Toward a Theory of Landscape Aesthetics

STEVEN C. BOURASSA

Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, 226 Johnson Hall, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152 (U.S.A.)

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ABSTRACT


Philosophers of aesthetics have tended to limit their subject to include only objects of art. In contrast to art objects, landscapes include elements of both art and nature. In this article, I expand the scope of aesthetics to embrace landscapes. This is accomplished by linking pragmatic and humanistic aesthetic theories in a framework suggested by Jungian psychology. The framework has two interrelated components called the cultural theory and the biological theory. Diverse empirical observations are presented in support of the cultural and biological theories and implications for landscape planning are explored.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a theory of landscape aesthetics. I use the word “landscape” not due to any preoccupation with rural scenery, but rather because it is the most appropriate word for my purposes. Admittedly, the word is not usually used in common parlance to refer to the urban scene. This, however, does not mean that it is inappropriate to use it for that purpose. In fact, geographers have used “landscape” for that purpose for some time (Sauer, 1925). “Landscape” is preferable to “environment” because the former refers to a perceived scene, while the latter is much more general and imprecise. Appleton (1980, p. 14) has distinguished the two words rather neatly: “‘Landscape’ is not synonymous with ‘environment’; it is ‘the environment perceived’, especially visually perceived.”

Landscape aesthetics is not a well-developed field of inquiry, with authoritative texts supported by a solid base of knowledge. Although this makes the subject somewhat difficult to study, it also suggests that there are substantial opportunities for research if one is willing to pioneer in a speculative area. A major problem in developing a theory of landscape aesthetics is the fact that philosophers of aesthetics have not given much attention to landscapes as aesthetic objects. In fact, many philosophers limit the scope of aesthetics to embrace only discrete objects of art. I propose a solution to this problem and then proceed to articulate a the-
ory of landscape aesthetics. The attempt here is not to review the literature (cf. Lang, 1982). It is rather to tie together selected strands of thought and develop some general implications for landscape planning.

ART AND NATURE: THE PROBLEM OF LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS

The primary obstacle to development of a theory of landscape aesthetics has been an unduly constrictive conception of aesthetics. Philosophers of aesthetics have, as a general rule, given most of their attention to the study of well-defined objects of art rather than elements of nature or objects as complex as landscapes (Hepburn, 1968; Rose, 1976; Appleton, 1982). This has inhibited researchers’ examination of the subject and even led a major theorist, Kevin Lynch, to abandon the concept of aesthetics in his book, *A Theory of Good City Form* (1981). Lynch argues that (p. 104):

“Esthetic experience is a more intense and meaningful form of that same perception and cognition which is used, and which developed, for extremely practical purposes. Theory must deal with the esthetic aspects of cities, even though it may be a more difficult part of its task. Indeed, it must deal with function and esthetics as one phenomenon.”

Disappointingly, the difficulty of dealing with aesthetics leads Lynch to discard it as a useful category of inquiry in the development of his theory. In justifying this, Lynch cites (p. 371) “the problems that emerge when esthetic values are divorced from other aspects of life”. A similar complaint has been expressed by James Marston Fitch (1970, p. 76): “A fundamental weakness in most discussion of aesthetics is the failure to relate it to experiential reality”.

One philosopher who is not guilty of the charge of divorcing aesthetics from the rest of experience is John Dewey. Dewey’s basic argument, expressed in *Art as Experience* (1958), is that aesthetics is a part of everyday experience and not something that comes into play only in certain experiences of artists or art connoisseurs. Dewey’s purpose (p. 10):

“is to indicate that theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter”.

It is perhaps obvious that the idea of landscape aesthetics presupposes a broad conception of aesthetics such as that set forth by Dewey. Without such a conception, the everyday landscape and the ordinary person’s perception of and response to that landscape would not be suitable subjects for aesthetic inquiry.

Another contribution which Dewey makes is his suggestion that there is a biological basis for aesthetics. In regard to certain aesthetic responses to natural scenery which men seem to have in common. Dewey states (p. 9):

“I do not see any way of accounting for the multiplicity of experiences of this kind (something of the same quality being found in every spontaneous and uncoerced aesthetic response), except on the basis that there are stirred into activity resonances of dispositions acquired in primitive relationships of the living being to its surroundings, and unrecoverable in distinct or intellectual consciousness.”

