

CREATIVE CURBS

How can one quantify learning design?

My 12 year-old daughter who oddly combines a penchant for horses, dogs and drums, and who remains constantly tormented by a lethal load of homework concerning numbers and cryptic names of plant parts, asked me exasperatedly, "Why does one have to go to school, after having learnt to read, write and count?!" Our dog, who had been napping, woke up in alarm, his ears tweaked up, almost as if he understood, and seconded the rhetoric plea in all earnestness. I chose, at that moment, to ignore it. Needless to say, it got me thinking.

Critically and essentially, schools today are breeding boredom. Caught in a conventional, dogmatic system of evaluation and instruction, the schools beat out any possibility of creative thinking, promoting the rise of a conformist labour force of unquestioning clerks.

How different are design schools? Can design be taught? I have been teaching architectural design for four years. In this time, I have struggled to find a methodology, a mode or code for evaluation. I have consulted several of my colleagues, who have been teaching for over a decade. However, I have no clear

answers. Perhaps, herein lie both the fallacy of the question and its answer.

There is no clear instruction manual to teaching design. Its text is as wide as one's own interests. Design cannot pose a singular, unique answer to problems.

Design is a multilayered, complex response to several latent, hidden stimuli that exist in a single programme, from constructing a building, even if it were a small house, to an object or a piece of furniture. It is a process, which is constantly evolving with new parameters and paradigms.

For instance, suppose a list of requirements for a house would be living and dining spaces, a kitchen, bedrooms, bathrooms and perhaps even a small garden.

This becomes the brief or the programme for design. But there are still several hidden factors that could well be just as important for ingredients in the brief. The cultural context, the lifestyles, the micro-climate, the client's unspoken needs and ambition, the image or statement that he may wish to express, combined with the designer's poetic/romantic expression using materials, light and vol-



SAMIRA RATHOD
Principal architect at Samira Rathod Design Associates, Mumbai, Samira celebrates design and considers every project an opportunity to critically test parameters. About herself, she says, "I am an architect and enjoy being one".

COULD IMAGINATION AND DAY-DREAMING BE ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR CREATIVE THINKING? COULD TEXTS BE POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART? CAN EVALUATION BE BASED ON MADNESS AND UNPREDICTABILITY?



umes as his tools to create the built form. The brief would then be a product of all these layers, sedimented into one complete and complex entity.

These unspoken needs are constantly changing, so are the immediate environment, contexts and technologies. Hence with every project, the set of parameters are different, constantly evolving.

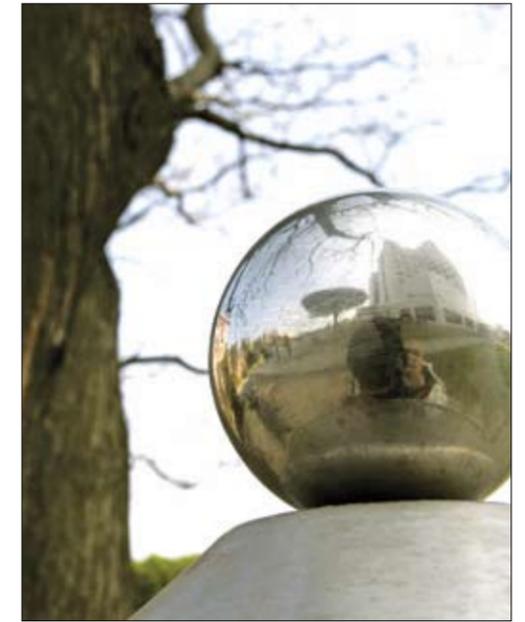
The tools of a designer play a vital role as well. Often, like words restrict one in expressing the intensity of an emotion, a designer's tools restrict absolute manifestation.

Let me explain—the idea of creating a building like a flute which allows wind through its fenestrations, whistling different tunes as the day turns, is almost lost in translation in its built form, or gets compromised due to physical limitations of several kinds. However, the genesis of the idea is beautiful, and undoubtedly it would result in a beautiful expression of creativity. Such thinking is romantic and cannot come from an instruction manual.

Unfortunately, briefs are reduced to a simplistic set of needs, and the response is a boring, simplistic building that does little to enhance one's living experiences. The result is quite apparent in our banal urban sprawls.

What then is the essence of teaching design?

Perhaps, it would be to nurture thinking and encourage questioning. The essence of teaching design would be to instil rigour in observation as well as construction (of ideas and manifestations), and to create permanently zealous individuals.



Can't we accrue simple experiences into a data bank of the subconscious, without seeking any direct derivation for an immediate result? We could then perhaps sow the seeds for fresh creative thinking.

Could imagination and day-dreaming then, be essential tools? Could the text be poetry, literature and art? Can evaluation be based on madness and unpredictability? Would a serious light-heartedness, and rigour for the non-conformist become key ingredients to real design?

Let me leave you with a small thought...

Recently, I conducted a workshop at CEPT, Ahmedabad with architecture and interior design students on 'The notions of motion and apparent uselessness'. This was a three-day intensive workshop. The students explored movement in mundane phenomena—at traffic junctions, a drop of ink in still water, a stray puppy exploring a school campus... These were closely observed and coded into a pattern. This pattern was then translated into another medium, choreographed with body movements and further still into a film.

During this entire exercise, the students reviewed works of several artists who have worked with movement, the kinetic art movement, and were exposed to new software in film-making while creating their own interpretive expression of the studied patterns. Several ideas, of tangible physical movements as well as the intangible metaphysical ideas of motion, thought, memory were discussed as well. Could this learning be of any less value?



WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF TEACHING DESIGN? PERHAPS IT WOULD BE TO NURTURE THINKING AND ENCOURAGE QUESTIONING... TO INSTIL RIGOUR IN OBSERVATION AS WELL AS CONSTRUCTION OF IDEAS AND MANIFESTATIONS... CAN'T WE ACCRUE SIMPLE EXPERIENCES INTO A DATA BANK OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS?