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STRANGELY FAMILIAR: DESIGN AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Design in the Age of Design

A paradoxical presence in our lives, design is both invisible and conspicuous, familiar and strange. It surrounds us while fading from view, becoming second nature and yet seemingly unknowable. Broadly conceived as the world of human-made artifacts, design is everywhere: the tools we use, the furnishings we keep, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the books we read, the houses where we dwell, the offices where we work, and the cities in which we live. Even nature does not escape the reach of design, whether a park, a new species of plant, or the manipulation of human bodies and genes. In a typical day the average person encounters hundreds of objects and thousands of messages, each designed by someone.

Despite this utter ubiquity, design remains for many people a mysterious force. This is in part because it presents itself through the myriad objects and images it creates—autonomous and mute things, which tend to conceal rather than reveal the process of their making. Thus, the vast majority of people come into contact with design as consumers learning to discern among innumerable offerings. Far fewer individuals have access to designers or are privy to the processes employed by them. While the activity of design is pervasive and the numbers of professionals who engage in it are quite vast in any modern society, most design escapes notice, emerging from the landscape or entering the world rather quietly, often anonymously. The relative invisibility of design is also a matter of perceptual survival. Most new things are quickly absorbed into our immediate surroundings, forming the background against which we go about our everyday lives. Without this ability to integrate objects into our environment, the world would seem a daunting place—an ever-changing visual cacophony.

Just as design populates a familiar world, it can also stand apart from it. Modern societies demand designs that create distinctions by signaling what is different or new. During the 1990s there was a marked increase in design awareness within the media, among businesses, in the government, and most certainly in the culture at large. There are numerous markers for this conspicuousness: Frank Gehry's design of the Guggenheim Bilbao, which inaugurated the phenomenon of spectacle architecture; the introduction of numerous self-consciously designed products, such as Apple Computer's multicolored iMacs and Nike's proliferation of footwear styles; or Prime Minister Tony Blair's rebranding of British heritage as "Cool Britannia." No longer the province of specialty shops with inaccessible prices, mass-market retailers promoted the democratization of design at the international furnishings company IKEA, or in once unthinkable places such as the home of the "bluelight special," K-Mart, whose aisles now stock domestic denizen Martha Stewart's line of housewares. Other retailers such as Target produced signature collections by architect Michael Graves and designers such as Todd Oldham and Philippe Starck. Not content to fill only the pages of specialist journals, design became a subject for newspapers and mainstream magazines, and spawned new publishing genres. The concept of lifestyle coalesced; that elusive but identifiable thing united such disparate patterns as one's preferences in clothing, automobiles, and furniture with tastes in music, movies, travel, and cuisine and packaged it under titles such as *Wallpaper** or *Martha Stewart Living* (to name only two). Today design is expected to perform in an ensemble cast, no longer as a wallflower or mere product feature, but in a starring role in a story where branding, lifestyle, and products form various narratives of consumer experience.

The aforementioned examples belie the invisibility of design in the world at large. Indeed, they map the terrain in which design emerged as a potent force transforming products into lifestyles, companies into brands, and neighborhoods into destinations. Design in the 1990s exemplified the transformation of the economy from its postindustrial condition (which was after all only a symptom) to its more synergistic guise—what economists James Gilmore and Joseph Pine have famously termed the "experience economy."[1] In such an economy, products are merely props in the staging of memorable moments of consumption. In economies of the past, we understood the function of goods in terms of exchange value (worth) or use value (utility). The experience economy represents the systematic development of what philosopher Jean Baudrillard refers to as sign value (meaning). Like a medieval cosmology where objects are imbued with mysterious meanings, nothing represents itself literally in the world of experience economies: sneakers are signs of wellness, competitiveness, and prestige, and coffee is no longer just a drink but the nexus of social conviviality and a barometer of lifestyle. This suggests that objects are merely nodes in a larger web of references and connections in which consumptive desires, patterns, and actions are central.

The design fields responded to the needs of this economy by producing a plethora of new things. The 1990s were the most prolific and important years for design since the 1960s. This vitality could be seen in the massive building boom that demanded more inventive and expressive forms of architecture, or in glitzy new consumer products—mobile phones, digital audio players, other handheld electronics, or even the more pedestrian garbage cans, toothbrushes, and staplers—whose forms were undergoing rapid change. With computer-aided design programs, contemporary culture has been visually transformed by the spline curve, adding sinuous edges to everything from buildings to cars to sneakers in what promoters and detractors have come to call "blobjects" and "blobitecture."[2] It is both tempting and plausible to view the last ten years as an exercise in this new styling, a contemporaneous version of 1930s streamlining. However, despite the increasingly seductive products on offer, it would be misleading to focus solely on this formal aspect of design.

A comparison of the last decade's output to the 1960s is instructive. In many ways, one sensed an air of optimism, even an unbridled enthusiasm, about the possibilities of design—the same attitude that pervaded the youthful exuberance surrounding inflatable furniture, modish environments, and geodesic housing of thirty years prior. In fact, many contemporary designers acknowledge their inspiration from sources such as the visionary architectural proposals of Archigram; the fluid, colorful spaces and mod furniture of Verner Panton; or the social consciousness espoused by design gurus Victor Papenak and Buckminster Fuller. The spirit of social liberation that spawned various possibilities for alternative living in the sixties (communes, bachelor pads, converted school buses, or even imagined colonies in outer space) has its contemporary corollary in the desire for evermore connected but mobile lifestyles and all of the things that go with it. The ecological imperative of the *Whole Earth Catalog* or Fuller's *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* finds its 1990s equivalent in "green architecture" with, for instance, its rooftop garden schemes, and in "disassembly lines," by which manufacturers can reclaim the components of their discarded products.

