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Carnivora

An Exhibition and Interior Vignette at the Salon Satellite, Milan International Furniture Fair, Italy 2004

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ABSTRACT

The Faculty was invited to participate in 'Dining Design', an international exhibition which explored ideas of dining culture in different international cities and proposed future possibilities. This paper looks at an independent learning, interdisciplinary approach to teaching, using a real project with an interface between education, industry and design practice.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Interior Architecture Program at the University of New South Wales was one of twelve universities and design schools from around the world invited to participate in 'Dining Design', an interactive exhibition and event organized by Tihany Design New York, in Italy for the 2004 Milan Furniture Fair. The exhibit was about showcasing restaurant design alongside food, fashion and design. The event also highlights Italian manufacturer's ability to translate the design ideas of the students into a built environment.

Ten design schools accepted were provided with a brief to design a themed restaurant within their home city. The participants created their own original titles:

1. **Quicnic**, a fast food hamburger diner in Berlin, by Staatilche Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe
2. **b: roque**, a Viennese cafe in Brighton, by Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College
3. **White**, a Japanese restaurant in Helsinki, by University of Art and Design, Helsinki
4. **Fooo**, a Kyoto pizzeria, by Osaka University of Arts
5. **Roll-away**, a karaoke sushi bar in Lausanne, by ECAL- Ecole cantonale d'art de Lausanne
6. **Trace**, a wine bar in Tribeca, New York City by Rhode Island School of Design
7. **Pi'u-Yiu`**, a Chinese restaurant in Rome by Polytechnic of Milan
8. **Carnivora**, a steakhouse in Sydney by The University of New South Wales
9. **Partingline**, a french fine dining in Tel Aviv by Bezalel Academy for Art and Design, Jerusalem
10. **bisTO** French bistro in Turin by Istituto Europeo di Design, Milan

The thematic program for the UNSW was a 'steakhouse' described as being for businessmen during the day and a hip young crowd in the evening, including a cigar lounge. The 'product' to be displayed was an interactive exhibit housed in an area 7x 21m and had to include:

- A 1:10 scale model (1.5 x 3m)
- Display boards showcasing drawings
- A 1:1 vignette of the finished design where the general public visitors would dine on prepared meals prearranged by a renowned chef

The project was distinctive as it offered the class the opportunity to create a complete design package for a restaurant including interiors, furniture, costumes and cutlery; to travel to Italy to participate in the event; and to exhibit at an interactive public event in Milan.

An interdisciplinary grouping was arranged, combining the Interior Architecture and Industrial Design programs, with a total of 27 students and 4 lecturers working together.

This paper examines the development of the project through:

- Applying independent learning methods
- The integration of interdisciplinary principles in a student project
- Creativity and the final result as a 'real' project for a world audience
- Learning and teaching outcomes and challenges.

I. WHAT THE PROJECT WAS ABOUT

The pedagogical objectives determined for the project were based on:

- Structuring the group to foster independent learning
- Achieving an integrated approach to the design brief within an interdisciplinary team
- Expanding the creative output of the students through this interdisciplinary approach
- Challenging the industry perspective on 'dining'

- Creating a dynamic, multifaceted learning experience for students.

The studio actively sought an independent learning style by modelling these techniques:

- Learning centered
- Process focused team to team
- Critical thinking
- Ability to communicate
- Ability to work in teams and collaborate
- Authentic problem solving
- Project based learning
- Cross disciplinary learning
- Ability to self organize/self direct

(Fisher, 2005, p.7)

II. IN THE STUDIO BEFORE THE EXHIBIT

Initially students consistently getting the highest design studio marks were recruited by staff to join the summer elective course. When few students were prepared to forgo their summer break at the end of our academic year, a broader invitation was issued to submit expressions of interest, conditionally based on availability, to make up a class of thirty. All candidates were required to outline their interests, skills and abilities. With pressing time constraints in which to undertake a highly challenging project, staff intentionally “interfered with the ‘normal’ forces of group formation” based on natural similarities and complimentary factors, (Kennedy, 1998, p.12) and encouraged diversity. Rapid selections were made, forming ‘teams’ from both disciplines combining various stages of experience and ability, in order to focus on the different facets of the project, comprising:

