

Delft University of Technology [TU Delft]

Research Explore Lab

## The Felt Body & The Modern City

An exploration of the sensory meanings, impacts, and design principles of objects in  
(semi-)public spaces

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# Preface

Before you lies the thesis that has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of my Architecture master degree at TU Delft. I was engaged in carrying out an architectural analysis of different structures and artistic objects in (semi-)public spaces with a special focus on the experience from the beginning of September 2023 till the beginning of February 2024. The topic of this research was formulated with the help of my supervisors, Elise van Dooren and Leontine de Wit. I would like to thank my supervisors for the support, feedback, and inspiring examples, which has helped to improve my focus and argumentations. The second stage of my graduation year consisted of designing; I created interventions that help connect city inhabitants to the layered pasts of the city. The found design principles in the research phase offered a tool to assist in designing these interventions.

Sofie Carpaij,

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21-05-2024

# Abstract

Modern cities are often characterized by their fast paced environments and levels of sensory overload. Consequently, these environments often pressure individuals and can create feelings of (emotional) detachment. These feelings of detachment call for interventions that enable people to connect to the full scale of their emotions and reconnect to their surroundings. Art and architecture have the potential to offer environments and encounters that can stimulate this (re)connection. Therefore, this research investigates the architectural principles and embodied visitor experiences of objects in (semi-)public spaces. An overview of design principles and accompanied visitor experiences is created. The main types of experiences that have been identified are: contemplation, experiment/play, movement, surprise/wonder, and (unexpected) social interaction. Useful architectural tools to achieve these experiences entail, among others, the use of material, play with light, the relation (or disconnection) to place and its history, shape, sound, and perspective. Lastly, it is important to note that experience is rather subjective, even though these architectural principles can guide the experience. Therefore, urban planners and designers are encouraged to extensively investigate the case specific context to determine the most fit design.

*Keywords:* (semi-)public space, embodied experience, the felt body, art, architecture

# 1. Introduction

Modern cities are often criticized for their fast pace and over stimulating environments. Georg Simmel, a philosopher and sociologist, already theorized 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.

Furthermore, Böhme (2013) and Pallasmaa (2012) both highlight the importance of *atmosphere* in this interaction between individuals and art and architecture. Atmosphere refers to the sensory and emotional qualities that can be conveyed by the built environment (Böhme et al., 2014). In this description, atmosphere is not just an objective property, it can be considered as something that is being formed at the interplay between objects and subjects (Bjerregaard, 2015). Atmosphere is thus intrinsically linked to space, but also to the (immediate) experience of an individual (Bjerregaard, 2015; Havik, Teerds and Tielens, 2013; Havik and Tielens, 2013). Atmosphere is therefore a concept that needs to be explored in further detail when looking at art, architecture and the experience of individuals.

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 senses or direct surroundings This examination will be done by an attempt to answer the following research question, with a focus on the concept of atmosphere:

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

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

1. *What architectural principles underlie the different objects?*
2. *What are the (sensory) effects and accompanied visitor experiences for the different objects?*



Image 1: interplay between experience and an architectural structure [photograph made by author]

## 2. Theoretical Framework

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

### 2.1 Phenomenology & (embodied) experience

Phenomenology is a philosophical and methodological approach that tries to describe and study the foundational elements of human experience (Carman, 2012). According to Carman (2012, pp. viii), phenomenology is “a descriptive, not an explanatory or deductive enterprise” since it tries to unveil the fundamentals of experience instead of constructing hypotheses and speculating beyond the essence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was an influential phenomenologist and philosopher known for his writings on perception and the human experience. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012), human experience is embodied, meaning that the individual body plays an important role in shaping perception. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012), there exists an inseparable relation between the body and perception, dismissing the mind-body dualism and underlining the central role the body has in shaping experiences.

This role of the individual body can also 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). Hermann Schmitz is often referred to in writing by Gernot Böhme, a philosopher who is mostly known for his writings on atmosphere, architecture, and being present in space. In line with the phenomenological approaches of Merleau-Ponty, Schmitz argues that body and mind should be approached holistically and not as dualism. According to Schmitz (2021, pp. 1), a 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). 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”, highlighting the importance of an individual’s senses and emotions (Johnson, 2015, pp. 1; Tzortzi, 2017).

Continuing on these philosophical approaches in the context of experience, there is now a common conception that experience is embodied, meaning that perceptions, thoughts,

and emotions are fundamentally configured by bodily interactions with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023; 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.

