

# **Looking into the Modern Interior:** **History, Theory and Discipline in Education and Practice**

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## **Abstracts**

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### **The Emergence of Interior Urbanism: John Portman's Peachtree Centre in Atlanta**

John Portman's Peachtree Centre is a multi-use development of consisting of three atrium hotels, a commercial mall, office towers, carparking, leisure facilities and the world's largest wholesale merchandise market, most of it linked by a network of above-ground walkways, and all of it in the heart of downtown Atlanta. In architectural terms, Portman is best known for developing the atrium hotel type, beginning with his 1967 Hyatt Regency Atlanta, one of the first buildings of the Peachtree Centre. Although vast public interior spaces are one of the defining conditions of urban spatial modernity, and while we might marvel and wonder over the particular spatial drama and kinetics of Portman's atriums, the significance of these vast interiors needs to be considered in urban terms.

This paper will discuss what it might mean to understand interior spaces in terms of the urbanism they produce. It will discuss how the sequencing of interior spaces of the Peachtree Centre produces particular kinds of urban subjectivity and experience. It will link this analysis to the wider forces that were acting on American cities including Atlanta from the postwar period, such as the development of the interstate freeway system, and the economic and social factors influencing suburbanization. These factors will be considered in light of strategies for the reinhabitation of the cores of cities, strategies which the Peachtree Centre exemplifies. The paper will utilize the author's own in-depth photographic recording of the Peachtree Centre, and in particular the atrium hotels.

The focus on Portman for an explication of interior urbanism relates to questions of disciplinary focus. Portman has largely been ignored in architectural scholarship, even though his designs, and especially his hotel atriums, received much attention in professional architecture and interiors journals at the time of their completion. Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles was made 'theoretically' famous by Fredric Jameson and Mike Davis in being called into the debate about postmodern urban space, yet no developed spatial account of the effects of Portman's work, or other urban complexes of its kind, has eventuated.

The concept of interior urbanism has the potential to develop an analytic to link the effects of pervasive interiority to urban questions, thereby recovering for critical analysis a range of architectural and urban projects that have been overlooked within conventional disciplinary debates. These projects are important precursors to contemporary architecture and urban thinking in new city developments in such places and China, India and the Middle East.

Trevor Keeble, Kingston University, London, UK.

### **Table Stories: History, Meaning and Narrative in Contemporary Homemaking**

The *Telling Tales* exhibition at the V&A in London suggested that 'story-telling' provides creative inspiration for a number of leading contemporary designers. Drawing upon the work of international designers such as Tord Boontje, Maarten Baas, and Jurgen Bey, the exhibition argued that through decorative devices, historical allusions and choice of materials, these designers manifested a thematic preoccupation with 'fantasy, parody and a concern with morality'.

This paper is concerned to suggest that these issues are fundamental to an understanding of contemporary homemaking. It considers the practices and processes of homemaking through an analysis of the acquisition and 'meaning' of domestic objects and is concerned to understand homemaking as a 'narrative' practice of design. Considering the ways in which objects are designed, redesigned, bought, given and inherited, the paper seeks to uncover how the home is designed through time in order to constitute a narrative of personal, marital and familial identity. Taking the objects of the dining table as its focus, the paper will consider the ways in which these narrative processes of 'homemaking' shift and evolve over time and across generations. In this sense the paper seeks to explore the significance of 'biography' and 'story-telling' to the domestic interior and domestic design.

Considering plates, table mats, and napkin rings, the paper situates the domestic interior across the disciplines of design and material culture studies. It seeks to understand the diverse ways in which objects coalesce within the home to create an interior in order to better understand the manner in which inhabitation is in itself an 'expanded' and continuing mode of design. Importantly, the paper seeks to explore the complex notions of public and private that are revealed in these domestic design practices, and the ways in which the domestic interior potentially materialises both memory and forgetting.

*Table Stories* is part of a broader interpretation and educational project entitled *Home from Home* which is currently being developed at Dorich House Museum as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

**Penny Sparke, Kingston University, London, UK**

### **The Garden Inside: Plants and Flowers in Modern Interiors**

This paper sets out to provide the beginnings of an intellectual framework for a study of the above. By addressing the relationship of the natural world – plants and flowers in particular - with the spatial, material, cultural and psychological nature of the designed modern interior it will aim to offer an approach to a study of that subject that extends beyond existing accounts of it which have, for the most part, been focused on architectural space; the role of designed and decorative art objects in the interior; the emergence of professional interior design practice or the formation of identities in the consumed/inhabited interior. While the underpinning historical frame of this subject will necessarily be wide, spanning the era of industrialisation to the present day, covering, that is, the emergence of the add-on conservatory to the contemporary practice of including large trees and extensive planting inside the atria of large public buildings, the paper will focus on a discussion of a number of key themes and methodological challenges that arise from it.

The starting point for this discussion is the premise that, with the onset of industrialisation in the western world, the gap that quickly developed between the constructed material world and the natural world stimulated a need to re-align them such that plants and flowers began to be brought inside both private and public spaces. This in turn brought into being numerous new artefacts, from the elite seventeenth-century tulipiere to Frank Lloyd Wright's 'weed-holder' and beyond, and, with the growth of empires and the expansion of foreign travel, coincided with the importation of 'exotic' plants and flowers from distant lands and the intensification of the study of horticulture and the cultivation of plants and flowers.

Given the scope of this subject this paper will aim only to briefly offer some thoughts on a few of the themes that it brings into focus, primary among them the implications of the tension that existed between the choice of using either plants or flowers in the modern interior and their significance for a new way of 'reading' it. These include the modernists' preference for exotic plants, including cacti, rubber plants and 'Swiss cheese' plants, in their interior spaces which contrasts with the decorators' preference for flowers – especially lilies and roses; the deep cultural symbolism of plants versus the novelty and memory-free nature of imported exotic plants; and the ephemeral nature of cut flowers against the extended life of the potted plant.

Nancy Blossom, Washington State University, USA

## A Reflection on the Historic Narrative of Interior Design

Current scholarship bemoans a vague understanding of interior design as a profession.<sup>1</sup> A reflection on the structure of the historic narrative of the profession is one way to explain this vagueness. This paper explores the profession of interior design by examining the complexity of the periods that shaped the practice and subsequently our understanding of the practice of interior design. The groundwork for the profession of interior design was laid in the late 1800s but the bulk of development in the field spans twentieth century modernism and post modernism. Modern and postmodern are complicated terms, representing multiple modes of understanding. On the one hand modernism is understood as an idealized aesthetic on another as period of social change. Post modern, is simply understood as “after modern”, but scholarship suggests that postmodernism also defies a singular definition. Postmodern theory constructs an image of modernism. The tendency to see things in seemingly obvious, binary, contrasting categories is usually associated with modernism.<sup>2</sup> The tendency to dissolve binary categories and expose their arbitrary cultural co-dependency is associated with postmodernism. This position acknowledges the competing views of history and tradition and shifts away from universal histories, the grand narratives, to local explicitly contingent histories, the mini narratives.

It is the hypothesis of this paper that by turning our attention to the mini-narratives of interior design in the twentieth century, an understanding emerges that suggests the value of the heterogeneity embedded in its history. To discuss this more clearly, I note some of the binary representations of the profession that have dominated traditional histories of interior design. Next I posit a framework of binary oppositions and finally I challenge the clarity of this framework by examining the mini narratives of individuals who are recognized in the history of interior design.

