Interior Spaces in Other Places

An IDEA [Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association] Symposium
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 3-5 February 2010
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Biographies

Penny Sparke
Penny Sparke is a Pro Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Design History at Kingston University, London. She graduated from Sussex University in 1971 and was awarded her doctorate in 1975. She taught the History of Design from 1972 to 1999 at Brighton Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art. She has published over a dozen books with an emphasis, since the mid 1990s, on the relationship between design and gender. Her books include As Long as It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste (Pandora, London, 1995); Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration (Acanthus Press, New York, 2005); and The Modern Interior (Reaktion Books, 2008).

Michael J. Ostwald
Michael J. Ostwald is Dean of Architecture and Professor of Architecture at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He is a Visiting Professor at RMIT University and a Professorial Research Fellow at Victoria University Wellington. In 2009 he was awarded the first ARC Future Fellowship in the architecture and design area. He has a PhD in the history and theory of design and a higher doctorate, DSc, in design mathematics. He is co-editor of the journal Architectural Design Research and on the editorial boards of Architectural Theory Review and the Nexus Network Journal. His recent books include The Architecture of the New Baroque (2006), Homo Faber I: Modelling Design (2007), Residue: Architecture as a Condition of Loss (2007), Homo Faber II: Modelling Ideas (2008), Understanding Architectural Education in Australasia (2008) and Fractal Architecture (2009).

Davide Fabio Colaci
Davide Fabio Colaci graduated in architecture from Milan Polytechnic and studied at the Faculty of Architecture in Oporto [Portugal]. He works as a designer and set designer in Milan. He is in charge of interior design projects and the design of public buildings at the Guidarini & Salvadeo Architetti Associati studio. In 2003 he was one of the founders of Xgr*n, a multidisciplinary research group that has investigated the borderline areas between product, fashion, food and communication. He is an instructor in set design at the Faculty of Architecture and Society, Milan Polytechnic, where he has been carrying out teaching activities for five years. He is currently an assistant in the course run at the Faculty of Design by Professor Andrea Branzi, with whom he is carrying out research activity into the theme of the spaces of the contemporary metropolis as part of his research doctorate in interior and exhibit design.

Kathleen Connellan
Kathleen Connellan lectures in art and design history at the University of South Australia. Her research connects art and design with issues of social accountability. Currently she is portfolio leader of research in Art, Architecture & Design (AAD) where she works with researchers from all of these areas. Past projects include curriculum renewal in design history and theory in Australia (Opening Pandora’s Paintbox) and current projects include developing research pathways for students interested in the theory of art and design (Theory Spine). Her research outputs are strongly interdisciplinary incorporating postcolonial theory and critical race theory.
Robert Crocker
With a research background in the history of early modern science and ideas, Dr Robert Crocker is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia, where he teaches the history and theory of architecture and design and coordinates the honours program in Interior Architecture and Industrial Design. His current research includes a project focusing on the cultural history of the Anglo-American ‘period style’ interior (c.1900-1940). In 2007 he was awarded a Winterthur Museum and Library Research fellowship to develop this research project further.

Katarina Dimitrijevic
Katarina currently heads the Interior Design Department at Greenside Design Center in Johannesburg. Her research interests lie in exploring the recycling-re-used design strategies and to promote conscious design approach. She presented a paper at Heltasa – Bloemfontein RSA on the 10% community engagement program which was integrated into the GDC curriculum from 2007. As co-author presented and published a paper in 2008 at Milan, Italy (Places & themes of interiors, contemporary research worldwide): ‘Street synergy: African Re-Tale in a global narrative’. As an interior design/architecture practitioner, Katarina has considerable experience and has been the sole member Inspace Interiors since 1998.

Georgina Downey
Dr Georgina Downey is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Art History Program at the University of Adelaide. Her research interests include paintings of domestic interiors in the early twentieth century as well as cosmopolitan networks in London and Paris. She is currently working on a book Picturing Home: Representing Interiors from the Victorians to the Moderns (Berg), that is a trans-disciplinary room-by-room exploration of representations of the domestic interior.

Matthew Dudzik
Matthew R. Dudzik is a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design. He received an MArch from Washington University and a BA in architecture from Miami University of Ohio. His research focuses on urban paranoia and the enactment of social identity in the built environment.

Julia Dwyer
Julia Dwyer practices across art and architecture, combining architectural practice with collaborative public art projects. She studied architecture at the University of Sydney, the Architectural Association and North London Polytechnic (London Metropolitan University). She is senior lecturer at the University of Brighton, and teaches on the MA Interior Spatial Design at Chelsea College of Art and Design. She has published chapters in Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics (Petrescu 2007) and Thinking Inside the Box: a reader in interiors for the 21st century (Gigli, et al 2007). She is a member of the Taking Place group, which investigates feminist spatial practice through spatial interventions.

Kathleen Gibson
Professor Gibson is a design educator at Cornell University. She practiced contract interior design for seven years before joining the academy. Her expertise is in computer-aided design (CAD) where she investigates the effect of digital media on creativity, studio processes, and decision-making. A second area of investigation centers on modern Chinese material culture and its historical context in the domestic interior.
Andrew Gorman-Murray
Andrew Gorman-Murray is a Research Fellow in Human Geography at the University of Wollongong, specialising in social and cultural geography. One of his key research interests is the mutual intersections of gender, sexuality and domesticity. His PhD investigated how gay men and lesbians design and use their homes in ways which contest heterosexual norms, and he has published widely on gay and lesbian homemaking practices. His recent research explores men's changing engagements with domestic spaces and relationships; he is currently CI of an ARC Discovery Project (2009-11) investigating new spatialities of domesticity and masculinity in inner Sydney.

Krismanto Kusbiantoro
Krismanto Kusbiantoro graduated from the Architecture Department of Parahyangan Catholic University in 2001 and received a Masters Degree in Architecture in 2003, specializing in theories and philosophy of Architecture. He has also worked as an architect and interior designer. In 2005 he joined the Interior Design Department, Maranatha Christian University, and lectures in CAD Visual Presentation, Lighting Design, Interior Design Studio, and Introduction to Interior Design. He has conducted a range of research projects and has published in both national and international scientific forums such as ICOMOS Thailand International Conference 2008 and The Fifth Annual Ename International Colloquium 2009 (Belgium). He is currently a PhD candidate in architecture specializing in locality of design.

Gini Lee
Gini Lee is a landscape architect and interior designer and is Professor of Landscape Architecture at Queensland University of Technology. She is the current Executive Editor of the IDEA Journal of the Interior Design Interior Architecture Educators Association. Until early 2008 she was a researcher and lecturer in spatial interior design and cultural landscape studies at the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Architecture and Design, University of South Australia. Her PhD entitled The Intention to Notice: the collection, the tour and ordinary landscapes, investigated ways in which landscapes and interiors are incorporated into the cultural understandings of individuals and communities through ephemeral thinking.

Brenda Martin

Terry Meade
Terry Meade has a background in architecture, fine art and engineering, all of which contribute to research interests. His research covers aspects of design particularly in relation to the discipline of interiors, specifically, an investigation about the generation of spatial ideas.
and the role of ‘play’, ‘chance’ and the use of poetic language. Recent work, in Palestine, helping to build houses, has led to an investigation about the way issues of security, (walls, borders and barriers), have contributed to a particular shaping of domestic space. Currently he is a Ph.D. candidate at the department of design, Goldsmiths College, London.

Hannah Mendoza
Hannah Rose Mendoza is an assistant professor in the Department of Interior Architecture at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. She has previously taught at the Savannah College of Art & Design and West Virginia University. She received an MFA in interior design from Florida State University and a BA in art history from Rutgers University. She is currently pursuing a PhD in feminist geography. Her research focuses on identity and the built environment; feminist theory; and issues of socio-spatial justice, particularly in Latin America.

Kathy Mezei
Kathy Mezei is a Professor in the Department of Humanities at Simon Fraser University, Canada, where she teaches courses on domestic space, cross-cultural translation and modernism. She leads a research group on domestic space and citizenship, and has created a website, www.sfu.ca/domestic-space. Her recent publications relevant to domestic space include, The Domestic Space Reader, under contract to the University of Toronto Press; Domestic Modernism, the Inter-war Novel, and E.H. Young, with Chiara Briganti, Ashgate, 2006, two guest-edited issues of journals; ‘Domestic Spaces’, B C Studies 137 (Spring 2003), and, with C. Briganti, Special Forum: ‘Rethinking Domestic Space Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Home and Garden’, Signs 27: 3 (March 2002).

Julieanna Preston
Julieanna Preston is an Associate Professor at Massey University of Wellington. With a BArch from Virginia Tech (USA) and a MArch from Cranbrook Academy of Art (USA), Julieanna’s experience as a professional designer and an academic extends across geographical and discipline boundaries, a factor that continues to figure strongly in her creative work. Recent publications include INTIMUS: Interior Design Theory Reader (Wiley, 2006) and Moments of Resistance (Archadia Press, 2002), both in collaboration with Mark Taylor. She was the guest editor of AD: Interior Atmospheres, an issue investigating the temporal and material attributes of atmosphere within interior environments. She is currently melding her background in feminist practices, craft and construction, interiors and landscape in a doctoral study at RMIT, Melbourne, Australia.

Angela Rui
Angela Rui is currently studying for a PhD in Interior and Exhibit Design at Milan Polytechnic, conducting research in an area poised between art and interior design, and in particular investigating the symptoms of rarefaction and contamination between the arts at a time when, emerging from their own disciplinary territory, they are starting to play a social, collective, living role. She carries out teaching activities as an instructor in various courses at the Faculty of Design, Milan Polytechnic, including Design and Contemporary Arts and Museography, both run by Beppe Finessi; Theory of Interiors, run by Andrea Branzi and Pierluigi Nicolin; Laboratory of Interior Design, run by Andrea Branzi.
Mark Taylor
Mark Taylor is an Associate Professor and Head of Interior Design at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Previously he has held visiting positions at several universities and taught, lectured, exhibited and published in Europe and Australasia, including editor *Surface Consciousness* (Wiley-Academy, 2003), and with Julieanna Preston, co-editor *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader* (John Wiley, 2006). He is currently editing *Interior Design and Architecture: Critical and Primary Sources* (Berg 2011). Recently Mark had work exhibited at *Melbourne Museum* as part of the ‘Homo Faber: Modelling Ideas’ exhibition (2007), and the *2008 Venice Architecture Biennale, Australian Pavilion – Abundant*, Venice. He is currently completing a PhD at University of Queensland.
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Papers were matched, where possible to referees in the same field and with similar interests to the authors.

The Editorial Committee would like to thank all those peers who gave their time and expertise to the refereeing process.

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Short version
To comprehend other places through the lens of the ‘shifting’ interior – examining interior histories and theories, and by association, the constructed and performed practices of a range of interior conditions – is to enable speculation on the production and occupation of interior space in other territories and societies. Forms of inspiration are, as both keynote papers acknowledge, often overlooked; whether this is a result of western-centric approaches to aesthetics, or their methods of enquiry. Evidently as the Symposium papers demonstrate, the discussion is more complicated than it might at first appear and the observation of interior decoration/design as critical practice offers one way to engage.

In her exotic and somewhat synaesthetic description of the painter Sir Frederic Leighton’s London home, Mary Haweis transports the reader through many foreign lands, to an assemblage that Judith Neiswander describes as ‘modern and British.’ Although her argument is concerned with notions of ‘individuality’, relative to both ‘aesthetic’ and ‘artistic’ interiors, this architecture was the result of individual selection and reconfiguration of disparate elements. The implication cannot be missed that being ‘British’ included cultural appropriation and the recreation of a miniature Empire.

This process was reflected in the physical space of the home and studio and included the highly exotic 1870s Arab hall that incorporated Leighton’s collection of 15th and 17th century polychrome tiles from Damascus, Syria. Paralleling the atmosphere generated by built form, Leighton’s carefully arranged collection of antiquities (including a cast of the Parthenon marbles) also evoke the foreign, as Haweis observes:

> the main feature of the house is this gradual progress and ascent to the studio, and the arrangement of the ground floor, where hall opens out of hall, reviving now antique, now medieval, now Renascence Italy, from Florence to Rome, down through Naples, on to Cairo itself; and yet it is not Rome, nor Sicily, nor Egypt, but a memory, a vision seen through modern eyes.

Haweis’ response is to the affect; there are other more ‘rational’ descriptions, just as there are others that reveal a homoerotic sensibility permeating the space. However the notion that being modern and British was to incorporate and subsume the foreign in an ‘English’ house, is somewhat amusing from a post-colonial perspective. Leighton’s collection of disparate parts are grounded and understood within the cultural context of the artistic elite in London, and housed within the tradition of British domestic architecture. Although built of local materials the house and studio adjusted itself to accommodate the foreign and exotic, and appears slightly different to its neighbours.

On the other side of the world Robert and Joanne Barr Smith were busy filling their Adelaide homes Torrens Park and Auchendarroch with furnishings and decorations from Morris & Co. Besides being admirers of Morris’ craft, and having the company designers’ co-ordinate their schemes, the intention was to create a quintessentially modern English interior in Australia; where ‘modern’ includes the critique and rejection of the Victorian interior.
This direct importation might suggest a lack of translation or adaptation between the old and New World home, but for the fact that the interiors were housed in an architecture that had already undergone technological, climatic and cultural change. While living on the margins of an empire, the Barr Smith's wealth enabled a cultural continuity between London and Adelaide, but for others the recreation of the homeland was made from both imported goods, and pieces fashioned from local materials, using local craftsmen.

In both the above situations the geography of place and political climate allowed for a form of critical practice; that is, through the critique of cultural artefacts, (including their adoption and/or rejection) the interior is seen as an agent of social and cultural change, rather than the promoter of structural or sheltering aspects of home. But while the Barr Smiths’ followed the Arts and Crafts version of England, shrouded in the middle ages, the modern ‘Englishness’ of English architecture lay in foreign lands. Inasmuch as the politics of space are always contested, even if space is central to the mechanisms that are intent on the erasure of a culture through social and material practice. We have used the above as examples, precisely because the concern of this IDEA Symposium is not to question interior space and globalisation, but to question whether the interior has changed because of local conditions, or rather how is the condition of interior space already inscribed in the question of place.

In framing the theme our intention is to understand how theory and practice is transposed to ‘distant lands’, and how ideas shift from one place to another. To this extent the Symposium invited papers on the export, translation and adoption of theories and practices of interior design to differing climates, cultures, and landscapes; and reciprocally on how locality contests or alters the importation of ideas. This process, which we might refer to as a shift from ‘the centre to the margins’, seeks both new perspectives on the adoption of Euro-American design ideas abroad, and their return to their place of origin.

New and emerging places/spaces of the interior also inform the Symposium theme, particularly regarding directions and differences in our understanding of the interior and interiority, both real and virtual, and an ever-changing relationship to city, suburb and country. Keeping within the Symposium theme the intention is to invite examination of other places, particularly on the margins of the discipline’s domain, and give a platform for this discussion.

The broad and overlapping range of subject matter in this collection of papers raise a considerable diversity of tentative proposals and tangential provocations. They cover a range of issues from a field or territory of Interior Design that is not constrained by formal hermeticism but is open, irregular, and fragmentary. Reading the papers in various combinations, suggests a number of dialectical relations; whether read from the particularities of locations as diverse as Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Singapore, Canada and the USA, or from an indexical reading of home, objects, collections, and erasure, much of the writing is concerned with occupants and their relationship to space.

What emerges is a shift away from the interior as an object of architecture. Consideration of location, identity, and a deep suspicion and distrust of the heroic pervades many of the essays. For some, an understanding of the interior through not only systems of representation (maps, drawings and photographs), but through gender and/or politics of space are evident. Others refocus the interior around identity, localised cultures and urbanisation, opening questions of how we map the interior to the city, and the impact of political/urban situations.
The problem of creating home in the knowledge and material practice of other cultures was not only Frederic Leighton’s challenge, but was evident through both colonial settlement, and returning native citizens.

The Symposium’s invited speakers’ present new research that traces the rise of shifts in the progression of the interior through investigating the transposability of interior spaces and their material arrangements across continents and genres. Penny Sparke’s writing revisits and extends debates on the style and aesthetics of the modern interior drawn from Euro-American paradigms; her thesis being that such interior models, when applied to local and other conditions, can provoke adaptations that produce new interiorities. In his reconstruction of the lost interior in Learning from Las Vegas Michael Ostwald speculates on the visibility of overlooked or unrecorded interior spaces as sites for a critical spatial history.

The 2010 IDEA Symposium has gathered together a range of international perspectives on a somewhat familiar yet overlooked subject; the shifting and adaptable interior that functions within and beyond the colonial and post-colonial and the diasporic. This contribution to a recent increase of interest in the interior within a number of disciplines is an incentive to analyse design and decoration more closely. The theme illustrates how the study of the interior is shifting from its location in architectural and domestic history, to cultural, artistic and social history, supported by philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Endnotes

I’m delighted to be here and I would like to thank all those who made it possible. I’m especially pleased to be able to offer a few words at the start of what is clearly going to be an extremely interesting conference which is addressing such an important and relevant theme – the past, current and future nature and role of the interior in the context of globalisation. It is a theme that interests me enormously, and to which I am glad to be able to make a small contribution.

In the field of architecture, the question of the impact of globalisation, glocalisation (hybridity) and localisation on the 20th century built and material environment has been debated for some time now. The effect of different climatic conditions, of geographic specificities, of local materials, of varied landscapes, and of local cultural identities, histories, traditions and memories, on architecture and the built environment, has led to many discussions about developments outside Europe and the US. In addition many efforts have been made to modify, subvert or simply ignore what might be called the western-centric modern architectural ‘model’ in an attempt to avoid what are often seen as the evils of globalisation and the need for more localised thinking.

There is nothing essentially new about the idea that architectural models can be exported and appropriated in places beyond those of their origins. The stylistic differences, within Europe, of northern and southern baroque architecture in the 17th century; the national variants of the late 19th Art Nouveau style; and, more recently, the local variants of international modernism are well known. The mechanisms for exporting architectural styles and ideologies were, and remain clear; from the movements of people and things across national boundaries; to the effects of colonisation, especially in the relation to the exportation of materials, goods and architectural typologies; to the impact of the mass media in the form of international exhibitions, journals and magazines; to, more recently, the global influence of TV programmes – from interior make-over shows to ‘Grand Designs’. International trade and commerce has clearly played a key role within this, giving us westernised shopping malls all over the world that all contain the same shops and brands wherever we are; branded hotel and restaurant chains that look the same in Seoul or Sydney, etc. The interior spaces of McDonalds restaurants and of Armani stores hold few surprises in whichever city one is travelling. These commercial settings carry the same messages of modernity, consumerism and social aspiration wherever one encounters them. It is a familiar story that I don’t need to repeat here.

To some extent the interior follows architecture, especially within the neo-modernist context just alluded to. I would like to suggest, however, that while the interior is inevitably part and parcel of the architectural globalisation story, especially in this neo-modernist context, it also parts company from it as the interior, especially in the contexts of modernity and post-modernity. It is subject to different, and I would argue, more complex forces. Where the private dwelling is concerned for example, abstract concepts such as domesticity, interiority, privacy and the individual identities of inhabitants become all important. These are of course,
also heavily influenced by developments within western industrial culture, especially its social and psychological effects upon people, but they are not directly linked to architecture.

I would like to ask today: What were, and are, the meanings of the interior within modern western industrial culture? But also, given that western industrial culture is collapsing around our ears, can the relationship between the local and the global be redefined?

So I would like to offer a reading of the 20th century modern, western-centric interior that focuses on its multiple, often conflicting meanings and ask the question: Is it a reading that is only meaningful within western industrial culture or can it be transposed? Are there local equivalents and challenges to the model? Is it a model that is out of date and needs to be rethought?

In my conclusion to *The Modern Interior* I wrote that, perhaps in the context of virtual space, in which new inside and outside spaces can be accessed through a computer screen – which can be viewed at home, at work, in the gym, in the garden, in an aeroplane, or on top of a mountain – the idea of modernity, of the separate spheres, and above all of the modern interior, cease to have any meaning.

I came to that conclusion as a result of an extended discussion about the notion of the western modern interior as it developed from the middle of the 19th century. I would like to share some of that discussion with you today in order to ascertain whether or not we might be able to think about the issues relating to globalism and localism in a way that goes beyond the architectural discussion.

My definition of the modern interior was not primarily focused on the question of style, or styles, but rather on the idea that it was formed by the everyday experiences of western industrial modernity and that it could be expressed in multiple stylistic languages. As I thought longer and harder about what lay at the root of the western modern of the interior I began to realise that there were two key determining forces. The first was the changing nature of ‘the dwelling’ and the emergence of the concept of ‘home’ in the mid 19th century, ie, a dwelling in which for the most part paid work was absent and which was focused on the concept of ‘domesticity’, a place for familial values, for privacy, for safety and refuge etc. This stood in sharp contrast to the place of work – the office, the factory, the shop, the bank etc which stood for quite different values, linked to production, commerce and trade. In turn the home became the destination for the consumed goods that are produced in the public arena.

My ideas in this area were stimulated by a scene I came across in a Calgary shopping mall. Going back to the 19th century I discovered that this interior dualism was not new. Two distinct languages had been developed for these different interiors, one of them private and the other public.

However as soon as they emerged they began to invade each other’s territories. From this I realised that it was not the separation of the 2 types of interior that characterised its modern incarnation but rather the inevitable tension that was created between them and their innate instability. This was not an architectural phenomenon per se but rather a result of industrialisation that had brought about the separation of production from consumption. It was
also linked to the impossibility in a fast moving industrialising society, of categories of class and gender to stay fixed in a world where identities were constantly being formed and re-formed. The ‘separation of the spheres’ as an ideology but also to a significant extent a reality, was focused on the middle classes and had a strongly gendered implication – ie, stereotypically, men going out to work and women staying at home but going out to consume goods for the home – hence the need for domesticity to travel with them.

The modern public arena interiors of work, culture and commerce were equally unstable, but for different reasons. This was less a direct result of industrialisation than of progressive architects and designers wishing, for political reasons, to eliminate the idea of bourgeois domesticity from the dwelling. To do this they sought to inject the rationality and functionality of the modern workplace (the factory or the office) into the modern dwelling. The result was a rationalisation and a simplification of the home, starting with the kitchen, that was hugely influential in the inter-war years and beyond.

My book explores the forces that shaped the modern interior seen from this perspective, and the values that developed alongside them, which in turn I argue, determined the visual, material and spatial nature of the modern interior.

1. The language and meaning of the private interior.

Writing in the 1930s the German cultural critic, Walter Benjamin explained that ‘Under Louis Philippe the private individual makes his entrance on the stage of history – the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work… the former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office’. He went on to explain that within the interior the dweller confronts his fantasies, looking out on it as if he were in a box at the opera.

By the middle of the 19th century the language of the domestic interior as exemplified by the Victorian parlour was in place. As the Calgary Mall image shows us, it is still alive and well. This aspect of the modern interior is characterised visually, materially and spatially by a lack of interest in the outside world; a sense of comfort, a lack of unity, an appreciation of soft textiles, knick knacks and personal memorabilia and the inclusion of nature in the form of plants. It was not primarily an interior language that was determined by architecture but rather one that focused on the lives that went on within it and its social and psychological function.

On a more abstract level it was an interior that encouraged subjectivity (especially feminine subjectivity), individual expression and interiority. It was a destination both for hand-made and consumed goods and a place in which the middle-class housewife’s main role was to arrange its component parts. As 19th century commercial culture grew more sophisticated and the need to create consumer desire for mass-produced goods grew stronger, so the domestic interior was transformed into an idealised space in which people were promised the fulfilment of both their personal and social ambitions and aspirations. This idealisation of the interior, and its consequent close relationship with the mass media, was at its most obvious in its presence in exhibitions, department stores, shop windows, museums, trade catalogues, mass market magazines, and in more recent times, films and television programmes. Gradually it became increasingly hard to distinguish between the real and the ideal interior and the link between the interior and aspiration became an indissoluble one. Charles Rice has written about the ‘double interior’ that is both the real one and the represented one. Increasingly the
image of the interior became as more, important, for aspiring consumers, as its real incarnation. This dualism was a direct result of the idealisation of the interior which grew from the economic and social pressures of mass consumption within western consumer culture. It was bridged by the goods that found their way from the marketplace into the home.

As part of this process the interior moved away from architecture and moved closer to the fast-moving world of fashionable dress. Like dress the interior came to play an important role in identity formation and social display for increasingly large numbers of people. Mirroring this, for example, the late 19th century department stores moved from selling dress to also merchandising components of the interior. This was particularly visible in the 1925 exhibition in Paris where a number of leading department stores created interior settings, designed by the leading decorators or ‘ensembliers’ of the day, as a means of publicising and ‘branding’ themselves. The couturier also provided an important model for the new interior decorator who operated in a very similar way.

This commercially focused consumer culture with a highly gendered and idealised view of the interior was fully in place by the mid 20th century. Alert to the workings of the fashion system it has transformed itself visually over the century since its formation, embracing a sequence of decorative styles from Victorian eclecticism to Art Nouveau to Art Deco and finally American streamlined Moderne. It developed its own professional, the interior decorator and, as a visual language, it trickled down through society through the medium of exhibitions and widely disseminated magazines. It also owed its existence to the expanding body of domestic advice books over the period. While it owed its origins to the emergence of the home it spread the message of domesticity and interiority far beyond its boundaries. It can still be found in coffee-shops and dentists' waiting rooms and it can be created both by amateur and professional. Its primary message is still one of comfort, refuge and personal identity but this cannot be separated by its aspirational role and its place within the dynamics of mass consumption. It should be added that it is a face of the interior that is not embraced by high culture nor by the academy. Most interior design courses would characterise it as the world of plumping up cushions and look down at it in favour of a more architecturally defined view of the interior. The interior decorator still has a lot of cultural baggage to deal with.

2. Public interiors

Most of the modern public interiors that were created in the west in the 19th century were linked to the worlds of trade, commerce and productivity. Visually they were characterised by their lightness and their airiness and they only prioritised the comfort of consumers as much as they were protected from the elements. The emphasis in the public space of trade and commerce was on the visibility of the goods to be consumed, while in the less public spaces of work, the factory and the office, the efficiency of manufacturing and administrative processes that went on within them was uppermost. The emphasis was less aesthetic than functional. Their inhabitants were more likely to be seen as anonymous masses or workers, than as personalised individuals. Their legacy lies in the interiors of our airports and shopping malls, which on one level are little more than sheds housing the activities that go on within them. These interiors also act as spaces of control and surveillance, demonstrating the process of ‘interiorisation’ that has been a strong force within modernist urban and suburban planning and which is still with us today.
The language of the modern public interior was transformed by the architects and designers of the Modern Movement into an ideological programme. In their hands the visual languages of the interiors dedicated to production and commerce were turned into a political statement about the rejection of bourgeois domesticity and a desire to create a democratic, functional architecture (and, by implication, interior) that broke down the distinction between the world of the private and the public. Indeed the language of the latter was transferred into the former. Given that it was architects for the most part who drove this programme, the interior was pulled back into their territory.

This manifested in a number of different ways in the first half of the 20th century. It began to be evident in the work of the turn of the century proto-modernists, the architect-designers, Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Glasgow, Van de Velde in Belgium, Peter Behrens in Germany, Josef Hoffmann in Vienna and Frank Lloyd Wright in the USA, who sought to create a ‘whole work of art’, a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’, in which there was a seamless link between architecture and the interior. Importantly, it was the architect who had total control over them both. Their interventions were in both the private and the public spheres and they sought to erode the distinction between them.

While the turn of the century architect-designers tended to bridge the private/public gap by developing a language for the interior that grew out of the private dwelling and was taken subsequently into the public arena (similar to the way in which the bourgeois Victorian interior had moved between those two worlds), the next development of the modern western interior that sought to deny the concept of the ‘separate spheres’ depended upon a transference that moved in the other direction. The space planning exercises, undertaken by men such as Frederick Winslow Taylor, that were part of the movement known as scientific management (or Taylorism) set out to rationalise and make more efficient the work that went on in factories and offices. This was quickly seized upon as something that could also be applied to the home. In the hands of Christine Frederick and others the Rational Interior quickly became a reality.

Other aspects of the production rather than the consumption culture of western industrial modernity also impacted on the interior at this time. They included the idea of standardisation that emphasised the low cost, sameness and mass availability of things; from Ford automobiles to simple white cups and saucers. Where the interior was concerned modernist architects went in search of the ‘minimal dwelling’ and redefined interior objects as items of equipment rather than of memory. On yet another level, modern interiors were proposed that didn’t simply replicate the standardised object as it came off the production line, but took their lead rather from the abstract ways in which fine artists had transformed the philosophy of mass production into a simple aesthetic language made of basic geometric elements and colours in combination with each other.

By the 1930s a variety of modern interior styles were available in the western marketplace, each of them combining responses to different faces of western industrial modernity. Those different faces of the modern interior as described are still with us today, as we have seen in the Calgary shopping mall, from the Victorian parlour to the neo-modernist shopping mall.
Conclusion

What I hope I have demonstrated here is that the westernised model of the modern interior is a complex one. It emerged as a response to the development of western industrial modernity on a number of levels, both to the rationalism that underpinned industrial culture but also to the 'irrationality'; if you like, of the consumer culture that was an inevitable result of industrialisation. Where the real modern interior was concerned this resulted in a hybridity that was a consequence of the tension that grew out of this dualism. Within this hybridity the influence of architecture was ever present but not all encompassing.

This model of the modern interior, which I would argue is still with us even though it is constantly being redefined, is informed therefore, by various faces of western industrial modernity. To return to the subject of this conference, the effects of globalisation, the importation of the western model to ‘other places’ this tells us that this is perhaps more complex an issue than we may have thought. Not only does the non-western interior need to think about all the geographical, climatic, material, technological and identity issues that a local architecture has to consider it also has to address questions that relate to the nature of the consumer culture that is driving one face of the interior. Can the western emphasis on conspicuous consumption be modified locally? Can the relationship between the public and the private spheres be re-thought? What are the class and gender implications at a local level? What are the relationships between the professionals and the amateur makers of interiors? How does the interior interface with the mass media? How does a notion of the ideal interior relate to its lived-in equivalents? These are all difficult questions that need to be discussed within a broader debate about the possibility or otherwise of moving away from or beyond western economic and cultural models in general. The answers will vary according to the level of development of the locality in question. It is dangerous to make generalisations. I hope I have shown, however, that the interior in the context of modernity and post-modernity is rather more complex than it may seem and that the answers that have been provide for a glocal architecture will and will not provide solutions for the development of a glocal interior.

To return to my quote at the end of my book about the possibility that with the arrival of the digital world the modern interior as we have known it might have ceased to exist – if we add to this the impact of the collapse of the economy this looks like a very good moment to think about the meaning of the interior, in whichever places, as we move further into the 21st century.

Thank you.
Ignored or Repressed: reconstructing the missing interior in *Learning from Las Vegas*.

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**Abstract:** The book *Learning from Las Vegas* was famously credited with promoting a shift in architectural thinking away from a contrived formalism and towards a more vibrant, vernacular tradition. It set out to deride one movement (the International Style) for its uncritical ubiquity, while promoting an alternative universal paradigm, postmodernism, which relies on the adoption of local references within a spatio-semiotic system. While the central message of *Learning from Las Vegas* has been repeatedly revisited, the present paper offers an alternative, discursive exploration of the work that revolves around one of its critical omissions, the interior, and the question of transposability. This paper undertakes two, interconnected, tasks. First, it traces moments in *Learning from Las Vegas* where the interior is either acknowledged or is structural in the central thesis. Second, using archival records and published materials, it reconstructs the key interior spaces that the authors of *Learning from Las Vegas* inhabited while undertaking their research in 1968. Through this combined process the paper asks whether the interior of Las Vegas was simply forgotten or whether it was deliberately ignored and if so why?

**Introduction**

First published in 1972, Robert Venturi’s, Denise Scott Brown’s and Steven Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas* is an iconic example of twentieth century architectural theory.¹ It has been praised as ‘a seminal statement in the history and theory of architecture’ and as ‘one of the defining texts of postmodernism.’² Every major compilation of twentieth century architectural writing includes an extract from this landmark work and almost every compendium of design from the last century makes reference to its themes. For example, Joan Ockman, when constructing a history of architectural thinking in the twentieth century, chose the year 1968 as the critical turning point.³ In 1968 Venturi and Scott Brown undertook the ‘scientific’ fieldwork that would lead to *Learning from Las Vegas* and published the first postmodern manifesto in architecture.⁴ Bernard Tschumi describes the change that took place in 1968 as a generational shift; the moment when ‘descriptive’, ‘prescriptive’, or propositional texts were replaced with works that sought, through ‘radical questioning’, to ‘correct the ills of society.’⁵ Kate Nesbitt, suggests that the genesis for this generational shift can be traced to the 1966 publication of Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, even though it wasn’t until four years later and the release of *Learning from Las Vegas* that these ideas would reach a wider audience.⁶ Regardless of whether, as Charles Jencks proposes,⁷ a precise date can be identified for the death of Modernism, the publication of *Learning from Las Vegas* would certainly be complicit in its passing.

For Gilbert Lupfer, the central contribution *Learning from Las Vegas* makes to the history of architecture is that it presents the built environment as bearer of meaning: ‘architecture as a means of communication.’⁸ In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi and Scott Brown provocatively argue that the ‘ordinary and ugly’ architecture of the commercial mainstreet is a
valid urban condition and that parallels can be drawn between the Las Vegas strip and the Roman Piazza or between grocery store parking lots and the gardens of Versailles. In contrast, they condemn the ‘heroic and original’ propositions of Modernity decrying its reliance on contrived formal compositions to achieve an often-unwarranted monumentality. By developing a rhetoric of ‘ducks’ and ‘decorated sheds’, and a heraldic reading of advertising, Learning from Las Vegas presents a powerful manifesto for a popularist architecture of signs and symbols. However, despite embracing Las Vegas, and celebrating its lessons at an urban and architectural scale, the spaces that traditionally harbour humanity, the interiors, are rarely mentioned in the work. Indeed, for a book that describes the results of a ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ analysis of the experience of a city, the space where the team presumably spent the majority of their time, the hotel interior, is never directly mentioned.

Whereas past research has examined the architectural and urban propositions in Learning from Las Vegas, this paper is concerned with what it says, or more correctly doesn’t say, about the interior. Poststructuralist analytical techniques have repeatedly demonstrated that it is both possible and productive to examine the hidden or sublimated qualities of a text. While the present paper does not use any overt poststructuralist strategies, it borrows from both the writings of Derrida in philosophy, and Ingraham in architecture, to seek out those instances where the repressed becomes either visible or structural in the text. That is, those moments in Learning from Las Vegas when architecture’s ‘other’, the interior, is either acknowledged (and made visible) or is tactically deployed to support an argument (and is thereby structural or foundational). While it might be possible to draw conclusions from a detailed review of this dimension alone, the present research interweaves this analysis with a reconstruction of the actual interior experienced by the group while they undertook their fieldwork in 1968. Through the interleaving of these two approaches a set of common themes are uncovered and an argument is developed that the interior in Learning from Las Vegas has not simply been ignored, it has been actively repressed. Not only has the interior been repressed, but this action is closely associated with issues of sexuality, commodification and transposability.

The visible, the structural and the actual

In October 1968, following three weeks preparation, Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s team arrived in California to undertake the fieldwork for Learning from Las Vegas. As well as the two project leaders, the team comprised thirteen students from Yale University and Steven Izenour, a teaching assistant. The group travelled to the west coast of the USA for a total of fourteen days, spending the first four in Los Angeles and the remainder in Las Vegas. While in Las Vegas they set out to methodically map the city, paying particular attention to the relationship between cars, signs and buildings. Over 5000 colour images were taken during the ten-day period, along with several films, and around forty analytical figures were produced. The focus on documentary images was deliberate; the strategy of ‘replacing the human eye’s selective perception with the camera’s mechanical gaze’ was central to Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s desire to work with ‘an absence of emotion.’ This objective quality was critical to their ‘studio research problem’ because Venturi and Scott Brown were relying on the ‘scientific’ quality of their fieldwork to support a ‘revolutionary’ vision for architecture; a paradigm shift that would undermine the apparent hegemony of the International style and replace it with a new architecture of signs and symbols. The final title of the work, Learning from Las Vegas, directly suggests that a wide range of lessons can be developed from the close and objective observation of the Strip and that, moreover, these can be repeated in
most developed countries. However, while the fieldwork associated with Learning from Las Vegas commenced in 1968, the groundwork began three years prior to that time.

It was Scott Brown who initially proposed that the Las Vegas Strip was an ideal topic for architectural research. She records being inspired by the writings of Thomas Wolfe who, in 1965, described Las Vegas as the quintessential city of signs and sexuality. For Wolfe, Las Vegas provides a physical and emotional ‘stimulus’ that is ‘both visual and sexual’; its streets are lined with advertising signs and its casinos with people clad in ‘sexually provocative’ attire; ‘buttocks décolletage’ and ‘ack-ack breasts’ being de rigueur. However, whereas Wolfe’s essay famously divides its attention between the urban character of the strip and the eroticised interiors of its casinos and hotel rooms, Venturi and Scott Brown seem to have restricted their analysis to the former, semiotic dimension, of Wolfe’s work ignoring what he had to say about the interior.

Scott Brown visited Las Vegas for the first time in 1965 and in the following year, this time with her fiancée Robert Venturi, the couple passed through Las Vegas on the way to their wedding in Santa Monica. Scott Brown describes their initial reaction to the Strip as being both ‘dazed’ and ‘dazzled’; ‘both loving and hating what we saw, we were jolted clear out of our aesthetic skins.’ Golec argues that in a city dominated by ‘gambling and sex’, Venturi and Scott Brown ‘found beauty’. Rem Koolhaas even suggests that Las Vegas was the symbolic locus of their romance, describing the documentary photographs as depicting a team lead by ‘two lovers’; a ‘romantic couple’ on a ‘honeymoon.’ This observation is significant because it was in the 1960s that the concept of a ‘honeymoon in Vegas’ attained a special significance in American culture; a status which Venturi and Scott Brown would have found hard to ignore given its spatial and temporal proximity to their own nuptials.

Barbara Penner observes that, ‘enabled by the motorcar, the highway system and mass tourism’, in the 1960s the honeymoon was transformed from a simple celebration of marriage, to a ritual of ‘hedonism and pleasure.’ In particular, hotel rooms in places like Las Vegas were being designed to encourage the transformation of sex from a private act into a theatrical one. For example, in the late 1960s hotel interiors in North America increasingly took on the qualities of romantic stage sets, their props and choreography guiding couples from one fixed coital encounter (on the bed) to another (in the bath or in front of the fireplace). In other words, they showed young couples how ‘it’ could be done within a carefully circumscribed menu of possibilities.

Given the popular cultural connotations of a ‘honeymoon in Vegas’ the almost complete lack of commentary about Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s own accommodation in Las Vegas is striking. For example, we do know that Venturi and Scott Brown stayed at the Stardust Hotel in late 1968 at which time it only had six room types. The three standard rooms (‘Chateau’, ‘Satellite’ and ‘Galaxy’) typically featured rich orange fabrics on the curtains and beds, with orange, velvet wallpaper highlights, thick, shag-pile carpets, mirror fronted bars, plush lounges and heart shaped basins embracing oval baths. The lights and furnishings were an incongruous mix of 1960s ‘modern’ (brass, steel and frosted glass) and mock-Louis XIV-classical. The ‘Executive’, ‘Penthouse’ and ‘Honeymoon’ rooms were decorated with zebra-skin covered feature walls, white leather lounges and a white spiral staircase leading to a mezzanine with a vibrating bed. However, in stark contrast with the reality of their accommodation, in Learning from Las Vegas only a single description of a hotel interior is
provided. The room is ‘14 feet wide by 27, 24, or 21 feet long.’ Entry to the room is by way of ‘a double-loaded corridor’ with a ‘luggage rack, closet and shelf space on one side; dressing room with sink and bathroom on other.’ The remainder of the room is given over to a combined ‘bed-sitting room’ with a ‘TV opposite the bed; luggage rack, desk, and TV counter in one continuous counter top.’

While the reality of their experience of the interior was rich and sensual, the typical room is rendered characterless by the objective description. It is as if Venturi and Scott Brown were seeking to repress the potential (or actual) phenomenological and experiential qualities of the room. Moreover, given the cultural and personal significance of the concept of a ‘honeymoon in Vegas’, the objectification of the hotel interior also suggests a desire to deny the erotic or sexual potential of the interior. This strategy has strong parallels to Venturi's and Scott Brown's selective appropriation of only one half of Wolfe’s vision of Las Vegas; the city of signs. The other half, the erotic interior – Wolfe's site of petty larceny, languid sex and lurid dreams – is completely ignored. This framing of the hotel room, and the suppression of its sensual and emotive potential, offers the first of a series of clues about the interior in Learning from Las Vegas, but further examples are needed to confirm the initial impression.

A close reading of Learning from Las Vegas reveals that, including the overview of the standard hotel room, interiors are described explicitly on only four occasions. In addition, to this, there are also several minor references to interiors secluded within the analytical diagrams. Only two of the descriptions of the interior are in any way ‘structural’; they are the ‘interior Oasis’ and the ‘roadside interior’. This first of these examples commences with an objective description of the interior spatial sequence of a Casino which ‘progresses from gambling areas to dining, entertainment, and shopping areas.’ Venturi and Scott Brown then note the ‘exaggerated separation’ between the environmental qualities of the exterior and the interior describing the latter as having the ‘quality of an oasis.’ Whereas the exterior is bright and hot, the interior is cool and ‘always very dark’ creating an ideal space for ‘privacy, protection, concentration, and control.’ The space of the interior is therefore illusory; ‘artificial light obscures rather than defines its boundaries.’ Whereas the normal architectural interior is lit from outside and its walls and surfaces are defined, in the casino the gambling machines are the source of the light, and the architecture is hidden.

The evocation of the interior as oasis is a carefully choreographed step that supports the greater proposition in Learning from Las Vegas that signs are more important than architecture. Thus, Venturi and Scott Brown argue that the commercial ‘Strip is virtually all signs’ whereas historic building types, like the ‘Middle Eastern bazaar’, contain ‘no signs’. For this argument to be sustained, the modern interior has to be repeatedly positioned as a site lacking conventional phenomenological stimulus in much the same way that even the honeymoon suite at the Stardust hotel is rendered in objective prose. If Venturi and Scott Brown acknowledge the sensual nature of the interior, then their neat structural division, between the city of signs and the interior of illusion, dominated by symbols, breaks down.

Venturi and Scott Brown argue that the historic commercial interior does not require signs because in the bazaar, ‘communication works through proximity’ and the visitor can smell, touch and taste the produce on display. In the historic bazaar, not only are all of the senses stimulated, but the ever-present ‘explicit oral persuasion’ of the merchant reminds the visitor that everything is for sale. This argument, that the Las Vegas vernacular has learnt to do without sensual stimulus because signs communicate more than architecture, is repeated in
several variations. For example, Venturi and Scott Brown describe the casinos as ‘bazaarlike in the immediacy to the sidewalk of their clicking and tinkling gambling machines’\textsuperscript{36}, a phrase that suggests that aural, if not oral, persuasion, might still operate in the interior. But within the building, the interior is described, once more, in purely objective terms: ‘[t]he building is low because air conditioning demands low spaces, and merchandising techniques discourage second floors; its architecture is neutral because it can hardly be seen from the road.’\textsuperscript{37} Once again in this example, the phenomenological qualities of the interior are suppressed to ensure that the semiotic argument is privileged.

The second example where the interior in \textit{Learning From Las Vegas} is revealed as serving a structural purpose is found in the figure entitled ‘the roadside interior’; a comparison between ‘old’ and ‘new’ monumentality.\textsuperscript{38} This figure seeks to differentiate the historic, or Modern interior of the church nave (a space which is ‘high’, ‘open’, ‘uncluttered’ and designed for ‘communal crowds’) from the interior of the typical Las Vegas Chapel (a space which is ‘low’, ‘enclosed’, ‘glittering’ and mazelike serving the needs of ‘separate people’). Whereas the historic nave was a monumental space signifying the presence of a divine authority, the Vegas chapel is a low space (for ease of air-conditioning) and with little lighting (for hiding its cheap finishes and unwashed surfaces). The diagrams they provide show the historic and modern architecture deeply articulated to capture natural light, to encourage voices raised in song and to accommodate crowds. In contrast the Strip Chapel is long and low, with indistinct edges, and a splash of glittering light at its core next to a covered pavilion. The electric light is the symbol of a non-specific divinity, an artificial focus for a bureaucratic procedure, and the baldachin, signifies a place to stand during the short, non-denominational service. The remainder of the space is hidden from view. If it wasn’t for the two signs (the light and the canopy) Venturi and Scott Brown imply that the space could have been used for any other activity. Indeed, without these signs it is apparently indistinguishable from nearby grocery stores and pole dancing clubs; or at least this is what the reader is meant to believe. In reality the differences are more than symbolic.

In August 1965, at the time Venturi and Scott Brown were first visiting Las Vegas, the local justice of the peace, James Brennan, performed more than 70 marriages a day stating that he had ‘got [the ceremony] down from five to three minutes’ and, that he ‘could have married them en masse, but they are people, not cattle.’\textsuperscript{39} This, the stark reality of the wedding business in Las Vegas, tends to undermine the illusory interior of the Roadside Chapel with its isolated symbols and dark, mazelike passages. The wedding chapel should not be compared with a cathedral nave; their purpose is completely dissimilar. As Joan Didion observed in the early 1960s the Chapel only served to legitimise sex.\textsuperscript{40} Similarly, the purpose of Nevada’s famous ‘quickie divorce’ system is not to end marriages, but to dissolve the fiduciary bonds that enabled guilt-free sex. So, in this sense Venturi and Scott Brown may be right in suggesting that the interior fabric is less important than the symbols it contains, but by stopping their analysis at the symbolic level, they curiously avoid the more interesting and complex rationale for the interior.

