

Cellsreen Korban Flaubert

*materia*





## Workshop as Laboratory

Janos Korban

Korban Flaubert's approach to design generally involves more doing than talking, so it's a bit of a challenge to express it in words. It's not that we're a bunch of illiterates but we're a small group who work together well and know each other well and often we just communicate in one-word or two-word sentences.

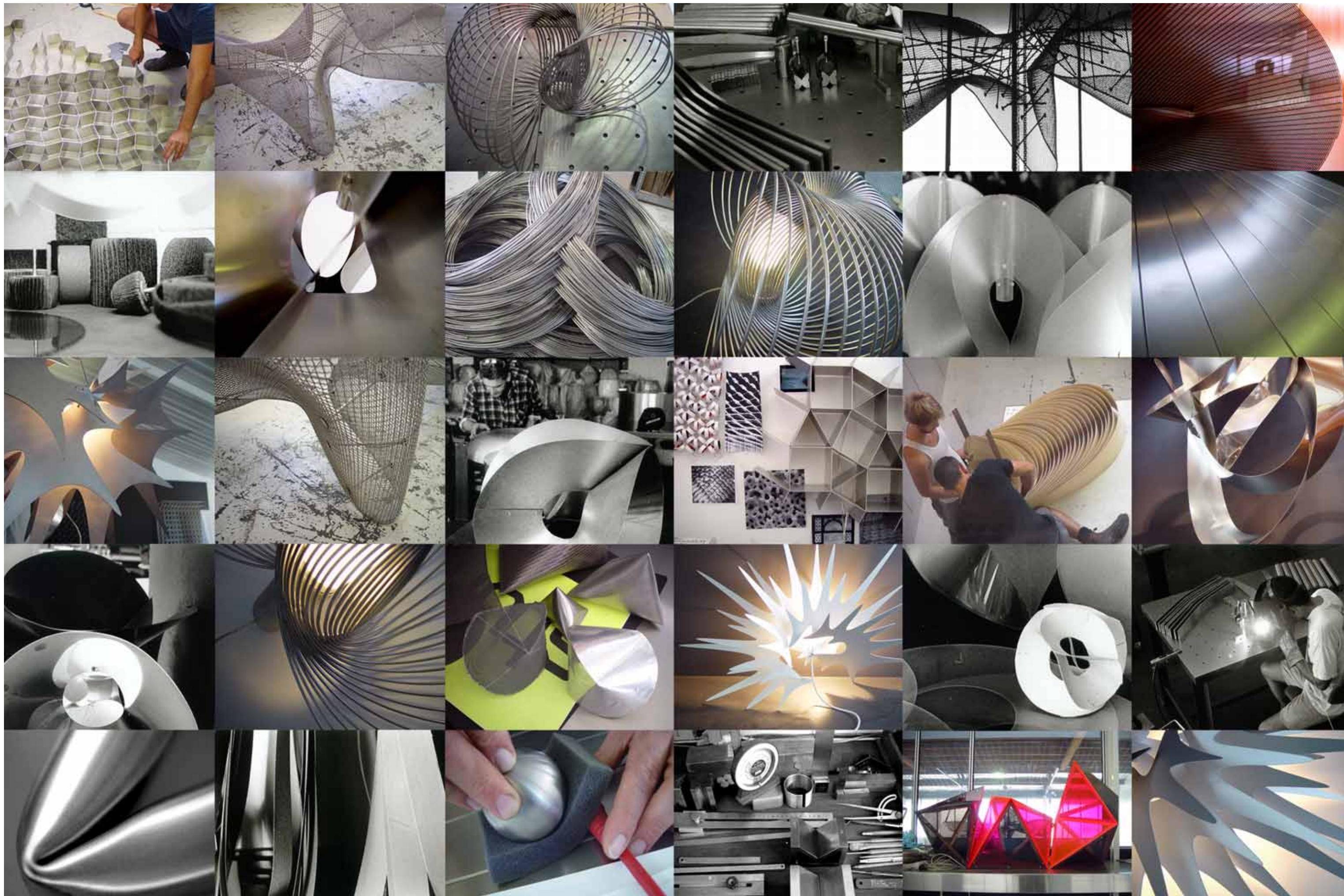
We're interested in the effect objects have on the viewer. How people face-off with objects and make sense of them. We're interested in primitive and instinctive responses and the idea that there are fundamental effects that objects have on all of us on some basic instinctive level. We want to make objects that are understandable on this level and that are understandable to anybody.

What we usually are aiming for is a self-evident result, an undesigned quality. We set up our workshop in such a way that our methodology would support this general tendency – we tend to invent themes and then set up experiments along these themes. And then they run, and run wherever they want to; sometimes something happens and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes a product emerges and sometimes something more abstract.

The themes are often suggested by phenomena in nature, the outside world, life, the world around us. We don't set out to duplicate nature but it's pretty easy to be caught in the thrall of the natural world. Themes are often also suggested by material and action effects – by just playing with material. The workshop was set up first and foremost to be a place to have fun, so we play, we structure the play and then we play some more.

We can loosely describe our approach to design in terms of material and anti-material. On the one hand the effect of the material is of critical importance to the formal outcome while conversely there are projects where we rely on non-material, non-tectonic expression for their effects.







One of our main concerns is the idea that there is energy contained in the physical character of the materials. That is, the reality or the substance of the material, physical and perceptual qualities specific to materials and their configurations and scale. We thought it would be interesting to have these qualities dominate typological concerns. Can materials speak for themselves, by themselves, with no design?

Metals are our main material. We do a lot of work in stainless steel where the material has its own power and it's the material that dominates. Material properties are conventionally expressed in engineer's tables, elongation values, offsets, tensile strengths and hardness. This is something of an abstract and removed thing to be concerned with and having a workshop allows us to work directly with materials. Hopefully, after a while you can develop some kind of synthesised understanding of the dry, intellectual, physical knowledge and the actual hands on. We're always amazed that the more you know, the more there is to know.

The wrench project evolved from our first experiment along the theme 'material + action'. We wanted to see what happens when you take away the controls in normal tube bending processes. Everyone assumes they want smooth curves from a bending process but what if I don't want nice smooth curves? We set up hundreds of experiments just twisting, mangling and crushing things with no particular idea of outcome, just to see what kind of interesting effects would emerge. From these experiments the wrenchlamp product evolved.

We like this 'one material and one action' approach; the outcome is a direct result of that. It's very dry and non-mysterious and what you see is what it is. Our Membrane chaise-longue also demonstrates this in a much gentler way.

Another theme of ours is called Volume/Surface/Edge. It generally involves developing volumetric forms from flat sheet materials, examining continuity and the impact of edges. Tetra sphere is a single continuous surface with two edges. Swaylamp is a continuous surface with one edge.

A few years ago we were asked to develop a piece for an exhibition at object gallery Customs House on the theme of light. This was well-timed because we had been banging away with hard materials for a while and we thought it might be nice to work with something as intangible as light.

We liked the idea of light being a substance itself and being treated as a physical thing and making an immaterial effect behave like a substance and this generated our glowblocks: a series of blocks that generates fields of colour which merge differently depending on the viewpoint.

With the Bongo stool we liked the idea of making a blob that you could sit on, a blob that would firstly be a transmitter of colour, and second a material. It is moulded in polyethylene from a highly polished tool so it comes out waxy and shiny and can be produced in lots of fun colours and this is pretty much what interior designers specify them as – little blobs of colour that punctuate spaces.



**Bubbles** Korban Flaubert



**Tetra White** Korban Flaubert

**Swaylamp** Korban Flaubert



**Bongo Stool** Korban Flaubert





We're also interested in mesh and moire and the strange optical effects you get as your body approaches the pieces or which occur in shifting light conditions. The Siren piece began as an experiment in the manipulation of a single square of mesh. One of the models we explored ended up being a piece in the Sculpture by the Sea event, on a rock ledge above Tamarama beach in Sydney. At times it can look reptilian with its enormous variations in transparency; it's a quite a fascinating effect from a very simple mechanism.

With the cellscreen we were interested in making the material less material – it's quite a delicate structure and it has some of the visual properties of a textile or an Islamic screen structure but is executed in crisp, hard aluminium. Transparent from the orthogonal view, opaque from the angled view, so interesting effects as you walk by.

As the projects get larger we're interested in the effect that size has. Objects exist in a primary relationship to the body and its relationship to movement. Objects can motivate movement and engagement and they can activate your body. The site-specific piece we developed called 'arterial' is located on King Street in Sydney, directly opposite the Theatre Royal. We started out with a balustrade and we stretched the scope of the piece a little bit. It's now 16 metres long, made from 1.8 tonnes of stainless mesh. Here we were interested in repetition and sequence and shifting points of view and how these effects influence your changing relationship to this scale of object as you walk along it.

The site-specific pieces we develop are generally sub-projects within interior design projects or architectural jobs, mostly for corporate clients who have been intimately engaged with the process.

We like to make objects that are ambiguous and often have no function whatsoever and see where it leads us. We're interested in how this modifies the way in which people approach objects. You don't, you can't necessarily classify these objects within a known typology. It is quite interesting to see how people respond to that.

We spend a lot of time running experiments, quite basic experiments often, but they often generate interesting, complex results. Some turn into products, some don't but we have a lot of fun developing them. The projects oscillate between those that are very reduced and simple and those that, by contrast, rely on complexity and repetition, but in either case, the effect of material is usually critical to the outcome.

We like to know our materials really well and that's the benefit of having a workshop: beating them up first hand, and seeing what happens. But we'd never like to know them so well that they don't surprise us. We like to think that they always have surprises in store.

**Cellscreen** Korban Flaubert



Siren Korban Flaubert



Membrane Korban Flaubert







## Material is a Political Thing

Soumitri Varadarajan

### Opening Story

On 25 July in a small town in Kerala, in the south of India, it rained. The rain was red in colour.

- The scientists speculate in the newspapers that a meteor may have exploded into a cloud of dust that hovered till the rain brought it down.
- Is a religious oracle somewhere using this as a sign that the Gods are angered?
- Are the environmentalists contesting the scientific interpretation, even as they await the chemical analysis of the rain, claiming it is the portent of things to come on this already polluted planet?

The scientist, religious Guru and the environmentalist each have a way of constructing knowledge. These three constructs I name the rationalist, the formalist and the environmentalist. And am promptly unhappy – because this does not help me construct the context in which the designer apprehends material. And so I restart my inquiry.

Red Metal Chair in a Paint Shop, New Delhi, 1989  
Photo: Soumitri Varadarajan



**Cycle Abandoned in a Park, Tokyo, 1991**  
Photo: Soumitri Varadarajan



**Cycle Rickshaws in New Delhi, 1999**  
Photo: Prabhu Satyajit

#### **Proposition: All lies**

Different designers look at material in different ways. Some do not see any material in their styling exercises. Some re-dose society with its wastes, albeit peripherally, in the manner of unwanted material from hairdressers finding a resting place on the heads of the vain. Students all over strive to get an expertise in the nomenclature of materials believing it to be useful for their careers. On the fringes of design, the fashionable designers resurrect material and show it not as usable but as a curiosity, worthy of publication, documentation and exhibition. The digital mainstream in design is anonymous, silent and isolated from contact with material substances.

To set the tone I say that design in the past, as in the craft and architecture traditions may have been about shaping material. It is not that any longer, unless you are working with a craft community or with your own hands producing objects for sale on high street. Those who claim design is about material are lying. It is about profits, tapping latent desires, offering new lifestyles and about selling glossy expensive design publications. These publications are based on the assumption that the anonymous majority of designers in huge manufacturing enterprises are the silent audience for the theatrical performances of the designers who visualise curious rare collectibles. This particular form of design, mirrors media as a construct, and is also all about power of the sort enjoyed by the media personalities and their private relationships. This is power that does not look to exercise influence, at least not overtly, but can be experienced as an ability to be pervasive in media.

#### **Proposition: On theory**

I am taking up the task of depicting the space between the designer and material, if such a construct may be considered possible at all. This space can be given form and energised. The occurrences today of the many forms of this space in the profession of design need not be simplified for the sake of this explanation. Instead I speculate that a few instances can be discussed to energise the understanding of the designer's relationship with material. A construct here is a particular way of constructing design theory, with specific terminologies and concepts, and with specific sympathies and alignments. Material can be located in each construct, both as presences and absences.

#### **Construct I – The bridge between matter and spirit is matter becoming spirit**

##### **Story 2**

Years ago in design school I took up a project to design a conference chair for a building designed by an architect who in his past had worked with Corbusier in Chandigarh. As I did my research on the spirit of the building and what I would infuse the design with, I wrote up a statement of meanings that could be interpreted from the building. The two pages I wrote drew upon the terminologies that construct modernism. I was liberal with the use of words like truth, honesty and clarity in the use of material. I added to that Pevsner's condensation of the spirit into heroic, clinically precise and somehow machine-like. This sufficed then and continues to do so in situations like the design of furniture.

