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Editorial

Projected Interiorities, or the Production of Subjectivity Through Spatial and Performative Means

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Abstract

Even those, who consider themselves lucky to have escaped trauma, long-term illness and death, have experienced radical changes to their conception of life in its relation to public and private domains due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When public space turned into a dangerous realm, private interiors were assigned a new role, and with these shifts, also new questions about the relation of interiority to any type of exteriority emerged. The first four contributions in this *Projected Interiorities* issue of the journal *Technoetic Arts* reflect from an architectural and urban point of view on the conception of the public and private, their past, present and future. Yet, the pandemic contributed more widely to a re-evaluation of interiority, not least because the public and private realms were seemingly integrated via digital processes. While this journal issue cannot cover all these questions, it indicates the range of the pandemic turn in thought, collecting contributions from theory and practice, including architecture, art, philosophy and literary studies. With authors of a variety of disciplinary backgrounds based in China, India, Norway, France, the UK and the USA, this issue of *Technoetic Arts* covers not only a multiplicity of methodological approaches but also diverse regional and cultural perspectives on the idea of *Projected Interiorities*.

Keywords

interiority, space, COVID-19, architecture, art, philosophy

The recent events connected to the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have shattered our consolidated ideas and our perception of public and private spaces, as well as our conception of the border between them. We suddenly discovered the obscene truth that our body is a porous membrane which emits and receives biological information from other bodies through airborne wet particles. The others became dirty entities to be kept at a safe

distance. Mouth and nose became body parts to be ashamed of and to be kept covered in public. Public space suddenly turned into a dangerous realm.

Nevertheless, also the interiors into which we were forced became more and more uncomfortable. Being locked down meant for many people that they were forced to live with the threats of depression, anxiety, abusive family relations and domestic violence. Nevertheless, also those privileged enough to live in spacious homes, enjoying healthy relationships, fast internet connections and the possibility to order food deliveries, experienced their domestic space from uncannily new perspectives. We mean ‘perspectives’ in a literal sense: the use of digital screens and webcams has allowed us to optically project our interiors to the outside world and to project other interiors within ours. Digital interfaces became the tools through which we could see and be seen in our most private domains. The public gaze forcefully penetrated our interiors.

Hannah Arendt ([1958] 1998) defined public space as the space for the development of free human action. Contrary to the silent and visually opaque spaces of reproductive labour (the home) and productive work (the factory), public space is for Arendt a theatre: on the one hand, an acoustic device for our linguistic performances and, on the other hand, an optical, perspectival space that allows to see the others and to be seen by them. The pandemic accelerated the process, already in place, of transforming our homes into offices, schools and theatres. Or better, the pandemic made this process visible: digital interfaces made the pandemic interior become transparent and noisy. The pandemic offered glimpses of a different form of organization of our space and times, questioning the functional and typological organization that governs the life of our cities and at the same time, opening up new possibilities for the spatial organization of our lives.

In his course dedicated to the philosophy of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze explained architecture as the tool to construct a ‘regime of visibility’ ([1985] 2022: n.pag.). Deleuze refers to a type of opticality that is different from that of the public architecture described by Arendt. If for Arendt architecture was the public art par excellence, shaping the visibility of public space as a space of the performance of human’s free will ([1958] 1998: 39), Foucault and Deleuze, instead, saw architectural visibility as an element shaping subjectivities through the management of our bodies in space. The panopticon was the architectural diagram of the disciplinary society’s regime of visibility, which organized the construction of docile bodies through a series of institutional settings – public buildings such as the hospital, the factory, the prison and the school. The pandemic interior, at once home, isolation quarantine facility, office and classroom, is the space in which various social forces converged to reconfigure our subjectivity in the midst of a sanitary, environmental and societal crisis of an unprecedented scale and pervasiveness.

