

BEING AND CREATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract: This article is a narrative inquiry into how personal meaning is made through the experience of a creative process during a six months sabbatical leave. The article's intent is to interrogate the nature of creative experience as realized in a phenomenological description through artwork, generated by lived experience. This ontological approach is highlighted to reflect a way of making, producing and a way of being. Because the world we live in is revealed to us through our senses in everyday life, it seems already familiar and we often fail to reflect on what we are aware of in terms of our human reality or mode of being that will allow us to participate in an integration of knowing-acting-being. Higher education continually seeks to educate according to contemporary values rather than develop intrinsic capabilities of students to enable them to be creative.

Keywords: *Creative, experience, ontological.*

1. Defining a sense of 'Being'

After 30 years of teaching Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, I set myself a project; *Crow*, with two outcomes in mind. First I was looking forward to immersing myself in the lived creative process which happens in the moment of bringing forth (interpreting) consciousness of self from a context and content of understanding, best described as unconcealment of 'Being'.

Although I have been involved with creativity in the classroom, discovering my own sense of self and the connection with other forms of life (external world), I yearn for self-renewal and the truthfulness of own experience. This sense of interpretation, of revealing what the artwork already points to is allied to Heidegger's notion of phenomenological description. Second, I hope to cast a renewed light on our persistence to pursue creativity from a theoretical perspective at the university resulting in us bypassing the origin and authenticity thereof concluding in predictable design outcomes and students not able to access an embodied understanding in their creative field.

We engage in the world we live in by choosing how we breathe, touch, move and relate to things around us. Stefan Zweig in his study of Nietzsche as creative and solitary man gives us insight into the great philosopher as a man with all his weaknesses, brilliance and prophetic knowledge (Zweig, 2013). It is not surprising that Nietzsche experiences Being as embodied and that he complains:

'I possess a most unpleasant irritability as regards the instinct of purity, so much so that I perceive physiologically, I actually feel in the most intimate sense the proximity and depth of the souls entrails.'
(Zweig, 2013)

Problems faced in Higher Education such as student engagement with their studies, self-perception and self-definition reveal that the obviousness of us relating to our everyday being in the world has been lost to us since ancient Greek times and it is my belief that an ontological approach to learning can remedy our situation and can open us to new possibilities, a way of thinking, experiencing and being. Ultimately the aim of an ontological approach for Design is to set the stage for creative innovation in a global market driven by entrepreneurial and sociological change.

From a phenomenological point of view if we have a perceptual encounter with for instance a crow, the seeing of the crow would be inherently corporeal. We need to focus our eyes on it to identify the visual environment noticing the selectivity of both the temporal and spatial image which we are not able to manipulate or invent differently to what is specifically present in what we are seeing. I (my body) participate both actively and passively to give rise to a sense of the emergence of 'crow'. This 'sense' is made by me through my body being in that space and time. I can now say that phenomenologically my embodied dialogue has made sense of the crow in the natural environment.

Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception* claims that our intentional embodiment of a situation brings meaning to the experience of our world by allowing our consciousness of things in space and time to emerge as embodied experience independent of us. Our relationship with the natural world around us can be compared to Buddhist belief that all things are interdependent, inseparable and in a process of constant becoming (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1997). An ontological continuity between the natural world and us with which we are involved in and inextricably part of will express the perceptual encounter as an embodied experience. In this environment knowing is not only the active agent for embodiment, but also for becoming. We can only interrogate the ontological operation, according to Merleau-Ponty, of sense as the self-interrogative becoming of being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that we are not mere human beings set in the world as individual thinking subjects, but we are '*beings-in-the-world*' who inhabit life; by having to produce something, interact with something, interrogating, creating, etc.

The methodology of phenomenology requires a back and forth investigation and discussion of truth among various levels of questions asked during the time of creative development and experience of the artwork. It is the nature of this complex process of interrogating the experience of the lifeworld, in this instance Crow, that re-thinking, re-drawing and re-doing will create depth by constructing multiple layers of meaning revealing possible ambiguity.

From this being-in-the-world we can understand that an encounter with art and design cannot simply be subjectively projected onto the work but the work's meaning can emerge through our own dynamic engagement with it. An enactivist approach sees being, knowing and action as inseparable from each other and shifts separate experiences of people, objects and places to the importance of relationships between people, objects and places. The enactivist perspective resulted from the term 'autopoiesis' created by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela which refers to complex dynamic systems of spontaneous and self-sustaining self-organization.

