

# Ecology

The ecological method focuses on physical arrangements of an environment and how people interact with such conditions. The development of this approach is identified with the "Chicago School" of sociology. The classical application of the method used theoretical models from plant and animal ecology to investigate human communities. An overview of the classical position, as well as criticisms of it, along with new directions which have emerged from social scientists' studies of people's adaptations to space, is available in George A. Theodorson's (1961) anthology, Studies in Human Ecology.

One of the new directions was shaped by researchers' interest in the sociocultural components of ecological phenomena. Jonassen (1961) quoted Norwegians who talked with him about their reasons for settling in certain communities in Queens, Staten Island, New Jersey and Connecticut. His method has much in common with that of the undergraduate ethnographer (Davis, 1972) who used student informants to describe conflict in a junior high school. Some ethnographical studies are involved with people's interactions with space, or "place" as Schroedl (1972) referred to it.

In his description of kitchen culture he observed:

Although there are no signs posted or lines drawn on the floor, all experienced restaurant people know that a kitchen is generally divided up into a dozen or so areas. Certain areas are for preparation, others for cleaning and maintenance, and so on. Each of these areas is restricted to certain employees in the restaurant. But since cooks have the greatest responsibility, they have the greatest freedom in going where they want to go in the kitchen. Everyone knows this map of the kitchen, except the new worker who is continually going places he shouldn't. (p. 186)

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He added that efficient operation was the reason for such divisions: employees know where to find things and they do not get in the way of one another. These concerns, as well as the means for coping with them, are very familiar to art teachers. Schultz (1973) exemplified this point of view:

The art room is very important in the studio-art approach. No matter what kind of room or space is available, the art teacher organizes it specifically to serve the needs of the program. The four basic units--drawing, painting, printmaking, and three--dimensional design--each have their own equipment, work-space, and storage requirements. (p.8)

His book contains many photographs and considerable discussion of equipment and arrangements which are intended to enhance the making of art. Linderman (1971) maintained that "classroom environments are active processes. . . The room should be visually stimulating so that a student can continually make discoveries of an aesthetic, artistic, or appreciative nature" (p. 40). McFee and Degge (1977) directly manifested sociocultural concerns in their adaptation of Sommer's concept of personal space to classrooms:

People's I-spaces include not only those spaces they regularly occupy and consider their areas, but things they wear and carry. For instance, the student's desk in the schoolroom is his or her place during a given time; and the things arranged on the desk are part of what identifies the individual's space. (p. 218)

Lieberman's (1960) The Artist in His Studio is a documentation of what he refers to as "the mystery of environment" (p. 9). He photographed artists, their work, and their studios in France after World War II. The book includes verbal descriptions as well, and the whole is the culmination of numerous visits to each artist over a period of several years. He attempted to record significant details

that he felt added to his understanding of an artist's method of work. An example is his description of an aspect of Leger's painting environment:

The floor of his studio was unique. Most artists in their studios surround themselves with monochromatic or subdued color, but the deep red floor of Leger's studio was an intense base from which his eye received a constant shock. He needed the stimulus of pure color. The blotting papers on his writing table under the window were red, yellow, green--bright and intense. (p. 49)

The graduate students' papers which follow are responses to an assignment to use ecology as a research method in some sort of art-related setting. Studios, classrooms, art display spaces, and art research areas were suggested as possible environments on which to focus. Their instructions were to map the area and then to observe people's interactions with the physical arrangements. They were asked to look for activity zones or natural areas and to describe what life was like in those places. It was anticipated that general insights concerning the affects of specific ecological aspects would emerge. These conclusions were to be documented with evidence in their papers.

Two additional circumstances contributed significant background preparation for these papers. Priscilla Fenton, in connection with her first reaction report on Collier's, Visual Anthropology, chose to document her working environments at home and in her office. As a result the seminar members had seen colored slides of the items, and their arrangements, with which she surrounds herself in these spaces. This kind of fortuitous enrichment is always an exciting possibility in seminar settings. I suggested to Janice Johnson that,

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because of her research interests, she might like to read Liberman's book for one of her reaction reports in class. She acted on this recommendation and so the students were acquainted with his research into the interactions of these specific artists with their working environments.

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