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Interior Spaces and the Layers of Meaning

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine how space is conceived and conceptualised by under-graduate students. It further discusses how space is translated from mind to actuality without loosing meaning and characteristics and how to move beyond designing 'designed' spaces by putting space in a more extensive debate. Interior architecture/design, as an academic discipline, is outside of the humanities, designing a space requires the capacity to think similarly to a humanities student who is directed to understand the complexity of culture and better understand the world in which they live. Interior architecture/design has always lacked identity and has had difficulty positioning itself as it is often divided between technology, science, art and production. Designing space is often the product of compromise and limitations (material/budget) and reducible to something that is calculable and measurable. Consequently, a physical space is often interpreted as a space disconnected from whom or what occupies it. The visual and sensory quality of a space becomes so dominant that there is the potential to reduce the socially contextualised design to a mere product of design. For design students, space is always seen in relation to the physical fit of humans and its interaction with human activity and objects. The abstract nature of design projects and the fact that most designs are virtual creations before they become reality makes thinking about space outside the production of space challenging. Space is the core of interior design and surprisingly not much emphasis is given to understand space on a complex level as explored by thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, Peter Sloterdijk and Bruno Latour. Lefebvre in his work The Production of Space interprets space on three levels; physical, mental and social space. He argues that space is not simply something we inherited from the past or is determined by the rules of spatial geometry but space is produced and reproduced by humans in which they construct their lives. 'Space is produced by the people who occupy it and influenced by those who design and produce it' (Lefebvre, 1991). Interestingly the architect Frank Lloyd Wright believed that the space within a building is the reality of that building.

Keywords: Interior Design, Space, Language of Space, Design Education, Interiority

Introduction

THE CONCEPT OF space is both familiar and complex. I will start by unpacking the concept of space and how it relates to interior design. In addition, I will pose some questions and investigate problems in interior design education. Finally, I will reflect on a case study that highlights some problems to be explored.

As a professional and later as an educator teaching interior design, I have long attempted to understand how the values of everyday life and ones own experiences can be used in designing better spaces. The study described in this paper is part of my ongoing research into interiority and how humans interpret interior environments (spaces). This study also discusses limitations of interior design, particularly in the realm of space design and demonstrates how design education needs to be re-evaluated to teach more informed methods when designing spaces. My research aims to examine the role of 'space' in the discipline of interior design and identify how students understand spaces and manipulate them.

COMMON GROUND

There is a need to go beyond the current approaches of interior design education and look toward human interactive/environment interactive relations and theories. A theoretical framework would allow for different interpretations of the complexity of interior space and provide much needed answers, support and guidance for design students. There are several theories that aim to underpin interior design practice. The theoretical positions of Lefebvre, Bruno Latour and Peter Sloterdijk are worth mentioning. These theoretical positions together with more established theories, namely narrative theory, semiotics and phenomenology, will form the basis of my discussion. To support my research I will present a case study that examines a project that was completed by a final year interior design student. The project was the result of identifying and clarifying the relationship between the built environment and human behaviour. Research was conducted by a group of students who were looking to go beyond their comprehension of interior design when designing spaces in an attempt to understand its complexity by using research and theory. The students identified a need to have more comprehensive methods for understanding how humans respond to environments and how this will inform how to design spaces.

Interior Design -The Current Status Quo

The built exterior/interior environment is a key player in establishing meaning in people's lives. It contributes to people's emotions, physical comfort of being, general wellbeing and sense of belonging. Interior designers play a key role in defining and shaping the spaces we live in and therefore have the liability and obligation to create spaces that meet those needs. Butterworth (2000) asserts that spaces, places and buildings are more than just props in people's lives. They are embedded with deeper personal and cultural meaning and resonance and simultaneously symbolise personal histories, interpersonal relationships, people's values and sense of belonging. As a basic necessity buildings should cater for safety and shelter. However, in order to cater for people's wellbeing, a place needs to be able to give its inhabitants a sense of belonging and a sense of identity; a place for both privacy and social interaction. We do not merely exist in a physical environment- we interact with it, posit it with significance and derive important meaning from it. The aesthetics cannot be absent from our built forms and just like the importance of a defined space, aesthetic qualities of a space reinforce spatial experiences. Encouraging a space to come to live and evoke senses and responses, movement, comfort and control are important to people's lives.