Certainly it would be possible to view many segments of recent design through these perspectives of formal evolution, historical zeitgeist, technological change, or ecological concern. Many books and exhibitions have done precisely that. Instead, the exhibition *Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life* takes a broader approach, examining a range of projects across many areas of design. What connects these disparate works are a strong conceptual basis and a desire to rethink certain assumptions about design by offering us imaginative and often strange solutions. These projects force us to look at our everyday world anew, challenge our own presumptions about what is possible, and reconsider our relationship to things that once seemed so familiar.

If the last decade has been about the special nature of design—its strange and conspicuous presence in our world—then there has been a countervailing need to examine the more mundane and familiar world of daily life. The everyday is an elusive subject, a kind of residual realm encompassing those activities, practices, spaces, and things that exist

beyond or beside the reach of society's official dictates and actions. It can be said that the everyday acts as a foil to design's increasingly active presence in the world. Conversely, design can be the measure by which we gauge our encounter with the everyday.

3. Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?", in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 210.

Thinking about the Everyday

"How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infraordinary, the background noise, the habitual?"
– Georges Perec[3]

The quotidian has long been a touchstone for many artists and movements, from scenes of daily life famously detailed in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings or the once-shocking ordinariness of Postimpressionist subject matter. No longer content with depicting daily life, artists soon sought to disrupt it. Duchamp's "readymades" and the Surrealists' oneiric tableaux transformed mundane objects, radically altering their once familiar contexts. As modern artists sought to join art with life, everyday practices became a principle component of their work, from the gamelike strategies of Fluxus to the Situationists' technique of the *dérive* (partially programmed wanderings through the city), to the unflinching recording of banal activities in the Andy Warhol films *Sleep* or *Eat*. In both artistic practice and intellectual inquiry, the everyday as a subject of critical examination developed in the postwar period with the advent of a modern consumer society. In the social sciences, the quotidian has been studied for decades by philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau or writers like Georges Perec. Each of these individuals provides a departure point for understanding the role of everyday life.

Lefebvre, in his pioneering analysis first published in 1947, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (*The Critique of Everyday Life*), argues that the quotidian as the subject of philosophical study had been long neglected, treated as trivial in favor of "higher" or more serious topics. Because everyday life was particular and concrete and had to be lived to be truly understood, he faulted the abstract, systematic theories of then-evolving studies such as

structural anthropology and semiotics. Born at the turn of the twentieth century, Lefebvre saw French daily life eroded by the effects of modernization. By suggesting the alienation experienced in modern society, which estranged people from a once holistic conception of life and work through the fragmentation and specialization of industrialized labor, Lefebvre argues against what much of everyday life had been reduced to, namely the drudgery and repetitiveness of work, bureaucratic social control, and empty consumerism. It is difficult to locate in his writings any direction for design to take, because in so many ways it contributes to the very problems he identifies: the mechanisms of advertising to create desire, the proliferation of identical consumer goods, and the rationalized strictures of modern urban planning. Nevertheless, his 1974 treatise *La production de l'espace* (*The Production of Space*) has influenced recent thinking in the fields of urbanism and architecture (undoubtedly due in part to its translation into English in 1991). As the title indicates, Lefebvre understands space as neither natural nor abstract, but rather as something that is consciously created, and in turn, produces specific effects. He countered the idea of classical and modernist notions of a universal, abstract space dominated by the visual by proposing instead a social space composed of differences. For him, space is a social product, not a neutral container, one that can encourage or discourage certain practices and behaviors.

4. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 145.

Perhaps not surprisingly, his ideas about the ideological nature of space were of interest to those involved in architecture and urban planning during the 1980s and 1990s, a time when such subjects were increasingly examined, no matter how belatedly, through the lenses of gender, race, and class. This also signals a shift away from the modernist preoccupation with formal aspects to a more postmodernist stance considering content or effect. Contained within *The Production of Space* is a fictitious exchange in which Lefebvre answers his critics who would complain that true creativity lies within formal innovation itself. One side contends that "for architects who concern themselves primarily with content, as for 'users,' as for the activity of dwelling itself—all these merely reproduce outdated forms. They are in no sense innovative forces."[4] Lefebvre replies: "Surely there comes a moment when formalism is exhausted, when only a new injection of con-

tent into form can destroy it and so open up the way to innovation."[5] In many ways, this passage would epitomize a major shift in design thinking, opening avenues of innovation to other possibilities, other uses, and other contexts.

5. Ibid.

While Lefebvre articulated more overarching principles governing an understanding of everyday life, de Certeau, a sociologist and historian, took a more specific and ethnographic approach. His investigations into the realm of routine practices, or the "arts of doing" such as walking, talking, reading, dwelling, and cooking, were guided by his belief that despite repressive aspects of modern society, there exists an element of creative resistance to these strictures enacted by ordinary people. In *L'invention du quotidien* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*), de Certeau outlines an important critical distinction between strategies and tactics in this battle of repression and expression. According to him, strategies are used by those within organizational power structures, whether small or large, such as the state or municipality, the corporation or the proprietor, a scientific enterprise or the scientist. Strategies are deployed against some external entity to institute a set of relations for official or proper ends, whether adversaries, competitors, clients, customers, or simply subjects. Tactics, on the other hand, are employed by those who are subjugated. By their very nature tactics are defensive and opportunistic, used in more limited ways and seized momentarily within spaces, both physical and psychological, produced and governed by more powerful strategic relations.

