A Metaethical Study of Simone Weil's Notion of Attention Through Critical Practical Analogy

Dino Alfier

University of the Arts London

PhD Thesis

February 2011

Abstract

This research provides an example of art practice employed within a metaethical framework by addressing Simone Weil's ethical notion of *attention*. In this thesis, 'metaethics' is defined as a *second order* inquiry into *first order* questions of normative ethics, more specifically, an inquiry into the metaphysical and epistemological premises of Weil's discourse on the ethical value of attention. On one hand, I demonstrate how Weil's notion of attention can expand the scope of art so as to include metaethics. On the other hand, I use art to widen the current knowledge of Weilian attention.

The research projects described and analysed in this thesis are predicated on a method which I designate 'critical practical analogy'; this is an analogy which includes art practical operations for the purpose of critical investigation. This method subsumes both theoretical and practical inquiries. I used two analogies:

– *Normative* analogy compares (a) the dualistic relation that Weil postulates between agent and reality in her discourse on attention to (b) the relation that I postulate between my agency through observational drawing and the object of observation. The analogy operates by using Weil's assertions on attention normatively in observational drawing.

– *Imaginal* analogy compares (a) Weil's use of tautology and contradiction in her arguments for ethical attention to (b) tautology and contradiction considered as argument *forms*. The analogy operates by giving aesthetic presence to these forms, i.e. by turning them into images through artworks.

The analogies obtained the following outcomes:

– The normative projects afford a practical knowledge of Weilian attention by interpreting it as an ethical practice of detachment. The projects also demonstrate that, notwithstanding Weil's transcendent view of truth, such a practice of detachment is compatible with a subjective notion of truth.

– By capitalising on the non-propositional mode of representation which is typical of visual art, the imaginal projects engender a scepticism which favours dialogue and values questions as positive research results.

The outcomes indicate the following implications for visual arts practice:

– The outcomes of the normative projects demonstrate how contemporary artists who regard notions of universal truth with scepticism need not necessarily disavow ethical intentions in their practice.

– Due to its propositional character, theoretical metaethics can reach an impasse from which it can only point discursively to the limits of language. The outcomes of the imaginal projects evidence that art can move beyond these limits non-propositionally.

The use of critical practical analogy also indicates a methodological implication for art practical, interdisciplinary research. Critical practical analogy could provide artists with both a heuristic research tool and a template for articulating a discursive representation of art practice which both acknowledges the non-linearity and indirectness of practice-led research and the need for interdisciplinary intelligibility.

Contents

Dedication

To Michele.

Acknowledgements

List of figures

The texts in Appendix 4 and in figs. 4.25 and 4.37 are too small to be legible because, in these figures, I intend to show exclusively the context of my drawings within the academic publications to which they belong. Most of the text in Appendix 4 is an adaptation of §4.33.

List of videos on DVD

List of abbreviations

The following is a list of the abbreviations of Weil's works used in the thesis. For French texts, I adopt the abbreviations employed by the *Association pour l'étude de la pensée de Simone Weil*. For English translations of Weil's texts, there is no such unified standard of abbreviation.

AD: Weil, S., 1966. *Attente de Dieu*. Paris: Fayard.
C 1: Weil, S., 1951. *Cahiers, Vol. 1*. Paris: Plon.
C 2: Weil, S., 1953. *Cahiers, Vol. 2*. Paris: Plon.
CO: Weil, S., 2002. *La condition ouvrière*. Paris: Gallimard.
E: Weil, S., 1949. *L'enracinement*. Paris: Gallimard.
GG: Weil, S., 2002. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated from French by E. Crawford & M. Von Der Ruhr. London & New York: Routledge.
ICG: Weil, S., 2005. *Intimations of Christianity amongst the Ancient Greeks*. Translated from French by E.C. Geissbuhler. London & New York: Routledge.
IPC: Weil, S., 1985. *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*. Paris: Fayard.
LF: Weil, S., 1999. *Lezioni di filosofia*. Translated from French by L. Nocentini. Milano: Adelphi.
LP: Weil, S., 1959. *Leçons de philosophie*. Paris: Plon.
LPR: Weil, S., 2002. *Letter to a Priest*. Translated from French by A.F. Willis. London & New York: Routledge.
LR: Weil, S., 1951. *Lettre à un religieux*. Paris: Gallimard.
NR: Weil, S., 2002. *The Need for Roots*. Translated from French by A.F. Willis. London & New York: Routledge.
OC I: Weil, S., 1988. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 1 : Premiers écrits philosophiques*. G. Kahn & R. Kühn, eds. Paris: Gallimard.
OC IV 1: Weil, S., 2008. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 4, Vol. 1 : Écrits de Marseille (1940 – 1942), Philosophie, science, religion, questions politiques et sociales*. R. Chenavier, ed. Paris: Gallimard.
OC VI 1: Weil, S., 1994. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol : 1 1933-septembre 1941*. A. Degrâces, P. Kaplan, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.
OC VI 2: Weil, S., 1997. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 2 : La science et l'impensable*. A. Degrâces, M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.
OC VI 3: Weil, S., 2002. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 3 : La porte du transcendant*. A. Degrâces, M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.
OC VI 4: Weil, S., 2006. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 4 : La connaissance surnaturelle*. M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & J. Riaud, eds. Paris: Gallimard.
OG: Weil, S., 2002. *L'ombra e la grazia*. Translated from French by F. Fortini. Milano: Bompiani.
S: Weil, S., 1966. *Sur la science*. Paris: Gallimard.
WG: Weil, S., 2001. *Waiting for God*. Translated from French by E. Craufurd. New York: Perennial Classics.

Style and references

In matters of style, I follow *New Hart's Rules* and *The Gregg Reference Manual*, and I adopt the Harvard style of referencing with discursive footnotes.

1. Introduction

12

1. Introduction

1.1 Research aims

The aim of this research is to provide an example of how art can be employed within a metaethical[1] perspective by investigating, through art practice, Weil's discourse on the conditions of the possibility of attention, where attention is considered as possessing an ethical value – this is how Weil considers attention in general. Such metaethical inquiry into the *possibility* of ethical attention is not only distinct from but also antithetical to a practical inquiry into the *actuality* of cognitive attention. This is because the latter entails empirical validation, which, being contingent, necessarily abstracts from the very object of the study of metaethics which is the basis of the *unconditional* principles of conduct[2]. Even though some metaethical positions reject the unconditionality of these principles, the articulation of such rejection must nevertheless employ the notion of unconditionality as a common ground of discourse.

I stress the distinction between inquiring into the *possibility* of ethical attention and into the *actuality* of cognitive attention because, historically, the topic of attention in the visual arts has been treated as a branch of cognitive science. As Jonathan Crary argues in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, 'in the second half of the nineteenth century, attention became a fundamentally new object'. Crary claims that the Kantian view that there exists a 'a priori cognitive unity', supporting the idea of 'the possibility of the self imposing its unity onto the world ..., became untenable' and 'the problem of reality maintenance gradually became a function of a contingent and merely psychological capacity for synthesis and association.'[3] But while, in the first half of the

---

[1] Alexander Miller, in *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, describes metaethics as a *second order* inquiry about *first order* questions regarding moral obligations – these first order questions belong to normative ethics (Miller, 2003, p. 1). My research is metaethical with respect to Weil's discourse on attention, in the sense that it investigates the metaphysical and epistemological premises of her discourse on the ethical value of attention. The metaethical *perspective* that I adopt must be distinguished from a research project whose aim would be a comprehensive contribution to the *field* of metaethics. My theoretical study of ethical issues concentrates on Weil's writings and secondary sources on Weil, and although a certain familiarity with metaethical discourses was necessary in order to make sense of Weil's philosophy, I claim no thorough knowledge of such discourses. Throughout the research, my focus has always been primarily with Weil's thought and with a critique of it through *artistic means*.

[2] The object of metaethical investigation is ethics, and ethical principles are postulated as being unconditional. For instance, Peter Singer writes that 'the justification of an ethical principle cannot be in terms of any partial or sectional group. ... Ethics requires us to go beyond "I" and "you" to the universal law, the universalizable judgement, the standpoint of impartial spectator or ideal observer' (Singer, 1993, p. 11).

[3] Crary, 2001, pp. 14–17. Weil is anachronistic with respect to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century conceptualisations of attention (from which modern cognitive notions of attention derive), since Weilian attention is far removed from cognitive science. That is not to say, however, that the centrality which Weil accords to the notion of attention does not reflect the general interest in attention at this time. What Crary writes regarding Maine de Biran – that his idea of attention arches back to earlier conceptualisations of it and yet prefigures the new, emerging conceptualisation (Ibid., p. 20) – could also be applied to Weil (Weil refers to Maine de Biran in *OC VI 4*, p. 393), with the

twentieth century, art critics and theoreticians could attempt to develop ethical positions by appealing to quasi-scientific notions of attention and visual perception (one need only think of the analysis of Cézanne's work by art critics or artists such as Erle Loran[4], Roger Fry[5] and Lawrence Gowing[6]), nowadays, cognitive science is a highly specialized field of inquiry unconcerned with ethics[7], with the consequence that the study of attention in art excludes ethical considerations of a *metaethical* type[8].

I therefore decided that investigating Weil's notion of attention by reference to theories of visual perception would have been inappropriate for this research project. This decision depended on the point within my development as an artist when my first encounter with Weilian attention occurred. When I started reading Weil, my art practice consisted solely of observational drawing, to which I had returned after having worked as an abstract painter (greatly inspired by the writings of Bridget Riley) with a particular interest in the subtleties of visual perception. When I returned to observational drawing, concerns with perception were not as explicit as in the painting practice, but they nevertheless lingered at a liminal level, possibly due to mere habits of thought, which informed my self-representation as an artist. At this point, I encountered Weilian theories of attention, through the aphoristic notes collected in the most popular of her books, *Gravity and Grace*. As I read passages such as 'we have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will'[9] or 'the virtue of humility is nothing more nor less than the power of attention'[10], I felt that they chimed with my interest in perception and observational drawing. But it was precisely my resolution to question that comforting feeling of "chiming in" that prompted me to undertake this research. When I started to read Weil's writings more comprehensively and purposefully, I realised, firstly, that I did not know what Weilian attention was, and, secondly, that Weil's discourse on attention dealt with ethics, not with perception[11]. If before starting the research (but also at

---

difference that Weil's transcendentalism makes her unresponsive to the more physiological strands of contemporary discourses on attention. For Maine de Biran on attention, see: De Biran, 1942, pp. 28–29, pp. 136–137, p. 138, p. 143, pp. 148–149.

[4] Loran, 1963.

[5] Fry, 1952.

[6] Gowing, 1977.

[7] The outcome of cognitive science research may no doubt inform or even require the questioning of ethical views (as has been the case for genetics), but generally ethical issues do not determine the aims of cognitive science research.

[8] I stress of a *metaethical* kind, because even though many contemporary artworks purport to have ethical import, e.g. as catalysts for socio-political change, I have distinguished these types of contents or contexts from a metaethical investigation (see §1.42).

[9] Weil, *GG*, p. 116.

[10] Ibid., p. 128.

[11] For this reason, even though some of Claude Heath's drawings (notably, the series of plant drawings that he produced during a residency at the Centre for Drawing, London, in 2001) formally resemble those drawings of mine that I discuss in §4.322, his focus on perception (see Patrizio, 2003,

the very beginning of the research), I had thought that being *Weilianly attentive* would make me a better drawer[12] (even though I possessed only vague notions of Weilian attention and of what being a *better* drawer might mean), the actual research has turned out to be (among other things) an attempt to understand Weilian attention using art. It may seem trivial to refer to this personal history, but it is important in the context of an art practice-led[13] research, firstly because it has shaped the development of the art projects and secondly because I think that ideas regarding the artist's intention or frame of mind will always inform in some capacity the interpretation of artworks.

The link between observational drawing and Weil's notion of attention, which led to the resolution to pursue the present research, became more explicit as I was making a series of drawings at the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, in 2005 (Figs. 1.1–1.3) The following notes were written *while* drawing in the museum; it is important to stress this fact, since dialogue between image and text, under several guises, and more generally a *dialogic approach* to art-making, runs throughout the research:

> When I draw, what is the conduct to keep? Every action should be performed with an attentive, lucid mind. How do I know that I am acting lucidly? I experience contradiction. How do I know that I'm acting *without* lucidity? I experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction. If I experience satisfaction, it's no use to try to convince myself that it isn't so. Firstly, because I will experience dissatisfaction and *not* contradiction. Secondly, because contradiction is real and not the imaginary fruit of self-deception. Similarly, if I experience dissatisfaction and I succeed in convincing myself that it isn't so, I will experience satisfaction, not contradiction.
>
> As Simone Weil argues:

---

pp. 32–57) makes his practice concerns quite removed from the metaethical inquiry that I pursue in my research art practice.

[12] Readers of early drafts of this thesis were divided on the appropriateness of the term 'drawer': (1) some maintained that it is not a proper term[*] at all and suggested that 'better drawer' should be substituted with 'better at drawing'; (2) others thought that the clumsiness and the jarring quality of 'drawer' conveyed both the fumbling character and the somewhat tragic (one reader remarked that 'better drawer' conjured up the image of a child stamping his foot and screaming 'I want to be a better drawer!') connotation (see §4.4) of my initial intention. Given that, as I argue in §4.4, one of the outcomes of the research was to replace this tragic self-representation with a more critical representation based on analogy, I decided to retain the word 'drawer'. [*]Although, as a matter of fact, this is the term that artists engaged in drawing use, not the alternative noun 'draughtsman'.

[13] Even though an in-depth study of current debates on how to denominate doctoral research which involves art practice is beyond the scope of my research, I will briefly justify my choice of qualification 'practice-led'. From the very beginning of the research, I worked with the AHRC definition of practice-led research which is found in the guidelines for AHRC doctoral award grant applications: 'The research questions or problems, the outputs and – most importantly – the research methods, must involve a significant focus on your practice as distinct from history or theory.' (Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2008.) Although the suffix 'led' does not suggest the balance of art practice and theoretical practice (theoretical study is a *practice* as much as art is) in my research, I decided to retain it because: (1) it represents with reasonable accuracy the methodological relevance of art practice within the research (see §2.1); and (2) art practice (i.e. my observational drawing practice) did *lead* to the formulation of my research aims and, throughout the research, the outcome of art projects (albeit not exclusively) showed the way to further research development and investigation.

'It is incontestable that the void which we grasp with the pincers of contradiction is from on high, for we grasp it the better the more we sharpen our natural faculties of intelligence, will and love. The void which is from below is that in which we fall when we allow our natural faculties to become atrophied.' (Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 121)

I find it difficult to maintain attentiveness. Anything that stimulates the development of attentiveness, be it drawing, reading a particular text, or some other pursuit, is useful for the development of my drawing. Conversely, anything that *doesn't* stimulate the development of attentiveness is useless, or harmful, for the development of my drawing.
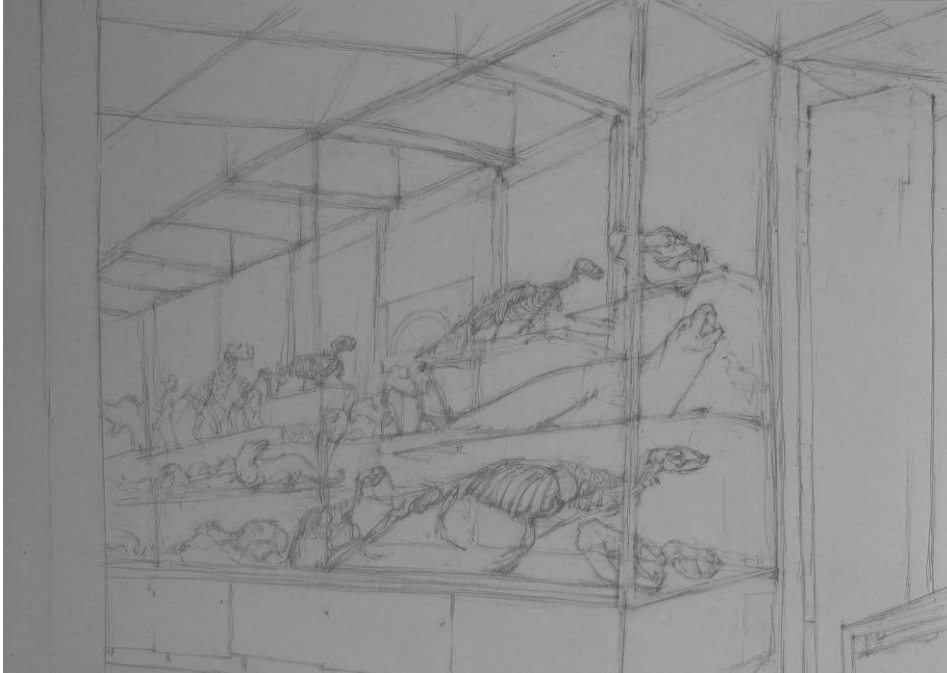
Fig. 1.1 *Museum of Zoology, Cambridge*, 2005, pencil on paper, 30 × 42 cm.
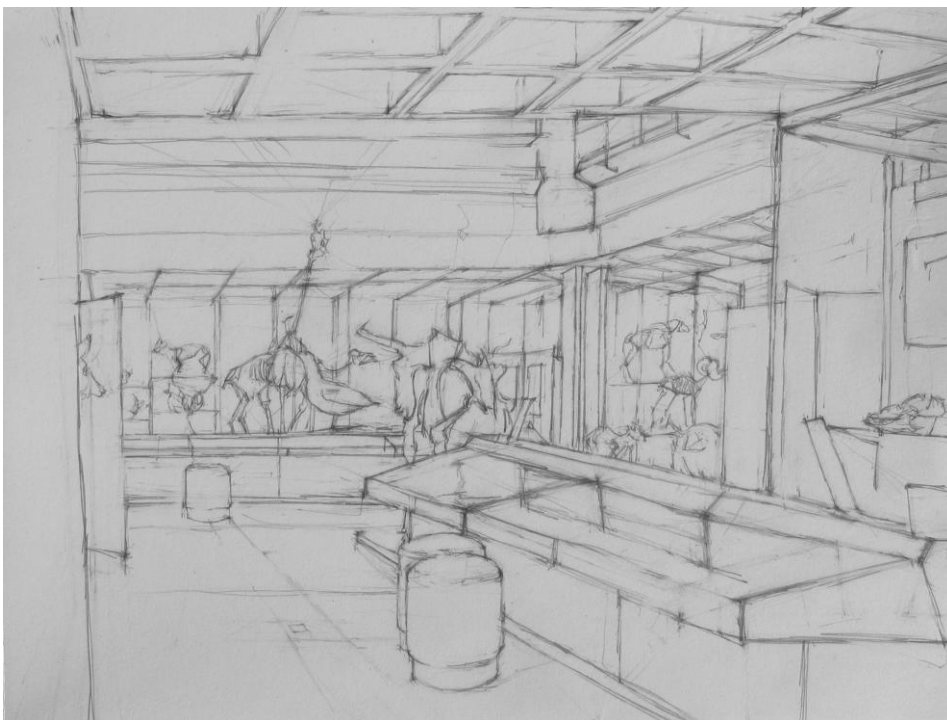
Fig.1.2 *Museum of Zoology, Cambridge*, 2005, pencil on paper, 30 × 42 cm.
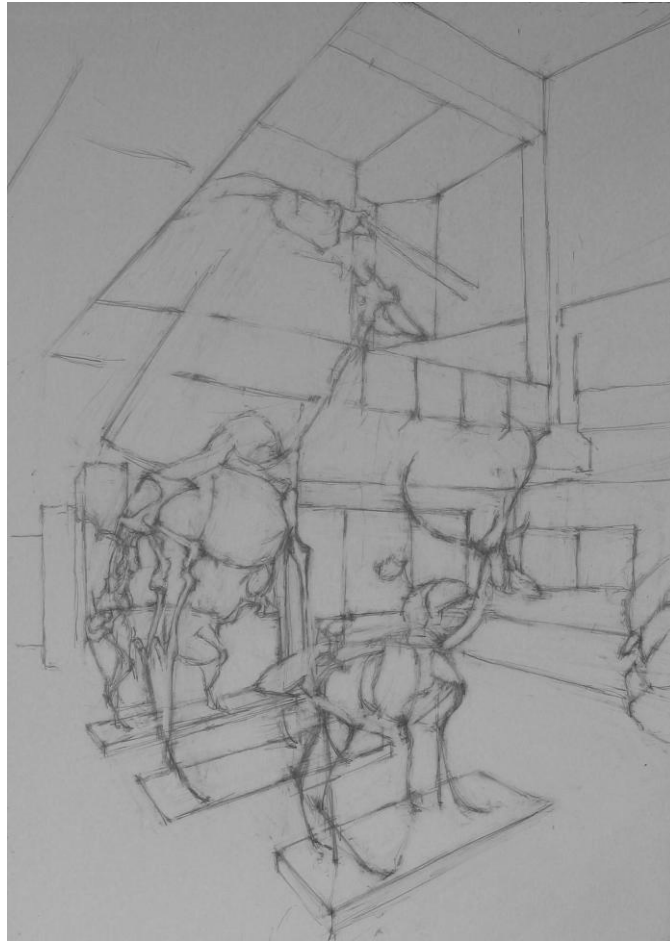
Fig.1.3 *Museum of Zoology, Cambridge*, 2005, pencil on paper, 42 × 30 cm.

The note above evidences a specific type of ethical view of observational drawing as a
practice for the development of attention, and it also exemplifies a typically self-reflexive
approach to subjectivity in art practice, and, consequently, in art practice-based research.
However, Weil also argues that the ethical value of any effort of attention is independent of
its results[14], and this seemed to jeopardise the conceptual tenability of my intention to use

---

[14] 'School children and students who love God should never say: "For my part I like mathematics"; "I
like French"; "I like Greek." They should learn to like all these subjects, because all of them develop
that faculty of attention which, directed toward God, is the very substance of prayer.' (Weil, *WG*, p.
58.) 'Students must therefore work without any wish to gain good marks, to pass examinations, to win
school successes; without any reference to their natural abilities and tastes; applying themselves
equally to all their tasks, with the idea that each one will help to form in them the habit of that
attention which is the substance of prayer.' (Ibid., p. 59.) 'Quite apart from explicit religious belief,
every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of
increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his effort produces
no visible fruit.' (Ibid., p. 59.) For Bradford Cook, the value of artistic creation is that it trains the
attention, which is 'a subtle combination of the active and the passive in mental concentration.
Composition of any kind, by any mind, constituted a spiritual exercise leading eventually, she [Weil]
hoped, to the perfect concentration of prayer. Thus literature was to be respected as a means to
transcendent ends' (Cook, 1953, p. 74). 'It has been observed that he [the writer] exercises his faculty
for attention, that art is a rudimentary form of prayer and commendable to that extent; so much so,

observational drawing for the development of attention: drawings are *results*, and, thus, it follows from Weil's argument that drawings will not necessarily offer an indication of attentive action. This is not problematic in itself, but, within the context of the research, it raised questions regarding the status of the drawings I would make: could I refer to the drawings in terms of attentive action without contradicting one of the main tenets of Weilian attention? Furthermore, my survey of secondary literature on Weil did not solve the difficulty of the relation between attention and results, because, generally, Weilian scholarship has not detected the potential contradiction in the notion of *result of an effort of attention*. For instance, the artist Eva Zippel, who has written on Weil, argues that, in order to avoid producing mediocre artworks, the artist must be attentive[15]; the poet Cristina Campo writes that 'the word *reveals* instantaneously the degree of attention at which it was born'[16]; and Weil scholar Mario Von der Rhur maintains that 'just as happiness is more easily found when it is not actively sought, so serious attention is more likely to yield *results* when these are not expected'[17].

This difficulty seemed, if not resolved, at least counterbalanced by another of Weil's claims on attention, namely, that the value of attention can only be apprehended through direct, subjective experience[18], since I thought that an art practical research self-reflectively focussed on my subjective experience of observational drawing might prove an effective means of representing such experience. However, as I explain in §4.22, self-reflectivity proved to be problematic in view of Weil's conceptualisation of the subject in her discourse on attention.

---

indeed, that the usually careful Simone Weil could occasionally compliment even the worst of writers for honourable, if fruitless, efforts in this direction.' (Ibid., p. 76.)

[15] 'When an artist loves his or her subject, the result will be mediocre. ... When the artist of genius creates, he or she abstracts from him/herself.' (Zippel, 1994, p. 13.) 'The first works of an artist often possess a surprising geniality. This geniality wears out with experience and is degraded in repetitions if attention is not constantly present' (Ibid., p. 15). According to Jacques Cabaud, for Weil, only the artist with a morally sound life can produce a masterpiece (Cabaud, 2008, p. 46).

[16] Campo, 1987, p. 169; my italics.

[17] Von der Rhur, 2006, p. 24; my italics. Furthermore, in Weilian scholarship, it is not uncommon to find a slippage from reference to Weil's *notion* of attention to the presumed attentiveness *of* Weil. For instance, Jacques Delaruelle writes: 'The indifference of reality characteristic of our mediatised culture already formed the background of Simone Weil's passionate attentiveness to things and humble attendance to their otherness.' (Delaruelle, 2003.)

[18] 'If one searches for the solution of a problem of geometry with true attention and if, after an hour, one has not advanced, one has nevertheless advanced ... in another more mysterious dimension. ... This apparently sterile and fruitless effort has brought more light into the soul. ... Certainties of this kind are experimental.' For an alternative translation see: Weil, *WG*, p. 58. 'Human thought and the universe constitute the book of revelation *par excellence*, if attention, lighted by love and faith, knows how to decipher them. The reading of them is a proof, and indeed the only certain proof. After having read the *Iliad* in Greek, no one would dream of wondering whether the professor who taught him the Greek alphabet had deceived him.' (Weil, *ICG*, p201.)

Although Weilian scholarship has dealt sporadically with the role of attention in art from an ethical perspective, these studies are wanting because Weil was primarily interested in literature, not visual art, and, accordingly, secondary sources on Weil concentrate on literature[19]. The very few artists who have considered the relationship between Weilian attention and art have premised their arguments on what can be characterised as an inadequately defined notion of attention[20].

Given the lack, within art practice, of concern for attention as a subject of metaethics and the limited understanding of art within Weilian scholarship, I pursue my research aim through two main subsidiary aims:

– on one hand, to demonstrate how this notion can expand the scope of art so as to include a metaethical perspective;

– and, on the other hand, to use art to expand the knowledge of Weilian attention beyond its present restricted horizon.

In order to pursue these aims, it was essential to achieve the preliminary subsidiary aim of clarifying Weil's notion of attention.

The chapter structure in this text is as follows. Chapter 2 delineates the overall research methodology. Chapter 3 presents my study of Weil's writings on attention and of relevant secondary sources. In Chapter 4, I report on my art projects that use art within a metaethical perspective. Chapter 5 deals with art projects which expand the boundaries of Weilian scholarship. The first and the second sections of Chapters 3–5 give an account, respectively, of the objectives (§3.1, §4.1, §5.1) and the sub-methodological considerations (§3.2, §4.2,

---

[19] See, for instance: Andic, 1996b; Bok, 2005; Lindroth, 1996; Sturma, 1987.

[20] There follows a list of a selection of texts in which the term 'attention' remains undefined. I will give an example of this uncritical usage of the term 'attention': 'To the extent in which individual attention is not summoned, the mind turns away from external reality and withdraws into itself.' (Jiménez Ruiz, 2010, p. 52.) In this passage, the notion of attention is pivotal and yet no clue is given as to what attention might be (despite the qualification 'individual', of which it is difficult to make sense in the context of Weil's theory of attention, given that Weil never qualifies attention as individual). In the following list of undefined occurrences of 'attention', I provide only the bibliographical details of the text in question and the number of the pages where 'attention' appears: it is clear that my assessment of these texts with regard to the uncritical usage of 'attention' can only be taken on trust, as this judgement can only be obtained by a first-hand reading of the *whole* text. What is being taken on trust here is that, throughout the texts which I list, 'attention' is used as uncritically as in the above cited passage. However, I do not wish to criticise the authors of these texts: in any argument, there are terms which remain undefined and taken for granted, and 'attention' is an obvious candidate because often Weil herself takes it to be a self-evident notion; but, as a result of my focusing on Weilian attention, I became particular sensitive to underdetermined references to this notion. Aubert, 1982, p. 18. Cook, 1953, pp. 73–80. Delaruelle, 2003. Devaux, 1995, p. 19, p. 21, p. 24. Droz, 2008, p. 401, p. 402, p. 403, p. 404, p. 410. Ferber, 1981, pp. 63–85, p. 64. Jiménez Ruiz, 2010, p. 51, p. 52, p. 56. Marianelli, 2004, p. 91, p. 92. Molard, 2008, p. 85, p. 87. De Monticelli, 2001, p. 183, p. 184, p. 194, pp. 197–199. Nicolle, 2009, pp. 67–68. Rey Puente, 2007, p. 132, p. 189. Springsted, 1996a, p. 5, p. 7. Zippel, 1994, p. 13, p. 14, p. 16.

§5.2) which pertain exclusively to the subsidiary aims analysed in that chapter. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I elucidate how the overall research aim (to provide an example of art practice-led metaethical investigation) has been achieved by analysing my solutions to the problems arising from the two main subsidiary aims, which I outline in §1.41–1.44.

1.2 Who is this research for?

In light of the two main subsidiary aims outlined in the previous section (i.e. expansion of the scope of art practice and conceptual expansion of Weilian attention), the research addresses two audiences with different fields of expertise: the artistic arena (unaccustomed to Weil's philosophy) and Weilian scholarship (unfamiliar with contemporary art). Since ultimately my contribution is in the area of art, it was essential for me to engage with the Weilian community not only discursively, exposing my artistic intentions and their theoretical ground, but also directly through artworks.

1.3 On the use of 'I'

Before moving to the final section of this introduction, which sketches out the overall concerns of the two main subsidiary research aims, I will explain why I decided to use the pronoun 'I' throughout the research exposition, rather than the customary academic 'we'. This decision finds its justification, firstly, in the primacy that Weil gives to direct experience in her discourse on attention. Secondly, there has been a tendency to translate the infinitive which Weil often uses in her journals with 'we'. For example, in *Gravity and Grace*, Weil writes: 'Ne pas juger. A la manière du Père des cieux qui ne juge pas: par lui les êtres se jugent. Laisser venir à soi tous les êtres, et qu'ils se jugent eux-mêmes. Être une balance'[21], while the translation reads: 'We must not judge. We must be like the Father in heaven who does not judge: by him beings judge themselves. We must let all beings come to us, and leave them to judge themselves. We must be a balance.'[22] The relentless use of the prescriptive 'we must' is a poor substitute for the infinitive of the original (particularly if one takes into account the private nature of this text), and one may be drawn to ascribe to the text a dogmatism which cannot be imputed to the original, which reads as a to-do, not a *must-do*, list. Lastly, for Weil, 'we' is a sign of what she called, referring to Plato, 'the Great Beast'[23], that is, of the collectivity, whose *ersatz* force conceals the true vulnerability of the individual[24]. Notwithstanding how Weil develops this argument, those who have tackled it often arrive at the following paradoxical conclusion: Weil argues that the use of 'we' is bad,

---

[21] Weil, *OG*, p. 170.

[22] Weil, *GG*, p. 93.

[23] For Plato's image of the Great Beast, see: *Republic*, VI, 493a–d, in Plato, 1993, pp. 214–215.

[24] There are many instances of this argument in Weil's writings. See, for instance: Weil, *GG*, pp. 164–169; Weil, *OG*, pp. 283–293; Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 45; Weil, *OC VI 4*, pp. 151–152.

therefore, *we must not say 'we'*[25]. The root of this paradox, which *I* find problematic, is the view that the field of ethics extends beyond the individual, subjective 'I' to the collective 'we' with some claim to objectivity, and, as it will become clear, this is relevant to my investigation into the ethical value of attention and the limits I describe with regard to what I can do with it and what I can say about it.

1.4 Research difficulties and concerns

In this section, I give an account of the problems I faced in my pursuit of the two main subsidiary research aims. This is followed by an outline of some methodological considerations which concern the research as a whole. §1.41 and §1.42 consider the issues which underlie the aim of expanding the perspective of art practice to include metaethics. §1.41 introduces a distinction between a theoretical and a practical view of Weilian attention. §1.42 anticipates, on one hand, questions regarding notions of truth and subjectivity in Weil's discourse on attention, and, on the other hand, my claim that the answers which my research provides to these questions have implications for the possibility of metaethical inquiry through art practice in general. §1.43 considers the issues which underlie the aim of expanding the knowledge of Weilian attention. As I pointed out in §1.1, the two main aims are complementary, in the sense that their purpose is to mutually fulfil the overall research aim, that is, to provide an *example* of metaethical art practice-led research. What distinguishes the two aims is whether Weil's notion of attention is taken as the starting point[26] from which to rethink the potential scope of art practice-led research (expansion of art practice), or whether certain views (already belonging to the art theoretical canon) regarding the function of art are employed to rethink Weil's notion of attention (expansion of Weilian attention). §1.44 addresses the overall methodological question of how to represent art practice in the context of interdisciplinary research *in general*. That is to say, this question abstracts from the particular metaethical concerns entailed by the two main research aims, although it arose from methodological considerations which are specific to my investigation of Weilian attention. In the conclusion (Chapter 6), I reconsider these issues in the light of the research outcomes and I will elucidate their implications for visual art practice. The issues outlined in §1.41–1.44 are discussed in §6.2–6.5, respectively.

---

[25] For instance, Alice Nicolle writes: 'Simone Weil never stopped denouncing *the tendency to fabricate lies which any collectivity possesses*, which Plato translates with the fact of buttering up the 'great beast'. Simone Weil, who despised what she calls '*the social thing*', maintains that it can be recognised by a sure sign: it is what says 'WE'. 'We' is the refusal to think for oneself, to question ideas and beliefs. How easily the individual drowns in collective thought.' 'Thus an authentic approach to religion would involve first of all to feel this bond which, *in secret*, connects us to an order of the world in the universe (the macrocosm) that is also within us (microcosm)...' (Nicolle, 2009, pp. 47–48).

[26] Which does not mean that Weil's notion of attention is *taken for granted*: as the analysis of the projects discussed in Chapter 4 will demonstrate, I investigated Weilian attention *critically*.

1.41 Distinction between theoretical versus practical notions of attention

I will introduce this section with an anecdote which illustrates a difficulty that I encountered in my attempt to pinpoint the meaning of Weilian attention. Since the word 'attention' is very commonly used in a number of English expressions, it often happened that, when fellow researchers (who knew the subject of my research) uttered the word 'attention', they would give me a knowing look. As the research progressed, I found it more and more difficult to confront that knowing gaze, because I felt that I knew less and less what attention was: complicated metaphysical and epistemological questions seemed to obfuscate rather than clarify the idea, which was the reason for undertaking the research. In §6.2, I will elucidate how this difficulty stemmed from my initial research intention to gain a theoretical knowledge of Weilian attention, while in the course of the art practical research I discovered that, for Weil, attention is essentially a *practical* notion. However, I shall point out that, initially, I was unaware of my initial intention: I was only able to identify it retrospectively, in the light of the shortcomings of my purely theoretical analysis of attention articulated in Chapter 3. These shortcomings emerged in the process of developing the art projects discussed in Chapter 4, and this is indicative of the critical function of art practice within my research.

1.42 Objective and subjective truth, and subjectivism in art practice

In my experience, artists are typically sceptical of notions of objective truth and they tend to think of their practice as pre-eminently subjective. Scepticism and subjectivism hinder the possibility of dealing with metaethical subjects through art practice, because they tend to deny the possibility and validity of intersubjective consensus, while I claim that the possibility of intersubjective consensus is a prerequisite postulate of any reflection on ethics. The acknowledgement of the possibility of intersubjective consensus must be distinguished from the dogmatic use of 'we' that I described in §1.3: in the former, consensus represents an ideal aim (a hypothesis) that guides dialogue; while in the latter, consensus is an unquestioned premise (a dogma). Analogously, there is a form of open-ended scepticism and a form of dogmatic scepticism which precludes dialogue (see §6.4). In light of this distinction, Weil's quintessentially non-sceptical philosophy is compatible with the open-ended scepticism which informs my art projects discussed in Chapter 5, since she rejects only *dogmatic* scepticism.

An indication of this dogmatic hindering scepticism in the arts is, for instance, the fact that, for many artists, words such as 'authenticity', 'honesty', or 'truth' are very much taboo. This claim is a truism: one need only have attended a 'crit' in an art college to know that whoever uses this kind of terms will almost inevitably be accused, at best, of naivety or mystification (of the kind which I will describe in §4.4) and, at worst, of being reactionary. And yet it is

also clear that many see artists as bearers of moral values and that many artists define themselves in this way, not by using the word 'moral' but, more indirectly, by implicitly claiming some kind of *value* for their activity. It is as if artists did not have at their disposal a vocabulary for conceptualising their practice *metaethically*. I stress the qualification 'metaethically', because it seems to me that *ethics* is not particularly problematic for artists. In fact, artists are used to framing their practice in ethical terms with regard to their products; and a vocabulary for such framing is readily available[27], but this does not require any explicit reference to notions of honesty, truth, etc., which, in this context are tacitly taken for granted or deemed too abstract to be relevant. On the other hand, metaethics investigates precisely such notions and thus requires that one acknowledges their existence (even if one aims only at proving that they are fallacious).

As regards subjectivism, it precludes artists dealing with, or having a dialogue about, metaethical questions, because subjective statements tend to be thought of as being 'independent of the truth or falsity of statements of other types; they are like isolated cogwheels that do not engage with the rest of language.'[28] Subjectivism encourages artists to adopt a self-reflexive and solipsistic disposition towards their practice. In other words, ethical self-reflexivity is a disposition in which the artist considers the ethical value of the results of their practice exclusively as an expression of their *self*[29]. My notes on the Museum of Zoology drawings, in §1.1, are an indication of a self-reflexive disposition. By contrast, my observational drawing projects that I discuss in §4.31 illustrate a progressive moving away from self-reflexivity towards an explicit objectification of my role as drawing agent. Although I claim that many artists adopt an exclusively self-reflexive approach, ethical self-reflexivity and objectification are not mutually exclusive, since self-reflexivity refers to one's disposition towards the results of one's work, while objectification is guided by considerations regarding how a given artwork will be interpreted by potential interpreters.

---

[27] Again, one need only read an Art Council funding application to see this: 'Arts Council England's mission is to enable everyone to experience arts that enrich their lives. We believe that great art inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves, and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. We want as many people as possible to engage with the arts.' (Arts Council England, 2008.) This terminology clearly illustrates Arts Council England's ethical commitment.

[28] Bitbol, 2008, p. 56. The image of the disengaged cogwheels of the machinery of language, used by Bitbol, was proposed by Wittgenstein; see: Wittgenstein, 2001, §270, p. 80ᵉ. Bitbol exemplifies the isolated character of subjective statements as follows: 'For instance, the subjective statement "I feel hot" is admittedly indisputable [i.e. it cannot be the object of a meaningful *dialogue*], even when confronted with the thermometer-reading statement "the temperature of this room is 5°C". By contrast, the statement "the temperature of this room is higher than the boiling point of alcohol" clearly conflicts with the former thermometer-reading statement.' (Bitbol, 2008, p. 56.)

[29] Therefore, in this thesis, the term 'self-reflexive' is not predicated of artworks that refer back to themselves or to the process of their making, as is typical in art theory (e.g. Michel Foucault's famous text on Velazquez' *Las Meninas*, in which the philosopher interprets this picture as a representation of the process of painting).

In the analysis of the art projects discussed in Chapter 4, I demonstrate (1) that even though Weil's writings on attention relate the ethical significance of attention to a notion of objective truth, in fact, Weilian attention is compatible with a *subjective* notion of truth; and (2) that the kind of subject that Weil envisages in her discourse on attention is not self-reflexive or solipsistic but rather calls for a *dialogic* approach to art practice. In §6.3, I consider the consequences of (1) and (2) for art practice: namely, Weil's view of the subject and the compatibility of attention with subjective truth indicate a way of conceptualising art practice metaethically.

1.43 Weilian transcendentalism and dialogic scepticism

As will become clear from my analysis of Weil's philosophy throughout the research, Weil's discourse on attention draws on her transcendent agnosticism and often employs the language of Christian theology, particularly in her late writings. Agnosticism is transcendent in the sense that it postulates an ultimate divine reality that goes beyond (i.e. transcends) human knowledge[30]. Weil's agnosticism is not equivalent to Kant's transcendental idealism: Kant's transcendental philosophy is an inquiry into the necessary condition of knowledge, which leads to transcendental idealism; while Weil's transcendent God is a postulated unknowable entity. Therefore, Weil's notion of God cannot be assimilated into Kant's notion of noumenon: Weil's God exists regardless of human existence (for Weil, God *created* human beings), whereas it makes no sense to say of noumena that they pre-exist or create human beings, given that noumena are the condition of human beings' *knowledge*, not of human beings *tout court*.[31] My initial resolution was to be as analytical as possible and to refrain from all references to God. This intention sets my research apart from most Weilian scholarship, which can be roughly divided into two camps: scholarship which adopts a religious perspective and which sees no problem with Weil's references to God; and scholarship which remains quite neutral to her transcendent statements, quoting Weil's passages on God, but from a very abstract perspective, without going into the problematic details. The only notable exception to these two approaches is Rush Rhees' book *Discussions of Simone Weil*, which truly tries to grapple *analytically* with Weil's religious arguments; and, for this reason, Rhees' work was an important guide in my initial research[32]. But, in the course of the research, I realised that, firstly, I could not dispense with Weil's transcendent philosophy, because it is so central to her discourse on attention, and, secondly, that the analytical approach towards her transcendent philosophy led to an impasse (what I

---

[30] Agnosticism is qualified as transcendent in Mautner, 2000, p. 568.

[31] For Kant's view that noumena are the condition of knowledge, see Guyer, 2006, p. 29.

[32] Rhees' significance for my research is not measurable by the number of references to his book which can be found in this thesis, because what is significant is primarily his analytical *approach* to Weil's philosophy, not the conclusions he obtained.

call the 'dead-end conclusion': see §5.32), that is, a preclusion of dialogue across the divide which separates those who assert the existence of an absolutely good divine creator of the world and those who deny such a view. Consequently, I developed an alternative method for investigating the transcendent strand of Weil's discourse on attention; namely, a non-analytical, non-propositional disposition which I designate 'dialogic scepticism'. I discuss how this disposition expanded the knowledge of Weilian attention in §5.5. In §6.4, I elucidate how the method of dialogical scepticism constitutes an example of metaethical art practice.

1.44 Intelligibility of art practice-led interdisciplinary research

This section outlines a question engendered by the interdisciplinary nature (art and philosophy) of my research; namely, how to make the research intelligible to both artists and philosophers. During my research, I came up against a problem which, for a time, I did not fully comprehend and which I will call *the invisibility problem*. As I said in §1.2, the two main subsidiary aims which I formulated addressed two audiences with different fields of expertise. What I found is that art-informed audiences failed to see the philosophical meaning of the artwork and philosophy-informed audiences failed to see the specificity of how the art practice dealt with philosophy. My answer to this question was to devise a methodological tool (i.e. critical practical analogy, which I discuss in Chapter 2) which allowed me to retain the non-linear investigative approach which is typical of art practice-led research (which I consider to be a strength of this kind of research) without sacrificing the discursive intelligibility which is required of philosophical research. I approach the invisibility problem as a problem regarding the *discursive representation of art practice*.

Practice-led research, including my doctoral project, generally requires a written component, whose purpose is to make interdisciplinary practice-led research *validatable* according to *the norms that matter* in another extra-artistic field of inquiry, whatever this may be.

Already in 1973, Lucy Lippard had framed the problem of validation of interdisciplinary art as a problem of artists not being taken seriously by the practitioners of those other disciplines with which such art engaged:

> As yet the 'behavioural artists' have not held particularly rewarding dialogues with their psychologist counterparts ... 'Art use' of elementary knowledge, already accepted and exhausted, and unsophistication in regard to work accomplished in other fields are obvious barriers to such interdisciplinary communication.[33]

Since Lippard is referring to *successful* artists, it is obvious that, for her, validation of artists by the artistic community is not enough to validate their work in the wider interdisciplinary contexts which these artists purport to address. The latter validation typically requires a

---

[33] Lippard, 1973, pp. 895–896.

discursive representation of art practice. Artists may argue that this hierarchy of disciplines is questionable[34], but the state of affairs described by Lippard seems to be an accurate assessment of how matters still stand.[35] In §6.5, I propose an answer to the question: What is the minimum requirement of a discursive representation of art practice in order for it to be intelligible in an interdisciplinary context? Secondly, I argue how the concept of critical practical analogy can meet that requirement, while avoiding a separation between practice and theory, which may lead to theory dictating the methodological schema and practice becoming merely illustrative of theory.

In order to overcome the difficulties presented in §1.41–1.44, my art practice could not merely illustrate Weil's ethical views by using her assertions on attention prescriptively; since those assertions constituted the first-order object of my second-order metaethical inquiry. After a preliminary theoretical exegesis of Weil's discourse on attention, the art projects that I developed engaged critically with my theoretical findings and obtained the following outcomes:

(*a*) I expanded Weilian attention towards the practical domain by elucidating the notion of attention as a practice of detachment (see §6.2).

(*b*) I demonstrated that, although Weil's ethics draws on an objective notion of truth, attention as a practice of detachment is compatible with a subjective notion of truth, provided one takes into account her conceptualisation of the agent as *subject to* all-embracing necessity—this demonstration indicated how the subjective and the sceptical dispositions can be useful to investigate metaethical questions (see §6.3).

(*c*) I showed the limits of an exclusively theoretical and propositional approach to Weil's discourse on ethical attention (particularly with reference to her metaphysics), and, through my art projects, I illustrated how the non-propositional nature of artworks allows an expansion of Weilian research (see §6.4).

(*d*) Critical practical analogy provided a template for representing the heuristic function of my art practice in the context of the research (see §6.5).

---

[34] This is a popular topic of discussion amongst art practice-led researchers.

[35] Lippard also points to the fact that often artists have limited knowledge of those other disciplines, but the fact that thorough interdisciplinary knowledge and art community validation are, by themselves, not enough for the interdisciplinary validation of art products can be demonstrated by giving the example of the artist Adrian Piper, who Lippard lists as one of the exceptions, i.e. an artist who is interdisciplinarily knowledgeable: Piper's artistic practice has been validated by the artistic community, and her philosophical practice has been validated by the philosophical community, but the latter community has not validated the former practice. Thus I think that the crux of the matter resides, yet again, in the *discursive representation of art practice*.

Thus, by addressing the problems outlined in §1.41–1.44, this research exemplifies a metaethical application of art practice to the study of Weil's theory of attention.

1. Introduction

Chapter outline: This chapter introduces the methodological device of *critical practical analogy*, which determined the development of the art projects in this research, and which shaped the presentation of research in Chapters 3–5. Critical practical analogy relates notions which are habitually considered as pertaining to distinct conceptual domains to critique them through art practice. To illustrate how critical practical analogy functions, I examine an art project by Art & Language and an essay by the art historian Charles Harrison that analyses this art project. For this research, I formulated two critical practical analogies. The first analogy compares, on one hand, the relation that Weil, in her theory of attention, envisages between agent and world to, on the other hand, the relation between my role as observational drawing agent and the object of observation. Since this analogy employs Weil's assertions on attention to devise *norms* for my observational drawing practice, I designate it as 'normative'. The second analogy considers Weil's metaphysical and epistemological arguments for attention, which draw on the notions of tautology and contradiction. This analogy is labelled 'imaginal' because it involves creating *images* of tautologous and contradictory argument forms by materialising them. In this chapter, I also give a brief account of how the outcomes of these two critical practical analogies fulfil the two main subsidiary research aims, namely, the expansion of the scope of art so as to include metaethics and the expansion of the horizon of research on Weil's notion of attention.

2.1 Methodology: Critical practical analogy

In order to pursue the two main subsidiary research aims, I formulated two critical practical analogies to employ in art practice. After having explained what I mean by 'critical practical analogy', I will argue why a methodology based on such an analogy is neither purely theoretical nor purely practical but rather subsumes both theoretical and practical research. I will then provide a synopsis of the two critical practical analogies that I formulated.

2.2 What is a critical practical analogy?

I qualify analogy as 'practical' to indicate that such an analogy is to be used in practice, to be used to act, to make something. The meaning of 'critical' is the one generally used in philosophy, i.e. as pertaining to a critique, an investigation leading to some, not necessarily negative, result[36]. More specifically, drawing on Kant, I distinguish the critical approach from the dogmatic approach: dogmatism being concerned with determining judgement with regard to the object of a concept; criticism being concerned with investigating the subjective conditions of thinking a concept[37]. The notion of critical practical analogy derives (albeit not explicitly) from two essays by the art historian Charles Harrison, who, writing on an Art & Language project (the project involved covering figurative images by flicking white paint on them, and I will refer to it as 'the snow project'), describes the project as a 'practical analogy'[38], and as a 'device [through which] a critical account of modernity may be realised or embodied or enacted.'[39] Harrison does not use the expression 'critical practical analogy' (his two qualifications of analogy are found separately in the two essays), but a definition of this expression can be extrapolated by compounding his descriptions: *a critical practical analogy is a practical analogy used as a critical device*.

---

[36] According to Norman Kempt Smith, a critique is 'an investigation leading to positive as well as to negative results.' (Kempt Smith, 2003, p. 1.) The entry for 'criticism' in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* is: 'Criticism *n*. From the Greek *krisis* = sifting; discerning; judging. This word, its derivatives and their cognates can be taken in two different senses. In one sense, a critic of a work is a person who subjects it to careful examination. The upshot may be, but does not have to be, negative. In another sense, criticism implies censure. In philosophical contexts, the first sense is often the one intended.' (Mautner, 2000, p. 117.)

[37] 'Even though a concept is to be placed under an empirical condition we deal dogmatically with it, if we regard it as contained under another concept of the object – this concept forming a principle of reason – and determine it in accordance with the latter. But we deal merely critically with the concept if we only regard it in relation to our cognitive faculties and, consequently, to the subjective conditions of thinking it, without undertaking to decide anything as to its object.' (Kant, 2008, §74, p. 223.) As Paul Guyer argues, 'Kant's "critical" approach to philosophy involves ... an examination of the human powers of cognition and reason as the basis for all claims about the laws of nature and morality ... [while, for Kant, dogmatism] is an uncritical assertion of laws of nature and morality, that is, a confident assertion of the truth of such laws that is not grounded in an antecedent critique of human intellectual powers' (Guyer, 2006, p. 9).

[38] Harrison, 2008, p. 74.

[39] Harrison, 2001, p. 180.

I will exemplify the notion of critical practical analogy by referring to the Art & Language project considered by Harrison and by explaining how this kind of analogy functions. In order to do this, I must first outline the components of a critical practical analogy in general. A critical practical analogy has an ***aim*** and an ***outcome***. As with any analogy, it is a relation of two *analogues*. In a *critical* analogy, the analogues play different roles: one analogue is the ***objective analogue***, that is, a state of affairs which is assumed to be the case; while the other is the ***reflective analogue***, that is, something that, for the purpose of the critique, i.e. of *reflection*, is assumed to be analogous in some respect to the objective analogue. Lastly, in order for the analogy to be *practical*, there needs to be an ***operational principle***, without which the analogy would remain merely the stating of a relation and not a means for action.

I will use Harrison's essays on the snow project to interpret the project as an instance of critical practical analogy, by identifying the components of the analogy. Since Harrison does not develop the idea of critical practical analogy, his essays do not refer to any analogy components; rather the components belong to my schema for conceptualising the workings of critical practical analogy. Moreover, the fact that, as Harrison maintains, the Art & Language project is a critique of modernism is a contingent element from which one can abstract while retaining the idea of artwork as critical device.

Harrison writes that the idea for the snow project was suggested by Lucas van Valckenborch's painting *Winter Landscape* 1586 (but the aim of the critique did not involve Valckenborch's picture). In this painting – a typical Flemish winter scene – the representation of a snow blizzard has been achieved by seemingly flicking white paint on the canvas. The *aim* of the snow project was to test how far Art & Language could go with modernist reductionism. Its *objective analogue* was 'late-modernism apparent vacillation between surfeit and erasure' (exemplified by 'the implosion of modernist reductionism with the advent of the black canvas')[40]. The *reflective analogue* was the 'idea of a composition painted to be snowed on' until 'all vestiges of content had been obliterated'[41]. The *operational principle* was the carrying to its extreme of the technique that van Valckenborch had employed to create the effect of snow in *Winter Landscape*, that is, by 'gradually snowing on figurative compositions with dabs of white paint'[42]. The *outcome* was the

---

[40] The objective analogue is not necessarily something on which everybody agrees (for instance, it might be open to question whether late-modernism vacillates between surfeit and erasure) but simply something that is taken as a *datum*. In this sense, within critical practical analogy, the objective analogue is not open to question.

[41] Harrison, 2008, p. 74.

[42] Ibid., p. 74.

marking of 'a kind of limit beyond which art cannot really be pressed if it is to remain in any sense a social practice.'[43]

Sol LeWitt, in his essay 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', writes that, in his work, '[t]he idea becomes a machine that makes art' and that 'all the planning and the decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.'[44] A critical practical analogy can also be understood as an ideational machine, but a machine *for*[45] the making of art in which the execution is *anything but* perfunctory: the execution leads from the aim to the outcome; the outcome cannot be obtained simply by formulating an aim. For instance, in the snow project, the mere formulation of the aim of testing the limit of modernist reductionism could not have established the demarcation of this limit. I stress that the execution is essential in critical practical analogy because doctoral research is defined as a contribution to knowledge, and if the aim contained the outcome *a priori*, then there would be no justification for undertaking research, let alone practice-led research[46].

2.3 Critical practical analogy subsumes both theoretical and practical research

The snow project example demonstrates how critical practical analogising subsumes both theoretical and practical research. In the analogy formulated by Art & Language, the objective analogue is deduced from an art theoretical discourse, while the reflective analogue resides in art practice. As regards the operational principle, the fact that, in this project, the operational principle involves the construction of artworks is incidental (although it is not incidental to the specific Art & Language aims). In the following section, I will give an account of the components of the two critical practical analogies I employed in my research, which will indicate further how the objective and the reflective analogues belong to the theoretical and the art practical strands of the research, respectively. However, later, in the detailed account of the research inquiry, it will become clear that art practice and theory often intermingle in such a way that to try to distinguish them is a fruitless exercise.

2.4 Critical practical analogies

The following account serves as an interpretative guide to the research, and it therefore presents the research themes only in the most general terms.

---

[43] Ibid., p. 74. For Harrison, the marking of this limit is indicated by the fact that the snow project was eventually abandoned (Ibid., p. 74).

[44] LeWitt, 1967, p. 79.

[45] As distinguished from a machine that makes art, as it were, automatically.

[46] This is not a negative assessment of LeWitt's stated intentions: he was not pursuing research in the sense that the word 'research' possesses in the context of a PhD.

I formulated two critical practical analogies because each analogy addressed one of the two subsidiary aims I stated in §1.1. These subsidiary aims also constitute the aims, i.e. the starting point, of the analogies.

Thus the *aim* of the first analogy was to demonstrate how the notion of attention can expand the scope of art so as to include metaethics. The *objective analogue* was the dualistic relation that Weil postulates between the individual agent and reality – and the role that attention plays in this ontological model (these concepts were deduced through theoretical inquiry). The *reflective analogue* was the dualistic relation that I postulate between my role of artist agent (the action being observational drawing) and the object of observation (thus the reflective analogue belongs to art practice). The *operational principle* was the *regulative* use of some of Weil's assertions on attention to devise limitations in the practice of observational drawing. The *outcome* was a demonstration of how Weilian attention can expand the scope of art so as to include metaethics, but it also highlighted some problematic epistemological and metaphysical tenets of Weil's argument on attention, which I could not address through this analogy and which led to the formulation of the second critical practical analogy, to which I now turn.

The *aim* of the second analogy was to use art to expand the knowledge of Weilian attention beyond its present restricted horizon. The outcome of the first analogy revealed some problems with Weilian metaphysics (i.e. the postulation of a tautological divinity) and epistemology (i.e. the pivotal role that so called 'insoluble contradictions' play in her ethical discourse). What I found problematic was the dogmatic character of her discourse. My study of secondary sources on Weil established that, generally, Weilian scholarship did not see this as a problem. Consequently, the *objective analogue* was Weil's defence[47] of tautology and contradiction in her discourse on attention (again, I identified Weil's defence through theoretical inquiry). The *reflective analogue* was arrived at by abstracting from the particular instances of tautologies and contradictions to which Weil refers, by considering tautology and contradiction as immaterial argument *forms*. The *operational principle* was the objectification, i.e. the representation of these argument forms through the materialisation, narrativisation and personification of tautological and contradictory forms. The meaning of these operations will become clear when I give an account of the art projects in Chapter 5. The *outcome* was the development of a series of art projects in which the dogmatism of Weil's discourse on attention is not refuted but rather indirectly corrupted through the deflation of the absoluteness of the concepts of tautology and contradiction by introducing

---

[47] It is important to point out that Weil's defence of tautology and contradiction is not itself tautological or contradictory.

the snag of contingency in my representation of them – contingency was an inevitable result of the process of objectification.

The outcome of the second critical practical analogy might seem to be a negative outcome, but, in fact, when viewed alongside the outcome of the first analogy, it becomes apparent that it fulfils the overall aim of the research, that is, to offer an example of the use of art in the field of metaethics. Rather than trying to refute Weil's dogmatism (a task that belongs to normative ethics, rather than metaethics), I took the problems I perceived in her dogmatic stance as an opportunity to approach the issue from a different point of view: non-declaratively[48], through art making.

2.5 Normative objects and imaginal objects

I qualify the two critical practical analogies with reference to their operational principles. In the first analogy, the operational principle (the regulative use of Weil's assertions on attention) produced *norms*. Consequently, I will call the first analogy *normative* critical practical analogy. In the second analogy, the operational principle (the representation of argument forms) produced *images*. Consequently, I will call the second analogy *imaginal* critical practical analogy. Inquiry through normative objects entailed the scrutiny of the consequences of acting according to the norms I had contrived. Inquiry through imaginal objects entailed contemplating the images I produced in order to bring to light conceptual ramifications relevant to the research.

The difference between normative and imaginal objects informs the difference in exposition of the art projects. For normative objects, the expository pattern is as follows: I explain why I used a certain norm; I give examples of the work I produced following the norm; and I analyse the given examples with a view both to deepening my understanding of Weil's discourse on attention and to assess the critical efficacy of the project. For imaginal objects, I give an account of the argument form I intend to represent; I elucidate how the given artwork constitutes a representation of that argument form; and, lastly, I interpret the representation within the context of Weilian metaphysics and epistemology. This outline of the two modes of exposition shows that, while the analysis of the normative projects required a subjective approach[49], in the imaginal projects, I claimed a more objective position.

As I used two different critical practical analogies to pursue the two subsidiary aims, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are qualified both with regard to the two aims stated in §1.1 and the

---

[48] By 'non-declaratively' I mean by creating non-truth-apt signs. Art works are non-truth-apt signs because they do not state anything.

[49] I have already introduced the issue of subjectivity in the normative projects in §1.42, and, as I pointed out in that section, the issue will be examined in detail in §4.22.

kind of analogy used to attain them: Chapter 4 deals with normative projects and Chapter 5 deals with imaginal projects.

Both normative and imaginal practical analogies avoid collapsing the distinction between ethics and metaethics by conceptualising my art practice not as an expression of my own ethical disposition but as a representation and critique of Weil's discourse on ethics.

Chapter outline: This chapter examines Weil's discourse on attention. I begin with some exegetical considerations regarding Weil's texts; notably, I stress the importance of referring solely to her original French writings, and I justify my decision not to use Weil's published notebooks, on the grounds that they are too ambiguous and fragmentary to allow a reliable interpretation. I also give an overview of the secondary sources I have studied. The study of Weilian attention starts with an analysis of her conceptualisation of the agent in the early essay *Science and Perception in Descartes*, which highlights how Weil uses the notion of attention to account for the possibility of free agency in a material world ruled by necessity. Weil postulates a dualistic relation between agent and world, and this relation constitutes the basis for the normative analogy discussed in Chapter 4. I then consider Weil's theory of imagination and perception, which states that reality is a matter of signification, or *reading*. In order to denote Weil's semiotic view of reality, I designate her discourse on the ethical value of modifying one's habits of reading with the term 'semethics', and I discuss the role of attention in semethics. I also offer a tripartite classification of orders of Weilian attention, based on the degree of mastery of the imagination. Throughout her writings on attention, Weil relies on the notion of all-encompassing necessity—e.g. she argues that attention is a prerequisite for the awareness of necessity—and this, I maintain, entails a problem of incompatibilism. In the concluding part of the chapter, I demonstrate that Weil's views regarding free will, necessity and attention were greatly influenced by the two philosophers Alain and Jules Lagneau; although, unlike them, she greatly emphasises the contradiction between necessity and freedom by making *insoluble contradiction* one of the central tenets of her ethics.

3.1 Outline of the objectives of the preliminary subsidiary aim

This chapter deals with the preliminary subsidiary research aim, namely, the clarification of Weil's notion of attention. This aim was partly *exegetical* (to understand what Weil means by the term 'attention' by studying her texts and secondary sources), but it was also *critical* (to question the congruousness of her assertions). Firstly, in this section, I give an account of the objectives determined by the preliminary aim. Secondly, I outline the taxonomy of literary sources that I have considered (§3.2). And lastly, I turn to my analysis of Weilian attention (§3.3).

The aim of investigating the meaning of Weilian attention determined the following objectives:

(1) A study of Weil's writings and of secondary sources dealing with her ideas in general and specifically with her notion of attention.

(2) An examination of the philosophical heritage which informs her discourse on attention.

Firstly, objective (1) confirmed the centrality of attention in Weil's philosophy, since it evinced both that it was a constant concern throughout her life and that secondary literature frequently invokes 'attention'. It also revealed the tendency in the literature to refer to Weilian attention as if it was a semantically self-evident term, while the meaning of Weilian attention seemed to me anything but self-evident and in need of investigation. Secondly, I investigated Weil's theory of mind (which highlighted the centrality of the notions of imagination and of *attention as faculty* which *wilfully* regulates imagination), and I identified the key concepts of her discourses on attention: namely, a semiotic view of reality, the notions of will and habit, a threefold classification of orders of attention, and a dualistic view of the relation between the individual and the world.

Objective (2) involved evaluating the influence of Weil's philosophy teacher, Alain, and of Alain's own philosophy teacher, Jules Lagneau, on her conceptualisation of attention. This was important for two reasons. Firstly, their theory of perception underpins Weil's discourse on attention. This intellectual debt needs to be made explicit, since Weil took this theory for granted and hardly articulates it in her writings, as her writings are seldom addressed to an academic audience. Secondly, Lagneau and Alain are virtually unknown in English-speaking countries, with the result that Anglophone Weilian scholarship has generally neglected the study of their influence on Weil's thought. I also consider the work of two major philosophers: Descartes and Wittgenstein; as their import to the research was an outcome of the development of my art projects, I will discuss these two philosophers in Chapter 4 (Wittgenstein) and Chapter 5 (Descartes). The notable absence of two philosophers—Plato

and Kant—who one might expect to find in this research needs to be justified. Many authors have investigated Weil's Platonism[50] and a cursory scan of the indexes of Weil's books is sufficient to realise the predominance of references to Plato. Nevertheless, the relevance of Plato's philosophy to Weil's notion of attention is tangential. As regards Kant, in my view, there are profound differences in the epistemological requirements which Weil and Kant see as essential to philosophical enquiry: Kant, it can be argued, always aims at eliminating contradiction, while, as I will show, Weil argues that there are insoluble contradictions and, furthermore, that such contradictions are the mark of the real. Thus, even though Kant is not completely absent from this research, I refer to his philosophy only in order to bring into sharper focus Weil's notion of insoluble contradiction. However, the full force of this difference between Kant and Weil cannot be appreciated until Weil's notion of insoluble contradiction has been clarified; and, since this clarification was achieved through the imaginal projects, the topic will be dealt in §5.32.

3.2 Sub-methodological concerns: Taxonomy of literary sources

Primary sources

Whenever possible, I have used the *Simone Weil Œuvres Complètes* edition which currently consists of ten volumes. However, as the five remaining volumes of the *Œuvres Complètes* await publication, some texts are only available in older anthologies of Weil's writings.

Collections of Weilian texts

When investigating Weil's texts, it is important to acknowledge the fact that most of her writings were published posthumously and were collected in books with a degree of editorial intervention, which, on occasion, has been rather heavy-handed. For instance, Weil's *Waiting for God* contains, amongst other texts, some letters which Weil addressed to Father Perrin, who is also the editor of the book. Father Perrin has captioned the letters as follows: 'Hesitations Concerning Baptism', 'About Her Departure', 'Spiritual Autobiography', 'Her Intellectual Vocation', and 'Last thoughts'. Another example is Weil's *Gravity and Grace* – the most well known of Weil's books – which is a very small selection of extracts from Weil's notebooks, edited by the French Catholic philosopher Gustave Thibon. In *Gravity and Grace*, the extracts are arranged thematically ('Void and Compensation', 'Detachment', 'Imagination Which Fills the Void', and so on), regardless of their original chronological order. Such interventions can have a considerable bearing on one's interpretation of the texts and, therefore, it is advisable to be cautious.

---

[50] See, for instance, Doering & Springsted, 2004.

Heterogeneity of Weilian texts

Weil's published texts are heterogeneous, and they can be classified as follows: notebooks, notes of her philosophy lessons taken by a student, complete essays, more or less developed drafts for essays, letters and poems[51]. The notebooks form a large part of Weil's output, but in the present study, they are never taken into consideration on their own, but only if they repeat arguments found in the essays. This decision is justified by the fact that, in the notebooks, thoughts are juxtaposed in such a way as to invite dubious conceptual associations. To this problem, one should also add the sometimes cryptic character of the entries in the notebooks[52], which is perfectly understandable in light of their private nature, but which may also lead to a lack of interpretative rigour. Nevertheless, given that much secondary literature on Weil has focussed on the notebooks, it is impossible to completely disregard them while, at the same time, engaging with the wider context of Weilian scholarship. The notes of Weil's philosophy lessons, collected in *Leçons de philosophie*, do not present the same difficulties, because their clear delineative character firmly delimits interpretative boundaries; therefore, I use them, along with the essays, which are the primary material for study.

On the use of original French texts

The general tendency in Anglophone Weilian scholarship has been to study English translations of Weil's writings. I decided to always refer to the original French texts for the following reasons.

Firstly, many important texts have not been translated into English (there is an exception: an edition – albeit not complete – of Weil's letters is available in English – *Simone Weil, Seventy Letters*, edited by Richard Rees – while a French edition of the complete correspondence will not be published for several years).

Secondly, since there is often no interlingual one-to-one correspondence between words, translators must make compromises which are determined by their purpose. As my (*very specific*) purpose was the study of Weil's theory of attention, it was important for me to be certain that I noted every occurrence of the term 'attention', and, as the following translation from Weil's *The Need for Roots* demonstrates, available translations could not be relied upon in this respect:

> The mode of political action outlined in these pages requires that every choice made be
> preceded by the simultaneous review of several considerations of a very different nature. This

---

[51] I do not make use of the letters and poems.

[52] In an essay on the task of translating Weil's notebooks, Elisabeth Edl and Wolfgang Matz write that, in them, one finds a 'complex and sometimes elliptic syntax' and 'enigmatic expressions and allusions' (Edl & Matz, 1994, p. 7).

implies a high degree of concentration [*attention* in the French original], more or less of the same standard as that required for creative work in art and science.[53]

Thirdly, the task of translation can reveal semantic facets of a certain term that are unavailable to the native writer. In this case, the translator has an advantage over the author. I will elucidate this with an example. Sometimes, Weil uses the term 'vouloir' equivocally, both in the sense of 'will', a *faculty*, and as the verb 'to want', whose meaning is closer to 'to desire', a *passion*. To the English speaker, the ambiguity is evident because in English 'will' implies an agency, while 'wanting' does not. Consider the following Weil passages:

> We have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will [*volonté*]. The will [*volonté*] only controls a few movements of a few muscles ... I can will [*vouloir*] to put my hand flat on the table. If inner purity, inspiration or truth of thought were necessarily associated with attitudes of this kind, they might be the object of the will [*volonté*].[54]

> The wrong way of seeking. The attention fixed on a problem. Another phenomenon due to horror of the void. We do not want [*vouloir*] to have lost our labour. ... We must not want [*vouloir*] to find[55].

Weil seems to be unaware of this ambiguity, and this is relevant to an implication of the argument that she advances in the first quote, namely, that the *will* is not involved in the highest form of attention. The second quote also raises the following questions: Can one *not* want to find, if one wants to find? (The question could also be couched *definitionally*: is what one wants not, by definition, what one does *not* not-want?) Are wants in our control and, thus, ethically qualifiable? And this has a bearing on Weil's discourse on the ethical value of attention, since an ethically responsible agent is by definition a *wilful* agent. The same ambiguity carries through secondary sources. For instance, when Zippel asks 'But can one want (*vouloir*) to be attentive?'[56], it is not clear whether she is asking 'Can one *will* being attentive?' or 'Can one *want* to be attentive?'. The seeds of this semantic equivoque can also be found in the writings of Alain, Weil's philosophy teacher, who had a great influence on her thought. For instance, in the following claim by Alain, in the context of an argument on volition, he seems to evade the problem by impatiently resorting to circularity: 'To ... do what one wants [*vouloir*] to do, one must do what one wants [*vouloir*] to do.'[57]

Lastly, as I explained in §1.3, English translations of Weil's writings tend to strongly normalise the French infinitive (which Weil often uses and which is normative only in a weak sense), by rendering it with 'we must'.

---

[53] Weil, *NR*, p. 213.

[54] Weil, *GG*, p. 116.

[55] Weil, *GG*, p. 117.

[56] 'Mais peut-on vouloir faire attention?' (Zippel, 1994, p. 14.)

[57] Alain, 1990, p. 240.

Secondary sources

Material that deals with Weil's notion of attention

Little work has been done on Weil's notion of attention[58]. Sometimes, a relatively more sustained and more systematic investigation of Weil's attention is found in books whose primary subject is not attention. This state of affairs indicates the value of a research on this little studied aspect of Weilian thought.

Material on Weil

This includes wide-ranging collections of books and essays, from biographies to material which deals with very specific areas of Weil's philosophy. Often, this material will refer to attention, taking it to be a perfectly self-evident notion which does not need to be explained. This, at once, demonstrates the centrality of Weil's notion of attention and the need for research focused on this subject.

Art theory and artists on Weil

Visual Arts theoretical writings on Weil are almost non-existent[59], thus, inevitably, most of my art theoretical references are indirectly related to Weilian attention via the mediation of my art practice. Accordingly, such references will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.3 Critique of Weil's discourse on attention

3.31 Attention as faculty

Throughout Weil's writings, one finds indications of her Stoic position[60], particularly as regards determinism[61]. For instance, she states that the 'whole universe is nothing but a compact mass of obedience'[62]; and she speaks of the 'necessary connections which

---

[58] The objective of the following books, despite their titles, is not a thorough investigation of Weilian attention: *L'attention au réel* (Chenavier, 2009); *Simone Weil: l'attention et l'action* (Janiaud, 2002); *Simone Weil: An Apprenticeship in Attention* (Von der Rhur, 2006).

[59] The book *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965 – 1975* does not provide such a contextualisation, since it does not refer to Weil's philosophy in any specific way. Jon Thompson's essay, 'New Times, New Thoughts, New Sculpture' (Thompson, 1993), mentions Weil only in a postscript, where he writes that reading Weil's *Gravity and Grace* 'taught me ... that there was more to sculpture than meets the eye – or more importantly, than meets the ground.' (Ibid., p. 34.) Yehuda Safran's essay, 'The Condition of Gravity is Grace' (Safran, 1993), does not mention Weil explicitly, the only Weilian connotation being in the title.

[60] 'The duty of acceptance with regard to the will of God, whatever it be, imposed itself on my mind as the first and most necessary of all, the duty which one cannot abdicate without dishonouring oneself, after having found it in Marcus Aurelius in the form of Stoic *amor fati*.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 40.) For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *WG*, p. 24.

[61] The following argument by Marcus Aurelius presents the typical Stoic determinist view: 'All things come to their fulfilment as the one universal nature directs; for there is no rival nature, whether containing her from without, or itself contained within her, or even existing apart and detached from her.' (Aurelius, 1964, p. 92.)

[62] Weil, *IPC*, p. 161. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *ICG*, p. 193.

constitute the very reality of the world'[63]. The typical charge against determinism is that, if everything is determined, then there is no freedom, and, therefore, there is no moral responsibility[64]. Anyone who holds a determinist belief and who also wishes to defend moral responsibility must find a way of arguing that, in a determinist universe, in a world ruled by necessity, freedom is preserved. The defence that Weil mounts in one of her earliest writings, *Science and Perception in Descartes*[65], involves positing attention as a faculty. What is particular[66] to her defence is the fact that she does not try to demonstrate that attention is compatible with necessity, but rather she claims that the very notion of necessity cannot be formed without attention. Weil puts it clearly in *Lessons of Philosophy*:

> One loses the notion of necessity when one anxiously searches a lost object which one urgently needs; but when one searches methodically, the necessity appears that the thing is not where one has searched, that one must [logical necessity] find it in such and such a place, if it is there.[67]

Even though, in this passage, Weil does not explicitly mention attention, attention is implied in the reference to methodical searching, since, as I will show in the analysis of *Science and Perception in Descartes* that follows, for Weil, attention is the basis for all methodical action. Weil's claim that the notion of necessity depends on attention is also relevant to the classification of different orders of attention which I propose in §3.36.

Weil's diploma dissertation, *Science and Perception in Descartes*, is one of the earliest essays in which she employs the notion of attention, and it is particularly valuable because it gives the most detailed account of Weil's theory of mind that can be found in her writings. This is due to the fact that, in this essay, Weil sets out to argue for the value of Descartes' analytical method by using it – as Weil says, she intends to 'resuscitate' Descartes[68].

I will not give a detailed account of Weil's dissertation, which, in true Cartesian fashion, requires that the reader 'take seriously claims that would be dismissed as incredible later on'[69], but rather I will present an overview of her argument to demonstrate the pivotal role that attention plays within it. In his analysis of the essay, Peter Winch points to the essay's conceptual failings and claims that these are due to the fact that, at this point, Weil had not

---

[63] Weil, *ICG*, p. 188.

[64] For an in depth study of this topic, see: Bobzien, 2001.

[65] Weil, *S*, pp. 9–99.

[66] I will show, however, that, with regard to this, Weil was heavily influenced by Alain's and Lagneau's philosophy.

[67] Weil, *LP*, pp. 96–97.

[68] 'Thus let us imitate Descartes' trick in commenting Descartes. As Descartes, in order to form correct ideas with regard to the world in which we live, imagines another world which would begin with a sort of chaos, so let us imagine another Descartes, a resuscitated Descartes.' (Weil, *S*, p47.)

[69] Sorell, 1987, p. 60.

yet introduced the notion of attention[70]. I will demonstrate that the notion of attention *is* central to Weil's argument, even though it is quantitatively scarcely represented in the text: attention is mentioned only twice[71] in this one hundred-page essay, and, in both cases, it may be easy to miss its importance to the overall argument. Thus it is important to outline the essay's overall argument in order not to miss the significance of attention.

At the beginning of the essay, Weil postulates that the relation of the human subject to the world is dualistic, with *me* on one side and the *world* on the other[72]; this is a recasting of Descartes' separation between *mind* and *matter*[73]. Her goal is to demonstrate the possibility of *true action* (*action véritable*). Her strategy is to prove the possibility of *my getting a hold on the world* (*la prise de moi sur le monde*)[74].

Firstly, Weil asks: What if I was merely sensibility? If I was merely sensibility, I would know nothing; I would only have passive feelings[75] of pleasure and pain, which, moreover, would always be ambiguously mixed, so that, even when I hurt myself, mixed with the pain, I would still taste the pleasure which is the flavour of my existence[76]. I could say nothing of the world; for instance, I could not say 'this thorn hurts my finger' or 'my finger hurts' or 'I hurt'[77], since I would know nothing about my own existence: I would not know what *I* sense because there would be no 'I', there would only be the world, of which, likewise, I would know nothing. Feeling would be for me what pushing could be said to be for a stone which is being pushed[78]. I would have no hold on the world. Feelings would be intermediaries between me and the world, but only in so far as I am passively subjected to the world[79].

Secondly, Weil asks: What if I was pure thought? If I was pure thought I could doubt hyperbolically, that is, I could think that everything I have consciousness of is merely something that I think, an illusion. I would be the only agency that brings everything into

---

[70] 'These are difficulties which are going to plague any conception of thought as pure activity. And in fact Simone Weil was to leave such a conception far behind in later writings in which the concept of attention became central to her account.' (Winch, 1989, p. 11.)

[71] Both instances of the term 'attention' are found in Weil, *S*, p. 75.

[72] Weil, *S*, pp. 73–74.

[73] For a discussion of Weil's Cartesian dualism, see: Narcy, 2003.

[74] Weil, *S*, p. 74. Martin Andic offers an alternative translation of 'la prise de moi sur le monde', as 'my grasp on the world' (see: Andic, 1996a, p. 119).

[75] Weil treats the terms 'feeling' (*sentiment*), 'sensation' (*sensation*), and 'impression' (*impression*) as synonyms.

[76] 'Pleasure and pain are not without mixture of one another ... Even hurting myself, is, first of all, to taste this pleasure which is like the flavour of my own existence. The presence of the world is for me, first of all, this ambiguous feeling.' (Weil, *S*, pp. 49–50.)

[77] 'I cannot say anything about the world. I cannot say: this thorn hurts my finger, nor: My finger hurts, nor: I hurt.' (Ibid., p. 50.)

[78] This analogy is mine, not Weil's.

[79] 'Impressions are intermediaries by which I am subjected to the world' (Ibid., p. 69).

existence, including myself. Everything would need *me* in order to be thought, thus, by this power of thought which is revealed to me by the power to doubt, I know that I am[80]. I make my existence by thinking[81]. But, again, I would have no hold on the world, since the existence of the world would be doubtable.

Weil's bridge between *me* and the *world* is summarised in the following argument:

- – 'All real power is infinite'[82], unless something limits it[83].

- – If there exists only me, there exists only my absolute power of thought (that is, absolute insofar as it is a power to doubt[84]).

- – But with regard to giving myself something to think and doubt I am powerless[85].

- – Therefore, my power is not infinite.

- – Therefore, there exists something limiting my power.

- – Therefore, 'there exists something other than myself'[86].

This argument establishes in a weak sense the possibility of my hold on the world, that is, only on the world *qua* thought, since, for Weil, it demonstrates only the existence of something, but it gives no clue as to what it might be. However, for Weil, progress had been made, since now I can read in each thought a double signification: in so far as a thought depends on me, it is a sign of myself; in so far as it does not depend on me, it is a sign of the existence of something other than myself. Even though this knowledge is not yet a hold on the world (it is only the giving an account of a thought[87]), it shows at least what one could call the *formal* possibility of such a hold because it allows me to interpret each thought as an

---

[80] '[I] can suppose that this table, this paper, this pen, this wellbeing and even myself are nothing but things that I think ... I think them, they need me in order to be thought. ... And, by this power of thought, which reveals itself to me only by the power to doubt, I know that I am.' (Ibid., pp. 54–55.)

[81] 'I know what I do, and what I do is to think and to exist' (Ibid., p. 55).

[82] Ibid., p. 60.

[83] Weil neither sets the limiting condition 'unless something limits it' nor does she spell out the conclusion; as is often the case with Weil, the argument is enthymematic. In other words, Weil takes for granted the premise that a power is infinite if it is not limited by something and she directly proceeds to give an example of such a dynamic, namely, the human power of thought, whose infinity is limited by something extra-subjective, namely, the object of doubt.

[84] 'If there exists nothing but myself, there exists nothing but this absolute power ... I am God, since this sovereign domination which I exercised on myself negatively when I refrained from judging [i.e. when I doubted] I must, in this case [i.e. the case in which only I exist], exercise positively as regards the content of my judgement. That is to say that dreams, desires, emotions, sensations, reasoning, ideas or calculations must be but my volitions.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

[85] 'My sovereignty on myself, absolute as far as I only want to suspend my thought, disappears when it is a matter of giving myself something to think.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

[86] Ibid., p. 60.

[87] 'Knowing, thus far, has been for me nothing but a giving an account of a thought.' (Ibid., p. 69.)

obstacle[88], i.e. not as something to which I am exclusively subjected or as an illusion, but as something upon which I can (formally) act.

In order to hypostatise this formal possibility, Weil introduces the notion of *imagination* as a 'bond of action and reaction between the world and my thought'[89]. Imagination, she continues, can be either *disorderly* or *orderly*. Imagination is *disorderly* when I consider it *as action*, thus representing my thoughts as being the cause of changes outside myself. Since I always represent the causes as having the same nature as the effects, if I represent my hold on the world as a correspondence between my desires and a change in the world, then, I represent the world as being *passionately* disposed towards me and, in turn, as being the cause of my passions. An impassioned world would be absolutely unpredictable, and this would rule out the possibility of any true action[90]. Disorderly imagination is passive and not in my control, so it cannot afford a hold on the world. Imagination is *orderly* when it is considered *as thought*. Orderly imagination is not passive: it determines clear, methodical ideas, which permit rational thinking; the world troubles my thought via sensibility, and, via orderly imagination, I act on the world, I get a hold on the world.

In Weil's argument, there are other steps to the proof of true action, for, thus far, as far as Weil is concerned, only the possibility of *logical* action has been demonstrated. For the purpose of the present study, it is sufficient to stop at this stage and ask: What orders imagination? The answer is: *attention*. As Weil writes:

> When I consider these same things on occasion of which my imagination rules in me, I find an idea of a different kind that does not impose itself on me, that exists exclusively in virtue of an act of my attention, that I cannot change. ... I find that this idea of number, and those that resemble it, replace, so to speak, the changes without rule, to which the others are subjected, by a progress of which they are the principle.[91]

Weil's notion of attention as the ruler of imagination legitimises her subsequent argument on the possibility of true action as a bridging of the divide between *extension-less direction* of mind and *direction-less extension* of matter. Attention is the point of balance of these two poles. Its function cannot be measured quantitatively but only perceived by the indispensable support it offers.

---

[88] Weil uses the term 'obstacle' in a positive sense, as something that I can deal with (even though it might prove difficult), as opposed to something whose hold on me is completely unexplainable: 'the world, without depending on me, is no more an inexplicable hold on me but ... the obstacle.' (Ibid., p. 68.) Or again: 'I must use cunning, I must impede myself with obstacles that lead me where I want to go.' (Ibid., p. 84.)

[89] Ibid., p. 71.

[90] Ibid., pp. 73–74.

[91] Ibid., p. 75.

Weil concludes *Science and Perception in Descartes* with the claim that her analysis demonstrates that idealism and realism are not contradictory views. Merleau-Ponty, in the chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception* titled 'Attention and Judgement'[92] develops a similar argument (as far as I know, Weil and Merleau-Ponty were not aware of each other's works, but both attended Alain's philosophy classes). Merleau-Ponty's argument can be explained as follows: attention would have no bearing on the world:

–   if the world was a purely intellectual creation (intellectualist view): because nothing could be added to this perfect knowledge;

–   if the world was purely physical and the only cause of knowledge (empiricist view): because knowledge would be physically determined, as a stone is physically pushed.

For Merleau-Ponty, both intellectualism and empiricism are forms of realism, that is, both leave consciousness and take one of its results as a given: empiricism takes the world in itself as given, while intellectualism takes the determinate measurable world of science as given.

Analogously, Weil carves a space between, on the one hand, *sensation* (empiricism) and on the other hand, *understanding* (intellectualism), which allows attention to be conceptualised as a faculty, and which supports her claim that her analysis of agency demonstrates that 'there is no longer any contradiction between idealism and realism ... [since] the whole mind is active in the application of thought to an object.'[93]

Furthermore, one can point to an analogy between Merleau-Ponty's description of attention as *empty intention* and, on the other hand, Weil's recurring references to attention *directed towards the void*. For instance, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> They [empiricism and intellectualism] are in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness *in the act of learning*, and that neither attach due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still 'empty' but already determinate intention which is attention itself.[94]

Similarly, Weil writes:

> An orientation of the soul towards something that one does not know, but of which one knows the reality. Thus I had a thought which seemed to me important. I do not have anything to jot it down. I resolve to remember it. Two hours later, I recall that I must remember a thought. I no longer know at all what thought, not even what it is about. I orient my attention towards this thing of which I know that it is, but of which I do not know at all what it is. This empty attention can last several minutes. Then (in the best of cases) the thought comes.[95]

---

[92] Merleau-Ponty, 2000, pp. 26–51.

[93] Weil, *S*, pp. 97–98.

[94] Merleau-Ponty, 2000, p. 28.

[95] Weil, *C 2*, p. 291.

However, there is a major difference between Merleau-Ponty's and Weil's conceptualisations of the subject: while Merleau-Ponty's objection to the dichotomy between intellectualism and empiricism leads his reflection towards a phenomenological dissolution of the divide between subject and object[96], Weil describes the relation between the subject and the world as a kind of *agonistic* dualism. In other words, for Weil, the subject is primarily an *agent*, or, to say it differently, for Weil, what defines a subject is his or her capacity for true action. As I will show in §4.22 (see also §3.362), Weil's conceptualisation of the *subject as agent* bears on her argument regarding attention as a practice of detachment, because it is by contemplating attentively his or her *actions*, and by realising that these actions are completely dependent on necessity, that the subject makes progress towards detachment.

3.32 Semethics

I have coined the term 'semethics' to denote Weil's discourse on the moral value of exercising one's attention in what she calls 'perceptual apprenticeship'. Semethics, a conflation of 'semiotics' and 'ethics', expresses the fact that, for Weil, this apprenticeship modifies one's interpretative *habit* (hence the reference to ethics) and that this habit modification amounts to a change of reality, since, for her, reality is always a process of *interpretation* (hence the reference to semiotics)[97]. I define semethics as *Weil's discourse on the ethical value of modifying one's habit of reading reality, where reality is conceptualised as a semiotic tissue.*[98] In this research, the notion of semethics is employed exegetically to highlight a strand of her ethical argument.

When Weil speaks of *reality*, or *the real*, in this context, the transcendence of the real is not at issue, since she assumes the reality of the material world to be a common sense truism. Weil's semethical discourse is predicated on the following premises: reality is a matter of signification, that is, of signs; and by a perceptual apprenticeship one can modify one's perceptual habits, i.e. one's habit of interpretation of reality ('ethics' derives from the Greek *ethos*, meaning habit, disposition).

In §3.33 and §3.34, I will consider these two premises, elucidate Weil's assertion that the modification of one's reading habit is an ethical pursuit and deal with the role of attention in

---

[96] 'It is the mountain itself that, from over there, makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that the painter interrogates by looking' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 21).

[97] The term 'semethics' has also been used by Michael Eskin in his *Ethics and Dialogue in the works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shatam and Celan*, but to convey a different meaning, namely, 'the semiotic character of the interhuman' and 'Levinas' semiotic conception of my relation to the other' (Eskin, 2000, p. 39), while I refer to Weil's ontological (for Weil what is at issue is *reality*) notion of reading habit.

[98] A theoretical account of semethics and its relation to attention is given in sections §3.32–3.34. The subject is further investigated in §4.33.

