Rethinking Inside the Box: Reflections on the Interiors Forum Scotland 2007 Conference

Andy Milligan, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design; Ed Hollis, Alex Milton, Edinburgh College of Art; Drew Plunkett, Glasgow School of Art; Frazer Hay, Napier University; John Gigli, Glasgow Metropolitan College with Glasgow Caledonian University

Abstract: *This discussion paper describes key findings from the international IFS (Interiors Forum Scotland) conference, 'Thinking Inside the Box', held at The Lighthouse, Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City in March 2007. In conjunction with an historical overview of interior design education in the UK, the authors describe the intention behind the conference, outlining its origins, aims and ambitions. The Interior Forum Scotland's lead role within the UK sector is discussed, as is its collaboration with the UK wide Interior Educators Council. Similarly, the IFS, in its first conference, is positioned against more established international interior design research communities, such as IDEA, (Interior Design / Interior Architecture Educators Association), amongst others. The authors speculate on the issues and themes highlighted by an international audience of interior design educators, researchers, authors and practitioners, and consider the future directions, challenges and issues driving interior design thinking internationally and design generally, and in particular, how these may influence the independent Scottish interior design sector. The paper and conference underpins interior design as an exceptionally broad and increasingly self confident spatial field, albeit one which operates within distinct interior frequencies from decoration to architecture. It also examines the ways in which interior design educators, organisations and practitioners are reclaiming, refining and redefining this field. Interior design's initial co-architectural / pro-decorative role is placed into context against new environmental territories and new challenges.*

Keywords: *interior design, interior architecture, Interiors Forum Scotland*

Introduction

The Interiors Forum Scotland is a new interior design academic group representing the interests of the leading interior design honours degree programmes in Scotland. A number of shared concerns and situations have provoked the speculations explored in this discussion paper. In particular, the IFS's inaugural interior design conference, 'Thinking Inside the Box: New Visions, New Horizons, New Challenges', held at The Lighthouse, Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City, in March 2007 offers a response to those concerns and

contexts. One such concern is the threat of a deregulated expansion of new interior design programmes saturating an already complex graduate market and in the process threatening to dilute quality as skills force scholarship to the side. Expansion, it seems, is a shared concern provoking the field to reflect on its purpose (Caan, 2006). Comparisons between the UK and the international interior design community suggest that these concerns may be justified. Further, the deletion of the term 'interiors' from the RCA, Royal College of Arts MA Architecture & Interiors has provoked anger from alumni, academics, and practitioners mobilising the Interiors Forum Scotland into action (Casson, 2007; Billings, 2007).

Arguments against interior design's erasure from that programme cite the preponderance of refurbishment over new-build in the UK as a market for interior design and interior architecture, not least in the £20bn schools programme planned by the UK Government. Whilst a few research conferences have emerged in the UK, these have tended to focus on highly specialised sectors, such as history, theory and exploring contexts of domestic dwelling (Sparke, 2006). No critical conference platforms exist in which UK interior design educators, researchers and practitioners can explore the overarching complexities, diversities and challenges of interior design education with the international interior design community, and fewer still in which interior design education is central to the debate, rather than positioned on the margins of other design or architectural symposia. Whilst the interior design research culture in the UK continues to grow in quality, scale and reputation, the networks, organisational frameworks and benchmarks which help establish research in the field are perhaps less advanced than other nations prompting the question as to the lessons the UK sector can learn from the international community.

The authors recognise the positive role that organisations like Interiors Forum Scotland can play in advancing this agenda, but remain conscious of the critical and global contexts and impact that UK Government reports will have in transforming the design sector. Government initiatives, such 'Enhancement in Art, Design & Media in Scotland', (Fisher, 2006), and the report on 'Skills in the UK: The Long Term Challenge', (Leitch, 2005), highlight the UK's optimal skills targets for 2020 to maximise economic productivity and social justice within the global economy. Further, the report 'Creativity in Business in the UK' (Cox, 2005), identifies the growing competitive threat to the UK design profession and addresses three central concerns: 1. changes within the design profession suggest discipline blurring and flexible modes of practice; 2. changing economic factors within a global marketplace are already transforming employment patterns and graduate opportunities; and 3. rapid technological developments, most notably in information computing, which promise to bring efficiencies

and experimentation together. Conventional boundaries are blurring, and innovative design programmes, such as Stanford's Studio D are challenging outmoded disciplined bound schools. Designers such as IDEO, Philips, Hella Jongerius, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, Marti Guixe transcend disciplinary definitions, but in what way are interior design programmes embracing these realities? Flexible modes of design practice are challenging the disciplinary 'closed shops', whilst offering up hybridised design models and new design personas such as the polymath interpolator, (exploiting broad design bandwidth to define the area where the solution might lie), and the specialist executor, (implementing polymathic observations specifically within the format that is needed) (Rodgers, 2007; Seymour, 2007).

