

Summary of Seeing Like A State  
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## Introduction

Centralization and planning are two of the most important socio-political concepts of the twentieth century. Disputes surrounding these concepts and the practices that emerge from them rank in intensity with those surrounding intellectual and political freedom in the eighteenth century. Indeed, any citizen who does not understand the consequences and place of centralization and decentralization runs the risk of allowing his government to make choices that can be destructive.

James Scott's book, Seeing Like A State, is a study of the twentieth century practice of imposition of structure upon diverse social elements. He offers a forceful critique of political methods that seek to make "legible" societies, cultures, and practices that developed without strict geometrical and hierarchical order. This summary is intended for people who wish to understand some important ideas about how governments shape their world, yet who do not have the time for a thorough study of Dr. Scott's outstanding work.

## Seeing Like A State

By

James C. Scott

The book is a study of how the modern state has imposed order upon those aspects of society that it needed to understand and control. The order is imposed by simplifying complex phenomena such as land ownership through processes such as making highly regular maps. Scott calls this process creating "legibility". Scott argues that "the most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering originate in the pernicious combination of four elements":

1. The "administrative ordering of nature and society."
2. A "confidence about scientific and technical progress" that leads to the conclusion that science comprehends all knowledge and therefore maximizes all productivity. He calls this "high-modernist ideology".
3. "An authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power..."
4. "A prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans."

He opens **the first chapter** with a description that will serve as a metaphor throughout the book. This is the story of scientific forestry in Germany toward the end of the eighteenth century. The Prussian state of this time had a strong interest in the value and productive potential of forests. The state therefore undertook to measure forests and count the trees of various kinds in them. Since certain trees provided greater capital returns, it made sense to create homogenous forests of these trees alone. To do so, forests were cleared of underbrush and of other kinds of wood, trees were planted in straight lines to facilitate counting and cutting, and

personnel were trained in managing the designed forests according to a few simple rules. These steps greatly facilitated centralized management.

When these managed, artificial forests began to die, the state undertook to introduce measures that would duplicate the original forests, such as creating birdhouses and anthills, and even importing spiders. By this time the German model of planned forestry (founded upon the desirability of being able to quickly assess the value of the forest and the belief that scientific principles could improve upon the workings of nature) had spread throughout the world with devastating results unilaterally.

Despite the failures of the planned forest (which took many years to realize), planning and measurement spread as highly desirable activities among emerging nation states. The main impetus for planning and standardized measurement was a concern about tax collection. Tax collection had been an irregular habit of royal demands followed by a popular effort to give enough to appease and hide the rest. The foundation of this irregularity was non-uniform weights and measures. People commonly weighed and measured based upon local tradition, with any common denominator (such as a "basket" or a "bushel") being anything but common. "Standard" measurements might vary by two or three times from one town to the next. Even when standardized to seemingly fixed measures, the local populace would commonly find a way to gain some advantage, such as by "rounding" the top of measured wheat.

In France the State brought this situation under control by imposing the metric system. An increasing market economy brought popular demands for regular measures, the State had a strong desire to regulate taxation, and Enlightenment

thinkers pushed the desirability of regularity. Rarely have the people's will and the government's need aligned so correctly as with the imposition and adoption of the metric system in eighteenth century France.

The regulation of taxation within an emerging market economy was a small problem in comparison with the measurability and quantifiability of land. The early modern state was confronted with a morass of local customs that regulated how land was distributed that boggled the mind of all those except those who grew up with it. These customs constituted a "system" of local politics that took into consideration individual family needs, inheritance, land yield, ecology, wildlife, and myriad other factors. The rules that governed land ownership and use resembled a Rube Goldberg project. However, "the very concept of a modern state presupposes a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible and hence manipulable from the center."

Given the disparity of aims between existing local customs and the modern state's desire for easily assessable (taxable) and manageable (saleable) land, one of the two had to give. The state won, of course, by imposing regular land parcels upon the populace: "the historical resolution has generally been for the state to impose a property system in line with its fiscal grid." The dream was to manage and tax land more easily; the result was to completely disrupt a system of community land tenure that provided protection to the collective local community and replace it with forced individual holdings that rewarded individual effort and forced and facilitated a shift to a market economy.

