

THE PLEASURE FACTOR IN THE ANTHROPIC ENVIRONMENT AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF BEAUTY

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Abstract

The paper represents a socio-geographic analysis of the products, objects and entities designed and manufactured for an anthropic environment use, looking to evaluate the different types of pleasure and the emotional feedback generated by these elements. The analysis of the four types of pleasure, as well as the innate preference for beauty, was conducted in the urban areas of Lisbon, based on the observations collected in April 2014, with no claims to have gathered all the relevant examples for this model-city. The conclusion is that the design-approach based on pleasure in the anthropic environment can now be significantly and systematically applied to help create a better environment, in terms of human emotional responses to it.

Keywords: Pleasure, beauty, anthropic environment, urban, design

Introduction

By the early twenty-first century, any product designed and manufactured for human use incorporated, in its material and virtual form, mostly elements of functionality and usability, while the idea of pleasure was left outside of the conceptual matrix of the producer (with the obvious exception of those products designed explicitly to generate physical pleasure). The genesis of positive emotions, sensations and feelings seemed to disagree with the product creation process.

However, at the beginning of the XXI century, Patrick Jordan (Jordan, 2000) began to daringly analyze this new component – the pleasure,

which represents today an essential element in the design of any object (Jordan, 1998, pp 25-26; Jordan, 2000, p 6) (Fig.1).

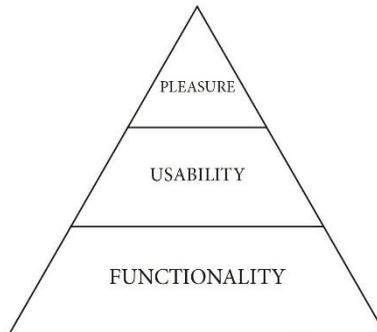


Figure 1. The rankings of consumer needs. Adaptation of Jordan’s hierarchy of consumer needs (Jordan, 2000, p 6).

Pleasure

What is pleasure? According to the Oxford English Dictionary (online edition: <http://www.oed.com/>), pleasure is „the condition or sensation induced by the experience or anticipation of what is felt to be good or desirable; a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment; delight, gratification. Opposed to pain.”

A few years before, the Canadian anthropologist Tiger conceptualized four distinct types of pleasure: physical, social, psychological and ideological (Tiger, 1992; Jordan, 2000, pp 13-14; Demirbilek and Sener 2003, p 1351) (Fig.2).

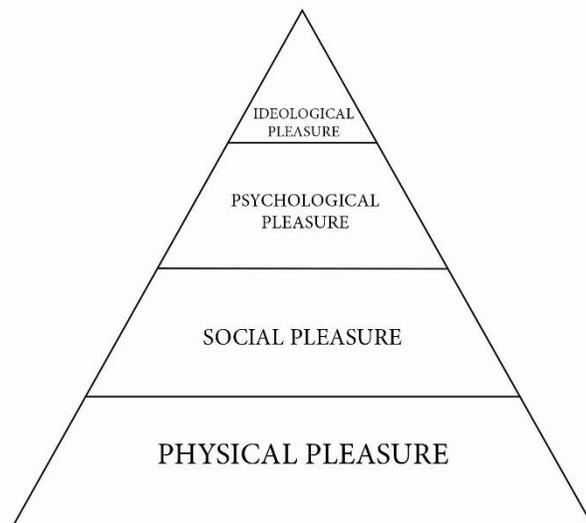


Figure 2. The hierarchy of pleasures conceived according to Tiger’s four pleasures model.

Physical pleasure is linked to the human body and to the positive feedback of sensory organs. In other words, physical pleasure is the bodily pleasure which incorporates the positive or satisfactory feedback of the sensory organs, responding to the actions of certain triggering factors; for example, tactile, gustatory, olfactory, auditory, visual, sensual pleasure. In terms of product design, the focus is set on tactile and olfactory pleasure (e.g. the feeling the consumer gets while touching a certain product, the occurrence of tactile sensation which may/may not trigger tactile pleasure. How does the interior of a new car smell like? (Jordan, 2000, p 13) Or a new wardrobe? When the first avid whiff is taken in by a new potential buyer, does the explosion of the olfactory pleasure occur or not?)

