

AFFORDANCES OF EVERYDAY THINGS

A study guided by Francis Carter
and Dan Lockton

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Objects surround us every minute of every day, however we rarely observe or consider them in great depth. In this two-week long study we talked about the affordances or functional qualities of objects we encounter on a daily basis. Rather than simply acknowledging the objects' existence and intended function we consider the more profound qualities it possesses. We asked ourselves questions like Is the current function different than the intended function? Does the object enable the behavior it intended or is it a hinderance? Have humans intervened in the system that the object exists within to satisfy their needs? How does the object fit into the greater environment?

Some of the things we discussed with Francis included the different components of affordances (i.e. cultural relativity, dynamicism, skill relativity, preception independence, agent-centeredness, and experience relativity) we left our studio and went out across campus to look for different kinds of affordances. We were also given books written by different theorists, anthropologists, and designers about the thigns they've observed in the world and how they've decided to record and categorize thier affordances.

DISCUSSION





Power outlet attached to an outdoor lighting pole. Many of these don't function, but this one still worked. Accommodates staff working outside who need power, students charging laptops while sitting on the steps, etc.

OBSERVATION

After discussing the different components of affordances we threw on our winter coats and headed out towards the central part of campus. Every ten yards or so we would pause and talk about the qualities and systems associated with a particular phenomena that caught our eye.

It was pretty remarkable to see just how often we miss or disregard the functions of everyday things. The conversations were not simply about what the thing looked like and how it was used; we started analyzing the people that come across it every day, how it's deteriorated or changed over time, and how it enables or hinders particular interactions to take place.

The three images on the adjacent page, from top to bottom, are a rock meant to prevent people from cutting the sidewalk corner, a drain that cannot function due to the leaves getting trapped in it, and a dirt pit that serves no obvious function but is used for a wide variety of purposes by students and organizations.



A concrete barrier to prevent larger cars from entering the parking lot. Still lets motorcycles and bikes get through. Very heavy duty but has been smashed into multiple times. Why is it so heavy duty?



PERSONAL EXPLORATION

With our newfound perspectives for observing things and their affordances, we were set the task of going out by ourselves and performing field research on different affordances we observe throughout our day. The expectation was to thoroughly annotate and examine the affordances we come across. These annotations can take the form of detailed journal entries, notes overlayed on photographs, sketches and notations beside photographs, etc.

The overall goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how the built environment shapes human behavior and how we as designers can gain a deeper understanding of our surroundings and the role they play in shaping interactions.

Each of us took a different approach to studying and documenting things and their affordances. The following sections illustrate some of the different objects, spaces, and interactions that we observed individually in our field research.