Environments (spaces) can suggest a range of activities that can or cannot occur and have the ability to evoke feelings. Nasar and Augustin (2007) agree and explain that the perceived visual quality of places has powerful effects on human experiences. They can contribute to worker productivity, state of mind consumer behaviour and people's general wellbeing. Studies show that visual quality is rated highly with people. Nasar and Augustin (2007) elaborate that most people give visual quality more importance than other aspects of their surroundings and physical appearance that is inconsistent with the desired image can lead to people avoiding a place. For example, the desired user of a space might avoid the place if it conveys an undesirable meaning to them. Nasar and Augustin (2007) give the example of an unfamiliar restaurant. Customers make judgement by entering the space from its appearance which lets them make assumptions about price, food quality and service. These judgements will also influence the behaviour of patrons. Interior designers need to be able to predict such perception and come up with design solutions that convey a desired meaning.

The trained interior designer needs to be able to read how users evaluate the environment and what meaning potential users may see in it.

A general perception is that the interior design industry has long been regarded superficial in nature. The International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI), the international body for interior design, struggles to give a clear identity to the profession and continues to debate the industry's disciplinary definitions and directions. The amateur tag of interior decoration attached to the industry has also been very frustrating for designers globally. In the United States, the use of the title interior design is extensively protected by title, practice and legislation. This restricts the use of title to those who have fulfilled the requirements to be registered and licensed to practice (American Society of Interior Designers 2006, p. 2). To fulfil the requirements, students need to obtain a degree from accredited tertiary interior design programs. Accreditation responsibility lies with the Council for Interior Design Accreditation.

In Australia, interior design practice is unregulated and interior design education is unaccredited. Some Australian universities have changed their programs to interior architecture in an attempt to distinguish their programs from interior decoration and design qualifications offered by the vocational sector (Cys, 2006). However, as Cys (2006) explains, the name interior architect is widely used in Europe, but the Architects Act legislation in Australia renders this title illegal for anyone other than a registered architect. As a result, in Australia, anyone can call themselves an interior designer, regardless of educational qualifications. This is perhaps why the industry has lacked identity and has been associated with decoration rather than design and a sense that the visual quality of a space is of greater importance than designing for the human interpretation of spaces. Interior design is perceived by many other professions as feminine, superficial and mimetic in comparison to male, rational and original architecture. It is asserted that interior design is inferior to architecture (Havenhand, 2004). Interior designers understand that they have a problematic and often misunderstood identity and have worked diligently over the years to legitimize their field; the public perception has not changed. Television shows and glossy decoration magazines perpetuate the image of a feminised, self expressive, decorative, and superficial kind of interior design, while the myth of a heroic male architecture is continually reinforced in movies and TV shows. "The boundary between architecture and interior design remains in place, held there by a persistent idea of difference between two fields: male vs. female, structure vs. decoration and superior vs. Inferior" (Havenhand, 2009, p.33).

This uninformed view of interior design confronts the academic discipline each year by the newest cohort of prospective students. They are attracted to the reputation that interior design carries (decoration). Many students are disappointed to discover a severe abandonment of all that makes that industry so stereotyped. In fact, contrary to its image, most interior design courses offer very little in terms of superficial ornamentation and decoration. Ironically, interior design course content is very similar to architectural studies (i.e. concept design, detail, design, construction and materials, CAD). Gains in a gradual shift of thinking with interior design students does occur for some students during their degree, however, successes are usually short-lived as the industry they enter as graduates is inundated with superficial approaches to design.

Architecture and interior design are seen as an exclusive industry that thrives on iconic design and immediate visual recognition. Interior design students often have difficulties to differentiate between practically applied projects and those who are symbolically meaningful.

To most undergraduate students, the inherent visual effect is so strong that they fail to see the layers that have embedded meaning to a particular design. This is perhaps reinforced by the already mentioned public perception of the interior design profession. As a design educator and researcher on human behaviour and space, I aspire to create change in current interior design education. I actively question a vocationally oriented undergraduate degree approach in favour to one where students are able to think critically for themselves and have an intellectual foundation to use throughout life - this whether they decide to go into the design profession or not. The focus in interior design education has to go beyond what is currently taught. There is a need for a transformation of what is taught in creating an understanding of interiority, inner minds and inner dwellings, the working of consciousness and cultural difference.

