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Architecture as thriving

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Photo on the front cover: Magnus Rönn.
The photo show artistic design from an introduction course for students in architecture, called A1, at Chalmers University of Technology.

ARCHITECTURE AS THRIVING – IN SEARCH OF "THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME"

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Abstract

This article explores the everyday use of architectural objects, conceiving the purpose of architecture to be the support of everyday wellbeing – of "thriving". The approach combines Bateson's concept of "meta-communication" with Scruton's Wittgenstein-based architectural aesthetics. To describe architecture as an act of "thriving" is to propose that everyday architecture makes it possible for its users to 'enunciate' their experience of the fluency of their shared occupancy of the architecture that constitutes their surroundings. Thriving is thus defined as a socially habituated and mostly unconscious and non-verbalized "quality without a name" (to borrow Alexander's notion). We examine the empirical implications of this theoretical argument by exploring the practices of residents in a newly built apartment block in the inner city of Helsinki, Finland. The empirical research uses autoethnography and observations, photographs, interviews, social media discussion, and planning and design documents as its primary methodology and sources of data.

Introduction

Many old buildings and townscapes, and also some new ones, are considered to constitute "good" architecture. But what is it in those environments that makes us appreciate them? A special aesthetic quality? Christopher Alexander (1979) poses that there is no answer to this question; instead, he speaks of "a quality without a name".

The unnameability of qualities is a familiar situation in our encounters with art. Although the quality of a painting or piece of music seems indisputable, it escapes conceptualisation. This, however, is not a problem in the art world – following the experts' opinions (or independently of them), I am after all able to choose for myself what concert I want to attend or what poetry I like to read.

In architecture, the situation is not quite as simple. Unlike most of the other arts, architecture surrounds us. We experience it constantly, whether we want to or not.[1] If the architecture that surrounds us is bad, we suffer; if it is good, we feel good. An explanation of this relation between inhabitant and environment is offered by the fundamental proposition upon which all notions of "ecology" are based: namely, that the living being and its environment form an indivisible systemic whole (Bateson, 1972; Järvilehto, 2000). To think of human being without its environment is, from such a view, inconceivable.[2] There is no way of not experiencing the environment, regardless of the fact that these experiences are largely unconscious.

The environment surrounding us is substantially made up of architecture; we experience architecture all the time, and in this it constitutes a vital necessity for mankind. This is why there is an urgent need for studies that address how architecture frames wellbeing. By focusing on the notion of a "quality without a name", our attention is directed to the quality of everyday living that is conditioned by architecture.[3]

Alexander's architectural philosophy takes as its starting point the notion that architecture is experienced unconsciously. The situations when such experience takes place, he poses, can nevertheless be recognised, and they are used to construct his well-known "pattern language" (Alexander et al., 1977). It is not, however, Alexander's pattern language that forms the subject of this article, but rather the architectural philosophy that underlies his theories, which has been gaining increasing attention in recent scholarship (c.f. Kalb, 2014; Diethelm, 2013; Bhatt, 2010; Elsheshtawy, 2001). We aim to explore how the "quality without a name" can be brought into an academic discussion of architecture despite of the clear difficulties that it presents in terms of its conceptualisation.

1 "A building is essentially a public object, to be looked at, lived in and walked past at all times, in all conditions and in all humours" (Scruton, 1979, p. 189). Scruton also says that therefore 'modernism' in architecture raises a special problem (p. 13).

2 "There is no body without an environment, no body without the ongoing flow of organism-environment interaction that defines our realities" (Johnson, 2007, p. 276).

3 While approaching architectural quality from Alexander's perspective of 'quality without a name', we acknowledge that there is a variety of other approaches to studying quality in architecture and to developing methods for its assessment (e.g. Plowright & Cole, 2012; Ek & Çıkış, 2015; Nelson, 2017).

In *The timeless way of building* (1979), Alexander stated that the quality "cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly, by the ordinary actions of the people, just as a flower cannot be made, but only generated from the seed" (Alexander, 1979, p. xi). As such, "it will happen of its own accord, if we will only let it" (ibid., p. ix). At the time, these words sounded mysterious, but Alexander had realised what later on would be confirmed in many ways: what is real to us is largely experienced by our bodies, not our minds (c.f. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).[4] Contemporary neuroscience provides indisputable evidence confirming this insight (Damasio, 2010).[5] As a result, the architecture that constantly surrounds our bodies affects each of us, all the time.

In this article, we introduce "thriving" as a concept that will be central in the search to understand how architecture conditions the quality of everyday life. The verb "to thrive" usually refers to living beings other than humans; we say that certain flowers "thrive" in shadow or that some bacteria need warmth to "thrive". However, following the ecological approach mentioned above, here we apply this term to human beings in their built environment. Understood in this way, "thriving" does not mean mere cosiness, or the harmless feeling of being at ease, but rather describes *the realisation of a fundamental condition of being a living creature*.[6] Practically every moment of our lives is spent dwelling within architecture; architecture is thus the ecological environment of the human species. As such, we would do well to ask: Does the architecture that surrounds us render possible our bodily, mental and social wellbeing? Does it allow us to *thrive*?

