Interior Ecologies: exposing the evolutionary interior

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Simply put, ecology is a relational concept that concerns the exploration of interactions between the individual, their communities and the environments that sustain them, and this is not confined to the human domain. Although the normative understanding of ecology in everyday use can infer the world of organisms and systems found in the ‘natural’ world, its etymological roots lie in relatively recent interpretations of the Greek οἶκος and the study of the house and habitation. If it follows that ecological thinking applied to interiors is predicated upon relational thinking then research into interior ecological practice should offer up alternative concepts for design that move beyond ‘green’ environmentalism and associated sustainable design approaches to embrace a range of disciplinary and theoretical domains. The IDEA JOURNAL 2010 Interior Ecologies provocation arises from an interest in exposing how a critical ecological approach to interiors can enable expanded locales for research and experiment in private and public realms. Commonly held concepts regarding the vulnerability of the ongoing sustainability and stability of designed habitats in the face of global political, societal and economic change frequently promote technological regimes and societal education as factors aiding recovery over developing more conservative and lateral responses in the city’s ‘interstitial spaces, in the home economies, in the human relations; within our minds’.

To read the account of the conversation as it moves through text and image, uncovers methods for transforming relational perspectives of city (Attiwill) and propositional ‘take’ on what the concept Interior Ecologies could offer has resulted in five provocations placed throughout the Journal to provoke critical thought or a pause within the referred works. Generously offered provocative thinking on interior ecologies, expressed through text and image, uncovers methods for transforming relational perspectives of city (Branzi), spatial associations and learned responses to environments actioned through engaging our emotional intelligence (van Schaik), practices conditioned through attention to and modelling weather through cosmological thinking (Randerson), paying close attention to the intimate and the periphery in everyday life (Weinthal) and the production of an interior economy through spatial and temporal writing as interior practice (Attiwill).

An additional invitation to scholars and thinkers to provide concise expressions of a critical and propositional ‘take’ on what the concept Interior Ecologies could offer has resulted in five provocations placed throughout the Journal to provoke critical thought or a pause within the referred works. Generously offered provocative thinking on interior ecologies, expressed through text and image, uncovers methods for transforming relational perspectives of city (Branzi), and propositional ‘take’ on what the concept Interior Ecologies could offer has resulted in five provocations placed throughout the Journal to provoke critical thought or a pause within the referred works. Generously offered provocative thinking on interior ecologies, expressed through text and image, uncovers methods for transforming relational perspectives of city (Branzi), spatial associations and learned responses to environments actioned through engaging our emotional intelligence (van Schaik), practices conditioned through attention to and modelling weather through cosmological thinking (Randerson), paying close attention to the intimate and the periphery in everyday life (Weinthal) and the production of an interior economy through spatial and temporal writing as interior practice (Attiwill).

Andrea Branzi’s Ten Modest Suggestions for a New Athens Charter expands upon Le Corbusier’s original intent for structuring and modernizing the city (1933) into a proposal of fluid forms. His new conceptual reforming cities are territories embracing a multiplicity of relationships played out in the city’s ‘interstitial spaces, in the home economies, in the human relations; within our minds’.

Offering a fragment of his writing and modeling of spatial intelligence, LeonVan Schaik’s ideogram
Shoebox Theatre is a mise en scène of spatialised personal remembered histories. In this theatre the narrative of interior elements announces associations and concepts imprinting relational inferences of everyday life upon our emotional intelligence. The Anemocinegraph is a fictional remote sensing device for simultaneous reading of weather phenomena and fleeting events that collapse the global with the intensely personal moments of daily existence. Janine Randerson’s art project reminds us of our presence in an ever-changing atmospheric world. Personal worlds are also finely drawn in Lois Weinthall’s provocation, Mapping Interior Adjacencies where she exposes the necessity to pay attention to the ephemeral details and narratives of daily life. Weinthall’s spatial world is a relational domain diagrammed lightly across the public and the private and across matter and object; with a guiding presence that tracks temporal movement, from inside to outside, across and within, to map the interior space of cues and objects of everyday life. Caught within a sea of white space, Suzie AtzwäI’s, in reflects upon interior-making and interior design practice in her purposeful positioning of the reader in engaging with difficult text in the material space of the Journal. Here is also a relational discussion on the nature of provocation, on working in the middle space that interior design affords and the conceptual interior ecology composed of ‘assemblages producing spaces, objects, and subjects’ mediated through immersion in now-time.

Dan over London, the composite cover image seeks to extend the provocative intent through illustrating multiple physical, spatial and collaborative perspectives through the graphic transformation of a record of a moment in a space once traversed by colleagues, serendipitously. An artist-made interior space installed as a type of parasitic incursion mediating an interior gallery and an exterior deck hovering above the Thames, a bridge and London’s southbank, has in hindsight revealed a working interior ecology as experienced site and as remembered and expanded site. The sequence of images made while exploring this space with a design collaborator seeks to reveal the multiplicity of this space as it simultaneously provides; necessary shelter, an educational device for simultaneous reading of weather phenomena and fleeting events that collapse the global with the intensely personal moments of daily existence. Janine Randerson’s art project reminds us of our presence in an ever-changing atmospheric world. Personal worlds are also finely drawn in Lois Weinthall’s provocation, Mapping Interior Adjacencies where she exposes the necessity to pay attention to the ephemeral details and narratives of daily life. Caught within a sea of white space, Suzie AtzwäI’s, in reflects upon interior-making and interior design practice in her purposeful positioning of the reader in engaging with difficult text in the material space of the Journal. Here is also a relational discussion on the nature of provocation, on working in the middle space that interior design affords and the conceptual interior ecology composed of ‘assemblages producing spaces, objects, and subjects’ mediated through immersion in now-time.

