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The Aesthetic as an Aspect of Praxis - Architectural design as a cooperative endeavor

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Abstract

Commonly the aesthetic is understood as sensuous private pleasure, which other people cannot experience, but maybe talk about, and on the other hand as created by individual artists' talents. We will attempt to bring the aesthetic back into praxis by arguing that aesthetic experience is tied to Gibson's notion of perceptual systems. The article builds on observations of a design project for a community center in a Danish village. We argue that the aesthetic is shared pleasure resulting from struggles by participants in praxis, where aesthetic, material, functional, ethical, political, and economic aspects are formed by each other in a dialectic process. The struggles are found in the community council's reasons for starting the process, in the design and construction process and the use of the results. This means that descriptions of the aesthetic appearance of buildings should incorporate relevant discussions and struggles of the design, construction and use of the building, and that aesthetic experience is enriched the more aesthetic experience it is based on. It also means that the key to a fruitful ongoing collaborative process producing good aesthetic designs comes from managing together the many aspects of praxis in an open way.

Keywords: The aesthetic, perceptual systems, aesthetic experience, praxis, contradiction, coordination, design

Introduction

Commonly the aesthetic is understood as sensuous private pleasure, as something ethereal and ephemeral, which we cannot make other people experience, but may try to talk about, even though some say it spoils the pleasure.

The sciences mirror this incorporeal phenomenon by having difficulties defining it. In *Encyclopedia Britannica* it is stated that the philosophical definition of the subject of aesthetics is immensely difficult and it is deliberated whether the subject is philosophically irrelevant. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* declares that the aesthetic has come to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, of judgment, attitude, experience or value. Here, for example, theories of aesthetic experience are divided into two kinds, internalist ones, which appeal to phenomenological analysis, and externalist ones, which appeal to features of the object experienced. In sociology Bourdieu (1996) focuses on the normative aspects of the object, on how good taste was established in the field of literary arts through institutionalized power struggles. In psychology, phenomenological analysis of the aesthetic experience attempted to identify its structure, while experiments on color and the golden section sought to identify features of the object giving rise to the aesthetic experience (Funch, 1997).

The difficulties with defining the aesthetics can be seen in for example how Beardslly (1958, 1982) moved from a phenomenology of the aesthetic experience to an object-oriented one. We understand this move brought about by the theoretical intent of isolating a phenomenon in order to analyze it, and by then discovering that the concept is connected with other phenomena, which are relevant to include in the analysis. This wavering between isolating an object for analysis and giving it up in order to include other objects is due to the circumstance that we discover objects through their concrete relations to other objects (Axel & Højholt, forthcoming). Especially subjective phenomena like aesthetics are many-sided and concrete. We are therefore forced to investigate them where they appear in their many-sidedness in the process they come out of. We must study how the aesthetic experience, pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad, is produced and sensed, and it would therefore make sense to study how artists and designers create their works.

Turning thus to an empirical substantiation of the production and sensing of aesthetic experience we discover the concrete sociality of the subjective phenomenon. We discover that the production of aesthetic experience isn't the result of an individual's work, but a result of cooperation, sometimes with conflicts. In debates about architecture as an art form Witold Rybczinski recently introduced the term "Starchitect" in order to point to the problematic individualization in the architectural profession as it can be seen in the hagiographies of famous architects. He writes:

"In *Fallingwater Rising* ..., Franklin Toker documents the tug of war that took place over the building's unusual structure between Frank Lloyd Wright, his client Edgar Kaufmann, and their respective engineers. But a biography doesn't have space for such lengthy digressions. The temptation is to either simplify or omit. Too often, the architect is presented as the sole creative force—a heroic Howard Roark-like figure. Colorful but inaccurate" (Rybczinski, 2015).

A theory of aesthetics must grasp this social aspect, the fact that design ideas cannot be understood as coming from one person.

We also discover, that the works, which made an industrial designer famous, were designed in collaboration with his staff. Raymond Loewy, for example, an American

industrial designer in the early twentieth century has been admired for his creative, elegant designs. However, when we get closer to his work, we are told that many of the designs, which made him famous, were mostly designed by members of his staff, and that he regularly endorsed their drawings by signing them (Beckman, 2012, p. 28). It is said, that a reason for his success is the fact that he had a wonderful eye for good design and was a good salesman thereof (Bonsall, 2000, p. 190). Studying Loewy and his collaborators' design drawings it becomes evident that they had a history of being tossed between him, his staff, and others in the design world. A theory of aesthetics must grasp this connection between producing and identifying a good design.

Thus, the aesthetic experience must include all the aspects mentioned. It is social because it is a coordinating endeavor, and it is subjective because it is sensuous feeling (and because we must incorporate the production and appreciation of designed things and their aesthetic aspects). We therefore take point of departure in Gibson's notion of perceptual systems (1979). We shall identify sensing as the activity of looking, listening etc. Each perceptual system corresponds to a mode of attention, subordinated to an overall orienting system, which makes us learn when we explore, investigate, resonate etc. The notion of perceptual system makes it possible to understand the sensuous feeling of aesthetic experience as an active phenomenon in human social life. We take this to mean that perceptual systems point to the fact that we are feeling the world with all our senses, prioritizing them according to our point of focus and having sensuous experience from this activity. For example two persons see a house, feel for it in different ways, both knowing how it would be to live there together; a fashion designer feels a cloth - its surface, color, and vividness gives her an idea of how a dress could be made of it, and how it would be for somebody including herself to wear it. In this way we connect aesthetic experience with feeling in the exploration of the world around us. This means the aesthetic experience is in all aspects of human activity, but takes on a different character depending on the nature of the activities, senses, and the materials involved.

