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16. Margaret Crawford

**THE FIFTH ECOLOGY:
FANTASY, THE AUTOMOBILE, AND LOS ANGELES**

With the opening of Disneyland in 1955, an environmental paradigm emerged that was to haunt the ecological, cultural, and psychological landscapes of southern California. By organizing his amusement park around thematic zones based on fictional environments, Walt Disney replaced the squalid ambience of the carnival with conceptual models of American mythology at two-thirds scale. Main Street equals small-town America, Frontierland, the myth of the western frontier, and Tomorrowland, the corporate and technological promise of the future. These myths were packaged to be consumed, which quickly made Disneyland the most visited attraction in southern California.

In spite of its incredible success, Disneyland itself was only good for an afternoon, not for life; physically, it was too limited and its technology too evident to be directly adopted as a model for environmental planning. At the same time, its reduction of a complex and debatable reality to a single, agreed-upon theme—a theme that could be both cliché and archetype—suggested that environmental reality could be replaced by a focused thematic unreality at a larger scale.

This possibility offered a way out of the ecological impasse facing Los Angeles in the late 1950s. Although the city had long generated fantasy commercial architecture, such as Tail o' the Pup, a hot dog stand shaped like a hot dog, or the Brown Derby, a restaurant built as a hat, based on limited images, these buildings existed as isolated elements in a larger environment dominated by powerful geographic features. In the early 1960s Reyner Banham classified Los Angeles into four ecologies: three natural systems, the beach, the foothills, and the basin, connected by autopia, an artificial network of roads and freeways.¹ Fantasy architecture, confined to a setting of palm trees, orange groves, and snow-capped mountains, had no room to expand.

By introducing the concept of the theme environment, Disneyland allowed a new system of land use to emerge, liberated from the physical setting of the city and based on a landscape of the imagination. Like Disney's "lands," theme environments consist of controllable settings designed to convey a unified image. Based on a carefully selected set of themes presented with a consistency and coherence not found in everyday life, they offer a reduced



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FIGURE 16.1

"The Stack"—four-level intersection of the Hollywood, Harbor, and Pasadena freeways, Los Angeles.

experience of a more complex reality, whether historical, geographic, or cultural. Themes, drawn from anywhere in time and space, are unlimited, but their presentation is restricted to communicating nostalgia and comfort. Whether based on fictional texts like Tom Sawyer's Island or on historical locations like New Orleans Square, these spaces have been drained of ambiguity and contradiction, their meanings reduced to entertainment.

This concept had significant social implications. In addition to providing thematic arenas for consumption, Disneyland transformed public space itself into a commodity. Charles Moore noted that although Disneyland introduced public space into the "private floating world of Southern California . . . you have to pay for the public life."² The public realm, described by Hannah Arendt as an area where people define their own identity and awareness of others' identities through participation in ritual and civic life, was replaced by a place where human needs for public experiences are shaped by fundamentally commercial purposes. In spite of its window dressing, which is derived from reassuring visions of other times and places, Disney's artificial version of public life is totally divorced from any traditional social, religious, or cultural context.³ Here, the individual defines himself through consumption choices.

The multiplication of similarly packaged environments testifies to the accuracy of Disney's insights. "Consumerist" architecture, its principles based on behavioral manipulation through communicable imagery, primarily characterizes building types directed toward leisure activities.⁴ Offsetting the rationalist standardization imposed by the workplace, its fantasy fuels the need for entertainment and escape in other areas of life. Most widely applied to consumption environments such as shopping malls, stores, and restaurants, and often to hotel and resort architecture, thematic approaches are increasingly appearing in residential architecture. The extra level of metaphor provided by theme images, such as clapboard villages or Spanish haciendas, gives otherwise indistinguishable housing and condominium developments a marketing edge over less communicative projects.⁵

Existing buildings, particularly those with historical associations, can be easily repackaged into theme environments, as the transformation of several city blocks into New York's South Street Seaport "festival marketplace" indicates. A large area of the town of Monterey, California, has been thematically unified with the widespread application of motifs inspired by John Steinbeck's novel, *Cannery Row*, turning the real Cannery Row into a parody of itself.⁶ The ultimate expansion of Disneyland beyond the confines of the theme park into daily life is illustrated by Disney Corporation's own

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FIGURE 16.2
Map of Disneyland's Tomorrowland.

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Studio Backlot project in Burbank, a complex containing a shopping mall, entertainment center, hotel, and theme park, all based on a completely fictional premise.

