

‘Alienated From Within’

A study on the domestic interior , and it's future

A space, an enfolding, a gap, being investigated piece by piece through history since there was structure to frame it, once there is structure there is void and in many ways this said void captures a part of architecture that allows for a deeper reading, than the structure itself ever did.

This void, which dresses itself as the “Interior” has been studied thoroughly, spatially and psychoanalytically¹ through the experience of many generations of historians, architects and theorists; and not only have the questions not been resolved but rather each person has opened a door to a door which allows for a deeper understanding of the subject of “interior”. The interior has always been known as a part of architecture, a filler to a deeply studied and fundamental concept. If stood alone, it does not hold a physical form but rather a concept enclosed by the architecture around it. However, the subject itself has proven to be one of the fundamentals of architecture. The interior might be addressed as what is within architecture but through deep readings of the space itself, its effects and its roles in domesticity we can understand a new layer to architecture.

Previously I had argued how architecture was initiated from an experience, a means to a need and hence the structure was formed and so was domesticity, however a factor which was not considered through my past readings was in fact the interior, what it holds and to what extent has architecture been affected by the interior.

This essay takes a look into how the domestic interior is experienced and how the concept has been formed over the centuries. It goes through the many stages of analysing the ‘Interior’ through the thinking of Charles Rice in his book “The Emergence Of The Interior”² as well as the radical approach of Sigmund Freud and the brilliant readings of space by Sir Walter Benjamin.³ The essay aims to argue the sense of ‘Alienation’ which has emerged with modern domestic interior and argues for a shift of focus in relation to the interior which could potentially solve issues/questions created by modern domestic interiors.

While the interior is not itself a new aspect of architecture, Going back to its initial origins, can draw a much simpler line of thought towards understanding this concept in more depth. Historically, the interior was developed as a context for a fundamental desire for privacy and comfort, it was not a stand alone concept but rather a consequence of a familial and gendered motive, a self-representing and domestic practice of domestication.⁴ In order to understand the

¹Rice, Charles. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2008. Chapter 2: Lost Objects: Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical interior.

² Rice, Charles. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2008.

³ Benjamin, Walter. *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (expose of 1939)*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. p 20

⁴ “The interior emerged historically as a context for newly articulated desires for privacy and comfort, the consolidation of gendered and familial roles in life, and domestic practices of consumption and self-representation.” Rice, Charles. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2008. Page 0

historical progression of the interior one will have to take a look at two fundamental aspects of the concept; firstly To understand and follow the progression of the definition of the word through time and secondly, to take said information and apply it to the historical writings of Sir Walter Benjamin.

Cited by *The Oxford English Dictionary*,⁵ the word 'Interior' was only initially being used in the fifteenth century to provide the meaning of *Inside as divided from the outside* as well as to explain the nature of the human soul and to add a description for the spiritual and the inner nature of the human consciousness. By the eighteenth century the word 'Interior's meaning had shifted in relation to *individual subjectivity*, to the definition of, *to designate inner character*. The domestic was not introduced within the word itself until the middle point of the eighteenth century, and the interior came to the meaning of, *to designate the domestic affairs of a state*, as well as *a sense of territory that belongs to a country or region*. In the nineteenth century however, spatial meaning was introduced to the word by explaining it as, *the inside of a building or room*. In relation to said definition, many others emerged as well as the interior being introduced as, *a picture or representation of inside a building or room*. In respect to a theatre, the word could contain the very physical form of a set. In response to the progression of the definition of the word itself, we can clearly observe a lack of physicality and a concept tied with boundary and an enclosed space. The interior emerges as a new concept to be explained, as a three dimensional space as well as, a two dimensional representation such as a painting or even as mentioned in a theatrical sense, a backdrop creating an experience rather than physical space. What can be abstracted from this, is a conversation based on 'Doubleness of the interior', which introduces a separation of the interior as an image and a space "*With neither sense being primary*" as Rice explains it.⁶

"The interior is produced through an infolding"

Walter Benjamin

The interior was seen by Walter Benjamin as a soft and impressionable surface. However this surface does not hold the responsibility of creating a seal against the outside world, but rather is activated through the inhabitants relation to the city and it's exposed public nature.⁷ A world of commodities and exposure, the surface holds the subjective behaviour of this exposure, and it interiorizes for the securing of a private life. The interior is initiated once the relationship between the inhabitant and their 'Outside World' is considered; only then is the domestic interior, a presence of a substitute space of exposure where the inhabitant can subjectively respond to the social norms of their cultural and architectural context.