2. The Crow Project

Ted Hughes' (English Poet Laureate 1984) *Crow* was acclaimed as 'a most extraordinary work of genius' by the great majority of reviewers. I was inspired by this poet's *Crow* who is deeply rooted in folktales, mythology, theology and embodied experience. Hughes asks questions about human relationships, nature, survival, beliefs, felt meaning, creation, existence, truth and spirit. Hughes describes Crow in terms of Trickster Literature which '*draws its effects from the unkillable, biological optimism that supports a society or individual whose world is not yet fully created, and whose metaphysical beliefs are only just struggling out of the dream stage.*' (Hughes & Sagar, 2012)

Researching the emergent changing visual dialogue of the coming-into-being of Crow is my project. I experimented with different media; charcoal on paper, pen and ink on paper, pen on fabric, fabric

paint, silk, linen, cotton organza, knitting, crochet and sculpture. My 200 sketches were dated as my intention was to journal every stage to track my development of the process in action.

I set out to explore the ever elusive act of creativity with questions of 1. What happens during creating? and 2. How does the process develop? I was looking forward to journal and to engage in dialogue with myself. As the days progressed however and I became deeply involved in my work, the journal disappeared under piles of drawings as did my original ideas.



Figure 1 Two early sketches on paper illustrating the development of Crow's identity.

3. Creative Experience as Methodology

I committed to start work every day at 8h00 and found myself often drawing all night, painting, reading and producing artwork, struggling with joy and satisfaction and starting anew the following day moved by the spirit (right brain function) of creativity in search of meaning. I was aware of a relationship between felt experiencing and my subject matter (Crow) which functioned symbolically as Gendlin explains: *'Meaning is formed in the interaction of experiencing and something that functions symbolically. Feeling without symbolization is blind; symbolization without feeling is empty'* (Gendlin, 1997) Therein my encounter; experiencing being as an unconcealment and bringing-into-being the creative life force that creativity is: frightening, forthright, exhausting, discontent, joy and confusion.

Because the process of creating through focusing and immersion moves the creator into a heightened state of awareness, I could not break this precious unintelligible receptivity with the pedestrian analysis or account of what happens to enter anything into my journal. For the first time I became acutely aware of the different functions of the left and right brain and I decided not to engage in any left brain function like writing when I was producing artwork. This discovery of not being able to reflect in my journal came as a surprise and was in direct opposition to my educational philosophy of teaching students through their reflective understanding of their work while they were in process. For the first time I could understand the difficulty the students experienced in journaling while they were still getting to grips with their projects.

It was clear to me at this stage that two types of discussion were emerging: the 'philosophical', questions of Being, and 'scientific', questions concerning the nature of concepts: creativity. I was imagining, feverously catching fleeting particles of meaning-making with my Crow in the moment of a thought; in brushstrokes, pen strokes, dye paint, garment forms, etc. and at the end of it all I could do was to collapse into bed completely spent from being in the 'Moment'. This way of responding is called an enactive approach where reality is not completely dependent on the constructed creation, but it is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver (Varela, 1992). Hughes' poetry is an example of this approach where reality is not a given but is perceiver-dependent therefor allowing us to

investigate the primary relationships between experience (as we understand and feel it) and symbolization of interpreted concepts.

Subjecting myself to creative experience and becoming a learner immersed in the same situation of making, producing and a way of being as my students, is a valuable learning plan and it enables me to introduce and share results with the students in the design faculty and to interrogate teaching and learning in our faculty anew.

The creative process usually starts with me deciding on the materials, size and theme and develops as I ask myself questions about intention, theme, and story concerning Crow. From there I can move in and out of the image; understanding what is called for in dialogue with me posing relevant questions and answering them as I go along. One brush stroke can modify the image and the story can be changed to reflect an opposing intention. This process describes a bringing forth of an artwork. Heidegger describes the process of creating as truth happening in the bringing forth of the work. If we have to answer the question what is the difference in bringing forth as a process of creation and bringing forth in a mode of making of a craft, the same applies. The ancient Greeks named art and craft by the same name: *technē* although it didn't point to art or craft, and was not at all considered technical. Heidegger explains:

'For Greek thought the essence of knowing consists in alētheia, that is, in the revealing of beings. It supports and guides all comportment toward beings. Technē, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings forth what is present as such out of concealment and specifically into unconcealment of its appearance; technē never signifies the action of making. The artist is a technitēs not because he is also a craftsman, but because both the setting forth of works and the setting forth of equipment occur in a bringing forth that causes beings in the first place to come forward and be present in assuming an outward aspect. Yet all this happens in the midst of the being that surges upward, growing of its own accord, physis.' (Heidegger, 2008)

The work of art arrived at out of concealment into unconcealment is described through the multiple movements in music: The spirit of the opening movement of a Symphony followed by *'the tiny sharp staccato of aphorisms, the sordino of the songs, the pizzicati of the mockery, the risqué stylizations and harmonies of the prose, the maxims of the poetry.'* (Zweig, 2013) The bringing forth of the artwork is never a cold intellectual objective affair but the work itself recalls a deep personal immersion to reach into the unfathomable depths of the spirit (right brain function) of creativity which does not dwell on the surface of things but waits to be discovered in the innermost fibres of each human being.