Dan Graham’s Waterloo Sunset at the Hayward Gallery (2002-03) has been described as a counterpoint two-way glass pavilion stretching across sculpture, design and architecture. Depending upon the light conditions outside, the walls shift between reflectivity and transparency and the curves create juxtapositions of distorted figure and ground, furniture and freeway. Graham’s space is neither inside or out – it is both conditions at once due to the mediating aspect of glass curved around a geometry that produces multiple expressions of the city and its interior furnished or not, an infrastructure or not, fine day or stormy, day or night. Relational aesthetics unfold at each turn. The personal is morphed into the pavilion’s fabric and fleeting movements are broadcast to others only tangentially present. Captured in the zone of co-existence the retreat to the pure outside allows clarity of knowing where you are, before delving again into the multiple presences of the interior. When Rafael Gomez rearranged the images I had given him of Dan Graham’s installation to my mind he was creating a new ecology for this interior. In so doing working collectively to express the idea of ecologies within ecologies to reveal an alternative scenario for a space that is both of the city and a multifocal expression of the articulated interior of borrowed and cyclical experience.

Re-articulation and sometimes transformation of interior practices, programs and processes are present in the papers and this has formed the editorial basis for their inclusion. Ecologies of theory and practice are introduced in Susan Stewart and Susan Sherringham’s research into the role of the designer in spatial design practice in the context of next-generation learning practices. They contend that the design of processes and communication systems must now operate alongside the more familiar role of the design of spaces and objects, with the result that responsive and inclusive approaches to the interior are increasingly necessary. Such shifting practices are also revealed in Jill Frans’s collaborative and participatory projects for Independent Living where the imperative is to work in a designerly manner to develop relationships between people, places and the systems that define assisted living situations. Ignoring territorial urges to claim areas and concepts as one’s own, the paper describes how the project has actively encouraged design disciplines to trespass in each other’s interiors. Seeking to respond creatively to unfamiliar spatial needs has required the designers to embrace other transdisciplinary practice regimes and relinquish territorial
...and 'self' and 'identity' present in independent living rooms. Substantially altered lives are performed and played out within both environments constructed as idealised domestic space.

Rachel Carley’s intimate survey of the British sculptor Rachel Whiteread’s Nameless Library (1996-2000), a holocaust memorial in Judenplatz Square, Vienna, expresses a transformation of typological forms as intangible ecologies of history rewritten in the fabric of the architectural object turned inside out. This installation, which is simultaneously monument and urban relic and abstract library and collection, reveals the sum of its parts through its embeddedness in the narrative of site. Whereas the Australia Café and Bar (1915-16) is seen as a now departed interior architecture that was pivotal in the introduction of new forms within an evolving social context in early modern Melbourne, Annette Condello describes how Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony experimented across cultural forms and she traces the ultimate erasure of their exotically articulated interior that proved too advanced for the conservative social conditions of the time. In another space in time Chiara Rubessi has researched the case study of a retail project in Bologna that is transformative both in its program as exhibition space and in its material realisation. Proposed as a model of an ecological approach to the sustainable use of extant spaces the interior program adopts distinct materials strategies as basis for conceptual practice.

In addition, two reviews of interior publications have been included as an expansion of the Journal into providing invited critical reflection on interior design and interior architecture writing and presentation Interior Design a Critical Reflection by Clive Edwards is a recent offering in the world of interior theory. The researchers and authors in the main have worked within both environments constructed as idealised domestic and ‘home’ and ‘self’ and ‘identity’ present in independent living rooms. Substantially altered lives are performed and played out within both environments constructed as idealised domestic space.

Material ecologies are expressed in mobile installations of the remade, digitally produced Tesselated Reroscope, an ongoing project in which Igor Siddiqui acts as both creator and collaborator with a range of people and sites. The production of the rug with its various permutations as it is moved from site to site and performed by various players reveals an ecological intent that is both invested in the material – the carpet squares are recycled – and in the participatory occupation of interiors by both the performer/s and the rug. Siddiqui also regards this work as contributing to the evolution of the contemporary interior as each installation of rug and maker invest new territorial instincts in both the place and the tesselated artefact. Drawing upon the naturally occurring soap bubble and its various structural forms, Hélène Frichot responds to the everyday activity of the Bubble Man in her adopted local square in Berlin to muse upon questions of scale and materiality of form that respond to weather conditions. Ecologies of systems and spaces respond to atmospheric pressures from within and without, material and immaterial, social and environmental.

Domestic ecologies and territories are literally performed through the familiar room settings inferred by the relational composition of objects and actors in Harold Pinter’s narratives. Kirsty Volz’s expanded visual essay is an account of the room as site of the abstracted theatre set where she suggests that domestic ecologies are subverted through the interaction of the temporal passing of time and the choreography of actor and object in these ‘rooms’ of abjection and mimesis. The realised interiority of Volz’s constructed rooms are challenged when regarded alongside Franco’s discussion on the relationships of Inte...