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Abstract

This essay highlights the development of learning and teaching approaches within the interiors cluster at The CASS, London Metropolitan University, in response to the perceived over use of new technologies, enabling students to produce accurate outcomes, however may result in less experimentation, critical reflection and above all a lack of materiality and experience.

Why Making Matters

In recent years Interiors courses have seen the relationship of qualitative critical, contextual research undertaken through testing, experimentation of materials, mixed media and technical making skills, eroded by the apparent 'accuracy' of new technologies.

Higgs 2006 refers to "critical and creative conversations" to describe the process and practice of meaningful making. Therefore implying, that in order to have a conversation and for that conversation to be transformative, the process needs to reveal an explorative, reflective and reflexive set of discussions.

Critical reflection and understanding through haptic development has been somewhat replaced by lasered or rapid-prototyped models generated from digital drawings. The results are typically less developmental and lean towards a diminished material sensibility and an unresolved charred edged finality.

Is a model solely a representational tool/product? Or, haptic, tangible, analogous qualities of engagement with an idea? Should tutors encourage students to make by hand and or manage the use of combined technologies, to enable recording, reflection, action and speculation to be enhanced, physical and material knowledge to be advanced and therefore potentially creating greater paradigm shifts within personal and collective learning?

Figure 1. Spatial experience. Model by Lina Navickaite

The translation of an interior concept is often represented by scaled models, models that express the spatial experience. *[Figure 1]* Technologies enable the design to work towards an accurate representation but not necessarily demonstrating the materials and the experience in the space. Testing the idea and its spatial possibilities through sketch models is part of our process and practice, however, the testing of the materiality may be limited to mood boards, visuals and sometimes handmade samples, to support the outcome with the model acting in a supporting role.

Figure 2. Subtle realistic model, Millennium Mills by Iliana Mitova

There is an argument that models attempting realism can be criticised as too representational, almost lacking control, unless carefully crafted. Subtle tones, no evidence of laser burns and glues, work towards a successful outcome *[Figure 2]*. Yet students may test and experiment creating real samples but lack the skills or time needed to effectively convey a realistic representation within a scaled outcome, hence simplified white or monochrome models are widely produced.

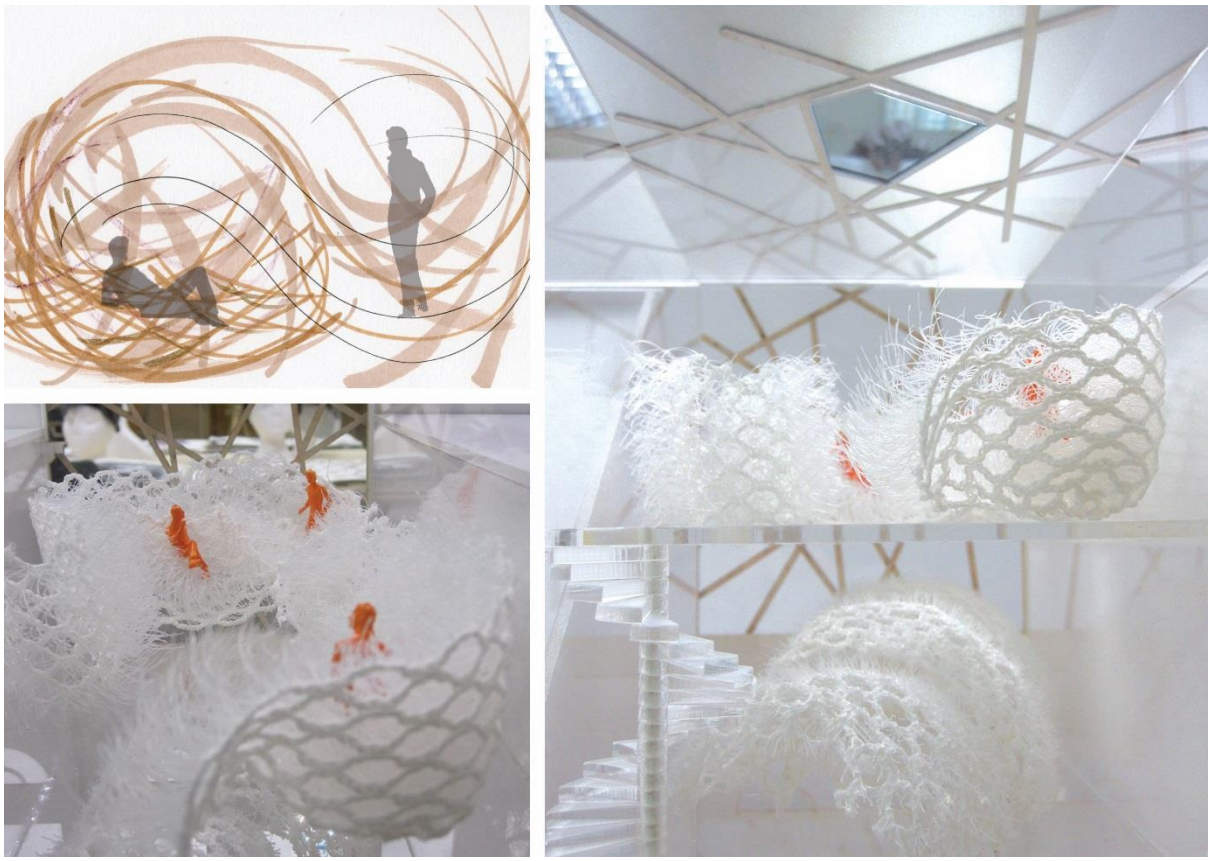

Figure 3. Monochrome materiality. Model by Gabriella Ramacciotti

However it is possible by using combinations of real materials, haptic skills and drawing to bring together an outcome that will be believable, with model material selection being a vital consideration. Therefore a neutral toned approach can be an excellent stratagem, encouraging the viewer, to project their own vision of the materials, colour and experience *[Figure 3]*. Indeed, within industry a monochrome model can be employed as a device to suggest a programme to their client, giving a starting point to negotiate or encourage a discussion. However, materiality creates the spatial experience, the texture, form, structure and kinetic quality of light and transition, there is value in exploring this through making.

The Interiors cluster, at The Cass, has made a shift away from the reliance of technologies to enable the students to develop and engage with material experiential outputs, at scale and at 1:1. The studio at level 4, which includes a cluster of students from 3 interiors disciplines, has developed a programme of making that challenges students to consider materiality as part of the developmental stage of the initial concepts. The aim is to enable the cohort to create real experiences and interventions, often using haptic skills alone or combined with technologies.

Figure 4. Materiality investigation. Model and image by Elena Hopwood

Level 4 starts with fast paced model making, utilising hand tools only, translating personal narratives into a spatial experience *[Figure 4]*. In turn this approach develops critical analysis and reflection, using lighting and photography, leading to further development of ideas and speculation. The students are encourage to share their techniques and help each other to see the potential and possibilities of each of their designs. The outcomes develop a collective consciousness of the reality of the designed element and spark debate about the possible interpretations of real or representational vs imagine experience.

Figure 5. 1:1 Interiors project

The workshop inductions are combined with a project to maximise and enable meaningful learning. Time is allowed to test and improve skills and develop an understanding of materials, material choices and specification. Manufacturing, construction and finishing techniques all adding to a critical conversation *[Figure 5]*. An immersive experience into the workshops and 1:1 projects help students understand process and practice, while learning how to detail.

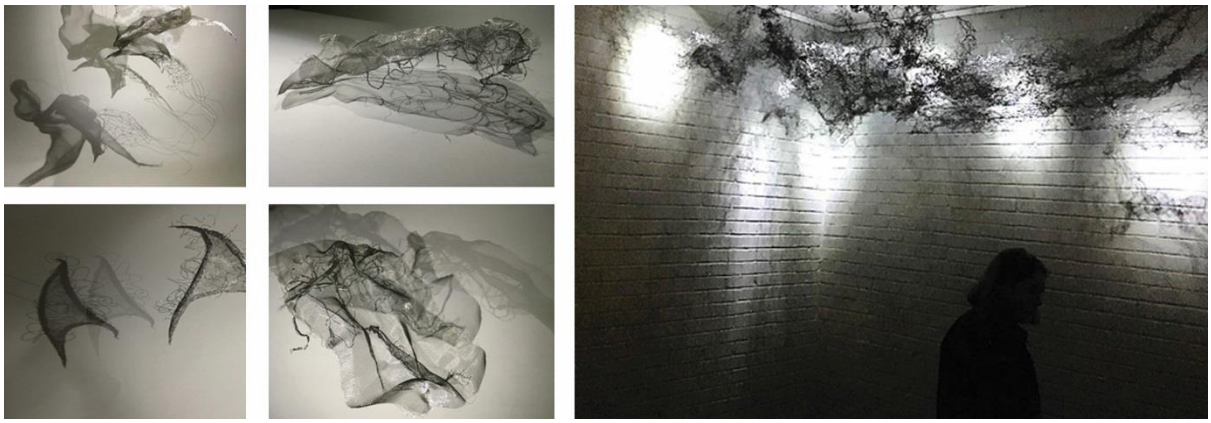

Figure 6. Group lighting installation

It is quite typical at level 4 for some students to strive towards the projects end goals as soon as possible, however making helps to develop a reflexive approach that challenges the students to test and evidence their conceptual journey. We encourage group work for the 1:1 projects which involves problem solving, communication and patience to create a successful

output, it takes time *[Figure 6]*. Through careful guidance and studio workshop activities we can develop critical research approaches to support academic research. Students gain confidence and realise that they can enjoy 'the process'.

