

All Things Out of Rule

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ABSTRACT

This article brings together and compares my own artistic practice of drawing/painting and the eighteenth-century novel *Tristram Shandy*. In both cases, there is a free play of lines, textual or graphic, which sets ‘all things out of rule’. A whole typology of lines is woven throughout Sterne’s text and reappears, alter-inscribed, in the artworks. The article presents an account of these lines: rectilinear, hylomorphic, fractal and nomadic, as well as the line of incision (or the cut). Each is explored as a specific mode of line with differing effects. To follow these lines is to enter a world of material expressivity, to be exposed to an ontology of becoming and change, of flows and transformations, that overturns the traditional ontology of being and stable identity. Sterne’s use of wild digression, doodles and graphisms, establishes certain proximity between writing and drawing. Both may be seen as types of ‘figured metaphysics’ and as ways of bringing something new into the world. The article concludes with some philosophical observations on the strange event of drawing a line, with reference to the work of Heidegger and Deleuze and Guattari.

KEYWORDS

Tristram Shandy, lines, drawing, painting

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

A sudden impulse comes across me—drop the curtain, Shandy—I drop it—Strike a line here across the paper, Tristram—I strike it—and hey for a new chapter! The duce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair—and if I had one—as I do all things out of all rule—I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had done—Am I warm? I am, and the cause demands it—a pretty story! is a man to follow rules—or rules to follow him? (*Tristram Shandy*, IV:10)¹

Laurence Sterne’s (1967) *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was published 250 years ago, but has nonetheless been repeatedly cited as a protomodernist, even a postmodernist, novel (Keymer, 2006, p. 14). Its interest, in the present context, is that it functions as a type of ‘figured metaphysics’ (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 154). That is, it sets out a philosophy—of life, existence or art—through the medium of written and drawn figures and lines. This article will consider two of my own drawn/painted artworks in proximity to *Tristram Shandy* and will use the comparison to tease out a certain relation between writing and drawing. Both are discussed as ways of ‘figuring’ the world and of bringing something new into the world.

Framed and Unframed Works

To begin with the artworks, the first thing to note is that one (Figure 3) is large-scale and unframed while the other (Figure 1) is smaller and framed behind glass. It may help to focus briefly on the difference introduced by the interposing of the frame between an artwork and its surroundings.

Historically, picture framing evolved from the borders that were placed around ancient tomb paintings (about 3000–4000 years ago) and were later applied to frescos and mosaics.² Each of those art forms was fixed into place and its meaning was strongly context-specific. It was not until the Renaissance, when patronage of the arts extended beyond the control of the Church, that paintings became movable objects. And only then did they acquire portable frames designed to complement and enclose the pictures themselves, rather than blend with the surrounding architecture. In the modern period, frames increasingly served to define and emphasise the shape of paintings, but also to further isolate them as stand-alone objects. This subtly modified their meaning; the modern tendency is to see a painting as *being* such a discrete *object*, enclosed and delimited by its frame, existing independently in an abstract space that transcends all context.



Figure 1. *Trikolar*, lithographic monotype, 2010. Photo by Sam Hartnett.

Typically, the modern frame is a regular polygon with four sides and in most cases, it is rectangular. Given its method of construction, such a frame emerges within a planar space mapped out by four points, or four geometric co-ordinates, which are linked together by lines of connection. Each line, or side of the frame, runs from point to point in a strictly determined fashion. Within this punctual system, it connects together two of the pre-given points in the most efficient possible way, hence the straightness of the lines. They are, as we say, rectilinear.

The narrator of *Tristram Shandy* (VI:40) reminds his readers of the cultural role played by this rectilinear line. He inscribes upon the page 'a line, drawn as straight as I could draw it by a writing-master's ruler', then appends a brief commentary:

This *right line*,—the path-way for Christians to walk in! say divines—

—The emblem of moral rectitude! says Cicero—

—The *best line!* say cabbage-planters—is the shortest line, says Archimedes, which can be drawn from one given point to another.—

Tristram literally sketches out the relation between *recti-linear* and *recti-tude*: illustrating how righteous conduct follows a path prescribed by a moral code. We orient ourselves in moral space by referring to fixed points of propriety and by plotting a course unerringly between them. This strange geometric vocabulary recalls the logic of Deleuze and Guattari's claim that 'we are made of lines' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 215).