An implication of this is the idea that man may have some hereditary responses to landscapes which parallel similar responses in animals; thus it may be possible to infer the former from the latter.

Dewey also makes an important contribution to the theory of landscape aesthetics by discarding the idea of beauty as the central concept of aesthetics. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey notes that (pp. 129–130):

“Beauty, conventionally assumed to be the especial theme of aesthetics, has hardly been mentioned in what precedes. It is properly an emotional term, though one denoting a characteristic emotion. In the presence of a landscape: a poem or a picture that lays hold of us with immediate poignancy, we are moved to murmur or to exclaim ‘How beautiful.’ The ejaculation is a just tribute to the capacity of the object to arouse admiration that approaches worship. Beauty is at the furthest remove from an analytic term, and hence from a conception that can figure in theory as a means of explanation or classification. Unfortunately, it has been hardened into a peculiar
object; emotional rapture has been subjected to what philosophy calls hypostatization, and the concept of beauty as an essence of intuition has resulted. For purposes of theory, it then becomes an obstructive term. In case the term is used in theory to designate the total aesthetic quality of an experience, it is surely better to deal with the experience itself and show whence and how the quality proceeds. In that case, beauty is the response to that which to reflection is the consummated movement of matter integrated into a single qualitative whole.”

As I shall show, it is necessary to break away from the standard dictionary definition of aesthetics as “the theory of beauty” in order to develop a satisfactory theory of landscape aesthetics.

It has been argued that Dewey’s pragmatic theory of aesthetics goes too far by reducing aesthetic experience to a biological response to the environment. Susanne Langer, in her Feeling and Form (1953), is strongly critical of this reductionism (p. 35):

“The chief assumption that determines the entire procedure of pragmatic philosophy is that all human interests are direct or oblique manifestations of ‘drives’ motivated by animal needs. This premise limits the class of admitted human interests to such as can, by one device or another, be interpreted in terms of animal psychology. An astonishingly great part of human behavior really does bear such interpretation without strain; and pragmatists, so far, do not admit that there is any point where the principle definitely fails, and its use falsifies our empirical findings.”

Moreover (p. 36):

“The true connoisseurs of art, however, feel at once that to treat great art as a source of experiences not essentially different from the experiences of daily life . . . is to miss the very essence of it, the thing that makes art as important as science or even religion, yet set it apart as an autonomous creative function of a typically human mind.”

Langer seems correct in asserting (p. 40): “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling”. But it is unworkable to restrict aesthetics to the philosophy of art thus defined. To do so would make it impossible to develop a theory of the aesthetics of the ordinary landscape despite the fact that that landscape surely has an aesthetic quality. What is needed is some kind of bridge between the philosophies of Dewey and Langer, a structure which admits the importance of biological motivation while also respecting the significance of art.

A glimmer of a solution of this problem is provided by Gaston Bachelard in his The Poetics of Space (1969). Bachelard is concerned with poetic images of “felicitous space” (p. xxxi) and, as a basis for the study of such images, he sets forth a rather provocative philosophy. His philosophy emphasizes the creativity manifested in art but it also embraces the biological bases of behavior. Quoting C.G. Jung, Bachelard suggests that human mental structure can be used as a model for aesthetic analysis (p. xxxiii). Using a metaphor, Jung characterizes the problem of describing the mind as follows (1928, pp. 118–119):

“[W]e have . . . to describe and to explain a building whose upper story of which was erected in the nineteenth century; the ground floor dates from the sixteenth century, and a careful examination of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling-tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar a filled-in cave, in the floor of which stone tools are found, and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be a sort of picture of our mental structure. We live in the upper story, and are only dimly aware that our lower story is somewhat old-fashioned. As to what lies beneath the superficial crust of the earth we remain quite unconscious.”

It should be noted that the foundations are active in the mind and not inert as might be implied by the metaphor.

