Respite from the Playa of Life

*“I guess I’d always known but never fully considered that being broken is what makes us human. We all have our reasons. Sometimes we’re fractured by the choices we make; sometimes we’re shattered by things we would never have chosen.* ***But our brokenness is also the source of our common humanity, the basis for our shared search for comfort, meaning, and healing.*** *Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion. We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity.”*

-Bryan Stevenson

Burning Man is all about the human experience; a group of people coming together and trying to live better, to do better, serving as a contrast to this dysfunctional world we live in. Fly Ranch needs to do this in a more permanent way by creating a sustainable infrastructure that honors the planet and treats people well... designing a better future for our planet, and for one another. This is an opportunity to take a stand, to show the world that there is another way. Humanity is destroying our planet, and our relationships with one another in the process. But we can change this.

*Respite for the Playa of Life* is about living right with the world, and right with one another... designing for the human experience in a sustainable way. We’ve all been broken in one way or another, but the Japanese art of Kintsugi teaches us that this brokenness is not something to hide. Instead it is what makes us human, what shapes us into who we are. To deny our brokenness is to deny our humanity. But to accept it and understand it, is where we find commonality, where we begin to find healing. When we embrace this brokenness within ourselves, we begin to have compassion for others. Let the brokenness in others break your heart so that in place of judgement you find love.

Nobody can be forced to explore their own brokenness, but *Respite for the Playa of Life* is meant to provide space for reflection and healing. A momentary respite from the rest of the world in order to understand one’s brokenness. Whether seeking solitude or community, this is a safe place to find it. There are three primary components to the design: contemplative steam rooms, sleep pods, and gathering spaces.

The steam rooms are designed for both physical and psychological respite. They improve circulation, clear congestion, promote skin health, boost immune system, loosen stiff joints, and reduce stress. But the intended healing goes much deeper, it is a place of contemplation. In the same way that sensory deprivation tanks remove one’s sense of reality, the steam rooms are designed to remove unnecessary distractions and allow a heightened sense of self awareness. To help achieve this, dye solar cell technology is utilized from Solaronix. Not only do these solar panels produce electricity, but they are fully customizable, allowing for unique shape, color, and transparency. The function is therefore twofold: producing electricity to help power the steam rooms, and simultaneously creating a unique contemplative space. This combination of steam and opaque colored planes will create an environment well suited for deep reflection to better understand one’s “*brokenness”.*

The sleep pods are aesthetically minimal providing a solitary space for both sleeping and contemplation. Distractions are minimized in these pods allowing for deeper thought. Rest and isolation are a key aspect of the healing process.

Community spaces are designed to allow for connection, with no requirement of it. Comfort can be found in sharing our brokenness with one another, but this should never be forced. The space is minimal with gathering spaces for only a small group of people.

It is essential that all spaces are not forced or prescribed, rather designed to facilitate healing. Restoration is found by personal choice and is a shared understanding necessary for visitors to *Respite from the Playa of Life*. This is not a tourist destination, but rather a healing center meant for those who desire or need it.

The design of this project is meant to be sculptural, functional, and sustainable. The primary building material is bamboo, used both for the structural system and the planar construction of the pods. Lamboo, a US based company produces cross-laminated bamboo which would be utilized for the pods and structure. Bamboo is a fast-growing resource that, when used properly, can create a strong, sustainable structure. Multiple layers of bamboo “scaffolding” are utilized with openings for the different pod types to infill voids within the overall structure. The intent behind using this material is not only to be sustainable, but to provide a building that is experienced through movement, changing in appearance depending upon one’s perspective. The shape of the pods emulates the cracks in the ground found on the Playa and Fly Ranch from the severe temperatures of Black Rock Basin. This forms is a symbolic representation our collective of *“brokenness”.*

All these different components come together to create a brokenness made whole. What initially seemed broken, is made to be beautiful. Just like people, there are all these fragmented, broken pieces that begin to come together in a way that shows brokenness doesn’t mean you’re incomplete. Instead, through healing, we can put back together the pieces of our lives into something beautiful that reveals how we have grown. In this collective mosaic, the colored steam pods emphasize the people within this design. It is the people, after all, that are the focus of this project. Helping people find healing in a sustainable way works towards a better future.

