
IRENE BREUER

THE AFFECTIVE INTERTWINING OF BODY AND SPACE
*Towards a Phenomenological Sublime in Contemporary
Architecture*

Abstract

My paper addresses the founding body emotions of architecture, and in particular it aims at redefining the sublime into phenomenological terms. Starting from Kant, it argues that the phenomenological sublime is a bodily-felt emotion aroused by the excess of sensuousness over conceptuality. But at present, the body metaphor does no longer guarantee order and symbolic meaning. This disruption was brought about by Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's criticism of compossibility and representation, which led, paradoxically enough, to a sublime bodily experience of space. As contemporary architectural space shows, body and space are affectively intertwined, but this co-belonging is characterized by conflicts, tensions, and the suspension of meaning.

Keywords: Architecture; Body; Husserl; Merleau-Ponty; Sublime

1. *Introduction*

My paper aims at redefining the sublime in phenomenological terms. Departing from Kant, it claims that the phenomenological sublime is an emotion no longer aroused by an overwhelming feeling of self-transcendence, but by the arousal of the bodily sensuousness, as expressed by our most primary drives and impulses. The moving powers of architecture, which presently enhance dissonance over harmony and difference over identity, call forth a tension between our traditional bodily habits and our bodily lived experiences and force us into a self-reflection insofar as they compel us to question and suspend the institutionalised sense architecture has to convey. Thus, the disruption of the bodily metaphor leads paradoxically enough to a sublime bodily experience of space, and thus, to a *phenomenological feeling of the sublime*. The phenomenological sublime is an emotion aroused neither by the power of our reason transcending the inadequacy of imagination as it concerns nature, nor by the overwhelming powers of imagination as it concern an artwork, but by the excess of sensuousness engendering a negative pleasure, which echoes the bodily state of dispersion amid spatial sensuous forms that resist to be harnessed into concepts and lead to an endless process of sense formation. I will attempt to show that this shift, though advanced by empirical psychologists in the nineteenth century, took place in the twentieth century resulting from Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of Husserl's phenomenology. Indeed, Husserl focused his transcendental-phenomenological position on the modes of appearance of the perceptually given to the experiencing subject. Everything is perceived from a certain perspective and centred in the moving bodily 'I'. Thus, the visibility and invisibility as limited or possible visibility build up the

world as a picture or representation, so that the true origin of space is found in the body as a source of the entire perceptual field. This anthropocentric, organic and harmonious conception of the visible characterizes an architecture based on the bodily metaphorical order. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, claims that the possibility of creation lies in the tension between the coherent distortion of and the compliance with natural forms. In this equivocal field ruled by ambiguity there is sense, but in a state of suspension. As the experience of contemporary architectural space shows, body and space are affectively intertwined, but this co-belonging is characterized by conflicts, tensions, and the suspension of meaning. Hence, the phenomenological sublime is a bodily-felt emotion.

In what follows I'll deal with Kant's theory of the sublime as well as with Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's bodily space theories and work out a redefinition of the sublime into phenomenological terms. These considerations will be finally applied to and verified in contemporary architecture.

2. Husserl: The Body as the Turning Point between a Lived Experience (Erlebnis) and an Experience-of (Erfahrung). Harmony and Representation

The seat of our most primitive sensuous feelings like pleasure or displeasure, wellbeing or discontent is the lived-body, which is not a phenomenon among others: It not only senses the outer world but feels itself; we experience our lived-body as experiencing. It has two types of interrelated specific sensations: the 'kinaesthetic sensations' – a system of subjective feelings of movement motivating the visual appearances of things – and a specific kind of sensorial, tactile events called 'sensings' (*Empfindnisse*). These sensings are neither an experience of something (*Erfahrung*), nor a perception (*Wahrnehmung*): sensings not only allow the lived-body to sense itself but to constitute itself as a living object, a body. Both, kinaesthetic sensations and sensings, constitute the outer world, but the tactile constitution underlies the visual one. These distinctions split the constitutional process into two spheres: the bodily sensings, which are mostly unconsciously lived or *erlebt* on the one hand, and on the other, the kinaesthetic sensations, which are consciously experienced or *erfahren*. Later on, Husserl reviews this static and stratified constitution based on a clearly drawn differentiation between intentional experiences in the sense of *Erfahrung* and non-intentional lived experiences as *Erlebnisse* as published in the *Logical Investigations*. Their continuity is ensured by a bodily intentionality, which localizes hyletic and tactual sensings and feelings, anchoring them on the body itself. This process is not driven by an active intentionality correlating conscious experience to the appearing world, but by a passive intentionality ruled by sensuous drives or impulses. In my view, these impulses are the driving force, which ensures the continuity and dynamics of the constitutional process of the body.

The body not only constitutes itself by the localization of its sensings but it is the source of space and higher objectivities too. It is no other than our body as a «medium

of all perception; [...] the organ of perception»¹, who ensures the relationship between things and their surrounding space. Its role is therefore essentially productive or constitutive. The starting point of the constitutional process of objectivities and space is the reduction of the surrounding world to the pure primordial space, which is localized perspectively around the living body as the «bearer of the zero-point of orientation»². The body is not simply the centre in terms of which all perceived things are situated, but also the lived-body of free movement, of approaching and distancing, of grasping and repelling. These movements or kinaesthetic sensations «are here free courses and this freedom in our consciousness of their unfolding is an essential part of the constitution of spatiality»³. This means that the constitution of perceived things requires that they be spatially oriented around the body, while the constitution of space is achieved by a body insofar as a centre of motility and of action. Notice that it is not a matter of a simple effectuation of a movement that addresses something, rather it is a question of sensing a living movement that the I ascribes to himself – a «moving sensing and a movement through which we sense ourselves»⁴, as Bernhard Waldenfels puts it.

