

The pattern of bonding or overlapping of the bricks is a source of enormous variety. The manner of shaping the joint can vary from round recessed, to struck at an angle, to flush and so on. Combine all of these and I hardly ever see two walls the same! Unfortunately this very sophistication about the physical form of architecture can lead architects to see and experience it quite differently. There really does seem to be such a thing as architects' architecture, and it can get pretty remote from the lives of ordinary people! So objects that have meaning for us, which we understand and for which we have concepts with names attached to them, are likely to have foreground quality.

Context

An important way in which meaning has an impact on attention is through the context of a situation. As I drive to work in the morning, I am doing many things. Obviously I control the car by steering and operating the pedals to regulate speed, and I watch the road and events around me to determine how this should happen. But I also listen to the radio and think through the day ahead, and maybe even compose some thoughts about the book I am currently writing. If you were to ask me later in the day which traffic lights were red this morning I would probably find it hard to remember, and yet thank goodness I have never once failed to stop at a red light. So I must be processing some information, almost in the background as it were, without paying much attention to it. All this goes on pretty well until something unusual happens. Perhaps a child steps out into the road suddenly in front of my car. At this point attention will change rapidly. No longer does the diary or the book feature; all mental faculties are brought to bear on the emergency action that needs to be taken. In fact we seem to have a number of loops of mental processing capabilities that facilitate this complex and sophisticated behaviour. We can think very deliberately and concentrate; we can 'daydream' while performing physical tasks; we can listen to music while watching for traffic lights to change and so on. Actually one of the signs of a highly developed skill is that we can perform it without paying attention to it. When you first started to drive a car your skill was so low that it took all your attention; in fact you may have even found it hard to steer and change gear at the same time! Listening to the radio and mentally writing a book were certainly not possible!

Not only does the development of skill change our attention; so does our whole learning process. George Rand delightfully illustrates this in his work on how children perceive houses and draw them (Rand 1980). He quotes work by Muchow, who showed how children develop in their perception of a department store. She pointed out that at the age of 6 years, such a place has quite different meaning. At that age you are not in possession of a budget and not responsible for furnishing