Orienting the Future: Design Strategies
for Non-Place

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OVERVIEW

NON-PLACES ARE THE EVERYDAY SPACES OF LATE-CAPITALIST CITIES, SUCH AS AIRPORTS, MALLS, SUPERMARKETS, AND MOTORWAYS. IN CONTRAST TO TRADITIONAL PLACES, WHERE ORIENTATION AND BELONGING ARE BASED ON SEDENTARY AND LOCALIZED INHABITATION, NON-PLACES ARE DESIGNED TO BE EXPERIENCED BY TRANSITORY AND MOBILE SHOPPERS, COMMUTERS, CORPORATE NOMADS, TOURISTS, ITINERANTS, MIGRANTS, AND VIRTUAL WORKERS.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT NON-PLACE COMMONLY IDENTIFY A LOSS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY, A DECLINE IN MEANINGFUL RELATIONS AMONGST THE USERS OF SPACES, AND THE FORGETTING OF HISTORY. ONE DESIGN RESPONSE TO THESE DEFICITS IS TO RESTORE IDENTITY, RELATIONS AND MEMORY: TO MAKE NON-PLACES MORE HOMELY. A SECOND CATEGORY OF RESPONSE YIELDS TO THE GRAIN OF NON-PLACES, EXAMINING THE CREVICES AND INTERSTICES OF NON-PLACE, ITS FLOWS AND RESISTANCES, MICRO-PRACTICES AND THRESHOLDS, TO PROVOKE LIBERATING AND FINELY-HONED DESIGN RESPONSES.

Activities

In keeping with its brief, the non-place research team occupied three main sites: Retail nonplace the B&Q Retail Warehouse, at New Craighall, Edinburgh; Transportation non-place Stansted airport; and Bureaucratic non-place Lunar House, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office, Croydon. The cluster activities brought the thinking of designers, sociologists, information specialists, geographers and engineers to bear on these categories of non-place. Cross-cutting workshops explored the implications for the design of information systems and for built environments.

Insights

• *Appropriating non-place* Our observations of non-places confirm that people are adept at creating a sense of place, even in alien environments. How do people make themselves at home, and what technologies do they deploy?

• *Non-place and cognition* Theories of situated cognition suggest that thought and mind extend into the environment. How do non-places promote or hinder thoughtful action?

• *Non-place, action and agency* Non-places are products of variable and uncertain agency. What are the roles of users, tourists, itinerants, and the forces of socio-technological systems, bureaucracies, institutions and media as designers of non-places?

• *Designing legible cities: text, context and orientation* The architecture, pavements, buildings, and streets of the city interact with informational systems (signs, maps, mobile devices, timetables) to establish the parameters for everyday life. How do built fabric and information technologies combine in the design of a flexible and accommodating urbanism?

• *Signage and control* Non-places are reputedly dominated by textual signs, which are becoming increasingly dynamic, and potentially can be targeted to specific users. What is the non-place sign in the emerging context of dynamic displays, user interaction, and mobile telephony?

• *The design of intimate artefacts* How do artefacts (architecture, digital and wireless technologies, dependable and ubiquitous computing, graphics, performance and visual art) inform our everyday experiences of non-places? The aim is to devise new technologies and imagine new social conventions for individually responsive and inclusive devices for orientation and way-finding.