Embodied Drawing: A Case Study in Narrative Design

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ABSTRACT
This article uses a case study to discuss drawing and interior dwelling as enstasic methodological practices that reach potentials beyond those available to thinking prescribed by the written word. In considering the means by which the short film *Munted* (Ings 2011) was drawn into being, it suggests that drawn approaches to the design of filmic narratives might enable the designer to reach in unique ways, into ideation and outwards into the communicative content and appearance of a text.

Keywords: enstasis, interior drawing, methodology, script writing/design, skariphasthai

INTRODUCTION
Film is created in many ways but generally, the worlds we watch are conceived as written scripts that are later translated into images by directors, production designers and actors. However, if film may be understood as ‘talking pictures’ it might also be conceived and developed inside the domain of images. This alternative method reaches far beyond the didactic storyboard. By using it, the designer draws a world into being (Figure 1). By forsaking the script (scriptum), he might engage the Greek idea of skariphasthai (to scratch an outline, sketch) as a mode for dwelling within an embodied space where thought is pursued, encountered and drawn into tangibility. In this case study drawing is used as an ideational tool, where the designer processes ideas that words can’t reach; he touches the nuanced, draws into what withdraws, and retrieves from a protean world, a complex story that thinks… and speaks in pictures.

Using the recent short film *Munted* (Ings, 2011) and reflecting upon considerations of thought (Eliade, 1958; Heidegger, 1968; Rosenberg, 2008; and Polanyi, 1967) the article traces a trajectory of practice-led design research through the creation of the film’s story and treatment.

AIM
The aim of this approach was to find a way of bridging the space between visual ideation and visual communication (in the development of a film text). In other words, I was seeking a method through which I might transfer something of the intangibility of image-led thought into a film that dealt with a very interiorised man and his relationship with a child who wanted to become an artist. I was interested to see if a method of embodied drawing might enable me to reach into processes (and ideas) beyond words. In so doing, I was attempting to open up the process of film design to higher levels of discovery.

LITERATURE AND THEORY
While a significant number of publications continue to reinforce conventional approaches to scriptwriting (Landau 2012; McBride 2012; McKee 2010; Turner 2011), a body of recent writing has surfaced that draws into question screenplays as an appropriate model for designing and developing film.

Millard (2010) has discussed how, in an era where images and sound play increasingly significant roles, traditional formatting conventions may restrict innovation in screenwriting. Murphy (2010) has considered alternative approaches to the screenplay including improvisation, psychodrama and visual storytelling. Their work builds on Wells’ (2007) argument that the role of film ideation and development needs to be broadened to embrace alternative narrative forms, concepts, images, sounds and music. He notes, “many innovative screenwriters and film-makers have long favoured audio and visual expressivity over plot and narrative drive” (p.13) Wells’ ideas have been prefigured by diverse examples of directorial practice. Geuens (2000) notes
that Jean-Luc Godard used images for inspiration. Similarly, the graphic designer Wong Kar Wai who in 1995 created *Fallen Angels*, insisted on the role of images, sound, and music in the scripting and production process. Like the films of Antonioni, Wong’s work is developed from the idea that “abstract lines, and forms, and shapes, and colours can give emotional meaning and expression just as much as narrative lines, dialogue and characters” (Brunette 2005: 119). He believes, “You can’t write all your images on paper, and there are so many things – the sound, the music, the ambience, and also the actors – when you’re writing all these details in the script, the script has no tempo, it’s not readable… It’s not a good idea (to write out a complete script beforehand) and I just wrote down the scenes, some essential details, and the dialogue” (ibid.: 126).

**THE SCRIPTED NARRATIVE**

However, unlike these films *Munted* was entirely constructed and refined through a process of drawing, poetic notation and painting.

Traditionally it is a requirement that the spectrum of visualised material in the writer/director’s head must be translated into the comparatively limited parameters of written language before investors or funding agencies will consider the work. In other words, the merits of an imagined film are assessed on the act of translation into the interim medium of the written word.

The assumption that the narrative potential of film can only work if imagery is translated into written language may be in part inherited from the traditions of theatre where written scripts have historically driven performed narratives. However film is not theatre on celluloid. It tells its stories in unique, pictorial ways.

