

BEAUTY
AS
EXPERIENCE

Anton Zoetmulder

Beauty as Experience

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Preface

This research “Beauty as Experience” was originally written for my graduation at Explore Lab on the faculty of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences at the TU Delft. However, most importantly it was written in order to explore my fascination for the topic of beauty in architecture.

This research is organized around a multitude of chapters that read as a crescendo but are in fact a decomposition in order to search for the ingredients that make up an experience of beauty. In this thesis I will commence by analyzing the legacy of one of the founding fathers of present day theory of beauty; Immanuel Kant. Firstly I will dive deeper into the understanding of Kant’s *free play* of mind, since, I think, it is crucial in the establishment of an experience of beauty. Secondly I will examine the peculiar relation architecture has in relation to the Kantian concept of *free beauty* and I will argue that architecture is not excluded from Kants conception of beauty. Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* will act as a foundation to work from in the rest of my research. After this I will elaborate, expand and alter Kants notions in order to include the integral experience of beauty and in this sense adding a more phenomenological side to the discussion. I will do this by taking from, among

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others, writers like; Gottfried Böhme, John Dewey and Alexander Nehamas. Through Gernot Böhme's writing on new aesthetics and atmosphere I will try to connect human states *to* environmental qualities in experience. Through John Dewey's *Art as Experience* I will try to find more elements of which an experience of beauty is constructed. From there I will continue by taking from Alexander Nehamas' *Only a Promise of Happiness* and some examples of architecture to identify and concretize several of the elements of which an experience of beauty is composed.

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0 Prologue

The topic of beauty in architecture fascinated me because it is often neglected in architectural education; because of its presupposed subjective character beauty is never seen as a valid design choice and more rational or pragmatic design considerations are taken as superior. Still it is obvious that architects have to inevitably make decisions regarding beauty in every design process, it is never something you can bypass. However, because most of the education is concerned with concept development in order to make pragmatic design choices we are only marginally able to think about our aesthetic design implications. While, in fact, the main conception of an actual building, through real-time experience, is the way it is aesthetically judged.

One of the main complications I found in architecture's dealing with beauty is that, although everyone seems to know beauty is a subjective and very personal experience, architectural theories tend to focus on the formal, objective, characteristics of buildings. This approach seems to suggest that beauty is something that can be forced upon a perceiver by an authority, the architect or designer, which has a more developed taste. And especially this, the top-down forcing of a superior taste, is something completely

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outdated in a world that has never been so focused on the development of the individual personal self.

So, instead of trying to find formal guidelines to create beautiful architecture (like was used in the classical conception of aesthetics in architecture), my research focused on the experience of beauty and how such an experience can be understood in such a way that a designer can use it to make aesthetic design choices. Universality, and thus objectivity, in beauty is not to be found in the object that is judged as beauty, however, it can be found in the fact that the experience of beauty is universally recognized as an existing experience. Moreover this experience of beauty, in all its various ways it comes to us, still has certain sameness in how this experience is composed and how this experience is lifted up from the general flow of experience.

This shift of focus triggered a research on the decomposition of the experience of beauty in order to distill elements in it. These elements are the core ingredients of each separate experience of beauty. The way beauty is experienced, with all its various parts and elements, is the pre-eminent thing that binds various experiences of beauty together. The experience is the coherent factor that joins together the

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beauty found in Terragni's fascist masterpiece Casa del Fascio to the beauty discovered in the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens.

My research was mostly done as a philosophical research on beauty; I mostly laid aside the architectural focused aesthetic theories and focused on the work of among others; Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, Gottfried Böhm and Alexander Nehamas. Most other points of departure came from phenomenological research on my own and other person's experiences of beauty and intensive talking about their varieties and consistencies.

1 Kant

Writing about beauty one cannot sidestep Immanuel Kant, his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* first appeared in 1790 and has since been seen as one of the blueprints of any writing and thinking about beauty. This is not without reason, because in his writing Kant heroically and quite successfully tried to connect the two main existing aesthetic traditions, empiricism and rationalism. The empiricist tradition, represented by Hume, Hutcheson and Burke, claimed that beauty was an expression of feeling and a matter of subjective preferences. The rationalist tradition, represented by Baumgarten and Meier, saw beauty as the cognition of an object as having an objective property of beauty (Ginsborg, 2013, p. 6; Wood, 2005, p. 154).

The way of looking Kant introduced, in which beauty can be approached both from a subjective side and an objective side, is now quite familiar and it is very apparent in our way of writing and talking about beauty. On the one hand we make a judgment of beauty by stating that: "x is beautiful", seeming to suggest that the beauty is in the property of the judging object. On the other hand we are very familiar with such aphorism as: "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", stating that beauty is a personal, and thus a subjective, matter. The reunion of these two worlds is the

Kant

toughest challenge Kant, and still any writer on beauty, has to face.

The connection Kant tries to make between the subject oriented theories and the object oriented theories is most apparent in the four heads or 'moments' Kant introduces in the first section of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. With these four moments he tries to distinguish a 'pure' judgment of beauty as opposed to one that is not pure. This distinction is necessary because it is quite unclear what is actually meant when one says something is beautiful, sometimes the judgment "x is beautiful" is used to communicate that you like something, while some other time you use the word beauty to find words for something that was so beautiful that you felt it was almost indescribable. It must be clear that when I say to a friend I think he has beautiful new shoes the use of the word beauty is very different than when I try to explain him the indescribable beautiful experience I had when I was hiking in the mountains during sunrise. Kant will mostly discuss the later, the judgment of pure beauty, in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

In order for a judgment to be in fact a pure judgment of beauty it must confirm to all four moments Kant introduces. In these moments he describes two seemingly opposed sets

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of features; on the one hand features relating to subjective values on the other hand features relating to objective grounds. In short these moments are: Firstly, a judgment of beauty is based on a feeling of disinterested pleasure (§5). Secondly, a judgment of beauty makes a claim to universal validity, this universality is however not based on concepts (§9). Thirdly, a judgment of beauty presupposes that the object about which the judgment is made does not have an end or purpose which it is taken to satisfy (§17). Fourthly, a judgment of beauty is 'exemplary' of how everyone else is ought to judge (§22). As stated before, with these moments he insists on describing two seemingly opposed sets of features. On the one hand judgments of beauty are based on a feeling of pleasure and thus the subject side of the debate. On the other hand they make a claim to universal validity and thus the object side of the debate. This insistence confronts him with the problem of how the two features are to be brought together. As Kant puts it:

"how is a judgment possible which, merely from one's own feeling of pleasure in an object, independent of its concept, judges this pleasure as attached to the representation of the same object in every other subject, and does so a priori, i.e., without having to wait for the assent of others?" (Kant, 2008, p. §36)

2 The free play

Kant's official answer, which is I think the most crucial part of Kant's theory, hinges on that pleasure in the beautiful is depended on the 'free play' of the faculties of imagination and understanding (§9). In Kant's earlier work *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) he describes the ordinary distinctions and relations between these two faculties. According to Kant the faculty of understanding is prescribed by rules that correspond to particular concepts, which are then applied to objects (Ginsborg, 2013, p. 6). You understand the world by things that you already know or recognize. When using the faculty of understanding you ascribe a determinative concept to your perception and make a, so called, determining judgment. On the other hand Kant describes the faculty of imagination as the synthesizing of the manifold of intuition in order to bring them under rules of the understanding (Ginsborg, 2013, p. 6). When using the faculty of imagination you reflect upon the object in order to arrive at a concept belonging to it without presupposing one, you make a, so called, reflecting judgment (Wood, 2005, p. 154). In determining judgment a concept is applied while in reflecting judgment a concept is sought out. In this sense imagination is always constrained by understanding, namely through the placing under a concept, however, in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*

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he introduces a new relationship in which imagination and understanding can stand, namely the 'free play'.

