

SESSION 2

# Observation

Design Thinking for MBAs

(Remote Session)

Monday, January 26, 2026 | Patrick Ray

# Today's Session

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- This session is remote due to weather conditions.
- We'll practice observation through curated video footage.
- Same goal: **Notice everything.** Try to resist interpretations (for now).

*Your only job today is to see, not to interpret,  
not to judge, just to notice.*

# Before We Begin

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- Pen and paper ready.
- Maximize your window. Noticing details requires screen space.
- Use the largest screen you have.
- Write as you watch.



You'll share observations from your notes during debrief.



# Five Windows into the World



01

## Central Park

One location across seasons

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02

## NYC 1910s

Over a century ago

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03

## London

Present day, walker's perspective

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04

## Tokyo (Shibuya)

Density and pace

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05

## Mumbai (Dadar)

Slow motion, intimate observation

# Video 1: Central Park

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One location across time

## OBSERVATION PROMPT

- What stays the same?
- What changes?

Duration: ~5 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSIYGZhRGd4>



# Video 2: NYC 1910s

Over a century ago

## OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Watch how people move.
- Watch how people interact.
- Watch how people use space.

Duration: ~8 minutes

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ1OgQL9\\_Cw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ1OgQL9_Cw)





# Video 3: London

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Present day. A walker's perspective.

## OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Notice the pace.
- Notice what draws your eye.

Duration: ~3 minutes

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Eo-dvEH7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Eo-dvEH7g)



# Video 4: Shibuya, Tokyo

## Density

### OBSERVATION PROMPT

- Notice your own reaction to the density.
- What overwhelms?
- What do you filter out?

Duration: ~3 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qGiXY1SB68>





# Video 5: Stainless (Dadar)

Adam Magyar

**Just watch.**

High-speed camera slowed to 1/54th speed. A 12-second moment stretched to 2 minutes.

<https://vimeo.com/467675747>



# Silent Writing

**Take 3 minutes. Write what you noticed.**

Don't talk yet.

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# What Did You See?

No interpretations yet. Just observations.

*Drop one word in the chat for what you noticed.*

# Comparing Contexts

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- What was different about observing the 1910s footage vs. present-day?
- How did the pace of Shibuya vs. London change what you noticed?
- What did slowing down (Magyar) reveal that you'd have missed at normal speed?



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# How Did You Observe?

*Let's surface what you naturally do.*

# Attention Patterns

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- What drew your attention first?
- Did you watch the whole frame or focus on individuals?
- What did you ignore or filter out?

*We naturally filter a great deal of our sensory input. Design Thinking helps us turn these filters off, or at least acknowledge them.*

# The Interpretation Impulse

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- When did you start making up stories about people?
- How quickly did you move from "I see X" to "X is probably..."?
- What assumptions did you make based on appearance or behavior?

Observation ends where  
interpretation begins.

# Your Observation Strategies

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- Did anyone develop a system while watching? What was it?
- Did you notice yourself comparing across videos?
- What would you do differently if you watched again?





# A Framework for Observation

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A



## Activities

What are people  
doing?

E



## Environments

What is the space  
like?

I



## Interactions

Engaging with  
people & objects?

O



## Objects

What things are  
present?

U



## Users

Who are they?  
Roles?

# Why This Matters

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You naturally gravitated toward certain things.

Probably **Activities** and **Interactions**.

But how many of you were systematically watching the **Environment** or the **Objects**?

*AEIOU helps you cover the full frame.*

# TETHER: Your First Design Thinking Assignment

## Take Extended Time to Hold Everything in Review

### The Assignment

- 90 uninterrupted minutes observing people in an environment.
- Practice seeing without immediately interpreting or solving.

### What to Observe

- **Movements:** Where do people go? How do they move?
- **Pauses:** Where do people stop or hesitate?
- **Interactions:** With people, objects, space?
- **Objects:** What do people carry, use, touch?

### Deliverables

- Notebook entry with 90 min of raw observations.
- Assumptions noted separately in margins.
- Half-page written reflection (~250 words).

#### Write This

"Person looked at phone, then looked around, then walked to counter"

#### Not This

"Person was confused about where to go"

*Sustained observation reveals patterns that shorter observations miss. Your unique vantage point contributes to our collective understanding.*

#### Ideas for Locations:

Workplace common area • Coffee shop • Grocery store •  
Transit station • Park • Library

# Next Session: Shadowing

- Wednesday we return to campus (weather permitting).
- You'll shadow a campus staff member.
- Confirm your shadowee by email before class.

*Separating what you SEE from what you ASSUME*

**See you Wednesday!**



# Image Sources



[https://media.istockphoto.com/id/1447427225/photo/open-bible-journal-and-pen-with-plant-on-desk.jpg?s=612x612&w=0&k=20&c=4HFuDB3nUZtvNp9kDv3XrUHG5BFte\\_4t0MUmgg568sU=](https://media.istockphoto.com/id/1447427225/photo/open-bible-journal-and-pen-with-plant-on-desk.jpg?s=612x612&w=0&k=20&c=4HFuDB3nUZtvNp9kDv3XrUHG5BFte_4t0MUmgg568sU=)

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<https://i.redd.it/fwpf8a3tpku51.jpg>

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<https://blog.ricksteves.com/cameron/files/2019/07/cameron-britain-london-chinatown-1-640x415.jpg>

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<https://media.istockphoto.com/id/1068888080/photo/aerial-view-shibuya-crossing-tokyo.jpg?s=1024x1024&w=is&k=20&c=AFCKU1ScGMHLAYsuEMw9QAImfjMZ7dla4aHCr6asZmU=>

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