The article is organized in a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical part we shall present a notion of human activity as praxis, and demonstrate how aesthetic experience is an aspect thereof. Next, we present our examination and discussion of how the aesthetic experience is a part of the development of a design- and construction project. We shall demonstrate aesthetic experience as an aspect of praxis with an empirical example from an everyday architectural design project. We shall delve into a conflictual process over a design proposal for a square in front of a community center. We shall argue that the struggle involved economy, resources, the social life around the house, and several other aspects in the concrete and complex collaborative project. The architects, landscape architect, engineers, contractors, and users all had suggestions for the design of the square. The interplay between these different perspectives must be taken into account in order to understand how the aesthetic experience of the square came to be, (and what to the participants constituted its good design).

Praxis – Contradictions, Subjectivity and Mediations

Accordingly we begin our theoretical presentation with a historical theory of praxis (Axel, 2011), developed in the tradition of critical psychology (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp 1983; Lave and Wenger, 1991) and inspired by Bernstein (1971).

If we used the notion of action we would have to begin with the individual and not cooperating human beings. If we used the notion of activity we would tend to focus only on the processes. We shall use the notion of praxis in the Aristotelian tradition which allows us to start with coordination, ethics, economy, and politics in human activity and acts. Thereby we can explore how these aspects are relevant to aesthetics.

As human beings we keep up our lives socially by producing and distributing our means of existence and thereby changing our conditions of life. This entanglement of human activity is a first identification of praxis, in which there are many entwined common causes (Axel, 2011). In each cause we can find other causes mediated and find how they reciprocally form each other. People act in praxis when participating in or setting up some common causes. We shall understand an architectural design project organized around a future building as a common cause in praxis. The participants anticipate what may happen in the common cause and try to make it happen by coordinating the ongoing activity reciprocally. In this coordination participants reflexively identify what each of them should or can do, and they don't know everything that is going on in the common activity. Thus, even though the result of the work is anticipated, the result may prove itself to be more or less irrelevant when working on it and it may become relevant to redo or rework anything possibly including the anticipated result of the work. Therefore, to get a broader grip on what goes on we must widen our understanding of the concrete causes in praxis mediating each other, and we cannot study them as isolated themes on their own.

We can, however, focus on problems participants in praxis are struggling with and their context, as well as the connected causes in praxis and their aspects. To understand the struggles we shall explore the contradictory and subjective aspects of praxis. The contradictory ones are about our relations to incompatibilities in our praxis, and the subjective ones are about how we as persons relate to our contradictory conditions.

The fact that participants don't know everything that is going on in their activity is not the only circumstance that forces us to broaden the grip, to learn how to do things. *Contradictions* come out of the concreteness in praxis, its different aspects, things, and relevancies. *Things and their different aspects in our life are not always compatible with our purposes. A thing contains contradictory aspects, it works in ways that don't go together. Therefore they need to be coordinated. Exactly this need for coordination gives an opportunity and direction for development in praxis* (Axel, 2011, Ollman, 2003). Further, there is no single way of coordinating contradictory conditions, but several ways. A truck removing the soil from a construction site may be too heavy to cross the pathway when moving in and out of the site. Thereby it damages the path it makes for itself. This constitutes a contradiction, the truck driver crossing the pathway with her heavy truck, damages what she drives on, thereby hindering herself and pedestrians in using the path. The contradiction encompasses the heavy truck and the ground that cannot carry it, and this gives a direction for what can be done without a definite solution. This contradiction appears regularly on construction sites and opens the possibility of developing new methods of handling the problem, e.g. of joining pieces of metal grids on each other. Commonly, the problem may be handled with further provisional techniques developed at other constructions sites. But it must also be stressed that each of these ways are varied according to available resources, and thereby developed at the concrete site.

Thus, contradictions, like damaging what we are using, force us to explore the connections in the particular common cause with all the concrete aspects, and the contradictions give

direction to the search to develop maybe new ways of doing things. Both these aspects make it necessary to make things work by exploring the situation according to current intentions, by modifying what we know about things and the rules for their use. We anticipate what must be done on the basis of our experience and the meaning of rules is understood on the basis of our anticipations in the common cause and what we thereby take their meaning to be. In this way rules are guidelines. *The subjective aspects: the explorations, anticipations, and finding the meaning of rules make each of us see our contradictory connections in praxis differently.* We act in and understand the general aspects of the concrete situation from a particular location and its contradictory conditions according to their relevance and meaning to us. We act from a personal perspective (Dreier, 2008). To tear down an old house with the intent of building a new one may by a passerby be understood as such. However, the passerby may, according to his relevancies, focus on the intent of tearing down and overlook the contradictory intent of building, or focus on something the constructors haven't thought of: the flora of the site being damaged and the consequences for the beehives in the neighborhood. Thus, each concrete act in, for example, a construction praxis, accounts for itself to a person. It accounts for itself in different ways in different contexts for different people with different relevancies, thereby inviting them to act in different ways – which also become entangled with others. The many concrete considerations in praxis make for unending possible outcomes in and of praxis; each way of understanding the tearing down may give occasion to different ways of acting. Further, the accountability of an act also includes an *ethical and moral evaluation*; do others judge the activity and the persons who performed it to be good? Is it a good thing to tear down the old house with its cultural value? Is the passerby a nuisance by wanting to stop the construction to save the flora of the site? Additionally, by forming an act, by tearing down a house, *participants reflexively form their own and the others' ability to participate and perceive in the common cause.* In a broad perspective this means that persons participate in other persons' formation, development, or learning.

