

Personal Process Reflection

Tamara Evnin

Major Studio: Interface

Professor Brinkman Zhang Ga

6 October 2010

Introduction

Major Studio: Interface. I have spent the past five and a half weeks trying to figure out what this course is about, and now eleven classes in, I feel like I have somewhat grasped the main purpose of why this is meant to be an integral and formative part of my MFA education. Coming from a social sciences background, I was used to thinking in terms of the scientific method and memorizing facts. While critical thinking was a main component of my undergraduate education, the output of that thinking would mostly be another theory, tested in a specific environment. I have learned that the result of critical thinking in a design environment is to design a solution, and then actually realize that solution in a tangible way. This process is both new and exciting for me. In this paper I examine the projects created for this course and what I have gained from each, my evolving design process, and finally what I hope to gain throughout the remainder of the semester and my time in this program.

Projects

The projects undertaken in this class are manifold. My projects thus far have been mainly focused on the environmental crisis and creating solutions to curb the damage we are causing. This theme stems not only from the focus of our class projects, but also from personal interest and conviction.

I completed a series of four projects in four days, an exercise in quick ideation and execution. In my first project of the series, I repurposed shipping materials I had received that week, including cardboard boxes, tissue paper, and bubble wrap. I created bookends and a notebook from these materials, among other things. I went into this

project not knowing what I wanted to make from the materials, but found inspiration for new objects from the structural qualities of the original objects: the creases in a box and size of the folded areas looked like they would bend nicely into a notebook, a length of bubble wrap fit almost exactly to the dimensions of my laptop.

My second project was inspired by The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysinⁱ, which teaches that the random combination of elements creates an unexpected and non-replicable product. I combined The Repair Manifesto by Platform 21ⁱⁱ, The Maker's Bill of Rights by Make Magazineⁱⁱⁱ, and a summary of The Communist Manifesto^{iv} in order to create an all-encompassing manifesto for designers. These three documents, while different in content and meaning, all encompass similar ideals: making things that are accessible to the masses and long lasting. By physically cutting up each of the documents and randomly rearranging and merging their contents, I created a meaningful Manifesto^v for like-minded designers to subscribe to.

My third idea was to create a forum for repurposing-project ideas. My strategy was to create a website that would compile project ideas as well as a community for those involved in this movement. I bought the domain <http://www.repurpose.cc> and created a site map and mock-ups of the content pages of the website. My final project was an Animatic that illustrated the consumption-to-waste life of a product, inspired by The Story of Stuff Project^{vi} and Cradle to Cradle^{vii}. This short illustration was created using hand-drawn sketches put into a timeline.

While these projects were intentionally shallow in time and depth, I have ideas for expansions and re-iteration for each of them. Most notably, I hope to create a prototype for packaging that would be meant for repurposing and to move forward with the design and implementation of repurpose.cc.

Zone of the Impending

Besides these small projects, the main focus of this course thus far has been the creation of a project to be featured in Zone of the Impending, a component of an international media art exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, to open in 2011. This exhibition “explores artists’ interventions into the ecological and environmental crisis, proposing alternative strategies to the impending dangers that loom over human existence.”^{viii} This group project challenged us to research concepts, identify precedence, design by constant iteration, and propose a final concept.

Our first step was to research the idea of the ecological and environmental crisis and develop a more specific research question. Each group member researched topics independently and shared our findings through a series of e-mails. Early in the process, we noticed a theme in the content we found particularly interesting and inspirational: waste ending up in unexpected places in devastating ways and how we can get people interested in reversing that. From this point, we focused our research to studies and projects concerning electronic waste and its devastating effects on the environment and developing countries. We also looked to media art projects and compelling data visualization techniques to serve as precedence for our own project ideas.

Combining our research findings with our individual skills and interests, we began to formulate ideas for our project. While I cannot say that all group members contributed evenly to solid project ideas, we were able to, rather simply, agree on a basic direction together and develop ideas as a team. All subsequent work and ideation was distributed evenly among group members and refined as a group.

Our final project proposal, “Wall of Waste”, was for a wall constructed of electronic waste, including television screens, computer monitors, iPods and other portable music players, and cellular phones. A projection screen is set up across from the wall and projects images and live data visualization onto the wall of waste. Data is collected using an online survey, conducted both before and during the exhibition. Preliminary data is used to generate the main visualizations and data collected during the exhibition is used to update the visualizations. The data includes the number of electronic products consumed by the users, as well as their self-professed knowledge about where their waste goes once they dispose of it. The purpose of the projection onto the wall was to visualize the over-consumption of electronics, due in part to planned obsolescence, and to make viewers aware of where their products go and the harm they cause once they are disposed of.

