

# Architecture that constitute to the mood philosophy essay



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The character of a space or place is not simply a visual perceptual quality, as is usually assumed. The judgement of the character of an environment is a complex combination of numerous factors which are immediately understood as an overall mood, feeling, ambiance, or atmosphere. Peter Zumthor, who is one of the architects who has acknowledged the significance of architectural mood, says “ I enter a building, see a room, and in a fraction of a second have this feeling about it”.

The experience is multi-sensory in its very essence; however it also involves judgements beyond the five Aristotelian senses. The immediate judgement of the character of a space calls for our entire, embodied and existential sense. It could be perceived in a subtle and peripheral manner, rather than through precise and conscious observation.

The aim of this dissertation is to identify the factors in architecture that constitute to the mood of a place or space; and also if the factors are universal to all the arts such as music, film, paintings and sculpture. The question sought to be answered is: What are the constituents in a space or place that contribute to the creation of a mood?

The majority of the work produced by the three architects selected revolves around this phenomenological field of study. By assessing their individual relevant literary and architectural works, and extracting the common and overlapping qualities, a more profound understanding of this mood is expected to be acquired.

## Acknowledgments

### Introduction

John Dewey a visionary American philosopher, who already eight decades ago grasped the immediate, embodied, emotive and subconscious essence of experience, articulates the nature of this existential encounter:

“ The total overwhelming impression comes first, perhaps in a seizure by a sudden glory of the landscape or by the effect upon us of entrance into a cathedral when dim light, incense, stained glass and majestic proportions fuse in one indistinguishable whole. We say with truth that a painting strikes us. There is an impact that precedes all definite recognition of what it is about.” (Dewey, Art As Experience, page 151)

In ancient environmental moods there exist interpersonal moods such as cultural, social, family, work place, etc.... The mood of a social situation can be supportive or discouraging, liberating or repressing, inspiring or dull. We can even speak of specific moods in the scale of cultural, regional or national entities. We can indeed speak of the mood of the place, which gives it its unique perceptual character and identity. Dewey explains this unifying character as a specific quality as he writes:

“ An experience has a unity that gives it its name; that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of the unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variations of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it.”

(Dewey, Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, page 206)

In another context the philosopher reemphasises the reintegrating power of this experiential quality when he writes “ The quality of the whole permits, affects and controls every detail.” As we enter a space the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject. Robert Pogue Harrison, the American literary scholar states “ In the fusion of place and soul, the soul is as much of a container of place as place is a container of soul, both are susceptible to the same forces of destruction.”

Mood is similarly an exchange between material or existent properties of the place, and immaterial realm of human perception and imagination.

Paradoxically, we grasp the mood before we identify its details or understand it intellectually. In fact, we may be completely unable to say anything meaningful about the characteristics of a situation, yet have a firm image, emotive attitude and recollection of it. In the same way, although we do not consciously analyse or understand the interaction of meteorological facts we grasp the essence of weather at a glance, and it inevitably conditions our mood and intentionality. As we enter a new city we grasp its overall character without having consciously analysed a single one of its countless properties.

Dewey even extends this process that advances from an initial, but temporary grasp of the whole towards the details, all the way to the processes of thinking. He writes:

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“ All thought in every subject begins with just such an unanalysed whole. When the subject matter is reasonably familiar, relevant distinctions speedily offer themselves, and sheer qualitiveness may not remain long enough to be readily recalled.”

Every thought has its beginning in emotion. This is an intuitive and emotive capacity that seems to be biologically derived, largely unconsciously and distinctively determined through evolutionary programming. Peter Zumthor writes “ We perceive moods through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive.”

The new sciences of biopsychology and ecological psychology actually study such evolutionary causalities in human behaviours and cognition. It is evident that we are genetically and culturally conditioned to seek or avoid certain types of moods. Our sheer pleasure of being in the shadow of large trees looking on a sunlit opening is explained on the basis of such evolutionary programming; and this specific type of setting demonstrates the polar motions of refuge and prospect, which for instance have been used to explain the pleasurable feel of Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses.

Although mood and atmosphere are overarching qualities of our environments and spaces, these qualities have not been much observed, analysed or theorised in architecture. Recently some philosophical studies rely on neurological evidence significantly valorise the power of the mood.

## **Section A: The theory of Architectural Moods (title to be revised)**

### **Summary**

#### **Meaning and disambiguation of architectural moods**

The mood in architecture is generated by the question “ what do we mean when we speak of architectural quality?” To Zumthor, this quality rises from a building which moves the person experiencing it. The difficulty is identifying what causes this feeling and how to apply it to one’s work. The words atmosphere, mood and ambiance all capture these emotive qualities and can be used interchangeably. One can compare it to the first impression one gets of a person; however this impression can also be felt through architecture.

