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Garden Table

Adapt existing space to create new interactive engagements

Lei Dai

2019

Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts endorsed with Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Preface

My thesis research builds on my first year of Master of Fine Art study, which let me continue research on how to look at plants in a fresh way. In the first year of study, plants were fun rather than of major interest to me. This kind of fun was more like curiosity about new environments and new culture in New Zealand. The 'garden table' was designed from my own experience of the surrounding environment. I grew up in China, and my living environment is quite different from that of New Zealand. The streets and alleys are full of tall buildings. Because of the market demand of architecture and interior design, I initially started interior design. After one year's work as an interior designer, I do not want to be bound by the technical processes of design, but intend to expand my knowledge to spatial structure planning or furniture/props design for special spaces. I have been living and studying in New Zealand for two years now, with all my life trajectories centered on school and home. Due to cultural differences and language barriers, I gradually got used to thinking and appreciating everything alone.

When I was not busy with my studies, I often sat on the hill behind Massey University to relax, to see, and to enjoy sunshine. I sat on the grass, straightened my legs, and felt comfortable when surrounded by green grass. I pulled out some grass and put it into my hand to twist, and to play with, which made me feel peaceful and calm. When I was thirsty and hungry, I took out water and biscuits from my bag; when I wanted to write or draw something, I took out pencil and notepad from my bag. I found that all actions were natural, but something seemed to be missing.

I deemed what was missing was a table which could be appreciated and used. It would not need to be on a massive scale or have a complex structure like a formal table (dining table). It could be a part of nature, and be respectful to nature. It might also become a bridge between people and nature. When I returned home, I wanted to bring the sense of peace and calm into my studio and home. I envisioned designing a 'garden table' that could connect indoor and outdoor spaces. It also could be Zen-like, which presents a peaceful spirit. It could be easily integrated into natural and built spaces.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who helped me, particularly:

My supervisors: Simon Morris and Jennifer Gillam

Staff of the Fab Lab Wellington: Wendy Neale and Daniel Harmsworth

Staff of the Center for Teaching and Learning: Lawrence McDonald

Staff of the library: Craig Cherrie

Massey University staff from the Schools of Fine Arts and Design, especially including: Professor Julieanna Preston, Shannon Te Ao and Mike Bridgman

My classmates, especially including: Harry Culy, Leda Farrow and Sopenha Kham

I really appreciated the encouragement, advice, support, constructive criticism and help mastering the English language.

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Abstract

Through the design concept of 'garden table', I expand and redefine the functions and possibilities of existing spaces to see how they can enrich people's existing lifestyles and attitudes. When I focus on the creation of works from the perspective of nature and the aesthetic of the materials, it tends to be regarded as a work of art; while when I discuss the function and commerciality of design, it might be treated as a work of design. Whether it is art, design or both, I hope that the audience can experience the 'garden table' with a new and fresh perspective.

Introduction

The mini, tiny 'garden' is a rootless and mobile 'garden' that is situated on a table. Usually pot plants are placed on a table not embedded in them. It combines two independent functional objects and concentrates more on something akin to the 'being' of plants and the 'essence' of the material of the furniture.

In the art process, I try to activate the potential of the material properties. A plant in this process can be more than a decorative addition to a vase or flower pot, it can be an integral part of the living materials (wood). Furniture with plant material tries to balance and rethink the concept of construction between artificial material and natural environment. An authentic plant provides a full sensual experience of nurturing life and passing time and this kind of experience makes it easier for us to have the desire to be close to nature.

In the following research, my purpose is to try to place these tables (mindfulness garden table and socialization garden table) in natural/semi-natural urban space (river/beaches), social spaces (library) and shared private space (design studio on university campus) to observe what changes have taken place in these spatial layouts. I am interested in how the culture, history and use of these existing spaces will change the interaction and understanding of the garden tables. I test garden tables in different spaces, to observe how people engage with these spaces. What kind of behavioral pattern emerges within these different spaces?

1. Table

Background of ‘low table’

Tables have an infinite number of uses. They all share one thing in common: a surface, typically flat and horizontal that may be used for working or eating from (Blackburn, 2005). Depending on the particular culture and customary use, a table is divided into different kinds according to height, for example library tables, coffee tables, and dining tables, etc. Coffee tables are normally placed in front of couches and sofas, due to their lower height.

The history of low slung coffee table dates back to the late 18th century during the Victorian Era. During this period, people used them for placing cups of tea. The height of these low slung coffee tables may have come about because of the influence of the practically floor level Japanese tables, in tandem with the Ottoman-styled table found in tea gardens (William, 2019). Most Japanese floor level tables use natural materials. Japanese furniture commonly uses wood, bamboo and grass as furniture materials, fully demonstrating the beauty of natural materials. For example, wood is simply processed, maintaining the wood grain, and is plated with gold or bronze as decoration. ‘Garden table’ was inspired by the concept of natural materials, allowing us to enjoy the natural world around us.

Traditional Japanese tables include: Zashiki (a traditional restaurant seating arrangement featuring low tables set on tatami flooring); Horigotatsu (a traditional Japanese table that is low to the ground and has recessed floor beneath it so that people can stretch out their legs); Kotatsu (a type of heat table. An electric heating unit is built into the bottom and a special type of quilt covers the table frame to keep the heat from escaping) and Chabudai (a traditional dining customs of tray or tray table, original from the development of shojin ryori (vegetarian “devotion cuisine”) and new schools of Buddhism, particularly Zen.