We think that it is reasonable to place such a demand on the everyday environment; this is "the quality without a name" we are looking for. When architectural quality is defined in this manner, it becomes something quite different from the qualities that are normally sought when the art of architecture is evaluated. Nevertheless, we set out to demonstrate that the "quality without a name" remains *aesthetic* in nature.

The aesthetics of architecture, in such a view, does not refer to the things that architectural critics quarrel about, but rather invokes an "aesthetics of the everyday"[7] (Wittgenstein, n.d.; Shusterman, 2000; Scruton, 1979; 2011). Such an aesthetics does not require intellectual efforts to understand it – everyone, regardless of their prior knowledge and mental capacity, takes part in experiencing architecture (Bhatt, 2010). Thus Alexander's "quality without a name" does not refer to an exclusive myth for the few, but rather emerges as something that is open to be enjoyed by everyone – exactly as Alexander said it should be. There is, after all, no way of avoiding the profound influence that architecture exerts on everyone who lives within it.

4   "[…] findings of cognitive science are profoundly disquieting in two respects. First, they tell us that human reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains. Second, these results tell us that our bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 17.)

5   "Mind is a most natural result of evolution, and it is largely nonconscious, internal, and unrevealed. It comes to be known thanks to the narrow window of consciousness" (Damasio, 2010, p. 188).

6   *Trivas* in Swedish and *viihtyminen* in Finnish signify approximately what we in this paper mean by *thriving*. However, applied to architecture those words often signify only coziness or feeling at home – the ecological aspect is seldom present.

7   "Architecture is simply one application of that sense of what 'fits' which governs every aspect of daily existence. One might say that, in proposing an aesthetics of architecture, the least one must be proposing is an aesthetics of everyday life." (Scruton, 1979, p. 17.)

Thus understood, "quality" in architecture is something radically other than that which is evaluated in architectural competitions, with the implication being that architects are not necessarily the best experts when evaluating architectural quality.[8] Architects are inclined to look for quality in the execution of the practices of their profession only, disregarding the effects of architecture on users (c.f. Troiani, 2007). Understanding architecture as human ecology embeds it within cultural and social traditions and habits that have developed from time immemorial. Embracing these traditions and habits should be fundamental to the professional skills of an architect.

Our reasoning is as follows. First, we suggest that the users of architecture continuously *communicate,* through their use, consciously or unconsciously, to other users of the same architecture, about their social relationships.[9] Second, we suggest that *thriving* occurs when the users are able to become coordinated in their shared use of the architecture, thereby strengthening or confirming their social bonds (c.f. de Certeau, 1984, p. 108: "I feel good here"). Thriving is of vital importance to users – it is a common concern that is communicated through use, even if they are not able to conceptualise it. As such, we ask: Can such communication be observed and described? Third, we suggest that at the core of thriving lies architectural aesthetics. Following Wittgenstein (1938; and Scruton, 2011), we conceive of aesthetics as an essential ingredient of everyday living.

Empirical method

Although our argument is mainly theoretical, our intention is also to examine the implications of that argument for empirical research. We do this by exploring the everyday practices of residents in a newly built apartment block in inner-city Helsinki, in Finland. We seek to show, with practical examples, how architecture frames human activity, and plays a vital role in the social context of a residential building. We are interested in the situations that are evoked by the architecture, and how the residents communicate through their behaviour in these situations. Our starting point is that "coming to an agreement" on how to behave together in the building takes place largely without conceptualisation. The residents habituate to the conditions of their built environment, adjusting intuitively to the actions of each other.

In our examination, we also discuss the ideas and ideals behind the design of the building in question – a typical, contemporary apartment building.

To create a dialogue between the presented theory and the practices of dwelling in a residential building, we have used a variety of data as our empirical material. Having designated the new apartment block

8   "Since [architects] no longer have a widely shared language which roots them in the ordinary feelings people have, they are […] prisoners of the absurd and special languages which they have made in private" (Alexander, 1979, p. 233).

9   According to Bateson (1972, p. 275), all communication is about relationship.

in Jätkäsaari, one of Helsinki's flagship residential areas, as our object of study, our empirical method is built around autoethnography and observation, photographs, resident interviews, and an analysis of the Facebook page of the building, as well as an interview with the architect responsible for designing the building. The design of the building was very strongly guided by detailed building guidelines (Hietasaaren rakentamistapaohje, 2010), provided by the municipal planning authority. These guidelines have also been used as research material to inform the study.

Autoethnography is a method used to understand a particular phenomenon or culture, by drawing on the researcher's own experiences (Méndez, 2013, p. 280). Autoethnography has several orientations. In our case it is used to study the academic's "own life circumstances intensely in order to illuminate a larger social or cultural phenomenon" (Butz, 2010, p. 139). Entering and documenting the "moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life" is an important way of knowing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737).