The Design Process and the need to be more Focused on the Relation between the Human Sphere and the World (Biophysical and Social)

How are spaces designed, created and adapted? How important is the user of the space to the designer during the design process? How are assumptions and interpretations made concerning place, time and space (including material/physical/virtual and cyber space). Engagement and insight from critical theory is paramount in providing answers. Beyond notions of spaces for subjects, objects and events how are theses spaces socially constructed? Who are the designer of those spaces and what agendas are fulfilled through designer roles? Those are kinds of questions students need to learn to ask and answer. They need to grasp the human experience and interdependent concepts of space and how place is expressed across the disciplines – in art, philosophy, literature, geography, psychology, science, sociology and anthropology. Tuan (1977, p.6) proposes that 'ideas about space emerge from constructivist notions that experiences are the modes by which we construct reality. Theories about space and place include conceptions of space as static and concrete, space as location for objects, subjects and events, space as defined completely in terms of relationships and space as a form imposed by people'(Burns, 2003). There is value in understanding space as being socially produced as observed by Lefebvre. In interior design the production of space is achieved through design practices which themselves are located in spaces, through representations of space like blueprints, concepts etc. These productions largely regulate and organise space "through often contested social, cultural, political, and economic meanings" (Burns, 2003). Burns (2003) argues that space has a function in creating settings in which we are able to form and perform our roles and identities. In professional practice, designers develop concepts away from the space and site of construction using abstract ideas and drawings about materials, construction methods, expressive forms and functions. In the design process the objective is to understand the client's world and to determine how and with what criteria they judge the process and interactions within that world (Burns, 2003, Silverstein, 1993, p 80). The human participant in the environment apprehends both the concrete experience that is the result of design decisions and the abstract values upon which they are based (Burns, 2003).

Lefebvre - *The Production of Space*

In the domain of architecture and interior design, space is a primary component.

Students have very little understanding of any philosophical interpretation of space and introducing new ideas and unfamiliar concepts to students has proven difficult. Students dominantly relate to space as a site of design and construction rather than a philosophical concept. Although I have been working as a designer for two decades, I too have found it difficult to relate philosophical thinking to how I design. The inquiry into how humans interpret space highlighted my own insufficient knowledge early in my career and has developed into a research interest.

Space is an overused word which can mean anything or nothing and the ambiguities of language can account for some of the problems that exist when discussing the notion of space and concepts of design. While this paper is not interested in discovering the primary source of linguistic ambiguity, it is important to acknowledge that language can be blamed to some degree. The ambiguity of language has resulted in the loss of some aspects of meaning. This is the case for many languages but the German language for example has preserved many terms in relations to traditional conditions of space words which imply meanings (Raum, Platz, Abstand, Weltraum etc) (Bollnow, 1992,p. 3). Latour (2008, p. 4) explains that the word 'design' for instance, has a much more restricted meaning in French than it has in English or Scandinavian. To the French, who imported the word from English, it meant no more than 'relooking'. A good translation does unfortunately not exist in English. As Latour (2008, p.4) explains, to relook means to give a new and better look to something – a chair, a car, an interior. 'In fact if left without 'design' this something would simply remain too barren, too severe or too clumsy'. Design in its limited sense occurred by adding a veneer of form to the creations of more serious professionals like engineers, scientists or accountants.

This view of design is perhaps still felt today but design did make some significant progress. Design has extended over time from the details of objects to cities, to nations, to cultures; today the term is undistinguished from the very substance of production (Latour, 2008, p.5). Latour asserts that 'to design could mean equally to plan, calculate, arrange, pack, define, project, write, code, and dispose'. Design is applicable to ever larger assemblages of production (Latour, 2008, p.2). A contemporary German thinker, Peter Sloterdijk, shares similar ideas on the philosophy of design. Like Latour, Sloterdijk has published numerous works on cultural criticism, the philosophy of culture and religion, the theory of art, psychology and economics. In his latest work '*Sphere's*, he formulates the fundamental question of philosophy – the question of 'being'. His work differs to the work of Heidegger. While Heidegger poses the question of 'being' in relation to time, Sloterdijk's interest in 'being' is in relation to space. In *Sphere's*, the author attempts to answer questions such as, how human beings manage to master interactions with each other in conjunction with an overwhelming abundance of non-human and co-human factors. 'One is never alone only with oneself, but also with other people, with things and circumstances- thus beyond oneself and in an environment. Space is thus no longer an empty abstraction, but a form of human life in the sense of a space-shaping, space –creating activity' (Sloterdijk, 2004).