Importantly, de Certeau shifts attention to acts of consumption, or use, and away from the historical preoccupation with the means of production. In so doing he focuses, for example, not on authorship but on reading, not on urban design but on walking through the city, not on theories of language but on the provisional and improvisational aspects of conversation. For de Certeau, consumption is not merely empty or passive, as many critics claim, but can contain elements of user resistance—nonconformist, adaptive, appropriative, or otherwise transgressive tactics—that become creative acts of their own fashioning. By locating such creativity in the user and beyond the conventional role assumed by the designer, de Certeau opens the possibilities of a design attuned to its use, context, and life rather than only its material quality, prescribed functionality, or formal expression.

While de Certeau saw the potential for individual acts of imaginative consumption, Perec enthusiastically wrote about a more poetic reimagination of everyday life. He was a member of the literary group OuLiPo, which was an affiliation of mathematicians and writers interested in producing poetry using systematic methods and agreed-upon constraints. One of his most famous literary contributions in this regard was *La Disparition* (*A Void*), a three-hundred-page novel that did not use a single word with the letter "e." His embrace of the quotidian can best be gleaned from the work *Espèces d'espaces* (*Species of Spaces*), a selection of ruminations on urban and domestic realms. Perec's literary inventiveness and poetic sensibility pervade the texts, which consider subjects such as the space of the page, the functionality inscribed by the rooms of a typical apartment, and the social life of a street or neighborhood. In the essay "Approaches to What?", he coins neologisms such as the "infraordinary" (versus the extraordinary) or the "endotic" (as opposed to the exotic) in order to discuss the specific character of the everyday. Most importantly, he obliges the reader to question the commonplace things that become habitual:

6. Perec, 210.

7. Ibid.

8. Perec, 31.

> "What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Where? When? Why?"[8]

Perec's lists of possible inquiries and subjects for consideration are the very stuff of everyday life, the objects around us, the places we inhabit, the habits we form, the routines we perform. He asks such seemingly simple questions as "What is there under your wallpaper?"[7] Or he imagines an apartment that is organized around the senses instead of rooms: "We can imagine well enough what a gustatorium might be, or an auditory, but one might wonder what a seeery might look like, or a smellery or a feelery."[8] His poetic inquisition of the everyday affords design an opportunity to

9. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1972). Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964).

reimagine itself and to engage the world in new and inventive ways. Interestingly, two designs appear to respond to Perec's questioning, although not intentionally. Gis Bakker's *Peep Show* wallpaper produced under the auspices of Droog Design in the early 1990s was a blank white surface with large circles cut out, exposing the wall beneath and thereby reversing its conventional function. Architects Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer recently completed the design of a museum for an archaeological site in Germany where in A.D. 9 the Teutons defeated the Romans. Their design also includes three pavilions, "seeing," "hearing," and "questioning," which are devoted to different sensorial experiences. One space functions as a camera obscura and another, through a moveable acoustical pipe much like an ear trumpet, amplifies the sound of the surrounding fields, while a third transmits televised news broadcasts from around the world — stories that too often carry headlines of contemporary armed conflicts. Each space serves to underscore in a distinct way the visitor's perception of the site where an ancient battle once took place.

Design and Everyday Life

While the everyday has played an important role within modern art and the social sciences, it has only recently become central to discussions of design gaining momentum over the last decade. This tardiness seems implausible given that design, in its most basic sense, always already implicates itself in the construction of the everyday world. Yet, it is one thing to be part of the everyday—to help create it—and quite another to make it the subject of analysis or even critique. It is not coincidental that the quotidian should be of interest just as contemporary consumer culture is even more intricately woven into all aspects of daily life.

Among designers, interest in the quotidian is of course varied in its interpretations and responses. The nineties (and millennial) take on the everyday is different from earlier interests in anonymous or vernacular architecture, which saw such efforts as aspirational or inspirational—whether designers were learning from Venturi's Las Vegas or absorbing the lessons of Bernard Rudofsky.[9] These unschooled examples of design held some allure because they represented an untainted world that had existed

independently of the discipline's increasing professionalization and before the expansive reach of commercial culture had taken hold. Seen through the professional's eyes, the vernacular attains an exotic status, while the commonplace fades from view. Today's everydayness is not reducible to period styles of the vernacular or the untrained informality of the anonymous. It accepts the bland, the generic, and the ordinary as the predominant context in which design will be situated, and against which the brand name and the spectacular operate.