CONTENT

JI TAE KIM

CHRISTOPHER PERRY

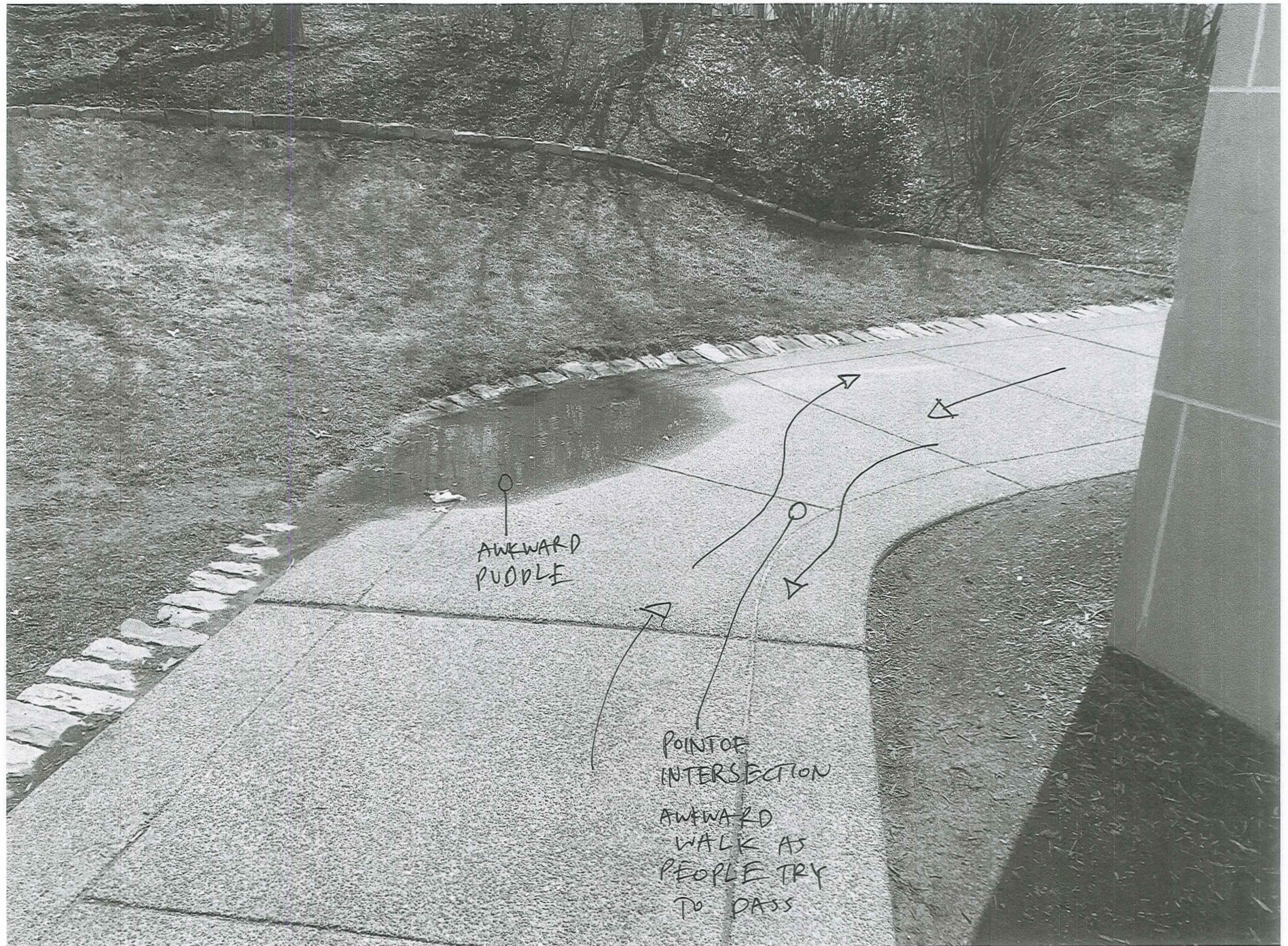
GILLY JOHNSON

TY VAN DE ZANDE

JASPER TOM

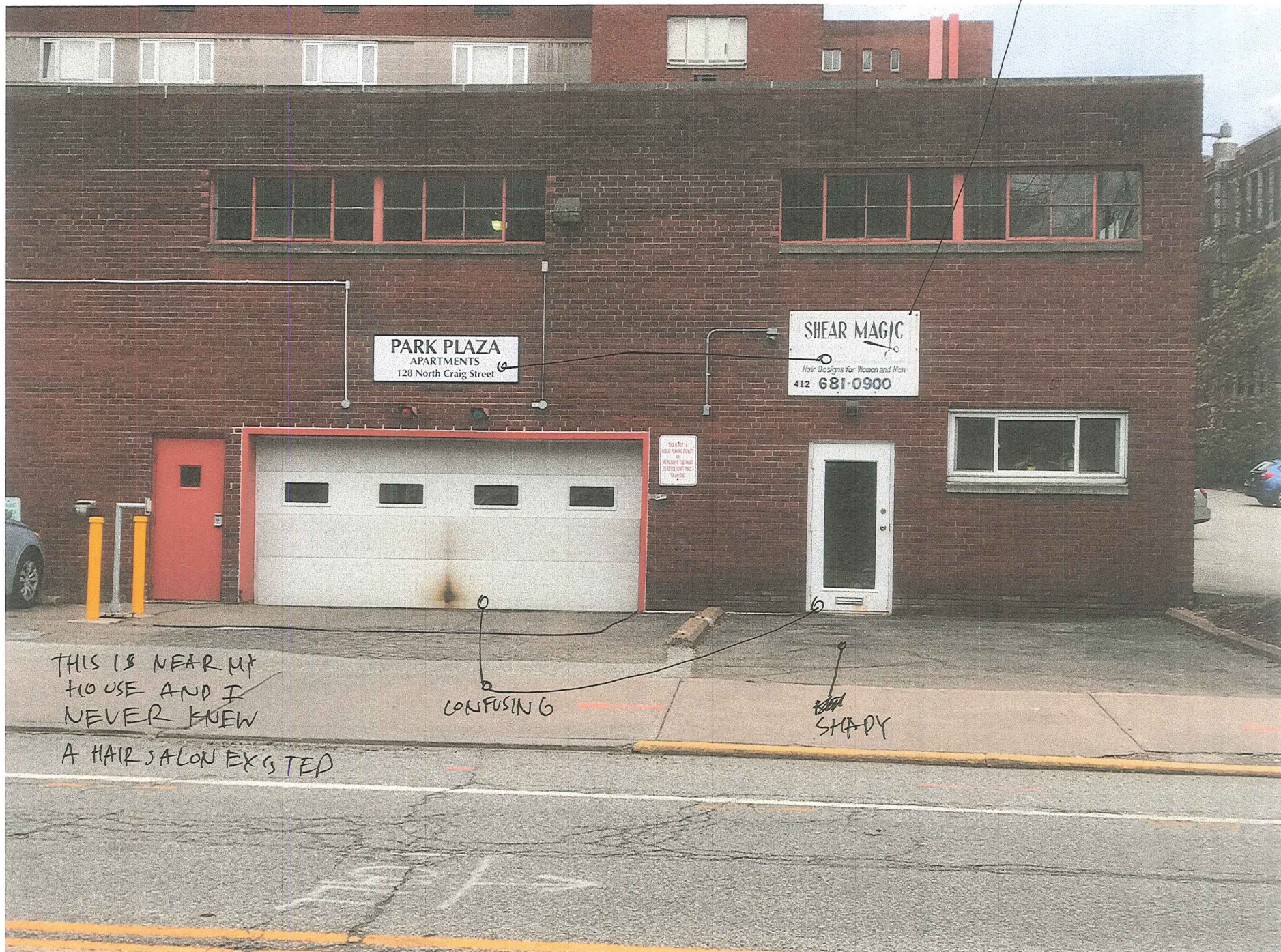
JI TAE KIM

MOREWOOD WALKWAY TO CROSSWALK



HEATER





BAD HIERARCHY