The theme of a movie backlot provides a mental structure that allows the infusion of fantasy and spectacle into every aspect of the building. The nature of the cinematic medium, inherently fragmented, justifies the juxtaposition of disparate attractions, such as a steakhouse in a boat that appears to be teetering on the edge of a waterfall, a seafood restaurant where diners would have the illusion of eating underwater, and a nightclub hosted by holographic images of celebrities of the past. Hotel rooms would replicate famous movie sets, with employees dressed as film characters. Even the parking lot, covered by a huge sheet of water, would become "the Burbank Ocean."⁷ The megastructure requires only the addition of housing to become an inhabitable fantasy, a complete world in itself.

More than simply extreme examples of kitsch, these environments represent a broader cultural tendency toward the domination of fantasy images, which has significant cultural implications. Theme environments can be seen as particularly visible examples of a hyperrealism increasingly present in contemporary life. As defined by the poststructuralist philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality is a condition in which "simulation" effaces and replaces reality.⁸ Hyperreal representation produces an imitation that becomes more real than reality itself. One effect of the hyperreal is to impoverish reality. An actual small town can never be as perfect as Main Street in Disneyland, just as Fifth Avenue will never be as clean or well organized as a shopping mall.⁹

Theme environments are not unique to Southern California. Boxcars made into train restaurants and newly built New England fishing villages that are actually shopping malls have become a staple of the American commercial landscape. They are perhaps most evident in recently developed Sunbelt cities, without historic infrastructure or hierarchical organization. Only in their point of origin, however—Southern California, with its constant stream of immigrants, absence of conventionally perceivable history, and lack of urban self-definition—have they become a dominant realm of spatial and social experience. As in Hollywood films, also clearly a significant cultural influence in the local acceptance of theme environments, fiction vanquishes the real.

The means for achieving the dominion of the hyperreal was the subsumption of the region's three natural ecologies by the fourth, autopia. The

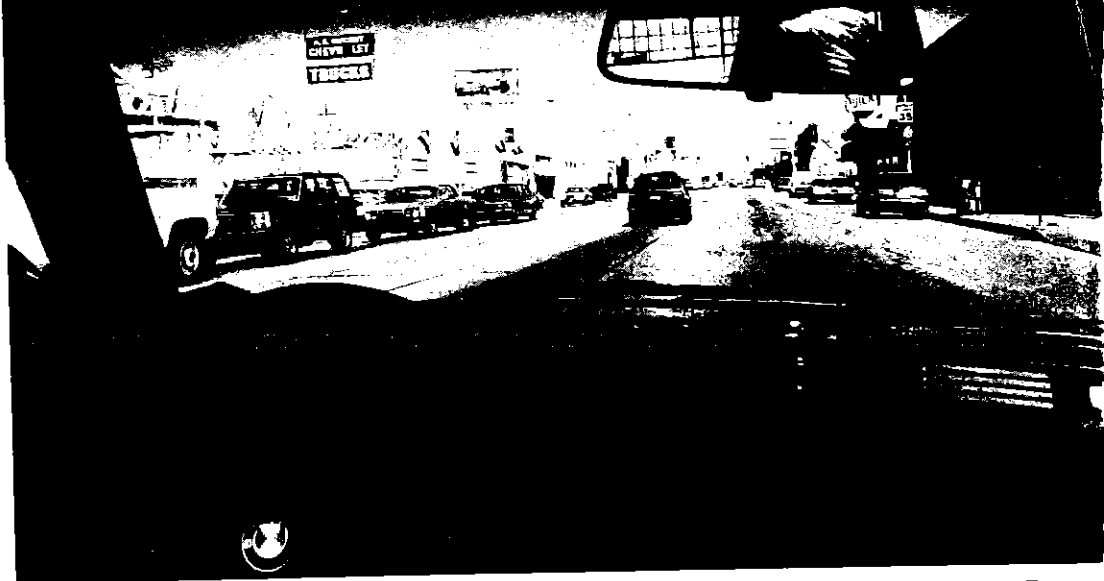
triumph of the automobile and its necessary road network allowed another, latent, ecology to emerge, the ecology of fantasy. Fifteen years later Banham's original taxonomy, still tied to natural processes, is no longer valid. The automobile severed the links between Los Angeles' culture and its natural setting. This development resolved the increasing contradiction between the automobile and the basin's natural limitations, which produced environmental damage from smog, ruptures of urban pattern, and destruction of landscape features. In the new ecology of fantasy the car is no longer an ecological villain but a means of liberation, providing access to an unlimited and constantly changing set of theme environments.