Within architectural circles, interest in the everyday has taken on a particular meaning borne out of a reaction against the theory-laden 1980s, with its interests in the instruments of textual analysis, poststructuralism and, in particular, deconstruction, as well as an economic climate favorable to high-profile building in the 1990s.[10] Highly analytical, conceptually abstract, and predominantly textual in their focus, these theories were seen as too removed from actual lived experience, specific contexts, and practical constraints. Whether intended or not, such concepts were elastic enough to be adapted to intensive formal experimentation and innovation, and therefore provided a much-needed antidote to the regressive forms of most postmodernist design of the period. Not surprisingly, the opposing tack of the everyday would emphasize a renewed pragmatism, embracing specific conditions of use and actual social contexts. Following this shift, architecture is real, not abstract; it resists analysis and must be experienced, inhabited, and otherwise occupied. Against the rising cult of celebrity surrounding the architects of the 1990s building boom, the doctrines of everydayness advocate an antiheroic approach, opting to see architecture expressed as moments and cycles of habitation rather than in one-off monuments of expressiveness.[11]

Within the realm of product design, interest in everydayness can trace its development in the reaction to the design of the 1980s, with its elaborate use of materials and finishes and a hyper-styling of forms. Ventures such as Droog Design, a loose collective of initially Dutch designers who gained notoriety and influence in the design world in the early 1990s, typified this shift.[12] Embracing a renewed sobriety in the face of a resplendent materialism, Droog adopted a more straightforward attitude to materials, an

10. Steven Harris, "Everyday Architecture," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, eds. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 1–8.

11. Deborah Berke, "Thoughts on the Everyday," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, 222–226.

12. For an account of Droog Design, see *Droog Design: Spirit of the Nineties*, eds. Renny Ramakers and Gijs Bakker (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998).

inventive approach to fabrication processes and methods, and a resistance to product styling. The attitude of Droog became defined by the latent humor and wit that characterizes so many of its products: a chandelier made from a cluster of eighty-five exposed lightbulbs, a chest of drawers created by strapping together a variety of used drawers, or a polyester-impregnated felt sink.

At the same time, a growing interest in ecology, sustainability, recycling, and product obsolescence fostered a change in attitude among many product designers that required a rethinking of previously held and unquestioned assumptions within the field about resourcefulness and wastefulness in production, the life cycles of products, and the role of use and consumption.[13] If product design was to be more than styling exercises, it needed to expand conceptually, explore new methods of fabrication, and be informed by the use, adaptation, and personalization of objects by users.

Without resorting to orderly definitions, this exhibition offers its own interpretation of everydayness and design. The assembled works are not recessive; they do not fade away into the familiarity of the world around us. Instead, these projects transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, acknowledging that the everyday is a participatory realm where design is essentially incomplete, knowing that people will eventually inhabit and adapt what is given. Collectively, these works are meant to challenge some basic tenets of design accepted in both public perception and professional preconceptions.

Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life

The projects gathered together for this exhibition are a heterogeneous collection of distinctive works and unique ideas. They have been assembled to explore four themes related to the design of contemporary objects and spaces:

· polemical objects that force us to reconsider our relationship to products and dictate new rituals of use and expectations of performance

· portable structures that respond to nomadic conditions of lightness and ephemerality, thereby undermining long-held architectural principles of site-specificity and permanence

· multifunctional objects that change both shape and use, thereby blurring the traditionally fixed relationship between so-called "form and function"

· extraordinary designs that reference and transform otherwise ordinary objects and spaces, drawing our attention to everyday conditions

Rituals of Use

Many projects featured in *Strangely Familiar* attempt to implicate the user as a central figure or participant in a design's realization. The point is not to second-guess the consumer or to commodify formerly marginal activities, but rather to include user participation, personalization, customization, and even rejection as a vital element in the work. The incompleteness, openness, and unpredictability of such projects are in opposition to most ideals of design, which typically demand a high degree of finish and see adaptation as a flaw, or chance as a risk.

For designers the everyday represents the site of actual use—the messy reality where designs are negotiated. This is a realm beyond the carefully circumscribed boundaries of design proper; it is outside the client-designer commission or the controlled nature of test markets and focus groups. Critical theorists of the quotidian understand the everyday as a place where common practices and routines contain elements of dissent, subversion, or circumvention—small gestures or actions that were unanticipated, beyond the reach of the most carefully executed planning. Many designers now conduct field research to better understand how people use their products and services or to develop new products based on ad-hoc creations made by ingenuous do-it-yourselfers. However, these types of endeavors do not necessarily take a critical approach to design or reveal the underlying conditions of the everyday any more clearly. Such efforts are affirmative projects to the extent that they embrace existing conditions and situations but do not necessarily alter our relationship to everyday objects or challenge conventional ideas about design.

13. See Ed van Hinte, ed., *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1997) for discussions and strategies surrounding issues of product obsolescence and life cycle; and Conny Bakker and Ed van Hinte, eds., *Trespassers: Inspirations for Eco-Efficient Design* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999) for a more lighthearted approach to sustainable design.

Countering this affirmative tradition of product design are works such those by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, who engage in what they call "critical design." Operating outside of the traditional marketplace and the prescribed role of the professional product designer, they create simple-looking but conceptually complex objects in order to probe social behaviors and cultural values through long-term investigations. By doing so, they open up design to consider the effects of modern consumer products in our lives. Their *Placebo Project* (see pp. 90–106) explores our often anxious relationship to electronic goods through the creation of furnishings that can, for instance, detect the presence of electromagnetic radiation given off by modern conveniences such as laptop computers and cell phones. Although these objects perform a function, it is not one dictated by the market or demanded by a consumer. This reconsideration of the role of the designer and user is also present in the work of Michael Anastassiades. His *Social Light* and *Anti-Social Light* (see pp. 107–109), which brighten or dim in the presence of sound, are objects that respond to the behavior rather than the commands of the user. This reverses the conventional expectation about product servitude and consumer control and allows us to consider the effects that products have on the way we shape our lives. Both Dunne & Raby and Anastassiades utilize new technologies in order to augment existing forms, whether a table or a light, not to forward the idea of technological progress so closely associated with modern product design, but rather to interrogate this myth and consumers' expectations.