It is worthwhile to explore Jung’s ideas a bit further because they provide a conceptual basis for a theory of aesthetics which encompasses nature and art, biology and culture, and the ideas of Dewey and Langer. Jung divided the mind into three levels: consciousness, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. Jung’s primary interests were the functions and contents of the unconscious, particularly the collective unconscious. He characterized the personal unconscious as “more or less superficial” (1959, p. 3) and (p. 42):
"made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed."

The contents of the personal unconscious are called "complexes".

More important are the contents of the collective unconscious which (1959, p. 42) "have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity". The contents of the collective unconscious are known as "archetypes". According to Jung, the archetypes are the same for all individuals (1959, p. 4). Archetypes are analogous to instincts and, as Jung suggests (1959, pp. 43-44), see also 1928):

"there is good reason for supposing that the archetypes are the unconscious images of the instincts themselves, in other words, that they are patterns of instinctual behaviour."

Sources of proof as to the existence of archetypes include dreams, "the active imagination", and other evidence such as "the delusions of paranoiacs".

For the purposes of this paper, an important paper by Jung is his "Mind and earth", in which his intention is to discuss the relationship of the mind with the conditions of its environment. Here Jung compares the mind with the human body as a whole (1928, p. 110):

"This... psychic organism corresponds exactly to the body, which, though constantly showing individual variation, is none the less in all essential features the general human body, which in its development and structure still preserves those elements that connect it with invertebrate animals and finally with the protozoa. Theoretically it should be possible to shell out of the collective unconscious not only the psychology of the worm, but even that of the individual cell."

Thus it would seem likely that some of the mind's unconscious responses to its environment are similar to those of much more primitive forms of life.

The preceding references to Jung outline a psychological theory which is clearly in congruence with Dewey's assertion of the existence in man of instinctual responses to landscape. If the theories are correct, the collective unconscious posited by Jung would be the locus of archetypes which are images of the instincts coming into play in man's experience of landscape. Jung's thesis is also quite compatible with Langer's aesthetics because it recognizes that while one part of human mental structure is shared with other animals, another part is uniquely human. Thus there is a place in the human psyche for uniquely human activities such as artistic creation or the enjoyment of objects of art. Any comprehensive theory of aesthetics must encompass the full range of aesthetic experiences and behavior, including both aspects which are uniquely human and those which are not.

In the next two sections, I will sketch the outlines of such a theory and discuss some diverse empirical observations which lend support to the theory. It is useful to divide the theory into two parts: one concerned with those aspects of aesthetics which are shared with other animals, the other concerned with those aspects which are shared with other animals. For convenience, I have labeled these two parts the cultural theory and the biological theory, respectively.

A BIOLOGICAL THEORY OF LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS

In his review article, "Urban environmental aesthetics", J. Douglas Porteous (1982, p. 69) cites Jay Appleton's The Experience of Landscape (1975) and Peter F. Smith's The Syntax of Cities (1977) as the two major works on landscape aesthetics. Appleton's ethological method and Smith's reliance on neurophysiological research are criticized roundly by Porteous (1982, pp. 69-71) who objects to the reductionism which he finds in these approaches. Although both Smith and Appleton are too simplistic in some respects, their theories do contribute to a biological theory of
landscape aesthetics and, as I will show, they complement and support each other.

Appleton's book was the first major attempt to establish a theory of landscape aesthetics. Following Dewey, Appleton (1975, p. 15) avoids the idea of beauty and, instead of asking "What is beauty in landscape?" proposes to ask "What is the source of that pleasure which we derive from the contemplation of landscape?" Appleton's aesthetics relies heavily on Dewey's assertion that man obtains aesthetic pleasure from satisfaction of basic drives shared with animals. Appleton argues that the environmental implications of these basic drives are fundamentally the same for both man and other animals. For example, self-protection requires an environment which facilitates activities such as hiding, escaping or fighting whether one is human or animal.

Appleton's basic contention is that an environment that appears to offer satisfaction of biological needs is one which will elicit a spontaneous response (attraction) in man that parallels similar instinctual responses in animals. Thus Appleton proposes (p. 69):

"that aesthetic satisfaction, experienced in the contemplation of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visual attributes, act as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favorable to survival, whether they really are favorable or not. This proposition we can call habitat theory."

