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Title

**The Interpretation of “Interiority” through Research in Design Context of Public Space
*Reformulation of Hypothesis***

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Full Paper

Introduction

The term “interiority” denotes inner character or subjectivity and conjectures a state of inwardness and individual contemplation. Its generic interpretation follows the lexicon of containment, confinement, enclosure, privacy, security, shelter, etc. (1). The notion of interiority has been traditionally used in disciplines outside of design, such as psychology, philosophy, literature, abstract art, and film, frequently referring to inner psychological life, or the inner voice forming the narrative, or a retreat into self-awareness and reflection. Interiority recognises that there exists a relative continuity with its dialect “exteriority” through the imaginative tension of inside and outside; between one’s house and the world outside (2), vis-à-vis private thoughts, self-reflection, and the subjectivity of others. Self-reflection is not a process of leaving the world and considering one’s isolated subjectivity, as Merleau-Ponty states, “Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards a unity of consciousness as the world’s basis. . . ; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice” (3).

This paper responds to the contemporary instances of public space practices while considering multiple interpretations of interiority. This holistic approach explores the notion of interiority in the design context of urban (or exterior) public spaces which incites further exploration for its diversity and complexity, in the “reversed” paradigm of interior public spaces.

Interiority in the Design Context of Public Space

Over the past few decades, many researchers in architecture and related design fields have addressed interiority and expanded its interpretation in terms of inhabitation in space. Originally entwined with the moral notion of “truth”, the notion of interiority changed to more explicit spatial meaning, following an ecological and complex approach, such as conscious awareness, individuality, subjectivity, along with the inherent characteristic of the interior, besides the description of nature of certain urban or exterior spaces. It established the anthropological idea of the historical and spatial contextualization of human beings, signifying the spatial, tangible, and intangible aspects of human life, particularly of the inhabitable space.

In contemporary architectural discourse, this development founded the notion of spatial interiority, which is not bounded to the internality of architectural space and is not limited to the physical enclosure of the environment (1). Although the term interiority is every so often used to characterize the inherent quality of the interior; as feeling immersed or contained, it is different from the interior, as it implies subjectivity and self-reflection. Stepping out of the confinement of interior space, the notion of interiority repositions into the urban context, emerging as urban interiority beyond the fixed boundaries of interior and urban (or exterior). Various gradations of interiority appear in urban spatial settings, occurring at various levels of porosity of the boundaries between spaces and various forms of traversing boundaries (4). Though this idea concedes subjectivity, it can be explained and experienced through the sensorial encounter, personal engagement, and social interaction (5). In public spaces, interiority can be formed by many conditions such as psychological, environmental, spatial, formal, programmatic, or a combination of all (6). Given the unlimited possibilities, this paper attempts to interpret different typologies of interiority that can be uncovered within some of the key instances of public space, with an assumption that interiority is a shared underlying aspect contributing towards their effective public qualities.

Spatial Interiority

Spatial interiority is material, corporeal and perhaps most straightforward interpretation; primarily an experience of being confined and enclosed in a space. As Michael Benedict observes, “This feeling of being immersed, surrounded, and enclosed – transcends the experience of indoor enclosures and extends to the out-of-doors in gardens, squares and parks bounded by trees or low walls” (7). The sheltered place under the great roof of the Stadshal market hall in Ghent, designed by Robbrecht & Daem / Marie-José Van Hee (2012), gathers people in one big room, one that is open to the city all around them [Fig.1]. It is an open porch that protects pedestrians from rain and sun and is often used as a shelter for concerts, gatherings, and weekly markets (8). It is a place where one can be oneself, and concerns relations between people rather than power, a place that permits reflection and interiority. It exemplifies the possibility to experience inside while being physically outside, here interiority is created in exteriority, intended to represent freedom with a sense of being in confinement [Fig.2]. One of the key considerations here, is the relationship between the architectural shell and the inhabited interior, making spaces that flow and question the traditional dualities of inside and out, approached with the techniques and tactics of what Suzie Attiwill called an “interiorizt” approach (9).

Interiority as Psychological Reflection

Furthermore, in this context of public space, a distinctive approach to interiority as a psychological condition was presented by Richard Sennett, as he proposed that interiority is not necessarily linked to merely a private interior space, but rather allocated to an exterior public space. Interiority is not detachment from the world, it is a particular kind of relationship with the world, which is reflexive, observational and most importantly, “work of memory”. These conditions produced an environment, in Sennett’s words of “openness, frankness and sharing”, constituting interiority (10). Sennett described interiority through the thoughts of Georg Simmel, who suggested that it was the street rather than the

home that produced subjectivity within the individual. The street and exposure to others thus produced feelings and thoughts, creating subjectivity, individuality, and interiority.

