INTERFACE: ON BEAUTY

Introduction

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Planning in the Name of Beauty

'Beauty', a term that almost defies definition, can be highly emotive in its use: more emotive, we posit, than many other commonplace terms used to frame thinking about the future of space and place. Thus, the relationship between beauty, decision making and the city has a complex history. This complexity invites critical engagement and, therefore, we are surprised that the subject of beauty receives relatively sparse coverage in planning literature. Is this perhaps because much of planning is focused on what is perceived, or defined, as objective, and accepted as part of the planning framework, even where value judgements are actually involved? What interests us, therefore, is what role does, *and should*, an emotive term like beauty have in shaping contemporary practice, and with what effect? Contributions from both practice and academia presented in this *Interface* respond to these questions, and in so doing proffer important contributions on how ideas of beauty are impacting planning theory, practice and decision making. This matters because, as we begin to expose in this introduction, the innate challenge of beauty is that its promulgation can have both oppressive and emancipatory intent.

Urban planning history depicts the waxing and waning of the presence of beauty as an overt purpose, or 'motivation' (MacDonald, 2012) for planning. Most recently, England's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC, 2020) proffered a very specific, and historicized version of beauty as an explicit outcome for planning. Whilst some perceive the

pursuit of beauty as contributing positively to societies and social justice (Scarry, 2010), this belief is disputed.

Plato famously suggests exiling artists and poets, including Homer, from his ideal city because he believed they create untrue ideas leaving impressions that harm justice (Plato, 2012). However, 'creating impressions' has long been an integrated part of managing and planning cities. More authoritarian politicians have been keen to erect buildings with specific impressions. Peter the Great founded Saint Petersburg as a political statement representing his power (Berman, 1983). Saddam Hussein's Umm al-Qura Mosque, Francois Mitterrand's *Grands Projets*, and even Tony Blair's millennium dome materialise their ideologies (Sudjic, 2006). However, the ideologies presented in buildings will not necessarily be received as intended. Dostoyevsky thought that Saint Petersburg was too abstract in being "*the most theoretical and intentional town on the whole terrestrial globe*" (2011, p. 4) but Pushkin saw the celebrated bronze statue of Peter the Great in the heart of Saint Petersburg as a glorious symbol of beauty as well as of despotic power (1982).

Impressions created in cities can become spectacles and then progress to being commodities (Debord, 2005). That impression then tends to generate a sense of beauty "*The image is the commodity today, ..., that is why, finally, all beauty today is meretricious and the appeal to it by contemporary pseudo-aestheticism IS an ideological manoeuvre*" (Jameson, 1998, p. 135). This is why beauty can be understood in relation to capital (as a commodity) and at the same time as a part of culture production processes in cities (Cuthbert, 2007, pp. 186–192). Thus the *ideological manoeuvre* of beauty is intrinsically political. Hal Foster questions "*the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose,' all but beyond history*" suggesting that "*aesthetic space too is eclipsed- or rather, that its criticality is now largely illusory*" (Foster, 1983, p. xv). Therefore we cannot ask why something is beautiful without exploring "whose interests it serves and how it has been valued" (Felski, 2006, p. 136), or its varying consequences for people based on their class, gender and ethnicity. For example, Jackson (2020) shows how racism weaponises aesthetics.

These debates are present and interrogated in the pieces presented here. Carr exposes the need for precise language for decision making, and thus the challenge beauty poses. The 're-injection' of beauty into policy making in England, is interrogated by Simmons who encourages us to think about the aesthetic preferences of power elites' and the way in which

beauty is 'deployed', a matter which is implicitly picked up by Gassner in contemplating the weaponizing of beauty: beauty becoming a tool to achieve ends beyond the aesthetic. Edmonds further develops Gassner's probing of 'Western norms of beauty and white standards' by questioning the 'dominant framing' of beauty as a 'visual expression of aesthetic taste' and introducing alternative functions of beauty, such as that of Australian indigenous people. In her piece 'Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?' Ryser raises important questions about the subjectivity of beauty and therefore 'whose' beauty may be codified in rules and regulations. Also a practitioner, Souri takes us to Iran and Germany to consider the way in which municipalities seek to feature beauty in their interventions, and raises significant questions about the relationship between urban-design and beauty, questions which are addressed by Biddulph . He discusses where beauty might be positioned relative to the many design issues that planning systems consider, making important connections to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

We hope that this *Interface* acts as a prompt for further debate and reflection about the practical and political implications of a term which seems so unquestioningly positive on face value.

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A Legal Challenge to 'Beauty' in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021

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This article seeks to examine the legal implications of the inclusion of the term 'beauty', as regards the built environment, in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') 2021. The NPPF sets out central government's planning policies and how they are expected to be applied by local authorities[1] in England. References to beauty in the NPPF 2021 have doubled compared to 2019 which used the term five times, exclusively with reference to the natural environment or open space. Contrastingly, the five new mentions refer to beauty in the built environment[2], implying that not only does the government see beauty in the built environment as a separate category to beauty in the natural environment, but that the former is equally important to central government planning policy.

There has been discussion of beauty in the planning movement for over 150 years, for example in the works of John Ruskin (1877) and the Garden Cities Movement (1913). There are also many references to beauty in the natural environment across the history of planning policy and law[3]. However, historic references to beauty in the built environment in policy and law are rare, possibly because previous generations of planners, lawyers and law makers understood that beauty in the natural environment is not reliant on human intervention, whereas the built environment is necessarily dependent on an individual or organisational conception of beauty, which may not chime with others' conceptions.

[1] Ministry of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2021

[2] Paragraphs 8(b); 73(c); 125; 126; 128. : As part of the definition of sustainable development and the overall social objectives of the planning system

[3] See, for example, protection of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and before that the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

In this piece, I shall argue that references to beauty in the NPPF 2021 are either superfluous and unnecessarily conflated with good design or amenity, or they indicate an ill thought out and undefined policy direction. With reference to two recent planning appeals I conclude that either scenario is likely to cause difficulties in both legal and planning decision making.

The NPPF is a material consideration that can weigh heavily in planning decisions[4]. Indeed, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, introduced to Parliament on 11th May 2022, gives the NPPF equal, and in some circumstances greater, weight than a local development plan[5]. Under current planning law, as a result of its inclusion in the NPPF, the term 'beauty' is a material consideration in the contexts of sustainable development, major housing schemes, density, and good design. Beauty's inclusion in the NPPF is a result of the government's response to the 'Living with Beauty' report by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission published in January 2020. In it, the authors recommended the planning system 'ask for beauty' and 'refuse ugliness'.

The Commission's definition of beauty is not included in the NPPF or in planning legislation. It is doubtful that the term can be defined in the context of planning or that it would be desirable to do so. Beauty is an emotive and mutable term, which changes from beholder to beholder and from context to context[6]. The effect of defining beauty in policy or legislation would be to fix it temporally and attach it to one person's or institution's conception of beauty. This would not be desirable as conceptions of beauty develop over time and differ between individuals, places and contexts. Whilst the planning system can seek to look forwards, for example by ensuring new buildings are environmentally sustainable, it cannot predict what future generations will see as beautiful. Similarly, if planners are to 'refuse ugliness' they will inevitably do so based on their own, contemporary understanding of beauty, leading to decisions which may be based on unexamined or misguided prejudices.

[4] National Planning Policy Guidance 2021, Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 21b-006-20190315
[5] Sections 5(A)-(C) Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, 2022
[6] David Hume, Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays, 1757

Beauty, as it appears in the NPPF does not simply mean 'good design' or 'amenity'. These differences are clearly recognised by the authors of the NPPF as they use the three terms separately and not interchangeably. Good design in the NPPF has recognisable criteria[7], whereas beauty does not. Similarly, there have been planning cases that actively distinguish amenity from beauty[8]. Whilst the definition of 'amenity' has been problematic over the history of planning disputes, there are two key differences from the problems around defining beauty. First, amenity is not nearly as emotive a term as beauty. Secondly, amenity in planning terms is widely understood as referring to a quality or character of an area, contributing to its overall enjoyment, whereas no such understanding exists as regards beauty.

Beauty has been raised as an issue in two recent planning appeals, the legal mechanism by which an applicant can appeal to the Secretary of State (through appointed planning inspectors) against a refusal of planning permission or against the terms on which permission is granted. On both occasions the inspector has recognised the difficulties associated with the term and avoided dealing with it. The first relates to a mixed-use scheme for 144 flats in Ealing[9]. In this appeal, one of the parties placed great emphasis on the concept of beauty. The planning inspector concluded as follows:

"There is I believe something of a tension between identifying a building as an exemplary piece of design which is an objective finding based on established architectural principles, and adorning a building with the epithet 'beautiful', which is a subjective one. To my mind, my finding that the building would attain a very high (or exemplary) standard of design is sufficient to justify a conclusion that the proposal does not fall foul of Government advice on the subject in the Framework, the National Design Guide, and the National Model Design Code."[10]

[7] For example, the National Design Guide 2019 and National Model Design Code 2021.
[8] *R (Lisle-Mainwaring) v Isleworth Crown Court and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea* [2017] EWHC 904 (Admin)
[9] Appeal Ref: APP/A5270/W/21/3268157
[10] Paragraph 23

This seems to suggest that, in the Inspector's view at least, the advice on beauty in the NPPF is repetitious of its advice on good design. However, it should be recognised that this is not necessarily the case, for reasons already mentioned. A second occasion in which 'beauty' in the NPPF has been raised is in the planning inspectorate's recommendation for refusal of 'the Tulip' scheme in the City of London[11]. At [14.82] the Inspector said:

"I did not pursue the notion of beautiful found in the draft NPPF. It is evident, for all the reasons that they set out, that the Appellant and its supporters consider that the scheme would be beautiful while objectors think it would not. While I certainly accept that innovative designs can be beautiful, in other regards I consider that the concept of beauty or otherwise for this appeal is in the eye of the beholder and that any further discussion is unlikely to be helpful."

