

A Reconsideration on the Theory of Beauty: Previous Views and a New Approach Following Maslow's Theory (Part II)

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Abstract

This paper is the second part of a work that aims to rethink the concept of beauty as close as possible to its essence and in a way that integrates the science of aesthetics with the field of construction. Within other theoretical and practical works, this study may be further used to physically reflect the definition of beauty in areas such as architecture, civil engineering or urban planning and support professionals in designing and building beautiful objects and constructions. However, it has to be added that the assumption that there must be a particular original aspect related to beauty that leads a human-made object to success, needs to be further identified. The approach to the concept of beauty is through a general philosophical perspective and partially through the areas mentioned above. The second part of the study includes the synthesised guidance provided by Monroe Beardsley through the theories on beauty from the nineteenth century until today. In addition, it comprises the scheme of concepts that characterised the beautiful in this time, including the lines that guided its study, previous ideas that support our later views on presented theory, and a brief exposition of Maslow's theory of human motivation followed by our theory on beauty and the conclusions.

Keywords

aesthetics, beautiful, architecture, psychology, evolution, primary human needs

1 Introduction

In Part I of this work (Lehene, 2020), the beautiful is the mirrored effect of an original element that emanates emotions and sensations, which impress us. It is an expression of an individual's culture and psychology, the findings of the human quest for comfort, the way one covers their lacking, completing thus the human expressiveness.

Regardless of the domain of activity, the individual constantly experiences "ups and downs" in their evolution; the beautiful is one of the items which accompany them throughout their life. Thus, despite the curving path, the beautiful is not itself less or more, but it is less or more understood and mirrored in one's works.

In a preconceived way, we associate these works' labelled failures to the actual level of presence of the beautiful in those works. That should not happen.

2 Monroe Beardsley's synthesis of the theories on beauty from the 19th century to the present day

Monroe Beardsley is one of the thinkers whose own vision on beauty was also discussed in Part I of this work

(Lehene, 2020), being one of the main references for our theory. In essence, he believed that the beautiful was the perceptible value, consistency, fullness, subtlety and richness of significance. He also wrote a reference work, commented later, exploring the transforming concepts of beauty over almost 150 years.

2.1 Alienating the concept of beauty

Beardsley (1973:pp.207–214) produced an inventory of the concepts from the nineteenth century up to 1974 that characterised the evolution of understanding the beautiful. The article gathers a series of definitions of the beautiful, the concepts that characterised it and the lines the aesthetic studies followed.

Each theory, definition or line of study of the aesthetics attempts to provide solutions to the philosophical issue of aesthetics. To be able to provide solutions to a problem, this must be known and understood thoroughly. Defining a concept already means giving it the shape that the thinker associates it with and further presents it after thoroughly

understanding it. The definition of beauty cannot be said to have necessarily benefited from an evolutionary path, as we must stop at the word "path". This is because every historical period, undercurrent or thinker who dealt with the issue of beauty, added one more definition to the previous chain of definitions and pointed out what then and there was defining the beautiful (Beardsley, 1973:p.207).

The evolving path of the binomial beautiful-aesthetics from the 19th century to the present day and the thinkers and their views is further presented.

In 1892 Bernard Bosanquet defined aesthetics through the philosophy of the beautiful, and the beautiful is "what has its own or specific expressiveness for the perception through senses or imagination" (Beardsley, 1973:p.207). According to Bosanquet, the history of aesthetics follows continuous intellectual development from the classical concepts of beauty, such as harmony, symmetry and unity in variety, to the features with a subtler aesthetic significance, such as the sublime, the grotesque, the graceful, the violent.

Sibley (1959) added some others to the generous list of terms that characterise the beautiful, such as elegance, delicacy, stridency, power, joy.

Like other transcendentalists, Bridges (1929) was an adept of art for art's sake and assigned to the beautiful a divine value, perhaps a little due to a romantic excess.

For the first time, in 1902 and 1913, Benedetto Croce replaced the concept of beauty with expression; he pronounced the formula "art equals expression equals intuition" (Beardsley, 1973:p.207), and the beautiful is the expression, so the beautiful is the essence of the art.

In 1914 Clive Bell, and in 1920 Roger Fry attached the "meaningful shape" (Beardsley, 1973:p.207) to the beautiful because that defines it.