Design is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, accessible and democratic, allowing non-designers to design, and in some cases, lead design as demonstrated by the socially inclusive work by Hillary Cottam, recently named winner of the UK Designer of the Year 2005. Such a phenomenon is familiar to interior designers frustrated at the amateur tag of interior decoration and the confusion created by the global phenomenon of TV make-over shows (Cottam, 2005). New interior theory readers now provide the theoretical and intellectual ammunition in which to evolve truly innovative environmental programmes (Scott, 2007; Preston & Taylor 2006; Rice, 2006; Brooker & Stone, 2004, 2007; Hudson, 2007; Coles & House, 2007; & de Botton, 2007), but in what way are these transforming interior education? The contexts in which we frame our discipline are also set to change, shifting away from artefacts toward the multi modal, sensorial and cultural narratives (Asymptote, 2007) toward the experiential; retail is as concerned with the experiential and cultural narrative as it is about the product reflected in IDEO and OMA's flagship for Prada NYC, and Carlos Miele by Asymptote. Like the Interiors Forum Scotland, the international interior design community continues an on-going speculation on disciplinary definitions and directions (IFI, 1983; IFI State of the Art, 2006; BIDA, 2007; CSD, 2007). This appears to be in contrast to the situation in Australia and New Zealand where interior design research and education seem well served.

Past, present, future

Published in the early seventies, Interior Design: An Introduction to Architectural Interiors (Friedmann, Pile & Wilson, 1982), provided the then emerging field of interior design with a useful, though relatively rare publication identifying tools and tactics for the new breed of interior architectural practitioners. The authors speculated on the future challenges confronting this new breed. Concerns over the environment, conservation, planning, CAD, and disability sat alongside traditional course primer material and methods to make existing

structures fit for future purpose, and against these contexts, also offered a new definition of future interior design practice as environmental rather than mere 'interior' design. The term environmental design seemed symbolic of a truly adaptive industry, capable of interdisciplinary working within the field of adaptive re-use. Nomenclature remains a delicate issue to many today. Then as now, this new harder breed sought alignment with the serious industry of architectural interiors by distancing itself from the softer decorative end of the interior design spectrum. Then as now, the search for disciplinary respectability and academic credibility continues to occupy our minds.

The once predictable tendency to locate interior design's future within the shadow of architecture may be giving way to a new optimism from the international interior design community. Indeed, where once interior design existed as the 'auld' enemy of a more established, much larger, and much better supported architecture community, (particularly so in the UK), new research alliances are emerging which position interior design educators at the forefront spanning theories of intervention design concerned with re-reading theories of interior architecture; with spatial narratives (O'Connor & Milligan, 2007; Milligan, O'Connor & Ross, 2007); with interdisciplinary and co-design practice (Rogers & Milligan, 2006), and with environmental re-making projects (Nelson & Milligan, 2006; 2004).

Collaborations between Scottish interior design schools and European partner institutions are represented in the two year IMIAD programme, an International Masters in Interior Architectural Design developed in response to the Bologna Accord to bring participating countries in line with a British-style degree system and the prediction of an increase in new Masters provision by 2010 (Bologna, 2005). Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art is exploring the virtual and cultural dimensions of client and designer exchanges with Texas (Milligan & Mohr, 2007). Collectively these suggest an interior design community which is thriving rather than withering, but does so, the authors would suggest, despite the intense pressures, challenges, demands and intellectual isolation which UK educators in particular endure. The authors are however conscious of on going debates on the future direction of interior design through the International Federation of Interior Architects and Designers, but would argue that very few UK academics have had the opportunity to participate in that crucial debate. Equally significant is the success of IDEA, (the Interior Design / Interior Architecture Educators Association), and its biannual conferences and journals. Established in 1996 and advancing progressively since, IDEA comprises leading interior design programmes throughout Australia and New Zealand and advocates excellence, and supports diversity within its degree programs and its research culture. Significantly, the Interiors Forum Scotland,

in partnership with the emerging UK Interior Educators Council, held a round table discussion with leading members of IDEA and associated organisations from the United States and Scandinavia inviting participation in the conference and advice to the UK sector.

The historical and theoretical position held by the MIRC, Modern Interiors Research Centre, at Kingston University, offers a research focus located within the specialised domain of design and architectural history, visual, material and spatial culture, but focusing specifically on the design of interiors from 1870 to 1970. MIRC has broadened research within the marginalised modern interior, exploiting the conceptual gap between architectural and design history and its prioritising of the 'building' and the 'object' over the ensemble (MIRC, 2007). Equally important in helping to position the new role of the Interiors Forum Scotland is the AHRC (the Arts & Humanities Research Councils), Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior and its Domestic Interiors Database, established over five years (AHRC, 2007). The authors of Interior Design: An Introduction to Architectural Interiors acknowledge interior design as an evolving, yet slippery discipline often resisting concise definition. Whilst the interior is indeed everywhere, (both through the ubiquity of life style magazines, and the global phenomenon of reality TV make-over shows), it exists between the physical, the poetic (Perec, 1997), and the phenomenological, (Bachelard, 1994). The interior domain is the place of dwelling, dreaming, belonging, sanctuary, memory and association, and a metaphorical stage set in which we act out life, simultaneously saturated with artefacts of conspicuous consumption in a world deeply concerned with sustainability. It is a platform on which to benchmark fashionable social mores, project social status and a lab in which to test ethnographic methods and patterns of use, behaviour and ritual (Gaver, Boucher, Pennington & Law, 2004).