The question that arose now was how can I best reveal the lived experience which I discovered in my drawings of crow? The bringing forth of my insight into the essence of the phenomenon of crow is what I want to create in time and space, so that one can touch, feel and see (experience) the message that was being expressed. The garments would be wearable and the style would complement and aid the message conveyed by the drawn, painted, dyed, embroidered, and knitted or crochet design. To contextualize the narrative, I would style each garment according to the message of the design and photograph each one so that the photograph becomes an artwork in itself. An example of how the styling of the garment relates to the design can be seen in figure 3; the cocoon styling of the dress at once inhibits crow from flying yet it frees the human body from feeling restricted at the same time comforts it by allowing the arms to retract into a safe space at any chosen time. In the photograph of the dress from the back the shadow of the person enacts crows' dialogue.

In the fifth month, I broke the silence and introduced music and dance into my work. A stormy intoxication entered the rhythm of my drawings as crow was released and given wings. Yet another possibility was unleashed when I realized that movement; more particularly performance and dance would become part of my offering together with the non-movement in the photographs of my embodied symbolization of the story of crow.



Figure 2. Top two drawings are examples of Crow responding to Pina Bausch’s dancing. The drawing on the left embodies *Pure Joy* on the right is *Crow’s Dithyramb*.

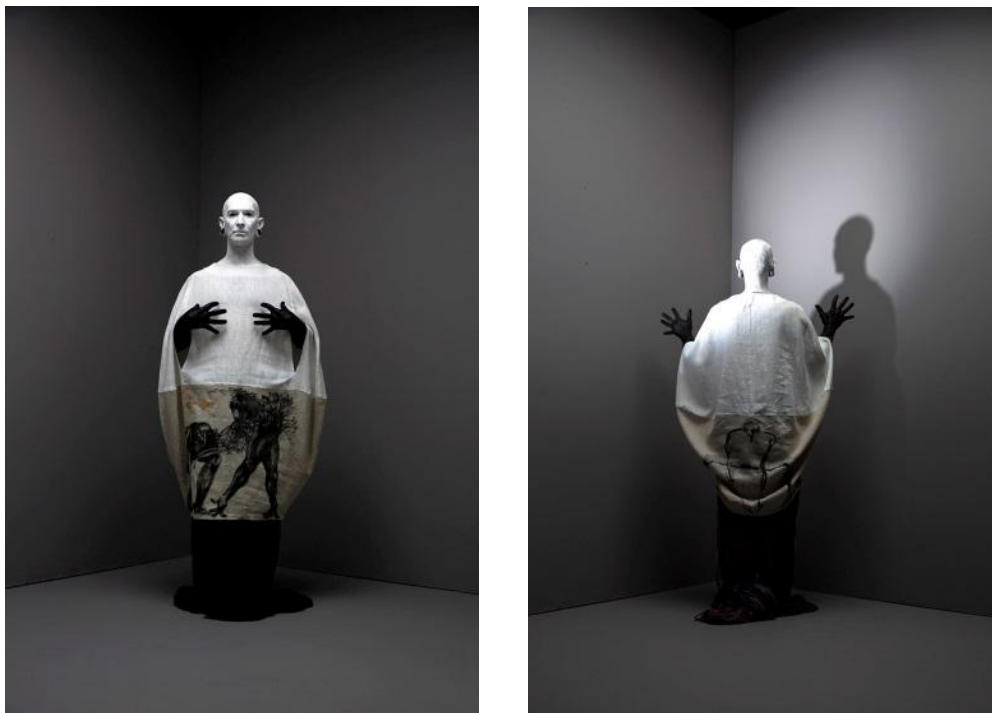


Figure 3. The contextualization of my garment developed from Crow in dialogue with the influence of Butoh dancing.

In Butoh dancing the dancer observes the body as ‘container for experience’ and narrates the objective through a resonant expression of doing Butoh which reveals as an ‘exchange of bones’ the lived body experience. The Butoh (dance of darkness) is an exploration into the unconscious, imagination, and primal relationships of the dancer and the world. It has its roots in German Expressionism (Neue Tanz) and is a movement that began in Japan in the late fifties; the consciousness that underscores Butoh is that of a silent scream. The body processes used in Butoh can be referred to in terms of ‘lived bodiliness’ contextualized in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

Pina Bausch is the founder and principal choreographer of the Neue Tanz. In a document ‘What moves me’, which I reproduce here, not necessarily in a sentence or context but as such *key words* – my collaboration is with the Crow, Pina discusses her life, work and inspirations (Bausch, 2004):

‘...all questions, attempts, uncertainties, even doubts during the process of creating; showed something of themselves. That is something very real. When I am engaging somebody surely I hope there is a feeling of something which I madly want to know more about as (the dancers) are finding out things for themselves. It takes years, until they suddenly flourish. For some, who have already danced for a long time, it is almost like a second spring. Instead of becoming less, it becomes more and more.

