

Need for aesthetics in visual and audio environments

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Abstract

Since the early ages, mankind has always been in search of a comfortable, convenient, safe and pleasant environment to live. Mankind's quite different endeavors and intellectual progresses throughout the historical process have been related to the reason and continuity of his existence. Man's endeavor to leave various traces in the environments he has been and his creativity have been effective in the formation of cultures and civilizations. This also denotes art.

All environments that harbor men stand for their environment. The house, neighborhood, district, village, city, country, office, outdoor or indoor spaces where he dwells are considered the basic constituents of the environment that encircle mankind. All of these constituents have always been interwoven and in contact with cultural textures, aesthetics and art.

The fact that the origin of cultures are cities also makes one think about the fact that mankind lives in this environment formed together by such cultural accumulation and the nature. This is because cultures spring from cities, live in cities and spread their influence from one city to another.

In this study, the environment where mankind lives is analyzed in terms of meeting aesthetical expectations. With this study conducted on the basis of literature, it is intended to call attention to the subject of designing environments suited to the aesthetical needs and expectations of mankind.

Keywords: Visual environment, audio environment, aesthetics.

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1. Introduction

Life is an invaluable and unique right for every living creature. What makes our lives valuable and important is that time cannot be turned back and repeated. Many things such as incidents in life, environment, society, science, education and art have importance to individuals. Every society and civilization has their own unique artistic perspective and trend. This is because art prospers life and renders it meaningful. The power and beauty of art springs from the fact that it surrounds human life.

According to Erinç (2004), life is the act and effort of making decision and choosing between binary oppositions like right-wrong, good-bad and beautiful-ugly. We develop and forced to develop an attitude towards everything we interact in our daily live and life experiences whether knowingly or not. If we are satisfied with such attitude, in other words, meet some of our needs, we feel happy about such attitude. A way of showing that happiness is to express out liking to the object that we interact with and feel happy about. Liking is the ability to tell the beautiful, good and right from the ugly, bad or wrong.

The objective of this study is to analyze the visual and audio environment that an individual is within in terms of a critical perspective within the context of aesthetical needs. Accordingly, the study is conducted based upon literature to a great extent and supported with findings and conclusions, and visual and audio materials. The findings of the study are reported under the subheadings *Environment, Art – Aesthetics – Aesthetical Perception and Awareness* as follows.

2. Environment

Every setting where we are present at serve as our environment as a conceptual dimension. The fact that humans are changeable and open to developments and novelties affect the concept and fact of environment.

According to the Turkish Language Society (TDK) Dictionary, environment is defined as the “vicinity, proximity, surrounding of something. The setting that stands for the society that the individual is a part of. The entirety of the natural, social and cultural external factors that have an influence of the development of life” (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr>).

According to Taşkın (2010), since environment concerns many scientific disciplines, the definition of environmental pollution varies across scientific disciplines. Air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, electromagnetic pollution, etc. On the other hand, environment is the shortest and the most effective indication of how a society is. The culture of a society, its respect for human rights, its civilization, prosperity, ethical and aesthetical values, economic development, social and political structure is engraved into its environment. Therefore, taking a look at the environment where a society lives would be enough for having an idea and reaching a conclusion about that society.

Since 1982, Turkey has been one of the few countries that include “Environmental Right” in the “Constitutional fundamental rights and duties”. The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey defines that everybody has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment and it is the duty of the government and citizens to improve the environment, protect the environmental health and prevent environmental pollution (Art. 56), and assigns the government to ensure the preservation of the historical, cultural and natural heritages and values and to take necessary measures for this purpose (Art. 63) (Erim, Refet, cited by Taşkın, 2010). “Government ensures the preservation of historical, cultural and natural heritages and values, and takes supportive and encouraging measures to this end (Art. 63/1)”.

Aside from the penal laws, other legislative regulations have a significant role in the protection of the environment. Legal rules and specifically laws assume substantial and effective roles in the protection of social values. Many laws brought legal reforms that protect the environment such as Construction Zoning Law no. 3194, Environmental Law no. 2872, Mass Housing Law no. 2985, Metropolitan Municipality Law no. 5216, Municipality Law no. 5393, Law no. 3083 on Agricultural Reform for Land Arrangement in Irrigation Areas, Coastal Law no. 3621, Law no. 5312 on Intervention and Indemnification in case of Emergencies related to Marine Environment Pollution with Petroleum

and Other Hazardous Substances, Law no. 4856 on Ministry of Environment and Forestry Organization and Duties, and Electronic Communication Law no. 5809 (www.mevzuat.gov.tr/, (cited by Taşkın, 2010).

