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# Architecture's 'other': An ontological reading of the abject relationship with interior design

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## Abstract

Dialectic relationships exist between architecture and emergent architecturally informed disciplines. Interior design constitutes such a discipline and is considered a critical case study. The main problem is to investigate the ontology of interior design by considering its affiliation with architecture. With the use of Julia Kristeva's construct, the abject, a synopsis of architectural and interior design theory is read to ascertain the dialectic and overlapping relationship. Through heuristic enquiry an ontological analysis of interior design (with reference to essentialist aspects of architecture) is made. The Manichean dialectic is employed to produce qualitative descriptions that portray the disciplines as discrete 'others'. Architecture is a normative profession which considers interior design as a part of itself.

**Key words:** Abjection; architecture; interior design; ontology

## Introduction

Although the subtext is not said out loud, it still is clear: interior design is inferior to architecture. In spite of many postmodern/poststructuralist reassessments during the last thirty years, the duality that places architecture as the dominant term in a binary opposition with interior design remains largely undeconstructed (Havenhand 2004:33).

This indicates the necessity to examine the dialectic relationship that exists between interior design and architecture; the article recognises this and aims to explore the status quo. It will argue for self-consciousness and self-confidence. Lucinda Kaukas Havenhand (2004:33, 38) argues that since interior design occupies a truly marginal position it has the potential to offer 'more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world' and that it can only reach this potential when it discontinues to emulate architecture and explores its 'otherness'. The perceived assumptions regarding interior design's role as 'other' to architecture must be investigated.

The main problem addressed in this article is to investigate the ontology of interior design by studying its relationship with architecture. The paper accepts the device known as the 'other' as a mechanism to study identity and to understand dualistic relationships, as

is evident in the work of Edward Said (2003) and Homi K Bhabha (1994) (on postcolonialism) and Simone de Beauvoir (1953) (on gender). In his article *Problematizing exclusion*, David Sibley (1998) argues that a form of exclusion might occur when marginal groups try to create spaces where a form of autonomy can be established. Sibley (1998) further investigates the possibility that while knowledge of minorities may be used to deconstruct the myth of the abject 'other', it may also be a tool to control or colonise the marginalised group.

This article takes cognisance of Gloria Anzuldúa's arguments against dualism, oversimplification and essentialism of hybrid identities in *Borderlands* (Elenes 2005: 359), but specifically utilises and exploits the dualism between interior design and architecture. It does not aim to offer new insights into the nature of the ontological construct denoted as the 'other', but it views the lack of application of this device to understand professional relationships (particularly amongst closely related disciplines) as a lacuna in existing architectural theory and ontology. We aim to offer new insights in this area, and an attempt is made to understand the binary oppositions related to the relationship between the disciplines: the public and the private; exteriority and interiority; rationalism and intuition; inherent materiality and applied decoration; and so forth. To inform the inquiry the process of 'abjection', as proposed by Julia Kristeva (1982), is taken as a starting point. Abjection is the process whereby an object is expelled from a subject without attaining a separate 'otherness': '[t]he abject is an impossible object, still part of the subject [but unabolishable]' (Grosz 1992:198). It is the premise here that interior design is architecture's abject 'other'. An ontological understanding of the disciplines may enable a better informed future professional framework which not simply aims to define legal boundaries for their professional practices.

## Methods

In its concern with the nature of being, ontology is suitable for application in an inquiry about the character of interior design as being. The concept of the impossible object ('abject') has direct impact on the relationship between architecture and interior design. The phenomena representing this relationship may be studied to understand the nature of the relationship between, and the very being of, the disciplines. The article follows a liberal plural meta-theoretical approach. This concept was developed by the political theorist, William Galston in *Liberal pluralism* (2002) and *The practice of liberal pluralism* (2005). Although liberal pluralism allows for value judgements and moral statements, we do not attempt to offer judgements on interior design or architecture, and recognise that both disciplines have valuable traditions. The 'other' is used as device to make sense of the complex and overlapping identities of the disciplines in question. The purpose is to illuminate possible professional boundaries and attempt to delineate greater autonomy, while not denying complex and relational traditions.

A heuristic enquiry into the nature of interior design will enable us to evaluate material from the empirical world (theory created by architects and interior designers, direct quotations and depictions of the disciplines in the popular media) to produce qualitative descriptions about the being of interior design. All heuristic enquiries pursue a question which is closely related to one's own identity and selfhood (Moustakas 1990:40). We will value the personal and the experiential in both the research and writing; even in phenomenological observation, the *observer* cannot be removed. In using this method we claim the right to subjectivity. The research is dependent on the personification of the professional identities of the disciplines in question.

