

## **DRAWING A BLANK**

### **Susan Morris**

When I was between nine and ten years old, glancing at my father's newspaper, I stumbled across an image that shocked me. Since then, every time I am reminded of this incident, I experience a kind of panic. My mind goes completely blank: it is as if a piece of my self 'cuts out'. This incident has echoed through the years. As a kind of 'recurrent forgetfulness', it is also both event and figure on which my practice is based.

I am interested in exploring the link between a sudden remembered event and a coincident moment of self obliteration or blanking, as described above, and the (im)possibility of making a mark in relation to, or at the same time as, this moment. The images I make, in which something intermittent or fluctuating appears to be being recorded, often look like diagrams, notations or charts. Yet they lean towards that which is meaningless, unintelligible or illegible; a scribble, or a coded sign or message, The work is also sometimes similar in form to a kind of writing, but one in which gaps, lapses and silences play a component part.

What I saw in the newspaper, all those years ago, were two photographs accompanying an article on the effects of 'drug-taking' on a spider. Side by side, the images recorded two different 'instances' of the creature: one before and one after it had eaten a fly laced with LSD. The spider itself was in neither image. Instead she was represented – defined, perhaps – by her web: one perfect and the other (after the 'drug-taking') a chaotic shambles. I knew, at

From their determination to support the Government's application for EEC entry by any decision reached today by the Labour Party conference.

It was, in effect, Mr Jenkins's own version of the late Mr Galtskell's "fight, fight, and fight again" challenge to the majority of the Labour Party conference. He delivered it at Brighton last night on the eve of the conference debate on the Common Market.

Mr Jenkins, deputy leader of the Opposition, said at a pre-conference rally organised by the Labour Committee for Europe that he was convinced Britain would be in Europe by 1973. "I want West European Socialists' cooperation to begin in the closest form from that date. I want the British Labour Party and other European Socialist parties to provide a new strength of Left-wing leadership in Europe, and I want this to be fully operating during the crucial transitional period," he said.

## Unease over dead refugee

By JONATHAN STEELE

A Rhodesian African refugee to whom Britain refused asylum has died there in mysterious circumstances.

The refugee, Nimrod Khumalo, was one of 21 from Rhodesia who vainly sat in at the British High Commission in Botswana appealing for asylum as British subjects earlier this year, after the Botswana Government had refused to allow them to remain. Most of them said they were members of the banned Zimbabwe African People's Union.

The news adds fresh impetus to the Left-wing drive for a full debate on Rhodesia at the Labour Party conference this week. After the case had been reported in the Guardian on July 3, Mr Anthony Kershaw, for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, told Mr Frank Judd, MP, in a written answer on July 9 that "the High Commission found that none of the petitioners qualified for asylum." He added: "I have had no indication that any action has been taken against them since their return to Rhodesia."

But the Ministry of Justice in Salisbury has now confirmed that on June 29, 10 days before the Minister's bland answer, Khumalo was sentenced to a fine of 50 Rhodesian dollars or three months' hard labour for contravening Section 31 of the Deportation from Rhodesia Control Act.

On July 16, he and another man, Danny Ndlovu, were taken to Bulawayo Prison. A fortnight later Khumalo was dead.

According to information reaching Amnesty International from Rhodesia, the man died as a result of brutal treatment in the prison. The Ministry of Justice merely says that "on July 30 Khumalo complained of vomiting and a headache. He was thereupon examined by a prison doctor who immediately sent him to Mplao General Hospital, where he died the same day of purulent meningitis."

TV and radio ... 12  
Arts ... 13  
Cricket ... 17  
Chess ... 17  
Crosswords ... 12  
Dances ... 19  
Finance ... 14-18  
Homes ... 25-29  
Classified advertising ... 13  
Theatre guide ... 12

## LSD spitters take a tangled trip

By JOHN EZARD

SPIKE MILLIGAN, protector of cats against American artists, may care to know that for the past 22 years an American psychologist, Dr Peter Witt, has been systematically deranging spiders.

In a laboratory where temperature and light were regulated day and night, he dosed them with mescaline, caffeine, carbon monoxide, amphetamines, and apparently most of the other drugs or substances which have been found to have an ill effect on humans.

The results of this indefatigable work have been at once predictably horrifying and scientifically inconclusive. His stoned spiders, normally among the most delicate and admired artificers of the natural world, have spun webs which are both ugly and repellent as catching flies.

Dr Witt keeps them in individual aluminium frames where their webs can be easily photographed for analysis. As the *English Magazine*, "Drugs and Society," notes in a study of

his work, the spider spinning is usually a remarkably precise and complex process whose mechanisms we do not fully understand. Every morning just before dawn the spider makes the web in 20-30 minutes by laying down radii at set intervals and then crossing them in pendulum and round turns to lay the insect-catching zones. Then it settles down at the hub with its eight legs spread on the radii to pick up the vibrations from a caterpillar.

Drugs radically interfere with this behaviour. Tranquillisers which were among the mildest drugs administered, often made them spinless. The webs were smaller and lighter, with less thread and fewer errors and radii. These would have been less good at catching flies. Under relatively high, stimulating doses of amphetamines the spiders tried to build aluminium frames where their webs can be easily photographed for analysis. As the *English Magazine*, "Drugs and Society," notes in a study of

Mr Jenkins signing autographs after a pre-conference church service at Brighton yesterday.

