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values of this older economy have become no more and no less than a metaphor for hierarchy, control, separation, meanness, opacity, dullness, stasis, death. The new office, to be relevant in the new economy, has to proclaim an entirely opposite set of values—networks, knowledge, interaction, enjoyment, transparency, fluidity, life. The big design question is what iconography is appropriate to express such values. To answer this question architects and designers will have to come to terms with yet another level of process—understanding what delivering the new work culture really means in the widest social and economic context.

Disintermediation and the Democratization of Design

The Internet makes possible disintermediation, i.e., stripping away layers of middlemen to give everyone, including all office workers, direct access, for example, to the design process. Disintermediation means the inevitable democratization of the design, procurement, and delivery of every aspect of the office environment. From this perspective, five major disconnects are opening up between what e-commerce offers and how things are done in the conventional way.

The first gap is between the openness, choice, and responsiveness offered by the Internet and conventional real estate procedures based on hierarchy and control. The second gap is between the highly branded, easy-to-access, fun-to-use style of the web and the tired, slow, old economy delivery we know so well in property, construction—and design. The third is between the locational freedom offered by ubiquitous technology and the rigid demarcation of work and life that we have inherited from the mores of the late-nineteenth century. The fourth disconnect is between design that stimulates and attracts people by offering multiple choices and the sterile stereotypes of the conventional office. The fifth is the difference between using change management techniques to accelerate organizational and cultural change and confining such techniques to far less ambitious damage limitation.

Frequently the argument is made that increasing dependence on electronic communications will destroy the need for face-to-face interaction and make places—and hence the physical design of the workplace—redundant. Nothing is less likely. In the world of virtuality, e-commerce will make real materials, real experiences, real places more rather than less significant. To compete