

The Temporal Implications of Spatial Prospects

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Abstract : The work reported examines potential linkages between spatial and temporal prospects, and more specifically, between variations in the spatial depth and foreground obstruction of window views, and observers' sense of connection to the future. It was found that external views from indoor spaces were strongly associated with a sense of the future, that partially obstructing such a view with foreground objects significantly reduced its association with the future, and replacing it with a pictorial representation of the same scene (with no real actual depth) removed most of its temporal association. A lesser change in the spatial depth of the view, however, had no apparent effect on association with the future. While the role of spatial depth has still to be confirmed, the results suggest that spatial prospects directly affect temporal ones. The word "prospect" typifies the overlapping of the spatial and temporal in most human languages. It originated in classical times as a purely spatial term, but in the 16th century took on the additional temporal implication of an imagined view ahead, of the future. The psychological notion of prospection, then, has its distant origins in a spatial analogue. While it is not yet proven that space directly structures our processing of time at a physiological level, it is generally agreed that it commonly does so conceptually. The mental representation of possible futures has been a central part of human survival as a species (Boyer, 2008; Suddendorf & Corballis, 2007). A sense of the future seems critical not only practically, but also psychologically. It has been suggested, for example, that lack of a positive image of the future may be an important contributing cause of depression (Beck, 1974; Seligman, 2016). Most people in the developed world now spend more than 90% of their lives indoors. So any direct link between external views and temporal prospects could have important implications for both human well-being and building design. We found that the ability to see what lies in front of us spatially was strongly associated with a sense of what lies ahead temporally. Partial obstruction of a view was found to significantly reduce that sense connection to the future. Replacing a view with a flat pictorial representation of the same scene removed almost all of its connection with the future, but changing the spatial depth of a real view appeared to have no significant effect. While foreground obstructions were found to reduce subjects' sense of connection to the future, they increased their sense of refuge and security. Consistent with Prospect and Refuge theory, an ideal environment, then, would seem to be one in which we can "see without being seen" (Lorenz, 1952), specifically one that conceals us frontally from others, without restricting our own view. It is suggested that these optimal conditions might be translated architecturally as screens, the apertures of which are large enough for a building occupant to see through unobstructed from close by, but small enough to conceal them from the view of someone looking from a distance outside.

Keywords : foreground obstructions, prospection, spatial depth, window views

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