

WHERE DOES THE SACRED DWELL? OUTSIDE AS INTERIOR: AN ATTEMPT TO RETHINK THE INTERIOR WITH HUMAN EXPERIENCE

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Öz

Mimarlık felsefesinde “yer”, “mekan”, “uzam”, “boyut” gibi kavramlar sıklıkla tekrar tekrar ele alınıp tartışılır. Bu makalede en temelde aynı şeyin “içerisi” ve “dışarı” kavramları için yapılması denenmiştir. İç mekanlar genellikle binaların içi olarak düşünülür ve söz konusu bir dış mekan olduğunda, bu mekanın “içerisi” olarak düşünülmemeyeceği varsayılır. Dışarı asla tam olarak bir iç mekan değildir. Bu makalede, bu görüş problematize edilmiş ve “dışarının” da bir “içerisi” olarak deneyimlenip deneyimlenemeyeceği araştırılmıştır. İlk olarak mekan sorununu ve bunun insan ile karşılıklı ilişkisini ele alındı. Mekanı deneyimleme şekillerimiz ve bunların insan bedeni ve duyularıyla özsel ilişkisi içerinin ve dışarının anlamını tanımlamada bir zemin oluşturdu. Maurice Merleau-Ponty ve Martin Heidegger üzerinden insan bedeni ve bedeninin mekan ile ilişkisine dair fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım ile aynı zamanda Jean-Luc Nancy ve Derrida'nın “kutsal” üzerine görüşlerini ele alarak dışarıyı bir içerisi olarak deneyimleyebilmemizin nasıl olanaklı olduğu incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İçerisi, Dışarı, Kutsal, Mekan, Yer, Deneyim

KUTSAL NEREDE İKAMET EDER? İÇERİSİ OLARAK DIŞARISI: İÇERİSİNİ İNSAN DENEYİMİ ÜZERİNDEN YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEYE DAİR BİR GİRİŞİM

Abstract

In philosophy of architecture, the meanings of the terms like “place”, “space”, “extent”, “dimension” are always rehandled, problematized and discussed upon. In this article, it has been basically tried to do the same with the concept of “interior” and “outside”. The interior spaces are thought to be in buildings but when it comes to an outdoor space, it is assumed that it can't be thought as interior. The outside is never really an interior space. In this article, it has been tried to problematize this and see if there's a possible to experience “outside” as an “interior” too. First it has been taken the matter of space and its interrelation with human on hand. The ways we experience the space and its essential relation to human body and senses have provided as basis for defining the meaning of interior and outside and the relation between these terms. Along with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger for a phenomenological approach of human body and its relation with space, it has been taken the accounts of Jean-Luc Nancy and Derrida on the concept of “sacred” to link with and to reiterate our endeavor of how we can experience the outside as an interior.

Keywords: Interior, Outside, Experience, Space, Place, Sacred

This article is relatively an experimental approach on the concept of interior space, we tried to see if it's possible to think interior space as a matter of scale and perception, rather than a matter of location. But for this to happen, we have to push the presumed interior space postulations first. In the recent years, the traditional interior space definition is taken into discussions. With this regard, Attiwill describes the practice of designing an “interior” as “a practice which addresses the relation between people and

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surroundings to produce interiors which perform different functions such as living, working, playing, selling, exhibiting and so on.”³

The first question to handle is about whether there are outdoor spaces that show interior space characteristics or not. But to get an answer to this question, it is mandatory to try to redefine the relation between “human” and “interior” first. Thus, the perception of space becomes an important issue. For example, is it possible to be in or within a church, without being inside a physical church building? Can a church’s outdoor garden be an interior place? Or when a tourist takes photographs of a temporarily closed church’s facade from the outside of the entrance gate amazed by it, is she/he really outside of the church? Too early for a decisive answer. What does it actually mean to be “inside” a forest? What is the interiority potential of an outdoor space? How do we define this potential? With which criteria? Anthropocentric perspectives and environmental phenomenologies such as sound, daylight, wind or smell, movement in time can maybe provide a holding point to build a theoretical ground.

What is interior? Interior space has many definitions. As a beginning, they are defined by a sensation of cover, as the interior needs distinguishing borders (either concrete and/or sensorial) from exterior space; such as interiors of buildings. They are also the primary space that we can perceive directly with our body. So, maybe, if we’re trying to define an interior space in outdoor environment, the scale of examined spaces should also be close to the human scale.

