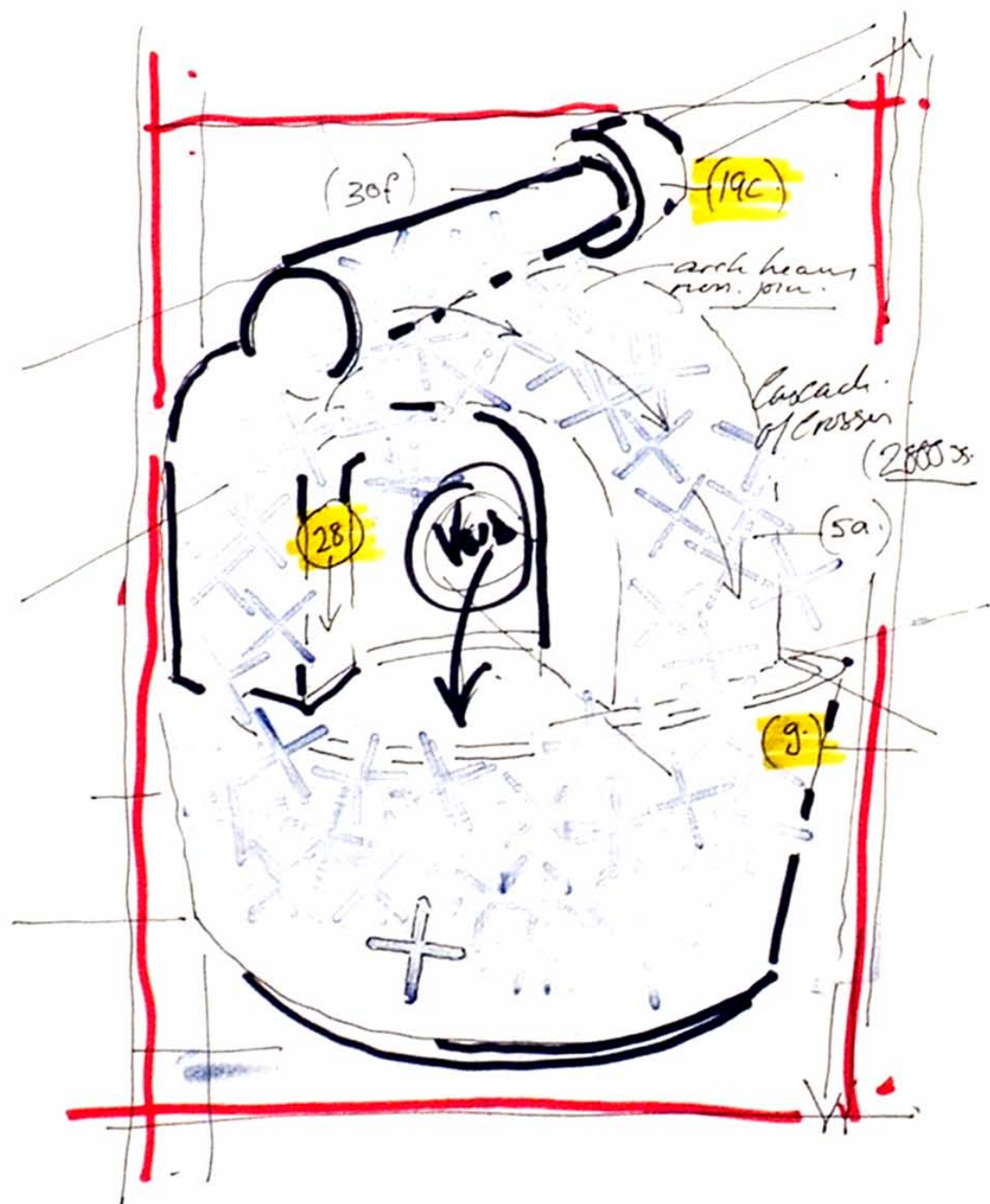


# repetition & difference



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Terry Perk

## Introduction Practice-Based Action Research



'Repetition and Difference' is the first action-based research project undertaken by the MAKE Research Cluster at the University for the Creative Arts in Rochester. The project was developed to explore the way different practitioners within fields of art and design might approach the making of objects as a means of thinking through aesthetic and design concerns.

As a first collective outing into the realms of action-based research the project was a success on a number of levels, consolidating a lot of hard work by a number of people in forming the cluster over the last year. In this context MAKE's grateful thanks goes to all the participants who gave up their time to take part in the project and to the University for the Creative Arts, the University of Kent and Georgetown University for their financial support in creating a forum for presenting the research.

### Project Brief & Overview

The project was organised in two parts, with the latter forming the basis of the research discussed in this catalogue. In phase one of the project Gary Clough was set the task of generating a series of drawn forms using a taxonomy of objects defined by different types of connection: Adhesion, pressure, containment and interweaving. From the resulting 384 drawings four were selected in response to the following criteria:

1. The 'openness' of each form to more varied interpretations
2. The variety and originality of functions implied by each form
3. The formal possibilities implied, in terms of physical connections

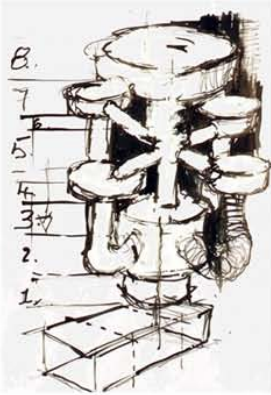
The four forms selected then served the basis for phase two of the project, which involved practitioners from a range of backgrounds and with varying degrees of experience in art, design or architecture. The brief for these participants was to develop and produce three-dimensional objects in response to one or a number of the four drawn forms. Whether following a technical interest, a conceptual line of thought, or a purely functional consideration, the emphasis was on the adoption of particular methodologies for producing objects. This phase of the project ran intensely over one week in the Modelmaking department at UCA Rochester between the 14th and 18th of July 2008. The work produced, along with interviews by Andrew Jackson and recordings of daily discussion groups, then formed evidence for the essays developed for the catalogue.

Terry Perk  
Lead Academic MAKE Research Cluster



Ed Keller

## Forward



"What really exists is not things but things in the making. Once made, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used in defining them. But put yourself in the making by a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing, and the whole range of possible decompositions coming at once in your possession, you are no longer troubled with the question which of them is the more absolutely true. Reality falls in passing into conceptual analysis; it mounts in living its own undivided life – it buds and burgeons, changes and creates."<sup>1</sup>

What is at stake in an investigation founded on the dispute between repetition and difference? Even more, beyond that basic and difficult question, a further qualification: what about work staged under the aegis of Deleuze's own unpacking of the protocols of sameness, variation?

The MAKE research cluster began with a taxonomy of chimeras- object-forms, each already a sheaf of attributes- and extrapolated these initial studies forward to sense [while in the very act of working the attributes in formation] the self reflexivity of knowing knowing. The optimistic pragmatism of this kind of exercise invokes an embedded mind, phoenixlike, always able to animate itself - like Julio Cortazar's '...colorless fire that at nightfall runs along the rue de la Hutchette, emerging from the crumbling doorways ...'

The ontological distinction between 'a set' and 'a series' functions as a key conceptual [pedagogical] engine for the projects. By avoiding a pre-defined outcome, indeed by supposing [in an act of controlled folly] the ineluctable reality of the unexpected, both process and outcome can be assessed as evidence; not of a closed model that reifies, but an agitated tracing of lines of thought. Apropos of the outside, the external thread that connects across scenes and bodies: "...the finer it is...the further duration descends into the system like a spider- the more effectively the out of field fulfills its other function which is that of introducing the transspatial and the spiritual into the system which is never perfectly closed."<sup>2</sup>

This multiplicative intensification functions as an agent that can exist across the bounds of known sets; as a parasite or noise presiding over the threshold, on both sides of the genesis of time and sense. Work of this nature produces not meaning but thought; thought which is then indistinguishable from being. Thought which struggles each moment to wrest itself from the shackles of 'Great Habit' and expose the imbricated, living horizons of potential.

High falutin' claims being staked out here. Yet this is the scope of the hybrid objectform, the pragmatism of working substance-thinking-work, all trending towards a radical modernism of thought. A kind of Zen Ars Combinatoria: to quote Alan Watts, 'Thinking no thing, will limited self unlimit.'

1. JAMES, W. Bergson and his Critique of Intellectualism. In: A Pluralistic Universe, Kessinger Publishing, 2005, pp. 273-274.

2. DELEUZE, G. Cinema 1: The Movement Image. University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.17.

**Ed Keller is an architect and artist, who teaches architecture, film and digital media programmes at Columbia University, SCIArc, Parsons, Pratt and the University of Pennsylvania.**



This project was not only about the process of making things, but also about the makers themselves – about the individual people who came together to take part in the week, and who brought personal approaches and methods to the exercise. Whilst the participants came from a variety of backgrounds, they were united by a common interest in the making process, with each bringing highly developed skills to the studio. Some came as established artists supported by strong professional networks, or had worked as part of the professional design industries, whilst others were mature art students embarking on a change from a previous career.



Keen to understand the impact that these individual biographies had on the attitudes, approaches and methods of the makers, the group decided to record the events of the week through photography, video, recorded interviews and participant observation. The use of ethnographic methods in order to better understand the practice of designing and making is now well established, and is increasingly utilised as tool in user-centred design methods. We chose this approach because we wanted to explore the ways in which the social is constituted through practice – we were as interested in the process as the product. In the words of Shove and Watson, “theories of practice emphasise tacit and unconscious forms of knowledge and experience through which shared ways of understanding and being in the world are established, and through which purposes emerge as desirable, and norms as legitimate”.<sup>1</sup>



Although all the participants brought expectations and attitudes to the project, none were sure what the outcomes would be. The looseness of the brief, combined with reluctance of Terry Perk and Gary Clough – who jointly conceived the structure of the week – to lead the participants to pre-conceived conclusions, meant that attempts to ‘test’, or ‘prove’ a theoretical model were deliberately avoided. Rather, the team aimed to generate a grounded theory, based on an inductive approach to the material that was gathered. The observations that follow emerged and coalesced as the week progressed, but are, of course, only one of the interpretations that could have been brought to bear on the experience.



As the makers spoke about their background and their approaches to the week, it quickly became clear that each had a life history that strongly informed their identity as a maker. In this context we choose to talk about identity as a product of our social and educational biography, the specific experiences we have within each of our respective disciplines, the roles to which we assign ourselves, and our wider character attributes or approaches to everyday life. As the week progressed, and as each of the participants spoke about their backgrounds and their feelings about the project, this complex nexus of interlocking facets began to define the individual characteristics of the makers, and to offer some wider insights into the practice of making.

Andrew Ivory’s professional experience is in the building industry, but he



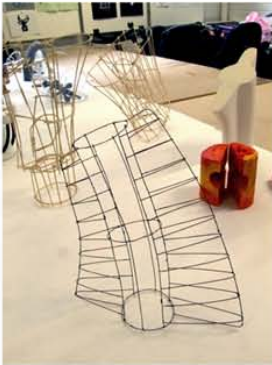


is now taking a part-time degree in fine art. For Ivory the joy of making is rooted in the moment. He dislikes planning ahead, and rarely carries out preliminary drawings before starting work, revelling instead in the pleasure of the process. Ivory's approach falls within the definition of the bricoleur – the maker who works iteratively, using found materials and continuously responding to their sometimes unfamiliar qualities and characteristics. In *The Savage Mind* (1966) Levi-Strauss calls this ongoing process of problem solving the “science of the concrete” – forming one's survival by adapting the bricoles of the world.<sup>2</sup> Andy described how working from his home workshop he had relished the challenge of building a set of outdoor speakers from unlikely materials (such as marble and tree trunks), the labour expended far out-weighting the eventual functional goal of supplying music for a garden party. Ivory works in the now.

