USING PHENOMENOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY ARTS RESEARCH & PEDAGOGY

Facilitated by Jorella Andrews, Jeffrey Say & Clare Veal
Funded by the Goldsmiths/LASALLE Partnership Innovation Fund

Session 2: ‘Starting from below’: Phenomenological interventions in art history and visual culture

Dr Jorella Andrews
Visual Cultures Department, Goldsmiths, University of London

Kim Jongku, *Mobile Landscape*, 2009, steel powder, CC camera, LED projector, paper roll, dimensions variable.

PART ONE Phenomenology?
Phenomenology and art

PART TWO ‘Starting from below’
Description and what it can do

PART THREE Researching with Kim Jongku’s
Mobile Landscape

Landscape with Gentlemen Visiting a Scholar in a Lakeside Pavilion. Korean, Chosŏn dynasty, first half 17th century. Traditionally attributed to Kim Che (active mid-16th century); perhaps by Yi Ching (b. 1581) or Kim Myŏngguk (b. 1600)
Album leaf; ink and light color on silk.

PART ONE

Phenomenology?

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)

- *The Structure of Behavior* (1942)
- *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)
- ‘Cezanne’s Doubt’ (1945)
- *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collége de France (1954-55*)
- ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ (1952)
- ‘Eye and Mind’ (1961)
- *The Visible and the Invisible (followed by working notes)* (incomplete/published posthumously in 1964)

PREFACE

WHAT is phenomenology? It may seem strange that this question has still to be asked half a century after the first works of Husserl. The fact remains that it has by no means been answered. Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'. It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a 'rigorous science', but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide. Yet Husserl in his last works mentions a 'genetic phenomenology',[1] and even a 'constructive phenomenology'.[2] One may try to do away with these contradictions by making a distinction between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies; yet the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the 'natürlicher Weltbegriff' or the 'Lebenswelt' which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology, with the result that the contradiction reappears in Husserl's own philosophy. The reader pressed for time will be inclined to give up the idea of covering a doctrine which says everything, and will wonder whether a philosophy which cannot define its scope deserves all the discussion which has gone on around it, and whether he is not faced rather by a myth or a fashion.

[1] *Méditations cartésiennes*, pp. 120 ff.
[2] See the unpublished *6th Méditation cartésienne*, edited by Eugen Fink, to which G. Berger has kindly referred us.

Even if this were the case, there would still be a need to understand the prestige of the myth and the origin of the fashion, and the opinion of the responsible philosopher must be that *phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy*. It has been long on the way, and its adherents have discovered it in every quarter, certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. A purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof; we find in texts only what we put into them, and if ever any kind of history has suggested the interpretations which should be put on it, it is the history of philosophy. We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves* which has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for. Phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method. Let us, therefore, try systematically to bring together the celebrated phenomenological themes as they have grown spontaneously together in life. Perhaps we shall then understand why phenomenology has for so long remained at an initial stage, as a problem to be solved and a hope to be realized.

It is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analysing. Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a rejection of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance *qua* form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world. I am, not a 'living creature' nor even a 'man', nor again even 'a consciousness' endowed with all

the characteristics which zoology, social anatomy or inductive psychology recognize in these various products of the natural or historical process—I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties—if I were not there to scan it with my gaze. Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.

This move is absolutely distinct from the idealist return to consciousness, and the demand for a pure description excludes equally the procedure of analytical reflection on the one hand, and that of scientific explanation on the other. Descartes and particularly Kant *detached* the subject, or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it. They presented consciousness, the absolute certainty of my existence for myself, as the condition of there being anything at all; and the act of relating as the basis of relatedness. It is true that the act of relating is nothing if divorced from the spectacle of the world in which relations are found; the unity of consciousness in Kant is achieved simultaneously with that of the world. And in Descartes methodical doubt does not deprive us of anything, since the whole world, at least in so far as we experience it, is reinstated in the *Cogito*, enjoying equal certainty, and simply labelled 'thought about . . .'. But the relations between subject and world are not strictly bilateral: if they were, the certainty of the world would, in Descartes, be immediately given with that of the *Cogito*, and Kant would not have talked about his 'Copernican revolution'. Analytical reflection starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience, revealing the all-embracing synthesis as that without which there would be no world. To this extent it ceases to remain part of our experience and offers, in place of an account, a

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we are grafted to the universal by that which is most our own.

Modern painting presents … the problem of knowing how one can communicate without the help of a pre-established Nature which all men's senses open upon, the problem of knowing how we are grafted to the universal by that which is most our own.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', *Signs*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 39–83, 52.

Phenomenology and art

Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1968, stainless steel, plexiglass, Walker Art Gallery

Tony Smith, *Light Up!*, 1971, Seagram Plaza, NYC

Richard Serra, *Circuit*, 1972, hot rolled steel, four plates, each 244 x 732 x 2.5. Installed: Bilbao.

Philip Yenawine and Alexa Miller, ‘Visual Thinking, Images and Learning in College’, *About Campus*, Sept-Oct 2014, 1-8.

Abigail C. Housen, ‘Aesthetic thought, critical thinking and transfer’, *Arts and Learning Research Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2001-2002, 99-132.

Philip Yenawine and Alexa Miller introduce the practice of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and explain how class discussions using the art-based pedagogical model support the development of critical thinking not just in the arts and humanities but also the sciences.

By Philip Yenawine and Alexa Miller

Visual Thinking, Images, and Learning in College

WHAT IF YOUR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS had both the confidence and language skills to debate complex ideas with you and their classmates and, at the same time, were able to disagree civilly and build on information and ideas from others? What if they expressed opinions based on detailed observations and consistently provided evidence to back them up?