This article is presented as object-relations oriented criticism, and follows a subversive strategy which allows for the self-identification as interior designers. (Refer her to Karen Burns (2010:256) stating 'innovative writing has become a woman's sign of her otherness', she continues 'that it is too easy for feminist work to play the Other'. In this paper we will try to depart from the male/female notion of 'otherness' by stating that interior design is architecture's 'other'.) To initiate the argument, the experience and roots of abjection are discussed. Following this, an ontology of interior design will be established. It may be argued that within the realm of the 'other' it will be necessary to establish an ontology for architecture against which interior design may be measured. This is not necessary. Firstly, an architectural ontology falls outside the scope of this article; secondly, the 'other', as device, may be employed by referring to essentialist aspects of architecture. To conclude, interior design will be stated as architecture's abject 'other'.<sup>1</sup>

## The experience of abjection

[The other] is not unknown but unknowable, refractory to all light. But this precisely indicates that the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence. The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in each other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with Mystery. The other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity, for exteriority is a property of space and leads the subject back to itself through light (Levinas 1989:43).

Abjection relates to the process of the separation and differentiation of identities; it is not only applicable

to the individual, but also to the collective (Lloyd 2004: 141). Identity formation is an 'attempt to overcome a lack, as a process of desire for the power of the other, that produces the image of the self' (Neuman 1999:8). In understanding the process of establishing professional identity, the process of abjection is a valid device. Abjection is discussed from two points of view: firstly, it is considered from a positive viewpoint as the process whereby the 'same' : 'other' conceptual pair gains separate identities. It is, therefore, the process whereby a new identity is established. During the process the abject is the incomplete object; it has only one quality of the object – 'that of being opposed to the I' (Kristeva 1982:1). This is in opposition to the conventional discussions of abjection that describe it as negative and ugly, and leads to the second, and traumatic point of view where '[t]he abject is what threatens identity' (Oliver 1993:56). Abjection is considered traumatic because it represents an unfinished process of ambiguity.

The abject is neither subject nor object (same or 'other'); it makes the impossible identity of each clear. The abject signifies the precarious grasp that the subject has over its identity and boundaries (Grosz 1992:197-198). Architecture's own identity is precarious; in answering its own ontological questions it is met with disagreement (Shepherd 1995:15). Interior design is a discipline that threatens and questions the identity and boundaries of the architectural profession.

Individual and collective identities are not only created in the difference between the 'same' : 'other' conceptual pair, but also in the ambiguity 'where one is other to oneself, and in the recognition of the other as like' (Norton in Neuman 1999:8). Abjection is above all other things ambiguity. It does not separate the object from the subject, but it acknowledges the perpetual danger to the identity of the subject (Kristeva

1982:9). In the separation of identities abjection blurs the boundaries:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'. Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be (Kristeva 1982:10).

There are 'pollution powers' at work on the boundary between the disciplines of architecture and interior design. Here we refer to Mary Douglas (1966:112):

But there are other dangers to be reckoned with, which persons may set off knowingly or unknowingly, which are not part of the psyche and which are not to be bought or learned by initiation and training. These are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining that which should be separate.

This ambiguity and lack of definition is the object. Interior design and architecture are object 'others'; to refer to a group as object represents it as something that is alien to the collective (Sibley 1998). The object can only exist while abjection is in process. On completion the object will collapse into the subject (Kristeva 1982:210). This reiterates the positive aspect of abjection: it is the process whereby the 'same' : 'other' conceptual pair separate and gain individual identities.

For the purposes of this article, abjection is referred to as a construct employed to understand how the disciplines are differentiating and establishing separate identities. While the process of abjection is incomplete, the subject/object is not able to exist as either same or 'other'. It is this fluid process that makes it impossible for interior design and architecture to exist as discrete

professional practices. An attempt will be made to highlight the dualistic aspects of their identities.

## An ontology of interior design

[The interior] exists between the physical, the poetic and the phenomenological. The interior domain is the place of dwelling, dreaming, belonging, sanctuary, memory and association, and a metaphorical stage set in which we act out life, simultaneously saturated with artefacts of conspicuous consumption in a world deeply concerned with sustainability. It is a platform on which to benchmark fashionable social mores, project social status and a lab in which to test ethnographic methods and patterns of use, behaviour and ritual (Milligan, Hollis, Milton, Plunkett, Hay & Gigli 2007:20).

