

Breaking the Binary Oppositions of the Interior: A Momentary Permanence

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Abstract

The previously static view of the interior is changing, as social, economic and cultural factors produce a new requirement for building flexibility and potentially forcing a change to the normal spatial paradigms. There is an emerging altered dynamic between building, interior and user, posing the question: When does architecture become the interior? Conceptions of the future interior give renewed focus to the more flexible void space, over the opposing static architectural shell. By adjusting the realms of contact within a space and limiting the influence of architecture, the user is re-envisioned as a central adjudicator of spatial experience. Provocatively, conceiving the interior as a more temporal or fluid entity, we may liberate its relationship with its immovable and constant architectural keeper. This paper will argue that the dynamic city structure is driving a new conception of the interior and its place within society and architecture.

Keywords: binary, thresholds, dualism, structuralism, boundary

Introduction

Structuralism centres around the idea that “something” does not have an absolute meaning or value, alone. Instead, the value or meaning of an element is relative to the other components within a larger, overarching structure or system. This is unlike romantic or humanist models, which focus on the author or user as the starting or focal point. Instead, it is suggested that human experience is an effect of the structure, rather than something that is created by the user or individual within it. Similarly, cities can be argued to be systems. Although, as physical entities, the city is simply a collection of smaller components, driven and affected and formed by non-physical factors such as art, culture, society, architecture and design.

Scott (2008) suggests

The city is in our head; my language would be exhausted if one tried to describe its actuality. Many hands make the city: the builders, the legislators. The developers, both public and private, the traffic and railway engineers, the service engineer, the architect, the designer, the anonymous dead. It is the greatest manifestation of the collective spirit. (p. 184)

As a result of this wider picture of the effects of culture and society, structuralism in architecture became a reaction to the ideology of modernism and the determinism of functionalism. This renewed a focus on the design of buildings for the needs of humanity; the user and their experience of place (Coyne, 2012).

The city and the architectural landscape within it are formed and continually moulded by human activity. As Aldo Rossi suggests, “the city resides in the collective unconscious” (cited in Scott, 2008, p, 185). The interiors within it exist and come alive through human interaction with the architectural shell and the void space it creates. The interior is the dynamic interface between architecture and the user. As we respond to changing socio-cultural values and influences and the predicted sparsity of space within the increasingly saturated urban landscape of the future, we must reflect and reconsider our understanding of architecture and interior and the relationship between these two spatial allies.

It is suggested that basic understanding can only happen within systems if clearly defined differences and oppositions exist. For example, hot has no meaning if cold does not exist. Such opposing elements are known as binary oppositions, opposing and mutually exclusive components. Structuralism would suggest that architecture and interior are a binary pair (Söderqvist, 2011). They

remain intrinsically bound, neither can exist without the other but oppose each other in most respects. However, as the city system evolves and changes over time, the rigidity of this oppositional relationship seems to be weakening and more temporal and flexible architecture and design are becoming more prevalent.

This paper challenges the traditional structuralist concepts of architecture and interior as binary oppositions and will argue that spatial experience is driven by the user and not simply an effect of the surrounding structure. Using case study examples in the North East of England, this position will attempt to demonstrate how the dualism of outside and inside appears to be merging and a new focus on the user as the creator of “space” is being revealed. Instead, by reconceptualising the relationship between the user and interior, the interior is presented as a central arbitrator of spatial experience.

Flexible Space (*Conceptual*)

Scott (2008) suggests that the fate of a building on completion is either to remain unchanged, to be altered or to be demolished. In a perfect state, a new building would fulfil its original purpose or be demolished. However, with the ever-changing needs of society, a building very rarely fulfils its original purpose or function, forever. Instead, use or function changes and results in the need to alter the original state of the building.

The city environment and the architecture and interiors within act as ever-changing and moving parts in an overarching mechanism. The diminishing quantity of usable and purpose-built space within the urban realm comes as an increased effect from other factors within the urban system. Our cities will eventually have to grow inwards, not outwards. The utilisation of previously exterior space may become a common practice. However, regardless of what type of volume is being designed or redesigned, architects and designers must explore new methods of space making and consider the need for more flexible spatial environments in the future.