The Aesthetic in Developing Contradictory Praxis

We shall now give arguments for attempting to bring the aesthetic back to praxis. This endeavor implies investigating the aesthetic and praxis by taking their reciprocal nature into consideration. A concept of praxis is a processual conception concerned with how things develop dialectically with concrete human activity. Our discussion of sensuous feeling, perceptual systems and praxis makes us see that *the aesthetic* appears from the sensuous aspects of praxis and its results, and from the way human beings find pleasure, excitement or disgust in their activities with things in praxis.

It is necessary to display a more precise demonstration of what makes the aesthetic experience appear. In architectural theory the aesthetic appearance of things - of buildings - has been related to the activities going on in them. The aesthetic experience has been discussed under the heading of, “form follows function,” without necessarily involving a theory of praxis and without reaching a definite conclusion. We shall sketch aspects of this question in order to point to involved aspects in the appearance of the aesthetic experience from praxis.

In architectural discussions some claim that functionality *is* aesthetic, others that the aesthetic has nothing to do with functionality (Hansson, 2005). An example of identifying the aesthetic and functionality comes from Richards (1958):

"It derives its nature from the acceptance by architects of the principle that the process of designing a building begins with a close analysis of the needs it is to serve. It has as its object the fulfillment of such needs as logically and economically as possible by taking full advantage of the means and materials available. Its aesthetic character is created by the same process.

Richards sees that the aesthetic is so dependent on function, that the pair becomes one. Such statements made Robert Venturi (1967) write that Orthodox Modern architects have a tendency to shove complexity and contradiction, and advocate purity (like the identification of form and function). According to Venturi, striving for purity could also lead to the separation of functions, "either-or". We can easily find examples of the separation of form and function. In some architectural books, houses are described solely from their aesthetic aspects. Erik P. Nash (1996), for example, writes about Falling Water only in aesthetic terms like: "... it is an exquisite expression of a dynamic flow of space in the multiform relationship between the verticals and horizontals." Such abstract aesthetic descriptions of houses are possible because the specific use of the home for its inhabitants is invisible or irrelevant for the reader and writer. Further, it is well known that Orthodox Modern architects were very controlling in how a house could be used, since some specific use would change its aesthetic appearance. The possibility of abstract aesthetic descriptions on one side and the change in the aesthetic when a thing is used in new combinations with other things on the other indicate that the connection, if any, between the aesthetic and use, between form and function, is loose. Furthermore, today it is a common experience to buy utensils because they are aesthetically pleasing and to find that they are not satisfactory in use. In such cases it may be the aesthetic that weakens the functionality (Good point). This phenomenon demonstrates that the aesthetic and functionality are indeed entangled; they can both further or hinder each other irrespective of whether the person relates only to one of the aspects. It is the nature of such relations that needs investigation if we are to properly discuss how the aesthetics appears in praxis.

In order to understand these relations better we shall look more into Robert Venturi's criticism of Orthodox Modern Architects, a criticism that had a part in introducing the postmodern design of buildings. As we have just seen, Venturi was against the conformity and separation in Orthodox Modern Architects' design. About form and function he declared in his book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture":

Though we no longer argue over the primacy of form or function (which follows which?), we cannot ignore their interdependence (p. 19)."

Venturi advocated complexity of meaning in architecture, and stressed the dialectics of context; context gives meaning to a design and the design changes its context. Lastly, he backed the concept of complexity of meaning in architectural design by quoting Cleanth Brooks' description of a poet's accomplishment:

"...an insight which preserves the unity of experience and which, at its higher and more serious levels, triumphs over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern (p.20)."

Venturi thereby connected the achievement of art and architectural design.

However, we can also find statements about architecture which goes against his own contextual, unifying approach: "I make no special attempt to relate architecture to other things (p. 14)." It appears as if Venturi wants to purify the theory of architecture, and it can therefore come as no surprise that his examination of architectural designs tend to be

solely about the interplay of forms from an aesthetic point of view like Nash' presented earlier.

As Venturi stated, we cannot ignore the interdependence of form and function, and we must acknowledge that it is important to connect art and architectural design. This is because architecture as art unites contradictions in experience into a new developed pattern. But in contrast to Venturi we argue that uniting contradictions involves exploring local possibilities in praxis according to current intentions. Therefore we cannot understand the nature of the interdependence of form and function as an isolated aspect of ongoing praxis.

We arrive at the following understanding of how the aesthetic is rooted in praxis. To form a thing aesthetically is the art of exploring possibilities in contradictory praxis in order to produce a coordinated result, where the way the result is coordinated also produces aesthetic experience. Mediated by the perceptual system, aesthetic experience can vary dialectically with all aspects of explorative praxis, and human beings toss it between them in a social as well as subjective process. A specific aspect of the aesthetic is sensuous feeling, e.g. pleasure, disgust, satisfaction or longing, tied to perceptual systems. The aesthetic varies from thing to thing, location to location, person to person. The aesthetic feeling is contextual.

The Aesthetic Experience is Historically Developed in the Perceptual System of the Body

To sum up: The aesthetic experience appears in all aspects of human activity, in its subjective, social and material relations. However, this doesn't mean that it is free-floating in the relations.

It is appearing for persons in their perceptual systems, and therefore it is a result of bodily activity. In the positivist theories of last mid-century it was common to understand the body in ways which separated body and mind, establishing a duality. Lock and Farquhar (2007) state that positivist theories saw the body proper as an unalterable unit carrying rights, biomechanics, consciousness, action, knowledge etc. The body could be inhabited by culture, not altered by it. However, it is now once more accepted that our bodies are formed by the social life we live.

