

# A View from the Margin: Interior Design

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1 It is important to note here that the same stereotypes assigned to women as interior designers are equally inscribed in stereotypes of gay men. The elision of the feminine, decoration, the interior, and the inferior was put firmly in place in the early modern movement not only by the anti-decorative invectives of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, but by a large societal discussion and concern about the issue referred to as “degeneration.” At the turn of the century, legitimate scholars as well as pseudo-scientists from all fields theorized that the new conditions of modernity indicated that society was devolving or degenerating. The reason for this degeneration generally was recognized as the “feminization” of culture. In degeneration theory, the feminine represented the primitive, base, and erotic urges of society that had to be suppressed in order for society to evolve and progress rationally. All indications of the feminine, therefore, were perceived as inferior. The perception that gay men are “feminized” men links them automatically with the same inferiority assigned to both women and decoration. Like stereotypes of women and decoration, the stereotype of the gay man as decorator still is strongly inscribed in the public’s perception and equally as under-constructed. Since this article speaks mainly from my personal viewpoint and experiences as a woman, it will not deal specifically with issues of this stereotype, although it is equally important and relevant to this discussion. (See my article “Decoration as Modernism’s Other: (Re)Reading the Texts of Early Modern Architecture and Design” in *Cultural and Artistic Upheavals in Modern Europe: 1848–1945* (Cummer Studies, Vol. 1, 1996) for a more complete discussion of the origins of these stereotypes).

About ten years ago, after nearly a decade of practice as an interior designer, I returned to school to work on a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary humanities. In my first semester, I was, perhaps, a bit over zealous and enrolled in a philosophy course whose subject was Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. I was intellectually rusty after being away from school for so long, and this class was very difficult. New jargon and concepts had sprung up since my last academic experience, and I found that I was hanging on the professor’s every word just so I could understand. But I studied hard, read diligently, and I was doing well. I was required to do a presentation in class, so I met with the professor just to be sure I was on the right track. In that meeting, we quickly got into an extremely stimulating discussion of Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics, which was my topic. It was one of those animated discussions that every grad student and professor long for. I was elated that I was able to hold my own in the discussion, and perhaps because I could, the instructor paused in our conversation to ask about my background. In my description of myself, I mentioned that I was an interior designer and from that moment everything changed. My professor abruptly ended our previous conversation, and started asking for my advice about decorating her living room. Although I tried to get the conversation back on its previous track, I could not. Somewhat discouraged, I decided to leave and our interview ended, not with closing remarks on Nietzsche or my presentation, but with my professor commenting: “I have always admired you girls like my mother and sister who have the knack for picking colors.”<sup>1</sup>

Considering my instructor was both a woman and a feminist, I was incredulous that this conversation had taken such a turn. I had encountered many people in the past with preconceived ideas about me because of my identity as an interior designer, but I had never seen it shift so remarkably right in front of my eyes. The ability of the label “interior designer” to do that indicated to me that something very powerful was in play. The fact that my professor, who seemingly was sensitive to issues of sexism, could not recognize the same embedded in her own statement made me realize just how strong and obscured this power was.

As a graduate student and later as a professor teaching interior design, I have long attempted to understand this phenomenon. From an investigation that is situated in both my personal experience

as well as my academic research, it is clear to me that the mechanisms of the power of this label are part of a larger discourse that assigns both interior design and the feminine the position of “other.” Interior design is perceived as feminine, superficial, and mimetic as compared to a male, rational, and original architecture. Although the subtext is not said out loud, it still is clear: interior design is inferior to architecture. In spite of the many postmodern/poststructuralist reassessments during the past thirty years, the duality that places architecture as the dominant term in a binary opposition with interior design remains largely undeconstructed.

While “otherness,” marginality, and femininity have formed the central focus of many recent critiques, the field of interior design has neither fully recognized nor examined its marginal position. This is not to say that it is not aware of it. Interior designers do understand that they have a problematic and often misunderstood identity, although they have worked diligently over the past fifty years to identify and legitimize their field. In the 1930s and ‘40s, these activities were centered on differentiating interior design from interior decoration through the creation of educational programs and criteria for competency and knowledge. Later, professional organizations such as the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER), and the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) were formed to oversee the development and maintenance of these criteria both in education and practice. These groups crafted legal definitions of interior design and constructed a unified body of knowledge that included its own history and theory. A professional internship program (IDEP) was put in place in 1993, and an ongoing effort to create licensing and titling acts that identify qualified interior designers to the public continues.