## 2.2 Atmosphere

Another concept, as mentioned in the introduction, 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). Though, according to Böhme (1993, pp. 121), objects radiate a certain type of atmosphere and fill the surroundings “with tensions and suggestions of movement”. Arguing from this perspective, objects thus possess a certain “ecstatic ability to spread beyond itself” (Dorrian, 2014, pp. 191). Consequently, in the space surrounding these objects, subjects can encounter and experience this atmosphere. These conceptualisations of the concept *atmosphere* highlight how difficult it is to define and thus grasp an exact *atmosphere*. Though, the different explanations underscore the role of the subject in experiencing atmosphere.

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, according to him, is inherently 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 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).

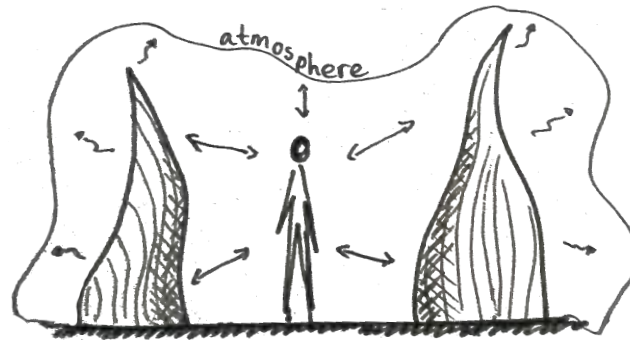


Image 2: the author's understanding of atmosphere [sketch made by author]

### 3. 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. Firstly, an intuitive selection of objects is 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 to the researcher, it is included (Appendix I contains an overview of the selected projects). In combination with selecting the objects, occasional site visits are performed to get a better grasp of personal and visitor interactions with the objects. Subsequently, the objects are examined through an analysis of the type of intervention and the accompanied architectural principle through a basic plan analysis. A variety of projects ranging from individual artworks, to architectural structures, or virtual initiatives is analyzed. Whereas the need for connecting to sensations and emotions seems more prevalent in modern metropolises, objects in smaller agglomerations and nature areas are also included. The wide selection of objects enables to get a better grasp on the possible configurations and principles that already exist.

Secondly, the embodied experience with its associated sensory meanings and impacts on the visitor is examined. It is attempted to find common denominators that help to group



them. As mentioned in the literature review, the individual body is intrinsically linked to shaping experience and perceiving atmosphere, and hence human experience is of a subjective nature (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Therefore, it can be difficult to fully grasp the sensory effects and accompanied experience of certain objects. To get a comprehensive understanding of the experience, Google Maps reviews and occasional short interviews with (past) visitors are combined with the description of the researcher. The use of online reviews (e.g. Google Maps and Tripadvisor) has mostly been limited to research on airport environments, tourism, and restaurant experiences (Lee and Yu, 2018; Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj, 2020; Stoleriu et al., 2019; Taecharungroj, 2019). Though, it is assumed to be helpful since "spontaneous visitor comments and reviews coming from these alternative sources [such as Google Maps] provide specific insights into visitors' experiences that traditional interviews can overlook" (Winter, 2018). The combination of comments by the researcher, occasional interviews, and Google Maps reviews will potentially yield a more profound understanding of different subjective perspectives beyond what the researcher can describe.

The different steps of the research are 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. 'Tags' are used to describe the architectural elements, the visitor experience, the type of object, and the material properties. These 'tags' might help to create more overview and find common denominators. In the final stage of these steps, the projects will be analyzed one more time to find a suiting overarching theme and see if there could be a category missing. For each of these subcategories, an abstraction is made to try to visualize the basis of this experience. Furthermore, one object is discussed in more detail to concretize the principles of the specific subcategory and to give an impression of the accompanied (embodied) experience. This overview will enable designers, artists, and urban planners to think about possible experiences for visitors that can help to make these visitors feel more present and in the moment.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Contemplation

The first category is contemplation, which entails being in a state of thinking, reflecting, or considering something with a high level of awareness and often in quietness (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). In terms of architectural design, the environments for contemplation can have different scales, which is shown in the two subcategories below. Furthermore, places for remembrance (often memorials) are a distinct group within these places of contemplation that can be shared in both categories. The architecture of these types of places often incentivizes specific behavior; namely respectful and often also silent behavior, sometimes even expressing grief and mourning.

