An interpretation of the role of meaning in interior design

Raymund Königk

Lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

raymund.konigk@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The cultural role of the interior artefact, through the representation and interpretation of meaning, is considered in this article. This follows Umberto Eco's moderate hypothesis of culture in which all cultural phenomena can be studied as contents of a semiotic activity and in accordance with Jeff Lewis's construct of culture as a collection of meanings. The 'interior artefact' that is considered here is the physical manifestation of interior design as a professional practice in the built environment and not a general product of human activity. It is assumed that successful interior artefacts are dependent on the generation of meaningful images and their appropriate spatial interpretation. The interior artefact is a material artefact that creates and communicates meaning; it offers the framework for situated meaning and is the result of that meaning. The interior artefact is the spatial embodiment of the visual identity imagined by the interior designer on behalf of the client. In this context, interior design is considered as a cultural activity with importance for human development, which includes the utilisation and development of identity. The article considers identity to involve more complexity than merely expressing categories of belonging (such as race and gender). In interior design the generation and interpretation of meaning is dependent on the visual presence of cultural discourses; the article concludes with a brief discussion of some of these.

Keywords: artefact, cultural discourse, interior design.

Introduction

I shall reflect on the creative ability of interior designers to unlock greater and deeper cultural meaning within the built environment. Since I believe that this creativity is rooted in the cultural world, I refer to the description of interior design's cultural aspects in the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) *Interiors Declaration* (IFI 2011):

> As a creative enterprise, interior design is a mode of cultural production. It is a place-maker that interprets, translates, and edits cultural capital. In a global world, interior design must play a role in facilitating the retention of cultural diversity.[1]

These two paragraphs in the *Interiors Declaration* are in opposition: when interior design translates cultural capital, it facilitates cultural exchange, which is a unifying and globalising force; this may threaten cultural diversity. It becomes obvious that a deeper understanding of interior design creativity, or cultural agency, is necessary to mitigate these factors. This article is a reflection on the findings of my PhD thesis, which is not based on the objective to prove or defend a theoretical position, but is the result of a theoretical inquiry to understand interior design creativity: it asks the question: '*how does interior design* ***create meaning****?*'

The thesis investigated a collection of photographic representations of interiors that were designed by numerous designers from around the world, and which were published after the signing of the IFI *Interiors Declaration* in February 2011. The purpose of the collection process was to assemble a corpus of interior artefacts rapidly that allow the researcher to claim representivity and generality.[2] When I collected the data, I further adopted an attitude that is akin to an interior designer collecting visual material to create a mood board. In this way, it represents my own tastes and preferences; it can also be seen as a visual synthesis of my normative position to the ontological question (what is interior design?). I present speculations on the cultural role of the interior artefact within the larger cultural discourse. This is presented as a theory of interior design as a cultural process. It considers the generation of meaning in the interior artefact as a cultural practice. I follow Umberto Eco's (1979a:22) moderate hypothesis of culture in which all cultural phenomena can be studied as contents of a semiotic activity and in accordance with Jeff Lewis's (2008:396) construct of culture as a collection of meanings. In this way, interior design can be understood as method to create meaning, and the interior artefact can be understood as a meaningful object. I consider culture as a noun of process (after Williams 1976:77) as culture is continually created, interpreted, and reproduced. This process is a general description of human development as an assemblage of meanings that are made and interpreted by a group. Culture is a system of meaning, and interior design is active within that system. The action to produce culture is reduced to the action to create meaning.

1. The text was edited to eliminate the term 'interior architecture'.

2. The corpus is a non-probability judgmental sample that was collected from design blogs; artefacts could be designed by any professional (i.e., the designer did not have to self-identify as an interior designer) but must be recognisable as a volumetric interior. The purpose was to consider the interior artefact and its material contributions, not the professional contributions of a particular occupation. The data was collected from twelve blogs, but 75 per cent were delivered by five prominent blogs: Dezeen; Arch Daily (and its derivatives); Designboom Magazine; The CoolHunter; and Trend Hunter. The blogs offered search functions and organised their content by discipline or type, which facilitated the search process. Dezeen, Arch Daily, and Designboom Magazine (contributing 65 per cent of the corpus) are cited regularly in academic articles. The corpus was assembled with analytic intent, specifically to consider how interior design practically produces meaning, and by extension culture, through a grounded theory analysis. This article represents the theoretical integration of that analysis, and is presented therefore as a theoretical and philosophical investigation. The intent is to generate a general understanding of the interior artefact.

Interior design as a cultural activity with importance for human development

Social space is the vehicle for the cultural life of society to take place (Perolini 2011:167) and it is produced by and influences cultural interaction. Space encourages or discourages certain behaviours and interactions and gives form to social structures and ideologies (Perolini 2011:168). This is an account of the recursive relationship in which cultural practices inform space-making, while space-making, in turn, constructs and maintains cultural practices.[3] Interior design offers the tangible cultural spaces that serve as vehicles for intangible cultural practices (e.g., a restaurant acting as vehicle for a waiter serving dinner, with associated meanings of servitude and social position and additional connotations of commodity and expense). Culture is strategically important for human development and is a universal human characteristic (UNESCO 2003; 2005); since interior design is a cultural activity that provides the tangible vehicles for the expression of intangible cultural aspects, there is a need to consider and understand interior design's role in this context.