In these three major examples, the ‘hotel room’, the ‘oasis’ and the ‘roadside’ chapel, Venturi and Scott Brown position the interior as a neutral backdrop for visual symbols. While this may be at least partially reasonable for the case of the Chapel, it remains unconvincing for the hotel room and the casino interior. However, the most striking interior that the team from Yale would have experienced in Las Vegas is not even alluded to in the text, even though it was a space they must have passed by and most probably experienced.
The interior as constellation of signs

During the fieldwork for *Learning from Las Vegas* the group from Yale stayed, free of change, at the Stardust hotel. They were also supported by free car hire and special access was provided to millionaire playboy Howard Hughes’ personal helicopter. Scott Brown was invited to the ‘gala opening of the Circus Circus Casino’ and arranged for the rest of the studio group to ‘semilegally’ attend as well. While all of this information is recorded about the group’s time in Las Vegas, significant details are missing. For example, Venturi and Scott Brown describe the Stardust Hotel where they were staying as ‘one of the finest on the strip’; but they neglect to mention that its fame was largely as a result of its glamorous, if risqué, Lido revue. The *Lido* ‘production, imported from Paris, and featuring topless dancers’ was, by 1968, one of the most spectacular shows ever staged in Las Vegas. Tickets for the *Lido* review were made available only to people staying in the Stardust and so Venturi and Scott Brown would have had the opportunity to see the show, even if they turned it down.

In its 1968 incarnation the *Lido* ‘set piece’ featured a pirate adventure with its predominantly statuesque French and Nordic cast dressed as prisoners. At its climax the stage was filled with water as the ship sank and the cast, now largely naked, swam to safety across the back-lit sea. While the *Lido* review was famous for presenting its cast clad only in feathers and jewels, the Stardust also had a parallel burlesque review in the secondary ballroom, less than 100 metres from where the *Learning from Las Vegas* group stayed. The Yale group even recorded the existence of this show, entitled the ‘Polynesian Review’ in their map of the ‘written word’ just as they carefully recorded that these ‘living dolls’ of the Pacific were performing nightly in their documentary photographs. However, their famous physiognomic diagram in *Learning from Las Vegas* of the sign contains a curiously Freudian slippage when the ‘living dolls’ of the Pacific are mis-transcribed as simply ‘naked’. Was this a mistake or an ironic attempt at ‘truth in advertising’? Those who attended the show would have seen an interpretation of a traditional island dance, along with copious, largely female, nudity. The ersatz island sojourn was completed with a complimentary Pineapple liqueur cocktail in the nearby Tiki Lounge. Once again, it is not known if the team saw this show, eat in the Stardust’s Aku Aku restaurant or drank at its Pacific themed bar, but it would have been impossible to ignore its presence.

The third critical feature of the Stardust interior is the infamous foyer show. According to the *Las Vegas Journal* of 1965, the most startling interior decoration in Las Vegas was to be found in the foyer of the Lido ballroom and cafe, where a series of platforms were automatically lowered from the ceiling and then raised again, each one supporting a topless showgirl draped in gold cloth. On its opening night in 1958, a journalist describes the arrival of this interior entertainment as follows.

> House lights dim, there’s a few bars of overture, and from the ceiling of the Continental cafe descent platforms, each with a bare-bosomed beauty, standing cool as you please, and before the surprise has caused near-sighted gentlemen to repair their thoughtlessness by putting on glasses, the girls are wished upward into the rafters.

As Ralph Pearl in the *Las Vegas Sun* notes, the foyer show featured a ‘lot of naked chests attached to pretty gals [who] came down on elevators from the ceiling.’ In the late 1960s, a showgirl called Gloria Tiffany, ‘who rode down from the rafters on a large disc [even] slid off
[the disc] and onto a guest table. The guest was hurt [...] and so was Tiffany. “You could see the imprint of a Stardust ashtray on her thigh.”

While it is not recorded if Venturi and Scott Brown’s team attended the Lido or the Polynesian review, they documented the signs for both of these shows in their diagrammatic analysis but never mentioned them in the text. Even though the team may have been able to avoid both of these performances, it is unlikely that they would have spent 10 days in the Stardust Hotel without seeing the foyer show with its famous platform girls. Yet, this important, or even unique dimension of the interior of Las Vegas is never mentioned. Perhaps the task of providing an objective description of this interior and its unique ‘decoration’ would have undermined Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s primary agenda, and this is why it is missing completely, as too are any references to the various ballrooms and stage shows.

‘What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas’

Kenneth Frampton and Neil Leech have both been critical of Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s veneration of the sign as an example of a new type of urban or architectural monument. They separately observe that Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s isolation of the sign from its meaning results in a range of jarring conceptual faults in the foundations of their theory. For example, neon advertising for groceries, gas, gambling and girls, may all be signs, but one of them is about the commodification of sexuality and the exploitation of women. Frampton argues that Learning from Las Vegas condones ‘ruthless kitsch’ in architecture by providing a ‘mask for the concealment of the brutality of our own environment.’ Leech is more direct when he states that in the neon signs reproduced by Venturi and Scott Brown ‘[w]omen are treated not as women but as commodified images […] decorative, sexually charged accoutrements.’ For Leech this is the central problem in Learning from Las Vegas, the lack of commitment towards an ‘important ethical question.’ But if Venturi and Scott Brown are exposed to such criticism for their lack of judgement concerning a few neon signs, then they are especially vulnerable to attack for any account of the interior of the Stardust Casino with its ballroom, lobby, cafe and hotel rooms.

Forewarned by Wolfe, the interior in Las Vegas was always going to be problematic for Venturi and Scott Brown. For their spatio-semiotic argument to work, they could not acknowledge the phenomenological qualities of the interior, however obvious. Thus, on those rare occasions when the interior is described in Learning from Las Vegas, it is often the subject of an inconsistent and clumsy attempt to achieve objectivity. In the more extreme cases, like the Lido platform show, the interior is simply erased or removed from the text; as if blindly hoping its presence and proximity is never revealed. While this explanation for the absence of the interior is most likely the solution, there is an additional, attenuating factor that may have played a role in suppressing the interior.

In the 1960s Thomas Kuhn identified the three key elements required to encourage a paradigm shift, or ‘revolution’ in a discipline. Kuhn’s work was highly influential at Yale in the half decade before Venturi and Scott Brown decided to study Las Vegas. Indeed, the propositional structure of Learning from Las Vegas owes much to Kuhn’s blueprint for revolution. The first of Kuhn’s three precursors for change is that the evidence for the new proposition must have been collected in a scientific or objective manner. This is precisely what Venturi and Scott Brown set out to do and it is reinforced in their descriptions of the work. The second is that the evidence must contain a reasoned critique of the failure of a past
paradigm, or of the benefits of a new one. The rejection of monumental Modernism and the counter-proposition of a ‘city of signs’ is Venturi’s and Scott Brown’s response to the second requirement. The third element that is needed to support a revolution is that the new system must be universally applicable; a criterion known as transposability. While Venturi and Scott Brown were able to argue that the relationship between cars, signs and buildings was of growing international relevance, they were unable, or unwilling, to propose a similar argument about the transposability of the Las Vegas interior. If they had attempted to construct such a proposition they would have been forced to confront the very dimensions of the city that they had so rigorously denied; the sensual, phenomenological and commodified nature of the interior. Ultimately, regardless of the explanation the inference is that in the case of platform displays, honeymoon suites, burlesque reviews, roadside chapels and pole dancing clubs, Venturi and Scott Brown believe that what happens in the Vegas interior should stay in the Vegas interior.

Endnotes

1 While the authorship of Learning from Las Vegas is conventionally attributed to three people – Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour – many of the sections of the book had been previously published or circulated as the work of just the first two named authors. Moreover, it is also apparent that some sections, like the preface to the revised edition, were written entirely by Scott Brown. In this paper, where the work is clearly that of one or two authors, it is generally credited to them in the text, even if the citation leads to the complete work.
9 Catherine Ingraham’s variation of this poststructuralist approach is known as ‘troping the proper’ or ‘faulting the proper’. It refers to the idea that the inversion of accepted structures results in theoretical instabilities which can be metaphorically described as faults or cracks within the greater body of architectural discourse. This is a deconstructive philosophical process; it seeks to tease out the inherent instabilities in the core of a proposition. However, whereas Derrida typically sought to use binary opposites and difference to draw out the missing or repressed dimensions in a text (to make the ‘other’ structural), Ingraham’s process is more appropriate for the present paper which seeks to uncover the ‘other’ and review its role in the interpretation of the work. See: Ingraham, C. ‘The Faults of Architecture: Troping the Proper.’ Assemblage, (7: October) (1988): 6-13.
16 Wolfe, The Kandy Coloured Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby. 24.
17 Wolfe, The Kandy Coloured Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby. 24.
have decided that no lessons could be gleaned from this last of the three most lavish interiors on the American City. This is noteworthy, in the first instance, because of the relatively low numerical significance of the interior. Five of the categories are concerned with exterior architecture, three with urban massing and car parks, two with signage and one with foliage. In effect, the interior is accorded the same level of significance as the trees lining the parking lot. The images of the interior are also singularly hard to read; three appear to be gambling areas, two are of burlesque reviews, one of a foyer and one of the corner of a hotel room. In four-point font, running vertically down the spine of the book, several of these casinos are described stylistically in terms which recall Wolfe. For example, Caesars Palace is dubbed 'Yamasaki Bernini cum Roman Orgiastic' and the Stardust, where they stayed and spent much of their time, is described as 'Arte Moderne Hollywood Orgasmic'. But what does this appellation mean? Is it a reference to their undocumented experience of the honeymoon suite? Might it refer to the interior in some way that is never explained in their book?
55 Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. 64.
The Human Metropolis:
Interior Architecture as a Process of Manipulation, Invention and Inversion of the Contemporary Metropolis

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Abstract: The metropolis has lost the recognizable and measurable space of the agora, set aside for meeting and discussion, replacing it with millions of personal existences that migrate, encounter one another, reorient themselves, pair up and in their flow give rise to a new temporary and mutable attribute of the city. The individuals who live in the metropolis are the source of its energy and are the natural connection to an unpredictable network of communication and a new specificity of places. Interior design seems to be the means best suited to manipulating, inventing and inverting these processes in the contemporary metropolis.

The human agglomeration

Many people are in movement because they have been driven by a seduction, or by a propulsion, a force too powerful and too mysterious to be resisted.

The primary factor that prompts us to consider the metropolis a universal language of the contemporary dimension is represented by its unstoppable demographic growth. In 1950 less than one third of the population was urbanised. Today, half the world population lives in the city; according to a projection by the United Nations, in 2030 the urbanised population should exceed 60%. This means that out of an estimated population of around 8 billion, the inhabitants of cities will be around 5 billion, of whom 2 billion will live in the shanty towns and slums of the major megalopolises of Asia or Africa.

Just as the major civilisations of the past were closely associated with the destiny and forms of the city, the present of the new metropolises also seems to be inseparable from the nature of their evolution. The metropolis has become - or perhaps it has always been - the reservoir of a dynamic drive, physical and sexual, which is developed in a universe of survival and selection, where man’s energies are interwoven with those of society ‘spilling out of every possible form of containment’.

This overwhelming evolution is released from within national confines on account of the double planet-wide flow of migrant peoples and the globalised information that often drives these movements. It is not possible, therefore, to define the human metropolis as an exclusively territorial object, but it is possible to consider it as a phenomenological property produced by all the human presences that make all the cities of the hemisphere close to each other, irrespective of politics, religion, wealth or social condition, thus going beyond the idea of the nation state.

This human agglomeration therefore clearly represents the concentration and development of human resources and the activities of the planet’s major urban habitats and is transformed into the most meaningful indicator of the phenomenon of the ‘metropolitanisation of the
The number of major human agglomerations increased five times over between 1975 and 2005, displaying a dynamic that is manifested not only in Western countries, but to a significant degree also in the developing countries. The human agglomeration in fact does not interpret the strictly socioeconomic factor of the new metropolises, but places the evolutionary capacities of the advanced business centres of the west and the slums of the poorest cities, with their high capacity for connectivity, on the same plane. As Saskia Sassen states:

"It is perhaps one of the great ironies of our global digital age that it has produced not only massive dispersion, but also extreme concentrations of top-level resources in a limited number of places."

Tokyo, Mumbai, Mexico City, São Paulo, Jakarta, Lagos, Calcutta and New Delhi, together with many other cities, represent the human, physical and cultural development of everything that is ambiguously in continuous flow. Yet the geographical distance between these metropolises is virtually reconstituted by man and by the individuals that inhabit them. It is in fact people who nourish and form the natural link with the communication network, generating, with their own presence, a new specificity of locations. And it is precisely in the global community, increasingly similar to an endless circuit animated by uncontrollable migratory flows and by phenomena of mass communication, that the most interesting changes in project culture are concentrated.

The production of new contemporary subjectivities

The human metropolis is understood to be a theoretical model of a city where dynamic and evolutionary energies coincide with the city itself. Nobel prize-winner Rita Levi Montalcini has described the capacity of ‘project mankind’ as the positive result of mankind’s biological imperfection, of never being entirely and definitively homogeneous with the physical and historical environment. This incompleteness leads humans, through their genetic system, to develop the best conditions of expression and survival for themselves and for their environment. These energies of transformation stir up a primitive evolution represented symbolically by the interweaving of human heritage and the new systems of globalisation, which, through their own code, produce a circuit that forces information, images and viewers to circulate ceaselessly.

The internet has dematerialised everything that up to the last century was experienced directly, giving rise to an open complexity of representation and media diffusion. This process is cause and effect of a transmigration of political, civil and religious powers, in an uncontrollable state manipulated by the media and cleverly structured by its communication flows. In light of these changes, the present seems to be marked by a civilisation in which the human, information, systems, the services and spaces of the city, are flowing into a single system, in a new genetic patrimony in continuous evolution.

This system generates new basic mechanisms capable of inducing unexpected transformations in the spaces of the contemporary city. As Appadurai claims, referring to the planet’s migratory flows when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities. As Turkish guest workers in Germany watch Turkish films in their German flats, as Koreans in Philadelphia watch the 1988 Olympics in Seoul through
satellite feeds from Korea, and as Pakistani cabdrivers in Chicago listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in mosques in Pakistan or Iran, we see moving images meet deterritorialized viewers.\textsuperscript{7}

It is not hard to deduce that cultural reproduction is no longer marked by a traditional bond between people and knowledge of the same territory, but has been atomized and diffused through the new media organisms: TV, social networking, nanotechnologies, iphone.

And it is for this reason that the inhabitant of the metropolis can no longer be considered a passive party, but is transformed into a transit node of sequences brought about elsewhere and destined for elsewhere, who – through the collective imagination – nourishes the development of his or her own individual expression. This \textit{vital expression} is always in search of a form or a definition of the environment that contains it, even if this is only provisional; nourishing the process of formation with the logic of digital communication systems, which encourages and obliges open and participatory community uses. Subjectivity itself is thus transformed, indirectly, into a project instrument. As Pierluigi Salvadeo affirms, the distinctive feature of today's post-industrial society is 'a creative living capable of continually inventing new ways of occupying the space, sometimes even inappropriately, but always in an innovative way.'\textsuperscript{8} The inhabitant uses the space without requiring any close identification with it, if not through a functional and poetic redefinition of these territories, thus associating his presence with a more creative dimension, rich in images.

The built city, with its changes and its permanences, no longer faithfully and meaningfully reproduces its own society, which, rather, is very well interpreted by the human presence and by the creative energy emitted from it. The metropolitan population 'is no longer representable through a recognisable succession of forms and locations',\textsuperscript{9} but consists of an elastic and porous system that changes with relations. Goods, information, flows, services, build the nature and characteristics of the locations of the city, forming an open system of relations (between activities and individuals) irrespective of the specific context of reference. The space of the city has therefore been transformed into a temporary attribute of the urban scene, which manipulates, inverts, and invents the spatial characteristics of locations, generating a new specificity for each of these.

**The new specificity of places**

Increasingly animated by deterritorialised players, affected by endless market categories and by incessant information flows, the human metropolis, rather than 'inventing new languages, reuses and disarranges the languages invented by modernity.',\textsuperscript{10} It is not a new form of post-modern processing now devoid of any meaning, but, as Rem Koolhaas prophesied for the generic city, a combination of styles represented by 'free style',\textsuperscript{11} which perfectly embodies the visionary repertoire of the human, an assortment animated by an uncontrollable hyper-expressiveness.
In fact, the places of the metropolis are distinguished by living human presences, ‘the only cells bearing true diversity, exceptions’\textsuperscript{12} that through fashion and trends transform their expressiveness into an urban quality, into a changing spatial specificity. Indeed, the human dimension of the crowd, through its attitudes, habits and the homogeneity of behaviour that brings it together, builds up an expressive flow that is more important than the various repertoires of the architecture that contains them. As Giandomenico Amendola states:

\begin{quote}
The great Baroque streets of Rome and Paris could not even be conceived without the people: the individuals, the groups, the processions or their dress, colours and sounds, the words.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Today not much has changed; people acquire the same value, becoming themselves a ‘mobile building’\textsuperscript{14} that, through their human dynamics, inhabits and shapes the space through their presence. It is for this reason that the most significant and symbolic locations of contemporary metropolises are tied to their capacity for attraction, consisting of the crowd itself, which renders them pulsating and unique. Thus an attitude of the city is delineated that considers the specificity of locations as a mutable attribute generated by the people who nourish and form the natural link with the spaces they have decided to inhabit. This elusive specificity is not the only attribute capable of characterising the places of the city; human expressiveness has reserved itself a role of primary and real aesthetic production inside the contemporary scene.

The intrusiveness of the phenomena of aesthetisation of the everyday described above is often transformed into a metabolic system capable of redefining the built space in project terms. If this metropolis is therefore designed to intercept and interpret people’s desires, to amplify and emphasise the social trends and phenomena that make the aesthetisation of daily life visible, then in this aesthetic and dynamic spiral, the contemporary project attempts to inoculate the imagination in the locations that are deprived of it. For this reason the planned and built quality of the human metropolis is formed through a universe of autonomous – but reproducible – microsystems, which uses the component production of interiors as project structure. This condition does not interpret the primary functions of dwelling but tends to construct a form of visual entertainment that, in addition to exploiting the heterogeneity of individual expression, manipulates and modifies the aesthetic categories of the inhabited city.

Today the uses of the contemporary metropolis are indifferent to housing types and are often not very closely tied to the conditions of territorial location. This indifference leads to an endless interchangeability of the objects and characteristics of every environment, increasingly moving project practice towards a decorative process typical of the applied arts.
and decoration. The specificity of a location of our metropolises is no longer a prerogative of the architectural form, but rather has become a quality expressed by the public that frequents its shops, by the preciousness and value of the goods displayed, by the services and the information contained in every point of attraction and by the formal aggregations that represent its aesthetic sense.

Chinese lanterns in any city of North America and Europe, South American specialities on the menus in the school refectory of Switzerland, Oriental sports and disciplines in the parks of Northern Italy, Shinto temples in the middle of Germany and Arabic script on the shop signs of central Paris. This flurry of global goods and identities is mainly created through reversible and provisional systems, which can change with the same speed with which the desires of individuals or the commercial logics that sustain them change. The hybridisation of the world territory, made up of Chinese districts in the heart of Manhattan and historical theme parks in mid-desert, is characterised by a series of *autonomous layers* that enrich the ambiguity and variety of the uses and customs of the city; thus reversing the forecasts of the modern movement, which hypothesised a future aesthetically and functionally *monological*.

**Figure 2: Shopping in Tokyo and restaurant Kung Fu in New York**

**Inhabiting other places**

The human metropolis is therefore a model composed of urban systems conveying an aesthetism founded upon the population's housing desires, in the sense in which *inhabiting the space* with one's own creative energy means reproducing other environments in other *places*. This inhabiting does not affect the built space in a permanent way, but inverts its aesthetic meaning and manipulates its possible forms. For instance, groups of Japanese Otakus, through their clothing that perfectly copies the Manga costumes of their favourite heroes, declare their passion for comic strips, for collecting figurines and robots, for the compulsive use of chatrooms and Playstations. Through the presence of the Otakus, the Tokyo district of Akihabara has modified its internal operations, changing the commercial categories of its shops, its functions, its customs and its opening hours; reaching the point of affecting even the main characteristics of the prevalent domestic sphere, experienced by the Otakus as a forced internment of loneliness poised between innocence and perversion. All this has transferred the colours, the soft and ironic forms of Japanese Manga into a piece of the greatest megalopolis in the world, transforming small studio apartments into a myriad of sanctuaries of collectors and collections.
Inhabiting places with the expressiveness of one’s own clothing, through the objects of one’s own imaginary universe, with the rituality of one’s own habits, is transformed into a kind of human furnishing able to evoke every place of one’s own imagination. These other places are no longer the destinations shared by the social, political or religious community, but they emerge from the pages of Japanese comic strips, from the lifestyle content of transnational TV programmes, or from the pre-packaged models of planetary culture.

Another significant example of reversible alteration of the environmental characteristics is represented by rave parties, ‘intermittent and mobile mass gatherings that revolve around listening to techno music.’ These human gatherings are events that require lengthy preparation and bring together thousands of young people through a comprehensive and informal network of personal contacts. Through the new communication systems information is spread and distilled on locations, timetables and methods to reach the chosen destination. It all begins when the event suddenly takes shape in an abandoned factory or on a piece of land at the edge of the city, invisible to the resident populations and above all to police checks. The rave usually takes place in an empty space, which is mainly equipped with an easily transportable sound system and a series of light systems with their own generators. These gatherings represent the construction of a mobile and temporary place, incapable of depositing permanent traces on the territory, where high volume music, low frequency vibrations, synthetic drugs and convulsive and uncontrolled body movements are manifested without planning by a single person.

In the major human agglomerations, it is precisely the tribes that are the metabolic systems of the phenomena of change

sexual, religious, cultural, sporting, musical tribes; their numbers are infinite, their structure identical, as are their characteristic features of mutual assistance, sharing of feelings, affective atmosphere.

We are therefore faced with a bond no longer formed on the basis of a political or religious ideal, but from a relationship that is ‘organically founded upon the common sharing of rooted values: language, customs, cuisine, attitudes to the body.’ Thus there emerges a fragmentation of the figure of the person performing different roles with respect to the tribes he frequents and of which he is part, multiplying exponentially a social life so intense as ‘to form an elusive nebula.’

![Figure 3: People in Milan and Chinese shop in Chinatown](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
Let us borrow for a moment the concept of *transference* from psychoanalysis. Transference is a radical mechanism whereby each individual tends to shift patterns of feelings and desires relating to a signifier onto a person, a place, a habitat, involved in his or her own interpersonal dynamics. The human metropolis works in the same way. It acts like an enormous kaleidoscope that transfers (elsewhere) fashions, tastes, images, cultures and an unlimited choice of ‘image expressions’, becoming at the same time the object and the field of desire of the whole society. This type of transference fits into a more general framework that attempts to go beyond the figurative limits of contemporary architecture, in an urban territory now characterised by *other* values and *other* structural phenomena: commodity groups, services, information. As Germano Celant claims

> The project exploration stages the object, the sign and the image; it makes them interweave with the functions and structures for which the value of iconic message is mixed with the value of use. The result is symbolic relations that are added to the nature of architecture, expanding its communicative position on the plane of social and political, economic and media prestige, and make the project definitively enter a territory of resonance, the information excess of which is the new dimension of contemporary architecture.\(^20\)

This *territory of resonance* is precisely the most fertile terrain for exercising those processes of transference mentioned above. The extension of this exploration has affected the entire environment that surrounds us, but what happens when this dynamic hits an introflexed space, contrasted with an *outside* where there is nothing architectural to see, apart from large commercial communications or formal aggregations more to be looked at than accessed? The most meaningful examples are those compressed passages of territory – in uses and in space – inside major structures with a controlled microclimate.

Even if this process of *landscape transference* has not produced virtuous or meaningful spaces for the design world, it has had a very important theoretical and cultural impact upon the modes of use of the interiors of the contemporary metropolis. If the Classical city has, for better or for worse, always recognized the differences between inside and outside, between the territories of leisure time and the territories of production, between open spaces and paid-for spaces, today in what way is the project culture driven to investigate the nuances between these categories?

As an advertising claim on the Internet states

> Imagine you are in Dubai; it is August and the temperature is touching 42°C. What would you give for some refreshment? What would you do to be up in the mountains? Maybe skiing? Thirty euros? Well, for that figure you can enjoy two hours of skiing. Yes, you heard right, because in Dubai, in the middle of the desert, for some years now, there has been one of the largest indoor ski centres in the world: Ski Dubai. With its 22,500 square metres of completely covered slopes, Ski Dubai is part of the *Mall of the Emirates*, one of the largest shopping centres in the world. Inside it are five ski slopes of varying difficulties and lengths.\(^21\)
The Human Metropolis

The advertising product shows how the imagination has entered the logic of ordinary life, becoming an integral part of people's daily mental workings. This transposition of the imaginary has led to the birth of a series of desires, and therefore of locations where new functions are presented as genuine practicable exceptions. The metropolis and its interiors seem to exploit this relationship with the collective imagination in the most simplified and informative way, proposing a fifth season that can be tried out anywhere and anyway. The reference to the external context is not therefore entirely absent; it is found in the expectation of consumption and in the projections of a population of wealthy resident and omnivorous tourists.

The technical factor that determines the capacity to create landscapes in locations where they are not envisaged, such as tropical gardens in the coldest cities of North America and Thai beaches in continental Germany, is closely correlated today with the technological capacity to control the interior microclimate of inhabited spaces. This element, which does not have a measurable form, if not in the quality of the air contained inside the building, has become one of the identifying motifs of such spatial devices. Indoor control determines and builds the perimeter of the building, making the microclimate become the most important quality of its architectural form.

This mode of environmental autonomy has been interpreted on occasions by the avant-garde and by a series of artists capable of creating strong points of contact with the design world. The artist Olafur Eliasson, for example, has imagined an extraordinary Sun in the Turbine Room of Tate Modern, the former power station transformed into one of the main temples of contemporary art, creating a stupefying atmospheric experiment. Thousands of people bathed in the sun stretched out on the floor of the room, caressed by the warmth of the sun and hypnotised with monochrome light, which, depending on the air currents and the temperature, creates thick banks of clouds with unpredictable forms. This process of transference of atmospheric phenomena by artists, designers or architects tells of a process of invention, manipulation and inversion of the places of the contemporary metropolis where it is no longer the design world that structures the creation of spaces, but it is the new human agglomerations with their expressive research that press for the production of a new metropolis to host their imagination.

It can be understood that contemporary society often develops spatial relationships independently with respect to the pre-constituted form of the spaces of the city, and the capacity to inhabit creatively these spaces declare that all the processes of manipulation and
invention of the contemporary metropolis should mix material and immaterial realities in its human life. The design world is traversed today by the design of services, telecommunications, fashion design, scenography and the exhibit, passing through component production and environmental control devices, transforming the project into a universal, human language; an instrument of design of mechanisms.

The human metropolis is therefore the result of an anthropological attitude that corresponds to a different way of understanding the project and the changes under way. This model of interpretation is pervasive, because it is associated with the phenomena of globalisation and it is interwoven with the inexhaustible human code that the contemporary metropolis feeds in its evolutionary growth.

Endnotes

7 Appadurai. Modernity at Large. 1996.
9 Branzi, Modernità Debole e Diffusa, 2006.
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‘At home’: a discussion of diaspora and hybridity

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Abstract: The meaning of ‘home’ in the context of migration and displacement is the key theme of this paper. Examples come from people who left South Africa before, during and after the apartheid era and are now living in Australia, and they are all white. Although white South Africans are themselves a product of colonization, they are also the product of privilege, therefore making the diasporic condition a more complex one.

It is my intention to interrogate this complexity by looking at items of material culture that travelled with the migrants or were acquired afterwards. In addition, the design, decoration and arrangement of domestic spaces is analysed in terms of creating both a home and an identity that speaks a particular language to those who visit and those who inhabit the space. They have either carried their identities with them in domestic objects such as furniture and cultural items or created hybrid identities partially through specific acquisitions in Australia. The paper relies upon ethnographic research conducted with individuals and families in their homes. Visual and transcribed information will contribute to understandings of the meaning of migrant homes and the relationship of this material culture with national identity.

Introduction

The theme of this symposium, Interior Spaces in Other Places resonates with ongoing debates on belonging and diaspora. The meaning of home and the recreation of homes in new places is not a new topic, but by bringing a postcolonial and critical race reading to the diaspora of white South Africans, I will point to some less obvious spatial identities and national narratives.

Consequently the three subthemes ‘time’, ‘signs’ and ‘security’ help to structure the paper according to influences and expectations which are tied up in a complex semiotics of spatial and personal safety. In addition to postcolonial and critical race theory, the paper uses ethnographic interviews conducted with white South Africans in Adelaide, Australia. The sample was taken from a sports club and their extended families in the hope of obtaining broad representation. However despite the club being state wide, there are no black or coloured South African participants. The racial representation is relevant even if it is not surprising. Therefore because the participants are white, this presents an interesting case study as not enough is written about white diasporas. The lack of writing on white diasporas is symptomatic of what Richard Dyer calls a white ‘invisibility’. There is discomfort attached to white South Africans who left. There are those who left in exile or disgust during Apartheid, those who left in dismay for the ruined ‘white’ dream after Apartheid and those who left with mixed feelings or personal intentions either during or after Apartheid.

Consequently the paper looks at the relationship between objects and people in the context of migration and identity. All the respondents have created spaces with objects which tell stories. Therefore together with Mieke Bal, the question ‘can things be, or tell, stories?’ is explored in relation to the types of ‘fictions’ embedded in these narratives. Such fictions are inextricably tied up with subjectivity, and as Gayatri Spivak says ‘who then are we (not), how are we
In the process of unpicking these subjectivities through the voices of the objects and also via postcolonial commentaries, I abstract the notion of the migrant into ‘the diasporic subject’ to allow for a more inclusive reading than just the South African one.

Before I continue, it should be said that this paper is a shortened version of a much longer piece which does more justice to the research conducted, however by dividing the paper into the thematic sections mentioned above I hope to provide some cohesion and depth. Firstly the influence of time is considered.

**Things in time**

Things that have happened are not necessarily over; objects carry identities which both hold and efface time. In this way migration dislocates and relocates producing compound stories. The thing in this passage of time sits at the centre of the diasporic subject. And when two different migrant families who are unknown to each other, left South Africa many decades apart and lived in other continents before coming to Australia, choose an almost identical item as representing their ‘favourite’ thing, this presents an interesting conundrum. The object is a painting (Figure 1) of an elderly African man, in traditional attire smoking a long thin pipe. It is a typical example of a cultural stereotype, for which, one respondent, Judith, uses the following descriptive words: ‘evocation of Africa – the old man is almost a muse for me [and then Sarah and Jo, speaking together]: We appreciate African art, it reminds us of the culture we left’. Both families use the words ‘peace’, ‘old wisdom’ and ‘ancient’ in their description of the painting as an object genuinely dear to them. Indigenous Africa is essentialised into a homogenous grandeur of ancient wisdom, which is encapsulated into the supposedly timeless sign of the elderly African without a name. This object-sign is then transported across the sea to another country of different indigeneities (Australia).

![Figure 1: Seated African man smoking a traditional Xhosa pipe and dressed in semi traditional garb. Oil on canvas.](image)

These migrants are part of a diaspora that collect objects and memories as they move from one settler existence to another. The diasporic subject’s ‘empty’ dwelling in the new country presents an absence or gap, which can be filled with objects that perform dialogical connections (imagined and real) between the past, present and future. The house that was empty before being filled with objects of memory equates with the colonial space of terra...
nullius. The awaiting domestic space is akin to Homi Bhabha’s ‘caesura in the narrative of modernity’. Modernity is one of the consequences of colonialism and, for those who benefitted it offers the choice to move across the world when the need arises. Therefore both the caesura or pause in time and the empty space become part of the post colonizing moment in recreated homes. So the vacant rooms only become home when they are benevolently colonised and filled with objects that link time and place thereby giving the dweller a past that authenticates a future.

However belonging can be disrupted by an un-mended caesura. If the physical space is filled with objects that lack connective meaning then the space remains symbolically empty and the present is not embraced because it has no past. It can still be considered that people and especially migrants, who remove themselves from situations that they no longer feel ‘at home’ with, need to adhere to objects that can serve as icons in a semi-religious sense – vehicles through which silent and ‘iterable’ communication and action can take place. In so doing a space is created for the subjectivities to recognise themselves. It is not the commodity that is of concern in this paper nor is it the status of ‘cultural capital’ as espoused by Pierre Bourdieu, although it can certainly be argued that belonging to a new country carries cultural capital.

What I would like to focus upon is the way in which objects are used as agents of forgetting and remembering. ‘Culture is the cult of memory’ according to Viacheslav Ivanov (in Banerjee) who suggests that culture is indicative of an absence of God on earth. The ‘thing’, with its renegotiated meanings through time, becomes the fetish object, that which fills the space left by the absence of God or meaning. To explain this point I refer to Hal Foster’s fascinating discussion of the substitution of God for objects in terms of the seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings, which are early representations of western domesticity. In his discussion, Foster refers to the northern European fascination with still-lifes of silver bowls, ripe fruit, highly polished copper implements, glinting crystal, oriental china and gleaming fish on platters as the ‘ultimate golden calf’. Therefore objects that fill the contemporary diasporic subject’s domestic void can similarly take on the role of synecdoche and fetish. It is generally understood that the fetish is an object endowed with a spirit within and revered as such. However, as Foster points out, to Freud the fetish acts as a substitute for loss, but Foster contends that ‘fetishism is not only disavowal: it is a compromise-formation that allows the subject to have it both ways … the fetish is also a “memorial”’. Attachment to objects of memory that serve to uplift the spirit need not be pathological in the Freudian sense but can serve to negotiate between past and present in the hybrid state of performing identities.

Performances of selfhood, subjectivities and ultimately identities, are enacted in space and usually interact with forms/objects. Elizabeth Grosz writes ‘The thing is the point of intersection of space and time, the locus of the temporal narrowing and spatial localization that constitutes specificity or singularity’. She goes on to say that things are ‘localization[s] of materiality’ and have ‘the capacity … to divide [themselves]. Therefore, the thing to Grosz is a catalyst for meaning in a transitional or new space; i.e. this object-thing can distribute, organise and separate the experience of such space ‘for the living’.

Judith said she objected to the term ‘favourite’ object in the interviews: ‘I have a problem with the concept of favourite, as in life I like/favour many objects/travels/people/ experiences equally – but for differing reasons. I brought no furniture when I migrated to Australia only
objects as mentioned, equally loved’. She resisted selection and instead showed me walls filled with objects, books – autobiographical walls of life (figure 2). Here and elsewhere there are objects that resist isolated homage through their collectivity. But there are also those that rupture attempts at continuity and enact violence upon the mending of the caesura.

![Figure 2: Shelves representing 'life-walls' of objects collected on travels and residencies in other countries.](image)

With Jill, another respondent, there is the ink drawing of a burning neighbourhood (figure 3), a symbol of Apartheid carnage, which was mistakenly discovered in a portfolio in the back of a cupboard by her daughter. Although these two women are from different migrant families, the potentiality for collision between what is concealed and what is revealed from the past into the present is precarious.

![Figure 3: Ink drawing of Apartheid South Africa, showing the destruction and desolation of black South African township homes and identities.](image)

A present carefully constructed as home is always already fragile if it bears (or hides) shadows of lingering violence. ‘I believe, a moment of a kind of “projective past” … is a mode of “negativity” that makes the enunciatory present of modernity disjunctive’. Residues in the shape of speaking objects interrupt healing by the negation of their alternate stories but also by their mere presence. They set the diasporic subject in an ambivalent narrativity, a hybridity that according to Couze Venn reveals ‘a fragility of the worlds that have been instituted in colonial and “postcolonial” times’.
Signs and beginnings

Homes are use-worlds (a term I adapt from Venn’s ‘life-worlds’), they are filled with coded representations of hybrid identities. And, because contemporary time is subject to a macro-world of sign systems, the empty house is filled with signs to make it a home. The important things to Kate, another respondent, are small things that hold personal narratives: ‘… my journals … written record of my life … two shells I found on a beach’ (figures 4 & 5). ‘We are surrounded by emptiness, but it is an emptiness filled with signs’ writes Henri Lefebvre. Sign language, the communication device of the visual spectacle, may be rendered impersonal in city streets but it is given the warmth of personal tonality in the voices of objects in a home. Kant writes, ‘To think an object is not the same thing as to know it’ and to this I add: one cannot know an object if it is not in use. Kant’s ‘sensuous perception’ can be adopted and added to an understanding of how objects are used. ‘Use’ in this case links the sign with the signified by way of communicating the narrative. Collections of objects, as discussed by Bal take on a ‘radically different’ meaning when they are read as signs. In this way their use transcends basic utility and incorporates a personal-political reading of the object-sign. Bal notes that, ‘In one episode of this narrative, the extension of subjectivity through the investment in a series of objects fit to stand in for the absent attribute of the past [and] may overrule other affects’.

The attributes of some objects are more heavily laden with signifiers than others and I now draw attention to the home bar, a site for entertainment and display. Figure 6 is the home bar of Sarah and Jo, and figure 7 is another couple, Fiona and Rob’s home bar. I do not have the space in this article to write about drinking and sports culture nor, unfortunately about the vibrant multi-racial street bar culture that is permeating post Apartheid South Africa so the discussion is limited to the bar as an object of meaning in a migrant home. The examples shown were offered as places of pride, corners that enshrined a past and held a cultural allegiance. The ‘semiotic functioning’ of the bar ‘as a part of signifying practice … includes the agency of the symbolic’. The bar in this instance is a device for enacting gender roles and national loyalties in the domestic domain. Seating is inscribed and performativities of gender and patriotism are ‘encrypted’ into its stage setting.

Gender [like nationalism] is in no way a stable identity … it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*.
The bar is a space charged with accountability but clothed in convivial hospitality; an arena where expectations are written into the dark wood, sliding glass panels, and promotional logos. ‘Gender [and national] identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo’\(^\text{24}\). Therefore in the case of the home bar, a small circumscribed country can be reconstituted almost anywhere in the world. In the intimacy of a domestic environment the explicit/authoritative form of the bar imposes spatial and social borders. In *Home Possessions*, Daniel Miller writes that ‘power lies everywhere’ and the ‘ghosts’ of past homes or loyalties travel with home possessions.\(^\text{25}\) The bar in this sense can operate as an enshrined memorial to a lost nationalism, a nationalism that is haunted by the Apartheid legacy.

**Sanctuary/security**

The Apartheid legacy is tangled with security and fear, and some of the open-ended interview questions referred to favourite rooms or spaces and immigrant understandings of the term ‘home’. The majority of respondents regard the home as a place of personal security and their choice of favourite space is the dining area; a place of family gatherings, love, peace, sharing and sanctuary. In this way the objects-possessed fade in their formal sense and assume a more active role in the relationships that operate spatially. Georges Perec suggests that we ‘stop thinking in ready-made terms’ and ‘forget what the sociologists have said’ in relation to space.\(^\text{26}\) This calls for a more subtle reading of responses, one that recognises the rawness of wanting to make a home but yet have authenticity and roots. Diaspora can sever ties and as Venn carefully notes, there can be no ‘routes without roots’\(^\text{27}\). And, Gaston Bachelard who is another theorist with a gentle touch, notes

> We must first look for centers of simplicity in houses ... simplicity at times is too rationally vaunted ... We must therefore experience the primitiveness of refuge and, beyond situations that have been experienced, discover situations that have been dreamed.\(^\text{28}\)

Bachelard encourages the poet inside ‘us’ to find solace in remembered refuges but, with actual lived spaces. So, in order to make sense of this poetic, I return the analysis to subject formation (Venn) and narrative identity (Grosz). Venn enlarges upon space as ‘chora’, and draws upon Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur in his explanation of ‘chora’ as emblematic of both the rupture and the join of part and whole.\(^\text{29}\) I interpret this as the disjuncture that is experienced by the diasporic subject in her/his ambivalent state of transformation. For example, Judith, the respondent with the life-wall says, ‘I don’t know where I belong … my
answers move in circles’. Therefore if a centred space can be found for or by the diasporic subject, it offers an alternate fertile ground for remaking the self. To this end, Grosz’s reading of Plato offers ‘chora’ as a generative space, which has distinctive nurturing qualities that facilitate becoming. An incorporation of this meaning of ‘chora’ could be instrumental in releasing and healing what has been repressed. ‘Plato’s *Timaeus* … invokes a mythological bridge between the intelligible and the sensible, mind and body, which he calls *chora*.30 The space or link which is ‘chora’ exists in time and motion, it is not static. In this way the object-space (old books, paintings, dining areas, bookshelves) act as conduits for ‘chora’. Grosz writes

It [chora] functions primarily as the receptacle, the storage point, the locus of nurturance in the transition necessary for the emergence of matter, a kind of womb of material existence, the nurse of becoming, an incubator to ensure the transmission or rather the copying of Forms to produce matter that resembles them.31

Grosz also says that a ‘chora’ is a ‘mediator’.32 The cherished object-space discussed in this article could take on this role of *chora*, the ‘matter’ of which include the energies of memory (past) and promise (future). The *chora*-object-space is akin to my previous discussion of the fetish; vehicles through which communication and identification take place. Grosz asserts that ‘chora’ does not have ontological status but to this I add that as an object or specific domestic space it generates ontological status amongst its recipients and produces a sense of sanctuary.

**Closing**

This paper has deliberated upon what it is to be ‘at home’ as a diasporic and hybrid subject. Finding a place and making a space that can be called home involves the movement of things in time, and when Bhabha suggests ‘scattering’ can become ‘a time of gathering’, he notes how ‘metaphor … transfers the meaning of home and belonging across … distances’.33 Possessions, things, objects that have an unchanging outward appearance are reassuring when places and people may lack consistency in the process of diaspora. Having said this, it might seem strange that I have used Bhabha and Venn’s thoughts on hybridity, subjectivity and diaspora in examples of white South African migrants to Australia. The hybrid subject is usually understood as subaltern and diaspora in postcolonial studies is most frequently concerned with the spread of disadvantaged groups. The research idea upon which the paper is based was originally premised upon the expectation that a sample of mixed race and white respondents would participate in the ethnographic study but this did not happen. Therefore although this paper focussed upon the interaction and narratives of objects in new places, the fact that the new place is in Australia presents an avenue for socio-political comparison in a future paper.

The discussions and examples used in the subdivisions: ‘things in time’, ‘signs’ and ‘sanctuary/security’ revealed a need to retain idealistic memories of Africa and South Africa and also to reinforce some national identities such as those evident in the home bar. There did not appear to be any great sense of loss amongst the respondents but instead an attitude that ranged from determined to fluid in the way they situated themselves into their adopted country. There appeared to be a greater need for building a sense of safety and security in the families and couples with the home bar than those who did not have one. The others were more attached to particular objects or groups of objects that told various stories, and rather
than security this latter group was looking for a sanctuary, a place of intimate respite. The latter group were also less concerned with identity and national insignia from South Africa than they were with personal subjectivity. Therefore whilst there was no obvious evidence of trauma or loss, the respondents’ selection of objects and spaces does reveal some level of allegiance which might stand guard against residual guilt(s) of living a post Apartheid existence outside of the South Africa. Whether this is a state of denial, a state of inverted exception, a philosophical acceptance of change or something else in the white South Africa diasporic journey, is unclear. What is clear is the power that time and distance has upon reframing spatial and personal subjectivities.

Copyright permission has been obtained from all respondents. This research has been approved by the University of South Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

Endnotes

1 Names used in the text are pseudonyms from the seven migrant families who took part in the research. As a white South African migrant myself, I included my home and objects as part of the research material.
10 Foster, ‘Art of Fetishism,’ 7.
12 Elizabeth Grosz, Time Travels, 132.
13 Bhabha, Location of Culture, 238.
14 Venn, ‘Narrative Identity,’ 40.
15 Venn, ‘Narrative Identity,’ 40.
18 Mieke Bal, A Mieke Bal Reader, 283. Although I do not use the term ‘collection’ as Bal does i.e. collection of a set of similar objects, but rather as the collection of objects consciously chosen by the respondents as representing their identities, but Bal’s analysis still applies.
19 Mieke Bal, A Mieke Bal Reader, 284.
22 Venn, ‘Narrative Identity,’ 36.
27 Venn, ‘Narrative Identity,’ 39.
29 Venn, ‘Narrative Identity,’ 40.
At home

33 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 291.
Re-assembling the Past: tradition and modernity in the Anglo-American ‘period-style’ interior

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Abstract: The broadly based middle-class impulse (c.1900-1940) to collect and consume the antique and the ‘authentic’ reproduction, despite its evident importance in retail and in the design professions, has been largely neglected in the history and theory of the interior. But this cultivated impulse to reassemble or inscribe a ‘reproduced’ past, often within an otherwise modern setting, has left an indelible mark on our cultural and material landscapes.