Miller (1934) was one of the avant-garde's voices that rejected the previously consecrated features of the beautiful, declaring its new purpose: to intensify and radicalise the observer's experience.

Ogden and Richards (1923), alongside Stevenson (1944), categorically denounced the existence of beauty, a term they used only due to emotional reasons. For them, the beautiful only had a meaning when it was found in an object that it characterised (Beardsley, 1973:p.208).

The 23 references selected from the thinkers, philosophers and aestheticians, presented in Part I of the paper (Lehene, 2020) and Beardsley's synthesis on the theories of beauty together capture the main phases of the definition of beauty, essentially revealing its roadmap. If, until the 20th century, the concept of beautiful benefited from

a positive acceptance, which clearly defined its membership in the great umbrella of the good, of what is good, and produces positive results, we observe a reinterpretation through negation of its essence during the past century. By contesting the essential values that have been discovered, confirmed and reconfirmed by millennia, and keeping in mind Maslow's scale, that reveals the human process of returning from a higher to a lower step in their development. The decay is consequent to a shock suffered by society, while the satisfaction of the primary survival needs is severely threatened. It feels right to credit that decay to the two World Wars that marked the century; thus, we are no longer surprised by this downgrading of the concept of beauty. Nevertheless, despite the major vicissitudes humans face, such as a world war, the beautiful always finds new springs to persist and manifest. This is due to the creative energy found within it, more precisely, within the creative power endowed by the individual on their divine conception.

The next phase is discovering the beautiful's ability to find its flourishing energy for manifesting and developing even in less favourable conditions.

Another explanation we propose for the alienation undergone by the concept of beauty lies in that the human arrives from time to time to a psychological saturation and needs to return to their original state. After a long period of obedience to the consecrated principles that characterise the existence, manifestation and functioning of an item, the individual sometimes feels the need to cross again the stages of discovering that item, in this case, the essence of the beautiful. The psychological fatigue that appears after a long period of time leads to an impetuous need to cross again the process of discovering-inventing and then reconfirming that item's characteristics. Moreover, the best way to start reconfirming what a certain thing is to deny it because the denial calls for the maximum effort to support or deny it. The process of rediscovering and reinventing an item, driven by different ages, recorded different values of what one's utmost effort was. This is why the results differ from one age to another, and so the understanding of the beautiful greatly varies too.

We cannot exclude that the social storms of the two World Wars were, in reality, the last drops that filled the glass of fatigue accumulated over time, triggering the urgent need to return to origins, that is to deny the essence of the beautiful, as Ogden, Richards and Stevenson did. Now the individual needs to concentrate their resources again in order to rediscover it.

2.2 The scheme of concepts that characterised the beautiful

The beautiful has acquired several satellite terms that define it, according to the theories issued on it. The first major division of these satellite terms is because the beautiful can describe – so it is a descriptive concept - or it can evaluate – so it is an evaluator (appraisal) concept (Beardsley, 1973:p.208).

As a descriptive concept versus an evaluator, the beautiful translates into the two types of statements on aesthetics that Tatarkiewicz described rigorously in his extensive work *The History of Aesthetics* (Tatarkiewicz, 1978a:p.131). The descriptive statements of the beautiful will describe, analyse and explain more precisely, provide definitions of the beautiful and of art, analyse the beauty, explain its nature, and describe what effects the beauty has on the human condition. The descriptive aspect of the beautiful is "the expression of the experience and of the reasoning" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978a:p.131). The ancient Greek vision, where the beautiful is what is good and true at the same time, was also on the side of the descriptive concept. On the other hand, the appraisal statements of the beautiful are judgments of value. These say "which things are beautiful, which artworks are successful", to what extent "the beautiful and the art have to be valued" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978a:p.131). The appraisal aspect of the beautiful is "the expression of the taste" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978a:p.131).

Osborne (1952) defended the appraisal nature of the beautiful, although he also recognised its descriptive function (Beardsley, 1973:p.208).

We will further focus on the appraisal nature of the beautiful, which seems to have been preferred by the thinkers of the last two centuries. Though, today we can see a diminishment of the boundary between the two concepts.

The evaluator thinkers of beauty are further divided into monists and pluralists, respectively in affective and attributive.

