Cherry on Top

Darian Lu
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/datum

Part of the Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/datum/vol3/iss1/23

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Datum: student journal of architecture by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Truth lies in the future. Frank Gehry believes that the future of the context lies in the architecture that is yet to be created. As students, we need to trust the value of our project lies in the time that is yet to come. Education lies in trust. “It embraces the future... by supporting the growth of something that cannot be seen yet, an emergent sensibility that cannot be judged by contemporary standards.” (Columbia University GSAPP Dean’s Statement: The Future of the Architect)

The question at hand is: Do we have faith in the unpredictable future where the value of our projects might be proved?

I had a project that failed in the reviewers’ eye. During the project critique, the reviewers said that they did not know how to critique the project, as I told them that the sculpture form was created solely to add to the experiential quality for people entering the space (Image 1). Three years later, I realized this “failed” project has been fundamental to the development of my design thinking. The idea of the project came from the experience of walking on a solid surface compared to walking on a surface of mixed and unknown texture. Walking on a surface of mixed textures was tricky for me. The ground was bumpy. It was like the bottom of my feet had to change its form constantly so as to match the ground. It was interesting to me how a consistent form had to be reshaped to adapt to an environment. Based on this, I developed a wood structure on the site. Its shadow was cast onto walls, land, trees, and visitors. The solid structure became unpredictable when cast onto different textures. People were involved in the physical environment by contributing to the change they experienced. The value of the project came upon reflection. Once I understood what I had created, I was able to carry the knowledge further.
I always want to physically engage audiences with the things that I create. In the spring of 2010, I nailed 30 pounds of nails on an entire 10’ x 12’ wall (Image 2). This field of nails engaged people visually through multiple layers created by nails, shadows and reflections. The same field of nails looked different from time to time, and from people to people. As much as it was visually intriguing, in my point of view, this project was not completed until someone decided to lay against it, or pull some nails out of the wall. 2011 Spring, I put up a stack of 60 pages of paper on the wall in the hallway. Each piece of paper had a pricked hole in the middle at an exact same spot. A pin was pushed into the wall hidden behind the stack of paper. I found it fascinating to observe people’s reaction. Some people flipped back and forth the stack of paper looking for marks made by author; some looked through the pricked hole expecting a mystery to be revealed, and some started leaving their own trace on my project by drawing. In both cases, the audience engaged in creating the projects, by making them hard to predict.

I embrace this type of uncertainty in projects as much as I embrace them in life. The summer of 2011, I went on a backpacking trip to the west coast by myself. The trip started from Seattle and ended in Los Angeles. I traveled through 7 major cities and couch surfed for an entire month with strangers. From time to time, I did not know what to expect, where to stay for the night, or who to stay with. Somehow I was not a bit scared. I believed everything would be great at the end. I did not know how, but I knew it would. A month later, I came back to Iowa with lots of stories, a refreshed mind, and a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve in my last year in college.
The uncertainties in my projects continued. 2012 Spring, I conducted a project titled The Venture!! The project dealt with the connectivity between human beings and the environment. In this project, I became a part of the physical environment so that “it” can actively interact with the guest with words and gestures (picture 3: The Venture!!) The interaction projected a common life experience where people were constantly being influenced by their environment, and re-adapt themselves to it. For a period of time, I found it extremely challenging to present the project to the public. It was not like any project review where I stood up as myself and present what I did. I was troubled until I realized that I had to transform myself from a student to a mysterious host. The project sat somewhere between reality and fantasy, and I needed to be as well. The project was not accomplished until someone volunteered to be the one guest that sat at the table with me and ate the meal that I prepared. It was even better when the audience gathered around the table and ate the rest of the food that the guest left. To me, this type of unplanned activities was like finishing up an ice cream shake with a cherry on top.

I choreographed The Venture!! during my last semester. During the same time, like lots of other students, I did not know where I was heading to and what type of person I was transforming myself into after graduation. There was anxiety and frustration. From this point of view, The Venture!!, as well as my moment of wandering, were also self-projected. It projected who I was at that moment of life. Luckily soon afterwards, I was offered a designer job in Los Angeles, as well as graduate school admission from Columbia in NYC. From the two, I chose to further my study of advanced architectural design in Columbia. I thought either choice would be good at the end. But it was more intriguing to me when the road I headed to was full of adventures. After all, I feel uncomfortable in my comfort zone. I believe my responsibility was to live up to the dreams and the uncertainties in life. Now I am on my way to a new venture.

It is not worth the effort to create a design where everything is strictly planned out. It is not worth living a life where everything can be easily foreseen.

Embrace the “cherry on top”.
AFTER ALL, I FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE IN MY COMFORT ZONE.