The personal narrative of one of the authors of this article, as well as observation and photographs about dwelling in the apartment block in Jätkäsaari, is taken as the starting point of the empirical investigation, and thus determined our choice of case. Apart from being a resident, the author has also been the chair of the building's Housing Committee, since moving into the newly finished building in 2013. This has meant sharing in the residents' concerns, as well as their delight, regarding dwelling in the building. This experience has also made her aware of how the building has been used by its residents. The dwelling practices, starting from when the residents moved in, have thus been observed for a number of years. This positions the author as both researcher and object of research (Muncey, 2010). Being "within academic knowledge" implies "claiming a degree of academic authority", including a claim to understand questions and the implications of positionality, experiential knowledge, and narrative voice (Butz, 2010, p. 139). According to Mäenpää (1991), personal experiences and observations in place diversify the understanding of a particular phenomenon, but also serve to confirm hypotheses, thereby reducing the feeling of subjectivity.

Butz (2010, p. 150–151) has claimed that autoethnography is both reflexive and self-conscious, which makes it distinct from everyday practices of self-presentation. It alternatively looks inside and outside, searching first for the social and cultural aspects of a researcher's experiences (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739). This makes closer, but also a more embodied, involvement possible in whatever is being researched (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 433–434). Our daily vocabulary has many limitations when it comes to the verbalisation of bodily experiences (Paterson, 2009). Thus, the photographs included in our empirical material not only visualise the architecture that is part of the study, but they also help to illustrate

the bodily practices that occur when architectural objects are in use. A lot of intuitive knowledge is also involved in everyday practices, which, whilst it is not necessarily completely unconscious, may be hard to grasp discursively (Latham, 2003). We do not aim to reveal unconscious practices, but rather try to reflect on the non-cognitive and embodied aspects of the residents' shared dwelling practices (Paterson, 2009; Latham, 2003, p. 2001).

One of the advantages of taking the experiences of the researcher as empirical material is that the data for investigating a particular phenomenon is easily available (Méndez, 2013, p. 282). Apart from autoethnography and observation, the empirical study also consists of an analysis of the residents' Facebook page (on dwelling issues raised by the residents), as well as shorter informal interviews with 11 residents, the property manager and the maintenance manager that addressed general issues of residing in the building and the use of the common spaces in the building. In order to understand the use of each apartment in greater detail, formal structured interviews with three residents were conducted. The resident interviews focused on the residents' dwelling histories and their current use of their apartments and the building. In order to understand the ideas behind the design of the building, the designer-architect of the building was interviewed. She was asked about the process of designing the building and the related choices made, but also more generally about her views on designing residential buildings. Especially while interviewing the residents with a structured set of questions and also letting them talk, quite practically, about the floor plans of their apartments, some intuitive dwelling practices became conceptualised as they were put into words. Unconsciously experienced phenomena, or tacit knowledge, is made conscious when the interviewer brings these up or the interviewees start to think about such phenomena during the interview.

The construction of the studied building, which contains 62 apartments (Figure 1), was completed in 2013, which is also when most of the residents, during a very busy weekend, moved in.

Figure 1
The studied building with the yard. The building comprises of 62 apartments, grouped around three staircases.
The building includes one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, with varying sizes (from 38 m² to 94.5 m²).
SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS.

The people living in the building have differing backgrounds when it comes to their level of education, income and line of work, and household form. This kind of social mixing is in accordance with the housing policy of the City of Helsinki, which owns the building. The City's selection of residents is based on national legislation, which aims to maintain a diverse tenant structure. Because Jätkäsaari is an area in which both housing prices and residents' income and educational levels are higher than the city average (Väliniemi-Laursson and Alsuhail, 2016), the households in the building are quite mixed in terms of income and education. The largest age group in the building is 31–40 years old, and the amount of children is also remarkable. Less than 10 percent of the residents are over 60.

Given the richness of the qualitative data available, we sought a well-rounded sensitivity to everyday living in addressing the case apartment block. We saw this as crucial to examining how the residents coordinated their use of architecture, and the difficulties or conflicts that arose in such co-ordination. In employing this method, we hoped to be able to observe whether and how the residents (including the self-reflexive author of the present text) co-ordinated themselves, even without realising it, and how they communicated in such situations. Are we able to, we asked ourselves, observe thriving?

In the coming section, we report on our empirical observations, unfolding them piece by piece with reference to a broader theoretical discussion. We do not attempt to use our empirical findings as "proof" of theory; instead, the empirical material is used with the aim of illustrating our argument, which remains at a theoretical level. We argue that if an illustrative capacity is found within the empirical material, this holds implications in assessing the appropriateness of our empirical method. To ask for proof of a theory, however, would indicate an inappropriate conception of the nature of the research problem at hand – an issue to which we will return in the concluding section of the article. The ultimate aim of both our theoretical and empirical examinations is to advance an understanding of how quality emerges in the use of architecture.

Architecture framing social co-ordination

Architecture *frames* human activity; it plays a central role in almost every social context. The situation framed by architecture is usually common to people even with different backgrounds, different expectations and different opinions (even about architecture!). In spite of such differences, these people manage to agree on how to live with their shared architecture. Typically, Finnish residents avoid making noise in the stairwell of an apartment block. They keep their cars in the parking space, and not at the front door. They sort their garbage, and they take it to the waste shed. They even pick up litter found in the stairwell and take it home to their own dustbin. And so on. The architecture grounds the rules of behaviour, as it were, and these rules are in turn reinforced by the behaviour of the residents.