Interior design is often criticised because it lacks a deep, comprehensive body of theory and history. For example, in the preface to *A philosophy of interior design*, Stanley Abercrombie (1990:ix) states that during a debate in 1987, an argument was made against the licensing of interior designers. Interior design could not be considered a true profession since it lacked a body of theory. A number of writers developed theories for interior design after Smith and Tate's (1986:560) statement that interior design is preoccupied with 'vision and touch'. The discomfort amongst interior designers regarding this concept indicates a reluctance to be associated with decoration. This discomfort is rooted in the concept that decoration is superficial when compared to functional or spatial aspects. Furthermore, it builds on an inferiority complex that links decoration to femininity and spatiality to masculinity. A stereotypical dualism exists that associates women with the body and decoration and men with technology and the shaping of nature (Clegg & Mayfield 1999:3).

Interior design should not be criticised for its decorative aspects. Decoration is a critical aspect in any conversation about interior design (Attiwill 2004:62). For this argument, 'vision and touch' are considered decorative elements. When interior design preoccupies itself with vision and touch (which are very closely related) this is born out of deep concern for the user of space. The distinction between interior design and decoration creates an allegiance with architecture where interior design cannot be separated from it. The interrelated histories of both disciplines are well documented in sources such as *Architecture and interior design* (Ball 1980), *Modern architecture since 1900* (Curtis 1996) and *A century of interior design, 1900-2000* (Abercrombie 2003), but if interior design follows a strategy to align itself with architecture, it will strengthen its supplemental role. In contrast, Havenhand (2004:40) suggests that interior design should embrace its dissimilarity:

In a new strategy for interior design that celebrates its marginal feminine position, and therefore a wider, more complete, and more robust view of interiority, issues such as materiality, sensuousness, decoration, nurturing, self expression, desire and mothering which have been de-emphasised in a male, rationalist, architectural framework would be brought to the foreground.

The choice of materials can give an intervention a temporal aspect; in addition, '[t]he designer is more inclined than the architect to experiment with new materials' (Scott 2008:174). Interior design deals primarily with the experiential and temporal aspects of space. It deals with the body in space, and it does so in a practical way, concerned with space usage, anthropometrics, ergonomics and comfort; but it also deals with a deeper philosophical way of understanding the way the user will experience space, the way people interact with space, understand space, and intuitively are in constant dialogue with space. The concept of 'vision

and touch' is not merely a superficial way of dealing with trends and fashion.

In Baxter's (1991) article, *Thirty years of growth in the literature of interior design*, a body of literature about interior design from the period 1961-1991 is suggested. The article states that works like *A philosophy of interior design* (Abercrombie 1990) undermine the idea that interior design lacks a scholarly body of theory (Baxter 1991:249). Although *A philosophy of interior design* is used as a source for this article, a review of the text indicates that it relies on the *description* of the most universal aspects of interior design. This can be contrasted with older texts in architecture (from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier), as well as recent interior design theories. The most notable work in recent interior design theories is *On altering architecture* (Scott 2008), which offers a theory and vocabulary for the design work that responds to, and alters, architecture. It is an attempt to argue against the hegemony that declares architectural work to be of more value. Increasingly, the disparity between the theoretical approaches of architects and interior designers is diminishing as the latter consider the impact of culture on the design process (Baxter 1991:249). Suzie Attiwill (2007) and Luis Diaz (2007) start to speculate on the possible objects of an interior design history and canon.

In our opinion, attempts to create a history for interior design that pre-empts that of architecture is a device which undermines the contemporary professional practice of interior design. This might be achieved by referring to cave paintings or other prehistoric interventions in 'found space' (e.g., William Turner (1981:8) refers to 25,000 year old cave paintings at Dordogne. The objectives of prehistoric spatial interventions and interior design in the twenty-first century are not comparable). In Western architectural history, Malnar and Vodvarka (1992:4) trace the professional specialisation in the

interior realm to the Rococo period, which was a result of the financial position of the *petit* aristocracy. The interior had become financially and symbolically important enough to warrant specialist attention (Malnar & Vodvarka 1992:18-19). At this stage interior design work was performed by architects. Recognition of interior design as a discipline separate from architecture is a twentieth century phenomenon (Gürel & Potthoff 2006:218).

