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There is an underlying pattern in contemporary American culture that can be identified in different environmental sites. This pattern is one of a staccato rhythm consisting of disjointed fragments that are a format of the packaging of information, and can be seen in the suburban strip-mall, the form and content of American education, and in mass media. Rapid readings of a barrage of information is a lateral rather than a vertical skill, and is enculturating the American public to be responsive rather than reflective at a time in world history when critical thinking is acutely necessary.

The pace of information is rapid, and saturates the environment. Environment is taken here in its broadest, most inclusive sense, as everything external to the self that constitutes one's physical and ideological context. Architecture may shape environment through strategic, tactical and poetic choices about the production of structure and form. Architecture has an invisible aspect in the power relationships that are present, but unseen in the continuous flow of information, including mass media and formats for formal learning; architecture also can be material, as in the design of buildings and urban planning, and the design of television programs, cyber-space, and print media.

Culture is learned, and not innate. The more deeply embedded a cultural trait, the more natural it seems, and hence, the more privileged, correct and unalterable. Enculturation can be seen as the multi-faceted process by which culture is learned, and may include formal education, and also enculturation by unconscious imitation in everything from posture and carriage of the body in motion and at rest, to how time is perceived and codified, and to what values and beliefs are held to be natural and right. One process of cultural learning is entrainment, which is a phenomenon that also can be observed among various life forms, when, for example, fireflies' blinking is observed to be synchronized. In *The Dance of Life*, E.T. Hall wrote:

Immediately following birth, the newborn infant will move rhythmically with its mother's voice and will also synchronize with the voice of other people, speaking any language! The tendency to synchronize with surrounding voices can therefore be characterized as innate. Which rhythm one uses, however, is a function of the culture of the people who are around when these patterns are being learned. It can be said with some assurance that normal human beings are capable of learning to synchronize with any human rhythm, provided they start off early enough. " (p. 175, Hall)

Rhythmic patterns can be seen in everything from patterns of conversations and gestures between two people, to the shifts, or edits, in television imagery, to the rise and fall of civilizations and the periodic cleansing of forests by fire, a phenomenon that allows a different range of species to thrive. The entrainment of a human being to the rhythmic patterns of the motion of the mother's body and her speech patterns begins before birth. According to child psychologist Dr. Barry Brazelton, parents who fail to entrain with their children

may become child-abusers. "Clearly, something so thoroughly learned early in life, rooted in the organism's innate behavior program and shared by all mankind, must be not only important, but also a key contributor to the survival of our species." (Hall, 175)

The totality of the natural environment and its interlocking rhythms comprise a complex, fluid network of relationships and mutual influences. The division of the natural and human-made world into discrete categories is a cultural construction that does not, in fact, *exist* as a concrete phenomenon. A failure to recognize the extent to which these same "natural" relationships and influences affect us as human beings may be due to a linguistic and socio-cultural identification of "nature" as other-than-us. Similarly, technologies and their effects also may be perceived as other-than-us, even though if seen holistically, the products of human hands and minds can be categorized with birds, beaks, and nests. Our technologies extend our senses and capabilities, providing us with supports for life and spirit, including shelter, transportation, health, spiritual significance, and information. The forms and effects of technologies are culture-based, while the tendency to synchronize with prevailing rhythms may be instinctive.

In the book *Future Shock*, by Alvin Toffler, the author talks about the "roaring current of change, a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots." (1) Toffler wrote, "Future shock is the dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future. It may well be the most important disease of tomorrow." (11) *Future Shock* was published in 1970, in a world already characterized by rapid change, but Toffler did not foresee specifics about the then unimaginable and quickly developing changes brought about by wide availability of the internet or cable news channels, innovations that are rapidly promoting a nearly global ethnocentrism, due to the increasing loss of the balance of alternative ways of life, including different rhythms.

There are few if any of the world's cultures that have not been altered by the influences of post-modern, Western culture, as its products, advertising, and ultimately economic-based propaganda infiltrates everywhere. It is a profit-based colonization that may be deliberate in the sense of targeting populations for particular products and manipulating a global market, or in a more general transmission through travel, television and the internet of the ethos of a consumer culture that values variety and novelty, rather than the stability of more traditional values. The more cultural diversity that is lost, the more natural, authentic and automatic the post-modern culture seems to be.

