



final reflections

CHAPTER 6

“The studio is a laboratory, not a factory. An exhibition is the result of your experiments, but the process is never-ending. So an exhibition is not a conclusion.”

-Chris Ofili

If the evolution of the interior design discipline from upholsterer to decorator to interior designer contributes to the devalued status of textiles within the interior, the research within this dissertation re-evaluates this position and reclaims this valuable lost territory. The dissertation investigated the construction of hand knotted textiles and their application within interior space. By translating traditional rope knotting techniques into alternative textile fabrication methods the study explored the characteristics and manifestations of textiles within interior space. Further it placed emphasis on the use of textiles as a valuable interior design material.

The dissertation employs a hybrid research strategy. The combination of the Practice-based Research method and the Action research method allows for the independent exploration of the textile and its potentials while still providing the framework for rigorous documentation, allowing for a dissertation where research is conducted through the act of making.

This final section of the dissertation brings together the various themes as discussed within the preceding chapters and can be seen as a final reflection. The section briefly reflects on the final outcomes of the exploration of textile space-defining elements and the hybrid research method. Whereafter it lists the research contributions. The section concludes with recommendations for further study.



a conclusion

6.1. PERSONAL REFLECTION

As stated in Chapter 2: Methodology, reflection plays an important role in the Hybrid research strategy. This section acts as the final reflection of the dissertation 'Knowing through making'. The reflection is written from a personal viewpoint and consolidates thoughts and ideas about the process and experiences throughout the year. The essay does not cover all the parts of the process but highlights some important lessons I have learnt, suggests things that could be done differently and gives an overall picture of the design journey.

The initial dissertation topic was focussed towards ideas of decoration and the issues that the discipline of interior design has with the act of decorating. The topic of decoration is a controversial one and a source of many discussions between my fellow interior design students and I. I had considered early on that I wanted to experiment, build and 'make' using textiles as part of my dissertation's study. Consolidating the discussion on decoration and the exploration into 'making' with textiles proved to be a struggle.

With assistance from the examiners and my study leaders, the topic was narrowed and focussed on a specific area within the discipline, broadly related to concepts of decoration, but directed more to the use of textiles. It was also decided that a very specific research method would be needed to address the topic. At this point in the process I decided to combine the Action Research method and the Practice-based Research method. These two methods have many aspects in common but each have strengths of their own that play toward the concepts that I wanted to approach through my research. The PBR method allowed me the freedom to make and experiment and due to its cyclical nature, the AR method assisted in the process of documentation and iteration.

The speed at which the dissertation evolved from the beginning of the year up until the June exam proved radical. Due to the initial doubts about the research topic, the research strategy was implemented later in the year than is ideal. This contributed to the lack of 'made' knowledge early in the design process resulting in initial responses largely based on 'collected' knowledge. I suggest that any students that focus on Research through making should start the process of 'making' much earlier on within the year to avoid this. However, this would mean that the student would need to select the research field and research method at the start of the year. Ideally the

student would need to decide whether they wanted to research in a traditional way (collected knowledge) or in an alternative manner (made knowledge).

Once the decision about the specific research method was made and fully understood, the process evolved more naturally. It became clear that the project was one where research was done through making, and the selected research methods were well geared toward this aspect.

Conducting continuous rigorous research, through the act of making, proved more difficult than originally anticipated. I continuously searched for inspiration and ideas, whether through discussion with students and lecturers, old books on the topics of textiles and decoration found in the library or image boards made from photos collected from the internet. These conventional research techniques assisted me in the act of making. But, ultimately I discovered that in order to continue making, I had to simply continue making. 'Playing' with the material took up a lot of my time and initially this was a cause of concern to me. When I compared my progress and completed tasks to students with more conventional projects, it seemed as if I was much further behind than I should have been. It was only during the June exam that the progress I had made became evident. The rigorous manner in which the documentation was done and the continual observation and reflection added significantly to the design development.

The next obstacle that I discovered employing the Hybrid research strategy, was when I had to alternate between the act of 'making' and other, more traditional, design techniques (such as sketching on plan and section). The transition seemed forced and the jump seemed to inhibit the use of design intuition. In order to move beyond these hurdles, I completed small design charrettes on intermittent occasions. These charrettes related directly to the issue at hand and were used as a 'translation' mechanism. Other more alternative design tools included the development of the range of various testing sites. These sites allowed for a more fluent transition between making and the more traditional design techniques.