PARK PLAZA
APARTMENTS
128 North Craig Street

SHEAR MAGIC
Hair Designs for Women and Men
412 681-0900

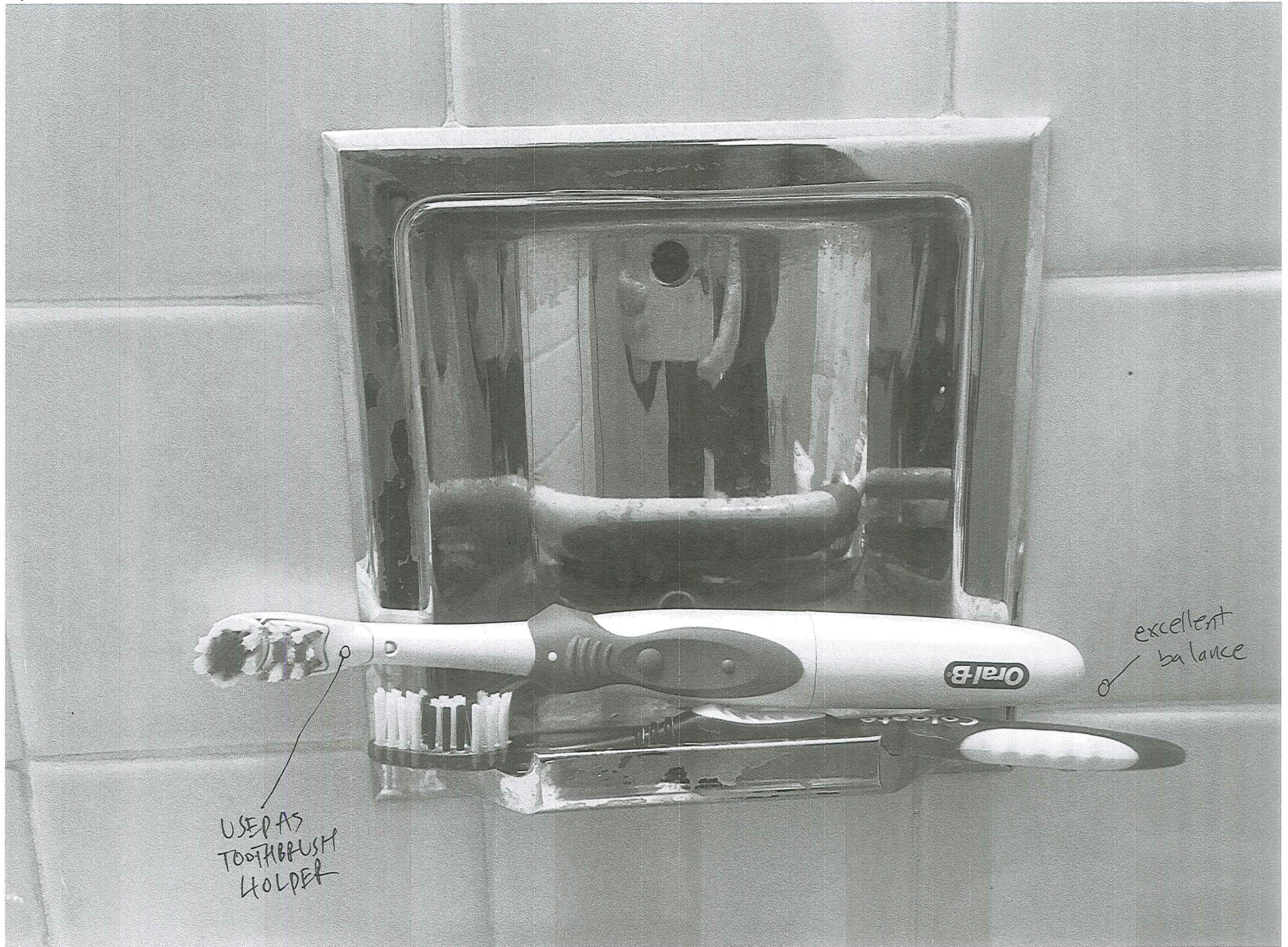
THIS IS NOT A
PLACE WHERE YOU CAN
BE SMOKE THE HOUSE
TO OTHERS COMPLAINTS
TO THE POLICE

