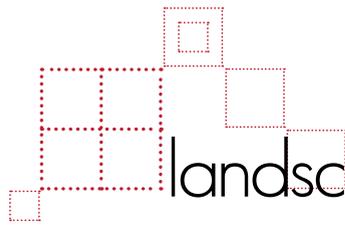


landscape **bento**: any WHERE any TIME





# landscape bento : any WHERE any TIME

by Wei Ching Sun

a Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Department of Landscape Architecture  
Faculty of Architecture  
University of Manitoba

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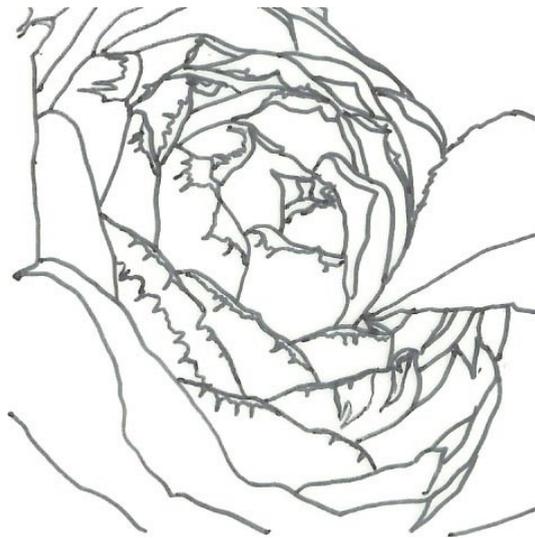
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appetizer



## Abstract

This practicum is a collection of ideas intended as a framework for an alternative approach to understanding creativity and process in landscape architecture. An exploration of the values that guide our thinking is a critical ongoing activity that weaves into creativity and decision making in design process. Relationships exist that when examined provide not a method but an approach. A re-interpretation of landscape architecture and a bento box resulted.

Writing took on the first person in the present tense as a way to work through both writer's block and designer's block. The blocks provided many moments for critical thinking. Food and cooking are a passion. Connections and networks exist in our personal environments but are most often not noticed and certainly unexamined. The relationship between food and cooking, and the environment and designing revealed a similar process of creativity. This was used as a metaphor to act as an alternative approach to aid in moving through doubt and block.

Through an explicit, conscious consideration of passions and values, a deeper understanding of the process and product of landscape architecture emerged.

## Foreword

It feels that I have pondered what to say in this foreword, for as long as I could think on my own. Why is it so hard to write it down on paper? Ah! The foreword is the window to the entire practicum. Who wants to enter the house if the window is crooked and the glass is shattered? This the first thing people read closely to get a glimpse of what is happening, and when they make a decision of whether to put it back on the shelf or to take it home from the library.

"You have made the right choice to open this page!" That is what this foreword should tell the reader!

"Hello! And welcome!"

And if they found the rest of the practicum boring and skipped every other chapter, they shall not miss the foreword!

\*clear throat\*

This is a practicum compiled of research, discussion, contemplation, and reflection upon the subject on landscape architecture and food. A collection of essays and prose works on the process of learning, thinking, and design application.

At the beginning it was about trying to tie two passions of mine - food and landscape architecture - together with a lot of questions to be answered. When I really sat down and pondered these questions, I realized that I did not know much about why I am passionate about landscape architecture?

Was it because I thought landscape architects have a higher social status? Or was it because landscape architects are a bunch of a lovey-dovey environmental designers whom I would rather be stuck with? Or what?

I seemed to have forgotten everything I had previously learned. Soon I found out it was not memory-loss, it was because I did not pay attention to my surroundings and my own thoughts other than what was taught in class. Even in class I was tensed up to listen to the language I barely understood, and then *complacently* regurgitated pieces of information I learned from class and treating them like 'gospel'.

I was so confused as to why I had done things to someone else's expectations, and in the end, I did not feel rewarded.

Hold it right there! Complacent? This word should not appear in my dictionary. Or let us just say

that when I found myself at that stage, I freaked.

Why am I here? What have I learned? Where am I going?

Questions that are so simple and yet so important.

I escaped to work-out regimes and exercises, which eventually led to a couple of half-marathon races and a 9-day bike-a-thon around the Island of Taiwan. I would consider these life-changing due to the fact that I had so much time to think on the roads instead of sitting at home falling asleep on the couch or drooling over merchandise in a shopping mall. And I had to write and reflect on the events so I could brag about it with some degree of 'depth'.

It was not long until I was sick of bragging about the races and (Ah! One of my running instructors just came in to Starbucks with a bunch of runners after their Sunday morning run when I am writing this! He would not recognize me now and I am so out of shape and wearing skirts and a pair of girly sandals. I had wondered if I might run in to them here. Was it premeditated? Or perhaps I knew coming here to work would revive my memory of when this practicum started forming, and that was pretty much the silent end of my active lifestyle. Serendipity 6/13/2010 9:47:27 AM) that bike-trip, since I have stopped doing it such a long time ago, it made me sound obnoxiously stupid. (Aw ... They look so happy ...)

Changing and shifting in time and in places best describes the life I lead and the thoughts I have.

I came across Heidegger's quote "... poetically man dwells ..." one day when I was reading a book article on conversations of architecture and poetry (cited in Pai & Tong, 2005). "Does not all dwelling remain incompatible with the poetic?" (Heidegger, 1971) and so I thought. Amongst our daily routines and regimens, we learn to romanticize them as 'rituals' to lift our spirits and go on with yet another dreadful day. So yes, when I walked along the tree-lined walkway between the engineering building and University Centre by myself, I imagined that I was strutting down the runway. Was I a plain loner or a poet in disguise?

The questions I raised for myself at the preliminary presentation were such questions like: what is landscape architecture? It must seem very strange to some people "what have you been doing or clearly, not been doing, to ask such a question after a one-year undergrad and two-year masters level landscape architectural education?"

Meanings change and shift with time and space, what I conceived in the past three years can flip and switch in the next second. That is what design and innovation is based upon, change. Change for the better. The often headed phrase "good enough is never good enough" does not insinuate

the low self-esteeming mindset, indeed it suggests that as a designer (or any walk of life on earth, really) we have to keep on learning, on being creative, and aim for the 'better'. There is no best. If there is a very best, it is only for the moment, the nanosecond, but definitely not forever. Humans are humans not because they are mortal; they are not eternal gods.

I honestly do not know how or what people write in the foreword to their work. Do they already know what they are setting out to do at the very beginning, like someone who already knows what they will pack three weeks before they travel? Or someone who waited and let things evolve slowly, organized in one's head and in the very last minute packs everything in under three hours? I have always admired the former type of person, because I am obviously the latter. I could never be sure what I will end up needing or I could never just follow a plan. I take a lot of detours which some people call - distractions. Is it such a bad thing? Or is it just a different type of process, if we all get on the plane with packed bags in time? (I am inspired to use the 'day-before-flight' metaphor because I have to get this foreword to my prof. before she boards a flight to cross the Atlantic Ocean in under 48 hrs! Yikes!)

My advisor hired me to become a teaching assistant (TA) for a course with her on Philosophy, Ethics, and Aesthetics - a new course being offered for the very first time. Besides my duty as a TA, I was thrilled to have another chance to sit in a classroom to learn and have conversations with other students - getting paid to do so was an absolute bonus. In fact this is probably the first time I felt I had enough time and energy to fully participate in a class, so I grabbed on to this opportunity tight. The course encouraged students to not just learn, but to think and to question what we have all learned in school. I was not confident at all when I accepted the offer, as I have not been the best student in the world; I remained silent at similar courses when I was taking them. But I thought, I can operate the photocopy machine, it should not be a problem. However by the end of the term I never did get the codes right for the photocopier in the main office that has label-missing keys. Hence, I did not photocopy a single sheet of paper for my 'boss' successfully.

If we do not think nor question what we have learned in class, what are we doing in university and how can we count knowledge as our own? How is that different from regurgitating someone else's ideas without digestion? And that then brought on my biggest fear since I heard the word 'plagiarism' in my freshman year and later 'originality' after I enrolled into the Environmental Design program. How to think is not part of our education back home in Taiwan. We followed the same route laid in front of us; exams required memorization over interpretation. Actually we were not allowed to interpret. It was easy to write a good essay at exams if you knew how to plug in all the phrases or idioms appropriately, especially once you knew that is all you needed to do to get a high mark. It does not matter whether the arguments were sincerely

yours, as long as they were 'politically' correct. This deviates far away from Confucian's teaching and philosophy while these educators were force-feeding 'Confucianism' word by word to their pupils from generations to generations.

One evening I had a phone conversation with my cousin who has just moved to Brooklyn. She spent the maximum time allowance to finish her master's thesis in graduate school while working at a government bureau in Taiwan. The job at a government bureau is a popular 'career' choice in Taiwan for the same reason that the country's education system has been degraded to producing robotic chickens. Taking more than two years for a master's degree is regarded as being outrageous! She did seem to understand the depression I am going through with this seemingly never-ending degree. She raised good points and shared valuable experiences with me that gave my fragmented thoughts congruency, that is, what we should learn in graduate school is to find your own way to study for the rest of your life. The learning process does not end when you finish your thesis/practicum. This is going to lead me to answer that question - "what is landscape architecture is to me". Write down whatever thoughts you have and, in the end they will come together and you will see how to make it coherent.

Writing was so difficult in the beginning, not that I do not know enough words or sentence structures to write in foreign language but I am afraid, I was so afraid of making mistakes that I thought by preventing myself from making them, I would not have to face them unless it was absolutely necessary. I did not have enough confidence in myself to stand up and to own my fear and shortcoming. At my last birthday, I made a decision to cut off certain bad habits. Like the year when I decided to give exercise a try - to renew my body and soul in the springtime. I have a journal where I write with a mechanical pencil using 0.3mm lead for my thoughts, etc. I also bought a notebook and fluid ink pen to write articles whenever I have enough words in my head to fill a page or two, I could blab on without correcting myself, while I head for the prize of finishing something.

My advisor is absolutely supportive when I showed her a few pieces of write-ups I did. When we met I would sit across from her, anxiously rubbing my palms, glancing at the expressions on her face, with ten thousand things running through my head like a marquee: "The grammar in your writing is way off! Why would you explain it that way? It doesn't make any sense. Did you write it before you come to see me this morning? You are not confident with your English writing skills and you should do something about it. Before you see me next time, please get someone to proofread for you. This thing you are writing has nothing to do with what you talked about at your preliminary presentation." None of that came out. And in fact, I heard the first positive comments about my writing in English that it was good and interesting. I did not believe what I heard. I sort of knew that when it was written in Chinese it is not a bad piece, but normally people get so turned off with my 'awkward English' that they do not bother to figure out what

I was trying to say. Let us just say that a little encouragement goes a long way. I started writing like nobody's business. I originally thought I would have more graphics than text, but what I ended up having is the other way around. I did not even know or care to know how many pages, or words I have accumulated over the past year.

I noticed that I started to use writing as a way to formulate my questions, or to communicate what is troubling me with others through written words. Another half year passed, and a friend told me she was leaving Winnipeg for good by the end of the year. We had just met and got along well for a few months before she announced her leave. I could not help but to wonder why? Winnipeg! I have wanted to get out of this silly place since my flight first landed and I got out of the airport with my stern host-mother. All I wanted was to get a diploma, and leave. Who knew I would end up staying behind when everyone else who came around the same time left the city one by one for many different reasons. Whereas I had no other reasons to leave and I was grounded here with this master's degree for five more years. I was quite sentimental the day when it occurred to me that I am left by myself alone in this vast and barren place again I wrote a poem with a pen in my notebook using a tree as a metaphor for my circumstance, for I was a seed that had blown away and landed here. Slowly my roots grew and grounded me forever. The birds and flowers come and go, but the tree is still here, standing alone.

I went to see my advisor with one paragraph translated in English and explained to her what happened since our last meeting. She loved the idea of the grounded tree opposed to the groundless birds (which I was totally not thinking of at the time), and she encouraged me to translate the entire story and expand my thoughts on the trees. I was skeptical about how much I could do with the topic. What is there to know about 'trees', and then a great idea bloomed in my bathroom - during my shower - I played the hopeful student and the skeptical mom at the same time, to just explore the possibilities of trees in our surroundings. Whether it is providing shade, telling us the time and direction, or perhaps its poise, the meanings it inspires, right down to the fruits and seeds growing from it which of course links back to both food and landscape architecture. Trees/plants, fire/light/energy, water, stones and metal are elements of the basic landscape language that we tend to take for granted and overlook.

The craziness that goes on in my head can only be sorted out at dawn. Sometimes these thoughts do more damage than good. This voice checks in every minute with me, whenever I feel either uncertain or too certain. At times they are my voice, at other times they are the voice of what I imagine that my friends, family or enemies would say to me. When I watched the movie *Girl, Interrupted* (1999) I realized that the Lisa character is the voice in my head. And in *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), I realized that these voices never existed or had taken over my thoughts before I started university here. In a way they could be my imagery friends who kept me company all

these years living and eating by myself. At first when I included weird thoughts in the lighter gray colour in this document it was mostly for fun and a way to let my professor know what was going through my mind without my having to waste time remembering and explaining it. "They would not make it to the final document anyway, at least not like this!" Those grayed texts became quite entertaining and my professor never said anything bad about them, and I believe they help the reader to understand me a little more. And sometimes they are a way to tell the reader where the idea comes from originally, which is neither plagiarized nor it is meant to be contrived. Thus I presumed there is a place for these voices in my practicum, and Lisa - inspired by *Girl, Interrupted* - is the name of that voice.

While Lisa continually occupied my thoughts, I reflected upon the trips I have been on, and the foods I have eaten on the trips. I realized what makes the trips exciting and memorable for me and why I have taken photos, was really always about food, friends, and landscape. Soon that became the mainstay of my life, and the practicum became about my life. Since this is a practicum focusing on perhaps a personal design/philosophy, I took notice of the importance of perception which is changed by time and place (space). I began to recognize the serendipitous events that constitute my decision making within design. Intuition plays a big part in the recognition of these events for me. It opened my mind and let the possibilities come in.

Because I am trying to form a personal design framework from an elementary point of view, I started by looking at picnics for food and landscape architecture - dining in the wild - or with foods that can be consumed in a constantly changing environment, that is highly depended on mobility. What better way to create an element specific to landscape architecture like bento boxes? The bento box is generally a take-along meal in a box to be consumed away from home, whether it is in a classroom, an office, at a picnic, or on a moving train. A specific site is not necessary for this practicum, it is a demonstration/exercise of element specific creations achieved through layers of design approaches. It began as a landscape architectural picnic that could be employed any where (location), any time (season).

Having settled on the format of landscape bento gave creativity a dimension to play. The last thing on the itinerary is to find the path to happiness and to find the way to transcend and inspire happiness in others. I believe strongly and passionately that landscape architecture is a discipline that aims to inspire happiness in others, having the capacity and generosity to share the aesthetics through a mindful mediation between human culture(s) and the brilliance of nature.



jelly-bean landscape bento

ingredients: vanilla counterpoints, rootbeer earth, margarita plants, plum rock

The SWEETEST thing ...

To my committee,

Vincent deBritto, for taking great interest and support in the subject I am working on, you have shown so much trust in someone unknown, and for sharing your passion for food. Thank you!

Richard Perron, if it was not you, I would not have thought of applying for grad school, or stayed around after so many 'episodes' of devastations to come. I have always wondered about those marks you gave me, as in, do I deserve the grade for the level of completion? But now I see, you were not kidding when you said that you encourage students to make assumptions and focus on the process of creative thinking. Thank you!

Marcella Eaton (Marcy), every time I think about putting down the words about how thankful I am, I start crying. I am crying because when I write this acknowledgement, it also means the end of our official relationship as teacher and student. You probably do not remember this conversation we had back in ED2 (then), I said "I want to learn ...", and you replied "I want to teach, and I am here to teach." You have gave me the education of a lifetime, and granted me more than I would dare to ask for. Your capacity to love and care for students who come to your door has wowed me. You reached out to me when I was lost in the endless tunnel all alone, which makes you a Bodhisattva! School may have ended, but you will always be my family. Thank you for your graciousness of sharing your time and space with me. Thank you!

To my family and my extended family, Niang (mom) and lao-ba (pa), da-ma (auntie), da-ba (uncle), and my cousins - Shao-ling jie, and Kan ge. You give me life, and you nurture and teach me great values and always watch over me. My memory of coming home to a hot meal and sitting around the dining table has been with you. You are what happiness is all about! Thank you!

To my friends,

Ya-Shan and Yu-Fang, my best buddies since high school, thank you for the laughter and entertainment that never run out. Allie, Andrea, Andrew, Mary, and Xiaoyu (Cindy), thank you for your kindness, generosity, and forgiveness! Kelly, Yoshi and Yuko, your intelligence and attention to details are incredible, thank you for sharing them with me over so many wonderful meals the city has to offer. Yin, you opened my eyes about vegetarianism, you showed me it is not just delicious, but also doable. It has been a life-changing experience for me. Thank you for your friendship and those vegetarian lunches you brought from home.

And last but not least,

The Venerable Hwei-Shen, for your wisdom and compassion that lead us through the fast-lane on the spiritual passage and our daily-life as human beings, by using the simplest language and everyday examples to teach. Thank you! Amitabha!



## Introduction

A creative passion in my life has been food. While studio projects often stifled my creativity, I could always have an open, endless creative relationship with food and cooking. What blocked my studio work? And what blocks other very clearly creative students studio work? What does doubt have to do with this? These questions led me to understand and see the relationship between food and the land more clearly. The journey helped me to see landscape architecture in a different light. It helped me to reignite my passion for design. It led me to understand that all students who are cast in their own moments of doubt might ask themselves the following questions: what is landscape architecture? what is design and what is creativity? What does happiness have to do with it?

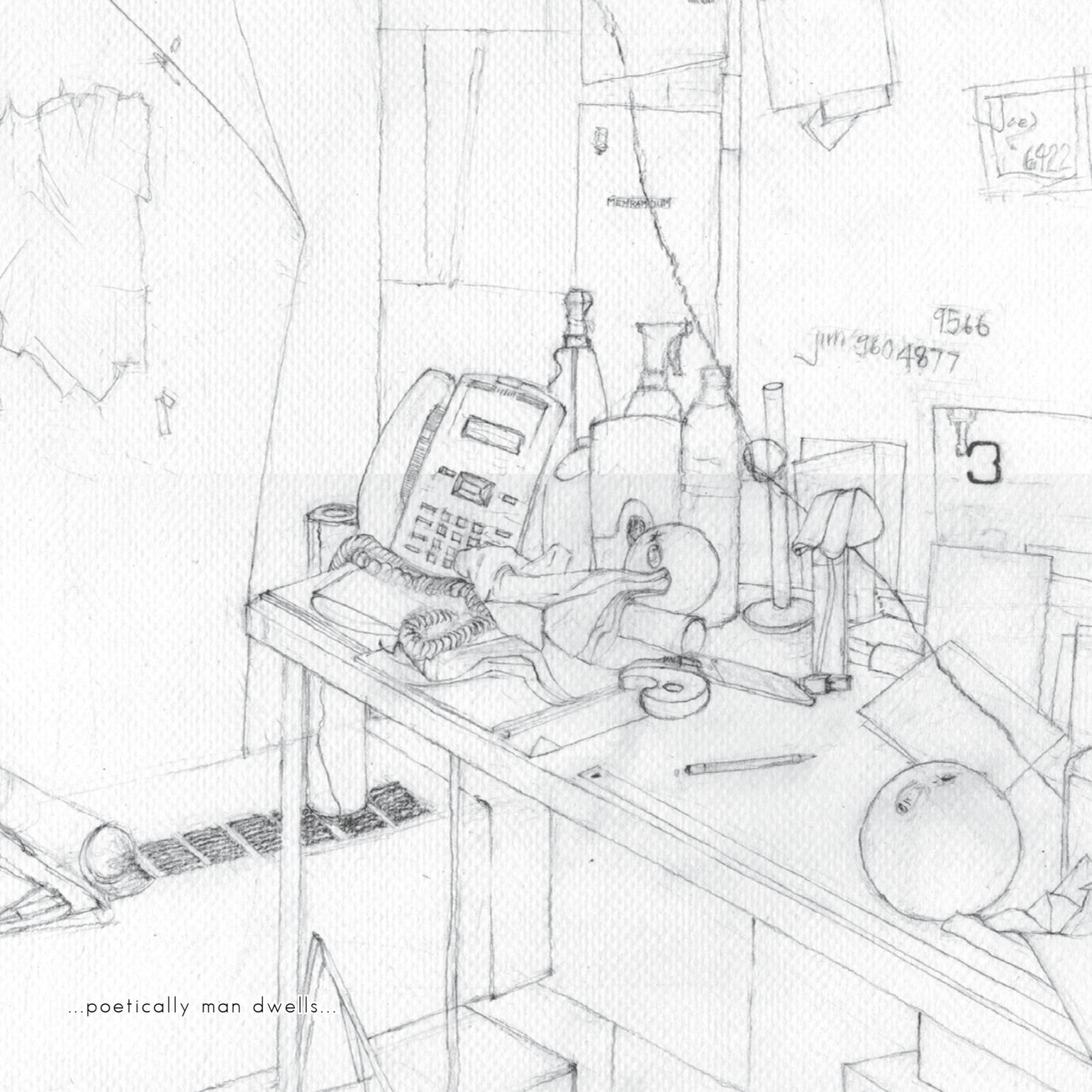
To move through writer's block, I started writing in the first person. I thought how design, environment, cooking and food are related to my thoughts in moments of pause. Are things and ideas somehow connected to each other, but we just do not take the time to notice? And as students are we just too caught up in moments of doubt and deadlines to understand?

Living in a foreign country to study has provided an opportunity to reflect more closely on my own culture. Though we share similar values, daily life at home differs from Canada. There is less space and more people. I go to the Temple rather than the Church. The sounds and scents of the streets full with life and people, seem an affirmation of life. Memories of sharing food with classmates from our bento boxes at lunch are an embodiment of cherished values. The bento boxes organize carefully prepared food. Presentation of food is as important as the nutritional value of food.

When we have the will to inspire happiness in other people, an embodiment of heart/mind is evident. I believe that this is also true of good design. This helped to clarify and organize my thoughts. The bento box is a reflection of this from my culture. The term 'bento' originated in Japan, which influenced Taiwanese in the early 20th century during colonization. It is a simple form that I used to experiment with the creative process to deepen my understanding of landscape architecture. It gave me freedom to create set pieces within the context of the box.

Are these then landscapes without context? No. They are evidence of a process of thought and of landscapes created for distinct clients. They follow a process not dissimilar to cooking. Does this then imply that cooking is the important metaphor? No. The importance is to understand personal passions, desires and most importantly values.

This explicit intellectual activity could be viewed as a useful device for all students.



...poetically man dwells...

a la carte

## Blogging serendipity

29/03/2010 3:56:27 PM Crystallized Ginger

I received a bundle of cake slices wrapped in wax paper. It was the first day after a dreadful weekend. An unintended phone-call from overseas nearly destroyed my spirit. Some way to wipe out a perfect sunny day which I had planned for non-stop bread and pastry making. In the dark, I cried faintly ... please do not let the dimming light go out ...