Richard Epps and Alison Fisher both bring experience of working as design professionals to the project. Like Ivory, Epps is also taking a part-time degree in fine art, whilst Fisher is now a full-time academic, leading a degree course in modelmaking. Both quickly adopted a team-based approach to the project, discussing and developing a clear, shared conceptual driver for their models. This approach is a reflection of their experiences within the design industry that, despite persistent myths about the individualised authorial control of designers, is largely composed of teams working to proscriptive and tightly defined briefs. Although the core of Epps' and Fisher's project was built upon a desire to create a single spectacular outcome (ice sculptures whose decay would be filmed as a performance piece), their team quickly broke the making task into component parts, each of which were assigned to individual team members, and were to be assembled at the end of the process. Drawings and diagrams were used to make decisions about the approach that would be taken, and the team rapidly implemented a division of labour that, whilst sacrificing individual spontaneity, offered precision and efficiency. Although allowing the potential for sophisticated outcomes, this division of labour was ultimately a high-risk strategy. Without the benefits of repeated iterations and intuitive responses to situations as they occurred, the team were wedded to an outcome that had been pre-determined early on in the design process. In this sense Epps, Fisher and their team worked in the future.

Rather than working in the design industry as Epps and Fisher had, or being rooted in craft processes as Ivory is, both Gary Clough and Chris Wraith have backgrounds in fine art, and have been represented by galleries at various stages in their respective careers. For them the project represented particular challenges. To what extent did participation in this project constitute their 'own work'? During discussions Clough, who had generated the two-dimensional forms around which the making exercise was built, raised interesting questions about the journey his original forms were taking as they became subjected to the creative will of other artists and designers, and were morphed, adapted and reconstituted by the makers in ways in which he could not have imagined. Authorial control also raised interesting questions for Wraith, who initially expressed concerns about the problematic relation between his own practice and the outcomes of the project. Where did his practice end and this exercise start?





Unlike designers who, if they are to survive in their occupation, have to quickly accept the ways in which the division of labour undermines an idea of sole authorship, the professional trajectory of artists depends on the ownership of unique and original contributions to their field. The modernist paradigm of fine art practice ensures that artists are always constrained to some extent by their past activity. Although originality is highly prized, each new piece of work tends to build upon an existing body of ideas that feed and sustain future activity, ensuring cohesive and consistent creative action. In this sense Gary and Chris were working from the past – and their past practice determined the appropriate way to respond to this new situation.

We only have space here to discuss a limited number of cases – and it would be a mistake to completely condense the rich variety of approaches that became evident during the week. However, these brief observations may throw light on the longstanding debate about the differences between art, design and craft. By focussing on the ways in which the identities of the individual makers have been formed through their respective histories, and observing and interrogating their practice over the week, we are able to develop a model that helps us to understand the boundaries between these disciplines. Craft practice could be described as residing in the present, working with a heuristic and intuitive response to materials and processes. Design practice depends on understanding a future that is as yet unmade. Perhaps most surprising is the possibility that fine art practice might be defined by a commitment to the past. The idea of complete authorial control being carefully guarded by the individual, and of artistic production depending on a holistic and evolving, but ultimately pre-existent body of work, may be described as a rear view mirror approach to practice. However, in spite of the retrograde implications of this analysis, it is a method that – in this exercise at least – produced some of the most forward looking and stimulating pieces in the show.

1. SHOVE, E., WATSON, M., HAND, M. and INGRAM, J. *The Design of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2007, p 12.
2. For a rich and engaging ethnography of this approach to work see: HARPER, D. *Working Knowledge: Skill and Community in a Small Shop*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987.

**Andrew Jackson is senior lecturer in design at the University for the Creative Arts. He has a background in commercial design, running a design studio for ten years before gaining an MA in Design History from Middlesex University. His research interests are centred on theories of consumption, particularly in relation to amateur design and craft practice. Most recently, he was a contributor to the special issue of the *Journal of Design History* devoted to do-it-yourself, and his contribution to Maria Buszek's *Extra/Ordinary: Craft Culture and Contemporary Art* will be published in the USA in 2008.**

Terry Perk

## Objects in Series



“By simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned.”<sup>1</sup>

There is always something compelling about artists' studios: The layers of paint indexing the history of activity that has taken place there, or the objects piled beneath workbenches marking various options cut short, or rejected. Derived from four forms developed by Gary Clough, the proliferation of stuff generated for Repetition and Difference creates a similar affect. Reviewing the drawings, constructions, photographs and films produced over 5-days in the Modelmaking department at UCA, one can tangibly sense the multitude of decisions and questions explored by the thirteen artists, designers and architects invited to participate in the project there. Even before one distinguishes between the range of objects produced for the project, the accumulative impression of such decisions and variations in the use of materials creates an intensity that is felt as much as it is rationalised. In this context my short essay will focus on both the affect and inter-related nature of the objects produced for the project, questioning their representational relationship to the original four forms.

