

Response development: playing on the site

Response seems to be the second stage of the design methodology after the site survey. What could generate from the site survey, to a large extent leads to what sorts of outcome of the response would be. In contrast with the normative site survey, 'creative survey' has no limitation and generates more useful outcomes which we could not expect. In my opinion, we could use the creative thinking of 'playing' on the stage of response to continue the creative throughout the design process. This essay would explore 'playing' within the design process could how far influence the programme even the final building.

From the previous knowledge on education or practice work in china, response to the site seems to be reductive and simplicity because of the knowledge of the site is normative, and most of the time, the OS maps. Therefore design of the building or programme is not creative and even reductive. The aim of this essay, is to explore how 'playing' which is a ease way of human activity could be applied to be the design methodology to generate a playful architecture throughout the design process. And the main focus of playing which would be explored in this essay is playing on site.

After gather lots of information of the site through series of site survey, we start to analysis this useful data and play with them. But what should we explore and which direction we should focus on seems some kind of confused at the beginning. The aim of 'play' in the step of response is to generate more opportunities and possibilities which contribute to future building and programme. However, the final building which contains series of aspects from social, economic, cultural etc, is not easy to create. The issues within it are often complex and by no means to draw up the conclusion straight away. In that case, 'play' could be the stimulus of inspiration, test all the collective information and generate some new ideas based on non conscious activities.

So, what is play? Play is a spontaneous action. We play in most of the situation when we are free, happy and feel tired of working. While we play, a series of outcomes would be created, consisted of aspects which differ from normal behavior. Play is a spontaneous activity which is a counterpart of the normality. As we could find in 'The Ludic City':

'In general terms, 'play' is used as counterpoint to behavior which is 'normal' - everyday, conventional, expected, calculated, practical, constant. Which impacts of play are noteworthy depends on professional interest. Play is in some way unusual, special and different, either in form or in outcome.'¹

'Play is presented in western metaphysics in opposition to seriousness, morality,

and productive work, and the social power relations these value structures help reproduce (Spariosu 1989).² Quentin Stevens defines play is 'non-instrumentality' which includes several aspects: non-propose, irrational, freedom, waste. 'Play activities are irrational because they are not shaped around conscious, preformulated ethical and pragmatic goals. Play often runs against orthodoxy, ignoring the systematic organization of human activity, and transgressing the boundaries of seriousness, including taboos.'³ Since play is non-propose and freedom, many possibilities could be created and inspiration would be stimulated by playing.

In most occasion play occurs in urban space. Hence, playing and the urban public to some extent influence each other. 'Play is shaped by urban social conditions: the density and diversity of people, the mixing of their activities, the unpredictability of their behavior, their differing expectations and the unfamiliarity of their expressions all contribute to instability and 'the dissolution of constraints'(Lefebvre 1996:129).' ⁴ Playing in public could to a large extent attract people's attention, enlarge the possibility of people's engagement. Through playing, a large group of people from diverse background gather. They have different characters such as ages, race, live experience which contribute greatly to the stimulation of inspiration. Since people meet others who are not familiar as in their everyday life while playing, playing seems to be more interactive. As Queetin stated, 'Freedom from social responsibilities allows for the broadest expression of people's individuality. Others can experience different aspects of a person's personality through their play,...'⁵

In terms of the typology of play forms, Caillois(1961) defines four forms of play, which are 'competition, chance, simulation and vertigo.'⁶ In my opinion, it could be the classification of play in terms of response to the issue on site.

Competitive play is an activity which includes conflict and fairness. Participants within the play use their knowledge and skills to maximize their ability to achieve a certain goal. This sort of play could somehow challenge people's limits. This is stated by Quentin: 'open conflict aims for mastery over others, but the true goal of competitive play is to foster mastery of the self, the testing of human limits.'⁷ Competitive play in public could be more contributive than in private way. The presence of public audiences could ensure the fairness of the game. Moreover, the diversity of population within the city contributes greatly to the competitive nature of play because of the diverse abilities around people.