At this point we may ask how all these processes relate to the one and the same body. How is that unity guaranteed? The kinaesthetic freedom of our body provides us with a valuable clue: As a moving body and as «a field of localization of its sensations», the body is «an organ of the will» insofar as «only bodies are immediately spontaneously (“freely”) movable»⁵. The subject has the ‘faculty’ (the ‘I can’) to «freely move this Body», in Husserl words⁶. Thus, the subjective capacity of my body to move freely belongs to the horizon of my kinaesthetic freedom.⁷ Significantly enough, the subject is conscious about his possibilities and views himself as the subject who is able to freely command his kinaesthesias⁸. Furthermore, as each place in its surrounding space is defined by my body’s ability to reach an unmoving thing, place can be understood as an embodied place (*Leibort*). Thus, place and body are essentially intertwined: The body is

1 E. HUSSERL, *Ideas II. Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book. Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 5th ed. 2000, p. 61. Originally published as *Hua IV, Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch. Phänomenologische Untersuchung zur Konstitution*, hrsg. von M. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1952, p. 56. Hereafter quoted as *Hua IV* and *Ideas II*.

2 *Hua IV*, p. 56; *Ideas II*, p. 61.

3 *Hua IV*, p. 58; *Ideas II*, p. 63.

4 B. WALDENFELS, *Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 3.*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 2013, p. 69.

5 *Hua IV*, p. 152, *Ideas II*, p. 159.

6 *Hua IV*, p. 154, *Ideas II*, p. 159 f.

7 See B. RANG, *Kausalität und Motivation*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1973, pp. 159-163.

8 HUSSERL, *Hua XI. Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926*, hrsg. von M. FLEISCHER, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1966, p. 24: «Sie [die Kinästhesie] verläuft als mir frei verfügbar, als frei zu inhibieren, frei wieder zu inszenieren, als ursprünglich subjektive Realisation ab». See HUSSERL, *Volume LX. Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, ed. by R. Bernet, trans. by A. Steinbock, Kluwer, Dordrecht 2001, p. 60: «(E)very appearance belongs systematically to some type of series of appearances to be realized in kinaesthetic freedom».

therefore spatialized, as it exercises its constitutional functions in space and is itself spatially extended, while space i.e. place is in turn embodied, as place is defined by my 'being here' i.e. my being the zero-point of orientation.

But in my view the body is something more than the centre of the whole perceptual field and space is more than an absolute location, an objective or representative space relying on an active act of thought or intentionality: in passive intentionality they are intertwined, as space already belongs to my bodily structure, which is defined by its kinaesthetic feelings and its motility. These, in turn, are affectively motivated, so that it is the role of our affective kinaesthetic freedom to bestow our surrounding world with sense. The freedom of this affective-motor process – as we may call it – is by no means absolute, as it is conditioned by our motility habits. The consciousness of kinaesthetic feelings and of motility in general is the primary sphere in which all sense is engendered, this consciousness being essentially a bodily one.

Thus, we may conclude that first, feelings and sensations, not only allow us to recognize and experience ourselves as experiencing lived-bodies, but they allow us to know and recognize ourselves as the bodies who are able – at least insofar as kinaesthetic sensations are concerned – to freely command them. Second, my being aware of my self-perception, my self-experience and my kinaesthetic freedom is provided by a consciousness that not only 'knows' about his bodily capacities, but knows itself as the body originating them. Third, it is the role of the bodily consciousness to endow the surrounding world with sense. In conclusion, passive experience is grasped by an affective bodily self-consciousness, which in its turn, allows for a bodily self-knowledge, an experiential self-knowledge that expresses itself in bodily drives and affections and deploys itself in habitual actions within the surrounding world.

Even though Husserl stressed the role of sensings and kinaesthetic movements in the constitution of the body and of the outer world, he still conceived the body as separate from the space surrounding him, i.e. the body remains for him what we might call an objective body immersed 'in' a place in an Aristotelian way, while consciousness remains knowledge. This understanding of space as organic and organized around an objective body fits into Husserl's conception of a lifeworld subjectively lived which is characterised by a «harmonious unity of perspective and a perspectively organized experiential style»⁹. But Husserlian phenomenology has shown that our relationship to the world is not limited to an immediate presence of the subject amid things. Even though our world might be organized perspectively around us, our presence is not limited to a relation of representation: world and things are always more than what is offered to our gaze insofar as intentionality opens up horizons, internal and external, of infinite possibilities of determination of things which allow for a potential enrichment of sense. Therefore, insofar as consciousness exceeds the immediate givenness

