

Aesthetic, Somatic, and Somaesthetic Experience of the City

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Abstract: *The paper will deal with the notion of the experience (as a crucial term of aesthetic theory) of the city, especially the aesthetic, somatic, and somaesthetic experience. The understanding of experience will be based on John Dewey (1980), Richard Shusterman (1999), Maria Bukdahl (2012), Virgil C. Aldrich (1963), and Walter Benjamin (1935 [1969]). In dialogue with Richard Shusterman, we will illustrate two levels of experience: a) the somatic (almost biological) level of experience and b) a second level of experience that requires some intellectual evaluation: interpretation.*

Introduction

It may sound paradoxical considering the expansion of a somaesthetics (based on experience) and the fact that aesthetic experience is a central notion of everyday aesthetics (in contrast to aesthetic of art); considering the position of aesthetic experience in general, but the notion of aesthetic experience was intensely challenged in previous decades. The past two years were, from the theoretical point of view, so extreme that they even questioned the very need (or even necessity¹) of aesthetic experience and required some sort of revision.² If we accept³ aesthetic experience as a crucial term of aesthetics theory, and at the same time, the most common tool for aesthetic appreciation, and any aesthetic evaluation of the human environment, fine art, everyday realities or the human body... the weakening of it is something that we need to be wary of. Nevertheless, the new situation of the human environment that took shape over almost two years was, in the absence of possibilities and obvious aesthetic stimuli, theoretically interesting.

1 From Welschian's (1990) point of view, there can be the counter-argument that it was not the existence of aesthetic experience that was in danger, but we all grew ignorant, or overwhelmed by aesthetic impulses and stimuli, but in fact, the situation was different, because our reality changed and the aesthetic impulses have weakened or reduced in number, not by our own doing.

2 This need for revision was caused by the isolation (physical, aesthetic, personal...) of recipients and the absence of obvious aesthetic stimuli. I use the past tense because this need has appeared during the last two years, but it was never fulfilled, and the need to review, re-examine, and reformulate aesthetic experience is, in my opinion, still valid. We cannot deny that some structures and mechanisms of our everyday life and reality (including aesthetic experience) changed drastically.

3 A great part of the present paper could discuss the relevance and importance of aesthetic experience, but this sceptical approach would not be productive in any sense or way, and it would broaden the paper. If anybody (excluding John Dewey as an obvious, but not contemporary, choice) needs to be mentioned, in the recent but systematic analysis of aesthetic experience, it is N. Carroll (2002, 2012), A. H. Goldman (2013), G. Iseminger (2013), and R. Shusterman (1997). Carroll, Goldman, and Shusterman tried to redefine aesthetic experience and define the nature of aesthetic experience, but at the same time challenged the criticism of the given notion. For all the valid criticism, please see all of them.

The most potent environment (at any time) that offer many possible aesthetic situations and objects (including fine art, which cannot be excluded), can be understood as a complex aesthetic phenomenon and is capable of stimulating the revision of aesthetic experience in any sense or form is the main issue of this paper: the city as a special environment; world in itself. However, even this kind of environment, or perception of this environment, has been challenged during the past two years.⁴

The city will be, in this paper, understood in the most general sense as an urban space inhabited by its dwellers (this is one of the most important aspects of understanding the city as an object of somaesthetic interaction and somaesthetic examination). Composed of streets, alleys, squares, roads, different kinds of nature, etc., but especially of different architectural forms. Architecture is a defining aspect of the shape and understanding of the city, a structure⁵/ skeleton of the city: the most important aspect, layer, dimension... of the city. Architecture as a representation of space (Zervan, 2022)⁶ creates the space of the city and creates visible boundaries of the urban environment. If we experience the city, we most often establish our experience on the reception of the buildings, and architectural objects, on their relation, connection, harmony, inconsistency or their urban placement and so on (structure and position in general). Architecture gives us the frame for the experience (see Shusterman, 2012b) and at the same time determines the urban situation that we are experiencing, because when we experience the city, we experience this situation that we are part of. Urban situation is, therefore, a complex situation containing many processes when the aesthetic subject is no longer a distanced, nonparticipative recipient of the city, but becomes a part of the city, that he/she experiences by himself. He/she is not a passive element anymore, but becomes an active agent of the city. The issue of the recipient of the city, and dweller or inhabitant of the city, will be explored as an imperative part of the forthcoming analysis, because the participation of the recipient on a phenomenon or its distance is still an issue of discussion. What is crucial is that the somaesthetic and aesthetic aspects of the city (aspects that are dependent on a special type of attitude towards the objects) determines the character of the experience, and also modulates and specifies our perception of the urban situation.