This quote offers further insight. Once again, the Inspector assessed the equation of beauty with good design, accepting that good or innovative design *can* be beautiful but that need not necessarily be the case. He then goes on to suggest that, due to the subjectivity of the term, 'beauty' is unlikely to be a helpful concept in planning appeals.

Beauty's status as a material consideration in planning decisions raises the issue of the weight decision makers should give to the criterion. As can be seen from the two appeals, the outcome is likely to be that the term becomes an often ignored and therefore unnecessary inclusion in the text of the NPPF that can be easily equated with good design or amenity. However, planning decision makers should be wary of ignoring it. By its inclusion as a separate and distinct term, beauty is a material consideration in its own right. Therefore, by ignoring it decision makers may find they have fallen foul of the statutory imperatives in s.70 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and s.38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, meaning that a decision may be open to statutory[12] or judicial[13] review.

[11] Appeal Ref: APP/K5030/W/20/3244984
[12] Section 288 Town and Country Planning Act 1990
[13] Section 31 Senior Courts Act 1981

The task of interpreting the term 'beauty' in the NPPF on a day-to-day basis will fall to planners. However, planners' interpretations of terms such as beauty can be challenged in the courts[14] [15]. There are already many terms in the planning system that require interpretation, such as 'openness'[16] [17] or 'special regard'[18]. It is a cornerstone of public law that when faced with an issue of interpretation in planning policy or legislation, the courts will, so far as possible, attempt to interpret words and expressions in an ordinary, everyday manner, whilst avoiding absurdity and ambiguity. The difficulty in applying these principles to a term such as 'beauty' is clear – beauty cannot be read in an 'ordinary' or 'everyday' manner when its meaning and conceptualisation is so fluid.

The implication of the inclusion of the term 'beauty' in the NPPF 2021, and especially in such key paragraphs, is that the term is enshrined at the heart of national planning policy. The lack of definition ultimately leads to the type of confusion the courts could normally step into resolve. However, with a term like beauty they may be unable to. Furthermore, the use of the term in the creation of design codes leads to the perpetuation of unacknowledged prejudices and the undue dominance of a notion of beauty from one section of a community responsible for the creation of design codes.

National policy makers should avoid the inclusion of superfluous language in the NPPF, especially terms as emotive and fluid as beauty. Alternatively, if the use of beauty is purposive, it is incumbent upon national policy makers to define the term to avoid confusion and inconsistency in decision making. It may appear controversial to suggest that 'beauty' should not factor into decisions relating to the built environment. However, I have argued in this piece that whilst planning can, and should, concern itself with achieving good design and amenity, it

[14] *Tesco Stores Ltd v Dundee City Council (Scotland)* [2012] UKSC 13
[15] *Suffolk Coastal District Council (Appellant) v Hopkins Homes Ltd and anor* [2017] UKSC 37
[16] *Heath & Hampstead Society v LB of Camden* [2007] EWHC 977
[17] R *(Timmins and Lymn Family Funeral Service) v. Gedling Borough Council and Westerleigh Group Limited* [2015] EWCA Civ 110
[18] *Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited v. East Northamptonshire District Council and Others* [2014] EWCA Civ 137

should not concern itself with beauty. Beauty is temporally and individually mutable and is therefore ill suited to decisions which affect many people over a long period.

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Oliver Carr is a PhD student at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. Before undertaking his PhD, Oliver qualified as a barrister with a particular interest in planning and public law. Oliver's PhD research focuses on the contributions of judges and case law to spatial planning in the United Kingdom.

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Power Elites as Arbiters of Design Quality and Beauty in the Built Environment – the English experience Since 1947

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> "To create solid and stable convictions in the minds of the uncultured masses there must be something which appeals to the eye; […] if the authority of the Holy See were visibly displayed in majestic buildings [...] belief would grow." (Pope Nicholas V, cited in Duffy, 1997, p139)

Pope Nicholas V captures the premise that, historically, European power elites defined and manipulated beauty for their own ends. Is England today different with policy inserting 'beauty' into planning? (MHCLG, 2021, p. 38) As an academic and practitioner, I ask whether modern power elites influence planners' engagement with aesthetics, using the English planning system as a case study. My interest stems from being, from September 2004 until March 2011, Chief Executive of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the UK government's adviser on architecture, urban design and public space in England. [19]

Arbitrating 'good design' preoccupied the powerful for millennia. Feng Shui in ancient China and more recent interventions in Britain and the USA (Carmona et al., 2017, p4; Lubbock, 1995) are examples. Often a contested prerogative, English planning's aesthetic controls are no exception. They have been a political football since a left-wing Labour government

[19] CABE operated only in England. The UK's three devolved administrations formed similar bodies: Architecture + Design Scotland, the Design Commission for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment. They continue to operate in 2022.

enabled them in 1947 (H.M. Government, 1947, S.12 et seq.). Arguments against state intervention - artistic freedom, consumer choice, deregulation, landowners' rights - tend to align with libertarian-Right agendas. Those in favour have been more pluralist: making cities safer, healthier and more efficient; promoting national prestige;[20] beauty for art's sake; 'cultural belief in the moral agency of civic art (U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, accessed 2022, 24 June).

UK Governments since 1947, e.g., Labour in 1970 (Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Welsh Office, 1970) and e.g., right-wing Conservative in 1980 (Department of the Environment, 1980) restricted planners' intervention in aesthetics, often arguing that developers know better than public bodies. At other times both parties swung contrariwise, e.g., in 1994 (Department of the Environment, 1994), 1997 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 1997), and notably in 1990, when Conservative planning minister Chris Patten (Royal Fine Art Commission, 1990) repudiated his party's 1980 edict against interfering in design (Department of the Environment, 1980), and in 1999 when Labour created CABE.

In 1924, an interventionist Conservative minister established the Royal Fine Art Commission (RFAC) as governmental adviser on architectural quality. Populated by the aristocratic, professional and political "great and good", it was eventually seen as patrician and elitist (Carmona & Renninger, 2018). In 1999, Labour replaced it with CABE. Though not aristocratic, some claimed CABE was still elitist (Carmona et al., 2017, pp. 120 & 157).

Before its abolition in 2011 by the Conservatives, in coalition with centrist Liberal

[20] See e.g., the correspondence and articles in the London *Times* between 19 July 1858 and 19 August 1859 arguing whether the new Foreign Office ministry building in London should be designed in the Classical, Gothic or 17th Century European style

Democrats,[21] ostensibly to save money (Hansard, 2012), CABE advised on the design content of a new National Planning Policy Framework,[22] arguably the clearest mandate yet that planning must deliver good design (DCLG, 2012, Ch.12). After decades of political tennis, a Conservative leadership reinforced design's place in planning policy.

One way CABE exerted influence was by publishing assessments of design quality using broadly agreed criteria. England's housing market is, unusually, dominated by owner occupation. Annually, around 43% of owner occupier homes are built by only six developers.[23] This puts them and half-a-dozen smaller volume producers in a powerful position to manage markets, influence government, and pressurise planners to permit standard designs. Perceptions that this was detrimental to quality led CABE to audit housing design between 2004 and 2007 (CABE, 2007). This showed that, with honourable exceptions, these housebuilders' architecture and placemaking were mediocre or poor. CABE persuaded some to improve design: usually ones hoping to improve market perception or get easier planning permissions. Others remained intractable, rejecting CABE's advice (Carmona et al., 2017). Today they still argue that, guided by markets, they know best (e.g, Tutte, 2020), focusing on homes as consumer products, with small regard for placemaking (Place Alliance, 2020). As one said: "Developers do not need everyone to love their homes - just the people

[21] CABE ceased to be a public body on 31 March 2011, merging with the Design Council as a non-governmental charity, shedding c. 100 staff, with c. 20 transferring to the new body. Department of Culture, Media and Sport funding was withdrawn on transition. Limited Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government funding ended three years later. CABE's brand was absorbed into the Design Council's and discontinued. (Author's personal experience and Carmona, 2017)

[22] Author's personal experience

[23] E.g., in 2021 the government recorded 145,086 "private enterprise" completions (*Table 213: permanent dwellings started and completed, by tenure, England (quarterly)*. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building); Gardiner reported 62,316 completions by the six biggest companies (Gardiner, J. (2021, 17 December). Top 35 Housebuilders. *Housing Today*). https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/story.aspx?storyCode=5115234&preview=1&hash=DCD1D60A98A86CC7112B45D1E8463F7C). Both accessed 2022, June 25

that want to buy them," (Smith, 2020). A Place Alliance housing audit shows this problem persists, with only modest progress since 2007 (Ibid.)