The automobile connects individual circuits of theme environments, a coherent conceptual grid overlaid on the real economic and topographic surface of the city. Driving from one theme environment to another, the endless, nondescript blocks of the city disappear. Robbed of conceptual validity, they become neutral filler between a set of points that construct a coherent thematic reality, physically discontinuous but conceptually integrated. Thus, although individual themes have coherence, serial themes only can become dominant in a setting of disjointed context.

More than just transport from one fragment to the next, the automobile functions as a medium, transforming our experience of the landscape we are traveling through. In the car we move through the city without disturbing it or it disturbing us. Like television, another individualized medium, the automobile distances us from the world outside our sealed capsule while restructuring and abstracting it. The world, through a television screen or a windshield, becomes two-dimensional, and substance is reduced to the level of image, a strictly visual event that does not invite participation.

Unlike the pedestrian, whose fully utilized senses require buildings providing a full range of stimuli, the driver's senses are numbed by the metal jacket of the car. Thus architecture, intended to be perceived slowly through touch, smell, and hearing, has been replaced by facades perceived completely with the sense of vision. Moving too fast to smell, sealed off from sounds by air conditioning, radio, and tape decks, and with touch limited to the steering wheel, the automobile's perceptual limitations have distanced the driver from a traditional sense of reality, dematerializing the world beyond the windshield.¹⁰

Moving through space in an automobile is also a televisual experience, a succession of quick cuts and rapidly edited fragments unified by the medium of the automobile. Baudrillard has observed that increasingly fluid and auto-



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FIGURE 16.3
Los Angeles through the windshield.

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mated vehicles produce fluid and automated space in which we let ourselves go, tuning into them like we tune into a television set. Driving promotes a flattening effect, erasing the fragmentation of time and space and homogenizing everything to the absolute present. It allows the continuous bombardment of people, places and things, once driven past, to be forgotten quickly. Driving erases memory.¹¹

The physical environment reinforces these perceptual changes. Roadside architecture, identified primarily from the car, has undergone a similar transformation. Marc Treib and Philip Langdon have charted the shift away from the lively individualism of early commercial strips to today's bland "television roads" composed of standardized franchise outlets.¹² Similar economic and marketing forces have fragmented the city into single-use enclaves, accessible only by automobile. Without apparent logic, collections of disparate themes and functions face each other across roads and parking lots. Our unquestioning acceptance of this landscape of juxtaposition owes much to Disneyland's radical compression of themes remote in space and time.

Looking from nineteenth-century New Orleans across an African jungle and into the future has accustomed us to a fragmented vision of a discontinuous environment. At Disneyland discrete worlds collide with an ease previously achieved only in the most speculative science fiction. Spatial proximity breaks down accepted boundaries between near and far, past and future, and reality and fantasy. The abrupt shifts of time and space and the equation of fiction and fact present in Disneyland also resemble the perceptual model presented by television. Changing realities appears to be as effortless as changing channels.

To convince its users, the theme environment must sever all perceptual connections with its automobilized origins and setting. The theme environment's ability to communicate depends on its isolation from the realities of the necessities of its daily life. As the counterpoint to the automobile's diffuse, reduced experiences, encapsulated pedestrian spaces offer intensity and increased stimulation. In order to entertain, shopping, eating, and relaxing have become highly theatricalized. Spectacle has begun even to penetrate daily activities such as food shopping. West Hollywood supermarkets sell sushi from a bamboo structure with costumed Japanese chefs expertly trimming raw fish and emphasize fresh produce by displaying it on hay-laden carts with clerks dressed in overalls.

To maintain the illusions, valet parking has become a central element in the ecology of fantasy. Now offered by supermarkets, art galleries, and de-

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FIGURE 16.4

Valet parkers on Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles.

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- partment stores as well as restaurants, valet parking reduces the need to physically interact with the social reality of the city to the six feet of sidewalk between the car door and the entrance, which allows an existence consisting totally of theme environments to become conceivable. So far, this degree of selectivity over one's surroundings made possible by avoiding city streets and urban reality is unique to Los Angeles. Unlike the structural layers of Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis*, which separates the workers from the owner's skyscraper city, the automobile permits a synchronic organization in which, without physical barriers, consumers of theme environments are equally well protected from the unwelcome realities of class and ethnic differences.