Thirty-five years after the publication of *Future Shock*, it is possible that the "roaring current of change" has normalized itself to current generations to the point where alternatives are increasingly difficult to imagine, much less implement. It was Toffler's premise that the rapidity of change is pathological, and if that is the case, then what are its symptoms, and what are the implications? The "pace of modern life" is a catch phrase that usually has negative connotations about something that is regarded as an immutable

condition, one that is, if not identifiably pathological, then at least somehow off-kilter. It is a "felt" condition of rushing and disjuncture, a vague uneasiness or sense of wrongness. That sense of wrongness may come, in part, from lack of synchronicity with the rhythms of the body to the tasks, impressions, and necessities of contemporary urban or suburban life. The pace of pre-industrial agriculture, hunting, and making proceeded at the pace and limitations of a human body, and were understandable in bodily terms.

Cross-culturally, the domestication and use of the horse for plowing, transportation, hunting and sport were still understandable in terms of the human body. Riding a horse synchronizes the body with the rhythms of the gaits, and both horse and rider may brim with freshness and energy, or sweat with exhaustion. In transportation by carriage, there remains a cognizance of the condition or age of the horse and there are limits to the speed that is possible. In the transition to a car-culture, the first cars were designed to resemble horse-drawn carriages, but soon outpaced the capabilities of the horse. With the early cars and trains, the landscape began to rush by in a way not seen or experienced before.

The Strip-Mall

When American president Dwight D. Eisenhower made the decision to develop American's highways rather than rail transportation, the effects reverberated forward to the future. His was a strategic decision as a reaction to World War II., with the thought that in case of foreign invasion, a well-developed highway system would facilitate the movement of ordnance as a viable defense. The development of American highways instead of public transportation shaped the environment in ways that were not envisioned, and has had a profound effect on everything from the hollowing of town centers as shopping malls spring up like mushrooms, to the development of the fast food industry with its drive-through windows, to pollution and energy crises. With population growth and an over-population of motorized vehicles, parking became an issue in the "downtown" sections of American towns. This was, and is, a problem that found its solution in the development of shopping malls with clusters of inward-facing stores under one roof, and brand-identified mega-shopping complexes. These buildings have vast parking lots. Strip-mall development also flowed along highways where the terrain was flat, unforested and inexpensive.

The smaller stores of the strip malls, en route to interstates or shopping mega-complexes, have their own parking lots and signs fronting the highway. Because of the speed of a passing vehicle, the stores themselves have become signage, announcing themselves through distinctive colors and logos. Instead of comprising a unified whole made up of related variations, as is usual in a pedestrian-friendly town-center, these buildings compete for the consumer's attention as these buildings-turned-signs flash by the car windows as colorful fragments. Paying attention in order to locate a particular landmark or destination is a learned skill, one that is simultaneous with the complex motions and procedures for driving the car, van, truck, or SUV. This simultaneous

attending to multiple bits of information can be incredibly sophisticated, but the fragments of information are cues that are nearly devoid of content except for their brand-identification, and the subsequent reaction on the part of the driver, to turn in to a particular parking lot, or not to turn in. In a sense, the strip-mall reverses the sensibility of a parade, in that it is the spectator who is in motion past these colorful, simplified structures. As information, the architecture of the strip-mall, including its rhythm, is synchronized with the perceptions and one-dimensional readings that are possible from a moving vehicle.

American Public Education

The rhythmic pattern of separated frames of information is echoed in the American system of education, both spatially and pedagogically. In American public education, there are most usually three discrete segments, with each segment typically housed in its own building and district. The public school a child attends is determined by the neighborhood of residence, a factor that almost automatically differentiates children by economic level/social class.

Grade school usually comprises kindergarten through grade five. Middle school is grades six through eight, and high school is from ninth grade to twelfth. As the students rise through the grades, the separation of subjects begins to be a matter of spatial separation, as well. By grade four, the students may begin moving to different classrooms, with different teachers for various subjects. This is a trend that progresses as the students advance in grade levels. In middle school, most usually each class takes place in a separate room, and the teachers may or may not coordinate instruction with one another. Some team teaching may occur, either spontaneously or structurally, but that is not the prevalent model. By high school, subjects are taught as discrete entities and are spatially separated, with the students in motion throughout the day to different classrooms. There seems to be little or no coordination of subject matter, and few if any attempts to link the classes in terms of an overarching topic or theme to which the material covered in class is related.