As an example, C. Ray Smith (1986), in the influential text, *Interior Design in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, explains the birth of the “profession”<sup>3</sup> of interior design in America through the designs of Elsie de Wolfe and Frank Lloyd Wright. Smith presents the work of each as dichotomous, that of de Wolfe as traditional, Wright as innovative, de Wolfe as intuitive, and Wright as methodical, scientific. A closer reading of Smith’s work reveals the binary oppositions in notions of gender, ability, and professional trajectories. That both might have influenced men and women, demonstrated progressive genius or begat modernism is lost on Smith.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars have adopted this approach to the history of interior design as well as commented on it.<sup>5</sup> Women who followed Elsie are often referred to as “dilettantes,” that is someone who is interested in a specialized field of knowledge but who has only a superficial understanding of it. It can be interpreted as “less than” and often is. Interior decoration is often interpreted as less than interior design, and interior design interpreted as less than architecture. By exploring key ideological and cultural forces that mediate our understanding of the practice of interior design, this paper challenges these interpretations.

<sup>1</sup> Most recently Martin (2008) has led the criticism of the public perception of the profession, but the discussion has been ongoing. Drab, T. (2002, 1997) reviewed the impact of magazines on the perception of Interior Design as a profession. Birdsong and Lawlor (2001) discussed contemporary perceptions of professionalism. Dickson and White (1997, 1993) offered a model to shape the public perceptions of the value of professionally designed interior environments and challenged practitioners and academics alike to embrace research as a foundational component of the profession.

<sup>2</sup> Modernity is about order; that is rationality and rationalization in pursuit of order. The more ordered a society is, the better it will function. Modern societies rely on continually establishing a binary opposition between "order" and "disorder" so that they can assert the superiority of "order." In western culture disorder is understood as "the other"--defined in relation to other binary oppositions. Thus anything non western, non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, is understood as "disorder," and has to be controlled or contained in the ordered, rational modern society.

<sup>3</sup> In this case Smith defines de Wolfe as professional because she offered services to others for fees; this definition is not consistent with the emerging definition of professionalism in the early twentieth century. Wright, in fact, although recognized as an architect also falls short of that definition of professionalism, which requires a person to acquire both education and training in a specialized body of knowledge to be considered a professional. While Wright trained under other architects, his formal education in the field was limited.

<sup>4</sup> De Wolfe’s first interior demonstrates many of the qualities of the modern aesthetic relative to the Victorian interior it replaced.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, McKellar and Sparke (2004), Sparke (1995), and Turpin (2007, 2001)

**Patrick Lee Lucas, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA.**

**‘Sarah Hunter Kelly: Designing the House of Good Taste.’**

New York designer Sarah Hunter Kelly (1896-1982) represents but one of a number of interior designers working in the mid-century when interior design emerged and stabilized as a profession distinct from both architecture and interior decoration – and when the “Modern” interior surfaced as a design choice. Her work allows a glimpse into a world shaped by men and explains how professional women encountered and retooled the design enterprise in the decades after World War II. With an international career, which featured interiors in both France and England and in major cities in the United States, Kelly worked throughout the nation on residential projects for a wide variety of clients, moving in social circles not unlike her design peers, such as Elsie de Wolfe, Edith Wharton, Rose Cumming, and Eleanor McMillan Brown. During her career, Kelly continued to amass clients throughout the world and thus developed a reputation as a quiet leader in the design profession, as suggested in her *New York Times* profile (1981). As further evidence of her growing prominence as a designer, in 1964, Modernist architect Edward Durrell Stone teamed with Kelly to design the “House of Good Taste” for the World’s Fair of that year, held in New York City. In an oral interview by the producers of the fair, Stone and Kelly talked about Modernism and forecasted some of the trends in residential design (NY World’s Fair audio recording, 1964), suggesting that her voice literally informed others about the importance of interior design to modern American life.

Alongside the Stone/Kelly Modern collaboration, the 1964 World’s Fair also featured a “contemporary” and “traditional” house to amplify the differences between Modern design and the other two genre. The interview extends to the various designers of these additional structures who also speculate about interiors in the residential sphere. Captured in this single exhibit (and in the rare voice recording that animates the various designers and their intentions) are the very tensions that both strung together and pulled apart the various professionals and dilettantes who claimed the responsibility for interiors at mid-century and the decades following.

Using discourse analysis, I will interpret Kelly’s designs for the Modern house interior in the 1964 “House of Good Taste” exhibit in the context of the exterior Stone designed, as well as the adjoining “contemporary” and “traditional” houses, both representative of Synchronous stylistic oeuvre. In doing so, I will place Kelly’s contributions in relationship to other interior design practitioners, because so little is known about Kelly’s work that very few acknowledge her presence among her design peers. Significantly, I will define what is meant by a “Modern” interior at the middle of the twentieth century – using a convenient trio of houses designed and fabricated to illustrate that very point – with the idea that a more concrete meaning will aid design historians in grappling with what some consider to be one of the critical defining moments in the creation of the interior design profession.

Jan Jennings, Cornell University, USA

### Le Corbusier's "Naked": "Absolute Honesty" and (Exhibitionist) Display in Bathroom Settings

In 1929 Le Corbusier described the modernist principle of "absolute honesty" as "naked". This paper examines 1) the language and meaning of "naked" in relationship to bathroom design as an important aspect of twentieth-century modernism, and 2) the ways in which plumbing fixtures, the most utilitarian of objects, became worthy of museum-like display and exhibitionist behavior.

Le Corbusier's "absolute honesty," a reiterative interpretation of the British and American Arts and Crafts "honesty of materials", also extended to objects of daily use in domestic interiors.<sup>1</sup> Le Corbusier's "naked" denoted a lack of disguise in which an object's true intention was not concealed.

For much of the twentieth century, bathrooms could be understood as manifestations of historical limitations and social codes, but early in the twenty-first century modernists' ideals pushed beyond the boundaries of this framework. Naked is now interpreted as an archetypical design practice in apartments and hotels in which one or more bathroom fixtures are visible through transparent partitions, or a fixture is located out of the context of a private space, such as a bathtub located in a bedroom.

The paper develops a chronological sequence of the various interpretations of naked in bathroom design, including planning, aesthetics, functional requirements and rhetorical devices directed to consumers.

The elevation of an individual fixture as an object of beauty worthy of exhibition began in plumbing manufacturers' trade catalogs where bathrooms were illustrated as ostentatious, capacious and luxurious. In 1939 one of American Standard's vignettes exhibited recesses for both tub and toilet, a canopy over the tub to "add a note of distinction" and the use of rounded walls and partitions associated with Moderne styling.<sup>2</sup> By mid-century Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses included the separation of the toilet from a bathroom's space. In roadside motels ordinary Americans experienced the separation of fixtures into independent niches and rooms to increase flexibility and efficiency. In 1994 Philippe Starck introduced a new minimalist guise for Duravit fixtures, ensuring that a toilet remained an objet d' art.

When The Standard Hotel in Manhattan opened in 2009, it joined a long line of boutique hotels with an open plan bathroom. Until recently, however, people's behaviors in these rooms remained as privately conventional as bathrooms used to be. Standard's "wall-to-wall floor-to-ceiling windows", "massive peek-a-boo showers", and oversized tubs seemingly encouraged guests to prance around in the buff. This urban voyeurism can be interpreted as the next step in a society that has been "peeping and poking" into private lives.<sup>3</sup> This paper, however, acknowledges that naked as the lack of disguise began by design as a "museum effect" that has evolved into a bed/bath space where nothing and no one is concealed.

<sup>1</sup> Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 150.

<sup>2</sup> *American Standard Catalog* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: American Standard and Radiator Sanitary Corporation, May 1939), divider between 188-89.

<sup>3</sup> Geraldine Baum, "Voyeurs Have a Whole New Perch in New York," *LATimes.com* (Sept. 17, 2009): n.p. accessed Sept. 24, 2009.

**Barbara Penner, Bartlett School of Architecture, UK**

### **Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom*, and The Limits of Architectural Graphic Standards**

Hayden White once noted, "Every discipline [is] constituted by what it forbids its practitioners to do." This talk adapts White's statement to argue that disciplines are equally constituted by what they allow practitioners to speak about or how they are allowed to speak. Bathrooms and toilets test the boundaries of disciplinary limits like no other subject. Toilets are not invisible in art, design, and interior discourse - far from it - but they are spoken about in very particular ways in order to contain their taboo aspects.