Material objects and spaces create and communicate meaning; they offer the framework for situated meaning and are the result of that meaning (O'Toole & Were 2008:618-619), that is, material objects communicate meaning and are created meaningfully. They are the result of actions and also connote those actions. The interior artefact is such a material object or space:

> [Space and material culture] is both a manifestation and influence on our cultures, social structures, sense of agency, identity and power structures (O'Toole & Were 2008:631).

The interior artefact exists as a technical object in the technological system (*techne*) and a meaningful object in the cultural system (*dogma*); it straddles the interdependence between the tangible and intangible aspects of culture. Like all technical (functional) objects it can be said that interior artefacts are 'in flight from the technological system towards the cultural system' (after Barthes 1983:8). This is an expression of the relationship between first- and second-order meaning and the process of transfunctionalisation to move between the two (after Gottdiener 1985). Any functional object generates meaning and must communicate with its user on two levels: first-order meaning indicates a functional object's operational purpose or use, while second-order meaning may refer to socially constructed connotations such as cost or social status. The embodied meaning of the interior artefact is considered as an utterance (after Eco 1979b). Any utterance conveys organised

3. The term 'space' is used in this article to refer to inhabitable artefacts that can be entered and navigated by humans, for example, landscapes, open urban places such as sidewalks and squares, buildings, interiors, and rooms. When the interrelationship between cultural practices and spaces is considered, or when these spaces obtain identities or are inhabited, they can be considered as 'places'. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider the philosophical underpinnings of 'place-making'.

and analysable content formed by a hierarchy of semantic features. The features exist as a system (Eco 1979b:176). This section highlights some of the systemic characteristics of meaning in the interior artefact.

Both levels generate meaning: the technical object conveys first-order meaning in the technical system and is primarily concerned with the interior artefact's functional characteristics and operational purpose; as a meaningful object the interior artefact carries second-order connotations in the cultural system. This embodied meaning is the primary cultural aspect of interior design; it establishes the interior artefact as a cultural object and its continuous (re)generation is consistent with considering culture as a noun of process.

Considering the interior artefact as *techne* or *dogma* allows me to consider broadly the creation of meaning in interiors. The creation of meaning addresses the psychological needs of the inhabitants, while technification directs embodiment thereof in physical objects. O'Toole and Were (2008:618) describe the relationship between meaning and function in objects as follow: '[m]aterial objects and places are ostensibly constructed and possessed for an operational purpose, but also to create and communicate meaning'. The implication for interior design is that as meaningful objects, the second-order meaning to be embodied in interior artefacts must be generated first. This challenges the role of the interior designer as a technologist who is primarily concerned with the production of a physical object that protects the health and safety of the inhabitant; the physical expression of the interior is relegated to a secondary professional role.[4]

Eco (1979b:14-40) proposes a model of interpretation based on the complexity of the text: if the text is simple, few factors have impact on the message and its eventual acceptance by the addressee; for more complex texts, such as fictional texts, other factors such as the suspension of disbelief are important (Eco 1979b:16).[5] Meaning in the interior artefact functions on similar principles: as technical objects interior artefacts require of their inhabitants to trust that they will fulfil their function, as meaningful objects they require a suspension of disbelief which is associated with the ambiguity and complexity of the interior artefact.

Eco (1979b:40) offers a tantalising invitation to complexity of meaning in texts:

> To conclude a book of textual interpretations with a metanarrative text that speaks ambiguously and with tongue in cheek of its own ambiguity and of its own derisory nature seems to me an honest decision.

4. This has implications for the establishment of interior design as a profession (also refer to Königk 2010); the professional ground shifts to a concern with meaning. A professional concern with the imaginal aspects of the built-environment and relegation of the spatial aspects (or at the least a counterpoint to the spatial bias of architecture) provides a greater ontological separation from architecture, and interior design is no longer 'a little bit of architecture'; it establishes a discrete practice. Perolini (2011:168) evokes Lefebvre's (1991:135) 'representational space'; in this realm space is lived through associated images that are connoted with spatial codes and symbols. The interior design occupation, as a profession, should place greater emphasis on the generation of meaningful images.

5. Or other 'metatextual propositions' (Eco 1979:16); for a scientific text the metatextual proposition is not the suspension of disbelief but a greater sense of trust. I assume that in the technical object a sense of trust and suspension of disbelief would be required since the technical object exists in both the technological system and the cultural system. This requires a hermeneutic approach to the generation and interpretation of meaning in technical objects, with constant comparison between the constituent parts and the whole and the interrelationship of the constituent parts and of the technological and cultural systems.

To appropriate this invitation to the interior artefact (as a complex spatial text) requires the interior designer to be aware of the ambiguities; the unpredictability of iteration and interpretation; and the instability of meaningful codes that are embodied in the interior artefact. The generation of texts is dependent on contextual and circumstantial selections,[6] overcoding,[7] and the framing[8] of the text. This establishes a horizon of meaning and delimits a spatiotemporal condition that informs the codes and subcodes that are utilised in the text.[9]

When it is considered as a 'text' the interior artefact is a common and usual artefact that exists within the cultural system like any other. In this case, the interior artefact can be considered as a (non-linear) text that contains units of meaning. This text is interiorised in a spatiotemporal horizon that is contained paradigmatically and contextually, and which is dependent on unpredictable iterative sequences to convey meaning between the interior designer and the eventual inhabitant. The interior artefact functions with similarity to all artefacts in the system of objects.

