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DRAWING WITH THREAD UPON A DUSTER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF FEMALE DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE.

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This paper explores the idea that drawing with thread upon duster can be a means of facilitating the phenomenological investigation of the modern-day female domestic experience. Presented through examples of my own creative practice and the development of an ongoing collaborative research project, which position a duster as the focus, it defines the procedural distinctions between drawing with thread and more typical drawing practices whilst investigating relationships between process, form, intention and context.

An exploration of the theory that underpins the concept of phenomenological drawing, citing Merleau-Ponty and Rosand in particular, supports the notion that drawing can embody thinking and experience. The duster is positioned as a catalyst for expression; drawing with thread as a route to unlocking memories of experience. It is argued that drawing 'into' an object can enable a deeper conscious and unconscious understanding of the object's particular materiality and visual language and that by framing the domestic as a context for phenomenological investigation, through an object that 'speaks' of domestic tasks, an embodiment of the domestic experience is made possible.

Female perceptions of domesticity are also discussed whilst referencing the role of stitch to empower and yet reflect the historical powerlessness of women. Additionally, definitions of the domestic experience explore how a phenomenological investigation might give form to the liminal state of tasks that are never fully completed.

Through thread-drawn mark making, an internal response to the context and content of the time spent engaging with the duster is made external, making the drawing of lived domestic experience a phenomenological possibility.

Introduction

This paper discusses drawing research that has evolved from an ongoing practice-based, collaborative project, which explores the contemporary and experiential relationship between women and domesticity by asking for individual perspectives and experiences to be embroidered upon a duster. The role of the duster is to prompt responses, providing a catalyst for expression through the act of drawing into it with thread. It visually identifies the domestic and social focus through its role as a cleaning cloth, then carries and performs these experiences as embroidered dusters through process and display. When discussing the phenomenology of gesture in drawing and painting Paul Crowther writes that *'images made by gesture are thence autographic expressions of the imagination'* (Crowther 2017, p.17). This theory establishes a connection between gesture and a personally identifying mark. I am however seeking to express recollection rather than pure imagination, through stitch-drawn rather than typically mark-made gestures. These stitch-drawings tell their own autoethnographic narratives, connecting personal biographies to the social issues they discuss, through participation, discussion and exhibition, whilst referencing the legacy of women's work through the process of stitch. This research seeks to begin to establish the theory that engagement with an object that visually and physically represents a particular theme, combined with the phenomenological process of piercing and drawing into it with a needle and thread, is a methodology that offers a route to uniquely informed and expressed narratives. In short, I'm asking if drawing with stitch into a duster can provide a new route to exploring and expressing the female domestic experience?

My collaborative 'Women & Domesticity – What's your Perspective?' project, started in 2014. It built upon my existing artistic practice and was partly inspired by the idea that the stitching of statements onto cloth can hold power and become a voice for women (Greer, 2014). Participants include members of the public from every walk of life, without prejudice towards skill or creative capabilities, nor age, social background or gender (although overwhelmingly women responded). The result is a growing collection of over 100 hand-embroidered dusters featuring personal reflections and insights that include poetic quotes, resentful statements, images and fond memories (figure.1).



FIGURE 1: A SELECTION OF DUSTERS FROM THE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT ON DISPLAY AT THE DE LA WARR PAVILION, BEXHILL-ON-SEA, UK, IN MARCH 2016.

The collaborative and outward facing element of this project provokes others into action and provides a platform for ongoing dialogue on the often-silent task of housework, discussing common experiences and commenting upon them without distinction. The collection is regularly exhibited, with accompanying practical workshops, ‘performing’ through display a collection of voices that call for acknowledgement. My aim throughout this project has been that through stitching and exhibiting these experiences upon dusters, these voices are heard and credited with the appropriate weight of their significance.

Dusters were selected because they are mundane and unadorned. I chose an object that is unacknowledged and kept under the kitchen sink as an aide to visualising the invisibility of domestic tasks. The traditional duster I’ve selected has a sense of nostalgia and is striking in its vivid yellow with its characteristic red stitched hem; it is pleasurable to embroider too, a reference to the comfort of domesticity. Embroidery was originally selected as a means of expression and embellishment to form a relationship with the past, as historically sewing is often defined as women’s work (Barber, 1995). Red thread was chosen to match the hems, and because of its historical representation of femininity (Beverley, 2011). This transformation, from humble cleaning cloth to an embellished and significant object, imbues the duster with layers of meaning that are expressed and interpreted through both relational and performative engagement, for both the maker and the viewer relate to the cloth and its purpose; one participatory, one observational. The duster also performs in its own right as an object, embodied with experience through the stitch-drawn gestures it displays and the audience’s reading of its purpose. Thus, relation and performance become an interdependent cycle. Whilst artists such as Cornelia Parker make work that challenges particular object associations (Parker, 1996) and others such as Catherine Bertola (2015) use dust to highlight the domestic experiences of women by making it appear as beautiful patterns, my work focuses instead on what happens when participants engage with