While these efforts helped to legitimize interior design as an academic and professional discipline, they have done little to dislodge its supplemental position to architecture. In spite of its many efforts to clarify its definition, the public perception of interior design still remains largely askew. Television shows such as *Designing Women*, *Will and Grace*, and now *While You Were Out*, *Trading Places* and HGTV perpetuate the image of a feminized, self-expressive, decorative, and superficial kind of interior design, while the myth of a heroic male architecture, as presented in Ayn Rand’s *Fountainhead*, is continually reinforced in movies and even TV shows such as *Seinfeld*.<sup>2</sup> The boundary between architecture and interior design remains in place, held there by a persistent idea of difference between the two fields: male vs. female, structure vs. decoration, and superior vs. inferior. Ironically, at a time when interior design has become more like architecture because of its consistent emulation of its practice and education, the field of architecture seems even more intent on keeping this idea of difference in place. Lobbying efforts by the American Institute of Architects and the National Council of

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2 I refer here to the episodes in which the character George refers to himself as an architect to impress women.

Architectural Registration Board to prevent further interior design licensing and titling acts, regardless of what it also may be, serve this purpose. In addition, interior design's efforts to establish and legitimize itself seem to have done little to promote dialogue and exchange between the two fields. An atmosphere of opposition and exclusion exists, particularly in academia. In a recent call for papers by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, for example, participants from other disciplines were encouraged to submit for their annual conference entitled *Re-calibrating Centers and Margins*. Urban planning, real estate development, the fine arts, and industrial design were listed as related fields and topics. Interior design was not mentioned. The "other" was not invited to participate.

This essay suggests that it is interior design's strategies for legitimacy that have contributed to this marginalization, and prevent it from understanding and establishing a distinct, nonsupplemental identity. In efforts made to define, establish, and recognize the field of interior design, little mention has been made of the issue of gender. Whereas other fields such as home economics and nursing have dealt head on with the inherent gender biases of their professions, interior design has not. The gender implications attached to interior design, which in turn are largely responsible for its inherent assignments of inferiority, have been treated like "the crazy aunt in the attic" and have been purposely overlooked. By ignoring this important aspect of its perceived identity, interior design has not been able to acquire the proper self-consciousness needed to solve its identity problem. As its recent history demonstrates, efforts to control its own identification by creating definitions, bodies of knowledge, and professional rules and organizations do little to counteract interior design's perceived inferiority to architecture. This will not take place until the issues of gender and marginality are recognized, considered, and deconstructed. The link between interior design and the feminine has to be acknowledged.

In a new strategy for interior design that considers its assignment as feminine, the history and theories of feminism could become particularly useful. From this viewpoint, it is easy to see that interior design's current theoretical approach to identity politics can be recognized as echoing the strategies of first-wave feminism. In their fight to attain equality and suffrage, early feminists questioned the idea of difference as a constructor of inequality between men and women. Since, at the time, difference was being used to legitimize the unequal treatment of women, they attempted to repudiate it so that women could assume their rightful place in society. Demonstrating how women were equal to men and could do similar work was a large part of early feminist practice. Inherent in this strategy was an underlying assertion of androgyny; a push not just to ignore gender, but also to absent it from discussions of equality.

Making the case that interior design is equal to architecture has been a large part of its legitimization strategy. Interior design, in both education and practice, has emulated architecture as the basis for its studio education, qualifying exams, and internship programs. Architectural history and theory have been integrated as part of its own. Demonstrating how interior design education is comparable to architectural education also has been part of its licensing and titling efforts. Buie Harwood, a leader in interior design education, for example, outlined in her 1991 article, "Comparing Standards in Interior Design and Architecture to Assess Similarities and Differences" in the *Journal of Interior Design* how interior design's education and practice parallels that of architecture. Using a chart that compares the different aspects of each, she argues point by point how interior design and architectural education are similar.