Interestingly, we have documented these skills in elementary students—fourth- and fifth-graders—who have experienced a modest intervention called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS uses discussions of art to build language and thinking skills as well as visual literacy, and it accomplishes this in an efficient 10 hours a year beginning in kindergarten. Its efficiency relates to its structure: it activates and builds on existing skills and interests, is developmentally based, engages peer interaction, and gradually escalates challenges. In addition to these skills, cognitive researcher Abigail C. Housen has documented others that appear over time in almost all students, including the capacity to speculate among multiple possible conclusions drawn from observations. Many students will return to an idea to elaborate or revise opinions based on new information.

What if these same skills, deployed easily by 10-year-olds as result of rigorous art-viewing discussions, were developed with intentional consistency at the college level? If the new Common Core State Standards are effectively implemented—not a sure bet at this point—students might develop these or similar skills before they get to college. But as it stands now, students enter college only a few weeks out of high school, and we expect them to learn in a much more challenging environment for which few are truly prepared. The rigors, requirements, opportunities, choices, and responsibilities of college are new to most students, yet the general expectation is for them to hit the ground running, with the ability to take in material that is likely more challenging than any encountered earlier, process it in more sophisticated ways, and produce work in forms and at depths and speeds that are most likely new.

If students enter college missing essential skills, and if we expect clear, innovative, analytical, reasoned thinking and writing, what responsibility do college educators have to help students learn to think and express themselves in the ways that optimize the potential learning offered by an array of courses taught by faculty who have spent years acquiring knowledge about their subjects?

In this article (and in its companion by Dabney Hailey), we propose a role for the Visual Thinking

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Figure 1. VTS at a Glance

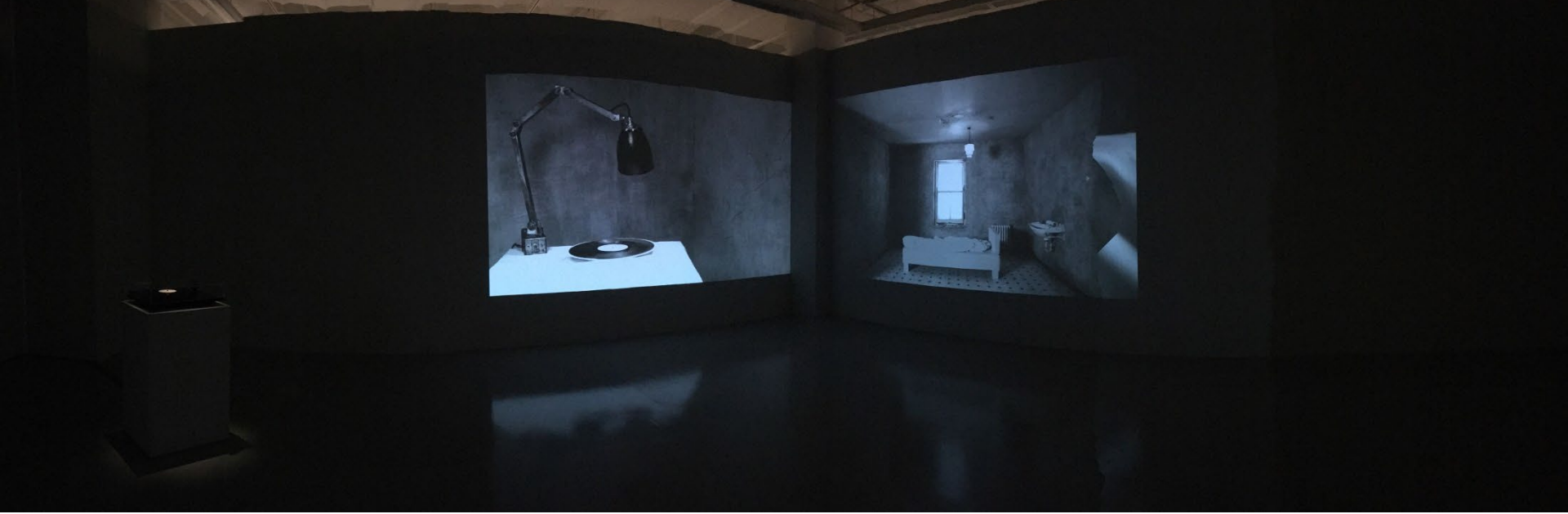
The basic steps for conducting a VTS discussion are as follows:

1. Present a carefully selected image. Ideal images contain:
   - Subjects of interest given the specific students ages and backgrounds
   - Familiar imagery given the existing knowledge of students
   - Strong narratives, accessible but layered; "deep"
   - Accessible meanings given students: intrigue but don't stump them
   - Ambiguity: enough complexity to puzzle and inspire debate
2. Allow a few moments of silent looking before beginning the discussion.
3. Pose three specific research-tested questions to motivate and maintain the inquiry:
   - What's going on/happening in this picture?
   - What do you see that makes you say that?
   - What more can you/we find?
4. Facilitate the discussion by:
   - Listening carefully to catch all students say.
   - Pointing to observations as students comment, a "visual paraphrase."
   - Paraphrasing each comment, taking a moment to reflect on it while formulating the response to make sure all content and meanings are grasped and helpfully rephrased.
   - Linking related comments whether students agree or disagree, or build on one another's ideas.
   - Remaining neutral by treating everyone and each comment in the same way.
5. Conclude by thanking students for their participation.

research confirms. Using a stream-of-consciousness interview protocol, by asking subjects to talk about what they see in both art and material objects such as fossils, maps, or unusual tools, Housen has coded thoughts that can be categorized generally as observing, inferring, offering evidence, speculating among possible conclusions, and revising opinions. These appear first in interviews during which the subject examines an art image and reliably later when looking at objects of another sort. Teachers have observed this variety of thinking transfer from VTS lessons to discussions of poems, scientific phenomena, math word problems, and elsewhere.