#### Sheltered/calm introspection



Image: August Fischer, October 2016, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

#### Bruder Klaus kapelle

Church of light  
Nooit meer Auswitsch

#### Overwhelming calmness/reflection



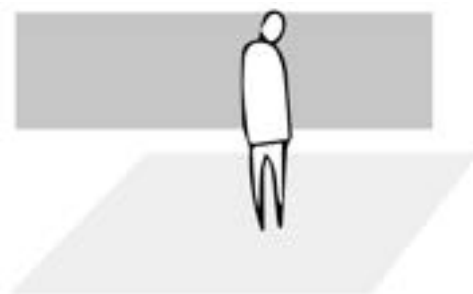
Image: Hummel, K., [www.libeskind.com](http://www.libeskind.com)

#### The memorial of names

Reflecting absence  
Srebrenica is Dutch history  
Poems for earthlings

#### 4.1.1 Sheltered/calm introspection

Small-scale spaces that are mostly focusing on the direct surroundings (can be exterior or interior) and on the individual, possibly leading to calmness and introspection.



***Bruder Klaus kapelle, Peter Zumthor, Mechernich-Wachendorf, 2007***

This chapel is located in an open field. The chapel can only be reached by a slightly ascending walk of 10 to 15 minutes through this landscape. The interior of the chapel contrasts the material of the exterior (horizontal vs vertical focus, smooth vs rough finishing). Furthermore, the material is thick and textured. If you stand in the middle of the small space, you can see the sky.



Images from left to right: Bennett Mueller, April 2018, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com); Kateer, July 2007, [www.commons.wikimedia.org](http://www.commons.wikimedia.org); Flemming Ibsen, July 2017, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

*Experience*

Emerging in vast fields, the chapel slowly **unfolds** for the approaching visitor. Leaving behind the car and daily life, the visitor becomes **increasingly excited**, maybe even impatient, for the entrance. Once inside, the **mystical** interior may offer a place for calmness and **reflection**. The play with light, coming from the entrance, ceiling, little holes in the wall, and candles may offer a **spiritual** or **silent** experience.

“**Magical** place in the middle of a field in the Eifel” (Bierschenk, A., Google review)

“A masterpiece. Materiality, cubature, **atmosphere, feeling**, colorfulness, patina ability... I am **overwhelmed**. Built **contemplation**” (Fuchs, M. A., Google review)

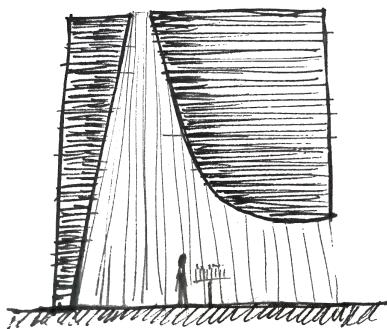


Image: abstraction Bruder Klaus kapelle [sketch made by author]

Enclosed Object in plane

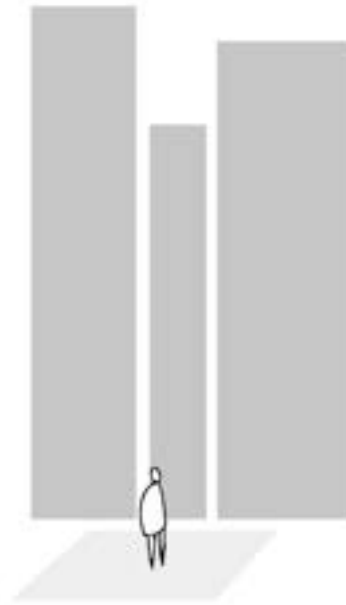
Touch Looking up Walking Vision  
Contemplation

Chapel

Heavy Solid Light

#### 4.1.2 Overwhelming calmness/reflection

Spaces that can be overwhelming in terms of scale, quantity of elements, or setup. Due to the overwhelmingness, visitors can become quiet and feel a certain calmness or level of reflection.



#### ***The Memorial of Names, Daniel Libeskind, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2021***

The Memorial of Names is located on the edge of the Jewish Quarter. The memorial consists of many individual stones, all carrying a name of a victim of the holocaust. Furthermore, it is difficult for visitors to locate themselves and there is not a clear path that can be followed. Also, the mirrors on top of the stones reflect different angles of the city, possibly creating more disorientation when going through the memorial.