an object that speaks of domesticity within a given framework. This is more about the embodiment of an experience through the process of drawing; an investigation of how the perception of '*subject, object and meaning*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.200) combine to embody the domestic experience, so that the subject, object and meaning become one.

Project Developments

As the project evolved it became apparent that the thoughtful and time-consuming process of hand embroidery prompts reflective thinking and the careful selection of marks and words; something often more considered and insightful in than those simply spoken in related discussions. Through time spent engaged with the object, it was transformed into a catalyst for self-expression. This was evident through changes that happened when participants spent time handling the duster. They often became more reflective, at times even changing their response to the subject. There were also occasions when changes occurred as participants spent time stitching them at home. For example, one woman stitched two dusters; one started in a workshop, one at home. The first discussed the unappreciated invisibility of the domestic tasks she completed, the second discussed invisible tasks that bound her home and family together, a complete change of perspective. Whilst other factors could affect these changes too, it was notable that they always occurred after time spent stitching into the duster. This prompted further inquiry.

My research was directed away from the statement-led approaches, pictured in fig.1, towards the study of drawing and phenomenology through the need to understand the role that engagement with the duster plays in this process. As Merleau-Ponty writes '*phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner of thinking*' (1945, p.ix). This '*thinking*' requires a complex relationship between the body and the thing, which can be achieved through drawing because as David Rosand writes it is '*in essence, a projection of the body*' (2002, p.16). By virtue of the time-intensive and physical process of stitching into a duster, participant's '*think*' phenomenologically and consequently express experiences with stitch, through conscious and unconscious responses to the duster as an object. Central to my investigation is the idea that stitching, like drawing, can become a phenomenological tool. The marks made with a needle and thread reference those created through drawing, leaving a trace if unpicked and permanence through application and style, thus becoming the process of drawing with thread. This paper also discusses two workshops that sought to develop the workshop style used earlier in the project, which was discussion heavy and prompted statement-led responses, towards a directed embodiment of domestic experiences through drawing in response to and onto a duster. Whilst the workshops documented here do not fully resolve the research question, they explore possible routes to understanding it, which continue to inform my development of an established methodology for further workshop-led research practices.

Phenomenology in Action

'Drawing is the primal means of symbolic communication' (Downs et al, p.x). This communication need not be literal in order to communicate. When combined with concepts of materiality (of the object) and process (sewing) plus materials (needle, thread and cloth) this idea can be expanded into a performative process that is focused on investigation rather than clear visual messaging or aesthetic outcomes.

It should also be noted that drawing is a physical process. From precise line-based representational drawings to huge expansive gestural pieces rendered in charcoal, each requires the careful positioning of the drawing tool in the hand, considered movements of the arm and elbow, the position and motion of the body as it turns to perform gesture, to look at the subject, and to make marks. The lived experience of domestic tasks is much the same. We choose our task; the careful polishing of a treasured item or the physical push of the vacuum cleaner, the wiping of a surface or the reaching up towards cobwebs. All of these require the hand to hold the tool; the motions of arm, elbow and body; the need to look at the subject and to perform the gestures that wipe dust and dirt from our homes.

In each instance we look, we choose a tool, we position ourselves and make gestures with our hands, limbs and bodies. So, can it be that drawing itself must be a phenomenological experience? David Rosand writes that *'drawing asserts itself as the main object of concern, the primary other in the subject-object relation'* (2002. p.13) and that *'different modes of drawing represent different modes of knowing and understanding'*. He discusses the *'haptic ambition of assurance'* (2002. p.14) to somehow reach the object in our attempts to record it. But what if we have already reached it, if we are also engaged with and reaching *into* it by drawing with thread? Surely this leads to a deeper phenomenological experience of the object itself. By relating directly with the object, not just the space it exists in, we are able to use drawing with thread as a tool for phenomenological investigation. According to Rosand the act of drawing, of making a line, extends a gesture made not just by the hand but by the body it extends from. We project ourselves, our lives and our dramas through the gesture of that line, even more so when the object *speaks* and the context is given. A connection is made that is not possible through other means, as David Rosand states: *'in no other art – save, perhaps dance – are means and end ... so perfectly identified'* (2002. p.16).