Why start with art as a discussion topic? First, all sighted people have the ability and innate habit of looking at what's around them and thinking about what they see. Beginning as toddlers, we examine everything—people, things, faces, bugs, the moon—and come to understand such things in our own ways. To reflect on this universal practice reminds us of the close interaction between the mind and the eyes; what we see inherently shapes what we think we know. As the child further hears the names of the things she notices, she starts making connections between observations and sounds, and language begins to form. While it is a visual connection to the world that establishes foundational understandings, this is gradually eclipsed as children begin to accommodate text and numbers. Even so, the ability to observe and decipher remains intact. It's especially strong among students with learning challenges and those who have immigrated to the United States recently who use their eyes and minds to figure out what's going on until they begin to accommodate language.

This capacity for looking at the world around them is no less true of the young adults entering college. And while visual learning may hold less curricular space in our text-based schools, it can be called back into action easily, honed quickly, and applied to a range of visuals to great effect. Visual literacy is only the most basic aspect of the impact of exercising the eye–mind connection. Abigail Housen's data confirm ideas as old as Aristotle: when our brains are negotiating aesthetic territory—the blur of movement captured



Hiraki Sawa, *Lineament*, 2012, 2-channel high-definition digital audio projection, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound, vinyl record, record player sound and video each 18:47 minutes. Collection: John Chia and Cheryl Loh. Installation view: Two Houses: Politics and Histories in the Contemporary Art Collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang, ICA Singapore, 21/7-10/10 2018.

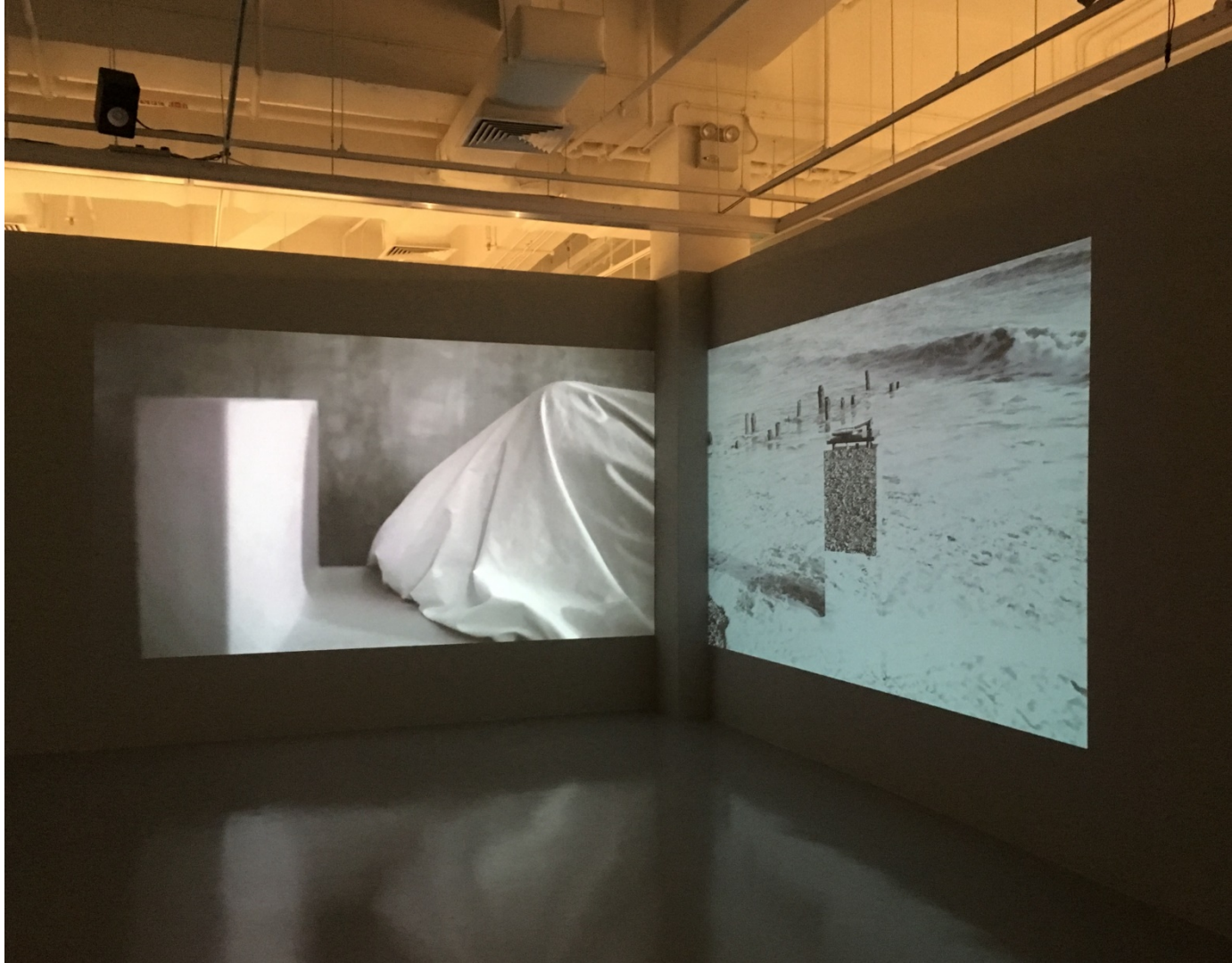
A boy shuts his eyes for a moment.