Atmosphere is perceived through our “ emotional sensibility”. This is a nearly instantaneous and instinctive process which we humans need in order to survive, since certain situations do not permit us the time to asses and weigh our options, but react. We feel something inside us telling us to respond spontaneously from an emotion; as opposed to the linear and organized train of thought. This is what the musicologist Andre Boucourechliev wrote about the composer Igor Stravinsky:

“ Radical diatonicism, forceful and distinctive rhythmical pronunciation, melodic clarity, harmonies plain and severe, a piercing radiance of tone colour, and finally, the simplicity and transparency of his musical fabric, the stability of his formal structures” (Zumthor, Atmospheres, page 19)

A musical composition has an atmosphere just like architecture. It has the ability to touch the person instantly and instils a consoling feeling in the observer since a lot of time, care, and skill was put into it. The process of generating atmospheres is personal and individual, brought about by inner sensibilities.

## **Architectural phenomenon**

### **Approach & Perspectival space – incomplete perception**

The way in which we approach and enter a city has different implications on our perception of it. Entering by plane offers an aerial (bird's eye view); approaching by train usually involves an external frontal view, followed by the darkness of the underground station, followed by an ascent into the heart of the city; entering on foot may involve crossing a bridge and passing through the city gate which is again a different experience entirely. These special experiences offer a matrix of overlapping perspectives with “ multiple horizons, hovering horizons, and multiple vanishing points.” These experiences shape our view of a city. With modern transportation systems, airports, chain restaurants and universally identifiable commercial establishments it has become harder to distinguish cities from one another. The sense of place and uniqueness has somewhat been diminished if not all together lost. When experiencing enmeshed space we understand individual fields and objects as a whole; however, when we experience a city we only understand it as “ perspectival, fragmented, incomplete.” These partial views offer a very different involvement from an aerial view.

Our perception is formed by a series of overlapping perspectives which develop from a change in position of our body in relation to the urban fabric. We never see a complete view of a building or space; instead we see a number of individual images which constantly change according to their background and the speed at which we move through space. When designing architectural and urban spaces we use this multi-perspectival approach with the aid of a computer in order to achieve precise dimensions needed especially for construction; however this falls short of the phenomenological process forming our perception of the urban fabric of a city. Therefore perceptual principles that occur when moving through a city should be employed, leaving room for the tension between “ absolutes of architectural intension and the in-definitive urban assemblage.”

### **Body of architecture & Enmeshed experiences**

This refers to the actual “ material presence of things in a piece of architecture”. Architecture combines different materials and forms in order to create a particular space. The word body in architecture can be used literally, like the anatomy of a person with the skeletal frame and skin. The buildings becomes like a membrane covering us, as if we are being embraced by the building.

Enmeshed experiences go beyond the physicality and functionality of architecture; it deals with the continuous unfolding experience of materials, details and spaces. Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls this phenomenon “ in-between reality” where objects begin to lose their clarity and blend into the field. “ complete perception” is the combination of foreground middle ground and distant ground combined with the subjective influences of light an <https://assignbuster.com/architecture-that-constitute-to-the-mood-philosophy-essay/>



materials. The way the original idea is conveyed is a combination of the subjective and objective; the objective would be the logical, functional and theoretical aspect while the subjective is the link to the mysteries of its perception. This blend of focuses and illuminated materials must be considered as an experiential whole. Ultimately we cannot break perception up into a collection of individual experiences and emotions, but perceive it as a homogeneous mood of a place. Similarly, in film one does not focus on the individual elements such as the scenario, acting and music. Instead one gets captivated and absorbed into the mood the film wants to give through this enmeshed experience.

## **Material compatibility & colour**

Colour variations occur due to a complex combination of material, texture and light. Reflective, matte, translucent and opaque surfaces offer a broad range of colour phenomenology dependant on the intensity and colour of light. The physics behind light waves cannot explain sufficiently the way we perceive colour. The colour itself is only partially responsible for the experience one has when encountered with it. A matte dark wall painted in streaks of supposedly “ bright” primary colours may have a very different effect then a rainbow with a natural backdrop and sunlight shining through it; with the latter being more powerful. Therefore the phenomenal experience is more intense and valuable than the mathematics behind the colour itself which is inappropriate and misleading. Walking in the country in the late afternoon on an autumn day, may reveal dark brown and colours of leaves and a greyish-black puddles scattered around; the same location in the morning on a sunny day may reveal the leaves to be more amber with

the light shining through it and the puddles may appear to be rich blue like the sky.

