



“Interiors, however, are bereft of the values of thorough and complex design, often preferring market values: efficiency in production, economic competence and fashion”

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Reasonable doubts

Doubt has always appeared to me the key tool for understanding problems. Doubt has helped boost my confidence when it comes to choice. Doubt has ensured that I would make fewer mistakes due to haste. Doubt has enabled me to discover prejudices and misunderstandings. Doubt has helped me mistrust arrogance. Doubt has allowed me to start again with new reasons. And I reasonably doubt whether doubts haven't always been able to help me. And yet, they have never abandoned me.

Our environment is certainly changing at a surprising speed and new demands are made of interior space designs so that their social responsibility may be met. My doubts arise from the use of the knowledge we have, from how we adapt it to reality, from how we obtain it and from what part of it continues to be valid and what part needs revising. I'm not sure that vocation, craft and profession coincide. I'm not sure who is referred to as a professional interior designer, whether someone who makes a living from this work or someone who in addition attempts to improve reality while increasing his chances of understanding it. I was wondering whether society continues to demand this commitment as it used to, and whether we ourselves, sceptical that we will be able to influence this change or manage to understand what is going on, also demand it.

Architecture has lost the sense of interiority that justifies it, yet it has preserved the sense of exteriority that strengthens it and makes it transcendent and collective. Interiors, however, are bereft of the values of thorough and complex design, often preferring market values: efficiency in production, economic competence and fashion. Little added value.

The evanescence of materials and the obsolescence of technology intrinsically transform spaces into bases for consumption and business. In my opinion, we should not forget that interiors are the heart of buildings, the part that makes them tick. Interiors turn spaces into places. All interiors, whether they be the places where we live, the shops where we buy, the restaurants where we eat, the venues where we enjoy ourselves, the offices where we work, the museums where

we keep and display our cultural heritage, or the exhibitions where we tell stories, need that tick.

Like children listening to tales, many people like to hear the same story repeated over and over, unchanged, in order to understand and remember it. Understand it because this gives them a sense of security, and remember it as a way of filling what is often a dissatisfied present. And many people feel the same way about spaces, more secure when they recognise and remember them. This explains why spaces are becoming increasingly more adaptable to repeatable models, which are a safer, quicker, cheaper and more effective bet. There are always some people, however, who like new stories, the risk and vertigo of the unknown, the need to explore and the irreplaceable feeling of discovery.

Leaving domestic interiors to one side, where the diversity of needs and proposals offers solutions that are much more realistic and innovative due to the new uses they are given, commercial spaces are suffering a wave of boundless mercantilism. Today commercial spaces are places that aspire to loyalty to a brand image. Spaces have become supports for marketing thanks to graphic design, furniture, lighting and colour. Space becomes an excipient and places are chosen for their centrality, their size and obviously their price, although designs are only required to provide uniqueness as a driving force for business.

Interior designers are gradually becoming function installers who handle different elements. Can we still speak of auteur interior design? Well, that depends on the notion of authorship. Few are the authors we can consider responsible for freely addressing problems and coming up with answers in their designs. More often than not, authors are chosen for their name, as in the case of fashion brands, rather than for their work, and spaces respond to identity needs rather than to real needs.

It would be advisable for the market to pay greater attention to the intangible conditions of places. In point of fact they are only used to describe tangible spaces: sustainable, natural, handmade, dynamic, elegant or, to top it all, 'design spaces'. Such descriptions are intended to provide recognition to mediocre or anonymous interiors.

Perhaps we have lost some of the essential features we should strive not to forget. In interior spaces we eat, look, hear, touch and smell, and we experience pleasure, satisfaction, inconvenience and concern. When we design, we are making decisions about things that address our senses. When we manage to satisfy them all we get a harmonious feeling we identify as comfort, a feeling that increases our well-being and which I consider to be a non-negotiable value in interior space.

I now see a number of interests that do not respond to these senses but to other requirements such as efficiency, security and economy. Anything that can be sold.

Spaces can be delimited by the edges that define them and by the conditions they embrace. Geometry helps us define these edges; choose their proportions, scale, size, axes, symmetry, rhythm, sequence and order. It helps us trace what is visible and drawable; what is objectively measurable. However, to ensure these edges make sense we need more than our sense of sight. We also need to formalise for others, and so we need to define the conditions they contain: the sound of space, the feel of things, their smell; temperature, humidity, light and shadows. These are conditions difficult to draw; conditions that need to be defined in each project and are always relatively measurable. Nowadays all that which isn't measurable isn't quantifiable, and all that which isn't quantifiable isn't sellable. Square metres, heights, number of rooms, number of levels can all be sold; lights, shadows, pleasant textures or the right acoustics cannot. Spaces are now often born from a drawing instead of a wish. In many cases the complexity is afforded by the drawing, not by the strategy of their growth or senescence, the complexity of their use or their response to people's needs. Spaces should be desired first, and then drawn and defined.

