

# INTERIOR ROOM URBAN ROOM

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **'Interior room, urban room'**

This paper will consider the idea of the 'room' and how it is explored at the scale of the interior and also the effects the concept of the 'room' has on the consideration of urban space. This is the subject of a range of teaching and research projects at the Portsmouth School of Architecture, where students of interior design and architecture have worked together to explore 'room' at these different scales, interpreting space through drawing, modeling and mapping. The language of the interior affects the urban idea, but also the urban scale infects interior space. It is a consideration of scale, but using varying forms and uses of material. There are common considerations in both environments and this paper looks at these commonalities. The interior space can be mapped and described as a journey, an environment where events take place, analogous to the city. The idea of understanding context or place is also common to both interior and urban scales. The transition between interior and urban space allows for a new understanding of the idea of the 'room'.

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## **INTRODUCTION : URBAN ROOM INTERIOR ROOM**

There are differences between our consideration of space and our understanding of that space. Interior space as defined by the individual experience of the interior and urban space as defined by the individual experience in the city. Architecture becomes a mediator between these two scales of experience, the interior is understood at full size, tangible physical space. The urban is understood by maps, models, but also memory and description.

This paper brings together two different realms: the interior and the urban and uses the 'room' as a common language or framework. We often consider the interior experience relative to the building or architecture it sits in. The architecture is also considered relative to the urban context. This investigation is about the relationship between the

interior and the urban, how can they inform and react to one another, what are the common areas of discourse and consideration. The paper is informed by an interior design teaching programme and an urban design teaching programme at the same school of architecture and uses different projects to describe methods of understanding and description of interior and urban space.

## 1 SCALE OF SPACE

Mapping the room, mapping the urban environment

### Mapping Interior space



*Fig 1 Mitchell Bould, Setting out of Osborne School onto a Victorian Cellar. Setting out drawing by Fred Rees, Site Engineer, Photograph by Dan Keeler, Architect, represented at the Winchester Gallery 2004.*

The interior is understood at the human scale of existence, it is the part of the building we touch and inhabit. Its palette is one of materials, colour, light, space, the fabric of a building. We play with surface, form, and structure. Our tools are pencil, pen, paint, card, cutting mat and steel rule, a drawing board and computer. We shift through scales of practice, from objects to rooms, to buildings and into the city.

The interior is interpreted through our bodily responses and our sensory perception of space. It can be mapped through both analytical and experiential processes.

At Portsmouth students have been involved in a project, 'The Sensory Experience of Space', which considers the dialogue between the built form, its textural and material qualities, and our haptic response to it.

The aim was to develop a new language of drawing to map personal experience of space rather than a more delineated and ordered way of understanding space that comes from conventional ways of recording space.

The Sensory Experience of Space, [1] Is a student project with dancers, artists and designers to investigate space using drawing as a site for collaboration and investigation. Drawing through the body, drawing physically, drawing with string, elastic, cling film. When thinking about mapping of space we begin to think about the texture of space, the sound, the touch and feel, to consider how to record an experience rather than the space itself. Important considerations are the personal narratives we bring to space, the tools we have to work with. During this process we consider how people inhabit buildings and what marks they make in their inhabitation.

Students were encouraged to look at different types of notation, diagrams, language, plans, maps and to use Lawrence and Anna Halprin's RSVP cycle to respond to their experience of the space. The intention was to understand how buildings are experienced, by trying to connect the felt and the abstract, students were encouraged to use themselves as a resource in a building. The buildings provide the frame to work within, the container and the contained.

Mitchell Bould, a research collaboration in interior and textile - worked to represent the experience. They produced a stage set, a set contained within a set developed through the representation of student work. They mapped the space through drawing and sound. This experience suggested new ways to record and engage with the interior.

### **Mapping of Urban space**

The analysis of urban space involves mapping, recording describing. The initial maps of cities were as people perceived and experienced them. Maps were drawn which had no scale, just important features of the city. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century an exercise was undertaken to create a military survey in the UK, an early 19<sup>th</sup> century survey created maps of England at 1 inch to one mile, which were using a set scale. This developed to the national grid reference and the digitised mapping system that we use today. This physical mapping is about measurements and scales, creating a defined framework to measure and place buildings and spaces within. Figure ground mapping uses

scale drawings and maps to describe building forms but also spaces between buildings.

