

HYPOTHESIS #6

Distancing  
the If  
and Then

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The term ‘hypothesis’ describes the gesture of supposition, the event of supposing. Taken as a suggestion, it is a proposal towards the possible but not yet known, towards that which is conceivable but still unverified. It is an act of thinking, believing or imagining something about the world in the absence of having the available evidence or facts to hand, a provisional statement served to the inquisitive as provocation for further exploration or investigation. A hypothesis is the leap of an idea performed by the curious when existing explanations no longer suffice. Like the pioneer who pushes at the edges of territorial frontiers, its statements skirt the boundary or limit of existing knowledge(s), the point at which a known reality slips towards the indeterminacy of uncharted waters. Akin to the returning traveller, the hypothesis offers a tentative account of those phenomena witnessed along the borderlands of the encyclopedia or map; its explanations remain as the line drawn in wet sand – indefinite, susceptible to change. In the realm of scientific method, the hypothesis would seem to be considered potentially suspect; it must be tested through experimentation, subjected to rigorous review. Here, perhaps, the hypothesis reveals the location of a troubling grey area – or terrain vague – disturbing the smooth landscape of what is already named and known. It is the site of some uncertain doubt. The hypothesis sets in motion a process of enquiry that hopes to clarify matters by settling things one way or the other. The unknown or unexplored situation that the hypothesis identifies as its subject is taken as an inhibitory rupture or break, which needs to be carefully filled or bridged by the production of new knowledge. It is an invitation towards decisive action, where frontiers are extended, gaps closed.

The hypothesis is often considered as a preliminary or preparatory phase within a given enquiry; it creates the premise for something to follow, where it is perceived as being always antecedent to something else. However, the hypothesis may also be considered preliminal, since it marks the entrance of a threshold zone between the known and the unknown. The hypothesis signals a transitional state of being between, where things are neither yet proven nor disproved. It is a double-headed arrow. Its glance, like Janus’, is double-facing, for it always looks towards the conditions of the present-past for stimulus, whilst gesturing forwards to the future, to the (imagined) arrival of clearer understanding, towards the moment of realization. For