Social pleasure refers to the relationships with others – individuals, groups and society as a whole. Socio-pleasure is generated by the certain aspect of a product, one which ensures a certain social, material or cultural statute to its owner or helps him build a distinct identity and/or stimulate beneficial social interactions. The quality of this product generates a positive feedback to the individual once he owns it, in terms of (his impression of) his image in society.

Psychological pleasure (psycho-pleasure) refers to the cognitive interaction of the product owner with its product and to the subsequent emotional reactions. It finds its origins in the products which provide satisfactory results from an emotional point of view, as a result of the cognitive demands of interaction (Jordan, 2000). It was found that significantly more satisfying results, from an emotional point of view, are obtained when the products allow the user to conduct and complete complex tasks, while using reduced cognitive demands (for example, a computer soft).

Ideological pleasure is linked to the people's values and ideologies. When it comes to using certain products, this particular type may take many forms, ranging from aesthetic to ethic pleasure. It involves and includes tastes, moral values and personal aspirations, while defining the manner in which people see themselves or how they would like to see themselves. Ideological pleasure arises from a positive relationship between a product “as an art form” and its aesthetic effect on the user's environment. It can also surface in the values incorporated in a product: is its market presence equitable? Is it bio? Durable? Organic? Environmentally friendly? Handcrafted? Cutting edge/modern?

Beauty

What is beauty? According to the Oxford English Dictionary (online edition: <http://www.oed.com/>), beauty refers to several things: a. That quality of a person (esp. a woman) which is highly pleasing to the sight; perceived

physical perfection; attractive harmony of features, figure, or complexion; exceptional grace, elegance, or charm in appearance. b. That quality of a person or thing which is highly pleasing or satisfying to the mind; moral or intellectual excellence. c. That quality of a physical object or animal which is highly pleasing to the sight; perceived physical perfection; exceptional harmony of form or colour. d. That quality of a thing which is highly pleasing to the senses generally.

If we were to consider the beauty of objects, then it can be concluded that they can generate physical pleasure by stimulating the senses, as well as social, psychological and ideological pleasure.

Still, the beauty of a landscape, urban or otherwise, is not an exclusive focus for research and scientific knowledge. Looking at a landscape, an esthetician sees its sublime and its poetry, while ignoring the physical forces, the subordination relations and numbers (Bandiu, 2002, p 74). Apparently, there is a breakage, a rupture between art and science when it comes to observing and understanding a landscape. In fact, this rupture does not exist. There is, however, a double interpretation of (urban) landscape reception and beauty, which can be achieved by two types of language (Bandiu, 2002, p 74): *the scientific language* – impersonal, simple, accurate, transparent, and *the artistic language* – with its unique features, multiple connotations and disobedience of rules, characteristic to the art world.

In order to describe and characterize an urban environment, experts usually use the scientific language. However, if we approach the urban environment from the city aesthetics (*urbicalia*) point of view [urbis (latin) = city; kalos (ancient Greek) = good], we may use both scientific and artistic types of language. The urban landscape can be presented in two different situations: a. as *aconcrete and objective reality* which can be described using the terms of exact sciences (geography, ecology, landscape architecture) and as *a subjective reality* located beyond ourselves, a meta-environment in terms of aesthetics, which entails emotional states such as excitement, reverie, admiration, relaxation, happiness (Bandiu, 2002, pp 74-76).

We believe that the urban environment and its beauty should be viewed holistically, using both objective and subjective instances, this approach being the only one capable of ensuring its thorough understanding.

Aims and Method

This paper represents the first step in identifying and analyzing the four types of pleasure connected to the products inserted in the anthropic environment, as well as the innate preference for beauty, conducted in the urban areas of Lisbon, with no claims to have gathered all the relevant examples for this model-city. The analysis is based on the direct qualitative

observations collected in April 2014, during an Erasmus teaching internship in Lisbon, using observation and photography methods for gathering the data. Subsequently, Tiger's four pleasures model/method is used to perform this analysis. The study had 3 main objectives:

- to identify the four types of pleasure in Lisbon's urban space,
- to identify the properties of the urban product/component that generates a certain kind of pleasure,
- to identify the emotional and behavioural feedbacks generated by the 4 pleasure types.