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari deploy the idea of lines to express the creative movement of life itself, the becoming of difference within the world. They describe lines of various sorts. A line may circumscribe a territory, define a trait (of a thing or a person) or intersect with other lines to establish a network of points. These 'molar' or 'segmentary' lines (ibid, p. 215) establish rigidified structures and systems, regulate behaviour and encode the identities of objects, individuals, classes or states. Alternatively, a line may break free from structural containment and volatilise all identity in an act of pure escape to the outside. Such a 'line of flight' may happen upon chance connections and map out unprecedented possibilities, before resettling as part of a newly emergent territory or identity; or it may simply dissipate its energy and veer into the void. There is continual interplay between the various lines and their creative and destructive exchanges transform the world by giving birth to the new from within.³ An important aspect of this theory is that Deleuze and Guattari invert the normal relation between lines and points. In their view, lines precede points and are 'ontologically primary'; they are expressive of movement and becoming, of the real in transformation. Points and positions are derived from the intersection of lines which pass through them; they arrest movement to produce fixed determinations of being such as stable identities and organised systems (Strathausen, 2010, p. 1). In what follows, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of lines is used as a basis of comparison between writing and drawing, between *Tristram Shandy* and my own artworks.

The Hylomorphic Line

Seen in these terms, the rectilinear lines of a painting's frame go beyond Tristram's moral exhortations to take on an additional, ontological significance. They do this insofar as they connect together to create the *hylomorphic* line: the outline that separates the artwork from the rest of the world and establishes its independence as an object enclosed within its own identity (Zepke, 2005, p. 169).

According to Aristotle, objects come into being as the combination of *hyle* (matter) and *morphe* (form). An active agent, working with a particular model or end in mind, imposes the form of the model upon an inert material. In this hylomorphic ontology, all existing objects are understood as products of 'formed matter'. The intellect is active and does the forming. Matter is inert and passively

accepts what is imposed upon it. And that, basically, is how we still tend to think of objects in the world.⁴

This can be seen at work in drawing: the way an object is rendered hylomorphically by tracing its outline. The outline is called a contour line, or a figure. The interior of the drawn object becomes its matter or content. And representation then marks (or re-marks) the passage between the two. To represent is to re-present the matter of an object in an appropriate form through which it is made available both by and for a viewing subject. This is most successfully done when, with a few well-placed lines, the artist captures the essence of something. The Renaissance term *disegno* indicates how drawing is assigned this primary task of capturing essential form. In contrast, painting (*colore*) is assigned the secondary task of colouration, the description of surfaces and textures, the depiction of an object's accidental—that is, non-essential—attributes.

Material Flows and Transformations

The artworks shown here have tended to work counter to this hylomorphic ontology. On reflection, it could be said that these drawings/paintings emerged as acts of departure and difference from the rectilinear (plotted) line—the segmentary line of measurement and control—and the hylomorphic (contour) line that imposes an ideal form upon objects. There was no intention to abolish or go beyond these lines, but rather to play with and subvert their standard meanings, which is why frames and out-lines are retained in many of my works. The goal is to reveal something prior to, and ontologically more fundamental than, the world these lines describe—or rather, the world they set up and set in place in such a way that it appears entirely neutral or natural, as a plain fact rather than a constructed representation.

Ingold (2007), anthropologist and author of the book *Lines: A Brief History*, undertakes a similar task when he defines his 'ultimate aim' as:

to replace [the hylomorphic model] with an ontology that assigns primacy to *processes of formation* as against their final products, and to *flows and transformations of materials* as against states of matter. Form, to recall Klee's words, is death; form-giving is life. (Ingold, 2010, pp. 2–3. Italics added.)

It is these same material flows and transformations that are traced or let loose in my artwork. As in the art of Paul Klee, there is less concern with *representing* the visible than with the act of *making visible*. Reproducing an existing form is less important than the emergence of new 'formless' form. This can be seen quite clearly in the first work.

The coloured lines do not reproduce the forms of recognisable objects. Instead, they give birth to an apparently formless construction made up of neighbouring lines that meet or pass by in flows of indeterminate movement. A thick blue cursive line sweeps up from the bottom centre towards the top right; other blue lines merge with it to create positive and negative spaces. Green and orange lines appear to encroach from above and outside the frame. In contrast to hylomorphism, there appears to be no external agent or finality organising these lines into a closed, representational image. Each line blazes a trail where none previously existed; it forges a path that no map has plotted out; it *becomes* a line through its own immanent displacement across the page.

This type of line is known by various names. Historically, it was called the 'serpentine line' because of its shape, but also to suggest an immanent vitality, a force of self-movement (Bredekamp, 2004, pp. 15–17). It seems to propel itself forward, ignoring all coordinates and pre-plotted paths and threatening to twist free from all fixed identity. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this line variously as the line of flight, the abstract line and, more descriptively, the nomad line which they define as: 'A line of variable direction that describes no contour and delimits no form' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 549, 551).

Ontologically, this line does not conform to the idea of inert matter shaped by an external intelligence. Instead, it emerges as a flow of explorative materiality that is formally unprecedented and sensuously particular. That is, it resembles no formal model, and its appearing gives rise to very specific sensations: sensations that motivate or affect us in ways we do not immediately understand. Far from the usual cognitive experience of familiar objects, we enter into a more fundamental encounter—a sensuous or aesthetic encounter—with material forces in expressive movement.

