

Contemporary Craft in Iceland: Communicating Culture Through Making

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By

Thomas Hawson

Design Faculty

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Brunel University

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I dedicate this thesis to Jenny

Abstract

This doctoral project develops an interdisciplinary collaborative approach to furniture designer/maker practice. At its core is a practice-based framework that can be used to assess and reflect upon the tacit, primarily visual nature of makers' knowledge and the way that this can be communicated in order to develop design outcomes.

The enquiry takes as its focus a two-year collaboration between the author – a British-based furniture designer/maker – and six indigenous Icelandic craft practitioners in which the ultimate goal was the creation of artefacts that, it was hoped, would be expressive of Iceland's native craft traditions. During the 'Iceland Project,' as it came to be known, interaction between and among participants was grounded in a predetermined plan developed democratically through consultation and dialogue.

The project successfully develops new knowledge through a contemporary reinterpretation of indigenous Icelandic craft-making knowledge and demonstrates this through the making of artefacts imbued with recognized cultural status. It also extends furniture designer/maker research by developing an innovative practice-based method of collaboration rooted in the multimedia archiving of the making process which can then be used to illuminate and facilitate future practice.

The project is a scholarly display of makers' knowledge: the process is shared democratically among peers; the decisions that articulate design and methods of making are reviewed; and inter-subjective outcomes are generated. To facilitate learning from designer/maker practice-based research, the creative narrative is necessarily partly articulated through visual media and artifacts.

Contents

	Page
Contents	iv
List of Multimedia Discs	viii
List of Illustrations	x
List of Tables	xii
Acknowledgements	xiii
Author's Declaration	xvi
Abbreviations	277
Language Notes	278
Glossary of Terms Within the Context of this PhD	279
References	281
1. Introduction	17
1.1. The Author's Background	17
1.2. The Icelandic Parliament Speaker's Chair Commission: The Projects Background.....	18
1.3. Project Overview	29
2. Research	32
2.1. People.....	34
2.2. Objects.....	39
2.3. Related Research Projects	41
2.4. Literature	43
3. The Interaction Plan: Development of a System to Share the Design and Make Experience	49
3.1. Defining the Table and Chairs Design Brief	52
3.1.1. Questionnaire Methods.....	52
3.1.2. Questionnaire Findings	54
3.1.3. The Amended Table and Chair Design Brief.....	55
3.2. Proposing the Interaction Plan to Icelandic Makers	57
3.2.1. Icelandic Makers Responses and the Amendments Made to the Proposed Interaction Plan.....	59
3.2.1.1. Amended Interaction Interview Method.....	60

3.3.	Pilot Interaction Interview	62
3.3.1.	Amended Craft Practitioners Interaction Interview Method.....	64
3.4.	Selection of makers to participate in the interaction process	65
3.5.	Schedule for the Interaction Interviews	67
4.	The Interaction Interviews	71
4.1.	Edited Video Recordings: Interaction Interviews with Makers	73
4.2.	Artefacts	76
4.3.	Audio Diaries	81
5.	Design Proposals.....	82
5.1.	Drawing	83
5.2.	Models and Mock-ups	84
5.3.	Specifications	84
5.3.1.	Dining Table Specifications.....	86
5.3.2.	Dining Chair Specifications	88
5.4.	Selected Makers Amend the Design.....	89
5.4.1.	Makers' Comments on Proposed Design	90
6.	Making the Table and Chairs	101
6.1.	Method of Recording the Making Process	106
6.2.	The Completed Table and Chairs.....	108
7.	Feasibility Study: Production of the Project Table and Chairs in Iceland.....	109
7.1.	Gretar Mar Thorvaldsson.....	109
7.2.	Fjolnir Hlynsson.....	110
7.3.	Geir Oddgeirsson	111
7.4.	Ása Hatún	112
7.5.	Combined Summary of Makers Returned Information	112
8.	Exhibition Tour and Evaluation of Artefacts.....	113
8.1.	Methodology for Exhibition and Questionnaire	117
8.2.	Results of Exhibition Survey	120
8.3.	Interpreting Exhibition Data	121
8.3.1.	Would the Market Buy the Table and Chairs.....	121
8.3.2.	Does the Market Recognize the Cultural Content and is it Important?	121
8.3.3.	Project Success.....	122