This talk considers the ways in which toilets have been "cleansed" within architecture through the modernist language of formalism, graphic standards, and expert discourse. It takes as its main case study the Cornell University professor, Alexander Kira and his unique study, *The Bathroom* (1966; reprinted 1976). Kira fully understood that the "taboos and guilts" around his subject were the greatest obstacle to *The Bathroom's* success and he adopted a range of strategies to contain their psychosexual associations and the anxieties they provoked. Specifically, he sought to neutralize his subject through language and representational techniques. As Kira sought to reach a professional audience with his ideas about design, his technical drawings and studies broadly conform to the conventions set out in architectural "bibles", handbooks like *Architects' Data* or *Architectural Graphic Standards*, especially the standardized manner in which they depict interiors (residential and public toilet facilities), normative human dimensions, reach, and movement.

But Kira also believed that cultural and behavioral considerations deserved to be given equal weight as any anatomical and ergonomic data, arguing that was counter-productive to ignore them as toilet "producers" and "purchasers" (by which he meant architects and builders) regularly did. In this sense, *The Bathroom* illuminates the complexities one faces when one moves away, as Kira sought to do, from a strictly formal approach. Kira found himself in the somewhat contradictory position of using functionalist tools to rethink designs which he recognized were not purely (or even mainly) functional, and of trying to accommodate existing social beliefs and anxieties at the same time as reforming them. Kira's work raises a question which remains pertinent today, when bathroom design particularly in public spaces still seems to be an afterthought. How does one redesign a taboo?

Jean Edwards, University of Louisiana, USA

## The Maison de Verre: In the Tradition of the Parisian Urban Townhouse

The evolution of the *hôtel particulier* in Parisian urban architecture provides a context for analyzing the Maison de Verre, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century house designed by Pierre Chareau. Located in a historically upper-class residential neighborhood, the Maison de Verre in many ways represents an early Modern challenge to bourgeois housing conventions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris (Edwards, M. J. & Gjertson, W. G., 2008). It also reflects, however, the urban townhouse tradition as it evolved in Paris from the 16<sup>th</sup> century forward. This paper contends that the Maison de Verre shares particular features of the *hôtel particulier* type, and continues its tradition, albeit in 20<sup>th</sup> century guise.

### Methodology

To examine the Maison de Verre within the typology of the *hôtel particulier*, this paper compares and contrasts the house with characteristic features of developing Parisian hôtels from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Hôtel Lambert, a townhouse built on the Ile St. Louis by the architect Louis Le Vau and still inhabited, provides an instructive example for the comparison. The paper explores similarities and differences between 17<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century housing conventions in Paris as reflected in site organization, interior spatial planning and circulation, and the decorative schemes, including the use and placement of furniture and furnishings.

### Review of Literature

Neuman (1980) discusses the conditions and causes for the evolution of the *hôtel particulier* in Paris. He describes the most salient features of this typology, placing them within the cultural context of early 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris. (It is noteworthy that the Maison de Verre replaced all but the top floor of an 18<sup>th</sup> century townhouse, and thus was designed within its fixed parameters and existing site orientation). Blakemore (1997), also discussing the typical Parisian townhouse, identifies the Hôtel Lambert as an example of an “early use of asymmetrical planning” and cites Le Vau’s interest “in the dramatic” and his exploitation of “light and dark contrasts” (p. 161). Further analysis will show that these characteristics have parallels with the Maison de Verre, noted for its theatricality and the quality of light and shadow within its interior (Edwards & Gjertson, 2008). In both the Maison de Verre and the Hôtel Lambert the use of art is integral to the interior program. Henderson (1974) details the decorative paintings by Le Sueur as they were conceived for the Cabinet des Muses in the Hôtel Lambert. This paper compares and contrasts the themes of this interior painting scheme with the use and placement of art throughout the Maison de Verre.

### Summary

The Parisian *hôtel particulier* emerged as a distinct type as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Although “the term *hôtel* was originally restricted to houses of the nobility, while the word *maison* was applied to town mansions of the middle class, [this] distinction ... had broken down by the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century” (Neuman, p. 129). The Maison de Verre, a notable 20<sup>th</sup> century Parisian townhouse, can be seen in this context as an extension of the *hôtel particulier* tradition.

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**Scott Gleeson, Southern Methodist University, USA**

### **The Functional Beauty of the Miller House**

Richard Neutra's relationship to the machine has been described by architectural historians as one in which the architect "accepted the discipline of the machine without coming under its tyranny."<sup>1</sup> A close examination of one of Neutra's most paradigmatic works, the Miller House in Palm Springs, California, however, reveals that in order to overcome this dystopian relationship to the machine the architect radically reconfigured his concept of the human body according to the utopian and democratic rhetoric of the machine aesthetic. This reconfiguration of the relationship between modern technology and the body in Neutra's design practice began during earlier collaborations with neuropath and physical culturist Dr. Phillip Lovell on the doctor's L.A. home (the first modular steel frame home in America); yet, it was not until his introduction to Grace Miller, entrepreneur and certified instructor in the internationally popular Mensendieck System of Functional Exercise, that Neutra's ideas found their ultimate expression. Because Miller intended to use the home as both a private winter residence and a studio for Mensendieck instruction, the design of the home had to balance its private and public identities.

To meet her personal needs, Grace Miller required a cost effective use of space and materials, but to fulfill the requirements of the Mensendieck studio, the home needed adequate lighting, privacy, clean surfaces, and a continuous wall of mirrors where the students could view their own anatomy during instruction. The resulting structure, in addition to the architect's drawings and publicity photographs created by Julius Shulman, reflects the same paradoxical relationship between functionalism and aesthetic beauty experienced in the Mensendieck System, which promoted a notion of physical fitness based on repetitive, machine-like motions that prepared the body as an aesthetic object for the male gaze. Thus, in designing a home for the disciplined, machine-like body of Grace Miller and her students, Neutra constructed a concept of the home as a disciplinary structure where the body, fragmented by the dissecting power of the clinical gaze, becomes incorporated into a total system of mass-production and consumption. An examination of the home and its documentation chronicles a process that finally culminated in the disintegration of the architect and client's collective utopian fantasy and the fragmentation of their bodies as a result of a phenomenon referred to by Neutra as "phantomic extension."<sup>2</sup>

To support these conclusions I will draw from recent research by architectural historian Stephen Leet, technology historian Barry Brummett, and the theoretical writings of Michel Foucault, whose concept of the clinical gaze correlates closely to the dominant sign of the machine aesthetic, *transparency* (objectified in the Miller House in the form of glass, steel and reflective surfaces). Anatomical photographs from German and American Mensendieck publications will establish a basis for my arguments about changing concepts of the body and its violent penetration by architecture and machine culture.

<sup>1</sup> Ester McCoy, *Richard Neutra* (New York: Braziller, 1960), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Leet. *Richard Neutra's Miller House* (St. Louis: School of Architecture, Washington University, 2004), 134.

**Mary-Anne Beecher, University of Manitoba, Canada**

### **Before and After: Modern Interiors by Subtraction**

With the dawn of the modern era in American interiors came an often over-looked problem—that most interior spaces of the 1920s and 1930s were actually found in buildings that were characterized by the historicism and ornament of the previous Victorian era. In 1928, the *American Builder* magazine estimated that more than twenty million older American houses fell short of modern standards.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1920s, designers and the occupants of such spaces had both come to view them as totally unfashionable.

Given that this era is also defined by a period of economic hardship, demolishing out-of-date structures and beginning anew was not usually a viable option. Instead of a clean slate, therefore, persons designing modern interiors often had to focus their attention on processes of “modernization” that relied on subtractive processes. As a result, modern American interiors—especially those associated with middle-class America—can often be understood as pared down versions of a former design. The popularity of this *modernization process* sparked a movement in the U.S. that stimulated the sagging construction industry with a renewed interest in remodeling. The government and the building industry sponsored programs and contests to educate the public on the values of modernization.