Here, surprisingly, the older work of Merleau-Ponty's, "The Phenomenology of Perception" (1962), has had a broad impact. The book is about the concrete unity of the body moving and perceiving in space among things. In the introduction of the work he expounded the philosophical history of the problem, a variety of the mind-body dualism. From Descartes to his own era he described a movement in philosophy towards the body and the senses. With Descartes, mind and body got separated, human beings could doubt anything their senses told them, and the mind was isolated in its "I think therefore I am". Since anything in the senses can be doubted, it turned out to be a difficult problem to explain how our thoughts were connected with the world. With Kant, the body was partly introduced since he counted on the senses as a humanly specific access to the world. The senses offered fixed categories to perceive the world and with those we could construct our concepts, but then we did not see the world as it is. In continuation hereof, Merleau-Ponty introduced the transparent body moving in the world as the foundation for sensing it. This was the given, which couldn't be disrupted or made more transparent by conscious thought:

“Our relation to the world such as it tirelessly announces itself in us is not something that analysis can clarify (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, preface, lxxii)”.

Merleau-Ponty stresses that the world is always “already there” prior to reflection (ibid. lxx). He does not seem to focus on the spontaneous reflexivity of the senses, the fact that persons unintentionally modify them in their praxis. For example: as infants we learn to communicate our intentions, and inadvertently we form our hearing and our muscles with which we speak, to make the fine distinctions of our first language; when we learn to draw we learn to see in specific ways without intending it. This reflexivity of development can be grasped with the notion of self-relating-in-relation-to-otherness so that change comes about through internal development instead of through external determination (Farrell, 94) or the notion of changing-oneself-under-changing-conditions-to-stay-the-same (Axel, 2002). This means that the subjective reflexive relation of the motoric and perceptual systems to their environment is an aspect of social historical praxis. Another consequence of the reflexivity of the senses is that there are no absolute norms for aesthetics (Gadamer, 1964), for a good design. What is good aesthetic quality is contextual, and is thereby socially constituted and historical.

The Aesthetic Comes Out of Repeated Activities and can be Developed by Reflecting on It

The perceptual system forms itself in the body. This phenomenon is an inadvertent result of intentional activities like speaking, seeing, drawing, producing, designing. The aesthetic experience is contained therein. This raises the question of whether the aesthetic is intuitively given, and since it develops on its own, the question of stability, of how we recognize it, and of our possibility for developing it.

Can our aesthetic feeling only exist in a flow? Must we follow aesthetics where it takes us? Is it possible to direct our aesthetic feeling with our reason? Will we obstruct aesthetics by trying to direct it with our reason?

When developing something, all aspects of forming the result aren't necessarily in focus. When we focus on some aspects of praxis we may affect other systematic, but unintended consequences. This is a central characteristic of praxis, and this is valid for the aesthetic as well as other aspects of praxis. Along these lines, Ingold (2000) has demonstrated how the pleasing patterns of baskets come out of weaving the fibers; the form of the basket and its aesthetic patterns emerge through the arrangement of skilled movements.

But we are not left to the repercussions of the side effects of what we are doing, we may rework them to coordinate them in a better way. Once the aesthetic aspect of the productive activity has caught our attention, repeating the activity under other circumstances makes us able to focus on how to handle the aesthetic aspect. For example, in order to achieve a specific change in the shape and aesthetic of baskets we may experiment with different ways of weaving. This interplay of intent and side effects of material, form and aesthetic appearance, makes us understand why artists, with each other, discuss how to work with their materials more than they discuss how to achieve the aesthetic of the result. With this work they develop their sense of the aesthetic, which to many appears as intuition.

But most importantly we have introduced contradictions as a way of understanding how the new is developed. A concept of contradiction makes us able to see the possible directions of developing new results. We can incorporate the unexpected, rework it for our purposes and sensuous feeling. In the case of the truck crossing a pavement we saw how the contradiction of damaging what is used and the ugly aesthetic as an aspect thereof makes the participants explore the particular concrete aspects of the situation to make ends meet, to reorganize the situation, to unite contradictions in new workable results. Additionally, with contradictions we investigate what is available, what the social conditions are for developing something new.

Further, the concept of perceptual systems, of understanding perception not as passive reception but as an activity to find meaning or possibilities in the objects, makes us see that the production and use of objects are different aspects of the same activity. When we produce objects, we use objects to open new meanings and possibilities, when we use objects we produce meanings and possibilities for us and modify the objects according to use, if possible. This is also valid for aesthetic sense: our production and use of objects in aesthetic respect are differently prioritized aspects of the same activity.

We must understand perceptual systems and their aesthetic experience as an aspect of the broader concept of experience, related to Dewey (1929, 354f). Experience is the concrete unity of our past present and future being in the surrounding world. We have participated in previous situations with contradictions, contingent conditions and consequences, some of which appeared accidental to us, but may not appear so now. We have developed insights into the problems by exploring local contradictions, and are able to make use of what we thereby learned to find relevant future directions. Our insights come from previous experiences, and we may here and now for different reasons have to abstain from opportunities for acting, but may have the ability of deliberating and producing directions for what could be done. With the concept of contradiction we can grasp what goes on in praxis mediated by repeated activities in wide spans of locations and time. We must know what we can do with objects and each other, coming here from other places. Even though we know something about them, we don't always know where they came from, how they came into being, and how we should make them work in similar connections to those in which they were made. Here we must explore our relations with them and use what is available to us, our motoric and perceptual systems, our acquired abilities as an aspect of our experience to expand our abilities to make them work in their connections.

The more we experience repeated, widespread, connected, specific activities from different perspectives, the more differentiated insight we possess of what to do. This is also valid for our aesthetic experience or sense. When we only know one case, we see it as unique, but when we note many variations of the case, the mediation between the variations make us find stability in them, we discover a *style*. For example, the more variations of houses made in the same way we experience the more our sense of style deepens.