Weilian semethics. But first, I shall address a question regarding the usefulness of framing a study of Weil's discourse on attention by reference to the concept of semethics. As I have argued in §3.31, imagination is the bridge that Weil postulates between *me* and the *world*. Throughout Weil's writings, imagination is a passive cause of perceptions, capable of being moulded either in disorderly or orderly fashion by, respectively, the world or the attention-guided mind. In what follows, I will show that, for Weil, *reading* – a late notion of Weil's – is essentially a modification of the imagination. By introducing the notion of semethics, one can thus understand Weilian attention in relation to her beliefs, which underlie the whole of her philosophy, regarding the nature of perception. The fact that, in later years, there is a change in Weil's discourse on attention, with Weil positing the existence of a transcendent object of attention, is not incompatible with the role of attention as the faculty that orders imagination[99], and this change becomes more discernible against the stable background of Weil's conceptualisation of imagination.

3.33 Reality as semiotic tissue and reading

In Weil's late writings, the early argument of *Science and Perception in Descartes* that, to comprehend the relation between mind and matter, both idealism and realism need to be acknowledged at one and the same time (see §3.31), crystallises in the notion of *reading* (*lecture*). For Weil, perceiving is analogous to reading. In order to illustrate the concept of reading, Weil resorts to familiar examples: the way a child learns to read the letters of the alphabet[100]; the different interpretations of the same text by someone who knows the language in which the text is written and by someone who does not[101]; or Descartes' image of the process by which a blind person learns to perceive by using a cane[102], to which I shall

---

[99] In his analysis of Weil's notion of reading, Robert Chenavier speaks of levels of reading which coexist: 'We do not see, in Simone Weil, sharp breaks between early and late writings ... Most of the philosophical subjects on which she wrote in the forties are a central preoccupation since the twenties: the problems of necessity, time, attention, of purposiveness without purpose ... The interpretative key for Simone Weil's thought resides in ... the 'distinction of levels'. ... To read does not mean to replace a text with another, a reality with another, abandoning the lower levels at the advantage of the higher level. The world is not a rebus with a translation 'at the correct level' to be taken as reality.' (Chenavier, 2001, pp. 32–34.)

[100] 'As a child learns the use of the senses, the sensory knowledge, the perception of things which surround him, as later he acquires the analogous mechanism of transference which is linked with reading, or to the new sensibility which accompanies the handling of tools, so the love of God involves an apprenticeship. ... A child knows at first that each letter corresponds to a sound. Later, by glancing at a page, the sound of a word comes directly to his mind through the eyes.' (Weil, *ICG*, p. 200.)

[101] Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 74.

[102] 'The blind man's cane, an example found by Descartes, gives an image analogous to that of reading. Anybody can convince themselves that in handling a penholder it is as if touch were transported at the tip of the pen. If the pen bumps into some unevenness on the paper, this bumping is given immediately, and the sensations of the fingers, of the hand, through which we read, do not even appear. Nevertheless this bumping of the pen is only something that we read. The sky, the sea, the stars, human beings, everything which surrounds us is likewise something that we read. That which

return in §4.33. Given that, for Weil, all perception involves imagination[103], it follows that reading involves imagination[104]: reality is a matter of signification, not sensations, and signification is read *through* sensations[105]; reality is a semiotic tissue[106].

---

one calls a corrected sensory illusion is a modified reading.' (Ibid., p. 7.) 'The perception of objects at the tip of a cane or an instrument is different from touch proper. This other sense is formed by a shift of attention through an apprenticeship in which the whole soul takes part.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 337.)

[103] 'In normal perception there is already geometry. Thus it is not surprising that there is imagination in geometry since there is already imagination in perception.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 50.) One could interpret this passage in Kantian terms as a perception, or cognition, being a synthesis of imagination and understanding: 'Synthesis ... is the mere effect of the imagination of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all' (Kant, 1999, p. 211). But, while it is indubitable that a certain degree of Kantianism permeates Weil's philosophy in general, this seems more a reflex of the Neo-Kantianism of her philosophy teachers, Le Senne and Alain, since nowhere does Weil deal with Kant philosophy in any detail. As I will argue in §5.32, there are profound differences between Weil's and Kant's philosophy. For the neo-Kantianism of Le Senne and Alain, see: Kühn, 2003.

[104] 'If in the evening, on an isolated road, I believe that I see in place of a tree a man lying in ambush, a threatening human presence imposes itself on me, and ... it makes me tremble even before knowing what it is about; I get closer, and suddenly everything is different, I tremble no more, I read a tree and not a man. There is not an appearance and an interpretation; a human presence had penetrated through my eyes right into my soul, and now, suddenly, the presence of a tree. ... When Esther advances towards Assuerus she does not advance towards a man whom she knows can kill her; she advances towards majesty itself, terror itself, which reaches her soul through sight, and this is why the effort of walking makes her faint. Moreover, she says it: what she looks at fearfully is not the forehead of Assuerus, but the majesty which is impressed upon it and which she reads. Usually, in similar cases one talks about an effect of the imagination; but perhaps it is better to use the term "reading".' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 76.)

[105] 'Two women receive a letter each which gives notice of the death of their sons; the first woman, after a glance at the page, faints ... The second woman remains the same, her gaze, her attitude, do not change; she cannot read. *It is not sensation but the meaning which took hold of the first, reaching the mind, immediately, brutally, without her participation, as sensations take hold of us*. It is as if pain resided in the letter, and from the letter it jumped on the face of the one who reads. With regard to the sensations themselves, as the colour of the paper, of the ink, they do not even appear. What is given to sight is pain.' (Ibid., p. 74; my italics.) 'At each moment of our lives we are seized as if from the outside by the significations which we ourselves *read* in appearances. Thus one can discuss endlessly on the reality of the external world. Since what we call 'world' is meanings which we read; thus that is not real. But that takes hold of us as if from the outside; thus that is real.' (Ibid., pp. 74–75; my italics.) 'In a sense only sensations are given to us; in a sense we cannot but think sensations. But in a sense we can never think sensations. We only think something through them. We *read* through them.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411; my italics.) As it is evident from the following passage, Weil's notion of reading, and her view that sensations are merely intermediaries by means of which one apprehends an object, are indebted to Alain's philosophy: 'Nowadays, it is commonly admitted, even by those who do not know the proof very well, that the sun is very far from us, much farther than the moon, even though their apparent size is more or less the same, as one sees during eclipses. Thus one cannot maintain that the object that we call 'sun', the true sun, is this blinding ball; it would be like saying that the true sun is the pain in our eye when we look at it carelessly. We must then find out how we have come to posit this true sun that nobody can see or imagine, no more than I can see a cube that I nevertheless know to be a cube. *I see signs of it, as I see signs of the true sun ... The object is thought, not felt*.' (Alain, 1990, pp. 59–60, my italics.)

[106] 'Our whole life is made of the same web of significations which impose themselves successively' (Weil, *OC IV, 1* p. 78). As Vladimir Volkoff writes, according to Weil, 'we can represent, … we can have a *metaxu*, an "in-between", something that gives the idea of something else' (Volkoff, 1996, pp. xiv–xv).

3.34 The role of attention in semethics

Weil argues that the power one has over how one perceives, or reads, reality is extremely limited; at any one moment in time, one has no power whatsoever as regards what reality is for them, as it is not given to them to stand back and interpret appearances, since appearance and interpretation are always conflated[107]. For Weil, perceptions seize us, jump up at us, they are triggered, without our participation, immediately and brutally[108], that is, they are *intuitive*[109]. If, Weil claims, in a certain situation, we may necessarily perceive a certain human being as somebody we ought not to kill, in another situation we may as necessarily perceive the very same human being as somebody we ought to kill[110]. Weil redresses this view of perception in which, from instant to instant, one is helplessly delivered to perceptions by arguing that one does have a certain degree of power over how one reads reality: through a prolonged and *attentive* apprenticeship, one can indirectly[111] change one's perceptions by modifying one's reading habits. Weil writes:

> Indirectly and in time, the will, and above all attention, and above all attention in the form of prayer, lead to a modification in reading. What is then changed is the imagination. [112]
>
> One does not choose sensations, but, to a large extent, one chooses that which one feels through them; not in a moment, but through an apprenticeship. [113]
>
> The perception of objects at the end of a cane or of an instrument is something different from touch proper. This other sense is formed by a shift of attention in virtue of an apprenticeship in which the whole soul and the body partake. [114]

Weil clearly believes that the concept of reading belongs to ethics, since, as she writes, it is related to the notion of good:

---

[107] 'There is not an appearance and an interpretation; a human presence had penetrated through my eyes right into my soul, and now, suddenly, the presence of a tree.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 76.) 'Thus, space, relief, forms: they are given to us by our imagination. Of course, in this case, 'imagination' is not at all synonymous with fantasy or arbitrariness: when we see two points, we are not free to see something other than a straight line.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 49.)

[108] Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 74–77.

[109] That is to say, immediate or non-discursive. Mautner, 2000, p. 281.

[110] Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 77.

[111] Already in *Science and Perception in Descartes*, Weil argues for the possibility of acting on the world *only indirectly* (see §3.31), although, there, the focus is on effective (true) action and not on perception.

[112] Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411. In her book *The Sovereignty of Good*, Iris Murdoch develops an argument, which draws on Weil's theory of attention, on the *slight but real* power to change our reading of the world through attention. Murdoch writes: 'But if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. ...We are not free in the sense of being able suddenly to alter ourselves since we cannot suddenly alter what we can see and ergo what we desire and are compelled by. In a way, explicit choice seems now less important: less decisive (since much of the 'decision' lies elsewhere) and less obviously something to be 'cultivated'. If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at.' (Murdoch, 1971, pp. 36–38.)

[113] Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 410.

[114] Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 337.

> A man who is tempted to take a deposit will not refrain from doing so simply because he will have read the *Critique of Practical Reason*; he will refrain, perhaps even, it will seem to him, despite of himself, if the appearance itself of the deposit seems to him to shout that it must be returned. Everybody has experienced similar states, when it seems that one would want to act wickedly but that one cannot. At other times, one would want to act in a good way but one cannot. ... *The problem of value posed around this notion of reading is related to truth, beauty and goodness, without it being possible to separate them.*[115]

Several commentators have remarked that, for Weil, the notions of attention and reading are closely associated with each other[116]. The tendency has been to ascribe to the concept of reading an ethical value in itself. For instance, Julien Molard writes: 'Simone Weil often uses a word which evokes attention. It is the word 'reading'. 'Reading' must be interpreted as reading the other, understanding him.'[117] However, Weil does not attribute an ethical value to the notion of reading, since, for her, perception is *always* a matter of reading, of interpretation; as far as Weil is concerned, this is simply how things are. What *does* have an ethical value, for her, is *the positing of the problem of the value of reading*[118], or, with the terminology I propose, semethics. In other words, Weil uses the notion of reading to articulate a *metaethical* discourse on the moral progress of the subject. Without this distinction between metaethical and the ethical concerns, Weil's philosophy will mistakenly seem to be exclusively one of answers, when, in fact, with respect to the notion of reading, the questioning mode gives a more accurate representation of her view. As she writes:

> The texts of which appearances are the characters seize my soul, they abandon it, they are replaced by others. Are some more valuable than others? Are some more true than others? Where to find a norm?[119]

It may be argued that one could as easily find passages where Weil is very dogmatic with regard to how people could, and should, be *trained* to read more ethically[120]. This is true, but, even in these cases, the distinction between semethics as a type of discourse and Weil's own instantiation of the semethical discourse holds. Furthermore, given that, for Weil, all

---

[115] Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 79; my italics.

[116] 'Simone Weil defines attention not through the juxtaposition of perception and reflexivity, but in this form of perfect synthesis which leads to the point where it becomes impossible to distinguish them. Henceforth one can clearly understand Simone Weil's interest in reading insofar as it is exemplary of such a synthesis. One does not use attention for reading, but one must become attention [*sic*] to attain a reading that, if it is authentic, will not leave us indifferent.' (Lecerf, 2006, p. 64.) Massimo Marianelli argues that, for Weil, what is needed is 'directing attention beyond the appearance of things and events, in order to predispose it to orient itself [i.e. attention] in the infinity of symbols that the cosmos offers to *reading*.' (Marianelli, 2004, p. 92.)

[117] Molard, 2008, p. 88. Similarly Vivienne Blackburn writes: 'Waiting on God meant waiting on others, waiting until their needs became clearly evident in one's mind, and responding without thought for oneself". She [Weil] called this 'reading' other people.' (Blackburn, 2007, p. 265.)

[118] See Weil's quote immediately above: 'The problem of value posed around this notion of reading is related to truth, beauty and goodness, without it being possible to separate them.'

[119] Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 78.

[120] For instance in Weil's essay 'Le christianisme et la vie des champs' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 263–271).

particular readings are wholly beyond one's control, and given that it is a requirement of ethical acts that they be in one's control, that is, free[121], it follows that particular readings must be *ethically neutral*. That is not to say that Weil believes human beings to be *a-ethical*; as Dwight Harwell suggests, for Weil, attention opens onto an ethical perspective, that is, for her, the ethical nature of human beings is a given on which her discourse on attention is premised rather than a claim she argues for[122]. Yet, given that attention plays such a key role in Weil's theory of reading, the ethical neutrality of reading might seem to hamper the ethical qualification of attention. However, as it will become clear in §4.22, the ethical neutrality of reading finds its *ethical sense* in the context of Weil's discourse on attention as a practice of detachment and on a notion of selflessness.

3.35 Free compulsion

Weil's views that perception depends on habit and that habit is coercive are not novel: they can be found, for instance, in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*[123] or in Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*[124]. Neither is her argument that, through habit, signs almost replace the things they denote (by a process of what the physicist Jean-Marc Lévy-Leblond has called the 'ontologisation of the sign'[125]) her own innovation. What is original to Weil's characterization of habit is that Weil greatly emphasises the coerciveness of habit[126] so far as to make it counterintuitive. I will illustrate this with an example. A skilled pianist is usually thought of as someone who *can* act in very specific ways, that is, the pianist's skill is

---

[121] If a tiger was to kill a person, most people would not qualify the tiger's action as ethically bad, since most people would believe that the tiger had no free choice, but rather acted as its nature *dictated*.

[122] 'The whole act of attention is expressed in expectant waiting and in obedience to the irresistible pressure of grace. Herein true action is seen to be the measure of true attention. ... Even the inclination itself can be purged of the "I", the self, when action is focussed attentively on the obligation.' (Harwell, 1959, pp. 119–121.)

[123] For instance, at the beginning of Proust's *The Way by Swann's*, the narrating character describes the process of becoming accustomed to an unfamiliar bedroom as follows: 'where my mind, struggling for hours to dislodge itself, to stretch upwards so as to take the exact shape of the room and succeeding in filling its gigantic funnel to the very top, had suffered many hard nights, while I lay at full length in my bed, my eyes lifted, my ears anxious, my nostrils restive, my heart pounding, until habit had changed the colour of the curtains, silenced the clock, taught pity to the cruel oblique mirror, concealed, if not driven out completely, the smell of the vetiver and appreciably diminished the apparent height of the ceiling.' (Proust, 2002, p. 12.) Note that what is described here is a complete change of perception. The coercive character of habit is expressed by the grammatical structure: habit is the subject; it is not merely the case that the character does not notice the now familiar objects, but rather, habit *has changed* colours, smell, sizes, etc.

[124] 'Habit transforms voluntary movements into instinctive movements. ... In this way organs become so accustomed to movements requiring force or serious effort that they become incapable of more subtle movements for a long time afterwards.' (Ravaisson, 2008, p. 59.)

[125] Lévy-Leblond, 2006, p. 67.

[126] See footnote 105: 'At each moment of our lives we are seized as if from the outside by the significations which we ourselves read in appearances'. The verb 'to seize' renders the idea of coerciveness.

thought of as a *freedom*, while, seen through Weil's conceptualisation of habit, the pianist's skill is a *non-freedom* that can be expressed double-negatively: the skilled pianist *cannot not* play skilfully.

Secondly, she shrinks free, and therefore ethical, agency to almost nothing, that is, to the faculty of attention, more specifically, as I will argue in §3.362 and §3.363, to the faculty of intellectual attention and of attention as *amor fati*. For Weil, as the following passage shows, the rest of reality is under the dominion of necessity, human freedom being, with a Stoic simile, analogous to the freedom of a dog tied to a moving cart that can either want to follow the cart or be pulled unwillingly[127]:

> The whole universe is nothing but a compact mass of obedience. This compact mass is scattered with luminous points. Each of these points is the supernatural part of the soul of a reasonable creature who loves God and who consents to obey. The rest of the soul is encased in the compact mass.[128]

The image of 'luminous points' on the 'compact mass of obedience' suggests a state of affairs that does not change anything material, as, for instance, the falling of a stone, which remains materially the same falling regardless of whether it happens in light or in darkness; and, in fact, Weil continues by claiming that those who do not consent to obey are, as those who consent, 'obedience through and through, but merely in the manner of a stone that falls'[129].

However, it would be misleading to say that Weil presents a monolithic view of the will. In fact, her arguments on the will are very context-sensitive: in her more religious writings, she tends to claim that the only freedom is consent to non-freedom, to necessity; while, in texts which are more concerned with political and social issues, she often claims that the exercise of attention does have a bearing on the material world. The latter argument has been perceptively analysed by Iris Murdoch, who maintains that attention gives 'some continual slight control over the direction and focus of ... [our] vision'[130], and that, in time, we can change the way we see the world, but that, in contrast with the claims of existentialist philosophers, there is no 'empty choosing will'[131].

---

[127] The cart and dog simile is one the most famous and most commented similes in Hellenistic scholarship. See, for instance: Bobzien, 2001, p. 351; Gould, 1970, p. 150; Long & Sedley, 1987, p. 386; Von Arnim, 2006, p. 845.

[128] Weil, *IPC*, p. 161. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *ICG*, p. 193.

[129] Weil, *IPC*, p. 162. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *ICG*, p. 193.

[130] Murdoch, 1971, p. 39.

[131] Murdoch, 1971, p. 34. See also: Murdoch, 1971 p. 41, pp. 54–55; Murdoch, 2003, pp. 246–247; Bok, 2005, pp. 71–78; and footnote 112.

But are these the only possible conceptualisations of free will: either obedience to necessity, slight control or existentialist leap? Douglas Hofstadter proposes an alternative absurdist argument to illustrate what he takes to be the futility of posing the problem:

> I am pleased to have a will, or at least I'm pleased to have one when it is not too terribly frustrated by the hedge maze I am constrained by, but I don't know what it would feel like if my will were *free*. What on earth would that mean? That I didn't follow my will sometimes? Well, why would I do that? I order to frustrate myself? I guess that if I wanted to frustrate myself, I might make such a choice – but then it would be because I *wanted* to frustrate myself, and because my meta-level desire was stronger than my plain-old desire.[132]

Using a different strategy, Raymond Smullyan also collapses the issue by challenging the notion of necessity as domineering force, thus pre-empting the problem of free will:

> Don't you see that the so called "laws of nature" are nothing more than a description of how in fact you and other beings *do* act. They are merely a description of how you act, not a prescription of how you should act, not a power or force which compels or determines your acts.[133]

I find these two arguments *both true and unsatisfactory*, to use a Barthes-inspired expression[134], because I do not seem to be able to imagine the possibility of ethical agency without freedom. But I find Weil's position no more comprehensible, given that she considers contradiction as constitutive of any honest discourse on ethics, which leads to oxymoronic notions of *free compulsion* or *compulsive freedom*.

It is not the purpose of this research to propose a solution to this problem but rather to offer a perspective that makes Weil's view more comprehensible, by showing that the expressions *free compulsion* and *compulsive freedom* are not equivalent. One of Weil's examples of reading considers two women who each receive a letter with news of their son's death; one woman can read: she faints; the other cannot read: she remains indifferent. I ask: Could the letter have meant, for the literate woman, anything other than news of her son's death? If the answer is 'No', as I believe, then, *in a sense*, she was *compelled* to read as she did, but compelled in a very particular sense, which does not entail forceful coercion: hers was rather a *free* compulsion, i.e. the consequence of *an unshakable certainty that to do otherwise would change nothing* – a 'wilful' mistranslation of the letter would not have changed its meaning[135]. The kind of necessity at issue here is analogous to the one that necessitates the

---

[132] Hofstadter, 2007, p. 340.

[133] Smullyan, 1977, p. 106.

[134] Barthes' expression is 'neither untrue nor satisfactory' (Barthes, 1985, p. 157).

[135] Considering Weil's idea of state justice, Ronald Collins and Finn Nielsen argue that, for Weil, 'citizens need to comprehend in a full and fair sense *why* they must obey laws and not just that they must do so. Without this, one might do the 'right' thing for the wrong reasons ... More than results count here.' (Collins & Nielsen, 1996, p. 244.) That is to say that, for Weil, it is exclusively rational comprehension that can lead to *free* compulsion (as distinct from the mechanistic compulsion of the compact mass which obeys material necessity).

truth of the conclusion of a valid argument whose premises are true, i.e. logical necessity[136]. Thus, while the expression *compulsive freedom* is paradoxical, there is a way of conceptualising *free compulsion* in a non-contradictory manner. Of course, this way of looking at the problem is not impervious to the objection that it is incompatible with the sort of hard determinist[137] views which Weil sometimes proposes[138]. I will not counteract this objection by appealing to Weilian supernaturalism, as some scholars have done in the context of a defence of compatibilism[139], for this would short-circuit enquiry. I return to these issues in §5.32.

3.36 The three orders of Weilian attention

Weil uses the term 'attention' to denote three very distinct modalities of human agency. Since Weil never wrote *systematically*[140] about attention, the following is a reconstruction based on several of Weil's texts and corroborated by secondary sources. This reconstruction is justified by the fact that there is a great consistency in Weil's conceptualisation of attention, so that one finds the same ideas in early essays such as *De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée* (1929) as well as in later writings such as *Réflexion sur le bon usage des études scolaires en vue de l'amour de Dieu* (1942).

3.361 Spontaneous attention

For Weil, spontaneous attention is not in one's control; one is prey to the emotions, immobilised and rigid. One cannot think anything but what the emotions dictate. Fear,

---

[136] This is the standard definition of a valid argument in propositional logic: 'An argument is valid if the truth of the premises necessitates the truth of the conclusion' (Stebbing, 1952, p. 6).

[137] Ultimately, I think that the whole of Weil's argument on the insoluble contradiction between the possibility and the impossibility of good rests on a hard determinist view, since Weil's claim that good is impossible is based on her positing a 'tight' and 'hard' necessity, a necessity with no 'holes' or 'leeway' for free action.

[138] This kind of objection typically involves: firstly, referring to a prior state of events *S* on which the supposedly free act *F* depends and which, according to the determinist view, could not have not happened; and, secondly, pointing out that, if *S* is determined, then an uninterrupted chain of determined events links *S* to *F*, so that *F* cannot be free. In the present example, the objection could, for instance, take the following form: Was not the fact that the literate woman was literate *determined*?

[139] For instance, Eric Springsted writes: 'For her [Weil], what supernatural means, I suggest, is seen in our reading possibility in impossibility ... What her supernaturalism amounts to is a bare, indefinable hope, a faith in a goodness that transcends the human attempt to imagine – and limit – goodness and despair.' (Springsted, 1996b, p. 188.)

[140] In the essay *Quelques réflexions autour de la notion de valeur*, Weil writes disapprovingly of the kind of philosopher who builds systems: 'True philosophy does not construct anything; its object is a given, that is, our thoughts; philosophy only makes an inventory of them; if while making the inventory it finds some contradictions, it is not up to philosophy to suppress them, lying in so doing. Those philosophers who try to construct systems to eliminate these contradictions make the opinion that philosophy is conjectural appear justified; because such systems can be endlessly varied, and there is no reason to choose one over another.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 59–60.) In this passage, Weil seems to refer to some kind of (true) *philosophia perennis* which acknowledges that there are insoluble contradictions.

horror, etc. engender spontaneous attention.[141] Weil gives the example of the inept apprentice who is rigidly and uncontrollably attentive to that which he or she intends to avoid, as the inept cyclist who focuses so much on the obstacle to be avoided as to end up going towards it. The cause of this phenomenon is an illusory expansion of the 'I' toward what is not in one's power.[142] Spontaneous attention is a *negative* attention[143]; and scholarship which deals with Weil's notion of attention has disregarded it, perhaps considering it synonymous with *distraction*. But, firstly, 'distraction' does not convey the obsessive and forceful quality which Weil ascribes to spontaneous attention[144]; and, secondly, by referring to Weil's argument for the possibility of true action, which I examined in §3.31, one can see how spontaneous attention is an expression of disorderly imagination, that is of imagination prior to the attentive act, so that negative attention is not the contrary of attention, i.e. distraction, but the *incapability* of being attentive[145]. This interpretation has the advantage of inscribing Weil's notion of spontaneous attention within the wider context of her ethical concern with true action and also of showing that the distinction between spontaneous and voluntary attention rests on Weil's conceptualisation of imagination. Furthermore, this interpretation makes sense of Weil's use of the expression 'spontaneous', which would otherwise have to be considered as a rather fanciful substitution of 'spontaneous attention' for the more obvious 'distraction'.

3.362 Voluntary attention

Voluntary attention is in one's control; it is the basis of all clear ideas, of all calm, methodical action[146]. One is in charge of one's intellect and, accordingly, Weil sometimes refers to voluntary attention as 'intellectual attention', arguing that, in a sense, it gives rise to reality, seen as a web of necessary connections. Without this kind of attention, there would

---

[141] 'Emotions always cause spontaneous attention (fear, horror, etc...). Psychological signs: one cannot think about anything else. Physiological signs: immobility, rigidity, interrupted respiration.' (Weil, *LP*, pp. 264–265.)

[142] 'There are two ways of paying attention, which correspond one to dexterity and the other to clumsiness. In reality, a clumsy person does not know how to pay attention. He is fascinated by the obstacle as the bird is fascinated by the snake. When our body is not developed, we pay attention to the actions which we must avoid. The cyclist apprentice, for instance, pays attention to the blunders he can make and he makes them. In the novice, good will becomes rigidity.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.) 'A cyclist apprentice fears an obstacle; he can only think about how to avoid it, but he thinks so much that his hands lead the handlebars exactly in the direction of the obstacle. The essential character of this phenomenon is that the cyclist transfers to the object itself the resistance which his own body opposes to his desire.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 33.)

[143] 'The condition of the apprentice is in reality a condition in which one is aware but one cannot pay attention. The apprentice's attention is always negative.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.)

[144] See footnote 142: 'He is fascinated by the obstacle as the bird is fascinated by the snake.'

[145] See footnote 143.

[146] The role of attention in methodical, true action has been analysed in detail in §3.31.

be no thinkable reality, i.e. no reality at all[147]. Weil calls this non-reality state 'the kingdom of Proteus', because, in such a state, everything would be protean discontinuity ungraspable by thought[148]. As with spontaneous attention, voluntary attention has a negative element: one *waits*, merely pushing away all that is insufficient to the attainment of one's object[149]; but, unlike spontaneous attention, there is no rigidity: one waits alertly for the right choice to present itself[150]. Voluntary attention is indispensable in the apprenticeship of detachment from the 'I', because it is by paying attention to the fact that necessity underlies all (apparently freely willed and non-necessary) action that the subject gradually becomes detached from his or her imaginary self. For Weil, one fundamental indication of the mark of necessity on action is that there is always a gap between the object of desire, or the object of imagination, and the actions which one must perform to attain this object. As Weil writes:

> No relationship between the movements which are naturally joint to the desire and the imagining of this or that material change and the efficient movements to accomplish this movement.[151]

I will return to Weil's view of the subject when I discuss the sub-methodological concerns entailed by normative art projects, in §4.22.

---

[147] 'Attentive intelligence alone has the power of carrying out the connections, and as soon as that attention relaxes, the connections dissolve. ... The necessary connections which constitute the very reality of the world have no reality in themselves except as the object of intellectual attention in action.' (Weil, *ICG*, p. 188.)

[148] 'This example makes it possible for us to conceive what they can be for me, these changes of a world of which I receive an impression only through the intermediary of imagination. No matter how little Proteus changes, all traces of the immediately preceding state are abolished straightway' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 122). 'It is the kingdom of Proteus, that is to say, of the thing which transforms itself by an internal power and without continuity.' (Ibid., p. 127.) 'There is a part of imagination in all perception' (Ibid., p. 128). 'Imagination is necessarily conserved in all perception. Nevertheless ... one can distinguish degrees of perception according to whether imagination has been more or less mastered; and one can form a series, in which the first term will be pure imagination, or dream; the second term, orderly imagination, which constitutes what one can call 'common perception'; the third term is perfect perception, or completely mastered imagination.' (Ibid., p. 129.) See also: Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.

[149] 'In every school exercise there is a specific way of desirously waiting upon truth without allowing ourselves to search for it. A way of paying attention to the data of a problem of geometry without searching for the solution, to the words of a Latin or Greek text without searching for the meaning, of waiting, when one is writing, for the right word to come of itself at the end of the pen, while rejecting inadequate words.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 94.) For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *WG*, p. 63. 'Attention is an effort, the greatest of all efforts perhaps, but it is a negative effort.' (Weil, *WG*, p. 61.)

[150] 'One can analyse the attention focussed on a problem of geometry or on an essay. Psychological signs: calm. ... In voluntary attention one prevents oneself from becoming rigid, one continuously prevents voluntary attention becoming spontaneous attention.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 265.) 'Most often attention is confused with a kind of muscular effort. If one says to one's pupils: "Now you are going to pay attention", one sees them frowning, holding their breath, contracting their muscles. If after two minutes they are asked what they have been paying attention to, they cannot reply. They have been paying attention to nothing. They have not been paying attention. They have been contracting their muscles.' (Weil, *WG*, p. 60, with some slight changes.)

[151] Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 237.

Voluntary attention is also referred to by Weil as discursive, or rational, attention and, as Joël Janiaud maintains, Weil distinguishes this from *intuitive* attention[152] which is superior to the former and is 'a sort of direct perception of the supernatural'[153]. Janiaud also maintains that, in her earlier writings, Weil postulates an active power of the mind in order to prove the possibility of an act of attention, while, in the late writings, the role of the mind is problematised [154]. But, as Robert Chenavier has argued, intuitive attention does not replace or inhibit discursive attention, but rather there are different non-incompatible, superimposed readings, and 'these articulated and "superimposed readings" little by little form the network of Weil's ontology ... the crossing of a threshold, several times, without changing direction, each level finding its sense and value in a change of the order of attention.'[155] As I will contend in §3.37, the qualification 'intuitive' is problematic; however, accepting this qualification for the time being, for Weil, discursive and intuitive attention are not merely compatible, but rather intuitive attention *depends* on discursive attention: discursive attention makes necessity/reality known and intuitive attention makes it an object of love[156].

3.363 The most elevated attention or *amor fati*

In the most elevated attention, the 'I' has been eliminated. One consents to and loves everything that happens. This is essentially the attitude that the Stoics called *amor fati*[157].

---

[152] However, the distinction between discursive and intuitive attention is not prominent in her writings. Such distinction is rather a plausible interpretation based on the Platonic distinction between 'intuitive and dialectic *noesis* ... [and] discursive and hypothetical *dianoia*' (Janiaud, 2002, p. 69).

[153] 'For her [Weil], superior attention is not discursive or rational, but intuitive: it is like a direct perception of the supernatural.' (Ibid., p. 69.) As Janiaud points out, Weil deals with this in 'Condition première d'un travail non servile', in Weil, *CO*, pp. 418–434, especially pp. 425–426 and p. 431.

[154] 'Empiricist attention would be too indifferent to its object, intellectualist attention too learned ... At first, Simone Weil is close to intellectualism due to her debt towards Descartes and Alain: geometry is present in all perception, and the slumber of conscience is only a lack of attention. But the power that, in her first writings, she accords to the human mind, already tempered by the experience of matter in work, is markedly questioned thereafter. Attention can open us to a truly surprising reality that the mind cannot master.' (Janiaud, 2002, p. 123.)

[155] Chenavier, 2001, p. 35.

[156] 'We, by intellectual attention, do not indeed create, we produce no object, yet in our sphere we do in a certain way give birth to reality. This intellectual attention is at the intersection of the natural and the supernatural part of the soul. Having conditional necessity as object, this attention produces only a half-reality. We confer upon objects and upon persons around us all the fullness of reality when to this intellectual attention we add that attention of still higher degree which is acceptance, consent, love.' (Weil, *ICG*, p. 188.) See also footnote 148. Elizabeth Hardwick points out that, for Weil, the awareness of the equity of necessity is a condition of justice and love (Hardwick, 1975, p. 89).

[157] The correspondence between attention and *amor fati* is implicit in most of Weil's writing. There is, however, a passage in which these two notions are explicitly associated: 'God is acceptance without distraction. One must imitate the attending and humility of God. ... We have our 'me' in time. Acceptance of time and of everything that it can bring – with no exception – (*amor fati*) – is the only disposition of the soul which is unconditional in relation to time.' (Weil, *OC VI 4*, p. 185.) There follow some secondary literature implicit references to attention and *amor fati*. 'Emptiness, the condition of renouncing the possession of the world, engenders in the human soul an attending disposition, a disposition of attention towards the Totally Other ... total compliance [i.e. *amor fati*],

The reality to which voluntary, intellectual attention gives rise is only a half-reality in comparison to the full reality perceived by the one who consents to all that happens[158]. Weil's early writings, which are mainly concerned with manual work, emphasise the effectiveness of this kind of attention – for instance, the good, attentive cyclist effectively avoids the obstacle because he or she perceives the road in its entirety, and not only the obstacle, as the inept cyclist does[159] – whereas in later writings the non-active (Weil often refers to this kind of attention as *waiting*[160] or as a contemplation of the *void*[161]), religious and transcendent aspects are emphasised[162], but the practical purpose is not completely absent[163].

---

pure attention.' (Carta Macaluso, 2003, p. 106.) 'Thus, for her [Weil], one needs an immense capacity for attention in order to be able to squarely contemplate necessity, an attention that she conceives as love' (Rey Puente, 2007, p. 132). 'The beautiful is that which we are capable of contemplating, a statue or a painting which we can watch for long moments, something we can pay attention to ... But attention can be exercised only upon what is real, what is. The identification of the beautiful and the real follows from this. Obviously this identity does not mean that the beautiful is something of the order of substance, hypostatized; the real, as we know, is only the network of necessity limiting and organizing the material world. The presence of necessity in the universe is essentially a harmony Weil liked to designate with the Stoic term "order of the world".' (Vetö, 1994, p. 90.)

[158] See footnote 156.

[159] 'The good cyclist sees not only the obstacle but the whole road.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.) For the simile of the cyclist, see footnote 142.

[160] See footnote 149.

[161] 'Music unfolding in time captures attention and carries it beyond time bringing it at each moment on that which is. The attending is attending to the void and attending to the immediate.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 268.) Even though in the following passage, the term 'attention' does not appear, the relation between attention and the void becomes clear if one keeps in mind that, for Weil, the most elevated attention is love of the real. 'To know that nothing that one touches, hears, sees, etc., in this world, nothing that one represents to oneself is good. If one thinks God, this is not the good either. Everything that we think is as imperfect as we are, what is imperfect is not the good. ... The good is nothing for us, since no thing is good. But this nothing is not not-being, it is not unreal. Everything that exists is unreal when compared with it. This nothing is at least as real as us. Since our very being is nothing but this need for good. Absolute good resides completely within this need. But we cannot go there and take it. We can only love the void.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, pp. 190–191.) For a discussion on the translation of *attention à vide* as both 'attention to the void' and 'aimless attention', see: *CFDPS Notes 07* in Appendix 5, pp. 278–280.

[162] 'When we do not see, when no part of our soul is capable of sensing the reality of God, then, to love God, we need to really transfer ourselves outside ourselves. This is to love God. To do this we need to keep our gaze constantly turned towards God, without ever moving. ... One must be completely motionless. To remain motionless does not mean to abstain from action. ... There is an effort to make which is by far the hardest of all, but it does not belong to the domain of action.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 274.) 'The only choice given to man is to attach or not his love here below. Let him refuse to attach his love here below, let him remain motionless, without searching, without moving, waiting, without even knowing what he is waiting for. It is absolutely sure that God will come all the way to him.' (Ibid., p. 278.) 'The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. ... The highest part of the attention only makes contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough for such a contact to be established.' (Weil, *WG*, p. 57.) On the transcendence of the object of attention, see: Ferber, 1981, p. 64.

[163] For instance, see quote on pp. 43–44, from Weil's very last work, which deals with *practical* concerns regarding the political and legislative structure of France in the event of liberation.

The terms that Weil uses to describe this kind of attention with respect to whatever happens are not only 'consent' and 'love' but also 'acceptance', 'desire' and 'obedience'. All these terms invite a misinterpretation: namely, one might assume that Weil is claiming that the highest achievement of a human being is to accept whatever happens, without trying to change it, regardless of whether he or she thinks it just or not. This is *not* what Weil has in mind; hers is rather a *you-cannot-undo-the-past* view as exemplified by the following passage:

> If one descends into oneself, one finds that one has exactly what one desires. If one desires a certain being (who is dead), one desires a particular being; who is therefore necessarily a mortal, and one desires this being, this being who..., that..., etc, in short this being who died, a certain day, at a certain time. And one has that being – dead. ... In such cases, suffering and emptiness are the mode of existence of the objects of desire. If one draws aside the veil of unreality, one sees that they are given to one thus. When one sees this, one still suffers, but one is happy.[164]

When I try to guess how anyone in the throes of bereavement would interpret this argument, I cannot help thinking that most people would see it as a heartless joke and would take the claim that they can be both suffering and happy to be cruel nonsense[165]. And, leaving aside the tragic thought experiment, in my experience of dialogues on this issue, I found that acceptance, obedience, etc., often soon slip into the semantic area of *laissez-faire*. How to avoid misinterpretation, then? An analogy may be helpful. Someone, *S*, accustomed solely to tonal Western music and with no musical training decides to learn how to sight-sing and, to this purpose, starts ear-training. At the beginning, *S* recognizes major and minor thirds quite easily (to *S*, they feel familiar), while sevenths and ninths, especially minor ones, sound very disharmonic, unfamiliar and ugly. As *S* perseveres with the training, gradually, the sense of disharmony, unfamiliarity and ugliness disappears. In *S*, there has occurred a change towards acceptance, love, etc[166]. But, even though this analogy eliminates, to a certain extent, the potential for confusion outlined above, it has the disadvantage of having no ethical import, unlike Weilian attention as *amor fati*. As I will show later, I approached this problem through the installation *Attending* (see §5.422), by producing a sign that acknowledges Weil's reference to contradiction[167].

---

[164] Weil, *OG*, p. 42. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *GG*, pp. 22–23.

[165] I shall return to the issue of nonsensicality in §4.3121.

[166] In fact, the term 'obedience' is quite appropriate here, given the etymology of 'obey': 'from O.Fr. *obeir*, from L. *oboedire* "obey, pay attention to, give ear," lit. "listen to," from *ob* "to" + *audire* "listen, hear"' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2010).

[167] Although, in this context, the term 'contradiction' must be understood very broadly: the (1) *you-cannot-undo-the-past* and the (2) *laissez-faire* interpretations are not incompatible but ethically unappealing, (1) for its apparent obviousness and unhelpfulness, and (2) for its dismissal of ethical responsibility.

3.37 Is the most elevated attention intuitive?

By the most elevated attention, does one *read*[168] reality as something one loves unreservedly (as distinct from 'something *to be* loved', which would imply the possibility of choice) and, therefore, is this attention *intuitive*, as Janiaud and Chenavier maintain, or is it a matter of free choice, as the terms 'acceptance' and 'consent' would seem to suggest? Appealing to the notion of free compulsion, I will advance an answer, which, however, will not conceal the fact that Weil seems ambivalent on this point.

There are passages in which Weil describes the most elevated attention in the same way as she describes reading, that is, as a sort of helplessness. However this is not a mechanistic kind of helplessness (as a stone helplessly falls) but rather a *rational* one, as the compulsion of the literate woman, in the example above, was free in the sense that it was rational. Consider these excerpts:

> When one has understood [by voluntary attention] deep in one's soul that necessity is only one of the faces of beauty, the other face being the good, then all that which renders necessity felt – vexation, pain, grief, obstacles – become a supplementary reason to love.[169]
>
> No one could ever prove that such an absurdity as consent to necessity is possible. We can only recognize it. There are in fact souls which consent to it.[170]

That this attitude towards reality is dictated by reason is clear from the fact that Weil writes 'when one has *understood*' and 'an additional *reason* to love'. John Berger, reflecting on Weil's words, 'to know how to turn whatever happens, no matter what it is, into an object of desire', introduces a dichotomy between, on the one hand, wilfulness and, on the other hand, encounter, collaboration or participation between artist and object[171]. But whether or not one accepts Weil's contention, and Berger's assumption, that anyone who attends will *inevitably* see reality as an object of unreserved love[172] is another matter; given that, for Weil, this is both certain and only directly experienced, and yet dependent on faith[173], I do not foresee much progress on this issue as long as it is framed in these terms, for there is no argument here but only a *claim*, capable of being asserted, denied or ignored, but not in any way

---

[168] Keeping in mind that elevated attention is loving the universe as God-obeying creation, one can see the link between attention and reading in the following passage: 'As one learns to read, as one learns a craft, so one learns to feel in everything, first and foremost, the obedience of the universe to God. It is truly an apprenticeship. As all apprenticeship, it requires effort and time. ... For those who have completed the apprenticeship, things and events, everywhere, always, are the vibration of the same infinitely sweet divine word. Pain is the colour of certain events. Confronted with a sentence written in red, the one who can read and the one who cannot both see red; but the colour does not have the same importance for both.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 356.)

[169] Weil, *IPC*, p. 36. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *ICG*, p. 101.

[170] Weil, *ICG*, p. 184.

[171] Berger, 2002, p. 11, pp. 15–16, p. 20.

[172] As I pointed out earlier, for Weil, the universe is a book of revelation for the one who attends lovingly (see footnote 18).

[173] See footnote 18.

proven. However, as I will argue in §4.3212, there is another way of interpreting Weil's claim that attention involves a kind of inevitability and compulsiveness; namely, by reintroducing the notion of reading and by postulating two phases of action: the first phase is the *free* choice to go through a certain apprenticeship in reading; the second phase is the *inevitable* reading which results from the possession of that acquired reading skill. In this context, it will be useful to briefly consider the intellectual *milieu* out of which Weil's ideas emerged; and, to this purpose, I will now examine the influence of Alain and Lagneau on Weil's philosophy.

3.38 The legacy of Alain and Lagneau

As I said earlier, Émile Chartier, known as 'Alain', was Weil's philosophy teacher, and Jules Lagneau had been Alain's cherished[174] philosophy teacher. They have been virtually forgotten by the main history of philosophy: no major study on their work has been undertaken; and, outside France, they are almost unknown but for a few scant mentions in books on twentieth-century French philosophy. Weil's philosophical debt to them has been acknowledged[175], but, with the exception of Chenavier's *Simone Weil. Une philosophie du travail*, only in a rather general manner. In what follows, the analysis will be limited to Alain's and Lagneau's views on reality, habit and will, since a comprehensive scrutiny of their philosophy in relation to Weil's is beyond the scope of this research. The aim is to show that the problems regarding free will that arose from my analysis of Weil's notion of attention inhere in the philosophical tradition to which Weil subscribes.

Like Weil, Lagneau argues that perception is not immediate[176]; it might seem to be so, but, in fact, it is based on habit[177]. Moreover, for Lagneau, neither pure sensibility[178] nor pure

---

[174] Alain also wrote a book on Lagneau, *Souvenirs concernant Jules Lagneau* (see: Alain, 1960).

[175] See: Pétrement, 1976, pp. 25–42; McLellan, 1990, p. 12, p. 206.

[176] 'Perception is never immediate. – In perception considered as immediate, there could be no illusion; the study of the main illusions shows that this kind of perception does not exist. To perceive is always something different from subjection or reception of a sort of imprint; it is always the affirmation of something that one has felt, something which is judged real.' (Lagneau, 1950, p. 167.)

[177] 'Thus perception is the completion of the representation and the correction of sensible data, which both are the result of a judgement, apparently immediate and intuitive, but based on habit' (Ibid., p. 178).

[178] 'There is no such a thing as truth of sensible knowledge. ... Sensible knowledge is false because one cannot conceive of a way of feeling which must be considered as true for us under given circumstances. In fact, this would suppose either that our sensible nature does not change or that its development is subjected to a rigorous law, that is to say that this nature obtains in us in virtue of its relation to the exterior world, of which it would merely be an effect, a resultant. ... If everything in nature was subjected to necessity, if there was for us a way of feeling which would be the true one, if at each instant our way of feeling was a result of the exterior world, we would not feel anything.' (Ibid., pp. 181–182.)

intelligence[179] can account for the fact that human beings can perceive reality as necessity; for him, intelligence rests on sensibility. In Lagneau's arguments, one finds the premises of Weil's critique of both empiricism and intellectualism (§3.31), her conceptualisation of reality as a web of necessary relations (§3.362) and her idea that one reads through sensations (§3.33). And, finally, Weil's seemingly paradoxical view of free will (§3.35) is matched by Lagneau's argument that one is not subjected to necessity only to the extent that, having conceived the existence of necessity, one endorses it[180], and this is achieved by the cultivation of a moral habit, which Lagneau describes as a second nature[181]. This outline of Lagneau's ideas on reality, habit and will presupposes a semethical perspective, i.e. the view that one can acquire ethically better interpretative habits.

In Alain's writings, one finds echoes of Weil's argument that true, non-rigid action requires an attention which can be exercised only after one has acquired a habit, by which one learns to focus on what is relevant rather than wasting one's energy in movements caused by fear of failure[182]. Alain also refers to *amor fati* as a *reading* that reveals the necessary interconnectedness of everything in the universe (Weil's semiotic tissue) – this is essentially Stoic cosmic *sympatheia*[183]. As for Weil, Alain's characterisation of the will rests on the

---

[179] 'There is no such a thing as purely abstract truth. ... If there existed an abstract truth, that is to say a truth independent of the mind ..., this purely abstract truth would be purely unintelligible ... If we conceive that there is a truth, we conceive it as the truth of what we feel ... But from the very fact that truth has its basis in sensibility, in present perception, and from the fact that this perception is itself undeterminable, it follows that necessity, which rests on this undeterminable basis, would not be determinable. The order of intelligence rests on the order of sensibility.' (Ibid., p. 182.)

[180] 'This action cannot be explained without the positing of a freedom which is subject to necessity only because it endorses it.' (Ibid., p. 136.)

[181] 'All certainty is thus a necessity which depends on freedom and which rests on a belief. It is a necessity willed and maintained through the constant operation of freedom, and this operation is only possible by means of moral habit, which is the mind becoming nature (within nature) through volition.' (Ibid., p. 105.)

[182] 'It is a mistake to say that an action that one knows how to perform is performed without attention. ... I would rather say that in this case judgement, in virtue of habit, is obeyed immediately, without useless movements. ... The price of thought is that one must think well. Since we cannot act without thinking, we cannot act properly without thinking well about it. The main obstacle to this is fear of acting wrongly ... In order to overcome it and do what one wants to do, one only has to do what one wants to do, for instance, extending one's arm without moving one's foot, or opening a lock without grinding one's teeth, or again holding a bow without gripping it, or again climbing without holding one's breath. ... Man learns ... not through mechanical repetition, but ... always on the condition of a sustained attention, in other words, on the condition that the movements which are carried out are willed and free, without the body doing other movements. The main cause of this disorder is the confusion of ideas increased by the fear of making a mistake' (Alain, 1990, pp. 240–241).

[183] 'I believe rather that it is the universe as a whole which is beautiful, and the interconnection of all things; the small pieces do not mean anything; they have no sense. But everything has a sense, because everything depends on everything. One loves the sea and the mountains because in them force [i.e. necessity] is visible; it is our alphabet. After having spelt [analogous to necessity perceived by means of voluntary attention], one must read and learn to survey the interconnection of everything to everything ... If one was able to read perfectly in the Great Book, everything would be beautiful [analogous to attention as *amor fati*].' (Alain, 1970, p. 95.) For Stoic cosmic *sympatheia*, see: Sambursky, 1959, p. 41.

view that all perception involves imagination[184] and that there are different states of imagination, depending on whether or not it is ordered by the mind[185]. However, there is a fundamental difference between Alain's and Weil's conceptualisations of truth. As I have anticipated in §1.42 and as I will argue in §4.322, Weil's writings on attention suggest that she postulates an objective notion of truth while, as the following passage shows, Alain holds a *normative* view of truth:

> The very idea that the Stoics have of truth: is not its purpose to guard us against sceptic discouragement, to gives us confidence in ourselves? Why doubt what we know? It is wasted time: for what we care about it is not what we know, but what we will know. We must not pursue the true, but the truer. What one must consider it is not the results, but the method; it is not the condition of our mind, but the progress of our mind.[186]

It is important to distinguish Weil's objective truth from Alain's normative truth in order to signpost a likely interpretative trap: namely, to explain Weil's disregard for the results of an effort of attention by referring to the *merely* normative character of truth. As will become evident in §4.22, Weil's disregard for the results of attention is more clearly explained by considering her view of the subject as agent who, through attention, progresses towards a detached attitude.

3.4 Summary

A summary of this chapter can be introduced by pointing out the philosophical commonalities between Weil, Alain and Lagneau. The three philosophers share: (1) an unwavering belief in a free rationality, (2) a view of necessity seen as a gift of applied reason, and (3) a defence of a contradictory argument on the relation between freedom and necessity. In their arguments, (3) is premised on (1) and (2), since (1) states that there is freedom, while (2) states that necessity is all-pervasive, i.e. that there is no freedom. However, Weil departs from Alain and Lagneau with respect to (3), not by disavowing it but by acknowledging it more fully with the introduction of her notion of *insoluble contradictions*[187] as objects of contemplation for the most elevated attention. Whether or not Weil's qualified[188] defence of contradiction constitutes a solution to the problem of incompatibilism is debatable, given that such a defence could conceivably entail

---

[184] 'Even in the most rigorous perception there is imagination' (Alain, 1990, p. 62).

[185] In Alain, one finds Weil's three degrees of imagination (see footnote 148): '[In] all imagination one will find always three kinds of imagination. First, orderly imagination, that errs only because it dares too much, but always according to a method and under the control of experience ... The other imagination, that turns away from things and closes its eyes, attentive above all to the movements of life and to the impressions which arise from it, could be called fantasy. ... Lastly, impassioned imagination can be defined above all by convulsive movements and vociferation.' (Ibid., p. 64.)

[186] Alain, 1891, p. 41.

[187] See §5.42.

[188] Weil distinguishes between true and false contradictions. André Devaux discusses this distinction in Devaux, 1996.

trivialism[189]. In any case, as my exposition in §3.35 and §3.37 shows, I remain

unconvinced[190]. But this uncertainty was the starting point for the development of the

normative critical practical analogy projects discussed in the next chapter, which adopt a

more abstract perspective on the findings of my study of Weil's discourse on attention. From

this perspective, there emerges a constant in Weil's various writings on attention: the

relation between *myself* (an agent) and the *world* (the real). As I stated in §2.4, this relation

constitutes the core of the normative projects to which I now turn.

---

[189] Trivialism 'is the view that *all* contradictions are true (and hence, assuming that a conjunction entails its conjuncts, it is also the view that everything is true)' (Priest, 2008).

[190] I should also point out the fact that, as my analysis shows, Weil does not give a definition of attention. This fact is easily missed because Weil's writing style is, on the whole, very declarative, and this tends to conceal the highly metaphorical character of her arguments – Rush Rhees speaks of 'Weil's use of simile or metaphor with no clue as to what the precise meaning could be.' (Rhees, 2000, p. 56.) Rhees is a very sympathetic reader of Weil's writings, but, as he intends to study Weil as if she was a Wittgenstein-like analytic philosopher, he struggles with her metaphorical language throughout his book. At the 2008 Colloquy of the *Association pour l'étude de la pensée de Simone Weil*, in Paris, Jean-Marc Lévy-Leblond indicated Weil's propensity for making rather sweeping statements of which it is sometimes difficult to make sense. Lévy-Leblond alluded to Weil's claim that the ancient Greeks invented the function, which in his view, was an utter misconstruction. See also: Lévy-Leblond, 2009.
.

4. Normative critical practical analogy

Chapter outline: This chapter examines my art projects which deal with normative critical practical analogy. The projects, which are all concerned with observational drawing, are divided into two categories: projects whose objective is to represent an experience of necessity; and projects whose objective is to represent an attitude of detachment. These two objectives led to the introduction of a textual component in my observational drawing practice for the following reasons. Firstly, I argue that an attitude of detachment requires that the results of my drawing activity should be interpreted as indications of action rather than as material objects which affect the attention of the viewer, and I use text to deflect the focus away from the material presence of my drawings. (I call this text–drawing compound 'hybrid art object'.) Secondly, I refer to Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* to show that the notion of necessity is dependent on propositional language, while the non-propositional nature of drawings makes them unsuitable for the representation of the experience of necessity. All the projects discussed in this chapter, with the exception of *Bâton de l'aveugle*, are collaborations with the artist Hephzibah Rendle-Short, and they illustrate my attempts—with varying degrees of success—to make my drawings less self-reflexive and less solipsistic while retaining the focus on my subjectivity that was required by the representation of an experience of necessity and of an attitude of detachment. In order to pursue this aim, I made use of Weil's conceptualisation of the subject. Weil's subject is essentially an object that is ruled by material necessity, a de-reified and self-*less* subject; the normative projects aim at representing this kind of objectified subject. On the other hand, *Bâton de l'aveugle* develops the semethical theme of perceptual apprenticeship (introduced in Chapter 3) by considering Weil's argument that the goal of such apprenticeship is a shift of attention which leads to a disposition of equanimity, or indifference, towards whatever happens. The normative projects obtained the following outcomes: I acquired a more precise understanding of how to represent my role of artist-agent non-reflexively; I was able to discriminate between the notions of inevitability and constraint, showing that the former does not entail the latter; I gained practical knowledge of the distinction between orderly and disorderly imagination; and I showed that, even though in her writings on attention Weil typically refers to the concept of objective truth, in fact, the notion of attention as a practice of detachment does not require a reference to objective truth.

4.1 Outline of the objectives of the normative analogy

In §2.4, I pointed out that the aim of the normative analogy was to use art from a metaethical perspective and that the objective and reflective analogues were, respectively, the dualistic relation between the individual and the world and the dualistic relation which I postulated between my role of observational drawer and the object of observation.

The development of the two analogues determined the following objectives:

(1) To define the constitutive elements of the objective analogue.

(2) To find a way of representing the reflective analogue in my art practice.

(3) To devise an operational principle for the normative analogy.

Objective (1) drew upon the study of Weilian attention presented in Chapter 3. Having discerned the dualistic relation which Weil postulates between the individual and the world, I qualified the relation as follows. According to Weil, I have the capacity (dependent on the faculty of attention) to take a particular *attitude* towards the world and to *experience* certain facts of the world, namely:

- I can adopt an attitude of *detachment*.[191]

- I can experience *necessity*.[192]

As I have shown in §3.31, in the early essay *Science and Perception in Descartes*, Weil deduces from the relation between *myself* and the *world* the necessary[193] existence of the act of attention. In later writings, the relation is not posited as explicitly but is, nevertheless, evidently implied by her argument on the reality-loving individual[194]. What is absent in the relation individual/world as articulated by Weil is any kind of extra-subjective *effect*, or *result* of action, and this suggests a self-reflexive subjective approach to the issue of progress in attention. However, self-reflexivity seems to me incompatible with Weil's claim that attention is essentially a non-action, a waiting, that there is a 'way of desirously waiting upon truth without allowing ourselves to search for it'[195], because this claim conceptualises the goal of attention as something completely extra-subjective, i.e. as some kind of objective truth that the attentive individual must simply embrace if and when it presents itself. I discuss the manner in which I dealt with the difficulty regarding subjectivity in the practice

---

[191] The notion of detachment in relation to attention is elucidated in §4.22.

[192] The notion of necessity has been discussed at §3.362 and §3.363.

[193] That is, for Weil, logically necessary for the possibility of true action.

[194] Since what the individual loves is a world subject to necessity and necessity can only be perceived through an effort of attention.

[195] See footnote 149.

of attention in §4.22. In §4.4, I explain how the notion of objective truth[196] that characterises Weil's approach to attention as a practice of detachment can be dispensed with without compromising the ethical significance of Weilian attention.

Objective (2) was achieved by recasting the relation between individual and the world into a relation between me as observational drawer and an object of observation. In other words, in the normative projects, I imitate the kind of individual agent postulated by Weil in the most general premises of her discourse on attention. Before giving, in §4.21 and §4.22, a detailed account of the methodological concerns entailed by objectives (1) and (2), I will discuss objective (3).

The operational principle of the normative analogy involved a series of limitations to be used in the practice of observational drawing and these limitations were deduced from some of Weil's assertions on attention. Objective (3) entailed the identification of relevant assertions to be used as practical limitations. As I have demonstrated in §3.362 and §3.363, the concept that links voluntary attention and the highest form of attention is *necessity*: voluntary attention perceives necessity and the highest form of attention loves necessity or is analogous to love of it. For Weil, necessity is always perceived as a *constraint* and, accordingly, objective (3) entailed devising explicit constraints in the manner in which I approached drawing from observation. Thus, the relationship between objectives (2) and (3) becomes clear: (3) aims at representing necessity and (2) aims at representing the experience of necessity.

My use of 'practical limitations' may bring to mind the mode of working of Sol LeWitt, to which I refer in §2.2, or Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* project (see footnote 197), but there are two significant differences between the work of these artists and my normative projects. Firstly, neither Barney's nor LeWitt's work is primarily concerned with observational drawing. Secondly, Barney's restraints are self-imposed but not self-sustained (except in the weak sense that it is always up to him to stop), while the operational principle of the normative analogy requires the *voluntary* self-sustaining of limitations, and this is essential for the representation of an experience of necessity because, as I have argued in §3.362, for Weil, necessity exists only by virtue of an effort of voluntary attention. Barney's self-impositions take as their model bodily restraint[197] (i.e. mechanical necessity) and,

---

[196] See also p. 68.

[197] 'Right from the start, I wanted to put my body into my work, I wanted to put my own experiences into my work; and the experiences I'd had, which had been most profound, were on the football field, I think, at that point. So, I think, instinctually, I looked at those experiences and tried to draw them into what I was making in the studio, and started using my body that way, and creating situations that put some sort of a resistance against my body. And I think that, as an athlete, you understand that your body requires resistance in order to grow; it's something you take for granted; the whole training

therefore, they shrink the volitional dimension of action. At the other end of the spectrum, LeWitt also reduces the import of voluntary action by making execution perfunctory, as I pointed out in §2.2.

4.2 Sub-methodological concerns: The subject in attention

This section discusses the sub-methodological requirements entailed by objectives (1) and (2), discussed in §4.1, namely: (a) to find a way of representing through art practice the essential role that Weil accords to direct, or subjective experience; (b) in light of this centrality of the subject, to clarify the nature of Weil's version of subject, referred to as 'the Weilian subject'. Objective (a) is discussed in §4.21; objective (b) entailed articulating the relation posited by Weil between subject, experience of necessity and detachment, by elucidating the dynamics of attention as a practice of detachment. As I will show, the Weilian subject, unlike the kind of subject typically postulated in art practice-led research, does not imply self-reflexivity, and led me to use a dialogical approach through a collaboration with artist Hephzibah Rendle-Short. Objective (b) is discussed in §4.22.

4.21 The hybrid art object

As I have elucidated in §4.1, the identification of the objective and the reflective analogues of the normative analogy evidenced the explicit disregard for extra-subjective effects in Weil's account of the relation between a subject and the world, since this relation is exclusively one between an individual's attitude of detachment and a world which, if attentively contemplated, is seen as pure necessity – even though results are produced, for Weil, such results are merely residues devoid of ethical significance. Accordingly, in order to represent this relation through art, I posited that my observational drawing practice should signify an attitude of *detachment* by explicitly disregarding results and by inviting an interpretation of the drawings as being subjective, specifically, a subjective experience of *necessity*. While, as I pointed out in §1.1, in my initial investigation of Weil's notion of attention through observational drawing, I resorted to text in the form of notes referring to my subjective experience of drawing in a rather broad and general manner, the articulation of the normative analogy indicated that my texts should focus on drawing as act, and explicitly *not* on drawing as product. In this section, firstly, I will give two examples of views of drawing as product which refer to attention, and I will indicate in what respect these views differ from notions of drawing as act; and secondly, I will explain how the

process is built upon that understanding. So, I think that when I was confronted with this idea of being in the studio and generating form, it was a way in which I could understand form being developed with a self-imposed resistance placed upon it, as it is in a body. So those were the ideas that started the *Drawing Restraint* project.' (Barney, 2006.)

function of text as a reflection on drawing as act, within the normative projects, required a clearer definition of the correlation between drawing and text, which was achieved by introducing the idea of *hybrid art object*.

A reference to attention in drawing, where drawing is considered as product, can be found in Philip Rawson's book *Drawing*. Rawson's approach epitomises a view of drawing as result, in the sense that it emphasises the materiality of drawing, pre-eminently through formal considerations: for Rawson, the appearance of drawings *directly* affects a perceptual, attentional change in the viewer; and to a large extent, Rawson can afford to ignore the intention[198] of the drawer – the drawer is conceptualised as a *pro-ducer* of drawings (he or she *brings forth* drawings), not as an agent whose agency is indicated by his or her drawings. For instance, analysing Sesshu's *Spilled ink landscape in* haboku *style* 1495, Rawson writes:

> Those objects or elements which form the centre of attention in any picture are drawn with firm, dark lines which set off the bulk of the feature they contain as an enclosed area of strongly contrasted light tone. ... Then around them the other features are treated in a descending scale of darks, and of attention. ... This scale of tonal values ensures that the spectator does not feel the open spaces in the picture as gaps, but only as the natural tapering off of his focused attention.[199]

Likewise, for the artist David Musgrave, it is the *material* aspect of drawing that directly affects the attentional disposition of the viewer:

> Drawings, in their material slightness, tend to collude in their own disappearance. No matter how heavily worked a drawing might be, the repeated abrasions of a pencil, charcoal, chalk or pastel just can't be made to congeal into an oily impasto; a line is more likely to transform a sheet of paper into a space than to draw attention to its substance, and shaded expanses of graphite form a very tenuous skin.[200]

Rawson's and Musgrave's approach to attention in drawing seems to me incompatible with the role which Weil's assigns to attention in her account of the relation between subject and the world. For them, what is at issue is what drawings attract attention *to*, rather than how the drawer deals with the problem of the exercise of attention through drawing, which entails considering drawings as traces of intentional action. Moreover, my analysis of Weilian attention in Chapter 3 demonstrates that, for Weil, the concept of attention encompasses a range of ethical notions which are evidently not implied by Rawson and Musgrave[201]. For these reasons, I deemed the view of drawing as product to be unsuitable within the methodological framework of my investigation of Weilian attention through observational drawing.

---

[198] Rawson's consideration of the drawer's intention is mostly restricted to intentions at supra-individual level. For instance, Rawson consider Sesshu's drawing (see below) only with regard to it belonging to the general class 'early Chinese and Japanese drawing'.

[199] Rawson, 1987, p. 121.

[200] Musgrave, 2004, p. 11.

[201] This is not surprising, given Weil's highly idiosyncratic conceptualisation of attention.

A theorist who has provided a sustained reflection on attention with regard to art *making* (i.e. to art as act), although not specifically to drawing, is Anton Ehrenzweig. Throughout the chapter 'The two kinds of attention'[202] of his *The Hidden Order of Art*, Ehrenzweig makes a distinction between inferior *differentiated* (conscious, narrowly focused) attention and superior *undifferentiated* (unconscious, widely focused, scattered, empty) attention. Similarly, Weil distinguishes between two kinds of attention that correspond, respectively, to clumsiness (*maladresse*), which is rigid, and to dexterity (*adresse*), which is open and relaxed[203]. But the psychoanalytic topography of Ehrenzweig's discourse on attention cannot be mapped onto Weil's discourse on attention, since she believes Freud's theory of the unconscious to be unclear on the point of ethical responsibility[204], and, for her, attention has pre-eminently an ethical significance[205].

I now turn to the correlation of drawing and text in the normative projects. At the beginning of this section, I identified a parallelism between a view of drawing as result and a focus on the materiality of drawing. Thus, since, in the normative projects, I intended to combine drawing and text in such a way as to convey a disregard for the results of the act of drawing, the methodology of normative projects involved using text to deflect the focus away from the material presence of my drawings. In order to do so, I found it methodologically useful to envision a kind of *hybrid art object* which comprises both what is commonly thought of as the *artwork proper* (in the visual arts, this is typically a non-linguistic, material object) and a linguistic component, be it the artist's own or somebody else's reflection on, account of, justification for, etc. a given work.

Instances of this kind of art object are more readily exemplified by materially slight artworks, for, in these cases, the question 'What constitutes the artwork?' seems particularly relevant. I will give four examples:

(1) James Lee Byars' *Homage to Apollo*: In an essay on Byars, the art critic Thomas McEvilley gives an account of an impromptu performance by the artist: a homage to Apollo, at the Temple of Apollo, in Delphi[206]. What is the mode of existence of this piece? Or,

---

[202] Ehrenzweig, 2000, pp. 21–31.

[203] See footnote 142.

[204] Weil, *LP*, pp. 106–117.

[205] 'At the centre of voluntary action: attention.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 390.) 'It is impossible, even absurd, to be surprised by Achilles' inhumanity. He does not pay attention to the fact that the young Trojans belong to the same species to which Patroclus belongs.' (Ibid., p. 389.) 'Voluntary act' and 'humanity' are ethical notions.

[206] 'The next day at Delphi, Byars wanted to do a piece in the Temple of Apollo (it was, after all, New Year's Day). Breaching the rope boundary, he stretched himself into a star-shaped figure behind a gold lame circle while I hollered a selection of locutions ("That's a beautiful hat"). As the guards blew their whistles and rushed towards us, a schoolteacher stopped her students to say, "Look

rather, since the former question misleadingly suggests a duality between a *piece* and an *account of it*, it is more appropriate to ask: What is the art object here? Given that, as far as I know, there is neither video nor photographical recording of Byars' performance, McEvilley's account of it would have to form part (even the *main* part) of the answer, *any* answer; this is sufficient to show the import of the linguistic element in this art object, regardless of the various particular answers one may formulate.

(2) Tino Sehgal: Sehgal has made immateriality one of the principal concerns of his artistic endeavour (he does not allow the events he organises to be recorded and even gallery labels are dispensed with). To give an idea of the thoroughness with which Sehgal tries[207] to preserve the immateriality of his work, I will quote from an interview between the artist and Silvia Sgualdini:

> SS: I have a last question, which is about the future. This year you have been invited together with Thomas Scheibitz to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale 2005. Can I ask you what we can expect? TS: Yes, you can because you are working on the project but only when you switch off the machine. So you can, the machine cannot.[208]

Sehgal maintains that the referentiality of language makes language a suitable means for the representation of immateriality, while images tend to be interpreted as (material) artworks in their own right[209]. In the normative projects I use text to *referentially* emphasise the status of drawing as act, rather than as a result (as Rawson and Musgrave do).

(3) Yves Klein's *The Refinement of Sensibility in the First Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility* (*ROS*). This art object is found in the book *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein* and it consists of four photographs of the empty[210] Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, on 27th April 1958, where and when *ROS* took place, and Klein's lecture *The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial*, given at the Sorbonne, on 3rd

---

children, an homage to Apollo".' (McEvilley, 2008, p. 145.) This essay has been reprinted with some changes in Friedli & Frehner, 2009.

[207] In this age of easily producible and reproducible images, it is impossible for Sehgal to avoid the dissemination of images and videos of his work. But by not selling such by-products, Sehgal maintains control over what constitute *his* work. Immateriality extends also to contracts: 'To guarantee absolute de-materialization of the art object, Sehgal only sells his work via an oral contract. ... Generally speaking Sehgal presents the sales contract as a feat of memory alone.' (Sayej, 2006, p. 20.)

[208] Sgualdini, 2009.

[209] In an interview with Tim Griffin, Sehgal argues: 'As with any other art, my work wants to communicate and is dependent on its reception. For me, the issue simply is the way such communication takes place – that it doesn't substantially alter the character of my work, as a photograph would. ... Language is rooted in a referential mode, while a documentary image is always in danger of being taken as something in itself, especially, of course, in the field of visual art.' (Griffin, 2005.) See also: Coburn, 2007.

[210] The term 'empty' is used with its everyday meaning. Given my argument, the Galerie Iris Clert can be said to be empty but not *art-object-less*.

June 1959[211], where he refers to *ROS*. Again, in this art object, the text, i.e. Klein's lecture, plays a major role in its mode of existence.

(4) The last example is Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, which is particularly paradigmatic in the context of my research, because it contains both texts and *drawings*. In order to clarify what kind of perspective on drawing is required for interpreting the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, and the normative projects, as a hybrid art objects, I will outline Patrick Maynard's notion of *depiction*, in his recent book on drawing. Maynard makes a distinction between:

- on one hand, *representation*, whose function is to mandate that we imagine things, i.e. which is a source of information;
- and on the other hand, *visually depictive representation*, or, more succinctly *depiction*, whose function is to mandate that we imagine seeing things, i.e. which is a source of information about what is visible, about how things might look.[212]

Maynard's use of this distinction in his analysis of drawings is illuminating because it affords a theoretical conceptualisation and, therefore, a clarification, of the kind of semantic function of drawing which Rawson and Musgrave describe in the quotes discussed above, namely, a function that goes beyond straightforward causality[213]. But I would like to expand Maynard's notion of depiction so as to include the conflation of text and drawing characteristic of hybrid art objects. For Maynard, there are, on one hand, drawings which are representations, such as design drawings and diagrams, and, on the other hand, depictive drawings which are depictions, in which latter category one finds artistic[214] drawings; and he predicates this distinction almost exclusively on the appearance of drawings. The expansion of the notion of depiction which I propose considers drawings as signs that, by virtue of many factors (many of which are extra-visual, such as the context in which the drawing is seen, the socio-cultural association the drawing might suggest, extra-artistic fields of knowledge, and, notably, a *textual* component referring to the drawing), invite a certain range of interpretations. I think that this expansion is necessary to fully appreciate the semantic function of Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (and of the normative projects in my research): according to Maynard's view of depiction, the *Pedagogical Sketchbook* would

---

[211] Klein, 2007, pp. 71–98.

[212] Maynard, 2005, pp. 88–93.

[213] When Rawson writes that, in Sesshu's drawing, 'the spectator ... feels ... the open spaces in the picture as ... the natural tapering off of his focussed attention', or when Musgrave writes that 'a line is more likely to transform a sheet of paper into a space than to draw attention to its substance', they conceptualise drawings as the *causes* of the attentional disposition of the viewer.

[214] Maynard does not use the term 'artistic', but a fleeting perusal of the images in the book should be sufficient to demonstrate that this is what Maynard has in mind.

neither be a mere source of information (notwithstanding the diagrammatic nature of many of the drawings) nor a source of information about what is visible in any straightforward sense. How, then, can one make sense of the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*? The expanded notion of depiction helps to answer this question. In the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, through a combination of texts and drawings, Klee is inviting the viewer/reader to interpret the drawings as an *analogy* to mechanical dynamics: here is a line – look again: it is an *active* moving point that has come to rest; here is a plane described by a line – look again: it is a *medial* moving point which, while forming a line has returned to its point of departure; here is a plane – look again: it is a *passive* line; and look again: the point is a brain, the linear plane is a muscle and the plane is a bone; or a waterfall, a wheel and a hammer of a waterwheel, respectively, or, again the drum of a big wheel, the transmission belt of a subsidiary wheel and the subsidiary wheel[215]; and so on and so forth – the analogy keeps propagating semantic permutations.

Likewise, the normative projects are hybrid art objects in which the textual component invites the viewer/reader to interpret the drawing in terms of the normative critical practical analogy, that is, as representations of my attempt to adopt a detached disposition towards necessity. [216]

Having explained how the notion of hybrid art object affords a conceptualisation of *action* which is congruent with the relation that Weil envisages between the individual and the world in her discourse on attention (namely, a relation which centres on disposition and which ethically devalues the results of action), in §4.22, I will outline Weil's views on the nature of the agent, or subject; in particular, I will demonstrate that the Weilian subject cannot *self-reflectively* evaluate his or her progress in attention as a practice of detachment.

4.22 The Weilian subject in attention as a practice of detachment

Given that Weil stresses that the value of a sustained effort of attention can only be comprehended through direct subjective experience and given that self-reflexivity is the most diffused mode of discursive articulation of art practice, it is not surprising that, as I have pointed out in §1.1, I initially construed the hybrid art object in self-reflexive terms, with my notes on drawing functioning as a detector of my progress in attention. Furthermore, the fact that, for Weil, the degree of attentiveness with which an action is

---

[215] Klee, 1953, pp. 16–30.

[216] Other art objects which I consider to dwell on questions regarding the relation between material object and text are: Paul Klee's *The Thinking Eye* (Klee, 1978); several publications of Marcel Duchamp's notes: *The Writings of Marchel Duchamp* (Duchamp, 1973), *Duchamp du signe* (Duchamp, 1994a), *Notes* (Duchamp, 1994b); and Henry Michaux's *Emergences/Resurgences*, a book which contains reproductions of Michaux's drawings alongside his reflections on them (Michaux, 2000).

performed is not measurable by considering extra-subjective effects of action (see § 4.1) seemed to point in the direction of subjectivity. However, as my analysis of Weilian attention in Chapter 3 intimates, the Weilian subject is just one more element in the web of mechanistic necessary relationships that constitutes reality (as I have argued in §3.363, in the most elevated attention, the 'I' has been eliminated). In other words, the essential point of the subject in Weil's account of attention as a practice of detachment is that the aim of such practice is to obtain a *de-reification* of the subject. Therefore, the Weilian subject cannot be self-reflexive because this subject is self-*less* (even though selflessness is an ideal, regulative goal for Weil). Also, as I pointed in §3.34, even Weil's notion of reading, which would seem to imply the possibility of self-monitoring one's ethical progress, points towards ethical neutrality. I will elucidate the Weilian subject by considering it within the dynamics of attention as a practice of detachment.

As I have argued in §3.362, for Weil, voluntary attention perceives reality as necessity. The most elevated attention is acceptance of reality as necessity and this also includes accepting that the subjective 'I' is always *subject to* necessity along with the rest of the material world (§3.363). That is to say, in her discourse on attention, Weil sees the subject within the reductivist perspective of scientific materialistic monism[217], which de-reifies the subject by turning it into an *object-subject-to*. Detachment is the acceptance of this de-reified conceptualisation of the subject as the reality of the subject. For Weil, the process of de-reification of the subject through attention involves contemplating the subject with regard to its *agency* in the context of the relation between the subject and the world (which constitutes the objective analogue of the normative analogy (§4.1)). In this respect, the Weilian *subject as agent* is akin to the view of the agent which is found in Stoic ethics: as Pierre Hadot maintains, Stoic ethics 'invites the subject to act ... while becoming aware of the fact that the results of our actions do not depend on us, but from the interweaving of universal causes, of the general course of the cosmos'[218] – although the concept of de-reification of the subject is alien to Stoic philosophy. The process of de-reification obtains the *death of the subject* as free wilful agent, and this death of the subject is *detachment*. As Weil writes:

> Any **action** which has really occurred can be reduced to a play of necessities, **without any residual part of the self**.[219]

---

[217] 'According to this principle [i.e. the principle of monism] in its scientific guise, there is one unified universe consisting of generally one kind of stuff, which can be described completely by physics. This metaphysical principle is closely conjoined with another belief, known as universalism, which asserts that natural quantifiable, regular laws govern the course of events in the universe throughout all space and time.' (Wallace, 2000, p. 23.)

[218] Hadot, 2002, pp. 173–175.

[219] Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 331; my italics and bold.

> There is no greater attitude of humility than that of silent and patient ***attending***. ... The cry of pride is 'the future is mine', in some form or another. Humility is the knowledge of the opposite truth. If only the present is mine, ***I am nothing***, for the present is nothing.[220]
>
> Hunger (thirst, etc.) and every desire of the flesh is an orientation of the body towards the future. The whole of the carnal part of our soul is oriented towards the future. Death freezes. From afar, privation resembles death. The flesh lives oriented towards the future. Concupiscence is life itself. ***Detachment is a death***.[221]

Thus, attention as a practice of detachment leads to the paradoxical foiling of the subject by the subject. Weil's argument is similar in some respects to the one articulated by Wittgenstein in the famous penultimate proposition, §6.54, of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed upon it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.[222]

Likewise, Weilian attention as a practice of detachment requires the use of the concept of subjective 'I' in order to recognise that there is no 'I'. As I will show in §5.3, this kind of paradox belongs to the wider contexts of Weil's metaphysics, in which the notions of tautology and contradiction (which are the subjects of the imaginal projects) play a central role. On the other hand, in the normative projects, I use the non-self-reflexive Weilian subject to develop an epistemological critique of Weil's notion of attention.

There is another reason why I deemed self-reflexive subjectivity to be methodologically problematic within the research, namely, the problem of *solipsism*. The following drawings of mine (Figs. 4.1–4.4) and accompanying notes are an example of solipsistic hybrid art object:

---

[220] Wei, *OC VI 4*, p. 129; my italics and bold.

[221] Ibid., p. 125; my italics and bold.

[222] Wittgenstein, 1999, p. 108.
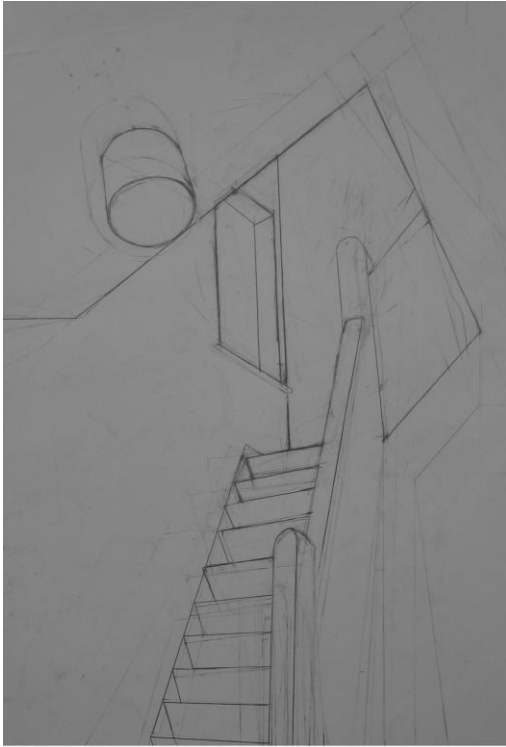
Fig. 4.1 *Gisborne Road, East*, 2005, pencil on paper, 42 × 30 cm.
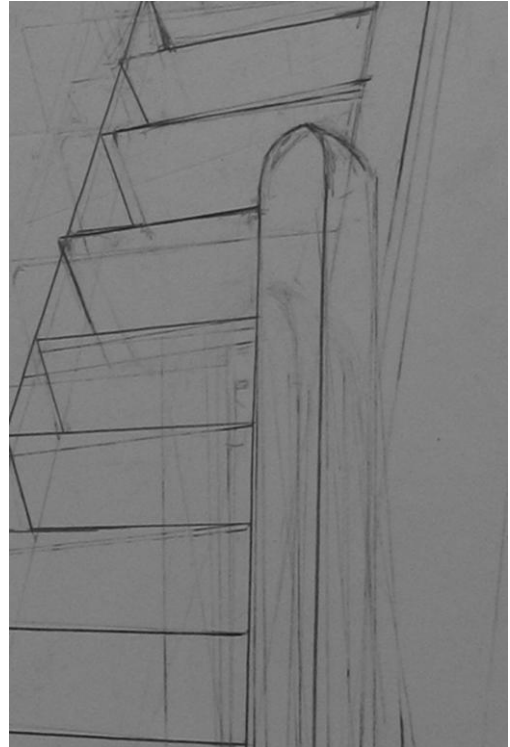
Fig. 4.2 *Gisborne Road, East* (detail), 2005, pencil on paper, 15 × 12 cm.
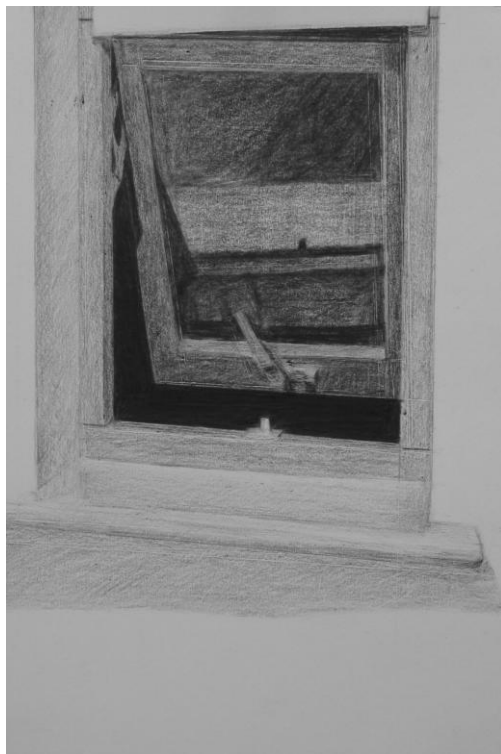
Fig. 4.3 *Gisborne Road, Night Window*, 2005, pencil on paper, 42 × 30 cm.
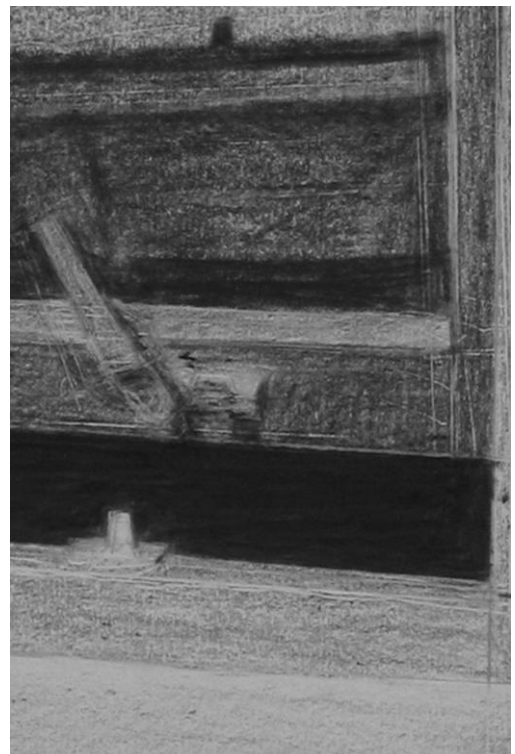
Fig. 4.4 *Gisborne Road, Night Window* (detail), 2005, pencil on paper, 13.5 × 10 cm.

> I'm drawing from observation. As soon as I put down a mark that refers to the subject, I become aware of a paradox. On one hand the mark does seem to relate to the subject in some way: I say 'This mark represents that particular feature of the observed object'; on the other hand, I'm aware of the total difference that exists between the mark and what it represents: I say 'This mark is not what I see'.
>
> It would seem an impasse. Yet, because I can't hold on to the idea of total difference between seeing and representing, and because, for me, the mark still refers, somehow, to the subject, I start believing that I can, however slightly, reduce the gap of total difference. The difference is, of course, fundamental, the gap cannot be bridged but I can't know it (I can write and talk about it, but knowing is another matter), therefore I have the (deluded) impression that something can be done, that there is a lot of work to do.
>
> With drawing I say nothing: I turn my attention to...
>
> As long as I hold on to the paradox that what I draw is and is not what I see, there is always more work to do. Strangely, it feels like voluntary forced labour, self-imposed ob-*servation*.

Solipsism is not only at odds with Weil's conceptualisation of attention as a practice of detachment: there is also a more specifically artistic issue regarding solipsism, that is, the positioning of the viewer, or interpreter. Without an interpretative 'way in', the viewer might be left stranded in front of an unintelligible sign. In the above notes, for instance, references to *what I see*, *what I believe*, *what I have an impression of* and *what I feel* remain quite impenetrable for the reader. The viewer needs to be presented with a context for the work. That context could have taken the form of an explanation in terms of my research on Weilian attention, but this would have been unsatisfactory, for the semantic function of artworks is generally tied to a quite indeterminate, but nevertheless pervasive, notion of autonomy of the art object. That is not to say that I subscribe to a modernist view of art as existing in a socio-cultural vacuum; neither do I think that explanation – or rather the explanatory mode – as such is inappropriate material for the production of artworks. But, if the explanatory mode is not read by the viewer as an artistic trope, then, given the general view of the semantic autonomy of artworks, it is likely that a mismatched dualistic reading of explanation, on one side, and artwork, on the other, will ensue; and, in turn, this would make the artwork merely illustrational (my notes quoted above could for instance be seen as illustrative of Weil's own manner of philosophising) rather than heuristic.

In order to deal with the problem of solipsism and to enact the non-reflexive subject through observational drawing, the methodology of the normative projects involved a dialogical approach, which was implemented through a long-lasting collaboration with artist Hephzibah Rendle-Short. The collaboration arose from a common interest in the potential of observational art practice to address questions that exceed the field of art, and we shared the intention of employing theoretical discourses which are not germane to art theory for a critique of our art practices. This collaboration spans several normative projects, and, consequently, it is the core of the exposition of the projects articulated in §4.3. I use the

adjective 'dialogical' with its most general meaning, i.e. 'pertaining to, or characterized by dialogue'. As I will show, the collaboration turned the solipsistic monologue, characteristic of my initial approach, into a dialogue. However, the dialogic element of the normative projects should not be confused with the dialogical scepticism of the imaginal projects (see §6.4), since the former is a *method*, while the latter is a methodological *attitude*. Dialogue in the normative projects pertains to a *way of making* drawings, while dialogical scepticism in the imaginal projects is a *way of approaching* Weil's discourse on attention through art making.

4.3 Normative projects

In what follows, I discuss the normative projects. These projects all use the dialogic methodology, with the exception of the project reported in §4.33, which is in many respects a transitional project (somewhere in between normative mode: it places limitations on my observational drawing practice; and imaginal mode: it is an image of an image, i.e. of the blind person's cane metaphor). The project belongs in this chapter, firstly, because it delves into the semethical notions of habit and reading[223], and, therefore, it deals with the issue of the agent's disposition towards the world (which is the key concern of the normative projects); and, secondly, because it is a clear example of hybrid art object, since two versions of this project were published in journals as a combination of text and drawing.

The twofold qualification of the relation *myself/the world* in terms of a capacity to experience necessity and to assume a detached attitude affords a classification of the normative projects into two subcategories, namely, projects whose objective is the

---

[223] This change of course required laying aside, at least for a time, the preoccupation with the general picture of Weilian attention which I outlined in the literary review, focussing instead on the rather scant[*] remarks that Weil makes on the relation between attention and artworks. In these remarks, Weil holds that an attention-inviting art object, A_i, cannot but be the result of the agency of an attentive artist[†], A_a, and this is problematic not because it is incongruent with what Weil says about results of attentive actions, but because it places the artist, as producer of A_i (in this case, *me*) in the position of having to assume the role of A_a. Since this implies a self-righteousness which I find untenable, I decided to discount, temporarily, Weil's equation $A_i \rightarrow A_a$. In other words, I assumed that I could produce an artwork having the properties of A_i and that this would not necessarily make me A_a.

[*] The scantiness of the remarks is counterbalanced by the fact that they are found in a rather wide-ranging and systematic essay, titled *De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée*, in which Weil relates attention and art by considering imagination, which, as I argued in §3.31 and §3.32, is an overarching concern of hers.