Images from left to right: own photograph; Libeskind, D., <https://www.archdaily.com/>

## Experience

The experience of the visitors may be characterized by **confusion** and **doubt**, due to the lack of clear routing. The reflecting material on top of the stones strengthens this feeling of **disorientation**. The alternation between small corridors, and closed and open spaces (comparable to squares or rooms) invites for standing still and **reflection**. As a result of both forcing visitors to actively choose their own path and creating places for reflection, visitors are encouraged to perform an **active act of commemoration**. Furthermore, the amount and uniformity of the bricks may contribute to a certain feeling related to the **massiveness** of the horrors of the Holocaust.

“Mijn bezoek aan het holocaust monument vond ik erg **intrigerend**. Toen ik langs de muren **liep** en alle namen las, zag en **voelde** ik hoeveel families gestorven zijn. Maar ook voelde ik het **verdriet** voor de mensen die het overleefd hebben. Mensen die gevochten hebben om dit monument hier te krijgen. Daar **rondlopen** bracht **verschillende gevoelens** met zich mee. Verdriet, kracht, maar vooral ook “dit mag nooit meer gebeuren”. Als je tussen de muren staat en het zonlicht doorbreekt, zie je pas hoe mooi het is.” (Julia, interview)



Image: Hummel, K., [www.libeskind.com](http://www.libeskind.com)

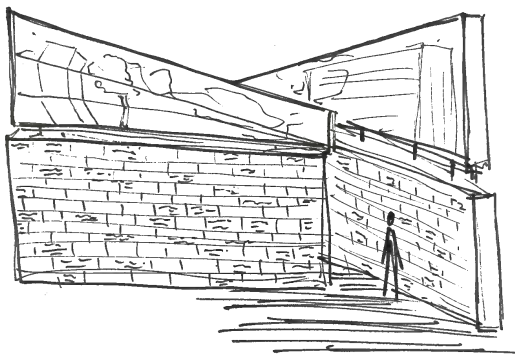


Image: abstraction memorial of names [sketch made by author]

Guiding movement

Close to former Jewish quarter

Contemplation Walking around  
Commemoration Confusion

Memorial

Quantity [stones] Reflections Fragmentation

## 4.2 Experiment/Play

The second category is characterized by experiment or a certain level of playfulness of the visitor. This category asks for an active role and can be subdivided into *playing with your own perspective* and *triggering the senses*.

### Playing with your own perspective



Image: Thilo, F., olafureliasson.net

#### **Your rainbow panorama**

Hemels gewelf/panorama  
Weather project

### Triggering the senses



Image: Sutcliffe, J., olafureliasson.net

#### **Ice watch**

City to dust

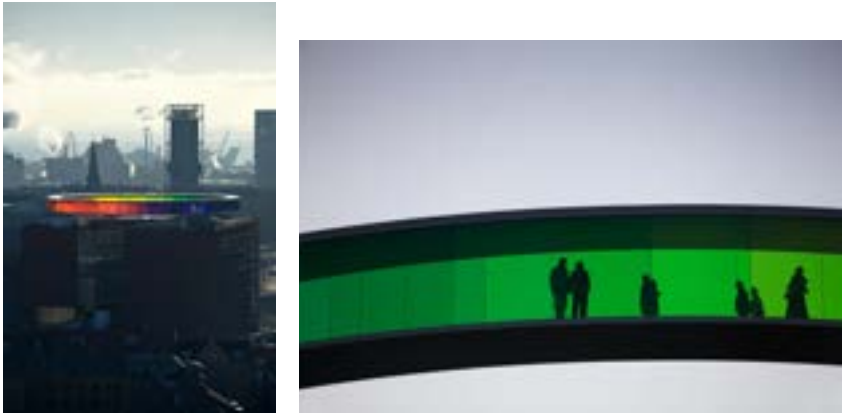
### 4.2.1 Playing with your own perspective

This type of space asks for an active role of the visitor. By moving around and changing their own perspective, the visitor can experience these spaces. The space invites people to move around and it might result in a certain playfulness or curiosity of the visitor.



#### ***Your Rainbow Panorama Olafur Eliasson, Aarhus, Denmark, 2006-2011***

On top of ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, a rainbow panorama was installed. The panorama is 150 meters long and divides different parts of the city of Aarhus with glazed rainbow-coloured glass. While walking around, the colors change and different views on the sky and the city of Aarhus are offered. The view is panoramic. Multiple people can experience the installation at once, but as can be seen at the sketch it still has a scale suited for the individual.