The interpretation of interiority as psychological reflection has been the centre of the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He emphasised "... the body as the primary site of knowing the world", and the continuity of inner and psychological life, which he called interiority, and the material world or exteriority (11). The discourse eventually reaches the question of the ability to unfold the experience of interiority in the design context of public spaces, with a continuous interplay between individuals and society. Russell Rodrigo (12) accounted for the contradiction in the imagined and inhabited interiority of Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (2005) [Fig. 3]. He stressed the affective potential of memorial space focusing on memory-making, or it can be expressed in Sennet's words as "work of memory" (10), as an embodied expression of interiority through physical and emotional engagement. The spaces within the field and along the peripheries have a strong contrast of individual and collective reflection [Fig. 4]. However, the memorial's imagined interiority of reflection as a place of remembrance is somewhat negated due to lack of signification within its design; the absence of "linking objects" as denoted in Karl Ochsner's theory (13). While the inhabited interiority of the memorial beyond the traditional comprehension is predominantly experiential or performative. In architectural discourse, the term "performative" is associated with the concepts of open-form and flexibility, which enables a space to anticipate, and host predicted and unpredicted occurrences and to adjust to future changes. It also gives architecture the character of unfolding an event in time and space (14).

Interiority as an Expression of Qualities of a Space

Interiority is about perception, or a state of mind, the character of a place, and not a particular space; and it must be understood in connection to its surroundings (15). Aside from the apparent similarities, an important refinement is made by Jacqueline Power, as she conceptualized interiority as an expression of the qualities of urban space, freed from the constraints of architectural forms (16). It can also be interpreted as "public interiority", which is a perceived condition that grounds the built environment in phenomenology, varied human experiences, and everyday conditions within exterior (or urban) public spaces. While we frequently experience interiority inside structures, public interiority is also a perceived condition found in the public sphere, without structure. (15).

The implication of this kind of interiority is the focus on public space as a space considered as public and illustrates the societal values and people's relations; space where people appear, move, act, become conscious, experience pleasure, and perceive freedom of personal interiority. This expression can be read through the urban revitalization project, Superkilen Park, Copenhagen (2012), a creative collaboration of the team BIG architects, Superflex, and Topotek 1 [Fig. 5]. The project exhibits ethnic diversity and multi-culturalism through a collection of global found objects of the 60 different nationalities inhabiting the area (17). It embraces all age groups with a variety of activities in three unique environments, colour coded as red, black, and green. The red square, conceived as an urban extension of the sports and cultural

activities of the Norrebrohall, integrated the same colours and materials. Its surface merges inside at the foyer of the new main entrance of the Norrebrohall, thus traversing or blurring the boundaries between interior and exterior. The free wide-open space with ample sunshine falling on the bright colour pallet of surfaces and objects, together with extensive night lights creates a sense of safety and in turn produces luminous interiority. The black square, Mimers Plads, also known as the “urban living room”, is a place where the locals meet (17). The straight white lines on the black asphalt surface curves around the furniture and objects, highlighting it, creating an explicit spatial interiority. The green park features sculpted grass hills and a convex basketball court and is a preferred space for picnics and sunbathing. The Superkilen Park has become popular for social interaction and public encounters, creating psychological interiority, partly formal and partly subjective, as stated by Liz Teston, the interaction between a person and the built environment shapes the perception of inside-feeling places (15). Besides performing activities and sports, abundant sitting spaces allow people to develop an interior insight not through interaction but through freedom of being able to observe without interacting. It creates the opportunity of observational cruising, as it is not about engaging the outside but observing it (10).

Programmatic Interiority

Suzie Attiwill’s idea of research through the design of the “urban room” design studio addressed the process of interior-making shaped by spatial and temporal conditions within the urban environment (9). Her idea is stimulated by Lois Kahn’s triad concept, “the room, the street, and the city”, as he denoted the street as a room of the city. The primary idea of urban interiority emerged through the belief that urban space was not only enclosed but also defined by the difference of its actual use, emerging from the practice of open-air rooms to the effort of placemaking for the community (18). This innovation of public spaces in the form of urban (outdoor) rooms through introducing programs and functions that are primarily associated with interior environments can be appreciated as the programmatic interiority. The open-air street libraries, outdoor cafes, and al-fresco office spaces are the instances where people perform activities that are considered functions of the interior. This interpretation of interiority can also be found in the surrealist techniques of Le Corbusier, as he put together the familiar elements of the domestic interior in the exterior in the Beistegui apartment roof garden (1933). He manifests the relationship between the spatial sequence of interior and exterior and writes “... a plan proceeds from within to without,..” (19) and illustrated it through eliminating the external walls in some of his projects and often considered exterior as a framed interior.