The understanding of experience will be based on John Dewey (1980), Richard Shusterman (1999), Maria Bukdahl (2012), Virgil C. Aldrich (1963), and Walter Benjamin (1935 [1969]), but in opposition to Shusterman's understanding of experience as something more dominant, relevant, and important than interpretation. The position of interpretation will be more important, or at least equal to experience. Although Shusterman's main goal was to "resurrect" interest in the body as a somatic tool of experience and, therefore, deny everything that can undermine a bodily interaction with aesthetic facts (see Shusterman 1998, 2000, 2012), this

4 The way of experiencing the city and the human environment was also influenced. There was a time when the dwellers were afraid to walk freely in the street, and some paranoia from this period surely influenced our habits of experience in the city. John Dewey (1980, p. 4) states that the city can be aesthetically interesting only in its relationship to the recipient, only if the city "*becomes an experience for [a] human being*". However, what happens when there is no inhabitant in the city? It may sound like some scene from a post-apocalyptic sci-fi movie, but we have all experienced this kind of situation at least once in the last two years. We were maybe living in a city where there was a lockdown or saw some images of these kinds of cities. However, first of all, the space that we were living in is also the part of environment. It was still our flat/ house, but at the same time, it was something very different. We were living in a space that resembled a prison and this claustrophobia of space began to influence our experience: urban, aesthetic, somaesthetic... At the same time, the existing place became a background or a "cover" for virtual reality, a virtual environment that we used to live in. The virtual environment even become more real than the real one and for some people it was difficult to distinguish between different realities, because they could, or must, access the theatre, work, shops... from their home: from the same spot sitting behind a computer.

5 Structure is understood here in the structuralistic sense as something that has its layers in some structured manner, as something that is in constant dialectical relationship and every element is, in a dynamical sense, approaching other elements. In the case of architecture and the city, and its perception, this is a dynamic part of the experience (see for example: Mukařovský, 1966; Sériot, 2014)

6 R. Shusterman (2012b) speaks about architecture as an articulation of the space.

effort was motivated by the defense of popular art (suitable area for somaesthetic research), and his argumentation is defined by this motivation. Shusterman based his advocacy on bodily experience that is, in his opinion, not something inferior to aesthetic experience of art, but something totally different, because the rationality (base for interpretation) is excluded from this intensive, somatic experience. In dialogue with Shusterman, we can state a hypothesis which will be illustrated in the paper; there are always two levels⁷ of experience: a) a somatic (almost biological) level of experience and b) a second level of experience that requires some intellectual evaluation.⁸ It is necessary to note that these levels of experience are not something that distinguish the quality of experience nor something that can be hierarchized in any sense. Yuriko Saito (2017) indicates that even the (b) "second level of experience" could be something inferior to the (a) "somatic level" in the case of intensity.

The paper will deal with the notion of aesthetic, somatic, and somaesthetic experience of the city. All three experiences will not be understood as something different or hierarchized, but rather as different forms or concretizations of experience that are not in contradiction and even share some common ground (somatic level). Even if their relation and connection will not be explained further in detail,⁹ we need to note that all of them are connected. Somatic experience as a base for every experience (the body as an original receptor) can result in aesthetic, or somaesthetic experience. At the same time, it is a part of them both, because there is no experience without the body, and can dispose of aesthetic aspects. Somatic experience is always the base, and aesthetic and somaesthetic experience are its complex extensions. Urban experience, as a more general notion and more wholesome phenomena, will be understood as a complex experience of the city: an unspecified experience of the urban situation that includes all the other types and kinds of experiences specific for the city.

The paper will be divided into three main parts. In the first chapter, the notion of (aesthetic) experience will be discussed in general, although we will use some "unorthodox" authors (as stated above), therefore the understanding of the nature of experience will slightly differ from the widespread understanding of experience.¹⁰ The dominant and central understanding of experience in this paper can be defined by categories of particularity, interaction, activity, and originality, with the emphasis on experiencing either the aesthetic or the somaesthetic level of reality. The second part of the paper will focus on the recipient/dweller of the city as a necessary condition for any kind of experience, and, at the same time, almost an ontological condition for the existence of the city as an environment. The question raised by our participation in city life: "when does the experience of the city start" will be the leitmotif for this analysis. Even if we quite often use the notion of recipient as a typical notion of aesthetic theory, we need to emphasize that his/her participation and activity in the life of the city are necessary for the existence of any possible experience. If we are only perceiving something, we are not a part of the city, and we cannot experience it. The last part will review the specifics of urban experience (with the focus on aesthetic, somatic, and somaesthetic experience). Therefore, the paper will claim that

7 I would like to speak about levels, or layers, because this levelling is applicable for different kinds of experience. Yuriko Saito (2017) speaks in a similar way about the degrees of aesthetic sensibility and argues that aesthetic experience is not only the experience that has the most aesthetic influence. Even the less visible, or appreciative, aesthetic experience is good enough to be called aesthetic experience. Therefore, aesthetic experience is not something that is related only to fine art, or to the most visible experience, or to the experience with the strongest effect.

