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New Territories: Reimagined Interiorities

Abstract

At a time where boundaries within society, culture and technology are continually challenged and redefined; even the commonly understood binary oppositions within areas such as gender, age and digitality (Negroponte, 1995) are becoming less visible, measurable and socially accepted. In this new realm where even physical reality is encroached upon by the digital, are the tangible and perceived distinctions between interior and architecture also becoming extinct? An emergence of more flexible and transitional space appears to not only blur the boundaries of inside and outside, interior and architecture, but also the previous distinctions of function. Space is no longer solely intimated by visual cue, materiality or the physicality of walls and interior objects. Instead we see increased “function neutrality” within buildings, with rising opportunity for user interpretation and “take-over”. This renewed focus on the user can be seen to enrich our built environment, as we embrace a new equality of the interior and relish its new freedom and voice.

Keywords: *interiority, architecture, thresholds, reimagined, temporality*

Introduction

The common conceptualisation of the interior and its role within architecture and design are being reconsidered. The interior is commonly envisaged as a static entity, anchored to, and perhaps, limited by its architectural keeper. Traditionally the interior can be viewed as a tactile and decorative interface between architecture and the user. It is by the interior, which we (the user) engage and experience architecture. The duality of the interior and

architecture has often resulted in them being observed as a binary pair, opposing and distinct, but reliant on each other to exist (Soderqvist, 2011, p2). However, over the last century there has been a shift emerging where the boundaries between the two appear to be blurring. To identify change and look to this evolving interior of the future, we must first explore the positioning of the interior within society, culture and design. Penny Sparke frames the changing position of the 'modern interior' within a range of disciplines and situations during this period. Three significant forces appear to have had notable impact on the development and perception of the interior in society; architectural modernism (space), the cultural, social and psychological based connection between interiors and those who occupy them (place) and the historical interior of the decorative arts (taste) (Sparke, 2010, p7). To understand the modern interior, these subjective ways of viewing the interior must be recognised and we should explore the "roles of 'interiority' and 'representation', both visually and literary" (Sparke, 2010, p7).

A conflict appears to have developed between the spatially oriented interior associated with the modernist architects, designers and planners of the 20th Century, and the interior "places" relating to the human inhabitant which created and reinforced their cultural identities. This line of thought begins to delineate the conceived space of the designer and architect, and the user focused reality of the space as lived and experienced, also discussed by Psarra (2009) and Lefebvre (1995). The latter can be described as "discussion into the areas of fashion, taste, identity, and lifestyle – the defining features of modernity as experience by many inhabitants of the Western, industrialized world" (Sparke, 2010, p8). A significant shift is noted, from a focus on the (designed) conceptual nature of the interior, to a concentration on the user of the space, a projection of self and recognition of an individual perception on a

range of levels including emotional and psychological. The preconception of the modern interior as a spin-off of the minimal and pure forms of modernism is incorrect. Instead, Sparke suggests that the defining quality of the 'modern' condition is related to "its social, cultural, and psychological relationship with its users, inhabitants; its continuity with history; its links with the fashion system; and roles of both amateur homemakers and professional decorators interested in the interior as a site for (mostly feminine) self-expression and identity formation" (2010, p14). The acknowledgement of a relationship between the user and space and an interpreted spatial experience appears to be a significant evolution within the modern interior, specifically its growing allegiance and responsiveness to the changes in society defining its modernity. Walter Benjamin refocuses the domestic interior as being the most important emergence within mid 19th Century industrial modernity – along with the separation of public and private space, in particular dwelling and place of work (2004, p190).

The demarcation of the three positions and perspectives of the interior as "space", "place" and "taste" also help outline the type of traditional interior which perhaps remains as a residual perception in many people's minds. "Taste" and the traditional and historic framework it situates the interior in, also relates to the turn towards private (domestic) from public (work space). Benjamin references individuals and their influence and connection to personal space and further outlines this new focus on the user relating to "place" (2004, p190). This emphasis on the domestic and acknowledgement of the reflection of the inhabitant in 'every day space' is discussed by multiple authors. Todd and Mortimer define it as being the spatial projection of the self (1929, p1), while it is depicted as manifestation of the occupant and their spatial practice within the materiality and object content of the interior by Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo (2018, p1-2). Pimlott describes the personal projection of

the user within the (domestic) interior specifically relating it to the concept of interiority and suggests that “interiority pertains to the inner life of the individual”(2018, p2). The modern interior is ever evolving as it follows economic, social, technological, cultural and psychological drivers and is, as Walter Benjamin suggested, “a mirror of modern life itself” (2010, p16). McCarthy further advances this description of the interior to that of interiority, describing it as “a transformative concept, dependent on social, cultural, physical and technological developments in our own specific societies” (2005, p122).