9 HUSSERL, *Die Welt der lebendigen Gegenwart und die Konstitution der ausserleiblichen Umwelt*, in «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», VI, 3 (Mar. 1946, reprint 1963, pp. 323-343). Here, p. 324 f: «[D]as ganze dingliche Wahrnehmungsfeld als konstituierte Mannigfaltigkeit von perspektivisch erscheinenden Dingen ist eine harmonische Einheit der Perspektivität; ein perspektivischer Stil waltet».

or actuality of the intended object it breaks with the «sovereignty of representation»¹⁰, in Lévinas' words. We may add that it breaks with representation in terms of the full determination of objectivity, but not in terms of our presence among things and in space. Given that on the one hand, my body is a stable zero point of orientation, and on the other, the constitution of space, objectivity and body are correlative, we may conclude that the organisation of space mirrors the organisation of our bodily parts, as Aristotle too claims. This anthropological and organic conception of space is paired by a normative system of relations, i.e. the principle of the concordance among parts and the whole, so that the body lays the grounds for the aesthetic conception of space.

3. Merleau-Ponty: *The Flesh of the World*

Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body is no continuation of Husserl's. His new interpretation of Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' opens up into a non-dialectical intertwining of body and existence, i.e. a pre-objective reference to the world grounded on bodily experience. In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty formulates the concept of '*être au monde*', i.e. of 'being towards the world'¹¹, by which he means the state of being devoted to the world. The self and its surroundings are the two sides of a reflexive relationship, which makes up the unity of the flesh of the world. By means of the concept of «flesh»¹², Merleau-Ponty overcomes Husserl's constitutional phenomenology and thus the split between the body as the organ of perception and the world as the field of perception: The flesh accounts for a sensuous principle, whose 'cardinal point' is the own body. The body is 'towards space' in the sense of an embodied attuned 'being-in'.

Merleau-Ponty breaks with Husserl's theory of constitution: In his view there has always been sense and world insofar as being «caught as up in the tissue of things», my body «draws it entirely to it, incorporates it». The world is embodied¹³ so that «there is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other»¹⁴. The flesh is thereby a «means of communication»¹⁵, a general location, between the visibility of things and the bodiliness of the subject who sees. We may therefore define the term 'experience' as the place, where this embodied self opens up to the visible and invisible of the world. Here, the experience-of (*Erfahrung*) and a lived experience (*Erlebnis*) unite into a «situated, incarnated»¹⁶ self. The decisive point here is the body does

10 E. LÉVINAS, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Vrin, Paris 2010, p. 181.

11 See M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, [*Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Paris, 1945], trans. by R. Boehm, de Gruyter, Berlin 1966, p. 7 Fn.4. R. Boehm remarks on the modification of this concept.

12 ID., *The Visible and the Invisible [Le visible et l'invisible]*, ed. by C. Lefort, trans. by A. Lingis, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968, p. 136.

13 *Ivi*, p. 135.

14 *Ivi*, p. 138.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ivi*, p. 76.

not constitute space but is «organic[ally]»¹⁷ intertwined with it, i.e. space is already built into the bodily structure. Such a body inhabits space not in a conceptual but an affective «understand[ing]»¹⁸, provided that he is able to unfold his motility abilities in life. This is why space is given to the body not in terms of an intentional search for knowledge but in terms of «an intention to take hold»¹⁹. What Merleau-Ponty has in mind is rather an embodied space ruled by «motility as basic intentionality»²⁰. In his words, «[...] consciousness is being towards the thing through the intermediary of the body [...]. Motility [...] is not [...] a handmaid of consciousness»²¹.

Although Husserl's intentionality breaks with representation in terms of an accurate reproduction of the world, it grounds on its undisputed essential trait, namely, Leibniz' claim that the qualitative difference among things and place might be overcome in a harmonious way through the unification of space and things in perspective. Merleau-Ponty stresses instead the rivalry among things, which are simultaneously extended in space and time within the field of presence and which fight for our attention. This space of bodily localisation and motility is not organised perspectively around the body, but it organises itself in depth as a simultaneity of heterogeneously given things and bodies and is affectively coloured. Space is bodily lived and the gaze expands to a reinvention of space. There is therefore no coincidence between the gaze and the visible, but manifold «chiasms»²² united in an «intentional “encroachment”»²³ that makes up the impossibility of the world: «The chiasm truth of the pre-established harmony – – Much more exact than it: for it is between local-individuated facts, and the chiasm binds as obverse and reverse ensembles unified in advance in process of differentiation»²⁴. What is at stake here is not the accurate representation of space for a perceiving bodily subject, but the bodily affective experience of space.

This bodily, affectively lived experience which was made possible by the break with both the perspectivity of our *Dasein* and the compossibility of the beings' realm, triggers in my view an emotion of the sublime, a *phenomenological emotion of the sublime* which is engendered by the excess of sensitivity over conceptuality, an excess that was already suggested by Kant. In order to sustain this thesis, I'll shortly consider the sublime in Kant's terms in order to put forward a *phenomenological emotion of the sublime* as the expression of a bodily affective experience. This bodily experience of space involves a sense of being liberated from the perceptual rules of representation.

17 MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception* [*Phénoménologie de la perception*], trans. by C. Smith, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1958, p. 293.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ivi*, p. 119.

20 *Ivi*, pp. 158 f.

21 *Ivi*, p. 161.

