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The Roosting Site: A Creative Installation for the 2014 International Žižek Studies Conference in the School of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (DAAP), at the University of Cincinnati, April 2014

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CONCEPT SKETCHES: Rebecca Doughty

Introduction

This article describes the creative process and lived event of a participatory multisensory architectural installation created for the 2014 International Žižek Studies Conference within the postmodern architecture of the School of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (DAAP) at the University of Cincinnati. The installation was created by a collaborative



team of three multidisciplinary students to address the intersection of aesthetics and inquiry on a spatial dimension. Carrying traces of transcultural tribal and traditional modes of comfort, rejuvenation and shelter; the Roosting Site layered architectural space, sound, and aesthetic experience; inviting conference attendees and the university community to intersect with and engage in transitory, ephemeral, unstructured encounters with others within the temporal and spatial gaps between the institutional contexts of an academic conference. The Site functioned as a nonhierarchical space; interrogating and encouraging the possibilities of spaces in between established architectural and structural contexts as potential sites of knowledge creation.



0. ATTUNEMENT

Documentation of this installation winds poetically through the experiential and the inspirational: from construction to destruction; offering a ghostly echo of the now no longer existent Roosting Site contained here, folded into text and image. In this article I will expand upon our team's collaborative process, the making of the installation, the theoretical foundations of our work, and reflect on its use during the conference. The name of the installation, The Roosting Site (which will be expanded upon at a later point in the text) invokes a state of temporary rest, a pause. Similarly this descriptive text will be juxtaposed with poetic interludes (*identified by ...*) which are inspired by reflections on the event of the site that allow for a momentary steeping with and filtering through of emotive experience. As the author of this text I would like to acknowledge the trust and contributions of my collaborators Rebecca and Phillip. My words are inspired both by our ongoing interactions and by their boundless energy, attention to the aesthetic of experience, and meticulous crafting skills.

1. COLLABORATION

The Roosting Site existed in real time and space briefly. Although it has since been dismantled, moved, stored and recycled into a variety of slightly more mundane and useful objects, its image still carries resonances of the creative making process of our team. Our collaborative effort consisted of interactions brought to collision, rather than synthesis, with the event of the installation. Our team crossed borders on multiple levels identifying as artists, architects, planners, designers and



The Artists Reflected in Inky Water, Nandita Baxi Sheth

educators and brought together a wild mix of life experiences. Three factors emerged as critical to our collaborative making: time, listening, and trust. We committed time over the course of 3 months to discuss the project over many meals and cups of coffee and tea. Time spent speaking with and actively listening to others allowed for design decisions to emerge from the overlapping of theory, material, and intent. Our team's time together which took place in the in between spaces of academic and personal lives made us constantly and consciously devoted to the making of an experiential structure which would foster similar interactions for others during the conference. Time and listening contributed to the development of a third factor of our successful work as a team: trust. Trust involved vulnerability, risk and also offered multiple rewards. Trust in the different and unique strengths of each member allowed both an ease in letting go and a confidence in the decisions we held on to.

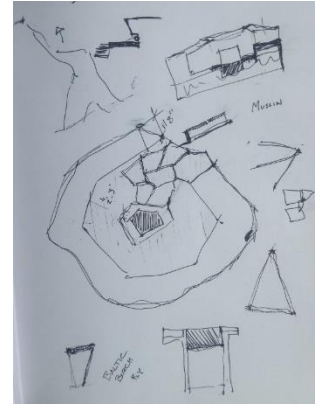
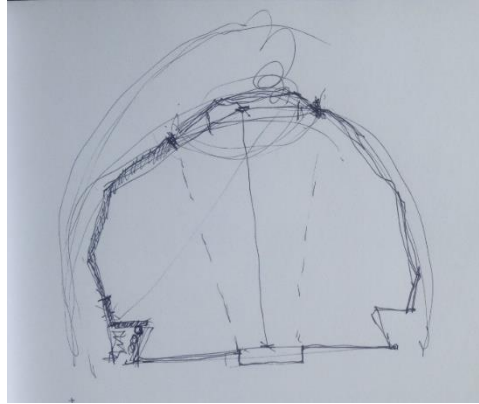
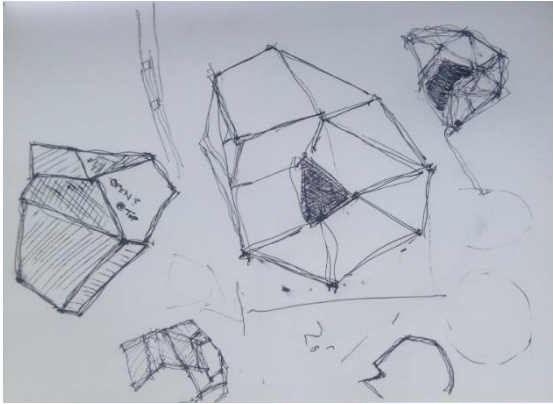
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*water boils
for a tea ceremony
hot hot hot, it is poured into
a tiny unglazed orange clay teapot packed with
unfurling oolong tea
thin curls of steam rise
as tea drips over an edge
evaporating instantly off the hot surface
miniature cups glazed with white*

can you taste, smell, touch, touch, capture wonder?