8.4. Summary of Exhibition Process and Information Gathering	124
9. Reflect Review Appraise	125
9.1. Literature Review of Reflective Practice	125
9.1.1. Paradigm of Inquiry.....	125
9.1.2. Social Science and Anthropological Theories of Reflective Practice.....	128
9.1.3. Visual, Social and Anthropological Research.....	134
9.1.4. Practice-Based Research in Art and Design	136
9.1.5. Practice-based Research in Art and Design in Iceland.	145
9.1.6. Video in Practice-based Research.....	146
9.1.7. Collaborative Visual Arts Practice	149
9.1.8. Summary of Theories Relating to ‘The Makers’ Journey’	150
9.2. Reflections on the ‘Makers’ Journey’	152
9.2.1. Apprenticeships	153
9.2.2. Practical Experiments	159
9.2.3. Making Decisions.....	164
9.2.3.1. Critical Decision Point Example 1	164
9.2.3.2. Critical Decision Point Example 2	165
9.2.3.3. Critical Decision Point Example 3	166
9.2.3.4. Critical Decision Point Example 4	167
9.3. Summary of Chapter	167
10. Conclusion.....	169
Appendices.....	179
Appendix 1 Letter from Nicola Wood.....	179
Appendix 2 Defining the Product Brief Questionnaire Results.....	180
Appendix 3 Proposed Formal Interview Questions, Recording Method and Archive Presentation Structure.....	184
Appendix 4 Transcription of Interviews to Consider Proposed Interaction Plan.....	192
Appendix 5 Amended Formal Interview Questions and Archive Presentation Structure	197
Appendix 6 Final Interaction Interview Questions and Presentation Structure	207
Appendix 7 Media Formats	217

Appendix 8 Lists of Images Used in the Interaction Interview Discs	218
Appendix 9 Fjolnir Hlynsson's Response to Work in Progress Photographs	229
Appendix 10 Design Comments Form	231
Appendix 11 Feasibility Study Form.....	244
Appendix 12 Table and Chair Specifications.....	248
Appendix 13 Exhibition Tour Venues 2004	253
Appendix 14 Pilot Exhibition Survey Questionnaire.....	255
Appendix 15 Exhibition Survey Questionnaire	260
Appendix 16 Exhibition Survey Qualitative Data Abbreviations.....	267
Appendix 17 Potential Market that Would Like Table and Chairs in Own Home.....	268
Appendix 18 What the Market Thinks the Table and Chairs Would Cost.....	270
Appendix 19 Successful Use of Traditional Crafts.....	273
Abbreviations	277
Language Notes	278
Glossary of Terms Within the Context of this PhD	279
References.....	281
Printed Sources	281
Books.....	281
Journals	283
Conference Paper.....	284
Academic Dissertation	287
Non-Printed Sources.....	288
Internet	288
Academic Projects	290
Interviews	291
Site and other Visits	291
Museums and Exhibitions	291
Workshop Visits	292

List of Multimedia Discs

The discs are attached to the back of this thesis.

Disc 1 Interaction Interview Presentations (DVD)

Birger Andersen, Shipwright, Denmark.

Asa Hatun, Wool Worker, Faroe Islands.

Fjolnir Hlynsson, Sculptor, Iceland.

Disc 2 Interaction Interview Presentations (DVD)

Thorhildur Thorgeirsdottir, Goldsmith, Iceland.

Geir Oddgeirsson, Cabinetmaker, Iceland.

Gretar Mar Thorvaldsson, Pattern Maker, Iceland.

Interaction Interview Transcriptions file (Windows Word files)
(DVD-ROM)

Disc 3 Image and Data Files (CD)

Interactive Interview Artefacts

Sketchbook Pages

Models and Mock-Ups

Web Site Photographs of Work in Progress

Completed Table and Chairs

Exhibition Data

Disc's 4 and 5 Interactive Interview Diaries (audio CD)

21 Audio Diary Entries from 24.4.03 to 1.8.03

Disc 6 Telephone Design Amendments (audio CD)

5 Telephone Calls With Makers from 25.2.03 to 27.2.03

Disc 7 Making the Table and Chairs (DVD)

Video presentation of the making process with G. Thorvaldsson, T. Thorgeirsdottir, G. Oddgeirsson and F. Hlynsson in Iceland between, 27.3.04 and 7.5.04.

