

Beyond Building – interior designs

Orientations

This paper addresses the question of becoming in relation to interior design as a practice of designing interiors both physical and mental. An understanding of 'interior' in a substantive way shapes current interior design practice. This is evident in the frequent use of the term 'the interior' which suggests some thing – a space or a subject – which exists as an independent entity. The proposition of becoming invites different ways of thinking about interior making – a shift from foregrounding things to processes, from the individual to the process of individuation, from form to information, from space to time and movement. This is a kind of flip – from a thinking which addresses 'the interior' in a state of becoming, some thing in a state of becoming, to one where interior designing happens in the midst of flux, creating/inventing temporal-spatial compositions (interiors) to enable inhabitation. Rather than beginning with the interior in a state of flux, this paper considers the interior as a product of flux. This flip draws attention then to the different projected interiors and selected exteriors apparent within different space-time compositions.

The focus of this paper is a research project conducted through undergraduate design studios and doctoral research. The project addresses the environments (physical, psychological and situational) of young people living in residential care houses under State protective custody. The studios explore how the production of interior designs might affect, transform and/or benefit the physical and emotional wellbeing of adolescents living in these houses. Called *beyond building*, the project invites students to consider the question of interior design as a practice not confined to/contained by the inside of a building. Instead the invitation is to think about interior design as an interior-making; as a process of interiorization. Relational conditions – between people, programs, different times of day and night, schedules, colour, light, tactility, psychological and affective qualities of design and interiors – are highlighted. This also shifts design as practice from one concerned with structures and physical form to one that takes into account temporal as well as spatial conditions. Through the projects, the practice of interior design becomes apparent in relation to the production of interiorities – from fixed subjectivities based on identity and being to ones that attempt to enable subjectivities to move, change, become. This research contributes to the growing focus of interior design in relation to wellbeing. It has the potential to offer up a different way of understanding interior design through posing the question of interior 'to inspire new modes of subjectivization' (Deleuze 2006, 260).

Some introductory remarks as a way of orienting the approach here: it is important to grasp a shift being made in the use of the term 'interior design' as a practice that is different from interior decoration and interior architecture where the word 'interior' is used as an adjective of a practice as the inside of architecture or the decoration of an interior (an inside). Interior design does not have the same implications – that is, the inside of some thing; instead design as a verb rather than as a noun or entity can be activated and the emphasis shifts to interior design as a practice of designing interior where interior becomes a creative proposition, a contemporary problematic and an outcome of designing.

This is conceptually challenging as the word 'interior' whether interiors, interior design, interior architecture or interior decoration is generally understood in a substantive way, as an entity – 'the interior'. An understanding of interior in relation to existing space, form and structure is reiterated through the dominant narratives of interior design practice, histories and theories. An example can be found in the introductory paragraphs to *The History of Interior Design* where 'Interiors are [defined as] an integral part

of the structures that contain them – usually buildings. This means that interior design is inextricably linked to architecture and can only be studied within an architectural context' (Pile 2009, 11). And the other interior implicated in interior design – that of the subject who inhabits; where interior design is described as a human-centred practice and the human is positioned also as an interior – a being, a subject that is already constituted. While recent interior design practice and discourses engages with the performative, temporal, relational, spatial – the question of interior is usually not addressed directly. This is highlighted by the fact that the word space is often interchangeable with 'interior'.

To pose the question of designing interior confronts existing concepts of interiors – of space and subject – not in a way that dismisses them so much as highlights the implications of an substantive concept of interior. In questioning 'interior', the invitation is not to provide an answer through redefining the concept of interior. Instead of a what question ('interior?'), '?interior' is posed. Coming before, the question mark poses the very possibility of interior and becomes a question in relation to practise – a 'how' question to be addressed each time anew. It is to suspend the assumption of the middle bit that already defines an inside and to place the question of interior in the world; to open it up to the exterior/outside.

Here the concept of becoming can be teased out further as there are different ways of addressing this concept. In this paper, a connection is made to the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his use of the concept 'becoming'. There is a richness here in making such a connection in relation to the question of ?interior as Deleuze dismisses the idea of interior and interiority as an independent, *a priori* condition. He makes a distinction between being and becoming. For Deleuze, becoming is not something that can be used to describe things and qualities; it is not a trait of an individual's trajectory. Rather becoming is the actual dynamism of change and things are the products of becoming.

Instead of being about transitions that something initiates or goes through, Deleuze's theory holds that things and states are *products* of becoming. The human subject, for example, ought not to be conceived as a stable, rational individual, experiencing changes but remaining, principally, the same person. Rather, for Deleuze, one's self must be conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces, an epiphenomenon arising from chance confluences of languages organisms, societies, expectations, laws and so on (Stagoll 2005, 22).

The writings of Gilbert Simondon on individuation – which Deleuze refers to – are also useful in reorienting how we might think about this idea of becoming in relation to interior designing. Like the distinction made above with becoming, Simondon makes the point that it is critical '*to understand the individual from the perspective of the process of individuation rather than the process of individuation by means of the individual*' (Simondon 1992, 300). This flip is crucial to an understanding of individuation as a shift from one which assumes an already constituted individual where 'the question being asked is merely what constitutes the individuality of this being, that is to say, what characterizes an already individuated-being ... [to one where] the individual is not just a result, but an *environment* of individuation' (Deleuze 2004, 86).