22 MERLEAU-PONTY, *The Visible and the Invisible*, cit., pp. 160, 199, 214 f, 239, 259.

23 *Ivi*, pp. 239, 259.

24 *Ivi*, p. 262.

4. Kant: The Emotion of the Sublime

Kant's first attempt to articulate a theory of the sublime is found in his pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, published in 1764. Kant remarks that we experience various feelings of enjoyment or of displeasure, which depend on our subjective disposition, which in its turn enables us to find things pleasurable or displeasurable. In case of the sublime, Kant suggests that our disposition towards it may occur in three characteristic ways: The feeling of the sublime is sometimes accompanied by dread or melancholy – «the terrifying sublime» – sometimes with quiet wonder – «the noble» – and in still other cases with an extraordinary beauty – «the splendid». As examples of these Kant cites, amongst others, great buildings (such as the Pyramids) as splendid. Our responses to it can embody 'quiet wonder' as well as delightful horror. Kant uses works of architecture to illustrate the phenomenological workings of the sublime, for example, when he describes the feelings of a visitor of St. Peter's in Rome. On such terms, a work of architecture can be so perceptually overwhelming as to transcend the scope of our capacity for rational cognition²⁵.

While in the *Observations* sublimity is constructed dispositionally, as a feeling, the *Analytic of the Sublime*, the second book of Part I of the *Critique of Judgement* concerns in my view the phenomenological structures grounding the beautiful and the sublime. The limit of the universal claim for beauty lies there, where our capacity to build up forms, i.e. the power of imagination or the faculty of presentation, becomes overwhelmed by what Kant calls the «formlessness»²⁶ of a sense impression. This excessive demand as results of the sheer immensity of a peak suggesting the idea of limitlessness or infinity to us, has itself the character of an aesthetic emotion. The sublime, «may appear, indeed, in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgment, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to do violence, as it were, to the imagination»²⁷. The consciousness of imagination's inadequacy to cope with the formless phenomenon arouses a contradictory and ambiguous feeling of a pleasure arising from displeasure, a «negative pleasure»²⁸ which involves not only alternations of attraction and repulsion but a sense of pain – «a check to the vital forces»²⁹ as resulting from the imagination's failure

25 Crowther has reconstructed Kant's theory of the sublime in terms of four varieties: First, the «cognitive variety», which divides into the mathematical and dynamical modes; second, «the artefactual sublime» which arises when some man-made product makes vivid the scope of human artifice; third, «the personalized sublime», which involves an overwhelming personal significance; fourth, «the expressive sublime», which evokes a sense of universal significance. Crowther offers a general definition of the sublime: «The sublime is an item or set of items which, through the possession or suggestion of perceptually, imaginatively, or emotionally overwhelming properties, succeeds in rendering the scope of some human capacity vivid to the senses». P. CROWTHER, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989, p. 162.

26 I. KANT, *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment [Kritik der ästhetischen Urtheilskraft]*, trans. by J.C. Meredith, ed. by N. Walker, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, § 24, p. 78.

27 *Ivi*, § 23, p. 76.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

to build up the unity of a perception. Hence, imagination is induced by this very failure to «recoil upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight [*rührendes Wohlgefallen*]]»³⁰. Such agitation is emotional, it involves being moved from ‘within’: Whereas in the case of beauty we seek a basis in the formal purposiveness of the work of art, in the case of the sublime, however, we look for this basis «in our own ideas», i.e. «within us»³¹, because we fail to estimate the determinate form or magnitude. Hence, the formless natural object is «counter-purposive (*zweckwidrig*)»³² insofar as, defying purposiveness, it seems to defeat the very end of cognition.

As Kant claims in § 80 of his *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, the ontological concept of a substance requires reference to a purpose (casualty of nature), while conversely, nature and its laws are themselves subordinated to a cause or idea that binds nature to a particular form. The purposiveness of nature for our faculties of cognition is subjective; the principle must be regarded as «if an understanding (though it be not ours) had supplied them for the benefit of our cognitive faculties, so as to render possible a system of experience according to particular natural laws»³³. We have «to admit this distinction as one subjectively necessary for our cognitive faculty, constituted as it is, and as valid for reflective, and not for objectively determining judgement»³⁴. It is a transcendental principle, under which Kant understands a principle «through which we represent *a priori* the universal condition under which alone things can become objects of our cognition generally»³⁵. As Manfred Baum remarks, this is an «ontological principle» that «addresses the conditions of possible cognition of things through our human faculties of cognition»³⁶.

Kant then proceeds first to the «association of the feeling of pleasure with the concept of the purposiveness of nature»³⁷ and thereafter to «the aesthetic representation of the purposiveness of nature»³⁸. Both underline the subjectivity of this principle by relating it to the sensible intuition and the faculty of feeling of the human being³⁹. It is a contingent principle and its necessity is hypothetical: «For, were it not for this presupposition, we should have no order of nature in accordance with empirical laws, and, consequently, no guiding-thread for an experience»⁴⁰. For Kant, «it is quite conceivable» that material comes «to hand in such a confusion (properly speaking only infinitely multiform and ill-adapted to our power of apprehension)» that «it makes impossible for our understanding to discover in nature an intelligible order» so as make out of this material

30 *Ivi*, § 26, p. 83.

31 *Ivi*, § 25, p. 80.