When the inhabitant identifies codes within the artefact and makes meaningful connections external properties, such as associations and connotations, are recognised. The reader then makes indexical presuppositions[10] and assigns the text to an external world[11] (Eco 1979b:17). The interior artefact's placement within an external world[12] generates connections to world structures and discursive structures; these connections represent extensions of the meaning embodied in interior. Eco (1979b:17) suggests that during the interpretation of a text the reader places these extensions of meaning into brackets and he labels them as 'bracketed extensions'. During the design of an interior artefact, the interior designer can foresee these bracketed extensions and should incorporate them proactively; this will produce denser meaning within the text.

A sign is a correlation between an expression and content (Eco 1979b:179); as such the identifiable signs in the interior realm can be considered as expressions. During the interpretation of a text the reader is faced with a series of expressions. The reader applies codes or systems of codes to these expressions to transform them to content (Eco 1979b:15). This is the process whereby the reader gains access to the meaning of a text and reaches understanding.

During its generation, the interior artefact is manufactured like any other artefact. Information is extracted from the cultural domain; the designer extends or transforms it, and embodies the new meaning in an object. This object is either rejected or validated. Once the object is validated, its contained meaning is returned to the domain and made available for further transmission.

6. Circumstantial selections and presuppositions are concerned with the shared knowledge of the sender and the addressee on which successful communication is dependent (Eco 1979b:108).

7. Overcoding records commonly used strings of signs as pre-established rules (and assumed stable codes) that are extended to propose a rarer application of the previous rule (Eco 1979 [1976]:133). Outside verbal language and all iconological representation is dependent on overcoding; this allows the assigning of additional meanings to minimal expressions (Eco 1979 [1976]:134).

8. A frame is the mediation between a comprehensive encyclopaedic representation and an instance of overcoding (Eco 1979:20).

9. I am not concerned with what these codes and subcodes are; they must be interpreted by using precedent and archetype on a continuous basis. It is stressed again that these units of meaning are unstable and to a large extend indeterminable although they are dependent on the recognition of previous codes (Eco 1979 [1976]:129).

10. These are causal connections between a sign and its object (Eco 1979 [1976]:115); i.e., there is causal correlation in the mind of the inhabitant between the interior and its larger cultural domain; these constitute circumstantial selections.

11. The properties of this external world are 'transformed into pieces of encyclopedic knowledge' (Eco 1979:17). This implies that the inhabitant enlarges the meaningful space of the interior but this external world must still be 'small' (after Eco 1990:81-82); this 'small world' is limited and contained and to an extent contrived and fictional.

12. The external world can be considered as a 'small world' (after Eco 1990: 81-82), which can be interpreted as a limited and contained, contrived and fictional, world.

During the inception and manufacture of the interior artefact, existing meaning is reproduced, transformed, or extended in an unpredictable sequence of iterations that are impacted on by various role-players.[13] Interior design is an innovative practice that introduces gradual change into a process of establishing enduring meaning. This production process facilitates cultural exchange and the translation of cultural capital.[14] In this process, the interior artefact's idiosyncrasies are conversant with the interior design process and the physical nature of the interior artefact.

Since the interior artefact serves as a tangible vehicle for the expression of intangible cultural practices, it can be argued that the interior facilitates the close relationship between individuals and the larger cultural groupings[15] to which they may belong. As individuals articulate personal attributes that contribute to collective cultural identities, so do individual interiors. The personal attributes of an individual can be made analogous to the specific attributes of an interior. Individual interiors that are created in iterative sequences and which express intertextuality can be considered as subsequent 'generations' of interiors. Interior design can express customs and conventions handed down over time; these can be extended or altered to introduce innovation.

The connection and differentiation between the 'self' and the 'Other' is regulated through boundary conditions. In this context, the 'power of the individual' is expressed as the individual's control over his or her own identity and the assimilation thereof in the larger cultural habitus. The individual will express various territorial behaviours to protect his or her individual identity as 'oneself'. Territorial behaviour involves marking and communication that spaces or objects belong to an individual (or smaller subgroup) (O'Toole & Were 2008:620). The interior here serves as a tangible agent to express territorial behaviour. Individuals and interiors collectively contribute to larger cultural habitus; conversely, they maintain individual identities within these larger groupings. Interiors, or marking smaller interiors within a larger space, can generate a sense of belonging and identity (Perolini 2011:164).[16]

In conclusion, I assume that as people create their personal identities and express these in personal spaces, so too are public spaces created. Individuals employ familiar methods to denote occupation, inhabitation, and identity to mediate the boundary condition between oneself and the 'Other'. The professional practice of interior design is the best located occupation to facilitate this process in the public domain. It is now necessary to consider interior design specifics in greater detail.

13. These role-players include the interior designer, the client, contractors, the existing spatial condition (and its embodied meaning), the external context, and the user (after Wilwerding 2013:82).

14. The inherent dangers of cultural exchange and cultural translation are tacitly stated in the *Interiors Declaration*. Cultural translation transcribes cultural capital obtained from the 'Other' (which may be removed temporally or spatially) in a process, which enables the hegemonic agency of the 'self' (Butler 2013).

15. These collective cultural identities do not necessarily indicate ethnic or national groupings but merely a shared habitus in which a shared humanity enable a sharing of meaning amongst individuals.

16. In the public domain, it is specifically the use of proximal assemblies (ensemble, constellation, and symbolic motifs) that facilitate territorial behaviour and the mediation between the oneself and the 'Other' through signifying inhabitation. These actions allow inhabitants of crowded space a sense of belonging, of knowing where one belongs, having a sense of how to navigate the space, etc.

