Aesthetic Perceptions

All designers or planners aspire to the creation of beautiful environments but a fundamental weakness in most discussions of architectural or environmental aesthetic is a failure to relate it to its matrix of experimental reality. Fitch and Bobenhausen (1999) state that our whole literature suffers from this conceptual limitation in that it tends to divorce the aesthetic process from the rest of experience. Although Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) believe that many individuals including designers ignore aesthetics and other intangibles, we persist in discussing buildings as though their aesthetic impacts upon us, as can be read in the assigned articles. This leads to the serious misconceptions as to the actual relationship between the environment and its occupants.

Buhyoff et.al (1978), Brown and Gifford (2001), McCool et. al. (1986) and Bengston (1994) all discuss the aesthetic perceptions of public and designers. Brown and Gifford (2001) clearly identify their research questions. They question the role of architects in building design and their perspectives compared to the layout person’s view. The method they developed for measuring the aesthetic perception of the public is founded on a ranking system, which the participants evaluate various environments, by looking at their photos. McCool et. al. (1986) at this point explain the details of this method very clearly in their study. The bodies of all those articles are based largely upon photographs of buildings rather than the experience of the building. Although McCool et. al. report that the correlations between viewers ratings of photo representations of a scene and the real scene are high, Fitch and Bobenhausen (1999) believe that the limitations of photography make it in the highest degree unlikely that, we could arrive at a viable estimate of the experiential reality of the building. For instance, we could no more enjoy photographs of a building while seated on a bench in the pouring rain than we could respond favorably to a concert in a storm-tossed lifeboat at sea. The perception of the environment is not limited to the narrow channel of vision. It can never be felt, perceived or experienced in anything less than multidimensional totality. A change in one aspect or quality of this environment, inevitably affects our perception of and response to all the rest.

In spite of these specific methods for measuring the aesthetic values, the pursuit of both understanding and change, as well as the democratic involvement of participates in solving the contextual problems is quite remarkable in all of the articles. Dick (1995) believes that this kind of an approach is useful in ‘real’ concrete situations where it is difficult to control the variables because the situation is concrete, complex and on going. On the other hand only Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) explains the actual use of the public input, although the major goal of most of the articles is to find a possibility to create designs that both designers and the community like.