
INTERIORITY: DESIGN AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF SPACE

Interiority, or the quality

Interiority, or the quality of interior space, is a concept of boundedness and openness, both physically and culturally. Physically, interiority is the product of boundaries; culturally, it implies the presence of the other, or the exterior, to create the conditions that render it inside. The presence of the exterior demands a relationship between that which is outside and that which is inside. On the one hand, design professionals work with interiority as a space created and conditioned by the exterior—by a building’s walls, its shape, or its skin. In *Complexity and Contradiction*, Robert Venturi writes that “designing from the outside in, as well as the inside out, creates necessary tensions, which help make architecture. Since the inside is different from the outside, the wall—the point of change—becomes an architectural event.”¹ On the other hand, designers work with interiority as a space that itself can condition a building’s shape. For interiors, the wall is not only an event; it is the beginning of a double-sided boundary. Martin Heidegger writes, “A boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.”² For many designers, the inside has been considered integral with the outside. Frank Lloyd Wright considered them to be integrated. “In Organic Architecture, then, it is quite impossible to consider the building as one thing, its furnishings another and its setting and environment still another. The Spirit in which these buildings are conceived sees all these together at work as one thing.”³ Just as an exterior can have an impact upon interiority, interiority can impact exteriority or exist independently. The emergence of interior architecture as a distinct field results in part from the twentieth-century phenomenon of build-outs and renovations, where the design of a building’s skin and core is separated from the design of its habitable space. Linda Pollari and Richard Somol write that interior architecture tends to question the limits of space and relates “the vocabulary of the interior—‘wallpaper,’ ‘carpets,’ excessive ‘material palettes’ to inform diverse projects and practices.”⁴

In architecture, concepts can either precede or follow projects or buildings. In other words, a theoretical concept may be either applied to a project or derived from it.

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The relationship between the exterior and the interior, open to such diverse interpretation as design “from the inside out” or design from the “outside in” is changing the breadth of interior design education and the practice of interiors. Olivier Leblois, architect, furniture designer, and professor at L’Ecole

Speciale d'Architecture and Camondo in Paris, writes that the main point is that there is no "interior" architecture and no "exterior" architecture; (interior) architecture is a spirit and way of feeling, seeing, living; the question is not the difference between the exterior and the interior, but what resides in all the places that are in between. He cites Foucault, who said that one's identity is not in status, fact, and knowledge, but in prospect, trajectory, and perspective.⁵ Others define interior architecture as the "holistic creation, development, and completion of space for human use or humanistically conceived space following Vitruvius's dicta—firmness, commodity, and delight."⁶ Interior architecture is no longer limited in practice by medium or location (the interior), but is now characterized by a more multidisciplinary agenda. John Kurtich and Garret Eakin, in *Interior Architecture*, set forth a threefold definition of the practice of interior architecture: first, integrated finished interiors completed with a building; second, completion of space in an existing enclosure; and third, the preservation, renovation, or adaptive re-use of buildings with an interior focus.⁷ This expanded description identifies emerging areas of expertise with requisite professionals. In practice, the arena between the inside and the outside is being shared by capable transdisciplinary architects and interior architects as its very boundaries become permeated.

Culturally, the "limits" of the interior are transforming in definition and in practice as well. The field of interior design is being redefined by the development of cyberspace, with a whole new type of space to be considered. As William J. Mitchell points out, "You can enter and exit virtual places like rooms." Through the computer, endless communities of virtual rooms can be entered, experienced, and moved through without the restraints of gravity. On-line, individuals and groups use virtual space and spatial metaphors such as "chat rooms" to inform and entertain themselves, even though they are removed from each other in proximity. Cyberspace takes shape depending upon how we use it: "Depending on the interactions that interest you—it's the pick-up bar, the seminar room, the mardi-gras, the shopping mall, the library, or the office." We can now access and interact on the trading floor, experience and contribute to the growth and decline of companies on screen, explore the virtual Guggenheim and visit cities long ago lost to the accumulation of civilization.⁸

Both the physical and the virtual bounds of interiority are expanding and opening, as is the understanding of what constitutes design and who is a designer.