

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 *oikos* 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 influenced by novel design strategies. Projects such as Paul Virilio's and Diller, Scofidio + Renfro's *Native Land Stop Eject*, at Fondation Cartier, Paris in 2008, graphically bring into focus the predicted global mobility of communities and cultures due to climatic and other environmental dynamics, and such issues are increasingly being explored by emerging urban design and architectural research and practice. The provocation Interior Ecologies: exposing the evolutionary interior seeks to elicit parallel interior-focused research and discourse influenced by speculations into environmental and social change to uncover emerging explorations into contemporary interior spatial, material and performative practices.

A conversation Mary Zourmazi recorded with Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers reflects upon the concept of an ecology of practices to aid in the transformation of old to new creative practices through articulation rather than replacement.¹ To read the account of the conversation as it moves back and forth between interviewer and interviewee is to witness an ecology of communication emerge as a collaboration of ideas posed, and in turn expanded upon. Such fluid, relational speaking may also be imagined as contributing to the making of interior spaces through a fluid, relational conversation of ideas developed between collaborators in studio and in the academy. Interior spaces that are simultaneously physically and materially derived from conceptual ecologies draw

from thinking about the world and the various political and social drivers that influence everyday life. Stengers suggests that to create the possibility of transformation it is necessary to imagine new events and problems to confront and risk change. Risk is both creative and political; engaging in risky thought and action promotes invention and an ecology of practice made visible as a collaboration between the domain of the expanded interior and the researchers and practitioners that approach opportunity with fresh eyes. If evolutionary thinking is necessarily adaptive to changing environments and opportunities then logically evolutionary interior practice is adaptive practice. If future existence is predicated on rapidly altering and dematerialising material and political environments, then interiors that embrace and demonstrate risk and relational thinking predicated on an ecological turn, offer a critical perspective on the transformation of spatial and material worlds.

The IDEA JOURNAL Interior Ecologies presents ecological thinking in the broad interests offered by the authors of papers, design studio reviews and visual essays in response to the above call. While not seeking to draw confining associations around the research, certain coinciding interests appear across the selected papers where ecological concepts are indeed broadly and sometimes tangentially expressed. Ecologies of theory and practice, domestic ecologies and territories, transforming typological forms, material ecologies and the framing of an ecological pedagogy in the academy appear in various ways throughout the ten papers, which are expanded upon later in this writing. Additionally, threads of relationships across the above themes are present across the authors' accounts of their current research where concepts of home, performed and furnished space, discursive site and interdisciplinary practice coexist in a demonstration of ecological thinking and practice in the interior realm.

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 refereed 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'² Offering a fragment of his writing and modeling of spatial intelligence, **Leon Van Schaik's** ideogram



ShoeboxTheatre is a mise en scene 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 Weinthal's** provocation, Mapping Interior Adjacencies where she exposes the necessity to pay attention to the ephemeral details and narratives of daily life. Weinthal'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 Attwill'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. Hers 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'³ 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 an design collaborator seeks to reveal the multiplicity of this space as it simultaneously provides; necessary shelter; an educational space for children and a place to sit and rest. A repurposed unused space, it's glazing produces a maze-like effect through multiple reflection which shocks the visitor into a displaced sense of the city and the possibility of movement through it. The spectator is both enticed and manipulated within an interior ecology of spatial experience and disassociated traversal.



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.⁴ 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 Franz'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

Opposite and Above

*Drawn from the inside into altered space – the interstitial zone is traversed – yet shifting transparency/reflectivity caused inside outside occupation at once and all the time – the interior is reconstructed at every step
Contributory images for Dan over London, Hayward Gallery Gini Lee 2010*



norms. **Lubomir Savov Popov** introduces his alternative view of interiority through examining an Activity Theory approach to the social production of space. He draws our attention to the distinction between the interior as a container that provides for comfort and use value and the emerging experiential interior that is predicated on sustaining process and productivity within shifting socio-political regimes.

Kyuhoo Ahn and **Mihyun Kang** enlist ecological concepts in case studies to advance interior design pedagogy through their concern that a lack of relational connections between design history and design studio has resulted in functionally design illiterate interior students. Through experimenting with historical knowledge applied to scaled design and making improved engagement with and understanding of precedent has been demonstrated.

Material ecologies are expressed in mobile installations of the remade, digitally produced *Tessellated Floorscape*, 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 tessellated 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 Franz's discussion on the relationships of 'interiority' 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.

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 design theory and practice writing. **Mark Taylor** finds that the growing body of surveys that benefit the area of design student and practitioner information so far requires further articulation by the discipline to support a more critical perspective. **Eleonora Lupo** writes on the recent online publishing project *Inventario*

and the *Tutto e progetto/Everything is a project* edition on the idea of everything is design. Visual inventory is used to uncover the stories present behind artefacts. Including this review of the online journal/book/magazine reminds us that there are multiple platforms available in the ecology of information collection and dispersal in which interior practice and discourse is situated.

Interior Ecologies exposing the evolutionary interior is expressed as a provocation to interior design/interior architecture theoreticians and practitioners to engage with current design debate in the light of dynamic environmental and social situations. It seeks to both reflect upon the wide domain of interiors and the concomitant possibilities for existing and future practice to enlist in seeking ecological transformations in everyday life and to affect more universal agendas to support interior theory. The researchers and authors in the main have worked an ecological perspective into their research that is embedded in the community of the domestic and the everyday. Active participation in interior environments and discourses are in the main the primary attention being presented here. Speculative and theoretical proposals have been received through the invited provocations which insert themselves among the argued papers somewhat in the way that the Situationist *Memoires* (1957) book rubbed its sandpaper cover against its neighbours on the bookshelf to leave a residue or abrade the covers of adjacent books. It appears that the motive for the evolutionary interior is emerging in subtle practice and engagement with process and programs for activity that enlists multiple practices and authors and takes place slowly, over time.

NOTES

1. Mary Zournazi, A cosmo politics: risk hope change, a conversation with Isabelle Stengers, in *Hope: new philosophies for change*, Pluto Press Australia, Annandale, 2002: 244
2. Andrea Branzi, 'Ten Modest Suggestions for a New Athens Charter', *IDEA JOURNAL* 2010: 12,13
3. Suzie Attiwill, 'in', *IDEA JOURNAL* 2010: 88
4. *Sculpture* 2004 23(3): 27

Opposite

*A new ecology within ecologies for Dan over London, Hayward Gallery
Gini Lee and Rafael Gomez 2010*