8 At the conference *The Promise of Pragmatist Aesthetics: Looking Forward after 30 Years*, which took place on 25-28 May 2022 in Budapest, R. Shusterman stressed, in the discussion, that his own theory was always based on the assumption of the existence of two types of meaning: the articulable and the inarticulable

9 I challenged this distinction in the paper *The Soma and the City: A Critical Approach* (Makky, 2021).

10 For a contemporary viewpoint on aesthetic experience and for a different approach towards the nature of experience, see Caroll, 2002.

the quality and intensity of urban (including aesthetic, somatic, and somaesthetic) experience, as an experience of the city depends on the activity and participation of the city dweller and is modified by the information that we have at our disposal, and can be changed due to the interpretation and evaluation of the experience itself.

1. (Aesthetic) Experience: general understanding as a theoretical background

John Dewey (1980, p. 35) is convinced that: "*Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviring conditions is involved in the very process of living.*" Every day, every moment, we are in the constant process of experiencing something, even if we do not realize it. This experience does not need to be really intense or aesthetic all the time (the possibility of aesthetic experience is enough: see Mukařovský, 1966 for Eng. translation see Mukařovský, 2015), but it is constantly present, and it offers a methodological frame for the examination of every aesthetic fact, object, or phenomenon. We acquire¹¹ most of the information about the world through experience, and only because of it. We, as recipients do not choose to experience something; we are experiencing it. This constant process of experiencing could be understood as a place for a critique, because in its banality it does not distinguish anything, but at the same time it shows the range of perceptive abilities of man. Naturally, we can ignore some aspect of our everyday life, and shift our focus onto something else, but if we decide so after gaining some information (after the interaction with phenomena that we choose to avoid), or, after first impressions, we cannot any longer ignore it as something that is not a part of our experience. If we already perceive something, it is part of our everydayness and our experience; we cannot delete it. Another crucial fact is that even if the experience is a really broad and indistinguishable notion as such, we can identify practical, urban, every day, aesthetic, somatic, scientific... experience. Therefore, all of them are still a kind of experience, but they have different characteristics, nature, and focus.¹² The city is, from this point of view, nothing extraordinary, because as a dweller of a city, we experience it constantly, and even if we are just a visitor to another city, we cannot stop experiencing this new situation. However, at the same time, it does not matter if we experience something trivial, or something new. We experience even the city that we live in, and although we know it so well, the experience could or should be different every time. It is a never-ending loop of experience, even when the intensity and degree of experience fluctuate a lot.

Any experience is based on the interaction of a subject (recipient, participator, dweller) and the object, or environment that they perceive. Richard Shusterman (2007) emphasizes the somatic aspect (somatic naturalism) of this interaction, anticipated already by Dewey (1980), and his methodology and approach resulted in somaesthetics. He put aesthetic experience and the human body, which serves as a mediator of all perception, action, and cognition in the center of his own theory, and he even puts the body, experience, and environment in direct connection. Somaesthetics can also be, in this context, defined as "*the critical [...] study of the experience and the use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation [...]*" (Shusterman, 1999, p. 302).

Shusterman (2006) is convinced that we are actively undergoing aesthetic experience and accepting the situation as it influences us. He criticized the understanding and position of

11 I would like to emphasise the words: "to acquire" and "most of the information". If we speak about experience, we acquire the information, but the understanding and critical evaluation of this information is not automatically a part of experience. Therefore, if we need something more than information, we need to interpret it, to understand it, not just to experience it, and even if this experience can be aesthetically pregnant, we need some kind of evaluation.

12 The approach that we choose to take is the answer to how to distinguish between different kinds of experience (see: Mukařovský, 1966).

aesthetic experience in the field of art, especially the most common conception of aesthetic experience as a valued experience. Therefore, when somebody describes aesthetic experience (according to him) he basically suggested "*that it is very likely to be valuable*" (Shusterman, 2006, p. 219). However, everyday aesthetics had shown us a couple of times that the aesthetic experience is not a guarantee of a real influential or significant value, but rather a revelation about the possibility of valuable aesthetic phenomena. Shusterman (2000) criticized the notion of aesthetic experience as "value", because it was in direct contradiction to his appreciation of popular art based on experience, and it was partially responsible for the distinction of the categories of high and low art. Therefore, he denies this axiological understanding of experience as its main characteristic and only "admits" its not-dominant existence.

