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par Victor R. Savage

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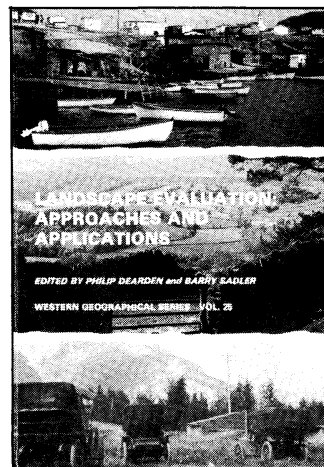
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Landscape Evaluation: Approaches and Applications. Victoria,
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The 12 articles and one photographic essay in this book are all geared towards "methodological problems of landscape evaluation research". While the editors note that landscape evaluation is based on the "premise that the aesthetic quality" of landscapes (natural, rural, urban) is of some importance, the various articles demonstrate its variety of implications in landscape perceptions, taste, preferences, appreciation, utilization, planning and management. Despite the seemingly narrow subject matter at hand and the definite western cultural aesthetic vantage point (Edward Gibson's western-defined traditions of landscape aesthetics), the book reveals a plethora of varied angles, concepts, insights, and approaches to the subject. Recognizing the complexity of the subject matter, the editors have tried to control and focus to some extent the disparate viewpoints and methodologies by introductory and concluding essays and dividing the 10 articles under three sub-headings: background, approaches and applications.

In spite of the overwhelming contributions by geographers in this book, a trans-disciplinary comprehension and approach to the problems of landscape evaluation is still balanced with a definite geographical perspective. The book also shows that within geography, the landscape concept is undergoing a diversity of approaches, a product of both inter-disciplinary inputs and philosophical undercurrents within the discipline.

The introductory chapter by the editors, while providing a somewhat succinct summary of more recent trends in landscape evaluation, was short on providing the longer historical overview of landscape evaluation. The absence of Alexander von Humboldt's classic work *Cosmos* (see especially volume 2) comes to mind because it provides an early recognition of landscape aesthetics in geography. The move towards an ideational interpretation (symbolic, social, iconographic) of landscapes is a major underlying theme in landscape evaluation which has been of increasing focus in geography, but given scant attention. This view is best summed up in the recent works by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds) (1988) *The iconography of landscape* and William Norton's (1989) *Explorations in the Understanding of Landscape*.

This book sheds light on two different trends in landscape analysis that current geographers are engaged in. First, landscape is viewed not only as reality (pristine wilderness, rural, urban) but as it is depicted through various «mediums' (as opposed to approaches) of expression. This book shows alternative ways of looking at and evaluating landscapes. There are the literary landscapes (perceived through fiction and poetry) and the pictorial landscapes (art and photographs). In Douglas Porteous' study of Malcolm Lowry's works (Canada's greatest novelist), the familiar terrain of humanistic and existential themes (home, place, inside-outside, city and wilderness) are once again evoked though the examples are location specific of the Canadian landscape.

Colin Wood's interesting analysis on the importance of colour in landscape evaluation seemed a bit of a misfit, not in the book but as an «approach' — colour should be perceived as one important ingredient in landscape composition that develops varied meanings and symbolisms depending on the cultural filter.

John Marsh's postcard landscapes of the Glacier National Park (British Columbia) and Barry Sadler's photographic study of the Canadian Rockies (Banff National Park), reveal an interesting way (photographs) of studying environmental cognition, changing landscape taste and recoding landscape data.

Second, several articles show the applied influence of landscape practitioners and professionals (landscape architects, landscape designers and planners, foresters) in geography. If the articles are representative of the applied research in this area, then research is long on large scale natural park areas and short on real life, quotidian, existential rural and urban landscapes. While this natural landscape bias reflects in part the nature of Canadian landscapes, it does also say something about the nature of applied research — that it might be easier to quantify (as is the case in many of the articles here) and make better objective assessments of natural parks because of their «enclosed' (protected) physical characteristics and touristic importance. The more culturally complex lived-in landscapes clearly are difficult to operationalize objectively in landscape evaluation. And furthermore, unfortunately, cultural landscapes have often been planned from top down rather than reflecting grass root public preferences which Pomeroy, FitzGibbon and Green's article attempts to demonstrate («personal construct theory'), despite its limitations.

At the root of the wide ranging approaches and applications of landscape evaluation lies the fundamental polarized issue: on the one hand, does the subjectivity (individual, cultural differences) of landscape evaluation override a common approach to the subject; and on the other hand, is there such a thing as a universal, objective appraisal and evaluation of landscape? Philip Dearden's article comes close to providing one framework of showing that landscape aesthetics is a product of overlapping universal (human, innate) and particular (culture, socio-economic variables) influences though the framework is conceptually difficult to operationalize.

At the other end of landscape evaluation, there is still the question of whether beauty is inherent in objects and landscape and whether one can measure such inherent beauty or the attractive uniqueness of a landscape. Here many of the articles have attempted to ascertain qualitatively and quantitatively the scenic quality and attraction (Robert M. Itami, John Marsh articles) and uniqueness (Michael Moss & William Nickling's article) of particular landscapes.

All the articles admittedly recognize the problems in landscape evaluation, the lack of suitable theories for landscape aesthetics, the complex subjective/objective dichotomy, the shortcomings of quantitative (statistical and mathematical models) and qualitative methods by themselves, the lack of grassroot reality of complex concepts and techniques and the dangers in academia of accepting uncritically novel and innovative approaches. Unfortunately, recognition of these complex problems is not sufficient because the academic system of peer review endorses the "persistence of error" in landscape evaluation. Louis Hamill's frank and daring criticism of the dangers of academia's peer reviews should be heeded if the development of landscape evaluation is to progress: "peer review is no longer reliable for fair, unbiased, accurate, and complete reviews of research reports and other writings. There is convincing evidence that academics have learned how to use peer review to the advantage of individuals and groups" (Hamill, 1990, p. 203).

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