Images from left to right: Lars Aarø, olafureliasson.net; Thilo Frank, olafureliasson.net

### *Experience*

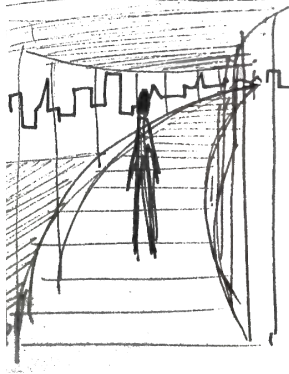
The rainbow panorama asks for an **active role** of the observer to fully experience the installation. Color is used as a mediator to **intensify reality** and which, together with movement, forms the walkway. Both this movement and changing colours transform the body 'into a color resonator' (OASE 111).

“Je stapt in een gekleurde wereld waarin het blauw je als eerste overkomt als je de trap opklimt naar de kleuren galerij. Het zicht op de andere kleuren die in het verschiet liggen en waar je nog **doorheen** gaat **lopen**, werkt **uitnodigend**. Ik wilde gaan **spelen** met de kleuren en kleurencombinaties **onderzoeken** door **foto's te maken** van de effecten en invalshoeken die ik allemaal kon maken bij het doorlopen van de regenboog aan kleuren. Het was een feest.” (Roeland, interview)

What you experience may be of both panoramic scope and **introspective** quality – you may see yourself seeing (ArchDaily, <https://www.archdaily.com/469611/your-rainbow-panorama-olafur-eliasson>)



Images: Thilo Frank, olafureliasson.net



Guiding movement

Playing with perspective Movement

Panoramic installation

Coloured glass Circular shape Panoramic view

Image: abstraction my rainbow panorama [sketch made by author]

#### 4.2.2 Triggering the senses

Some of the objects clearly trigger specific senses that ask visitors to touch, smell, look, or listen. These objects often invite interaction and further exploration.



#### ***Ice Watch, Olafur Eliasson & Minik Rosing, Place du Panthéon, Paris, London & Copenhagen, 2014***

This temporal artwork was placed during a Climate Change Conference. For visitors, it is a surprising encounter. It invites you to walk around and touch the ice. The goal of the artists was to make people aware of climate change and its effects "by providing a direct and tangible experience" (olafureliasson.net, n.d.).



Image: Feferberg, E., AFP, Getty



## Experience

This artwork offers an **unexpected** encounter and may draw random bystanders towards it. The blocks are slowly melting and the surprising material may invite people to **touch** it.

“Put **your hand** on the ice, **listen** to it, **smell** it, **look** at it – and witness the ecological changes our world is undergoing. Feelings of distance and disconnect hold us back, make us grow numb and passive. I hope that Ice Watch arouses **feelings of proximity, presence, and relevance**, of narratives that you can identify with and that make us all engage.” (Eliasson, O., <https://www.phaidon.com/>)



Images from left to right: Forgham-Bailey, C., [olafureliasson.net](http://olafureliasson.net); Sutcliffe, J., [olafureliasson.net](http://olafureliasson.net)

Object

Touch Surprise

Artwork

Temporal [melting]  
Cold material

## 4.3 Movement

The third category invites movement; this can be by both physically visible invitations or by a more virtual incentive (e.g. online platform or route).

### Physical invitations



[Image: Šmídek, P., 2016, [archiweb.cz](http://archiweb.cz)]

### The Sonsbeek pavilion

Schaulager  
Bunker 599  
Tilted arc

### Virtual guidance



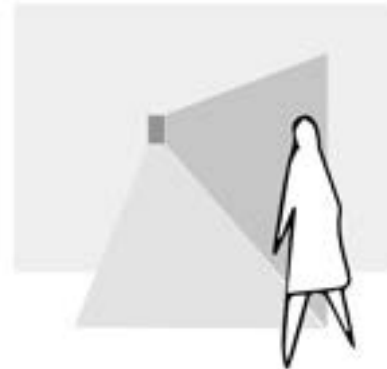
[Image: De Jong, H., [hansdejongfotografie.wordpress.com](http://hansdejongfotografie.wordpress.com)]

### Arago meridian

Returning the gaze  
@ommetjemettom [instagram]  
Solar System Trail

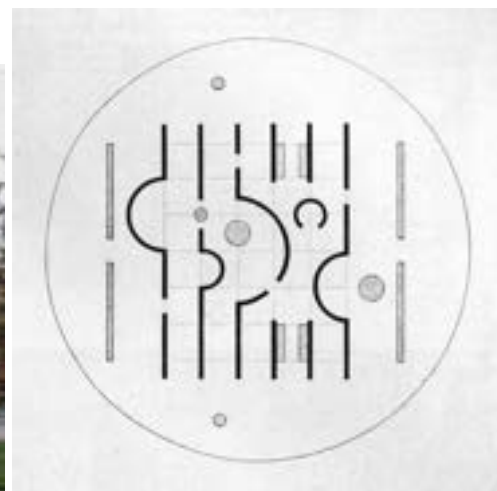
#### 4.3.1 Physical invitations

This category is characterized by physical interventions that invite movement towards or away from it. It offers a place that people might want to explore or move away from.