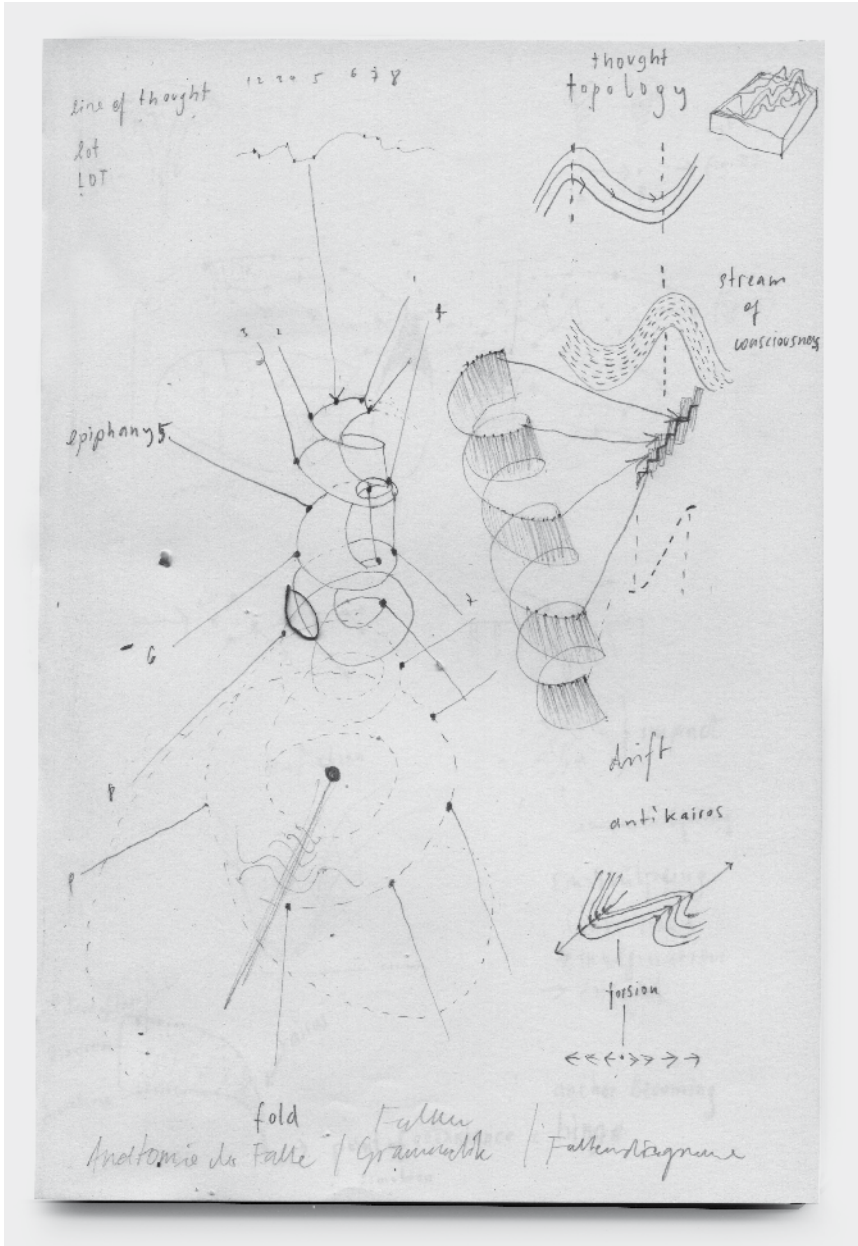
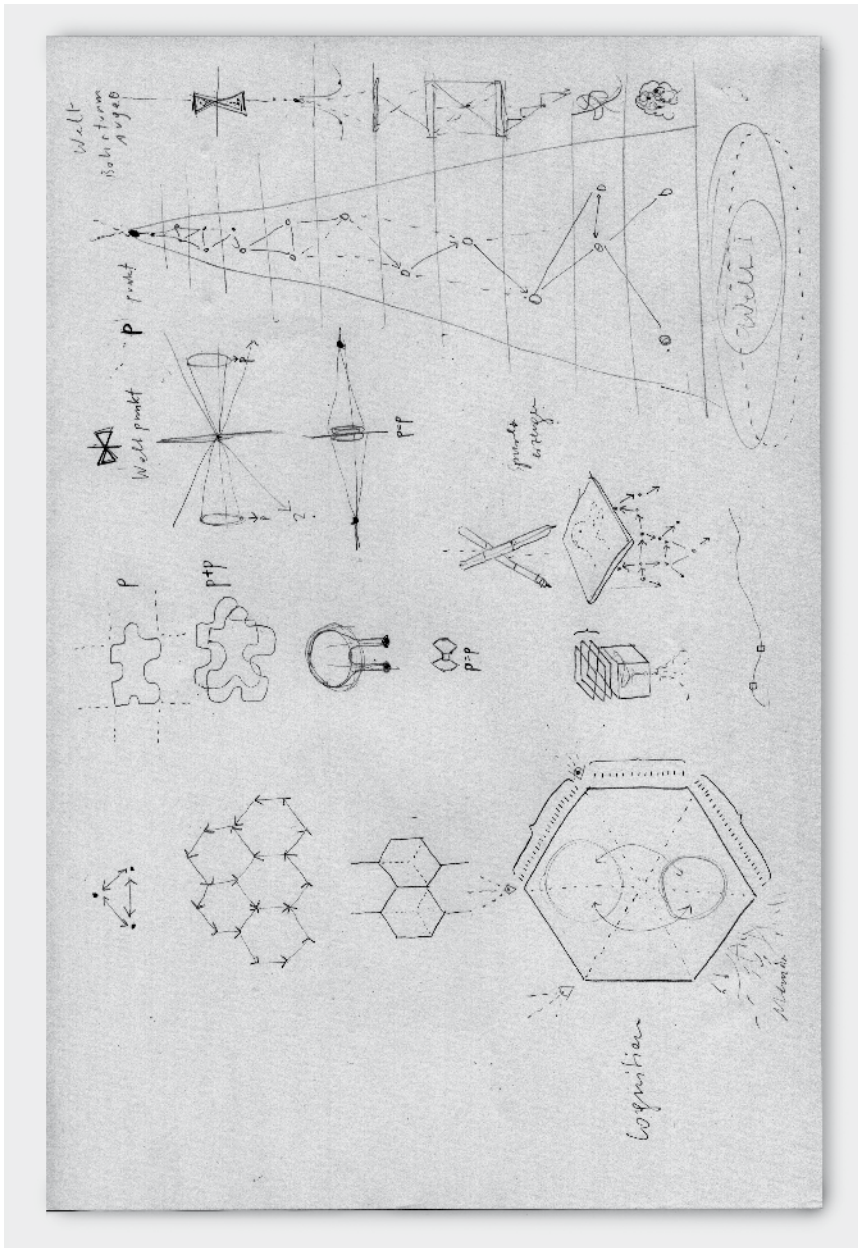