Results and Discussion

The four types of pleasures, the anthropic environment and the choice for beauty in Lisbon

Physical pleasure

This type of pleasure in the anthropic environment has its origins in those aspects related to physical sense stimulation. In this respect, the material selection for the items, products or utilities found in the anthropic environment is of overriding importance. The materials used can provide a sense of time, space and cohesion for that particular environment. In general, the local materials are used in rural areas, while urban areas are in demand of futuristic, innovative and revolutionary materials, with no particular affiliation (Bardill, Karamanoglu and Herd, 2005).

But what if we used traditional materials, specific for the space located within the urban or anthropic area in which it would be used? For example, we are all familiar with the city bus stations and their metal or plastic benches, designed to deny any physical pleasure, not to mention the others types. What if we designed a few of these bus stations with some hardwood benches displaying that nation's traditional architecture? The wood scent would spontaneously trigger the olfactory pleasure, providing a sense of affinity to that place and why not, an overall good mood.

Through the analysis of this type of pleasure in the city of Lisbon, we identified the famous Portuguese or Spanish painted tile, known as Azulejo (Fig.3). It is an essential component of the Portuguese culture, being in constant production for the past five centuries. It is also produced in South America and the Philippines, both of them former Spanish and Portuguese colonies.

In Lisbon, as in the entire country, *azulejos* can be seen not only in the museum dedicated to its evolution, but also inside and outside churches, palaces, ordinary houses, schools, restaurants and bars, train and metro stations, and so on.



Figure 3. Azulejos in Lisbon - part of the Portuguese history, culture and everyday life

These tiles represent a basic element of Portuguese architecture, which finds its way onto walls, floors and even ceilings. Azulejos is much more than a decorative art form, being part of the Portuguese history, culture and everyday life, their presence strengthening the connection between people and their land or home, as well as stimulating the senses and providing a sense of joy.

Social Pleasure

This particular segment demands special attention. Environments which do not promote a sense of belonging, or the ones which emit messages with negative connotations regarding the position of an individual in society, are prone to negative social relations and even hostile attacks (Bardill, Karamanoglu and Herd, 2005). By its very nature, architecture can promote or discourage crime. Certain apartment buildings (with their dark passages and poorly lit corners) encourage crimes and robberies.

Low levels of socio-pleasure, caused by the lack of design focus on the urban product's humanistic side, will lead to faulty relations between the user and his environment.

In some cases, the surface public transportation stations can become an indicator of the users' social status (Bardill, Karamanoglu and Herd, 2005), sending out negative connotations on the social position of the individual. If the stations are dirty, located in loud places, with endless streams of cars passing by the people using the buses, trams or trolleys, it can sometimes lead to this message: "you have a low social status and this is

what you deserve”. The plastic or metal benches found in each bus station and designed to discourage long-term comfort, can send the following message: “we don’t appreciate you, we don’t care”. The use of flashy primary colours combinations for these bus stations leads to an effortless puerile and inane aesthetic, conducted without any concern for social pleasure. Social pleasure appears and flourishes when social interaction and experience sharing happen in a safe and comfortable environment.

Coming back to Lisbon, the apartment buildings or office buildings covered in eye-catching, smart, ingenious graffiti (Fig.4) send out the message that they belong to the whole community, even though they are located in the centre. Graffiti makes us think of non-conformist young people who are sometimes, unfortunately, rejected by society and who mark their territory with these special drawings. When their art finds its way legally onto central buildings, it basically sends out an acceptance message for these groups: “you are also part of this city/neighbourhood, welcome, brother!”

Lisbon lives and breathes social pleasure, which is developed within the little stylish cafes found on its wide boulevards, places where human interaction is as natural as breathing.



Figure 4. Ingenious graffiti in Lisbon

Youngsters and seniors tango on the little improvised stages in front of the cafes (Fig.5), while tourists make efforts to get rid of their status and simply blend in, even for only a few hours, in order to take in to the fullest the beauty of these urban pleasure mini-entities.



Figure 5. Youngsters and seniors tango in front of the cafes in Lisbon

Psychological pleasure

It is the result of emotionally-satisfying interactions, at a low cognitive price. In the urban/anthropic environment, psycho-pleasure is born from those elements which allow a tacit understanding of the geography and functions of a publicly-available urban complex (Bardill, Karamanoglu and Herd, 2005), without requiring detailed plans and maps consultations for that area.

A first-time visitor will go out into a city and revolve around the main boulevards, central squares and the most important commercial hubs.

Urban landmarks, represented by certain constructions, squares or natural-component urban entities (parks, green areas), are essential for the development /construction of effective mental models, in terms of what a complex city and the geography of its beauty stand for.

