Instructions: Build Your Own Toaster!

Congratulations on your acquisition of this fabulous new toaster! As you’ve probably noticed, however, the toaster requires some assembly, which is where this instruction manual comes in. In this manual, you’ll find plenty of information pertinent to the assembly your new toaster.
As designers and creators, the work we produce is essentially an extension of our lives and ourselves as individuals. Each piece of work we put out into the world is a culmination of a lifetime of experiences, revelations, mistakes and understandings. Emphasis should be placed more on what the creative process does to you than anything you could possibly create or publish. These trails of effort, things you do—and, at times, even the things you refrain from doing—are the things you are what define you as a designer, a creator, a person, and are what set you apart from everyone else.

Today, more than ever, in our digital era, work tends to take the form of versions rather than final products. This sense of “unfinish” that characterizes such work leaves things rather open ended for a designer. Looking back on a lifetime of “unfinished” worked, one begins to wonder—what's more important: the work or the process?
The autobiography is a prime example of the medium as an extension of ourselves as human beings. It allows the creator to completely and holistically indulge himself in a topic of which he holds the utmost expertise: himself. The autobiography is often placed oh-so-discreetly on the dust jacket of a book, or, in its most self-indulgent state, takes the form of the book itself. Yet, at the pinnacle of one’s glory, in a celebration of oneself and one’s achievements, I am often left wondering--what is really important? Do I really need to know that this person went to Princeton, likes the snow, and has a half brother named Joe? True, such facts are often strewn among more relevant anecdotes—the more definitive, life-changing, poignant moments that proved to be turning points for Mr. Inspirational. Yet in our society, so much time is still dedicated to worshiping the celebrity, the distinguished creator who has accomplished and completed so much great work in his lifetime.

At the same time, when admiring an end product, often times there is little consideration for the process of getting to that end point. Many revisions, re-workings, and ultimately, mistakes were made before arriving at the final product as presented to the masses in its entire splendor. Yet this process is mostly, if not entirely, overlooked by many people. We are in essence, then, falling prey to the wonder of the Spectacle. We are stepping into the sidelines and becoming completely enamored with the greats that have accomplished so much, and the accomplishments that they are so lauded for.

And what of it? Often times, the work itself is what is recognized, what’s important. However, it can be argued that the process is far more interesting—how a person gets to where he ends up, how that ending is not really an ending at all. The Mediawork Pamphlet Series presents an interesting collection of experiences, as seen through the eyes of an array of productive and creative individuals who have in essence dedicated their lives to the production of work. Each author in the series presents a starkly different approach to his or her writing and life. Each author puts forward a very different and unique set of life experiences that brought him or her to the present, and yet, at the same time, they acknowledge the future as a yet untapped, unistine jewel with endless possibilities.
Life, above all else, is characterized by a sense of “unfinish”. The day you declare yourself to be finished; done, completed, fulfilled, perfected, is in essence the last day of your useful life. Your life itself is ultimately your life’s work, as experienced through years of time, through successes and failures, through stubbornness and impressionability. These experiences, the processes of yourself as an individual, are very involved and are often times experimental in nature. One must forge new ground on a regular basis, do the unexpected, and be unafraid to fail. It is through these experiences, successes, failures alike, that one gathers ideas and understands as a means to generate new content and experiences. It’s a hybridized and disparate act of remixing—taking from the observations and understandings of the outside world, reinterpreting it from within, and allowing it to change you. It is, in essence, a remixing of the self.
It becomes clear, then, that it is not just the pivotal, life changing experiences that are important, but rather, the everyday, overlooked experiences are just as definitive as the former. We are reminded to live every day to the fullest, to resist the urge to put your life on pause and simply sit back as an observer of the Spectacle. It’s a celebration of process instead of product. Of purpose instead of the person. The endpoint becomes in essence irrelevant, or, perhaps, absent, all together.
And so here you are. You’re sitting here, with a small booklet and a disassembled toaster. You’re wondering why you should go about putting together a toaster—there are plenty of other toasters in the world, and you already have one in your kitchen. Why, then, should you dedicate valuable time and effort out of your day to putting together this ten-dollar toaster? My response: have you ever put together a toaster before? If not, why not try? You might learn something about the toaster and, quite possibly, about yourself, in the process.

Good luck.