Cedric Price believed that buildings should meet the needs of the user, then either be altered or demolished when they no longer do so. With the needs of buildings users ever-changing, he believed a building should be permanently flexible. The unbuilt Fun Palace was the manifestation of these beliefs “with no permanent roof, moving walls and floors without doors, enabling it to be endlessly dismantled or reconfigured” (Price & Littlewood, 1968). The building was designed to be permanently altered and adapted to the needs of the user and event, essentially future-proofing the design for the needs of tomorrow users.

Case Study: Fun Palace (Cedric Price, 1961)

Price developed Avant-garde ideas for this unorthodox architectural concept, which he described as a Fun Palace. This project was a direct response to the sign of the times and austerity of the post-war years, and, along with the Archigram architecture practice defined a ground-breaking conceptual style of post-war British design. Along with Joan Littlewood, a celebrated theatre director, Price developed the design for an architectural statement focusing on the design as a synthesis of contemporary architectural discourses and theories. The aim was to produce a new kind of improvisational architecture that negotiated and sympathised with the constantly shifting cultural and social conditions of the period. The idea of a structured machine extended to a place where local members of the community could meet and interact with each other, a place where they could learn a new trade or craft, make or watch a movie, observe fine arts in a gallery, have a professional meeting or rest for the day.

This new form of combined leisure space epitomised the principles of structuralism and encouraged the users to migrate through the architecture using the spaces as staging points of experience and different types of leisure activity. Using the space for performances, exhibitions and films encouraged new thinking about interior space and intertwined the spatial disciplines (architecture, interior, exhibition, display) and began to remove the idea of enclosure, changing the walls and edges between the inside and the outside. Using a structural frame as a metaphor for change, Price encouraged the users to remain on the inside of the architectural space, developing a form of interiority, testing binary oppositions between the enclosed and open-air experiences, revolutionising the traditions of transitional boundaries between space.

The design was structurally “hung” inside a large constructed and triangulated frame and was populated with different connected spaces and modules that served a wide level of community and social groups. The binary aspects were strengthened through the narrative levels within each space. Some spaces were simple circulatory spaces for movement, others provided spatial stories and learning using theatre, open-air screen cinema, inflatable auditorium, restaurants, exhibitions and spaces to view outside the building. The spaces were flexible and the elements were designed to be changed as the need arose and encouraged socialisation through learning and education. The building was developed to improve citizenship and democracy. The framework principle was a partially open structure and allowed for the designed spaces to be semi-exposed to the exterior climate, moving people on

moving walkway, ramps and stairs to different levels and places. The structure removed hierarchy and was flexible enough to have the spaces remodelled, removed and reconstructed within the structure as needs and societal conditions changed.

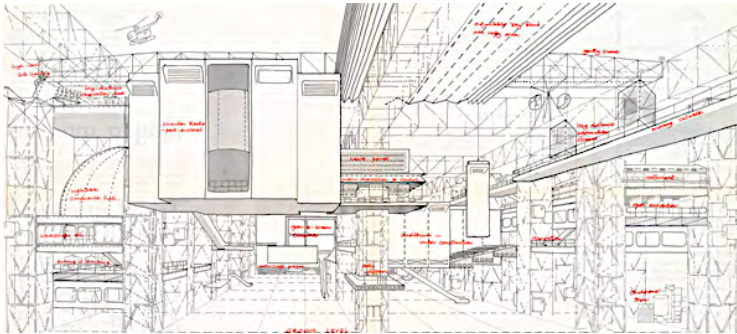


Figure 1
Fun Palace
(Cedric Price and
Joan Littlewood,
1964. Reprinted
with permission
from Canadian
Centre for
Architecture)

Inspiration for the idea came from traditional pleasure gardens and working men's institutes, which were very much for the community as a whole. They wanted to build a radical venue which was to be a "laboratory of fun" or a "university of the streets," where visitors could go along and enjoy performances, participate in arts and craft activities or just meet up, socialise and have fun. As a result, allowing culture, science and education to be available to people from all backgrounds forming new democratic ideology for public space. The Fun Palace was not a building in any conventional sense but was instead a socially interactive machine, highly adaptable to the shifting cultural and social conditions of its time and place.

