



## Introduction to the issue

It is a significant fact that for a long time now the range of academic understanding of the term *aesthetics* has been expanding and going far beyond the borders established by its philosophical beginnings. Theoreticians explore the aesthetics of everyday life, the aesthetics of sport, the aesthetics of animals, the aesthetics of design, meteorological aesthetics, and so forth. This collection of papers, whose common denominator is the aesthetics of the city, fits into this trend of the pluralisation of aesthetics. Although discourses on the aesthetics of objects distance themselves from philosophical aesthetics, they do not dispose of the terminology that was worked out within the philosophical realm. Therefore, it is important to outline the most essential shifts in the subjects these types of aesthetics examine.

Philosophical aesthetics (the philosophy of art) developed by Alexander Baumgarten was designed to examine, as well as to critique, sensory perception, but it was limited to the perceptions achieved through the sensory cognition of beauty, for which the experience of a work of art is essential. Thus, aesthetical studies were conducted within the strictly defined sphere of the interrelationships between sensory perception, beauty and art. Furthermore, perception and art had to comply with specific requirements to become aesthetic. Therefore, not every instance of sensory perception was seen as aesthetic in nature, but only those where the individual grasped beauty. Nor could every work of art be termed aesthetic, but only those that could be classified as belonging to one of a selected group of fields, namely: poetry, music, painting, sculpture, dance, architecture or elocution.

We perceive beauty through these art forms, and for this reason they are called ‘beautiful arts’ in many European languages, but they also meet one more condition that was self-evident in the eyes of the eighteenth century thinkers: they are mimetic. In phenomenological aesthetics, the specific type of perception that focuses on art is referred to as the intentional orientation towards the aesthetic value, and this is categorically differentiated from a research

orientation towards the object, as well as a practical one, as Roman Ingarden demonstrated (Ingarden, 1973). In the aesthetic experience, the experience of beauty occurs in autonomy, in isolation from reality and the practices of everyday life, and its occurrence is guaranteed by carefully designed (both spatially and acoustically) museum rooms. From this perspective, real objects such as trees, people or animals, can neither belong to the realm of beauty nor be called aesthetic, since such a classification is limited to the works created by an artist working in the defined fields of fine arts. A sound becomes aesthetic only when it is a component of a musical piece, and a city attains an aesthetic qualification only when it becomes the subject of a painting, like for instance the city of Delft in Vermeer's veduta (*View of Delft* 1660–1661). That is why while conceptualising avant-garde art and defining the conditions of the reception of Marcel Duchamp's artefacts, Timothy Binkley calls them non-aesthetic objects (Binkley, 1977) as opposed to aesthetic art, since viewing *Fountain* does not give rise to an aesthetic situation as it is defined by Baumgarten.

The non-aesthetic, as a result of its not being beautiful, art of the avant-garde broke the surface of a picture and introduced snatches of everyday life into it. This thereby augmented the sphere of art by the element of everyday life and turned viewers into active participants in the event. The spaces of artistic artefacts and the events and the spaces of everyday life then overlap, while the aesthetic orientation and the strict discipline of visual perception become eliminated. As artists began to take art out of museums and galleries, theoreticians also shifted the focus of their research beyond art and towards real objects and events occurring in the reality surrounding living people, and in doing so they too stepped outside of aesthetics (Welsch, 1997: 18–37).

Although the term *aesthetics* is still in use, its meaning has undergone such profound transformations that its present sense has little to do with philosophical aesthetics (the philosophy of art). Other traditional notions, such as beauty, the sublime or pleasure, have also acquired meanings that are dependent on the context in which they are used rather than on the theory of perception. The pluralism of aesthetics is the result of the belief that various areas of our life are permeated with aesthetic potential, which calls for naming, description and reflection. Such an approach requires the research perspectives be reoriented and the search for the essence of a research subject to be abandoned, since the nature of a city, as well as the nature of a sport or of weather, can hardly be encapsulated as a notion. What becomes more important is the specific phenomenon of its entanglement in a web of interconnections and relationships, as is most fully illustrated by the city, where the art (of buildings and urban planning) is fully integrated with the practices of communal and individual lives, and where historicity is intertwined with the present, while the geography of the terrain is related to the character of architecture. As the discussions on the subject of the aesthetics of everyday life prove, our inability to enclose the

research subject in a philosophical framework by no means prevents us from trying to define its boundaries or attempting to capture the specific character of the city, possibly with the help of the theories developed in the fields of urban planning and architecture, sociology and cultural anthropology.