Tristram Shandy (IX:4) includes an example of such a nomad line, a candidate for the most famous doodle in literature. In the midst of a conversation about the freedoms conferred by the state of celibacy, Corporal Trim suddenly brandishes his walking stick:

Whilst a man is free,—cried the corporal, giving a flourish with his stick thus—

Tristram then comments: ‘A thousand of my father’s most subtle syllogisms could not have said more ...’ With these words, Tristram testifies to a surprise encounter with the material expressivity of the gestural line, the flow of stick through air, that, in an instant, surpasses all the demonstrative powers of logical reasoning (Figure 2).

The inclusion of this nomad line in the midst of the text is of course a visual joke, but a deeply philosophical one. It implies that such a line is more immediate to experience than our language or concepts. In opening up an encounter with expressive materiality (the flourished walking stick, the doodle upon the page), it reminds us that artworks—even novels—are not simply texts to be decoded, logically or semiologically. After all, written words are a type of material inscription, ink on paper, a locutionary form of drawing. Instead, the nomad line provokes an aesthetic sensation that—however contextualised—is not readily amenable to conceptual mediation, but first and

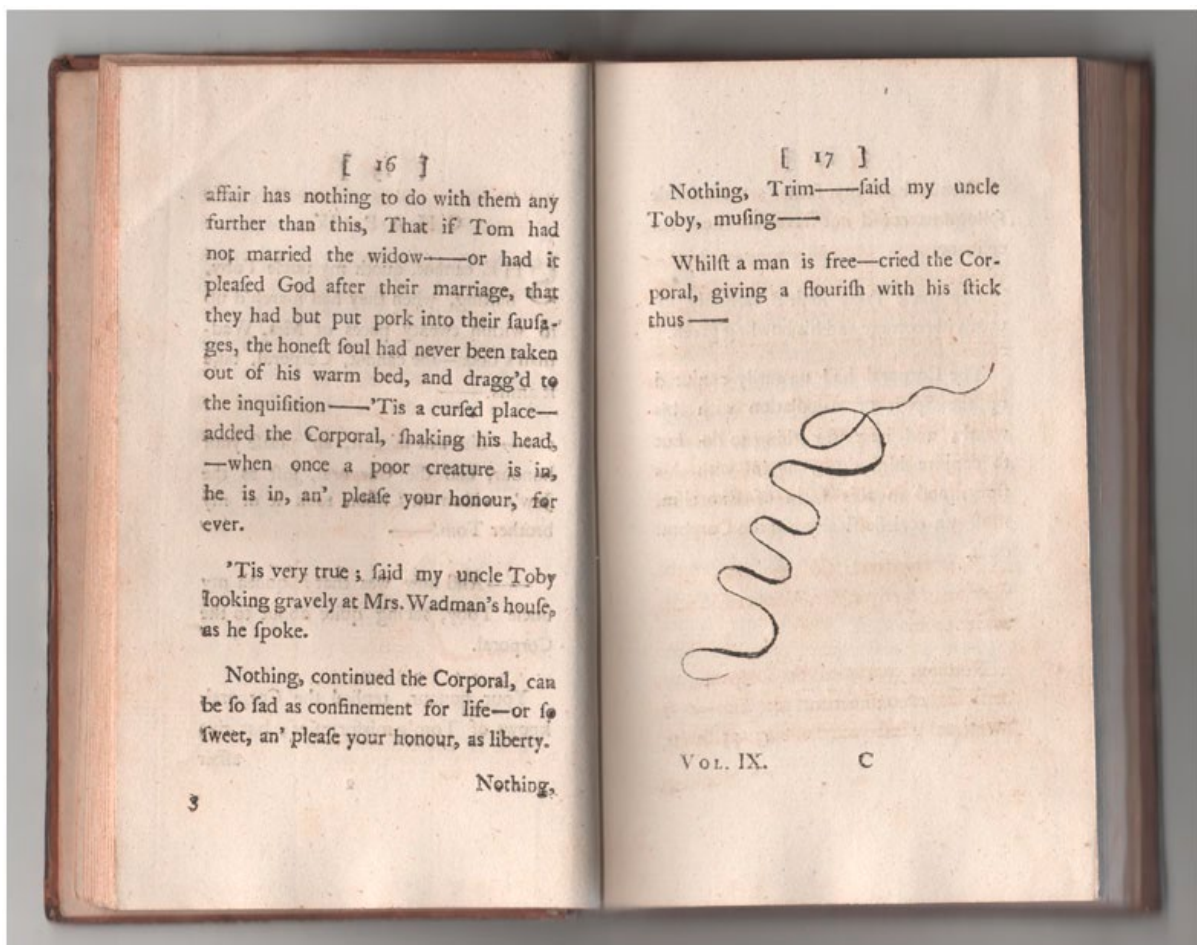


Figure 2. Trim’s line from *Tristram Shandy*, 1760, Copyright—The Laurence Sterne Trust.

foremost, impacts directly on the body, the nervous system, the sensibility. It opens up a realm of sensation and affect, prior to questions of meaning and identity (Deleuze, 2003, p. 37). And it is this material realm, and these questions, that are explored through my own deployment of the nomad line.

