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Research Plan
Explore Lab
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The Felt Body & The Modern City: An exploration of the sensory meanings and impacts and accompanied design principles of objects in (semi-)public spaces

Keywords: Public space, Atmosphere, Experience, The felt body, Art and architecture

Introduction

Modern cities are often criticised for their fast pace and over stimulating environments. Georg Simmel, a philosopher and sociologist, already theorised these city characteristics and their impacts on the individual at the beginning of the 20th century (Simmel, 1903/1950). Simmel (1903/1950) coined the term *blasé attitude*, explaining individual feelings of detachment and indifference due to sensory overloads of modern, urban environments. Pallasmaa (2012, pp. 19) highlights similar reactions of “detachment, isolation, and exteriority” in modern society, but primarily explains it by the dominant focus on vision over the other senses. Even though both explanations are different, the theories both highlight the call for interventions that create new urban environments that enable people to reconnect to the full scale of their sensations and emotions.

This theme of connecting to emotions and senses can be linked to writings of Gernot Böhme, a philosopher who, among other things, focuses on being mindfully present in spaces. According to Böhme (2013), architecture has the capability to shape the experience of individuals and, as a result, connect them to the spaces surrounding them. In line with this statement, Pallasmaa (2012, pp. 11) highlights how art and architecture can help to strengthen one’s sense of self and, accordingly, allow "to engage fully in the mental dimensions of dream, imagination and desire". Art and architecture can thus both function as a counterweight of these highpace, overstimulating urban environments. Therefore, understanding the different (design) possibilities of art and architecture that can disconnect people from overstimulating daily life and let them reconnect to their senses and surroundings is crucial.

This research will focus on different artistic and architectural interventions (in a broad sense and from now on called ‘objects’) in (semi-)public spaces and examine how they

reconnect individuals to their innerworld or direct surroundings This examination will be done by an attempt to answer the following research question:

How do objects in (semi-)public spaces influence the embodied visitor's experience?

In order to answer this research question, the following three sub questions will be examined for the artworks and architectural structures to find common denominators:

1. *What type is the object?* [object & ingredients]
2. *What elements does the object consist of?* [elements & design principles]
3. *What are the (sensory) effects and accompanied behaviour of the spectator or participant?* [subject & action]

Theoretical Framework

A foundation of theory linked to experience, and more precisely to embodied experience and atmosphere, must be established to be able to understand the interaction of people with objects. In the following section, these two concepts will be described in more detail.

Embodied experience

The connection to an individual's senses and emotions can be linked to the concept of the *felt body*, which gained attention through the writings of German philosopher Hermann Schmitz (Schmitz et al., 2011; Böhme et al., 2014). According to Schmitz, body and mind should be approached holistically and not as dualism, since this dualistic approach undermines the complex nuances of felt experiences and does not explain "the immediate affectedness with which reality is encountered by human beings" (Schmitz et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2021, pp. 1). A more extensive explanation of the felt body is beyond the scope of this research, since it is a rather philosophical concept. Though, the conceptualisation of the felt body formed an important basis for contemporary philosophers and is in line with recent views in the mind sciences, which recognises "that understanding is profoundly embodied" (Johnson, 2015, pp. 1; Tzortzi, 2017).

In the context of experience, embodiment entails that perceptions, thoughts, and emotions are fundamentally configured by bodily interactions with the world (Tzortzi, 2017). This is in line with the writings of Gernot Böhme, who continued on Schmitz's ideas and wrote on the concept of *bodily presence*. According to Böhme (2017), physical presence is

directly linked to an involvement with the surroundings through an individual's senses and physical sensations (Böhme, 2017). This role of the senses in relation to space has also been explored by the philosopher Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard et al. (1994) discuss how the different senses (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory) contribute to experience and influence emotions and thoughts (Bachelard et al., 1994). The subjective perception of space and the accompanying overall experience is thus rooted in the physical body and its encounter with sensory perceptions and bodily sensations.

Atmosphere

Another concept that is important in the context of experience is that of *atmosphere*. To be able to grasp the affective dimensions of an object, atmosphere can be considered as a “mediating force” (Havik, 2018, pp. 270). The concept of *atmosphere* follows from writings on *aura* by Walter Benjamin, which is considered as an “intermediary” between object and subject that exists outside of both (Benjamin, 2008; Böhme, 1993; Novak, 2019). According to Böhme (1993, pp. 121), objects radiate a certain type of atmosphere and fill the surroundings “with tensions and suggestions of movement”. These objects thus possess a certain “ecstatic ability to spread beyond itself” (Dorrian, 2014, pp. 191). And in the space surrounding these objects, subjects encounter and experience this atmosphere. *Atmosphere* can therefore be considered as something that is being formed at the interplay between objects and subjects (Bjerregaard, 2015). This conceptualisation of *atmosphere* highlights how *atmosphere* exists outside of objects and is therefore not an objective property. Though, *atmosphere* is also not something subjective that is determined by the psychic or physical state of subjects (Böhme, 1993). *Atmosphere* is spatially undetermined, and therefore intrinsically linked to *space* (Bjerregaard, 2015).