The Conservatives faced the ongoing political challenge of a long housing affordability crisis, with prices out of reach for younger people. Owner-occupiers' votes are their bedrock, so they wanted to increase support by growing supply for younger buyers, while keeping on side their traditional base of older, wealthier home-owners. They, though, frequently object to poor, standard designs, "built for nowhere, but found everywhere" (Ashworth, 2007). Meanwhile, planning authorities struggled to obtain better design while ministers pushed them to permit more homes faster, mainly for sale by volume housebuilders (Place Alliance, 2020). Budget cuts and failures to prioritise design meant planning departments often lacked skilled designers to deliver the NPPF's demands (Carmona & Giordano, 2017, 2021). Without CABE to help fill the skills gap, government had to look anew at the problem. In 2015, to placate objectors, the coalition government set up a panel to improve housing design (Design South East, 2015). Leading the panel were "[…] folksy architecture tsar Terry Farrell, […] the prince [of Wales]'s pet classical architect, Quinlan Terry, and philosopher Roger Scruton, a vocal opponent of modern buildings (Wainwright, 2015)." The panel made little headway.

The government's response to this failure was to inject beauty into policy, bringing about a complex interaction between power elites' aesthetic preferences and developers' dogmatism which is still playing out in mid-2022. Design policy in CABE's time eschewed the word beauty. Beauty is not universal coinage. The New Zealand Urban Design protocol doesn't mention it (Ministry for the Environment/Manatū Mō Te Taiao, 2005). The French Conseils speak of 'la qualité de l'architecture, de l'urbanisme et de l'environnement' rather than 'le beauté'. (Conseils d'Architecture, d'Urbanisme et de l'Environment,). Still, it is used

internationally. The US Commission of Fine Arts, born of the City Beautiful movement, seeks beauty (U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, accessed 2022, 24 June). Chinese 'Characteristic Towns' must exhibit beauty (Zou & Zhao, 2018, p. 1064).

Yet 'beauty' was excised from Richard Rogers's Urban Task Force report by civil servants under Labour (Rogers, 2017). CABE was discouraged from mentioning it.[24] Rogers was told: "'If you want to get anywhere in politics you can't use the word beauty'. I was told it was too subjective." This despite the RFAC publishing, in 1990, *Planning for Beauty*, commending design guidelines (Hillman, 1990). Chris Patten expressed interest (Royal Fine Art Commission, 1990) but beauty vanished from official vocabulary. In 2005, in opposition, Conservative strategist Oliver Letwin did call for politics to be conducted "as if beauty matters" (Letwin, 2005), but without immediate impact. Then, with the Conservatives in office, in 2016:

> Transport minister John Hayes […] made a startling attack on the quality of modern British architecture during a speech on 'beauty in transport' […] [He] said the majority of public architecture built in the last 60 years was 'aesthetically worthless, simply because it [was] ugly'. Citing […] Roger Scruton[…] Hayes promised an end to the 'Cult of Ugliness' and that his mission was to ensure 'beauty' was at the heart of every new transport scheme (Waite, 2016).

It is instructive that Hayes praised the Prince of Wales's attacks on Modernism, quoting a Prince's Foundation finding that "84% of those asked want new buildings to reflect historic form, style and materials" (Wainwright, 2015), as the Prince advocates (e.g., HRH The Prince

[24] Author's personal experience

of Wales, 2003, p. 8)[25]. Scruton (2009), a philosopher who championed traditional aesthetics was quoted in a Prince's Foundation publication about traditional urbanism (Murrain, 2003, p. 14). Later, excoriating "modernist starchitects", he praised two of the Prince's favourite architects, Terry and Robert Adam, (Scruton, 2011).

Accentuating beauty seems to have been driven substantially by the influence of the Prince, Scruton, and Conservative policy innovators Jack Airey, from right-leaning think tank Policy Exchange (PEX), and Nicholas Boys Smith, ex-Conservative policy adviser turned campaigner for traditional streets. In 2018 ministers appointed Scruton to chair a 'Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission' (BBBBC) to raise design quality. 'Beautiful' revived the Letwin thread and locked onto *Building More, Building Beautiful* (Airey et al., 2018), a PEX report making explicit the expectation that beautiful developments would be less objectionable to their neighbours. This is the nexus between beauty and the Conservative goal of expanding England's 'property-owning' democracy to grow support for their party (Owen, 2019). By defining 'beauty' as, essentially, traditional design they entwined an ostensibly unobjectionable goal (beauty) with the aspirations of a power elite.

PEX urged the BBBBC on with two 2019 publications, one including an essay by a Prince's Foundation director (Airey, 2019; Airey, Ed., 2019). On Scruton's death, the BBBBC's chair passed to Boys Smith. An interim report stressed its advisers' expertise (one from the Prince's Foundation; Hayes as 'Parliamentary link'), and that the Commission would not dictate style (BBBBC, 2019, p. 14). Nevertheless, a Commissioner told me they wanted "conservative

[25] The Prince of Wales has a long history of 'meddling' in architecture in favour of traditional design (Waite, R. (2018, 8 November). Prince Charles says he will not 'meddle' in architecture once King.' (*Architects Journal*)

solutions"[26], and the report was influenced by Scruton's traditionalism (e.g., Op. Cit., p. 11).

Their final report advocated numerous policy changes. It was influential not least because Airey had become a Prime Ministerial adviser. Boys Smith was said to be involved in drafting policies.[27] Obligatory design coding, advocated by the Prince's Foundation (2003, pp.44-48), was adopted through an update to the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021).

Coding has roots in obligations aristocratic estates placed on tenants to secure long-term value, and is championed by the Congress for New Urbanism (Murrain, 2003, p. 15). The Prince of Wales, an advocate for the Congress (H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, 2003, p. 8), uses it on his estates (E.g., Duchy of Cornwall, 2019). One features on the cover of the 2020 Planning White Paper (MHCLG, 2020). Boys Smith (2021), appointed head of a government 'Office for Place' in 2021 to drive design improvement, has indicated that objectives for promoting beauty include overcoming fear of development and simplifying planning as well as better placemaking. As such, it embodies the agenda to build more housing.

This paper is not, though, about the merits of the BBBBC's proposals. It's about whether the beauty agenda is controlled by power elites, as in Nicholas V's time, or a broader constituency. You can't get more elite than the Prince of Wales. His influence on government and the BBBBC isn't hidden. The RFAC was populated by elites. CABE comprised a more consistently professional elite. Some ex-CABE people advised the BBBBC, which included members close to the government's ideology. So, it's arguable that Nicholas V is still with us in spirit.

[26] Author's personal experience

[27] Information provided to the author by confidential sources within government

There's a difference, though. Nicholas saw the masses as uncultured beauty fodder. Today, elites turn to them through surveys, studies and market intelligence (e.g., housebuilders' attempts to prove they know best about design) to learn what people want or, perhaps, reinforce their elite's arguments for a particular aesthetic. Discerning what people see as beautiful is complex, as CABE's research on popular notions of beauty found (Ipsos MORI, 2010): it would be easy for confirmation bias towards one's favoured styles to creep in. Something certain modern elites do have in common with our Renaissance Pope is a desire for beauty to serve ends other than aesthetics. 2022's Conservative government wants to solve a housing affordability crisis to increase party support. Nicholas V would definitely recognise its deployment of beauty to serve that aim.

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Beauty as Violence

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In this short article I look at the recent interest in beauty in planning through the lens of violence. In the UK, concerns with urban beauty go hand in hand with a "lurch to the right" (Bielik, 2019) and the mainstreaming of right-wing politics (Mondon & Winter, 2020). This does not mean that those urban designers and planners who envisage 'beautiful' developments identify – necessarily or overtly – with right-wing politics. But when 'experts' and powerful institutions decide who and what is "highly pleasing to the sight" and of "exceptional grace, elegance, or charm in appearance" (OED, 2022), then disagreement usually means exclusion. The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC, 2020) suggests that nothing should stop us "from building as beautiful as the Georgians and the Victorians", especially because we are "so much richer than they were?" (p. 13). In so doing, the commission not only establishes a causal link between economic and aesthetic values (see Gassner, 2020); it also reproduces Western norms of beauty and white standards. Such a statement is useful for those who see inequalities between people as natural and positive and who propagate such a perspective within or outside of mechanisms of representative democracy.