It is useful in this regard to consider for a moment the etymology of the term ‘script’. The Latin word *scriptum* means a written text. It refers to the nature of recording in written language and relates to conventions of presenting ideas in a cohesive manner through the construct of writing. However, there is a potentially richer term akin to this word that is...
of comparable interest. In Greek *skariphasthai* also means to inscribe but it may be defined as scratching an outline, or sketch.

*Skariphasthai* suggests that meaning might be drawn into being in realms that transcend the limitations of the written word. It supposes an approach to communication that still records, but provides a broader dimension for thinking and construction of narrative. It prescribes an environment where a world imagined in pictures might be processed in pictures and eventually communicated in pictures, without the unnecessary impingement of literal translation. Within this construct, the hand and pencil as realising agents in the act of drawing, may serve as transilative tools that operate in a purely iconic mode (closest to the mode in which a film might be imagined) (Figure 2). Pallasmaa (2009: 17) suggests “the pencil... is a bridge between the imagining mind and the image that appears on the sheet of paper. In the ecstasy of work, the draftsman forgets both his hand and the pencil, and the image emerges as if it were an automatic projection of the imagining mind.” This kind of drawing is a process of pursuit rather than capture.

If the imagining mind creates in images and we accept that film uses pictures to communicate meaning, it is useful to consider the potential of methods of ideation and development that operate purely within iconic modes. If one considers the scripting of a film as *skariphasthai*, one might create and refine through a process of drawing. In this approach, the designer might engage with levels of indwelling inside the film’s emerging diegesis and this process may lend itself to a deeper contemplation of the visual potentials of a proposed narrative.

**ENSTASIS AND DRAWING**

Sketching as a method of processing and communicating design ideas has been discussed by a number of writers, (Goel 1995; Hare 2002; Pipes 1990; Rodgers, Green, and McGown 2000; Scrivener, Ball, and Tseng, 2000; Verstijnen, van Leeuwen, Goldschmidt, Hamel, & Hennessey 1998). However, much of the emphasis of research in the area has focused on what Rogers (2000) considers three primary uses of design drawing. These are concept sketching, presentation drawing, and drawing for manufacture.

![Figure 2. Pencil and wash drawing of the decay of tidal flats. Painted in coffee, ink and muddied water, drawings like this formed thinking spaces where I read the narrative potential of the site. These paintings offered up to four hours of contemplation and suggestion. The scribbled notes reflect on sounds, smells, and motion as poetic thought.](image-url)
However, through a process of immersion the designer might also engage in an embodied method I would describe as enstasic drawing. The term enstasic suggests a standing within. It surfaces from the Indo-Greek roots ‘en’ (into) and ‘histanai’ (to stand). It may be contrasted with dis-stasis (non-standing) and ecstasy or ec-stasis (standing outside of). The word has been used in certain esoteric/philosophical writing (Dooyeweerd 1931; Eliade 1958; Von Baader 1987; and Friesen 2011). However, its origins predate this use. Although these writers use enstasis in slightly different ways it may be broadly understood as a state of indwelling, interior consciousness or inner reflection. Eliade (1958: 193) describes it as a state and knowledge where the “consciousness is saturated with a direct and total intuition of being”.

In design research I would suggest enstasis might refer to an induced interior state of selfhood where one dwells in the creative potential of what is not yet formed. This process may involve the deployment of drawing in a slow, reflective process that allows the designer to become immersed in the world of the emerging image and story. In this approach, thinking becomes contemplative; the designer converses with drawing and the drawing talks back to him. This talking is generally more nebulous than literal. One talks in tone and weight, emphasis and potential. Ideas are coloured and lit and their parameters are nuanced. Thinking is not prescribed by the territorial limitations of words. Images operate with a more flexible grammar and one is able to connect possibilities in comparatively abstract and intangible ways.

Rosenberg (2008: 109) refers to this process as a state “where one thinks with, and through drawing to make discoveries, to find new possibilities that give course to ideas and to help fashion their eventual form”. Here he says “the represented object does not function as a sign but rather as a trope; a vector, a directional motion that moves from the singularity of the image to turn the mind out towards something that suggests itself in the hubbub of connections” (ibid.: 114).
Thus, in a state of enstasy one is not outside of one’s self, drawing to create a picture, but inside one’s self, drawing to explore the potentials of a thought. As such drawing is a process. Rosenberg suggests this form of drawing, “is thinking and acting between the not yet formed and the formed” (ibid.).