An increasingly pluralistic and eclectic selection of themes has emerged. Mass consumers are limited to itineraries of shopping malls, chain restaurants, and purpose-built tourist attractions, but Los Angeles also has generated permutations of increasingly specialized and sophisticated theme circuits. The apparent profusion of choice follows the logic of marketing, which dictates constant novelty aimed at specific market segments. New themes rely on more abstract imagery; punk, new wave, and heavy metal themes are obvious. Art themes, utilizing constructivism, minimalism, or graffiti art, depend on less-accessible codes. Self-consciously hermetic high-art architecture, with its unique stylistic vocabularies, has been subsumed into a readily identifiable, therefore marketable, product.¹³ Even recent immigrant groups, such as Koreans and Japanese, have created distinctive theme environments along Olympic Boulevard and in Little Tokyo, with images derived from Buddhist temples and zen gardens now used for restaurants, hotels, and shopping centers. In a city of endless atomization, infinite individual ecologies are available.

The consumption of fantasy themes is not available to everyone. The homeless, present in increasing numbers in the city, are both physically and economically excluded. Put on the streets by the shutdown of mental hospitals, the disappearance of family assistance programs, and the contraction of blue-collar industries, they must claim whatever marginal territory is available for living space: cars, sidewalks, and vacant lots. Rather than consuming prepackaged environments, they are forced to produce their own. They improvise provisional shelters from whatever materials are at hand and gather into temporary communities for safety and to obtain services. Their spontaneous creation of living environments from virtually nothing implicitly questions the calculated construction of the theme environment. Even seen

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from a passing car, it is difficult to reduce the density of despair in Skid Row to a purely visual image.

More and more, irreducible realities intrude on the neutrality of the street, making it difficult to maintain an uninterrupted circuit of theme environments. "Street people," no longer confined to downtown, panhandle in many areas of the city. Unemployed immigrants sell oranges and peanuts at stoplights and gather at designated corners for the "shape-up"—of an informal labor market—to announce their availability for any kind of manual work. When they do find employment, it is often as the service workers, waiters, busboys, and valet parkers on whom theme environments depend. The presence of these silent observers, implies another, as yet unrealized, ecology, presently submerged but likely to become dominant given the fact that, according to demographic projections, immigrants will constitute over 40 percent of Los Angeles' population by the year 2000.

In a city devoted to the search for increasingly esoteric individual themes, immigrant groups establish community against great odds. Inheriting the physical city of pre-Disneyland Los Angeles, they lead urban lives familiar to the inhabitants of many cities: walking through crowded downtown streets, using public transportation, and gathering in public parks. All over the city, newcomers have reclaimed public places such as streets, parks, and markets, transforming them into functioning social space. Spanish-speaking Broadway, between Third and Eighth streets, offers the most concentrated street life in the city, with pedestrians far outnumbering vehicles. Olvera Street, Los Angeles' original civic plaza, turned into an ersatz tourist attraction in the 1940s, has come full circle to be used once again as a public square and paseo. The authentic intensity of these pedestrian experiences recalls traditional urban ecologies and points out the hollowness of their recreation inside theme environments. This forms a major barrier to the total incursion of the ecology of fantasy.

What will be the result of the inevitable collision of these disparate ecologies? One possibility is suggested by the science fiction film *Bladerunner* (regarded by many as an accurate projection of Los Angeles' future) in which everyone who can afford to has moved "off-world", leaving the city to its Third world inhabitants. Off-world is not yet available, but outlying, privately developed new towns (such as Mission Viejo or Westlake Village, whose physical and social coherence are maintained by deed restrictions and security guards) address the same needs. Another scenario is the expansion of theme environments to include "melting-pot" content, with non-Spanish-

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speaking, second-generation Chicanos happily dining in Hispanic-theme restaurants.

Less likely, given the constraints of consumer economics and class and ethnic division, is the possibility of synthesis. One can still imagine, however, a future in which environments that do not orchestrate escape from daily life might include an awareness of multiple realities. We cannot expect the individual automobile to disappear or for Los Angeles' dispersed fragments to come together, but we still can hope that the theme circuits we endlessly create might become inclusive rather than exclusive, expansive rather than reductive, and that the principle of mobility might be used to cross boundaries rather than to construct them.

