

Chandler Householder

Mathur/Cleary

World Arch 318L

11 December 2017

Scalar Implications: Changing Effects in Aesthetic Pleasure of Art and Architecture

This essay was written for my world architecture class, the second part of a two-semester class covering the general history of architecture through different time periods and cultures. While it is a required course for those studying architecture, it became one of my favorite classes. As a student with a passion for art history (the study of which guided my interest towards architecture), I was constantly drawing my own parallels between the histories of each respective discipline. Towards the end of the semester, the class was assigned a research paper with an open topic, as long as it related to something we covered during the course of the semester. I decided to take a detailed look at the difference between the human experience of art and architecture as explained through scale and through the aesthetic categories of the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime. A topic of such specificity would have only arisen through the combination of my passion for art, architecture, and involvement in UT's Landmarks program.

Two of the most closely related art forms throughout time are sculpture and architecture. Sculpture can be a part of architecture, sculpture can be architectural, architecture can be sculptural, a sculptor can be an architect, and an architect a sculptor. While the main concerns of both sculpture and architecture are spatial relationships within the piece itself and the viewer¹, these relationships play out at very different scales. These differences in experience based on

¹ Art Brenner, "Concerning Sculpture and Architecture," *Leonardo* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1971): [Page 100], accessed December 10, 2017.

changes in scale are used strategically by both the sculptor and the architect in the communication of their own ideas and in the imposition of a certain experience upon the viewer. This is best demonstrated through the lens of the different aesthetic pleasures; The beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime. Each of these categories are focused in their expressions and representations, but how do differences between them arise on through the small scale of sculpture and large scale of architecture? Through a comparison of sculpture pieces from The University of Texas at Austin's Landmarks public art collection and various pieces of historical architecture, the differences in a viewer's experience can be analyzed by the scalar implications of the nature of one's engagement, the spatial presence of the piece, and the pervasiveness of viewer experience through the lenses of the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime.

Given their obvious differences in size, it is unquestioned that sculpture functions on a small scale whereas architecture functions on a much larger scale, and that in turn these scales will create varying responses to each form, but what exactly are these differences? Firstly, working on either small or large scales directly correlates to the nature of interaction as individualistic or communal between viewer(s) and piece. Because sculpture is spatial creations made for a more human scale, people often engage with it in a more intimate nature, whereas since architecture is built on a large scale to accommodate groups of people, is often engaged with as a collective². Secondly, the spatial presence of sculpture typically as objects in space versus enclosures of space like architecture, sculpture can be experienced much more compactly and quickly whereas the architectural experience is more wholistic³. Sculpture can be experienced in the round, an expression that allows for more rapid interpretation and changing of

² Brenner, "Concerning Sculpture," 100.

³ Katherine Fischer Taylor, "Architecture's Place in Art History: Art or Adjunct?," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (June 2001): 342, accessed December 10, 2017.

forms. Conversely, it is nearly impossible to synthesize architecture in this manner, however, because the view of architecture is more wholistic it speaks more to a sense of experience versus expression. Lastly, the implications of the blurring between architecture and sculpture must be addressed. This most often occurs when a piece takes on one of each of the previously discussed attributes. For example, a work may function on the smaller scale of a sculpture, but creates a habitable structure that functions more so like an architectural enclosure of space. The blending of sculptural and architectural characteristics results in a dichotomy that cancels out the way each piece informs space, attempting to remove spatial constructs entirely so the work's implication is ambiguity itself.

Having discussed the similarities of sculpture and architecture with respect to them as spatial arts and the differences found in each art forms due to the implications of functioning at different scales, the specific ways in which these effects manifest themselves in architecture and sculpture will first be examined through the beautiful. The aesthetically beautiful is characterized by regularity and harmony⁴. With respect to architecture, this often refers to the harmony and purity in Greek Classical architecture. The beautiful often creates a calm sense of grandeur and awe within a viewer at the realization that this kind of beauty is the achievement of man. Two prime examples of the beautiful are Marc Quinn's *Spiral of the Galaxy* (housed within the University of Texas at Austin's Landmarks public art collection) and Soufflot's Church of Saint Genevieve in Paris.