Fig. 12-21

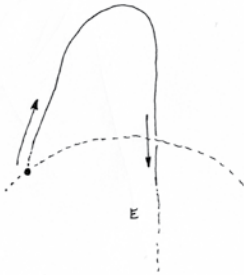
the scientist perhaps, the hypothesis anticipates a period of experimentation that – like a rite of passage – attempts to affect a transformation in status. Through the ritual of the experiment, the researcher practises the alchemical turning of the unknown into what can be known, the making consistent of what has hitherto lacked form or definition. Yet, thresholds can be crossed in both directions, where what is known can as easily be transformed into what is no longer recognizable or certain. Here, another logic emerges wherein the hypothesis might perform differently, operating according to the terms of an alternative structure of experimentation and enquiry, less concerned with expanding the limits of what is known than with increasing the spaces of indeterminacy along its borders. This other logic is not a critique of the scientific method but neither is it the wholesale borrowing of its terms. Rather, it is the emergence of a concurrent way of knowing that reveals moments of porosity or elasticity within existing structures of knowledge, taking a certain pleasure in inhabiting these perceptual or cognitive gaps. Here, the hypothesis no longer identifies the presence of a temporary glitch in the fabric of knowledge such that it may be apprehended and its run stalled. Rather, it is the inquisitive finger that finds holes in anticipation of teasing them further open, for the pleasure of pulling at their loose threads.

Within an art practice, the hypothesis emerges as autonomous critical activity, no longer bound by the repetitious cycles of testing and validation to which it is subjected in other fields. Its mere conjecture is rescued from the pejorative, recast as the pleasurable reverie of the thinking mind engaged in nascent speculation. Released from the stranglehold of teleological knowledge production, it is possible to discern specific properties or characteristics within the hypothesis that, in turn, point to certain critical operations at play within the practice of drawing. Drawing is the language through which the hypothesis is shaped within art practice, since it too has been habitually designated as a preliminary activity, always coming before, rarely taken for what it is in itself.<sup>1</sup> Like the hypothesis, draw-

1) The idea of drawing as the 'hypothesis of sight' is explored by Jacques Derrida in *Memoirs of the Blind, the Self Portrait and other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1993. Derrida's ideas around the hypothetical or conjectural proper-



— Fig. P01-03



— Fig. 12-81

ing is a conjectural operation, the tentative manifestation of an insurgent if. The hypothetical if is typically understood as a conditional statement, closely followed by the consequential or predictive then. Whilst if is the opening of innumerable possibilities, then grounds, returning the flight of the imaginary back to the realm of measurable affect. Paul Klee notes, 'In the world of physical reality every ascent must be followed by a descent at the moment at which the gravitational pull of the earth overcomes the ascending energy of the rudder'.<sup>2</sup> He signals this as (→ \_\_ Fig. 12-81) a drawn curve, whose rise falls as surely as Newton's apple. An ascendant (and affirmative) if is thus habitually subjected to the descendant or negating pull of logic, the gravity of the consequential then.



