More than – not enough: 
the approximation of the sketch

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Thinking the Sketch

How does one do _more than_ philosophy? How does one exceed writing? How does one challenge the limits of signification, and reach the _more than_ of the text?

Marcia, you give us both the _more than_, and the _not enough_. Philosophy is a discourse of language. But language is not the same as reason. Language can never purely absolve from the poetic; the resonance, the tonality. It lives in the vicinity of the musical, and of rhythm. Poetry is not so far from the language in which we practice philosophy. The old battle between philosophy and poetry is a well-known struggle between cousins.

But what about the image? Whereas religion has struggled with the image, it seems not to have been a hot ground for philosophical queries. You approach the relation between image and philosophy in _Att tänka I skisser. Essäer om bildens filosofi & filosofins bilder_, _How to Think in Sketches. Essays of the Philosophy of the Image & The images of Philosophy_ (2011). Over the centuries, philosophy has defined its own borders with the help of the question of mimesis, simulacra, and theoria, but these are concepts that traditionally reflect on the relation between the image and the truth content conveyed by the image. It does not say anything about the quality of the image, or discuss the range and kinds of images that we may approach as philosophers. With your book we are reminded of an aspect of thought that is only rarely brought to the fore in philosophy: its relation not to the image as something already understood as a given structure of the visible, but to the sketch, the almost-image, the image of becoming. As we read your book, we become aware of how the closeness of thought to art
permeates not only Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of technology, but many other thinkers, not least in speculative philosophy, and its predecessor, Immanuel Kant.

As you think through the sketch, you also sketch the way thinking presents itself.

Here. You enter a domain where a certain incompatibility shows itself. How can we transpose the image into language? How should we consider the relation between philosophical ideas and the visual arts, is that even a meaningful endeavor? As one approaches these questions, one is taken to a point where philosophy appears both limited – not enough – and potentially limitless – more than its premises.

In the works of Clarice Lispector, the incompatibility between thought and the various media of expression, and the wish to move beyond it, is always at stake. In *Agua viva* the voice of the text stems from a painter who has changed her medium and started to write. In writing, she cannot manufacture with her hands, as she was doing when she was blending colors for instance. But writing, like painting, engages the body, although the body behind the text is a secret one: “More than anything else, I paint painting. And more than anything else, I write you hard writing. I want to grab the word in my hand.”¹ The art of the hand is that of the sketch. As one looks at the soft anatomical drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, one can see the hand in the sketch. The hand seeks the sketch, just as the sketch is in need of the hand. A sketch may be a drawing. But a sketch does not need to be a drawing, and a drawing does not need to be a sketch.

The philosophical question of the sketch takes its beginning, perhaps, with the concept of *disegno* in Giorgio Vasari’s sense, by the way he speaks of the art of the drawing as somehow pointing to the ideal beyond the image. To Vasari, the sketch and the drawing is the art of the divine. Through *disegno*, we approach the shapes of creation. The idea and the image are one. This comes to the fore, in particular, with the shapes of the human body. But in modern art, and contemporary philosophy, we witness an inherent incompatibility between the two. As you show in your book, this incompatibility is brought out, rather than overcome by the philosophical question of the sketch.

The challenge to philosophy when it is concerned with the sketch, then, is not to identify what it means think in images. Whether the mind operates with internal images or not is another problem that has been dwelled upon in centuries: by Descartes, Wittgenstein and others. But this is not what is at stake here. The sketch exceeds the image, and it exceeds language. It is more than image and more than language, in the very moment when it seems to be less: a sketch is an approximation. Therein lies its challenge not only to language and image, but also to thought. How can we conceive of thought when it doubles, lacks in precision, ceases to define? This is the moment when it becomes more than philosophy, at the very moment when it also becomes less.

The sketch and the concept

The sketch, you show us, has a transcendental quality. It acts as if. The image of the hand of the sketch is not an exact copy of the hand, but it acts as if it is the hand. In this way, it is an approximation. Here the challenge to thought presents itself: if the sketch is an approximation that we all agree upon, than certainly the mind can bring forward other kinds of presentations that we all agree upon as well, although they are approximations. Theoretical concepts, also, may serve as sketches. A concept is working with relations rather than objective facts. It is putting something in shape. It produces the as if of the shape. In your way of reading Heidegger, for instance, you bring out this quality of the sketch. It becomes an architectonic form. As such, it is shaping the conditions of thought. Architecture is not simply putting things in place. In a truly beautiful work of art, form is everything, Schiller, writes, but the form is not frozen. It is full of antinomies.

Theoretical concepts may serve as approximations that allow us to grasp conditions that we cannot objectify. Thoughts can be brought to concretion through a kind of sketching by thought itself. Sketching is a kind of process of thought. It is not so much concerned with describing what is true as with describing what is real. Sketches present something real for us, although they are not mimetic, or pictures, or aspirations to truth. In this way, the

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sketch is a kind of thought. It is a creative process that is not determined by external conditions. Your book brings forward the role of imagination for philosophical abstraction. You translate the Kantian concept of *Einbildungskraft* for these purposes into the Swedish neologism *Inbildningskraft*. This is a concept which points to the imago, the image, the Bild.