Sculpture creates a more intimate, individualistic, and detail-oriented experience due to its engagement of the viewer on a smaller, more personal scale in order to convey the intricacies

⁴ Sandra Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, summer 2012 ed. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University)], last modified May 9, 2012.

inherent within the beautiful. In the Landmarks piece *Spiral of the Galaxy*, Marc Quinn emulates the notion of regularity and harmony characteristic of the beautiful in this golden spiral shell sculpture. Marc Quinn transforms this conch shell from its too-small life-sized scale of a hand-held object and precisely copies it using 3D scanning images to recast the object in bronze on a sculptural scale that enhances the shells beauty on a more human scale⁵. On this scale, the viewer can engage and therefore appreciate the coming together of the detailing in the proportional spacing and spiraling rhythm of the conch shells ridges as a feat of nature and of the beautiful⁶ (Figure 1). Additionally, due to its semi-reflective materiality, the viewer then distortedly sees oneself within the beauty of the work, leading to a further engagement on the personal level⁷ (Figure 2). This level of realization would not have been possible on the architectural scale because such magnitude of size defeats the perception of the object as a success of nature in its depiction more-so on the large scale as a success of mankind and civilization.

Architecture creates a more communal and wholistic experience due to its engagement of the viewer on a larger, more public scale using monumental size to convey the aesthetically beautiful in an overwhelming sense of grandeur. In Soufflot's famous Church of Saint Genevieve in Paris, emulates the regularity and harmony characteristic of the aesthetically beautiful through a balanced repetition of well-proportioned Classic Greek elements⁸ (Figure 3), such as the columns that line the arcades⁹ (Figure 4). Because these Greek elements are integral to the design of the church and are found everywhere combined with the fact that church's function as large, people-packed public spaces, the viewer indulges in this experience on a communal level.

⁵ LANDMARKS, "Marc Quinn Spiral of the Galaxy," Landmarks, accessed December 10, 2017.

⁶ Paul Bardagjy, *Detail of Spiral of the Galaxy*, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

⁷ Paul Bardagjy, *Detail of Spiral of the Galaxy*, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

⁸ Jean-Pierre Lavoie, *Inside Panoramic View of Pantheon*, December 31, 2004, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

⁹ *Pantheon wide angle*, March 6, 2007, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

In fact, it was crucial to the perception of this beauty that it be done on an architectural scale in order to create this overwhelming, other-worldly sense of grandeur necessary to the architectural functionality and understanding of churches as spiritual, transcendental places.

The next category of the aesthetically beautiful that demonstrates the scalar implication of sculpture versus architecture is the picturesque. The picturesque can be described as when art meets nature, creating a wild composition that still maintains some level of pre-planning and order. The picturesque is all about creating this active curiosity and sense of discovery within the viewer, often times through a variety and intricacy in massing¹⁰. Two prime examples of the aesthetically picturesque are *Monochrome for Austin* by Nancy Rubins from the Landmarks collection and Central Park in New York City by landscape architects Olmstead and Vaux.

Sculpture utilizes the spatial presence of a work as an object in space rather than an enclosure of a space in order to encourage the experience of a work in the round for a quickly changing but quickly synthesized interpretation. In terms of the picturesque, this allows the creator of a work to fit in these notions of variety and intricacy within a small, easily realized space. Nancy Rubins takes advantage of spatial character of sculpture to create the air-borne assemblage of canoes known as *Monochrome for Austin*¹¹¹²(Figure 5). Only as a joined assemblage functioning as a single object that people can walk around, under, or even see from above can the viewer explore the variety¹³ (Figure 6) and intricacy¹⁴ (Figure 7) in the massing of these dynamic canoes. Additionally, the notion that these movements around the sculpture and changes in the massing can occur quickly and seamlessly adds to the dynamicism of the

¹⁰ Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics,".

¹¹ Landmarks, "Nancy Rubins Monochrome for Austin," Landmarks, accessed December 10, 2017.

¹² Paul Bardagjy, *Monochrome for Austin*, 2015, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

¹³ Paul Bardagjy, *Monochrome for Austin*, 2015, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

¹⁴ Paul Bardagjy, *Monochrome for Austin*, 2015, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

sculpture itself and the curiosity and wonder as to how this richness can be achieved in this single-object (at least in the way it is perceived spatially) formed.

The nature of architecture is to define and enclose space, serving not as an object in space but the object that surrounds it. This spatial relationship results in more thoroughly experienced, time-immersive landscapes that picturesquely present slow-changing scenes, where the curiosity is revealed in the small, gradual changes the total picture. Central Park in New York City by Olmstead and Vaux takes on this character of a winding, English garden versus the axial French gardens for an experience in favor of small, modest, wholistic changes versus the imposing monumentality of the axial¹⁵ (Figure 8). Because the scale was so immense and the picturesque changes so small, "...this picturesque landscape was the ideal for public parks, allowing the mind to wander with the body."¹⁶ Without such a large scale for these intricate changes in the landscape to play out, there the paths of Central Park would completely lose their peaceful, contemplative effect so carefully constructed within the loud, hustle-bustle of the gridded city.

