DETERMINING SELECTION CRITERIA FOR THE COMPILATION
OF AN INTERIOR DESIGN CORPUS

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Abstract

The paper considers culture as a collection of meanings which are produced and consumed by a given social group. Thus, the generation of meaning would be analogous to the generation of culture.

In the investigation of architectural (built) artefacts it is unusual to identify a representative sample; instead research focus is on the in-depth precedent study. The purpose of this paper is to identify selection criteria for such a broad corpus of interior design artefacts (which may be studied from a semiotic perspective) as grounded theory requires a large and broad data sample. This is a novel application.

This paper will consider the role of the interior design researcher as domain gate-keeper in the determination of criteria to select a future corpus of interior design artefacts for semiotic analysis. It will conduct a literature review of interior design and social theory to identify selection criteria. The analytic purpose and selection criteria serve as example from which broader principles are identified.

Keywords: *corpus; cultural production; interior design; selection criteria*

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Introduction

The position is taken that the conference theme 'design cultures: encultured design' reflects the reciprocality between design activity and culture in the broadest sense. Social space is the vehicle in which the cultural life of society takes place. Social space is produced by and influences cultural interaction. Space facilitates behaviours and interactions and gives form to social structures and ideologies (Perolini, 2011 pp.167-168). This is an account of the recursive relationship in which cultural practices inform place-making while place-making in turn construct and maintain cultural practices. This is essentially a process of creating, transmitting and interpreting meaning. If a narrower view is taken and culture is defined as a community which shares values, practices, processes and products then such a culture may be the community of a professional discipline. The paper is broadly aligned to the design community with specific reference to the production and maintenance of culture by an identifiable group. It is built from interior design research, but is presented from the assumption that there are shared practices and values between design communities and that knowledge may be shared amongst them. The paper introduces the concept of cultural production and considers the domain gatekeepers as important role-players.

A 'corpus' is considered as a collection of artefacts (texts, writings, material artefacts, etc.) assembled for the purpose of analytical interpretation, this is differentiated from a 'text corpus' which is a large structured collection of texts used in linguistic analysis where the method is largely statistical (e.g. the *International Corpus of English*[1] or the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*[2]). A 'body' simply refers to a collection, without any specific analytical purpose. The 'canon' is a cumulative cultural repository (Attiwill, 2007 p.59).

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[1] http://ice-corpora.net
[2] http://www.americancorpus.org

Journals, exhibitions and teaching disseminate the canon and the canon is formed through selection, recognition and publication (Attiwill, 2007 p.59). In my interpretation the canon is the largest collection of artefacts considered as valuable, a body is merely
a collection while a corpus is a collection with analytic purpose.

In the investigation of built artefacts research focus is on the precedent study while representative samples are unusual (Bechtel, 1980 p.218). If a representative sample is considered the problem is to determine selection criteria for such a collection. This paper refers to a representative corpus of interior design artefacts as example (this corpus will be used as a data set for content analysis through interpretation). The purpose and selection of this corpus serves as one example from which broader principles can be inferred. This corpus forms part of a larger research project and is aimed at the determination of methods to create meaning in interior artefacts. Interior spaces can be considered as examples of artefacts that exist as expressions of the recursive relationship between place-making and cultural practices in general. Interior spaces provide the tangible places in which intangible cultural practices can take place. These places form part of the social world in which humankind exists. This is the world of thinking and living in society. It is in this social world that individuals, under the guidance of symbols, "perceive, feel, reason, judge, and act" (Geertz, 2000 p.405). Since place-making and culture are both considered as processes of creating, transmitting, and interpreting meaning this paper will present a brief overview of meaning and interpretation.
The thesis of this paper is that when design corpora are compiled the selection is dependent on the taste of the collector; but this should be augmented with the use of selection criteria which are compiled through research.