Garden table (mindfulness) was inspired by the concept of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is part of meditation derived from Zen Buddhism, which can happen anytime and anywhere, with anyone engaged in the present. Mindfulness is the simple act of paying attention and noticing and being present in whatever you are doing (Eisler, 2019). In the creative process, I hope to bring that mindfulness into my ‘garden table’ (mindfulness) experience, and let participants’ thoughts and sensations emerge in activity.

Chabudai

In Japan, low-sitting tables were made in the early 20th century. People used to put food on a large tray coated with paint when they were eating. These trays were placed on tatami, the trays around tatami occupied most of the space and scattered family members across different spaces. This greatly affected the communication of family members; therefore, the Japanese invented the first table, chabudai.

Chabudai is a short-leg table, the height of the legs usually between 15cm to 30cm. People may sit on zabuton or tatami rather than chairs; chabudai is multi-functional, most of the time, chabudai is used for family meals. In fact, the idea of family meals was not native to Japan. After the industrial revolution, this concept was introduced into Japan from the West. Before that, women were not allowed to eat at the same table with men; therefore, the meaning of the table is not merely restricted to the eating of meals, but also can be more like a meditation place of solitude and quiet for men.

The shapes of chabudai are various, from rectangular, round, to square. Due to chabudai being made of solid wood, the natural texture is clearly visible; therefore, no matter whether in indoor or outdoor space, they can create a harmonious atmosphere, reflecting nature.

The naturalness of Chabudai is inseparable from Zen ritual within indoor use, and the most prominent one is the teahouse. The Teahouse has also been called the Zen room, which is the product of religion, philosophy, ethics and aesthetics. Since tea originates from nature, natural materials are followed and used in the table's design. Some teahouses are built for spiritual practice, some for keeping away from noise and being at ease, while others follow the traditional Japanese way of placing trays on the ground for the purpose of meditation. Either way, it tells us that in this narrow space, even if without any language communication, the host and guest could reach the realm of heart-to-heart communication (Hai-tao, 2014).

Mindfulness

In my work, I do not plan to imitate or create a new teahouse, but take it as a 'door'. I am thinking about how to integrate the mindfulness and calm atmosphere in the teahouse into our daily life, and making it a way of life. I created a refined space to produce a calming environment. It might alter a person's mood, or merge with a person's feelings. It reminds me of the work 'The Dining Project' by LEE MINGWEI (figure 2). He creates a dining space and invites strangers to share dinner together with an informal dialogue. All actions are recorded during the dinner. The concept of his work is based on Buddhist notions and encourages people to be aware of ordinary everyday actions, impermanence and the essence of 'here and now'.



Figure 1: Mindfulness, 2019

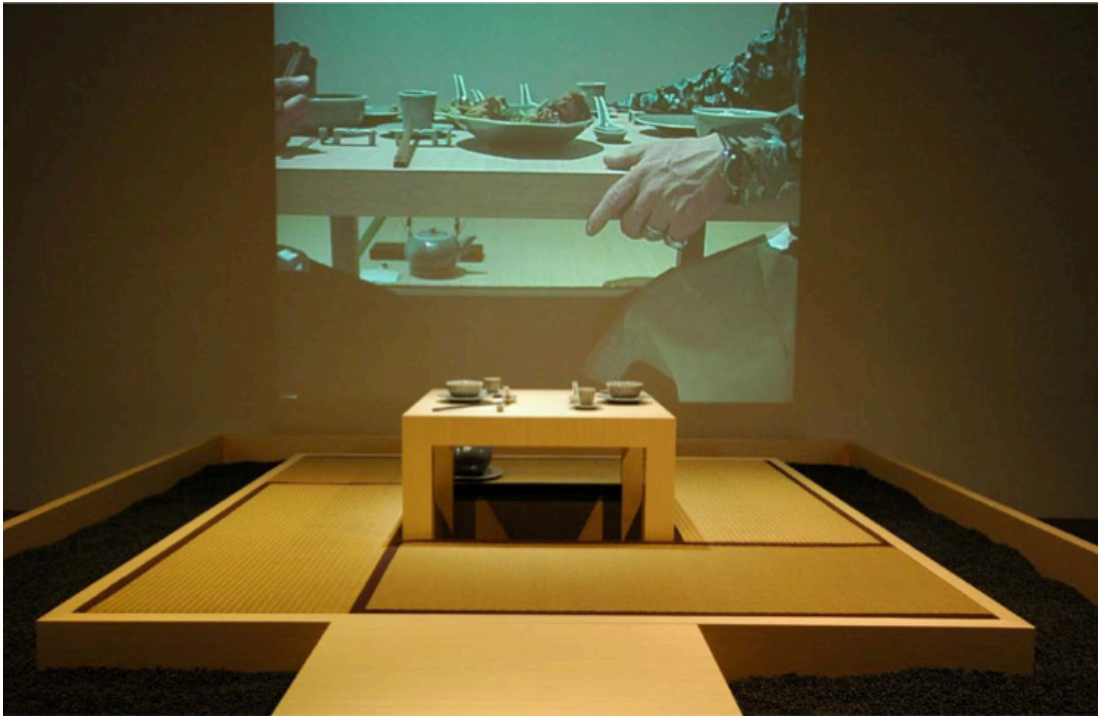


Figure 2: The Dining Project,
LEE MINGWEI, 2014

Lee creates a quiet atmosphere in the dining space, not merely focusing on the lighting or atmosphere itself, but aims to highlight participation among strangers.