When he wakes the world he once knew is gone.

His room is an unfamiliar place. His language has failed him.

He has forgotten everything and everyone he ever knew. Gone.

The world he now lives in is one of lost things.



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Works of art provide the level of density and complexity to engage the mind thoroughly and a context for students as well as teachers to address material that is authentically unfamiliar, which is an essential condition for promoting a climate of discovery.

by photography, the graphic certainty of the illustrator's line, the questionable mix of color displayed in the landscape, layered meanings—virtually all aspects of cognition come into play.

Second, this happens because of the nature of art. Much of what we see in art is common to daily experience. Most art images depict people, places, things, expressions, interactions, moods, costumes, weather, spaces, light, colors: virtually all that we experience or imagine finds its way into art of various times and cultures. But works of art are also ambiguous in meaning, multilayered, intentionally open to interpretation, and often have symbolic and abstract elements; making sense of them offers great training for our minds. An important aspect of art is that feelings are embedded in it along with information, triggering a full range of responses from those who look at it thoughtfully. Again, we cite Housen's research into thinking related to art: it is a particularly rich form of cognition, incorporating processes applicable in most disciplines.

Talking about what we see in images brings the thinking into focus. To explain our thoughts, we seek and use language that goes beyond what is required by normal interactions. Skillful facilitation, as discussed in the following paragraph, greatly assists individual students, as well as the group at large, in finding full expression for their thoughts and evolving understandings of what they see.

While the three questions make up the core of the VTS protocol, other key teacher actions also drive the process: the facilitator *points* to students' observations as they are stated, *listens* to each comment, and *paraphrases* students' responses. These moves acknowledge each speaker, ensure that all realize the validity of what's said, and often clarify the language and ideas expressed. Experienced VTS facilitators draw on a wide repertoire of language to help students learn to express themselves in the manner appropriate for college, without changing students' meanings.

Such paraphrasing aptly captures the thrust of students' comments that may be quite rich as ideas but need assistance to be expressed with equal richness. Students appreciate this nearly invisible but vital assistance as well as the respect each comment receives from the authority figure at the head of the classroom. In order to build awareness of thinking itself, the facilitator identifies the kinds of thoughts heard; for example, she might say: you've noticed something not yet mentioned, you're building a narrative, you're recalling information and applying it here, you're thinking of what the artist/author might have intended, you're seeing a metaphor here, you've picked up cues regarding the era here and are wondering how to know specifically when this is taking place, and so forth.

The Importance of Discussion in Higher Learning

Twenty-First Century Students

need to learn to manage twenty-first century data: data that is complex, ambiguous, changing, and requiring synthesis across disciplines. We share this hypothesis with many colleagues—one in particular is Linda Duke, director of the Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, who has been influential in developing these ideas through her collaboration, mentorship, and tireless work at the intersection of art museums and higher education. Works of art provide the level of density and complexity to engage the mind thoroughly and a context for students as well as teachers to address material that is authentically unfamiliar, which is an essential condition for promoting a climate of discovery. Furthermore, students must navigate this unfamiliar territory using the skills of perception, language, thought, emotion, and collaboration. In this way, VTS nurtures the skills of inquiry and critical thinking. Art further provides a change in context for the practice of essential skills, allowing for students to explore new behaviors, see anew, push their boundaries, and to do so in a supportive environment.

The case for employing VTS to enrich learning among college and university students, as it has proved to be for younger people, is based on the premise that discussion fosters the development of skills difficult to teach or learn any other way:

PART TWO

‘Starting from below’

We will come to these questions by starting ‘from below’.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior* [1942], Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, 4.

- **The value of pre-critical forms of engagement with primary sources**

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- **The role and power of description as a key phenomenological method**

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- **The role and power of description as a key phenomenological method**
- **The use of visual skills like drawing, diagramming, mapping**
- **The critical value of the personal, situated and ideographic nature of phenomenological research**

Description and what it can do

Description progressively dispossess me of pre-constituted categorizations and judgments

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Description enables me to find a home within the visual, with its difficulties, so that it becomes a site of openings

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Description teaches me how to attend (to attend involves positioning myself in service of another, of a self-showing world)

Description turns things around, inside out, upside down; it expands our vision

PART THREE

Researching with Kim Jongku's *Mobile Landscape*

Kim Jongku, *Mobile Landscape*, 2009, steel powder, CC camera, LED projector, paper roll, dimensions variable.

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FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCE

TOPIC:

PHENOMENOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

June 13 – 15, 2018

Harvard University Faculty Club, Room 212, 20 Quincy Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02138, USA

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OFFICERS
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The World Phenomenology Institute P.O. Box 5155, Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA
Phone 802.295.3487 Fax 802.295.5963 Email office@phenomenology.org Website www.phenomenology.org

Thursday Afternoon, June 14, 2018

2:00 – 3:30 SESSION VII: *CONTEXTUALIZING POSTHUMANISM (CONTINUED INVESTIGATION)*

The Sublime Heteromorphic
Roberto Marchesini, Center for the Study of Posthumanist Philosophy

Evolution of Art's Effectiveness on Post Humanism, Infinite Life through the Changes of Time/Humanity
Christine McNeill-Matteson, University of Kansas

The Aesthetics of Metahumanism: A Feminist Perspective
Nikila Lakshmanan, Smith College

3:30 – 3:45 (COFFEE, TEA BREAK)