An important element of Shusterman's and even Dewey's thinking is the distinction and relationship between experience and interpretation. Shusterman (1990) has consistently (even to the present day: see footnote 8) held the opinion that interpretation and understanding differ, or rather: are not the same. He searched for his answers in the field of everyday life, where the constant process of interpretation cannot exist, and some evaluations of the circumstances in which we find ourselves take place almost "instantaneously" and automatically (without any need for interpretation). Even when we (according to him) do not interpret, we can reach understanding. It is this preference for understanding and knowledge that Shusterman has a problem with, for as he argues (when criticizing the interpretation), "*the goal of interpretation is not aesthetic richness per se, but truth or correctness...*" (Shusterman, 1988, p. 148). This demand of the truth or truth-like claims, building on a correspondence theory of truth and knowledge, is the source of Shusterman's critique of interpretation. Interpretation, as a tool for revealing truth, is problematic for him, since he is convinced of the existence of non-articulative contents, or non-discursive knowledge, which the recipient attains quite often. (see Shusterman 1998, 2000, 2012). Shusterman's critique of the interpretation is therefore based on different reasons: a) advocacy of popular art focused on the aesthetic experience, b) existence of non-discursive knowledge, c) prioritizing aesthetic analysis over aesthetic interpretation.

At the same time, Shusterman (2012a, p. 275) mentioned that experience and interpretation "should work together", and we can strongly agree, because recent years have shown us how irreplaceable the interpretation is in the evaluation/understanding of aesthetic experience. The Czech pragmatist theoretician Zdenka Kalnická (2018) reminds us that pragmatism has arisen from the issue of interpretation, and, in a broader sense, we see that Shusterman understands this fact. He accepted the meaning and justification of the interpretation, but at the same time, he needed to undermine the position of interpretation in order to defend popular art, and somatic based experience, that understand interpretation as something unnecessary. Elsewhere, Maria Bukdahl (2012), in reaction to Richard Shusterman, made a valid remark: "*The aesthetic experience is never passive; thus, an artwork is not complete until the viewer has experienced and interpreted its particular qualities.*" As we can see, the interpretation is understood as an integral part of experience. It is not necessary for experience to happen, but it is necessary to understand it. Even if Shusterman disagrees with this statement, we can find in his conclusions the need for interpretation if the process of aesthetic experience wants to be completed.

Virgil C. Aldrich (1983) thought that aesthetic experience is a specific aesthetic sort of experience that occurs when man interacts with aesthetic objects, phenomena, or activities and therefore it is not something that could be mistaken for something else. It is something original that cannot be repeated. In this regard, we could discuss the possibility of auratic, in the sense of Walter Benjamin's theory (1969), value of aesthetic experience: something that is defined by its

time and space. Aura as a notion of the criticism of reproductive art is bound to tradition but is defined by its creation on a specific time, on a specific moment, that is ephemeral, and eternal at the same time. The time of the creation of some artefact will never change, not even with the creation of a copy, because the copy has a different "time stamp". The same logic is applied to a spatial aspect: not even the place (with its time relation and layers of meanings) cannot be recreated. All of this is also valid in the case of experience.

The originality, non-repeatability, uniqueness of experience inclines to a special kind of aesthetic experience more typical for experiencing fine art, but according to the notion of aura conceived by Benjamin, besides man-made artefacts, it could also be "*illustrated with reference to [...] natural objects*" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 5). Any kind of experience of the urban situation is defined by these two conditions: time and space; the same exact experience cannot be repeated; therefore, any experience is an original. Furthermore, experience is not a foreign concept to Benjamin. In the critique of reproductive art, he analyzes the concept of aura in the context of tradition (method of the preservation of aura) and cult (the original way of concretization of aura in our world) the base line of which is the experience and participation of a recipient: in other words, no cult rite, can exist without the participation of its participants (active recipients). It almost seems as if aura could be understood as an ontological and perceptive (based on the experience of the subject) notion, or that the ontology of the object of aura could be based on the experience that takes on the characteristics of time and space.