Making use of the archives of a once successful British manufacturer of furnishing textiles, A. H. Lee, this paper explores the cultural and material dimensions of this global trade in ‘period style’ textiles, and the role the imagined past played in the typical middle-class interior. It is suggested here that the ‘period-style’ interior was not so much an attempt at faithful reproduction, but an otherwise modernizing interior organized around the idea of an ‘authentic’, historically placed and aesthetically balanced cultural ‘home’.

A passion for the antique

In an American booklet extolling the virtues of original modern design over antique and reproduction furniture and furnishing, Goodbye, Mr Chippendale (1944), the author refers to ‘a young generation of Americans to whom it seems as natural to find antique and reproduction furniture in the living room as it does to find an electric refrigerator in the kitchen’. He goes on to claim that between 1910 and 1940 approximately 1 billion dollars was spent in Europe buying antiques for American homes.

The size of this trade, and the active involvement of designers, architects and retailers should not surprise us; it is evident in most trade directories in the period, in advertisements and trade catalogues. We do not have to go as far as New York to marvel at the extraordinarily lavish results of perhaps buying a complete Renaissance ceiling and installing it in an early twentieth century mansion, or to wonder at the grand ‘period rooms’ installed in the Metropolitan Museum in the same period. On a more modest, local scale, we can visit Carrick Hill in Adelaide built for Edward Hayward and Ursula Barr Smith following their marriage 1935. As the Carrick Hill website explains:

During their year-long honeymoon they acquired much of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-century paneling, doors, staircases and windows from the demolition sale of Beaudesert, a Tudor mansion in Staffordshire, England. A family friend, Adelaide architect James Irwin, designed the house around these fittings, and while the overall appearance is of a seventeenth-century English manor house, it incorporates all ‘the latest’ in 1930’s technology. Oak paneling and pewter light fittings happily blend with heated towel rails, ensuite bathrooms and intercom systems.

Ursula’s father, Robert Barr Smith, a mining and grazing millionaire, was the leading Australian client of Morris and Co in Australia, and assiduous collector of the romantic
medieval designs his company was famed for. This lavish reconstruction, or re-imagining, of the treasures of the past in a modern setting, was widely amongst the wealthy from the turn of the century, and led to the increasing popularity of the ‘period style’ interior in more modest homes. The paradox that cannot be avoided in the case of the Haywards and Barr Smiths, as well as their wealthy American and British counterparts, is that this interest in the antique and the ‘authentic’ past did not restrict their economic and social roles as modern leaders of industry and commerce, or exclude them from taking an active interest in modern art or literature. In fact, most visitors today go to Carrick Hill to admire the important collection of Modernist art its original owners later gifted to the state of South Australia, and are probably unaware of the rather complex derivation of the parts of the interior and the sophisticated historical references of the design of the building itself, unless they happen to read the information provided by the volunteer guides that staff the building during open days.

**Historical scholarship and the authentic past**

Much has been said about the Victorians and their love of the past, and their romantic appreciation for the ‘authentic’ remnants of a bygone age. Ruskin’s and Morris’s contribution to this appreciation was in part shaped by social and moral concerns, and this led them to argue convincingly for the value of the vernacular as furthermore containing its own moral, material, economic and social secrets – secrets which pointed to the possibility of a more rewarding, socially harmonious ‘happy’ and aesthetically satisfying life. Morris and his followers excited a revival of interest in the history and surviving practices of traditional furniture-makers, weavers and craftsmen, and this led to an expansion of interest in collecting these and other things. Spurred on by the beliefs of the Arts and Crafts movement, many voluntary societies devoted to preserving or reviving traditional customs and crafts were founded on both sides of the Atlantic, and their ideas influenced architects and designers, collectors and museum curators, and of course retailers and journalists.

As Muthesius notes, the first two decades of the twentieth century saw not only a very rapid expansion of the London antique trade, but the publication of many new histories of furniture and furnishing by individuals sometimes active in this trade as collectors, curators or designers. Large scholarly works, like Edwin Foley’s massive, expensive and detailed *Book of Decorative Furniture* (1910-11), and Percy Macquoid’s *History of English Furniture* (1904-8), and these were followed by many other popular surveys, many of which were funded by furniture manufacturers or retailers and simply abstracted the information found in these books, or published advice on period style furniture in journals like *Country Life* and *The Connoisseur*. By the 1930s books on ‘period style’ furniture were being published ‘for everyman’, along with many descriptive trade journal articles often containing potted histories of furniture and furnishing. In this way ‘period styles’ deriving from the 17th or 18th centuries, often strangely located in an otherwise modest suburban, bungalow or vaguely Arts and Crafts influenced ‘cottage’, became enshrined in Anglo-American interior furnishing as a somehow ‘timeless’ presence, suggesting good taste, aesthetic balance (a favourite word), and continuity with the past and an ‘authentic’ national (and in America, rather bizarrely, a ‘colonial’) identity.

But whether this movement to capture the ‘feeling’ for the past in the interior was actually as conservative, reactive and restrictive as some have claimed is open to question. More recent scholarship has suggested that the Arts and Crafts movement itself cannot be classified in
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these simplistic terms, since it represented an ‘alternative’ view of modernity. In the discussion that follows I would like to suggest that a desire to locate and experience the past and integrate this into the home is a consequence of the experience of modernity itself, and not necessarily ‘only’ or ‘just’ a ‘conservative reaction’ to this experience.

Furnishing the period style interior

A number of leading British and American firms clearly profited from this taste in ‘period style’ furnishing, with many of them exporting their wares across the British colonies to an audience always eager for the material and visual reminders of home. Forty years ago Pauline Agius noted that in 1903 the bespoke furniture manufacturers, Gillows, opened a textile factory in France to produce luxury ‘period style’ fabrics exclusively to cover their fine reproduction furniture. This was very much a sign of the times and the dominance of the period style interior in the homemaking culture of an expanding middle class. A number of leading British textile producers involved in this trade interestingly also derived from origins influenced by the Arts and Crafts-led renaissance in textile design, including Warner and Sons, G.P. and J. Baker and Arthur H. Lee, whose archive partially survives in the Williamson Museum not far from where their factory once stood in Birkenhead.

Arthur H. Lee and Sons was one of England’s leading furnishing textile and tapestry manufacturers, until the firm became victim to the industry-wide revolution of the 1960s. Arthur Lee’s family had been involved in the textile industry in Manchester (in Tootal Broadhurst and Lee), but as a young man inspired by the example of Morris, Arthur Lee set up a large workshop to manufacture high quality furnishing textiles and tapestries at Warrington in 1888. While at first Lee used his own designs and those of some of the leading Arts and Crafts designers such as Voysey and Crane to produce woolen furnishing textiles in the style then popular, much of his own and his son’s designs were carefully worked up from museum or private collections, ‘authentic’ adaptations which by then had become increasingly popular. The success of his business led him to move his factory to larger premises in Birkenhead in 1908, and to send his son Humphrey to New York to set up an office to sell and distribute his textiles across the United States and Canada.

The global reach of Lee’s business before and after the First World War was extraordinary, with up to 60 per cent of the Birkenhead factory’s wares being sold through local agents to middle-class homemakers in Australia, South Africa, Canada, the USA and continental Europe. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this business in any depth here, two aspects of this stand out. Firstly, they enjoyed a large business in commissioned hand-made woolen tapestries, often to designs reworked from museum exemplars, and sold on to wealthy homemakers, institutions like banks and other companies, and luxury ocean liners. These were designed and made from wool dyed and hand-stitched in the Birkenhead factory. As an extension to this, Lee’s also produced crewel-work for chair coverings, and crewel-work (embroidery) kits, sold through their agents to those following the Arts and Crafts tradition, and Lee’s published a number of guides to crewel embroidery techniques. Secondly, Lee’s also sold a large quantity of high quality woolen furnishing fabrics, woven and over-blocked in their factory at Birkenhead, using a unique technique which Lee himself had developed. Small hand-blocks of colour were applied to woven woolen fabric, which in turn gave the resultant fabric something of the feeling and richness (and thus cost) of tapestry-work.
Lee’s was an interesting company, led by a family of inspired weaver-designers some of whose design books survive in the Williamson Museum in Birkenhead. They also employed some remarkable designers, such as G. F. Armitage and F. Lewis Day, whose popular textbooks on textile design, pattern and embroidery still survive in many older libraries. Arthur Lee himself took not only his design and management role but his paternal social responsibilities very seriously, giving ‘lantern-slide’ lectures to his girls every Friday evening, and sending them off on holiday every summer to some cottages in Wales he had bought for this purpose. In 1929 Lee’s also took on the British and American distribution rights for Mariano Fortuny’s fashionable Renaissance-inspired silk furnishing textiles.

The importance of historical accuracy

In Lee’s business, and in that of their many retail clients, the design, overall construction, and sale of the various elements of the period-style interior required a good detailed knowledge of the history of furniture, furnishing textiles and interior design. Style in furnishing textiles was complicated, then as now, by the ephemeral, international and complex derivation of many pattern designs, with many patterns renewed through design adaptation, and others migrating from one particular type of textile to another, and from the end of the nineteenth century, new technologies being utilized to reduce costs, and make former luxuries more widely available. This kaleidoscope of pattern and fabric variations made the job of homemakers interested in the period-style look, and the salesman attending to them, particularly difficult.

Many books have been written on the subject of period furnishing, and trustworthy information is easily accessible to all who desire it, but it is quite otherwise with regard to what we may call period fabrics. No standard works, no hand guides exist, to aid the man who would have his valuable old pieces, or his modern reproductions, covered with fabrics in perfect keeping with their style and period. However excellent his taste, he is inevitably at a loss. He would give much to know with what bravery of adornment his Tudor stools – his Restoration chairs – first faced the world – what light or somber curtains hung beside them. It is just such knowledge that the publishers of the Period Guide hope to place with more or less precision before him.
So wrote the author of Lee’s *The Period Guide to Fabrics in their Relation to Furniture*, which the company published to considerable acclaim in the trade between 1928 and 1934. First issued as a series of large-format illustrated cards by subscription to their retail clients (and ‘collectors’), starting in 1928, and attaining its final form in 1934, the *Period Guide* was unusual in its depth and detail. As was readily acknowledged in several trade journals at the time, no other guide was as comprehensive or wide-ranging. Its rigorously detailed organization, illustrated and period-keyed layout made it especially useful. Loosely following the structure of earlier scholarly works, the *Period Guide* was divided up into sections determined by the reigns of the English Kings and Queens and the ‘woods’ commonly used in furniture during these reigns. As simplified furniture history the *Guide* was diligent, cleverly building its history of textiles around exemplary period chairs, which were easy to recognize. In fact, in the *Guide* these ‘typical’ chairs came to represent the whole style of the associated period.

![Figure 2: A card from Lee’s *Period Guide* Satinwood period, typical chair types (A series) – note that the text concentrates on coverings. Author’s copy (photo by author)](image)

Issued by subscription, initially as a work in progress, the *Period Guide* eventually grew to around 85 cards, made up of 6 alphabetical card series, including Early Oak (Tudor period), Oak (Stuart period), Walnut (the early eighteenth century), Mahogany, Satinwood and Sundries (which included the ‘modern’ Victorian period, significantly illustrated only by Morris’s own work). Some green ‘Trade Cards’ helped the salesman match the particular patterns illustrated with products in Lee’s extensive catalogue.

The ‘modern adaptations’ series (D), coming before the other fabric cards, present an image of what a tasteful, period-based interior might look like – a model to use in the difficult business of imagining how a room containing these pieces and coverings might appear. This was a formal exercise typical of early Arts and Crafts inspired interior design. Drawn to scale and in elevation, the various textile elements were picked out in colour to emphasize their important role in integrating and harmonizing the interior. Pattern was the authenticator of this schema – an inappropriate pattern would destroy the desired effect and render the whole unbalanced.
The last of the card series was issued in 1934, having by then attained a circulation of around 2500 sets. The local publisher F. Lewis then reproduced the whole set in a matching folder for a wider audience, and this seems to have been replicated in America, by the American company, which suggests that well over 5000 copies of the cards were issued in total, mostly between the Wars, and all over the world. After the Second World War, in the early 1950s, due to changing tastes and more straightened circumstances, A H Lee issued another but greatly abridged bound version of this Guide as The Period Digest, with drawings of a ‘seventh’ historical period, which we would probably label Modernist (Breuer’s famous chair being one of the chosen exemplars for this period). By this stage the company was belatedly trying out more abstract ‘modern’ patterns, including some Indian-derived repetitive patterns, but was clearly having difficulty competing in the brave new world of cheaper short-lived synthetics. The Birkenhead factory closed in 1970, although the American branch of the company survived with some difficulty as Lee Jofa.

**Canonicity, Conservatism, Restraint and Adaptability**

The ‘period style’ interior mapped out in Lee’s Period Guide was not an attempt at exact historical recreation, despite its emphasis on museum exemplars and historical scholarship, but a hybrid adaptation, an aesthetic collage made up of some antique or period style elements, skilfully combined to suggest a modern harmonious whole. While taking its cue from Morris’ adaptive approach to design, it developed its own cultural momentum, developing a broad following amongst middle class homemakers keen to express and embody a more stable and durable cultural identity in the home and an aesthetic apparently threatened by dynamic but corrosive character of modernity. They also felt alienated by the harsher domestic (or anti-domestic) aesthetic of emerging Modernism.

As Lee’s representative in Australia in 1935, R.F. Chapman, claimed, Lee’s were...
taking the very best period designs of undeniable beauty and adapting them for the requirements of today. And so at last we have a contemporary style that is based on something more aesthetic and stands on firmer ground than anything we have known for years.  

That he simultaneously dismissed modernism as an unstable passing fad may seem to us an extreme form of reactionary conservatism. But this needs to be put into context. In the 1930s the lifespan of an interior might last 3 to 4 times longer than a similar interior today, and the danger of stylistic obsolescence was one that Lee continued to trade upon into the 1960s. Theirs was the ‘classic’ look, which would never be made redundant in stylistic or cultural terms. The ‘period style’ interior could be ‘collected’ or built up slowly, and its harmonious totality was never confronting, and never clashed with the occasional exotic presence of a Turkish rug or oriental antique.

Rather like an Edwardian gentleman’s library, the intention seems to have been to suggest an established ‘canon’ of good taste in furniture, decorative arts and matching textiles, and thus certain valued cultural and educational standards. Just as no middle-class bookshelf before World War Two would have seemed complete without the presence of Shakespeare, Milton and the poets and the great works of English history, a few choice antiques and suitable reproduction pieces, rugs and furnishings in the home’s interior would similarly appear to be essential. Significantly, the same shelves often contained works describing the English (or American) countryside, including the hugely popular series of books on different counties and their histories, often nostalgically linked to the family concerned. These were illustrated with lyrical watercolours of towns, villages and natural landscapes usually devoid of any sign of industrial modernity.

The interior landscape of the period-style interior, the selected scenes in these books, and those collected or reproduced in prints for the walls and, in the homes of the more wealthy, in figured tapestries, all now seem ‘nostalgic’, romantic and strangely devoid of all signs of modern industrial or urban life. But books and prints depicting particular village scenes, involving craftsmen at their work or maids occupied with timeless rural duties, were especially popular before and after the Second World War – it was these which seemed to spell out to many in England and in the Commonwealth, what ‘we were fighting for’. This love and appreciation of the handmade and hand-crafted was not only exploited by publishers and print-makers (ironically often producing their wares in large runs in modern factories) but also by the furniture and furnishing industries, where brochures and advertisements shamelessly proclaimed the ‘craft’ values embedded in their products. What was handmade, it was implied, was necessarily of superior quality to the mass-produced, something that might be much harder to claim today.

For example, in a 1930s brochure from the large Birmingham furnishing store, Alfred Allen, one of Lee’s British clients, every effort was made to distinguish a national craft aesthetic in the goods they sold from ‘the rush and bustle’ of modern mass-production, its shoddy goods and ceaseless quest for novelty this entailed. Like many other advertisements and brochures of this period, the author was at pains to emphasise that the values and traditions of local craftsman, with their furniture and fabrics produced by ‘master craftsmen’ – creating objects of aesthetic elegance and balance, durability and longevity. Allen’s brochure has a strongly emotive flavour typical of advertisements associated with the ‘period style’
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interior, openly exploiting its readers’ fascination with an ‘authenticity’ and stability ‘threatened’ by the onrush of modernity (we can almost hear Morris speaking of ‘shoddy’ here). A similar fascination with the simple craft-based productions of ‘colonial’ America can be seen in advertisements, trade catalogues and design advice from the USA in the same period, again emphasising a unique national aesthetic embodied and expressed through a regional, now threatened craft tradition.44

Conclusion – an adaptive but decidedly modern style of interior

Despite its evident appeal to its consumers’ romantic ideas about the past, the period style interior represents a strangely modern and restrained or ‘disciplined’ return to a carefully imagined and ‘designed’ past, combining too much designed open space and freedom from clutter, too much carefully considered stylistic unity, and too much coordinated colour, pattern and form, with an obligatory concern for modern comforts and convenience. The period style interior is thus markedly different from the exaggerated stylistic revivalisms of the Victorian era, or the dark, gloomy and decidedly uncomfortable interiors of the real seventeenth century. Like the popular history and myth embedded in today’s ‘heritage’ reconstructions, and today’s more up-market ‘country style’ interiors, the period style interior is a modern (but perhaps anti-modernist) configuration of the past to suit the needs of the present, and embodies a now common desire for stability, identity, continuity, cultural depth and place.45

There are modern parallels with this reinterpretation of the past in the lavish projects undertaken by some ‘tree-changers’ in Australia, who might lovingly ‘restore’ some nineteenth-century homestead to a decidedly modern version of its ‘former glory’. The resulting ‘heritage modern’ interior is suggestive of the kind of attraction many homemakers felt for the ‘period style’ in the 1920s and 1930s.

As David Brett argues, the modern pursuit of the past is not necessarily anti-modern, but can be read as an expression of modernity itself, of a ‘sedentary’, local, historically grounded quest for social and cultural identity, authentic belonging and place, which attempts to ‘correct’ or balance the more familiar ‘nomadic’, international, technologically-driven and future-oriented impulse we tend to associate with modernity.46 As Arthur Lee’s grandson, Christopher, declared in a speech to the Royal Society of the Arts, his company aimed in their products to transcend the ‘ephemeral’ and short-lived styles of modern fashion, and to appeal to a sense of the canonical, the durable and the ‘timeless’. Within this tradition reproduction textiles played, and continue to play, a crucial but understated role. Antique or reproduction furniture may have become an anchor for creating the required sense of the past in the ‘period style’ room, but it was the furnishing fabrics, window treatments and wall coverings that provided the unifying elements in the schema, and brought the collage of the various historical and exotic references together.

The interiors presented in Lee’s Period Guide’s ‘modern adaptations’ card series are clearly not supposed to be accurate historical reconstructions, of the kind a museum might put together for its visitors. Like the interiors displayed from wealthy homes in Country Life, the Period Guide’s ‘modern adaptations’ series pieced together the various elements required to design and build a comfortable and apparently ‘timeless’ adaptation, a material expression which eschewed the industrial and ‘shoddy’ for the hand-made, the durable and skillfully crafted. This ethic is reflected in the visual iconography of the publications Lee’s produced, many of them on expensive hand-made paper and reminiscent of the productions of the
similarly influenced Private Press movement, another expression of the Arts and Crafts movement.

The modernity of the ‘period style’ interior, like that of the Arts and Crafts movement, should not be dismissed because it was ‘anti-Modernist’ and open to the past as well as to the present. The ‘period style’ interior was attractive also because it was flexible - it could be incrementally created and accommodate grandma's armchairs, personal objects, family heirlooms and art works, and add a few new ones or antiques, over time, something which could not easily be done in a modernist interior which might require more commitment, and more radical aesthetic surgery.

The period-style interior therefore can be seen to express a valued sense of individual and familial identity as well as cultural and aesthetic continuity – with the grand homes of the country, with the ‘heritage’ displayed in the museums – and it also responded to an established sense of middle class comfort. This makes the period-style interior, while never a Modernist one, a decidedly modern one, able to adapt to the modern quest for greater comfort, convenience and cleanliness within the myth of what appeared to be an established tradition of elegance and sophistication, referencing a canon of historical, hand-crafted exemplars.

Endnotes

1 This essay derives from research undertaken at the Williamson Library in Birkenhead and the Winterthur Museum and Library in Delaware, USA, where I enjoyed a Library Fellowship in 2007. I would like to thank Linda Eaton, Curator of Textiles at Winterthur, and the archivists and librarians there for their many kindnesses to me during my visit, and the Trustees and Curators at the Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead, for permission to make use of the A.H. Lee archive held there. I would also like to thank especially Ellen Kravet for her many kindnesses to me, and her encouragement and help in allowing me to view the related Lee Jofa archive in New York and the G.P. and J. Baker archive in High Wycombe. I must also thank Dr Philip Sykas, University of Manchester, for his generous advice and assistance.
3 Robsjohn-Gibbings, Goodbye, Mr Chippendale, 5.
4 A very large number of these can be viewed in the Winterthur Museum and Library. For a discussion of the active role of designers and retailers in promoting the antique and period style, see below, and Patricia Edmondson. The Tension between Art and Industry: the Art-in-Trades Club of New York, 1906-1935, unpub. Masters Thesis, Winterthur Library, DE, 2008. The Art-in-Trades Club was for a time the closest approximation of an association of interior designers and retailers in New York. This deserves a larger, more sustained investigation.
suggested, namely the beauty, stylistic longevity and cultural depth of the ‘old’ styles. This literature popularized the large scholarly literature of the previous 3 decades.


20 This has its echoes in literary and visual culture, where cheap ‘classic’ editions of canonical authors such as Shakespeare, the English poets and Dickens, illustrated histories of English counties and towns, and cheaply reproduced prints of English landscapes, were popular across the English-speaking world.


23 The Victoria and Albert Museum holds material relevant to the early designs made for the company. On the social history of the company see Johnson and Moore, Lee’s Tapestry Works 1987; Mais, Fifty Years of Fabrics, 1938; and Christopher Lee. ‘Hand Blocked and Embroidered Tapestries’, Journal of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce (115:5216) (Jan., 1967): 90-104.

24 The historical information provided here and below derives largely from the A.H. Lee archive at the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead and the Lee material currently held by Ellen Kravet. I am very grateful for permission to use this material here. See above, note 1.

25 Lee Archives, Birkenhead; Johnson and Moore, Lee’s Tapestry Works,1987; ‘The Board Room Tapestries’, The Midland Venture, (August 1939): 302-5 (describes a very large tapestry commissioned from Lee’s by the Midland Bank for their boardroom, which was supposed to be the largest tapestry ever woven). Few authors take tapestries seriously now as a part of the early 20th century interior, despite the evidence of several manufacturers operating in the UK up to the Second World War.


28 See the excellent catalogue essay by Philip Sykas, *The Secret Life of Textiles*. Manchester and Bolton: Bolton Museums, 2005, on the role and different types of design books commonly used in the industry.


30 Johnson and Moore, *Lee’s Tapestry Works*, 1987; and see press cuttings in Lee archive.

31 Mary Schoeser makes this point very well in *Fabrics and Wallpapers* (London: Bell and Hyman, 1986), as does Philip Sykas in *The Secret Life of Textiles*, which contains numerous examples reflecting the fashion-driven, ephemeral, international, and even cross-cultural dimensions of the trade in textiles.


34 Calculation based upon advertisements and press cuttings in the Lee Archives, Birkenhead.


36 Examples of these can be found in advertisements in the Lee Archive.


38 See the interview with Lee’s representative here emphasising the stylistic longevity and aesthetic superiority of the period style, in *Furniture Trades Review*. Sydney, Australia, (December 1935): 3-4. Lee had a considerable presence in the department stores in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as in those in South Africa. See press cuttings and advertisements, Lee Archive, Birkenhead.

39 Christopher Lee makes the same point in some detail, linking typical buyer profiles to interior longevity in Lee, ‘Hand Blocked and Embroidered Tapestries’, 1967, art cit.


45 Louise Ward. ‘English Country House Style: the English country house as it might have been but never was’, in Helen Hughes ed. *John Fowler: the invention of the Country House style*. Shaftsbury, Dorset: English Heritage, 2005: 63-75.

Township Metropolis: design for disposal

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Abstract: From an African perspective, this paper attempts to overview various socio-economic survey data, which is used as an empirical tool for retail design process. With this in mind, the author's intention is to explore, from macro to micro level, the various examples of multilayered weave of the urban environment and tribal influence within the local township community. A socially conscious design approach was the primary focus, which can inspire and empower local individuals towards small scale co-production. The design motto was to integrate Nampak products in interior presenting innovative re-use of materials. This creates a dynamic interaction between retail space vs. rural/urbanized consumers and the enviro-social impact of products sold directly to public. The case study will be examined, focusing within the South African context on local trends which are emerging, influenced by growing middle class consumers. Is something dematerialized in this transition from informal street trade to formal retail space? Is this new mall in effect a true reflection of the cultural and lifestyle needs of the consumer, or is it merely a replication of global malls trends, satisfying only developers' needs as the final outcome? This paper serves to not only attempt to answer these questions, but to provide a platform for clarity in understanding the design process and their final outcomes, when focus is on a sense of community engagement, recycling and a prescribed low budget.

Introduction

The city has become the great shopping mall for most of the sub-Saharan Africa. New geographies of retailing and consumption are redefining the economic of cultural horizons of contemporary Johannesburg.¹

Historically, Euro-centric society has encoded Africans as rural creatures that suffer from an irresolvable crisis. From an African perspective this paper attempts to overview various socio-economic survey data, which is used as an empirical tool for retail design process. With this in mind, the author's intention is to explore, from macro to micro level, the various examples of multilayered weave of the urban environment, and tribal influence within local township community.

Firstly, an investigation at the macro level from a statistical summary of Gauteng Province, in the majority of studies explored, has been on the marginality of township locations and the hyper-visible issues of poverty and dispossession. This is typically characterized in emerging parallel economies, including informal trade and new mall markets. Due to this fragmentation, the township metropolis itself is a representation of post-apartheid fragmentation and segregation influence on one side vs. African rural and tribal heritage on other. Is something dematerialized in this transition from informal street trade to formal retail space? Is this new mall phenomenon in effect a true reflection of the cultural and lifestyle needs of the consumer?
Secondly, the core purpose of this study is to reflect, at a micro level, Nampac's retail stores' narrative and conceptual process that is inspired by new emerging trends in South Africa. The case study is to be examined, focusing on two of Nampac's Redi Box retail outlets located at Moloto's new strip mall, and its retail potential to create a platform inclusive of empowerment and educational components interactive within neighboring communities.

Thirdly, as principal member of Inspace Interiors, an interior design practice, and as an educator in the same field, the question emerged: In what ways could I, as a designer, make a difference?² The aim is to re-direct the design approach towards socially responsible, humanitarian and sustainable goals. Paul Polak suggests that nothing less than a revolution in design is needed to reach the other 90%.³ Furthermore, he questions how complicated it is to design for the poor, with the conclusion, that if you think of poor people as customers instead of recipients of charity, it will radically change the design process itself.⁴ This paper will attempt to explore this narrative of South African township urban development and its influence on the local consumer market.

**Gauteng's antiurbanistic melody**

Indeed, for many analyses, the defining feature of contemporary African cities is the slum.⁵

Contemporary Gauteng is an inland province full of exploitable natural resources, a typical metropolis of the Southern hemisphere, as the conjunction of two cities that presently are undergoing a massive spatial restructuring, and where overflowing wealth and informal settlements co-exist side by side. Urban and industrialized zones of Johannesburg and Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), over the past decade, have become so geographically and socially overlapped that the two cities have no fixed boundaries; no unique center, no unlike Mother Africa herself. Johannesburg, with its dilapidating, abandoned city structures, has merged through extensive greenbelts with Tshwane's miles of governmental infrastructure and poetic avenues of jacaranda trees. Fifteen years after post apartheid liberation from its oppressive past, new urban growth development is injected by private capital for middle and upper income residents, supported by city planning authorities as much as by private developers and real estate capital investors.

Office developments, shopping centers, and hotels dominate the cityscape that hides the African narrative landscape, shaped historically by the booms and slumps of the gold mining industry and bizarre apartheid urban planning. Therefore, new urbanized reshaping development is highly orientated towards tourist attractions such as shopping malls, hotels and restaurants, and the township as local phenomena themselves. Idealized through aestheticised political struggle, townships have been re-conceptualized as one of the province’s best tourist influx attraction tools as a beautiful-ugly⁶ image of an undesired past and a new democracy. Simultaneously, apartheid city structures suffered and ‘...the former inhabitants have abandoned their green pastures and moved to armed townhouse complexes and shopping malls in the north. It is also a mark of a culture that accepts that its very existence is purely temporary and that the day will come when its time for the tribe to move on.’⁷ Therefore, the metropolis itself was mapped in unorthodox ways.
that Sarah Nutall is exploring, using vocabularies of separation and connectivity that surface only to recede again, creating the specific resonance of city-ness of Gauteng province.

**Township metropolis**

The music is culturally reconfiguring the relationships between township space and city space to the extent that for many the township is no longer apart, but rather a part of the city. ⁸

The process of globalization and its associated consequences have fostered the emergence of multiple economies in South Africa. Laborers, affected by the privatization of most basic services, have been forced to live in half-built environments that are increasingly overused and poorly developed.

Informal settlements within the boundaries of Tshwane (previously Pretoria) constitute 35% of all households. ⁹ Marginally located on Tshwane’s urban boundary, Moloto, as part of the Dinokeng homelands area, is nested between relative economic development and opportunity in Gauteng on the one hand, and great poverty and under-development in Mpumalanga and North West Province on the other (Figure 1). The environmental management plan for the Dinokeng project area, which was conducted by the department of economic development, has deep concerns regarding numerous structural applications, including both retail and commercial land uses. Informal and *leap frog* constructions are detracting from the overall goal to create a premier tourist socio-ecological destination. ¹⁰ The area is characterized by predominantly low income groups with housing ranging from formal to informal. The lack of educational skills and vulnerability is an ongoing problem in and around the Soshanguwe and Mamelodi locations. A micro survey applied under University of Pretoria’s umbrella shows humbling statistical results, where unemployment ratios vary from 52% to 61% in neighboring townships, and for the majority of self-employed inhabitants, monthly contribution statistics are between R800.00 to maximum R2500.00 per household. Unfortunately, this is accompanied by poor infrastructure where basic amenities, including running water, sanitation and refuse systems, are almost non-existent.

The study area is representative of a high and intricate biodiversity, as well as a rich cultural and historical past. A cultural heritage, spanning over millions of years, covers human development from the Stone Age to the present day. The Ndebele chief’s prayer songs praise the site’s sacredness and they use local water for royal ceremonies, baptisms and cleansing initiations. The sacredness of local sites must not be disposed since statistics show that in 2008, an estimated 8000 young Ndebele tribesman took part in initiation ceremonies.
Besides the above-mentioned statistics, fifteen years after the end of apartheid, there is minimal data available on the postliberation ethnographies of everyday life in the townships. The obvious fact is that the township is both urban and non-urban; it is in close proximity to the city, while at its margins, all these points are incontestable. A Paul Jenkins reflection on informal settlements makes them infernal and eternal simultaneously. The conclusion is that informal is normal.\textsuperscript{11}

The layout and design of dwellings in informal settlements, in their physical form, can vary greatly. They are closely linked to social networks and local infrastructure, and the majority of employed residents work near to where they live and walk to work. Surveys in RSA found that an average of 52% of households have rural homes in which members of extended family live.\textsuperscript{12} Squatter camps differ from townships only in a material sense: They are more deprived and are home almost exclusively to the unemployed. Residence of squatter camps are seen by society as disposable people. It should be added that in townships, everybody knows everybody else, where they come from, and how their parents met. Everybody has a stake in the township and can call it home. The city is for the passersby.

The township has a little bit of inrural-land in terms of social relations, but it is clear that much of what takes place in African townships is fairly invisible. It is an almost impossible task to quantify the number of people who reside in a given compound, and how household income is distributed and supplemented; it is likewise practically impossible to determine how electricity is charged for, as there are more households than there are official connections. The township, as a liminal place, could be said to be the purest form, representation and reflection of cultural identification. It is the immediacy and accessibility of informal urban structures that allows for social interaction and a heightened social experience. The color, sounds, smells and movement of these locations elevates the social experience, yet ironically, these are regarded within the mainstream of material culture as marginal from the economic and social point of view (Figure 2, 3).
African mall phenomena

Mall is seen as antidote to apartheid, place where people blend and can forget the past and there current anxieties.\textsuperscript{13}

South African malls initially catered only to the white elite, followed by Afrikaners and coloreds and finally, after the 1994 elections, a new black middle class took off and the consuming masses grew in vast numbers. The paradox lies in the fact that, a decade or so later, it is still risky to invest towards an exclusively township or African mall. ‘Simply because of sheer numbers, but if you cater purely for blacks, you chase away the whites – and the blacks even more. It all boils down to new aspirations’, bluntly noted by SA shopping editor Mr. Viljoen.\textsuperscript{14} Attempting to prove otherwise, Soweto’s entrepreneur, Richard Maponya, started the first mega mall in Soweto. Maponya mall today, with its total of 60,000 square meters, is attracting 200 retail outlets including big names like Woolworths, Edgars, Pick & Pay, Ackermans, and Ster Kinekor cinemas. This mall gives no local stylistic indicators besides a large bronze elephant at the main entrance, which is the totemic clan symbol of the Maponya tribe. According to oral tradition, most tribes in African society trace their origin to an animal to which certain taboos have to be adhered to. Regardless of the fact that Maponya mall could be transplanted to any global site due to complete lack of African cultural identity, Soweto dwellers perceive the local mall as second rate or inferior and prefer to take a taxi to the nearest regional mall. Today Maponya mall is not fully let, and suffers not only from a local inferiority, but also from a global economic crisis. Is something lost in this transition from street to formal retail space? (Figure 4, 5, 6)
Presently, South Africa’s shopping centers are undergoing rapid changes, and many examples of successful small-scale strip township malls are mushrooming country wide. ‘A shopping center has the power to bring people together, to create a bond, and to separate them.’\textsuperscript{15} The mall works like a Pandora’s Box of aspirations. One would assume that those who do not have a car or credit card have little interest in malls. New township malls welcome those who depend on public transport and disposable cash. Although exposed and entrenched in a global mentality, the polemic arises: how are the needs and experiences of the township consumer, coming from such a diverse and complex society, being met? Or is Maponya mall a replication of global trends, satisfying only developers’ needs as the final outcome?

Opposite to its more contemporary mall representative, Big Tree Mall has been established with a long term overview for \textit{out of town} by Tshwane \textit{leap frog} property investor, and is closely situated to the neighboring townships of Mamelodi and Soshanguwe. Typically, the developer used a Euro post colonial style for this center, bridging the gap of non-contextually by naming the mall after an old African woman, who managed to build a rural primary school next to a big tree called Modumela. The interesting aspect of this typical township strip mall is that it demonstrates a co-existence of global retail and local culture. Township ‘Y’ generations decided to take over and create a more contemporary Africanized cultural pattern, over imposing bustling taxi rank commuters and youth congregates in front of furniture stores, dancing to blaring \textit{kwaito} music from the shops’ speakers, surrounded by the colorful blankets displayed in store fronts (Figure 7, 8).

City architect Fanuel Motsepe uses the term \textit{township metropolis} to describe increasing imbrication and mutual influencing of each space, city and township, with one another.\textsuperscript{16} As a result, a strong cultural identity has been integrated in a mall structure via products and services offered instead. Big Tree mall’s inner core vernacular structure is open to the outdoor environment, accommodating the anchor tenant Spar supermarket, as well as various banks, clothing stores and, a vast number of funeral parlous and medical suites, which is typically African. The commodification of \textit{post mortis} is an important part of the local lifestyle (Figure 9, 10), with consumers spending the majority of their scarce savings on lavish funerals. The cultural influence is strongly present in traditional \textit{Muti} shops, which are using Redi box packaging for herbal medicinal remedies. Big Tree Mall exists as a public space, configured within an economy of need. By reprogramming it with fast food outlets, cell phone suppliers and other accoutrements of consumer society, its incorporation in global multiple narratives has occurred, and transcended, in an informal manner. However, the transition from this familiar milieu of the street...
Township Metropolis

to the prescribed space of the township mall, and in particular the Moloto Mall, is one that begs many questions: Does the future lie in South Africa’s growing consumerism market and small-scale strip malls?

**Designed for disposal**

*Informality*, as non state regulated forms of social, economic and cultural action, in fact pervades our lives in many ways, but is more symbolic in higher income countries where states are usually strong and state activity penetrates social and economic life more profoundly.  

Ironically African culture is based and deeply rooted in its own narrative aspects. As local designers, why do we fail to acknowledge this and incorporate with within our concept design process? Therefore, an approach was taken with a strongly present African culture in the initial design phase, focusing on services and the needs of the community. The work displayed and described for the retail client Nampak has little relation to what global and local retail trends generally highlight on professional design.

Nampak Redi Box Gauteng (Pty) Ltd specialize in a comprehensive range of packaging products, contract packaging services, plastic bottles, bulk and safe water storage containers and plastic drums. Nampak, like other companies, faces the challenges of delivering incremental returns to shareholders, producing more cost effectively. BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) is a mechanism that can assist the South African businesses in this regard, and should be seen in this context. Nampak’s aim is to be regarded as a black empowered company by 2014, from an ownership perspective. The programme identifies the critical need to provide information and education on water, sanitation and sewerage services to those communities which previously lacked these amenities. Given the high rates of infectious diseases in South Africa, programmes like these are crucial (Figure 11, 12). Therefore, Redi Box uses a diverse range of educational interventions for the first time users of these services, which are alive to issues of language, culture and literacy. With twenty outlets situated throughout South Africa, Nampak has taken a leap of faith to establish new concept for retail, catering directly to the public under the trading name ‘Redi Box’. The initial flagship outlets were established in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg (Figure 13, 14) as positive feedback was received. Following local mall trends, they have taken a new direction to cater for additional warehouse concept flagship stores, designed for township strip malls and their customers exclusively. Inspired by the client’s new programmatic vision, Inspace Interiors Studio has taken on the task to incorporate the current social and cultural realities for these specific localities, and emerge them in the initial design phase using a socially conscious approach. The studio’s goal is to ‘draw attention to a kind of design that is not particularly attractive, often limited in function, and extremely inexpensive.’

The design process is to integrate Nampak’s existing Redi Box range in interior, displaying innovative re-use of materials and products. This creates a dynamic interaction between retail space vs. rural/urbanized consumers and the enviro-social impact of products sold directly to public.
As a reflective design overview, the Redi Box project is not about providing expensive high-tech solutions. Instead, it is about providing low cost, open source design that can be applied and replicated by the users, thus providing them with the means to become entrepreneurs. Regardless of this, Carlo Vezzoli argues that when information replaces materials, in the current economic and cultural context, information brings along material ballast, and the increase in the information flow tends to create new consumption opportunities.¹⁹

The question to address in future is whether or not these newly designed, socially sustainable realities are remedying only one aspect, neglecting the overall environmental impact. Within the design process, the opposing issue emerged: Is this just another interior-architectural trend and are we all about to globally realize its unsustainably disappointing end?

As such, the conceptual design process was pivotal in understanding the quantum of available resources and the potential consumer’s immediate needs and desires. To facilitate rather than dictate township requirements, spatial intervention was applied, using bulk containers, safe water storage containers, plastic drums and crates as tools to provide a retail narrative. Inspace Interiors, through research, has been inspired and visually seduced by the traditional Ndebele cultural legacy, and their resourcefulness in their recycled-remixed application. The design process was infused with an intense color palette throughout the packaging products vs. earthy tones applied in concrete paint finish for the floor application. In addition to this, spatial storytelling was accomplished through fixed display units and vertical pattern repetition using monochrome plastic crates. The display window narrative has taken a more expressive form, emerging as an installation piece. The central window area has been treated experimentally, cutting various water storage drums, and through repetition of the circular pattern, creating a fixed though porous visual screen curtain (Figure 15, 16, 17, 18). The informality of finish was embraced as a positive outcome rather than imperfection. The design theme was to integrate the Nampak products as permanent window-display fixtures, applying repetition of the same component in an axial direction, presenting innovative re-use of resale products available. The aim was to create an interactive dynamic introducing the process of spatial and product dematerialization to a partly rural, not completely urbanized consumer who is just about to take their first step in a disposable income reality. ‘More products = more well being.’²⁰
The Design process, in its initial phase, was already made for disposal that ‘provides a narrative thread that weaves a story of culture and lifestyle and how the spirit of ubuntu and sense of community wills itself in the concrete spaces of a mall.’

Conclusion

All the above ethnographical and enviro-economical facts reinforce newly explored retail strategies, and give an applied example that rigid design rules can be broken; that taking a seemingly opposing direction to existing trends can bring more emphatic shopping experience without compromising brand identity or sales. This study argues that the systematic sustainability embedded in Redi Box retail application was derived from a local contextual analysis. Design priority is applied in a higher octave, in favor of low cost disposable solutions over the aesthetics phenomenality of the retail environment itself. Therefore, the primary aim is to inspire and empower local communities towards small-scale co-production, so that they can evolve into self-supporting entrepreneurs independently.

Endnotes

9 University of Pretoria, HSC. A housing support centre; Contextual research, Macro scale; City of Tshwane statistics, UPmamelodyresearch02chapter2, 2003:12.


20 Vezzoli, Design for Environmental Sustainability, 20.

Maisons d'artistes: sympathetic frame and wandering aesthetic

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Abstract: Originally a 'highly aestheticised bachelor atelier for the exhibiting of art and the seduction of visitors', the maison d'artiste was adapted by artists in the early twentieth century to provide a flexible living and working space that also functioned as sympathetic frame for their practice. Maisons d'artistes were created from the late nineteenth century by James Whistler, Oscar Wilde, Eileen Gray, Romaine Brooks, Sonia Delaunay, Marie Laurencin, Florine Stettheimer, and Dora Gordine. In post World War II America, a notable one was created for Robert Motherwell. Maisons d'artistes continue to be created and decorated by artists in the twenty-first century. In each case these combined living and working spaces were written up and circulated through various interior and architectural journals both at the time of their creation and since, helping transpose, but often homogenising this incorrigible space.

Using Bourdieu's term disposition this paper envisions how the maison d'artiste has travelled. It will demonstrate through historical and contemporary examples how the artist's studio has been used as a means for the reinforcement of marginal artistic practices (feminine, queer) and also how as a form, it has 'travelled' both geographically and beyond the boundaries of medium and discipline. Transposable and durable, the maison d'artiste is revived, decade after decade, as a sympathetic structure for producing, sheltering and ultimately framing the work, and it stands in perverse, ambivalent, and even antagonistic relationship to white-walled modernism.

Introduction

As ideas traffic across borders, so things journey to furnish local interiors and become what James Clifford has termed 'markers of embedded travel ... always already encoded in any putatively fixed cultural site'. Clifford calls the overall process of the journeying object 'travelling-in-dwelling'.

Clifford was embarked on a theory to explain travel as a marker of elite status in the late nineteenth century literary world; Pierre Bourdieu was embarked on a more sweeping and programmatic theory that would explain social patterns of behaviour and how these generate structures of domination. However, they meet in the middle with Clifford's notion of travelling-in-dwelling' and Bourdieu's assertion that a habitus and its dispositions are not fixed spatio-temporarily, but can be transposed. In theory therefore, a room can roam. In fact, movement is key to Bourdieu's definition of a habitus as made up of a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures ... principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations.

An interior, however, is not a habitus, even though there is 'a strong congruence between habitus and habitat'. Hillier and Rooksby point out that 'Bourdieu's view on the precise role of physical space is difficult to discern'. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's term remains useful in the
study of interior spaces, since even though the process is ‘blurred’ it ultimately allows for the translation of social space into physical space.6

Bourdieu likens habitus, with its constituent dispositions to character, indicated through a person’s tendencies, preferences, and tastes, which are consistent, albeit transposable. By applying Bourdieu's theory of dispositions as mobile and portable, we shall see how five artists identifying as bachelors, [of both sexes] were responsible for the travels of the maison d'artiste, from its fin-de-siecle origins to its twenty-first century variants, and from its first home in France to the US and UK. The paper will demonstrate that the bachelor studio apartment or house has, and continues to provide a ‘sympathetic frame’ for disruptive artistic practices including those from feminist and queer standpoints.

Interior magazines gave the maison d'artiste its public face, popularising it as a form for living but often failing to penetrate any further to its role as a ‘sympathetic frame’. Through four magazine articles on the interiors of the maisons d’artistes in question we see how the space itself was presented to a wider audience, and how in the Post War period it was 'tamed', particularly in regard to its sensual affects.

The maison d'artiste, originally a 'highly aestheticised bachelor atelier for the exhibiting of art and the seduction of models and viewers',7 was adapted by artists in the early twentieth century to provide a flexible living and working space that became both a medium and an expression of a practice.

One of the few to write on the maison d'artiste, Paulette Singley defines them as a space that orchestrates corporeal delight; provides a site for illicit activity; contains a sensuous and elaborate exhibition of objects and furnishings ... [and above all] is associated with the personality and sexuality of its inhabitant, who is always understood as a bachelor, regardless of marital status, gender, or sexual orientation.8

Singley begins with its mid last century derivative, the small domestic house, then works backwards, constructing a history and culture around the bachelor studio, and situating it as a crucial frame for resistance to both bourgeois and high modernist tenets. Describing its origins as drawn both from actual, historical interiors, and from literary interiors, she interweaves a history and culture of the maison d’artiste around excerpts from a key Decadent text, Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest.

