

The Image Is Intimate

A performance-lecture given by H at one-day symposium: *exCitation*

Venue: Photography Department, Royal College of Art, London,

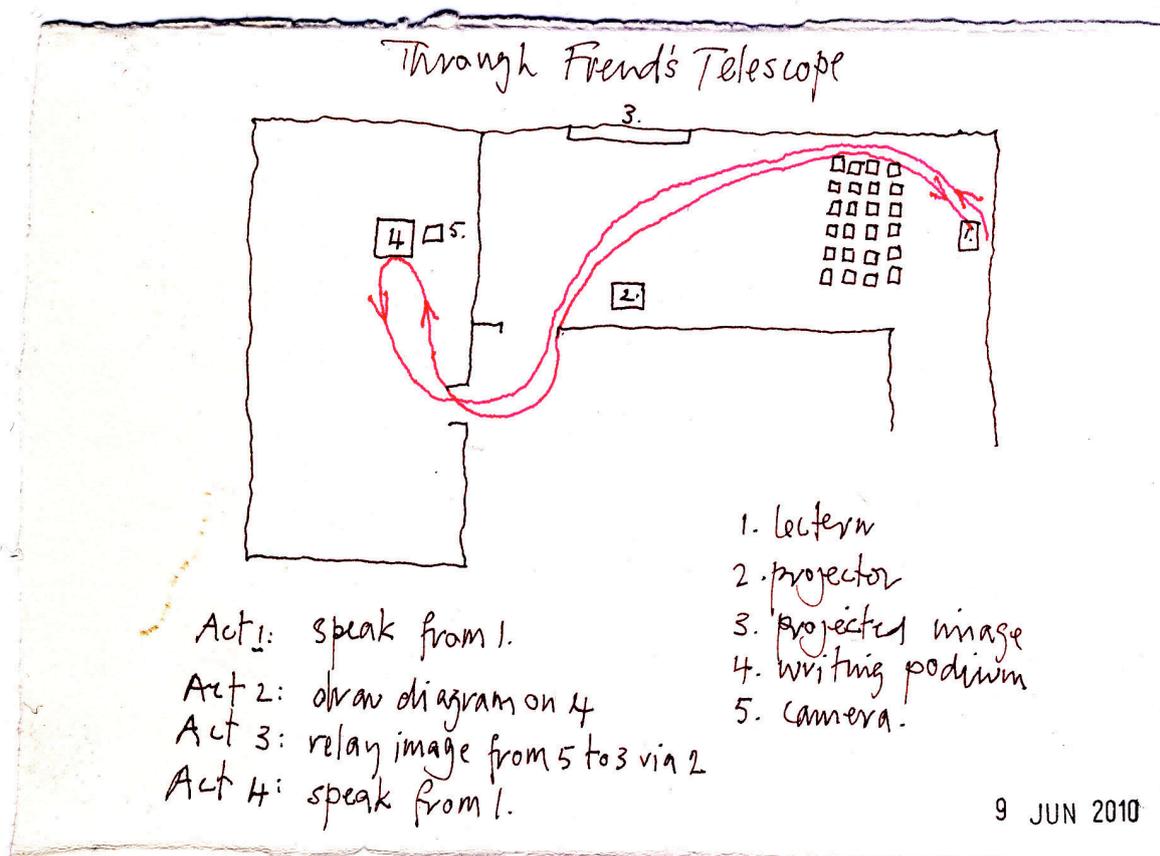
Date: Wednesday 9th June 2010

Prop: *Lectern*

H's notes:

In this performance H talks (see below) about the structure of the mind and how it works with particular attention to the relationship of images to language. The drama of the performance was an enactment of the Möbius strip in reference to *extimacy*, a neologism coined by Jacques Lacan to reformulate the inside/outside distinction.

The performance circulated around absence and presence as H disappeared into another room and then reappeared to finish the talk. While in the other room H elaborated via a live video feed the story of *Freud's Telescope*. H talked about the necessity of the absence of objects in the real world in order for language to re-present them symbolically. Images in the mind rely on the absence of things in the world. The possibility to make an archive of the lost house is precisely due to its absence.



The Image is Intimate

If Jacques Lacan tells us that we are born into language, as he does in Seminar II¹, we might ask, is the imaginary born out of the symbolic? And if so is what can be thought about the relationship of language to images? Or put another way, the relationship of signification to sense—and it is this relationship that I have recently been puzzling over. I have been considering whether images that originate in the mind are within language or, sitting in close proximity to it, outside, which poses a question of the ontological status of the image.

When I left home at the age of seventeen, I never saw my childhood house again. It was cut in half, removed from its place embedded in a hill; in the small hours of the morning it was taken to the other side of the city on the back of a semi-trailer. I am now re-building my house, a memory of a memory, to make a remembered archive of documents: images, diagrams and texts. The house of course will never be fully recovered, the archive will only ever be fragmentary, in the sense that the documents are re-finding the house in memory, the archive is of something impossible, it is an impossible archive, it is an archive of negation: *A Lost Object Archive*.