— Fig. 12-82

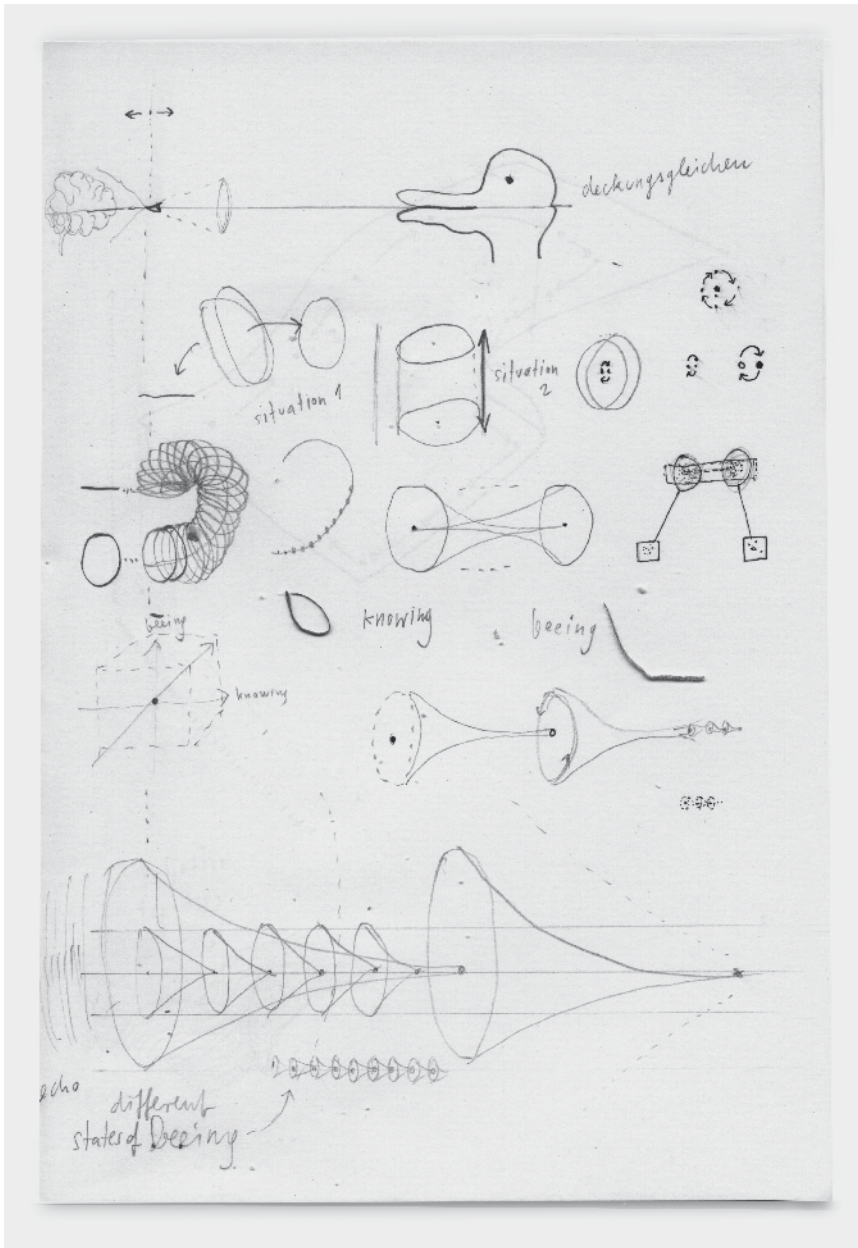
Conjecture is a practice for scarifying a conceptual terrain, unsettling its surface to create the germinal conditions within which further thought may take root. The drawn hypothesis attempts to extend the space of the conjectural, deferring or delaying the effects of consequential thinking in order to keep the if in flight. Comprehension remains suspended between one mode of thinking (as if) and the beginning of another (then). Suspension delays the logic of cause and effect, creating hesitation between stimulus and response. Stalling disturbs rhythm and unsettles familiar patterns, creating the spacing of a missed beat; an affective gap or form of creative attention in which to consider things differently to what they already are. Here, drawing produces the possibility of (→ \_\_ Fig. 12-82) Klee's 'cosmic curve', the trajectory of a line (of thinking) that 'frees itself more and more from the earth in infinite motion, to fulfil itself freely in a circle or at least an ellipse'.<sup>3</sup> Propelled by the invitation of the drawn hypothesis, thinking momentarily escapes the pull of gravitational logic, for drawing not only complicates the production of the consequential then, but also encourages the generation of further ifs. If is like the wind, an auspicious force whose energy keeps the arrow air-bound, buoyant. Yet, too many ifs and the arrow's flight