The maison d'artiste, suggests Singley, was intended to function as a 'psychologically picturesque interior' where 'boundaries between self and space can dissolve'. It also had consistent spatial features that appear in most of its examples; a large open studio, flexible working spaces, natural light, often with a staircase spiralling up to sleeping areas, and an elaborate array of objects.9 Arrayed artfully, these objects complete an exotic interior for the artist and his or her work, that ‘travels’ through the anecdotal recall of startled visitors, as for example, the news of Sarah Bernhardt’s ‘coffin bed’ travelled through Paris.10

Such objects and images conjured notoriety because they were uncanny, curious, delightful, artificial, and strange, like Robert de Montesquiou's jewelled tortoise, or des Esseintes's alcohol dispenser that played musical notes.11 Their purpose was to create the conditions for
what the Symbolists called 'ideated memory'; or an early form of self psychoanalysis that was
to have a profound influence later on the Surrealists.

The imperative of the _maison d'artiste_ according to Singley, was to integrate the space of the
bachelor with that of the artist. She describes how in the nineteenth century this space
provided for a way of living that embodied Decadent and Aesthetic values; particularly their
construction of the 'cult of beauty' and their rejection of utilitarian concepts of art as moral and
useful.\(^\text{12}\)

The roots of the _maison d'artiste_ are literary, and are described in the fictional interiors
occupied by des Esseintes, from Huysmans's _A Rebours_ and Dorian from Oscar Wilde's _The
Picture of Dorian Gray_.\(^\text{13}\) Singley describes these books as 'instruction manuals' for
decorating the _maison d'artiste_.\(^\text{14}\) The eighteenth century _petite maison_ as a scenario
designed for seduction, described by Jean-Francois Bastide in his fictional narrative of the
same name, also contributes to the literary pedigree of the _maison d'artiste_.\(^\text{15}\)

Singley also aligns the _maison d'artiste_ with the Decadent's '
embrace of the hysteric, convalescent, or androgyne as privileged figures of deviance
and abnormality, [that required] the construction of [sympathetic] spaces around
aberrant bodies.\(^\text{16}\)

Two of the most 'deviant and abnormal' of the Decadents, Robert de Montesquiou, and Oscar
Wilde were famed for the decor of their houses in which, as Singley puts it, 'each of the
senses is marshalled towards sensory gratification'.\(^\text{17}\)

While a full discussion of Singley's paper is beyond our present scope, what can be drawn
usefully from it is her identification of three overlapping tropes that connect the Decadent
literary or artistic figure to the _maison d'artiste_ as a sympathetic space, and these are:
sensory gratification, solitude, and provision for languorous repose.

Beginning with Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici's house E.1027 (Figure 1), I will trace these
three tropes or conditions through four further examples. The dialogue between Eileen Gray
and Jean Badovici in 'From Eclecticism to Doubt' in _L'Architecture Vivante_ provides the link
between E.1027's spare, pure and formal aesthetic and the richly ornamented, essentially
narrational Decadent interior. From this text there is no doubt that E.1027 was intended to
operate on the senses in the arousing manner of the Decadent [or Aesthetic] interior and they
describe exactly how they intended the house to 'orchestrate corporeal delight' and thus to
function as a _maison d'artiste_.

Their attention to sensory gratification, to bodily pleasures as these informed the design of the
house and its furniture, has been commented on by Beatrice Colomina, Sylvia Lavin, Lynne
Walker, Caroline Constant and Katarina Bonnevier.\(^\text{18}\) However this requires iterating again
here in terms of E.1027 as a _maison d'artiste_.

In 'From Eclecticism to Doubt' Gray describes E.1027 as a house where 'dream and reality
will find equal support'; where emotion and sensation and the pathos of modern life could be
rediscovered, thus making it clear that it should invoke the senses directly and indirectly at
every turn.\(^\text{19}\)
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In E.1027 spaces and furniture are supremely oriented to the body and this awareness of the body is heightened through the use of luxurious and sensual materials, surfaces and textures. In Gray's words the orchestration of corporeal delight is achieved through

The furnishings – chairs, screens and pile carpets, the warm leathers, low metallic lustre, [sic] and depth of cushions – all contribute to an atmosphere of intimacy.20

The second of Singley's qualities – solitude was also an important consideration for Gray and Badovici. They write that 'in this very small house we have tried ... to provide an independent and remote centre where the individual can develop his [sic] profound powers.'21

Of the living room (Figure 2) Gray and Badovici state

We have ... sought to plan the [living] room in such a way that each of its inhabitants could, on occasion, achieve total independence and an atmosphere of solitude and contemplation ... everyone ... must have the impression of being alone, and if desired, entirely alone.22

Finally – the maison d'artiste as a space for a languorously reclining, even convalescent bachelor body – is echoed in E.1027. Not only in the ultra-hygienic hospital-like bathrooms but also the sheer number of surfaces on which to lie down and rest. In this 'very small' house for a couple, a maid, and maybe the occasional guest, there are no fewer than nine beds, including daybeds, divans and hammocks (Figure 3).

This bevy of beds somewhat gives the lie to the description of E.1027 as 'a house built for the man who loves work, sports and entertaining.'23 Moreover Gray's emphasis on repose as a kind of convalescence leads us back to the roots of the maison d'artiste in the Decadent movement and their 'embrace of the hysteric, convalescent, or androgyne as privileged figures of deviance and abnormality'.24

Since Badovici was at the time the editor of L'Architecture Vivante he gave generous page space to E.1027. Plentiful photographs of every room, corner, and crevice of the building give a clear idea of how the house looked and felt. The jointly written room-by-room descriptive text that follows from the dialogue and the plans give a real sense of walking through the house with Gray and Badovici. In this way, the magazine coverage gives a precise idea of the affective or habitudinal qualities of the building. Unfortunately subsequent press coverage of the maison d'artiste tends not to be so generous in allowing the inhabitant to convey the space's sensual qualities or how these sympathetically frame their practice.

The maison d'artiste went on its first journey through the wide circle of women friends, lovers and clients around Eileen Gray in Paris.25 As both Bridget Elliott and Peter McNeil have pointed out it was through the operation of homosocial networks that female and male interior decorators exerted a profound influence on modern material cultures between the wars.26 These same homosocial networks are also responsible for the transposition of the maison d'artiste.27

Gray's circle of wealthy friends – women artists, designers and writers could, and did, lead the way in adopting the maison d'artiste as one of the definitive dispositions informing the habitat of the sexually subversive modern woman artist in Paris and London in the mid 1920s.
Moreover, as Bourdieu would concur, members of Gray's social network had unusually high amounts of both cultural and economic capital – two forms of power he describes as always homologous.28 The major players in this circle included: the expatriate American heiress Natalie Barney, and her lover, Romaine Brooks who inherited a fortune at twenty-seven. In Paris both patronised Gray's shop, Jean Désert, for rugs to decorate their maisons d'artistes.29 Over the Channel, there was Hannah Gluckstein, known as Gluck, inheritor of the Lyons Coffee House.30

In various ways each of these women adopted the maison d'artiste because it provided them with 'flexible spaces that accommodated both daily life and artistic practice'.31 Both Romaine Brooks and Gluck, ‘publicised the fact that they worked at home in distinctive interiors which they had ... designed, [and], they invited 'members of the press into their homes to photograph themselves and their work'.32

Romaine Brooks (Figure 4) had a 'passion' for interior design that incorporated both Decadent and modernist elements, and her interior design schemes were closely related to her painting.33 In the 1910s Romaine Brooks decorated a large apartment on the avenue du Trocadéro all in greys, velvets and brocades operated as a frame and 'distinctive' backdrop for her highly tonal portraits (Figure 5).

Bridget Elliott suggests that by creating this 'total aesthetic' the interior functioned as 'a guarantee of authenticity of her work, and heightened its effect'.34 Further, as Joe Lucchesi suggests, by posing her lovers nude and clothed in this very distinctive and well known interior, she was also sending out clues and messages to her homosocial network that few would have missed.35 This apartment was admired and described in the press by none other than the arch-Decadent and model for Huysmans's character des Esseintes, Robert, Comte de Montesquiou who described it as 'sharing the same sensibility as her paintings.'36

In London, Hannah Gluckstein, (Gluck) also related her interior design schemes closely to her painting. Born in 1895 and studying at the St John's Wood Art School from 1913 to 1916, Gluck painted still life, landscapes and portraits of lovers, family and friends (Figure 6). In the early 1920s she came into her fortune, cropped her hair, changed her name, and wore only men's clothes from this time on. In Cornwall in 1923 she met Romaine Brooks and they painted each other's portraits. Thus her connection to the fashionable Paris circle around Natalie Barney was forged.37

Her purpose-built studio in the courtyard of her Hampstead home Bolton House on Windmill Hill was designed by architect Edward Maufe, who in 1935 converted it from a stable on the property. In July 1935 Homes and Gardens38 ran a feature on Gluck's studio (Figure 6). The article begins with a coded reference to the Bolton House's early history, which included providing shelter for literary and artistic lesbians. The first female inhabitant was Joanna Baillie, who moved there in 1791, and lived there until her death in 1852. Baillie was a friend to Wordsworth, Byron, Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and the early woman of science, Mary Somerville. She is buried next to her lover Lucy Aitken in the nearby St John's Church.39

To most readers, this reference to subversive sexualities would have missed its mark. None, however, would have missed the tone of approval applied to its aesthetic, one that Peter O'Neil40 has described as one of 'genteel modernism' that by the mid 1930s in England
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constituted a quite acceptable mix of modern and traditional fixtures and furnishings (Figure 7).

The journalist, J.M. Faber was clearly seduced visually, and her text suggests her senses were evoked by the display of enormous, pale coloured sea-shells on the dining room mantelpiece, the collection of crystal walking sticks, the shimmering off white decor and sensual furnishing fabrics – the 'amber, tea rose and apricot-coloured silks' creating [she writes] a particular affect of 'serene rightness'. Faber's words recall Singley's hallmarks of the maison d'artiste as a space that: ...'orchestrates corporeal delight'.

By reason of his wealthy background and cosmopolitan outlook, American Abstract Expressionist painter Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) would, like Gray, Brooks and Gluck certainly have been recognised by Bourdieu as a wielder of significant cultural capital. Motherwell was widely travelled, and was fluent enough in French to translate Delacroix's journal, and read Baudelaire and Mallarmé in French.

Motherwell agreed that he was 'imbued with French culture' and this alone made him a bit of an outsider as far as his fellow New York school artists were concerned (Figure 8). Unlike his peers Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, William De Kooning or Mark Rothko, he was neither working class, hyper-masculine, nor much focused on a nationalistic artistic vision. It was his contribution to critical writing as well as painting that explained American abstraction to a critical audience.

What Motherwell believed and strove to find in his abstract painting was what Baudelaire called 'correspondence' the theory of Symbolism, in which Nature is essentially a system of equivalences, that any given thing can be a metaphor for something else. Baudelaire's disengagement of art's purpose from verisimilitude anticipated and underpinned abstraction and Motherwell believed that this aesthetic provided the link, a thread of influence running right through from 1880s Symbolist Paris, to post war New York.

In New York in the early 1940s Motherwell befriended a circle of French émigrés fleeing the War, including Marcel Duchamp, Fernand Leger, Max Ernst and Pierre Chareau, architect of the Maison de Verre (1932) (Figure 10). With Eileen Gray, Chareau had been a colleague and co-member in Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM) a group of pro-Modern Movement designers who welcomed the use of industrial materials.

Motherwell engaged Chareau to build him a maison d'artiste for 10,000 dollars in the Hamptons, where land was then cheap and there had been an artist's colony since the 1890s. Chareau's house for Motherwell was built near Georgica Pond in early 1946 (Figure 11) Described as 'an architectural oddity' and a 'complete subversion of the suburban house', it was unlike anything Chareau had built before, except for one consistent feature – the inclusion of industrial elements in the form of two Quonset Hut kits bought from the US Navy. What is central to this discussion is how as a maison d'artiste Chareau's house for Motherwell 'orchestrated the senses' of the artist and formed both frame and habitus for a practices associated with the Decadent bachelor artist.

As soon as the house was completed in 1948 the structure and interior of the house began to play a powerful role in Motherwell's work. In this sympathetic structure he embarked on a new
series of paintings, in which he sought as the Symbolists did visual equivalents for inner archetypes rather than social conventions.\textsuperscript{48} The series, which was sparked by a small drawing Motherwell made in 1948 to accompany a poem by Harold Rosenberg, evolved into an ongoing, years-long exploration of the theme in more than 150 monumental canvases all titled \textit{Elegy to the Spanish Republic}.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Harper's Bazaar} wrote up the house in June 1948. There is no mention in the article of the sensual qualities of the oak disc floors or the quality of light, nothing about the aesthetic spillage between the house and the artist's work. The article does note that ‘the interior is unusual’ and it praised the un-partitioned living areas and the striking ‘circus-red curving cross beams’. A couple of prosaic metaphors round off the short commentary; in winter the rain ‘runs down the large south window (recycled from a commercial greenhouse) in a delicious waterfall’ and from outside at night, the house looked, ‘like a brilliant goldfish bowl’.\textsuperscript{50}

In the intervening decades few art critics have tried to trace a particular set of bodily affects and sensations from the house to Motherwell’s painting (Figure 12). Its been left to architectural historian Alistair Gordon, in a book on the built environment of the Hamptons, to suggest that its rough hewn, improvised quality, readymade materials, and quantity of light, were echoed in Motherwell’s use of layering, found materials, chance and accident in the paintings he made while living there.\textsuperscript{51} Gordon points to how the architectonic spaces of the paintings press against one another – curves struggling with straight lines – in a formal dialogue that correlates to the steel ribs and sectional walls of the house.\textsuperscript{52} Such links suggest the house exerted some kind of synaesthetic influence, and also suggests perhaps why the artist commented he had done his best work there, even though he only lived there for five years.\textsuperscript{53} This notion of a dialogue between the spaces and of the house and of the art are suggested by Motherwell himself when he wrote in 1946, the year the house was completed:

\begin{quote}
Structures are found in the interaction of the body-mind and the external world; and the body-mind is active and aggressive in finding them.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

This correspondence between the body-mind, abstract form and the spatial particularities of the house – all ribs and curves – is again reflected in the bull tail and testicle shapes in these two examples from the \textit{Elegies} series, which Motherwell used to explore the darker side of masculinity (Figure 13). Here, presented as vulnerability rather than mastery, with a focus on pain rather than transcendence. Thus in dialogue with his new house, Motherwell made an unusual contribution to a movement known as archetypically tough, aggressive and hyper-masculine.\textsuperscript{55}

The final example of a \textit{maison d'artiste} finds it functioning as a sympathetic frame in the twenty-first century. It is the London studio apartment of Polish-French artist Marc Chaimowicz (1946-). Bought by the artist in the late 1970s the apartment is part of an Edwardian block named Hayes Court, on the Camberwell New Road. Built in 1909 for bachelor clerks needing proximity to the City on the nearby Northern Line of the Underground, the flat occupies the top floor of a four storey castellated red brick building (Figure 14).

In the early 80s, after deciding to travel less for projects, the artist turned to the decoration of his studio apartment. From the start the decor was intended to be a project complementary and analogous to his practice. He covered the walls with hand-stencilled wallpapers, sewed
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curtains, painted the woodwork in tones of gray and began filling the rooms with an array of objects that were placed, he claims, with ‘still life’ exactitude.56

These items included: an Eileen Gray table, a Wienerwerkstatte chair, a limited edition carafe by friend Richard Hamilton labelled 'Richard' instead of 'Ricard' and a recycled hospital bed that hints at 'the convalescent, or androgyne as privileged figure of deviance and abnormality' in Decadent literature.57 This laboratory/salon/boudoir was for the artist

neither quite public nor private...the space exists in limbo, somewhere between the world of ideas of art and the interior life of the artist, and this 'home', both real and metaphorical was therefore simultaneously the catalyst of [the] art and its resultant form.58

The artist recalls that in the early 80s 'when [England] was then free of TV driven trends-anxiety' 'dabbling with decoration' was frowned on in the art world, and it was considered peculiar for a bachelor to be so focussed on his domestic interior.59 Around this time the artist also started undertaking industrial design commissions for decorative materials for the home, working in glass, fabric and ceramics for French, German and Swiss companies. His practice developed a complex overlap between fine and decorative arts with an accompanying critique of the gendering and culturing of domestic space.

Then, in the April 2006 the apartment was featured in World of Interiors, (Figure 15, 16, 17) a shelter magazine described by American academic Terry Castle as 'the holy of holies – epicene and intoxicating ... so farcically upscale and eccentric that it might have been conceived by P. G. Wodehouse.'60 The World of Interiors commissioned Chaimowicz to write a statement to accompany the photographs by James Mortimer. However the essay was rejected for being 'too intellectual' and they sent editor Marie-France Boyer to interview the artist. Boyer gives the artist a brief biography and devotes the rest of the article to a list of the various exotic objects on display; describing them as having a 'grammar that has not changed in thirty years'. It also includes a physical description of the artist as 'ambiguous, spindly, and strangely reptilian'.61

The commercial shelter magazine, with its monthly exhortations to readers to express their inner selves through the consumption of stylish decor, struggled with such an idiosyncratic interior. The text did not put the apartment in historical context as a maison d'artiste – although it is a bachelor home that includes two studios – and it strained to find a label for the distinctive aesthetic, deciding finally that the interior is 'not quite sure what its meant to be' and 'suffers from an identity crisis'.62

In response to this, the artist took the whole April 2006 edition and used it as a template for an alternative project that, using bricolage and collage, transformed it page by page into a catalogue raisonné of his own work (.Figure 18, 19). Published jointly by the Cornerhouse Manchester and the Migros Museum in Zurich in 2007, The World of Interiors straddles a number of borders. In the words of the litigation-wary curator of the Migros Museum, Heike Munder, it is 'a subjective comment on the original pages...resulting perhaps in a conditional truce between two divergent aesthetics – personal practice ... and magazine culture'.63

Alongside documents of his own work inserted between ‘real’ pages from the original April issue, Chaimowicz also included ‘things felt to be culturally urgent’. It is no coincidence that
most of these things – photographs and texts – refer to the history and culture of the *maison d'artiste* (Figure 20, 21, 22, 23).

Chaimowicz’s reworking of the *World of Interiors* is thus more than a commandeering of the ‘holy of holies’. It is in actual fact a carefully considered answer to the question of what continues to make the *maison d'artiste* ‘culturally urgent?’ This answer weaves itself suggestively through the pages of the April issue, constructing a passionate defence of the idea of the *maison d'artiste* as a sympathetic frame.

Through these four examples I’ve traced how the *maison d'artiste* or studio house was transposed from interior to interior, from country to country, from the 1890s to its modern and post-modern configurations. To return to Bourdieu, each example shows how the *maison d'artiste* can be seen as a disposition within a set of dispositions that characterise a certain habitus associated with the Decadent bachelor, male or female. For the artists who housed themselves in *maisons d'artistes*, a constellation of consistent tendencies have been outlined; the production of art works in which normative sexualities are subverted, the insistence that one of the interior’s key roles is to ‘marshal the senses towards gratification’; a belief in deviance over conformism, in synaesthetic correspondences, with at base a culturally pessimistic outlook that resists art or design having to serve some moral or didactic purpose.

It has been found that interior magazine features focus on *maisons d'artistes* and their objects as ‘artificial and strange’ without necessarily relating them as critical to the *modus operandi* of the artist or designer; that is, to his or her everyday practice.

One might ask at this point, where does the *maison d'artiste* stand in relation to modernism? Arguments massed on one side might suggest the *maison d'artiste* stands apart from the modern movement. We’ve not seen many white walls, machine aesthetics, pure Functionalism, or hygienic spaces amongst these examples. This is, except for the first example, E.1027, which was described by its designer in several discussions as a deliberate critique of dogmatic Formalism. If, as Mark Wigley suggests, modern architecture is like a white lab coat thrown over a contradictory and fashion-driven structure, then the *maison d'artiste* is like a black velvet opera cape, with red satin lining, and a few arcane lines from Mallarmé sewn in to the hem and incorrigibly hard to keep clean.

On the other side, Paulette Singley finds that the *maison d'artiste* stands stylishly at the centre of the modern movement in America because ‘modern domestic architecture’ owes it such a debt. She argues the *maison d'artiste* and the small modern family home can be seen as ‘engaged and reciprocal’ and as ‘insincere adversaries’; the bachelor pad versus the family home – domain of bourgeois morality, the stylized and ‘immoral’ versus the sincere and earnest. So while they look mutually exclusive she argues they borrow from each other in terms of size and disposal of spaces. As a case in point she uses Marcel Breuer's prototype small house built in the sculpture court in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1949, which, while ostensibly a model for a small family home, also contained all the spatial features of a *maison d'artiste*.

This is well and good if one is – like Singley was – embarked on an account not only of the *maison d'artiste* but also of role played by Philip Johnson in the American avant-garde (the curator of the Breuer House and bachelor nonpareil). But it leaves aside the question of the *maison d'artiste* as a sympathetic frame for the artist’s persona and work. For that we need to
return to Bourdieu, and the field in which habitus operates, which of the latter he assures, although durable can be transposed and when transposed will affect a dialectical confrontation with the objective structures it finds. Hence the maison d’artiste confronted the small modern family home, and gave over its most useful parts. It nonetheless remains in the field, on shakier ground, but as resistant as ever to the blandishments of consumer magazine culture and the homogenising hypochondria of the modern movement.
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Figure 16. Collaged double page, Mano Chantelou, The World of Interiors p 66-67 [two chairs opposite swirled cut paper]

Figure 17. Photograph of Luisa's Nuit House 1932, the Ultiposten House, Vienna 1932 pages 66-67 and Andrea Lurato's Dorf Hotel, particular at Versatile from 1936, page 144.

Figure 18. Robert Mallet-Stevens film interior for Le Ventre 1928 pages 104-105.

Figure 19. Photograph of E.1027 facing a notice from a French magazine on an Elsson Quay exhibition p 105.

Figure 20. Henry Moore in the Buttermilk House around 1948 p 205.
2 Clifford in Cuddy-Keane, ‘Modernism, Geopolitics, Globalization,’ 553.
10 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest’, 166.
14 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest,’ 165.
16 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest,’ 161.
17 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest,’ 166.
19 The quote follows: “we must rediscover the human being in plastic expression, the human intention that underlies material appearance and the pathos of this modern life.”
20 He says “to what pathos are you referring?”
21 She says “to the pathos that is inseparable from all real life”.
22 He says “In short, you mean to re-discover emotion”
24 Constant, Eileen Gray, 24.
26 Constant, Eileen Gray, 241.
29 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 188.
30 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 188.
32 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 179.
33 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 179.
34 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 185.
36 Elliott, ‘Housing the Work’, 185.
37 Elliott, ‘Performing the Picture’, 70.
40 Faber, ‘An Artist's House in Hampstead,’ 62.
41 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest’, 166.
42 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest’, 166.
49 Ashton, The Writings of Robert Motherwell, 348.
51 Gordon, Weekend Utopia, 53.
52 Gordon, Weekend Utopia, 53.
53 Motherwell interview, 1985, [the year the house was razed] quoted in Gordon, Weekend Utopia, 53.
55 This view of Abstract Expressionism can be found in many retrospective accounts of it from feminist and queer standpoints. For the ‘masculinist’ performance of Jackson Pollock see Jones, A. 'Clothes Make the Man: the male artist as a performative function', The Oxford Art Journal, 18 (2) (1995): 18-32.
58 Chaimowicz, The World of Interiors, 178.
59 Chaimowicz, The World of Interiors, 178.
61 Boyer, M-F. 'This is not a flat' in Chaimowicz, The World of Interiors, 176.
62 Boyer, 'This is not a flat,' 174.
63 Heike Munder, Index to Chaimowicz, M. The World of Interiors, [enclosure].
65 Singley, ‘Importance of Not Being Earnest,’ 170.
Place: walking it, naming it, taking it

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Abstract: The specificity of place can be established through the sequence of discovery, positioning, naming, representation and performative event. Through reference to events in Australian colonial history and their contemporary impact, it becomes evident that defining place is culturally inflected and has a political tinge. It has agency at all scales, contributing both to the formation of regional and local identity, and to spatial appropriation. A parallel is made between the exploration and ‘discovery’ of place in colonial histories, and the processes leading to works by Iain Sinclair in London and Ian Burn in Australia. These issues were developed in walks carried out by taking place in suburban London and an 18th century hunting park in Germany. As with colonial exploration, the walks were opportunistic but in this case, were scouting, for ideas: the diverging interpretations that emerged underline the cultural and political formation of notions of place.

Place based events and associated narratives reiterate the specificity of place. ‘Places from Spaces’, an urban design project initiated by muf architecture art and funded by South East England Development Agency, culminated in the temporary transformation of public sites in three UK coastal cities in summer 2009. Operating within the interstices of this project, Interior Architecture undergraduates from the University of Brighton developed spatial propositions which arose from elaborate exercises in knowing the place and finding the ‘site’ within it. Here fragmented exploratory processes enter the teaching studio, structuring its approach to ‘site’.

Introduction

The specificity of place can be established through the sequence of discovery, positioning, naming, representation and performative event. Through reference to events in Australian colonial history and their contemporary impact, it becomes evident that defining place is culturally inflected and has a political tinge. It has agency at all scales, contributing both to the formation of regional and local identity, and to spatial appropriation. A parallel is made between the exploration and ‘discovery’ of place in colonial histories, and the processes leading to works by Iain Sinclair in London and Ian Burn in Australia. These issues were developed in walks carried out by taking place in suburban London and an 18th century hunting park in Germany. As with colonial exploration, the walks were opportunistic but in this case, were scouting, for ideas: the diverging interpretations that emerged underline the cultural and political formation of notions of place.

Place based events and associated narratives reiterate the specificity of place. ‘Places from Spaces’, an urban design project initiated by muf architecture art and funded by South East England Development Agency, culminated in the temporary transformation of public sites in three UK coastal cities in summer 2009. Operating within the interstices of this project, Interior Architecture undergraduates from the University of Brighton developed spatial propositions which arose from elaborate exercises in knowing the place and finding the ‘site’ within it. Here fragmented exploratory processes enter the teaching studio, structuring its approach to ‘site’.

Iain Sinclair, the British writer, film maker and essayist, has created a literary, cinematic and photographic patchwork of detail through his iterative crossings of London. His method, which
is to notice the physical and associate it with remembered or historical events, allows a specificity of place to emerge. In ‘Liquid City’, Sinclair and photographer Mark Atkins describe a walk they performed, beginning near Sinclair’s house in Hackney and finishing 12 miles to the south-west in Herne Hill.

I’m in mid-stride, mid-monologue, when a deranged man (French) grabs me by the sleeve. The Frenchness is not the source of his derangement. There’s something wrong with the landscape. Nothing fits. His compass has gone haywire. ‘Is this London?’ he demands, very politely. Up close, he’s excited rather than mad. Not a runaway. It’s just that he’s been working a route through undifferentiated suburbs for hours, without reward. None of the landmarks – Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, Harrods, the Virgin Megastore – that would confirm, or justify, his sense of the metropolis.

But his question is a brute. ‘Is this London?’ Not in my book. London is whatever can be reached in a one-hour walk. The rest is fictional.1

Sinclair empathises with the Frenchman’s lack of ability to orient himself on his walk through the ‘undifferentiated suburbs’ of south London. He expects the other stranger to be lost: he himself is having trouble. Sinclair’s south London is not only dull; (‘Funeral streets with nothing to watch’); being further than an hours’ walk from his east London home, it is also ‘not London’: ‘The rest is fictional’.2 This periphery is both geographical and allegorical: it is a space ‘without reward’, with no tourist landmarks or apparently much in the way of inspiration for Sinclair’s psychogeographical deviations. Later, in south-east London, Sinclair anticipates the discoveries to be made when walking beyond the periphery, which might engender a new permutation of the literature of urban walking.

Now that we have nowhere to go except onwards, we speed up. We race not to get there, to unarrive. Unwritten territory replete with pre-fictional possibilities. Nothing known. No cultural markers.3

For Sinclair, walking has become a practice of spatial and creative exploration.

Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city: the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movements of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, trampling asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself.4

As a ‘born again flâneur’, Sinclair is aware of other artist-walkers who have contributed to the literatures of the city: contemporaries such as Patrick Keiller and Gilbert and George – ‘Drift, we drift’5 – inhabit his narratives. They have a role in making an ‘alternative cartography of the city’, and can add to the many potential versions of how the manifestly shared (or at least specifically public) streets and buildings delineate fragmented locations and sense of placement and identity.6

They are to ‘rescue’ dead ground and wrest it from the grips of developers, clerks, clerics, ecofreaks, and ward bosses,... to divide London according to our own anthologies’.7

In aid of ‘fiction’ and the creation of identity in relation to place, the territory is to be divided up, explored, and exploited... by artists. This is not just any territory but ‘dead ground’, devoid of life, on or beyond the periphery, a periphery of perception as much as of geography.
Sinclair’s work is located in the Metropolis, which inflects his discourse of exploration, ‘discovery’ and interpretation, and constructs his notions of centre and periphery. These discourses take on a different tone in Australia, with its recent history of invasion and settlement. Here the systematic and determined work of exploration carried out by surveyors, scientists, the military, geographers and anthropologists has categorized, mapped and (re)named the country. In the course of this, specimens have been collected, notes taken, and drawings made, increasing scientific, linguistic and cultural knowledge, which has been applied to the task of the exploitation of the land consequent on exploration. Unlike Sinclair’s an Australian usage of ‘discovery’ is conditioned by lived experience of the consequences of imperialism, viewed from the periphery.

The approach to the rapid naming of the ‘discovered’ lands taken by Captain Cook as he mapped the east coast of Australia included honouring his crew (‘Point Hicks’), saluting his superiors (‘Port Jackson’), and scattering names to leave traces of his journey’s narratives (‘Mt Warning’). Approaches to naming were to change, in part as acknowledgement of the existing names and routes accrued over tens of thousands of years of inhabitation. In 1854, the surveyor Robert Austin ran into difficulties finding his way while mapping the Gascoyne River area in western Australian. He was helped by experts in differentiating the characteristics of the bush, the local clans, who ‘gave him the name and position of all the significant places on his line of march as far as the boundaries of their country’.8

Tony Birch9 shows how conflicting interpretations of the history of the exploration of Victoria’s Western District were flushed out in the disputes which followed the state tourist commission’s proposal to restore Aboriginal place names in and around the Grampians National Park, which included renaming the Grampians ‘Gariwerd’.10 His research into the exploration of this region in 1836 by the Surveyor General of New South Wales, Major Thomas Mitchell, reveals how imperialist attitudes are made visible in the act of naming. Mitchell was born in Grangemouth, Scotland, in 1792, and arrived in Australia in 1827, already a soldier/surveyor. He named the range of mountains he passed through after the Scottish Grampians. His lieutenant, Granville Stapylton, called them an ‘El Dorado... at present worth sixty millions to the Exchequer of England’.11 Mitchell predicted that ‘the reign of solitude in these beautiful vales was near a close’.12 Despite this ‘solitude’, Mitchell’s expedition was in constant contact with local people, who tracked it, guided it, and from time to time, attacked it. Earlier on the same expedition Mitchell’s group had ambushed a group of aborigines and shot seven while they attempted to escape across a river. A ‘naming’ followed this event

\[I \text{ gave to this little hill which witnessed this overthrow of our enemies, and was to us the harbinger of peace and tranquillity, the name of Mt Dispersion.}^{13}\]

Thomas Mitchell was known for ‘advocating the retention of aboriginal place names’14 Despite this, the maps of the Western District now show dozens of names which either signify the Metropolitan centre - ‘Horsham’, ‘Victoria Valley’- or link settler family to place - ‘Halls Gap’, ‘Zumstein’s Crossing’. These names saturate the map with settler history, causing it to be recited over and over as their history is described in tourist brochures and websites. The partial nature of some popular histories, and the power of names to reiterate this, is expressed in a poem Birch found in the Koori Tourist Unit files

\[\text{He battled through the heathery scrub and scaled the frowning wall}\]
To stand at last triumphant, on the topmost peak of all
He named the range the Grampians. Why should we change it then?
That traveller made our history, he and his stalwart men.
What the Coori people call the hills we cannot ever know
For they have gone like yesterday, with little left to show.¹⁵

The Victorian state government ‘in the name of reconciliation’¹⁶ has recently issued guidelines promoting the use of indigenous place names and their correct usage. This state intervention underlines the power of representation (in language, on maps) and shows how the legacy of imperialism continues to affect contemporary politics.

Although it is possible to map without naming, exploration in the service of exploitation uses names to assist way-finding (this way to ‘El Dorado’), and to amplify the imposition of an imported culture upon an existing culture perceived as vestigial, valueless. Naming refers to narratives and histories, and the contested control of space. In referring to past narratives, it contributes to their reiteration. For those from recently invaded and settled former colonies, like myself, there is a lived experience of these contested definitions, which conditions any understanding of the visual and textual language of ‘exploration’.

History has shown us that innovation and experimentation has continuously been imagined on the periphery. However, territories exposing ‘marginality’ are now being revealed deep within the city fabric.....In this context, the term ‘periphery’ transcends locality and represents instead a philosophical zone – the architectural opportunity.¹⁷

In common with Sinclair, spatial designers have identified the periphery as a space of exploration. When found, the periphery promises ‘the architectural opportunity,’ where that gold dust of design practice, ‘innovation and experimentation,’ is possible.¹⁸ This ‘philosophical zone’ is reminiscent of the investment zones established in marginal industrial areas, eg the UK’s Coalfield Enterprise Zones, where internationally funded developments transcend locality by ignoring local planning controls and side-stepping local democracies.

The conventional map no longer helps to locate the margin: the city must be remapped or re-walked (in Sinclair’s case) to find it ‘deep within the city fabric’.¹⁹ But, if the periphery is not clearly geographically located, then, as for Sinclair, spatial designers have a task of definition, although ‘it seems an almost impossible task to define a contemporary peripheral condition: yet it is that very quality, its extreme elusiveness, that ensures its attractiveness for debate’.²⁰ Debate is a social activity, but when it is held between members of only one professional group, the field of ‘names’ that can be used to define the social and spatial qualities of any locality over time narrows. If the purpose of the debate is to locate sites for exploitation, then the values of those involved in the debate, determined in part by taste, fashion and aesthetics, are privileged over the values of those who inhabit the spaces designated as peripheral. Although naming is an integral part of the structuring of knowledge about any ‘site’, acts of designating and defining ‘peripheries’ are particularly sensitive to and revealing of positions in relation to cultural and political values. After all, one person’s periphery is another’s centre.

Exploitation of the peripheral condition can be a strategy adopted by those who both inherit their location on the geographical ‘margin’ and choose to critically position themselves within it. Conceptual artist Ian Burn worked in London and New York before he returned to Australia.
One of his abiding concerns was in re-evaluating the hybrid cultures of the periphery in relation to the hegemony of metropolitan concerns. He came to see a way of making intersections that articulated and framed their differences. Spacing, which had formerly damned cultures such as Australia to a tyranny of distance, now became an agency for making visible different cultures, practices and contexts.21

‘Spacing’ gave Burn the conceptual impetus to work with trace Australian material while in London, ‘Systematically Altered Photograph: The Suburbs’,22 created through the repetitive photocopying of an image taken from publicity material issued by the Australian government, is, in part, a self conscious exhumation of his cultural formation.

Later, in Australia, his critical repositioning of the marginal surfaced in the ‘Value Added Landscape’ series which worked with ‘parochial and untutored’ amateur landscape paintings. This series, in which text is overlaid onto ‘found’ paintings, was intentionally exhibited in art galleries and entered into art discourses: in doing so, it questioned the boundaries of ‘professional spaces and identities’, while at the same time offering up rereadings of Australian material.
Burn had a sustained interest in the land in Australian painting being represented as a worked or viscerally experienced place, rather than as a scene, viewed from a distance. In this passage about Namatjira’s work the landscape itself is not the subject focused upon but instead reads as something one journeys through; its references seem more about distances than vastness. Burn suggests that it is the experience of space that defines the way it is represented.

‘Walking Around the Block’ (WATB) was a walk taken by taking place at my invitation in south London in 2001, near to where I live, not far from ‘the choking dullness of Tooting’. There is a common view, (see Sinclair), that this is an area of undifferentiated monotony, peripheral to the cultural heartland. Patrick Keiller’s short film ‘Norwood’ was set here, and imbued it with an unexpected narrative potential. His pace was ambulatory, and his approach was fond and knowing, probably arising from his time living and working in south London. As with Burn, Keiller’s understanding comes from his inhabitation of the margin.

When Ridge, Petrou and I were short-listed for the Streatham Landmark competition, our starting point was to attempt to ‘name’ this place. The competition’s existence showed that even the local council’s urban designers believed the area was almost invisible; an Augéian ‘non-place’ where, for the motorist or passenger, the landscape is ‘emptied of all content and all meaning’. We were aware of the difficulty we would have in extracting the specifics of the place, in noticing subtle interruptions to the everyday, which were important to our ways of arriving at ideas. taking place, already debating definitions in relation to feminist spatial practices, was invited to use a map to take a walk around the block in which the ‘landmark’ was to be sited, then to tell me what they saw in a conversation after the walk. Three participants were unable to come, and were sent the map, a marked up section of the familiar, commercial London A-Z, and asked to describe their ‘walk’ over the phone. The form of the responses differed according to whether or not the place had been experienced bodily. The four women who walked on location were succinct and factual, using phrases and single words, whereas those who ‘walked the map’ were more descriptive, speaking in whole sentences, even paragraphs. For the virtual walkers, the names of the streets and the street patterns became important clues in imagining the character of the place.

T: ‘Those straight avenues: this was all planned at the same time so it’s very samey: you can’t tell where you are without looking at a map.’
M: ‘In A B C D roads the homes are similar, they are all linked, with a few different coloured doors and gates in low brick walls.’

They involved their own memories in describing atmosphere, even though in one case the respondent hadn’t been there. Both groups asked questions and hesitated to make conclusions: they often made comparisons with places that they knew.

T: ‘It’s a bit like New York: so there’s uptown / downtown.’

A: ‘Burgess Hill: it’s almost a townscape, not a city or a suburb: like small town Sussex’.

There were contradictory statements about what was seen. They all discussed street life and the types of people who lived there.

H: ‘I felt vulnerable and shown up when I was walking down the road. No-one else was going for a walk. People were looking at where I took photographs’.

All the respondents wanted to position the place geographically, and themselves within it.

B: ‘Brixton is the last bit of London: Streatham isn’t London anymore. Where is Central London?’

K: ‘There was a road house pub on a big junction. Because I live in Nottingham I think the pub is ok’.

The transcript was performed while photographs of the route of the walk were projected at TP2, an event held by taking place at the School of Architecture, London Metropolitan University. The public performance reinforced for the participants the ways in which the place was seen through the lenses of their own experience and cultural formation, focusing away from the place and towards the participants themselves. WATB encouraged a critical evaluation of our relationship to the projected art space, and a move to seeing, recording and working with the details which contributed to its experience.29 It provoked questions about the relationship between exploration of place and personal subjectivities, and about the interpretative power of the codified drawing (the map).

Walking around the Schloss returned to these issues in the context of a hunting lodge outside Stuttgart, Schloss Solitude, and was performed as part of TP5 at Akademie Solitude.30 Here the walk became a way of researching and exposing the subjectivities that participants in the Symposium brought with them. It provided a structure for an ambulatory experience of the taking place presentations in an otherwise static symposium format.

A map was assembled from screen snapshots of Stuttgart’s official map. Once a walk was drawn onto the base map, it was emailed to taking place and people based at the Akademie. Each group was invited to write a description of what they ‘saw’ when following the lines drawn over its bland iconography. Most of the respondents were based in London, and speculated about a walk, whereas those in Stuttgart were able to walk it. Although all responses were written rather than spoken, the styles adopted were similar to those for WATB: the speculated walks, which exposed positions in relation to landscape, Germany, language, architecture and map iconography, were well constructed sentences demonstrating the participant’s narrative abilities:

B: ‘At this point I can stand with my back to the main avenue and look up at the building itself. It is grand and lavish but sort of stoic. In my dream it was impossible to
see the building from a distance, but here it reclines comfortably in its privileged setting, curving its long arms into a gentle embrace of land, time, the view and my passing body’.

D: ‘This is a strange point in the walk where one is choosing to go on the grass, ignoring the architect lines and follow an imaginary line – a large scale border or frontier – drawing an abstract administrative territory that includes the Schloss but not the forest’.

K: ‘Most interesting is the long axis which has the power to split our curved building in two but not to inflect the strong box of the small palace building or to withstand the force of the major road cutting right across it’.

Whereas the ‘walked walk’ views made specific and immediate observations, and consisted of a narrative of fragments:

H: ‘i. power written in the landscape
j. everyone does this walk: what is the point?
k. we can’t go in there it’s private
r. there are tracks for cross country skiers
s. a wood pecker that sounds like dripping water
u. this part reminds me of the bridge near home
v. It’s horrible how the traffic cuts through the woods
w. I like the way the snow hangs in forks.’

Kn: ‘l. the snow in this area has so few footprints.
J. Why is this path still established? I would’ve guessed people go in different ways.
The snow fort now needs supports to stay erect.
K. The few sledders are speeding down the hill, and the windows of the castle are all boarded up.’

These views annotated the walk map, which guided walkers from one taking place presentation to another, and then out into the snow covered woods at the conclusion of the Symposium, following instructions

You are now invited to participate in a group walk, following this map, no longer the audience but the participants, to test the map’s iconography and the validity of its speculations and observations.31

Once the walk emerged into the outdoors, the sharp cold and reflected light from the snow energised the participants, who began to open up the opinions and questions that had been stored over the preceding two days. Safe within the geographical certitude of the map, the participants responded to the release offered by the outdoors: the careful ‘speculations and observations’ about the space of the hunting forest were, like most annotations on maps, put aside so as to experience the moment. It was in the action of the walk itself that the group arrived at a consensus based on embodied experience.

The work of muf architecture art32 shows how temporary transformations of a public space can influence the form and content of permanent transformations. In Barking, the specificity of the place is reiterated, firstly through local people’s experience of a series of performative and
representational artworks, which themselves were developed from a close observation of local characteristics and events, and then in designs for the town square which structure opportunities for temporary performance. Places from Spaces, an urban design project initiated by muf and funded by SEEDA, culminated in the temporary transformation of public sites in Brighton, Portsmouth and Southampton in summer 2009.

Operating within the interstices of this project, Interior Architecture undergraduates from the University of Brighton developed ideas for the temporary transformation of St Peter’s Church, which sits within the Valley Gardens, Brighton and Hove City Council’s Places from Spaces (PfS) site. PfS supported collaborations (‘knowledge exchanges’) between the School of Architecture and Design and the City Council at a variety of scales, aimed at raising the level of public debate about urban design generally, and the redesign of the Valley Gardens in particular. Although the Valley Gardens is not geographically marginal, it is ignored, cut off on all sides by heavy traffic on a multi-lane one way system. Many of the students passed the site daily on their way to the university. None had entered the church, and few crossed the green spaces around it, which were perceived as unsafe due to the drinking groups and drug dealers who used them.

Exploratory processes enter the studio when Interior Architecture students construct an approach to site. Students are asked to research a site’s spaces ‘as found’, in other words, to see the place differently so as to reveal the unexpected details (of space and inhabitation) found in the apparently familiar. Iterative journeys through the site, favouring different view points (up view/down view, through the lens, from the bus, from the surrounding hillsides) are made and documented, and records taken of ephemeral and material phenomena. Some aspects were uncovered through site based performance, and others through site tests of propositions. This documentation is discussed with students to identify within it emerging preoccupations and issues, which are harnessed to generate spatial propositions.

At St Peter’s, students were asked to discover what was exceptional and interesting about it, what aspects contributed to its underused condition, and how it changed. Existing spatial hierarchies, already overturned by deterioration and misuse, became the subject of many of the propositions. Student K. A. Harrison appropriated the fenced off rear entrance to the church, now used as the main entrance due to falling debris, and revalued it thorough a performance of cleaning and gilding its fabric. Embodied experience of space affects both the way in which student spatial designers initially describe ‘site’, and later conceive of new spaces. Bianca Yousef noticed the profound lack of connection between the vast interior of the church (opened only two hours per week to the congregation), recorded sound inside and outside the church, and connected the spaces through an installation consisting of a listening ear linked to reverberating wires. Hollie Marriott proposed projections which linked the adjacent bus stops with the huge façade of the church, an unlit backdrop to the road at night, reversing night-time perceptions of the space. The propositions exploited existing conditions revealed through embodied investigation of site, never disinterested, always conditioned by the students’ need to find the exceptional and interesting.

Conclusion

The journey-based process of exploration and discovery, naming and mapping, is closely connected with exploitation, which is made easier if the spaces explored are seen as void,
and their inhabitation of little value. Histories of colonialism inflect contemporary exploration, even when it is artists, designers and students rather than surveyors and prospectors who are searching for an El Dorado. The sites for exploration are necessarily little known, and for spatial designers, including students, this requires the reconceptualising of existing, already inhabited space.

Peripheries, metaphorical and physical, are resistant spaces that, due in part to the effort required to define them in relation to the ‘centre’ even for those who inhabit them, lead to critical understandings of position. Embodied experience of space through shared performances and an ensuing debate can develop more complex ways to express the specificity of place, despite its ‘marginal’ status. It is in the interests of developing critical understandings of place and its specificity that these processes arrive in the teaching studio.