The paper is delivered from the point of view that it is not feasible to establish a definitive corpus which includes all worthy artefacts (this approach is applicable to other disciplines and applications). The selection criteria are determined through literature review. The method is informed by Barthes' (1983) study of the fashion system. He argues that it is not necessary to study the entire corpus diachronically. If the determination is systemic analysis it will be more efficient to limit the corpus synchronically (Barthes, 1983 p.10). The review is conducted as constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (described by Charmaz, 2006). When we are engaged with data we *construct* understanding based on our subjectivity (Charmaz, 2006 p.47). The purpose is to offer an interpretive portrayal of the world (Charmaz, 2006 p.10). CGT is underpinned by a relativist position which states that the researcher constructs theory as an outcome of their interpretation of the data (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006 p.7). Interior design and social literature is collected and coded segments of data are categorised to isolate selection criteria (this is facilitated with the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)).
The set of selection criteria that are determined through this process serves as an example from which broader principles are uncovered. These principles represent the findings of the paper since they have applicability in the establishment of other corpora.

Meaning and interpretation

When a corpus is assembled the analytic purpose and theoretical background is instrumental in determining selection criteria. For the example under discussion the idea of meaning and its interpretation as agent of culture is important. It is necessary to define culture broadly at this point: "Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process," (Williams, 1976 p.77). 'Culture' can be considered as the entity encompassing all human phenomena not determined by biology. In this way 'culture' includes all human endeavors: objects and artefacts, architecture, technology, knowledge, professions, institutions, religions, music, literature, etc. Lewis (2008 p.396) describes culture as "an assemblage of meanings which are generated and consumed by a given social group." This is supported by Geertz (2000 p.5) who states that culture is essentially the webs of meaning

that humankind created. Isar and Anheier (2004 p.4) summarize Csikszentmihalyi's systems perspective of cultural production as such:

> [T]he interactions between, first, the creative person, second, the domain (a specific cultural symbol system) and third, the field (defined as made up of domain gate-keepers such as art critics, gallery owners, star performers, etc.) are what determine the emergence and in particular the recognition of a creative act or product. The creative individual takes information in a domain and transforms or extends it; the field validates and selects new ideas and methods; the domain then in turn preserves and transmits creative products to other individuals, societies and generations.

In other words, cultural production is a circular system of selection, interpretation and synthesis of meaningful elements or actions (cultural information). Cultural production is an iterative, collaborative project which is dependent on individual expressions. These expressions must be recognized as 'valid' or 'valuable' and made available to the canon and disseminated. It is at the point of recognition that the 'domain gatekeepers' become noteworthy.

Domain gatekeepers act as mediators in the cultural production process. Millard (2001 p.13) describes the art establishment as something that was dull and unconcerned with popular acceptance just as the populace was unconcerned with it. This changed when young British artists became "concerned with ease of comprehension rather than perplexing intelligence" (Millard, 2001 p.25). Sometimes meaning must be communicated explicitly and be easy to understand; this is because cultural production is not only dependent on cultural 'pinnacles', but on the everyday (Millard, 2001 p.135). It implies that cultural production takes place in a hierarchical fashion and it is the role of the cultural intermediary or the domain gatekeeper to act as mediator in the process and to provide 'validity' to artefacts. Cultural capital may move 'up' or 'down' in the hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984 p.327). This is supported by Douglas when she describes culture as a system of differentiation and emulation: "happiness goes up as design travels down the social scale, then the upper class begins to be unhappy because its designs are no longer distinctive. It adopts a change, to outpace low-class emulators, and the emulators' happiness goes down, until they gradually catch up again," (Douglas, 1996 p.56). Phillips (2005 p.217) sums up the role of the 'tastemaker' as an undemocratic but significant conduit for the formation of taste. Domain gatekeepers carry designations such as *virtuoso, connoisseur*, 'expert', (and 'designer'?) to indicate a lifestyle freed from basic and material needs to which 'vulgar' people are sacrificed (Bourdieu, 1996 p.293). The lifestyle is geared toward aesthetic appreciation and expressions of 'good-taste'. Bourdieu (1996 p.294) continues that this is geared, along with philosophical investigations into the knowledge of objects, towards the social construction of the artefact. Taste is considered as an inescapable social aspiration (Millard, 2001 p.246). Although it is clear from the accounts above that domain gatekeepers carry hegemonic agency, they provide a valuable role as cultural producers in their mediation between producers and consumers of cultural capital. It is through their selection, recognition and dissemination of the new that validity is provided. They are influential in determining popular taste and utilize fascinated media to disseminate ideas and to influence culture in general (Millard, 2001 p.27). Isar and Anheier's (2010 p.4) account of mediation in the cultural domain indicates that all novel ideas and artefacts are not considered as valuable. Bourdieu (1984 p.16) identifies a hierarchy of taste: legitimate taste; middle-brow taste; and popular taste. Once novel ideas or artefacts are validated by the gatekeepers they are made available for further synthesis. As informed individuals the domain gatekeepers determines which novel artefacts are considered as worthy of study and emulation. They include prominent designers, educators and researchers. The mediation is constant, especially in the form of design education: educators will firstly expose students to artefacts while providing value judgments; secondly, when novel artefacts are produced by students (a common occurrence) a large proportion will be rejected through continuous assessment (these pedagogic actions need further research which fall outside the scope of the paper).