How to explain such accord? There has to be some kind of communication about the situations evoked by the architecture – coming to an agreement on how to behave in these situations. But evidently there is no awareness of such: "coming to an agreement" happens without conceptualisation. At times, someone becomes indignant, which in our case example is sometimes brought to the attention of the owner of the building, but more often is communicated to other residents through the Facebook page of the building. "Oh, is there still someone who is not yet familiar with the fact that you can't leave metal waste on the yard! It may be dangerous in the hands of children!" posts one resident, or: "Our shift is at 18–20, and somebody else's laundry was in the machine. We took it out because we really have to do laundry today". Overt conflict, however, is avoided.

However, conceptualisation may be needed when architecture hinders social co-ordination. The worst conflict observed in the residential building in Jätkäsaari was caused by the developer's and the architects' lack of understanding of residents' practices in the City's rental buildings. Almost every rental building has a common sauna, and every apartment

is entitled to rent one weekly shift in the sauna, based on a "first come, first served" principle. Those who rent first can choose which sauna they want to use (in this case, a choice between saunas in two different staircases) and at what time. In our case block, one of the saunas is bigger and situated in connection to the common room, while the other (smaller) sauna has a small dressing room only. Both saunas have outside terraces with a view to the sea, for the bathers to cool off.

The problem in the building emerged when some residents wanted to arrange parties in the common room during other residents' sauna shift. That would have meant a lack of privacy for the bathers and denied their possibility to cool off on the terrace, which is only accessible from the adjoining common room. This caused a rather aggressive discussion on the Facebook page, between those who had their sauna shift in the sauna next to the common room and those who supported the evening use of the common room by all residents. During one of the resident meetings, some of the attending seven residents started to argue openly. The planning of the common room was not made in accordance with the building guidelines, which state that "The common rooms should be planned as natural meeting places connected to the entrances. For the usability of the common rooms their connection to the yard is important" (2010, p. 21). The issue was resolved by permitting the use of another building's common room in the evenings, leaving the common room in the case block for the exclusive use of bathers. When the architect was asked why in the floorplan one of the saunas was placed in direct adjacency to the common room, she did not answer clearly, but repeatedly reinforced that she had learned that the saunas and common rooms needed to be planned so that they can be used separately.

Metacommunication in architecture

People communicate through their behaviour, when using shared architecture. In seeking to understand such communication, we draw on the work of Gregory Bateson and especially his *Theory of play and fantasy* (Bateson, 1972). Bateson developed his insights by observing young monkeys playing in a zoo. The monkeys clearly communicated that what they were engaged in – nipping at each other – was not fight but play ("this nip suggests bite and at the same time refuses to do so"), their actions indicating to each other that their social context was about play (Bateson, 1972, p. 179–180). Bateson argues that such metacommunication is typical also to human beings (p. 177–178).

Metacommunication is the communication of communication. It comments on some communication, thus placing the latter in a context. Usually metacommunication is associated with conceptualised communication using words, such as uttering "This is fun!", or "I don't like this new arrangement". In his *Theory of play and fantasy*, however, Bateson

applied the concept of metacommunication to non-conceptual commu-
nication, too. This means that metacommunication does not necessarily
imply words. Interestingly, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his 1938 lessons on
aesthetics, places communication through gestures and facial expres-
sion in a central position when people articulate their aesthetic atti-
tudes (n.d. [I § 10], 8).

Michel de Certeau claims that people using their common environment
"enunciate" the experience of essential living conditions and thus attain
social co-ordination – agreement on a "good life" that is confirmed by
the fluency of their shared occupancy of surrounding architecture (de
Certeau, 1984, p. xiii, 19, 93, 110). We suggest that metacommunication in
Bateson's sense occurs in architecture: in their use of the architecture
that surrounds them, people metacommunicate their social contexts in
order to co-ordinate. This means that in their use of architecture, human
beings learn to unconsciously metacommunicate their social relations.
The objects of the built environment "afford" themselves (cf. Gibson,
1979) as tools for metacommunicative action. For example, "although I
greet you, my neighbour, by waving my hand, I prefer to stay on my own
porch and be left alone", or "the door to my study is open, your entering
is no disturbance".

In Jätkäsaari, the yard of the studied apartment block is particularly suit-
able for observing how new neighbours become socially co-ordinated. In
the summer you can hear children playing in the yard from early morn-
ing until late evening. They use the swings, bike and sometimes take out
their Barbie dolls, spreading out sheets on the concrete surfaces. Foot-
ball was played in the yard until the family with active footballers moved
to the suburbs. The large grass areas are used for running and playing.
Parents with toddlers stand together and chat while their children play
in the sandbox. The yard is in constant use! This causes also concerns. Be-
cause the yard is built on a deck, the grass does not grow well, and after
heavy rain the water collects in a great puddle in the middle of the green,
killing the grass, making it impossible to enter and very grey to look at.
The bushes growing on the small hills of the yard are trampled by kids,
who like to run over them.