But rather a new approach to the relation between body and space can be seen in Oskar Schlemmer’s work in Bauhaus. In the introduction of “The Theater of the Bauhaus”, Walter Gropius describes Schlemmer and his approach on space as “it is apparent that he experienced space not only through mere vision but with the whole body, with the sense of touch of the dancer and the actor. My own great impression of Schlemmer’s stage work was to see and experience his magic of transforming dancers and actors into moving architecture.”⁴

The change of the perception on human body and its relation with the space around it can redefine the space with its location and correlations with the surrounding. The body can be something not fixed, but potentially active all around himself.

Shirazi explains environmental perception and its relation with our body as follows: “We can sense both our ‘physical body’, for example, in the action of gravity while falling downstairs, and our animated ‘living body’, for example, when we move ourselves towards the door. In other words, our body has a special kind of corporeality, a lived-bodiliness, which makes us an actor in the world, and thus our perception is a lived, experienced perception.”⁵ This explanation shows that while we exist in a space, that space is defined according to our perception of environment and thus, through our own body.

Now, we can assume that interior space is a perception of space, not defined by whether it is in a building or not, but a space that has closer contact with wherever the

³ Suzie Attiwill, *Urban Interior: Informal explorations, Interventions and Occupations*, Ed. Rochus Urban Hinkel, Art, Architecture, Design Research (AADR) Publications, Spurbuchverlag: Spurbuchverlag Publishing House of AADR, Baunach 2011, p. 13.

⁴ Walter Gropius, *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, Ed. Gropius, W. – Wensinger, A. S., The Johns Hopkins Press Ltd., London 1961, p. 21.

⁵ M. Reza Shirazi, *Towards an Articulated Phenomenological Interpretation of Architecture: Phenomenal Phenomenology*, Routledge, London & New York 2014, p. 13.

human body it is located. In this aspect, it is not a matter of location; *it is a matter of scale*. So, it can be that there are outdoor spaces also containing some interior spatial elements' characteristics or can have the sense of interior. Even they are "exterior" spaces, they are also perceived like interior spaces. Maybe the phrase of "city as house" can help us build a metaphor for this situation: "In compact urban fabrics where contiguous facades shape coherent pathways and places, we occasionally hear the metaphor 'city as house' used to describe the environment. The streets are hallways, plazas are rooms and building facades are interior walls."⁶ But in here, we want to try the possibility of a more intimate and essential mode of "interior" as "outside". To get this most essential occurrence, we have to dig deeper into the relation between human and space.

In recent years, the importance of humane environmental design with sensual perceptions have found its importance again in the design fields, which was thought as a less-crucial aspect of architecture and built environment after the modernist period's pragmatical perspective. Grange states that "just as our bodies have come to feel the sterility of Bauhaus architecture and reject its lack of tactile depth, so our bodies have come to feel the phoniness of green-belt planning schemes [...] The human body, in the final analysis, cannot lie. Perception is our conscience."⁷ The intangible qualities in architecture had been recognized as subjective and unpredictable, consequently our environment gradually turned into a space configuration without the sense of place and being. Hesselgren clarifies the importance of subjective phenomena as follows: "According to psychological terminology, 'subjective' refers to phenomena appertaining to mental life, while 'objective' refers to phenomena occurring in the physical environment. In this sense, subjective phenomena can be just as real and generally valid as objective phenomena. Perceptions are every bit as real as their stimuli: for us human beings they may even be more real."⁸

Pallasmaa explains this as a feeling of "alienation", the consequence of lacking "peripheral vision" which is unconsciously turning the ocular perceptions into bodily experiences. Peripheral visions connect us with space while focused perception draws us outwards, turning us into spectators only.⁹ Steven Holl describes the difference of sensorial perception in architecture, as being more fully than other art forms that engages the immediacy of our sensory perceptions. The passage of time; light, shadow and transparency; color phenomena, texture, material and detail all participate in the complete experience of architecture, unlike two-dimensional photography, painting or graphic arts and unlike the limits of aural space in music.¹⁰ Although perceptions are influenced by personal and social experiences from past, there are common experiences that all humans share despite of their personal background or cultural aspects. Gibson called them as affordance; that is what our environment offers us with its substances. The basic affordances of the environment are perceivable directly without an excessive amount of

⁶ Edward T. White, *Path Portal Place: Appreciating Public Space in Urban Environment*, Architectural Media Ltd., Florida 1999, p. 24.