However, the division of labor in the repeated activities opens up regular aesthetic experience from different perspectives based on participants' previous experience and actual relevance. For example, an architect who has designed houses and participated in their construction will find aesthetic experiences in her productive activity, in how her shop has worked together to select and arranged the materials and functionality of the house, and how this varies contemporary constructions, materials and shapes of other

buildings. She will appreciate other houses on the basis of her professional experience; her appreciation will be different from other architects due to their professional experience. Further, due to her experience and relevancies, her appreciation of a house she has designed will be different from the users of the house. They will appreciate the house from what it signifies in their everyday use. For both participants the appreciation will be more or less tied to their perspectives on producing or using the house. Each will have the possibility of developing and negotiating with participants to integrate and mediate the different perspectives based on mainly production or mainly use.

With the aesthetic we see a similar interdependence between the social and subjective as with meanings. We have argued that aesthetic styles come out of repeated widespread activities on common conditions, and hinted at their historicity and change. For example, the aesthetic of the community centre can be seen from a social perspective, since it was developed from a play with the materials of the church and industrial simplicity without adornments. As such it is a compound style coming out of repeated variations on the interplay between old and contemporary forms, materials and constructions. On the other hand it can be seen as a subjective, particular arrangement by the architects' drawing office, and as such it is a characteristic design, where in the social style we can find specific variations pointing back to the design activity of the drawing office.

We have seen the aesthetic as coming out of widespread social activities in contradictory and surprising praxis. It develops in subjective explorations, reflections and activities under local, mediated conditions.

The Aesthetic and Motivation, Ethics, and Politics in Praxis

However, if we only identify the aesthetic as a social and subjective aspect of praxis, it may appear as an incidental aspect thereof. But since human beings are prepared to dedicate their life to the aesthetic in art and design, we must also identify what makes it so important. We shall therefore end our theoretical discussion by deliberating how the aesthetic becomes part of the motivational, ethical and political aspects in praxis.

Gadamer (1964) made the aesthetic a part of these aspects of praxis by stating that we must see the aesthetic as one access among others to the meanings in praxis. He claimed that through our aesthetic formation we access the meaning of art as a call to change our life. Although he disregarded other functions of art like confirming what is, what has been, he pointed to a central connection between the aesthetic and praxis. Inspired by Gadamer, Silvia Gherardi (2009) has claimed that practice is a matter of taste. She lends the aesthetic a central function by declaring that it appears to be the aspect of praxis which constitutes the principle with which we perform judgments in order to act in a good way. This is contrasted with the more moderate assertion, that the aesthetic nourishes the sense of how to go on, of motivation. The understanding is parallel to the one of Critical Psychology, where Holzkamp (83) has identified emotion as an evaluation of the environmental conditions for action possibilities. A concept of aesthetic experience helps us to connect our sensations, be they aesthetic or emotional, to bodily sensuous feeling and their meaning for our social activities.

There is no doubt, that the aesthetic can be motivating, as when a child with awe sees an excavator in action and wants to become an operator of such machines. However, we must argue that the awe is only one among many motivating aspects in the praxis. The awe may

come from the significance of the work and the virtuosity with which the operator masters the machinery and it may be the significance and mastery which motivates the child. These considerations imply that the aesthetic and its impact in praxis are reciprocally formed by and form other aspects of praxis.

In the example of the truck drivers crossing a pathway, we can see how contradictions give direction to the motivated response of which the aesthetic experience is an aspect. The mud in the damaged path can be taken as a disgusting sign of the damage to the path, thus being part of what motivates the participants to organize some remedy for the damage.

In the case of the house being pulled down we can see that the subjective perspective based on relevance plays a part in the formation of the aesthetic experience. The decision to pull down a house can be seen as productive and motivating, when one focuses on the functionality and the aesthetic of the new house and what can be accomplished with it. The decision can be seen as unproductive and provoke resistance when one focuses on the functionality and the aesthetic of what is damaged.

We will use the short story "Before the Law" by Kafka as an example of how aesthetic contradictions direct us towards central motivational, ethical and political issues in our social life. Kafka uses, literarily, the aesthetic invitation of an architectural detail: an open gate. The specific sense of an impressive court gate is the core of the short story. There is an entrance to the law, an open gate never closed but with a guard in front of it. A person from the countryside arrives at the gate and wants to enter and appear before the court. He is stopped by the guard, begs to be allowed to enter, is told to do so but also that there will be other gates with other guards. The man from the countryside decides to wait until he is allowed to enter. He stays there for many years. Just before he dies he is told the gate was for him, and it is closed. Kafka builds the short story on the material contradiction between the invitation of the open gate to *walk in* and the guard making the visitor *stay outside*. But the material contradiction is mediated in words and mostly played out between the tall guardian and small person. The contradiction is used aesthetically, the man from the countryside is attracted and spellbound by the invitation of the gate to the court behind it, and the guard tries the man's painful patience. To the reader the waiting is absurd and incomprehensible. We can see how the aesthetic experience of gates and guards can be accounted for as an aspect of ongoing – or arrested – development in our social life. In the question of whether the man from the countryside should have acted on his call for justice and entered the gate, or whether he should have respected the guard's command on behalf of the court that he should leave the initiative to the court, we find issues of taking action, of respect for authorities and political consequences thereof.

Kafka's short story does not tell us directly what to do, but the question: why doesn't the person enter? hints at ways the problem could be answered: the man from the countryside could have taken action on his call for justice and respected the court and its decision on certain conditions. This integration of contradictory perspectives makes us see an outline of good aesthetics: they come out of the integration of form, materials, and resources and their interplay with the integration of motivational, ethical and political issues.