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“ situation, climate, and colour” affect use and perception of colour. In Mediterranean countries, facades and roofs of buildings are usually painted white due to heat gain, while in northern countries warmer and darker colours are usually used due to the cold. In Holl’s project for the offices in New Yourk City, 1991, they created colour changing interiors by projecting colour off coloured surfaces which faced the exterior.

Materials react with one another when combined, to produce a certain effect which is unique to every specific composition. Also each material can have a certain treatment applied to it further increasing the amount of possibilities. The ratio of the combined materials and the way they are lit also can be varied indefinitely. The endless possibilities in types of materials make it mysterious and thought provoking. When experimenting and combing materials in practice in an actual building, certain prejudices about which materials are compatible with each other may be altered and new perceptions acquired.

When combining two or more materials together, one may notice in the design process, that the materials are too close or too far from each other; therefore there must be a balance.

Palladio creates this atmospheric energy through his “ sense of the presence and weight of materials”.

## Sound

Each space has its own acoustic properties almost like “ large instruments”; absorbing, reflecting, amplifying, softening and redirecting. The sounds people make differ according to the material used in the space. Certain sounds are associated with certain rooms such as the knocking of pots and pans is associated with a kitchen, or chattering with a living room. Exterior spaces also have their own sound such as a person walking on a stone floor sounds different from one walking on wooden decking.

When one experiences a room which is soundproofed from external noise, one becomes conscious of the sounds his or her body makes. The stillness of the space instils a kind of mystical presence where one becomes aware of their self. If an architect manages to eliminate all external noise, which could prove to be very challenging especially in cities, they can focus on the sounds and reverberation the building itself produces, with the combination of materials and geometries.

Sounds have the power of bringing up past memories and emotions through the associations we have with them. For example, the sound of chattering can bring up a childhood memory of a Sunday family lunch, and instil the warm feeling of unity and harmony; or an echoing space may bring up a memory of mass in a cold stone Cathedral which could make us feel belittled and slightly anxious.

The echoes of an interior give us an understanding of the material, geometry, and volume of a space. If echoes were absorbed completely by the surfaces, our perception of the space would be more confusing and

unclear since one of our senses would be muted. Externally, the sound of for example a church bell, gives us an image of the spatial configuration of our town or city through the reverberations, resonances, absorbance and fading with distance; a kind of “ sound space”. Sound is sensed through the whole body due to different resonances occurring within. Low frequencies are felt as vibrations in the stomach, high frequencies can be felt in our head, intense pressure waves can be felt in our bones, rhythms can be felt in our muscles. There has been a rapid progression in the tonality and rules of musical composition due the increase in technology, specifically electronic sound.

Although in the past music and architecture where ordered and followed rules, nowadays they both have become more unpredictable and irregular. Music can make a person want to dance to a beat, and similarly architecture may cause certain muscles to contract and rotate to rhythms in spaces. Paul Valery suggests a close relationship between music and architecture, which is not found in paintings and sculpture, in the sense that no matter which way you turn, the sound like the space surrounds you.

## **Temperature**

Materials have a certain temperature when they come in direct contact with our skin or the air around it. This has a lot to do with their conductivity, rather than their actual surface temperature; in other words, the rate at which the body’s temperature is extracted or elevated. Wood for example is an insulator, so it tends to make a space feel warmer; as opposed to steel which is an excellent conductor so it is therefore quick at extracting surrounding heat.

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When Zumthor speaks of temperature, he also associates it with the verb 'to temper' in relation to an atmosphere. It is similar to tuning an instrument in order to achieve just the right mood; a slightly different tone and the mood changes entirely. The colour, texture and reflectivity of a material can therefore change the temperature of a room. For example, a white, reflective interior could give off a feeling of sterility and coldness. Therefore temperature has both physical and psychological implications.

Surrounding objects

Places in which people spend a lot of time, such as their home or work place, more often than not are adorned with objects. Although they individually do not seem to have any relation to one another, as a whole they "come together in a caring, loving way, and that there's this deep relationship."

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In places which require a warm, nostalgic, and harmonizing atmosphere, places to put these personal objects should be considered and catered for in the design. This turns the physical house into a home; however the same idea cannot be said for recreational places such as bars or discos, since their intension is not to make one feel too comfortable. Introducing these items by the users causes a building to change and evolve, rather than be frozen in time. This happens independently of the architect and ensures a living and prolonged existence of the building or space.

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## **Between composure and seduction & Detail: haptic realm**

“ Architecture is a spatial art [... and] also a temporal art”. This therefore related to how people move through the space in duration of time. In Zumthor’s thermal baths for example, one of his objectives was to seduce the users into strolling freely, rather than a directed flow.