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READING OUTSIDE THE GRID: DESIGNERS AND SOCIETY

by

Frances Butler

*Perfection of means and confusion of goals seem—
in my opinion—to characterize our age.*

—Albert Einstein

Modern kitchen—where the pot calls the kettle chartreuse.

—Anonymous

*We're now living 200 years per annum. When you're moving at
that clip there's no place to stand. Its like putting a Model T
on the highway at 100 miles per hour. It breaks down.*

—Marshall McLuhan

All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.

—C. S. Lewis

Willi Kunz began questioning the operation of the grid system of page layout through typographic experiments in the early 1970s. (The

grid, as we all know, but no one else does, provides columns with margins between them in both directions; it provides for multiple but similar starting points on a page.) Kunz pushed especially on the conflict, or at least difference, between text placement or punctuation, which implies stasis around points, and word sequence, which implies both physical and mental movement from word to word. Somewhat later Wolfgang Weingart also began to dismantle the Swiss grid system, using it as a three dimensional support for illusions of planar overlay generated by differences in grey value. Instead of horizontal linearity, his text layout involved depth perception, certainly a new direction for the ordering of thinking or reading. But, following the same procedure followed by architects who, in pursuit of a style of spatial articulation called Modernism, had turned from ornamenting construction to constructing geometric ornament, these early graphic experiments were soon replaced by stylists using the dismantled grid as an ornamental motif. Now dismantled Swiss layout is a fad in the United States, usually featuring the full range of Univers or Helvetica type strewn over the pages of avant-garde tabloids and school posters. Different designer intentions support this style of text layout, ranging from

historicism—reopening the Futurist's experiments with *Parole in Liberta*—to generating a new style of physical manipulation and visual acrobatics that could be called "sporty reading," or at least opening up possibilities for more reader control of narrative syntax.

But now that this mode of free writing, and/or freed reading, has been institutionalized (i.e., taught in design schools), it is time to ask whether these announced intentions coincide with their actual social operation, and if they do, how and why they work. We must understand what this evolving layout tactic means in order to know if, once more, graphic designers are making up a style that is interesting to them alone, or if this new layout system reflects changes in the nature of institutional thought. For in late twentieth-century democratic culture, institutions and their founding assumptions control all of our big decisions. We are a culture of committees, in business, government, and education, and although we make personal decisions, these are either marginal or irrelevant to the main operations of power. There is nothing more important to institutional culture than its organizational systems, big or small. And the systems we use to organize either thinking or living, be they modular sizes for the manufacture of building materials or the models governing text layout, are all based on the assumption that placement is information.

Beginning the questioning process about place on the page, we need to question the grid with more speculation about its origins. So far the origins given have been symptoms of its existence, not causes for its generation. For, as in the development of most new underlying social assumptions, or founding epistemologies as the anthropologists call them, practices precede theory. The origins of the grid structure do not lie in academic or aesthetic teaching or theorizing. Alan Hurlbut contends that the early twentieth-century books of Jay Hambidge were a contributing influence on the grid. Now it is true that Jay Hambidge, Claude Fayette Bragdon, Mathilde Ghyka, Darcy Wentworth Thompson, and others around the turn of the century discovered, or demanded, an underlying geometry in the world, finding the golden mean and the Fibonacci series to determine everything from the arrangement of plants to countless systems for generating ornament, ranging from that of Islam to that of dynamic symmetry. Lydia Dalrymple Henderson has gathered the writings of these neo-Platonist enthusiasts into two main groups; those that gave time, the "fourth dimension," a physical, geometric form, and those, who like the Theosophists, connected physical geometry to the service of a religious spiritualism. But the grid as a page organizing system predates these geometricizing spiritualists by about a century. It originated in the need for more precise indexing systems to make, market, account for, and transport the products of the Industrial Revolution. Newspapers, catalogs and railway schedules all provided the multiple vertical column. Order forms, bills of lading, sales receipts, and account books provided multiple horizontal locations.

The Swiss grid simply divided the page, or the double spread, into more possible points of significant separation. It was a logical conclusion in a culture that had been developing a profound conviction that place was an active component of abstract thought ever since the place system in counting and calculation was learned from the Arabs in or about the twelfth century. The two dimensional grid was very slowly assimilated into the accounting practices of the Italian and German bankers and merchants, but by the sixteenth century was in wide use. It was then supplemented by a three-dimensional version when Descartes proposed the grid as a locating system for the properties of the physical universe. The Cartesian grid was considered so useful, or so glamorous, that Thomas

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Jefferson used it to structure the Land Ordinance of 1786 and determine the property boundaries of all new lands subsequently acquired and sold by the United States. And at the end of the eighteenth century J. H. Lambert (1728-1777) and William Playfair (1759-1853), began to develop time-based graphic charts based on a grid of two intersecting horizontal and vertical variables.