Good aesthetics may not always touch on so fundamental themes in our life, but can always play with the meaning of things. In architecture, common social activities are mediated by material forms, e.g. the entrance is a much varied form, playing in many ways on the meaning of entry. For example, Castles and churches are furnished with

impressive entrances, we could say, to mark the right of public institutions to impose themselves on people. Contrary to this, in many of Frank Lloyd Wright's private houses the entrance is hidden, we could say, to mark the difference between open public and closed private sphere.

Gathering Insights and Understandings of the Aesthetic Appearance of the Community Centre

With this theoretical demonstration of aesthetic experience as an aspect of praxis we shall turn to our empirical material. We shall examine a conflictual cooperation over a design proposal for a square in front of a community centre and see how the aesthetic was a key aspect of the process. (Axel, 2009; Hermansen, 2015). We followed the project from the day the client signed the contract to the day the house was delivered to the client. Our material consists of observations noted down, interviews, some of which are transcribed, drawings, minutes, accounts and occasional material we found during our sessions in the project. In this discussion of the material we focus on how the landscape architect designed the square in front of the parish community centre in collaboration with other professionals and the client.

We followed the client meetings where the different professionals presented and discussed their work with each other, the client and client's consultant. Our focus included the process of decisions. Some of the observation sessions were followed by interviews that focused on concrete issues from the meetings and conversations and the development of the site. We also simply conversed with participants, sometimes in the car when we drove back from the meetings together with the project manager and the architect.

To understand the aesthetic contextually and to understand the conditions for its development, we must take point of departure in the complexity of praxis, its contradictions, contingencies and accidental aspects, as well as in our identification of the general implication of particularities. With Ingold we saw that the way we do something has unexpected implications, some of which we may take into consideration to develop further (for example pleasing aesthetic aspects). This doesn't point to the unity of form and function, but to their many-sided interrelation in praxis. For example, when an architect chooses a material, he has the option of choosing a way of production and thereby opens some aesthetic possibilities and closes others down, or when he has to design a room, he must accept that it can have many functions, residence, passage, intimacy, public display, etc.

Empirical Material: The Discussion about the Square

For our presentation we have selected an episode where the design of a square was under discussion between participants. In a succession of design meetings we witnessed a fundamental change of the aesthetics of the square based on participants' different priorities.

We conducted an interview with the landscape architect before she was to present her design at a meeting with the clients. She told us her design was based on a document for the architectural competition, where the clients described the house they wanted. She also underlined how she must make the square and path fit together with the environment and

the architects' vision of the project, and how she must coordinate the design with the arrangements and resources of the project.

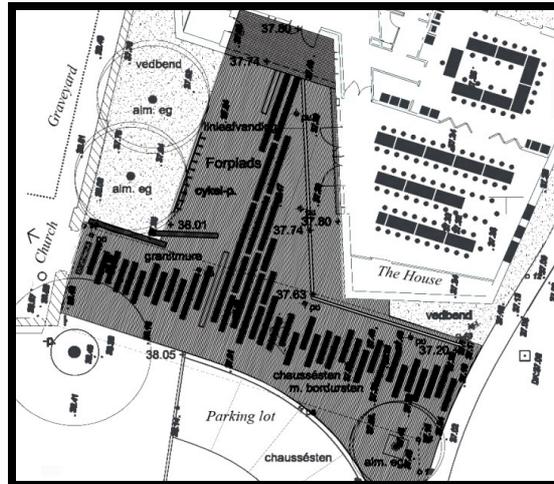


Figure 1

At the following meeting with the clients the landscape architect presented her design (fig. 1). The architects wanted the centre painted white, imitating the white washed church and the old farmhouses on the local road. Inspired by the materials of the path leading from the church to the parking lot and the street, the landscape architect suggested cobblestones on the square and borderstones marking where to go. She carefully explained the use, possibilities and economy of the project. The clients appeared to like the project. However, the clients' consultant immediately declared it was too expensive, and, after the meeting, made the clients align with him and send a letter to the landscape architect demanding a cheaper proposal.

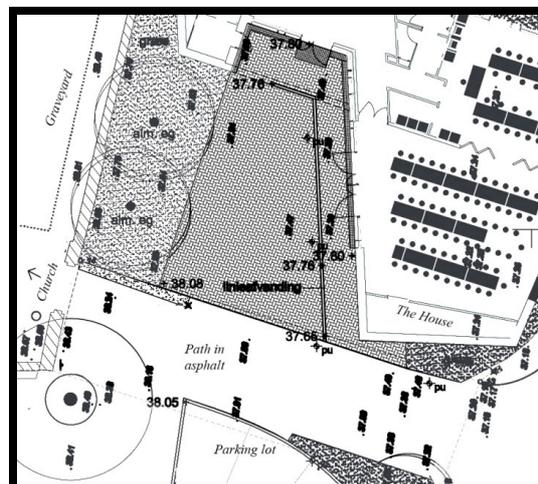


Figure 2

The landscape architect produced a second proposal (fig. 2). Now she used asphalt on the path, industrial stones on the square in front of the centre, thus saving money for the project. Interestingly, she defended the new design claiming that the asphalt and stones would give a better walking comfort that she herself would prefer. The clients observed that among the parishioners you would not find many women walking on high heels. She also claimed that the industrial stones would blend in with the color of the house. We

could say that now the general impression would be an interplay between the industrial stones, and the modern design of the house being unique and industrially produced at the same time. Thus the aesthetic appearance of the square had completely changed and the designer defended it as a good solution under the given resources. It did not play on the historical and religious aspects of the environment as the first proposal did, but fit into the modern house and its industrial construction.