Like the early feminist stances, these kinds of arguments also assume a kind of androgyny. Gender is purposely not discussed. While demonstrating that interior design education and practice have appropriate rigor, they make little headway in undermining its supplemental position, since they do not break the elision of the feminine and interior design.

In feminism, critics of the strategies of the first wave were able to identify the inherent weakness in these kinds of strategies. These feminists recognized that, in trying to assert that women were "as good as" men, they were only asking to be continually compared to them. In a critique that perhaps began with Simone de Beauvoir, the idea of attaining equality for women by emulating the characteristics of male privilege was reconsidered. Feminists recognized that assuming an androgynous position was difficult in a system that was controlled by patriarchal ideology. Since such a system privileged male superiority as the normative condition, not discussing issues of gender only silently acknowledged the norm as the ideal. The feminine within this system still is assumed to be inferior. As the theorist, Madan Sarup points out, "The feminine always finds itself defined as deficiency, imitation, or lack" in Western culture.<sup>3</sup> Feminists have concluded that redefining the feminine within this patriarchal system is problematic since, as the feminist poet Audre Lourde stated so succinctly, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, as long as interior design tries to gain legitimacy by comparing itself to and emulating architecture, it inadvertently supports the system that ensures its supplemental position. This strategy not only acknowledges the superiority of architecture and its position as the norm, but dooms interior design to always being less than, and not equal to, architecture. The tendency for academic programs and professionals in interior design to call what they do "interior architecture" is a popular strategy for trying to correct the inherent perceived inferiority of interior design. But this method supports the system that created the problem, and does little to

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3 Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 119.

4 Audre Lourde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Audre Lourde Compendium* (London: Pandora Press, 1993).

dislodge the connection of the interior with the supplemental. Renaming interior design interior architecture becomes a futile game of “passing.” This strategy, like that of the early feminists, also assumes a kind of androgyny, and therefore the inherent link between the feminine and interior design remains unbroken and continues to be confined to its supplemental position. In most cases, interior design seems neither to be aware of nor moving in a direction to correct this quandary.

Feminists, however, have given the matter greater consideration. A second wave of feminism since the 1970s has proposed the idea of celebrating difference instead of trying to eliminate it as a solution for legitimization. Christine DiStefano, a feminist scholar who refers to this tendency as “antirationalism” explains:

Antirationalism comes face to face with the denigration of feminized nature within rationalism, and attempts to revalorize the feminine in the light of this denigration. Significantly, the terms of this valorization are the terms of the excluded and denigrated “other.” Antirationalism celebrates the designated and feminized irrational, involving a strong notion of difference against gender-neutral pretensions of a rationalist culture that opposes itself to nature, the body, natural contingency, and intuition. This project sees itself as a disloyal opposition, and envisions a social order that would better accommodate women in their feminized difference rather than as imperfect copies of the everyman.<sup>5</sup>

Feminists supporting this position argue that, since the definition of the feminine has been controlled by a male patriarchal system, there has been a distortion and devaluation of feminine characteristics. They call for a reconsideration of the so-called “natural” inferiority of these. This second wave of feminism discards the pursuit of androgyny and the reduction of gender difference, and advocates for both identification and celebration of female characteristics. Although this position has raised the criticism of being “essentialist” (assuming all women are the same, and that a general category called “woman” is definable),<sup>6</sup> it provides a provocative starting point for new theories of gender and marginalization; a starting point that could be both interesting and useful for interior design.

As part of this reconsideration of the feminine, Donna Haraway and others have contributed to the development of a concept called “feminist standpoint theory.” In standpoint theory, the gendered nature of the construction of knowledge is recognized, but the assignment of inferior attributes with the feminine is reversed. Feminine knowledge and characteristics are valorized, not as a mere inversion of the binary opposition, but as a starting point for a new understanding of knowledge. Haraway, a scientist, has suggested that:

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5 Christine di Stefano, “Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism” in *Feminism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 67.