The analysis of culture is an interpretive process in search of meaning (Geertz, 2000 p.5). Culture can thus be studied as a system of meaning, and the generation of meaning considered as analogous to the generation of culture. If interior spaces are considered as expressions of the recursive relationship between place-making and cultural practices in general then it must be inferred that they are carriers of cultural meaning. Their meaningful content can then be analyzed specifically to determine *how* meaning is created in these artefacts. Content analysis is the examination of data with the aim to systematically describe form and content. Since qualitative data may often be ambiguous, a systematic approach is advised for rich text and deep accounts (Martin & Hanington, 2012 p.40). The methodological problems encountered to order the 'cultural cosmos' is analogous to the steps used to organize the natural world. The first step is the observation of phenomena (collecting empirical material); secondly these must be interpreted; finally the results must be coordinated in a coherent system or theory (Panofsky, 1955 p.7). To infer such a coherent system of theory from a limited number of precedent studies will have severe shortcomings.

When built artefacts are selected for analysis (or to serve as examples during instruction) there is a tradition to focus on the in-depth case study or the 'precedent study' (Bechtel, 1980 p.218). The case study involves the in-depth investigation of singular examples using multiple source of evidence. The in-depth investigation of notable cases aims to compensate for the lack of breadth but it limits the ability to generalize (Martin & Hanington, 2012 p.28). When the design researcher or educator exercises their role as domain gatekeeper in the choice of notable artefacts this is a highly effective and appropriate method. Precedents provide useful examples for understanding architectural form but their study omit many important interior design characteristics such as furnishings, materials and room concepts (Jennings, 2007 p.49). I assume that when a domain gatekeeper selects an artefact it will be a canonic artefact which can be considered as extraordinary (for interior design Carlo Scarpa's Olivetti Showroom in Venice (1957-1958) may serve as an example of such an artefact). The selection of a case study is not aimed at representivity (Martin & Hanington, 2012 p.28). Abimbola (2001 p. 48) asserts that focused precedent studies may be biased towards works from the western canon and may lead to the lack of inclusion of cultural diversity in design education.

I do not question the validity of the case study approach and merely argue that it can be augmented in design research. There exists a need for the study of many cultures and a broader empirical investigation of the designed artefact (Abimbola, 2001 p.57). The in-depth case study is not applicable for all forms of research and is specifically limited for use in grounded theory. Grounded theory requires larger, broader samples, since a small sample will seldom match the insight that emerges from a detailed case study (Charmaz, 2006 p.95). It must also be considered that the selection procedures of domain gatekeepers are highly subjective and the shortcomings of their subjectivity may not be revealed to design researchers when they select canonic artefacts. When many cases are studied, or broader representivity is acquired, researchers may become aware of their own preconceptions about their topics (Charmaz, 2006 p.132). In the grounded theory context a "researcher can rarely make persuasive, much less definitive, statements from limited data," (Charmaz, 2006 p.18).

Most grounded theories are substantive theories since they investigate clearly delimited problems in substantive areas. The logic of grounded theory can reach across these substantive areas into the realm of formal theory; this is reliant on generating abstract concepts and to develop the relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006 p.8). The case study approach is too specific to allow the development of abstract concepts that can be used to understand problems in multiple substantive areas. (As an example it is useful to consider the grounded theorist Erving Goffman, his concept 'dramaturgical analysis' can be applied in interior design to consider the connection between everyday life and theatrical performance (Edwards, 2011 p.127).