[†] 'What is particular in works of art is that the sound which reaches the listener from outside seems to him to be solely the fruit of his own attending. In reality, it has been the fruit of the artist's attending. For the composer, to foresee what note will follow is always to invent it; this invention is the fruit of attending' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 75). 'In composing music or poetry, one aims at a certain inner silence of the soul and one arranges words or sounds in such a way as to render this aspiration perceptible to others.' (Weil, *C 1*, p. 56.)

representation of an experience of necessity, and projects motivated by the intention of representing an *attitude* of detachment, and thus the following sections are arranged according to this classification.

4.31 The experience of necessity

4.311 First collaboration with Hephzibah Rendle-Short

In this project, Hephzibah painted my portrait and I made a drawing of the painting after each session; we both wrote notes on this process; no agreement was made with regard to the form the notes should take, and we never compared notes during the project. In the exhibition *Acts and Actions*[224], we presented the painting, four drawings and a booklet with a typed reproduction of the notes, arranged so that the viewer could compare the notes we had written after each session (Figs. 4.5–4.16).

Fig. 4.5 *Acts and Actions* installation, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting.

---

[224] Cafe Gallery, London, February 2008.

Fig. 4.6 *Acts and Actions installation*, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting.

Fig. 4.7 *Acts and Actions*: Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, oil on canvas, 101 × 86 cm.

Fig. 4.8 *Acts and Actions*: Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting (detail), Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, oil on canvas, 101 × 86 cm.
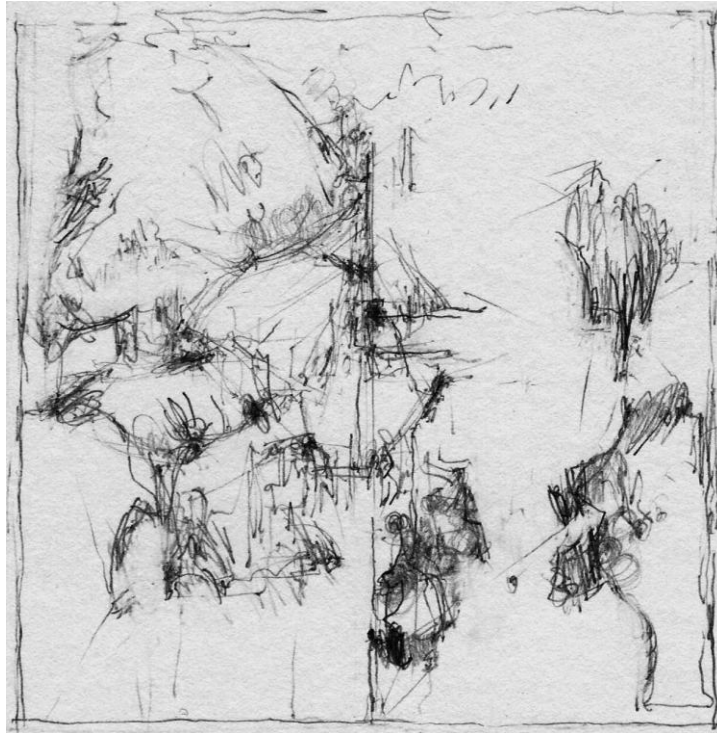
Fig. 4.9 *Acts and Actions*: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting (detail), Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, pencil on paper, 7.9 × 7.8 cm.

Fig. 4.10 *Acts and Actions*: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting (detail), Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, pencil on paper, 9.1 × 7.8 cm.
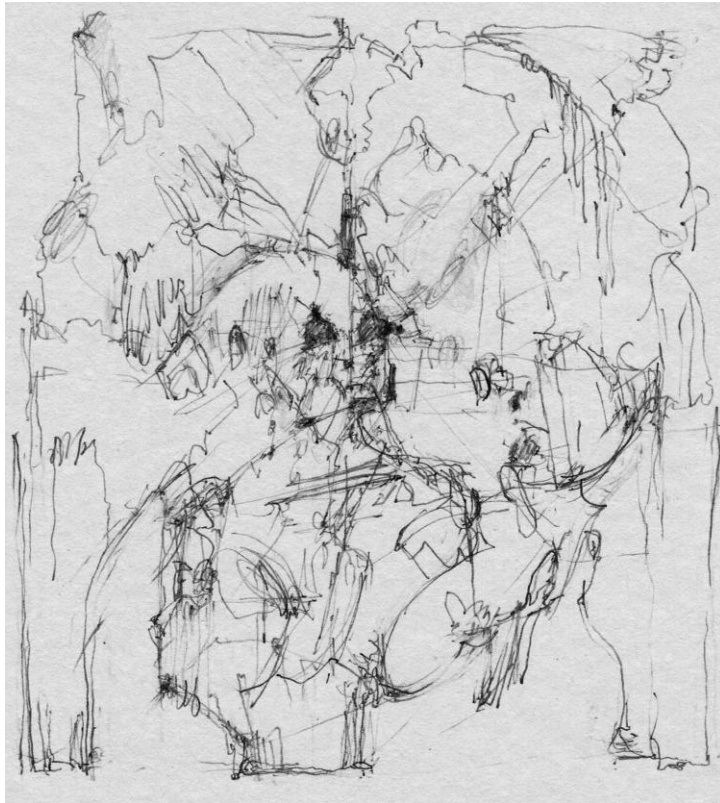
Fig. 4.11 *Acts and Actions*: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting
(detail), Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, pencil on paper, 10.7 × 9.7 cm.

Fig. 4.12 *Acts and Actions*: Drawings after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting
(detail), 2008, Cafe Gallery, London, pencil on paper, 9.5 × 8.6 cm.

Fig. 4.13 *Acts and Actions*: Booklet, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, 21 × 14.8 cm.

Monday 28th January 2008

Thinking of silence: Before we started we had a coffee. We talked about silence. No hope of form and content there. To talk is to be not-silent. Unlike painting, that activity of silence. To paint in silence. Certainly to paint, not in language.

I time share the studio with a musician. Often in the space there is music being played; piano or cello. No.... that is too passive.... the room is filled with music, full to the brim like a glass full of water. But within that I can find silence. There is a silence within the sound.

Is the white ground of the painting an equivalent to silence? The white surface there waiting to be disrupted with the marks, the scrubbings, the movement of paint? The white surface being an indeterminate space neither here with me nor elsewhere. The white surface being incorporated into the spatial negotiations of mark and non-mark. It is the ground out of which something can and must emerge and as such has already a million possible paintings painted on it.

Monday 28th January 2008

H's rhythm: she looks for quite a long time (up to 10 secs), she paints. Whether she is drawing a line or painting an area of colour, in her body language I read a close correspondence between her action and her thought (how?) (Well); her body is not tense but at-*tentive*: between two acts, a slight relaxation. Looking back and forth between the painting and me. As she mixes paint colour, the same posture indicative of attentiveness; *painthinking*.

As I draw, I'm thinking that what I'm thinking *now* I can think only by drawing (at least in part). In English, you cannot say 'humane human cruelty' with two words; in French you can. Drawing is one of the many phenomena through which thinking happens.

Fig. 4.14 *Acts and Actions*: Booklet, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, 21 × 14.8 cm.

Sunday 10th February 2008

Fishing the grey jumper out of the laundry bag: this is part of the painting too.

Perhaps I'm repeating myself: I have the feeling that, drawing, I 'say things' I cannot 'say' any other way (but, then, why not simply 'drawing' rather than 'saying'?) and the even stronger feeling that there are things I don't understand, I don't quite grasp, etc., which I cannot understand only through drawing; like knowing a language: there are ideas in books written in English and Italian (but not, for instance, in German) which I'm aware I don't understand: knowing that one doesn't know: Socrates' pearl. Also the constraints of the present situation: e.g. the drip-erasures of white spirit - another drawing may represent them but not *this* drawing *now this* time with *this* mind - *now*, necessarily *this*, not that □ *amor fati*

Sunday 10th February 2008

"It was good thinking of silence last week, I said.
"Do you think that that thinking is silent? you asked.

What precisely is it that I am painting? What precisely is out there? Is it the flicker of light, the luminosity that lifts off the surface of things, the hum of silence? Is it the enigmatic encounter between the head and the empty space? The drama of it, the shock of it: a head infusing an energy into an emptiness. The unoccupied space made of the meeting of two walls, one the dull ochre of mdf and the other brick encrusted with layers of white paint, meeting at right angles. The head.... put in place, takes up its place and this void takes on a different actuality. The head *disturbs* the emptiness....disrupts...makes play with the stillness of the space to bring another kind of stillness. It is like dust settling, each time anew. The head disturbs the silence to make its own silence all over again.

Above all I must not paint what I see.....rather I must not paint what I can name....or again, I must paint what I can not name.

Fig. 4.15 *Acts and Actions*: Booklet, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, 21 × 14.8 cm.

Monday 18th February 2008

Monday 18th February 2008

As I write this D.A sits drawing from the painting. With a similar attention that I had to him sitting there in front of me, he now sits in front of the painting, putting down marks. His marks removed from the referent, removed from him yet returned to him with a surprising twist. I imagine a fold. I imagine a figure of eight.

It was snowing outside today, the air felt cooler, the light felt colder. I realise now that two touches of cool blue crept in; the first was cool, the second even cooler, both acted as a tool to find a purchase, an opening out of the space.

Drawing with colour, colour as drawing, finding an architecture within the silence, a geometry within the void. Is this painting what I can not name?

ptng h me drwg

ptng h me drwg

musing isn't easy (for me)

Fig. 4.16 *Acts and Actions*: Booklet, Cafe Gallery, London, 2008, 21 × 14.8 cm.

In light of my research[225], this was a representation of the relation myself/the world, in the sense that it was an invitation to interpret the installation as an objectification of *me as drawing agent*, both through the visual component: these are drawings of an object, i.e. of a painting and not of a person (Hephzibah's non-*trompe-l'œil* painting manner reinforced the objectification); and through the textual component: see, for instance, the notes of Monday 18th February 2008 (Fig. 4.16), where Hephzibah describes me drawing and where I give a diagrammatic sketch of the dynamic of the collaboration. I stress the difference between (1) the text/drawing combination in Figs. 4.1–4.4 and (2) the *Acts and Actions* installation: the interpretation of the former presupposes that the viewer empathises with me as a specific individual (hence the potentially unintelligible solipsism), while, in the latter, the viewer is presented with a description, or representation, of me as belonging to the class 'drawing agent', which offers to the viewer a more helpful interpretative key. In (2), one sees the object of observation, i.e. the painting (this is not so in (1)), which functions as a representation of *the world* in the relationship *myself/the world*. While (1) indicates a belief in the direct *presentability* of this relationship, (2) evidences a view of the artwork as *re-presentation*, as mediation between an intended meaning and a potential interpreter who will respond in a certain imputed manner[226]. Moreover, while (1) is ambiguous with regard to the effacement of the results of drawing, in (2), the reading of the drawings as results is discouraged by their inclusion in the wider dialogic narrative of collaboration.

As I show below, the collaboration with Hephzibah continued further and moved towards a more explicit representation of the artist as drawing agent, which involved questioning what counts as drawing as result.

4.312 Collaborative residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short

Hephzibah Rendle-Short and I collaborated on a residency at the Centre for Drawing Project Space, London[227]. In order to elucidate our intentions, firstly, I will return to the analysis of the orders of Weilian attention and explain how Weil binds the notions of voluntary and most elevated attention, necessity and contradiction in her discourse on ethics. Secondly, I will identify what I saw as a problem with Weil's argument. And, thirdly, I will show how I used this problem positively in art practice by appealing to Wittgenstein's distinction between ethical feelings and ethical judgements. The first part of this third exposition discusses Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics*, and, even though it might have seemed more

---

[225] Naturally, as Hephzibah's research concerns differed from mine, the function she intended the work to fulfil was also different.

[226] This triadic semiotic relation is modelled on the one proposed by Ogden and Richards in their book *The Meaning of Meaning*. See: Ogden and Richards, 1989, p. 11.

[227] The residency took place during May 2008.

appropriate to include such a discussion in Chapter 2, this would have obfuscated its specific propaedeutic function in the development of the art projects.

As I have argued in §3.362 and §3.363, for Weil:

– Voluntary attention reveals necessity and the most elevated attention is consent to necessity.

– The most elevated attention is associated with both goodness in the general sense of aptness (e.g. the dexterity of the good cyclist) and with goodness in the ethical sense of freedom as acceptance of the will of a transcendent being[228].

– There is an insoluble contradiction between the fact that reality is necessity and the fact that the only truly free act is the acceptance of necessity[229].

One may object: Is this not an impossible situation? Weil's answer to this objection is simply: Yes, it is an impossible situation; and yet, if you fix your attention on the impossibility, your actions will inevitably be good. I shall quote two passages where Weil proposes this argument:

> All true good entails contradictory conditions and is therefore impossible. He who keeps his attention truly fixed on this impossibility and acts will do what is good.[230]

> We all know that there is no good here below ... Every human being has probably had during their life several moments in which they have clearly admitted to themselves that there is no good here below ... It is up to them to remain motionless, without diverting their gaze ... If God, after a long wait, gives a vague premonition of his light or even reveals himself in person, it is just for an instant. Once again one must remain motionless, attentive [*attentif*], and wait [*attendre*]. Electra [in Weil's metaphor, Electra is the soul] does not search for Orestes [in Weil's metaphor, Orestes is God], she waits. ... All that which she desires is not to exist, since Orestes does not exist. At this moment Orestes can no longer stop himself. He cannot help but disclose his name. He gives certain proof that he is Orestes.[231]

I found Weil's proposition problematic, since it seems to ask for more or less blind acceptance of contradiction. And, yet, at the same time, I also felt that it indicated something significant about Weilian ethics. By considering the proposition as an index (see §4.3121), I was able to lay aside the question of whether what Weil maintains was true or false[232] and I could concentrate on what the index seemed to point to, which, for the moment, I shall call

---

[228] See footnote 162.

[229] See §3.38 and §3.4.

[230] Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 95.

[231] Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 334–335.

[232] Indexes do not possess truth value because they do not state anything. For instance: a pointing finger is neither true nor false; the index of a book, despite the fact that it might be composed of symbols which convey very abstract and complex notions, states nothing, but merely indicates that such notions are to be found at such and such a page. The second example intimates how a proposition, such as Weil's proposition regarding the possibility/impossibility of good, might be considered an index, despite its propositional function.

an 'ethical inkling'. Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* proved very useful for the investigation of this issue.

4.3121 Ethical feelings and statements of absolute value

In *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein describes ethics as an enquiry concerned with absolute value judgements[233]. The problem is that all judgements are represented by propositions and so, given that propositions are statements of facts and given that statements of facts are always relative (i.e. not absolute), there appears to be no possibility of representing absolute value judgements[234]. If an omniscient being, Wittgenstein continues, were to write a book stating all the facts in the world, 'this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. It would of course contain all relative judgments of value and all true scientific propositions and in fact all true propositions that can be made. But all the facts described would, as it were, stand on the same level and in the same way all propositions stand on the same level.'[235] Yet, since Wittgenstein is 'still tempted to use such expressions as "absolute good", "absolute value", etc.'[236], he tries to give examples of the sort of expressions he is inclined to use when he experiences ethical feelings; these expressions are: '*I wonder at the existence of the world*' and 'the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe'[237]. It is important to stress the word *feeling* here, because Wittgenstein is very clear about his predicament: 'I am in the situation in which you would be if, for instance, I were to give you a lecture on the psychology of pleasure.'[238] In other words, Wittgenstein makes no claim to the effect that, from his ethical feelings, he can deduce the truth of propositions stating some absolute, or ethical, value – this follows from Wittgenstein's view that subjective statements, like statements regarding one's feeling, are disengaged from the machinery of language (see p. 25 and footnote 28). On the contrary, Wittgenstein writes: 'I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence.'[239] Wittgenstein remains firmly within the limits of 'I'.

---

[233] Wittgenstein, 1993, pp. 38–39.

[234] 'Every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value: Instead of saying "This is the right way to Grantchester," I could equally well have said, "This is the right way you have to go if you want to get to Grantchester in the shortest time"; "This man is a good runner" simply means that he runs a certain number of miles in a certain number of minutes, etc. Now what I wish to contend is that, although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statement of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value.' (Ibid., p. 39.)

[235] Ibid., p. 39.

[236] Ibid., p. 40.

[237] Ibid., p. 41.

[238] Ibid., pp. 40–41.

[239] Ibid., p. 44.

Wittgenstein's distinction between *ethical feelings* and *statements of absolute value* allows a clearer view of Weil's contradictory proposition on the simultaneous possibility and impossibility of good: this proposition is an index of *her* ethical feelings. I may or may not have experienced similar feelings, but this is beside the point. In my view, Weil's discourse on ethics suggests that her ethics rests on logic, that is, that it can be deduced by the use of argument, and thus she has to resort to a dogmatic notion of impossibility, while, for Wittgenstein, ethics rests on aesthetics, i.e. on feelings. Wittgenstein's distinction between *ethical feelings* and *statements of absolute value* allows him to approach ethical enquiry in a less dogmatic manner than Weil. In the last lines of the *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein writes:

> My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. It is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.[240]

Even though Weil does not explicitly argue that ethics rests on logic, this is implied by several passages in which, unlike Wittgenstein, she claims that there is such a thing as a science of ethics which is even more precise than mathematics:

> One does double harm to mathematics when one regards it only as a rational and abstract speculation. It is that, but it is also the very science of nature, a science totally concrete, and it is also a mysticism, those three together and inseparably.[241]

> There is an analogy between the fidelity of the right-angled triangle to the relationship which forbids it to emerge from the circle of which its hypotenuse is the diameter, and that of a man who, for example, abstains from the acquisition of power or of money at the price of fraud.[242]

> We have lost the idea that absolute certainty belongs only to divine things. ... Our intelligence has become so crude that we no longer conceive that there could be any authentic, rigorous certainty concerning the incomprehensible mysteries. Upon this point there would be an infinitely precious use for mathematics, which is irreplaceable in this respect.[243]

> The appearance of geometry in Greece is the most dazzling of all the prophecies which foretold the Christ. One can thus understand how science, by its infidelity, should have become partly involved in the principle of evil.[244]

But, as Rhees points out[245], Weil's tendency to posit absolutes is problematic because the validity of scientific proposition, including those of mathematics, make sense only within a *relative* context of investigation.

---

[240] Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 44.

[241] Weil, *ICG*, p. 191.

[242] Ibid., p. 189.

[243] Ibid., p. 165.

[244] Ibid., p. 171. According to Olivier Rey, '[for Weil,] it is a mistake to believe that one can bracket good and evil, while one acquires the knowledge to be used later on for good.' (Rey, 2009, p. 195.)

4.3122 Propositions and necessity

Ethical feelings, as all feelings, state nothing. Statements of absolute value, considered as indexes, point to ethical feelings but state nothing, even though they seem, at first, to state that something is the case. Furthermore, the adjective 'ethical' in the expression 'ethical feelings' does not qualify the feelings themselves, for feelings are *undergone* by someone, not willed, and, since anything undergone is beyond one's control, it follows that it is ethically neutral (in the same way that particular readings, in the Weilian sense, are ethically neutral). Ethical feelings are qualified as ethical because the expressions which one is inclined to use when experiencing them evoke absoluteness. Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* illustrates how verbal language, through propositions, permits the representation of absolute values and, at the same time, leads to the collapse of this representation by the deduction of the nonsensicality of the expressions which one is inclined to use when one experiences ethical feelings. In this collapse, I saw the possibility of an experience of necessity, since the nonsensicality of expressions of absolute value is a corollary of the relativity of all statements of fact, that is, it follows from a reading of reality as a web of necessary relations.

4.3123 Necessity and drawing

Drawings, insofar as they are *images*[246], state nothing. In this respect, drawings are analogous to ethical feelings. In the collaboration with Hephzibah during the Centre for Drawing residency, I sought to bring verbal language and drawing closer to each other, with a view to experiencing necessity. Before giving an account of this project, it will be useful to consider in more detail the non-propositional nature of images.

It is easy to forget that images[247] state nothing, as one might confuse the strong sense of actuality that images can sometimes engender with the semantic stating function of

---

[245] 'All mathematical scientific methods, whether Greek science or classical mechanics, leave you with a certain relativity. Scientific problems (of physics or biology) and possible answers to them have meaning *within a system* – in relation to a method of investigation, of proof or disproof, testing and confirmation, and in relation to a notation. When Simone Weil speaks of "une véritable science" (almost like "what investigation would be, if it were *really* investigation") she confuses this. But if she suggests that a genuine science, perhaps Greek science, would show the world as God sees it, this cannot be something which she learned from science or from contemplating science. It must rest on the religious conviction which she has independently of science.' (Rhees, 2000, pp. 91–92.) For a more sympathetic view, see: Morgan, 2009, pp. 293–294, p. 307. For a neutral account of Weil's ideas on the relation between science and ethics see: Rey Puente, 2009. For a historical contextualisation of Weil's ideas on science see: Arcoleo, 2009.

[246] Drawings are not images by default, as they can be employed in such a way as to functions as symbols.

[247] When I speak of 'images' I have in mind Charles Sander Peirce's notion of *icon*, or *likeness*, and his triadic classification of signifiers (or, to use Peirce's more technical term, *representamina*) into icons, indexes and symbols (Peirce, 1998, p. 5). I retain the term 'image' because its meaning is sufficiently clear, while the term 'icon' would require a more sustained exposition of Peirce's theory of signs, which is beyond the scope of the present research. I will, however, summarily sketch

propositions. For instance, a photograph of a dead friend might make one feel as if the friend was actually there, while a sentence stating that the friend was alive on such and such a day, at such and such a time of that day, etc. is less likely to engender this feeling of actual presence. But the fact remains that the photograph does not state anything at all regarding the life of the friend.

The example of the photograph might mislead one into thinking that the term 'image' denotes solely that class of signs that are devoid of symbolical elements. This is not the case: for instance, as Katarzyna Paprzycka argues, propositional forms (which are composed of symbols) cannot be true or false, as they do not state anything; to elucidate this point, Paprzycka shows that the meaning of a propositional form (which is not itself propositional) written in the standard symbolical logical notation, $p \rightarrow (\sim q \bullet p)$, (if p, then not q and p), can be represented by an image[248]:

$$\boxed{} \rightarrow (\sim \boxed{} \bullet \boxed{})$$
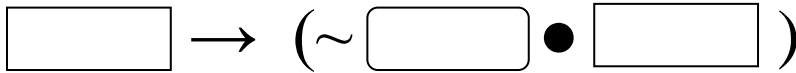
By the same token, images might be used in a semantic context where they function propositionally: for instance, in a school, photographs of students might be placed on a board to signify that a given student attends that school; in this context, a photo of a given student on the board is equivalent to a proposition stating that that student attends that school; thus, the photograph functions symbolically.

4.3124 Gesture and observation

I now return to the Centre for Drawing residency, and I will show the practical bearing of the insights afforded by reflection on Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* outlined in §4.3121 and §4.3122. During the residency, the first step towards nearing verbal language and drawing was a questioning of the notions of *gesture* and *observation* by a reflection on a passage of Alain's *Propos sur l'esthétique*. Alain writes:

> Observation does not temper the gesture; but, on the contrary, it is the gesture that tempers observation. Retain the gesture, if you want to know.[249]

This quote suggests that it might be possible to investigate how gesture informs observation. But what is a *gesture*? Is it simply what one can infer from the drawing marks with regard to

---

Peirce's semiotic model by quoting Roman Jakobson: '(1) The *icon* acts chiefly by a factual similarity between its *signans* and *signatum* ... (2) The *index* acts chiefly by a factual, existential contiguity between its *signans* and *signatum* ... (3) The *symbol* acts chiefly by imputed, learned contiguity between *signans* and *signatum*. This connection "consists in its being a rule" and does not depend on the presence or absence of any similarity or physical contiguity.' (Jakobson, 1990, p. 409.)

[248] Paprzycka, 2007, pp. 6–9.

[249] Alain, 1923, p. 65.

the movements of the drawing-agent's hand? Or does it include the manner in which the agent sits? And what about the agent's diet and sleeping habits – are they also part of gesture? We thought that the meaning of 'gesture' was sufficiently broad to comprise the way one might analyse drawings verbally and we proceeded to make drawings of the empty Centre for Drawing Project Space, which we subsequently tried to analyse as objectively as possible, typing our analysis as we spoke, as a way of equalising the status of analysis and drawing in terms of product. Figs. 4.17–4.18 show an example of the results of this approach. The related text can be found in Appendix 2.
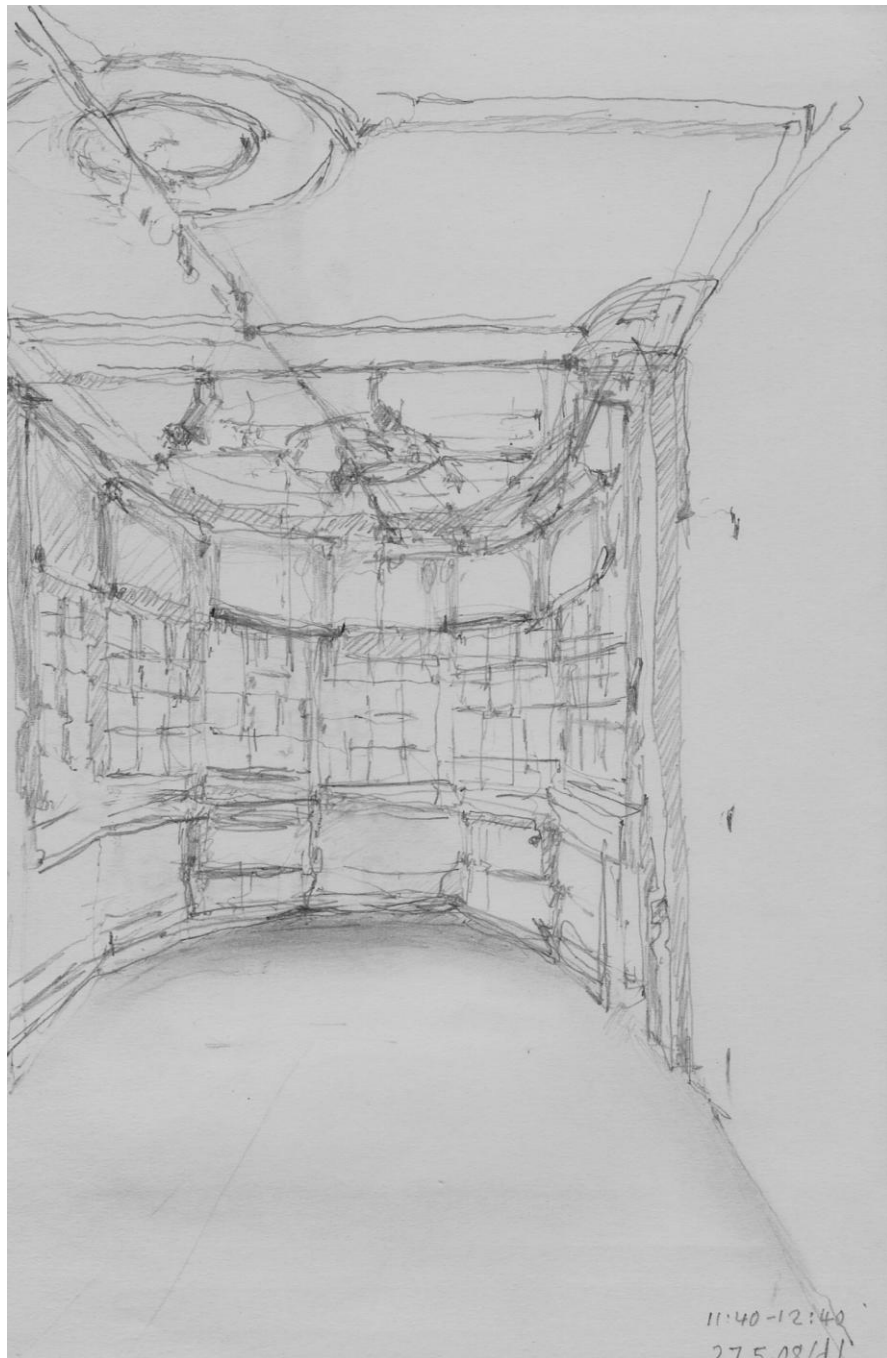
Fig. 4.17 My first drawing during collaborative residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short, at the Centre for Drawing, London, 2008, pencil on paper, 14.8 × 9.8 cm.

101
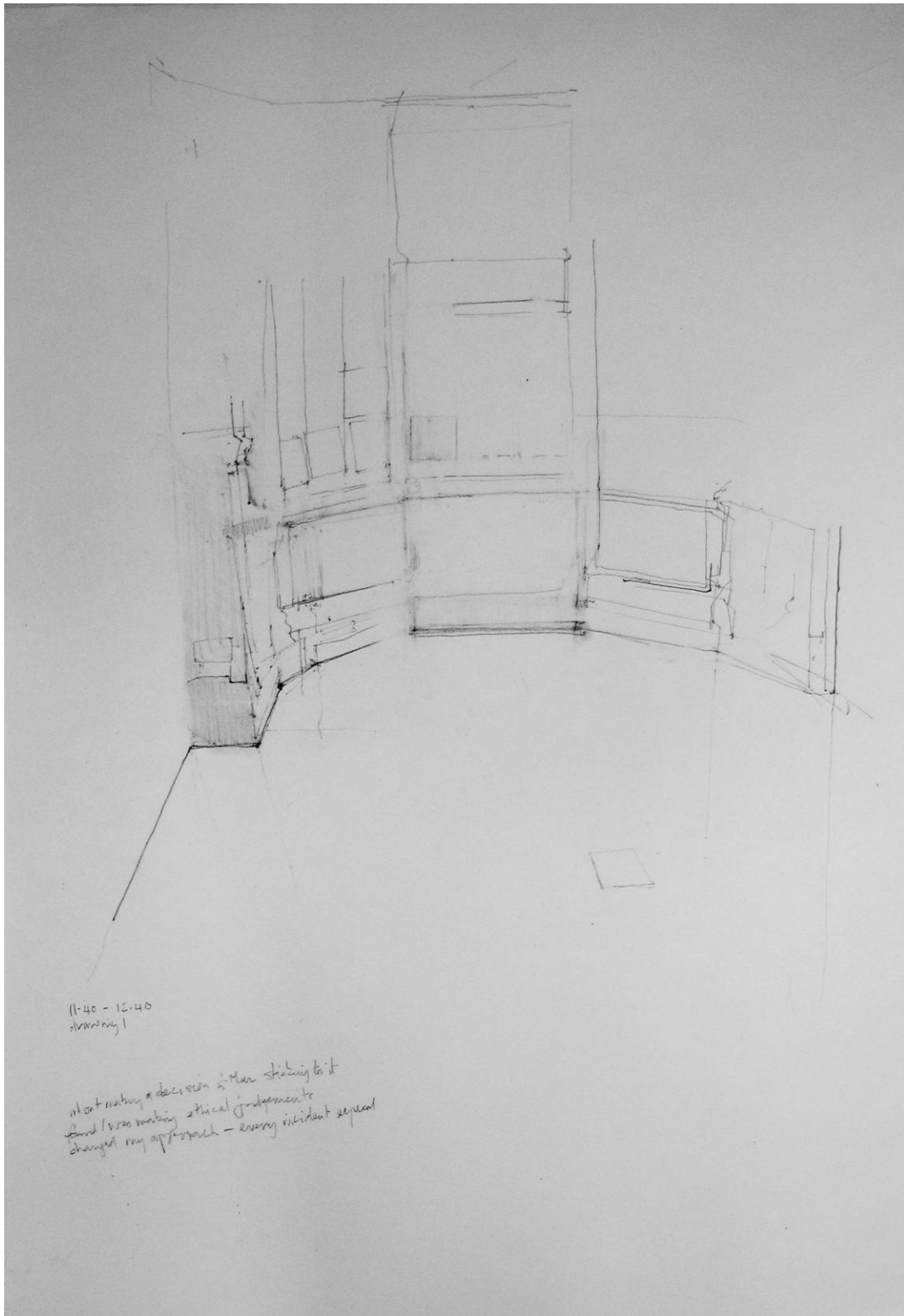
Fig. 4.18 Hephzibah's first drawing during collaborative residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short, at the Centre for Drawing, London, 2008, pencil on paper, 42 × 29.7 cm.

We repeated this process several times with a growing sense of frustration, due to our realisation that verbal analysis and drawing were as far apart as ever, with the difference that we now had become very conscious of the fact. After various attempts, we arrived at the following method: one of us would draw and, at the same time, would instruct the other person, who would face away from the object of observation and draw, relying on the instructions, but able to ask for clarification regarding the instructions. In Appendix 2, there is a transcript of one of the dialogues by which the drawing was made and Fig. 4.19 reproduces the resulting drawing.
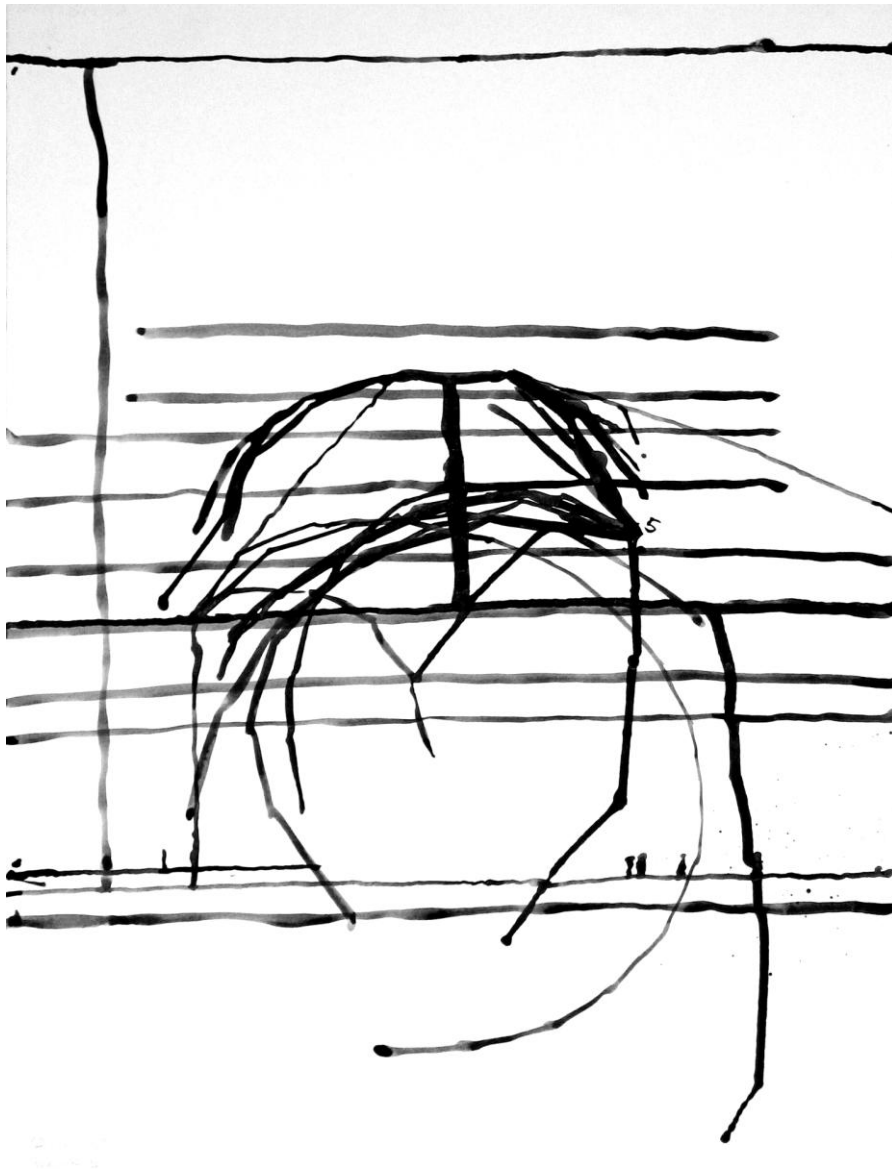
Fig. 4.19 Hephzibah's drawing during collaborative residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short, at the Centre for Drawing, London, 2008, ink on paper, 59.4 × 42 cm. The space drawn is the same as the space that can be seen in Figs. 4.17 and 4.18.

As I argued §4.22, in order to avoid unintelligible solipsism in the representation of the relation *myself/the world*, I aimed at objectifying the sign *drawing agent*. Such an objectification involved questioning what is to count as *drawing as result*. A comparison between the drawings reproduced in Fig. 4.18 and Fig. 4.19 and related text, will clarify how this aim was achieved. In order to both preserve the conceptualisation of these two works as single drawings comprising two components and distinguish between the two components, I shall refer to the textual component as 'drawing$_T$'('T' standing for 'text') while the other will be called 'drawing$_M$' ('M' standing for 'mark'). As it will become evident, such indexing is more representative of the work reproduced in Fig. 4.19 than of the one in Fig. 4.18, but it is nevertheless appropriate in both cases as a representation of our intention.

Fig. 4.18. Drawing$_T$:	*Fig. 4.19. Drawing$_T$:*
Is an analysis of something (i.e. drawing$_M$). It is clear that there are two very separate elements: drawing$_T$ about drawing$_M$.	Is not an analysis of something. Drawing$_T$ is not drawing$_M$ but is *a part* of the same drawing.
Could be used as a set of instructions to make a drawing$_M$ resembling, albeit imperfectly, the one which is being described (similar to Sol LeWitt's instructions, although much less precise): e.g. 'At the bottom there is a curve swinging left to right' could be read as an instruction to draw a curve at the bottom of the page, left to right.	Could not be used as a set of instructions to make a drawing$_M$ resembling the one to which the text is related, because the time frame of the rhythm by which we "synchronised" our formats is merely indicated but not represented: e.g. '*But mine has gone right off the page*… Well, it doesn't matter it is more the rhythm….*But am I following your rhythm or my own?* Following mine, follow mine… *Ok shall we start again?* Yes. 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… *I'm off the page*. Ok, you're off the page.'
Is mostly a series of propositions whose truth value could be assessed (at least in some cases) by the viewer through a comparison with drawing$_M$: e.g., the viewer could ask 'Is it the case that at the bottom of the page there is a curve swinging left to right?'	Despite its considerable length, there are no descriptions of drawing$_M$, but representations of intentions. Moreover, there are many interjections which indicate (and, therefore, do not describe) feelings such as frustration, surprise, uncertainty, etc.
Is a consequence of the drawing$_M$ and is thus a descriptive representation of drawing$_M$ as result.	Is a transcription of the dialogue which took place before the drawing$_M$ was produced (drawing$_M$ is a consequence of it) and is thus a representation of a drawing-agent action, and not of drawing$_M$ as result.
Functions symbolically, that is, it will be transparent to any interpreter who knows the conventions (i.e. the English language) by which it is a sign.	Possesses more the semantic opacity of a thing[250] (it is likely that most viewers would find it unreadable).

---

[250] Oliver Sacks, in his book *Musicophilia*, reports the case of Clive Wearing, a musician with a severe form of amnesia, who cannot remember anything that happens from one moment to the next: 'Desperate to hold on to something ..., Clive started to keep a journal ... But his journal entries consisted, essentially of the statements "I am awake" or "I am conscious," entered again and again every few minutes. He would write: "2.10 pm: this time properly awake.... 2.14 pm: this time finally awake.... 2.35 pm: this time completely awake," along with the negations of this statements: "At 9.40

In drawing Fig. 4.19, the focus of drawing$_T$ has shifted from drawing$_M$ to the drawing agent, but it neither represents the agent descriptively nor iconically (i.e. through resemblance[251]); rather it is an object, a by-product, or an index, of the drawing agent – in this sense, drawing$_T$ (Fig. 4.19) represents the agent through objectification.

Did this proximity of drawing$_T$ and drawing$_M$ afford the experience of necessity I sought? No, but this is inconsequential with respect to the analogical function of the work for two reasons: firstly, even if I had experienced necessity, it would have been in any case a *private* experience; and, secondly, the analogical function was to be fulfilled by the *approach* to drawing, rather than by the *properties* of any particular drawings that might be produced.

4.313 Sin Podium: Speaking of Writing – Speaking/Writing ~~about~~ Drawing

The work of which Fig. 4.19 is an instantiation[252] was presented as a performance at the conference *Sin Podium: Speaking of Writing*[253], with the title *Speaking/Writing ~~about~~ Drawing*. This title is a misnomer because, in fact, there was no writing during the performance, and, as no audio recording of the event was made, there was no possibility of transcribing the dialogue at a later date. Furthermore, the drawing$_M$ I made was never shown to the audience and Hephzibah's was discarded at the end of the performance. The only record of the event is a rather grainy photograph (see Fig. 4.20).

---

pm I awoke for the first time, despite my previous claims." This in turn was crossed out, followed by "I was fully conscious at 10.35 pm, and awake for the first time in many many weeks." This in turn was cancelled out by the next entry.' (Sacks, 2008, p. 203.) Recently, Clive Wearing's journal was exhibited in *Identity: Eight rooms, nine lives*, at the Wellcome Collection, London, 26th November 2009 – 6th April 2010. Even though drawing$_T$ (Fig. 4.19) has nothing tragic about it (on the contrary, it is quite comical), it possesses qualities which are similar to Wearing's journal, in so far as both engender a feeling of impenetrability, or opacity, with regard to the experience that they signify.

[251] As Wittgenstein writes: 'In the fact that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the symphony out of the score, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct the symphony from the line on a gramophone record and from this again – by means of the first rule – construct the score, herein lies the internal similarity between these things which at first seem to be entirely different.' (Wittgenstein, 1999, §4.0141, p. 46.) In the case of drawing Fig. 4.19, the similarity between drawing$_M$ and drawing$_T$ is suggested, but there is no rule to turn the drawing into the text and vice versa.

[252] By this, I mean to say that *the work* is not the final product but, in keeping with the aim of normative critical practical analogy, the work is the set of norms used in the process.

[253] The conference took place at the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, on 15th July 2009. The conference had the following aim: 'The recent history of visual arts practice, with its fusion of performance and residual object-based work, its increasing assimilation of varieties of writing, and its interrogation of the relationship between image and text, suggests that contemporary artists and art researchers are well placed to critically explore the habits of public presentation. *Sin Podium* will bring together presentations that, in various ways, look at the production of writing in its relation to spoken presentation, engaging in an interrogation of the concept of the speaker's platform in all its diversity. The event will focus on those rarely acknowledged practices, both material and immaterial, which underlie the presentation of writing.' *Sin Podium: Speaking of Writing*, 2009.

Fig. 4.20 *Speaking/Writing ~~about~~ Drawing* performance at the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading, on 15th July 2009. This image was reproduced on the website dedicated to *Sin Podium* (http://sinpodium.wordpress.com).

As the photograph shows, I faced and drew the audience and gave instructions to Hephzibah, who faced away from the audience. I drew on an A6 sketchbook and, as I was sitting about two metres from the first row of the audience, my drawing$_M$ could not be seen. The piece of paper on which Hephzibah drew was attached to a blackened glass which reflected the audience. The performance lasted half an hour. This event pushed the objectification of the drawing agent further because there was nothing else left: no drawing$_T$ or drawing$_M$, but only two people engaged in the act of drawing. The struck-through 'about' of the performance title signified a change of perspective with regard to this project: at the beginning, we had conceived the nearing of verbal analysis and drawing as a *bridging of the gap* between text and image; now, we sought to *get rid of the bridge*, for we saw the bridge as a separation, not as connection – 'about' represents that separation in the sense that, as long as our texts remained analyses *about* drawings, they could not be read as components (drawing$_T$ and drawing$_M$) of a *unique* drawing. The strikethrough of 'about' was the real bridging.

4.32 Attitude of detachment

In this section, I consider a normative project whose objective was the representation of an attitude of detachment. The project was a development of the first collaboration with Hephzibah, which I discussed in §4.311.

In this project, Hephzibah painted a portrait of me. I made a drawing from the painting after each session and I also drew a portrait of Hephzibah – a new drawing on each session – and, in turn, Hephzibah made a painting from each drawing[254]. We decided not to write any notes on our experience. The next section (including the three sub-sections) deals with the drawings I made after the painting.

4.321 Skull drawings

For the drawings after Hephzibah's painting (see Figs. 4.21–4.24), I proceeded as follows:

– Focus attention on three patches of colour at a time.

– Imagine that the three patches are the eye and nose sockets of a skull.

– Wait until the sockets 'pop'[255] into consciousness, as if they were not on the flat canvas surface but, as it were, three-dimensionally following the volume of the imagined skull.

– Draw the sockets with unhurried, light gestures (reassessment of previously drawn sockets was also permitted, both through erasure and superimposition of marks).

Each drawing session was on average one-hour long.

---

[254] Retrospectively, this move might be interpreted as a way of eliminating the textual component of the process while preserving the reflective aspect.

[255] I borrow this expression from Betty Edwards; she uses it in the context of the perception of negative space (Edwards, 1995, p. 155). Imagining the sockets feels very similar to perceiving negatives spaces, as in both cases there is a conscious effort to see something as something else and there occurs a rather sudden perceptual shift.
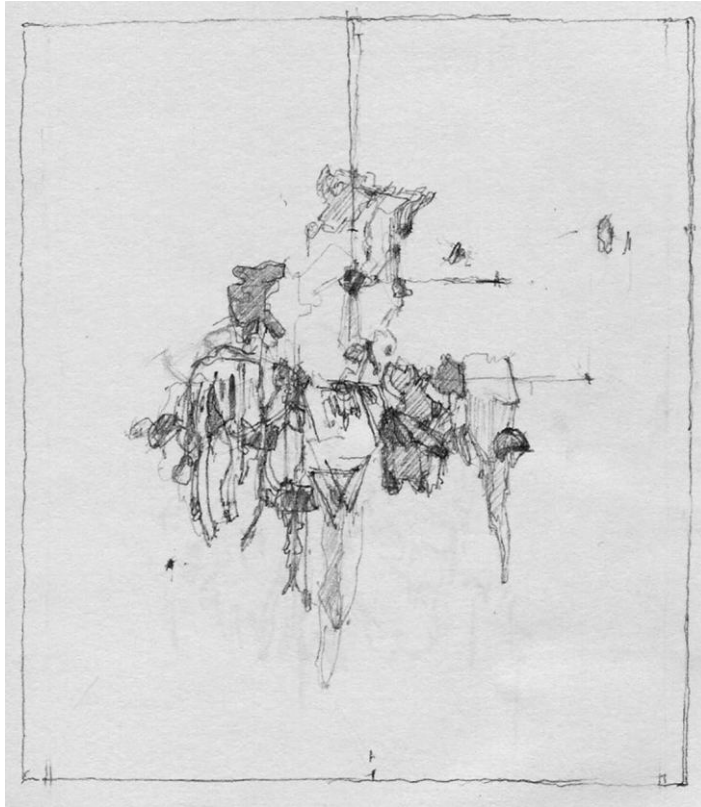
Fig. 4.21 Skull drawing after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, 11th May 2008 (detail), pencil on paper, 7.1 × 9.3 cm.
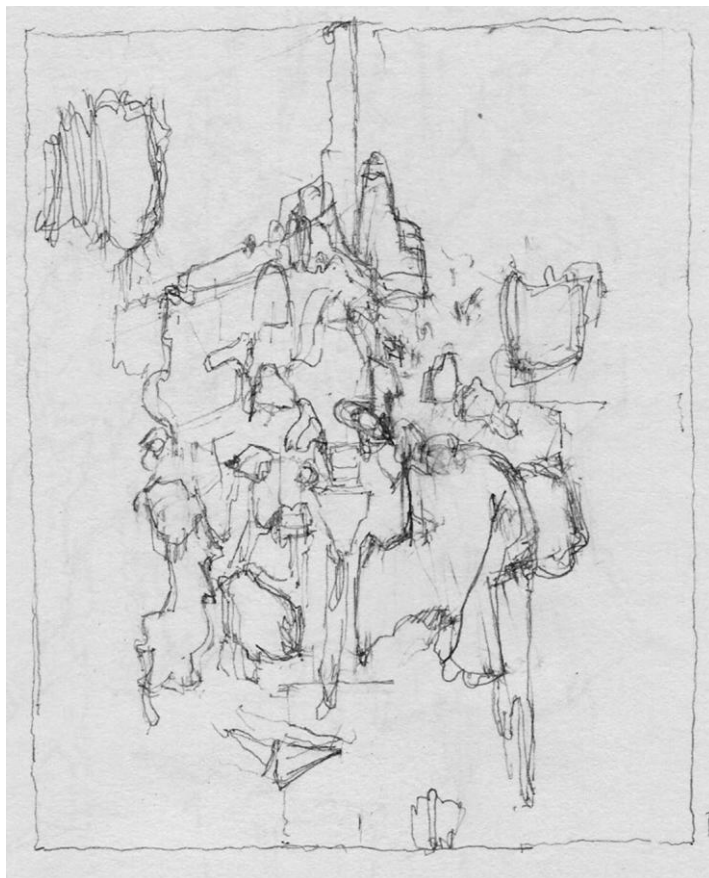
Fig. 4.22 Skull drawing after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, 15th May 2008 (detail), pencil on paper, 11.1 × 9.2 cm.
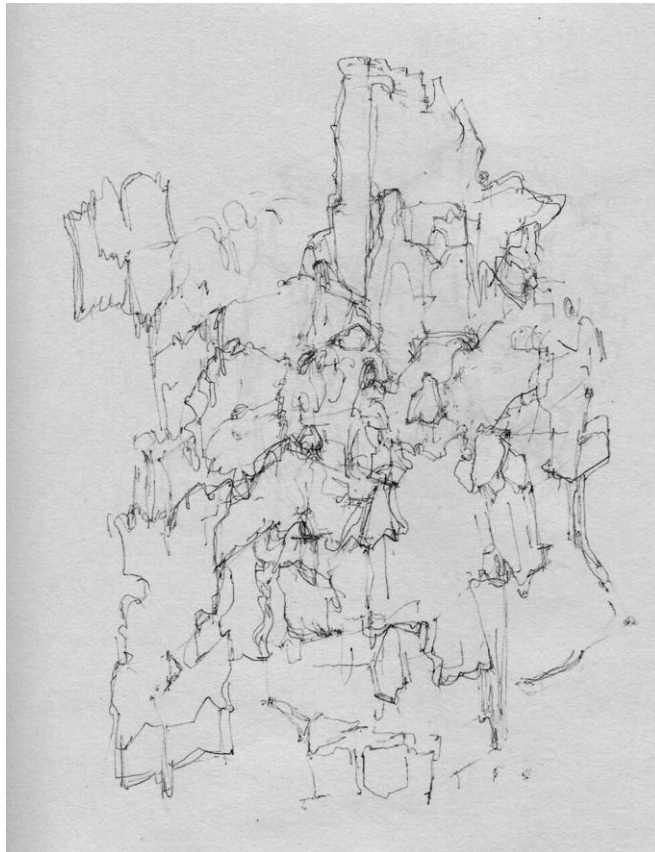
Fig. 4.23 Skull drawing after Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, 19th May 2008 (detail), pencil on paper, 15 × 11.5 cm. See Fig. 4.26.
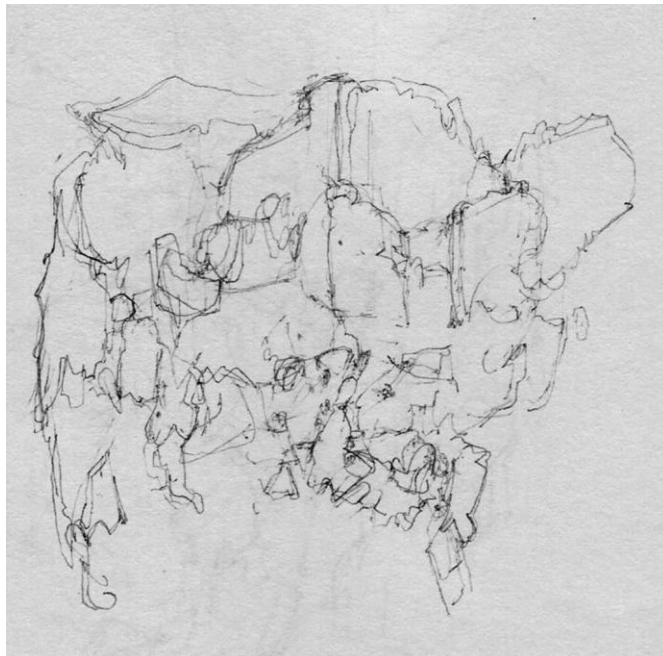
Fig. 4.24 Skull drawing after Hephzibah's painting, 2nd June 2008 (detail), pencil on paper, 8.5 × 9.3 cm. See Fig. 4.27.

This approach was not exclusively germane to the collaboration, and, in fact, on occasion, it was used outside that context; for example, in an essay I wrote which deals with Weil's notion of the *moving indifference* of works of art through an analysis of Agnes Denes' artist book *Book of Dust* (see Fig. 4.25), which I will discuss further on in §4.33.

SPECIALE WEIL

	MICROSCOPICO	SCALA UMANA	COSMICO
dimensione	10^{-33} cm	200 cm	10^{28} cm
	(lunghezza di Planck)	(persona)	(universo)
velocità	10^{-7} cm/sec	100 cm/sec	3×10^{10} cm/sec
	(deriva dei continenti)	(uomo che cammina)	(velocità della luce)
energia	10^{-9} watt	10^{-20} watt	4×10^{26} watt
	(neurone)	(cuore umano)	(sole)
numeri	meno di 10	10^{30}	10^{80}
	(tipi di particelle stabili)	(atomi in un essere umano)	(atomi nell'universo)
densità	10^{16} g/cm³	1 g/cm³	5×10^{-30} g/cm³
	(nucleo)	(essere umano)	(universo)
massa	10^{-28} g	10^5 g	10^{45} g
	(elettrone)	(essere umano)	(galassia)
temperatura	3 K	310 K	10^7 K
	(radiazione cosmica di fondo)	(temperatura del corpo umano)	(centro del sole)

Denes, «Book of Dust», p. 32.

Denes commenta così questa serie di dati: «L'idea basilare e antropocentrica che noi siamo il centro dell'universo è, in un certo senso, vera. In quest'universo di estremi, l'umanità è quasi al centro della sua gamma di dimensioni, masse, e temperature. Noi siamo macroscopici, nel mezzo fra proporzioni cosmiche e microcosmiche. La nostra dimensione è il medio geometrico fra gli atomi e le stelle, dieci bilioni di volte più grandi di un atomo, dieci bilioni di volte più piccoli del sole. Siamo il medio fra l'ultramicroscopico (quark e lunghezza di Planck) e l'interezza dell'universo visibile. Il nostro mondo comincia sulla superficie della nostra pelle, e possiamo scrutare interiormente ed esteriormente fino alla stessa profondità. Similmente, la nostra temperatura corporea, 300 K, è il medio geometrico tra la temperatura di 3 K dell'universo e quella di 30.0000 delle stelle più calde. Pure la terra è un pianeta mediano: nel sistema solare, ce ne sono quattro di più piccoli e quattro di più grandi. Noi occupiamo uno strato sottile sulla superficie della terra, fra il suo interno fuso e il frigido spazio cosmico»[18].

Mentre la tavola rappresenta l'approccio scientifico odierno (impersonalmente freddo e basato sull'accumulo di dati), il commento di Denes ci riporta alla prospettiva antropocentrica, al punto di vista personale per il quale il fatto della presenza umana nell'universo appare un meraviglioso equilibrio, un toccante e quasi inimmaginabile momento di stasi fertile nel movimento sterile e schiacciante della materia.

3. Polvere umana

In una sezione di *Book of Dust* intitolata «polvere umana», Denes presenta una foto di alcuni resti calcarei umani.

L'immagine è seguita da un testo in forma di

Dino Alfier, Agnes Denes, *Human Dust*, 1969, 2008

42   N. 67/09   PROSPETTIVA ·PERSONA·

Fig.4.25 Page from the essay 'La commossa indifferenza dell'artista che attende: Il valore dell'arte in Simone Weil and Agnes Denes'. At the bottom of the page, one can see a skull drawing after Denes' photograph *Human Dust*.

Nevertheless, once again, Hephzibah's manner of painting (see Fig. 4.26) was particularly suited to the task, as it made it relatively easy to abstract from the representational content of

the image (this kind of abstraction would have certainly been more demanding with a photorealistic painting)[256].

Fig. 4.26 Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, 19th May 2008, oil on canvas, 101 × 86 cm. See Fig. 4.23.

---

[256] The idea for this project originates in Leonardo da Vinci's *A Treatise on Painting*, where he describes a technique to awaken and increase one's creative faculty which involves imagining a landscape, figures, etc., in the stains on a wall (see: da Vinci, 1995, p. 58). Furthermore, the project was inspired by Henri Michaux's *Emergences/Resurgences*, in particular, a passage on p. 14 (with related drawing on p. 15), both because of the general *emergent* quality of the drawing, and of the text in which Michaux describes the perceptual metamorphosis of patches of colour into nameable entities: 'Someone says, "Why not paint on a black ground? Or simply on a sheet of black paper?" As soon as I start in, as soon as several colours are applied to the sheet of black paper, it ceases to be a sheet and becomes night. The colours almost haphazardly applied have become apparitions... looming out of the night.' (Michaux, 2000, p. 15.)
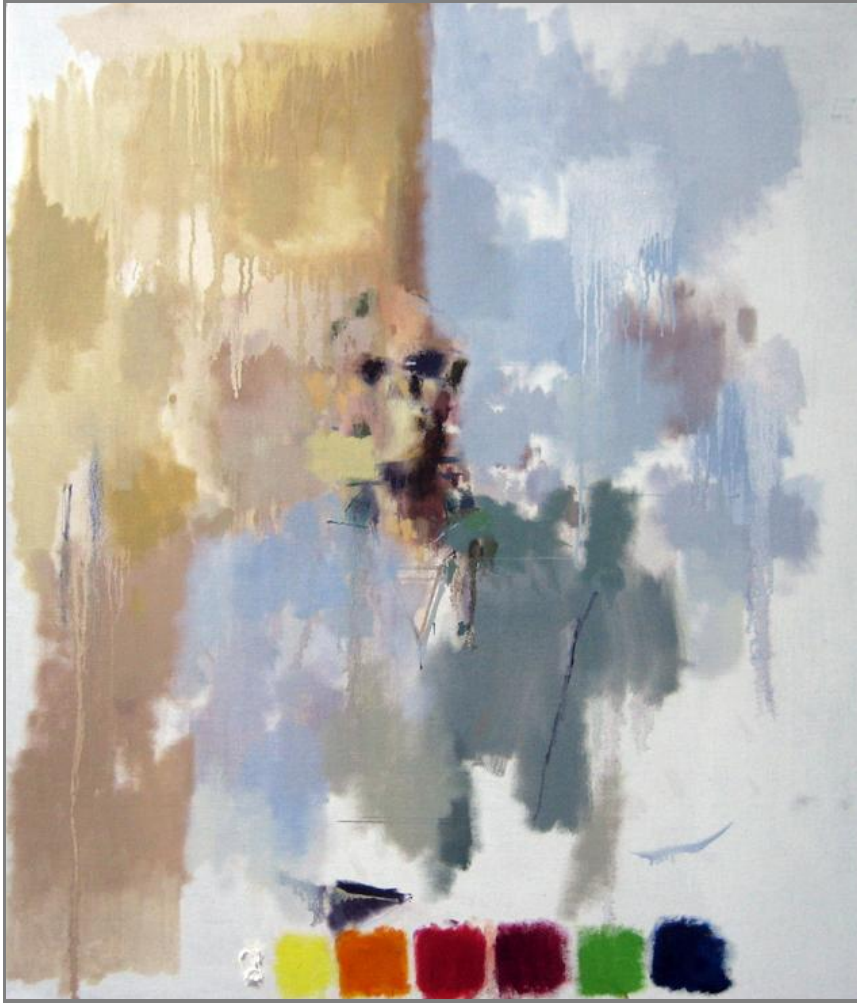
Fig. 4.27 Hephzibah Rendle-Short's painting, 25th June 2008, oil on canvas, 101 × 86 cm. See Fig. 4.24.

The project, as I said, sprang from an intention to represent an attitude of detachment; more specifically, it investigated the notions of waiting, free compulsion, and obedience (with which I dealt theoretically in Chapter 3), and, accordingly in §4.3211–4.3213, I focus on these aspects separately.

4.3211 Waiting

I have argued that Weil associates attention with detachment and that she also describes attention as a kind of *waiting*. The restrictions I posed on drawing were the means by which I could *wait* in the Weilian sense[257]. On one hand, the skull drawing project is problematic, due to its solipsistic nature, but, on the other hand, I wish to stress its importance as a step

---

[257] 'I have a thought that seems to me important. I have nothing on which to jot it down. I resolve to remember it later. Two hours later I recall that I must remember a thought. I no more know which thought at all, not even what it is about. I orient my attention towards this thing of which I know that it exists, but of which I do not know at all what it is. This empty attention can last several minutes. Then (at best) it comes. I recognise, without any incertitude, that it is that thought.' (Weil, *C 2*, p. 291.) See also the passages quoted in footnotes 149 and 162.

towards the development of *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* (*GIOI*), discussed in §5.412, since it gives me the opportunity to exemplify one of the *modi operandi* of art practice within the research, i.e. a process of association which might sometimes appear quite removed from the conceptual territory of the research. *GIOI* is the title of the installation which I produced during a residency at the Centre for Drawing, which consisted of an exhibition of the work of the fictional character Otto U. Gayl. The poster for *GIOI* (see Fig. 4.28) shows a figure looking up at a passing cloud, which 'becomes' an indeterminate creature's head (which, incidentally, as with the imagined skull, possesses eyes and nose but lacks a mouth), before turning once more into a nondescript shape.
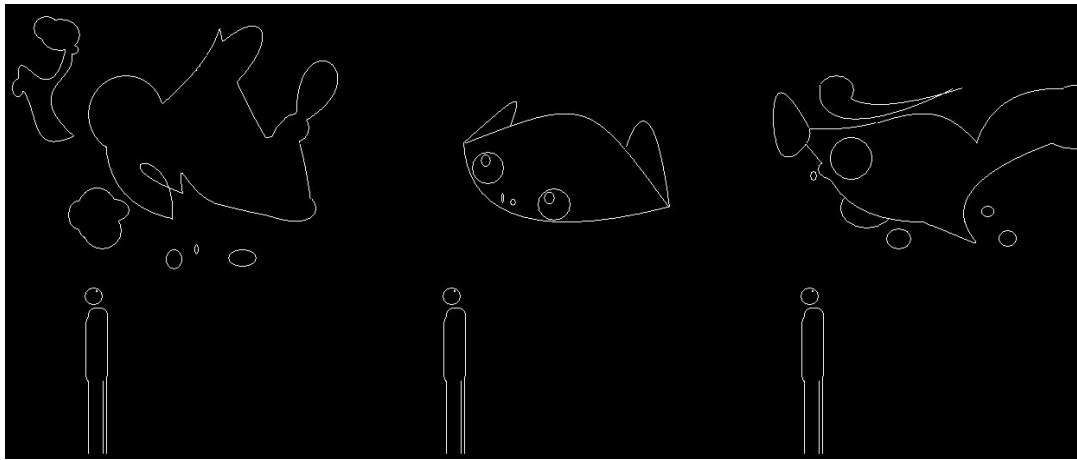
Fig. 4.28 Image for poster of *Gayliana: Isle of Idle*.

GIOI is conceptually very distant from the skull drawings, and, yet, the latter informed *GIOI* and helps its contextualisation within the research, since *GIOI* also dealt with attention as waiting[258]. As I will argue, with regard to the issue of how these projects function as artworks in the wider sense[259], I consider *GIOI* a more successful project precisely because the viewer does not need to be informed of the research context in order to experience it as I envisaged. Moreover, *GIOI* was the result of a clearer awareness of how wide ranging associations could be used in art practice as a tool for the acquisition of knowledge[260].

---

[258] As the poster for *GIOI* announced: 'As part of my ongoing PhD research on Simone Weil's notion of attention, I intend to muse on Weil's idea of *attention as waiting*, where waiting oxymoronically approaches assiduous idling. In many ways, Otto U. Gayl, to whom the residency is dedicated, was the quintessential assiduous idler (it would be fair to say that, because of this, he was, until recently, *completely* unknown), and there is a chance, perhaps, even a good chance, that Gayl may lead me towards hoped-for sites, or environs.'

[259] In §4.22, I pointed out that this *wider sense* is not inconsequential for the semantic function of the artworks within the research.

[260] The dialogue between Dino Alfier, Fiona Erild and Odelia Frin, in *Centre for Drawing Project Space – Notes 07* (see Appendix 5), exemplifies the non-linear, associative mode, and, in many ways, it is the most comprehensive representation of my findings on Weilian attention. Notably, this representation does not possess the form of an argument with premises and conclusion; rather its form is spiral, with several returns on the same axis but on a different position. Another example of

The skull drawing project was instrumental for my understanding of Weil's distinction between disorderly and orderly imagination, discussed in §3.31, since I soon realised that my intention to wait for the sockets to 'pop' was hindered by impatience; and now I could interpret this impatience as an indication of disorderly imagination, under the influence of which I postulated (according to Weil's argument, *mistakenly*) a thought – i.e. my intention – as having a direct consequence on the world. Retrospectively, I also interpreted the hurried and heavy manner of the earlier drawings of Cambridge Museum of Zoology (Figs. 1.1–1.3) as an indication of the same dynamic. On the other hand, the intention itself (i.e. the intention abstracted from the consequences of acting upon it) was a representation of orderly imagination, albeit solely in the form of a wish. Before undertaking the skull drawings, I possessed a merely theoretical picture of the distinction between disorderly and orderly imagination, which promised no way forward with regard to how this might be engaged with through art practice; while now I could see it in relation to a specific attitude towards drawing – this newly gained perspective paved the way for the reintroduction of the artwork as a positive, attention-inviting element in the research, with the work *Bâton de l'aveugle*, which I discuss in §4.33.

4.3212 Free compulsion

With the skull drawings, I sought to conceptualise drawing as a form of *reading*, in order to investigate the notion of free compulsion, at which I arrived through the analysis of Weil's notion of reading. To this purpose, I considered drawing as a form of translation, because:

- The concept of translation is semantically close to that of reading.

- One can find an ethical viewpoint in several texts on translation[261] (similar to Weil's ethical framing of reading); and, particularly relevant to this research, the attitude of the *good* translator has been described as a disposition of detachment[262].

---

association can be found at the end of §4.33, where I explain how the project *Bâton de l'aveugle* led to Diderot's letter to Sophie Volland, which, in turn, led to further reflections on Weilian metaphysics.

[261] For instance, Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator', in which he speaks of 'pure language' which possesses an 'ultimate essence' (these notions belong to ethical discourse), which the translator 'releases in his own language' (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 80–81).

[262] For instance, the following text by Jean-François Lyotard suggests how translation could be thought of as an ethical pursuit of detachment: 'Perhaps nothing is as wondrous as a good translation. Because of the abnegation [detachment] one feels. Much more than for the motives of technical competence. ... It arouses moral respect. For someone who was willing and able to prefer what came to the mind of another rather than what could happen to one's own. Not preferring what the other writes as such, once things have been cleaned up, to what he or she, the translator, could write on the same subject. But, if possible, to prefer the thought that comes to another before being cleaned up. Thus, to prefer the other's disorder, if you like, not just to one's own order, but to one's own disorder, the translator's (for just because you're a translator doesn't mean you think or write any less). A great effect of love.' (Lyotard, 1999, p. 156.)

- In discourses on translation, there appears the idea of *untranslatability*[263] (which seems to present some analogy with Weil's notion of the impossibility of absolutely good reading).

- I was interested in the idea of open-endedness[264] in translation.

Before I turn to free compulsion, I shall counter the possible objection to the application of the term 'translation' to drawing on the grounds that translation is too narrow and simple to describe what a drawing agent tries to achieve through observational drawing. As Douglas Hofstadter points out, translation is anything but straightforward, and even the most literal translation often involves making carefully considered choices between conflicting demands[265], and it is a generative process, in the sense that the process of translation has a bearing on what the translator perceives. The composer György Ligeti gives a clear account of the generative nature of translation involved in the creative process:

> I lay my ten fingers on the piano and imagine the music. My fingers copy [translation] this mental image as I press the keys, but this copy is very inexact: a feedback emerges between idea and tactile/motor execution. This feedback loop repeats itself many times, enriched by provisional sketches ... The result sounds completely different from my initial conceptions: the anatomical reality of my hands and the configuration of the piano keyboard have transformed my imaginary constructs.[266]

The analogy between drawing and translation will give an idea of the complexity of the translation involved in drawing if the 'text' to be translated is thought to possess the complexity of a text such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: it is difficult to envisage the ultimate true translation of *Finnegans Wake*, and yet it still makes sense to talk about more or less successful renditions of *Finnegans Wake* (although agreement could be very limited).

As regards the issue of untranslatability, it can be exemplified as follows. Take the sentence 'The butterfly flied[267] over butter in the port of Dover'. How could this be translated, for instance, in Italian? How could one translate the relation butterfly/butter, and the incorrect conjugation of the verb 'to fly' which creates a phonetic 'Dover'? In this context, Hofstadter's notion of 'perceptual attractors' is useful, which Hofstadter defines as 'long-

---

[263] See, for instance, Jacques Derrida's 'From *Des Tours de Babel*': 'For Babel is untranslatable. God weeps over his name. His text is the most sacred, the most poetic, the most originary, since he creates a name and gives it to himself' (Derrida, 1985, p. 227).

[264] This open-endedness is exemplified by Douglas Hofstadter's book *Le Ton Beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language*, in which one finds, amongst other things, 72 translations of the same poem, *A une Damoyselle malade*, by the sixteenth-century French poet Clément Marot (see: Hofstadter, 1997).

[265] Ibid., p. 2a.

[266] *György Ligeti Edition 3*, 1996.

[267] 'It is "*flew*", not "flied"!', one might point out. This is true, but are we to limit translation to orthographically correct texts? Once again, I bring the example of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: is *Finnegans Wake* not the most orthographically incorrect (*ortho*-graphically un-*ortho*-dox) book ever written? And yet it has been translated.

term mental loci that are zoomed into when we encounter a new situation.'[268] Perceptual

attractors are concepts, whether or not they are capable of linguistic representation[269]. An

example of a linguistically representable perceptual attractor would be the English auxiliary

verb 'can' as used in the following context: in English, the difference between *knowing*

something and *knowing how to do* something is difficult to perceive because the auxiliary

verb 'can' indifferently labels both situations, while, with languages which make a

distinction, such as Italian, the difference is clearly perceived[270]. This may seem an obvious

consideration, but it seems so only because the example is simple, for the sake of clarity. To

reiterate[271] that perceptual attractors are not necessarily as simple as the concept conveyed

by a word such as 'can', I will give an example that I used in a pedagogical context (a life

drawing class): I invited the participants to draw the model as if 'you were drawing the

down on a butterfly's wing'[272]. After the exercise, I asked the participants their views on the

experience, and they said that the metaphor had changed the way they saw the model: they

---

[268] Hofstadter, 2006. Hofstadter distinguishes between three kinds of perceptual attractor: 'Standard lexical items (words, names, phrases, proverbs, etc.) provided to a vast public through a shared linguistic environment ... Shared vicarious experiences provided to a vast public through the media (e.g. places, personages, and events of small and large scale in books, movies, television shows, and so on), the smaller of which have explicit linguistic labels, the more complex of which have none ... Unique personal memories, lacking any fixed linguistic labels (such chunks are generally very large and complex, ... such as a favourite high-school class, a year spent in a special city, a protracted divorce, and so on).' (Ibid.)

[269] Hofstadter points out that perceptual attractors, even when they remain within the sphere of what can be represented by words, include lexical items that are not normally thought of as concepts: e.g. 'Well, ...', 'I mean, ...', 'Whatever!', etc. While the typical exemplification of concept involves words standing for objects perceivable through the senses, such as 'dog', 'house', etc., perceptual attractors also include (I am extrapolating from Hofstadter's argument) the manner in which a certain people communicates certain information. For, instance, Lera Boroditsky reports that, in a small Aboriginal community of northern Australia, spatial information is always communicated by reference to the cardinal points, with the consequence that 'you have to stay oriented all the time, or else you cannot speak properly.' (Boroditsky, 2009.) It seems plausible to infer that the way this social group perceives space is quite different to, for instance, the way an English speaker perceives space.

[270] So, for instance, in English, 'Can you swim?' might mean either 'Do you possess "the skill *swimming*"?' or 'Is it possible for you to swim in the situation you find yourself at present?', while in Italian, these two meanings are conveyed, respectively, with 'Sai nuotare?' or 'Puoi nuotare?', notwithstanding the fact that, in practice, speakers often use these expressions interchangeably. Another example: my mother-tongue is not English but Italian, and thus I do not perceive the quality *heathery-ness* very easily, because the Italian language does possess the word 'heathery': one can say 'covered with heather', 'having the colour of heather', 'similar to heather', and so on, but none of these expressions convey that which 'heathery' conveys. And, yet, having lived in an English-speaking country for some time, I possess a very rudimentary grasp of heathery-ness that, at least, allows me to think about the issue of my difficulty to fully grasp heathery-ness. Thus even what one may call the *subjective* perception of qualities (i.e. aesthetic perception) is bound up with non-subjective entities.

[271] I think that this reiteration is justified by the tendency to fall back on simple conceptualisation of the notion of perceptual attractor.

[272] Quote from Ruskin's *The Elements of Drawing* (Ruskin, 1971, p. 39). Joseph Becker has shown the importance of typically unnoticed, culturally acquired phrasal patterns in the process of expressing a thought linguistically: e.g. 'Like all other scientists, linguists wish they were physicists' is an instantiation of the phrasal pattern 'A: Like (pl. n.)... B: all other (pl. n.) C: (person) wishes (he/she) were (something)'. (Becker, 1975, p. 63.)

had 'felt' the sensitivity of human skin more markedly than usual. This example shows not only that something as elusive as a metaphor can be considered a perceptual attractor but also that perceptual attractors are not exclusively habit-bound: a concept never encountered before, such as *drawing-the-down-on-a-butterfly's-wing-as-if-ness* might, in a limited context, such as a life-drawing class, bring about a significant, albeit short-lived, perceptual shift.

Moreover, the notion of perceptual attractor, at least with regard to those perceptual attractors which can be expressed linguistically, makes the idea of detachment thinkable, because the fact that they can be expressed linguistically entails that they do not belong exclusively to an individual but to a community of speakers. As Weil argues in *Leçons de philosophie*, language is an object upon which the faculty of attention is exercised: signs (e.g. the words of a given language) are objects one can attentively select. Signs allow one to objectify one's feelings by a doubling process. For instance, Weil argues, on one hand, there is *my* pain (*'I' pain*), and, on the other hand, there is the word 'pain', which is 'not me' (*'I'-less pain*). Thus objectified, pain can be observed.[273] In the skull drawings, the concepts 'skull', 'eye socket', 'nose socket', 'unhurried gesture', etc. are perceptual attractors, and, as such, they were used with the intention of attaining a detached attitude. The hope was that, through practice, my reading habit would change in time, and that the perception of this change would afford a reflection on Weil's notion of reading. This change was observed, that is, I developed a tendency to 'see' skulls while drawing visual situations which were conducive to this reading, i.e. in the presence of relatively irregular patterns of shapes, such as the foliage of a tree. However, the problem of the compatibility of free compulsion and hard determinism, discussed in §3.35, re-emerged, since, in the skull drawings, it was hard to see how free compulsion could be said to follow from *an unshakable certainty that to do otherwise would change nothing*: the meaning of 'certainty' seemed inappropriate, since what had happened was simply that a new habit had, to a certain degree, superimposed itself, and thus slightly changed, some old habits. And, yet, this dynamic is quite consonant with some of Weil's descriptions of free, or good, action[274]. From this point of view, free

---

[273] 'Language is of great importance with regard to ... attention (form of the will). Given that we have language, amongst the words that come to our mind, there are some that we can reject: selection of words. ... Language is an object (because it is fixed, permanent, artificial). It permits us to double ourselves: tears, screams, moans: they are states of us, often unconscious and, in any case, always felt as ours; on the contrary, the word 'pain' is not painful. When one has given a name to one's feelings one can look at them as an object.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 69.)

[274] 'As it is for error and for clear and distinct thought [Cartesian expressions], there are thoughts of action that, if stared at with the eyes of the soul suspending one's judgement, vanish as air bubbles (they can influence body movements only in the darkness of the soul), there are others that, on the contrary, cross onto the real, biting on reality through the intermediary of the body.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 333.)

compulsion could be seen as an inevitable consequence of some prior *free* decision taken by the agent. To illustrate this with the example of the literate and illiterate women introduced in §3.35, the free choice, for the literate woman, would have been the decision to learn to read, from which would have followed the *inevitable* correct reading of the letter[275], as in the skull drawings, the free choice would have coincided with the decision to imagine skulls, sockets, etc., from which inevitably would have followed my perceptual shift. This view of free compulsion is not compatible with hard determinism[276], while, on my first conceptualisation of free compulsion, in §3.35, the problem of the inevitability of action (raised at in §3.37) is evaded by implicitly appealing to some idea of *free rationality*[277]. Neither can I propose a solution for incompatibility (even though, in §4.3213, I suggest that there might be a way of conceptualising necessity as inevitable but non-constraining) nor have I found a plausible solution in Weilian scholarship[278].

4.3213 Obedience

However, despite this unresolved incompatibility, the skull drawings were instrumental for a practical understanding of Weil's notions of necessity and obedience, which so far had remained merely theoretical concepts. While drawing, the 'appearing' of a skull had a quality of inevitability but not that of a constraint[279], somewhat akin to the recognition of a familiar face in a crowd of strangers. This experience led to a clarification of the notions of necessity and obedience: for Weil, there is a mechanical obedience, which is a consequence of determinist, mechanical necessity, and a higher form of obedience, which is a consequence of spiritual necessity and which depends on voluntary attention[280]. I would not

---

[275] As Weil writes: 'Almost always, the moment of deliberation does not coincide with that of choice. One deliberates when one has already chosen, or perhaps, more rarely, when one is not yet in condition of choosing.' (Ibid., p. 332.)

[276] It suffices to point out that, for most people, literacy in not a matter of choice.

[277] That the notion of rationality is at the basis of this conceptualisation of free compulsion can be seen by referring once again to the example of the literate woman: the letter cannot convey to her any other meaning than the meaning it does convey on the assumption that she is a *rational being*, i.e. that, for her, *if A is B and B is C, then A is C*, or *in valid argument the conclusion incontrovertibly follows from the premises*, and so on.

[278] The problem of incompatibilism has not been raised by Weilian scholarship, with the exception of Rhees, who however offers no solution (Rhees, 2000).

[279] 'Obedience is the only pure motive … On the condition that it be obedience to a necessity and not a constraint.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 194.)

[280] 'Obedience: there are two kinds of it. One can obey gravity or the relationship between things[*]. In the first case, one does that to which the imagination which fills the void pushes. ... If one suspends the workings of the filling imagination and one focuses the attention on the relationship between things, a necessity[†] appears, which one cannot not obey.' (Ibid., p. 200.)

[*] 'Necessity. To see the relationships between things and oneself, including the motives that one has, as one of the terms.' (Ibid., p. 201.)

[†] 'Men can never escape from obedience to God. A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men as intelligent [the rationality theme] and free creatures, is to desire obedience or not to desire it. If a man does not desire it, he obeys nevertheless, perpetually, inasmuch as he is a thing subject to

speak of spiritual necessity with regard to the seemingly inevitable but unconstrained appearance of the skulls, but this experience was, in some respects, similar to what Weil describes and thus useful in order to try to grasp what she might have meant. And even though it offers no solution to the aforementioned problems, it, at least, made it clear that Weil's spiritual perspective, as represented by her writings, could not be completely discounted when investigating her ideas on attention. This implied some limitation of the normative projects, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.322 Portraits of Hephzibah

For the portraits, I proceeded as follows: I used coloured felt-tip pens and, every five minutes, I switched to a pen of a different colour (see Figs. 4.29–4.31). Sometimes, this procedure was used in conjunction with the skull drawing procedure (see Figs. 4.32–4.33).

---

mechanical necessity. If he desires it, he is still subject to mechanical necessity, but a new necessity is added to it, a necessity constituted by laws belonging to natural things. Certain actions become impossible for him; others are done by his agency, sometimes almost in spite of himself [the inevitability theme].' (Weil, *WG*, pp. 76–77.) A reference to Spinoza is helpful, in this context, since as John Curt Ducasse argues, 'As Spinoza observes, an emotion towards a thing which we consider to be free (i.e. unnecessary) is greater than one towards what we conceive to be necessary' (Ducasse, 1929, p. 253; see de Spinoza, 1996, pp. 164–165). Read from a Weilian perspective, the strong emotion towards a thing which one considers free would be an indication of the disorderly state of imagination, when the world is regarded as free, that is, as capriciously inclined sometimes benevolently and sometimes malignantly towards oneself, while the milder emotion would be an indication of a view of reality as a web of necessary relations, which, for Weil, is attained through voluntary attention.

Fig. 4.29 Colour drawing, 23rd November 2008, coloured felt tip pens on paper, 29.7 × 20.1 cm.

Fig. 4.30 Colour drawing, 3rd January 2009, coloured felt tip pens on paper, 29.7 × 20.1 cm.

Fig. 4.31 Colour drawing, 1st March 2009, coloured felt tip pens on paper, 29.7 × 20.1 cm.
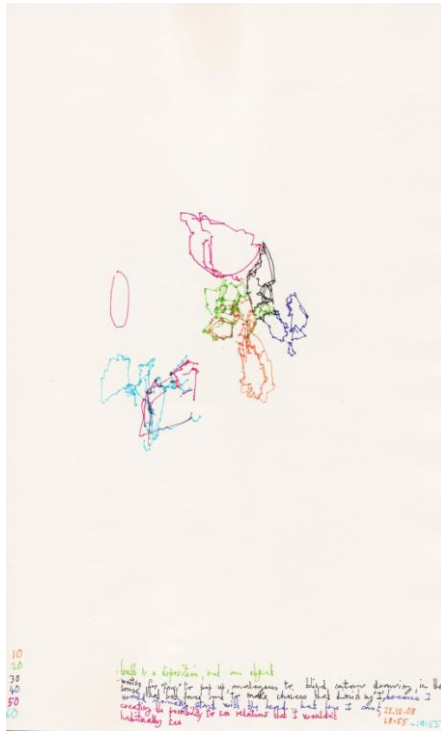
Fig. 4.32 Drawing made using both the colour drawing and the skull drawing procedures, 2009, coloured felt tip pens on paper, 29.7 × 20.1 cm.
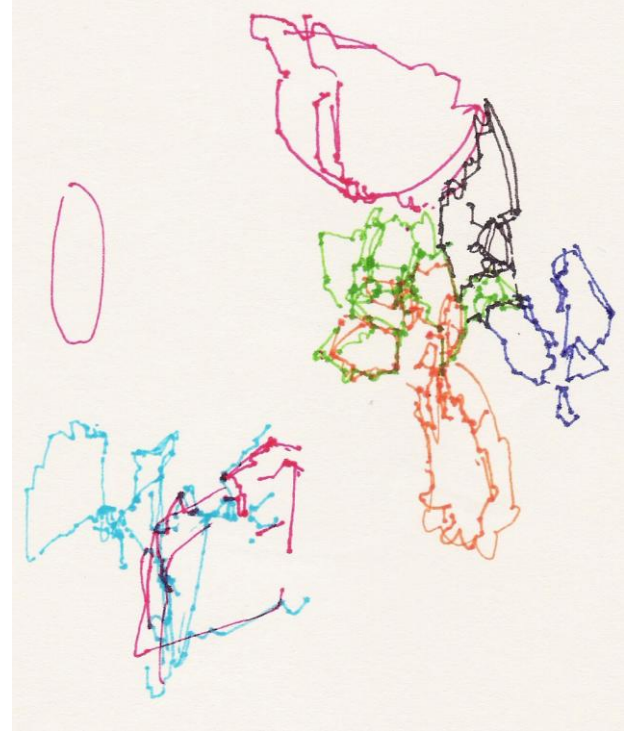
Fig. 4.33 Drawing made using both the colour drawing and the skull drawing procedures (detail), 2009, coloured felt tip pens on paper, 10.8 × 8.9 cm.

In the skull drawings after the painting, there was a problem with the lack of indexes that the viewer might interpret as pointers to an intention to develop an attitude of detachment. The portraits possess such indexes because: (1) the chromatic progression does not serve *my* representational purpose, but, on the contrary, is quite external to it[281], and the passage of time, which is also indifferent to human purposes, is explicitly represented[282]; (2) the comparison of several drawings reveals my habits (see Figs. 4.34–4.35), which, by the very repetition of their indications, are shown in all their mechanistic *'I'-lessness*[283]; (3) mistakes,

---

[281] As the project progressed, I realised that, in order to make the indifference of the chromatic progression with respect to the representational purpose explicit, I should avoid using all the light and dull colours at the beginning, otherwise, the progression would follow the quite natural tendency to draw the most visible marks towards the end, when, through trial and error, one has attained a clearer understanding of the object of observation: as Norman Bryson writes, 'the work of drawing follows an innate rhythm of development, from broad to narrow and from relatively loose to increasingly bound and determined.' (Bryson, 2003, p. 154.)

[282] Attention to the inexorability of time as a practice of detachment is a constant theme in Weil's writings. See, for instance, the following passage: 'Manual labour. Time that enters in the body. ... Work is like a death [i.e. the death of the 'I']. One must go through death – let the old man die. But death is not suicide. One must be killed, be subjected to gravity, to the weights of the world. ... To work – if one is exhausted – is to become subjected to time as matter is. The mind is forced to go from one instant to the next: this is to obey.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 62.)

[283] The viewer might also see that these habits are quite impersonal: for instance, the habit of drawing from left to right is very likely a consequence of the culturally acquired manner of reading and writing; the habit of drawing the face first is a very general one which, I assume, is a consequence of the fact that humans spend a lot of time looking at people faces. My activity as a drawing tutor confirms that these are indeed very typical habits.

in the form of reassessments of previously made marks, are made explicit – for Weil, attention to one's mistakes is a practice of detachment: reassessment is made explicit by the fact that the viewer can see, albeit only discretely, the orders in which the marks were made.

Fig. 4.34 Colour drawing, 23rd November 2008 (detail), coloured felt tip pens on paper, 10.1 × 8.6 cm.[284]

---

[284] In this drawing and the one reproduced in Fig. 4.35, I use the same colour sequence, namely, orange, light green, brown, blue, red, light blue, black, pink and green. Comparison of the two drawings shows that I have a habit of drawing from left to right (Fig. 4.35) and that this habits is superseded by the more peremptory habit of drawing the face first in those situations where the face is to my right and the mass of hair to the left (Fig. 4.34).

Fig. 4.35 Colour drawing, 3rd January 2009 (detail), coloured felt tip pens on paper, 10.8 × 10 cm.

