

Outline of Lynch The Image of The Environment

Page 1

This page explains that nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences. I'd like to breakdown what I think this means, basically – everything is in relation to one another. Nothing can truly be identified on its own. There is always something that makes it what it is. It is dependent upon a sequence of events leading up to it and its surrounding.

Page 2

Lynch states “Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all. Not only is the city an object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own.” To me this was a little hard to understand. But reading it slowly helps to make sense of this. From what I'm getting is as we look at the city and perceive it, there is more than what meets the eye. Every sense, meaning our 5 senses are in operation and the image in front of us is just the composite of it all. The image is just what it is. But hearing it, smelling it, tasting it and feeling it are involved as well. The perception of the city involves more than just a visual. It's everything.

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Moving on with page three. They discuss Legibility. According to Lynch “This book will consider the visual quality of the American city by studying the mental image of that city which is held by its citizens. It will concentrate especially on one particular visual quality: the apparent clarity or "legibility" of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized.”

Legibility of a city or a neighborhood incorporates recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern.

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“A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish a harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. This is the obverse of the fear that comes with disorientation; it means that the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar but distinctive as well.”

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“It must be granted that there is some value in mystification, labyrinth, or surprise in the environment. Many of us enjoy the House of Mirrors, and there is a certain charm in the crooked streets of Boston. This is so, however, only under two conditions. First, there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out. The surprise must occur in an overall framework; the confusions must be small regions in a visible whole. Furthermore, the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have some form that can be explored and in time be apprehended. Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.”

This means there must be a sense of confusion in order to see what clarity looks like.

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“Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed now limits and emphasizes what is seen, while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process. Thus the image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.”

I really can take appreciation for this portion of the article because its saying that the image that lies before the eye can be perceived differently from person to person only because we come from two different experiences in life. For example, if I grew near an area that had a gate in front of pool, the next time I see a pool, my eyes would immediately recognize / look at the gate more so than a person who never had a gate in front of their pool. I would make earlier connections more than someone else would based on my pathway and the sequence of event that lead me to where I am today.

Page 7

“As manipulators of the physical environment, city planners are primarily interested in the external agent in the interaction which produces the environmental image. Different environments resist or facilitate the process of image-making.”

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“An environmental image may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure, and meaning. It is useful to abstract these for analysis, if it is remembered that in reality they always appear together. A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness. Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation.”

Page 9

“Imageability Since the emphasis here will be on the physical environment as the independent variable, this study will look for physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image. This leads to the definition of what might be called imageability: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called legibility, or perhaps visibility in a heightened sense where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses.”

Page 10

“The imageability of city form will be the center of the study to follow. There are other basic properties in a beautiful environment: meaning or expressiveness, sensuous delight, rhythm, stimulus, choice. Our concentration on imageability does not deny their importance.”

Page 11

“Kilpatrick describes the process of perceptual learning forced on an observer by new stimuli that no longer fit into previous images.”

Page 12

“The voice and drumbeat of the North American Indian follow entirely different tempos, the two being perceived independently. Searching for a musical analogy of our own, he mentions our church services, where we do not think of coordinating the choir inside with the bells above”

Page 13

“The conscious remolding of the large-scale physical environment has been possible only recently, and so the problem of environmental imageability is a new one.”