When the state of mind of the perceiving subject is in free play this means that the faculties of imagination and understanding stand in a different relation than they would normally do. Now the faculty of imagination harmonizes with the understanding without imagination being constrained or governed by understanding. The perceiving subject becomes *free* from guidance by any concepts (Ginsborg, 2013, p. 6; Wood, 2005, p. 155). And thus the subject doesn't perceive and respond to an object as related to this and this concept, instead the subject whose faculties are in free play responds to it with a state of mind which does not relate to any concept in particular (Robert, 2014). You perceive whatever might be without relating it to a particular concept. It is precisely this non-conceptual state of mind that can give you the feeling of disinterested pleasure and it is this kind of pleasure which is the basis for a judgment of 'pure' beauty.

What is interesting about Kant's dualist approach to the human mind is that more recent neurological research showed a same sort of distinction between the two hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere, which is

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more related to what Kant calls the faculty of understanding, is mostly concerned with narrowly and/or focused attention to things you already know are of importance (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 177). While the right hemisphere, which is more related to what Kant calls the faculty of imagination, is mostly used to have vigilant and/or broad attention for whatever might be without any commitment to what that might be, so without relating it to any concept in particular (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 178). So when the state-of-mind is in free play the right hemisphere, imagination, is in harmony with the left hemisphere, understanding, without being constrained by the left hemisphere. This means we perceive in a broad, vigilant and open way without pinning things down or making them exact by relating them to particular prescribed concepts.

Normally the understanding constrains imagination so that we can make sense of the world around us; we move through the city and understand the traffic lights and pedestrian crossings because we relate the appropriate concepts to them, the left hemisphere or the faculty of understanding is dominantly active. However, when we are in a new environment, for example on vacation in a country with a different culture, it becomes more difficult for the understanding to make sense of the world around us.

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Neurological studies have shown that especially in these kinds of new situations the right hemisphere, the faculty of imagination, starts becoming more active (McGilchrist, 2009). And one must admit; there is a lot of beauty to be seen in an unknown environment, while in your familiar environment most judgments of beauty are merely of an agreeable kind.

3 Architecture and free beauty

Kant is for aesthetic theory what Newton is for the natural sciences, we owe him a lot but we also struggle with the flaws in his legacy. One of these is his strict object-subject dichotomy, of course this dichotomy was a reaction to his contemporaries but it was also a rudiment of his other judgment theories introduced in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (I will come back to this later). Besides this, another difficulty lies in the fact that I will write about beauty with in my mind beauty experienced through the perception of architecture. And precisely architecture and Kant's aesthetic theory have a peculiar relation, since, according to Kant, a building can never be appreciated as purely beautiful. A buildings usefulness pollutes its capacity to be judged as beautiful, since, according to Kant, it can never be judged without taking into account its purpose (Holland, 2013). The architects' fright for Kant is mostly caused by the following sentence in §16:

"But the beauty of (...) a building (such as a church, palace, arsenal, or summer-house), presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; and is therefore merely dependent beauty (Kant, 2008, pp. 38, §16)."

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This sentence is part of moment three, namely; a judgment of beauty presupposes that the object about which the judgment is made does not have an end or purpose which it is taken to satisfy. In making this argument Kant introduces the difference between 'free' beauties and 'dependent' beauties, in which free beauties presuppose no concept of what the object should be and dependent beauties do presuppose such a concept and consequently a model of its perfection. Kant states that a building always has a function and therefore it possess an *a priori* concept of its perfection which it is taken to satisfy and therefore it can be merely a dependent beauty and consequently it can never be the object of a pure judgment of beauty.

In the treatment of free and dependent beauties Kant talks about them *as if* they are features of the object that is being judged, and therefore it sometimes seems *as if* an object can be either an adherent beauty or a free beauty (and not both). However, when you think of an object, any object, none of them can ever be a purely 'free' beauty; that being that it presupposes no concept at all. Every object can and will be classified by man and can therefore be judged according to belonging to this or that concept and thus to a certain perfection of this concept. To see an object as a free beauty seems more dependent on a way of looking than

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that it is on whether or not the object presupposes a concept of its definitive end. Kant has the following thing to say about this:

“In respect of an object with a definite internal end, a judgement of taste would only be pure where the person judging either has no concept of this end, or else makes abstraction from it in his judgement. But in cases like this, although such a person should lay down a correct judgement of taste, since he would be estimating the object as a free beauty, he would still be found fault with by another who saw nothing in its beauty but a dependent quality (i.e., who looked to the end of the object) and would be accused by him of false taste, though both would, in their own way, be judging correctly: the one according to what he had present to his senses, the other according to what was present in his thoughts. This distinction enables us to settle many disputes about beauty on the part of critics; for we may show them how one side is dealing with free beauty, and the other with that which is dependent: the former passing a pure judgement of taste, the latter one that is applied intentionally(Kant, 2008, pp. 39, §16).”

For an object to be a free beauty it is more important whether the perceiving and judging subject is able to see

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the concepts the object belongs to or not, if I don't see, recognize or understand the concept the object belongs to only then can I experience it as a pure beauty¹. Because in fact every object is simultaneously a dependent and a free beauty, whether you experience them as the former or the latter depends on what is present in your memory and in what state of mind you are. This makes Crawford suggest that the predicate dependent or free is not supposed to be designated to the object of beauty at all, but that it is instead designated to the judgment of beauty itself. This way we can have a free judgment of beauty as opposed to a dependent judgment of beauty² (Crawford, 1974, p. 56), the dependent judgment of beauty can never be a pure judgment of beauty because the judgment is made according to a concept of an end the judged object is taken to satisfy.

¹ This stance is supported by Karan August: "*This unbalance (in dependent beauties) hinders the power of reflecting judging, unless the individual is either ignorant to the normative hierarchies of the idealized forms, or if the individual is able to intentionally bracket off the social-historical-political concepts of ends*" (August, 2013).

² Kant's way of talking was, according to Crawford, simply a concession to common ways of talking. Just like Kant simplifies the judgment of pure beauty to judgment of beauty, so without the pure, in almost the entirety of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

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The judgment "This tulip is beautiful" is not a judgment of pure beauty if the judgment relates to the beautifulness this tulip has in comparison to other tulips, because then it would relate to a concept of its end, also it is not a judgment of pure beauty if the judgment is intended to mean that all tulips are beautiful, because then beauty would be a predicate assigned to all tulips. It is only a judgment of pure beauty in the sense that "this tulip there is beautiful" and it is precisely, and only, this tulip there that gives me the feeling of disinterested pleasure. And it is only in the latter example in which the judgment is dealing with a free beauty and thus (possibly) with a pure judgment of beauty³.

In order to be able to make this latter judgment, thus to see this tulip there without relating it to tulips in general, I have to be either quite ignorant, know completely nothing about flowers and/or tulips, or my mind has to be in a state in which my understanding is restricted by my imagination so that I can judge things without relating them to any concept in particular. So precisely the state of mind which Kant calls the free play.

³ This tulip example comes from (Böhme, 1995, p. 104)

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Besides the judgment of beauty Kant also treats the judgment of the sublime in his *Kritik der Urteilstkraft*. This judgment can, in the same way as the judgment of beauty, be either pure or fail to be pure according to the same moments. In the treatment of the sublime Kant also gives examples of architecture which can be experienced and judged as being purely sublime; among others he talks about the Pyramids of Egypt. This example is interesting because here we can find an entrance for architecture in Kant's aesthetic theory because it is one of the only positive examples Kant gives about architecture as an object of a pure judgment of beauty.