ties of drawing are further explored in *Drawing Now, Between the Lines of Contemporary Art*, Down, Marshall, Sawdon, Selby and Tormey, I.B. Tauris (eds.), London and New York, 2007.

2) Paul Klee, *The Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Faber and Faber, London, 1953, p.56.

3) Klee, *The Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 1953, p. 56.





— Fig. 12-27

collapses impotently under the weight of its own potential or against the pressure of unruly turbulence, its hypothetical properties lost within the realm of pure fantasy. True conjecture is always uneasy, somewhat difficult to maintain.<sup>4</sup> Without caution it is possible to get carried away. The drawing of a hypothesis is thus performed as a trajectory that harnesses the tensions of competing forces, maintained as an ever-active line oscillating between what may well have been imagined, but which could be perceived to be anchored within the real.

Drawing's hypothesis mobilizes the desire of the logical then, but thwarts its progress such that a conclusion never comes. It remains an incomplete or unresolved figure, promising the possibility of a revelatory moment whilst disabling the logic through which this might occur. Thought is brought to the quivering brink of realization, but its summation is indefinitely held back, unable to be reached. Predictions formed from an analysis of the drawing's conjectural efforts are not those of rational reasoning but seem more akin to acts of divination or prophecy. Occult methods are borrowed as the means through which to conjure the drawing's latent meaning, as familiar strategies of reading or interpretation fail to make sense of that which is abstract or obtuse. Conjecture is a form of perception led by intuition or insight, a portentous occupation. Indeed, conjecture has an archaic meaning, where it is defined as the interpretation of signs and omens – the quest, perhaps, for answers in the absence of other (arguably more rational) means. Drawing invites only the drawing of further hypotheses, made either by the artist as part of the line of enquiry or experimentation set in motion by the original conjecture, or else by the audience who are invited to form their own hypothesis in relation to the observable phenomenon witnessed at the site of the drawing itself. The drawn hypothesis is thus both a speculative act for making a statement about one set of observable phenomena, at the same time as presenting it as one which requires further analysis or explanation. The drawn hypothesis creates the first loop in a cognitive chain stitch of an interminable length and direction. This lasts as long as the thread of thinking remains

4) Indeed, the presence of these 'evidentiary' footnotes attests to the difficulty of remaining truly conjectural.



dynamic and aleatory, where it is neither cut short nor reduced to snarled knots. Drawing works loopholes through which new thought may make its escape. Yet, opportunity (or *kairós*) is only so if taken.<sup>5</sup>

The encounter with art provides the conditions – of potential indeterminacy – from which a hypothesis might be drawn, where the task becomes one of drawing the hypothesis in a way which remains faithful to the terms of the original stimulus (art).<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the testing of the hypothesis must also be undertaken without simply reducing matters to the realm of the determinate, without simply making things at once stable. Drawing is the hypothetical figure deemed capable of describing the unfolding phenomenon encountered at the very site of drawing itself. In these terms, drawing is the kairotic event of creating an adequate epistemology simultaneous with the experience it attempts to describe, the restless instant where naming and the thing named attain co-existence (in time).<sup>7</sup> It is the optimal means through which to communicate the nature of the observable – if somewhat intangible – phenomenon of drawing (and also perhaps of being) whilst demonstrating fidelity to its terms. Drawing is a form of hypothesis which attempts to account for its own coming into being, a reflexive practice performed as the infinite loop of observing itself observing, *ad infinitum*. It is the hypothesis folded back to regard its own making; this being analogous to thinking about thinking – a Foucauldian inversion.<sup>8</sup> Or rather it is that which is produced through the process of attending to and documenting the process of its own production.



