

AESTHETICS OF THE BUILT-ENVIRONMENT

Readings in the theory of beauty

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جماليات البيئة المبنية

قراءة في نظرية الجمال

ملخص

تمهيد:

فلسفياً الجمال قيمة مُطلقة، إلا أنه لا يختلف اثنان على الشيء الجميل؛ فالإحساس بالجمال يبعث بالراحة في نفس الإنسان ويتسرب إلى أعماقها عبر الحواس الخمس ليُشعرها بالسعادة ويُخفف عنها بعض همومها؛ فجمال الشيء لا يتوقف على طبيعته، بل على إدراك وتخيل الناظر له.

نقاش: الورقة تناقش مسألة القيم الجمالية بناءً على التعريفات المختلفة للجمال والتفضيل الجمالي للبيئة المبنية، كما تناقش ما ورد بكتاب: "عمارة الناس" للمعماري بايرون ميكليديس حيث قدّم بأن الجمال سيكون حقيقةً مُرهَفَ ورائع عندما أفراد مختلفين يحسون جمال نفس القطعة؛ لأن من المشاكل المركزية لمسألة الجمال هي دائماً عدم التوافق في الإحساس بالخصوص. يقول بايرون ان مشكلة البحث عن مبادئ مشتركة وراء التنوع الواضح ليست غريبة على علم الجمال؛ تماماً كما نشأت مشاكل مماثلة للغاية في تخصصات أخرى كاللغويات والأنثروبولوجيا، حيث جاء الاختراق في هذه المجالات من خلال تطبيق أساليب البنيوية، وهو يرى أن النهج البنيوي هو مفتاح علم الجماليات أيضاً.

على مستوى جماليات البيئة المعمارية والعمرانية تبحث الورقة في آراء البروفيسور بيتر سمث حول الجمال وفكرته بأن الانسان يولد بهذه الدنيا وهو مُزود بجهاز مُعقد لبرنامج ذهني مؤسس لردود الأفعال والإحساس نحو البيئة المحيطة؛ كما انه أشتغل على فكرة ان التفضيل الجمالي للمدينة يرتكز على اربع عناصر اساسية تتجاوز الزمن والثقافة وهي: (الإحساس بنمط الشكل، تفضيل الإيقاع، تمييز الاتزان، والحساسية نحو تناغم العلاقات) هذا وقد اتخذ من مدينة امستردام مثلاً لتطبيق نظريته.

الخلاصة: عرضت الورقة وجهات نظر مختلفة فيما يتعلق بأفكار الجماليات، حيث يرتبط إدراك وتقدير الفرد للجمال دائماً بثقافته وتقاليد ومعتقداته. الباحث يتفق تماماً مع فكرة أنه للإجابة على ماهية الجمال، على المرء أن يعود إلى الطبيعة، ويتعلم منها ويخرج ببعض القواعد التي يمكن تطبيقها على محيطه، وعلى العمارة والمدينة.

The Problem Identification:

Many philosophers tried to define what is the function of man's appreciation of beauty? So in this essay I will deal with the problem of aesthetics values, based on the different definitions given for the beauty in a general view, to come up with the urban / architectural aesthetic values. In the beginning let us see how the beauty has been dealt in Byron Mickellides book: "***Architecture for People***" where he advanced that the beauty would be fine where it is true that different individuals of the same species did find the same objects beautiful, but one of the central problems of aesthetics has always been the lack of clear consensus.

Byron Mickellides follows saying that the problem of looking for common principles behind apparent diversity is not peculiar to aesthetics. Very similar problems have arisen in other disciplines, notably in linguistics and in anthropology. The break-through in these fields came through applying the methods of structuralism. Byron Mickellides believes that a structuralist approach is the key to a science of aesthetics. In addition, Leui-strauss, in his discussion of the analysis of myth wrote as follows :

"... the contradiction which we face is very like that which in earlier times brought considerable worry to the first philosophers did notice that certain sequences of sounds were associated with definite meanings, and they earnestly aimed at discovering the reason for the linkage between these sounds were equally present in other languages although the meaning they conveyed was entirely different, the contradiction was surmounted only by the discovery that it is the combination of sounds, not the sounds themselves, which provides the significant data".