What is interesting is that Kant here treats the Pyramid as being judged according to a free judgment of the sublime. Thus we can see this building, which is of course built with a certain intrinsic concept in mind, namely a tomb for Pharaoh x, apart from this concept. Of course it is relatively easy to not see the concept the pyramid is taking to satisfy, because it's intrinsic concept, namely a tomb for Pharaoh x, is not part of our present culture. This leads me to the suggestion that Kant introduced the distinction between free and dependent beauty *and* as relating to the judgment of beauty (as Crawford supposes) *and* as relating to the object of judgment. However it only relates to the object in the

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sense that certain objects have a higher possibility of being judged as free beauty because it is less likely that they presuppose the concepts they are taken to satisfy. The first example Kant gives of a free beauty in §16 could support this reading:

“Flowers are free beauties of nature. Hardly anyone but a botanist knows the true nature of a flower, and even he, while recognizing in the flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end when using his taste to judge of its beauty (Kant, 2008, pp. 37, §16)”

The flower, just like the Pyramid, is of course not completely free from a concept it is taken to satisfy, Kant recognizes the flower as having a concept of an end, namely its reproductive organ, however, when judged of its pure beauty we don't pay attention to this end, not even if this end is part of our knowledge. Kant hereby makes perfectly clear that the flower is in fact not free from a concept it is taken to satisfy and thus the flower is not strictly speaking a free beauty, however, the judgment is a free judgment. Still with the sentence *“Flowers are free beauties”* Kant insists in saying that the flower itself is a free beauty and not (only) the judgment that can be made about it. There must be a reason why he seems so strict. This is, I think, because it

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must be clear that the flower has many objective features, like its shape and color, which can also give a pleasurable feeling without an apparent relation to an end. It is relatively easy to perceive the flower without thinking of its direct purpose, while for another thing, for example a hammer, it is quite difficult to see it without thinking of its purpose. Still about both we could make a free judgment of pure beauty; however, for the flower it is more likely that this happens than it is for the hammer. Just like it is easier to see the Pyramid as a free beauty, because its concept is vague, than that it is to see a Kiosk as one, because its concept is apparent. We could thus say that the Pyramid is more a free beauty and the Kiosk is more a dependent beauty, however, this way of using the predicates will always stay a sliding scale, there is no strict boundary between what is a free beauty and what is a dependent beauty, its merely a heightening of the possibility of a judgment of pure beauty to happen.

4 A new perspective

There are many other things in Kant's writing that can be questioned, disputed or specified, (among others the precise functioning of the claim for universality) however, I have only tried addressing the problems arising from the free-dependent beauty distinction because in this way I could introduce architecture inside Kant's aesthetic theory. However most of these disputes can, in my opinion, be solved by acknowledging two major limitations of Kant's text.

The first intrinsic problem of Kant's aesthetic theory is that it is actually written as a theory of judgment and therefore it doesn't directly deal with the actual experience of the beautiful. Also this means that the entire text is shaped according to a scheme Kant used elsewhere, namely the one in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. The demarcation line between when Kant is talking about the experience of beauty as opposed to the judgment of beauty is not clear and creates many interpretational problems. Secondly Kant struggles with the legacy of his contemporaries, namely the strict dichotomy of object and subject. Still Kant's theory stays a solid base to start from since he addresses and/or deeps out almost anything one can say about the experience and judgment of beauty.

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Gernöt Böhme addresses both these problems of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in his writing *Kant's Aesthetics: a New Perspective* (Böhme, 1995). According to Böhme, to fully understand the meaning of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, one has to read the entire book "laterally" because Kant's most significant observations are often hidden in his work and are frequently found in examples, footnotes and excurses (Böhme, 1995, pp. 101, 116). What you will find then is not an aesthetic theory that is merely concerned with the judgment of beauty but one that is in truth "*a highly sensitive and sympathetic examination of the phenomenon of beauty and of the experience of beauty*" (Böhme, 1995, p. 116). However, the entire *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is not written as such. In principle Kant wrote a theory on the judgment of beauty and not on the experience of beauty. This means that the entire text is shaped according to a different scheme, namely one that contains an analysis of the judgment "x is beautiful". And therefore it does not directly treat the experience of beauty.

Like said before, it is unclear what is actually meant when saying "x is beautiful". The word beauty is used with different intensities, sometimes doing more justice to the word, sometimes less. As Kant would say it, some judgments of beauty are pure and some are not. Kant tries

to distinguish a pure judgment of beauty as opposed to one that is not pure by stating what it is not. Namely; an object is beautiful when it is the object of a necessary delight apart from any interest, apart from a concept and apart from the representation of an end. Additionally Böhme finds that Kant asserts that beauty is not a predicate, but that we speak about beauty *as if* it is a predicate. This form of speech, "x is beautiful" suggests that the term beautiful is a predicate applied to x. Kant breaks through this appearance by saying *"He will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a property of the object and the judgment logical"*. However Kant does not give a decisive answer about what beauty then is, he only states what it is not.

What does become clear in Kant's writing is that the basis for the judgment "x is beautiful" is to be found in the judging subject, and not in x. It is a judgment on the state-of-mind of the subject in the face of the beautiful object, to be more precise, a judgment concerning the harmonious play of the faculties of imagination and understanding in the mutual relation with the powers of a given representation (Kant, 2000, pp. §9, 102). The true meaning of "x is beautiful" would then have to be "I feel myself beautiful in the face of x" (Böhme, 1995, p. 102). Kant doesn't come to this strict analogy because it confronts him

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with the problem of *a relation* between subject and object. Kant stays under the spell of his contemporaries and the strict dichotomy of object and subject. Because of this he cannot assign the basis of this relation in the object and thus he has to seek it in the perceiving subject.

Böhme, however, suggest that beauty is to be found in an in-between; a theory of beauty should be concerned with the relation between human states *and* environmental qualities (Böhme, 1993, p. 114). Because, as Böhme points out, the judgment of beauty can only be made at all if x, the beautiful object, is given. The perceiving subject and the radiating object thus must have some sort of shared reality. Also in Kant's writing such inter-subjectivity can be found, although he is never decisive. When Kant claims that the judgment of beauty is "apart from a concept" (§9) this also means that the judgment "x is beautiful" does not refer to what x precisely speaking is, but it does refer to the fact that x is given at all.

Other examples of inter-subjectivity are to be found in Kant's use of free beauty and his use of the word representation. Like explained before, in my interpretation, free beauty can relate to both; the judgment of the subject *and* the qualities of the object. The freeness of beauty

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relates to both; having a free state-of-mind *and* dealing with a beauty free of an imposed concept. Also Kant's use of the word representation has this ambiguous place in his writing since it is precisely an in-between. In a judgment of beauty one feels pleasure caused by the free play of the mind reflecting on the *representation* of an object. When we perceive and reflect upon an object we can never perceive the actual entirety of the object, we always see a representation of the object. For Kant this representation is the word for an object at any stage in its determination by the subject (Palmquist, 2010). Once it is determined we will see the object as the thing we have determined it to be. But before its determination it stands in-between the subject and the object, it is neither in the object nor in the subject.

5 Atmosphere

Because Kant is never unambiguous about the intersubjective status of beauty I will continue with someone who is, namely Gernot Böhme. In his writing *Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics* (Böhme, 1993) he uses the existing peculiar intermediary status of atmospheres as an in-between that could play a crucial role in redefining a theory of beauty. This theory is thus concerned with the relation between human states *and* environmental qualities. It searches more in-depth to the meaning of this "and", this in-between, in order to find an entity that could bridge the gap between the state-of-mind of the perceiving subject and the environmental qualities in which the subject is immersed. This in-between, characterized by Böhme as atmosphere, suggests a quality radiated by objects that *tinctures* the mood of the perceiving subject. It must be clear that such an approach to an aesthetic theory is much more serviceable to a possible creator of beauty (an architect) because it connects the qualities of the beautiful object to the feelings in the perceiving subject caused by that object. In this sense it adds to a theory on the judgment of beauty because its focus shifts towards the understanding of the experience, and the interconnection of subject and object, that comes before the judgment.