A discrete understanding of interior design's idiosyncrasies as an agent of meaning

Interior design is a traditive discipline that carries meaning from earlier artefacts; it acts as other cultural practices but it includes its own idiosyncrasies. This section considers some of these in greater detail to contribute to answering the ontological question.

I consider culture as a noun of process that implies that culture is continuously renewed and reconstructed to contribute to a sense of continuity and durability. In this iterative practice, culture is (re)produced out of the medium itself, and as a cultural product interior design is produced out of and for interior design. The interior design discipline is self-referential and self-duplicating; this is evidenced by strong intertextual links between interior artefacts. Since intertextuality implies knowledge of other interiors this supports a pedagogic underpinning that is concerned with the production of interior artefacts specifically.[17]

To initiate the discussion the following definition is proposed:

> Interior design is the generation a meaningful image which is expressed spatially.

This utterance takes the form of a meaningful image that is embodied in an inhabitable use artefact (technical object).[18] It was indicated above that meaning addresses psychological and social needs while technification embodies them in physical objects. During this process interior design must mediate between the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural production: it must construct the message (intangible) and then spatially express the message (tangible). As meaning is expressed in a material, physical, and volumetric artefact, the role of the interior artefact (as an inhabitable space) within the cultural domain differs from other artefacts. The interior artefact's idiosyncrasies are conversant with the physical nature of the volumetric interior.[19]

For interior design to produce culture (construct meaning), it must generate a physical object, which is the inhabitable spatial expression of the imaginal meaning in the mind of the designer. The designer is responsible to create a material artefact to convey the design intention. This object is usually documentation of the designer's intent; it will be interpreted and constructed by a team of contractors and craftspersons. For interior design, technification therefore implies the generation of two different material objects: it is the generation of drawings (imaginal texts) and it is the construction of the physical interior artefact. It can be inferred that the

17. This does not imply that interior design, as an occupation, or interior designers, as cultural producers, do not access the cultural domain in general, which will also influence the production of the discipline and inform that production through, possibly very strong, multidisciplinary influences. The interior artefact exists like any other artefact in the cultural production system. This is based on the assumption that the built environment is the product of culture in the broader sense and that similar cultural production methods inform the built environment on a number of scales; but it does not ignore the fact that creative disciplines have their own idiosyncrasies. As a discipline, interior design is influenced by closely related disciplines such as architecture, but also by unrelated practices such as music and literature.

18. Here I distinguish between the interior as an indicator of function (first-order meaning) and its connotations (second-order meaning). The built artefact is firstly functional but includes other communicative purposes; the communicative purpose supports the built artefact's primary function (Eco 1980:13).

19. The volumetric interior is distinct from the rest of the world; its containment offers opportunity for the generation of a contrived identity that exists discretely in the contained interior.

interior design process is primarily concerned with the generation of construction documentation; during the construction process the interior designer merely acts as a facilitator.

In the interior artefact there are two layers of meaning: first-order meaning (use value and denotation) in which the metatextual proposition is dependent on the inhabitant's trust in the technical execution, or in the interior artefact's ability to fulfil its function.[20] In second-order meaning (associations and connotations), the metatextual proposition is dependent on the inhabitant's suspension of disbelief and trust in the message and its connoted references.[21]

The associations and connotations (second-order meaning) are unstable and timely; they are contextually bound and dependent on the creative participation of the inhabitant (which serves as the addressee or reader when the interior artefact is considered as a text). In generating the meaningful image (which functions as an utterance containing the second-order meaning), the interior designer must identify and generate various levels of meaning. These levels of meaning are then embodied through analytical and iterative design practice in a hermeneutic manner. In this iterative practice the interior designer can refer to existing artefacts and collect and synthesise various meanings, both deep and superficial. It is possible to map the hierarchy of semantic features that forms the analysable content of the utterance. In this way, the interior designer can investigate how the message will be structured in the artefact, or how similar messages were structured in previous artefacts. This further establishes interior design as an iterative practice. The transfer of meaning is dependent on correlations between the associations identified by the designer and those active in the mind of the inhabitant. The designer must develop an emphatic response to the future inhabitant.

The temporal emotions are a class of emotions that Jennifer Lois (2010:441) claims belong to a class of emotions 'that can only be felt by crossing timeframes, and thus may be more useful (than non-temporal emotions) in constructing a continuous self over time'. She continues to describe the characteristic of all emotions to be experienced in the present, remembered from the past or anticipated in future, but some emotions can only be experienced by bridging the present either to the past or to the future; these include: nostalgia, regret, ambition, hope, optimism, disillusionment, and dread. The temporal emotions facilitate the construction of a self-identity over time by tying life experiences together to provide a sense of durability and continuity. The meaning embodied in interior design contributes to the generation of enduring cultural identities in a similar manner. Since interior design functions like all other cultural practices when it collects and extends

20. First-order meaning is concerned with the technical nature of the profession: how the interior is constructed?; was this done safely and responsibly?; are appropriate material choices made?; does the interior environment protect the health and safety of its inhabitants?; does the interior environment protect or damage the larger natural environment?, etc.