Unlike philosophical aesthetics, the various aesthetics of the city do not constitute an autonomous field, since they involve research intuitions directed towards tracking and finding aesthetical components in the aspects belonging to the areas of urban planning or the economy, or in other words, to what follows naturally from the practices of building a city and living in an urban environment. These various aesthetics are attempts to fathom the multidimensional tangle of the city's space time continuum; they offer the most suitable intellectual tools to enable us to name a phenomenon or extract a quantum of order. The aesthetics which has so far been the most successful in describing the city is the aesthetics of the environment. As Arnold Berleant said, 'the aesthetic of the city is an aesthetic of engagement' (Berleant, 2004: 92). Proponents of this approach have continued Dewey's pragmatism, which they have augmented with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. It is to their credit that the sight-centred conception of perception, or disinterested examination, has been replaced by a multisensory experience that results from the dynamic relationship of a person with his or her surroundings. This aesthetics is prescriptive in its nature, as it classifies environments as good or bad based on the criterion of appreciative engagement. The notion of *aisthēsis*, taken in the broad sense of combining sensory, cognitive and moral perceptions, expands the concept of beauty beyond that of art (architecture or urban planning) to include all phenomena that take place in the space of the city, such as the activity of strolling, or of dirt and cleanliness.

One of the most capacious aesthetic categories, which works well in regard to the city, is the category of harmony and form. Harmony can be applied to the city as a whole or to its fragments, and it can also be used to evaluate the layouts of cities or to serve as an aesthetic indicator of the actual experience of the city. However, a distinction has to be drawn between two types of harmony: conceptual and actually experienced. The former deals not only with the layouts of ideal and actual cities but also with virtual designs, which are complete works whose aesthetic quality is purely conceptual in nature. Therefore, the study and evaluation of the aesthetic quality of a layout is to a great extent an autonomous field. The latter, in contrast, is a product of the coordination of the multiple sensual and emotional components of our actual being that are involved in and experience a specific city, where sights change due to our movements and are dependent on the season, weather conditions and light. The sights are also interwoven with the smells and noises of the places where we participate in the communal rhythm of events and experience the depth of historical time, or the many layers of history. The rhythm of this

harmony is not geometric, but is instead sensual and emotive. This 'being in the city' is what the various contemporary aesthetics of the city are most interested in. Understood in such a way, the city can hardly be called a work of art, even if we significantly alter the meaning of the term, since if we attributed the term to each and every thing that surrounds us, on the grounds that it is, for instance, created as an artefact, we would lose the unique characters of both art and everyday life. Nonetheless, the intuition that the city possesses an aesthetic potential is confirmed every time the city is likened to a work of art. This is illustrated by Walter Benjamin's comparison to a film; Yrjö Sepänmaa's reference to a total work — *Gesamkunstwerk* (Sepänmaa: 2003: 78); as well as in articles by Donald J. Olsen and Christie Boyer (Olsen, 1986; Boyer, 1994), whose contribution is all the more important as it offers a perspective different from the aesthetic one. Thus, the aesthetic component of the city constitutes a vital element without which no city could exist.

The city is an open work, existing in a space-time continuum. No single creator can claim full credit for its creation, as it is created by an organised community — a joint effort of urban planners and architects who have focused on building an efficiently functioning organism, which at the same time allows its residents to feel at home and to develop their own identity, where they can live a good and safe life within a specific form and visual shape. The city, however, is also transformed by the processes of unplanned building and by architecture without architects, as well as by tragedies, such as wars and man-made or natural disasters. This is when ruins, abandoned and neglected places, deprived of form or life, become a basic city component. Creation and destruction are both inherent in the temporality of the city, and accompany its transformations and modernisation, which results in the aesthetic qualities of the city oscillating between harmony and disharmony, between beauty and melancholy and nostalgia, and between what Stephen Greenblatt calls wonder and resonance (Greenblatt, 1992). Cities can testify to the wealth and the artistic and intellectual culture of their residents, but they can also bear testimony to the decline of once-powerful families, rulers, social classes and nations. Thus, the various aesthetics of the city have a dual task: they offer a reflection of not only what the city is supposed to be like, but also what it actually is. The papers in this collection dealing with selected notions and categories cover both these aspects of research into the city: they show its positive qualities; as well as revealing its negative aesthetical qualifications.

The main aim of Piotr Winskowski's paper is to show how the essential features that distinguish the city's centre from its outskirts become the sphere of various urban planning and architectural solutions. The centre is characterised by a high density of buildings and a fast pace of life; whereas on the outskirts the buildings are sparser and slower lifestyles dominate. These two types of urban spaces, generating different sensory and motor experiences, belong

together and complement each other. Thus, the effect of the outskirts introduced into the densely built-up area of the centre allows the residents to experience a natural rhythm, and to rest, which leads the author to the conclusion that it would be beneficial to leave open spaces within the centres of cities. The city where the centre and the outskirts can be easily distinguished is contrasted with a city that is devoid of distinctive features. It is a common practice to integrate plots of greenery and trees or parks into city centres to serve as enclaves, allowing the residents to have a rest and return to a biological rhythm. The author of another paper, Beata Frydryczak, is concerned with the issue of how the notion of a landscape corresponds to the city. She applies the traditional aesthetical categories, such as the picturesque and the sublime, to an urban space understood as a cultural landscape. She also examines the status of nature in the city and its relationship with the development of buildings. The subordination of nature to human needs, as can be witnessed in the city, enables her to reformulate the notion of the sublime, which is no longer associated with a passive stance and becomes the driving force behind the activities of 'urban gardeners', people who are actively involved in the life of urban communities.