Discussions:

On the basis of Leui-Strauss's idea, Byron Mickellides follows expressing that each element of the appreciation or distasteful whole is, in isolation, indifferent, in a word, the material is indifferent, but the form comes under the aesthetic

judgment. Those judgments which are commonly conceived under the name of taste are the result of the perfect appreciation of relations formed by a complexity of elements. Byron Mickellides takes up the idea that there is one thing to point to, it is the importance of relations. However, some would say what relations are important while others may say why? As an answer few people have written with more insight about beauty than the poet Gerard Mantey Hopkins. Hopkins is hardly to be called a structuralist since the name had still to be invented in his life time, yet not only did he see that the essence of beauty lies in certain relations but he attempted explicitly to define what those relations are. In 1865, Hopkins wrote a paper for his tutor at Oxford in the form of a platonic dialogue between a student and a professor in a college garden . The two of them fall to discussing the beauty of the garden and they dwell in particular on the leaves of a chestnut fan, pointing out how each leaf is a variation with a difference of the common pattern, how the overall shape of the fan shows mirror symmetry, the left half being a perfect reflection of the right, each of the large oblique leaves, being reflected by an exact copy of itself in miniature, and he discusses too the relation between the leaves of the chestnut and the leaves of other trees. Then the beauty of the oak and the chestnut fan is a mixture of likeness and difference or agreement and disagreement, or consistency and variety, or symmetry and change. If we don't feel the likeness we should not feel them so beautiful, or if we did not feel the difference we should not feel them so beautiful. Thus the beauty we find is from the comparison we make of the things with themselves, seeing their likeness and difference. And if we define rhythm as likeness tempered with difference, all beauty may be a metaphor called rhythm.

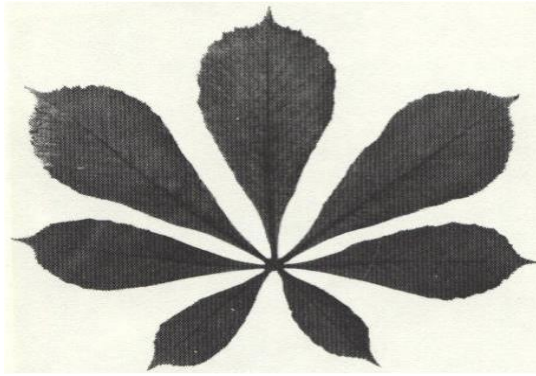


Fig (1) Chest-nut fan

With the same idea in England the philosopher Whitehead wrote of rhythm. He said : “ the essence of rhythm is the fusion of sameness and novelty, so that the whole never loses the essential unity of the pattern, while the parts exhibit the contrast arising from the novelty of their detail ”. Given this, Byron Mikellides follows by asking the question: Why do people like the relations which rhyme epitomizes? And what is the biological advantage of seeking out rhyming elements in the environment?

Here, Byron Mikellides introduces another element rhyme, taken as the paradigm of beauty. Then the answer proposed is as follow: Considered as a diological phenomenon, aesthetic preferences stem from a predisposition among animals and men to seek out experiences through which they may learn to classify the objects in the world around them. Beautiful structures in nature or in art are those which faciliate the task of classification by presenting evidence of the taxonomic relations between things in a way which is informative and easy to grasp. The role of classification then in this context is to help or organize sensory experience and to introduce an essential economy into the description of the world.

If the classification is the core of learning, what evidence is there that classification is agreable to men and animals alike? The Roman architecture and the aesthetics of the built-environment is a case in point. Man made cities

present a very complex panorama to our senses. Yet, houses, shops, gardens, alleys may-be seen as forming a nexus of relations which men in their instinctive quest for order are challenged to uncover. And if the city landscape has to be beautiful, then the classification's puzzle must be neither too difficult nor too easy to solve.