The compilation of the interior design corpus which serves as example for this paper is aimed at determining a data set for content analysis. The research purpose is to generate knowledge in the form of theoretical

interpretation of artefacts (in other words, research about design). The theoretical interpretation will consider the ways in which interior design artefacts generate meaning, and by implication how this contributes to cultural production in the broader sense.

Selection criteria

When a broad sample of artefacts is assembled for analytic interpretation (i.e. when a corpus is determined) it is not feasible to solely rely on the subjective selection which the researcher will exercise when acting as domain gatekeeper. It now becomes important to determine a set of selection criteria which augments the taste of the design researcher in the selection of artefacts for inclusion.

In the absence of actual material artefacts the use of representative documents (e.g. photographs) has methodological and practical advantage. These include the ubiquity of these documents, their ease of acquisition and the ability to store them. (To collect a corpus of actual interior artefacts is clearly not feasible.) The 'texts' included in the corpus will be visual representations of the actual artefacts. The photograph of the interior is then considered as the primary empirical evidence. It was established earlier that the determination of the corpus is dependent on the arbitration of gatekeepers. As it is not prudent to solely depend on taste and the availability of convenient data to compile a corpus a set of criteria is proposed. The set is specifically aimed to generate a broad, representative sample of interior design artefacts for content analysis. Since all artefacts cannot be considered the selection criteria will narrow the applicability and imply limitations to the findings. The selection criteria are presented synoptically:

Inclusion criteria

Artefacts must comply with all inclusion criteria to be included in the corpus.
1. Interior design
The artefacts must be identifiable as interior design. The 'core' of interior design is considered broadly and includes everything from 'selection of cushions' and 'coordination of adjacent rooms' (Taylor & Preston, 2006 p.12) to projects created *ex novo* (Sparke, 2012 p.24).
2. Commercial interiors
In the largest American interior design practices a marginal percentage of fees are generated by residential interior design (Zimmerman, 2013 p.99). Interior design's influence on cultural production is publically oriented and the discipline's professional underpinning is oriented toward the commercial interior.
3. Public access
Since public realm is important in defining the self (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1989 p.17) the chosen interiors must be accessible by the public and specifically excludes access controlled areas (e.g. hotel bedrooms; private areas of corporate head offices).
4. Physical context
The interiors should be physically enclosed with a strong boundary condition.
5. Synchrony
The synchrony is limited to the period after the singing of the *IFI Interiors Declaration* (February 2011).
6. Contemporary
There is a need for design research to focus on contemporary design (Jennings, 2007 p.52). Artefacts are considered as contemporary if they are paradigmatically appropriate.
7. New
The artefacts must be 'new': a dialectic discomfort between tradition and innovation must be present (Deleuze, 1992 p.163).
8. Contrived or fictional

The interior must be 'contrived' and should not be the result of the everyday or vernacular; an author must be identifiable.

9. Broad reading

A broad reading of meaning must be possible; this is included in an attempt to accept the coexistence of multiple tastes (Sparke, 2012 p.27).

10. Iconic of built

The data will be in the form of iconic (pictorial) representations of built artefacts. The iconic representation forms part of the architectural canon, and is available to study built artefacts in the absence of the actual artefact (Rattenbury, 2002; Rice, 2007; Attiwill, 2007). The purpose is to compile a corpus of images.

11. Cultural context

The cultural context can be described as neo-liberal and post-industrial. It is assumed that the consumption and production processes of a western cultural milieu are in place (Cook, 2005). The post-industrial milieu reflects a plurality of cultural perspectives (Myerson, 2004 p.191).

12. Small scale production

Interior design artefacts are considered as mediators of large scale production, but the artefacts themselves are small scale (Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p.215).

13. Media

Barthes (1983 p.10) identifies fashion magazines as suitable corpus to study the fashion system. Interior design magazines may be included, but the focus will be on electronic publication due to convenience, availability and speed of dissemination.

14. Audience: experts or laypersons

Iconic structures aimed at both laypersons and experts will be included, these have different conventions (Serraino, 2002 pp.127-8) and will convey meaning in different ways.

15. Reader: semantic or critical

The artefact must lend itself to semantic and critical evaluation (Eco, 1990). Some artefacts will foresee both types of readers; at least some of the artefacts must have been created with this in mind.