The interior is familiar and elusive, practical yet paradoxical. It occupies increasingly broad disciplinary frequencies, and in the context of education, operates with that familiar artefactual framework common to partner disciplines of art, product and fashion. Interior design is often limited economically and logistically by the paper space abstraction of scaled visualising rather than real scale doing. Whilst other disciplines have highly visible expressions of their developing craft, (for example, painters paint, sculptors sculpt), interior design students rarely construct interiors. The authors acknowledge that making beyond model-making is occurring, but question whether limitations of economy, resources and time inevitably lead to compromise the making. This reality of limits prompts us to speculate as to what defines the craft of interior design; is it space, making, drawing, skin and surface- a debate that was perhaps limited in the IFS conference? Within education and practice, interior design reveals multiple spatial identities, yet its historical, theoretical and

contextual framework remains patchy, and is frequently contested in comparison to those of other disciplines. Speculations on the validity, challenges and directions of future interior design practice in 'Thinking inside the Box', are reflected in related events. The 'After Taste' symposium at Parsons, offered a critical review of interior design by exploring four themes; the Dweller's Trace, which sought to theorise the study of the interior; More Room, exploring alternative sites, users, and technologies; Class Room, examining pedagogical models; and Reconsidered Outside In, speculating on the progressive practices at the edge of the field (AfterTaste, 2007). Further, InterSections 07 in Newcastle brought together leading design thinkers from a wide spectrum of disciplines to explore design's relationships with other fields and examine how design is adapting to change.

The UK interior design scene: historical perspectives

The re-emergence of the UK Interior Educators Council is a reincarnation of the AIDDC, the Association of Interior Design Degree Courses, established in 1983 but which ceased to exist in the late eighties. However, it is important to offer a historical overview of the lineage in which the Interiors Forum Scotland is now part. UK interior design practitioners and students, (but not educators), may apply for professional membership of the Chartered Society of Designers (CSD), formerly the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers, with design membership in excess of 3000 across 34 countries. The CSD represents the interests of product, fashion, exhibition, interactive media to graphics, with interior designers once again somewhere on the margins. In the 19th century, (at a time when engineers held the celebrity status currently projected onto Architects today), interior design practitioners sought membership of the British Institute of Interior Decorators (BIID). BIID's credibility was gradually diluted due to its alliance with decorators, and interior designers in the early 20th century distanced themselves from the decorative / feminine focus (Sully, 2004). This new breed rejected the BIID and opted to join the more progressive SIAD. Later, the BIID merged with the renamed CSD, but for many the CSD has been ineffective in supporting interior design. Founded in 1930, the SIAD predates the Design Council, (formerly The Council of Industrial Design, COID), which was itself founded in 1945. In contrast, the Royal Institute of British Architects, founded in 1837, and its independent Scottish counterpart, the Royal Incorporation for Architects in Scotland, formed in 1916, have both been formed on firmer foundations.

The seminal events which reignited interest in design in the UK (particularly within the interior domestic domain) were the 1951 Festival of Britain and the publication of 'Design' magazine. However, as Sully (2004) states, interior design was still the poor relation to architecture, product and graphic design, with the exception of interior practices such as Design Partners,

Design Research Unit, David Hicks, Conran and Dennis Lennon, (the latter being an architect who specialised in interiors). Indeed it was architects who were producing the designs until the better qualified interior designers entered the scene from the mid sixties. Sully (2004) identifies as important interior architectural practices: Sheppard Robson, Powell & Moya, Stillman & Eastwick-Field, Stirling & Gowan, Building Design Partnership, Austin Smith Lord, Renton Howard Wood Levin, Purcell Miller & Tritton, and Stefan Buzas all of which collectively specialised in interiors. In-house interior designers gained experience working for local authorities, health boards, the police and large companies such as Pilkington Glass and the British Shoe Corporation soon gaining a foothold in specialised environmental contexts of museum and exhibition design, set design for theatre, TV, and film as well as the retail phenomenon driven by the power of teenage spending. The diversity of career routes originating in the sixties continues to expand in today's cross disciplinary climate.

Collectively, these new arenas enabled interior design to gain professional credibility, albeit credibility bound to capitalism and consumerism. In the seventies the Burolandshaft thinking offered specialist interior design practices, such as Planning Unit and DEGW, (Duffy, Eley, Giffone & Worthington), new opportunities in which to hone strategic tools and skills in enhanced organisational, analytical and interpretive brief writing. They cultivated close client engagement and sought to demystify design for clients prior to commissioning the design process. DEGW also successfully added value to the profession whilst meeting the demands and profit margins of its corporate clients. In 'A Vision of a New Workplace', the progression from functional office to multi dimensional work environment demonstrates how far this specialised interior realm has progressed (Duffy &Tanis, 1993). New hybrid office, service designers and interior research at Dundee, invoked interdisciplinary and hot-desk working whilst helping to shift focus from products and square feet acreage toward experience design (Buchenau & Suri, 2000), human factors and proxemics (Hall, 1998), environment well being (Anjum, Ashcroft & Paul, 2005), business acumen, and hi-tech servicing. This interior specialism challenged Frederick Taylor's work-study models, where workers were components and units of production organised for maximum efficiency. The earlier diversity of career routes, including the work of DEGW from the seventies, brought aspects of interdisciplinarity into the frame. Today interdisciplinary thinking is becoming a crucial element within interior education in Scotland, and, within practice, is evident in practices such as Imagination, Fitch, Land, Aukett Associates, Pentagram, Graven Images, Northern Office of Research & Design, and Landor Associates; and internationally, IDEO and Philips.