Fractal Line

Returning to the work on paper shown in Figure 1, although apparently rectangular in form, it contains no rectilinear lines. Instead, the paper has what is known as a 'deckle edge'. An edge of this type is not cut along a straight line by a guillotine or related device. During the production process, a deckle or framework allows the fibres of pulped paper to congeal freely along the edges, leading to that characteristic 'torn' or 'feathered' look. The process tolerates or releases the expressivity of the materials, granting them the freedom to shift and settle into their own immanent limit.

The deckle edge invites comparison with fractal geometry: an example would be the measurement of a coastline (Mandelbrot, 1967). If a coastline is measured from point to point, say from one headland to another across a beach, this creates a rectilinear and easily measurable line. If a fractal approach is adopted instead, it would require an extremely long piece of thread to be wrapped around every pebble or every grain of sand at the water's edge along the beach, say at low tide. Mandelbrot demonstrates that a fractal line of this sort (a 'limit curve') tends towards infinity in length; its measure depends upon how closely one can wrap into each irregular segment.

For my purposes, deckled paper is a strange kind of readymade. It is deployed to establish a set of non-rectilinear, barely measurable, yet clearly perceptible edges or lines. These, in turn, enclose a mathematically indefinite space within which, or together with which, a further set of lines may be sketched out. The deckle edge acts in tension with the rectilinear frame which is not rejected, but retained as a reminder of those enframing or hylomorphic habits of thought that are being performatively contested from within, by means of the artwork.

In *Tristram Shandy*, something like the fractal line emerges in Tristram's compulsion to delve into the finest details of every particular, digressing at extravagant length rather than pressing on with his narrative. For a 'historiographer', he declares, it is 'morally speaking, impossible ... to drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward', and in this matter, Tristram will not confine himself 'to any man's rules that ever lived' (I:4, I:14). An early indication of the narrative's fractal propensities is the tortuous marriage settlement in which clause is embedded within clause, spiralling inwards beyond all reason. Later, Uncle Toby's obsessive modelling of military fortifications acquires the 'complex scaling' of a 'fractilised terrain', a vanishing 'geometry between dimensions' that echoes the structure of the novel as a whole (Freeman, 2002, pp. 154–158).

Modalities of the Cut-out

The second artwork (Figure 3) shows yet another type of line. Despite being made famous by Matisse in the 1940s, the cut-out—or cut-out line—remains relatively under theorised. To create his *gouaches découpés*, Matisse took a large pair of scissors and set about cutting shapes from coloured papers prepared by his assistants. It is true that his lines tended to be sinuous like the serpentine line; and they produced naturalistic-looking forms that resemble the contour of a body, leaf or flower. And yet, the cut-out could produce effects that were fundamentally different from either.

My own work has deployed the cut-out line in multiple ways. Some paper cut-outs sit raised upon the surface delimiting a positive space, but others are visible as negative outlines only. In the case of *Big Yellow*, a cut-out operation is combined with an operation of expressive materiality.



Figure 3. *Big Yellow*, lithographic monotypes and paintings, 2010. Photo by Sam Hartnett.

This large-scale installation began life as 66 sheets of cut paper that were printed in yellow and pinned to a wall. The work was unframed but it retained a rectangular-rectilinear form in each of its individual pages and also in the overall ensemble of pages. This outer shape was then subjected to a cut-out operation—the cut-out, in this case, being simply the decision to remove one page at the top right corner, thus destroying the rectangular (geometrically ideal) form of the ensemble. This type of cut-out has yet to be explored *as a line*—a line of decision or of ‘the cut’. Etymologically, the verb ‘to decide’ means to cut off, all of which has clear connections with the cutting and editing work of the art of cinema.

In addition, selected pages from *Big Yellow* were produced using a lithographic technique whose effects inherently challenge the hylomorphic model. As a metaphysics of production, hylomorphism ‘invests all productive activity’ on the side of form; no agency whatever is attributed to matter (Welchman, 1992, p. 5).⁵ Yet, liquid tusche⁶ breaks with this understanding by displaying ‘auto-induced ... mobile traits of relative formality’ (pp. 6–7). In Klee’s terms, tusche enacts an immanent process of ‘form-giving’. Applied to a lithographic stone, it reveals its distinctive characteristics as it dries out, creating contingent effects of reticulation in the guise of wave-like or web-like patterns. Tusche is also notoriously sensitive to any variation in handling, so that results can be doubly unpredictable: both in particulars of final shape, and in details of surface texture. This stochastic element, or element of chance, was an important dimension of *Big Yellow*. It provides a visible index of the work’s guiding aesthetic, which allows for random effects deriving from the immanent qualities of the materials used. The work foregrounds its ‘indebtedness’ to material flows and transformations through the appearance of contingent patterns of colour and subtly differentiated surface. It thus aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of ‘material-forces’ which they oppose to the ‘matter-form’ pairing. Material-forces are less about ‘a form capable of imposing properties upon a matter than material traits of expression constituting affects’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 407, 451).⁷