The building guidelines states that the yards have to be designed by
professional landscape architects. Still there is a contradiction between
how the yard was designed and how it is used. For example, children
see architectural objects such as the ventilation ducts as affordances
for play (Figures 2 and 3). According to the building guidelines (Hieta-
saaren rakentamistapaohje, 2010, p. 34), the play areas are to be placed
where the sunlight circumstances are the best. This is also the case – and
parents obviously enjoy being able to stand or sit in the sunlight while
watching their toddlers play in the play areas.

We claim that people metacommunicate through their use of architectural objects – in an apartment block, the stairwell, entrance door, courtyard, parking space, the waste shed etc. Although this use communicates non-conceptually, the parties – dwellers, neighbours, children's pals, the service company – know how to behave in the situations framed by the shared architecture (Cussins, 2002, § 2, 3). Adrian Cussins speaks of "non-conceptual content", which is cognition not in the sense of thinking but cognition as a *skill* – an acting without thinking, as in skilfully hitting a tennis ball with a racket, not concentrating on the hit itself, but on how to overtake the opponent with the hit. Such cognition is conditioned by its situation; it emerges when the parties enter into it. By experiencing our skilfulness, we thrive.

Our skills of dwelling are developed through earlier experiences of dwelling. In the Jätkäsaari case, it was clear from the start that people brought with them multiple habits of living in a residential block. While communicating on the rules of inhabiting the new block, earlier experiences were, and still are, negotiated as inclinations to do something in one way or another. The need for privacy was particularly clearly metacommunicated when the residents on the lowest floors added venetian blinds to their windows. This was approved by the landlord. Many residents living in apartments on the upper floors facing the unusually narrow streets also felt the need to buy venetian blinds, when the residents in the opposite block moved in. The building guidelines (2010, p. 19) stresses the "rich and careful detailing of the facades". This may be important for those who walk on the narrow streets, but it is clearly less important for residents, who prefer the privacy provided by the curtains over the view to the opposite façade, however "rich and careful" in detailing (Figure 4).

Figures 2 and 3
The ventilation ducts are popular for climbing up on and sliding down. Parents keep shouting to the children to get away from the ducts, afraid of them getting hurt.
PHOTOS: JOHANNA LILIUS.

Figure 4
Venetian blinds cover many of the apartment windows. Many residents are disturbed by the unusually small distance between buildings at the streets in Jätkäsaari, and metacommunicate their need for privacy by keeping their curtains closed, which makes the street view somewhat hostile – contrary to the aim of the building guidelines.
PHOTO: JOHANNA LILIUS.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "language games" (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2009) is helpful in explaining how we metacommunicate through our use of objects. There is no consensus about what Wittgenstein himself was after with the concept. From the point of view of this article, it is interesting that it seems to have been important for him to find a concept which could stand for "the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven" (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 7). He emphasised "the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (§ 23, emphasis omitted) – language is life, not mere rhetoric. If instead of "language" we used the word "communication", those statements would fit perfectly in the situations framed by architecture.

We suggest that social co-ordination through metacommunicative uses of shared architecture can be understood as Wittgensteinian language games. The term "language game" seems suitable for denoting how through their use of architecture (that is, without words), people express to each other the understanding that this architecture of theirs has such quality that, in the behavioural settings implied by it, their daily living can go on pleasantly and without too much effort – they can, in other words, thrive here.[10] The parties play their language games, each one giving the architectural settings meaning(s) unconsciously. If the users of the architecture were told that they are engaging in some sort of a game, they would likely be astonished, their communication being unconscious.

But in spite of its communicative function, architecture is physical, too: buildings and building parts, rooms and corridors, courtyards and streets… Architecture is no neutral playing field on which to carry out language games. Quite the contrary: it is made up of objects that the players employ as tools for using their environment. While in Wittgen-

10 When Wittgenstein in the beginning of *Philosophical investigations* exemplifies the idea of language games as quite a primitive communication between a builder and his assistant, he obviously does not find the verbal form of their words important; what is important is the communication of the social context (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 2–7).

stein's language games, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 43), the meaning of architectural objects in architectural language games is indicated by how the objects are used. For example, the stairwell in an apartment block forms the stage for encounters between residents; using it, they metacommunicate the meanings they associate with their mutual relations.

The aesthetic evaluation of common architecture

When behaving in the manner described above, people unconsciously evaluate their shared architecture *aesthetically*.[11] They communicate to each other that things are "right" (Wittgenstein, n.d. [I § 8, 13, 15], p. 3, 5; Scruton, 2011, p. 310),[12] demonstrating the shared skill of metacommunication through their situated use of architecture. Thriving is, among other things, being content with how things are.[13]

Things go "right" when we can carry out our daily errands in the built environment fluently and comfortably. The communication of this demand is foregrounded in architecture that gives the mind something to cling to – natural light, carefully designed details, ornamentation, colours, materials. Such features are common in traditional and folk architecture. They were of central importance also in the architecture of the so-called masters of modern architecture – Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright.

In the Jätkäsaari case, the need for privacy was expressed by several of the residents on the ground floor through the act of adding espaliers to the terraces that faced the yard. One family expected that their balcony would be glazed, as this was what was stated in the floor plan that the family received with the apartment offer. The glazing, however, was never installed, and the family moved elsewhere because things didn't go "right". The family that moved in after them constantly used the terrace, and their children often spread their games out into the yard, thus blending the private and public spheres. Apparently, in this new family's aesthetic evaluation, things were "right".