— Fig. 05-08

5) *Kairós* is an ancient Greek word meaning an opportune or fleeting moment whose potential needs to be grasped before it passes.

6) A series of 'figures' provided by the artist provided the 'conditions' that prompted the production of this particular written hypothesis. However, the nature of its conjecture has been encouraged by other encounters with art practice also. I would especially like to thank artist Lee Trimming for the provocation offered by his work and for his insights into the conjectural nature of drawing.

7) Here, the reference to *kairós* is more specifically made in relation to how the term is used by Antonio Negri in *Time for Revolution*, trans. M. Mandarini, Continuum, London, 2003. For Negri, '*Kairós* is the modality of time through which being opens itself, attracted by the void at the limit of time, and it thus decides to fill that void', Negri, 2003, 152. Here, suggests Negri, 'the thing, on the edge of being, calls on the act of naming to augment being, in the same way as the name calls the thing to a new singular existence,' Negri, 2003, 154. My hypothesis then is that the act of drawing may equate to both the thing and the name.

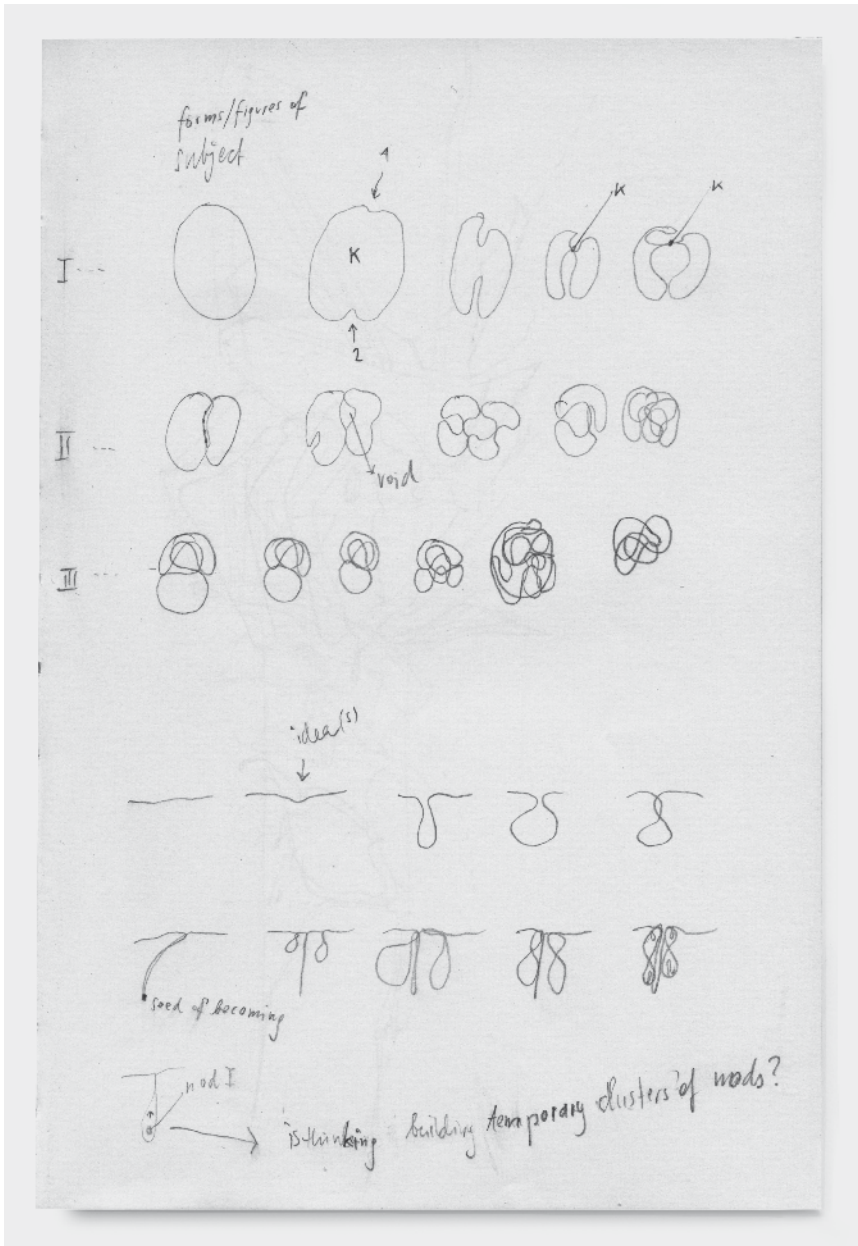
8) Gilles Deleuze further conceptualizes Michel Foucault's 'fold' of subjectivization in *Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)*, in *Foucault*, trans. S. Hand, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988.