Turning again to *Tristram Shandy*, and to the cut-out, the novel contains numerous variations on this operation. The famous black page (l:12) eliminates any possible act of inscription, and two

empty chapters (IX:18, 19) confront the reader with a play of narrative absence/material (paper) presence. The 'white' page (VI:38) withholds a written description of the character Widow Wadman; instead, Tristram invites the reader to 'call for pen and ink' to make his own drawing of the widow upon the blank page provided. There is also a 'torn-out' chapter that leaves 'a chasm of ten pages' in the text (IV:25). Tristram adduces contradictory reasons for this extreme act of excision, but refers to a type of line that simply had to be erased. During the repainting of the family's coat of arms, a *bend-sinister* had been mistakenly inserted in place of a *bend-dexter*, thus incorporating a 'vile mark of Illegitimacy' into the Shandy lineage. By inclining in the wrong direction, the line had accrued intolerable meaning. More intolerable still, perhaps, was the unkindest cut of all: five year old Tristram is accidentally circumcised, whilst in mid-urination, by a falling sash window (V:17).

Hylomorphism and the Marbled Page

The typology of lines presented in this article is meant to be indicative rather than comprehensive, but it would be remiss to leave *Tristram Shandy* without a mention of the most enigmatic set of lines of all. This is, of course, the marbled page inserted without explanation at III:36, yet proclaimed by Tristram as 'the motley emblem of my work'. A recent interpretation of this page, devised by Schiff (2000) and advanced by McCaffery (2006), can be fitted nicely within the framework developed here—that is, the page can plausibly be presented as a play on hylomorphism, a cut-out operation and a nomadic 'overcoming' (Figure 4).

The opening scene of the novel goes back before Tristram's birth to the moment of his conception. According to the eighteenth-century theory of the homunculus,⁸ the father's sperm contains not only generative force but also the full form of the future human being, in perfect miniature. The homunculus, as Tristram describes him, is a 'little gentleman' in all particulars, transfused *in toto* from father to son and 'escorted' to his worldly destination by 'animal spirits' (I:2). By contrast, the mother's womb is but an inert receptacle: indeed, at one point (IV:29), the novel rehearses the ecclesiastical-legal argument that 'the mother is not of kin to her child'. Welchman (1992, p. 10) nicely derides this idea of uterine nullity, of unformed empty matter, as 'a hylomorphist's wet dream'. Alas, in Tristram's case, his parents' copulation is interrupted (cut) at the critical moment: ejaculation misfires; Tristram's animal spirits are dispersed; his essence is scattered. As a result, his life is predestined to calamity and confusion. In an attempt to overcome this inauspicious beginning, the adult Tristram embarks upon a quest for proper incarnation—he resolves to achieve substantial presence in the world through the act of publishing his 'history'. That history, as it turns out, is a recapitulation as 'sad' and 'disorder'd' as its originary moment: a veritable rhizome of digressions and self-interruptions, recursions and wandering meta-commentary. At intervals, Tristram defends the digressive-progressive 'machinery of [his] work' (I:22). Finally, in a lucid moment, he affirms the deeper truth of the narrative: 'For this is no digression from it, but the thing itself'.⁹ This is Tristram's moment of nomadic overcoming. He accepts that he is destined to twist free along lines of performative becoming that replace hylomorphism's fixed determinations of being and identity.