In my work, I created two 'energy points' (one is plants, another is rice) to encourage people to focus on their own actions and the inspiration behind this behavior rather than relating with others. When it comes to plants and rice, my feeling is clear: it looks like a Japanese rock garden, which is contained, and reveals an artistic concept of 'silence'. Japanese rock garden is also known as niwa which means 'garden' nowadays but actually denoted 'ritual space' in ancient times. The 'ritual space' is prepared for sand raking. The purpose behind the sand raking is not to create something aesthetically pleasing but to attain enlightenment by training thought and mindfulness.



Figure 3: Stone Garden,
Nendo, 2013

The mention of Japanese rock garden reminds me of an installation of the “Stone Garden” created by Nendo (figure 3). Oki Sato creates a floating landscape in a waste space. The material and color are derived from earthy and natural quartz. The sense of floating is reminiscent of a Japanese rock garden.

For me, Japanese rock gardens are symbolic. They are flowing and living. I used rice as an ‘energy point’ by the rock gardens. Rice in my work is a metaphor for rocks or white sand, and by moving the hand across, and drawing delicate patterns, the body and nature are fused. Furthermore, rice is both perfect and imperfect. When your fingertips create friction against the rice, you notice that it is beautiful and clean. You pay attention not only to the pattern of the drawing, but also to the culture of planting. In this actual experience, I hope participants can be fully engaged with what they are doing at that moment.

2. Art or design?

In this section, I plan to describe the characteristics of 'garden table' from two aspects: art and design. In most people's mind, art belongs to the exhibition and it is forbidden to touch. It is more inclined to a sensory experience. By contrast, design, more than art, is closer to life. It is the product of industry and the commodity market, and the purpose of items is usually for practical use. For the boundary between art and design, Oppeln (2011) put forward the concept of 'aboutness'. It can be used as a yardstick to understand art and design. 'Aboutness' claims that an object is merely used for some purpose. For example, if 'garden table' were to be placed on a stage it might be a stage design object; in a gallery it might be understood as an installation; in a shop it might be understood as practical furniture. Many observers have focused on the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines. In my work, I do not want to overly distinguish the boundaries between art and design. Walking between them helps me to discover the potential possibilities of 'garden table'.

Huber, Meltzer, Monder and Oppeln (2011) note that art and design are defined as fields of action, which is a crucial point to encourage the audience to participate. The concept of field of action in my work could be understood as a functional use or not. Oppeln (2011) continues to argue that in the field of furniture design, the structure of the work of art is similar to the work of design. They are all equipped to be functional and usable, and could be marketed. However, art furniture design also contains some additional things, for instance, 'criticality', which involves the usage of unconventional concepts and ways of designing. For example in figure 4, the tree-trunk bench, made by Makkink and Bey (1999), combines the material source of furniture and the material source of art to create a piece of work. It maintains the usage quality, and it can be described as a work of art, specifically a sculpture. In fact, Bey criticizes his work for making little sense. When the work has many possibilities of function and you are not able to address what it is, it can be defined an 'ArtDesign' (Bey, 1999).



Figure 4: Tree-trunk bench, Studio, Makkink & Bey, 1999



Figure 5: Garden table (mindfulness), 2019

My 'garden table' (mindfulness) was inspired by the concept of 'ArtDesign'. I try to create my works from a designer's point of view, but also appreciate them from an art and aesthetic perspective. In figure 5, I combined a natural source of plants and an artificial source of furniture to create a peaceful table. However, with 'garden table' (socialization), I clearly present my interest in the relationship between site or place and tables, rather than merely focusing on aesthetic value. It should be emphasized that its functionality can be clearly identified: to sit or not to sit might be the audience's first reaction. For example, in figure 6, 'garden table' has a chance of bringing art and life closer. When art merges with everyday life, it should not be understood as a decline in art's sphere, but an expansion (Oppeln, 2011).



Figure 6: Garden table (socialization), 2019

3. My Objects

'When we live in cities from which nature has been excluded to an extreme degree, we tend to forget that our lives depend on the power of nature, only to remember that basic fact when natural disasters occur. Instead, we should always appreciate nature and treat it with respect'.

Satoshi Itasaka, 2014

Itasaka fully expresses his attitude to nature in his work: Ivy chair (Figure 7) is covered with white leaves, and is intended to remind us not to neglect nature and health in urban life. In my view, white leaves are a manifestation of the city's rejection of nature. As a chair, the symbolic meaning is obviously greater than the practical use. Some artists often use symbolic design strategies to criticize social phenomena and reflect social life. This strategy has been a great inspiration for my works.



Figure 7: Ivy chair,
Satoshi Itasaka, 2014

In my work, I hope the 'garden table' could raise people's awareness of nature. Taking care of plants survival is also a duty for the users, this is a good chance to remind people our natural environments also needs to be cared for. I hope people can cherish the opportunity to reflect on nature while they use it.

Garden table (mindfulness)



Figure 8: Garden table (mindfulness), 2019



Figure 9: CNC cutting, 2019

The basic structure of my table is similar to Japanese chabudai, made of pine wood. The dimensions of the table are 800mm long by 800mm wide and 350mm high, with different sized circle frames on it. There is a 13mm deep hole in the center of the table, which was cut with a CNC machine (figure 9).

When we are talking about the strategy of this table, I would like to consider the possibilities of multiple functions. I cut holes in different shapes and depths on the surface of the table; the purpose of these holes is to place grasses or seeds for mindfulness and appreciation. In this process, I do not encourage people to overfeed as gardeners do. Therefore, its form and function are different from the table garden placed on a patio or deck. It is not designed for planting, nor does it have a commercial function. It more reveals a kind of artistic aesthetic.