System Inputs and Outputs

There are 12 steam pods in the project. The maximum recommended time spent in a pod is 15 minutes. Calculations are based on all 12 pods being used 300 days of the year (assuming closure over holidays and during colder weather). The volume of a typical pod is 120 cubic feet. The total volume needed for steam use is 1,440 cubic feet. A 36 kW steam generator can provide steam for up to 1,590 cubic feet. 36 kWh for 300 days with steam pods being used for 15 minutes requires 2,700 kWh/year.

Due to Solaronix being relatively new, there is little information on exactly how much energy can be produced. But, using information from an example project, with making adjustments for panel placement, the panels would produce 719 kWh/year. This is based on 1,048 sf of panels and energy production between .46 and .93 kWh/year/square foot. The average daily electricity production from 1 kW of peak DC solar panels installed in Nevada is 4.3. That is 1569.5 kWh/year. To meet the required need of 2,700 kWh/year, 1.3 kW of solar panels is needed. A standard 275 watt residential polycrystalline solar panel is 18.85 square feet. To meet the demands of the steam generator, 90 square feet of solar panels are needed. Water is to be pulled from on site for the steam generators and native wildflowers.

Maintenance would involve ensuring the steam generator and solar panels continue to operate properly. Along with this, nutrients would need to be added occasionally within the system that irrigates the wildflowers.

On-Site Prototype

If this project were to be chosen for an honorarium grant, I would build a scaled down version of the design. This would include a sleep pod and a steam pod (excluding the community pod now due to there being capacity for only one person). Building at this scale would allow all the different technologies and structures to be displayed. Utilizing Solaronix would provide information on how much energy can be produced at Fly Ranch. Getting custom products from Lamboo in this smaller production would allow any issues to be sorted out before building on a larger scale.

Materials

The primary materials utilized are dye solar cells from Solaronix, cross-laminated bamboo panels and dimensioned lumber from Lamboo, and local Nevada wildflowers. The overall dimensions of the project are 8 meters wide, 30 meters long, and 9 meters tall.

Cost

In order to estimate the cost of the project, further design and coordination with the production companies would be necessary. Solaronix panels do not come in standard sizes, but rather are fully custom. The Lamboo panels and scaffolding would be similarly customized with the use of CNC machines.

Environmental Impact Summary

One of the most important aspects of Burning Man involves taking care of the environment. In a world that is facing climate change caused by excessive carbon emissions, it is essential that we come up with a better alternative to living. The goal of Respite from the Playa of Life is twofold: providing healing for people and doing it in a way that has little to no impact on the environment.

Because of this, the primary component used for this project is cross laminated bamboo. Not only is bamboo a rapidly renewable resource, but it also has great structural properties when used in the right applications. Lamboo utilizes environmentally safe treatments and preservatives without formaldehyde to reduce decay and rot. Being an organic material, bamboo is biodegradable, which helps to reduce the overall impact of the building.

By utilizing Solaronix solar cells, as well as traditional solar panels, all the necessary energy is produced on site. By doing this, the carbon emissions are limited to the production and transportation of these panels. To slow the impacts of climate change, we must drastically reduce the amount of carbon emissions. Utilizing renewable resources is one of the primary ways we can accomplish this.

Not only is the energy captured on site, but so is the water. Water is used for the steam pods as well as the wildflowers. Fly Ranch is a unique environment that has plenty of natural water features which can be utilized for on-site infrastructure.

While it is necessary to bring in products from off-site, the goal is to use as many natural resources as possible. Respite from the Playa of Life is meant to connect people with nature and become a part of the landscape. Natural bamboo, local wildflowers, and steam pods powered by the sun with water supplied from Fly Ranch integrates this project into the site.

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