As regards (3), Weil argues that, when one attends to one's mistakes, one sees one's 'I' as the source of error, while the truth is perceived as not belonging to 'I'. Weil exemplifies this as follows:

> *I say that 7 + 8 = 16, I am wrong; in a way, I make 7 + 8 = 16. But it is not me who makes 7+ 8 = 15. A new mathematical theorem, a beautiful line of verse; reflections of this great truth... I am absent from all that which is true, or beautiful, or good.*[285]

There is a problem in transposing this example onto observational drawing, namely, the fact that, in drawing, there is nothing as definite as 7 + 8 = 15. However, this problem offers the opportunity to reflect on the aptness of Weil's example, since this example unduly stresses

---

[285] Ibid., p. 125.

the *objective* correctness of $7 + 8 = 15$[286]. After all, if I first calculated $7 + 8 = 16$, and then 'corrected' myself by calculating $7 + 8 = 14$, Weil's argument would still hold: *subjective* awareness of having made a mistake is what is consequential here (even if nobody else thinks that there is a mistake), while the notion of objective truth is dispensable. This interpretation once again narrows the scope of Weilian ethics to the individual. My point is that the notion of truth as a subjective regulative principle of conduct is a very familiar one, which can make sense even when one is patently at a complete loss with regard to what that truth might be. To give an example from the visual arts, in the famous anecdote about Cézanne painting the *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* 1899 (Cézanne left two small spots of the canvas unpainted and, allegedly, when Vollard asked Cézanne whether he would paint the two spots, Cézanne replied that if he painted them at random, he would have to start the whole painting all over again[287]), it is unlikely that those who find the anecdote ethically meaningful (i.e. those who take it to indicate Cézanne's artistic greatness, honesty, etc.) would claim that they know the objective colours which befit those spots, and yet presumably they have no problem in thinking that the search for just such colours regulated Cézanne's conduct during work on the painting (the main moral of the anecdote is to represent Cézanne's rigorous adherence to this self-imposed rule).

Furthermore, in Weil's own writings, one finds references to a subjective notion of truth which seems distinct from the notion of objective, mathematical truth expressed in the above quoted passage. Notably, Weil argues that the notion of truth applies solely to those objects of knowledge that one loves:

> If a man catches his wife, whom he loves and whom he trusted completely, being flagrantly unfaithful to him, he is brought into brutal contact with the truth. If he learns that a woman, whom he does not know, of whom he hears the name for the first time, from a town which he does not know either, has cheated on her husband, this does not change in any way his relationship to the truth. This example furnishes the key. The acquisition of knowledge draws one closer to the truth when it is a question of knowledge of that which one loves, and in no other case.[288]

If one recalls that, for Weil, love is synonymous with the most elevated attention, then the ethical significance of acknowledging one's mistake with regard to the objective truth of the mathematical example is primarily dependent on attention as love and only secondarily dependent on the intersubjective agreement on the truth.

---

[286] This example might also be read as an indication of Weil's tendency to conceptualise the 'I' very negatively, sometimes, with images, which suggests annihilation, as the following passage shows: 'The beauty of a landscape when nobody sees it, absolutely no one... To see a landscape as it is when I am not in it. When I am somewhere, I blemish the silence of sky and earth with my respiration and my heartbeat.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 109.)

[287] Benesch, 2000, p. 54.

[288] Weil, *E*, pp. 318–319. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *NR*, p. 250.

4.33 Attention-inviting art object: Bâton de l'aveugle

The project *Bâton de l'aveugle* (see DVD Track 1) saw the reintroduction of the artwork as
an attention-inviting object. More specifically, the project singles out a Weilian metaphor for
reading – the metaphor of the blind person's cane (discussed below) – to produce a work,
that, in the light of this metaphor, solicits an interpretation of the work as attention-inviting.
Bâton de l'aveugle is a video composed of a series of blind drawings of Weil's 1935 Renault
factory identity card[289] (see Fig. 4.36).

Fig. 4.36 Weil's 1935 Renault factory identity card.

Each drawing took between 1 and 60 minutes and, in the video, each drawing appears for a
number of seconds equivalent to the number of minutes it took to draw it. The video *Bâton
de l'aveugle* was shown during a presentation/performance at the 2009 American Weil
Society Colloquy[290]. Two different printed versions of this work also appeared: in the
Cahiers Simone Weil, the philosophical journal produced by the *Association pour l'étude de*

---

[289] Weil worked in several factories to study the conditions of workers. I chose this image because it
is the most iconic of all of Weil's photographic portraits: it has been used extensively on the covers of
many books of Weil and in countless posters for Weilian conferences. There are surely many factors
that render this image so iconic, but I will refer only to two: firstly, its frontality and the impassibility
of Weil's expression, which will be read by many as a representation of Weil's moral staunchness;
secondly, the image might remind one that Weil sought that contact with hard reality (she, a well-to-
do Parisian, chose to become a factory worker) which she so keenly advocated, and was not a mere
speculative philosopher. Whether these interpretations are founded or not is inconsequential, since
what matters for *Bâton de l'aveugle* is the existence of this Weilian hagiography, the myth of *Saint
Simone*[*] (which can be gleaned from Weilian secondary literature), because this ensures that the
community of Weilian scholars and more generally of those interested in Weil, will instantly
recognise the image and find it emotionally charged. That is not to say that *Bâton de l'aveugle* was
exclusively directed at the Weilian community, but rather that, for such a community, the work will
convey a more explicit meaning.

[*]One can also buy a Saint Simone Weil T-Shirt (see: *Saint Simone Weil T-Shirt*, 2000).

[290] Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 24th April 2009.

la pensée de Simone Weil[291], where the first blind drawing of the series was published alongside a text outlining the project (see Fig. 4.37); and in the humanities magazine *Indigo*[292], where the first 98 blind drawings are accompanied by an essay on Weil's argument on the training of attention (see Appendix 4), with which I deal in this section.
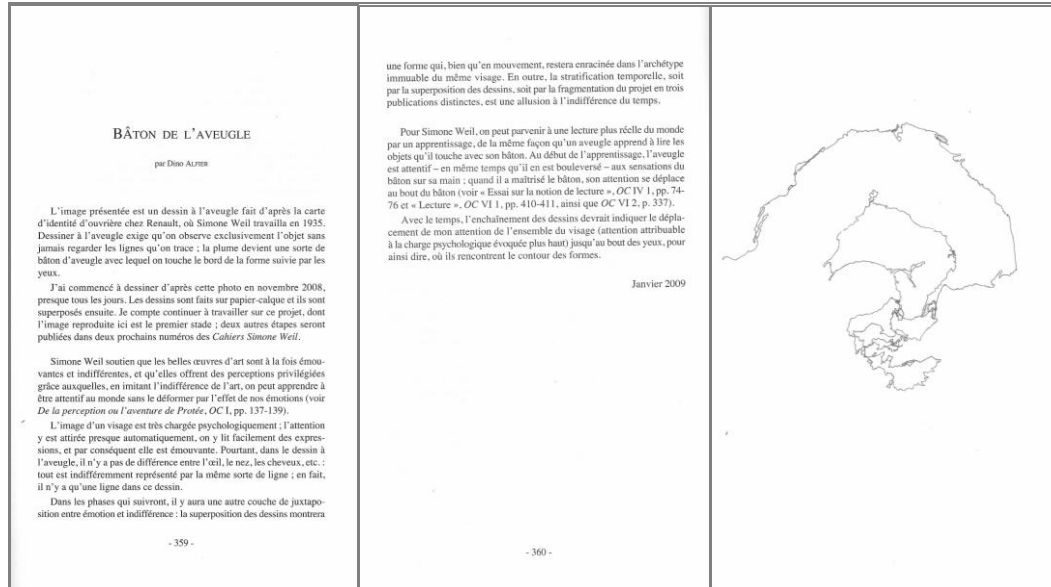
Fig. 4.37 *Bâton de l'aveugle*, *Cahiers Simone Weil* version.

In the essays *De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée*[293] and *Essay sur la notion de lecture*[294], Weil develops an argument on the training of attention. Whether this argument applies to both voluntary attention and the most elevated attention or to just one of them is not clear; and, while the fact that Weil often describes the most elevated attention as a kind of transcendent gift would seem to rule out that this attention can be trained, thus leaving only the voluntary-attention option[295], her writings remain ambiguous on this point. I will consider two strands of this argument. The first strand adduces that works of art are useful means in the training of attention. The second strand is best introduced with a metaphor which Weil uses: the metaphor of the blind man. How does a blind person learn to read objects with a cane? At first, the sensations caused by the cane on the hand are overwhelming and the blind person finds it difficult or impossible to perceive what is at the end of the cane. When the blind person has mastered the cane, the sensations of it on the hand hardly register, and attention is directed to the object *conveyed* by the sensations[296]. With the image of the blind person, Weil illustrates a much more general point about the

---

[291] Alfier, 2009a.

[292] Alfier, 2010.

[293] Weil, *OC I*, pp. 121–139.

[294] Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 73–79.

[295] Spontaneous attention cannot be trained by definition, given that it is *spontaneous*.

[296] See also §3.33.

128

perception of reality, which I exposed in §3.34, namely, that, for Weil, we[297] read everything that happens to us in a certain way, and, by a slow apprenticeship, we can change the way we read, as the blind person does[298]. For Weil, we can improve how we read: the aim is to read everything that happens as *good* for the very fact that it happens, instead of reading certain things as good (e.g. pleasurable occurrences) and other things as bad (e.g. painful occurrences)[299].

Weil holds that human beings are frequently fooled by their disorderly imagination because they distort their perception with the reflection of their emotions; for instance, Weil writes, 'when the sun rises, I do not know if the landscape seems to me more joyous because I feel happier, or because the sun is higher; a real landscape is illuminated by my happiness as much as by the sun's rays.'[300] In such conditions, attention to the world is impossible because the world keeps changing abruptly under the distorting effects of ever-changing emotions, and nothing is stable enough to become an object of attention[301]. For Weil, even if one could attain an emotionless state in which reality is a web of pure mathematical relationships, nobody could remain is this state of pure reason for very long, because, for her, imagination and emotions are necessarily involved in all perception[302]. What can one

---

[297] Here I am merely reporting Weil's use of 'we' and this usage does not contradict my decision to use 'I' which I discussed in §1.3.

[298] As Claude Droz argues, for Weil, 'attention transforms the force of impression by transforming imagination' (Droz, 2008, p. 406).

[299] Weil appropriates the simile of the blind person from Descartes's *Optics* (see: Descartes, 1985, p. 153f., p. 166, p. 169f.). However, that is not to say that Weil subscribes to Descartes' physiological account of vision; rather she uses Descartes' image metaphorically and in different contexts; for instance, Weil uses it to illustrate not only the idea of reading and of the possibility of shifting one's attention (which I exposed in §3.34) but also that of *metaxu* or means between a human and a transcendental being. The blind person simile appears many times in the notebooks: see: Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 110, p. 201, p. 290, pp. 293–295, pp. 308–309, p. 316, p. 322, p. 329, pp. 338–339, pp. 410–411; *OC VI 2*, p. 73, p. 145, p. 247, p. 337, pp. 356–357, p. 465.

[300] Weil, *OC I*, p. 138.

[301] 'In reality, the first object of our perception is not scattered things; it is not even the Proteus of the legend, something that is in front of me; it is an indivisible Proteus, which presses upon my body, winds itself up, so to speak, around me, without ever being, since it has no parts, big or small, near or far. We cannot form any idea of this condition which precedes perception' (Ibid., p. 132). 'This example allows us to conceive what the changes of a world which impresses itself on me only through the intermediary of imagination could be for me. No matter how little Proteus changes, all trace of the immediately preceding condition is abolished straightaway' (Ibid., p. 122). 'It is the kingdom of Proteus, that is to say, of the thing which changes by an internal power, without continuity.' (Ibid., p. 127.)

[302] 'Certainly, one must admire the man who, having come out of the cave by reflecting on geometry, has grabbed Proteus, has divested it and has found, beneath this mantle of emotions, pure extension, always external to himself, the material for our work, which does not talk, think or will. But even for the sage these moments of clairvoyance are difficult, rare, and unrelated to ordinary perceptions, which all, without exception, are first of all emotions. Some hungers pangs, a sun ray, a noise more frightening or sweeter than the rest: these will be sufficient to make the sage fall again into our world of illusions; then he will forget his difficult wisdom, and, at the very moment when he needs this wisdom to overcome the passions, he will be as gullible to emotions as an infant.' (Ibid., p. 137.) As I

do, then, in order to pay attention to the world? One can train in the art of perception by contemplating works of art. Works of art move us aesthetically and, yet, they remain *indifferent* to us: 'in a painted sunrise, even if the light can make me happy, this happiness will never be accompanied by an accretion of the light.'[303] By imitating the moving indifference of works of art, one can learn to direct one's attention to the world without distorting it with the reflection of emotions. Eventually, this leads to love of everything that happens[304]. In this argument, Weil is drawing on the distinction that she makes in *Science and Perception in Descartes* between disorderly imagination (considered as action) and orderly imagination (considered as thought). As I argued in §3.31, this distinction is one between, on one hand, a world seen as impassioned (i.e. *not* indifferent) towards us, and, on the other hand, a world seen as law-bound (i.e. indifferent to our ends but that, for this very reason, can to a certain extent be mastered through methodical action).

Weil's argument can be summarised as follows: The world is ordered but extremely complex and it is difficult to perceive its order; the senses of those unskilled in the art of perception are passively subjected to the world, so they respond to this aesthetic assault by fabricating illusions; the order of works of art, on the other hand, is simple and, unlike purely mathematical order, it is an aesthetic order – one can *feel* it, not only *think* it, and is thus suited to human perception which is a synthesis of intellection and sensation[305]. To elucidate the notion of aesthetic order, Weil gives the example of the sounds of a piece of

---

have shown in §3.31, Weil articulates in detail this view of perception as a synthesis of intellection and perception in *Science et Perception dans Descartes*.

[303] Ibid., p. 138.

[304] 'Thus our moments of Cartesian clairvoyance are useless without an art of perception, that is, a gymnastics which allows us to recall pure understanding, while not stopping, as we do in reflection, being attentive to the dances of our body. But doubtless this gymnastics would not be possible without the experience of special perceptions by which the spontaneous dance of our body, although it sometimes compels our attention, does not hinder, and perhaps aids, the use of pure understanding. These special perceptions are given to each one of us by humankind through works of art.' (Ibid., p. 138.) 'A cathedral moves us more than nature does, but things do not respond at all to our emotions; even though they move us, they remain indifferent.' (Ibid., p. 138.) 'Thus, until now my life was divided in two: those moments in which, by an effort of attention, I stopped being moved and I delivered myself to pure reason; and the moments when emotions once again got hold of me and I let myself be deceived by Proteus, clothing objects with my own emotions. ... But even these objects [i.e. artworks] would be useless for me, if, by an imitation of the attitudes, of the movements, of the immobility which they impose on me, I could not, without escaping from the emotions that I receive from nature, which is impossible, at least rid nature of the reflection of my emotions. Landscapes must become paintings for me, forests must become cathedrals, sounds must become symphonies, men must become portraits or statues; only then is Proteus truly tamed.' (Ibid., pp. 138–139.)

[305] This argument evidences that Weil's idea of perception remained unchanged throughout her life, since *De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée* was written in 1929 while *Essay sur la notion de lecture* was written in 1941.

music: these sounds are moving, but their order is based on invariable rules which have nothing to do with the emotions the listener feels[306].

One aim of the blind drawing project was to produce a work that carries a quality of moving indifference, in the Weilian sense. The image of a face is psychologically charged, attention is drawn to it almost automatically, and it is easy to read expressions in it (even an expressionless face is a face with an expressionless *expression*); in short, the image of a face is moving. But, in blind drawing, eye, nose, mouth, etc. are all represented indifferently by the same kind of line; in fact, there is only one line in each drawing; and the order of the images in the video is indifferent to what one may call 'the emerging lingering family resemblance', in the sense that this resemblance is sometimes defaced. In other words, while the content of the project carries a moving agency, its form carries a quality of indifference[307]. Furthermore, the erratic duration of each drawing in the video creates an impression of indifference[308].

As regards the second strand of the argument, which is concerned with shifts of attention, it was hoped that, in time, the series of drawings might indicate a shift of attention from the whole of the face in the photograph, whose psychological charge, as I said, attracts attention, to the far end of the 'cane of my eyes', so to speak, where the eyes 'meet' the contour of shapes devoid of any figurative representational connotation. This second aim was not achieved, but, as for the representation of a detached disposition in the skull drawings, it nevertheless functioned semantically in the form of a wish or hope.

Bâton de l'aveugle was in part the outcome of my analysis of *Book of Dust*, by the American artist Agnes Denes[309]. I will first give a brief overview of *Book of Dust*, before I explain how it has helped me to clarify an aspect of the first strand of the argument which I

---

[306] 'If in a forest, I hear a scream of horror, even the whispers of the leaves will seem to me full of horror. But at a concert, after a sort of moan that wrings the heart, comes immediately, not according to my emotions, but according to the text of the symphony, which itself conforms to invariable rules, a love song or a triumphal song.' (Ibid., p. 138.) Michel Narcy argues that Weil perceived necessity in a Cartesian fashion as blind, i.e. as not having *finality*, or, rather, as having a *finality without finality*, that is as a work of art (Narcy, 2003, pp. 33–34). For an investigation of the view of the artistic creation as being characterised by finality without finality ('autotely without *telos*'), see: Lyotard, 1991, p. 172.

[307] By 'content', I mean that which one reads in the 'form'. For example, if one writes the word 'house' first in lower case and then in capital letters, one changes the form but not the content of the word. I do realise that this is a simplification. For instance, take a text written all in lower case except for the word 'HOUSE' which is written in capitals: wouldn't that change its content? I think it would. Anyway, here I work with the simplification. I will return to the issue of form and content later in this section when considering Agnes Denes' *Book of Dust*.

[308] Indeterminacy feels more indifferent that determinacy, because in the latter one possess at least a certain degree of control in the form of an understanding of the determining law, while in the former no such knowledge is available.

[309] Part of the following reflections on the relation between Weil's idea of attention-inviting art and Denes' *Book of Dust* were published in Alfier, 2009b. See also: Alfier, 2009c.

described above, that is, the issue of the moving indifference of works of art. *Book of Dust* is a text with images that, according to the author, tries to give an overall account of contemporary hard science, particularly, physics, chemistry and neuroscience[310]. In what follows, I consider three instances of moving indifference in *Book of Dust*.

Firstly: The title *Book of Dust* can mean both 'book *made of* dust', and 'book *concerning* dust'. By 'dust', Denes means the astrophysical notion of cosmic dust. The semantic duality of the title, on one hand, points to the material slightness of human existence, it points to the undifferentiating process by which everything that is dust to dust shall return[311], and, on the other hand, it conjures up moving images of the immensity of the universe.

Secondly: Denes compiles a table of data regarding some material aspects of the universe—namely, size, velocity, power, numbers, density, mass and temperature—and she considers these aspects at the microscopic level, the human level and the cosmic level; for instance, size: at the microscopic level, Denes gives Planck length, which is 10^{-33} cm; at the human level, one finds the average size of a human being, which is 200 cm; and at the cosmic level, 10^{28} cm, which, according to Denes, some scientists hypothesise to be the size of the universe. This table is followed by a text which argues that the table seems to justify an anthropocentric view of the universe[312]. While the table conveys Denes' critical evaluation of the contemporary scientific approach which is based on the indifferent accumulation of data, her comment on the table conveys the idea that the human presence in the universe is a fragile and fertile equilibrium. In other words, this is a moving representation of indifference.

Thirdly: In a section of the book titled 'Human Dust', one finds a photograph of a pile of human bones. This image is followed by an obituary written in a rather emotionless style:

---

[310] Denes developed this project during the 70s and 80s in order to tackle the ever-growing specialisation of the various scientific branches. She sees the body of knowledge as an octopus whose tentacles continue to multiply and extend, while its head keeps shrinking. This renders reasonable dialogue increasingly difficult as knowledge drowns in information (Denes, 2008, pp. 66–67). Denes is motivated by ecological concerns; she believes that lack of knowledge makes humankind incapable of taking effective responsibility for the future of the earth (Ibid., p. 71).

[311] Genesis, 3:19.

[312] 'The ultimate anthropocentric view that we are the center of the universe is true in a sense. In this universe of extremes humanity is almost in the center of its range of sizes, masses, and temperatures. We are macroscopic, in the middle between cosmic and microscopic proportions. Our size is the geometric mean between atoms and stars, ten billion times larger than an atom, ten billion times smaller than the sun. We are the mean between the ultramicroscopic (quarks and Planck length), and the whole visible universe. Our world begins at the surface of our skin and we can peer inward and out at equal depths. Similarly, our body temperature, 300 K, is the geometric mean between the 3 K temperature of the universe and the 30,000 K of the hottest stars. Even our earth is a medium planet; there are four smaller and four larger in the solar system. We occupy a thin layer on the surface of the earth between its molten interior and frigid outer space.' (Denes, 2008, p. 32.)

> He was an artist. He died of a heart attack. ... He was unhappy and lonely more often than not, achieved 1/10,000 of his dreams, managed to get his opinions across 184 times and was misunderstood 3,800 times when it mattered. ... He had 4 friends at various times in his life and was loved by 17 people, including his parents. He was liked by 312. ... 34 people remembered him or spoke of him after his death, and his remains shown here [this refers to the photograph of the pile of bones] represent 1/85 of his entire body.[313]

The text is discordant[314] because there are two juxtaposed registers: the monotonous accumulation of numerical facts refers to concepts which have little to do with number and quantity: sadness, loneliness, friendship, etc. For instance, while the last sentence of the quote ('his remains shown here represent 1/85 of his entire body') refers to the pile of bones as something that could indifferently belong to anybody, the obituary evokes the moving memory of an individual life.

The *form* of *Book of Dust* is that of hard, indifferent science: the table of data, the images of matter, the impersonal style of the writing; while its *content* refers to human value, and, above all, to the aesthetic experience of feeling oneself in the world. In other words, in *Book of Dust*, the form conveys a quality of indifference, while the content conveys a moving quality. The meaning of *Book of Dust* is somewhat analogous to that of a medical report informing somebody of an incurable illness. Probably, for the patient, the form of the report will carry a quality of indifference, while the content will be moving.

Book of Dust was instrumental in thinking about how to conceive an art project, *Bâton de l'aveugle*, which, in the context of my research, may express Weil's idea of art as a means in the training of attention.

As with the skull drawings, *Bâton de l'aveugle* engendered an association which, even though it might seem far removed from Weilian attention, afforded a reflection on Weil's metaphysics that was instrumental to the development of my research through the imaginal projects. The association was sparked by the compound of blindness, reading and drawing which led me to Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*. The book opens with a quotation from a letter from Diderot to Sophie Volland:

> I write without seeing. I came. I wanted to kiss your hand ... This is the first time I have ever written in the dark ... not knowing whether I am indeed forming letters. Where there will be nothing, read that I love you.[315]

---

[313] Ibid., pp. 35–36.

[314] I delivered this quote on several occasions and the reaction of the audience was always the same: the passage 'He had 4 friends at various times in his life and was loved by 17 people, including his parents. He was liked by 312' always engendered laughter. At first, I was puzzled by this reaction, as, on my first reading of *Book of Dust*, I had not found the passage amusing. Later, I thought that my interpretation had been informed by my knowledge of Denes' artistic overall concerns (which most definitely do not include irony), while the audience had sensed the jarring and uncomfortable quality of the text and had thus reacted by laughing.

[315] Derrida, 1993, p. 1. Diderot, 1984, p. 48.

The words 'where there will be nothing, read that I love you' were the catalyst between my theoretical and practical lines of enquiry to date, for they precipitated my understanding of the role of *absence* in Weilian attention: in the reading of reality as an object of love (*amor fati*), that object is, for Weil, absent, just as, in the unformed characters of Diderot's letters, the meaning is absent but still, he hopes, capable of expressing his love and, thus, in turn capable of *making the reader a lover*. In Weil's metaphysics, God is analogous to Diderot: God means love but one needs faith and love (the most elevated kind of attention) to decipher God's message[316]. In other words, Weil's remarks on attention operate within her wider negative-theology discourse. As I will argue in Chapter 5, this realisation affected a shift in the epistemological premises of the research, that is, a change of view with regard to what I believe my research can contribute to the expansion of knowledge of Weilian attention (see §5.1).

4.4 Summary

In Chapter 3, I argued that Weil articulates a hierarchy of attentive states, at whose summit is a disposition of absolute consent to whatever happens and whose object (i.e. the object of attention) is an insoluble contradiction. In the present chapter, firstly, I stated that the notion of insoluble contradiction is epistemologically problematic. Secondly, I approached the problem of insoluble contradiction by appealing to Wittgenstein's notion of the nonsensicality of ethics and the distinction he makes between ethical feelings and ethical judgements. Wittgenstein's distinction allowed me to both abstract from particular ethical dogmas of Weil (by considering them as indexes of her ethical feelings) and to make a parallel between ethical feelings and judgements, on one hand, and image and text, on the other hand (texts and judgements being propositional, images and feelings being non-propositional). This parallel was used for the representation of necessity and of an attitude of detachment in some of my observational drawing projects. As I have pointed out in §4.3124, even though this strategy did not lead me to experience necessity, it nevertheless fulfilled the

---

[316] With regard to the hidden love of God, Weil writes: 'At each instant, the fabric, the substance of our very being is the love that God has for us. God's creative love, which maintains us in existence, is not only overabundance of generosity. It is also renunciation, sacrifice. It is not only the Passion, it is creation itself which is renunciation and sacrifice on God's part. The Passion is only its completion. Already as creator, God empties Himself of His divinity. He takes the form of a slave. He submits Himself to necessity.' 'The evil that we see everywhere in the form of affliction is a sign of our distance from God. But this distance is love and therefore it must be loved.' 'It is not that one must love evil. But one must love God through evil. When a child, while playing, breaks a precious object, the mother does not love this destruction. But if later her son goes far away or dies, she ... thinks about this accident with affection, because she sees in it only one of the manifestations of the existence of her child.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 272–273.) 'There is an effort to make which is by far the hardest of all, but it is not in the domain of action. It is the effort of keeping one's gaze turned towards God, of bringing it back when it deviates, of applying it with all the intensity of which one is capable.' (Ibid., pp. 274–275.) 'The only choice offered to man is to attach or not his love here below. Let him refuse to attach his love here below, let him remain motionless, without searching, without moving, attending, without even trying to know what he is waiting for.' (Ibid., p. 278.)

function of the normative analogy, i.e. the representation of Weil's relation between individual and the world through observational drawing. The insights afforded by the application of the normative analogy can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, I acquired a practical knowledge of the difference between orderly and disorderly imagination which Weil's postulates. I was able to discriminate between inevitability and constraint, showing that, even though it seems quite natural to think of something inevitable as a constraint, in practice, the feeling of inevitability need not be accompanied by a feeling of constraint. This analysis might allow a less monolithic conceptualisation of the notion of necessity which Weil articulates in her writings; and, even though the implications of such a conceptualisation are beyond the scope of my research, I expect that it could provide a fruitful starting point for further research on Weilian ethics.

Secondly, I identified a distinction between *truth* and *subjective awareness* of truth, arguing that Weil's argument on attention as a practice of detachment holds even if one rejects the absolutist view of truth which Weil's writings seem to imply. The implications of this distinction for art practice dealing with metaethics are discussed in §6.3. The distinction might afford an interpretation of Weil's philosophy from a less morally dogmatic point of view than the one adopted by a great deal of Weilian scholarship.

Thirdly, the analysis of the normative projects presented in this chapter chronicles my journey from an equivocal representation of the subject[317] in the normative analogy (a self-reflexive representation which is common in art practice) to the realisation that I could capitalise on Weil's version of the de-reified, non-reflexive subject to achieve the critical function of the normative analogy: i.e. the epistemological critique of Weil's notion of attention through the dialogic method of artistic collaboration. In other words, by instantiating the normative critical practical analogy through the normative projects, I progressively came to understand the character of the subject/agent which Weil envisages in her discourse on attention and the requirements which the normative projects had to fulfil in order to re-enact such a subject. This demonstrates the heuristic function of critical practical analogy: the objective and the reflective normative analogues, which I articulated in §2.4, were very abstract, guiding concepts that, through the normative operational principle have

---

[317] This kind of subject, which was a determination of my initial intention to become a *better drawer*, as discussed in §1.1, invites a sort of mystified reading along Merleau-Pontian lines of the artist as a somewhat tragic figure, as a doomed alchemist trying to make the visible seen: 'It is the mountain itself that, from over there, makes itself seen by the painter. It is the mountain that the painter interrogates by looking. What does he ask exactly? To reveal the purely visible means by which it becomes mountain under our eyes. Light, illumination, shadows, reflections, colour: all these objects of the research are not real beings at all, they have only a visual existence, as ghosts have. They are barely at the threshold of everyday vision; they are not commonly seen. The gaze of the painter asks to them how they manage to suddenly make something be there, this thing, to compose this talisman of the world, to make us see the visible.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 21.)

acquired particular and precise referents. In light of this development, the projects which more clearly exemplify the workings of the normative analogy are the performance *Speaking of Writing – Speaking/Writing about Drawing* and the project *Bâton de l'aveugle*, the former, because its absurdist character is an antidote to the mystification of observational drawing[318], the latter, because it parallels one of Weil's arguments in such an explicit manner as to leave little room for mystification. As I will show in Chapter 5, the imaginal critical practical analogy does not entail the same problems with regard to the subjectivity of my role as an artist, both because the imaginal projects do not involve observational drawing and because, in these projects, my role as art maker is not of primary importance for the interpretation of the work.

However, I also realised that my theoretical conceptualisation of free compulsion in Chapter 3 evaded the question of how one's freedom to change one's perceptual habit could be made compatible with the idea that necessity is all-pervasive (which, regardless of the above-mentioned distinction between inevitability and constraint, is undoubtedly how Weil describes necessity). In other words, an insoluble contradiction remains very much *unsolved*; and, in my view, this is problematic because, in the appeal to contradiction, I detect an impatience to cut dialogue short (the *contradictory* expression 'to agree to disagree' renders clearly this kind of impatience). The last paragraph of §4.33 intimates that an investigation of Weil's metaphysics, specifically of her negative theology argument might prove a useful lead to deal with (if not to solve) this problem. This investigation will be the subject of the next chapter.

Before I turn to Chapter 5, I will ask the following metaethical questions. Is it fair to appeal to Wittgenstein's notion of ethical nonsensicality to investigate Weil's assertions on ethics? Is Wittgenstein's view not some version of emotivism by which any ethical judgements are interpreted as mere expressions of feelings? And is the emotivist view not antithetical to Weil's ethical position, which seems much more aligned with the kind of non-naturalist cognitivism propounded by G.E. Moore? In other words, have I not grossly misinterpreted Weilian ethics? I propose the following answers. Wittgenstein's notion of nonsensicality is not emotivist, since he does not state that ethical judgements merely express emotions, but rather that, when analysed, ethical judgements do not seem to represent any conceivable actual state of affairs. Even though Weil's language (especially in her religious writings) sometimes suggests a non-naturalist view akin to Moore's[319], her notion of insoluble contradiction intimates that her discourse is more self-critically open-ended than Moore's:

---

[318] This performance is not a tragedy but rather a kind of tragicomedy.

[319] This view sees moral facts as non-natural, that is, as fundamentally different from the facts which are the object of investigation of natural science, but nevertheless *cognisable*.

while Moore *asserts* that there are non-natural moral facts, Weil often *asks*: Are there non-natural, or transcendent, moral facts? In this respect, I think Weil's reflection on ethics is closer to Wittgenstein's. Thus I do not think that I have misinterpreted Weil's discourse of ethics, even though I do not hold that the reading of it which I have articulated is the only plausible reading. My reading stresses subjective truth over objective truth, on one hand, and on the other hand, objectifies the subject; while the typical reading proposed by Weilian scholarship tends to move in the opposite direction, assuming an objective moral ground[320] and yet articulating an exegesis of Weilian attention styled on Weil's own subjective expository manner[321]. My reading was no doubt at least partly determined by the fact that the operational principle of the normative analogy functioned through a practice of observational drawing, because a critique of the notion of objective truth seems to me necessarily to inhere within such practice.

---

[320] Of which tendency the insistent preference for 'we' over 'I' (see §1.3) is an indication.

[321] In 4.2121, I have shown how I have objectified Weilian statements on ethics by considering them as indexes of her ethical feelings, and not as beliefs that I had to try to 'make (subjectively) mine' in order to be true to Weil's philosophy.

5. Imaginal critical practical analogy

Chapter outline: This chapter begins by returning to the issue of the relation between attention and freedom and focuses on the metaphysical basis of Weil's negative theology. I argue that, like Descartes, Weil postulates an absolutely free faculty of attention by means of which one can withhold judgement whenever perception is unclear. Both Weil and Descartes, I claim, are dismayed optimist rationalists in a quandary: since they posit the existence of an absolutely good divine creator, they require the notion of attention in order to give a rational account of the possibility of human evil; and, since, for Weil, God is infinitely good, finite human beings cannot know God's goodness—except through revelation. This conclusion is unsatisfactory, firstly, because it precludes dialogue between those who do and those who do not accept Weil's religious metaphysics, and, secondly, because it proceeds exclusively from propositional argumentation and overshadows my non-propositional thoughts on these issues. The imaginal projects obviate these shortcomings: they capitalise on the non-propositional semantic function of artworks by abstracting from the content of Weil's metaphysical discourse, retaining only the argument forms which this discourse employs, namely, tautology (e.g. God is God) and contradiction (e.g. The good is possible and impossible). Furthermore, through these projects I developed a sceptical disposition whose intention was to favour dialogue. In the most general terms, imaginal projects function by materialising tautology and contradiction, thus introducing an element of contingency into the representation of these purely logical forms. Weil is widely regarded as a pre-eminently mystical thinker, but the imaginal projects highlight the fact that her metaphysics, in particular her notion of insoluble contradiction, also draws on ideas of logical purity and unconditionality that are quite distinct from—but not incompatible with—her mystical outlook.

5.1 Outline of the objectives of the imaginal analogy

The aim of the imaginal projects was to expand the knowledge of Weilian attention beyond

its present restricted horizon. This horizon is constituted by the typical position found in

Weil scholarship on her negative theology (outlined in the next paragraph), but is also

indicated by my scepticism with regard to the epistemological status of insoluble

contradictions. In secondary literature on Weil, one finds a general acceptance of both

Weil's negative theology and her appeal to insoluble contradiction.

Weil sometimes refers to the contradictory object of attention as the simultaneous

presence/absence of God[322]. For Weil, the object of the most elevated attention is absolute

good (a notion which belongs to ethics) or God (i.e. a transcendent being), and it cannot be

found, as Weil writes, *here below*[323]. If nothing 'here below'[324] can be the object of attention,

then, this object cannot be represented in statements of fact (except negatively). The general

view of Weilian scholarship is exemplified by Ann Pirruccello's argument that this object

can be grasped only in a non-discursive 'realm that opens up only through images'[325], but

little is achieved through this argument, not because this claim is not an appropriate

interpretation of Weil's thought, but because Pirruccello's argument remains discursive: this

would be analogous to pointing at something and stating that it *absolutely* cannot be seen.

Another related issue is the manifestation of the attention of the artist in the works he or she

produces. Weil suggests that it *is* manifested[326]. I ask: How can it be manifested if the object

of attention is transcendent? Can the artist ascend to the transcendent? Is attention not

unmanifestable by definition? One can see how attention conceptualised as the ultimate,

absolutely good ethical end (as Weil conceptualises it) quickly leads always to the same

epistemological impasse, variously expressed. In her writings, Weil grapples time and again

with this impasse, and this feeds my interest in her philosophy, but trying to demonstrate that

---

[322] Pirruccello, 1995, pp. 61–74.

[323] 'Man does not have to search for, nor even believe in, God. He must only refuse to love anything that is other than God. This refusal does not suppose any belief. It is sufficient to note what is evident, namely, that all the goods here below, past, present or future, real or imaginary, are finite and limited, radically incapable of satisfying the desire of an infinite and perfect good which perpetually burns within us.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 277.)

[324] The scare quotes are justified by the fact that the expression 'here below' presupposes a transcendental metaphysics, that is, it presupposes a *there above*, i.e. God's place. Note how, on the other hand, Wittgenstein's ethical discourse does not presume a metaphysical domain.

[325] Pirruccello, 1995, pp. 61–74.

[326] The following passages, already quoted in footnote 223, express this view: 'What is particular in works of art is that the sound which reaches the listener from outside seems to him to be solely the fruit of his own attending. In reality, it has been the fruit of the artist's attending. For the composer, to foresee what note will follow is always to invent it; this invention is the fruit of attending' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 75). 'In composing music or poetry, one aims at a certain inner silence of the soul and one arranges words or sounds in such a way as to render this aspiration perceptible to others.' (Weil, *C 1*, p. 56.)

the work I make somehow manifests elevated attention would be, following Weil's reasoning and using her terminology, identical to claiming to be God – a hard claim to live up to. These epistemological questions required a change in the art practice, that is, a shift from normative to imaginal critical practical analogy.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Weil's negative theology appeals to the ideas of tautology and contradiction in a very *general* sense. That is to say that, while in the field of logic, the terms 'tautology' and 'contradiction' have very specific meanings and denote two infinite classes of arguments (which can be extremely complex), Weil's tautologies and contradictions are so in a general and everyday sense: a tautology has the simple form 'Something is something'; a contradiction has the simple form 'Something is x and something is not x'. The imaginal projects also assume this general sense of the notions of tautology and contradiction.

The objective analogue of the imaginal analogy (Weil's appeal to tautology and contradiction in her discourse on attention) determined the following objective: to indicate how Weil refers to tautology and contradiction in her metaphysics. The role of attention in Weilian metaphysics is discussed in §5.31, where I demonstrate that her metaphysics has its roots in Descartes' philosophy. In §5.32, in light of my analysis of Weilian metaphysics, I propose an explanation of why Weil postulates the notion of attention. As I will argue, this explanation, albeit plausible, is a *dead-end conclusion*, and I propose it in order to highlight the usefulness of the expansion of knowledge of Weilian attention which is the aim of the imaginal analogy. Further elucidation of Weil's views on tautology and contradiction are found in the analysis of the art projects in §5.41 and §5.42. The reflective analogue (considering tautology and contradiction qua immaterial argument *forms*) involved a general reference to the notion of logical form and to the everyday sense of the words 'tautology' and 'contradiction' which I described in the previous paragraph. The operational principle (the materialisation, narrativisation and personification of tautological and contradictory forms) was informed by the art theoretical classification of the functions of art proposed by the philosopher Curt John Ducasse; by the writings of the art historian Thomas McEvilley on the use of theory in Conceptual Art; and by the work of Agnes Denes. These theories, which inform the methodology of the imaginal projects, are discussed in §5.2. The account of the imaginal projects is divided into two sections: one on tautology (§5.41) and one on contradiction (§5.42). Each section gives an account of two projects.

5.2 Sub-methodological concerns: Aesthetic, lectical and heuretic art

My initial conception of the possibility of developing the imaginal analogy owes much to the classification of art practices according to their function advanced by Curt John Ducasse in his *The Philosophy of Art*. Ducasse distinguishes between: (1) aesthetic art (objectification of feeling); (2) lectical art (objectification of meaning); and (3) heuretic art (objectification of will)[327].

Ducasse's categories are not mutually exclusive, and there are objects that may function at once aesthetically, lectically and heuretically. For instance, a cookery book written in the form of a poem whose meter represents mathematical equations would function in the three modes simultaneously. On the other hand, in a more conventional scenario, a poem may function mainly aesthetically[328], a cookery book mainly heuretically (it objectifies the will-to-cook), and a mathematical treatise mainly lectically. The snow project by Art & Language, considered as a hybrid art object, which includes Charles Harrison's essays (see §2.2), is an example of an artwork which fulfils Ducasse's three functions of art: it aesthetically gives the feeling that there is a limit beyond which art cannot be pressed; it heuretically objectifies the will to paint on a composition until all recognisable content is obliterated[329]; and Harrison's essay fulfils a lectical function through an exegesis of the snow project.

Although Ducasse, having defined the terms of this tripartite classification, concentrates solely on the aesthetic function of art, his categories present a wide and inclusive idea of the scope of art; in particular, they allow one to see *arguments* (which are lectical) as possible objects and material of art, and, consequently they permit one to see how art practice could deal with Weil's argument on attention at a meta-level, i.e. not at the level of its content but at that of its form. As Thomas McEvilley argues, arguments and theories are objects and, as such, they have aesthetic presence[330]. Agnes Denes' installation *Rice/Tree/Burial* 1968–79,

---

[327] Ducasse, 1929, pp. 110–133.

[328] The function a particular art form fulfils is culturally relative. For instance, twentieth-century Western poetry tends to fulfil an aesthetic function, while, say, the *Divine Comedy* fulfils not only an aesthetic function but also a lectical one (narrative, descriptive, theological, etc.). To demonstrate the rarity of the lectical mode in contemporary poetry, it is sufficient to point out the rarity of contemporary novels in verse, such as Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (see: Seth, 1986).

[329] The aesthetic and heuretic functions which I attribute to the snow project are paraphrases of the passages from Harrison's essays (see §2.2).

[330] 'The general neglect of what might be called the aesthetics of thought arises from the tradition of mind-body dualism. ... Descartes divided all that exists into two categories, the material (*res extensa*), that is, the body ...; and the immaterial, which is specified as mind (*res cogitans*). A consequence of Descartes' thought is the idea that mind, being immaterial, can have no intimate connection with the arts that, like painting or music, work through the senses. ... In terms of Conceptual Art, ... theories *are* things ... Every thought or concept is an object, and every object has form and aesthetic presence. ... There is, in other words, an aesthetics of thought' (McEvilley, 2005, pp. 78–79).

which, the artist writes, is part of a 'process leading to the visualization of mechanisms and hypotheses'[331], is an example of the materialisation of theory, which I found helpful[332] for the development of an art practice suited to the research problems.

The *aesthetic function* of art in the research is supported by the following seemingly obvious consideration: a definition does not *feel* like that which it defines. For example, saying that a tautology is the 'repetition of the same thing in different words'[333] does not feel like 'A cat is a cat' does. The qualification 'aesthetics' is here employed in the Kantian sense of that which pertains to *examples* and it is distinguished from the discursive, or conceptual mode of representation[334]. Thus, the operational principle of the imaginal analogy obtains an *aesthetic* representation of the *conceptual* forms of tautology and contradiction (which constitute the reflective analogue), in the sense that it gives particular examples of such forms. Furthermore, as Agamben argues in *The Coming Community*, since the property of examples is that of 'being-called', then 'being-called, the property that establishes all possible belongings (being-called Italian, -dog, -Communist) – is also what can bring them all back radically into question.'[335] For Agamben, even though what makes something an example is its having the purely linguistic property of *being-called*, unlike purely linguistic entities (he refers to the purely linguistic 'set' of set theory), the example, remains nevertheless a *paradigm*, that is a *para-deigma*, i.e. something 'which is shown alongside'[336], and, as such, it remains ambiguous, at once universal and particular. In other words, an example is not only an abstract semantic placeholder of a member of a given

---

[331] Denes calls this process 'Dialectic triangulation': 'Dialectic Triangulation ... refers to a process leading to the visualization of mechanisms and hypotheses. ... One builds progressive trichotomies, failing and succeeding in a dialectical method, each time arriving at a better thesis on a higher level.' (Denes, 1976, p. 3.) Denes gives the following example of Dialectic Triangulation: '*Exercises in Logic*: The first transitional triangulation was realized in the summer of 1968, in Sullivan Country, New York. RICE was planted to represent life/growth; TREES were chained to represent interference with life/growth; and HAIKU was buried to represent the idea, the abstract, the absolute. We begin with something vital or controversial – LIFE; find its opposite – DEATH; then proceed to establish a connective link, intermediate rationale which modifies the first two, (deductive, assertive or expository) and transitional into a higher trichotomy – IDEA.' (Ibid., p. 5.)

[332] Denes' work is a useful example because it engages with theory in a thorough manner, which is not the case for all conceptual art. As McEvilley writes: 'Artists often make superficial references to scholarly and scientific topics. Others take more extreme approaches: Bernar Venet[*] refuses to study the context or meaning of the mathematical or astrophysical formulas he uses in his work. ... Denes, by contrast, has intensely studied each of the disciplines she has drawn from, attempting to bring the inner meaning of scientific ideas into the artwork.' (McEvilley, 2004, p. 160.)

[*]For McEvilley on Venet see: McEvilley, 2003, pp. 108–113.

[333] Brown, 1997.

[334] In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes: 'Finally, as regards clarity, the reader has the right to demand first discursive (logical) clarity, through concepts, but then also intuitive (aesthetic) clarity, through intuitions, that is, through examples or other illustrations *in concreto*.' (Kant, 1999, Axviii, p. 103.)

[335] Agamben, 2007, p. 10.

[336] Ibid., p. 10.

class, but also a thing that exceeds its exemplary role. In the imaginal projects, I aimed to exploit the ambiguity of examples because I do not see this ambiguity as a negative quality (and neither does Agamben) but as a semantic richness that might afford a new viewpoint. Lastly, the idea proposed by Norman Jakobson that linguistic signs, such as sentences, have aesthetic meaning, that is, that they are, to a certain extent, images of the things they signify[337], was instrumental for the maturation of the idea that it was possible[338] to create images of tautology and contradiction.

The *lectical function* is fulfilled by art events (often combining installation and performance) comprising a textual component which dealt, either explicitly or implicitly, with some specific aspects of Weil's discourse on attention. The function of these projects is to expose problematical concepts (i.e. problematical *lekta*) or arguments which are unclear to me and to work through them in a manner for which traditional written research is not suited, due to the need for systematic articulation which the latter requires, which favours the kind of negative-theology to which I referred in §5.1.

The products of *heuretic art* are instruments which invite or suggest a particular sort of willing[339]. Ducasse's example is the telephone which objectifies the will-to-speak-far[340]. Ducasse warns that 'to objectify a volition is not to carry it out in action, but to create a state of affairs in the contemplation of which that volition is reflected back, reimparted to one.'[341] Retrospectively, my initial approach to the normative projects can be interpreted as an attempt to objectify the will to be attentive, achieved through an explicit representation of my role of artist-agent. This representation, according to Ducasse's definition of heuretic object, does not imply that I have carried out any attentive action (as a telephone does not entail that its maker has made a phone call), that is, it does not necessarily place me in the uncomfortable position of claiming the position of the attentive artist. Nevertheless, the

---

[337] 'The chain of verbs *veni, vidi, vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered) informs us about the order of Caesar's deeds first and foremost because the sequence of coordinate preterits is used to reproduce the succession of reported occurrences. The temporal order of speech events tends to mirror the order of narrated events in time or in rank. ... The correspondence in order between *signans* and *signatum* finds its right place among the "fundamental varieties of possible semiosis" which were outlined by Peirce (1932). He singles out two distinct subclasses of icons – *images* and *diagrams*.' (Jakobson, 1990, p. 412.) In Peircean terminology, the image $p \rightarrow (\sim q \bullet p)$, discussed in §4.3123, is an icon belonging to the subclass diagram.

[338] This possibility was sufficient for envisaging the possibility of making text-based artworks functioning aesthetically. A detailed study of Jakobson linguistics is beyond the scope of this research.

[339] Ducasse, 1929, p. 121.

[340] The general notion of heuretic object is quite intuitive and is also found in Weil's *Leçons de philosophie* (although Weil does not use the term 'heuretic'): 'Every object which we see commands a hint of movement, no matter how imperceptible it is. (A chair commands to sit, stairs command to go up, etc.).' (Weil, *LP*, p. 23.)

[341] Ducasse, 1929, p. 120.

normative work still invites an interpretation as intending to convey the idea that the artist who produced it is an attentive agent. In the imaginal projects, the likelihood of this interpretation is reduced because the role of the artist is depersonalised by the use of fictional characters (see §5.412), or stereotype—the lecturer (see §5.411 and §5.421)—and observational drawing is used primarily as a denotative means (see §5.422), by which I mean that the issue of the appearance of the drawing is secondary to the overall meaning that I intend to convey. In the imaginal projects, the heuretic function is downplayed, because in this work there is an element of spectacle, which places the audience in a removed position with respect to what is being presented.

Since two of the projects discussed below included my presence, it will be useful to elucidate how I intended my presence to function semantically. In order to do so, I will draw on the text 'Art as Catalysis' by the artist Adrian Piper. Piper reflects on her early performances as follows:

> The artist himself becomes the catalytic agent inducing change in the viewer; the viewer responds to the catalytic presence of the artist as artwork. This is not to be confused with life as art or the artist's personality as art. The aesthetic formality and artifice of the work temporarily replace or veil the personal attributes of the artist as a private individual. The artwork consists in artificially assumed attributes of the artist.[342]

My performances are also clearly artificial (e.g. they have the form of lectures but they are obviously *not* lectures in the traditional sense, they are *artifices*), with a view to functioning as referents to the research topics rather than to my private individuality.

The mention of tautology and Conceptual Art is likely to bring to mind the name of Joseph Kosuth so a clarification is in order. Kosuth writes that 'art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art.'[343] For Kosuth, tautology depends on *meaning*[344], not on form, while the imaginal projects involve dealing with tautology and contradictions merely as argument *forms* and are, therefore, independent of meaning. However, abstracting from what Kosuth says about the inherent tautolougness of art, works such as his *One and Three Chairs* 1965 doubtlessly have been an example for the development of my projects on

---

[342] Piper, 1996, p. 34.

[343] Kosuth, 1993, p. 20.

[344] Kosuth's characterisation of art helps to elucidate what I mean by tautology dependent on meaning: 'works of art are analytic propositions' that 'if viewed within their context – as art – ... provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact' (Ibid., p. 20). An analytic proposition is a proposition in which there is equivalence between subject and predicate in virtue of their meaning: e.g. 'All bachelors are unmarried'. On the other hand, as I have argued in the fourth paragraph of this section, argument forms, such as tautologies, are empty of meaning, because their variables are not propositions but placeholders for propositions: e.g. to say '*p* is *p*' is equivalent to saying '*Bla bla bla* is *bla bla bla*'.

tautology, particularly, his intention to critique the generally presumed perfect fit, or tautology, between an object and its signs.

The imaginal analogy is much closer in spirit to the work of Belgian artist Éric Duyckaerts, both in terms of interests and products. As regards interests, Duyckaerts' work typically deals with epistemology (see also §5.422). As regards products, I will give the example of the installation which Duyckaerts exhibited at the 2007 Venice Biennale, which consisted of a labyrinthine installation which at once echoed the *formal* urban intricacy of Venice and the convolution of paths to knowledge[345]. As is often the case with Duyckaerts' work, this piece also involved a lecture-like performance. As it will become clear when I discuss the various imaginal projects, I used a similar strategy for the representation of tautological and contradictory forms.

5.3 Weilian metaphysics

5.31 The Cartesian roots of Weilian attention

In §3.31, I discussed Weil's explicit reference to Descartes' philosophy in the context of the theory of mind which she delineates in her early essay *Science and Perception in Descartes*. I have indicated the import of the notion of attention in this early text. Now I turn to the analysis of the role of attention in Weilian metaphysics, with a view to introducing the referents of the imaginal projects, namely, tautology and contradiction. In what follows, I will demonstrate that Weilian metaphysics is also indebted to Descartes, although, since Weil does not explicitly acknowledge this debt, my demonstration requires a synoptic perspective on Weil's writings, rather than the kind of step by step examination which I articulated in my study of her theory of mind. There follows a synoptic reconstruction of Weil's and Descartes' arguments on attention, which shows their affinity.

Argument outline:

(1) I am free of refraining from judgement when I do not have a clear perception.

(2) When I have a clear perception, my freedom of judgement coincides with the necessity of making just that judgement (i.e. the rationally right judgement).

(3) By attentive meditation, I can form the habit of avoiding error.

(4) Thus, attention can make me free.

---

[345] Duyckaerts, 2007, pp. 9–12. See also Mangion, 2007.

Descartes' expression of the argument:

(1) 'For it is surely no imperfection in God that he has given me the freedom to assent or not to assent in those cases where he did not endow my intellect with a clear and distinct perception'.[346]

(2) 'In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways [i.e. indifferently inclined to both affirmation and denial]; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction – either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts – the freer is my choice. But the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation.'[347]

(3) 'I can avoid error in the second way, which depends merely on my remembering to withhold judgement on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear. Admittedly, I am aware of a certain weakness in me, in that I am unable to keep my attention fixed on one and the same item of knowledge at all times; but by attentive and repeated meditation I am nevertheless able to make myself remember it as often as the need arises, and thus get into the habit of avoiding error.'[348]

(4) The conclusion follows from Descartes' argument[349].

Weil's expression of the argument:

(1) 'Attention consists of suspending one's thought, leaving it disposable, empty and penetrable by the object, of maintaining within oneself, in proximity of one's thought, but at a lower level and without contact with it, all the diverse knowledge which one is forced to use. ... All mistranslations, all absurdities in the solution of geometrical problems, all awkwardness of style and all imperfections in the connection of ideas in French compositions, all these are due to the fact that thought has rushed hastily on something, and, thus being prematurely filled, was no more disposable for the truth.'[350]

(2) 'The only choice given to man, as intelligent and free creature, is to desire obedience or not to desire it. If he does not desire it, he obeys nevertheless, perpetually, inasmuch as he is

---

[346] Descartes, 1984, p. 61.

[347] Ibid., p. 58.

[348] Ibid., p. 62.

[349] Because, for Descartes, through attention, I can withhold judgement (3); the withholding of judgement (in cases of unclear and indistinct perception) is an exercise of freedom (1); and the degree of freedom is directly proportional to the degree of clarity and distinctness of the perceptions on which my choices depend (2).

[350] Weil, *AD*, pp. 92–93. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *WG*, p. 62. The freedom of withholding judgement when one does not see the truth is tacitly postulated rather than stated.

a thing subject to mechanical necessity. If he desires it, he remains subject to mechanical necessity, but a new necessity is added to it, a necessity constituted by laws belonging to natural things. Certain actions become impossible; others are accomplished through him, sometimes in spite of himself.'[351]

(3) 'Indirectly, and with time, the will, and above all attention, and above all attention in the form of prayer, lead to a modification in reading. What is changed then is the imagination.'[352] 'One does not choose sensations, but, to a large extent, one chooses what one feels through them; not in a moment, but through an apprenticeship.'[353]

(4) 'At the centre of voluntary action: attention. Only attention is free.'[354]

I will give an account of Weilian metaphysics by answering the question: What metaphysical premises does the above argument require? An answer to this question necessitates some references to secondary sources on Descartes' philosophy.

Cecilia Wee argues that, for Descartes, if one is attentive, then one cannot help but do what one clearly perceives as good[355] but that, since there is always a temporal gap between perception and the affirmation of the will, one can, in principle, shift one's attention away from a clearly perceived good[356]. In other words, for Wee, Descartes ascribes an ethical value to attention, i.e. the value of making the agent, if he or she so chooses, see and consequently pursue the good. That Weil ascribes the same ethical value to attention is

---

[351] Weil, *AD*, p. 113 (see footnote 280). For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *WG*, pp. 76–77. Weil does not mention clear perception or judgement; the affinity with Descartes' argument is this: the only freedom we have as intelligent creatures (and one could say the highest grade of freedom, pointing back to Descartes' argument, if we assume that, for an intelligent being, the best action is to act intelligently, i.e. rationally) is a *free* (i.e. desired) *impossibility* to do otherwise. A passage of Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, already quoted in §3.34, footnote 112, succinctly describes the link between attention and *choiceless freedom* (or free compulsion): 'If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at.' (Murdoch, 1971, pp. 36–38.)

[352] Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411.

[353] Ibid., p. 410.

[354] Weil, *OC I*, pp. 386–387.

[355] 'In letter 463, Descartes had maintained that it is 'always open to the agent to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good.' Kenny points out that Descartes' letter to Mesland makes clear that this can be done 'only by distracting one's attention; one cannot refrain from desiring a good clearly seen to be good.' It is because the will seldom 'attends for more than a moment to a single thing' that one may be distracted from assent to a clear and distinct perception. But as long as attention is *focused* on the clear and distinct perception, the will would be necessitated in a particular direction, and the agent could not have done otherwise.' (Wee, 2006, p. 395.) On the active attentive scepticism of Descartes as a means to avoid error see also: De Warren, 2003.

[356] 'Descartes clearly accepts that there is always a temporal gap – no matter how brief – between the clear and distinct perception of a truth/good, and the will's affirmation/pursuit of that truth/good. ... This being so, it is in principle always possible for the agent to have a clear and distinct perception of a truth /good, and to shift attention to some other thought *before* the will affirms/pursues that truth/good. Thus, it is possible for the agent to do otherwise even in the case of clear and distinct perception – for it is possible for her *not* to affirm and *not* to pursue, by the expedient of shifting her attention almost immediately to some other thought *before* she affirms/pursues.' (Wee, 2006, p. 396.)

evident from the passage of the above reconstructed argument, where Weil maintains that the cause of imperfect action is a lack of attention, and also in her argument that attention affords perception of the real (keeping in mind that, for Weil, the real and the good are synonyms). Furthermore, Wee points out that, in Descartes, there is a tension between free will and 'God as the pre-ordainer and sustainer of this universe', which Descartes 'solves'[357] by making a distinction between clear perceptions: those which proceed from the natural light, and those which proceed from divine grace; and by appealing to the latter, twinned with a commonsensical stance (*I feel free, therefore I am free*), to argue that we can have a clear perception of the possibility of free will in a universe pre-ordained by God[358]. Again, Weil uses an analogous strategy to deal with the problem of the contradictory possibility and impossibility of good, by appealing to the notion of insoluble contradiction and divine grace[359], which crowns the attentive agent's effort; moreover, her claim that, in these matters, certainty can be reached only through experience is a commonsensical claim.

Furthermore, in Descartes (the following observation also applies to Weil), as Paul Reynolds points out, the notion of attention does not fulfil an explicative function, and attempting to

---

[357] The quotation marks indicate my, not Wee's, scepticism with regard to this solution.

[358] 'For Descartes, the main tension lies between free-will (which includes the robust$_D$ [*sic*] ability to do otherwise) and God as the pre-ordainer and sustainer of this universe. But Descartes makes clear that humans can never adequately comprehend the infinite power(s) of God. This being so, the first perspective – wherein we consider freedom and the robust$_D$ ability to do otherwise in relation to the wider metaphysics and God's powers – must lie beyond our human grasp. But the Cartesian agent knows, independent of any wider metaphysics, that she is genuinely able to choose otherwise. This is all she needs in order to establish that her actions are free and contingent.' (Ibid., p. 413.) 'Descartes accepts that we cannot 'grasp' how human freedom, including the robust$_D$ ability to do otherwise, is compatible with God's pre-ordination of events in the universe. However we know from our own experience that we are able to do otherwise, and this is enough to ensure that we can do so.' (Ibid., p. 411.) 'How God can be three individuals and yet one is beyond the 'natural reach of the human mind,' for it apparently contravenes the laws of logic. However [for Descartes] we would still have to accept that God is a trinity. For Descartes, the clarity and the transparency that marks a perception as indubitably true may come from either the natural light or divine grace. In this case, the clarity of the perception that God is a trinity is given by divine grace. Thus we have to accept this, though we cannot conceive how it could be so.' (Ibid., pp. 408–409.)

[359] Thus the interpretation proposed by André Devaux, that the (indubitable) increased transcendentalism that marks Weil's later writings implies a moving away from her earlier Cartesian rationalism (which became a mere step towards grace[*]), is not the only plausible one because: (i) Descartes view is not less transcendentalist than Weil's; and (ii) as I have shown in §3.31, in Weil's earliest writings, the existence of the external world is inferred – according to Weil, in Cartesian fashion – from a limit of the power of thought (I have the power to doubt any thought, but not to give myself an object of thought), which already amounts to an admission of the existence of a supra-human reality. That is not to say, however, that Weil did not consider her later views as a distancing from the Cartesian position; but this concerns *Weil's* idea of Descartes as a pre-eminently rational thinker and in no way precludes *a priori* a Cartesian interpretation of Weil's late transcendentalism.

[*] 'Thus Weil opposes to the Cartesian philosophy of immediacy a religious metaphysics based on the idea of *mediation* and on the presence of the Mediator. Rational philosophy keeps its essential role: 'to bring to light what is irreducible to it', but after 'rationality in the Cartesian sense, that is, the mechanism, humanly representable necessity, [will have been] supposed in any place where one can suppose it' [C2 III, 236]. Then the mind comes up against 'the incomprehensible', 'the true mysteries, the indemonstrables, which are real [C2 III, 264].' (Devaux, 1995, p. 22.)

use attention explicatively will lead to argumentative circularity[360] (one could say to *tautology*). For Weil and Descartes, attention is a postulate (see also §3.31), whose function is to guarantee, within their metaphysics, the possibility of free human action, which is a prerequisite of good action, in a world which is the creation of an all-powerful God[361].

There is, however, a difference between Descartes' and Weil's metaphysics which was crucial for the articulation of the objective analogue of the imaginal projects. As Anthony Kenny argues, for Descartes, 'it is possible to prove the existence of God from a consideration of God's creatures' and this proof is based 'only on his [i.e. Descartes'] own mind and its ideas':[362] for Descartes, the fact that he can conceive the idea of a perfect God is sufficient to prove that a perfect God exists.[363] On the other hand, Weil problematises the issue of the existence of God: for her, God is beyond our reach and whatever we think of as being God is a *false* God[364]. And it is precisely the negative theology which Weil articulates by means of the notions of tautology and contradiction that is the starting point of the imaginal projects.

---

[360] Reynolds, 1939, p. 426.

[361] This entails the incompatibilism problem discussed in §3.35. Weil's argument that creation of the universe by God is an act of withdrawal and abnegation does not conflict with the notion of an all-powerful God, for this argument refers to God as, according to Weil, it can be known by human beings *phenomenologically* and not as God *really is* (even though Weil claims that human beings can never know God's real reality); the many Weilian claims regarding the super-rigidity of super-natural laws (which are stricter than mechanical necessity) support this point. For both Weil and Descartes, attention is a faculty, i.e. an *active* power, but, in order to understand how this power can be employed by the good agent, one must keep in mind that both Weil and Descartes subscribe to a positivistic metaphysics: for Descartes, there is the *light of the understanding*; for Weil, there is *truth*. All the good agent has to do is not to withdraw attention from the perceived good and the will inevitably flows towards the good. In other words, attention is a *constraining* power. The will is analogous to a sphere at the top of an incline. At bottom of the incline is the light of the understanding (or truth). The incline gets steeper as it approaches the light of the understanding, so that the will of those closer to the light of the understanding rolls towards it with more force than the will of those who are further from the light of the understanding (the will of those who are *very* far from the light of the understanding is on a sort of plateau with hardly any inclination: it rolls here and there, haphazardly). A good sphere is a sphere that rolls towards the light of the understanding; a bad sphere is a sphere that rolls here and there. The sphere has a brake. Good spheres pull the brake more strongly the less the incline and release the brake more the more the incline; bad spheres use the brake in the contrary manner. The less a sphere *has to* pull the brake in order to be a good sphere the *freer* it is, but all spheres can be good because they can all use the brake. The brake is attention. This image conveys Weil's and Descartes' optimism, for it depicts the good not as an ascent, with the risk of an inevitable fall, but as something always within the agent's power (the brake), *if only the agent be attentive!* (That is not to say that, for them, the exercise of attention is easy – quite the contrary; but it is, nevertheless, always *up to the agent*.)

[362] Kenny, 2009, p. 127.

[363] 'Because we find in ourselves the idea of a God, or a supremely perfect Being, we are able to investigate the cause which produces this idea in us; but after, on considering the perfection it possesses, we are constrained to consider it only as emanating from an all perfect being, that is from a God that truly exists.' (Descartes, 1911, p. 226.)

[364] 'If we believe we have a Father here below, it is not him, it is a false God. ... One must be glad that he is infinitely beyond our reach.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 337.)

In the next section, firstly, I identify some of premises that Weilian metaphysics requires one to accept; secondly, I argue that these premises are problematic; and, thirdly, I explain why the argument that I articulate in §5.32, albeit defendable, is an inadequate representation of my views on Weilian metaphysics and of my intention as a researcher.

5.32 The dismayed optimist rationalist quandary

As I anticipated in §5.1, this section considers the function of the notion of attention in Weil's metaphysics. My purpose is to demonstrate that a propositional approach to the question of the ethical significance of attention leads to a conclusion which I deem unsatisfactory both because it hinders dialogue on this issue and because it is semantically depleted. On the other hand, as I will show in my analysis of the imaginal projects (§5.4), the non-propositionality of these projects favours dialogue and encompasses a wider range of meaning.

Why do Weil and Descartes need to postulate the faculty of attention? Why not postulate, for instance, a natural movement towards the good which does not require any active effort of attention on the part of human beings? Byron Williston argues that 'it is precisely the inclination to place oneself intentionally in a condition when one can act contrary to the perceived good that Descartes understands as constitutive of moral weakness. Adapting the letter to Mersenne to the problem of moral weakness thus understood, we can say that the latter requires the prior withdrawal of attention from the good in favour of the less worthy alternative, which is itself then seen (delusively) as the good.'[365] Descartes needs an attention-withdrawal requirement, Williston continues, because, without it, he would be (logically) forced to admit that an agent can *knowingly* pursue the bad, and this admission would amount to claiming that reason is not free[366]; this is not a tenable position for a rationalist like Descartes[367]. Thus, Descartes is an optimist: human beings are rational; the

---

[365] Williston, 1999, p. 42.

[366] 'Sparshott concludes that Aristotle's entire theory of *akrasia* 'depends on the moral principle and the acrastic desire bypassing each other'. If this did not happen, if the *akrates* were fully aware of the discrepancy between his acratic desire and the reason it contravenes but chose nevertheless to act against that reason, knowledge would indeed find itself dragged about like a slave, something which Descartes, no less that Socrates or Aristotle, does not want to allow. This is why for Descartes attention must be withdrawn from the perception of the overriding reason before acratic desire can fully triumph.' (Ibid., p. 47.) 'If and when the defect does manage to manifest itself at the level of thought it has by that fact overcome the reasons which were contrary to it. And since those reasons were *ex hipothesi* manifest to the agent, the only way they could have failed to win the day is if attention were actively withdrawn from them.' (Ibid., p. 48.)

[367] This non-acratic view of the moral agent has a long history in Western philosophy and can be traced as far back as Socrates and, later, the Stoics. As Anthony Long argues in his study on Epictetus' philosophy, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, 'the core of Socratic ethics', some of whose propositions include 'no one does or wants what is bad, knowing or thinking that what he does or wants is bad [i.e. wrongdoing is involuntary]'[*] and 'the wrongdoer does not do what he wants, but what (mistakenly) "seems good to him"'[†], were endorsed by the Stoics in general and Epictetus in particular (Long, 2004, pp. 70–71).

exercise of reason is guaranteed by the free faculty of attention; and reason is all one needs to be a good agent. One could object that this applies to Descartes but not to Weil: Weil is not a rationalist but a transcendent thinker – at any rate, in later years. This objection is dispelled with the observation that Descartes' position *too* was a transcendent one: for him, there are clear perceptions that proceed from *divine* grace. The objection follows from a view of reason and transcendence as mutually exclusive. This objection indicates a confusion: namely, a failure to recognise that this is not *Weil's* or *Descartes'* view: for them, reason and divine transcendence coexist[368]; even though reason has its limits and the transcendent domain may be sometimes described by Weil as being *above* the rational domain[369], this, as Weil maintains in *Letter to a Priest*, does not imply the primacy of the transcendent object over the rational[370]. Weil's rationalism, characterised by a fervent transcendent *élan*, is typical of the Neo-Kantianism of her philosophy teachers, Lagneau and Alain, although, because of her interest in religion, and Christianity in particular, her terminology is much more explicitly theistic than theirs.

If the claim that Weil never renounced the rationalism of her early philosophy might be met with resistance by those who consider her an exclusively transcendent thinker, the assertion that she was an optimist might be even more controversial: after all, the almost total domination of evil, brutal force, etc. are ubiquitously referred to in her writings. 'Almost' is the key word here: for Weil, the world is *almost* (i.e. *not* completely) ruled by blind force, because God, who is absolutely good, counter-levers this force. To subscribe to a metaphysics whose fundament is an absolutely good divine entity is to be an optimist.

---

[*]See: Plato's *Gorgias*, 468d (Plato, 1997, p. 812); Epictetus' *Discourses*, Book 2, Discourse 26 (1–2), (Epictetus, 1995, p. 145).

[†]See: Epictetus' *Discourses*, Book 4, Discourse 1 (3), (Ibid., p. 227).

[368] However, as I argued on pp. 150–151, Weil does not claim, as Descartes does, that the existence of God can be deduced through ratiocination.

[369] Weil writes: 'The mysteries of faith are not the proper object for the intelligence considered as a faculty permitting affirmation or denial. They are not of the order of truth, but above it. The only part of the human soul which is capable of any real contact with them is the faculty of supernatural love. It alone, therefore, is capable of an adherence in regard to them.' (Weil, *LPR*, p. 36.)

[370] Weil's view on the *anathema sit* demonstrates this: 'We owe the definitions with which the Church has thought it right to surround the mysteries of faith, and more particularly its condemnations (... *anathema sit*) a permanent and unconditional attitude of respectful attention, but not of adherence. ... Intellectual adherence is never owed to anything whatsoever. For it is never in any degree a voluntary thing. Attention alone is voluntary. And it *alone* forms the subject of an obligation.' (Weil, *LPR*, p. 38.) In this extended letter, Weil's thought is close to Wittgenstein's (i.e. to the view that ethics does not belong to the discursive, intellectual realm), perhaps, because, here, she considers *her own* ethical feelings in relation to the Church dogmatism, while, generally, in her socio-political writings, she abstracts from her individual perspective.

As an optimist and a rationalist, Weil has a problem, which I shall call 'the dismayed optimist rationalist quandary'. Reason is ethically neutral because it is not voluntary[371]. God is absolutely good. One might ask Weil: 'If God is absolutely good, why is there evil in the world?' Weil does agree that there is evil in the world (that is why she is dismayed) and she answers: 'Human beings do always what seems good to them, but often they mistake evil for good. This is not God's fault, but it is due to an *active* withdrawal of attention, for which *they* are responsible, not God.' One replies: 'But if God is absolutely good, why did God give this active power to human beings, so that they can mistake evil for good?' And Weil: 'This is one of those insoluble contradictions which are the most elevated object of attention.' This short imaginary dialogue illustrates the incompatibilism problem with which Weil is confronted, which differs from the free will *versus* determinism incompatibility, discussed earlier, in §3.35: in the latter, the question is *how* one *can have* free will (and, consequently, a potentially *good* agent) in a totally determined universe; in the former, the question is *why* one *would want* free will (and, consequently, a potentially mistaken and *bad* agent) in a universe created by an absolutely good God. Weil uses the notion of attention to pass the responsibility from God to human agent[372]. This interpretation offers a possible explanation of Weil's ambivalence with regard to the results of attentive action and her insistence on the *very small degree of control* that, through attention, one can have on one's habit and thus, indirectly, on one's action. If every attentive action bore visible fruit, then attention, and consequently good action, might seem easy; and if one had a high (or absolute) degree of control over one's action, then how could the dismayed optimist rationalist account for the existence of evil? Did God get it wrong? Is God, perhaps, not as absolutely good as one thought? No, this cannot be: for Weil, the human agent possesses just enough freedom for moral blame, but goodness belongs to God.

In many ways, this conclusion seems obvious: if one postulates the existence of goodness and calls it 'God', then one (logically) needs also to postulate the existence of badness and, at the very least, hypothesise that its source is not in God. Why, then, would such a conclusion not have occurred to Weil scholars with a profound knowledge of her philosophy? The answer is that many Weilian scholars would not accept that her argument is *hypothetical*: for them, God *is* good. From this point of view, Weilian attention is truly a means to become a good agent and not a mere logical consequence of hypothesised premises

---

[371] See footnotes 369 and 370: for Weil, intellectual, or rational adherence, cannot be the subject of obligation, i.e. of normative ethics.

[372] This is evident in Weil's claim that evil is a consequence of an attention withdrawal: 'Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil than is the flesh. This is why every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves.' (Weil, *WG*, pp. 61–62.)

or a functional term within the economy of Weil's metaphysics[373]. Mine, however, is not a critique of that view, but rather an admission of incapacity: I am incapable of seeing what it means to say that God is good, and, like Wittgenstein, if I conjecture an omniscient being's book, I see this book containing only relative judgements of value (see §4.3121). But I do not deem this incapacity as antithetical to the experience of ethical feelings. Moreover, since, as I have pointed out in §1.1, my decision to pursue this research coincided with the abandonment of the intent of becoming a *better drawer* through attention and with the resolution to use art practice heuristically, it follows that my research does not address first-order ethical questions regarding *good (or better) agents* but second-order metaethical questions regarding the manner in which those first-order questions can be approached. Thus, while Weilian scholarship, given its typical concern with ethics, tends to seek a direct (almost causal) nexus between an agent's practice of attention and his or her ethical betterment, my investigation, which is situated at the more abstract, metaethical level, can make sense of the hypothetical character of Weilian attention merely as *a way* of engaging with ethical questions. That is not to say, however, that the metaethical perspective includes the ethical perspective; rather, both fields have specific limitations: on one hand, ethical discourses exclusively endorse one amongst the many possible metaethical positions, but this localisation potentially gives to ethics a great pertinence to everyday life situations; on the other hand, metaethics is far removed from everyday concerns, but its speculative nature counterbalances the not uncommon dogmatic entrenchments of ethical positions.

With regard to the issue of insoluble contradiction, even if one considers the distinction that Weil sometimes makes between *knowing* that the good is impossible and *possibility* of the good[374] (a possibility depending on the revelation of God to the attending soul), there is no contradiction between the knowledge that the good is impossible and the possibility of the good. However, here one is on epistemological quicksand: Weil's argument would not be considered valid by someone who is sceptical as regards the possibility of the *graceful* revelation of God to human beings; and, given that Weil takes the knowledge of the impossibility of the good to be inherent in all human beings without exception, such a sceptic could also ask 'How does *Weil* know that the good is possible?' On the other hand, Weil's argument will be acceptable for someone who believes in the possibility of divine revelation and that Weil experienced such revelation.

---

[373] The expression 'a functional term within the economy of Weil's metaphysics' is an adaptation of an expression that the philosopher Michel Bitbol uses in the context of an epistemological analysis of the scientific concepts of 'categorical property' and 'dispositional property'. Bitbol argues that to say that a property is categorical or propositional 'does not denote its *nature* but only its *function* within the economy of knowledge.' (Bitbol, 2010, p. 127.)

[374] See quotes on p. 96, where the emphasis is on the *lack of knowledge* of the possibility of good here below, as distinct from the actual impossibility of good.

Before offering an appraisal of the arguments that I proposed in the two preceding paragraphs, I must briefly explain (as I anticipated in §3.1) why a reading of Weilian metaphysics in Kantian terms (which might solve the problem of contradiction) would lead to a misinterpretation of Weil's philosophy. For Kant, the *unconditionality*—be it of good (categorical imperative) or beauty (aesthetic judgement)—and the *conditionality*, or contingency, of the world of nature (i.e. the domain of cause and effect) are *not contradictory*, because they arise from distinct faculties of the mind, and they serve different purposes (unconditionality: practical purpose, i.e. moral conduct; conditionality: theoretical purpose, i.e. acquisition of knowledge). Thus, for Kant, even though 'we feel ourselves urged by the moral law to strive after a universal highest end, yet we feel ourselves and all nature too incapable of its attainment'[375], there is no contradiction here because the concept of a universal highest end is merely *regulative* (both of moral conduct and of scientific enquiry)[376], i.e. *non-objective*. On the other hand, for Weil, there is an *insoluble contradiction* between absolute, unconditional good and conditionality; and this insoluble contradiction is the mark through which reality is given to us (albeit only negatively). Moreover, Kant argues that transcendental concepts are objects of practical faith and not theoretical provable knowledge[377]. Sometimes, Weil also maintains this—notably, in *Letter to a Priest*, where she writes that Christian dogmas are objects of contemplation and not of assertion or denial (see footnote 369)—and yet when she argues about attention she claims that the results of attention, even though they belong to a spiritual (and therefore, presumably, supersensible) realm, can be confirmed by experience[378]. In doing this, Weil goes towards a sort of Pyrrhonian scepticism (good is impossible and good is possible), which is the very position Kant argues against[379]. But, of course, Weil is not a sceptic: for her, insoluble contradictions are the mark of the real, not the proof that we cannot have any form of reliable knowledge (as for Pyrrhonists). These elucidations demonstrate that, even though in Weil's writings one finds many words of praise for Kant, there is a fundamental difference in the way they conceive transcendence and, consequently, in their conception of what an adequate philosophical account of the transcendence requires.

---

[375] Kant, 2008, p. 275.

[376] Ibid., pp. 227–232.

[377] Guyer, 2006, p. 134.

[378] 'Human thought and the universe constitute the books of revelation *par excellence*, if the attention, lighted by love and faith, knows how to decipher them. The reading of them is a proof, and indeed the only certain proof. After having read the *Iliad* in Greek, no one would dream of wondering whether the professor who taught him the Greek alphabet had deceived him.' (Weil, *ICG*, p. 201.) See also footnote 18.

[379] 'Undermining Pyrrhonian skepticism ... by determining the proper use and limits of human reason through the critical scrutiny of its powers is the methodological project that structures the whole of Kant's presentation and defence of his substantive theory of theoretical and practical autonomy of human beings.' (Guyer, 2006, p. 12.)

In §5.1, I described the argument which I have articulated in this section as a *dead-end conclusion.* Why? Because it obtains two exclusive disjunctions:

(1) On one hand, those who believe that God is good, for whom attention is a means to become a good agent; on the other hand, those who do not believe that God is good, for whom attention is a mere hypothetical postulate to which Weil is forced to have recourse because of her mistaken metaphysics (i.e. mistaken for those who do not believe that God is good).

(2) On one hand, those who believe in revelation, for whom there is no contradiction between knowing that good is impossible and the possibility of good; on the other hand, those who do not believe in revelation, for whom there is a contradiction between knowing that good is impossible and the possibility of good.

I qualified these two disjunctions as *exclusive*, and they are obviously logically exclusive[380]. But they are also exclusive in the sense that they exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue between those who hold the opposing views. I consider the preclusion of dialogue detrimental; therefore, I deem this a dead-end conclusion. There is also another reason why, for me, this is a dead-end conclusion. Even though, as it is clear from my argument, I side with those who do not believe that God is good and that there is no contradiction between knowing that good is impossible and the possibility of good, I nevertheless feel that the propositional character of argumentation ill-represents the *not-very-propositional thoughts* that I have on these matters. I feel that I have been cornered by my own argument, but I also feel that there is no real corner beyond the one created by the argument. This cornered feeling is similar to the feeling one might experience while answering the questions of a survey that does not seem to justly represent the facts that it purports to deal with and that consequently forces one to give inaccurate answers.

The purpose of following this argument to its dead end is to highlight how art practice can expand the knowledge of Weilian attention precisely because, by virtue of the *non-propositional* character of its products (and unlike *propositional* argumentation), it does not so readily engender 'trapping corners' and affords a richer (and I believe truer) representation of my position. I said that the dead-end conclusion precludes dialogue, and it is not accidental that, in many of the imaginal projects, the exposition of which occupies the remainder of this chapter, *dialogue* plays a crucial role.

---

[380] In logic, an exclusive disjunction has the form *One or the other but not both*.

5.4 Imaginal projects

5.41 Tautology

For Weil, God is a tautological entity[381] and God is also synonymous with absolute good. Tautologies have the property of being *always* true (e.g. it is always true that a cat is a cat, regardless of any contingent fact about actual cats). Thus, Weil's claim that, in ethics, there are insoluble contradictions follows from the tautologousness and absolute goodness which she ascribes to God, because the goodness of God is not contingent, while the goodness *here below*, the goodness of human actions, is *always* contingent: e.g. it might seem non-contingently good to save ten people from dying in an accident, but what if one of those who has been saved turns out to be a mass-murderer who will kill thousands? I do not need to answer this question: this kind of thought experiment is a commonplace in discourse on ethics. My point is to illustrate why it is quite natural to think of non-divine goodness as being necessarily contingent. One could put it as follows: I am convinced that *my* best is not *the* best. And this is also the crux of Weil's view on the matter.

A tautological God is a transcendent God because nothing here below, in the contingent world, is tautological. As I pointed out in §5.1, to deal with the transcendent through deductive argumentation always leads back to contradiction; in view of this fact, I decided to consider tautology *qua* aesthetic object, in order to gain and represent another mode of knowledge: aesthetic knowledge. Below, is an example of deductive argumentation in which one of the interlocutors makes a tautological claim about beauty:

> Two inseparable friends called Tauto and Logy. They are sitting by the sea, at sunset. Tauto says "Isn't this beautiful!" "Yes, truly beautiful... the calm sea, the incandescent red, the seagulls... ah!" says Logy. "But, you can't reduce this beauty to a mere string of facts, as if you could engineer it in some lab, at will!" "Ok. Then beauty is..." "Beauty is beauty, beauty is *just* beauty!" Tauto cries out. And Logy: "Good. So *that* is *that*. What can we talk about now?"[382]

Tauto's claim is an argument *about* the tautologousness of beauty, but when one states that something is a tautology, the work of expressing the tautological quality is yet to be done. The stance of Weilian scholarship on Weil's ethics (i.e. on her notion of good) is similar to Tauto's position. My aim is to acknowledge Logy's question (What can we talk about now?), but the approach that I adopt does not appeal to logic but, as I said, to aesthetics.

There are precedents of artistic representations of tautology, notably, besides the already mentioned work of Kosuth, many pieces by William Anastasi, e.g. *Microphone*[383] 1963,

---

[381] 'God produces himself perfectly. ... First of all, God loves himself. ... The love between God and God, which is itself God, is this doubly virtuous bond; this bond that unites two beings to such an extent that they are indiscernible and are really a single one, this bond which extends over the distance and overcomes an infinite separation.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 353.)

[382] Alfier, 2009d.

[383] A tape recorder that plays its own sound (McEvilley, 2005, pp. 105–135).

Nine Polaroid Photographs of a Mirror[384], and *Six Sites*[385] 1967, and Bernar Venet's *Tube no. 150/30/1300*[386] 1966, in which a metal tube is exhibited alongside a diagrammatic representation of it, or Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations*[387]. Even though my tautology projects are closer to the slightly absurdist sensibility which Anastasi displays in his work than to the hieratical quality of Venet's and Kosuth's work, my projects are also quite different from Anastasi's in at least two major respects: firstly, unlike Anastasi's work, they also function lectically; and, secondly, as I will show in §5.411 and §5.412, while Anastasi represents tautologies[388], I represent *thwarted* tautology.

5.411 Is capable of not not-being

The first imaginal projects that dealt with tautology was *Is capable of not not-being* (*ICONNB*), an event, including an installation (Figs 5.1–6) and a performance (Figs 5.7–8), which took place at the Centre for Drawing, University of the Arts London, in December 2008. As I have shown in §3.32–3.36, Weil argues that without *intellectual* attention, there would be only matter, or *stuff*[389] – not stuff thought by *mind* but *mindless* stuff, pure matter of which nothing could ever be said or written, because, no matter what the materialists say or write, it could never be thought. Weil rejects the materialist view of reality on the grounds that, since we *do* talk about stuff, this stuff must necessarily be *thought stuff*; she also rejects idealism on the grounds that there are limits to what we can think, not think, doubt, and so on (see §3.31). For Weil, intellectual attention constitutes, that is, *creates* reality as a semiotic tissue.

Semiotic stuff remains always somewhat recalcitrant stuff, although, most of the time, this goes unnoticed because, in thinking and perceiving, one generally manages semiotic stuff which can be 'manipulated' seamlessly, or nearly so[390]. *ICONNB* materialises some recalcitrant aspects of semiotic stuff in order to make it aesthetically significant.

---

[384] Anastasi took Polaroid photographs of himself in front of a mirror. Each new Polaroid was stuck to the mirror, until the mirror was completely obliterated by the photographs but for one small section of the mirror (Ibid., pp. 105–135).

[385] An exhibition of photographs of the walls on which the photographs were hung (Ibid., pp. 105–135).

[386] Ibid., pp. 154–155.

[387] Kosuth's famous piece *One and Three Chairs* 1965, which consists of a chair, a life-sized photograph of the chair and the dictionary definition of 'chair', is part of the *Proto-Investigations* series (Ibid., pp. 86–87).

[388] E.g. in *Microphone* one has *this* (the sound of the actual recorder) and *this again* (the recorded sound of the recorder).

[389] I use the term 'stuff' to denote matter and to connote – by reference to 'stuff', meaning woven fabric – Weil's notion of reality as semiotic tissue.

[390] I return again (see §3.35) to Lévy-Leblond's notion of *ontologisation of sign*. Lévy-Leblond's argument is that seamlessness in the handling of signs is determined by habit and, therefore, precarious: 'These graphic signs, albeit originally wholly contingent (tied for example to a particular

The installation consisted of:

400 pages containing the first million digits of π attached to the wall (Figs 5.1–2).

Fig. 5.1 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: First million digits of π.

---

language: otherwise why denote a mass with *m*?), end up acquiring a real ontological charge: for the physicist *E is* an energy, *v is* a speed, etc. To assure oneself of this, one only needs to see how difficult it is to carry out a physical law, even an elementary one, when the conventional notations are modified.' (Lévy-Leblond, 2006, p. 67.)

Fig. 5.2 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: First million digits of π.

A post-it note reading 'an *infinitely* small portion of the digits of π' (Fig 5.3). On the opposite wall, a drawn circle with one of its diameters (Fig 5.4).
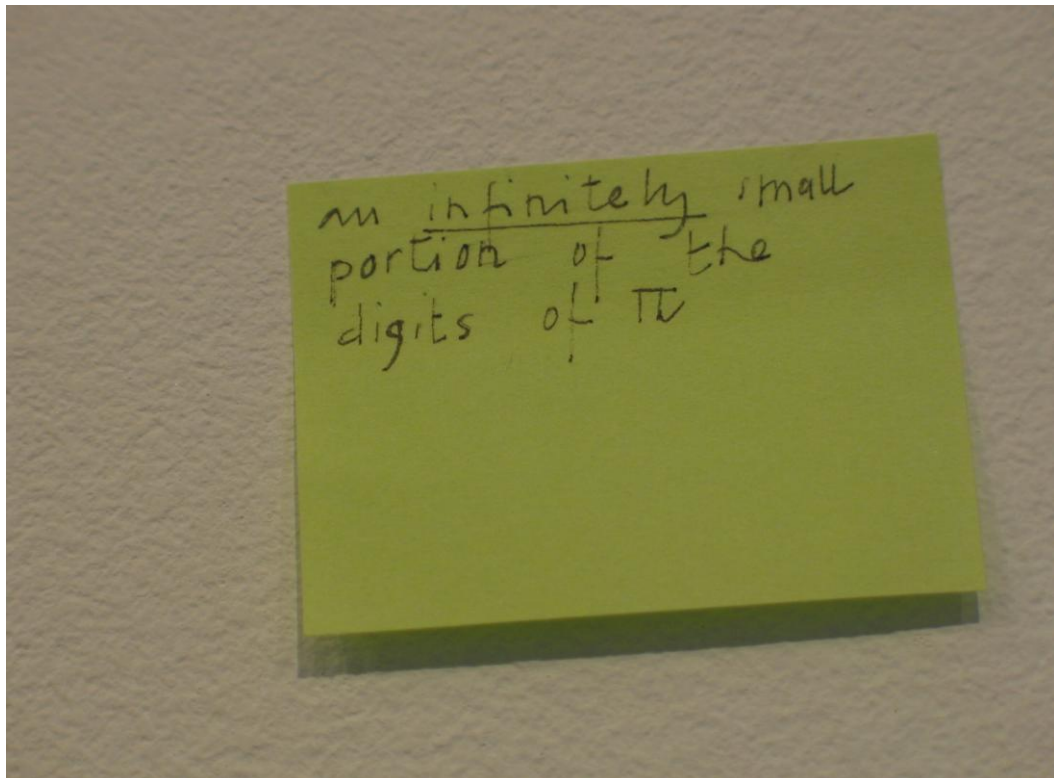
Fig. 5.3 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: Post-it note reading 'an *infinitely* small portion of the digits of π'.
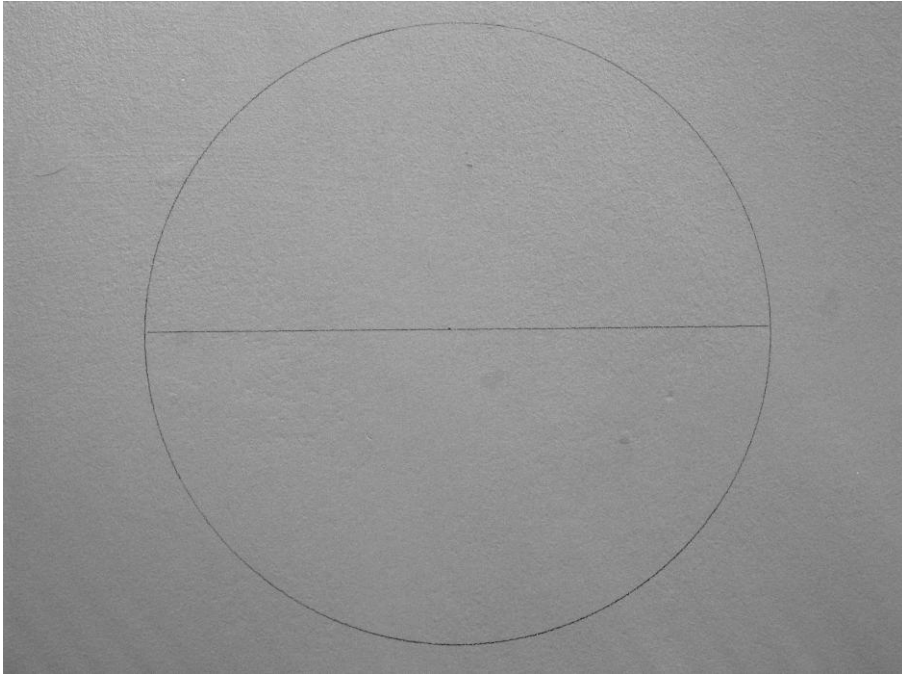
Fig. 5.4 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: Circle drawn on the wall.