Interior decoration has its origins in the involvement of women in the nineteenth-century arts and crafts movement (McNeil 1994:632). At the turn of the twentieth century, decoration was considered an appropriate occupation for women, with academic programs in interior decoration established in the home economics departments of American universities (Gürel & Potthoff 2006:210). Charles Rice (2003:144) states that an awareness of the interior as distinct from architecture emerged at the end of the 'first part of the nineteenth century', thereby affirming Massey's (2001:142) opinion. This leads to interior decoration's distinct professional identity, which is considered to be antagonistic to the architectural profession. After the Second World War, the profession of 'interior design' emerged. Designers usually received formal (graduate) education, and 'increasingly worked on non-domestic commissions, as the commercial sector realized the value of good interior design' (Clegg & Mayfield 1999:10).

Despite its technical and spatial aspects, interior design is still viewed, by both men and women, as a 'feminine' discipline (Clegg & Mayfield 1999:11).<sup>2</sup> In the broader construction of public and private spaces, the 'inside' is still associated with women; this causes interior design to remain on the feminine side of the gender dualism despite the discipline's orientation towards public, commercial and industrial spaces (Clegg & Mayfield 1999:11). The association of interior design with femininity

and architecture with masculinity is clear in the following description of an interior design student who has technical interests: '[she] found herself frustrated by the presumed associations of femininity despite her own preferences for the *architectural*' (Clegg & Mayfield 1999:11, emphasis added).

The origins of interior design as an applied art are rooted in architectural practice, but it is developing into an interconnected but independent discipline (Baxter 1991:241). This discipline can be distinguished from interior decoration and architecture because it is a discipline of spatial performance and experience and not a discipline of composition or style (Pringle in Attiwill 2004:6).

There is a conceptual lacuna between architectural and interior design theory, where architectural theory prioritises the 'building' or the 'object' over the ensemble (Milligan *et al* 2007:20). '[A]rchitects design buildings from the outside; the inside is fallout' (Gürel & Potthoff 2006:220). Beyond a very brief first impression, interior design is an amalgam of elements experienced individually (Abercrombie 1990:143). During the experience of an interior space the observer has to be inside the space from whence it is then impossible to experience the totality. The experience of interior space relies on a sequence of partial understandings of viewings of the space. The sequential partial understanding of interior space is the phenomenological agent that prohibits interior design from being a discipline of composition:

Unlike architecture, interior design has never been based on formal visual composition, but always on an understanding of experiential reality and meaning of form. Such experiential reality is emotion based and embodied (Solovyova 2008:3).

Composition and style are intricately linked in architecture. To achieve consistency and coherence in architecture, allegiance to a particular style is an effective device: 'the great developments of architecture and design in the last century were manifestations of such allegiances' (Scott 2008:174-175). Architectural style is the product of the design process; it is not a concept based on classifying features of design; a consistent way of doing results in a consistent style. In a broader sense, style is consistent with a collective adoption of organising principles. Changes of style can be observed when dominant principles are no longer productive and the architectural community's way of doing changes (Rowe 1987:109-110). Kurtich and Eakin (1993:407-408) state that during times of stylistic change the fashion in design becomes trendy without substance; a trend will only develop into a style if it matures into an expression of the current culture. Since the 1990s, the literature of interior design has pointed to a shift away from the study of trends (Baxter 1991:249). Style is not a device that is available to the interior designer. In interventional design, the designer must follow other paths than the search for cohesive composition. The means to achieve contradiction and confrontation in the composition may be more appropriate (Scott 2008:174-175).

Scott's (2008:xv) definition of 'pure' architecture, the making of a new building on a cleared site, is used to construct the following argument. For architecture, a major source of decision-making and form giving is theoretical discourse. To be valid, a theory should have a community of subscribers that represents shared principles worthy of emulation. Architectural theory is generally concerned with the ontological question, 'What is architecture?', and the utopian question, 'What ought to be?' (Rowe 1987:115). Architecture is utopian in its nature. The answer to the question lies in utopia as a project. In this instance, 'utopia' is meant in its broadest, idealistic meaning. In 'utopia as a project', the work

of architecture is directed towards construction that would overcome the crisis and antagonism of contemporary life (Tarfuri in Cunningham 2001:169). If utopia is achieved, if the State is functioning perfectly, there will be no alteration work necessary in architectural work. Buildings will either remain as they are indefinitely or be demolished, '[t]hrough forethought and prescience, buildings would remain unchanged from the moment of their inception up to their eventual demise' (Scott 2008: 1).