Motivated primarily by the desire for individuality and/or an up-to-date aesthetic expression, the most common types of interior modernization included the addition or alteration of a fireplace and the modification of exterior and interior millwork. The replacement of light fixtures, hardware and less-fashionable color schemes could also be accomplished with relative ease.

Design publications promoted methods for achieving modernized interior spaces in a variety of ways, but the most common was the use of “before” and “after” images that communicated the possibility for the extreme transformation of space via the removal of unwanted elements. Photographs such as Elsie de Wolfe’s “before” and “after” images of her dining room at Washington Irving’s house demonstrated the power of subtraction well. By removing heavy millwork, dark colors and overly ornamented furniture, de Wolfe achieved the desirable effects of modernization without making a radical architectural intervention.

This paper will theorize the process by which some modern designed interiors originated from previously existing rooms by analyzing the potential significance of the use of subtractive processes to achieve effects that were commonly perceived as additive. Secondly, it will demonstrate how “before” and “after” photographs became a powerful tool for communicating a potential new role for interior design at a time when minimal economic resources were available to be used to achieve desired improvements. It will propose their use as tools to promote the perception of the interior designer as a “wizard” capable of creating change with minimal expenditure and effort. Finally, I will consider connections between the subtractive acts of “modernization,” the “before” and “after” photographs used to promote this process, and ultimately, the gendered meaning of the “make-over” that began in the 1920s and evolved over the twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup>“Remodeling Sketch Service Offered Free by *American Builder*,” *American Builder* 44(February, 1928): 96.

**Zamila Karimi, Southern Polytechnic State University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.**

***“Tradition is the tending of the fire, not the worship of the ashes.”***

The role of the modern interior is redefining itself in this era of globalization when boundaries blur amongst communities of diverse backgrounds to create new narratives and identities in a wide range of settings. The notion of regional influences, juxtaposed against cultural and religious attitudes are opportunities to explore and respond to with imagination and skill. The lack of knowledge and understanding about cross-cultural issues amongst professionals and educators often result in *pastiche i.e. stylistic* interventions rather than an intellectual inquiry and search for new forms of expression.

How can we as educators and professionals play an important role in addressing issues of cross-cultural diversity and traditional values in design? How can we develop new knowledge that is critical to the practice and teaching of Modern Interior Design in the context of *cultural amalgamation*? The topic is vast and requires many levels of approaches. However, this investigation narrows it to the study of contemporary Islamic religious buildings and their interiors in the western milieu and explores if there are underlying trends of historic precedence as well as contemporary materials and techniques that are successful within the context they exist.

“The resulting buildings are representations of Muslim communities in transition and raise wider issues about cultural heterogeneity and assimilation, and about hybrid forms and meanings. The architecture of the mosque provides a window on the nature of indigenous Islamic states, and on the dreams of the increasing numbers of recent Muslim migrants living in societies with more diverse backgrounds.”

Islamic Centers are built for Muslim communities in the West with a mandate of fulfilling not just the functional aspect of the community but also act as symbols of Muslim presence in the West. The underlying *concept of Unity* permeates Islamic buildings; there are complex geometrical and spatial relationships between the building’s exterior and interior. The notion of dematerialization of interior surfaces through lavish surface decoration incorporating geometrical and arabesque patterns in unison with calligraphic motifs creates a multifaceted experience that invokes all the senses. In contemporary Islamic interior spaces such complexity can be achieved with new materials, modern tools and technology of mass production. It can pave the way for a new type of Modern Interior that is based upon the essence of Islamic building heritage but within the regional context of where it is located. Thus, through specific examples in the West of such buildings I will share the various attitudes existing in the design and conceptualization of the interiors for such building types ranging from, “.... Neutral expression of pan-Islamism, in that it represents an attempt to employ an architectural style that will be accessible to all Muslims, regardless of their geographical origins,”

To “.... a systematic exploration of reinterpreted Islamic themes and motifs....”.

Design professionals and educators have a stake in how the history of Modern Interiors will unfold within the context of cross-cultural societies. Will we lead by intellectually engaging ourselves in defining and creating new forms of expression within the aspirations of our clients, or will we let *pastiche i.e. stylistic* interventions define the course?

**Morris Hylton, University of Florida, USA**

**Modern Design as Social Action: Remaking the Physical Environment of Education in Post-World War II Sarasota, Florida (The Sarasota Public School Program 1953-1960)**

The process and product of modern design was often framed as social action. Following World War I, European design practitioners, reacting to then unprecedented social upheaval and physical destruction among many other contextual forces, described their work as efforts to better society by improving the built environment<sup>1</sup> Though further shaped and redefined by changing economic, political, cultural, and other factors, modernism following the Second World War tended to retain an implicit—and in some instances explicit—social agenda, such as the Public Building Act and other programs of the United States General Service Administration in the 1950s through 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Postmodern scholars have challenged and, in some instances, dismissed this aspect of modernism as deliberate social engineering or, at best, naiveté.<sup>3</sup> However, recent scholarship in architectural history asserts the value in accepting these aspirations as a continuing questioning of the role of design in modern life and examining the social and political intentions of designers and others who shaped architecture and interior design during this period.<sup>4</sup> Exploring socio-political positions and motivations could enhance our understanding of modern interior design, the meanings and values assigned to it, and how these meanings and values have changed over time.<sup>5</sup>

Employing a case study analysis, this paper will present the theoretical framework, research methods, and outcomes of an examination of the socio-political intentions to remake the learning environment of post-World War II Sarasota, Florida. Confronted with the same increases in student enrollment felt around the country following the postwar baby boom, the Board of Public Instruction of Sarasota County commissioned four major additions and six new schools between 1953 and 1960, increasing classroom capacity by more than 75%.<sup>6</sup> Philip Hiss, the Board's chairman from 1954 to 1958, argued that innovative architectural school design was critical to correcting what he and others considered failures of the local school system. The subsequent building campaign engaged designers associated with what would later be defined as the "Sarasota School of Architecture," a regional design movement distinguished by the adaptation of modernism to the sub-tropical climate and culture of southern Florida's west coast.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example, Le Corbusier defined architecture as a "question of morality" in *Towards a New Architecture*. New York: Dover Publications, 1986 reprint of 1931 original published by J. Rodker, London.

<sup>2</sup> General Service Administration. *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*. Washington D.C.: General Service Administration, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> A recent example is Reinhold Martin's *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Examples include K. Michael Hays's Marxist analysis of Mies van der Rohes Barcelona Pavilion, "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta* (1984), pp.14-29 and Sara Williams Goldhagen (editor), *Louis Kahn's Situation Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Intentions in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Muldowney, Lorette Marie. *Sarasota County's School Building Program (1955-1960)*. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Master of Science in Architectural Studies Thesis, 1999, pp. 40-49.

<sup>7</sup> Howey, John. *The Sarasota School of Architecture, 1941-1966*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997.

**Baba: Inside the Czechoslovakian Werkbund Housing Estate**

For a new generation of designers of the newly formed Czechoslovakian state, Baba, once a Celtic hill and pilgrim's path, prominently hailed its position above the city of Prague; thus its eminent form offered the perfect vantage point for an instructive building program for both its residents and the public below. Purchased by the Czechoslovakian Werkbund in 1932, the site was reconceived by architect Pavel Janak as thirty-three residential plots democratically arranged in a checkerboard pattern to provide each homeowner with a vista of the city and its illustrious Prague Castle below. Politically minded, both the homeowners and designers of the Baba housing project were members of the Czechoslovakian Werkbund, practitioners of the New Architecture and Living movement and influenced by housing estates in neighboring countries; these qualifications made Prague's "academic" architects, mostly Social Democrats, hopeful that a solution to Prague's housing question would be provided. Twelve thousand people attended the opening, however, Baba's prominence was immediately shrouded by a damaging critical dismissal by members of the radical left.