Interiority in the Environmental Realm

Interiority can also be explored and conceptualized in the environmental or ecological realm, such as the natural flow of light and air within a space. It can be explained as the landscape interiority, formed by the alignment and juxtaposition of natural elements, or as sensory interiority within the natural environments. The design of Paley Park by Architect Robert Zion (1967) is focused on providing a quiet escape from the noise of the city, every detail of the park was crafted to mitigate city noise and create a peaceful space (20) [Fig. 6]. The entire park is slightly elevated from the street level by several steps, the dense ivy on

the walls and the low tree canopy work as a sound barrier beside the waterfall feature on the back wall produces white noise which at up to 90 decibels sound masks the noise of the busy city [Fig.7]. This may be recognized as auditory or acoustic interiority. Seasonal changes in the tree canopy moderates the temperature and sun exposure, as well as the evaporative cooling effect of the water feature, providing thermal comfort to the people, thus generating thermodynamic interiority. Limited visual access into space from the street, inward-facing movable seating, and an informal arrangement of trees create a feeling of safety, seclusion, and privacy, which are the fundamental aspects of the spatial interiority.

Conclusion: Reformulation of Hypothesis

The comprehension of interiority is regarded as a prospect to retort to various design questions of public space intended for an improved individual and collective experience. Through multiple interpretations of interiority, this paper discussed and synthesized some iconic cases and illustrated the potential paradigm of the design practice of urban (or exterior) public space. In the broader context of my PhD research, I will analyse whether this paradigm of interiorized public spaces can be reversed through research in design context and explore how these interpretations of interiority can be “exteriorised” to explore the paradigm of interior public space [Fig. 8]. As Mc Carthy suggested that inside and outside are architectural elucidations of the boundaries, whereas interiority and exteriority interlace within and without the built constraints of architecture (1), the reversed paradigm will focus on the continuity of outside to inside. The hypothesis does not encompass the dialectic correlation between urban (or exterior) and interior, rather it envisages the continuity of the public realm beyond the architectural façade with the permeability of boundaries; a blurred threshold between interiority and exteriority. This continuity can be interpreted through the continuous flow of surfaces, forms, voids, or as described as the “continuous interior” of Mark Pimlott (21), or, as the case of “conditioned space” (22) and would seek commonalities and potential compatibilities.

My PhD research on interior public spaces, as complex settings with a continuous flow of space, would contest the notion of the (public) interior as literally being bound or enclosed. It will explore the qualities of interior public space, such as places for gathering and interaction promoting freedoms of movement, association and action, and advocating consciousness of the self and others (23), while considering the experience of interiority beyond the traditional understanding, in terms of transition, movement, and ephemerality (24). Here, interiority is perceived as an engagement and not a spatial condition, that can be experienced when the outside is brought in or the inside out.

Hence, I would like to complete with the statement posed by Gaston Bachelard “... outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed” (2).

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List of Illustrations

[Fig. 1]

Formation of Interiority in Exteriority of Stadhsal (market hall), Ghent (2012)

original file source: Bravo, David (2018): “Stadshal”: Market Hall and Central Squares. Public Space, <https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/h031-stadshal-market-hall-and-central-squares> from June 16, 2021.

[Fig. 2]

Questioning the Duality of Inside and Outside, Stadhsal (market hall), Ghent (2012)

source: Drawings by the author (Sarah Javed Shah)

[Fig. 3]

Individual and Collective “work of memory” in the Memorial to Murdered Jews of Europe (2005)

original file source: Map of the Memorial to murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin. *Google Earth*, 2009. <https://earth.google.com/web/search/memorial+of+murdered+jews/> from June 14, 2021.

[Fig. 4]

Imagined and Inhabited Interiority Formation in the Memorial to Murdered Jews of Europe (2005)

source: Drawings by the author (Sarah Javed Shah)

[Fig. 5]

Interiority as an expression of the qualities of urban space of Superkilen Park (2012)

a. Original file source (site map): Map of Superkilen Park, Copenhagen. *Google Earth*, 2016.

<https://earth.google.com/web/search/Superkilen+Park,+N%c3%b8rrebrogade,+Copenhagen+Municipality,+Denmark/> from June 12, 2021.

b. Original file source (sections): Aga Khan Trust for Culture (2016): Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark

https://archnet.org/sites/15124/media_contents/112972 from June 23, 2021.

[Fig. 6]

Formation of Interiority in Paley Park NYC (1967)

original file source: Sikiö, Sampo. (2006). "Paley Park @ 53rd St.". Online Image. *Flickr*.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sampos/203024733/> from June 12, 2021.

[Fig. 7]

Interiority in the Ecological Realm of Paley Park, NYC (1967)

source: Drawings by the author (Sarah Javed Shah)

[Fig. 8]

Reformulation of Hypothesis

source: Concept diagram by the author (Sarah Javed Shah)