Different points of view define architecture's role in the relationship between inside and outside. For Robert Venturi (1966:88-89), architecture happens on the boundary between interior and exterior:

Designing from the outside in, as well as the inside out, creates necessary tensions, which help make architecture. Since the inside is different from the outside, the wall – the point of change – becomes an architectural event. Architecture occurs at the meeting of interior and exterior forces of use and space.

Opposed to Venturi's notion is the idea that 'interior' and 'exterior' simply describe opposite sides of the same wall (Gordon 1974:viii). In one description the *wall* is the architecture; in the other the *spaces on either side of it*. The architect's self-image relies on the conviction that s/he is a 'problem solver'. The problems on both sides of the wall are subject to the same functional analysis and rules of harmony and visual order (Gordon 1974:viii). Although Venturi (1966) recognises the difference between interior and exterior space, Gordon (1974) proposes the same approach to solve the problems of both. This establishes the idea that in the design of interior space architecture is reliant on composition and style. The modes by which interior space is produced are different for the two disciplines under discussion.

The interior created by an architectural envelope is an oppressive and exclusive space (Irigaray in Smith 2004:93): 'In other words, the interior is inferior and limited by the architectural form that contains it' (Smith 2004:93-94). Conceptually, the interior space is contained and constrained by the architectural envelope. Rice (2003:145) refers to an enclosed space provided by architecture in which furnishings and domestic objects may be inserted to create an interior. Interior design is, therefore, merely the act of insertion within the architectural envelope. The perceived inferiority of interior design is seated in this fact. It is a construct that the discipline is inferior since its sites of intervention are dependent on architecture. Interdependence does not indicate hierarchy. Approaches in interior design thinking should not see the interior space as an empty container to be filled with 'interior design', because it would imply that the discipline is inferior to and defined by architecture (Smith 2004:100).

Interior designers have responded to the concept of the oppressive and exclusive architectural space in a number of ways. For Tate and Smith (1986:wiv-xv), 'interiors' are distinguished from 'spaces' when they are fully enclosed and have *ceilings*, and 'interior design' is the creation and organisation of interior spaces. A progressive and recent description that tries to break down the boundaries between inside and outside is that of Ellen Klingenberg (2006:22), who holds the opinion that interior space is not specifically inside a building: '[I]t could be under the sky but it is not architecture either'. In our opinion, the first description is too restrictive and the second too general. Klingenberg (2006) is unable to define the discipline and its field of expertise, but she opens the discipline to scrutiny and self-definition. Neither of these descriptions adequately answers the threat of architectural containment and conscription.

Attiwill (2004:3) offers an appealing point of view:

The question of interior and exterior are still pertinent and potent but they are dynamic, changing relations rather than one of permanence defined by built form. Interior design then becomes an activity of organizing material spatially and temporally.

For Christine McCarthy (2005:119), habitation related to interiority is not literal but projected across space, scale and time: 'This preoccupation addresses how one might occupy a dollhouse ... and how the two dimensions of an architectural drawing, a shadow, or a computer screen might be spatial and interior. Interiority touches, but is beyond, three-dimensionality'.

The temporal and experiential aspects are pertinent in Attiwill and McCarthy's descriptions. The interior becomes a space of interconnectedness, not containment (Smith 2004:94). The discipline should be careful not to become too general and undefined. Interior space should be contained in some way. This containment should be more specific than saying that 'the horizon is an interior' (Colomina in McCarthy 2005:114).

To consider interior design in a holistic manner it can be described as such: the term (interior design) is used in an inclusive manner to incorporate all work concerned with the design of interior space; an entire building designed to contain integrated interiors, the completion of space in existing architecture or the adaptive reuse of existing buildings (including additions) with a focus on interior space. Interior design is considered holistically to include 'interior decoration' and 'interior architecture', as 'interior design' describes both the product ('interior space') and process ('design') of the discipline. Interior design is a space making discipline that responds to found space; the product must be contained in some way (for a full discussion on the semantic issues



relating to the title of the discipline, refer to König (2011).

For both interior design and architecture, the criterion that design must engage its audience is a precondition for achieving other goals (Rowe 1987:147). The goals of the work might differ for interior design and architecture, but without communication between the work and its audience these goals cannot be met.