According to the above-mentioned approaches, we can distinguish between the following features of aesthetic experience:

- 1) **particularity**¹³: aesthetic experience differs from all other forms of experience with something unspecific¹⁴.
- 2) **interaction**: experience of the aesthetic object is dependent on the interaction between recipient and object.
- 3) **activity**: if the recipient experiences aesthetic experience and is the participant in an aesthetic situation, at that moment he/she is aware of it and actively participates in the experience, activity or event which can later initiate aesthetic interpretation.
- 4) **originality**: aesthetic experience is always in some sense original, not-repeatable, and auratic, because we cannot experience the same aesthetic experience again. To participate in an aesthetic experience means to be part of a transformative process, not to be part of something static and permanent.

The city with all its alleys, streets, trees, buildings, and parks is a complex environment that requires active recipients; therefore, the dwellers, to interact with it. Every day they experience the city, but they always experience something different because the city is in a constant process of changing and the experience is therefore always original: this is realization of the auratic

13 "Particularity" is a little bit problematic. According to Aldrich (1968), the aesthetic experience differs from all other kinds of experience, but according to Dewey (1980), Arnold Berleant (1986), and Nathalie Blanc (2013), we should not think in relation of opposition and difference but we should speak about general experience. It looks like we are contradicting each other, but in reality, this conclusion does not create any discrepancy, because we can declare that the aesthetic experience is something special that cannot be replaced by any other kind of experience, maybe with the exception of somaesthetic experience. Anyway, this claim does not mean that the other types or kinds of experience are in some way inferior.

14 Vlastimil Zuska (2002) also declared this position when he spoke about aesthetic distance.

aspect of the experience. They interact with the evanescent aura that proves the originality of the experience because it cannot be replicated, and even if all the stimuli of the city were the same, the mood or psychological state of the recipient would be different, and it will influence or determine the experience as such. The city or its structure cannot be ignored, because if it is, the dweller would be not able to perceive the environment that he/she is living in, he/she is therefore an active agent of the urban experience. All these characteristics of aesthetic experience will be looked at from a different point of view in the next part: the recipient/participant (dweller) as a crucial element of the city will be analysed.

2. The place of the (participative/nonparticipative) recipient in the city: the issue of city dweller

A specific aspect of urban aesthetics is the very fact that a recipient is not only an impartial observer but participates in the life of the city themselves: he/she is a part (or one of the aspects) of the city. He/she cannot separate themselves from the city or the urban situation that is known to him/her. Every action that he/she takes in the city becomes a piece of the city itself, because recipient creates the city at the same time he/she is experiencing it. If you take a photo, take out the trash, smell or plant a flower, walk through the street, socialize with people... you perceive and partly create the city. Imagine that you are doing your laundry, and you let it dry on the balcony. With this simple act, which is really banal, mundane, and, from the perspective of the recipient, really irrelevant, you can change the aesthetic effect of the building that you are living in. With this act, the facade of the building will change its colours and some alternation (even short-term) to the city would be made. However, this example does not end here, because if nobody sees your colourful laundry, the alternation of the visual aspect of your buildings is not recognised and, in this case, irrelevant, therefore imagine that some dweller (at this point a valid recipient) is passing by your building and sees the laundry. Maybe they just disliked your building, but for some reason, and they do not know why, they feel different today. It is possible that the colourful clothes that you chose to put on the balcony changed everything, because they liked this change, without even knowing it. Any aesthetic experience and subsequent aesthetic reflection of the city struggles with this participation (co-creation) on analysed phenomena (creating or perceiving one's favourite music in the street, pretty colours on the building, nice flowers beside the street, intriguing smells of food/perfume in front of the building) and inability to take the aesthetic distance that is, to some extent, necessary in formulating any rational conclusions (Zuska, 2002) or interpretation. On the other hand, with this kind of situation, aesthetic interest and enthusiasm as such arise, which can bring a more intense aesthetic experience (Elkins, 2001), and raises the argument of a disinterested approach towards aesthetic objects.

According to James Elkins, the more critically you approach some aesthetic object (in his analysis, he was speaking about fine art, particularly paintings), the more you lose the authentic and emotional value in the experience. In other words, if you encounter any aesthetic object with some "reservation" or distance towards it, you may not be able to appreciate the object adequately. At the end of Elkins' book *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (2001) the reader is not really certain if the "ability to cry" in front of a painting (to show some disturbing and extreme emotions) is something that we should strive for, or not. In this line of thinking, Elkins does not give us any explicit clues for aesthetically experiencing the city because he distinguishes between people that are able to cry in front of paintings and those that are not, therefore he focuses on the art. He makes the difference

between art critics/theoreticians and "common" recipients, and in some sense, he mourns for the times when he was able to (maybe just metaphorically speaking) cry in front of a painting. It is maybe something that is no longer approachable for theorists. Having said that, his approach is not totally inapplicable to our issue (otherwise we would not mention it). This distinction of recipients that are able to experience everything in an intense emotional state (tendency towards somaesthetic) and (not always) theoreticians that tend to use "cold" "calculating" intellect is universal in every field of aesthetics. There is a difference between somebody who can look at the streets, on the wall of some old building and feel (not just experience, but feel) something, and somebody who just sees architectural, and historical facts carved in stone.