Endnotes

2 Atkins and Sinclair, *Liquid City*, 40, 41.
3 Atkins and Sinclair, *Liquid City*, 64.
5 Atkins and Sinclair, *Liquid City*, 206.
10 Now the Grampians-Gariwerd National Park.
11 Birch, ‘Nothing has Changed’, 154.
12 Birch, ‘Nothing has Changed’, 154.
13 Birch, ‘Nothing has Changed’, 156.
14 Birch, ‘Nothing has Changed’, 155.
15 Birch, ‘Nothing has Changed’, 151.
22 Burn, I. *Systematically Altered Photograph: The Suburbs*: 1968, black and white photographs, reproduction from Australian Panorama, Australian News and Information Bureau,1967, and photocopy on paper,150 x 120cm.
23 Australian artist (1902-1959), Western Arrernte people, Northern Territory.
25 Taking Place is a shifting network of artists, architects, writers and theorists. www.takingplace.org.uk
27 Keiller, P. *Nonwood*, UK, 1983, sound, B&W, 26 mins, 16mm.
Place: walking it, naming it, taking it

32 **muf** is an art and architecture collaborative committed to public realm projects. [http://www.muf.co.uk/](http://www.muf.co.uk/)
33 See [http://www.placesfromspaces.org.uk/](http://www.placesfromspaces.org.uk/)
34 South East England Development Agency, [http://www.seeda.co.uk](http://www.seeda.co.uk)
Imaginary Architectures: Overseas Chinese and the Mingshi Lou

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Abstract: Constructed as a defensive residential tower in 1925, Mingshi Lou was recently designated a UNESCO World Heritage site owing to the stylistic fusion of Chinese and Western culture. This study explored the cultural relationship between vernacular architecture, modern building technology and the returning Overseas Chinese. Past interest in the tower centered exclusively on the exterior façades while discounting the tower interior. Bray’s framework of three Chinese imaginary architectures—decorum, cosmos and culture—proved an effective method to isolate interior archetypical practices and discriminate between Eastern and Western cultural expression. The discussion focused on the Fang clan and the analysis of Mingshi Lou’s ancestral hall, main hall, kitchens, bedrooms and sitting rooms.

Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between vernacular and everyday ordinary Chinese architecture, modern building technology during the early twentieth century and returning Overseas Chinese. Kaiping, a rural village in southern China’s Guangdong province, west of the Pearl River Delta, is the epicenter of this intersection; a region populated with just over 1800 watchtowers constructed during the first quarter of the twentieth century. A single residential tower built by the Fang clan, Mingshi Lou, serves as the primary source of this investigation.

Unlike the tower exteriors, the domestic interior spaces of the diaolou have received minimal study. Through published photographs and the author’s field study at the Zili Village site in 2009, the following analysis between American vernacular and Chinese vernacular as expressed in these towers examines the spatial relationships, furnishings and surface materials within the Mingshi Lou interior. Examination of Mingshi Lou suggests further study about cultural authenticity, hybridity and acculturation of domestic spaces populated by Overseas Chinese.

Towers in China

In contrast to the more popularly known horizontal courtyard houses and Chinese imperial buildings, multi-story towers were favored by the elite of the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 8). No ruins of ancient examples remain, however drawings, carvings and models provide knowledge of these traditional domestic buildings. Guo classified five archetypical towers (guan, xie, que, lou, ge) in ancient China based on function. In addition to ancient artifacts, scholars garnered more detailed information from the State Building Manual (Yingzao Fashi) which is the earliest written document still in existence today to identify Chinese terminology, materials and building methods. The towers were constructed from rammed earth, timber, masonry or a combination thereof. Some towers were joined together with elevated walkways (ge) while others contained storied verandas. This specialized construction suggests a sophisticated understanding of engineering principles and construction techniques.
Fast-forward two centuries to twentieth century southern China. Between 1890 and 1930, remittances from overseas Chinese relatives led to an upsurge in the construction of family estates in Kaiping and the neighboring counties of Enping, Taishan and Xinhui in Guangdong province. Residences consisted of two housing types: sprawling villas (lu) or narrow lofty towers, called diaolou or lou, which consisted of three or more floors. Watchtowers were not exclusive to the Guangdong region—they were also widely found in Danba and Shuopo in Sichuan province, Tibet, watchtowers associated with the Great Wall such as those found in Pingyao City, Shanxi province, and watchtowers of the Forbidden City in Beijing. What makes the Kaiping diaolou unique is their hybrid architecture and connection to Chinese sojourners who had resided in the West.

A heightened quest for security and surveillance amplified new tower construction. Batto and other scholars observed that building techniques used in medieval Europe and modern America altered the way in which the returning Chinese constructed their rural towers and mansions. Reinforced concrete overtook traditional Chinese vernacular building practices using wood, stone, rammed earth or grey bricks. In 2001, of the remaining 1,833 Kaiping diaolous, eighty-percent were made of reinforced concrete. The towers were similar in their exterior massing and their use of square floor plan configurations. On the exterior, the building became more complex in form, featuring Occidental domes, turrets and colonnades. Less is known about the interiors contained within the watchtowers; architectural analysis and descriptive articles have focused almost exclusively on the buildings’ exteriors.

Mingshi Lou

The Zili Village is a small rural community in the Tangkou township, about 25 kilometers outside the city of Kaiping. Located on the west bank of the Zhenhai River, the village sits within a vast landscape of rice paddy fields and fish ponds. Three types of dwellings compose the village: moderate single story homes of blue-brick with tiled roofs, a grouping of nine diaolou towers (lou) and six Western-styled villas (lu).

According to the UNESCO report, personal safety was a major concern for the local population, and especially the wealthy that were targeted for extortion or worse as purported by the local saying 'walking behind every emigrant, there are three bandits'. In 1920, a communal watch tower was constructed funded from overseas residents for the protection of several Fang clan villages. In addition to raising money, the community supplied militia for surveillance and protection. Five stories high and designed specifically for defense, e.g., metal shuttered windows and a secure entry door, the tower was equipped inside with guns, an electric generator, search lights and a siren all provided for by American emigrant remittances.

Cognizant of the perils to his family and having amassed great personal wealth in America, Fang Renwen returned to Kaiping in the early 1920s with the intent to construct a protective residential tower for himself and his descendants. Named Mingshi Lou, which means 'Inscribed Stone Tower,' the dwelling looms over the vast landscape (Figures 1, 2). At over twenty-two meters and five stories high, Mingshi Lou is comparable in stature to many diaolou in Kaiping. The smaller building adjacent to the tower was used to house farm equipment and contained a kitchen administered to by servants.
Figure 1: Mingshi Lou (center), Zili village, Kaiping, China, 2009 (Copyright: author).
Figure 2: Floor plan sketches, Mingshi Lou, Zili Village, Kaiping, China, 2009
(Drawn by author).

Similar to other watch towers of this period, Mingshi Lou is a representative example of vernacular architecture which adheres to local materials, techniques and traditions but with a slight variation for appropriating Western-inspired decorative elements to the exterior skin and interior space. In all probability, there was no formal architect assigned to guide Fang’s project. It appears some design decisions were based entirely on function or building traditions while more ornamental features were intended to impress visitors and reinforce the owner’s economic and social status. Batto suggests that Western inspiration came predominately from the overseas emigrants and their travels abroad. Hypotheses by several scholars suggest that sojourners returned with a collection of picture postcards of buildings in other countries or brought a catalogue of standardized decorative features. Others indicate that immigrants were stimulated by the colonial architecture they witnessed during their departure and arrival through port cities like Hong Kong and Macao. At this time, isolating the aesthetic inspiration for Mingshi Lou remains a mystery.

Visually, the exterior of the tower is a paradox of quasi-Western styles and restraint. The base and lower exterior surface of the tower are plain and unadorned however the top is elaborately ostentatious with Western and Eastern-appropriated decorative elements. Divided vertically into five floors each separated by an incised course, the top level features a cantilevered loggia articulated with a colonnade of rounded arches anchored by columns with Corinthian-topped capitals. Turrets, punctuate all four corners of the tower. Decorative exterior elements on the terraced level above employ a fanciful mixture of Chinese, Indian and European motifs and forms.

While the mixture of Eastern and Western motifs were not noticeably common in China, they were also not overtly rare in the urban architectural landscape. Port cities like Shanghai, Fujian and Xiamen operated with a foreign minority and established long-term trade relationships with Western businesses and an extensive number of countries. Hence, a segment of city mansions and foreign banking establishments were exclusively or partly Western in their architectural aesthetic and interior furnishings. What is exceptional about
Mingshi Lou beyond its hybrid aesthetic guise and its defensible multi-story archetype is the use of reinforced concrete in the rural countryside and its distinct connection to the overseas Chinese population during the Chinese Republican era (1912-1949).

Three Imaginary Architectures

Characterizing domestic buildings in late imperial China, Francesca Bray established a sociological framework based on the work of Klaas Ruitenbeek. I suggest that a house in later imperial China is best understood as a material structure or shell incorporating the design principles of the three ‘imaginary architectures,’ each conveying a different set of messages about the relations between its inhabitants, the cosmos and society at large.17

Embedded into the Chinese home is the first imaginary architecture: etiquette and moral behavior, a ritualized expression of neo-Confucian orthodoxy and patriarchal kinship. In the home, decorum is manifest in the family shrine, ancestral tablets, and clan activities. The second imaginary architecture encompasses geomancy and the exploiting of positive energy. Part of ancient Taoism, feng-shui guides the organization and form of a home’s interior and the natural space beyond. The final imaginary architecture is that of family practices and cultural patterns. Ways in which the house supports family socialization, traditions, sustenance, and beauty signify this third architectural precept18.

Although these architectural canons were intended to benefit the inhabitants of palaces and wealthy estates in late imperial China, they also speak to less consequential and vernacular buildings. In his analysis of vernacular beauty, Lung offers a compelling argument that ‘…the palace looks like an elaborate house, the house a simplified palace. Both were guided by the same philosophies, both by similar deliberate rules or codes.’19 Moreover, these domestic ideals are meaningfully entrenched into Chinese society through generations of adoption and practice; in today’s world they are not archaic or transitory.

I will therefore utilize the three imaginary architectures to examine and assess the magnitude of Chineseness verses Westerness encapsulated within the interior of Mingshi Lou. This framework will identify characteristics that corroborate Chinese practices and values, which can then be teased apart from those archetypical features which are more affiliated with Western culture and tradition.

Space of Decorum: the Ancestral Hall

When Fang decided to build his diaolou he hired a geomancer, who with the practice of feng-shui and his cosmological compass, defined the location for the ancestral alter. All additional rooms and domestic spaces evolved from this origin. The fifth story of Mingshi Lou is architecturally unique in that it is subdivided into two spaces. One half is enclosed and serves as the ancestral hall while the other half is a covered loggia. Contained within the hall is the ancestral shrine of intricately carved wood and extraordinary gilding which conveys a reverence of familial respect. Carvings feature auspiciously stylized animals (unicorns, dragons, phoenix), animals representing long life (deer, crane, elephant), plants symbolizing education (bamboo, orchid, plum-blossom) and elements of a scholarly life such as musical instruments, games and books.20
Instructions on how to build an ancestral hall and the cabinet to house the tablets was contained within the Carpenter’s Canon, as are passages about inviting the gods and spirits into a new house. The ritual tenets were followed by Fang and his builder at Mingshi Lou. The ancestral hall is three bays wide with a cabinet for books, sacrificial vessels and a pantry for offering food to ancestors. The covered area is quite large, however I could not ascertain whether it was expansive enough to contain all living members standing in rows during the rituals as was required. Three small steps led from the loggia to the room that contained the shrine.

Everything associated with the shrine and ancestral hall is Chinese. The only item which can be attributed to the West is the kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling in front of the shrine. Kerosene lamps will be discussed further in the next section.

Positive Energy and Shelter: the Main Hall

In vernacular construction nearly every decision required a ritual and cosmic calculation causing the carpenters, geomancers and owners to be in conflict. Disregarding house magic could lead to all types of family peril and hence it was important for Fang to treat his carpenters and builders well. Bray explains that although most carpenters were illiterate all had a worn handwritten copy of the Carpenter’s Canon in their workshop to aid calculations using the eight segmented (good or bad luck) scale. Frequently geomancy reasoning was consistent with aesthetic preference

The shape of a house is of the highest importance. If the shape is unfavourable, the house will be hard to live in definitively. Whether the house is favourable or unfavourable, unlucky or lucky, can be told with the eye. As a rule, a house is favourable is it is square and straight, plain and neat, and pleasing to the eye. If it is too high and large, or too small and tumbledown, so as to be displeasing to the eye, then it is unfavourable.

Lung analyzed Chinese aesthetic and efficient proportions as an indication of architectural beauty, surmising an importance of the 2:3 ratio ‘Symbolically two is the first even and three the first odd. One is yin and one is yang.’ Most rooms and elements within Mingshi Lou do not appear to reflect this geomantic architectural proportion preferred in traditional Chinese buildings.

One enters the house through an iron gate and then a pair of heavy defensive wooden doors before arriving directly into the main hall (Figure 3). Two pilasters surfaced with mirrored planes reflect the inhabitants’ cosmological beliefs about space and spiritual forces. Dikotter discloses their importance ‘Spirit screens were traditionally used to prevent evil forces from entering a household, and were often placed inside or outside a doorway.’
Reliance on concrete negated many the primary keystone rituals and folklore construction methods used with timber. In a timber house, columns had a square, round or hexagonal stone base which was aesthetically pleasing but also functionally shielded the timber against moisture transfer from the earthen foundation. The building interior was exposed, enabling occupants to understand the physical relationship between simplicity and complexity, between structure, connections and intricate bracket details. With concrete, the interior steel structure and connectors are hidden and the interior is visually uniform and monotonous which is contrary to the inherent natural characteristics of wood. Concrete however is a strong material and responded exceptionally well to Fang’s need for defense against criminals and natural disasters. Visually, concrete conveyed Fang’s quest for modernity and aligned his clan with new technological advancements from America.

The ceiling is unadorned except for a round decorative ceiling medallion in the center of the main hall exhibiting white Greek acanthus leaves within a contrasting red-maroon background. From the medallion, a kerosene lamp with white porcelain shade and brass-finish accoutrements is suspended. Western-styled lamps such as this were commonly sold by Sears Roebuck and Company to the American middle-class. This modern fixture stands in contrast to the simpler Mei Foo lamp, which was marketed by Standard Oil and became common throughout rural China.27

Two series of hinged wooden doors contrast with the heavy concrete walls and divide the main hall from the two adjacent private spaces. The doors are stylistically mixed, containing Oriental carvings at the base, Western window-like elements in the middle portion and perforated panels framed with cornice molding above for ventilation. In the middle part of the screen, the muntin pattern and glazing is characteristic of upper-sash lights popular in American Queen Anne-style cottages. In American Vernacular Interior Architecture: 1870-
1940, Jennings and Gottfried describe hued figured glass and sand blasted picturesque scenes as common glazing window features during the turn of the century in the United States. In Mingshi Lou, the distinctive sand blasted glass regions portrayed in round and fan-shaped Chinese amulets is a contemporary interpretation of traditional paper scrolls which summoned good fortune, happiness and luck (fu).

The impermanence of furniture placement and accessories over years of occupancy, vacancy and transition makes this analysis challenging when discussing Mingshi Lou’s past. For example, photographs published in 2001 by the People’s Republic of China show subtle modification in furniture placement from what this author personally observed in April 2009. The accuracy of past furniture placement was unknown by museum personnel. According to the UNESCO report, furniture which remains inside the diaolou today is original to Mingshi Lou and consists of wood construction with marble accents. It is surmised that these objects were produced locally or purchased from Chinese sources in the nearby urban centers of Hong Kong or Guangzhou.

The main hall contains an excessive amount of furniture and accessories. Some of the furniture is quintessentially Chinese in form and decoration, namely the couch-bed (ta), occasional chairs and table. The cupboard at the north end of the room serves as an alter table and is definitively Western in appearance citing the turned legs and brass fittings. Arrangement of the furniture is characteristically Western—informal, non-symmetrical and unbalanced within the room. Missing are the traditional couplet scrolls of Chinese characters hanging on the walls. In place of traditional decorative hangings and prominently displayed is a series of four large Western portraitures of Fang and his three wives. Fang and his second wife, who remained in the United States, were dressed in Western attire and donned modern hairstyles.

Pictures of aquatic scenery and flora decorate this room and elicit a Western sensibility of permancy (versus the provisional couplets) through framing. Western clocks embodied science, precision and measurement in a modern Chinese household. In Mingshi Lou, Fang gave his wall clock a prominent location: next to the portraitures and opposite the entrance where it is most likely to be noticed by visitors. A second clock, a tall grandfather clock was located on the east wall adjacent to the chairs. Prominently featured on the cupboard sits a bronze-colored Buddha statue, six polychrome tin objects and a framed picture; at the base of the cupboard are an incense stand and storage baskets. On the wall behind the incense is a grouping of Chinese ceramic tiles with calligraphy.

Much of the architectural qualities of the main hall interior are Western in materiality, style and technology: concrete, colored glass, picturesque glass, decorative kerosene lamp, room proportion and the asymmetrical organization of furniture pieces. The hinged doors are a hybrid cultural mix. Accessories are also mixed—items located on the alter table are ritualistic and thus traditionally Chinese whereas objects within the remainder of the hall are Western examples of modern technology. These findings suggest that Fang wanted a public interior characterized by modernity and American aesthetics with just the required touch of Chinese familial tradition.
Family Culture: Private Spaces

Decorations, interior furnishings and their arrangement characterized differences between public and private rooms, formal and informal spaces. Interior objects also marked the status of Fang’s clan and his personal taste. Unlike the two previous categories which were managed by the male population, family culture was within the female realm. Issues dealing with child-bearing, child-rearing, cooking, cleaning, clothing the family and decorating the interior came under the jurisdiction of Fang’s wives.

Because Fang had several families living with him in Mingshi Lou, a separate kitchen was provided on each of the first four levels of the house. Within each kitchen was a wood-fired stove constructed of brick with a ceramic drainage pipe to transport the exhaust outdoors. A large, flat concrete surface above the stove’s brick foundation contained a circular hole set within for an iron wok. Large ceramic storage jugs and jars remained on top of the stove and were positioned along the walls. A small wooden stool, a wooden wash basin on a stand, a few ceiling hooks for hanging produce or storage baskets and two windows for light and ventilation completed each kitchen. In the Chinese house the stove did not represent the family center – the hearth and home – as in Western culture. Uniquely Chinese is the Stove God, a domestic deity whose importance evolved over time. The Stove God was judicious and reported to Heaven the family’s behavior on the New Year. Use of honey, sweetmeats or wine was provided to appease the stove deity and yield an optimistic report and divert punishment.

Floors throughout the first level in the Mingshi Lou are natural unglazed clay tiles arranged in a running bond pattern. Vertical surfaces show the residue of brightly-colored pigment applied to the concrete walls. A blue floral stenciled pattern bisected each elevation—golden parchment hue below (representing earth) and off-white above (signifying heaven) occurred on all wall surfaces throughout the entire building interior.

The upper floors contain more of the same armchairs, day couches and occasional tables found on the first level. According to Beurdeley’s classification of traditional Chinese furniture, the wooden straight-back armchairs with marble insert and small occasional tables are Chinese with Western influence, e.g., the cabriole legs, stretchers and seat apron. A Chinese tester bed (jia zi chuang) and various storage chests also populate the private rooms. Of note is a Western rocking chair with upholstered seat and back apron rail in one sitting area (Figure 4). Beds were always canopied with delicately carved wooden frames. Miscellaneous storage chests, dressers and armoires populated all upstairs sleeping rooms. Accessories of a bygone era suggest the life experiences of Fang and his family. A phonograph suggests an interest in modern mechanical devices, a love for music or perhaps both. Animal antlers, framed pictures, family portraits and items of normal life remain dispersed throughout the house, e.g., letters, books, magazines, photographs, perfume bottles and student diaries.
Kitchens in Mingshi Lou are characteristically Chinese without Western influence. I suggest that necessary tools and preparation of traditional food was a powerful influence on whether to modernize. Paint colors suggest the ying-yang duality reminiscent of Chinese cosmology. Consequently, the furniture in bedrooms and sitting rooms appear to reflect a modern Western sensibility which is also expressed in the sound of mechanized objects. Mingshi Lou’s private spaces therefore are a hybrid Chinese-Western mix. Function appears to have been a significant factor in the selection of personal interior objects and cultural identity.

Conclusion

After eighty years, Mingshi Lou stands as a plausible remnant of the transnational modern life of Fang Runwen, his family and the Overseas Chinese community in Kaiping during the Chinese Republican era. Use of the three imaginary architectures was successful in characterizing areas within the daiolou interior. Spaces of decorum, signified most directly by the Mingshi Lou’s ancestral hall, indicated a strong relationship between tradition and cultural authenticity. In the main hall, the most public of interior spaces, Fang increasingly adapted the interior toward the American domestic aesthetic and the positive energy exhibited by the modern era. The more private rooms categorized by the spaces of culture, were quite mixed and may best represent the cultural duality of the family’s transnational experience of living for periods in both America and China. These initial findings suggest supplementary study of the tower interiors is warranted as a means to enrich the understanding of interior design by way of cultural authenticity, hybridity and acculturation of domestic spaces.
Endnotes

3 David Lung. *Chinese Traditional Vernacular Architecture*. Hong Kong: Regional Council and the University of Hong Kong, 1991: 64, 66.
4 Lee and DiStefano, ‘Chinese-built Western Towers’, 16.
5 Jeffrey Cody. *Exporting American Architecture 1870-2000*. London: Routledge, 2003: 32. Modern building techniques were preferred for durability and safety. See Chapters 1 and 2 for a comprehensive discussion about American construction abroad and the vast worldwide exportation of new building materials and construction methods, e.g., steel, hollow concrete block and equipment to produce these modern materials and erect large urban projects.
7 Lee and DiStefano, ‘Chinese-built Western Towers,’ 17.
8 UNESCO. *Kaiping diaolou and villages*. Beijing: The State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People’s Republic of China, 2001: 27. As of 2001, the total population in the Zili Village was 427 residents, of which fifty-eight percent lived abroad. Remittances from the overseas Chinese Fang clan contributed to the economic livelihood of this static farming community.
13 Lee and DiStefano, ‘Chinese-built Western Towers,’ 17. Concerning the use of picture postcards from abroad as reference for local builders, authors note that ‘archived oral-history records in Kaiping seem to support this hypothesis, but at present, it remains a plausible explanation pending further investigation.’
14 Lee and DiStefano, ‘Chinese-built Western Towers,’ 18. The authors suggest a stylistic parallel between the diaolou and the palaces and forts of India’s Mughal Empire (16th - 18th centuries). They maintain that ‘while in transit in Hong Kong, the Overseas Chinese would have come across a number of impressive commercial buildings in the city’s central business district.’
16 Lee and DiStefano, ‘Chinese-built Western Towers,’ 18.
24 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 78.
26 Dikotter, *Exotic Commodities*, 180. ‘success with the Mei Foo lamp, Standard Oil also started to make free gifts … contributing to the dissemination of things modern.’
28 Dikotter, *Exotic Commodities*, 165. ‘The timepiece was the earliest sign of an age of machinery, with its intricate cogs, weights and hand, its mysterious movement and impressive bell.’
29 Site visit to Mingshi Lou, April 2009. Fang had two wives living in China and several adult sons. If still alive at that time, his parents may have also resided there. It was customary in China for multiple generations (and households) to live within one large residence.
30 Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 109. ‘Possession of a stove identifies a family as an independent entity.’
Materialising masculinity: men and interior design

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Abstract: This paper investigates men’s engagements with interior design and decoration in contemporary Australia. Data is drawn from an in-depth qualitative study of men’s domestic practices in inner Sydney, and include interviews, diaries, home tours and photographs. The project seeks to understand new relationships between masculinity, home and homemaking in a context of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household patterns. Utilising an analytical lens informed by cultural geographies of home, in this paper I scrutinise what the data reveals about shifting associations between gender, the domestic sphere, and material dimensions of homemaking. Against the traditional ideology of the domestic sphere and its constituent practices as a feminine domain, the men in this study are highly engaged in interior design, active in composing the appearance of their homes alone and alongside their partners. Moreover, I find that their involvement in the material aesthetics of home is deeply entwined with fostering comfort and wellbeing, expressing personalities and identities, and strengthening relationships. Consequently, I argue that masculinity and domesticity are bound together in ever more complex correlations: men’s increasing participation in interior design, amongst other domestic practices, is simultaneously shifting gendered meanings of home and generating new (domestic) masculine subjectivities.

Men on the home front

This paper investigates men’s engagements with interior design and decoration – with the arrangement, appearance, colour and texture of domestic interiors, including fixtures, furnishings and ornamentation. I draw on data from a study of ‘ordinary’ men’s meanings and everyday practices of homemaking in twenty-first century inner Sydney. This context is one of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household patterns, thus enabling empirical observations which help refine knowledge of, and reconceptualise, the relationships between masculinity, domestic life and the modern home. The material includes in-depth interviews, reflective diaries and home tours conducted with fifty men. From analysing this data I argue that there has been a shift in men’s material and ontological connections to the domestic sphere in twenty-first century Sydney. Against traditional stereotypes of feminine domesticity, the men in this study are active in practices of interior design and decoration, deciding the style and appearance of their homes alone and alongside their partners. Consequently, these men are ever more engaged with the aesthetics of domestic materiality, emphasising its importance for expressing identities, cementing relationships and fostering feelings of comfort and wellbeing. With these shifting gendered practices of homemaking, new (domestic) masculine subjectivities are emerging.

Through developing this argument I seek to make a number of contributions to scholarship on interior design and domestic material culture. Men’s everyday homemaking practices have been marginal in research endeavours across design, humanities and social science disciplines,1 and so most fundamentally I help to redress this under-representation and under-theorisation in the present paper. As such, I contribute to a significant trans-disciplinary interest in the shifting relationships between gender and domesticity in the contemporary Western home. I use approaches from cultural geography to assist designers to better...
understand the factors underpinning interior design practices in twenty-first century society. The first two sections outline a conceptual scaffold and methodology. I then analyse the empirical material, interrogating the meaning of men’s changing concerns with interior design. In doing so, I elaborate the wider contextual associations of this change, contemplating how shifting patterns of gendered domesticity are embedded in trends unfolding across the West, including transformations in employment and relational meanings of home.

**Domestic materiality, gender and interior design**

I want to draw together and extend two themes informed by recent geographical conceptualisations of home. The first is the materiality of home and its connections to identity, comfort and wellbeing. One of the key points of Blunt and Dowling’s critical geography of home is that the space of the home is both material and imaginative. 2 Home is a physical location, constituted in Western society at the site of the house. But home is not reducible to location and shelter: home is a matrix of cultural associations and personal meanings and relationships intersecting in and with the space of the house. These material and imaginative dimensions of home are inseparable: for a house to become a home it must be imbued with meanings, feelings and experiences by occupants. And since the home is a material space, a critical dimension of homemaking is modifying and maintaining its materiality, including interiors, furnishing and objects – domestic materiality is entwined with and shaped by personal and familial activities. 3 Indeed, the home provides a material locus of comfort and wellbeing for the constitution and reconstitution of individual and collective identities. 4 As Young argues, home is ‘the material anchor for a sense of agency and a shifting and fluid identity’. 5 In this paper, I focus on how men’s material homemaking practices enable comfort and wellbeing which in turn articulates identities and affirms relationships.

This leads into the second theme I wish to advance in this analysis: the gendered dimensions of meanings of home(making). Blunt and Dowling contend that home is a key location, and homemaking is a critical set of practices, for constructing, reinforcing and contesting wider subjectivities and social relations, including gender, sexuality, family, class, race and ethnicity. 6 As feminist scholars have stressed, home is one of the most significant sites for constituting gendered subjectivities, and homemaking is a critical expression of gendered practices. 7 In particular, home is imagined as a site for enacting normative heterosexual gender roles. Public policy and popular culture reinforces the heterosexual nuclear family home as the ideal version of home, bound tightly with the ideology of separate gendered spheres of home and work. 8 In this discourse, paid work is positioned as the basis of men’s self-worth, while domestic spaces and activities are seen as women’s domain. 9 This in turn gives rise to the binary subject positioning of male breadwinners and female homemakers. 10 In this gendered framing of the domestic, homemaking is seen as a feminine undertaking, and men are rendered ‘out-of-place’ at home while paradoxically providing economic resources for family upkeep. From this perspective, men have limited engagement with homemaking.

But gendered subjectivities and associated masculine and feminine practices are also malleable and multiple. While the ideology of breadwinners and homemakers influences masculine and feminine associations with the home, its coverage is incomplete. In working-class families, for instance, wives have often participated in the labour market to ensure sufficient financial provision for their families. 11 Moreover, the gendering of home has become increasingly complex over the twentieth century, with masculine insinuations into domestic
practices. Indeed, drawing together the two themes of materiality and gender, domestic materiality has provided a practical and ideological seam for refashioning gendered connections with the home. While wives, at least ‘ideally’, attend to housework (i.e. cooking, cleaning, childcare), husbands have been charged with home maintenance, particularly carpentry, cabinetry and plumbing – e.g. fixing broken window frames, unblocking drains and building furniture. The ‘handyman’ husband is not out-of-place at home; for him, home is a place on which to work. Gelber has chronicled the development of this domestic masculinity in the Anglophonic West, focusing on the US. Beginning in the early twentieth century, DIY grew in significance so that ‘[b]y the 1950s being handy had … become an expected quality in good husbands’, and ‘household repair, maintenance, and construction projects … became a requirement of masculinity’. In this light, material homemaking constitutes masculine, as much as feminine, subjectivities.

Interior design is a fundamental aspect of domestic materiality linked to the pliable gendering of domestic practices. Stretching from the present day back to Victorian times, attention to interior design has been understood as a feminine concern. In the Victorian era, the middle-class home was understood as both a moral bulwark against worldly temptations and an aesthetic statement of family status, and bourgeois wives were expected to sustain these ideals through interior decoration. Style, colour, ornamentation and arrangement were utilised as instruments for shaping moral character and expressing social standing. Sparke contends this legacy was then taken up by housewives in 1950s post-war America and Britain (and across the West), who were ideologically charged with decorating, furnishing and making homely their newly-built suburban houses. Yet, there have also been masculine associations with interior design, particularly beyond the ideal of the hetero-nuclear home. In post-war America, the bachelor pad became a ‘cultural icon’ in which interior design was configured as a distinctly masculine practice underpinned by stylistic expression and (hetero)sexual seduction. Recently there has been discussion of gay men’s interior design, including whether their presumed aptitude for domestic styling is empowering or ‘feminising’, but also empirical studies investigating their domestic design practices in the context of wider processes of marginalisation.

Further configurations of masculine interior design are emerging. These changes are captured in various media forms, and thus the media is a key site for encapsulating and articulating new connections between masculinity, domesticity and the modern home. Key here is the rise of a ‘mixed gender address’ in interior decorating and homemaker magazines and lifestyle television programmes across the Anglophonic West since the 1980s, with both women and men equally targeted as image-conscious, style-attentive individuals. As Attwood contends increasingly, in contemporary consumer culture, the home is presented as an important site of self-expression for both women and men. The ‘feminine’ worlds of fashion, beauty and the home are being opened up to men, acquiring new centrality and changing status within the culture.

This is buttressed by the presence of men engaged in conventionally feminine homemaking practices in popular lifestyle programmes and magazines in the UK, the US and Australia, from cooking to interior decoration, as both experts and everyday practitioners. Attwood argues that this gathering masculine address re-genders the domestic: in the contemporary
West, men are increasingly positioned as homemakers, and the home has become a central arena for masculine self-expression.\textsuperscript{23}

New design-oriented domestic masculinities are further reinforced in other media forms. Recent commentaries and advice books in Australia, the US and the UK suggest that more types of men – straight, gay, husbands, fathers and bachelors – are increasingly concerned with interior design and decoration.\textsuperscript{24} These assertions link men's identities, happiness, comfort, and relationship satisfaction to active decision-making about the design of interior spaces. Minor, for instance, contends that a man's personal investment in décor provides material support for his sense of self, with flow-on affects for both his wellbeing and intimate domestic relationships.\textsuperscript{25} He further suggests that greater numbers of 'ordinary' men in Sydney are designing and decorating their own domestic spaces. But while there has been scholarly interest in men's increasing contribution to domestic labour and parenting,\textsuperscript{26} there has been little attention to their involvement in interior design and what this means for the constitution of masculinities\textsuperscript{27} (aside from studies of bachelor apartments and gay men's homes noted above).\textsuperscript{28} These unfolding changes in men's homemaking need empirical and scholarly assessment to understand how meanings of home, gendered subjectivities and domestic practices are shifting in contemporary society. This is the aim of this study; next, I outline data collection methods.

\textbf{Methodology}

The data utilised in this analysis are drawn from a project on men's changing practices of homelife in contemporary inner Sydney. The project is prompted by growing concern amongst social commentators and policy-makers about men's wellbeing and sense of self-worth – a so-called 'crisis of masculinity' induced by changing employment conditions, gender roles and household and family structures since the 1980s.\textsuperscript{29} Yet these social changes and crises lie alongside persistent cultural valuations of homelife, a basic manifestation of the ‘Great Australian Dream’, reinforced through popular discourse like lifestyle television, homemaker magazines and interminable reports on the health of the real estate industry.\textsuperscript{30} In this national ideal, home is epitomised as a site and source of self-fulfilment, happiness, emotional health and ontological security. In these twin contexts, this project seeks to understand how men value and use their homes for personal and lifestyle goals in the pursuit of work/life balance, and how domestic spaces and activities contribute to a sense of self-worth, wellbeing and 'healthy' masculinity.

This is not a simple equation by any means. In light of the crisis of masculinity and associated gender transformations, there is no universal and homogenous masculinity.\textsuperscript{31} Rather, there are masculinities – a fluid set of subjectivities differentiated by intersections of gender with sexuality, class, age, \textit{inter alia}. They are also distinguished by household and family formation, including bachelorhood, cohabitation and fatherhood.\textsuperscript{32} These social and spatial intersections produce multifaceted relationships between masculinity and domesticity. Fifty men have participated in this project, varying across household type (including single, couple and family homes), age and occupation.\textsuperscript{33} Table 1 summarises these characteristics. While there are a range of household, dwelling and tenure types represented, there are some demographic tendencies: 88% are of European heritage (80% Anglophone), 84% are (or were) employed in managerial or professional jobs (with associated middle-class performativities), and only two respondents are over 70yo. This is partly because of the
spatial concentration of the respondents. The fieldwork was focused on inner Sydney (from the coast in the east to Strathfield in the west, from Sydney Harbour in the north to Botany Bay in the south) to provide some socio-spatial coherence. And indeed, some similarities did emerge across the sample, such as men's interest in interior design, the focus of this paper.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Number (Proportion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple family</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear family¹</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent family</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-person</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group²</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi/detached house</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned</td>
<td>23 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented (private)</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented (public)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal agreement³</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>24 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71+</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/New Zealand</td>
<td>35 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North/South America</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK/Europe</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation (Australian Standard Classification)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers/Administrators</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired⁴</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Normative couple family with children.
2. Unrelated adults cohabiting.
3. Informal agreements between family members: e.g. adult sons living with parents; leasing property owned by a family member; or only one partner in a couple being the property-owner.
4. Former occupation: 8 managerial/professional, 1 trades, 1 service.

Men were recruited in June-September 2009 through advertisements in local newspapers. Participation involved three stages, offering a depth of narrative and visual information. First, participants completed a semi-structured interview about their homelife. A range of themes was explored: work at home, leisure at home, interior design, domestic labour, parenting,
home maintenance, gardening, pets, entertaining, neighbourhood involvement, and the ideal home. Next, participants recorded a time-use diary of their homelife for one week. For each day they were asked to chronologically document their activities – what, where, how long, with whom – and to write a reflection for each activity considered significant to their wellbeing, feelings, and sense of self. Finally, a follow-up visit was conducted one week after I had read the diary. This involved asking specific questions about the diary, discussing the participant's life satisfaction, and importantly, a guided home tour. Home tours allowed me to ‘see’ the spaces and activities discussed in the first two stages, probing for further details about homelife. This provided a valuable visual component to the research, and photos were taken with permission. Men’s partners, if applicable, were invited to participate in the follow-up. Together, the interviews, diaries and tours afforded rich layers of insight into men’s homelife. In this paper, I focus on what these data reveal about men’s changing engagements with interior design – a practice, I argue, that offers a powerful lens for interpreting newly emerging domestic masculinities, and subsequently for the shifting gendered meanings of home in contemporary society.

Materialising masculinity: men and interior design in Sydney homes

Men’s role in interior design was explicit in this project. In each interview I discussed interior design, asking men if it was important for their wellbeing and sense of self, and how they participated in interior design practices. I found that, across the sample, interior design was important: 43 men, 86% of respondents, said that they were concerned with and participate in interior design, and that it was important for their wellbeing. Men across all household types were engaged with interior design decisions and actions – bachelors, partners and fathers – thus supporting Minor’s assertion that the feminine stereotype of interior design and decoration is being reworked in contemporary Sydney. In this analysis I want to focus on men’s interest in interior design in relation to several themes raised in the earlier conceptual discussion: gender norms and roles, self-expression, comfort, wellbeing and relationship-building. These elements are interwoven. For example, wellbeing is enabled by a combination of self-expression and physical comfort; gendered practices are re-sculpted in the context of relationships with spouse and/or house. I consider both bachelors and partnered men to show the increasing significance of masculine interior design across household types. In doing so, I draw specific examples from the research.

The interviews, diaries and home tours indicated that men are engaged in interior design practices to create a comfortable environment for relaxation and rejuvenation that simultaneously allows unhindered self-expression. I contend that this concern originates in, but reworks, a particular normative masculine engagement with the home: the idea that a man’s home is his castle, a private place to retreat after the distractions of a heavy workday. As a bulwark against the trials of public life, home enables the articulation of a man’s ‘private’ or ‘inner’ sense of self; as Noble argues, comfort ‘is fundamental to the fashioning of identity’ and ‘is best seen in terms of an attachment to a place or context that makes acting in that setting possible.’ This thesis is supported in my findings. When I asked respondents what home meant to them, all said it was (or should be) a private space secured against the public sphere and outside engagements, where they could ‘be themselves’ and express their personalities. Even if some worked at home sometimes, this was typically presented as an intrusion into private space and time. Sequestering a restful space was thus seen as important for personal and emotional wellbeing. Interior design was deployed as a key way of
facilitating this environment, with comfort, self-expression and wellbeing achieved through control over colour, texture, furniture and arrangement.

This was noticeable in bachelor apartments, where men lived alone, generating their own homemaking ideals. These men's interior design practices arguably find their heritage in classic treatises on bachelor domesticity stretching back to the nineteenth century. In 1881, for instance, Oliver Bunce asserted in *Bachelor Bluff*:

refined and perfect domestic comfort is understood by men only. ... Women are ... neat because they constitutionally hate dust, not because neatness is important to their own selfish comfort.38

Drawing on such evidence, Snyder argues that bachelors could be seen as ‘exemplars of domestic life’,39 especially skilled in creating a comfortable home environment as a framework for selfhood and personal wellbeing. Some of the middle-class bachelors in this study embody this legacy, discussing how they made their homes comfortable and expressive through material refinements in design and furnishings, creating a private oasis from work and the public sphere, and buttressing their psychological and physical health.

For instance, Brett (30s, professional, renter) described his apartment as his ‘sanctuary’, a space where he could retreat from a range of outside pressures, including work and interpersonal relationships, and ‘be himself’. Creating this sanctuary was heavily contingent upon interior design and material culture. He emphasised the need to craft an environment that was expressive, comfortable and beautiful, with these elements entwined through the choice and arrangement of furniture, texture and colour. Figure 1 shows his open-plan living area. Colour is important for generating a restful personal space, particularly ‘earthy’ greens and browns, which affirm his sense of connection to nature and bring this into the domestic.

![Figure 1: Brett’s living area: colour, texture and arrangement (30s, renter, apartment).](image)

To this end, Brett has a balcony garden, and places a mirrored screen at the opposite end of the living area which reflects the greenery and draws it deep into the living space. The leather lounge is the centre of this scenic domain: even though it was over-budget, Brett said he had to purchase this lounge, providing two reasons which interleave self-expression and wellbeing. On the one hand, its colour, brown, complements and enhances Brett’s ethos of using natural light and colour to create a restful space, bookended by real and reflective gardens. On the other hand, its textural softness induces rest: since he spends most of his
time at home on the lounge, it was important that he could ‘sink into’ it and allow it to 
envelope his body. The combination of colour, texture and placement thus establishes an 
expressive and restful home environment designed to facilitate emotional and physical 
comfort.

Brett’s example invokes design features that were important across other single men’s 
apartments. When I asked Gavin (30s, professional, renter) and Tom (30s, professional, 
renter) what was the most important space in their homes, both focused on the lounge itself. 
The lounge was the specific site where most relaxation and recuperation from public and 
employment commitments took place, and was central to building a restful homelife. This was 
an explicitly material concern, utilising interior design to facilitate wellbeing. Size and texture 
were important for relaxing body and self, but so too was placement adjacent windows in 
order to access views and natural light seen as rejuvenating (Figure 2). Arrangement of other 
furnishing and use of colour were also important for bachelors’ comfort and self-expression. 
To create an individual but harmonious environment, Ryan (30s, professional, owner) chose 
furniture which suited the colour of existing features (e.g. a red lounge to complement the 
maroon splashback), the unusual circular shape of the rooms (his apartment was in a ‘silo’ 
redevelopment) and emphasised space and flow (Figure 3). Limiting clutter was important 
here, and reflected his ‘meticulous masculinity’.40 But for others ornamentation equally 
engendered a personalised and emotionally healthful interior. For widower Doug (60s, 
professional, owner), this meant surrounding himself with furniture, ornaments, paintings and 
photos (of family) from his earlier home (Figure 4).

![Figure 2: Tom’s living area: placement and light (30s, renter, apartment).](image1)

![Figure 3: Ryan’s dining room: colour, shape and flow (30s, owner, apartment).](image2)
Expressive interior design was also enacted by men in heterosexual couple family households. This provides an interesting case of changing gendered meanings and practices of home. In this case, the underlying discourse of home-as-a-man's-castle is predicated on a traditional archetype of separate gendered spheres and divisions of domestic labour – a model which, as noted earlier, posits women (as wives-and-mothers) as unpaid homemakers whose duty is to create a secure and restful ‘fortress’ for their husbands, and serve their needs when they come home from work. This model has been rightly challenged and altered by the entry of women, wives and mothers into the paid workforce. In couple family households where both partners work full-time, there are both reduced expectations and opportunities for female partners to take charge of creating a home environment as a haven from work. In this study, 23 out of 25 non-retired couple (and nuclear) families, both partners worked (mostly) full-time; the female partner was a full-time homemaker in only two. In this contemporary context of dual careers, both husbands and wives work together to sculpt their domestic retreat. Male and female participants reflected on how this diverged from their own parents’ experience, where mothers had typically handled interior design. Consequently, I argue that men have taken – have had – considerably greater interest in interior design in order to fashion, together with their partners, a domestic refuge for the constitution, affirmation and wellbeing of both partners.

In many cases this was done in flexible and interesting ways, and such material homemaking practices were also significant for relationship-building. Planning and fashioning domestic interiors together, for the wellbeing of both partners, requires careful and often lengthy negotiations over colour, furnishings and arrangement. Samuel (30s, professional, owner) and Lisa, for instance, planned and executed the renovation of their house over a three year period, enabling their individual and mutual likes and personalities to be materially reflected in their home (Figure 5). Similarly, Michael (40s, professional, owner, house) and Gina admitted to spending considerable time – months and even years – negotiating new colour schemes and furnishings. Aaron (20s, professional, renter, house) and Wendy demonstrated another style of partnered interior design. Wendy worked in a major furniture and homewares store, and used this situation to select the furnishings, paintings and ornaments for their home. However, it was Aaron who took responsibility for deciding where these acquisitions should go and arranging the appearance of their living space (Figure 6). This was a fascinating way of allocating aesthetic decision-making, and both emphasised that this process had effectively
created a shared sanctuary from outside pressures and engagements – a home which reflected not just their separate personalities, but their relationship and joint aspirations.

Figure 5: Samuel and Lisa’s dining room: negotiation and expression (30s, owners, house).

Figure 6: Aaron and Wendy’s living area: aesthetic decision-making (20s, renters, house).

Indeed, in all cases the aim was to confer to both partners, through an ongoing process of disagreement, compromise and alignment, a sense of investment in the appearance of domestic spaces. These homemaking practices materialised both partnerships and individual personalities in couples’ interiors, enabling a space of identification, comfort and wellbeing for both men and their partners, alone and in relationship. But in order to ensure this was the case – and that the male partners’ aspirations and identities were reflected in the home – the men themselves had to take an active involvement in interior design decisions and practices. This engagement reveals a significant change in men’s relationships with domesticity and, moreover, a loosening of the traditional gendering of the domestic sphere. There is a shift away from both a simple link between femininity and domesticity, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of a man’s home as his castle on the other. Instead, there is an
emerging ethos of equal gendered investment in the modern home, including its interior design and decoration.

