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CHAPTER  
**ONE**

# Looking at Themed Environments

## The Increasing Use of Themes in Everyday Life

Since the end of World War II, our everyday environment has been altered in profound ways. Before the 1950s there was a clear distinction between the city and the country (Williams 1973). Cities grew as compact, dense industrial environments usually laid out along right-angled grid lines. They possessed a central sector of office towers and an adjacent area of factories tied to rail spurs and roads. Residential areas comprised the classic contrast of the “gold coast and slum.” Wealthy, privileged areas of housing were juxtaposed in close proximity with the more modest, sometimes squalid, neighborhoods of industrial workers. Lying in contrast directly beyond the limits of the city was the country—the fields of farm lands, wooded acres and occasional houses of families separated by open space. Cultural styles of life that were either urban (urbane) or rural reflected this dichotomy of land uses as did depictions of city and country dwellers in novels and films (see Redfield 1947).

Beginning with the 1950s the trend toward suburbanization, which had been operating in the United States for over 100 years, began to accelerate and break down the urban/rural dichotomy. Between 1950 and 1970 the plurality of the U.S. population took up residence in the new space created by the large-scale housing development of rural land next to our biggest cities. Decades of suburban growth eradicated the clear distinction between the city and the country, although its vestiges continue to echo in the popular media. Novels and films, for example, are still produced that focus exclusively on cities. They give the impression that the cities are somehow isolated from both the surrounding suburban region and the global forces that influence virtually all places on the earth.

Along with these population shifts, people changed the ways they imputed meaning to their daily environment. Before the 1950s, fundamental