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Böhme uses the word atmosphere as we use it in everyday life; *"one speaks of the serene atmosphere of a spring morning or the homely atmosphere of a garden"* (Böhme, 1993, p. 113). In this manner of speaking it is unclear whether we should attribute atmosphere to the objects and environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them. We both feel at home in the homely garden and the garden itself is homely. The atmosphere of the garden is precisely an in-between. *"On my feeling I can feel in what kind of place I am"* (Böhme, 2014, pp. 27,28). Of course not only the place you are in defines your state-of-mind, you always carry in yourself a certain mood. What Böhme tries to make clear is that this mood you carry can be influenced or strengthened by the atmosphere you find yourself in. The atmosphere sets a kind of underlying tone that *tinctures* all the others moods that arise in you. A homely garden can help you feel at home, however, it is not a guarantee; it is a heightening of a possibility. The homely garden tries to lure you into a state of homeliness. When we deal with an experience of beauty the presence of the object and the receptivity of the subject merge and co-interact.

Because atmospheres belong neither to the object nor to the subject it is difficult to define what they are. Böhme

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expresses this as follows: *"Atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thing-like, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities. Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subject-like, belong to subjects in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space"*(Böhme, 1993, p. 122). One of the keywords in Böhmes explanation is presence; or more precisely the simultaneous presence of body and thing; the co-presence of the two (or multiple). Without the co-presence of the perceiver and the perceived there would be no atmosphere. Atmosphere is the shared reality of the co-presence of the perceiver and the perceived. Atmosphere is the presence radiated by objects and perceived by a subject present. This sensing of presence happens before the object is determinate. You perceive atmosphere before you perceive objects. And in this sense atmosphere might precisely be what Kant calls representation, namely; an object at any stage in its determination by the subject.

The judgment which the perceiving subject makes about the presence of an object cannot communicate the

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characteristics of the object, because they are not determined yet, but instead that one responds to its presence in a characteristic way. This characteristic response, a feeling of pleasure caused by the free play of the faculties of the mind *and* the presence of the object, is called beauty. To say "x is beautiful" is to say; I find myself in a characteristic state, with a corresponding feeling, in the presence of x (Böhme, 1995, p. 105). The connection between the subject's state-of-mind and the object's characteristics is exemplified in atmosphere.

Additionally, besides its intersubjective character, atmospheres are noteworthy because they always consist of a multi-sensory perception. Atmosphere consists of the perception, with all the senses available to you, of the presence of all the things surrounding you. A cozy atmosphere is in so far cozy in that vision, olfaction, audition, tactility, thermoception, proprioception, and all the other senses you want to distinguish harmonize into one atmosphere of coziness. As the Finish architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa would say: *"The judgment of environmental character is a complex multisensory fusion of countless factors which are immediately and synesthetically grasped as an overall atmosphere"* (Pallasmaa, 2014). This also means that the harmoniousness of an atmosphere can

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easily be disturbed if one of the sense perceptions is unharmoniously triggered. If a room looks cozy, has a cozy touch and smells cozy the harmony of the cozy atmosphere can still easily be disturbed if there is heavy metal music playing.

As Böhme notes there are an infinite number of atmospheres, among others he names: serene, serious, terrifying, oppressive, elevating, open, confining, joyful, melancholic, majestic, frosty, cozy, festive (Böhme, 1993, p. 123; 2014, p. 29). This list seems endless and unclear therefore Böhme proposes three groups of characteristics which the different atmospheres could belong to. The first group could be characterized as intimations of movement in the confines or expanses of space. Atmospheres belonging to this group are for example open, elevating and oppressive. The second group is made up of synesthetic properties. This group consists of atmospheres belonging to more than one sensory field simultaneously, for instance when we find ourselves in a chilly atmosphere this might be because of the low temperature and/or the cold blue color. Atmospheres belonging to this group are for example chilly, sharp and warm. The third group consists of atmospheres described by their social characteristics. These are the most culturally specific atmospheres, belonging to this group are

Atmosphere

for example serious and cozy but also holy and powerful (Böhme, 2014).

This introduction and grouping of different atmospheres, and thus different ways a co-presence can manifest itself, adds a whole lot to the discussion on aesthetics. However, this new approach to aesthetics is not specifically dealing with the experience of beauty but also with the experience of joyfulness or the experience of melancholy. All these different atmospheres create a distinct feeling in the perceiving subject. So, what is the place of beauty between all these atmospheres? Böhme suggests that beauty is (just) one of many atmospheres when saying: *“Classical aesthetics dealt practically only with three of four atmospheres, for example, the beautiful (and) the sublime”* (Böhme, 1993, p. 122). It seems like Böhme suggests that you can find yourself in a beautiful atmosphere in the same way as you might find yourself in a melancholic atmosphere.

I don't agree with this. Since beauty can be found in so many different occasions, not all of them “feel” the same in the way one melancholic atmosphere feels the same as the other. What I propose is that beauty is indeed an intersubjective entity but that it is not a specific type of

Beauty as Experience

atmosphere. If you find yourself at the beach during sunset with your beloved one the co-presence of you, your love, the setting sun, the water, the beach, the temperature, the wind and everything else together could form a romantic atmosphere. You both feel romantic and the setting is romantic. However, besides the romantic-ness of this atmosphere, the whole atmosphere can at a certain moment create a more intense feeling inside you; a feeling of beauty. This feeling can either feel to be caused by the romantic-ness of the atmosphere itself, a beautiful romantic atmosphere, *or* by a separate object within this atmosphere, for example the sun. Atmosphere is always produced by all the objects present in your field of perception in interaction with your state-of-mind. Beauty is found either in the totality of all these objects, so in the atmosphere (a beautiful melancholic atmosphere), *or* in one separate object part of this atmosphere (beauty).

So firstly beauty can be the feeling of pleasure caused by the harmonious play of the faculties of imagination and understanding in the mutual relation with the co-presence of the entire environment which is radiating a unique atmosphere. For this all the objects present are judged as being a whole and possess a certain harmony in that they radiate a same sort of atmosphere. Beauty is found in the

Atmosphere

harmonious wholeness of the atmosphere. An example of this could be the experience one has in a Gothic church during the holy mass in which the forms of the architecture, their old stones, the sound of the liturgy songs, their echoes, the smell of incense, the light falling through their smoke, the courteous faithful all work to create a same sort of sacred atmosphere. The wholeness found in this atmosphere can be experienced as beautiful.

Secondly beauty can be found in a separate object within an atmosphere. This beauty shows its presence in the same way as atmospheres, as a co-presence, but without precisely being an atmosphere. In this occurrence atmosphere is the co-presence of the entire environment, all objects co-present, while the beautiful is found in one of the objects present. This beauty is part of the atmosphere with which it harmonizes but at the mean time it stands out from this atmosphere and becomes a separate entity within the atmosphere it belongs to. An example of this could be the experience one has while strolling through an old Dutch city in which the bricks of the buildings, their detailed window frames, the bricks of the pavement, the tree lined canals, the bridges over them and the murmuring of the citizens harmonize to create an unique atmosphere. Strolling through this atmosphere and going around another corner

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you will find the market square opening up towards you with on the other side of it the soaring church tower, standing high above the rest of the city. The sudden presence of this separate object, that is simultaneously part and not part of the surrounding atmosphere, might trigger inside you a feeling of beauty. The materiality and position of the church tower makes it harmonious with the rest of the cities atmosphere, while in the meantime its bigness makes it stand out of it.

