IDEO, DESIGN, THE EVERYDAY



This is the first in a series of commentaries on a class running at Stanford, Winter Quarter 2010 – "Transformative Design" ENGR 231 – [Link]

I made a visit to IDEO last week, the design consultancy with its head office in downtown Palo Alto, by Stanford. I'm teaching a class next term with one of its founders, Bill Moggridge. It's called "Transformative Design" and is run through the Hasso-Plattner Institute for Design at Stanford – the d.school. Bernie Roth from Mechanical Engineering is with us as one of the original teaching team. I am joining this year with Megghan Dryer, also of IDEO.

The d.school's mission is quite clear – to promote "design thinking" – the *process* of human-centered design at the heart of IDEO's very successful consultancy. I am fascinated with this juxtaposition – IDEO's distillation of design practice with the interpretive understanding and analytics at the core of archaeological and anthropological approaches to material culture.

[Link to class website]

David Kelley, Tom Kelley, Tim Brown and Bill himself have written much about IDEO's method, the use of ethnographic observation, brainstorming, prototyping and narrative. I'll be elaborating on all this through the course of the class.

[Link] – Bill's book – "Designing Interactions"

[Link] – Tim Brown's blog on design thinking

My line is that archaeologists offer unique insights into both creativity and innovation in the history of design, and, as modernity's key memory practice, archaeology is itself a *design* practice, working on what is left of the past, crafting and modeling.

[Link] – archaeology as design in contemporary "risk society".

An insight came straight out of this recent visit.

I picked up a couple of books in the IDEO collection. "Thoughtless Acts" is a photographic documentary of intuitive everyday "design" – when people adapt things and environments to needs and desires often unforeseen.

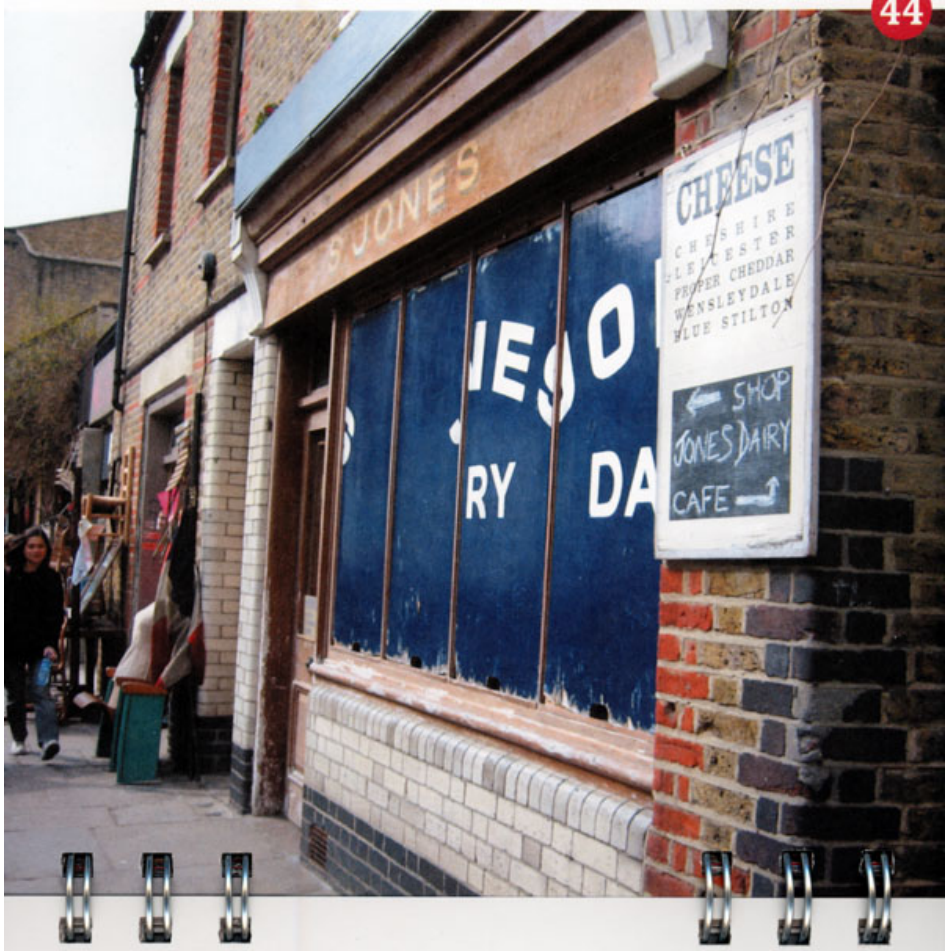


Improvization.

IDEO people have also produced two travel guides – on London and New York.

They are called “eyes open” and celebrate experience, ambience and character, rather than overdramatized tourist “attractions”.

[*] **FOR A DIFFERENT TAKE ON TIME**, drive by The Tea Building at 56 Shoreditch High Street. Looming light and bright over its front door is a digital clock that continually counts down to last call seven nights a week.



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Now you see it, now you don't. This tiny, time-based intersection is our favorite brunch spot in town, hands down. That is, if you don't mind sitting on a curb rather than a chair. Depending on when you happen upon this intersection, you will either experience some serious alfresco snacking or find yourself on a deserted cobblestone street. Jones Dairy sits right in the middle at 23 Ezra, in case you need a landmark to help you find this find. Arrive before 2 pm on a Sunday, and you'll see lots of people and their pets taking to the streets—sitting, perching, or standing while enjoying oysters, coffee, cheeses, and breads. Each specialty shop, all within steps of one another, opens for a few hours until it has sold out of the day's goods. By "shop," we mean painted wooden doors and windows that open onto the street during "business hours." You'll see lots of flowers tucked under people's arms, freshly liberated from the Columbia Road Flower Market [25]. It doesn't get any more local than this.















There is so much value in making manifest what is tacit, overlooked, assumed.

The quotidian – the everyday, the unnoticed, the ambient – is at the heart of human experience. The quotidian constitutes our sense of “presence”, of really being there. The quotidian is a core of an archaeological imagination.

For me, the flow of everyday experience always and already implies a question of attention, about “what matters” – on what should we focus, what is really happening? It is the question of the relationship between signal and noise, figure and ground.

More notes – Figure and Ground