Educational perspectives: UK and Scotland

Today, the undergraduate experience is under threat from lucrative Masters programmes, whilst interior graduates now target conventional design and non design careers. Until the late sixties, the National Diploma in Design was the standard interior qualification after four years of intense study. This was changed when Manchester, Leicester, Leeds, Brighton and Hornsey had their NDD interior design courses upgraded to Diploma in Art and Design, underpinned by national benchmarks outlining curriculum content. In the seventies, new vocational polytechnics were established and were able, through the Council for National Academic Awards, (1965 to1992), to award honours degrees in interior design and other creative fields, offering academic credibility on a par with university qualifications and architecture. An important consequence of the CNAA was the introduction of the academic dissertation allowing interior design programmes to demonstrate a theoretical quality previously absent. Cultural programmatic distinctions remained. Architecture was perceived as an 'academic' university profession, lasting seven years backed by the ARB, the Architects Registration Board and RIBA, the Royal Institute of British Architects overseeing curriculum content, whilst interior design was a vocational programme of four years in Scotland and three in England with no external professional support. However, the architectural community is, like interior design, now challenging previously rigid educational models and contemplating flexible alternatives (Taylor, 2005). Recent initiatives from the Chartered Society of Designers for an international Course Recognition Programme, is perhaps symptomatic of the anxiety some design organisations are experiencing in an increasingly international market. Interior design, however, is again on the margins of this initiative, rather than a central concern (CSD, 2006).

In comparison to the wider UK sector, the Scottish interior design community is intimate, geographically close, comparatively easy to network, and has allowed the Interiors Forum Scotland to establish itself quickly and lead the education debate ahead of the Interior Educators Council. The Scottish sector offers diverse degree structures, including BSc(hons), the only Bachelor of Science within interior design in the UK, BA(hons), BDes(hons), and distinct masters and undergraduate programmes with titles including IMIAD, an International Master of Interior Architectural Design, Masters of Design and Interior Architecture, Interior Design and Interior & Environmental Design. The growth of new interior design programmes, increases in student fees, large student staff ratios, and intense competition for studio, workshop and CAD resources in England and Wales have not impacted on interior design education in Scotland yet. Facilities in Scotland are generally less crowded, space is more

generous, student staff ratios lower, costs of living cheaper, students' costs less onerous and learner's are better supported by the Scottish Parliament, whilst programmes are generally four rather than three years. The five Interiors Forum Scotland institutions possess distinct identities. Edinburgh College of Art operates interior design, as well as product and furniture design programmes and has strong links to the lighting industry, whilst also benefiting from the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe, (Hollis & Milton, 2007); Dundee produced the first interior design PhD graduates in Scotland, is a centre for the games industry and its interior and environmental programme is experimental and interdisciplinary in focus; Glasgow's reputation as a thriving design community is well founded, having comparable cultural centres to Edinburgh but often projecting a diverse and energetic design scene.

Interiors at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design use the indeterminate, contentious and shifting nature of interior design as an intellectual and conceptual springboard for environmental exploration. Themes of spatial narratives, co-designing, interdisciplinary working, sit alongside deliberately broad definitions of environmental engagement, from PhD studies concerned with environmental design, the office workplace, maternity wards (Anjum, Ashcroft & Paul, 1994; 1997; 2005), and re-appropriation and reworking waste which meet aspects of the eco pluralist manifesto (Faud-Luke, 2005). Glasgow is a contradiction, the seminal second city of the British Empire; a centre of the Scottish Enlightenment; a merchant city relying in the past on the dubious trading triangle of manufactured goods, tobacco and slavery; a cradle of the modern architectural movement; and a peon of the Industrial Revolution. It simultaneously embraces the studio-based culture of Glasgow School of Art, alongside the highly vocational training of Glasgow Metropolitan. Edinburgh College of Art sited in a medieval city bounded by a neo Georgian counterpart and host the world's largest arts festival. Edinburgh College of Art values the art of storytelling, proposing that interior designers are not only re-reading buildings, but also retelling them, allowing their old stories to be experienced anew. Interior Architecture at Napier University, believes that architects and designers need to analyse the structural DNA, (design, narrative and aesthetics), of their host building (Hay, 2007). These distinct voices reflect what UK architect Tony Fretton, (lecturer at interior architecture at Delft Technical Institute in the Netherlands), describes as the interiorists, an inclusive, rather than divisive, interdisciplinary term reflecting the distinct frequencies, exchanges and collaborations necessary for interior operations; interior designers, interior decorators, interior architects, exhibition designers, lighting designers, stage designers; event designers; installation artists and architects.