All video on discs filmed, recorded and edited by the Author.

All photography on discs by the Author unless referenced otherwise.

List of Illustrations

	Page
Fig. 1 The Gokstad Ship.....	19
Fig. 2 Cherry picking ladder writing desk, made by the author, 2000.	20
Fig. 3 Coat rake, made by the author as undergraduate, 1996.	21
Fig. 4 First sketch design of the Iceland Parliament Speakers Chair.	22
Fig. 5 Hand print signature by the author in the Icelandic parliament visitor's book.....	23
Fig. 6 Icelandic parliament speakers chair.....	24
Fig. 7 Map of the Nordic Region. Copyright, Kort & Matrikelstyrelsen, Denmark.....	32
Fig. 8 Sketch of 14th century Viking trader's helmet by the author.	40
Fig. 9 Author wearing the 14th century Viking trader's helmet he made.	40
Fig. 10 Viking ship upper deck knee made by the author under instruction from Birger Andersen at the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum, 2003.	76
Fig. 11 Felt seat made by Ása Hatún and the author, in the Faroe Islands, 2003.....	77
Fig. 12 Viking lady's Knife made by the author with Fjolnir Hlynsson, 2003.	77
Fig. 13 Reindeer horn handled knives, made by author with Fjolnir Hlynsson, 2003.....	78
Fig. 14 Poem Fence, by Fjolnir Hlynsson assisted by author, 2003.	78
Fig. 15 Silver and bone handled spoon, made by the author while apprentice to Thorhildur Thorgeirsdottir, 2003.	79
Fig. 16 Cast aluminum spoons, made by the author while apprentice to Gretar Mar Thorvaldsson, 2003.....	80
Fig. 17 Wooden pattern and aluminum casts, sculpture made by the author while apprentice to Gretar Mar Thorvaldsson, 2003.	80
Fig. 18 Celtic knot work art.	83
Fig. 19 Design sketch for table top.	84
Fig. 20 Dining chair outline proposal drawing.	85
Fig. 21 Dining table outline proposal drawing.	85
Fig. 22 Dining table and chair presentation drawing.	86
Fig. 23 Birger Andersen's amendment sketch	90

Fig. 24 Eight leg table.....	92
Fig. 25 Steam bent leg table.....	92
Fig. 26 Viking navigation aid.....	93
Fig. 27 Model chair.....	93
Fig. 28 Chair sketches.....	94
Fig. 29 Fjolnir's chair sketch.....	95
Fig. 30 Fjolnir's chair detail sketch.....	96
Fig. 31 New table legs sketch.....	99
Fig. 32 New table legs sketch 2.....	99
Fig. 33 New table legs model.....	100
Fig. 34 Completed table and chairs.....	108
Fig. 35 Viking navigation aid.....	230

All illustrations by the Author unless referenced otherwise.

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1 Project Time Plan	50
Table 2 List of Questionnaire Recipients	54
Table 3 Interaction Interviews Schedule	67
Table 4 Time Schedule for Making the Table and Chairs in Iceland	102
Table 5 Iceland, Faroe's and Shetland Exhibition Time Schedule	114
Table 6 Glasgow and Denmark Exhibition Time Schedule	115
Table 7 Recognized Nordic Traditional Crafts (sample 35).....	122
Table 8 Stainless Steel A2 Screws and Bolts for Table	250
Table 9 Chair Wooden Components.....	251
Table 10 Stainless Steel A2 Screws and Bolts for Chair.....	252

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Author's Declaration

The practical knowledge of making, handed down from maker to maker, is the primary resource of this project. This making heritage has been interpreted to design and make a table and chairs, which are part of the project submission. The author and the following partners share an equal part in the designing and making of the table and chairs submitted.

Fjolnir B. Hlynsson, Sculptor, Iceland.

Thórhildur Thorgeirsdóttir, Goldsmith, Iceland.

Grein Oddgeirsson, Cabinetmaker, Iceland.

Gretar Mar Thorvaldsson, Pattern Maker, Iceland.

Biger Andersen, Shipwright, Denmark.

Ása Hátún, Wool Worker, Faroe Islands.

The author coordinated the designing and making of the tables and chairs with the above list of partners and recorded this process on audiovisual multimedia.