Defining the Process of Drawing with Thread

Within the context of this research drawing with thread upon a duster should not be defined as embroidery, which is generally defined as the art of decoratively embellishing cloth with thread, just as drawing should not be defined as observational marks made upon paper. For the purposes of this investigation the focus is on drawing methodologies, so therefore definitions of drawing are challenged and yet underpinned by its *'peculiar dependence on a direct and physical process'* (Downs et al, p.ix). Within the context of drawing, it is worth exploring how working with a needle and thread alters the process and tools required for a different act of mark making, i.e.: how the medium changes the experience and how the materiality of the duster effects the purpose of the process.

Mark making with thread is undeniably a different process to traditional drawing. It is necessary to note the differences between these, in order to begin to understand the phenomenological differences too. Marks made on cloth require piercing, which is not a typical drawing motion. This requires an action into rather than onto the surface, supporting a deeper investigation of the surface because it is necessary to penetrate it and to hold it in both hands. The duster is also more pliable than paper and is therefore handled differently and cannot be easily damaged through excessive manipulation when mark-making (figure.2).



FIGURE 2: DRAWING WITH THREAD

Whereas an observational drawer might look away from their drawing to record an object, direct engagement with the object through stitch concentrates the focus. Whilst this is also true with mark-making focused drawing, when working with thread both the front and back must also be considered, as they are alternately experienced through the process of piercing and turning the cloth. Additionally, the two sides of the cloth look different when completed, resulting in an underpinning set of marks that evidence the making of those on the surface. It is possible that these marks could be 'read' as part of the phenomenological experience too.

The action is different; a push more than a sweep of the hand, although much like a drawing the action affects the way the marks appear; reflecting the skill of their creator but also the experience. Be they neat, messy, tight, loose, small or large, in much the same as an artist expresses with paint or a pencil, stitch too can be expressive. This is a significant difference to embroidery, which must almost always be neat if considered of value, particularly as a *feminine* skill, where skill usually holds precedence over expression (Goggin et al, 2009). The definition of drawing with thread offers release from this constraint but does not conform to a '*definition that confines [drawing] to paper and certain traditional materials*' (Downs et al, p.ix.) It is however possible for the differing methods to support the other; marks can be made as a direct stitch into the cloth but also in response to those made more traditionally on paper, so an interaction between thread drawing and traditional drawing is possible.

Typical drawing tools are held between the fingers but not in the same way as a needle; there is a necessary consideration for the tightness of the thread that follows the mark making tool, which does

not exist with drawing tools where the flow of a line is defined by the point of contact with the surface. When drawing with thread the flow of the line is defined by where the next pierce takes place; if a curve is required then several lines secured by several pierces are needed. This is a significant difference in the way that gesture is expressed. Paul Klee's popular idea of taking a line for a walk investigates the differences in these active lines (Klee, 1973) noting that a flowing line, such as can be drawn with a pencil, can move freely without a goal. An active line that is limited in its movement by fixed points, such as drawn with needle and thread, perhaps has less freedom and more intention but as Rosand writes when exploring the *'reciprocal relationship'* between line and maker, *'once begun, the line becomes more than a means toward an end'* (2002, p12). So, the line is defined by its possibilities in the hands of its creator; whether to express, explore or record. A phenomenologically focused line supports exploration.

Tim Ingold's investigation of lines notes that *'it is not enough to regard the surface as a taken-for-granted back-drop for the lines inscribed upon it'* (Ingold, p.42). He also explores the definition of a line discussing that it by no means limited to those formed through traditional drawing. Dr Samuel Johnson defines lines, amongst seventeen other definitions, as *'a slender string,'* a *'method'* and a *'delineation'* (Ingold, p43). Ingold defines lines as different traces; additive (for example charcoal on paper) or reductive (altering the surface they are imposed upon). Drawing with thread is both; additive because it leaves a layer of thread and reductive because the surface must be pierced. Therefore, because *'the material of the trace and the implement with which it is put on, are one and the same'* (Ingold, p.46). The duster and thread become one object. By virtue of exploring the object in this way, the record and residue of this investigation, *'the surface and the backdrop'*, actually becomes part of the fabric of the object.