There are approaches to mapping cities that involve an understanding of space and movement through it. Gordon Cullen in his book *Townscape*, introduced the idea of serial views [2] as a way to describe a route or journey through a city, this involves an abstract map or diagram and then a series of images.

*Invisible cities* by Italo Calvino uses a series of essays to describe the city, it describes imaginary cities both the characters within them and the places themselves. It deals with life events, associated with relationships and the places these events take place. Bernard Tschumi describes the city in his book *Event City* [3] as an arena for events to take place and occur.

Other techniques, which describe cities, have been developed by Dutch architects MVRDV: *Metacity Data town*. [4] This book uses strong graphics coupled with a range of statistics to describe urban conditions. A city can be described with a map, or it can be quantified in terms of a list of buildings, population, density and land area. These analytical approaches to the city record what is there, in both quantitative and qualitative ways. When starting an urban design project one of the important initial exercises is to encourage a personal interpretation of the area, through drawing, modelling and creating journeys of experience and abstract models of the place. The mapping of cities uses information about what exists to inform future design ideas.



*Figure 2. A figure ground map of Chichester allowing an understanding of the*

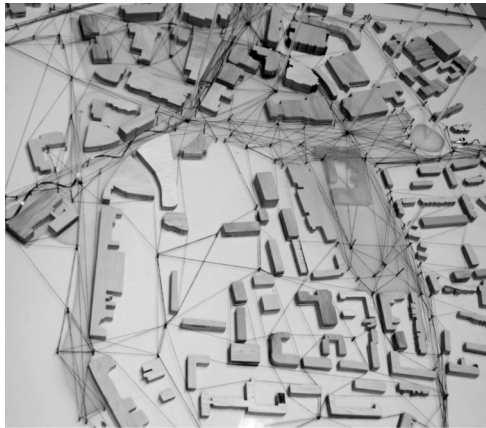


Figure 3. An analytical model of Portsmouth, indicating areas of activity and desire lines or movement patterns across the city

## 2. SITE CONTEXT

### Interior Context

'Stripping back in its extend manifestation is the process by which the interventional designer acquires an understanding of the host building with which she or he is engaged. It is to the end of developing a structured affinity, as a preparation for the correspondence between their work and the existing. The host building needs to be understood intrinsically and in terms of its setting, and to be looked at in terms of actualities and provenance. This is an enquiry that will have both architectural and socio-economic aspects.' [5]

The interior is analysed through understanding the host building and its many layers, its stories, histories and the lives of people who've inhabited the space, its social and political context. It is also understood through the structures and methods that produced the spaces as well as the physicality, the material that is the building. The designer needs to understand the building its fabric, how it has been occupied to clearly understand the original building.

A building is in a continuous process of change, as soon as it is 'complete' it is occupied and change begins to take place, the purpose for which the building was built becomes redundant. The interior as the city is transient.

Interior designers normally respond to a given context, a site, a building, a room. It is important to consider what is the relationship of our intervention to the building and also what meaning does this give?

The visual artist is always aware of 'site'. The meaning the work has in relationship to the site, the gallery, the installation in the street. The meaning it gives the work, the relationships it suggests. The work needs to be placed within a context.

This idea of understanding the site, revealing its nature, is a process that we need to record and use; the recording in itself is a creative experience.

### **Urban site context**

The urban condition can be described in emotional and figurative ways; these descriptions provide information that creates the context for an urban idea or master plan.

To create a master plan for a city requires an understanding of the place. This is an understanding of what the city is and what it was. The understanding of the past is important. It can suggest and stimulate design ideas for the future. This understanding needs to be related to function and activity, what happened on site or in a place. To discover stories, narratives about who lived, worked and experienced that place.



Figure 4. This is a drawing of a site which reveals the roman remains beneath the street, the plan suggests that the site had a past as well as a present

The layers of history of a city in Europe can have physical evidence from Roman periods and beyond. This information can be relevant and inform current design issues and considerations; it is part of the story of the site. The idea of the city as a palimpsest refers to the Roman practice of writing on wax covered tablets, which could be scraped off and written over again and again.

In architecture this metaphor can be understood when we see traces of the past in a city, this may be on a wall or in the road surface. These traces suggest something about the past, how a building was used or experienced. Tram tracks across a cobbled street. An edge where a building once may have stood, these scars reveal something of the past in the city.