Price (and Littlewood) would develop and refine their concept of interactive, performative architecture, adaptable to the varying needs and desires of the individual. By assembling their own pedagogical and leisure environments using cranes and prefabricated modules in an improvisational architecture, common citizens could escape from everyday routine and serial existence and embark on a journey of learning, creativity, and individual fulfilment. The Fun Palace was one of the more innovative and creative proposals for the use of free time in post-war England. It has provided a dynamic template for many other architectural concepts and buildings (a practical example is the Pompidou centre, Paris by Rogers, 1977) and is often cited as a stimulus for new interior thinking that encouraged the interior to migrate out of the confines of architecture into new spatial realms.

Price's forward thinking in designing adaptation into a building from the start of its life cycle is essential in making sure future building stock has longevity. Unfortunately, this is of little use to the

existing building stock in our cities, which generally was designed and constructed with a sole purpose and limited flexibility to the function. Sadly, the Fun Palace was never realised but stood as a testament to how inventive structuralism combined with an individual and flexible approach can significantly impact on how the built environment can shape human experience.

As the possibilities for adapting existing architecture become limited with the available building stock, previous exterior space is being re-examined, reclaimed and absorbed into the interior realm. This begins to mix and fuse the inside and outside in a way not previously recognised before. Sometimes this is suggested conceptually (as suggested above) or more through adapted, extended or new spaces. Often this mixing of spaces revolves around the edges of the architectural boundary or skin. Lehman (2017) suggests that the "building skin can become an extension of the inhabitants" and "occupants are able to transcend space – as where they are, can simultaneously become where they are going, as well as where they have been" (pp. 34-35). This mixed spatial terrain often organically evolves as an "in-between space" (Can & Heath, 2016, p. 31) or *I-Space*. In such areas the boundaries between interior and exterior become blurred and the emphasis simply comes down to the location, space and user experience.

Boundaries and Permanence: Traditional Examples of "Insideoutness" (Adapted)

Historically, a market place was a temporary space that frequently sat in-between the preconceived boundaries of inside and outside. Markets provided focal points for the city where covered bazaars and open piazzas were arranged, often surrounded and protected as arenas for commerce, providing an early form of horizontal architectural interiority. The interior style area within the city provided a coveted space, where the inside and outside were controlled as "hybrid spaces" (Massey, 1995) of the market environment. This hybridity enables the market to use the interior as a mediator of internal and external space, creating a new territory of the interior hinterland (*I-Space*) and forging new boundaries for the Interior. Stone (2007) suggests that Le Corbusier symbolises the interior as a seeing eye framing both the exterior and interior in the same vision. He suggests that this reciprocity enforces a strengthening of the relationship between the two states positioning Le Corbusier's belief that the "interior is always an exterior" (Stone, 2007, p. 228) as a possible conflict. Globally this is still very much in evidence, both in the traditional sense of a market, but also in modern alternatives.

However, further hybrid concepts are developing, stretching the “insideness” and momentary nature of the market. The pop-up store, which traditionally has been a cornerstone concept of the market, has a very common global presence. Pop-up stores “appear” and have a designed limited shelf life, only surviving for a limited time, promoting the get it now, or “it will be gone” culture. This concept transgresses across a temporal boundary and has moved into mainstream retailing. The market is being used to regenerate lost urban spaces to showcase regional development and the regeneration of town and cities.

Case Study: Tynemouth Market, North Tyneside, UK

One specific case study is the Tynemouth Market, North Tyneside. The market is housed in the existing Metro station in the old Victorian station design by William Bell in 1882 to the North Eastern Railway. This is in an outside location but under the cover of an enclosed Victorian platform shelter. The market is very popular and was started as a way to utilise the empty and architecturally significant, railway station. It regularly has 80 stalls of various sizes and complexities and thrives as a strong example of local regeneration and how a market can trigger regeneration of a town and region. Its popularity is secured as it specialises in both new products, recycled, retro antiques and food and drink. It is a leisure destination enriching the local culture and community. The location within the railway station totally typifies the hybrid and binary nature of the interior.



Figure 2
Tynemouth
Market interior,
Tynemouth, Tyne
and Wear, UK
(Photograph by
R. Adams)

There are many enclosed areas and sheltered spaces for the market to operate in, but also open aspects for plants and cooking spaces. Whilst the building is still a fully functioning rail station, the market operates in and around this activity, providing a dwelling and location for the variety of stalls. All are temporary, in that they are set up using a series of common tables, but are adapted by the stall holders to display their different goods. The open market “hall” is punctuated by these stalls creating corridors for movement and organisation. The station canopy is a beautiful example of Victorian cast iron structure which is fully glazed to allow light to illuminate the market trading.