Experiencing Materiality

Drawing Now describes drawing as the *'relationship between hand, material and paper'* (Downs et al, p.ix). Drawing into a duster is a different relationship, impacted by our knowledge of its purpose and materiality. Just as the tools and process are significant, so too is the cloth. It is not usual to stitch into a cleaning cloth, they are usually kept under the sink and taken out for the purpose of polishing and wiping away dust rather than embellished with meaning and experience. As Christopher Tilley writes *'things are meaningful and significant ... because they provide essential tools for thought. Material forms are essential vehicles for the (conscious or unconscious) self-realisation...'* The duster becomes a tool for thought. Maxine Bristow notes how this *'silent, but, undoubtedly, potent nature of this embedded/embodied material language'* (2011, p.46 ed., Hemmings, 2012) resonates with her own practice. This is also the case with my practice and fundamental to the role that the duster plays in this research. It cannot be any cloth, it must be the duster, which *speaks* of cleaning. A phenomenological investigation of the duster and all it represents through its own materiality, supports the drawing of lived domestic experience.

Context in Search of Knowledge

The context introduced by the identification of the duster as a domestic object is crucial in defining the purpose and focus of the investigation. Conscious knowledge always has an impact on conclusions sought through unconscious investigation if full senses and pre-dated knowledge of the object exist. If I had never seen a duster in a domestic context before and had no idea of its purpose then I might simply

find it soft and colourful. Because I know it is a duster this knowledge is ever present. If we build this into a phenomenological drawing-based investigation then this knowledge surely becomes our starting point.

So, we have knowledge and purpose, what about the fact that I am a woman exploring and seeking to capture domestic experience? Social factors then come into play. As a woman do I feel that I am expected to clean? How does this make me feel? Satisfied like a 1950's housewife straight out of an advertisement, or rebellious, put-upon and angry? Does the duster belong to me or my house? Does it belong to anyone? Is ownership important in considering phenomenological experience? When I draw upon the duster with thread with the purpose of exploring the object and investigating domestic experience I cannot do so without some form of prejudice. As Rozsita Parker writes in her book *The Subversive Stitch*, history has established embroidery as signifying '*self-containment and submission*', *linked indissolubly to women's 'powerlessness'* (1984, p.11). The recent Craftivist movement has since established stitch as a voice of power, but whichever way you look at it, the use of stitch establishes certain prejudices that are arguably held most firmly for a woman. Stitch upon a duster is a powerful combination.

The domestic experience

In their essay '*Cleansing Dislocation: Make life, Do Laundry*' Aritha Van Herk asks if laundry '*merely declare[s] cleanliness, or if has it come to occupy a liminal representational space, ever present, but never able to represent itself?*' (2008, p.195 ed., Briganti, 2012). Because laundry is a common mundane domestic task often carried out by women it is a useful example to consider. When discussed within the context of dislocation as in Herk's essay the focus is in what the act itself communicates but what if we consider the more intangible '*liminal representational space*' instead? Is this what that drawing with thread upon a duster with phenomenological intent seeks to achieve, wherein other methods might succeed only in being figurative or representational? In attempting to represent the experience of mundane domestic tasks does a phenomenological approach offer the necessary scope to give form to a liminal state of being in-between? Is this in fact the only way to represent it? Is the constant liminal state of household tasks being completed and subsequently needing to be completed again, summed up best in the saying 'a woman's work is never done', crucial to a definition of the domestic experience?

This raises questions about exactly what the domestic experience is and how it is that haptic drawing upon a duster can somehow contain and express it. Is it the recollection of physically performing domestic tasks, the feelings that arise from completing or reflecting upon them, the connection to the domestic environment that touching, holding and piercing a duster with thread and thread evokes, or a combination of them all? Domesticity provides the context by virtue of the purpose of the cloth and the presentation of the research question but an authentic phenomenological drawing requires conscious and unconscious investigation of the object, in which case could domestic experience be a secondary concern, one that provides a framework but does not define the investigation of the object?

I would argue that the focus on domesticity actually defines the phenomenological investigation by imposing necessary boundaries, which provide focus and are underpinned by the nature and purpose of the cloth itself. Unconsciously there is scope for deeper investigation of the tactile nature of the cloth through touch or smell but more practical associations exist within the unconscious mind as well, so once again the framing of the research question brings us back to the domestic.

Phenomenological Investigation of a Duster: a practical experiment

In an attempt to answer these questions practically I drew into a duster with the purpose of investigating it phenomenologically. In order to focus the practice, I set certain boundaries and framed it within the context of domestic experience with the intent that my marks would hold meaning. The rules were that I must engage with the duster through drawing with thread every day for one month and I must stitch it at home. There was no limit to the minimum or maximum amount of time I could spend on it. I was not permitted to plan my outcome nor to change it. No words were allowed and I restricted myself to a simple running stitch so that the focus would be on the object rather than on the technique.