Appleton further develops his argument by stressing the importance of "the ability to see without being seen"; he labels this portion of his thesis "prospect-refuge theory". The relationship between habitat theory and prospect-refuge theory is outlined as follows (p. 73):

"Habitat theory postulates that aesthetic pleasure in landscape derives from the observer experiencing an environment favorable to the satisfaction of his biological needs. Prospect-refuge theory postulates that, because the ability to see without being seen is an intermediate step in the satisfaction of many of those needs, the capacity of an environment to ensure the achievement of this becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction."

Prospect–refuge theory describes a mechanism which protects individuals from hazards, a third type of environmental feature which plays an important role in Appleton's schema.

Prospect–refuge theory, with its focus on three broad categories of environmental stimuli, serves as the foundation for the rest of Appleton's book, which for the most part simply elaborates on this basic schema. For example, Appleton devotes a chapter to categorizing the basic imagery and symbolism of the prospect, the hazard and the refuge, and he further develops this framework by discussing surfaces, light and darkness, levels of symbolism and scale and locomotion. Light and darkness, for example, are associated with prospect and refuge, respectively. The discussion of levels of symbolism and scale both support the argument that aesthetic response to landscape needs as stimuli only symbols of prospects, refuges or hazards; the real thing is not required. Locomotion is discussed as an important aspect of the aesthetic experience of landscape because it is crucial to survival.

Appleton also devotes a fairly lengthy chapter to illustrating his theory with examples of landscapes as evoked in various art forms. Illustrations are chosen from landscape design, architecture and urban design, painting, poetry and prose. All of these examples are carefully chosen to support his theory of "hide-and-seek aesthetics", as he terms it (p. 101). For example, he notes (pp. 194–202) that aesthetic preferences for particular urban environments seem to support his prospect–refuge theory: well-designed pedestrian areas have the characteristic of

"affording the observer the security of lateral cover until the moment when he is ready to concede the refuge as the price of achieving a wider prospect."

Appleton's theory (as well as Dewey's) contains remarkable parallels with both Jungian psychology and recent findings in neurophysiology. Jung's ideas have already been dis-
cussed at some length and their relevance to Appleton’s theory is obvious. Support for both Jung and Appleton comes from neurophysiological research, particularly that of MacLean (1973; also see Koestler, 1976, pp. 267–296; Stevens, 1983, pp. 262–267). It is of interest to note at this point one reason for Langer’s inability to build a comprehensive theory of aesthetics; she writes (1953, p. 38): “... there is no elementary success that indicates the direction in which neurological aesthetics could develop”. As the following paragraphs indicate, this is no longer correct even if it was correct when Langer was writing.

According to MacLean, the human brain is divided into three parts which he calls reptilian, paleomammalian and neomammalian. Both in terms of structure and function, the reptilian and paleomammalian brains (together known as the limbic system) are similar to their counterparts in the brains of more primitive animals. The neomammalian brain (or neocortex) is more uniquely human and is the seat of those capabilities (such as language) which are found only in man. In regard to the reptilian brain, MacLean notes (p. 8): “On the basis of behavioural observations of ethologists, there are indications that the reptilian brain programs stereotyped behaviours according to instructions based on ancestral learning and ancestral memories.”

Research on brain physiology has also revealed direct connections between the visual system and both the limbic system and the neocortex. Furthermore, it appears that each of the different sections of the brain may respond to sensory information in its own way, indicating, for example, that instinctual and rational responses to landscapes could occur separately. Thus one need not be conscious of visual stimuli for such stimuli to be processed by the brain (MacLean, 1973, pp. 42–60).

Smith draws heavily from the findings of neurophysiological research in his book, *The Syntax of Cities* (1977), which, according to the author (p. 9), “is an attempt to explore the different levels upon which the city may offer psychological rewards, with particular emphasis upon that highly specialized reward, the aesthetic response”. Smith discusses three models of the anatomy and physiology of the brain in his attempt to comprehend aesthetic response to urban environments. He labels these the phylogenetic, attitudinal and functional–hierarchical models, of which only the first is particularly relevant to the biological theory of landscape aesthetics. The phylogenetic model is essentially MacLean’s tripartite model as interpreted by Koestler and Smith himself. According to Smith (p. 33):

“In parallel with the rational evaluation of the neocortex, the limbic system applies criteria laid down during an earlier stage in phyloge netic development. According to Jung and the dynamic psychologists, these systems of reaction fall into a number of identifiable patterns or archetypes, which in turn have a tendency to be expressed in a limited range of symbols.”