Inately, I laid on the broken couch (god I have yet to throw that out) and switch the channels abusively. Then there she is, Nicole Kidman and her famous nose from *The Hours* (2002), I stopped my overactive index finger and watched it to the end. The next day I found it online and watched the entire movie. I stayed and watched closely for the first half I missed the night before, and then I went back to the kitchen to test the possibilities of one simple soda cracker dough. That test did not work out as imagined; the rest of day I slowly ate my failure and made it disappear.

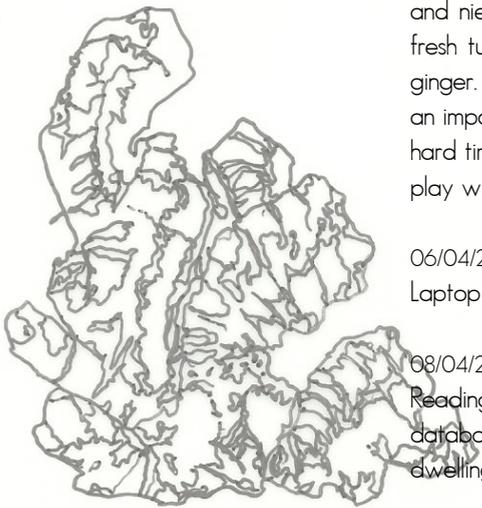
As I opened the wax paper, oh my! Is that candied ginger decorating the crown of the loaf, glistening on top of this baked brown cake! I broke a chunk off the bread with the bright yellow pieces ... it is candied ginger, the one Virginia Wolfe insisted the maid ... Nelly ... ride a train from Sussex to London to buy, which goes with China Tea, as a treat for her nephews and niece. She called them '*ginger*', which in my head appeared to be raw, skin-attached, fresh tuber dug up from soil. Soon I found out Virginia Wolfe was referring to crystallized ginger. Of course, the English did not cook their dishes with ginger back then. Ginger was an imported commodity and treated as a delicacy by preserving it. As most of us still have a hard time comprehending chocolate in savoury sauce called mole - not enough ingredients to play with, so to speak.

06/04/2010 5:11:46 PM Typewriter

Laptop is broke. Play with typewriter. 50th anniversary of photocopying. In that order.

08/04/2010 4:19:30 PM Time Ingold

Reading Lines: A Brief History. Dosing off ... Related titles from Routledge. BISON library database. Titles by Tim Ingold. Loads of related research. Hunter-gatherer, pastoral, environment, dwelling, creativity ...



01/05/2010 Terminology

morning Jeffrey Steingarten, the (scary) food writer

Cleaning the living room before guests coming over for takoyaki party. Last year's Vogue magazine fell open on the page with illustration of melting cheese on toast ... I never paid any attention to the articles in Vogue except for the photos of current fashion trend ... not really a purchase guide, merely an assurance that the clothes I already had are still wearable and not raising eyebrows if I had to walk out on the streets ... okay, back to the topic ... that article is a food column by Jeffrey Steingarten a.k.a. 'The Man Who Ate Everything' ... also one of my least favourite judges on Iron Chef America ... What does this mean man have to say? In *Vogue*? Bah!

I was sort of outraged ... I stopped what I had been doing and sat on the toilet to read ... soon I realize ... I might have found a kindred spirit in the weirdest place and time anyone can imagine ... the toilet and a past-issue fashion magazine. and all ... just the way Steingarten describes food and their making ... and how the way of making changed the way it tastes ... hmm ... and finally the way he rectified terminology that's used without care in the food-writers circle ... you know what Mr. Steingarten? I think we will get along quite well ...

06/05/2010 4:07:28 PM Photocopying Accident

accidentally hit 40 copies on photocopy machine ... it shot out 9 copies before I pressed down on the cancel button ... I get to collage in accordance to the following statement on the same page I photocopied: "An edition about 12,000 copies of *Intuition* was made between 1968 and 1985, with variations in timber and nails." (Hamilton & Todoli, 2009)

5/20/2010 3:47:32 PM Beauty

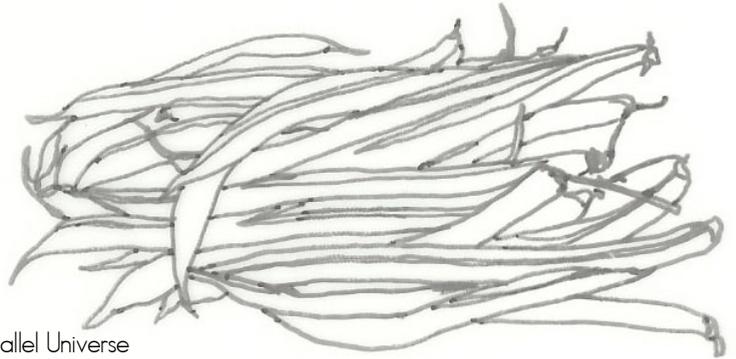
bugged by the need to find support to complete my assumptions ... I felt like reading about 'beauty' again ... few hours later I found just the quote from J. Ruth Gendler's *Notes on the Need for Beauty* (2007)

5/21/2010 3:00:03 PM Watched Over

another Ruth Gendler moment ... solved my life-long question ... okay that was over exaggerating ... a theory I've had for months ... beautifully proven ... makes me wonder if someone's watching over me ...

5/21/2010 3:18:48 PM More Books, Please

Then another life-long search of packaging templates ... someone dropped by the office and showed us the book she got ... now in my shopping cart on Amazon ...



5/21/2010 4:25:26 PM Parallel Universe

replied to a blog entry with an excerpt from Gendler's book I just read ... parallel universe ...

5/26/2010 3:14:04 PM Mirror

mirror, mirror, on the wall ... Ruth Gendler I should have just read your book first ... on the contrary, I like the way our thoughts collide at the end of the journey of thoughts ...

20/08/2010 12:38:21 PM Time, Place, Cuisine

receiving email about a book release entitled: *Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine (2010)* ... right when I took a break from outlining the intermediate presentation ... now that's just creepy ... Time. Place. Cuisine?

17/09/2010 12:29:19 PM Green Beans

reading the history of The Fat Duck in *The Fat Duck Cookbook (2009)*, to the section which Heston Blumenthal talks about his job as a restaurant apprentice that he has mountains of green beans to 'top and tail' and " ... that was not the only time green beans played a decisive part..." in his life ... I happened to grabbed a bag of green beans yesterday right after I entered the shop ... simply because, I love green beans, they are versatile, sautee-ing, making risotto, or making inari or onigiri, besides, they are particularly fresh yesterday, just the perfect quantity I had in mind, they were calling out to me.

Early this morning, I found confluence with the 'start over' statement in this book which states it's what cuisine is about.

18/10/2010 5:33:31 PM Soul Mates

Could Heston Blumenthal be a Gemini? Let me have a look on the internet ...

Wikipedia says ... "Heston Marc Blumenthal OBE (born 27 May 1966 in London ..."

Ah-ha!

## Twittering happiness

It's 5:24pm and I can still see the light outside , I'm happy. 2/17/2010 5:26:24 PM

Received parcels on time by friendly UPS gentleman. Books and L'Occitane make it feel like heaven. 3/3/2010 3:09:58 PM

Found postcards and letter in my real mailbox. 3/3/2010 3:11:30 PM

Cleaned up the desktop and changed the wallpaper first thing in the morning.3/18/2010 11:23:04 AM

The smell of fresh prints 3/18/2010 1:43:41 PM

Found the use for the binocular bought for Field Ecology ... spying ... mwahahaha 3/21/2010 3:08:45 PM

Realized I haven't been twittering happily since March 21 ... so to pretend ... 3/31/2010 1:27:07 PM

Got permission not to turn written words into paragraphs 4/19/2010 10:09:44 PM

Too busy to think to compare to slow down to enjoy ... happiness never really left in the past month ... 5/20/2010 3:59:45 PM

Print off all the write-ups and exhale 6/1/2010 1:43:38 AM

Aesthetically yummy

My mother always says 'Japanese sweets always look pretty and delicious until you take a bite of it. It is sickly sweet!'

She is right yet not necessarily correct. Japanese sweets are an incredible feast to the eye, they are sickly sweet and it is not the level of sweetness Chinese are used to.

Having said that, Japanese sweets are not to be eaten the same way as Chinese sweets. Especially not the gulping style my mother partakes in.

Do I recall seeing her using a tiny dessert spoon to scrap down the sides of cake piece or a scoop of ice cream? Or seeing her gently puts the content on her tongue and lets it melt until all the taste buds are enveloped in the heavenly syrup, followed by a sip of tea to mellow the sensations that just happened inside the mouth?

Never.

Actually the ice cream scoop is her dessert spoon, and a gulp of tea from a Grande mug is more like her style.

It is not that Japanese sweets are not tasty; it is the way they are eaten and what they are eaten with. It is not a kind of hand-held food you would see at a carnival, night market, or at an outdoor festival. You have to sit down in a quiet setting, cut them into smaller pieces and tastes, and after finishing the sweets, a sip of a strong tea balances the over-stimulated palate.

My mother praises Taiwanese snacks, which are tasty, uncomplicated with balanced flavour - this sounds like the criteria for a perfect lover. The packaging is generally utilitarian such as paper bag that absorbs grease, and plastic bags to hold liquids. It seemed ordinary to me when I was back home. After living on this other continent for so many years, this packaging becomes nostalgic and quite memorable; they are saying, 'eat me! I am authentically Taiwanese!'

Paper makes everything tastes better!

Is it because papers are made from wood. Wood - trees - plants - soil ?

In my experience, the best tastes I had are foods wrapped in paper. The moment heat and grease hits the wrapper, it emits its scent (the scent of paper). When you take a bite of the food, you not only taste the food but also sniff the paper, at the same time, you hear the sound of the paper, crumpled by your hands. Chump!

I have never had *pomme frites* held up in a cone made of newspaper, but I can just imagine how wonderful it tastes, that is the sensorial connection I can relate to. I miss kettle corn in a



cardboard cup. Nowadays, you buy a bag of popcorn from the mall or the theatre and the bag is covered with 'food grade barrier coating' made of silicone. Visually it is still paper, and it has the good intention of trying to prevent the grease from seeping out. But the unique chemistry of hot oil hitting paper has been lost forever. Is it really worth it, I ask?

Here is a thought ... What happens when we have good design intentions, have improved upon certain qualities, but this aesthetics is not shared by our users?  
Can we really design a meaningful landscape? Who is to say that the design is meaningful?

Back

writing day ...  
not an Office Sprite today but a less charming Bed Bug ...  
my back ... it is my silly back

when you think everything goes into the place it should be, something will jump out of the line  
and knock you down, way down  
my eyesight is now 90cm from the floor  
it was even lower when I laid with my back against the floor, my legs resting high on the chair  
suddenly, I opened my eyes and smiled like a child  
no railing, no building, no parking lots in sight  
just pure blue sky framed between the window sill and drapery  
what a lovely day ... I think  
it does not matter that I am nearly bed-bound ...  
I have an ever-changing picture frame keeping me company, resolution is infinite, the size of the  
frame is 24" x 36"  
Carpe diem ... 'savour' the moment

"Tectonics"

I went to the JAR building to drop off a book. At the turn by the staircase I had a glimpse of a  
presentation proceeding in centre space: a poster with eight glorified letters spelled T-E-C-T-O-  
N-I-C. I wondered when the last time I used a word like that. It's fun to throw around jargons  
all over the place, sometimes.

Is there a life after the jargons?

Last weekend I went through my old scattered documentation CDs from ED1, it required a lot  
of energy and courage. They haunt me every night in my sleep and every step I take, when  
I try to make the next design move, it occurs to me the phase when I failed to make positive  
impression on others.

I was wrong. Like a young person who thinks success is to have obscene amount of money, could  
not see anything beneath the surface. I was not looking for money but seeking nothing less than  
ridicule, feeding my engorged ego-gland. Sure we all say we do not value the extrinsic, but  
indeed we subconsciously mask over our uneasiness and insecurity with flashy diction.

Hmm

Hmm...

Lots of deleting ... found myself in a ranting-and-typing spiral so I cut it off ...  
Of course, last week was hectic and the remnant ripples are still in effect.  
Stress over work, mailing, injury, relationships, studying, and the paycheque ...

I have made a decision to leave the job after the holiday rush.

For the first time in my life, I feel books are the answer to my troubles and studying is my beacon

People always said to me, being a student is the simplest time you can enjoy, savour it! Wait until you start to work ...

I just could not comprehend back then.

Why am I justifying my action?

I feel the juices flowing, the deadline approaching, and ... and ...

Did I say that before already?

However I feel certain this time ...

Pathetic, Sun. Re.al.ly pa.the.tic

Realization

True happiness in life is to retain humbleness and die peacefully

For humble is not pretentious

For humble is the original state we are born with

For humble is the highest form of self-realization and accomplishment

For humble is knowing and understandin

For life is a journey you want to come home at the end of the day, not drifting into the unknown

## Creating Lisa

Though I missed Lisa, life was easier without her.  
A thought is a hard thing to control.  
All I know is that I began to feel again.  
Crazy? Sane?  
Whatever I was, I knew there was only one way back to the world ...  
... and that was use the place ...  
... to talk

-*Girl, Interrupted* (Wick, 1999)

Lisa is an imaginary friend, Russell Crowe's character's cheery roommate in *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), enemy, frien-emy, that villainous character which got Angelina Jolie an Oscar in *Girl, Interrupted* (Wick, 1999), who pushes buttons , taunts, laughs, screams, that little voice you and I love to hate and hate to love ...

I find 'Lisa' indispensable from my research. I tried too hard to shut her up, never realizing that by being different from her has shaped the way I think, I walk, and I eat. Lisa is the solid where I form the void. Always cynical, always self-righteous, always confident, mostly a liar in disguise, a wimp in denial, a lost puppy who is desperate for adoption and friendship ...

I love her straightforwardness, I envy her confidence, and I loathe her untruthful friendship.

Once I realized what kind of character Lisa was, I gained a new-found attitude. She is no different than anyone else. She questions my question, and helps me reinforce a thoughtful idea. This is what Lisa does, a side-note on the margin, always cynical, making me seem less self-righteous.

## Lisa #2

I dreaded this day to read through Lisa #2's practicum. Bashing her work without really reading closer is quite unfair.

Lisa #2 finished her practicum years ago. We were good friends then. At the time I was having so much trouble with reading and writing, with a few incomplete courses on hand. I did not have a chance read it through until our friendship dissolved, however I did comment on the images she produced. I hesitated to look at it, as hearing Lisa #2's name, or things about her being mentioned, would drive me up the wall.

However, yesterday at undergrad presentation, something got into me. I headed straight to the library and pulled practica from the shelves, including Lisa #2's.

I spent the morning reading it.

It is amazing how you feel about a person can change the way you read their work ... for me, I am indeed biased.

Something that once felt so imaginative now seems contrived...the unconstraint groundless and unsubstantiated...the childish charm self-indulgent and arrogant  
I simply had to hold my prejudice aside as much as possible for the duration of the read.  
Successful? Not quite.

At 12:20 pm, I thought the writing was quite strong to the point that I almost switched to Team  
But I wonder what meaning it will generate overtime, or rather, will it get diminish, built over  
before its novel fruition?

If the design component is so insignificant or treated thus way I question that whether or not Lisa  
#2 needs a site? Or a design?

And all those silly questions I 'sort of' settled were raised again ... this is exactly what happens  
when one tries to meet with their demons face on ... Pandora's Box of quick-spreading infectious  
disease, knocks one right down.

Do I need to pick a site now? Do I need to write the way Lisa #2 did? How many more books  
do I need to read? Will my design look better? Do I need to design at all? Why do all of my  
writings lack of published resources and intellectual debates?

All these non-questions which I thought were out of the way!

I took a few minutes to flip through a couple practica done by others which were recommended  
by my advisor a while back.

Phew ...

I did need to read over Lisa #2's work, to get that agonizing load off my shoulder, not putting  
more back on. These questions I previously asked myself have been answered; and I shall continue  
to do my practicum my way, period.

New page /new chapter

if last week was a whirlwind ...

this week must be a full-moon lying somewhere within ... literally, it is so frantic and non-productive

I did not get to check out the sky during the day or the moon at night

until yesterday on our way to Yoga, a friend mentioned her wicked (in the bad way) encounters the day before with ex-boyfriend and soon-to-be ex-friend

"It must be a full-moon", she said

on the same day I received an answer about my unprocessed online order

on the same day I thought about a friend could help me getting the seasoning from the same supplier

on the same day I went out for dinner with someone I thought I probably would not have dinner with again

two days later I found a letter in my real mailbox (is it not annoying that nowadays when someone mentions a mailbox, it can be either real or virtual? Most of time they meant the virtual electronic mailbox?)

from the friend whom I imagined could help me with the purchasing

in the letter she mentioned the same supplier opening up a shop in her town before then we have not talked since last November

asking for help with buying stuff only exists in my imagination

but I needed to tell her the story and the whole story

trying to catch up on lost time

I dare not to repeat what I mentioned in that email

Tumbling down the rabbit hole again was not pretty

The nagging feeling bothered me until this morning.

It is Thursday. Not the brightest day we have seen this spring.

Stupid.

It is unfortunate enough that in order to catch up with an old friend I had to go over the unhappy things happened to me in the past

Then letting it bother me like that is not worth it ... again ... I have to remind this to myself over and over ...

My life has turned a new page

Maybe not the new *chapter* my mother wants me to be in  
But hopefully soon ...  
Sometimes I wish I would never be contacted by the past (or even the barely present)  
But it has been written,  
published and distributed  
There may be several editions coming out in the future ...  
But what has been said has been said  
It cannot be taken back

Maybe sometimes I do have to look up the things written before I continue writing  
For life is not really random (a word I very much hate to use in my vocabulary)  
Everything is miraculously connected  
Random is an irresponsible way to speak about something that has happened  
I believe everything happens for a reason; a series of events can be serendipitous, but never random.  
Random is when one does not want to put in any effort to describe or to blatantly refuse recognising the world around oneself  
It is like throwing out jargon without giving definitions, meanings, and context to a landscape architecture project.

'*Constant flux*' - constantly heard at presentations.

Sometimes I see the designer standing beside their boards with ultra-legible text ...  
Who is talking about how just by watching everything change, they are unable to do anything but call it a '*constant flux*'.  
My question would be: 'are you not in this process as well?' 'If not, what are you doing here to begin with?' Then why not just *wonder away!*

Wonder is clearly an immediate category, and involves no reflection upon itself. Doubt, on the other hand, is a reflection-category. If a later philosopher said 'Philosophy begins with wonder', he was straightaway in continuity with the Greeks. They had wondered, he wonders also; they had perhaps wondered at one thing, he at another. But whenever a later philosopher repeats or utters the words 'Philosophy begins with doubt', the continuity is broken, for doubt is precisely a polemic against what has gone before. (Kierkegaard, 2001)

A few days later I found this quote by Jeffrey Steingarten (2009), who will share with me the angst against reluctant word-usage in culinary world:

When used in savory dishes, brown butter is nearly universally described as "nutty". I

hate that. Do they mean that it smells like a walnut or a peanut (not a true nut anyway), a brazil nut or a pistachio, a coconut or a macadamia or a pine nut, an almond or a beech, a cashew or a chestnut or a pili nut or, in a actual fact, the very hazelnut herself? Are they referring to a raw nut or a roasted nut, and if the latter, has the nut been dry-roasted, pan-roasted, oven-roasted, or just deep-fried? People who describe a food as nutty, whether they're lazy laymen or slothful food writers, don't really have much of anything in mind. They can't think of a better word, and rather than ponder and ruminate and rack their brains, they type out the word nutty. I know - I've done it myself. But never again! (Nevertheless, I won't deny that my continue use of the word delicious is anything but slothful when I use it to describe delicious food.) (P. 138)

## Critical thinkers

Yesterday's undergraduate presentation was inspiring. Students took what they have learned in our theory class to convey each of their own thinking process through design. The visual impact of the work they produced, needless to say, absolutely amazing, stunning and unique. They are graduating with the most powerful tool: thinking.

At the presentation I see critical examination of their site, not just the spatial site, but also the community they are designing for. Compelling ideas with thoughtful details operated with good ethics. Aesthetically communicating with their audience/community, the space of the site, and translated these qualities into beautiful designs. I didn't hear the usual: "maybe, like, kind of, came up with this idea, I pulled an all-nighter, I'm just trying to wing this presentation." Nope, they are confident and composed. They are now independent thinkers and professional speakers.

Then I thought, when you employed all three elements in your design process: aesthetics, philosophy, and ethics; you have developed the confidence to present your idea. You have doubts because you have concerned about ethics. You have consulted with doubts through philosophy (owned or borrowed). And last not least, you created a design with all-around beauty which we sometimes call aesthetics. There is only place for fear if that is the idea you are trying to convey through your design, not as a presenter of your own project.

How I wish I was like them when I was their age ...

## Force-fed ducks

Students, we are  
Force-fed sedative morbidly obese ducks  
What we are is what we eat ... or rather how we eat  
Learning creativity ... or rather learning how to be creative  
The creative mind is imbedded with the notion of recognizing possibilities  
Force-feeding ideas ...  
Results in regurgitating ideas ...

## Professions

I walked out the dentist office yesterday with a \$314 bill and an aching jaw ... the first thing I wanted to do was to go home and hug my pillow. "weep"  
I wondered on my way back to study ... with the pain persisting between my cleaned teeth and gum ... someone said to me last week that dentistry pays well but it is "such an icky job to have" ... I can see now ... I could not decide if I whole-heartedly appreciate my hygienist's work because now I am suffering too much pain that I did not have before I went into the office ... regardless I am holding a goodie bag filled with 2 toothbrushes, some Advil, and a tiny case of dental-floss ...  
I should feel happy and content ... but I was not ... even everyone at the dental office tried their best to make my visit friendly and pleasant ... and my insurance covered most of the cost ... still ... for the first time in a very long time, I lost my appetite ...  
I pay less to go to a spa and walked out feeling pampered and serene ... even when the staffs who work there are a little snobby ...  
They say landscape architecture is a profession that makes people happy... I will keep that in mind  
In two weeks I will get another alarmingly painful reminder appointment ... reminding me why I want to be a landscape architect again and how I should design ... and please freeze my gums, freeze them good and numb ...

## Instilling Doubt

We have been reading closely and discussing Johannes Climacus or: A Life of Doubt in the course  
I am TA-ing (as a teaching assistant)

Have I always doubted?

Have I not?

Not always?

Sometimes?

Often?

Rarely?

Sporadically?

It is quite interesting ... where I come from ... oh where I come from ... we were told ... at least back in my days, never to doubt the grownups, never to doubt your teachers ... we are only allowed to think otherwise unless we are asked to.

Mind that, they are older, hence wiser, better, right and more than right, even if they are wrong they are right, they are right to be wrong.

Who dictates good or bad, right or wrong?