In this shift, the state gained the ability to survey quickly. It ignored, however, a large body of knowledge about the land and its people. Two parcels of

equal size were deemed equal; one however might be fertile and the other unproductive. The impact upon individuals was sometimes grave. Since taxation was levied based upon parcel size, the state made no effort to discern what the productive capacity of a lot might be, and thereby demanded equal taxes from each. The unlucky recipient of unproductive land was often impoverished, while he who received productive land in the transition to government-regulated parcels might pay his taxes easily and have much to spare.

This first step in statehood concerned itself with basic measurement and uniformity for the sake of taxation. The modern state would build upon uniformity of measurement in trade and land as it began to be involved in “productivity, health, sanitation, education, transportation, mineral resources, grain production and investment.” That is the topic of the second chapter.

**The second chapter** begins with a discussion of the transition from Medieval to Modern cities. Early cities were highly disorganized, which provided them with a degree of autonomy. Their very irregularities meant that outsiders depended upon locals for knowledge of the city, which knowledge could be regulated by the locals themselves. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment brought calls for aesthetic regularity that many Italian city planners took seriously. These planners also wanted to facilitate troop movement through cities and towards rebellious quarters of cities. Post-Revolutionary Paris serves as a prime example of this. Much of the city’s interior was reconstructed in a giant public works project that brought regularity to the streets, increased sanitation, provided better water, and gave aesthetic appeal. In addition, the city became more manageable for the government. Particularly concerned with a poor region known as Bellvue, the

government created broad streets into Bellvue that allowed troops to move there quickly to quell any possible insurrection. While tens of thousands of people were displaced, the government gained the upper hand in tax management and military control while providing the city with healthier living conditions and better economic arteries. The working class populace lost much of their autonomy.

A second step in the consolidation and enabling of state functions through legibility was the assignment of surnames. While this practice varied over time and country, "in almost every case it was a state project, designed to allow officials to identify, unambiguously, the majority of its citizens" for the purposes of taxation. Some projects failed because the populace rebelled; others succeeded because punishments for failure to comply were severe. One extreme example from the Philippines typifies the rigidity with which some of these projects were undertaken. In 1849 all Filipinos were assigned surnames because the Spanish government had no way to manage and tax them. A book of common names (drawn mainly from common nouns) was drawn up and people were assigned surnames alphabetically by region: entire towns were designated "A" or "B" or "C".

States also needed to control language, which remained perhaps the most formidable guardian of local custom. While Scott does not go in depth into state efforts to control language (such a study would probably require a book), he mentions France as an example of an emerging nation state that codified French as the lingua franca, thereby relegating those who could not speak it to the fringes of advancing society.

The French also took measures to control early roadways by creating straight roads into Paris that again served troop movements. One such failed endeavor

created a railway from Paris to Strasbourg on a perfectly straight line, ignoring the difficulties of topographical nuance and the location of existing cities. It is a perfect example of how a successful strategy such as straight, wide streets to accommodate troops, when applied metaphorically to other matters (when the impetus to do so was the success of the former project rather than the similarity between projects) is almost certainly doomed to failure.

The examples and arguments in this chapter indicate that modern states have been motivated by the desire to easily control certain key regulatory features. To do so, they have quantified and normalized key social features such as land parcel shape and size, naming conventions, travel routes, and the layout of cities. This process inevitably becomes recursive, and the people subject to such normalizations then follow the patterns set for them by the people who simplify complexity for the sake of intelligibility. In extreme cases of authoritarian regimes, these categories (originally invented to provide easy understanding) can impact the actual lives of citizens in devastating ways.

**The third chapter** studies “authoritarian high modernism:” “a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied—usually through the state—in every field of human activity.” This process of extending the benefits of progress to everyone within a society commonly begins when states gather data that assist in describing that society. The descriptions then become norms, and the norms can be viewed in light of higher standards. Given that individuals can improve, states assume that whole societies can be improved if the rules of progress are imposed unilaterally upon their populations. Of course this centralized planning removes sources of innovation, progress, and change that

emerge from localized elements (necessity, genius, etc.) in favor of a single guiding body that determines the desired results and structures social action to create those results.

Naturally, the intelligentsia laid claim to the leadership of high modernist pretensions. Being the possessors of scientific knowledge, they saw themselves as being in the intellectual position of leading whole societies toward a renovation of its individuals and its results. While this may sound inherently destructive, many of the world's most progressive and beneficial projects have grown out of large scale planning. Two such enormous planning projects (i.e., centrally administered projects) grew out of wartime economy and the Depression with positive results for the economy of the United States and other countries. However, two other political phenomena have resulted disastrously: revolution and colonialism.

The ideology at the base of these activities probably began in Germany during WWI under the direction of Walter Rathenau. Rathenau planned nearly every aspect of economic life in Germany in order to maintain the war effort, and in doing so created a mechanized process that actually worked. The success of a rationalized production process inspired faith in it across political boundaries. Those who believed in it also believed that it would eliminate society's ills by increasing productivity, decreasing job dissatisfaction, eliminating capitalist oppression, and equalizing the distribution of wealth (because of the inherent equality of each worker). With the war ending and rebuilding looming large, it seemed logical to extend wartime practices of economic control and planning to a peacetime economy that would flourish without the drain of war.

Lenin was drawn to and inspired by Germany planned successes in labor, and longed to implement them (before the Revolution) as the foundation of a socialist society in which the optimum methods of productivity were practiced universally by the proletariat, thereby leapfrogging a socialist society past capitalism. After the Revolution, Lenin sought to implement planned productivity along Rathenau's guidelines.

"Despite the authoritarian temptations of twentieth century high modernism, they have often been resisted" for three reasons: the private sector's belief that government ought not interfere; faith in the free market economy (and its benefits); and institutions founded upon representative political principles.

**The fourth chapter** looks at actual implementations of this ideology in cities. The chapter compares Le Corbusier's views of city planning with Jane Jacobs' views. Le Corbusier was a planner *par excellence*. He abhorred all things that emerged from natural interaction, preferring always planned spaces, planned transportation, planned living quarters, etc. He insisted upon designs that separated living activities from social activities from work activities. His city plans were made to reduce all functions to their most elemental and mechanical forms: kitchens for the production of food, highways for quick and convenient travel, and work places for maximum efficiency. His plans arose from a belief in the absolutely scientific foundation of his method. He thought that humanity lived in great waste of space, energy, time, and life by not having that life planned precisely and reduced to its most bare and efficient terms. He abhorred all things that did not conform to rules of geometric precision (straight lines, right angles).

Jane Jacobs studied the city from the street. She argued in favor of the functionality of a city that emerged from localized interactions, pointing to example after example of the richness of life in a city that may seem confused at first glance. She argued that people preferred short streets, multiple functions within neighborhoods (shops, residences, traffic, parks, theaters, etc.) as opposed to the single function areas for which Le Corbusier argued (isolated living spaces, isolated parks, isolated work quarters, etc.) She said that cities gain strength from the unpredictable and irreproducible interactions of its agents. She pointed out the error of reasoning from the cleanliness of plans to the functionality of a planned city. In fact, planned cities reduce information flow and redundancy, making themselves more susceptible to economic decay, social discontent, and cultural stagnation.

**The fifth chapter** opens with a look at Lenin's ideas as highly representative of ideological high modernism: the conviction "that superior knowledge, authoritarian instruction, and social design could transform society" in the best and most efficient way. In his vision, the party serves as the "brain" of the state directing the body of the people. He pictures the implementation of this "brain" and "body" in military terms, with the masses representing the soldiers and the political and revolutionary leaders representing the generals with battle plans in hand. This plan consists of direction from above for the social phases leading to true socialism. Lenin harps on the necessity of top-down guidance to bring about the aims of the socialist revolution. In this and in many other ways, Lenin mirrors Le Corbusier in his insistence upon hierarchy and authority to bring about a proper solution to social ills.

The following quote brings into relief Lenin's ideas about the absolute necessity of central control in the future planned society: "But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one... We must learn to combine the public-meeting democracy of the working people... with the iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work." Lenin's state requires unity of will among the masses that can only be had by complete submission to the will of the state dictated from above by the ultimate planner: the Soviet leader.

In contrast to Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg had greater faith in the emergent actions of the people being guided by the leading revolutionaries. Luxemburg rejected the planned revolution, insisting that revolution "was a complex social event involving the wills and knowledge of many human agents, of which the vanguard party was only one element." Luxemburg accepted process, agency, and complexity as necessary and essential elements to be understood and used within political change. She used organic metaphors instead of mechanical ones, insisting upon the complexity of the process of change and the interrelatedness of all actions and people involved. She recognized that centralized control forfeited creativity. Her critiques of Lenin's methods proved prophetic as the people's revolution disintegrated eventually into a common dictatorship.

