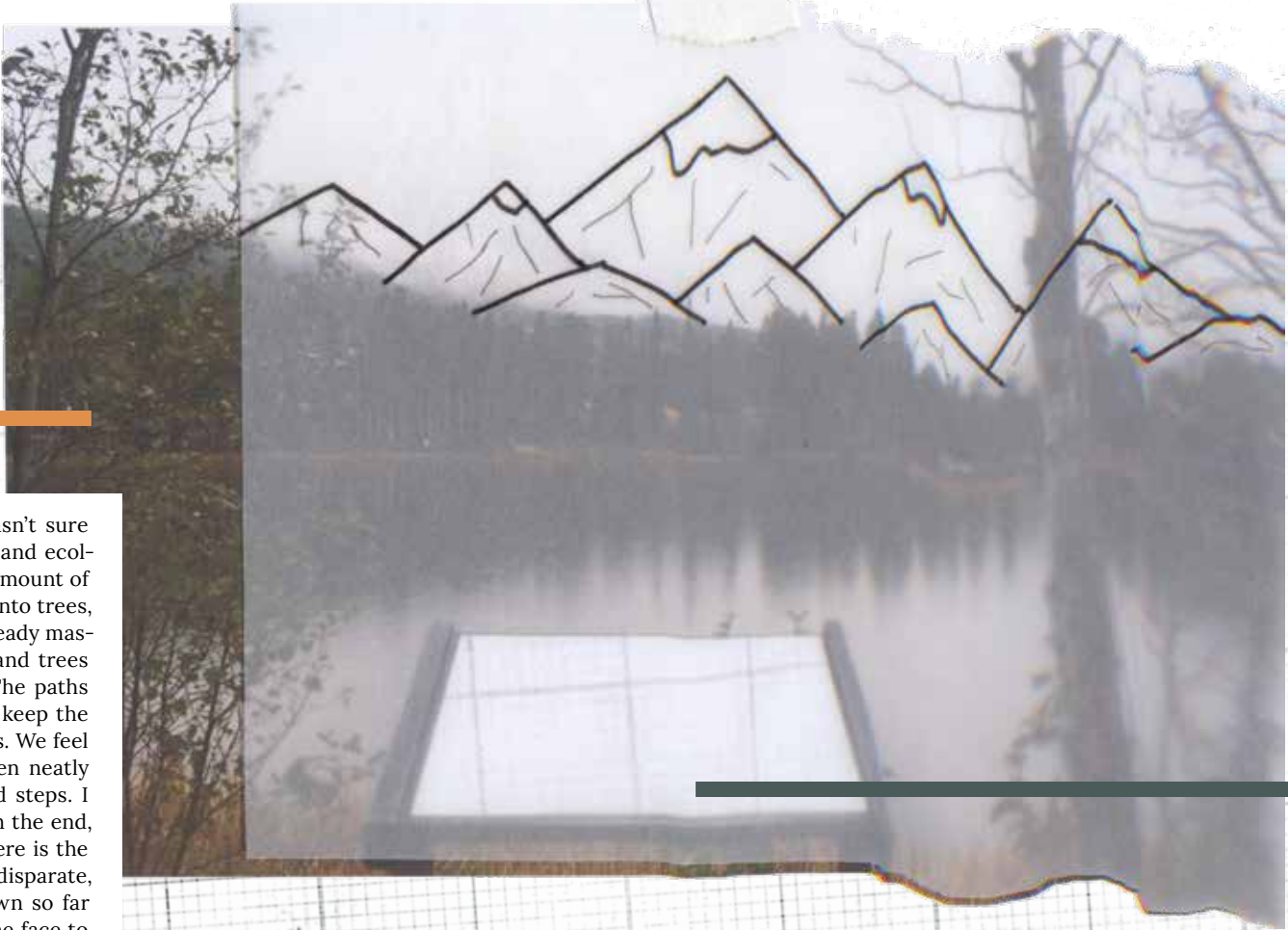


in addition

Clarisse Pinto



I walk with Cheryl. She mentions the crowding and the parking lot and wonders what that means for us. The parking lot holds forty cars. If each car holds five people, that's a potential 200 bodies brought to Sprague Lake at any given time. 200 people who wouldn't have to walk the three miles uphill that we took to come see the lake, still gladly stroll on its wide, even dirt path supported by sturdy wooden railing separating us from the water. It feels like a *made* space, and we come to it as a museum, to read the signs, say *ooh* and *aah* and point but not touch. We want people engaged with nature, but can we only do that with paved lots and inserted type treatments? In that case, what are they engaging with; nature or what a designer has implanted in it? That's then the designer's job to make considerations about how we could interact.



But I couldn't quite grasp at the answers, and Cheryl wasn't sure either. How do we get people to engage in and understand ecology? And to what extent can it be helpful? There is no amount of signage that will keep people from carving their names into trees, from tossing their trash into a flowing river. There is already massive intervention in just the existence of trails. Rocks and trees moved out of paths or into them to prevent erosion. The paths delineated and steps leveled. Constant maintenance to keep the organic chaos on either side of the neatly marked routes. We feel in nature, but the area our bodies can occupy has been neatly carved for us. Still, I happily take these predetermined steps. I greet passersby with a smile and a good morning and in the end, I am here just as they are. Though I'm not sure if my here is the same as theirs. All this time spent in my head feels disparate, even with my thoughts drawn from the space, I'm blown so far out at times that it can take a stumble or a branch to the face to

plug back

As we make the round, kiosks tell us about Sprague and show labeled images of the peaks we should be seeing. I stare out into the dense cloud-cover obscuring everything but the foothills. They roll gently, and if it weren't for the printed photographs showing off, I'd be perfectly satisfied with the low hills and the white sky. Setting aside these feelings, I take a picture with the kiosk in the foreground whose bright printed image tells the story of only one season. *I can draw those peaks in later with pen*, I thought. This thought felt like a form of conquering. I don't think I want to "conquer" or at least, the idea of it made me feel strange in my humanity in this space

and

at this point in time.

"...there are those you can call nothing but tourists. Those that go tearing from coast to coast and back again on their vacations are tourists. When they reach home from their travels they are not certain where they saw this or that..."

-Abner Sprague

I consider the Vignellis in the idea of conquering nature. They created a visual system so perfect that it could be applied to all types of information displayed at every national park. That gridded material sits so quietly in the middle of its habitat, but the exactness of that structure exists in direct opposition of what it describes. It's beautiful too, in the way it fulfills exactly its purpose, in that everything can be seated thoughtfully in relation to each other to maximize

comfort
and interest
and ease.

And how that then increases appeal, elevates peoples' mood, and hopefully invites them to stop and take in otherwise uninteresting or difficult to maneuver information more thoughtfully. I imagine them creating this intervention, knowing that even here Modernism would work seamlessly. Despite the disconnect I perceive from its monumental backdrop, this invasive piece of civilization gently takes me aback in its system of standardization, how words set in neatly stacked grotesk seem to say, "This is a timeless statement."

But then I feel a breeze graze my cheek
and my focus goes macro again. I think about Sprague from above, these trees don't exist in a grid, these mountains don't rise in straight lines. But my mind takes these trees and flattens them, mapping points in perfect square grids and it's beautiful. How could we ever work with instead of take over the environment we want to protect? Is there anything we could add to nature to help foster real engagement? Should we "add" at all and if not, is there even space for design? If the Vignellis were to design the trees around their signs, what would they look like?

I don't know.

But Cheryl looks back and tells me to keep up, so I do.