32 *Ivi.*, § 27, p. 89.

33 *Ivi*, *Introduction*, IV, p. 16.

34 *Ivi*, § 88, p. 286.

35 *Ivi*, *Introduction*, V, 16.

36 M. BAUM, *Kant on Teleological Thinking and its Failures*, in *Id.*, *Kleine Schriften I. Arbeiten zur theoretischen Philosophie Kants*, ed. by M. Heinz, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 2019, pp. 305-321. Here, p. 311.

37 KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, cit., *Introduction*, VI, p. 21.

38 *Ivi*, *Introduction*, VII, p. 23.

39 BAUM, *Kant on Teleological Thinking*, cit., p. 313.

40 KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, cit., *Introduction*, V, p. 20.

«a consistent context of experience»⁴¹. Hence, an object that defies purposiveness as its ontological principle also defies the very possibility of experiencing it, which, in Kant's terms, implies cognoscibility. A formless object shows therefore an 'ontological indeterminacy' that results on the one hand, from Imagination's failure to link it to an adequate concept and on the other, from its counter-purposiveness. As Henry Allison remarks, «the purposiveness of the beautiful is always that of the form» understood as the «suitability» of the apprehended object to the interplay of the imagination and the understanding. In contrast, the «sublime presents itself as counter purposive» in view of its lack of form.⁴² Paradoxically enough, however, the object is liked, so that even though it is counterpurposive to our mind, it is purposive to our sensitivity.

Imagination would seem to fall into an abyss if it had not been rescued by the work or reason. The sublime, indeed, «concerns ideas of reason»⁴³, so that the ground of our pleasure lies in the way in which objects of nature engage our cognitive faculties. Kant thus claims that «(t)he sublime is the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses»⁴⁴. While what is beautiful implies «restful contemplation»⁴⁵ of «what pleases in the mere judging of it» (i.e. apart from all interest) and involves no «concept of the understanding», the sublime «is what pleases immediately through its resistance to the interest of the senses»⁴⁶. Herein lies for Kant the difference between a feeling and an emotion: While feeling involves a mere sensuous and disinterested pleasure arising from the concordance between our faculties, an emotion arises out of their conflict: The sublime requires us to esteem something in spite of the «hindrances on the part of sensibility»⁴⁷. Harmony is here achieved by virtue of the «dominion» which «reason imposes [...] upon sensibility»⁴⁸. It is important to remark that for Kant, which is sublime is not the formless object itself, but rather the «unfathomable depth of this supersensible faculty»⁴⁹, which, through the ideas of reason, can grasp the totality. This negative feeling of the inadequacy of imagination is overcome by a positive feeling of «respect»⁵⁰ aroused by our becoming conscious of possessing an independent, «pure reason»⁵¹. Sublime is therefore the «attunement of the spirit evoked by

41 *Ivi*, p. 20 f.

42 H.E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste. A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 309 f. Unlike Allison, who claims that the paradox underlying the sublime is the «paradoxical conception of a counter-purposive purposiveness» (*Ivi*, p. 310), I'd suggest that purposiveness may be considered under two points of view, namely, from our sensitivity related to our capacity of being affected, and from our understanding related to our capacity for conceptual thinking.

43 KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, cit., § 23, p. 76.

44 *Ivi*, § 25, p. 81.

45 *Ivi*, § 27, p. 88.

46 *Ivi*, *General Remark upon the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgements*, p. 97.

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ivi*, p. 99.

49 *Ivi*, p. 101.

50 *Ivi*, p. 102.

51 *Ibid.*

a particular representation engaging the attention of reflective judgment»⁵² of the subject of reason and not the mere sensuous object. Kant supplies us here with a phenomenological description of the emotion of the sublime, an emotion that encompasses, as Birgit Recki summarizes, rejection as well as admiration, pleasure and displeasure, anguish and redemption, irritation and confident pacification, fright and enthusiasm.⁵³ Herein lies the first step towards the autonomy of aesthetics.

It is also important to note that for Kant, the experience of sublimity focuses on nature, whereas the idea of nature as the major object of aesthetic sensibility was a view closely related with the rise of Romanticism. As regards to nature, harmony is re-established by the work of reason. Even when Kant comes to define the sublime in terms of representational art, their signifying elements must be ordered in agreement with nature. Harmony is here attained by the correspondence between a representation and a subject-matter. But Kant also offers examples where the subject-matter in itself is sublime: In the well-known case of the inscription upon the *Temple of Isis* (Mother Nature): «I am all that is, and that was, and that ever shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from my face», as Paul Crowther remarks, we may be dealing with ideas whose intellectual content cannot be grasped in a perceptual sense, or which evoke extremes of terror and fantasy.⁵⁴ Here, Kant uses the term ‘sublime’ in relation both to the work of art and to the way the revelation is expressed. This suggests the possibility of approaching a specifically artistic sublime. Kant himself takes a step towards this notion when he comes to define the aesthetic idea as

that representation of the imagination which evokes much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite fully capture or render completely intelligible⁵⁵.