From another methodological point of view, "we can ask" Theodor W. Adorno (1998), what to do. He also spoke about the situation when empirical experience and knowledge enter into a relationship with artistic/aesthetic experience. He concludes that too much information and empirical knowledge disturbs our aesthetic experience of fine art and the same can be said in application to architecture and the city. What happens if somebody is experiencing a renaissance building in the centre of a modern city? Probably he/she will sooner or later ask themselves why is there only one historical building and will confront the visible reality or maybe question the age of the building, because either the building is the only survivor of the old city (what is almost unbelievable), therefore something must have happened with the city in the past, or this building is a copy, or some modern, pseudo-historical monument. In this situation, we can appreciate the building, the structure of it, the colour, some ornaments, etc., but our understanding, and maybe the intensity of our experience will be different. In the first case, we implement the information in the experience of the city, and the understanding of the building as a monument of the past (the last survivor), will change our view on the whole city, its atmosphere and it will modulate our experience to be more sentimental. In the second case, we just understand and experience the building as a beautiful piece of architecture, in a modern city that stands up. These two possibilities show us the difference between valuable experiencing of a building, and therefore the city, and between experiencing some ordinary aspects of the building that gives us some aesthetic satisfaction.

From both examples, we can read a theoretical tendency, or need to choose between subjective and objective positions, and maybe the dilemma if we need to take a distance from the object of our experience. However, this problem lies maybe in a wrong understanding of the notion of aesthetic distance. Vlastimil Zuska (2002) pointed out that even if we need distance to some extent and for some reason, in the process of aesthetic distance, we are distancing ourselves from something. That means that we decide what the subject of that distance will be, and what not, or what will the object of our aesthetic apperception be, and what not. In short, aesthetic distance (in extreme circumstances) is not a tool for being objective, and scientifically clear but it is another misleading way of making aesthetic interaction more complicated and less complex. Aleksandra Lukaszewicz Alcaraz (2017, p. 3) speaks in similar way in her analysis of Arnold Berleant's approach. She explains that our involvement and participation is "*always an involvement in a certain environment*" with which we are in constant connection. To sum up, every time we need to decide something from some point of view, we are bound to this position, to this point, and our decision is made according to it. This is the limit of every interaction, experience, and every examination and it does not matter if we are personally involved in the experienced process or not. It is logical to participate, or to be involved in the city that we are living in. To borrow a part of R. Shusterman's (2000) conclusions of defending popular art; what is wrong with the aesthetic phenomena that give us so much pleasure? If we like a building, and

in response, also the whole street or city, just because a building is in our favourite colour, or because it is from our favourite historical period or artistic style, why should we take a distance in our experience. It is likely that we have good reasons to like this concrete building, or artistic style. Moreover, if we accept the comments of Elkins and Adorno, we can implement the right amount of information in this kind of participatory experience, and set up our distance, and vice versa. If we combine the right amount of information, with our personal feelings or preferences, it will make the interpretation of experience more valid, and more complex. However, partial conclusions will sound more valid after Arnold Berleant's (1986, 2017) comments on the notion of disinterestedness.

3. (Aesthetic and Somaesthetic) Experience and the City

Arnold Berleant (1986) expressed, in the paper, *Cultivating and Urban Aesthetics*, two crucial facts about urban aesthetic: 1) we need to analyse the experience of the city; in detail, all the aspects that the subject can identify and experience and knowingly define from the interaction with the city, and 2) the position or significance of the human body ("bodily consciousness"¹⁵) in such an experience. Berleant did not exclude personal feelings, or any kind of intimate interaction with the city, from his research, because he was aware that even this kind of interaction is a part of the urban experience. He latter evaluated it in the concept of disinterestedness when he argues that it does not mean a lack of interest but "*rather not having appreciation distracted by outside interests*" (Berleant, 2017, p. 10). The common notion of the opposition of disinterestedness and involvement/interestedness is not valid, and the dialectical relationship between those two notions is not really that simple. The recipient can experience some aesthetic phenomena either in engagement with the phenomena or in a disinterested state of mind, where he is focused only on the aesthetic phenomena or object. Thomas Leddy argues that disinterestedness can open "one to new perspective[s]". He even discusses the possibility that "[a] *disinterested perception can contribute to engagement with an aesthetic object*" (Leddy, 2017, p. 74).