#### *The Sonsbeek pavilion Aldo van Eyck, Kröller-Müller, 1965-66*

This sculpture 'garden' was originally built for the temporary world expo in Sonsbeek (1966). The design consists of walls of concrete stones and a transparent roof. Circles and curves play a major role in the design.



Images from left to right: [krollermuller.nl](http://krollermuller.nl); [socks-studio.com](http://socks-studio.com)

#### *Experience*

Depending on the side of approach, the pavilion is either **inviting** the visitor in, or **guiding** them around. The alternation of 'alleys' with small 'squares' is sometimes a bit **confusing**. Also, the high concentration of sculptures in the rather narrow spaces combined with vistas towards other artworks can be **overwhelming**. Van Eyck tried to facilitate "**spontaneous encounters**" with the artworks (Van den Heuvel, 2019).



Image from left to right: Van Eyck, A., the Aldo van Eyck Archive; Šmídek, P., 2016, www.archiweb.cz

Guiding movement

Walking around Light Sudden encounters

Sculpture garden

Concrete Transparency Vistas

#### 4.3.2 Virtual guidance

Objects that stimulate people to move around through other means than clearly physical/visual ones. Examples are a route on a map, on the internet, or a collection of places to visit in a play or on instagram.



#### *Arago meridian Jan Dibbets, Paris, 1987*

This artwork is located in Paris exactly on the zero meridian and consists of 135 medallions from north to south on approximately 9,5 km. The bronze round plates are 12 cm and have the inscription ARAGO, N (north) and S (south). Francois Arago (1786-1853) was, among other things, an astronomer and scientist. In the middle of the meridians is an empty pedestal which used to carry a statue of Arago.



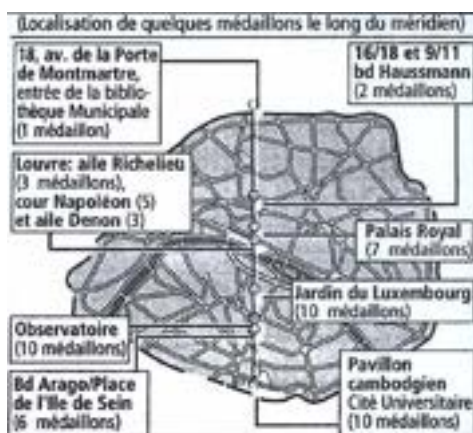
Image: <https://www.mathouriste.eu/>

### Experience

When encountering one of the medaillons, it can form a **break to everyday life**. It may invite people to think what the meaning is and once you find out it can **connect** you to a shared geographical location and history. It can create a heightened **awareness** and may **invite people to look** for all 135 medaillons and follow the route through the city.

According to Dibbets, the Parisians would begin to **wonder** what the meaning of those bronze circles could be. And then, the visitors **become aware** of the imaginary circle of longitude and finally - at least the most curious among them - of the spiritual legacy that Francois Arago left them (kunstgeografie.nl, nd.).

“While walking around, I **encountered** these objects **by surprise**. My walk got a surprising new goal and I was **triggered** to discover more of the objects” (Camiel, interview)



Multiple objects  
[guiding movement]

Historical relation

Breaking routine  
Wonder Connection  
to place

Memorial

Medaillons

Image: De Jong, H., [hansdejongfotografie.wordpress.com](https://hansdejongfotografie.wordpress.com)

## 4.4 Surprise/Wonder

This category distinguishes itself by providing elements that surprise people or make them wonder. This can either be by an element that is contrasting the (expected) environment or by an addition of something that exemplifies or makes visible the already existing situation.

Both are in a way commenting on the existing environment and drawing people's attention to it.