In December 2020, Donald Trump signed an executive order with which he imposed a return to the "architectural tradition derived from the forms, principles, and vocabulary of the architecture of Greek and Roman antiquity" for all federal buildings, disparaging modernist architecture as ugly and inconsistent (Kelly & Hoffman, 2020). As problematic as this order is, it is important to emphasise that architectural styles do not have explicit and consistent ties to the forces of political economy. Questions about proportions, scale, symmetry, architectural details, and materiality cannot be nailed down on the political spectrum (Trüby, 2017). While architecture is ideological and some of it is sponsored by and built for autocrats and authoritarian regimes, what defines right-wing spaces, more than anything else, is that

difference is subordinated to a central vision. This also means that aesthetic concerns are not necessarily reactionary. A radical approach to aesthetics democratises views, reaffirming that political change involves new ways of sensing the world. Such an approach brings to light who and what is marginalised in or excluded from a specific urban vision. Radical aesthetics, then, can be conceptualised as a battleground where urban struggles are played out; a field for irreducible dissensus that discloses what is (and is not) shared, common, and valued.

When this battleground is being ignored and voices are being silenced, then beauty turns violent. To unpack this claim, an extended conceptualisation of violence is required. We might understand violence as "the deliberative exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc." (OED, 2022) – a direct intervention by an actor that harms another individual, such as the killing of a person, a "'blow' […] between two parties in a heated encounter" (Butler, 2021, pp. 1f), or the smashing of a shop window. Crucially, however, urban space is not a neutral container in which violent actions take place. To critically explore not only relationships between beauty and violence but, furthermore, beauty as a type of violence, a shift from violence *in* space to violence *of* space is needed.

According to Johan Galtung (1969), "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p. 168). Whether there is a specific actor that commits the violence (personal, direct) or not (structural, indirect), "[i]n both cases individuals may be killed or mutilated, hit or hurt in both senses of the words, and manipulated by means of stick or carrot strategies" (Galtung, 1969, p. 170). Structural violence is built into the city, for example as ongoing disinvestment or exclusionary forms of investment in marginalised and racialised neighbourhoods. Urban planning produces and reproduces violence if it does not intervene in "unequal power and consequential […] unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969, p. 170) of different communities. When beauty's violence is being revealed, then it is usually considered as part of cultural violence. Galtung (1990) describes this type of violence as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence […] that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (p. 291). Beauty can also be a contributory cause of direct violence – for example when racial inequalities and representations of social groups create unbearable living

conditions. And it can make racialised structures and racism "look, even feel right – or at least not wrong" (Galtung, 1990, p. 291).

What follows from Galtung's account is that cultural, structural, and direct violence are distinct from each other and that they are interrelated. In fascist regimes these distinctions collapse. Nazi urban planning ideas – from the gigantic redevelopment plan for Berlin that drew on nineteenth-century City Beautiful movement ideas to de-densification strategies in other cities to 'kill' the diversity of urban life – showcase how beauty can be linked to a definition of what it is to be human that creates a chain of action from segregation, to ghettoisation, to annihilation. And when Walter Benjamin (2006) identified fascism as an aestheticisation of politics, then he emphasised how only physical destruction and death on a massive scale became spectacles that are intense enough to satisfy the political craving for socio-economic transformation without, however, changing the capitalist class structure (Gassner, 2021a). In such a regime, physical violence is not only glorified but different types of violence are inseparably tied together, resulting in an all-encompassing world of violence.

I understand Benjamin's notion of the aestheticisation of politics as a type of beautification and suggest that a distinction between aestheticisation and beautification is crucial for excavating the radical potential of the former in order to work against the authoritarian space-time that the latter produces (Gassner, 2021b). Radical aesthetics can intervene in a world of violence. What a radical aesthetic approach to current UK planning implies can be exemplified by introducing three aspects that counter the late Roger Scruton's view on the role of beauty in planning. Scruton was a key protagonist of traditional conservative views and co-chair of the BBBBC.

Beauty and harmony: For Scruton (2018), a beautiful city is a harmonious city, i.e. a city where a harmony of interests brings about visual and spatial harmony. The role of planning, according to him, is to bring back a lost harmony. In my view, such a harmony of interests does not exist and an image of harmony depoliticises the city by solidifying asymmetrical power relations. Such an image expels who and what cannot be easily incorporated in a pre-defined wholeness; or it imposes a set of norms and standards for whoever and whatever is forced to be included. When Scruton (2018) claims that judgments of beauty "are a necessary part of practical

reasoning in any attempt to harmonise our activities and ways of life with those of our neighbours" (p. 9), then he advocates the violent act of integration; not the annihilation of a group of people but, nonetheless, the definition and oppression of an 'other'.

Beauty and capitalism: Scruton (2018) alleges that planning should not be "'taking charge' of what happens and where" (p. 14) as this should and will be answered by the free market. He envisages planning "as a system of side-constraints" (Scruton, 2018, p. 14) and regards beauty as a particularly important constraint due to its "centrality to home-building and therefore to establishing a *shared* environment" (p. 11). According to him, a shared environment is one where a structure fits into an existing urban fabric, which is why he is highly critical of 'iconic' buildings that "stand apart from their surroundings, islands of Ego in a sea of Us" (Scruton, 2018, p. 12). In my opinion, these buildings are not solely, not even primarily, problematic because they visually stand out but because they naturalise a non-egalitarian distribution of power and resources (Gassner, 2020). They contribute to the urban skyline as a phantasmagoria of capitalist culture: a dazzling image that abstracts from the commodified urban landscape by promoting its further commodification (Gassner, 2017). In an inherently unjust city, both non-intervention and an intervention that does not reduce spatial injustices are violent processes.

Beauty and peace: For Scruton, an aesthetic judgement is not "an expression of individual taste" but "the expression of a community" that is "guided by a shared tradition" (Scruton, 2018, p. 10). His pacifist view of the past reduces histories to the history of the oppressor, and life worlds to 'the city'. Scruton chooses to ignore violent processes and promotes, with the help of beauty, an understanding of planning as a 'peace-keeping' endeavour. Acknowledging endemic forms of state and capitalist violence, I propose a conceptualisation of planning as an eventful practice that brings conflicts to the fore; a practice with peace as its horizon. Conflicts against violence! This slogan brings us closer to an understanding of what a radical intervention in the recent interest in beauty in planning can mean. What remains to be explored, then, are the aesthetic dimensions of these conflicts.

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On Beauty: Aboriginal Australians and the Particularity of Relationships to Place

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As an Australian Academic teaching in Architecture and Sustainable Design, and with practice experience in large scale public engagement and participatory design, this contribution seeks to highlight the different cultural interpretations of Beauty that contemporary planning might wish to consider. This contribution specifically highlights the cultural beliefs of Indigenous Australians and is informed by my time living for over a year in a remote Aboriginal Australian settlement in Australia's north where I conducted participatory planning contracted by the Northern Territory Government. That work is detailed in my 2020 book *Connecting People Place and Design*.

Whilst the dominant contemporary delineation of the world occurs through binary separations between what is present and what is history, and between what is 'nature' and what is not, these separations do not exist for Australian Indigenous Aboriginal cultures and this impacts how the notion of 'beauty' is framed. For Australian Aboriginal people, the so-called – 'inanimate' world is alive with 'being'. Hills and mountains are manifestations of creation beings- creatures from ancient stories, each with lessons to teach about the right way to live with the land and its people. The wind is alive with the spirits of the dead, and the plants and animals are in constant communication with us about both our lives and theirs (Lehman, 2008). When speaking of the significance of place, Aboriginal people refer to it as 'country'. This notion of 'country' also points to the discrete yet interconnected sociocultural and economic systems, each with responsibility for and with specific places. The point is that just like planning, this is a relationship of human systems of governance to place (Porter, 2017). It draws attention to the fundamental determination of *how we structure relatedness* (For further on this see Van Horn et al., 2022).

All ‘country’ is bound in an interrelated network of connected relationships. Each place has its own particular identity, life forms who call that spirit country their home and custodians whose job it is to keep everything ‘standing up alive’ (Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993). Custodial responsibilities ensure continued observation of both the ontological significance of place as the origin of all life, and practice of the balanced traditional law system that embodies its continuity. Consequently, for Australian Aboriginal cultures, beauty is framed in the embodiment of the values that underpin this ontological order, by contrast with the contemporary dominant framing of beauty as a surface visual expression of aesthetic taste. The Indigenous kinship system, which holds the world as a set of relationships where all is interconnected, demonstrates this by example. In drawing attention to the Western scientific bias toward visual definition of the qualities of being, Botanist and Potawatomi Nation member Robin Wall Kimmerer describes: “Science polishes the gift of seeing, [whilst] Indigenous traditions work with gifts of listening and language.” (Tippett, 2022).