The discussion about Kant’s schematism in your book shows us clearly how imagery and concept are tied in the sketching of the mind. The image, and also the concept, is not a reproduction but a production, not a representation but a presentation. With his schematism, Kant sketches the thought of synthetization. The manifold is conceptualized, and the concept becomes a schematic image of the real: “The concept is a conceptual schema and thereby ‘as if’ it were an image. It is a pictureless image, unifying sensibility and thought.”

The meaning of what philosophical conceptualization may imply is thereby widened. It is not about creating a language under which the real is to succumb. Kant sees a way of producing concepts that incorporates the image rather than refer to it.

Perhaps this is why Kant becomes interested in the aesthetic qualities of thought: beauty and the sublime. Here we can remind ourselves of the reading of Jean-François Lyotard, to whom Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* refers not only to thought’s own imagery, but also to thought’s own self-touching capacity, a sensibility of thought which we can see ingrained in the idea of the sketch.

Indeed, the sketch has a very particular place in paragraph 14 in *Critique of Judgment*. When the Reize – sometimes translated as the “charms of sensibility” – are the cause of judgement, taste becomes “barbaric”. A judgement of taste can only be pure when Reize, instigations of sensibility such as colors, are not involved. True beauty presents itself through something that is minimal in its manner of attracting. Therefore, a drawing is the example that best exemplifies the object of taste. Here there is no vulgar sensation involved. True objects of art are contained in their shapes. Painting is the drawing before the color. Music is the composition before the tones.

But here we encounter a problem: To think in sketches: could that perhaps not entail the risk of moving too far from corporeal sensibility? To,

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3 Ibid., 37.
like Kant, end up in an illusion about the pure, the untainted, in an illusion about thought moving itself? I see this problem present itself in Kant and Heidegger, and I would like to discuss this with you. Is there not a movement away from corporeal sensibility in these philosophical considerations, which belies the original vicinity between body and sketch that presents itself with the extraordinary drawings of Rembrandt, for instance? A vicinity which was present even in Vasari’s Neoplatonic idea of disegno?

The sketch is an approximation. Sketches present something real for us, although they are not mimetic, or pictures, or aspirations to truth. They serve as something that makes it possible to grasp the real. Here we are reminded again, after Lispector’s quote above, of the very corporeal quality of the philosophical sketch of the concept. The impulse of sketching begins in the body. The sketching needs the concretion of the hand, just as Lispector says. The philosophical impulse to grasp begins with the hand. We grasp the real through the very tactile qualities of the approximation; with our minds as with our hands.

The grey melancholy of the sketch

How does an image appear as an image? Is there something that unites all images, you ask, looking for the transcendental quality of the as if in all sketches.

Is there something like a pure image? How are we to perceive its particular qualities not as a metaphor of language, but as an image that has always already been, like the thing or thinginess that comes before the unique object?

As we consider the sketch, we encounter both the possibility and immediate impossibility of such an image of the image. The considerations of the sketch lead us to the limits of philosophy, but also to the limits of the arts. A painting is never only visual, and poetry spills over into the world of images. A composition draws from the realm of rhythms, which determines the contours of the sequences. The sketch, perhaps, is a kind of transposition, a suggestion that you make towards the end of your book, although in indirect terms.

In the late Heidegger, which you discuss, one can see a movement between image and writing where they mutually create each other. The phenomenology of appearance, you argue, builds on a parallel movement where the writing of the image and the image of writing approach one
another. To Heidegger, van Gogh does not paint reality, or imagination. He paints images. It is as if the image is a quality that places itself between reality and that which creates images. The image makes visible an appearance. This is what a sketch is to Heidegger. In this way, Heidegger’s idea of the sketch implies a connection between figurative and abstract art.

Perhaps, and here I reflect upon your suggestion, this is where the transition between figurative and abstract is made visible. In Manet’s paintings for instance, of the famous view over Rouen, painting has become more sketch-like. At the same time, in certain works of Brazilian concretism, the transition between sketch and writing is seamless. Mira Schendel, in her drawings of concepts and words, some of them barely discernable, look like calligraphy, but also “confers thickness and corporeality to graphical signs which, weren’t it not for their capacity to vibrate, would remain within the sphere of abstraction.” At the same time, as Hannah Arendt saw, literature can be pictorial: Kafka’s novels were blueprints of the real.

Art is not imitation but a depiction of the real. The essence of the image lies not in its ways of representing but in the way in which it lets something be seen. In the same way, poetry is not rendering the real, it is the creation of an openness where beings can appear.

Something, like Freud saw, which makes the dream-image into an image and nothing else, which at the same time is directly related to what he calls the thought of the dream. In this way, the relation between sketch and writing has intrinsically engaged psychoanalysis. As Freud discusses the memory traces of the human mind in the very sketch that he makes towards the end of *Traumdeutung*, it becomes clear that there is never any original trace. The mind, in the process of recalling, is sketching a memory, but it is unclear whether that memory is pictorial or written – the memory trace is always already drawn into a chain of displacement.