Paradoxically, interior design has its origins both from within architecture (the interior is an indisputable aspect of architecture) and from without (as a 'women's profession' based in the applied arts and homemaking). In its spatiality, studio education and knowledge of construction and structure it is similar to architecture; as a discipline outside architecture, interior design brings intellectual capital and a worldview that is dissimilar to that of architecture. Rice (2003:146) describes the abject relationship in this manner: 'The interior is thus caught between being both a part of architecture, at the same time it exists apart from architecture'. It is in this dissimilar similarity that the roots of abjection lie.

## Contested identities

The domain of interiors constitutes a point of tension between practicing architects and interior designers. Design of interior spaces is a significant part of the architectural profession (Gürel & Potthoff 2006:217).

This section deals primarily with the writings about architecture, *in lieu* of reference to architectural objects. The relevance of this method is illustrated in the texts *Ex libris: Archaeologies of feminism, architecture and deconstruction* (Burns 2010:242-265) and *Following*

*Hélène Cixous' steps toward a writing architecture* (Frichot 2010:312-323).

The abject relationship between architecture and interior design is revealed in two ways: firstly, interior design is not considered as a separate discipline and is thus neglected in the architectural discourse; secondly, interior design may be acknowledged, but aspects that are significant in its ontology are considered as a source of pollution which deteriorates architectural practice. Rice (2003:145) offers two alternatives to describe the relationship between interior design and architecture: the interior realm is either collapsed back into architecture or considered wholly outside it.

In the first instance of contestation, interior design is not considered a distinct discipline, since the design of interior space falls within the scope of architectural work. The interior domain falls within this scope, and as such, interior design is considered as part of the architectural profession.<sup>3</sup> The implication is that interior designers are people who 'practise just a little bit of architecture' (Giattina in Hughes 2003:45). An example is found in the text *Writing spaces*. Crysler (2003:1) presents the interdisciplinary character of the built environment professions in his introduction when he mentions 'disciplines such as architecture, planning, geography, and urban studies'. It is interesting to note that Crysler (2003:203) fails to mention any disciplines that primarily deal with the creation of interior space. In his conclusion he states that 'the categories of "world", "territory", "nation", "city", "settlement", "architecture", "room", and "body" are increasingly difficult to separate'. When discussing space, the text does not exclude interior space or the body's relationship to space ('architecture', 'room', and 'body'). The discrepancy that is evident in the exclusion of the *discipline* of interior design, while *interior* space is included in a discussion that states that 'the idea of the architect

as a singular author is more popular and widespread than at any other time' (Crysler 2003:202). Interior design is not respected as a discrete discipline.

Even though the interior may be regarded as a secondary aspect, it is still considered part of the architectural realm. When interior designers claim that interior design is a distinct discipline, it forces architects to experience the object: 'I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be "me"' (Kristeva 1982:10). This represents an instance where the act of the disciplines differentiating and establishing separate identities causes distress.

In the second, more sinister, manifestation of the object relationship, interior design is acknowledged but significant aspects of its ontology are considered as a source of pollution.

The 'image' can be considered as a case in point, where both disciplines establish norms and standards against which deviants are stigmatised, according to Augé's (1998:58) principle.<sup>4</sup> When image making is present in architectural practice it is considered to be something which reduces the integrity of the profession. In a criticism on the contemporary professional practice of architecture, Zaha Hadid (1993:27) offers the following:

The new role of the architect is to comply with competitively asserted standards of efficiency, to cater to commercial clients, increasingly with the objective of representing corporate identity or else of satisfying the fluctuating standards of good taste. The profession is thus torn into two distinct aspects: on the one hand, architecture becomes a pure technique, as if it were a branch of engineering; on the other hand, it becomes image production, as if it were a branch of advertising. It is in the rise of this second role which is the half-conscious background

to the recent flourishing of 'experimentalism' in architecture.

This statement is noteworthy when compared to Crysler's (2003:202) description of a new form of interdisciplinarity:

Architectural practices are increasingly forming working relationships with advertising agencies, marketing consultants, and media strategies in a new form of 'professional interdisciplinarity' geared towards developing architecture as an integrated part of product "theming".

Both authors consider the influence of corporate identity on architecture. They are specifically concerned with the influence of the image on architecture. Hadid (1993:27) is especially critical of this aspect since it leads to the deterioration of the architectural discourse. This repeats Tate and Smith's (1986:560) perception that architecture is about ideas, in contrast, interior design is about 'vision and touch' (image). In Hadid's (1993:27) view the inclusion of the image in architecture is a form of defilement which leads to the deterioration of discourse.