Aboriginal custodians share identity with their place of origin, and their being is considered a continuation of that place. This network of relatedness and interdependency between people and places was confronted by colonial mapping techniques, which, on the assumption that the lands were ‘uninhabited’, promptly set about marking new boundaries unrelated to the deeper stories of the creation of those places. In the Indigenous cosmogony of every region in Australia, the foundation of names, spirits and ontological structure had already been established and existed within its own beautiful order of balanced relations. The imposition of naming and mapping in terms derived from another culture, as with the imposition that followed of considering land as personal property that could be owned, was overlaid upon that which was already there existing since creation times (Wensing & Porter, 2016, p. 91). As Porter explains “All places in Australia, whether urban or otherwise, are Indigenous places. […] It is a deliberate, even required, feature of the settler-colonial dynamic to systematically and publicly *forget*.”(Porter, 2018, p. 239)

Colonization requires the alienation of land in the interests of colonial possession and domination which is continuously reasserted to survive (Porter, 2017). British colonizers were blind to the beauty embodied in the Aboriginal kinship relations and custodial responsibilities to place. There are at least two components to acts of dispossession. “First is the theft of

land, and the subsequent imposition of systems of land tenure, property law and planning regulations that legitimate dispossession. Second is the forced removal of the original population". (Porter, 2017, p. 242) Sadly, these facts underpin all Australian cities and towns.

Despite the impositions of the colonial encounter, the Indigenous foundations of kinship relations and custodial responsibilities continue to provide enduring significance for Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal Australians, place is particular. Each place has its own creation stories, and ancestors are considered to have enduring presence at those places; indeed people born from a place are expressions of those enduring ancestors with responsibilities for that place. Thus the kinship laws hold that all animate beings belong in a world of relations, and an Indigenous approach to beauty is inherent in these relations. As custodians with responsibilities, Aboriginal people expect to be consulted and their permission sought for any activities which will take place within their country. For these reasons places are not interchangeable nor homogenous as space, nor can they be understood as alienable personal property (f Edmonds, 2020).. As Diana James describes:

> The Australian landscape is mapped by two laws. The songlines of her Aboriginal peoples move deep beneath the surface following the dips and curves of the land itself, while the borders imposed by more recent settlers are straight lines cutting the surface of the land(James, 2008p109).

What is important is that the life force of an individual is understood to originate at a particular place and the individual shares substance with that place, and responsibilities for maintaining the health of the place. Through family, individuals are also responsible for other places. An intricate kinship web connecting people to places, animals, plants, rocks and water patterns the country (see Edmonds, 2020, p23, 30, 32, 34, 35. This ontological connection between people and place structures all of life, and beauty is embodied in this sustained balance. In this manner, time is ever present as the past is contained within the present. Until the colonial encounter and its subsequent influence, for Aboriginal people time had not developed as a determinative quality of being.

For Aboriginal Australians, Ancestral events are themselves coterminous with the present through place, and act as the primary means of orientation. Elkin made the useful analogy

that Aboriginal time could be understood “not as a horizontal line extending back through a series of pasts but rather as a vertical line in which the past underlies and is within the present” (Edmond, 2020, 23). A particular site of significance is simultaneously the evidence of ancestral action in creation times, and their continued presence in that place. Thus, time is not understood as cyclical, chronological or linear, but perhaps best analogized as a spatial or seasonal field, or rather simply as Land itself – where past and present can occur simultaneously through the continuity of the Land. As Yuin (Aboriginal) woman Danièle Hromek describes “We did not need to construct major monuments, as Country itself has always been our monument, both tangibly and intangibly.”(Hromek, 2021) Place provides people with connection to the past, present and future simultaneously. Again, beauty is embodied in this sustained balance.

This idea that monuments are unnecessary because Country itself is an everpresent temporal field, stands in stark contrast to the European veneration of history and heritage as manifestations of ‘beauty’ (itself informed by the rupture in continuity consequent upon the Enlightenment).Further, for Aboriginal Australians, beauty is expressed as an embodiment of balance, of presence and of ontological significance underpinning the origins of all life force. Such an Indigenous approach to embodiment of beauty stands in stark contrast to an enlightenment framing of beauty as a matter of aesthetic taste. In the latter, history as a sequence of ‘nows’ renders the framing of what is included as beautiful in one era as irrelevant and reducible in the next. Such a circumstance is inconceivable in an Indigenous approach, since time is not a determinative quality of being, the ever-present past, present and future defies separation.

In Australia, the colonisers applied a foreign order overlaid upon the embodied Aboriginal Law of the Land. This was an attempt to re-structure the relationships between people and country. In a city, the planning and licensing codes which flow from this are not neutral but rather establish the distribution of power, hierarchy, who is acknowledged or considered, and who is not and the circumstances under which certain voices are considered relevant. In the context of this volume on beauty- this includes definitions of how ‘beauty’ is defined or operationally framed. As this contribution has argued, for some cultures ‘beauty’ is an embodiment of how relatedness with all life is structured- it defies abstraction into a concept

or temporally delineated definition. It stands outside of time as an embodiment of balanced ontological order of life. If Planning legislation really sought to be inclusive of culturally diverse notions of beauty, then it would apply to more than aesthetics. It would extend respect for all life, to moral responsibility and reciprocal relationships with all life, regenerative purpose for any development, and much more.

The irony is that place *is* the fundamental precondition we share. Without a common place to stand, we do not share a mutually experienced moment, nor live together in a collective society. Place *is* the fundamental precondition that needs to be sustained in order for us to experience living in relationship to others. Acknowledging the significance of place as a precondition of experience is a vital first step. Such an acknowledgement opens appreciatoin of other dimensions of beauty, embodied in the ways we are related, and consequently our obligations to one another.[28] Systems of order may be overlaid upon place, whilst place remains mute in the process. "One way of looking at modern history is as[..] a race to achieve social integration, to structure connections among people and organize the world" (Calhoun, 2003).

In contemporary Australian planning where these approaches -of Aboriginal notions of 'country' and the imposed planning regulations- remain at odds with one another, some changes are evident. For example, recent changes to the New South Wales government's *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) "require built environment professionals to protect and maintain heritage, including Aboriginal heritage, in the design of the built environment" (Hromek, 2021). This demonstrates the start of a more holistic view around Indigenous knowledges and the obligations of respect built environment professionals owe them. Another example is the New South Wales government initiative *Connecting with Country* which aims for everyone involved in delivering government projects to adopt the following commitment:

[28] For further see Edmonds A. 'How do we structure relatedness? Differentiated Solidarity and the Obligations of Proximal Dwelling ' in *Living Politics in the City* (University of Leuven Press forthcoming)

> Through our projects, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of Country by valuing, respecting, and being guided by Aboriginal people, who know that if we care for Country – it will care for us.[29]

"Knowing that Country communicates what it needs to keep the land, water and air healthy means that we, as humans, need to ensure we are listening to those communications."(Hromek, 2021) A different notion of beauty is both central to this, and something that this approach embodies.

Notes on Contributor

Angelique Edmonds has a passion for design education and public engagement- i.e. engaging diverse people in the decisions about place which impact upon their everyday lives. Trained as an Architect, she operates professionally in two roles, as a **Senior Lecturer in Architecture & Sustainable Design** currently at **Uni SA**, and independently as the founder and Creative Director of the **School for Creating Change**. Her 2020 book called ***Connecting People, Place & Design*** (published by Intellect UK) draws together fifteen years of her practice and research regarding human relationships to place, our capacities to connect with one another and place, and the extent to which contemporary public design mechanisms allow public participation. She has held numerous in the Australian Institute of Architects and delivered National CPD twice (2014 and 2021) on the topic of Social sustainability and pursuing Social Value in design. She has taught in 4 different Australian Universities and studied PhD, M.Phil and degrees in Architecture in Sydney, London and Cambridge UK. She is also a mum to a spirited 6 year old.

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Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?

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Before answering this question from a standpoint as an "urban-thinker" linked to practice, there is a need to clarify the concept of beauty, so as not to let it become an all embracing passepartout. Historically, the notion of "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is attributed to Margaret Wolfe Hungerford.[30] However, there are many contrasting perceptions of beauty, by different social classes and ethnicities; in different geographies and cultures; at different periods of time; conceived only visually or perceived with other senses such as Eurovision's[31] "sound of beauty". Therefore how beauty is discussed here speaks to refers to a broader context than its material expression in buildings and the built environment. It relates to historical awareness of beauty; is connected to fashion's ephemeral idea of beauty changing rapidly over time, and is intertwined with human activities, skills and experiences; even moral values.

The latter are reflected in the independent 'Scruton Report' (BBBBC, 2020) commissioned by the UK government to inform its planning reforms. This report treats the concept of beauty as being essentially visual, although it also lays claim to "promoting health, well-being and sustainable growth". However, it is narrowly related to housing. Not much is said about beauty of other building types: the work environment; buildings for healthcare, education, worshipping, leisure, sport, travel, hospitality, recreation; even less is said about the large scale urban structures of commerce and trade with their ports, warehousing, logistics, shopping malls and their enormous car parks; let alone utilities: energy extraction, generation, distribution and storage, water supply and sewage plants, waste disposal, IT networks. and many more. There is nothing about streets and its traffic, spaces for mobility and travel, including airports, railway stations, coach interchanges, even bus stops; and nothing much about spaces in between buildings, urban open spaces and public realm. All these categories of the built environment are likely to command different notions of beauty, due to many diverse factors and possibly linked to their uses and the great variety of beauty perceptions of users. Thus a 'generic' standardised notion of beauty would have to relate to all aspects of the built environment, as well as the man-made nature surrounding it. The question is whether such a 'one-size-fits-all' concept of beauty is desirable or even conceivable.