The chapter's central thesis is that centralized planning of an economy mirrors the centralized design of a city, which mirrors the centralized planning of a forest: implementation of process based exclusively upon plans without the recursive feedback of error and the lessons of emergent creativity is doomed to failure.

### **Part three: The Social Engineering of Rural Settlement and**

**Production.** In order for a state to administer its functions, it must understand its population through quantification. Since all societies are older and more complex than the states in which they exist, the state must seek to simplify them in order to administer them. The amount of knowledge necessary about a given society is proportional to the state's administrative aims: mere taxation requires less information than taxation, conscription, road planning, and food distribution. Historically states have attempted to get this information through an imposition of order that isolates and simplifies the societies that they seek to understand and administer.

As an example of this, precolonial Southeast Asian statecraft consisted of attempting to keep the population near the center in order to levy taxes. Consequently, these states worked toward sedentarization of their populations. They sought populations that stayed in one place and worked the land in predictable ways; this way the government could easily extract the benefits of their production. The state itself, therefore, consisted logically of those areas of population that could be thus managed. Those that fell outside the state's sphere of influence would not truly be a part of the state, even though they might live within "boundaries".

The logic of state building, therefore, says that these peripheral societies need to be localized, stabilized, and quantified in order for them to be of benefit to the state. Those who migrated proved intractable. The interaction between hidden or migratory people and the state consists of "negotiations" that seek to make the people visible to the state at some expense to the people. To the degree that the

state can convince the unsettled population of the benefits to be had from conformity, this may be a peaceful process; otherwise, the process may require military imposition.

Agriculture presents us with a particularly telling case in point. Governments in this area knew that small, local farms outperformed larger plantations. Yet governments sought consistently to impose plantation-style farming. One important reason was because large plantations were more easily taxable. These plans are often defended in terms of “development and social services” rather than in terms of taxation.

**Chapter six** begins with a short description of a long history of failed attempts within the Russian Empire to make legible the chaotic social and economic constructs of the Russian peasantry. Lenin inherited these failed plans and a landscape that had been changed radically by WWI and the Russian Civil War. The newly barren landscape was ideal for grandiose schemes to overlay an orderly state structure and create a new soviet citizenry unilaterally allied to a common goal. It was also ideal to create intelligibility for the state.

From about 1910 until 1930, the US and Russia collaborated in sharing industrial agriculture information and methods. This included a thorough study and understanding of what could be mechanized. Whether or not large scale mechanization was practical or desirable for any given agricultural application was irrelevant: agricultural engineers sought uniform mechanization across agricultural boundaries. This belief led to some very large (and failed) endeavors to implement industry style farms on a large scale from the ground up. These efforts were often gargantuan in scale and planned without reference to the problems of actual

implementation and the nuances of shifting economies, labor markets, weather, and disparate soil conditions. Large American efforts inspired great enthusiasm in Russia, and large Russian efforts inspired enthusiasm in America.

In the Soviet state, these huge efforts ended in collectivization. While the project failed and cost the Soviet Union the lives of perhaps 20 million of its citizens, it did succeed in another way: it provided the state with a legible (and thereby controllable) picture of its populace that only a few years before was completely chaotic and unintelligible.

Lenin's land reform, which effectively granted any seized land to peasants, created a more chaotic picture than that which existed in czarist Russia. The reform confounded the problem by turning large estates that produced a surplus for the cities into subsistence farms whose inhabitants were unwilling to share with the government and the cities. Thus the Bolsheviks faced a hostile rural populace upon whom they depended for income and bread, and about whom they knew virtually nothing, including how to collect taxes from it.

Faced with this enormously confusing and hostile situation, the Bolsheviks saw themselves as having few options other than forced regimentation of every aspect of rural life. The ultimate act of regimentation was collectivization, which the government used to both acquire much needed grain from the countryside and to force the peasant population into intelligible units that supported their ideological conviction that high degrees of organization and commensurate implementation of technology would bring about great social change. Maps of the day show highly structured communities formed around state owned farms without regard for the nuances of the local terrain or the particular needs of the populace.