21. Second-order meaning expands interior design's professional ground beyond that of architecture.

information that exists in the cultural domain, it implies that interior design is an expression of culture as an inherited legacy of meanings which provide a sense of continuity (even though some interior artefacts have a relatively short life span). This sense of continuity is established when the interior designer imbues the contemporary interior with appropriate signs that convey earlier meaning; this establishes interior design as a traditive discipline. This combination of inherited meanings that are continually embodied in new artefacts that are produced with technical mastery, displays a dichotomy between tradition and innovation; artefacts like these can be considered as 'new' (after Deleuze 1992) or as well done artistic works (after Eco 1990). Interior artefacts that display this characteristic exhibit the qualities of culture as a system of iterative meanings, thoughts and traditions in a continuous dimension of critical and theoretical reflection (after Baudrillard 1998). Interior design is traditive and innovative simultaneously and without contradiction.

The analogy between individual identity and identity contained in the interior artefact can be further expanded: in commercial interiors, the constructed spatial identity must find correlation with the personal identity of the individual who chooses to consume the interior by inhabiting it. This inhabitation is expressed when the individual occupies the interior temporarily. When individuals choose to occupy an interior, they indicate that interior artefact as an outward extension of their personality. In this instance, the interior functions as a signifier for personal identity. This merely indicates an association between the identity of the inhabitant and the space, and not a shared identity.[22] Interior design fashions identity through artifice and participates in the staging of individual identities (Sanders 2006:304-305).

Since differentiation is made between the interior artefact and other artefacts, the built artefact (in general) must be differentiated from general texts; although built artefacts (including interiors) can be considered as texts they are fundamentally different from written texts, and meaning cannot be created in them in the same way. The interior artefact is a spatial text that cannot be made analogous to a narrative text (after Lefebvre 1991). The spatial text is not read but inhabited and its connotations are contained[23] in a broad 'horizon of meaning'.[24] The general properties of linguistic texts (narrative texts) or oral utterances ('linear text manifestations') are made applicable on the interior artefact (which is interpreted non-linearly) through comparison. The interpretation, and possibly the generation, of messages and meaning is a continuous process and its timing is unpredictable (Eco 1979b:18).

The transfer of messages is dependent on the transmission of a sign between the sender and the addressee, and the existence of overlapping associations (which the sign connotes) in the mind of the reader and the addressee. Eco (1990:143) describes

22. This personal expression can be considered analogous to the use of fashion to construct or extend personal identity.

23. Lefebvre uses the term 'acted'; I prefer the term 'contained' for its connotations with interiority (also refer to Colomina (in McCarthy 2005:114) for whom 'the horizon is an interior').

24. Butler (2013:11) refers to the 'spatiotemporal horizon' in which traditions are generated and propagated in an unpredictable iterative sequence.

two models of interpretation: the 'dictionary model' is composed of a limited set of semantic universals whereas in contrast the 'encyclopedia model' is a system where every semantic unit must be interpreted through every possible association. When Lefebvre's description of the spatial text is considered, it must be conceded that the spatial text, with its 'broad horizon of meaning', must be interpreted according to the encyclopaedia model. Although this would generate a more nuanced interior with several layers of meaning, it may be problematic since (especially commercial) interiors need to send unambiguous messages to possible inhabitants.

The dictionary model is useful to generate explicit messages that are easy to interpret. The dictionary model is effective since it depicts the competency of the laity (after Eco 1990). In my interpretation of interior design as a creative discipline, the dictionary model explains direct and artificial[25] connotations. These connotations enable fairly accurate and speedy interpretation, but it may lead to a banal practice of interior design in which meaning is simply ascribed and encoded and may generate pastiche. The use of a dictionary approach may contribute to the impression that interior design is easy to execute.

The encyclopaedia model in contrast is ambiguous; it introduces complexity in the interpretation of artefacts (and their pre-emptive generation) when it is considered that the laity can attribute incomplete connotations and disconnected associations to sememes (after Eco 1990). The encyclopaedia model's potential for unlimited semiosis is reduced by the cooperation of the interpreter (Eco 1979b:39). This again implies that, for interior design, consideration must be made for the future inhabitant of the interior artefact. The inhabitant of the commercial interior plays a specific role in the consumption of meaning and the generation of identity that this implies.

Although I tried to highlight some of the systemic characteristics of meaning in the interior artefact, the task remains incomplete. To expand the comprehension of interior design's idiosyncrasies, some time will be spent on its hegemony.

Applying interior design's hegemony

In its facilitation of cultural exchange and the translation of cultural capital, interior design may pose a threat to cultural diversity. There is a need to understand this to enable its application with circumspection, rigour and responsibility.

I consider the interior artefact to be active within the traditional consideration of culture as an inherited legacy of works, thoughts, tradition, and the continuous

25. Eco (1990:143) describes the model as 'undoubtedly pretty artificial'.

dimension of critical and theoretical reflection (after Baudrillard 1998:101). If interior design is considered as such a cultural practice, it differs from the popular image of the discipline as a form of mimetic production; which is evident in its depiction in popular media.[26] Interior design's hegemony does not lie in its role as tastemaker[27] but in its influence on larger cultural discourses. If interior design (re)creates culture and meaning by repeating norms and standards contained in the discipline's own cultural residues, and those it accesses from the cultural domain in general, it re-establishes existing cultural norms, extends them, reinforces them, questions them, and can even subvert them.