Furthermore (p. 52):

“At least part of the magnetism of the city may be explained in terms of such archetypal symbolism... Dynamic psychology maintains that the mind responds to signals from the environment on a level which is independent of conscious articulation. It reacts to certain environment presentations according to deep-seated rules and criteria which exist outside the centres of rational thought.”

Smith argues that perception and response may be “limbic intensive” in that instinctual behavior may overwhelm rational behavior. As an example, Smith discusses “escape” (and here he seems to be thinking of something like Appleton’s prospect–refuge theory, although he does not cite Appleton) (p. 34):

“In the context of environment, the limbic system will perceive according to biological criteria, like the matter of escape. We may rationalize with great sophistication our reasons for disliking a building, while all the time our reaction has been conditioned by the fact that it does not facilitate escape.”

All of this suggests that Appleton’s habitat and prospect–refuge theories are important steps toward identifying biological bases for aesthetic behavior. Unfortunately, much of
Appleton’s elaboration of prospect-refuge theory seems misguided. In developing his “Framework of Symbolism”, Appleton merely lists and categorizes various landscape features. Many of the features which Appleton lists are ambiguous symbols of prospect, refuge or hazard (Bunkse, 1977, p. 151). Bunkse notes, for example, that (p. 151): “ Darkness may not always signify a refuge, but may instead be forbidding; it is, in fact, one of the few universal environmental elements that induces fear in infants.”

Despite his simplistic pigeonholing of landscape elements, Appleton has made a significant contribution to the theory of landscape aesthetics. An unresolved problem, however, is how to go about building upon Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory so as to develop a useful biological theory of landscape aesthetics. One approach would be, as Jung suggested, to explore the products of the active imagination. An excellent example of this kind of exploration is Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1969). Bachelard devotes chapters to analysis of poetic images of the house, nests, shells, corners, drawers, chests and wardrobes. Consider, for example, Bachelard’s account of Henri Bachelin’s childhood reveries (pp. 30-31):

“Henri Bachelin’s childhood home could not have been simpler... The lamplit room where, in the evening, the father read the lives of the saints – he was Church sexton as well as day-laborer — was the scene of the little boy’s daydreaming of primitiveness. daydreaming that accentuated solitude to the point of imagining that he lived in a hut in the depth of the forest. For a phenomenologist who is looking for roots of the function of inhabiting, this passage in Henri Bachelin’s book *[Le servitrur]* represents a document of great purity. The essential lines are the following (p. 97): ‘At these moments, I felt very strongly — and I swear to this — that we were cut off from the little town, from the rest of France, and from the entire world. I delighted in imagining (although I kept my feeling to myself) that we were living in the hut in the heart of the woods, in the well-heated hut of charcoal burners; I even hoped to hear wolves sharpening their claws on the heavy granite slab that formed our doorstep. But our house replaced the hut for me, it sheltered me from hunger and cold; and if I shivered, it was merely from well-being’. In this passage from Bachelin’s book, the hut appears to be the tap-root of the function of inhabiting.”

The aesthetic appreciation of the refuge corresponds with the intensity of the dialectical relationship of the refuge with the prospect or the hazard. The pleasure afforded by the boy’s hut reverie is enhanced by imaginary wolves scratching at the door. Thus Bachelard also devotes chapters to topics such as “house and universe” and “the dialectics of inside and outside”. All of this is clearly in step with Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory (Bunkse, 1977, p. 151).