As part of this archive I have recently made some drawings of the house from memory: the space underneath it and the land around it and objects associated with it. I have used what's close to hand—A4 computer paper, felt tip pen, tipex, highlighter and paint—on the A4 paper I have been making visualizations of mental images; marks upon a page that correspond to pictures in the mind; a manifestation of mind-pictures: 69 drawings in all.

In making these drawings three orders of image are brought into play; the image in my mind—the thought, the imagination, the fantasy, the hallucination; the image in the world as a drawing, as a physical object; and the image conjured in the mind of the viewer. I am caught in a loop. And this loop fences me off from the real world. As a being in the world I am trapped within a 'box of representation', a box Didi-Huberman describes in his book *Confronting Images*. Caught in this box I can only speculate what is beyond, and the only way to recuperate this beyond is via the specular. I am cut off within the imaginary register, cut off from the physical world².

In producing the 69 drawings I find a way to pull the representation from my mind into the world; the drawings trace the wavering from the internal to the external oscillating between absence and presence. A memory presents an image in the mind predicated upon the absence of the thing in the world. Its representation makes present its absence. A word makes present this absence twice removed: a representation of a representation. This is what Freud called *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*: a word as representation of something already represented in the

¹ 'If the symbolic function functions, we are inside it. And I would even say – we are so far into it that we can't get out of it.'

Lacan, J. (1991). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company.

² Didi-Huberman, G. (1990). *Confronting Images*. Pennsylvania, Penn State Press.

psyche, which in turn represents the thing in the world. It was this idea that Lacan drew upon to elaborate a whole theory of the mind and posit his proposition that the unconscious is structured like language. In Seminar VII, the seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan follows Freud as he elaborates a topology of the mind in the 7th chapter of his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this elaboration Freud likens the mental apparatus to the organisation of the lenses in a telescope and I am going to follow Lacan to show you how he did it.

Video *Freud's Telescope*

Blanchot tells us: 'The image is intimate. And it makes of our intimacy an exterior power, which we suffer passively. Outside of us, in the ebb of the world which it causes, there trails, like glistening debris, the utmost depth of our passions³.' This he says is what psychoanalysis teaches us and this is what I learn as I lie on the analyst's couch encased within my box of representations. Within the box I experience a fluctuation between the barely perceptible and the emergent. Thoughts come as images, like images hallucinated, and lying there Freud's injunction to me is to put these images into speech. Putting into speech—memory, that offers itself up as shadowy, non-specific and diffuse. As I lie there on the couch I cast about in my mind for a specific memory to fix upon in the way of an object, a place or a thought. Through attention the ground of indistinctness falls away, withdrawing, to allow an image to take form: piece-by-piece it comes to me in a fragmentary way, dislocated and patchy. To make a thing distinct is to pull it away from another thing—it becomes different—it takes on meaning—it takes on signification as I bring it into language—a linking occurs between an *S*₂ and an *S*₁. An operation of attention is at work. And it is through this attention as I lie on the couch that I bring the image in my mind into speech and I wonder is by a similar operation that I pull the memory in the mind on to paper?

I am faithful to the remembered image, in its fugitive and incomplete state, with any resultant drawing positioned somewhere between sign and sense, through the commingling of the haptic, the somatic, the visual. To make a *drawing* from this partial recovery of the real world I aim to reproduce – *in the sense of producing again* – the thought-image. But first I must put the thing into language. The loop is played out: the image in the mind emerges on the page: the projected production of material marks informs the thought-image ... and the image as such hovers, suspended between the mind and the page—being neither fully complete in the mind and nor ever totally recovered on the page—comes into being ... trembling ... in the space between the two—opening out a rift.

It is through an effort of attention that the image in the mind is differentiated from what surrounds it to become a recognizable sign, which is copied through material means—and placed within signification. To resist signification to redress its cogency, to regain a space for the image, I start to

³ Blanchot, M. (1989). *The Space of Literature*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska.

erase: tip-ex out, I remove, cover over, cut up. I nudge the drawing from the sign of something that is nameable, to its material; pure sense–felt-tip, high lighter, tip-ex and paint–materials that leave a trace—a smudge, a smear, a mark—some sort of inscription upon the page. As I nudge, disrupting and unsettling these marks—meaning is obstructed. Signification within language is lost, covered or cut from a signifying chain to become free floating. The drawing becomes detached from meaning loosened into indeterminacy. Does this make, I wonder, an S_1 standing alone—as material...unattached to any other signifier; not on the side of *naming*—the naming of paper, tip-ex, high lighter, felt tip and paint – when paint is a colour – like pink – but in terms of the *stuffness* of paper, tip-ex, high lighter, felt-tip and paint – when paint is colour as sensation...

Where I wonder is this *stuffness* of material, this sense, positioned in relation to language? And the *das Ding*, that excess and leakage, what later became the *object a*, the remainder that causes desire, the pull of an image that draws us back, that is never fixed in signification but always coming into being – does this account for something of what is outside signification, and that the image is elsewhere in proximity to language?

Blanchot, M. (1989). *The Space of Literature*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska.

Derrida, J. (2007). *Psyche: inventions of the other*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Didi-Huberman, G. (1990). *Confronting Images*. Pennsylvania, Penn State Press.

Lacan, J. (1991). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company.