In both cases atmosphere plays a major role in the facilitation of beauty; however, since beauty is not precisely a defined atmosphere in itself, we should ask ourselves what kinds of atmospheres do facilitate an experience of beauty? As we found in Chapter 2 the faculty of imagination harmonizes with the faculty of understanding in environments in which one can perceive whatever might be without any commitment to what that might be, while, at the same time one is in an environment in which one is unknown. So, on the one hand the perceiver must feel safe enough in its encompassing atmosphere to look at the world without relating it to particular concepts, while, at the mean time the perceiver senses that there is something unknown to be found in this same atmosphere. An atmosphere that complements the experience of beauty, in the way that it

Atmosphere

contributes to providing the perceiving subject with a free state-of-mind, is preferably one in which the perceiver feels safe while at the mean time it holds surprises.

6 An experience of beauty

What we found in the previous two examples is that beauty is not a singular experience in time and space; it is instead an experience that enfolds in time and through movement⁴. There is a sequence of events before the actual feeling of beauty is evoked and the corresponding judgment is made. The way beauty is experienced, with all its various parts and elements, is the pre-eminent thing that binds various experiences of beauty together. Some of the elements of which the experience of beauty is comprised have already come past; for example the importance of the state-of-mind when perceiving beauty *and* the importance of atmosphere when perceiving beauty are both part of this experience. First you have to be in a certain state-of-mind, then you perceive a presence, this emits a certain feeling in yourself, and only after that you judge an object or atmosphere as beautiful. Kant has in his writing mostly kept his focus on the functioning of the final judgment and thus keeping his focus mostly on the theory of art-critique side. The succession of possible events is, however, more interesting for anyone who wishes to create something that has the capacity to be found beautiful, for example an architect.

⁴ Movement of yourself or the things around you, may they be visual, olfactive, auditive, etc.

An experience of beauty

Because when an architect understands the elements of which an experience of beauty is comprised, s/he can design his buildings in such a way that this experience is facilitated.

To dig further into the elements of which an experience of beauty is comprised we turn to John Dewey, he takes this succession of events, the experience, as a starting point of his aesthetic theory in his book *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1994). He sees the final judgment of beauty merely as an intellectualization of the actual experience of beauty. "*For Dewey, judgment is an act of intelligence performed on perception for the purpose of more adequate perception*" (Ledey, 2013, p. 22). Furthermore he describes the experience of beauty as "an" experience that is a defined whole separate from experience in general. An experience has a beginning and a clear end that are separate from the general flow of experience: "*(...) we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment*" (Dewey, 1994, p. 36). This experience is clearly marked by the consummation in the feeling of beauty, or, in other words; the experience runs its course to fulfillment in the feeling of beauty. The experience of beauty ends at the moment this feeling is intellectualized by judgment, when judgment is made the perceiving subject

Beauty as Experience

snaps out of its state-of-mind that is in free play. The faculty of understanding starts to constrain the faculty of imagination, we will try to find logical argumentations for our judgment of beauty and we start to feel desire and importance in defending this judgment; we lose our disinterested look on the object and the experience is terminated.

What I find interesting about Dewey's approach is that the experience of beauty encapsulates more than only the perception and/or judgment; it takes into account all the things that happen before the perception and judgment. In that sense it also takes into account how the free play of mind is formed and/or sustained by the experience itself, before this state-of-mind is confronted with the presence of an object of beauty. This is extremely useful information for a creator of potential beauty since the feeling and the following judgment of beauty are never possible without the perceiving subject having the correct state-of-mind. In the course of *an* experience the state-of-mind of the perceiving subject is constantly influenced by environmental qualities present in other objects presented to the perceiving subject as atmospheres. The state-of-mind can be influenced, strengthened or weakened, by the atmosphere that is radiated by the environment. Dewey stipulates that *an*

An experience of beauty

experience stands out because it is marked out from what went before and what came after. It is the experience *from* going through the gates of the city *until* reaching its crescendo on the church square. *An* experience has an unity established by a single quality that pervades the entire experience (Dewey, 1994, p. 38). I would like to characterize this single prevailing quality as the atmosphere of the experience (which we dealt with in the previous chapter)⁵.

Dewey identifies that *an* experience consists of successive parts, it flows freely without sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts; the parts continuously merge so that there are no holes or dead centers in it. This merging happens because of the harmonious wholeness of the encompassing atmosphere. What is most insightful about this stance is that *an* experience, which is distinct because it is separate from the general flow of experience because it has a clearly defined beginning and end characterized by one prevailing atmosphere, still has separate parts in it. There are parts but these parts merge into a whole, brought together by the

⁵ Dewey is not familiar with the concept of atmosphere, he, however, tries to grant this same inter-subjective characteristic to emotion. *"Emotion is the moving and cementing force (that) provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience"* (Dewey, 1994, p. 44)

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prevailing atmosphere. These parts in it are distinct, not because they have a distinct color of atmosphere, but because they have a distinct shade of atmosphere.

It must be said that every step in this sequence of experience doesn't necessarily lead to the following step and that this experience will thus indeed consummate in the feeling of beauty. The experience can be ended prematurely when there is a break in the continuous experience. This break is likely to occur when the harmoniousness of the atmosphere in which the perceiver is emerged is disturbed, *either* through an unharmonious object or movement in the environment *or* by the slipping of the state-of-mind of the perceiving subject towards a state-of-mind which is governed by understanding.

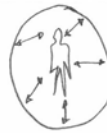
With help of the previous enquiry in the experience of beauty we can now start making a sequence of some of the elements of which this experience is composed:

An experience of beauty

1 Perceiving Subject: Subject is present and carries with him/her a certain state-of-mind and a specific nimbleness



2. Atmosphere: The perceiving subject and the presence of its environment have a shared reality exemplified by atmosphere. This atmosphere is breathe-in by all the senses of the perceiving subject. This is where the experience of beauty can possibly start.

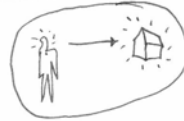


3. Free Play: The atmosphere has the ability to alter, sustain, strengthen or weaken the existing state-of-mind of the perceiving subject that is submerged in it. In an experience of beauty the atmosphere can help to change or sustain the state-of-mind of a subject into free play. The faculty of imagination becomes free from guidance by the faculty of understanding; we reflect upon what is

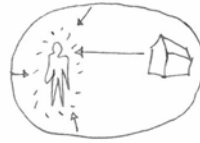


given without pinning things down.

4. Perception of Presence: The subject perceives the presence of a thing. This presence can either be of the harmonious totality of all the objects part of the atmosphere or in a separate object that is simultaneously harmonious and contrasting with this atmosphere.



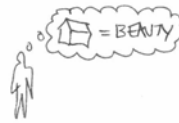
5. Feeling of Beauty: The subject reflects upon this presence with a free play of mind and this causes in him/her a feeling of beauty.



6. Judgment of Beauty: Based on this feeling the subject makes the judgment that s/he experienced beauty. This act of intelligence is made through utilizing the faculty of understanding, thus the perceiver snaps out of the free play of mind and the experience of beauty is terminated.



7. Predicate of Beauty: Beauty is assigned as a predicate to the object or environment that was present while intellectualizing the experience of beauty in: "x is beautiful".



A possible sequence of an experience of beauty in an environment could go as follows: Firstly the perceiving subject already has a certain state-of-mind before entering into *an* experience. This state-of-mind can be strengthened or altered towards a state-of-mind in which the faculties of imagination and understanding are in free play by the environmental qualities radiated through a certain atmosphere. This is supposedly an atmosphere that feels new (in that it is unknown) and hides secret but in which one still feels safe and without need to pay strict focused attention to anything in particular. It takes time, movement and a wide, broad, open perception to fully let the atmosphere affect your state-of-mind. This requires something from the perceiving subject, namely the free play of mind and a free way of perceiving, and something from the environment, namely a space in which the subject can spend time moving around while not having the necessity to focus their attention to presences that indicate something defined (traffic lights, tour guides pointing at stuff,

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nameplates, explanations, directions, a wild lion). Once in the correct state-of-mind one has the potential to feel beauty when perceiving the presence of atmosphere or the presence of something in this atmosphere. The experience will be consummated in the feeling of beauty. This feeling mostly means that the experience is brought to an end because this feeling gives you interest in the presence that caused it, you will try to define the presence as an object and you will try to define the feeling you just had. Your feeling goes into judgment and judgment to understanding and the loss of the feeling of beauty.