THIS IS NEAR MY
HOUSE AND I
NEVER KNEW
A HAIR SALON EXISTED

CONFUSING

STADY

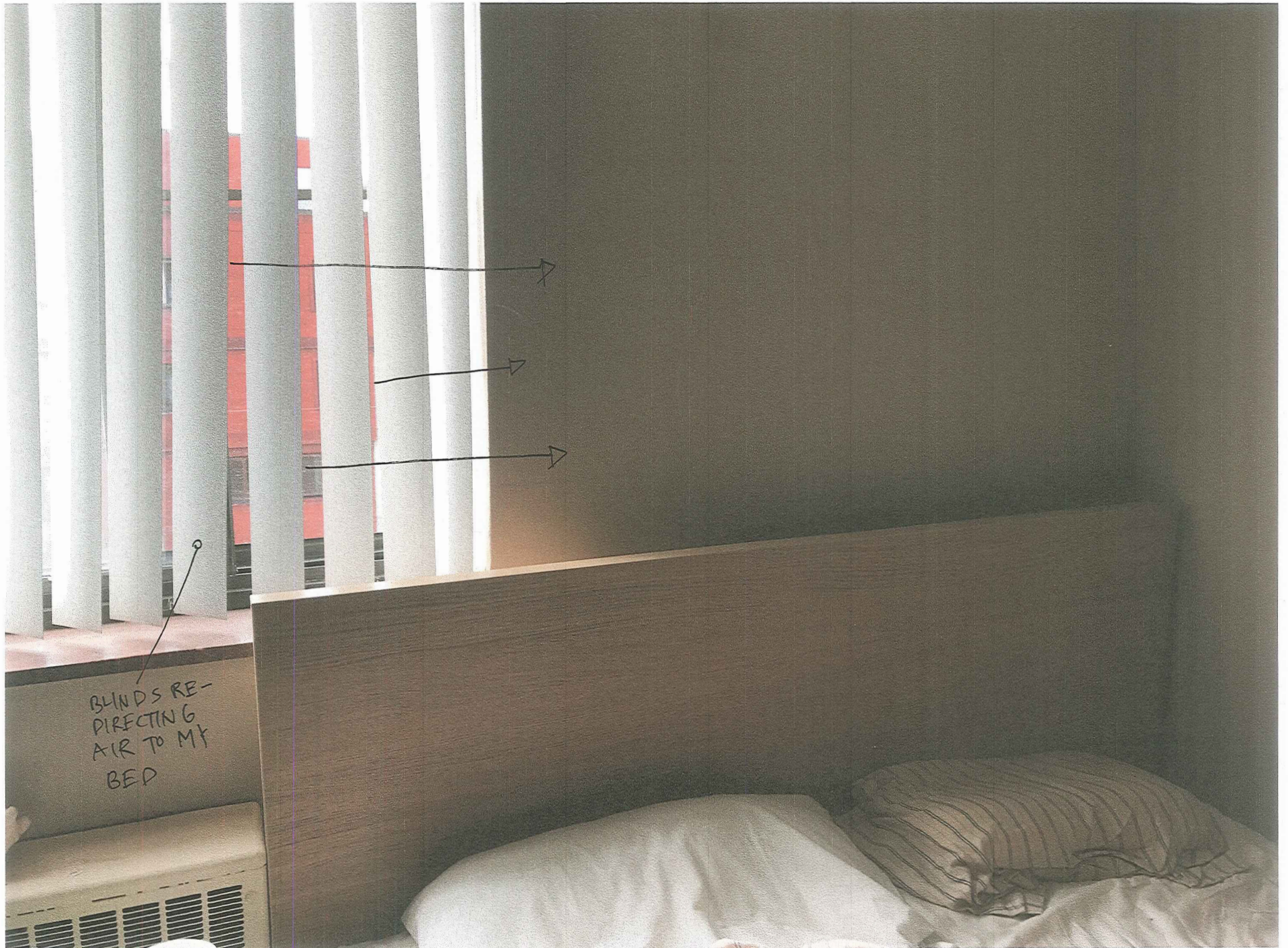
SOAP HOLDER



USED AS
TOOTHBRUSH
HOLDER

excellent
balance

BLINDS



TOWEL HANGER



I WORRY
MY TOWEL
WILL GET
WET
TOO LOW TO