Berleant introduced, in this regard, the concept of aesthetic engagement. An alternative to aesthetic disinterestedness, that originated in the notion "to engage" (in the aesthetic sense) with something, and not just research or observe something. This engagement is in some sense more personal and intimate. "*To be engaged in a relation of resonance means to feel addressed (angesprochen) by something valuable that affects me and to respond to it by acting adequately*" (Diaconu, 2017, p. 43). Aesthetic engagement rejects the dualism of subject and object, where aesthetic experience is understood as the subjective appreciation of an object and rather underlines the "*contextual character of aesthetic appreciation*" (Berleant, 2013). Berleant solves the theoretical issue when he suggests that the object and subject of aesthetic interaction do not have to be separated and introduced the theory of aesthetical field(s) (Diaconu, 2017), based on four principal components: appreciator, the object, activity or event, and factor that activates the field of situation (Berleant, 2017).¹⁶ To be able to experience the city, we need to be part of this (urban) situation and engage with the city, and at the same time, we need to experience the city in a context, which means that we implement gained information in the experience and another interpretation at the same time. The contextualization of the information that is needed for a more valid and complex experience is necessary and this combination of experience, interpretation of them, and implementing them to another experience is a never-ending loop.

15 He explain this bodily consciousness as "thoughtful, perceiving organism" (Berleant, 1986).

16 In the aesthetic field, "there is no separation between the components, but a continuous exchange in which they act on each other" (Berleant, 2017, p. 10).

The other aspect of Berlant's understanding of urban aesthetics, human body, is from the somaesthetic point of view, explained as a receptive tool that helps us gain any information about our environment, our reality that we need even if something needs to be done with this information. R. Shusterman (2012b, p. 223) even understands the body (soma) as a "*composite structure through which we live*." Berlant (1986) was convinced that in the process of experiencing the city, cultural and historical meaning, and data of sensory awareness fuse together in a "medium of sensibility". In this notion of sensibility, he tries to combine senses and meaning (Berlant, 1986), so in the analysing of urban aesthetics he demands a part of experience based on bodily interaction, and another part that can only be the outcome of an interpretation. In his understanding of urban experience, we can see the connection with the soma, because the body is at the centre of it all. All the senses that we usually use can increase our sensitivity of all the aspects of the city, and strengthen our interaction and connection with the environment that we are living in. In this kind of understanding, we can agree with Mirza Turšič's (2019) thoughts about the engagement of individuals in a "particular sort of imaginative play" when the past, "latent reality", and perceived reality combine. This combination and also cooperation of past and present are crucial for any kind of experience and interpretation.

From the somaesthetic point of view, in agreement with Berlant, we understand bodily reactions as natural components of our existence. We cannot interact with the city without our body and biological receptors: we can experience only what we see, what we smell, what we touch, and what we hear. Therefore, everything is bound to our senses. It is clear that, in somaesthetic experience, the body is a source, and also, central tool of sensory examination of the realities and had its dominant position, but we cannot deny that a similar significance and emphasis also lies on the body in aesthetic experience, especially in the issue of urban aesthetics: the body is important for aesthetic and for somaesthetic experience to the same extent. If the body is a tool to gain information about our environment, it cannot be bound only to one kind of experience, or only to urban experience as a complex kind of experience. The somatic experience, as a first level of experience, is, therefore, a general level of every experience. We gain the necessary perceptive information through our senses and because of our body, only one thing that changes (from this perspective) is the focus, motivation, and approach that we choose in the realisation of the second level of experience. In the dialogue between Berlant and Shusterman, we need to make one statement: interpretation and experience is not something different, but a practice that needs to cooperate, or fuse together to create a complex experience: an urban experience *per se*. Interpretation helps us to understand all the implications and nuances of our experience, and experience gives us new opportunities to interpret more. Let's imagine that we are walking on the streets of a city from the Middle Ages, and we are used to seeing, in this type of city, some castle or fortress. The most basic impulse of a recipient is to look up and try to find this kind of building or monument on a hill. Our experience of the city is limited by this movement of our body and with this kind of focus, because our experience cannot be free until find this fortress. We can miss a lot of the city, until we find the castle. Afterwards, we can experience this kind of city as a typical medieval city and we will maybe come to the belief that this building has been a monument in this city for centuries. Our movement and experiencing of the city will be defined by this one crucial reality, and it will frame our experience and understanding of the city. Although what will happen with the experience of the city if we discovered that the appearance of the city is not a matter of centuries, but just relatively recent changes or urban structure? The city of Malaga (Spain) is this kind of city, the kind of city that gives you the impression that you are visiting another medieval city in Andalusia. Everything is there: narrow streets, alleys, trees,