A great example of an experience that consummates itself in beauty is the entrance towards the ancient Roman city of Petra in contemporary Jordan. The visitor to this city first walks through a kilometers long, very high and quite narrow gorge. This gorge radiates an atmosphere that has the ability to change the state-of-mind of a subject that finds her/himself into it. There is hardly anything that requires strict focused attention and the direction of movement is clear. Still in the movement through the gorge there is an anticipation of new things to happen. You move around a corner, the gorge widens or narrows, it becomes higher or lower, there is more light or more shadow, the color of the stone slightly changes. The time that is forcefully spent in the

An experience of beauty

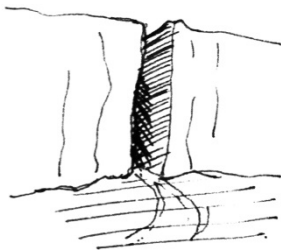
gorge, because of its length, gives the subject time to fully absorb the atmosphere of the place. The gorge ends facing the temple El Kazneh. This temple is carved out of the same rocks, illuminated by the sun (which is lacking in most of the gorge), clearly man made but still very much part of the same atmosphere. It is easy to find this temple beautiful. The entire gorge prepared your mind to be in the correct state of perceiving the El Kazneh as beautiful. Without this preparation the beauty of the El Kazneh would be less intense, or at least more mediocre. Further into Petra there are more similar temples as the El Kaznheh, some larger and more meticulously crafted (so formally speaking maybe more beautiful), however they do not get the same universal appreciation in terms of beauty as the El Kazneh has.

7 Promise of more

But why does the El Kazneh trigger the feeling of beauty? And not some other object? Why should that stone on the ground not trigger your feelings, you are in the correct state-of-mind right? I think it is quite right to say that, when you are in the correct state-of-mind, anything can be perceived as beautiful (light falling on a grain of sand, or a suddenly found flower). However there is a much higher change that you perceive the El Kazneh at the end of the gorge as beautiful. There are a few simple reasons for this; firstly the El Kazneh is framed in such a way that the eye is immediately pulled in its direction, it does this without disturbing the atmosphere in which the perceiver is immersed. The El Kazneh is directly framed by the end of the gorge itself; it is clearly marked as the end or consummation of the entire experience. Adding to this is that there is a contrast between the dark gorge and the light shining on the El Kazneh, pulling the eye towards the light. Thirdly the forms of the El Kazneh are in contrast to the natural forms of the gorge and its surrounding. Still El Kazneh is very much part of the whole atmosphere of the environment because it is cut out of the same rocks. Additionally the El Kazneh is put on a small pedestal to make it seem more important. The combination of these features, being in contrast but still very much part of the

Promise of more

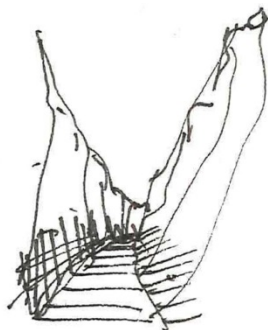
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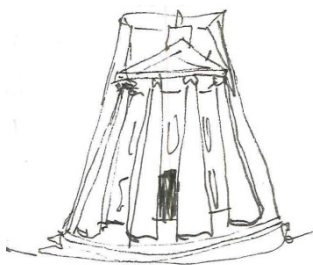
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6.



7.1 The sequence towards the El Kazneh

Beauty as Experience



7.2 The El Kazneh is framed by the gorge

encompassing atmosphere while at the mean time being framed, heightens the chance that a subject in the correct state-of-mind is unconsciously pulled towards the presence of the object. This doesn't necessarily mean that the subject will indeed experience the object as beautiful; much is dependent on personal taste and previous experience (if you have claustrophobia you might hate the gorge, if you despise or love roman architecture your experience might become polluted, etc.), still the frame and the contrast heightens the chance of beauty to happen.

This frame and contrast pulls our eye⁶ towards something, it puts emphasize on the object but it doesn't tell us anything about the object itself. This is also apparent in the fact that the presence of the object is judged of beauty and not the objective object itself. This leads to the question if there are any properties of the object that can heighten the chance of an experience of beauty to be consummated in the presence of that object? To find a direction in answering this we turn to Alexander Nehamas who in his book *"Only a Promise of Happiness"* characterizes beauty as an invitation to further

⁶ Beauty in atmosphere is found through a multi-sensory experience which is harmonious. Beauty found in an object within an atmosphere (like El Kazneh or beauty found in a musical piece (not in the complete atmosphere of music) is triggered by the pulling towards of one of the senses

Beauty as Experience

experiences (Nehamas, 2001; Sartwell, 2012, p. 7). The beautiful object promises us more; it evokes longing. The presence of the object can give hints towards this more.

I found, through analyzing various events of beauty that these hints *either* seduce you to a continuing of the experience of beauty, they promise you a prolonging of the experience you have now, *or* they promise you that you might find other (agreeable) beauty in it. In the El Kazneh the hints towards a continuing of the experience could be the pedestal and the entrance; we can continue our experience up and inside the building. The hints towards finding other beauty are mostly in the fact that it is immediately clear, while only perceiving the presence of the El Kazneh, that it is a "job well done". Because of its precise detailing in sculpture, columns and framing; it is worthy of admiration and thus of our agreeable beauty. Besides this it is also of importance that the El Kazneh forms a clear separate and defined unity, it is immediately apparent which elements are part of it and which are not. This is on the one hand achieved through the contrast in form with the environment, the carved rocks in contrast to the raw rocks. On the other hand the carved rocks form a unity in materialization and style that produce a

Promise of more

harmonious whole in itself, which is simultaneously in harmony with the encompassing atmosphere.

8 Elements

We can now name several elements that are always or frequently part of an experience of beauty. Most importantly it is essential that the perceiving subject has a state-of-mind that is open to perceiving beauty, this state-of-mind is called the free-play and is a state in which imagination harmonizes with understanding. The atmosphere in which the perceiver is immersed can facilitate the formation of this specific state-of-mind. This atmosphere is preferably safe, in that there are no things that require immediate focused attention, and harmonious, in that most of the various objects that make up the atmosphere radiate a similar atmosphere, yet at the same time the atmosphere should present or promise something unknown, and thus potentially unsafe and unharmonious.

When in the just state-of-mind anything can be perceived as beauty, either atmospheres or objects, however, some things can help you see the beautiful more easily; they lure the perceiver's senses towards their presence. Through the example of Petra we have found several of these elements. Firstly the *frame*. When the co-presences of which the atmosphere is composed emphasize the presence of the beautiful. This can either be a spatial frame, composed by the presence other than the perceiver's, or a mental frame,

shaped by the specific interest of the perceiver. The spatial frame can, naturally, take very different forms and intensities. It can be very clear, like the gorge of Petra, the picture frame around a painting or the pedestal of a statue, or very subtle, like a ray of light illuminating a façade or two earrings emphasizing the face of a girl. We won't dive into the mental frame any further, since, to be put to use by a designer, it requires a categorization of people into groups; something that would never do justice to the individuality of any person⁷.

Secondly, occasionally intertwined or connected to the frame, is the *border condition*, either experienced in atmosphere or in the beautiful. These borders are mostly presented to us in contrasts, may it be in shape, size, color or style. Borders in atmosphere are a transition towards a different shade of atmosphere and make you conscious of a next part in the experience. For example when moving through a city we see different elements of it, each defined by their own specific shade of atmosphere, from boulevard, over town canals, in streets, through alleyways and onto

⁷ As Deleuze and Guattari remarked on their co-writing of the book *Anti-Oedipus*: “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd (Ballantyne, 2007, p. 1)”. Referring to the multi-layers of which self-identity is composed.

