, as James Longenbach has argued, the line persists as a kind of phantom formal referent.³⁶ This, in turn, belongs to the same supplementary chain of negation that opposes writing to drawing in a dynamic of nostalgia or mourning. In other words, poetic lineation represents a flipside of Derrida's rhetoric of the *trait*, insofar as it is a disarticulation or decomposition of the *trait* that is inevitably articulated with it, and which inevitably refers back to it.

On the other hand, Nancy's account of rhythm foregrounds the way in which poems, like drawings, derive their organising energy or 'formative force' from the dynamic accretion of finite lines. This is what the poet George Oppen refers to as the 'pulse of thought which is given by [...] lines'.³⁷ Nancy addresses the poetic line directly in an interview with Emmanuel Laugier, employing the distinctly Heideggerian metaphor of field-tilling to characterise the movements of what he refers to as verse: '*versus*, the reversal of the plough at the edge of the field and the verses as furrows that turn back when they reach the enclosure' (*EPL*, 114). For Nancy, the finitude of the line

literally signifies our own finitude as mortals. Beyond the particularities of metre, we feel, and view, the rhythm of poetry as such: ‘The verse allows death to be heard at the point of the break, the terminus of the line’ (*EPL*, 115). This does not predicate the line on its verbal or syntactic qualities but, instead, on its non-verbal, non-syntactic qualities. To avail myself of one of the double-values that both Derrida and Nancy exploit in their respective essays - the French word *retrait*, which signifies withdrawal or retreat, as well as the reinscription of the *trait* (*PD*, 73) - the poetic line is precisely a of *retrait*. Enjambment enacts – or figures – the supersession of the *trait* by the poetic line, while at the same time re-inscribing the logic of the *trait* as a mark of finitude.

To return to the discussion I initiated in the introductory section of this essay, graphic and poetic line are, in a sense, antithetical. Lineated writing subsumes the graphic line and, conversely, the graphic line – Paul Klee’s ‘active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal’ – mocks, in its activity, the syntactic constraints of lineated writing.³⁸ Tim Ingold puts it starkly: ‘Linearization marks not the birth but the death of the line’.³⁹ This, in turn, implies an expanded field, according to which poetry is no longer the opposite of prose – *drawing is*. Poetry, instead, occupies a position that is not quite intermediary, but is a mode of writing that interrupts, decomposes, and makes a virtue of linearization, and in so doing provides visual and rhythmic figurations of the kind of aspects of drawing that Derrida and Nancy both dwell on. Here, finally, ‘rhetoric’ and ‘rhythm’ can be re-appropriated to refer to the ways in which the poetic line functions as an ambiguously figurative unit: figurative, in the case of Derrida’s rhetoric, of the continuity between drawing and writing; and conversely, in the case of Nancy’s rhythm, of finitude – a finitude that is figured by the recurring termination of lines. In this sense, rhetoric and rhythm, continuity and finitude, correspond to the twofold movement of extension and interruption that defines poetic lineation.

¹ Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, translated by Idris Parry, (London: Penguin 1994), 100

² Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, translated by Joyce Crick, (London: Penguin 2002), 228

³ Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 177

⁴ For example, see Ian James, “Differing on Difference”, in *Nancy Now*, edited by Verena Conley and Irving Goh, (Cambridge: Polity 2014)

⁵ I refer to drawing as an ‘other’ of poetry with Jahan Ramazani’s *Poetry and its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* in mind. Whereas Ramazani’s study gives ways in which poetry enters into dialogue with other literary and verbal genres, I argue that the field of drawing represents a privileged other of poetry, and partly for the ways in which it *resists* the kind of dialogic engagement and appropriation that Ramazani, citing Bakhtin, charts in his book. This, in turn, demands a consideration of the possible distinction the dialogic and the ekphrastic, which is outside of my scope here.

⁶ The revolution of the drawn line associated with Cézanne (the shift from one-point linear perspective to a more spontaneous perceptual perspective) was broadly contemporaneous with the revolution of the poetic line as a visual element associated with Mallarmé and Apollinaire. In each case, the line is recalibrated from being a received structural device to being a plastic, decomposable instrument of expression.

⁷ Yves Bonnefoy, “Overture: The Narrow Path toward the Whole”, translated by John T. Naughton, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 84, “Boundaries: Writing & Drawing” (1994), 15

⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Painting, or Signs and Marks”, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1996), 83

⁹ See Jacques Derrida, “Maddening the Subjectile”, translated by Mary Ann Caws, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 84, “Boundaries: Writing & Drawing” (1994)

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993), vii. Subsequent references to this text are given in the text as *MB*.