Compare to competition, chance seems to be an obvious aspect of play when play is a spontaneous activity. Since play is irrational, chance and occasion enhance when people participate and play in public space. Interaction between site and participate, individuals is unexpected and unpredictable and hence playful. 'Chance encounters in the city provide opportunities for escape from

predetermined and ritualized courses of action. Many social activities in public are playful because they are spontaneous, derived from dynamic conditions of the place, occasion and individuals present (Lennard and Lennard 1984).⁸ Space within city is diverse and the patterns peoples' activities are different. All these coming together increase the likelihood of unexpectedness within city. Thus, city itself is full of chance.



Fig. 1. 'Get It Louder' exhibition in the shopping mall

Photo: from '<http://www.getitlouder.com/blog/default.asp?cat=32>'

'Get It Louder' is an exhibition of contemporary arts and design in China. Art and design is playing a more and more important part of people's life in modern city.

The conventional venue of an exhibition should be in the museums or galleries. However, 'Get IT Louder' placed in the largest shopping mall in the city of Guangzhou which really connect the people living to the exhibition itself. The collections of each artist were exhibited on an independent site within the shopping mall. All of them are placed randomly and seem to combine in the spaces and become a part of the shopping mall.

When People walk around the shopping spontaneously, they will meet the exhibition by sudden, which I would refine it as playing with chance. Here roles of participants within the shopping mall were changed. Customers had multiple identities which were consumers and spectators. Shopping mall served as both a commercial building and a exhibition hall. Through this playing responding to a site which is already functional, the potential function of it was inspired. Such playing inspires not only the potential function of the shopping building itself but the pursuit for the flexibility within the building design.

Simulation is another form of play which contains consideration of imagination and reality. Participant of simulation should go through a series of process from forgetting, disguising, and escaping their normal world. It involves fabrication of a brand new role on individual or situation which is totally different from normality. Such simulation could somehow generate some outcomes which are not predictable if we treat them as a normal situation. The urban space design apply the logic of simulative play. The roles of the participants in the city activities are redefined through the research process. The site is like a stage, and the people participate on it are the performers. The architects who explore the site are the spectators. 'The design of urban space can reinforce the notion that a simulative play event is occurring by structuring of participant and audience (Lennard and Lennard 1984, 1995).'⁹



Fig. 2. Claudia Amico dancing on the market square

Photo: Carolyn Butterworth

Claudia's dancing in the market square is defined as a creative survey of first stage of design methodology. However, this event could also consider as the simulative play which belongs to response. In the activity, Claudia stepped up on to the make-shift stage in front of the market hall. The simulation occurs in the event when the music is on. The square change to be a stage, Claudia simulate as a folk dancer, and the pedestrian simulate to be the spectators. Each participant of the event seems to step out the normative role and contribute greatly to the whole activity. In doing so, this simulative play is a response to the site which an unknown place. It attracts public attention to this territory, encourage people to consider the stories of its history and the future.

Vertigo is the last form of play according to Caillois' theory. Vertigo emphasizes uncontrolled and sensation of instable. It involves the thinking in which people would step out the normal stance and change to another way to perceive the city. 'The common feature is 'the voluptuous experience of fear, thrills and shock that cause a momentary loss of self-control', which allows one to step outside normal, stable perception of the world and bodily practice within it (Caillois 1961:169).'¹⁰ Vertiginous play encourage to explore the city in a more active, kinetic and risky way which could be useful to challenge the limit of city space.