THE GROUND

USED TO
PUT SHAMPOO
AND BODY WASH

TOWEL HANGER



CHRISTOPHER PERRY

Did you know...

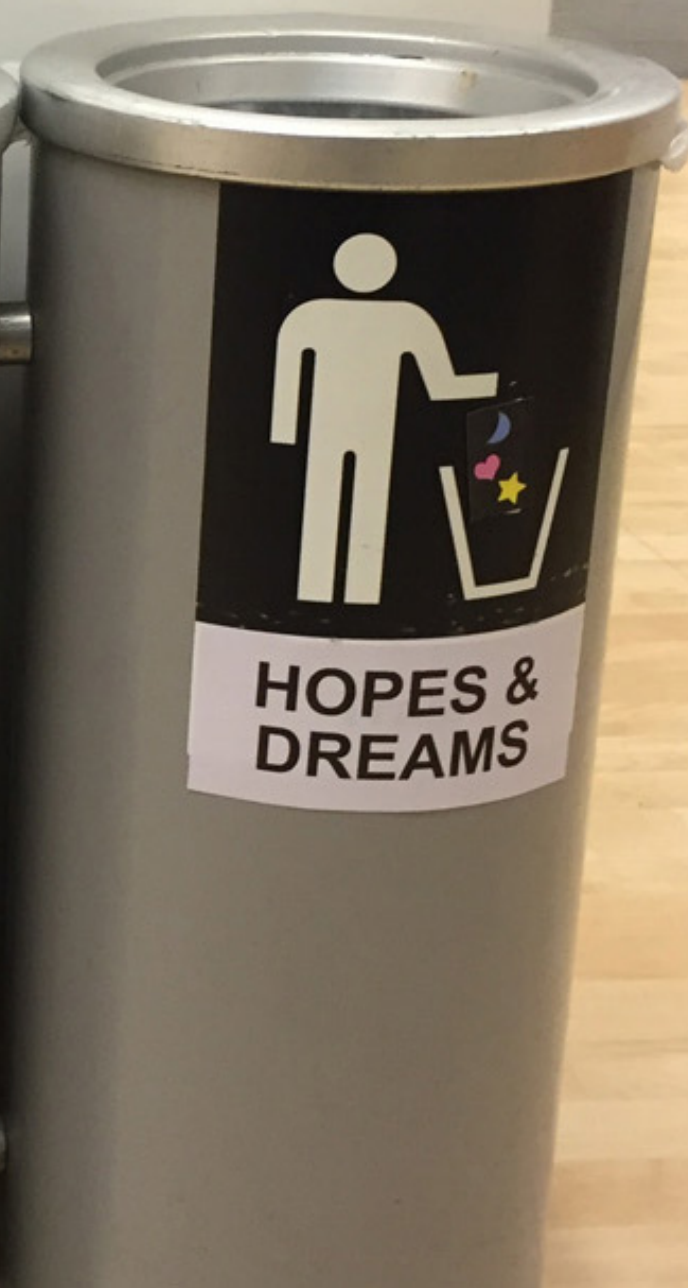
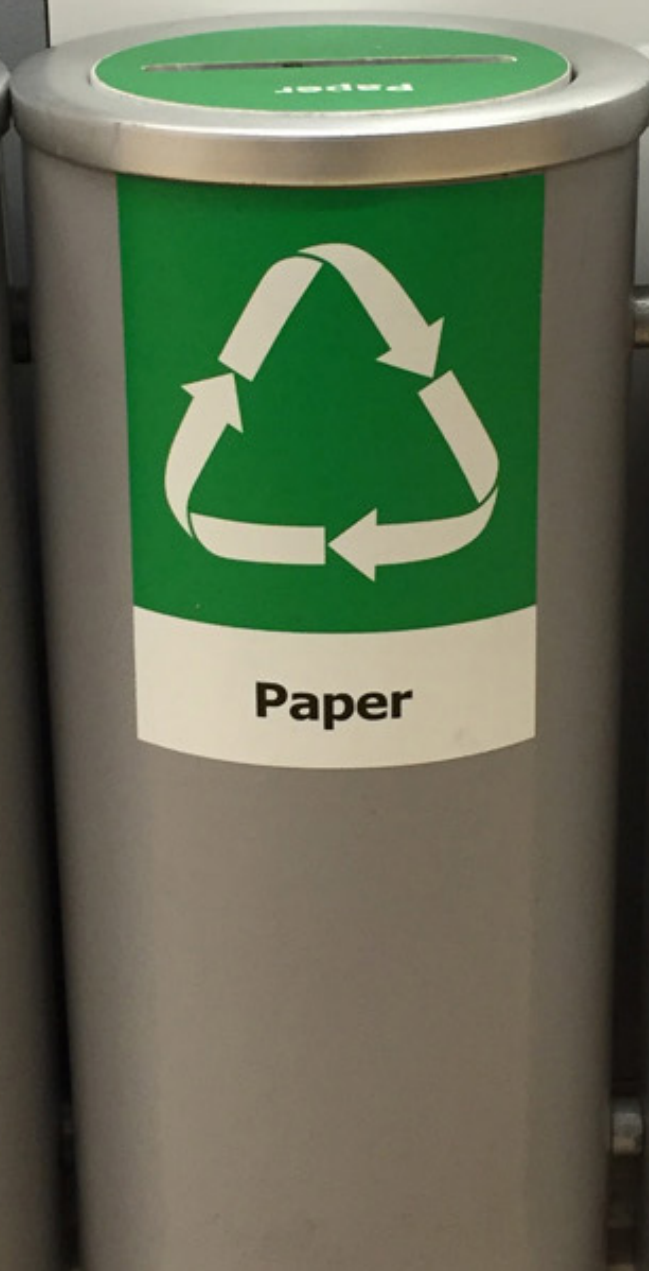
**If you sit on a hen,
it will hatch into
a larger, more
powerful hen.**



