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Citation: Adams, Roderick (2018) An interior anthropology: Frontiers, thresholds and boundaries. In: Inside the City - IE Conference 2018, 22nd - 23rd November 2018, London, UK.

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AN INTERIOR ANTHROPOLOGY: FRONTIERS, THRESHOLDS AND BOUNDARIES

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/ ABSTRACT /

Design anthropology is an increasingly influential and critical discipline that enriches the understanding of society and the city. This paper sets out to deepen the contextualisation of the city by outlining an emergent discourse between spatial design and anthropology. The Interior has an obvious but often unrecognised anthropological profile, where the behavioural sciences are crafted intuitively with culture and dwelling (Ingold), the organisation of space (Dale), its form and structure (Brooker/ Stone) and the synthetics of space through the senses (Cantwell). The paper proposes a re-evaluation of the spatial terrain and the context for interiority (Attiwill, Maken), determining new principles and key definitions of an emergent interior anthropology. By synchronising this discourse through an analysis of spatial frontiers, thresholds and boundaries, the disciplinary bonds between design and anthropology are transformed to form new insight for the urbanised interior.

The paper combines the core principles of design practice (examination of the past to form the future) and anthropology (translation of human and social values) as a way to extend the interior nexus, enriching cultural transmission and engendering an improved social geography (through design). It seeks to question the complicity of interior territory through an anthropological lens and identifies key elements of the interior that determine the value, setting and place of human interactions.

An architectural frontier is presented as a place where interiority is researched, enacting and encircling the inhabitants. A series of interior journeys are used to highlight the entwined 'layers' of interior anthropology and space. The paper embodies the nature of the interior threshold as a margin for people to cross, connecting spaces that impact on human values and build relationships with the interior. It concludes with the identification of an Interior anthropology as a new social science, assembling a new theoretical consciousness within the interior.

/ KEYWORDS /

Interiors, Design, Frontiers, Thresholds, Boundaries, Margins, Anthropology

/ FULL PAPER /

Introduction

The following seeks to extend the reach of design anthropology into a new spatial realm, outlining new concepts, alignments and principles linking the disciplines. The relationships between anthropology and the interior highlights how the power of a designed experience can affect human and social geography within the city-scape.

The origins of anthropology are rooted in comparative investigations of human civilisation, societal structures and the associated environment. These investigations help bind histories, behaviours and cultures, creating meaning for a constructed ontology, empowering cohabitation and building experience. When combined with the science of ethnography (participant observation), anthropology produces powerful analysis of the human condition and the related environment (Macken, 312). This forms the basis and identity for an "interiority" of space (Attiwill, 112-113). This provocative position helps to break through the thresholds of the interior, shattering preconceived understanding of experience and space, placing "environmental experience ahead of form-making" (Benedikt, 4) which supports "the spatial experiences people have are grounded in their real, lived experiences" (Poldma, 2.3). This interiority suggests a focus on authentic encounters formed from the conditions of the surrounding environment, positioning this as part of a new spatio-anthropological journey through the interior towards the cityscape. Social analysis of human behaviour in real settings, allows deeper understanding of how humans engage with their environment, creating spatial "immersion" (Ingold, 153-157) which steeps the senses (Cantwell, 546-557) with environmental phenomena and behavioural triggers. Interior space supports human activity and provides an authentic situation for capturing human behaviours and social structures. It is an intricate spatial terrain, regulating and directing interaction between individuals and groups. This complexity helps to define form and delineate space through various strategies (Brooker, Stone 144-170), which further develops the integrated interior experience. Human activity and the associated environment are intrinsically linked, forming the basis of social structures and community networks. These integrated structures of people, space and place

ensure a currency on how humans build new relationships with their environment. Fulton Suri (70) suggests an active meshing of the disciplines, where "sharing and adapting" insights of human-centred knowledge can synchronise a new form of combined practice. By fusing design and anthropology together and specifically, a sub-grouping of Interior anthropology, a new and powerful platform can be created where the actions and the locations of human activity are explored, influencing the conditions for the interior and the city.