In this atmosphere of significance designated by place, the development of a grid layout system, doing for text what the multiple entry system had long done for numbers, cannot be explained by the existence of any one group of geometricizing enthusiasts at the turn of the century. And furthermore, the grid system of page layout simply expanded on the basic tactic for information access already used in the classic page layout of the codex. Guides to the information on a traditional page were usually found on the top and on the left margin of a page. At the top of the manuscript page the *Diminuendo* gave entry into the text. In printed texts the running head gave a continual summary of the contents of the chapter or that page. On the left margin indentations or marks announced changes of subject. Sometimes the folio numbers were on the top or side of the page, and extra material (elaborations, definitions, concordances) was printed in smaller type in the outside or central margins. But like the other elements of the traditional codex layout, these emendations sought to make the center of the text block more accessible through marks on its edges. The grid system dissolved that block, moving the top down, and the left margin over progressively so that the entire page was open to the devices of traditional indexing.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the multiple column format was used for the structure of some books, especially almanacs that had to incorporate many different kinds of information. By 1931 layout guides like Andrew Tuer's *Mise en page* were advocating a rudimentary grid of vertical and horizontal page divisions to accommodate different kinds of text and pictures. And in the 1950s, the grid was given final form in the work of Swiss designers like Max Bill, Armin Hoffmann, or Emil Ruder.

The next question that needs to be raised about the grid system relates to how texts presented in grid formats are read. The grid system not only organized textual material, it affected reading by changing the kind of language that was used within its confines. A grid system can exist with only two columns of text or images per page, but more typically it has three or more vertical columns, and three or more horizontal divisions. As the number of columns goes up, their line length goes down, and many newspaper columns are not more than 12 or 15 picas wide. The argument used to justify short line length ties together the small forward eye movements used to read, the saccadic movements, with reading by contending that the sentence length which most nearly corresponds to the amount of text seen at one time is most easily read and comprehended. Now this may be true, but it is also true that the kind of idea best presented in a short sentence is short, or uncomplicated; one without ambiguities or qualification. (Remember, the columnar grid originated in numbers, or in the one or two word categories found in accounts, graphs, train schedules, and catalogs.) Such short entries, and short thoughts, work like codes which are deciphered by reference to information given outside the sentence, outside the text, in general culture. This kind of idea can be called conventional wisdom, common sense, the cliché, or implicit knowledge; but whatever the name it is never a *new* idea. Ideas which are not "common sense" frequently need explicit development in longer sentences for anyone to comprehend them. First Ludwig Wittgenstein and then Marshall McLuhan, both

of whom presented not new ideas, but new arrangements of old ideas, found to their dismay that if an idea is not already so well known as to be implicit in the culture, there could be no substitution for precise language, carefully deployed around the dimensions of the idea. Both tried to present their ideas in aphoristic language, in the short sentence; and McLuhan, at least, finally reaped nothing but resentment and scorn. Now, a generation after his death, his ideas have been quietly assimilated and many academic writers have found his writings useful in thinking and are writing entire books to fill in the gaps left in his abbreviated dicta.

McLuhan's fate highlights the fact that other ideas, many of which are still useful for thinking, have fallen out of general circulation because we can no longer read their sentences. Many earlier English writers, and contemporary writers in other languages like Italian, use long sentences. It is not appropriate to put either Henry James or Italo Calvino into a 12 pica line. It is difficult to sustain reading of their long sentences when these are forced into narrow lines, and therefore extend half-way down the page. The combination of saccadic eye movement and frequent line returns sets up excess noise that interferes with the smooth remembrance needed to keep the multiple subtended clauses of such sentences in order.

But for the common-sense idea, the assumptions that implicitly govern culture, the grid system and the short, encoded sentences that the grid supports, provide a simple reading system that is open to every level of reader. The wide range of type weights and set widths in the sans-serif type families typical of the Swiss style grid layout, and the generous white spaces, help frame the information and make it memorable much as the shape of a chart serves as a mnemonic for its data. Ease in reading the grid layout supports equal access to information, which equals democratic opportunity for employment and economic survival. And democratic access to information is critical to our corporate business and bureaucratic structure, for, to flourish corporations require a large pool of potential employees characterized by intellectual skills like literacy, conceptual inventiveness, and organizational talent. Such skills do not necessarily occur in sufficient numbers in the privileged populations created by blood-based dynasties or caste hierarchies.