⁷ Joseph Grange, *Place, Body and Situation in Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, Ed. D. Seamon – R. Mugerauer, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht 1985, p. 83.

⁸ Sven Hesselgren, *The Language of Architecture*, Vol. 1, Applied Science Publishers Ltd., Great Britain 1967, p. 14.

⁹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., West Sussex 2012, p. 18-42.

¹⁰ Steven Holl, J. Pallasmaa and A. Perez-Gomez, "Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture", *a+u Architecture and Urbanism*, July Special Issue, 1994, p. 41.

information; they are in a sense objective, real and physical unlike values and meanings.¹¹ These types of human environment affordances are our subject as we are concerned with the sense of being inside of a space. Lang quotes an example from the well-known phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior* (1963) about a soccer player and the football field: "The soccer player is not a distant consciousness surveying the field as an object of thought; the field is given as 'the immanent term of his practical intentions', and the vectors of force in it are constantly restructuring with his actions during the game 'the player becomes one with play and feels the direction of the goal [...] as immediately as the vertical and horizontal planes of his body.' The player understands where the goal is in a way which is lived rather than known. The mind does not inhabit the playing field but the field is inhabited by a 'knowing' body."¹² The concept of outside explained in this paper is mainly perceived by this kind of bodily knowing and experiencing of the interior environment. An interior may turn into an exterior and likewise, an exterior may turn into an interior related to the space and time conditions and perception. The approach to this concept is as Heidegger describes the concept of space and boundary: "What the word for space, *Raum*, *Rum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum* means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary."¹³

White also deals with the activities that are held in outdoor space. He explains importance of human activities as "the sense of place [...] is created by people being and doing things there. And staying creates place. Even a slow moving, crowded line of people moving through a narrow portal fosters a kind of action stability, a belonging, a place."¹⁴ As we can see, even the concept of "space" (or "place" for that matter) is deeply bounded to the way of humane and phenomenological experience of it. So, an exterior place or "outside" can be experienced as an interior regarding mode of being of our bodies and existence. If we go back to the example we gave in the beginning of this paper about tourist taking a photograph of a church's facade, the answer is "yes, he/she is outside of that church." But there might be a christian or a catholic standing right next to that tourist, and even though this believer is at the same spot with the tourist, the two might be very different places. A true catholic might sense the presence of god at most when there's a church around to be sensed and if the church is the house of god, then it means that a believer can be standing in an interior, even though that believer didn't experience any entrance into the church. Not just because he/she is already in there spiritually and mentally, but in its own *truth*, her/his body is in a place to experience the outside as an interior.¹⁵

In *Noli me tangere: On the raising of the body*, Jean-Luc Nancy problematizes the body with this kind of approach (even though there was a different context) when he

¹¹ See: James Jerome Gibson, *The Theory of Affordances in the Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, USA 1979.

¹² Richard Lang, "The dwelling door: Towards a Phenomenology of Transition", *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, Ed. D. Seamon – R. Mugerauer, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht 1985, p. 202.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter, Harper & Row Publishers Inc., New York 1971, p. 152.

¹⁴ Edward T. White, *Path Portal Place: Appreciating Public Space in Urban Environment*, p. 76.

¹⁵ For further investigation about the connection between *truth* and the *sacred* with regard to a similar context handled here, see: Engin Yurt, "Hıristiyanlıkta Kutsalın Doğasına dair Fikir Ayrılığı ve Buna Kilise Babaları'nda Olası bir Çözüm", *Felsefi Düşün*, No: 10, 2018, p. 357-358.

interprets the situation between Jesus and Mary and the whole “do not touch/embrace me” conversation.¹⁶ There can be a side of celestial, divine and sacred truth in the tangible, physical and corporal body. I think this interpretation provides a solid ground for the possibility of outside being experienced as interior.

As a conclusion, we can assume that the interior space is relatively different than what it is accepted in general terms of architecture. Interiors can also be in open (outdoor) spaces. An interior is an interior because of its relation with human, not just because it is somewhere indoor or enclosed.

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¹⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body*, Trans. Saraf Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Nass, Fordham University Press, New York 2008.