Scaling the Interior

When developing justifications for a new social science, it is important to consider the point at which design and anthropology started to fuse. This is described by Hunt (91) as a "critical turn" where the recognition of a symbiotic relationship started to form. As part of a collaborative blending, anthropology started to utilise the processes of design (Rabinow, 11, 12), in particular, the ideas of experimentation and the creative processes of the design studio. This began with examining its own practices of enquiry and how this relates to contemporary experience. Rabinow suggests (ibid, 93-97) that anthropology needs to experiment more with its modernity and temporality. He suggesting both a speeding up of the contemporary processes, but also a "slowing down" to ensure all "micro-practices" of human activity are captured. There is a focus on the ideas of speculative enquiry and "the invention" and "assemblages" (ibid, 5-7) of concepts to help improve the visibility of the emerging human constructs and behaviours.

Most design activity requires a clear understanding of human behaviours and user-centred design. The Interior is particularly susceptible to this because of its scale, tactility and hapticity and the nature of the environment to surrounding and protecting the user. Most Interiors are informed by knowledge of predicted human behaviours, some highly functional, some more speculative. But of all the design disciplines, the interior holds a unique position, utilising two distinct spheres of design. The first is created where the designer indicatively predicts human activity and behaviour and creates a functional design from a defined brief. Increasingly, a second sphere is becoming accepted as a legitimate design process and is driven by the conditions of the original design, but adapted incrementally by the inhabitants as the interior action unfolds. This emergent process of design is often overlooked as inconsequential, but actually serves as a more authentic and sympathetic example of a "weave in" (Anusas, Harkness, 57) of anthropological process into design practice. Both spheres are anthropometrically significant and allow for the human condition to be realised.

A particular feature of interior design is the flexibility in which it critically engages its macro and micro lenses towards the city when examining human behaviour. Macro considerations of inhabitation, commerce and human encounter provides an opportunity for behaviour to be guided and adapted to form a new interior urbanity. Stickells (192-3) suggests that urban interior space is formed by colliding spaces or an "orchestrated mingling" of people through traditional interior boundaries and forming new "climate-controlled spaces, bodies and cultural practices". These spaces often stretch and migrate through the urban architecture, connected by city walkways and interior underpasses breaking the thresholds of normal and compartmentalised interior experiences. The city is layered with these routes which connect and cohere the city-scape affecting human encounter and behaviour. The micro lens provides a more granular experience of the interior, prompting questions about the closeness, the immediacy and impact of the interior on the human body. This heightens the senses, highlights materiality and the control of light, building atmosphere(s) for the human occupants. The interiors are destinations that contribute to a wider cityscape as a series of nodal territories, building investigative journeys into community, social science and spatial organisation.

Social and Spatial Thresholds

To ensure a future integrated anthropology of the interior, there needs to be continuing orientation of the disciplines. This will be achieved through a persistent alignment of language and practice. There is growing discussion (Rabinow, Ingold) that design is influencing anthropological practice, but it is equally the case where anthropology significantly influences design practice. Particularly the emphasis on developing experiences from the "real world" (Brown, 382). But this is not just a controlled use of case studies of existing designs, but using real experiences of humans in situ, interacting with the designed environments, over sustained periods. This brings a better realism to the research process and brings greater emphasis to design methods and enhancing a "designerly way of knowing" (Cross), knowledge gathering and critical thinking. However, this starts migrate into some unfamiliar realms for commercial interior design, particularly involving post-occupancy investigation. This threshold offers real insight to the designed interior for anthropologist and ethnographers. Anthropology bridges into new levels of research that deepens the knowledge of how human use and behave within the interior spaces. Data gathering on the spatial terrain will include new interventionist forms of investigations that enhance the existing iterative forms of reflection and action already present in the design process, but in post-occupancy manner. There could also be much more detailed analysis of designed spaces using scenario building, mock-ups and spatial prototyping. The designer needs to create better networks and integrated research possibilities beyond the design studio, that encompasses a broader view and live experience of the interior as it functions and fails. Finding a critical path towards a combined inter-disciplinary research methodology is important for the development of the interior and integrated city-scape.