Any transference of ideas and/or information from one class to another is given over to the student, and may or may not occur. The relationship of one class to another may be obvious, such as the use of math in science classes, or it may be so seemingly distinct that few connections are made between the literature of a historical period, for example, and the political and social milestones of the same period presented in a history class. There is little or nothing in the pedagogy of an American school that would support the student in making connections among bodies of knowledge. A foreign language class remains an entity unto itself, as does a class in social studies.

There are some exceptions to this structure, including schools that are foreign-language focused, or "magnet" schools with specific concentrations such as the arts, sciences, or occupation-based schools such as aeronautics. Even with these thematically oriented schools, the children usually move from one classroom to the next, one subject area to another with attempts at coordination being optional and at the discretion of the personal inclinations and liaisons

among teachers. Therefore, the subjects are self-contained and fragmentary in terms of the accumulation of a body of knowledge and scholarly production that can be grasped in any sense as a whole. The networks of relationships among seemingly disparate topics may be beyond the capacity of most students, and there is very little in either the school or the culture that reinforces holistic thinking or the exploration of networks of causes and effects, regardless of whether these causes and effects may reverberate throughout a culture, and the world.

Standardized learning tests come from a growing trend of accountability in American schools, in an effort to improve the quality, and uniformity, of education. These are subject-based tests, geared toward evaluating individual students' progress and their success and failures, but are also intended to be evaluations of the school's effectiveness, primarily, in transmitting facts. The model is one of transferring information to the student by the teacher, and from the textbooks. That mode of education is generally a one-way street, in that the insights of a student change nothing, and the structure of the school and the classroom remain the same. The empowerment or independence of individual students is not a stated goal of most American public schools. Investigating an idea deeply over a period of time is not supported by either the spatial or conceptual configuration of schools, and the synergy of ideas across disciplines is the exception.

In higher education, the student may become "well rounded" by taking a variety of subjects, but the trend of separation of areas of knowledge may be nearly complete at this phase, with departments and specific programs of study. Collaboration among faculty, if present, is more in the sense of clusters of courses, rather than any sort of personalized dovetailing of knowledge to avoid duplication or to enhance or link complimentary areas. The knowledge may be vertical, i.e. "deep," in individual classes and may involve critical analysis, but holistic thinking across disciplines happens as a process of the students' maturation, and not usually as a result of the architecture of the university, either in a material or ideological sense.

A gifted student may learn to cross disciplines and combine ideas in original and productive ways despite of, not because of, the educational system. Among faculty, without bridges or networks among micro-studies and insular disciplines, sharing, or even implementation, of findings is not likely. Medical research bridges to practice with clinical trials, but the same cannot be said of most of the disciplines in higher education, where papers are given at topical conferences that are barricaded from dissemination by the frames of each discipline and are presented in language, including jargon, not accessible to the general public.

Mass Media

In the once-removed imagery of photography, with its capturing of refracted light, there is some sense of the process of the photographs' making, as magical as the process may have seemed to the first viewers. A photograph is a

fragment of history, but it may be lingered over, examined and returned to at will. The photographs of animals and people in motion by Edward Muybridge were explanatory, not only of the mechanics of bodies in motion, but of the process of recording that information. In some modernist films, the use of scratches or sprocket holes is a confrontation with a specific technology, as were the brushy, painterly marks of Impressionist paintings. Although the post-modern media consumer may be highly visually literate and able to differentiate, for example, the subtle difference between televised film and televised videotape; there is no sense of the pixels that form the image. It is an image made up of tiny fragments, and increasingly, the televised imagery is fragmented as well. Even so, the imagery of television may seem to be reality itself, an impression that gains credence as television screens grow larger so that the faces of people are of a natural size.