In the aesthetic idea, concept is inadequate to intuition. The sublime witnesses the idea’s failure to meet the form as also the case of an object of nature that is «monstrous [...] by its size» shows. Such an object ‘defeats the end that forms its concept’. As Kant adds,

(t)he *colossal* is the mere presentation of a concept which is almost too great for presentation, i.e. borders on the relatively monstrous; for the end to be attained by the presentation of a concept is made harder to realize by the intuition of the object being almost too great for our faculty of apprehension⁵⁶.

The imagination is able to create ‘a second nature’, i.e. an artwork, out of the material

52 *Ivi*, § 25, p. 81.

53 B. RECKI, *Ästhetik der Sitten. Die Affinität von ästhetischem Gefühl und praktischer Vernunft bei Kant*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2001, p. 201.

54 CROWTHER, *The Kantian Sublime*, cit., p. 154.

55 KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, cit., § 49, p. 142.

56 *Ivi*, § 26, p. 83.

supplied by nature. In doing so, it ‘surpasses nature’, a surpassing that does not consist in representing the supernatural but things ‘transgressing the limits of experience’ through the creation of an original image of sensuous configuration. To experience such artworks as sublime «involves their perceptually, imaginatively or emotionally overwhelming properties, making vivid the scope of human artifice or expression itself»⁵⁷.

In my view, this surpassing of nature or «the confines of experience»⁵⁸ entails the impossibility of attaining harmony, insofar as reason is unable to provide a concept for the excesses of imagination. Here, we are clearly faced with an inversion: While in things of nature, the inadequacy of imagination is overcome by adequate concepts – conceptuality here exceeds sensuousness – in works of art, no concept can be wholly adequate to the representations of imagination – here, sensuousness clearly exceeds conceptuality.

5. The Sublime as Expression of an Affective Bodily Lived Experience

Reason’s insight, that what is perceived exceeds the concept thereof, goes hand in hand with the phenomenological insight of our faculty of perception, that the thing is always more than what is given in its actual perception. Actually, the phenomenon cannot on principle be synthesized as a totality, because each new perception opens up corresponding new horizons. This fact not only leads to the bursting of representation and consequently, to a revision of the feeling of the sublime in Kant’s terms but to a *phenomenological mode of the sublime* as the accurate expression of a bodily lived experience.

In this connection, we have seen that in Kant’s conception of the aesthetic idea, the emotion of the sublime arises from the excess of sensibility over conceptuality. We fail not only to find an adequate concept of the object of experience, but to ascertain its purpose. This failure triggers an overwhelming lived experience (*Erlebnis*) that befalls the passive subject. The signification content of this lived experience initially evades the subject because of its immediacy, so that the lived experience of the sublime encompasses something ‘more’ than what ontological concepts can grasp. While the emotion of the sublime involves the final overcoming of fear or danger by the work or reason, in its beginnings, the feeling of sensuous overwhelming leads to a pause; a pause wherein reality seems to be beyond the subject’s grasp, a fold of time wherein it «recoils upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight»⁵⁹ in Kant’s terms. In this fold of time the subject becomes momentarily detached from or even alien to every contextual reality. It is an indeterminate lapse of time wherein the subject is ecstatically drawn back to itself: an experience of ‘ecstatic eternity’, where the intentional correlation between our consciousness and the perceived object rests in suspension or is, in the worst case, interrupted: When an intention toward homogeneity is disappointed, «complete conflict takes place»: Our perception in Husserl’s terms or our imagination in Kant’s is no longer able to recognize i.e. to synthesize the object, so that what

57 CROWTHER, *The Kantian Sublime*, cit., p. 168.

58 KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, cit., § 49, p. 143.

59 *Ivi*, § 23, p. 83.

is given in experience shows, as Husserl puts it, a «complete heterogeneity», «a dissimilarity in a pregnant sense»⁶⁰. The object of experience remains a riddle and the subject is left in a state of utmost bewilderment.

This experience leads not only to a break of the spontaneous formation of sense but to a self-reflection insofar as the subject is thrown back to «the whole of his life», as Hans-Georg Gadamer claims⁶¹. In these rare moments, we encounter the «supersensible side of our being»⁶², in Kant's terms. The aesthetic lived experience of the sublime, as every aesthetic experience, suspends all hitherto existing orders and institutions of sense only in order to engage in new formations of sense. A time lapse opens up, out of which a primary affect, the irritability as such, grows up. These affects, which are bodily lived and sensed, are only apparently exogenous; actually, they originate in the emotional impulses of the «originary sensuousness», which encompasses, in Husserl's words, «activities driven by drives and "sensuous" tendencies»⁶³. We are faced with something 'other', something indeterminate that waits to be endowed with sense. Out of this call there grows step by step a new sense, which, owing to both the horizonedness of our experience and the excess of sensibility, will never be thoroughly grasped by conceptuality, thus being doomed to an endless process of sense formation. At this point we may ask where this emotion of the sublime arises from, considering that its underlying pre-condition, i.e. the overcoming of our faculties' conflict thanks to the work of reason is put into question by the break with representation.

