

Interior Economies: Money, markets, labour, politics, culture, land, people, objects, desire and space (not always in that order)

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"I am an economist, an economist who believes that the future economy will be an economy of quality."¹

Cultural economist, publisher and research academic Harry Hillman-Chartrand wrote these bold and inspiring words in 1987. Given the current volatile and fragile state of local and global economies twenty-five years later, these words beg critical reflection. Has this future economy of quality come to bear? If so, how might interior design be implicated?

Hillman-Chartrand argued that the arts would be the main driver of this future economy, the arts consisting of three distinct yet interrelated sectors: the fine arts (a form of pure research that equates 'art for art's sake' with 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'); the commercial arts (an art that dwells on profit-making); and the amateur arts (a recreational or leisure activity that enables a citizen to actualise her/his creative potential and appreciate life more fully).² Hillman-Chartrand's notion of an 'arts industry' is now familiar; it forms the corner stone of what is understood as either 'the creative industries', 'the cultural industries' or 'the creative economy' and depending on which expert one consults, consists of advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing and visual arts, publishing, software, sound, toys and games, TV and radio, and video games. This amalgam of professional practices, university programmes, research, manufacturing and government-driven incentives capitalize on the value of innovation and entrepreneurship.³ The creative industries have become increasingly important to economic well-being, with advocates such as Richard Florida suggesting that 'human creativity is the ultimate economic resource.'⁴ Interior designers are part of this commodity of labouring subjects.

The interiors that designers create are also high-value receptacles for the products of this economy; they promote and engender 'lifestyle'. While the building construction industry, in particular residential construction and residential real estate sales, are primary indexes for economic growth

in most developed countries, interior renovation and home decoration have continued to prosper despite the recent world-wide recession. It seems that the trend sways away from large risk-taking investment towards a generally more conservative and cautious consumer response to economic upheaval. Retro-fitting, and refurbishing encapsulate the original meaning of the Greek term 'oikos', (translated as the management of the domestic household) and represent thriving import and export markets as well as local trades and skill-based industries such as painters, wallpaper hangers, recycled furniture and op-shops and home repair crafts-people. Though tenuous at times, life goes on and so does the penchant for interior lifestyle.

Hillman-Chartrand's call to replace 'post-industrial' sensibilities of economy with 'post-modern' has been supplanted by a contemporary phase of modernity that Lash and Urry call 'disorganised' capitalism.⁵ They signal that 'a new temporal and spatial playingfield is produced in which the established forms of capital: money, productive capital, commodities (all objects) and labour (subjects), all circulate across increasing distance with greater velocity. The increasing number of objects circulating, and being consumed, has resulted in the inability of people adequately to attach meaning to them, before either the meanings or the objects are transformed.'⁶ Structuralist conceptions of social processes are shown to be insufficient at addressing the effective subjectivity of the transformations occurring between people, objects and places. In the context of social science, interior designers might find resonance with the emphasis that Lash and Urry place on 'aesthetic reflexivity' where people are actively involved in shaping and being shaped by both the goods and services that they consume. These authors call this relational component 'new communities', groups of people forming temporal networks for the sake of shared identity and purpose. Such communities persist through the flow of information and communication. 'It is the use and exchange of meaning in such flows that allow self-interpretation relative to social and spatial/temporal practices.'⁷

Lash and Urry offer interior design a notion of economy that hastens a relational perspective to a fluctuating and temporal condition of inhabitation. Though their main goal is to reconceptualise the transformation of meaning production in people-to-people (services) and people-to-objects (goods) relationships, their emphasis on the social interface between these constituents highlights the concerns of this guest-edited issue of the IDEA JOURNAL, principally, how interior design as a professional (creative industry) practice and an interior engages or produces economies. The use of the plural form of economy here is intentional, for in the space of 129 pages, this issue expands upon the normative definition of economics as 'the study of labor, land, and investments, of money, income, and production, and of taxes and government expenditures.'⁸

Though this is an accurate description of economy, this definition could be interpreted as something that happens outside of interiors, as if interiors are still and merely regarded as isolated, protected, private and cellular nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic home environments, havens from the external urban chaos or twenty-first century industry and technologies, transport and

communication. While such vantage points have been significantly fruitful for developing interior design theory and re-visioning its histories intellectually, the interior as a conceptual construct is no longer only equated with 'home', no longer a singular idea nor it is wrapped in cotton-wool; it is as permeable to external infiltrations as it is the centre stage for cultural violence⁹, the scene of political contestation¹⁰ and the surface of industrial forces operating at a mega-scale.¹¹ Like interiors, notions of material culture and capitalism have expanded to consider economies as social processes and cultural practices rather than as a unitary economic logic.¹²

With the original call for papers and visual essays to Interior Economies, I sought to draw out speculative conversations around interior design's interface with emergent notions of economy both within and outside of its discipline boundaries. It was meant as a provocation to engage forthrightly with contemporary issues and to address the economic factors that are so emphatically present in all forms of interior design practice. As such, this issue was envisioned as a place where topics such as ergonomics, construction specifications and performance based codes might be considered in light of contemporary philosophy on the body, or spatial efficiency models might be challenged by sustainable 'slow' movements, or new notions of inhabitation might emerge out of an analysis of collaborative 'open-source' and 'open-plan' workplace environments. What an opportunity to critically interrogate Martha Stewart's website, IKEA, and the home shopping channel in light of the plethora of bespoke or hand-made furniture design companies and sustainable interior design products and practices!

