

Reading Between the Lines: Revealing Interiority

Paramita Atmodiwirjo, Yandi Andri Yatmo

*Universitas Indonesia
Indonesia*

The relationship between language, texts and built environment plays a critical role in forming our understanding of how we relate to and engage with our surroundings in various ways. The way that architecture and interior spaces are configured is actually a form of language that communicates actors' behaviours and intentions, as well as their relationships (Lawson, 2001). A physical layout can convey information about the degree of intimacy, power relations, appropriate behaviour and modes of interaction occurring and expected in space. Language is also a representation of how people think of their living spaces spatially. The ways in which language is used to describe the "spatial notions in everyday life" in various cultures suggest that diverse ways of understanding space across cultures exist, and that there is no single, universal notion of space (Levinson, 1996, p. 356).

Language can convey messages on the interiority of human space through the use of various media. Design disciplines tend to rely on conventional drawings of spaces as representational media, and such conventional representation systems "tend to fail the full circumstances of interiority, collecting, instead, picturesque or conventional forms and resisting the complexity of the condition" (Treadwell, 2012, p. 2). Words, texts and narratives have the potential to reveal the complexity of interiority; they can tell stories beyond the physical materiality of space to reveal spatial occupation, address social and cultural issues embedded in space and capture the trajectories of inhabitation over time.

Drawing on work from Kristeva on the spatialisation of the word, Friedman (1993) described the structure of narrative, which contains movement along the horizontal axis, connecting the writer to the reader, and movement along the vertical axis, connecting the text to other texts or to its contexts. In every story, aside from the trajectory that connects the writer's storytelling to the reader's interpretation, "the vertical narrative has many superimposed surfaces, layered and overwritten like the human psyche," which requires reading "down into" the texts (Friedman, 1993, p. 15). This structure demonstrates how the texts and narratives, as the medium of representation, not only can narrate architectural and interior space, but also convey embedded meanings and values beneath the surface, i.e., reveal interiority.

The close relationship among texts, space and interiority suggests the possibility of architecture and interior being viewed as a form of texts. They are 'written' throughout the process of their production, then 'read' through various acts of perception, occupation, experience and interpretation. This issue of *Interiority* addresses writing and reading as a form of inquiry towards the idea of interiority being embedded within the represented forms of architecture and interior. Writing and reading are forms of critical practice (Rendell, 2007) that offer the possibility of expanding textual mediums' role in understanding the spatiality and production of architecture and interior. Texts, narratives and other forms of 'writing' could serve as a medium through which the idea of interiority is perceived, understood, questioned and manifested. Architecture and interior spaces serve as containers of deeper meaning, intention and messages that are embedded beneath their surfaces. The reading of architecture and interior is not merely the reading of what is tangible: Reading between the lines becomes a channel of comprehending what is inside, of revealing the interiority of the built space.

The articles in this issue demonstrate various forms of inquiry concerning the idea of interiority through various media of 'writing,' then explore how their reading becomes a way of revealing interiority. Igor Siddiqui begins this issue by arguing for the notion of writing interiors as a creative practice. In particular, he examines the use of the slash (/) punctuation mark and its role in spatial interpretation. Drawing on various artwork forms that use the slash as a punctuation mark, he then argues for the critical role of conversation between writing and designing in the field of interior.

The next two articles address the role of various forms of representation in conveying interiority as the meaning embedded in cultural values and social relations within particular spatial contexts.

Narratives as alternative forms of representation can celebrate human engagement with space (Coates, 2012) and enable space and architecture stories to be told from the perspective of inhabitation (Till, 2009). Thus, narratives could become a useful representational medium through which to convey the human experience in space. Maria Vidali presents a detailed account of a festival celebration in the village life of Kampos. By creating a fictional narrative on what happens during the day of the festival, she reveals spatial and social layers of interiority that explain how the community is bounded and connected. Here, the narrative becomes a medium for revealing the interiority of the communal life.

Texts and narratives are among various forms of media that can convey interiority. It is interesting to see how different forms of representation could become a medium through which interiority is projected. Through analysis of three different constructs of faces, buildings and songs, Pieter Marthinus De Kock argues that interiority suggests deeper meaning beyond architectural spaces as containers of meaning. He also touches on technology's critical role in our contemporary society in mediating the process of projecting meaning inside external forms of architecture.

The 'texts' of architecture and interior are not necessarily written by architects or designers (Coates, 2012). The narratives that arrive spontaneously out of everyday life actually carry the real meaning of space and experience. Such narratives give voice to the actors and acknowledge the different perspectives that emerge from such experiences. The next three articles illustrate how interiority is revealed in different contexts and perspectives. Liz Teston addresses public interiority as a perceived condition in the public sphere and proposes a taxonomy of public interiority that is developed based on the ontology of interiority, comprising psychological, form-based, atmospheric and programmatic interiority. This taxonomy reflects the reading of public interiority based on the understanding of various ways in which the built condition of the interior could shape human experience.

Another perspective on the urban environment presented by Nerea Feliz Arrizabalaga, who draws on the Anthropocene as a key idea in shifting the understanding of sustainability in urban spaces. Through several design projects that incorporate under-acknowledged life forms in the city, she argues how design tactics could promote inclusivity of nonhuman species into our urban environment, thereby cultivating our intimacy with other life forms.

The final article by Dak Kopec and Kendall Marsh illustrates how architectural space is read and experienced by individuals with

symptoms of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) as a form of traumatic brain injury. Through the person-centred design approach, a CTE patient's understanding of spatial needs and issues becomes the basis for developing a design prototype to accommodate such a person. Here, the elements of interior spaces are chosen carefully and configured to create a constructive dialogue between the space and the person to regulate particular behaviours, as well as lessen or prevent symptoms.

Together, all contributions in this issue offer possibilities for further development of architecture and interior practice as forms of critical practice, as well as further possibilities for expanding the medium of representation as alternative ways to reveal the idea of interiority. Such practices may result in the production of architecture and interior that serves as a container of meaning and a channel for various perspectives in reading and experiencing the interior.

References

- Coates, N. (Ed.) (2012). *Narrative architecture*. London: Wiley.
- Friedman, S. S. (1993). Spatialization: A strategy for reading narrative. *Narrative*, 1(1), 12–23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20106989>
- Lawson, B. (2001). *The language of space*. Oxford: Architectural Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (1996). Language and space. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25, 353–382.
- Rendell, J. (2007). Critical spatial practice: Curating, editing, writing. In J. Rugg & M. Sedgwick (Eds.), *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance* (pp. 59–75). Bristol: Intellect.
- Till, J. (2009). *Architecture depends*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Treadwell, S. (2012). Writing/drawing: Negotiating the perils and pleasures of interiority. *IDEA Journal*, 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.37113/ideaj.v0i0.89>