...

2. MAKING



Concept Sketches, Rebecca Doughty

The design of the Site reflects a consideration of transcultural, tribal and traditional modalities of shelter and rest: the tipi, the hut, the cave, igloo, the yurt; the cocoon. From imagining nuances of somatic experience we generated multiple articulations that sought to answer questions:

- How could architectural space affect human interaction and meaning making?
- How could the space of the in-between be performed?
- What aesthetic factors shape experience?

After a collaborative design process over a period of 3 months the final construction



Construction, Rebecca Doughty

took place over approximately 2 weeks.

Computer generated construction drawings drafted by Rebecca from concept sketches were used to cut the structural wood sections and muslin for the inner lining shell. The construction work was accomplished by Phillip and Rebecca, with Nandita working on fabric and sound. The Roosting Site was

constructed a raised platform of wood, with an interior shell of muslin and an outer wrapping of layers of natural cheesecloth that

allowed light to filter through. Wood benches lined the inner octagonal shape providing comfortable seating for up to 6 people. Underneath the benches speakers layered sounds, often unintelligible but offering whispers to counter stark silence. The shape of the pool and the opening hole on top are identical. The center “pool” contained water dyed black with ink creating a reflective surface for contemplation.

3. FOUNDATIONS

The name of the Roosting Site was informed by philosophies of education and architecture that consider the pause/rest/perching/landing/roosting as an essential aspect of experiencing the world. Educator and philosopher John Dewey, referencing James, visualized the nature of experience as the flights and perchings of birds. He said,

Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing... Each resting place in experience is an undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and, unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routine, each doing carries in itself meaning that has been extracted and conserved. (Dewey 1934/2005, 58)

Dewey stressed that it is the reflective contemplation of aesthetic experience that allows for the emergence of significant knowledge creation. Our installation was planned for 3rd floor Atrium of the School of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (which was also a busy entrance and registration space) with the intention of engaging conference attendees, students, and community members in embodied, experimental practices of exploring pedagogical and reflective potentials of pause. Another theoretical influence that informed our installation was the writings of the architects of Reversible Destiny, Arakawa and Gins who define landing sites as oscillating between form and formlessness and the yet to be formed. “Landing sites occur on all scales of action, and they abound within each other.” (Gins & Arakawa, n.d.). The Roosting Site was thus “performed” by active participants engaging in a temporary landing within the space of the building and the structure of the conference. The Site un/veiled private space within