The monists claim that beauty is a unitary and unique property, while the pluralists believe that the beautiful comprises several properties. What ultimately matters is that the definition of the beautiful takes all its components into account and, thus, identifies its essence. If the evaluating philosopher further declares himself as monist or pluralist, it does not matter that much, as long as the evaluation is driven integrately and objectively (Beardsley, 1973:p.208).

The affective is attached to the appraisal perspective of beauty to emphasise its ability or capability to offer satisfaction or pleasure. This view is also embraced by Beardsley (1973:p.209) and Howes (1905).

Before explaining the homologous category of the affective, namely the attributive, two subcategories of the affective will be mentioned here: the relativists and the non-relativists. As expected from the description of the concept of affective beautiful, one of its subcategories – the non-relativists - supports the affective capacity, the power to provide aesthetic satisfaction, while the other - the relativists - appreciate its potential abilities in the direction of the aesthetic value. A non-relativist was Pepper (1955), while a couple of the relativists were Alexander (1933), Beardsley (1973:p.209) and Ducasse (1929).

Returning to the previous classification level of the concepts characteristic to the beautiful, the attributive is now exposed besides the already discussed affective trait. This one is defined as the power to perceive and contemplate things in order to determine their aesthetic value (Jessop, 1933).

Still here, the attributive aestheticians question whether the aesthetic attribute is natural or unnatural, respectively, if it is complex or simple. The naturalists, including Prall (1929), use psychophysical concepts to outline the beautiful as the result of the interaction between people and the surrounding world. On the other hand, the non-naturalists, such as Gilson (1965) or Maritain (1920), claim the transcendental status of the aesthetics, which is possibly obsolete, coming from Plato's neo-scholasticism (Beardsley, 1973:p.210).

The definists, who defend the complexity of the aesthetics, sustain, somehow similarly to the pluralists, the need to use a group of terms, such as harmony, measure, proportion, symmetry, order, for defining beauty. They also raised the matter of the necessary and sufficient limit in determining these properties. At the same time, the non-definists look at simple properties and claim that, although each of them is positively appreciated, still, the entire appraised object may be unsuccessful. That is why every simple property must contribute both individually and together with the others to the aesthetic success of the object.

Due to the large number of properties that the definists analyse in the aesthetic appraisal, they consider the need to determine the type of properties that ensure the work's success. Thus, they are divided into objectivists - who consider that the internal properties are important and their variability should not be hindered - and non-objectivists - who prioritise the external properties above the functional relation. As the primary goal of the objectivists was to identify the objective conditions, i.e. the internal properties, for achieving the beautiful, two sub-branches emerged: the formalists and the intellectualists. The formalists defend the form

and the formal qualities (Greene, 1940). Alternatively, the intellectualists believe that the beautiful is the conclusion of the cognitive and reflective human function, which is directed to the cognitive content of an object (Beardsley, 1973:p.211; Chernyshevsky, 1953; Stace, 1929).

The author believes that the primordial purpose of the aesthetics is to find the definitions of the beautiful, then its unifying definition, to explain the phenomenon of beauty and explore its generation methods. On the one hand, we think that the assessment in aesthetics is necessary but not a constructive process because it does not add value. It deconstructs the object and sometimes destroys it. On the other hand, the evaluator can easily criticise, disassemble and label it with their own meaning, according to their abilities. The problem occurs when the evaluator's abilities to define, exemplify, describe, assemble the object with all its components and traits are scarce or just

not well enough developed. The beautiful object's components create an ensemble functioning like a living organism, capable of evolving and generating a constructive impact over the environment and humans.

A schematic representation of the categories of the concept of beauty, as identified by Beardsley, is in Fig. 1.

2.3 Guidelines for studying the beautiful

The study of aesthetics comes from four directions: philosophical, phenomenological, psychological and sociological (Beardsley, 1973:p.212).

The scheme of concepts that characterise the beautiful is the product of philosophical analysis. This is an example of an aim of a philosophical analysis - to characterise and explain the nature of a concept: unique or multi-component content, necessary and sufficient components, components belonging to a family or distinct components.