## Saddled with a pay rise

CORPORATION employees at Walsall have been given a rise for travelling to jobs on their bicycles. The weekly allowance has been increased from 20p weekly to 50p because they say the use of bicycles saves time and money.

## Safety point

RICHARD IHM, who has designed a car with a pointed front, which he says will reduce road accident injuries, drove it yesterday before a group of motorists. He crashed into two conventionally fronted stock cars while driving at 30 mph. One of the stock cars, both of which were driven by 40-year-old motorists, was badly damaged. The pointed car and Mr Ihm escaped without injury.

## Cooperation

ROADWORKERS using heavy pile-driving equipment outside Chelmsford and Essex Hospital have agreed to down tools when the operating theatre is being used for a complex operation. A hospital official told them that noise and vibration could upset surgeons' concentration.

## US in Laos

LAOS, writes T. D. Allman from Vientiane, has long been used by the Americans for clandestine forays into southern China. But in view of President Nixon's prospective Peking visit they have been called off-ropes page 4.

## Girl, 11, fights after Derry sn

From SIMON HOGGART in Belfast

Doctors were fighting last night to save the life of an 11-year-old girl who was shot in Londonderry. At Altnagelvin Hospital her condition was said to be critical. The girl was thought to have been hit in Derry after a bomb-throwing incident. The girl was discovered in Abercorn Road after terrorists threw a bomb at an army observation post a short distance away. An army spokesman said a car door opened and a parcel aimed at the army post, was thrown out. It exploded in the pub premises. A passenger in the car was seen to slump down, the spokesman said, and the car continued up the street. The weekend's regular pattern of shootings and bombings in Belfast yesterday included a number of new and worrying factors for the security forces. Early yesterday morning, a car came under sustained fire in the Falls Road area during one of the

fiercest attacks on soldiers since the riots which followed the internment. At least 100 soldiers, including some from sub-machine guns, were fired at from the troops. A company of the Scots Guards yesterday in Linden Street, just off the Falls Road, at about 5 am, they searched a number of houses in the street and held a three men for questioning. During the search they found two revolvers, and some ammunition, including a dum-dum bullet. At 4.45 somebody blew a whistle — "rather like a referee's whistle," according to one eye-witness — and almost immediately a bomb was thrown at the bottom of Linden Street. At this moment troops in the area were fired upon from a number of snipers. A middle-aged man who had been seen yesterday in Linden Street was shot dead in the crossfire. He was named as Patrick Daley, a Ministry of Agriculture spokesman. An army spokesman said that it is concluded that he was an innocent bystander.

## Complaints panes for BBC and ITV

By JOHN O'CALLAGHAN

Both Independent Television and the BBC are to have special panels whose only job will be to deal with complaints. The BBC announced yesterday that it will appoint a chairman of its new Complaints Commission, composed of Lord Parker, former Lord Chief Justice, and Lord Maybray-King, the former Common Speaker, and a fourth member from the senior staff of the authority but separate from the programme side.

Both panels will be the last stage in processing complaints received from listeners and viewers. The ITA panel is in a less advanced stage of gestation than the BBC's, and the main difference between them seems to be that complainants to the ITA will be able to put their case direct to the complaints panel.

Those with a grievance against the BBC will have to go through the usual stages and procedures of the present complaints system.

Asked how its panel has come into being at the same time as the BBC's, the ITA said last night that the coincidence was "evolution." Both broadcasting authorities are anti-pathetic to broadcasting which their independent bodies with wide powers of control over broadcasting, and which these have been pressure.

Among the main points of the BBC's commission are that its members will serve for three years, appoint staff, work out procedures, occupy premises apart from the Corporation. They will devise a system of appointing their successors. Complainants dealt with must relate directly to people or organisations who believe themselves to have been treated "unjustly or unfairly." The commission—unlike the fundamental adviser—deals with matters in wider fields, such as good taste, and the

Susan Morris

that moment, that the images were there to terrify any potential drug user into just saying 'no'. But at the same time something else struck me and the question still remains: what terrified me about the photographs themselves?

Clearly, I have been marked by this encounter. But by that I mean something rather more complicated than the thought that I am unable to forget it. Of course, I remember it, but at the same time I'm aware that something always occurs in relation to this event that causes me to briefly 'lose it'. In fact, it seems to me that there are two kinds of memory at stake here. The first is an everyday sort; I draw on this memory every time I recite the story, and I know this story by heart. But the second, which in fact precedes the first, is linked to the actual instance, to the moment of remembering — and leaves me lost for words. Is the 'blanking' that occurs — as a state of wordlessness, or 'drop out' of the self — a remembering somehow conjoined to forgetting? Am I dealing with a memory that is simply out of reach — the problem a matter of my own individual memory; that it is perhaps damaged or faulty; that I have, maybe, just a bad memory? Or is the experience connected to something radically different from anything that has been memorised — been committed to memory — in the first place? Is what occurs a kind of between or beyond of memory? Might there be an action, in other words, connected to ways in which I experience something past, that is not the same as a memory of it; an experience that, while resounding in the body, nevertheless remains inaccessible to me; unrepresentable?