I discovered that both the process and the outcome mimicked my domestic behaviour patterns. Some days it was just few stitches, sometimes just a touch. On other days I spent hours making marks, enjoying the flow of the stitches into the cloth - the equivalent of a Spring Clean versus a quick sweep. As a graphic designer by training and professional experience it took conscious effort not to be overly concerned with the aesthetics, inevitably however, visual patterns emerged. It is hard to say if this was a phenomenological failing or success on my part.

The natural path that the stitches took were remarkably similar to the motions that my cleaning takes – sweeping and wiping in particular (figure.3a). I think I wipe more than any other domestic action. Circles also emerged (figure.3b) as separate elements, set apart from the other groups of stitches. I often make piles of ‘stuff’ that are separate from other household detritus, believing that a neat, separate pile of items performs the act of tidying up. It is not unusual for several piles to litter a space, which I then wipe around. These are reflections after the act when considering the final piece, they were not conscious choices but unconscious marks made with domesticity in mind, in a domestic context, with a domestic cleaning cloth. Does this mean therefore that my duster bears witness to an authentic phenomenological investigation? I like to think that it does (figure.3c).

A marked difference of this drawing experience, as compared to making marks on paper, was the way observational references, were made *into* my object of focus. These references were also inspired by touch and thought, rather than sight. Time spent mark-making in this way has become second nature to me now, so there wasn't much conscious thought about the process, but its fluidity was notably different to drawing on paper; the marks took longer to make and therefore I had more time to consider their direction before I made the next one. I don't naturally draw from imagination so the haptic engagement with the duster was usefully all consuming as there was no need to look up to observe and record. I frequently looked beneath the work to pierce the needle again and again so that the drawing became multi-dimensional, dual sided and more textural as it progressed. Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the formative force of drawing, the role of gesture '*not to trace in order to reveal*' but instead to '*find, to seek a form to come*' (Nancy, 2013. p.10). The gestures I made, which were rooted in contemplation, imagination and experience of the duster and the domestic meaning it holds were formed from ideas but not of design. As Nancy writes: '*It is the thought of the thing... its formation, its reformation, or transformation into truth*' that lead the gesture and its mark. The gestures were not hugely expansive, as they might have been on paper, but the patterns they formed and the weight of thread held within the cloth became a gestural record; a thought-led drawing of experience.



FIGURE 3A: STITCHING WIPING MOTIONS



FIGURE 3B: STITCHING PILES



FIGURE 3C: MEDIATING THE MATERIALITY OF THE DUSTER. VANESSA MARR, 2018.

Drawing an Experience

Drawing with thread upon and into a duster whilst contemplating an experience requires imagination and emotion as a route to the necessary expression of meaning, although imagination in this context should creatively recollect the truth rather than literally imagine a new idea. In his reflections on the work of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty considers the quantitative research qualities of imagination and emotion, noting that *'one sees under what conditions the image is presented,'* going on to elaborate that *'the image is never altogether self-sufficient in our conscious life and that it serves only to resume a certain project of thought or to carry references to certain objects'* (1964, p. 59). As discussed, the intention of the duster is to be acknowledged as an object that makes a visual reference to domesticity (in this instance also acting as an image presented for response), so this is a valid starting point. Within the context of this project it is also specifically framed within a domestic context and presented as a route to expression. Participants generally have knowledge of the collection and an introduction to the project is given at the beginning of the workshops, so the *'conditions'* are set up: "here is a duster, use it to express your domesticity". Even outside of this environment, we see a duster and we have experiential knowledge to know its purpose and context, that after all it is the reason it was selected. But, what if we

aim to experience the duster on deeper, phenomenological level? Then we need both conscious and unconscious investigation to support a deeper and more quantifiable understanding.