Alignment criteria

Alignment criteria are included to align the corpus with the researcher's subjective interests. The purpose of these criteria is to allow for the researcher's emphatic response. Unlike the inclusion criteria they are not exclusionary or controlling. They also allow the researcher to act as domain gatekeeper and not simply be reliant on a set of controlling criteria.

16. Mode of production: install, insert, intervene or new

Although all three modes of production of interior design (as identified by Hay, 2007) and new buildings are included the selection will lean to the 'insertion' with its characteristic strong boundary.

17. Geography: dominant centre, Alpha city or the global South

Dominant design centres identified by Sunley (2008 p.676); the Globalization and World Cities Research Network's assessment of globally integrated cities, 'Alpha++' and 'Alpha+' (GaWC, 2010); and The South, Asia, and other Postcolonial contexts are included to broaden the interior design canon (beyond the Western paradigm). If either the project or the design firm is located in a location of geographic alignment, it will be indicated.

18. New, young firms

An alignment towards 'new young firms' is included since their work may shift the canon (Rattenbury, 2002 p.206). Firms will be indicated as new or young if the principles are younger than 40 or the design practice newer than 10 years.

19. Value judgement

The domain gatekeeper is allowed to offer a value-judgement on that which is 'valuable, interesting, and essential' (Rattenbury, 2002 p.58).

20. Utility

Artefacts which do not comply with the other criteria, but which is deemed useful to the study, may be included in the corpus, at the researcher's discretion, if they illustrate pertinent issues.

Consideration criteria

These criteria consider the artefact and its contribution to cultural production.

21. Taste

The artefact which includes taste, furnishing, decoration and the surface to encompass 'interior design' and thus avoid "[retreating] into 'interior architecture'" (Kleinman, 2012 p.29) is identified.

22. Gender

It is assumed that all interior artefacts are gendered (Taylor & Preston, 2006). Artefacts will be identified that comment or gives input on sexual identity or gender specifically.

23. Privacy or interiority

Artefacts are identified which deals with privacy or interiority. Issues of identity and the privacy – publicity dialectic involves issues of interiority and habitation (Sparke, 2009 p.3).

24. Non-canonical

Artefacts which contribute to a 'new' and fragmented canon (Jacobs & Hanrahan, 2005 p.8) and which questions the boundary of the discipline are identified.

Conclusion

The paper presented the selection of broader, representative samples of designed artefacts as alternative to the case study or precedent study. Such a collection of artefacts should be considered as a 'corpus' which is a collection of artefacts with analytic purpose. When a design corpus is assembled the selection is dependent on the taste of the researcher who acts as domain gatekeeper. Since corpora are intentional, their compilation can be augmented with the use of selection criteria determined during the research process itself. As illustration the paper presented an example: the section criteria to determine an interior design corpus for content analysis through interpretation. This analysis is aimed at identifying interior design's methods to generate meaning. Since the example may be considered idiosyncratic the findings and recommendations are generalized for broader application:

Findings

The domain gatekeepers play a role in the generation and maintenance of culture. They specifically play a role in the mediation of the novel artefact which they may reject or accept and make available as cultural capital for future iterations.

Since the taste of domain gatekeepers have bearing on their mediation of valuable cultural capital, their taste will also have bearing on the selection of artefacts to be included in corpora.

Since corpora have analytic purpose, they must be compiled based on selection criteria that are aligned with the eventual analysis.

'Inclusion', 'alignment' and 'consideration' criteria are proposed; the categories of criteria have differential application in the selection of artefacts.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the role of design educators as domain gatekeepers is researched (especially pedagogic actions which determine the validity of cultural capital such as the continuous assessment and value judgment of novel artefacts).

It is recommended that in the compilation of design corpora, educators select artefacts based on a set of criteria and are not solely reliant on their own frames of reference or taste.

It is recommended that selection criteria are compiled which have bearing on the analytic purpose of the corpus.

In summary

When selecting novel artefacts worthy of emulation the domain gatekeeper will make tacit declarations of what is valuable, interesting or essential in design. The subjectivity of the gatekeeper can be mitigated with the use of selection criteria; this may have surprising results when the gatekeepers start to question their own taste and motivations.

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