In many ways the relationships between the objects can be visually straightforward to interpret. Repetitions and resemblances in construction, form or technique denote particular kinships between them. Equally, divergences between or within sequences of drawings and objects can be just as telling, revealing individual ticks or traits that belong to particular approaches to the use of materials. Subtle alterations to form and construction can also mark intuitive responses to a range of affecting forces, whether functional, emotional or logistic, but understanding such deviations in thought, which determine the production of one thing rather than another, can be an extremely complex problem.

Yet the question of how we choose to analyse the differences or similarities between outputs, particularly in the context of their shared point of departure (the original four drawings to which the participants responded), can effect the way we understand the works both collectively, as sharing attributes or embodying particular intentions, and independently, as objects with their own spheres of influence.

The relationship between an original source and a representation is traditionally defined in terms of differences or similarities between a copy and a model, but understanding the things produced for Repetition and Difference as simple and straightforward representations, or copies, of the initial four drawings presented in the brief seems overly biased towards an equivalence of identity, in which the impact and value of each new object is framed in terms of characteristics belonging to the original. At stake here is the idea of representation: Representation as a device that would structure our understanding of each object in terms



already defined by the original drawings. The effect of which might undermine the individuality of objects and disguise other, perhaps more interesting, characteristics inherent to them.

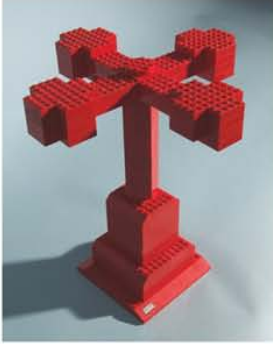
In this context an interesting distinction can be made between the idea of a 'series' of works and the concept of a 'set'. A set can be defined as a group in which all possible members are already determinable (the very nature of a mathematical set means that any objects within it share particular characteristics). Understanding the objects produced for Repetition and Difference in this way would frame them in terms of their resemblance to the four original drawings and ignore the fact that many of the objects were made in response to other constructions, often drawing on material, aesthetic or functional potentials that only revealed themselves in the act of making. After the first day's discussions it became clear that the focus shifted away from caring about any resemblance to the original forms, focusing instead on the possibilities that were emerging in the new objects being produced.

With this in mind and in opposition to the concept of a set, we can contrast the idea of a 'series', in which the progression from one thing to another is often open to unforeseen and unpredictable influences. Unlike a set, in which the characteristics are determined in advance, a 'series of works' is generated in response to subtle variations or incidents that present themselves as the series grows. Within such a framework the process of invention can simply be determined by anything interesting enough to warrant further investigation. In other words, thinking of the objects produced as a set encourages an equivalence of identity, in which dissimilar things are too easily categorized together under the umbrella of particular characteristics, whereas understanding them as a series embraces what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze would call their 'virtual' potential.

In Deleuze's sense of the term, the virtual is used to describe a capacity for variable use or interpretation prior to any specific expression or content of signification. In this sense it isn't explicitly tangible in a particular object, but exists as the infinity of potential expressions that might result from something. To borrow from Brian Massumi: The virtual is to a thing what energy is to matter.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on the work produced for Repetition and Difference, the virtual dimension of the original four forms could only ever be alluded to by the proliferation and collective impact of all the objects produced. Similarly each new object would have its own virtual dimension from which new and distinct expressions might be formed, with their own potential to influence in un-thought of ways.

