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The completed drawing

By Anette Højlund

How does form come into existence? This is one of the questions behind the title of my PhD thesis, which reads, “How does drawing imagine the world?” The idea of the thesis is that drawings draw the world to come, i.e.: Drawing establishes new forms in the world. The drawing process is a set-up for genesis; it is the premises and possibilities of this scene that I investigate in my PhD project.

In creative processes, the unexpected often emerges, but in drawing processes it is especially noticeable that the object the draughtsman is creating – the drawing – gives something back. Something appears that one did not know of before drawing it. It is the same thing we experience in the thought process: Something appears in the *act* of thinking. This analogy is the reason for the metaphorical title of my thesis.

The executive order for the Danish Design School states that we teach design on an artistic basis. What ‘the artistic basis’ might be is not specified. We commonly understand the term ‘artistic’- in connection to design – as referring to more or less well-defined terms such as gut feeling/experiment/things that the maker does for his or her own pleasure/something especially beautifully done. In my thesis, I understand the artistic as a process, and as far as possible I look at it from the point of view of the creator. In this way, I hope to contribute to clarify the role of the artistic in design contexts.

A big part of my project deals with trying to understand the irrationality that is characteristic of artistic processes: To describe that which appears, even though one does not know where it comes from. The thing that happens when one is drawing. One of my ideas is that to be able to generate form, it is necessary to indulge in indefinable expectations – which are indeed very irrational terms to do research under. To be able to argue for and throw light on the necessity of indulgence and expectation, I study in depth how drawing processes take place. During my investigations, I enter into a dialogue with philosophers, who have discussed the issues regarding the genesis of form.

An interesting question in relation to drawing and the genesis of form is when is the drawing completed? How does it appear – and how and when does one know that it is finished? One might think that the draughtsman has an already completed image in his or her mind, and that it is this image he or she will end up drawing. If this were the case, the answer would be easy: When the drawing resembles the image in the mind, the drawing is completed. But in practice things are not like that. Instead of an image (and what *is* an ‘image in the mind’, after all?), perhaps the draughtsman has in his mind an undefined expectation, a faint vision, or a sensation. Often – no, I should say always – things turn out differently than the draughtsman expected. Either less is happening: The drawing is not falling into place - or more is happening: The drawing reveals something one did not expect. And this is, in fact, exactly what one is up to: That the drawing reveals something, so that what one had vaguely in mind clearly reveals itself – or even better: That something one did not know of, offers itself as a possibility.

But when, might one ask, is this unexpected experience completed? The fact that something is completed may seem accidental, just as accidental as the beginning of something often seems. In that moment, when the first line is placed on the paper, one is for a very short while out of oneself. The same sentiment applies to the finalization: In a split second, one realizes that the drawing is completed. In a discussion concerning the original¹ structure of the artwork, the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, interprets Aristotle’s point that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.² If one makes an analogy from this to a drawing (i.e., the object) it will mean that: A drawing is not just the result of the paper (or any other surface), the lines, the hand, the movement, etc. put together. It is impossible to understand the whole by reducing it to its component parts - there always exists something ‘more’. This ‘more’, which causes the whole to be more than the sum of its parts, must be, Aristotle wrote, something radically other, that is, not an element that exists in the same way as other elements do, but rather something that may only be found by leaving the endless parting into smaller elements, and thereby enter into a more

¹ Original = as it was conceived in Antiquity

² Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Stanford University Press, 1999

essential dimension. Aristotle described this dimension as ‘the cause of existence’ – the principle that provides the origin for and maintains everything that exists. This cause is not any material element, it is ‘form’.

In the drawing process, form is generated over time. One idea of time is that it is an uninterrupted series of moments. When time is shown as a process, the illustration is often a line, and on this line events are noted as points. The points create a rhythm in the flow of time. If the time line was enlarged, we would see points referring to smaller and smaller events, and every single point would represent a change. In the same way, the conception of the rhythm would change; one might perhaps perceive it as faster. If we make an analogy to drawing (i.e., the process) and regard the completed drawing as an event on the line, then by enlarging the line one would be able to see countless minor events leading to the finished drawing. The draughtsman constantly shifts between acting and viewing; the draughtsman is constantly either ‘in’ the drawing or outside of it. Decisions concerning the direction in which the drawing must develop and how this might be done has to be made continuously. The shifts can be more or less conscious. If the draughtsman lean back to evaluate the drawing, in order to decide if there is more that must be done, he/she obviously finds him/herself in the role of the viewer. But mostly, the shifts are not noticed, rather they are a vibration or an oscillation where the draughtsman is not aware of when he/she is acting or when he/she is viewing. Drawing may be described as a rhythmical exchange between action and deliberation.