In his book *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes makes the observation that since the invention of photography one can see oneself 'differently from in a

mirror', adding that he thinks it 'odd no one has thought of the disturbance (to civilization) that this new action causes'.<sup>1</sup> A photograph, as many commentators have pointed out, is an image that is also an imprint; the image has, so to speak, been impressed upon its surface through direct contact with reality. It therefore belongs to that category of sign (established by C.S. Peirce) as *indexical*.<sup>2</sup> Photography's physical genesis 'seems to short circuit or disallow those processes of schematisation or symbolic intervention'<sup>3</sup> at work within other kinds of representations, such as paintings or drawings. Photography, then, "disturbs" civilisation because it evades or bypasses the artificial, culturally produced, system of symbols that we use both to communicate with one another and to construct a sense of self. Instead, as Barthes notes, photography 'reproduces to infinity what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real.'<sup>4</sup>

The ideas that Barthes explores in his book on photography are of great interest to me in relation to my encounter with the spider web images. Written in the shadow of his mother's death, *Camera Lucida* is essentially a work of mourning; a set of reflections triggered, as this piece of writing has been, by an encounter with a particular photograph. But the book also presents a (related) argument for the existence of two kinds of memory, two kinds of *being*. Furthermore, as Barthes suggests, you have a choice; either partake in the general consensus, from which a society is constituted, or be out of it: 'mad or tame'.<sup>5</sup>

Barthes argues that memory plays a part in our relation to the photographic image, but not the kind of memory out of which a social history and a sense of our own identity is woven. This memory, through which we narrate the

stories of our lives, he describes as 'anamnesic'.<sup>6</sup> What is encountered in the photograph, however, is 'ecmnesic'; outside of memory: 'Not only is photography never, in essence a memory... but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter memory'.<sup>8</sup> Photography draws a blank. Yet it is also, Barthes believes, 'as certain as remembrance',<sup>9</sup> in the face of which 'words fail'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, if in describing the photographic affect as ecmnesic,<sup>7</sup> Barthes is associating it with a kind of memory loss, it is one that can, however, be linked to its opposite: involuntary recollection. 'Remembrance', he writes (directly quoting Proust), is memory that is always 'involuntary'.<sup>11</sup> And indeed the ecmnesiac doesn't forget everything. Retaining a memory for events in the remote past, s/he suffers instead from a lack of a present. The past, as lack *in* the present, 'intrudes'.<sup>12</sup> Ecmnesia, then, can perhaps be thought of as a kind of selective forgetting; momentary blanks cause a breakdown of the unified 'self' that memory weaves together. Novelist Debra Dean describes the experience as 'like disappearing for a few moments at a time'.<sup>13</sup> Considered from this perspective, Barthes' photographic remembrance – which he opposes to culturally regulated memory or history – is quite literally 'lost time'.

Barthes is suggesting that there is a relationship between the photographic 'encounter' – with its momentary, blinding, flashes of ecmnesia – and the operation of remembrance. Both bring about a paradoxical loss of memory; a discontinuity of self. In relation to my reaction to the spider web images, it seems, therefore, that it was precisely because these images were *photographs* rather than illustrations or drawings (as they perhaps could have been) that they had the capacity to disturb in the particular way that I describe. Yet again, although photographs, the images of the spider webs did have a kind of diagrammatic, illustrative, quality; they were *like* drawings. What they pointed to was a kind of

*automatic* drawing, with the web – as ‘drawing’ – indexing a kind of collapse of ‘spider-ness’ (if you accept that the essence of a spider is her web). So was the disturbing quality of these images also connected in some way to their relation to drawing? If so, would it have to be a drawing of the type that, like photography, evokes the mark of something ‘not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*?’<sup>14</sup>

The essence of the photograph is that what you see in it has undeniably been there; the image, as Roland Barthes insists, is ‘extracted’ by the action of light making contact with a chemically-treated surface, meaning that ‘the thing of the past, by its immediate radiations (its luminances) has really touched the surface which in its turn my gaze will touch.’<sup>15</sup> And yet, it could be argued, it is this action, carried to a sort of (il)logical conclusion, that was initially set in motion – or cast – by the first mark. In his essay ‘The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing’, Michael Newman links the origin of drawing, which *traced* the object it sought to capture, to that of the first photographs, by suggesting that ‘writing with light began by imitating drawing.’<sup>16</sup> If this is the case, as Newman suggests, drawing and photography might share the same ‘condition’ whereby the mark in or of the drawing stands for contact with the thing represented. Under these conditions – of being imprinted with that which it represents – the mark, like the photograph, might be in a position to challenge the category of representation itself; to exist, as Newman suggests (echoing Barthes), outside of it altogether, as a ‘resemblance produced by *contact*, like a life cast or death mask, an image not made by human hands, a relic like the stain on a shroud.’<sup>17</sup>

Newman’s essay takes as its starting point Pliny’s claim that drawing ‘began with tracing an outline round a man’s shadow.’ Butades’ daughter, as the story goes, ‘was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face, thrown by a lamp.’<sup>18</sup> In the shadow, Butades’ daughter recognised the essence of her lover and, at the same time, all that she would lose when he departed. It was this realisation, as an encounter with that which is *already* lost, that precipitated the first mark; a mark that functioned, Newman suggests, ‘like a memorial’.<sup>19</sup> Butades’ daughter doesn’t trace around her lover’s body, she captures his *shadow*: a thing of the past. ‘If she could have’, Newman suggests, ‘she might have taken a photograph’.<sup>20</sup> Instead, she produces an objective image ‘that may act as a substitute’<sup>21</sup>, out of that which is a mixture of the ephemeral, virtual, subjective and imaginary, and that which has an direct, physical, relation to the thing that caused it. (Shadows are an exemplary type of indexical sign.) This ‘photographic’ process, as a methodology for creating an image, simultaneously establishes a chain in which all subsequent marks or traces might be linked, related by ‘degrees of remoteness’ from the original ‘fleeting shadow’.<sup>22</sup> Hence, as Newman suggests, the mark – that which is both substitute and substitutable, like words in a language – also always contains something of the shadow; that which is irreducible, unintended, ‘received from elsewhere’.<sup>23</sup> It is in this way that Newman envisages the possibility that the mark or drawing, *in common with the photograph*, ‘names something inhuman’.<sup>24</sup>

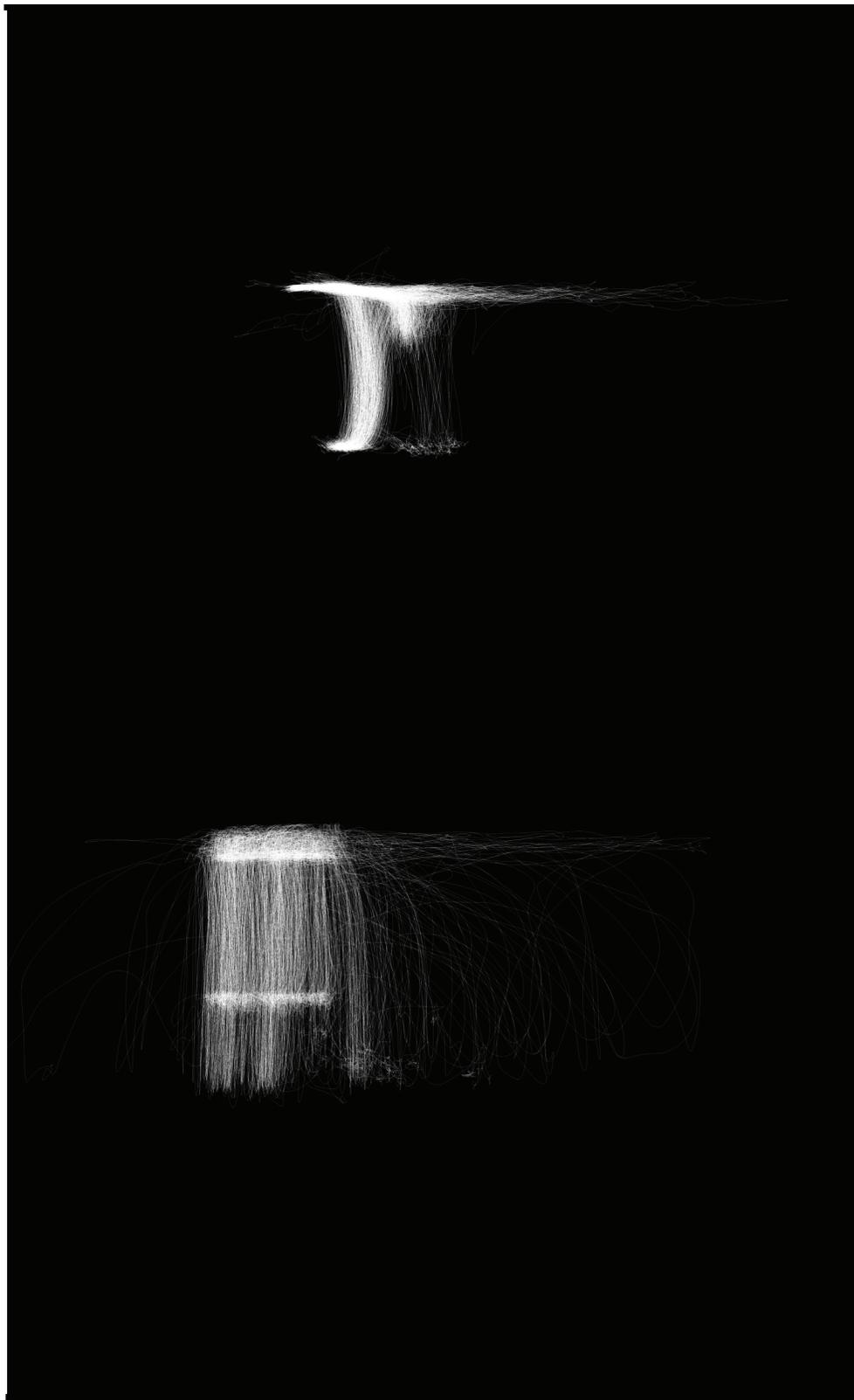
The link between drawing and photography can be expanded further when considered in relation to Jacques Derrida’s commentary on representation

in general, summarised as 'a complicitous entanglement of sight and blindness, absence and presence, life and death, construction and ruin.'<sup>25</sup> This is interesting in relation to the feeling I have that my own practice is based on an original encounter with something I cannot quite remember and which, probably, I didn't actually see. To what extent, for instance, did the photographs of the spider webs *themselves* embody (or reflect) the blindness and memory loss I experienced in relation to them? Entirely missing the message 'drugs wreck your brain', did I instead register something – intrinsic to the photograph – that echoed something within, or of, the self? Might there have been something there that was present as *an absence*; both constantly resolving (being made or 'appearing') and dissolving, collapsing into ruin? In the case of photography, Derrida notes, it is 'all about the return of the departed'<sup>26</sup>: the photograph always contains 'a trace of the thing that was once there'<sup>27</sup>, a trace that, although irreducible, is only perceivable between – at the intertwining of – vision and blindness. In other words, for Derrida, there is something present in the photographic image that, in visual terms, is inconsistent; something that hesitates or flickers between the visible and the invisible; something that may or may not form into a tangible image or readable thing. Accordingly, when we encounter the kind of drawing that shares the condition of the photograph, we find ourselves face to face with the imprint, or trace, of something from which we may be excluded, cannot properly access, categorise, and therefore 'see'. It is to this place – to the trace as 'flicker' – that I am drawn as an artist; and to the two distinct types of drawing style that occur there: the mark and the scribble.