The topic of atmosphere also plays an important role in the writings and designs of several architects such as Peter Zumthor and Juhani Pallasmaa (Havik et al., 2013; Tzortzi, 2017). According to Zumthor (2006, pp. 13), quality architecture is when a building manages to move, which is intrinsically linked to the concept of atmosphere and the perception of this atmosphere “through our emotional sensibility”. In his book *Atmospheres: architectural environments - surrounding objects* (2006), Zumthor seeks the essential components of how atmosphere is generated and becomes apparent in his works. It is through, among other things, material presence, material compatibility, the sound and temperature of spaces, tension between interior and exterior, levels of intimacy, and light on things that this

atmosphere is created (Zumthor, 2006). Though, a visitor's reading of this atmosphere is intrinsically linked to a short moment and impression and goes more intuitively than these categorisations suggest. It is where both this expression (physical world and atmosphere) and reception of the individual (bodily experience, senses, emotions etc.) meet, where (embodied) experience happens and one's reality and self is shaped (Pallasmaa, 2014).

Methodology

This research aims to explore what design characteristics exist of different objects in (semi-)public space that can help to improve the connection of people to their sensations and emotions. A variety of projects ranging from individual artworks, to museums, or narrative environments is analysed. Whereas the need for connecting to sensations and emotions is more prevalent in modern metropolises, objects in smaller agglomerations and nature areas will also be included. The wide selection of objects will enable to get a better grasp on the possible configurations and principles that already exist.

The research will be organised in a stepwise manner, consisting of three main parts; Firstly, an intuitive selection of objects will be made, based on personal feelings and experiences of the author. Whenever a project is encountered, either in daily life, literature, or through talks with others, that moves or gives a certain curiosity/feeling, it is included. In combination with selecting the objects, occasional site visits will be performed to get a better grasp of personal and visitor interactions with the objects. During these site visits, photographs will be taken to help in unveiling extra depths of meaning by capturing different details and angles (Glaw et al., 2017). Also, writing exercises will be performed to get a better grasp on the atmosphere of the objects and the "embodied, emotional experiences of the participant-researcher" that are evoked (Hokkanen, 2017, pp. 24). Havik (2018) proposed different writing methods that can help in researching the atmosphere of places and the resulting embodied experiences. These writing methods entail "evocative description", "writing through the eyes of another", "automatic writing", "focused fragments", and "metaphor, memory and montage" (Havik, 2018).

Subsequently, the objects will be examined through an analysis of the type of intervention, the design elements, and the accompanied sensory meanings and impacts on the visitor. It will be attempted to find common denominators that help to group them. These first two steps of the research will be of an iterative character; once projects start to have clear similarities with one another and might belong to the same category, projects of that character will no longer be looked for. In the final stage of these two steps, the projects will be analysed

one more time to find a suiting overarching theme. Example of different object characteristics/classifications that will be focused on throughout the research:

- Timeliness (temporary or permanent)
- Level of immersion (is the visitor a spectator or participant of the structure?)
- Layout
- Material
- Colour
- Light

Lastly, after overarching themes have been chosen for the different projects, it will be attempted to create a catalogue, in which different design principles of the objects are abstracted and linked to the (affective) response of the visitor. In this catalogue there will be an explicit focus on the senses of the visitor and how visitors are invited to behave. This catalogue will enable designers, artists, and urban planners to integrate these principles in future design practices.

Diagram of the research structure

The following diagram is an abstraction of the methodology and research structure:

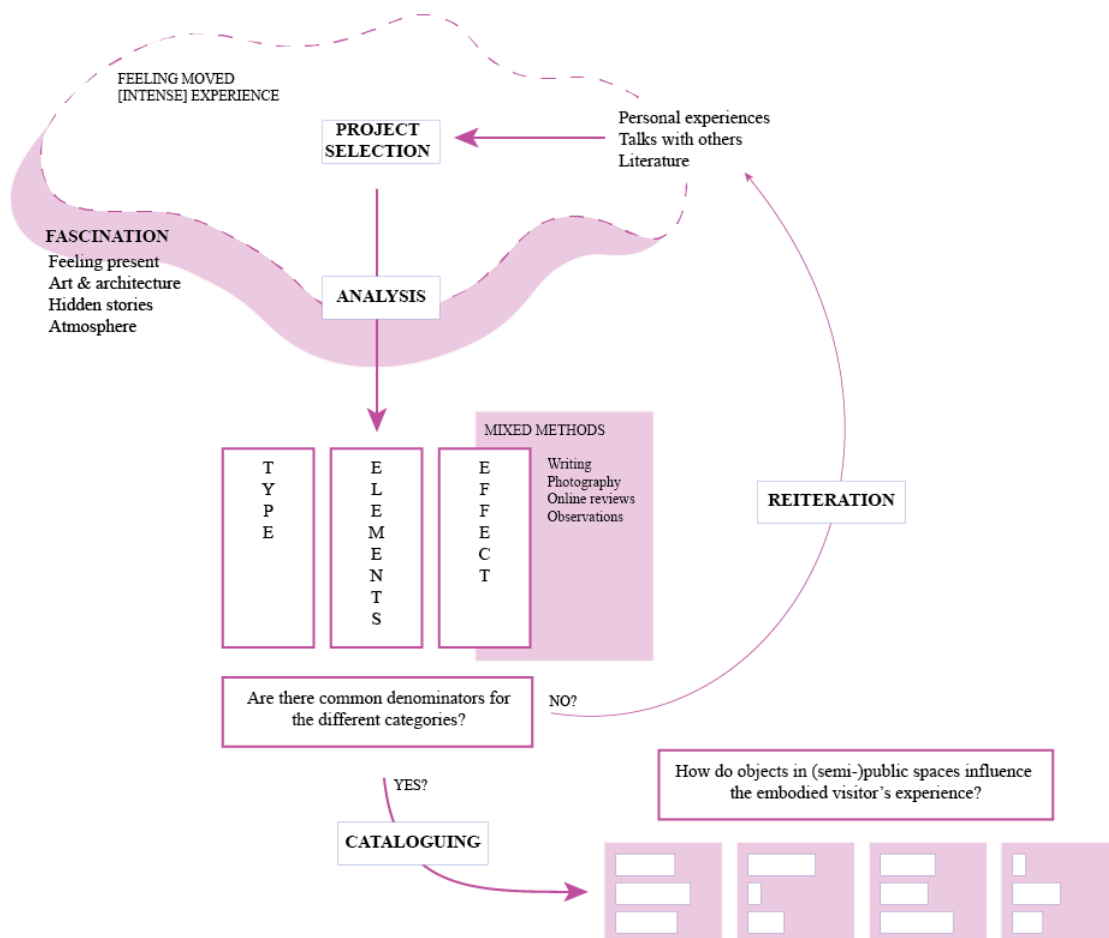


Figure 1: Abstraction of the research structure [made by author]

[**COMMENT TO CONSIDER:** Maybe some projects need a deeper analysis to get a better understanding of the experience of others as well. Possible to perform a walk-along with a writing exercise as proposed by Havik (2018) or an additional photo elicitation. The method of photo elicitation has been used in research as an additional tool next to interviewing to get a deeper understanding of the experience (Carpiano, 2008; Glaw et al., 2017).]

Relevance of the graduation project & link to the design

As mentioned in the introduction, modern cities are often criticised for their fast pace and levels of overstimulation. There is a need to create spaces that can function as a counterbalance to this intense city life. In order to develop these types of spaces, it is important to get a bigger understanding of the principles that can be used. As stated before, architectural structures and art have been suggested to function as such a counterbalance. In this research, art and architecture will be understood in the broad sense of the words and also narrative environments and other types of objects will be included, since it is believed that they can have a similar effect. How to successfully integrate these objects in urban fabrics such that they can indeed function as a counterweight to overstimulating life is something that is still underexplored. To be able to know how to integrate them, it is first important to understand how they are configured and what their effects are on visitors. By analysing different projects in more detail and finding out how they direct an individual's attention and how they affect these visitors, it will hopefully become more straightforward how to integrate such objects successfully in urban spaces. By creating a catalogue, designers, urban planners, and artists will be provided with more clear tools to create balanced environments.

Subsequently, this catalogue will function as an input for my own design process. For my graduation, I want to create an urban intervention that helps in breaching daily routines of individuals and help them feel in the moment. This moment of feeling can be in different forms; it can be contemplative, or through interaction, or through movement. Maybe there are also other possible actions, that is something to be discovered throughout my research. It will become apparent through site analysis what action or actions are best suited for the specific intervention. Ideally, my design will include a route with different interventions, to test the different principles found in the research. And probably one of these interventions will be developed in more architectural detail.