It appears that the evolution of space, and specifically the interior, to a user centric device is long overdue and this renewed relationship between inhabitant and environment is driving the change. Lefebvre described the potential disconnect between conceived and lived (architectural) space as being due to modern space tending to be wrongly framed by the egocentric vision of the architect or designer, rather than focused on its user based and experiential purpose. The mistake is forgetting that “space does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible-readable, but that it is first of all *heard* (listened to) and *enacted* (through physical gestures and movements)”, placing importance on the understanding of the lived and experienced space (1991, p200).

Changes in how architecture is viewed and experienced within our generation also follows suit in the mirroring of modernity. The temporality of the digital age and what Negroponte describes as “digitality” (1995) produces the fleeting nature of experiences. A focus on the printed image and digital presentation as a medium to experience architecture has resulted in a distancing from the human body and the level of tactility that is associated. This

detachment from reality turns architecture into to a visual stage set and lacks true authenticity, as a representation of these notable cultural changes (Pallasmaa 2011, p41).

These aspects compounded create a user who is more physically and digitally mobile, within the built environment and society. As a result, a more dynamic and transient spatial experience is materialising, extending the territorial reach of the interior. We can observe an insurgence of impromptu “place making” and the momentary portrayal of the interior as an “event” (Adams and Author, 2019a). There appears to be new ways of viewing and designing the interior, which is not entirely physical or object based and instead is focussed on the evolving characteristics of the user. This territorial expansion is demonstrated by interior experiences occurring outside of the traditionally understood conditions of interior. Using case study examples, this paper will explore four real world scenarios where this spatial evolution is evidenced:

1. **“open platform” interiors** – occurring within architecture but where the neutrality of the design actively empowers the **user** to define function and drive inhabitation
2. **momentary spatial encounters** - such as “pop-up” interiors
3. **interiority in non-interior spaces**
4. **virtual interiority** - which transcends the physical world into the

Open platform – User Driven (*facilitated*)

The user has previously been guided by the division of space and definition of purpose the interior commands. However, spaces are becoming less defined by boundaries, thresholds

and permanent division of space. Voordouw suggests that since the age of modernism, the interior has slowly been weakened by its growing link to the exterior (2018, p318).

Room function is not solely dictated by the position of walls and the interior envelope, instead a space more often becomes an open stage on which the interior “event” is played out, connected to the spatial needs of the user at that point in time. There will always be need to divide specific rooms and spatial functionality in sectors such as healthcare, but civic, leisure, education and workplace sectors are seeing an increasingly user driven approach to the creation of public and communal spaces.

The refocussing of the user as the driver of spatial function in these sectors is visible in the design of more open and neutral spaces which appear in a constant flux between functions. This creates an open platform for inhabitation and refocuses the user as the driver of spatial function. Lefebvre suggested that actually space is not defined by the physical delineations of architecture, instead “visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces when in fact what exists is ambiguous continuity” (Lefebvre, 1991, p87). This ambiguity is acting as an enabler for the expansion and movement of interior functions between spaces, dictated by the human user.

This open call for user definition can be seen at the LocHal Library in Tilburg, Netherlands (Figure 1). The space is an innovative hybrid form of library, where users can source books and media, but also be part of a wider knowledge exchange and production. The library occupies the former LocHal locomotive shed, which has been reinterpreted to house an ‘open style’ library, co-working spaces, exhibition, lecture and events spaces and a children's section. The cavernous industrial site has been celebrated through its reincarnation, with

the new interior maintaining vast open sightlines dissected only by the colossal structural members which create its frame. The layering of open levels, connected by a tiered landscape of hybrid staircase and seating areas, creates vast auditoriums for users to inhabit or simply meander through as circulation space. The design has produced an open arena for



Figure 1. *Interior landscape at the Lochal Library.*

user defined occupation where people can be viewed working alone, enjoying lunch in small groups, conducting breakout meetings and even practicing performance art. The purpose of the space is open to interpretation and users claim it as they see fit. There are few interior tactics employed apart from the tiered landscape. However, levels of spatial intimacy are still experienced with the suggestion of territory defined by the linear and vertical boundaries of the steps. These aspects support the suggestion that in fact interiority is not solely reliant on architectural enclosure (Morris, 2019).