In addition, I choose pine wood as the main material for making 'garden table' because the traces of cutting fully present the natural beauty of the wood. The pine wood still emits a faint fragrance, which makes people feel as if it is the breath of nature. The cut ply pine wood presents completely different patterns and colors (Figure 10). For me, the color of the tables becomes a significant symbol with these works.



Figure 10: patterns, 2019

Garden table (socialization)



Figure 11: Garden table (socialization), 2019

If 'garden table' (mindfulness) was aimed at mindfulness and personalization, then 'garden table' (socialization) is more inclined to public space and human connection. In this part, I have broken up the concept of a whole table. The purpose is to make the interaction between the tables and spaces more flexible. Their shapes do not look like furniture products, but more like an 'object'.

In this series of works, the shape of the tables is composed of two layered structures. Besides the pine material, I added imported keruing for the tabletop. The different color and texture of the materials create a visual contrast and enrich the tactile experience.

What interests me about this series is the question of ‘assembling’ and ‘dispersing’ (Figure 12), by positioning and placing the tables separately or together somewhere, from natural urban space (rivers/ beaches) to interior-public space (libraries) to private space (design studios or homes). These spaces have different meanings and functions.



Figure 12: Assembling and dispersing, 2019

4. Micro-space of the table

Structure and layout

After introducing the material and overall shape of the table, I began to consider the mode of embedding the plants. More specifically, the way plants are laid out on the table. In 'garden table' (mindfulness), I used both regular and irregular geometric form to lay out the structure of the tabletop. Firstly, with the center of the table as an axis, a symmetrical square 'Dichi', 600mm long, 600mm wide and 10mm high was excavated. Dichi is a lake formed by geological depression; it is named due to being below the horizon. The center of the 'Dichi' was filled with rice instead of soil. The paved rice formed a stronger visual contrast with the table. The rice was gathered in the center of the table; looking like what we call 'Gather Ki' in Chinese. There is a saying in India that rice should be as close as brothers and not stick together. In China, what we understand as 'Gather Ki' is more like gathering invisible energy sources from an object, which could bring people's attention and minds together. At the corner of the table, I used irregular circles to break the square and the monotonous layout of the whole table.

No matter whether you are standing or sitting, the circular geometry can make the layout of the table look softer, natural, and balanced. I used the same method (CNC cutting) to cut two circles with different areas. One was 160mm and the other was 310mm. The center of the circles was filled with green plants (grasses). The two circles were arranged around the 'Dichi' of the table, which could change the way the scene is viewed due to the composition of the different heights of the circles. From different perspectives, people could appreciate the beauty of the construction via different visual routes.

In 'garden table' (socialization), due to the irregular geometrical layout of the table itself, when designing, the plants can be placed at the edge of the table as far as possible according to the actual needs of use. Depending on the use of the tables, all tables, except for the area required by plants can be used for people to put a laptop, some books and a cup of coffee. In addition, the edges of plants are also designed with decorative patterns of different shapes and sizes, which reflect different forms of natural scenery in gardens. It makes the tabletop look more like an 'irregular site' that forms in nature. Except for the patterned ornamental area, small items such as pens, erasers, scissors, paper clips also could be placed inside of these patterns, which maintain a clean tabletop during use.

Horizontal (grass)

Grasslands are more like a 'horizon' on the earth, which divides the regional relationship between cities, villages, buildings and roads. Ramljak, Dion & Rockman (2018) describes 'the bounds of nature' in the book of Natural Wonders: the 'relationship of man and nature resembles a line, drawing a line between wild and other accessible areas, it wrongly implies that wildness exists only in far-off places and not in our backyards, playgrounds, and city lots. Just as nature's growth cannot be cordoned off, 'nature' does not only thrive in the distant reaches of forest and mountain'. It can also appear unexpectedly on street corners, walls and any space within the interior.

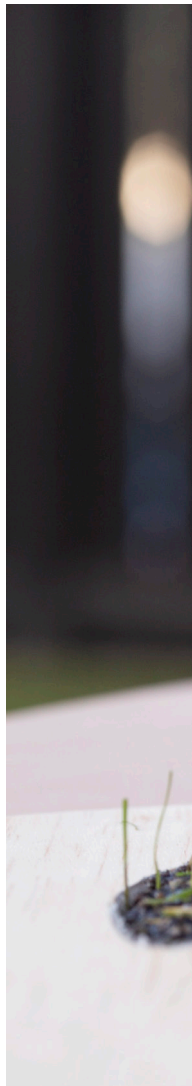
Nature is a great source of inspiration (Ramljak, Dion & Rockman, 2018). When I sit on the ground, I feel that the landscape around me extends outward from my center, translating the center of 'horizontal' from outside to inside. In my table, rolling landscape fields change from macro to micro, changing landscape to the personal (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Horizontal, 2019



Figure 14: Horizontal, 2019





In figure 14, I shoot a series of photos in different locations. Through the macro perspective, the essence of the surrounding environment is captured. In addition, when I was cultivating these grasses, I watched them and weeds continue to grow, until they decayed (Figure 15). No matter how I watered them and carefully cared for them, they still seemed so fragile that they would die if I touched them carelessly. The changing state of these plants has increased my awareness of the fragility of life.