- Design – the design of the restaurant
- Workshop – model and other 3D components
- Computer technology – working drawings and 3D modeling
- Cinematic – to initiate a ‘theatrical’ experience to the vignette in Milan
- Textile and fashion – costumes of staff and students for vignette
- Graphics and identity – brochures, all 2D imaging including press kits for Milan
- Project management – co-coordinating teams, organizing freight, flights, accommodation and recording process.

A. *Achieving an Integrated Approach*

Interior Architecture articulates the environment including the floors, walls, ceilings, space planning, furniture design and its placement. Industrial design focuses on the design of objects within these spaces such as chairs, cutlery and accessories. Drawing, as a communication medium is common to both disciplines, as is model making (demonstrated at an advanced level by industrial designers).

To counter potential ideological difficulties due to noticeably different approaches between disciplines, various strategies were developed to build a common understanding. These included:

- Meeting with Design professionals in the studio to present and discuss ideas
- Students unfamiliar with the technical aspects of model making were exposed to the techniques and technical language of the industrial design workshop
- Lecturers from both programs integrated with all students
- Teams were mixed
- Guest speakers were brought in from various disciplines to talk to the group as a whole.

The experience of working in teams developed multiple skills and the ability to see from others’ viewpoints. Within the design team, Industrial Design and Interior Design with their unique professional cultures had different approaches to problem identification and problem solving. “However diversity can be viewed as a source of strengths in terms of flexibility and mutually enriching perspectives, with all approaches having more similarities than differences” (Davidson, 1994, p13)

Often the diversity necessitated discussion and negotiation, as “unacknowledged or misunderstood individual differences can result in conflict, loss of productivity through re-work” (Kennedy, 1998, p.21) The industrial design students commented on how the interior design students worked in the larger three-dimensional plane and their first thought was to select products from a catalogue rather than produce their own. The interior design students conversely related to the intricate detail the industrial students dealt with and admired their ability to design a product from scratch but felt they lost sight of the context and built environment.

At times this caused a struggle between the designers about space versus furniture design issues. We facilitated the process with weekly conflict resolution meetings, focused on understanding and appreciating commonalities and differences. However both agreed that the learning experience of understanding the various thought processes has matured them as designers.

B. *Expanding creative output*

Some students and staff challenged the brief on the issue of stereotyping (a ‘business men’s’ restaurant, and a ‘steak house’ being insufficiently multicultural, etc.). The requirement was to rise to the challenge rather than seek to dismantle it.

Research provided one means of response by employing “the Group Investigation model” (Thelen, 1981) by dividing the topic into multiple sub research topics. The key issues were: meat production, restaurants, and masculinity stereotypes - and groups presented back to the class the results of their researches. This had the effect of

‘broadening horizons’ that had been narrowly prescriptive. A reflective comment by a student describes in her journal “a very thought provoking lecture by Peter McNeil COFA led to opening my eyes and thinking about how we do things ...to look at how everyone likes choice and customization.”

As a result of brainstorming, a paradigm shift occurred when the working concept for the restaurant – selecting your seating environment from a furniture menu, having a set food menu and seeing furniture prepared in a workshop rather than food in a kitchen – was brought about by deconstructing and questioning the brief. The process involved the “use of what if...? questions to challenge usual assumptions and expectations” (Leff, Thousand and Nevin, 1994, p.308). This mass customization of the physical space/place concept (providing individual settings for individual consumers) provided a unique and futuristic perspective to dining.