6 See Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13:3 (1988) for a good discussion of this issue.

The gender-specific and differentiated perspective of women is advanced as a preferable grounding place for inquiry—preferable because the experience and perspective of women as the excluded and exploited other is judged to be more inclusive and critically coherent.<sup>7</sup>

Haraway suggests that women, because of their marginality, have a kind of epistemic privilege. She continues:

The standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because, in principle, they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge ... “subjugated” standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Haraway also advocates that these marginal viewpoints could be particularly valuable in today’s society:

We are also bound to seek perspective from those points of view ... that promise something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination.<sup>9</sup>

The potential of this special viewpoint of the marginalized is a topic that frequently has been discussed in recent contemporary theory. The feminist bell hooks, for example, has recognized the position of marginality as the “space of radical openness” and “a site of creativity and power,” as well as a “site of resistance” in her writings.<sup>10</sup> The filmmaker Trin T. Minh-ha refers to the position of the margin as “our sites of survival” that “become our fighting grounds.”<sup>11</sup> Mary McLeod, an architectural critic, points out in her article, “Everyday and ‘Other’ Spaces” that the field of architecture has readily acknowledged this special position of marginality. She says that one of the primary preoccupations of contemporary architectural theory has been the concept of “otherness.” Architects such as Peter Eisenmann and Bernard Tschumi, for example, have attempted to deconstruct the historical notion of architecture by elevating terms such as “demateriality,” “nothingness,” “dislocation,” and “absence,” the binary opposites or “others” of the traditional terms of architecture, in their work.

McLeod criticizes these architectural explorations of marginality, however, because they are being carried out by male architects whose position and architecture are not marginalized. She claims that these architects are “colonizing” the position of “other,” and therefore are limited in their vision by their inauthentic marginal position. McLeod suggests that the subject position of women and of the everyday present more legitimate marginal viewpoints, and therefore more potential for truly new discoveries in architecture.

7 Donna Haraway, ed., *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 74.

8 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (Fall 1988): 583.

9 *Ibid.*, 585.

10 bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” in *Gender Space Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 203.

11 Trin T. Minh-ha, “Cotton and Iron” in *Out There: Maginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 330.

Herein lies the importance for interior design. If interior design is a truly authentic marginal position, rooted in its perceived femininity, then interior design possesses the potential of having this special viewpoint of the marginalized; a viewpoint that in, Haraway's words, "promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world."<sup>12</sup> Interior design can only explore this potential, however, when it discontinues its practice of emulating architecture, and fully acknowledges and explores its characteristic femininity and "otherness." Recognizing and celebrating its marginal position, therefore, would not only afford interior design a way of developing a unique and distinct non-supplemental identity apart from architecture, but also the potential for providing a different and special kind of perspective for re-envisioning the built world. To quote Haraway again, "...a knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination."<sup>13</sup>

What then would an interior design that elevated and celebrated its marginal "feminine" characteristics be like? Feminist architect Karen Franck perhaps gives us a idea in her essay, "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing."<sup>14</sup> The idea of a "women's way of knowing" emerged in this second wave of feminism as part of its acknowledgement and identification of specific feminine characteristics. This theory posits that, since men and women have different experiences of the world, they "know," and analyze that world differently. As Franck explains: "We construct what we know, and these constructions are deeply influenced by our early experiences and by the nature of our underlying relationship to the world."<sup>15</sup> Many feminists have speculated on how women experience the world differently. Nancy Chodorow, for example, using the premises of psychoanalytical object-relation theory, posits that children develop gender identity at an early age by being able to identify with or differentiate themselves from their primary caregiver. Since, in most cases, the primary caregiver is the mother, women develop relationships of attachment to self-identity since they are the same gender as their mothers, while the men's process is one of differentiation since they are not. Emotion and subjectivity, characteristics of attachment, therefore, become important aspects of a woman's way of looking at the world, since they are essential parts of making connections. Reason and objectivity, both methods of differentiation, are characteristics of a masculine view. Nancy Hartsock, another feminist theorist, reinforces this idea, as Franck explains:

The masculinity that boys must achieve is an ideal not directly experienced in the home and family, but reached only by escaping into the masculine world of public life .... In contrast, the female sense of self is achieved within the context of the home and family, and hence embraces and values everyday life and experience.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Haraway, 584.

13 Ibid., 585.

14 Karen A. Franck, "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing" in Ellen Berkeley, ed., *Architecture: Place for Women* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989) and reprinted in *Gender Space Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

15 Ibid., 295.

16 Ibid., 296.

Like Haraway, these feminists propose the recognition and elevation of women's ways of knowing not merely to reverse their supplemental position, but to integrate this way of looking at the world as an acceptable and important framework for research and analysis. In her article, Franck identifies what she sees as the characteristics of these women's ways of knowing, and how they may be used in designing built spaces.

The first quality she notes is the "desire for connectedness and inclusion," which is achieved by "the recognition of an underlying connectedness to others, to objects of knowledge, and to the world and a sensitivity to the connectedness of categories."<sup>17</sup> She theorizes here, like Hartsock and Chodorow that, since male self-identity is developed through distance and abstraction, the tendency to think in terms of dualisms and oppositional characteristics is more pronounced in men's thinking. Since female self-identity is developed through identification and connection to everyday experience, she speculates that women have a tendency to overlook dichotomies and recognize connections rather than differences. The boundaries between categories such as public/private, work/home, and male/female tend to be broken down in women's ways of knowing. Design processes undertaken in this feminist perspective are likely to blur role distinctions between designer and client, and designer and user; make closer spatial or visual connections between spaces; integrate diverse kinds of spaces; and combine both subjective and objective information.

The second quality Franck recognizes is an "ethics of care" and "value of everyday life" in women's ways of knowing. Attention to the issues of the everyday life has been a consistent characteristic of design reforms undertaken by women throughout history. She points out the work of social and urban reformers such as Catherine Bauer, Edith Elmer Wood, Jane Jacobs, and Clare Cooper who have emphasized the importance of daily-lived experiences. She also points out how women designers such as Lili Reich and Eileen Gray have created spaces and furniture that were direct responses to everyday needs. Eileen Gray's design of color sheets, for example, can be seen as an acknowledgement of the use of an unmade bed as the site of everyday, informal activities including reading and eating.

Franck also proposes that, in making design decisions, women would be more motivated by a female "ethic of care" rather than by a male "ethic of justice." She cites here the feminist, Carol Gilligan, author of *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, who proposes that there is a difference in how men and women make decisions:

Women and girls draw upon a "reflective understanding of care" requiring that no one be hurt and that one respond to the need of others, whereas men and boys are concerned that everyone be treated fairly.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Ibid., 297.

18 Ibid., 296.



Designing according to a women's way of knowing therefore would pay more attention to the individual and the subjective needs of the users, and less to applying standards across the board.

The acceptance of subjectivity and feelings as a strategy of women's way of knowing also is recognized. Franck says that personal experience and knowledge become sources of information for design in women's ways of knowing. Attitudes and emotions, usually downplayed in a rationalist approach to design such as mothering, personal expressiveness, affection, intimacy, and attachment would be considered valuable.

The desire for complexity and flexibility is another characteristic Franck identifies as part of women's way of knowing. Complexity and ambiguity are considered desirable in this context because they undermine hierarchical control and invite user participation. Considering multiple uses for spaces and objects, and an awareness of the need for change, flexibility, and transformation also are part of this aspect of women's way of knowing.

When I first read Franck's categorization of women's ways of knowing, I was taken aback not because the information was new, but because it was so familiar. From my experience as both an educator and interior designer, I recognized all these characteristics as part of what interior design does. Interior designers focus on the intimate movements, needs, and emotional concerns of the users of interior space, as individuals and in connection with others. Good interior design creates a kind of "second skin" or prosthetic that facilitates or reflects not only the functional needs of its "wearer," but their emotional, personal, and spiritual needs as well. Interior design is concerned with the more intimate needs of its user, i.e., the intimate needs of our own interiority. Since the interior has long been assigned as the realm of the feminine, recognizing the feminine nature of interior design only more fully recognizes and celebrates the idea of interior. In a new strategy of 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-emphasized in a male, rationalist, architectural framework would be brought to the foreground.

