

Exploratory Essay Writing. An Aesthetic-Phenomenological Research Practice

Alex Arteaga, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland
Email: info@alex-arteaga.net

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.

On phenomenon

An appearance appears.

Not yet: appearances appearing.

Not even this but only appearing—a continuous flow of appearances, not present as a flow but as smoothly geared presences, as a dynamic multidimensional mosaic, a gently tight, thick but airy fabric.

Or rather, at the beginning—at the absolute and undeniable beginning of everything (what is happening, what I am doing, what we are doing, constantly, as nothing special, we say, even as nothing, probably, because it is not special, not singular because not singularized, not an “it,” because there is no other background on which an “it” could appear as foreground, as figure, as one figure)—at this beginning, thus, entities (things, thoughts, feelings, actions, events, places, atmospheres, issues, states of affairs). Entities there—here, now, with me, in different ways.

A wide variety and number of entities, if I think about it, but not present as such when they are simply there. Simply present, obviously present—not even “present,” thus, but simply there.

I open my eyes and they are there—every time. No wonder, but obviousness.

Obviousness, a matter of fact, a matter of course—of my course, another obviousness, most of the time. My course with them, obviously. My interwoven course interweaving facts, obviousnesses—infinite potential ways (-vious, -via) in front (ob-) of me.

The making (fact, *facere*), my making, our making—we make it: myself and the issues that come to be facts, that we make facts in and as part of our common course—of a way-in-front, forward, we tend to say, obviously, without noticing it, most of the time.

Not appearances, not presences, thus, but specific entities-there—single but not particular, most of the time, not extra-ordinary but configuring, as a matter of course, the ordinary, what is simply there, simply the way it is there—the given, basic, obvious order, the spontaneously coherent sequences. Entities in and for themselves there, every time.

But now, I turn. I dis-place (myself). I modify my dis-position towards one entity which, so far, has been part of this dense texture, of the continuity of the obvious, of the obviously, simply, there, noticed only enough, playing, almost unnoticed, its role in the dense but airy fabric of entities-there, of entities-with-me.

I turn spontaneously, maybe, because something happened—because something is happening—because one of these entities comes to be there, suddenly, in a way that

motivates, that provides conditions for my move—a way that impels me to move or even, we tend to say, that makes me move.

A chain, a sequence—somehow, a simultaneity—of dis-placements, of shifts.

I feel, then, maybe unnoticed, compelled to turn, to dis-pose (zu um-dis-ponieren), to dis-place myself, remaining in touch with this other dis-placement—to dis-place-with.

Or maybe, apparently at least, I turn as result of my de-cision. Out of a move, of an action, that takes place in—we tend to say—myself and therefore we qualify as mine—as my de-cision, as a cut, as me cutting off a piece of fabric, provoking, at least to a certain extend, an ex-cision, an extraction.

A move, thus, that happens without apparent causal correlation with another entity or, at least, without noticing any in-fluence, any vector of activity, of agency coming from the outside—we tend to say—from an otherness, to me, to my-self-de-ciding. “I take a decision” or even “I make a decision.” I, only me, as the maker—we tend to say—of an action of un-doing, of de-ciding.

A double decision, thus. The first—previous, implicit, unnoticed, participating in the obvious—consisting in considering myself as a separated entity, as the only agent of what I, then, consider to be my actions. The second, thus, taken to be as an act of this singular unit towards something else—some thing my self is not.

An action showing, as its own condition of possibility, what it hides through the performance of what it apparently negates: the radical continuity, the mutual—radical—con-ditioning of agents in touch.

I move, then, I turn.

We—in any case—we both turn. We dispose ourselves differently to one another. We expose ourselves in another way to one another by virtue of an unbreakable mutuality, of the immanent reciprocity of being there, inevitably, to one another, from the moment this is there for me—with me.

We position ourselves differently towards our outside, towards the otherness implicit—at least potentially, latently—in being-there. We offer to one another a different surface, another angle, another access—another form or at least another possibility of access, another view, another perspective.

The incipient disclosure of an alternative—a new birth in an innate, unborn, being-there.

Or maybe better: each of us initiates a trajectory of turn—a dynamic of turning, of moving elliptically taking the other as a gravitational center. De-cision as re-in-forcement of the con-nection.

Trajectories that evolve strongly conditioned by one another, by the mass of the other, by the agency of the manner in which the other turns—the changing manner in which each of us is there, changing now, to one another.