**Chapter seven** treats another failed experiment: forced villagization in Tanzania. The government faced a perceived problem of a highly dispersed, irregular, and mobile population. The government described this population as “backwards” and badly in need of the benefits of “modern” living and society. Having “complete faith” in “scientific agriculture”, they chose to implement western agricultural techniques in consolidated areas that required that the population live in close social confines. In one case, the government resettled thousands of people in the “Shire Valley Project”. This project ignored completely nuances of local terrain, opting to divide territory into geometrically regular quadrants that could be visualized and managed easily. The government also implemented agricultural techniques that were destructive and unproductive for the land, leading to a massive failure of the plans.

Later experiments were even more encompassing, involving forced resettlement (villagization) of 13,000,000 (70%) of Tanzania’s population. The government “hoped that ‘social emulation, cooperation, and expansion of community development services’ would” assist in changing attitudes about resettlement and old agricultural practices. But the populace resisted. Convinced that the people “did not know what was good for them”, the government turned to more forcible measures. In December of 1973 the government issued an order mandating: “To live in villages is an order.” The order was carried out along militaristic lines, with severe penalties for those who resisted relocation, including burning down homes and refusing food to those in need.

This unfortunate tactic was accompanied by a senseless agricultural plan that emphasized geometrical orderliness of fields, singularity of crops being planted, and

communal labor on land that often was among the worst in the country. (The land was chosen because of its emptiness, no one having considered that it may have been empty for a reason).

While the plan made the social landscape intelligible to the government, it failed to provide for proper irrigation, labor needs, actual costs of growing certain mandated crops, or the caloric needs of the population. The result was a complete disaster that the government claimed was a victory. It praised its own ability to “identify able bodied individuals to work”, to locate families next to roads, and to keep track of planted crops; but it failed to acknowledge the utter failure of realizing its stated aims of improving the lives of its people.

The final section of chapter seven describes an Ethiopian political imposition of state order upon a scattered society. In 1985 the government determined to relocate “all 33 million rural Ethiopians.” The practice followed the strict ideological line that scattered populations are unproductive, while cohesive communities marked by geometric order are progressive and productive. The people were resettled according to very strict plans into communities of predetermined numbers. These communities followed one pattern in which central governmental offices sat at the center of a village surrounded by precisely equal plots containing identical housing units. The government dictated the kind and number of crops, as well as a number of social activities.

While the government described the imposition of the plan in terms of progress and human services, the people themselves recognized it for what it was: an attempt to categorize and control them through simplified enumeration and geometrization.

The examples in this chapter typify centralized attempts at imposing legibility upon illegible populations with the intent of simplifying understanding for the government and controlling the population more easily. Such moves rely upon visionary rhetoric with uncompromising faith in technology at the expense of localized knowledge. All such experiments have failed at a huge cost to human life, the environment, social structure, and cultural knowledge.

**Chapter eight** deals specifically with agriculture. The question that the author poses is: "Why a model of modern, scientific agriculture that has apparently been successful in the temperate, industrializing West has so often foundered in the Third World." He suggests four reasons: 1) planners extrapolated from one set of circumstances and conditions to another, 2) such plans were often intended to serve the schematics of state building rather than agriculture itself, 3) placing productivity at the top of the list of desired aims, planners ignored other essential reasons and features of agriculture, 4) laboratory conditions do not work well under actual conditions.

Early agriculture responded to the environment, with the cultivator learning what the land would give. Twentieth century agriculture sought to shape the environment to its needs and methods, prioritizing yield, technology, and regularity. One "unintended consequence" of modern agriculture was to create susceptibility to epidemic disease among homogenous crops. Despite this, modern Western agriculture continued to propagandize the desirability of "large, integrated, planned projects." This view was based upon a "visual codification of modern agricultural practice" that decried disorder as "a symptom of backward techniques."

The solution, of course, was to impose visual uniformity. Rarely did scientists notice “the resilience and durability of diversity.”

Another face of this diversity was “shifting cultivation” in which farmers moved from place to place, burning small areas to farm and allowing others to lie fallow. Naturally, this practice contradicted the stability of organized farms dictated by the ideology of agricultural order. Equally offensive to this ideology was the practice of not using chemical fertilizers, opting instead for natural means of soil enhancement. Some of these soil enhancement techniques required intercropping (the process of growing many intermingled things in one place).