C. Dynamic Learning Experience

Students were excited that the project was distinctively different from the usual solo studio based program as it involved team work, with multiple minds focusing on one single project, as distinct from individuals focusing on their own work resulting in thirty different projects. Another difference was that it was intended to be built rather than only completed in 2D and 3D drawings and cardboard models. A great amount of detail was potentially achievable because of the group aspect and the involvement of the combined disciplines. Students would travel from Sydney, Australia to Milan, Italy to exhibit their work. They would be challenged by working in areas that they had little experience in such as photography, costume design, model making,

Each student maintained a ‘Reflective Journal’ detailing his or her personal learning experiences. The discipline of writing down their experiences in handling various challenges obliged them to think clearly and objectively about the issues, as well as giving the staff a window into the effect of our pedagogical efforts. The ‘method’ of the diary keeping (deconstructing problems, to appreciate that ‘problems’ are creatively useful) making the students more consciously responsible and would “serve a dual role in assisting students to develop their personal learning strategies and provide feedback to teachers on both the content and process of their teaching” (Kennedy, 1998 p. 26)

The educational aspects of the project strongly interfaced with design industry and professional practice. To demonstrate this, the studio was regularly visited by: design print media editors; professional designers; and corporate business was approached for sponsorship.

III. DURING THE EXHIBITION

In April 2004, 24 students and 3 of the lecturers and the Head of Program travelled to Milan to construct the finished design in conjunction with a nominated manufacturer, Dada Molteni. The response received from industry, educational institutions and the general public for the finished product was overwhelmingly positive.

Team building

The mood at Opening Night was one of celebration and pride in achievement, a large and sustained team effort having brought this project to successful fruition. All shared this jubilation equally as we had broken down hierarchies between the various teams, skills or sexes.

The costume team originally comprised two students with special interest in this field; however, working outside their own design discipline proved too difficult and the costumes were unfinished on arrival in Milan. In response, a number of other students agreed among themselves to join and bolster the costume team. This initiative demonstrated the level of teamwork that had been established between the students as a whole.

This sense of unity and camaraderie, which lasted for the duration of the exhibit, owed something to the (highly contentious) uniforms/costumes the students wore while on the stand. It was the snug fit and ‘costume not uniform’ approach some of the students objected to. The designs were based on the themes of the restaurant – meat and tools – with flesh coloured, tight-fitting bodices, split, torn and stitched to represent the ripping of flesh, coupled with an apron (representative of a butcher’s apron) and a tool belt. When they discarded their inhibitions and wore the costumes, it gave them a sense of ownership; a connection with each other through genderless uniforms, and in some cases a persona, which was not their norm.

From this it could be said that identity played an important role in team building, one aspect of this being the costumes.

In Milan, the staff and students spent a lot of time together in the exhibit space itself. This contributed to maintaining the team spirit in a way analogous to the role the dedicated studio space played in creating it. Students who either did not stay at the hotel or take ‘ownership’ of the space at the Fair through participation or other means, did not feel as much ‘part of the group’ as others did. Space ‘ownership’ and an ‘owned’ place to meet, work and / or play has been an important aspect.

Problem solving

Problem solving became an even more pronounced and immediate issue as the Opening night drew close. Being

'on site' and having tight deadlines galvanized the process; matters that might have taken weeks to resolve in a studio were resolved quickly. Students benefited greatly by seeing how quickly problems could be resolved by the fabricators (between themselves or in discussion with the students) and how congruently the various trades' people worked with one another.

B. Expanding creative output

The most important achievement was less obvious and public, being the team's success in trying and using different and even novel media, and doing quality work in areas of design outside their usual zones. Outstanding examples of this were the restaurant concept, soundscape, and the costumes.

Students within the 'cinematic team' prepared the soundscape, which had originally been coupled with a projection piece that was composed of sounds from a workshop and a kitchen. The sound piece, a series of sounds manipulated to form a rhythmic, even musical soundscape, was completed with a favourable response from the public audience. The piece was also selected to be part of the official Milan Furniture Fair CD.

Of note were the stools, which were a definite draw card to the stand, the lamps, the 1:10 scale model, the 3D computer modelling and the full and rich interior space.