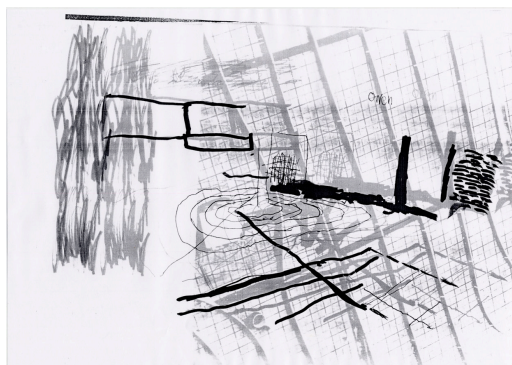


*Figure 5. This is a photo of a building that has been partially demolished; this suggests a type of palimpsest, suggesting that there has been a memory to this site, a previous experience that has now been removed*

When creating a response to a city, there needs to be a careful understanding of the context and a recording of the information that is there in terms of buildings, activity, function. This understanding is critical to respond to the site and produce either a master planning proposal or an architectural proposition.

### **3. THE ROOM**

#### **The interior Room**



*Figure 6 'Family Drawing', Mitchell Bould, Site Works  
Drawing made layering different scales of the same space together, Library at Osborne School, to form a new space.*



The room is the device that we use to contain our human experience; it is defined by function, activity and experience. When we think of buildings, the unit of space we can connect with is the room. The interior room is where human activity happens and events take place.

'we set out to make depictions of space, built form and incident, to invoke true relationship between architecture and human affairs.'

Fred Scott, Space and Time in Architecture and Painting. [6]

The room suggests what we should do within it, sleep, dine, live. Interior designers can create opportunities of this human interaction to take place. To understand the room an understanding of the potential of a body and how it could engage with its space is important. The room is the container of our activities and interactions.

### **The Urban Room**

This reference is used more and more to suggest that the city and its scale is human, something that can be engaged with. The room metaphor is used to all scale of urban space, from a piazza, to a small courtyard type space. Just as interior spaces can exist at various scales, so too can urban rooms.

The writer:

Charles Baudelaire wrote about the Flanuer, a gentleman who lived around Paris at the time of the French revolution. He considered the city as his home, it existed as a series of rooms, the library was his study, the restaurant his dining room, this reference has been used to suggest that the city has spaces that can be used and considered as different sorts of accessible spaces but also that the city can be considered like a large house, or a range of interconnected spaces. The urban room can be a piazza or square or a restaurant or library, interior references such as the 'room' become useful metaphors for design of urban spaces, activities can be assigned to urban rooms as with interior rooms to suggest the possibility for interaction, further metaphors such as 'carpet' can be used to suggest surface, these start to connect urban spaces with the idea of habitation and comfort that we associate with interior experiences.

### **4 Conclusion Container/Contained.**

There have been described a range of approaches that describe the interior and the urban condition.

The language of both environments suggests possibilities for exploration of the urban and the interior. When considering the idea of

context there are important connections that can inform the placing of buildings in a city, or the response of an interior to an existing building. At the start of a project to design an interior space there are methodologies of analysis, both recording and description, which can be applied to the understanding of urban space. Accordingly, methods used in recording urban space, can equally be used in the analysis of interior space.

Perhaps one of the most important observations is that design disciplines co exists, the interior may be connected to the body in space, and how it is 'contained' but the city is also at a completely different scale also concerned with the experience of the 'containers', or architecture.

The interior suggests borders of experience, the city creates opportunities for events at a range of scales of experience, some of these are at the scale of the interior, intimate, private, shared and others are collective, work, play. All these experiences need an understanding of the possibilities of our engagement with our environments whether interior or urban.

*'To live is to pass from one space to another' [7]*

Wherever our experiences start, the room is connected to the architecture that is part of the city. Through mapping the city, buildings and interiors and exploring new ways of connecting and drawing experience we hope to produce new interpretations. There is a synthesis of experience and analysis to create new dialogues in the urban environment. Shifting from 1:500 scale of an urban space to describing the touch of a room, the 1:1 detail. The dialogue between the two needs to be explored and developed.

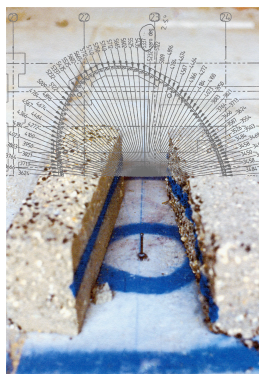


Figure 7 Mitchell Bould. Relationship between the drawn and the real. Site setting out drawing

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