Emphasizing the importance of “polluter pays principle” and “precautionary” principles in the protection of environment, Taşkın addresses the protection of the environment outside the penal law as *Legal Protection, Educational Protection, Social and Philosophical Protection, Ethical Protection and Administrative Protection*.

According to the same source, any person causing noise that would cause damage to the health of other people in violation of the obligations defined in the relevant laws will be sentenced to two months to two years in prison or imposed punitive fine (Turkish Criminal Law, Art. 183). Noises which are loud to the extent they may damage the health of others are considered as offense. An expert should assess which level of noise damages the human health. In addition, since the statement “damage the health” is used in the law, the term “health” should be widely interpreted. In other words, not only problems related to hearing but also psychological and mental disorders should be addressed in this context (Taşkın, 2010).

On the other hand, the term “zoning”, signifying a cultural meaning for the environment where people live, is also used for public works, act of developing, improving and enlivening. The term zoning is used to denote developing the areas subject to housing and settlement inside and outside the municipal boundaries within the scope of a certain plan. Namely, the term zoning does not refer to an activity conducted within a certain area or settlement area but the improvement and beautification of a whole country. In relation to a settlement that will be constructed on a plot or land as a public or private structure in different types and for different purposes, Zoning Law refers to a set of rules that regulate which characteristics such settlements should have depending on their type and purpose (Taşkın, 2010).

In relation to environmental awareness, Kuban (2015) addresses the concept of architecture and environment from a critical perspective and suggests that people today have started to almost think of it as their fate to live in dull, poorly planned and neglected structures in an urban environment that gradually becomes uglier, drifts away from the nature and gets polluted.

Within the frame of the concept of environment, the environment that is visually offered to us and perceived by us is our visual environment. Likewise, the auditory aspect of the environment we live in is our audio environment. Visual quality involves the senses and perceptions that appeal to our eyes. The visual harmony of the every environment we live in involves the concept of aesthetics and beauty.

On the other hand, Environmental Psychology that examines environment together with humans argues that man is influenced by the environment, he changes his environment and he is an active organism that changes together with the environment. Whereas traditional psychology examines human behaviors outside environmental conditions, Environmental Psychology defends that man cannot be isolated from his daily life environment (Türksoy, 1986).

Structures in urban areas are products of architecture; and they are characterized with the aesthetical emotions they awaken, their futures related to their mass, fronts and form and indoor and decorative qualifications. However, when a series of structures are clustered, quite different senses manifest themselves, which cannot be seen when perceiving a single structure; thus, different formations and art originate. Therefore, both single structures and the environment that consists of a cluster of such structures should not only have the functionality to meet the biological needs of the people but also bear aesthetical qualifications that meet the psychological and intellectual needs of societies (Erdoğan, 2006).

According to Erzen (cited by Erdoğan, 2006), the most important element of the environmental aesthetics is that it manifests itself in every instance of life and the realm of existence and that it is changeable depending on the dynamics of life. In this sense, aesthetics is the perception, reaction and stimulus that provide for the motion and energy of life and the source of communication between “self” and the “whole”.

3. Art-Aesthetics–Aesthetical Perception and Awareness

Aesthetical values are intrinsically subjective. Aesthetical tastes vary by different periods, and an entity/formation/element that is considered aesthetical in a certain period could be considered to lack aesthetical values in another period. However, understanding spatial qualities through the cultural characteristics created by the structures of a society and the relevant aesthetical feelings would serve as a guide. It is possible for societies/individuals to live healthily, happily and delightedly depending on the environmental conditions, therefore, only in visually qualified, well-analyzed, functional and aesthetical environments.

“The way we perceive or can perceive the world is the way we perceive ourselves; or how we perceive ourselves is how we perceive the world. One of the most (maybe the first) practical means of correctly perceiving ourselves must be art” (Erinç, 2004). According to Erinç, art is the endeavor to reveal *the beautiful* and create forms that appeal to tastes by stimulating the connections between the style and the harmony that exist in the feeling of its creator and its receiver. Therefore, art is the man’s endeavor to create the beautiful. As for the beautiful, it is the emotion of connections that appeal to tastes (Erinç, 2004).

On the other hand, Read (2014) stresses his opinions regarding the concepts of beauty/aesthetics as follows. “However we define the meaning of beauty, we must accept that it is theoretical; the abstract meaning of beauty is merely the first step of the endeavor of art. Ones who enter on this endeavor are the living people, and everything they create are under all the influence of life. There are three steps in art: The first step is perceiving the material characteristics – colors, sounds, movements and many complex and unidentified physical external reactions; the second is shaping and molding these perceptions into likings. It can be said that the aesthetical concern ends with these two steps. However, there can be a third step, which is the expression of an emotion or enthusiasm that exists before the arrangement of perceptions. In this context, it could be suggested that art is neither more nor less than *expression*.”