A final point about men’s changing concern with interior spaces cuts across both single-occupancy and couple family households: the contribution of media messages to design practices. Earlier I argued that the media – especially homemaker magazines, lifestyle television and advice guides – constitutes a key space for articulating new relationships between masculinity and the home, prompting men’s involvement in domestic aesthetics. The input of media commentaries into men’s interior design activities was affirmed in this study. For both bachelors and partnered men, media discourses played an important role in encouraging design practices and providing information about possibilities. Most homes contained an assembly of homemaker magazines. These were prominent in bachelors’ homes, often exhibited as aesthetic library displays. Both Brett and Harry (50s, professional, owner, apartment), for instance, housed collections of home design journals on living room shelves, including *The World of Interiors*, *Vogue Living* and *Indesign Magazine*. Partnered men also read such publications: Brendan (50s, professional, owner, house) had journals and books on domestic design (which were his, not his wife’s). While these men applied ideas from magazines and books, others utilised advice from lifestyle television. *HomeMade* – a renovation show featuring teams of interior designers, and the new lifestyle programme for 2009 – was a favourite. Michael and Sean (40s, professional, owner, house), for instance, watched the show with their wives to glean creative ideas for their homes. These men, like most in the study, felt they should be equally involved in interior design, and found information and inspiration through lifestyle programmes. Such findings confirm contentions about the role of media discourses in re-gendering interior design and reconfiguring domestic masculinities.43

**New masculinities, new domesticities**

This paper has utilised a cultural geographical perspective on homemaking to advance insight into interior design practices in contemporary Australia. Specifically, I have drawn together concepts about the materiality and gendering of homemaking to analyse new relationships between masculinity and interior design, focusing on the case of men’s shifting patterns of homelife in inner Sydney. The spatial and temporal context of twenty-first century Sydney offers opportunities to explore meanings and practices of homemaking in a situation of changing gender, work, lifestyle and household configurations. Through a combination of interviews, diaries and home tours I have found that the majority of men in this study take a strong interest in the design and decoration of their domestic interiors. This is true for both bachelors and men in heterosexual couples. Concern with material homemaking practices – with the style, appearance and arrangement of domestic space – is bound up with personal needs for comfort, wellbeing, self-expression and relationship-building. In the process, interior design and decoration is appropriated as a masculine activity. At the same time, the gendered meaning of the domestic sphere is reconfigured, and home becomes a site for materialising both masculine and feminine identity work.

These changes are bound up with trends unfolding across the West, including the continued entry of middle-class women into the paid workforce, the rise of personal ‘lifestyle projects’, and the centrality of domestic styling to those lifestyle goals.44 In other words, while the ideology of separate gendered spheres erodes, home is increasingly valued as a material site
of comfort, wellbeing and self-expression. Advancing these desires has demanded a realignment of gender and space. Just as women are now firmly embedded in the public sphere, men are ever more present in the domestic sphere, taking up homemaking practices like cooking, designing and decorating. These emerging masculinised domesticities are apparent in lifestyle television across the West. Along with advice guides and wider media commentaries, these programs urge men to further engage with homemaking as part of an ethos of wellbeing and self-expression. Moving beyond the simple misogynistic logic of ‘a man’s home is his castle’, masculinity and domesticity are entwined in increasingly complex correlations, with consequent fluorescence of new (domestic) masculine subjectivities. Future work on these gendered performativities would find a fertile vein in intersections of class and sexuality with masculinity, comparing working-class and middle-class masculinities and gay and hetero-masculine domesticities. Indeed, these are my intentions for further analysis of the material introduced in the present paper.

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Endnotes

12 All domestic practices are material to the extent that people have physical need for shelter, food and clothing. Thus, cooking, cleaning and laundry are also arguably material practices. What I am interested in here, however, is the materiality of the dwelling and contents.
14 Domosh and Seager, Putting Women in Place, 2001.
28 Gosling et al’s US study of material attributes in young college students’ accommodation shows some gender differences in décor, with women’s personal living spaces (PLSs) often more colourful and stylish, containing flowers, and men’s PLSs less organised, containing mechanical equipment. They suggest this reflects conventional gender roles. My concern, however, is with changing masculinities. See Gosling, S., Craik, K., Martin, N. & Pryor, M. ‘Material attributes of personal living spaces.’ Home Cultures (2:1) (2005): 51-88.
33 Sexual orientation also varied, with 13 self-identified gay men and 37 heterosexual men. A thorough comparative analysis of gay and hetero-masculine domesticities will be the focus of a later publication from this study (as noted in the conclusion to this paper).
39 Snyder, Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 35.
40 Pink, S. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2004


Localizing the Universal Values of Christianity in Local Church Design of Indonesia: towards sustainability
(Case study: Church of Poh Sarang and Church of St. Mary Assumption)

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Abstract: Globalization is now an inevitable phenomenon that has put pressure on all aspects of human lives and design. John Naisbitt argued that this phenomenon is a paradox where greater global pressure produces stronger local identity. Therefore, globalization brings a blessing in disguise for the emergence of local values.

The issue of global versus local in Indonesian church design has existed for decades. As a foreign culture introduced during the colonial era, Christianity, with the spirit of universalism, faced problems of acceptance. Christianity had to address the local cultures that had existed for many centuries in order to be accepted. Therefore the issue of localizing emerged to adapt Christianity with its context, including its design.

It is critical to understand that a place, including churches, means significantly to people because they have certain values. Churches that show local characteristics prove to be culturally significant to the people and therefore more sustainable in the long term. The presence of this kind of church in a local district ensures it will become inseparable from place, and hence, strengthen the local character. For example the Church of Poh Sarang (by Maclaine Pont) and the church of St. Mary's Assumption Klaten (by Mangunwijaya) are churches designed with the spirit of locality. Local values and meanings are crystallized within design elements of these churches.

This paper will describe how architects adapted universal values of Christianity into local ways and design elements, in order to survive as an inseparable part of society. These churches show how design can contribute to the sustainability of Christianity in Indonesia.

Introduction

A discussion about the word ‘local’ is difficult due to its multiple meanings. The word ‘local’ comes from the Greek word locus which means a place or anything related to a certain place. The ambiguity of the word allows us to interpret it either in a broad or narrow sense. But in every use of the word, we can guarantee that it is always related to a specific place.

Apart from the place matter, the word ‘local’ also has a subject orientation. A place local to someone or a certain community might not be local to someone else. Every person or community has its own local, and a place that is local to someone now might not be local in the future. So the word local also has something to do with time or a specific period. Therefore I can conclude that when we are speaking about ‘local’, ‘locality’ and ‘localizing,’ we will have to deal with these three keywords: place, subject and time.¹

Locality is inseparable from the inevitable globalization phenomenon. John Naisbitt in his book Global Paradox argues that this is a paradox phenomenon where bigger global pressure...
produces stronger local identity.\textsuperscript{2} Therefore globalization brings a blessing in disguise for local values to emerge. The issue of global versus local always becomes an interesting issue for philosophers, historians, theorists, and even designers. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur has advanced the thesis that a hybrid ‘world culture’ will only come into being through a cross-fertilization between rooted culture on the one hand, and universal civilization on the other.\textsuperscript{3} Consequently both rooted ‘local’ culture and universal ‘global’ culture play significant roles in determining our future culture and architecture. Moreover it is important to understand that both culture and architecture are always dynamic.\textsuperscript{4}

I believe that in architecture, a form is created for certain purposes. The design’s point of departure starts with the needs and wants that must be facilitated. Architecture is a materialization of certain cognitive systems that is determined by the relationship quality of human beings and their surroundings.\textsuperscript{5} Therefore architecture cannot be separated from its context. So the discussion about the act of localizing architecture is actually the act of contextualizing architecture; putting architecture in its context.

**Local and sustainable building**

Before we continue the discussion, I need to explain the word ‘local’ in connection with the idea of sustainability in order to begin discussion of the following case studies. Apart from its acclaimed achievements, modernism has made a massive assault on the continuity of tradition and established rationality as a new basis of thinking.\textsuperscript{6} However, since the decrease of its domination in the 60’s, there has appeared a counter approach that restructures the relationship between subject and object. One of the most influential is phenomenology.\textsuperscript{7} A phenomenological approach is based on the assumption that reality is multi-faceted, suggesting that we need a holistic perspective. I want to begin this discussion about the word ‘local’ by borrowing the idea of phenomenology.

One phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger, was trying to separate the often confusing idea of place and space through linguistic approach. He suggests that a place refers to an environment, entity, or concrete form of space that means more than just an abstract location. A place where man is capable of dwelling is somewhere between landscape boundaries (horizontal axes) and the earth and the sky (vertical axes). Only in a place where we can find the concept of dwelling, can we clearly distinguish the outside and the inside. In a place we find a certain identity or character that we often know as *genius loci*.\textsuperscript{8}

On the other hand, a space denotes the three dimensional organization of the elements which make up a place. A space can be understood as a concrete three-dimensional geometry as well as an abstract perceptual field. A space helps to give form to a place.\textsuperscript{9} Based on Heidegger’s thinking, Schulz summarize that architectural works are not just an abstract organization of space but a medium where man can dwell in a landscape.\textsuperscript{10} In the context of philosophy, dwelling is often described as a condition that is diametrically opposed to modernity. Dwelling refers to a way of being, whilst modernity is characterized by forgetfulness of being. Hence Adorno, Berger and Kellner all conclude that dwelling and modernity are always opposed to each other.\textsuperscript{11}

In the context of what I have discussed earlier about locality, dwelling is a local concept that accommodates the creation of a place. The person who dwells is someone who is open to all
fundamental dimensions of being which the plural modern society has generally left behind. The plural modern society, with intensive individual mobility and migration, has forced the life of the society to move from one space to another, instead of a remaining in a place. The modern society is freed from the limitations imposed on them by their family or clan or by their village community. Therefore we can see that only universal values determined the individual life of modern society. The renunciation of the traditional framework or reference and also local values of their lives means a loss of certainties and of meaning. It is perhaps why, in the context of design and architectural expression, we see the dominance of individuality over collectivity, which is local.\textsuperscript{12}

So the idea of ‘local’ in this paper opposes the universal idea of modernity. It is unique instead of universal, although the uniqueness is common to its own society. It is related to traditional frameworks, values and sometimes beliefs, instead of the modern way of thinking that promote rationality. It is related and attached to society, and parallels Heidegger’s concept of dwelling. In a design context, ‘local’ suggests the making of a place rather than a space; it consists of a holistic concept of everyday living. Romantic notions of the past are not a must, but sometimes emerge in the act of design. We cannot separate the idea of ‘local’ with society and daily life. Something that is local always embeds with the life of the society, including the rituals, the values, the beliefs and even the art of making architecture.

Although the word ‘sustainable’ has many meanings, for this paper it refers to the idea of conserving both tangible and intangible aspects of the building. The tangible aspects address physical elements while the intangible aspects relate to ideas, concepts, and meanings attached to the building. A building that is ‘sustainable’ in this paper refers to a building that is long-lasting, rather than ‘eternal’, and is physically well preserved and significant to the society because it is meaningful. I suggest that a building that is local will be sustainable since it is meaningful yet significant for the life of the people around it.

**Christianity and Indonesian churches**

Indonesian church building began after the Portuguese introduced Christianity during the colonial era (began at 1496)\textsuperscript{13} and was followed by the Dutch period of occupation (began at 1595 until 1942).\textsuperscript{14} Although some sources mentioned that missionaries came to Indonesia from southern India twice in the fourteenth century, no artifacts of their arrival remain.\textsuperscript{15} As a promising archipelago, Indonesia once was a great destination for trading from China, India and Persia.

The period between 16\textsuperscript{th} – 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries is known as the Early Modern Era for the Indonesian archipelago and was marked by the arrival of European traders.\textsuperscript{16} The Portuguese and the Dutch were two foreign powers that played a role in spreading Christianity throughout Indonesia, although Northern Indonesia was, for some period, greatly influenced by the Spanish who already settled in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{17} The Dutch began to colonise Indonesia and build churches within fortress complexes, using an architectural expression transplanted from Europe with minimum adaptation to the local context.\textsuperscript{18}

Indonesia’s Modern Era began in the nineteenth century and lasted until 1940 (just before the World War II). During this period almost all parts of Indonesia were colonized by the Dutch who built roads, railways, transportation systems, offices, post offices, military complexes,
civic buildings, churches and residences, and planed many cities.\textsuperscript{19} However following World War I, the great depression in Europe produced many critics of positivist thinking, and the emergence of social sciences concerned with humanist rather than imperialist ideas. Moreover the early decade of the twentieth century, saw many colonized countries able to experience the fruits of ethical politics.\textsuperscript{20} For example European émigré architects opened offices in colonized countries, and in Indonesia built more churches for the local Christian community. The architectural expression that emerged during this period accommodated the local context of Indonesia. The most significant adaptation being recognition of the local tropical climate, formalized through roofs, wall openings and terraces. European styles, such as neo-gothic and art deco were also used but with the awareness of the local tropical climate.

Churches were an ‘imported’ function necessary to provide the increased Indonesian Christian population with places to worship. But as an imported foreign culture Christianity, with its spirit of universalism, faced problems of acceptance and, in order to be accepted, had to engage local cultures that had existed for many centuries. Therefore the issue of localizing emerged, whereby Christianity and the design of its places of worship had to adapt to its context.

Localizing church architecture was begun by the Catholic Church through a process Father Huub Boelaars terms ‘indonesianization’.\textsuperscript{21} The aim of Indonesianization was to integrate, rather than alienate, the Church into the life of Indonesians. The main purpose was to present the Church as truly rooted and growing in the very heart of Indonesian people, while expressing the unique characteristics of Indonesia. Of course it is an ongoing process since indonesianization is the continual integration of two different cultural bodies; Church and Indonesia.\textsuperscript{22}

Henry Maclaine Pont, a Dutch-Indonesian architect and Y.B. Mangunwijaya, a local architect who is also a Catholic priest, are architects who show their passion for localizing Indonesian church architecture. Pont began this process in the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, whilst Mangunwijaya started in 1960’s. Local values and meanings are crystallized within design elements of their churches, and they tend to be more culturally significant to the people and therefore more sustainable.

**Local Design: Maclaine Pont’s Church of Poh Sarang**

The Catholic Church of Poh Sarang in Trowulan, East Java (1936) was ordered by Father H. Wolters, CM as the Pastor in the Diocese of Kediri. In accepting the commission Pont proposed that modern functional architecture can be materialized in the local forms and themes. The church complex consists of two main parts; the first is the main building, a sacred area containing the altar, baptistery, nave and tabernacle. The second area is the terrace that in Javanese is called a *pendopo*. The uniqueness of this building is the dome-shaped roof that creates a dramatic vertical space inside. The dome is created by four timber arches that interlock and support galvanised ‘nets’ which supports the corrugated roof tiles. The galvanised nets are flexible enough to support the wind load and the roof tiles, enabling the whole system to perform as a membrane construction of traditional materials. The idea for this construction came from Pont’s research into traditional housing in Java villages that used
bamboo as the primary building material. Pont was trying to integrate the traditional roof form with modern construction technology of wood, membrane and steel.

At top of the dome the unique crown shape houses symbolic images of the four writers of the gospels; a winged-human (Matthew), a winged-lion (Mark), an eagle (John) and an ox (Luke) that also represent the four compass directions. Beneath this the altar is composed of rounded stones which are available locally in abundance. On the cylindrical stones there is an interesting carved relief depicting a deer which is drinking while the others await their turn.

The interior of the Church is dominated by red bricks, while the exterior is rounded stones matching the boundary fence walls, a construction technique found in many Majapahit palaces. The temple-like gate of the complex is also made from stone.

When entering visitors see and touch various surface textures; at the same time the hand touches the water while entering the nave, the nose smells burning incense, the light directs the eyes towards the altar, the tongue taste the bread without yeast, and the ears hear the chanting followed by the rhythm of the wind. These effects build an exotic atmosphere that is so familiar for the Javanese, especially with their late animism ritual belief called Kejawen.

The building is a symbol and a place that unites heaven and earth, man and God, traditional and modern, Christian rituals and Kejawen atmosphere, Javanese and Dutch, rough and smooth, outside and inside. The local characteristics that Pont implemented in this church are
focused on the form of the roof and local materials. The roof form was Pont’s main focus since Indonesian traditional architecture is a roof-dominant architecture, although Pont elaborates the traditional roof form with modern construction technology. The main purpose is to avoid univalent values that will restrain local values to emerge. 23

Local Design: Y. B. Mangunwijaya’s Church of St. Mary’s Assumption

The Church of St. Mary Assumption in Klaten (Central Java) is an authentically preserved masterpiece by Y. B. Mangunwijaya, an Indonesian architect, Catholic priest, writer and social worker. Although built in 1972 the architect in a book of commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Church of St. Mary Assumption, stated that the inspiration for the design came from the renewal spirit of the Second Vatican Council (1964-1967). 24

Located in the residential district of Klaten, the building is a rectangular form consisting of two squares. Of the two squares the layout of the main one is symmetrical with diagonal axis and an altar on the corner, while the other is also symmetrical with horizontal axis. Circulation begins with the front yard and is followed by an inner entrance court. Visitors are welcomed by a garden and a fish-pond, indicating that the journey to God is being prepared by sequences. When entering the building the sense of warmth and homely atmosphere is significant since orientation is away from the altar – which directly expresses sacredness.

The interior of the church expresses a particular atmosphere created by local ornamentation on the building envelope. Most of the ornaments are symbolic forms found in churches such as Christ’s blood as the red wall, the green tree of life, and the bird-shaped roof. But they also display characteristics of the local Javanese culture. In Javanese culture there is also a sacred tree symbol called pohon hayat (the tree of life) or kalpadruma or kalpataru in Hinduism which is believed to be the tree of hope and life. 25 Another symbol is the tripod-shape column in the centre of the façade, which refers to the Holy Trinity in Christianity, but in Javanese culture it is part of the saka guru; the main sacred column groups that always become the centre of the cosmos. 26

Early in the morning the sacredness of the worship place is created by the dramatic entrance of sunlight through wall openings and the gap between wall and roof. In this church the roof is not attached to the wall, and is different to the ‘tent’ concept, inspired by Moses’ Holy Tent built during the exodus. A tent is portable and movable along with the concept of the pilgrim church in the world.
Javanese people believe that there are three important relational aspects that need to be encouraged in Javanese culture. First is the relation between human and God, second is the relation between humans, and lastly is the relation between humans and nature (cosmos). This concept becomes a basic conception of the ordering principles in the building.

The inner court at the entrance is a place that symbolizes the relation between humans and nature. Next is a place with a higher platform where people met and greet each other. This symbolizes the relation amongst humans. The Southern area (the main square) has a lower platform and higher ceilings, and is a place that symbolizes the relation between humans and God. The sacred area is larger and has higher ceilings that the profane area. Although both areas have similar colours, textures, and ornaments, it is clear that there is a difference in hierarchy. The sacred area is primary and the profane secondary. During the mass, both areas function as a nave but the character of the profane area is more horizontal due to the lower proportion compared to the sacred area.
Beside proportions, the difference between sacred and profane spaces is strengthened by a different orientation of the furniture. In the profane area, furniture is arranged in parallel with the main horizontal axis, while in the sacred area it is radially arrayed.

![Concrete columns and beams with unique textures](image9)

In these areas ceilings are made of wood with a gloss finish, whereas in the corridors they comprise woven bamboo also finished in a similar manner. Columns and beams are made of concrete with an unusual texture resulting from the imprint of bamboo form-work. These exposed and painted textures align perpendicularly with the span direction. Generally walls are made of roughly plastered and painted brick, but several wall surfaces are specially treated to create accents. The front exterior walls are painted in red with a horizontal textured line as an eye catcher for the surroundings. The background wall to the altar is made of small carved rectangular sections of timber with a gloss finish. Other solid walls are roughly plastered and painted in various colours.

![Pattern of carved timbers behind the altar](image10)

Along the walls are several ornamented ventilation openings made by high-skilled local craftsmen. There is also a non-solid wall made of concrete that beautifully decorates the nave; unfortunately this wall was destroyed during the earthquake two years ago. Floors are made of pre-cast pattered concrete and arranged together with small round stones. These
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floor patterns also indicate differences between the sacred and the profane area. The sacred area uses a circle pattern which symbolises perfection and likeness to God, whereas the profane area uses a dove-like pattern to symbolise the Holy Spirit who is always with believers in their daily life.

The local characteristic that Mangunwijaya tried to implement in this church is focused on the decorative elements of design. The details of the walls, openings, ceilings, columns and beams are meticulously designed and show local characteristics that interpret the context of the place. There are so many beautiful and valuable details on Mangunwijaya’s architecture, all of which have unique local touches suitable for further study. But until now there has been no comprehensive documentation in the form of models or replicas so whenever the originals are damaged or destroyed, it is still to be reconstructed. The fact is that these details are truly valuable cultural artefacts and absolutely need to be conserved.

Conclusion

To summarise, the effort to raise the local in architecture as we have seen from the examples by Pont and Mangunwijaya, are efforts at reinterpreting locality – a conceptual device that has little to do with style and/or decoration. The aim is to try and create modern expressions with a cultural spirit that are meaningful for the local society, so that they become significant, sustainable and enduring.

The two case studies demonstrate that the presence of the church in the local area strengthens the local character such that it becomes an inseparable part of the place. The environmental context and local values are both important issues to be considered in the design process. Churches, which are contextual, when designed to suit both the natural environment and artificial environment, will be an inseparable part of the life of the local people. Places are significant when they have meaning; and something that is significant culturally can be considered local for the society. Therefore as long as it is meaningful for the society, we can presume that it is significant and its sustainability is assured since the society will become involved nurturing and conserving it as part of their daily lives.

Endnotes

5 Salura, Menelusuri Arsitektur Masyarakat Sunda, 2.


Van den End, Ragi Carita 1, 22.


Boelaars, Indonesialisasi, 51.


Art Deco Moderne in Singapore in the 1930s domestic interior

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Abstract: In Singapore in the 1930s, still a British colony, Art Deco acted as a signifier of modernity for the wealthy. New furnishings and other accoutrements of modern life from Europe were easily imported through department stores such as John Little and Company and mail order. For the ex-patriot returning to the west, Chinese manufactured goods and antiques from the Holland Road market were cheap and easy to export home on one of the regular shipping lines. This paper will consider the art deco moderne style in homes created by British ex-patriots in Singapore in the 1930s, when through magazines and journals, shops and catalogues there was an open dialogue in this decade between the East and West concerning modern living and fashionable interiors.

In the pursuit of modernity, social rituals were modified and appropriated in different ways which breached traditional boundaries of both the Chinese and British. Even the cheongsam, the traditional Chinese women's dress, usually decorated with flowers, was produced with art deco geometric patterns. This paper will speculate on the reasons for the success of the art deco moderne style in Singapore. Case studies will be the house of Doris Evelyn Laing (decorator) and two houses by Dora Gordine (sculptor) built in the 1930s.

Art Deco Moderne in Singapore in the 1930s domestic interior

In the study of the design of the modern interior, the meanings invested in the home and arrangement of domestic spaces in Europe have been linked to status and identity since the 1840s, starting with John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) and continuing in a proliferation of advice manual, home journals and exhibitions which has been explored and well documented elsewhere.

Contemporary cultural discourse has seen the European home in the colonies as a significant expression of an Imperial power, and the creation of a particular 'English home' culture abroad as way of imposing an alien value system and European social rituals. The importance of maintaining moral standards and the difficulty of keeping up familiar styles of dress and social patterns in a tropical climate has been discussed with regard to the Indian colonial bungalow by William J. Glover, who wrote:

if the bungalow was, in part, a setting for the cultivation and display of refined manners and taste, then its physical appearance played a role in the pervasive sense of anxiety about the effects on human character of living in a colony highlighted in European writings.

In 1934, the perceived dangers of moral deterioration in British Malaya were also expressed by Roland St John Braddell (1880-1966) a prominent Singapore lawyer and a municipal commissioner for the city between 1914 and 1929, who had grown up in an English colonial family in Malaya. He was a friend and promoter of Dora Gordine (1885-1991) who will be discussed later, and brother in law of the progressive English interior decorator, Dorothy Braddell, who perhaps decorated his living room. [Figure 1] Roland Braddell wrote in an
otherwise affectionate memoir of his time in Singapore ‘Every white man who goes to the Orient has a mental and spiritual fight before him; he must always keep up his guard or the country will down him.’ The domestic interior for the expatriate abroad therefore can be seen as central to the notion of home, nationhood and moral standards.

Figure 1: Art Deco Moderne in the Braddell’s Living Room. 1934. Illustrated in The Lights of Singapore, published 1934.

Figure 2: Typical Colonial Black and White bungalow, Singapore, 2006
For the wealthy British expatriates such as the employees of British American Tobacco and the Firestone Tyre Company who arrived during the rapid economic expansion of Singapore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the notion of home was located in rural 19th century England, expressed in the traditional colonial ‘black and white’ houses designed by the Public Works Department or European architects like R.A.J. Bidwell at Swan & Maclaren, the leading architectural practice at that time. Built in the English mock Tudor architectural style, they were modified with large overhanging eves and deep porches as shelter against the monsoon rainstorms, and wide verandas, protected from the sun by white and black or green rattan ‘chicks’ (or blinds) which could be let down in the hottest part of the day. Typically in plan the house was a sequence of large and small rooms set around a large central reception room, punctuated with many doors and window openings placed opposite each other for a cooling through breeze. Four or five bedrooms would be at the back of the house with steps up from the outside to each, for the night soil removal before proper sanitation arrived. The receptions and dining rooms were ranged along the front and sides of the houses, with large verandas on all sides increasing the living space. The kitchen and servants sleeping quarters were separate from the main house.

![Figure 3: Kitchen outhouse attached to a colonial bungalow, Malaya c 1925 – Source: Artstor](image)

The interior decoration drew on historical styles from the past – from classical Greek and Roman styles, to Jacobean, Victorian and Edwardian English country house styles, which the British colonials aspired to. The abundance of local servants and cheap consumer goods contributed to a higher standard of living than was possible at home, compensating somewhat for the debilitating heat of the tropical climate. The colonial bungalow, based on designs for homes in India, evolved from English mid-19th century house design which had few internal corridors and large open airy spaces to cope with the tropical climate. The veranda, where it was coolest in the early mornings and evenings, became an important hybrid exterior/interior living space which was not designated for one activity, or indeed class. Activities which might take place here were breakfast, afternoon tea and ‘sun downers’ (cocktails) before dinner, and sitting in the cool of the evening after dinner. But it could also be the space where servants prepared food and did some washing, albeit at the back of the house. This lack of specified function encouraged homeowners to choose furniture more appropriate to the geography of place, such as cane furniture, which offered a cool alternative to upholstered chairs which may fall prey to pests and mildew, and fabrics decorated with bamboo and tropical vegetation rather than roses and English foliage. The traditional design of the low
reclining chairs encouraged lounging rather than sitting upright, making it difficult to retain the decorum of an Edwardian drawing room.

Figure 4: Art Deco screen with tropical vegetation and Chinese style feet by André Mare (1885-1932) c. 1925.
Source: Artstor, University of California image.

Also, the veranda was not a private space, with servants coming and going from the interior of the house and doors and windows to each of the separate bedrooms in the house. For the British colonials of the early 20th century, especially the women who may spend more time in the house during the day, the sense of interiority which had its high point in the Victorian parlour, a cosy refuge from the outside world and a cold climate, was disrupted, and the veranda represented for some an alien space where the invisible boundaries of traditional European domestic interior spaces were challenged. For the Victorian and Edwardian colonials this violated their sense of privacy and the division of space between servant and master.

Perhaps the unsatisfactory traditional tropical house design prepared the way in the late 1920s for the success in Singapore of the art deco moderne style with the British expatriates. Also, the open plan interiors of the art deco moderne style villa appealed to the wealthy Straits Chinese, who had Asian values which centred on the family and the community of the individual, but there is not space to go into this here.7 In public housing the Singapore Improvement Trust, set up by the British Colonial Government in 1927, were providing mass produced, art deco, reinforced concrete public apartments for the Straits Chinese of ‘simplicity, rationality and beauty’.8 Until the mid 1920s, traditional Chinese buildings had not
been designed by architects in the western sense, but by builders and craftsmen who constructed larger buildings from Imperial Court or religious sponsored publications and domestic buildings from standards handed down from craftsmen to craftsmen, with variable quality control. In 1927 an Architects Ordinance was passed, requiring all buildings to be designed by qualified architects. Forty six Chinese architects registered immediately, many with knowledge of modern architecture techniques learned in England and Europe, who began to depart from classical traditions and experiment with the technology and aesthetics of Modern architecture in response to demands from both wealthy Chinese and the British colonials. Kallang Airport, resembling the De La Warr seaside pavilion at Bexhill on Sea, England was built by the public works department under Frank Dorrington Ward in 1937.

The young British expatriates arriving in the 1930s to work for the Singapore Harbour Board and the British Administration came with a western sense of identity rooted in the urban modernity of twentieth century Europe, which was quite different from that of preceding generations. Those who wanted to impress with something in the latest style commissioned English architects such as Frank Wilmin Brewer, trained at Kings College, London, who started his own practice in Singapore in 1933 or the former municipal engineer, John MacBride Jackson. Of the Chinese architects working in Singapore, the most notable was Ho Kwong Yew (1903-1954) who built a house for Chee Guan Chang on Grange Hill Road in Singapore in 1938. [Figure 5, 6, 7] Yew was a draughtsman who had worked under S.D. Meadows in the Municipal Engineers’ office, and then for the Chung and Wong practice, before setting up on his own in 1933.

Figure 5: Chee Guang Chang house, Grange Road, Singapore. (Built 1938)
Figure 6: Chee Guang Chang house, Grange Road, Singapore. (Built 1938)

Figure 7: Chee Guang Chang house, Grange Road, Singapore. (Built 1938)
An extraordinary expression of the art deco moderne style was a villa completed in 1937 for the wealthy Chinese owners of the Tiger Balm ointment empire Aw Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par by the architects Chung & Wong, which seems to be an eclectic mix of influences of Eric Mendelsohn’s expressionism and modern techniques of concrete and glass. [Figure 8] The interior was a modern interpretation of the old bungalow layout.

The roof had six impressive domes surrounding a large central dome which covered the reception hall. There were six rooms, comprising two bedrooms, a drawing room, a dressing room, a dining room and a central hall each with a domed ceiling finished in gold. The furniture and fittings, imported from Europe, were the best that money could buy.11

The conspicuous consumption of new ideas, furnishings and the goods of modernity was helped in the 1930s with better shipping and frequent passenger liners taking people home on leave to Europe. A good postal service brought letters, magazines and mail order catalogues from home, where images of modern interiors were readily available.12 Modern materials were also available locally, and, importantly, up to European standards. The Malay Saturday Post advertised ‘Marbelite Patent Floorings made locally under European Supervision’ which were ‘More Hygienic than tiles and fire proof’.13
Advertisements in the *Malayan Architect* in the 1930s included modern building products such as ‘Ruberoid and Malthoid Roofing, Cork Insulation, Reinforced concrete, tiles and concrete mixers, Italian Marble and Steel Windows’.  

![Minton Tiles Advertisement](image)

Figure 10: Advertisement for Minton Tiles from the Straits Times, 1932

A wide selection of imported consumer goods from the west were readily available through the major department store such as John Little and Co. in Raffles Place, which even included Yardley cosmetics and ‘Colombia Gramophones in a solid mahogany cabinet, dark oak or, top of the range, a ‘very elaborate cabinet of choicest oak with piano finish’.’

The extraordinary range of disc records to order included Bagpipe Solos, Laughing Songs, Yule Songs Bugle Calls and Chinese vocal solos. Furniture was available to order locally produced in a range of historical styles, in the modern style, or in a mixture of different styles in one piece. Reclining chairs called ‘Bombay Chairs’ were popular, known locally as belah belah.  

![Belah Belah Chair](image)

Figure 11: A Belah belah (or Bombay) chair, derived from Indian styles, designed for lounging in the heat of the day.
In the 1930s John Little and Co., operated a car business, motor garage, furniture factory, beauty salon and café. If you could not afford to buy new, then the For Sale columns in the Straits Times offered a rich mix of streamlined second hand Frigidaire and Kelvinator refrigerators, Jacobean style walnut stained teak furniture, Canton blackwood bric-a-brac whatnots, Shanghai jars (large jars for holding water for washing in) and folding screens with blue silk panels.\(^\text{17}\) Genuine antique Chinese furniture with its simple lines – chairs, stools, altar and console tables – could be bought in the Holland Road market, to the West of central Singapore. For Government civil servants, everything down to the Sanderson fabrics on sofas and armchairs was supplied from government stocks, which kept up with changing taste for less cluttered, more streamlined art deco inspired interiors. Furniture could be imported via Robinsons, Whiteaways, and John Little or made to order by the many local Chinese businesses.\(^\text{18}\) Throughout all this, the highest and most often repeated accolade was that things were ‘up to European standards’.

**Case Studies – Laing and Gordine houses**

![Figure 12: The living room of Evelyn Laing, Singapore, 1930s. Private collection.](image)

Three case study domestic interiors which were photographed in the 1930s, demonstrate personal interpretations of the art deco moderne interior. They were the result of collaboration between two women personally and closely involved with art and interior design in London and Paris during the 1920s.
One was Dora Gordine (1895-1991) an Estonian sculptor who had arrived in Singapore to make bronzes for the new Town Hall, commissioned by the British Government of Malaya. The other was Evelyn Doris Laing, an Englishwoman, wife of Philip Laing whose company in 1932-33 was building the Grandstand of the new Singapore Turf Club for the major building contractors Swan and Maclaren. Gordine was employed to work on a mural in the British Pavilion of the 1925 *Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* exhibition in Paris, and was able to observe the whole exhibition of modern design at first hand. Following considerable artistic success she had commissioned an elegant modernist studio from August Perret in Paris in 1929, where she had used antique Chinese furniture alongside modernist designs. Laing was a painter who had exhibited with the New England Art Club in London in 1928, where she may have met Gordine for the first time. Laing also designed rugs and the interiors of the Tea Room of the new Singapore Turf Club for her husband’s company in a colour scheme of pale green and pink.

The impact of the model rooms set out at 1925 exhibition and the art deco style has been well documented and its widespread influence acknowledged. Penny Sparke has written that by the 1930s the style represented a mass produced modernity which valued the experience of the individual and offered the potential for modern luxury, glamour, leisure, pleasure and escape, (and which was above all accessible) hugely appealing in those years.

It was through an exhibition of a model room that Gordine and Laing brought the art deco moderne to Singapore in August 1931 when Laing put on an exhibition in a small shop in the Capitol Buildings in the centre of town, of a ‘sitting room in the modern style’. It contained armchairs, tables, furniture and rugs in the modern style and a bronze sculpture by Dora Gordine, set on a sideboard. The *Straits Times* exhorted the young wives of the community to visit the exhibition, writing

Much has been heard of the art of interior decoration and various magazines make a great feature of photographs of rooms furnished in the modern manner. Singapore
wives who have wondered wistfully whether they could do something of the kind with their houses or flats will do well to visit the exhibition of modern interior decoration which Mrs. Evelyn Laing has opened.26

The writer went on to praise the conservatism of the exhibition as an example of good taste. It is modern in design, but at the same time there is nothing about it of the extreme, an error into which the enthusiastic amateur decorator can easily fall, for the cult of the straight line can be overdone and some designs of tapestries and carpets which are arresting at first sight would be tiring to live with. Mrs. Laing shows that a room can be in the modern style and yet restful to the eye.26

Unfortunately there was no image to accompany this interesting article in the Straits Times, but the Laing’s own living room [Figure 12] could have provided the illustration. The modern sofa and square furniture in the Laing house resembled closely those designed by the French decorator, the rationalist designer Djo Bourgeois in 1930 27  The Laing family were wealthy enough to commission furniture by the English designer Betty Joel which may be the origin of the cupboard in the background.28 The glass just visible in the windows and doors show that electric air conditioning had been installed.29 The wall lights and chandeliers were designed by Dora Gordine, and also shared in her own homes. The open plan stairs, wide archways and high ceilings, arrangement of the furniture around a centrepiece rug, designed by Laing herself, are all typical of the art deco moderne, and yet at the same time show how suitable they were for the tropical climate. The simple austere lines of the furniture are French moderne, inspired by the 1925 Paris exhibition. Ironically, these simple forms were inspired originally by Chinese antique furniture, as Raymond Koechlin noted years before in the journal Art et Decoration in 1925, ‘modern furniture in our houses would not be understandable in its search for a noble simplicity and rare materials if it were not linked to Chinese, models.’30

Figure 14. The Round House, Garlick Avenue, Singapore. Exterior 1982
The second home in this case study is one Gordine designed in 1934/35, the Round House, eventually built and furnished by her divorced husband in 1937, after Gordine had left Singapore. [Figures 14, 15]

![Figure 15: The Round House Interior photographed in the 1970s. Courtesy of Jon Lim](image)

As its name suggests, the Round House was completely circular with a central atrium sheltered by a detached roof, built from brick and reinforced concrete, with metal windows, in sets of three. The spaces of the rooms appear to flow in open plan through the arched doorways into one another, allowing free flow of both people and cooling breezes. There was a decorative band of dark tiles around the skirting, octagonal tiled floors, possibly by Marbelite, and the carpet pattern in tiles on the curving staircase, all add a modern style and panache to the design, which is based on the unifying principle of a circle. The sequence of rooms around a central atrium, edged with a Greek key pattern and with wrought iron rails, were visible from the central well below, which appears to have been used as a gallery by Garlick to show off Gordin’s sculptures.
The elegant staircase provided one of the essential art deco moderne elements – that of the stylish entry into a society gathering. Instead of windows, there were decorative wrought iron grills on the window openings for security and two shuttered doors, one to the outside veranda and one to the inner reception room, all carefully placed opposite each other to draw air through the house and up the central well, a traditional Chinese architectural device for air conditioning before the arrival of fans. On the outside of the building a *brise soleil* (sunshade) shaded the southern windows, a shallow scoop of metal seemingly applied as an afterthought to a modernist design more suited to the western climate. The servants’ quarters were in a separate block on the edge of the property.

Gordine left Singapore in 1935, divorcing Garlick from London, England. She never lived in the Round House and the modern furnishings in the photographs are her ex-husbands, but the free flowing arrangement of the space and the art deco moderne interiors of her design were realised in her next project, Dorich House in London SW15, England, completed in 1936 only a year after she returned to England.
Dorich House, situated on the edge of Richmond Park, London and financed by Gordine’s quickly acquired second husband, the Hon. Richard Hare, is the third house in this case study. It shows the transfer of the art deco modern style from Singapore to London England, with the incorporation of traditional Chinese furniture and decorative objects. [Figures 16, 17] Dorich House is not round but an asymmetrical rectangle, of brick and reinforced concrete, with metal windows in sets of three. It has similar arched doorways, a double height first floor gallery and studio and the same chandeliers. The walls and curtains were described in magazines such as *Country Life* (5 Nov 1938, pp 456-7) and *Ideal Home* (Oct 1946, pp 36-40) variously as in shades of ‘velum’, cream and ivory, with grey in the studios. During the restoration of the house, yellow paint was found in the kitchens and bathroom. Modern Parisian style furniture is set alongside two 17th century Chinese cabinets with circular locking plates [Figure 18], a myriad of Chinese antique furniture – small Chinese tables with turned under feet, Chinese cane hats, Chinese hardwood screens decorated with dragons, and, making the most dramatic statement, a pair of round Chinese moon doors divided the two main living rooms.

![Figure 18: 17th century Chinese cabinets in coromandel wood. Sold at auction in 1991. Dorich House Archives](image)

At one end of the living room was a hardwood carved mah-jong table, topped with a large Javanese storage jar used as a vase. The blue and white china used by the Chinese for mourning Gordine said ‘mixed so well with European blue and white china’. In the bedroom, an English Queen Anne desk was placed next to an antique Chinese side table. For Gordine, the carved Altar tables of traditional Chinese homes made excellent hall consoles. [Figure 19]
The photograph of the living room on the top floor of Dorich House [Figure 20] shows on the right hand side modern French inspired furniture, with a small decorative Chinese red lacquer table behind, moon doors and Chinese screen. The fireplace, inspired by Auguste Perret’s designs for Gordine’s Paris studio, contains an array of oriental ornaments and jars, and an ancient stone head of the goddess of mercy, Guan Yin. Low console tables under the windows were previously antique Chinese furniture from the ancestral hall of a traditional Chinese home. Gordine furnished her dining room with a Chinese long table, and antique Ming Chinese hardwood chairs [Figure 22]. In fact, she delighted in the riot of colours from the exotic east with which she enlivened her rather stark modernist home.
She spoke at length about her home on BBC radio in 1950 in the *Not Only for Women Series*, saying

> I found Javanese sarongs which are lovely coverings for walls, and cushions, and they blend with Chinese embroidery. I bought Malayan silver, Canton enamel, jades and frescoes. What a joy it was to bring back to Europe all these living memories of the Far East, after working there for five years. ... How well they look together and what a rich harmony the produce in a home ... Brilliant sarongs and embroideries placed near old English glass, or silver, show up the sober, dignified English craftsmanship. Flamboyant Chinese ornaments draw closer attention to the refined grace of English Regency furniture on which they are standing. Caucasian carpets, with bold designs and deep colours, can blend happily in the same room with Chinese carpets whose design melts away in delicate pastel shades.\(^{34}\)
In conclusion, the art deco moderne interior expressed the transitory nature and increased social mobility of the modern life style of the twentieth century. The transience of life in the colonies, and ‘moving on’, illustrated in the advertisements in the Straits Times which offered nearly new Kelvinator refrigerators, and flats and houses with ‘electric light and modern sanitation’ to let for a year, encouraged the furnishing of homes in the art deco modern style, which could also include the exotic additions of antique Chinese furniture readily to hand.

It can be identified with a lifestyle of glamour and fun transported from Paris, Berlin and London in the late 1920s, supported by cheap and plentiful servants, still attainable in the British colony of Singapore in the early 1930s.

The art deco moderne style could provide through consumer goods what British expatriates and Straits Chinese aspired to in the thirties, in Singapore, a city which has always embraced modernity with enthusiasm in any decade. With increased media access to European culture through magazines, films, the BBC Radio service, and informed by frequent trips home, the expatriates of Singapore no longer needed the comfort of a rural English style which was outdated.

The essentially open plan nature of the tropical house and multiple use of the veranda space can be seen to have a connection to the twentieth century European modernist ideal of open, light and airy interiors, and spaces which could be converted from sitting rooms, to studies, to bed rooms, furnished with simple furniture covered in plain or geometrically patterned textiles.

The Japanese invasion of Singapore in 1942 destroyed many of the art deco buildings of Singapore. Ho Kwong Yew’s derelict Tiger Balm Villa was demolished in 1945, and only the gardens remain. The Round House in Garlick Avenue was sold to property developers in 1982, who built six large houses on the site. Others were destroyed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s vision of a modern ‘world class’ city. A very few remain, like the Chee Guang Chang house on Grange Hill Road which was still there in 2006, to be rescued by the Singapore Heritage Board. The interiors of Dorich House, Dora Gordine’s London studio home, were restored by Kingston University 1994-6 and it is now an accredited museum, with the major collection of her sculpture, and a rare collection of Imperial Russian art, collected by her second husband, the Hon. Richard Hare.

Endnotes

4 William J. Glover. ‘A Feeling of Absence’, Home Cultures (1:1) 2004: 73. Glover cites Somerset Maugham and Kipling’s writings with regard to Indian colonial life. I would add Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness to those publications portraying the threat posed by the exotic to human sanity and morality.


6 Historically dwellings on one story, even two story homes were still referred to as ‘bungalows’ in the late 19th century.


12 The Singapore Cold Storage Company on Orchard Road advertised Californian loganberries, strawberries and rhubarb in the Straits Times of August 1932.


19 Dora Gordine was a successful Estonian sculptor in her own right in Paris. She married Dr. George Garlick, a doctor in the Malay Civil Service in September 1931, shortly after her arrival in Singapore, and initially lived in his company house in Johore Bahru working in a studio built in the traditional Malay style with an attap (woven palm leaves) roof.


21 Laing exhibited an oil painting, Farm Buildings Near Essendon (Exhibit 138) under her maiden name as Doris Evelyn McIntosh at the New English Art Club’s 78th Annual Exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London. Other exhibitors included Lucien Pissaro, William Rothenstein, P. Wilson Steer, Francis Dodd, Augustus John and Sir William Orpen amongst others.

22 Katherine Kolbucz, niece of Evelyn Laing, to the author Feb.2007. Dorich House Archives


25 ‘Interior Decorations’ Mrs. Evelyn Laing’s Exhibition in Singapore’, Straits Times, (August 1931)

26 ibid, Straits Times, (August 1931).

27 Illustrated in Penny Sparke. ‘A Modern Decorator in the French Tradition,’ in Jonathan Black and Brenda Martin eds. Dora Gordine: Sculptor Artist Designer, London: Philip Wilson, 2007: 158. (Fig. 4.4) Katherine Kolbucz, niece of Evelyn Laing to the author 2005

28 Electric lighting and fans first replaced oil-lamps and punkas in 1906, but reliable electricity did not arrive into the suburbs for private houses until the 1930s. Edwards, The Singapore House, 130.

29 Lynden Koechlin. ‘Le Bronzes Chinois’, Art et Decoration, (47) (1925): 44, quoted in Anna Jackson, Art Deco in East Asia, 73


Representation, Destruction and the creation of Territorial Islands

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Abstract: Issues of demolition and redevelopment are normally justified in quite straightforward terms such as upgrading or redevelopment. Implicit in many instances of demolition however, is an alternative claim on territory and a different spatial ideal. This paper explores the politics that often shadows acts of demolition - an associated terrain of displacement, separation and exclusion. Beginning with the selective representation that was a driving force in the demolition of a notorious slum area in East London this paper will go on to consider the impetus behind the construction of territorial islands, internally ordered and bounded places that form and migrate or are deliberately implanted into alien situations, constantly at odds with their surroundings.