While the previous examples have all discussed what happens in the dichotomy of the sculptural and architectural scales, such closely related art forms also have a point where the two converge, coming together to create a whole new set of scalar implications through the blur. This blur occurs when the previously discussed attributes from sculpture and architecture are mixed within one work. The blending of sculptural and architectural characteristics results in a dichotomy that cancels out the way each piece informs space, attempting to remove spatial constructs entirely so the work's implication is ambiguity itself – a fantastical environment inherent to the sublime. The aesthetically sublime is characteristic of the sensational, whimsical,

¹⁵ John Bachmann, *Central Park*, 1863, illustration, accessed December 10, 2017.

¹⁶ Phyllis Andersen, "A Matter of Taste: Pleasure Gardens and Civic Life," *Arnoldia*66, no. 3 (2009): [Page 11], accessed December 10, 2017.

awesome, and other-worldly. It seeks to achieve this sense of wonder that forces the viewer to consider the reality of that space and their world¹⁷. Works that blend the sculptural and the architectural are a hybridization that forces the viewer to confront their own sense of occupation in a space, leading to a pervasiveness of experience necessary of sublimity that can be seen in both the James Turrell *The Color Inside* at the University of Texas at Austin and Boullée's unbuilt Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton.

Through a combination of the individualistic engagement of the sculptural and the enclosure of space achieved on the architectural scale, James Turrell's *The Color Inside* immerses the viewer in a space that itself removes spatial constructs in order to leave the viewer in a state of sublimity¹⁸ (Figure 9). *The Color Inside* brings an audience into its interior and focuses their attention on an oculus¹⁹. Using this focal point²⁰ (Figure 10), a contrast between the changing colors of the setting sky and that of the artificial colors projected on the ceiling and walls of the construct create a mesmerizing, tunnel-vision like experience that blends the two together²¹, leaving the viewer in an unsettlingly calm state of limbo with regards to their physical relationship to their surroundings. This physical uneasiness leads to a train of thought of uneasiness, leaving the viewer in a state of ephemeral contemplation.

In Boullée's unbuilt Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton, the hybridization of the sheer immensity of the structure and the isolated experience of the viewer creates a completely overwhelming sublime environment in honor of the sheer awesomeness and magnitude²² (Figure

¹⁷ Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics,".

¹⁸ Paul Bardagjy, *Detail of The Color Inside*, 2013, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

¹⁹ Landmarks, "James Turrell The Color Inside," Landmarks, accessed December 10, 2017.

²⁰ Paul Bardagjy, *Detail of The Color Inside*, 2013, photograph, accessed December 10, 2017.

²¹ Megan Friel, "Sublimity in the Art of Light and Space Movement," *Explorations: The UC Davis Undergraduate Research Journal* 15 (2013): [Page #], accessed December 10, 2017.

²² Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Exterior Elevation of Cenotaph*, 1785, illustration, accessed December 10, 2017.

11) of Isaac Newton's accomplishments. The tomb imposes itself as a giant building from the outside, but on the inside, it transforms into a different world²³ (Figure 12), filtering light to project the night's sky²⁴ (Figure 13) on the ceiling. The architectural size and sculptural nature of engagement of the cenotaph project work together as the synthesis of art and science – an important concept to Boullée as the only true means in honoring the Enlightenment scientist²⁵.

By looking at the differences between the representation and viewer response to the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime in sculpture and architecture, it is clear the scalar implications of each are utilized by both the sculptor and the architect for not only their aesthetic goals, but also for the specific targeting of a certain kind of engagement from their intended audience; on the small scale of sculpture connecting with the individual and on the large scale of architecture connecting with people as a larger community.

²³ Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Light Interior of Cenotaph*, 1785, illustration, accessed December 10, 2017.

²⁴ Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Interior Night Effect of Cenotaph*, 1785, illustration, accessed December 10, 2017.

²⁵ Michelle Miller, "Cenotaph for Newton / Etienne-Louis Boullée," Archdaily, accessed December 10, 2017.

Works Cited

- Andersen, Phyllis. "A Matter of Taste: Pleasure Gardens and Civic Life." *Arnoldia* 66, no. 3 (2009): 10-14. Accessed December 10, 2017.
<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/42955613>.
- Brenner, Art. "Concerning Sculpture and Architecture." *Leonardo* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 99-107. Accessed December 10, 2017. doi:10.2307/1572183.
- Friel, Megan. "Sublimity in the Art of Light and Space Movement." *Explorations: The UC Davis Undergraduate Research Journal* 15 (2013): 1-15. Accessed December 10, 2017.
http://explorations.ucdavis.edu/docs/2013/FRIEL_MEGAN.pdf.
- Landmarks. "James Turrell The Color Inside." Landmarks. Accessed December 10, 2017.
<https://landmarks.utexas.edu/artwork/color-inside>.
- Landmarks. "Marc Quinn Spiral of the Galaxy." Landmarks. Accessed December 10, 2017.
<https://landmarks.utexas.edu/artwork/spiral-galaxy>.
- Landmarks. "Nancy Rubins Monochrome for Austin." Landmarks. Accessed December 10, 2017. <https://landmarks.utexas.edu/artwork/monochrome-austin>.
- Miller, Michelle. "Cenotaph for Newton / Etienne-Louis Boullée." Archdaily. Accessed December 10, 2017. <https://www.archdaily.com/544946/ad-classics-cenotaph-for-newton-etienne-louis-boullee>.
- Shapshay, Sandra. "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2012 ed. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford

University. Last modified May 9, 2012.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/schopenhauer-aesthetics>.