In a similar vein, the designers of *Dialog*—Marek Walczak, Michael McAllister, Jakub Segen, and Peter Kennard—explore the potential of digital technology to create alternative scenarios for computer-based experiences. *Dialog* (see pp. 110–113) counters the conventional notion of personal computing in which a single person interacts with the computer and perhaps with others online, but often alone and in isolation. Adopting the intrinsically social dynamics of a table as a gathering space, it allows multiple users to simultaneously explore a collection of ideas and artifacts.

If the consumer does have a role to play in the creation of products, it has been typically in the category of do-it-yourself (DIY) projects. In most cases, such endeavors are undertaken with a clear model in mind, something to replicate and emulate (think Home Depot classes or IKEA flat-pack furniture) These instructional offerings or kits-of-parts cast the role of the user as a form of deferred assembly labor. In more interesting variations of this approach, the design allows for some sort of uncertainty to take place in terms of the final product by centralizing the user as active and creative participant. This kind of open-ended resourcefulness can be seen in Blu Dot's *Free Play* shelving system (see pp. 114–119), which allows users to configure its parts in numerous ways, or in *Felt 12x12* (see pp. 120–125) by the studio www.fortunecookies.dk, which provides a basic module with which participants can create innumerable felted-wool garments and accessories.

Certainly user participation is the central premise behind the products of the design venture do create: a ceiling light that you swing from, providing illumination as well as exercise; a vase that can be thrown and cracked but not broken; and a chair made by smashing a cube of metal with a sledgehammer (see pp. 126–131). In the world of do create, consumer behavior is brought to bear in the realization of each product's function, thereby blurring the distinctions between creation and consumption. do create's humorous approach to design embodies deeper consumer desires to be released from the tyranny of perfection that surrounds product promotion and the frustration of so many failed and uncompleted DIY projects. Paolo Ulian's *Greediness Meter* (see pp. 132–135), an edible chocolate ruler, shares the playfulness of do create's approach but through an object whose own consumption is the measure of a guilty pleasure.

Traditional aspects of production and consumption in manufacturing industrial goods are actively rewritten by Tokyo-based elephant design. In a conventional marketplace, goods are offered to people for purchase in ways that try to predict what consumers may want. Using the Internet as its primary sales vehicle, elephant design proposes new products and solicits ideas from potential customers about goods they wish to purchase. Virtual models are created, manufacturing sources are identified, and sales prices are determined in advance. People can place an order for a product that will be produced when demand is sufficiently high to initiate its fabrication at

an agreed-upon price. Among its many offerings is the *Insipid* collection of consumer goods (see pp. 136–144) — rice cookers, microwaves, cordless telephones, fax machines — with spare, minimal styling, pure white color, and refined detailing.

Portability

Along with the city, the home is an important site in which to understand the workings of everyday life — its cycles of cooking, cleaning, sleeping, bathing, and eating, among others. It is the place where the strictures imposed by such things as social bureaucracy, science, and technology are felt most directly as an intervention in our personal lives. The home is synonymous with shelter, the nexus of our daily lives and, with increasing exception, a space that is distinct from the workplace. The house is a fundamental typology of architecture, one that ties us to a sense of place and personal history. This is true despite the fact that the typical American will move many times in a lifetime, changing jobs and homes along the way. This increased mobility is fueled in part by the expansion of technology that can keep us tethered to the office, if only virtually or remotely. The nomadic possibilities of contemporary life are explored in this exhibition through several projects that propose portable dwellings.[14] Not only do such structures acknowledge the desire for mobility and freedom, but they also confront our need for connection and community. The portable house also challenges long-held architectural assumptions of permanence and stability, which in turn account for the relatively low status such work has typically held. The most popular form of portable housing in the United States is the mobile home. Ironically, the vast majority of these dwellings rarely move about with the freedom associated with their portability. The trailer home's mobility is really a by-product of its prefabrication, simply a method of transport to its site, where it is permanently anchored.

The recreational vehicle embodies the freedom sought after by generations of retirees and vacationers whose migratory paths most closely recall the nomadic lifestyles of earlier civilizations. The popularity of the iconic Airstream, a trailer with a streamlined aluminum shell first introduced in the 1930s, is a testament to this quest for mobility. The Airstream

14. For more information on the history and development of portable structures and dwellings, see Dr. Robert Kronenburg, *Houses in Motion: The Genesis, History, and Development of the Portable Building*, second edition, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2002).

provided the functions necessary for living but contained them in a package so lightweight and balanced that its publicity materials showed it being pulled by a bicycle. Of course, the Airstream was a product of the automobile culture and quickly became emblematic of the growing postwar market for leisurely pursuits. R&Sie...'s *Habitat Furtif* (see pp. 146–151), a living unit for one person, recalls the Airstream's metallic body with its highly polished reflective surface and its bicycle-powered transport. However, *Habitat Furtif* travels urban streets in search of safe harbor for its inhabitant rather than traversing the byways of the countryside in pursuit of recreational activities.

