

Book Review

Interior Design: a critical introduction by Clive Edwards

Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2010

Reviewed by Mark Taylor, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

This book is another contribution to the growing influence of interior design/interior architecture within 'architectural' education and practice. It also contributes to the number of 'introductory' publications including Dorothy Stepat-DeVan, *Introduction to Interior Design* (1980), Stanley Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design*, (1990) and the *Basics Interior Architecture* series by Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone. Others in this field include Dianna Rowntree, *Interior Design* (1964), Stanley Abercrombie, *A philosophy of Interior Design* (1990) and Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *What is interior Design?* (2010) as well as those that are aimed at equipping the reader on how to establish and run an interior design practice.

As interiors gains popularity in the public mind, the practice of defining interior decoration/design/architecture is not simple. For example some books have claimed there is little in the way of theory, or construct history in the shadow of architecture, whereas others have exposed broad areas of theory and complex histories (Sparke, Rice, Massey, Taylor and Preston). The place of sceneography, photography and cinematic spaces (Hannah, Mulvey, Shonfield) have also been identified as contributing to the discourse, as has the political, social and sexual examination of space (Hayden, Meade, Colomina, Hartzell, Berrett-Brown). While much of this work has revealed the interior as a fertile and contested ground of criticism as well as practice, other academics have begun to question the delimitation of the interior through enclosing walls, and the nature of 'containment'.

In *Interior Design: a critical introduction*, Clive Edwards proposes a critical transdisciplinary approach to examining 'the design of interior architectural spaces, their furnishings and equipment, as undertaken by interior designers'. There are twelve chapters which seem to reflect three areas; firstly the history



of the interior; the profession and the professional practice of interior design (the business end), secondly the process of design generally and interior design specifically, and thirdly elemental aspects of the interior such as colour, light, decoration and space. Sustainability has a chapter of its own and covers general understandings of sustainable practice, design process and materials. Throughout the book there are a number of strategically placed short précis of important or influential figures, and a number of case studies describing interiors relative to the chapter theme.

In the introduction Edwards surveys some recent findings and proposals about the interior; defining the difference between interior decoration/design/architecture, and issues that seems to preoccupy those intent on claiming territories and drawing professional boundaries. While this is an informative discussion the constant anxiety over who said what about whom, does not demonstrate a discipline's maturity. The second and third chapters offer respectfully, a history of the interior and the development of the profession. Acknowledging the possibility of multiple histories and the problems of Western centric style focused linear histories, the author presents a traditional synchronic framework, especially in relationship to 'styles' and trends from the nineteenth century to the present day. The profession and design education is similarly treated, but focuses on both North American and UK developments – nothing about Europe, Australia, Asia or Central and South America. While I acknowledge an in-depth analysis of professional development outside the US and UK might be beyond the scope of this book, it might go some way to answering the 'critical' component of the title, even if that criticism pointed to the need for such a study.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an insight into general processes of design, and interior design in particular. Despite confirming that design processes vary, there does seem to be some blurring between design as abstraction and process and design as material practice. This in itself is not a problem if the 'critical' approach examines these relative to various theoretical formulations. For example the problem of linear design processes is dealt with by outlining a general model and noting the limitations of such abstract models in reality. However the detailed examination of a design process (Chapter 5) immediately reverts to a linear model that mirrors traditional practice. What it does not do is examine 'critical practice' or 'research-led practice' that might adopt new techniques and technologies to advance design outcomes. Further the premise for design is based upon slightly dated 'principles' such as proportion, balance, symmetry and axis – that underscore 'classical' readings of architecture. While I am not against the historical significance of such ideas, and their impact on the built environment, we also have to look at the effects of new mathematics informed by non-Euclidean geometry, and rapid prototyping. What design currently has is the ability to compute complex mathematical forms very quickly, and thereby offer an alternative framework around parametric design, and file to file manufacturing. Having said that, the case studies in this chapter leave a lot to be desired, they are certainly not exemplary projects, and should have illustrated a more critical approach to either the traditions espoused, or offered new formulations.

As the book shifts into the more 'elemental' sections on Space, Colour and Light, the historical tone that introduces each chapter gives way to the didactical. When describing the contributions of philosophers and psychologists to the understanding of space the author's position is not clear on how such ideas inform thoughts on spatial organisation and wayfinding. That is, the examples lack discussion about how theories might inform design practice, even the broader aspects of interior design practice (urban interiors, performance, narrative, installation and art practice). In a similar manner the chapter on Colour provides a short introduction to colour history/theory and psychology, before reverting to an empirically driven statement about colour planning.

To some extent these later chapters exemplify a problematic raised by the challenge of the book: how do you present a critical introduction to a discipline that is only just beginning to articulate its activities? To some extent a good concluding chapter would have been more effective than leaving the reader adrift after the final chapter on 'The business of interior design'. It might have been worth examining current design teaching and research emanating from tertiary institutions.

Despite these questions I have raised, *Interior Design: a critical introduction* deserves a readership. While I have no doubt it will assist first year students orientate themselves to the expectations of traditional practice, interior design clearly needs a second, more inspirational volume that unpacks a more critical academic and research orientated approach to the discipline.

Publication Review

Inventario: Tutto è progetto / Everything is a project

Creator: Beppe Finessi Editor: Corraini
<http://www.inventario-bookzine.com>

Reviewed by Eleonora Lupo, Polytechnico di Milano, Italy



The list as 'representation' system is an expedient presentation alternative to the showing of a finished form, which is referential and closed in on itself. In literature, Umberto Eco's reading of Homer's Iliad, among a number of citations related to biblical scriptures, illustrates the contrast between the description of the shield of Achilles and the power of the Greek army. The first description is shaped by enumeration of the shield world [even if the incredible number of represented scenes makes it difficult to reproduce it visually], The second is a list or a catalogue 'made of countable items that we can not enumerate' specifically the ships of the Greek army, and suggests the physically infinite perceived through the indefinite.¹ The need to postulate an 'aesthetic infinite' of an objective kind is related to the shortcomings of the inventory and not to a subjective feeling about the sublime to which the representative modality of the list responds.

The recent Italian publishing project, *Inventario*, situated between book and magazine is curated by Beppe Finessi and published by Corraini with the support of Foscarini. Drawing reference from the example sourced from Eco's writing translated to the physical and material field, the subtitle *Tutto è progetto / Everything is a project*, expands upon the infinite list when it