

The architectures of seeing and going: Or, are cities shaped by bodies or minds? And is there a syntax of spatial cognition?

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Abstract

In my first paper to this Symposium, it was argued that the human cognitive subject played a key part the shaping and working of the city. The key mechanism was the *synchronisation* of diachronically experienced (and usually diachronically created) information into higher order pictures of spatial relations, the guiding form for which was an abstracted notion of a grid formed by linearised spaces. This notion was argued to be both perceptual and conceptual, serving at once as an abstracted representation of the space of the city and as a means of solving problems, such as navigational problems. In this paper, the question addressed is where the notion of the ideal grid comes from, why it has the properties it does, and what it has to do with the real grids of cities, which are commonly of the 'deformed' or 'interrupted' rather than 'ideal' kinds (Hillier, 1996). The answer, it is proposed, lies in the very nature of complex spaces, defining these as spaces in which objects are placed so as to partially block seeing and going, and, in particular, in certain divergences in the logics of metric and visual accessibility in such spaces. The real grid, deformed or interrupted, is, it is argued the practical resolution of these divergent logics, and the ideal grid its abstract resolution. In both resolutions, however, the resolution is more on the terms of the visual than the metric, suggesting that cognitive factors are more powerful than metric factors in shaping the space of the city. The question is then raised: do people have or acquire the concept of the grid, perhaps as some kind of perceptual-conceptual invariance of spatial experience in complex spaces, and do they use it as a model to interact with complex spatial patterns of the urban kind? This possibility is examined against the background of current opinion in the cognitive sciences.

Keywords

Metric integration, visual integration, Space Syntax, perceptual, conceptual

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06.1