Forbidden Shops

- 211 Abercrombie & Witch
- 212 Nightmares Remembered
- 213 A Store You Can Enter, But Never Leave
- 214 Dread, Wrath & Beyond
- 215 The Sunken Place
- 216 A Jamba Juice That is Also a Portal to Another Dimension
- 217 Cursed National Bank
- 218 Greg's Dungeon Supplies
- 219 Apocalypse City
- 220 Fear 1 Imports
- 221 A Store That Has an Oracle Who Gives You a Cube and on That Cube is the Date of Your Death





GILLY JOHNSON

AFFORDANCES

EXERCISE (MARCH 25, 2017)

Starting point: Studio MM210
12:50 pm

Things that I've used most so far after sitting for 20 minutes:

- Desk
- Water bottle
- Chair
- Phone

QUESTIONS

1) How does my demeanor change when I don't have it with me?



The act of drinking, distraction

Setting: desk facing wall, cluttered space, water bottle is something familiar and comforting.

Where are they going?
What are they doing?
talking about?



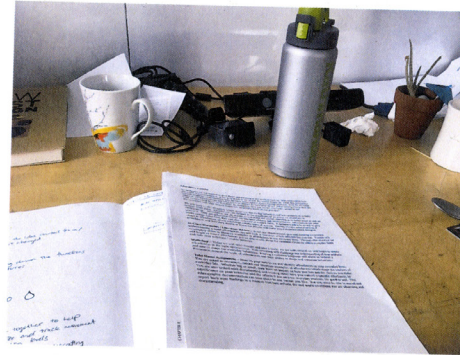
Affordances:

- Fidgeting *
- Water source
- Comfort

It's enjoyable to open and close it, therefore I am more prone to drink from it.

- Cold drink
- Something to distract myself with when I need a break from work

- Visual break, audible shift
- Cool air, ventilation (natural) for studio
- People watching, place for me to make up stories about situations and interactions
- We have intimate conversations in studio, yet still feel connected to the outside world via windows
- Source of information
- Signifier of distance/barrier



"Clean desk, clean headspace, dirty desk, cluttered headspace."