The Lochal library also hosts more formalised devices for need based adaption of space.

Expansive textile screens hang dormant, waiting to be moved via computerised systems to

divide spaces into smaller lecture theatres or open up space and become the back drop to large scale events (Figure 2). Depending on the needs of the user, the space reconfigures and transforms throughout the day, expanding and contracting. This textile acts as a malleable, flexible, dynamic interior envelope shadowing the user's needs, capable of



Figure 2. *Moveable textile screens at the Lochal Library.*

reprogramming space within the fixed architectural container. In addition to the physical breaking of sightlines and feel of boundary and enclosure, these textile walls create an acoustic condition of intimacy and of atmospheric delineation (Civic Architects, 2019).

The reduced reliance on physical form and interior tactics to create the interior is discussed by Liz Teston, who describes a type of interior experience found in the public arena that is unconnected to the architectural envelope. Teston defines a taxonomy of interiorities based on conditions; instead “public interiority” is described as a feeling of interior created by psychological, atmospheric, programmed and form based conditions (2020, p69-74):

Psychological - person centred experience (based on the interactions between a person and the built environment or between two people, shaped by context).

Form based - derived from physical architectural form which humans perceive.

Atmospheric - created by suggestions of atmosphere such as luminous, thermal, acoustic, tensions, energies between forms.

Programmed - where programming (function) takes interior activities away from the interior and creates a new sense of interiority.

In particular, Teston demonstrates a new realm of entirely non-form based experiences of interiority. The physicality of our interior experience appears to be lessening and a more transcendental encounter is evolving. In the case of the LocHal library we can observe Teston's psychological, form based and atmospheric conditions creating public interiorities. There seems to be a developing understanding that the user has an increased input in the creation of an interior experience. They do not simply encounter a piece of architecture, instead there is a performative engagement with it and production of experience via personal perception, whether this is impromptu as seen in the tiered interior landscape of LocHal library, or more formally engineered as per the moveable screens. Dorita Hannah (2018) suggests that architecture is dependent on the creativity of the user, who actively help engineer their environment via perception and sensory engagement. In summary, although these open platform interiors are user driven, they are designer-enabled. The case study design demonstrates a discrete acknowledgement of the empowered status and increased mobility of the current and future user.

Temporal Interiors (*momentary*)

Traditionally the interior can be viewed as the interchangeable lining of a building, and as such generally has a shorter life cycle than its more permanent architectural anchor.

However, an emerging wave of temporality in interiors has begun to reimagine the concept of the interior experience. So frequently pop-up interiors are designed, installed, experienced and removed within in a matter of weeks, days or even hours. Perhaps overlooked, the original momentary interior can be said to be the market stall and really this concept has not changed much in the development of pop-up interiors. The concept of the market stall challenges the preconceived boundaries of inside versus outside, interior versus architecture and demonstrates the temporal qualities of the pop-up store (Adams and Author, 2019b).

Momentary interiors have changed the goal posts in how we can view the interior. It is no longer reliant on architecture upon which to hang itself, but instead can stand alone. Their finite nature, means that these new types of interior appear dynamic, mobile and live, and as a result have a performative quality. There is a subtle reorientation from the perception of interior from object, to action. Pop-up interiors may occur as temporary events within larger designed spaces such as shopping centres and department stores, but perhaps more frequently within disused, vacant spaces. Interestingly, the bureaucracy in planning and development and crippling prices of the high street has created stagnation in lots of the available spaces within the built environment. The utilisation of these spaces by companies such as Meanwhile Space, Makeshift and Appear Here has created a new market of very short term leases. There is scope to suggest that this has actively encouraged this type of

momentary business and temporality in the retail, leisure and community interiors which occupy the spaces.



Figure 3. Successful use of 'meanwhile space' at Pop Brixton, London.