Not me, I was raised to be a literal no-brainer.

I started out having faith in people and things, I only begin to doubt when I am disappointed by them.

Is this the kind of doubt we were discussing with the students in class?

Doubt 'doubt'?

Why do all religions preach about faith?

"... for if one were to preach doubt in order to awaken doubt in another, he might thereby evoke faith, just a faith, conversely, might evoke doubt" (Kierkegaard, 2001), says Johannes.

A student of our class asked: "can one be 'human' without ever doubting?"

For my understanding, I am to have faith in the 'book of faith' (mine is a 'sutra'), but then I start doubting, not in the book itself, because I stand behind my religion, believing it tells truth and only truth. We are sharing the same standpoint; I look around the world I am situated within and I zoom in on myself; doubt if I judge others according to the value advertised in the sutra, so then I myself am nothing more than a hypocritical senseless recitalist?

As I pondered upon these questions, that student came in the room, the same person who asked "can one be 'human' without ever doubting?"

He came in to hand in his assignment after the class. A force of behavior/out of curiosity, I quickly opened the pages and tried to skim through before I placed it with the other assignments organized on the light table. There was a photo of an old couple laughing and holding each other, they look like they have known each other for their entire life! It has the same quality of the photo Marcy showed to us earlier this morning in class, of families. I paused and read the text under the photo and found a block of text that is quite interesting:

"If Gene had gone to college, we wouldn't have had the interesting life that we've had"

a life built together, viewed in retrospect. (Littlefield, 2010)

"Her story is our story. And our story is God's story. So many of us have been conditioned to think of our faith as solely an issue of us and God. But faith is a communal experience. A shared journey. I have heard people say their stories are not exciting. I can only imagine how deeply offended God is with comments like this. Not exciting? If the story is about me, then yes, it is only exciting to a certain degree. But the point of our stories and our faith journeys is that they are about something much bigger. (Bell, 2005)"

That's my serendipity of the day, March 24th, 2010.

I instilled myself with faith that by recording the moments of happiness and serendipity I encountered through a period of time, I would have clearer view on life by the end of the journey.

Leaving this writing behind for a week ... things had changed ... everything I believed in, turned its back on me ... faith?

Faith slashed me across the face and made sure it cuts, deep.

Who am I to question faith? Who am I to have doubt? I am nothing if I do not finish this practicum. I should not have a minute of doubt to get it done. "What do you have to ponder? Just get it done!"

The journey I am making means nothing. My value means nothing. The cross I bear is unnecessary. "Just get it done!"

What if ... (in fact,) this practicum is about the journey I am making, my value maybe is not your value, and why do I make it as difficult for myself as possible?

Suddenly, my world darkened ... Doubt why I am here still wondering/ thinking/ struggling with a different language/ time management / money issues ...

## Eat Drink Man Woman

My love for Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) is everlasting. To calculate the times I have watched this movie is not probable. The first time I saw it on free movie channel I fell in love with it, and I watched it every time it came on the television, of course, to a point I would have to wait until no one else was at home. I have sickened my parents with my repetitive movie-watching disorder.

When I lived across from the University of Winnipeg in 1999, there was a Blockbuster near my apartment. One night I went there and browsed through the shop floor, and I found *Eat Drink Man Woman* on the shelf! To my amazement I rented it. You can imagine by now, how hard I cried, when I watched it in a foreign place, and in a different time zone.

The hustling scooters, high-rise commercial buildings, humble old houses nestled in the newly developed high-density residential units, family dinners, intermingled food cultures, street foods, re-defined relationships, the passing of the elderly and the birth of younger generation, the conflict and tension between the characters, what is on the surface and what is hidden below ... oh I could just watch ten thousand times more.

The movie surrounds the main character, Lao-Chu ... a retired master chef of the top hotel of the country, and his three daughters. The retired widower has many secrets, losing his sense of taste for one. Each daughter has distinct personalities and problems. The intricate network of family, friends, and colleagues. Perceived intentions are challenged as the film proceeds, the ending is always a surprise to the audience as well as the characters in the storyline. The family has a mandatory dinner every weekend, when Lao-Chu prepares elaborate dishes that is enough for ten people. With everyone present at the dinner, it is the best time to 'announce' important news to the family. The audience are wowed by the Sunday 'feast' however, the unfazed look on the characters' faces are equally interesting to watch. Everytime when Lao-Chu tries to announce the 'news', something would interrupt the dinner or Lao-Chu's mood.

The round dining table is the centre of the film, and symbolized the place where we observe the four basic elements of human relations described by Chinese . They are, *bei* (悲) - sorrow, *huan* (歡) - joy, *li* (離) - separation, and *he* (合) - gather.

If we were to design a landscape like writing a screenplay, what would it be like? Who are the characters in the landscape? And what kind of relation and interaction will these character have with the site, and each other? How do they move through the space? Does the landscape design tell a story for the audience to explore? Getting surprised, even? Which component is the centre of attention in this landscape? Can our design invoke emotions in others?

## No-Food for thought

Recently a yogi from India who claimed he had not consumed any food or water or urinated for 70 years got a lot of media attention. Research and examinations of this person, Prahlad Jani, are being done in a monitored hospital unit.

One theory says it is not impossible for human to live on other energy resources, such as sunlight.

The news and tests raised many doubts ... including my own ... but mainly I was thinking that such an ability would save my fresh-produce and grocery bill! No more forgetting my lunch or tea tumbler at home when I rush to get out and catch the bus ... would that not be great?

Jokes and extreme-fasting aside ... let me make a humongous assumption here ...

Could it be possible that a person eats less without feeling deprivation in a different environment setting?

Mainly I am thinking as an overeating city-person. This assumption may or may not apply to people who are already living in a relaxed and naturally bountiful environment.

People I know overeat. If they seem to eat sensible portion at mealtime, they may either be a snacker/grazer or they watch their diet closely.

If we are under a lot of stress, we over-eat, or some under-eat. If we haven't slept well, we overeat.

And that seems to be the common life of people in our design school ... stressed out, not enough sleep, and overeat ... surprise surprise.

This assumption I am making has some background ideas I have gathered over the years. Let us call this a field-study.

My professor and her husband spend time in a barn in UK's country side, at a property they own. There is a garden attached to the barn where they do gardening while they are there. Bountiful flowers and plants growing, including my professor's favourite lavender which is also a well-known herb for its relaxing property. Not to mention how beautiful it is to look at. Outside of their garden fence, there are miles and miles of green fields with sheep calmly grazing all day. The sheep come to the fence and let you pet them on the head as they like. Can you believe sheep in UK are having a better deal than we do here? I do not want a TV or a laptop if I could

do what the sheep do every day! That is, of course, before they are slaughtered and eaten.

My other professor owns a cabin on an island in North-Western Ontario, surrounded by beautiful lakes that are so clear they change their magnificent colours throughout the day. The only way to get there is by boat, you see no cars or roads. There is no electricity or cell-phone reception. We arrived there when the sun slowly submerged under the horizon, the scarlet red sky infused and turned the lake purple. The only boat crossing the surface of water, for a moment I thought I was in *The Notebook* (2004). The trip was set up last minute due to bad phone communication. We went there with last minute shopping, some fruit, half-a-dozen croissants, beverages, frozen sandwich pockets, cheese and cold cuts, cracker, etc. I stayed for the night until next afternoon. I had a few crackers with rum and coke that night, fruit salad and a croissant in the morning, then drank diet coke for the rest of day without feeling the need to reach for food. The setting was so calming and care-free, the green filled my eyes and my soul. The bedrock on the shore balanced my mind, the water cleansed away my worries, that may sound far fetched, but it is true. Then of course, back to the city, and I was craving food again. Food! Food! Food! Gah! Where is my food? I want food when I am hungry, and I want food when my stomach is neither really empty nor growling.

Summers spent on two different continents across the Atlantic Ocean, both of my professors had the same comment after their break: they ate better, more often, weight dropped to normal, one of them doing gardening all summer; the other worked on constructing addition to the cabin.

Not all vacations/trips help me retain regular eating habits. I ate more than I did at my parents' house when I went to Japan. I sat there eating after I knew I was full, but I just could not stop until all the food on the table disappeared. In my parent's house I eat a lot. Food is easy to get on every corner of the street. Our fridge is always stocked ... daytime market, sunset market, modern supermarkets, and all the convenience stores. In fact Taiwan has the most saturated convenience stores in the world, followed by Japan. I never have to worry about a shortage of food or varieties! But I tend to overeat from the moment I open my eyes until I go to bed again. In my Winnipeg apartment I eat less than I did at my parents'. I also eat more in winter than in summer, and it gets worse during practicum writing.

I image it must have something to do with space and stress. The area my friend Andrew and his girlfriend live in, is a very nice area - actually one of the best neighbourhood is Japan. It is half way up the mountain. Still, the density of population is high everywhere you go. There is a mutual agreement that public transit is not a place for talking. People converse in public only when they are required to do so. The only place I remember to hear people chatting normally, was the day we climbed the mountain, and when we were in the tourist shopping district. I

went there unprepared except for an introductory level Japanese study, English, and the ability of comprehending *Kanji* (Chinese characters). The time difference, the cold, humid, and overcast weather threw me for a loop.

My parents' home is located in a higher density residential area. Our apartment is in a 5-story high building, but people who own the top floor built over the rooftop without a permit, which was supposed to be a fire exit from building to building. The width of the lane is as wide as a three-car garage. The side of the lane is occupied by parked cars and things belongs to people who live on the ground floor. The middle of the lane is occupied by scooters, motorbikes, and bicycles. In our apartment I can hear nails scratching on the floor above us when the neighbour's dog gets excited. I can hear people fighting but cannot see from which apartment across the lane. I believe our neighbours can hear us when we laugh as well. Oh and there is a kitchen half a metre away from ours that belongs to a family with three kids; they live on the other side of the fire lane. Those kids learned all kinds of musical instrument when they grew up: piano, flute, oboe, etc. Unfortunately each lesson never last long enough for improvement, we suffered from a lot of noise pollution. Speaking of noise pollution, there are also people singing karaoke on amplifier without installing sound-proofing windows!!! Karaoke system is common to be seen in household, consisted of video-audio player, microphones, speakers, and an amplifier, which can be attached to any video output you own.

These spaces have a lack of clean air, vegetation, serenity, clear water, and are naturally heated and ventilated. Yet this concrete jungle has no shortage of the artificial chaos of air conditioner and sights. What you hear, breath, see, touch, and taste are polluted, limited, modified, or altered.

I want to know where this yogi lives. If by getting fed through my ears, nose, eyes, and pores on my skin, the mouth is not the only receptacle of energy for sustaining my bodily functions. Not all energy has gastronomic value and yet energy is everywhere.

The ability to perceive, to respond, to create beauty is a triumph against brutality and, also, mediocrity. Beauty is like a medicine made from local herbs that steadies and strengthens, tonifies the nervous system. A friend who moved to the California coast notes, "Living here surrounded by beauty, for the first time in my life my inner landscape is supported by the external landscape. I feel so much more at peace." (Gendler, 2007)

The cherry blossoms swept across the projected wall, such is the vision I missed on my trip to visit Kansai and Andrew in 2008.

2008 was an interesting year, I was aimlessly wandering everywhere I could with incomplete status with three courses. Speaking of aimlessness was a lie. I aimed to escape into oblivion.

After returning from the trip, I uploaded the album and labelled it 'Friends + Food + LandEscape' to somewhat justify the purpose of this trip being not just about landscape but with much more.

Two years later when my advisor introduced me to a book about Ferran Adria's restaurant elBulli (2008), it suddenly dawned on me - my 'LandEscapes' were not merely a waste of money, time, or energy.

If a plant survives on three things - sunlight, air, water - we animals, need food, a place to grow, and do not forget, friends.

The other morning I made cucumber sandwich with the Japanese mandarin which I just bought on the weekend. For no particular reason, (okay maybe it is because I know I am grounded until this practicum gets finished, so I lavish on my paper towels usage), I used enough paper towels to dry these uniform-cut cucumber slices. I buttered my favourite white sandwich bread I just discovered two weeks ago with my usual brand of margarine, sprinkled fleur de sel on top of the margarine instead of directly on the cucumbers, laid prepared cucumber on top neatly without overlapping each other, overhanging is fine, then freshly ground pepper, I lay another slice of buttered bread on top to cover, and trimmed the edges off without deforming the bread, and cut it into three finger sandwiches.

I made two sets that morning, ate one right away. How can I resist?

The other one I placed inside a clear reusable plastic container with bright green lid, to prevent those perfect looking sandwiches from tumbling I cut a square of giant bubble wrap to stuff the container. I took them to school for lunch. The sandwiches stayed in place and in shape, the cucumber stayed crisp and the bread stayed dry.

This is my PERFECT CUCUMBER SANDWICH. Just like Heston Blumenthal (2009) would say.

The cucumber sandwich is not a new idea. The ingredients are easy to get virtually everywhere, it is as simple as it can be, and anyone can make. I realize the key to make a proper cucumber sandwich is to keep the flavour profile as simple as possible.

Here comes the question, keeping it simple and do not complicate it, yes, but why there are ones just taste better than others? The simplicity and freshness is the integral part to cucumber

sandwiches that should be kept, what I did was to perfect each step and choose quality ingredients.

Why is it so difficult to design with originality? What is original and what is not? If I 'came up with' something without looking at precedents or have any knowledge beforehand, is it true that there is not something similar that could have already existed or perhaps someone elsewhere who never, ever heard of me 'came up with' similar idea, and gets it built a year later in Dubai? If my idea is never good enough and good ideas end up seemingly as a mere copy of existing masterpiece, what am I? What is the person I am becoming? What kind of designer do I want to be? What is a design student to do under such circumstances and conflicting ideas? WHAT IS DESIGN ANYWAY?

These questions plagued me for years and on a request sent by old faithful, me, want to answer all of these questions by the end of this journey.

At the beginning of setting out the preliminary, the idea was to integrate two distinct subjects: food, and landscape architectural design. But I was not content with designing picnic tables, and checking the historical background of my site, or, there must be a reason why we prefer picnicking in a foreign environment than our domestic domain - table in a dining room.

I think it is essential for a designer, even the novices who are too timid to call themselves designers, to understand themselves first while continuing to interact with the rest of the world. Interaction is truly important, but before you know who you are, you could easily lose yourself in it.

If I do not understand myself, how can I be truly sympathetic to others?  
How do I then design something that inspires happiness in others?

The worst thing that can happen to a designer, happened. Fatigued by these thoughts whirling in my head, I lost the excitement I once had. I have turned myself and my attention to: exercising (very new to me), travelling (escaping from one place to another), looking for food (as always), etc.

I went to Kansai, Japan, to search for inspirations and learn their food culture which I had a smattering knowledge of. Looking back on that, I went to Kyoto on the wrong day so I did not get to try *shojin ryori* (Japanese strict-vegetarian cuisine); I missed the opening time of *Kiyomizudera*, I did not get to have a glimpse of the main structure; I bought cheap plane tickets and it happened to be a late blossoming year so I did not even see the *sakura* flower buds on the branch. However, I did bring back some contemporary Japanese food experience with me. I

tasted the real *gomadofu* (definitely not tofu drizzled with sesame dressing), tasted the best tofu boiled in water (not broth), tasty chestnuts cooked in syrup, authentic matcha green tea that is both frothy and slightly bitter to taste, and Japanese pickle which I had never liked but it can taste so good with curries or rolled into sushi.

Since my trip, I have shared the food I learned with many people having dinner with me.

Some of the recipes do not come from this trip alone. *It is little by little, a gathering pieces of information here and there; day by day, and the dishes get improved over time. This trip instilled my kitchen with new ideas, energy, and a sense of authenticity.*

I found out only recently, that elBulli restaurant has limited season. For half of the year the restaurant is closed, the chefs go out travelling, doing research, creating and testing new menu for the upcoming season. The latest news from Ferran Adria is that the ever-evolving elBulli restaurant will be permanently closed in December 2011 and when it reopens it will not be a restaurant but a culinary academy.

Indeed, the trend today can be, and usually is taken over by a new trend tomorrow. *The harsh, fast-paced world we live in gives us no time to look back or even pause for a moment.*

So I forced myself to stop whatever I am scrambling doing. Think, retrospectively.

On my first day as an environmental design student, I ran up the stairs of JAR. Of course I would have walked if my ride were not late.

I was carefree and happy.

Okay, the story goes south from here on ... stop.

But food was always there! When I left for Canada, I also left my mother's cooking. On the upside, leaving my mom's kitchen territory meant I could finally cook my own food, without my mother's harsh critiques and hovering over, worrying I might cut my fingers or burn down the house.

In my Winnipeg kitchen I began cooking the easiest food I helped my mom with, steamed meatloaf. The spin-off of the same mixture can be wontons, dumplings, meatballs and cabbage hot pot, and so on. Soon a bowl of steamed rice with one entree turned into a feast with ten fancy dishes. That was six months later when I cooked Chinese New Year's Eve feast. I was 18

and proud as a turkey!

I kept on learning and cooking food I craved. Nostalgic for home, food I once did not pay much attention to and even took it for granted. Even after I converted to a lacto-vegetarian when my grandfather passed away, I cook with the same attitude while paying more respect to the ingredients I use. Cooking and eating vegetarian food was once so constricted. But with the help of innovative food science, cooking vegetarian is not a drag, but a good, fun challenge. It literally opened up my palate for food and tasting the taste of each vegetable like never before.

Then I thought, why could I not have the same attitude towards my design? I just whine about how many constraints there are before I even thoroughly read the assignment briefs. Sometimes creating more boundaries to be locked in before we can say 'design'. Why could I not be as happy and satisfied after finishing and presenting my design projects like I dish out my kitchen creations?

Sure I could blame it on Winnipeg for being the most boring and uninspiring place on earth, and how trapped I feel in this place, oh and do not forget that language barrier is also a major factor! If at the end of every month I could stretch the steamed rice into a watered down porridge, then blend it to release the starch, add more water and boil it to a consistency to fool my eyes and my stomach, then I am sure I could learn something from it.

## Cucumber Sandwiches Revisited

Finding my way to the kind of result I wanted turned out to be far from easy, however. Recipes varied dramatically. Should I use egg yolks and/or whites or not? Should I use sugar or glucose or some other sweetener? Should I use milk, or cream, or a mixture of both? And if cream, what sort? The permutations seemed endless, and that was just the ingredients. The techniques were equally variable, and I wanted to know the reasons for such variations. (Blumenthal, 2008. p.52)

Going back to my version of 'perfect cucumber sandwiches'.

The choice of bread was the part, which I reluctantly decide to be the best white sandwich bread for this particular kind of sandwich.

I finally bought a loaf last week. Ever since the intermediate presentation, I have had my head wrapped up in this idea of *simplistic perfection*. I have been craving it.

This time I noticed how consistent and smooth the surface of the slice is.

I played sophistication with these sandwiches.

Just like how they are consumed in an English Afternoon Tea.

The way we conceive a cucumber sandwich as the 'authentic' kind.

The perfectly uniformed slices of cucumber.

Lining up neatly against each other on a piece of sandwich bread.

The bread is smoothness compliments the cucumber slices' form.

White sandwich bread is obviously smoother than a whole-wheat loaf. That is a no-brainer.

This kind of bread loaf has denser and even texture without any obtrusive big air bubbles. On the other hand, the French baguette is defined by its many large airy holes that make up for the crunchiness and lightness.

The sandwich bread itself is baked in a rectangular mold, enclosed with a flat lid to form the loaf into rectangular cuboids.

The margarine is applied evenly and acts as a buffer between absorbent bread and hydrous cucumber. I was on a vegan diet, to substitute butter I chose my favourite brand of margarine.

The salt, it would be authentic to use Maldon salt, but is it the best combination to Canadian born English cucumber? I have to find out some day.

Here's another thought ...

The most luxurious ingredient, or the most authentic ingredients does not necessarily equal the best flavor when combined.

But one can test out all the available ingredients and do a scientific experiment by pairing and comparing the taste to find out the best mates on a soccer team or kitchen brigade - who works well together as a team, complementing each other, and helping the main character stand out - salt and pepper, margarine as the goalie, when you think the only brigade in the kitchen are the head chef and cooks.

Hmm ... for some reason every time I think about cucumber sandwiches I think of soccer field ...

(I was looking for one that would yield an intense, almost nutty result, and the crab that did this wasn't a widely prized delicacy, like Cromer or king, but a small, live green crab from Brittany.) In the search for a pure, clean crab flavor we had to concoct all kinds of poaching liquids with all kinds of aromatic just to reach the conclusion that the most effective stock was water. (Blumenthal, 2008. P.64)

The white sandwich bread is purchased from big chain supermarket that have their own bakery inside, providing breads made with the same ingredients and the same process throughout its nationwide locations. Not much surprise about the quality control 'to a T' - generic at its best. However the consistency of the texture, the blandness of the taste provides a perfect backdrop to the clean-tasting cucumber. The bread does not overpower the star ingredient - cucumber - yet its suppleness contrasts its partner's crunchiness. They are equally important to this recipe, although hierarchically speaking, cucumber gets to shine. When cooking and combining ingredients, the cook has to realize and/or appoint each one's role in this dish, team members and ingredients - perhaps in hierarchical order. Of course we hear the term 'hierarchy' a lot in design world.

When it comes to design, we often come across precedents. Precedents come from a time before us. They are masterpieces. But are all the features and ideas of precedents still feasible to modern day culture or zeitgeist? On a user-centric perspective, there are compromises to be made. Take the margarine I used in my recipe as an example. I am on a plant-based diet. If I was forced to eat butter, my stomach could not handle it. If I simply took the butter out, my cucumber sandwich would become flavour-less - boring and dry. It would hardly be a 'cucumber sandwich' any more - let alone something that could be called 'perfect'. These are things to consider and to decide. What is authentic? Is it in the making? Is it in the ingredients? Or is the experience of the person who receives it?

## Tree

What is a tree? "Duh! Don't you know what a tree is?"

What is a tree to you? "uh ...??"

After an extended period of silence as I anticipated, "Well, we had this mango tree in our yard when we were young, it grew too much over the years, and it completely shaded the front of our tiny house. My father was so proud of it. But one year when a strong typhoon came hard and broke it into half, my father decided the tree became hazardous to people their age and should be taken down once for all. The fruit from that tree as I could remember was so scrumptious, what a pity!"

A tree, beyond the dictionary definitions, it completes every aspect of our life.

The tree provides a *place* (a tree takes over a *space* and turns that space into a *place*) for us to linger, to hide under or behind, to climb up and down, to *play* around, to *rest* beneath.

The tree provides force of life; the foliage filtered the harsh sun, the fruits and seeds replenishes our needs for hydration and nutrition, the trunk and branches is the fuel for fire that keep us warm.

The tree provides great stories and memories that will last from generations to generations and for centuries and centuries.

Tree inspires poetry, and 'tr-ee-ger-ed' great revolution in physics - Sir Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation. Although the story of him getting hit by an apple under the apple tree is over-dramatized and false, watching apple falling from the tree can inspired formulation of a great theory is quite poetic itself.