By mark I mean both that which is indexically linked to something inhuman, outside the range of words in a language, but also that which, in contrast, marks

out, maps and structures space; the mark as diagram, as the variations of the subjectifying structure that point to – or speak of – our position in language. The scribble (perhaps closer to the indexical mark) is everything that falls short of this kind of articulation; where something else, some kind of refusal or inability – some fault in speech – is being registered.<sup>28</sup> The photograph may be the site at which these two 'drawing' styles meet. Indeed, as Susan Sontag has noted, there are occasions when the photograph can be classified as a scribble. An instance of this can be found in W. G. Sebald's use, in his novels, of uncaptioned photographic images which function, Sontag suggests, 'like the squiggles in *Tristram Shandy* ... [as] ... insolent challenge to the sufficiency of the verbal.'<sup>29</sup> It seems to me that the 'before and after' photographs of the spider webs also demonstrate, perhaps even act out, these two positions; one of speech, of the speaking subject, the other of something outside of that, something that hovers on the threshold of the visible; inexpressible, unrepresentable. Did I see the marks of the photograph, particularly in the image of the distorted or ruined web, as some sort of 'print out' of the spider's loss of memory; as (to continue to link memory with selfhood) an indisputable record of its *non-being*? If so, what during the activity of spinning had remained of the spider? What was still there, still moving, as empty echo of the 'web builder'? Perhaps what shocked me, evidenced by the photograph of what the spider had 'drawn', was the realisation that something that I might assume had at least some basic level of consciousness, could carry on automatically; weaving, writing, drawing – even after it had 'lost its head'.

The photographs of the spider webs captured indexical traces of something directly connected to *spider-ness*, with one of the images recording how this *being* could be somehow interrupted. Given that I encountered this at the



same time that I came face to face with photography's own indexicality, which already points to a problematisation of selfhood, to something outside of a self, then the heart-stopping anxiety I experienced in relation to these images seems more understandable. Perhaps the photographs themselves, as well as what they recorded (the absent minded spider) brought home what Marcel Proust also discovered about his vital organs. In 'Les Intermittences du Coeur' – the original title for *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* – Proust makes it clear that the laws that define our sense of self are bound up with intermittences of the heart that, linked to 'disturbances of memory'<sup>30</sup>, are connected to the *body* as well as to the emotions. To return to Tristram Shandy, this thought is echoed throughout Sterne's novel where, as Paul Goring has remarked, 'the legibility of the body and the body's reliability as an index of meaning/character/soul', was also a recurrent subject, with descriptions of the heart rate or pulse, the blush or stammer etc., occurring alongside – as, perhaps, equivalences of – the scribbles and squiggles mentioned by Sontag, above.<sup>31</sup>

*The spider draws the thread from her body. Her movements are compulsive (she knows not what she does) and through these movements – a kind of mnemonics – she weaves a net. The net is a trap – she consumes all she catches there. The spider's web is both her habitation and the mark, trace or notation of her being; through it she can be identified. The web is also therefore her self-portrait – a mirror of her presence. And while it is difficult to work out what the scientists performing the drugging experiment thought that a spider might have in common with a human, for Lacan, it is more straightforward. Memory has its laws – remembrance, on the other hand, is characterised by a lawlessness; its status as something 'out of bounds'. Thus, like the marks which 'rain' from the painters brush, what falls from the spider is not the result*

*of a set of decisions, based on knowledge it has acquired culturally; the web is formed, not out of choice, but from what Lacan insists is 'something else... If a bird were to paint', he suggests, 'would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves?'*<sup>32</sup> *What the spider does is completely natural: her movement has no relation to any human activity.*