Aesthetically, the white geometric forms and minimalist interiors denoted the constitutive features of modernity, but in its program it had neglected the goal of collectivity. The Baba estates had eventuated into individualized domestic spaces that did not adhere to the modernism's objectives of universal standardization and collective spaces. The spaces were not designed to be generic and adaptable interiors, but complicated the modernist narrative through the distinct design programs. In its individuality, the housing estate ostensibly neglected to function as a social experiment determined to structurally transform the public sphere, as architecture and design were expected to perform in a new nation-state. By altering these primary lessons, the once exemplary status of the prominent hillside was reconstituted as merely a bourgeoisie island adorned with stylistic platitudes. This early dismissal from the radical left altered Baba's history and suppressed subsequent research. The notion of a "bourgeoisie island" still reverberates through Prague today and only a diminutive number of publications exist; therefore, this paper aims to correct this unfair assessment by re-examining Baba and its relationship to Modernism's narrative through interior design.

The estates at Baba provide an opportunity to locate new strategies in which its designers dealt with the modern condition and reexamine the interior designer's relationship to Modernism. The Baba housing project was not dominated by the visual paradigms of architectural training, but led by three well-known interior designers, Ladislav Zak, Hana Kucerova-Zavesk, Antoin Heytheman, who were active practitioners in the field. Their projects confront modernist theories regarding time and space, mobility and flexibility through structural and interior attributes, such as furniture, that choreographed movement while thoughtfully reflecting the lifestyle and occupation of the homeowner. An analysis of the interior exhibits how the highly individualized, domestic interiors were constructed within the context of modernism, not against it. Rather than assume the designers debased the tenets of modernism to stylistic platitudes, Baba demonstrates the ways in which the concepts of individuality, domesticity and interior design can enter the modernist discourse.

**Pierluigi Salvadeo, Politecnico di Milano, Italy**

### **Spectacular form in the interior design of Adolphe Appia's 1906 Rhythmic Spaces**

The research I should like to present concerns my study of some of Adolphe Appia's stage sets contained in his collection of perspective drawings entitled "Rhythmic Spaces". (Theatre Archive of the Swiss Theatre Collection, Berne)

The rhythmic spaces designed by Adolphe Appia are imagined performance areas: three-dimensional sets capable of realization. They are not set in any particular place: they describe nothing but themselves, and all attention is focused on the abstract site they themselves are intended to represent. They are architectonic spaces not designed for a functional specification or to match a given context; their reference is to the abstraction of music, evoking other spaces and other circumstances.

Adolphe Appia was one of the first creators of the new conception of set design that arose in contrast to the "naturalism" of the nineteenth-century theatre. His basic principle was that the set designer has complete artistic independence, stage sets no longer being based on the concept of mimicking nature but on their own inherent artistic characteristics: it is these which answer the spirit of the drama. In the general climate of renewal that pervaded artistic thinking during this period, the revolutionary contribution of Richard Wagner and the spread of his *Wort-Tondrama* (drama using words and musical sounds) had a special influence on Adolphe Appia's work. Wagner conceived his "total work of art" as a kind of higher art form, and stressed the social function of dramatic performances, as in the Dionysiac tragedy of ancient Greece.

In 1906 Adolphe Appia met Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who had for some time been experimenting with a new type of musical gymnastics, or "Eurhythmics". Through music, Adolphe Appia felt, rhythmical movement brings about a unity of actor and space. This allows us to rediscover the point of articulation between body and spirit which had seemed lost; as the artist moves to the music, these movements give the space its true measure. A particular relationship – involving light, colour, volume, music and proportion – links these Rhythmic Spaces of Adolphe Appia to *interior structural design*. The elements which make up the space are interrelated in a new collusion, alternating the "illusory" space of the stage set with the "real" space of the architecture in an attention-engrossing weave of artificiality with authenticity, both of them present in the entire spectacle; but it is the music that orchestrates the main relationships and dimensions.

Rhythmic Spaces are environments in their own right, where real space fuses with fictional set design: magical places, contrived by art, in which the part of a private script is enacted. In these spaces fiction and reality are combined by superimposition, and the places evoked become themselves the protagonists of the stories that unfold within them. Spectacle and real life coexist, with no break in continuity. What is happening here is a redefining of the concept of "set design", in which the *inner space and its outer aspect as spectacle become mingled in a single synthesis*. Unlike conventional set design which had always been ancillary to the action of the play, Rhythmic Spaces give us the set as something that exists prior to that action, something therefore which has its own independent spatial and cultural connotations. Having no narrative function, these spaces are free to take on a new form of realism and of spatial truth: they are *interior spaces* which, for the first time ever, have *spectacular form*.

**AO Ajenifujah-Abubakar, Federal University of Technology Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, Africa**

**'Interior Design Practice and Teaching Impediments in Nigeria: Identifying a Way Forward for Budding Architects.'**

With its potential to do a lot more than just delineate spaces for human comfort and activities, Architecture is known to create excitement and bring new energy to existing communities. Simply put, design is using what you have to get what you need in a simple, functional and aesthetic way. This paper examines Interior Design practice and teaching in Nigeria. It asserts that the inclusion of Interior design and interior architecture which are not integrally a part of our national curriculum is vital to the successes that can be achieved by budding design professionals. This paper considers the various opinions of scholars concerning the subject and highlights the importance of certain design elements and principles necessary for inducing and sustaining the aesthetics of the environment. It is imperative for the artist/ designer, artisan, architect and planner to consider the matter of integrity in each of its separate applications: to materials, form, function, and ornamentation. It further asserts that the curriculum of the departments of design in the higher institutions in Nigeria necessitate definite restructuring to make it more relevant, and to meet the country's pressing national needs in interior architecture provision. It is a usual practice to find an interior designer collaborating with an architect to run a practice in these parts and it is worthy of note that what obtains more in Nigeria is the practice of interior decoration as against interior design. It further examines architectural education in Nigeria, and its adequacy in preparing would-be architects to function effectively as members of inter-disciplinary teams of building professionals with a direct focus on the impediments that involve teaching and practice as applied to interior design. The paper identifies other weaknesses in the design scene which go beyond the obvious power shortages and the inadequate infrastructure, though macroeconomic issues are however not particular to education and design delivery for the construction industry. The respective roles of individual interior decorators, designers and architects on the practice and history of the interior; significant people, firms and practices; the development and role of education in the modern interior cannot be over-emphasised in a bid to realise sustainable practices in the built environment industry.

**Chinandu Mwendapole and Zoran Markovic, University of Botswana, Africa.**

**'Future Directions for Interior Design in Botswana – The Potential Way Forward or Re-inventing the Past.'**

Interior design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. Traditionally interior design was considered the superficial and decorative art compared to architecture and industrial design. The trends towards the green economy, environmental conservation and sustainable development have had a transformational impact on the role of interior design. Interior design is now no longer just about the design of interior spaces, it is much more and.

Dewey (1997) argues that knowledge requires interaction between individuals and is the result of acts or actions gained through doing or experience. Experience is defined as the knowledge and understanding gained from exposure to events and artifacts. Currently Botswana has roughly more than 20 registered companies offering interior design services and more than 40 furniture manufacturing companies. For developing country with only 1,6 million people, this is accepted as respectable industry. These companies have the opportunity to apply their traditional and local knowledge in the design and manufacture and take into account the green economy.

Green economics are not just about the environment and sustainability. In green change, the personal and political, the social and ecological, go hand-in-hand. Social, aesthetic and spiritual capacities become central to attaining economic efficiency, and become important goals in themselves (Milani 2005). The new concepts emerging from the green economy are revolutionizing not only how we produce, consume and dispose of products, they are also giving rise to new approaches in design for the environment.

