

There appears to be a growing dissatisfaction with the visual environment of the past few decades, in contrast to the positive feelings evoked by its historical predecessors. Further, places in the environment have been identified where those messages are often "read." Such places are described in scenarios where sequences of activities take place, and related messages and concepts are studied. These are entrances, buildings, inside buildings, and pathways. Some of the places that stand out visually in the environment are familiar to us, either because they have been part of our everyday experiences, or because they are similar to places we have experienced in the past. Through learning, these are the places that "tell" us about people and their activities, and evoke either good or bad feelings reflecting our present sensations and associations we make with our past. The rationale for a new professional outlook is not necessarily unique to the design field, but to the ubiquitous gulf between academics and professionals, between theoreticians and practitioners, or between researchers and designers, in all fields. We lose the ability to orient ourselves and spend more time determining where we are in relation to where we want to go. More significantly, we cease to identify with places and things that surround us because their formerly unique characteristics have been homogenized for the sake of practicality and economics. Research, however, indicates that professionals differ from the public in their environmental preferences (Canter, 1969; Groat, 1982; Hershberger and Cass, 1974). In short, continuous and indiscriminate changes contribute to the creation of environments at least lacking the character of their local makers and users, and often introduce inappropriate and destructive forces. Becoming aware of perceived environmental effects is a necessary first step in striking the delicate balance between familiarity and monotony and boredom, and between variety and confusion and disorientation. At the extreme, large-scale urban projects are so interjected into existing cultural and physical situations that marked and distressing forms of antisocial behavior result. As evidence of contemporary dissatisfaction with urban environments in particular increases, the need for understanding and knowledgeably modulating the interaction of people and place becomes more critical. Recognition and deliberate repetition of meaningful elements provide a culture with a powerful mechanism for self-proclamation and stability. The tradition of criticism in the design fields, too, has contributed to superficial reactions of highly subjective judgments about the quality of the environment. When buildings are demolished and neighborhoods modified, familiar environments become unfamiliar, altering our feelings of comfort and safety. This inability to effectively embrace issues of visual quality can be traced to many factors, least of which is the planning and design process. Consequently, criticism has very little value for design professionals because it fails to explain the reasons for those subjective judgments. Integrating design research and practice can be viewed as a new strategy for achieving a productive dialogue about the visual environment.