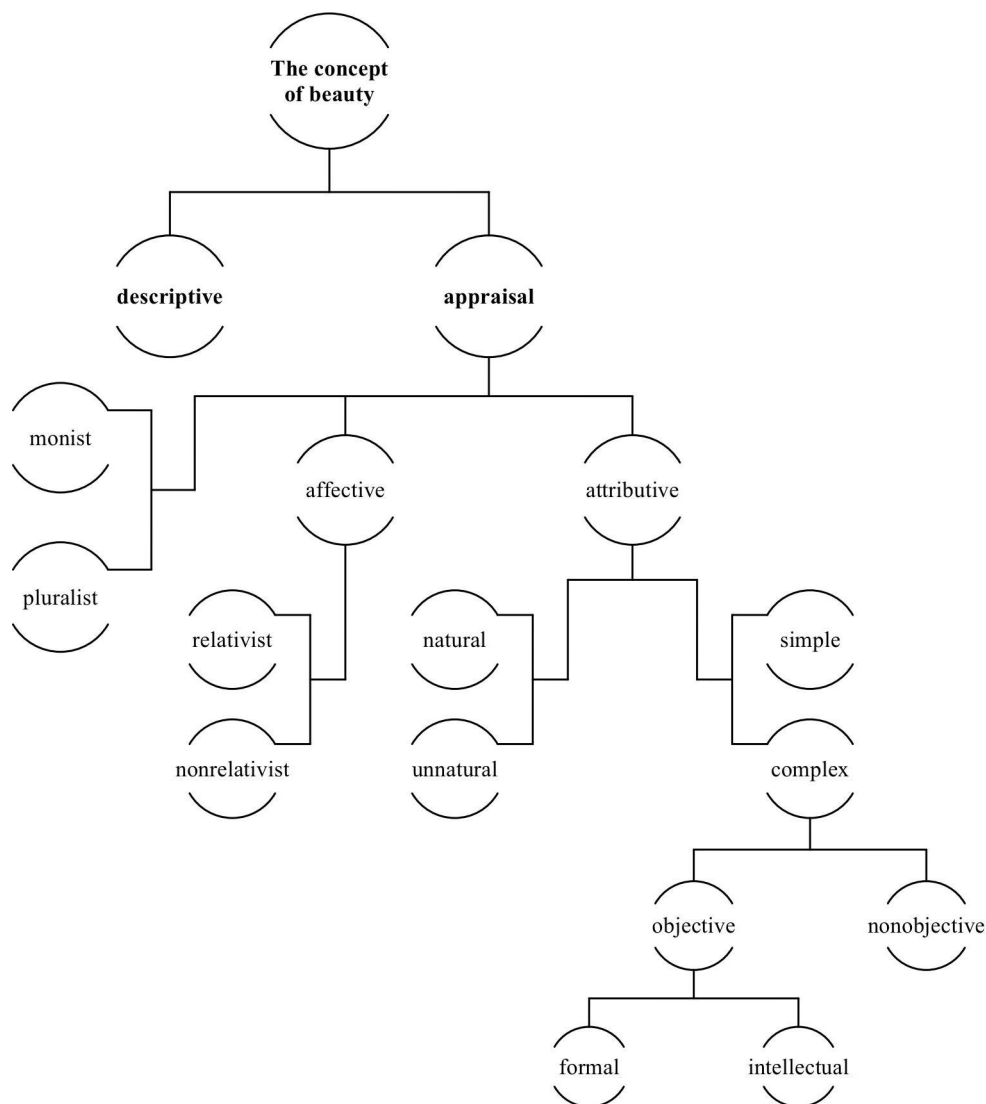


Fig. 1 The beautiful's categories as they were identified by Beardsley

The phenomenological studies on aesthetics have focused on the experience of beauty, analysing similar experiences so to outline their differences and determine their essence. Phenomenology has defined a systematic, sensitive and rigorous program to assess the beautiful. Heidegger (1950) was a phenomenologist who analysed the working character of the artwork and the incorporation of the truth in the artwork. As a phenomenologist aesthetician Hofstadter (1965) advocated that the phenomenon came from the combination of power, measure, dynamism and harmony, when the art creator is aware of their own creative experience (Beardsley, 1973:p.212).