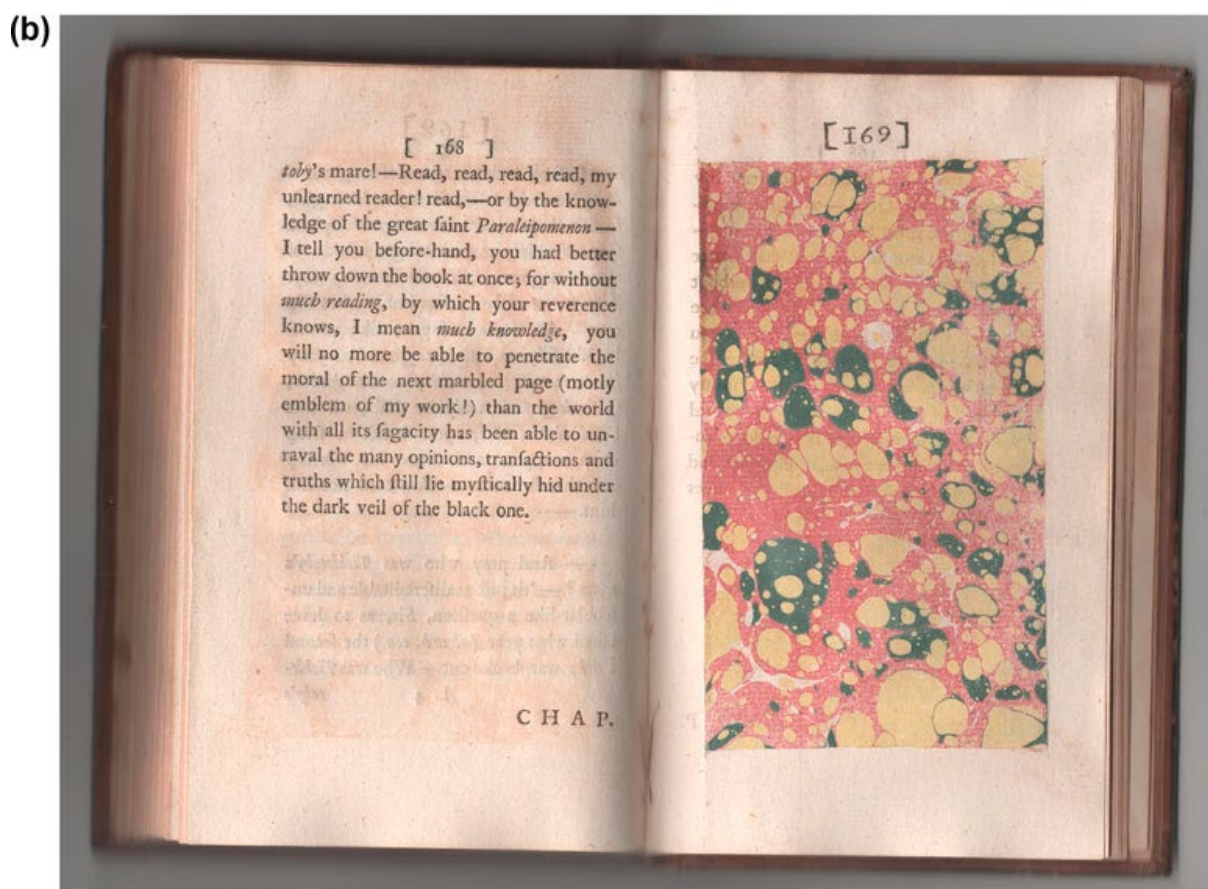


Figure 4. The marbled page from *Tristram Shandy*, 1760, Copyright—The Laurence Sterne Trust.

In this wider context, the marbled page can be seen as the original scattering of semen and/or animal spirits;¹⁰ its profusion of lines heralds Tristram's future nomadic becomings. In early editions of the novel, each marbled page was individually hand-produced and inserted into the printed copy (Regan, 2002, pp. 19–21). It stands as the paramount example of Sterne's playfulness with the material form of the novel, also seen in the woodcut lines (VI:40) drawn by Sterne himself, the rearranged and missing chapters, and the countless paratextual and typographical jokes. When feeling his frustrations pile up (VII:30), for example, Tristram writes:

VEXATION

upon

VEXATION

There is an ontological as well as a material dimension to these various jokes. Once again this is epitomised in the figure of the marbled page. In a fascinating article, McCaffery (2006, pp. 66–69) describes a medieval semiotics in which marbling was enlisted to illustrate Christian ideas about incarnation (the penetration of the sensible by the intelligible). Under cover of this religious code, artists of the time began to explore marble's uncanny dynamics of form and formlessness. Painters simulated its capacity to produce 'abstract, variegated, accidental lines', which they used to negate figuration in favour of sensuously particular, aesthetic affects. Given this historical background, McCaffery suggests that *Tristram Shandy's* marbled page and the 'entire formula' of the novel is 'suspended in the ontological paradox of incarnation'. In other words, Sterne's artwork operates at a level more fundamental than, and prior to, any fixed representation (incarnation) of the world. The marbled page that prefigures Tristram's life is an emblem of *becoming*: of 'a narrative staging of presence before representation' whose 'strange itinerary' will refuse to settle into a stable body of meanings (p. 67).

What McCaffery has identified is the crucial moment in the background of *Tristram Shandy* with which my own work seeks to make common cause. It is that moment in painting when 'the invisible vacillates and spills into the visual', when sense is given not just through figures, contours and recognisable forms but also, and more fundamentally, through 'the "cursed part" of paintings, the indexical, non-descriptive, and *dissemblant* part', the part that does not resemble anything (McCaffery, p. 68, quoting Didi-Huberman).¹¹ This concerns more than the negation of figuration, or an abstract style that forsakes the 'solace of good forms' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 81). It is where paint or line is let loose to run 'all out of rule', where the work engages with contingent materiality, where the artist is caught up in the play of nonsense from which sense must always first emerge. It is this moment that will be taken up in the concluding sections of this essay.