I would go further by stating that interior design exercises interpretive processes during the generation of interior artefacts. The design process itself is dependent on the interior designer interpreting and recreating existing cultural codes and norms. In this way, interior design is hegemonic when it (re)creates existing cultural norms. I call on interior designers to not merely exercise this agency, but to do so critically. The critical application will require a new awareness of the cultural codes that are (re)created. This requires empirical design practices and implies a greater role for research as part of the design process. The interior designer must identify the cultural codes and understand their interdependency in the generation of meaning in the interior artefact.

When the inhabitant recognises external properties connoted by the interior she assigns the subject to an external world (after Eco 1979b:17). These external links generate connections to a larger encyclopaedia of knowledge. The generation of texts is ideologically informed and so is their interpretation, even if the participants are not aware of that (Eco 1979b:22).

I identified interior design discourses from the literature that was compared and synthesised to reach a list of eight tacit interior design discourses.[28] These discourses offer interior design the opportunity to exercise its agency with critical application. The use of the discourses allows the interior designer the opportunity to 'frame' the interior by adding ambiguous or ideologically informed meanings . I will briefly present these interior design discourses:

Alteration: Scott (2008:xv) defines 'pure' architecture as the production of a new building on a cleared site.[29] If interior design is considered as an architectural discipline, in so far as it produces built artefacts, then the act of alteration distinguishes the professional practices of interior design from architecture. This elevates the act of altering existing buildings to a major theoretical discourse for the discipline in which the interior designer's response to the host has normative

26. The essentialist depiction of interior design on television is discussed by Königk (2010:36-38).

27. The tastemaker is characterised by his or her casual capability and an overt refusal of didacticism (Bourdieu in Philips 2005:218).

28. The interior design discourses were identified from interior design literature as part of the grounded theory coding process. The list was initiated by Taylor and Preston (2006:6-14) who identified major methods and discourses in interior design theory: form; gender; inhabitation and the body; interiority; objects and artefacts; and taste and status. Sparke (2009:3) mentions the body; gender; identity; interiority; and taste. The discourses in the list were synthesised to reach the current list of eight tacit interior design discourses. During the analysis of the corpus these discourses were used to indicate synoptically the presence of a conceptual idea in an interior artefact; their general application is discussed in this article.

29. Since architecture is therefore concerned with the generation of an observable three-dimensional object, the generation and composition of form is established as an important architectural discourse. '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' (Königk 2010:13).

implications (Scott 2008). Interior design can be considered as a temporal discipline that in the act of alteration illustrates the failure of architecture (to reach its utopian or theoretical ideals) (Königk 2010:50).

Episteme: if design is considered as a way of thinking then attention must be paid to 'to the thinking and considerations that inform its production' (Leach 1997:xv). If epistemology is considered as the knowledge of knowledge systems that separate those forms of knowing which constitute defendable, and therefore valid, belief from mere opinion, then the use of episteme in design implies a normative position that distinguishes between right thinking and wrong thinking.[30] Episteme is concerned with design arguments and whether these arguments are defendable. As research interferes with the objects it studies (Grosz 2009:127) which affect the larger cultural system (Saukko 2003:25), so too does design production.[31]

Form: the theoretical informants that contribute to the generation and use of form in design are related to the epistemological arguments about design thinking. These arguments constitute a major field of architectural theory (Königk 2010:14), and it hardly warrants an elaboration on this field.[32] In interior design, form relates to the specific shape of the volumetric interior (Edwards 2011:90); this shape is determined by the host building, or architectural envelope, but can be manipulated by the interior designer. Architectural production is informed by arguments and understandings of architectural form, but these omit many important interior design characteristics (Jennings 2007:49). Since form is an interior design vehicle for communication (Tan 2011:46), understanding it in a discursive sense is imperative. Form as a theoretical construct explores all that is concrete, material, and objectified in the physical interior artefact (Taylor & Preston 2006:11).[33]

Gender / Sexuality: it is my belief that gender plays a significant theoretical role in the discipline owing to its perceived acceptability as a career for women or gay men (and an implied criticism of male heterosexuality). Taylor and Preston (2006:10-11) assert that it is not possible to ignore the role of feminist theory in interior design. Interior design's feminine characteristics are historically founded in the emergence of interior decoration as a women's pastime at the end of the nineteenth century. It is argued that gay men are attracted to this profession (like fashion and theatre) owing to their perceived marginalisation elsewhere (Sanders 2006:305-5).[34] Since gender, as a construct, is so instrumental in the establishment of individual identities, it includes notions of the body, privacy, publicity and display; it is extended to issues of ontology and power. In the commercial practice of interior design a greater sensitivity to gender as a construct will enable the interior designer to design appropriate environments with greater sensitivity.

30. Episteme therefore also influences interior design as an institution: 'Our social interaction consists very much in telling one another what right thinking is and passing blame on wrong thinking. This is indeed how we build the institutions, squeezing each other's ideas into a common shape so that we can prove rightness by sheer numbers of independent assent' (Douglas 1986:91).

31. This article can therefore be considered an epistemological design study that I hope will interfere in interior design's production system.

32. I am not concerned with the architectural canon but include some architectural works here as example, since (as a young discipline that is informed by architecture) interior design refers to other theoretical sources (such as architecture) in an intertemporal manner (Königk 2010:49). Sources include, but are not limited to: Alexander (1964); Ching (2014 [1979]); Crysler (2003); Curtis (1996 [1982]); Johnson (1994); Lang (1987); Rowe (1987); and Venturi (1966).