In this vein, one can also consider Derrida’s *Memories of the Blind*, the catalogue from the exhibition at the Louvre in Paris 1990. Here, the image came to be connected with the autobiographical. What the gaze can do, what seeing can do, is to sketch a happening, an event, a memory perhaps.

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The origin of the drawing and the origin of the painting gives place to multiple representations that substitute memories for perception. Therefore, one also forgets. The drawing becomes an art of skiagraphia, a writing of the shadows, an art of blindness where memory, and the lack of memories, replaces perception.¹⁰

The idea that something always precedes the image, just like something always precedes thought – an arbitrary trace that is not always discernible – cannot be avoided. Perhaps the mimetic impulse, in spite of your resistance to it that we talked about in the beginning of this text, comes close to this idea of the sketch. Plato insisted that mimesis is the affirmation of the imperfect. Does this not also release its productive qualities? As Samuel Ijsseling has shown, mimesis can be read as an early concept for the trace.¹¹ Mimesis presumes no original, what may be produced as an image is not emerging from nowhere but is to some extent always a mirror of something that has already been produced, What is seen is always a repetition of something that has already emerged, although in a new way. Mimesis is a displacement, to another level. It is, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has argued, surprising that Heidegger has not given more attention to mimesis, unlike his contemporary, Theodor Adorno, to whom mimesis was always in focus of critical thought.¹²

It is not possible to entirely synthesize, in words, the sketching process of thought. It varies with different thinkers. It is a process that several philosophers have tried to immerse themselves in. One can argue that Kant’s Einbildungskraft is not only producing the non-existent in the abstract but also shaping concepts. To Schelling, thought is a productive process that rather relates to the negative freedom of nothingness. In Heidegger, technique sketches the shadow of the real, and puts it in a shape it has not had before.

Let me quote your book on Heidegger’s philosophy of techne: “The task of thought’ could be considered to consist in learning to see, read and discover that to think is to sketch the possibilities of being. This is what the closeness

¹¹ Samuel Ijsseling, Mimesis: On Appearing and Being (Amsterdam: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1997).
of thought to art consists in.” 13 Perhaps what Kant is lacking is a depiction of philosophy not only as receptive but as productive, desiring and as laden with affects, an activity which is never pure but always more than and not enough. Perhaps Kant fails to bring out the radical incompatibility between image and thought.

We find it, instead, in Friedrich Schelling. To Schelling, art is a source of philosophy. Here we see a paradoxical movement: to see with the image, one needs to see beyond it and through it. It entails to, with the help of the gaze that loses itself in the attraction of the image, lose oneself in the inner perception of intuition. Marcia, you read Schelling as a philosopher of appearances. But also, you see that this philosopher of appearances leads us towards the point where the image will disappear. You read Schelling as a thinker who is not only the inheritor of Kant, which is the usual dramaturgy of the history of philosophy. You read him as a possible friend of Paul Klee and Cy Twombly. You see them lose themselves, jointly, although from different practices, in the “imageless intuition” of that which Klee calls “the grey point”, the point which is neither black nor white. It is both.14

But is there not also a melancholic side to this, unleashed by a philosophy unable to reach beyond its own borders, unable to move towards the more than and the not enough. Through constructing a system on a concept of freedom that is set as a lack of ground, rather than as ground, on drives rather than desires, Schelling is emphasizing plurality, mobility and productivity, such as it is manifested through a work of art. He is affirming another kind of plurality than that of the empirical world. He is interested in the invisible dynamic that produces differences, mediations and novelities. The specular phenomena of temporality: the titanic moment lifting philosophy, the upheaval of the split caused by the fall, results in an encounter of the gaze with death, which is always imageless, such as we know it from Maurice Blanchot. With Schelling, the image becomes a symptom of the diremption of man. The titanic, the sublime, wild nature expresses a desire which can only find fulfilment through death: going through the mirror, defying the lack, giving up on desire.15

13 Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Att tänka i skisser, 24.
14 Ibid., 56.
You demonstrate thought to be, through its very nature, immersed in sketching. You show us why this is altogether different from “thinking in pictures.” This is also where the incompatibility with philosophy lies – which for a long time has insisted upon the “thinking in pictures” to be the main problem to deal with, or the mimetic impulse. The sketch, however, points to another kind of incompatibility, which philosophy must seek, and which it must not strive to overcome. The picture has an intrinsic relation to the real. The sketch, however, points to the abyss of the real. It does not give any answer as to how the real is constituted. As we gaze at a picture, we may be led towards the point where it disappears.\(^\text{16}\) At this point, we find the melancholic side of philosophy. Where is the connecting point between the schema and reality? Between the image and its correspondent? Between the sketch and the real? These are questions that philosophy cannot determine. But philosophy may need to head towards the abyss of the real, rather than place itself comfortably in a zone, where there are no sketches and no approximations, only pictures and certainties. No artist or writer would be comfortable there. If art has anything to teach philosophy, this is perhaps the lesson to be taught.

\(^{16}\) Sá Cavalcante Schuback, *Att tänka i skisser*, 56.