In the preface to *On altering architecture*, 'pure' architecture is defined as the production of a new building on a cleared site (Scott 2008:xv). Scott (2008:11) elaborates that the purpose of pure architecture is to create buildings that are fitting to the nascent principles of a particular time and place. Reiterating Patrik Schumacher's (2002:5) notion that 'theory offers implicit utopia'; 'pure' architecture relies on utopian ideology. Architectural imagination is an implicitly utopian practice (Coleman 2005:236). When pure architecture is created, it is done with the intention to improve the world to the best ability of people at the time of its creation.

Rem Koolhaas (in Scott 2008:56) claimed that owing to the declining rate of new building against the growth of alteration, the 'end of architecture' will occur at the point on a graph where the two lines would cross. To counter this, Koolhaas proposes that the city should be zoned into areas where new architecture should be built, which will remain unaltered for a hundred years, after which it will be demolished and replaced with new buildings. This solution would be the end of alteration, and to a large extent, the end of interior design.

This introduces a further point of difference between pure architecture and the design of intervention. In order to be 'pure', architecture must establish a new building on a clear site. To exist, architecture is dependent on one of two forms of destruction: firstly, if a building already exists, architecture must first be destroyed to allow new building to take place; secondly, if architecture is to inhabit a greenfield site it requires the destruction of the natural environment. Interior design does not require destruction for its existence. This highlights a second failure by architecture in terms of its own principles: to ultimately exist, architecture must destroy something in the environment (either natural or built), this while it is a discipline that is founded on utopian principles to improve that same environment.

Architecture stigmatises interior design as a discipline that is concerned with the cosmetics of interior space; in contrast, interior design feels that architecture cannot create interior space that is positively centred on human experience (Kurtich & Eakin 1993:462). The idea that architecture is unable to adequately deal with interior space was expressed in 1877 by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman (in Gürel & Potthoff 2006:219) in *The decoration of houses*:

Architects [*sic*] task seems virtually confined to the elevation and floor-plan. The designing of what are today regarded as insignificant details, such as moldings, architraves, and cornices, has become a perfunctory work, hurried over and unregarded; and when this work is done, the upholsterer is called in to decorate and furnish the rooms.

Kurtich and Eakin (1993:461) elaborate on this point by stating that architects can plan buildings well, but they do not study and develop the interior spaces. This is especially evident in architect's drawings that are devoid of furniture and finishes and indicate a lack of awareness of interior design. In contrast, in her design for E.1027, Eileen Grey considered the divans to be 'indispensable' and drew them directly on plan (Rault 2005:169).

The issue of scale is one of the most obvious points of differentiation between the design disciplines. The interior dimension is experienced more intimately than architecture, and this makes interior scale smaller than exterior scale (Malnar & Vodvarka 1992:20). As mentioned previously, in Crysler's (2003:1) analysis of disciplinary discourses he specifically mentions 'architecture, planning, geography, and urban studies'. In his conclusion, scale is identified as a point of differentiation in the 'space' disciplines (Crysler 2003:202):

... I would suggest that if there is a fault in the model of interdisciplinarity that has developed until now, it is rooted in the reluctance of the 'space' disciplines to communicate with each other, and hence reinforce the scale politics of spatial analysis that continues to divide the field as a whole.

If interior design were added to Crysler's discussion it would inevitably be the discipline which operates on a smaller physical scale than architecture. This opinion is

shared by Milton Tan (2003:7; 2006:13-14), who differentiates between architecture and interior design on the basis of scale.

This article indicates the temporal aspect of interior design's ontology. It introduces a shorter time scale as a point of differentiation from physical scale. Although there will be areas of overlap, interior design products are, in general, physically smaller and survive for a shorter period of time than pieces of architecture. In our opinion, the combined effects of a small-scale design project that only survives for a short time is that the work is considered less important, less complex, and, therefore, easier to execute and inferior to architecture.

Architecture in itself is a discipline that is difficult to define. It is a 'weak discipline' and efforts to make the practice comprehensible depend, in part, on the acceptance of utopia as project (Coleman 2005:236-7). Diaz (2007:168) states that architecture has no 'objective logic'. To the layperson, architecture is indistinguishable from other methods of designing buildings (for example, engineering); the specificity of architecture is based on its theory. Architecture has a fragile 'monopoly of expertise' and architectural services are marketed by using the image of professional practice in the competitive arena of professional services (Crysler 2003:200-201). Interior design, as a discipline, enters this competitive market, and its own strategies of legitimisation and professional practice undermine that of architecture.