The Primal Scene of Drawing

A useful place to begin is at what Bryson (2003, p. 150) calls the inaugural moment or 'primal scene of drawing'. This occurs whenever a pencil-point is first set upon a white page and begins to be displaced. As the point moves, it deposits a graphite trace that becomes a line. Klee focuses on this inaugural line that is prior to all representational responsibilities: it is no more than *an ongoing presence*, 'an active line on a walk, moving freely without goal'. To illustrate this, Klee draws a series of short lines that twist and curve at will (Klee, 1960, p. 16).

As has been seen, my own painting involves this type of nomad line. But, for now, the argument will be presented via drawing. As the inchoate line emerges, its appearance is accompanied by some strange event in which the 'mechanism' remains unseen—yet which nonetheless transforms the page. No longer just a material effect, the page becomes a surface of inscription and a virtual space of composition. Background and foreground visibly set themselves apart, yet remain conjoined and co-dependent. A strange gap has opened up. But how? An *incision* has been made, unseen, along the path of the drawn line, as the graphite trace advances.

A number of commentators have tried to grasp this uncanny event. For Rosand (2002, p. 2), the pencil ‘releases’ what Chinese calligraphers call the ‘generative’ power of the paper, its hidden potential to both *bear* and *bring forth* the image. Bryson (2003, p. 151) also invokes the idea of release. He refers to the whiteness of the page as ‘an area without qualities’; but this apparent lack is neither emptiness nor an inertness of matter. Instead, it is a ‘reserve’. The specific effect of this reserve (according to Bryson) is to release the act of drawing from the totalising imperative of the art of painting. Conventional ‘realistic’ painting tends to an aesthetic of finality and closure: the image is given in its final arrested state, as an overall design, in the completed past. In contrast, the reserve of the white page ‘sequesters’ and ‘protects’ the inchoate line as it emerges, allowing it to unfold in an ongoing present time, relieved of co-optation into a totalised representation of the world (ibid, p. 151).

If these ideas of reserve and generative potential are combined, they may be thought of as a single material – home, with mom and dad. In the artwork, this material-force—capable of bearing and bringing forth a line whilst also sheltering it— maintains a gap between the self-*presentation* of lines and a binding *representational* image. It can do this for all possible lines, and, by extension, also for colours, textures, words, tones, etc. The idea of such a material-force lies in proximity to what Heidegger calls ‘the earth’, or simply ‘earth’.

Earth and World, Nonsense and Sense

In making this connection, it must be noted that, for Heidegger, earth is neither an entity of any kind nor an independent power. Rather, he sees it as one pole of the dynamic relation between earth and world, which unfolds as a fundamental ‘strife’ (Heidegger, 1971, p. 49). A world is a total network of practices, relations and significations. A world is the place, and the historical taking place, of meaning.¹² Earth supports that place and that process; in so doing, it makes human dwelling possible. Yet, of all that comes to presence within a world, to overt meaning, earth sustains and shelters a hidden dimension. Earth withdraws into concealment, to a dimension prior to intelligibility and beyond sense.¹³ Earth and world are locked in a relation of difference, torn between concealment and unconcealment or ‘clearing’ (Heidegger, 1971, pp. 53–54).

Whatever presents itself in an artwork (e.g. a line or a colour) divides between a hidden ‘earthly’ side, and a visible ‘worldly’ side that partakes in the circulation of meaning. The true artwork activates and stages this immanent difference, bringing it openly into view for the first time. And it does this by means of the *incision* mentioned earlier. That incision may now be understood as the most fundamental cut of all: the *riss* (rend or rift) that separates yet conjoins earth and world as a unity in difference. The *riss* has no visible presence but it inheres in prospective lines of meaning that are sketched out by the artwork and become decisive for its community.¹⁴

For Heidegger, this is one way in which fundamental change comes about. Indeed, if the artwork is a truly great one, it will help found a new world and a new history.¹⁵ But, to conclude, it will suffice to make more modest claims on behalf of the artwork. The strife of earth and world may, at a certain level, be regarded as a play of sense (the intelligible) and nonsense. Here, nonsense is neither a negation nor an absence, but a name for that excess which remains active within the intelligible even as it withdraws into ultimate impenetrability. It can be seen at work in ‘difficult’ poetry. Or, take the example of paint. Paint has the potential to be worked up into a meaningful, even decisive, image. View the image too closely, however, and the paint begins to appear either banal or uncanny—an excessive, a-signifying presence. It is given to us to see, but we can make nothing rational of this givenness, this mere ‘being there’.