The impact of unresolved encounters and struggles between people threaten basic assumptions about inhabitation. People migrating across national boundaries with different belief systems and world-views often seek to impress new identities onto existing places and cultures. For those there already the sense of interior is interrupted by the arrival of others. They must struggle to maintain stability as daily routines and activity are curtailed, moulded and adapted to a changed environment. For newcomers, energy and resources are often expended on establishing new rules and conventions and in maintaining a protective skin. Jacqueline Rose has written about how, with such movement across national boundaries ‘you are just as likely to carry your enemies with you’. Nothing is ever simply left behind and this ‘baggage of the mind’ often surfaces as ‘fierce blockading protectiveness. This paper ultimately will address the way people struggle to make room for themselves in places that are crowded with conflicting claims and open to different interpretations. It will examine the way ideas are carried from one space to another.

Introduction

The modern political project is made up of two complementary actions: the domestication of the state’s interior, based on a disciplinary politics and an idea of cultural hygiene, and the exclusions of the outside, with which it finds itself in constant violent engagement.¹

The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble.²

Radical change, carried out through acts of demolition or substitution requires both a profound ethical conviction and a concrete idea for what will follow. To replace an existing structure with something quite new and often strange has far reaching effects on concepts of place and time. Demolition is normally justified in quite straightforward terms of upgrading or redevelopment; however, an associated terrain of displacement, separation and exclusion frequently shadows such acts. The ghost of ‘colonialism’, usually involving removal,
dominance and alternative ideas and claims on territory, often accompanies this terrain. Colonies habitually begin with the creation of territorial islands – internally ordered and bounded places, usually set at odds with their surroundings. Imagined as places of ‘fresh start’, they create ‘otherness’ externally while simultaneously domesticating and cleansing the enclosed territory. Such places form and migrate or are deliberately exported and planted into alien situations.

This paper will explore the way ideas are carried from place to place on the back of acts of substitution and removal. It will also confront the way language operates to prepare the ground for such movement. Language in the form of selective representation has an intrusive, authoritarian quality, which can assume the most tangible shape and motivate significant political activities. It can formulate justifications for acts while at the same time simplifying the moral and emotional contradictions that may be encountered.

Words, as Robin Evans has suggested, may be used to construct a fiction on the body of something real, and in the following case words have played a significant part in preparing the ground for the acts of removal and substitution that occurred. Consider this opening passage from Arthur Morrison's novel, *A Child of the Jago*:

> It was past the mid of a summer night in the 'Old Jago'. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot, heavy air lay a rank oppression on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it and through it all there rose from the foul earth and the grimed walls a close, mingled stink, the odour of the Jago.

> From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage set across with posts gave menacing entrance on one end of old Jago Street... There, the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and fettered... Old Jago Street lay black and close under the quivering red sky; and slinking forms as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts and the gut by the High Street, and scattered over the Jago.

This is a vision of hell, a scene of fire with buildings in silhouette, populated by skulking forms, like rats, moving around. The novel is situated in a fictional area almost identical with the district in the East End of London known as the ‘Old Nichol’ and was published just as that notorious slum was being demolished, at the end of the 19th century. Morrison stated that his theme for the novel was ‘violence and despair’ and he portrayed the Jago, as a monstrous enclosed world from which there was no escape. The book was peppered throughout with allusions to the polluting effects of the slum and the inhabitants not being fully human. One conversation in the book, between the Revered Sturt and the physician advocated penal settlements and emigration for the inhabitants along with measures to constrain their reproduction. Morrison’s novel was full of moralising and it was subsequently attacked for its simplistic treatment of the area.

Early photographs in fact, show that the ‘Old Nichol’ was an area of badly built, but rather ordinary one and two-storey houses, collected together in enclosed blocks along narrow streets and alleys. Rundown, dilapidated, but hardly a fortress of crime. Ordinance survey maps from that time reveal it was surrounded by a number of institutions such as churches,
ragged schools and a police station. People who had lived there told interviewers of the Salvation Army being a familiar sight on the streets. The notion of impenetrability appears to have been something of a fiction. The London County Council made its own maps and found that some of the housing was in a reasonable condition. They also reported that a strong family structure was present in the area. The chief activity in the district was not, as Morrison claimed, ‘cosh carrying’, but the making of cheap furniture. Arthur Harding was nine when Morrison’s book was published and in an interview recorded in 1970, he described the experience of growing up in the ‘Old Nichol’

The Nichol was a place on its own. There was hardly any traffic, the children could go anywhere and have no fear of nothing. The coal carts didn’t go fast, the chimney sweeps, now they knew everybody. The result was that it was a close-knit community and everybody knew everybody.  

Morrison’s excitable prose produced an artificial aura of romance, exaggerating events and circumstances. In fact, from Hogarth through to Dickens, London’s slums in the 1840’s were portrayed as dreadful, but also fascinating because they were dangerous, mysterious and incomprehensible to outsiders. To police and other authorities they were no-go areas. In essence they were closed guarded districts owned by aristocratic landowners but sublet over and over again so that these landlords were able to claim little responsibility or control over them. Full of interstices and hiding places, they provided perfect urban landscapes for people to hide, and for outsiders to become lost. Connections made through houses, party walls smashed through at all levels and networks of tunnels and ladders provided a protective web for the unofficial, unsanctioned activities of the area.

A ‘language of metaphors, analogies and contrasts’ was cultivated to give flavour to the detailed factual descriptions of these areas carried out by the nineteenth century reformers who ventured there. Words like hellish, subterranean, submerged, netherworld, chaotic, infestation, decay and labyrinthine occur again and again among their reports and statistics. These ideological distortions were transferred to questions of morality under the rubric that ‘evil communication corrupts’. Cholera was, a major concern, threatening to break out of the slums and enter as ‘an uninvited guest’ into the homes of the wealthy. The analogy between the spread of vice and the spread of disease has been well documented. Immorality and disease were conflated and bound to particular areas where the dangerous classes are to be found amongst the chronically poor and dispossessed, crammed into a congested, dilapidated fabric and ‘surrounded with vice as with the atmosphere.’

Reports of Parliamentary Commissions of the 1840’s and 1850’s show an obsessive concern with the immoral and primitive nature of the urban poor. John Greenwood, among the earliest wave of sociologists who travelled widely throughout the British Empire, wrote popular accounts of everyday life in remote regions and then made comparisons between ‘primitives’ and the life in London’s poor and impenetrable areas

The language of the explorer had been overlaid with that of the ethnographer, and the city seen through these analogies was cut across with ethical as well as physical boundaries.

One-room living was a key issue where ‘no distinction between persons or events, public or private, was possible and in which, as an inevitable consequence, vice flourished like
disease.\textsuperscript{12} Investigators compiled statistics in order to enhance the picture. The causes of poverty were explained in terms of dissolute habits and disordered lives played out in a correspondingly amorphous terrain. Philanthropist Octavia Hill noted

\begin{quote}
The peoples homes are bad, partly because they are badly built and arranged; they are tenfold worse because the tenants' habits and lives are what they are. Transplant them tomorrow to healthy and commodious homes, and they would pollute and destroy them.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Morrison’s novel along with earlier literature produced by the reformers provided a ‘political cutting edge’ for those who sanctioned the wholesale demolition of the real slum and the displacement of its inhabitants. The publicity enabled the creation of a new set piece in the area. It was one of the first clearances by the London County Council where the slums were literally smashed to death. The most efficacious method was to cut streets through them in order to ventilate them and open up the enclosed life.

A new urban form, one of the first ‘model’ housing schemes was planted in the area. It bore no relation to the pre-existing layout, completely obliterating any trace the ‘Old Nichol’. The rubble of the old slum was collected into a central circular podium (a symbolic repository of memory), and the new housing blocks and avenues radiated out into the surrounding area. This central podium, Arnold Circus, featured a bandstand where bands of Her Majesty’s forces would play for the local residents on Sundays. In form it resembled a Panopticon, an architectural instrument of control and generalised surveillance used to focus a supervisory gaze. This arrangement, organised around an all-embracing view was in chorus with notions of transparency and hygiene. In the aftermath of the ‘ripper’ murders in nearby Whitechapel, a pathological fear of darkened spaces existed in the East End.

Redevelopment of the 17 acres of ‘The Old Nichol’ caused the displacement of 5500 people and in the seven years that it took to demolish, nothing that had existed before survived. In the 1893 Ordinance Survey map the district appeared as a white, blank space, reminiscent of the blanks appearing on old colonial maps as uncharted areas. This amounted to a conceptual cleaning of the ground, a blank canvas ready to be inscribed with a different form of occupation.

The enclosed slum of the Old Nichol was replaced by a newly invented island of semi-rural life in the city based on principles of the self-sufficiency, (isolation) of each family group. Built at the height of the British Empire, the housing blocks were named after towns on the upper Thames and the new avenues were named after military generals. The unifying factor was a red brick construction in a sort of arts and crafts style and the buildings themselves presented a different kind of fiction as they took on the appearance of individualised dwellings. ‘Only fifteen of the 1069 new tenements were one-room dwellings whereas the Nichol had 752 single rooms housing nearly half its population\textsuperscript{14}, and just eleven of the original Nichol inhabitants moved into the new buildings. There was no obligation for the LCC to re-house the displaced residents and in fact the new buildings were designed for a class above the very poorest with rents not more than double that paid by the Nichol inhabitants. The new tenements were eventually occupied by the next wave of immigrants into the East End of London.
One means of resolving the ‘slum problem’ was presented in the ‘Model Houses for Four Families’ project designed by Henry Roberts in 1851 under the patronage of Prince Albert. Robin Evans has suggested that this project showed ‘the various ways in which architecture was to be deployed against low-life.’15 Through training of the tenants and the consequent assurance of prompt rent payments, it was argued, investors would be encouraged to finance housing for the poor.

This aim of shaping experience through the medium of building was intended to directly confront issues of criminality, noisiness and lack of restraint and to customise stereotypes such as that of women and domestic space. Small, enclosed territories of domesticity were created at a time when domesticity was seen not just as the proper condition of families but, often, as superior to all other varieties of social experience. The Model Family was the Private Family. In the ‘Model Houses’, families were separated from other families, spaces for traffic were separated from spaces of privacy and a further separation between boys and girls was based on a layout able to facilitate a measure of surveillance.16 It was a process of social colonisation – an attempt to remake the poor into an image of English Middle class domestic life. Not exactly alike, (there shouldn’t be a blurring of class boundaries), but close enough to exhibit a reassuring respectability. In the words of Homi Bhaba, ‘Colonialism’s ultimate desire is for a reformed recognisable ‘other’ as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.’17 As Evans pointed out ‘the choice was not just between good and bad housing, but between two radically different ways of life.’18 These Islands of intimacy and domesticity were exported throughout the British Empire as outposts of civilisation, described as a retention of England outside itself. Although exalting in their civilising enterprise they were in reality a reiteration of the most conservative paths or voices, evoking nationalist, classist and racist narratives.

In 1971, Robin Evans chronicled ‘the strange way human beings attempt to render their world inhabitable by circumscribing and forgetting about those parts of it that offend them.’ He depicted two distinct, but not mutually exclusive ways to achieve this, retreat and exclusion. The first way, the way of retreat involves

the withdrawal of participants into the privacy of brave little communities of utter individual autonomy... It can be understood as the provision of a mantle to envelop the inhabitants within a familiar landscape populated with sanguine mementos – a place to correspond with, and therefore vindicate, our ideological prejudices.19

The second way, ‘exclusion’, attempts to fence off and exclude those elements that cause stress or the possibility of disharmony. These two conditions, retreat and exclusion, (one usually also implies the other), rely on the forces of imagination, projection and ideas about idealised communities. The Old Nichol embodied both retreat and exclusion. It offered protection for those seeking refuge or escape. The perceived impenetrability of the slum was set against intrusive forays by authorities in pursuit of felons or debtors. The Nichol was also a zone of ‘outcasts’, long regarded by those on the outside as housing an immense, teeming, and formless population, dramatically different from the world that surrounded them.

Lines drawn around particular groups can generate a capacity for an exaggerated sense of group solidarity combined with a passionate hostility to outsiders. The progress of the ‘Old Nichol’ from unruly formlessness to tamed domesticity, arose from what Derek Gregory has described as ‘the double-headed coin of colonial modernity’,20 on one side, a partitioned,
hierarchical and disciplined space, and on the reverse, a primitive, wild, mysterious and excessive territory. Although there was an urgent need to address issues of overcrowding, dilapidation, decay and insanitary living, fear was a compelling factor in decisions to demolish the slums. Fear partly engendered by the violent outbreak of disease (such as occurred in Spitalfields in 1837), and fear of working class movements. The possibility of unrest was perceived as a growing threat to the middle and upper classes and ultimately to national security.

Fear, Jacqueline Rose suggests, ‘generates an identification with somewhere else. It travels. And, in doing so, it becomes its own fortress’. Fictional constructs and mythic narratives have the power to create powerful group identities. Sometimes acted out as a claim for a return to an imaginary past these narratives may be used to erase other memories and identifications. The language that inflamed fears of slum dwellers is a language of ‘realism’, long regarded as a dependable means of representing the world. It is full of certainty and conviction, containing connotations of Empire and suggestions of boundaries between ‘known’ and ‘other’.

A more recent example of this language, characteristic of the Bush era ‘War on Terror’, was recorded in February 2002. Efraim Eitam, a retired Israeli brigadier general, and ex-commander of the IDF army in Southern Lebanon, spoke at a major international military conference, in Haifa, Israel attended by geographer Stephen Graham

With around 30 urban warfare specialists from the Israeli Defence Force and United States and British forces in attendance, this event addressed the links between war and cities in the twenty-first century. In his presentation Eitam argued the spontaneous construction of Palestinian housing and refugee camps within both Israel and the Occupied Territories, was a ‘cancerous tumour destroying the ordered host’ of the Israeli state... we are dealing with the use of urban areas as weapon, the building as weapon

Graham argues that fear of Palestinian built and urbanized spaces reaches very high levels among Israeli military leaders and commanders. Eitam, a leading member of the Israeli settler movement, has advocated persuading or forcing Palestinians to leave the West Bank to be resettled in Jordan or the Sinai. The idea that places and people are a source of infection touches upon deep cultural insecurities, putting the notion of threat into the mode of disease – as a cancer or plague – poisoning the ordered body from within. Such language is part of a recurring ideology of separation – the civilised, ordered and hygienic world set apart from the unknowable, closed, nests of disorder danger and terrorism.

Projecting places as dark, impenetrable irrational, full of dehumanized, subjects encourages a domesticating or cleansing mission and legitimises violence against both the everyday urban life within those places and the systems, which sustain that life. The wholesale destruction visited recently on towns and districts such as Fallujah and Sadr City in Iraq, Jenin, Nablus and Gaza in Palestine, the Tamil enclaves in Sri Lanka and numerous other places, are testimonies, ultimately, to the power of such representations.

Issues of exclusion and retreat that confronted the reformers in the slums in the late 19th Century are now more pronounced. Today, migrations occur on all continents. They are producing multiple crossings of external borders that have resulted in local resistance and
reaction leading to more borders. A new phase of ‘Fortress Building’ confronts the contemporary world caused by a combination of fear and distance. Definitions of insider and outsider now stretch beyond national borders. Certain groups, such as asylum seekers and refugees have vastly increased in numbers and are now assigned global identities.

Separated territorial islands spring from a desire to extirpate and remove the root causes of disarray. They have appeared in the form of settlements, refugee camps, military zones and gated communities. Places set apart, often fortified at their edges by a range of security apparatuses, walls and barriers, separate the ‘other’ from the same. Meir Margalit describes the deliberate fragmentation of a formerly unified region caused by the implanting of settlements into existing communities in Palestine

Taking control of space’ refers to a much broader concept than merely the appropriation of physical properties. A single settlement structure invades the entire surrounding space; its impact is felt over and above that one building due to the security system associated with the structure, spreading a pall for the residents. A single house or an entire compound becomes a fortified site in the finest colonial traditions of the nineteenth century - a gated community in the 21st century.23

The settlement brings with it security fences, guard-posts, closed circuit cameras security personnel and police forces that monitor every movement of the existing inhabitants. The character of the space changes from a peaceful living space to a conflict zone. A settlement not only fragments the territory by creating isolated and separated enclaves, causing a break in the physical surroundings; it also destroys the homogeneity of the community. As horizons have shrunk and new frontiers are scarce these new territorial islands have become the agents and operative figures in a form of re-colonisation of existing places.

The impact of unresolved encounters and struggles between people threaten basic assumptions about inhabitation. People migrating across national boundaries with different belief systems and world-views often seek to impress new identities onto existing places and cultures. For those there already the sense of interior is interrupted by the arrival of others. They must struggle to maintain stability as daily routines and activity are curtailed, moulded and adapted to a changed environment. For newcomers, energy and resources are often expended on establishing new rules and conventions and in maintaining a protective skin.

Derek Gregory has shown that ‘representations are never merely mirrors held up to the world; they enter fully into its formation.’24 Language plays a major part in preparing the ground for territorial islands to emerge. Words have an ability to condense, simplify, and represent something in dramatic terms, able to grip the imagination of social groups. However, this simplification ultimately lends a porosity and uncertainty to the territorial island that no amount of demolition, removal or securing through boundary or identity can hide or repair. The following passage by Israeli novelist David Grossman describes the narrowing effects that words of certainty and conviction have for those caught up in such alienation and conflict

From experience I can say that the language used by the citizens of a conflict to describe their situation becomes flatter and flatter as the conflict goes on, gradually evolving into a series of clichés and slogans. It starts with the jargon invented by the systems that handle the conflict directly – the army, the police, the bureaucracy. The trend spreads into the mass media, which create an elaborate, shrewd language designed to tell their audiences the most palatable story...The process eventually
seeps into the private language of the citizens...All that remains are the clichés we
use to describe the enemy and ourselves – the prejudices, mythological anxieties,
and crude generalizations with which we trap ourselves and ensnare our enemies.
The world indeed grows smaller.\(^{25}\)

Endnotes

8. Interview recorded by Raphael Samuels
11. Evans, 'Rookeries and Model Dwellings', 98.
15. Evans, 'Rookeries and Model Dwellings', 96.
16. Evans, 'Rookeries and Model Dwellings', 102.
18. Evans, 'Rookeries and Model Dwellings', 111.
Residential Spaces in a Culture of Fear: Interior Design in São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract: The wealthy residents of São Paulo, Brazil live in a culture of insecurity in which the fear of crime and violence pervades every aspect of their lives. The responses to this fear in architecture and urban design have been the site of much previous investigation. The security measures taken in the city as a whole are felt in the design of the interior and the production of the interiors is a component of the enactment of culture. Through the reactions to insecurity, these residential interiors serve to both exacerbate and legitimize existing class divisions. In this paper, the relationship between this urban paranoia and the design of the interior environment are explored in terms of the manifestation of dominant emotive institutions.

Introduction

Brazil is a society in which social and spatial injustices are inexorably interrelated. In a country in which 1.7% of the population owns 50% of all arable land and with one of the greatest gaps between rich and poor, feelings of insecurity on the part of the wealthy have become a part of nearly every decision and interaction. The anxieties felt manifest themselves in conscious decisions about security and in choices made with regard to the representation of identity through the focus placed on the ‘secure’ interior environment. The possibility of enhancing security through the built environment has been a topic of interest for several decades but there is an increasing understanding of the problematic nature of responses to fear through design. Scholarly exploration of this issue has focused largely on urban planning and architecture and as of yet, there has been little exploration regarding the institutionalization of these fears in interior space and the discursive practices present in interior design.

Interior spaces are locations for the mutual constitution of individual and social identities and beliefs about ownership, territoriality, and citizenship. Behind the gates and walls of fortified residential citadels in São Paulo are interior images that ‘are designed to make personal experience of the world tangible and, through this tangibility, public and meaningful’. These interiors are not only products resulting from the projection of national and personal ‘narratives constructed on the basis of cultural frameworks of meaning, identity, and emotion’, but also actors which ‘may be regarded as emotive institutions that work, pragmatically, to schematize emotional understandings of history and identity.’

The interiors we examined in this study clearly demonstrated the response to feelings of grave insecurity in the urban environment through Ellin’s model of practices of nostalgia, retribalization, and escapism. The ‘retreat and fortify’ reflex led to a strong desire to control encounters and eliminate contact with the unexpected as a method of creating a sense of security and stability. The aesthetics, spatial relationships, and designed security measures directly responded to fear or were created as a method of compensating for the disruptions to self caused by those direct responses. The negative impacts of this urban paranoia are felt...
not just by those who are excluded or diminished as outsiders, but also those who are trapped within this newly prisonized society (Figure 1). As ‘environment-making is an open-ended and speculative process for projecting possibilities of how we might live’ we argue that the approaches taken in the design of the interior environment problematize relations and spaces on the border between those who have and those who can’t.

Figure 1: Luxurious living happens only behind thick concrete walls

Paranoid urbanism

The discourse of fear as part of the fabric of contemporary life for the upper-class members of urban society exists even where statistics demonstrate marked decreases in crime. In the last century the city has become increasingly associated with fear of crime rather than as a mechanism for increased security. The (re)expression of this fear as part of everyday discourse is a method of legitimizing avoidance of other and is often a coded method for discussing ethnic and racial differences. In addition, the response to this paranoia has been to exercise control and power through the strict partitioning of time and space in order to insulate the individual from unexpected encounters. The perception of an increase in the danger of the outside world leads to an increase in the desire for privacy both from that world but also with regard to other types of difference and opportunities for discomfort that exist within the home.

Security concerns in residential interiors are intensified by the conceptualization of home as a place created to provide respite from the danger and competition occurring in the space of the public world. During the 1980s Brazil underwent an economic restructuring that increased the fiscal distance between the socio-economic classes while simultaneously narrowing the spatial divide that had previously located the residences of the elite in the center of São Paolo and those of the poor on the periphery. This new mixed status distribution created closer physical proximity between the wealthy and the worker and caused the perception of an invasion by outsiders from the northeastern part of the country (Figure 2). The conditions of the urban poor were juxtaposed against more opulent lifestyles, and the wealthy began to fear the envy of those less well off. To create a sense of security, they identified the enemy, drew clear conceptual boundaries differentiating ‘us’ from ‘other’, utilized those differences to justify their own possession of material wealth, and isolated themselves from anything that reminded them of their own discomfort.
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These conceptual boundaries are realized in the physical forms of walls, security systems, gates, private police, and cameras designed to control the movements of outsiders and exert social control (Figure 3). However, rather than relieving wealthy residents of worries, these security devices instead served as constant reminders of fear. Residents of fortified enclaves felt sharp indignation at the injustice of their self-inflicted imprisonment while their withdrawal from public spaces simultaneously exacerbated the dangers outside. The closure of spaces in which cultural creation occurs and authority is conferred denies those on the outside recourse to the resources necessary to move from the position of outsider. The relationships between those who belong inside and those who don’t become increasingly antagonistic as personal relationships and humanizing encounters, previously occurring in public spaces, are avoided and the divide becomes institutionalized in physical impenetrability. There is some feeling that the measures taken decrease the risk of urban life, but ‘such separatism also leads to more ignorance of others and less tolerance of difference. It feeds an ‘us against them’ mentality and a tendency to defend one’s borders, family and self with gates as well as guns."

Figure 2: Auto-constructed housing in one of many favelas that exists in close proximity to the residences, businesses, and services for the wealthy.

Figure 3: Many levels of security must be passed through before admittance into the interior space of these fortified enclaves.
Research design

This preliminary study took place in São Paulo, Brazil during the summer of 2008. São Paulo was chosen as the site because it is the financial capital of Brazil and there is a significant amount of research on São Paulo in regard to designed responses to the culture of insecurity to provide a larger context for the information gathered. The research began with a review of literature to ascertain which the primary high-end residential architecture and design firms practicing in São Paulo. Eight firms provided contact information for the residents of spaces they had designed or provided their own photographs of their design work. In addition, personal contacts were utilized to locate other participants.

A variety of methods were used to collect the ethnographic data in the field including, open-ended interviews, observation of participants in their homes, and photo-documentation. All of the interviewees were European Brazilians and the absence of minority participants is indicative of the racial and ethnic composition of the targeted social class. While the exact financial status of the participants is unknown, interviewees were business and creative executive and belonged to the wealthiest 5% of wage earners whose income accounts for 36.6% of national income in contrast to the poorest 40% of the population whose wages account for only 7.2%. The spaces analyzed, with one exception, were detached, single family homes.

An understanding that the design of space is a form of communication formed the theoretical foundation for examining the built environment as part of a larger discourse of insecurity. The visual analysis of the spaces was performed using Rose’s critical visual methodology, in which the interiors were considered as productions of visual culture. The interpretation of the meaning of the interiors required exploration of sites of production, existence (the interior itself), and audience. These were each approached through an examination of technological, compositional, and social modalities. We also engaged in critical discourse analysis of context, production processes, and the spaces themselves to evaluate the institutionalization of everyday practices of control and exclusion. Our goal in engaging in this analysis was not to create a quantifiable list of characteristics or representations but rather to engage the individual and situated nature of responses in an effort to understand a typology of security focused design responses.

Nostalgia, retbralization, escape

Responses to insecurity in urban design have been classified into three typologies: retbralization, nostalgia, and escapism. Retbralization is the desire to reassert cultural distinctions in response to the increased homogenization of a globalized world. Vernacular design and the idiosyncracy of the local are valued as part of establishing the strength of connections and ownership to particular areas or groups. Nostalgia is different from retbralization in that rather than choosing connection to place as the locus of identity, connections across time are made through an idealization of some point in the past. Ownership and belonging are established in nostalgia through establishment of a timeline that inserts self in the history of location. Escapism is a more pronounced form of remaking current circumstances. Rather than imagining cultural or temporal connections to place, escapism turns away from connecting and retreats and rebuffs. In the homes that served as
the texts for analysis in this research, there was evidence of at least one response in every residence and sometimes of all three in combination.

_Nostalgia._ In São Paulo, wealthy residents have developed nostalgia for invented traditions that allow them to create themselves in the image of the True Brazilian with an inherited right to the land that they occupy. As part of the struggle to recreate the imagined home of their childhood they recast themselves as heroes in the struggle for the values of decency, culture, and citizenship and the general sentiment of childhood safety is recast through these new interpretations of their childhood interiors. There are even moments in which a particularly secure childhood memory such as a treehouse is directly referenced. This sentimental recall of a more idyllic past leads to the adoption of neo-traditional tendencies in interiors aesthetics that work to emulate their European counterparts while maintaining the myth of a cultured Brazil. In addition, just as Brazilian democracy exists in political society but is not fully realized in civil society, the Brazilian Modernism adopted in these homes has elevated the ideals of improved citizenship through ‘Good taste’ without adopting the social message of Modernism’s founders (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Living room of an executive](image)

The types of building materials that have formed the vocabulary of Modernism are particularly well suited to environments which must incorporate security and protection as a fundamental part of its aesthetic. Concrete, glass, and steel combined with iconic pieces such as Le Petit Confort or the Barcelona chair transport the occupant to a time when the possibilities for social transgression were less present and the idea that the world could be tamed via architecture and design still inspired hope. The very permanence of the materials communicate a defiance of transience. The defiant statement of staying power is presented in sharp contrast to the temporary nature of favela construction in which materials are easily (re)moved or cleared away by humans or nature. The non-transience expressed in the permanent materials signals rootedness and belonging on the part of the occupants and creates a sense of security through spatial anchoring and temporal continuity.

_Retribalization._ The elite in Brazil are overwhelmingly of European descent. The desire to ascribe to the white, European aesthetic canon is a reflection of a struggle to differentiate themselves via that connection from the darker skinned, immigrant _nordestinos_. Adherence to Modernism is an effort to create cultural identity and constitutes retribalization through shared norms and values. By virtue of its history, it also responds to a feeling of nostalgia by tying
Brazilians to a period in their history before recent economic restructuring, government unrest, changes in immigration patterns, and the shift to a mixed urban structure.

Modernism in interior design is akin to abstraction in art and in the same way is considered a reflection of high culture and high taste. Being able not only to appreciate but to afford the objects and finishes required to create this aesthetic, serves to divide insider and outsider. The interiors of these homes set the stage for the performance of the cultural values of appreciation instead of use, minimalism instead of display, and patronage instead of ownership and make transgression through difference a manner of social control over freedom of expression by outsiders (such as workmen or servants). The acceptance of these aesthetic norms as representative of good taste also restricts the activities that can appropriately occur and still be considered tasteful (Figure 5).

![Dining room of a manufacturing executive, Pinheiros, São Paulo](image)

This does not translate into the aesthetic value of sameness. The pattern houses and homogeneity of design valued in the gated communities and suburban neighborhoods in the US have long been associated with cheaper housing created for workers and so are not desirable to the elite. Homeowners go to great lengths to personalize their houses and customization provides one method of expressing individuality in the interiors. It is interesting to note that the same customization is an integral part of the auto-constructed residences in the favelas. In both these interior situations, doors, windows, wall coverings, textiles, and other elements of the interiors are built specifically for the site and not produced in mass quantities (Figure 6).

![Custom built shelving in a penthouse, Pinheiros, São Paulo](image)
Cleanliness remains a priority but neatness rises in importance. Materials that require detailed daily maintenance and color palettes that are unforgiving of wear are heavily utilized and pristinely maintained as a manner of demonstrating status either through the possession of the leisure time in which to maintain them or the financial status to buy the time of someone else to do so (Figure 7). The use and display of glass, marble, stainless steel, and silver are particularly prized in the interiors of homes of the elite. During one interviews a woman focused at great length and with a particular passion regarding how difficult it is to find good help. She related a moment during at a recently thrown dinner part when one of her guests, a prominent bank president, pointed out a smudge on his glass and suggested that she consider finding better help. The memory of this still mortified her and while at the time of the interview she had yet to replace the young woman responsible, the extra scrutiny under which the woman now worked was apparent.

Escapism. The architecture of these homes is part of the interior experience, as the true exterior is the wall that which surrounds the compound and divides private from public space (Figure 8). Much has been said of the walls and gates that separate the domestic space from the public. Escapist responses both heavily utilize those walls but also make every attempt to disguise them and create an environment divorced of the larger urban context.
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The homes turn their backs to the walls that surround them and create large, open exterior areas in which walls are either disguised by foliage or become part of the aesthetic experience (Figure 9). Controlling the width of the view in order to not reference the surrounding space is an effective manner of creating a sense of security whereas open views that do not allow a viewer to fully be aware of what is beyond the cone of perception create a sense of tension and are often used in horror movies to enhance feelings of insecurity.22

Figure 9: Courtyard of walled residences, São Paulo

The myths of nature as a restorative antidote to the stresses of urban life are enacted in the emphasis on interaction between the exterior and interior. Large, uninterrupted vistas to luxuriously landscaped and maintained private yards create the feeling of free interaction with the exterior environment. The openness of the naturecape however is tightly controlled and bears only metaphorical relationship to the true wildness of nature.

The construction of fortified enclaves has changed not only the interactions and character of public life but has also significantly impacted on private life. Open public spaces with free circulation patterns have historically been part of the interactive freedoms and democratic ideals of an open society. In them, there is the possibility of inattention to class because it can be ignored or even occasionally transgressed. Closing these spaces and monitoring movement denies physical and social mobility, emphasizing differentiation. It becomes impossible to be inattentive to class especially as it is tied to physical difference. Within the interiors of the homes of the elite, the open free-circulating spaces are recreated as a contrast to the fractured vista of the walled city and class can again be denied but only by those who have already been admitted (Figure 10).

This duality creates the sense in the residents that because they have access to the privilege of a classless society that class can be ignored and that its construction is only an excuse for personal weakness. While this classless society only extends to the confines of their spaces, these spaces include office buildings, shopping centers, schools, hospitals, and entertainment facilities as well as the interior of the car that is the predominant method of transportation between these spaces.23 This deadens the awareness of issues that urgently need to be addressed and contributes to their continued neglect.
In response to a city fragmented by walls and security measures, the interiors of these homes are spacious and open (Figure 4). The emphasis on cleanliness and order exists in stark contrast to the public spaces in a city whose public spaces have largely been abandoned by the wealthiest residents. In addition, the size of the spaces, the types of materials used, and the strict neatness required of Modernist design indicates an abundance either of leisure time or sufficient wealth to pay for the time of others as without those, this level of order could not be achieved.

The geometries that exist in the interiors are discrete and rational, orderly and restrained in keeping with the ideals of ‘good taste’ and high culture, in opposition to the aesthetic of the working classes, based on display and ebullience. This dominant European aesthetic of organization and order as beauty is disturbed when the vista includes the favelas and disarray of active street life. That contrast could create a feeling of conflict and tension for those viewing through the ideals of Modernism. Walls are then built to shut out the visual disarray and order and organization are re-established inside the home. As the aesthetic of disorder present in public space exists in such sharp contrast to the security and tranquility of the interiors of wealthy private residences, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the spaces in which occupants and welcomed guests may transition from one to the other (Figure 11). The entry moments are carefully crafted to refresh and relieve the anxiety of the unpredictable exterior. These views are not available to those who are entering for service or sales purposes as all residences have separate and distinct entry that remind and reinforce the relation to the residence (Figure 8).
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Conclusion

Residents in exclusive housing in São Paulo create psychological protection for themselves in their residential environments through nostalgia, retribalization, and/or escapism. The construction of walls, removal from public interactions, and institution of other security measures on the exterior of the home creates the need for an impression of freedom in the interiors. Differentiation and exclusion are created not only through those external security measures however, instead they are embedded in the design language naturalized within the space as taste. As noted by Caldeira, ‘necessity is being transformed into art by styles that metamorphose hard-edged material needed for security into ambiguous signs of beauty and keep out.’

The productions of these interiors are rituals engaged in to create a sense of order, enact cultural myths, create personal and social identities, and legitimize the existing socio-spatial injustice. As class conflict continues to be enacted through the built environment, the tools used to aid the secession of the wealthy become part of a tool kit utilized by designers to respond to urban paranoia. The deepening of the socio-spatial divide acts to further dissolve community relationships and decrease the equitable distribution of opportunity. The results of such divisions are seen in the erosions of freedom of physical and social mobility that are part of basic human rights.

This study represents a preliminary phase of exploration into the relationships between insecurity and interior environments. Future research in other locations and with larger samples will continue to contribute to the broader understanding of response typologies. This examination of interior space in conjunction with research conducted by others in locations around the world suggests that the design decisions made were not the result of purely local characteristics or completely idiosyncratic personal decisions but rather are part of general trends in the transformation of interior spaces as part of a secession from the public by the wealthy.

Endnotes

24 Caldeira, City of Walls, 2001: 408.
Living the Domestic Interior: 
Seven characters in search of home in Vancouver, 2008-2010

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Abstract: This project concerns a journey undertaken by seven characters through the domestic spaces of Vancouver, a postmodern pastiche city in the process of globalization, a city and a globalization marked by edginess. The object of our study is to model our own living spaces as a kind of imagined street in present-day Vancouver and to consider the ways in which young people, artists, retirees in their living arrangements, movements, and networking are changing the interiority of Vancouver.

Who we are

This project is about a journey undertaken by seven characters through the domestic spaces of Vancouver, a postmodern pastiche city in the process of globalization, a city and a globalization marked by edginess. For, Vancouver is a city on the edge of Canada, edgy in literature, art and photography, edging to accommodate its hugely diverse population, and at the precipice of the February 2010 Winter Olympics. As a recent book on Vancouver, Vancouver Special, by Charles Demers succinctly commented

Vancouver is at a crossroads in its history – host of the 2010 Winter Olympics and home to the poorest neighbourhood in Canada; a young, multicultural city with a vibrant surface and a violent undercoat; a savvy urban centre with an inferiority complex.¹

We random seven have embarked on a journey to map, textualize, collect, and live domestic spaces across the city, generations, and experiences, and thus to generate a domestic discourse that encompasses the practical, the theoretical, the civic and the private. The object of our study is to model our own living spaces as a kind of imagined street in present-day Vancouver and to consider the ways in which young people, artists, retirees in their living arrangements, movements, and networking are changing the interiority of Vancouver. Although the architecture and built spaces of Vancouver – in particular the renowned
buildings of Arthur Erickson (Simon Fraser University, the Law Courts, the Museum of Anthropology and many private residences) have received serious critical attention, there has been, in contrast to the United Kingdom and Australia, relatively minimal discourse about domestic interiors. In response to this deficiency, our project attempts to demonstrate the relevance and significance of engaging in discourses about local domestic spaces.

Ranging in age from 23 to 62, in occupations of student, designer, professor, civil servant, arts consultant, social worker, and living in spaces varying from a postmodern apartment in a seedy downtown area in the process of gentrification to a leafy suburban street of heritage houses, our multi-disciplinary group forms a collectivity and a collection in the Benjamian sense of keeping objects, alongside a network of collectivity (Emily, referring to Walter Benjamin, ‘Unpacking my Library’). Although the ‘collection of domesticities we represent is a narrow one, still there is diversity. We are settled and we are transient. We have arrived and we are becoming. Some have downsized. We live with parents, with partners, and alone. There are lovers and children who join us as occasional residents. We use our homes as sleeping platforms and as offices’, (Margaret). ‘What we are producing (as a collectivity) is a collection in a literary sense, but also a material practice’, (Emily).

Goals and Methods

Our goal is to ‘show how an engagement with the domestic may lead to the formation of a map and a discourse that can help us better elaborate citizenship’, (Pat). We understand citizenship in the sense of shared space, a kind of being together as a basis of common projects and the exercise of collective power. Part of a larger research enterprise on ‘imagining citizenship’ explored through study groups in religion, social justice, the environment, modernity, and media arts in the Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, we firmly believe that citizenship begins at home, at the level of the local, and in intimate relationships and spaces. In the arrangement and ambience of gardens, decks, rooms, neighbourhoods, and objects lie the detritus of our everyday lives; these are the paths to our social relations, our citizenship and our interiority. As Daniel Miller observes in The Comfort of Things ‘what was once the creation of societies is now in part accomplished at a domestic level under the auspices of effective, but distant state levels’. Yet we note that the design and impact of the private sphere upon social behaviour in our city has not been a subject of much inquiry, except in literature (for example, the novels of Ethel Wilson, Audrey Thomas, Wayson Choy, Timothy Taylor, Daphne Marlatt).

Our method responds to Henri Lefebvre’s concepts of spatial practice (perceived), representations of space (conceived), and representational spaces (lived), in that each time we meet, we are living in a conventional sense – travelling, visiting, eating, conversing in someone’s home rather than merely discussing or seminar ing in an academic sense and in an institutional environment. (Emily). Our practice is to gather once a month at one of our homes. The host prepares a meal and outlines the history of his/her domestic space and neighbourhood; we explore and discuss the space as well as one or two assigned theoretical readings on some aspect of domestic space (see Works Cited).

Sometime after, we all send posts to our private domestic space blog relaying and textualizing our experiences of the domestic space and reflecting on what we learned during this lived and living experience. We are conscious of the distinction between experiencing and then
representing lived space through words and visual media, and in our writing try to textualize the experience so that it resonates with immediacy – then and now. We are exploring how writing (including the visual, performance and textual arts) impacts the triangulation of subjectival interiority, the architectural interior and the city (Pat). At the same time, we are honing our skills of observation – the process of observing spaces, ourselves, and each other. We ask ourselves: how do we look at a building and what is the relationship between looking and writing? (Keith). That is, we do not see ourselves as domestic ethnographers, but rather as domestic voyeurs, home invaders, domestic missionaries (Keith), who enter into, observe, and then recreate the immediacy of those lived spaces through our words (textualizing).

By our process, visual records and written commentaries, we intend to make public, to draw attention to the significance of the domestic interior to the character and configuration of our city and of our citizenship. With our backgrounds across many disciplines, we contribute specialized knowledge and standpoints: social work, history, heritage site, architectural and design theory, literary texts and theory, the contemporary art scene, contemporary poetics, interior design practice. And, unlike design magazines, we are interested in human subjects and relations. In particular, we want to map the interiority of the subject in relation to interior space.

As part of the project of exploring how this city sometimes acknowledges – or more often occludes – domestic interiors (there are only two university departments dedicated to the study of interior design in Canada), we have also visited and participated in representations of Vancouver domestic spaces – exhibits, heritage houses, and conferences. As domestic missionaries, we have organized conferences and exhibits (Pat – ‘Showroom Symposium: A Discussion on Making Vancouver,’ June 2008); delivered papers on domestic matters (Emily and Kathy at the Showroom); presented talks (Keith on the Vancouver Special, a uniquely Vancouver mass produced home in the 1970s and 1980s, Emily on the shopping mall, Pat on Vancouver laneways).

Emerging motifs

Emerging out of our visits, discussions, and subsequent posts are certain recurring motifs; out of these recurring, somewhat obsessive motifs, a pattern is emerging that could begin to constitute a domestic discourse shaped by Vancouver on the edge. For example, Keith’s post on Fran’s house poses important questions: how do we attach meanings to buildings, how do we interpret interpretations and theories, and can we attain knowledge through a Bachelardian dream state?
It’s tempting to look at a building, or any physical object, but a building in particular in this case, and attempt to extract meanings from its shape, its colour, and other ways in which it engages the senses, as if those meanings were somehow intrinsic. Or, in the place of presumed absolute meanings, you could use Ideas from Important Thinkers, and wrap those ideas around some aspect of the building. Or, attach meanings based upon the aesthetic judgements (and attendant keywords) of Arbiters of Good Taste. There is a more mysterious approach, even: to enter the object as if it were a dream, and to try to capture what appears as knowledge in the dream state and bring it into the realm of language.

The ‘intrinsic’ isn’t really, and I think that is generally accepted. The observer is speaking from a particular set of expectations and experiences, in ways that are not always obvious. Uncovering the origin of a turn of interpretation can sometimes be illuminating, and sometimes tedious. Adopting that interpretation when your own position does not support it can be paralysing, or it can lead to unexpected leaps of understanding. This is also true of basing an interpretation on an authoritative (or even just trendy) work of theory. Without some examination of the relationship between the theorist’s position and your own position, a pre-emption of real understanding can occur; but careful examination of the theorist’s relationship to your own time and place (since Important Thought almost always appears as something foreign – but not too foreign) can destroy the spell cast by the theorist’s influence if it is not done with the proper reverence. We could turn to the writers of ‘house porn’,
who are often immensely clever, and like fashion writers are capable of constructing provisional systems of meaning in the blink of an eye, or maybe more appropriately, the twitch of a curtain. From them we can learn that an arrangement of cushions shows enormous wit and charm, or that a set of vertical surfaces intend to oppress us – items in a household not only convey meaning, but have intentions of their own.

These are other people’s dreams, though, and dreams whose interpretation is highly determined by cultural assumptions, or the politics of academia, or the necessity to attract the proper readers to a magazine.

Keith, an apartment dweller, in Vancouver's crowded West End, then reflects more specifically on his ‘experience’ of Fran’s house, and through his turn of phrase, his textualizing of his reactions, creates the immediacy of a ‘lived experience’.

A house is not a painting or a photograph. It is more than a set of surfaces, so to some extent you would have to disregard what you see, and use other senses and other evidence to uncover what is beyond the surface. Beams creak and settle in response to movement, heat and cold, and other kinds of stress. Other sounds come from the physical and organic processes of the house. What I notice here is quiet. Without the sounds of traffic, and neighbours, and strangers in the street, I am disoriented. Rather than living inside a machine criss-crossed by humming pipes and wires, here I am inside of a box that clicks softly as beams and joists slide against each other.

There is a real division from the street here, and from neighbours: windows do not face other windows, crowds of passers-by do not stare at the front window trying to discern what is there. The entrance, and these windows, are separated by height from the ground the house rests on.

The geometry seems odd, different inside than out. One horror of the detached house is the mysterious hidden room, likewise spaces in the walls or attic or under the floorboards, or storage closets in the basement, where a previously unknown space can be revealed, containing what the surface denies is there. As a devotee of a particular type of horror film, I am highly disposed to see more, rather than less, potential for evil lurking in idyllic circumstances than in the more common reality of half-damaged existence. When a serial killer is arrested, don't the neighbours describe him as ‘normal’, or even ‘nice’, and ‘quiet’ (although in retrospect, perhaps he ‘kept to himself’ a bit too much)?

The early-20th-century house, however, is not a perfect machine for incarceration, or even for the unquestioned exercise of authority. It is permeable to some extent by sound, by light and air, and by various forms of communication technologies. It is available as a vessel for oppression, but is not oppression itself. More than incarceration, it is either a place of sanctuary, or of self-exile. Sanctuary is largely symbolic, governed by a set of rules that vary from time to time and place to place. It is a matter of drawing a line around the space in which you find yourself, and having that line accepted by others. It is also a matter of determining who else will be granted sanctuary in that place, and under what terms. Shoeless, possibly. Bearing small
gifts, possibly. Understanding that there are limits to the indulgence of their curiosity and exploration, quite likely. The place has to be prepared. Items commonly used, stored away. Stores of special provisions laid in. Spaces within the space prepared. The entrance prepared, and paths cleared for intended series of movements. If possible, all of this without the appearance of self-consciousness.

In response to Keith and the rest of the group's posts on her house and their comments on how the house reflects Fran herself, Fran pursues the relationship between space and subjectivity.