Another means of elaborating Appleton’s theory is to consider the writing of keen observers of landscape (“environmental critics” — to use Carlson’s term (1977, p. 153), such as Gordon Cullen or J.B. Jackson. Cullen’s *Townscape* (1961) contains many passages which are congruent with Appleton’s thesis. Cullen’s contrast of “hereness” and “there-ness” seems much the same as Appleton’s distinction between “refuge” and “prospect”. For example, consider his description of the enclave (p. 25; cited by Appleton, 1977, p. 197):

“[The enclave or interior open to the exterior and having free and direct access from one to the other is seen here as an accessible place or room out of the main directional stream, an eddy in which footsteps echo and the light is lessened in intensity. Set apart from the hurly-burly of traffic it yet has the advantage of commanding the scene from a position of safety and strength.]”

Similarly, Jackson (1970) has described Grand Central Terminal in New York City as (p. 83):

“[A conspicuous example of a rich and almost completely satisfactory sensory experience... [One] passes through a marvelous sequence; emerging in a dense, slow-moving crowd from the dark, cool, low-ceiled platform, he suddenly enters the immense concourse... almost every sense is stimulated and flattered; even posture and gait are momentarily improved. Few other cities can offer such a concentration of delights; certainly Paris has nothing comparable. The nearest equivalent is the Vienna Hofburg with its succession of open places and dark arcades, its tremendous panorama of city and mountains abruptly alternating with intimate architectural areas.]”
The implication for landscape planning of the biological theory is a need to emphasize the tension between inside and outside, here and there, refuge and prospect, intimacy and immensity. Of course, it does not make sense to do this without at the same time respecting cultural variations in aesthetic responses to landscape. Yoshinobu Ashihara begins his book, *The Aesthetic Townscape* (1983), by stressing this point (p. xi):

"After observing architecture and cities around the world, I am convinced that the key explanation for the great diversity in basic perceptions of space lies in the nature of the boundary that distinguishes internal from external space and in the treatment of territorial space."

This rather insightful observation links the biological with the cultural without doing injustice to either. Cultural variations in landscape aesthetics are seen as different ways of addressing the inside/outside dichotomy. To Ashihara, these differences are significant and meaningful. As I will show in the next section, these differences are quite meaningful to the inhabitants of different places.

**A CULTURAL THEORY OF LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS**

I have already suggested, in discussing Dewey's aesthetic philosophy, that "beauty" will not play a significant part in the cultural theory of landscape aesthetics. But if the idea of beauty does not afford any explanatory power, what does? The answer to this question is provided by John Costonis in his recent seminal article, "Law and aesthetics: a critique and a reformulation of the dilemma" (1982). Costonis examines two hypotheses which could provide a basis for aesthetic development controls. One is the "visual beauty" hypothesis, which refers to a desire to preserve or create a visually beautiful environment. Costonis rejects this hypothesis in favor of the "cultural stability-identity" hypothesis, which finds a basis for aesthetic controls in the desires of groups to protect their identity and cultural stability by exercising control over their environments.

Following Dewey, Costonis argues as follows (pp. 357–358):

"It is true, of course, that viewers respond affirmatively to particular visual configurations in the environment. Their responses, in fact, are often sufficiently patterned to refute the objection that aesthetics is too subjective to warrant legal protection. But these configurations are compelling because they signify values that stabilize cultural group, or individual identity, not because their visual qualities conform to the canons of one or another school of aesthetic formalism."

In arguing against aesthetic formalism, Costonis states that aesthetic response is comprised of reactions to symbolic, nonsensory aspects of an object as well as to the object's sensory attributes. These symbolic features of an object include (p. 399): "the meanings ascribed to it by virtue of our individual histories, and our experiences as members of political, economic, religious, and other societal groups". Furthermore, Costonis asserts that nonsensory factors are more important than sensory ones in aesthetic response. Thus (p. 401): "We do not so much discover aesthetically compelling properties in the environment, as ascribe them to it on the basis of our individual and cultural beliefs, values, and needs".

In regard to the formalists' assertions that beauty can be defined in terms of the formal characteristics of objects, Costonis points out that, even if this were the case, no one has found any satisfactory rules for identifying beauty (p. 402). In any case, the circumstances of actual aesthetic controversies suggest that the semiotic aspects of the visual environment are more important than any canons of visual beauty. As an example, Costonis discusses the Isaac L. Rice Mansion dispute in New York City's West Side. In that case, the mansion was threatened with demolition and replacement with a 30-story tower. The architectural qualities of the mansion and the proposed tower
were barely considered in the course of the controversy which led to the mansion’s protection through designation as an historic landmark. Instead, opponents of the tower (pp. 393–394) “reacted... to the idea of the tower as associationally dissonant with the Mansion on the West Side”.