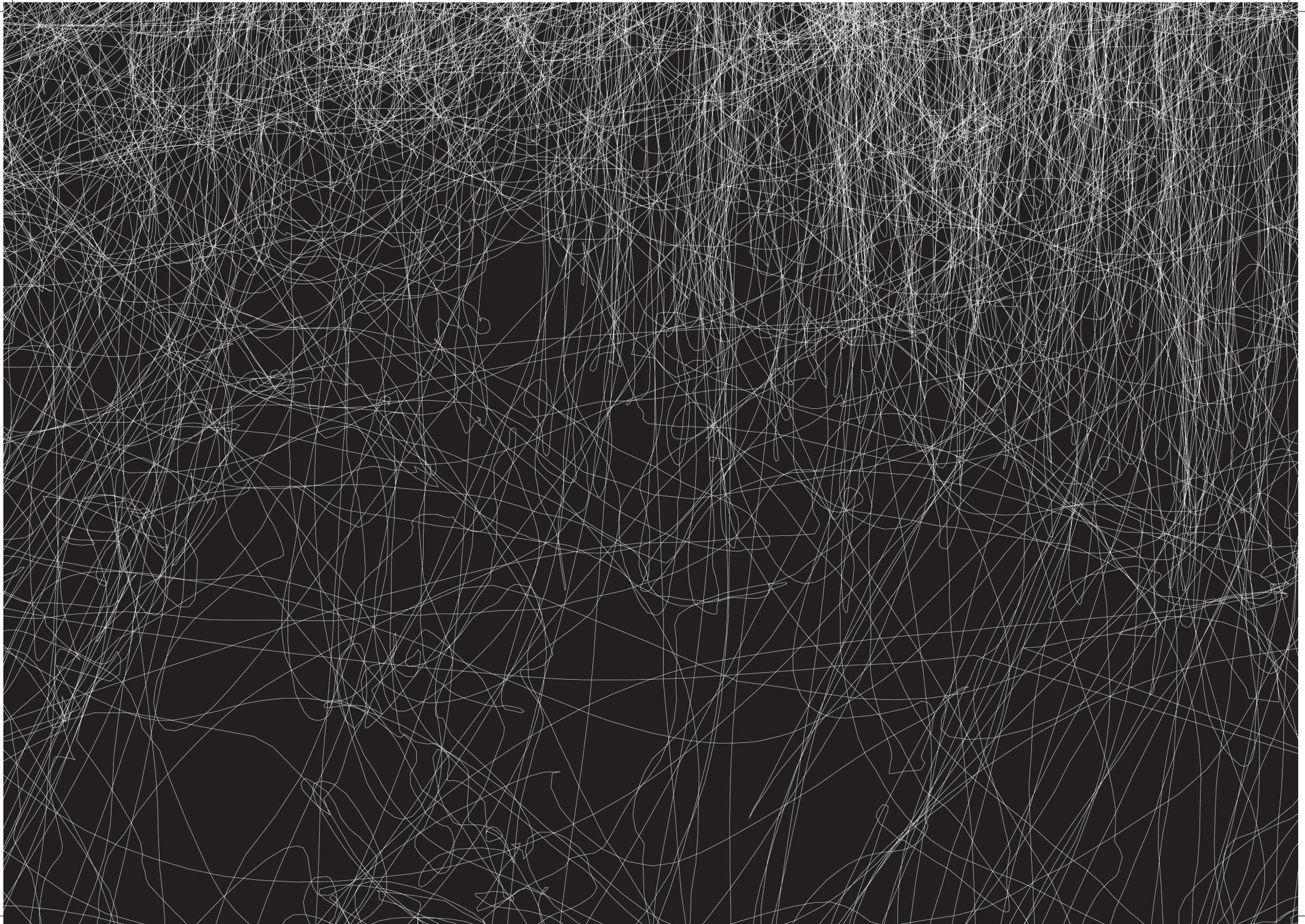
Remembrance (i.e. not memory) is closer to forgetting. It is this that links it to the retroactive operation of the trauma. Hence also its obsessive nature, the repetitive or compulsive, somewhat lawless, activity that often accompanies it. Perhaps my work takes the form of a compulsive restaging of the event described above, encountered as a child, where the holes in the net (or 'text') of my drawings, derived from the movement of my body, stand, like dropped stitches, for moments of blanking out; for something that fails to register, to get into language. The spider webs represented – stood in for – something at the limits of speech; or for the gaps in speech, which is to say something at or about the limits of memory, of subjectivity. The drugged spider's movement occurred through a combination of what it knew (its genetic evolutionary programming, on which its life depends) and what it had forgotten; it drew on what its forgetting had left behind, from the ruins of that memory. Beginning from the point at which it can no longer remember, through a compulsive remembrance it makes something else. Could this be a model for practice? My recent works, based on the memory of this (missed) encounter, are in certain ways, visually similar to the spider web photographs. They are also like drawings; they are marks that share the condition of photography by being directly related to that which causes them; where that cause is from 'elsewhere'; indexing something both 'inhuman' and 'disturbing'.

The art historian Rosalind Krauss has written about ways in which artists have attempted to reproduce or replicate the conditions of the photograph in their work. 'Again and again', she notes, artists 'chose the terminology of the index'; substituting, thereby, 'sheer physical presence for the more highly articulated language of aesthetic conventions (and the kind of history they encode.)'<sup>33</sup> What attracts an artist to make explicit use of the index is precisely the fact that it bypasses any culturally produced system of symbols, so that physical presence is registered as 'meaninglessness';<sup>34</sup> nothing, a *blank*. Interestingly, most of the works Krauss considers aim at a kind of self portraiture, but one, however, that is 'displaced.'<sup>35</sup> The intention of these artists is to 'interrupt'<sup>36</sup> meaning in exchange for something more natural; by documenting presence, to embed within their works a 'perishable trace'<sup>37</sup> of the body.