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[30] "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is attributed to Margaret Wolf Hungerford (nee Hamilton, The Duchess) in her novel Molly Bawn (the perception of beauty), first published in 1878, but this meaning has been used by many others before her, including Shakespeare, Plato and John Lyly (1588).
[31] The 2022 Eurovision Song Contest motto was 'The sound of beauty" https://eurovision.tv/

The “Living with Beauty” report seems to refer (unintentionally?) to internalised values about beauty related to selected historic periods such as the Victorian era or the middle-ages and the case studies are of a very similar typology, ‘leafy suburbia’ evoking a ‘noble savage’ ideal of a rural idyl. Although adopted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the ‘noble savage’ aspiration is deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon popular psyche (Redford, 1991) UK estate agents advertise leafy suburbs as an asset of living in or at least with nature and the implicit values of this figment of imagination form part of resistance to man-made development underpinning the anti-urban stance toward the British planning system. In this sense the goal of the “Living with Beauty” report can arguably be construed as a means to soften the pro-development National Planning Policy Framework circumscribed as “presumption in favour of sustainable development” which can be considered as a contradiction in terms (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021).

The “Living with Beauty” report seems to refute in particular 20th century modernism and its machine aesthetic (Le Corbusier, 1928). It judges fascist architecture ugly, possibly because of its political connotation. However, looking for ‘beauty’ with politically untainted eyes, fascist architecture is very much based on the principles of functional modernism and its own concept of beauty, often designed by good and progressive architects of their time. Some of it is monumental, which may suit public buildings by making a statement about their socio-political importance (Bodenschatz & Welch Guerra, 2021).

Even when approaching beauty purely through its visual appearance it can be perceived from very different perspectives. In “Ways of Seeing” John Berger (1972) contests the conventional way of looking at art and proposes a dialogue between the viewer and the ‘object of beauty’. Kevin Lynch’s (1960) representation of desirable built environments and neighbourhoods also reaches beyond the purely visible. Such positions reinforce the premise that “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder” and cannot be reduced to a single top-down concept.

In a more abstract sense, the notion of beauty could be related to power and domination which have essentially shaped the built environment of a time; type, scale, shape, materiality and design. For example, churches and their spires were the most imposing buildings during the European middle-ages when religion dominated society, while the tallest most visible buildings today are corporate headquarters reflecting capitalist might dominating contemporary societies.

For example, skyscrapers are not about the value of ‘beauty’; they symbolise competitiveness for their global material worth as pure commodities and the ‘world-beating’ status of their owners. Whether they are considered beautiful is essentially subjective. This leads to the question: who are the legitimate custodians of the beauty of buildings? Architects are laying a claim but there are undoubtedly others, including governments as the report ‘Living with

Beauty' reflects. Who else could lay this claim and on what grounds: the artistic community, academia, the establishment, the rich and powerful, ordinary people? In reality, this amounts to competing claimants, whereby experts, professionals, politicians are imposing their normalised concept of beauty on society at large, overruling views of local communities and the users at the receiving end of their notion of beauty.

However, 'ordinary people' are likely to have a clear idea about the beauty of the 'dream homes' they aspire to inhabit. In turn, their notion of beauty may be influenced by what they are used to, by tradition, socio-cultural conventions, but also by the housing market and its advertising. Note the proverbial argument for choosing wallpaper 'because it sells the house well' instead for the personal taste of the owners or users of the house. Most likely, their perception of beauty changes over time, under external influences, as well as in relation to the trajectory of their own life cycles. Alternatively, beauty may just be one criterion of ownership and control over their homes among many others, such as affordability, location, energy efficiency. Thus the conception of beauty is a fluid, constantly changing and evolving phenomenon. Governmental planning and building regulations may have a lesser influence on beauty as they tend to avoid controversy-provoking aesthetics and focus more on performance specifications, safety and security measures. However, the built environment professionals consider beauty as part of their trade and address it when they produce design codes or are campaigning for place quality.[32]

Fig1 South Bank cultural centre London, view from north side of the Thames

Two cases will now illustrate this premise, one focused on materiality, the other on use. In the 1960s the Archigram collective[33] of young architects had won a competition to design two concert halls and an art gallery as extension of the South Bank cultural centre in London. They had shifted from their playful and utopian Archigram design style to brutalism, the latest version of modernism with its oversized raw concrete components.[34]

[32] Place Alliance is an example of design pressure group aiming at a better quality built environment which includes aspects of beauty. e.g. A Housing Design Audit for England, 2020. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/planning/news/2020/jan/place-alliance-research-finds-new-housing-design-england-overwhelmingly-mediocre-or

[33] The Story of Archigram. https://www.archigram.net/

[34] The Royal Festival Hall was designed by Robert Matthew, then Chief Architect of the London County Council, with Leslie Martin, project leader, Peter Moro, Edwin Williams, Robin Day furniture designer

Fig 2 London South Bank Concert Halls and Hayward Art Gallery. Brutalist extension of the South Bank Centre designed by Archigram, 1967-58

Their buildings were adjacent to the Corbusian version of modernism of the Royal Festival Hall built for the 1951 Festival of Britain. Both represented the most avant-garde architectural styles of their time, praised by their elitist protagonists, but intensely refuted by lay persons. As is usual, with unconventional designs, the local media were full of objections and criticisms by the general public.

The perception of their beauty, or absence of it, had been changing over time. Initially decried as visual eyesores they were defended several decades later as much-loved familiar icons when they were threatened with demolition. When substantial refurbishments of the Royal Festival Hall were undertaken in 2007 it was seen "akin to that of an old master painting lovingly restored to its original glory" in press comments.[35] Similar attachment to the brutalist concert hall and art gallery additions was voiced. Opinions about it vacillated again, ranging from being a disgrace in a 2014 review signed by Peter Hall[36] to an amazing place by visitors in 2021.[37] The designers increasingly appreciated these buildings during their refurbishment in 2018 and treated them as if they were listed. The transformation of the harsh concrete surroundings with fountains, lighting, greenery, easier access and painted in bright yellow have no doubt contributed to how the general public now assesses the beauty of the South Bank complex, indicating that the notion of 'beauty' reaches far beyond the visual.

What about 'beauty' of the undercroft of this brutalist complex?

Lucienne Day textile designer and technical cooperation of the Building Research Station.
https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/about/what-we-do/history-royal-festival-hall
[35] The Guardian, In Praise of the Royal Festival Hall, Opinion Art Leader 4 June 2007
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jun/05/comment.artnews
[36] https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g186338-d548614-r230290484-Royal_Festival_Hall-London_England.html
[37] https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d548614-Reviews-Royal_Festival_Hall-London_England.html#REVIEWS

Fig3 South Bank centre undercroft colonised by skateboarders adapted to their own concept of beauty

Colonised by skate boarders when it was an abandoned and much maligned space, it has become an attraction for South Bank visitors. The skaters have covered the concrete completely with graffiti, a manifestation of their concept of beauty. They managed to get the lighting reinstated and are using the space at all hours in all weathers. When the management planned to evict them and offer them a remote dreary place instead, there was public uproar and a large number of supporters signed petitions to let them stay. The notion of beauty or attractiveness can thus be related to place, its imaginative uses and spontaneous visual transformations rather than its architectural design. From this South Bank story, it could even be construed that the continuously diverse and changing perceptions of beauty of these spaces and the controversial debates about it were instrumental in bringing about improvements and turning this building complex into a much more accessible public realm for all. This also meant that the influence of a more popular notion of beauty has encroached the pure design aesthetic.

This discussion highlights the many perceptions of beauty, how they are changing over time and thereby defying a measurable, common denominator. Proscriptive safety of building structures and materials, energy efficiency, prevention of health hazards, personal security or protection of nature all command shared values. The notion of beauty in constant flux certainly challenges any intention to include 'beauty' in some regulations or codes to guide the production of the built environment. The premise may have to become "beauty is in the eyes of the beholders" making the query about whose beauty, with what rights less categorical and hopefully redundant.

Notes on contributor

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Comparison of the Process of Creating Beauty in Iran and Germany from the View of an Urban Designer

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As an urban designer who has been involved in a wide range of projects since 2006, and as a member of the “Tehran City Beautification Committees” for 5 years, I have found that ‘’beauty’’ is a challenging quality to be achieved practically. The interpretations of beauty between architects, urban planners and decision-makers on the one hand, and the users of the place on the other hand, are not the same. These different perceptions usually lead to the creation of spaces which are not seen as beautiful by the public: the real users of the space, while designers or city managers do consider them as a beautiful space.

In this short essay, I will explain the challenges surrounding the terms "beauty" and "beautifying" from my work practice experience in Iran as well as comparing these findings with work experiences in Germany.