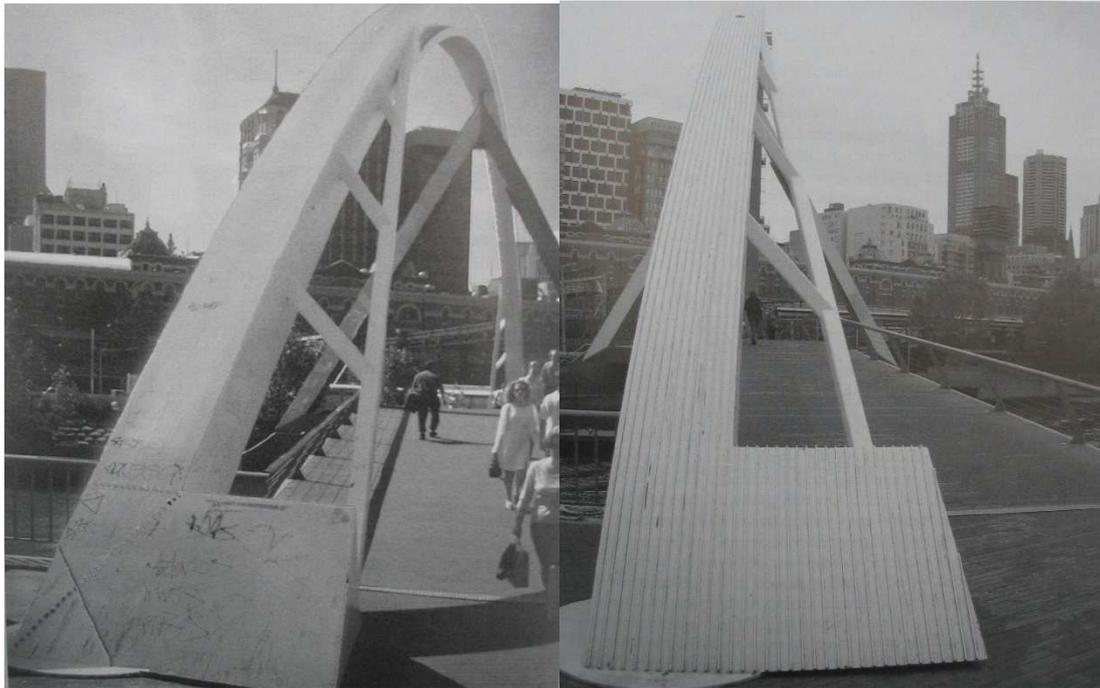


Fig. 2. Footbridge of Southbank Promenade

Photo: From 'The Ludic City' pp76,77

The case of the footbridge of Southbank Promenade could be described as the play of vertigo. The foot bridge links the station and the Southbank Promenade, which is very busy. The footbridge structures as an arch which is an uncommon form in this city. The low triangular form of the stanchion at the end of arch and its smooth surface make it easier to make the metaphor as a slope for rollerblading. In addition, no barrier to protect the stanchion, this situation occurred anyway, tire marks of rollerblading and graffiti were anywhere on the surface of stanchion.

To prevent this situation, some intervention which I defined as a play of architect was applied. A vertically grooved surface was applied on the arch, which make it difficult to skate on top of the arch. However, although it successfully prevents the in-line skating, the graffiti still keeps reappearing. In this case, play from both pedestrians and architects contribute to the site. In-line skating and graffiti indicate there should be that kind of potential needs within the site, and encourage architect to explore this in the future. Moreover, the play of intervention of architect on the arch for testing how it works was really helpful to the design in a further way.

The case of the footbridge should be classified as play of public which amplify the problem to alert some intervention by architect. However, many cases support that there is opposite way in which architect play on site to test the circumstance and get some feedback from the site. 'Made for Middlesbrough' is one example.



Fig. 2. Product of 'Made for Middlesbrough' on site

Photo: Junjie GENG

One of our studio project is 'Made for Middlesbrough'. In this project we each found a local client who required a product we could manufacture for them. My client is the shopkeeper of a canvas photo shop. This shop is not big with about 8 sqm. All of the walls within the shop have been occupied by the canvas. Several of them have been put disorderly alongside of the wall without proper place for them. Moreover, there is no place for the customer to rest when they are waiting.

By considering all the situation about the shop, I made a decision of producing a piece of furniture which could be multi-functional and served as a storage as well as a table and a seat. Most importantly, it saves space. This design could be served as a table with a drawer in it. The space within the drawer was designed in relatively big for the size of canvas. Moreover, the drawer within the table could be pulled out to serve as a chair when there are some waiting customers. When you need a chair, you just simply pull it out. When you don't need it, just put it in to save space.

Although this is a finish product for a certain client, we can still define it as playing and testing for the site and the demand of client. After handed over the product to my client, the process of application started to test how the product works in the shop. The feedback from my client is that some additional wheel should be fixed at the bottom to make it movable.

To sum up, the conventional way of response to the site of a certain issue is reductive and simplicity. Through playing which is a spontaneous way of action, all of the issues within the site amplify, all participants are encouraged to engage and interact with each other. Ideas are inspired through playing and the design process seems to be more playful and creative.

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