Whilst the Tynemouth Market is a good example of a traditional British market format, there are many types of the market presented globally, but all have some simple core principles by which they abide. By promoting a temporal and momentary nature of the market experience (it is not a permanent fixture in the landscape) and by ensuring the market retains a notion of mobility (either with the market being removed at the end of each day or by the traders moving in and out of the stalls), the market retains a dynamic quality where the unexpected is highlighted. One of the key aspects for market spaces is the relationship that is formed with an insideness and intimacy of the market stalls and an outsideness to the quality of the climatic experience, genuinely creating an in-betweenness of spaces (*I-Space*). Traditionally markets were placed outdoors simply for the ideas of circulation space and allowing a “thoroughfare” of customers past the stalls. The market defends itself against any weather (good and bad) and the customers and stall holders have to act against the outdoor trading. The market stall is designed to effectively protect the goods that are traded.

Tynemouth Market represents the antithesis of market space. It is essentially outside in the sense that external air passes through it, under the canopy and the ambient temperature is external. But the space also appears to have an internal quality (enclosed, covered, intimate). The “outsideness” of the market is the basis of tradition. The principles presented here are a good example of how a binary code between the inside and outside can be represented. The structure is open and regular but offers the opportunity to come alive through human interaction with the architectural shell through an exploration of binary *I-Space*.

Spreading Trends - Reclamation of Exterior Space (*Extended*)

The use of exterior space as site or reclamation and amalgamation of previously exterior space into interiors schemes has dominated

leisure and museum design over the last two decades but is spreading to other areas of design such as workplace, hospitality and travel hubs. With this in mind, the boundaries and preconceived notions of interior and architecture are becoming increasingly blurred supporting Voordouw's suggestions that there has been a specific spatial evolution from "defined threshold to a porous, ambiguous gradient" (Voordouw, 2018, p. 318). There is an insurgence of design which injects and creates renewed relevance, function and utility to disused ruinous or outdated existing buildings and architecture, reactivating the existing building stock. This has provided a much wider range of contexts for interior "happenings," quite often sites that are unexpected, previously uninhabited by humans or not used by them a different function.

Case Study: Central Station, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

In June 2014, Ryder Architecture completed the refurbishment and internalisation of the exterior portico at Newcastle Central Train Station, Newcastle upon Tyne. Alongside this reclamation of previously exterior space was the creation of new retail facilities, refurbishment of toilet facilities, relocation of the Travel Centre and ticket facilities and relocation of the taxi rank. Previously, the external portico was open to the elements, housing a taxi rank and drop off locations for passengers by car.

The design was created alongside Network Rail and English Heritage, in an attempt to sensitively adapt the Grade 1 Listed building, originally designed by John Dobson (Ryder Architecture). The existing portico was left almost untouched, revealed and celebrated by sand-blasting treatment of the original stonework. Large expanses of glass curtain walling were used to seal the newly created interior space, whilst not interfering with the visual of the original wall and column structures and ornate architectural detailing. The juxtaposition of rough sandstone and glazing highlights the thresholds between old and new.

The insertion of internal retail outlets as stand-alone objects reinforce the delineation between original and existing. The coffee shops and ticket machines are clad in reflective copper sheet, the consistent material identity of the new insertions contrasting against the original structure.

Where exterior becomes engulfed by the interior scheme, the relationship between the two is compounded. On occasion, external architectural structures provide unplanned and impromptu interior volumes. Lost spaces between buildings form enclosed internal courtyards partially protected from the elements or railway arches

create acoustic chambers for live bands. In such contexts, from the finite constraints of the preconceived architectural shell, the interior is able to break free and take on a life of its own forming new in-between spaces (*I-Space*) as directed by the human user.