In this context, the authors recognise that design is undergoing change, designers are adopting new roles as creative strategists, co-creators, rationalists and story-tellers (Myerson, 2004), and recent speculation on the UK sectors obsession with disciplinary territory, identity, and nomenclature, may be contrasted with more flexible attitudes in defining one's creative terrain. This is particularly so in new attitudes toward interior design in some sectors of the Netherlands. Rodgers (2006), author of Inspiring Designers, suggests that more fluid models for future collaborations and practice are required and that fluid terms like Fretton's interiorist neutralise the debate surrounding architecture or interior which distracts many designers. How would the wider interior design community balance existing strengths within the commercial sector, whilst also exploring ideas of the design specialist or design polymaths (Seymour, 2007)? In addition, the authors suggest that interior design has to respond to crossing, rather than defending boundaries and respond to interdisciplinary, experimentation, and co-designing strategies. Such speculations echo the Friedmann et al definition of environmental designer, and whilst interventional design is described in *On Altering Architecture* (Scott, 2007) distinguishing a practice focused on the grammar and remodeling of existing buildings, what alternative futures might exist for interior design beyond remodeling existing buildings and outwith physical architecture and design?

In addition to the speculations already mentioned from Myerson, Seymour and Rodgers above, a number of themes emerged within the conference. A rejection of space, in favour of skin, surface and transience was suggested as a key concern for the new interior designer (Plunkett, 2007) at the recent International Federation of Interior Architects and Designers round table in New York, and is outlined in the theory reader, T*hinking Inside the Box: A Reader in Interiors for the 21st* Century (Gigli, Hay, Hollis, Milligan, Milton & Plunkett, 2007).

The Interiors Forum Scotland

In 2003, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design initiated a new academic interior design partnership. Interior design degree programmes within the Scottish higher education sector, including Edinburgh College of Art, Glasgow School of Art, Napier University, Edinburgh, and Glasgow Metropolitan College, (with Glasgow Caledonian University), formed a cross-institutional interior design academic body, the Interiors Forum Scotland. The group emerged in response to the frustration many expressed at the increasingly London centric position of design organisations, national student shows and the lack of opportunity for critical debate, research, networking, and sharing of good practice. Educators and practitioners have begun to express concerns over unregulated growth of both interior design programmes and student numbers, matched by inevitable reductions in teaching time,

staff, and class contact. The IFS recognised that design is a critical, socially engaged activity that is rapidly transcending traditional design boundaries. Interdisciplinarity, sustainability, and entrepreneurial skills need to be matched by a heightened global awareness. Holistic education needs also to exploit research culture whilst digital thinking will shift from visual tool toward cybridised place. A number of issues specific to Scotland will also transform interior design education. In the next ten years the eighteen year old demographic which typifies its current application pool will reduce; by 2009 class contact will be reduced by one third in Dundee; and the undergraduate system will gradually be overtaken by more lucrative international masters programmes.

Uniquely, the IFS body is the first forum in Scotland and currently leads the interior design educational debate in the UK. Hannay (2007) suggests that the saturation of graduates into an already compact market ignores the fact that fewer jobs exist, yet greater numbers of graduates are emerging from the UK higher education sector. Given this graduate career pressure, the conference sought to examine how interior design academics in the UK might respond and to explore how interior design programmes equip their graduates with intellectually flexible creative attributes to deal with an increasingly uncertain world.

Interior design has, in the past, allowed other design disciplines to influence its character. It is not surprising therefore to understand the Freudian fixation some interior designers express in seeking alignment with architecture. Given this legacy and lethargy, it is perhaps understandable that lack of disciplinary ownership might lead to lack of confidence, and be responsible for the rather out dated debate on how interior design may, or may not, fit an architectural mould. Such concerns say little for interior design's disciplinary self-confidence and self-belief. Very few disciplines would relinquish creative, spiritual and intellectual ownership so easily to another 'related' discipline en-masse, but in the past, guardianship of interiors has been dominated by architectural academic teams, rather than diverse environmental teams. Many disciplines, including architecture, certainly would not accept the reverse scenario. The message this sends passionate interior design students, keen to pursue a serious interior career in the field, is clear and unfortunate. Crucially, the IFS recognised that for too long interior design educators, practitioners, researchers and students have been neglected by the very organisations designed to protect their interests and cultivate debate. Significantly, the Scottish sector has been marginalised due partly to its geographic distance from London, and this has prompted the IFS to seize the initiative and lead the UK interior design educators' agenda.

At a time of crossing boundaries and mutual respect across those creative territories, it is important to continue to develop a clear sense of interiority across all bandwidths, (some

receptions being strong, other signals weak), and through further conferences the IFS plans another event, Interior Tools Interior Tactics in Edinburgh in 2008. In order to evolve an independent and distinct body of research knowledge, the question of what defines meaningful research, and what constitutes appropriate interior design education has to be re-evaluated from the ground up, through a passionate re-engagement within education, toward an informed perspective on practice, through to clearly defined research which is strategically driven.

