

VASTU

Critique

Fundamentally, a way to communicate one's response (cognitive and emotional) to a piece of work. The response must be grounded in an evidence of some sort, thereby allowing the response to be accompanied by a suggestion to remedy the piece of work.

Can also be perceived as the defining state of an organization's, institution's or any other organized body of people's culture.

Context

When this form was conceived, it was targeted at serving as a method of critique for product design projects. Product design can be painfully objective and I wanted to explore a form of critique that doesn't strip the objectivity and thereby the clarity off the critique but makes the critique more fruitful...

Not an argument or a war but a critique.

Roles

VASTU, as a form, is intended to be frugal and have as few parts to it as possible. The 'presenter' or the person seeking critique and the 'critique-er' or person giving critique are the only people involved in the exchange. However, I wasn't satisfied with the titles as they inherently give power to one of the people. As a result, I reframed the titles as being that of the 'creator' or the person who has built something and the 'audience' who is viewing the work and is entitled to an opinion on the work. VASTU then becomes a medium by which the communication of this opinion is mediated.

The form

NON-VERBAL

Initiate

The 'creator' presents their work along with a supporting object

The supporting object must embody the quality(ies) the 'creator' would like feedback on

NON-VERBAL

Respond

The 'audience' presents an object

This object must embody the initial objective response to the presented work, keeping in mind the quality that has been mentioned

VERBAL

Resolve

The 'creator' and 'audience' have a 3 minute discussion

The discussion serves as a chance for the 'creator' and 'audience' to subjectively explain their reactions, expectations and responses

Principles

Critique is often dubbed as being intimidating and overbearing. As creative practitioners, we put in a lot of ourselves into our work and critique that is not delivered and communicated in the right manner can be very frustrating. This leads to the creator becoming defensive about their work. VASTU balances subjectivity and objectivity to help take the defense out of the conversation while also making the interaction and exchange agnostic to roles, thereby eradicating the power struggle between the creator and audience.

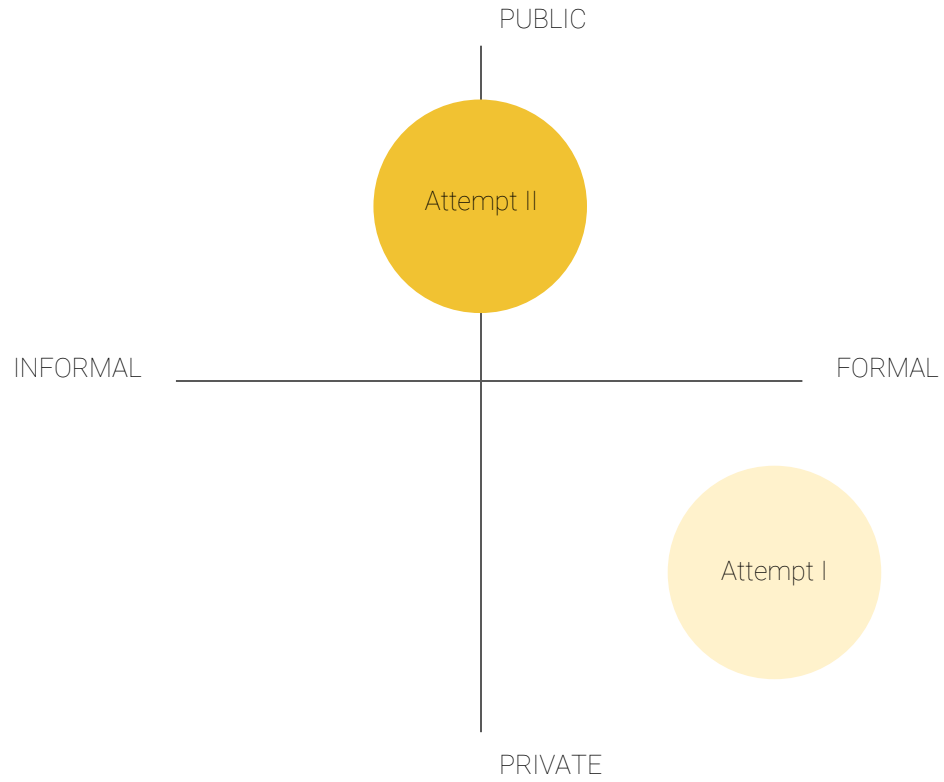
Intuition and authenticity were also guiding principles in the development of this form. Intuition is lent by the conscious pairing or contextual placement of an object to the quality, values and response that a person may have towards a piece of work. By making the exchange of objects non-verbal, there is an authenticity that is infused into the form.

Evaluation

- 1 Desirability - Are people willing to consume and employ the form in their organizations?
- 2 Viability - Are people more receptive to critique when it is delivered in this form?
- 3 Feasibility - What is the investment (time and man-power) in the performance of this form?
- 4 Sustainability - Is the form relevant with changing cultural frameworks within the organization?

Practice

In order to evaluate the form, based on the above criteria, I practiced the form in two contexts. In the first evaluation, I tried to maintain a ceremonial sanctity to the entire process and forcing the exchange to be between two individuals only. In the second evaluation, I opened the floor to multiple audience members and allowed the exchange to be a little loose while still forcing adherence to the verbal and non-verbal exchange. The diagrams on the next page show the possible placements of the two evaluation attempts on a continuum of scale and formality.



Learnings from practice

- 1 The form had a tendency to becoming vague and resulted in a heavy reliance on conversation
- 2 Exchange of objects lead to developing a healthy basis for conversation
- 3 Equal measures of objectivity and subjectivity throughout the form
- 4 The piece of work and the response are in the same form, thereby creating strong context
- 5 The form ably took defense out of the conversation
- 6 The language used while discussing was sans jargon
- 7 Too much control in the entire process lies with the people practicing the form

Metamorphosis

Based on the observations, I decided to accommodate a larger number of audience members. This would make the form informal while still maintaining decorum and also open the floor to a more public or collective response to a piece of work.

In an attempt to further refine the form, I got all the people in the audience (a group of three people) to respond with a single object that they co-created. This resulted in an interesting subjectivity to the response, however, it required mediation.

Finally, I also used the form in a non-product context. While it did not work very well with the one-to-one exchange, it was effective in the more 'public context'. This may be because the opinion, response and critique were limited to a single lens and bias which does not work as a fruitful form of critique for service, system and strategy oriented work

THANK YOU