The product of the tree makes civilization a civilization; from this very paper I put my thoughts down, the evolution of cartography. The gums we chew to prevent bad breath, to the tires we ride on ...

The tree broadens our creativity when we decide the shape of our hedge row, the type of species to use, and where to place it. Get creative with paper would be another chapter.

Allow me copy down the 'tree words' from the Random House Unabridged Dictionary (Flexner & Hauck, 1993) before my short-term attention span runs out:

(In alphabetical order) Tree, tree aster, tree crab, tree creeper, tree cricket, treed, tree diagram, tree ear, tree farm, tree fern, treefish, tree-form frame, tree frog, tree heath, tree hopper, tree house, tree-hugger, tree hyrax, tree kangaroo, tree lawn, tree-line, treelined, tree lupine, treen, treenail, treenware, tree of heaven, tree of Jesse, tree of knowledge of good and evil, tree of life, tree of sadness, Tree Planters State, tree poppy, tree post, tree ring, tree shrew, tree snail, tree sparrow, tree squirrel, tree surgery, tree swallow, tree swift, tree toad, tree tobacco, tree tomato, treetop, tree yucca.

Tree (n.), tree ring, treetop

Tree (v.), treed, treeing

Named after without specific reasons: treefish

Named after because the resemblance of species' size and/or shape of a tree (arboraceous/arboreous): tree aster, tree fern, tree heath, tree poppy, tree tomato, tree tobacco, tree yucca, tree of sadness

Species grows and/or lives on trees or in the woods (arboreal): tree ear, tree frog, tree creeper, tree crab, tree cricket, tree hopper, tree kangaroo, tree hyrax, tree lupine, tree shrew, tree snail, tree sparrow, tree squirrel, tree swallow, tree swift, tree toad,

Shares the same technicalities of the tree forms (arborescence): tree diagram, tree-form frame, family tree

Arboriculture: tree farm, tree surgery

Landscaping: tree lawn, tree-line, treelined

Architectural/construction: tree house, tree post (king post)

Communities: tree-hugger, Tree Planters State

Carpentry: treen, treenail, treenware

Mythology: tree of heaven, tree of Jesse, tree of knowledge of good and evil, tree of life

Trees in Culture: Tree Worship, Wishing Trees, World Tree - Axis mundi.

fire - a burning desire

By this oblation may my mind, speech, sight, hearing, taste, smell, seed, intellect, intention and aim become purified. May my seven bodily ingredients - outer and inner skin, flesh, blood, fat, marrow, sinew and bone - become purified. By this oblation may the qualities of sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, residing in the five elements constituting my body become purified.

-Maha-Narayana Upanishad - section 65-66 LXV-2, LXV-3.

The conversation started when I said how much I wanted to burn every project I made at the end of each term. Not just tear them apart and recycle them piece by piece, but BURN, burn to a crisp, burn into ash! BURNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN!

... why not design a site where every student can take their project and burn it off?

... like a giant fire pit ... that is a celebration almost ... and a feast to follow the burning ceremony

... end-of-term fieldtrip ... hehehe ...

That is it! ... a fire pit in the last stop of a narrative landscape I am creating ...

Why do I feel the need to burn my old projects? I am proud of them for sure (some of them, not all of them), but at the same time I do want to get rid of them, get them out of my mind, and not to be reminded of them by any chance.

But what makes me think and feel this way?

Cleansel! But is cleansing not a common property of water? I was contemplating these questions during a shower. It did not occur to me that the connection between my shower using water, and my thoughts of cleansing with fire. In fact the shower had become such a routine, that I put my mind into another use to pass the time. Sometimes I do not feel relaxed after taking a shower. I do not make a sound from my mouth, but I am beat up by too much debating going on in my head.

So I said to my opposite brain: water and cleansing can be a chapter on its own, focus on the cleansing fire for now.

Experience tells us that heat/fire can kill some bacteria that causes food to spoil, thereby extending the expiration time, so to speak. Before rubbing alcohol became easily accessible, fire

was used to sanitize instruments and wounds, as seen in civil war movies and common household remedies.

In Taiwan, when someone gets out of jail or escaped from a catastrophe, that person steps over a small fire basin before he/she enters the doorway of his/her home. This is followed by eating a bowl of vermicelli noodles with braised pork trotters to get rid of the bad luck. It is believed that fire will help get rid of the negative energy or spirit.

"By pouring libations on the sacred fire, sin is burnt"

- The Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Section CXCI

#### Fire and Rebirth/

The phoenix is a mythical creature known to have the ability to be reborn from fire. The phoenix go through their life cycle with a change of appearance from chicks to the colourful adult stage, from the adult stage to pigment fading maturity. Then comes the spontaneous combustion that turns the phoenix into ashes. In Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002), when Harry entered Dumbledore's office and witnessed Dumbledore's pet phoenix Fawkes burst into flame, Harry was shocked and thought he had done something wrong. Dumbledore told Harry that it is "about time too. He's been looking dreadful for days. Pity you had to see him on a Burning Day. He's really very handsome most of the time."

Surviving a bad burn is a great ordeal of persevering and endurance. And it is also referred to anyone who has been through a lot of tests and has learned a great lesson, that they have a different look on life from this point on. An enlightenment, even. It takes a strong will to survive and to persevere.

Plants in wildfire-prone ecosystems often survive through adaptations to their local fire regime. Such adaptations include physical protection against heat, increased growth after a fire event, and flammable materials that encourage fire and may eliminate competition. (Wildfire, 2010)

#### Fire and transmission/

In Zoroastrianism (Iran) and Chinese folk traditions, both cultures believe through fire the messages and libations will reach god or higher beings. In Chinese folk tradition, the messages, money, and goods can reach their ancestors or deceased ones (people and animals) by burning them in fire, although people do not burn animals these days, it is illegal and wasteful to burn real money. Companies specialize in manufacturing 'paper commodities' like paper money, paper boys and

girls, paper pets, paper flowers, and paper sedans. Recently, there is a famous company selling designer homes to scale, and all the latest electronic gadgets made of paper using modeling techniques of any design/architecture firm, to burn.

Also, in Harry Potter (Rowling, 2000), wizards can transport themselves or manifest from fireplace A to fireplace B by using Floo Powder. The Floo Powder can only be used fireplaces connected to Floo Network (like a SIM card to a wireless network for cell-phones). The Harry Potter Lexicon website ([http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizworld/floo\\_network.html](http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizworld/floo_network.html)), cited that Floo is derived from flue, as in, a duct for smoke to escape. Even in the wizard world depicted by J. K. Rowling, fire and smoke are dots connected by invisible lines, a network. The notion of flue is also a passage from one end to another.

sad springrolls

What do springrolls and the Easter chocolate bunny have in common?

They are both festive food to be consumed in early spring ...

The transition from winter to spring, from death to revival.

A reminder of the dead where people sympathize with food.

"Why? We gotta eat", I cannot put it better than Brenda from *The First Wives Club* (Rudin, 1996), when always-polite-and-complaisant Annie struggled to suggest having lunch with Brenda and Elise after the funeral of their best gal-pal back in college.

I always refer to the standard appetizer featured in every Chinese related restaurants and food vendors in North America. (This time, not only do I have to make my point, the I-'d-like-to-call-it 'Springroll Festival' is near, so does Easter.) In China, springrolls are an iconic food of one particular festival, it is not common to see them everywhere or everyday.

But let us travel back to the origin of eating springrolls, maybe it was common food (although not as common as in North America). Historically, springrolls were not meant to be deep-fried, or heated in anyway. The idea of a springroll is not much different from a Mexican burrito or a common salad wrap. Cold-Food Day (the day before Ching-Ming Festival a.k.a. Tomb-Sweeping Day) marked the point where winter turns into spring. In ancient time, the fuel for fire was wood, each season required different variety of firewood (on a sustainable point, maybe? Could we LEED-certify Cold-Food Day? It is low-emission, seasonal use of natural resource). At this turning point, no fire or burning is allowed until the supply of firewood of the new season arrives. As a result, foods were cooked prior to the cut-off time, and were meant to be eaten cold. One of them is to wrap multiple bite-sized cold dishes inside a super-thin wafer.

It is believed by Chinese society that Cold-Food Day originated from a story about Jie, Zhi-Tui who is a filial son who hid himself and his mother deep inside the mountains. Jie simply wanted to stay in his hometown taking care of his old and feeble mother. The emperor wanted him to work for his government; so much so, he set a fire in the forest in order to chase him out as a desperate measure. However Jie resisted the emperor's will, both he and his mother died in the fire. To commemorate the son's noble act, people do not use fire during Ching-Ming.

There, my favourite picnic food has given me something else to think about ... a bit sad, really.

time + space + trace

Pulsation

was inscribed in my heart the very moment

if I were to say brush strokes was transcribed from observing movement in a natural environment  
of ancient Chinese calligraphers  
it is best described this way perhaps

those Panels of Stone

were traced from photography taken by someone else

I merely hit 'print' on my computer, set up the suitable size for the panels because I thought they  
are beautiful images

And then I went straight to trace

Regardless of how much time I spent on these panels

All of them look just awkward to me

As for the Panel of Onion

It is something I have eaten, cut, and cooked

Before I traced over it, I freehand sketched and coloured it onto paper

Even though I did not take that photo myself ...

the quality of the panel is pretty satiable

the traveling of lines, let's put it this way

When I was tracing the stones

I had completely forgotten about minding the strokes

All I could remember was that I must circle each colour block conscientiously

And I shall end up with something recognizable as stones

I was wrong

Those branches in Panels of Tree

Were from the maple tree grew from the two-story School of Music building that I pass by  
everyday on my way home (the happiest hour of the day)

Summer passed by, the trimmed branches had grown so much and hung so much lower

I had to bend my knees to get under it every time I passed by it

And let the leaves on the branch swept across my hair

After passing the branches I had to leap across a small sand-pile

Then one day

I was stunned by the beauty of the scene, right in front of my eyes

## 描

悸動  
是從那個當下就銘刻在心裡的

如果說古代的書法家從觀察自然界的動態  
轉化成每個下筆的流勢  
大概就像這樣吧

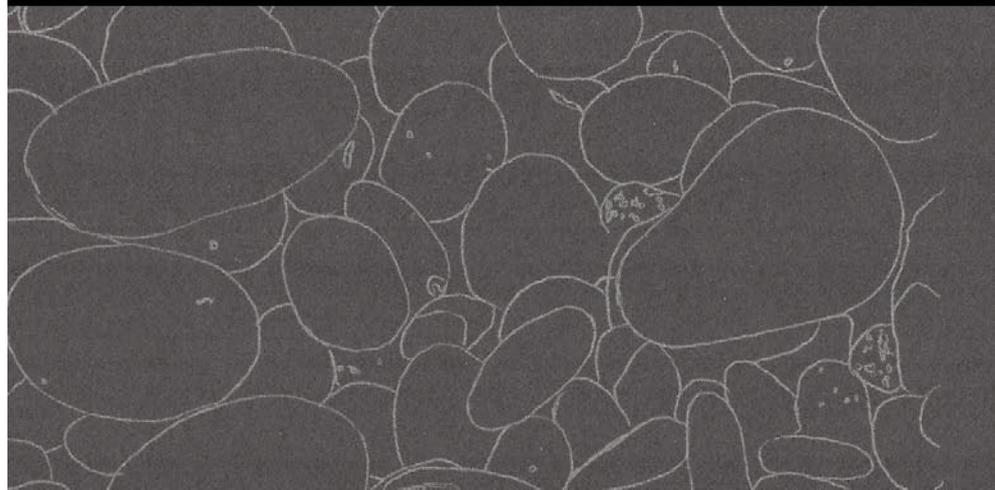
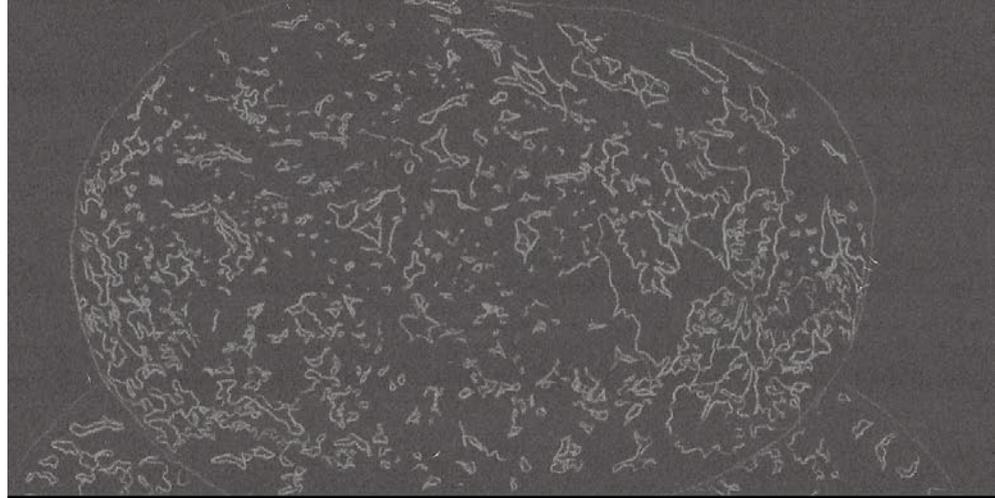
那幾片石頭的描圖  
影像不是我拍攝的  
只是因為看得喜歡  
機器列印出我需要的大小  
便開始描繪  
花在那片描繪的時間無論長短  
都是怎麼看怎麼不對勁

至於那個洋蔥的描圖  
因為吃過 切割過 烹調過  
先前也徒手用鉛筆在白紙上素描過 練習用水彩上過色  
雖然照片不是我親自拍的  
呈現在描板上的效果卻不差

就算是線的旅行吧

在描石頭前  
我已經忘了最重要的筆勢  
只記得我需要忠實地框出色塊  
便應圖窮匕現  
我錯了

那幾幅樹描圖裡的枝葉  
是我天天放學(最快樂的時間)經過音樂系所旁 挨著兩層樓建築和垃圾箱  
長的一棵楓樹  
一個夏天過去 修剪過得樹枝已長到垂下來  
每次經過我都要稍微蹲低  
枝葉掃過我的頭髮  
過了枝葉我還要越過一個小沙堆  
某天  
突的被眼前的美景震懾住





I could care less about the soon arriving bus  
I grabbed my camera from the bag and snapped from various distances  
Suffice to say, I am pretty close to this tree and I know it like the back of my hand  
Then came the day  
While I prance towards the bus stop  
Suddenly I was brought to a halt and landed on the sand pile abruptly  
My head turned  
It just occurred to me that maple who bid adieu to me every evening had been slashed across  
its waist  
Its beautiful branches with leaves were left in a pile on the side of the road  
The rest of the tree were broken down into foot-longs  
laid next to the stump waiting to be picked up

Perhaps I did exhort myself to encircle each and every colour block when I traced the trees  
Undeniably, the poise of the tree was on my mind the whole time  
Elegant, strong, and a little naughty

It is unfair to say stones are dead  
Nor to say it is inanimate  
Stones/Rocks are porous and breathable  
Formed eons ago in geological time  
Not the kind of movement which can be observed with eyes of human's 100-yr lifespan  
Always an afterthought ...  
That the sudden release of energy in the Earth's crust which we called earthquake

Those stones and I  
Lack emotional and sentimental connection  
The lineage is broken; or rather the line never ever existed  
The strokes in those panels are dull and stiff  
Almost cartoonlike  
Not the kind of aesthetics I was trying to achieve

The panels of water I am working on today  
Are traced from the photo I took  
Splash and wave hitting the rocks on the shore  
Soon I fell into the same predicament  
So I retraced my memories, compared the process and mindset I had with the trees, the stones,  
and today's water

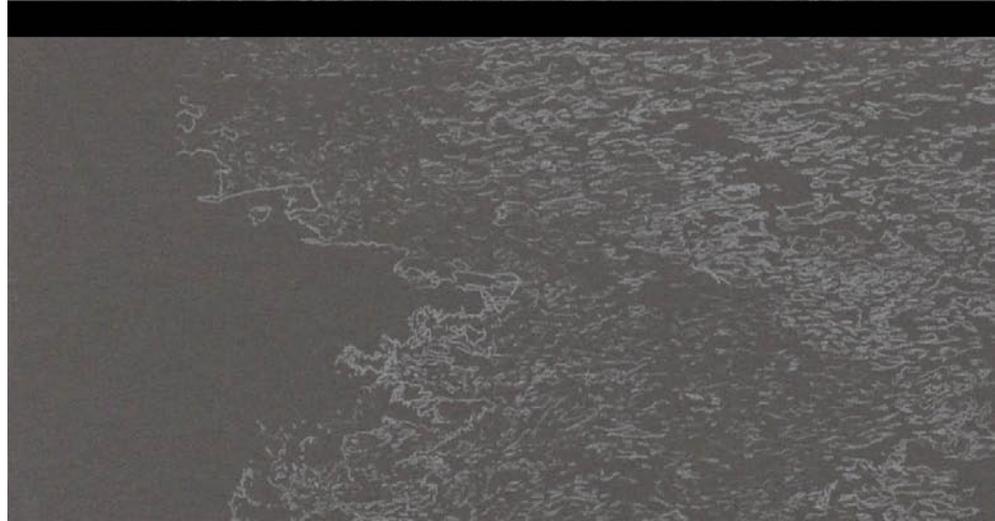
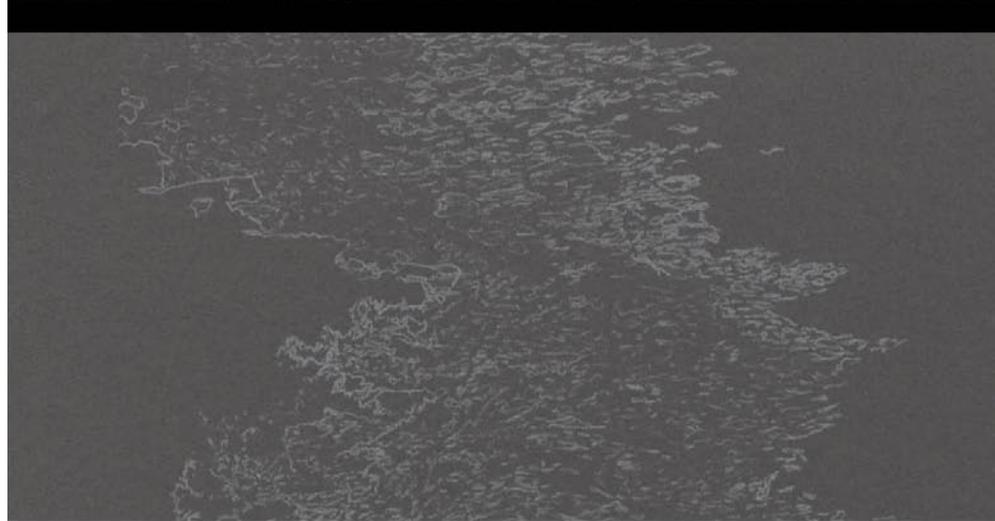
顧不得快趕不上的巴士  
我拿出相機連拍了數張遠近不同的照片  
這棵樹我只差不是瞭若指掌了  
有一天我快步地蹦跳著去搭公車  
突地踉蹌停下 站在沙堆上  
回頭一看  
才發現那棵每天跟我道再見的楓樹已被攔腰鋸斷  
枝葉隨便的堆在路旁  
其餘的部分鋸分幾截 放在樹幹的斷口旁等待收拾

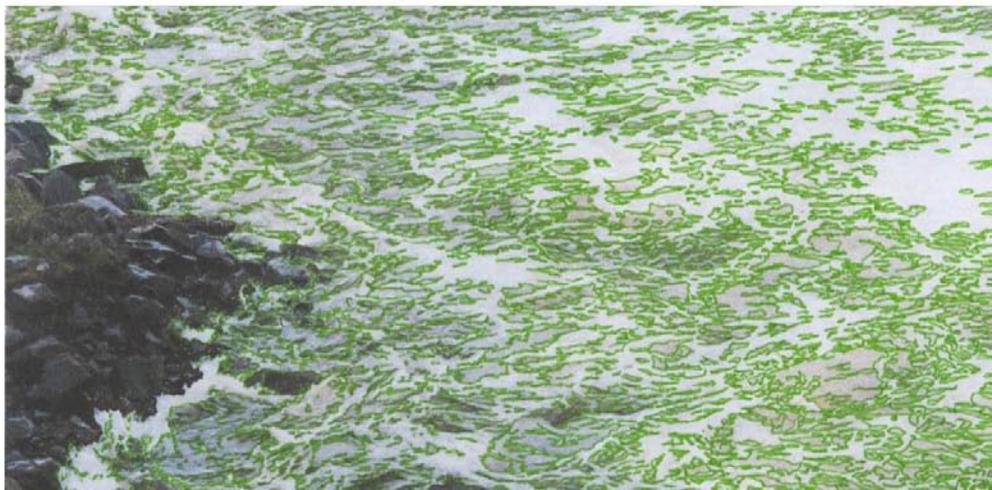
也許我在描樹時 確實叮嚀著自己要忠實描出輪廓色塊區別  
可是當時我心裡是惦記著這棵樹存留在照片裡的姿態  
優雅堅強又帶點小淘氣

不能說石頭是死的  
只因它一動也不動  
石頭也有氣孔  
億萬年的變化而來  
不是年僅一百的凡人肉眼可以觀察到它的動態  
我們總是在災難來臨才後之後覺  
地震是地層變動 板塊運動

我和那幾顆別人拍攝的石頭  
少了感官和情感的連結  
斷了線 應該說是線根本不存在  
那幾張描圖線條呆板  
好像畫漫畫一樣  
難怪呈現不出我要的美感

今天描的水圖  
是我自己拍的照片  
拍打在岸邊碎石激起的浪花  
漸漸我出現描石的窘迫  
於是我回溯比較描樹描石描水的異同





I add memories

The surge of my heart at the very moment of water leaping and splashing

Sharp like blades

In a nanosecond, they turned frothy

The froth dissipates and melts into sleek and smooth silk  
vigorous transformation

As for those stones in beautiful photos

Pretty, but I could not describe it as well as I just did

I could contrive

Then I thought contriving is not easy, either

Design, is the process of pursuing aesthetics, perhaps ...

Scan = Sweep + Trace?

Scan is translated to 'sweep-trace' in Chinese which I think it is quite brilliant

The process of putting the hand-traced image in the machine

The scanner's horizontal sensor sweeping in linear swift motion straight across

Intersecting the weaves in digital form

Like tracing, scanning represents the resurfacing of an image

I used green needle-point pen to trace on the original, with a sheet of white graphite paper  
between the original and the grey illustration board

The green lines on the printed original stood out

Yet the real product, the white graphite on grey shows only ambiguity

It is not unpleasant, it is just not visually convincing or compelling

I sought my professor's advice, after a night of tossing and turning

"if you cannot see what it is, then finish it until you can!" says my professor

After scanning both the green on original and the white on grey

I continued tracing the rest of the image

the lines I traced spread like wave on water surface unintentionally

As I progressed to half of the plaque I figured it is time to scan again

I did the last scan when the trace was complete

This progression of work suddenly resonated with the Board of Trees

I approached the tree closer and closer, as the wave surged to the shore wave by wave

A study of natural movements indeed

我把回憶加進來  
水花激起的瞬間 我心中的澎湃感受  
尖銳的像利刃  
轉眼間又化成泡沫  
泡沫散去溶成一片滑潤的絲綢  
相同的激盪  
對於那些美麗照片裡的石頭  
雖美 我卻無法做出相似的描述  
除非硬掰  
即便是硬掰也難啊!