The image can serve as a tool for capturing the unique character of the city, since it allows us to 'see' a given city. Among a wide range of various types and conceptions of the image, those employed by urban planners and architects in order to articulate their own concepts of the city are some of the most interesting. Maria Popczyk juxtaposes two distinct theories of the image — Lynch's empirical one and Pallasmaa's transcendental one — and derives from these different aesthetics of the city. As the phenomenology of architecture asserts, the image makes the city appear static, even though it is capable of embracing all of its dimensions, whereas the ruin is the mark of temporality. It is an aesthetic object par excellence, as it is devoid of usefulness, and it becomes a focus of contradictory emotions. In her discussion on a new type of post-industrial ruin, Małgorzata Nieszczerzewska exposes the semantic shifts that result from the activities of urban explorers, who operate on the margins, far from the centre of the cultural discourses concerning urban regeneration. The ruin, an abandoned place devoid of useful functions, loses its original meanings once it undergoes restoration and comes back to life. However, to make a place a home requires far more than an efficiently functioning building: it involves domesticating a place. For many years, making a place a home, or 'place making', has been an important trend in the research responding to the existence of places which are functional and useful but are deprived of the features which would make them a home. Maria Korusiewicz attempts to show the aesthetics components of the process of domestication, adapting a new space to one's needs and making it one's own. The city here is understood as a place of being in-between, dominated by the flow of events, and the nomadism and migrations of its residents. What enables a person to feel at home is a form of translation

which, far from being a purely linguistic activity, possesses a sensual and an emotional character.

What we see and what we do not see while walking along a city street depends on what we are paying attention to and what we want to see, but also on the perceptual patterns in our brains. Marianna Michałowska demonstrates what happens when viewing an actual place and viewing its image, and how the cultural ways of constructing visuality operate. The city is a source of multisensory sensations, where visuality, audibility and tactility are inextricably interwoven to create recognisable states and situations (rush hours, Sunday mornings, New Year's Eves, *etc.*). Futurists appreciated the value of city sounds and introduced them into their music, while in cultural studies exploring the audio sphere of the city is considered as a dominant part of its identity. Josip Brodsky claims, in his well-known description of Venice's sounds, that in winter the city sounds like the clink of porcelain cups on a silver tray. In the last paper, Kamila Staśko-Mazur examines the idea of soundwalks, demonstrating how artists exploit the sounds of the city, which when experienced with full awareness can allow them to evaluate sounds that are, after all, the essence of emotionality.

The city is fascinating in its inexpressibility. It embraces all the dimensions of human life, and its material and immaterial testimonies are permeated with an aesthetic element which subtly and gradually reveals its nature.

\* \* \*

The current issue of *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal* (2015, vol. 5, no. 2) also includes three other papers which do not address the leading theme. One article discusses the paradox of Kripkenstein and non-reductive materialism (by Jan Wawrzyniak), and another one is devoted to John Calvin's fideism in the doctrine of double predestination (by Antoni Szwed). The third article which is a polemic with Małgorzata Bienkowska's book on *Transsexualism in Poland* (2012), co-authored by Anna Karnat-Napieracz and Zbigniew Liber, reconsiders some medical, sociological, and psychological aspects of disenchanting inborn gender identity disorder syndrome. Besides, there are attached four book reviews (by Wiesława Sajdek, Anna Karnat-Napieracz, Aleksandra Węgrecka, and Magdalena Kłeczek).

Maria POPCZYK\*  
Issue Editor

---

\* Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Philology, Chair of the Department of Aesthetics and Anthropology of Space, Poland. E-mail: maria.popczyk@us.edu.pl.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berleant, A. (2004). Cultivating an urban aesthetic. In: A. Berleany & A. Carlson (Eds.) *The aesthetics of natural environments* (pp. 79–92). Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Binkley, T. (1977). Piece: Contra aesthetics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35(3), 265–277.
- Boyer, Ch. M. (1994). *The city of collective memory: its historical imagery and architectural entertainments*. Cambridge: The MIT.
- Greenblatt, S. (1992). Resonance and wonder. In: S. Greenblatt. *Learning to curse: essay in early modern culture* (pp. 161–183). New York–London: Routledge.
- Ingarden, R. (1973). *Cognition of the literary work of art*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Olsen, D. J. (1986). *The city as a work of art: London, Paris, Vienna*. New Haven–London: Yale University Press.
- Sepänmaa, Y. (2003). Multi-sensoriness and the city. In: V. Sarapik & K. Tuur (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Arts 'Place and location: Studies in environmental aesthetics and semiotics'* (pp. 75–85; vol. 3). Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts and Estonian Semiotics Association.
- Welsch, W. (1997). Aesthetics beyond aesthetics. In: M. Honkanen (Ed.). *Proceeding of the XII<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics, Lahti 1995* (pp. 18–37; vol. III: *Practical aesthetics in practice and theory*). Helsinki: University of Helsinki / Lahti Research and Training Centre. Retrieved from: [http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W\\_Welsch\\_Aesthetics\\_beyond\\_Aesthetics.html](http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W_Welsch_Aesthetics_beyond_Aesthetics.html) (10.02.2016).