It is the joining of imagination and experience to the duster whilst it is being stitch-drawn into that is crucial here. Paul Crowther discusses the challenges of imagining and its capacity to *'represent what is not immediately present to perception'* (Crowther, 2017. p.16), which suggests that it can be a route to recollections not held in the forefront of one's mind. He also notes it's *'little noticed'* unifying function. Can contemplative, object focused, drawing with thread channel the imagination towards the recollection and drawn embodiment of an experience? Is imagination the route to the unification of Merleau-Ponty's *'subject, object and meaning?'*

The drawing of an experience that embodies itself as an image upon the object (abstract or otherwise) also seems important in this equation. Whilst Merleau-Ponty argues that *'the image is not something observable'* (1964, p.60) and later that *'phenomenological analysis is a clarifying effort'* to *'identify with rigour'* (1964, p.63), the manifestation of our imaginative, emotional recollections through stitch-drawing does embellish the cloth, which is *'observable'* and the *'phenomenological analysis'* of the process brings clarification. It is also noted that these contributing traits that have potential to impact our experience of the thing as we embellish it. The point here is that the image and object become one through the process of phenomenological engagement. We could take the duster and simply illustrate our experiences upon it, but that would be subject only to the context and merely using the duster as a carrier of information, which is not phenomenological. In order to clarify our investigation of the dusting cloth we must engage with it on several levels; consciously employing intelligent knowledge and unconsciously experiencing it in another way.

What is this 'other way?' I would argue that in order to find it, we need to limit and focus our senses. We cannot hear it, and taste is not associated with a cleaning cloth, so sight, smell and touch become our primary means of experiencing it. Sight is notably subject to prejudice of knowledge. If it is removed then other senses are strengthened. Deborah Harty's essay Drawing through touch (2012) explores the phenomenological experiences of drawing with the blind and concludes that when non-sighted people *'experience drawings phenomenologically it helps to improve understanding of the world as experienced through touch'*. When considering Merleau-Ponty's reflections once again we can observe that the participant can 'see' through their other senses, undoubtedly engaging with their 'conscious life' and the given context, but also engaging with something unconscious that allows for a phenomenological exploration of the thing as an object.

Investigation Through Workshops

I sought a means of investigation that brought together conscious and unconscious thought; drawing offered a solution. Whilst most of the responses to workshops from the collaborative project have to date been text based and therefore statement led, drawing has played an important role in the methodology selected by particular participants; what words cannot express is literally drawn upon the duster with thread. These range from literal representations of objects (figure 4 a) that reflect their experiences, to abstract expression (figure 4b). The experience of the object is apparent in the way that the marks are made, in the space that they fill and in the forms that they take. Visually they speak.



FIGURE 4A: DRAWINGS THAT ILLUSTRATE OBJECTS TO REPRESENT FEELINGS OR EXPERIENCES. 'TIME, OR LACK OF IT' BY FELICITY TRUSCOTT, 2016.



FIGURE 4B: DRAWINGS THAT USE STITCH FOR ABSTRACT EXPRESSION – BLOTCHED PEN MARKS CREATED DURING CLEANING, THEN STITCHED INTO A 'QUILT'. SARAH WELSBY 2016.

I ran two workshops as a means of practically exploring how my developing theories might play out in practice. They were essentially experiments, which sought to test the reactions and outcomes of the participants if the duster was positioned as the starting point, presented for conscious and unconscious investigation as a catalyst for discussion and response through drawing, rather than as a carrier of the

message as it had previously performed. The participants were not told exactly what to do with the duster as I wanted an authentic response that was framed by their own domestic experiences rather than my suggested interpretation, but they were undoubtedly somewhat prejudiced by knowledge of the project and the sewing tools they were given. I presented the cloth for them to 'read' and we discussed its associated meanings, as a route to prompting their responses. This was also underpinned by discussion of some relevant academic texts. Notably this workshop methodology constantly evolves each time I run it because it is a means of practically developing a clear methodology to ultimately support a more rigorous theoretical approach.

I was invited to run the first workshop of this kind at the Loughborough University Drawing and Phenomenology Conference in 2016. Primarily I wanted to know if drawing would provide a framework for a more authentic investigation. The result was both interesting and rewarding.

I distributed carefully designed packages that told people a bit about the project. These packages ask 'Women and Domesticity – What's your Perspective?' in large type and picture an embroidered duster that is crumpled up ready for use. The workshop had a loose structure; I suggested drawing but everyone was keen to stitch straight away so I read a number of text texts about domesticity to direct and inspire conversation. In hindsight the packs hindered the drawing process as they were too effective in communicating an end product. The workshop was not entirely unsuccessful however and I received positive feedback. One participant chose not to sew but instead used her needle as a tool to make holes in the cloth (figure.5a); another rolled her duster up tightly and embroidered RIP upon it rendering it 'dead' (figure.5b); others folded their dusters and stitched the ends together or changed its form in some way (figure. 5c). I concluded that in this workshop the dusters had indeed been engaged with in a different way to previously because we had focused more on the object (figure.5d). The duster led us to discuss domestic experiences, whereas usually it was the other way around. I wasn't convinced that we'd all been drawing with thread nor that the process was necessarily phenomenological but it was a start.