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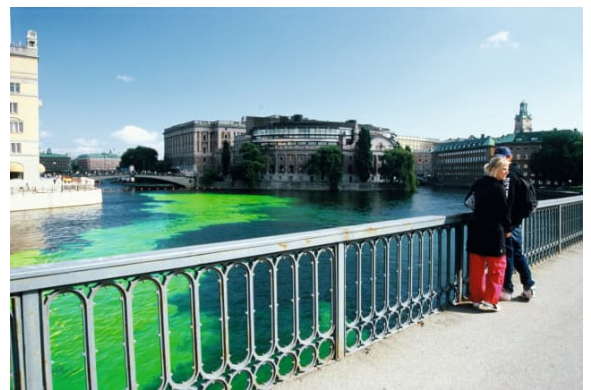
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Possible projects for analysis [more examples will be added]

Green River
Stockholm, 1998
Olafur Eliasson

Photo: Olafur Eliasson



The Mediated Motion
Kunsthau Bregenz, 2001
Olafur Eliasson & Günther Vogt

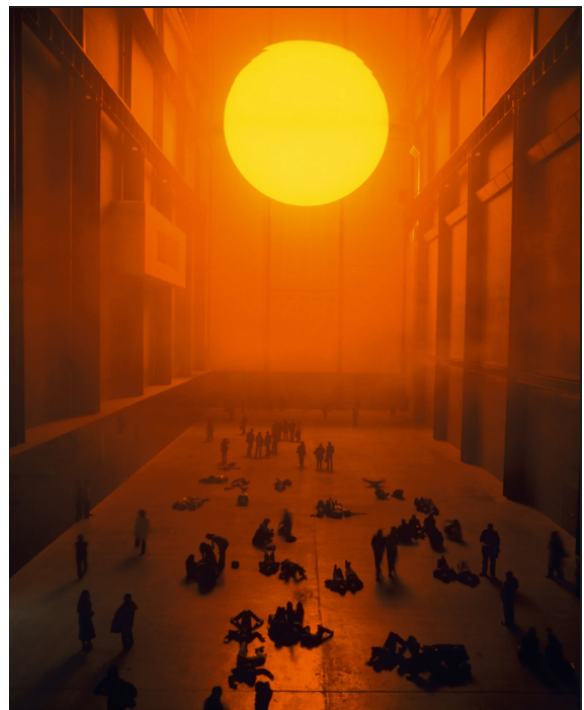
Photos: Markus Tretter





The Weather Project
Tate Modern, London, 2003/2004
Olafur Eliasson

Photo: Tate Photography (Andrew Dunkley
& Marcus Leith)



Oude Kerk, Amsterdam

Photo: by author



Poems for Earthlings
Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, 2019/2020
Adrián Villar Rojas

Photo: by author



Auschwitz Monument
Amsterdam, 1977
Jan Wolkers

Photo: <https://www.iamsterdam.com/>



Holocaust Memorial
Amsterdam,
Studio Libeskind

Photo: Kees Hummel



@ommetjemettom
Instagram Account, Amsterdam
Tom Jongbloed

Photo: screenshot instagram
@ommetjemettom



Museum Insel Hombroich
Stiftung Insel Hombroich, Germany, 1987

Photo: <https://www.inselhombroich.de/>



Voor de Kunst
Delft
Tijn Noordenbos

Photo: Caroline Vermeulen



Temporary Museum
UNFAIR, Amsterdam, 2021
Atelier Tomas Dirrix

Photo: Max Hart Nibbrig



Srebrenica is Nederlandse geschiedenis
Den Haag, 2020
Studio LA

Photo: <https://studio-la.org/nl/>



Tilted Arch
New York, 1981
Richard Serra

Photo:
<https://archiveofdestruction.com/artwork/tilted-arc/>



Wrapped Reichstag
Berlin, Germany, 1995
Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Photo: Wolfgang Volz



Tribunes in de Stad
Amsterdam, 2023
Collectief SLPLZN

Photo: <https://www.desamenleving.nu/>



Man die zijn Mol uitlaat
Hengelo, 2023
David Kater

Photo: David Kater



TIJDTUNNEL
Station Zwolle
?

Photo: Anne Reenders



A Line made by Walking
1967
Richard Long

Photo: Richard Long



Bruder Klaus Kapele
Mechernich-Wachendorf, 2007
Peter Zumthor

Photo:
<https://www.eifelinfo.nl/bruder-klaus-kapelle-wachendorf-unieke-veldkapel/>



Church of Light
Ibaraki-Shi, Japan, 1999
Tadao Ando

Photo: Naoya Fuji



Van Sonsbeek Paviljoen
Kröller-Müller, NL
Aldo van Eyck

Photo: Nathan Kramer