A lot of visual stimulation, so many things to look at, but you're still mostly staring at a wall

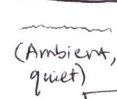


Sensing Space:

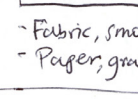
SIGHT



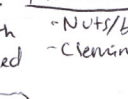
SOUNDS



TEXTURES



SMELLS



QUESTIONS CONT.

- 1) Does sitting like this cause more problems than benefits?
- 2) Should we get a foot stool?

- A place to store things
- To examine the past, remember
- To view things in conjunction
- Evaluate how messy things are

Sensing Space:

SIGHT

SOUNDS



(Ambient, quiet)

TEXTURES

- Smooth
- Cold
- Slitted
- Manufactured

SMELLS

- Nuts/berries
- Clementine

QUESTIONS

- 1) Does this place really afford working?
- 2) Why do I feel slightly on edge here?

- A support system, a way to shift positions
- Getting comfortable, getting uncomfortable again, shifting
- Fidgeting *
- Help to change perspectives, even if it's a small change
- Helps to relax me, reassures me that I'm in a comfortable place to get work done

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2017

12:35 PM



What does it offer me?

- Comfort
- Place to work
- Place to eat
- Place to sleep
- Place to rest and occupy my time
- A small nook that keeps me safe
- A place to pick out the clothes I will wear that day

I get to spend time here with my thoughts, can reflect on the day. My safe space, a place to be and breathe.

SOUNDS

- Cars on Fifth
- Engine starting
- Ambient
- Buzzing of my phone
- Refrigerator
- Pen click

QUESTIONS

- 1) Is it bad to mix work and personal life in this bed/place? Will I develop negative associations?
- 2) Do I spend more time sleeping in bed or doing work/hanging out in bed?

- Traveling from my house to school enables reflective thought
- Have time to mentally prepare for the day
- Walking at pace reinforces rhythmic thought, a repetition of small details I'm thinking about

- Makes me feel like part of the community
- Sometimes wonder why people are going places at such off times

SIGHT

- Books
- Clothes
- Window
- Dresser
- A lot of little things

SMELL

- Dumplings
- Trees
- Soy sauce

TEXTURE

- Micro plush blankets
- Fibrous paper
- Ruffled sheets

Walking on Fifth Ave.
1:15 PM, MARCH 27



SOUNDS

- Acceleration of an engine
- Conversations about friends
- Rustling of leaves hitting ground

SMELL

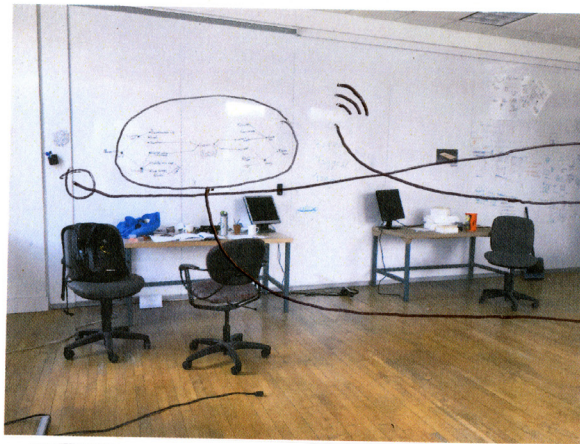
- Grass/dirt
- Decomposing raccoon
- Exhaust

TEXTURE

- Breeze rustling clothes
- Hard ground
- Natural rough surroundings

SIGHT

- Cars passing by
- Crumbling sidewalk
- Bare trees
- Changing lights
- Looking at my feet while walking



MARCH 27, 2017
5:30 PM
MM 210

THE WALL

- Barrier b/t 2 classrooms
- Barrier of sound (only diffuses a certain amount)
- Visual blockade
- One way to ease stimulation/distraction
- A one way interaction
- A way to organize ideas
- A way to collaborate
- A way to remember
- Shared divider of space

They have to open the wall
Can sometimes feel like they're having more fun b/c of music being played

SIGHT

- White board drawings
- Panels in wall
- Markers and magnetic pins
- Junk/computers

SMELL

- Mediterranean food
- Grass from outside
- Ink from pen

TEXTURE

- Smooth and plasticity

SOUNDS

- Music from my computer
- Chairs rolling on floor
- Tacks being put on wall from other side

Things I can see/understand things I directly interact with



Things I can hear/make assumptions about
- Affords imagination/c' filling in the gaps

What does it offer me?