Some of these interiors are truly momentary, mirroring the way a market stall pops up and is disassembled hours later. Some have longer life spans, generally due to popularity, but the materiality and constructions of a temporary structure and ability to be removed quickly in deconstruction terms such as Box Park in Shoreditch, Pop in Brixton (Figure 3), Common Ground in Seoul and Stack in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Boano Prisma's winning design for the "Arch Challenge Project" in collaboration with the Meanwhile Space organisation, has further challenged the notion of the momentary interior (Figure 4). The design consists of a system of dry jointed plywood parts, which is self-assembled, dismantled and redeployed in other locations. The interior structure is continually reconfigured to fit the next host site and was designed as a device to re-activate abandoned pocket spaces such as vacant railway arches, multi storey car parks and church

crofts (Boano Prismontas, 2018). As a result, it is not only the existing architecture which is re-purposed, it is the mobile interior which is also re-imagined. The transformative ability combined with the transient and fugacious quality of the interior, enters it into new conceptual territory.

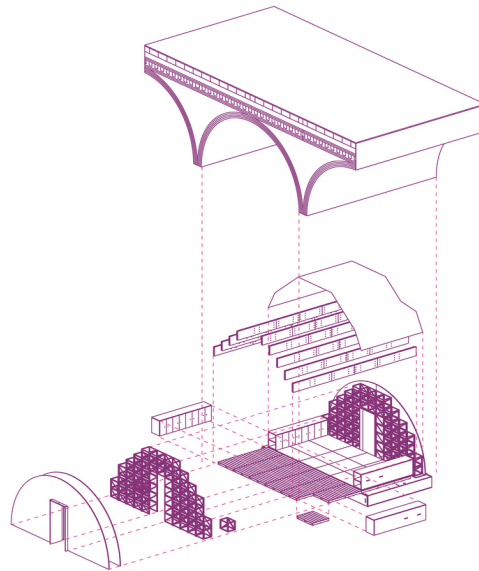


Figure 4. Arch Project, intervention with existing railway arches. Drawing by Boano Prismontas.

The transitory nature of these interiors, again, replaces the previously immobile interpretation of the interior and refocuses its anchorage from the static architecture to the mobile user. Adams and Author discuss these impermanent scenarios the interior can be viewed as more of an event or dynamic production (2019a). Dorita Hannah discusses the interior as a “kind of scenography that structures experience and interaction through open ended spatial dramaturgies orchestrating material and immaterial elements as temporal, interconnected, and mutable phenomena” (2018, p300). Instead of questioning what a piece of architecture *is*, as object, we should instead ask what the “fabricated environment (as a dynamic multiplicity) does”, as an instigator of engagement and experience (Hannah, 2018, p301). We can see this sentiment demonstrated in the Shed, New York, an arts,

performance and events space by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, which is framed on the original flexible architecture of Cedric Price's iconic Fun Palace (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Moveable telescoping roof of The Shed, New York.

“Like its precursor, The Shed’s open infrastructure can be permanently flexible for an unknowable future and responsive to variability in scale, media, technology, and the evolving needs of artists” (Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, 2018).

Non-Interior Spaces (*exploratory*)

It also seems apparent that the user can have interior experiences in spaces which may not be entirely “interior”. Where interior activities are performed in a non-interior setting, the user is still able to experience a sense of interiority. Teston rejects the need for interiority to anchor to a particular space or even be inside. Instead, it is related to the perceived character of a place, “Interiority is a condition of feeling inward, whether that condition is literally inside or a sensation of psychological otherness distinct from your physical surroundings or others

around you.” (2020, p66). Le Corbusier famously created a sense of interiority in his Paris rooftop garden design, simply by using visual cues referencing the interior (Figure 6).