"The surface folds to encase the inhabitants and these collected objects"

Walter Benjamin

⁵ "Interior | Definition of Interior in English by Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries | English. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interior>.

⁶ Significantly, doubleness involves the interdependence between image and space, with neither sense being primary."Rice, Charles. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2008. Page 2

⁷ Gilloch, Graeme. "Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City." 82-3. Polity Press.

Walter Benjamin points at the artifacts liberated from a world of commodities as “*These collected objects*”. Historical context suggests the emergence of interior as rather a division. A division which was driven from a dwelling that was divided from work, for the inhabitants and by this division, the space for the emergence of a domestic interior was created. The dwelling in its most extreme form was a condition of the nineteenth century.

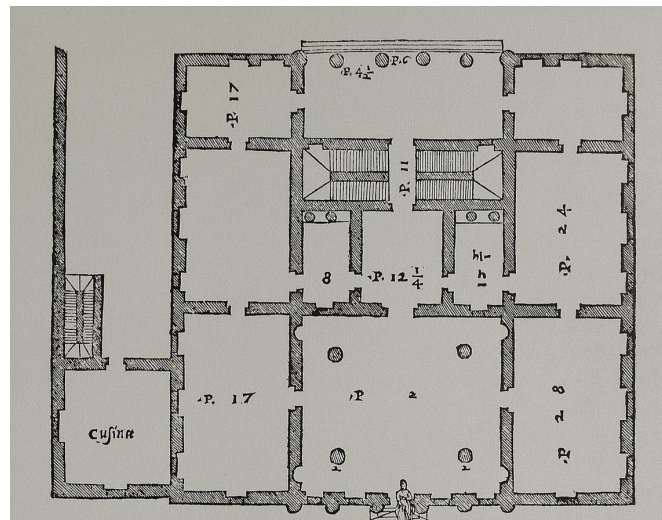
The ‘Doublenss’ mentioned arrives at a stage of observing the interior in relation to architecture and more importantly with focusing on architecture’s effect on the domestic interior.

“The interior emerged in addition to constructional, ornamental and surface definitions of inside space that were architectural.”

Charles Rice (*The Emergence Of the Interior : Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*)

The question of interior as an image was emerged by the doubleness because of the perception of architecture at the time and rather minimal understanding the conceptual sense of the word; however by the turn of the twentieth century, the understanding of the domestic interior as a social and national identity was established . This Establishment allowed space for the interior to be focused on with regards to its own disciplinarity, and it’s place as a holder of social and cultural content and at the same time understood as a material manifestation.

In many ways, the interior was approached in context to another existing element of the domestic, let it be structural or conceptual. In fact Robin Evans explains the change in the design of doors and corridor in respect to domestic needs in his essay , ‘Figure, Doors and Passage’.⁸ Palazzo Antonini(1556), Udine by Andrea Palladio can be taken as an example to take this point further.