Binggeli (2007) writes that in interior design the selection of materials, methods of installation, usage of water and energy, furnishings and air quality uses natural resources and affects the well-being of the building's occupants. In her view, whether the project is large or small the interior designer benefits from an awareness of how it will have impact on the welfare of the users and the nature of the community of which it is part. The greening of the market challenges the economic doctrine of globalization, because it is based on smaller working units, communal ownership and regional workplaces that utilize local labor, knowledge and resources (Schumacher, 1973).

The paper discusses the local interior design industry, its knowledge base and business models, it also addresses the new business models that have arisen as a result, of the green economy and the potential those new business models have for local interior designers. The paper concludes by recommending a way forward for the local interior design industry.

**Cristina Fiordimela, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.**

**'Interiors of Residential Architecture from the Modern Movement, Reinterpreted by Contemporary Artists. An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Design Culture of the Modern Movement.'**

Architecture historians and art critics tend to agree that contemporary art installations are an innovative resource as part of strategies for reviving Modern Movement architecture; strategies which are aimed at redefining its meanings in today's context, which is layered and undergoing constant changes (10th Docomomo Conference, 2008). The introduction of contemporary art marks a turning point in policies to safeguard residences. It helps to keep alive the original intentions of the Modern masters, in which the domestic space is often a workshop for experimenting with key concepts such as adaptability to change, and unity between art and architecture; and at the same time it contributes to renew idea of architecture as a total work of art. What are the synergies between contemporary art and the interior residential architecture of the Modern Movement, and how are they activated? The relation which is formed between a work of art and the architectural site it is on is that of a reactive reciprocity: if the art work remodels the site, the site gives shape to the art. The work of art picks up on, points out or indexes certain given features of the site, which may be aesthetic, socio-cultural, physical or symbolic, or conceived as interactions between subjects (B. Guelton, *L'exposition, interprétation e réinterprétation*, Paris 1998). Many artists carry out research or act upon the site as external commentators, transferring spatial elements to the abstract plane. What defines the relationship between art and architecture, compared to plastic and pictorial arts, is precisely the fact that they share a multi-sensory lexis built in a space-time dimension, and the condition of mutual interdependency between the two artefacts. These installations are interventions that are designed "in-situ": the total integration of the artistic phenomenon in the place in which it happens, introducing specific elements in reaction to and relation with the site (G. Celant, *Arte sferica*, Verona 2008). This point of view, then, takes in not only those architectures which are entirely and permanently intended to hold art (K. Kleinman, *L. Van Duzer, Mies van der Rohe The Krefeld Villas*, New York 2005), but also ephemeral initiatives which partially permeate the residence with the same intensity.

**Aims, structure**

The purpose of this study is to form a comparative critical analysis between the various methods of intervention in preparing residential architectures to house contemporary art, and the vision of artists, some of whom have been interviewed on this topic. The study, structured as a series of emblematic case studies, is introduced by the re-interpretations moderns interiors out by various designers or artists from the same periods, with references to the first ever installations, which appeared in the 1920s (B. Ferriani, M. Pugliese, *Monumenti effimeri*, Verona 2009).

**Conclusions**

The freedom of action which distinguishes artists from architects enable these interventions to trace out a critical vision across the two disciplines: a revisiting of the Modern culture in relation to contemporary society on the one hand, and the configuration of a new field of action for contemporary art on the other, change the identity of the site and form a link between past and present.

Deborah Schneiderman, Arizona State University, USA.

## The Prefabricated Kitchen

A gap exists in literature focusing on the relevance of prefabrication within the interior environment. Though much attention has been given to the prefabrication of architecture there has been virtually no pointed discussion on the influence and importance of prefabrication within interior environment. There are many historical examples of innovative prefabricated elements and assemblages within interior environments. This paper articulates the history and development of the prefabricated kitchen from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present and demonstrates its bearing as a significant instigator of prefabricated technologies throughout the built environment. The techniques and applications of prefabrication of the interior have been evident for thousands of years and prefabrication in the built environment owes much of its advancement to concepts investigated in interior elements and components. Prefabrication as a design topic and technique of construction has enjoyed continued attention by prominent architects and designers for reasons of efficiency and affordability.

It is a significant element of the domestic interior, the kitchen, which has been critical in informing the development of prefabrication technology. Driven by the need for efficiency (and, considered within the context of continued industrialized invention -- including every conceivable element for making the processing of food easier including computerization) the kitchen has historically served as an ideal laboratory for the investigation into interior prefabrication.

As early as the 1890s, the United States witnessed the first prefabricated kitchen furniture elements for the kitchen in the form of factory-produced freestanding "dressers."<sup>1</sup> Significant prefabricated kitchens of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century include Grete Shutte-Lihotsky's Frankfurt kitchen design of 1926,<sup>2</sup> and JaneDrew's conceptual kitchen plans, illustrated in her 1944 book *Kitchen Planning*, for prefabricated standard modular units which could be readily mass-produced.<sup>3</sup> Mid Century 'packaged' kitchens rely on prefabricated structures and not on the construction of the house for their support.<sup>4</sup> In his 1963 'minikitchen,' Joe Colombo re-conceived the portable pantry typology into a prefabricated package even more compact, mobile, and utilitarian.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary explorations include the prefabricated and flexible 'Min' and 'Max' concept studies from RISD,<sup>6</sup> and Grandma's Kitchen which arrives full circle to the return to the off-site manufacture of the kitchen wardrobe, the original prefabricated kitchen investigation.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally, the kitchen, though a domestic interior, has been approached as functional space and the kitchen user, historically the housewife, likened to a factory worker. The development of kitchen design has been the topic of a multitude of studies in efficiency and use of the workspace, as such; it is not surprising that the kitchen has been a vehicle for exploration in the mechanics of prefabrication in architecture and design.

<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne Beecher, "Promoting the 'Unit Idea': Manufactured Kitchen Cabinets (1900-1950)," 28.

<sup>2</sup> Joy Parr, "Modern Kitchen, Good Home, Strong Nation," *Technology and Culture* 43, no 4 (2002): 661.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Llewellyn, "Designed by Women and Designing Women: Gender, Planning and the Geographies of the Kitchen in Britain 1917-1946," *Cultural Geographies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 48-51.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Anne Beecher, "Packaged Kitchens: Understanding Prefabricated Manufactured Units as Mid-Century Interiors" (paper presented at the annual international meeting for the Interior Design Educator's Council, Montreal, Canada, March 5-8 2008). Proceedings page 150.

<sup>5</sup> Ignazia Favata, *Joe Colombo and Italian Design of the Sixties : Commentary and Catalogue* [Joe Colombo and Italian design of the sixties. English]. 1st MIT Press ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> "RISD : Rhode Island School of Design : FACULTY PROJECTS," [http://www.risd.edu/sponsored\\_research\\_unikit.htm](http://www.risd.edu/sponsored_research_unikit.htm).

<sup>7</sup> "Compact Kitchen, oma's Rache – Designboom,"

[http://www.designboom.com/contest/view.php?contest\\_pk=11&item\\_pk=7964&p=1](http://www.designboom.com/contest/view.php?contest_pk=11&item_pk=7964&p=1).

Julieanna Preston, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

**‘What’s At Risk? Concerning Matters of (interior design) Disciplinarity.’**

I borrow a few sentences from Bruno Latour to set the stage:

Wars. So many wars. Wars outside and wars inside. Cultural wars, science wars, and wars against terrorism. Wars against poverty and wars against the poor. Wars against ignorance and wars out of ignorance. My question is simple: Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? What has become of the critical spirit? Has it run out of steam?<sup>1</sup>

This symposium’s call for papers casts a provocative eye on the definition of what constitutes the discipline of interior design. In the space of two paragraphs this view throws a shadow which colours our discussion as a this-or-that, pick one, claim-your-ground battle spurred on by the terms ‘border’, ‘champion’, and ‘rebels’. Addressing the relationship between theory and practice the conference theme proposes that ‘the history, education and practice of interior design have a very particular and disciplinarily specific relationship.’ Motivated by this statement and in keeping with the notion of interior design as an interdisciplinary activity, this paper discusses the way connections between theory and practice can be cast through Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). The premise being that nothing is enacted alone and that both technical and non-technical elements have agency.