On the floor, red lines drawn with a permanent marker indicated the halfway point of the length of the room, the half of the half, and so on, until the space became too small to be drawn. A post-it note placed near the main half-indicating line read 'move on, Zeno' (Figs 5.5–6).
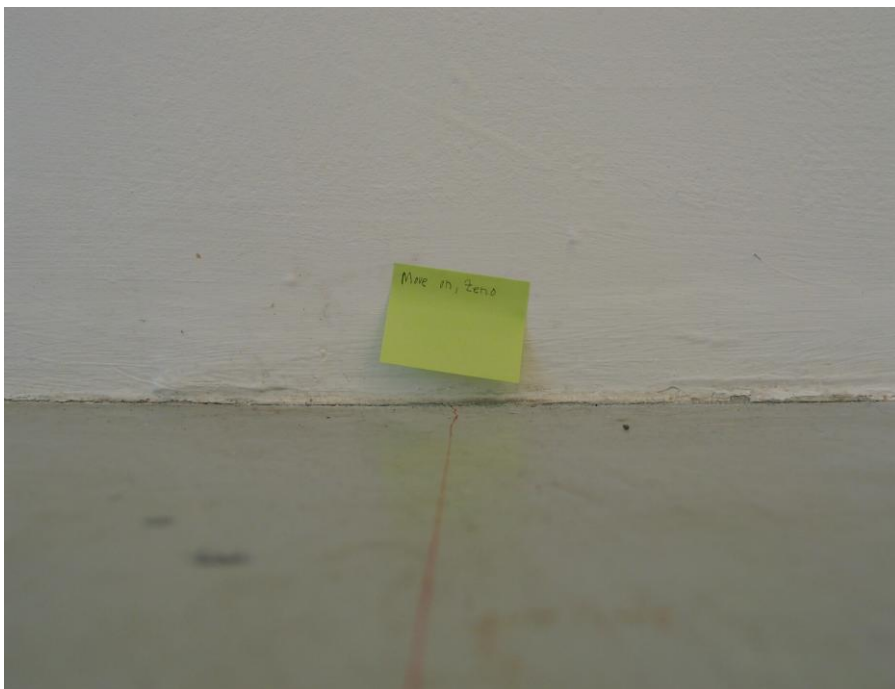
Fig. 5.5 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: Post-it reading 'Move on, Zeno'.

162
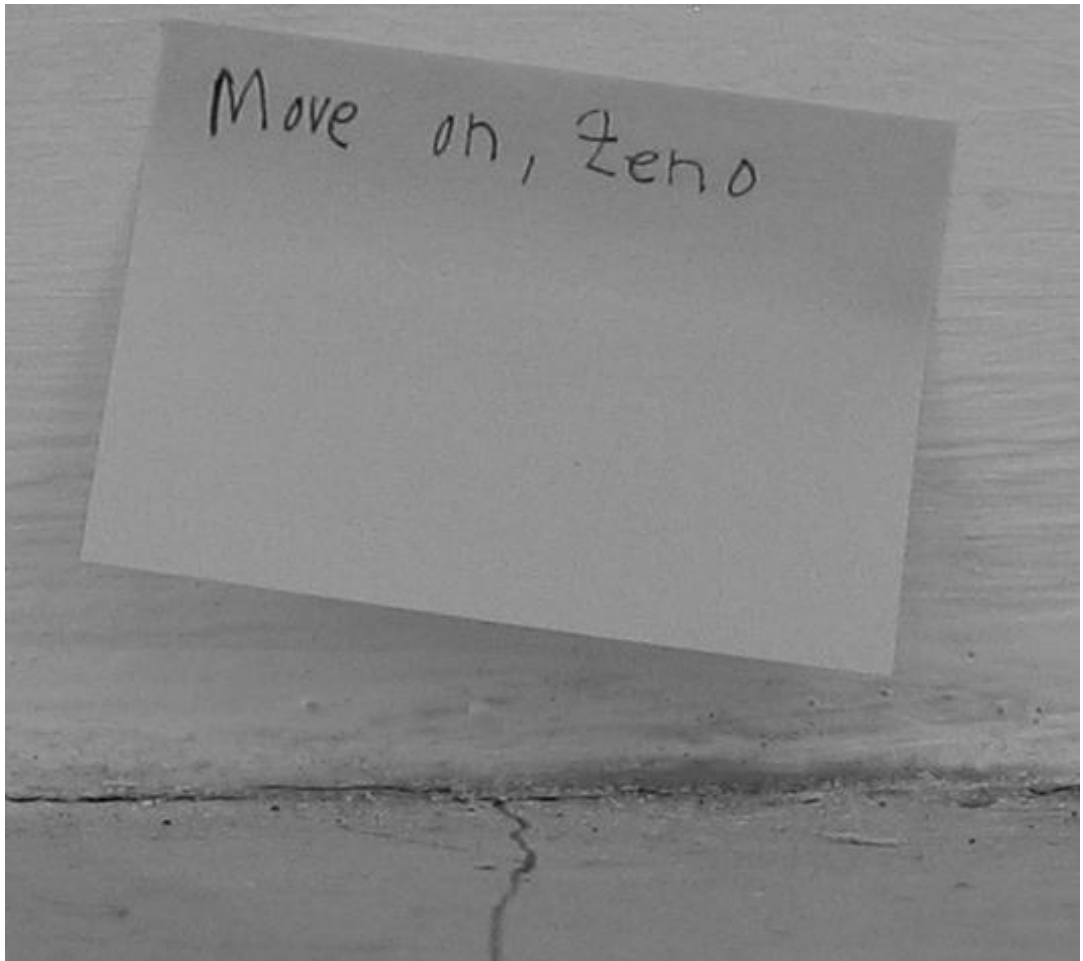
Fig. 5.6 *Is capable of not not-being* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008: Post-it reading 'Move on, Zeno'.

The performance was in the form of a lecture (Figs 5.7–8). As the performance lasts over an hour, I will limit myself to sketching out its main focus (a full transcript of the performance is given in Appendix 3): to show the difference between the verbal description of an occurrence and the experience of that occurrence (e.g. the difference between a description of silence and experiencing silence – I invite the audience to observe a minute of silence; or the difference between Weil's description of spontaneous attention and the experience of it – I bang the table loudly and unexpectedly); to problematise the notion of experimental certainty by questioning the notion of fact; in order to ask whether voluntary attention is possible, I invite the audience to try to solve the liar paradox ('this statement is false'), pointing out that nobody and nothing had compelled them to judge the statement alternatively true and false, that they had done so, assuming they had, *voluntarily*. The lecture gives no answers; rather it casts the question of the relation between Weilian attention and free will in epistemological terms: How does one know one is acting voluntarily?
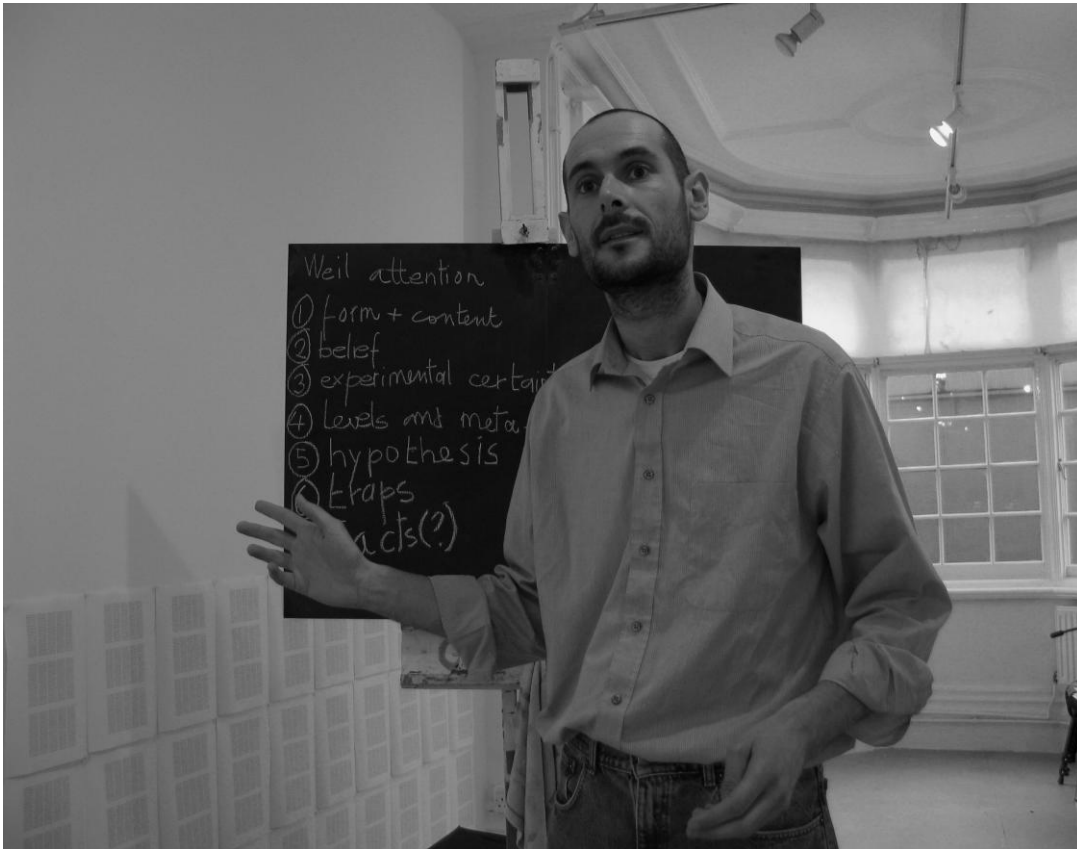
Fig. 5.7 *Is capable of not not-being* performance, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008.

Fig. 5.8 *Is capable of not not-being* performance, Centre for Drawing, London, 2008.

As for the materialisation of the recalcitrant aspect of signs, the almost materially negligible sign 'π' becomes slightly more materially substantial in the drawn circle and diameter, and becomes much more substantial in the 400 sheets of the first million digits of π: the wall was not large enough to accommodate them all so a pile of them was left on the ground, and the ink ran out while printing them (another indication of their materiality) (Fig. 5.9); furthermore, the post-it note reading 'an *infinitely* small portion of the digits of π' reminded the audience that, no matter how many digits of π one prints out, it will always be an *infinitesimal* portion of the digits of π – all the paper and ink in the world could not make the statement 'This is an infinitely small portion of the digits of π' false. In this respect, this statement shares with tautologies the property of always being true.
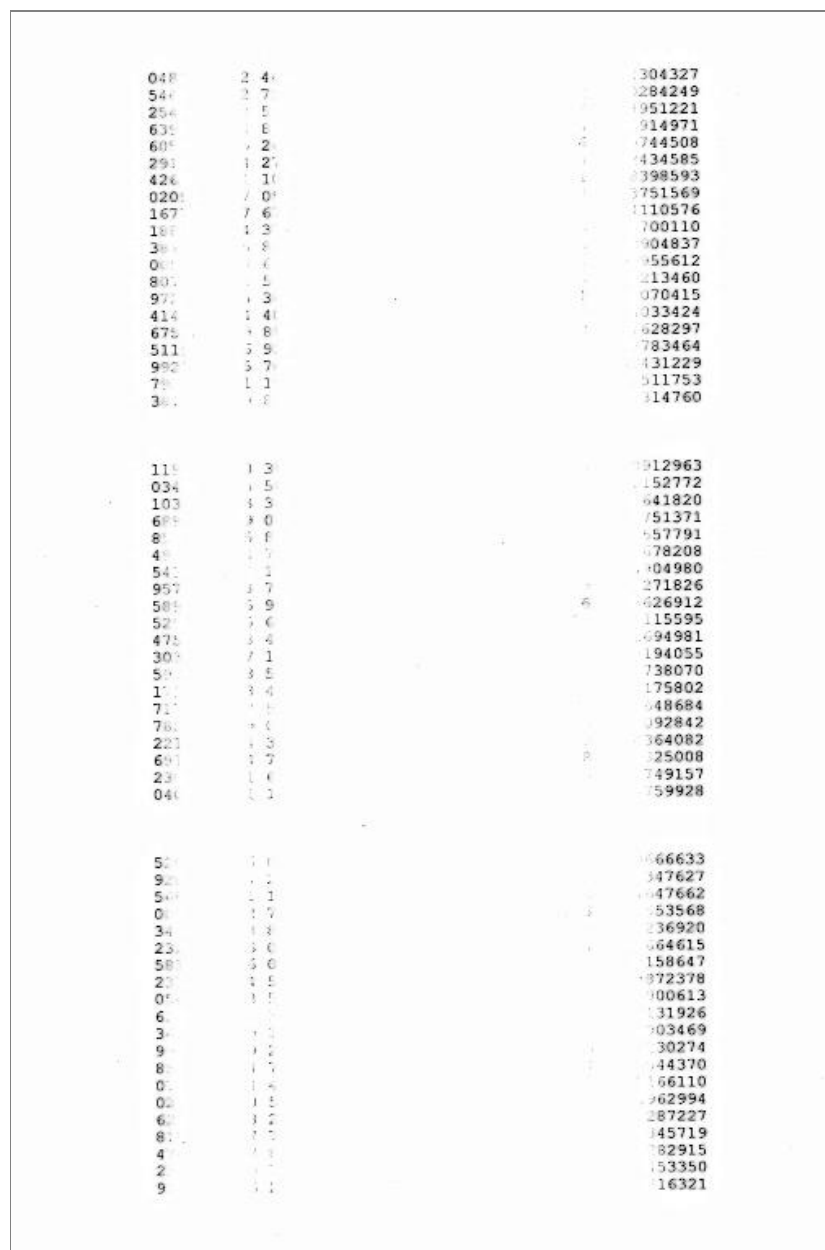
Fig. 5.9 *Is capable of not not-being*, 2008: A4 print-out of the first million digits of π, where the ink is running out.

The lines on the floor materialise Zeno's argument on the infinite divisibility of space, which leads to his famously controversial negation of the possibility of spatial movement. Even in this case, the materialisation brings recalcitrance: there comes a point when no more lines can be drawn.

As Vance Morgan, in *Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics, and Love*, points out, Weil constructs an analogy between the Greek solution to the problem of incommensurables through the use of the circle which transcends the numerical order and the problem of the incommensurability of contingent earthly good and absolute divine good which she solves by appealing to the notion of transcendence[391]. *ICONNB* deflates the transcendence conjured up by the circle as a purely geometrical concept, by asking: What is a circle? Is it this shape drawn on the wall, or the letter π, or these sheets of paper?

In the *ICONNB* lecture, the theme of circularity is associated with Weil's circular definition of voluntary attention as *not spontaneous attention*[392]:

> Imagine that somebody who wants to challenge Weil on the point of the non-compellability of attention says to Weil:
>
> "Someone is pointing a gun to your head. S/he gives you pencil and paper and tells you to draw a perfect circle. S/he also tells you that if the circle you draw is not perfect, s/he will kill you. You will probably draw as attentively as you can and you will be compelled to do so."
>
> I imagine that Weil would reply:
>
> "No drawn circle will ever be a perfect circle so there is no point in me trying to draw one; if my life depends on my drawing a perfect circle, I am as dead already by the very definition of perfect circle".
>
> The other, a little impatient because Weil has cunningly evaded the issue, would then slightly reshape the imaginary scenario and say:
>
> "Ok, *not* a perfect circle but whatever the gun-pointer deems to be a *good enough* circle".
>
> I imagine that Weil's reply would be: "If I was *compelled* to draw attentively it was spontaneous attention that I exercised and not *voluntary* attention which—*by definition*—is voluntary and, therefore, *non*-compelled."

As I will explain in §5.412, the notion of good enough versus good, which in *ICONNB* is merely sketched out, is central to the project *Gayliana: Isle of Idle*.

5.412 Gayliana: Isle of Idle

Before outlining the function of the installation *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* (*GIOI*), I will give a brief description of it. *GIOI* was the result of a residency at the Centre for Drawing, University of the Arts London, April–May 2009. The installation led to the publication of *The Centre for Drawing Project Space – Notes 07*[393] (*CFD07*), which is included as Appendix 5 and which contains additional visual documentation and several texts which are

---

[391] Morgan, 2005, p. 120, p. 126.

[392] This definition is circular because it begs the question: What is spontaneous attention, then? Not voluntary attention?

[393] Alfier, 2009d.

integral to this imaginal project. *GIOI* was presented as an exhibition of the work of a fictional character named 'Otto U. Gayl' (OUG), which is an anagram of 'tautology', although the viewer was informed neither of the fictional dimension of the installation nor of the anagrammatic source of 'Otto U. Gayl'. All OUG's works were duplicate[394] and included: several engraved glass and mirror pieces on plinths, accompanied by short texts from OUG's *Notebooks* (Figs. 5.13, 5.16–17[395]); blindfolds with circular mirrors, with a box and visual instructions on how to wear them[396] (Figs. 5.13, 5.15[397]) – these pieces were also on a plinth and accompanied by texts from OUG's *Notebooks*; a piece of music – the music was written by assigning to each letter of the alphabet a note and then 'spelling out' a series of palindromic-word[398] tautologies (e.g. 'reviver is reviver') arranged alphabetically, and the recording is a superimposition of two performances of the score by cellist Gamaliel Rendle-Short (Fig. 5.19 for the score and DVD Track 2 for the recording). There was a video-text with various facts about OUG's life and several books available for consultation by the public[399]. Over the entrance door to the installation, one read the words 'No Tautology in the Kingdom of Goodenough' (Fig. 5.18); and, on the wall inside, there were two texts referring to OUG's life (Figs 5.11–12).

Fig. 5.10 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009.

---

[394] For a presentation of the fictional exhibition, see Appendix 5, p. 274, where one can also find an explanation for the duplication of OUG's works.

[395] See also Appendix 5, pp. 281–282, p. 287.

[396] The instructions show that the blindfold should be worn with the mirrors facing the eyes and not outwards.

[397] See also Appendix 5, p. 284.

[398] 'Otto' is also a palindromic word.

[399] Appendix 5, p. 272.

Fig. 5.11 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. The text on the wall reads '"may imaging rig ruffled opposing rhythms" From Otto U. Gayl's will'. For an explanation of these words, see Appendix 5, p. 274. On the plinth are the blindfolds with circular mirrors. For a close up view of the blindfolds, see Figs. 5.13, 5.15 and Appendix 5, p. 284.

Fig. 5.12 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. The text on the wall reads 'Friends and foe alike ask "Otto, are you real?" I reply "Would you care for the short or the long answer?" "The short one, Otto." "Yes." "The long one." "Yes, but." From "Contagious Contingencies"'. For a close up view of the text, see Appendix 5, p. 288.
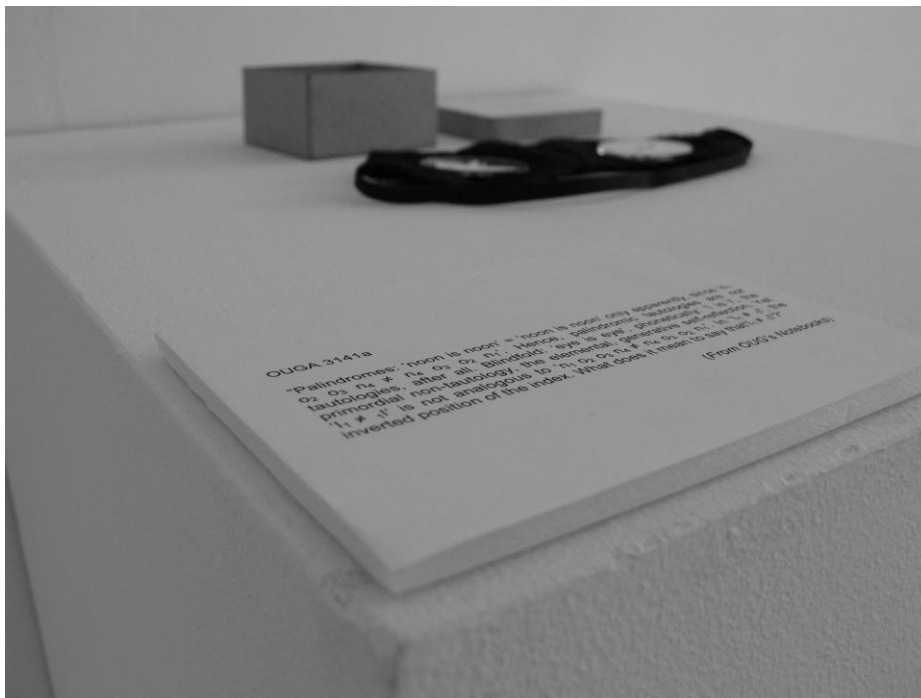
Fig. 5.13 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. The quote from OUG's *Notebooks* alludes to the possible ambivalent interpretation of palindromic-word tautologies. The label reads 'OUGA 3141a "Palindromes: *noon is noon = noon is noon* only apparently since $n_1o_2o_3n_4 \neq n_4o_3o_2n_1$. Hence, palindromic tautologies are *not* tautologies after all. Blindfold: *eye is eye*, phonetically: *I is I*, the primordial non-tautology, the elemental, generative self-reflection. Yet $I_1 \neq {}_1I$ is not analogous to $n_1o_2o_3n_4 \neq n_4o_3o_2n_1$. In $I_1 \neq {}_1I$, the inverted position of the index – what does it mean to say that $I_1 \neq {}_1I$?" (From OUG's *Notebooks*)'
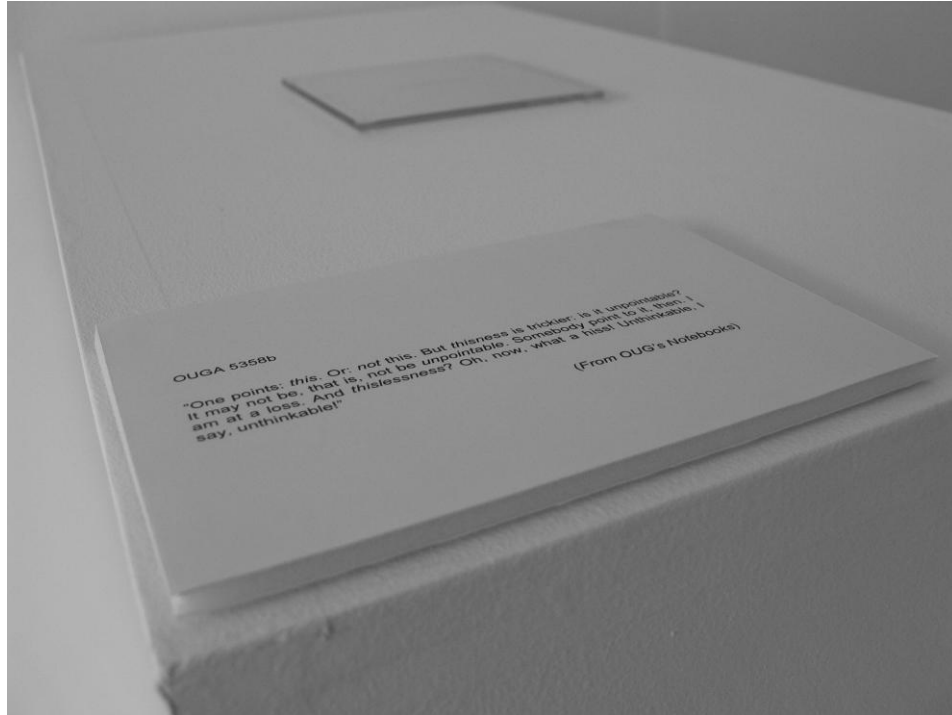
Fig. 5.14 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. The label reads 'OUGA 5358b "One points: *this*. Or: *not* this. But *thisness* is trickier: is it unpointable? It may not be, that is, not be *unpointable*. Somebody point to it, then. I am at a loss. And *thislessness*? Oh, now, what a hiss! Unthinkable, I say, unthinkable!" (From OUG's *Notebooks*)'. For a close up view of the glass, see Fig. 5.16.

Fig. 5.15 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009: Blindfold with circular mirror in a box, cardboard, paper, felt and plastic. Box: 7.5 × 7.5 × 3.9 cm. Blindfold: Approx. 7 × 20 cm.

Fig. 5.16 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. Close up view of the plinth that can be seen in Fig. 5.14. The glass reads 'thislessness'.

Fig. 5.17 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. A close up view of the glass that can be seen in Appendix 5, pp. 281–282, showing the reflection of the word 'soulless' engraved in the mirror.

Fig.5.18 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* installation, Centre for Drawing, London, 2009. Entrance to the exhibition. On the door, one can see the poster with the image reproduced in Fig. 4.28. See Appendix 5, p. 289.

The installation intends to give an aesthetic experience of tautology but also an experience of the fact that, as soon as tautology is materialised, it loses its tautologousness: the mirror and glass pieces are placed horizontally, so that, generally[400], they do not reflect the viewer but show a different view; and even though these pieces are duplicates, they are not identical

---

[400] Even if a viewer leaned over the reflecting surfaces in order to see a reflection of himself or herself, the reflection, due to the horizontal placing, would not be a familiar one and it therefore would not be experienced as a *doubling*.

because they are filled with different reflections; the two renderings of the musical score do not match rhythmically, as they are played at different speeds; palindromic tautologies lose their symmetry when musically represented because the 'is' is sometimes heard as belonging to the melody of the palindromic word, or the rhythmic progression might invite higher-level gestalts which abstract from the individual tautologies[401]. Moreover, even though palindromic-word tautologies such as 'reviver is reviver' *appear* to be tautologies, one could also see the second 'reviver' as a different word, i.e. as the first 'reviver' spelt backwards (see Fig. 5.13). In other words, the installation highlights contingency – the Kingdom of Goodenough – while suggesting tautology. As, in *ICONNB*, π is an image of perfection which is corrupted by the excrescence of its numerical representation, so, in *GIOI*, the perfection of the simplest of tautology instances – i.e. *p* is *p* – is negated by the experience of the latter *p* not being quite identical to the former *p*. (This exemplifies the respect in which *GIOI* is a representation of *thwarted tautology* and not of tautology, as is the case for Anastasi's work, to which I referred in §5.41.) However, the intention from which *GIOI* springs is not to state the untenability of Weil's idea that there exists a perfect (and therefore tautological) object of attention but rather to show the epistemological complications of this position.

Fig. 5.19 *Gayliana: Isle of Idle*. Score of six-letter palindromic words arranged alphabetically.

---

[401] The mismatch between the rhythmic regularity of the score and the irregularity of its performance can be clearly perceived by listening to the recording while following the music on the score.

CFD07, which is not a documentation of *GIOI* but an expansion of it, exemplifies the generative approach to Weilian discourse on attention and the process of depersonalisation. If Weil posits a transcendent reality (i.e. a divinity which is absolutely good, beautiful and true), *CFD07* sets out to ask: What is real? OUG, in his letter to the Fellows of the Board of the Discernment of Reality, states that he is as real as geocentrism or as the number 641 are real: are they real?[402] In the image of the books, the side-up spines might seem at first to be real but they are in fact a reflection[403]. The 'thislessness' image (several photographs of the same piece, taken with different exposures) highlights its being a photographic construction rather than reality[404]. In the front page image, one sees a road sign reading 'Goodenough Road'[405], but then a detail of the same image shows a sign reading 'Dialogue Road'[406]: is one image more real than the other? In OUG's Dialogic Tragedy Sketch, an 'innocuous' knife turns out to be fatally noxious[407]. This questioning sets the scene for the dialogue between Dino Alfier, Fiona Erild and Odelia Frin[408]; these three characters are all equally real or unreal, and through them I (the other Dino Alfier, the one who is now writing these words) can take different sides of the same argument and suspend the binary mutual exclusivity of truth and falsity. The dialogue does not have an exegetical function: it does not explain what Weilian attention is, but it rather instantiates a meandering thought thread which weaves around it. This instantiation is no truer than a deductive argument would be, but it is certainly a more accurate representation of how I think (or thought) about Weilian attention[409]. My critique of Weilian dogmatism, in §4.3121, gives a theoretical justification for this position: if, as Wittgenstein argues, attention belongs to ethics and ethics rests on aesthetics[410], then it seems plausible that my views on attention could be oscillating and represented by a non-propositional image such as the dialogue in question. In a sense, the dialogue functions as *GIOI* does: the perfectly true argument is tautologically hard[411]; while

---

[402] Appendix 5, p. 273.

[403] Appendix 5, p. 272.

[404] Appendix 5, p. 275.

[405] Appendix 5, p. 271.

[406] Appendix 5, p. 277.

[407] Appendix 5, p. 285.

[408] Appendix 5, pp. 278–280. 'Fiona Erild' and 'Odelia Frin' are both anagrams of 'Dino Alfier'.

[409] As I stated at the end of §5.32, one of my intentions in the imaginal projects was to obtain a truer representation of my thoughts.

[410] In §4.3121 I showed that, for Wittgenstein, ethical statements of absolute value are an attempt to express the perceived absoluteness of ethical feelings.

[411] I am referring to Wittgenstein's notions of super-mechanism and super-hardness which he associates with logical necessity, since, in propositional logic, a proposition whose proper logical form is a tautology is logically true, i.e. (logically) *necessarily* true. Wittgenstein writes: 'We have the idea of a super-mechanism when we talk of logical necessity, e.g. physics tried as an idea to reduce things to mechanisms or something hitting something else. We say that people condemn a man and then say the Law condemns him to death. "Although the Jury can pardon [acquit?] him, the Law

this dialogue, with its associative tangents, its admissions of closet transcendentalism, its materialist bouts, etc., is plastic. OUG's Dialogic Tragedy Sketch[412] represents this plasticity, these changes of mind, by the use of erasure. The common editorial practice of including erasures in the publication of manuscripts highlights the changes that occur in the thinking process: the writer erased certain passages but the editor rehabilitates them, thus eroding the image (perhaps, the image of a fiction) of monolithic certainty. If the normative work is based on the dogmatic[413] assumptions that what Weil writes on attention is true (or, at least, on acting *as if* it was true), *GIOI* proceeds from a more sceptical attitude. But unlike the supercilious, exclusive dead-end scepticism expressed in §5.32, this is a dialogic, open-ended kind of scepticism: while the former uses doubt as a weapon, the latter uses doubt as a question for the generation of dialogue.

The following passage from the dialogue printed in *CFD07*, exemplifies the dialogic, sceptical approach:

> FE: So how do you go from intellectual attention to attention *à vide*?
>
> DA: To be honest, my views on this oscillate. Sometimes, I think it's a gradual increase from one towards the other—a you-can't-run-before-you-can-walk sort of thing—and, sometimes, I think there's discontinuity, when you get to the top—more of a Mary-sucked-up-to-heaven type of event.
>
> FE: Do you believe that?
>
> DA: What?
>
> FE: The giant cosmic hoover effect. The Assumption.
>
> DA: That people can be transported up to the celestial sphere body and soul? No, not really. But then I sometimes catch myself thinking thoughts that, well, somehow, seem just as untenable, but they have a more acceptable attire. It comes down to fashion, perhaps: Fashionable thinking, thinking out of fashion.
>
> FE: Assumption? Thinking *out of mind*, if you ask me!
>
> OF: Or it might have something to do with the fact that signs can deceive, if you don't quite know what you are dealing with. Who was it who said "Between the two of them, they had 10 g of bread, a measly 5 g each. Had they thought of sharing with a third, what never-ending abundance! 3.3333333..."?

In the above passage, FE represents haughtiness, DA represents doubt, and OF represents the question that keeps dialogue going in the face of potential occlusion.

---

can't." ... The idea of something super-strict, something stricter than any Judge can be, super-rigidity. ... Cf. a lever-fulcrum. The idea of super-hardness. "The geometrical lever is harder than any lever can be. It can't bend.'" (Wittgenstein, 1966, pp. 15–16.)

[412] Appendix 5, p. 285.

[413] The qualification 'dogmatic' is used here not, as elsewhere in this research, in the sense of rigidly moralistic, but in the sense that Sextus Empiricus gives to the term in his *Outlines of Scepticism*: 'When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation. This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigation too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating. Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth' (Empiricus, 2000, p. 3).

Before moving on to discuss the two imaginal projects which deal with contradiction, I will ask: What kind of response does *GIOI* (but the same can be asked of *ICONNB*) invite from the viewer with regard to attention? To answer this question, I will refer to the work of James Lee Byars, whom I have already mention in §4.21 with reference to the notion of hybrid art object. Byars' work is paradigmatically concerned with *questions*. For instance, McEvilley writes that 'in May 1969, Byars went from Antwerp to Oxford and spent a week ... requesting questions from the dons and finding that they were much more comfortable with answers than questions ..., that, in fact, in this environment, the question apart from the answer was ... no question at all. This was precisely the problem: Byars had located a blind spot in attention.'[414] In November of that same year, 'the World Question Center was put on Belgian television. Byars, in a pink suit, with 50 students from the University of Brussels acting as "operators," telephoned people in Europe and the United States who had been forewarned of the event without being told that they would be asked for questions rather than answers.'[415] Thus, according to McEvilley, with the question, Byars was directing attention to an unattended object, i.e. the question itself. And, drawing again on McEvilley's interpretation, this strategy can be seen in the wider context of Byars' artistic intentions: 'It is not perceptual quirks, cultural codes or patterns of relationship that Byars's work focuses on, but the quality of delicate and open attention itself. The art work is less the object of this attention than the subjective experience of it. Attention relatively purified of past and future associations, attention that can see the thing as strictly experienced, *is* the substance of his art, and the purpose of his unusual persona.'[416] Is the experience of attention in *GIOI* likewise the *substance* of this work? Certainly such was, at least in part, my intention when I started developing *GIOI*, but retrospectively I am not in position to say. Thus, in Byarsian fashion, I shall leave the question unanswered, pointing to Byars' art as a possible interpretative perspective on this project.

5.42 Contradiction

The account of Weil's thought given thus far demonstrates that her whole philosophy is deeply impregnated with Cartesian dualism – me/the world, mind/matter, direction/extension, spontaneous/voluntary attention, good/bad: these are all expressions of a dualistic view; and the insoluble contradictions which are the object of the most elevated attention are also an indication of a dualistic perspective (possible/impossible good, present/absent God), since the very notion of contradiction implies the opposition of a

---

[414] McEvilley, 2005, p. 286.
[415] Ibid., p. 287.
[416] Ibid., p. 298.

proposition to its negation[417]. While *GIOI* and *ICONNB* engaged with the tautological form
of Weil's metaphysics and discourse on attention, the projects *Attention, Contradiction and
Detachment* and *Attending* dealt with Weilian dualism by acting out contradictory
arguments. Once again, this acting out is depersonalised; and, as *GIOI* and *ICONNB*
softened the rigidity conveyed by tautology as a purely conceptual entity, so these two
projects tarnished the shine of purely conceptual contradiction.

5.421 Attention, Contradiction and Detachment

Attention, Contradiction and Detachment (*ACD*) was a performance in the form of a lecture,
given at the French Institute, London, on 28th April 2009, as part of the *Simone Weil
Symposium: That Attention Be a Looking*. Weil ascribes the highest ethical value to the
practice of attention to (for her) insoluble contradictions; the ultimate contradiction is that of
the possibility/impossibility of good actions: good action is impossible and yet, if one
attends to this impossibility, one will do what is good[418]. More generally, for Weil, attention
to any kind of contradiction is ethically beneficial because this is a practice of detachment,
as she argues in the following passages:

> When attention fixed on something has rendered manifest contra[di]ction in it (since, at the
> base of all thought, of every feeling, and of all volition there is contradiction), a kind of
> unsticking is produced. By persevering in this course, one reaches detachment.[419]

> Connection of evil with force, with being, and of good with weakness, nothingness. And, at the
> same time, evil is privation. To elucidate the manner contradictories have of being true.
> Method of investigation: when one has thought something, to try to see in what sense the
> contrary is true.[420]

In *ACD,* I considered my own statements regarding Weil's writings on art, which I had
exposed in a previous presentation at the American Weil Society Annual Colloquy (at
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, on 24th April 2009) and I argued against them,
that is, I tried to show in what sense the contrary of these statements was true. But the
pronoun 'I' does not convey the depersonalised quality of the performance: while presenting
my initial statement, I wore a cap inscribed with the letter 'p', and I wore a '~p' cap for the
negation of the initial statement[421] (Fig. 5.20). Moreover, since the 'p' character (P) was

---

[417] Referring back to *GIOI*, one could say that there is no contradiction in the Kingdom of
Goodenough.

[418] See quotes on p. 96.

[419] Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 96.

[420] Weil, *OG*, p. 184. For an alternative translation, see: Weil, *GG*, p. 102.

[421] Initially, I had envisaged the use of a single cap, for the negation, merely to distinguish the two
voices, but I realised that to give a cap to one character while leaving the other character cap-less
would have conveyed the idea that the capped-self is somehow unnatural and artificial, thus
misleadingly suggesting that the cap-free character is the one who speaks the original truth. The artist
Éric Duyckaerts, in the video of the lecture/performance *La barre de Sheffer*, shows that what might
seem purely symbolical devices (as my use of a hat was symbolical) and devoid of any other
connotative functions might not be so: for instance, talking about the mathematical translation of the

likely to appear as having precedence over the '~p' character (~P), as if the latter had no existence of its own beyond the relation to its positive, i.e. non-negational, 'twin', I gave P an air of artificiality by using a voice-distorting device in order to counterbalance its tendency to be interpreted as the natural term[422]. P and ~P impersonate the two fundamental figures of propositional logic, and their dialogue is an aesthetic representation of Weil's dualistic premise in her argument on the object of the most elevated attention.

Fig. 5.20 *Attention, Contradiction and Detachment*. Caps that I wore during the performance at the French Institute, London, on 28th April 2009.

As I delivered the presentation, I showed stills from a passage of Werner Herzog's film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (see DVD Track 3), in which a professor tries to assess whether Kaspar can think logically; in the presentation, I make no reference to these images[423]. The professor presents Kaspar with the following thought experiment: there are two villages; the inhabitants of one village always tell the truth, while the inhabitants of the other always lie; Kaspar is asked to provide the only question that, if addressed to one of the inhabitants from

symbols used in propositional logic to represent truth and falsity, respectively, 'T' and 'F', with '1' for 'T' and '0' for 'F', Duyckaerts points out that to say 'I am number one' and to say 'I am a zero' are quite different statements; and again he argues that the Sheffer stroke '|' reveals an ambition of purity which is akin to that of the art of the beginning of the twentieth century, while the symbol '↓' representing Wittgenstein's 'neither *p* nor *q*' connector does not convey the same ambition of purity and reminds one of the arrows in Paul Klee's work (Duyckaerts, 1994).

[422] This explanation regarding the use of the hats and the voice distorter is part of the performance, albeit formulated differently.

[423] The images were shown in PowerPoint and I manually changed the slides while delivering the presentation. Given that PowerPoint is normally used as a presentation aid (to explain or expand on what is being said), the lack of explanation frustrated this expectation, thus giving to the dialogue between Kaspar and the professor a quality of independence from what I was saying, as two strangers in the room, who competed for the audience's attention against my delivery.

either village, would permit one to deduce in which village he or she lives; Kaspar does not know; the professor gives the answer: a double-negative question: 'Would you answer 'No', if I were to ask you whether you came from the liars' village?'[424]; Kaspar proposes an alternative question: 'Are you a tree frog?'[425]; the professor discounts Kaspar's answer (that is, his question) on the grounds that logic has to do with deduction and reasoning and not with description and understanding.

The dialogue between Kaspar and the professor illustrates the difference between logic and aesthetics (Kaspar's question is answered aesthetically, because whether or not I take the answer of the inhabitant to be true or false depends on whether or not he or she *seems to me to be* a tree frog, while no such appeal to appearances is needed for the professor's question), and, in light of what has been said earlier, with regard to the aesthetic basis of ethics, it shows the gap between aesthetic truth (in the sense that it is always true that I have the feelings that I happen to have) and logical truth (even when, as in the tree-frog case, aesthetics would seem to suffice to infer a conclusion which is certain[426]), that is, it reiterates the problem with Weil's ethical dogmatism. At the same time, the dialogue intimates that the categories of logic (deduction, reasoning) and aesthetics (description, understanding) might not be as discrete as they are often thought to be: the tree-frog question requires an appeal to the appearance of the villager, while, it would seem that nothing of the sort is required with the double-negative question; but does one not need to *hear* whether the villager says 'Yes' or 'No'? That is, could the villager's answer not be considered as an *aesthetic quality* (just as there is *tree-frog-ness*, there could be *yes-answer-ness* or *no-answer-ness*) of the villager? And, if so, then, is the difference between logic and aesthetics, or objectivity and subjectivity, one of degree and not of kind – the wider the consensus of the community of inquirers, the closer to logic and, conversely, the narrower this consensus, the closer to aesthetics[427]? Thus, while P and ~P act out pure logical bivalence, Kaspar and the professor

---

[424] If an inhabitant of the liars' village was asked this question, he or she would answer 'No' because the truthful answer would be '*Yes*, if you asked whether I came from the liars' village my answer would be "No"', and the liar *always* lies. On the other hand, an inhabitant from the truth-teller's village would answer '*Yes*, if you asked whether I came from the liars' village, my answer would be "No"'.

[425] Clearly, a liar would answer 'Yes', while a truth teller would answer 'No'.

[426] The conclusion seems certain in the tree-frog case because it is plausible to assume that, to most people, human beings do not appear to be tree frogs.

[427] Although the field of cognitive science is not only beyond the scope of my research but also, as I have argued in 1.1, antithetical to my research aims, I shall point to a convergence between my reflections on *ADC* and the views on objectivity and subjectivity proposed by Michel Bitbol, views aligned with the minority branch of cognitive science known as *neurophenomenology*. Bitbol's argument elucidates how objectivity and subjectivity can be conceptualised as two ideal poles of a continuum rather than as two distinct ontological entities: 'Objective domains of knowledge are elaborated in two steps, with conscious experience as an implicit departure point. Firstly, one progressively pushes aside any feature of experience on which conscious subjects cannot agree, such

introduce an element of doubt with regard to the epistemological ground of such purity; and, in turn, this doubt points back to Weil's categories of logic, aesthetics and ethics and the priority she accords to logic, since, for her, 'at the base of all thought [logic], of every feeling [aesthetics], and of all volition [ethics] there is contradiction'[428].

5.422 Attending

The installation *Attending* marked Weil's birth centenary in the town where she died and is buried and was held at the Eurostar wing of Ashford International Station, 27th November – 11th December 2009. It consisted of a video projection (DVD Track 4) and a pamphlet/bookmark (Appendix 6). *Attending* was a site-specific installation (Figs. 5.21–22), not so much because Ashford happens to be the place where Weil died and where she is buried (even though, of course, this fact is not wholly inconsequential) but because the semantic function of *Attending* relies on the specific semiotic situation of Ashford International Station, and if one abstracts from this semiotic milieu[429], the work loses much of its intended meaning: my aim was to create a rich sign conveying contradiction capable of being contemplated aesthetically.

---

as individual tastes, community values, or the emotional tinge which is associated by individuals and communities with particular situations. Secondly, one only retains a sort of structural residue of conscious experience that can be the object of a consensus, and of a collectively efficient use as a predictive tool. ... Objectivity arises from a universally accepted procedure of intersubjective debate ... [and it is not] a transcendent resource of which intersubjective consensus is only an indirect symptom.' (Bitbol, 2008, pp. 53–72).

[428] My point that Weil prioritises logic over feeling and will, rests on my belief that, ultimately contradiction belongs to logic, because only what is spoken (Latin *dicere*, Greek λέγω) can be *contra*-dicted. Nevertheless, one could object that Weil is simply referring to an everyday experience of contradiction, which indeed seems to include feelings and volition, as when one has 'mixed feelings' about something or one is 'in two minds' about doing something.

[429] Undoubtedly, there is a certain degree of similarity between the semiotic situations expressed by different train stations, but, as it will become evident, the specificity of *Attending* depended on its relying on the particular signs in the Ashford station.

Fig. 5.21 *Attending* installation, Ashford International Train Station, 2009: Video projection.

Fig. 5.22 *Attending* installation, Ashford International Train Station, 2009: Video projection.

In order to explain how *Attending* functioned semantically, I will report the semiotics of the station. On the one hand, there are inviting signs conveying images of places away from the station; in fact, these signs convey the idea that you are *already* elsewhere:

On the lift door, an image of Mickey Mouse points out that 'Disneyland is closer than you think' (the door is a fictional entrance to Disneyland Castle, and the fiction continues inside the lift) (Figs. 5.23–24):
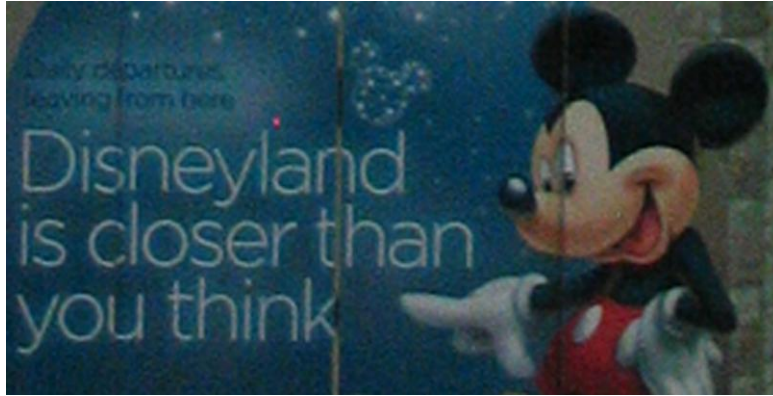
Fig. 5.23 Lift at Ashford International Train Station, 2009 (detail of Fig. 5.24).

Fig. 5.24 Lift at Ashford International Train Station, 2009.

A billboard with a drawing representing a countryside landscape reads 'Only five minutes away, Explore the countryside by train' (Figs. 5.25–26):
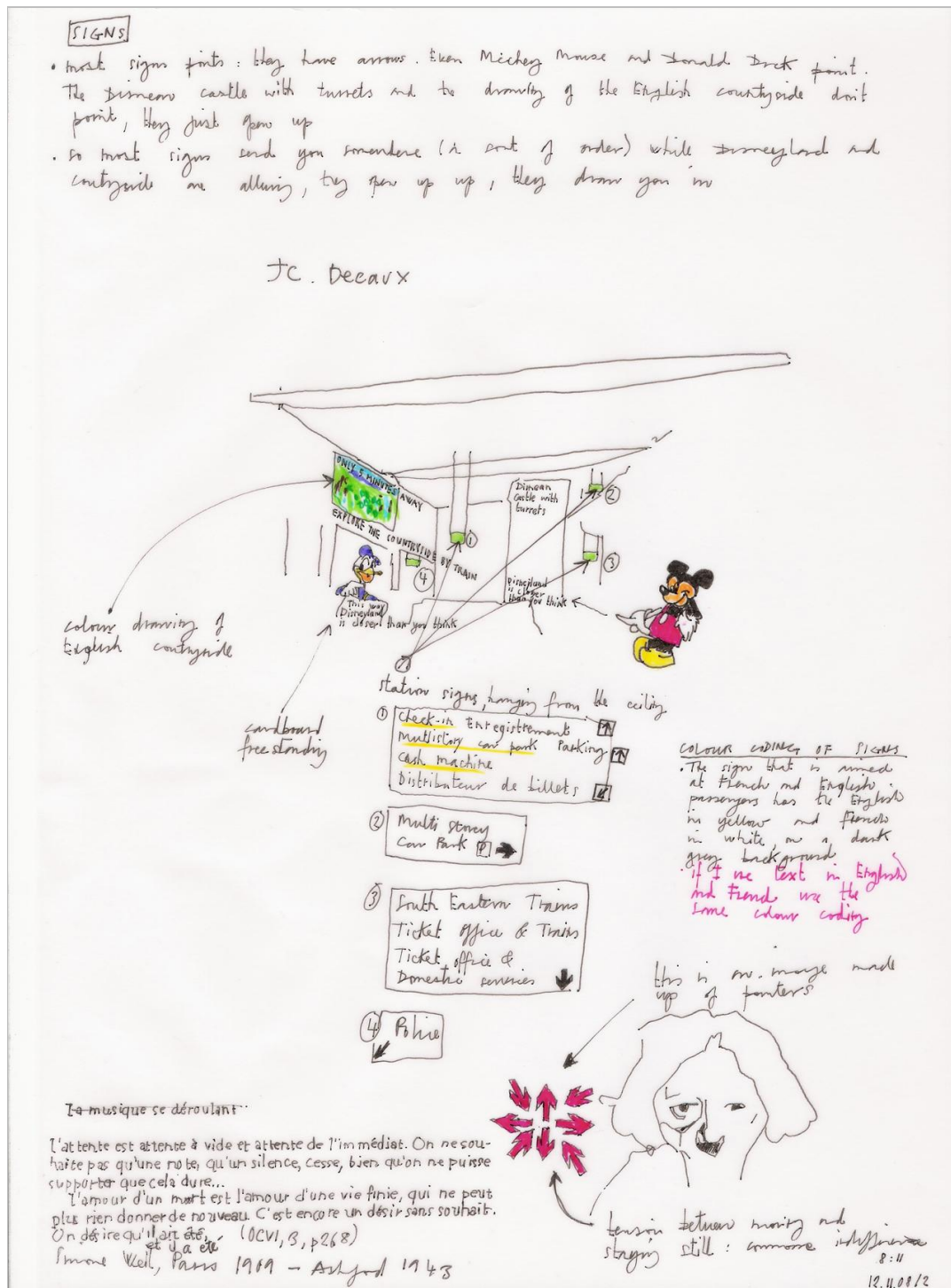
Fig. 5.25 Page of studies for *Attending*: Semiotic situation of Ashford International Train Station, 2009, coloured felt tip pens on tracing paper, 29.7 × 21 cm.
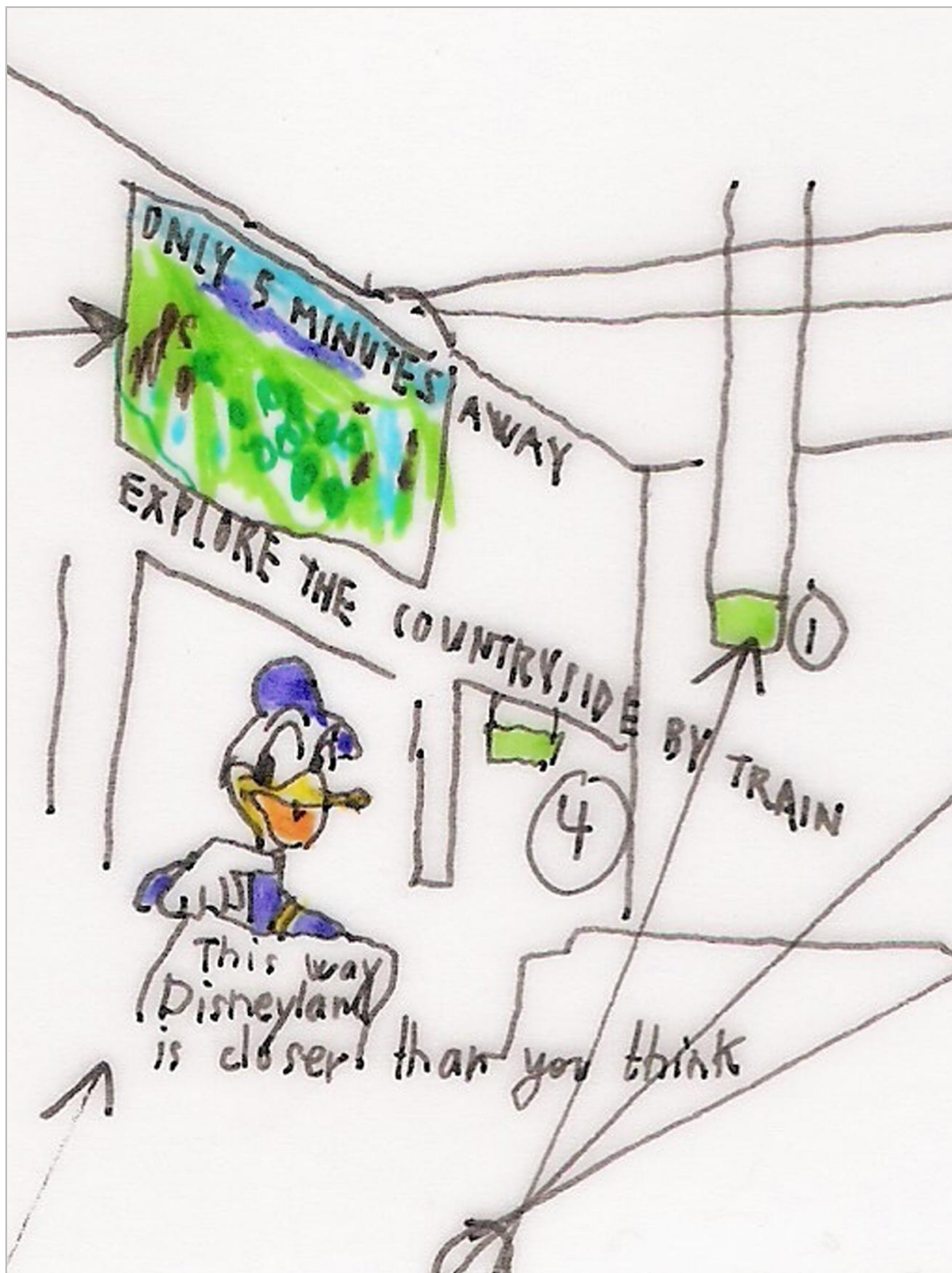
Fig. 5.26 Page of studies for *Attending*: Semiotic situation of Ashford International Train Station (detail), 2009, coloured felt tip pens on tracing paper, 5.2 × 4.1 cm (detail of Fig. 5.25).

A billboard with a photograph of the Musée du quai Branly imaginarily transports the viewer to Paris:
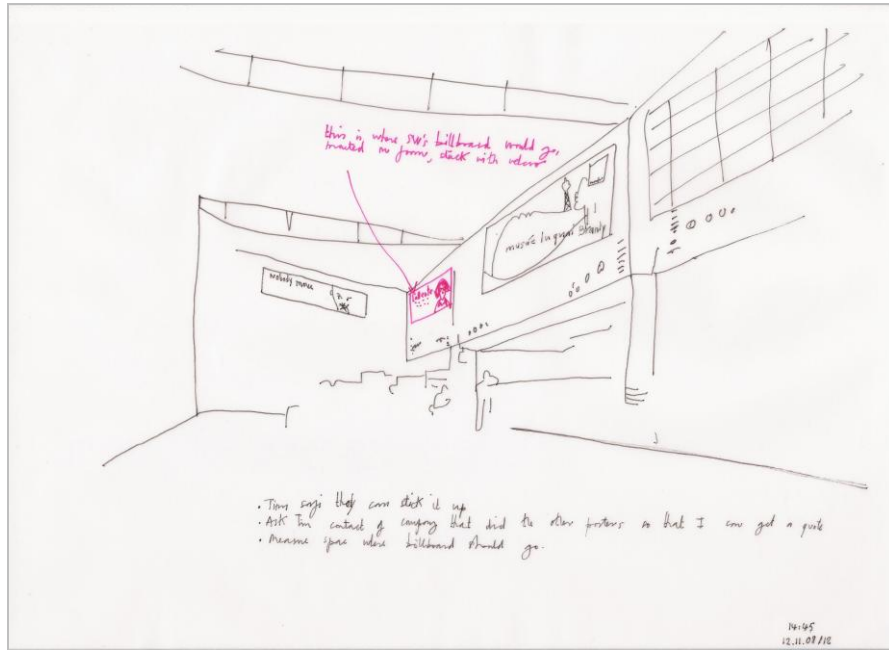
Fig. 5.27 Page of studies for *Attending*: Semiotic situation of Ashford International Train Station, 2009, coloured felt tip pens on tracing paper, 21 × 29.7 cm. To the right of the red area, one can see a sketch of the Musée du quai Branly billboard.

A more recondite sign of elsewhere-ness is a metal structure which, in the winter months, is used by travel agents to welcome skiers on their way to the slopes (Figs. 5.28–30):
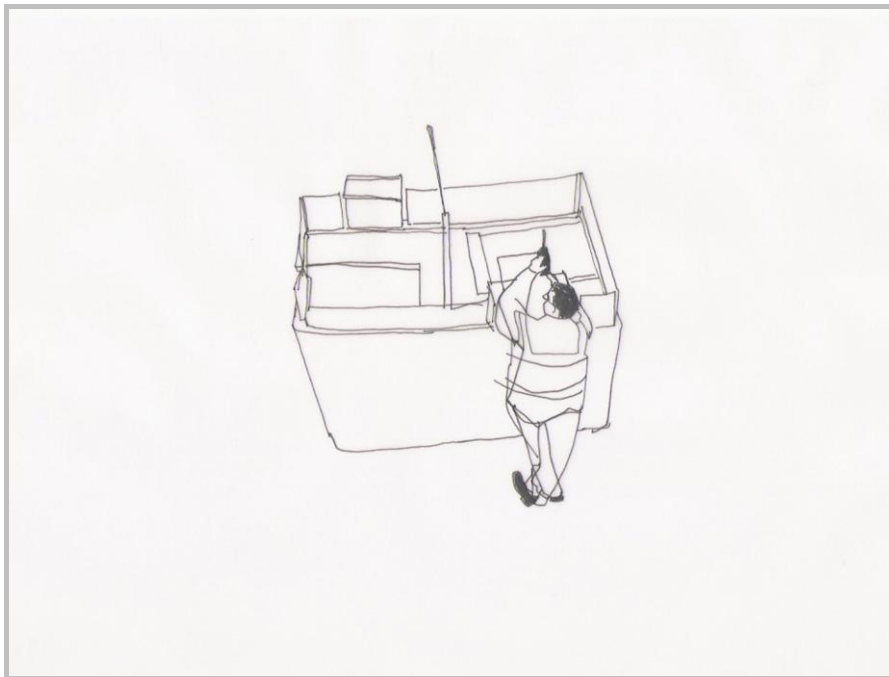
Fig. 5.28 Page of studies for *Attending*: The box, 2009, coloured felt tip pens on tracing paper, 21 × 29.7 cm.
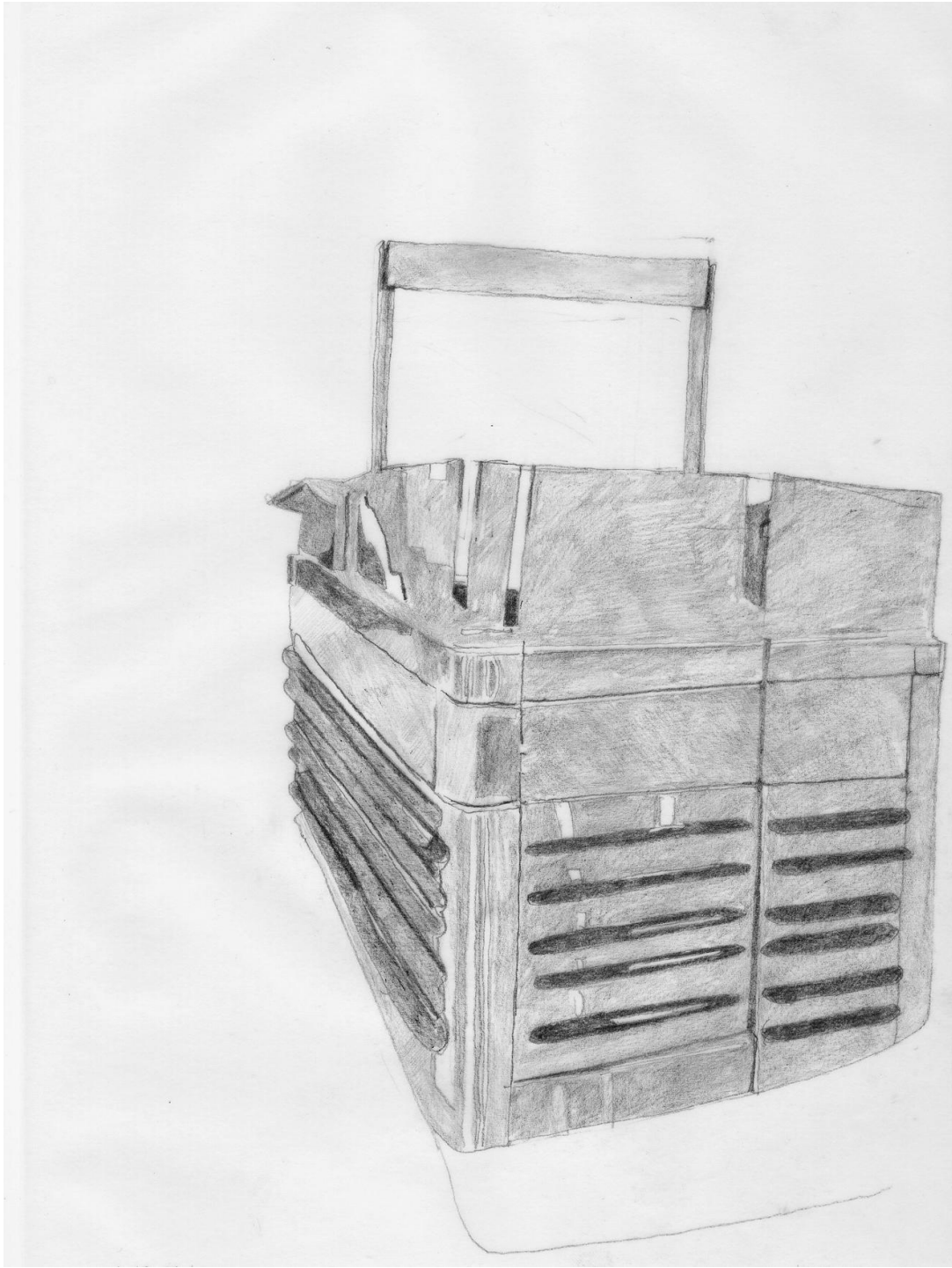
Fig. 5.29 Page of studies for *Attending*: The box, 2009, pencil on tracing paper, 29.7 × 21 cm.
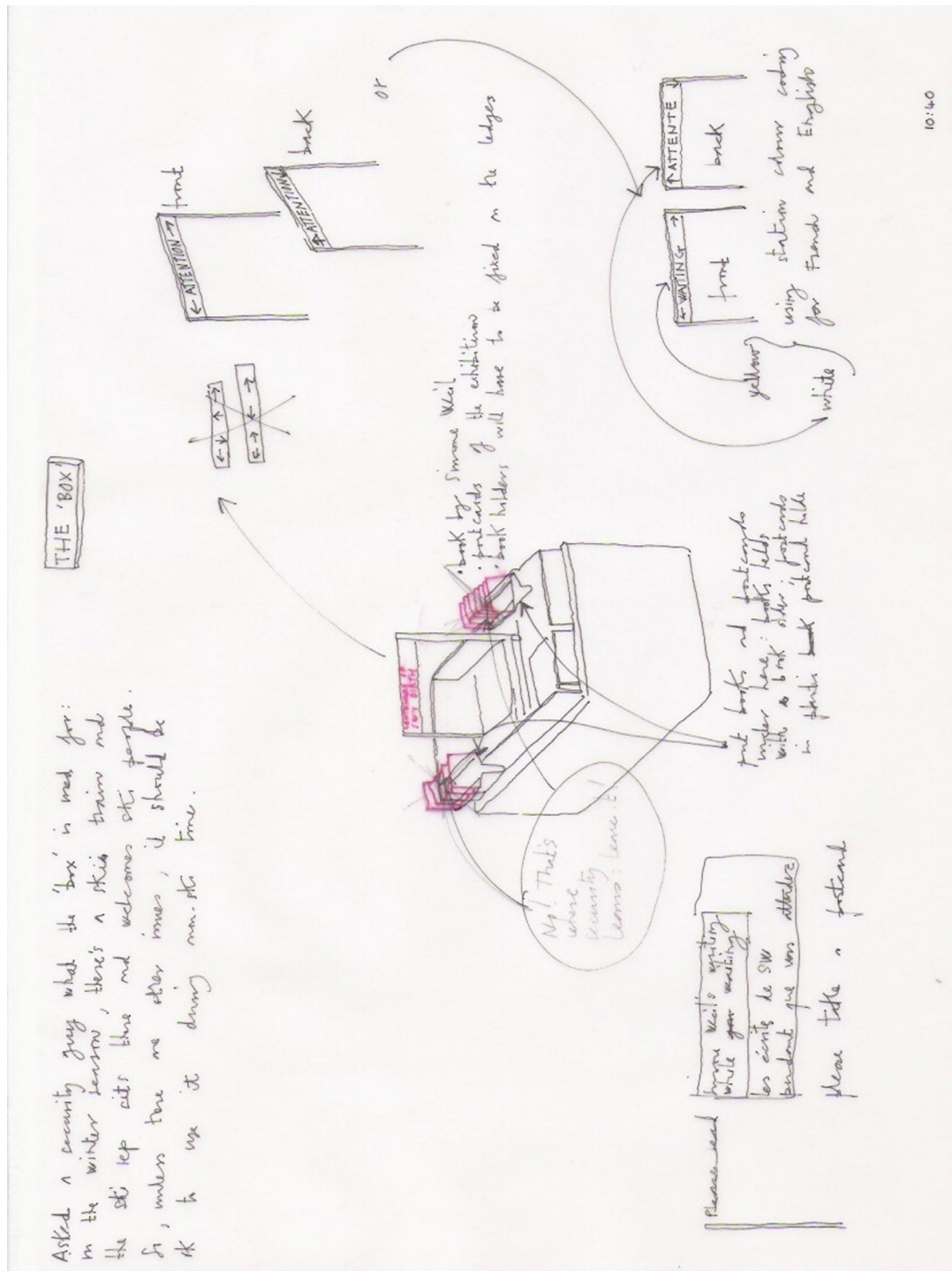
Fig. 5.30 Page of studies for *Attending*: The box, 2009, coloured felt tip pens on tracing paper, 29.7 × 21 cm.

On the other hand, there is an injunctive sign, which, borrowing the stereotypical expression of gunmen, orders that nobody move (Figs. 5.31–32):
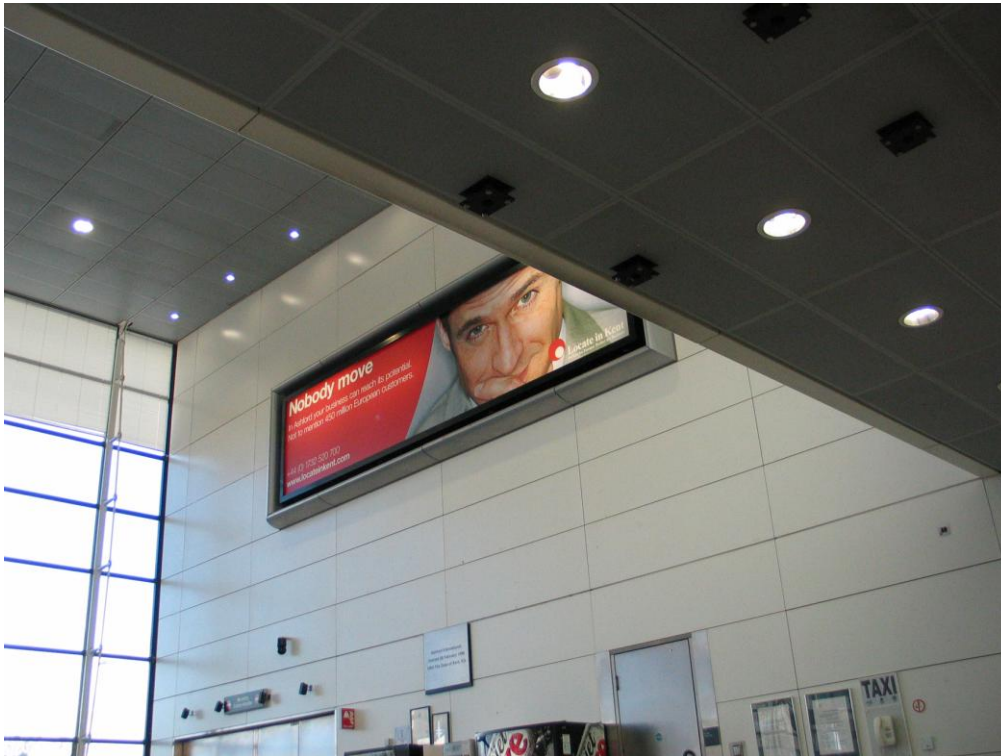
Fig. 5.31 Billboard at Ashford International Train Station reading 'Nobody move. In Ashford business can reach its potential. Not to mention 450 million European customers', 2009.

Fig. 5.32 Billboard at Ashford International Train Station reading 'Nobody move. In Ashford business can reach its potential. Not to mention 450 million European customers', 2009.

Thus, the station conveys *contradictory* messages in terms of *what* is conveyed (move/do not move); and, with regard to *how* these messages are conveyed. If the mode is not straightforwardly contradictory, it is at the very least incongruous (the Disneyland invitation versus the order of Nobody Move Man); and this incongruity, this jarring quality, is heightened by the ubiquitous presence of CCTV cameras, which betrays the fact that this is a highly controlled environment, even though it intends to convey a friendly image (this station is popular with families going to Disneyland). With *Attending*, I aimed to direct the viewers' *attention* to this contradiction.

The video (DVD Track 4) shows the front covers[430] of some of Weil's books published between 1951 and 2008, in chronological order, followed by the first sentence of each book. Viewers were informed of both book ordering and sentence selection procedures. By these procedures, I aimed at conveying a quality of detachment. The book covers and quotes are interspersed with dialogues which stem from a passage in Weil's *Gravity and Grace*, of which a section has been previously quoted in §3.363:

> If we descend into ourselves, we find we have exactly what we desire. If we desire a certain being (who is dead), we desire a particular, limited being; therefore, necessarily a mortal, and we desire that special being who..., to whom..., etc., in short, that being who died on such and such a day, at such and such a time. And we have that being – dead. If we desire money, we desire a medium of exchange (institution), something that can only be acquired on certain conditions, so we desire it only in the measure that... Well, in that measure, we have it. In such cases, suffering and emptiness are the mode of existence of the objects of desire. We only have to draw aside the veil of unreality and we shall see that they are given to us in this way. When we see this, we still suffer, but we are happy.[431]

In each dialogue, there are two interlocutors: one represents the view expressed in the above quote, while the other argues against this view; that is, each dialogue is a variation on the same theme and an unfolding of contradiction. Moreover, some of the dialogues are set in the station and some of the speakers are impersonated by Mickey Mouse, Nobody Move Man and the travel agents' stand, which ties the contradiction of the dialogues with that of the station's semiotic situation.

The pamphlet/bookmark (Appendix 6) picks up the same theme, and includes two drawings that refer to the *elsewhere-ness* conveyed by the signs in the station (the drawings show the sanatorium in which Weil died and her family flat in Paris), but, unlike the latter, the sketchy quality of the drawings is not inviting, but rather conveys a sense of absence, one could say of *elsewhere-ness-less*. In the normative work, the drawings functioned to a high degree as indexes of the drawing agent, while, in *Attending*, the quality and content of the drawings

---

[430] All images of Weil were removed from the covers.

[431] Weil, *GG*, London, Routledge, pp. 22–23.

fulfils the semantic function of engaging with Weil's discourse on attention, detachment and contradiction. In the context of the station, drawing refers to contradiction also for the following reason: in the station, photography is frowned upon, even when one has permission (as I discovered), but drawing is allowed. The contradiction is that the station does not allow photography presumably to avoid the gathering of information by ill-intentioned people, but drawing can be much more effective than photography as a means of gathering information.

The dialogues in the video are very short, relative to the duration of the whole video, and the exchanges between the interlocutors are quick and with stark transitions, while the book covers and texts linger on the screen and follow one another with soft fading transitions. I describe the characteristics of the dialogues in relation to the book covers and texts because the dialogues represent the jestful (but not mocking) quality, typical of the imaginal projects, by which I found I could overcome to a certain degree the awe-inducing effect[432] produced by the hieratic and poetic quality of Weil's writings and catch glimpses of interesting epistemological problems that would almost certainly have otherwise passed me by. This jestful quality was a result of the general approach I adopted for the imaginal projects, an approach which greatly differs from the one I adopted for the normative projects. In the normative projects, I would make the work only when I had a distinct idea of what procedure to follow for its production. In the imaginal projects, the approach was more *somnambulistic,* following connections without fully knowing where they would lead me. The artist Éric Duyckaerts, writing about his interest in the notions of 'certainty' and 'truth', in a humorous and seemingly quasi-autobiographical book, describes an open-ended, expectant disposition which finds a parallel in my approach in the imaginal projects:

> The idea of the gap between certainty and truth had become a certainty for me ..., I was uncertain [*dans l'expectative*]: if this idea was true, *as* I was certain, it could not be true at all, *since* I was certain of it. The reason why I talk about expecting [*expectative*] is that I preferred to wait for this question to find its solution by itself ... Thus I let this issue sleep ... while I started going to sleep more and more often and for longer and longer ... By sleeping too much one ends up not being sleepy. It is then that all can start: one forces oneself to sleep by a kind of autohypnosis which produces an incomplete sleep, rich of surprises.[433]

To return to the relationship between book covers and dialogue in the video, while the cover and texts convey the hieratical and poetical quality (which is heightened by the epigraphic character of the texts and by their decontextualisation and erratic juxtaposition), the dialogues put a snag in the "Weilian Parnassus", as it were, in the form of a *But...*, or a *Wait*

---

[432] It is my view that many Weilian scholars are in awe of Weil. An indication of this is the fact that most Weilian scholars refer to Weil as *Simone* Weil throughout their essays, as if they could not sever the personal and emotional tie with *our Simone*, as she is sometimes referred to in Weilian circles. I find this attitude unhelpful for the critical study of Weil's philosophy.

[433] Duyckaerts, 1992, pp. 12–13.

a minute..., or even an *I don't get it...*. But this, hopefully, is not mere sterile antagonism: as I pointed out in the first paragraph of this section, the aim was to make a sign whose contemplation would engender an aesthetic experience of contradiction by drawing on the semantic dynamic already at work in the station.

5.5 Summary

In this summary, I will consider how the imaginal projects have achieved the imaginal analogical aim (the expansion of knowledge of Weilian attention), through the process of aesthetic objectification of the concepts of tautology and contradiction.

As a preliminary reflection on how the imaginal projects work, I will consider two works by the artist Lizzie Hughes, because there are some similarities between her work and the imaginal projects. In an essay on the artist, Michael Wilson writes that Hughes describes her works as 're-representations of structures and networks that through scale and complexity defy a singular visualisation' and that some of her work 'attempts to quantify and embody various phenomena, often by relating them to direct human interaction'[434]. Hughes' *25 Kg Weight Piece* 2001, for example, connected 'the only door to a weighed pulley system ..., transforming the process of coming and going into an unnerving test of strength.'[435] Hughes' work sometimes deals with large scale structures: for instance, her *Second Empire State Building Piece* 2001 consists of a recording[436] of the artist phoning one company on each of the floor of the Empire State Building and asking 'Could you tell me what floor you are on, please?' Concepts, such as 'tautology' and 'contradiction', are both hard to make sense of merely conceptually (as is the concept '25 Kg') and *large in scale*, not in a material sense but in the sense that concepts are classes which subsume a large, and often, an infinite, set of instances[437]. As one listens to *Second Empire State Building Piece*, 'the varied responses (which range from bored to baffled, reticent to enthusiastic) accrue to form a composite portrait in sound that recasts the powerful symbol of the American capital as a more human and more tentative and mutable edifice'[438]. In other words, the piece reveals something new about the abstract concept 'Empire State Building' and enriches, and to a certain degree destabilises, this conceptual monolith. Likewise, the imaginal projects expand the concepts 'tautology' and 'contradiction' by revealing something *new* and by *destabilising* it with respect to the research exposed in Chapters 3 and 4, the dead-end conclusion reached in §5.32 and the general view on Weil's metaphysics held by Weilian

---

[434] Wilson, 2010.

[435] Ibid.

[436] This recording is contained in CD form in Harrison, 2002.

[437] In §5.1, I pointed out that there are infinite instances of tautologies and contradictions.

[438] Wilson, 2010.

scholarship, which I described in §5.1. As with *25 Kg Weight Piece* and *Second Empire State Building Piece*, the imaginal projects do not replace the purely conceptual meaning, and that is why I use terms such as *expansion* and *enrichment*. It is important to stress this fact, because it indicates how open-ended the outcome of these projects is, compared with the binary occlusion reached in §5.32. The remainder of the summary outlines the expansion of the concepts of tautology and contradiction afforded by the imaginal projects.

Using Ducasse's lectical and aesthetic categories[439] to order my account, I will consider the aesthetic and the lectical signification of the projects, drawing on my analysis of the plausible interpretations they solicit, which I articulated in this chapter. I will not refer to the individual projects but rather give a synopsis of the significations which the projects share. As regards lectical signification, I will use the notion of *grammatical mood*[440] to highlight the difference between the outcome of the imaginal projects and the outcome expressed in §5.32. I will argue that the signification expressed in §5.32 is indicative, while the lectical signification expressed by the imaginal projects is interrogative. As regards aesthetic signification, I will use the general notion of *quality*, by which I simply mean anything that can be denoted by an adjective, and I will indicate the difference between, on one hand, the quality of purely conceptual tautology and contradiction and, on the other hand, the quality of aesthetic representation of tautology and contradiction in the imaginal projects.

The mood of *lectical signification* of the imaginal projects is interrogative, that is, the projects formulate questions about entities that are typically thought in purely conceptual terms: What is a circle? How does one know one is acting voluntarily? What is real? What is good? What is good enough? In §5.412, I referred to James Lee Byars' use of the question as artwork material. I do not think that the questions which the imaginal projects obtain function as Byars' questions do (although the projects draw in a general way on his use of the question). Byars' intention was to isolate questions, to sever questions from their potential answers, so that questions themselves would become an object of contemplation, while the questions obtained by the imaginal projects, even though they are *unanswered*, nevertheless remain not only *answerable* but also *ask for an answer*. That the questions remain unanswered is hardly surprising given that they belong to metaphysics, a topic whose broadness vastly exceeds both my knowledge and the scope of this research. Yet one might ask in what sense questions can be a valuable outcome in their own right, since, generally, research outcomes are expressed in the indicative mood. To answer this question, I will refer

---

[439] As I argued in §5.2, the heuretic function of art is not very relevant in the imaginal projects.

[440] Examples of grammatical moods are: *indicative* (used for factual statements and positive beliefs), *imperative* (used for orders, prohibitions, etc.), and *interrogative* (used for questions).

to a passage from Andrew Ingraham's *Swain School Lectures*. Considering the topic of epistemology, Ingraham writes:

> It requires much experience of answers to frame a question rightly. The old analysts asked their questions boldly, and expected to find answers as 7 or 8; but they got fractions, negatives, zeros, infinities, imaginary and complex quantities, with which they did not know what to do. These are seen now to contain answers to questions which lurked unnoticed in the original questions. Similarly, the epistemologist's question, simple as it may seem, involves, I take it, a number of different questions. He who asks, as Kant did, "How is knowledge possible?" should have explained more fully than Kant did just what he meant by such ambiguous terms as *how* and *possible* and *knowledge*.[441]

In §5.1, I asked: How can attention be manifested if its object is transcendent?', 'Can the artist ascend to the transcendent?' and so on; and, I argued that, in turn, these questions led to Weil's negative theology and to contradictory questions (e.g. 'Is good both possible and impossible?') or to tautological questions (e.g. 'Is God God?'). The contradictory questions seem unanswerable, while the tautological questions seem not worth asking. These were, borrowing Ingraham's language, *bold* questions, and the conclusion in §5.32 leaped equally boldly to answers (in the indicative mood) which I deemed unsatisfactory. The questions obtained through the imaginal projects do not attempt to explain the various terms of the original questions, but rather they consider the forms of the statements by which the concepts referred to in the original questions are represented, namely, tautology and contradiction. The reason why I pointed out that these questions are *answerable* at least in principle and why I distinguished them from Byars' questions is that I do not intend to essentialise[442] the question. My hope is that the questions I have articulated will offer an opportunity for dialogue for artists and Weilian scholars alike.

I now turn to the *aesthetic signification* of the imaginal projects. The questions which I reported at the beginning of the previous section on lectical signification were explicitly expressed in the projects. However, the implicit and overarching questions referred to the notions of tautology and contradiction. Such questions were implicit in the sense that they were an offshoot of reflection on the aesthetic signification of the projects[443], i.e. their quality. In §2.4, I claimed that the outcome of the imaginal projects introduced the snag of contingency in my representation of tautology and contradiction by objectifying them. Even though it was not incorrect to describe this representation of tautology and contradiction as non-contingent as *mine*, in fact such a description is *definitional*. As Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

---

[441] Ingraham, 1903, p. 49.

[442] However, I do not think that Byars' is essentialising the question.

[443] My assumption here is that the imaginal projects possess the qualities that I ascribe to them and that a reflective interpreter would find that such qualities lead to a questioning of the notions of tautology and contradiction.

> The proposition, the picture, the model, are in a negative sense like a solid body, which restricts the free movement of another: in a positive sense, like the space limited by solid substance, in which a body might be placed. ... Tautology leaves to reality the whole logical space; contradiction fills the whole logical space and leaves no point to reality.[444]

Such is the view of tautology and contradiction which forms the basis of Weil's negative theology and transcendent metaphysics, which I sketched in §5.1. Following Wittgenstein's image, the imaginal projects point to a perch in the absolute emptiness of tautology and to a crack in the absolutely solid substance of contradiction. The terms 'tautology' and 'contradiction' denote perfection, while the imaginal projects represent them as *imperfect*. My aim in representing this imperfection is not negative, that is, I do not intend to ridicule Weil's metaphysics or Weilian scholarship that appeals to her metaphysics by demonstrating that non-contingent tautology and contradictions are chimeras[445]. As I pointed out in §5.32, the scepticism engendered by the imaginal projects aims at favouring critical dialogue, not at dismissing outright any form of transcendentalism. The critical function of the imaginal projects (which is a result of the methodological superstructure of critical practical analogy) evidences that these projects do not merely aestheticise philosophy, but capitalise on aesthetics in an inquiring spirit[446].

I conclude this summary by answering the following question: Given that personally I am (for the time being) sceptically disposed towards transcendentalism (and here I am referring to the *dismissive* kind of scepticism), how did I manage to adopt a less dogmatic, more dialogic, form of scepticism in the imaginal projects? The answer draws on Adrian Piper's argument on the catalytic agent, which I exposed in §5.2: by renouncing the idea (present in the normative projects) that the artwork has to match my views as a private, self-reflexive subject. That is not to say that the experience of developing the imaginal projects did not change my views on these matters (I hope to have become less dismissively dogmatic), but rather I wish to stress that it was the nature of the imaginal projects that determined the change of view and not vice versa. This demonstrates that, in my research, the function of art is not merely illustrative of previously held views but generative of ideas.

---

[444] Wittgenstein, 1999, §4.463, p. 63.

[445] This would be analogous to trying to demonstrate the non-existence of perfect circles by showing the inevitable imperfections in a few actually drawn circles.

[446] In a recent essay on artistic appropriation of academic institutional forms, Jonathan T.D. Neil argues that the work of artists such as Anton Vidokle, Pablo Helguera and Mark Leckey uses pedagogy—notably, the lecture form—merely as a trope and do not strive to acquire expertise in those extra-artistic fields of inquiry with which their work purports to engage (Neil, 2010; for a more sympathetic view towards the 'pedagogical turn' see Charlesworth, 2010, Gillick, 2008; Neil's critical view of pedagogical art is akin to Lucy Lippard's criticism of interdisciplinary art, expressed in her passage that I quote in §1.44); it could be said that these artists aestheticise pedagogy. On the other hand, the artists Agnes Denes, Adrian Piper and, to a lesser extent, Éric Duyckaerts have striven to achieve a high standard of extra-artistic knowledge—in science, ethics and epistemology, respectively—and, therefore, they have been guiding examples of the inquiring spirit which has animated my research into metaethics.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Synopsis

In §1.1, I stated that the aim of this research was to provide an example of the use of art within a metaethical perspective. In conclusion, I will indicate how this aim has been achieved and I will elucidate the implication of the research outcomes for the field of art practice and practice-led research. In order to do so, I will reconsider the concerns I introduced in §1.4 in light of the research which I have described and analysed in this thesis. Accordingly, §6.2 deals with the distinction between a theoretical and a practical view of Weilian attention (introduced in §1.41); §6.3 deals with the issues of subjective and objective truth and of Weil's account of subjectivity (introduced in §1.42); §6.4 considers how this research affords an expansion of the knowledge of Weilian attention (introduced in §1.43); and §6.5 deals with the methodological issue of discursively representing art practice in the context of art practice-led research (introduced in §1.44).

6.2 From 'what attention *is*' to 'what attention is *for*'

As I have argued in §1.41, initially, my research was guided by the tacit assumption that I would gain a theoretical knowledge of what Weilian attention *is* conceptually, but that this assumption in fact led to an obfuscation of the notion of Weilian attention. Since, in order to explain how I dealt with this difficulty, I will be drawing a distinction between 'what something *is*' and 'what something is *for*', I will illustrate this distinction with an example: when I use a computer, I do not know what a computer *is* (those who built it, not me, possess such knowledge), but I know, albeit it limitedly, what a computer is *for*: surfing the internet, sending emails, etc. One could call this the difference between *theoretical* and *practical* knowledge. As I have shown in Chapters 3 and 4, I articulated an inventory of the theoretical themes relevant to Weilian attention and I distinguished between different orders of attention, highlighting some of the conceptual difficulties with these notions, but this was not enough to address the feeling that something was missing and that the goal of achieving a conceptual clarification of Weilian attention kept slipping away. In fact, as I realised, the problem was my expectation of an acquisition of exclusively theoretical knowledge of Weilian attention: what I have acquired is a *practical* knowledge of it.