It is the distinction between permanent and temporary habitation that colors people's perceptions of portable housing. Typically understood as an acceptable solution for shorter periods of time, or in emergency situations, the portable home is seen by many as an escape from or loss of the everyday. For some, the need to maintain certain creature comforts, neatly captured in the expression "home away from home," too often means foregoing the conveniences associated with a sedentary lifestyle. For others the compactness, self-sufficiency, and convenience of mobile living outweigh the perceived loss of connection and community. The houses and structures featured in this exhibition represent a range of transience and permanence in dwelling.

While Markku Hedman's *Kesä-Kontti (Summer Container)* (see pp. 152–157) is designed for quick escapes to the woods, a kind of mobile weekend cabin, LOT-EK's *Mobile Dwelling Unit (MDU)* (see pp. 158–165) is envisioned as a permanent dwelling. Since the *MDU* is created from an existing shipping container, which is integrated into the worldwide systems for truck, rail, and ship transport, each unit is portable. LOT-EK envisions colonies of *MDU* harbors around the world, a structural framework that houses each person's unit, plugging into the necessary electrical and plumbing infrastructure — a kind of hotel in reverse, where occupants bring their rooms with them. While the *MDU* delights in its industrial and utilitarian roots, other designers have updated a modernist approach to the problem of the prefabricated home. Jennifer Siegal of the Office of Mobile Design (OMD) has developed several projects that utilize portable

structures. OMD's *Portable House* (see pp. 172–179) is conceived of as a more flexible and ecologically friendly version of the conventional prefabricated home, but its modern styling and finishes resemble the Eames Case Study House more than the neighborhood trailer park. Like the *MDU*, *Portable House* can be situated in a variety of locations for permanent or temporary stays, but unlike the *MDU*, it can be configured with other portable houses to form courtyards or other common spaces for social and outdoor gatherings. This integrated and combinatory potential is also present in Markku Hedman's portable dwelling, *Etana (Snail)* (see pp. 166–171). Evoking its namesake, *Snail* consists of a hard exterior shell and a soft deployable membrane. Its internal components can be arranged by the user to create a variety of live-work configurations. Like OMD's *Portable House*, individual *Snail* units can also be connected to form larger spaces or communal environments.

While the previous projects rely on continuous mobility in order to maximize their functionality, other works explore portability as an extension of its ease of manufacture. For example, Alejandro Stöberl's *Prefabricated Wooden House* (see pp. 180–183) is trucked to its site, offering an economical alternative to more expensive conventional housing stock. Stöberl's elegant glass-box structure employs a series of wooden shutters along the length of the front and rear of the house that afford expansive views of the outside when open and privacy or protection when drawn. One can imagine *Prefabricated Wooden House* as a weekend destination, a modernist update to the country home. Shigeru Uchida's designs for a trio of teahouses (see pp. 184–187) are also prefabricated to facilitate shipping and relocation. Uchida's modernist update to the traditional teahouse includes translucent papers and perforated woods, lending to each structure the paradoxical feeling of both exposure and enclosure. Both projects are extensions of the conventional house, existing apart and distinct from it while still psychologically connected to the idea of a domicile, if only to escape it. Artist Alan Wexler creates works that explore the rituals and routines of life. His *Gardening Sukkah* (see pp. 188–193) is a portable structure that contains all the necessary implements and furnishings to celebrate the Jewish Sukkot festival of the harvest. The portability and transience of the

sukkah signifies a historical connection to the life lived in the wilderness during the Jews' exodus from Egypt. The *Sukkah*'s collection of gardening tools, tableware, and cooking utensils evokes self-sufficiency, a veritable kit of parts uniting the cycles of growth, harvest, and consumption. Its hybrid form is part garden shed and part wheelbarrow, and with its retractable roof, table, and chairs it can be easily reconfigured to become the temporary outdoor dining area prescribed by religious tradition.

Another area of activity for portable structures is in the realm of emergency shelters used during various natural and man-made disasters. While most of these structures are by necessity of a basic or ad-hoc quality, architect Shigeru Ban's *Paper Loghouse* (see pp. 194–197) is a distinctive counterpoint. Originally used to shelter earthquake victims, *Paper Loghouse* employs commonplace, modest materials to great effect, creating a simple, functional, and beautiful structure that can be easily assembled by rescue volunteers and can endure for many months. Such a structure counters the vulnerability and transience associated with the tents used in such circumstances. The most elemental form of portable shelter is embodied in Martín Ruiz de Azúa's *Basic House* (see pp. 198–202). Weighing only a few grams, this metallic insulating cube can be carried in one's pocket and deployed on demand. While many of the previous projects express the potential for a more collective nomadic lifestyle, recalling perhaps the caravan, *Basic House* emphasizes the individual quest for maximum mobility and freedom.