Plan of Palazzo Antonini, Udine by Andrea Palladio, 1565

In sixteenth century Italy, a convenient room consisted on many doors, in fact there would most likely be a door between every joining wall however, by nineteenth century this simple design

⁸ Evans, Robin. *Robin Evans: Translation from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*. London: Architectural Association, 1997. Figures, Doors and Passages. Pg 55

factor had completely changed to one door per space.⁹ The change here is important not because of the rearrangement of the architecture but because it radically recast the pattern of domestic life. Over the years due to the shift of desires from the domestic space, the architecture began to hold it's inhabitant as a refugee rather than push to create a space of wide spread communication. The interior was defined through decoration; a literal dressing of what's inside architecture and in many ways overlooking its role as a self-standing concept. As much it was a space, the idea of 'Filling' introduced an image-based representation which did not comprehend the architectural effect of the interior. The interior impacted architecture as we know it today in many significant ways. Taking planning in England by the middle of nineteenth century for instance, and the relationship between the room and the corridor we arrive at a point where we can see how the imagination of the interior allowed a sense of comfort to be implemented architecturally. The comfort however was instituted as one of the elements which allowed the interior to apply the effect it did to architecture and through the inhabitants way of life the interior was strengthened and applied to architecture. A distinct association was put forward with the ever growing desire for comfort and the architectural technique of asymmetrical planning.¹⁰ The efficiency of the level of comfort being applied to the inhabitants with only the interior was limited; therefore the arrival to an efficiently designed, comfortable domestic space was imagined through the architectural organization represented by the plan. Robert Kerr in his book 'The Gentleman's House (1864)', describes the effect of interior on architecture as applying comfort by separating the inhabitants and functions from one another.¹¹ Robin Evans in His essay, points at the English domestic planning in nineteenth century as well as how Robert Kerr's readings centralized a technique of 'room and corridor planning', with it resulting in separating spaces of served and spaces of servant in terms of movement and access. The formation of interpersonal relationships and the layers of identity within the domestic space, were rather placed on objects as 'interior' and furnishing creating an architectural hierarchy with the removal of bodies in direct contact with bodies. While the interior formed it's place and its effect on architecture, it also created space of separation in relation to comfort and although the interior was neither a filler nor decoration anymore, the concept had a new effect on how spatial organization was formed. While this initially started as a consequence of a desire of domestic comfort, it's effect on architecture continued to grow through time resulting in the inhabitant as refugee. The interior in many ways became the 'Container of personal privacy and comfort' even within gendered and familial domestic roles. The argument of the interior not creating a seal was no longer relevant since the interior had alienated bodies from one another and from their context. In my opinion this alienation was a result of focus shifted on an element which drove the interior and it's contextual architecture to the point of personal separation. The interior exists beyond a response to the problem of modern world of commodities, rather it emerges as

⁹ Evans, Robin. *Robin Evans: Translation from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*. London: Architectural Association, 1997. Figures, Doors and Passages. Pg 55

¹⁰ Rice, Charles. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2008. chapter 3, Imagining the interior, Page 57

¹¹ Kerr, Robert. *The Gentleman's House, or How to Plan English Residences from the Parsonage to the Palace; with Tables of Accommodation and Cost, and a Series of Selected Plans*. 3rd Revised ed. London: John Murray, 1871.

a surface illusion of furnishing but holds artifacts of modern norms and has the ability to execute the interpersonal relationships with an approach to conceptual understanding of architecture. It produces spatial organization through the concept of relationships within the inhabitants and introduces itself as a fruit of modernity and domesticity.

In his Essay, 'Figures, Doors, Passages', Robin Evans points at the gaps and inconsistencies of contemporary domestic architecture, gaps which raise important questions that point to where domestic interior is headed at this moment in time and by analysing his writing, the future becomes a question of design Evans focuses of alleged 'Rationality of contemporary domestic architecture.'¹²

"If anything is described by an architectural plan, it is the nature of human relationships, since the elements whose trace it records walls, doors, windows and stairs- are employed first to divide and then selectively to reunite inhabited space."

Robin Evans (Translation from Drawing to Building and Other Essays)

Evans here discusses the relationship between visual representation of inhabitation and lack thereof in architectural drawings and plans. He argues how in even the most elaborate and delicately detailed architectural drawings there lies an absence of how the inhabitants inhabit the space. He goes on further to make the reader understand how this may not be a negative aspect and perhaps the idea of negative or positive becomes redundant when taken into account that once one goes beyond the architectural drawing, and arrives at a point of reality they are exposed to a way which humans dispose themselves in relation to their space and the other inhabitants. He explains how these creatures are taken as a sign of life in architecture and no matter how abstract or diagrammatic the plans are, they both trace to the concept of human relationships. He addresses how human figures and their portrayal in a domestic space and their interconnected relationships can be perceived as a way of life. The relationship between a way of life and spatial organization of architecture allows for the emergence of modern domestic interior.