Figure 3
Newcastle Central
Station Portico
(Photograph by R.
Adams/L. Marlor)



McCarthy suggests that the boundaries of interiority are essentially abstract, rather than of solid substance. Although viewed as conceptual parameters, they delineate between the states of interiority and exteriority, where the boundary is transitory. Moreover, these intermediary borders determine the flexible and mobile nature of the interior, “making temporality an active condition of interiority” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 115). This notion of boundary is neither interior or exterior, but rather it exists within both realms and as such blurs the separation between inside and outside. This is highlighted by the Mobius strip configurations where the internal and external surfaces oscillate as suggested by Voordouw (2018). Instead, the terms interior and exterior are made redundant as prescriptive architectural terms tied to the physicality of the building structure. Now free of these constraints, they take on a more ethereal level of existence and meaning. Caan (2001) speaks of the interior, not only as a spatial zone but also on an emotional, intuitive and psychological level, discussing the interior space as a second layer of skin to the human user.

Architectural theory quite often simplifies the philosophical ideas around space and built environment so much so that the user becomes seemingly detached from the equation. The very subject (the user) for whom the building is being created for, is becoming more and more redundant from the design process equation (Caan, 2001). In contrast, Hall’s spatial theory (cited in Holahan, 1982) suggests that the centre of space is actually the human user, with

boundaries only appearing externally to them. Interior is suggested as being within the user, the term “interior” (related to being inside architecture) is the next space beyond the thresholds of the body, with architecture existing as a further boundary offset from this central point. This moves away from the common conceptions of the threshold between interior and architecture i.e. entrance, door, aperture, etc. Instead, this theory diminishes the lateral border between inside and outside and begins the notion of a mobile sphere or second skin, radial in nature with the human user at the epicentre.

With an increased focus on the user as creator and driver of the interior, we can view the interior as a much more mobile and temporal entity. Conceptually, we may detach and invert the interior skin from its previous architectural anchorage; instead encapsulating the user with a metaphorical veil through which the interior is experienced. The spatial activity can be re-imagined as a series of detailed (major, minor) spatial incidents and encounters, where the human subject is re-purposed as a spatial initiate, coercing interaction and building the narrative and spatial experience around the body self-determining what the inside experience is and its context with the outside.

Spreading Trends – The Momentary Interior (*New*)

As the interior becomes more dynamic, momentary interior “events” are becoming common. Interiors no longer require four walls, a floor and a ceiling or to be purpose-built; instead, a humanised interior can “pop up” in an unassuming location for a matter of hours, days, weeks or years – and then be gone. Increased transferability allows the interior “event” to be staged in an array of potentially unintended “sites,” making use of abandoned buildings, waste-land and other lost or unused spaces.

Case Study: Stack Market, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Stack was open in May 2018 and is a semi-temporary “pop-up” leisure experience formed from a series of interconnected shipping containers that populates a derelict city centre site in Newcastle, UK. They have been adapted into covered food, retail and leisure units formed around an open square. This market experience draws deeply from the notion of mobility, transience and temporal space. The “container village” is placed on an empty corner plot once occupied by banks, insurance companies and a cinema. Set in the heart of Newcastle City centre, it is hailed as a new destination experience, binding shopping and small retail units and open-air eating blending a fluid experience of inside and outside space.

Containers are cut, sliced and peeled open, similar to the Mobius strip revealed in Voordouw (2018), to reveal interiors and internal spaces exposed to the outside. Each container is essentially a sealed unit that is secure and water-tight but has been constructed with utilities, ventilation and access. Horizontally, the containers are ergonomically ideal to access and are constructed in several lengths to suit their position and use. Vertically, the containers are the ideal height for the creation of interior space and are stacked up and connected with elevated walkways and promenades which connect the higher levels of the space. Exterior staircases provide clear vistas across the open plaza, which contains outdoor seating.

The configuration of the containers develops a migratory approach to the city, allowing the visitor to drift through the space, blurring the ideas of inside and outside space. A new intersection of how people use, interact and behave in the city is formed. It promotes the idea that you can be inside and outside at the same time, introducing a strong concept (favoured in many European models of culture) of bringing inside activities outside developing new boundaries and moments for the in-between space (*I-space*).



Figure 4
Stack Container
Village, Newcastle
upon Tyne
(Photograph by
L. Marlor)

The lower level containers are modelled on the ideas of the development of small and medium enterprises (SME) and start-up businesses, encouraging the development and rebirthing of the high street. The upper levels are modelled on the Asian concept of the food court, offering a wide range of international cuisines in small outlets where the eating of food is shared in a common open space. This is often seen inside air-conditioned leisure or retail malls either as a destination or as a service. The Stack food court extends this idea into the open air, covering the visitors with soft pitched rooves that embrace and protect the experience.