The main message in Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is that space is directly produced (1991). Space is not an empty volume waiting to be filled but rather it is a product that can't be separated from human activity, likewise it is affected by and affecting that activity. It can therefore be seen as a product of the everyday and equally it is constantly producing. Traditionally, in western culture, space is perceived as something to be filled with scientifically constructed rationality and reason. To Lefebvre (1991, p.135) however, social space was being conceptual and physical at the same time. Social space is the realm in which the 'cul-

tural life' of society is enacted. It is produced by a pattern of social interaction, but in turn imposes itself on its users and consequently shapes society. Space encourages and discourages certain forms of behaviour and interaction and gives form to social structures and ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991, p.134). Lefebvre's interprets space on three levels:

Representational Space is the space of inhabitants and users (in the sense that all space is symbolic and mediated - all space is representational – it is hermeneutically engaged). It is a space which is experiences passively and heavily influenced by ideological thoughts and theories. Representational space overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. (Lefebvre, 1991, p.135).Representational space is produced and contains spatial codes that change over time. The representational spaces of everyday life are produced by contemporary spatial codes and embody complex symbolisms. Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols and therefore the space of users but also of artists and writers and philosophers. For example, the village church, graveyard and village square.

Representations of Space is the formal conceptualised space of planners, scientists, urbanists, architects etc. Those spaces take on a physical form and can best be described as maps, plans, models etc. According to Lefebvre (1991, p.116), representations of space are about the history of ideologies. These histories can be studied by looking at how plans of a space changed over time. *Representation of Space* is conceptualized space without life, simply an abstraction. This level of space design is the one predominantly experienced by design students. A space of calculations, geometric and the visual, although abstract, is the language of architects and designers; tied to the production of those spaces and the order in which the production occurs. Intervention or inception occurs at the time of realisation or construction (Lefebvre 1991, p.116). For example, blueprints and plans but also the earth, the world and the cosmos.

Spatial Practice (perceived space) is Lefebvre's third and final interpretation. There are three different levels of space, from very abstract, crude, natural space (absolute space) to more complex spatialities whose significance is socially produced (social space). Social space is a social product. Every society produces its own social space. The production of social space is fundamental to the reproduction of society (its social control) [e.g. Soviet Union failed to produce a socialist space]. Spatial practice is what we do and although this might seem obvious, it is considerably different to how space is conceived by architects, and planners. Rather than seeing spatial practice as an activity that creates space, it is seen as producing space; as spatial practice is ordered and spaces themselves are ordered through representations of space like drawings and blueprints. Historical representation of space was an exclusive activity undertaken by priests, mathematicians, architects, composers, artists and economists and so on, but not workers. Lefebvre (1991, p.140) provides an example in the invention of the perspective in landscape painting (Renaissance) and the sense those paintings created of a 'true space'. Spatial practice embraces production and reproduction (Lefebvre, 1991, p.140). For example, roads connecting towns, towns, waterways trough towns and cities

A multitude of things are expressed in spatial terms, from nature's physical space to manmade spaces, even mental space and social space. Social space is the realm in which the 'cultural life' of society is enacted. As described by Lefebvre, space is produced by social interaction, imposes itself on its users and in turn shapes society. Space encourages and discourages certain forms of behaviour and interaction and gives form to social structures

and ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991). A concern with space has been the preoccupation of many thinkers dating back to pre-Socrates.

More recently *The Production of Space* has influenced spatial theories in several disciplines including theorists, practitioners and educators of urban studies, architecture and design. To Lefebvre, all social space is produced. The only space that is not produced is nature itself (if not modified). This space (nature) sits within a complex grid that constitutes social reality and is beyond re-capture. Lefebvre's work is that of an activist. He calls for the recovery of 'authentic' spaces that neither commodify nor oppress. In addition he is calling for new and existing spaces, like buildings, living spaces and community places to be re-looked in relation to finding the truth and to reconceptualise lived spaces. Lefebvre's philosophy seeks to create awareness of social space as produced by the state and by capitalism. In his view, if we don't reconceptualise spaces, capitalism will create space that turns us all into labourer-consumers and the world into pure resource (Lefebvre, 1991).