Taylor, Katherine Fischer. "Architecture's Place in Art History: Art or Adjunct?" *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (June 2001): 342-46. Accessed December 10, 2017.

doi:10.2307/3177212.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

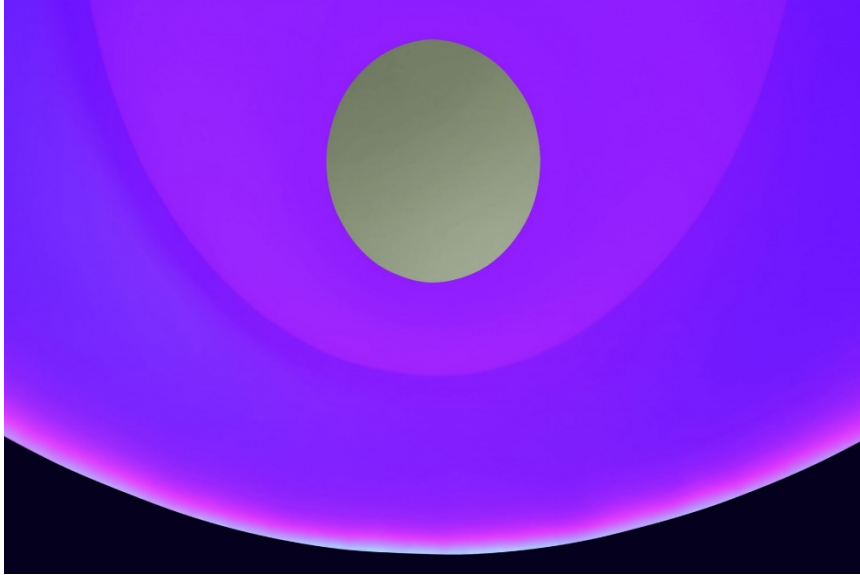
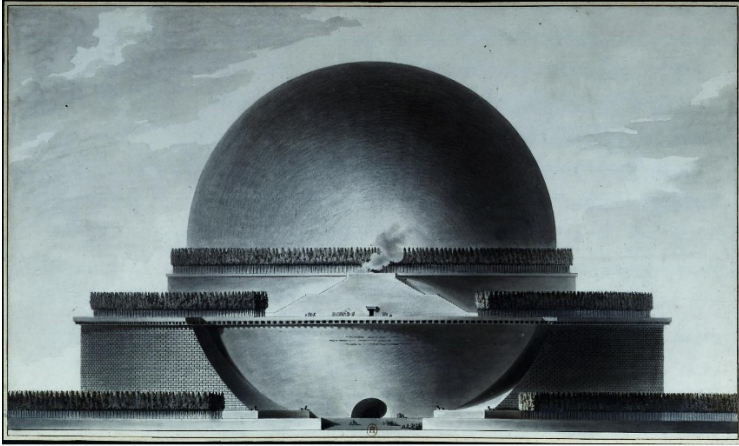


Figure 9

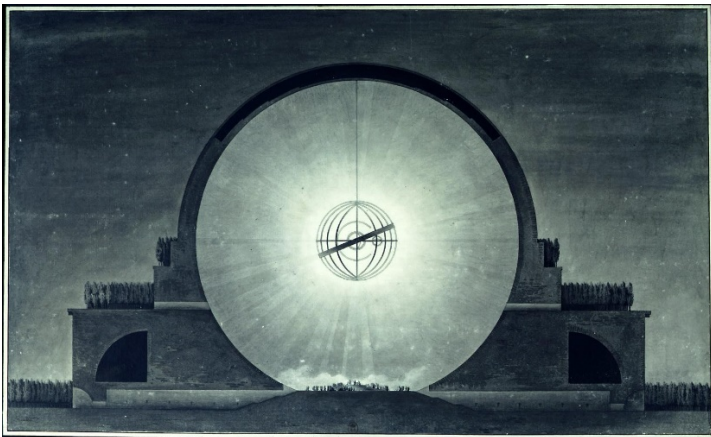


Figure 10



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 11



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 12



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 13