Rethinking Inside the Box

In March 2007, the Interiors Forum Scotland held its first international interior design conference and exhibition, *'Thinking Inside the Box: New Visions, New Horizons, New Challenges'*, at The Lighthouse, Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City, (designed originally by C.R. Mackintosh, and converted by Javier Mariscal and Page & Park). Since it's opening as the flagship of Glasgow's European City of Culture status in 1999, the IFS conference and exhibition represents the very first interior design event of any kind in over two hundred previous conferences held in the Lighthouse - the greater majority being focused on architecture and product design. This was also the very first time that a Scottish wide national perspective could be experienced en masse and which featured work from all five IFS member institutions across the four year programmes. The conference attracted delegates from the Netherlands, Scandinavia, UK, Australia, Canada, Italy, Turkey, US and New Zealand, and explored current research into education, practice and theory of interiors for the 21st century. An eclectic range of papers focused on architecture and interior design pedagogy, digital studios, theory and history, layering, doubleness, re-reading, slow homes, re-branding and identity, amongst many others, and were presented by an international audience of interior design academics, researchers, authors and practitioners. In addition, representatives from key international interior design organisations attended including IDEA, the Interior Design / Interior Architecture Educators Association involving leading universities of Australia and New Zealand; BIDA, the British Interior Design Association; the ECIA, the European Council of Interior Architects, the UK Interior Educators Council; and members of various US and Scandinavian institutions and organisations. The award winning multi disciplinary practice Graven Images presented alongside keynotes speakers Shashi Caan, (previously Chair of the prestigious Interior Design programme at Parsons, and the Pratt Institute, NYC). Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, co-authors of *Re-Readings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings; From Organisation to Decoration: An Interior Design Reader; Form & Structure* and *Context & Environment* in the Interior Architecture Basics series, provided the second keynote. Other notable authors

contributed including Mark Taylor, co-editor of *Intimus* with Julieanna Preston, and Charles Rice, author of *The Emergence of the Interior.*

The conference occurred over two intense days and was attended by one hundred interior design academics, researchers, doctorate students, practitioners, and writers from across the higher education sector. Interiors Forum Scotland also invited and hosted a meeting of the UK Interior Educators Council meeting on 28 February at Glasgow School of Art, and sought advice from leading interior design organisations including IDEA and representatives from the USA and Scandinavia. A parallel exhibition in the Young Designers Gallery from 24 February to 7 May, complimented the conference, and, as mentioned previously, featured for the first time in the UK examples of work from each of the fours years of each IFS member institution. Approximately 90% of delegates provided constructive feedback praising the energy of the event but also expressing concern over the sheer intensity of the programme. Most however, agreed that the presentations and discussions left them with ample food for thought and provocations to further action. The conference explored five deceptively simple areas of concern:

• The education of the interior designer: and the ethos, strategies, tools, tactics, themes and approaches influencing the field from undergraduate, postgraduate and continuous professional development.

• What / was / will be interior design?: interior design's identity, multiple identities, professional expectations and industrial connections, regulation, deregulation, definition, scope and futures.

• Interpreting interior design: reading and re-reading, theories, trajectories, practices.

• Histories of interior design: narratives, speculations, meditations on history and theory and their value to practice.

• How do we teach interior design?: reflections, observations and case studies from education.

An objective of the conference was, from a Scottish perspective, to gain deeper insight into the extent and diversity of interior design research and to reflect upon the possible directions and likely influences this may have on the Scottish sector. A further intention was to develop research and educational networks to the mutual benefit of the IFS and its UK partners. It was also crucial to the IFS to ensure that relationships were forged between higher and further education in the UK; the parallel exhibition helped to generate interest from this sector and high school applicants and their career advisors. The authors also wished to use the event

to gauge how diverse the international community was in its delivery of programmes or the scope of its practice. The event also served to boost morale by challenging the notion that interior design was a mildly schizophrenic design discipline in crisis. The outcome of the conference was, we hope, neither. Despite the pessimism which affects the sector, many interior design academics are, in the words of TS Eliot 'united by the conflict that divides them'. Several clear debates emerged, there were several ghosts at the feast, and several absences, all of which lent the theoretical discussion of interior design a certain consistency.

Chief among the debates that dominated the discussion was the question of point of view: should interiors be discussed, visualised and conceptualised only from traditional notions of inside/outside? The paper, 'Hertzian Space', a term used in wireless technology, describes an innovative design studio which investigates the possibility of defining activity beyond conventional modernist perceptions of space, movement and interaction (Burry & Taylor, 2007). Connectedness between overlapping fields of occupation and activity are used to generate an interior in response to data flows that affect, interfere and overlap, and engender a kinetic response to shifts in activity, occupation and fluctuations in an electro-climate defined by wavelength, frequency and field strength. Process drives product, with modelling, rather than drawing, the key methodology for design investigation. This example of collaborative design through modelling also explores a fascination with surface and skin.