The imagery of cable news programming, including the American channels of CNN, MSNBC, and Fox news, has undergone a rapid evolution in recent years, toward an increasingly fragmented imagery. The split-screen has become ubiquitous, where the screen is divided into two or more segments that show different aspects of the same or different events, giving the impression of rich, in-depth coverage from all angles. This is not an accurate impression. Commentators may appear in adjacent boxes or stacked one above the other in rows, appearing to be assembled in the same geographical location, when in fact, they are not. In the more lively discussions, several people may be speaking simultaneously, literally out shouting one another. Adding to the complexity is the scrolling text across the bottom of the screen, a device that has become conventional. This text is continuous as breaking news, but most usually only a segment of a sentence is perceived as the text continuously disappears off the side of the screen. An example would be the fragment, "measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale," from which one may deduce that there has been an earthquake, somewhere. Coverage of the earthquake may never be seen on the screen above the text, and one may never discover where the earthquake was, how many were affected, or anything about the context. Without more information, the fact of the earthquake may vanish from awareness as rapidly as the text disappeared from view.

The viewing public continues to adjust to the increasingly fragmented format, and has become skilled at coping with the simultaneity and rapid shifts of the imagery. If Marshall McLuhan was correct and the medium is the message, then the message being transmitted is one of jarring juxtapositions that have come to seem normal, a nearly subliminal pace in terms of rapid edits, and a cramming of the available space with information of the most rudimentary content. Additionally, there is the presentation of news commentators as experts, with conservative, business-style clothing, and perfect (but fast) diction. If one does not have the time to investigate events painted with only the broadest strokes, surely the news anchors must understand the fullness and implications of the story and would not steer the public in the wrong direction? But yet they do, through their brevity, omissions, and inevitably slanted viewpoints.

On June 2, 2003, the American government took a giant step in the trend toward deregulating ownership of media outlets. The same conglomerate may own newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations. Not only is the information gleaned from mass media shallow and briefly presented, but the information is likely to be the result of a corporate position that is more guided by a quest for ratings and advertising sales than it is by a responsibility to inform the public of events and conditions that have consequence for how we are to live.

Toffler wrote, "Who should be responsible for correcting the adverse effects of technology? Where self-regulation fails, however, as it often does, public intervention might well be necessary, and we should not evade that responsibility." (p. 442-443) The interface between adverse effects of technology, or the adverse effects of anything, and public action must be information, and knowledge, that adverse effects *do* exist. It is a circular dilemma, because dependence on the mass media for self-critique is not realistic. A layman may not read scholarly works about the social and cultural effects of the internet, for example, including a marked division between the knowledge bases of those living in industrialized nations compared to those in developing nations, on the negative side. A public that depends primarily on television for information may have only a crude understanding of the effects of global warming, or globalization and child labor, or on the impact of the media on critical thinking, if the primary source of that information is mass media itself.

Watching, or glancing at, television may be an expedient means of information gathering and the assumption may be that one is well informed because one has seen so much. It is a dangerous assumption. That there is warfare and starvation in the Sudan is information, but it floats almost freely and independently of context and causes, except for the most truncated of mentionings. News is by definition about the exceptional and unusual event, and these events replace one another in a staccato rhythm that is desensitizing, and eventually numbing. One may react with a feeling of compassion for the starving Sudanese, but then attention is turned to the next unusual, or terrible, event and concern for the Sudanese is replaced by the emotions, or emotional flatness, that is a reaction to seeing the aftermath of a car-bombing in Gaza.

Carl Jung wrote, "We cannot visualize another world ruled by quite other laws, the reason being that we live in a specific world which has helped to shape our minds and establish our basic psychic conditions. . . Our concepts of space and time have only approximate validity, and there is therefore a wide field for minor and major deviations." The school described by the American student holds classes for only forty-five minutes, while the student moves relentlessly from room to room, eight times during a typical day to classes that are disconnected from one another. The strip-mall is as much a commercial information delivery system as it is a string of colorful buildings. The television news program has the aura of truth, but its information is presented so quickly that there is only time for the most simplified versions of genuine events, events that are inevitably colored by a corporate stance that is invisible but real, behind the kaleidoscopic, moving images. There is little relief anywhere, and little time for reflection. Critical thinking is a skill that may not have been learned, or

practiced often, and placing value on in-depth exploration of subjects and dilemmas is not a cultural priority.