Symbolic Space

There are several theories exploring how designers understand human interpretations of the environment (and built environments). Semiotic, phenomenological and narrative theories examine the use of language, human interaction and constructed meaning relevant to under-standing human interpretations of environments (Ganoe, 1999, p.3). Lefevbre (1991) in *The Production of Space* discusses the importance of recognising that built environments are analysed as cultural constructions that can be read and interpreted as having different meanings. Similarly to social space and its connection to lived action, semiotics is based on symbolic meanings communicated between cultures and individuals, where as phenomenology emphasises on individuals' experiences, feelings and thought processes. Each of these theories contributes a different dimension to a broad understanding of the human interpretation of environments, including built environments and spaces (Ganoe, 1999). Ganoe (1999, p.4) suggests that narratives provide a complete structure which combines phenomenology and semiotics.

Interiority is linked to feminine beings and the stereotype view of interior design is that of a feminised activity. But why are females more drawn to this profession? Females have a deep desire for connectedness and inclusion which is achieved by the recognition of an underlying connectedness to others, the objects of knowledge and to the world and sensitivity to the connectedness of the inner mind (Havenhand, 2004). Female self-identity is developed through identification connections to everyday experiences. Women have a tendency to overlook dichotomies and recognise connections rather than differences. Design processes undertaken in this feminist perspective are likely to blur role distinctions between designer and client and designer and user. This perspective promotes closer spatial or visual connections between spaces, interprets diverse kinds of spaces and combines both subjective and objective information.

Interiority – We Live in a between the Exterior and the Interior

In 1985, C.J. Hewlett called for 'a theory of human nature unique to inhabitation that is sensitive to human beings as psychological phenomena rather than objects and can deal with life in its wholeness as well as its fragments' (Hewlett, 1995 p.11, Ganoe, 1999, p.1). Aware

of the limitations interior design offers to the experience of inhabitation, Hewlett suggested developing a greater understanding by applying a variety of approaches to interior design. In his view, one way of achieving a better outcome would include 'altering the consciousness of the designer' to aim for a design that challenges the imagination and offers emotional rewards regardless of its pragmatic duty (Hewlett, 1985, p.10). He further stated that interior design's most serious purposes are not visual, technological, object oriented, or materialistic, but rather those of interiority. Interiority can be defined as a process within a person that reflects an individual's unique awareness of the world and a psychological relationship to the world that is meaningful in ways specific to individual consciousness. Such processes include the need to inwardly reflect on one's own life experience and to understand this experience in a way that is supported by language, allowing for communication of personal experience with others (Ganoe, 1999, p.2, Parry, 1991).

Background to the Case Study

The implementation of this case study is a result of students identifying a lack of cognitive process of how knowledge is used in current interior design teaching methods, particularly in the theory content related to creating interior spaces. The existing teaching and learning strategy at the Queensland College of Art (QCA) interior design program caters for a student centred approach in all design and project courses. Even within the student centred courses, project based learning is not delivered in the true sense but is rather a mix of studio based work and lectures working on interior focused projects. The projects are often 'real life' projects with 'real clients' with a strong vocational focus. Furthermore, the majority of projects that have been undertaken by the students focus on a narrow spectrum of interior design areas in commercial design or residential design and have traditionally had a strong industry skill focus.

Case Study

A study taken up by three final year students as their final project generated much discussion in the design studio. These students were intrigued by my readings of Lefebvre and other philosophers and my research interest in understanding how spaces can be designed in more meaningful ways. The students used theory on space design to go beyond the current method of designing studio projects. Faced with uncertainty entering the interior design industry at the end of their degree, the students were hoping to become better informed designers by underpinning their knowledge with a framework based on theory. After three weeks of intensive reading and discussion of Lefevbre's *The Production of Space*, readings by Bruno Latour and Peter Sloterdijk and revisiting reading on narrative theory, phenomenology and semiotics, the students adapted their final individual projects to allow a new approach to challenge and question existing design thinking. The aim was to investigate if and how their consciousness will change with greater theoretical knowledge and lead to question their designs to offer more meaningful outcomes and to become aware of internal values (interiority), the meaning of space and how humans interpret environments.