Erinç (2004) categorizes human life into 1-Objective Relationship, 2-Functional Relationship and 3-Aesthetical Relationship.

“Aesthetical relationship is the life of creating and developing certain designs based on those that objectively exist; however, these designs are based on liking, in other words, the beautiful. Aesthetical experiences originate from such relationship. Such aesthetical experiences are the experiences that intensifies life and makes it more meaningful. Thinking of art that intensifies experience merely as a word, painting, sculpture, novel, piece of poetry music, cinema or drama, considering it merely as a being or addressing it as an objective being would be an incorrect and unfruitful approach. The reason is art makes human life interesting with its numerous complex processes and numerous relationships as a phenomenon; art makes it possible to make use of life in the most beautiful and most desired way. That is why art gives intensity to experiences and meaning to life” (Erinç, 2004).

When man evaluates himself and his environment and what happens around him, a perception and the concept of awareness step in.

According to the Turkish Language Society (TDK) Dictionary, Perception is defined as becoming aware of something by paying attention to it, as cognizance; Awareness is defined as the state of being aware; Aesthetics is defined as the theoretical science of beauty in art and life based on the general laws of artistic creation, *beautiful feeling, aesthetic, aesthetics* (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr>).

According to Erinç (2011), realm of perception and the ability to perceive are the two key factors that affect perceptions. The realm of perception is the natural and sociocultural setting where a person lives. It is the complete environment with which that person has the means to interact within a certain period of time. The entities that create that environment and the characteristics of these entities consist the realm of perception of man. These two realms together affect the personality of a person and controls his behaviors. It is possible to understand if he has the ability to perceive only through his attitudes and behaviors when he gets down to work. Namely, the ability to perceive can only exist and be talked about when it is concretized and objectified. Furthermore, the ability to perceive does not only mean becoming aware of the surrounding and what happens in the environment. In addition to such behaviors, integrating those which the individual becomes aware of, creating images based on those that are perceived, changing or developing the images perceived

are also the ability to perceive; and the its realization lies within the ability, desire and expectations of the individual.

On the other hand, as an art-science term, Aesthetical Concern in its positive meaning has a reinforcing effect on mankind when reaching the beautiful. It signifies the state of restlessness experienced when achieving the beautiful, the more beautiful and the most beautiful. Such feeling first of all stands for being able to perceive that the beautiful, or the beautiful that is found, caught, known or taught, is not absolute and not constant; it also means becoming aware and conscious that our own acquisitions about the beautiful, or art, are in a constant need of improvement (Erinç, 2011).

4. Discussion-Conclusion

It is seen that philosophers and researchers widely argue about art that the environmental beauty factor is influential in the education of man. It is known that the socialization process that starts with family continues with the school process. Accordingly, the environment factor and the education relationship exhibit a parallelism in social gatherings.

Herbert Read, who suggests that “a civilized environment can only exist in a cultural medium that wants and seeks for the beautiful” as cited by Kuban (2015), states that the first condition of good teaching is the beauty of the school structure and reminds that Émile of Rousseau was raised in a well-kept house in the middle of a beautiful garden. In today’s cities, while the big population booms are not able to provide for sufficient school structures, both the schools and the environments of children are far from beautiful and aesthetical values. Some of the structures which are believed to be beautiful are “new and maintained” rather than being beautiful (Kuban, 2015).

The examination of the legislative regulations on the environment revealed articles that address the natural and cultural environment and urbanization in Turkey together with auditory and visual environment; yet no articles that contain definitions such as ‘aesthetical’ and ‘beautiful’ were found; it was established that environmental regulations were analyzed within the context of health and practical living conditions.

On the other hand, among the findings obtained during the research, the “Environmental Law” dated February 27, 2012 of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus addresses the subject under “Environmental Aesthetics” title in Articles 60, 61, 62 and 63 of the Section 12. In this context, the statement “Beautiful housing areas which are clean, peaceful and aesthetical increase the quality of life of the society. These areas must be protected to keep them attractive” also support the subject matter of our study.

In conclusion, within the context of the legislative regulations and relevant researches examined during the research, it appears that it is necessary to “reregulate in line with the needs and expectations of humans” the subject of environment which is seen to be limited to “health and practical living conditions” to a great extent. The reason is that it is believed the measures to be taken in terms of aesthetics and beauty will also be effective in the improvement of health and practical living conditions.

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