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Aesthetic Boredom: The Case of Architecture

We often hear or say that certain buildings or architectonic structures are ‘boring.’ The purpose of this paper is to suggest a possible explanation about the meaning of these expressions. I propose to consider this as a form of aesthetic boredom, in particular as the anti-thesis of what I call the aesthetic emotion of inhabitability, which is distinctive of our everyday aesthetic appreciation of architecture and, by extension, of built environments. Inhabitability is our emotional response to—i.e. has as its intentional object—the aesthetic quality of spaces that I call inhabitability. Inhabitability is the quality of a space which we experience as being responsible for enhancing (qualitatively) the experience of realizing, or the anticipation of realizing, activities that are significant for us in that space. As an emotion, inhabitability shares with other ordinary emotions their central components: an evaluative perception that admits degrees, noticeable physiological changes, and a disposition to act. As an aesthetic emotion, inhabitability discriminates in a pre-reflective fashion a good for us (i.e. inhabitability) which is not such for practical or survival purposes but rather for the quality of our life. Inhabitability can explain also what we usually call our emotional attachment to larger built environments such as a city or a neighborhood--which implies that such an attachment is of an aesthetic nature and that its comparative strength reveals the comparatively better quality of the life we led in that particular city. Our aesthetic boredom towards spaces would be our response to the imperceptibility of any inhabitability in that space. This imperceptibility does not mean absence of an emotional response. In fact, quite often we also refer to these spaces—or think of them—as being painful. A painful place would be one that would range between being of insignificant and of negative inhabitability for us. These could be places that might not enhance in any noticeable way the quality of the experience of realizing the activities we must do, or we choose to do, in them (insignificant inhabitability); or places in which our experience of doing (or trying to do) certain activities have a negative quality. Notice that

more often than not we respond negatively (emotionally speaking) to zero-possibilities spaces rather than with indifference. This could be an expression of our constant desire (and even assumption) to find inhabitability in the spaces we encounter, and of the significance we assign to finding it. Our (negative) response could be explained as a response, not to not having encountered possibilities, but rather, as it were, to having lost them—i.e. to realizing that there are none where there should be some. Although this is always a personal issue, an empty factory building, a house in ruins, a prison cell, or a landfill, could be examples of zero-possibilities—i.e., boring or painful in the sense above--spaces for some.