While still in design school I also encountered the official historical narrative of design. In this in the period before Bauhaus and Morris there was no distinct and separate use of the phrase Industrial Design, and history in a sense stopped here. However a loosely sketched narrative exists if you are shown that design is just a manifestation of craft, with a more industrial focus. What was made singly is now made en mass, but the spirit, the process and the role of the creator is still the same. I have often been uncomfortable with this, but have myself, in the past, propagated this way of looking at history to my students. My discomfort would become especially acute when encountering a collector of objects, textiles or carpets. This collector would typically be someone who was knowledgeable, thoroughly so, about the particular object. And every kind of object on this planet has a constituency of collectors. To listen to one of them speak knowledgeably about the balance, form and craftsmanship of a serving spoon and to see them definitively compare a set of spoons is a shattering experience.

In the collector's narrative the object would contain within itself the toil: a disciplined and trained hand skillfully executing the task while engaged in the pursuit of perfection. A picture that is at once simple and refined. We are invited here to dwell upon the instant at which the potter pulls his clay to make the form, the pot. It is here that purity is located. It is here that you are shown how in the act of creation thought and action, body and clay are not separated. It is here that matter becomes spirit. It is here also that joy is located, the joy of creation and the joy of materials. Since there is no room for corrective action or rethinking only redoing, again and again, the activity rewards a particular kind of temperament. One that is peaceful, relaxed, capable of being involved totally in what she is doing, assured and decisive. This portrayal is idyllic and perfect, and thus tragic too. For this is so hard to achieve for many of us because of the way present reality is constructed.

The way out we see in so many ceramic designers becoming potters, so many textile designers becoming fabric artists and weavers, and so many product designers starting their own workshops making limited editions. I went this way too, started my workshop and kept my hands on material, for a while. Till my desire to do stuff that I considered more relevant won out and I became a narrator. To become the observer who watched to see which of my students took up the tradition to connect with material.



Story 3

In 2001, a sculptor I was talking to mentioned that she was going to another city, to a block of marble she had kept there for the right time. Now she felt that time had come, the block was calling her. Though she had an idea of what she would be doing with it she knew that in all such circumstances things often change, the block might make her do something entirely different. In the above narrative the connection between the creator and the material is mystical and magical. This narrative exists today in design too, though in a somewhat peripheral fashion. It survives in art, vibrantly – though for most designers art is peripheral too. It survives in some design school curricula too, but its survival and transference is linked to either the persuasion of the teacher or to the absence of self-consciousness in the design student.

Story 4

What is more prevalent is a switch in the narrative. The designer is spoken of as someone slightly removed from the material, the mediator is the craftsperson or her proxy the machine. On a tour of a ceramic factory in Japan I saw a conveyor line of freshly formed cups still wet from the machine. A woman standing by the belt picked up each cup in turn and distorted it just so, with her bare hands. Later in the shop at the front of the factory I saw similar cups on display, each distinct and unique in its own way. This is acceptable too though in a somewhat impure way, as the surviving form of the chance processes that can characterise the craft object. And so it is that matter becomes spirit.

Construct II – All that is solid melts into air

Story 5

Years ago Chris Rust took me to visit a design company near Manchester. He had mentioned them as the contemporary face of design, and as an example of how to make a success of the commercial practice of Industrial Design. I saw a project there of a small hand held gadget for a South Korean company. From design to prototype the project was accomplished in twenty-one days, without meeting the client even once! The brief was electronically conveyed, the LC was opened in the bank and money transferred, concepts were done directly on the computer, the file was sent electronically to New Jersey for stereolithography and on day four the samples were being examined for refinement in the studio. On the twenty-first day the file was being read by a CNC machine in a tool room in Seoul. End of project.

And the material? ABS and naturally so. You ask not about the chemical identity but about the shared narrative of material, the historical construct, the tactile sensory experience. It's gone. In its place is the offset, of the CAD program. The cavity, the void, is a space that is to be injected and left to solidify. The texture is printed onto the surface of the cavity. The object will have a feel to it. A matte.

The preoccupation of the designer here is with the fitness to purpose. As functionalism – it is articulated as the principles of good design. This functionalism attains the centre by pushing material to the periphery. This is a process of substitution, rather than a decisive fracture, and design theory in most places begins to look like a menu of options. If there is to be a language of this design theory the terminologies have to be selected from a pool of words shared by management, engineering and design. Any talk of purity and material is embarrassing, and antagonises the relationships in what is seen as a cooperative venture to realise a new project. The object is a project.

Even the discourse on form breaks away and from being treated as inherent it becomes functional too. Psychology, semantics and semiotics support the explanatory framework. What was once a simple activity has become loaded with text, briefs, strategy, presentations and justifications. Transient publications that will be shredded or filed away in secrecy once the product is done. This situation needs a breed of designer who is a team player, one who surrenders possession of the project and hence the material to documentation. He is to be comfortable with the fact that he may never see the first product rolling out. And for him that is not what design is about. That is not it at all!

This is tragic too. So the peripheral existence of the unique object is resurrected. Supported by the knowledgeable elite, who are a new breed of collectors, the product for high-street grows vibrant. As expensive and exclusive for the discerning – only this comes as a reaction to the utilitarian. This is also a reaction to the displacement of material and the pervasive power of the functional to render worthless the sensory joy of the material. Crude and rough, often one off, these sorts of creations can be seen in the cast aluminum picture frames. Exposed unpainted metal!

And so it goes. The claims by the designers in the glossy design press can all be added up and in the historical narrative it can be constructed as a political discourse: the fight against anonymity imposed by the mega multinational work situation. The need to keep alive marginal discourses is supported by the pervasive desire for the consumption of the culture of the minorities. This mirrors movements elsewhere, like the spirited reaction to the loss of power perceived in the process of globalisation.

Thus it is all air (the void), the tangible melts into air.



The Milk Pot  
Explorations in Ways of Handling Food  
ShyamGadepalli, IIT Delhi 1997



Bins from Recycled Tyres  
Thailand  
Photo: Kim Scheufftan



**Construct III – Material is a threat**

**Story 6**

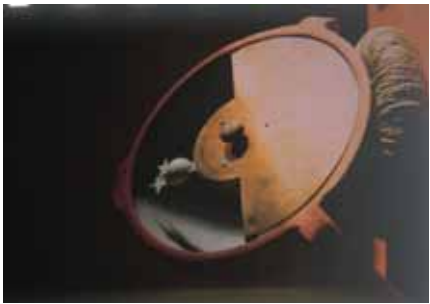
I am a garbage man (In 2001 I was collecting two tonnes of garbage a day!). As a designer and design teacher I am embroiled in the ongoing wrangle of freedom for each versus collective well being. The latter wins out in my recycling project and material for me is waste, the end, the problem and I have associates engaged in the sale of this waste material to agencies and factories which will either find secondary uses for this material or will reprocess and recycle the material. All this will happen before all material one day finds a final location as ash and air by incineration, or in transitory graveyards called landfills, or maybe in the future as projectiles to be sent into a still pollutable space beyond the earth's atmosphere. And we must not forget the traditional option exercised by the rich nations who for years have sent their wastes along with a monetary compensation to the poorer parts of this world.

When I first wrote this it was midnight in Kuala Lumpur in 2001. There were many of us from the Asia-Pacific region meeting to discuss how to get the world to consume less. One of the shared beliefs that brought the participants together is that materials are a threat and are essentially hazardous. Material is now a problem.

The shared narrative here looks with concern at the whole life cycle of a particular material: its extraction, processing, shaping into products, the use of the products and the final resting place of discarded products. Material is either seen to be the direct cause of an impact upon the environment or is seen to cause it in collusion with a set of other materials that come together as a product to use resources like water and electricity. Sanyo has announced their new machine will wash clothes without using detergents.

Elsewhere the focus of this view, liberally called green design, has been on the discarded product, the waste. This was seen as big loss of useful material. The consequences were that design would enable the dis-assembly and recycling of the product by the original product manufacturer. Referred to as closing the loop this did not always look at the whole life cycle of the product, which the generic framework of ecodesign then incorporated. In the project this mainly changed the stages before the brief was developed and not after. The process of problem identification became more disciplined and rigorous. Supported by software the environmental advantages built into a new concept could now be quantified. When this too was not enough the focus shifted to a product-less and material-less world.

The first stage in the path to a material-less world is when products are combined with services so that their overall quantities are reduced. The objective is being articulated as the reduction of the ecological footprint of an economic activity. Material being the necessary ingredient for most economic activity is classified and graded from the most harmful to the least harmful. Copper is bad and its use must be phased out because it is a scarce material. Plastics are bad because they are from non-renewable sources, finite and because cheap extremely susceptible to misuse, disposal and contain the potential to support a throwaway culture. This behaviour of plastic to litter and festoon the trees in the developing world drives the anti-plastic movements. Today many towns in India have a ban on the use of plastic carry bags.



**The Annual Clock**  
Shyam Gadepalli, IIT Delhi 1998



**Books - Professional Audio System**  
Soumitri Varadarajan, Denon, Japan 1991

The emerging discourse towards a less product heavy world is articulated as sustainable consumption, where we use fewer resources. With these paradigms seeping into the media and common usage many people the world over can make intelligent green choices in their buying habits. In a way the shopper looks at products in the supermarket as hazardous, the packaging will be waste instantaneously, the detergent inside will pollute the waters of the planet. In this the designer is offered the option to move away and practice design in a less harmful way. Designing products to be made from waste is seen as a tithe to be paid to society. Proposing an alternative aesthetic and promoting the classic style in an object that can be treated as a collectible are other ways to cut out the discomforts creeping into design theory.

‘What can I do?’ is the refrain that replaces the assurance of what I would like to do of construct I. And this is tragic too. Good design is given a bad name for the new good is the human one. Labeled social accountability the emerging theories of responsible citizenship permeate into the design discourse. Designers need not work visualising new forms of putting together the material, they need to be problem solvers where the better solutions are offered as dematerialised alternatives to what exists.

**End Notes**

**On method**

The three concerns I have articulated are depictions of the concerns of designers. Though it looks temporal and linear, it is not meant to be so. All the constructs exist simultaneously and are supported by society and academia. The staccato tone of the constructs was meant to open up the smooth narratives and definitive histories of design to alternative interpretations.

**The palimpsest**

And so it is that the design person's relationship with material is contested. Which of these perspectives should be privileged? All these perspectives exist simultaneously and are contextually grounded. And in the process the material becomes politicised.





**Land(e)scape** Casagrande & Rintala



**Potemkin** Marco Casagrande

## Land(e)scapes

Marco Casagrande

I am an architect. I graduated from the University of Technology in 2001; however, I had set up the office in 1998 and lied to be an architect. I had a clear image of how an architect should look and how too work. I liked big ideas. However I found after six months that I was the first person to compromise my ideas and quickly became something that I had always hated, something like a prostitute, a very commercial architect just making money. It was my own fault because I was so weak, so all these big boys with money and politics would tell me what to do. So I stopped, like some kind of business hari-kari or suicide. I took all the money that I had earned and put it into my first project.

I wanted to construct something that nobody could come in between. It meant I would be my own client; I would be the architect, construct it, and finance it and so on. It then became problematic because I had to think what it was I had to say. Was there anything? So I made it quite simple. I went back to my childhood memories and things that somehow felt real.



### Land(e)scape

Architectonic landscape installation realised in Savonlinna, Finland, 1999

This work was commenting on the desertion process of the Finnish countryside, which is happening everywhere in the world. If I go back to my childhood village in Lapland, it no longer exists, people have moved to the cities in the south. So I took three abandoned barn houses mounted on wooden shanks, raising them to the height of ten metres in order to give them a slow, majestic walk. Desolate, longing for their farmers, the barns cut their primeval union with the soil and were now swaying towards the cities of the south.

During this project I began to understand the value of process. I realised that one of the weaknesses I had previously was that I was just delivering plans and papers and losing the energy afterwards. So I became involved in the construction until the end, being able to react to the changes, to understand the structure's physical form and its layers, to be present. I have learnt a lot about this idea of presence from the circus, theatre and dance professions which are involved with being present, something that is lacking in architecture. I usually have other people from disciplines of art as mediators between the architecture or the physical form and people. Of course, I had to make construction drawings for the city for something that I had no idea how I was going to build, one of the basic things, to lie.