As is normally the case for edited volumes, especially those generated by open calls and subject to peer review processes, the final contributions of this IDEA JOURNAL issue tweak the original intentions to reveal something slightly different and yet valuable in their own right. Collectively these essays register a myriad of economies at play within interiors and interior design practice, the first of which is the subject of labour. **Sarah Josefiak** and **Michael Ostwald** revisit Foucault's notion of biopolitics and the panopticon as the impetus for 'seeing the body' not as a phenomenological condition but one factored as an economy of labour connected to the gathering and archiving of institutionalized data in a digital age. What may have been presumed about Foucault's theory of power, authority and omnipotent vision specific to physical imprisonment is redirected to economies that manage the body as information. Their argument is augmented by a theoretical design research project that speculates upon the design of a medical record archive in light new forms of data storage systems. With equal complexity and concern for the theoretical underpinnings of capitalism's influence on interiors, **Andreas Rumpfhuber** champions SANAA's Rolex Learning Centre in Lausanne, Switzerland as a contemporary example of a workplace architecture that mirrors the post-Fordist knowledge economy. Rumpfhuber is especially concerned with how this building represents a new form of office landscape, a place of 'immaterial labour' 'in which labour has become diffuse and penetrates all aspects of life; in which work-time and spare-time have merged, and the job has become indistinguishable from education and vocational training.'¹³

The next contribution is an extended visual essay framed as a conversation between New Zealand photographer **Wayne Barrar** and myself, a conversation that entertains some of the more poignant incentives and context to Barrar's recent touring exhibition *An Expanding Subterra*. As Barrar speaks to the experience of locating, framing and situating these works within his photographic practice, I probe notions of ground and construction geometries, in general, an application of a landscape architect's concept of cut and fill to the industrial production of interior space. Barrar's sublime images serve my cause to think of interiors well beyond the domestic realm; they bring to the fore complex issues of spatial navigation, the relationship between sustainability and comfort and culturally embedded values and myths around underground space. The words 'uncanny' and 'un-homely' do not begin to describe these forays into interior economies. I am aware of only two other works that come equally close to turning the interior inside out as the Subterra project does: the completely synthetic interior environments that Constance Adams designed for NASA's Mars station¹⁴ and Biosphere 2 in Arizona, USA.¹⁵ Led by Barrar's project in relation to these two examples, I am tempted to consider the synapse between economies and ecologies, a side track that would swerve our discussion towards so-called natural and artificial systems – of thought, of material processes, of growth and production – well beyond the scope of this introduction.

Teresa Stoppani's essay dwells upon dust and the act of dusting. I particularly appreciate her assertion that the 'new dusting appliance not only removes dust but, participating in the dynamics of the mediatic and machinic centre-less interior, it sucks up (together with dust), all familiar connotations of domesticity. Vacuumed, the interior is fragmented, multiplied and centrifugally dispersed; made permeable and exposed it is no longer separable from world events.'¹⁶ Wielding a dry humour, Stoppani's text migrates between ancient myth, popular culture advertising, film and visual art to confirm dust's penchant to recur and the act of dusting to be almost more sisyphian than rolling a large boulder uphill. As a designer infusing her practice with new materialist forms of feminism, I am not sure I will ever regard appliances the same way again.

Nuttinee Karnchanaporn contributes an essay that cuts to the core of an interior economy related to how size matters. Drawing our attention to the traditions of house dwelling compared to new urban apartment living in contemporary metropolis Bangkok, Karnchanaporn exposes the manner in which developer-driven housing design meets the financial imperatives for young city dwellers at the cost of valued cultural habits around dining, social life and privacy. The text and images represent a conscientious study informed by data analysis and interviews that bring a new dimension to the western European adage 'less is more.' In stark contrast, **Jacqueline McIntosh** and **John Gray** provide an in-depth analysis of conjoined housing in New Zealand and Australia. Their essay puts forward a new concept of economy privileging concepts of sharing manifest in small yet significant shifts in interior planning and detailing. The sensitivity they lend to this topic is made more evident in the images of their own design practice as they demonstrate an ethical commitment to sharing as a desirable and economic practice that both reduces total housing costs

as it reduces total constructions and promotes spatial interaction of occupants – two forms of economy supporting an increase in an overall quality of life.