3:45 – 5:00 SESSION VIII: *TRANSLATING EMOTIONS*

How to Turn Around Trouble: Merleau-Pontean Institution, Aesthetics, and the Metaphor of 'Woman'-as-Hinge
Jorella Andrews, Goldsmiths, University of London

Human Emotions: From Philosophy of Mind to Psychiatric Diagnostics
Aydan Turanli, Istanbul Technical University & Gamze B. Camsari, Mayo Clinic

Phenomenological Aspects of the Perception of Architectural Space
Lyudmila Molodkina, The State University of Land Use Planning and Management, Moscow

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION OF PAPERS

In this essay I present phenomenological aesthetics, principally as a mode of *investigation.*

I argue that, *if* deployed, it is especially effective in turning around (transforming) situations of the worst kind. By these I mean situations experienced as hopelessly entrenched in conflict, threat or harm where …

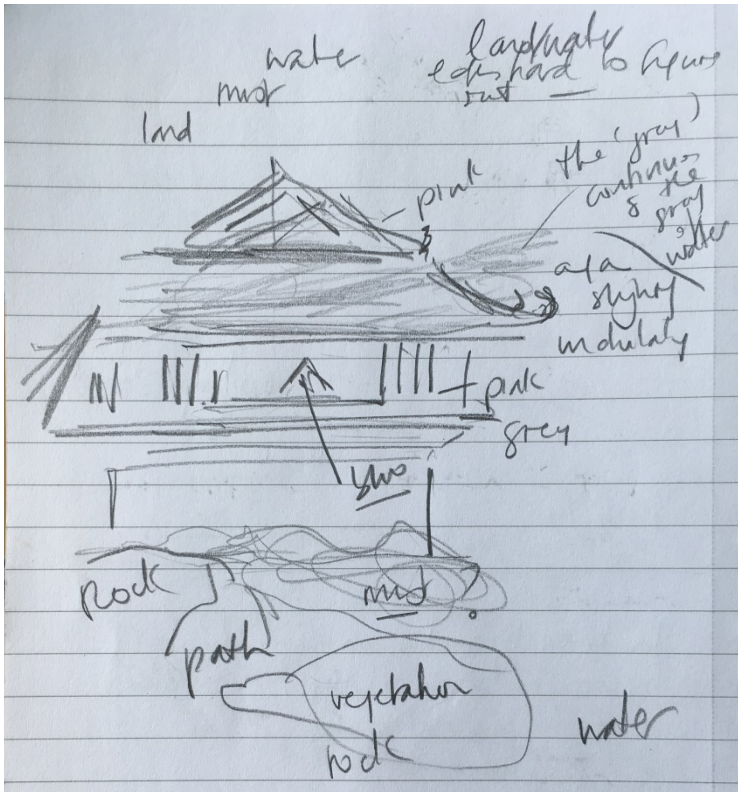
no attempts at resolution seem to work. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* of 1945, when referencing an instance of such a scenario, Merleau-Ponty wrote of a ‘subject who remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being’. We can recognise similarly entrenched structures of behaviour in other contexts ranging from the personal to the administrative to the political.

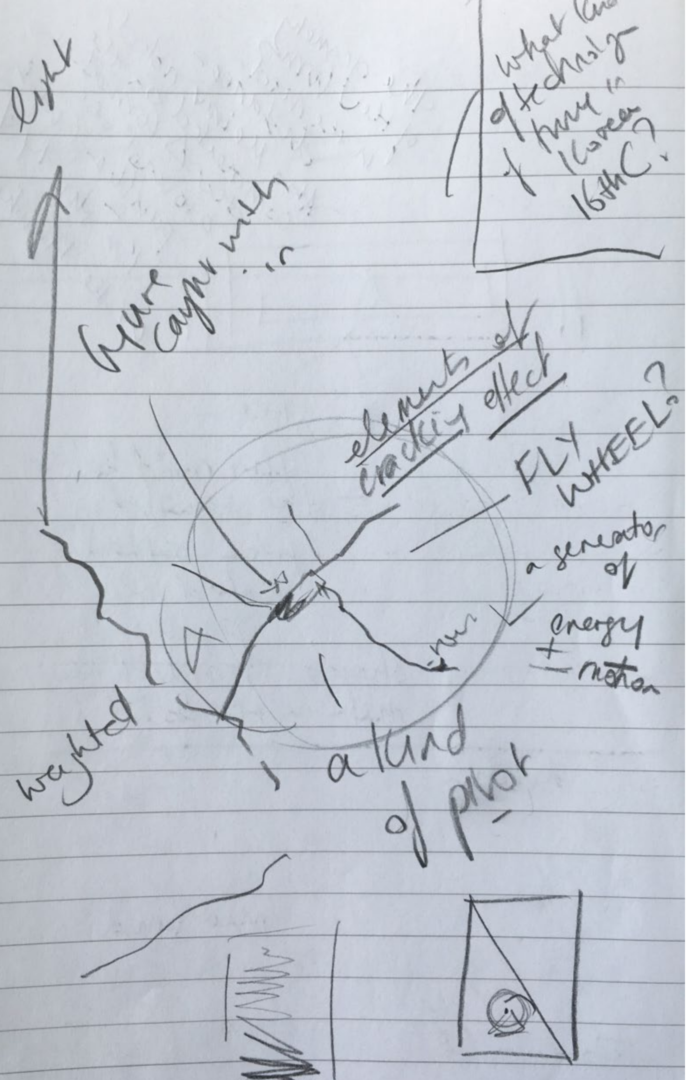
Ref: Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, 83.