De la Sota, distinguished Madrilenian architect of the mid-twentieth century, used to say he came up with his designs while out wandering. Once he was clear in his mind about what he wanted, he drew it on paper. He didn't like to erase much and used drawing and geometry to arrange the complexity of his designs though not to define their concept or choose their material, which were decisions that he had taken earlier. 'The sheet of paper will always be blank if one's mind is blank', a very good teacher of mine used to say. 'Fear of the blank page must replace fear of the blank mind', he insisted.

A long time ago I designed the interior of a restaurant. Tete Montoliu, a pianist of worldwide distinction who had a special gift on account of his blindness, showed me virtues and defects that were invisible to the eye. I had already been told of those that were visible by other colleagues. His senses could perceive a pleasant smell of food, an unpleasant noise in the diningroom, the fine texture of a tablecloth or of the wooden chairs, just as other diners unconsciously



▲ Dani Freixes, Vicente Miranda, Eulàlia González, Vicenç Bou, Hall of tales Felifonte Theme Park, Castellaneta Marina, Italy, 2003.

perceived them. I think of him when I'm designing an interior. I try to pretend I'm blind and see other things. Once I've finished, I often overlook things. Our senses are very picky and at once very grateful. In such a 'visualised' world, filled with images and visual devices, our sense of sight takes on a disproportionate significance.

I couldn't say how interiors should be designed, but I can think of one possible way to tackle them. Each one poses a new question and therefore requires a different answer. The ingredients I cook with are those I find in real life. My key allies, however, besides my student colleagues, have been and still are:

- light, the intangible nature of which makes it a flexible, expansible, mutating and spatially defining design material;
- colours, which are related to light;
- geometry, apparent and virtual, as in mirror images that duplicate, expand and otherwise help me complete space, or else reveal other hidden spaces thanks to distinct or subtle reflections in glass;
- usage, that conditions my choice of materials;
- and time, that shapes their duration, for time is life and life has to be reflected in design.

What I consider most important, however, is the presence of people. There is no point in being an interior designer or any other number of jobs if you're not interested in people—in what they need to do, in what they want to do, what they can do or what they dream of doing. It is hardly likely that anyone will find satisfaction in his work or that users will find satisfaction if this is not the case.

I discovered this satisfaction at the school of architecture, where I was taught three approaches that would help me obtain it through looking, doubting and choosing. I learnt to look in order to understand the needs of my surroundings and their solutions, the range of questions and answers they elicited. To doubt, in order to test the validity of ideas, develop a critical sense and understand that one must face up to problems by admitting that what we knew or believed yesterday is of no further use. And to choose, which is in fact to decide and to act. This is the most transcendental and difficult moment, for it implies giving up good ideas or solutions that we want or like in favour of others that are better or more convenient. Life then went on to teach me to accept the outcome, which is always a mixture of successes and failures and feeds experience.

Those who don't enjoy looking because they aren't generally curious about people or things, those who feel annoyed at having to call their opinions into question, or those who can't bear any of their thoughts to be lost or any of the

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effort they put into their work to be wasted, will not enjoy designing and will experience no personal growth when they design. The ability to doubt, to take an unprejudiced glance at reality is most important of these approaches.

I can't say whether I came to the world of interior design through architecture or whether I came to architecture through interior design. In any event, when I've had to work in each field I've started from the premise that my designs in both areas were formal contributions based on the need of being used, of being visible. This is what separates my designs from sculpture, although we should not scorn the possibility of the beauty offered by geometry or gesture. Life, however, must always prevail. We create spaces where loneliness and company can be administered to ensure we are not depressed when we are alone and are not weighed down if we have to share them.

Young people are informed and are continuously informing themselves; they broaden their knowledge but not their experiences, which they acquire when they put their knowledge into practice, knowledge that expires through lack of verification in reality. It is essential to introduce reality into design studies to ensure education in long-lasting fundamentals.

I would ask for a change in the syllabuses of schools business and economics; that we remember what money and business stand for (which is not what they stand for today); that we regard the material nature of the real world that demands greater respect for time and effort.

I would ask for greater ethical rigour in law studies; less laws, less bureaucratic rules and more wisdom to act fairly. And I would ask design schools to insist on finding meaning in decisions, to focus their reflection and action on people and to prioritise doubting time, the time we use to choose and analyse problems before trying to find the answers to them. Perhaps because a good design requires a good choice of the problems that are more in need of solving and that have more chances to be solved in a beautiful way.

Time for reasonable doubts.