Two contingent trajectories of turning towards one another—around one another—of being, of becoming different—differently, intensively—for one another—particular, singular, specific for, to and with the other.

A bifurcation—a deviation, a detour.

Irreversible—to a certain extent.

For us—for our togetherness, for each of us, for each-of-us-for-one-another.

Or at least, certainly, for it-for-me—for my counterpart, for this there, now, for me here.

The first consequence—the first ensuing common change, the first difference that follows this difference, this alteration of our togetherness: singularization, objectification.

A second objectification. A reinforcement, an affirmation of the constitutive objectification implicit in the coming to be of a being-there—in a coming-to-be-there, in a be-coming.

An assertion of an acceptance—“yes, you are there”—after a first, maybe unnoticed, implicit acceptance—“it is there.”

The acceptance of the assertion of an acceptance—the acceptance of my action of affirming, of reinforcing what came to be there, what came to be accepted—taken to and by the fundamental texture of accepted and accepting acceptances.

The reaffirmation of the boundaries of the entity being there—its frame, its skin, its sensible membrane of contact and, now, more relevantly, of separation, of self-confinement.

The reinforcement of the itness of an it—an it-there—and the weakening of its con-text—of our common texture.

Again a double move—a move inhabited by a double vector: affirming the it, weakening the non-it—bringing closer and dissolving, blurring, dispelling, letting the background sink, further, into the background.

And beyond, a third ambiguous vector affecting me—the I of and for this it. An I that, under the influence of my move, of our moves, tends alternatively to appear and to withdraw.

Appearing, due to the agency of the for-me, or even the mine of this it-there.

Withdrawing due to the agency of its itness, of its in-and-for-itself.

The I—my self—thus, as a layer in between: between the it and our withdrawing common field—the general field, the field consolidating everything (consolidating a specific everything) and consolidated by every-thing which is there.

The I as a protecting layer for the it. A subtle sphere as the necessary chamber of resonance for the it to show itself, to open up, to disclose itself, to blossom.

The I of the it as the necessary eye for the seen to acquire its visibility—for the seen to come to be (seen), to come to be as seen.

A blinking I, appearing intermittently, irregularly, mostly in and as a twilight, by virtue of the agency of the appearing it, of the progressively, increasingly appearing it—the appearing of the it as appearing, as appearance.

A further consequence of my turn, of our turn to one another: the it-as-appearance. Not the appearance of the it-there, but the it-there coming to be anew as appearance.

The transmutation of the it-there, of the entity being there. Its transfiguration: it becoming a figure through its figure—becoming an appearance, a constantly appearing appearance, through (in both senses: by virtue of and across) its itness as it-being-there.

A change of skin. Ecdysis: molting or shedding what comes to be (present as) an outer layer, an initial form (of presence, of givenness).

Again a twofold vector: casting off a temporary sphere to be inhabited, to be-there-to-be-inhabited, to be-for-others. But this time taking an elliptical course: coming back, re-inventing—coming-in-again, coming-in-anew. A new sphere in the spectrum of the first one—an appearance in the appearance, revealing retroactively the entity there as appearance, opening the seen to be seen as being-seen.

Adopting appearance. Radically. Becoming appearance—in order to be seen, or better, as accidental condition of possibility for being seen, for being observed, for being open to observation, for a protected being-in-front, being-faced, being the becoming of its own

disclosure, of its own dis-play: the potential sequence of potentially infinite disruptive, destabilizing becomings.

Another consequence of our turn, thus: dynamization—appearance as appearing. The appearance of the fluidity of the objectified, the liquidity contained by the constitutive boundaries of the appearing object.

Objectness, thus, in this case, as minimal consolidation to make possible the inherent dynamics of the appearing appearance to be seen—to be possible as seen.

Objectness as scope, as operative frame to observe the dis-ruptions, the de-stabilizations, the dis-placements of the objectified within a field of radical plasticity—breaking apart, releasing steadiness, changing positions: challenging its relational situatedness in a domain of significances.

Or, to use another image to formulate the life of phenomena—to access it in and through the medium of written language: a surface becoming a supportive, enabling plane. The seen, at first, the entity simply being there—the given—as foundation, as a condition of possibility for further offerings, for the given to give itself by virtue of the agency of its own givenness intensified by my acceptant turning to it, my stopping for it, my consideration—the establishment of an intimate togetherness with the unfolding of a dynamic con-stellation.

The given as source, as spring of it-self-becoming its own otherness as it-self-becoming.