In 'Towards a New Interior' a new interior design discourse is proposed which acknowledges the interdependence of the related disciplines of clothing, product, art, film, and politics which are contained by and inhabit the interior (Weinthal, 2007). By viewing these disciplines through the lens of interiors, it allows us to see how they rely upon the interior in order to complete their work, re-defining the host interior as a series of perceptual layers that surround the body, therefore, constructing a new definition of the body in architecture. Weinthal's paper brought a phenomenological, poetic and pragmatic argument to bear on interior theory. Indeed Weinthal's investigations touched upon home as containing perceptual thresholds, or layers, with implicit territories, explicit boundaries, with physical, (outside / threshold / inside), and metaphysical polarities. The latter was defined by Bachelard (1994) as the Oneiric Axis, representing a metaphorical vertically stacked trinity of distinct domestic realms; the lower cellar, (with its allusions toward nightmare); the inhabited formality of the 'middle kingdom' of the house; and the elevated dream space of the attic. This relationship between the poetic and the spatial is also evident in collaborations between the disciplines of english and interior environmental design at the University of Groningen and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee (Collins & Robillard,

2006), and allows us to speculate on the extent to which the more ethereal, poetic and phenomenological perceptions of home and dwelling are still fertile territory for interior design in an age in which the smart technologically laden home, rather than the poetic dwelling, seems to dominate.

In 'From Organisation to Decoration', new strategies and tactics affecting the re-use and remodeling of existing buildings are described citing the impact of Herzog and de Meuron, Diller & Scofidio, Matta-Clark, Whiteread, Malcolm Fraser Architects and Carlo Scarpa, and the theories of contextualism, of urban theory, art, archaeology and installation art as influences of new interior architectural thinking (Brooker & Stone, 2007). Re-use of existing buildings is presented as an increasingly legitimate arena, whilst the writings of Rodolfo Machado uses the palimpsest or 'writing over' as a metaphor for building reuse; the text of the manuscript has been scraped off and the parchment used again, but inevitably a trace of the original text remains, a shadow that haunts and influences the author of the succeeding inscription. And so with buildings, they are remodelled, reused, rethought and yet a suggestion of the former meaning disturbs and inspires the subsequent design and it is this search for that meaning that is the basis of the analytical chapter.

Another key debate that emerged was the definition of interior design: should it be regulated and strictly defined, as is the case in some countries, and indeed with other design disciplines, or should it be allowed to maintain the flexibility of a 'non-discipline' in an age in which the crossing of disciplinary boundaries, rather than the defensive closing of boundaries is increasing. In, 'But is it Interior Design?' interdisciplinary theory and cultural analysis are used to enrich interior design education and practice (Chalmers & Close, 2007). The connection between theory and practice for visual thinkers is explored, and the intellectual framework it offers interior design is presented as a tool for thinking critically and reflectively on how and why an interior is made. Chalmers and Close (2007) cite IDEO as exemplars in which designers work alongside ethnographers, anthropologists, engineers and social scientists, and argue that, rather than seeking to emulate architecture, or operate within life style superficiality of some interior decoration, interior design should explore interdisciplinary theories. The authors of this discussion paper suggest that interdisciplinary theories also enable an economic means of managing creativity in mass education (Anusas, 2006), whilst introducing related concepts from IDEO of experience design (Buchenau & Suri, 2000).

In, 'What's in a Canon?', Attiwill (2007) reflects on Chalmer's and Close's concern over a lack of a theoretical canon, but explores whether, in this multidisciplinary climate, a canon as it might be construed in architecture, may be undesirable or evolve into canons of distinct

interiorisations. Attiwill exposes the vast range of points of view that can be held about the discipline of interior design, speculating whether there are any canonical interior spaces that have influenced the practice of interior design on a par with that of architecture? An experimental workshop involving Australia's design media, academics, graduates and practitioners were asked to respond to the provocation 'What's in a canon?' The question had two potential readings in this context: to question and evaluate the value of a canon for interior design; and as an invitation to identify examples of interior design which are significant at this point in time to the practice of interior design.

The issues of graduate saturation and disciplinary proliferation surfaced forcefully within 'A Regulated Irregularity' (Hannay, 2007) and brought much needed comparative detail between regulated and protected interior design programmes in Germany and those in Cardiff, Wales which exposed the exponential scale of expansion affecting interior design education in the UK. Hannay suggests that organisations like the IFS and Interior Educators Council should take the lead in advocating a tighter definition of the profession, in order to combat sliding educational and professional standards.

In 'Not Cushions and Curtains' (Hoskyns, 2007) interior design and interior architecture are differentiated from each other through their different approaches to the use of textiles. The use of textiles, patterning, wallpaper and ornament are becoming increasingly fashionable in contemporary design, such as Boontje, Wanders and Timorous Beasties. Coates, Alsop and Nouvel represent architects using textiles as construction materials, and transformations in computer modeling combined with advanced textile engineering are creating sophisticated architectural solutions. Hoskyn describes an innovative design studio which reclaims textiles by integrating textile technology with site.

Disciplinary anxiety surfaced in the presentation, 'Why Do We Underestimate What We Do?' (Stone, 2007), which defines the interior as a coincidence of contexts, and that these provide the opportunity for different activities and the social, economic and cultural conditions that stimulate them to be articulated as a considered, defined and designed place. As such the interior must be seen as a laboratory, absorbing diverse and contradictory ideas and facilitating a dialogue between activities and experiences. Stone argues that tensions between the professions has nullified the intellectual growth of the subject and relegated learning to mere skill.