As Karnchanaporn speaks to the density and complexity of urban living and McIntosh and Gray are focussed on how housing surfaces, walls, services and facilities can be used in common as a mode of living sustainably, **Emma Gieben-Gamal** and **Juliette MacDonald** test some of the time-space continuums enabled by mobile technology, in particular, how the laptop operates to situate one's office, or rather, work place, as a nomadic interior. Their auto-ethnographic research confirms the pervasiveness of this technology towards not only our sense of space and place but as a tool where time and space are shared out of convenience; where work never ends but one is always on the move.

I am struck by the response that **Sara Lee's** essay offers to Gieben-Gamal and MacDonald. Her watercolour paintings resurrect her grandmother's house interior. As I peruse these images I am acutely aware of the time and labour invested to lay down the veils of coloured washes, of waiting for them to dry before proceeding with the next layer, of the intuition required to know when to stop and when to continue. Lee uses the traditional Taiwanese lunch called a bento as a means to metaphorically organize her memories of the house interior, and like the lunch box, her recollections of the interior are portrayed as saturated and multi-layered drawings. I would like to suggest that this visual essay provides evidence of a process that reveals new knowledge and awareness in its own making. In this case it is slow, careful and methodical. Perhaps this is an economy of resistance to the frenetic pace of modern interiors?

Outlining a pedagogical tool for interior designers, **Fátima Pombo_Wouter Bervoets** and **Hilde Heynen** have crafted a three part text, each part reflecting, interpreting or analyzing Edward Hopper's 1957 painting 'Western Hotel'. This group of authors provide an overview of three theoretical frameworks. In the space of the text, they demonstrate each framework's dominant orientation and its impact on research methodology. The lesson promoted here is that every research question deserves an appropriate framework with which to initiate the inquiry – choose and use your research tools wisely, i.e. economically.

I too believe that the future economy will be one of quality, but perhaps for very different reasons than put forward by Harry Hillman-Chartrand. While each essay in Interior Economies speaks to interiors and commodities, frugality, efficiency, minimum standards, cultural traditions, labour, gender, spatial politics, or time and cost savings, they each do so as a means to uphold or tease out an issue or question pivotal to well-being, a resoundingly qualitative interior condition that is not always measured in dollars or meters or minutes, but is inextricably connected to creativity (whether it is exploited as an industry or not) and cognisant of the pleasure that comes with experiencing designed environments (despite or in spite of the consumptive objects they engender).

NOTES

1. Hillman-Chartrand, H., The Arts: Consumption Skills in the Post-Modern Economy *Journal of Art & Design* vol 6, no 1, pp 35-50. (1987)
2. Hillman-Chartrand (1987), p. 36
3. Landry, C & Bianchini, F., *The Creative City*, (London: Demos, 1995)
4. Florida, R., *The Rise of the Creative Class. And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*, (New York: Basic Books 2002), p xiii.
5. Lash, S; Urry, J., *Economies of Sign and Space*, SAGE, (London: SAGE, 1994)
6. Biddulph, Michael, Reviews the book 'Economies of Signs and Space,' by Scott Lash and John Ury. *Urban Studies* (Routledge); Dec94, Vol. 31 Issue 10, p1786, 3p, p2.
7. Biddulph, Michael, Reviews the book 'Economies of Signs and Space,' by Scott Lash and John Ury. *Urban Studies* (Routledge); Dec94, Vol. 31 Issue 10, p1786, 3p, p3.
8. The American Economic Association website: <http://www.aeaweb.org/students/WhatsEconomics.php> (accessed 5 January 2012)
9. For example see Beatriz Colomina's book *Domesticity at War*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007)
10. For example see Julieanna Preston's conference paper "Into After" at IDEA Conference: *Interior Space in Other Places*, Brisbane, Australia. (<http://www.idea-edu.com/Symposiums/2010-Interior-Space-in-Other-Places>)
11. For example, see in this issue the visual essay by Preston and Barrar:
12. Bridge, G & Smith, A. (2003), *Intimate Encounters: culture – economy – commodity* *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* vol 23, pp 257-268. (find on 258)
13. Rumpfhuber, A. (2012). The Legacy of Office Landscaping: SANAA's Rolex Learning Centre. *IDEA JOURNAL: Interior Economies*. Lee, G. and Preston, L. (eds.), p. 22
14. For an introduction to Constance Adams' works, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vXWK1EQJOU>. (Accessed 2 January 2012)
15. See <http://www.b2science.org/> for an overview of Biosphere2.
16. Stoppani, T. (2012). Dust, vacuum cleaners, (war) machines and the disappearance of the interior. *IDEA JOURNAL: Interior Economies*. Lee, G. and Preston, L. (eds.), p. 50