The domestic space can also be seen as a spatial institution, an instrument for the government of bodies and the construction of subjectivities. As Dolores Hayden famously demonstrated, the construction of the post-war American suburbia contributed to restoring the traditional division of labour between men and women. If the war economy pushed American women to work in factories at a time in which the male workforce was employed at the front, post-war suburbia was the spatial device which brought them back to domestic work (Hayden 1984). Maria Giudici has recently shown that the very idea of the bourgeois apartment – with its functional division into rooms, and, in particular, with the invention of the ‘master bedroom’ (2018: 1205), which naturalizes and spatializes the basic biological reproductive unit – is neither neutral nor universal, but a diagram of patriarchal relations. Social and revolutionary movements have long addressed the issue by proposing new forms of domestic interiors to

shape new forms of social life, as in the case of the material feminists' proposals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries described by Hayden (1981) and the early radical examples during Soviet Russia. Perhaps, as Lu Duanfang has shown, it was Maoist China that established radically different forms of interiorities to destroy the patriarchal clan structure of pre-revolutionary China and establish new forms of collectivity no longer based on lineage but on the social structure of the production unit (Lu 2006).

Guest-edited by the Crosscultural Research on Architecture Collective (CRAC), this issue of *TAs* starts from the traumatic, yet revelatory experience of the pandemic to explore the notion of interiority, seen as the way in which our subjectivity is produced in terms of space (Ionescu 2018). It begins from an experience of the domestic realm, but it expands its scope through different scales and vantage points, in order to explore the way in which subjectivity is produced, represented and performed today. 'Projected Interiorities' initiate an exploration of how interiority is projected into images or spatial configurations. Of course, interior spaces can be seen as imposed on us by various powers and thus influence the way in which we are projected, but 'Projected Interiorities' also allude to the organization of spaces of everyday resistance in which individuals actively project their desires for personal or collective interiorities.

Tordis Berstrand (2022) argues for a positive reconsideration of domestic space after the pandemic. If the pandemic was a collective trauma, returning to the 'normality' of pre-pandemic life seems to be even scarier. How can the pandemic help us re-configuring our desires and forms of life, starting from the way we perceive, inhabit and design our homes? Berstrand describes how COVID-19 turned our domesticity inside out, through a series of topological operations of folding through the use of computer screens, webcams and other digital props. Berstrand traces a precedent of this idea of spatial inflection in Paul Klee's series of interior perspective drawings. Playing with the ambiguities of the perspectival projection, Klee shatters at once the western bourgeois interior, the characters that inhabit it and their perceptive habits, prefiguring a new type of interiority, which Berstrand calls the 'virtual house', a space ripe with possibilities.

Jiawen Han explores the construction of what she defines as 'community interiorities' (2022) within the Chinese gated residential compounds of Suzhou's Industrial Park. Han documents the initiatives of the residents of some of these gated communities to expand their domestic interiority within the open spaces found on the ground floor of their apartment blocks. Han finds new forms of collectivity emerging within the interstices of those commodified urban typologies, which have been usually interpreted as the market response to the desire for individual success and individualized lifestyles after the demise of the Maoist work unit collectivist model. Nevertheless, the recent lockdowns in the city of Suzhou have shown that the drive towards the construction of collectivities and their spatial organization is still active even in today's middle-class Chinese communities.

Analysing the conceptions of subjectivity and their spatial dimension in China, Teresa Hoskyns et al. explain that the term *dānwèi* is only superficially translated into English as 'work unit' (2022). Actually, its etymology reveals a more complex and stratified idea of the position of each individual in a society structured according to a hierarchy of nested self-contained spheres. Western conceptions of public and private space are, of course, established in Chinese cities, however, they are not able to fully explain how subjectivity is produced in Chinese cities. Starting from an analysis of public square dancing and other forms of public space appropriation in contemporary Chinese cities and of collectivist practices through history, the authors elaborate on a Chinese spatialized model of democracy

and grassroots participation. The performative action that occurs in Chinese public space is not that of a linguistic performance following the western idea of free speech, but rather the space of a free bodily performance of space occupation.