Fran's Response

I've been pondering on the subjectivity of home—when does a house become home, what makes a house a home? This place feels like home to me. I recognized it as home the moment my co-worker told me she was selling, and it has become even more so with each passing year. It is small, reminiscent of the home I was born into, and it is in a multi-cultural neighbourhood. Having grown up in small town Quebec, I am more at home in neighbourhoods where the dominant culture is 'other'.

But I'm not sure that those things are sufficient to make this 'home'. De Botton11 ponders on how sadness might be a requisite for relating to architecture. That may well be true. I think that at sixty years old, I am at a stage in my life where I am ready to claim 'my home', where I am ready to 'be home'. More than at any other stage in my life, it is important for my home to reflect me, my personality, my idealized self. And this home fits with my sense of myself.

Whereas at other stages of my life, I made a home for my family to feel comfortable in, this house feels comfortable to me. Each piece of furniture, each picture tells a story. Either it was given to us by someone who made it, or we bought it at a particular place in our lives. I am surrounded, therefore, by my life.

We have made improvements in the house in keeping, we think, with what the house deserves. We have tried to honour the house. And this is because we feel the house is honouring us. It mirrors back our sense of ourselves and our place in society. We are of a certain age, we have worked in the health sector and have been active in unions, we both come from the working class, but have been educated into the middle class. This neighbourhood reflects all of that and so does this house.

Fran also addressed the issue of how one relates the concept and experience of domestic space to the concept of citizenship, suggesting that by investigating domestic space, we expand and elaborate the meaning of citizenship.

This brings me to the second question I've been thinking about—does one's 'home' enhance a sense of citizenship in the resident? And does this mean that one is less of a citizen if one does not have a home? While I emphatically do not think that citizenship should only be conferred on those with homes, I do wonder about the effect of place on one's sense of obligations and responsibilities to others. If I am happy in my home, will this make me more compassionate to my fellow human
beings? Or does it do the opposite? Does ‘home’ affect this at all? Also, if one is at home in one’s neighbourhood, is it more likely that he or she will invest in the neighbourhood, the city, the country than one who feels ‘not at home’?

In her post on Margaret’s home, a two-bedroom apartment in Central Vancouver, Jillian explores the increasingly porous relationship between private and public spheres.

![Figure 3: Margaret's house](image)

**Jillian on Margaret’s home**

More than anything, our visit to Margaret’s home made me think about walking and the time we spend between domestic spaces. I had to hustle to Margaret’s, willingly crossing the east/west boundary, something I rarely do unless on my way to work. I was not hustling too hard, however, to think about two things:

1. How accommodating Vancouver is that in the middle of February I can walk 5.8 km, in fairly stiff oxfords, and not be overcome with frostbite or other such maladies that are symptoms of the shared Canadian winter experience.

2. How the act of walking, whether with a purpose or not, is an extension of our domestic spaces, particularly for those of us housed in small, urban spaces.

Despite my unfamiliarity with the streets and houses west of Ontario St., I felt at home walking, laying a certain kind of ownership on the cracked sidewalks as I moved along, looking in the lit windows of old bungalows and the grandfather houses that tower above them. Lamp posts and rusty mail boxes are just as comforting as the wood and fabric with which we furnish our houses, the sidewalks and bike paths just as important as the foundations into which we pour our memories and collections.

I can’t remember the exact phrase Margaret used, but she affirmed my thoughts when she mentioned how, because of their location, everything is accessible on foot. Mail, doctor, grocery, coffee… It seems as though when you give up a certain
amount of square footage in your dwelling, the areas immediately surrounding you become a part of your domestic space. And, the act of traversing these otherwise unknown city plains become part of domesticity, or the domestic ritual.

As much as we become part of the city through walking, we in turn pull the city, neighbourhood, or even just our block into our home. Much as a glass of wine at the end of the day makes eight hours in front of a computer bearable, walking makes a life partially spent in 600 square feet bearable, or at least convenient.

Figure 4: Jillian’s home

Interiority, Things, and the Private/Public divide

From these and other responses and our ongoing discussions, the emerging domestic discourse seems to emphasize the following motifs:

1. **Interiority**: In the context of globalization of economies and cultures, it is all the more vital to experience the urban environment from the inside, not merely to observe from the outside. Therefore, as domestic voyeurs, and home invaders, we peer into drawers, closets, cupboards and bathrooms, and ask probing and personal questions of our hosts. The interior spaces of our homes then reveal our own interiority, subjectivity, performance of self, even as we may seek to hide or mask those selves. As Gaston Bachelard famously said ‘the house image would appear to become the topography of our intimate being’. For it is here in these
lived spaces where the roots of our citizenship lie, whether projected inward to our families or outward to our communities.

We have learned that Fran’s house, carefully and lovingly decorated, represents her ideal self (Fran), and that Pat is a global, mobile citizen, ready to up and move at the whim of a position, and whose domestic interior here in Vancouver central transnationally mirrors his office as a graduate student in Melbourne. Pat has also recognized this about himself during the conversation and exploration of his apartment. But we have also reminded ourselves how our homes, our behaviour, and our interactions with our domestic interiors are subject to strategies of control and discipline, especially in this age of mass globalized communication, marketing, and consumerism, controls and disciplines about which many are surely oblivious.

2. Things: We have learned about thingness and objects and how they mirror and shape relationships, are infused with meaning and history, inhabit domestic interiors sometimes in unexpected ways, and how they reveal our interior selves. We are beginning to understand the vital and underlying connections between belonging and belongings. As Daniel Miller concluded in his study of households on a street in south London, ‘material objects are viewed as an integral and inseparable aspect of all relationships. People exist for us in and through their material presence’. Objects speak to us in sense that Alain de Botton quoting Ruskin meant when he noted that we want our buildings to shelter us, but also to speak to us – ‘to speak to us of whatever we find important and need to be reminded of’. And so in our domestic visitations, we paused to observe Jillian’s arrangement of books by colour, the rotation and placement of Keith wife’s paintings on the whitewalls, the light cast by Kathy’s lamp in the kitchen. We try to understand how people relate – or don’t - to their objects as a first step to understanding larger networks and contexts of human interactions and communications. We try to unpack the individual and diverse systems of objects we have encountered and the significance and trajectory of their traces. We have puzzled over and related to each other through the objects in our domestic interiors and to the host’s relationship with those objects. We have also thought about bodies and movement in these spaces, how family members in Emily’s house meet or avoid each other on the narrow twisting staircase from the kitchen to the bedrooms, how Keith manoevers in his tiny galley kitchen.

Figure 5: Jillian’s collection of books
3. **Public and Private.** Not surprisingly our most persistently debated subject revolved around the public/private axis.

‘Not one of us is burrowed into our interior space. All of us are active in the public realm. I struggle with the distinction between public and private realm. I have a better understanding of public space. My sense of being shape by open spaces is stronger than my appreciation of interiors.’ (Margaret)

Some of our lived spaces were small, even cramped, initiating discussion about privacy – what it constitutes, how important it is, how differently it is experienced. Both Keith and Pat who live in one-bedroom apartments open their front doors to communal hallways, and in Keith’s case to a sudden flood of light and sky and a large plant-laden furnished outside deck with a view over the Pacific Ocean. This blurring of private and public was perceived by some as a way of opening the self to the community, and inviting the community inside. Others perceived such exposure as an invasion of privacy, of exposing the self to public view. We recognize that as citizens and domestic missionaries we must step out into the public, but we are also protective of our privacy, even during our group visits.

Not only doors, but also windows function to blur the inside and outside. Windows in apartments and houses frame views of gardens, streets, mountains and water, yet also stage and illuminate the interior for the passer-by, the apartment dweller across the way, the inquisitive neighbour.¹⁸ Sounds and smells trespass into the privacy of our homes, carrying with them reminders of other lives.
How do our bodies as private spaces resemble or contort themselves to the different levels of domestic privacy – in the detached home, in a high-rise, in a three-storey walk up apartment? We seven are all city walkers, extending our domestic spaces into the public sphere, into our offices, the coffee shops, the street, appropriating this city’s magnificent view corridors for ourselves. Yet the public also enters the home and our own interiorities through texts and words that we bring public and academic discourse into our private spaces, thus surrounding, unpacking, and investing our objects and domestic interiors with interpretations and critiques. As Keith reflected in his post, we need to be aware of the origins and effects/effects of these interpretations and critiques.

Conclusions

Our search and our journey continue in the hope of contributing to the discourses and understanding of the vernacular, the local, and the interiors spaces of our city, our homes, and our selves against the backdrop of global economies and disasters and spectacles such as the 2010 Winter Olympics. We are in the process of textualizing our private domestic spaces into a concept book and a gallery installation that will attempt to project the experience of lived space and the intersection of the domestic, the global, and the citizen into the public sphere. By these means, we hope to draw attention to the significance of interior spaces in considerations of citizenship and the cosmo-politan.

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Endnotes

3 Domestic interiors, however, have been the subject of numerous works and installations by visual artists in Vancouver, for example, the exhibit ‘Ought Apartments’ by Reece Terris, which reconstructed North American domestic interiors from 1950s to the future at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2009, and photographs and paintings by internationally renowned photoconceptual artists such as Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas, and Ian Wallace.
5 Comments by participants in the project are drawn from their posts to our private domestic space blog; attribution is indicated by names in parentheses following the comment.
9 See also the special issue of BC Studies 140 (2003) on domestic spaces in Vancouver
16 De Botton, The Architecture of Happiness, 62
Abstract: Robert Polidori’s photographic exhibition *After the Flood* exposed a local disaster and a global socio-political event. Amongst this collection of photographs are a series of interiors undetected by satellite imaging or storm radar. More telling, more dramatic, more unnerving, more alarming, they force a disturbance of what is familiar; ‘...the distance between you and the idea of home is foreshortened.’ With visceral trepidation over entering these very private yet highly publicized spaces, I offer a form of critical reflection on these photographs and their capacity to keep the issues of concern in circulation. As my own vocabulary signals, I will be drawing from actor-network theory to inhabit these interiors with a subjective yet social consciousness that resists detachment. This essay is a site-writing exercise that expands upon Polidori’s own creative method. While traversing the geography of reordered interiors, I aim to demonstrate a trans-disciplinary practice that underwrites the political agency of interior environments.

The hurricane season started earlier than usual and the forecasters were hedging their bets that this would be the year that tested the engineering feats of levy building and the century’s increased capacity to predict, track and manage storms through technological means. I can imagine John McPhee, author of *The Control of Nature*, listening to the forecasts intently as history re-enacted an ongoing battle between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the natural world. ‘This nation has a large and powerful adversary...We are fighting Mother Nature...It’s a battle we have to fight day by day, year by year; the health of our economy depends on victory.’ As McPhee points out, there is no physical or moral high ground in New Orleans. Since their first construction, these levies have demarcated political values that privileged the livelihood of plantation owners over the general welfare of one of the nation’s poorest populations, the very same population that financed the levies’ construction. Each time the levies are increased, the resistive force of nature is amplified.

On this particular day, she belted out a mean and shrill response. A siren whining.

We could misconstrue her wrath as ‘that of a woman scorned’, the inevitable consequences of global warming, the failure of adequate emergency preparedness plans or ‘God’s will.’
the surface, any one of those reasons would suffice, except for the fact that we had been
warned before of a different storm, not a perfect storm, but, a storm that foretold the
separation of church and state, nature and culture, and science and humanities. This warning
came from John Ruskin in his notorious lecture ‘The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century’,
a critique of ‘the narrowness of modern science and its culpability in shaping a desolate
industrial culture’. As Katherine Anderson points out, his lecture champions the need for
close detailed observation emphasizing the power of visual over precise language; his lecture
includes amongst others, terms such as ‘malignant’, ‘malicious’, ‘panic-struck’, ‘the hiss
instead of a wail’, and ‘feverish’. While many have interpreted this lecture as an eccentric
attack on industrial progress or an environmental exposé on pollution (an interpretation
Ruskin himself denies), his lecture mounts a plea for emotional, aesthetic and symbolic
expression to augment what science puts forward as fact. According to Anderson, ‘Ruskin’s
work suggests how the visual basis of scientific knowledge could persistently evoke the
differences between the expert scientist and the ordinary observer.’ I believe this statement
underscores a rupture in the mind/body paradigm supported by cultural constructions
separating science and art.

Occupying a significant body of research in the physical sciences as well as cultural studies
and the arts, the study of clouds is an indicator of meteorology’s meanderings related to the
social and somatic attitudes of the weather. Noting meteorology as a tool and an artefact of
modernity, Jankovic states

It is a science of no place and every place, done both routinely and with an increasing
sense of urgency. Through its history we witness confrontations with the randomness
of material life across cultures, spaces, and epochs. More immediately perhaps than
other experts, atmospheric scientists are charged with the rational management of
natural resistances that often thwart the proceedings of everyday life. From the most
intimate personal details to the most volatile matters of geopolitics, the atmosphere
underpins and undermines our efforts at planning, rationalization, and control.

It is this very admission that underpins Neil Smith’s assertion that there is no such thing as a
natural disaster

Whatever the political tampering with science, the supposed “naturalness” of
disasters here becomes an ideological camouflage for the social (and therefore
preventable) dimensions of such disasters, covering for quite specific social
interests.

For the sake of this paper, I wish to underscore that when the personification of storms,
weather and nature is debunked, when ‘nature’ is not ‘other’, not externalised, and certainly
not feminized, blame is reconfigured as collective and individual moral responsibility.

Long after the skies had cleared, another storm was seeded.

In September 2006, a collection of twenty-four large chromogenic prints were unleashed into
the world. Robert Polidori’s work lined the long upstairs corridor gallery of New York’s
Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in vivid uncompromising detail of Hurricane Katrina’s
impact upon New Orleans. As John Updike recalls

The event was mostly just news, like tornadoes in Kansas and mudslides near
Malibu….no human beings are present in the photographs, so they have the uncanny
stillness of Piranesi carceri, of Richard Estes’s glittering cityscapes, of Egyptian tombs unsealed after millennia.\textsuperscript{13}

Polidori’s prints are testament to several scales of devastation and disbelief; the visceral response to what lies in the wake of the storm’s path extends beyond the loss of life, material possessions, homes and communities. Katrina made visible New Orleans’ identity as a city of racial poverty and despair masked by the city of the never-ending party. The aftermath beckoned Polidori’s portraits of an interior that was not previously in the picture plane. In this way, the images underscore the collapse of one trauma – that of a relatively short-lived storm – onto another – that of a population that serves the city’s dominant tourist economy yet living at risk in the shadow of the compromising levies. As many of the reviews of Polidori’s work indicate, if not for this storm, we would not have ever entered this/these interior(s).

I wasn’t amongst those who flocked to the MET to witness Polidori’s photographs. I was not one of the millions who fled the region before and during the storm, nor one of those that rallied to provide aid, blame or critique the emergency services. I am on the other side of the world, literally, and yet news of these astoundingly frank photographs reached as far as the antipodes. In her argument for site-writing, including a case for including subjectivity as a form of critical reflection, Jane Rendell writes ‘Where I am makes a difference to who I can be and what I can know.’\textsuperscript{14} Aiming to overcome distance – geographical and temporal – this essay will invoke a specific form of focalization as ‘a relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen.’\textsuperscript{15} Developed by Mieke Bal as an alternate to art history’s single, fixed and passive perspective that excludes active cultural forces and autobiographical references, focalization oscillates between the use of ‘I’ and ‘you’ in order to locate an intimate immediacy relative to art history’s grasp of spectatorship.\textsuperscript{16} In this case, focalization is employed to not just read Polidori’s photographic images, but to grapple with the milieu of cultural, material and political forces that arise because of an inward process of viewing.

I am interested in exploring the manner in which the photographs of these interiors provoke a spatial translation of the event while practicing the tenants of actor-network theory (ANT) in the arena of architecture, interior design and art. Latour and Yaneva promote a ‘gull-in-flight’ approach that calls for navigating amongst the complex ecologies of these disciplines and generating earthly accounts of buildings and design processes … tracing pluralities of concrete entities in specific spaces and times of their co-existence instead of referring to abstract theoretical frameworks … finding a way to address the “thingly” nature of buildings by contrast to their tired, old “objective” nature.\textsuperscript{17}

Much has been written on this significant theoretical development in the social sciences and what strikes me most about it is the commitment to inhabiting the boundaries of disciplines and ignoring the bifurcation between subjects and objects, science and humanities; everything is a thing related to everything, a kind of pluralistic democracy dependent on greasing the spatial divide to enable travelling between. While Latour and Yaneva’s article is one of a very few bringing ANT into the design and architecture fields, I note that interior and spatial design are especially suited for acting on these notions simply because of an emerging concern with interiority informed by psychology, subjectivity, performativity and dimensions of embodied knowledge.\textsuperscript{18}
Even as I sit here in my studio writing, or you sit there reading or over here, listening, I am practicing this topological sensibility. I am rifling through life experiences searching for a foothold or an empathetic hinge that will allow me to don a Massumi-like mode of thinking-feeling/feeling-thinking.

When I think of my body, and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this; an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, whereby each immediately summons the other?19

Three beds in trauma.

An ensuing hurricane in Charleston meant taping all the window panes to minimize the danger of flying glass. It stuck fast by the heat and advertised those who decided to ‘ride out the storm’. ‘X’ marks the spot. Hey, I am in here! Meanwhile, the sun, moon and streetlamps took turns imprisoning the interior with cross-like figures that wrapped under the sill, over the radiator, along the flooring, up the skirting and over my bedcovers under which I sought refuge. Heavy trap, heaving mound, breathing in pace with a wind that tested a thin bit of sticky on a thin bit of transparent. STAY OUT. This is my room!

Sisters in bunk beds. One pair in Sangley Point, the other, in Manila. Waking in the dead of night. One house on stilts, the other, a skyscraper apartment. Long, long waves of motion, motion, motion, rolling, the waves of the Bay of Manila between us wailing against each shore. Radio tower across the field, spurting flames and fireworks, pissing and hissing to fight squalls, torrents of rain, bending and bowing, as a pendulum gathering momentum and amplitude. One house sways, a metronome, the other sways, collapsing. One pair rushes to the arms of a mother. The other pair, the only survivors, find safety in their bunk bed.

At 17:36 the weather radio at Number 112 South Riverside Road squeales. Sirens in the next county sound against a bruising green grey inverted mass now blocking out the sun. There is nowhere to hide except in the thickness of the horizon and the stillness of the air that extend as far as the eye could see, even beyond the soybeans. Lie low, to the basement, everything from upstairs shifted downstairs, stuff co-habitating in non-indexical piles: books mixed with
crockery, lingerie stuffed between lamps and crystal, garden hoses and portable drills nudging a cello. Blessed are those with few belongings. Waking from a sleepless night, a knock at the door. Policeman: Ma’am, just to inform you... A line drawn on the lintel, river rising, evacuation, where to go? Piles of stuff experience a second degree of blending.

Tracing emotions masked by adrenalin.

Tracking trauma lodged between things.

This method of expression, if we must call it one, is known as site-writing, a practice that Jane Rendell uses to ‘identify the potential of particular concepts in feminist, art and literary criticism for developing understandings of positionality and subjectivity in critical writings in terms of stand-point, relation, encounter and voice.’ This is a shift away from criticism as a form of judgement where ‘...descriptions and observations of the ‘the real’ challenge criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now.’

This call for critical subjectivity is my link between site-writing, ANT and the situation put into action by Katrina and Polidori’s images.

![Figure 2. 5417 Marigny Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2006 ©Robert Polidori.](image)

Stashes of provisions are squirreled away in the body of my house, just in case. Fat cells. The house weighs much more than it looks because the hollows are chocker full. Sometimes during an especially strong wind or following an earthquake tremor I rewrite the list of what I would grab to take with me, out of the drawer, out of the house, out of the country, or to death, fleeing. Clutching, cherishing, possessing. Only last week my list read: my daughter, my dogs, my passports, my glasses, my jewellery box, a jersey and underwear, and only if I could run back into the house again, the very large still life painting by Richard Treaster that my mother, a painter herself, gave to me. (All of the above is predicated on my partner being right beside me acting on a list of his own.) Like all lists, it is telling; it reveals my priorities and the limits of my rational and practical self. For surely one cannot survive on art?

So, I look at these interior images and wonder, what is not in this picture? What did the persons living in this house take with them? These questions overturn the sense of excess that the images belie in much the same way as the flood waters have left furnishings in a
dishevelled decorum. What anthropological evidence would we find as we followed their migration – heaps left by the side of the road, the physical weight overcoming the personal value, or small cloisters of artefacts reconstituting home on the floor of the Super Dome in Texas? What do the cherished belongings of over 160,000 abandoned homes look like? How will they be disposed of after the flood, for in the lowlands, landfills are landmines? Polidori’s photographs record what is there/was there, as much as they document what isn’t.

One critic pointed out that the photographs were absent of human presence. I beg to differ. These photographs are bursting with the kind of presence that refuses delineations between fact and fiction and subject and object. While the flood may have forced inhabitants out, Polidori entered, probably wading through water to even reach the front steps, catching his breath as he read the code sprayed on the house cladding, and covering his nose and mouth as he waited for exposures of up to seven hundred seconds to pass as the camera took in all but the stench. But he entered. He says he entered ‘courageously, mindless but not reckless’ into another form of brave new world where the outside and the inside have commingled and the end result is a redistribution of all the actors, animate and inanimate alike.

I cannot be there, I am not there, it is not my house. I am trying to get into the city, into the house, I don’t want to, it is not mine to enter, I don’t belong here.

I could not enter as he did. When capturing the interiors of burned out houses in the heart of ‘8 Mile’ Detroit, one person held a mirror, its reflection providing the means of entry without trespassing, one person held the camera to capture the mirror and the context, and another person served as a look-out, keys in car, motor running, ready to take flight. Risking life to capture death, it wasn’t just an art project. The charred interior surfaces were alluringly repulsive. My white middle-class upbringing shone through. Perhaps it still does.

Like Polidori’s previous work on Chernobyl, After the Flood has drawn a great deal of criticism that has taken on a life of its own around classism and racism lingering in twenty-first century America, ethical practices of photographic art versus news documentary, and art practice as a form of social agency not just commentary. Each of these discursive realms builds upon what seems to be an inherent and furtive paradox between an impulse to ‘clean it all up’ and restore things to normal and the ambulance chasing, slow-down-and-look-at-an-accident manner of dealing with trauma. In the horror, I confer with Polidori – I will not look away but instead, I will look more attentively.
R. J. Keefe writes ‘it is hard to deal with the beauty of these photographs. Any attempt at analysis seems to court the danger of vulgar detachment.’25 Okay, go ahead and gasp, I want to address the elephant in the room – these photographs are beautiful. How uncritical, how politically insensitive, how dare I/you! Polidori says that they are just photographs of what is there but then he declares them as products of a dimness of light in the houses and the absence of light in the darkroom. For him this is part of the pathos of the house, the house affirming human fragility, the house as a local economy, an exoskeleton of a life, now shed, turning the city into a collection of dermal surfaces marking internal life forms.26

Every house I enter is an affirmative project in waiting. Home repair, renovation, maintenance, grappling with the skin, what lies behind a coat of paint, a handywoman’s worst nightmare, decorating with an eye for the substrate, matching curtains, picking colours, balancing textures. I confess to revelling in the act of tearing asunder delicately to find out what lies in the material girth of a house only to reassemble with some degree of care and tinkering. Living in art, living in the art of rebuilding, in mayhem, in dust, dirt, cold, the comforts of living with ease set aside for living in the process. Having a knack for seeing the potential is the trait of an opportunist and marks the difference between beauty of nostalgia and beauty of enterprise. But listening to the building before and as one rips, sands, cuts, scraps and peels is the trait of a gardener. Such dirty realism of everyday life is an antidote to a modern disinterestedness that ensures a rational distance towards the subject under consideration necessary because the aesthetic evaluation is supposed to be based on rational choice rather than a question of mere lust.27

The door to the third room is flung open by a wayward draught and any lingering fear gives way to a queer sense of titillation. A destructive force has waged a productive, even fruitful liaison with the material stuff of the room. Water has drawn its seeping presence onto the walls, violent seduction and suction, licking, lapping, the walls expiring toxic fluids through a cantaloupe-coloured membrane. The heat of the day plays havoc with the light of the day and spawns steam that catches in concavities and trickles amongst the abject blemishes of puckers, pustules, blisters, and other unmentionable lesions.
In the course of this essay I have used site-writing and focalization to produce critical reflection constructed by a vacillation between subjective and objective voices of expression and information. It is intentional that one does not dominate the other such that a hierarchical banter does not curtail, to borrow the term, tracing the circulation of concrete entities and earthly accounts. These multiple inward looking views demonstrate a trans-disciplinary practice that underwrites the political agency of interior environments. Most certainly, as a non-natural disaster, Katrina was a spatial force that threw open a Pandora’s box of political and social issues. While Polidori’s photographs broadcast the impact of that force, I cannot assume to know what the state of those interiors were before the storm, and nor can I fathom the complexity of histories that maintained them. Like most domestic interiors, they are closed to public scrutiny yet absorbent to external influences. But I can travel as an ordinary observer between the census records, oral histories, renovation, exhibition reviews, weather data, autobiography and engineering details as an activist for the plurality of the world as the life of things.

All images featured in this paper are the work of Robert Polidori who has supplied written permission to publish this work in this conference paper and any subsequent publication of this essay.

Endnotes

8 Anderson. ‘Looking at the Sky.’ 316.
20 Rendell, 'Architecture-writing,' 255.
21 Rendell, 'Architecture-writing,' 258.
Art that Turns into Space

Angela Rui, Milan Polytechnic, Italy

Abstract: During the second half of the last century, a series of research projects took place in artistic practice in areas very far removed from pure architectural production; these may be associated primarily with the social and technological changes brought about by post World War II recovery. Such phenomena did not have any immediate architectural impact, but over the course of subsequent decades they did facilitate invention and the gaining of a new territory in which interior design could still recognise itself.

The desire to move outside the frame unequivocally produced an exit from the discipline, moving art closer to life. Today, we talk of relational art, and art that offers services, that moves naturally into other territories, such as design and architecture; art that takes an active part in the renewal and the colonisation of the contemporary city.

The implementing of strategies able to guarantee a global political and economic equilibrium, the major scientific and technological discoveries, enable the recent history of art to be reread according to a perspective that demonstrates the origin and development of new epistemological and project spaces. Such spaces came about from the attempt to interpret the epochal transition from industrial to post-industrial society, inside which the entire class of the arts moves today.

Art that Turns into Space

In 1946 the first session of the General Assembly of the United Nations was held in London. At the same time the first electronic computer was experimented with at the University of Pennsylvania, as another first, Cannes Film Festival, was inaugurated. Meanwhile in New York Frank Lloyd Wright presented the first model of what was to become the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and in Buenos Aires, Lucio Fontana drafted the Manifesto Blanco with some students of the Academy of Altamira

We, men of this century … have become insensitive about the representation of known forms and frequently repeated experiences … a change is required in essence and in form … What is required is the transcending of painting, sculpture, poetry and music. Greater art is necessary, in tune with the demands of the new spirit. Man is exhausted with pictorial and sculptural forms. His experiences, his oppressive repetitions confirm that these arts remain stagnant, steeped in values extraneous to our civilisation, without the possibility of developing in the future.¹

The Manifesto Blanco was the first evidence of a growing impatience with the limitations placed on artistic processes, which were proving increasingly complex and interdependent and, above all, for which new expressive and representative forms were urgently needed. The conceptual assonances with the Futurists and the Dadaists declaration of poetics were very clear in this manifesto, as in the subsequent ones of the Spatialist movement. But the Manifesto Blanco group of artists expressed a much wider need that united the younger generation of the post-war period, including transcending the separation between art and life that, after the dramatic events of the war, was proving increasingly strident.
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After the Second World War, the progressive need to overcome various formalisms seemed to make it increasingly difficult to indulge in sectorialism in working practice. Artistic experience was taking on a powerful existential value, mainly motivated by two aims, firstly a kind of need to ratify some form of moral redemption after the catastrophe. Secondly, the desire to appropriate a new positivist future, dictated by advances in technology, science and production, and by the new political climate of global alliances aiming at a definitive post-war reorganisation. The progressive interconnection between the various techniques and the various arts became the unchallenged approach that spread through the international artistic territory through the particular phenomenon of Informal art, albeit organised in differing ways on both sides of the Atlantic.

What is of fundamental interest is that two nodal elements inside the movement were underlined; first of all, the work was progressively transformed from an object into a situation of relationship with the space, and secondly, the process became an essential component of the work. These factors in particular marked a clear passage from the work to the space and, above all, they tended gradually to weaken many of those features that traditionally enabled the typological contours of the various arts to be traced with precision. Found objects, fragments of the everyday, were absorbed by the aesthetic cannibalism of Dubuffet, Burri, Pollock, Rauschenberg, De Kooning and many others, abolishing the traditional boundaries between painting and sculpture, between work and space, and between art and life. It must be highlighted that the effusive dimension towards three-dimensional space turned, in the fifties, towards a vision of art that went beyond the object to translate it into tensionality and behaviour.

This was a necessary step towards determining how in subsequent years the true cornerstone of contemporary art was a definitive departure from its own canonical languages, to experiment beyond itself with the languages of reality, of what exists. Spatial practice became fundamentally the closest and most natural way to draw close to life, and the need to start from a neutral territory, freed from classicism, increasingly determined the radical investigation of empty space. In particular, in the passage from the fifties to the sixties, many artists chose emptiness, the void, as a paradigm to focus on the state of art and culture, and on the need to find in the void a valid principle upon which to construct their work. First among all these was Yves Klein, who with the exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, on 28 April 1958, inaugurated ‘Le Vide’ (The Void) on the day of his thirtieth birthday, and wrote the creation of an ambience, of a real pictorial climate, one that is therefore invisible. This invisible pictorial state in the space of the gallery will be so present and so endowed with an autonomous life that it will literally be what has been given, until now, as the best general definition of painting: radiance.

The exhibition consisted in abolishing every colour and every object inside the gallery, which was painted completely white, together with a showcase left empty. The external façade, on the other hand, was painted Klein Blue, a pigment patented by the artist himself. Exterior blue, interior empty and white. Albert Camus, with a poetic annotation made in the visitors’ book, wrote: ‘With the void, full powers’. Unlike Robert Rauschenberg, who in 1951 had produced the White Paintings during his unique experience at Black Mountain College, with Klein we witnessed the definitive passage from the object to the space, the latter responsible for the meaning of the work. Furthermore, the concept of the relationship between art and life
in its most real, existential place was definitively established, precisely because there was no object to relate them to each other.

So three key points can be delineated that clarify the effective osmosis between artistic fact and interior space: firstly the interior space becomes the only (unrepeatable) place to test out the work, secondly, the space is the work itself, becoming the object to enjoy; finally, the space becomes the chamber within which we witness the staging of what exists, a door through which to listen to the world. Therefore the experiences of the void, and of silence, inevitably moved art ever closer to life, making them so close to each other as to produce a symptomatic attraction of the other arts towards a new expressive code, which did not prefer any type or medium, but served to approach the sensibility of contemporary man. Susan Sontag wrote on the work 4’33” by John Cage

The artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resounding or eloquent silence … Similarly, there is no such thing as empty space. As long as a human eye is looking, there is always something to see. To look at something which is ‘empty’ is still to be looking, still to be seeing something – if only the ghosts of one’s expectations.

When the void is qualified, it is however necessary to distinguish between quantity and quality. A void defines itself thanks to its quantity, while its quality becomes a sign (which attests to its being empty). Underlining the epistemological rupture between aware being and conceptual self, Robert Irwin applied phenomenological reduction to take us to the heart of understanding of the void. For Irwin, contemplating the void requires a constant commitment to the spaces involved. His work and thought help us understand the unchanging qualities of a given space. In ‘Notes Towards a Model’, he writes ‘How is it that space could ever come to be considered empty when it is filled with real and tactile events?’

Like Irwin, other artists, including Michael Asher, Bethan Huws, Maria Eichhorn and Roman Ondak, have worked on empty space, focusing their attention on the manipulation of the exhibition space. But what unites them, in addition to the exploration of an absolute degree of vacuity, rather than the transcendentalist poetics of Klein, is the substantial disarmed poetics, the definitive loss of the use of the medium, the gradual insistence on the loss of meaning of the explored space. They highlight the weakness of the architectural space, its being a mirror of an empty society, or one that needs a profound silence, which is installed starting from the inside. But this absence is total; it does not imply any refuge, any secret. Nothing to see, nothing to hide, as Alighiero Boetti, the master of conceptual art, would have said. It cannot be said, therefore, that it is an impassive practice; if anything, it is an innocent practice. Language has given way to a kind of basic tongue, primitively comprehensible (the action on space) and, at the same time, conceptually cryptic (its meaning), which often depicts the symptoms of a culture devoid of learned models, and of a society dissolved into self-representation.

Although using different expressive methods, Cage himself soon realised that absolute silence could not exist; it was not provocable. But he also realised that the 4’33” of silence was a time to listen to one’s own being in the phenemnic world. The silence itself was the opportunity to make life (what was noisily happening around it) the sublime point of interest. A progressive path towards the zero degree of art, which is fed by its own self-destruction, led to a radical change in the statute of art.
Devoted to the idea, art no longer has any autonomy. And according to this perspective, it may be said that the age is now heading in a direction that necessarily flows into the total disappearance of art as a specific activity ... Art as such will perhaps have been only a parenthesis in the history of humanity, and it is worthwhile envisaging a prolonged concealment of it for a new age, the duration of which is unpredictable.8

Jean Baudrillard is rather apocalyptic in imagining the end of the art to come, and although my thought is close to his theories, everything we have discussed so far involves a progressive genetic change of art, and its progressive conquering of space. If until this point the space concerned made specific reference to the space of art (studio, gallery, museum, etc.) as a contextual reference closest to it for the appropriation of reality, it is now important to mark how art, through that attempt to survive disappearance discussed by Baudrillard, has been inserted in living social, cultural, community circuits, definitively releasing it from the need for a specific location within which to act.

Today the new and complex socio-economic reality introduces a definition of the metropolis as a ‘major biological deposit’.9 That is, a ductile and equipped territory where art and architecture (increasingly dialectically similar) form a weak connective system serving an accumulation of human presences, relations, interests, and goods exchange which totally fill the space. The urban space becomes a large enzymatic interior that is continually transformed, producing plankton of information, services, networks, microclimates, products. In this general hemisphere, art and architecture are manifested as a creative act that produces a transitory concentration of corporeal experiences. Inside this pulvicular economy, art becomes one of the most evolved models of production of wealth and information. That is with (not always) minimal investment the artist is able to produce surplus value using non-material (conceptual) means. Therefore, in the biological metropolis architecture and art become abstract forms of economic and vital energy, whose collaboration does not take place on the basis of an avant-garde experiment, but on that of the needs of a society that is avant-garde as a whole. Like a musical work, the spatial work does not have a meaning, but a horizon of meaning; a definite and indefinite multiplicity, a mutable hierarchy, in which this or that meaning, through a certain action, moves for a moment into the foreground.10

It is here, therefore, that the concept of the artist as listener opens doors to a reflection that invades the new physical and applicational territories of art. Artistic production has a social role of fundamental interest;11 one in which it is a vehicle of positivity, an anxiolytic vehicle, that serves to soothe consciences. For example, in an essay for the Traffic exhibition at the CAPC Bordeaux in France (1996), the French critic/curator Nicolas Bourriaud coined the terms relational aesthetics and relational art to describe the strategies of the artists involved (Liam Gillick, Jorge Pardo, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Höller, Christine Hill, Vanessa Beecroft and Maurice Cattelan), whose works he understood to be resisting the closure and instrumentality of standard accusatory social critiques by instead probing social relations.12

If art were once a prophetic process (to the point of professing its total dissolution), now it has been transformed into an exotic acceleration, no longer either revolution or revelation, but the recognition of a new social status, of a new power, or of a new non-artistic territory, to be occupied and cultivated for the new distribution of the artefact and the artistic product. Taking
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up the idea of the *listener*, artist-designers have become the functional specialists in reading reality, and take charge of a public prepared to welcome their proposals as optimum solutions. Proposals that have little to do with the artistic gesture, with the pure concept, with the happening, but rather that need a project, and a careful analysis of the effects of their artefact. Artists, though continuing to have a critical position, are oriented towards the construction of places of attraction, seduction, promotion or consumption. Art is functional, exactly like architecture, design and fashion. This process is no longer the narrow, scientific world of pure visibility, what in the seventies the Neo-Constructivists, Programmed Art, Optical Art and so on had endeavoured to come to grips with in an attempt to affect the image, but pure inhabitability and pure vitality that also concern all the relational languages extended to sociologists, architects, urban planners, etc. As Germano Celant said in a speech at the PAC (Pavilion of Contemporary Art) in Milan in January 2009

In the world of physical and electronic highways, the space of attention to the object has dissolved, thus no longer monuments in squares and on platforms but participation in communication, in the non-materiality of a disappeared world (that of art), also due to the cognitive super-acceleration on account of the techno-sciences, and perhaps a physicality, non-virtual but real because anchored to products, buildings, public events.13

What we are witnessing, therefore, is the immediate passage to direct contact with the world of the real in terms of application, function and feedback in real time, in which the problem is shifted from *seeing* to *living* the artistic product. Today art is contributing to economic, propagandistic, cultural building. We need only think of the dinners at Tiravanija’s house, the bar-cafeteria designed by Tobias Rehberger for Palazzo delle Esposizioni at the 53rd International Art Exhibition at the Biennale in Venice, or Dream by Yoko Ono, the word that tattooed Italian cities during last year’s hot summer. Or, finally, the fact that a few months ago the Vatican State announced its desire to have its own pavilion at the Biennale of Art in Venice, also listing some of its preferences from among the artists from whom it would like to commission the project, such as Anish Kapoor, Jannis Kounellis, Bill Viola, all great communicators of other messages in a moment of crisis of evocation (and above all, again, all three specialists in the creation of environments).

When introducing The Land, a project launched by artist Rirkrit Tiravanija in 1998 in Thailand in an area purchased near the village of Sanpatong, not far from Chiang Mai, the enlightened critic and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist states

More and more artists today refuse to display their creativity exclusively within and upon the pristine walls of the gallery space. Their curriculum vitae increasingly mention such diverse projects as designs for restaurants, private residences, or public buildings. This inclination of art toward architecture and design emerges from the revived interest of artists throughout the nineties to more actively question the role they play in society. In turning towards collaborative and transdisciplinary practices, artists have been defining new modes of bypassing formalist credos and interacting with the social realities of daily life.14

The sharing of the subjects of art with *others* in the world creates a system of infinite connections where aesthetic flows circulate freely and step outside of the immobile vision of the traditional aesthetic order. At the same time, by entering the whirl of communication, arts and their techniques arrive at the construction of a common language, that of the everyday
and the banal of things and instruments, towards which it is easy to attract a mass of spectators and consumers. Since the 1990s, the demand to participate on the part of the public has increased, because the cultured population has increased, but also because research, having pushed art to ensure it keeps in step with the technical and technological revolutions for over a century, today can communicate as equals with an audience that has expanded and is informed by the media, which forms its daily context. I suggest that it is an awareness of being able to act in other spaces that today has allowed the world of the project slowly to find that weak energy that enables it to follow new light logics, and therefore to save itself, to go forward, to look at and accept the world as it is. The position of Andrea Branzi on this subject is interesting; he writes

> When we speak of a liquid modernity, as an evolutionary phase of post-modernity, we also always speak of modernity. When we speak of a civilisation of uncertainty, we also always speak of an advanced phase of the processes of secularisation of society introduced by modern reason. The weak and diffuse modernity that marks the beginning of the 21st century is the result of a process of diffusive and extensive refinement of a culture that today strays beyond the disciplines of the project, affecting the processes of enzymatic transformation of the territory and the environment.

The arts today are therefore going through a phase of adaptation to an opaque and enzymatic economic, political and social climate, which, although it shows the weakness of contemporary man in the society of uncertainty, it has the force to be deeply innovating, and to allow new and unpredictable dynamics to enter the system. This fusion has been determined by many causes, which we may sum up in one objective fact. Starting from the 1970s, due to a series of economic and social factors, our Western cities stopped expanding, that is, dilating their perimeters into the surrounding territory, and began an entropic phase, occupying all the interstitial spaces, increasing their real estate density, regenerating all the industrial and service-sector areas that had been abandoned due to increasing globalisation, functionalising and specialising the urban spaces.

Today it is precisely the contemporary city that is the space preferred by contemporary art. This not only means that the museum or the gallery are being replaced by the urban terrain, but – I propose – the metropolis may be considered as an opportunity to demonstrate what we previously anticipated: a new statute of art that defines it as pure inhabitability, at a time when it is introduced into the construction of the space, and pure vitality, when it is inserted directly in the decisions that involve economic and social participation. At a time when art moves naturally into new territories, such as those of design and architecture, its intervention inevitably affects the production of space. What results is the creation of a new type of intervention that distinguishes and innovates the idea of environment, the prevalent character of which calls upon direct experience and widespread aesthetic practice. Today the definition of relational aesthetics must be extended not only to what the work provokes, that is, participation, awareness, relation, but also to what the work tends in this way to colonise. New environments are spread around like pit-stops over the urban terrain, offering unprecedented situations to go through [The Depression Square, Bruce Nauman, Munster (DE), 1977-2007; Touch of Evil, Nio Architecten, Pijnacker (NL), 2002-2004], to stop [Deep Garden, Gruppo A12, Venice (IT); Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, Kazuyo Sejima & Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA, London (UK), 2009], and to consume [Mobile Linear City, Acconci Studio, 1991; White Limousine Yatai, Atelier BowWow, 2003].
The city, which presents itself as a space of being in territories of transition, reveals itself as the place that nurtures moments, small spaces of liberty for the individual. And it can be imagined that the most intimate component lies not in the preparation of spaces for the individual, able to guarantee privacy, but rather in those schemes that, thanks to their incomplete project work, prompt a reflection on the subjective dimension of the public space. In order for this to happen, the work must be open,\(^\text{18}\) that is to say, the work in which sense and meaning are not data, are not unique, relives according to a perspective and an execution that are personal. To quote Umberto Eco, from *The Open Work*

> The poetic treatises concerning 'maraviglia', 'wit', 'agudezas', and so on ... seek to establish the new man's inventive role. He is no longer to see the work of art as an object which draws on given links with experience and which demands to be enjoyed; now he sees it as a potential mystery to be solved, a role to fulfil, a stimulus to quicken his imagination.\(^\text{19}\)  

It is in the poetics of suggestion that the author of the spatial work produces openness, prompting his own working approach in the *unsaid*, in the *non-complete*, to be ambiguous. It could be thought that this tendency towards the elusive and the indefinite reflects a condition of crisis of our time, while, on the contrary, it could be said that this attitude, in harmony with today's society, expresses the positive possibilities of designers open to a continuous renewal of their schemes of knowledge, productively busying themselves in progressing their faculties and their horizons. The contemporary aesthetic experience, which is the child of the advent of a new aesthetic statute where the interpenetration of knowledges and the fellowship of research are developed, identifies itself in the fading together (and not in the dissolution) of means, techniques and cross-disciplines.

> A slow transfer that chooses and accepts the combined presence of opposites, transcends the conflict and integrates them. This technical and cultural process of fading develops new aesthetics and new locations.\(^\text{20}\)

For a new generation of designers for whom the urban terrain is a terrain of opportunities and enigmas to be explored, space neither constricts nor signifies. The city itself is therefore an *open work*, since it contributes to the continuous renewal of its landscapes (and passages), to be understood as a *fuzzy skyline* that constantly redesigns its aesthetic quality.

The second half of the last century abounded with avant-garde developments and behaviours sensitive to the shocks of a modernity in an evolutionary phase. The desire for and the implementing of strategies to guarantee a global political and economic equilibrium, the major scientific and technological discoveries, the doubling of the world population in a few years, with all the consequent effects, have drastically changed our consciousness, guaranteeing the awareness that soon the everyday would be changed internally on account of these factors. In all this art had the immediate capacity to respond sensitively to the anthropological and social necessities that these changes were bringing into being. That is why its recent history can be reread as a paradigm to show the origin and development of new epistemological and project spaces, which came about from the attempt to interpret the epochal transition from industrial to post-industrial society, inside which the entire class of the arts moves today. One of the effects of this renewal is undoubtedly the definitive osmosis between the arts, offering the opportunity to reveal to us a new project work, strengthened...
with meaning and values able to guarantee the quality of contemporary man, as well as the
guality of the production of space.

Endnotes

3 The term aesthetic cannibalism was used by Yves Michaud to describe the work by Willem De Kooning in the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1984.
4 What is presented here is only a fragment taken from the text written by the artist for the exhibition held at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris. See: Sidra Stich. Yves Klein. Stuttgart: Kanz, 1994: 135.
6 From 'Notes Towards A Model,' written by the artist for the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Whitney Museum for American Arts, 1977.
7 4’33” is John Cage’s most well-known work. The title of the work (4 minutes and 33 seconds: 273 seconds) is perhaps a reference to the temperature of absolute zero (-273.15 °C).
The meaning of silence is the abandonment of any intention. The abandonment of the centrality of man. Silence does not exist; there is always sound. The sound of one’s own body, the sounds of the surrounding environment, the noises inside and outside the concert hall, the murmur of the audience in a theatre, the rustle of the trees in the open countryside, the noise of the cars in traffic. Cage wants to conduct the listening to the environment in which we live, the listening to the world.
17 This consideration was prompted by a series of lectures by Andrea Branzi entitled Esterni come interni, held at the Faculty of Design at the Politecnico in May 2009.
18 The term alludes to Umberto Eco’s thesis on the concept of The Open Work.
20 Celant, Vertigo, 7.