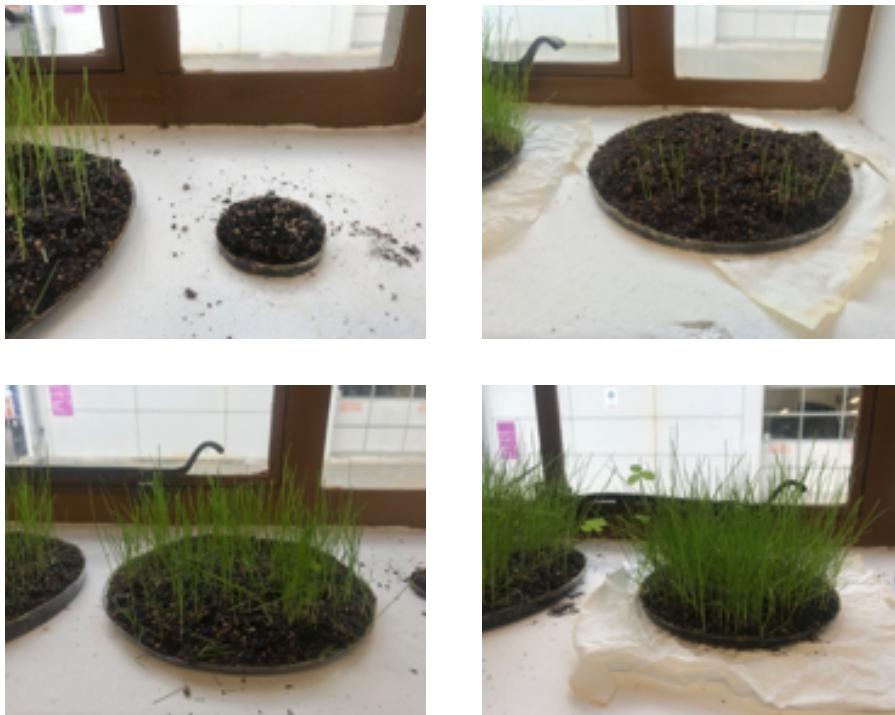


Figure 15: Plant growth record, 2019

Material in play (rice)

When people felt the beauty and energy of plants from my work, I continued to think about how to explore and experience this beauty from another fresh perspective. Therefore, I tried to use a ‘metaphor’ to express another form beauty of plant; such as the seeds from different plants (Figure 16), like beans, rice, wheat and so on. They are both plants and units of life; they present stillness and movement. Imagine your fingers touching these tiny particles, they are smooth, they slip and flow through your fingers, transform into different forms, and when you remove them with your hand, new shapes and stories are created.



Figure 16: Material in play (rice), 2019



Figure 17: Material in play (rice), 2019

With a series of movements, it brings about a desire for play. It becomes a connection between the body, nature and outside world. Zinguer (2015) considered that to feel the authenticity of objects is helpful to people's cognition of nature and the external world. In this experience, it is not merely limited to adults' mindfulness and thinking about life in their own world, but is also reflected in the interaction between children and adults. You can imagine, a child taking a branch and writing on the rice that fill the surface of the table, the branch flows, the shapes are formed among the rice; and with the embodiment of different physical forms, interaction is no longer restricted, and diversity of 'play' occur (Figure 17). Finally, the rice does not exist to follow people's common sense and expectation as food cooked and eaten by humans, but as a game. This method of 'metaphor' brings about an expectation, an expectation of the transformation of the underlying phenomenon of objects.

5. Site-specific space

Perception of environmental atmosphere

That shift from micro space on the tabletop to space in different sites is also a challenge for me. Gehl and Matan (2009) emphasize the importance of considering the social context of spaces, which might impact people's use, affection, and even perception of their environment. As example of this in figure 18, Yabu Pushelberg displays its latest furniture for new office areas and galleries, including puddle tables and wooden leg chairs. Puddle side tables are dotted between grassy mounds, and displayed within a black-and-white woodland video projection. The exhibition is intended to create understanding and explore current social issues (environmental issues and social pressures).

My idea is more concerned with the emotional resonance of the table in different environments, and I keep changing the space to see what events can be created. Based on puddle table collection, I conceived that the perception of space and place needs us to feel surroundings with our existential sense. This perception is unconscious, not a carefully calculated and conscious observation.



Figure 18: Yabu Pushelberg debuts puddle table collection in forest-like installation, 2019

The perception of space and atmosphere also includes a time dimension, and the duration of experience in space directly affects people's perception, memory and imagination. Vogeley and Kupke (2007) state that perceptions already require 'temporal continuity' as a necessary condition. The less or more time people spend in a place, the less or more experience they have of this place and its objects. Besides the time, natural elements have also become an indispensable part of people's perception of space. Natural elements are often connected to inanimate objects such as tree shadows, rocks, sea water, etc; and animate objects - birds, dogs, human beings, etc. When people stand in a specific environmental space, all these natural elements will more or less affect their perception and imagination of the atmosphere.

Take my 'garden table' (socialization) as a case study in the perception of environmental atmosphere in 'artificial natural' space. This space is located on Massey University's Wellington campus. I chose to display 'garden table' in the same natural space in two different time periods (Figure 19). One was sunny day, one was windy day. On sunny days, the leaves flutter gently in the wind, through the dense foliage and the breeze blows and rustles. From a distance, like the rolling waves of the sea, the plants on the table and the grass on the ground reflect each other. Most passers-by could not help stopping and enjoying the work, and seemed curious of the shadows interacting with table. By comparison, on the windy day, dark clouds covered the sky, which seemed like a gloomy child, and the ashen gray face of the sky sunk down gradually. The tender grasses flattened by the wind blowing, people were focused on their destinations before it rained, and it was very difficult for the 'garden table' to look full of vitality in this atmosphere.