- When I have one ear covered and the other not, it allows me to be in two worlds @ once
- Tune out ambient noise
- Keep a rhythm of working, concentration might stabilize more w/ stable sound input
- A sense of invisibility from others
- If I have audio stimulation, I don't need visual as much

6:10 PM
Desks have shifted

Headphones/
music



SOUNDS

- Fluctuating sounds
- Place to keep the beat
- No ambient noise of significance

SMELL

- Rubbery
- Metal from water bottle

TEXTURE

- Cushion around ears
- Cord is something to touch/bite on

SIGHT

- Spotify interface
- Occasionally looking up at screen from notebook
- If I like or respond to a song, it becomes a new distraction from my work

It's kind of a distraction from other thoughts that occupy my headspace.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Does the music shape my identity?
- 2) What do other people think of me playing music via headphones? Am I anti-social?
- 3) How much have I missed b/c I have my headphones on?
- 4) How would my environment change if the music was communal?

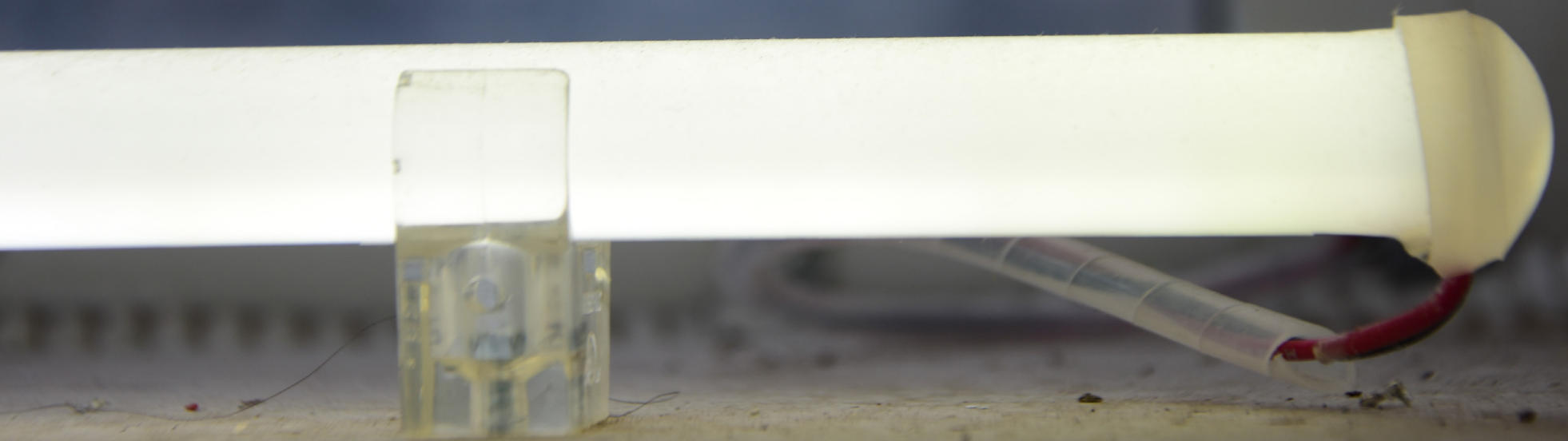
TY VAN DE ZANDE



This form of glass affords the creation of a sperate environment to be used as expression.



Glass affords reproducibility and anonymity.



This tube affords funtional lighting.



Glass is often used to create separate, smaller environments



The edge of the environment can be used permanently or ephemerally.

JASPER TOM



Anti-bird spikes fail to remove the affordances the window sill has for nesting.

OPEN MTC SCHEDULE v.1

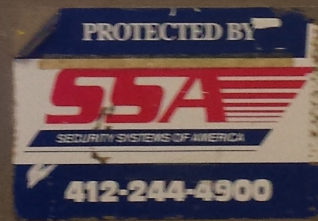
~~2:30-9:30~~
Sunday: ~~2:30-9:30~~
Monday: 4:30-9:30
Tuesday: 6:30-9:30
Wednesday: 6:30-10:00
Thursday: 6:30-9:30
Friday: 4:30-7:30
Saturday: 2:30-6:00

Subject to change, watch the door
for additions or cancellations.

Ben
ben@pie@andrew



119A



The sticker affords the idea that this room is secure and protected to people walking by and those leaving their belongings inside.



These set of switches simultaneously afford the public access to communal lighting and fail to afford a user any sense of which light switches control which lights.



The height of the concrete sidewalk affords the driver of the car to hit the edge without denting the body of the car itself.



The side of the mulch retaining wall affords the action of putting out cigarettes despite the presence of the cigarette receptacle.