Summing up Byron Mikellides suggestes, on the basis of what have been presented previously, that to find the answer to define the aesthetics values, it is necessary to go out and learn from experience what natural structures men find beautiful, because it is among such structures that men's aesthetic sensitivity evolved Then we can return to the drawing board and attempt to emulate these structures in the design of a city, streets, buildings, masses and spaces. As a result, the cities we want will be those in which the relations, both temporal and spatial, between the artificial elements exhibit the felicitous rhymes of natural beauty.

Furthermore, the beauty has been also defined by Peter F. Smith and his urban aesthetics ideology. Smith thinks that there is considerable interest in the idea that we come into the world already equipped with an elaborate set of mental programmes which establishes probabilities as to the way we react to the given environmental situations. Smith connects the idea, saying that the repertoire of mental programmes is very much associated with the limbic brain evolutionary, the most primitive collection of systems on the cortical ladder. This is the area of the brain responsible for the emotions, and so many of those programmes will have an in-built emotional link. Then he takes up with the idea that intuitive capacity for aesthetic appreciation has, at least, four distinct components which transcend time and culture.

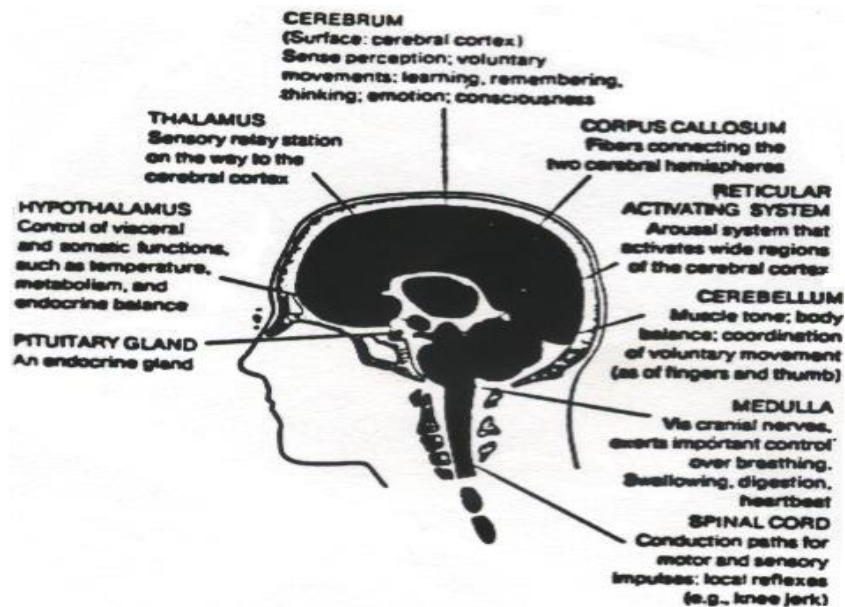
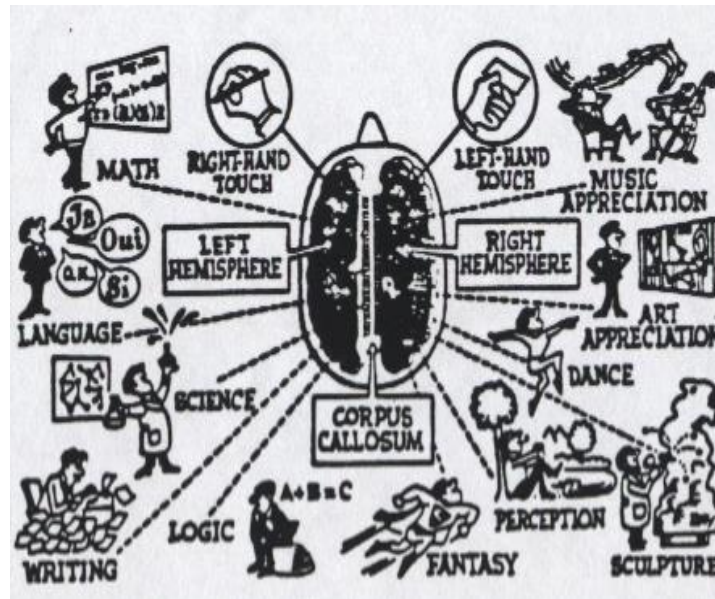


Fig (2) set of mental programs

They may be considered as four aesthetics programmes written by the genes and adapted to environmental circumstances; they are:

- the sense of pattern,
- the appreciation of rhythm,
- recognition of balance,
- sensitivity to harmonic relationships.