The boundaries to the experimental psychological study on aesthetics were laid down by Gustav Fechner in 1876. The psychological aestheticians have used "the method of comparing pairs" (Beardsley, 1973:p.212) of visual or artistic elements to identify those rated as beautiful by people, to identify the types of people who evaluate certain elements as beautiful and their reasons for the evaluations. One of the psychologist aestheticians, who conducted such experiments, was Valentine (1962). He observed that the appraisal of an object as beautiful is distinct from the appraisal that the object brings satisfaction or pleasure, although in many cases, the two aspects occur at the same time (Beardsley, 1973:p.212).

Langfeld (1920), Lee (1913) and Lipps (1903) were also psychologist aestheticians who issued the *Theory of Empathy*. According to that, the observer of the artwork unconsciously transfers expressiveness to that object and based on the degree of the transfer of expressiveness, the beautiful is perceived in that object (Beardsley, 1973:p.213).

From a sociological perspective within the aesthetics, the cultural and social context where the beautiful appeared was analysed, how it occurred and the social causes that contributed to its occurrence. Sociologists such as Tomars (1940) conducted several studies to find out how the understanding and the appreciation of the beautiful and taste vary according to the types of communities and social classes it is exhibited to. The cultural anthropologists led intracultural comparative studies and intercultural functional studies. The gathered conclusions, according to them, were that beautiful is abstracted as what people consider to bring them pleasure and that there still are universal standards on the aesthetic qualities (Beardsley, 1973:p.213).

The aesthetic needs to have been manifested through art over time; therefore, a close natural relation exists between aesthetics and art.

3 Previous ideas that support the theory

In support of our view on the beautiful is Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz's remark: "[the ancient statues], although [they were] admired for their technical perfection, they were no longer satisfying the needs of those times" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978b:p.216). The historical aesthetician observed that art satisfies the specific human needs characteristic for a certain point in time in the evolution of society or the individual. In the third volume of the same reference work, Tatarkiewicz commented on Leon Battista Alberti's vision that "the beautiful is therefore a law and a goal: a law of the nature and a goal for man" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978c:p.135). In the quest for explaining why the beautiful is a goal for man, we wonder if this is because every goal comes from a necessity. So, the beautiful is a necessity for humankind, most likely one of the fifth step of Maslow's pyramid leading to psychological plenitude.

Alberti expressed an assumption in connection with our theory outlined in this paper: "Although he was well aware of the diversity and ephemerality of things, Alberti still believed that they contained a stable and immutable element (constans atque immuable) that harmony and beauty depended on" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978c:p.135). The clear answer to what that "stable and immutable element" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978c:p.135) was, is not given there, thus opening the road to speculations. From the perspective of our vision presented later, that *element* is one's resemblance to the Creator of perfection, a resemblance due to their ability to also produce beautiful things. The measure in which this capacity is discovered and used depends on each one's level of evolution.

In the fourth volume of the same work of Tatarkiewicz, Claude Perrault's view on the beautiful is set out: "No proportion has anything capable to make it pleasant, but whether it is or not like that, it really does not depend on it, but on people, on their psychological mechanisms, and especially on their habits and on the game of associations that they include these proportions in. [...] Perrault regarded the reaction to different proportions and their evaluation as a psychological phenomenon" (Tatarkiewicz, 1978d:p.213). We find today more associative opinions as Perrault's and that supports the idea that the same beauty found in an object is to be identified and pronounced differently by different observers due to the psychic differences between them.

What helps to reach a higher level of awareness of the beautiful is a matter of personal interest and evolution. However, there have certainly been theories that have broadly used the same perspective of justifying the aesthetics through Maslow's scale.

4 Abraham Maslow: The Pyramid of human needs

Our view on what is beautiful is related to man's evolution. Evolution, a process that brings more value to the initial one, may refer to the process that one crosses to bring more value to themselves. Every value reflects a need that is covered by a valuable item. Something is labelled as a valuable item only if it fulfils a need. Thus, an individual's evolution is strongly related to the valuable items surrounding them to the extent they continue to raise the individual further. This is the link we see between human needs, the priorities hierarchy and the beautiful as a human need and value.

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) is famous for his reference work *The Theory of Human Motivation*, published in 1943.