After having to experience how a person dies, I have been allowed to experience how a person is born. And how one’s view of the world changes as a result. How a child experiences things. How free of prejudice it looks at everything. What natural trust is given to someone? In general to understand: a human being is born.

Experiencing independently of this how and what is going on in your own body, how it is changing. Everything happens without me doing anything. And all of this then keeps flowing into my pieces of work.

I am not interested in how people move but what moves them.’

The movement and non-movement of the lived body; unconcealed and the concealed; object body renders Butoh and the Pina Bausch style of dancing compelling. The heightened sense of awareness and active imagination that is linked to the whole bodily function of the dancer during a performance is no different to the visual artist or designer in process of bringing forth his artwork. Kazuo Ohno, a founder of Butoh has an often quoted idea, ‘Find the spirit and the form will come’.

The Surface Design students participated in a Butoh dance class in 2013 and felt invigorated afterwards realizing something very familiar and yet at the same time also unknown to them: creative truth. The experience opened a bodily awakening and a questioning mind to pursue creative experience beyond the limited confines of the traditional Design methodology taught at University. What we consider creativity is not yet creativity if it is not revealed, uncovered in the sense of unconcealment that can only be discovered when we are conscious of and partake in our lived experience of being.

4. Conclusion

Problems experienced with journaling the lived experience can be ascribed to the fact that writing tends to abstract our experience of the world relating it as an objectifying exercise on the one hand, yet on the other hand, *‘writing exercises us in the sense that it empowers us with embodied knowledge which now can be brought to play or realized into action in the performance of the drama of everyday life’* (Van Manen, 1990).

Gaining access to experience without risking pure subjectivism, the phenomenological concept of experience can be completed by ensuring its universality, consciousness needs and intentional character and linking it to the external world. Designing garments to retain their wear-ability as more fashionable rather than purely conceptual, was a self-imposed restriction to include a wider audience. The possibility to understand the logic of my experience in the sense of “felt-meaning” which Gendlin (1997) interrogates, seems to remain conceptual in the absence of the body moving through the form in space which is to be explored and captured as photographs when all the designs have manifested through garments made explicit in context. An example of this is shown in figure 3: the photograph of Crow in dialogue. The importance of intentionality (the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world), the correlation of lived experience and creative consciousness is the ontological approach that directs our participation in knowing-acting-being. Through the styling of the garment in

figure 3; the cocoon shape of the dress at once inhibits crow from flying yet it frees the human body from feeling restricted and at the same time comforts it by allowing the arms to retract into a safe space at any chosen time.

What does the earth think it is? Is a performance by a South African dancer Tossie van Tonder aka Nobonke wherein she explores existential ideas involving nature, place, humankind, the body and performance through her own intensely authentic and poetic body in response. With an all-white body and thin dress, she moved slowly keeping her legs wide open making me worried that the eternal female sexuality could creep into this pure situation. I was elated, after what seemed an eternity that I could understand this movement as natural rootedness. From the program: *'The body stands in for what we think we have lost.'*

In this paper I wish to draw attention to an ontological turn in art and design which higher education can promote as ways of being that integrate knowing, acting and being through creative process. Knowledge for the student remains important but it needs to be understood not only as created, embodied and enacted but it also allows the student to become Being. For student development we can counteract taken-for-granted perspectives by introducing the familiar in unfamiliar ways for example using Butoh dancing to assist in Design projects.

The importance of certain experiences and encounters in one's work and the decisions resulting from that and not from imposed laws, determines the choices to be made in design. In order for the demand for originality, newness and authenticity to prosper, the creation of design needs to be *'constructed from contingent beginnings, requiring that the artist 'improvise' until the plan for the work of art emerges'* (Landgraf, 2009) while drawing on the operational closure of the system of design.

From achieving what I set out to do, I (we) can now better perceive / understand the process-experience of Design to be: firstly, to turn away from our immediate world and to turn into ourselves and discover our Being; secondly, to turn back into the world reflexively as Creative Designer. The next step in the research process would be to specify the self-ordering from chaos and necessity from contingency.

Crow's Fall

*When Crow was white he decided the sun was too white.
He decided it glared much too whitely.
He decided to attack it and defeat it.*

Ted Hughes from Crow

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