33. As a theoretical discourse form is concerned with first-order meaning, this is expanded to include the consideration of historic interiors, or the history of interior design, which is not afforded a separate theoretical category here.

34. From my own experience as a gay interior designer, I need to comment on Sanders' assumption. Within interior design, I am marginalised owing to my masculinity, and I am acutely aware that my masculinity is imbued with hegemonic agency. It is also my experience that in predominantly feminine environments gay men are perceived as men first and as such pose similar threats as heterosexual men. As a man in interior design I am the 'Other'; as simply a man, I (still) occupy a normative state. During my career I have been accused by female interior designers of being 'hard', 'critical, 'intimidating', and 'lacking empathy', characteristics which I assume do not fit with the image of interior design as a caring profession. I have also been told (by women) that the discipline was unable to professionalise fully since it is filled with women and that they are therefore unwilling to

Identity / Ontology: for Penny Sparke (2009:3), in interior design identity addresses issues of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and age. This list of categories can be considered as an initial list only, and it must be stated clearly that the construction of identity in the interior involves more complexity than merely expressing categories of belonging. This article can therefore be considered an ontological study of interior design.[35]

Inhabitation and the body: developments in feminist and geographic studies investigate the relationship between particular bodies and their environment; as a specific body is located its capacities and desires are expressed and (re)produced by specific spaces (Taylor & Preston 2006:10-11). This supports the notion that inhabitants choose to consume a specific interior as an expression of their self-identity. The consideration for inhabitation could be expanded to include theories that are sensitive to human beings as embodied psychological phenomena, rather than living, physical objects (Hewlett in Perolini 2011:169).

Interiority: the theoretical consideration of the inner self as distinct from the rest of the world is applied in interior design in the contemplation of enclosure and the differentiation between the 'self' : 'Other' conceptual pair. Interiority establishes the interior as a discrete realm and moving into the interior is a movement from the public arena to a space that can express the idiosyncrasies of identity (Hillier & Hanson 1984:144-5). Interiority is the philosophical concept that examines the innerness of interior design as a locus for feeling and projection in which the interior environment is experienced via the body (as a 'culturally lived organism') (Taylor & Preston 2006:11).

Taste: when expressed in the interior, taste serves as a marker of social distinction (Sparke 2009:3). The use of taste contributes to social stratification and the expression of identity; this is specifically achieved through meta-knowledge of the second-order meaning that is connoted by objects. Taste as a discourse in the interior emerged in the professional struggle between architects and upholsterers in the nineteenth century; the interior emerged as a conceptual entity which is not simply architectural, but imaginal as it involves covering the inside shell with furnishing and decoration (Rice 2004:276). Taste as a discourse ranges from Elsie De Wolfe's (1920) practical discussion of its application in the domestic interior to Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) social critique of it as a cultural construct. In the commercial interior taste is applied in the 'alliance to consumption and the acquisition of possessions as a symbol of social status' (Taylor & Preston 2006:12).

fight for professionalisation. Comments such as these by Perolini (2011:169) offer tacit and implied criticism of masculinity itself: 'Women have a tendency to overlook dichotomies and recognise connections rather than differences. Design processes undertaken in this feminist perspective are likely to blur role distinctions between designer and client and designer and user'; she continues that women are more likely to interpret diversity and to promote spatial and visual connections between spaces. This is a misandrist position that may imply that men are, inherently, inferior interior designers. As a gay man, I find that the place of acceptance which interior design offered me when I first joined the discipline as a student in 1999 is becoming more irrelevant as being gay has become mainstream; the gay subculture has subsequently been eroded. These are my personal reflections and have little academic standing, but I believe that they are not unique, and are shared here to indicate the ubiquity and importance of gendered experiences for interior designers.

35. Which partially answers the ontological question, what is interior design?

The tacit discourses offer interior design the opportunity to exercise its hegemonic agency with critical application by adding ambiguous or ideologically informed levels of meaning.[36] These additional layers of meaning must augment, and not replace, the commercial meanings that the interior artefact must convey on behalf of the client to the future inhabitant; interior design should serve its professional and commercial responsibilities first. From the discussion above it is evident that interior design discourses are interrelated and do not form discrete, autonomous fields. These theories are primarily concerned with the construction of identity and the meaningful expression thereof. The interior design theories identify a disciplinary body of knowledge that includes social, political, philosophical, technological, and psychological aspects. The products of interior design act hegemonically when spaces give form and expression to social structures by encouraging and discouraging certain behaviours and when they influence the interaction of its inhabitants. In other words, interior design provides the tangible vehicles for the expression of intangible cultural practices. Finally, it must be noted that these discourses are not necessarily active in the mind of the designer or the inhabitant. The associations that a text connotes are only virtually present in the mind. Associations are stored socially or culturally and are picked up, by both the generators and interpreters of texts, when needed. It is therefore assumed that, like all hegemonic practices, interior design exerts cultural control and influence in ways which are not necessarily immediately apparent to either the designer or the inhabitant, but which are present and available. This article calls for greater awareness of interior design's cultural role and greater critical application of its agency to create meaning.

REFERENCES

Alexander, C. 1964. *Notes on the synthesis of form*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Armstrong, J (ed). 1992. *Michel Foucault. Philosopher.* New York: Routledge.

Barthes, R. 1983. *The fashion system*. Translated by M Ward & R Howard. New York: Hill & Wang.