Figure 7. Hermitage project in Spitalfields Market

At all levels it is important to develop meaningful learning opportunities, through live projects, where possible. We will often tackle difficult issues to develop a social conscience and try to create a paradigm shift that impacts and encourages lifelong learning.
Projects such as 'Unspoken Revolution' (Level 5 and 6) highlighted the importance of understanding the issues of homelessness for the perspective of homeless people's personal stories through the White Chapel Mission *[Figure 7]*. The aim was to create and make a collective outcome with individual conceptual responses, then challenged the general public's perception through exhibition and presentations, while raising money for the cause.
Students' experience of developing and conveying difficult narratives through making became a point of responsible design. Enticing the general public into engaging with a curious structure and its materiality, to touch, read and interpret was vital to the success of the project.

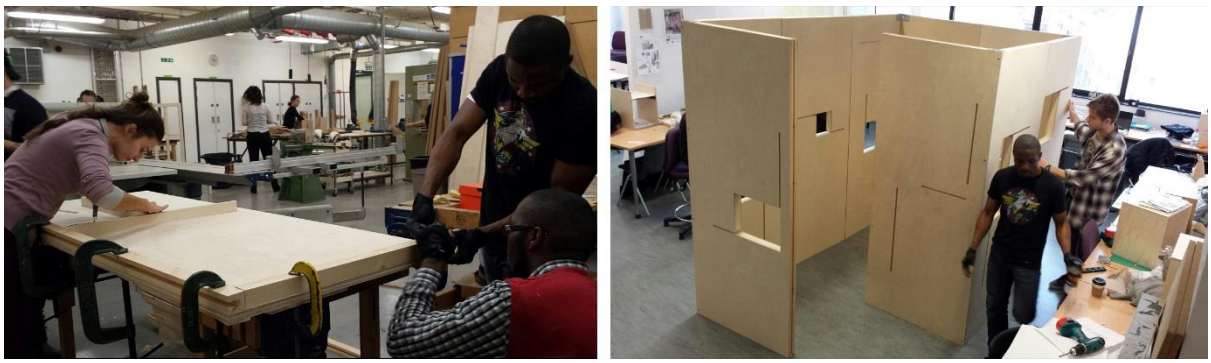

Figure 8. Workshop and construction

The materiality and manufacture of the intervention, how it came apart and was reassembled, it's resilience for each venue, played a huge part of the design strategy. The students only used CNC for parts of the structure the rest of the outcomes where largely hand made using general workshop tools and machinery *[Figure 8]*. This was a conscious decision by the students, in respect of the reality of the issues of the project. The materiality of the narratives, all imbuing the same personal ethos and care *[Figure 9]*.

Figure 9. Materiality concept responses

Making matters to interiors within The CASS. Through making we can encourage 'speculative and divergent' ideas, create a conversation through process and practice and aim to develop and enhance students' perspectives for their future selves and those they design for.

Images

Figure 1 Spatial experience. Model by Lina Navickaite image by Janette Harris. Visuals and illustration by Lina Navickaite.

Figure 2 Subtle realistic model, Millennium Mills by Iliana Mitova. Image by Iliana Mitova

Figure 3 Monochrome materiality. Model by Gabriella Ramacciotti. Image Janette Harris

Figure 4 Materiality investigation. Model and image by Elena Hopwood

Figure 5 1:1 Interiors project. Image by Alex Kondor- Krupanisk, Laura Grieco, Serena Previti, Filipa Fari, Sabah Mizban

Figure 6 Group lighting installation. Images by Janette Harris

Figure 7 Hermitage project in Spitalfields Market. Image by Janette Harris

Figure 8 Workshop and construction. Images by Janette Harris and Iliana Mitova

Figure 9 Materiality concept responses. Images by Janette Harris

Notes

Joy Higgs, Angie Tichen, Debbie Horsfall, Donna Bridges. *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching: Living Research*(Sense Publishers Rotterdam 2011) 302

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Bibliography

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