THE POST-THINKING DRAWING
These drawings are significantly changed when they are read post-process. Although residues of enstasic thinking were used in Munted as a way of making explicit the interior mind of a man, this was not their original purpose. Drawings on Don’s walls only acquired this function when one night as I was drawing I pinned some of his thinking on the wall in front of me (Figure 3). I was trying to clear my worktable of material, and when I looked up he felt comforted. It was the comfort of a fictional man. From that point the residues of some of these enstasic drawings contributed to a physical world that explained his interior nature.

Across the surface of these images we see evidence of an almost obsessive need to find meaning. Don’s notes weave through his drawings in a tiny scrawled hand that bursts into unpredictable volume. His thoughts are poetic, meandering and introspective. They are also broken. This is a consequence of many brain injuries where ideas cannot be held together in a cohesive manner for any extended period of time (see figures 2, 5 and 6).

Although some of these drawings became artefacts, enstasic drawing is only what it is during ideation. Rosenberg (2008: 123) notes, “When the process has a clear outcome, a telos, it is in a sense no longer an ideational drawing…. Once the idea is in a sense realised, the drawing is merely a record, a feature in a history of the process, and no longer part of the process proper”. In this regard I am reminded of Byron in his 1822 letter to Thomas Moore, who said, “....like all imaginative men, I, of course, embody myself with the character while I draw it, but not a moment after the pen is lifted off the paper” (Byron 1835: 623).

This approach to drawing surfaced characters, contexts and narratives. They developed and refined inside a visual world and eventually emerged as constructed beings. Thus, enstasic drawing became a method of immersing the designer in both the visual feel and the narrative genesis of the film (as thought).

DRAWING AS INDWELLING
This is not a new idea. The sixteenth century the Italian painter Titian reportedly “touched the surface of his paper in order to investigate an elusive world just beyond his reach” (Taylor 2008: 11). In so doing he was reaching into the domain of thought. He was drawn into the world of the mark. Heidegger suggests that what is thought provoking has not yet been thought. He notes that thought turns away from us, and calls us through the draft of its withdrawal (Heidegger 1968: 3-18). Schön, (1983: 159) argues that when drawing, we construct a “virtual world” where “the pace of action can be varied at will. The designer can slow down and think about what he is doing.” This process of “thinking about” aligns somewhat with Polyani’s concept of...
“indwelling” (1967: 17). In this state the thinker is dwelling inside an environment of the self where meanings and connections might surface.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985: 47) suggest that this process is marked by “vague and formless wanderings” but eventually there develops “a growing sense of direction and meaning emerge[s] as the perceptions and understandings of the researcher grow and the parameters of the problem are recognised.”

In this space, Rosenberg (2008: 109) suggests one thinks as “a process and always in process”. He notes that in this state the process of drawing is simultaneously mental and physical. It is both thinking and thought. Thus, he suggests, “we are drawn into making drawing and the drawing draws us into further thinking” (ibid.: 110). In this regard, “the known and the un-known are drawn to and through each other” (ibid.: 112).

ENSTASY IN APPLICATION

In developing the diegesis of the film Munted I travelled to a remote, farming settlement. I sketched the corrosion of old buildings, the danger of water, and the smell of summer mud (see figures 2, 4 & 5). Upon returning home each night, I unloaded piles of wilted plants onto my table. These were the remains of forgotten gardens; the residues of lives that had unfolded on the location. Then I began to draw in the character of a damaged man. I was not drawing as myself (indeed my painterly style is very different from the works that appear in this film); instead, I dwelt inside and sought out, a fictional character. I moved into an enstasic space. Here the rhythm and sound of a pencil and the smell of wilting leaves formed a kind of denkraum. This contemplation removed me from a known world and from an awareness of myself. In an enstasic space the unknown had room to dwell and find tentative form. Although Eliade (1958) considers this space one of static consciousness, no longer related to any temporal duration or functions, I would argue that it is not static, although time may feel suspended. Time and action function, but in less familiar ways. One is aware of fatigue and of the drying of paint, but not of the linear progression of time. Stasis is not a suspension of thought but a stillness inside which thought might surface as a form of contemplation.

Using a process of indwelling I slowly drew into existence the nature and story of another being. The man who surfaced from the interior space into which I was drawn was a botanical artist. I discovered that he was intelligent and had a scientist’s penchant for detail. However, some years before the film begins, he suffered a brain injury as the result of a car accident that killed his wife and children. Accordingly, his work wrestles with grief over the incident.