However, the financial crisis made other priorities possible, and the expensive solution was chosen by the clients. Thus the financial crisis in society made it possible to get more for the money. Since the design could have become fundamentally different, the actual result could be called accidental. But the result is not only accidental; it is also a necessary result of the discussions of the compound principles of the design. The aesthetic of a design is a mediation of relevant aspects in praxis. In her first proposal the landscape architect integrated aspects except resources. The clients were able to finally afford it when the financial crisis made it possible to integrate the needed resources in the design.

How the Professionals form the Aesthetic in the Mediations in Praxis

This observation of a discussion among participants in a common cause, the design for the square in front of the community centre will now be contextualized further and examined. We shall investigate the aesthetic as mediations between different aspects of praxis. We shall use the examples of how the aesthetic of the community centre and the square appears as mediations between different perspectives on the common cause, how the aesthetic appears as mediations between the way things are done, between their meanings, and activities.

First, in order to understand the design of the landscape architect, we shall expound how the square took shape from deliberations about how to form the house. In this process the aesthetic appears in related ways from different participants' perspectives.

The client had set up a competition for a house to accommodate religious, cultural, and administrative purposes. In the invitation they stressed that the site of the house was close to the medieval church.

The architects who won the competition sent an architect to the site before the design process. He walked around the church and its vicinity to get an idea of the "genius loci," as he said. This amounted to identifying the context of the centre to be built. He took pictures of the whitewashed church, old whitewashed farmhouses nearby, the ground for the center besides the church, parks, etc. Through these pictures the architects saw that the house could be situated half way between the contemporary, secular world and the historical clerical one (fig.1).

In this way the designers took point of departure in the client's specifications. In their work the architects spelled out, in more detail than the clients, the use of the house: they had to provide for a kitchen, rest rooms; clerical and cultural use. In order to get an idea of the functionality there were discussions with clients mostly in the beginning of the design process. But after this the architects wanted to work undisturbed by users, who tended to think up alterations during the design process. At a point in time they were in doubt about the design and held a meeting in their drawing office, also summoning colleagues not working on the project.

When the landscape architect entered the project, she completed the square in front of the house. First with a design playing with the materials on the religious site, it proved expensive, and then she came up with a design playing with the aesthetic appearance of modern materials of the house according to the resources available. She defended each design as best as she could.

From this sketch of the process we see several things related to Gherardi's notion of praxis regulated on aesthetic and ethical principles. First, there is an aesthetic aspect in the vision of the house and how the professionals mediate the client's and their own aesthetic perspectives, changing both in the course of events. Next, we find an aesthetic aspect in the way things were done, how the architects attentively closed the clients' influence on the project and how the landscape architect carefully explained her two proposals. Lastly, the design process is an open one, it may go in many directions driven by the interplay of materials, production, resources and political issues of distribution, and there is an aesthetic aspect in how unplanned initiatives must be given time in order to regulate the process.

We have identified aesthetic aspects in the form of a design process observed. However, it was moving towards a result. The future result, the house, can be given many forms, but when finished its form can only be changed and negotiated on a large time scale according to developing use, and on a smaller scale its meaning can be changed. There are different meanings according to our subjective relevance and how they are mediated on the site. We must therefore investigate the contextual relation between meaning and the aesthetic, and since a house comprises many functions, we must work with composite meanings. We found one composite and contradictory pair of meanings, which the design of the house evolved around. The architects argued that the house would be situated half way between the contemporary secular world with many functions and the historical clerical one, appearing as directed towards a spiritual purpose.

In relation to this pair the form of the centre was divided into sections according to its secular functions and designed to be irregular and asymmetric to make known, to the onlooker, the divisions of contemporary secular life, and the white painted bricks of the centre coupled it with the whitewashed church announcing that it belonged to religious life. In this way the contradictory meanings of the location played together in a new way in its aesthetic appearance.

To the architects, the future placement of a centre wing was difficult to decide. They had to discuss what the placement would mean for the users. They discussed this at the meeting mentioned above incorporating colleagues not on the project. A wing near the entrance (fig. 1) was to hold a hall for public use. We were informed that originally the architects had deliberated where to locate the wing without coming to a solution. Should they locate it along the stone-wall to the churchyard or along the local road? They felt that opening the square to the road made the centre turn its back upon the church and placing the wing on the side of the road would turn its back upon the secular world. The result of the discussion was to place the wing along the road. They saw that the future churchgoer would walk on the path between the contradiction of the sacred church and its call for the perspective of eternity, and the secular world and its timely issues. Halfway, they would be invited into the center, mediating the contradictions. Thus the location of the centre had an enticing aesthetic appearance.

The aesthetic invitation was enhanced by the shape of the square located between the path and the entrance of the centre. In fig. 1 the reader can see how the architects formed the square as an invitation by giving it a trapezoid shape. Its long base is the path leading from the local road up to the portal in the wall enclosing the graveyard around the church. The grass in front of the wall on the one side and the hall wing of the community centre on the other side are the legs of the trapezoid. The entrance forms the farthest and shortest side of the trapezoid, thus the legs of the trapezoid narrow invitingly in towards the entrance of the community centre.

We saw how the landscape architect completed the square with two designs, both in continuation of the architects' design. We shall examine a little closer her sensual arrangement of the materials on the square in the first design. Her use of borderstones marked where to go on the path. They were laid out as steppingstones, inviting you to walk between two worlds contradicting each other. The elongation of the borderstones, where they face the entrance of the mediating centre, puts you into yet another contradiction, sets you in a situation, where you cannot do two things at the same time. We can see how the aesthetic appearance of the borderstones encourage our perceptual system: A child would maybe run along the curved edge of the borderstones on one side and end up entering the house, or it might follow their zig-zagging edge on the other side, thereby moving between the clerical and secular worlds at the two ends of the path. A grown-up walking on the path would maybe "let the eye run along" the curved path and thus get a mediated sense of being invited to change direction by the particular way the stones are laid out.

