

Limits and Thresholds: On the Power of Interiority

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Abstract: *Before we can approach the tension between austerity and excess – or any other productive tension in a design practice – we must first enter the metaphysical space of 'interior' itself.*

The notion of interior is always defined by at least three 'working parts': inside, outside, and (most important yet least noticed) the threshold setting one off from the other. Properly speaking, this threshold is neither outside nor inside; rather, in setting the limit between them, it partakes of both. Like the skin of a body or the cladding of a building, indeed like any surface, the threshold comes into contact with what lies on both sides of it, linking the two environments in the act of separating them. 'A surface separates from out and belongs no less to one than to the other' (Don DeLillo).

The threshold is an ontological anomaly, a space outside of space, existing only in its vanishing. In theory, a threshold, as with any line in geometrical definition, has extension but no dimension. It is literally zero degrees thick. The function of the threshold, therefore, is not to be wide but to be crossed. Every limit is also its own negation. Drawing the limit-line is coeval with the possibility, the suggestion, we might even say the demand that the line be crossed. Once established, boundaries 'ask for' breaching – traditionally, a task for heroes.

This crossing is no simple matter, though we may blithely perform it dozens or even hundreds of times a day. What is involved here? What relationships of time and space, of consciousness and identity, of necessity and freedom, are created by the move from outside to in, and back again?

In this paper, I approach the thought of limits (and maybe the limits of thought) by taking the interior back to its moment of geometric inception, its philosophical ground zero: the drawing of lines and circles. Once inside, but only then, we may begin to ask what it is we seek in this crossing over, this transgression, of the threshold. Is it comfort? Security? Control? Or perhaps something deeper, and more challenging: the act of thinking itself.