Aesthetic preferences for architecture do not rely on commonly shared semantic distinctions

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INTRODUCTION

What drives our aesthetic judgments of architecture?

• Visual preferences for unfamiliar real-world scenes show a high degree of consistency across individuals. (Vessel & Rubin, 2010)

• These shared preferences are primarily driven by culturally shared semantic associations with the content of specific scenes. (Vessel & Rubin, 2010)

• Preferences for artwork, on the other hand, are highly individual. (Vessel et al., 2012)

• Similarities across observers for both stimulus sets may reflect characteristics of aesthetic processing styles.

In contrast to the range of semantic distinctions possible for the broader scope of real-world images, most observers do not typically semantically differentiate images of unfamiliar architecture beyond a small range of basic-level distinctions, e.g. office building, house, room. (Rosch, 1978)

HYPOTHESIS: If high agreement for preferences of real-world scenes is primarily determined by basic-level semantic interpretations, preferences for a diverse set of architectural images should not show high agreement.

METHODS

Stimuli

• Exterior architecture: 108 images

• Interior architecture: 118 images

• Images were contrast equalized by scaling the luminance distribution to achieve a luminance contrast (root-mean-square; Croot) of 0.22.

• Images did not contain people and were selected to emphasize architectural qualities over surroundings (exterior) and furnishings (interior).

Participants

• 14 observers with no formal architectural training: 8 female, 6 male, b/t ages 21-39

• In each session, observers participated in 3 blocks of trials with the full set of images presented in a new random order. Order of presentation was counterbalanced across subjects.

• 12 female, 6 male, b/t ages 21-39.

• 14 observers with no formal architectural training: 8 female, 6 male, b/t ages 21-39.

• Could this reflect something about observers’ “aesthetic style?”

CONCLUSIONS

Will a set of “real-world” architectural images (which lack strong basic-level category distinctions) show high agreement across observers?

• When compared to the broader class of real-world scenes, images of architecture show much lower agreement across observers.

• This suggests that aesthetic preferences for architecture do not rely on culturally shared semantic distinctions.

REFERENCES

