Part One

Over the past decade, conventional protocols of exchange that focused on the key relationship between design and making have been thoroughly redefined by digital technology [Sheil 2005a]. For centuries, the construction of prototypes, artefacts, buildings and structures has operated on a rolling tradition of visual and verbal communication between designers, consultants, makers, clients, users, regulatory bodies and contractors. In making buildings, roles were defined by where individuals and disciplines were located on a chain from concept to execution. All were reliant on its links being successfully forged, not only to achieve results, but also to underpin their status within their respective professions and trades. Prevailing over the entire process was the design, an assemblage of cross-referenced visualisations, specifications and quantities forming the templates and instructions for making. Given the numeracy of complex transfers from one step to the next, constructs in architecture have evolved as negotiated translations; the most engaging are those that have recognised this in a creative and informed way from the very outset.

The redefinition of these historic protocols was initially led by the gradual adoption of computer-aided drawing in the early 1990s by practice and academia. As three dimensional modelling and rendering became more available and sophisticated, a frenzy of liberated experimentation ensued. Speculative design looked to the weightless and scaleless domain of digital space as the new terrain for innovation and speculative discourse and as the means to compositionally define spatial and formal complexity.¹ The gap between the designer’s vision and operations of the construction industry widened as fabrication processes remained largely analogue in how they were driven and delivered. A defining example of this challenge was Future Systems’ Media Centre at Lord’s Cricket Ground (competition winner 1995, opened 1999), in which the primary enclosure was entirely prefabricated by the Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, Cornwall, as theirs was the only industry both familiar and experienced in extrapolating design information for the fabrication of such forms.

Concurrently though, news tools of computation, means to capture and analyse the performance of buildings, built environments and the behaviour of users, brought a fresh understanding of the complexity and density of dynamic contexts in architecture.
Geometry was re-ignited as a great organiser, only now it was adaptable and smart, as developments in design software far outstripped those in the world of how such forms could easily be made; more significantly, the means to communicate from one realm to the other was restricted. In the first decade of the new millennium this restriction started to lift as CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture) entered the mainstream. Subsequently, a vast expansion on the remit, scope and potential of the designer was released, allowing for their direct engagement and control of fabrication processes. Likewise, the capability of manufacturing and construction to fulfil design intent was expanded, and a creative dialogue between design and fabrication began converging once more.

**Size Matters**

The term ‘bespoke’ is said to have originated over one thousand years ago from the old English ‘bespeak’, meaning ‘to request’, ‘to order in advance’ or ‘to give order for it to be made’. Tailors of London’s Savile Row claim that the term was in common use on their street from the seventeenth century, when tailors kept their cloth on the premises and customers would ‘bespeak’ a particular length of fabric to be fitted as a suit or uniform. The first recorded use is thought to have occurred in C. Clarke’s *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Clarke* (London, 1755) on the life and experiences of an actress, cross-dresser and famous playwright’s daughter in eighteenth-century London. In this instance, the term was used in reference to the performance of a ‘bespoke play’, in the sense that it was a one-off.

Almost 275 years after suits and uniforms were first made there, the Savile Row Bespoke Association was founded in 2004, and within three years they trademarked the term ‘Savile Row Bespoke’ which defined a two-piece bespoke suit as ‘crafted from a choice of at least 2,000 fabrics, be made almost completely by hand, and requiring at least 50 hours of hand-stitching’. To qualify, Savile Row Bespoke suits must also be ‘derived from a paper pattern, individually cut and produced by a master cutter, and subsequently undergo personal supervision by the master cutter in the course of production’. In June 2008, the association lodged a complaint under the truthfulness rule at the UK’s Advertising Standard’s Authority (ASA) against the international firm Sartoriani who had recently opened a nearby store where machine cut suits were promoted as bespoke. The ASA noted the complainants’ argument that ‘the advertised suits were machine-cut abroad’ to a standard pattern after initial measurements were taken and adjusted at the end of the process’ and that the suits ‘at best’ should be described as ‘made to measure’. Sartoriani claimed that the initial machine-cut fabric pattern was a ‘working frame’ that could be individually adjusted if the customer’s measurements did not match a standard pattern size, and that this occurred in some cases.

The ASA concluded that, following recent changes to the industry, the use of the word bespoke to describe the advertised suits was ‘unlikely to mislead’. They went on to say, ‘both bespoke and made-to-measure suits were “made to order”’, in that they were made to the customer’s precise measurements and specifications, unlike off-the-peg suits”. The ASA did not rule on a fuzzy distinction between hand-made or machine made, nor the particular differences of approach either method adopts in making or fitting, nor even where the suit was made; they ruled on the rather neater and universal principle of measurement. Whether the artefact is made to order, made on the premises,