My claim is that the only way to turn around (in the sense of transforming/resolving) trouble of this intractable kind is by developing ways of *turning around within* those situations and of *being* turned around within them. This second sense of turning around (which provides an alternate to the classic responses to trouble of flight, fight and frozenness) has, in the first instance …

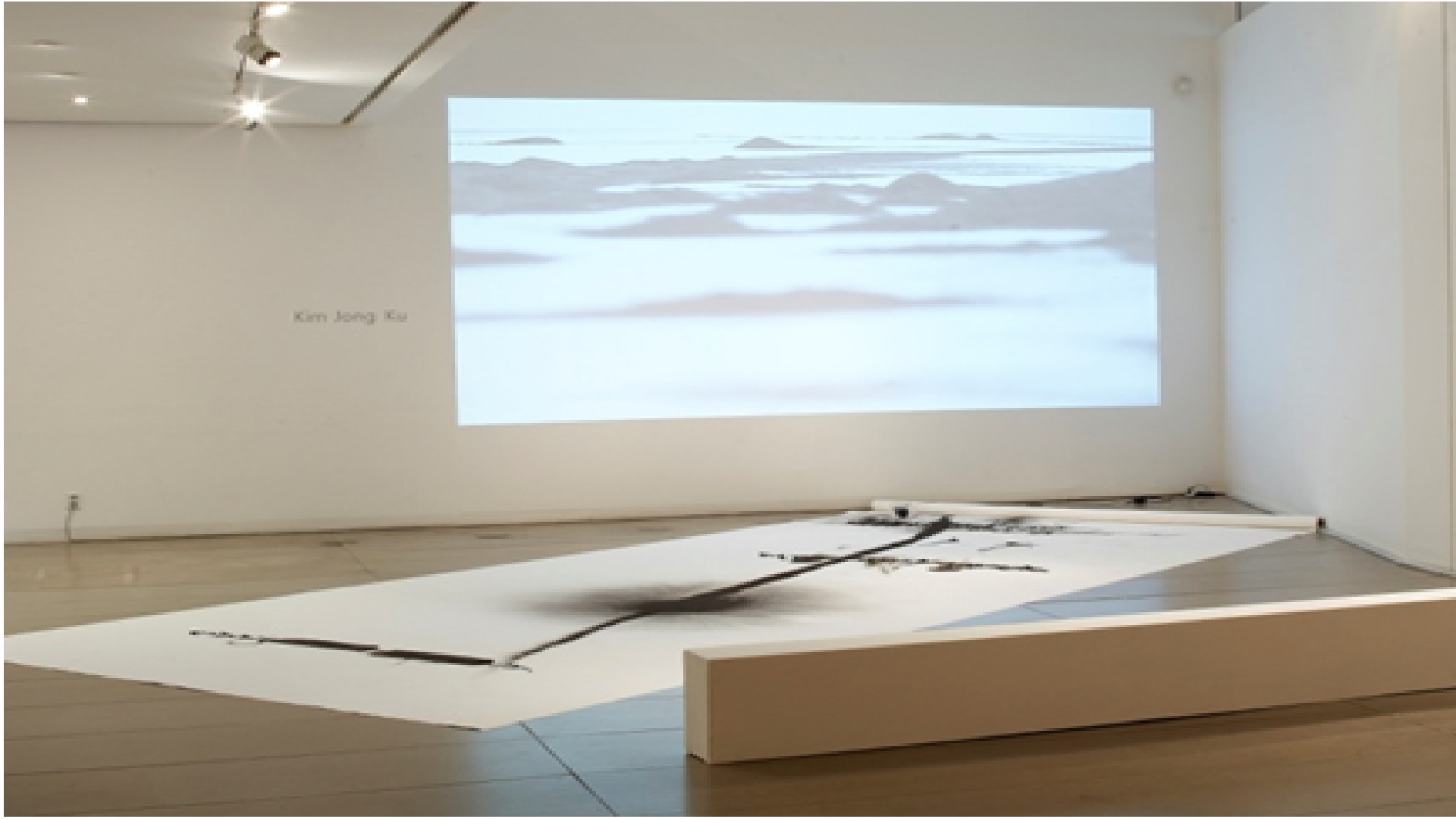
… to do with *perceptual* flexibility which, following Merleau-Ponty, opens up dimensions of unanticipated but effective emotional, intellectual and strategic capacity.