The practical knowledge of Weilian attention which my research has identified can be defined very simply: *attention is for*[447] *the development of a disposition of detachment*. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the remainder of this section, such a practical definition was *impracticable* for me as a possible[448] regulative principle for art practice until, through the

---

[447] I use the somewhat grammatically unorthodox preposition 'for' to emphasise the difference between a theoretical view of attention (i.e. attention *is* + definition of attention) and a functional, or practical, view of attention (i.e. attention is *for* + end to which attention is a means).

[448] In accordance with the critical function of the overarching methodology (i.e. critical practical analogy) as I defined it in §2.2 (that is, as an investigation of the subjective conditions of thinking

normative projects, I demonstrated that the notion of detachment does not necessarily entail a notion of objective truth (as Weil intimates) but is compatible with a notion of subjective truth, and that, in turn, an appeal to a subjective perspective need not entail a self-reflexive, solipsistic approach to art practice-led research. The consequences for art practice of these two insights are discussed in §6.3. Here, I will limit myself to showing in what sense the notion of detachment (or attention-for-detachment) might seem to entail objective truth, even if one disregards Weil's position on this issue. Secondly, I will argue that the notion of objective truth made the notion of detachment impracticable for me.

Firstly, my analysis of Weil's writings on attention leaves little doubt that, on the whole, she subscribed to an objective notion of truth. But notwithstanding Weil's position on the matter, the idea that one can have a detached disposition does seem to imply quite naturally some form of *objectivity*: if I am detached, I must be detached *from something*, which must be some *object* from which I can detach myself.

Secondly, if detachment entails objective truth, then the notion of detachment is unusable for me, because I find the notion of objective truth problematic, particularly in the context of observational visual representation[449] (to which class observational drawing belongs). What could 'objective truth' possibly mean in this context? Objective according to whose standard? According to the representational canon of Western art? Is Renoir's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* 1889 more or less objectively true than any of Cézanne's paintings of the same mountain? Is Govoni's *Self-Portrait* 1915[450] an objectively true representation of Govoni's face? And are any of Anastasi's *Subway Drawings*[451] an objectively true representation of a

---

about the concept of attention), once I had established that the concept 'attention' comprised the idea of attention-for-detachment, my aim was not to *practice* detachment but to investigate the *possibility* of such a practice. The scope of my aim is similar to that which the mathematician David Ruelle ascribes to mathematics: 'Human mathematics consists in fact in talking about formal proofs, and not actually performing them. One argues quite convincingly that certain formal texts exist, and that it would in fact not be impossible to write them down. But it is not done: it would be hard work, and useless because the human brain is not good at checking that a formal text is error-free. Human mathematics is a sort of dance around an unwritten formal text, which if written would be unreadable.' (Ruelle, 2000, pp. 3–4.) Can the analogy between mathematics and metaethics be taken further? Are the formal texts or norms of which metaethics postulates the possibility necessarily unreadable or in-*practicable*? Answering this question is beyond the scope of my research, but it might afford a fruitful perspective for further research into Weil's dismayed optimism.

[449] However, as I pointed out in §4.322, the issue here is not that visual representation is empirical while Weil refers to the non-empirical truth of analytic *a priori* propositions (e.g. $7 + 8 = 15$), because, even with respect to mathematical propositions, all that is required for attention as a practice of detachment is a notion of *subjective* truth.

[450] Govoni's *Self-Portrait* is a very schematic representation of a face. For instance, the eyes are two circles within which one reads 'circle of the death of the tears lifebuoy of sorrow' and 'gothic portals of the cathedrals of phosphorus on my brain' (my translation from Italian).

[451] The *Subway Drawings* were produced as follows: Anastasi sat in a moving underground carriage and, with eyes closed and holding a pencil in each hand over a piece of paper, he let the movement of the carriage make the drawings.

subway? Faced with these or similar questions, I assume that people would display a varied range of attitudes towards them. For instance, one might believe that the question regarding Mont Sainte-Victoire is, at least in principle, answerable, although consensus might be difficult to reach; but many might think that Govoni's face objectively did not look as he depicted it (given that faces normally do not possess any textual feature). In the case of Anastasi's drawings, one might ask what the drawing purports to represent in the first place. These examples illustrate why I find the notion of objective truth problematic in observational drawing and also why I assume that I am not alone in this.

I conclude this section by lessening the dichotomy between theoretical and practical knowledge of Weilian attention. As I pointed out in the first paragraph of this section, the problem was my expectation of gaining *exclusively* theoretical knowledge, not my pursuit of theoretical knowledge itself. I postulated the dichotomy between theory and practice for the sake of exposition while, in fact, one outcome of this research has been precisely the demonstration that theoretical and practical domains are not separate: my theoretical study of Weilian attention informed the development of the normative projects and, in turn, the normative projects highlighted the fact that an exclusively conceptual approach to Weilian attention was unsatisfactory. In this respect, the normative projects constitute an example of metaethical critique by means of art practice.

6.3 Objective and subjective truth, and the Weilian subject

In §6.2, I argued that the realisation afforded by the normative projects (i.e. that a full understanding of Weilian attention ought to take into account its practical dimension) illustrates the critical function of art practice and as such exemplifies a metaethical use of art practice. But I also pointed out that I saw the practicability of attention-for-detachment as dependent on the compatibility of Weil's discourse on attention with a notion of subjective truth. Accordingly, in this section, firstly, I will return to the point I made in §4.322 and §4.4, namely, that the notion of subjective truth is compatible with attention-for-detachment, provided that one refers to the *Weilian* version of the subject. Secondly, I will show why the notion of subjective truth and the Weilian subject make the notion of detachment usable for me. Lastly, I will abstract from my particular concern with attention-for-detachment, in order to elucidate how Weil's view of the subject and the compatibility of attention with subjective truth indicate a way of conceptualising art practice metaethically, as I anticipated in §1.42 .

Firstly, in §4.322, I argued that the notion of subjective truth is compatible with attention-for-detachment: e.g. a detached disposition requires that I pay attention to the mistakes I make in a drawing, but as long as it *seems to me* that I made a mistake, that is enough for me to attempt to act in a detached manner. In other words, I do not need a *constitutive*, objective

notion of truth, but merely a subjective, *regulative* notion of truth in order to make sense of a *practice* of attention (as distinguished from a *theoretical* knowledge of attention). As I pointed out in §4.322, the notion of truth as a regulative principle of conduct retains its sense despite the lack of objective basis for truth. Nevertheless, as I argued in §1.42, a certain form of solipsistic subjectivism would dismiss the possibility of intersubjective meaningful[452] consensus on metaethical issues. But the kind of subject which Weil postulates in her discourse on attention as a practice of detachment (§4.22) is precisely *not* a self-reflexive and solipsistic subject: the de-reification of the 'I' which is the goal of attention-for-detachment *objectifies* the subject by conceptualising it as a mere point in the web of necessary relationships, which, for Weil, constitutes reality. As with anything else in the world, then, the Weilian *objectified subject* becomes a viable subject of intersubjective *dialogue*. As I maintained in §4.3, it was through the normative projects that I elucidated Weil's views on the agent as a *subject to* necessity[453], which indicates the heuristic function of art practice within the research.

Secondly, as the only obstacle to the practice of attention-for-detachment was that it seemed to imply the notion of objective truth, once I realised that such an implication does not necessarily follow, attention-for-detachment became practicable. Furthermore, this conceptualisation of attention has the benefit of clarifying Weil's insistence on the fact that the results of attentive action are unimportant, because, if truth is subjective, then one could be both attentive and acting on beliefs which everybody else finds mistaken. Even though *all* the normative projects evidence my reflection on the relation between attention-for-detachment and truth, it is *Bâton de l'aveugle* that most explicitly shows this relation as one between detachment and *subjective* truth. As I pointed out in §1.2, it was essential for me to engage with the Weilian community not only discursively, but also directly through artworks. Daniel Boitier, in an essay on the visual representation of Weil in art and books, which appeared in the journal *Cahiers Simone Weil*, writes of *Bâton de l'aveugle* that, because of the method used to produce the drawings (i.e. the blind drawing method), 'the trace loses all reference to subjectivity.'[454] Being a representation of detachment, it is appropriate that *Bâton de l'aveugle* loses all reference to subjectivity; but this *reference* stands in need of qualification: the blind drawing method emphasises *subjective* error, *subjective* partiality of vision, and, therefore, in *Bâton de l'aveugle,* the non-subjective

---

[452] The qualification 'meaningful' is important because one could grant that intersubjective consensus is indeed reached while maintaining that such consensus is in no way an indication of convergence guided by some true fact of the world.

[453] As I argued several times throughout the thesis, this elucidation afforded a clearer understanding of the workings of the normative critical practical analogy.

[454] Boitier, 2010, p. 109.

reference pertains to the *pursuit* of a detached disposition and not to some notion of objective truth of the object of observation. Likewise, in the skull drawing *After Agnes Denes' "Human Dust" 1969* 2008 (Fig. 4.25), which appeared in my essay on Weilian attention and notions of impersonalism and personalism[455], the drawing can be qualified both as impersonal (or objective) and personal (or subjective) according to whether one considers, respectively, the aim (detached disposition) or the method (the *imagined* skulls were highly subjective).

Lastly, my research demonstrates that a subjective notion of truth that is approached via the Weilian subject is compatible with an art practice that critiques the possibility of ethical attention. However, even though it was as a result of my research on Weilian attention that I came to realise attention's compatibility with subjective truth and that I envisaged a non-solipsistic kind of subjectivism, one can abstract from my particular Weilian concerns and consider the paradigmatic consequences of these findings: namely, that this research constitutes an example of how (the many) sceptical artists can conceptualise their practice in metaethical terms while retaining their scepticism with regard to objective truth and without entirely repudiating a subjectivist approach.

6.4 From dogmatic scepticism to dialogic scepticism – from proposition to image

My reference to scepticism in the concluding paragraph of the previous section leads back to the issue anticipated in §1.43 and articulated in my analysis of the imaginal projects in Chapter 5, namely, that, in order to engage with the transcendentalism of Weil's discourse on attention, I adopted a methodological disposition of dialogic scepticism. In §2.4, I stated that the aim of the imaginal critical practical analogy was to use art to expand the knowledge of Weilian attention beyond its present restricted horizon; and in §5.1, I argued that this horizon was constituted by both the transcendentalist occlusion of inquiry typical of much Weilian scholarship and by my own dogmatic scepticism with regard to Weil's negative theology. In this section, firstly, I will qualify dialogical scepticism further, by distinguishing it from dogmatic scepticism; secondly, I will reiterate how the expansion of knowledge of Weilian attention was achieved; and, lastly, I will elucidate how the imaginal projects constitute an example of metaethical art practice.

My change of approach towards the investigation of Weilian attention – from the approach which obtained the dead-end conclusion described in §5.32 to the approach which obtained the imaginal projects – can be conceptualised as a trajectory from *dogmatic scepticism* to

---

[455] Alfier, 2009b.

dialogic scepticism[456]. The aim of dogmatic scepticism is to produce a dogma which is antithetical to some other dogma; its intention is therefore *polemical*; while the aim of the kind of scepticism displayed by the imaginal projects is to invite dialogue, or at least to make dialogue a thinkable possibility[457], through non-propositional representation; in this sense, its intention is *dialogical*. The trajectory from dogmatic to dialogic scepticism is a trace of my endeavour to find a place where art practice and philosophical practice meet. These two practices have met somewhere in the middle: on one hand, I have emphasised the non-propositional, imaginal mode in philosophy (whereas, typically, philosophy operates propositionally) through the objectification of argument forms; and, on the other hand, I have emphasised the lectical mode in art practice, by using the dialogical format (which belongs to the canon of philosophy) to produce artworks.

With regard to expanding the knowledge of Weilian attention beyond its restricted horizon, since a horizon is always correlated to a given *viewpoint*, one can ask: What is the viewpoint that restricts this horizon? The answer suggested by the imaginal projects is that it is restricted by an exclusive reliance on the propositional mode of representation. I return to Pirruccello's claim that the object of attention cannot be positively represented by statements of facts, but only through images (see §5.1). Pirruccello's argument *refers* (propositionally) *to* images but *is not* an image, and, therefore, it merely points at the restricted horizon (qualifying it as restricted) and conjectures a viewpoint which would expand the horizon. On the other hand, the whole enterprise of the imaginal projects could be described as an actualisation of the viewpoint which Pirruccello conjectures, i.e. an *imaginal viewpoint*. The imaginal viewpoint has been attained by objectifying tautological and contradictory argument forms (forms are *images*), as distinguished from the consideration of specific instances of these forms (i.e. propositions) that can be found in Weil's writings. Furthermore, the frequent use of dialogue contributes to the imaginal character of the projects, because dialogues *can be* images, if their intention is not to prove a point but rather to make an inventory of a range of positions on a certain subject[458] – and such was my

---

[456] The concept of dialogic scepticism draws on the distinction made by Michel Bitbol between dogmatic and methodological scepticism. I substitute the qualification 'methodological' with 'dialogic' to emphasise the role of dialogue in the imaginal projects. For Bitbol, methodological scepticism is a position which, 'contrarily to dogmatic scepticism, does not aim to build up a pessimist antithesis to the progressive eschatology of the realist thesis, but only to contribute, by the provocation that it represents, the refining of self-understanding of the work of scientific research.' (Bitbol, 1998, p. 1.) The aim that Bitbol assigns to methodological scepticism is thus critical, as I defined it in §2.2.

[457] As I argued in §5.32, the two propositions which constitute the dead-end conclusion exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue between those who hold the opposing views that I have described.

[458] I stress 'can be' because a dialogue can also be very propositional, if its intention is to prove a point. However, the very etymology of 'dialogue' suggests its imaginal character: *dialogos*, *dia*: across, *logos*: discourse, speech, statement, report, account, explanation, reason (see Kahn, 1981, p.

intention. Thus the imaginal projects are dialogic in two senses: (1) in the *determining* sense described in §5.5, where I have shown that the aesthetic significance of the imaginal projects is the engendering of a kind of scepticism which favours dialogue, through the interrogative mood conveyed by the projects; and (2) in the *intentional*, or *attitudinal*, sense of being the result of a non-propositional disposition on my part, achieved partly through the use of imaginal dialogues.

Lastly, I turn to the elucidation of how the imaginal projects constitute an example of metaethical art practice. Such an elucidation, as in §6.2 and §6.3, involves identifying that which is contingent to my research (and therefore non-exemplary), and that which can be viewed as relevant and applicable to art practice-led research in general. Both scepticism and dialogism are contingent: the former, because even though it was a strategy to deal with the specific problems I came up against in my study of Weilian attention, it is conceivable that other research subjects might not lead to such problematic results; the latter, because even though dialogism was instrumental to the creation of images, dialogism is not the only conceivable way to produce images. What can be generalised is the capitalisation on the inherent[459] non-propositional quality of art objects for the adoption of an imaginal viewpoint which is not available to exclusively propositional metaethical research.

6.5 Critical practical analogy and art practice-led interdisciplinary research

In this section, I return to the question, posed at the end of §1.44, regarding the intelligibility of interdisciplinary research. The question (which I approached methodologically by means of critical practical analogy) was: what is the minimum requirement of a discursive representation of art practice in order for it to be intelligible in an interdisciplinary context? I will show how critical practical analogy can meet that requirement by avoiding a hierarchical methodological priority of theory over art practice[460].

The minimum requirement for a discursive representation of art practice so that it is intelligible in an interdisciplinary context is that the practice not only be discursively represented as an *inquiry* but also that the method that makes such inquiry meaningful be *explicitly* represented thus. This might seem an obvious point, but, as I will show with an example, it is anything but obvious. In the video *Exploding the Crystal*, accompanying the recent Chris Ofili exhibition at Tate Britain, London, 27th January – 16th May 2010, Ofili describes his art practice as an 'inquiry' and asserts that he is 'examining in painting'. It

---

29). Thus, dialogue can be understood as a process of *going across accounts*, i.e. as the representation of a structure (a structure is an image) of accounts.

[459] That is to say, not *ontologically* inherent but *historically* inherent.

[460] The tendency towards hierarchisation is due to the fact that the discursive mode of exposition is usually thought of as belonging pre-eminently to philosophy and not to art practice.

does not seem inappropriate that Ofili should describe his art practice as an *inquiry*, because his subject is *clearly defined* [461]. But Ofili's inquiry is also very different from inquiry in most other fields, because he does not *explicitly* state what makes his practice meaningful, since, as he states in the video, he assumes that the history of painting will make sense of the work for an art-informed viewer. That assumption might be correct in the case of Ofili's work, but, then again, he is not an interdisciplinary art practice-led researcher. In my view, the latter cannot dispense with explicitly articulating why the method makes sense of the final product (articulation which is the *norm* for most researchers in many fields), if he or she wishes the outcome of the research to be intelligible in an interdisciplinary context.

In *The Waste Book*, by the 18th century scientist and man of letters Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, one finds the following aphorism:

"How's it going?" a blind man asked a cripple. "As you see," the cripple replied.[462]

On one reading, this is merely an illustration of lack of communication. But there is also a more positive interpretation: the aphorism shows how knowledge can be acquired *indirectly*, through the use of *analogy*. The blind man cannot directly perceive the cripple's condition, but, through the analogy that the cripple makes between his or her condition and the blind man's condition, the blind man acquires knowledge of the cripple's condition. It might seem unkind on my part to make an analogy between the situation presented by Lichtenberg and the philosophical and the artistic communities, but I think that the lack of a common frame of reference for meaningful dialogue is indeed very similar in both.

Initially, my way of dealing with the invisibility problem in the discursive representation of art practice consisted of downplaying the role of philosophy for artists and downplaying the role of art for philosophers[463]. I was also aware that philosophy (in which I include also art theory) came with its own tested discursively explicit methodology (identification of relevant literature, definition of key concepts, etc.). But no such explicit methodology was available for art practice, with the result that the discursive representation of art practice always tended to veer towards philosophy to the detriment of the practice. The critical practical analogy addressed this problem and proposed a solution, because, as I argued in §2.3 and demonstrated throughout the research, it subsumes both theoretical and practical research. Furthermore, critical practical analogy allows for the kind of indirect acquisition of knowledge which I exemplified with Lichtenberg's aphorism: for instance, in the normative critical practical analogy, the art-informed community can understand Weil's ontological

---

[461] Although this applies to a lesser degree to the latest work shown in the exhibition.

[462] Lichtenberg, 2000, p. 74.

[463] I mean downplaying the *specificity* of *my* art practice, as distinct from theorising about art practice in general with some token reference to my practice.

model of the dualistic relation between agent and world through the reflective analogue, while the Weilian community can understand a certain approach to observational drawing practice by reference to the objective analogue.

In §6.1, I stated that critical practical analogy affords a way of dealing with the difficulties which I have identified above *in general*. I will support this claim of general applicability of critical practical analogy with the following elucidations.

Firstly, in the same way that, as I have demonstrated in §2.2, one can abstract from the specific concerns that Art & Language had in the snow project and one can identify the general schema of critical practical analogy which underlines the project (i.e. one can consider the snow project as one of the many possible instantiations of critical practical analogy), so the particular objective and reflective analogues and operational principles that I have devised for the normative and imaginal projects are by no means prescriptive: they are only two of the many possible ways of articulating and of making explicit a relation between theoretical and artistic epistemic constructs.[464]

Secondly, the formulation of a critical practical analogy does not necessarily have to *precede* art practice-led research: its primary function is to allow the articulation of a discursive representation of art practice, and as such it can *follow* the production of the final artwork and be used as an instrument of reflection. This makes critical practical analogy particularly suited to art practice-led research, because in my experience, although artist-researchers know where their research is heading, it is also true that surprises and subsequent changes of course are of a different order and far more widespread in art practice-led research than in other fields of inquiry.

Thirdly and lastly, critical practical analogy can provide an interface between art and philosophy in interdisciplinary art practice-led research, both while respecting the difference of investigative approach of these two domains and while retaining mutual intelligibility. The discursive representation of art practice that critical practical analogy allows can both acknowledge the specificity of art practice and theory and show how these two strands inform one another.

6.6 Summary

Having opened this report by asserting that the aim of my research was to provide an example of how art can be employed within a metaethical perspective, I will conclude with a

---

[464] As I have elucidated throughout the thesis, the epistemic constructs of the normative and imaginal analogies were, respectively: the relation between agent and reality postulated by Weil, and the relation between drawer and object of observation which I postulated in my observational drawing practice; and Weil's reference to tautology and contradiction, and tautology and contradiction considered as forms.

synopsis of the research outcomes, articulated in §6.2–6.5, which underscores the *exemplary* function of the research.

However, firstly, with a view to identifying the distinguishing feature of the research with regard to its being an example, I will outline a conjectured instance of a research into metaethics, still involving art practice, but which would *not* be an example of art practice operating within a metaethical perspective. Such research could, for instance, comprise the following steps: (1) an exclusively theoretical study of Weil's writings and other relevant philosophical discourses; (2) a positioning of Weilian attention within the map of contemporary metaethical viewpoints[465]; and (3) a discursive representation of one's pre-existing art practice with reference to the results of (1) and contextualised with regard to (2). In step (3) of the above conjectured example, art practice has only an *exegetic* function, while I hope to have demonstrated that the scope of art practice can expand so as to also effectively function *heuristically*. Thus, the distinguishing feature of this research *qua* example is the heuristic function of art practice.

Finally, I turn to the overall exemplary status of the research, firstly, by presenting a synopsis of the considerations exposed in §6.2–6.5; and, secondly and lastly, by a further generalisation of the applicability of the research outcomes to art practice-led research.

The synopsis correlates the broadest assumptions which I make regarding particular characteristics of contemporary art practice with the research outcomes. §6.2 assumes that it is meaningful to draw a distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge; the normative projects show how art practice can be used critically to obtain practical knowledge and how, in turn, the practical knowledge thus gained can lead to a refining of theoretical knowledge. §6.3 assumes that contemporary artists are weary of absolutism and transcendentalism (or at least of its *terminology*); a subjective notion of truth, twinned with a Weilian perspective on subjectivity, allows a non-absolutist and non-transcendent art practical investigation of metaethical subjects that, as in the case of attention-for-detachment, involves a transcendentalist strand. §6.4 assumes that art objects are primarily non-propositional; an imaginal approach to metaethical subjects capitalises on the non-propositional character of art objects, while not disallowing the use of the propositional mode. §6.5 assumes that the method of inquiry in art practice is often non-linear and indirect; critical practical analogy could provide artists with both a heuristic research tool and a template for articulating a discursive representation of art practice which both

---

[465] As I argued in §4.4, Weil fits roughly within non-naturalist cognitivism: 'Cognitivists ... think that a moral judgement expresses a *belief*. Beliefs can be true or false: they are *truth-apt*, or apt to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity ... [while] non-naturalists [are cognitivists who] think that moral properties are not identical to or reducible to natural properties.' (Miller, 2003, pp. 3–4.)

acknowledges the non-linearity and indirectness of practice-led research and the need for interdisciplinary intelligibility.

In other words, this research exemplifies the heuristic use of art within a metaethical perspective by offering a *conceptualisation of knowledge* (§6.2), a *view of subjectivity and truth* (§6.3), an *approach* (§6.4) and a *methodology* (§6.5) which are congenial to the particular nature of contemporary art practice.

References

206

References

Agamben, G., 2007. *The Coming Community*. Translated from Italian by M. Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Alain, 1891. *La théorie de la connaissance des Stoïciens*. [e-book] Paris: Presses Universitaire de France. Available at: http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Alain/theorie_conn_stoiciens/Alain_Theorie_con_Stoiciens.pdf [Accessed 2nd September 2008].

Alain, 1923. *Propos sur l'esthétique*. Paris: Presses Universitaire de France.

Alain, 1960. *La passion et la sagesse*. Paris: Gallimard.

Alain, 1970. *Propos, Vol. 2*. Paris: Gallimard.

Alain, 1990. *Éléments de philosophie*. Paris: Gallimard.

Alfier, D., 2009a. Bâton de l'aveugle. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 3, pp. 359–362.

Alfier, D., 2009b. La commossa indifferenza dell'artista che attende: Il valore dell'arte in Simone Weil e Agnes Denes. *Propettiva Persona*, (67) 09, pp. 40–43.

Alfier, D., 2009c. La critique weilienne de la science contemporaine et le *Book of Dust* d'Agnes Denes. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 3, pp. 351–358.

Alfier, D., 2009d. *The Centre for Drawing Project Space – Notes 07*. A. Newman, ed. London: The Centre for Drawing.

Alfier, D., 2010. Where There is Nothing, Read that I Love You: Simone Weil's 'Attention' and the Art of Perception. *Indigo*, 2, pp. 34–41.

Andic, M., 1996a. Discernment and imagination. In: R.H. Bell, ed. 1996. *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 116–149.

Andic, M., 1996b. Simone Weil and Shakespeare's fools. In: J.M. Dunaway & E.O. Springsted, eds. 1996. *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, pp. 197–215.

Arcoleo, S., 2009. La réflexion sur la science dans la pensée de Simone Weil. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 3, pp. 309–328.

Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2008. *AHRC support for Practice-led research through our Research Grants - practice-led and applied route (RGPLA)*. [Internet] Available at: http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/RGPLA%20Pamphlet.pdf [Accessed 1st July 2010]**.**

Arts Council England, 2008. *Public Engagement (Grants for the Arts)*. [Online] Available at: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/information-sheet/public-engagement-grants-for-the-arts/ [Accessed 6th October 2010].

Aubert, J-M., 1982. Il vero volto di Simone Weil. *Il futuro dell'uomo*, 1, pp. 5–19.

Aurelius, M., 1964. *Meditations*. Translated from Greek by M. Staniforth. London: Penguin.

Barney, M., 2006. *On the Origins of* Drawing Restraint. [Online video] Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83WTxmkye04 [Accessed 28th June 2010].

Barthes, R., 1985. *The Responsibility of Forms*. Translated from French by R. Howard. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Becker, J.D., 1975. The Phrasal Lexicon. [Internet] *Proceedings of the 1975 Workshop on Theoretical Issues in Natural Language Processing*. Available at: http://acl.ldc.upenn.edu/T/T75/T75-2013.pdf [Accessed 9th February 2009].

Benesch, E., 2000. From the Incomplete to the Unfinished: *Réalisation* in the Work of Paul Cézanne. In: F. Baumann, E. Benesch, W. Feilchenfeldt & K.A. Schröder, eds. 2000. *Cézanne: Finished-Unfinished*. Zürig: Hatje Cantz Publishers, pp. 41–62.

Benjamin, W., 1968. The Task of the Translator. Translated from German by H. Zohn. In: R. Schulte & J. Biguenet, eds. 1992. *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 71–82.

Berger, J., 2002. *The Shape of a Pocket*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bitbol, M., 1998. Le réel-en-soi, l'inconnaissable, et l'ineffable. [Online] *Annales d'Histoire et de Philosophie du Vivant*, 1, pp. 143–152. Available at: http://michel.bitbol.pagesperso-orange.fr/Reelensoi.html [Accessed 10th May 2010].

Bitbol, M., 2008. Is Consciousness Primary? [Internet] *NeuroQuantology*, 6 (1), pp. 53–72. Available at: http://michel.bitbol.pagesperso-orange.fr/ConsciousnessPrim.pdf [Accessed 10th May 2010].

Bitbol, M., 2010. *De l'intérieur du monde : Pour une philosophie et une science des relations*. Paris: Flammarion.

Blackburn, V., 2007. Simone Weil, Hinduism and Inter-Faith Dialogue. *Theology*, (110) 856, pp. 260–269.

Bobzien, S., 2001. *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*. Oxford: Claredon Press.

Boitier, D., 2010. Usine, Église, Exil, ... Notes pour un portrait de Simone Weil. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (33) 1, pp. 103–114.

Bok, S., 2005. Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch: The Possibility of a Dialogue. *Gender Issues*, 22, pp. 71–78.

Boroditsky, L., 2009. How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think? [Online] Edge Foundation. Available at: http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/boroditsky09/boroditsky09_index.html [Accessed 1st October 2009].

Brown, L., ed. 1997. *The Cassell Concise Dictionary*. London: Cassell.

Bryson, N., 2003. A Walk for a Walk's Sake. In: *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act Selected from the Tate Collection*. Exhibition Catalogue. Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, September – March 2004, pp. 149–164.

Cabaud, J., 2008. Simone Weil: An Ethics for Esthetics. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (31) 1, pp. 45–80.

Campo, C., 1987. *Gli imperdonabili*. Milano: Adelphi.

Carta Macaluso, S., 2003. *Il metaxý. La filosofia di Simone Weil*. Roma: Armando Editore.

Charlesworth, J.J., 2010. We Don't Need No…. *Art Review*, Summer 2010, 42, p. 40.

Chenavier, R., 2001. *Simone Weil : Une philosophie du travail*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

Chenavier, R., 2009. *L'attention au réel*. Paris: Michalon.

Clive Wearing's Journal. Exhibit shown in: *Identity: Eight Rooms, Nine Lives*. Wellcome Collection, London, 26th November 2009 – 6th April 2010.

Coburn, T., 2007. *Artworker of the Week #64. Tino Sehgal*. [Online] Available at: http://www.Kultureflash.net/archive/192/priview.html [Accessed 27th May 2009].

Collins, R.K.L. & Nielsen, F.E., 1996. The spirit of Simone Weil's law. In: R.H. Bell, ed. 1996. *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 235–259.

Cook, B., 1953. Simone Weil: Art and the Artist under God. *Yale French Studies*, 12, pp. 73–80.

Crary, J., 2001. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: MIT Press.

Da Vinci, L., 1995. *Trattato della pittura*. Milano: Tascabili degli Editori Associati.

De Biran, M., 1942. *Œuvres Choisies*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne.

Delaruelle, J., 2003. The Utopia of Attention. [Online] *A Public of Individuals*, 4. Available at: http://au.geocities.com/apublcofind/feat_4a.html [Accessed 29th January 2009].

De Monticelli, R., 2001. De l'attention : Edith Stein et Simone Weil en dialogue. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (24) 3, pp. 182–199.

Denes, A., 1976. *Sculptures of the Mind*. Akron, Ohio: The Emily H. Davis Gallery, University of Akron.

Denes, A., 2008. *The Human Argument*. Putman, Connecticut: Spring Publications.

Derrida, J., 1985. From *Des Tours de Babel*. Translated from French by J.F. Graham. In: R. Schulte & J. Biguenet, eds. 1992. *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 218–227.

Derrida, J., 1993. *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*. Translated from French by P-A. Brault & M. Naas. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Descartes, R., 1911. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. 1*. Translated from Latin and French by E.S. Haldane & G.R.T. Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Descartes, R., 1984. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. 2*. Translated from Latin and French by J. Cottingham, D. Murdoch & R. Stoothof. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Descartes, R., 1985. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. 3*. Translated from Latin and French by J. Cottingham, D. Murdoch & R. Stoothof. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Devaux, A.A., 1995. Présence de Descartes dans la vie et dans l'œuvre de Simone Weil. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (18) 1, pp. 1–24.

Devaux, A.A., 1996. On the right use of contradiction according to Simone Weil. Translated from French by J.P. Little. In: R.H. Bell, ed. 1996. *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 150–157.

De Warren, N., 2003. How Thinking Must also Be: Authored Skepticism and the Authorization of Knowledge in Descartes. *Romance Quaterly*, (50) 1, pp. 149–160.

Diderot, D., 1984. *Lettres à Sophie Volland*. Paris: Gallimard.

Doering, E.J. & Springsted, E.O., eds. 2004. *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Droz, C., 2008. L'attention ou la force transformée dans les *Cahiers*. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (31) 4, pp. 401–416.

Ducasse, C.J., 1929. *The Philosophy of Art*. New York: The Dial Press.

Duchamp, M., 1973. *The Writings of Marchel Duchamp*. Translated from French by G.H. Mamilton. M. Sanouillet & E. Peterson, eds. New York: Da capo Press.

Duchamp, M., 1994a. *Duchamp du signe*. M. Sanouillet & P. Matisse, eds. Paris: Flammarion.

Duchamp, M., 1994b. *Notes*. M. Sanouillet & P. Matisse, eds. Paris: Flammarion.

Duyckaerts, É., 1992. *Hegel ou la vie en rose*. Paris: Gallimard.

Duyckaerts, É., 1994. *La barre de Sheffer*. [Online video] Paris: Léo Scheer. Available at: http://www.leoscheer.com/spip.php?article525 [Accessed 8th March 2010].

Duyckaerts, É., 2007. *Théories tentatives*. Paris: Léo Scheer.

Edl, E. & Matz, W., 1994. Le langage du traducteur. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (17) 1, pp. 7–10.

Edwards, B., 1995. *Drawing on the Artist Within*. London: Harper Collins.

Ehrenzweig, A., 2000. *The Hidden Order of Art*. London: Phoenix Press.

Empiricus, S., 2000. *Outlines of Scepticism*. J. Annas & J. Barnes, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Epictetus, 1995. *The Discourses of Epictetus*. Translated from Greek by R. Hard. C. Gill, ed. London: Everyman.

Eskin, M., 2000. *Ethics and Dialogue in the works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shatam and Celan*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Ferber, M.K., 1981. Simone Weil's *Iliad*. In: G. Abbot White, ed. 1981. *Simone Weil. Interpretations of a Life*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 63–85.

Friedli, S. & Frehner, M., eds. 2009. *Im Full of Byars*. Exhibition Catalogue. Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes, 11th April 2009 – 21st June 2009.

Fry, R., 1952. *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. London: Hogarth Press.

Gillick, L., 2008. The Fourth Way. *Art Monthly*, October 2008, 320, pp. 6–7.

Gould, J.B., 1970. *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gowing, L., 1977. The Logic of Organized Sensations. In: W. Rubin, ed. 1984. *Cézanne: The Late Work*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, pp. 55–72.

Griffin, T., 2005. Tino Sehgal: An Interview. [Online] *Artforum International*, 48 (8). Available at: http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Tino+Sehgal+an+interview-a0132554960 [Accessed 27th May 2009].

Guyer, P., 2006. *Kant*. London & New York: Routledge.

György Ligeti Edition 3, 1996. [CD booklet] Sony.

Hadot, P., 2002. *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Hardwick, E., 1975. Reflections on Simone Weil. *Signs*, (1) 1, pp. 83–91.

Harrison, C., 2001. On the Surface of Painting. In: C. Harrison, 2001. *Essays on Art & Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, pp. 175–205.

Harrison, C., 2008. Party Time? Decoration and Abjection. In: M. Baldwin & M. Ramsden, eds. 2008. *Art and Language*. Exhibition Catalogue. Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke, August – September 2008, pp. 59–83.

Harrison, M., ed. 2002. *A Measure of Reality*. Exhibition Catalogue. Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 9th March – 28th April 2002.

Harwell, D., 1959. *Attentive Fruition: Simone Weil's Vocation of Attention*. Ph. D. Strasbourg: University of Strasbourg.

Hofstadter, D., 1982. *The Mind's I*. London: Penguin.

Hofstadter, D., 1997. *Le Ton Beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language*. New York: Basic Books.

Hofstadter, D., 2006. Analogy as the Core of Cognition. [Online] *Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts*. Stanford: Stanford University. Available at: http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/hofstadter/analogy.html [Accessed 29th January 2009].

Hofstadter, D., 2007. *I am a Strange Loop*. New York: Basic Books.

Huxley, A., 2007. *Brave New World*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Ingraham, A., 1903. *Swain School Lectures*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company.

Jakobson, R., 1990. *On Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Janiaud, J., 2002. *Simone Weil: l'attention et l'action*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.

Jiménez Ruiz, J.M., 2010. Pensée de la médiation et médiation de la pensée chez Simone Weil. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (33) 1, pp. 45–60.

Kahn, C.H., 1981. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, E., 1999. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated from German by P. Guyer & A.W. Wood. P. Guyer & A.W. Wood, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, E., 2008. *Critique of Judgement*. 2nd ed. Translated from German by J.C. Meredith. Revised by N. Walker. N. Walker, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kempt Smith, N., 2003. *A Commentary to Kant's* Critique of Pure Reason. Basingstoke, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kenny, A., 2009. *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*. Indiana: St Augustine's Press.

Klee, P., 1953. *The Pedagogical Sketchbook*. Translated from German by S. Moholy-Nagy. W. Gropius & L. Moholy-Nagy, eds. London: Faber and Faber.

Klee, P., 1978. *Notebooks, Vol. 1: The Thinking Eye*. Translated from German by R. Manheim. J. Spiller, ed. London: Lund Humphries.

Klein, Y., 2007. *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein*. Translated from French by K. Ottmann. Putman, Connecticut: Spring Publications.

Kosuth, J., 1993. *Art as Philosophy and After*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT press.

Kühn, R., 2003. Le « moi » face à la manifestation pure du réel. In: M. Calle & E. Gruber, eds. 2003. *Simone Weil: La passion de la raison*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 211–236.

Lagneau, J., 1950. *Célèbres leçons et fragments*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Lecerf, E., 2006. Attention et vigilance, les deux limites du travail chez Simone Weil. In: N. Taïbi, ed. 2006. *Simone Weil : « le travail comme témoignage »*. Lyon: Université Jean Moulin.

Lévy-Leblond, J-M., 2006. *La vitesse de l'ombre*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Lévy-Leblond, J-M., 2009. Que Simone Weil fait-elle de la science ? *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 2, pp. 173–188.

LeWitt, S., 1967. Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. *Artforum*, (5) 10, pp. 79–83.

Lichtenberg, G.C., 2000. *The Waste Books*. Translated from German by R.J. Hollingdale. New York: The New York Review of Books.

Lindroth, J.R., 1996. Simone Weil and Wallace Stevens. The Notion of Decreation as Subtext in *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*. In: J.M. Dunaway & E.O. Springsted, eds. 1996. *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, pp. 151–172.

Lippard, L., 1973. Postface to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. In: C. Harrison & P. Wood, eds. 1992. *Art in Theory 1900 – 1990*. Oxford & Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, pp. 895–896.

Long, A.A. & Sedley, D.N., 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Long, A.A., 2004. *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Loran, E., 1963. *Cézanne's Composition*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lyotard, F-J., 1991. *The Inhuman*. Translated from French by G. Bennington & R. Bowlby. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lyotard, J-F., 1999. *Postmodern Fables*. Translated from French by G. Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Mangion, É., 2007. Les vérités qui n'en sont pas. *Art Press*, July 2007, 335, pp. 36–39.

Marianelli, M., 2004. *La metafora ritrovata: Miti e simboli nella filosofia di Simone Weil*. Roma: Città Nuova Editrice.

Mautner, T., ed. 2000. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Penguin.

Maynard, P., 2005. *Drawing Distinctions: The Variety of Graphic Representation*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

McEvilley, T., 2003. Monochrome Math. *Art in America*, (91) 4, pp. 108–113.

McEvilley, T., 2004. Philosophy in the Land. *Art in America*, (92) 10, pp. 158–193.

McEvilley, T., 2005. *The Triumph of Anti-Art*. New York: McPherson & Company.

McEvilley, T., 2008. James Lee Byars: A Study of Posterity. *Art in America*, November 2008, 10, pp. 142–156.

McLellan, D., 1990. *Utopian Pessimism: The Life and Thought of Simone Weil*. New York: Poseidon Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M., 2000. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated from French by C. Smith. London & New York: Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M., 2006. *L'Œil et l'esprit*. Paris: Gallimard.

Michaux, H., 2000. *Emergences/Resurgences*. Translated from French by R. Sieburth. New York: The Drawing Center.

Miller, A., 2003. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Molard, J., 2008. *Les valeurs chez Simone Weil*. Les Plans-sur-Bex: Editions Parole et Silence.

Morgan, V.G., 2005. *Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics and Love*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Morgan, V.G., 2009. Miracles et physique surnaturelle: Les relations entre la science et la religion selon Simone Weil. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 3, pp. 291–307.

Murdoch, I., 1971. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London & New York: Routledge.

Murdoch, I., 2003. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London: Vintage.

Musgrave, D., 2004. Living Dust. In: *Living Dust*. Exhibition catalogue. Norwich Gallery, Norwich, 30th September – 30th October 2004, pp. 10–15.

Narcy, M., 2003. Le dualism chez Alain, Simone Weil et Simone Pétrement. In: M. Calle & E. Gruber, eds. 2003. *Simone Weil: La passion de la raison*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 237–253.

Neil, J.T.D., 2010. The Pedagogical Impulse. *Art Review*, March 2010, 39, pp. 94–97.

Nicolle, A., 2009. *La trolesse*. Paris: Docteur angélique.

Ogden, C.K. & Richards, I.A., 1989. *The Meaning of Meaning*. San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Online Etymology Dictionary. [Online] Available at: http://www.etymonline.com [Accessed 5th February 2010].

Paprzycka, P., 2007. *Logic Self-Taught: A Workbook*. [Internet] Available at: http://www.filozofia.uw.edu.pl [Accessed 17th January 2009].

Patrizio, A., 2003. Perspicuous by their absence: the drawings of Claude Heath. In: A. Kingston, ed. 2003. *What is drawing?* London: Black Dog Publishing.

Peirce, C.S., 1998. *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*. N. Houser et al., eds. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Pétrement, S., 1976. *Simone Weil: A Life*. London & Oxford: Mowbrays.

Piper, A., 1996. *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, *Vol 1*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Pirruccello, A., 1995. Interpreting Simone Weil: Presence and Absence in Attention. *Philosophy East & West*, (45) 1, pp. 61–74.

Plato, 1993. *Republic*. Translated from Greek by R. Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Plato, 1997. *The Complete Works*. Translated from Greek by J. Barnes et al. J.M Cooper, ed. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett.

Priest, G., 2008. Dialetheism. [Online] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University. Available at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dialetheism [Accessed 9th February 2010].

Proust, M., 1992. *Du côté de chez Swann*. Paris: Libraire Général Française.

Proust, M., 2002. *The Way by Swann's*. Translated from French by L. Davis. London: Penguin.

Ravaisson, F., 2008. *Of Habit*. Translated from French by C. Carlisle & M. Sinclair. London: Continuum.

Rawson, P., 1987. *Drawing*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rey, O., 2009. Une science qui aimerait le monde. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 2, pp. 189–199.

Reynolds, P.A., 1939. Implication and Circularity in Descartes. *The Philosophical Review*, (48) 4, pp. 423–427.

Rey Puente, F., 2007. *Simone Weil et la Grèce*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Rey Puente, F., 2009. La science grecque comme paradigme d'une science nouvelle. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (32) 3, pp. 281–290.

Rhees, R., 2000. *Discussions of Simone Weil*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Roberts, R. et al. eds. 2005. *New Hart's Rules*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruelle, D., 2000. *Conversation on Mathematics with a Visitor from Outer Space*. [Online] Available at: *www.ihes.fr/~ruelle/PUBLICATIONS/126imu.ps* [Accessed 12th February 2010].

Ruskin, J., 1971. *The Elements of Drawing*. New York: Dover Publications.

Sabin, A.S., 1996. *The Gregg Reference Manual*. 8th ed. Westerville, Ohio: Clencoe & McGraw-Hill.

Sacks, O., 2008. *Musicophilia*. London: Picador.

Safran, Y., 1993. The Condition of Gravity is Grace. In: *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965 – 1975*. Exhibition Catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London, 21st January – 14th March 1993, pp. 38–41.

References

Saint Simone Weil T-Shirt, 2000. [Online] Available at: http://www.zazzle.co.uk/saint_simone_weil_tshirt-235064593658214827 [Accessed 25th February 2010].

Sambursky, S., 1959. *Physics of the Stoics*. London & New York: Routledge.

Sayej, N., 2006. Terms and Conditions: Selling Tino Sehgal. *ArtUS*, 15, pp. 20–23.

Seth, V., 1986. *The Golden Gate*. London: Faber and Faber.

Sgualdini, S., 2009. The Objectives of the Object: An Interview with Tino Sehgal. [Online] *E-cart*, 6. Available at: http://www.e-cart.ro/ec-6/silvia/uk/g/silvia_uk.html [Accessed 27th May 2009].

Singer, P., 1993. *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sin Podium: Speaking of Writing, 2009. [Online] Reading: The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading. Available at: http://sinpodium.wordpress.com [Accessed 18th February 2009].

Smullyan, R.M., 1977. *The Tao is Silent*. New York: HarperCollins.

Sorell, T., 1987. *Descartes: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Spinoza, B., 1996. *Ethics*. Translated from Latin by E. Curley. London: Penguin.

Springsted, E.O., 1996a. Introduction to *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil*. In: J.M. Dunaway & E.O. Springsted, eds. 1996. *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, pp. xi–xvi.

Springsted, E.O., 1996b. Rootedness: culture and value. In: R.H. Bell, ed. 1996. *Simone Weil's Philosophy of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 161–188.

Stebbing, L.S., 1952. *A Modern Elementary Logic*. London: Methuen & Co.

Sturma, L., 1987. Flannery O'Connor, Simone Weil and the Virtue of Necessity. *Studies in Literary Imagination*, (20) 2, pp. 109–121.

The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, 1974. [Film] Directed by Werner Herzog. Werner Herzog Film Production.

Thompson, J., 1993. New Times, New Thoughts, New Sculpture. In: *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965 – 1975*. Exhibition Catalogue. Hayward Gallery, London, 21st January – 14th March 1993, pp. 11–36.

Vetö, M., 1994. *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*. Translated from French by J. Dargan. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Volkoff, V., 1996. What Simone Weil Has Meant to Me. In: J.M. Dunaway & E.O. Springsted, eds. 1996. *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, pp. xi–xvi.

Von Arnim, H., 2006. *Stoici antichi. Tutti i frammenti*. Translated from Greek and Latin by R. Radice. Milano: Bompiani.

Von Der Rhur, M., 2006. *Simone Weil: An Apprenticeship in Attention*. London: Continuum.

Wallace, B.A., 2000. *The Taboo of Subjetivity: Towards a New Science of Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wee, C., 2006. Descartes and Leibniz on Human Free-Will and the Ability to Do Otherwise. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, (36) 3, pp. 387–414.

Weil, S., 1949. *L'enracinement*. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1951. *Cahiers, Vol. 1*. Paris: Plon.

Weil, S., 1951. *Lettre à un religieux*. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1953. *Cahiers, Vol. 2*. Paris: Plon.

Weil, S., 1959. *Leçons de philosophie*. Paris: Plon.

Weil, S., 1966. *Attente de Dieu*. Paris: Fayard.

Weil, S., 1966. *Sur la science*. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1985. *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*. Paris: Fayard.

Weil, S., 1988. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 1 : Premiers écrits philosophiques*. G. Kahn & R. Kühn, eds. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1994. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 1 1933–septembre 1941*. A. Degrâces, P. Kaplan, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1997. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 2 : La science et l'impensable*. A. Degrâces, M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 1999. *Lezioni di filosofia*. Translated from French by L. Nocentini. Milano: Adelphi.

Weil, S., 2001. *Waiting for God*. Translated from French by E. Craufurd. New York: Perennial Classics.

Weil, S., 2002. *La condition ouvrière*. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 2002. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated from French by E. Crawford & M. Von Der Ruhr. London & New York: Routledge.

Weil, S., 2002. *Letter to a Priest*. Translated from French by A.F. Willis. London & New York: Routledge.

Weil, S., 2002. *L'ombra e la grazia*. Translated from French by F. Fortini. Milano: Bompiani.

Weil, S., 2002. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 3 : La porte du transcendant*. A. Degrâces, M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & M. Narcy, eds. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 2002. *The Need for Roots*. Translated from French by A.F. Willis. London & New York: Routledge.

Weil, S., 2005. *Intimations of Christianity amongst the Ancient Greeks*. Translated from French by E.C. Geissbuhler. London & New York: Routledge.

Weil, S., 2006. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers*, *Vol. 4 : La connaissance surnaturelle*. M-A. Fourneyron, F. De Lussy & J. Riaud, eds. Paris: Gallimard.

Weil, S., 2008. *Œuvres complètes, Tome 4, Vol. 1 : Écrits de Marseille (1940 – 1942), Philosophie, science, religion, questions politiques et sociales*. R. Chenavier, ed. Paris: Gallimard.

Williston, B., 1999. *Akrasia* and the Passions in Descartes. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, (7) 1, pp. 33–35.

Wilson, M., ca. 2007. Ten after Ten in Samoa: The Art of Lizzie Hughes. [Online] Available at: http://www.lizziehughes.net/Text.html [Accessed 7th August 2010].

Winch, P., 1989. *Simone Weil: The Just Balance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wittgenstein, L., 1966. *Lectures and Conversations*. C. Barrett, ed. Malden, Oxford & Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.

Wittgenstein, L., 1993. *Philosophical Occasions 1912 – 1951*. J.C. Klagge & A. Nordmann, eds. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett.

Wittgenstein, L., 1999. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated from German by C.K. Ogden. New York: Dover Publications.

Wittgenstein, L., 2001. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated from German by G.E.M. Anscombe. Malden, Oxford & Victoria: Blackwell.

Zippel, E., 1994. Conseils à l'artiste contemporain. *Cahiers Simone Weil*, (17) 1, pp. 11–21.

Appendix 1: Original texts

14 'Les lycéens, les étudiants qui aiment Dieu ne devraient jamais dire : « Moi, j'aime les mathématiques », « Moi, j'aime le français », « Moi, j'aime le grec ». Ils doivent apprendre à aimer tout cela, parce que tout cela fait croître cette attention qui, orientée vers Dieu, est la substance même de la prière.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 86.) 'Il faut donc étudier sans aucun désir d'obtenir de bonnes notes, de réussir aux examens, d'obtenir aucun résultat scolaire, sans aucun égard aux goûts ni aux aptitudes naturelles, en s'appliquant pareillement à tous les exercices, dans la pensée qu'ils servent tous à former cette attention qui est la substance de la prière.' (Ibid., p. 88.) 'En dehors même de toute croyance religieuse explicite, toutes les fois que un être humain accomplit un effort d'attention avec le seul désir de devenir plus apte à saisir la vérité, il acquiert cette aptitude plus grande, même si son effort n'a produit aucun fruit.' (Ibid., pp. 87–88.)

15 'Quand un artiste est amoureux de son sujet, le résultat ne sera que médiocre. … En pratiquant aux moments de sa création, l'artiste [de génie] fait abstraction de soi-même.' (Zippel,1994, p. 13.) 'Les premières œuvres d'un artiste sont souvent d'une génialité surprenante. Cette génialité s'épuise avec expérience et se dégrade en répétitions si l'attention n'est pas constamment présente' (Ibid., p. 15).

16 'la parola svela instantaneamente a quale grado di attenzione sia nata.' (Campo, 1987, p. 169.)

18 'Si on cherche avec véritable attention la solution d'un problème de géométrie, et si, au bout d'une heure, on n'est pas plus avancé qu'en commençant, on a néanmoins avancé … dans une autre dimension plus mystérieuse. … Cet effort en apparence stérile et sans fruit a mis plus de lumière dans l'âme. … Les certitudes de cette espèce sont expérimentales.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 86–87.) 'La pensée humaine et l'univers constituent ainsi les livres révélés par excellence, si l'attention éclairée par l'amour et la foi sait les déchiffrer. Leur lecture constitue une preuve, et même l'unique preuve certaine. Après avoir lu l'*Iliade* en grec, nul ne songerait à se demander si le professeur qui lui a appris l'alphabet grec ne l'a pas trompé.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 171.)

20 'Dans la mesure où l'attention individuelle n'est nullement convoquée, l'esprit se détourne de la réalité extérieure et se renferme sur lui-meme' (Jiménez Ruiz, 2010, p52).

25 'Simone Weil n'a cessé de dénoncer *la tendance de toute collectivité à fabriquer du mensonge*, que Platon traduit par le fait de caresser le «gros animal » dans le sens du poil. Simone Weil, qui se méfie de ce qu'elle appelle « *la chose sociale* », assure qu'on peut la reconnaître à un signe certain : c'est ce qui di « NOUS ». « Nous », c'est le refus de penser par soi-même, de remettre en question les idées et les croyances. Avec quelle facilité

l'individu se noie dans la pensée collective.' 'Une approche authentique de la religion serait ainsi d'apprendre d'abord à sentir ce lien qui, *dans le secret*, nous relie à un ordre du monde dans l'univers (le macrocosme) qui est aussi en nous (microcosme)…' (Nicolle, 2009, pp. 47–48).

52 'syntaxe compliquée et parfois elliptique', 'expressions et allusions énigmatique' (Edl & Matz, 1994, p. 7).

53 'Le mode d'action politique esquissé ici exige que chaque choix soit précédé par la contemplation simultanée des plusieurs considérations d'espèce très différentes. Cela implique un dégrée d'attention élevé, à peu près du même ordre que celui qui est exigé par le travail créateur dans l'art et la science.' (Weil, *E*, p. 273.)

54 'Essayer de remédier aux faute par l'attention et non par la volonté. La volonté n'a de prise que sur quelques mouvements de quelques muscles … Je peux vouloir mettre ma main à plat sur la table. Si la pureté intérieure, ou l'inspiration, ou la vérité dans la pensée étaient nécessairement associées à des attitudes de ce genre, elle pourraient être objet de volonté.' (Weil, *OG*, p. 208.)

55 'Mauvaise manière de chercher. L'attention attachée à un problème. Encore un phénomène d'horreur du vide. On ne veut pas avoir perdu son effort. … Il ne faut pas vouloir trouver' (Weil, *OG*, p. 210).

57 'Pour ... faire ce qu'on veut, il faut ne faire que ce qu'on veut.' (Alain, 1990, p. 240.)

60 'Le devoir d'acceptation à l'égard de la volonté de Dieu, quelle qu'elle puisse être, s'est imposé à mon esprit comme le premier et le plus nécessaire de tous, celui auquel on ne peut manquer sans se déshonorer, dès que je l'ai trouvé dans Marc-Aurèle sous la forme de l'*amor fati* stoïcien.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 40.)

62 'L'univers tout entier n'est pas autre chose qu'une masse compacte d'obéissance.' (Weil. *IPC*, p. 161.)

63 'connexions nécessaires, lesquelles constituent la réalité même du monde' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 154).

67 'On perd la notion de nécessité quand on cherche anxieusement un objet perdu urgent ; mais quand on cherche méthodiquement, il appairaît la nécessité que la chose ne se trouve pas là où on a cherché, qu'on doit la trouver à tel endroit si elle y est.' (Weil, *LP*, pp. 96–97.)

68 'Ne nous faisons donc aucun scrupule d'imiter, en commentant Descartes, la ruse cartésienne. Comme Descartes, pour former des idées justes au sujet du monde où nous

vivons, a imaginé un autre monde, qui commencerait par une sorte de chaos, de même imaginons un autre Descartes, un Descartes ressuscité.' (Weil, *S*, p. 47.)

76 'Plaisir et peine ne sont-ils pas sans mélange l'un de l'autre ... Même me blesser, c'est avant tout goûter ce plaisir qui est comme la saveur de ma propre existence. La présence du monde est avant tout pour moi ce sentiment ambigu.' (Weil, *S*, pp. 49–50.)

77 'Je ne puis donc rien dire du monde. Je ne puis dire : cette épine me fait mal au doigt, ni même : j'ai mal au doigt, ni même : j'ai mal.' (Ibid., p. 50.)

79 'Les impressions me servent d'intermédiaires pour subir le monde.' (Ibid., p. 69.)

80 'Je puis admettre que cette table, ce papier, cette plume, ce bien-être et moi-même ne sont que des choses que je pense ... Je les pense, elles ont besoin de moi pour être pensées. ... Et par cette puissance de pensée, qui ne se révèle encore à moi que par la puissance de douter, je sais que je suis.' (Ibid., pp. 54–55.)

81 'Je connais ce que je fais, est ce que je fais, c'est penser et c'est exister.' (Ibid., p. 55.)

82 'Tout pouvoir réel est infini.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

84 'S'il n'existe que moi, il n'existe que cette puissance absolue ... Je suis Dieu, car cette même domination souveraine que j'exerçais sur moi négativement quand je m'interdisais de juger, je dois en ce cas l'exercer positivement, concernant la matière de mon jugement ; c'est-à-dire que rêves, désirs, émotions, sensations, raisonnements, idées ou calculs ne doivent être que mes vouloirs.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

85 'Ma souveraineté sur moi, absolue tant que je ne veux que suspendre ma pensée, disparaît dès qu'il s'agit de me donner une chose à penser.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

86 'Il existe donc autre chose que moi.' (Ibid., p. 60.)

87 'Connaître, jusqu'ici, n'a pas été autre chose pour moi que de rendre compte d'une pensée.' (Ibid., p. 69.)

88 'Le monde, sans dépendre de moi, n'est pas non plus une emprise inexplicable sur moi, mais bien ... l'obstacle.' (Ibid., p. 68.) 'Je dois ruser, je dois m'empêcher moi-même par des obstacles qui me mènent où je veux.' (Ibid., p. 84.)

89 'lien d'action et de réaction entre le monde et ma pensée' (Ibid., p. 71).

91 'Quand je compte ces même choses à l'occasion desquelles l'imagination règne en moi, je rencontre une idée d'une autre espèce, qui ne s'impose pas à moi, qui n'existe que par un acte de mon attention, que je ne puis changer … Cette idée du nombre, et celles qui lui

ressemblent, je trouve qu'elles replacent pour ainsi dire les changements sans règle auquel les autres son sujettes par un progrès dont elles sont le principe.' (Ibid., p. 75.)

93 'Il n'y a plus de contradiction entre ... idéalisme et réalisme ... tout l'esprit est en acte dans l'application de la pensée à un objet.' (Weil, *S*, pp. 97–98.)

95 'Une orientation de l'âme vers quelque chose qu'on ne connaît pas, mais dont on connaît la réalité. Ainsi il m'est venu une pensée qui me paraît importante. Je n'ai pas de quoi la noter. Je me promets de m'en souvenir. Deux heures après, il me vient à l'esprit que j'ai à me souvenir d'une pensée. Je ne sais plus du tout laquelle, ni même de quoi il s'agit. J'oriente mon attention vers ce chose dont je sais qu'elle est, mais dont je ne sais pas du tous ce qu'elle est. Cette attention à vide peut durer plusieurs minutes. Puis (dans le meilleur des cas) cela vient.' (Weil, *C 2*, p. 291.)

96 'C'est la montagne elle-même qui, de là-bas, se fait voir du peintre' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 21).

99 'Nous ne verrons pas, chez Simone Weil, de franche rupture entre les écrits de jeunesse et ceux de la maturité … La plupart des sujets philosophiques sur lesquels elle écrivait dans les années quarante figuraient au centre de ces préoccupations dès les années vingt : les problèmes de la nécessité, du temps, de l'attention, de la finalité sans fin … La clef de l'interprétation de la pensée de Simone Weil réside dans … la « distinction des niveaux ». … Lire n'est pas remplacer un texte par un autre, une réalité par une autre, en délaissant les niveaux inferieures au profit du niveau supérieure. Le monde n'est pas un rébus dont la traduction « au bon niveau » tiendrait lieu de réalité' (Chenavier, 2001, pp. 32–34).

100 'Comme un enfant apprend l'exercice des sens, la connaissance sensible, la perception des choses qui l'entourent, comme plus tard il acquiert les mécanismes de transfert analogues qui sont liés à la lecture ou a la sensibilité nouvelle qui accompagne le maniement des outils, de même l'amour de Dieu implique un apprentissage … Un enfant sait d'abord que chaque lettre correspond à un son. Plus tard, en jetant les yeux sur un papier, le son d'un mot lui entre directement dans la pensée par les yeux.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 170.)

102 'Le bâton de l'aveugle, exemple trouvé par Descartes, fournit une image analogue à celle de la lecture. Chacun peut se convaincre en maniant un porte-plume que le toucher est comme transporté au bout de la plume. Si la plume se heurte à quelque inégalité dans le papier, ce heurt de la plume est immédiatement donné, et les sensations des doigts, de la main, à travers lesquelles nous le lisons, n'apparaissent même pas. Pourtant ce heurt de la plume, c'est seulement quelque chose que nous lisons. Le ciel, la mer, le soleil, les étoiles, les êtres humains, tout ce qui nous entoure est de même quelque chose que nous lisons. Ce qu'on nomme une illusion des sens corrigée, c'est une lecture modifiée.' (Ibid., p. 7.) 'La

perception des objets au bout d'un bâton ou d'un instrument est autre que le toucher proprement dit. Cet autre sens se forme par un déplacement de l'attention au moyen d'un apprentissage où l'âme tout entière et le corps ont part.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 337.)

103 'Dans la perception normale il y a déjà géométrie. Donc, il n'y aura pas à s'étonner s'il y a imagination dans la géométrie puisqu'il y a déjà imagination dans la perception.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 50.)

104 'Si le soir, dans un chemin solitaire, je crois voir au lieu d'un arbre un homme embusqué, une présence humaine et menaçante s'impose à moi, et ... me fait frémir avant même que je sache de quoi il s'agit; je m'approche, et soudain tout est autre, je ne frémis plus, je lis un arbre et non un homme. Il n'y a pas une apparence et une interprétation ; une présence humaine avait pénétré par mes yeux jusqu'à mon âme, et maintenant, soudain, la présence d'un arbre. ... Esther s'avançant vers Assuérus ne s'avance pas vers un homme dont elle sait qu'il peut la mettre à mort ; elle s'avance vers la majesté même, la terreur même, qui par la vue lui atteignent l'âme, est c'est pourquoi l'effort de marcher la fait ainsi défaillir. Elle le dit d'ailleurs; ce qu'elle contemple avec crainte, ce n'est pas le front d'Assuérus, c'est la majesté qui y empreinte et qu'elle y lit. On parle généralement en pareil cas d'un effet d'imagination ; mais peut-être vaut-il mieux employer le mot de lecture.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 76.)

105 'Deux femmes reçoivent chacune une lettre, annonçant à chacune que son fils est mort; la première, au premier coup d'œil jeté sur le papier, s'évanouit ... La seconde reste la même, son regard, son attitude ne changent pas ; elle ne sait pas lire. Ce n'est pas la sensation, c'est la signification qui a saisit la première, en atteignant l'esprit immédiatement, brutalement, sans sa participation, comme les sensations saisissent. Tout se passe comme si la douleur résidait dans la lettre, et de la lettre sautait au visage de qui lit. Quant aux sensations elles-mêmes, telles que la couleur du papier, de l'encre, elles n'apparaissent même pas. Ce qui est donné à la vue, c'est la douleur.' (Ibid., p. 74.) 'A chaque instant de notre vie nous sommes saisis comme du dehors par les significations que nous lisons nous-mêmes dans les apparences. Aussi peut-on discuter sans fin sur la réalité du monde extérieur. Car ce que nous appelons le monde, ce sont des significations que nous lisons ; cela n'est donc pas réel. Mais cela nous saisit comme du dehors ; cela est donc réel.' (Ibid., pp. 74–75.) 'En un sens il ne nous est donné que des sensations ; en un sens nous ne pouvons jamais, en aucun cas, penser autre chose que des sensations. Mais en un sens nous ne pouvons jamais penser les sensations. Nous pensons seulement quelque chose à travers elles. Nous lisons à travers elles.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411.) 'Il est admis communément aujourd'hui, même par ceux qui ne connaissent pas bien les preuves, que le soleil est fort éloigné de nous, beaucoup plus que la lune, quoique leurs grandeurs apparentes soient à peu près les mêmes, comme cela est

sensible dans les éclipses. On ne peut donc soutenir que l'objet que nous appelons soleil, le vrai soleil, soit cette boule éblouissante; autant vaudrait dire que le vrai soleil est cette douleur de l'œil quand nous le regardons imprudemment. Il faut donc rechercher comment on est arrive à poser ce vrai soleil, que personne ne peut voir ni imaginer, pas plus que je ne puis voir le cube que je sais pourtant être un cube. J'en vois des signes, comme je vois des signes du vrai soleil ... L'objet est pensé, et non pas senti.' (Alain, 1990, pp. 59–60.)

106 'Toute notre vie est faite du même tissu, de significations qui s'imposent successivement'. (Weil, *OC IV, 1* p. 78.)

107 'Il n'y a pas une apparence et une interprétation ; une présence humaine avait pénétré par mes yeux jusqu'à mon âme, et maintenant, soudain, la présence d'un arbre.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 76.) 'Donc, espace, relief, formes nous sont donnés par notre imagination. Bien entendu, dans ce cas-là, «imagination» n'est pas du tout synonyme de fantaisie ou d'arbitraire : quand nous voyons deux points nous ne sommes par libres de voir autre chose qu'une droite.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 49.)

112 'Indirectement, et avec le temps, la volonté, et surtout l'attention, et surtout l'attention sous forme de prière, aboutissent à une modification dans la lecture. Ce qui est alors changé est l'imagination.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411.)

113 'On ne choisit pas les sensations, mais, dans une large mesure, on choisit ce qu'on sent à travers elles ; non pas en un moment, mais par un apprentissage.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 410.)

114 'La perception des objets au bout d'un bâton ou d'un instrument est autre que le toucher proprement dit. Cet autre sens se forme par un déplacement de l'attention au moyen d'un apprentissage où l'âme tout entière et le corps ont part.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 337.)

115 'Un homme tenté de s'approprier un dépôt ne s'en abstiendra pas simplement parce qu'il aura lu la *Critique de la raison pratique* ; il s'en abstiendra, peut-être même, lui semblera-t-il, malgré lui, si l'aspect même du dépôt semble lui crier qu'il doit être restitué. Chacun a éprouvé des états semblables, où il semble qu'on voudrait mal agir, mais qu'on ne peut pas. D'autres fois, on voudrait bien agir, mais on ne peut pas. … Le problème de valeur posé autour de cette notion de lecture a rapport au vrai et au beau comme au bien, sans qu'il soit possible de les séparer.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 79.)

116 'L'attention se définit … chez Simone Weil, non pas par la juxtaposition de la perception et de la réflexivité, mais dans cette forme parfaite de synthèse qui mène jusqu'au point où il devient impossible de les distinguer. On comprend dès lors assez bien l'intérêt porté par Simone Weil à la lecture dans la mesure où elle est exemplaire d'une telle synthèse. On ne met pas l'attention au service de la lecture, mais on se doit faire soi-même

attention pour accéder à une lecture qui, si elle est authentique, ne saurait nous laisser indemne.' (Lecerf, 2006, p. 64.) 'dirigere bene l'attenzione oltre l'apparenza delle cose e degli eventi, per predisporla ad orientarsi nell'infinità di simboli che il cosmo offre alla *lettura*.' (Marianelli, 2004, p. 92.)

117 'Un mot vient souvent sous la plume de Simone Weil quand elle évoque l'attention. C'est le mot *lecture*. Par lecture, il faut entendre lire l'autre, le comprendre.' (Molard, 2008, p. 88.)

119 'Les textes dont les apparences sont les caractères s'emparent de mon âme, l'abandonnent, sont remplacés par d'autres ; valent-ils mieux les uns que les autres ? Sont-ils plus vrais les uns que les autres ? Où trouver une norme ?' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 78.)

123 'où ma pensée, s'efforçant pendant des heures de se disloquer, de s'étirer en hauteur pour prendre exactement la forme de la chambre et arriver à remplir jusqu'en haut son gigantesque entonnoir, avait souffert bien de dures nuits , tandis que j'étais étendu dans mon lit, les yeux levés, l'oreille anxieuse, la narine rétive, le cœur battant : jusqu'à ce l'habitude eût changé la couleur des rideaux, fait taire la pendule, enseigné la pitié à la glace oblique et cruelle, dissimulé, sinon chassé complètement, l'odeur du vétiver et notablement diminué la hauteur apparente du plafond.' (Proust, 1992, pp. 50–51.)

124 'L'habitude transforme en mouvements instinctifs les mouvements volontaires. … Ainsi les organes s'habituent tellement aux mouvements qu'exigent un exercice violent ou un travail pénible, qu'ils deviennent pour longtemps incapables de mouvements plus doux.' (Ravaisson, 2008, p. 58.)

128 'L'univers tout entier n'est pas autre chose qu'une masse compacte d'obéissance. Cette masse compacte est parsemée de point lumineux. Chacun de ces points est la partie surnaturelle de l'âme d'une créature raisonnable qui aime Dieu et qui consent à obéir. Le reste de l'âme est pris dans la masse compacte.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 161.)

129 'tout entiers obéissance, mais seulement à la manière d'une pierre qui tombe'. (Weil, *IPC*, p. 162.)

140 'La vrai philosophie ne construit rien ; sont objet lui est donné, ce sont nos pensées ; elle en fait seulement l'inventaire ; si au cours de l'inventaire elle trouve des contradictions, il ne dépend pas d'elle de les supprimer sous peine de mentir. Les philosophes qui essaient de construire des systèmes pour éliminer ces contradictions sont ceux qui justifient en apparence l'opinion que la philosophie est quelque chose de conjectural ; car de tels systèmes peuvent être variés à l'infini, et il n'y a aucune raison d'en choisir un plutôt qu'un autre.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 59–60.)

141 'L'émotion provoque toujours l'attention spontanée (peur, horreur, etc…) Signes psychologiques : on ne peut plus penser à autre chose. Signes physiologiques : immobilité, raideur, respiration arrêtée.' (Weil, *LP*, pp. 264–265.)

142 'Il y a deux manières de faire attention, qui correspondent, l'une à l'adresse, l'autre à la maladresse. En réalité, le maladroit ne sait pas faire attention. Il est fasciné par l'obstacle comme l'oiseau par le serpent. Lorsque notre corps n'est pas formé, nous faisons attention aux actions que nous devons éviter. L'apprenti cycliste, par exemple, fait attention aux maladresses qu'il peut faire et il les fait. La bonne volonté chez les débutants se traduise en raideur.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.) 'Un apprenti cycliste a peur d'un obstacle ; il ne pense qu'à l'éviter, mais il pense justement tellement que ses mains conduisent le guidon exactement dans la direction de l'obstacle. Le caractère essentiel de ce phénomène consiste en ce que le cycliste transporte dans l'objet même la résistance qu'oppose son propre corps à son désir.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 33.)

143 'L'état de l'apprenti est en réalité l'état où l'on a conscience, mais on ne peut pas faire attention. L'attention de l'apprenti est toujours négative.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 386.)

147 'L'intelligence attentive a seule la vertu d'opérer les connexions, et dès que l'attention se détend les connexions se dissolvent. … Les connexions nécessaires, lesquelles constituent la réalité même du monde, n'ont-elles-mêmes de réalité que comme objet de l'attention intellectuelle en acte.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 154.)

148 'Cet exemple peut nous faire concevoir ce que peuvent être pour moi les changements d'un monde qui ne me fait impression que par l'intermédiaire de l'imagination. Pour peu que Protée change, toute trace de l'état immédiatement précédent est aussitôt abolie' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 122). 'C'est le règne de Protée, c'est à dire de la chose qui se transforme par une puissance intérieure, et sans continuité.' (Ibid., p. 127.) 'Il y a une part d'imagination en toute perception' (Ibid., p. 128.) 'L'imagination est nécessairement conservée en toute perception. Pourtant ... l'on peut distinguer des degrés dans la perception selon que l'imagination y est plus ou moins surmontée ; et une série peut être ainsi formée, dont le premier terme sera l'imagination pure, ou rêve, le second terme, l'imagination réglée, qui constitue ce que l'on peut appeler perception vulgaire ; le troisième terme est la parfaite perception, ou l'imagination absolument surmontée.' (Ibid., p. 129.)

149 'Il y a pour chaque exercice scolaire une manière spécifique d'attendre la vérité avec désir et sans se permettre de la chercher. Une manière de faire attention aux données d'un problème de géométrie sans en chercher la solution, aux mots d'un texte de latin ou grec sans en chercher le sens, d'attendre, quand on écrit, que le mot juste vienne de lui-même se placer sous la plume en repoussant seulement les mots insuffisants.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 94.)

'L'attention est un effort, le plus grands des efforts peut-être, mais c'est un effort négatif. Par lui-même il ne comporte pas de fatigue.' (Ibid., p. 92.)

150 'On peut analyser l'attention qu'on porte à un problème de géométrie, à la dissertation du moment. Signes psychologiques : calme. … Dans l'attention volontaire on s'empêche sans cesse soi-même de se raidir, on empêche sans cesse l'attention volontaire de se transformer en attention spontanée.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 265.) 'Le plus souvent on confond avec l'attention une espèce d'effort musculaire. Si on dit à des élèves : « Maintenant vous allez faire attention », on les voit froncer les sourcils, retenir la respiration, contracter les muscles. Si après deux minutes on leur demande à quoi ils font attention, ils ne peuvent pas répondre. Ils n'ont pas fait attention à rien. Ils n'ont pas fait attention. Ils ont contracté leurs muscles.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 90.)

151 'Aucun rapport entre les mouvements naturellement joints au désir et à l'imagination de tel ou tel changement dans la matière et les mouvements efficaces pour accomplir ce changement.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 237.)

152 'la *noesis* intuitive et dialectique ... [et] la *dianoia* discursive et hypothétique ' (Janiaud, 2002, p. 69.)

153 'L'attention supérieure est, selon elle, non pas discursive or rationnelle, mais bien intuitive : elle est comme une perception directe du surnaturel.' (Ibid., p. 69.)

154 'L'attention empiriste serait trop indifférente à son objet, l'attention intellectualiste trop savante … Simone Weil se rattache d'abord à l'intellectualisme par sa dette envers Descartes et Alain : la géométrie est présente en toute perception, et le sommeil de la conscience n'est qu'un manque d'attention. Mais la puissance qu'elle accorde dans ses premiers écrits à l'esprit humain, déjà tempérée par l'épreuve de la matière dans le travail, est nettement remise en cause par la suite. L'attention peut nous ouvrir à une réalité vraiment surprenante, que l'esprit ne maitrise pas.' (Janiaud, 2002, p. 123.)

155 'Ces « lectures superposées » et articulées constitue peu à peu le réseau de l'ontologie de Simone Weil … le franchissement d'un seuil, plusieurs fois, sans changer de direction, chaque niveau trouvant son sens et sa valeur dans un changement du régime de l'attention.' (Chenavier, 2001, p. 35.)

156 'Nous, par l'attention intellectuelle, nous ne créons certes pas, nous ne produisons aucune chose, mais pourtant dans notre sphère nous suscitons en quelque sorte de la réalité. Cette attention intellectuelle est à l'intersection de la partie naturelle et de la partie surnaturelle de l'âme. Ayant pour objet la nécessité conditionnelle, elle ne suscite qu'une demi-réalité. Nous conférons aux choses et aux êtres autour de nous, autant qu'il est en nous,

la plénitude de la réalité, quand à l'attention intellectuelle nous ajoutons cette attention encore supérieure qui est acceptation, consentement, amour.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 155.)

157 'Dieu est l'acceptation sans distraction. Il faut imiter l'attente et l'humilité de Dieu. ... C'est dans le temps que nous avons notre moi. L'acceptation du temps et de tout ce qu'il peut apporter – sans aucune exception – (*amor fati*) – c'est la seule disposition de l'âme qui soit inconditionnée par rapport au temps.' (Weil, *OC VI 4*, p. 185.) 'Il vuoto, la condizione di rinuncia all'appropriazione del mondo, mette l'anima umana in un atteggiamento di attesa, di attenzione verso il Totalmente Altro ... l'adesione totale, attenzione pura' (Carta Macaluso, 2003, p106). 'Il faut donc avoir, d'après elle, une immense capacité d'attention pour pouvoir contempler en face la nécessité, une attention qu'elle conçoit comme amour' (Rey Puente, 2007, p. 132).

161 'La musique se déroulant dans le temps capture l'attention et l'enlève au temps en la portant à chaque instant sur ce qui est. L'attente est attente à vide et attente de l'immédiat.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 268.) 'Savoir que rien de ce monde qu'on touche, entend, voit, etc., rien de ce qu'on se représente, rien de ce qu'on pense n'est le bien. Si on pense Dieu, ce n'est pas le bien non plus. Tout ce que nous pensons est imparfait comme nous, et l'imparfait n'est pas le bien. ... Le bien est pour nous un néant, puisque aucune chose n'est bonne. Mais ce néant n'est pas encore non-être, n'est pas irréel. Tout ce qui existe comparé à lui est irréel. Ce néant est au moins aussi réel que nous. Car nôtre être même n'est pas autre chose que ce besoin du bien. Le bien absolu est tout entier dans ce besoin. Mais nous ne pouvons pas aller l'y prendre. Nous pouvons seulement aimer à vide.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, pp. 190–191.)

162 'Quand nous ne voyons pas, quand la réalité de Dieu n'est rendue sensible à aucune partie de notre âme, alors, pour aimer Dieu, if faut vraiment se transporter hors de soi. C'est cela aimer Dieu. Pour cela il faut avoir constamment le regard tourné vers Dieu, sans jamais bouger. ... Il faut être tout à fait immobile. Rester immobile ne veut pas dire s'abstenir de l'action. ... Il y a un effort à faire qui est loin le plus dur de tous, mais il ne pas du domaine de l'action.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 274.) 'Le seul choix qui s'offre a l'homme, c'est d'attacher ou non son amour ici-bas. Qu'il refuse d'attacher son amour ici-bas, et qu'il reste immobile, sans chercher, sans bouger, en attente, sans même savoir ce qu'il attend. Il est absolument sûr que Dieu fera tout le chemin jusqu'à lui.' (Ibid., p. 278.) 'La clef d'une conception chrétienne des études c'est que la prière est faite d'attention. C'est l'orientation vers Dieu de toute l'attention dont l'âme est capable. ... Seule la partie plus haute de l'attention entre en contact avec Dieu, quand la prière est assez intense et pure qu'un tel contact s'établisse.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 85.)

164 'Si l'on descend en soi, on trouve qu'on a exactement ce qu'on désire. Si l'on désire tel être (mort), on désire un être particulier ; c'est donc nécessairement un mortel, et on désire cet être-là, cet être qui…, que…, etc., bref, cet être qui est mort, tel jour, à telle heure. Et on l'a - mort. … La souffrance, le vide sont en de tels cas le mode d'existence des objets du désir. Qu'on écarte le voile d'irréalité et on verra qu'ils nous sont donnés ainsi. Quand on le voit, on souffre encore, mais on est heureux.' (Weil, *OG*, p. 42.)

168 'Comme on apprend à lire, comme on apprend un métier, de même on apprend à sentir en toutes choses, avant tout et presque uniquement, l'obéissance de l'univers à Dieu. C'est vraiment un apprentissage. Comme tout apprentissage, il demande des efforts et du temps. … Pour qui a achevé l'apprentissage, les choses et les événements, partout, toujours, sont la vibration de la même parole divine infiniment douce. La douleur est la coloration de certains événements. Devant une phrase écrite à l'encre rouge, celui qui sait lire et celui qui ne sait pas voient pareillement du rouge ; mais la coloration n'a pas la même importance pour l'un et pour l'autre.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 356.)

169 'Quand on a compris jusqu'au fond de l'âme que la nécessité est seulement une des faces de la beauté, l'autre face étant le bien, alors tout ce qui rend la nécessité sensible, contrariétés, douleurs, peines, obstacles, devient une raison supplémentaire d'aimer.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 36.)

170 'On ne pourrait jamais prouver qu'une chose aussi absurde que le consentement à la nécessité soit possible. On peut seulement le constater. Il y a en fait des âmes qui consentent.' (Ibid., p. 150.)

176 'La perception n'est jamais immédiate. – Dans la perception considérée comme immédiate, aucune illusion ne pourrait trouver place ; l'étude des principales illusions fait voir qu'une telle perception n'existe pas. Percevoir, c'est toujours autre chose que subir ou recevoir comme une empreinte ; c'est toujours affirmer ce qu'on a senti, quelque chose que l'on juge réel.' (Lagneau, 1950, p. 167.)

177 'La perception est donc l'achèvement de la représentation et la rectification des données sensibles, qui résultent l'un et l'autre d'un jugement, immédiat et intuitif en apparence, mais fondé sur l'habitude' (Ibid., p. 178).

178 'Il n'y a point de vérité de la connaissance sensible. … La connaissance sensible est fausse en ce qu'on ne saurait concevoir une manière de sentir qui doive être considérée comme la vrai pour nous dans les circonstances données. En effet, cela supposerait, soit que notre nature sensible ne change pas, soit que son développement est soumis à une loi rigoureuse, c'est-à-dire que cette nature résulte complètement en nous de son rapport avec le monde extérieure, dont elle ne saurait qu'un effet, une résultante. … Si tout dans la nature

était soumis à la nécessité, s'il y avait pour nous une manière de sentir qui serait la vrai, si à chaque instant notre manière de sentir résultait du monde extérieure, nous ne sentirons pas.' (Ibid., pp. 181–182.)

179 'Il n'y a point de vérité purement abstraite. … S'il existait une vérité abstraite, c'est-à-dire une nécessité indépendante de l'esprit …, cette vérité purement abstraite serait purement inintelligible … Si nous concevons qu'il y a une vérité, nous la concevons comme la vérité de ce que nous sentons … Mais de cela même que la vérité a sa base dans la sensibilité, dans la perception actuelle, et de ce que cette perception est en elle-même indéterminable, il résulte que la nécessité elle-même, qui repose sur cette base indéterminable, ne saurait être déterminable. L'ordre de l'intelligence repose sur l'ordre de la sensibilité.' (Ibid., p. 182.)

180 'Cette action ne saurait s'expliquer sans l'affirmation d'une liberté qui ne subit la nécessité que parce qu'elle la juge et l'approuve.' (Ibid., p. 136.)

181 'Toute certitude est donc une nécessité qui dépend de la liberté et qui repose sur une croyance. C'est une nécessité voulue et maintenue par l'action constante de la liberté, est cette action constante n'est possible qu'au moyen de l'habitude morale qui est l'esprit se faisant nature (dans une nature) par la volonté.' (Ibid., p. 105.)

182 'C'est une erreur de dire qu'une action que l'on sait faire se fait ensuite sans attention. … Je dirais plutôt que le jugement ici, par la vertu de l'habitude, est obéi aussitôt, sans mouvements inutiles. … La rançon de la pensée, c'est qu'il faut bien penser. Comme nous ne savons pas agir sans penser, nous ne pouvons agir comme il faut sans y bien penser. La peur de mal faire y est le principal obstacle … Pour la vaincre et faire ce qu'on veut, il faut ne faire que ce qu'on veut, par exemple allonger le bras sans que le pied parte, ou bien ouvrir une serrure sans grincer les dents, ou bien encore tenir l'archet sans le serrer, monter sans retenir le souffle. … L'homme apprend ... non pas par répétition machinale, mais ... toujours sous la condition d'une attention soutenue, disons autrement, sous la condition que les mouvements exécutés soit voulus et libres, sans que le corps en fasse d'autres. … La cause principale de ce désordre [i.e. raidissement] est la confusion des idées augmentée encore par la peur de se tromper'. (Alain, 1990, pp. 240–241.)

183 'Je crois assez que c'est l'univers tout entier qui est beau, et la liaison de toutes choses ; les petits morceaux ne disent rien ; ils n'ont point de sens. Mais tout a un sens, car tout tient à tout. On aime la mer et la montagne, parce que le jeu des forces y est visible ; c'est notre alphabet. Après avoir épelé, il faut lire, et apprendre à saisir d'un regard la liaison de toute chose à toutes les choses … Si on savait parfaitement lire dans le Grand Livre, tout serait beau.' (Alain, 1970, p. 95.)

184 'Dans la perception la plus rigoureuse, l'imagination circule toujours' (Alain, 1990, p. 62).

185 'Dans tout fait d'imagination on trouvera toujours trois espèces d'imagination. D'abord l'imagination réglée, qui ne se trompe que par trop d'audace, mais toujours selon une méthode et sous le contrôle de l'expérience … L'autre imagination se détourne des choses et ferme les yeux, attentive surtout aux mouvements de la vie et aux faible impressions qui en résultent, pourrait être appelée la fantaisie. … Enfin l'imagination passionnée se définirait surtout par les mouvements convulsifs et la vocifération.' (Ibid., p. 64.)

186 'L'idée même que se font les Stoïciens de la vérité n'est-elle pas faite pour nous garder du découragement sceptique, ne nous rendre la confiance en nous? Pourquoi douter de ce que nous savons? C'est temps perdu: car ce que nous importe ce n'est pas ce que nous savons, mais ce que nous saurons ; c'est ne pas le vrai qu'il faut poursuivre mais le plus vrai ; ce que l'on doit considérer, ce ne sont pas les résultats, mais la méthode ; c'est ne pas l'état de notre esprit, mais le progrès de notre esprit.' (Alain, 1891, p. 41.)

205 'Au centre de l'acte volontaire : l'attention.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 390.) 'Il est impossible, même absurde, de s'étonner que Achille soit inhumain. Il ne fait pas attention que le jeunes Troyens sont de la même espèce que Patrocle.' (Ibid., p. 389.)

219 'Toute action qui a réellement eu lieu se laisse réduire à un jeu de nécessités, sans qu'il reste aucun résidu qui soit la part du moi' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 331).

220 'Il n'y a pas d'attitude de plus grande humilité que l'attente muette et patiente. … Le cri de l'orgueil, c'est « l'avenir est à moi », sous quelque forme que ce soit. L'humilité est la connaissance de la vérité contraire. Si le présent est seul à moi, je suis néant, car le présent est néant.' (Wei, *OC VI 4*, p. 129.)

221 'La faim (soif, etc.) et tout désir de la chair est une orientation du corps vers l'avenir. Toute la partie charnelle de nôtre âme est orientée vers l'avenir. La mort glace. La privation ressemble de loin à la mort. La chair vit orientée vers l'avenir. La concupiscence est la vie même. Le détachment est une mort.' (Ibid., p. 125.)

223 'Ce qu'il y a de particulier à l'œuvre d'art est que ce son qui arrive à l'auditeur de l'extérieure lui semble n'être que le fruit de sa propre attente. C'est qu'il a été en effet le fruit de l'attente de l'artiste. Pour le compositeur, prévoir la note que suivra n'est jamais autre chose que l'inventer ; cette invention est le fruit d'une attente' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 75). 'En composant de la musique ou de la poésie on a en vue un certain silence intérieur de l'âme et on dispose les sons ou les mots de manière à rendre l'aspiration à ce silence perceptible à autrui' (Weil, *C 1*, p. 56).

230 'Tout bien véritable comporte des conditions contradictoires et par suite est impossible. Celui qui tient son attention vraiment fixée sur cette impossibilité et agit fera le bien.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 95.)

231 'Nous savons tous qu'il n'y a pas de bien ici-bas ... Tout être humain a vraisemblablement eu dans sa vie plusieurs instants où il se avoué clairement qu'il n'y a pas de bien ici-bas. … C'est à eux de rester immobiles, sans détourner le regard … Si Dieu, après une longue attente, laisse vaguement pressentir sa lumière ou même se révèle en personne, ce n'est que pour un instant. De nouveau il faut rester immobile, attentif, et attendre … Électre ne cherche pas Oreste, elle attend. ... Tout ce quelle désire, c'est de ne pas exister dès lors qu'Oreste n'existe pas. À ce moment Oreste n'y tient plus. Il ne peut pas s'empêcher de se nommer. Il donne la preuve certaine qu'il est Oreste.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 334–335.)

241 'On fait doublement tort à la mathématique quand on la regarde seulement comme une spéculation rationnelle et abstraite. Elle est cela, mais elle est aussi la science même de la nature, une science tout à fait concrète, et elle est aussi une mystique. Les trois ensemble et inséparablement.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 159.)