An example from Philadelphia supports similar conclusions. In 1982, a developer proposed to build a 14- or 15-story glass-faced office building in the Rittenhouse Square area of central Philadelphia. In order to do this, he would have had to demolish three turn-of-the-century houses (Frey, 1983). In response to the developer’s proposal, some 18 organizations grouped together and formed the Rittenhouse Preservation Coalition which, among other things, published a 24-page report on the problem, organized a community meeting which was attended by several hundred neighborhood residents, and helped to draft a rezoning ordinance which protected the threatened buildings and surrounding blocks (Frey, 1983; Foglietta, 1983).

Here, as in the case of Rice Mansion controversy, the issue was largely aesthetic, in that the threatened buildings and the landscape of which they are a part are a source of pleasure to the residents of the community, not to mention visitors. Although the community’s concerns were largely aesthetic, the issue was not primarily a matter of visual beauty; instead, it was the community’s way of life that was at stake. It seems unlikely that more than a few of the neighborhood’s residents had any specific knowledge of the buildings’ architectural or historical significance before the controversy arose. But this lack of knowledge in no way prevented the development of a widespread negative reaction to the developer’s proposal. A letter to the editor of a local newspaper, written by the president of the Center City Residents’ Association (which was active in the Rittenhouse Preservation Coalition), also stresses the relative importance of preserving the community’s quality of life. In reference to the rezoning which protected the site from redevelopment, the letter states (Halpern, 1983):

“This zoning change enhances the prospects for the preservation of the buildings at 17th and Locust Streets [i.e. the buildings threatened with demolition] as well as the fine federal-era buildings on the 200 block of South 16th Street and the Victorian houses within the area. More important, it protects the present blend of highrise buildings, commercial storefronts and fine residential houses which makes Center City such a fine area for which to live and work. This vibrant environment is an attractive, exciting home for a heterogeneous population of professionals, artists, business people, older citizens and families. These people have a stake in the quality of life in town...” [emphasis added].

This example, like that of the Rice Mansion issue, provides clear support for Costonis’ theory.

Additional support can be found in Rowntree’s (1981; also see Rowntree and Conkey, 1980) interpretation of historic preservation efforts in Salzburg, Austria. Rowntree notes that preservation objectives reflect “visual neighborhood biases” (p. 62): “Since landscape tastes are nurtured by traditional scenery, the connection with historic preservation becomes obvious: people tend to preserve the familiar.” And:

“In an era of rapid environmental change, visual biases and aesthetic traditions are used to slow landscape transformation... Landscape tastes, it would seem, reflect the biases of a people toward the artifacts of their occupancy by giving cultures a sense of historical perspective and identity through their surroundings.”

Further support for the “cultural stability-identity” hypothesis can be found in Peter Smith’s work (1977). Both his “attitudinal” model of brain physiology and his discussion of “symbolic vision” are relevant. Smith’s attitudinal model of brain physiology has implications which are congruent with Costonis’ theory. The attitudinal model emphasizes the distinction between the left and right sides of the neocortex. Following split-brain theorists, Smith asserts that the left side of the neocortex specializes in verbal and mathematical abilities while the right side is concerned with spatial concepts, patterns, textures and so forth. The left side tends to be rational while the right
side is intuitive. Genius seems to be associated with strengths in both sides of the neocortex. yet, according to Smith, education today tends to emphasize development of the left side.

It seems likely that, as Smith asserts, creative thinking involves a dialectic between the two sides of the neocortex (p. 37):

"Creative perception, which is perhaps another way of describing the aesthetic response, may well rely on the dialectic principle. Confronted by a particular urban array, a dialectic rhythm may be set in motion between the constituent elements and the complete scene: between information carried in verbal concepts and abstract information about space and form, colour and texture and, above all, about elements contributing to pattern and unity."