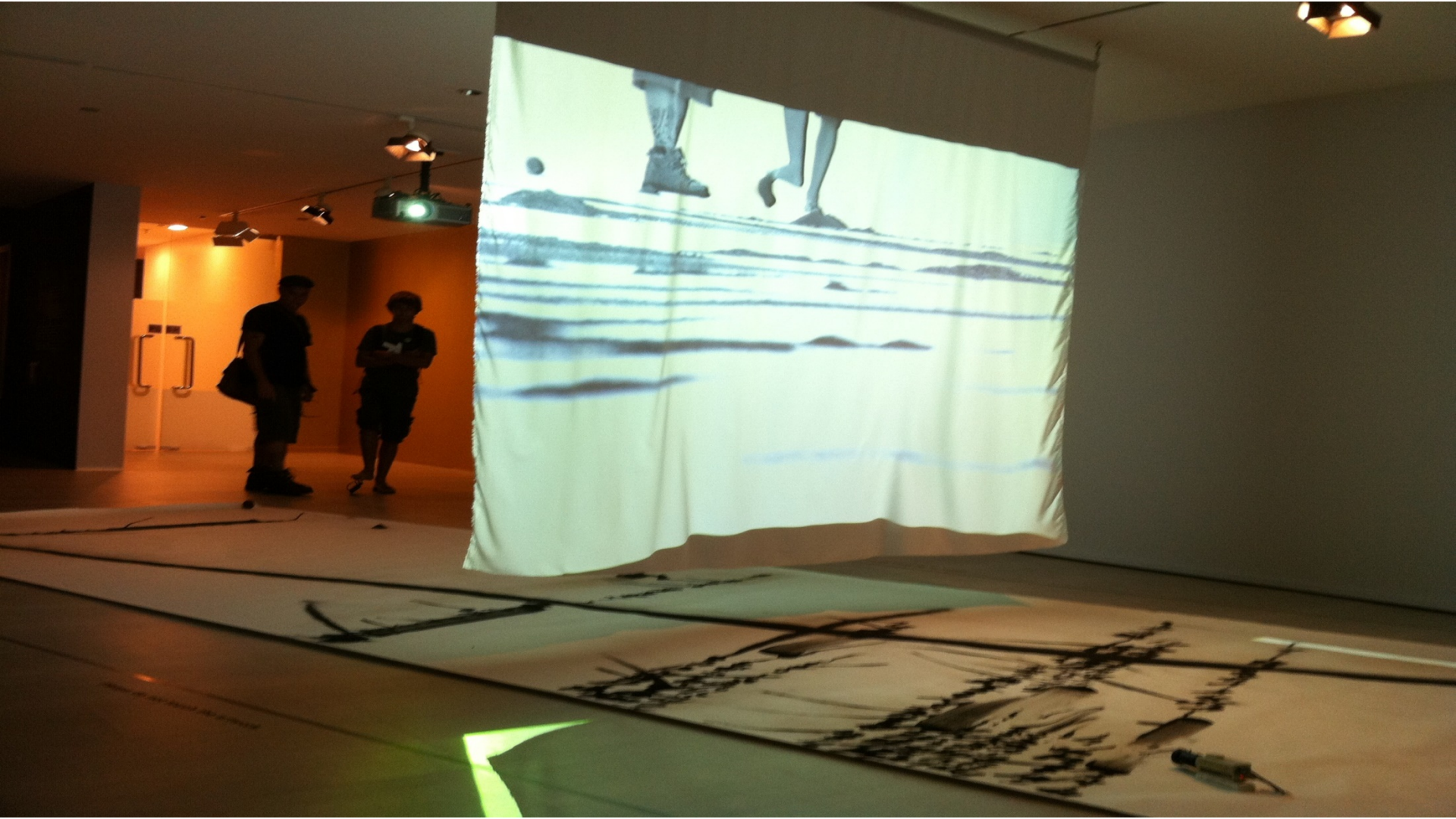
Landscape with Gentlemen Visiting a Scholar in a Lakeside Pavilion. Korean, Chosŏn dynasty, first half 17th century. Traditionally attributed to Kim Che (active mid-16th century); perhaps by Yi Ching (b. 1581) or Kim Myŏngguk (b. 1600)
Album leaf; ink and light color on silk.


land
mud
water
landwater edges hard to figure out
pink
the 'grey' continuous & the grey water
slightly undulating
pink
grey
rock
path
vegetation
rock
water


light
what kind of technology was there in Korea 16thC?
elements of cracking effect
FLY WHEEL?
a generator of energy + motion
weighted
a kind of pivot

Kim Jongku, *Mobile Landscape*, 2009, steel powder, CC camera, LED projector, paper roll, dimensions variable.


Kim Jong Ku



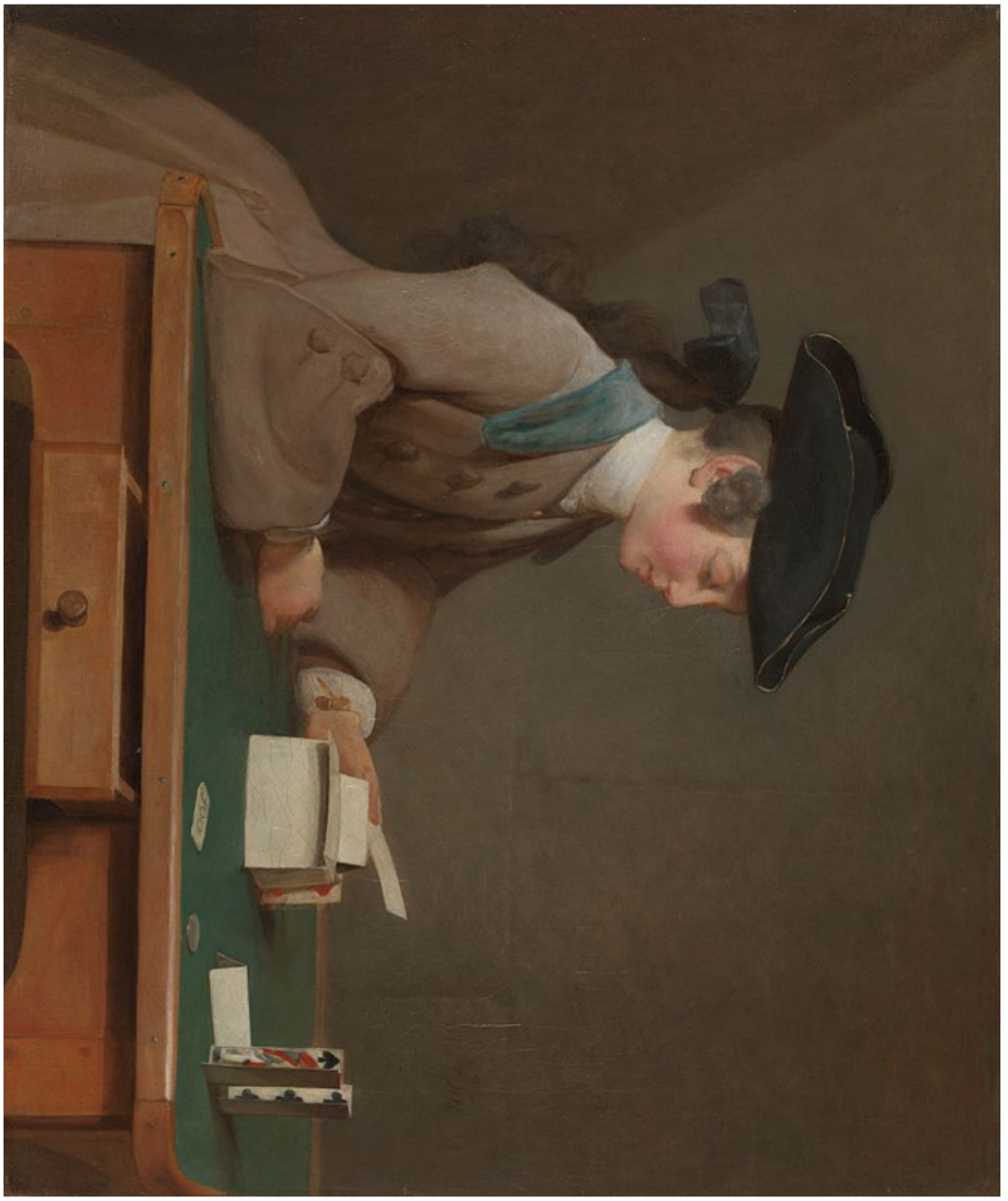
[The painter’s question] is not a question asked of someone who doesn’t know by someone who knows – the schoolmaster’s question. The question comes from one who does not know, and it is addressed to a vision, a seeing, which knows everything and which we do not make, for it makes itself in us. … The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him — those gestures, those