"Beauty" has always been an integral part of human needs (Greer, 2010) but the question “what is beautiful?” has been difficult to respond to. The controversy over the origin and meaning of this concept has a long history moving between the two poles of “Subjectivity” and “Objectivity” (Dickie, 1962; Pakzad & Saki, 2014; Reber et al., 2004). At one end of this spectrum, theorists seek beauty independently of the perceiver and as a property of the object , and at the other end, they see the spectrum in the eyes of the viewer and consider it only conditional on the satisfaction of the human senses. However, newer philosophical analyses take an interactive view and believe that a sense of beauty stems from patterns that connect people and objects: the interpretation of beauty is related to concepts such as “pleasure” and “perception” (Dewey, 1934; Pakzad & Saki, 2014). But what makes a place perceived as a ‘’Beautiful Place’’? In Tehran , there is an organization[38] supported by the city

[38] Some American cities like Los Angeles and Eden also have these kinds of organizations

municipality which is responsible for beautifying the city[39], implying that beauty is something that can be achieved through the right practical actions.

My PhD research[40] findings show that city managers, who are working for Tehran Municipality and are responsible for taking urban planning and design decisions, have a holistic approach to urban issues and look at projects from a political and financial perspective. Since their time to work on projects is quite short because of the political context in Iran,[41] (Danaee Fard, 2016; Mehdizade, 2018) i, they usually seek to implement projects in any way to indicate that these projects are their achievement in their career. Naturally, this rush to open projects often comes at the cost of quality and beauty! Regrettably putting the projects into practice in the shortest possible time takes precedence over the opinions of the beautification committee regarding the quality.

In addition, decision takers[42] have mostly a "visual" understanding of the concept of "beauty" and are often unaware of the "functional" and "perceptual" (semantic) components (Souri, 2017). This has led to poor and superficial design projects. A good example is ''17 Shahrivar Street in Tehran'', a place that was designed and implemented as a beautiful pedestrian path with eye-catching landscapes, but ultimately was reopened to cars after a few years due to the traffic, economic and social problems it had created for residents and businesses (Kanooni & Razavian, 2019; Kheyroddin et al., 2020; Nouri & Etessam, 2017).

Another significant issue is the non-professional intervention of city managers which impairs the quality of an urban design project. For instance, many of the city managers use the authority of their positions in order to impose their personal interpretation of a "beautiful design" on the urban designers and the city's Projects. An urban design consultant, who usually does not have much power, agrees to implement these personal opinions because of fear of non-payment. I witnessed the process of a project where the client demanded a black

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[39] Tehran Beautification Organization

[40] Souri, E (2017). The Role of Education in City Managers' Competency Concerning Urban Design;

Case Study: City Beautification Organization of Tehran, [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] PhD thesis in Urban Design, Department of Urban Design, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

[41] Urban management in Iran is greatly influenced by the ruling political parties, and any change in the ruling party through elections or internal disputes will lead to a change in urban management.

[42] Case study: Tehran Urban Beautification Organization

light[43] on a facade for a tragic religious occasion, the installation of which was therefore rendered meaningless! Another example was a project where the client believed that all available light colors should be applied in the illuminating of a bridge which was used just by cars, regardless of the issue of driver safety and the importance of the bridge in the city structure. The number of facade lighting projects of public buildings, with the aim of beautification that are neither used at night nor can be viewed from outside, is innumerable in Tehran. In other words, the quality of beauty is usually created based upon the client's preferences for beauty rather than the real users of the space, the people.

In contrast to Iran, city managers in Germany often have an economical and environmental approach to urban design issues due to the high energy prices and the higher costs of any physical development as well as strict rules[6]. Of course, there is also undesired influence from individuals such as politicians and investors in urban processes to create quality and "beauty". For example, in one of my recent projects, the whole project was cancelled because one of the main investors in the project (a famous German industrialist) believed that the plan was not visually "beautiful" enough! In another project, the city manager, in the name of beauty, was directly involved in many design details like choosing the type of flowers to be planted in the urban space, and even in selecting the type of luminaires: judgements usually requiring very specialized knowledge!

A remarkable aspect in German urban design is public concerns about the environment. In Germany, most urban design (and lighting) projects require environmental justifications. For example, the issue of light pollution in Germany has become one of the main concerns for city authorities, which has led to the removal of street lights from some urban spaces, such as highways and parks, in order to reduce light pollution. This gives the impression that respecting the environment in public open spaces is more important than beautification.

What about the people? How do they see beauty in cities? According to the environmental preferences approach, what a person likes for their environment is considered as the product of socialization. Based on this approach, the human perception of beauty is the product of social situations that are experienced and accumulated throughout life (Russell et al., 1989). It

[43] In optical physics black light does not exist. When there is no light, a shadow is created that is dark grey or black.

can be claimed that the more people have seen and experienced higher quality spaces, the higher the expectations of beauty would be.
My experience as an urban designer shows that in Iran people have a functional approach to the beauty of urban spaces. For example, our team found that most residents believe a beautiful space is a ''Safe, secured''and ''clean'' space with lots of ''greenery'' and less vehicle traffic. They do not care about the visual aspects such as color and shape of street furniture and flooring tiles, although clients and design teams consider these items as really significant aspects of beauty in urban spaces. Considerable time is spent on selecting furnishing tiles and arranging them in a beautiful order in harmony with modern street furniture. This confirms that visual improvements are insufficient for enhancing experience of public spaces.

During my residence in Germany, I reached the conclusion that Germans often see "beauty" in the simplicity of form and function. They do not prefer unnecessary decorations. In the field of lighting, they also have a more cost-benefit approach. Environmental concerns are also common among German citizens[44].

To summarize this text, beauty is neither an intellectual concept, nor does it have a precise definition. It is a feeling one gets when things work well together. It means that rather than worrying about beauty, we should focus on the quality of our designs.
In both Iran and Germany the existing gap between what is considered as ''beauty'' among decision makers, designers and citizens should be considered in urban planning process.
City managers and local authorities need to engage with, understand and protect beauty as an urban design quality. It is clear they would benefit from knowing more about why beauty matters to people and what it means to them.

Notes on contributor

Dr. Elham Souri has an academic and professional background in the field of Urban Design and Lighting. With more than 16 years of experience in practice, research and teaching - from macro to micro scale - she has gained unique expertise and knowledge in a range of settings in Iran and in Germany. Elham had been a member of Tehran's Light Committee from 2014

[44] Germany is one of the world's most sustainable industrialised nations. The country does particularly well with regard to environmental protection. The environmental concerns and sustainbale lifestyle are activated in individuals from childhood in school.

until 2020. Her research interests include public spaces lighting design and procedural dimensions of urban design and planning.

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Beauty Back in Place: The Place of Aesthetics and Beauty in Urban Design Thinking and Practice

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(The views expressed in the article of those of the author alone, and do not reflect the views of his employer)

This article discusses where beauty might be positioned in relation to a full range of design issues that planning systems around the world might consider, prompted in particular by a current discussion about where it should sit in English planning.

Since the policy initiatives of government minister John Gummer in the 1990s, the nations of the UK have been developing a richer seam of both policy and guidance related to design in the UK planning systems. His *Quality in Town and Country* initiative (Department of the Environment, 1994) was the catalyst for the reestablishment of the importance of design in planning. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)(DETR/CABE, 2000) published a range of design advice, including *By Design,* which briefly mapped out in straightforward terms which design issues a planner might have concern for.

These initiatives started to align with academic work, including some significant polemics about urban planning and design. If you did a degree in urban design, this is what you would learn. *By Design* was informed by the thinking of the garden city movement and the ideas of people like Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Gordon Cullen, Donald Appleyard and more recently Jan Gehl. In the mid 80s this academic work was brought together in books like *Responsive Environments* (Bentley et al 1985) just in time to inform the direction of *By Design* as graduates of academic programmes started to apply the thinking to policy initiatives. More recently an entire level of concern for the natural environment and environmental sustainability has been added, including new issues and solutions in response to our understanding of climate change. The National Design Guide (MHCLG, 2021) is another step

along this process of improving incrementally on this thinking in England, where a role for site specific design codes is clearly explained. So far, so good I suppose.

Then in 2018 there is a *sort of* disruption as the Policy Exchange, an influential UK conservative policy thinktank, published something that most of us probably ignored at the time. In response to public antipathy to the prospect of more private houses being built in parts of England, *Building More, Building Beautiful* (2018) argued that the design priorities of the previous generation of designers have been wrong. The argument is a bit chaotic, but in their own language: "*Simply put, not enough new homes are built with beauty in mind*" (p7). They go on to clarify that "…*People don't want excitement or drama from the design of their home. They want a sense of community, comfort and togetherness. The phrase 'fittingness' has been used in previous research and perfectly sums up the desires of most people*" (p8). Suddenly I find myself wondering how I can write *a lack of comfort and togetherness* into a reason for a planning application refusal. The argument is also, I suppose, that if homes look better, that local people affected by a development might be happier. This might be true, but underpinning the work are some poor assumptions or assertions about what people like.