Georgio Agamben introduces the idea that rhythm – as a term - introduces a split in the flow of time, and that this split represents a dimension of non-time. *“Rhythm grants men both the ecstatic dwelling in a more original dimension and the fall into the flight of measurable time”* (Agamben, p.100). Here, the more original time is to be understood as time without time – and this is incomprehensible to us. The incomprehensible condition, where we are held back but at the same time in ekstasis, because we experience being present in a more original time, is the basis of the creative forces of human beings. Rhythm offers humans *“.. the gift of being and nothingness ..”* (ibid.). A talent – and at the same time a gift – because it is only when based on ‘nothingness’ that ‘being’ can exist. Rhythm both gives and holds

back. With Agamben, I would thus say that rhythm contains an expectation of something to come.

If we return to the drawing process, where the draughtsman constantly finds him/herself in a movement between acting and viewing, and we then imagine this as a series of events: an event takes place when the draughtsman is viewing, and when he/she is acting. But what exists in the shift between the events, in the jump from one state to the other? Draughtsmen talk about time disappearing when they draw; 'one forgets time and place', 'one loses oneself in the drawing', or one 'forgets oneself' while drawing. Without doubt, time is actually *experienced* in a different way in the drawing process – as it, incidentally, may be experienced in other creative processes, too. Most likely, it is because the kind of time that Agamben calls 'the more original time' dominates the experience, and maybe this gap in time is what lies behind the jump between the two states. I suggest that it is from this gap the drawing grows, and that it is in this gap the draughtsman realizes that the drawing is completed.

When asking 'when is the drawing completed?', one also has to ask: Is a drawing only completed when it is good? The answer must be, no. Endless is the number of drawings completed, where the creator still considers them bad or not good enough. Compared to the expectation, failed drawings are not completed. Perhaps what characterises the failed drawings is that the parts – the paper and the traces of the tool - remain parts. In the unsuccessful drawings, the more - that which leads to experiencing the drawing as 'living', the more 'that' makes the drawing a drawing, a 'drawing-form' - is not present. Maybe we do not experience form *before* something is living. The form does not come first – after which we consider whether it is living or dead. No: Form is only living - and form - *when and as* it is form, that is: The form of which the draughtsman had an expectancy.

Among drawing teachers there is an expression going, 'the drawing has been worked too hard'. The drawing has been worked on to such a degree that it has 'collapsed' or 'died'. We might say things like this when assessing a student's drawing. So the issue is to make sure that the drawing does not collapse, but stands, that it lives, not dies. The term 'living' is a metaphorical expression used of

the drawing. By doing so, we imbue it with the same characteristics as something, which is biologically living. What characterizes a biologically living thing is that it exists in itself. It has its own substance; it has its own cause, although it is a cause also determined by a context or relation. And even though we are able to map it until a certain point, there is still something mysterious about its origin.

The draughtsman can be more or less aware of what he or she is looking for in the drawing, but his or her expectancy is always questioned. When the drawing is finished – and good – it is because the expectancy has been met. This is why people practicing drawing are able to say that a drawing is completed – and good – in the moment it is completed. A bad drawing – collapsed, dead, worked on too much, non-intense etc. – does not provide the draughtsman with an experience of (the ‘expected’/vaguely felt) form, and neither, in addition to this, the experience of life. A completed, but bad, drawing usually leaves the draughtsman unsatisfied. In this way, desire is connected to the process as well. A good drawing makes us see and experience life, and that is what we want: We prefer life to death any time, or else we would have died a long time ago. Good drawings – and here I do not refer to the categories of beautiful/ugly, but rather to those of necessary/unnecessary at a certain point in time – are met with responses and satisfaction. Bad drawings are not.

The drawing is completed when the draughtsman sees and senses the form, i.e. experiences that specific ‘other’, which makes the parts work with ‘more’, and which simultaneously meets a more or less clearly formulated expectancy. Still I must ask myself: Have I answered the question “When is the drawing completed?” I am not sure. Maybe it should stay a riddle, a secret remaining in the time pocket of expectancy, a secret we may speak about and investigate, as I have done here, but that we may not reveal. Because then we might stop drawing.

Becoming a creating draughtsman is not only about training the ability of seeing and of motor coordination. It is also about training the ability of devoting oneself to expectancy. There is a distinction between one the one hand seeing and drawing what one expected, and on the other hand to be in a state of expectancy. If one draws what one expected, nothing new will appear, and no aesthetic process will

take place when drawing. Contrary to this, it is the state of expectancy - and the expectancy of *more* – that what is at stake in an artistic process.