To understand more deeply Peter Smith's idea, let us take each factor individually explaining what those factors are and what role they play in the context of the aesthetic.

Rhyme and Pattern:

When an object manifests both, familiarity and novelty, it is described by Humphrey as possessing the quality of *rhyme*; then rhyme presupposes the simultaneous existence of complexity and pattern, with the later becoming dominant. In addition, the pattern that relates to rhyme does not comprise simple repetition, as in fabrics and wall-paper, but may be regarded as a system in which there may be no point to point correspondance but nevertheless substantial affinity. Peter Smith to explain Rhyme and Pattern concerning cities, gives the example of Amsterdam.

He said: " A city which one might say is dedicated to the principles of rhyming pattern is Amsterdam".

There are four integrated patterns which may register within the brain as features contributing to likeness. At roof level there is a pattern of lines sloping from right to left; the intervalls are irregular, but here again there is more to link them into a pattern than to suggest that they are random phenomena. The same can be said about the vertical divisions between plots. In the style of the Middle Ages, each floor tends to overhang the floor below it, this produces a clear pattern of short horizontal lines, accentuated by shadow. The arrangement of windows is such as to establish a strong pattern of small rectangles.



Fig (3) The City of Amsterdam

Rhythm :

There is a difference between rhythm and rhyme. The former relies for its impact on strict repetition. It has long been acknowledged that the brain derives particular pleasure from rhythmic presentation varying from the single binary kind to the complex repeated sub-systems which are evident in poetry, music and architecture. Thus the charm of Amsterdam lies in the fact that these rhythms rarely establish a strict tempo: there are countless irregularities. It seems that the mind derives much greater pleasure from extrapolating rhythm from situations in which likeness is tempered with difference, than from visual presentations in which there is no relief from the tyranny of accuracy. Here again P. Smith emphasises on Amsterdam being the perfect example.

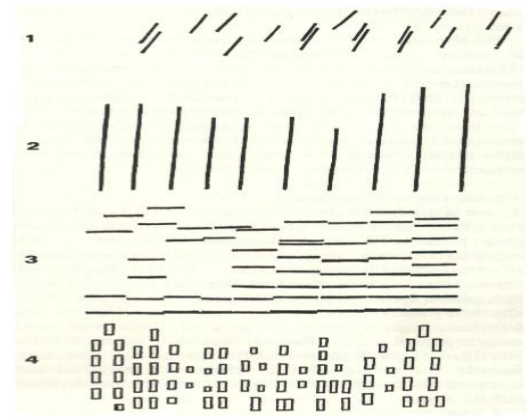
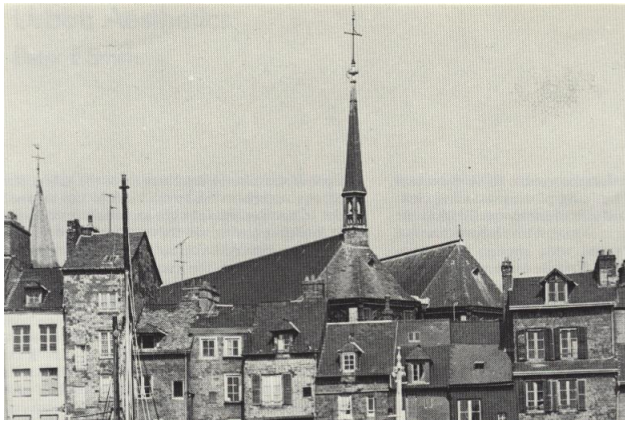