Subjective frontiers

Establishing the principles of how the subjects support and contribute to combined discipline is an important stepping stone. Principally, two analytical perspectives contribute to improving society and human endeavour. One is subjective investigations into the how the space is created and adapted by people which includes personal, emotional and physical perspectives. It encourages the occupier to create unique interpretation of the world and the interior space they are inhabit. This personalises the interior, encouraging a more individual approach to interior typology, leading to more distinct responses of trend, taste, fashion and aesthetics. Anthropological objective enquiry of "everyday practices" (Gunn, 2) creates detailed documentation of human interaction with their environment, but this can also lead to a level of subjectivity impacting empirical findings. Design openly uses both objectivity and subjectivity in its research inquiries, but these are used as differing points of the design process which create different forms of creative emphasis. In order to fully embrace analysis of the human user environment, both positions need to be fused across the disciplines, helping bind design and research of interiority in the city.

The intention is to form a richer experience building the quality of human existence. Ingold (2011,9) defines anthropology as "a sustained and disciplinary inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life". He specifically refutes that human life is not a "fixed" entity and is determined by "interaction with a specific environment". This interaction is a permeable state and defines a frontier of both the interior and anthropological fields of research and investigation. This spatio-human threshold can be theorised through the concept of the "fold" (Dale, 251). This is formed from the Baroque interior tactics of duplicity and guile, where space is shrouded and disguised through aged and layered surfaces, allowing for an individual interpretation (Deleuze 2006). This Deleuzian concept is derived from the harbouring, layering and production of a pearl in a shell. The shell produces a "folded" pearl (Baroque is Portuguese for misshapen pearl), which is completely unique, unexpected and individual (as natural pearls are). If we apply a conceptual "fold" between the interior and anthropology, binding the collaborative nature of disciplines into a unique proposition that folds alignment between observing and designing the layers connecting human activity and interior space. The fold promotes an individual relationship we all have with interior space, a subjective *and* objective relationship that helps us understand both social geographies and the thresholds and margins that are present within designed interiors.

By embodying an integrated collaboration between the Interior and anthropology, a new folded interior hypothesis, can emerge, highlighting the power of the interior to influence individual human behaviours and the testing of space to perform. Critically, aligning the distance between the lived experience and the observation of it, becomes more arbitrary or non-existent. Both Jameson's (1991,48-49) "critical distance" discussion and significantly, Lefebvre (1991), in his triad of spatial terms "conceived-perceived-lived" suggest a merging of the two, aligning the physicality and theoretical examination of the social spaces within the city. This is supported by Kaukas (40) as she empowers the status of the user and the interior:

"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"

Further alignments between the interior and anthropology are more difficult, as there are questions over the temporal nature of the collaboration. Design is a speculative and future-orientated discipline, but draws firmly from the past to inform the future. Smith et al (2016,1) suggest the designed future is not perfect and often flawed in its anticipations. They suggest that envisioned futures tend to differ from how they eventually "unfold" and anthropology as "situated possibilities, formations, and actions at the intersection of design and everyday life". The temporal aspects will need to explore further this intersection, particularly as it is located as the present. A combined discipline will need to use the present as a conceptual conditioning for both disciplines, a unique interior "fold" bridging between the past and the future. A place where occupation can occur.

Future Interior Anthropology

A future anthropology of the interior and the city consists of the development of a highly flexible interior and a mobile city experience. Digitalised analysis of human behaviour enables the interior to flex, scale and change as humans do, reflexively, timelessly and intuitively, empowering a moving and rippling city-scape. The internal cityscape would become transient and portable, timeless producing environments that would support human productivity and wellness. By combining the investigative analysis of anthropology and the predictive powers of user-orientated design, a temporal dichotomy can be averted through a critical intertwining of the disciplines into a new Interior Anthropology.

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