— Fig. 09-07

Drawing is thus not only the observational record or explanation of those occurrences belonging to the (external) world but also an attempt to account for or make manifest experiences that exist along another plane of reality. This zone of experience extends from deep within the body outwardly towards the newly emergent and indeterminate spaces opening out into and beyond the surface of the paper upon which the drawing works. Within the drawn hypothesis, internal and external realities are conceived as a continuum, where the body's skin no longer keeps the individual distinct from the world but rather is considered a precarious threshold through which they merge, becoming inseparable. Here, thought can be observed in the same way that a tree might be. Distances cannot be measured by a ruler's yard, for within the reality of the drawing spatial proximities remain unstable, shifting. Scale fluctuates. Dimensions waver. Shapes appear solid in one instance and then disappear in the next. Flat surfaces give way to vertiginous voids. Lines shimmer along their axis, turning. Concave forms bulge forward suddenly into unexpected protrusions. Cuboids worry themselves inside out. Receding objects make an unlikely return. Edges seem undecided about which entities they delineate. Movement occurs even whilst remaining still.

The supposing drawing is in the world but not quite of it, it remains at the level of suggestion. Suggestion is the practice of inducing or guiding thought without recourse to rhetorical ruse or rational reasoning, the bringing forward of ideas in the absence of intervening sense. Suggestion draws thought. Those susceptible to its powers may encounter a change in perceptual experience whilst under its spell. An older meaning links the term to the prompting of evil, a turning to the left-hand path. Here, the left is that which is out of order, out of line, out of sight. If right is to tighten, then left is to loosen – it is a politics of undoing, of allowing things to unravel. Left is to operate anticlockwise. It is also a lover's language, being closest to the heart. The tendency towards suggestion is also a move towards the improper or unseemly, a deviant form. Suggestion is thus both a cloaked and immodest practice, the offering of a hint. At one level, the hint can be considered a form of intimation; however, it also describes an occasion of opportunity, a kairotic moment waiting to be seized. To hint is to offer invitation to-



\_\_ Fig. 12-23

wards another's thinking; it is the leaving of a sufficient gap. The supposing drawing is that which belongs to the world, but which refuses to be reduced to its language. It may begin to approach a familiar form but will always stubbornly remain out of grasp. Here, drawing hovers at the edges of recognition, pulling back at the last moment to stay beyond definition's range. Or else, it may appear to have fallen out of meaning, seemingly cleansed or even exorcised of its relationship to any particular signification. The removal of the frame of reference leaves the mark wild. Decontextualization extracts the fragment from its context, in turn evacuating all sense of context from it. Here, drawing aspires towards a state of neutrality or openness. Those who attempt to decode its structures must acknowledge the status of their guesswork; their hypothesis can only ever operate – like the drawing itself – as a contingent proposition, unsolved, unsolvable. The contingent hypothesis is neither true nor false. In the end, to draw is to leave things undecided.