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The architect has the ability to control people’s movements, similar to directing a play. In the spa, the spaces were intended to slow time down and make the user feel like he or she could linger in a particular space, before getting curious about what is round the corner and moving on. This feeling gives the user the ability to choose their motion or lack of it, turning the experience into a “ voyage of discovery”; rather than being directed forcefully.

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“ Direction, seduction, letting go, granting freedom [...,] Guidance, preparation, stimulation, the pleasant surprise, [and] relaxation” should complement the use of the building and be utilized carefully.

The haptic realm is fused with the sensory experience of touch. The detail involved in constructing with natural materials opens up psychological engagement, which urges us to touch surfaces. Nowadays with the mass production of synthetic materials the sense is dulled down if not erased completely. One does not feel an urge to touch synthetic vinyls with a wood grain texture, unlike a carved wooden door handle or hand rail or coatings

put on materials such as anodized metals, glazed tiles, for example.

Experiencing architecture which is devoid of this haptic sense because of the use of synthetic materials can be compare to eating food which packaged and flavoured synthetically.

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Production processes and modifications to materials may be done in such a way as to enhance the natural properties of the material. The manufacturing process of glass by blowing discs, before plate glass was invented, caused an uneven thickness in the material, depending on the craftsmen's technique. This unevenness causes natural light to shine through with different intensities due to refraction, and when viewed through, distorts background images. Sandblasted glass traps light within itself causing the material to glow diffused light. The aging of materials should not be stopped, but taken into consideration when being implemented, since their wear creates patterns of subtle textures. This ambiguity and irregularity causes a mysterious and intriguing phenomenal experience.

Tension between interior and exterior

The qualities of interior and exterior spaces can be combined in interesting and exciting ways either when considered separately or when the border lines between the two is blurred.

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One may feel an intense awareness during this transition, when he or she suddenly realizes he is enclosed in an interior space. Linking to the exterior <https://assignbuster.com/architecture-that-constitute-to-the-mood-philosophy-essay/>

enhances ones sense of place and time. A building's façade separates these two realms. It hints at what is inside from its character and openings; however it does not reveal everything.

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An architect should keep in mind what one would want to see when walking past a building and also when inside a building looking out. The façade can say a lot about the character of the person living in it.

## **Levels of intimacy & Proportion, scale and perception**

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Matila Ghyka, in his book 'The geometry and art of life', talks about how the golden section (1: 1.618) is the crucial ratio found in nature. This coupled with the Fibonacci Sequence, have been utilized recurrently in architecture throughout the years, from the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. The Greeks however were concerned with perception, a part from geometry. In fact, they deliberately distorted most straight lines and turned them into curves to compensate for this discrepancy of perception. They used Euclid's geometrical theorem in everything from facades, to internal planning, to details.

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Humans have a subconscious perceptive appreciation of mathematical proportions. Just like when tuning an instrument to aural precision, we can intuitively produce harmonious proportions. Historically, cultures adhered to these relationships; such as in the Japanese Tatami mat, which essentially



provided a stencil for designing the plan of houses. “ Human scale, relative proportional scale and urban scale, all extremely important in architecture” need to be given more importance, since in recent years overpopulation and greed have made this quality dormant. The challenge of present and future architecture is to reassert the body as the locus of proportion and elevate the value of perceptual understanding.

This aspect is related to scale or “ proximity and distance.”

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It is the relationship between us and the building, with regards to mass, proportions, size, gravity etc... A door for instance may make us look a certain way when we pass through it; for instance a slim door may make us look wide. Once one enters or exits a building, the scale changes instantly.

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Buildings or features that are bigger than oneself can make the person feel intimidated, such as the large tall columns of the law courts, or make one feel comfortable and relaxed if they are a similar scale. The proximity could be considered either in relation to an individual, or the individual in a group or crowd.

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## **The light on things & Of light and shadow & Spatiality of night & Water: a phenomenal lens**

The way in which we visually perceive objects depends greatly on how light hits their surface. Their orientation in relation to the light source produces brightly lit areas and shadows.

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When designing a building, an architect must always take into consideration the way the space will be lit both naturally and artificially. What Zumthor likes to do when he designs building is to first plan a “ building as a pure mass of shadow”, then to start placing lights as if one is hollowing out that darkness; “ as if the light where a new mass”. Another consideration he performs is that when he chooses materials he has full knowledge of their reflective qualities by lighting each up systematically; subsequently Zumthor makes the space cohesive on the basis of that knowledge.