In this paper ANT is understood as operating at the intersection of the material and the theoretical, to address the complex interaction of social and physical influences, which are both human and non-human. The combination of which might be understood as the domain or discipline of interior design. This approach constructs a more complex picture; one that through Latour and Callon’s identification of ANT as a means of disrupting ‘heroic’ accounts of innovation and advancement, questions single point actors.

In simple terms, risk is uncertainty of outcome, either from pursuing a future positive opportunity, or an existing negative threat in trying to achieve a present objective. Actor-network theory generates a horizontal field where subjects and objects defer to the relation as things migrating topologically amongst bodies of knowledge and expertise. In this case, to be interdisciplinary does not mean to be without borders, identity or desire, but to risk them in the flight between intelligence (theory) and action (practice). My aim is to reveal some of the mechanisms that prompt this particular network together and sustain interior design’s emergent state.

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Latour. ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern’ *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225.

## Judith Gura, New York School of Interior Design, USA

### William Pahlmann and Billy Baldwin: An Unmatched Pair

It is possible, even today, to succeed in the interior design profession without academic training. Prominent practitioners in interior design can almost invariably be classified in one of two categories: those who begin with a foundation of professional education, and those whose native talent and (often) social connections propel them through the ranks to prominence in the field. Although they may be equally successful in both reputation and financial terms, there are critical differences between them, which are reflected in the interiors they design.

This paper proposes to illustrate that point by examining the careers of two equally prominent interior designers whose careers took different paths, both leading ultimately to national renown, for several decades in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. William Pahlmann (1900-1987), Illinois-born and Texas-bred, supported his professional training by working in Broadway musical theater, combining an academic background with skill, good looks and charm to carve out a career as the first designer of department store model rooms, then a successful New York decorator and finally as one of the first celebrity male interior designers -- as well as a member of the first generation, male or female, of trained professionals in the field. He published a well-received decorating book, was in demand as a speaker and panelist, and wrote a nationally-syndicated newspaper column. Billy Baldwin (1918-1993), on the other hand, gained his position largely through a network of connections, leaving his native Baltimore to negotiate a path through New York society, assisted by a mentor who herself was one of the (untrained) "First Ladies" of interior design. He also published books, more chatty than instructional, and designed the homes of some of the city's most prominent families.

Examining their interiors, their clientele, and the trajectories of their respective careers, reveals the difference that professional training produced in the quality and, more significantly, the breadth and range of Pahlmann's work, when compared with that of Baldwin. Though both produced admirable interiors, Pahlmann's foundation in classical theory, his Paris training, and his understanding of architectural and design history provided him with the means of creating environments that reflect these elements in their range and variety. He produced almost every conceivable type of interior, from dramatic retail displays to formal 18c salons, to casual sitting rooms, suburban retreats and offices. The spaces he designed were distinctive for their very lack of distinctive hallmarks.

Baldwin's instincts, though superb, were less productive in that sense, and his interiors bear the marks of a highly personal, but less versatile, aesthetic. With a keen eye for proportion and a strong sense of color, he created elegant, livable rooms that reflected his interest in traditional furnishings, modulated with warm color schemes and pared-down simplicity.

Drawing on material from the William Pahlmann archives at the Hagley Museum & Library, in Wilmington, Delaware, and on unpublished photographs of Pahlmann projects as well as the designer's working files, the paper will propose to illustrate how professional education contributed to the innovative concepts introduced by this designer, informing every aspect of his exceptional body of work. It proposes that the mark of a true professional is the ability to move in many directions, each direction reflecting the demands of the client and the project rather than an identifiable individual style.

Anca Lasc, University of Southern California, USA.

**'Describing the Parlour in Post-Haussmann France: *Le Style Moderne* or the Exception to the Rule'**

As Alexandre Sandier, collaborator to the interior decorating firms *Herter Brothers* in New York and *Damon et Colin* in Paris, and future director of the art department at *Sèvres*, explained in 1886, it was due to imitations of Medieval and Renaissance interiors that certain rooms in the French middle-class home were obfuscated by an abuse of stained glass and encumbered by feudal iron mantelpieces; that chairs, instead of adapting to the smooth curves and clothing of modern women, took the stiff shape of medieval cathedrals and "transformed the nineteenth-century Parisian, against her wishes, into a Blanche de Castille, a *châtelaine* weighed down by her punishment." Indeed, Roman studies, Moorish billiard rooms, Louis XIV drawing rooms, and Renaissance dining rooms were just some interior decoration schemes among many that were fashionable in the second half of nineteenth-century Paris. Yet this collection of historic and exotic themes always left room for an exception to the rule: the *petit salon*, or the parlor, a hotbed of artistic innovation, where a mixture of objects from different places and in different styles, arranged in an aesthetically unified setting was preferred. Siegfried Bing's 1895 shop *Art Nouveau* has traditionally been seen as the main promoter in France of the aesthetic movement that took up its name. Equal attention has been paid to *Japonisme*, the French eighteenth-century decorative arts' revival, and the new craft practices developed in the UK, Belgium, and the United States as major influences on the development of the *style moderne* or *art nouveau* in France. Yet the transformations that occurred in the literature about the private interior in the aftermath of Hausmannization, especially the debates about the decoration of the parlor (eclectic par excellence - yet part and parcel of a well-established and widely accepted decorative scheme that followed very precise rules and regulations), received little to no attention in scholarly volumes.

Freyja Hartzell, Yale University, USA.

### 'A Renovated "Renaissance": Richard Riemerschmid's Modern Interiors for the Thieme House in Munich'.

In 1903, artist Richard Riemerschmid designed modern interiors for the urban villa of Carl Thieme, the director of a Munich insurance company. These rooms drew together the diverse strands of Riemerschmid's design practice, developed during the 1890s, into what architect and cultural reformer Hermann Muthesius hailed in 1904 as a modern German *Volkskunst*: an "art of the people."<sup>1</sup> This paper explores the network of nineteenth-century forces that formed Riemerschmid's unique approach to interior design during the first decade of the twentieth century, exemplified at *Haus Thieme*. It argues for Riemerschmid's contribution to the design of modern interiors as rooted in the visual and material texture of late nineteenth-century Munich, which incorporated regional tradition, nationalist historicism, and cosmopolitan trends in art – as well as awareness of new theories about interior décor and domestic convenience – into its cultural landscape.

Riemerschmid's early twentieth-century interiors oscillated between artistic elegance and vernacular ease. Design historian Stefan Muthesius has identified this peculiar conflation of rustic materiality and romantic fantasy as originating in Munich's interior design during the period following Germany's unification in 1871. Two key terms – *derb*, meaning coarse or earthy, and *gemütvoll*, meaning full of feeling and imagination – appear frequently in Munich's design literature from the 1870s onward.<sup>2</sup> For Bavarians, *Derbheit* was a regional virtue, whether it referred to a casual roughness of character, or to the coarse wood-grain of a sturdy vernacular chair. A *gemütvoll* interior generated psychological affect through its conjunction of evocative forms, materials, and colors. The Munich publisher and tastemaker Georg Hirth discussed the interaction of *derb* and *gemütvoll* elements in *The German Room of the Renaissance*, where he proposed the material culture represented in the art of Dürer and Holbein as appropriate for modern German interiors.<sup>3</sup> For Hirth, wood constituted the interior's primary material and principal color. Against this woody *Derbheit*, strong accents – the green glaze of a tile-stove, the cobalt blue of a stoneware tankard, or the red embroidery of a tablecloth – created a *gemütvoll* atmosphere.