FIGURE 5A: DUSTER WITH HOLES MADE BY A NEEDLE



FIGURE 5B: DUSTER RENDERED 'DEAD'



FIGURE 5C: DUSTER WITH ALTERED FORM



FIGURE 5D: A WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT INVESTIGATING THE DUSTER

The next opportunity came at the Marks Make Meaning Symposium and exhibition at the University of Brighton in March 2017, where once again I ran a workshop. This time I led with drawing and did not give out packages. Each participant was given an A2 sheet of paper, a soft pencil and an unfolded duster. They were asked to close their eyes, to touch and engage with the duster whilst simultaneously making

marks on the paper, which was intentionally large enough to accommodate the arm-wide gestures that are typically made when cleaning (figure 6a). At the same time, I read a number of texts with a domestic theme. Interestingly people began to scrunch and stroke their dusters, they lifted them to their faces to smell them and touch them to their cheeks. When they opened their eyes and began to work with a needle and thread about half way through the workshop, the scrunched forms mostly remained rendering more sculptural outcomes (figures 6b). Some tore their dusters, notably one in particular that represented domestic violence (figure 6c); another painted hers black; but for the most part participants held their dusters in the forms they would for cleaning and fixed them this way with stitch. Form mirrored the need for gesture, creating a mass of cloth that filled the hand, exploding around the fingers, at the edges; an object prepped ready for its cleaning task (figures 6d and e). Stitched marks were purposeful rather than pretty, they did not look like embroidery but more like the marks made on paper earlier in the workshop. The marks communicated an internal response to the context and content of the time spent engaging with the duster. As such they communicated but did not illustrate or embellish, the focus was on expressing the experience of engaging with the object (figure 6f). This was an exciting discovery.



FIGURE 6A: MARKS MADE WITH A PENCIL WERE DEVELOPED BY DRAWING WITH THREAD UPON A DUSTER



FIGURE 6B: MARKS MADE WITH A PENCIL MIRRORED WITH THREAD AND THROUGH FORM



FIGURE 6C: A TORN, THEN MENDED, DUSTER REFERENCING THE EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



FIGURE 6D: STITCHED DUSTER FORM, BOUND WITH THREAD, READY FOR USE



FIGURE 6E: STITCHED DUSTER FORM, WITH FOLDS FLATTENED BY THREAD DRAWINGS



FIGURE 6F: EXPRESSING THE DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE WITH DUSTER AND THREAD

Following these first exploratory workshops I concluded that the duster can indeed be more than a canvas and that it can lead thoughts and associated drawing actions towards an embodiment of a personal domestic experience. However, the method needed refining and defining. With these discoveries in mind I have since developed a method that simply leads participants through a series of haptic, sensory and recollective prompts. Their reactions to the duster are first invited through invitations to touch and smell the cloth with closed eyes whilst simultaneously making marks on paper with pencil. Next, they are prompted to translate and build upon these with a needle and thread onto the duster with open eyes, and so their investigation of the duster continues intuitively. This method is still being refined before true qualitative data can be captured and analysed. It has been inspired by the following theories.

Drawing Meaning from Memory

Fundamental to this investigation is the time taken to touch and hold the duster through the prolonged application of stitch, and the role of this stitch as a record of experience. Because this experience has passed we rely on our memory to recount it, which is subject to influences past and present. June Crawford et al sought to construct meaning from memory in their psychological study of emotion and gender inspired by Frigga Haug's collective work on memories of female sexualisation. My study does not explore emotion specifically but it does explore gender specific recollections of an experience upon which emotion has a bearing, so some useful comparisons can be made. Both studies used a form of reflective story writing within which collaboration and sharing were also key, much like my workshops and exhibited collection.

Neither makes an obvious reference to drawing or phenomenology but when discussing the necessary *'tools of remembering'* Haug apparently seeks a *'key image'* to draw herself into the time and place of the memory. (1983, p.71). She regrets that this does not work for everyone but discusses the idea that smell and colour, or other senses, could have the same effect. The duster has potential to stimulate all of these. Could it be that by engaging several senses through the act of drawing with thread that we open a path towards memory and experience that is otherwise limited? Crawford's research notes that memories of experience can be subjective, so therefore potentially impacted by conscious thought, but also discusses the role of memory work in *'uncovering the processes of the construction of self'* (1992, p.39). The phenomenological experience with the duster is intended to be a route to expressing associated experiences of self, i.e.: perspectives on the relationship between a woman and her domesticity, so if a woman can access her experience in this way then in theory it is a more complete reflection, because both the conscious and unconscious mind are engaged.