Understanding the construction of one object after another as a series rather than a set draws attention to the way in which different objects, through discussion, collaboration and accident, took on a life of their own during the project, an idea that also recalls Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'simulacra', a copy of a copy that has become so removed from an original that it no longer seems to refer to it, only to other representations.<sup>3</sup> Extending Baudrillard's idea and drawing on Deleuze's idea of the virtual, Brian Massumi has asserted that a simulacrum is "less a copy twice removed [from an original] than a phenomenon of a different nature altogether."<sup>4</sup> While a copy is used to represent its model





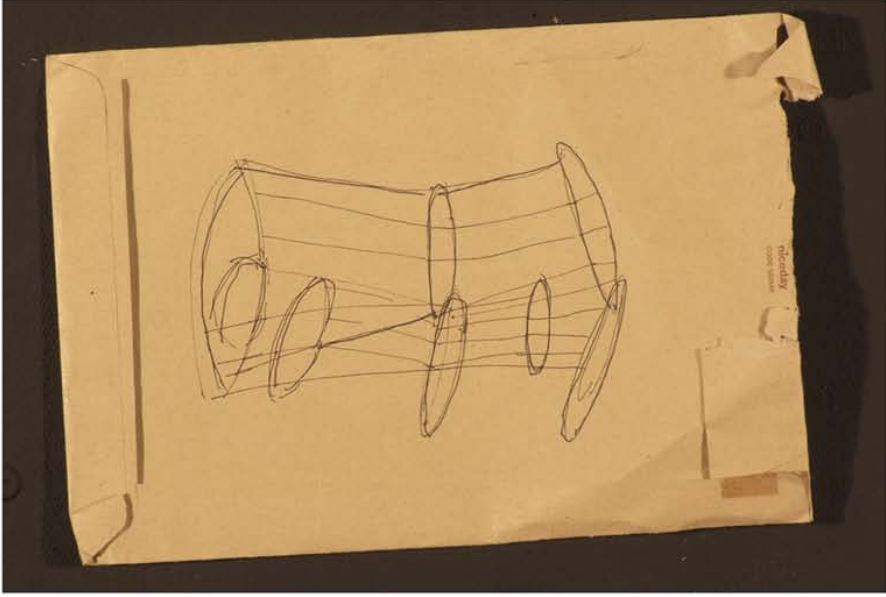
Massumi argues that we should only see a simulacrum's resemblance to a model as a device that allows it to do or become something else. It becomes a completely new object. There is a loss of hierarchy and in the context of Repetition and Difference we might say one object can now be understood 'next to another' rather than 'after another' or 'after an original'.

Re-framing the work in this way focuses our attention on the individual potential each object has to influence other possible outcomes, invoking a move away from questions of resemblance towards questions of potential and each object's capacity to form new connections with other things. To think the un-thought of is difficult, but perhaps the type of thought alluded to in the making of objects for Repetition and Difference allows interesting deviations to take place: The kind of deviations that elsewhere might undermine the type of thinking that encourages us to categorize things too quickly.

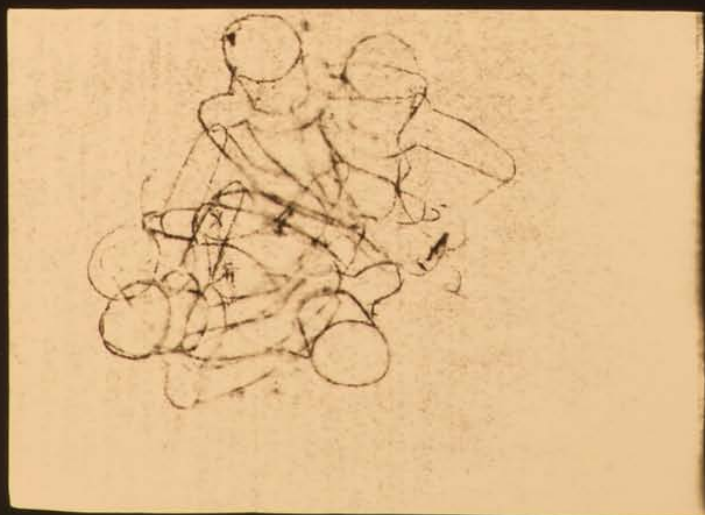
1. DELEUZE, G. *Difference and Repetition*. London: Athlone Press, 1994, p. 69.
2. MASSUMI, B. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 5.
3. POSTER, M., ed. Jean Baudrillard: *Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp. 166-184.
4. MASSUMI, B. *Realer Than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari*. Available at: [http://www.anu.edu.au/HRC/first\\_and\\_last/works/realer.htm](http://www.anu.edu.au/HRC/first_and_last/works/realer.htm) [Accessed 12th August 2008].