Baudrillard, J. 1998. *The consumer society. Myths and structures*. Translated by CT. London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Translated by R Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

36. The use of the discourses allows the interior designer the opportunity to 'frame' the interior artefact.

Broadbent, G, Bunt, R & Llorens, T (eds). 1980. *Meaning and behaviour in the built environment.* New York: Wiley.

Butler, J. 2013. *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Candlin, F & Guins, R (eds). 2009. *The object reader*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ching, FDK. 2014. *Architecture. Form, space, and order*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Crysler, CG. 2003. *Writing spaces. Discourses of architecture, urbanism, and the built environment, 1960-2000*. New York: Routledge.

Curtis. WJR. 1996. *Modern architecture since 1900*. Third edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Deleuze, G. 1992. What is a dispositive?, in *Michel Foucault. Philosopher*, edited by J Armstrong. New York: Routledge:159-168.

De Wolfe, E. 1920. *The house in good taste*. New York: Century.

Douglas, M. 1986. *How institutions think*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Eco, U. 1979a. *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. 1979b. *The role of the reader. Explorations in the semiotics of texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. 1980. Function and sign: The semiotics of architecture, in *Meaning and behaviour in the built environment*, edited by G Broadbent, R Bunt & T Llorens. New York: Wiley:11-69.

Eco, U. 1990. *The limits of interpretation*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Edwards, C. 2011. *Interior design. A critical introduction*. New York: Berg.

Gottdiener, M. 1985. Hegemony and mass culture: A semiotic approach. *American Journal of Sociology* 90(5):979-1001.

Grosz. E. 2009. The thing, in *The object reader*, edited by F Candlin & R Guins. Abingdon: Routledge:124-138.

Hillier, B & Hanson, J. 1984. *The social logic of space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

IFI, see International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers

International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers. 2011. *IFI Interiors Declaration*. [O]. Available: http://ifiworld.org/img/597IFI%20Interiors%20Declaration%20-%20ORIGINAL.pdf Accessed 07 June 2013.

Jennings, J. 2007. A case for a typology of design: The Interiors Archetype Project. *Journal of Interior Design* 32(3):48-68.

Johnson, PA. 1994. *The theory of architecture. Concepts, themes and practices*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Königk, R. 2010. Interior design as architecture's 'Other'. MInt Dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Lang, JT. 1987. *Creating architectural theory: The role of the behavioural sciences in environmental design*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Leach, N (ed). 1997. *Rethinking architecture. A reader in critical theory*. London: Routledge.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The social production of space*. Translated by D Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lewis, J. 2008. *Cultural studies. The basics.* Second Edition. London: Sage.

Lois, J. 2010. The temporal emotion work of motherhood. Homeschooler's strategies for managing time shortage. *Gender & Society* 24(5):421-446. [O]. Available: http://gas.sagepub.com/content/24/4/421 Accessed 23 October 2013.

McCarthy, C. 2005. Toward a definition of interiority. *Space and Culture* 8(2):112-125.

O'Toole, P & Were, P. 2008. Observing places: Using space and material culture in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 8(5):616-634. [O]. Available: http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/8/5/616 Accessed 11 December 2013.

Perolini, PS. 2011. Interior spaces and layers of meaning. *Design Principles & Practices. An International Journal* 5(6):165-174. [O]. Available: http://www.Design-Journal.com Accessed 5 February 2013.

Philips, D. 2005. Transformation scenes. The television interior makeover. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8(2):213-229.

Rice, C. 2004. Rethinking histories of the interior. *The Journal of Architecture* 9(3):275-287. [O]. Available:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602360412331296107
Accessed 25 January 2012.

Rowe, PG. 1987. *Design thinking*. London: MIT Press.

Sanders, J. 2006. Curtain wars, in *Intimus. Interior design theory reader*, edited by M Taylor & J Preston. Hoboken: Wiley:303-308.

Saukko, P. 2003. *Doing research in cultural studies. An introduction to classical and new methodological approaches*. London: Sage.

Scott, F. 2008. *On altering architecture*. London: Routledge.

Sparke, P, Massey, A, Keeble, T & Martin, B (eds). 2009. *Designing the modern interior. From the Victorians to today.* Oxford: Berg.

Sparke, P. 2009. General introduction, in *Designing the modern interior. From the Victorians to today*, edited by P Sparke, A Massey, T Keeble & B Martin. Oxford: Berg:1-10.

Tan, L. 2011. A review of environmental symbology: Origins and contributions toward a theoretical framework. *Journal of Interior Design* 26(2):39-49. [O]. Available: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1939-1668.2011.01056.x/full
Accessed 11 February 2013.

Taylor, M & Preston, J (eds). 2006. *Intimus. Interior design theory reader.* Hoboken: Wiley.

Taylor, M & Preston, J. 2006. Proximities, in *Intimus. Interior design theory reader*. Hoboken: Wiley:6-13.

UNESCO, see, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2003. *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.* [O]. Available: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
Accessed 07 June 2013.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2005. *Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions*. [O]. Available: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
Accessed 07 June 2013.

Vaikla-Poldma, T (ed). 2013. *Meanings of designed spaces*. New York: Fairchild.

Venturi, R. 1966. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*. Second printing. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.

Williams, R. 1976. *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society*. London: Fontana/ Croom Helm.

Wilwerding, J. 2013. A history of aesthetics and the structuring of space, in *Meanings of designed spaces*, edited by T Vaikla-Poldma, New York: Fairchild:66-87.