設計 算是一個追求美感的過程吧…

掃描  
翻的太妙  
從手描圖放到掃描器裡掃描的過程  
掃描器以水平軸直線移動  
交織重現一幅圖像

描是重現?

翻騰一夜 和教授談過  
我還是省不了先把喜歡的影像掃下再繼續手描下去  
實在是原圖加上綠線太特別  
真正要produce的灰底白描卻不知所云  
不是不美 而是無法從中理解意圖為何  
如果目前看不出是什麼 那你就把它描完吧! 教授如是說  
原圖和描圖掃好後  
我埋首繼續描  
雖然不是刻意的 但是我的筆觸卻如水波一樣蔓延開來  
圖片進行到一半 我決定拿去再掃描一次  
等到完成後掃第三次  
這樣的進展竟開始與樹的三個焦距起了呼應  
我越來越靠近樹 和水一波波湧向沿岸  
乃師法於自然界的動態

The movement of fire is furious and aggressive

Can it be a sort of the march of erosion?

Or, like contemporary artist Cai, Guo-Qiang's 'explosion events', created with the residual effect of fire

What about stones? The process of breaking-down? Or the movement of immobile? How tricky!

From the rough edged rocks to polished river stones, it is almost the change of attitude.

What about metal? If I were to consider metal for my practicum?

Metal, exists in many forms, melty fluid under high heat, rigid solid when cold.

It can be active but quiet, transient yet infinite

good food starts with good  
**ingredients**

landscape architecture design  
starts with understanding the  
**elements**

火有很激烈的動態 可以是一種侵蝕消失進行曲嗎？還是像蔡國強 用燃燒  
後餘灰殘影創作？

先破後立？

石頭呢？是分化的過程 還是很靜態的動態？這個難哪！從崎嶇不平被磨到  
溫和圓潤

那是屬於心態上的變化了

金屬呢？如果有金屬？

金屬以太多形態存在，熱的時候融化，冷的時候凝結被塑造的瞬間

能動能靜 瞬間化為永恆



entree

Food Ingredient +  
Cooking Techniques +  
Landscape Vocabulary +  
Senses

Tree

Trunk and Root/

Burdock root

Leaf/

Full leaf tea, any green leafy vegetable will do

Fruit/

Any fruit

Fire

Hot Spicy/

Chilli Pepper, Horseradish, Peppercorn

Red colour/

Tomato, red bell-pepper, Swiss Chard

Cooked/

Flambe, as long as it's cooked

Destroy/

Charring, grilling

Rebirth/

Roasted pepper(charred + skinned)

Water

Clean & Refreshing/

No excessive flavouring, keep it simple and original

Clear/

Jelly, salt crystal, Ice

Fluid/

Soup, dressing, sauce

Reflection/

"I cried in my soup ..."

## Stone

Hard and Rigid/

Rock Sugar

Rock Salt - not for eating, use as presentation bed

Rice, beans, nuts

Mineral/

Mineral rich vegetables and fruits, crystallization (salt, sugar)

Formation/

Igneous

Pulverized black sesame

Sedimentary

Layers

Metamorphic

Marbling

Breaking down, Crumbles/

Feta cheese, blue cheese, tofu, bread crumbs

Polished/

Beans, grains, candies

Stubborn/

Sprouts?

Long-lived/

-

Humble/

Potato, beans, oats, lotus root, lotus seeds

Still/

-

think outside the b\*\*

Push the envelope, designer! Think outside the box!

Boxes and envelopes are provided. The costs are included in the tuition fee you paid at beginning of school year.

Why do we have a box to begin with?

Where is the box? What's it look like? Color? Shape? Form?

Who told you there is a box? I want you to 'think outside' the box?

But there must be a box somewhere to begin with ... otherwise why were you mentioning the box?

As in 'push the envelope', don't you understand?

Can you just tell me where the box is sitting or where the envelope is hiding so I could find it?

God! There is no 'box'!

Good! Now we're talking!

Those were my Anti-Boxists conversation with Lisa, my evil twin.

Possibilities of a box

mmm ... Bento Box

oooooh ... Theatre Box

interchangeable photo box

common pencil box

they are all boxes, or called boxes

it is not that I am totally against the box, I just do not understand why some people perceive or communicate box as a form of confinement instead of a just a constructive act/process?

My interest towards the boxes in the world is not unlike Tim Ingold (2007) and lines. I will not call myself the founder of Neo-Boxism or Post-Boxism, even though I just thought about it a minute ago. Naming an act is like dropping a crate on oneself, not creating, merely by dropping.

If we emphasize process ...

Then there would be no box to begin with

It is the process of choosing material, imagining the possibilities of what it holds and how it covers, maybe not even holding or covering, an interaction between two(or more) elements, how many panels am I going to have, do I use a panel or not ... maybe not ... how does one edge join another ... how does different parts come together ... what is going to happen if I change

this to that, here to there ... perhaps in the end of the box, the end product, a birth-child of the process

I am intimidated by the very mentioning of that godforsaken box ...

Joseph Beuys decided one day that it was time his two children learned to cook. He took some pieces of wood and nailed them together to make a shallow pan. A mixture of flour, water and a little yeast was kneaded into a dough and put into his wooden box to rise. When Beuys was satisfied that the dough was ready to bake, he put it in the oven. The bread was edible. Asked to contribute to the exhibition *Zeitkunst im Haushalt* in 1968, which also included Dieter Roth, Robert Filliou, Wolf Vostell, Milan Knizak and Daniel Spoerri, he remembered his bread box and it was exhibited with the title *Intuition* written on the inside. An edition of about 12,000 copies of *Intuition* was made between 1968 and 1985, with variations in timber and nails. (Hamilton, 2009, pp. 99)

bento - boxed meal

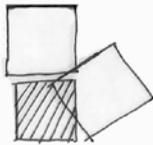




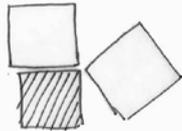


# landscape bento : any WHERE any TIME

is a state of free, unrestrained, comfortable, leisurely and carefree, free from trammels, and at liberty to enjoy oneself

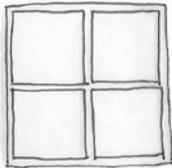


first attempt

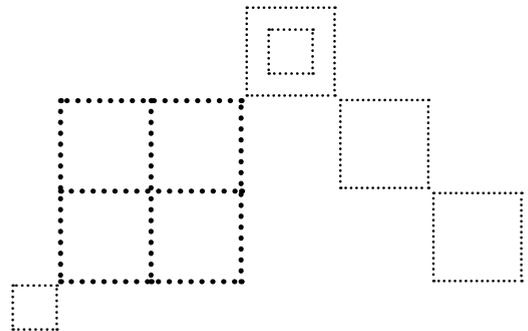


second attempt

----- stop the nonsense



----- the bento box unfolds itself into a spatial sequence



white as the counterpoint

white plates . blank slate

# start ver

although sometimes I feel like I'm  
chasing my own tail...





integrated rice-duck farming

## The Fat Duck Bento for Heston Blumenthal

When I first watched Heston Blumenthal's *In Search of Perfection* series, I was pleasantly stunned by his attention to detail. Astounding! At the beginning of each episode, Heston would do a survey in the street by asking what people's favourite dish is, and what they liked about that dish, as in, what makes the dish, to them. Then he took a journey, travelled to where the dish is originated or the restaurant that offers the tastiest version. He added his own memory and experience from before and after the trip, and combined these with the opinions of people from the street, and would then *come up* with a list of aesthetic aspects that the perfect dish could be (or rather, could bring to the consumer of the dish). He then went on to try to achieve each *desired quality* by means of sourcing the perfect ingredients, and by using unconventional methods (which some would tag *molecular gastronomy*). After much trial and error, he plated all the components, catering to all five senses, together to present at his version of a PERFECT dish.

When *Heston's Christmas Feast* aired on television I followed and watched the reruns twice. This time Heston really brought my hands up, waving in the air - this was all about creativity! He travelled to Middle East to find gold, frankincense and myrrh. Instead of serving a broth in a bowl, he cooked and clarified the stock, then freeze-dried and moulded it into a bouillon cubes gilded with edible gold leaf to create a golden ingot, served with hot water. The golden ingot is presented to the diners, who then immerse the golden ingot in the hot water pot, stirring with a spoon carved out of branch of myrrh. The scent of myrrh is beautifully rendered with the broth with the appealing visual of the branch itself and the hands-on interaction with the diners reconstituting the broth themselves.

*Heston's Christmas Feast* is one of the *Heston's Feasts* series by British broadcasting company, Channel 4. The first series consists of *Heston's Victorian Feast*, *Heston's Medieval Feast*, *Heston's Tudor Feast*, *Heston's Roman Feast*, and *Heston's Christmas Feast*, where Heston uses science and history to bring the extraordinary feasts alive. In *Heston's Victorian Feast*, the chef draws inspiration from a representative work of the Victorian era in literature - *Alice in Wonderland*. Note that *Alice in Wonderland* is the fantastical embodiment of English formal garden and having tea parties in the outdoors. The wonder-world of the very literature was adapted in a documented project *How Green is Your Garden* by C. J. Lim (2003), where the adventure of its fictional character Alicia Liddell wanders through her family's Victorian estate and wonders about the environments impact on architecture and what architecture can learn from the nature order.

Food and landscape are connected with each other. They are both essential part of our daily life to say the least. It is not just a vague idea.

Of course, besides literature as an inspiration of the layout of the theme of the feast, recipes from the same era were studied and interpreted into Heston's modern day taste and techniques. The

culture and history of the same era were also taken into account to bring non-stop fireworks to the feast. Guests arrive and are served a drink-me potion.

The highlight of the evening, a giant phallic fluorescent green jelly swaying and wiggling on the oscillating circular base with insertions of vibrators at four angles. However, this giant jelly is only the centre showpiece accompanying the actual jelly dish to be served. The Victorians loved to watch jelly at the dinner table during the meal. The vibrator, although it has not much to do with *Alice in Wonderland*, is one of the great inventions of Victorian era, and Heston wonders if titillation of an object is what delights the Victorians. Picking a sexual subject/object may be morally risky, but Heston showed how it can be done whimsically and fun.

Heston is also infamous for introducing strange ingredients to the British and North American public in his dishes such as snails, animal testicles (non-human, of course), frog legs, and lampreys. He tries to push boundaries with every dish he serves, while trying to anticipate the unknown outcome of the reaction/acceptance of each creation. "The challenge for me with these feasts is to push some of these dishes as far as possible. And if you can flip that trepidation, that nervousness, that slight sense of mistrust ... If you can flip that to a wow factor positive, then that's a fantastic thing to do. But the danger is [if you] just pushed the nervousness too far, you can't bring it back again ..." (Whitwell, 2009) and that is what happened to the lamprey dish which he served with the bleeding head of a raw lamprey, as a garnish on the plate with the rest of cooked part that are edible. No guest could finish this except perhaps Germaine Greer (you gotta love her).

At TED2006 conference, Sir Ken Robinson (2006) said that "mistakes are as important as rights":

What these things have in common is that kids will take a chance. If they don't know, they'll have a go. Am I right? They're not frightened of being wrong. Now, I don't mean to say that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. What we do know is, if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original. If you're not prepared to be wrong. And by the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. And we run our companies like this, by the way. We stigmatize mistakes. And we're now running national education systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make. And the result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacities. Picasso once said this. He said that all children are born artists. The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up. I believe this passionately, that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it. So why is this? (Robinson, 2006)

My first landscape bento is dedicated to Chef Heston Blumenthal for his creativity and inspirational approach to his food, and for the whimsy and playfulness of his creative process and edible creation.

Where to start?

I have two cookbooks (more like culinary journals) of Heston Blumenthal on hand. I started with *In Search of Total Perfection*. After quickly flipping through the book a few times I moved on to read the Table of Contents. It was really enjoyable to read the text in Heston's books. They are exactly the way he sounds on television - genuine everyday English with a huge dose of curiosity and passion. Yes, the Table of Contents, what about the Table of Contents? Out of the 16 classic dishes I picked Peking Duck, I watched that episode on the telly for one, and secondly, I have the memory of eating this dish. This can be the project where both of our cultures collide. In the meantime, I read the history section from *The Fat Duck Cookbook* which is itself a full chapter of 127 pages. My brain is somewhat slow ... up to this point I have not linked the dish Peking Duck with the restaurant Fat Duck, and what it might have to do with the landscape bento design for the chef. As the reading and day-dreaming proceeded, the light-bulb in my brain suddenly lit up! DUCK! The Fat Duck Bento for Heston Blumenthal!

At this point of my research I have developed a system for reading and taking notes which turned out to be fairly useful. For this book I focus on any mention of the word 'duck' and the 'process' Heston and the restaurant had been through. Even a three Michelin-star restaurant like the Fat Duck has its humble beginnings as its owner. But it is rare to see someone in Heston's position to talk about the past in such manner. For the past is the process that leads to the result that is anything prior to success/fail. We should always stay positive, but we should examine the past and see what lessons can be learned from our own history. I find it disturbing to hear people talking about who achieved what and how much they achieved, mainly naming big names, but seldom delving deeper and working backwards of what the successful person has been through. The shallow perspective on success normally sits between the turning point to the point of success, excluding the turning point, and what led to the point. I understand facing the past is painfully uncomfortable, but ignoring it is definitely not putting it to rest. It is merely covered up and waiting to be revealed when least expected. Besides shallow success does no one good but for gloating and bragging.

In the same vein, throwing jargon around when no one in the audience understands. Sometimes even the speakers themselves do not fully comprehend the term they are using. This has much to do with egoism, using words people are unfamiliar with sets us apart (Blackburn, 2003) - 'I am better than you'. If you are introducing terminology or using disciplinary jargon to your audience,

supply them with proper definitions. The term molecular gastronomy is the term people commonly refer to Heston's cooking style. I watched a few shows with self-claimed molecular gastronomy chef using science to cook their food before I heard of Heston Blumenthal. I was wowed by some of the techniques and what could be done with it - such as using a dropper to control the flow of red liquid of unknown substance, when it fell to a bowl of clear liquid, then forms red spherical objects formed resembling salmon roe - but it left me cold watching those techniques/technologies being repeated for the sake of it (because it's so 'cool'). Such techniques include the use of liquid nitrogen, flavoured foam, food colouring printing on edible sheets, the use of food additives, etc. However when I watched *In Search of Perfection* I did not get the same empty feeling afterwards, and I did not link the molecular gastronomic techniques demonstrated to me earlier, to Heston's show. Perhaps Heston hardly mentioned the term in his show, for one. The program is about searching and achieving perfection by all means, at all times. And they are techniques which can be achieved at home with common household equipment/items such as the stove top, the oven, barbecue grills, and constructing a fire-pit with building blocks in backyard, etc.

Molecular gastronomy is a show-stopper and attractive to the aspiring chefs, it has become more of a showmanship than anything. That empty hole in my heart of the size of a dinner plate finally found its answer after reading the history chapter. For him,

I realised I wasn't alone in finding the term [molecular gastronomy] frustrating. Harold McGee was equally concerned by how the role of science in cooking was in danger of becoming misunderstood, particularly by younger chefs. In the international gastronomic world, **culinary demonstrations** have become an important part of the circuit, and they are undoubtedly a fantastic forum for exchanging ideas and introducing new things. However, they also **put pressure on chefs to produce a spectacle**, and the battery of advanced technology that appeared on stage was forever increasing. We both worried about whether, in the midst of this escalation, **people might begin to see technology as the end rather than the means. We didn't want it to become all show and no substance, leading some people to doubt the value of a basic understanding of food science and misperceive the contribution technology can make to cuisine. The fact that the food at demos isn't being served up to customers could also tempt a young chef to focus technique rather than the taste in the mouth.** (Blumenthal, 2008. p. 124)

It is probably easier to follow a 'method' or rely on the new technologies, which are supposed to make human life easier. Of course we can take a handbook and start operating. It is not to say following a certain method is plain dumb and never unique; this is not always true. The questions I would ask myself are, 'on top of a given method, have I used my own brain to think about each step? Does each step make sense? Does it matter?'. Be inspired by the intelligence

of precedents, do not just copy them word by word. It is our own thinking process that makes a good/bad decision. It is not wrong to be ignorant, it just does not make any difference to what is already there. And the result becomes generic, not to mention the 'P' word - plagiarism.

... because the chefs always bent the rules, introducing little details that made a huge difference to the outcome and gave a dish its individual twist. I wanted to know these details, what effect they had and why. I would go through countless recipes for vanilla ice cream, trying to work out the reason for each variation, each difference between them. (Blumenthal 2008, p. 24)

Take the process of creating the Fat Duck Bento, I deconstructed the Peking Duck dish in order to find certain qualities to be interpreted into landscape language/elements of stone, water, fire/light/energy, plants, and metal. Heston's plating is very intricate and precise, so my mental image was occupied by the atmosphere he created - starting with the base layer of a grid system, whimsical items placed on it that lightened the seriousness of a grid - an unexpected surprise. The layer perhaps another grid, on top of that is tilted away from the base grid. I quickly realized that I seemed to have been thinking about Martha Schwartz's gilded frogs in the mall in Florida. I did a journal entry for history on that project so I know which book I should look for. Right there! And it says this work by Schwartz is "deconstructivist". Is deconstructivism the way to go? I am still confused how different deconstructivism and constructivism really is - in terms of built landscapes. Does it mean ... well, if I have a yard, instead of stacking things up or organizing and arranging them orthogonally or 'organically', it is *deconstructivism*? But even though I am 'constructing' the design of my yard? I am still not quite sure how this works, but I am sure that this term has no actual force to help me complete the design. I left it as process and moved on. I think my initial response to deconstruction to analyze the qualities and functions of an object is rather tangible.

And that is the way I am going.

## Deconstructing Peking Duck

protein - skin - rich and crispy - caramelized  
- flesh - soft and succulent

veggies - in contrast of protein  
-crunchy  
-palate cleanser  
-green colour

condiments - sweet (contrasting flavour)

starch - pancakes  
-envelope (canopy?)  
-plain, light, and neutral in taste  
-holds everything together  
-interactive eating experience  
-tone down richness / absorb grease (moderate flavours)

## Design intentions

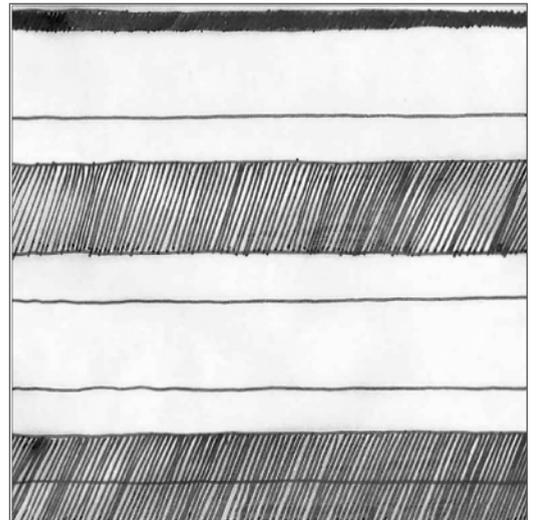
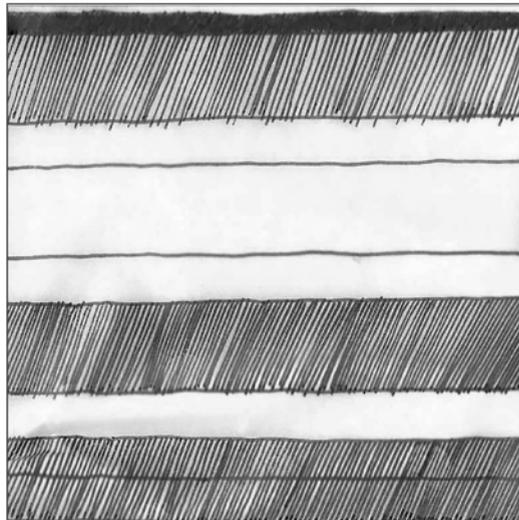
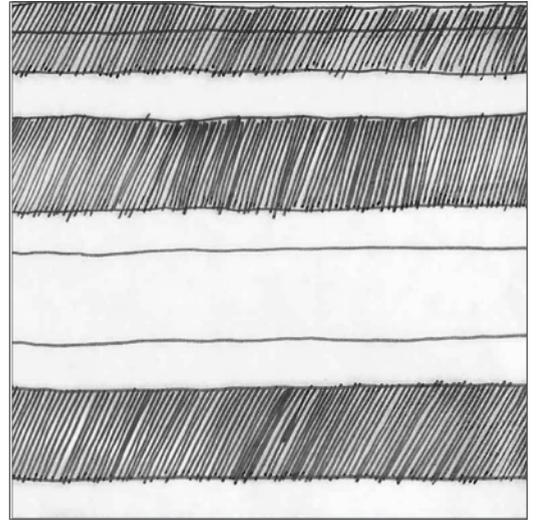
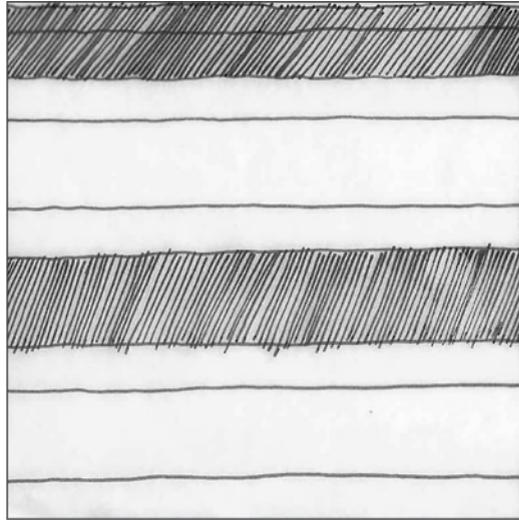
season - in summer, ducks are less fatty, less-desirable by gormands  
- happy duck

inspired by *integrated rice-duck farming system* (organic farming)  
- irrigated grass patch  
- grid system  
- rubber duckie

whimsy - larger-than-life rubber duckies (10" wide)