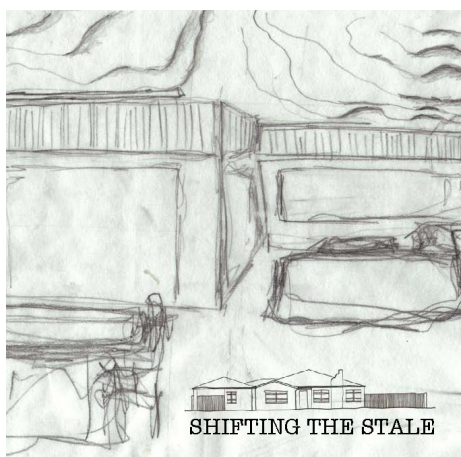
This distinction makes apparent how difficult it is to think in ways other than one which reverts to things, bodies, 'the interior' and especially to bring into question the concept of the individual as a conscious, self-contained and, from an interior design perspective, knowable being. Simondon's concept of individuation offers up a way of thinking through individuation as process. His examples of mould and crystallization, of mould and modulation, can be read as different dynamics *producing* interiors and exteriors; as well as the distinction he makes between physical and living individuals. For the mould example he uses the analogy of making a brick: clay is poured into a mould and there is an interaction between the matter of clay and the matter of the mould. The process of crystallization is one of modulation as distinct from mould – here the interaction with forces produces a process where the line or limit/frontier between inside and outside continually involutes and evolutes.

These may seem like odd connections from both an interior design point of view as well as from a philosophical one – interior design and Deleuze, interior design and Simondon – yet there are other philosophers who permeate interior design discourse to an extent that their ideas are assumed in tacit, implicated way. Those who come to mind are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard and Martin Heidegger. This highlights the ontological nature of interior design – as a practice which addresses people in relation to questions of inhabitation, of living and life style – and the potential of engaging with philosophical questions to open up this question of being and introduce other theoretical tools. This symposium’s call for papers, which links becoming and interior, is an invitation to do this.

Becoming + Interior Design

The power of this reorientation of ‘interior’ in relation to interior design as a practice became evident in relation to a research project – *beyond building*. A psychologist, Gregory Nicolau, who consults in the residential care sector, initiated the project. Nicolau approached the interior design department to see if students might be interested in addressing the interiors of these houses as he was concerned about the effect of the existing sterile, institutional conditions on the young people living there. At this time, he understood interior design along the lines of interior decoration and that the students would address soft furnishings, colour and furniture. The residential care units are a place where young people, who have been removed from their family environment to protect them from situations of neglect and/or abuse, are placed in protective custody and care of the State government. Depending on the situation internally as well as externally, they may live in one of these houses for a few days, weeks, months or years. The young people are looked after by residential care workers – twenty-four hours, seven days a week – who work in shifts. They attend school and other everyday activities.

In interviews with young people who had lived in residential care, they said they felt like they were in a prison. While the houses are meant to provide not only a safe environment but also a therapeutic one for these young people who have suffered trauma, it is not only the institutional environment that works against this but also the positioning of them as psychological subjects at the centre of the assemblage. In a sense, they are fixed and positioned; internalized spatially and subjectively. Hence the feeling of a prison is both a physical and a mental interiorization. They spend most of the time in their bedrooms which they describe as a refuge and retreat from the rest of the house, which is like a public space, ‘an outside’.



Felicity Griffin *Shifting the Stale*. (*beyond building* 2011)

To shift from the starting point of the interior as given – spatially and psychologically – to one which addresses the question of ?interior opens up to an outside where the boundary is not already given. Many of the student projects addressed ideas of movement, rhythm, and flows. While the concept of becoming was not part of the studio briefs, thinking about these projects now in relation to interior and becoming there is a sense that the provocation to think ‘beyond building’ engaged the question of interior with an outside and ‘interior’ as a product of individuation, a composition in the midst of flux that produces interiors and exteriors. The psychological subject and the physical spatial environments had a sense of stasis; one student described the feeling of being inside as stale. There was also a sense that one had to address these givens, individuals and houses, in order to understand the situation and design. What is interesting about the students’ projects is the introduction of movement and change to the situation – both in relation to spaces and subjects; to make them mobile as a way of engaging a sense of life and transformation. What becomes highlighted through these studios and projects are processes of interiorization – some which effect a total internalization of the subject and space (so it does feel like a prison), others – like the studio projects – which attempt to produce an interior that intervenes in this fixed environment to enable a different inhabitation.

