Exploratory Essay Writing. An Aesthetic-Phenomenological Research Practice

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Abstract

This paper presents a practice—exploratory essay writing—as well as conditions for evidence and arguments that substantiate the categorization of this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological research practice.

Four different strategies have been chosen in order to publish this practice. The first and most relevant was to perform this practice, that is, to write a new exploratory essay to be published in this Special Issue. To read this essay may allow the reader to enter in contact, retroactively, with the practice that generated it and, on this basis, achieve intuitively a sense of how the process of writing might have been developed. The second strategy consists in recording my reading of the new exploratory essay. The change of medium and the consequent aural presence of the essay provides on the one hand another access to the practice and, on the other hand, a bridge to the reflection about this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological practice. The third strategy presents three different “scores” for writing exploratory essays. These instructions or guidelines disclose step by step the actions that constitute this practice. Eventually, the fourth strategy of publication presents some reflections about exploratory essay writing as an aesthetic practice and as a phenomenological practice as well as about the possibility of conceiving and practicing—or better, of conceiving through practicing—an “aesthetic phenomenology” as complementary to a “philosophical phenomenology.”

Keywords: aisthesis, observation, aesthetic action, aesthetic cognition, enactivism

How to navigate the article: This article is realized in two parts linked to one another: Part 1, formalized as the document that you are reading now, includes the abstract, a brief introduction and an exploratory essay on phenomenon. Part 2 is formatted as an “exposition” on the Research Catalogue (RC), an online platform for publishing artistic research. This exposition is structured in three “pages” connected to one another through hyperlinks (words written in blue-grey color on the right and left edges of each page). One of this hyperlinks (“On phenomenon. An exploratory essay as written text”) allows you to return to Part 1. The exposition includes: the acoustic registration of my reading of the essay; three different scores for practicing exploratory essay writing; an explanatory account in two sections on this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological research practice; and a brief reflection on the plausibility of an aesthetic phenomenology. You are invited to read first Part 1 and afterwards to address Part 2 which is accessible by following this link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1158403/1158404.
Introduction

With this paper I aim at presenting a practice—exploratory essay writing—as well as conditions for evidence and arguments that substantiate the categorization of this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological research practice.

The categorization of this practice as “aesthetic” contrasts with the term “artistic” which is a constitutive component of the thematic definition of this Special Issue. This divergence can be understood in different ways depending on the relationship between “aesthetic” and “artistic” enabled by the outline of each term. On the one hand, “aesthetics,” relating to the concept of “aisthesis,” can be understood as one constitutive core of any artistic practice and/or artistic artifact. On this basis, art can be conceived as the field of practice that realizes the form of knowing that the term “aisthesis” may suggest. On the other hand, “aesthetics” (again, referring to “aisthesis”) can be understood as an autonomous field of practice that can be realized inside or outside of the art system which may encompass practices and/or artifacts that do not realize or simply do not refer to “aisthesis.” I understand exploratory essay writing as a variety of phenomenological observation realized through aesthetic action, a concept which I will outline in Part 2. I leave to the reader (and listener) of this article the decision about additionally categorizing exploratory essay writing as an artistic research practice.

Following this brief introduction, this document contains an exploratory essay on phenomenon. To read this essay may allow the reader to enter in contact, retroactively, with the practice that generated it. Similarly, the agency of reading this essay in the context of this journal’s Special Issue may create enabling conditions for the emergence of evidences of this practice as being, in an integrative way, an aesthetic and a phenomenological research practice.

The “exposition” on the Research Catalogue includes the acoustic registration of my reading of this essay. To display this recording, that is, to enable another form of presence of this essay, pursues a threefold goal: firstly, to provide another way to access the practice of exploratory essay writing; second, to enable the emergence of new evidences of this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological research practice and therefore to provide another experiential basis for the discursive reflections on this practice as an aesthetic-phenomenological practice and, furthermore, on a possible “aesthetic phenomenology”; and thirdly, to investigate and invite to consider the reading (and, maybe also, the recording and reproducing) of a written exploratory essay as an autonomous although subsidiary aesthetic-phenomenological research practice.

The other artifacts presented in the exposition on the Research Catalogue aim at substantiating conceptually the hypotheses that the practice of exploratory essay writing is an aesthetic-phenomenological research practice and that it is possible to conceive an “aesthetic phenomenology” as complementary to a “philosophical phenomenology.” This hypothesis is based on two interrelated ideas. The first idea is that aesthetics is an autonomous form of cognition, understanding cognition—according to the enactive approach—as the transformative process of emergence of sense enabled by the
interaction of living systems with the living and non-living components of their surroundings. The second idea that underpins the hypothesis of an aesthetic phenomenology is the possibility of performing phenomenological research in other media different from language and of mobilizing the agencies of the media of language—written, spoken, listened, recorded language—through non-discursive or apodictic practices.