To return to the ideas that I began with, what I attempt in my own work is a kind of scribbled drawing, or pictorial writing, that contains within it something that remains undecipherable, unrecoverable, and unknowable. I have been experimenting with ways of generating a mark that comes both directly from the body and, as Newman (above) suggests, from *elsewhere*; a mark that corresponds to – and simultaneously commemorates – the sudden self obliteration or 'blinking' that may occur in relation to certain remembered events. I don't make photographs; there is the problem for me of photographs always representing and digitalisation has, to an extent, removed the link between photography and 'truth' (which, because of the direct, physical, relation between the image and the objects it represented, was always 'a matter of evidence rather than a function of logic.').<sup>38</sup> but I try to make drawings that are *akin* to photographs, that share some of the characteristics of (analogue)

photography. The work that accompanies this short essay comes from a series of *Motion Capture Drawings*, made by attaching recording devices to my body while I performed a pre-set task. (I actually made another drawing, which, in order to function as template or mold, was generated by a series of movements that I know by heart. The idea was to stop me thinking too much about what was going on in the recording studio and instead to get on with the task in hand; the completion of the drawing I could see in front of me.) The numerical data, silently and invisibly gathered during this process, was converted into a set of lines that trace my automatic and unintentional movement as well as the gestures I had considered – my *ecmnesia* as well as any mnemonical processes. So two drawings are made simultaneously; one that follows a plan or pre-conceived set of ideas; which tries to achieve a result that (however vaguely) I had in mind; the other a set of marks generated by – or that 'rain' from – a body that moves without regard for any of this. Like the marks with which Lawrence Stern punctuates his novelistic writing, the attempt is to bypass the thinking self and present something of the body's truth; to reveal something of what the body does on its own accord. '*I wanted to draw the consciousness of existing and the flow of time. As one takes a pulse.*'<sup>39</sup>

The traces recorded are therefore indexically linked to a kind of bodily unconscious, to the body's *undertow*; or to what Krauss has suggested is a kind of 'Brownian motion of the self'<sup>40</sup> Not 'drawn by man', they fall directly from the body, are in fact cast by the body, like a shadow. I, *myself*, make virtually no intervention in, or contribution to, the way the works are made. Conventional decisions regarding issues of composition, form etc., are disallowed, cut out; the drawings make themselves. What they record chimes with the world itself; as trace of the body's uncivilised and ecstatic *being*, they record what



philosopher Eric Santner has recently identified as our 'creatureliness'.<sup>41</sup>

While trying to finish this writing, to collect together these somewhat scattered thoughts, it occurred to me that there might be some kind of mourning present in relation to them, such as that which triggered Barthes' reflections on the photograph, or Butades' daughter's 'first mark'. If so, what could it be that I sensed as 'lost'? By making explicit use of the index, both a drawing and a text could, as Krauss suggests, document 'presence', yet, when viewed or read in the aftermath of their making, their tense shifts *between* what Barthes posits as the essence of photography, '*That has been*',<sup>42</sup> and 'an anterior future of which death is the stake'.<sup>43</sup> The body's presence – traced in a drawing but also, perhaps, registered as *style* in a piece of writing<sup>44</sup> becomes, like the shadow cast by a departing lover, a 'thing of the past'.<sup>45</sup> My drawings function as both evidence of *and memorial to* a body that *has been there*, but also, because of what we know of it, a body that *will die*; may have already died. I say this because I think that what I might be mourning, what has been lost, has past, is gone, is something to do with a presence in the world that I have missed out on, been cut out of. Therefore, with these marks, this writing, I might be mourning my own past; as a being that was inaccessible, even – or especially – to me (which is probably why this writing has been such a struggle).

Graham Allen has described Barthes' book as 'impossible',<sup>46</sup> too subjective to reliably base a theory of photography upon, but I think that it is intentionally so. Like a haiku, Barthes' text resists interpretation, remains 'undevelopable';<sup>47</sup> presenting itself instead as structurally closer to – *as ecstatic equivalent of* – the photograph. *Camera Lucida*, then, is not so much a piece of writing about photography but a text that itself operates photographically, that traces

something both irretrievable and unrepresentable, and where remembrance operates as a counter memory, as a kind of self effacement or erasure – making space, thereby, for something else to emerge. To return (again) to Proust and Sterne; both novelists make us aware, in their writing, of the fact that there is a truth to the body but that this truth is indecipherable, unknowable; an expression of being that bypasses selfhood. I have tried to think about the kind of marks that might be available to an artist who is similarly interested in getting close to (back in touch with) the experience of *at-one-ness* with the world that language takes away. The question of how, or if, this kind of mark-making is indeed possible, given that it may result in a kind of madness – i.e. in perhaps being struck *dumb* – is at the heart of my practice, which searches for a way of casting off culture, history, memory, to connect instead – or wake up to – 'intractable reality'.<sup>48</sup>

The photographs of the spider webs presented an index (of spider-ness); furthermore, what they traced was something disorderly, 'out of it'. This disorderliness, or disturbance, is related to the photograph. As Krauss writes, in the photograph, one is faced with 'the mute presence of an uncoded [unsymbolised] event... the connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photograph is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system'.<sup>49</sup> The photograph excludes the 'self'; a construct of language, of culture. This fact links the operation of the photograph to that of remembrance; a link that hinges on what photography points out about the constitution of the self – that it contains an element of something erratic or variable, something not entirely present, or where what is present is closer to an absence, or void. When I saw the spider webs I had the sense of something continuing automatically, ungoverned, regardless – i.e. blindly – with neither 'I' nor eye. That one can



be possessed or directed by something outside of one's control frightened me. Yet I have come to realise that what I encountered also represented a kind of fascinating possibility of invention – the breaking off from habit in order to develop a new form of expression; one in which gaps, lapses and silences; the stutter, the blank and the forgetfulness – the possible insanity – of remembrance, have a significant role. Which reminds me of a reference that I once came across but have long since lost to the fact that James Joyce, who is my hero, used to do a little dance he called 'the spider' whenever he was suffering from writer's block.