There he discussed how a theory of human motivation should be approached, what it is about, what the basic human needs are and how they affect human behaviour, which are the characteristics of the basic needs and which is the human motivational mechanism. We believe that Maslow's view on human behavioural motivations directly applies to the understanding of the beautiful; the human aesthetic abilities appear in close relation to the level of satisfying man's primary needs.

Maslow also noted that it is more difficult to remedy the lacks from a motivational theory than to observe and criticise those lacks. However, the existence of a motivational theory is the path to its remediation (Maslow, 1943:p.371). In parallel to the idea that it is easier to criticise what a certain thing misses from being beautiful than to offer solutions for creating beautiful objects, we reiterate that the theories of beauty are not only needed to create an overview and extract from each one what is consistent, but we must reunite these parts in order to build up an optimised theory. Each theory helps to identify the resources one needed to fulfil their primary needs, in order to increasingly value the self on a mental, psychological and spiritual level.

The pyramid of human needs, as Maslow presented it, is divided into five levels: physiological needs, security needs, affection (social) needs, self-esteem need and the need for personal plenitude. Each of them, when it is triggered, absorbs the whole interest and puts in motion all of one's abilities to satisfy it. There is, however, a common phenomenon of camouflaging some needs behind others. For example, the need for comfort from the second level can be hidden behind the need for food from the first level. Thus, for instance, one may eat not because of hunger but to remove some discomfort such as stress (Maslow, 1943:p.373).

By using the appropriate resources associated with a particular need, that becomes satisfied. This entails the desire to continue with the next level of needs so to satisfy them too.

Satisfying the basic needs detaches the individual from the body that used to be the *master*: this has to occur so that the body does not punish through pain and suffering. At this stage, the body does not help the person, but the person serves the body.

As Maslow describes the second level of needs, the child is closer than the adult to the instinct and origin. If "a child needs a world rather organised than an unorganised and unstructured one" (Maslow, 1943:p.377), we deduce that the original universe is an organised and structured one. The beautiful, being part of the original universe, must be the same.

It would have been expected that those who have constantly satisfied the needs of the first four steps from Maslow's pyramid to be able to value their creativity at the highest level (Maslow, 1943:p.383). As most people are at the same time partially satisfied and partially not satisfied within the basic needs (Maslow, 1943:p.388), one understands that, for many people, the path to creativity is short-circuited. Consequently, we will have around us *beautiful* objects made by creative people because they express their creativity as an emerging stage in the process of satisfying their needs, respectively *beautiful* objects made by people who have challenged their creativity despite all the vicissitudes they have borne. Maslow believed, and so do we, that it is possible to clearly distinguish the artistic or intellectual product of the person basically satisfied from the one made by the basically not satisfied person (Maslow, 1943:p.383). There are also people more creative despite not having achieved or satisfied their basic needs than those who have all of them being satisfied (Maslow, 1943:p.386).

Although, in most of the analysed cases in order to identify the hierarchy of these needs, the order is that mentioned above – physiological > security > affection > self-esteem > personal plenitude need - this is not the same for everyone, as there are cases where the order is reversed (Maslow, 1943:p.386). Finally, as Maslow said that the theory of human motivation sought to explain the purpose and not the means (Maslow, 1943:p.370), we also believe that the purpose of our theory is to understand and produce the beautiful and to a lesser measure justify why it does not appear or why it is missing within an item. Regardless of the position of the beautiful among human needs, when

a specialist conceives a thing, they must have the senses directed towards the beautiful to incorporate it into the proposal. The vocation, the profession or the opportunity empowers the specialist to respond to the challenge of creating any item to satisfy the client and make the world a more beautiful and fulfilled place.

The beautiful is one of the reasons for a human to value themselves at a higher level, to maximise their skills. The goal of producing the beautiful is to gain the feelings and the long-lasting positive states that it attracts.

For most people, to create or to desire the beautiful is an unconscious motivation (Maslow, 1943:p.370). According to the intensity or importance of the rest of the aspects relevant for the creation of that item, the beautiful will be taken into account to a higher or a lower degree. The occurrence of the beautiful is made in parallel to satisfying one's needs according to the intensity of its attached urgency (Maslow, 1943:p.394–395). If one is preoccupied with satisfying their basic needs, they will not have the resources to care about what brings them profound pleasure and well-being.