I had to make a timeline for this, to somehow deal with the energy, to make it more simple and part of the timeline. I wanted this humble architecture to have a chance to speak out loud. So I torched it. It was a strange feeling, of course; it is a very violent act to burn a house. So I put a newspaper advertisement saying that there would be free vodka and sausage. Six thousand people came. It was quite nice to see their reactions when the houses caught fire. It was really shamanistic or religious. Some people started to cry and maybe the weirdest was that some people were very confused.

This was very personal work and I didn't think much at all but it became some sought of icon for the desertion process. It was easy to be published in the media and when the pictures appeared in the newspaper it became the focus for a big discussion of the sociological changes in Finland.



Land(e)scape Casagrande & Rintala





## 60 Minute Man

Architectonic installation for the Venice Biennale 2000

I was then asked to be exhibited in Venice Biennale in 2000. The theme of the biennale was 'Città: less aesthetics, more ethics'. The director Massimiliano Fuksias asked us to do an installation similar to the walking barn houses. I went there and was given this gallery space which was white and clinical and I didn't like it so I occupied the house next door, a much better ruin for the actual work in Venice. In Venice I decided to find a boat, an industrial boat to plant a forest inside, and sail with it from Finland to Venice. However it became quite clearly impossible, the vegetation would have died somewhere in the Bay of Biscay because of the very drastic climatic changes.

So we ended up in Venice with a Ford Transit with eight people inside it looking for a boat. It took some time. We found the boat in Chioggia, fifty kilometres south of Venice. Fifteen people working seven weeks took this abandoned old barge filled with mud and dirt to the shore, cleaned it up, made it waterproof again and made cuttings through the central axis to create a series of interior spaces. Everything we used was recycled.

We thought that doing this cultivated park in this piece of industrial waste wasn't enough so we decided that it should be built on compost. There was a big mystery as to what happens when you flush a toilet in Venice, there were many rumours. So we started to track down the digested sludge, to discover it all ends up in one place overseen by a very fine character. With him we calculated how much organic waste Venice produces annually. We then took it down to sixty minutes' worth, biologically cleaned this, composted it and put it into the boat as topsoil. It was under a layer of white gravel so when you first go to the boat all you see is these trees and shadows and it's nice. However when you go into the last room you see it's empty and in the corner there is a marble stone saying that this park has been planted on sixty minutes of human waste produced by the city of Venice. We sailed the ship to the Arsenale Harbour of Venice and it was opened as a public park.



60 Minute Man Casagrande & Rintala





Quetzalcoatlus Casagrande & Rintala

### Quetzalcoatlus

Architectonic installation and exhibition at the 7th Havana Biennale 2000

I was invited to Cuba to do an installation and I came up with the idea of collecting 15,000 political, religious and philosophical books from all around the world, taking them to Cuba and using them as bricks for a construction. However I got a letter from the Cuban government saying that the work was unsound; you cannot take these kinds of books to Cuba.

But they were kind enough to give us the opportunity to do another architectonic installation without any kind of ideological meanings whatsoever. On the campus area of Facultad de Arquitectura Instituto Superior Politecnico Jose Antonio Echevarrira we built an installation, 'Quetzalcoatlus'. The name reflects back to the ancient times of Pteosaurs – the last flying dinosaurs. The living conditions turned out to be too hostile for these great creatures.

There were no construction materials to work with, so we took ten kilometres of fishing line from Finland and we knew that this iron bar was hanging around so we stretched it between two university buildings. The solid iron beam with the length of seven metres was tensioned between two concrete buildings with the fishing line. The distance between the buildings was approximately sixteen metres. The weight of the beam was 315 kilograms and it was positioned slightly above the ground level. The beam has its own flight pattern due the thermal changes which tightened or loosened the fishing lines according to the time of day and weather conditions. When the sun came out the iron bar got hot and the fishing line would begin to stretch and the bar would descend towards the ground. At night the whole structure cooled and rose back up again. The heavy flight of the beam was balanced on the edge of the impossible. It made a beautiful sound. One could sense the possibility of disaster. If you cut one of the lines away the whole system would collapse. This, in a way, represents Cuba.

### Installation 1:2001

The book installation finally found its home as an architectural installation for the Biennale Internazionale dell'Arte Contemporanea di Firenze, Florence, Italy. The collection of religious, ideological and philosophical books from all over the world was constructed as a circular wall. The diameter of the circle was 6.37 metres (diameter of Earth 1: 2001000 according to Neil Heimler's Principles of Science) and the height of the wall was 6.37:2 metres. The books were used as bricks. The names of the books, whether it be *The Bible* or *The Koran* or *Das Kapital* were facing the outside. There was one entrance so when you went in to the installation there was a white wall of paper, you could no longer tell which one was *The Koran* and which one was *The Bible*.

This, like all of the installations, was meant to be quite provocative, wanting to find a straight interface with normal people, to evoke feelings of something that they would remember and touch subconscious values. As we built the wall the Italian locals were looking at the books and asked whether they could have them; we said after the biennale you can have them but let the installation be for a while. But it took only thirty-six hours for the Florentine people to steal all the books. We had this security video camera watching the installation so we knew what happened, but the biennale organisers couldn't come to terms with it so they made this lie for the newspapers that anarchists and anti-globalists had attacked the installation. But the anarchists were more like grandfathers running away with five kilos of Lenin in Korean or Lithuanian, languages that they could never read. It was some kind of mass psychosis in the cradle of the renaissance.



Installation 1:2001 Casagrande & Rintala



### Dallas-Kalevala

I was invited to do some work in Hokkaido and I had this image of the Japanese on the other side of the world being as far as I could get from Finland. So I flew into Japan and when I got to Hokkaido it was just like Finland. The climate was the same, the colour of the sky was just the same, the vegetation was just the same, the same kind of people and so on. I was really shocked so I looked at the map and found out that there was only one country between Finland and Hokkaido and that was Russia.

So I returned to Finland and drew a line to see whether it was possible to follow this line with a car. Of course it's a little bit problematic too just follow a line with a car. Our journey started in Helsinki, Finland, and ended in Obihiro Hokkaido, Japan. The trip was made by car, a Land Rover Defender. We followed roughly the borderline between taiga and tundra, cities and nomads. This is the climate area in which the northern civilizations exist.

As I traveled I was taking Polaroid pictures of grandmothers; every day I stopped the car and selected a good grandmother and took two Polaroid pictures, one for me and one for her. Every day I also traded a new axe in for an old axe. When I finally got to Hokkaido I exhibited the work in a horse stable with twenty-four stalls. The journey was twenty four days so I had twenty-four stops, twenty-four grandmothers, twenty-four axes, and also twenty-four times I recorded the local radio, if it existed, so people could make the same journey. To see how the grandmother and the axe are changing or remaining the same.

Dallas-Kalevala was a journey from today's existence back to origins of people living between Finland and Hokkaido. It was also a personal journey to feel genetic memory in places where people have always been moving between east and west.



Dallas-Kavella Exhibition Casagrande & Rintala





### Potemkin

Potemkin is a permanent park for post-industrial meditation in Kuramata village, Japan. It is a cultivated junk yard as a mixture of a temple and machine. It is articulated like a Zen garden except instead of rocks it is industrial waste. Recycled asphalt and broken glass make up the gravel. The park includes indoor and outdoor spaces constructed of iron; the deeper you go into the work the higher the walls become until in the end you are surrounded by this Kawasaki steel.

The park is situated, castle like, looking over the Kuramata rice fields and Kamagawa River. There is a small fireplace so you can fish in the nearby river and grill the fish at the park and go back home. It's a very small village and all the villagers can fit on the benches. It was really nice to work with them because they understood the work. They brought in a Shinto priest to bless the park. They have a dance they have been dancing for hundreds of years. All the villages get together and make this circular formation. It used to be in the Shinto temple but after this park was done they moved the dance here. Potemkin is a blessed and spirituous connection to one of the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan.



Potemkin Marco Casagrande





## Soft Stuff

Julieanna Preston

Wrestled from the auspices of upholsterers in the nineteenth century and serving to sustain a thriving industry of decorators, interior design appears to be assuming another dimension as a spatial and cross-disciplinary art. In the wake of such emergence lie numerous pockets of uncharted territory that promise to assert new forms, modes and knowledge of the discipline's practice. From my perspective, these positive developments reposition interior design relative to architecture, fine art, craft and performance.

The concerns for spatial and temporal qualities that hinge these bodies of knowledge together are bolstered by philosophical investigations on interiority and theoretical inquiry on the interfaces between social, political and geographical space and event. Interior design research and practice is taking an active role in probing these territories and by doing so, is charting its own body of knowledge.

Like all processes of maturation, lament or regret persist over what is lost, forgotten or transformed. Contemporary theory and criticism has noted the effects and faults of negating and denying historical inheritance in design. Equally so, aspirations run high to surpass the frontier of what is possible and imaginable in form and context – not simply for novelty's sake, but because modes of thought and accompanying technology suggest something other than what may be immediately familiar.



The work under discussion in this essay exemplifies a practice of critically examining the nominal aspects of interior design's past, its proclivity to decorate with colour and fabric and its commitment towards creating environmental comfort through design. New modes of interior design practice are pried open by delving sceptically into its own history as well as crossing into other disciplinary bodies of knowledge. As such, the work presented here is the product of design, in its active verb form, as the investment of knowing and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

What follows is a discursive text on the work of sixteen third-year Interior Design students at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, 2003.<sup>2</sup> The initial impetus for this studio was based on my own cathartic shift from architecture proper to that of interior design. Such shift accommodated a long-term desire to give intense attention to issues of design often relegated to the margins of architecture: colour, comfort, light, ornament, social/political and cultural issues, and gender studies. It also served further inquiry on the relation between art and architecture, space and matter, function and event.

This particular studio is a place in the Massey program that affords a high degree of experimentation and open-ended speculation. This specific term approached installation work as a means of fusing full-scale and physical spatial construction with critical inquiry on the interdisciplinary nature of interior design. Installations offer a mode of working directly with phenomena, and literal and technical conditions of site and inhabitation. I demanded that our making work proceeded at full-scale so that the realities of comfort, craft and detail could not be glossed over or hidden by the abstraction inherent to representation. Installations are embodied spatial constructions.

The second motivation for this studio targets interior design's cultural and historical frame – that of interior decorators choosing fabric swatches and paint chips as appliqués to room surfaces and their furnishings. I was interested in addressing these contentious bits of interior design head on. My enthusiasm to embrace decoration and ornament with critical respect was not shared by my students who demanded spatial challenges more intellectually robust than stereotypes of the decorator's profession offered. And so, we bravely approached the topic with a goal to subtly subvert the practice, to set our sights on new definitions of disciplinary limits and to hopefully cull the sensory and tactile qualities of lived spatiality into our work. Ultimately, my own agenda is to uncover and/or to re-orient a means by which the softness of human comfort as wonder, bodily pleasure and spatial tactility can be intellectually aligned with ornament and decoration, particularly those associated with interior design. Together, my students and I engaged with issues of disciplinary boundaries – as Grosz writes: 'leaving the inside open for the outside to rush in and produce another inside'. And with that as our motto, the stuffed cushion became our studio's emblem.

### Softness

Softness encompasses a range of spatial and material conditions:

- Soft to the touch, a tactile sensation, ranging from silky to spongy.
- Soft as an inherent material property, inferring something beneath the surface and quite possibly structurally related.
- Soft as a phenomenal event or temporal quality, a spatial ambience, such as light, sound, smell and memory. The descriptors 'delicate' or 'hazy' may be appropriate.
- Soft form, implying amorphous three-dimensional mass, volume or surface, perhaps non-Euclidean geometric form. Note this type's reliance on visual apprehension.
- Soft as a weakness, referring to lack of strength, fragile, indecisive, implying lack. Also aligned with marginal or peripheral.
- Soft as indeterminate or ambiguous, to do with boundaries and limits or more commonly understood as without reference, definition or point of origin.

Inferences to issues of gender, politics, cultural studies, technological innovation or philosophical debate within this list are obvious. As this list registers historic and stereotypical notions of what defines interior design, it also locates points of critical resistance or territories of speculative inquiry. While the list does not exhaust all of the potential of 'soft' definition, it is a by-product of literally working on the softness of four chairs.

These four chairs were both familiar and fraught with all the biases our intellectual pursuit sought to engage. They were proof of our stereotypical notions about what interior design was historically. As seemingly banal cultural artefacts they anticipated our concerns for material, construction, spatial and bodily inhabitation. They promised comfort. These chairs, donated by the Salvation Army, were well-worn, smelly, and held no pretensions about current fashion and all kinds of indications about past fashion.