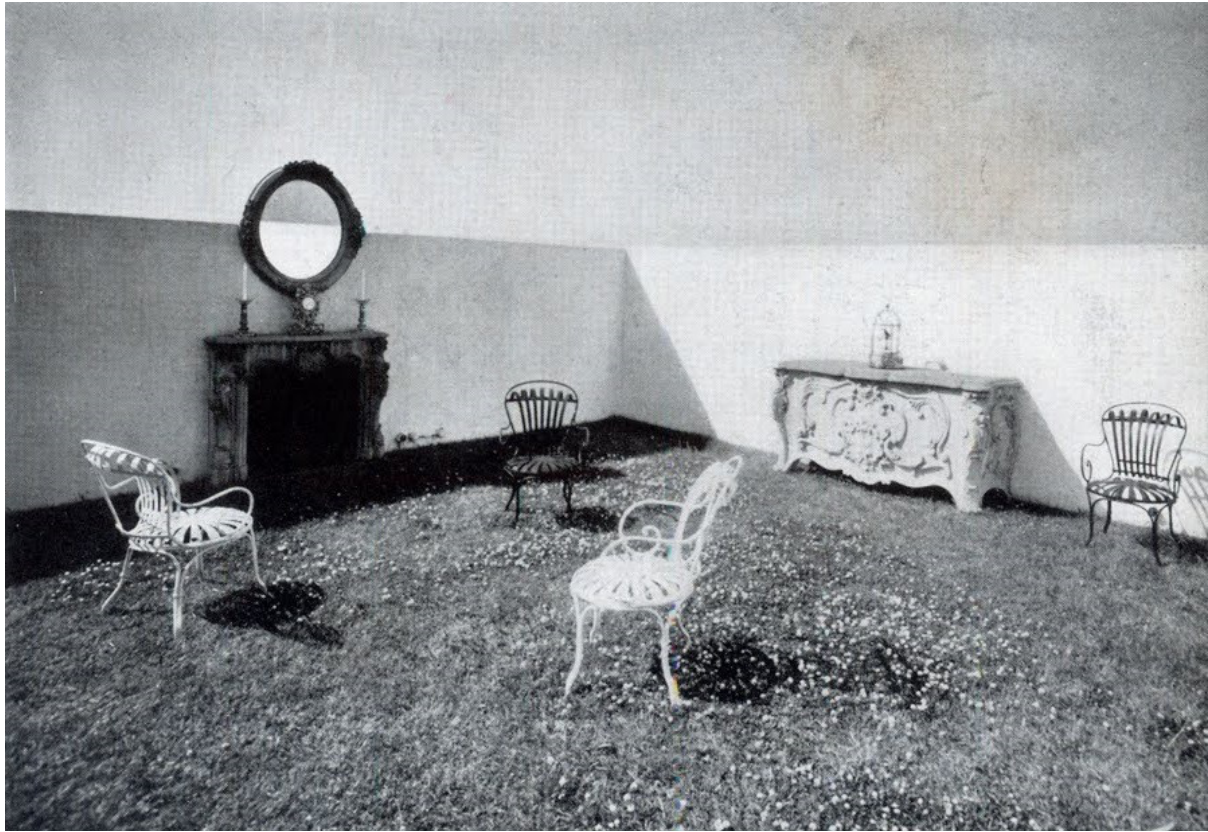


Figure 6. Le Corbusier, rooftop garden design for Charles de Beitegui, Paris.

William H Whyte and his Street Life Project explored why some urban spaces such as plazas and parks engaged the public and some did not. Whyte identified conditions within these external landscapes which helped create user experiences of interiority (2001). The Plaza at Ludwig Mies Van de Rohe’s Seagram Building, New York, was included in the study and famously attracts city goers to stop and occupy its expansive exterior footprint. Interior activities are played out in the external environment with little reference to the conditions of traditional interior (Figure 7). The building was the first of its kind, only using 40% of the site to house the buildings foot print (Emporis,n.d.). As a result, the plaza sits within significant void space within the built up cityscape. There are areas of architectural enclosure, for

example where the ground floor is set back from the street and the first floor level creates a roof structure over it. However, the majority of the space is fully open. This leads us to observe other, non-form based, conditions which create public interiority, in accordance with Teston's Taxonomies (2020, p69-73).



Figure 7. *Seagram Building Plaza, New York.*

The success of the Seagram Plaza is partially due to the presence of a range of seating types, on the steps, lips and edges of the plaza. This encourages the user to pause, experience the site (and other people) and to carry out interior activities such as meetings, eating lunch and work tasks. In addition, there are several atmospheric conditions within the plaza which create the feeling of entering and being inside a spatial zone. Changes in materiality suggest an entry threshold as the user passes from the coarse finish of the sidewalk onto the oversized pink granite paving of the plaza. The framed openness of the void space, against the solid verticality of the surrounding buildings, creates an atmospheric volume. Teston's Luminous

Interiority can be observed via the shadows cast from the imposing buildings, which again delineate boundary.

Virtual Interiority (*transcendent*)

Google Maps which launched in 2005, and later Google Street View in 2007, has significantly changed the way in which we are able to explore space within the built environment, virtually (Google, 2020). We can now experience, in a humanised view, new locations from the comfort of our own (home) device. This type of spatial experience opens up a virtual realm of perception and presentation of space, tying in with the framing of life, culture, persona and general 'content'. An extension of this virtual world opened up in 2011 when Google launched 'Indoor Maps' which allows exploration of public interiors in the same way the exterior has previously been documented. Within the interiors now available to be explored online are spaces such as museums, transportation hubs such as train stations and airports, shopping centres, retail and leisure (Google, n.d.). This, combined with the ability to present humanised 'Streetview' with interior mapping (plans), has created a new type of interior experience and renewed interest in the hidden interiors which lie behind the facades of the Street View cityscape.