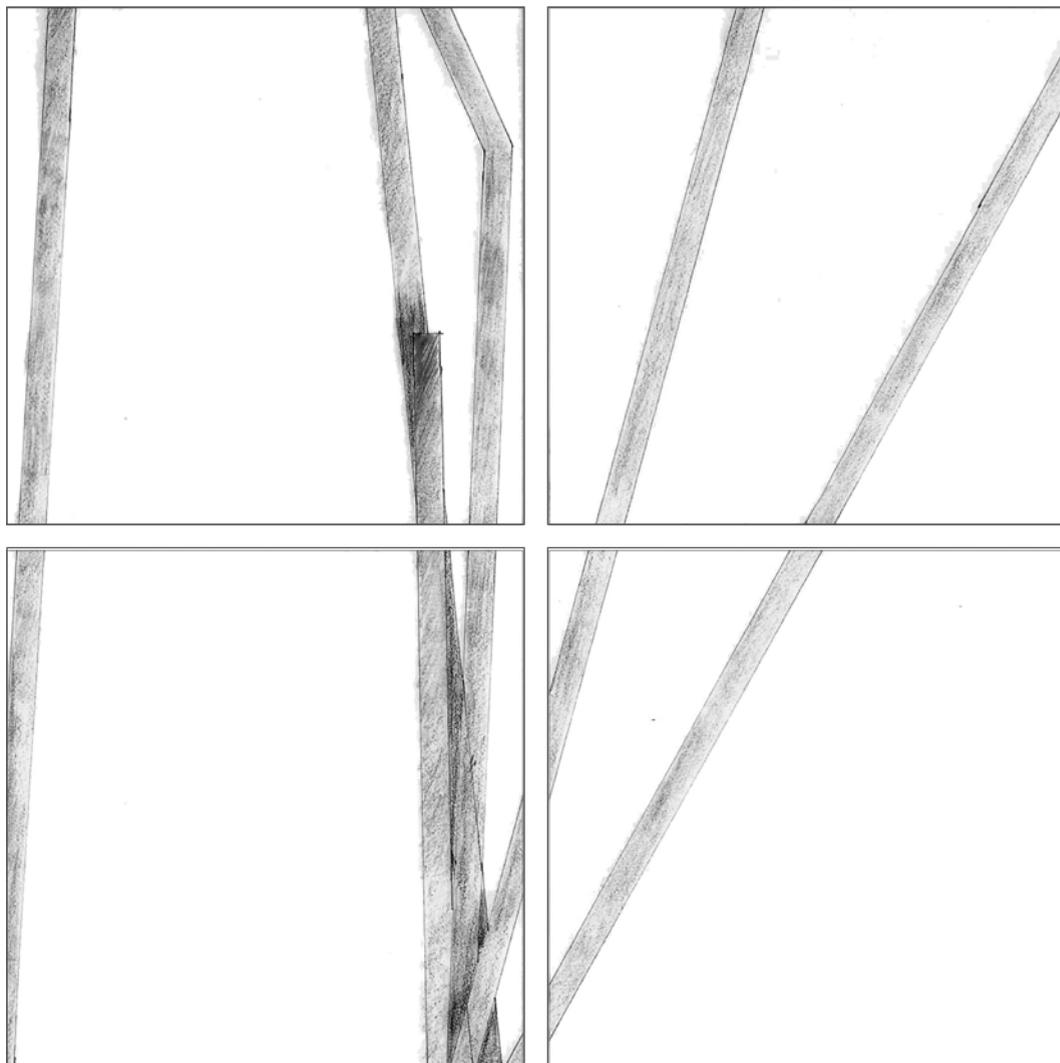
elements - trees/plant  
- water  
- stone/concrete  
- metal  
- fire/energy/light

# Irrigated Tall Grass Patch



## Reflective Metal Runner

irregularity - grass stalks  
reflects the sky, particularly sunset



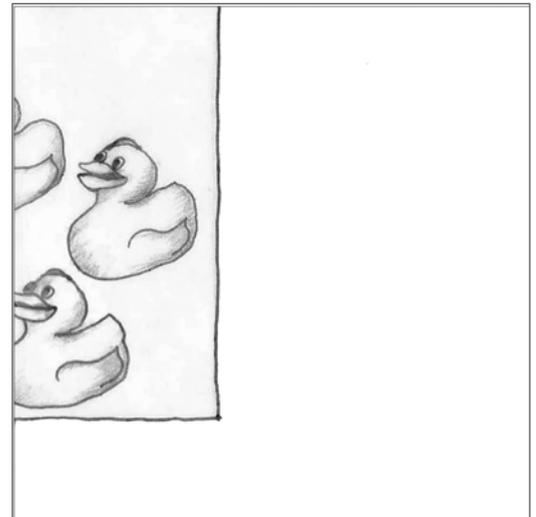
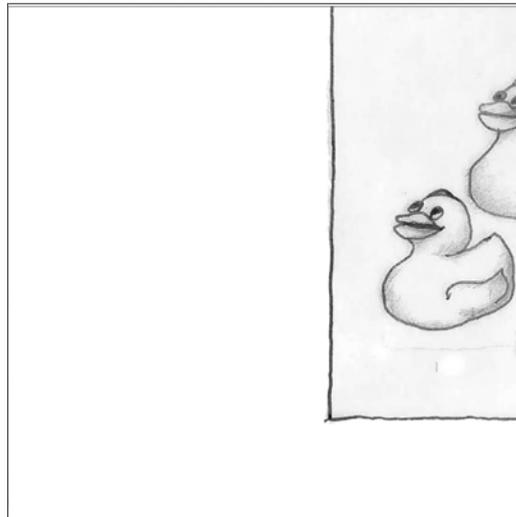
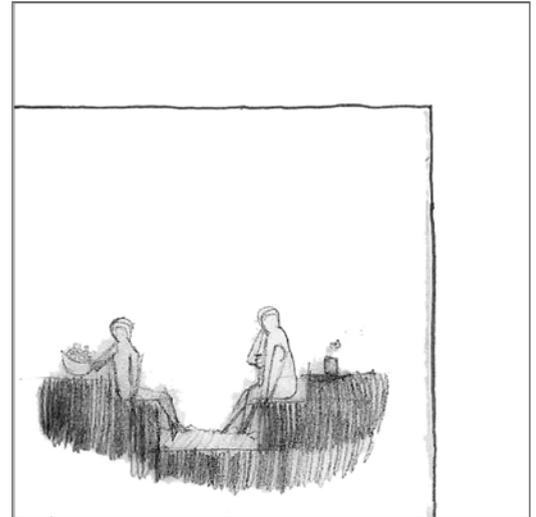
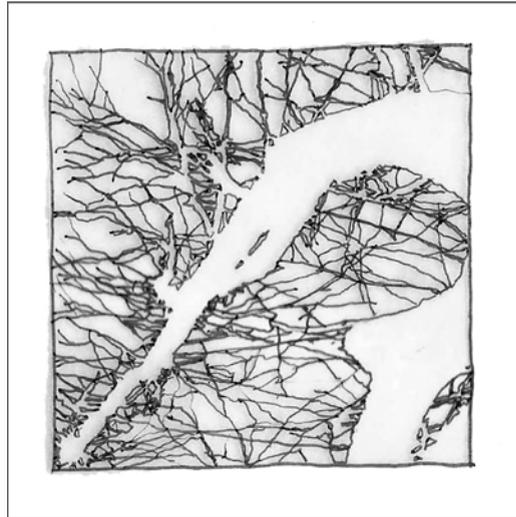
## Tree Canopy + Foot Soaking Trench + Rubber Duckies on a Grid

rubber duckies are 10" wide  
residence-restaurants - foot soak + snacking  
trees filtrates sunlight, provides shading

After a stressful day standing in the hot kitchen, a foot soak is a must!

Originally inspired by the quote:  
"Be like a duck. Calm on the surface, but always paddling like the dickens underneath." - Michael Caine

I recall reading the part when Heston first opened the restaurant and how nervous he was about serving his dishes.





When he was twenty-nine and still Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha had left his wife, child, and family to try and understand the nature of suffering. He had attained enlightenment, shared what he had learned, and left a path for others to follow. (Grubin, 2010)

Even the most abstract of the Buddha's teachings had a practical, ethical dimension. Compassion, the Buddha taught, comes from understanding impermanence, transience, flow - how one thing passes into another, how everything and everyone is connected. (Grubin, 2010)

The second bento landscape is a depiction of *the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva*.

A Buddhist Sutra I have been reading for years.

When I took *Advanced Landscape Theory*, I chose to do a precis on one of the chapters from *Lines: a Brief History* by Tim Ingold. At the end of the one-page precis where I wrote:

I am intrigued by the section - "mazes and labyrinths" - about the movement through the underworld. For I have been reading and contemplating on the Dizhang Sutra for the past 3 years. Inside Dizhang Sutra, the description of the 'underworld' and limbo are explicit, where one is heading depends on which 'path' one took when one was alive on earth. I am amazed to find the similarity between ancient tales in Western world and Asian religion such as Buddhism. Even more so that it never occurred to me to "trace" and "thread" "landscape architecture" through/within the religious realm.

That was the most devastating time of my life so far. Realizing doubt and holding a distrust of my surroundings and myself as a being - a being study in this discipline and a being on earth. Who the - lack of a better word - hell am I? What do I have to offer to the world? I am nothing but a waste of energy resources. The longest and darkest winter, I was called home to seek help from the Venerable Hwei Shen at our devoted temple. While waiting for the day to come, I succumbed to a brief period to the excessive drinking of alcohol; I didn't care about food. I woke up around noon and waited until sundown to start drinking until my emptiness was taken over by a blurred vision of the self.

地藏菩薩本願經

I ended up spending two thirds of my trip at the temple.

Six years ago Venerable Hwei Shen (Ven. Hwen Shen) left the previous temple she served, taking nothing away but people who were willing to follow her. There is no temple waiting for them to take over, they were starting afresh and everything had to be built from ground. They bought an empty lot and hired an architect who also designed the previous temple to draw up new plans for the future site. As disciples we tend to follow the spirit and the teaching of the Venerable, not the size or the establishment of the temple she lives in.

The buildings are expected to be finished in 2011. When I visited last February they had just removed the mold from structural component. They left a set of technical drawing of the building in the temporary meeting room built over the temporary kitchen. What appears as *landscaping* surrounding the main structure was minimalist and labeled as "segregation green belt". Suddenly I felt I should contribute something I learned, that is to design a landscape according to the Sutra we always refer to at our temple. I waited for the right moment to pop out the suggestion that I would volunteer to create the design. In the end, I did not say anything to anyone perhaps I briefly mentioned the idea to my mom when I got home. I didn't have the courage to face rejection, and for the knowledge and experience I had at the time, asking to do something like that was, unfortunately, egotistical. I had an idea, which suffice to say, I was nowhere near with my knowledge to be able to execute it. I questioned my motives, perhaps I just wanted something to put in my portfolio since I was so desperate for an opportunity, any opportunity.

The time spent at the temple helped my body and mind to quiet down. And I must say when I took a shower this morning, thinking about the possibility of recycling this idea - I could not remember when I felt as peaceful and quiet since the visit or the last time I recited the Sutra, or spent an hour to empty my mind through physical exercise (running, bowing), or meditation. This is it! This is what I should do! Design a bento box depicting the Sutra and the *realm* described in it. This is not about fulfilling my ego; it is simply an exercise on process. And this time I actually have ways to approach a project like this.

I was surprised to realize that the knowledge base I have now compared to last February. The knowledge I gained has empowered my confidence level; I have broken out of the cocoon. I have decided I do not want to be a *wasp* anymore, I have chosen to metamorphose into a *blow-fly*. No more hiding, covering up, with all the passive-aggressive nonsense. I am who I am. I will tell things as they are, and I will follow my instinct - the rule of thumb is that no one gets hurt as a result of my actions. And I know my heart is in the right place.

"Sutra of the Past Vows of  
Earth Store Bodhisattva"

What the Buddha realizes is that if we can get rid of this fundamental misunderstanding

of the nature of the self-based on egotism, we won't cling to things, we won't screw up everything we do because we're thinking about it in the wrong way. (Grubin, 2010)

Why a *blow-fly*? The week before the final presentation, I saw live maggots resting, twitching on the ceiling in my kitchen. Thank goodness my friend Cindy was having dinner at my house and she helped me to get rid of most of them. Squirming worms make my knees weak. At first we did not know what kind of worms they are. While Cindy scraped one tucking on the edge of the ceiling, she found out the worm had spun silk on the ceiling. "It must be some sort of maggots", I cried. "About a month and a half ago a big blow-fly flew in and I never really saw it left my house, maybe the blow-fly was pregnant or something". So we of course *Googled* "maggots" to see if they had any resemblance. The answer was yes, and that was when I realized, blow-fly, fruit-fly, and even butterfly belongs in the same Order - *Diptera* - mainly insects that have one pair of wings. And they all go through the stage of metamorphism. A week and a couple days later, while I recovered from post-presentation stress at home, I received the great news about a job offer. The first family and relative I told was my cousin Shao-Ling, who has been inspirational and my morale support since she moved to New York to become a student again. In the email I mentioned the maggot-situation I had at home, which is quite an anomaly. In Chinese astrology and fortune-telling, an anomaly is a sign of something extraordinarily good, and vice versa. When we talk about morphology, we immediately think about butterflies, and how beautiful they have transformed. But even a blow-fly has to go through metamorphosis to become one so it can fly away and high. At the end of the email, I could not resist to point out the satirical side of the metaphor, "I guess I am just a blow-fly at best."

Shao-Ling replied to me, "... of course it means for something extraordinarily good to happen! I think the point is about the process, not about the end-product. You ought to embrace the happiness of breaking out of the cocoon, being metamorphosed, and having found life at its turning point! It does not matter whether it is a butterfly or blow-fly."

She is absolutely right! I laughed so hard at my hypocritical moment. Just four days ago, I preached to a room full of people about the importance of a design process and I even talked about what the word 'form 色' means in Buddhism - *Form is empty, emptiness is a form 色即是空，空即是色*. And then I moped about how metaphorically I am just a silly blow-fly at best?

This assures me that process exists 'any where any time' with 'any form of life'. And dissatisfaction we have causes us to suffer endlessly.

I guess this brings to the next topic, '*suffering*', as in Buddhism. More accurately, suffering refers

to the beings unsatisfied by their surroundings, "... that you know we're never quite happy and if we are that's gone in an instant anyhow." (Grubin, 2010)

Having a religion in our life helps us to think about the questions of life/beginning and death/end and walking on the path/process of ethics early on, with the hope of solving some of these questions (that we have to ask ourselves eventually) sooner (especially people like me who takes more time to process an ideal). Our life on earth has a time-limit. In Buddhist sense, one does not go to heaven without resolving the problems one created (that is, bad karma). In turn, one has to go through reincarnation again if the time is used up. Which form of reincarnation occurs is dependent upon what level of wisdom one learned and practiced in the past live. In Buddhism, death is not the ultimate end - it is just another beginning, the beginning of unknown. One can change the tiding and right a wrong, but time does not slow down, and life is indeed, so very short.

When I took Field Ecology, for two weeks we were sleeping and eating away from the comforts of our own home. We bunked with other people in the woods. Assignments, lectures, and exams are packed into such short amount of time. I caught a really nasty cold on the third day with 11 days to go. I was coughing harshly and suffering from a fever, while my nose bled every time we climbed a slope, at least three times a day. It is hard to calculate how many tissues I used in one day. All I can remember was that I was making tissue-wontons all day, every day. My classmates got worried and asked me if I was going to die, I said to them, "No. But I am going to finish this stupid course even if I die from it. I just do not want to repeat this course ever again!"

The truth is, if I did fail, I would do it differently the next time, and I would definitely pack strong cold medicine in my bag. It turns out I did not have to repeat the course, but the experience triggered me to start taking care of my health, rather than my appearance, for the first time in my life. Maybe I did die on the trip. The old complacent me was reborn from the ashes of burned tissue-wontons.

As intelligent as *Homo sapiens* are, we still have tears, sweat, phlegm and such excretion and waste produced from our bodies, as a result of metabolism. Like any living organisms on earth, we metabolize in order to live.

Suffering didn't begin at birth, and finish with death. Suffering was endless. Unless it was possible to find a way out - become enlightened, become a Buddha. (Grubin, 2010)

Tissues are soft and essential; wontons are yummy and wonderful. But tissue-wontons are not as they are not edible but gross. First of all, you do not always get the chance to do it over

again. Maybe there is not enough time, maybe there is no maybe. So 'try your best' to do it right from the beginning. Pay attention to the details, and consult the genius of your heart. The most important thing is, do not stop trying even if you failed. Move on and focus on the next big challenge, there is always opportunity waiting for you to reach if you try hard enough. Tissues and wontons are both pure and wonderful *elements* to begin with. It is how you, as a designer, utilize them and bring them together in a aesthetically pleasing way. I don't think I'm having wonton soup tonight.



Earth Store Bodhisattva

In the documentary film, *The Buddha* (2010), Jane Hirshfield said that listening to stories is "one of the ways we learn. The story of the Buddha's life is an archetypal journey."

Venerable Hwei Shen always reminds us "Learn from Buddha, become a Buddha, but do not beg the Buddha". Here, 'Buddha' is a verb, a positive action everyone can do. The misunderstanding of Buddha being an idolized stature is false. It is the virtue and the wisdom that lit the path through which Buddhists can trace from. Incidentally, as usual, just a few days ago as I was flipping through a newspaper stacks at the apartment I housesat for the holidays, I came across an article entitled 'Happiness' in *The Globe and Mail* (Hampson, 2010). 'Tis the holiday season:

... making nice is not about blanket repression (that r-word Freudian thing). It's more about determination, I think, the desire to make events happy; to leave everyone with a memory of harmonious togetherness ... this sort of determined happiness ... now I treasure those times. They were happy because my mother and father made the effort 'Happiness' is contagious ... At the end of day, all we have is our memories. Like many people, I have experienced holidays that were seamlessly happy and some that had dark gaping holes ... But as a parent, I have always wanted to mark happy times in an effort to store them in the memory bank ... And it remains there, a still shot of happiness and calm amid the rolling, complicated film of life. (pp. L1, L5)

I often describe to non-Buddhists that practicing bowing is a lot like practicing yoga with one pose. That was however, when I had done an aerobic series with some yoga moves but never really participated in a proper yoga class. I was very lucky to be introduced to a good yoga teacher this spring and fall. The instructor exudes positive energy and he always encourages the class that "depth comes with time, aim for impeccable form".

Some people think the Buddha is born a Buddha, but often neglect the life of Buddha and his previous lives as different beings (Grubin, 2010). In a class of students, some students are always ready to talk, some students do not want to talk and try not to make eye contact with the instructor. I was the latter example, but I have always had a desire to become the talkie. My

problem is I do not dare to open my mouth and say something that will give people the wrong information, which in turn would cause me to humiliate myself. I am still afraid to fail. Marcella Eaton, my professor, saw this and gave me the opportunity to be the teaching assistant (TA) for her theory course where participation in discussion is part of the course marks. From previous experience being a student in her class, I knew the TA had to be prepared to talk in class in case she directs a question at you. I was really nervous and read the assigned readings carefully before each lecture as the students taking the course did. It was challenging and at the same time, I got to observe each student's performance and progress through the course.

Later I realized that amongst the talkative students, some of them recite from the readings and that is it; some of them can just blab on any points raised by the other students; while some of them can provide insightful interpretation from the readings. And there are the shy and quiet students - some of them did not read at all so they would not know what people were talking about. Some of them were nervous and shy like me, and some of them have great knowledge and understanding the readings but were not used to talking in class.

Rarely there are people who can think deeply and speak up in class without being nervous or stuttering. So my attention and curiosity was captured to pay attention and learn from one student in our class. The student used any opportunity to speak up throughout the lecture. When he talks, he does not necessarily have the answer, but he usually has an idea, and while he talks he is thinking and processing those ideas. But he is very honest with his feelings and the uncertainty of those points he raised. He is not trying to answer the answer, but rather he would work through a hypothesis, which I think was appropriate for our theory/philosophy course. So I would think, what if I cannot catch my breath when I try to engage in discussions in front of the class? My suggestion was to take a deep breath, and then try to finish my argument. *Easiness comes with time, aim for impeccable argument.* Practice. Practice. Practice. If I were to ask this student how he does it, he would probably tell me he has been pushing himself to talk since grade school, and now it just 'comes' natural to him to speak with poise.

Why do some people have the 'talent' to do certain things that required others to practice their entire life and still barely achieve the same level? The Venerable Hwei Shen once said, in Buddhist sense, we are born with residual skills and habits developed in the past life, or past lives. As we progress through life, we learn different things, and our skills improve over time. If we have the will and the stamina to stride ahead to not just talk the talk, but also walk the walk. Practice. Practice. Practice.

It was Camus who once said that, "Man is the only species who refuses to be what he really is." But the irony is that it might only be in recognizing our limitations that we can

really actually overcome them. The hope is that you all will think about your limitations, not necessarily as unovercomable, but to recognize them, accept them and then use the world of design to actually figure them out. That might be the only way that we will really be able to achieve our own human potential and really be the noble species we hope to all be. (Santos, 2010)

### Compassion, Passion, and Happiness ...

In the last section I talked about being honest with what you feel and what you do not understand. Addressing these types of questions will help you move through understanding and get on with your life but ... more obstacles ahead ... *suffering*.

Meditation's not about getting rid of anger, getting rid of lust, or getting rid of jealousy. Even while we become a monk, *often we experience anger - it happens*. It often happens when people start teasing you like a shaved bald head person, *but it gives a good chance for us to realize okay let's see this anger arises what is it? What most often happens in our ordinary life is whenever we experience these emotions we get stuck into it. It starts twisting us, but Buddhism is going right through inside it and getting out of it peacefully. And I think that gives us more joy. That makes human life more full, more round. We're not living a partial truth but it's like whole of things together.* (Grubin, 2010)

Buddhism is trying to look at things the way they are. The way it is, just as it is. It hurts. This is life. This is our life. And our relation to life involves losing it too. You don't get beyond these things. You don't get beyond them." (Grubin, 2010)

It's all right to feel what human beings feel and we are not supposed to turn into rocks or trees when we practice Buddhism. Buddhas laugh, cry, dance, feel ecstasy probably even feel despair. It is how we know the world. It is how we live inside of our hearts and not dissociated from them. (Grubin, 2010)

By addressing these issues closely, or by trying to deconstruct what is bothering you, you are then beginning to create a constructive response to resolve those issues. This is a very big step in the process of landscape design as well. When we understand why the site is the way it is, it is time to move along to our design intentions. I think, or I hope, inspiring happiness is what is on everyone's list to do. It does not matter if you are a landscape architect, a medical doctor, a philosopher, a dress maker, a house cleaner, or a chef. How do we know how to make people happy? We can start with ourselves. What really makes us happy? Is it coming home to a warm

and tidy house, with family waiting? You greet each other and perhaps the dining table is filled with piping hot and delicious food ready to be enjoyed.

These feelings have to be true, from our own memories, experiences, no 'if' or 'perhaps'. In my experience, if I was not truly honest with initial impressions, I normally end up with a contrived project. It would clearly show that I did not know what I was doing.

