



Hidden dimensions

Description

Cryptography hides messages from the senses, observation and interpretation. It belongs within an array of practices that fit comfortably within the field of [semiotics](#). I'm content to think that cryptographic practices extend C.S. Peirce's semiological pragmatism. After all, messages hidden in code are *signs*.

On the subject of messaging, I'm also interested in *hiddenness* as a way of talking and writing. Writers make frequent reference to the *hiddenness* of events, objects and places. Detective stories are founded on it. Education seeks to reveal truths that are otherwise hidden. The animal instinct to be curious drives us to search out what's under the rock, around the corner, and in the next valley.

Skilled writers even invent *hiddenness*, and weave it into their narrative in order to induce curiosity, engagement and to grab attention. Hence, orators conjure up mystery to keep the audience guessing and to capture their attention. Attention seeking politicians deploy this tactic to amplify their grandiosity: "what is he feeling right now?" "will he admit defeat?" "will he leave the White House?"

Hidden measurements

The topic of *hidden dimensions* amplifies further such fascination with hiddenness. The term "hidden dimension" is architecturally alluring as it implies something about space beyond how it is usually perceived. A book from the 1960s by Edward Hall bears the tempting title *Hidden Dimensions*, though it's less mysterious than it sounds. The book is about *proxemics*, the study of proximity "how people organise and use space in interpersonal communication. There's clearly a revival of interest in proxemics in the current era of mandated social distancing.

Hall indicates what he means by *hidden dimensions* as he explains the spatial arrangement in an office that consists of at least 3 zones.

1. The immediate work area of the desktop and chair.
2. A series of points within arm's reach outside the area mentioned above.
3. Spaces marked as the limit reached when one pushes away from the desk to achieve a little distance from the work without actually getting up.

• (53).

He then advocates for designers to account for the fluid and pragmatic dimensioning of space that goes beyond mere room dimensions: “Kinesthetic space is an important factor in day-to-day living in the buildings that architects and designers create” (53). Otto Bollnow made similar observations around the same time, though from a more far reaching phenomenological perspective. See post: [Space dehomogenised](#).

Hall draws attention to certain social practices that pertain to distances as somehow hidden, non-obvious and in need of discovery, as opposed to the obvious and visible sizes and shapes of rooms. A dimension is simply a measure, and so a *hidden dimension* is a measurement that is not obvious, such as the dimensions of the space formed by someone’s movements, willingness to approach others and how they place objects, e.g. in an office space.

Beyond measure

But most compelling of all for many writers and audiences with imaginations amenable to extrapolation, is the meaning accorded to “hidden dimensions” of other and parallel worlds. Thanks to Descartes’ characterisation of objects in space as defined by length, breadth and height, “dimension” equates to a gridded world view of three dimensions, a 3D world. So, of course we are entitled to extend the series in both directions 1D, 2D, 3D, 4D → nD. That’s worth further investigation. In the meantime here’s a reflection of my own office space in the light of dusk in autumn.



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1. Architecture

Tags

1. cryptography
2. mystery
3. semiotics
4. space

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