paths which he alone can trace and which will be revelations to others (because the others do not lack what he lacks or in the same way) — to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like the patterns of the constellations. Inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them.

Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 167.

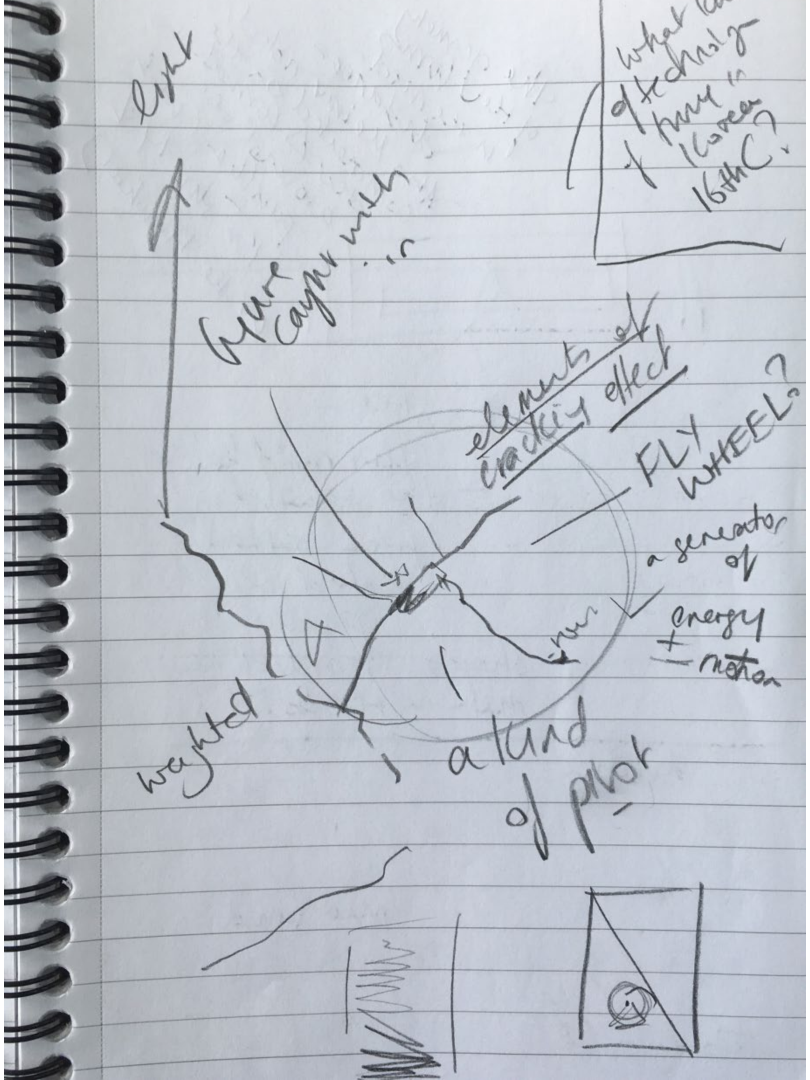
Antonello da Messina (active 1456; died 1479), *Saint Jerome in his Study*, about 1475, Oil on lime, 45.7 x 36.2 cm, National Gallery, London.

Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699 - 1779), *The House of Cards*, about 1736-7, Oil on canvas, 60.3 x 71.8 cm, National Gallery, London.



We live in intersubjectivity … [A] world with several compossible entrances; we are one for the others. Me-others hinge, which is common life, like me-my body hinge, which for me is not just weight, a curse, but also my flywheel. Accompany others, history, and not just endow it with sense by decision.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘For an ontology of the perceived world,’ *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collége de France (1954-55*), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010, 134.



light
figure caught within
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16thC?