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Daylight has a certain spiritual quality due to its changing colour, position and reaction to the medium it passes through. The way in which it rises every morning and reveals to us the world gives a certain feeling that there are things greater than our selves.

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Light and shadow is the medium which displays forms, volumes, textures, voids, reflections, colour, “ opacities, transparencies and translucencies.” It brings out “ The perceptual spirit and metaphysical strength of architecture”. Natural light has a distinguished quality of constant change, which effects dynamically what it touches and the way we perceive these things. Light is also used by many artists as a medium in itself such as the work of James Turrell and Robert Irwin. Since the sun is not an exact point source, we can observe certain phenomenon such as when looking at our shadow, we observe that the top part is blurry and as our eyes move down it gets sharper. Similarly, when light penetrates the leaves of a tree, the pattern created on the ground is not of clear sharp edges, but blurry spots of light dependent on the angle of the sun. Robert Irwin writes in ‘ being and circumstance: notes toward a conditional art’, “ what appeared to be a question of object/non-object has turned out to be a question of seeing and non-seeing, of how it is we actually perceive or fail to perceive...”

Thought:

Using a play of manipulated natural light, an architect can create certain internal experiences which vary according to external conditions. This keeps a link with the exterior while creating a specific mood inside. The absence of natural light, replaced by artificial lighting, is disorienting and creates an uncomfortable sense of being frozen in time. This is experienced for example, when watching a film in the cinema during the day. Upon exiting the theatre one expects it to be night time outside, and is confused when he or she sees that the sun hasn't yet set.

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In the 20th century, ever since our cities have become flooded with light, the night sky has taken a different shape in space. During the day, the sky seems like just one mixture of gasses. At night the light emitted from buildings and public spaces illuminates the space above it, turning it into a volume of illumination. When approaching a city by plane at night, this city of light has an entirely different influence on our perception of its urban fabric. A building's architectural experience should also be considered at night (especially in northern countries when the hours of daylight are limited) since in both cases they impose a certain presence.

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The scientific qualities of water also have a unique experiential effect on our perception when encountering it, through its multiple states, gravity sensation alterations, transparency, flow, refraction of light and reflections. Contrary to reflections from glass, looking at the world through water, warps and distorts our visual sense of reality. The motion of water adds to the dynamism and obscurity of this "material" and stimulates our imagination.

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In the housing project in Fukuoka Japan, 1989, Holl used the "silent space" of the inaccessible ponds adjacent to each building to reflect the patterns of light onto the underside of the ceilings. The intension was to create a sacred and still place where the inhabitants can unwind from everyday life. He uses these "phenomenal lenses" to project the changes in weather (heat, clouds,

rain, wind) onto the person's senses in order to connect them back to the natural real world.

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"As rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them, imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by not understanding them... for when he does not understand he... becomes them by transforming himself into them."

Vico, New Science

### **Architecture as surroundings & Site circumstance and idea**

All the "phenomenal zones" have a more important role when functioning as a whole, rather than each individual part. A fusion must occur between these phenomena, the site, and circumstance through an idea or "driving concept" or series of concepts. In today's buildings, with all the laws, requirements and standards, the need for a metaphorical concept is greater since it creates a tension between "a literary metaphor and an architectural program and structure." This symbolic aim should run throughout the structure, tying all the elements into a cohesive whole. An architectural contribution can only be valued according to the measure of perception which is underlined by this idea or concept. Site and circumstance make each piece of architecture unique. From the initial freedom and open-endedness to the final construction drawings, it has the potential of becoming anything; however the culmination of the work lies in our experience of it, "its perceptual essence".

This can be seen at a transcendental level; how buildings (after being constructed) become part of the environment. Our built environment affects the way we grow up and live our lives.

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A space or place may not influence us consciously, however in the future we might recall a building or square through an involuntary nostalgic memory. This could induce a variety of feelings depending on the quality of the work and the circumstance in which the person finds himself at the time. This shows how effective and influential buildings are to us, and give the architect a much greater responsibility. This phenomenal quality should supersede the fact that the building would still be mentioned in 3 or more decades from now; and the former should be given a higher priority in the architect's intension. This transcendent level of architecture as human environment has a lot to do with the love and satisfaction an architect has with architecture and the way in which people respond to it.

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## **Coherence & form**

There are certain ideas on what the best way to do things, in architecture, is; however this does not refer to the academic aspect. There are many occasions where the architect has to take the right decisions instantly, and this must be based on the cohesiveness of the whole project. It should not be sufficient for an architect to be satisfied with the user or a passer-by to say that the building has an interesting or attractive form.

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The focus should be on all te individual parts coming together to form a homogeneous whole; where every individual element has its place and the building wo