### Contrasting



[Image: spoorbeeld.nl]

### Waiting for buses and birds

Paley park  
Temporary museum  
Bospoldervos  
Arc de Triomphe, wrapped  
Ice watch

### Exemplifying/Making visible



[Image: Street Art Frankey, frankey.com]

### Various Interventions [by Street Art Frankey]

Arago meridian  
Reflecting absence  
Tribunes in de Stad  
Hemels Gewelf/Panorama

### 4.4.1 Contrasting

An object/installation that contrasts the existing environment. For example natural elements (e.g. sounds, projections, art objects) in an urban environment. Another example is a temporary building, for example located in a park (Temporary museum).



### *Waiting for Buses and Birds, Moniek Toebosch, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2015*

This artwork is located on the elevated bus station on the IJ-side of Amsterdam. Bird-like figures are projected from time to time on the inside of the semi-circular roof. They move

around like blue shadows and can only be seen at night. There is an additional soft soundscape of bird sounds.



Image: spoorbeeld.nl

### *Experience*

When you hear the sound before seeing the projections, you might start to **wonder** where it is coming from. Are there birds in the bus station or is it a sound that is being produced? When seeing the projections, one might become **fascinated** and follow the projections. Due to the movement and surroundedness.

“Mijn ervaring met de vogel op cs: **tijdens het wachten** op de bus op centraal station ging ik altijd **op zoek** naar de vogels. Het bracht **afleiding** en **plezier** als ik ze gespot had waardoor de tijd sneller ging. Als ik ze niet kon vinden, vroeg ik me ook altijd af waarom dat zo was; ook dat bracht **afleiding**.” (Anna, interview).

### Object

Vision Sound Surprise Wonder

Projection Soundscape

LED-lamps Contrasting elements [nature versus city]

#### 4.4.2 Exemplifying

This category includes objects that draw attention to a(n) situation/environment that already exists by making this situation visible or by exemplifying the existing.



#### *Various Interventions, Street Art Frankey, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2010-now*

Street Art Frankey is an artist that is, among other things, known for his interventions in public spaces in Amsterdam. In the examples on the images, the artist makes visible the existing situation through the addition of a graphic element.



Left two images: Street Art Frankey, frankey.com; right image: @streetartfrankey [instagram]

#### *Experience*

When seeing one of these objects, your **attention** is most probably **drawn to it**. Because of the object, the visitor might start **seeing the surroundings** of the object more clearly.

“While walking around, I encountered one of these objects by surprise. A couple of days later, I encountered another one. My walks through the city got a surprising new goal and I was triggered to discover more.” (Andy, interview)

Object

Surprise Wonder

Interventions

Graphic Small interventions Visually responding to the existing

## 4.5 Social Interaction

The last category is centered around social interaction. A(n) (unexpected) social encounter can create a moment of surprise and connection. When interacting with another person, you are most probably drawn into the moment because you have to interact. This can be through working together/collaborating, but also through a captured gaze, or through talking to one another.

### **(Unexpected) encounter**



Image: smarthistory.org

### **The Artist is Present**

You and Me Chairs of Merida

Tribunes in de Stad

The Garden Table

De plantage van onze voorouders - Keti

Koti Tafel

### 4.5.1 (Unexpected) encounter

These types of objects/interventions create a space that facilitates an (unexpected) encounter or interaction.



### ***The Artist is Present, Marina Abramović, MoMa, New York, The USA, 2010***

This performance art work by Marina Abramović invites others to take place in front of her and explore the dimensions of human interaction/connection. The performance includes a chair where the artist is seated, a table, and a similar chair on the other side, offering a place



for visitors. The visitors could stay in the chair as long as they wanted, while silently locking eyes with the artist.



Left image: indiewire.com; right image: moma.org

### *Experience*

For people not taking place on the chair, the performance can be seen as "a kind of stage for experience" (Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present, n.d.). However, when **participating** and taking a seat, the performance asks participants to be **present**, experiencing the moment while locking eyes with the artist. The setting creates an interpersonal vacuum of silent connection, often evoking **emotions** (see image).

“The effect, as recorded by Matthew Akers in his documentary “Marina Abramovic the Artist Is Present,” was **galvanic**. Many spectators **cried** during their encounter with Ms. Abramovic, and tears could often be seen in her eyes as well” (Scott, A. O., 2012)



Immersive

Interpersonal  
connection

Performance

Offering place

Image: Virtual Artist Residency blog at WordPress.com

## Conclusion & discussion

This study presented a categorisation of different (embodied) experiences of objects in (semi-)public spaces. According to this categorisation, (embodied) visitor experience can be subdivided into contemplation, experiment/play, movement, surprise/wonder, and (unexpected) social interaction. It is through different architectural tools that these types of experiences are achieved. For example, the use of solid and heavy materials is used in a few examples of the category *contemplation*. The solidity of the materials can have a grounding effect on the visitor. Also, the objects in the category of contemplation often play with light, which can be associated with trying to achieve a certain feeling of divinity.