Four practices unrelated to interior design were identified as well as methods of analysis associated with their performative activity. While most of these activities are focussed on the production of goods and services, we considered them as modes of material analysis, or in theoretical terms, deconstruction as a condition of reverse engineering. Specific tools, sequences and processes of taking apart, detecting or dissecting formed the basis for operating on each chair. The practice and its associated operations also became the strategy for investigating the cultural context of each chair and the keyhole to traversing theoretical inquiry.

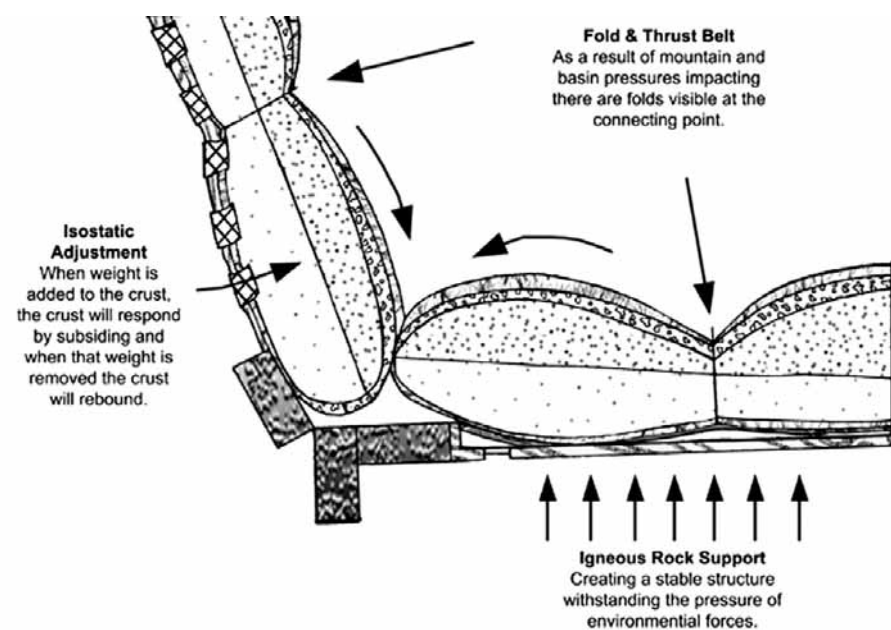


## Den chair

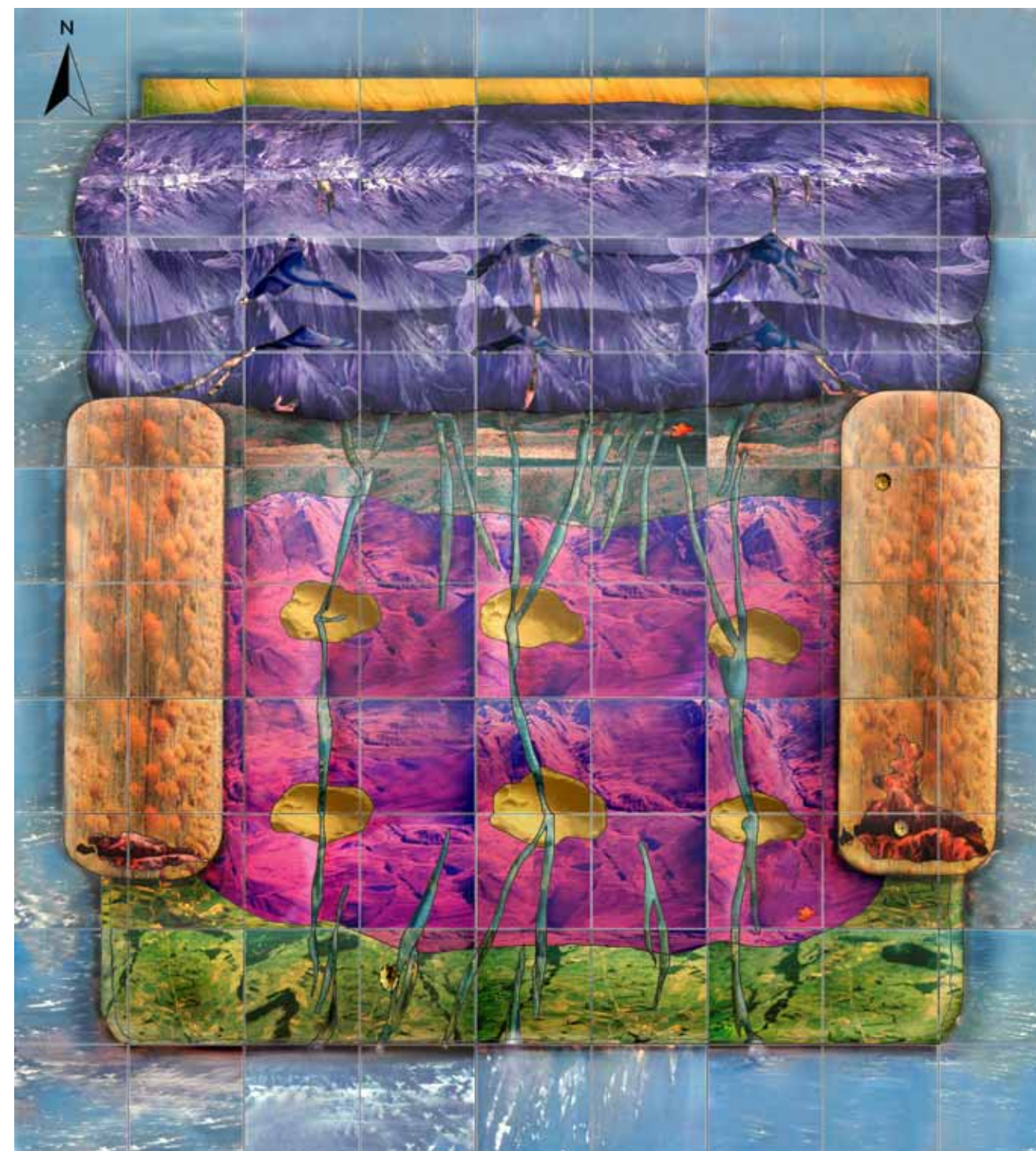
The first group of students examined a den chair as a physical and metaphoric landscape site in relation to a mining geologist's method of detection. A mining geologist surveys a territory looking for external clues of internal pockets of valuable fluids or minerals. A core sample is extracted at various strategic points in that territory to verify speculation. The sectional profile of such borings is analysed and scrutinised for traces of further evidence.

This project uses somewhat simplistic metaphoric analogy to survey the chair as a landscape terrain. The stained, soiled, collapsed and worn body of the chair was subjected to latitudes and longitudinal grid lines and literal bored for samples. The goal was to map the signs/site of wear and to discover what lay on the surface as well as below it without dismantling the chair and compromising future use. This exercise structured the re-representation of the chair as a tourist map of conquest and comfort, a ploy that merged 'island culture' with colonial culture.

In many ways the group neglected to close the loop and speculate on the prospects of inhabiting the site, as land or chair. However, the arduous and meticulous way in which they surveyed the chair/land exposed the potential for interior space and interior furnishings to be analyzed and designed as continuous complex three-dimensional surfaces inclusive of their inhabitation residues. It locates a link between interior inhabitation and topographic surfaces, a reference demarcated by Cache.<sup>3</sup> The surface of landforms inclusive of their inflections and thalwegs<sup>4</sup> are sites for inhabitation as well as moments of spontaneous event and chance. Philosophically, such convolutions are made analogous to the continuity of a sheet of paper or fabric tunic as a territory of infinite folds, the basic unit of existence. That we could envision our interior environments as enveloping surfaces and three-dimensional matter, and design them according to complex topological mapping strategies informed by notions of inhabitation as 'bodies being in' is a territory ripe for design speculation.



Structural Formation of the Mountain and Basin



Den Chair as Landscape Soft Stuff studio



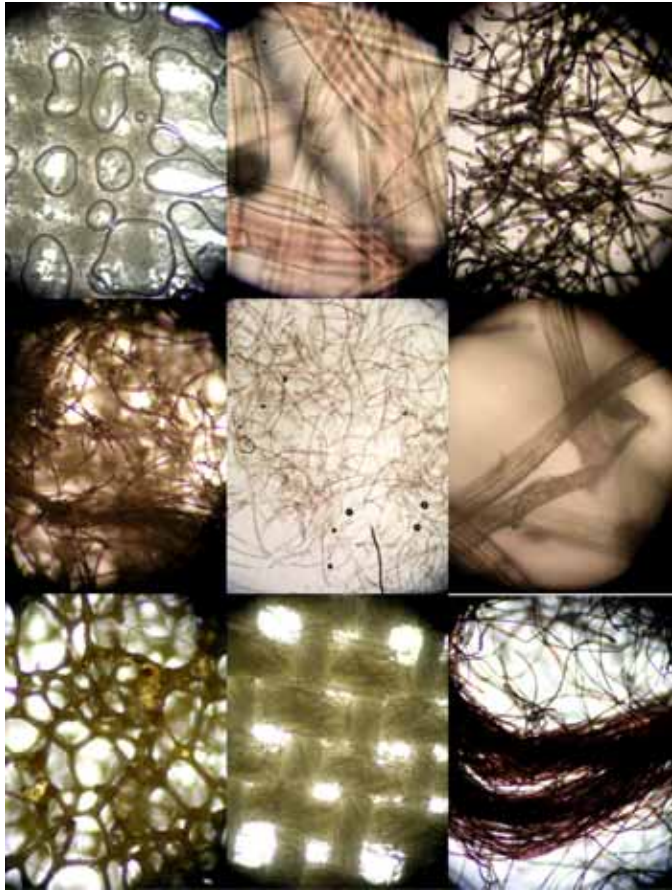
Dining chair

As the patient and the victim of its own diseased history, this dining chair took on the practice of microbiology to scrutinise an internal body. A microbiologist takes very thin slices of a body organ. Documenting the whole organ in cross-sectional sequence, each slice is captured in a binding matrix and read in close detail for its internal organisation, performance and growth. The thinness of the slice yields transparency in its multiple meanings. A world of organic form, colour and texture are illuminated through magnification. Each sample is scrutinised for abnormalities.

Swab samples of the chair were literally brought to life and later identified thanks to the technicians at the university microbiology lab. Imagined realities and experienced conditions of hygiene and sterility in the samples and the lab revealed a proliferation of residues. Within the soft stuff of everyday materials there are abundant hosts of teaming organisms. As we nestle down into these absorbent surfaces we not only feed these macroscopic communities, we submit ourselves to their infestation. The cultural and historical propaganda on cleanliness which so profoundly impacted architectural and interior design suddenly gained value. Interior space and surfaces were no longer thought to be benign. Rather than appeal to the gross substances residing in the chair fibres, students used the visual beauty found in the illuminated slides to generate a series of material experiments. This act of ‘seeing through’ the matter maintained a clean environment and allowed the project to merge into the dirty of interior design: decoration.

Writing on this aspect of soft stuff in terms of weakness, Sola-Morales states:

Decoration, then, or the decorative condition of contemporary art and architecture, not in the sense of vulgarity, of triviality, of the repetition of established stereotypes, but as a discreet folding back to a perhaps secondary function, a pulling back to a function that projects beyond the hypothetical grounds of things.<sup>5</sup>



Dining Chair Microbiology Soft Stuff studio



Quarantined Chair Soft Stuff studio

Analogous to the organ dissected for the sake of ‘knowing’ the whole body, weak architecture resists the classical condition of unity and wholeness as a system of cataloguing that curtails invention and distraction necessary for creativity. In the case of this group, the organ is sacrificed for the sake of realising another dimension. What is weak and soft has the potential to be generative. These students worked with common and banal materials by aberrant or ‘germ infested’ means, to subterfuge the banality of the material by virtue of revealing its potential to be ornamental and decorative primarily through tactile means. Concrete, plaster board, carpet and acoustic ceiling tile were manipulated out of their common institutional straight jackets and infected with unconventional processes and substances. As samples they were abnormal.

The diseased chair was quarantined in a sanitised room lined with plastic and stainless steel. The space was lined with images of its own germ cultures and the material samples. The images were enlarged and copied onto sheet film to repeat the magnification and transparency of the microscope and culture dish. The samples occupied horizontal surfaces like knick-knacks. As the images and samples filled the room, the room became smaller, cluttered and more inward focussing. Back lit from behind by a large window, the room was illuminated as a decorated shed. Such decoration exposed the potential for excess to be a spatial agent.