Roger Scruton claims that all of us have a need for self-presentation: "[…] what I am in your eyes is part of what I am for you; and what I am for you is part of what I am" (Scruton, 2011, p. 312; see also Mead, 1962). When the behaviour of users of architecture metacommunicates that "this environment suits me", they make an aesthetic choice, expecting endorsement from other people. Everyday choices of this kind always imply social orientation (c.f. Mead, 1962), aiming at mutual understanding.[14]

Traditions and established habits exist in how we behave with regard to architecture. Through their behaviour, people inform each other, now and again, that this architecture of ours is suitable for passing on those

11 "The act of aesthetic attention is not a rare or sophisticated thing, a detached gesture of connoisseurship, requiring some special attitude of 'standing back', of 'disinterestedness', or 'abstraction'." (Scruton, 1979, p. 206). "The real fact of the matter lies in the primitive expression of aesthetic choice, and that primitive expression subsists without the benefit of reasoned reflection" (p. 134; emphasis in orig.).

12 "[Architecture] derives its nature not from some activity of representation or dramatic gesture, but from an everyday preoccupation with getting things right […]" (Scruton, 1979, p. 259). As Scruton points out, Wittgenstein as a rule chooses the cases when things go 'right' from ordinary life such as making up one's mind about a tailor's cuttings or decorating one's home (see Wittgenstein, n.d. [I]).

13 "[…] every living creature that attains sensibility welcomes order with a response of harmonious feeling whenever it finds a congruous order about it" (Dewey,2005, p.13). "Perhaps the most important thing in connection with aesthetics is what may be called aesthetic reactions, e.g. discontent, disgust, discomfort" (Wittgenstein, n.d. [II § 10], 13).

14 "The aesthetics of everyday life is […] proximate to manners – an attempt at co-ordination, a tacit recognition that we must live in harmony and be careful not to offend" (Scruton, 2011, p. 312). "In aesthetic judgement we are […] suitors for acceptance, and this means that there is a reference outwards in what we do, which gives purchase to the judgement of others" (p. 315).

traditions and conventions. If there is a new situation (e.g. an elevator is installed in an apartment building), new habits gradually develop through trial and error. It does not seem natural to ask whether such situational cognition is "true" or not; non-conceptual cognition lacks a universality of thought. Nevertheless, through their conduct the residents gradually acquire reliable knowledge about how to conduct themselves – about how to get it "right". They just know this; it is confirmed by their experiences of the language game of architecture-in-use being played.[15]

In a new building, this knowledge has to be reinforced. The first weeks in Jätkäsaari were filled with excitement and tension. One had to get to know one's neighbours. Several shared facilities exist in the building: a washing room, a drying room in every staircase, two common saunas, facilities for maintenance work like taking care of bicycles (this space was later turned into a gym), and a recycling room where residents could bring things that they were not using anymore, which could be picked up by other residents. In addition, storage space was provided for each apartment in the basement, as well as spaces for car and bicycle parking. Neighbours started talking to each other to learn where in the building the different common spaces were to be found. In late September, people could still spend time in the yard. This was where school children and parents of toddlers got to know each other, and the common housing rules were gradually assimilated.

In the situations that are framed by architecture, a repertory of experiences of its shared use is continually accumulated (a memory, one could call it), which regulates further use and understanding around how things go "right". Children learn such habits, mostly through imitation, from their first year. These habits mostly remain non-conceptual. Thus, there is no way of determining whether the environmental habits shared by the people really mean the same thing to each of them or not. What matters is that there is enough common ground to co-align uses of architecture sufficiently. A non-conceptualised longing for social harmony in the common environment brings about communication through action. Architecture holds a central position in the existential conditions for being human and living together with other humans.

Activities induced by shared architecture strengthen feelings of togetherness in people (this is one of the connotations of the word "neighbour"); this is why such activities are important for thriving. We claim that strengthening community life has always been and remains one of the main purposes of architecture.

Common architecture extends to private apartments, too. In our Jätkäsaari case, the apartments look more or less the same, but this does not prevent the residents from assigning different meanings to them. This becomes apparent when people talk about how they have planned the use of their apartments and what is meaningful to them in their own apartment.

15 [...] accessible not through thought, but through the subject's skilled and knowing competence in getting about. [...] the environment is given to the subject as a realm of mediation. [...] thought-free – but intensely cognitive – passage through the environment may manifest the subject's personal-level knowledge of what it is to be a competent agent in an environment like this" (Cussins, 2002, § 4.)

Aesthetic use and functional use

The shared architecture of a group of people is clearly something differ-ent from the architecture that is depicted in architecture magazines – which at best tell little about how people in fact experience real built en-vironments. The architecture of Jätkäsaari was introduced to the readers of the major Finnish newsarticle Helsingin Sanomat through an archi-tectural review by architect Tarja Nurmi, titled "Gloomy in Places, Colour-ful in Places" (Nurmi, 2017). The article begins by asking "is Jätkäsaari a successful neighbourhood?" There is, however, no talk about user expe-rience in the article – it is merely an architectural review, written by an architect. One asks what the review would have been like if it had aimed at investigating the "shared architecture" that the residents experience? Architecture for them is intimately related to what they *do* when being in touch with it – exactly as Alexander claimed with his patterns.[16] "Archi-tecture is primarily a vernacular art: it exists first and foremost as a pro-cess of arrangement in which every normal man may participate," says Scruton (1979, p. 16).