We have already seen through Merleau-Ponty's writings that this break allowed for the emergence of a new perceptual ground (*Wahrnehmungsboden*), wherein body, things and world exist simultaneously in an ambiguous and dissonant correlation, which as such equates to the current plurality of particular worlds of experience in permanent tension with one another. After this turn, the emotion of the sublime as a negative pleasure is no longer engendered by an overwhelming feeling of self-transcendence but is aroused by a bodily lived experience, which is motivated by the spatial experience of a dispersed self amid a world submitted to overwhelming tensions and conflicts. This lived experience neither allows for transcendence of reason nor for the re-establishment of harmony. On the contrary, it implies a negative pleasure emerging from the consciousness of the irrepressible power of sensibility, which attests to the world's impossibility and contradictoriness. It is a bodily pleasure engendered by the disjunction and transgression of sensuous forms and motivated by the experience of contemporary architectonic space conceptions.

60 HUSSERL, *Experience and Judgment* [*Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*], ed. by L. Landgrebe, trans. by J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1973, p. 191 f.

61 See H.-G. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1990, p. 75.

62 KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, cit., § 27, p. 88.

63 HUSSERL, *Hua XXXIII, Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917-1937)*, ed. by R. Bernet and D. Lohmar, Kluwer, Dordrecht 2001, p. 276.

6. *The Architectonical Sublime*

Even if the sublime can encompass the domain of built environment, it has traditionally done so by assuming the rules of representation, i.e. of a harmonious relationship between subject and object, wherein the original ordering device mustered for traditional architecture was that of the body itself, as the original paradigm of order. From Francesco di Giorgio's⁶⁴ explicit analogies to Le Corbusier's direct 'imitation' of Vitruvian⁶⁵ bodily perfection (the «Modulor» system of proportions⁶⁶) in the layout of the *Ville Radieuse*, the body has provided a guiding metaphor. But the modern phenomenon of plurality of simultaneous coexisting worlds and the concomitant reformulation of our cognitive habits resulted in the arousal of other sensibilities, such as the fragmentary, the chance, and the marginal. The body is therefore no longer the warrant of harmony but becomes the expression of the dispersion of the modern subject. This disruption of the bodily metaphor leads to the conception of architectural forms endowed with an excess of sensibility, allowing for an experience of both bodily implacement and displacement.

Thus, the representational constraints give place to a new aesthetic dimension: the a.m. bodily experience of space. Anthropocentric forms are disrupted allowing for a negative pleasure in transgressing, resulting in excessive forms. An 'improper' aesthetics that celebrates the dynamic assemblage of forms over utopian harmony and that declines a clear 'visibility' of a univocal sense in favour of a grey or 'turbid visibility' of multiple senses – a wild gaze. A 'wild gaze' that implies a «wild meaning», i.e. «an expression of experience by experience»⁶⁷: Far from being reassembled into synthesis, it is experience itself which conveys meaning as Merleau-Ponty points out in the follow of Husserl. In the case of the sublime, however, words fall short in view of the excess of sensuous experience at work, insofar as our conscience tends to ignore the senses which she is unable to 'domesticate': There is always a remaining sense, a 'core' of wild meaning that resists being reassembled into synthesis or being: It marks the very birth of experience.

This disruption of the corporeal paradigm and the resulting excess of sensibility cannot but lead to a reassertion of the sublime: Summarizing, the phenomenological sublime is an emotion aroused neither by the power of our reason transcending the inadequacy of imagination as it concerns nature, nor by the overwhelming powers of imagination as it concern an artwork, but by the excess of sensibility engendering a negative pleasure, which echoes the bodily state of dispersion amid spatial sensuous forms that resist to be harnessed into concepts and lead to an endless process of sense formation. Paradoxically enough, this exhaustion of corporeality itself involves the arousal of the bodily sensuousness, as expressed by our most primary drives and impulses. The moving powers of

64 See https://www.google.de/search?q=francesco+di+giorgio+martini+vitruvio&sa=X&hl=de&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=R4Sq6ODK1O_YSM%252CUFb9JQwESmbqEM%252C_&vet=1&u-sg=A14_-kTqG1NIKb8vDmT6FKS1ZRakzO8JTg&ved=2ahUKEwik_b2xiOjqAhXQsKQKHfKfD-DwQ9QEwAHoECAoQHA&biw=1290&bih=742#imgcr=R4Sq6ODK1O_YSM

65 See https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitruvian_Man

66 See <https://www.lescouleurs.ch/journal/posts/der-modulor-menschennaechte-als-grundwert/>

67 MERLEAU-PONTY, *The Visible and the Invisible*, cit., p. 155.

architecture, which enhance dissonance over harmony and difference over identity, call forth a tension between our traditional bodily habits and our bodily lived experiences and force us into a self-reflection insofar as they compel us to question and suspend the institutionalized sense architecture has to convey.

Let us exemplify these considerations through the built work of architects as diverse as Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman and Frank Gehry, among others. As to Bernard Tschumi, the design strategy at work in his *Parc de la Villette*⁶⁸, inaugurated in 1983, can be related to Merleau-Ponty's questioning of the structural relationship between body, space and perception. The whole architectonic program is here decomposed and recombined into three autonomous structural systems – the points or 'folies', the lines of movement, the surfaces or 'prairies'. The arbitrary overlapping of these structures engenders no compossibility but their literal collision. The points or 'folies' express no function whatsoever, in spite of having been designed for a particular purpose: they are characterized by an ambiguity between sense and non-sense insofar as not serving to any purpose of denotation but of connotation, they suggest a multiplicity of meanings. These 'folies' question the possibility of inhabiting insofar as they ignore the distinction 'outside-inside' on the one hand and on the other, they offer the potentially inhabiting body «no comforting organic referent». Far from engendering an «embodied space» that bodies can inhabit and interact with, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, this arbitrary assemblage of singular elements, may it be stairs, ramps, etc., engenders, as Anthony Vidler remarks, «antibodily states, such as vertigo, sudden vertical and sideways movements», as if architecture would «aspire to the exhaustion of corporeality itself»⁶⁹.