Sunny day



Windy day

Figure 19: Perception of environmental atmosphere, 2019

This result questions Pallasmaa's (2014) concept that the perception of space and place could be unconscious. Trevor (2005) proposes that people's perception of space and place should be combined with the interaction of different subjects, especially social interactions. Trevor argues that the site is not so much physical location as an abstract set of relationships, informed by different histories and traditions as well as the underlying interests of different people. These relationships connect to the practices of everyday life; it is more conducive to enhancing people's emotional connection to 'objects' in a particular environment or in a particular atmosphere. Rawsthorn (2012) puts forward that one of the most important factors of the 'experience affect' is the instinctive response when you encounter the object. This affect is based on the time, materials, shapes, transformative natural elements and method of construction. Each will create different 'affects' within different environmental atmospheres.

In the following study, I will place 'garden tables' in different sites to observe their resonance and emotional response in different spatial atmospheres. According to Karacor (2016), urban space can be divided into twenty types from natural/semi-natural urban space to civic space to external/internal private space. Based on the cultural background, height, shape and functional constraints of the 'garden table', I plan to focus on three types of spatial form: Natural/semi-natural urban space (rivers/beaches); social spaces (library) and shared public space (design studios on university campus). Library and design studios on university campus are divided into multiple types of private space and semi-private space due to their particularity of function. By contrast, rivers/ beaches belong to the public space of the natural environment. What I am interested in is not how people use 'garden tables' in these spaces, but how does my 'garden table' (artificial element) interact and resonate with its surroundings (natural elements).

Resonance

Resonance is the power of an object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world (Greenblatt, 1990). This power can arouse the curiosity of the viewer, arrest the viewer's attention, and convey a noticeable uniqueness. McDonnell, Bail and Tavory (2017) note that resonance is not necessarily the product of a cultural or world view. Resonance is based on the relationship between objects, people and the environment, rooted in human experience, and emphasizes the connections.

Pragmatists believe that people and objects do not necessarily resonate in the interaction process. When an object is grow old and people have tire of them, special place or a special experience is needed to establish a new resonance with the object. With the passage of time and the wear and tear of furniture, furniture would gradually be abandoned and become 'matter out of place' (Arnatt, 1989). For example it seems inappropriate for a mattress to be left on the street because it becomes 'matter out of place', which disturbs the everyday comings and goings of the world outside (Gillian, 2014). As Bachelard notes, the 'outside and inside forms a merged understanding, the knowledge of space will blind us as soon as we are placed in relation to furniture in an external space. A natural response will spring to mind, 'things that are inside, should not be outside; breaching the threshold disturbs the order of things' (cited in Gillian, 2014).

In Figure 20, animated life (people/birds), inanimate life (table) and events (environment), ask us to understand the interaction between the objects and the process by which things develop.



Figure 20: Resonance, 2019

These objects go beyond evocation; There is a sense in which these inanimate objects have become animated, and the boundary between the two states is blurred, another threshold is breached (Gillian, 2014). Jane Bennett highlights a concept of 'thing power' in her book *Vibrant Matter* (Sun, 2015). She notes we tend to think of objects in the world as inanimate, but we need to stop seeing them as silent, fixed and rigid, and emphasize the interaction between all things, including 'responsive and non-responsive' capabilities (Sun, 2015). An 'affective responsive' can be seen between the animate (birds/ organic plants) and the inanimate (table and food).

Placing 'Garden table' in natural/semi-natural urban space (rivers/ beaches), creates an assemblage of various natural elements which reflect the particularity of the combination of different dynamic materials. Different affects and resonances would interact with each other.

For example, in Figure 21 and Figure 22, floating water slaps on the tabletop and rock, rising sea almost swallow the tabletop, and plants sway gently with the flow of sea water. I can imagine that with the passage of time, as the sea level gets higher and higher, the traces of the table will be erased. Eventually, the table will disappear in harmony with the ocean, leaving a tiny trace.



Figure 22: Resonance, 2019

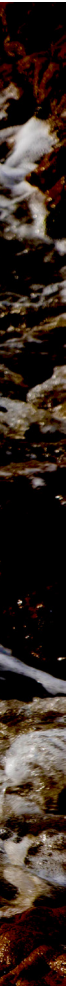


Figure 21: Resonance, 2019



Additionally, Greenblatt (1990) points out that the 'accidental' can also be a condition for the resonance. In Figure 23, the table was placed on the beach by the sea, the sand was blown up and scattered on the table. The table drenched by the sea water, clung to the sand and formed patches of dirt. The soil in the plants was covered with sand and the table looked as if it had been abandoned for a long time. The dirt on the surface looks more like part of a landscape, and these stains have an open connection to their surroundings, which creates resonance. Ultimately, the table was like a 'unique object' waiting for someone else to pick it up.

Resonance is also deeply rooted in emotion (Greenblatt, 1990) and can be affected by the level of familiarity of a place or activity. For example, in figure 24, a table was placed at Wellington High School outdoor porch space. This space was originally intended for the arrival of students, and for providing shelter on rainy days. When I placed a 'garden table' in the porch space, this space was invaded. The entrance was not an entrance anymore. The table enhanced the purpose of the porch space. By observation and interview, some students responded that they had been looking for a nice space to eat and chat. They were willing to put food on the 'garden table' instead of on the floor or eating with their hands. When students feel comfort and pleasure, this resonates and affinity arises spontaneously. Furthermore, based on the weather and scenery changes, this could also enhance students' intimacy and comfort in the use of the space.