In the research informing the report people are shown some cropped pictures of houses and flats and asked if they want their homes to be "futuristic" or maybe "traditional terraces with tree lined streets". Can you guess which wins? They ask people, would you like homes to be more spacious but less rooms, or less spacious and more rooms? Obviously the former, and preferably with a kitchen island, I guess. What I found both a little sad and interesting is how few people wanted the beautiful historic town centres which obviously the questioners' hoped would be the stylistic preference for the *central locations* of a larger town. I suppose aesthetically, and for a variety of other important reasons, I like beautiful historic towns. That wasn't reflected in the discussion or conclusions though.

This interest in *beauty* comes from the thinking of Roger Scruton, who was one of the report authors (Scruton, 2009). Because, I suppose, Scruton and people at the Policy Exchange have the ear of the English Government, so the English planning system then had to drift towards prioritising these ideas and concerns. Someone in government, set up the *Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission* (BBBBC) to tell professionals in England how to do things better (BBBBC, 2020). Here beautiful things are front and centre, as everything at every scale can be

(Figure 1).

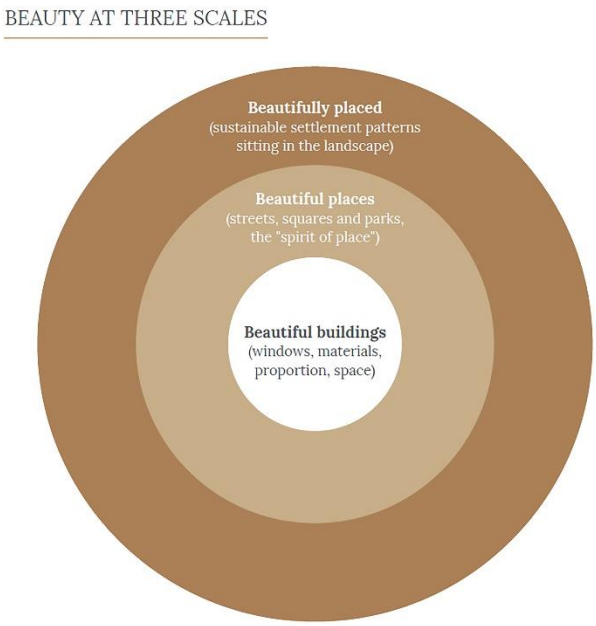

Figure 1 Beauty at three scales; Source BBBBC (2020, p10)

So where does this interest with beauty sit within a rich built environment design agenda? If I was going to be generous and a bit vague, I'd probably say that it depends on who you ask, because I know many planners who still think a conversation about design is *only* a conversation about what things look like. Strictly speaking though, we should know where and how to locate a concern for beauty, or possibly aesthetics, within the full range of concerns that designers should address.

I've always explained this to myself and others by referring to Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs,* where Maslow (1943) maps out, in a simple hierarchy, what motivates or matters to people

(Figure 2).

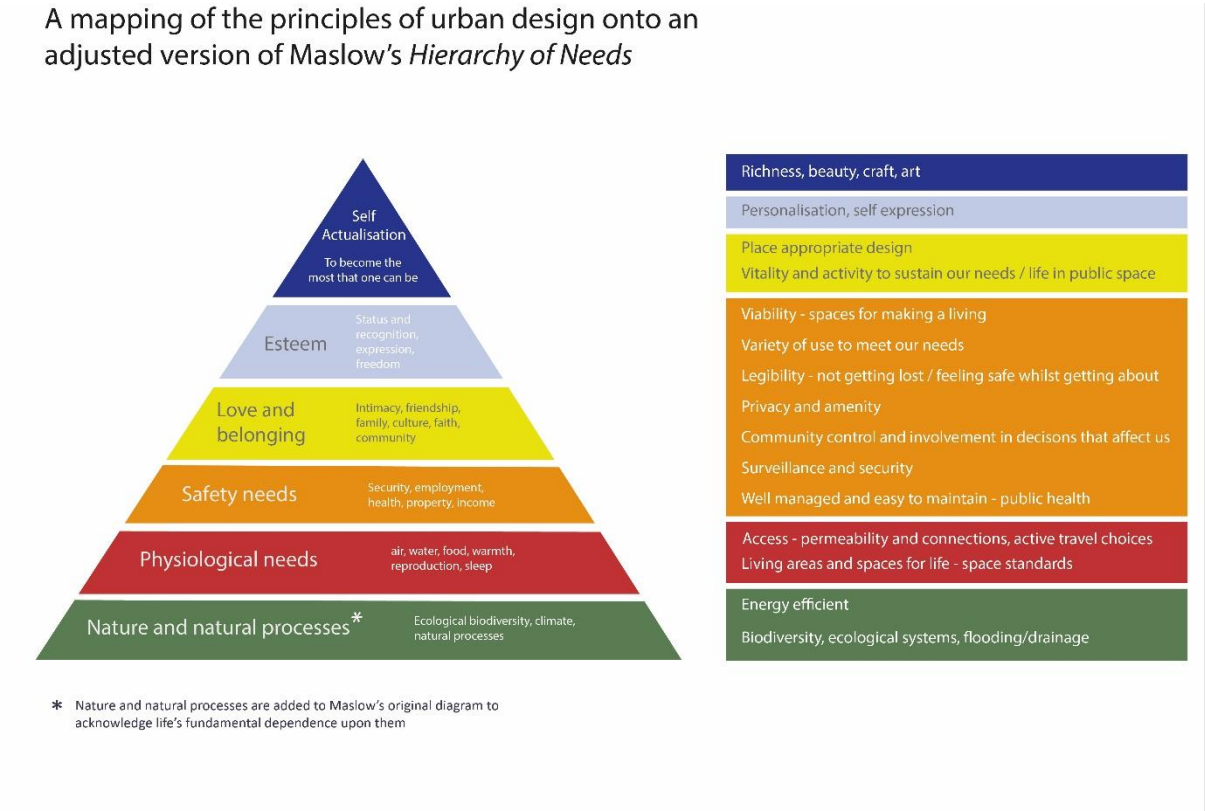

Figure 2 A mapping of the principles of urban design onto an adjusted version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Today I would supplement Maslow's original diagram with reference to nature and natural processes as underpinning all life on earth, and this obviously reflects the more recent (since 1943!) agendas in both planning and design. It is possible to loosely map onto this hierarchy the agenda of urban design, as reflected in both the academic literature or those diagrams and lists produced by organisations like CABE. The process is a bit bumpy, as it's hard to isolate, categorise and align precisely the wicked problems that planners and designers confront (Biddulph, 2012), but hopefully you get the idea.

So where is beauty? Obviously, it sits at the top of this hierarchy, where aesthetic matters are grouped and related to our need to become *the most that one can be,* to use Maslow's expression. It sits next to the complex idea of artfulness in design which, if the history of art and architecture in the 20th century is anything to go by, will be a highly interesting and contested area of discussion (Hughes, 1980). It's probably not the first concern of most people, or even the most important for many who might struggle to meet other needs first. It

is there though, and I feel that it is important to note that I also think that beauty is important, even if my idea of beauty probably won't be aligned with that of Scruton's.

The problem for us as planners or designers is all of that other stuff below beauty in the hierarchy. Whilst I really don't mind people trying to tell me that some idea of beauty is important, it does bother me when the same person might try and tell me it's the most important issue where an assessment of design is concerned. My diagram reminds me that that is obviously ridiculous.

Of course, all of these more important things could be beautiful or better considered, as most of them also have to look a certain way. Most planners working in practice could list many compromises that are made everyday over issues of what things look like, because those same people are also working to make things look better. Could that SUDs (sustainable urban drainage) scheme look a little more natural? Does that car park need to be so prominent and ugly? Would a stone wall really be too expensive? Will block paving really be churned up by the bin lorries? Can't you make bathroom windows any bigger? The real challenge however is to determine what exactly is adequate design in every setting. Developers and their agents often try and do as little as possible in many settings to get a scheme approved. That is the way capitalism works. They do it as cheaply as possible, bearing in mind what their market will tolerate. House builders know that their dull boxes will sell.

Of course, Scruton doesn't know much about architecture, landscape, engineering or even urban design, and I don't suppose that he has regularly attended a planning committee where local planning decisions are made. So possibly he should be forgiven for using his notoriety and media platform to say what he wants about issues that interest him. It is a free country. What does matter though is the obvious frailty of a planning system and profession who have so little conviction about what they are trying to achieve that they don't firmly *kick back* against this type of intervention and put a conversation about beauty back in its place. The same criticism should be levelled at a government who also places a concern for beauty at the heart of what it thinks we should be interested in. The English Government's press release about the launch of their New Model Design Code (MHCLG 2021) proudly states that [a]*ll new developments must meet local standards of beauty, quality and design under new rules*. If I worked in England, I would probably see this as placation, as little in the document is actually about beauty at all, which is as it should be. It pains me though, to see this rhetoric

at work, with its origins in such a vague piece of research and ultimately driven by such a poor understanding of what designers think about and actually do. What things look like really is important, and it is a concern of designers and some planners, but whilst beauty has a place in our conversations about design, you and I won't necessarily agree on what it actually is, and I hope I have convinced you that there are also many other more important issues to consider and discuss.

Notes on contributor

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