**Terry Perk is the Lead Academic for the MAKE Research Cluster and lectures on the Foundation Studies and Design, Branding & Marketing courses at the University for the Creative Arts in Rochester.**























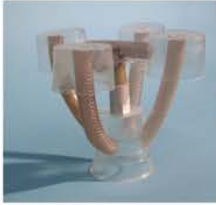
Untitled (Object 1)  
Mixed media



Untitled (Object 2)  
Plaster



Untitled (Object 3)  
Cardboard



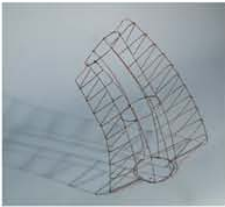
Untitled (Object 4)  
Mixed media



Untitled (Object 5)  
Mixed media



Untitled (Object 6)  
Wooden sticks



Untitled (Object 7)  
Wire



Untitled (Object 8)  
Thermalite



Untitled (Object 10)  
Wooden dowel & plastic tubing



Untitled (Object 10)  
Mixed media



Untitled (Object 11)  
Acrylic paint



Untitled (Object 12)  
Cardboard



Untitled (Object 13)  
Wooden dowel & plastic tubing



Untitled (Object 14)  
Wax & acrylic paint



Untitled (Object 15)  
Acrylic





Untitled (Object 16)  
Acrylic



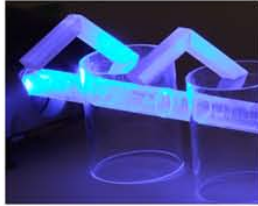
Untitled (Object 17)  
Wooden Sticks



Untitled (Object 18)  
Acrylic



Untitled (Object 19)  
Mixed media



Untitled (Object 20)  
Various acrylics



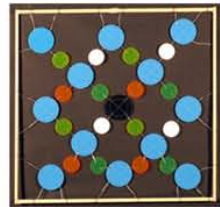
Untitled (Object 21)  
ABS (rapid prototyped)



Untitled (Object 22)  
Lego



Untitled (Object 23)  
Acrylic



Untitled (Object 24)  
Mixed media



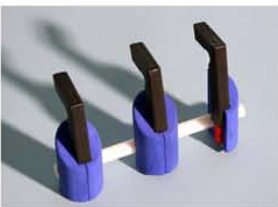
Untitled (Object 25)  
Glazed ceramic



Untitled (Object 26)  
Glazed ceramic



Untitled (Object 27)  
Ceramic



Untitled (Object 28)  
ABS (rapid prototyped)

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Project Co-ordinators</b> | Terry Perk<br>Gary Clough  |
| <b>Research Co-ordinator</b> | Andrew Jackson   |
| <b>Participants</b>          | Gary Clough<br>Andrew Dabomprez<br>Richard Epps<br>Alison Fisher<br>Thomas Holton<br>Andrew Ivory<br>Thomas Makryniotis<br>Phil Marsh<br>Terry Perk<br>Pamela Rana<br>Tracey West<br>Tracey Wood<br>Chris Wraith   |
| <b>Audio Visual Support</b>  | Mike Miller  |
| <b>About MAKE</b>            | Part of the University for the Creative Arts in Rochester, the MAKE research cluster was set up in 2007 to study the use of analogue models in different practices within art, design and engineering. MAKE is made up of academics and professionals from within the university and the creative industries, working in partnership to develop design projects and case-studies that explore the employment and construction of models in a range of disciplines and practices. |
| <b>Contact</b>               | For more information about the research project, exhibition or MAKE you can visit our website at <a href="http://www.makemodels.co.uk">www.makemodels.co.uk</a> . Alternatively you can contact:<br><br>Dr. Terry Perk<br>University for the Creative Arts<br>Fort Pitt<br>Rochester<br>Kent<br>UK<br>ME1 1DZ<br><a href="mailto:tperk@ucreative.ac.uk">tperk@ucreative.ac.uk</a>  |