The neglected heart of interior design is perhaps the home, but the authors speculate that the interior community may be reluctant to engage critically with the home, particularly

within education. However, in 'The Tailored Home' (Brown, 2007), new approaches toward customising existing residential dwellings are discussed in contrast to the large land development conglomerates considered analogous with the fast food culture of the US. Drawing parallels with slow food philosophy, which cultivates re-engagement with the culture and collective ritual of the selection, preparation and enjoyment of food, Slow Homes attempts to foster a re-engagement with the culture of the home, offering the client ownership and responsibility for the way in which the house is acquired and the home transformed; how it is designed, and the manner in which it is lived in and later adapted. Negotiating the conceptual space between the home as mass-produced commodity and home as a one-off high-end project, Brown replaces the one off bespoke ideal cherished by architects with a mass customisation strategy.

> *In clothing, high design is made affordable to a larger number of consumers with factory produced garments that are individually customised through alterations at the point of sale. In the same way, a Tailored Home begins with helping the client find an existing residential property that is the right size, price and location. This property is then tailored to fit with a series of interventions assembled from an edited kit of design strategies. The process creates an affordable way for individuals at a variety of economic levels to work with a professional designer to assemble their interior domestic world (Brown, 2007).*

A key to understanding interior design's identity is its history and theory. In 'Towards a History of Interior Architecture', Diaz (2007) offers suggestions on how an interior architecture theory programme may evolve, whilst raising questions about the definition of the field itself. Diaz suggests certain ground rules and identifies the strengths and weaknesses in various approaches to historiography. Diaz implies that the emergence of interior architecture is itself rooted to the history of modernism. In The Emergence of the Interior, Rice (2006) charts the emergence of the domestic sense of the term interior in the 19th century, and in particular, how through a reading of Dutch genre paintings, an ambiguous sense of doubleness surfaces: the interior referring both to a spatial condition, and a representation of a spatial condition. Rice argues that doubleness afforded the interior a conceptual structure that exposes certain problems for the various disciplines that study domesticity and the interior. The perception that objective Dutch realism offers a reliable device for evaluating interior life at that time is called into question. Rice argues that traditional histories assume the interior as a stable and timeless context for the unfolding and development of domestic life, rather than analysing what the historical emergence of the interior might mean for a critical account of the history of domesticity.

Conclusion

This discussion paper offers insight into the emergence of the Interiors Forum Scotland, with particular focus on their inaugural conference, 'Thinking Inside the Box: New Visions, New Horizons & New Challenges'. It attempts to place into context the reasons for its emergence against other conferences and symposia, and interior organisations currently debating the future of interior design. A historical overview of the UK interior design sector allows the IFS to be placed into context within an important, but fragmented, lineage of groups which previously sought to represent interiors in the UK. Concerns from the UK community are presented; research culture; identity; deregulation; saturation; lack of support; the loss of interiors from the Royal College of Art's MA programme; the impact of Government studies - the Cox and the Leitch Reports; demographic changes affecting Scotland; isolation, have mobilised the IFS into action. The IFS relationship with the UK Interior Educators Council is explored (for example, IFS institutions are members of the IEC, whilst one member is the Scottish regional representative). The relevance of other conferences to the IFS are discussed, 'After Taste', 'IFI State of The Art 2006', 'Intersections07', alongside the current, but highly specialised research in the UK of the MIRC, Modern Interiors Research Centre at Kingston, London, and the AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council five year research project by the Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior and its Domestic Interiors Database. The impact of IDEA, Interior Design / Interior Architecture Educators Association on the emerging UK community is identified, whilst the authors also recognise the significance of biannual IDEA conferences such as 'Inhabiting Risk 07', 'Inside Out 05' and 'Between Excess and Austerity 03', amongst others. The paper speculates on alternative future interior design practice separate from architecture, and identifies interdisciplinary culture and new hybrid concepts of the polymath and the specialist. A number of key papers from the 'Thinking Inside the Box' conference are discussed offering a flavour of the conference. The significance of remodelling is explored, suggesting that conversion rather than new build has economic benefits which could place interior design in a more favourable light, '…between 50% and 70% of all construction work and about half of the entire economic volume of construction now concerns work on existing buildings' (Cramer & Breitling, 2007).

Valuable lessons have been learnt in the first three years of the IFS's existence. While the intensity of the conference programme in 2007 confirmed the rich territory in which interior design operates, the IFS highlighted the need to address additional research funding to support ongoing debate and exploration. The format of the event was overly formal,

and future events need greater flexibility. The emergence of new interior design theory publications challenges the superficiality of life style catalogues and pragmatic construction course books. This offers serious intellectual material of value to educators, researchers, practitioners and learners. It is hoped that the Thinking inside the Box: a Reader in Interior Design for the 21st Century, published by Middlesex University Press will also contribute to this. This collection of 30 essays addresses an eclectic range of issues from the conference with comment from The Lighthouse. This reader is designed to provoke within the international interior design / interior architecture community a desire to rediscover, reframe and perhaps reclaim the field of interior design.

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Endnotes

The authors are indebted to Anthony Sully for his succinct historical overview of the various interior structures, educational and practice details, bodies, organisations and groups outlined above in 'Historical Perspectives of the UK Interior Design Scene', which stem from Anthony Sully's response to an article in IDFX in Oct 2004 entitled, 'All You Need Is Love'.