IV. CONCLUSION

"Outcomes are not deemed to be creative simply because the process by which they are generated is deemed to be creative but on the basis of an independent assessment of the outcome against predetermined criteria." (Harfield, 2007 p.126)

Despite the difficulties we achieved a highly satisfying result and one that is similar in many ways to the ideas of collaboration in the workplace and project team based achievement. (Laing, 1993, p.42)

The difficulties were mainly: the unfortunate timing, as it was hard for most participants to find the mental energy to commence a new project at the end of the academic year during the summer break; a general apathetic approach was shown by some students, demonstrated by indecisiveness and poorly organized presentations; difficult group dynamics – a greater emphasis on how teams work first while simultaneously involving a team project (Kennedy, 1998, p 12) may have reduced this problem; and skill deficiencies, when students who came from different levels and had limited abilities found they lacked the multiple skills required to work on a project of this type.

The venue was also perceived to be prestigious because of its location, its significance in a global context and

because of its size and potential exposure. Therefore students found it worthy of their efforts and this encouraged them to see this as an opportunity for self-promotion.

In conclusion we believe that the successful outcome of our Carnivora exhibit at the Milan Furniture Fair 2004 was due to two main positive forces acting together in order to overcome the negative aspects operating during the life of the project. The first positive force was the breakthrough that occurred when individuals recognized their own potential to achieve, and seized responsibility and ownership of their work within their group. This indicated maturity and ultimately fed into the whole project. A sense of belonging to the group and claiming ownership for work being produced was fostered in the workshop and the dedicated studio that followed through to the installation on site. There was a strong sense of camaraderie, once the project had been installed, especially from those who had taken a great deal of responsibility and those staying at the hotel together. This was not dissimilar from the sense of a team achievement that is experienced in design industry practice.

Secondly, there was a strong creative impetus amongst the group that demanded they challenge the stereotypical brief. The project would not have been as successful without the innovative response to a stereotypical brief. The diversity of students, being in different stages of their courses from two different disciplines, strengthened this position. Unwilling to accept mediocre solutions, students endeavored to engage with new ideas and creative concepts which through this process resulted in arguably the most dynamic, theatrical and interactive display amongst all the exhibits.

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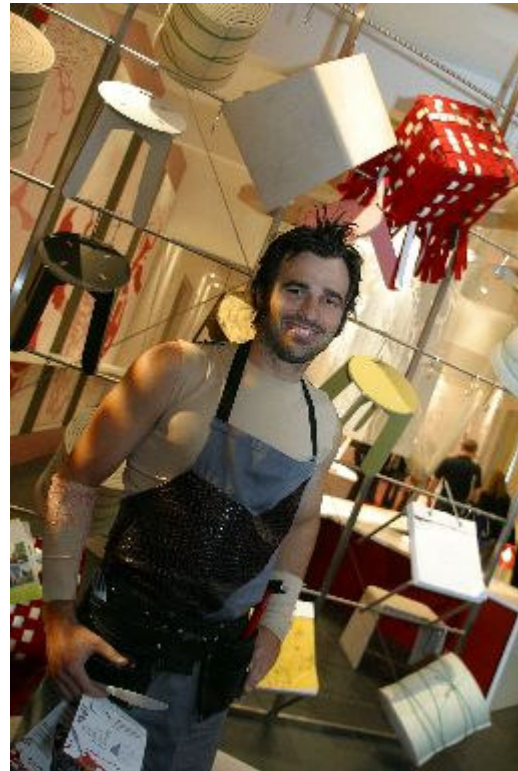


Image 3
Student wearing costume at exhibit with cutlery & menu in hand



Image 1
Signage, site construction and screen at exhibit



Image 2
Chairs and stools displayed along the entry screen at Carnivora exhibit Milan 2004



Image 4
A student in costume. Interaction with the visitors to the exhibit was a highlight of Carnivora