Fig (4) Rhythmic patterns, Honfleur, Normandy

Balance :

It is a fact that the human brain is able to perceive balance in visual situations which are not obviously symmetrical. The Gestalt psychologists are right to affirm that the human does have a preference for patterns, which ultimately balance out. P. Smith follows his idea by what R. Arnheim described as aesthetic balance; being a distribution in which everything has come to a stand-still. No change seems possible, and the whole assumes the character of necessity in all its parts. And that patterns are tested for balance by ascribing weight to their elements according to their size and inter-relationship. The components contributing to balance may include colour, texture, tone, mass and inferred weight. Even symbolism may be responsible for setting up a force field, which may, significantly affect the "force-system".

In one such view, attention is drawn to the various elements which make up the scene. Within the brain, a classification activity is initiated, prompted by the need to organize data according to how they relate to past experiences. At this stage of perception, the attention is concentrated on the various bits of information in the picture. Moreover, each parcel of information has an element of independence, and in the analogy with the physical world may be said to have its own centre of gravity.

If the scene is considered with each item with its force-field, and if it is exerting an influence upon its neighbours, since the whole thing stays stable, then all the various force-fields must ultimately contribute to a resultant centre of gravity. When this is somewhere near the centre of the system, then the whole scene is perceived by the mind as manifesting the quality of balance.

Harmony:

Finally P. Smith considers the last intuitive aesthetic capacity of the brain as the ability to respond to harmony. In the discussion of balance it was suggested that the interaction between the elements of a scene can produce a gravitational focus which is literally at the centre of the scene. At other times it is possible for the centre of gravity to be off-centre by an amount which conforms to a harmonic mean.

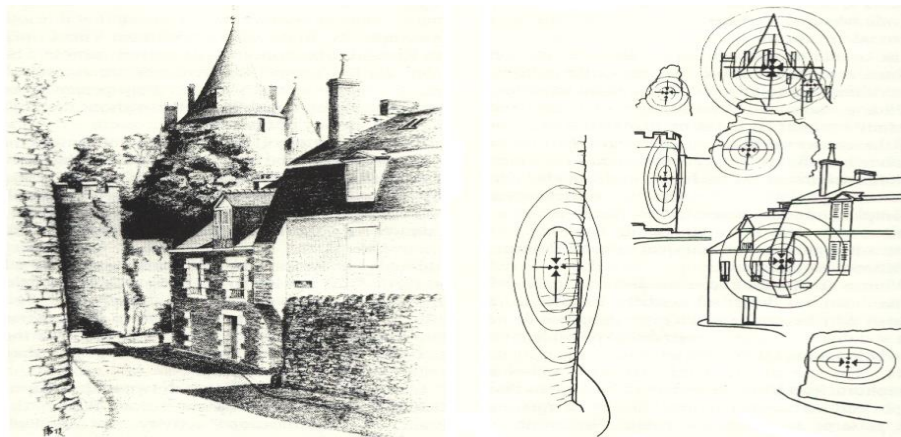


Fig (5) Balance and Harmony

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The paper presents the different point of views concerning the ideas of aesthetics which have been dealt at length before. I totally agree with the idea that to answer at what the beauty is, one has to return to the nature, learn from it and come up with some rules which could be applied to our surroundings, as well to the cities.

However, I think some justification is needed to the ideas of P. Smith. He neglects the man and his constitution as being different all around the world. But perception and appreciation of any object is always linked to the culture, the traditions, and the beliefs of the person. In my opinion, for the creativity, the man for some unknown reasons, has instituted some rules, and derive from there all kind of aesthetics with equal value. Furthermore, a city is like a dance which we perceive without analyzing it. All we feel is the aesthetic, the impression of beauty. The spectators appreciate even if they don't know the choregraphic rules governing it; but ultimately the dance is the result of the rules and their cohesion; although the rules are not the same to Japanese, to Hindus, to Arabs and to Europeans.

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