

MAN202T: Sociology of Design

Session 10



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY,
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SESSION OUTLINE

- Feedback on Exercise 9b / 9d
- How to get started & explore the world (see & listen better)? ... continued...

Revisit what you have captured in 9b / 9d

Observe the objects
around you... not
your feelings /
reflections

Observe details -
cues & signals... *Do
not abstract or
generalize*

*Were you able
to follow all the
principles?*

Remember, the act of
observing will change
the observed

Do not judge
what you observe

Do not
imagine
things

Revisit what you have captured in 9b / 9d

- Always be looking ... Everything is interesting. Look closer
- Use all of the senses in your investigation
- Observe for long durations
- Alter your course often ...
Incorporate indeterminacy
- Document your findings in a variety of ways
- Trace things back to their origins
- Consider everything alive & animate
- Create a personal dialogue with your environment. Talk to it
- Notice the stories going around ...
Observe movement
- Notice patterns, make connections

Artists and Scientists analyze the world around them in similar ways – Keri Smith

Observe, Collect, Analyze, Compare, Notice Patterns

Art is to Arrange or Fit Together

Revisit what you have captured in 9b / 9d

- Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch, Taste, Color, Movement, Shape, Texture, Function, Symbol, Language
- Subjectively, Objectively, In comparison, Contrast, Negative Space, Symmetrically, in Parts
- Anecdotally, Historically, Artistically, Scientifically, Morally, Diachronically, Synchronically, Linearly, Contextually, Culturally, Politically, Ritualistically, Micro, Macro, 2D, 3D, Mythically, Light heartedly

A story ... empathy vs judgement (1 / 3)

- Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before—such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength.
- People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. “This horse is not a horse to me,” he would tell them. “It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?” The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse.
- One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. “You old fool,” they scoffed, “we told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you’ve been cursed with misfortune.”
- The old man responded, “Don’t speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I’ve been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?”
- The people contested, “Don’t make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse.”
- The old man spoke again. “All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don’t know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can’t say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?”

A story ... empathy vs judgement (2/3)

- The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.
- After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. "Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us."
- The man responded, "Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don't judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase?"
- "Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don't say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don't."
- "Maybe the old man is right," they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.
- The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments.

A story ... empathy vs judgement (3/3)

- “You were right,” they said. “You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever.”
- The old man spoke again. “You people are obsessed with judging. Don’t go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments.”
- It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.
- “You were right, old man,” they wept. “God knows you were right. This proves it. Yours son’s accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever.”
- The old man spoke again. “It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows.”
- The old man was right. We only have a fragment. Life’s mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on life’s storms until we know the whole story.

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Exercise 10a: Step out of the classroom

Observe any of the following aspects for 20 minutes and document at least 20 observations. Sketch/Write/Encode and make the invisible visible

Observe from multiple angles

1. Cracks in classroom walls
2. Cracks in the pavement / walking areas
3. Corners of a classroom
4. Water pouring from taps in restrooms
5. Window openings in academic block
6. Weeds / shrubs in the academic area
7. Two/Four wheeler parking

Observe from multiple angles

8. Canteen seating or roof
9. Passages in academic block / lab complex
10. Path between academic block & lib/admin
11. Lifts in academic block
12. Portions of a wall exposed to sun vs shade
13. Hand rails of staircases / steps
14. Water coolers in the academic block



Exercise 10b: Interpret & present your findings

- Interpret / look for patterns – similarities/differences/hidden gems
- Use metaphors if required to stitch together different observations
- Generate new meanings for everyday routine things
- Make the familiar strange / invisible visible
- Does it reveal an unstated need or new product idea?

Try more on your product context

Get inspired by Keri Smith's book "How to be an explorer of the world"