The presence of automobiles in cities seems to be acknowledged as one of the factors hampering the development of public life in cities. Indeed, the space of vehicular circulation appears to be radically opposed to the idea of public space. Nevertheless, visions of future cities are strongly tied to the construction of automotive narratives, in particular, linked to the idea of self-driving cars or autonomous vehicles. Through an analysis of science fiction and design fiction literature, Lee Barron (2022) explores how narrative accounts of autonomous vehicles and smart cities expose contemporary hopes and fears connected to an increasing pervasiveness of artificial intelligence, algorithms and data-sensing infrastructure in our urban environment. Yet, beyond the imagination of more efficient and autonomous cars, can design fiction allow us to understand how artificial intelligence can help design a radically different urban mobility no longer based on private vehicles?

The first four contributions in this 'Projected Interiorities' issue of the journal *TA* reflect from an architectural and urban point of view on the conception of the public and private, their past, present and future. Yet, the pandemic contributed more widely to a re-evaluation of interiority, not least because the public and private realms seemingly coalesced via digital processes. While, of course, this journal issue cannot cover all these questions, it alludes to the range of the pandemic turn by collecting contributions from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles.

Leaving the city behind, the journal issue turns its attention to landscapes of textual representation. Through the lens of literary studies, Irfan Mohammad Malik (2022) explores the subjectivities that emerged at the threshold of the modern and the postmodern. Malik's article contextualizes the subject's loss of authenticity and its displacement that marked the end of the twentieth century. As a quasi-personification of the postmodern credo of the subject's death, Jack Gladney, the main character of DeLillo's renowned novel *White Noise* ([1985] 2009), serves as a perfect case study of subjectivity after subjectivity. The novel's textual landscape, placed in an era of post-truth and ecological disaster, appears strangely familiar. It is likely due to its apparent actuality that *White Noise* was adapted for film in 2022. Retracing the literature that reflects on the key turns in thought that challenged stable identities, sheds new light on contemporary subjectivities. In times of hopeless crisis, satire, such as *White Noise*, might offer an emergency aesthetic gesture to assist with the critical reconstruction of interiority.

Taking the postmodern theme forward, Zane Gillespie (2022) presents in his article a philosophy and art practice that is radically non-dualist, rejecting the principle of the excluded third that dominates western logic and embracing the paradox of the co-existence of contradiction. Developed by Gillespie in collaboration with a group of writers and poets, Noumenism aims at transcending the sensorial into a realm of higher-order redundancy – a realm, one could say, that ensures meaning as inter-subjective. As Gillespie states, Noumenist artworks are relational and non-relational at once. One could further argue that they constitute *Projected Interiorities*. The analysis of a Noumenist poem by Jason W. Johnson demonstrates how processual synonymy initiates the integration of opposites.

The issue's final article by Marc Veyrat (2022) presents an experimental deconstruction of identity in art, taking Joseph Beuys's performance *I Like America, and America Likes Me* as a point of departure. Transposing the performance in the realm of virtual reality turns into a reflection on the possibility of interiority in times of technological immersion. In the 1974

performance, Beuys, wrapped in a felt blanket, was transported on an ambulance bed to René Block Gallery in New York to meet a coyote (Veiel 2017). He spent three days with the coyote in a room that was empty except for some hay in a corner and a stack of *Wall Street Journal* newspapers on the floor. His artist insignia were the felt blanket and a shepherd's stick. When Beuys left the gallery, he had interacted with no one except the coyote – a symbol of the United States of America's neglected native interiority. Veyrat's reflection on the importance of the human face in the construction of identity leads to further explorations of the face as interface and its role in computational art. Yet, one could also wonder whether the deconstruction of identity in art, after all, leads to the reconstruction of a new identity or interiority, namely the artist-writer.

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