Beauty as Experience

the market square. All these shades are brought together under the overall atmosphere of the city. However, precisely in their transition, the border between one and the other shade, we are pulled towards the next. This border can be unlocalized in atmosphere or localized in one specific presence. This presence, the beautiful, stands out of the shade of atmosphere it is immersed in, it is in contrast, while simultaneously being part of it, it is in harmony.

Thirdly the *Promise of More*. The presence of the beautiful does a promise to the perceiver by giving subtle hints towards a more. These hints can *either* seduce you to a continuing of the experience of beauty, they promise you a prolonging of the experience you have now, *or* they promise you that you might discover more layers than are apparent in immediate presence. Since beauty is found in a presence, the representation of an object, the object is not yet determined by the perceiver, it hides secrets. In architecture the promises towards a continuing of the experience can be quite direct; the ascending of stairs, the opening of an entrance, a window with a view or a peek towards the next space. However, these architectural elements should be designed with great care (not necessarily meaning with great detail); a normal door is not a promise. A normal door excludes the unfamiliar perceiver

Elements

from entering, while a promising entrance should invite the unfamiliar perceiver in, without becoming itself the object of beauty⁸.

The promise of layers hints towards a more to discover than is apparent in immediate presence. The presence of the beautiful gives clues to its multi-layeredness. Additional meaning is given to the beautiful object through its layers but their exact meaning is not yet grasped in the presence of the object, they are only hints and they require further discovery. While finding beauty in the presence of an object, this object invites you to further explore its hints and unravel its layers. The hints towards multi-layeredness form the first step in a narrative that enhances the meaning of the, now judged as beautiful, object. Although the layers can be multiple and of a very diverse kind, may they be referential, theoretical, political, historical, cultural, environmental, local or something else, they all enhance the overall narrative structure of the object itself. In the discovery of the narrative one immerses into a new experience which can again lead to beauty or one may find

⁸ In this door example I mean to explain the promise of continuing and not the promise of layers. Of course a door or entrance can be beautiful in itself, however, the perceiver's interest would then be terminated in the door itself and not in the continuing of the experience (and in what lays beyond).

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the 'reasons' for the previously found beauty. And we will find, as we all know, that these reasons can never suffice in explaining the beautiful.

In the preceding chapter I have put together some of the elements of which an experience of beauty is composed. Often these elements, as Dewey notes, overlap and merge in experience; therefore they might become less recognizable. Still, I think, the awareness of the existence of these elements could form essential knowledge for every designer because decisions about beauty are never something a designer can bypass. Before clarifying some of my statements in examples I will conclude this section by bringing the elements of which an experience of beauty is composed under keywords:

1. **Atmosphere.** Which is a gentle simultaneous balance between *Safe, Unknown and Harmonious*. In order to bring the mind into free-play.
2. **Frame.** The co-presence of which the atmosphere is composed helps to lift the beautiful from the general flow of experience. Either through a *Mental frame* or a *Spatial frame*.
3. **Border Condition.** A slight, balanced, contrast between the beautiful and its encompassing atmosphere creating a transition. This contrast can

Elements

be caused by a *Contrast in atmosphere* or a *Contrast in presence*.

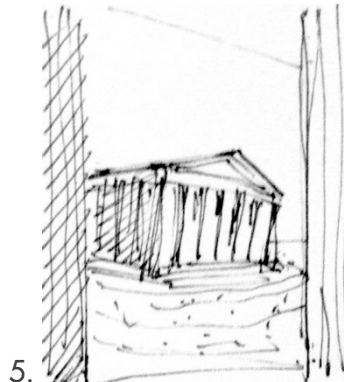
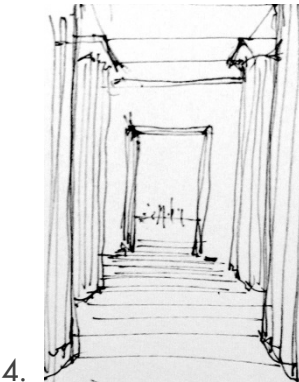
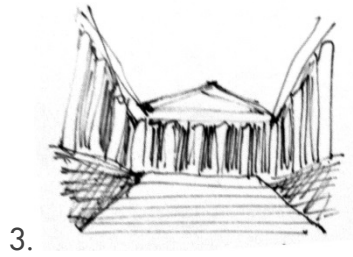
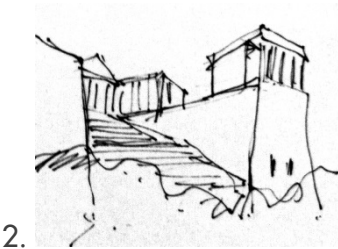
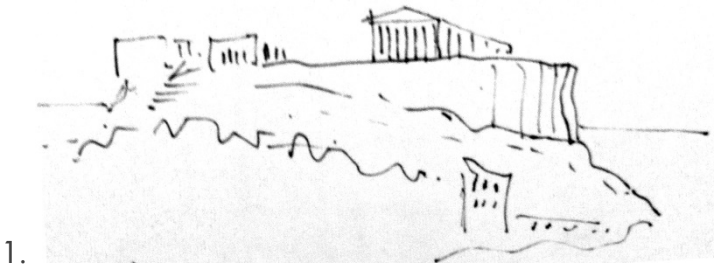
4. **Promise of more.** The presence of the beautiful does a promise to the perceiver by giving subtle hints towards a more. Either by the *Promise of continuing*, hinting for a continuation of the current experience, or by the *Promise of layers*, hinting towards additional narrative layers of the object.

9 Examples

The Parthenon in Athens has generally been regarded as one of the most beautiful examples of classical architecture; mostly motives are given such as its great historical value and adherence to the rules of the golden section and perspective. I will argue that the beauty found in the Parthenon is mostly caused by the way how the movement in and towards the Acropolis is able to facilitate the several elements of the experience of beauty. The given motivations, such as historical value and proportions, are merely the translation and intellectualization of the hints the Parthenon is giving in this experience.

From afar the hill of the Acropolis dominates the views over Athens and on it the Parthenon's presence already stands out. From any point in the city the Acropolis lures your eyes towards it; it already has most of the ingredients of an experience of beauty; it forms a border condition with the rest of the city below, it is framed by its pedestal and promises us more by the mythical ruins on top of it. However the real experience starts when approaching the Acropolis and the Parthenon slowly disappears from your field of vision. While approaching the Acropolis you start becoming more and more immersed in remnants from ancient Greek times; walking over the old stones of the

Examples



9.1 The sequence towards the Parthenon

Beauty as Experience



9.2 The Parthenon is framed by the Propylaea

Examples

Panathenaic way and passing the ruins of the Theatre of Herodes Atticus you start seeing glimpses of the ancient, and only, entrance towards the Acropolis; the Propylaea. At the brink of ascending the stairs you feel already completely immersed in the atmosphere of these ancient ruins; an atmosphere that is safe and harmonious, yet unknown. While breathing in this atmosphere your state-of-mind becomes in harmony with the atmosphere; the free play of mind is formed.

While ascending the stairs you are on the one hand invited onto the Acropolis by the Propylaea through a carefully choreographed entrance, while on the other hand it blocks, but latter reveals, the Acropolis. First the two wings of the Propylaea embrace your coming in; you are now surrounded by the colonnades without being under them. Moving up further you find yourself between the Propylaea's columns; there is only a glimpse of the Acropolis from here because the colonnade towards the Acropolis is divided by a wall, with a gate, in the middle blocking the views. Going through the gate of the Propylaea you are suddenly confronted with the three-quarter perspective view of the Parthenon, framed through the last colonnade of the Propylaea.