This section was dependent on essentialist depictions of architecture; it was stated in the Introduction that this device is used purposefully. In no way should this be construed as meaning that we are unaware of the contradictions evident in architecture's ontology. For example, the reader can refer to the dualist discussion of the romantic and rational traditions in architecture

in Wojciech G Lesnikowski's (1982) *Rationalism and Romanticism in architecture*. In order to employ the abject to understand the relationship between the architectural disciplines, certain generalisations are necessary.

In summary, we wish to quote Gwendolyn Wright (1977:306):

As long as architects, male and female, continue to deny the biases of their profession, individuals can only hope to offer adaptations and small scale improvements.

## Conclusion

This article established an ontology of interior design which compared the *being* of interior design with that of architecture. It was postulated that the modes of production of space differ for the disciplines, but that the disciplines have certain similarities. Architecture and interior design have contested identities. Interior design's strategies of legitimisation and its professional practice undermine that of architecture; the tension between the disciplines emerges from this situation.

The 'other' is used as a device to argue for an ontological separation of interior design and architecture in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of their professional boundaries. In response to the 'interior design': 'architecture' pair there are typically two reactions, both of which support the ontological pair that prohibit the abject from collapsing, thus barring interior design from gaining an independent, non-supplemental identity.

The first response is an attempt to correct the inherent perceived inferiority of interior design to architecture. In this attempt, interior design emulates architecture

and places emphasis on points of similarity. The discipline might even attempt a name change and call itself 'interior architecture'. This position does not dislodge the connection of interior design with the supplemental; furthermore, it may lead to the de-emphasis of aspects of differentiation, especially the decorative aspects of the discipline. This may leave the discipline impoverished.

The second response was purposefully employed as a tactic in this paper. In this case, the Manichean dialectic is used to differentiate the disciplines by placing emphasis on points of variation. Representations are created through the juxtapositioning of two essentialist entities. This tactic is dangerous. Firstly, the two essential entities become inseparable and define what is significant about each other dialectically. Here, a distorted sense of the 'other' may lead to a distorted sense of the self. The ontologically opposed pair also leads to a situation where points of similarity become embarrassing. In this case, aspects of similarity will be de-emphasised, which may also leave the discipline impoverished.

We wish to offer the following alternative to contribute to the collapse of the abject, which will leave interior design and architecture with independent and autonomous, albeit complementary and overlapping, identities: Interior design should develop a body of theory that is neither dependent on emulation nor on dialectic emphasis on points of difference, in order for interior design to reach a theoretical position where the discipline can act as itself, regardless of difference or similarity. The concept of liberal-pluralism allows scope for such a position. The ontological pair must be deconstructed, in other words, the dependent relationship must be broken. This will be achieved in a response where interior design neither emulates, nor differentiates itself, from architecture.

The deconstruction of the ontological pair requires a combined response that must be applied with circumspection and care. This response is reliant on elements from the two responses that reinforce the ontological pair. It would, therefore, require constant vigilance and balance to prevent the over-application of one method which will reinforce the ontological pair. It is in the nature of the disciplines that the boundary between them is indeterminate. If it was easy to differentiate the disciplines and establish a clearly defined professional boundary, the research question addressed in this article would be irrelevant.

Interior design is architecture's 'other'.

## Notes

- 1 Burns (2010:242) used a similar method when she considered writing as the silent other to architecture often assumed and seldom imagined. In our opinion, 'writing' as concept is too broad, Burns' concept refers to architectural writing specifically. As a closely related discipline, interior design is more suitable for comparison in this manner.
- 2 The origins and manifestations of gendered connotations are documented in the works of McNeil (1994), Braham (1999), Clegg and Mayfield (1999) and Hanna (1999).
- 3 Rice (2003:150) describes ways in which architecture tries to claim the interior as part of its own affects by: a) placing emphasis on the design of the interior simultaneously as to the exterior of the building; b) describing the arts and crafts movement as chiefly relating to the interior arts; c) describing Art Nouveau and Jugendstil as the 'liquification of the interior' and d) utilising modernist ideas to

conceptualise interior space as projects of the avant-garde, amongst others.

- 4 Once a culture institutes norms and standards it will recognise deviants and stigmatise them (Augé 1998:58).

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