I started to wonder about the role of decoration in contemporary interiors. And convinced that it still thrives like a germ in even the most austere of published works, this group’s work confirms Gombrich’s assertion that decoration and ornament are intimately related to systems of order and mnemonic analogy.<sup>6</sup> I wanted to exercise various modes of ‘tidying up’ this shed, to find rhythms of pattern and colour, to sort this collection as a mode of inhabiting it and making it my own. And as the images and artefacts in this tiny, dense and almost claustrophobic room accumulated in the guise of design, they would become another instance of Semper’s decorative enclosure. Would this incite a professional riot – that the practice of interior design is closer to the origin of architecture than more than one historian would like to admit?



## Reclining chair

In *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, Judy Attfield asserts that 'things' of the world hold object relations that interplay between the animate and inanimate worlds. She describes material culture of everyday life as the physical object in all its materiality as it encompasses the work of design, making, distributing, consuming, using, discarding, recycling and so on. 'But above all she focuses on how things have gone through all those stages as part of the mediation process between people and the physical world at different stages in their biographies.'<sup>7</sup> Design, according to Attfield, is a particular subset of the material cultural of things, one that distinguishes itself from most other things by investment of attitude.

This group took a very robust approach concerning the reclining chair as an artefact of modern popular culture. They established a link to the recliner as a lazy-boy (a gendered and branded La-z-boy) with that of butcher and pig. As they investigated the means by which a pig is carved into special cuts and packaged for retail consumption, they traced the relation between TV culture and TV dinners. After having prepared the studio for the slaughter, they cut the chair into the distinctive cuts and vacuum-packed the pieces into soft pouches. Every morsel of the chair was used with the exception of a few pieces of metal hardware which would not pass through the vacuum without puncturing the plastic wrap. In this case the students found an honourable means by which to both criticise the popular culture they claimed to abhor as well as to sacrifice the beast of a chair they could not dwell with aesthetically – even though, until it was carved up it was always occupied!

Cloth, foam, timber and steel, ground, minced and pulverised, one mass produced and consumed item was reproduced into another. A La-z-boy chair was processed into select cuts of processed goods. The chair's body was carved into soft seat cushions. Softness became a sign of material non-resistance and cultural complacency. Again, Attfield reminds us of the positive role that material culture can play beyond archaeological classification and historic data.

The interdisciplinary encouraged by a material culture approach can prevent the conventional pocketed system of design classifications from forming intellectual backwaters as an effect of research that turns material culture to reductive static object analysis with no reference to the social life of things beyond the train spotter's collection or the museum archive. It also attends to the mismatch that occurs between the real thing in the real world against the aspirations of modern design theory about the democratisation of luxury goods through mass production.<sup>8</sup>

This group partially disdained the La-z-boy recliner because of its dominance in the market place and hence its status in popular culture and mostly, because of its unquestioned presence in most living rooms. Factory-made meant that it existed out into the design world like an aberrant monster in unlimited editions. So carving up by hand was their political resistance towards the commodification of design and body furnishing, a signal of their allegiance to Sorkin's commentary on the ethics of comfort.<sup>9</sup> The economy and production of making many sausages became fused with issues of sustainability, recycling and good old kiwi ingenuity.

Butchered La-z-boy Soft Stuff studio







## Office desk chair

More so than the La-z-boy recliner, this office desk chair is a local product of mass-production. This group dealt with this via concepts of disassembly and assembly associated with kit-sets. They investigated the process of making the chair as an assembly line yet in reverse. As the chair was dismantled the pieces needed to be documented and catalogued. It was at this point that the exploded axonometric or isometric became critical to their practice. They likened their process of analysing the chair to that of an automotive mechanic who takes apart a vehicle piece by piece. Every part is essential in its relation to the parts around it. The process of taking apart is done in anticipation of putting back together. For these students, the space of inhabitation was the drawing and the logic of its parts not the bodily inhabitation of the chair itself. The drawing, the exploded view, however, does not relate sequence of operation as much as it indicates spatial orientation of parts to parts. The soft stuff was in the virtual apprehension of thing as a whole.

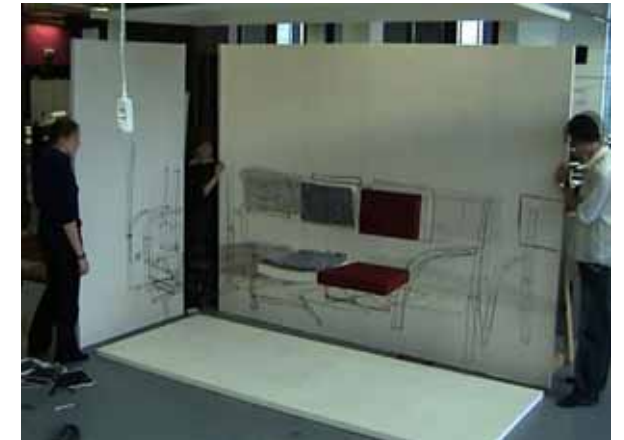


Students initially sought to replicate this chair, to repeat it in exactitude. Their desire to replicate soon gave way to impatience and in turn was overwhelmed by their eagerness to generate something new, something else, from the chair and method. They could not simply repeat without some intervention. They are not good factory workers, thank goodness.

Initial attempts to create accurate patterns using simple orthographic geometry led them to use CAD programs which quickly revealed not only the potential to go forth and multiply, the ease of consumer capitalism but revealed the spatial complexity inherent in virtual dimensions – that of layers, overlapping volumes, three-dimensional models as willing subjects to skews, distortions and creative mis-representation or intentional mistranscription at the push of a button. Insistent on working with actual materials and space, the pieces of the chair were fabricated out of copper wire frames and hung as floating elements relative

to a neutral white surface, a projective surface. In order to physically manifest the virtual attributes of multiplicity, a single lamp positioned at variable stations produced shadows of the hollow figures on the surface. Students recorded the compound extensions of the new chair onto the projection surface. They drew a copy using the very principles of drawing's origin. In that act of miscopying, they located a critical and creative production. Hillel Schwartz writes:

Copying is ultimately imperfect, our errors eventually our heirs. The more widespread the act of copying the greater the likelihood of significant mistranscription. Genetic slip or evolution, scribal mistake or midrash, whatever we call it, miscopying raises hard questions about identity, security, and integrity. The same technical advances that render our skill at copying so impressive also intensify the dilemmas of forgery. We use copies to certify originals, originals to verify copies, then we stand bewildered.<sup>10</sup>



I regret that they did not follow through to build the new chair. But alas, perhaps the findings extend outside pre-conceived expectations? I wonder if they actually built a new chair in the projection of its shadow. Perhaps the new copy deviates outside of typology of chair and therefore is unrecognisable without abandoning formal attributes established by long histories of chair? It seems that the chair was truly exploded. I wonder if Grosz would consider such work a text, one that could be read as perhaps a modest little explosive bomb, one that 'scatters thoughts and images into different linkages or new alignments without necessarily destroying them'?<sup>11</sup>



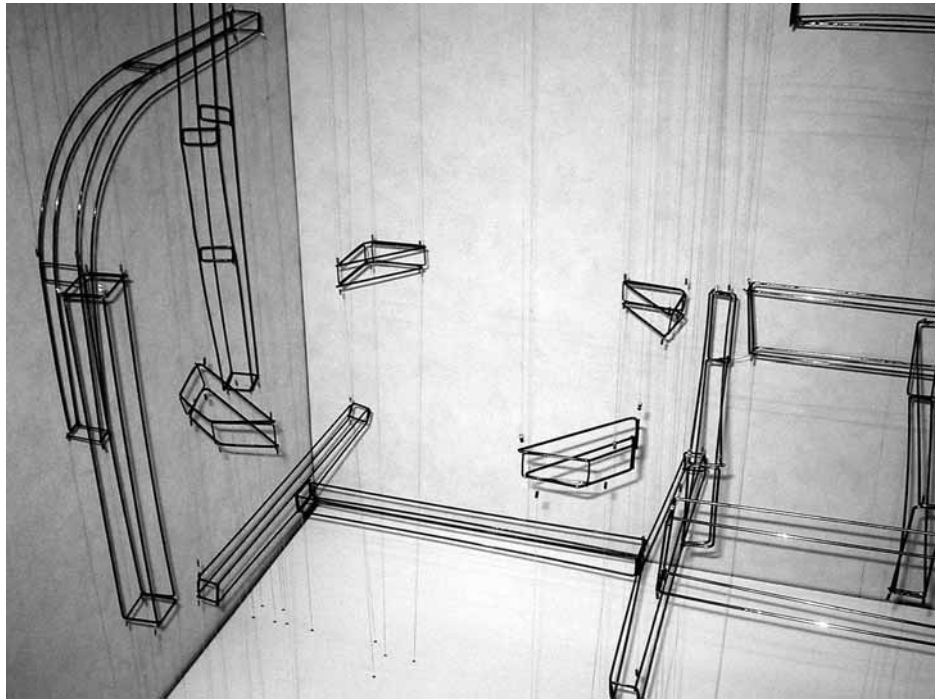


Acknowledging the risks and pitfalls of applying theory as opposed to using it, I have some inkling that this work was successful in teasing out fruitful lines of inquiry and analysis by virtue of shifting between the edge and centre of interior design. I am not so confident that our work in the end fully addressed comfort from a sensuous intellectual standpoint and nor do I have faith or fear that these students will invest their designs with many of these forms of soft stuff. After all we are dealing with a century of 'good design', 'honest materials' and purity of form. These are not reasons to have despair. I found comfort in how at ease my students worked across disciplines and invested research as data or information into creative works. They demonstrated dexterity at crafting an idea from the givens and letting it fold and twist upon itself so that it was unrecognisable to its former self but still constituted by the same logic. The products and operations of this work provide a convincing case that sensorial conditions have an aptitude to engage with the intellect in concert with bodily comfort. And most significantly, the work demonstrated their working understanding of what interior design could be without needing to declare boundaries or prop up a manifesto to protect itself.

...boundary work is ongoing, from the point of making claims to legitimizing practices and judging outcomes. It occurs in all interdisciplinary activities from borrowing tools and methods to forming new hybrid disciplines...boundary crossing has become part of the process of knowledge production, not a peripheral event. Interdisciplinary work is in the discipline as much as it is outside them.<sup>12</sup>



Butchered La-z-boy Soft Stuff studio



Exploded view – Office Desk Chair Soft Stuff studio

- 1 Peter Downton, *Design Research*, Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 2003, 2.
- 2 The students are: Joni Dawson, Stuart Foster, Charlotte Gardner, Gemma Gillett, Kathryn Gilmore, Nicola Habbitts, Sharlene King, Emma Lawrence, Mitch McTaggart, Emma Perry, Sarah Rowland, Richard Thurston, Natasha Wong, Ying Wang.
- 3 Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.
- 4 I am indebted to Emma Perry, a fourth-year student for this connection which she made in her final year Research and Development document 2004.
- 5 Ignasi de Solas-Morales, *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997, 69.
- 6 Ernest Hans Gombrich, *The Sense of Order in the Psychology of Decorative Arts*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1984.
- 7 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: the Material Culture of Everyday Life*, Oxford: Berg, 2000, 3.
- 8 Attfield, 31.
- 9 Michael Sorkin, 'The Measure of Comfort', in *Comfort: Reclaiming Place in the Virtual World*, Larry Gilman, editor, Germany: Cleveland Centre for Contemporary Art, 2001, 1.
- 10 Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, New York: Zone Books, 1996, 8.
- 11 Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 57.
- 12 Julie Thompson Klein, *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity*, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1960, 56.

All photos courtesy of Julieanna Preston and the Soft Stuff studio





Intimate Immensity      Andrea Mina

## Why are Cuttlefish Tickled Pink?

Andrea Mina

For many years I have held a fascination for the architectural model, consequently I have enjoyed a rich relationship with these diminutive three-dimensional forms, be they in the guise of on-the-spot folded paper models used to illustrate an idea or the highly finished architectural presentation models I have made on commission. My interest in the architectural model has been informed and enriched through collaborative research undertaken in the design studio with interior design students. This has been an inquiry into developing of a better understanding of what an 'interior' model may be if the interior is freed from the limitations of conventional representations of architectural form. Concurrently I began a private practice of constructing small, scaleless architecture which was sited nowhere else other than on my worktable and for few reasons other than to satisfy a fervent urge to make something in the image of architecture (one of the consequences of working in an academic environment characterised by its propensity to engage with ideas and future projections rather than the tangible realities of the 'workforce'). At that time I did not realise the significance the small size of my domestic workspace would have in influencing the trajectory of my research.

This private activity has served as the genesis for my research which has subsequently been formalised and brought into the public realm through my enrolment into a PhD by project, the working title of which is 'Intimate Immensity: The miniature as spatial discourse'. The initial making was generated in an 'un-restrained' and critique-free environment through what is easiest described as an 'intuitive' way of working. My research is being conducted through an iterative process of making, thinking and articulating, giving me the opportunity to interrogate this initial collection of work and to subsequently speculate on the work's inherent potential to generate discourses.

