

Chapter 19

drawing // digital // data: A Phenomenological Approach to the Experience of Water

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ABSTRACT

In the context of contemporary fine art, the chapter discusses the translation (the finding of equivalences) of a phenomenological experience of water during the activity of swimming repetitive strokes in a swimming pool into drawing with both traditional drawing media and a tablet computer – an Apple iPad. Firstly, through the identification of various physical and psychological elements that appear to consciousness whilst swimming repetitive strokes, the chapter furthers understanding and gives insights into human interaction and relationship with water during this specific activity. Secondly, the research uses the data collected from personal experience of this activity in order to explore and discuss the premise that drawing is phenomenology, considering whether this premise is compromised when drawing with an Apple iPad rather than traditional drawing media. The text considers the phenomenological approach to the research through an engagement with both philosophy (including Merleau-Ponty 1964, 2002, 2004) and theoretical research (including Rosand 2002), to underpin and generate understanding of experiences of water during the activity of swimming and the process of translation of those experiences into drawing.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenological experience of water during the activity of swimming repetitive strokes in a swimming pool serves as a means to investigate the premise that drawing is phenomenology. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in

the relationship between drawing and phenomenology and the possibility of process of drawing to be considered phenomenology; this focused study intends to extend some of the thinking around this particular aspect of drawing. The specific experience of swimming identified here provided the opportunity to collect data through personal experience, which was subsequently translated into drawn marks with both traditional

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drawing media (charcoal, graphite and paper) and an Apple iPad (Brushes and Sketchbook Pro apps). The chapter compares the data from both processes to uncover whether the introduction of the digital interface of the Apple iPad impacts on the premise that drawing is phenomenology.

Experience/Consciousness

Dewey (1934, p. 38) states, “An experience has a beginning and an end, ‘experience’ is ongoing, what we perceive every waking moment through consciousness.” For clarification, the experience of swimming with repetitive strokes is considered to be ‘an experience’ as it has a clear beginning and end. Moran (2000, p.60) states, “... consciousness is the basis of all experience ...” This research adopts the position that an experience, such as the experience of swimming referred to here, consists of all that appears in consciousness during the time it is experienced. As Velmans (1996) states:

The “contents of consciousness” encompass all that we are conscious of, aware of, or experience. These include not only experiences that we commonly associate with ourselves, such as thoughts, feelings, images, dreams, body experiences and so on, but also the experienced three-dimensional world (the phenomenal world) beyond the body surface.

Working on this basis the translation of experiences of water into drawn marks considers the physical elements of the water – visual and tactile qualities for example, alongside the psychological affect the water has on the state of consciousness; what it feels like to experience water.

Drawing with Traditional Media

Currently, there is significant debate and disagreement concerned with answering the question, ‘What is drawing?’ It is not within the remit of this study to discuss or answer this question.

However, despite conflicting definitions most (including: Farthing 2005; Petherbridge 2008 *in* Garner 2008 & 2010; Fisher 2003 *in* Newman & De Zegher 2003) acknowledge both: the intimate and immediate manner of drawing with traditional media, as Marden (*in* Farthing 2005: 30) states there is, “Less between the hand and the paper than any other medium”; and the potential of drawing to record the trace of the draftsman in the marks created whilst drawing, to allow the viewer to become, “... as close to the action of an artist’s thought as one can get” (Newman & De Zegher 2003: 70). Rosand (2002) furthers the debate of this attribute of trace by both: considering drawing’s ability to record the trace of the draftsman; and by suggesting that drawing is a phenomenological process – recording its own making through the trace of the marks. Rosand (2002: 12) states, “... the line recalls the process of its becoming through the act of drawing, the gesture of the draftsman.” The interest for this research is two-fold: firstly that drawing is phenomenology, capable of recording experience through the marks made whilst drawing; secondly, that drawing is a phenomenological process, capable of recording its own making through the trace of marks. Through discussion of the creative process of drawing during the translation of the identified experience, the chapter will attempt to make implicit aspects of the process of drawing explicit; considering if the intervention of the digital interface of the Apple iPad impacts or alters the potential of drawing to both document the specific identified experience and record its own making.

Drawing with an Apple iPad

Over the past few decades there has been a growing interest within contemporary fine art in drawing with technology. From drawing programmes, such as Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, graphic tablets, moving image cameras, and the more recent use of Apple products: iPod Touch, iPhone and iPad, artists (for example, James Faure-Walker,

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