Designers don't always have the best of things. We may look glamorous on the outside because we are trained with a certain taste that is celebrated. But our profession does not usually let us earn enough money to support the lifestyle of many of our clients. For example, I live in an apartment building, but I am commissioned to design someone's backyard completed with a tennis court and a swimming pool, etc. Compassion is treating others the way we want to be treated. If I were to design my own yard, what would it be? Do I want to be cool by the swimming pool or fully exposed to the sun? This wall is blocking the view and the material is worn. Do I want this wall? If so, shall we replace it with something that is visually pleasing? If we cannot replace the wall, maybe it could use a fresh coat of paint? Questions like these can be addressed with clients but we need to think ahead. It is important to formulate these 'questions' as well as getting feedback from the people who are going to use your design. Compassion is one step beyond feeling for yourself, it is a process to learn from another perspective and empathize with the subject next to you. To find the middle ground where we can share with each other.

Once you stop centering your feelings about your feelings on yourself what naturally arises is simple compassion; compassion for your own suffering and compassion for the suffering of others. (Grubin, 2010)

Also, the world around us is miraculous - a tree, a rock, a moth, a keyboard, this room, the heater, the season, sunlight, moonlight, cloud, storm, lightning, snow, blizzard, rain, you and I.

If we appreciate all these aspects and be mindful when we make decisions, the design outcome could be very different. The description of 'coolness' can thus enter. We don't design to be different and cool, but we design to make a difference, a positive change, and we hope it will instill happiness in our client's life, and perhaps they may exclaim "it is so cool!" when they enter the place we created.

With the fourth and final Noble Truth, the Buddha laid out a series of instructions for his disciples to follow: a way of leading the mind to enlightenment called the Noble Eightfold Path - *the cultivation of moral discipline, mindfulness, and wisdom ... be SMART about your desire.* (Grubin, 2010)

am I just a blow-fly at best?



When we have the will to inspire happiness in other people, an embodiment of heart/mind is evident. I believe that this is also true of good design. When we pay heed to our surroundings, we think about the balance of ecology and act with good behaviours. The good behaviour comes from within, which cannot be justified by some elitist 'green certification' gimmick.

This is always connected to that; everything is connected to everything else. You never live by yourself. You live always within a family, society or culture. You constantly interact with other people all the time. So our happiness depends on their happiness as well. How can we be happy if we are the only one happy on just an island of happiness within an ocean of misery? Of course that's not possible. (Grubin, 2010)

white

or blank

or beige

色 form/matter/colour

受 sensation/feeling/perception

想 conception/mental formation

行 implementation

識 consciousness/discernment

5 aggregates

五

蘊

## Pilgrimage Path + 13-Chapter Gardens

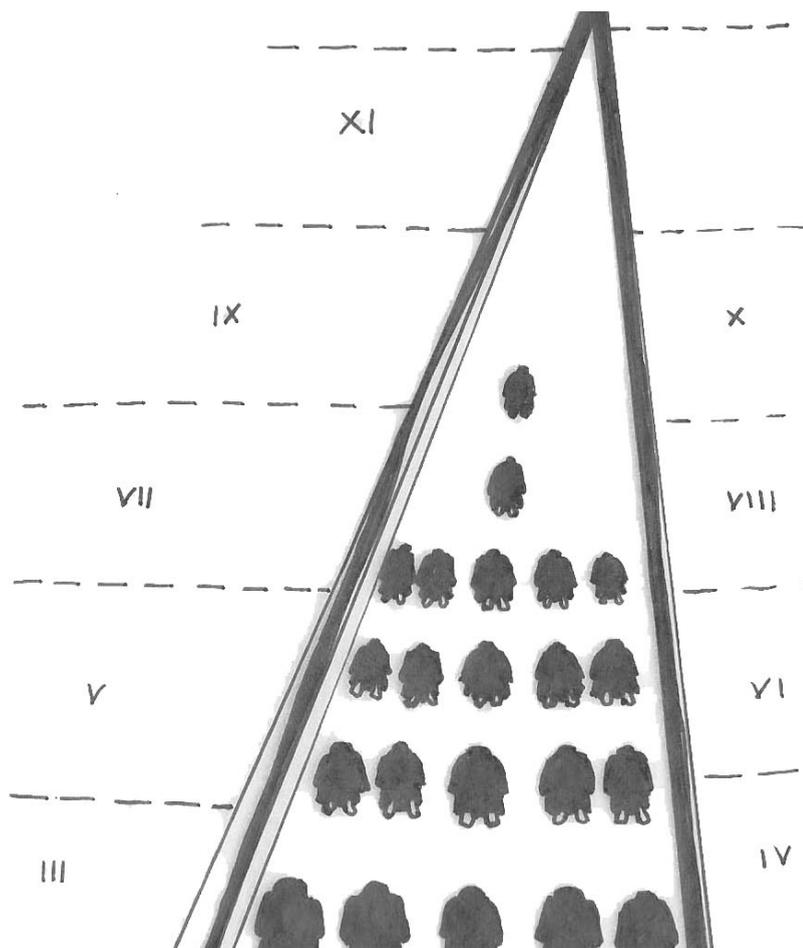
making a pilgrimage  
towards the temple (on  
the mountain):

bow down every three  
steps

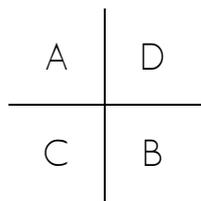
for 108 reps

the leader counts with  
Buddhist prayer beads  
(108 bead-count)

3 steps = approx. 7'



# Orientation



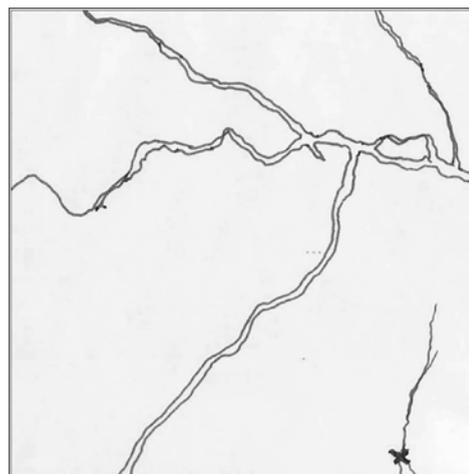
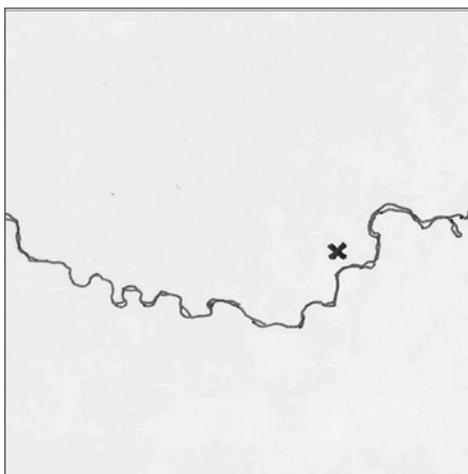
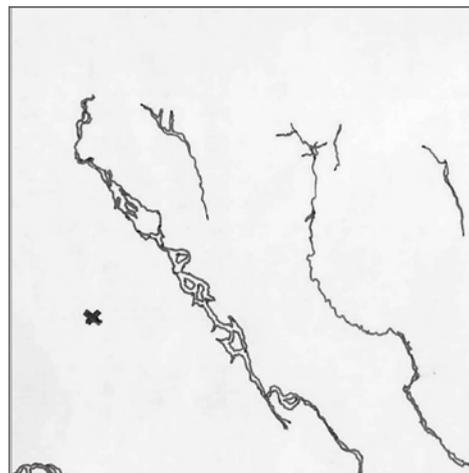
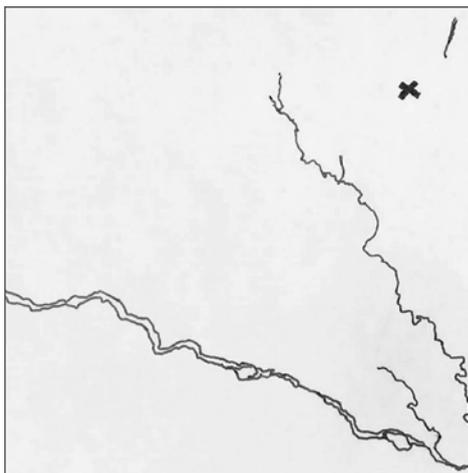
Locations of Buddhist PILGRIMAGE to the sacred sites

A - Lumpini, Nepal - The birthplace of Buddha

B - Bodhgaya, India - Site of Buddha's Enlightenment / The Bodhi Tree

C - Sarnath, India - Site of Buddha's First Sermon

D - Kushinagar, India - The place of The Buddha's Death



## Chapter I + Chapter III + Chapter V

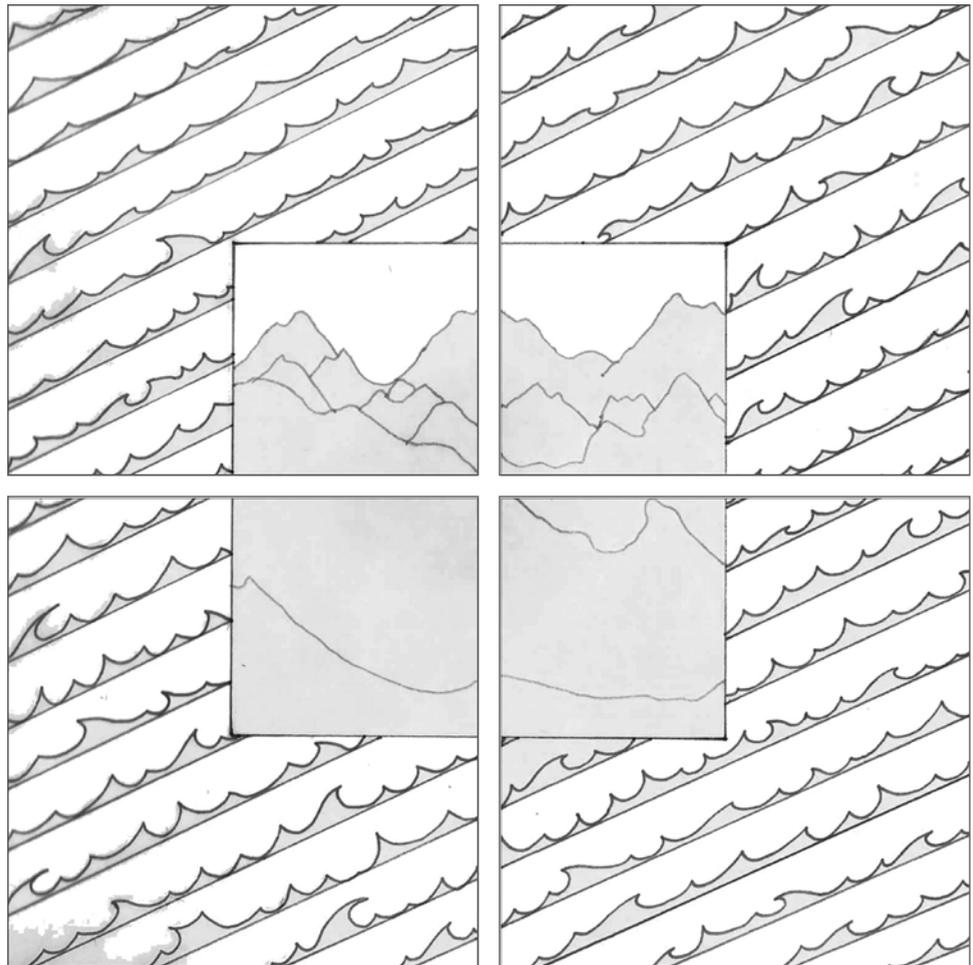
metal + stone + sand + gravel  
could it be *kare-sansu*?! Dry-landscape?

"Why is this water seething and bubbling, and why are there so many offenders and evil beasts?"

These are beings of Jambudvipa who did evil deeds ... during their lives they themselves didn't plant any good causes. Now their own karma calls for these hells. Their first task is to cross this sea." - Chapter I

"There is just one hell called Relentless. Its circumference is eighteen thousand miles. The wall of that hell is a thousand miles high, totally made of iron, and covered with a fire burning downward that is met by a fire burning upward." - Chapter III

"In eastern Jambudvipa there is a mountain range called Iron Ring. That mountain range is pitch black because the light of the sun and moon does not shine on it ... to inflict these retributions in each hell, hundreds of thousands of instruments made of copper, iron, stone, or fire arise from karmic forces. Those four materials come into being in response to the kinds of karma that offenders create." - Chapter V



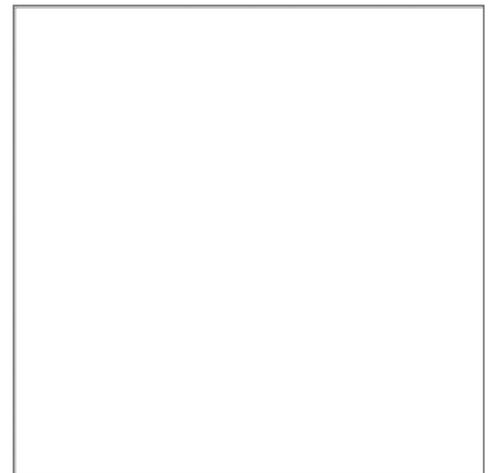
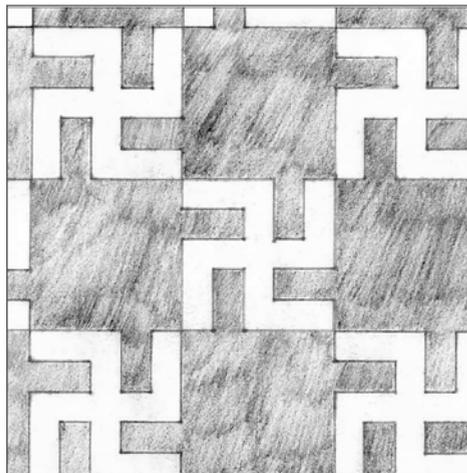
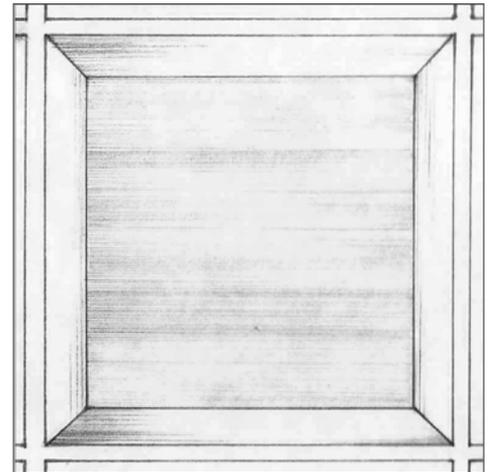
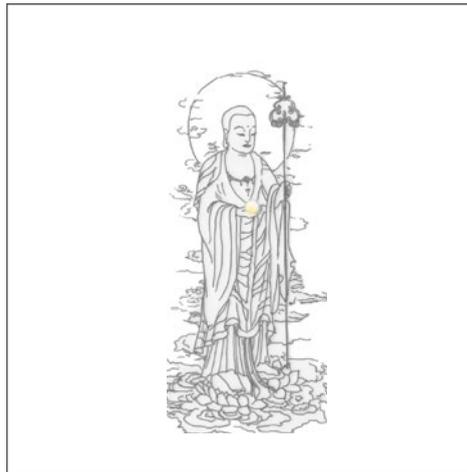
## Chapter II + Chapter IX + Chapter X

"My division bodies take across and liberate all those different kinds of beings ... I may appear as a mountain, a forest, a stream, a spring, a river, a lake, a fountain, or a well in order to benefit people. I use all these ways ... in order to teach and rescue being."  
- Chapter II

"If, however, at the time of such offenders' deaths, someone recites the names of Buddhas on their behalf, then their offenses can gradually be dissolved. How much more will that be the case for beings who recite those names themselves. The merit they create will be limitless and will eradicate measureless offenses."  
- Chapter IX

"... in the future, good men or women may plant good roots in the Buddhaharma by giving, making offerings ... or doing other good deeds amounting to no more than a strand hair, a mote of dust, a gain of sand, or a drop of water. Merely by transferring the merit from such deeds to the Dharma Realm, the merit and Virtue that those people will create will cause them to enjoy superior and wonderful bliss for thousands of thousands of lives."  
- Chapter X

Buddha, Buddha, everywhere  
water feature - representative well - shallow depth - wide opening  
*Svastika* pattern for pavement



## Chapter IV + Chapter VIII + Chapter XI

"Beings who have not yet obtained liberation have unfixed natures and consciousnesses. Their bad habits reap bad karma; their good habits bring rewards. Reacting to situations by committing good or evil deeds causes them to turn in the Five Paths without a moment's rest. Throughout eons as numerous as dust motes they remain focused, deluded, obstructed, and afflicted by difficulties.

They are like fish swimming through waters laced with nets. They may slip through and keep their freedom temporarily, but sooner or later they will be caught.

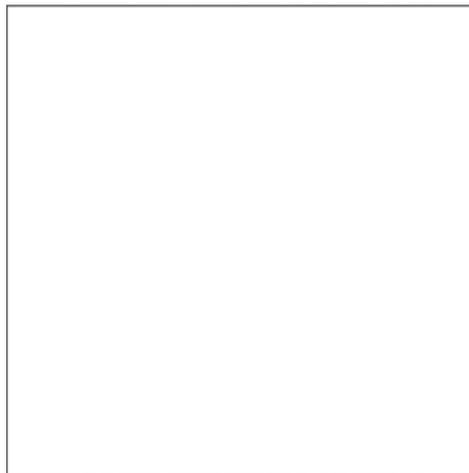
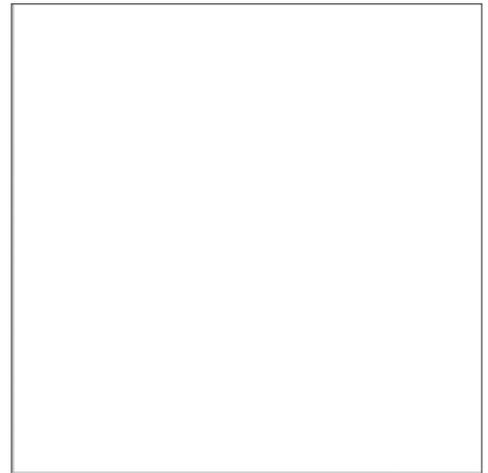
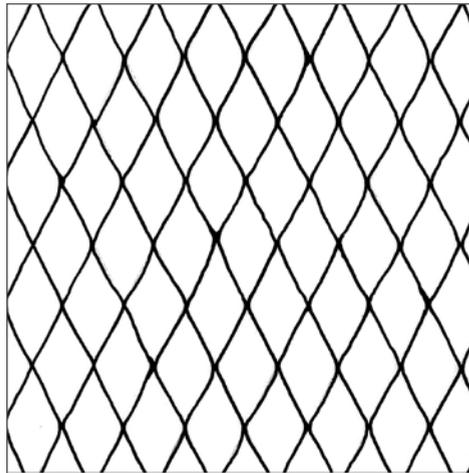
" - Chapter IV

"But because beings of Jambudvīpa are so bound up by their own heavy bad habits, they keep revolving in and out of the various paths over and over, as this Bodhisattva labours throughout many long eons to entirely effect their rescue and release ... They are like people who, in confusion, lose their way home, and take a dangerous road by mistake ... Those confused people are sure to be harmed very quickly on that dangerous path." - Chapter VIII

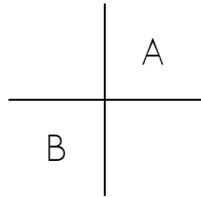
"The Buddha told the Earth Spirit Firm and Stable, 'There are few spirits who can match your great spiritual power. Why do I say that? All the lands in Jambudvīpa receive your protection. All the grasses, woods, sands, stones, paddy fields, hemp, bamboo, reeds, grains, rice, and gems come forth from the earth because of your power...'" - Chapter XI

Fishnet - web - lighting feature

Ginkgo biloba alley - ginkgo nuts is widely used in Chinese vegetarian cuisine - shading - makes the path way



## Chapter VI + Chapter VII + Chapter XIII



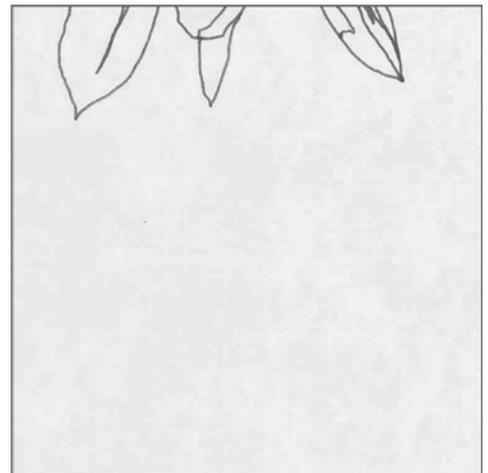
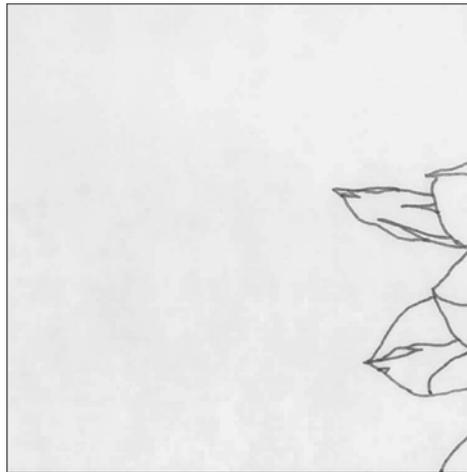
A - Night blooming *Cereus (Epiphyllum oxypetalum)* - impermanence - fragrance

B - Japanese *Camellia (Camellia japonica)* - young leaves are edible - seeds can be processed into cooking oil.

"... continually make offerings day after day without fail, of flowers, incense, food, drink, clothing, colored silks, banners, money, jewels, and other items ... who are able to play music, sing, or chant praises and make offerings of incense and flowers before images of the Bodhisattva ...."  
- Chapter VI

"... In the process of preparing the vegetarian meal and before it has been eaten, rice-washing water and vegetable leaves should not be throw on the ground. Before the food is offered to the Buddhas and the Sangha, no one should eat it." - Chapter VII

"... incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and pearl necklaces rained down in the Trayastrimsha Heaven as offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and Earth Store Bodhisattva, and everyone in the assembly joined together in gazing at and making obeisance to the Buddha and Bodhisattva. Then they put their palms together and withdrew.." - Chapter XIII





take out

This journey started in the kitchen when friends came over for dinner. They suggested that since I cook so much maybe I should use food as the subject for my landscape architecture practicum. When I started to piece together the possibilities between food and landscape architecture, I entered a whole new world, a new world of languages, backgrounds, aspects, etc. Soon after I found a tremendous inadequacy in my knowledge of my own discipline.

When I think I have found the clues to the answer, it turns out I find clues that lead to more questions. This world has no end, and perhaps no exact beginning. The moment the first question was formed is where it begins. And perhaps the moment I perceived a trigger to my senses was prior to that, and the tab goes on and on.

I feel at a loss that the journey has come to an end, somewhat an end. I have to finish here and start again in the next chapter of my life. In the next chapter I might not have the luxury to prioritize reading and theorizing as a daily activity. But I guess this is it. I fulfilled certain goals I set out to do on the land where people speak a language different than my mother tongue. I found the joy in independent study and I found a way to organize my thoughts as well as the ideas of others. That does not necessarily mean I am fully content with where I am at. But I am confident that it will only get better.