All of these localized practices had to be replaced by ones founded upon scientific method. The problem with this was that results that emerged from isolated laboratory findings could not be duplicated exactly in complex natural environments with different kinds of soils and terrains. Therefore, in an effort to duplicate lab yields, scientists literally forced the landscape to conform to laboratory standards: they flattened terrain, and fertilized soil to make it uniform. In a word, the environments that agricultural scientists encountered in the world were too complex to allow duplication of results, so they limited the scope of the environment in order to achieve their results. As these uniform plots and practices replaced older more disorderly plots, local people lost knowledge of the complexities of their environment that allowed them to respond to the complexities of nature.

In conclusion, virtually every attempt to impose ordered and unitary agricultural practices on real land have failed. Local farmers have a large body of practical knowledge that assists them in making highly informed decisions about

how to respond to environmental change and how to improve the yield and quality of their crops. Science has largely and traditionally discounted the value of this knowledge because of a mistaken association between complex practices that remain undocumented and backwardness.

**The ninth chapter** treats the subject of "metis": the Greek word that is often translated "cunning" that actually means "deep knowledge" or a thorough understanding of practical knowledge. Metis is knowledge that cannot be reduced to formulaic instructions. Some examples might be a ship captain's knowledge of certain straits, a mechanic's "feel" for an engine, a public speaker's ability to shift tone, rhythm, and cadence in response to a crowd, or a farmer's knowledge of his land. The word contrasts with the Greek word "techne", which describes that knowledge and practice that "may be logically derived from... initial assumptions."

The twentieth century is marked by exceptional devotion to the "imperium of scientific knowledge", that is, to knowledge and practice that can be reduced to instructions, prescribed, and imitated by those without understanding. In certain cases, this knowledge is supremely important, such as in cases of medical experimentation that isolate illnesses and their cures. However, Scott shows that when scientific knowledge of virtually any kind is imposed upon complex environments like societies or agricultural practices, it is almost always inefficient, and at times dangerous.

The opposite, however, almost always yields positive results. When people are free to experiment in many ways (think of planting their own fields, starting their own businesses, or building their own houses), then a vast body of practical and efficient knowledge emerges. "It would in fact be surprising if such a

combination of passionate interest, close observation, large numbers of amateur specialists trying different possibilities, and the time necessary for trial and error did not produce many novel solutions to practical problems.” In a word, top down planning, centralized control, and rationalistic structures have nearly always met with failure when applied to real world circumstances, while societies, cultures, and practices that emerge from multiple interactions over long periods of time demonstrate remarkable degrees of spontaneous creativity and long term stability.

Scott argues that metis is being systematically destroyed:

“It would be a serious error to believe that the destruction of metis was merely the inadvertent and necessary by-product of economic progress. The destruction of metis and its replacement by standardized formulas legible only from the center is virtually inscribed in the activities of both the state and large-scale bureaucratic capitalism. As a ‘project,’ it is the object of constant initiatives which are never entirely successful, for no forms of production or social life can be made to work by formulas alone—that is, without metis. The logic animating the project, however, is one of control and appropriation. Local knowledge, because it is dispersed and relatively autonomous, is all but un-appropriable. The reduction or, more utopian still, the elimination of metis and the local control it entails are preconditions, in the case of the state, of administrative order and fiscal appropriation and, in the case of the large capitalist firm, of worker discipline and profit.”

If this is true, the world is headed for dangerous territory.

**Chapter Ten: Conclusion.** No degree of planning or commitment to an absolute certainty about the design of the future can eliminate contingency.

Planners would do well, then, to consider the reality of contingency and proceed slowly, adopt plans that can be changed, expect surprises, and react to local human action.

Modern planners have ignored the reality of contingency in order to create by force what they envisioned as desirable. Beyond the economic and social failures that these plans have engendered, they have also created huge psychological harm: "high-modernist designs for life and production tend to diminish the skills, agility, initiative, and morale of their intended beneficiaries." High modernist impositions equally debilitate the systems and institutions that they created and sought to support. Their weaknesses are overcome, ironically, by individuals who break its rules in order to survive.

Given that highly structured institutions that rely upon centralization rarely function efficiently and often end disastrously, it makes sense to foster climates that accommodate innovation at the expense of simplified legibility and uniformity.