¹¹ A thematization that Derrida glosses with a distinction between the “transcendental” (the impossibility of drawing) and the “sacrificial” (thematic art, ie. representing the blind, which makes that impossibility visible; which *marks* it). (*MB*, 41).

¹² “*Cette exposition n’est pas non plus proprement thématique*”, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le plaisir au dessin* - - Dossier de presse, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, 6

¹³ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh., “Hesse’s Endgame: Facing the Diagram”, in *Eva Hesse Drawing*, edited by Catherine de Zegher, (New York: The Drawing Center 2006), 52

¹⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History Vol IX Libri XXXIII*, translated by H. Rackham, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), 373

¹⁵ Agamben, Giorgio, *Stanzas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20

¹⁶ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques., “Essay on the Origin of the Languages”, translated by J.H. Moran and A. Gode, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co)

¹⁷ The Plinian drawing, as an originary expression of passion that is *not* linguistic, therefore sits incongruously within Rousseau’s theory - as Bernard Vouilloux points out: “What is remarkable about this argument is that it maintains an apparently contradictory relationship with its context”. Bernard Vouilloux., “Drawing Between the Eye and Hand: (On Rousseau), translated by Christine Cano and Peter Hallward, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 84, Boundaries: Writing & Drawing (1994), 175.

¹⁸ English translations of the passage in Rousseau tend to render *baguette*, which could just as well be translated as stick or stylus, as “magic wand”, as though to emphasize the virtual or subjunctive nature of the “*sons*”. I point this out because the translation of Rousseau appears to be the root of the misleading rendering, throughout Spivak’s translations of *De la grammatologie*, of

“*baguette*” as “magic wand”, which elides the literal or technical dimensions of drawing in favour of virtual dimensions.

¹⁹ Michael Newman explores the theoretical distinctions between tracing and marking in “The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing”, in *The Stage of Drawing – Gesture and Act: Selected from the Tate Collection*, (London: Tate Publications, 2003)

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 234. Subsequent references to this text are given in the text as OG.

²¹ Michael Newman, “The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing”, 102

²² As Michael Newman puts it in his sophisticated account of *Memoirs of the Blind*: “there is no alterity without narcissism”. Michael Newman, “Derrida and the Scene of Drawing”, in *Research in Phenomenology*, 24;1 (1994), 221

²³ Note that Derrida refers to Butades’ daughter by the name of the father.

²⁴ Derrida’s gloss on the “rhetoric of the *trait*”: “For is it not the withdrawal [*retrait*] of the line—that which draws the line back, draws it again [*retire*], at the very moment when the *trait* is drawn, when it draws away [*se tire*]—that which grants speech? [...] This question does not aim at restoring an authority of speech over sight, of word over drawing”. (*MB*, 56)

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, (New York: HarperCollins 1977, 1993), 408

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 3.

²⁷ See Joyce Bernstein Howell, “Eugene Delacroix’s review of *Le Dessin sans maitre* and the modernized discourse of drawing”, in *Word & Image*, Vol 21 Num 3 (2005), 232

²⁸ Ginette Michaud, “Extended Drawing”, in *Nancy Now*, 96

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- ²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, translated by Philip Armstrong, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 39. Subsequent references to this text are given in the text as *PD*.
- ³⁰ David Rosand, *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 55
- ³¹ Jonathan Culler, “Why Rhythm”, in *Critical Rhythm*, edited Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (New York: Fordham University Press 2019), 22
- ³² Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Taking Account of Poetry’, translated by Leslie Hill, in *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, edited by Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2006), 17
- ³³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Expectation: Philosophy, Literature*, translated by Robert Bononno, (New York: Fordham University Press 2018), 89. Subsequent references to this text are given in the text as *EPL*.
- ³⁴ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, (New York: New Directions 1934), 198
- ³⁵ David Nowell Smith, “What is Called Rhythm”, in *Critical Rhythm*, 44
- ³⁶ On the prose poem, Longenbach argues that “the absence of the line would not be interesting if we did not feel the possibility of its presence”, before demonstrating how lineation haunts John Ashbery’s prose poem “Retro”. See James Longenbach *The Art of the Poetic Line*, Saint Paul: Graywolf (2008), 88
- ³⁷ George Oppen, quoted in James Longenbach, *The Art of the Poetic Line*
- ³⁸ Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, translated by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, (London: Faber 1953), 16
- ³⁹ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, (London: Routledge 2016), 155