The student project draws heavily on a study by Bruno Latour and on *The Production of Space* by Lefebvre. Latour and Yaneva (2008, p. 80) discuss that the problems with buildings is that they look desperately static. It seems almost impossible to grasp them as movement

and as a series of transformation. Although we know that a building once its built is not a static object; that it ages, that it is transformed by its users, modified by all that happens inside and outside and can transform beyond recognition, we fail to see it. Whenever we see a building, and an interior space, it is fixed in real time. Latour and Yaneva (2008) blame the power of the perspective (invented in the Renaissance) as a possible factor to give the idea of buildings as static objects. In fact, computer generated models of buildings are not any different. 3D rendered images of spaces give the illusion of a perfect interior, but where are the angry clients and their conflicting demands? Where are the many constraints from building and planning laws inserted? Where are the budget limitations visible (Latour and Yaneva, 2008, p.80)? Continuous movement (what makes a building) can according to Latour and Yaneva (2008, p.81) only be observed if we had a series of successive freeze frames documented over the lifespan of a building. Equipped with the background readings of *The Production of Space*, where Lefebvre discusses space as social space and previously acquired knowledge of the narrative theory, the student chose to monitor and document a familiar space over the semester. The emphasis was to understand the human interpretation of the environment, how the space is used and interacted with and how it changes over time. This was achieved by setting up a camera (just as Latour suggested) which recorded still images of the space every hour over twenty weeks.

The space was very familiar to the student – her family's living room. It had been a much lived in space and had not experienced any transformation for many years. It was a space where the family gathered, the social hub of the house. The space was furnished with an eclectic mix of furnishings, fixtures and ornaments. The student described the space as a creative composition that inspires, energises, fosters togetherness and feels like home. As the main social space in the domestic dwelling, the room was also used as the music room. It housed a grand piano and several string instruments. This family likes to get together and play music on Sunday afternoons. The space was semi open to the kitchen and dining area but private and enclosed enough to be private. The furniture had been arranged to suit the layout of the room, functional but not in any way innovative. The 54 square metre room was divided by the grand piano, which was placed adjacent to the large window overlooking the gardens. The remainder of the space was furnished with a lounge suite, coffee table and lots of bookshelves full of books. Its timber floor was partly covered with an oriental carpet. The walls, if not covered by bookshelves, displayed an assortment of artwork, ranging from oil paintings to etchings and photographs. There is plenty of daylight which is supplemented with dimmable lights.

The objective was to monitor the use of the room and to record movement in the space and interaction with the space over ten weeks for 24 hours a day in phase one and again for ten weeks in phase two. At the end of the ten weeks, the student put together a story board highlighting the daily rituals of her family's life. The freeze frames revealed what was anti-cipated and predicted, a social space with people coming and going, parties, music gatherings, quiet reading times, coffee times, conversation time and emptiness, a much used space, a much loved space. Changing the perception of a space depends on what we know, what we see, what we experience. Does the student have the same perception about the space as prior to her experiment? Did it change her consciousness by inwardly reflecting on her own life experience and connect it with this experience? And how would she re-design this space if given the chance? These are some of the questions the student tried to answer in the second phase of her project.

The second phase of her project allowed her to address the perceived shortcomings (if in fact there were any) of the space and re-design the space. Firstly she re-created the space as a visual representation using computer aided three dimensional design software. Any media was available to the student but she selected to use media she was most familiar with - 3D Max. By doing so, she now created a *Representation of Space*, Lefebvre's second level of interpreting space - a conceptualised space, a space without life, simply an abstraction. As outlined previously, this level of space is the one predominantly experienced by design students and has the danger of being interpreted as an empty volume that needs filling. To minimise the danger, the student felt she would benefit from working in the actual space with her computer and project her visuals on a wall in the living room, which allowed the family to comment and critique. Equipped with the research findings and informed by theory, the student tried to re-design the space by critically question how we inhabit space. She looked at how the client lives in the space by determining the different functions within the space and attempted to deliberately modify the existing space into separate spaces with specific activities – conversation, reading and music, as these were the three dominant activities monitored during the ten weeks observation. As the emphasis was on process and not on a finished product, the spaces were regarded as temporary spaces, interchangeable without much work. Her experiment involved to change the dynamic of the room by changing the zones. In her 3D model, she changed the location of the two zones (lounge area and music area). The lounge area was now near the large window overlooking the garden and the music area was where the lounge was. A third change involved moving all bookshelves with content to divide the room in half. In a way, the bookshelves acted as a wall, a room divider and visually separated the two activities. She rendered the drawing using materials and colours true to the original design. The finished fly-through was then projected onto a wall in the living room, allowing the users to experience the transformed space for one week. The third and final stage involved physically re-arranging the space. This was achieved by changing the layout according to the blueprint and to monitor and document the space for a further ten weeks using freeze frames.