These urban/anthropic environment elements, as well as their location, represent the keys to understanding the overall structure of a city, which allow the emergence of efficient mental models, able to ensure high levels of psycho-pleasure.

The study's targeted city, Lisbon, offers its visitors an increased psychological pleasure, with its easy-to-find wide boulevards and squares (Fig.6) and a perfectly functional public transportation system.

For the tourists visiting for the first time, a city map is only needed during the first day – “to be getting lost” or “to be needing a guided tour” is considered nonsense in Lisbon. The openness and kindness displayed by locals bring an important contribution to the city beauty's geography.

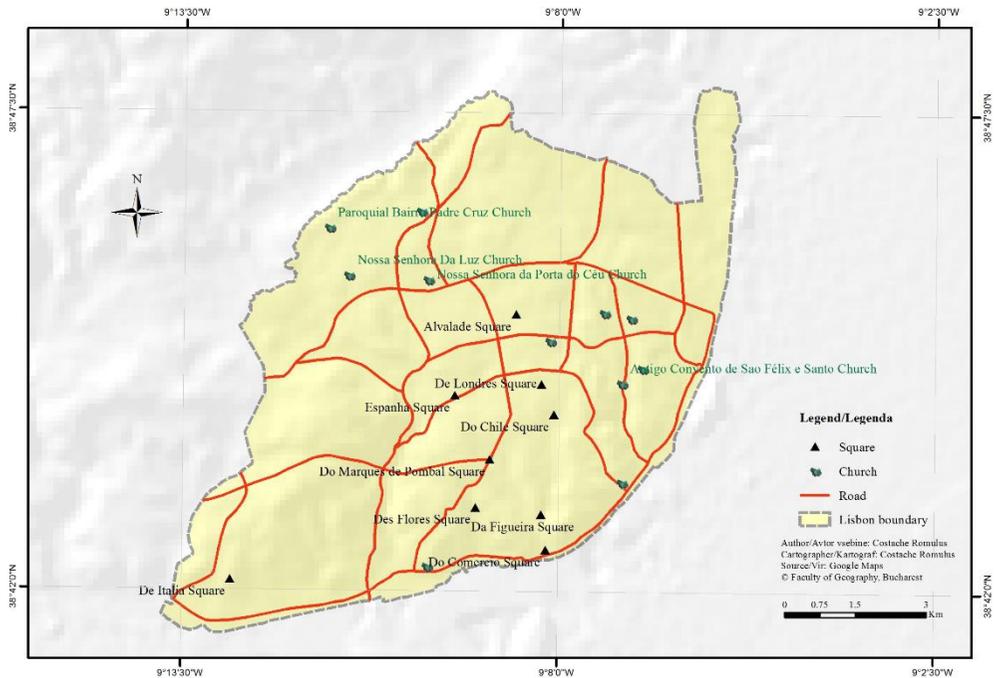


Figure 6. The main boulevards, squares and churches on the map of Lisbon

Ideological pleasure

It refers to personal values, ranging from aesthetic to ethical. In this regard, the birth of ideological pleasure in the urbanized environment is debatable. The reason is that aesthetic and ethical judgments are personal matters, built from a complex mixture of objective and subjective components (Bardill, Karamanoglu and Herd, 2005), which, in many cases, are likely to be found at opposing poles.

This personally-built pleasure is different from the preceding three, which include elements of history and culture, when generated in the urban/anthropic environment. For example, in Lisbon, the impressive architecture and size of the Catholic churches, as well as the famous town of Fatima located in its vicinity (Fig.7, 8, 9), can provide ideological pleasures for certain visitors.