#### notes

<sup>1</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980], p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Peirce 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Krauss 1986, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980], p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 70. See also Proust 2002 [1921], p. 158.

<sup>12</sup> This idea comes from Elena Seymenliyska's review of *The Madonnas of Leningrad* by Debra Dean. (Guardian newspaper, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006. The protagonist of Dean's novel is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, which often effects memory in the here and now, while leaving memories of past events intact. In this way I am equating Barthes' ecmnesia with the affects of something like Alzheimer's disease; where the past (memory) is *lacking* in the present, and selfhood is replaced by pure consciousness, or 'being'. As Freud argues, the two are incompatible: 'becoming conscious and leaving behind memory traces are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system...conscious arises instead of a memory trace.' (Freud 1920g, p. 25.)

<sup>13</sup> Dean 2006, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980], p. 82. See also p. 80, where Barthes suggests that photography presents us with a new 'experiential order of proof...a proof no longer induced: the proof-according-to-St.-Thomas-seeking-to-touch-the-resurrected-Christ'. Barthes describes the 'horror and fascination' that this proof evokes, and gives as an example a photograph of a slave market; 'I repeat: a photograph, not a drawing or engraving; (Barthes' reaction) came from this: that there was a *certainty* that such a thing had existed'. My own experience of horror

and fascination was similarly a result of this photographic 'certainty'; combined, however, with the presence of something (the spider) that was 'absent'.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Newman 2003, p. 105. In relation to these ideas it is interesting to note that 'absence of subject position' was, as Geoffrey Batchen (Batchen 199) has proposed, an almost universal aim shared by the inventors of around 1839. Almost all the early pioneers of photography 'spoke of wanting to devise a means by which nature ... could be made to represent itself automatically'. The image these inventors sought to capture, and fix, needed to be of the order

of something that had been written without any symbolic, cultural, intervention, as Talbot's 'carefully considered wording of his invention – *The Process by Which Natural Objects May Be Made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil* – indicated'. (Batchen 1999, p. 56.)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Newman opens his discussion on the mark with a quote from Pliny's *Natural History*. (See Newman, cited above: p. 93 and p. 106 n2).

<sup>19</sup> Newman 2003, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> See Batchen 1999, p. 172.

<sup>26</sup> Derrida 1988, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Jay 1994, p. 521. (I am drawing on Jay's summary of Derrida's position.)

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Brown links the scribble to the psychoanalytic concept of trauma, and suggests that both are 'figures of writing' in which the illegible and inexpressible are somehow preserved. (Brown 2002, p. 278).

<sup>29</sup> Sontag 2000, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Proust 2002 [1921], p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> See Goring's notes for Sterne 2002 [1768], p. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Lacan 1994 [1973], p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> Krauss 1986, p. 209.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>39</sup> de Zegher & Rodari 2000, p. 7. I am directly quoting the artist and poet Henri Michaux here.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> Santner 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980], p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> See Iversen 2007, p. 127.

<sup>45</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980], p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Allen as quoted in James Elkins response to Michael Fried. 'What Do We Want Photography to Be? A Response to Michael Fried'. (Elkins 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Barthes 2000 [1980] p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>49</sup> Krauss 1986 p. 212.

**references**

- Barthes, R. (2000 [1980]) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage
- Batchen, G. (1999) *Burning With Desire: The Conception of Photography*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press
- Brown, A. (2002) *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Dean, D. (2006) *The Madonnas of Leningrad*. London: Fourth Estate
- Derrida, J. (1988) 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes' in Hugh J Silverman, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge
- de Zegher, C. and Rodari, F. (2000) *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*. New York: The Drawing Center
- Elkins, J. (2005) 'What Do We Want Photography to Be? A Response to Michael Fried' in *Critical Inquiry* 31(4)
- Freud, S. (1920g) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE 18. London: Hogarth
- Iversen, M. (2007) *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press
- Jay, M. (1994), *Downcast Eyes*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Krauss, R. (1986) 'Notes on the Index' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press
- Lacan, J. (1994 [1973]) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London: Penguin
- Newman, M. (2003) 'The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing' in A. Newman (ed.) *The Stage of Drawing*. London: American Drawing Centre and Tate
- Peirce, C.S. (1955) 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,' in *Philosophic Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover Publications
- Proust, M. (2002 [1921]) *In Search of Lost Time, Volume IV: Sodom and Gomorrah*. London: Penguin
- Santner, E. (2006) *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago
- Seymenliyska (2006) Review of *The Madonnas of Leningrad* by Debra Dean. Guardian newspaper, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006
- Sontag, S. (2000) *A Mind in Mourning*. The Times Literary Supplement, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2000
- Sterne, L. (2002 [1768]) *A Sentimental Journey*. London: Penguin

**acknowledgements**

The images reproduced here show details from *Motion Capture Drawing, 2009*, which was made at Culture Lab, Newcastle, with the assistance of David Green. The work was funded by Arts Council England. Thanks to Paul de Villiers and Loretta Monaco for their interest in my work. And to Valentine Ammeux, Margaret Iversen and Deidre O'Dwyer.