It is interesting – and alarming – that architects do not seem to take much interest in how their implemented designs are inhabited by their users. They communicate with each other through pictures in journals – and through architectural competitions – but knowledge about how the built architecture is used is unusual. Exercising the professional skill of architectural design and planning is apparently considered sufficient for securing the quality of thriving. There are seldom open complaints, so why bother? But thriving is for the most part unconscious.

Use is quite possible without conceptualisation. The stairwell is an ex-cellent tool for transporting oneself between the dwelling and open air, even if it were not conceptualised; we know unconsciously how to be-have in architectural situations. (This, however, is not to claim that the stairwell would not exist as a concept for its users.) Functional efficiency is important for thriving. But it is not enough. Thriving is essentially aes-thetic. It is difficult to explain, being mainly unconscious, but essential all the same – it is "quality without a name".

It is in use that architectural objects gain their meaning. But architec-ture attains *aesthetic* meaning for its users only if it affords the opportu-nity for them to express themselves through the architecture and thus to metacommunicate their social relations. Such metacommunication means as a rule making aesthetic choices. We call this "aesthetic use" – an act of aesthetic judgement that occurs in metacommunicating the functional use of architectural objects, and thus recognizing their social context.[17] By making aesthetic choices about how the built environment is used, and thus expressing how things go "right", the user plays lan-guage games with other users.

16 "[The] emotional effect [of architec-ture] is dependent upon or closely allied to human affairs in which the building participates" (Dewey, 2005, p. 242). "[...] sociocultural objects, practices, and events are not mea-ningful in themselves. Rather, they become meaningful only insofar as they are enacted in the lives of human beings [...]." (Johnson, 2007, p. 152.)

17 The term *aesthetic use* is scarcely mentioned in research literature. Unlike us, Süner (2017) makes the distinction "instrumental use/aest-hetic use", our point being that the aesthetics of architecture is to be found within instrumental use. In turn, Grey's (2007) "aesthetic use of symbols" is rather to be understood as "the use of symbols in aesthetics". Neither discusses architecture.

Consider neighbours nodding to each other in the carpark, old people sitting together on a bench in the sun, toddlers splashing about in a rain-water puddle, or teenagers hanging around in the shopping mall – all of these people are making aesthetic choices thus metacommunicating the social context of their doings, the architecture.

Aesthetic use was usually ignored in universal functionalism. Architectural design abhorred old traditions and conventions about how to dwell, especially the social aspects of dwelling.[18] Such an attitude is still common among contemporary architects. Stairwells in apartment blocks are a case in point. Before functionalism, the stairwell was regarded a common space for the residents; its importance was emphasised through ornamentation and exaggeration of its measures: it was a central part of the architecture the residents had in common. With functionalism, the stairwell lost its aesthetic usability; in contemporary apartment blocks, it tends to satisfy mere functional usability.

In the Jätkäsaari apartment block case, the architect claimed that her design knowledge came from experience, and that experience means knowing the basic requirements of designing residential buildings. The starting point in designing apartment buildings, however, is not usually the objective of "thriving" but rather of achieving efficiency. Stairwells, with their expensive elevators, need to be planned so that they serve as many apartments as possible. In our case, the stairwells were built with large windows to give them natural light, but only on the upper floors. The result is that the lower floors – including the entrance – have artificial lighting, and the upper floors, with their enormous windows, tend to get too hot in the summer. When looking at the building from the outside, it becomes obvious that the windows have a special role in the design of the facade (see Figure 5), which was also stressed by the architect. According to the building guidelines: "The roofscapes of the residential buildings are rich and "Parisian" in their spirit, restless in a positive way [...]" (Hietasaaren rakentamistapaohje, 2010, p. 16). The large windows with views are however under-used by the residents, and do not add much since the Finnish fire regulations do not permit for example placing chairs in front of the windows (Figure 6).

18 The great inspirer Le Corbusier spoke about "machines for living" (Le Corbusier, 1985, p. 210).

Certain *architectural* demands have thus been taken care of. Inside, the entrances are narrow, even so that it makes it hard for several people to, for example, take the elevator at the same time (Figures 7 and 8). The architectural ambitions and the legitimate demands of the users seem to be conflicting.

Figures 5 and 6
There is a lot of light in the stairwells on the upper floors, which serves only a few residents. The main purpose is to make the façade richer architecturally – undoubtedly so with the red box on top.
PHOTOS: JOHANNA LILIUS.

Access to new service functions, such as common rooms and drying rooms, are from the staircases. This makes people use the staircases more than one normally does in an apartment building and thus increases the possibility for neighbours to interact – which would add to their thriving, if the staircases were more spacious.