The question must be asked though whether this is possible in a professional and academic world that still privileges the historical superiority of the characteristics of male and the rational. French feminists including Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixious have theorized that this is difficult if not impossible. These feminists have concluded that only from speaking outside of the controlling system, which is male, can true feminine perspective be understood and defined. Since language has been recognized as the major constructor of inequality between the sexes, they have proposed that women need to develop their own language. They have promoted a

different kind of writing for women that values the first person over the third, allows personal expression, and often is nonlinear and fragmented. This writing, which they see as subversive and “related to the body,”<sup>19</sup> they believe challenges patriarchal order and undermines the stability of binary oppositions, therefore making a place for feminine subjectivity.

What would a unique language of interiors that reflected its marginal and feminine characteristics look like, sound like, and feel like? Although most of the work in interior design now tends to emulate male, rationalist, architectural practice, a few examples can be cited that give a hint of what such an approach might be like. Perhaps one of the easiest and most straightforward ways of developing a new language for interior design would be in its drawing and presentation techniques. The “God’s eye view” of the architectural perspective and axonometric could be discarded in interior design in favor of drawings that allow only the true and accurate viewpoint of its occupant. The view from the interior would be superior to the view from the exterior in this new language. The resulting scale and intimacy of these drawings would reflect a stronger and more direct relationship to the body and its place within the depicted space. New computer programs that allow more accurate interior views from a multiplicity of perspectives, as well as virtual walk-throughs, could be a powerful tool for this new mode of representation. Presentations that emphasize the sensuality and bodily impact of the interior materials also could be part of this new language. The collage techniques of both Ray Eames and Florence Knoll in which samples of the actual materials and colors of the space were used to construct plan, elevation, and 3-D views could be reintroduced as part of this new interior design practice.

Most important, design education and studio practice would have to be evaluated and reconstructed. The nature, scale, and types of projects considered as important for interior design also might have to be reconsidered. Carla Corroto, a feminist scholar and interior design and architectural educator who is an advocate for reform of architectural studio culture, is one of the few pioneers who are working with new parameters in design studios that incorporate “women’s way of knowing” into design pedagogy. In Corroto’s classes, students earn grades not only by completing the assigned class projects, but also by being “cooperative learners.” Students are evaluated by their co-students after each project with regard to how their studio mate(s) supported them. Students can improve their grades by being recognizably supportive of their co-students. Corroto’s system undermines the traditional competitiveness and hierarchies of the design studio, and encourages Carol Gilligan’s “ethic of care” and “nurturing” atmosphere, while teaching students to co-author projects and be inclusive in a larger range of ideas and multivocal perspectives. Her studios promote an integration of an

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19 Sarup, 109.

appreciation of caring for others, and the development of intimacy through sharing, as part of the design process. Her approach could readily be utilized in training for this new paradigm for interior design.

Would efforts such as these help deconstruct the binary opposition that holds interior design in its supplemental position, and challenge the architectural status quo as the norm? Could they be used to clearly establish the difference between interior design and architecture, and celebrate and promote that difference so that interior design has a unique and non-supplemental identity? These speculations are all food for future thought, and this examination of an overlay of feminist theory onto interior design purposefully hints that it could provide some interesting answers to these questions.

At present, however, interior design is at a crossroads. Interior design must decide whether it wants to become architecture or continue to try to maintain a distinct identity of its own. As the rising tide of budget cutbacks and reorganizations push more interior design education programs and offices into the realm and control of architecture, or put them out of business all together, certain questions need to be asked now. Does interior design have an identity outside of architecture? Is it a distinct field that offers something different to architecture? Is interior design a valuable category of the design disciplines that needs to be preserved?

What this analysis has hoped to establish is the idea that interior design does have a unique and valuable position in the design world. Elevating the theoretical position of the feminine in interior design and acknowledging its marginality, which in bell hook's words can be a "site of creativity and power," may provide a starting place for change, innovation, and the successful establishment of an autonomous and distinct identity for it. In this light, instead of being seen as a subcategory or inferior supplement to architecture, interior design can be seen as having the potential for being a truly transgressive, creative, and transforming activity with a unique role to play in design practice and education.