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Reply to Larry Shiner on architecture

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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(A) Larry Shiner address some central issues about architecture in particular, he is interested in the extent to which architectural beauty is dependent on, or independent of, various functions of buildings. What role does or should our knowledge of the functions of a building play in our aesthetic appreciation of it?

I would say that a building may have various functions in addition to its aesthetic functions. One crucial question is over the way that the aesthetic and nonaesthetic functions may be interwoven, so that there may be the "aesthetic expression" of nonaesthetic functions, which is also an aesthetic function of the building.

I think that there are important unsolved and unresolved issues here, of great importance in aesthetics. What exactly is it to be beautiful as something with a function. What, exactly, is the aesthetic realization of a nonaesthetic function?

I hoped to make a start on these matters by invoking the notion of "dependent beauty", roughly as Kant described it, but perhaps with some recasting. I am pleased that Shiner appreciates the utility of the Kantian dependent beauty framework for thinking about certain substantive debates about architecture. A theoretical framework should have fruitful and illuminating application in particular cases. Recasting the form/function debates in architecture as debates about different kinds of function, I think, is helpful, especially because the framework allows for more or less aesthetically significant interaction between pure aesthetic and nonaesthetic functions. Shiner pursues some architectural debates in this framework; he is especially insightful on issues about the reuse of buildings.

(B) In *Metaphysics of Beauty*, I raised a worry about how to specify exactly *which* functions are relevant to the aesthetic assessment of architecture. *Architectural* assessment is broader than *aesthetic* assessment; leaking roofs are an architectural defect but not (usually) an aesthetic defect of a building. But then which nonaesthetic functions *do* impact on aesthetic virtue? Shiner thinks that I worry too much about this. But there are surely

limits to the nonaesthetic functions that admit of aesthetic expression. And we need to police those limits, or at least have some idea where they are.

Shiner allows more specificity than merely being a building, and this seems right. Some buildings are beautiful as specific types of buildings. For example, I might allow that a building is beautiful as a religious building. But then I might not allow further specification of the type of religious building (mosque, church or Buddhist shrine, for example). We must carefully distinguish this issue from the issue of whether a building might be a good work of *architecture* as a mosque, church, Buddhist shrine. This is consistent with the idea that it cannot be *beautiful* as a mosque but not as a church or Buddhist shrine.

(C) Shiner asks whether a functional defect can be an aesthetic defect. I answer: "No" (in that sense of function). It could indeed be a defect in a work of *architecture* or in the *building*. For a work of architecture or building may have many values and functions apart from aesthetic ones. It may be an aesthetic defect if a building fails in the *aesthetic expression* of nonaesthetic functions. But expressing or not expressing the nonaesthetic function is independent of whether the building in fact discharges the nonaesthetic function.

So I would query Shiner's formulation of his thesis that "the specific practical functions of a building [cannot have] zero weight in an overall aesthetic judgement". Shiner thinks that ordinary functional faults are *aesthetic* flaws of the building (by analogy with what is known as "moderate moralism"). But the point of the notion of dependent beauty is to allow for the aesthetic expression of a certain function even though the building fails to discharge that function. (Hence I think that my "moderate formalism" is not helpfully associated with "moderate moralism".) An aesthetic judgement about a work of art may not ignore how nonaesthetic functions are *expressed*. But it may ignore whether they are effectively *served*. This is not the case in an assessment or evaluation of a building as a work of *architecture*, since there is more to a work of architecture than its aesthetic functions. Buildings are multifunctional objects; an assessment of such an object must take all its functions into account. Aesthetic functions are a subclass of a building's functions. But they may stand in complex and varying relations to its nonaesthetic functions. Shiner's essay certainly helps us with the exploration of some of these relations.

Let me take this opportunity to thank Ewa Bogusz-Boltuc for the honour of arranging this symposium on my work and for eliciting six stimulating essays.