It cannot be said that our corporate culture does not support some blood-based social exclusion from information and social opportunity: we seem to be deeply and irremediably racist. But in so far as our institutional bureaucracies do need literate clerks, the grid system supports literacy. The dismantled grid does not. Reading the dismantled grid is only open to very determined and very sophisticated readers. The unskilled reader simply cannot regenerate enough text from the reader-syntaxed stew to find the implicit assumptions of institutional culture needed for their sustenance or interest. The style of the presentation, *dismemberment*, becomes the subject of the presentation.

It is possible to say that graphic designers are simply acting out the behavior of late practitioners of any art style outlined by historians of cultural shift like Henri Focillon, George Kubler, or Thomas Kuhn. These writers on the history and uses of style would perhaps have said that graphic designers long for variety and novelty but, not yet being able to generate a new style, exaggerate and ornament the old one. Or it might be possible to project from the writings of a number of late-nineteenth century art historians, the most important of whom was Alois Riegl, that this late style of fragmentary sentences, requiring active reader participation for the reconstruction of sentence sense, reflects a new preference in comprehension habits. Riegl wrote about late Roman sculpture, once considered

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unskilled, degenerate, by art historians because instead of the skilled transitions from one plane to another differences were crudely drilled in; roughly defined. Riegl contended that although skill may have declined, viewing preferences had also changed. He felt that these sculptures demonstrated a change in responsibility for making the complete image from the sculptor to the viewer, who, with the activity of their own eye and mind made from the light and shadow generated by the rough surface of the sculpture a complete, and dramatic surface more interesting than the smooth one provided entirely by the sculptor.

Applying Riegl's idea that a change in style reflects a change in the habits of cognitive practice in the groups that use that style, it is perhaps possible that the designers using the dismantled grid may reflect profound cultural changes; changes in organizational preferences, that is to say, changes in the very mode of comprehending information.

Joshua Meyerowitz, one of the many writers mining the seams first opened by Marshall McLuhan, has written a book, *No Sense of Place*, about his finding that the place system of authority which has sustained our culture for such a long time is collapsing. He notes that television, which sells the illusion of capturing the live moment with such close-up realism that it shows the red blood vessels in the skin of a politician's nose, has so effectively demystified public figures that it is no longer possible for them to gain authority simply by speaking from a position or place of power; a place like a church pulpit, a political seat, or an academic lectern. He found that even in popular culture, no one cares about contemporary "stars" the way they did about Gary Cooper or Elvis Presley, because their lives are no longer separate or mysterious enough from the rest of us. And he cites the newspaper editorials which made it clear that a president, who was televised tripping on his untied shoelace, could not regain the charisma that traditionally supported his authority simply by sitting behind the desk in the oval office.

There is evidence that belief in the fixed place as a condition of authority, truth, and power is slipping away at other scales of human activity. Einstein and his theory of the relativity of physical phenomenon has been jokingly accepted in popular culture for two or three generations, and popularizing books like *Chaos Theory* and television science programs continue to develop the theme of the fluidity of physical reactions. Now, the scale of the points or *places* described by fractal geometry mathematics has become so fine, so miniaturized, that it is too fine for visible distinctions of direction at all.

At the literary level, deconstruction of the process of assigning qualities to something by naming it, begun in the late nineteenth century by Ludwig Wittgenstein, has by now reached the level of popular culture. Deconstruction of the connection between naming and belief in the reality of the named qualities is now central to popular entertainment; the slow trajectory from Laurence Sterne to Samuel Beckett, who merely broke down literary conventions by making them the subject of their stories, accelerated off the charts as David Bowie and Boy George dismantled gender by making it their subject. In short, it may be that the incomplete story, the particle, the fragment, is now the preferred unit of information for our culture, and lack of place is more useful for presenting these fragments than to fix them into sentences or grids.