As I drew, I dwelt inside this man. Eventually I replaced the light bulbs in my studio with a kerosene lamp so he might feel more comfortable with the luminosity, scents and sounds that were in the slowly forming world he occupied.

The state of immersion became increasingly sensory to the point that, as the film sought higher levels of refinement, changes were made to the story only
after driving out to the world where the narrative would be shot and spending hours drawing inside the rooms of the cottage where he would be living.

Through this process of immersion the character of the botanical artist (Don) began to speak. He was strange company because unlike other characters I create, he did not speak with words... (in the film he has largely lost the ability). Instead somewhere between drawing and the scribbled, fragmented, poetry of his observations, his story began to surface and connect through a language of nuance and suggestion.

I discovered he was very vulnerable. He was afraid of conflict because he could not hold ideas together long enough to protect himself. Drawing had become his retreat into a simple but beautiful world that could not hurt him. His friendship with the child in the film was based on this same quest for the safety of innocence.

**STANDING WITHIN THE SELF**

The process of embodied drawing involved receptively ‘listening’ inside the drawing of a fictional man’s thinking. I was standing within the self and dimensions of the self were speaking in languages that transcended words. Drawing in this realm was not didactic. I was not trying to record thought. Rather drawing was contemplative. Each mark induced another and collectively the weight, colour and texture created worlds and ways of seeing became the dimensions of a fictional character and his story.

Embodied drawing in this regard may be likened to Keats concept of negative capability, “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason” (Keats 1958, I: 193). In this uncertain state one receives and reflects on thoughts rather than actively pursuing them. Thought is cumulative. The dimensions of characters, their worlds and stories gather like tentative fragments drawn to a magnetic field. These fragments are brought to the fore through rhythms of drawing objects and environments. Where a character murmurs words in this state, I record the fragments I ‘hear’. These fragments do not become the dialogues of the film, but act as further insights into consciousness. They are the lyrical thoughts of dimensions of the self that have adopted fictional personas.

Figure 6. Drawing of a wild lily showing a fusion of Don’s botanical training and the fragmented nature of his grief.
INSIGHTS AND CONSEQUENCES
As a research method, embodied drawing enabled me to think slowly and immersively. By being able to develop a film via images rather than through written description, instruction, and dialogue, I was able to develop a diegesis based on weight, tone, colour, texture and sound. This is not unlike Wong’s approach to filmmaking that utilises abstract forms, shapes, and colours to create distinctive levels of emotional resonance. However, the process of embodied drawing is more immersive. One dwells inside a world and through this indwelling that world gravitates towards the tangible.

Because as a director I had lived inside these characters and their physical worlds, I knew the ethos of what I eventually filmed on very sensory levels. This meant that approaches to lighting, grading, movement, sound and texture were internally cohesive because they were developed inside the same ideational process.

Significantly, the outcomes of this approach also influenced the manner in which the film was directed. When Munted was shot we did not have a script. I showed actors drawings, introduced them to the physical world they would inhabit, and explained the event that would occur in each scene. This meant that their performances were essentially responsive. This technique is not unique. Films like Wright’s Shaun of the Dead (2004), Kubrick’s Full Metal Jacket (1987), and Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976), all contain significant, non-scripted scenes. However, with Munted the entire film was directed through immersion and guidelines.

Both Katrina and Don spent long periods, prior to shooting in their respective houses and the environments that surrounded them. They learned to ride bikes through long summer afternoons, they picked wild blackberries together and drew pictures of each other. The scenes of Katrina’s near drowning and the assault on Don were shot without rehearsal. The actors knew what would happen in the scene but I asked them to feel their way through (dwell within) the episode and respond accordingly. This approach is closely related to the embodied process of Method Acting (Stanislavski and Strasberg) that enables performers to create rich reproductions of a character’s emotional state by dwelling inside emotions or sensations of their own experience.

LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIALS
Such approaches to narrative design and realisation are not devoid of problems. First, they can expensive, both in terms of time and money. Because the process of enstastic thinking is relatively nebulous it is not always easy to lock into schedules and budgets. It does not operate effectively in firmly prescribed time frames because it is rhyzomic rather than directionally oriented.