Here, the leitmotiv of the design strategy is the bodily movement, a movement which has neither origin nor aim, but calls forth an experience of nomadism: Paths that do not take us to any destination but induce us to linger in them by addressing our senses, as for example the so called *Way of Fragrances* does; ramps and stairs, which end up in inaccessible places, they all induce us to a revision of our traditional concepts and to a redefinition of their function. The resulting space can be understood as 'topological' in Merleau-Ponty's terms, insofar as it reaches unity only through the superposition of impossibilities. There arises a feeling of bodily fragmentation due to the lack of any reference to habitual places or architectural types already anchored in our body schema. This strategy triggers a perverse or negative pleasure that Tschumi explicitly aims at producing and that Adorno defines as the characteristic of the modern work of art. For Adorno, the picture gathers all the stigmata of the repulsive and the detestable of the new art⁷⁰.

Another example of this tension between pleasure and displeasure is the *Memorial for the Jews killed in Europa*⁷¹, built by Peter Eisenman in Berlin between 2003 and 2005. It

68 See URL:<http://www.tschumi.com>

69 A. VIDLER, *The Architectural Uncanny. Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 111 f.

70 TH. W. ADORNO, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. by G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, p. 55.

71 See <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/denkmaeler/denkmal-fuer-die-ermordeten-juden-europas-mit-ausstellung-im-ort-der-information>

consists of 2711 steles, which remind us of gravestones. No stele resembles the others, digital design methods enabled a plurality of different steles, almost unnoticeably inclined and standing on an apparently wavering floor. Upon entering the site there arises a feeling of uncertainty, unsettledness and even disorientation, as the visitor feels it sinks in the landscape. It is submitted to a deception: although the steles seem to be of the same height it is the floor which is inclined, so that the visitor is suddenly and unexpectedly surrounded by stones that tower over it and seem to bury it under their weight. This effect is even enforced by the lack of orientation insofar as the design avoided every point of reference. The abstract conceived steles remit to no meaning, to no message, they have no inscriptions at all, they stand simply mute: Eisenman defined the memorial as a «place of no meaning»⁷², their meaning remains a riddle. It is all about the silentness of the place, which should encourage to think about and to feel with the absent victims. This place awakens many feelings of despair – no way leads out of the site –, of solitude, of lifelessness – there is no comforting vegetation, only flat concrete with sharp angles. These steles offer neither an organic bodily reference nor a clear meaning: they show an openness which entails neither the possibility nor the impossibility of a reconciliation, so that their sense remains floating. Thus, there arises a field of tensions between the abstract forms and the multiple associations suggested: This place offers an immediate bodily experience the visitor is passively subjected to: It is overwhelmed by the massiveness of the stones, by the feeling of being entombed under their massive weight: a sublime experience.

This field of tensions can also be exemplified through the biomorphic architecture. Organic design is normally associated with smooth, flowing forms, insofar as designers take inspiration from natural forms. Glen Howard Small⁷³ is one of the oldest representatives of this aesthetics. Influenced by the futuristic aesthetics of the 70ies, he focuses on the way nature develops structures and employs these as models. Flowing, smooth, fluid forms are created, they look like tissues, skin, dried liquids or even parasites which seem to snuggle against the city. These forms motivate a profound feeling of estrangement, fascination as well as bodily sickness in face of reason's failure to find adequate concepts for these forms. Here it becomes evident that the excess of sensibility inevitably triggers a bodily sublime emotion, which accounts for the *pathos* inherent to the conflict between positive and negative emotions⁷⁴.

One of the pioneers of these design strategies is without doubt Frank Gehry and his *Vitra Museum* of 1989. The exterior form is in continuous transformation, so that no unity can be synthesized here, forms rather engage in a dynamic-forceful play. The same applies to the *Guggenheim Museum* in Bilbao, a building that exacerbates the play with forms in their disjunction and seemingly hazardous montage. Once again, disjunction breaks with representation, a bodily sublime emotion arises.

72 N. MAAK, *Peter Eisenman im Stelengang*, in «Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung», 16.08.83. See <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/thema/peter-eisenman>. (accessed 10.03.2020).

73 See <https://archinect.com/features/article/87160008/review-glen-small-father-of-green-architecture>

74 See on the 'Tragedy and the Sublime', E. BRADY, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 148-165.

7. Conclusion

By avoiding any pre-established signification as far as conceptuality is concerned, the a. m. projects impose upon the body affections that belong to the sphere of sensuousness: An 'experiential narrative' of bodily affections, of *pathos*, that can hardly be accounted for in adequate concepts. The sublime is thus engendered by sensibility's excess over conceptuality, leading to a break with representation. This break and the consequent questioning of the bodily metaphor as warrant of order and symbolic sense imply paradoxically enough the arousal of a bodily affective experience, which is profoundly sublime in phenomenological terms.