Figure 23: Resonance, 2019



Figure 24: Resonance, 2019

In this section, I emphasized the resonance between the 'garden table' and the natural environment. For me, 'garden table' is more like an artificial nature, which I bring into real nature, but what will happen is something I cannot predict. I cannot predict the arrival of seagulls and the sweep of sand. It seemed as if I heard the voice of the table itself, as if it had opened a dialogue with various surrounding aspects. In these public spaces, 'garden table' is like an abandoned child, waiting in the silence for the beginning of the next encounter. Furthermore, the emotional resonance between 'garden table' and the surrounding environment is relatively rich due to the uncertainty of environmental factors. Next, I will move 'garden table' from public space to private and shared private space to see how people will resonate with it in each particular environment.

6. Method

I tested 'garden table' in different spaces on campus of Massey University and observed how they interacted with the table, whether people were alone or with others. In this process, I put two series of tables into specific spaces. Some were placed indoors in relation to the architecture, and some placed in outdoor locations. Tables were placed as a set or individually in the spaces.

Space test research - Garden table (mindfulness)

Illusion of Emptiness



Figure 25: Emptiness, 2019

Emptiness in Japan not only means having an empty room, empty space or nothingness. Emptiness is very basic aesthetic philosophy in Japan. In ancient Japan, people built temple structures sometimes without a roof or sometimes without walls, to invite god into this empty space.

Emptiness creates these possibilities. For example, in figure 26, ‘Empty space can be the creative receptacle of imagination. The guest and host could face each other in a small, empty room. And when the host puts petals of the cherry blossom on the surface of the water, this means that the host and guests are sitting in the cherry tree in full bloom. This is an illusion. The guest and host share the illusion by sharing the small objects. By making small changes the space will be dramatically changed. It changes the seashore into an imaginary space’(Hara, 2010).

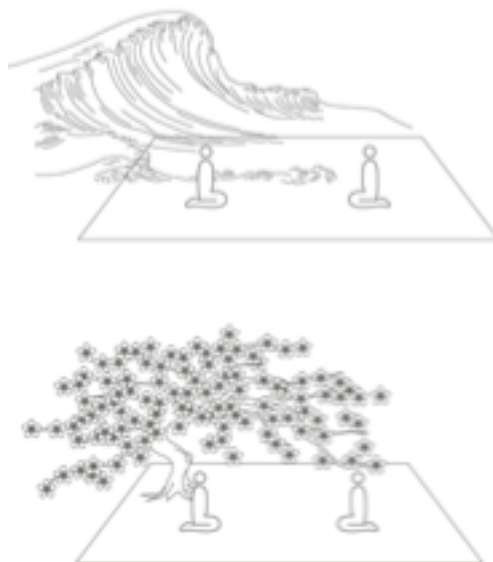


Figure 26: Emptiness, Sado, Japan, 2019

With my ‘garden table’ (mindfulness), I tried to build some ‘emptiness’ possibilities. The purpose is to build multiple possibilities of freedom for every participant to use the table in any way that they like. This emptiness enables participants to accept any sort of illusions in the space.

Here, I think of two examples to make people more intuitively understand the experience of emptiness in my work. On the one hand, suppose an adult man took his children to the office during overtime. He needs a quiet room to finish his work and does not want his children to disturb others. This room does not need to be too big. There is a table for a laptop, a cup of coffee, and low warm light. He can be completely relaxed against the wall, and most importantly, there is enough room for children to play (or, more specifically, to provide an attractive enough thing for children to play quietly on their own, and when the

man finishes his job, he can join the children's game. On the other hand, a young female wants to find an absolutely quiet place where she can talk on the phone without restraint and enjoy a cup of sweet coffee. After the call is over, she does not know what to do. At the same time, she can sit quietly at the table, enjoy the uneven grass growing out of the soil, or take out a pair of scissors to trim some withered or dead grass, or to shape what she wants. It is interesting. She will spend this time unconsciously, when she finds out that it may be an hour later.

Whether it is a male or female, a single person or a family, it is not a simple table. It provides enough 'emptiness' for you to enjoy your time in multiple ways. It is flexible enough that everyone seems to fit. I love the 'emptiness' that people could take on, using any way that might suit them.

In addition, the 'affective' element is also considered. In order to create a calm and peaceful atmosphere, I considered the size and layout of this space. If an indoor space looks spacious, it could appear hollow. Imagine a small table placed in a very large room. It is hard to experience a comfortable and peaceful atmosphere. I chose a small room with a yellow spotlight. The range of the light was adjusted to maximum, and was close to the edge of the wall. The warm light formed a strong contrast with this dark space. As expected, participants sat spontaneously in the middle of the light, which allowed them to experience a feeling of safety and warmth.

Experience and summary

In the first part of the exhibition of my work, I placed my table in a small dark room with only one window, which is located near the corridor, so the whole room only has artificial lighting (one spotlight). In this room, my problem was how to make people feel quiet and peaceful when they entered the room, and how to guide them to interact with the table.

In order to give participants' an authentic experience, I didn't directly guide or give advice on how to use this table. I didn't give any introduction about my 'garden table' - why I designed the table, how people should use it, where it should be placed, or what kind of atmosphere I wanted. I just wanted people to experience for themselves what these tables bring to them?

Feedback from my peers and supervisors was both positive and negative. Everyone who engaged with the first part of the project experienced calm and peaceful feeling it. It reminded them of the earth on

which they live. Rice here is associated with natural food. While participants touched the grains in different ways, they felt there was no order or pattern. White rice seemed like pebbles, which triggered people to think about their meaning, the place you come to, and the need to find the way out. However, some classmates considered most of elements were under my control.