Conclusion and Reflection on the Case Study

As practitioners we solve the design problems for humans who use and inhabit the space. We consider their needs, whether functional, social, psychological or environmental by understanding how to use research to help identify and clarify the relationship between human behaviour and the built environment. As a design project we can probably conclude that the case study was a failure. There were far too many limitations to the study, including the time frame which didn't allow enough time to monitor any significant change. But this was not purely a designing activity. This project was of an experimental nature, a learning experience to gain a sense of agency within the act of designing; the agency interior design potentially has in the world. This experience changed how this student thought about the practice of interior design. In essence what this student learned or what this exercise did was to ontologically chance how the student thinks about designing space. This student shifted her way of thinking and in a sense underwent a personal transformation in relation to how she interacted with interior design projects. She changed from her previous applied design approach (designing a space and place people and objects in it) to one which enabled established theories and methods to inform an approach that connected people and space.

During the entire design phase, the student acknowledged that design thinking as a skill is not exclusive to those with design training. Every day we are all faced with design decisions in everything we do, from selecting the clothes we wear to how we arrange our desk. With respect to built spaces, space is produced and reproduced by humans in which they make their lives (Lefebvre, 1991). Space is produced by the people who occupy it and influenced by those who design and produce it. Although this project was of hypothetical nature, the student's aim was to proof that if spaces are social spaces; does it matter if the layout changes significantly? Is it important if the visual connection of the functions within the space is lost? Would the influence of the designer have any impact at all on how people interact with their environment? Or is the 'social interaction' of a space so powerful that any given space will allow to be read as a social space, even if it is a representation of space?

In the final weeks of the semester the student re-visited her original project, a commercial space. The brief had not changed and the client was anxious to see the final design proposal. However, the last 20 weeks had changed this student's thinking and she was not able to engage with the already commenced design project. Instead, she wrote a return brief to the client and proposed significant changes. By looking at her research, by confronting her own inner self and by critically analyse established theories on space design, the student changed her approach to the design process and critically questioned how we inhabit spaces and how much the people themselves produce the space.

'Buildings don't function as a finished object but rather as a special process, open to whatever use it may be put to indeterminate future, not as a container of solids but as a facilitators of flows' (Grosz, 2001, p. 165).

While interior design continues to be without a clear identity and deemed by many to be inferior to architecture, more effort needs to be made to elevate its status and present itself as a discipline able to confront change. The direction of interior design needs to be a focus away from professional identity to one which allows the discovery of a larger sense of self and ones place in the world to cultivate an informed citizenry amongst design students capable of leading change. Its project needs to be redirected by significantly strengthening the theoretical position of interior design education and re-evaluating studio practice. Moreover, the types of projects considered important to facilitate student learning need to be reconsidered. Changing our perception of space depends on what we know, what we see, what we experience and the nature of the world we want to create. We need to depend more on theory to be able to think critically in order to bring new understanding to how we practice. While any change seems threatening, it is necessary. The world in which we live, how we live, confront many and major challenges. We can not continue to be and be as we are. How we are, how we dwell, how we live are all implicated in interior design. Hence the nature of interior design education has to change. One of these changes is how space is understood and engaged.

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Petra studied architectural design in Switzerland with a major in Interior Design and later worked as an interior designer in Switzerland for 2 years mainly doing corporate design work. She moved to Australia, completing a degree in visual arts majoring in interior design at Griffith University and later a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Queensland. She worked for Griffith University Facilities Management for 11 years designing for educational facilities and has also undertaken other work mainly in corporate design and retail design work. Prior to becoming an academic member of staff, Petra worked as a sessional teacher in the Queensland College of Art (Griffith University). In January 2007 she was appointed as a full-time lecturer in the college. Petra is a member of the Design Institute of Australia.

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