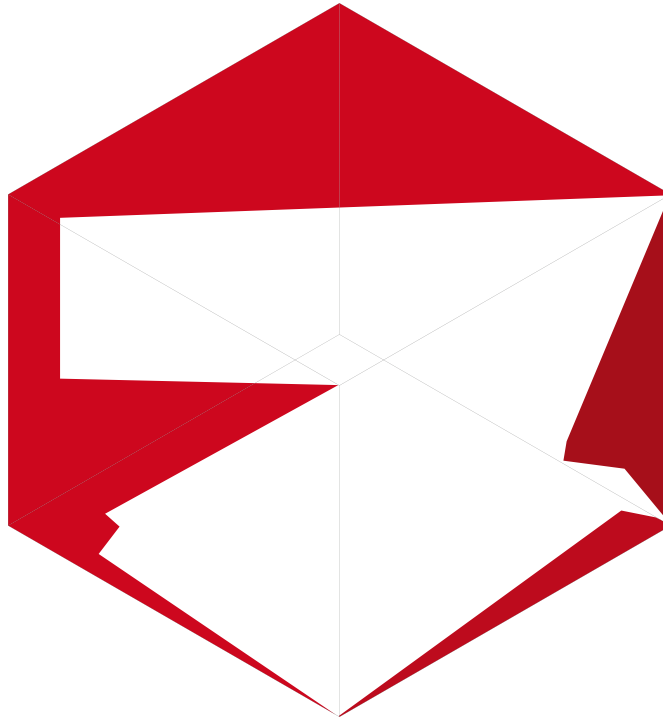


Studies in Material Thinking



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Inside Making

Editorial: Making, materiality and knowledge in creative research

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SMT Vol. 9 is a collection of practice-led research writings all of which started out as presentations at the *Making, Materiality and Knowledge Conference* held on the campus of Telemark University College, Notodden, Norway in September 2012. Physical and material aspects of making were very conspicuous at the conference. Keynote presentations were accompanied by lively demonstrations such as a skilled maker throwing a clay pot on a wheel or the playful performance of a group of young gymnasts in a game of gravity and trust. The university college was alive with a wide range of exhibitions and there was even a simulated Viking camp on campus with contemporary 'Vikings' making iron over a three-day period. The presence and voice of makers, demonstrating their tacit knowledge and revealing the richness and complexity of making, was evident in these activities and in the session presentations. In an effort to forward the spirit of the conference, the editors of three post-conference journals have agreed to include an invited manifesto, '**Making And The Sense It Makes**', from Mikkel B. Tin, professor of Traditional Arts in the Department of Folk Art and Folk Music, Telemark University College. As the final panel respondent for the main conference debate, Professor Tin made a brief, passionate summing-up presentation in which he encapsulated a vital philosophical position that seemed to underscore the rich diversity of knowledge shared over the course of the conference. Professor Tin was later asked to develop those spontaneous thoughts into a manifesto for the post-conference publications.

Wholeheartedly embracing Professor Tin's philosophical declaration, we were keen to make a selection of writings to emphasise three things. Firstly, we wanted the selection to reflect the transdisciplinarity of the making professions represented at the conference, including architecture, e-textiles, industrial design, artistic practice and design. The papers selected demonstrate a motivation towards understanding the wider impact and affect of creative practice in experiential and material contexts. These researchers strive toward an overarching framework of knowledge. Secondly, it was important to highlight the multidimensional role of the maker: as an actor; as the one who actually makes; as a learner and as a teacher who shares knowledge of and about the material thinking experience and process. Thirdly, we wanted to focus on writing that attempts to deal with tacit knowledge. These examples of praxis writing, emerging out of studio engagement are a particular form of material thinking that is currently being honed in higher education research programmes where many artistic and design practices are being re-negotiated in terms of their status as research. We wanted this volume to include makers, researchers and educators who might describe themselves as material thinkers.

The tacit knowledge of practising makers is highlighted in a number of these papers. Joseph, Hansen and Philpott all articulate key elements of their artistic practice including processes of reflection-in-action and collaborative communication. Their struggle to understand and communicate important elements of tacit knowledge within their creative practices is a demonstration of the way in which this approach to artistic research writing can invigorate the practice as well as provide constructive knowledge for advancing the field. For example, in the paper '**Living in the Material World**,' Hansen observes and describes her uneasy shift as a practitioner, from a 'happy' flow of experimentation to the troubled phase of decision-making. Hansen is happy in the chaos of experimentation, whereas Philpott has an entirely different experience and needs to invent research methods to cope with the angst of this overwhelming freedom. Philpott's paper '**Engineering Opportunities for Originality and Invention**,' describes the paralysis that can overtake the practitioner turned researcher. These are observations that will resonate with many artists/designers who become practitioner-



researchers or *chercheurs-créateurs*, to use the Canadian terminology. Philpott emphasizes the importance of establishing ways to bring a more exploratory approach into making even within a research process. She introduces a potentially useful concept with her playful, 'ludic research methods'. These are the reflections of sole practitioners, whereas on a collaborative team, Joseph discerns how negotiations in multidisciplinary teams are a way of voicing makers' tacit knowledge. "Collaborative processes can assist the formalization of tacit knowledge because the group requires more explicit information to co-ordinate, evaluate and integrate different stages and areas of project development" (see '**Collaborative Making: Developing expressive e-textiles for dance**').

Vernon and Sullivan have written an elegant, beautifully illustrated examination of form-making in '**Form to Product: Making as Pedagogy**.' Their reflective, well documented development of learning and teaching methods in a product design course provides us with a wealth of practical insight about how an immersion in material processes develops a shared language of form and a sense of authenticity. The result is an effective codification of tacit knowledge and a model for further research of this kind. Brænne and Nielsen are also concerned with pedagogy in their exploration of the link between design literacy and material knowledge, including consumer knowledge. In '**Design Literacy for Longer Lasting Products**' they examine the practical experience of material goods and the cultivation of empirical knowledge about material qualities that can be achieved through experience, practice and comparison or connoisseurship. They consider the implications for education and add to the growing discussion on the metalanguage of design.

The education of practitioners is also a feature of Sadar's paper '**Inhabiting Materials, Managing Environments**' in which he examines some of the challenges of a contemporary architectural education. Sadar recognizes that "... a full architectural engagement with the body does not rest at material and form, but extends to forces and energies, as perceived in light, scent, thermal comfort, and sound. Making can be a way of engaging future architects more fully in both the materiality and immateriality of our world." He believes it is important to build an understanding and appreciation of material and immaterial aspects of the environment and illustrates the difficulty with three discrete student projects, each of which opens a different window on the subject of study. Together they reveal the complex interplay between the material and immaterial. Piper also examines this complex interplay through a sculptural praxis in '**The Visible and Invisible in Making: Reflecting on a personal practice**.' He recognizes the material, physical world in its relationship with the human maker. Reflecting on the practical nature of his work, he attempts to understand central aspects of the practice that are so often invisible to the artist.

We hope that you will enjoy and benefit from the shared insights and transdisciplinary focus of these reflective, practicing artists, enquiring researchers and discerning teachers.



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