Riemerschmid adapted Hirth's historicist room for twentieth-century Munich by reversing his proportions and exploding touches of robust color into *fields*, while whittling down broad expanses of wood into potent *allusions* to rustic prototypes. The contemporary art critic Karl Scheffler wrote that Symbolist painters, accustomed to "thinking in translated colors," could be gifted interior designers.<sup>4</sup> Riemerschmid had begun his career as a Symbolist painter; and his design practice had evolved during a pivotal moment in interior design discourse, when the effects of electric light upon colored surfaces were under debate. *Haus Thieme's* luminous painted ceilings, studded with electric light bulbs, engage the theories of Dr. Wilhelm von Bezold, the Bavarian physicist whose 1874 treatise on color in applied art was widely read in late nineteenth-century Munich. At *Haus Thieme*, Riemerschmid integrated new technology into a timeless, vernacular framework, juxtaposed stylized rusticity with avant-garde artistry, and renovated the "Renaissance room" to accommodate the modern "rebirth" of the German *Volk*.

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Muthesius, "Die Kunst Richard Riemerschmids," *Dekorative Kunst* VII:7 (April 1904).

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Muthesius, "The 'altdeutsche' Zimmer, or Cosiness in Plain Pine: An 1870s Munich Contribution to the Definition of Interior Design," *Journal of Design History* 16:4 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Georg Hirth, *Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance* (Munich: 1879). This seminal work was revised and reissued in multiple editions through 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Scheffler, "Notizen über die Farbe," *Dekorative Kunst* IV:5 (Feb. 1901).

**Erin Cunningham, University of Florida, USA.**

**‘ “Renovating an Industry”: Interior Design in Times of Recession.’**

In August 2009, a *New York Times* article examined the impact of the recession on the interior design profession. With fewer clients and a decreased demand for luxury items, designers found themselves grappling with “new approaches” to making design “more accessible and less expensive.”<sup>1</sup> Roughly seventy-five years ago, during the Great Depression, the profession faced a similar set of challenges. With resources being funneled towards meeting basic needs interior designers struggled to find ways to meaningfully respond to the demands of a depression-era population. Based on archival data from the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History Archives, this paper examines interior design initiatives that developed in response to the Great Depression. Specifically, it examines the role the Henry Street Settlement’s home planning department, with the support of the Works Project Administration’s (W.P.A) interior design staff, played in making good design accessible to the working class residents of public housing projects.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Street’s home planning department started in the early 1930s as a consumer education initiative aimed at teaching tenement mothers how to organize their homes. The W.P.A’s interior design staff collaborated with the Settlement on this project by offering interior decoration courses. By the late 1930s, as the federal government began moving tenement dwellers into public housing, the focus of the home planning program shifted from tenement housing to how to make the modern apartments of the nearby Vladeck Houses livable for their new residents.<sup>3</sup> W.P.A’s interior design staff supported this initiative, supplying the Henry Street Settlement with experience they had gained from working in a consultative capacity on two other public housing projects.

Within the Vladeck Houses, the Settlement and the W.P.A staff set up a demonstration apartment that showcased efficient and attractive ways to furnish the modern layouts of the apartments. Next to the demonstration apartment, a workshop provided space for the residents to refurbish their old furniture. Perhaps more importantly, out of this workshop a visiting consultation service was offered that provided residents with design advice concerning how to adjust the floor plans of the new apartments to better suit their lifestyles. This partnership between the Henry Street Settlement and W.P.A’s interior design staff was short lived; however, by making design responsive to different tenants’ needs, from single family homes to multi-generational homes, it highlighted the social possibilities of interior design. As designers find new ways to work within declining economies and bring good design within the reach of a larger, less affluent clientele, the social welfare focus of the Henry Street Settlement and the W.P.A remains instructive today.

<sup>1</sup> Kimberly Stevens, D1.

<sup>2</sup> Evolving out of the Progressive Era, Settlement Houses were philanthropic outposts that were established in poor urban areas with the intent to help bridge cultural and class divisions between the urban poor and the wealthier classes. W.P.A’s interior design staff was a branch of the Federal Art Project that developed out of Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives

<sup>3</sup> The Vladeck Houses were the first coordinated public housing effort between New York City and the federal government

**Eva Storgaard, Artesis Antwerp Association University, Belgium.**

**Towards a Modern Domesticity:**

**The Role of Scale, Materiality and Furnishing within Mitigated Modernism (1958-1973)**

In many European countries the general attention for housing and dwelling grew significantly during the sixties and seventies. In Belgium the rapidly growing welfare, government subsidies, as well as changing aspirations and needs, caused an explosive growth of private initiative resulting in numerous one-family houses. As a result, and in contrast to other countries, new housing was not paralleled with a choice for modern architecture. Most private initiators perceived modern architecture as sterile, impersonal and overly rational. Instead they favoured values such as domesticity, authenticity and security. Houses in a traditional style, that combined the illusion of rural living with modern comfort, were believed to represent these dominant dwelling ideals.

In the margin of these developments, some young architects elaborated –through the design of single-family houses and almost noiselessly— alternative architectural approaches to dwelling environments in the period 1958-1973. These can be characterized as revisions or ‘mitigations’ of models brought forward by high modern architects during the 1920s and 1930s. Despite its innovative character, mitigated modernism and its new visions on dwelling environments disappeared rapidly from the Belgian architectural scene. Mitigated architectural ideals ‘died a silent death’. (Bekaert 1995)

This paper is an attempt to reassess mitigated modernism in Belgium. It provides an analysis of three case studies by architects Paul Neefs (1933-2009), Lou Jansen (1935) and Paul Schellekens (1939). All three houses are today conform to the original design and are still inhabited by the original clients. The analysis is based on *in situ* visits and interviews with the inhabitants, as well as with the architects. The paper will argue that in the work of Neefs, Jansen and Schellekens the architectural articulation of a ‘modern domesticity’ plays a paramount role. Without referring to traditional symbols or figures, but rather through a precise understanding of dwelling practices and a particular awareness of interior scale, materiality and ‘furnishing’ a new sense of domesticity is created.

Lena McLane, Florida State University, USA.

**'New, But Not Improved: Defective Domesticity in the Films of Jacques Tati.'**

“Let me say that I am shocked by the indifference of the modern world. What is the value of success, comfort and progress if no one knows anyone else?” – Jacques Tati, 1958

Between 1958 and 1971, French filmmaker Jacques Tati made three feature-length comedies—*Mon oncle*, *Playtime*, and *Traffic*—each of which lampooned the ostensibly rational, high modernist movement in architecture, interior design, and consumer products as an existential threat to traditional models of domestic life. Tati is one of very few filmmakers to scrutinize in depth the emerging technological-social center of post-war society, which saw massive and rapid urbanization, shifts in patterns of work and leisure, and the development of a retail culture of fashion and consumption. Although Tati's films have been the subject of several arching critical histories, scholars have not addressed more narrowly Tati's visions of interiority and exteriority through the contrasting contexts of industrial modernity and bourgeois domesticity. In this paper, I argue that Tati was himself a modernist designer of peculiarly disordered interiors, furnishings, and gadgets which only seemed to meet the needs of their users. As an artist and set designer, Tati studied architects like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as exempla of monumental modernism. For each film, Tati spent years in pre-production perfecting his own derivative buildings and imaginary appliances. Yet the purpose of these designs was to appear perfectly devised, and then to disassemble on cue, thus literally deconstructing the modern interior and revealing its physical frailty, conceptual brittleness, and ultimate vanity. Tati's bumbling alter-ego, Monsieur Hulot, served as the fastidious director's foil and agent, through whose frolics both the material and practical defects of the modern home environment were revealed. Of course, Tati's vision is a hyperbolic one, and it would be a mistake to judge the ultimate success of the modernist experiment by the disintegration of an artist's sham creations. Tati's films do, however, offer compelling historical and sociological insights into the wider practices of engineered disposability and the guising of low-quality spaces and products with modern-looking veneers, and should, therefore, be added to the core historiography of post-war modernism and interior design.