The bento landscape draws context from everywhere but an actual site. I would argue that the bento landscape, although highly developed such that it can be prefabricated and dropped on a cleared site, is undeniably, in a process of *becoming*.

A student just came by to pick up her assignments from the previous class I TA'ed - whom I briefly talked to - what I am doing at the moment and what my practicum is about. She thinks my project sounds interesting, while I have trouble forming my thoughts into a proper sentence, as I tried to explain to her. Oh! Bless her! I told her I am writing my conclusion but I have yet to finish the design, although the design of the design is just representing a process. She mentioned her last studio project which she purposefully finished without a design, "once the ideal is designed, it becomes cheap". In reflection, I do not agree or disagree with her point, which is absolutely interesting. My interpretation is that we, as designers, are selling a formalized ideal to people to an extent that we have to persuade the buyer and ourselves that ideal is tangible.

No matter how hard we try, no one can stop time. An organized home/designed landscape is for using (and messing up), which requires aftercare from time to time. The Buddha said, "All things change. Whatever is born is subject to decay (Grubin, 2010)."

It may sound pessimistic but we live in this world as we are. We are here to do things right; that

is our responsibility to this life and to our society.

Many theory and framework cocktails later, we need to take a stance. Even when the stance is a conglomerate of choices we have made. But I think, this is what design is, making better decisions as the time proceeds.

Going back to the home organization example, to organize is to make good decision on what to keep and what to toss. Knowing the context of the user and how they function in the space, we decide and assign what belongs where. We also find a happy medium in this exercise between 'keep' and 'toss' - to '*give away*' to someone who has better use for them.

Some might prefer the term - intervention - over *decision making* and *assigning* things, but honestly I feel that the word is almost violating other people's territory, too forceful. I would rather step back a little, understand the subject first. Do not use the term unless that is solely my intention to take radical action.

My living space reflects my mental state and progress in life. I started out settling down in a decent apartment, just me and a space, then I started hoarding to fill the emptiness of that space, junk accumulation has got out of hand. In this practicum I started out with just two words, food and landscape, then I started to hoard ideas and information, and it finally got out of hand, too. It is all because I did not have the skill to organize and process junk and thoughts. Learning how to learn has been a major part of this process.

To bring things down many notches and wipe down the dirty slate, I started fresh from somewhere before the lowest notch. I realized I have never asked myself what landscape architecture is to me. What is my stance? Do I know what I am doing? I may have studied through an undergraduate environmental design program and finished all the course work required for the master program, but I have not yet felt the confidence to say what I think landscape architect is. Although I may have answered that question in Professional Practice course a while ago, I sourced the Manitoba Landscape Architecture Association mandate.

The question is not what the discipline is, but rather what the discipline can be. At times it seems like I am sucked into nowhere and spat out all over the place. Through time I finally see where I am going without consciously knowing. I enjoy anecdotes and I am curious enough to follow a hunch and open my preconceived perception ...

Creativity comes from deficiency; it is a coping skill to change things for better and to humour undesirable fate. I came to Canada to see the Green Gables, but I landed in Winnipeg. I have yet to step onto PEI. I am pretty much an orphan, alone in this place where my language, manner,

and background misfit into. In the movie, Anne was invited over to Aunt Josephine's estate in Charlottetown for the first time. Before bed she whispered to Diana, "No wonder she [Aunt Josephine] has so little imagination! That's one consolation about being poor - you have to dream all this up." As the old saying, "When life gives you lemon, make lemonade." Sometimes we have to make do with what we have, whether it is a bitter sour lemon or sweet honey.

With something like lemons you have to get creative and play. Kids try and learn their social skills through playing with other kids. We adults think we have learned enough so we stop trying. Before we succeed we are afraid to fail. Some learned to stand up from the rubble and they do everything they can to prevent falling. David Sun, who worked at the top advertisement agency in Taiwan, just passed away a few weeks ago. 'The Godfather of Advertisement' some call him. David Sun was an extremely interesting man who coined many 'gilded' slogans that touched consumer's inner soul and deepest desire (e.g. happiness). In an interview for *Common Wealth Magazine* he said people are afraid of failing. But we have to try to fail. If the winning rate is 20%, you are bound to succeed on the 81st try. In a sense, you don't get a chance to win if you don't take the chance to try. Frankly there is nothing to lose or fail - failing does not matter under the circumstance of a bitter lemon.

In Pagels' quote on Einstein, "How can he be humble? He hasn't done anything yet" (Pagels, 1984). *False modesty can be a mask of egoism, that "all ambition is due to fear of death [in my case, fear of failure] ... that we have no insight, or even lie to ourselves, about our heart's desires* (Blackburn, 2001)."

I think in this practicum, I spent more time on the thinking process, the theoretical aspect. I always have had trouble putting things down on paper before I worked out the logics in my head. But now I have found a roll of trace paper that carries all the ideas ever made it out of my head and replays it in a continuous way so I don't get brain relapse. And I am armed with one soft-tip pen with black ink. Because of the soft-tip, I can easily switch the line weights and shading style at the tip of my fingers. I can letter and I can illustrate with one pen. A technical pencil filled with 0.3 F lead can add a different shade of non-colour and allows future editing or deleting with an eraser - to keep the scroll clean, and to simplify the visual impact. Coloured pens and inks are introduced with moderation and only when it is necessary. That is the way to start the 'practice' process, aesthetically.

Our true enemy/demon is ourselves. We only compare ourselves to others because we are not fully satisfied with ourselves. Lisa is that character I created to take blame about myself. If only I understood that form is emptiness, I should not be affected by her. I relied on Lisa when we were friends. I relied on her even more when we became enemies. I needed to reflect myself through

her to ensure that we are completely different creatures. Who is the real villain in this chapter? Who is the most unkind to me, to allow such pain to be inflicted on myself? The answer is that ... it has always been me. I did not let her go, not yet. Lisa's existence forced me to seek the truth and the path to happiness. I realized that, what I have imposed on her was only temporal. It is time now to let go completely.

Going through this process, I figure it is easier to just be myself ... life is/we are complex enough, why make it more complicated?

I thought to myself before the presentation ... why didn't I just read this sutra or talk about Buddhism from the beginning and make a project based practicum out of it?

But I guess the result would be like following one recipe without your own thinking and using your own judgement. However, no recipe is perfect, and unfortunately, according to Blumenthal (2009), people dumb the recipe down and over-simplify the process/ingredients to 'not to overwhelm' the reader.

The problem is at the time my faith in Buddhism and the confidence in myself was not yet there.

This process is not about producing a dish/project. I want to learn the process rather than manufacturing at neither the start or the end of the production line. Even if I have to wind my way through all the obstacle and get 'there'. And I needed this process to prove is that certain things are not just believable but also 'true'.

The confidence is based on how much knowledge I have gained, and what I can share with others what I have learned.

When I came to Canada twelve years ago, I had to cook on my own. The nostalgia of home cooking, money, being alone ... and no one to nag me when I use the kitchen ... all of that ... is what I love perhaps mainly because I love to eat. I want tasty foods ... I cannot just survive on instant noodles, I like variety. Not all the dishes I cooked come out great, but there are times that I had success.

On the other hand, my chances with environmental design were not very good. Slowly but surely I lost my interest and confidence, with only a little hope left in my faith that I could find my way around it. Hope is like a spark, not a lot of heat but there is the potential to start a prairie fire/forest fire with the right ingredients of place and time.

When I try my hand on a new dish, I find three recipes (e.g. family, cookbook, internet forum) and use my judgement to figure out the best formula before I set out to cook. Although that does not guarantee success on the first try, you get an idea which party should be approved next time. It boils down to the heart and honesty. The heart of good intention and the honesty to discern right from wrong - adjust accordingly. But is that how I approach my academic degree? Why not?

And I think everyday, when we pick up the newspaper, switch channels with a remote control, getting rid of uninvited bugs ... it all has something that we can learn from. And they are the ingredients for our creativity. That is what makes David Sun's commercial so unique. He did not start by creating a catchy phrase or slogan, he just reminded the audience how beautiful 'everyday' is and represented it authentically. He highlighted the part we don't usually speak of, and after the commercials aired, those lines became a meaningful slogan that never wears out - sustainability perhaps.

In the beginning, I was trying to write 'academically'. To me, 'academic writer' is someone who uses a load of jargon and terminology with at least five syllables, and they make the length of one sentence so long they are difficult to understand. "That would set me apart!" I thought to myself. In fact I did not have any thought at all. I hardly had any confidence in the things I said, let alone writing them. I was trying to create a veneer, which I am not capable of. Not until I stripped down to everyday vocabulary, I started to see the light at the end of the tunnel, which shines through the path. I can finally see closely what things really are. I got rid of the junk that blocked the window. The light can finally penetrate through. I started by writing in first person, telling my own stories, from the innocent beginning to where it went wrong, and working through questions and doubts by things I learned along the way. Shall I live happily ever after? I am happy because this story has come to an end, crazy practicum and 10 years of university - and it makes sense.

People like stories. It is one of the ways we learn. The story of the Buddha's life is an archetypal journey. But it is a means to an end. It is not an end." (Grubin, 2010)



## A RECIPE for creativity

Where recipes are concerned, I reckon that less is, in fact, less. (Blumenthal, 2008)

Creativity involves with coming up with something that has not been done before, but novelty along is not enough. It takes many hours of experimentation to create something that is both new and interesting ... New, creative and unique are not the same thing ... There is a fine line between being influenced and copying. (Adria, Adria & Soler, 2008)

\*Please check your ego at the door\*

Practice makes perfect --- it is not always perfect, but depth comes with time

Yes, it sounds generic. But it cannot be truer. We all secretly wish we are the gifted one, the talented, chosen one. But being gifted does not prevent one from having a mental block at some point of time. It is a matter of sooner or later. But to break that block, one has to think outside the box. It is not about repetitive motions; you don't break out with the same method that is not moving you one-trillionth forward or backward.

Have a little faith

What is faith really? Faith is belief. Believe in something or somebody (this can be yourself). One time at the temple, I was asked to cook a curry dish for lunch. The temple was packed with hundreds of people that day, quite a weight on my shoulder. I cooked mostly for myself, and I have never cooked for more than 10 servings. I didn't even know how to light the industrial stove top. The wok was as wide as my arm extended from my fingertip to shoulder. I didn't even know the stove was out of propane half way through cooking, as the heat had been inadequate from the beginning to the point when someone realized the propane was out. I had no sense of time in a kitchen that feeds the Buddha and everyone at the temple. The lunch had to be ready and transferred to serving dishes and placed in front of the hall to commence the noon offering ritual. Not only was I not supposed to taste the dish before offering, neither did I have time to do so before it was rushed away from the kitchen. The marquee in my brain reads, "Are the root vegetables cooked through?" I am afraid not. And I worried about the flavour and the consistency of the sauce. Hopefully I salted them enough and that it tasted like something. By the time people dug in the cooked potatoes in the soupy sauce would they think ... Ah! Disastrous!! As I watched all the dishes entered the temple hall, I prayed, "please please be yummy!"

As it turned out, some of the potatoes were cooked nicely, some of them could have used a bit more time though generally everything was cooked through. It was a surprise to me

that the dish turned out salty enough. Overall the dish was not as good as it could have potentially been, but it was acceptable to the palette. I was also surprised to hear some positive responses from other cooks in the kitchen. Perhaps they were just surprised to see a student work her way around the kitchen like a seasoned homemaker/cook. The *Paul Potts Effect* I call it.

Follow your intuition

Faith - receive/perceive things as they are.

There are those who suggest that a scientific approach to cooking somehow takes away from the artistry and romance and beauty of it all, and kills off the passion. For me the reverse is true. *I'm still first and foremost following my instincts, but using science as a tool to help explore culinary possibilities.* (Blumenthal, 2008. P.54)

According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator exam we took in Professional Practice, I am hopelessly intuitive.

I remember the day when I arrived our first environmental design studio session. I thought intuition was all I needed. Soon I realized it was not enough. I was too naive for my own good. I felt discouraged and suppressed by the technical courses, and even by design studio and history courses. I tucked my intuition away while I trying to please the instructors by doing whatever they told me to do - except being on time. There I lost my interest, and any hope to succeed in this discipline. I did the bare minimum on effort, and I spent more time procrastinating and getting distracted. So I thought if I had filthy amount of money I might as well purchase a diploma from some seedy institution and get on with my life. To hell with architecture!

I stayed around like the hopeful single at a bar. Maybe there is a chance, any chance to get around this discipline. Maybe I will try a different pick-up line every other night, eventually someone would want to hook up with me. Being picked up at a bar is perhaps not the best metaphor but close enough. When you want something attainable/unattainable badly, you will do anything and get very creative to achieve your goal.

The Buddha saw death and life as inseparable. These are two sides of the same thing. Death is always with us. Death is part of the whole large unknown and if we are unable to smile at the idea of the unknown, we're in real trouble. That's the realism that the Buddha was talking about, trying to come to terms with reality (Grubin, 2010)

Without doubt, there will be no faith. Say we live in a dualist world. Everything has both sides. There is no happiness without sadness, light and dark, hot and cold, to name a few. I had many doubts about my studies, the given environment and my attitudes towards it. Am I wronged by others or do I have wrong perception to begin with? Is intuition a valid approach? So I decided to take a leap of faith by starting to track things. I had two

set of records, one on happiness, and the other on serendipitous moments that make me pause in awe. I learned something quite valuable. The record of happiness taught me why certain time and place in combination makes one happy, why that time and place is worth celebrating and memorable at the same time, and how we as designer can use that to re-enact that moment in our design, to make people happy. At the beginning I scorned this approach, "happiness? How lame! It's not like being cool, you know?" But what is being *cool*, really? It is not very tangible if you really think about it. The serendipity blog showed me how everything is interconnected, perhaps through invisible lines. It is not just coincidence or 'randomness', a word I hate with all my heart, just because a line is invisible does not mean it does not exist. So this exercise is all about opening our eyes, or rather, opening the chakras; to embrace possibilities and take things as it is.

The record ended around the time I did the intermediate presentation, when I felt the exercise deemed its relevancy to my thinking process. At that time I decided to regard and register every piece of information that had a ring to it and follow/trace the invisible line that might connect to the core of the problem and solution.

To do that I needed to have faith, or I would laugh at my silly idea without moving forward. This recording exercise can become a maze where one enters a route which does not lead to the exit, while distractions lurk hiding on the corner or jumping out half-way that invoked deep emotions inside and drove me to the wrong side of the track or made me stop the process all together. Besides having faith to follow a winding road, I have to keep my mind clear in order for my *Third Eye Chakra (Ajna)* to shine through the path. That is, use my intuition to help with my discretion.

When in doubt, use your discretion

Doubt - discernment.

Always, always use your own discretion before you make the decision. Faith and doubt co-exist. We are all tortured by our thoughts, especially after you opened your Chakras and accept things as they are. Now we have to discern which one suits better and work towards it. Keep in mind, every decision you make has its consequences, good or bad.

Discipline and ethics

How to choose? Which to choose? Your discretion is based on perhaps a set of rules - ethical rules of a culture - yours or others, ethical parameters of a religion, and the aspects of a discipline. The ethical aspect is one of them.

### Form constructive questions

Before you can proceed or when you think you cannot proceed, it is time to form some good questions. Why am I here? What do I have to work with? Do I like it and why? Do I hate it and why? Sometimes "why" is all you need to start forming your questions? It helps to reason through your actions. And the answer can be effected by ethics, morality, mood, emotions, practicality, idealism ... etc. Practice "why".

### Observe closely by tracing a picture

everything is so easy for design students these days. Why practice hand lettering when typing on a computer is so easy and looks go good? Why bother with a enormous drafting table and silly parallel ruler when you can zoom in and zoom out on a computer screen with CAD programs that enabled orthogonal snap? Do CAD-generation students realize why they have a problem 'designing' with just a computer? And they are trapped in *SketchUp Lego Land* without realizing it? It may be a lot faster and more accurate to draw a horizontal line with various line weights to choose from on a computer, but you lose the thinking process of laying down interesting ideas on paper using a real pen. The moment a line is drawn, size of paper (or a wall, a table, a ceiling, etc.) creates a dimension, they become vessels to carry these thoughts. The way the line looked within this space will tell you more than a perfect line in virtual space. With a set boundary, you can tell if the line you just drew on the paper is somewhat thin, thick, dark, light, prominent, insignificant ... etc. This process enables thinking and decision making. Thinking and decision making is undoubtedly what design is all about.

When we put trace paper over this, we are selecting which line to keep and to perfect that line with a ruler or using a pen multiple times to achieve the desirable darkness and thickness (in one word, the line-weight).

Bowing in *Dharma* practice is a body-mind activity. "... bowing reduces pride, teaches us respect, and increases our goodness. Bowing awakens these qualities within, effecting our conscious state and view of ourselves and place in the world" (Huynh, 2010)

*Homo sapiens* learned to stand up to walk; we invented beds, chairs, cars, airplanes to keep a distance from the ground. We are so great; we are the only animal on earth that walks on their two-feet. We are so intelligent - other animals can only achieve the intelligence of a human child, and those animals are unclothed. How naive does that sound? Sometimes I wonder if in fact we have to use our brain to invent stuff in order to save our flawed genes - lack of body hair to keep us warm, or a pair of wings to lift us away from our standing view-point to an all-encompassing bird's eye view, or flatten and pave the road so we can

stand and walk without climbing with hands. Perhaps by bringing ourselves closer to the ground once again, we might learn to respect and have empathy for anyone or anything other than ourselves.

### 'Hoarding' Information

Once your mind is open, you will be exposed to a lot of amazing things, the beautiful and the ugly. You take it all in; you become an information hoarder. This is a phase that you might want to set a exit-point. It could be a month before a certain deadline, so you have time to process the rest of ingredients mentioned in this chapter.

### Organize Information and Ideas

You can try my framework to organize but you can always formulate one on your own. Whichever makes you learn better and more efficient. When you get the hang of the organization system, when you feel really confident and strong, you may take out the 'hoarding' part, but keep your mind open and alert to receive and gather new ideas.

Perhaps the hardest thing to do is downsizing. As an old Chinese saying, *'it is easy to go from cheap to extravagance, not the other way around.'*

Sort - prioritize. Toss, keep, or probation? Can you live without that article or that idea?

Assign tasks to the kept items - group information that has related ideas

Arrange - according to the relevance of each grouped information

### Aesthetics /taste/culture

Aesthetics is personal but it is not necessary private - common aesthetics supported in a society can be seen as a culture. A culture supported by ways of teaching/studying, playing/displaying, promoting, etc. Different cultures have different tastes, tastes in art and landscapes, as well as in food. For example: flavour profile, e.g. Thai cuisine is usually a balance between sweet, sour, and hot, texture, consistency, staple or hot commodity. Aesthetics satisfies human needs on different levels from the lowest to highest, although some would argue that the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it does not cover aesthetics. Then I wonder if sometimes having a full stomach is not only a basic need, but also a desire - in case of having a full stomach is already a luxury.

... because the chefs always bent the rules, introducing little details that made a huge

difference to the outcome and gave a dish its individual twist. I wanted to know these details, what effect they had and why. (Blumenthal 2008, p. 24)

#### Pause

Take a moment to breathe, focus on breathing and nothing else. When you are ready, start with a clear mind and start again.

This step can be taken as many as you need, as long as you have the time. When you have a lot of time, go for a run, read a newspaper, watch a movie, clean the house, talk to a close friend or family member. When you do not have much time, take a deep breath wherever you are.

#### Play and be ready to make some mistakes

Sir Robinson (2006) says that "mistakes are as important as rights", and I agree.

... I don't mean to say that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. What we do know is, if you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original. If you're not prepared to be wrong. And by the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost that capacity. (Robinson, 2006)

#### Have fun and inspire happiness in others

This, it seems to me, is an incredibly fertile area for cuisine [/landscape], and we chefs [/landscape designers] should look to broaden our horizons. A modern restaurant needn't simply be a place to satisfy hunger. Cooking [/designing] and eating [/being in a built landscape] should be about fun and pleasure, and there are all sorts of creative possibilities that could be brought into the dining [/visiting] experience to enhance that - lighting design, holograms, use of sound and smell and the power of suggestion. (Blumenthal, 2008. pp.112, 113)

We expected a visit to the theatre or cinema to have a powerful effect on our emotions: surely the restaurant [/built landscape], with its multisensory appeal, can have a similar emotive effect ... I prize above almost anything else the fact that my cooking [/design] can release that level of emotion. For a chef [/designer] there's no higher compliment. (Blumenthal, 2008. pp.112, 113)

#### Be true to yourself

By addressing these issues closely, or by trying to deconstruct what is bothering you, you are then beginning to create a constructive response to resolve those issues. This is a very

big step in the process of landscape design.

These feelings have to be true, from our own memories, experiences, no 'if' or 'perhaps'. In my experience, if I was not truly honest with initial impressions, I normally ended up with a contrived project. It would clearly show that I did not know what I was doing.

#### Take responsibility

Who we are is equally important as what we do. Our heart/mind affect our actions. Actions we take upon the world/environment/people around us as well as ourselves have their consequences.

... everything is connected to everything else. You never live by yourself. You live always within a family, society or culture. You constantly interact with other people all the time. So our happiness depends on their happiness as well. How can we be happy if we are the only one happy on just an island of happiness within an ocean of misery? Of course that's not possible. (Grubin, 2010)

Instead of greed, you have generosity; instead of anger, you have compassion; and instead of ignorance, you have wisdom. (Grubin, 2010)  
"You are [the] universe." (Grubin, 2010)

#### Creativity is in the details

The law, an assignment brief and ethical conducts of our discipline as landscape architects are the minimum requirements of the standard we act upon which when met, can have outcomes which fall between the ranges from adequate to very good. Keep in mind that it is unacceptable to fall below the bar, and considered to be not good practice. On the other end of the spectrum, what differentiates exceptional work from excellent work would be the personal touch, whether it is insightful, extra work, or work done thoroughly.

I wanted to know these details, what effect they had and why. I would go through countless recipes for vanilla ice cream, trying to work out the reason for each variation, each difference between them. (Blumenthal 2008, p. 24)

#### Do not stop learning

Design is a process of learning. Learn about yourself at each chapter of your life, learn about the site, learn about your clientele, learn about the material, learn about the new techniques, learn as you go, etc.

Learning does not stop at the moment you hand it your documentation for your practicum, or the assignment for a course.

The world's greatest and most creative chefs like Ferran Adria and Heston Blumenthal change their menu's every season. They learn new techniques that can be applied to their creative plates and they literally dish it out like no one else. They travel the distance; they source the origin of ingredient and ideas; they learn from their surroundings; they learn from experimentation and from history/precedents. Adria (2008) said, "With creativity, it is not what you look for that matters, but what you find." Being creative is not just about being different, or knowing what to look for beforehand, it is a process of observing, learning, thinking, organizing, presenting.



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