This makes it permissible to say that the written word or painted line is *a play of sense and nonsense*, in which nonsense is not a deficiency to be excluded but is positive and productive. Indeed, this is Deleuze’s argument in *The Logic of Sense*. For Deleuze, sense is not just reliable signification or its exchange, nor is it original; sense first has to be produced. What produces it is

'nonsense and its perpetual displacement' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 82). Sense arises as an effect of 'the respective position of elements which are not by themselves signifying'; the flow of formless nonsense 'enacts the donation of sense' (p. 81 and 83). But this event or presentation of sense is reactively reduced by representation to what is uniformly repeatable. The narrator of *Tristram Shandy* is well aware of this conundrum. On the opening page of the novel, no less, Tristram informs us that 'nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense' depend upon the 'tracks and trains' into which he puts his animal spirits: 'whether right or wrong ... by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it'. Since his own animal spirits were dispersed at conception, Tristram's digressions cleave so much closer to nonsense—and reveal so much more of its generative or form-giving power—than the habitual paths walked by others.

In conclusion, it may be claimed that *Tristram Shandy* is an 'Ontologic treasury' (III:19) and masterwork of sense and nonsense. Its wild digressions and excessive comical play *is* the artwork itself. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it is an assemblage of multiple lines, albeit a mutant and riotous one. The characters trace out segmentary lines of obsessional behaviour (their various 'hobby horses') which, in Tristram's recounting, erupt into madcap lines of flight that disrupt identity and stable meaning alike. As Tristram's 'history' eludes his grasp and conventions of narrative and novelistic structure are threatened with collapse, there is an uprising of apparently ungrounded and self-generating new meaning—Tristram's unique brand of nonsensical sense. In Heideggerian terms, Sterne's book performs—or provides a comic rehearsal of—the necessary labour that allows us to trace the emergence of fundamental structures of meaning (world) from the immanent potentialities of material forces (earth) by means of the differential play of inscriptions (art). My own artworks seek to explore broadly similar terrain, attempting to 'figure forth' metaphysical or ontological ideas in the medium of drawn/painted lines. There is something in the drawn line that leaves a visible trace of its becoming (its coming *into* being) which, if seen correctly, may evoke a feeling for 'being', however understood—as immanent source, as the happening of difference, or as self unfolding creativity.

Notes

1. References to *Tristram Shandy* are given as volume (Roman numeral) and chapter (number).
2. See *A Brief History of The Frame*. Retrieved from <http://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/publications/history.html>.
3. *A Thousand Plateaus* contains a basic typology of lines (see Chapters 1, 8 and 10). The three main types are the molar-segmentary line, the line of flight, and the molecular line (which oscillates between the first two). Within these 'types', there is room for infinite variation depending on context: lines may be described as creative, destructive, connecting, cutting or breaking, cracking etc. The present article applies elements of this typology to specific kinds of line encountered in the context of drawing-writing. On lines generally in Deleuze and Guattari, see Miranda (2013).
4. See Ingold, 2010, p. 2. For a critique of the conceptual pair form-matter, see Heidegger, 1971, p. 27. The hylomorphic line would function as a segmentary line in Deleuze and Guattari's terms.
5. Page numbers for Welchman refer to the online version.
6. Liquid tusche is a greasy, dark wash that is brushed onto a lithographic stone to create specifically 'painterly' effects—the highly variable surface patterns that develop as it dries out. These patterns show up strongly in the final image after the processes of etching, inking and pressing.
7. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) refer to 'a materiality possessing a *nomos*' or internal law (p. 451), and '*a material vitalism* that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognisable, dissociated by the hylomorphic model' (p. 454). Italics added.
8. On the homunculus, see Freeman. 'Offering a mock defence of the increasingly discredited homunculus, our narrator [Tristram] seizes upon its impending demise as an opportunity to expose a fault-line in the eighteenth century concept of ontology and identity' (p. 147).

9. Translation of an epigram from Pliny that opens Volume VII: *Non enim excursus hic ejus, sed opus ipsum est*. Earlier Tristram writes: 'Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; — they are the life, the soul of reading' (l:22).
10. McCaffery (pp. 65–66) quotes Schiff: 'In the context of the narrative, it is obvious that this image represents Walter Shandy's ejaculation ... The colours of the original marbled page can all be found in the body, and white and yellow pigments are splattered in the top layer'.
11. Didi-Huberman (1995, p. 45) traces the concept of *dissemblance* back to Plato. For medieval theology, God was *dissemblant* in that nothing resembles him; he is the formless ground of all form (p. 52).
12. Heidegger defines world as a 'relational totality' of 'significance' (1962, p. 120), and as an 'open relational context' for a 'historical people' (1971, p. 42).
13. Young (2002, p. 9) describes world (in Heidegger) as the *intelligible* as opposed to the *unintelligibility* of earth.
14. Heidegger (1971, p. 63) plays on the verbs *reissen* (to break open, rend) and *ziehen* (to pull, draw) to suggest that the artwork sets up a 'basic design' and 'outline sketch' of inaugural meaning. On the *riss*, see Chapter 4 of Fynsk (1993), and also McGuirk (2011).
15. *Ibid*, p. 77: 'Whenever art happens—that is, whenever there is a beginning—a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again'.

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