These discourses have evolved and I imagine will continue to evolve through processes which are as organic in structure as are the discourses they attempt to generate. As the making has been predicated on work practices reliant on chance or serendipitous encounters and the discoveries made through actual acts of engagement, there are evolving stories to relate that are neither linear in evolution nor entirely predictable in their outcomes.





Photo: Andrea Mina

## Models

My objects are not models of some other reality, they do not substitute for that which is not present and are not scaled representations of something else as they are made at actual size, full-scale, one is equal to one, neither larger nor smaller, and exactly the size they are. They do not conform to traditional understandings of the architectural model as they have no promise of a realised, 'scaled-up', future existence.

They may have connections to the Architectural Canon which has a rich history of the representation of ideas through scaled three-dimensional architectural-models. Architectural models have predominantly been used as enabling tools to give form to imagined futures as in design models and the 'city-apartment promotional centerpiece scale-models' whose main purpose is for marketing high-rise apartments sold 'off paper', the 'promise' of a predicted future. The model in the image of architecture has another manifestation as the literal re-presentation of existing realities. This is best exemplified by the high popularity of commercially produced architectural-miniature models<sup>1</sup>. Their popularity has spawned an industry to satisfy the demand for exactly scaled and finely detailed replica reproductions<sup>2</sup> of existing buildings whose already loaded spatial histories receive additional dimension through each and every new acquisition by collectors linked through the internet's global embrace.

## Miniature

'Miniature' is both a misleading and useful word to describe or attempt to contextualise these objects as the word offers an intriguing ambiguity in interpretation ranging from re-presentation on a small scale, with the implication that 'an original' exists prior to the production of a representation of 'it' to 'the art or action, originally that of a medieval illuminator, of painting portraits on a small scale and with minute finish, usually on ivory or vellum; a portrait of this kind'.<sup>3</sup> The latter interpretation is the more useful application as the inference is that the 'miniature' is the original, it is neither a reproduction nor a stand-in for something else but it has a presence and integrity of its own. There is a rich and well documented history of the tradition of hand making work at a small scale. This may be exemplified through the illuminations in medieval manuscripts and the pursuit of the miniature through the miniature paintings of sixteenth-century Persian and Indian miniaturists, the tradition of Japanese netsuke and the extraordinary collection of Fabergé eggs produced in the studios of Carl Fabergé in Moscow between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fabergé's objects are not only an extraordinary and extravagant display of the virtuosity of their handcrafted manufacture but they may also be seen as material manifestations of an ostentatious and isolated culture, they hover between what they are and what they may be imagined to be.

In *The Poetics of Space* Bachelard writes, 'we should lose all sense of real values if we interpreted miniatures from the standpoint of the simple relativism of large and small. A bit of moss may well be a pine, but a pine will never be a bit of moss. The imagination does not function with the same conviction in both directions.'<sup>4</sup> Bachelard's understanding of the miniature provides insight into that uncanny ability of the miniature to act as a vehicle that can provoke and illicit imaginings that are vast in scale in comparison to the smallness of that which has evoked them; 'One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small.'<sup>5</sup>



## Hands

The initial group of work comprises seven pieces each of approximately the same size, the size determined by the immediate relationship between my hands, eyes and the materials at hand. The objects consequently bear a direct relationship in size to that of my hands; the size of one thumb, the breadth of my palm, a comfortable fit against the length of my thumb and three index fingers, the diameter formed from joining my thumb and forefinger and so on. I have subsequently been intrigued by the effects engendered through enigmatic scale and in particular those phenomena associated with or related to small handmade objects whose small size may be considered miniature, that special category of small, and it is to this end the objects I make are tending to become smaller and smaller in size.

When viewed in this context this work bears the direct handprint of its author, and in so doing reveals through its human imprint the unseen time and devoted attention invested in its making. That investment in time manifests its return by revealing the hand of its making and in so doing the artifact can only but-be imbued with an energy that resides as a consequence of this prolonged, intimate contact made between the skin of the maker's hand and the surfaces that give form to the artifact. One may well consider the time of making, the time of 'conversion into something'.<sup>6</sup> However inextricable this communion between time and praxis may be it is not reason enough to assure poiesis or in other terms creative production. James Corner states in an article in *Word and Image*, '...an important connotation of poiesis is that only through the sentient perception of tactile and creative activity – the actual work of making – can discovery and revelation occur, the longed for moment of disclosure.'<sup>7</sup> From this can be understood the depth of engagement demanded from the maker by both the time of encounter and the material in hand, for without either there is nothing.

## Materials and tools

The accumulation of materials is an easy task as the volume of material demand is slight due to the very small scale at which my work is made. My materials of choice are those of which the origins are organic, ie at one stage in their existence they have contained life forces or were the channels through which some of the forces of life have been directed. Apart from my initial purchase of a length of 50x50mm balsa wood I have since not had to enact any monetary transactions in the accumulation of materials apart from the purchase of synthetic glues and adhesives. I have not intentionally sourced materials, preferring to allow whatever encounters to occur of their own making and in their own time. It is pertinent to reiterate the fact that a relatively small amount of material lasts a great distance when working at very small scale. To date I have worked with balsa wood, jarrah, pine, red gum, mountain ash, merbau, meranti, palm, plum, bamboo, kelp stalk, kelp pods, sea-anemone shell/spines, cuttlefish bone/shell (pink shell is highly prized) and cat and dog hair. Jarrah has proved to be the most resilient of timbers and the most rewarding in terms of being able to provide a fine diameter and long length. Bamboo shards as fine as human hair were a serendipitous discovery made by bending a length of bamboo back onto itself to the point of its sudden explosive rupture. Surprisingly one of my cat's hairs has provided the thinnest and straightest self-supporting material to date.

My implements are small hand-held manually operated tools apart from an electric dremmel and its assortment of sanding and drilling attachments. These tools include a Stanley knife and cutting blades, scalpel knives and blades, various sized and shaped tweezers, small pliers, small scissors, assorted dentists' tools, eg scraper, pricker, steel straight edge, solder-iron clamps and stands, sandpapers, masking tape, pva and 'super' glues and most importantly a number seven OptiVisor jeweller's optical headset. I am intrigued by the dialogue between glue and the organic parts it connects and brings together: order established through synthetic means.



Photos: Andrea Mina

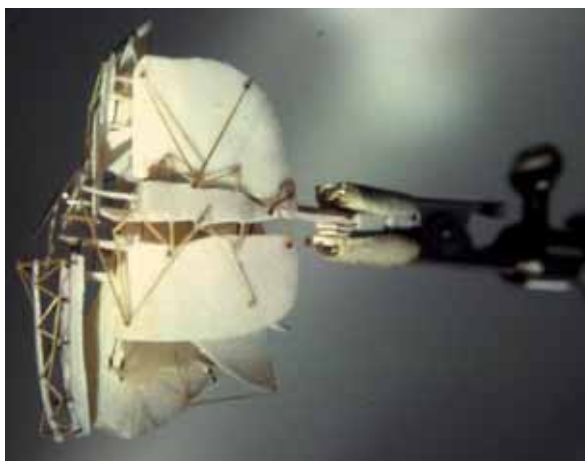


## Techniques

At all times there is an attempt to articulate space and its enclosing or defining forms as without one there is no other. Of most interest are the edges at which these two opposites meet, and in their meeting shape their coming into being. If we postulate form as defined by its extremities, ie the limits of its edges, it follows the shape of this edge signals visual clues necessary in understanding the nature of the form. I am interested in the shaping of these edges and the relationship between edges made with directed intention and those edges that emerge as a consequence of the method of their making; in my own making this is exemplified through the techniques of working materials to their points of imminent destruction, thereby producing edge conditions that emerge through forces beyond immediate control.

How fine can a splinter of timber be pared back until the bonding forces of its fibres are exhausted with the resulting disintegration of its material integrity? That ultimate moment of material rupture, the point of intractable destruction is a moment of pure resistance signaling completion through an abrupt, enforced ending to the action at hand. But it is only through these explosive moments that both hand and material limitations are exposed and apprehended.

It is also shaped from a theoretical premise of redeeming an 'architecture' at the point of destruction or disintegration through an intimate concern for its interiority. This is clearly manifest in the work through the literal working of materials to a point immediately prior to their destruction.

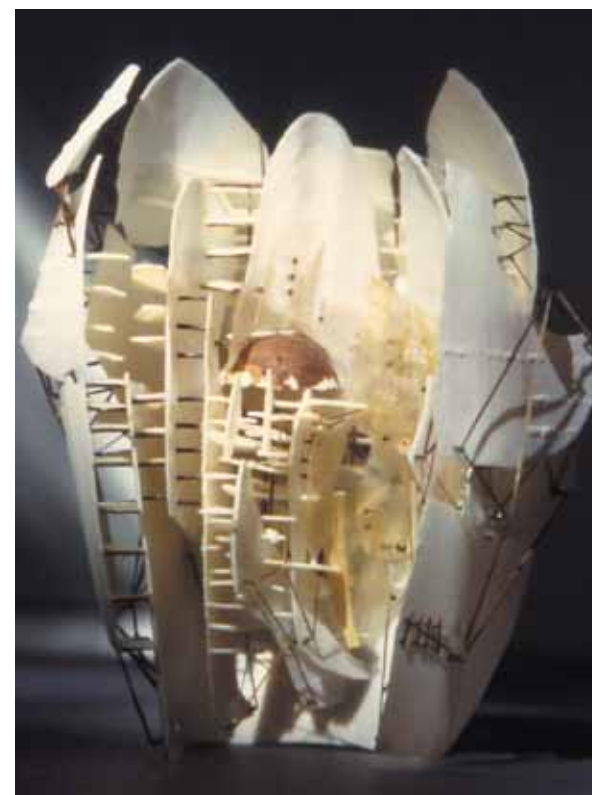


## Doodles

I employ a method of working that is in many respects analogous to my passion for doodling with pen on paper. After many years of doodling I believe the best doodles are made through an initial response to something that happens to be already there; the results have a greater sense of immediacy and produce the most unexpected outcomes. It is and therefore it has potential and as such invites a response which may lead to an interaction that once again may or may not elicit another response and so on and so forth until eyes, hands and intellect are satisfied, satisfaction being one of the most enriching forms of resistance as without resistance there can be no end to an unfolding project. In most instances that resistance is time, however in my making resistance is literally the ultimate moment of material rupture, at the precise moment it breaks, that point of intractable destruction. This is a moment of pure resistance, an explicit moment, and one which signals completion through an abrupt, enforced ending to the action at hand. It is through these explosive moments that both hands/eyes and material limitations are exposed and apprehended, with the knowledge gained through this knowing used to inform and refine future actions and encounters.

## Serendipity

I would like to augment the above by addressing the idea of, and delight in serendipity, that 'making of happy and unexpected discoveries by accident'.<sup>8</sup> Serendipitous moments have been and continue to provide a strong influence both in the conceptualisation and making of this work. The serendipitous moment is possibly the most cherished of moments and possibly also the most illusive. 'It' appears without announcement, agenda-less yet charged with latency. The moment is heightened through the fact of its being and the fact of the impossibility of attempting the orchestration of its coming into being. These moments cannot occur unless there is an intense engagement with the material in hand. It is through heightened senses and clarity of vision that one is able to extract one's self from the task at hand to acknowledge the significance of that which has transpired. This requires acute perception and a heightened awareness of the order 'of things' to first apprehend subtle shifts and misfits in this 'order', but then, more importantly, to be able to identify and apply an 'appropriate fit'; so what is it asking to be?



## Carving and enclosing

Two opposing methods are explored in the shaping and hence articulation of space: carving space and enclosing space. In carving space one works with a given solid by progressively removing material from the original to reveal an enclosing form containing space, the process of removal being able to take place from within and from without the original mass, ie the eventual form may emerge as a result of carving a form from a solid and then removing the interior mass to expose the object's void space. Or conversely a void may be carved from a solid and then the material removed from the outside in towards the void. In both cases the process of removal is continuous until the separation between interior and exterior space is abruptly defined through the failure of the material being worked with. A defining characteristic of the forms that eventually evolve from this process is the continuity of their surfaces; form is privileged over space. Enclosing space in contrast to the aforementioned requires the joining together of points in space through the assemblage of component parts; these parts are either handmade or are searched for in the workings on my workbench. Through the nature of its assemblage this is a process of accretion, the form slowly emerging in response to gravitational and compositional demands.



Dialogues

The work is not made with or according to specific narratives; if it is to have a life that life and its stories are momentary illusions which are entirely dependent on the perceptions, imaginations and mental projections of its observers. My work attempts to establish dialogue between material destruction and notions of material composition, construction and re-construction. This is one of many dialogues that explore tensions between interiority and exteriority, between durability and fragility, erosions and revelations and between the object and the frame. The work engages with these ideas of tension through the literal material and body tensions encountered in their making and through the instinctive bodily tensions which we experience during initial encounters and subsequent engagements with very small objects. These tensions are further engendered through hoped for dynamic fluctuations in apprehension that may occur as a result of juxtaposing opposing ideas within the same composition or frame. There is a fine balance between establishing a space of tension as distinct from establishing a space of oppositions because to engineer an equilibrium of material resonances within the same space requires the provision of a democratic space of engagement, a space able to accommodate the simultaneous material co-existence of not one but many voices in material form that is neither excessive nor lacking, thereby establishing dialogue in preference to hegemony.

Encounters

Whilst the scale at which I work elicits parallels between these miniature objects and the scale at which jewellery is made, unlike jewellery these objects deny any direct or immediate contact with the human body. Their seeming and actual fragility denies unsupervised handling; this is a fragility heightened by their encapsulation within the transparency of thin glass containers; they remain enticing and elusive, being touched only by the brain and felt through the human eye. By virtue of their small scale encountering small objects places conscious demands on the negotiation of the space between the very small object and the relative gigantic scale of the human body. These encounters require the observer to slow time down, to exclude external distractions for the purpose of focusing attention on minutiae amidst the normal scale and complexity of everyday life. Bodies are subject to unusual stresses as they tense to maintain equilibrium whilst hunching and straining forward, slowly testing the limits of how close to approach at such a small scale, guided by vision and innate senses of proximity. Tensed eye muscles are accompanied by an instinctual forwards movement of the head as they are forced to limit their field of vision in their attempts to adjust focus at such unusually close proximity. A conscious effort must be made to control the random scanning of the eye so that the minutiae of material and composition can be apprehended and pieced together to form a cogent understanding of the whole. The effort, hence energy of this craning forward, is intensified through the unfamiliar demands placed on the muscles to control movements measured in fractions of a millimetre. The miniature demands a commitment from its observer which is in the form of an investment of time, probably the most precious ‘commodity’ of all.

Ralph Rugoff offers this description in his catalogue essay for the 1997 exhibition ‘At the Threshold of the Visible’ of the ability of ‘tiny artworks’ to ‘force us to draw closer in order to scrutinize them, and this forward movement parallels a mental process: the more closely we examine minute details, the less we notice the gulf in size that separates us....This charges our experience of the object, imbuing it with an almost hallucinatory acuity.’<sup>9</sup>

Catalyst

One of architecture’s most fundamental characteristics is its capacity to provide for and accept human occupation. If we accept we can and may be projected into extraordinary mental spaces albeit for infinitesimally small moments of time and in doing so virtually occupy two spaces in the same moment of time, then the work may be viewed in the context of a very particular type of architecture. This is architecture at full scale but at a very small and enigmatic size. Through its form and by the images it may evoke or project the work may act as catalyst and facilitator for momentary flights of fancy driven by personal narratives in the hope for those split-second moments of occupation.

To physically encounter the diminutive is in itself an experience of disjuncture. It is these immeasurable moments of virtual occupation that are the central concerns of this work and it is to this end that the individual pieces remain untitled, freed from prescriptive narrative, desiring to remain material instead of metaphysical.<sup>10</sup> Central to my research is the idea that we cherish within us an innate common architectural imagining capable of being triggered through associations and composition. Yet it is through these miniatures’ overt architectural connotations and their strong assertion of interiority (and hence inhabitation) that there is aspiration in the making for the object to act as a catalyst for projections into this common architectural imagining and thus simultaneously, an occupation of those virtual spaces. These highly personal and infinitesimal spaces of imaginative flight are analogous to those daydreams described by Bachelard, ‘Daydreams of this sort are invitations to verticality, pauses in the narrative during which the reader is invited to dream. They are very pure, since they have no use.’<sup>11</sup>

1 A recent Google search ‘architectural miniatures’ listed 62,600 websites, the majority of which are suppliers of architectural miniature related products and services.  
2 Umberto Ecco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1986.  
3 *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2003.  
4 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 163.  
5 *ibid*, 150.  
6 *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2003.  
7 James Corner, *Word and Image*, vol B, no 3, July/September 1992.  
8 *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2003.  
9 *At the Threshold of the Visible, Miniscule and Small-Scale Art*, 1964-1996, New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, 14.  
10 Conversation with Peter King, 28 April 2003, ‘(the work) pushes desire to the brink of meta-physical meaning.’  
11 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 162.



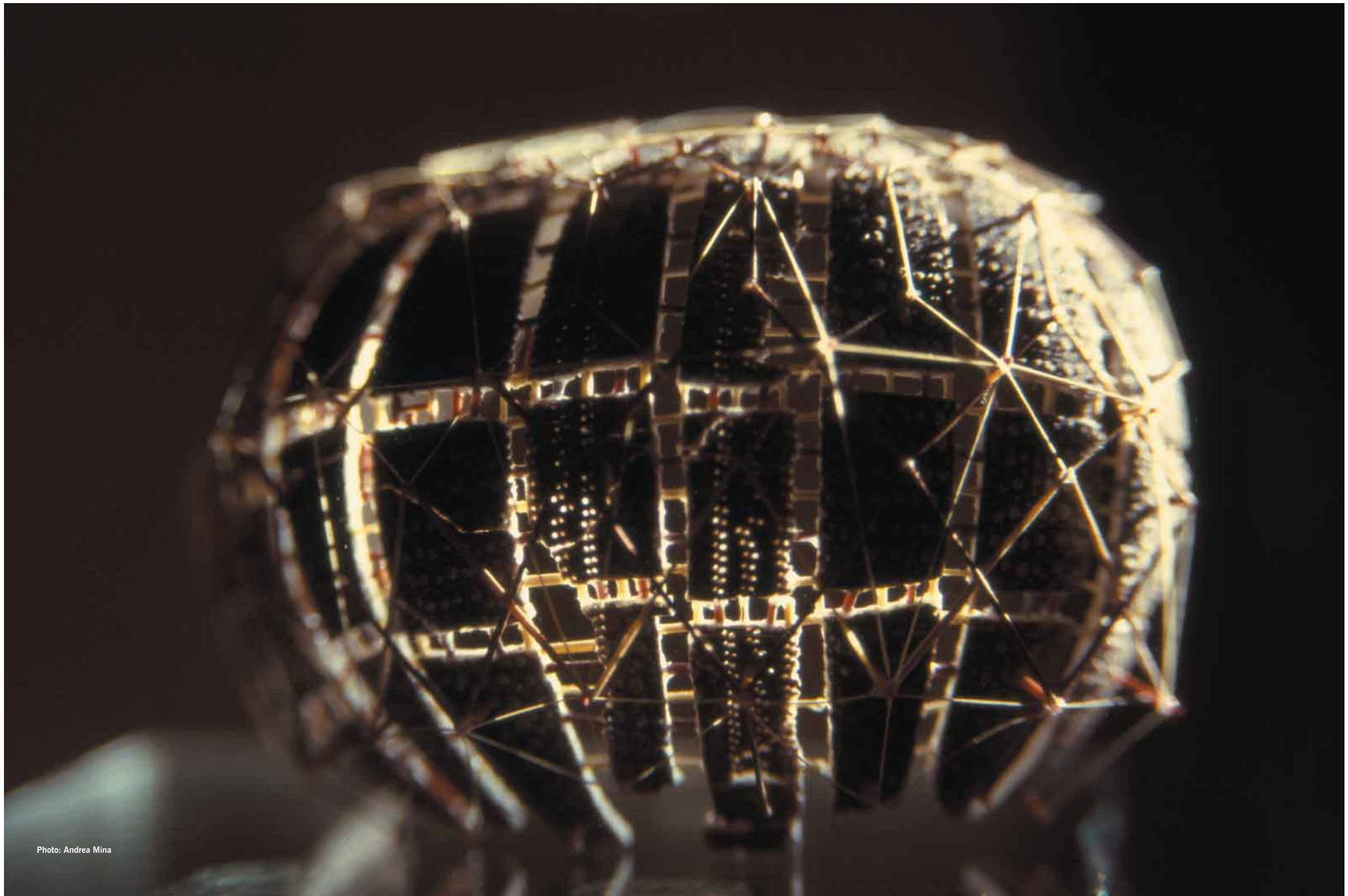
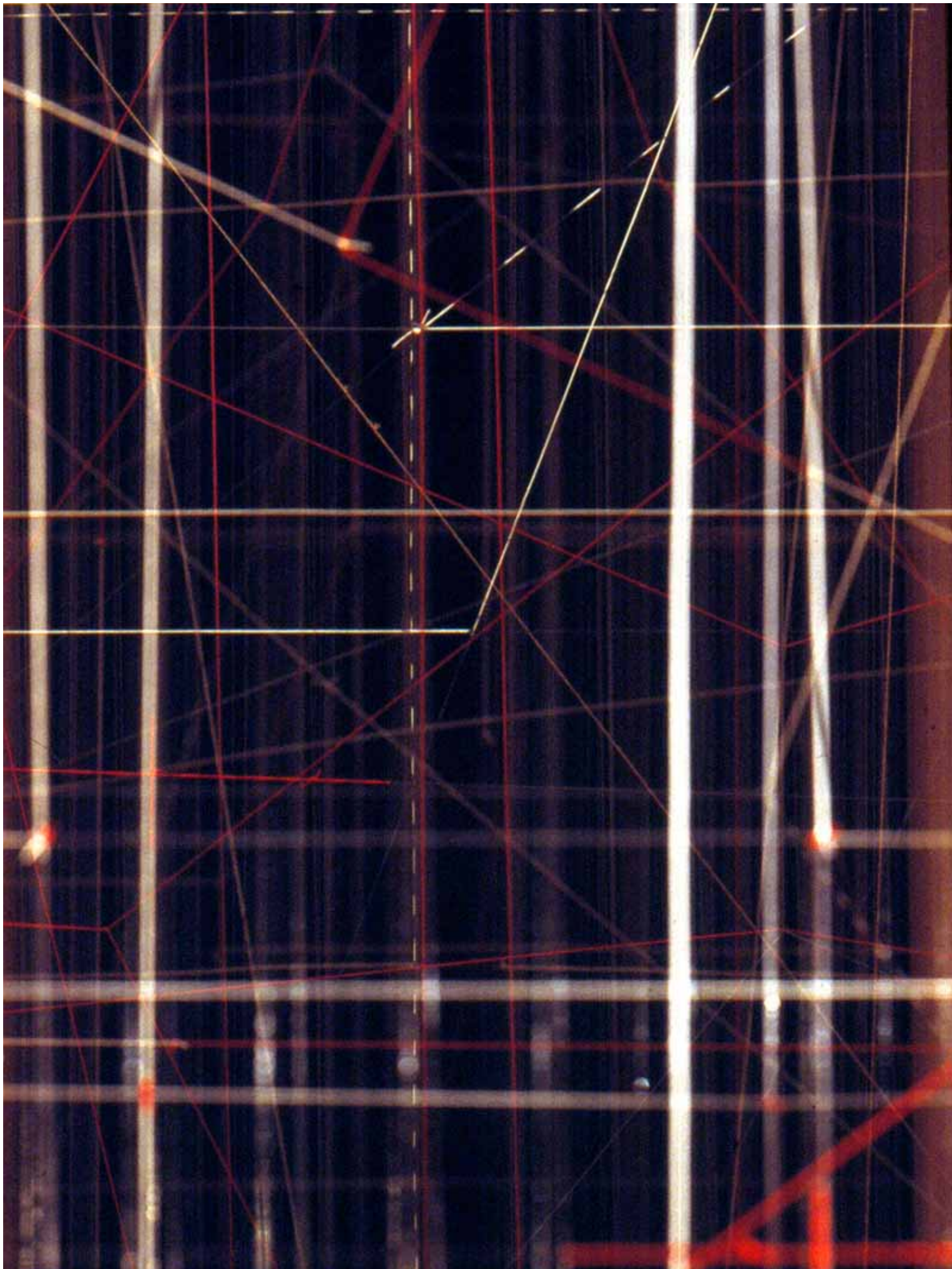


Photo: Andrea Mina





## Designing for the Sensuous Intellect

Robyn Ho

The 'Sensuous Intellect' is described as existing in the gap between sensation and thought, visceral bodily reactions giving rise to perception.<sup>1</sup> To design for the sensuous intellect is to construct situations where such phenomena can occur. This emphasis on the response of the body suggests an embodiment of the viewer in relationship to the work being presented, an empowerment of the intuitive body over the rational brain of thought.

Yet designing for a sensuous intellect is to design to a process that inhabits the middle space between the immediacy of sensation and the variable time of thought. To embody the participant yet disembody them, as they are encouraged to inhabit the virtual formless space of thought. Appealing to the sensuous intellect is to affirm contradictions, not to assert one view, but many simultaneously, their synthesis creating the participants' perception, a middle ground that will exist in the 'gap between sensation and thought'. This mirrors the processes of bodily experience, as humans sense their surroundings by '...no individual mode of sense alone, but all senses simultaneously...it is about intensity.'<sup>2</sup>



**To design for the sensuous intellect is to embody**

With any encounter, one must gauge the material with the most primal tool of perception – the senses – as our bodies and ‘...skin are the start of our relationship with the world’.<sup>3</sup> It is the basis of the human cognitive processes to develop methods of understanding external information that stimulate the brain and give rise to thought. However, this process occurs quite subconsciously and without much consideration of the visceral interaction between the senses and its stimuli. One does not ponder much on the individual characteristics of a smell, taste, sight, touch or sound, but the brain immediately skips to the cognitive processes which identify the source of the stimulus. Humans focus on the cognitive result rather than the experience.

To create works in order to primarily speak to the senses is to make the participants’ awareness of that initial procedure. If the viewer cannot recognise the usual signs that trigger patterns of thinking, then the viewer is forced by situation to utilise their senses. This empowers the body as it becomes the primary tool of perception, as if the work has coerced the viewer into ‘listening’ to their senses. An embodiment of the viewer occurs as they become aware of their body and the viewer no longer exists as an amorphous objective Eye but as an active Viewer that exists in time and space and that interacts with the work. That embodiment also occurs for the creator as ‘...in creative work, the scientist and the artist are directly engaged with their body and existential experience...’<sup>4</sup> However, interaction suggests an exchange, two parties giving and receiving. ‘The encounter of any work of art implies a bodily reaction. A work of art functions as another person with whom we converse.’<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in creating sensual art works or architecture, the designer embodies the work, providing the construction an active role, a ‘life-force’, a body.

**To design for the sensuous intellect is to disembody**

Any creation ultimately intends to speak of some concept or idea. The space for thought is often externalised from the corporeal body, with no boundaries of matter or time, as ‘...you exteriorise perception from the body so that things become objects in space’.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that concepts are not ‘...schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience’,<sup>7</sup> but thought transcends the boundaries of the body and exists almost separately and outwardly. As the viewer processes the sensual information, the act of imagination transports that initial information into those ‘schematic structures’ that do not tangibly exist within the body. These schematic structures contain a series of recognition patterns which the information is compared to and some level of cognition is reached. Thought acknowledges the need for the body but in its cognition development, does not require the use of the physical body. Emphasis on ‘...the intellectual and conceptual dimensions of architecture further contributes to a disappearance of the physical, sensual and embodied essence of architecture’.<sup>8</sup> Abstraction and conceptualism divorces the viewer from the boundaries of their actual bodies and the work and forces them to inhabit a boundless space of thought. Thought is an intangible construct, a visualisation that ensues from the tangible sensual stimulus of the work, the experience. Therefore, the viewer is embodied by the use of their bodies in the experience of the work, but then is disembodied as they are forced to think in a space outside or without their physical bodies.<sup>9</sup>

**To design for the sensuous intellect is to deal with the now**

Sensual responses are of the now. Human senses are binary in the fact that they are either on or off, seeing or not seeing, and so forth. To design for the sensuous intellect is to construct moments of intense presentness, the moment of meeting between two interfaces, one of the viewer’s body, and one of the works.<sup>10</sup> ‘The surface is where most of the action is...The surface is what touches the animal, not the interior.’<sup>11</sup> That interaction with that surface only lasts for the duration of that touch, or sight, and does not extend past that, as a sensual experience can only be spoken in terms of what it is or was at that particular time as the occurrence of the sensual situation can only occur when those particular variables happen together. Designing a work that appeals to the senses is to construct a field whereby these momentary collisions can occur. ‘On principle, phenomenology liquidates the past and confronts what is new’.<sup>12</sup> However, that collision of surfaces becomes a cataclysm for thought, which has associations with the past and of memory.

**To design for the sensuous intellect is to deal with the past**

The sensual interaction of the viewer and work gives rise to thought as the current sensual experience is then compared to ‘schematic structures’. These ‘schematic structures’ can also be called memory or knowledge. When confronted with recognisable situations, one is familiar with the patterns of signs, yet when something new is encountered, new patterns are created and existing patterns are then altered.<sup>13</sup> It is this shift of existing ideas that is the intent of any creation, the birth of new ideas. Concepts do not exist without some precedent that they have developed from, as thought does not exist as discrete moments unaffected by previous ideas but arises from the exploration of those foundation theories. ‘All experience implies the acts of recollecting, remembering and comparing’,<sup>14</sup> as ‘...memory is important to perception as it brings past into the present – the folding of various durations’<sup>15</sup> in the comparison of the current stimuli.

The senses, especially smell, evoke memory and nostalgia more effectively than any other method of communication. As Pallasmaa recalls, ‘I cannot remember the appearance of the door to my grandfather’s farm-house from my early childhood, but I do remember the resistance of its weight, the patina of its wood surface scarred by a half century of use, and I recall especially the scent of home that hit my face as an invisible wall behind the door’.<sup>16</sup> This nostalgia and history is also evident in the use of materiality by architects, for example, Leonie Matthews’ use of fibreboard sheeting in her architecture as she associates that material with 1950s beach houses of the Gold Coast which are part of her childhood memories.<sup>17</sup> To utilise immediate sensation and feeling in design is to enable recollection and activate the past.



**To design for the sensuous intellect is to design with disassembly**

In exploring any proposition, one must break it down into its parts in order to understand the ways its components relate together to create the desired result. Consequently, to utilise sensual stimuli as a communication tool for any creative work is to analyse and test the individual senses in order to apply them effectively and to understand their capabilities. As can be seen in this manifesto and in the Sensoria conference itself (with its breakdown of experience into phenomena, media and materia), the analysis of methods of designing for the sensuous intellect involves the separate investigation of component parts.

**To design for the sensuous intellect is to design simultaneity**

However, one must remember that ‘...discrete items only exist if plucked from a continuum...’<sup>18</sup> and that an accurate depiction of sensual experience is not distinct. Sensual perception is not of focused vision but a culmination of a numerous points of stimuli that occur concurrently which immerses the participant. It is from the analysis of how this information can relate that the synthesis of all stimuli can be achieved, giving rise to thought and a singular concept, and possibly the middle point between sensation and thought.

Designing for the sensual intellect is to allow for corporeal bodily reactions and for cognitive intangible constructs to arise. The two words that make up the term are on some level contradicting each other, and that is an indication of how to approach design for the sensuous intellect – to affirm contradictions in order to find a middle ground.

1 Paraphrase of Trish Pringle, ‘Phenomena Symposia introduction’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Phenomena Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 27 July 2004.

2 Pia Ednie Brown, ‘Emergent Forms of Experience’, in *ibid*.

3 Michael Trudgeon, ‘Smart Futures’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Materia Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 29 July 2004.

4 Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘Hapticity and time: Notes on fragile architecture’, in *AR*, 1999, 4 (originally presented at 1999 RIBA Discourse Lecture).

5 Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘An Architecture of the Seven Senses’, in *Architecture and Urbanism*, July 1994, 25.

6 Ted Krueger, ‘Human environment interaction’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Phenomena Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 27 July 2004.

7 Johnson quoted in *ibid*.

8 Juhani Pallasmaa, *op cit*, 21.

9 Though according to Robyn Hampton, ‘Thinking is not all in the head’, but is linked to the movement of the body, which in turns embodies or gives a body to the thought process. This does not disrupt the thesis of this text, but just reaffirms the simultaneous contradictions of designing for the sensuous intellect. Robyn Hampton, in ‘Brain Gym’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Phenomena Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 27 July 2004.

10 Paraphrase of Pia Ednie Brown, *op cit*.

11 James J Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979, 23.

12 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (orig. published 1958), xxxii.

13 Paraphrase of Pia Ednie Brown, *op cit*.

14 Juhani Pallasmaa, *op cit*, 25.

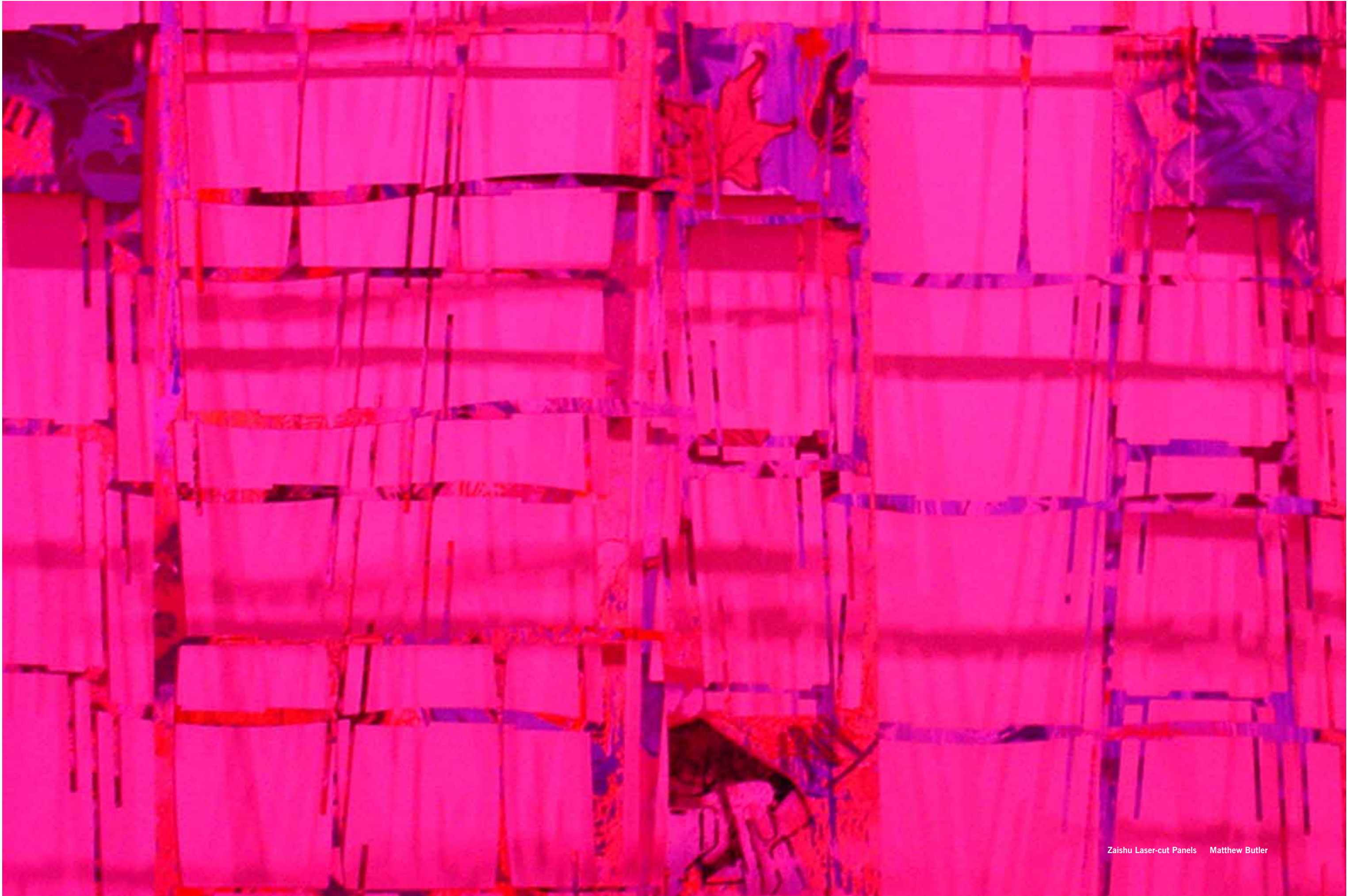
15 David Thomas, ‘Duration of light’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Phenomena Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 27 July 2004.

16 Juhani Pallasmaa, *op cit*, 23.

17 Leonie Matthews, ‘A theoretical approach to material’, in *Sensoria: Festival of Design Education – Materia Symposia*, RMIT Storey Hall, Melbourne, 29 July 2004.

18 David Thomas in ‘Duration of light’, *op cit*.





Zaishu Laser-cut Panels Matthew Butler