The yellow spotlight formed a clean circle on the ground, and surrounded the table in this giant circle. The light encouraged most people to naturally sit around the perimeter of the circle, rather than at the sides of the table. This scene really surprised me. People did not sit on the 'cushion' I designed, as I expected (these 'cushion' looks so beautiful, I would not sit on them, as one participant told me). It made me rethink whether the scene I designed was too rigid. Would participants feel calm in the atmosphere I created? Would it help participants be aware of their behaviors and emotions? However, the atmosphere might be overwhelming, controlling, and participants might feel uncomfortable, and unable to freely engage and communicate with these living organic elements (rice and grass). Therefore, in the test of 'garden table' (socialization), I will consider more comfort and freedom, and the choice of scenes will become more flexible.

Space test research - Garden table (socialization)

Social space (library)

As a social public place, the library is the center of information gathering and sharing. Students and faculty have the opportunity to share resources and services in the library. As a centralized place of university information resources and professional technologies, many university libraries are remaking their image as a social space to attract more people to visit and communicate. Furthermore, in order to enrich people's experience and pleasure of reading, the expansion of library facilities has also become a crucial part of public space, for example, coffee/tea spaces and exhibition spaces. The Massey University Wellington campus has set up an open exhibition space on the first floor of the library. The function and purpose of this space is varied: to display student artworks, and host library morning tea events for academics.

I placed 'garden table' (socialization) in the exhibition space on the first floor of the library. The table was displayed for a specific period of time, along with surrounding artworks by others. The tables were easily identified by their aesthetic value rather than their use value. After all, touching works in an exhibition is often prohibited. Regardless of whether it is a table or 'garden table', they have their own display functions. For example, in figure 27, although the appearance of the 'garden tables' has changed compared with everyday tables, they can still be used as tables. The altered 'garden table' might no longer be recognized as the object of design, but for me, due to its touchability and usability, it runs counter to the 'exhibitability' and 'untouchability' of the artwork (Duttmann, 2011).

The altered 'garden table' might no longer be recognized as the object of design, but for me, due to its touchability and usability, it runs counter to the 'exhibitability' and 'untouchability' of the artwork (Duttmann, 2011).



Figure 27: Exhibition,
Massey University
Wellington Campus, 2019

The more design objects seem to resemble artworks, then, whether in fashion, in the domain of items of practical use, or in the realm of ornaments, the more they are exhibited and hence appear untouchable, the more they distance themselves from art, as their use value catches up with them (Duttmann, 2011). Although the use value of 'garden tables' was lessened when displayed in an exhibition context, it was unexpected that audiences still responded spontaneously. One of the librarians said: 'the height of these tables used to be popular in Korea, but now it is rare. It still makes me feel friendly, but it may not be comfortable enough for older people, due to it being a little hard to sit down and stand up'.

This reminded me that I should pay more attention to comfort during the testing process. Therefore, I put two of the 'garden tables' on the second floor of the library (figure 28).



Figure 28: Social space (library), 2019

The tables were placed against the wall, so that the body could rest against the wall, and the thighs could be stretched or bent freely until finding the most comfortable position. In this test, I invited a librarian to experience the table and conducted an informal interview with her. She informed me that a carpeted floor makes it easier to create a quiet atmosphere. In addition she suggested including a sign inviting students to use them. I would prefer to suggest an invitation, such as putting books or tableware on the tables rather than an including a sign.

Shared Private space (a design studio on a university campus)

In this part, I focused more on the performance of 'garden table' in shared private space. I planned to change how people interact, drawing them in to a shared space. In figure 29, this design studio is divided into different small spaces where everyone learns in their own spaces. Whenever I need to communicate with my mentors or peers, I am surprised to find that there is no space for people to gather together. The only thing we can do is push chairs from someone else's space into our work space and prevents more spontaneous communication.



Figure 29: Design studio, Massey University Wellington Campus, 2019

I tidied the center space of the studio, where the main function is to store sundry items. In figure 30, this rearranged space connects people together. One thing should be emphasized: the addition of cushions and carpet were crucial, and directly affected the feeling of comfort.



Figure 30: Design studio, Massey University Wellington Campus, 2019

Through testing and observation in different spaces, most people affirmed the positive side of the 'garden table'. For example, promoting interaction; enriching the possibility of spatial diversity. Some people wondered If it was more suitable for a group, or for a specific activity.

7. Conclusion

The design of 'garden table' enabled me to use different disciplines to create a new product. In the original intention of the design, I hoped people would look at plants from a fresh perspective rather than the design of the table itself. I encouraged people to have contact with plants in a special way. I took into account the practicality and aesthetics in the 'garden table'. In my further exploration, I placed the garden tables in different spaces and added stories behind them to enhance people's emotional attachments. In my eyes, this MFA programme has created the opportunity of opening an avenue to explore these objects, and the garden tables may ultimately be placed within the category of industrial design. After all, it is a table.

Currently, I am still thinking about the expansion of 'garden table' into various spaces. Due to the limitations of the size and number of 'garden table(s)', the scope of the spatial experience is also limited. At present, 'garden table' cannot be situated in large public spaces or commercial entertainment spaces. When they enter large public spaces, they might be transformed from regular furniture to street furniture or urban furniture. This transformation will lead to a series of creative extensions. For example, I might assemble various plants, lights, building facades, bollards, or integrate pavements, etc. Furthermore, I will continue to consider the concept of raising people's awareness of nature.

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