Figures 7 and 8
The entrance from the yard (7) and the main entrance from the street (8). The bright artificial light and white walls cannot diminish the gloomy and cramped appearance.
PHOTOS: JOHANNA LILIUS.

Functionalism (also later modernism) was content with functional use as conceptualised by the designer. The aesthetic use of architectural objects in everyday living was disregarded, which meant disregarding also their importance in the users' metacommunication of their social relations. Ignorant of the importance of the *ornamentation* of objects of use as a medium for the user's self-presentation, functionalism condemned it as false embellishment, "throwing out with the bathwater also careful detailing and choice of colours – which importantly can make a building 'the loving companion of everyday life'" (Scruton, 2011, p. 313). A carefully designed entrance door is a case in point. It reminds every time it is in use that living in harmony with the environment – thriving – is important for each and every user of that door, thus making the users metacommunicate this fact to themselves and other users of the door over and over again.

Conclusion and discussion: thriving as the purpose of architecture

The users of architecture can live happily in their environment without having to conceptualise it. The designer of architecture has a different situation: for buildings to come into existence, a great many concepts are needed. However, for the designer, the behaviour of the users can remain non-conceptualised, provided that s/he shares sufficiently the traditions and established habits that govern the users' behaviour. This would secure a proper match between the aesthetic choices of the architect and those of the users, whereby a sufficient constellation of architectural objects required for thriving may come into existence. The provision of a "quality without a name" is thus a central aspect of an architect's professional skillset.[19] Does such a skill still exist?

If we are right when claiming that people generally get on well together in their shared architecture, then the quality we are looking for – thriving – can be found not only in traditional environments but in contemporary architecture, too.

This is not the case everywhere, though. Thriving (apart from as an opinion) is for the most part located outside conceptualisation. This means that measuring it is difficult, especially at the moment of its occurrence. When having to adapt to the surrounding architecture involuntarily, a risk exists that such architecture would cause suffering and stress, instead of thriving. For example, in spaces that do not afford environmental cues and markers for social co-ordination through behaviour – for sensing and affirming territoriality, publicity and privacy, and various subtleties in between – one feels alienated and unsafe. A staircase without windows, or a murky parking cellar, or an underpass, appear frightening; in dusky places, we involuntarily play language games of mutual threat, the architecture making us metacommunicate an atmosphere

19 "The architect must be constrained by a rule of obedience. He must translate his intuition into terms that are publicly intelligible, unite his building with an order that is recognizable not only to the expert but also to the ordinary uneducated man." (Scruton, 1979, p. 250.)

of fear. Avoiding such conditions would be a necessary part of an architect's professional skill. But quite often such skill seems to be lacking or is not enabled to materialise.

In this article, we have called living in harmony with one's environment *thriving,* referring to the fundamental condition of being a living creature presupposed by *ecology.* The environment of human existence is to a great extent architecture. Humans thrive if the architecture surrounding them is good enough. In our view, *thriving is the ultimate purpose of architecture.*

The quality needed for thriving emerges in the everyday *use* of architectural objects. People, although different in many respects, seem mostly to be in accord about how to use the architecture they have in common. Through their behaviour, evoked by architecture framing their activities, they unconsciously *metacommunicate* their social contexts, thus fostering mutual co-ordination. Such facilitation of everyday life is essential for thriving – a major contribution of architecture to the wellbeing of its users.

With our investigation of a newly built apartment block in Helsinki, we have sought to illustrate this notion and, at the same time, explore how it could be studied empirically.

We claim that the metacommunication of the functional use of architectural objects is to no small extent *aesthetic* in character. We call this "aesthetic use", by which we highlight the way in which the user makes aesthetic choices in how s/he uses his/her built environment, playing "language games" with other users to express how things go "right", and thereby building sociality. This is the crucial value of ornamentation of architectural objects, adding affordances for their aesthetic use beyond mere functional use. The "quality without a name" resides in situations whereby subtle, effortless, everyday uses of architecture are enabled.

Autoethnographic empirical research was a means for one of the authors of this article to observe both the verbalised and nonverbalised "language games" of the use of architecture, as a co-player in these games in the co-habited apartment building. Of course, all reporting of such observations is necessarily mediated via *reflection.* This makes grasping the quality of becoming socially co-ordinated *unreflectively* in the joint use of architecture a paradoxical task – as indeed is all theorising of the issue. Yet, by calling such a task paradoxical, we do not mean a paralyzing contradiction. Instead, we claim that the condition of trying to reach the unreachable is inevitable when searching for a better understanding of the quality of architecture in use – trying to name what we admit cannot be named. Wittgenstein, too, took on such a paradoxical task in his investigation of language games: in terms of certainty,

what was left was the mere notion that "this language game is played" (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 654), suggesting that there must be rules that are jointly followed, while acknowledging that they cannot be named. For him, the only way to convince the reader was to exemplify various cases of language games.

Acknowledgements

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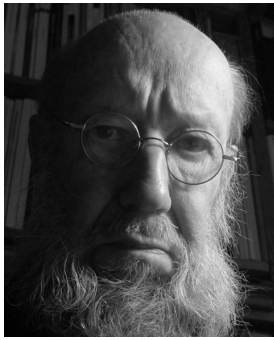
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