While our project was well realized and a great deal of work was put into its realization, I am unsure that we achieved the ultimate goal of the project, which was to create a piece that uses live streaming environmental data. Our data, although environmentally aware, was not actual environmental data, and I believe we lost sight of this fact early on in our process. Future iterations must take this into consideration; otherwise, our piece

is nothing more than a public service announcement regarding over-consumption of electronics.

Perhaps one of the most important components of this project, working in a group taught me a great deal about my own process and work style. While I was initially uncertain that my partners and I would work well together, I was pleasantly surprised to find that we were all willing to put in an equal amount of effort and worked rather well as a unit. One of our most successful strategies was meeting bi-weekly in person. Sitting down together for about an hour to verbalize ideas, divvy up tasks, etc., proved to be much more efficient than e-mail communication. This was also a lesson for me in patience and leadership; I often had to refocus conversation and outline the tasks needing accomplishment. Observing how other groups functioned during this project, I believe our group was one of the most functional and cohesive, although our end product may not have been the most exceptional.

Process

My process has begun to unfold with the following path in mind: concept, strategy, manifestation. The *concept* encompasses the main design question as well as research conducted and projects turned to as inspiration. *Strategy* is the blueprint I lay out to attempt in the execution phase, including materials and process. Finally, *manifestation* is the actual execution of the project.

Iteration has become an extremely important component of my process. I find that when I come up with an idea, I almost impulsively began running with that idea. I have

learned to then take a step back from that initial idea and manifestation and think of what it is lacking, or how it can communicate my initial concept better. The more I iterate, the stronger my concept becomes. This does not necessarily translate into a stronger manifestation, but it does encourage me to keep pushing an idea.

Conclusions

In writing this paper, as well as in experiencing this course, I have realized that a lot of learning and self-reflection has occurred. Good design comes from knowing what is already out in the world and having an educated, novel idea that contributes something more than anything has before. This takes a tremendous amount of research and a dedication to the design and art worlds. I would like to become more involved in these worlds and actively seek out design experiences, including participating in competitions, visiting art and design galleries, and finding mentors in the community. I also want to define my design aesthetic and gain stronger skills in industry standard design software, challenges I face coming from a non-design background.

I have found this course to be rather challenging, in both the effort required and ability to take intense constructive criticism. I know I am being pushed to create strong work, and that is the attitude I need to keep in order to succeed in this course. I hope to hone in on the major design questions I want to answer during my two years here, a topic that is unclear to me at this point and is being redefined constantly. Coming from a social science background, I know that I want to explore technology in a humanistic way, but I do not know yet which techniques I want to use to do so, or exactly what questions I want to attempt to answer. I have a lot to learn and a long way to go, but through this

course, I am gaining confidence and become convinced that I can hold my own in the design world.

-
- ⁱ William S. Burroughs, *The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin*, http://www.ubu.com/papers/burroughs_gysin.html.
- ⁱⁱ Platform 21, *Repair Manifesto*, <http://www.platform21.nl/page/4453>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mister Jalopy, "Owner's Manifesto," *Make: Technology on your time*, Volume 04, 154.
- ^{iv} Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, <http://pd.sparknotes.com/philosophy/communist>.
- ^v Tamara Evnin, "The Maker's Repair Communist Manifesto," <http://tami.ev9.org/parsons/blog/?p=302>.
- ^{vi} *The Story of Stuff*, Online, directed by Louis Fox (Free Range Studios, Berkeley, CA), <http://www.storyofstuff.com/index.php>.
- ^{vii} William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to cradle: remaking the way we make things*, (New York: North Point Press, 2002).
- ^{viii} Brinkmann Zhang-Ga. Major Studio: Interface – PGTE 5200 E course syllabus, (NYC: Parsons The New School for Design, 2010).

Bibliography

1. Burroughs, William S., “The Cut Up Method of Brion Gysin,” UbuWeb Papers.,
http://www.ubu.com/papers/burroughs_gysin.html.
2. Brinkmann, Zhang Ga, Major Studio: Interface – PGTE 5200 E course syllabus,
NYC: Parsons The New School for Design, 2010.
3. Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*,
<http://pd.sparknotes.com/philosophy/communist>.
4. Evnin, Tamara, “The Maker’s Repair Communist Manifesto,”
<http://tami.ev9.org/parsons/blog/?p=302>
5. Jalopy, Mister, “Owner's Manifesto,” *Make: Technology on your time*, Volume 04,
154.
6. McDonough, William and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to cradle: remaking the way
we make things*, New York: North Point Press, 2002.
7. Platform 21, “Repair Manifesto,” <http://www.platform21.nl/page/4453>.
8. The Story of Stuff, Online, directed by Louis Fox, Free Range Studios, Berkeley, CA,
<http://www.storyofstuff.com/index.php>.