Multifunctionality

The desire for portability corresponds to an interest in products with multiple functions, things that create efficiencies in space or weight, important considerations for mobility. After all, why take two things when one will do? Those of us with sedentary lives encounter this need when we choose to leave the comforts of home for a road trip or camping expedition and must decide what to take. What can be carried on one's back has always been the most reductive approach to this problem. Not surprisingly, garments are one locus of activity. While *Basic House* evokes the Basque sheepherder's tent/coat, a multifunctional garment that serves as a form

of peripatetic shelter and bodily protection, Moreno Ferrari's *Tent* (see pp. 210-211) is the contemporary instantiation of this piece of clothing. Using simple tension rods, *Tent* can be formed from a translucent raincoat. Ferrari's designs for the Italian sportswear enterprise C.P. Company use modern materials and techniques. His ingenious creations for the aptly named *Transformables* collection include *Tent* as well as a cloak that converts into a kite (see pp. 205–209) or a jacket that becomes a sleeping bag (see pp. 212–213).

Multifunctionality has long been a characteristic of furniture design, particularly in circumstances where space is at a premium. A space for dining, the simple kitchen table is often the site of many functions, including the preparation of foods, a place for a child's study and play, or a surface for making crafts. In this instance, a piece of furniture is generic enough to suggest a multitude of activities. The modern equivalent is the storage unit, which, depending on its arrangement and location within the home, provides a place for clothes (wardrobe), linens (closet), dinnerware (sideboard), electronics (armoire), or collectables (cabinet). Multifunctional furniture is often a hybrid product, expressive of its dual functionality, such as the daybed or sofa bed. The eighteenth and nineteenth century witnessed a rise in the development of furniture based on the multiple components associated with machinery, such as the reclining or sleeping chair for train travel or the various schemes for integrated baths and kitchens. This represents a more complex approach of assembling different apparatuses into one unit.

The chair is perhaps the oldest and most developed form of furniture, one that closely maintains an intrinsic relationship to the human body. Perhaps not surprisingly, the variety of chairs is quite extensive, suggesting a range of sitting positions, from the informality of a stool to the upright posture of a dining chair to the repose afforded by the lounge chair. Julian Lion Boxenbaum's iconic *Rugelah Chair* (see pp. 214-218) captures in one piece of furniture a multitude of possibilities for sitting, lounging, and sleeping. *Rugelah Chair* explicitly references the form of rolled carpets often carried by nomads but is predicated on Boxenbaum's experiences using camping gear, products that put a premium on their

functional efficiency. Similarly, Paolo Ulian's *Cabriolet/Occasional Table* (see pp. 219–221) is a sofa, storage unit, and coffee table in one. Both projects respond to the space limitations of small urban apartments and the highly mobile lifestyles of the young. These are but two examples of an increasing number of multifunctional furniture pieces produced with renewed enthusiasm today.

Implicit in multifunctional design is the idea of user choice, the ability to select the mode best suited to a particular situation. At an architectural scale, *Tumble House* (see pp. 222-227) is a six-sided structure designed by Koers, Zeinstra, van Gelderen of the Netherlands that allows people to rotate the building into six different positions, and each one changes the functionality of interior elements. For example, a door becomes a window or skylight. *Tumble House* behaves more like garden furniture, which can be rearranged, than conventional garden architecture such as the potting shed, the greenhouse, or the storage shed. New York–based su11 explores both prefabrication and mass-customization in *Composite Housing* (see pp. 228-232), which allows individualized components to be combined in multiple ways. These components, which replace traditional notions of rooms and spaces, can exhibit transitions on the same surface, indicating a different usage or programmatic change. Thus, materiality and texture become important design elements. By providing a variety of material and configuration choices to the consumer, su11 challenges one-off craft-based building traditions of architecture with fabrication techniques and industrial processes more akin to product design. This fundamental shift is possible largely because of changes precipitated by digital technologies for computer-aided design and manufacturing as well as the advent of the Internet.

These explorations of multifunctionality express a desire to provide multiple choices for users, allowing functions to be situationally contingent. The multifunctional object displays intrinsically hybrid formal qualities at odds with the conventional design philosophy of "form follows function." Coined by architect Louis Sullivan around the turn of the twentieth century, this expression became one of the guiding principles of modern design, one that continues today. Since the multifunctional object changes

both shape and use, it complicates the otherwise tidy equation that a product's (static) form would be expressive of its (singular) function. The philosophy of functionalism is rooted in ideas like those espoused by Horatio Greenough, who wrote *Form and Function* in the early nineteenth century. Drawing upon examples of quintessentially American "no-nonsense" approaches to the design of everyday things, he countered the more ornamental style of Victorian England. Pointing to the design of industrial objects and structures such as the truss bridge, Greenough saw a natural affinity with the more scientific and objective ideas of engineering than he did with the artisanship associated with the craft guilds of Europe. By the early twentieth century, the philosophy of functionalism dominated the discourse of modern design, where it slowly ossified, becoming as static as the objects it produced. Ironically, it was the nineteenth century that witnessed great activity in the development of multifunctional objects, eschewing the role of the objective scientist or engineer in favor of the ingenuity of the inventor or the pragmatism of the tinker.

Transforming the Everyday

Lefebvre once wrote rhetorically, "Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?" His question is inverted through this exhibition, which asks instead if the concept of everydayness can reveal the ordinary in the extraordinary. Many projects embody the everyday only to transform it, giving it back to us anew. We witness this alchemy in works such as Jurgen Bey's *Kokon Chair* (see pp. 239–241), with its protective polyester-resin coating covering the ghostly presence of the ordinary chair that lies beneath, or in Atelier Bow-Wow's *Moth House* (see pp. 234–238), whose polycarbonite shell preserves a fragile domicile within. The tactic of surprising displacement, making the familiar strange, is at the heart of Doug Garofalo's renovations of typical suburban houses such as the *Markow Residence* (see pp.242–248), which give once-staid structures and homogenous forms an alternative spatial arrangement and appearance through complex geometry. Sometimes it is absence of an object that paradoxically brings forth its presence in the world, such as artist Rachel Whiteread's *Daybed* (see pp. 249–251) for London-based furnishings com-

pany SPC, which recalls the impression of a bed's mattress and frame, or Nucleo's *Terra: The Grass Arm-chair* (see pp. 252–255), seating that emerges from the lawn.