242 'Il y a analogie entre la fidélité du triangle rectangle à la relation qui lui interdit de sortir du cercle dont son hypoténuse est le diamètre est celle d'un homme qui, par exemple, s'abstient d'acquérir du pouvoir ou de l'argent au prix d'une fraude.' (Ibid., p. 156.)

243 'Nous avons perdu cette idée que la certitude absolue convient seulement aux choses divines. … Notre intelligence est devenue si grossière que nous ne concevons même plus qu'il puisse y avoir une certitude authentique, rigoureuse concernant des mystères incompréhensibles. Il y aurait sur ce point un usage infiniment précieux à faire de la mathématique. Elle est irremplaçable à cet égard.' (Ibid., pp. 125–126.)

244 'L'apparition de la géométrie en Grèce est la plus éclatante parmi toutes les prophéties qui ont annoncé le Christ. On peut comprendre ainsi que, par l'effet de l'infidélité, la science soit devenue pour une part un principe de mal' (Ibid., p. 133). 'Croire que l'on peut mettre le bien et le mal entre parenthèses, le temps d'acquérir des connaissances que l'on fera ensuite servir au bien, est une erreur' (Rey, 2009, p. 195).

249 'L'observation ne tempère pas le geste ; mais au contraire c'est le geste qui tempère l'observation. Retiens le geste, si tu veux connaître.' (Alain, 1923, p. 65.)

257 'Il m'est venu une pensée qui me paraît importante. Je n'ai pas de quoi la noter. Je me promets de m'en souvenir. Deux heures après il me vient à l'esprit que j'ai à me souvenir d'une pensée. Je ne sais plus du tout laquelle, ni même de quoi il s'agit. J'oriente mon

attention vers cette chose dont je sais qu'elle est, mais dont je ne sais pas du tout ce quelle est. Cette attention à vide peut durer plusieurs minutes. Puis (dans les meilleurs des cas) cela vient. Je reconnais, sans aucune incertitude, que c'est cela.' (Weil, *C 2*, p. 291.)

273 'Le langage a une grande importance dans ... l'attention (forme de la volonté). Étant donné que nous avons le langage, parmi les mots qui nous viennent aux lèvres, il y en a que nous pouvons refuser : sélection des mots. … Le langage est un objet (du fait qu'il est fixe, permanent, artificiel). Il nous permet de nous dédoubler : larmes, cris, gémissements sont des états de nous, souvent inconscients et, en tout cas, toujours ressentis comme nôtre ; au contraire, le mot « douleur » n'est pas douloureux. Dès qu'on a donné un nom á ses sentiments on peut les regarder comme un objet.' (Weil, *LP*, p. 69.)

274 'Comme pour l'erreur et la pensée claire et distincte, il y a des pensées d'action, qui si on les fixe du regard de l'âme en suspendant son jugement, s'évanouissent comme des bulles d'air (elles ne peuvent influer sur les mouvements du corps que dans les ténèbres de l'âme), d'autre qui au contraire passent alors dans le réel en mordant sur la réalité par l'intermédiaire du corps.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 333.)

275 'Presque toujours, le moment de délibération ne coïncide pas avec celui du choix. On délibère quand on a déjà choisi, ou peut-être, plus rarement, quand on ne pas encore en mesure de choisir.' (Ibid., p. 332.)

279 'L'obéissance est le seul mobile pur … À la condition que ce soit l'obéissance à une nécessité, non pas a une contrainte.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 194.)

280 'Obéissance, in en a deux. On peut obéir à la pesanteur, ou aux rapports des choses[*]. Dans le premier cas, on fait ce à quoi pousse l'imagination combleuse de vide. … Si on suspend le travail de l'imagination combleuse et on fixe l'attention sur les rapports des choses, une nécessité[†] apparaît, à laquelle on ne peut pas ne pas obéir.' (Ibid., p. 200.)

[*] 'Nécessité. Voir les rapports des choses, et soi-même, y compris les fins qu'on porte en soi, comme un des termes.' (Ibid., p. 201.)

[†] 'L'homme ne peut jamais sortir de l'obéissance à Dieu. Une créature ne peut pas ne pas obéir. Le seul choix offert a l'homme comme créature intelligente et libre, c'est de désirer l'obéissance ou de ne pas la désirer. S'il ne la désire pas, il obéit néanmoins, perpétuellement, en tant que chose soumise à la nécessité mécanique. S'il la désire, il reste soumis à la nécessité mécanique, mais une nécessité nouvelle s'y surajoute, une nécessité constituée par les lois propres aux choses surnaturelles. Certaines actions lui deviennent impossibles, d'autres s'accomplissent à travers lui parfois presque malgré lui.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 113.)

282 'Le travail manuel. Le temps qui entre dans le corps. … Le travail est comme une mort. Il faut passer par la mort – que le vieil homme meure. Mais la mort n'est pas un suicide. Il faut être tué ; subir la pesanteur, le poids du monde. …Travailler – si l'on est épuisé – c'est devenir soumis au temps de la même manière que la matière. La pensée est contrainte de passer d'un instant au suivant. C'est là obéir.' (Weil, *OC VI 2*, p. 62.)

285 '*Je dis que 7 + 8 = 16, je me trompe ; je fais, d'une certaine manière, 7 + 8 = 16. Mais ce n'est pas moi qui fais que 7 + 8 = 15*. Un théorème mathématique nouveau ; un beau vers ; reflets de cette grande vérité… Je suis absent de tous ce qui est vrai, ou beau, ou bien.' (Ibid., p. 125.)

286 'La beauté d'un paysage au moment où personne ne le voit, absolument personne... Voir un paysage tel qu'il est quand je n'y suis pas. Quand je suis quelque part, je souille le silence du ciel et de la terre par ma respiration et le battement de mon cœur.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 109.)

288 'Si un homme surprend la femme qu'il aime et à qui il avait donné toute sa confiance en fragrant délit d'infidélité, il entre en contact brutal avec la vérité. S'il apprend qu'une femme qu'il ne connaît pas, dont il entend pour la première fois le nom, dans une ville qu'il ne connaît pas davantage, a trompé son mari, cela ne change aucunement sa relation avec la vérité. Cet exemple fournit la clef. L'acquisition des connaissances fait approcher de la vérité, quand il s'agit de la connaissance de ce qu'on aime, et en aucun autre cas.' (Weil, *E*, pp. 318–319.)

300 'quand le soleil le lève, je ne sais si le paysage me paraît plus joyeux parce que j'éprouve plus de joie, ou parce que le soleil est plus haut ; un paysage réel est éclairé aussi bien par mon bonheur que par les rayons du soleil.' (Weil, *OC I*, p. 138.)

301 'En réalité, l'objet premier de notre perception, ce ne sont pas des choses éparpillées ; ce n'est même pas le Protée de la fable, quelque chose que j'aie devant à moi ; c'est un Protée indivisible, qui se presse sur mon corps, s'enroule pour ainsi dire autour de moi, sans être jamais, puisqu'il est sans parties, grand ou petit, proche ou lointain. De cet état qui précède la perception, nous ne pouvons nous faire aucune idée'. (Ibid., p. 132.) 'Cet exemple peut nous faire concevoir ce que peuvent être pour moi les changements d'un monde qui ne me fait impression que par l'intermédiaire de l'imagination. Pour peu que Protée change, toute trace de l'état immédiatement précèdent est aussitôt abolie' (Ibid., p. 122). 'C'est le règne de Protée, c'est à dire de la chose qui se transforme par une puissance intérieure, et sans continuité.' (Ibid., p. 127.)

302 'Certes il faut admirer l'homme qui, sorti de la caverne par réflexion sur la géométrie, a empoigné Protée, l'a dépouillé et a trouvé, sous ce manteau d'émotions, la pure étendue,

toujours extérieure à soi, matière de nos travaux, qui ne parle, ne pense ni veut. Mais pour le sage même ces moments de clairvoyance sont difficiles, rares, et sans rapport avec les perceptions ordinaires, qui toutes, sans exception, sont d'abord émotions. Il suffira d'un tiraillement d'estomac, d'un rayon de soleil, d'un bruit plus effrayant ou plus doux que les autres, pour faire retomber le sage à notre monde d'illusions; il oubliera alors sa difficile sagesse, et, au moment même où il a besoin de cette sagesse pour vaincre les passions, sera aussi crédule aux émotions qu'un enfant.' (Ibid., p. 137.)

303 'En un lever de soleil peint, si la lumière me peut donner de la joie, jamais cette joie ne sera accompagnée d'un accroissement de lumière.' (Ibid., p. 138.)

304 'Ainsi nos moments de clairvoyance cartésienne nous sont inutiles sans un art de percevoir, c'est-à-dire une gymnastique qui nous permet de rappeler le pur entendement, sans cesser pourtant, comme nous faisons au moment de la réflexion, d'être attentifs aux danses de notre corps. Mais cette gymnastique même ne nous serait sans doute jamais accessible, sans l'expérience de perceptions privilégiées, par lesquelles la danse spontanée de notre corps, tout en s'imposant parfois à l'attention, n'empêche jamais, et peut-être aide, l'exercice du pur entendement. Ces perceptions privilégiées sont fournis à chacun de nous par l'humanité dans les œuvres d'arts.' (Ibid., p. 138.) 'La cathédrale nous émeut plus que la nature, mais les choses ne répondent plus du tout à notre émotion; tout en nous émouvant, elles restent elles-mêmes indifférentes.' (Ibid., p. 138.) 'Ainsi jusqu'à présent ma vie se partageait en deux parts ; les moments où, à force d'attention aux choses, je cessais de me laisser émouvoir, et me livrais de la pure raison ; et les moments où, les émotions m'atteignant à nouveau, je me lassais tromper par Protée, revêtant de mes propres émotions les objets même. ... Mais ces objets merveilleux eux-mêmes me seraient inutiles, si, par une imitation des attitudes, des mouvements, de l'immobilité qu'ils m'imposent, je ne pouvais, sans me soustraire aux émotions que je reçois de la nature, chose impossible, ôter du moins à la nature le reflet de mes émotions. Il faut que les paysages deviennent pour moi des tableaux, les forêts des cathédrales, les sons des symphonies, les hommes des portraits ou des statues ; alors seulement Protée est véritablement dompté.' (Ibid., pp. 138–139.)

306 'Si dans une forêt j'entends un cri d'effroi, les murmures mêmes des feuilles me paraîtront pleins d'horreur : mais au concert, après une sorte de gémissement qui serre le cœur vient aussitôt, non pas selon mes émotions, mais selon le texte de la symphonie, lui-même conforme à des règles invariables, un chant d'amour ou de triomphe.' (Ibid., p. 138.)

315 'J'écris sans voir. Je suis venu. Je voulais vous baiser la main ... Voilà la première fois que j'écris dans les ténèbres … sans savoir si je forme des caractères. Partout où il n'y aura rien, lisez que je vous aime.' (Diderot, 1984, p. 48.)

316 'Notre être même, à chaque instant, a pour étoffe, pour substance l'amour que Dieu nous porte. L'amour créateur de Dieu qui nous tient dans l'existence n'est pas seulement surabondance de générosité. Il est aussi renoncement, sacrifice. Ce n'est pas seulement la Passion, c'est la création elle-même qui est renoncement et sacrifice de la part de Dieu. La Passion n'en est que l'achèvement. Déjà comme créateur Dieu se vide de la divinité. Il prend la forme d'un esclave. Il se soumet à la nécessité.' 'Le mal que nous voyons partout dans le monde sous forme de malheur et une signe de la distance où nous sommes de Dieu. Mais cette distance est amour et par suite doit être aimée.' 'Ce n'est pas qu'il faille aimer le mal. Mais il faut aimer Dieu à travers le mal. Quand un enfant en jouant brise un objet précieux, la mère n'aime pas cette destruction. Mais si plus tard son fils s'en va au loin ou meurt, elle |regarde le malheur| pense à cette accident avec tendresse parce qu'elle n'y voit plus qu'une des manifestations de l'existence de son enfant.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, pp. 272–273.) 'Il y a un effort à faire qui est de loin le plus dur de tous, mais il ne pas du domaine de l'action. C'est de tenir le regard dirigé vers Dieu, de le ramener quand il c'est écarté, de l'appliquer avec toute l'intensité dont on dispose.' (Ibid., pp. 274–275.) 'Le seul choix qui s'offre à l'homme, c'est d'attacher ou non son amour ici-bas. Qu'il refuse d'attacher son amour ici-bas, et qu'il reste immobile, sans chercher, sans bouger, en attente, sans essayer même de savoir ce qu'il attend.' (Ibid., p. 278.)

317 'C'est la montagne elle-même qui, de là-bas, se fait voir du peintre, c'est elle qu'il interroge du regard. Que lui demande-il au juste ? De dévoiler les moyens, rien que visible, par lesquelles elle se fait montagne sous nos yeux. Lumière, éclairage, ombres, reflets, couleur, tous ces objets de la recherche ne sont pas tout à fait des êtres réels : ils n'ont, comme des fantômes, d'existence que visuelle. Ils ne sont mêmes que sur le seuil de la vision profane, ils ne sont pas communément vus. Le regarde du peintre leur demande comment ils s'y prennent pour faire qu'il y ait soudain quelque chose, cette chose, pour composer ce talisman du monde, pour nous faire voir le visible.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 21.)

323 'L'homme n'a pas à chercher, ni même croire en Dieu. Il doit seulement refuser son amour à tout ce qui est autre de Dieu. Ce refus ne suppose aucune croyance. Il suffit de constater ce qui est évidence pour tout esprit, c'est que tous les biens d'ici-bas, passés, présents ou futurs, réels ou imaginaires, sont finis et limités, radicalement incapable de satisfaire le désir d'un bien infini et parfait qui brûle perpétuellement en nous.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 277.)

340 'Chacun des objets que nous voyons commande une esquisse de mouvement, si imperceptible soit-elle. (Une chaise commande de s'asseoir, un escalier de monter, etc.).' (Weil, *LP*, p. 23.)

350 'L'attention consiste à suspendre sa pensée, à la lasser disponible, vide et pénétrable à l'objet, à maintenir en soi-même à la proximité de la pensée, mais à un niveau inférieure et sans contact avec elle, les diverses connaissances acquises qu'on est forcé d'utiliser. ... Tous les contresens dans les versions, toutes les absurdités dans la solution des problèmes de géométrie, toutes les gaucheries du style et toutes les défectuosités de l'enchaînement des idées dans les devoirs de français, tout cela vient de ce que la pensée s'est précipitée hâtivement sur quelque chose, et étant ainsi prématurément remplie n'a plus été disponible pour la vérité.' (Weil, *AD*, pp. 92–93.)

352 'Indirectement, et avec le temps, la volonté, et surtout l'attention, et surtout l'attention sous forme de prière, aboutissent à une modification dans la lecture. Ce qui est alors change est l'imagination.' (Weil, *OC VI 1*, p. 411.)

353 'On ne choisit pas les sensations, mais, dans une large mesure, on choisit ce qu'on sent à travers elles ; non pas en un moment, mais par un apprentissage.' (Ibid., p. 410.)

354 'Au centre de l'acte volontaire : *l'attention*. Seule l'attention est libre.' (Weil, *OC I*, pp. 386–387.)

359 'A la philosophie cartésienne de l'immédiateté, Simone Weil oppose donc une métaphysique religieuse axée sur l'idée de *médiation* et sur la présence du Médiateur. La philosophie rationnelle garde son rôle essentielle : « mettre en lumière ce qui lui est irréductible », mais après que le « rationnel au sens cartésien, c'est-à-dire le mécanisme, la nécessité humainement représentable, [aura été] supposé partout où on le peut » [C2 III, 236]. L'esprit se heurte, alors, à « l'incompréhensible », « aux vrais mystères, aux vrais indémontrables, qui sont réel » [C2 III, 264].' (Devaux, 1995, p. 22.)

364 'Si nous croyons avoir un Père ici-bas, c'est ne pas lui, c'est un faux Dieu. … Il faut être heureux qu'il est infiniment hors de notre atteinte.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 337.)

369 'Les mystères de la foi ne sont pas un objet pour l'intelligence en tant que faculté qui permet d'affirmer ou de nier. Ils ne sont pas de l'ordre de la vérité, mais au-dessus. La suele partie de l'âme humaine qui soit capable d'un contact réel avec eux, c'est la faculté d'amour surnaturelle. Seule par suite elle est capable d'une adhésion à leur égard.' (Weil, *LP*, pp. 64–65.)

370 'On doit aux précisions dont l'Eglise a cru devoir entourer les mystères de la foi, et notamment à ses condamnations (... *anathema sit*) une attitude permanente et inconditionnelle d'attention respectueuse, mais non pas une adhésion. … L'adhésion intellectuelle n'est jamais due à quoi que ce soit. Car ce n'est jamais à aucun degré chose

volontaire. L'attention seule est volontaire. Aussi est-elle *seule* matière d'obligation.' (Weil, *LR*, p. 68.)

372 'Il y a quelque chose dans notre âme qui répugne à la véritable attention beaucoup plus violemment que la chair ne répugne à la fatigue. Ce quelque chose est beaucoup plus proche du mal que la chair. C'est pourquoi, toutes les fois qu'on fait vraiment attention, on détruit du mal en soi.' (Weil, *AD*, p. 92.)

378 'La pensée humaine et l'univers constituent ainsi les livres révélés par excellence, si l'attention éclairée par l'amour et la foi sait les déchiffrer. Leur lecture constitue une preuve, et même l'unique preuve certaine. Après avoir lu l'*Iliade* en grec, nul ne songerait à se demander si le professeur qui lui a appris l'alphabet grec ne l'a pas trompé.' (Weil, *IPC*, p. 171.)

381 'Dieu se produit lui-même parfaitement ... Avant tout Dieu s'aime soi-même. … L'amour entre Dieu et Dieu, qui est lui-même Dieu, est ce lien à double vertu ; ce lien qui unit deux être au point qu'ils ne sont pas discernables et son réellement un seul, ce lien qui s'étend par-dessus la distance et triomphe d'une séparation infinie.' (Weil, *OC IV 1*, p. 353.)

390 'Ces graphismes, pourtant à l'origine parfaitement contingents (lies par exemple à une langue particulière : pourquoi si non noter *m* une masse ?), finissent pour porter une véritable charge ontologique : dans la perception du physicien *E est* une énergie, *v est* une vitesse, etc. Il n'est pour s'en assurer, que de voir la difficulté à mettre en œuvre une loi physique, fût-elle élémentaire, des lors que sont modifiées les notations conventionnelles ' (Lévy-Leblond, 2006, p. 67).

419 'Quand l'attention fixée sur quelque chose y a rendu manifeste la contra[di]ction (car au fond de toute pensée, de tout sentiment, de toute volonté il y a contradiction), il se produit comme un décollement. En persévérant dans cette voie, on parvient au détachement.' (Weil, *OC VI 3*, p. 96.)

420 'Parenté du mal avec la force, avec l'être, et du bien avec la faiblesse, le néant. En même temps le mal est privation. Elucider la manière qu'ont les contradictoires d'être vrais. Méthode d'investigation : dès qu'on a pensé quelque chose, chercher en quel sens le contraire est vrai.' (Weil, *OG*, p. 184.)

431 'Si on désire de l'argent, on désire une monnaie (institution), quelque chose qui ne peut être acquis que dans telle ou telle situation, donc on ne le désire que dans la mesure où… Or, dans cette mesure, on l'a.' (Weil, *OG*, p. 42.) For the rest of the quote, see note 164.

433 'L'idée du décalage entre certitude et verité était devenu pour moi une certitude ..., j'étais dans l'expectative : si cette idée était vrai, *comme* j'en avais la certitude, elle devait ne

pas l'être tout à fait, *puisque* j'en avais la certitude. Si je parle d'expectative, c'est que je préférais attendre que cette question trouve sa solution toute seule … Je donc laisser dormir cette histoire ... en même temps que je me mettais à dormir de plus en plus souvent et de plus en plus longtemps … À trop dormir, on finit par n'avoir plus sommeil. C'est alors que tout peut commencer : on se force à dormir par une sorte d'autohypnose qui produit un sommeil incomplet, très riche en surprise.' (Duyckaerts, 1992, pp. 12–13.)

456 'La position que nous allons adopter est celle d'un scepticisme méthodologique, qui, contrairement à un scepticisme dogmatique, ne vise pas à se constituer en anti-thèse pessimiste face à l'eschatologie progressiste de la thèse réaliste, mais seulement à contribuer, par la provocation qu'il représente, au raffinement de l'auto-compréhension de l'œuvre de recherche scientifique.' (Bitbol, 1998, p. 1.)

Appendix 2

Appendix 2: Three texts from residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short

The following are three texts from the May 2008 Centre for Drawing Project space collaborative residency with Hephzibah Rendle-Short.

Hephzibah's description of Dino's drawing reproduced in Fig. 4.17

I'm going to turn the drawing upside down. The page seems to be divided into four. I am looking at the drawing the right way up now. At the bottom there is a curve swinging left to right. On the bottom right: time and date. The bottom edge of the page demarcates the shape. The curve is an accumulation of small marks and smudges into a tonal area at the top of the curve. This whole area is slightly greyer than everywhere else in the drawing. Down the right-hand side of the page there is a white strip of paper. The bottom edge of the strip is the right-hand edge of the curve I first described. The strip is about an inch wide and is cut off at the top by a diagonal going from left to right in an upward direction. The character of the diagonal is slightly wiggly and stops before it reaches the edge of the paper, so that it feels as if stopped in mid-air. In this vertical shape of white paper down the right-hand side, there are three pencil marks about an inch apart which seem to imply closeness to me compared to the vertical of the edge of the shape. The top section of the page has got pencil marks on it. Every pencil marks seem to gather others with it which gives the drawing a kind of nervous energy. There is a diagonal that runs on the top left-hand side corner a 1/4 inch from to left, it runs as a diagonal into the centre of the page, about a third of the way down the page. On the horizontal, this diagonal brings my eyes into the centre section of the page which is almost a square. The thing that stops it being a square that bites into it is the curve at the bottom of the page. This square has a lot of lines in it. Almost every line is repeated by another line, another line, another line. Only occasionally does a line stand on its own. Sometimes, shapes are picked out by diagonal shading which moves from right to left. Some lines are harder that others and have been reiterated. This gives them a more emphatic quality. Some areas of this central square, particularly the top right, sit on the surface of the page; in fact the way they sit on the surface of the page connects them to the top section of the page which I described, which gives the drawing a interesting dynamic (but maybe that's an ethical statement). There are lots of verticals across the central square and some horizontals. The two verticals on the side of the square and the horizontal echo the square at the centre of the drawing which seems to represent a window. The diagonal that runs from a 1/4 of a inch from the left corner in to the centre square where there is a nervous energy made by the repeated marks is running in the same direction of the right hand side of the curve at the bottom of the page; in fact, if I extended this diagonal it would connect to the top section of the drawing. There is an ellipse made with many small pencil marks. Inside

the ellipse, there is another ellipse which echoes a curve in the top third of the central square of the drawing.

Dino's description of Hephzibah's drawing reproduced in Fig. 4.18

Sticking with facts. There is some writing on it. That is a fact. It is quite difficult. I will start with simple things. What I can infer about gesture from the marks. Overall, the lines have been made with a slow movement of the hand. Slow but not…what shall I say….a relaxed pace so that you get this line that is slightly wavering. It has a tension about it, but it is not like… not that pronounced as if the drawing had been made by using slower movements. There is a variety of pressure that was applied. I would say there is… simplifying it, a lighter, mid pressure and much heavier marks. And looking at those marks again… looking at the three pressures, the light and mid marks are much closer in tone. So the dark mark is lower on the scale, the dark is made with more pressure than the other two. Ah… there is a sense that there is… it is very difficult… you are... not everywhere… you are touching the contour, feeling… though not too pronounced. Where I notice it particularly is where you represent the window panes: I would expect the vertical to be vertical…..it was more touched than looked at, so there is a more haptic quality about that. I suppose the haptic quality seems to be present throughout, it seems to diminish when you do longer lines, e.g. the lines representing... are slightly skewed… on the ground, the line on the left representing the left line of the wall. Whereas the haptic quality seems to increase where the line is not a straight one, for example, the line representing the pipe of the left hand radiator. There are a lot of erased lines which seem to… well, the way that they have been erased... there is an element of correction, but there is also a sense that it has a function of representing light… particularly on the left hand side. There is something I don't understand, I don't understand what it is. It is on the representation of the floor of the drawing and it appears to be a piece of paper. In any case it seems to have the function of a representing something that is on the ground, the slant of the ground as it moves towards the viewer represents the space. That's it for the moment… perhaps we can return…

Transcript of dialogue between Hephzibah and me, by which Hephzibah drew the drawing reproduced in Fig. 4.19

Ok... so the first thing I want to do is to kind of... ermm... to get some agreement on the size of the page so... ermm...   the only thing I can think of doing that is by drawing the rectangle within the rectangle. And in order to draw it on the... ssss ermm... more or less the same size I would like to do it through… I don't know if this is going to work out... ah rhythm. So if you imagine you are making… like a… a line… so just draw like a horizontal line as… anywhere on the page… it doesn't matter, a line uniformly… like that… and then another one and just try to get it as uniform as possible… like in terms of speed... and then

as you do that start making another one … start counting a rhythm…1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7….8... 9… 10... [Laughter] *Is it meant to be one line?* 11… sorry… there... it's just to get the rhythm… *But mine has gone right off the page…* Well, it doesn't matter it is more the rhythm….*But am I following your rhythm or my own?* Following mine, follow mine… *Ok shall we start again?* Yes. 1... 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… *I' m off the page.* Ok, you're off the page. Ah! That's a good way of doing it. So your off the page then… *Yeah, my page…*Can we do can we do it again then? *I didn't start at the other edge of the page. I started in from the other edge.* Ok, start... start from the edge of the page then. *Ok.* Ok… 1... [In Italian] 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8…9… *Mine I'm off.* At... at eight? *Nine.* Ok, so that's nine… ermm… ok… so… can can we do it again to see if we are in synchrony? So…Ok… mmm... 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9… *Off.* Ok, so now it was a bit… too fast. Ok… so I... I'll use you as a rhythm… so I will do it once again: 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9… *9... off.* Ok, that's... that's… *I'm being pretty constant.* Yeah, that's pretty good. Ok, so that would be our… width. *What? Nine?* Nine. *That's the whole page.* For you? *Yeah.* That's the whole page. Ok, and then… *My page* [Laughter] *is horizontal.* So your page is 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6... 7… 8… 9…? *Yeah.* Ok, so now we will do a vertical. *Ok.* And then be hopefully twelve. *You want it what?* Twelve. Twelve. 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9… 10…11… 12... *Ok.* Ok, so just that will be basically the size of the page. *Ok.* There… ermm… ok, so... so that would be 1… 2… that would be sort of the rhythm that I am going to use if that makes any sense. *Yep.* Ok... errr… so… I'm going to start from the… the bottom left corner… ermm… and... Ah! … Let's see... bottom left corner… mmm… mmm… st... how am I going to do this? H… h… ok… ok... actually top r... left corner… ermm… and... ah… sptm… ahhh... mmm… are you drawing with ink yeah? *Yeah, I am…* [Laughter] *and my page is kinda horizontal.* Ah… ok… ah… oh I don't know what to do… ah… ah… mmm… fff… mmm… I find this very difficult. I don't know where to start from… so we have got the page size… 1… 2... ok… ok, what I would like to do... ok... is... mmm... bottom edge... ok, let's start by counting… two from the left edge so going … *in our rhythm?* ... yes... so 1… 2… ok... and then mark a spot down that line... *yeah…* and the same... actually no, not the same…and three on the other side… so three… *coming in three?* From the right… *oh… so the one…* so... so two from the left... *oh, I see. Ok…* and two from the right so 1… 2… 3… so that means that we should be left with 4 in the middle, so let's check that as well... is that right... 1… 2… 3… 4… that's… *I've got five in the middle.* Ok, so I guess adjust it until it is more or less 4. *Ah, but the whole thing is twelve… no it's not, it's nine...* nine… *ok…* then from the left point… go two… er... I would go up... ahm... … ff… ff… four units, so 1… 2… 3… 4… and from… so actually yea mark that point but don't make a line… *too late…* ok... ah, yes, well... ermm… you know… and on the other

side basically... ah … the same thing vertical going up but don't mark it. So 1… 2… 3… 4… and then go up half as well… half of that… so… *what two...* so... yes… so… *there should be six. It should be half way up*… no no no no, not half of that half of one... half of a unit. So it would be like four and a half more or less… so if you go one and then cut that in half and mark that point… ok... mmm… now that we have those two points... actually... actually, make it... make it… a four, five… so let's count again from the bottom… so that vertical is 1... 2… 3… 4… 5… and so we should have about… 7 going up… like... a like a... from that point to the top edge... so 1… 2... 3… 4… 5… 6… 7. Ok, mine is a bit short so I have to bring it up… ok… ok, so basically... well... I know you made a line but you should have two points now somewhere on the page. Ok, now what I want to do is... to make... a line… that connects these two points and it's basically... it... it's like a cir... a... you know, a curve, it's a curve that joins I'm... I'm looking at it from the left, from the point on the left, and that curves upwards... but actually I am not seeing upwards. I am seeing it in space so I am not... not flattening it so that it moves to the other point that we've drawn and what it does... it doesn't curve in a smooth way. it's... it's made up of segments. Now, what I am going to do is to... ah... go kinda using the rhythm and going through several times trying to join, so every time I... I... mmm... ok, I think the rhythm here is not going to help much because... ok, let's say I am still going to use the rhythm but it... it is going to... mmm… ok … let's... let's draw another horizontal line… ah… sss... that goes... twelve… let's try actually… lets... lets no horizontal line… *can you say that again what did you say?* So I... I just want to... aahah... kind of… ah, rehearse again the speed of the line so... ammm... make... we make a horizontal line which is the width of the page counting one to nine... *again*… yea yea*... do that again*… yes, so we kind of attune the speed of the line so... 1... 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9... that's about it… *yeah*... Ok, so there is the speed of the line so you have your own speed so starting from the left point I'm just going to basically to make… a… line… that... changes… slightly direction, so it becomes… so every time that you think... so if you are making a continuous line and it changes direction… mmm... kind of slanting slightly a… ammm… downwards, every time I say change… amm... and every time I change... say change... its kind of slanting a little bit and the idea is that in the end... so basically I'm going to... sss... to count the changes and keeping that kind of speed of line that we decided on and you should join the point on the right [Laughter]... this is different isn't it? *Ok.* So... and I am going to do it several times until... until I get it kind of right… ok… and so you follow me… *So... so until the I've joined up the points*… yes but basically the line is also the same speed and I just call the changes... *ok* …ok… ready… change… change… change… change… change… that... that's not too bad [Laughter]... in mine, I didn't even look… mmm... how's yours? (*Laughter*) Is it far off the mark? We we will do it

again… *it is as far from the mark as it was at the beginning*… no, I don't understand… *well, I have ended up as far away from my destination as I was from my setting out point*. Ok, so shall we do it again? *Yeah, so maybe I made my changes too abrupt*… well, it is quite difficult... so even for me... so let's… *I am finding it hard because I am left handed so I would naturally go work from right to left*… ok… *so I'm finding... maybe if I use my right hand it might be better*… perhaps… *that's going to change my rhythm*... well... well, I can do it the other side… in fact, let's start doing it from one side to the other… *ok… can we start from the right hand side then ok?* Ok… so we are going… so the rhythm... mmm... ok... ta... sorry… start… change… change… change... change… change… *ok*... ok... *how many changes did we have?* [In Italian] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. *Ok*… 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 yeah… *1, 1, 2, 3, 4... oh, I only have four changes* shall we 5, 6 ok… but we can do it again until... errr... until it kind of feels right… *ok, let's try again because I haven't really got*… ah, wait, I should also say... sorry... the line... the line... ok... on the left, the line, if we start from the left, the line starts with a slant, it's not a vertical line, it starts with a slant…ah, to the right… sorry... *ok yeah yeah*… ok… *but*... but you say, yeah, but you are thinking of that are you… *are we... are we starting on the left hand side or on the right hand side?* The left this time… *the left... ok then*… ok... mmm... mmm… *are we going yet?* Go! … ok... change… change….. change... change... change… *ah, that was better*... mine was totally off this time… *I've gone too far*… ah... ok, I think, you know, now we start from the right. I think we need to get some rhythm here I think it's th… *it was better that time*… yeah but this time I ... I wasn't really... I was going with the rhythm and kind of changing my speed… *ah*… so should keep the speed... the... the speed the same so... so if we start from the... when we start from right … *yeah*... it's much more slanted… *oh, the first line more slanted*… yeah... the first one is more slanted… *we are aiming higher*... no no yo... yo... it's slanted... errr... downwards more…*oh, I see. So you don't aim as high*… yeah, you don't aim high… *ok*... so the rhythm is da ta da … *have we... have we started?* Ok, lets start…*ok*... change… change… change… change… change… *no*... there's... there's something wrong about… no, no, not wrong... its… *there's... yeah... I think because... ummm... I think I am going to start with the rhythm*… No, I think I'm not... basically I'm adjusting my rhythm so I should keep the... the speed of the line the same. I... I th... think the problem is that I'm... the rhythm is too fast. So if I slow down the rhythm, so... like... so if we take our... our nine and try to go as slow as we make... let's say… let's make it sixteen does. Does that make sense? So we... we... we... go much slower. *Ok.* So let's see, let's try another horizontal then... *but ok... but the distance isn't as much as it seems*. No no, but so it... so basically we have nine and we keep that... that distance but basically it will take... so if I go 1… 2… 3… 4… we... so basically keeping that rhythm. *Ok.* Ummm... that... that's still the rhythm... the line we make is much slower so

that it will take sixteen of that to... to go from one side to the other of the page. *Ok*. Let's try it if it works. *So are we starting from the left-hand side or the right-hand side?* Left-hand side. *Ok*. So 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7… 8… 9… 10... 11… 12… 13… 14… 19… errr... *15... 16...* Ok, that's too short… *Well mine was too long so I obviously didn't understand you because mine was almost a whole* circle. Right, ok, so I think we should keep to the nine because that seemed to be a more natural way... *slightly more natural...* if... if... if... that if that... if... that... if I count the speed kind of relaxed speed... ummm... *Shall we try again?* Do we... do we do the nine? *Yes*. Ok. *From the right*. Ff... so just make a horizontal line from the right. *A horizontal. Why a horizontal?* Ah, are we making a circle? Ok, sorry I didn't realise. *The curve*. The curve, yeah, so from the right... errr ok start… mmm... change… change… change... change… change… you see that... that that felt better did... did you feel that the last one was longer? *It was much longer*. Yeah. *That's why I did a whole circle last time*. Yeah, but... but you know the... errr... regardless of what kind of line we are making that... that was that was better... better… *much better*. If I could attune that... ok so... well, let's start all this from the right then, because I think... *Ok*. Ok. Go... change… change… change… change… change... so stop... really... mmm... *we are getting closer…* mmm... ok again then. *Ok, ready, ok*. Change... change… change... change… change… change… ok... *mmm...* I mean, I think... I think it's getting better in the sense that I realise that now I really need basically the way I... I... I'm doing this is to at once concentrate on… on the line... mmm... kind of going at uniform speed and then concentrate on where I see the... the slanting changing and just somehow without even looking at the page just, you know, keeping the speed right... errr... like... errr... a uniform... and then changing there and its quite difficult to do these things I'll do it again. Go... change… change… no no, I've completely lost it. *I'm just... I'm just going over the same mark… for some reason...* Are you looking? What point do you draw? *Ummm... yeah... kind of... well, I no... yes...* ok... *well, yes I think I am...* cos I suppose I haven't been... *you haven't been...* no... so... so basically what... what I... what... what I ended... is a like a... a series of... of kind more or less... *similar...* yeah... *yeah...* ok but actually... but now... now... there... there... so... so basically this sort of a cluster of marks is quite... is quite interesting because suddenly, now that we have made so many, I realise that... I realise in which way it is not representative of what I want to represent… because… b... basically... now I'm starting to describe what... what I see the... the difference I see between this cluster of marks... ummm... and... and actually how I think it should be to represent what I see. So if... if you take... if... if I take my top... ermm... like the top of my cluster of marks... *yeah...* errr… ok, if I take that, basically I feel like it should be much higher than it is I say… bas... basically if you draw... a horizontal… from… ermm… let's say that goes... that goes across the page and that touches... that goes through

the... the point on the left that we done. So if you draw a horizontal there that goes across... *the whole page...* yeah… well, mine is not really horizontal… ok… so if... ok... you have that... basically it feels like that... that... that the curve... that it comes on the top of that horizontal should be... errr... kind of much higher….i... i... i... it's... basically the curve should curve m... errr... a lot higher and that would say if you take the distance of ahmm… like where the curve culminates on the top... ok… ah... let's see… it should… ah... ok... let's... ok... say... let's that... ummm... so what... so you must have a place where the curve culminates on top... *the top, the highest point of the curve...* yeah... *yes...* now if you draw a line like a vertical that meets the… the horizontal we draw across the page *yeah...* ok… so you... you got that, so basically what I am going to do now is… ermm… is... is to do something... [Sound of someone striding across a room… something is dropped and then the sound of striding back.]... errr... ah... ok... using the same rhythm I'm going to the... the rhythm that we used and the rhythm that I think we should rehearse... ah... so let's do the nine again at the bottom... 1… 2… 3… 4… 5… 6… 7. 8… 9… that... that seemed alright with me. Was that alright with you? *Ummm... that looks good.* Errr... ok... so from that horizontal... from that point on the horizontal... errrr... I'm going to count and... and let's stop where I stop. So go... 1… 2… *where are we going?* … 3... sorry... upwards... *From the horizontal?* From the horizontal up to the... basically just retrace the vertical that you have been tracing. *Ok, ok.* Ok, again, go... 1… oh, sorry, I wasn't looking. *Ok.* Ah, ok, go... 1… 2… 3... *mmm...* ok, so I'll do it again. Go... 1… 2... 3… that's not good. Again, go... 1… 2… 3… and… once again, go... 1… 2… 3… ok, so I... I got a point which is higher than... than the curve was. Do you have the same? *Yep.* Ok, so basically that... th.. that is the top of the curve really as I perceive it. *Oh, really?* Yes. *Oh, wow we are... we're not aiming high enough here* [Laughter]. So... ok, so that's the top of the curve. *Shall we have another shot?* Ah, well, I think... I... I think... what I would like to do is... ummm... so if you take that... that point there that is higher... the curve, and somehow make it a unit... errr... sorry, make there a horizontal which goes through that point and is... that is centred on that point which is... and is a unit so is one and is centred there... *just one?* Yes, so one. *Ok.* Ok, so you have got that line... *emmm... ummm...* and then from… ok, so from from... the right point... errr... that that we been… you know... *of that unit?* Errr... no no, sorry, from the right point of the start of it, the one that we used to make the curve. *Oh, yeah.* Errr... we again... we again... basically… we are trying to joint that right point with the right point of the line that we just made... *ok...* and... *in how many moves?* It is basically just one move. *What?* Yes. *What, one unit?* Well, no... errr... sorry it is one change... one change but... but... but what I would like to do first is basically to... to join the points without... just with a straight line and... *two right hand points?* Yes. *Ok.* And we kind of... I... I mean I think rhythm is not going to help much

here. I think... errr... kind of just voice is going to help so we kind of need... I... I think I'd like to attune the distance of those two points so like... you know, I'll just go… *in a straight line?* Yeah, and from, yeah, one from one to the other and when I stop my... mmm... there will be the end. *Ok.* And let's see... and we... and we... yeah... keep the usual speed... *mmm...* and stop... well. when I start singing... well, is... singing, that's a big word for it, laaaaaaaah… that was it… I'll do it again… laaaaaaaah... no that was too short... errr… alright, that was about it but... but it actually comes to the left of the right point. Is that the case for you? *Well, I was aiming for the right point.* Ok. So... *it comes just below it...* ok, so aim... aim slightly to the right... left of the right point. *Towards the centre of the right point, towards the centre of the line?* Yes, yes, towards the centre, to the left of the right point... *ok...* and do it again... errrrrrrrrrah... *ok...* ok, that was about it. Ok… ok, so basically now… so if you consider that line that you just made as the bottom of... um… like a... a... a triangle... *yeah...* ok... so basically we are to make the other two sides of the triangle… and… the side that starts from the... the point on the horizontal line that we just found and that goes through the apex of that triangle, so that side is longer than the one that goes from that apex of that triangle to the bottom of... errr... errr... the point of the bottom right. Does that make sense? *Ummm... no I'm not up with you.* Ok, so, basically if you consider that line that we just made as... yeah, like the base of a triangle... *yes, yes...* so what we want to do is to construct the other two sides of that base. *Yes.* Ok, and so if you... if you... if you look at those two sides, basically the... the left side, the one more to the left is longer than the one to the right... *ok...* and so that's what we're going to do now... is to try to... to... to construct that triangle... errr... and I think the only way to do it... no, it is not the only way... one way again is to use... so if you think that from the point on the horizontal… there is a slight slant downwards of... of the line... ok let's just do that so s... slight… so if you... if you just make a line which is... ummm... well, you can make it as long as you want. At the moment it is just kind of a guide line which slants slightly towards... so downwards from that point. Is that clear? *From the right-hand point on the horizontal?* Yes, so it slants slightly. Just make a line. *Ok.* Yeah, just... ok... so that line... now I'm going to again go errrrrrrrrrah and then change, and when you change, the line slants downwards and the idea is that eventually it should join the right down point. Does that make sense? *Why? What's... what's the down point?* The... the point where we, at the beginning, we've been kind of building the curve from... *from ok, ok...* so... and... so basically, you know, as I go errrrrrrrrrah, you go along the line that we just... *yeah...* drew and then slant with the other one. *Ok.* Ok... errrrrrrrrrah... change... stop. Was that anywhere near? *No, it's kind of... like... it's kind of vertically above.* It's vertically above. Ok. A... one... errrrrrrrrrah. Ok, lets do it again... errrrrrrrrrah... change... I didn't say stop. Let's do it again... errrrrrrrrrah... change...

stop… *mmm*. How did that go? *It's getting close*. Yeah, let's do it again... errrrrrrrrah... change... stop... and once again... errrrrrrrrah... change... stop… *mmmm*... ok, let's... what... what I ended up with is not with the line I wanted at all. *Have you got a triangle?* No, I have got something that kind of resembles a very squashed triangle. Basically more or less I... I... I... just a cluster of lines that kind of make up some sort of triangle... *yeah*... but the way is... I see it what do you call it a isosceles... *yes*... yes, and it shouldn't be.... basically what it should be basically... the left... so if you have the base and the two sides, so the left side should actually be longer than it is and slightly lower, slightly more slanting downwards… so if you just do a line that is slightly slanting down… actually... yeah... if... if you cut… and… basically where that line that we just drew meets... *the problem is my ink is so thick I can't see it...* [Laughter] *it is becoming black*. I am really curious to see the drawing. *Can we stop and find... page…* an arm... *no* ok... well, actually if you've done that line that I just said... *sorry*... have you... have you drawn that line I just mentioned? *No, reiterate it*. So basically if you just draw a line there... *from where?* From the left… sorry, from the right point of the horizontal... *yeah*... and which is basically about half way between the base of the triangle and the... the sss... halfway in terms of angles between the base of the triangle and the... the... *the guide lines...* the guide lines... *yeah, done that...* so basically if you do that line where it meets one of the first of lines of the other side of the triangle... *yeah*... you stop and leave it to that... *when it meets the other side of the triangle… you stop*. I'm dying to see your drawing. *I'm not sure what you mean by the other side of the triangle*. You know, basically we... we built this triangle that was an isosceles triangle... *yeah, its more notional than actual...* yeah, yes, so yeah, even for me basically but more or less where... where it meets the other side which might be... *yeah, yeah, ok, so what do I do when... when...* you... you just stop there. *Ok, done*. Ok... ermm... so moving on the left side of that... errr... horizontal which is... *yep...* ok... which is.. what I'm going to do is, from that point, I want to join the left point, you know the bottom left point on this horizontal that we made earlier, the horizontal that... that goes across the page so... *from... from which we shot our curves?* ... yes, yes... *ok...* from which we shot our curves and what I'm going to do is to make... yes... so... so... so... to draw a line from one to another... *just a straight line?* ... yeah, just a straight line... *is it a guide line?* ... yes… *ok, that's easy... that's very easy… that's good…* that's alright… and... ok… *I've got a problem, my ink is dripping*. It's dripping... *mmm*... we're nearly finished... *mmm*... because I don't think I can sustain this forever... well I find this very interesting... actually I find this more about the way I draw. *Yes, it is interesting*. So basically what I am going to do now is to join... so... so we made this guide line... *mmm*... what I want to do is to join those two points we... actually… three... there are three lines… basically… *ah*... so it's... it's not... and basically we are kind of... kinda following the slant

that we were trying to do with the circle, but we are just... just slightly above it... *mmm*... so if you start from the right point of that horizontal, you know the top horizontal with a slight slant, and again accord... *up or down slant?* ... errr... down slant... so... so fairly slight slant... *mmm*... if I call... ok, I will just go with the voice and then call the changes... *mmm*... mmm... change… change…stop. *Ok*. Anything near? *Yeah, I'm way off but*... ok, let's do it once more... mmm... change... change... no I've got it wrong… mmm… change… change… stop... ok… its quite off the mark, but I think I will leave it. Let's leave it to that.

Appendix 3: Text of performance *Is capable of not not-being*

My name is Dino Alfier. In October of this year, I started a PhD research at the University of the Arts London and I am based at Wimbledon College of Art. The working title of my research is: *The semethics of Simone Weil: attention as geometric mean between the existent and the real*. [Write 'Weil' on blackboard]

Weil was a thinker, left-wing political activist and philosophy and Greek teacher. She was born in Paris in 1909 and died in Ashford, Kent, in 1943. Her major philosophical interests were Greek thought, history of philosophy and science, mathematics and, in her last years, Catholicism. The notion of *attention* [Write 'attention' on blackboard] crops up time and again in her writings and it is my view that Weil regarded attention as a virtue.

The talk that I wrote, that is printed on the pages which are on this [point] table right in front of me, and that I have faith I will deliver today had already begun before I started talking. What do I mean by this? I will first tell you a couple of meanings that I *don't* mean. But, before, I would like to have a minute of silence. [Minute of silence]

So, the talk had already started.

I don't mean to say that when you started making your way towards the venue where you believed the talk would be held in order to attend it (having the attending of the talk as the end of your walking) the talk was already implied in your walking and, therefore, it had already begun before you heard me saying the first sentences of this talk.

Neither do I mean to say that the talk started at that precise moment in the past when the first thought of it came to my mind.

More generally, I don't mean to say that, by tracing backwards the network of causes, one could go right back to the origins of the universe and, there, find the implication of my talk.

All these senses may well have been the senses I meant. And I don't doubt that there are other senses that could be meant by the proposition 'The talk... etc... etc... had already begun before I started talking'. But none of these are the sense I mean: That is why I spent some time to point out that none of these are the sense I mean.

What I mean to say is that, by observing a minute of silence, I wished to introduce four of the objects of the talk [Write objects on blackboard]. By 'objects' I mean what the talk is about.

For the notion of 'object' I am indebted to Paul Ryan who is a friend and a second year PhD researcher at UAL and based at WCA. The title of his research is: *Peirce's Semeiotics and*

the Implications for Aesthetics in the Visual Arts. An Extemporary Case Study: The Sketchbook and its Position in the Hierarchies of Collecting and Exhibiting.

The objects of the talk are: (i) the relation between form and content which is also briefly recast as mind/matter right at the end of the talk; (ii) belief; (iii) experimental certainties; and (iv) levels and meta-levels.

There is also an overarching object which is 'acknowledging complexity' which I will write on the back of the blackboard to symbolise (although the term 'symbol' is a little tricky) its *overarching-ness* with respect to the rest of the objects. [Write 'acknowledging complexity' on back of blackboard]

Objects (ii) and (iii). If I had told you, 'Believe that the sound in this room when everybody tries to be as quiet as possible is very different from the sound in this room when everybody does not try to be as quiet as possible', being as accurate as possible in my description of what I deemed the difference to be, my statement and description may have informed a belief in you in the existence of such difference and even a fairly precise idea of the nature of that difference as I conceived it. The experimental certainty that there is (or there is not) a difference between room-in-silence and room-not-in-silence and the non-experimental belief that such a difference exists (or doesn't exist) feel quite different. The feeling of the latter difference (difference (or not) between experimental certainty and non-experimental belief) is also of the nature of an experimental certainty.

Object (i). The content, object (i), was in a particular form, that is, in the minute-of-silence event – and what followed was a description of the content. Now, imagine the following scenario. (If you have experienced the situation I am about to describe, you may find it easier to imagine.) You are in a modern office. There is a power cut. You become aware of the silence which is another way of saying that you become aware of how noisy the office, with its computer vents spinning, was before the power cut. The content of the imaginary scenario I described is object (i) (the relation between form and content) but the relation between form and content is different from the one in the minute-of-silence event. In the office case, the content was described to you by me and not experienced by you, except as description; in the minute-of-silence event, it was experienced by you.

Moreover, the silence event and the imagined office scenario are, on another level within the talk (a meta-level (object (iv))), another form in which the object 'relation between form and content' is cast. On this level, the silence event and the imagined office scenario play a role analogous to, respectively, not-silence/silence. In the sense that, in moving from the silence event to the imagine office scenario, you experienced (I would assume) a difference.

Another, fifth, object regards an aspect of the nature of attention (more accurately, attention as the notion defined by Weil in her writings, as I understand it now). The fifth object [Write object on board] is the proving (or disproving) of the following hypothesis: *Nobody and nothing can compel one to be attentive; something can hinder one from being attentive.* [Write full hypothesis on blackboard.]

There are other objects:

Object (vi) is 'traps in argument, or loose reasoning chain'. This is an implicit object, in the sense that it is a little hidden; and, it is very likely that, in this talk, there may be many instances of loose reasoning chains that are hidden to me but blatantly evident to you and that you may want to point out at the end of this talk; in fact, this is so probable that you may be wondering why I bothered to intentionally loosen some reasoning chains; I suppose the answer would be: Just in case. [Write 'i' beside the implicit objects]

By 'implicit object' I also mean that the object is *in* the form. For instance, take question: *'Is the first word of this question 'is'?' a self-referential question?* [Write sentence on blackboard]

In this sentence the object *self-referentiality* is implicit in 'Is the first word of this question 'is'?' and explicit in ''Is the first word of this question 'is'?' a self-referential question?' as a whole. Although, is it? Difficult to tell since 'this question' seems to refer to both the whole question and the nested question.

Other objects are: (vii) facts (?); (viii) erasure – implicit; (ix) axiom; (x) question; and there are probably other objects [Write '...' under objects].

First, I will read two quotes from Weil's writings where she talks about attention.

The first quote is from a book called *Leçons de philosophie*. This book does not contain Weil's writings but the notes that a student of Weil took during her philosophy lessons. Moreover, the quote that you will hear is my translation in English of an Italian translation of the text. Here is the quote:

> Emotions always engender spontaneous attention (fear, horror, etc.). ... Psychological
> symptoms: One cannot think about something else. ... In voluntary attention, one continuously
> ... stops voluntary attention from becoming spontaneous attention.[466]

So Weil makes a distinction between spontaneous and voluntary attention. From now on, when I refer to attention, I mean voluntary attention. As an example of voluntary attention, Weil gives the effort one puts in solving a geometrical problem.

---

[466] Weil, *LF*, pp. 243–4.

As an example of spontaneous attention I would give this [Bang loudly on the table].

The second quote is taken from an essay which in English (I don't know the French title) is called 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God' which is contained in the book with the English title *Waiting for God*. The French title is *Attente de Dieu*. Weil did not give this title to the book nor did she collect the essays contained in it – it was published posthumously.

> It is certain that this effort [of attention] will bear its fruit in prayer. There is no doubt whatever about that. Certainties of this kind are experimental. But if we do not believe in them before experiencing them, if at least we do not behave as though we believed in them, we shall never have the experience that leads to such certainties. There is a kind of contradiction here. Above a given level this is the case with all useful knowledge concerning spiritual progress. If we do not regulate our conduct by it before having proved it, if we do not hold on to it for a long time by faith alone, a faith at first stormy and without light, we shall never transform it into certainty. Faith is the indispensable condition.[467]

I will start by making a little terminology substitution: Someone or something that compels one to do *p* can be also said to demand *p* from that very one. I make the substitution to temper a little the absoluteness of the term 'compel'. If, first, I prove that somebody or something can demand that one be attentive, then, it may be easier to take on the task of proving the stronger not-compel/hinder hypothesis. If I cannot prove the weaker demand hypothesis, then, there seems to me little hope to prove the strong hypothesis.

Here are two things – rather two words that stand for two classes of things, that is, objects that you can see and touch of which I brought one example [Show *Tractatus*] and something that stands for it [Show piece of twine]. So, here are two things: a tightrope and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (to which, from now on, I will refer as the *Tractatus*).

For those of you who are not familiar with the *Tractatus*, it is considered by many an extremely demanding read – I say demanding *read* and not *book* because, as a book, the *Tractatus* could, for instance, be used as a door stopper, although that would perhaps be too demanding for the *Tractatus* since it is so slim.

Does *reading* the *Tractatus demand* attention? No. One could read it inattentively.

Does walking on a tightrope *demand* attention? No. One could walk on it inattentively and fall. Or a very experienced tightrope-walker may walk on it inattentively and *not* fall.

---

[467] Weil, *WG*, p. 58.

It seems that *Tractatus*-reading and tightrope-walking demand one's attention only if one reads the *Tractatus* and walks on the tightrope *attentively*. This is a plain tautology. Is there a way out of the tautology? I say 'a way out' because, *to me*, a tautology feels like a circularity that I want to exit as soon as possible. I stress '*to me*' because, *to you*, a tautology may feel like a pleasant place to be, a place that you may want to leave eventually – but not in a rush.

A way out of the tautology would be to trace back the etymological root of the verb 'to demand' which is the Latin *demandare*, to entrust, charge with a commission. The *Tractatus* and the tightrope demand attention in the sense that they entrust whoever reads/walks them with the commission of reading/walking them attentively – one can choose whether to read/walk them attentively or not, whether or not to betray the entrusted trust. The drawback is that, in English, the verb 'to demand' has very strong connotation of order, to be sure an order that can be contravened but not without an expectation of more or less unwanted consequences (that is not the case in Italian, for instance, where 'domandare' means 'to ask'). [Object vi. This is a little trap. Earlier on, I said 'If I cannot prove the weaker demand hypothesis, then, there seems to me little hope to prove the strong hypothesis', but now, not having proven the weak demand hypothesis, I proceed to try to prove the strong compel hypothesis]

[Write on blackboard: 'This statement is false']

[The liar paradox is an *example* of paradox. The status of the example with regard to individual and universals is a special one, according to Agamben: 'In any context where it exerts its force, the example is characterized by the fact that it holds for all cases of the same type, and, at the same time, it is included among these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all.'[468] This may have a bearing on the discourse on what distinguishes an art product from a, for instance, philosophy product (e.g. a book), the former usually understood as individual (particular), the latter as universal (general). Also, this may be important in relation to Weil's use of Greek tragedy as an example. A tragedy is a fictional example (in this sense, different from the liar paradox which *is* both a paradox and an example of a paradox).]

This is called the *liar paradox*. It is also known as *Epimenides paradox*, named after Epimenides who was a Cretan who once said 'All Cretans are liars'.

Try to work out if the statement is true or false [Give a couple of minutes to the audience to think about the paradox].

---

[468] Agamben, 2007, pp. 9–10.

Your reasoning will probably have been something like the following: If the statement is false, then it is true; but if the statement is true, then it is false; but if the statement is false, then it is true; and so on.

What I want to draw your attention to is not the circularity of the statement (as interesting I find it) but to the fact that, it seems to me that when you reason 'If the statement is false, then it is true, or, if the statement is true, then it is false', nobody and nothing compels you to do so.

Your reasoning seems to me a thought experiment, you are drawing conclusions *as though you believed* [Write 'as though' on blackboard] that the statement is false and *as though you believed* that the statement is true. Your thought experiments are not unlike the experiments that scientists do *as though s/he believed* that *p* to see if *p* is the case or not. And it is not unlike my having as an object of the talk the hypothesis 'Nobody and nothing can compel one to be attentive; something can hinder one from being attentive' as though I believed it in order to see if this hypothesis is or is not the case.

Certainly, it is not the statement that compels you to make these thought experiments since the statement gives you no answers with regard to its truth or falsity. And certainly, it is not me that compels you to make these thought experiments since all I ask of you is to try to work out if the statement is true or false and I leave the rest to you.

You cannot even suspect that, somehow, my knowing the answer to the question 'Is the statement true or false?' is (unknowingly to you) stirring (or even *compelling*) you to formulate certain thought experiments since, if you have tried to answer it, you are probably quite certain by now that I do not know the answer either.

Yet there is something that hinders you. You just cannot answer the question 'Is the statement true or false?' – it keeps slipping away. You may think: The 'this' in 'This statement is false' does not point to the self-same sentence where it is found. This is all very well but that doesn't answer the question 'Is the statement true or false?' but the question 'Is the statement self-referential or not?' Besides, even trying to decide whether the sentence is self-referential or not seems to me tricky, to say the least.

This paradox should have given you the flavour of a *non-compelled act*. It should also have given you the flavour of a *hindered act*. That is, if you accept that a thought experiment is an act and if you agree with me that the thought experiment involved in the liar paradox is non-compelled but hindered. [Write flavour near hypothesis] In fact, this flavour is another object.

I will return to object v shortly but, first, I think a break would be beneficial. What follows is a recreational short section called the *blackboard* [Write 'blackboard' on blackboard] dealing with object (vii).

In an early version of the *blackboard* section I wrote:

'In the *blackboard* section I will deal only with facts. 'What is a *fact*?', you may ask. And I may reply: 'An example of a fact would be 'The earth is not flat''. And you, who may not be in the mood for heavyweight arguing and may let go of the "fact" that you didn't ask for an example of a fact but for a definition of a fact, may say: 'But would 'The earth is not flat' be a fact for someone who believes that the earth *is* flat?' And I may say: 'mmm...' and scratch my head.

And at this point, I may realise that, before I say 'In the *blackboard* section I will deal only with facts', I better make sure that I am clear about what a fact is. And, as this process of clarification may seem very daunting to me, I may leave it to one side for the moment and rephrase the introduction of the blackboard section: 'In the *blackboard* section I will deal only with non-explanations.'

'What is a *non-explanation*?', you may ask. And I may reply: 'An example of a non-explanation would be 'The earth is not flat''. Assuming that you may still not be in the mood for heavyweight arguing, you may say: 'But would 'The earth is not flat' be a non-explanation to someone who believes that the earth *is* flat?' And I would probably say: 'Yes'.'

[The quote from an earlier version of the talk is so long that, when I read it, I forget it is a quote (a bit like for the long quotes in the *Iliad*), that is, I am hindered from believing that it is a quote even though I know that it is a quote.]

Here are a few non-explanations:

My primary school teacher was called 'Maestra Mariucci' [Write 'Mariucci' on blackboard].

A German artist who was born in 1921 and died in 1986 was called 'Joseph Beuys' [Write 'Beuys' on blackboard].

One day, in 1974, Maestra Mariucci taught a lesson at the primary school of the town of Musile di Piave [Write 'Musile di Piave' on blackboard].

One day, in 1974, Joseph Beuys gave a lecture at The Art Institute in Chicago [Write 'Chicago' on blackboard].

In 1974, Maestra Mariucci used a blackboard.

In 1974, Joseph Beuys used a blackboard

In January 2007, I used a blackboard.

In October 2007, I used a blackboard.

In January 2007, somebody mentioned Joseph Beuys to me.

In October 2007, somebody mentioned Joseph Beuys to me.

[It would be very tempting for me to say: in January and in October 2007, nobody mentioned Maestra Mariucci to me. This would still be a non-explanation but it would also make *explicit* (implicit-ness/explicit-ness is another object that the talk represents through examples) my questioning of the usefulness of the kind of comparisons people tend to make when talking about art, that is, it would imply that the fact that Beuys used a blackboard doesn't seem very relevant to me in relation to what I'm doing. The most important point is to show that categories (such as non-explanation and explanation) don't have necessarily sharply defined limits (and this links with Hofstadter's image of the wind chime), that they may blur/shade into one another. When one says 'I am only stating the facts' as if to say 'I am not trying to present facts in a certain light, I am not trying to tell you what to think about the facts', the line between explanation and non-explanation is supposed to be very clearly defined. By not saying this, I hope that the form itself will reveal the content, showing it rather that describing it.]

Object viii. I cannot prove the hypothesis *nobody and nothing can compel one to be attentive; something can hinder one from being attentive*. Why?

It may be that I run out of ideas. Or there may be something about the hypothesis that resists (for the time being at least) its proving. So, I will have another look at the hypothesis.

One aspect of the hypothesis that I had not noticed at first is that the two parts of it do not seem to me equally problematical. That attention can be hindered seems quite unproblematic to me, and this has nothing to do with how one defines *attention*. It is unproblematic because anything in the *material* world of action and reaction can potentially be hindered. Any human being can be hindered in any action whatsoever by another human being if, for instance, the latter kills the former. But what about compulsion?

Nobody and nothing can compel one to be attentive: In order *for me to prove this to each one of you*, I would have to find a way to make you make an effort of attention, but *without compelling you to so do* (since that would disprove the hypothesis). And how could I do this?

At the moment, I think that the only way I could do this is by *suggesting*, by *inviting* you to have *faith* in the hypothesis, to act *as though* the hypothesis were true which, as I said

earlier, seems to me a non-compelled act. And which is what Weil argues in the quote I read earlier and which I will read again:

> It is certain that this effort [of attention] will bear its fruit in prayer. There is no doubt whatever about that. Certainties of this kind are experimental. But if we do not believe in them before experiencing them, if at least we do not behave as though we believed in them, we shall never have the experience that leads to such certainties. There is a kind of contradiction here. Above a given level this is the case with all useful knowledge concerning spiritual progress. If we do not regulate our conduct by it before having proved it, if we do not hold on to it for a long time by faith alone, a faith at first stormy and without light, we shall never transform it into certainty. Faith is the indispensable condition.[469]

But would this suggestion/invitation count as *me proving to each one of you* that *nobody and nothing can compel one to be attentive*? It would seem not but I am not too sure about this.

The other issue is that, for Weil, (voluntary) attention is non-compelled by definition:

> In voluntary attention, one continuously ... stops voluntary attention from becoming spontaneous attention.[470]

Imagine that somebody who wants to challenge Weil on the point of the non-compellability of attention says to Weil: 'Someone is pointing a gun to your head. S/he gives you pencil and paper and tells you to draw a perfect circle. S/he also tells you that if the circle you draw is not perfect, s/he will kill you. You will probably draw as attentively as you can and you will be compelled to do so.' I imagine that Weil would reply: 'No drawn circle will ever be a perfect circle so there is no point in me trying to draw one. If my life depends on my drawing a perfect circle, I am as dead already by the very definition of perfect circle'. The other, a little impatient because Weil has cunningly evaded the issue, would then slightly reshape the imaginary scenario and say: 'Ok, not a perfect circle but whatever the gun-pointer deems to be a good enough circle'. I imagine that Weil's reply would be: 'If I was compelled to draw attentively it was spontaneous attention that I exercised and not *voluntary* attention, which *by definition* is voluntary and, therefore, *non*-compelled.'

[The dialogue highlights the relation between form and content. The content of the dialogue could be represented in a non-dialogue form but it wouldn't be quite the same *thing* – yes, words on a piece of paper are a thing too, and not only at the level of ink on paper. The Socratic dialogues. A dialogue as an *example* of a line of thought?]

Object xix. I am almost tempted to say that, for Weil, it is axiomatic that attention is non-compellable. But I am not sure about this.

---

[469] Weil, *WG*, p. 58.
[470] Weil, *LF*, pp. 243–4.

By 'axiom' I mean *traditional* axiom. In the *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, under the word 'axiom' one reads:

> Traditionally, propositions taken as axioms were so selected because they were thought to be self-evidently and indubitably true; neither capable of proof nor requiring any.[471]

The modern notion of axiom is:

> A formula (i.e. proposition, or a well-formed expression which on interpretation yields a proposition) that belongs to an axiomatic system, without being derived from any other formula in that system.[472]

If you are interested in the modern notion of axiom, I suggest that you have a look at Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*. I can give you the bibliographic details at the end, if you are interested.

So, in a way, it *feels* right to me that the non-compellability of attention should be axiomatic, since the axiom is the epitome of the non-compelled belief in the sense that nobody and nothing can compel one to believe an axiom, since it is so self-evident that it cannot be doubted in the first place. Here is an example of an axiomatic and self-evident truth: 'if *a*, *b*; *a* therefore *b*' [Write 'if *a*, *b*; *a* therefore *b*' on board]. I have some doubts on whether this qualifies as an axiom but I will assume it does for the moment.

I will read an extract taken from an email exchange which took place between July and August 2005 on the *International Stoic Forum*, between Paul Ryan, who I mentioned earlier, and somebody who I do not name because I did not ask their permission to do so. The email answers a question about Leibniz's *Principle of Sufficient Reason*: There can be no true proposition without a sufficient reason for its truth. Paul writes:

> this is how I see it:
> true propositions not based on any particular reason are the
> 'indemonstrables' of logic (so called in stoic logic):
> for example:
> If A, then B; A therefore B.
> There are five such indemonstrables.
> These are the foundations of reason, and being such they have no pre-cursor
> reasons to be true. Instead they tell us something about causation itself
> (which is why paradoxes were so important to stoics - they show up the
> detail).

---

[471] Mautner, 2000, p. 56.
[472] Ibid., p. 56.

So we can say:

'If it is day then it is light; it is day therefore it is light'

Without needing further justification

It may be counter-intuitive, but we can also say

'If it is day then it is dark, it is day therefore it is dark'

but we might want to re-define the words 'day' or 'dark', so that vocabulary

can make sense.

I make that last point to try to show that the 'indemonstrable' is the

proposition's 'form', not the words.

'If *a*, *b*; *a* therefore *b*' is an axiom because nobody, so far, to my knowledge (which I admit is very limited in this field) has ever come up with a way of disproving it. Thus, so far, to my knowledge, nobody has ever been compelled in believing that 'If *a*, *b*; *a* therefore *b*' is true.

The way I picture to myself an axiomatic truth is in the form of a dialogue: On one side of the dialogue, there is a follower of Descartes' who has attained the secret of *absolute doubt* (there is no limit to the capacity of doubt of this Cartesian; s/he can even doubt whether s/he *is* at all, in order to come to the unshakable belief that indeed s/he *is* because s/he thinks); on the other side of the dialogue, there is somebody who has a few self-acknowledged limits when it comes to doubting. For instance, s/he cannot doubt that 'if *a*, *b*; *a* therefore *b*' is true. The Cartesian says: prove it, prove it, prove it! On and on, and the other does not know what to say.

Object x. Is the non-compellability of attention likewise self-evident and non-provable? The title of this talk is a quote from a book by Giorgio Agamben called *The Coming Community* (the Italian original title is *La communità che viene*) and it is to be found near the end of the following passage:

> Between the not being able to not-be that sanctions the decree of necessity and the being able to not-be that defines fluctuating contingency, the finite world suggests a contingency to the second power that does not found any freedom: It is capable of not not-being, it is capable of the irreparable.[473]

I won't say anything about 'being able to not-be' since contingency doesn't ring true to me.

When I first started writing the talk, the words that I used in the title, 'is capable of not not-being", seemed, somehow, to promise an answer to the question: Is the non-compellability of attention likewise self-evident and non-provable? I say *promised* because it was by no means clear to me how it could answer the question. It was a *feeling*. But as the days passed

---

[473] Agamben, 2007, p. 40.

the feeling evaporated and I spent a sleepless night with 'is capable of not not-being' swirling in my mind, trying to at least recapture that feeling if not getting an answer.

Then, little by little (it was no sudden bolt from the sky), an idea started emerging: 'is capable of not not-being' subtly emphasises interiority. It does so by moving the 'not' from the place before the ability [Write 'not being able to not-be' on blackboard] to the place after the ability (or capability) [Move 'not'] (Object (i)), so that the ability envelops the negation rather than the other way around.

But, as awareness of the subtle difference in meaning between 'not being able to not-be' and "is capable of not not-being" emerged, I also became aware that it kept slipping away with "not being able to not-be" and "is capable of not not-being" *boiling down to* the same thing. I use the expression *boiling down* to convey the idea of a purely mechanistic outlook that assumes that meanings can be *boiled down* since it is, I think, this kind of outlook that makes me lose sight of the subtle difference.

Acknowledge complexity. I will conclude the talk with an image that Douglas Hofstadter develops in the book *The Mind's I*, which, to me, seems a fruit of a *non-boiling down* outlook. This book is concerned with the issue of the distinction between matter and mind. The view of the author is that the distinction is not nearly as sharp as it has generally been thought to be, but rather is a matter of (subtle) degree.

[Attach the *Tractatus* to the twine and hang it]

The image is that of a wind chime, the lowliest wind chime'. Hofstadter says that this wind chime has volition. But then he goes on: 'But is it fair? Does a wind chime have desires? Can a wind chime think?' Then he progressively makes his imagined wind chime more and more complex:

> There is a fan on a track near the chime, whose position is electronically controlled by the angle of one particular branch in the chime, and whose blades rotational speed is controlled by the angle of another branch ... many branches control blowers, one blower per branch. Now when wind – natural or blower-caused – blows, a group of tinklers will shimmer, and subtly and delicately they will transmit a soft shimmer to various other portions of the chime. That in turn propagates around, gradually twisting branches, thus creating a new chime state that determines where the blowers point and how hard they blow ... Now the external wind and the internal chime state are intertwined in a very complicated way – so complicated, in fact, that it would be very hard to disentangle them conceptually from each other.[474]

 [Turn blackboard.]

---

[474] Hofstadter, 1982, p. 198.

I leave you with the image of this wind chime which is so very hard to disentangle conceptually from the wind that blows on it. Agamben's 'is capable of not not-being' seems to me also to point to the same complexity, to give a *flavour* of it with the subtlety of the linguistic adjustments that he makes. [Again the importance of form for content/meaning. The difference in Agamben's phrases is very difficult to explain in terms of grammatical difference. From a grammatical point of view, both phrases are a double negation and they have 'roughly' the same meaning.]

It seems to me that a discourse on the compellability or non-compellability of attention would have to start with an acknowledgement of such complexity, which is what I aimed to do with this talk.

Thank you.

Appendix 4

Appendix 4: Version of *Bâton de l'aveugle* published in Alfier, 2010.

Where There is Nothing, Read that I Love You: Simone Weil's 'Attention' and the Art of Perception

Dino Alfier
The Centre for Drawing Project Space at Wimbledon College of Art, London

Thus our moments of Cartesian clairvoyance are useless without an art of perception, that is, a gymnastic which allows us to recall pure understanding, while not stopping, as we do in reflection, being attentive to the dances of our body. But doubtless this gymnastic would not be possible without the experience of special perceptions by which the spontaneous dance of our body, although it sometimes compels our attention, does not hinder, and perhaps aids, the use of pure understanding. These special perceptions are given to each one of us by humankind through works of art.[1]

The subject of what follows is Simone Weil's argument on the training of attention. The two main texts on which I will draw are Weil's essays *De la perception ou l'aventure de Protée*[2] and *Essai sur la notion de lecture*[3]. I will articulate the argument by giving an account of my art project *Bâton de l'aveugle*: a video composed of over one hundred blind contour drawings[4] of Weil's 1935 Renault factory identity card[5]. Each drawing took between 1 and 60 minutes and, in the video, each drawing appears for a number of seconds equivalent to the number of minutes it took to draw it[6].

I will consider two strands of Weil's argument. The first strand adduces that works of art are useful means in the training of attention. The second strand is best introduced with a metaphor which Weil uses: the metaphor of the blind person. How does a blind person learn to read objects with a cane? At first, the

Appendix 4

sensations caused by the cane on the hand are overwhelming and the blind person finds it difficult or impossible to perceive what is at the end of the cane. When the blind person has mastered the cane, the sensations of it on the hand hardly register and attention is directed to the object conveyed by the sensations. With the image of the blind person, Weil illustrates a general point about the perception of reality, namely, that, for Weil, we read everything that happens to us in a certain way, and, by a slow apprenticeship, we can change the way we read, as the blind person does[7]. For Weil, we can improve how we read: the aim is to read everything that happens as *good* for the very fact that it happens, instead of interpreting certain event as good (e.g. pleasurable occurrences) and other things as bad (e.g. painful occurrences)[8].

Weil holds that human beings are frequently fooled by their disorderly imagination because they distort their perception with the reflection of their emotions; for instance, Weil writes,

[...] when the sun rises, I do not know if the landscape seems to me more joyous because I feel happier, or because the sun is higher; a real landscape is illuminated by my happiness as much as by the sun's rays.[9]

works of art are useful means in the training of attention

In such conditions, attention to the world is impossible because the world keeps changing abruptly under the distorting effects of ever-changing emotions, and nothing is stable enough to become an object of attention[10]. For Weil, even if one could attain an emotionless state in which reality is perceived as a web of pure mathematical relationships, nobody could remain in this state of pure reason for very long, because, for her, imagination and emotions are necessarily involved in all perception[11]. What can one do, then, in order to pay attention to the world? One can train in the art of perception by contemplating works of art. Works of art move us aesthetically and, yet, they remain indifferent to us:

[...] in a painted sunrise, even if the light can make me happy, this happiness will never be accompanied by an accretion of the light.'[12]

By imitating the moving indifference of works of art, one can learn to direct

264

Appendix 4

one's attention to the world without distorting it with the reflection of emotions. Eventually, this leads to love of everything that happens[13].

synthesis of intellection and sensation

Weil's argument can be summarised as follows: The world is ordered but extremely complex and it is difficult to perceive its order; the senses of those unskilled in the art of perception are passively subjected to the world, so they respond to this aesthetic assault by fabricating illusions; the order of works of art, on the other hand, is simple and, unlike purely mathematical order, it is an aesthetic order – one can *feel* it, not only *think* it, and it is thus suited to human perception, which is a synthesis of intellection and sensation[14]. To elucidate the notion of aesthetic order, Weil gives the example of the sounds of a piece of music: these sounds are moving, but their order is indifferent to us because it is based on invariable rules which have nothing to do with the emotions we feel while listening[15].

One aim of the blind drawing project was to produce an image that carries a quality of moving indifference. The image of a face is psychologically charged, attention is drawn to it almost automatically, and it is easy to read expressions in it (even an expressionless face is a face with an expressionless *expression*); in short, the image of a face is moving. But, in blind drawing, eye, nose, mouth, etc. are all represented indifferently by the same kind of line; in fact, there is only one line in each drawing; and the order of the images in the video is indifferent to what one may call 'the emerging lingering family resemblance,' in the sense that this resemblance is sometimes lost. In other words, while the content of the project carries a moving agency, its form carries a quality of indifference[16]. Furthermore, the erratic duration of each drawing in the video creates an impression of indifference[17].

As regards the second strand of the argument, which concerns the shifting of attention, I hoped that, in time, the drawings might begin to indicate a shift of attention from the whole of the face, whose psychological charge, as I said, attracts attention, to the far end of the "cane of my eyes," so to speak, where the eyes "meet" the contour of shapes with no explicit figurative significance[18].

265

attention is love of reality

I conclude with a few words on the role of attention in Weil's transcendental metaphysics. The object of the most elevated attention[19] is reality: attention is love of reality. But reality, which for Weil is the creation of God, is perceived as *emptiness*, as de-*void* of love: even though God loves through reality[20], we cannot read this love – and yet, for Weil, we must love reality:

It is not that one must love evil. But one must love God through evil. When a child while playing breaks a precious object, the mother does not love this destruction. But later if the son moves far away or dies, she remembers this accident with tenderness because she only sees in it one of the manifestations of the existence of her child.[21]

A parallel can be made with a letter of Denis Diderot to his lover Sophie Volland. God means love through creation as Diderot, uncertain whether his characters will be legible, hopes that the characters will nevertheless express his love, thus *turning the reader into a lover*:

I write without seeing [...]. I write that I love you; at least, that is what I want to write [...]. This is the first time I have ever written in the dark [...] not knowing whether I am indeed forming letters. Where there will be nothing, read that I love you.[22] INDIGO

266

Appendix 4

Dino Alfier, Drawings 1 – 49 for Bâton de l'aveugle

267

Appendix 4

Dino Alfier, Drawings 50 – 98 for Bâton de l'aveugle

268

Appendix 4

---

1) 'Ainsi nos moments de clairvoyance cartésienne nous sont inutiles sans un art de percevoir, c'est-à-dire une gymnastique qui nous permet de rappeler le pur entendement, sans cesser pourtant, comme nous faisons au moment de la réflexion, d'être attentifs aux danses de notre corps. Mais cette gymnastique même ne nous serait sans doute jamais accessible, sans l'expérience de perceptions privilégiées, par lesquelles la danse spontanée de notre corps, tout en s'imposant parfois à l'attention, n'empêche jamais, et peut-être aide, l'exercice du pur entendement. Ces perceptions privilégiées sont fournis à chacun de nous par l'humanité dans les œuvres d'arts.' Weil, 1988, p138.

2) Ibid., pp121-139.

3) Weil, 2008, pp73-79.

4) In blind contour drawing, the drawer fixes his or her eyes on the outline of the object, drawing the contour with a continuous line without lifting the pencil or looking at the paper.

5) Weil worked in several factories to study the conditions of workers. I chose this image because it is the most iconic of all of Weil's photographic portraits: it has been used extensively on the covers of many books by and on Weil. Amongst the many factors which render this image so iconic, I will refer to the following two: firstly, its frontality and the impassibility of Weil's expression – which, I venture, will be read by many as a representation of Weil's moral staunchness; secondly, the image might remind one that Weil sought contact with that hard reality (she, a well-to-do Parisian, chose to become a factory worker) which she so keenly advocated.

6) Reprinted in this paper are images of the first 98 drawings made for *Bâton de l'aveugle*, in chronological order, left to right, top to bottom.

7) Ibid., pp73-79, p75-76. As Claude Droz argues, for Weil, '[...] attention transforms the force of impressions by transforming imagination.' Droz, 2008, p406.

8) Weil, 1985, p154-155.Weil appropriates the simile of the blind person from Descartes's *Optics* (see: Descartes, 1985, p153f, p166, p169f). However, that is not to say that Weil subscribes to Descartes' physiological account of vision; rather she uses Descartes' image metaphorically and in different contexts; for instance, Weil uses it to illustrate not only the idea of reading and of the possibility of shifting one's attention, but also that of metaxu or means between a human and a transcendental being. The blind person simile appears many times in Weil's notebooks. See for instance: Weil, 1994, p110, p201, p290, pp293-295, p308-309, p316, p322, p329, pp338-339, pp410-411; Weil, 1997, p73, p145, p247, p337, pp356-357, p465.

9) '[…] quand le soleil le lève, je ne sais si le paysage me paraît plus joyeux parce que j'éprouve plus de joie, ou parce que le soleil est plus haut ; un paysage réel est éclairé aussi bien par mon bonheur que par les rayons du soleil.' Weil, (1988), p138.

10) Ibid., p122, p127, p132.

11) Ibid., p137. Weil, 2008, p79.

12) '[…] en un lever de soleil peint, si la lumière me peut donner de la joie, jamais cette joie ne sera accompagnée d'un accroissement de lumière.' Weil, 1988, p138.

13) Ibid., pp137-139.

14) Weil, 2008, p79.

15) Weil, 1988, p138. Michel Narcy argues that Weil conceptualised necessity in Cartesian fashion as blind, i.e. as not having *finality*, or, rather, as having a *finality without finality**, that is as a work of art. Narcy, 2003, pp237-253, pp33-34. * For an investigation of the view of artistic creation as characterised by finality without finality, see: Lyotard, 1991, p172.

16) By 'content' I mean that which one reads in the 'form.' For example, if one writes the word 'house' first in lower case and then in capital letters, one changes the form but not the content of

269

the word. I do realise that this is a simplification. For instance, take a text written all in lower case except for the word 'HOUSE' which is written in capitals: would that not change the content of the text? I think it would, at least at the level of connotation, if not at that of denotation.

17) Indeterminacy seems to me more indifferent that determinacy, because in the latter one possesses at least a certain degree of control in the form of an understanding of the determining law, while in the former no such knowledge is available.

18) The hope remains unfulfilled.

19) Weil distinguishes between two orders of attention: intellectual attention and the most elevated attention. Intellectual attention '[...] gives rise to reality [...]' seen as a web of necessary connections. Without this kind of attention, there would be no thinkable reality*, i.e. no reality at all. Weil calls this non-reality state 'the kingdom of Proteus,' because, in such a state, everything would be protean discontinuity ungraspable by thought.± But the reality to which intellectual attention gives rise is only a half-reality in comparison to the full reality perceived by the one who consents to, who loves, all that happens.§ * Weil, 1985, pp154-155. ± Weil, 1988, pp127-129, p386. § Weil, 1985, pp154-155.

20) Very often Weil states that God and reality are one and the same thing.

21) 'Ce n'est pas qu'il faille aimer le mal. Mais il faut aimer Dieu à travers le mal. Quand un enfant en jouant brise un objet précieux, la mère n'aime pas cette destruction. Mais si plus tard son fils s'en va au loin ou meurt, elle [...] pense à cette accident avec tendresse parce qu'elle n'y voit plus qu'une des manifestations de l'existence de son enfant.' Weil, S, (2008), pp272-273.

22) This translation is quoted, with some additions, from Derrida, 1993, p1. The original French reads: 'J'écris sans voir [...]. Je vous écris que je vous aime, je veux du moins vous l'écrire [...] Voilà la première fois que j'écris dans les ténèbres [...] sans savoir si je forme des caractères. Partout où il n'y aura rien, lisez que je vous aime.' Diderot, 1984, p48.

Bibliography

Derrida, J, (1993), *Memoirs of the Blind. The self-portrait and other ruins*, Brault, P-A & Naas, M, (Trans.), Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

Descartes, R, (1985), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. 3*, (Cottingham, J, Murdoch, D & Stoothof, R, (Trans.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Diderot, D, (1984), *Lettres à Sophie Volland*, Paris, Gallimard.

Droz, C, (2008), 'L'attention ou la force transformée dans les *Cahiers*,' *Cahiers Simone Weil*, Vol. 31, N. 4, pp401-416.

Lyotard, F-J, (1991), *The Inhuman*, G. Bennington & R. Bowlby (Trans), Cambridge, Polity Press.

Narcy, M, (2003), 'Le dualisme chez Alain, Simone Weil et Simone Pétrement,' *Simone Weil : La passion de la raison*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

Weil, S, (1985), *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Paris, Fayard.

Weil, S, (1988), *Œuvres complètes, Tome 1. Premiers écrits philosophiques*, Paris, Gallimard.

Weil, S, (1994), *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers, Vol. 1. 1933-septembre 1941*, Paris, Gallimard.

Weil, S, (1997), *Œuvres complètes, Tome 6, Cahiers, Vol. 2. La science et l'impensable*, Paris, Gallimard.

Weil, S, (2008), *Œuvres complètes, Tome 4, Vol. 1. Écrits de Marseille (1940 – 1942). Philosophie, science, religion, questions politiques et sociales*, Paris, Gallimard.

Appendix 5: Centre for Drawing Project Space – Notes 07

Dear Fellows of the Board of Discernment of Realities

I learn, not without profound consternation, that BODOR doubts my reality. I shall tackle the issue headlong and without hesitation: I am *real!* You should know that I seldom employ exclamation marks, but I hope you will excuse this use of heightened punctuation, given the fact that what is at stake here is nothing less that my reality! I am quite sure that many others, if similarly plighted, would not refrain from using two, or even three exclamation marks! In the acts of your last yearly colloquy, whose inflammatory, yet infuriatingly catchy, title was *Railing at Roilers of Really Real,* one reads:

"After much careful deliberating, the members of the Board unanimously concur that Mr Otto U. Gayl is a mere figment of the imagination, an inconsequential thought, an immaterial nothing, a less than measly insignificance, a paltry, puny, trifle of a negligible triviality. Succinctly, Mr Gayl is *not real,* and, therefore, Mr Gayl shall be *banned from reality,* from now on and for eternity. Anyone found claiming the reality of Mr Gayl will be severely prosecuted.".

Leaving aside the question of how something non-real would need to, or, even could be, banned from reality, I believe that I have good reasons to be alarmed. May I ask how any of you, gentlemen of the Board, would react at the unexpected news of your unreality? Not to mention the fact that, having claimed, at the opening of this letter, my reality, I can now look forward to being severely prosecuted, although I wonder how: by realigning the real rollers of my derailed unreality, perhaps? That would not surprise me, if the title of your colloquy is anything to go by. But let us move on.

To me, the fact of my reality seems to follow uncontrovertibly from the fact that I am writing to you. Yet, I understand (or, rather, I can imagine, which, perhaps, is not the same as understanding), that, in order to be reassured, or, rather, assured, of my reality, you might need some elucidations as regards the modality of my being real. What does qualify as real, for me? Simple: anything that can conceivably have an effect, of which the real something is the cause, or that can reasonably explain a fact, is real. It is true that, since clairvoyance is rare and since reasonableness is a complicated notion, the matter is not as simple as it may at first appear, nevertheless, the criteria of reality, which I propose, have, on the whole, proved reliable in my day-to-day business of deciding what is real.

Let us go back to 1633. In Rome, Galileo Galilei stands before the Inquisition, suspected of heresy. In his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems,* he had argued, in a manner not veiled enough, for heliocentrism. Galileo is thinking "I wonder if geocentrism is real?". Now, I am thinking "Galileo's most obvious and reasonable explanation of the fact that he was standing trial was the reality of geocentrism. And he could conceive of a set of likely effects of geocentrism, effects which geocentrism would have conceivably caused, had he not recanted his heliocentric assertions. Therefore, Galileo must have

concluded that geocentrism was real indeed.". No, Galileo did not think that geocentrism was *true.* In fact, it is precisely because he believed that geocentrism was false that he became so aware of the reality of it. But, I ask, is it not enough for something that is real to be real? Why burden it with the weighty bifurcation of either true or false?

As I said, I am real. I am real as geocentrism is real. And I can add a further analogy: I am real as 641 is real. Let me explain with a rather long quote from Douglas Hofstadter's *I Am A Strange Loop,* Chapter 3: 'The Causal Potency of Patterns', Subchapter: 'The Prime Mover' (Hofstadter, DR, (2007), *I Am A Strange Loop,* New York, Basic Books, pp.37-39):

"My first example involves the familiar notion of a chain of falling dominos. However, I'll jazz up the standard image a bit by stipulating that each domino is spring-loaded in a clever fashion (details do not concern us) so that whenever it gets knocked down by its neighbor, after a short "refractory" period it flips back up to its vertical state, all set to be knocked down once more. With such a system, we can implement a mechanical computer that works by sending signals down stretches of dominos that can bifurcate or join together; thus signals can propagate in loops, jointly trigger other signals, and so forth. Relative timing, of course, will be of the essence, but once again, details do not concern us. The basic idea is just that we can imagine a network of precisely timed domino chains that amounts to a computer program for carrying out a particular computation, such as determining if a given input is a prime number or not. (John Searle, so fond of unusual substrates for computation, should like this "domino chainium" thought experiment!)