In Fig. 2, this pyramid of basic human needs, as identified by Maslow, is displayed.

5 A reconsideration on the theory of beauty

Following the study we built on previously exposed, supported and denied definitions, concepts, and views on the beautiful, a reconsidered perspective was issued, which is a theory of the beautiful and human evolution. It consists of the following four statements:

1. The aesthetic failure in practice, in arts and science, particularly in architecture, is due to the beautiful's importance that is disregarded or insufficiently embedded in the proposal.
2. The beautiful is valued according to the level of evolution of both the person or society that the aesthetic object is designed for and the professional producer's evolution.

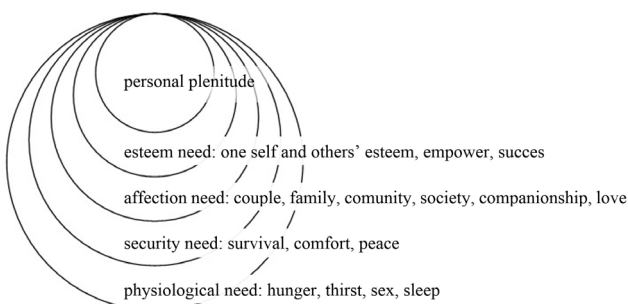


Fig. 2 The Pyramid of human needs, as identified by Abraham Maslow

3. The level of evolution of the person or society is parallel to Maslow's scale (Maslow, 1943). The more one satisfies these needs, the more they evolve.
4. The evolved individual will be more creative, will understand the beautiful and will be able to produce it to a greater extent. The beautiful is a quality of the object that is understood or produced by the individual to the extent of their level of development.

This theory is schematised in Fig. 3.

The beauty generates and maintains the feeling of sensual, emotional or psychological pleasure to the observer and thus increases the quality of his life, creating a pleasant environment for them to develop from child to adult and to evolve from the simple human condition to the individual who thinks and is aware of the complexity of the world which they live (Tatarkiewicz, 1972:p.178).

6 Conclusion

Just as all the mentioned aestheticians and many others who were unfortunately not cited in this paper and would have enriched the overview through the paths that each opens, we also tried to give this definition of the beautiful a consistent form, as an extension of its conceptual development.

Since the beautiful is part of our being before we even become aware of it, the unifying and revised theory of beauty exposed in this paper also has an instinctual and intuitive approach.

Nobody should stay indifferent to the rich aesthetic and artistic heritage of his time. Instead, we should explore and value it, thus creating a more beautiful and more

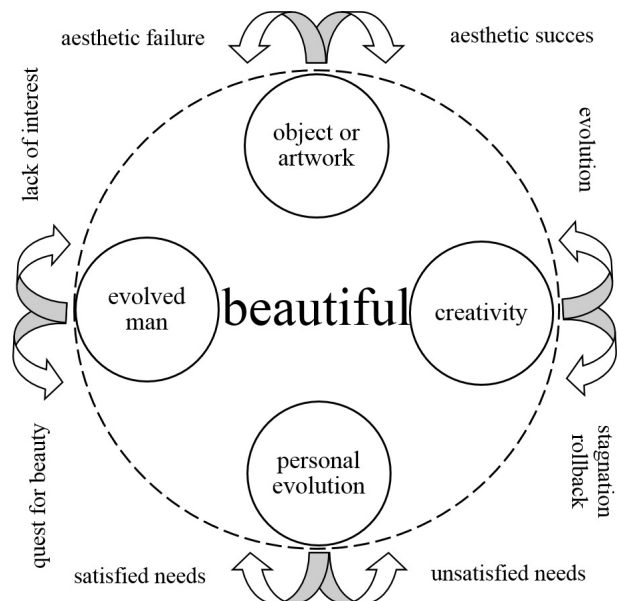


Fig. 3 The scheme of the Theory of beauty and man's evolution

fulfilled life, overcoming the apparent or temporary lacking. The beautiful will satisfy more needs at the same time.

Instead of building boundaries while assessing an item, one should better appreciate it by understanding its qualities. Of course, any labelling of an object must be done after identifying and exploring it deeply enough to describe it according to the truth. Nevertheless, no matter how thoroughly we believe in having done that, there is room for more knowledge and deeper understanding; consequently, another view can always be more objective than ours.

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