



HDK – Högskolan för design och konsthantverk

Embodying Openness

A Pragmatist Exploration into the Aesthetic Experience of Design Form-Giving

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the tension between a reflective view of design and design as an embodied, aesthetic experience. Most research exploring the nature of design follows a tradition of practice-based design research, which aims to empirically establish what constitutes design by studying what designers do and say. The challenge with this observational approach is that it depends on design as an object of study and can therefore only deal with its rational or cognitive dimension. The inherently aesthetic and subjective dimension of the immediate perception of designing remains largely unexplored in design research.

To address this lack of research, this project builds on the Classical Pragmatist non-dualistic view of experience and knowledge. In particular, drawing on Dewey's thesis in *Art as Experience*, I explore the embodied, aesthetic dimension of design through investigating in detail *my* experience of the activity of form-giving. This methodological perspective maintains continuity between thinking-feeling in action and in terms of subject-object relations.

From this non-dualist view, I critique the specific claim made by researchers and design practitioners who advocate that designers exhibit an attitude of *openness* that contributes to creativity. Assuming that openness is a quality that can be felt, I ask how this quality is felt in my experience of designing, and what openness means practically with regard to direct sensory and physical engagement and what it conceptually means in the way a designer approaches the world.

To explore an integrated experience of designing in the present, I follow an artistic method of movement improvisation called Butoh. Butoh provides a specific context of inquiry for exploring perceptual and physical engagement in the present through a heightened state of somatic awareness. The empirical work is comprised of four direct experiences from my Butoh training that are examined through the lens of Pragmatism and embodied cognition. Together, they show how I actually engage my 'self' through concrete sensory, emotional, and feelingful frames of experience of form-giving in the present.

This research makes theoretical and methodological contributions through developing an embodied, aesthetic perspective of practice-based and artistic approach to design. It suggests the potential of *openness-capacity* as a concept for understanding and actually practicing the type of creative approach attributed to a designer's attitude of openness. It provides a critique of rational mechanisms underlying the contexts of design inquiry, as well as having practical implications for design education and the kinds of teaching and learning that support the creative, self-directed, exploratory capacities of designers.