Conclusion

Drawing with thread upon an object that *'speaks'* offers considerable opportunities for a phenomenological investigation that embeds meaning into the object itself from the first point of engagement. Within what is fundamentally a material experience, both record and residue become one, consolidating conscious and unconscious responses into a collection of marks where gesture and form make meaning. The piercing of the duster through the act of drawing with thread taps an *'impulse'* and *'energy'* that is *'gathered from an entire culture and history'*; from an *'experience'* that is presented and performed in the *'vibration of the mark'* (Nancy, 2009, p.101) upon the duster. In my opinion, there is no deeper way to gather, present and perform the female domestic experience.

The experience of drawing in this way changes the methodology and outcome through differences in action, touch and gesture, whilst the domestic focus effects the purpose of the process. Limiting the senses; piercing, folding, creasing and turning the cloth; all prompt a drawn response that demands complete engagement with the object. Whilst it can be argued that skill with a needle differs from that of drawing, the purpose of this research is investigation, so differences in stitch length or application support the presentation of meaning and evidence a potentially deeper engagement with the cloth.

Context and personal experiences or prejudices inevitably effect the way the duster is approached, particularly due to the gendered focus of the investigation. There may also be differences in responses made at home to those in a workshop due to peer influences or differing experiences of the home space. Personal memories that relate to a domestic context or task can also evoke influencing emotions. There are further aspects of the relationship between phenomenological action and domestic experience to be explored, including the role of collaboration and that which is reflected upon as opposed to that which occurs in action. These are distinctions between experience and action, present and past, performance and exhibition.

The brilliant bright yellow of the duster is easily recognized. It is an object that makes an easy reference towards to a domestic context, in particular the liminal state of ever repeating tasks such as dusting. Drawing has the potential to support a phenomenological investigation through its concern with the body-object-focus relationship; drawing with thread takes this even further into a relationship that reaches into the object itself. Within a phenomenological investigation of female domesticity through a

duster, drawing with thread is a process that enables a full investigation of the object and its potential to hold and present meaning (figure 7).

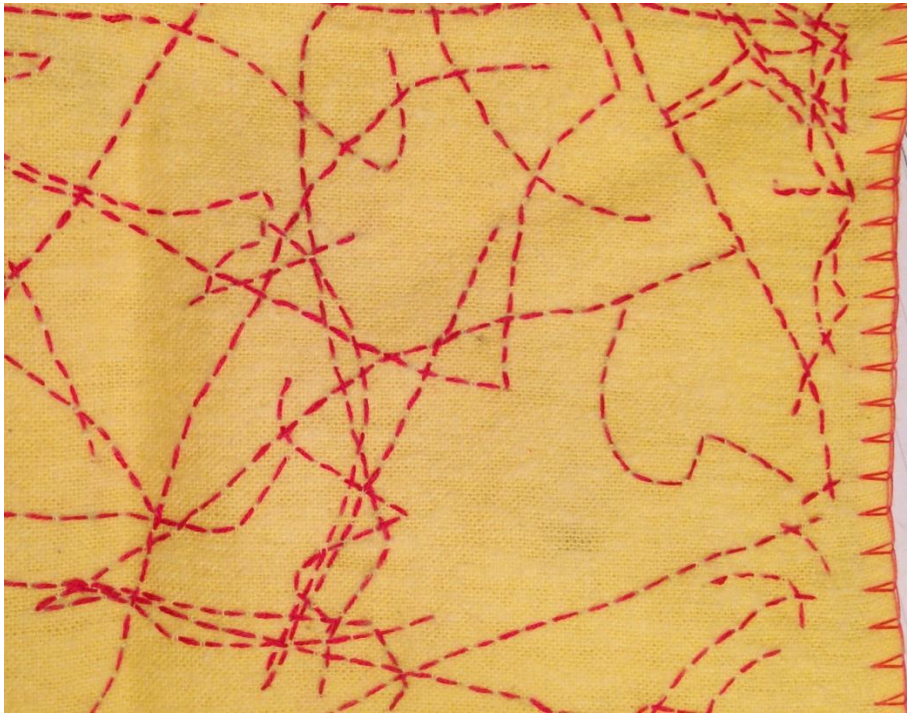


FIGURE 7: DRAWING WITH THREAD UPON A DUSTER

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