The following projects from the *beyond building* undergraduate studio are offered up as examples of this interior designing:



Narita di Loreto *Crossing Thresholds*. (*beyond building* 2008)

‘This project is an exploration into the idea of Crossing Thresholds and how this simple, physical act of moving through space can consequently affect one’s emotional and psychological state. This idea responds to what I identified as being extreme and conflicting conditions which currently exist within the residential care units. These factors are usually the intangible forces which contribute to the overall morale of the spaces. An example being the comfort and security felt in the bedrooms of the youths (private spaces) in contrast to the anxiety, restrictiveness and intimidation felt within the rest of the unit (public/shared space). In response to these issues the final proposition was to design and create a gradual experience of transition which focuses on methods to achieve a sense of diffusion through space. As a result, creating a more calming and progressive experience for the inhabitants, as well as creating a flow and connectivity throughout the unit, both visually and psychologically. The logic is that if this is achieved, an overall greater feeling of comfort within the whole environment will cascade and effect other areas positively, such as establishing a greater sense of community, improved use and respect of communal spaces and further interaction between both carer and youth, and between youths.’ (Narita di Loreto, *beyond building* 2008).



Sarah Jamieson *Make Me. (beyond building 2008)*

'This project operates within the understanding that the interior is a dynamic relational structure constructed from physical, social and psychological relationships. In the context of this brief, research identified the 'process of making' as an agent of relational transformation. This project works with carers and residents to facilitate encounters that transform relationships (and therefore, transform the situation) through the 'process of making'. An analysis of the existing conditions of a case study residential care unit was converted into a series of situation based making projects designed to shift the existing relational conditions. The projects are translated into simple doing directives & printed on stickers. 'Making' is offered as an annual subscription in which a pack of stickers are posted to residential care units monthly. The sticker packs contain three types of stickers; action, event and time stickers. Action stickers are expressed as simple doing directives such as 'change me', 'colour me', 'shuffle me', 'flick me', 'move me', 'bake me', 'stencil me', 'meet me' and 'show me'. Event stickers with blank spaces to be filled out by the user, include '_____ hour', '_____ day', '_____ swap', '_____ tour' and '_____ comp'. Both action and event stickers may combine with a completed time sticker. Through applying the stickers, residents & staff interact to transform existing objects & surfaces into potential actions and events. The interior becomes a situation that is constantly made and re-made.' (Sarah Jamieson, *beyond building 2008*).

Propositions

To shift from the individual to individuation, from being to becoming, interior design is highlighted as a practice in the midst of movement and forces.

'... the constitution of territory is the fabrication of the space in which sensations may emerge, from which a rhythm, a tone, colouring, weight, texture may be extracted. ... the provisional ordering of chaos through the laying down of a grid or order that entraps chaotic shards, chaoid states, to arrest or slow them into a space and a time, a structure and a form where they can affect bodies.' (Grosz 2005, 19).

Here an interiorization, a making habitable through a process of selection and arrangement to produce an intensive space; a temporal consistency, a 'fabrication of space' which enables inhabitation – spatially and subjectively.

'... in all art (or in anything worth calling 'art'), we find an attempt to find release from the suffocating sense of given possibility, ready-made ideas; even in the old masters, we find a fight against immobility, catatonia – against, in a word, 'depression'. There is a logic to the fight – to extract possibility from probability, multiplicity from unity, singularity from generality – the logic of 'a life'. A basic problem for Deleuze's larger conception of aesthetics is then to introduce this sense of 'intensity' into the very idea of 'sensation' and our relation with it – into the very concept of 'aisthesis'

[I perceive]. Instead of looking for ‘conditions of possibility’ of sensation, we might then be able to look to sensation for the condition of other possibilities of life and thought.’ (Rajchman 2000, 127).

The existing residential care houses tend to the anaesthetic rather than the aesthetic through an emphasis on standardisation both in terms of physical functionalism and also routines. This invokes an initial response which foregrounds the individual subject and the perceived need to give them an opportunity to personalise their environment. However this has the effect of further internalising and fixing the subject – like Narcissus and his reflection. In contrast, one could address the possibility of producing encounters to enable an encounter with sensation as an intensification, a ‘self-’ making that is open to an exterior, to change and forces where movement comes first.

This shifts from an understanding of subjectivity as something inherent in a person and the subject as a person, to the idea of subjectivity as a production.

‘By emphasising the creative possibilities inherent in subjectivity, Guattari is arguing that all those who intervene in subjective or psychical domains, whether individual or collective (in education, health, culture, sport, art, the media, the fashion industry etc.) have an ethical responsibility which cannot be dissolved by a neutrality based on a claim to mastery of the unconscious or scientific knowledge. That is to say we have a politico-ethical responsibility for our creations or progeny whether virtual or actual. For the way we invent/posit subjectivities and for our reappropriation of the means of the production of subjectivity, which alone will enable us to deal with the eco-systemic crises already engulfing us and with those yet to emerge.’ (Bains 2002, 106)

In the *beyond building* project, the opening of interior to exterior transforms how such a project might be approached. Shifting from being to becoming, from individual to individuation, interior design as a practice that attends to the question of interior becomes foregrounded and understands life not as ‘form or as a development of form but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. [...] So an animal, a thing is never separable from its relations with the world. The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior.’ (Deleuze 1992: 62)



Felicity Griffin *Watercolour Experiments* – situational studies (*beyond building* 2011)

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