In co-designed texts like film or graphic novels (with a combination of a writer and director or writer and illustrator) such thinking can also face difficulties because it cannot transfer intact from the originator to the collaborator. It may however offer fruitful material for discussion between the two parties. By extension, highly embodied methods of ideation and development in film must also cross from the self-referencing interior environment of the originator to synergetic relationships with actors, lighting designers, set constructors and sound engineers. Unless this can occur the process of creation can become marooned and a breakdown will ensue between the imagined and the realised world.

Embodied methods of ideation and development also face issues of vulnerability. Konin (2000) and Hamden (2010) both note that when individuals immerse themselves deeply in fictional worlds as a process for creation, especially if these environments engage with psychologically fraught material, problems can surface if emotions are not compartmentalized and they encroach on other facets of the researcher’s life.

These issues acknowledged, the potentials of embodied thinking in narrative design are considerable. The approach may be transferable into the design of fictional narratives and their corresponding worlds in media forms as diverse as the graphic novel, the picture book, animated narrative, the zine, theatre, opera, and arguably music. In these art forms embodied thinking may help one to experience unique connections beyond the limitations of the written word. Such immersion may enable the designer to experience ideationally, synergies between light, sound, texture, weight, image, rhythm, pace, tone, colour and volume.
CONCLUSION
In trying to describe the design process that brought the film Munted into being I am aware of the difficult nature of the discussion.

First, enstasic consciousness (as discourse) has a somewhat discordant history through theological philosophy. In considering the term I have largely stripped it of its spiritual/esoteric associations and considered it as a concept that may be used to describe a state and process used for developing creative thought.

Second, enstasic drawing is not a form of communication. Its purpose is not didactic (diagrams), nor a form of shorthand (sketches). Instead, it is used to generate thinking.

Third, enstasic drawing is by its nature, nebulous. It validates the sensory, the immersive and the tacit. It elevates standing within the subjective self to draw thought into being. As such its processes are neither stable, predictable nor explicit.

Finally, enstasic drawing is useful only in action. What we read post-process is not the thinking, but at best, a disconnected residue. In Munted, these drawings did bleed into the film. Because of this, it has been necessary in this article to differentiate between the drawings as enstasic thinking and their nature and use as post-ideational artefacts.

IN CLOSING...
Munted premiered in the 2011 Montreal World Film Festival. It went on to official selections in a number of international festivals including the 53rd Bilbao International Film Festival, the 29th Brussels International Film Festival, the 27th Berlin-Interfilm Film Festival, the 18th Regensburg Short film Week, the 2011 Vladivostok International Film Festival, and the 2011 Lucerne International Film Festival. The film won numerous awards including: Best Short Film at the Lucerne International Film Festival; Finalist in the 2011 New Zealand Design Awards, the Jury Award: Special Honour at the 18th Regensburg Short Film Week, and the Audience Award at Zubiax Gexto (Spain).

But these awards are only the aftermath of making. Munted was a film generated inside an enstasic space that eventually bled into a short film text. The film was conceived through painting, drawing, touch and sound, in a world beyond words. Through this highly sensitised process, two men reached out to each other. One was the designer and the other, a fictional man. These men were inextricably linked, although one functioned as the creator of the other. The drawings constitute the territories and residues of their thinking.

NOTES
1. Although traditionally the role of the director is a discrete, interpretive one, in films like Munted the roles of ideator, writer, director, production designer, illustrator, typographer and editor are fused. In cases like this, I position myself as the designer of the text. By design I refer to a conscious and critical orchestration of graphic elements/thinking into coherent, communicative texts.

2. A trailer for Munted can be viewed athttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8I1k6gwn1w(796,554),(928,570)

3. The word enstasis as it appears in early Greek thought referred to an objection to a premise in a logical argument, or to finding an example that countered an argument. See Aristotle: “enstasis d’ esti protasis protasei enantia” (Aristotle: Anal. prior. II, pp. 26-28). However, Friesen (2011) notes the Greeks also used enstasis to refer to a ‘way of life’ (enstasis biou). He records the first reference to contrasting ‘enstasis’ with ecstasy in the writing of Heinrich Paulus (1800, vol. 1, p.15).

4. Some of these fragments establish homologies and resonances; they ‘relate’ to each other. Others surface and then fall away. This may be likened to Simmel’s discussion on method (1908: 1) where he notes, “out of complex phenomena, the homogeneous will be extracted… and the dissimilar paralyzed”.

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