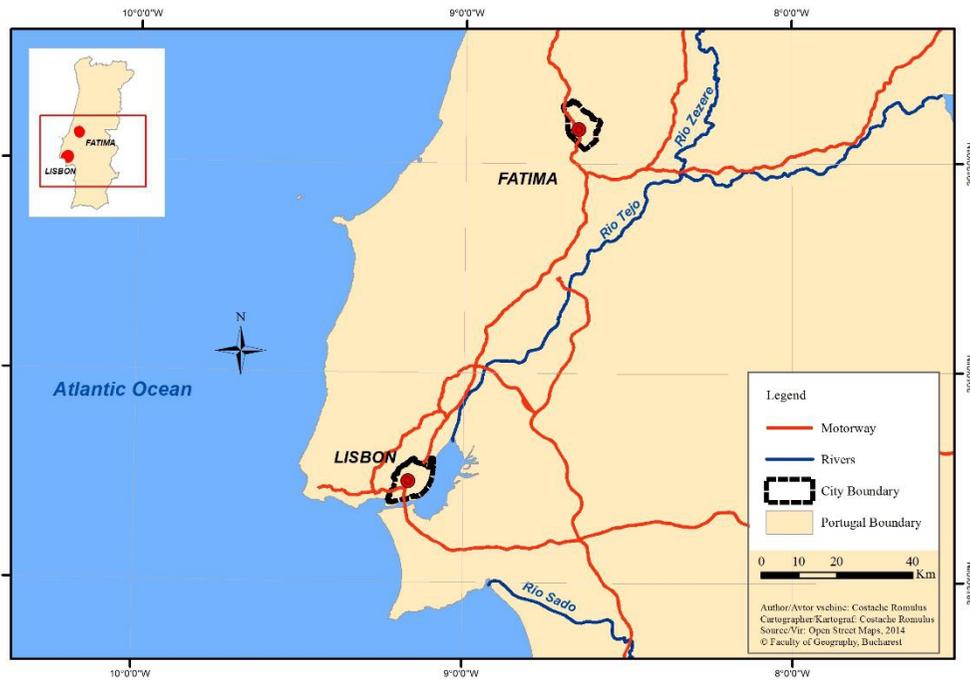


Figure 7. The short distance between Lisbon and Fatima, highlighted on the map

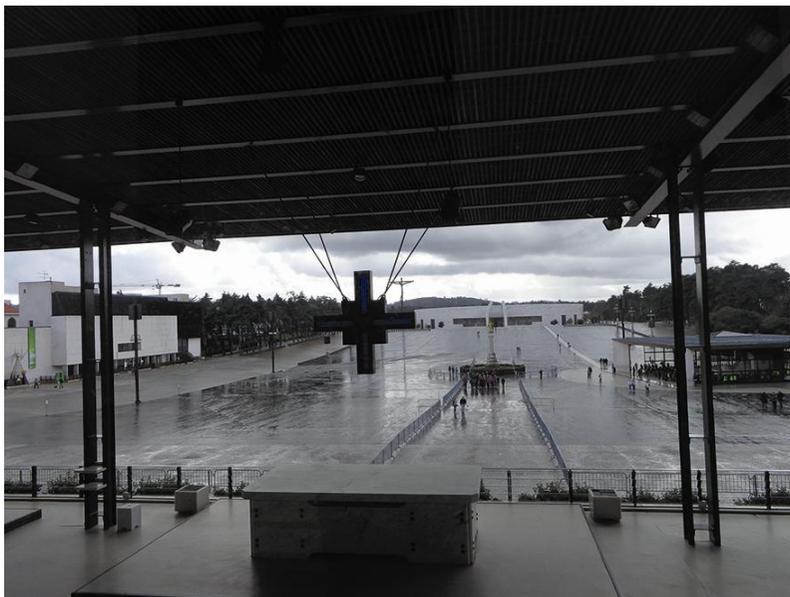




Figure 8, Figure 9. Impressive architecture and spaces in Fatima generating ideological pleasure

Due to the required mixture of objective (related to history and culture) and subjective factors connecting education (religious as well) and ethical and moral values of each person, ideological pleasure concerns each individual at a time, making its approach delicate and difficult.

Conclusion

The pleasure-based approach of urban design can now be substantially and systematically applied to help create a better environment, in terms of the emotional responses it can incite; this emotional feedback is responsible with building the relationship between the user and his anthropic environment.

The physical, social and psychological pleasures involve elements deeply rooted in history and culture (historical and cultural reference points), when generated by the built environment. These elements, depending on their use in the anthropic environment, can provide a sense of time, space and cohesion for that particular environment, can promote a sense of belonging, or can discourage crime, and they can allow the emergence of efficient mental models, able to ensure high levels of psycho-pleasure.

Still, the ideological pleasure, seen as an individually personalized construction, remains a difficult and delicate subject, due to the subjective factors involved. All these forms of pleasure have been identified in the urban environment of the capital of Portugal, which contribute to the city beauty geography.

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