Fashions are a mode of asking questions and an experimental range of answers. "Running it up the flagpole" may provide answers that last fifty years, or may provide answers that last for centuries. In the thirteenth century the zero and the place system used in counting and mathematic calculations was a fashion. It proved to be such a useful adjunct to the development of accounting that accompanied mercantilism that it has lasted for

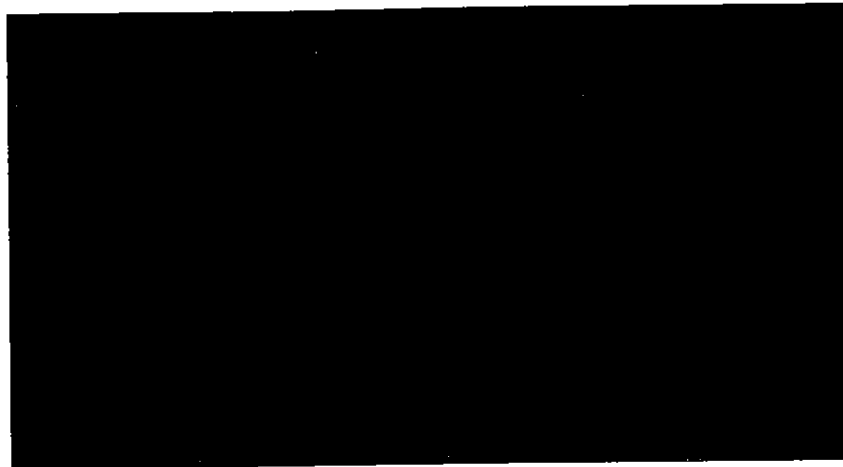
centuries. The place system is but one example of our cultural reliance on grid systems for organization, evidence that the grid has been a fruitful tool for thinking. Now it may be that the fashion among graphic designers for the deconstruction of the grid, and of some kinds of traditional punctuation like the continuous sentence may auger a new kind of idea for thinking, a new textual organization system, of floating fragments, combined by the readers the way Riegl contended fourth century Romans combined vision of light and shadow to make up the images of their sculpted gods and generals. Perhaps this new spatial system will produce texts in which the connection of word to word will be, as it is in Japanese, very much more flexible. In Japanese the reader runs any two contiguous words through a wide and open range of connections at every stage in the deciphering of a sentence. In effect, reading Japanese, or reading the post-Swiss or fragmented sentence expands the possible connections beyond the scale of the grid that has served us so far, into a new grid, with so many connections that the intersections are no longer visible. We are now, with computers, truly gathering and using information on a new scale, through a grid that is sub-miniaturized.

Change of scale is not a simple additive or subtractive process; change of scale is absolute, with consequences which cannot be comprehended by projection from previous experience with the earlier scale of organization. For example, the change of scale of our business and governmental institutions into ever larger bureaucracies required the development of simple communication matrices, language and work practices, which could be understood by a large and varied work force. But this change of scale has unexpected consequences: these engrossed bureaucracies could not even deal with many of the very social problems they were established to handle, because society is not one large body but many individuals, with many specific, personal, idiosyncratic needs.

Scale change is absolute change. Converting the visible grid that we have known into a sub-miniature grid is a change of scale that has produced not additive but absolute changes. The sub-miniaturized grid is too small to be visible and punctuation can no longer be seen to fit into it. A new punctuation system may be devised by the same kind of experimental repetition that generated the earlier grid over time, but as yet the new grid is only a fashion, a question. As yet the fashion for the floating sentence is too abbreviated for many to make use of it. It is not unlike the aphorisms of Wittgenstein or McLuhan, without the necessary bulk of different interpretations and experiences swathed around their skeletons to make them comprehensible to the out-size groups which support the scale of our social institutions. Designers may provide enough variations on the freed sentence, inserting it into many different kinds of reading products, and ultimately make it familiar to different populations so that they can either use it or reject it. Academics will then analyze the ways in which the freed sentence works, write theories about it, and produce teaching texts to support it. If the freed sentence is to be a major reading and thinking tool, the time it takes to establish it is one of those unknowns that results when organizational scale is changed. A few years or a few hundred years from now the freed sentence may provide our major reading, and thinking, tool.

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(Lupton/Miller)



We cannot simply draw a line between low and high, or between the inside and the outside of culture, or between public and private experiences of mass media



The categories of low and high are relative. Even at the level of the kitchen baseboard, one can find distinctions of low and high, formal and vernacular. The roach motels above recall Robert Venturi's and Denise Scott Brown's opposition between the modernist monolith and the decorated shed. The tasteful, International Style wood-grain model on top is designed to tastefully disappear, while the Trap-a-Roach below joyfully promotes the bugs' final vacation.