Conclusion

The rapid pace and lack of depth of the delivery and perception of information first must be identified as problems, if there is to be mediation of their effects. There may be a sense of loss, but the rhythmic tempo is so pervasive that it may have come to seem normal and permanent. What are lacking may be the alternatives as they inexorably disappear, even as anthropology departments in universities are facing self-definitional crises as traditional cultures either all have been studied, or have vanished entirely. The study of non Indo-European languages, such as Wintu (native Americans of Southern California) or the Swahili spoken in parts of Africa, reveals worldviews that are vastly different from the dominant, Western culture. The influence of these alternate viewpoints is negligible.

It may be lamented that the strip-mall is an ugly, barren but necessary environment, but its negative effects are not only visual. The personal contacts and repetitions of interactions that once were the rule in town centers are a social dimension that is being lost as the pedestrian possibilities of urban and suburban life are replaced by the necessity for individuals driving. It is kind of inevitable trap, because the shopping mega-complexes and strip-malls are a convenience in terms of parking, but then the town center is weakened and may dwindle. As it dwindles, what once was perceived as a convenience becomes a necessity and the sense of community may be weakened. The bus, train, or ecologically superior monorail could provide access to various locations and allow time for reflection during the journey, but the enhancement of public transportation would require a shift in values, including the priority placed on convenience rather than interpersonal richness.

The strip-mall is probably beyond reclamation once it has taken root in an area, and triage may be the only solution. Some communities may still be "saved" from the eroding effects of mega-stores and strip malls by zoning regulations. "Just say no to Wal-mart" is growing movement, but is a pitched battle wherever it occurs, as entrepreneurial pressure meets community resistance.

The degeneration of information into rapid, simplified fragments must first be identified for what it is. . . news that is so lacking in context, depth, or alternative viewpoints that it has been reduced to slogans. The packaging of the news has come to seem normal and impervious to change, other than its ever-increasing pace. There are a few independent, "free speech" television channels in the United States and there is advertisement-free public television, but they cannot compete with the overwhelming resources of the media conglomerates who now exert a powerful influence on what is categorized as news and presented to the public, what is omitted, and how fast one news item is replaced by another. To roll back media deregulation and allow more competition among

news outlets would require enlightened politicians and an informed and enlightened public.

The solution, if possible, lies in education. Again, the difficulty is found in the dearth of alternative models. One suggestion would be apprenticeships, not only in vocations but also in styles of thinking and tackling problems. A mediation of the fragmented packaging of areas of knowledge in schools could be mentorships, where an educator follows the progress of individual students and guides the students to seek networks among subjects. Another alternative could be instruction through a discursive, less hierarchical mode, allowing each student to select an appropriate pace for learning and follow through on ideas that spring up as areas of fascination in the classroom. The empowerment of the student would be a primary goal, rather than the passivity of the student as receptacle for information. An empowered student becomes an empowered adult, who sees action as possible, and may not accept current conditions as inevitable.

There are more modest interventions that could promote the students' perceptions of the interrelationships among areas of knowledge and promote the outside-of-the-box thinking that will be necessary to solve the world's problems. A single desk, with bookshelf, in a single classroom, for each student, might provide a home base that promotes a sense of community among learners and could stabilize the frantic pace of each school day. Rotate the teachers, instead of moving the students to different areas of the school where not only knowledge, but also space, seem disjointed and temporary. Another alteration that could occur would be the downplaying or elimination of standardized testing currently used to evaluate the effectiveness of each school -- a perceived effectiveness that is linked to a school's funding. Faith in teachers is not unwarranted, and there are many alternative means to evaluating progress. Not every student learns at the same pace, or in the same ways. Even a gifted teacher can be stunted by a system that ultimately involves teaching for the tests, rather than lingering over a subject that has inspired enthusiasm and a desire to know more.

A counter-argument to these innovations is that the current educational system in America is economical, and there can be no other way that is as efficient. It is a question of priorities and the acceptance of the idea that alternatives exist and may, in fact, be better. American schools, and especially many high schools, have reached a nearly unmanageable size and behavioral control of those masses of young people becomes paramount. It is suggested that it is the teachers, not the facilities and materials, that are critical to education. A school can take place anywhere, even in the abandoned storefront in a centerless town. A school with fewer students and more teachers allows for individual development of thought processes, in addition to mastery of facts. The trend of rushing and paying attention only briefly before moving on is a cultural, not an innate, pattern that can, and should, be broken.

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