Another important architectural tool in creating experience is playing with the visitor's perspective. When movement of the visitor is needed to change perspective and experience the object fully, a certain level of playfulness is created (e.g. in My Rainbow Panorama). However, perspective can also be used to draw a person's attention to something, helping the visitor focus and connect to a specific element. An example is the performance by Marina Abramović, the architectural tool that offers a space that invites the visitor to sit down. Once seated, the gaze of the visitor is directed towards the artist's eyes, creating a vacuum that can evoke emotions. A last important architectural tool is connected to the physical configuration. An enclosed space is often linked to sheltered/calm places for introspection (contemplation category). A more open configuration with several objects/or wall like structures can guide movement. Also, such an open configuration with elements that invite people to move in/towards them (e.g. my rainbow panorama) or take place on them (e.g. the artist is present or hemels gewelf/panorama) are a tool to create places for experiment/play.

Many of the identified architectural tools can also be found in the reflections of Peter Zumthor's book *Atmospheres: architectural environments - surrounding objects* (2006). According to Zumthor (2006), atmosphere is created 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 (Zumthor, 2006). On the verge of this atmosphere, the physical properties of the object, and the visitor, all elements come together in an embodied experience. Though, it proved to be difficult to objectively describe all of the elements, which both the theoretical framework and the researched Google reviews/interviews highlighted.

Furthermore, there are many factors that might influence the embodied visitor experience. As mentioned, there is a level of subjectivity that is difficult to grasp. Also, temporal factors, such as climate, time of the day, seasons might influence perception and the embodied experience. Though, this research suggests that there are some architectural tools that can be used to steer this experience. Future research could integrate neuroscientific methodologies, providing a more nuanced understanding of emotion responses to architectural experiences. Lastly, in the context of this research, only Dutch respondents were asked for their experience. It is recommended to explore how cultural differences might influence architectural preferences and experiences. Integrating these suggestions for future research can create a more extensive architectural toolset that can help to create spaces that oppose the trend of hectic and disconnecting modern city life. Through the addition of more places in the city that offer space for reflection, playfulness, movement, surprise, or social interaction, the future of the modern city can achieve a better balance, aligning more closely with the needs of contemporary inhabitants.

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# Appendix I

List of researched objects.

**Bruder Klaus Kapelle** Peter Zumthor  
**Church of Light** Tadao Ando  
**Poems for Earthlings** Adrián Villar Rojas  
**Nooit meer Auschwitz** Jan Wolkers  
**The Memorial of Names** Daniel Libeskind  
**Srebrenica is Dutch History** Collective *Bosnian Girl*  
**Reflecting Absence** Michael Arad & Peter Walker  
**Voor de Kunst** Tijn Noordenbos  
**Temporary Museum** Atelier Tomas Dirrix  
**Tilted Arc** Richard Serra  
**Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped** Christo & Jeanne-Claude  
**Bospoldervos** Florentijn Hofman  
**Ice Watch** Olafur Eliasson & Minik Rosing  
**The Sonsbeek Pavilion** Aldo van Eyck  
**@ommetjemettom** Tom Jongbloed  
**Returning the Gaze** Sites of Memory  
**Weather Project** Olafur Eliasson  
**Sonic Fountain** Doug Aitken  
**Hemels Gewelf/Panorama** James Turrell  
**Schaulager** Herzog & de Meuron  
**Arago Meridian** Jan Dibbets  
**Solar System Trail** Astronomical Society of Victoria  
**Your Rainbow Panorama** Olafur Eliasson  
**Waiting for Buses and Birds** Moniek Toebosch  
**Paley Park** Robert Zion  
**Bunker 599** RAAAF  
**City to Dust** Studio LA  
**Solar System Trail** Astronomical Society of Victoria  
**You and Me Chairs of Merida** Unknown  
**De Plantage van onze Voorouders - Keti Koti Tafel** Orkater  
**Various Interventions** Street Art Frankey  
**Tribunes in de Stad** Collectief SLPLZN  
**The Artist is Present** Marina Abramović