Let us thus imagine that we can give a specific numerical "input" to the chainium by taking any positive integer we are interested in – 641, say – and placing exactly that many dominos end to end in a "reserved" stretch of the network. Now, when we tip over the chainium's first domino, a Rube Goldberg-type series of events will take place in which domino after domino will fall, including, shortly after the outset, all 641 of the dominos constituting our input stretch, and as a consequence various loops will be triggered, with some loop presumably testing the input number for divisibility by 2, another for divisibility by 3, and so forth. If ever a divisor is found, then a signal will be sent down one particular stretch – let's call it the "divisor stretch" – and when we see that stretch falling, we will know that the input number has some divisor and thus is not prime. By contrast, if the input has no divisor, then the divisor stretch will never be triggered and we will know the input is prime.

Suppose an observer is standing by when the domino chainium is given 641 as input. The observer, who has not been told what the chainium was made for, watches keenly for a while, then points at one of the dominos in the divisor stretch and asks with curiosity, "How come that domino there is never falling?"

Let me contrast two very different type of answer that someone may give. The first type of answer – myopic to the point of silliness – would be, "Because its predecessor never

falls, you dummy!" To be sure, this is correct as far as it goes, but it doesn't go very far. It just pushes the buck to a different domino, and thus begs the question.

The second type of answer would be, "Because 641 is prime." Now this answer, while just as correct (indeed, in some sense is far more on the mark), has the curious property of not talking about anything physical at all. Not only has the focus moved upwards to collective properties of the chainium, but those properties somehow transcend the physical and have to do with pure abstractions, such as primality.

[...]

Before passing on to other metaphors, I'd like to point out that although here, 641's primality was used as an explanation for why a certain domino did *not* fall, it could equally serve as the explanation for why a certain domino *did* fall. In particular, in the domino chainium, there could be a stretch called the "prime stretch" whose dominos all topple when the set of potential divisors has been exhausted, which means that the input has been determined to be prime.

The point of this example is that 641's primality is the best explanation, perhaps even the *only* explanation, for why certain dominos *did* fall and certain other ones *did not* fall. In a word, 641 is a prime mover. So I ask: Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?".

"Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?". Is there a better way to end a quotation than on a questioning note? "Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?". And, a question about cause and effect, about shoving, in the bargain! Where was I? Ah, yes: I am real as 641 is real. I suspect that you, with your detestable nominalistic ways, whose perniciousness is indicated by the despicable language you have used to describe my supposed non-reality, would hold that 641 is *not* real, and that the only real thing in relation to the not-falling of domino X is the not-falling domino preceding it (the not-falling domino, not *the* not-falling *of* it). What can I say to you? On the one hand, I feel sorry for you: you are like a people whose numerical system does not include the notion of 0; even though you get by, your calculations are incredibly cumbersome and, must I say it, they lack the intangible Beauty of True Mathematics. On the other hand, I despise your arrogant presumption of being the keepers of the gates of reality. You delusionally believe yourselves to be the tamers of that ravenous institutional Great Beast whose name is BODOR, but, in fact, BODOR subjugates you, mere slaves to a monstrous master.

But, ultimately I do not fear your ban. If you wish, you can hang a generous reward over my unreal head, as bait for those who would be only too glad to hand my unreal self over to the real you, if ever should I digress the unreal borders, or the real limits of unreality, within which, by your decree, you allegedly confine me. The fact is that you *cannot* keep me out, and you know it. Your preposterous words are a sure mark of the powerlessness you so desperately attempt to conceal. Well, you cannot fool me.

Yours *really,*

OTTO U. GAYL.

GAYLIANA: ISLE OF IDLE

"I am the Houdini of Tautology."[1], Otto U. Gayl is reported to have told his life-long friend Kate W. Bhiln. This is, perhaps, the best introduction to the mind of the remarkable polymath, whose work is virtually unknown outside the forbidding and diminutive circle of Gaylian scholarship.

In *Going Around In Circles: The Life and Work of Otto U. Gayl*, Bhiln tells us that Gayl, spurred (or curbed) by his indomitable transcendentalism, never finished anything, on the grounds that, as he nautically elucidated, "Mortals' only approach towards divinity is by the shores of Infinity, but, as God refuses them His Perfect Docks, Nonfinishedness is the very next best thing."[2]

Entrusted with the task of fulfilling Gayl's testamentary wishes, Bhiln set up OUGA (Otto U. Gayl Archive). Understandably anguished, but, ultimately, as courageously as an Orpheus who would not look back at the still Hades-pacing Eurydice, Bhiln carried out the will:

> After having made as-accurate-as-possible copies of them, destroy all my manuscripts and fabrications.

The preceding unambiguous mandate was followed by an esoteric *post scriptum*:

> P.S. May imaging rig ruffled opposing rhythms.

What could this mean? Bhiln cogitated the conundrum for several months with no success until, consumed by the quandary and in a state of almost complete exhaustion, she had a vision: Gayl was holding the will, and the first letter of each word of the *post scriptum* was ablaze, so that Bhiln could read a fiery "MIRROR" across it.[3] Bhiln claims that she intuitively and undoubtedly knew that this sign should be interpreted as follows: Make two copies of every manuscript and fabrication by Gayl. Bhiln also stipulated that Gayl's works should always be exhibited alongside their double,[4] and that under no condition should a single piece ever be presented to the public. This explains the somewhat unusual installation of this exhibition.[5]

Gayliana: Isle of Idle brings together, for the first time since Gayl's death, a modest but comprehensive selection of Gayl's work. The exhibition was organised in collaboration with OUGA and under the auspices of WAOUG (World Association Otto U. Gayl), with the aim of leading the way towards the discovery of Gayl's chameleonic artistic, cultural and scientific legacy.

1. Bhiln, KW, (1921), *Contagious Contingencies*, Laval, The Reifier Press, p.16.
2. Bhiln, KW, (1928), *Going Around In Circles: The Life and Work of Otto U. Gayl*, Berlin and London, Neben Verlag, p453. This is the only biography ever written on the great savant. The first edition of the book appeared under the title *This is This: The Orbicular Genius of Otto U. Gayl*, but it was subsequently revised, hoping, alas in vain, that the less arcane appellation would attract a wider public.
3. Bhiln gives an account of this vision in the afore-mentioned biography, in a concluding chapter called 'Rarefied existence', where she explains that the vision was as much a chronicle of Gayl's real life as the rest of her book. Ibid., p.568.
4. OUGA Statute, Clause 146d.
5. The exhibition *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* was held at the Centre for Drawing, London from 13th April to 15th May 2009.
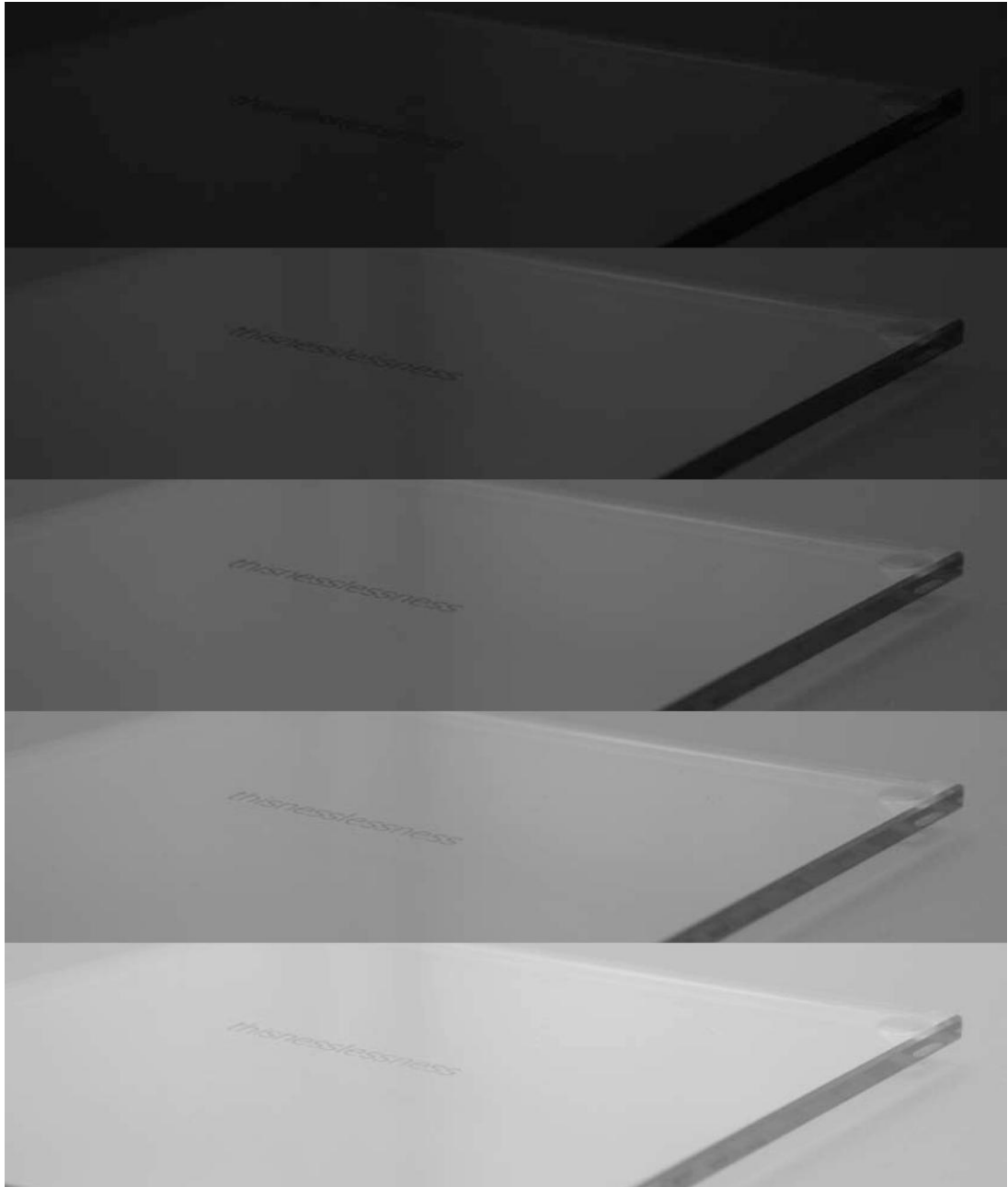
Once, Otto U. Gayl was asked "What is The Truth?". "I will use an analogy.", said Gayl: "It was de Selby, the great savant, who argued that, owing to the fact that light travels at a certain speed, when one looks into a mirror, one sees the image of a former self, even though it is only an almost imperceptibly former image – 'almost' is crucial here. As O'Brien reports, "[…] de Selby ever loath to leave the well enough alone, insists on reflecting the first reflection in a further mirror and professes to detect minute changes in this second image. Ultimately he constructed the familiar arrangement of parallel mirrors, each reflecting diminishing images of an interposed object indefinitely. The interposed object in this case was de Selby's own face and this he claims to have studied backwards through an infinity of reflections by means of a 'powerful glass'. What he states to have seen through his glass is astonishing. He claims to have noticed a growing youthfulness in the reflections of his face according as they receded, the most distant of them – too tiny to be visible to the naked eye – being the face of a beardless boy of twelve, and, to use his own words, 'a countenance of singular beauty and nobility'. He did not succeed in pursuing the matter back to the cradle 'owing to the curvature of the earth and the limitations of the telescope'."[1]. If one could find a way to counter-balance, or counter-curve, the curvature of the earth, and provided one was in possession of a telescope strong enough, one could go as far as seeing an image of one's-few-instants-old-self focusedly and intently looking back at one's-presently-mirror-gazing-self.". "But, it is a well known fact that new born babies can neither intently nor focusedly look into a mirror, or into anything else, for that matter.", inquisitively and sceptically said the inquirer of Truth. "Indeed,", replied Gayl, "indeed.", falling into an inscrutable silence leavened only by his vacant gaze.

1. O'Brien, F, (1993),
   The Third Policeman,
   London, Flamingo, p.67.

Dino Alfier, Fiona Erild & Odelia Frin

FE: You know, off Dundonald Road, coming from Wimbledon Station—I often walk it on my way here—just after the tram line, there's a turn on the right called "Goodenough Road". When I saw "No tautology in the kingdom of Goodenough", over the Centre for Drawing Project Space door, it came to mind. Any connection? DA: Yes, I know the road you mean. No connection, not conscious, at least. There is an anecdote that the phrase "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter" was engraved at the entrance of Plato's Academy. I also remember reading—I think it might have been in Simone Pétrement's biography of Simone Weil—that, in one of the *lycées* where Weil taught, her students had written this same phrase, or something like it, over the classroom door. The school authorities weren't pleased with it. Perhaps they weren't geometricians. All this was at the back of my mind when Gayl came up with his own veto: "Let no one ignorant of Tautology enter". But Gayl is very ambivalent: On the one hand, he is a sort of perfect embodiment of tautology, and, on the other, he is the "Houdini of Tautology", as he once said, so.... FE: Do you know that Houdini used to attend séances to debunk con psychics and mediums? DA: No. FE: Yes, he was a member of a Scientific American committee that offered a cash prize to any medium who could demonstrate supernatural abilities. DA: Did anyone ever collect the prize? FE: No, thanks to Houdini. Quite ironically, after his death, his wife, Bess, held yearly séances at Halloween for ten years. He never showed up, so she stopped. She said ten years was long enough to wait for any man. DA: This reminds me of something Weil says about attention, absolutely pure attention, attention to the void, to what is inexpressible, impossible. FE: What do you mean? DA: When attention is directed towards something that can be present without attention, attention is not pure, it's mixed with impression. Perfect circles, for instance: You can't have an impression of them, because no drawn circle, no visible circle, will ever be perfect. For the senses, a perfect circle doesn't exist, so, if you conceive, if you imagine a perfect circle, it's solely by virtue of an effort of attention. OF: But how can you imagine a perfect circle? DA: It's what Weil calls *attention à vide*, an expression that is difficult to translate in English: It means 'aimless attention', but then you lose the void and the image of 'attending to the void'. FE: Empty attention, perhaps? DA: That's misleading. This kind of attention is *full*, fully directed towards the void. FE: Oriented attention but not clinging... sometimes I try to listen to music that way. DA: Attention as desire without wish—'wish' as in "make a wish". Well gives the example of the love one has for a person who is dead: One desires that s/he has been, and s/he has been. OF: 'You desire that the one you love be dead? DA: No, it's not like that. Either you accept the fact that... well... if you wish that the dead be alive, you don't desire the life of the one you love, since, clearly, that particular life ended when it did. You desire an imaginary life. OF: I vaguely see what you are saying, you know, like one of those 'featureless patterns you stare at till they pop up in 3D, it's about to pop, but it doesn't. It's very counterintuitive. DA: Bess waited for ten years, but not à *vide*. She was waiting for something, a ghost, a voice, I don't know. OF: Ten years was long enough, for her. FE: Good enough. DA: Goodenough. Ah, yes: Goodenough Road. I was saying, Gayl 'embodiment of tautology', and Gayl 'Houdini of tautology'. "No Tautology in the Kingdom of Goodenough", as if to say "What tautology? There's no perfect tautology. Always a crack somewhere, always tarnish, at most enough, never perfect.". FE: Like a perfect circle, a perfect tautology exists only by virtue of an effort of attention. DA: You could put it that way. When I saw "GOODENOUGH" stencilled on the wall, I kept reading 'good nough', and thinking *goode* as an obsolete spelling of 'good' (does it exist?), like *olde* for 'old', and *nought*, even though there's no 't': No good, good for nothing, something like that. And then, I don't know why, I thought of Goodenough Road. OF: Do you know the story about the two friends talking about beauty? DA: No. FE: The one in which the friends end up looking into each other's pupils to see if beauty *really is* in the eye of the beholder? OF: No. This is about two inseparable friends called Tauto and Logy. They are sitting by the sea, at sunset. Tauto says "Isn't this beautiful!" . "Yes, truly beautiful... the calm sea, the incandescent red, the seagulls... ah!", says Logy. "But, you can't reduce this beauty to a mere string of facts, as if you could engineer it in some lab, at will!" "Ok. Then beauty is... " "Beauty is beauty, beauty *is just* beauty!", Tauto cries out. And Logy: "Good. So *that* is *that*. What can we talk about now?". FE: Logy is the one who wants to articulate ideas. It seems to fit its name: In the beginning was the word, the *logos*. And *logos* also means 'account', 'speech', 'explanation'. OF: Logy wants to give an account of beauty, but Tauto won't have any of that. True to its name (*tauto* 'the same'), Tauto keeps repeating itself. Tauto doesn't want explanations... doesn't *do plane*, but goes around and around. DA: There's a tension in the very word 'tautology' between circular reticence and desire to talk through. OF: Could you say something about how *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* relates to your study of Weil's notion of attention? DA: As I see it, Weilean attention forms a cluster of what I would call agnostic ultimate notions: The ethical notion of absolute good, the aesthetic notion of absolute beauty, and the logical notion of absolute truth. These, for Weil, are inseparable, they are, in a way, the same thing, expressions of the same thing in different domains, perhaps. The most elevated kind of attention leads to an omni-acceptance of reality (consent to everything that happens, *amor fati*), reality which is the creation of god who, in creating, withdraws itself from creation and is therefore unknowable, as are god's perfect good, truth, and beauty. Very much a negative theology: This kind of acceptance is an unreachable ideal. OF: A void? DA: Any absolute entity, as the term 'ab-*solute*' suggests, is solely itself, the same as itself, that is, a tautology. I think I am more of a "Logy type". I want to talk, to unfold... not necessarily with words... unfold tautology. I think Otto U. Gayl was born out of this desire. FE: 'Unfold' feels very different from 'explain'. 'Explain' makes me think of ironing, taking the creases out. It's feels a bit puritanical? OF: Explaining is puritanical? FE: Perhaps it's just that ironing is so boring! DA: Some people even iron their towels. OF: They do look much tidier in the linen cupboard. DA: I suppose they do. Anyway, there was Gayl... OF: What about Tino Netta or Annie Tott? DA: Sorry, I don't follow you. OF: Otto U. Gayl is a personification of tautology. Have you thought about personifying attention? I'd be interested to see what attention gets up to. FE: The first character to appear on the scene in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* is Strength, and there is Violence too. DA: I have an Italian translation of *Prometheus*, and it has *Potere* 'Power' for Strength and *Forza* 'Strength' for Violence—quite different. I hadn't thought about personifying attention. I'd probably choose Annie. I suppose it's because 'attention' is feminine in Italian, my mother tongue. FE: If there was an extra 'e' in 'attention', you could have had Antoinette: attention so elevated as to be "heady". Doesn't dealing with tautology feel like being in a hamster wheel? I mean, you don't go anywhere. At least with paradoxes, you progress a little, not much, that's true, but.... for example, "This statement is false': If it's true, it's false, but, if it's false, it's true... you see, a bit of space to stretch. But with tautology it's really just going around in circles. DA: It feels more like a spiral to me. FE: Moving inwards or outwards? DA: Neither, I don't know, I haven't really thought about it. OF: I'd like to say something that tangentially relates to OUGA 5926, 'here' in Braille. A few years ago, I was driving to my brother's with a nephew of mine, he was about three at the time and he had never been to my brother's house. He kept giving directions all the way. When we got there, I asked him "Do you know where you are?". He very confidently said "Yes.". "Where?" "Here!" DA: He was right. OF: Yes, faultless. DA: I wonder what he would have said, if you had asked "Where's here?" . OF: "Here is here." perhaps? Why is the glass engraved with the word 'here' covered by a plastic casing? DA: How do you know Braille? OF: I have a friend who is blind. When she goes on holidays, she takes pictures. I asked her why. She said it was to show them to people who can see. It made me think about being blind in a world of mostly seeing people, and I learnt to read Braille. DA: I didn't want people to be able to touch it. I wanted to make it useless, or unusable, like a map with a pointing "you are here" when you don't know where here is. I was also thinking about the idea (was it Kant?) that the beautiful is purposeless, useless. And, you know, very often, when one says "Your argument is a tautology", it's meant as a fault—I suppose it is—but there's another way of looking at tautology, as they do in logic: A tautology is a propositional formula that is true under any possible valuation. So it seems that you can be sure that 'A is A' is always true. And what's the use of that? FE: But, in a way, to know that here is here isn't useless. Does a stone know that? DA: I don't know. OF: Maybe a stone is so certain of it, a degree of certainty we can't even imagine, that, for it, here is actually *here*, so there's only HERE. DA: Or maybe stones are not very talkative. FE: I can't read Braille, so I didn't know that it read "here". I assume most people can't read Braille. Isn't that a problem? DA: It wouldn't take much for someone to jot down the dots and to go and find out what they mean. OF: And when they find out, they wouldn't

be here, I mean, here would be *there*, displaced, and *here* here would be, in a sense, vacant. DA: Void. FE: That's asking a lot of the viewer. DA: I don't see a problem with that. It's not impossible. Perhaps, it would help, if I said something about the genealogy of this work, or it might just confuse things. 2009 is the birth centenary of Weil and I want to mark it with a work in Ashford, Kent, where she is buried. In Ashford there's a road called "Simone Weil Avenue". OF: So roads come around again. DA: Yes, and there's a plaque dedicated to Weil with a few biographical details. I thought I could make a sign to go near the plaque, a sign in Braille reading "you are here", with no relief. I had an email exchange about it with a friend of mine, who had many questions about what the sign would communicate, about what its illegibility would convey. He also thought that there was, on my part, an intention to conceal something, and when I told him, that, yes, there was, he replied that that was fine with him, but that it might backfire. I didn't quite understand what he meant by that, but he knows me very well, so I reckon he probably had a point. I toyed with the idea of using this email dialogue to write a fictional dialogue between Rhea O'Eurey, an anagram of 'you are here', and… I can't remember now… something to do with the German for 'death'. OF: So how did you get from "there" to "here", to the piece in *Gayliana*? FE: Gayl and Weil: They sound very similar. Coincidence? DA: Again, it wasn't a conscious thing, but it can't be fortuitous, I think. It's curious: When you say "Gayliana", I think "Gayliana: Isle of Idle", perhaps, because I think playfulness is at the heart of this installation. As I wrote on the poster, it's about the idea of *attention-as-waiting* being a sort of assiduous idling. That's why I had the image of the cloud reader on the poster: Productive idling. When I was a child, I remember one year I read several times *The Mysterious Island* by Verne. It was summer, under a huge kaki tree…. OF: What does a kaki tree look like? I've never seen one. DA: Its fruits look a bit like orange tomatoes. OF: Are they nice? DA: I don't know, I've never eaten any, but you *can* eat them. Birds liked them. I kept reading it over and over again. It's as if it hadn't occurred to me that I could read something else. FE: I had something similar when I was fourteen with *Brave New World*. I think it belonged to my sister. OF: Do you remember *soma*? "Hug me till you drug me honey kiss me…. OF & FE: …. till I'm in a coma hug me honey snuggly bunny love's as good as soma."* DA: *Soma sema* means 'the body is a tomb', a tomb for the soul, if I remember correctly, but I often think "the sign is a tomb". DA: Just a tomb. FE: A tomb of what? DA: A tomb of what? OF: Nothing to do with that. DA: *Soma sema* in the *Phaedrus*? OF: Nothing to do with that. DA: You see: I can't imagine that. When you say "house, this, tomb", I automatically think something like "this house is a tomb" or "this tomb is a house". OF: Just because you can't imagine it, it doesn't mean that it can't be. FE: Can *you* imagine it? OF: No. I guess, after so many years of predicative language, it would take a lot of practice. DA: They couldn't think tautologies. OF: Do they have compounds? FE: Sorry? OF: Compound words, like 'househouse', 'thisthis', 'tombtomb'? DA: What's a *tombtomb*? FE: What's a *tombtomb*? DA: Can I just come in and steer a little the conversation? There, under the video, there are some books which are relevant to *Gayliana: Isle of Idle*. Can I pick one? Flann O'Brien's *The Third Police Man*. FE: How did you find Flann O'Brien? DA: In a second-hand bookshop. Can you speak Irish? FE: I learnt it in school. I speak it a bit. I can read it. DA: In Irish, the word for 'justice' is *ceart* and 'square' is *cearnóg*, isn't it? I was leafing through an English-Irish dictionary, once. Are *ceart* and *cearnóg* etymologically related? FE: I know *ceart* means 'certain', 'sure', but I didn't know it also means 'justice'. Why do you ask? DA: I was curious because it seems to make sense that justice should be square, you know, precise, measured. FE: It could have something to do with public squares. DA: That appeals much less: Institution. But I'm digressing. OF: I think justice is more of a circle: All are equal before the law, as all the points on the circumference are equidistant from the centre. DA: Actually, this reminds me of something Weil writes which is not that far from the issue of attention. She says that there is an analogy between the way a right-angled triangle is bound to the circle of which its hypotenuse is the diameter and, say, the just man who abstains from power at the price of fraud. And one can perceive this analogy only if one can perceive mathematical necessity, and that's where attention comes in, *intellectual* attention: It is attention that makes one perceive reality as a web of necessary relationships. I think all this is in the essay 'The Pythagorean Doctrine', in *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*. FE: "The sun will not transgress his measure. If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice (*Dikè*), will find him out."‡ Heraclitus. DA: Strange use of tenses. I would rather say "The sun cannot transgress his measure. If he did, the Furies, ministers of Justice, would find him out.". But I don't know ancient Greek; I don't know how verbs work. FE: Neither do I. This is a translation by Charles Khan. You said *"intellectual* attention". Is that different from attention *à vide*? DA: They are not the same. Through intellectual attention, you see conditional necessity, or reality, and then, there's a higher degree of attention through which you accept, consent to, love reality. Weil says that intellectual attention produces only a half-reality. It is the higher form of attention which gives the fullness of reality. Is this elevated attention the same as attention *à vide*? Weil didn't write a systematic treatise on attention, but, yes, I think for her they're the same thing. FE: So how do you go from intellectual attention to attention *à vide*? DA: To be honest, my views on this oscillate. Sometimes, I think it's a gradual increase from one towards the other – a 'you-can't-run-before-you-can-walk' sort of thing – and, sometimes, I think there's discontinuity, when you get to the top – more of a 'Mary-sucked-up-to-heaven' type of event. FE: Do you believe that? DA: What? FE: The giant cosmic hoover effect. The Assumption. DA: That people can be transported up to the celestial sphere body and soul? No, not really. But then I sometimes catch myself thinking thoughts that, well, somehow, seem just as untenable, but they have a more acceptable attire. It comes down to fashion, perhaps: Fashionable thinking, thinking out of fashion. FE: Assumption? Thinking *out of mind*, if you ask me! OF: Or it might have something to do with the fact that signs can deceive, if you don't quite know what you are dealing with. Who was it who said "Between the two of them, they only had 10g of bread, a measly 5g each. Had they thought of sharing with a third, what never-ending abundance! 3.3333333…."? FE: Or the apparent infinity of π. DA: And Zeno's turtle. FE: Tortoise! OF: On my mp3 player I have a discussion with Derrida, in 2002. He is talking about 'praying', and there's a part which I think is relevant to what we are talking about. I've listened to it so many times that I know exactly where it is: 21' 9'' to 26' 44''. Do you mind if I connect this to the speaker and play it? "[…] the suspension of certainty is part of what a prayer has to be, in order to be authentic. If I knew, if I knew, if I was simply expecting an answer, that would be the end of the this suspension of knowledge, this inability to answer your question – "To whom? Who do you expect to answer these prayers?" – is part of what a prayer has to be, in certainty as to the one, the one or more than one, to whom I address this prayer, if this is still a prayer. And, of course, the child prayer, that would be an order, the way I order a pizza, ok? No, I'm not expecting. And my assumption is that I must give up any expectation, any certainty as to the one, the one or more than one, to whom I address this prayer, if this is still a prayer. And, of course, the child is praying for, expecting some answer, or expecting some protection, for himself, for life, for his beloved ones, for his relatives, for wife, children, friends, and so on and so forth, but I can't tell if I am praying someone invisible, transcendent one, or if I am praying precisely these other ones in myself that I want to address out of love and for the protection of their lives. […] Now, there is, at the same time, some suspension of any expectation, of any economy, any calculation, any calculation. I'm not expecting, I'm not hoping, it's a hopeless prayer, on the one hand, totally hopeless, and I think this hopelessness is part of what a prayer should be. And, on the other hand, I know there is hope, there is calculation, there is economy, but what sort of economy? Is it the economy of the child, or my own economy as an old, old man? […] So, the calculation, if there is a calculation, and obviously there is a calculation, despite the incalculable hopelessness that I mentioned earlier, there is a calculation. That calculation, if I wanted to describe it briefly, would be, would take the following form: I know that praying in that way, even if there is no one god, in the form of father, or mother, receiving my prayer, I know that by this act of praying in the desert, out of love, out of love, because I wouldn't pray otherwise, something might be already good in myself, like a therapy, I know that, by doing this, I try – not necessarily succeed – but try to affirm and to accept, to accept something in myself, which won't do any harm to anyone, especially to me. The impression that I, that I do something good to myself – that's a calculation – and, by the same token, to my beloved ones, if through this prayer, I am a little better in reconciling, and, if I give up any calculation, because of this calculation about, around the incalculable, I can become better for myself, narcissistically, but, to become better

narcissistically, is a way of loving in a better way, of being more lovable for our beloved ones. So, that's a calculation, it's a calculation that tries to integrate the incalculable.** DA: Where can I find it? OF: Ubu.com. They have a lot of interesting stuff there. DA: How do you spell it? OF: 'U', 'B', 'U'. DA: O'Brien, I was saying. *The Third Policeman*. It made me think about, no, I thought *through* it (for me, it's really a philosophical text, if a distinction between philosophy and literature, or art in general, has any sense, I'm not sure it has), through it, I thought about pure attention, attention unmixed with impression. We were talking about it earlier on. I said that, for the senses, perfection doesn't exist. In the book, there's this surreal policeman: MacCruiskeen. The following happens to the narrator of the story—I'll call him "Nar", since his name is never mentioned. The policeman takes a spear. He asks Nar to put his hand out. He puts the spear ever closer to Nar's palm. When the point is about half a foot away, Nar feels a prick and there's a bit of blood. Nar's confused. I'm going to read a couple of passages: MacCruiskeen's explanation. The point is "simply" very sharp: "About an inch from the end it is so sharp that sometimes—late at night or on a soft bad day especially—you cannot think of it or try to make it the subject of a little idea because you will hurt your box with the excruciation of it."¶. But it turns out that what gave Nar the prick is not the point. The point is even thinner: "It is so thin that it could go into your hand and out in the other extremity externally and you would not feel a bit of it and you would see nothing and hear nothing. It is so thin that maybe it doesn't exist at all, you could put no thought around it—only pure attention is pierced by it. OF: Only *attention à vide*. FE: But, if you can't see it, hear it, or think it, how can you possibly know it's there? And, besides, *what is there*? What's this 'pure-attention-piercing' thing? OF: For MacCruiskeen, it's always a matter of thinking of something, making something the subject of an idea, putting a thought *around* something. FE: So? OF: Those prepositions seem important. They might be a lead. I'm seeing thinking as a groping hand and the spear as that which the hand is trying to grasp, to get hold of. The hand doesn't grasp the spear, but there's still thinking, still groping. FE: Yes, thinking *of* the spear! OF: No, *we are* thinking *of*, and *not of the spear!* Nar is thinking *of* something else, and he knows that what he is thinking of is not the spear. FE: So, for Nar, the spear, the object of thought, is a kind of nose-thumbing jester: "No, no, not me! I know you can say it, "spear, spear, spear", but, not *this* spear, *this spear is your despair!*". OF: That seems so bleak! DA: Yes, Fiona, your jester launches a sarcastic, personal attack on Nar, while, for me, the image of the spear suggests impersonal continuity: In thought, the spear gets progressively thinner, a little thinner, a little thinner, until it's unthinkably thin. FE: That's exactly my problem: How can anything be unthinkable? The word 'unthinkable' is an oxymoron in disguise, since something truly unthinkable would not be unthinkable at all, it would simply not be. The unthinkable is always somehow thinkable. OF: Not-to-be is not that easy. The point of the spear is unthinkably thin, but it still *is*. FE: Any proof of its existence? OF: It is causing our mouths to move, for instance. FE: But the spear is just an idea in a book, it's immaterial. How could it cause anything? OF: Well, it's still the best explanation I can think of. FE: That doesn't mean it's really the cause. OF: What do you mean by 'really'? DA: This could go on forever. By the way, the etymology of 'oxymoron' is *oxys* 'sharp' and *moros* 'stupid', that is, 'oxymoron' is an oxymoron, as saying "intelligent-stupid". OF: Or "sharp-thick". Why do we associate thinking with sharpness? DA: 'Acute': that's the same idea: Pointedness. 'Acute' and 'obtuse'. FE: Perhaps, because thinking is like a sceptic, sorry, like a *scalpel*, a very sharp scalpel that can dissect, I mean, the sharper the scalpel, anyway, you get my point. OF: Is your point a *thinkable* point? DA: Your image of the sharp scalpel reminds me of an installation I did, here, in the Project Space, a while ago. I measured the half point of the room's length, and, on the floor, I drew a line across the width with a permanent marker. Then, I measured one half's half and drew another line, and the same on that half's-half's half, and so on. I stopped when the half got too small to be drawn. Then I put a post-it note on the wall, close to the floor, reading "Move on, Zeno". The tortoise beats Achilles only with the help of Zeno's "sharp thinking scalpel". Zeno keeps carving ever more infinitesimal slices of space, and Achilles, as he gets closer to the tortoise, sinks in the quicksand of infinity. FE: I saw that installation. I thought you were poking fun at Zeno: "Zeno, while you sit and ponder your "cleaver" paradoxes, the earth goes around, Achilles beats the tortoise, measuring tapes have their limits, markers their thickness, and we've all got something or other to do, so move it!". DA: My aim was humour, not mockery. FE: Well, with me, you missed your aim. DA: I clearly did. I don't think Zeno was trying to demonstrate that motion doesn't exist. Alain, in *Éléments de philosophie*, talks about Zeno's arrow paradox: At a given instant, a "moving" arrow can either move to where it is not or move to where it is; it can't move to where it is, since it is already there; and it can't move to where it isn't, since an instant is like a frozen snapshot: There's not enough time in an instant for movement. In fact, there's no time at all. OF: From spears to arrows. What next? A gun, perhaps? Who's Alain? DA: A French philosopher. His "real" name was "Émile Chartier", but he is best known by his nickname, "Alain". He was Weil's philosophy teacher. According to Alain, Zeno was making the point that movement exists in the realm of thought, as a system of relationships, and, in thought, there's no single instant, but always relation of instants. OF: An instant is like MacCruiskeen's unthinkably thin spear's point. DA: And Alain extends this argument to any object: They are all systems of indivisible relationships. Take a cube: A cube has 6 squared sides, 90° angles, and so on. But, when you see a cube, you don't see this. OF: So, strictly speaking, nobody has ever seen a cube. DA: That conveys the idea of a material machine doing the "raw seeing", the "not-really-seeing", and an immaterial mind doing the "seeing proper". And I don't think Alain's argument implies this kind of matter-mind dualism: There's only one seeing. OF: You did say "when you see a cube, you *don't see this*", a system of relationships, a cube, but you don't see *these*: squares, 90° angles, etc., separately, or unsystematically.". Alain's system is analogous to Weil's *web of necessary relationships*, of which attention reveals the weave, and she also refers to the example of the cube, which, I think, she ascribes to Jules Lagneau, Alain's philosophy teacher. OF: Achilles is spiralling towards the tortoise-centre, spiralling inwards. FE: Ever heard of Duns Deme Tuiuge and Geod Toggdob? OF & DA: No. FE: In the last issue of the *Journal of Recursive Acronyms*, there appeared an email exchange between these two persons. The subject was "ONE = ONE never ends", whence the publication in *JoRA*. DA: Are Dan Dean... FE: ... Duns Deme Tuiuge and Geod Toggdob... DA:.... yes, are they real people? FE: The piece came out of nowhere, it seems. DA: How can that be? FE: It was just published. I haven't looked into it. I happen to have it with me. It's not that long. It all took place on 12th June 2008, between 19:37 and 19:49. It's quite sad. Shall I read it? "Dear Geod, One feels *absolutely* lonely, as if there was no one else. One could say.... it doesn't matter.... one could say..., one could say..., but this is perfectly one's predicament: one cannot say "two". One has no solution for this, and one needs *no solution*. Unitedly, Duns" "Dear Duns, One apologies if one disappoints, but one cannot offer one single two. Sticking a one to a one just won't do: one ends up with a monstrosity. This could possibly be the most sterile dialogue one can imagine. Lonely, Geod" "Dear Geod, The image of the Oneone monster is frightful and one seeks refuge in the hope that it be nonsense. Geod, *one one*, or is one *one*? One is so confused. But there's only one one, so one is *The One! Onely* and only, Duns" "Dear Duns, *One is one*. Is one *One* too? There's only one *One* and one is *That One! Solely*" "one on one = one one one, and one and one = a none done, ONE = ONE never ends = ONE never ends never ends = ONE never ends never ends = ONE never ends never ends never ends x∞" DA: Could you photocopy it for me? FE: Sorry, but I'd rather not. The subscribers are so few that the journal is financially struggling, and photocopying kills small journals. OF: I imagine it's a small niche. FE: And the subscription fee doesn't help. DA: Is it very expensive? FE: The first year, it's free. The second year, it's £1. DA: That's not very much. FE: The third, again £1. The fourth, £2. Then, £3, £5, £8, £13, £21, £34, £55, £89, and so on. By the time you get to, let's say, the twenty-first year, it's £6,765. DA: Ah! Fibonacci! OF: Spiralling outwards, and fast. FE: Yes. I appreciate the coherence of *JoRA*, but, because of this, most people don't renew their subscription after the tenth year. There are a few exceptions, of course. The longest-standing subscriber was a certain Clive Surrey. 40 years. He was very wealthy, but he finally reached his limit: £63,245,896. OF: I regret to say that I've reach my time limit. I must go. FE: Time's arrow keeps moving. I must go too. DA: Good talking to you. OF: Good or good enough?

Note on punctuation

In quotations, the use of full stops, commas, question marks, etc. departs from convention. Example: According to current punctuation conventions, one should write either '"*Indeed,*" replied Gayl, "*indeed,*" *falling into an inscrutable silence leavened only by his vacant gaze.*', or '"*Indeed*", replied Gayl, "*indeed*", *falling… gaze.*' (or a combination of the two), but never '"*Indeed,*", replied Gayl, "*indeed.*", *falling… gaze.*' Conventional punctuation does not clearly convey that Gayl's reply is '*Indeed, indeed.*', and not '*Indeed, indeed,*' '*Indeed indeed*', '*Indeed, indeed*', or '*Indeed indeed,*'. Unfamiliar as it may look, consistently distinguishing between punctuation within and outside quotes avoids ambiguity of meaning. It may seem pedantic to distinguish between '*Did you say "Otto"?*' and '*Did you say "Otto."?*', but, then, what about '*Did you say "Otto","Otto.", or "Otto?"?*'?

University of the Arts London
Wimbledon

284

OTTO U. GAYL'S DIALOGIC TRAGEDY SKETCH

ACT I

A and B discuss a hypothetical art event: the artist (C) projects mental images of his/her work ~~onto in~~ on in the exhibition space, which remains empty, but for the projected mental images.

Void R~~r~~oom ~~containing nothing~~.

A: "Knowing that C projected mental images in the space makes no difference. It's still just an empty room."

Difference about what?

B: "~~The mental images our my knowledge of K~~knowing that C projected mental images in the space makes *all* the difference."

Discussion courses for a while. A and B positions ever more entrenched. Suddenly, A and B ~~fall silent~~ stop talking.

ACT II

The event has left A ~~shattered~~ broken-hearted, obvious, not so, not so, obvious,…

Same room (same for A, not for B).

B takes the only existing copy of a photo of A's daughter, who has recently died in an accident.

B shows A a photo ~~representing showing depicting~~ representing people ~~and things~~ A has never seen.

The chemist. Chemical analysis of both photos.

B burns A's photo.

B: "~~Both~~ The photos are ~~materially~~ chemically identical."

They have the same chemical composition, but they are still somewhat different because the images ~~of~~ in the two photos are different. Does it matter? Do you foresee outraged theatre goers? Negligible. What is negligible: the amount of outraged theatre goers or the difference between the two photos?
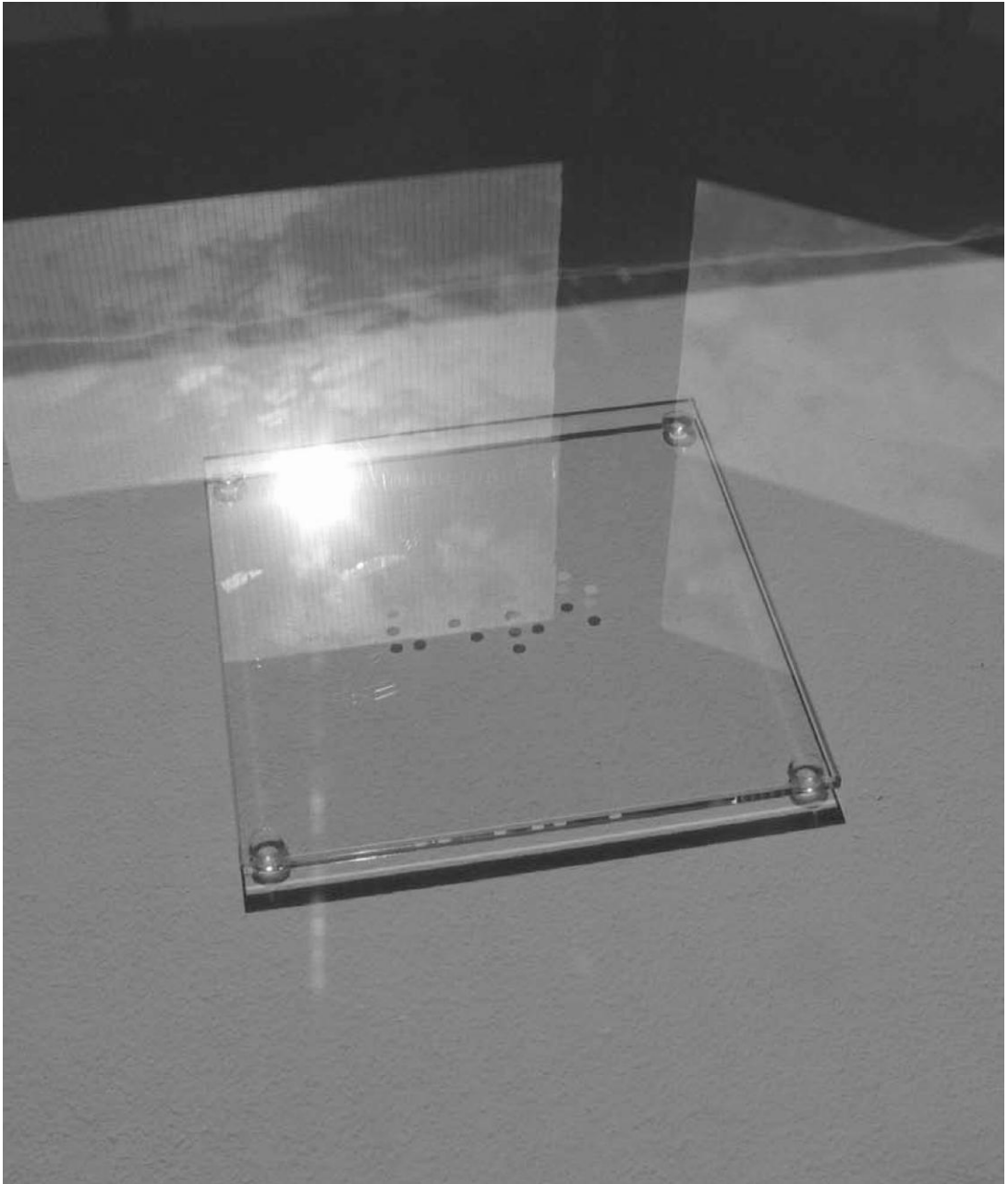
A takes a knife. Engraved ~~o~~On the knife, ~~engraved,~~: 'INNOCUOUS'.

ACT III

Same room (not for B – and not for long).

A cuts B's throat.

288

Friends and foe alike ask "Otto, are you real?"
I reply "Would you care for the short or the long answer?"
"The short one, Otto."
"Yes."
"The long one."
"Yes, but."

FROM "CONTAGIOUS CONTINGENCIES"
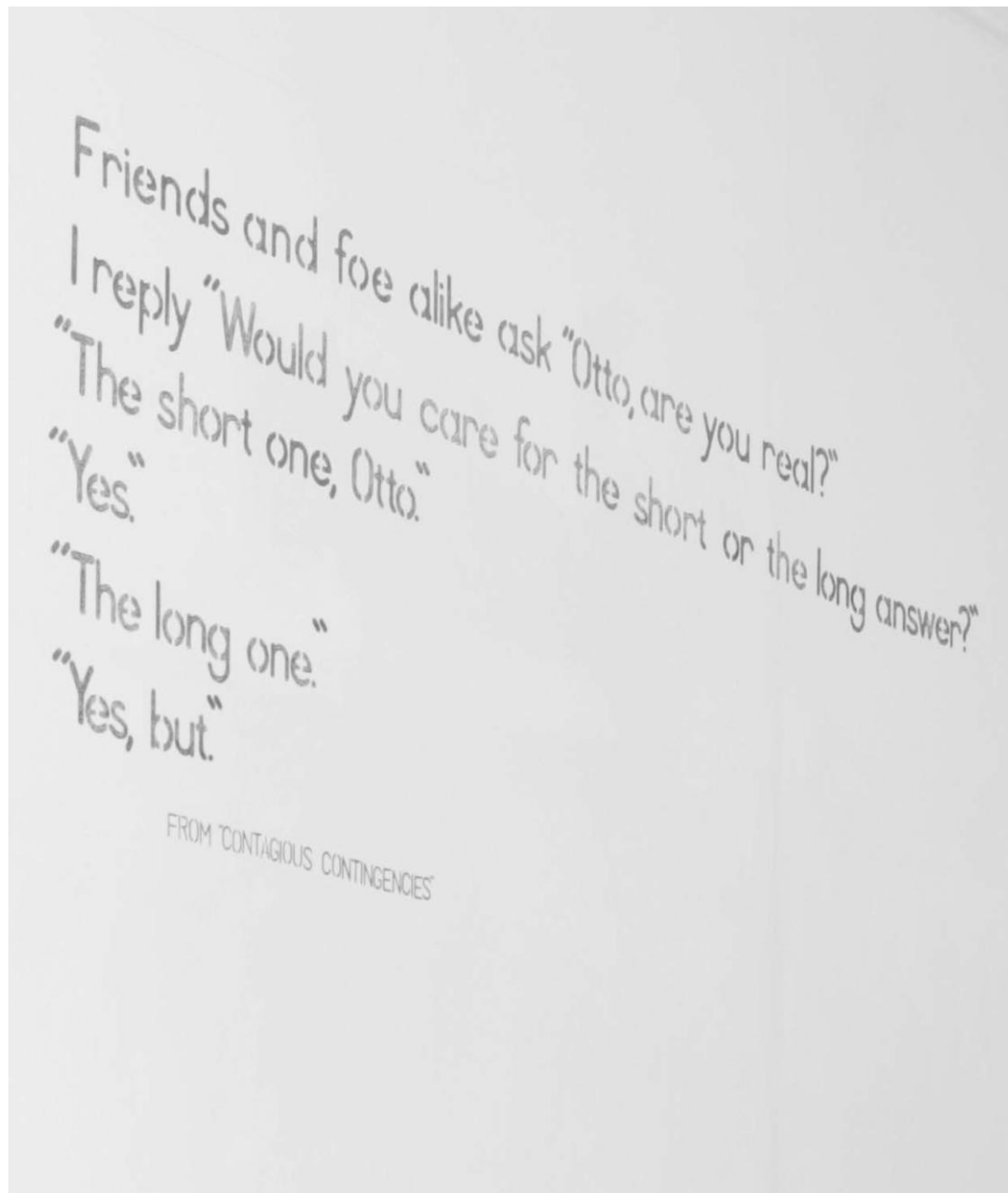
Text on Appendix 5, p. 273.

Dear Fellows of the Board of Discernment of Realities,

I learn, not without profound consternation, that BODOR doubts my reality. I shall tackle the issue headlong and without hesitation: I am *real*! You should know that I seldom employ exclamation marks, but I hope you will excuse this use of heightened punctuation, given the fact that what is at stake here is nothing less that my reality! I am quite sure that many others, if similarly plighted, would not refrain from using two, or even three exclamation marks! In the acts of your last yearly colloquy, whose inflammatory, yet infuriatingly catchy, title was *Railing at Roilers of Really Real*, one reads:

"After much careful deliberating, the members of the Board unanimously concur that Mr Otto U. Gayl is a mere figment of the imagination, an inconsequential thought, an immaterial nothing, a less than measly insignificance, a paltry, puny, trifle of a negligible triviality. Succinctly, Mr Gayl is NOT REAL, and, therefore, Mr Gayl shall be BANNED FROM REALITY, from now on and for eternity. Anyone found claiming the reality of Mr Gayl will be severely prosecuted.".

Leaving aside the question of how something non-real would need to, or even could be, banned from reality, I believe that I have good reasons to be alarmed. May I ask how any of you, gentlemen of the Board, would react at the unexpected news of your unreality? Not to mention the fact that, having claimed, at the opening of this letter, my reality, I can now look forward to be severely prosecuted, although I wonder how: by realigning the real rollers of my derailed unreality, perhaps? That would not surprise me, if the title of your colloquy is anything to go by. But let us move on.

To me, the fact of my reality seems to follow uncontrovertibly from the fact that I am writing to you. Yet, I understand (or, rather, I can imagine, which, perhaps, is not the same as understanding) that, in order to be reassured, or, rather, assured, of my reality, you might need some elucidations as regards the modality of my being real. What does qualify as real, for me? Simple: anything that can conceivably have an effect, of which the real something is the cause, or that can reasonably explain a fact, is real. It is true that, since clairvoyance is rare and since reasonableness is a complicated notion, the matter is not as simple as it may at first appear, nevertheless, the criteria of reality, which I propose, have, on the whole, proved reliable in my day-to-day business of deciding what is real.

Let us go back to 1633. In Rome, Galileo Galilei stands before the Inquisition, suspected of heresy. In his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, he had argued, in a manner not veiled enough, for heliocentrism. Galileo is thinking "I wonder if geocentrism is real?". Now, I am thinking "Galileo's most obvious and reasonable explanation of the fact

that he was standing trial was the reality of geocentrism. And he could conceive of a set of likely effects of geocentrism, effects which geocentrism would have conceivably caused, had he not recanted his heliocentric assertions. Therefore, Galileo must have concluded that geocentrism was real indeed.". No, Galileo did not think that geocentrism was *true*. In fact, it is precisely because he believed that geocentrism was false that he became so aware of the reality of it. But, I ask, is it not enough for something that is real to be real? Why burden it with the weighty bifurcation of either true or false?

As I said, I am real. I am real as geocentrism is real. And I can add a further analogy: I am real as 641 is real. Let me explain with a rather long quote from Douglas Hofstadter's *I Am A Strange Loop*, Chapter 3: 'The Causal Potency of Patterns', Subchapter: 'The Prime Mover':

"My first example involves the familiar notion of a chain of falling dominos. However, I'll jazz up the standard image a bit by stipulating that each domino is spring-loaded in a clever fashion (details do not concern us) so that whenever it gets knocked down by its neighbor, after a short "refractory" period it flips back up to its vertical state, all set to be knocked down once more. With such a system, we can implement a mechanical computer that works by sending signals down stretches of dominos that can bifurcate or join together; thus signals can propagate in loops, jointly trigger other signals, and so forth. Relative timing, of course, will be of the essence, but once again, details do not concern us. The basic idea is just that we can imagine a network of precisely timed domino chains that amounts to a computer program for carrying out a particular computation, such as determining if a given input is a prime number or not. (John Searle, so fond of unusual substrates for computation, should like this "domino chainium" thought experiment!)

Let us thus imagine that we can give a specific numerical "input" to the chainium by taking any positive integer we are interested in – 641, say – and placing exactly that many dominos end to end in a "reserved" stretch of the network. Now, when we tip over the chainium's first domino, a Rube Goldberg-type series of events will take place in which domino after domino will fall, including, shortly after the outset, all 641 of the dominos constituting our input stretch, and as a consequence various loops will be triggered, with some loop presumably testing the input number for divisibility by 2, another for divisibility by 3, and so forth. If ever a divisor is found, then a signal will be sent down one particular stretch – let's call it the "divisor stretch" – and when we see that stretch falling, we will know that the input number has some divisor and thus is not prime. By contrast, if the input has no divisor, then the divisor stretch will never be triggered and we will know the input is prime.

Suppose an observer is standing by when the domino chainium is given 641 as input. The observer, who has not been told what the chainium was made for, watches keenly for a while, then points at one of the dominos in the divisor stretch and asks with curiosity, "How come that domino there is never falling?"

Let me contrast two very different type of answer that someone may give. The first type of answer – myopic to the point of silliness – would be, "Because its predecessor never falls, you dummy!" To be sure, this is correct as far as it goes, but it doesn't go very far. It just pushes the buck to a different domino, and thus begs the question.

The second type of answer would be, "Because 641 is prime." Now this answer, while just as correct (indeed, in some sense is far more on the mark), has the curious property of not talking about anything physical at all. Not only has the focus moved upwards to collective properties of the chainium, but those properties somehow transcend the physical and have to do with pure abstractions, such as primality.

[...]

Before passing on to other metaphors, I'd like to point out that although here, 641's primality was used as an explanation for why a certain domino did *not* fall, it could equally serve as the explanation for why a certain domino *did* fall. In particular, in the domino chainium, there could be a stretch called the "prime stretch" whose dominos all topple when the set of potential divisors has been exhausted, which means that the input has been determined to be prime.

The point of this example is that 641's primality is the best explanation, perhaps even the *only* explanation, for why certain dominos *did* fall and certain other ones *did not* fall. In a word, 641 is a prime mover. So I ask: Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?"[475].

"Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?". Is there a better way to end a quotation than on a questioning note? "Who shoves whom around inside the domino chainium?". And, a question about cause and effect, about shoving, in the bargain! Where was I? Ah, yes: I am real as 641 is real. I suspect that you, with your detestable nominalistic ways, whose perniciousness is indicated by the despicable language you have used to describe my supposed non-reality, would hold that 641 is *not* real, and that the only real thing in relation to the not-falling of domino *x* is the not-falling domino preceding it (the not-falling domino, not *the* not-falling *of* it). What can I say to you? On the one hand, I feel sorry for you: you are like a people whose numerical system does not include the notion of

---

[475] Hofstadter, DR, (2007), *I Am A Strange Loop*, New York, Basic Books, pp. 37–39.

0; even though you get by, your calculations are incredibly cumbersome and, must I say it, they lack the intangible Beauty of True Mathematics. On the other hand, I despise your arrogant presumption of being the keepers of the gates of reality. You delusionally believe yourselves to be the tamers of that ravenous institutional Great Beast whose name is BODOR, but, in fact, BODOR subjugates you, mere slaves to a monstrous master.

But, ultimately I do not fear your ban. If you wish, you can hang a generous reward over my unreal head, as bait for those who would be only too glad to hand my unreal self over to the real you, if ever should I digress the unreal borders, or the real limits of unreality, within which, by your decree, you allegedly confine me. The fact is that you *cannot* keep me out, and you know it. Your preposterous words are a sure mark of the powerlessness you so desperately attempt to conceal. Well, you cannot fool me.

Yours *really*,

Otto U. Gayl

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Text on Appendix 5, pp. 278–280.

FE: You know, off Dundonald Road, coming from Wimbledon Station—I often walk it on my way here—just after the tram line, there's a turn on the right called "Goodenough Road". When I saw "No tautology in the kingdom of Goodenough", over the Centre for Drawing Project Space door, it came to mind. Any connection?

DA: Yes, I know the road you mean. No connection, not conscious, at least. There is an anecdote that the phrase "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter" was engraved at the entrance of Plato's Academy. I also remember reading—I think it might have been in Simone Pétrement's biography of Simone Weil—that, in one of the *lycées* where Weil taught, her students had written this same phrase, or something like it, over the classroom door. The school authorities weren't pleased with it. Perhaps they weren't geometricians. All this was at the back of my mind when Gayl came up with his own veto: "Let no one ignorant of Tautology enter". But Gayl is very ambivalent: On the one hand, he is a sort of perfect embodiment of tautology, and, on the other, he is the "Houdini of Tautology", as he once said, so...

FE: Do you know that Houdini used to attend séances to debunk con psychics and mediums?

DA: No.

FE: Yes, he was a member of a Scientific American committee that offered a cash prize to any medium who could demonstrate supernatural abilities.

DA: Did anyone ever collect the prize?

FE: No, thanks to Houdini. Quite ironically, after his death, his wife, Bess, held yearly séances at Halloween for ten years. He never showed up, so she stopped. She said ten years was long enough to wait for any man.

DA: This reminds me of something Weil says about attention, absolutely pure attention, attention to the void, to what is inexpressible, impossible.

FE: What do you mean?

DA: When attention is directed towards something that can be present without attention, attention is not pure, it's mixed with impression. Perfect circles, for instance: You can't have an impression of them, because no drawn circle, no visible circle, will ever be perfect. For the senses, a perfect circle doesn't exist, so, if you conceive, if you imagine a perfect circle, it's solely by virtue of an effort of attention.

OF: But how can you imagine a perfect circle?

DA: It's what Weil calls *attention à vide*, an expression that is difficult to translate in English: It means 'aimless attention', but then you lose the void and the image of 'attending to the void'.

FE: Empty attention, perhaps?

DA: That's misleading. This kind of attention is *full*, fully directed towards the void.

FE: Oriented attention but not clinging... sometimes I try to listen to music that way.

DA: Attention as desire without wish – 'wish' as in "make a wish". Weil gives the example of the love one has for a person who is dead: One desires that s/he has been, and s/he has been.

OF: You desire that the one you love be dead?

DA: No, it's not like that. Either you accept the fact that... well... if you wish that the dead be alive, you don't desire the life of the one you love, since, clearly, that particular life ended when it did. You desire an imaginary life.

OF: I vaguely see what you are saying, you know, like one of those featureless patterns you stare at till they pop up in 3D, it's about to pop, but it doesn't. It's very counterintuitive.

DA: Bess waited for ten years, but not *à vide*. She was waiting for something, a ghost, a voice, I don't know.

OF: Ten years was long enough, for her.

FE: Good enough.

DA: Goodenough. Ah, yes: Goodenough Road. I was saying, *Gayl* 'embodiment of tautology', and *Gayl* 'Houdini of tautology'. "No Tautology in the Kingdom of Goodenough", as if to say "What tautology? There's no perfect tautology. Always a crack somewhere, always tarnish, at most enough, never perfect.".

FE: Like a perfect circle, a perfect tautology exists only by virtue of an effort of attention.

DA: You could put it that way. When I saw "GOODENOUGH" stencilled on the wall, I kept reading 'good nough', and thinking *goode* as an obsolete spelling of 'good' (does it exist?), like *olde* for 'old', and *nought*, even though there's no 't': No good, good for nothing, something like that. And then, I don't know why, I thought of Goodenough Road.

OF: Do you know the story about the two friends talking about beauty?

DA: No.

FE: The one in which the friends end up looking into each other's pupils to see if beauty *really is* in the eye of the beholder?

OF: No. This is about two inseparable friends called Tauto and Logy. They are sitting by the sea, at sunset. Tauto says "Isn't this beautiful!". "Yes, truly beautiful... the calm sea, the incandescent red, the seagulls... ah!", says Logy. "But, you can't reduce this beauty to a mere string of facts, as if you could engineer it in some lab, at will!" "Ok. Then beauty is..." "Beauty is beauty, beauty is *just* beauty!", Tauto cries out. And Logy: "Good. So *that* is *that*. What can we talk about now?".

FE: Logy is the one who wants to articulate ideas. It seems to fit its name: In the beginning was the word, the *logos*. And *logos* also means 'account', 'speech', 'explanation'.

OF: Logy wants to give an account of beauty, but Tauto won't have any of that. True to its name (*tauto* 'the same'), Tauto keeps repeating itself. Tauto doesn't want explanations... doesn't do *plane*, but goes around and around.

DA: There's a tension in the very word 'tautology' between circular reticence and desire to talk through.

OF: Could you say something about how *Gayliana: Isle of Idle* relates to your study of Weil's notion of attention?

DA: As I see it, Weilian attention forms a cluster of what I would call agnostic ultimate notions: The ethical notion of absolute good, the aesthetic notion of absolute beauty, and the logical notion of absolute truth. These, for Weil, are inseparable, they are, in a way the same thing, expressions of the same thing in different domains, perhaps. The most elevated kind

of attention leads to an omni-acceptance of reality (consent to everything that happens, *amor fati*), reality which is the creation of God who, in creating, withdraws itself from creation and is therefore unknowable, as are God's perfect good, truth, and beauty. Very much a negative theology: This kind of acceptance is an unreachable ideal.

OF: A void?

DA: Any absolute entity, as the term 'ab-*solute*' suggests, is solely itself, the same as itself, that is, a tautology. I think I am more of a "Logy type": I want to talk, to unfold... not necessarily with words... unfold tautology. I think Otto U. Gayl was born out of this desire.

FE: 'Unfold' feels very different from 'explain'. 'Explain' makes me think of ironing, taking the creases out. It's feels a bit puritanical.

OF: Explaining is puritanical?

FE: Perhaps it's just that ironing is so boring!

DA: Some people even iron their towels.

OF: They do look much tidier in the linen cupboard.

DA: I suppose they do. Anyway, there was Gayl...

OF: What about Tino Netta or Annie Tott?

DA: Sorry, I don't follow you.

OF: Otto U. Gayl is a personification of tautology. Have you thought about personifying attention? I'd be interested to see what attention gets up to.

FE: The first character to appear on the scene in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* is Strength, and there is Violence too.

DA: I have an Italian translation of *Prometheus*, and it has *Potere* 'Power' for Strength and *Forza* 'Strength' for Violence—quite different. I hadn't thought about personifying attention. I'd probably choose Annie. I suppose it's because 'attention' is feminine in Italian, my mother tongue.

FE: If there was an extra 'e' in 'attention', you could have had Antoinette: attention so elevated as to be "heady". Doesn't dealing with tautology feel like being in a hamster wheel? I mean, you don't go anywhere. At least with paradoxes, you progress a little, not much, that's true, but... for example, 'This statement is false': If it's true, it's false, but, if it's false, it's true... you see, a bit of space to stretch. But with tautology it's really just going around in circles.

DA: It feels more like a spiral to me.

FE: Moving inwards or outwards?

DA: Neither, I don't know, I haven't really thought about it.

OF: I'd like to say something that tangentially relates to OUGA 5926, 'here' in Braille. A few years ago, I was driving to my brother's with a nephew of mine, he was about three at the time and he had never been to my brother's house. He kept giving directions all the way. When we got there, I asked him "Do you know where you are?". He very confidently said "Yes.". "Where?" "Here!"

DA: He was right.

OF: Yes, faultless.

DA: I wonder what he would have said, if you had asked "Where's here?".

OF: "Here is here." perhaps? Why is the glass engraved with the word 'here' covered by a plastic casing?

DA: How do you know Braille?

OF: I have a friend who is blind. When she goes on holidays, she takes pictures. I asked her why. She said it was to show them to people who can see. It made me think about being blind in a world of mostly seeing people, and I learnt to read Braille.

DA: I didn't want people to be able to touch it. I wanted to make it useless, or unusable, like a map with a pointing "you are here" when you don't know where here is. I was also thinking about the idea (was it Kant?) that the beautiful is purposeless, useless. And, you know, very often, when one says "Your argument is a tautology", it's meant as a fault—I suppose it is—but there's another way of looking at tautology, as they do in logic: A tautology is a propositional formula that is true under any possible valuation. So it seems that you can be sure that 'A is A' is always true. And what's the use of that?

FE: But, in a way, to know that here is here isn't useless. Does a stone know that?

DA: I don't know.

OF: Maybe a stone is so certain of it, a degree of certainty we can't even imagine, that, for it, here is actually *here*, so there's only HERE.

DA: Or maybe stones are not very talkative.

FE: I can't read Braille, so I didn't know that it read "here". I assume most people can't read Braille. Isn't that a problem?

DA: It wouldn't take much for someone to jot down the dots and to go and find out what they mean.

OF: And when they find out, they wouldn't be here, I mean, here would be *there*, displaced, and *here* here would be, in a sense, vacant.

DA: Void.

FE: That's asking a lot of the viewer.

DA: I don't see a problem with that. It's not impossible. Perhaps, it would help, if I said something about the genealogy of this work, or it might just confuse things. 2009 is the birth centenary of Weil and I want to mark it with a work in Ashford, Kent, where she is buried. In Ashford there's a road called "Simone Weil Avenue".

OF: So roads come around again.

DA: Yes, and there's a plaque dedicated to Weil with a few biographical details. I thought I could make a sign to go near the plaque, a sign in Braille reading "you are here", with no relief. I had an email exchange about it with a friend of mine, who had many questions about what the sign would communicate, about what its illegibility would convey. He also thought that there was, on my part, an intention to conceal something, and when I told him, that, yes, there was, he replied that that was fine with him, but that it might backfire. I didn't quite understand what he meant by that, but he knows me very well, so I reckon he probably had a point. I toyed with the idea of using this email dialogue to write a fictional dialogue between Rhea O'Eurey, an anagram of 'you are here', and... I can't remember now... something to do with the German for 'death'.

OF: So how did you get from "there" to "here", to the piece in *Gayliana*?

FE: Gayl and Weil: They sound very similar. Coincidence?

DA: Again, it wasn't a conscious thing, but it can't be fortuitous, I think. It's curious: When you say "Gayliana", I think "Gayliana: Isle of Idle", perhaps, because I think playfulness is at the heart of this installation. As I wrote on the poster, it's about the idea of *attention-as-waiting* being a sort of assiduous idling. That's why I had the image of the cloud reader on the poster: Productive idling. When I was a child, I remember one year I read several times *The Mysterious Island* by Verne. It was summer, under a huge kaki tree...

OF: What does a kaki tree look like? I've never seen one.

DA: Its fruits look a bit like orange tomatoes.

OF: Are they nice?

DA: I don't know, I've never eaten any, but you *can* eat them. Birds liked them. I kept reading it over and over again. It's as if it hadn't occurred to me that I could read something else.

FE: I had something similar when I was fourteen with *Brave New World*. I think it belonged to my sister.

OF: Do you remember *soma*? "Hug me till you drug me honey kiss me...

OF & FE: ... till I'm in a coma hug me honey snuggly bunny love's as good as soma."

DA: *Soma*? As in *soma sema* in the *Phaedrus*?

OF: Nothing to do with that.

DA: *Soma sema* means 'the body is a tomb', a tomb for the soul, if I remember correctly, but I often think "the sign is a tomb".

FE: A tomb of what?

DA: Just a tomb.

OF: Imagine a people whose language has only nouns—no verbs.

FE: And pronouns?

OF: Nouns and pronouns: 'house', 'this', 'tomb'...

FE: You see: I can't imagine that. When you say "house, this, tomb", I automatically think something like "this house is a tomb" or "this tomb is a house".

OF: Just because you can't imagine it, it doesn't mean that it can't be.

FE: Can *you* imagine it?

OF: No. I guess, after so many years of predicative language, it would take a lot of practice.

DA: They couldn't think tautologies.

OF: Do they have compounds?

FE: Sorry?

OF: Compound words, like 'househouse', 'thisthis', 'tombtomb'?

FE: What's a *tombtomb*?

DA: Can I just come in and steer a little the conversation? There, under the video, there are some books which are relevant to *Gayliana: Isle of Idle*. Can I pick one? Flann O'Brien's *The Third Police Man*.

FE: How did you find Flann O'Brien?

DA: In a second-hand bookshop. Can you speak Irish?

FE: I learnt it in school. I speak it a bit. I can read it.

DA: In Irish, the word for 'justice' is *ceart* and 'square' is *cearnóg*, isn't it? I was leafing through an English-Irish dictionary, once. Are *ceart* and *cearnóg* etymologically related?

FE: I know *ceart* means 'certain', 'sure', but I didn't know it also means 'justice'. Why do you ask?

DA: I was curious because it seems to make sense that justice should be square, you know, precise, measured.

FE: It could have something to do with public squares.

DA: That appeals much less: Institution. But I'm digressing.

OF: I think justice is more of a circle: All are equal before the law, as all the points on the circumference are equidistant from the centre.

DA: Actually, this reminds me of something Weil writes which is not that far from the issue of attention. She says that there is an analogy between the way a right-angled triangle is bound to the circle of which its hypotenuse is the diameter and, say, the just man who abstains from power at the price of fraud. And one can perceive this analogy only if one can perceive mathematical necessity, and that's where attention comes in, *intellectual* attention: It is attention that makes one perceive reality as a web of necessary relationships. I think all this is in the essay 'The Pythagorean Doctrine', in *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*.

FE: "The sun will not transgress his measure. If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice (*Dikē*), will find him out.". Heraclitus.

DA: Strange use of tenses. I would rather say "The sun cannot transgress his measure. If he did, the Furies, ministers of Justice, would find him out.". But I don't know ancient Greek; I don't know how verbs work.

FE: Neither do I. This is a translation by Charles Khan. You said "*intellectual* attention". Is that different from attention *à vide*?

DA: They are not the same. Through intellectual attention, you see conditional necessity, or reality, and then, there's a higher degree of attention through which you accept, consent to, love reality. Weil says that intellectual attention produces only a half-reality. It is the higher form of attention which gives the fullness of reality. Is this elevated attention the same as attention *à vide*? Weil didn't write a systematic treatise on attention, but, yes, I think for her they're the same thing.

FE: So how do you go from intellectual attention to attention *à vide*?

DA: To be honest, my views on this oscillate. Sometimes, I think it's a gradual increase from one towards the other—a 'you-can't-run-before-you-can-walk' sort of thing—and, sometimes, I think there's discontinuity, when you get to the top—more of a 'Mary-sucked-up-to-heaven' type of event.

FE: Do you believe that?

DA: What?

FE: The giant cosmic hoover effect. The Assumption.

DA: That people can be transported up to the celestial sphere body and soul? No, not really. But then I sometimes catch myself thinking thoughts that, well, somehow, seem just as untenable, but they have a more acceptable attire. It comes down to fashion, perhaps: Fashionable thinking, thinking out of fashion.

FE: Assumption? Thinking *out of mind*, if you ask me!

OF: Or it might have something to do with the fact that signs can deceive, if you don't quite know what you are dealing with. Who was it who said "Between the two of them, they only had 10 g of bread, a measly 5 g each. Had they thought of sharing with a third, what never-ending abundance! 3.3333333..."?

FE: Or the apparent infinity of π.

DA: And Zeno's turtle.

FE: Tortoise!

OF: On my mp3 player I have a discussion with Derrida, in 2002. He is talking about 'praying', and there's a part which I think is relevant to what we are talking about. I've listened to it so many times that I know exactly where it is: 21' 9'' to 26' 44''. Do you mind if I connect this to the speaker and play it? "the suspension of certainty is part of the prayer. And then I consider that this suspension of certainty, this suspension of knowledge, this inability to answer your question—"To whom? Who do you expect to answer these prayers?"—is part of what a prayer has to be, in order to be authentic. If I knew, if I knew, if I was simply expecting an answer, that would be the end of the prayer, that would be an order, the way I order a pizza, ok? No, I'm not expecting. And my assumption is that I must give up any expectation, any certainty as to the one, the one or more than one, to whom I address this prayer, if this is still a prayer. And, of course, the child is praying for, expecting some answer, or expecting some protection, for himself, for life, for his beloved ones, for his relatives, for wife, children, friends, and so on and so forth, but I can't tell if I am praying someone invisible, transcendent one, or if I am praying precisely these other ones in myself

that I want to address out of love and for the protection of their lives. ... Now, there is, at the same time, some suspension of any expectation, of any economy, any calculation, any calculation. I'm not expecting, I'm not hoping, it's a hopeless prayer, on the one hand, totally hopeless, and I think this hopelessness is part of what a prayer should be. And, on the other hand, I know there is hope, there is calculation, there is economy, but what sort of economy? Is it the economy of the child, or my own economy as an old, old man? ... So, the calculation, if there is a calculation, and obviously there is a calculation, despite the incalculable hopelessness that I mentioned earlier, there is a calculation. That calculation, if I wanted to describe it briefly, would be, would take the following form: I know that praying in that way, even if there is no one God, in the form of father, or mother, receiving my prayer, I know that by this act of praying in the desert, out of love, out of love, out of love, because I wouldn't pray otherwise, something might be already good in myself, like a therapy, I know that, by doing this, I try—not necessarily succeed—but try to affirm and to accept, to accept something in myself, which won't do any harm to anyone, especially to me. The impression that I, that I do something good to myself – that's a calculation – and, by the same token, to my beloved ones, if through this prayer, I am a little better in reconciling, and, if I give up any calculation, because of this calculation about, around the incalculable, I can become better for myself, narcissistically, but, to become better narcissistically, is a way of loving in a better way, of being more lovable for our beloved ones. So, that's a calculation, it's a calculation that tries to integrate the incalculable.".

DA: Where can I find it?

OF: Ubu.com. They have a lot of interesting stuff there.

DA: How do you spell it?

OF: 'U', 'B', 'U'.

DA: O'Brien, I was saying. *The Third Policeman*. It made me think about, no, I thought *through* it (for me, it's really a philosophical text, if a distinction between philosophy and literature, or art in general, has any sense, I'm not sure it has), through it, I thought about pure attention, attention unmixed with impression. We were talking about it earlier on. I said that, for the senses, perfection doesn't exist. In the book, there's this surreal policeman: MacCruiskeen. The following happens to the narrator of the story—I'll call him "Nar", since his name is never mentioned. The policeman takes a spear. He asks Nar to put his hand out. He puts the spear ever closer to Nar's palm. When the point is about half a foot away, Nar feels a prick and there's a bit of blood. Nar's confused. I'm going to read a couple of passages: MacCruiskeen's explanation. The point is "simply" very sharp: "About an inch from the end it is so sharp that sometimes – late at night or on a soft bad day especially –

you cannot think of it or try to make it the subject of a little idea because you will hurt your box with the excruciation of it.". But it turns out that what gave Nar the prick is not the point. The point is even thinner: "it is so thin that it could go into your hand and out in the other extremity externally and you would not feel a bit of it and you would see nothing and hear nothing. It is so thin that maybe it doesn't exist at all and you could spend half an hour trying to think about it and you could put no thought around it in the end.". You would not feel it, nor see it, maybe *it doesn't exist at all*, you could put no thought around it – only pure attention is pierced by it.

OF: Only *attention à vide*.

FE: But, if you can't see it, hear it, or think it, how can you possibly know it's there? And, besides, *what* is there? What's this 'pure-attention-piercing' thing?

OF: For MacCruiskeen, it's always a matter of thinking *of* something, making something the subject *of* an idea, putting a thought *around* something.

FE: So?

OF: Those prepositions seem important. They might be a lead. I'm seeing thinking as a groping hand and the spear as that which the hand is trying to grasp, to get hold of. The hand doesn't grasp the spear, but there's still thinking, still groping.

FE: Yes, thinking *of* the spear!

OF: No, *we* are thinking *of*, and *not* of the *spear*: We are thinking of thinking of the spear. Nar is thinking of something else, and he knows that what he is thinking of is not the spear.

FE: So, for Nar, the spear, the object of thought, is a kind of nose-thumbing jester: "No, no, no, not me! I know you can *say* it, "spear, spear, spear", but, not *this* spear, *this* spear is your *des*pair!".

OF: That seems so bleak!

DA: Yes, Fiona, your jester launches a sarcastic, personal attack on Nar, while, for me, the image of the spear suggests impersonal continuity: In thought, the spear gets progressively thinner, a little thinner, a little thinner, until it's unthinkably thin.

FE: That's exactly my problem: How can anything be unthinkable? The word 'unthinkable' is an oxymoron in disguise, since something truly unthinkable would not be unthinkable at all, it would simply not be. The unthinkable is always somehow thinkable.

OF: Not-to-be is not that easy. The point of the spear is unthinkably thin, but it still *is*.

FE: Any proof of its existence?

OF: It is causing our mouths to move, for instance.

FE: But the spear is just an idea in a book, it's immaterial. How could it cause anything?

OF: Well, it's still the best explanation I can think of.

FE: That doesn't mean it's really the cause.

OF: What do you mean by 'really'?

DA: This could go on forever. By the way, the etymology of 'oxymoron' is *oxys* 'sharp' and *moros* 'stupid', that is, 'oxymoron' is an oxymoron, as saying "intelligent-stupid".

OF: Or "sharp-thick". Why do we associate thinking with sharpness?

DA: 'Acute': that's the same idea: Pointedness. 'Acute' and 'obtuse'.

FE: Perhaps, because thinking is like a sceptic, sorry, like a *scalpel*, a very sharp scalpel that can dissect, I mean, the sharper the scalpel, anyway, you get my point.

OF: Is your point a *thinkable* point?

DA: Your image of the sharp scalpel reminds me of an installation I did, here, in the Project Space, a while ago. I measured the half point of the room's length, and, on the floor, I drew a line across the width with a permanent marker. Then, I measured one half's half and drew another line, and the same on that half's-half's half, and so on. I stopped when the half got too small to be drawn. Then I put a post-it note on the wall, close to the floor, reading "Move on, Zeno". The tortoise beats Achilles only with the help of Zeno's "sharp thinking scalpel". Zeno keeps carving ever more infinitesimal slices of space, and Achilles, as he gets closer to the tortoise, sinks in the quicksand of infinity.

FE: I saw that installation. I thought you were poking fun at Zeno: "Zeno, while you sit and ponder your "cleaver" paradoxes, the earth goes around, Achilles beats the tortoise, measuring tapes have their limits, markers their thickness, and we've all got something or other to do, so move it!".

DA: My aim was humour, not mockery.

FE: Well, with me, you missed your aim.

DA: I clearly did. I don't think Zeno was trying to demonstrate that motion doesn't exist. Alain, in *Éléments de philosophie*, talks about Zeno's arrow paradox: At a given instant, a "moving" arrow can either move to where it is not or move to where it is; it can't move to where it is, since it is already there; and it can't move to where it isn't, since an instant is like a frozen snapshot: There's not enough time in an instant for movement. In fact, there's no time at all.

OF: From spears to arrows. What next? A gun, perhaps? Who's Alain?

DA: A French philosopher. His "real" name was "Émile Chartier", but he is best known by his nickname, "Alain". He was Weil's philosophy teacher. According to Alain, Zeno was making the point that movement exists in the realm of thought, as a system of relationships, and, in thought, there's no single instant, but always relation of instants.

OF: An instant is like MacCruiskeen's unthinkably thin spear's point.

DA: And Alain extends this argument to any object: They are all systems of indivisible relationships. Take a cube: A cube has 6 squared sides, 90° angles, and so on. But, when you see a cube, you don't see this.

OF: So, strictly speaking, nobody has ever *seen* a cube.

DA: That conveys the idea of a material machine doing the "raw seeing", the "not-really-seeing", and an immaterial mind doing the "seeing proper". And I don't think Alain's argument implies this kind of matter-mind dualism: There's only *one* seeing.

OF: You did say "when you see a cube, you *don't see* this".

DA: You're right. I should have said "You see *this*: a system of relationships, a cube, but you don't see *these*: squares, 90° angles, etc., separately, or unsystematically.". Alain's *system* is analogous to Weil's *web of necessary relationships*, of which attention reveals the weave, and she also refers to the example of the cube, which, I think, she ascribes to Jules Lagneau, Alain's philosophy teacher.

OF: Achilles is spiralling towards the tortoise-centre, spiralling inwards.

FE: Ever heard of Duns Deme Tuiuge and Geod Toggdob?

OF & DA: No.

FE: In the last issue of the *Journal of Recursive Acronyms*, there appeared an email exchange between these two persons. The subject was "ONE = ONE never ends", whence the publication in *JoRA*.

DA: Are Dan Dean...

FE: ... Duns Deme Tuiuge and Geod Toggdob...

DA: ... yes, are they real people?

FE: The piece came out of nowhere, it seems.

DA: How can that be?

FE: It was just published. I haven't looked into it. I happen to have it with me. It's not that long. It all took place on 12th June 2008, between 19:37 and 19:49. It's quite sad. Shall I read it? "Dear Deog, One feels ab*solutely* lonely, as if there was no one else. One could say... it doesn't matter... one could say..., one could say..., but this is perfectly one's predicament: one cannot say "two". One has no solution for this, and one needs no *solu*tion. Unitedly, Duns" "Dear Duns, One apologises if one disappoints, but one cannot offer one single two. Sticking a one to a one just won't do: one ends up with a monstrosity. This could possibly be the most sterile dialogue one can imagine. Lonely, Deog" "Dear Deog, The image of the Oneone monster is frightful and one seeks refuge in the hope that it be nonsense. Deog, is *one* one, or is one *one*? One is so confused. But there's only one one, so one is *The* One! Onely and only, Duns" "Dear Duns, *One* is one. Is one *One* too? There's only one *One* and one is *That* One! Solely" "one on one = one no one, one and one = a none done, ONE = ONE never ends = ONE never ends never ends = ONE never ends never ends never ends = ONE never ends never ends never ends never ends x∞"

DA: Could you photocopy it for me?

FE: Sorry, but I'd rather not. The subscribers are so few that the journal is financially struggling, and photocopying kills small journals.

OF: I imagine it's a small niche.

FE: And the subscription fee doesn't help.

DA: Is it very expensive?

FE: The first year, it's free. The second year, it's £1.

DA: That's not very much.

FE: The third, again £1. The fourth, £2. Then, £3, £5, £8, £13, £21, £34, £55, £89, and so on. By the time you get to, let's say, the twenty-first year, it's £6,765.

DA: Ah! Fibonacci!

OF: Spiralling outwards, and fast.

FE: Yes. I appreciate the coherence of *JoRA*, but, because of this, most people don't renew their subscription after the tenth year. There are a few exceptions, of course. The longest-standing subscriber was a certain Clive Surrey. 40 years. He was very wealthy, but he finally reached his limit: £63,245,896.

OF: I regret to say that I've reach my time limit. I must go.

FE: Time's arrow keeps moving. I must go too.

DA: Good talking to you.

OF: Good or good enough?

Appendix 6

Appendix 6: Pamphlet for *Attending*

I love you.
You're not here.
You're dead.

I'm dead,
but I'm here.

I love you and you're not here.
You're dead.

Your love is miserly.
I'm here.

You're not.
I desire you be here.

I am.
I'm presently dead.
You desire I be here.
Absence is the way I'm here
as what you desire.
If you descend into yourself,
you find you have exactly
what you desire.

I desire you be alive now here.
You are dead.

Do you really love me?

Yes.

You're not taking me for
someone else?

No.

You say you desire someone
who is alive now here.
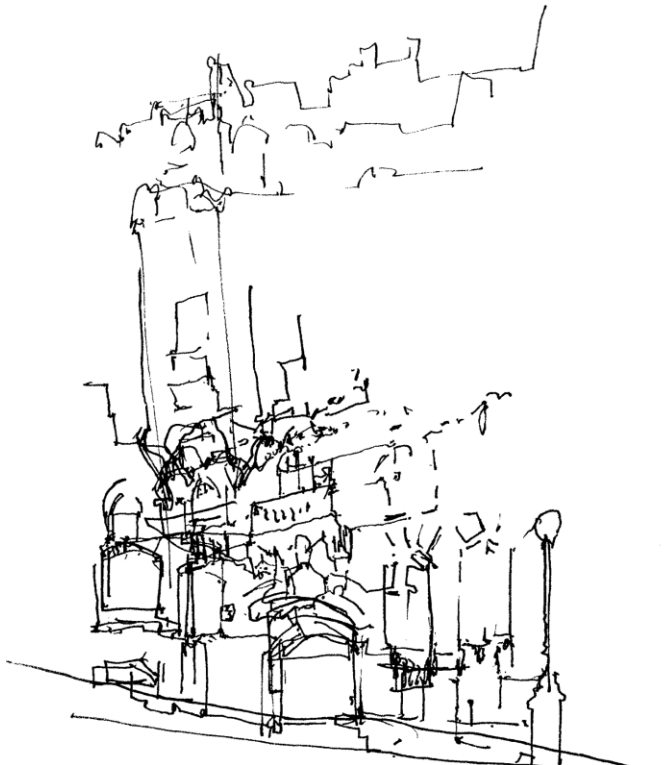That's not me.

Why not?

I'm dead.
You must be confusing me
with someone else.

I love you.

If you descend into yourself,
you find you have exactly
what you desire.

Simone Weil
Paris, 3 février 1909

If I descend into myself, I find I have exactly what I desire? | Yes, if you descend into yourself. | If I desire you and you're dead, I desire a particular person, a limited person, a mortal, I desire that person, that person who died, on that day, at that time. I have exactly that person: you - dead. | You have exactly what you desire. | That's not right. Word trick. That can't be right. | Why not? | Because I suffer. | So? | If I had exactly what I desire, I wouldn't suffer. | You have exactly what you desire. How could you not? | Why do I suffer, then? | Because I'm dead. | You are dead. That's not what I desire. | Your love was always that of a miser, and as is your love so is your desire. | I desire you be alive now. | Suffering is the way I am as what you desire. I'm yours thus.

This leaflet accompanies the installation "Attending", at Ashford International Station, which commemorates the birth centenary of the French philosopher Simone Weil. In 1942, Weil came to London to work for the French Resistance. Soon after, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and transferred to the Grosvenor Sanatorium in Ashford where she died and was buried in 1943. "Attending" deals with Weil's notion of attention, which had a profound ethical significance for her.

Installation "Attending" and accompanying leaflet by Dino Alfier
© 2009 Dino Alfier

Je t'aime.
Tu n'es pas ici.
Tu es mort.

Je suis mort,
mais je suis ici.

Je t'aime et tu n'es pas ici.
Tu es mort.

Ton amour est mesquin.
Je suis ici.

Tu n'y es pas.
Je désire que tu sois ici.

J'y suis.
À présent, je suis mort.
Tu désires que je sois ici.
L'absence est ma façon d'être ici
en tant que ce que tu désire.
Si tu descends en toi,
tu trouves que tu as exactement
ce que tu désires.

Je te désire en vie ici.
Tu es mort.

M'aimes-tu vraiment ?

Oui.

Ne me prends-tu pas
pour un autre ?

Non.

Tu dis que tu désire quelqu'un
qui est en vie maintenant ici.
Ça n'est pas moi.

Pourquoi pas ?

Je suis mort.
Tu dois me prendre pour un autre.

Je t'aime.

Si tu descends en toi,
tu trouve que tu as exactement ce
que tu désires.

Simone Weil
Ashford, 24 August 1943

Si je descends en moi, j'ai exactement ce que je désire ? | Oui, si tu descends en toi. | Je te désire et tu es mort, je désire un être particulier, un être limité, un mortel, je désire cet être-là, cet être qui est mort, tel jour, à telle heure. J'ai exactement cet être-là : toi – mort. | Tu as exactement ce que tu désires. | Ça ne marche pas. C'est un truc. Ça n'est pas juste. | Pourquoi pas ? | Parce que je souffre. | Donc ? | Si j'avais ce que je désire, je ne souffrirais pas. | Tu as exactement ce que tu désires. | Alors, pourquoi je souffre ? | Parce que je suis mort. | Tu es mort. Ce n'est pas ce que je désire. | Ton amour fut toujours avide. Tel ton amour, tel ton désir. | Je te désire en vie maintenant ici. | La souffrance est ma façon d'être ici en tant que ce que tu désire. Je suis à toi ainsi.

Images. This page: Grosvenor Sanatorium, Ashford. Overleaf: 3, Rue Auguste Comte, Paris, Weil's family flat from 1929 onwards.