Beauty as Experience

The structure of the Parthenon creates a border condition because of its contrast in size accentuated by its highest point placing and pedestal. Furthermore it promises you more than is apparent in its first appearance. Its ruins promise you a rich historical layering and other narrative structures to be discovered. While its heavy roof and pedestal frame its dark and promising interior; giving a promise of a continuation of the experience ascending its pedestal and discovering what is beyond the columns. Precisely because of the three-quarter perspective view you are having from the Propylaea the interior of the Parthenon is not revealed⁹.

Now for an example closer to home, my home town, the medieval Dutch city of Delft. What I see happening here everyday is that tourists (beauty seekers) are dropped out of their busses halfway into the city, right besides one of its main monuments; the New Church. By this way of access they are placed halfway into the experience and they are denied the involvement in the full experience of beauty from beginning till consummation. They can only halfheartedly

⁹ In ancient times the experience was continued when moving closer to the Parthenon. It was forbidden to enter the rooms inside the Parthenon, but from some points glimpses of the interior and the majestic statue of Athena were revealed.

Examples

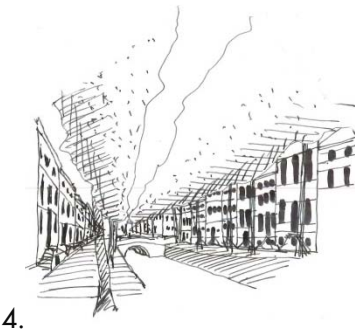
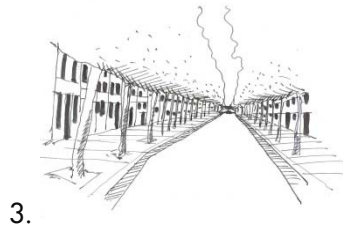
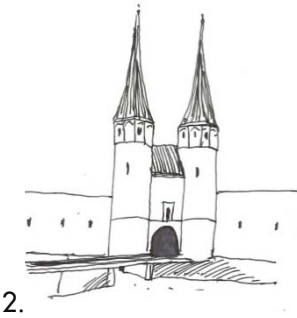
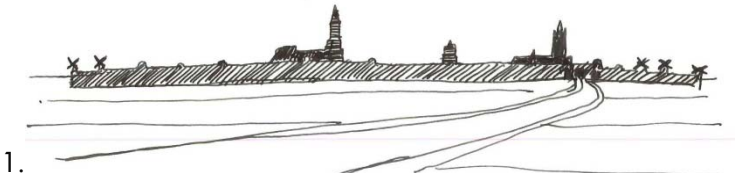
experience the play of atmosphere and the revealing and vanishing of Delfts main beauties.

This experience can most completely be described when we take Delfts old situation in mind, in which Delfts defense walls were still intact and the city stood solitarily into the flat agricultural landscape. When approaching the city of Delft from the countryside we already see some of the churchtowers spiralling above the city. Like in the Acropolis, Delfts' presence already stands out. From any point in the landscape it lures your eyes towards it; it already has most of the ingredients of an experience of beauty; it forms a border condition with the surrounding landscape, it is framed by the city wall, which acts as a pedestal for the church towers, and these church towers promises us more through their sheer contrasting size. Again, the real experience starts when approaching the city; when the church towers slowly start to disappear because of the rising city walls. At this moment the city gate becomes in sight, while moving towards and through the gate it forms a transition from the open and unprotected atmosphere of the landscape towards the enclosed and protected atmosphere of the city. The harmonious atmosphere of Delft, defined by the tree lined canals and the encompassing brick materialization, is both safe and unknown. Strolling through Delft we see different elements of it, each defined by their

own specific shade of atmosphere, from streets, over town canals and through alleyways. Each transition in atmosphere lures us towards the next. This play of transitions reaches its crescendo when entering the market square. There, framed by the sides of the Town hall and the town houses, the New Church is revealed to us. The open market square displays a new shade of atmosphere that at the mean time opens up views towards the church. The New Church forms a border condition with the rest of the city, because of its contrast in materialization, style and size, still it is very much part of it because of its exact placement in the urban fabric. Furthermore the opened and deep seated entrance promises us a continuation into the church and up the church tower, promising again extraordinary views. While we only perceive the presence of the church in the perception of beauty it is still immediately clear that this church carries an additional narrative, hints towards this are the multi-colored construction of the church¹⁰.

¹⁰ The multi-colored construction of the New Church makes some people dislike this church, I suggest the reasons behind this is that it breaks too extensively with the surrounding, all brick, atmosphere.

Examples



9.3 The sequence towards the New Church

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9.4 The New Church is framed by the Town hall and the market square housing

10 Conclusion

Learning from Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, the interpretations by Gottfried Böhme and the writings of John Dewey and Alexander Nehamas I decomposed the experience of beauty into several moments and elements. These moments and elements should never be understood as blunt steps or parts; they flow freely and continuously merge into one whole; *an* Experience of Beauty. When analyzing these experiences, we can only vaguely distinguish their contours.

The standard sequence of moments that lift *an* experience of beauty from the general flow of experience are as follows: Firstly there is a perceiving subject that already has a certain state-of-mind. This state-of-mind is brought into free play, possibly by the encompassing atmosphere. Once in this state-of-mind, one has the potential to feel beauty when perceiving a presence. This perception of presence is consummated in a feeling of beauty. Your feeling goes into a judgment of beauty, this judgment goes to understanding and the loss of the feeling of beauty. To conclude beauty is assigned as a predicate to the judged object in: "x is beautiful".

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Within this standardized sequence of moments we can specify an additional four elements that are recognizable within *an* experience of beauty. They focus on the part of the experience to has to do with the formation of the free play, the perception of presence and the feeling of beauty. These elements refer to inter-subjective qualities of a presence. And, because they refer to qualities of things we perceive, they become graspable for a designer of these things.

The first refer to qualities of an encompassing atmosphere that can bring the perceiving subject into free play and can sustain this state-of-mind. This atmosphere radiates a presence which is simultaneously *Safe, Harmonious and yet Unknown*. The second and third refer to qualities of the co-presence of which the atmosphere is composed, which help to lift the beautiful from the general flow of experience. This can be through a Frame, either a *Mental frame* or a *Spatial frame*, that emphasize the presence of the beautiful. Or through a Border Condition: a slight, balanced, contrast between the beautiful and its encompassing atmosphere creating a transition. This contrast can be caused by a *Contrast in atmosphere* or a *Contrast in presence*. The fourth element refers to qualities of the presence of the beautiful itself. They do a promise to the perceiver by giving

Conclusion

subtle hints towards a more. The Promise of More can either by the *Promise of continuing*, hinting for a continuation of the current experience, or by the *Promise of layers*, hinting towards additional narrative layers of the object.

By understanding these moments and elements we can start to recognize them in our everyday life. And from this recognition, we, as shapers of the everyday world that surrounds us, can start using these elements as a toolset in our designs. Of course, I will never claim that, by using these tools, all the things designed accordingly will indeed be beautiful. That is just not how beauty works.. However, by recognizing that each and every experience of beauty is lifted up from the general flow of experience in the same type of manner, we can be sure that, by accompanying these moments and elements in our designs, we gain some sort of control over this experience. And that is, I guess, as close as it gets.

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Anton Zoetmulder

Beauty as Experience

“The decomposition of the experience of beauty in architecture”

Beauty and architecture have a pretty problematic relationship. In architectural education beauty is often neglected because of its presupposed subjective character. Subsequently, architectural theories that are dealing with beauty tend to focus on the formal, objective, characteristics of buildings. This research tries to unite these two opposites, the subjective and the objective, by merging them into an experience related theory.

Laying aside the architectural focused theories, I will guide you through the dense aesthetic writings of Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, Gottfried Böhme and Alexander Nehamas. From there I will decompose the Experience of Beauty in order to find elements in it that are of use in the architectural design process and have value in the actual built thing.

Anton Zoetmulder