

Abstract:

Understanding the aesthetic process, a biographical approach

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Telling ones life-story or shaping ones biography is clearly an artistic activity (akin to story-telling, poetry and sculpture) and, following the philosopher Friedrich Schiller, this activity is the central quality that our individuality exhibits. Thus the full scope of art in education can begin to surface.

Schillers thinking provides the framework in which we can tell individuality and identity/biography apart. This explains how even severe injuries and disabilities that effect and circumscribe ones identity are not injuries to the individuality as such. It also provides a framework for working with, and understanding, processes of identity that are both strongly self-oriented and strongly communal. Perhaps most importantly it explains how artistic activity works to improve the sense of coherence and general well-being of a person. This, in turn, allows the development of an educational concept where schools as institutions are meant to provide what on the one end of a spectrum amounts to the healing of biographical fragmentation through artistic activity and on the other to develop ways of learning that include artistic activity thereby adding to biographical integrity and flourishing instead of subtracting.

Finally, by working with Schillers aesthetic philosophy it becomes possible to understand, and to systematically explore, aesthetic environments (environment here denoting both structure and external aesthetic processes such as listening to music). Using a study of the bookbinding at the Kristofferschool as well as some reflections drawn from the processes involved in the building of the Crafts-house there, two aspects of aesthetic environments will be discussed. One is the sense in which they are a reversal from the inside out of individuality, given that the individuality is our aesthetic capacity ie. our capacity to interpret and give meaning. Aesthetic environments thus come to meet an inner process of individuality with the same process from outside with all the implications that follow. The other aspect of aesthetic environments is an important part in developing a concept of what an aesthetic environment is. Creating an aesthetic object is necessarily a biographical process and aesthetic environments can be expected to carry a strong element of biographical flourishing for those involved in their creation. The aesthetic environment thus shows itself to have the same relation between visible environment and invisible process of creation that exists between individuality and identity/biography.

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