a castle (Alcazaba, Figure 1) and even a fortress (Gibralfaro), but the experience changes when you realize that Alcazaba was, nearly seventy years ago, full of low-class houses and did not look like a castle (Figure 2) even if it is a medieval castle. You cannot experience this information, you can only implement it into the experience, but you need to interpret it, and evaluate what does it mean for your experience and for the city. The current appearance of the city is bound to this reconstruction motivated by the effort to create an authentic Andalusian city. When we focus our experience on this one fact, we can miss other aspects of the city that are present in the experience like the smell of salt from the sea, the breeze, the sound of the sidewalks when we are walking on them, and so on. Therefore, our experience of the city radically changes when we implement all the necessary information and interpret the whole situation. We can ignore the information, and just enjoy the city as we see, smell, and touch it, and we can also include the information, and the interpretation of them into the experience and experience our emotions and information in a symbiosis. Both approaches give us a different experience, but neither one of them is better or worse. However, we will definitely experience a different city without this gained information, which needs to be interpreted and implemented into the experience process.

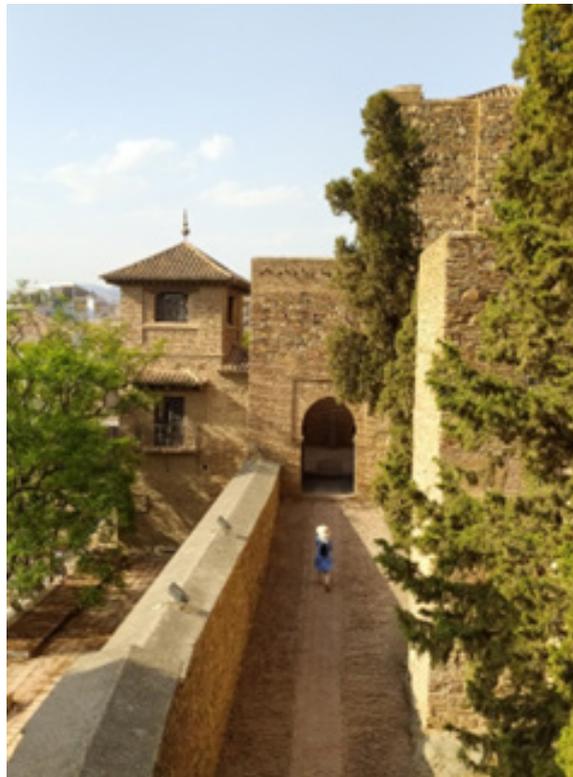


Figure 1 *Alcazaba, Malaga, Spain (author of photography: Lukáš Makky)*



Figure 2 Alcazaba in year 1910, Malaga, Spain.

Source: <https://www.malaga.us/attractions/alcazaba-malaga/>

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was not to analyse the difference between somatic, somaesthetic, and aesthetic experience, but merely to comment on all three of them in the context of the city, as the main form of urban experience. The focus of the analysis was on aesthetic aspects of experience and the emphasis was on the fact that even the somatic, and somaesthetic experience has, or can have, aesthetic nature. The analysis of the experience was based on the theory of John Dewey (1980), Richard Shusterman (1999), Maria Bukdahl (2012), Virgil C. Aldrich (1963), and Walter Benjamin (1969) resulting in the distinguishing of the four features of aesthetic experience: particularity (aesthetic experience differs from all other forms of experience), interaction (experience of aesthetic object is dependent on the interaction between recipient and object), activity (recipient is aware of the participation on aesthetic experience) and originality (aesthetic experience is always in some sense original).

The emphasis of the paper was made on the need for interpretation of the experience: experience is not enough for appreciation of the city because we need to implement (not ignore) the contextual information that we gain about the city, or the concrete aesthetic situation which we experience. The need for interpretation is most visible in the distinction of experience on two levels: a) somatic level of experience and b) a second level of experience. The first level is not typical only for the somaesthetic experience, as everybody might think, but for every kind of experience, because the body is the main and dominant tool for gaining any information about our daily lives. Interpretation, as a process of evaluating the gained information is necessary, because it can change the quality of our experience, but this relationship between experience

and interpretation is a continuing, or cyclic relationship. Every experience can improve our ability and touch for interpretation, and every interpretation can improve our sensibility for experience. It is not about dominance, or supremacy, but about the combination and cooperation of experience and interpretation.

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