If this is true, then the urban environment should ideally cater to both sides of the neocortex. Arguing that the right side of the brain is being neglected, Smith asserts that (p. 59):

"Emotional needs are as active in the twentieth-century urban inhabitant as in Cromagnon man. Yet things which would offer satisfaction to symbolic-emotional needs are being eliminated from our cities in the interests of a rational, antiseptic cerebral-intensive environment."

This statement seems to be less true today than it was one or two decades ago. Today, the postmodern movement in architecture, greater sophistication in the field of urban design, and the growth of historic preservation are all developments which reflect increasing recognition of the importance of the environmental features with which Smith is concerned.

Whatever one thinks of the implications of the attitudinal model, it is clear that the model is compatible with Costonis' theory of aesthetics. If, as Smith argues, it is true that an appealing landscape must be attractive to both hemispheres of the neocortex, then it follows that, as Costonis asserts, both sensory and nonsensory, or symbolic, aspects of landscapes play a part in determining aesthetic response.

Other similarities can be seen by comparing Smith's discussion of "symbolic vision" with Costonis' discussion of his "cultural stability-identity" hypothesis. Smith considers continuity at some length because he feels that the various aspects of the urban landscape that contribute to continuity are necessary prerequisites for symbolic vision. According to Smith, continuity has at least four aspects (p. 43): (1) obvious architectural highlights; (2) historical assets; (3) the "anonymous-familiar"; (4) traditional principles of urbanism. Three principles of urbanism are: (1) the hierarchical aspects of the historic city; (2) the differentiation, or mix of uses, of the historic city; (3) the uniqueness of historic cities. All of these aspects of continuity have conferred identity on the inhabitants of historic cities and identity is something which inhabitants of modern cities are trying to preserve or create.

As Costonis points out, aesthetic controversy is essentially (p. 381) "debate over environmental change itself, or to be more specific, the question whether that change is culturally disintegrative or culturally vitalizing."

The lessons for landscape planning are clear. A broad implication is that cultural identity and stability (in lieu of visual beauty) should be recognized as explicit objectives of aesthetic regulation and other government actions vis-à-vis aesthetics. A corollary of the cultural stability-identity theory is the idea that new development must be sensitive to its context. Christopher Alexander (1966) has defined good design as good fit between form and context. Alexander's argument (pp. 15-16):

"is based on the idea that every design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question and its context. The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem. In other words, when we speak of design, the real object of discussion is not the form alone, but the ensemble comprising the form and its context. Good fit is a desired property of this ensemble which relates to some particular division of the ensemble into form and context."

Because it is the whole scene which we experience and respond to, it is not relevant to speak of the aesthetics of individual objects in the landscape (e.g. buildings) without asking how those objects contribute to the wholes (landscapes) of which they are only parts (Scruton,
Furthermore, Alexander's idea that goodness of fit is the measure of good design seems to be implied by Costonis' cultural stability-identity theory. The question whether a change in urban form will be "culturally disintegrative" or "culturally vitalizing" is a question about goodness of fit. More precisely, it is a question about the fitness of new form with respect to its context — i.e. the cultural landscape within which it will be situated.

CONCLUSION

The theory of landscape aesthetics is a meta-aesthetic theory (cf. Rose, 1976). As such, it goes beyond traditional theories of aesthetics to include as subjects not only discrete objects of art but also landscapes. By demonstrating that human aesthetic response occurs at both biological and cultural levels, it has been possible to reconcile Dewey's pragmatism and Langer's humanism, and produce a theory which embraces both art and nature. Thus it is meaningful to discuss landscapes as aesthetic objects. This rather modest result is subsumed by the broad implication that there is a need to redefine and restructure the field of aesthetics. To do this comprehensively would require a major effort that would go far beyond the scope of this paper.

Perhaps the most important result of this study is the identification of aesthetic principles which may serve as very general guidelines for landscape planners. One principle is biological: aesthetic pleasure in the landscape derives from the dialectic of refuge and prospect. The other is cultural: aesthetic pleasure derives from a landscape that contributes to cultural identity and stability. There is clearly much room for further investigation and elaboration of these general ideas.

REFERENCES


Concept of Brain and Behaviour. University of Toronto, Toronto, pp. 4–66.