Bringing in a very interesting instance of domestic design and its interior can lead us to understand the side of domestic interior that Evans speaks about in a modern context. K Minus house draws an interesting parallel between interpersonal relationships and spatial organization in a domestic ambience. The K Minus house is a design which contains two separate housing units for both the client and his employee who lives onsite full time. The two housing units are designed with a very close attention to the connection between the inhabitants and their relationship. The spatial awareness allows for separating the units yet interconnecting using very key design elements. From the outside the whole structure comes across as one with having separate rooms at different heights however from the inside, the kitchen and the courtyards of each of the houses are placed by the four corners of a large central table which is shared by both of the inhabitants and their families. While cooking, each family will face the

¹² Evans, Robin. *Robin Evans: Translation from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*. London: Architectural Association, 1997.
Figures, Doors and Passages.

other and they can eat together if desired. While an illusion of togetherness is offered, physically their side of the space can be considered as a complete separate house.¹³



K Minus House-Architects:KUU ,2019, Shanghai

The choice offered in the K Minus house allows for a modern domestic way of life as well as allowing communication in a chinese traditional way. The architects in this design, created a domestic environment through the activation of social behaviour in the space.¹⁴ The open and closed design of the cubes(units) create a playful relationship between the inside and the outside with the use of interior elements as a fundamental key. The design also accesses a new layer of relationships created by vertical and horizontal design. The horizontal is introduced due to the design of the cubes and how they are placed. Each of the squares is interconnected and allows a view overlooking another space creating an illusion of singularity but also being a part of something bigger. The arrangement of the cubes within this rigid grid and the structure applied by the joints as well as the design of the openings and the orientation of each room all together, allow for a personal experience yet creating possibilities for communication in very simple ways. The precision in blurring the inside and the outside in this design was also one of the key elements which responds directly to the argument of ‘ not creating a seal from the outside world’ which was mentioned earlier.

The use of the interior as an element of focus on the inhabitants relationships to one another creates space for approaching the interior from a very different yet effective way. The interior shall not be used as a boundary or a seal, it shall not contain and conceal but rather with a shift of focus on interior as an activator of interpersonal relations we can not only rule out alienation but we can create architecture in a way which embraces the inhabitants relation to one another and their space of inhabitation. While this relationship does not necessarily need to be physical,

¹³ "Minus K House." Architectural Record RSS. August 17, 2016.

<https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/8371-minus-k-house>.

¹⁴ "Minus K House Kuu." Chinese. <https://www.chinese-architects.com/en/kuu-shanghai/project/minus-k-house>.

it can still create moments in the domestic space which allows communication but also maintain the desire for comfort and privacy.



K Minus House-Architects:KUU ,2019, Shanghai

We arrive at a point where we can observe alienation of the inhabitant from their city due to the formal expression of the domestic interior, the progression of the concept and its effect on architecture as we know it. Although the interior materialized itself through the increasingly widespread desire for comfort and privacy, one of its fundamental driving forces was based on consolidation of gendered and familial roles within the context of a domestic space. It's progression from being perceived as essentially a 'filling', to its main role of demonstrating social norms and a space of practice for self representation, do not exist anymore within today's definition of the domestic interior. In many ways we find ourselves asking where to go from this point? A point where the interior does not respond to the modern domestic desires? I would like to argue, with a shift of focus on not the elements which formed domestic interior as it is but rather the relationships created within the domestic space between the inhabitants themselves and the domestic space, we introduce the interior as a response to the modern domestic desires as well as contribute to the developing architecture of the modern world.

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