Set with the backdrop of a city skyline, the container aesthetic adds to the urban landscape providing an industrialised vertical form that promotes the temporary nature of this installation. The containers are a perfect example of urban structuralism providing a formed gridded outline, both in a macro level with the assembled parts and blocked units, but also at a granular level visualising the undulating but even-spaced containers sides add to the verticality of the site. The exterior of the containers is painted black which helps to see the site as a whole. The corner site has been controlled by using the containers in stacked mixed configurations. Some with their ends (or retail fronts) facing the street, while on the corner of the plot, the length of the containers are used to form a bridge entrance for visitors to pass under into the main plaza. This plaza is surrounded with bar and leisure units forming an outdoor leisure space with toilet facilities, benches and heaters. The black containers act as a reference to frame the shape of the development framing entrances and offering a vision of a layered hierarchy of space. This helps to enclose the visitor and offers a place of solace when the weather becomes inclement, emulating traditional European models where exterior city spaces are used for leisure, entertainment and socialisation. The lighting across the development is diverse and the site has been designed to be used throughout the day and night. Lighting acts a beacon on the outside to attract visitors, but also as a way to create mood internally within the site and units to build intrigue as day becomes night, changing and stretching the customer experience. The Stack Container Village is a welcome development in the city emphasising a mobile urban culture, developing the high street and the experience of visitors to the city. It diversifies the city experience by offering covered internal spaces that help people connect to the external urban environment.

New Territory—the I-Space

The case studies have been used to highlight different forms of in-between spaces that oscillate between the interior and the architecture envelope. They create a position to suggest an alternative form of space in the built environment. The research drew together four case studies with four different approaches to in-between spaces (*I-Space*): the *conceptual* (Fun Palace), suggests a utopian domain where the spatial cultures are blended as a new way of defining new, experimental space; the *adapted* (Tynemouth), where old spaces are repurposed and are used to reinvent traditional spaces, encouraging socialisation and community; the *extended* (Central), substantial adaptations to architecture, allowing new forms of interior spaces to be constructed, absorbing space

but creating an open interior “enclosure”; and the *new* (Stack) where newly formed spaces create specifically tailored in-between spaces. These mix spatial domains, allowing the skin of the architecture to be reconstituted and encouraging alternative urban outdoor living.

This newly crafted space has currently no place in the interior canon, hovering between architectural statement and interior experience. Therefore, this discussion attempts to define and delineate this topic. The case studies help to identify new knowledge by seeking to conceptually dissolve architectural boundary and identify the new freedoms for the interior which are shaping the extended urban situation. This exploration has recognised the diversity of this kind of new space and defined new descriptions of interiority.

Conclusion

The four case studies provide an expanding context and an exemplary reference to this interiority question, provoking that the interior is encroaching into new in-between territories outside. An in-between space is neither in or out but is populated with people focussing on interior living type activities (sitting, dwelling, interacting). As our research shows this kind of space is expanding to include more forms of interiors use. It suggests that this new form of space is an increasingly popular element of the urban landscape, teetering and bridging the skin of architecture and the draw to the outside. This space is sneaking into the fabric of the city forming new momentary experiences with the outside in an interior context. As the appeal of situated outdoor experiences expands, these new spaces are set to continue to provoke architecture and expand the meaning of the urban experience.

By highlighting how the interior is mutating, the case studies demonstrate the use of exterior surfaces and architectural detailing, helping to blur the traditional boundaries of the built environment. As this delineation between architecture and interior reduces, the interior is seemingly becoming less finished and polished. The raw nature of the exterior is absorbed and deeper hardiness and less preciousness to the interior is experienced. Previous interior materiality was specifically contrasted to that of the exterior, plush, luxurious and refined away from the conditions and climate of outside. As lighting emulates daylight and planted surfaces help populate the interior and bring the park inside, the duality of the opposition deepens.

As the world warms, will the defined global landscapes of the future be neutralised and merge into one continuous space, as outside and inside, exterior and interior, architecture and interior space become one? As the materiality of these new temporary interiors begins to become more “exterior,” can interior be created without the prerequisite architectural structure and form, focusing on more momentary occupations? As answers to these questions begin to be realised, we may observe how new examples of the interior are being presented as exterior spaces leading to the creation of new places and experiences.

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