The transposition of scale, making the small large and the large small, is an important device in altering our perceptions of the everyday. The play of scale between the visible and the invisible can be gleaned in Marcel Wanders' *Airborne Snotty Vases* (see pp. 256–261), which transform the microscopic forms of mucus produced by a sneeze into an unexpected function. Constantin and Laurene Leon Boyms' series of miniatures, *Buildings of Disaster* (see pp. 262–277), makes the monumental tangible at a scale that can be possessed even if the events that took place there cannot be fully grasped. In this way they function like souvenirs, not models, because they do not reference the buildings per se but the stories that accrue to them. Constantin Boym's *Upstate* series (see pp. 278–284) takes the form of souvenir plates whose vistas do not depict famous travel sites but ordinary scenes of rural New York. In these vignettes, the commonplace has been elevated to a status typically reserved for the ceremonial and the commemorative—an unexpected subject in a familiar form.

It has been said that the daily life of a people can be seen through newspaper reportage. But the news, as Lefebvre duly noted, is in fact the compilation of extraordinary events, everything but the ordinary. Jop van Bennekom's *RE–* magazine (see pp. 285–295) eschews the typical news fare of media events and the personification of celebrity, both of which form the basis of most publishing, in favor of capturing the attitudes of ordinary people, even if the subject flirts with topics close to advertising, such as sex and boredom. *RE–*'s use of photography owes something to the informality of the snapshot but retains a strong directorial presence, orchestrating the actions and technical elements to great effect, in essence restaging the everyday with a certain artifice in mind.

The problem of designing or studying the everyday is precisely the tension between its reality and its inevitable artificiality. In other words, when the concreteness or realness of everyday life is the subject of study or the intention of design, it becomes instead a kind of second nature—a reference to the real, a depiction of the ordinary, an allusion to the common-

place. Certainly nature is one such sphere where interventions by humans are immediately perceived to create a secondary effect, even if these changes are eventually effaced in our minds.

Nature is under constant transformation by humans who create hybrid realms—an artificial nature. Perhaps it not surprising that a Dutch architectural practice would harness that country's reputation for altering the course of nature (in particular, its elaborate system of reclaiming land from the sea) as the basis for its design of a national pavilion. MVRDV's pavilion for *Expo 2000* (see pp. 296–299) takes the elements of the Dutch landscape and dramatically stacks them. The pavilion becomes a microcosm of the Netherlands—a compact reduction of the tourist destination that the country itself carefully cultivates. The shift of scale between the local and global conditions of farming, the original form of artificial nature, is expressed through two projects, *Scrambled Flat* and *Pig City*. R&Sie...'s proposal *Scrambled Flat* (see pp. 306–311) takes as its subject the Alpine village of Evolène, Switzerland, with its age-old approach to small-scale local farming and vernacular structures that house both humans and animals. MVRDV's *Pig City* (see pp. 300–305), predicated on the health and sustainability issues of corporate pork production, proposes large-scale, vertical pig farms. While both share a futuristic vision of millennial agriculture, including more vertically integrated forms of living and farming, they do so in distinctly different terms at vastly different scales.

Conclusion

The premise of this exhibition subverts the expectation of ordinariness and anonymity implied in evoking terms such as "design" and "everyday life." This is necessary in a world in which the definition of everyday life is no longer agreed upon or even understood in the way it was originally conceived. Implicit in this strategy is the idea that design can be attuned to the nuances of the quotidian without sacrificing innovation, inventiveness, novelty, or newness. Some have argued for a kind of anonymous or vernacular design firmly embedded in the landscape of everyday life as the only acceptable alternative to the kind of conspicuous design that has emerged so strongly over the last decade. Indeed, there are many people

who subscribe to such an ideal for design, whether a self-effacing architecture so enmeshed in its context as to be barely noticeable or an outright rejection of material culture altogether. However, these strategies of mimesis and negation leave little room for design's creative energies or quest for invention. The projects featured in this exhibition stand out and apart from what we would call ordinary life. By doing so, they perform a self-reflexive action, causing us to reconsider our expectations of design and our approach to living, offering a provocative counterpoint to the habitual, the routine, and the commonplace. The exhibition intentionally spans multiple fields of practice and includes designers from many different countries whose projects vary in scope and scale. This range of people, ideas, and works is meant to reflect the intrinsic complexity of contemporary design. Some works offer themselves to the world as products to be purchased, while others exist as proposals; nevertheless, all contain compelling ideas that make us think about the world differently, in both large and small ways. The constancy and fluidity of the everyday ensures that it will continue unabated, but not unaffected. Design's task is to make us more aware of its effects, reconciling the growing predictability of design's conspicuousness—the familiarity of the strange—by disrupting its inevitable absorption into the everyday—the strangeness of the familiar.

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