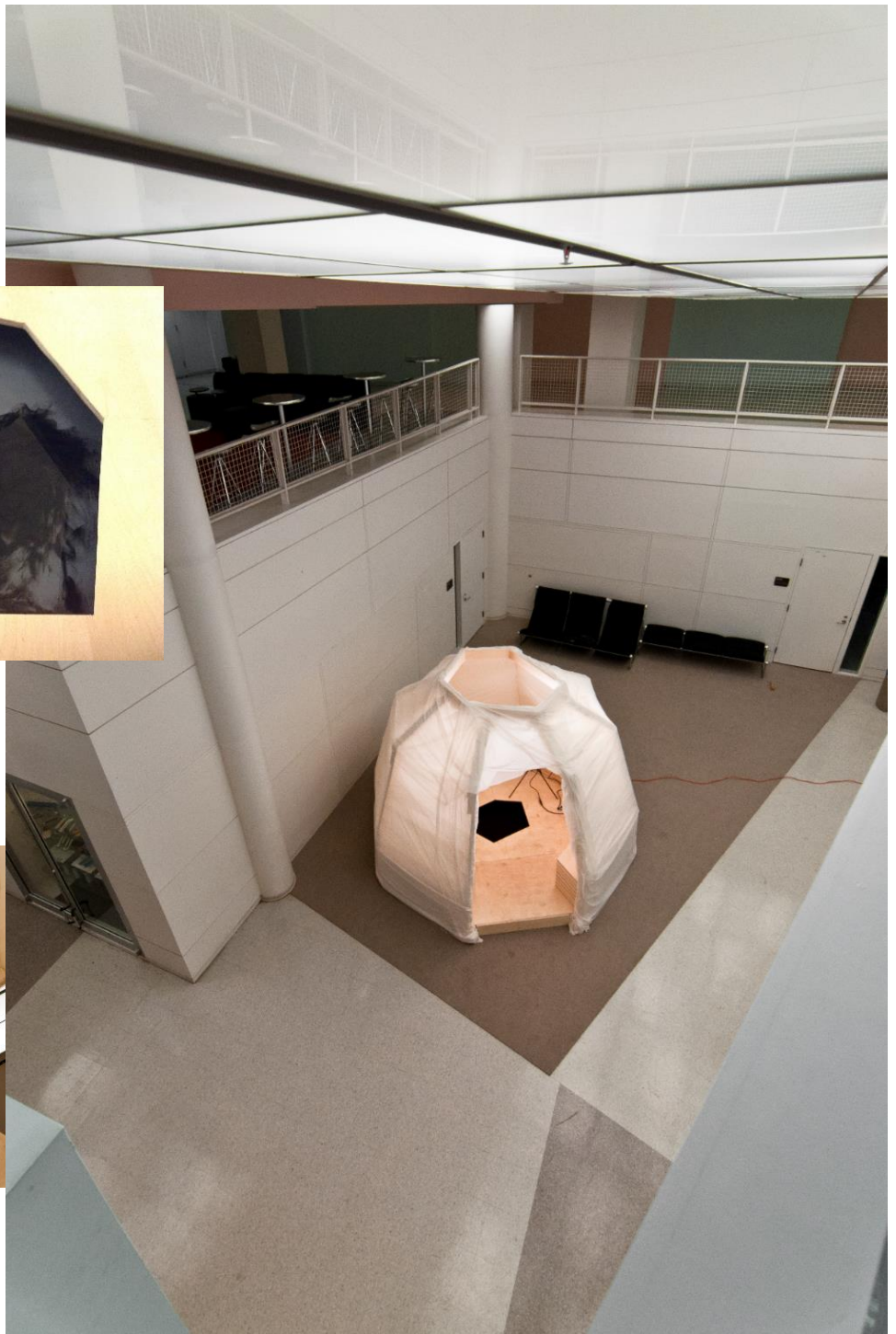
public space; inviting reflection alone and among others; with and without words, acknowledging temporality, chance, and the collaborative nature of human encounter.

...

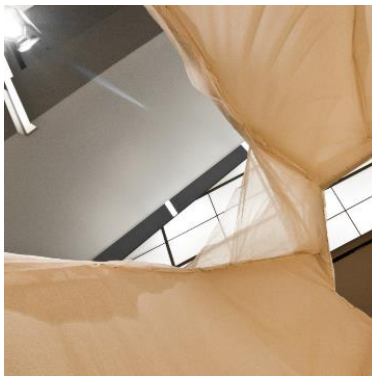
*words steep into fabric walls
enveloped by the gentle surprise of soft containment
glance up to the confusion of levels leaning in
lost in a pool of reflective inky blackness
sounds filter and emanate*

*a pause...a landing...
before
enchantment lost*

...



Finally, we imagined
Deleuze and Guattari's
lines of flight¹ as



murmurations of starlings, transforming from their linear figurations to visions of undulating cloud like forms. A murmuration is a constantly moving, shifting cloud of singular beings operating in precise concert with each other; offering a figuration of collaborative being in the world with others. The perchings of Dewey, the landings of Arakawa and Gins and the lines of flights/murmurations of Deleuze and Guattari established the metaphorical and visual foundations which inspired our “Roosting Site”.

4. MUMURATIONS



1Meeting in the Roosting Site, Rebecca Doughty

...
murmurs
insightful, confusing, unexpected,
disturbing, melancholic, delightful
encounters
meetings, reunions, intimate
conversations
pause, debrief, reflect
dream
 ...

A murmuration is a flock of starlings moving in unison through the sky, an undulating cloud. A murmur is an overheard whisper, an undercurrent of barely comprehensible

conversation, comforting and beguiling. The Roosting Site, which borrowed its name from the resting place of the murmuring starlings, became--in both its be-coming and finished state a vessel for murmurs. It was a destination for small scale interactions to occur within a postmodern architectural space of deliberate confusions and undefined boundaries (School of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, renovation by architect Peter Eisenman). Even as we built the structure, students and faculty stopped to question, to understand, and ultimately to engage in border crossing conversations between hierarchies and disciplines. For a few days, “let’s talk/meet in the Roosting Site” became a way to structure, limit, frame, and invite a particular form of human

interaction. We observed small groups of 2-6 people nestled, backs cushioned delicately by the muslin lining, leaning forwards, towards each other, and fully engaged in conversation. During the conference, artist teams and presenters chose to meet and debrief in what came to be called simply the “hut”. Muffled sound, partial views, and filtered light evoked a primal sense of safety and privacy in public. We imagine (and delight in believing) that in this ephemeral cocoon plans were hatched, dreams were shared, secrets were unveiled, successes were celebrated, and alliances cemented.

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