During the making process I found that sketches and hand written notes were more useful and valuable than digital documentation. Similar to the act of making, sketching offers a more tactile experience and changes made to drawings clearly illustrate the iteration process. This iteration process was also very evident while sketching on bumb overlaid onto plans and sections, emphasizing the process of iteration that already exists within the parameters of conventional design methods. I also made sure that all sketches and handwritten notes on pages were always dated. This allowed me to continuously

6.1.1. FINDINGS

refer back to notes, observations and reflections made earlier on in the year. Further documentation included photographs of physical samples as well as spreadsheets which documented the fabrication processes and materials used. This documentation process will allow other students the opportunity to follow the entire process of Research through making from the initial onset to the final results.

The development of the physical design process ran parallel to the development of the theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation. With each completed design cycle I discovered and documented new aspects about the knotted-rope textile. I contemplated associations and perceptions that designers and users have concerning the use of textiles. The learning curve was steep and with each step, observations became more specific and iterations more focussed. The debate about textiles, decoration and the act of making as a research method continued throughout the building. I had many insightful discussions and disagreements with peers and lecturers from the interior and architectural disciplines. These discussions strengthened my opinions and influenced my design decisions. Ultimately these types of interactions made me realise the importance of the studio environment.

True to the requirements of the hybrid research strategy, the majority of decisions were made through various cycles of iteration. Additionally many design and dissertation topic decisions were guided by the various milestone critiques. Large jumps in progress followed each critique, stressing the importance of responding to commentary. With this I learnt the significance of clearly communicating the observation and reflection parts of the hybrid research strategy. This should be done verbally as well as visually.

Due to continual development it is hard to reach final conclusions in the design part of the study. I think here the specific aims and delimitations that are set up at the start of the study creates an important parameter. It allows for precise decision making. Future students should keep in mind that these limitations need to be set up early in the year to ensure the desired end result. Yet, they should also understand that these limitations also adapt and grow as the study continuous throughout the year.

As conclusion to my personal reflection, the findings of the research is listed in **section 6.1.1.**

1. **The exploration of hand-knotted rope and rope-like materials revealed and illustrated various possibilities and restrictions that textiles present when utilized as space-defining elements. These findings were documented throughout the various design cycles as observations and finally employed in the test site for intervention as a part of the design response.**
2. **A construction method and a set of fabrication drawings for the manually constructed textile unit (scenario two) was developed and presented as *Knitting instruction*.**
3. **This dissertation serves as an example of research carried out by making, within the context of the interior design discipline. All procedures, methods and outcomes were described throughout the process and potentially serve as an informal guide to future projects employing similar research strategies.**
4. **The Hybrid research strategy employs a combination of the Practice-based Research method and the Action Research method. The Practice-based Research method places emphasis on the creative outcome or interior artefact as well as the process involved in its creation. The Practice-based Research method offers opportunity to carry out research that is focussed on the idea of making and is well suited to the Interior design discipline.**

6.2.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The dissertation makes the following contributions:

- The study contributes to the understanding of how hand-knotted rope and rope-like **textiles react** and manifest under certain test conditions.
- The study contributes an **alternative spatial application** for hand-knotted rope and rope-like textiles within the interior environment.
- The study contributes a **new fabrication technique and documentation process** as well as **new terminology** concerning rope and rope-like materials to the discipline of interior design.
- The study makes a contribution to the discipline of interior design at the University of Pretoria by applying a **hybrid research strategy** that includes the Practice-based Research method.
- The study makes a contribution to the discipline of interior design as it employs the **act of making** as a way to do **research**.
- The study and research methods applied, contributes **critique** on the current manner in which **teaching and learning** within the Department of Architecture takes place. The discipline of interior design is concerned with interaction between the user and its environment, yet the current design process is far removed from this tactility.
- The study contributes to the **present discussions** regarding the definition of the boundaries of the **interior design discipline** in relation to the architectural discipline and the architectural profession.

6.3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The dissertation makes the following recommendations for further study:

- That the three-dimensional textile unit and the spatial manifestations thereof, be further explored and developed.
- That the associations and resultant meaning of the hand-knotted textile be analysed and supplemented with empirical data collected through the study in order to determine its meaning within the discipline of interior design.
- That the dependency between a material choice, selected construction technique, the resulting form and its eventual spatial application be further explored.
- That the potential role of the act of decorating within the interior design discipline be investigated. This includes an investigation and analysis of the types (or scale) of decoration that already manifest within the interior environment and what the meaning of each of these are.
- That a greater understanding of the relationship between making and research within the interior design discipline be reached.
- That research methods that facilitate the act of making within the interior design discipline be further investigated and developed.

6.4.

CONCLUSION

The chapter, and the study, is concluded with a personal reflection essay discussing the various lessons learnt during the development of this dissertation. This essay highlighted times where great development took place as well as areas of difficulty. The personal reflection essay also made suggestions for future improvement. Lastly the research contributions were listed followed by recommendations for further study.