Francesca Murialdo explores the affect the emergence of Airbnb has had on the perception of the interior, positing that it is a "two-way mechanism (instrument) able to change the cultural and material role of interiors" (Murialdo, 2019, p179) instigated by the ability to view inside interior spaces from a distance and reflect on new types of interiority and our perceptions of them. This new way of viewing the interior in the digital realm, allows us to

connect to virtual interiorities in a way that has not been seen before. We can connect to the suggestion of home, culture and intimate space, via the presented visualisation of the designer or owner. As Murialdo suggests, this is a two-way process and we do not simply view the interior as object, we engage with it in a new type of interiority. In John Berger's book, "Ways of Seeing", he outlines this multiway mechanism of viewing. While describing the complexity of connections and layers of information made while visualising, Berger states that "We never look at just one thing, we are always looking at the relationships between things and ourselves" (1972, p8).

In the unprecedented conditions experienced in the 2020 COVID 19 outbreak an interesting presentation of person centred interiority became visible. The experience of shared space, whether in work meetings or social parties, became entirely virtual. A person's intimate spatial zone was re-presented within the rectangular capture of the laptop, phone or tablet. The digital architecture of the room creates a space for conversing in. In these new virtual meeting spaces, the user presented their own interior identity, whilst being presented with that of the other users, and in doing so creating a third space where both (or more) parties meet and engage. Suggestions of home, family, style, affluence and culture are framed within a single visual. Perhaps inadvertently to begin with but later designedly, the orientation of camera, choice of location and well placed personal artefacts quickly became a projection of identity, or desired identity. In this sense the interior became much more than a contextual environment or background. Instead, it played a significant role in how people were perceived. The interior became a communicative tactic to broadcast a personal message, and visually it became an extension of the user.

It is this live, shared experience of other interior space which differentiates this new interiority from that of the static staged photo of Airbnb or Google indoor mapping. The lived experience and emersion of a video call, plus the engagement and exchange with other users within the virtual enclosure, creates its own unique type of intimacy. Strangely the user does not see their own “interior space”, but shares in the virtual background and architecture of their partner or group, creating a shared interiority. There is no doubt that although virtual, there is an immersive interior experience and a sense of shared space. The potential for development in this area is extensive and is being explored by practices such as Space Popular, in ways which completely re-imagine the notion of meeting space. Founders Lara Lesmes, and Fredrik Hellberg present the possibilities for sharing video calls where the users’ home environments overlap, echoing a Venn diagram (2019).



Figure 8. Still from the Venn Room Immersive Experience, Tallinn Architecture Biennale.

This creates a hybrid space in which furniture can be rearranged to allow the users to sit next to each other, demonstrating a totally new type of augmented reality (Figure 8) and virtual connectedness. Adrian Forty describes space in three ways, “as **enclosure**, as

continuum (connection between interior and exterior space) and as an **extension** of the human body (formed by human activity) (2013, p256-275). It is this last description of space which resonates with virtual interiority, namely an interiority created as an extension of the user and formed by the engagement with others. It would appear that virtual interiority spans all of these qualities and is an area where there is vast scope for future development and exploration.

Conclusion

This paper draws upon four different ways in which the interior is expanding into new territories. We have identified the traditional qualities of the interior, introduced interior theory and evidenced this theory using case study examples. It is possible to have interior experiences in unexpected locations, scenarios and via alternative mediums. Whether lead by designers as in the open platform (*facilitated*) and momentary (*temporal*) interior case studies, or impromptu and user driven as seen in the Non-Interior (*exploratory*) and virtual (*transcendent*) space examples. All of the case studies point to a more dynamic, organic, evolving interior in continual change as it mirrors modernity. At the centre of this idea seems to be the user, with the established template for the interior experience being deconstructed and redirected to envelope and move with the individual. The notion of what the interior is and the definition of interiority is being reformed to meet our contemporary societal needs, driven by design, new understanding of contemporary inhabitation and most importantly, the user.

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Figures

Figure 1. Bollaert, S. (2019) *Civic Architects creates public library in vast locomotive shed*. [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/02/27/lochal-public-library-civic-architects/>

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