As we have seen aesthetic experience is commonly understood as existing as something in itself, being subjective, private and sensory. Also, it is often connected to letting the emotions direct our activity and setting reason aside. This opens the question of the relation between the aesthetic experience and emotions. Earlier we stated that the aesthetic experience was related to emotional experience. On this remark we set up a preliminary differentiation. Emotions and the aesthetic experience are aspects of praxis. The aesthetic experience is about sensing things and activities through perceptual systems, about *how* things invite us to use and produce them and about how we use and produce them. Emotions are about locating ourselves in relation to our lives, they are about its *content*.

Thus our examination of the square is an argument for understanding aesthetic experience as a social process based on perceptual systems. We have defended that aesthetic experience is about being directed, enticed, attracted, and invited to activities through the appearance of things and activities, or about setting up things and activities to this effect.

Aesthetic experience can be immediate as in the case of the child running along borderstones and not connecting this activity to anything but the pleasure of it. But there are mediations even in this spontaneous activity, the sight of the socially produced edges of the borderstones are mediating the way the child runs, and it is in this coordinated activity that pleasure can be found.

However, mostly the aesthetic experience appears from mediations. The way the landscape architect drew up the edges of the borderstones can be understood as a mediation of the childish aesthetic experience. Further, in words we can mediate aesthetic experience from our perceptual systems as in Kafka's story. Here the aesthetic experience of the invitation of the gate is qualified by the relation between the tall and imposing guard and the smaller man from the countryside.

The mediations in our perceptual systems include a varying degree of our previous experience, also comprising what we have learned from other people. We cannot help including meanings in our aesthetic experience; sometimes we feel that intended meanings from designers disturb our relation to what our sensuous feeling means to us. However, our aesthetic experience is supported and becomes enriched by taking intended meanings into consideration in a similar way as here, where we were presented with the designers' intended meanings.

In this process of enrichment of meanings the aesthetic experience does not become unequivocal. Neither does it become ambivalent in the sense of undecidable meanings, arresting directions of acts. The aesthetic experience shifts according to relevance, like the meaning and experience of the path from church to road shifts according to where the passerby intends to go. The shifts according to relevance may be conflictual, sometimes confusing, when the person does not have sufficient access in order to give priority to a relevant direction, or may open up for integration of meanings, like the aesthetic appearance of the community centre.

We may sum up by stating that the aesthetic experience is an aspect of praxis and its meanings, ethics, art, and politics. If the aspects of praxis are taken into account in one way or other, contemplating and reflecting on the aesthetic is meaningful and productive. In this way the aesthetic experience is refined by experience with the aesthetic and opens up possibilities for integrated activities.

Concluding Summary

An empirical observation of an architectural design process made us see that we cannot understand aesthetic as isolated perceptual enjoyment. Since we observed that aesthetic designs were tossed between designers, a concept of praxis was introduced to see the aesthetic as a phenomenon in and between persons. We therefore developed an understanding of the aesthetic as produced in the project where professionals and users organized themselves to produce a building for future use.

To open for the concept of praxis we identified the aesthetic as the sensuous experience in what Gibson termed perceptual systems, and since motoric and perceptual systems are of the same family, but with different priorities, aesthetic experience is all over in praxis (body, activities, relations, experience etc.). This means that the aesthetic experience is a sensuous way of relating to how the meaning of things make them relevant for our active participation in praxis, and including a motivational aspect.

Praxis is the way we keep our lives together. We develop praxis in our subjective relation to the contradictory conditions. We act on relevance, on what the things mean to us. Meanings and their aesthetic experience are reflexively developed in praxis. With Ingold, we argued that the aesthetic emerges from our relations in praxis to the dialectical interplay between materials, functions, forming and use of resources, sometimes intended, sometimes unintended. Meanings and the aesthetic are contextually, historically, and socially developed and we learn them.

We then tried to identify some limits for development and learning in the bodily side of praxis. Discussing Merleau-Ponty's conception of our relation to the world, which cannot be clarified by analysis, we found that perceptual systems all the same modify themselves with their activity. Having identified aesthetics as connected to persons through their

bodies and social activities, we discussed how the aesthetic comes out of repeated activities and can be developed by reflecting on it.

On this basis our main contribution has been to show that the aesthetic as a sensuous experience in perceptual systems is an aspect of participation in praxis. It emerges as a coordinated result in social praxis, where participants act in their subjective perspectives on a common cause. The aesthetic can be found in all aspects of praxis; in the way the process is handled, in the result, in the use of the result, etc.. When designing a thing, participants take the aesthetic experiences from other perspectives into account, as much as the division of labor allows. The aesthetic appears in praxis from reflexive mediations of ethical, political and design aspects. We found that the square from the empirical material is shaped by professional considerations in praxis of the contradictions of secular and religious meanings and of the resources, materials and production going into it. The aesthetic experience of the square is mediated dialectically by all this.

The aesthetic must be understood from its particular emergences in praxis, since on the one hand it is a mediation of extended social activities, like contemporary industrial production or contemporary reconstruction of old crafts, and, on the other, a particular design under particular conditions. The particular design of the square was a conditioned choice between two necessary designs.

In this way we have taken the aesthetic away from isolated considerations and brought it back to praxis. Managing contradictions and their coordination in praxis is not only central, but the key to a fruitful, ongoing collaborative process. To acknowledge design as a collaborative effort opens up for a more reciprocal activity when we design, or use designs, or cooperate with architects designing a house for us.

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